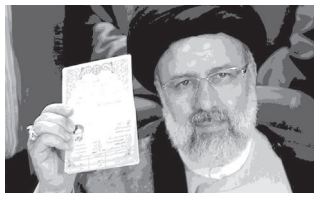




PALESTINE

Ofer Cassif and Aqel Taqaz
on ending the colonial
occupation



IRAN

Boycott further undermines
regime's legitimacy



NEW COLD WAR:
Nazi invasion of the USSR,
80 years on

Liberation

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Arguments for a People's Vaccine

Marc Botenga, Chris Matlhatko, Prabir Purkayastha
and Sevim Dagdelen Pages 6-9

editorial/liberation

The reports now emerging in the wake of the G7 summit of the deliberations made by heads of some of the most powerful capitalist countries, provide a sombre reminder of the challenges facing people across the world

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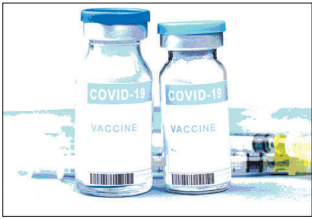
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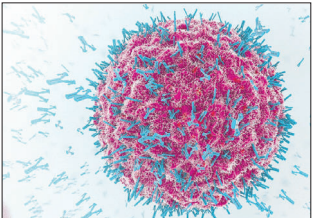
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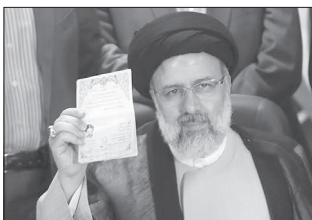
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Our mission: to fight for a just, safe and sustainable world!

The reports now emerging in the wake of the G7 summit, which took place in Cornwall last week, of the deliberations made by heads of some of the most powerful capitalist countries, provide a sombre reminder of the challenges facing people across the world - especially from the poorer nations.

There has been no shortage of important issues for the attention of all those campaigning for peace, human rights, and the sovereignty of independent nations. One is the Israeli military assault on the Palestinian people just last month. Another is the continuing catastrophe of the war in Yemen. There are the issues of continuing sanctions against Venezuela, Iran, and Cuba - and the trampling upon the rights of ordinary citizens in Myanmar (Burma).

Meanwhile, Sub-Saharan African countries face an existential threat because of a lack of access to the coronavirus vaccines.

Furthermore, there is the vital matter of addressing the threats posed to the world's climate and environment - these are not just the fanciful whims of liberal opinion but a matter of life and death for communities everywhere. One would have expected that the G7 summit would have offered some meaningful indication that the urgency of tackling these ills is both accepted and understood.

Climate change, mounting inequality, racism, and discrimination, are the by-products of the economic system in which we live. These important challenges cannot be answered by blaming China, continuing to violate the sovereignty of small and poorer nations, or bypassing the United Nations. The G7 approach to world affairs and the current way in which nations, large and

small, powerful and weak, relate to each other has to change urgently.

From 11 to 21 May the world witnessed yet another cruel and vicious assault upon the Palestinian people by Israel. Their crime? Continuing to agitate for their legitimate rights of national self-determination and an independent state of Palestine in accordance with successive UN resolutions. Liberation believes that the British people are morally justified to demonstrate against Israeli state policies and to demand Britain recognise the independent state of Palestine.

And, finally, regarding a pandemic which is far from over, despite the prevailing narrative put about by the largely capitalist-owned media, Liberation firmly believes that the world will only be safe when all people are safe - not just those of the first world. Many of the people hardest hit - indeed still being hit - are those of the former colonies, to whom more than a rhetorical debt is owed.

Thus, in many respects, the G7 summit was a theatre of the macabre rather than absurd. The US, Britain, and France, account for three of the official top six afflicted countries in terms of the four-million COVID-19 deaths worldwide, while many more countries across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Central and South America face a growing catastrophe due to the shortages of vaccines and continuing economic exploitation by that same G7. A billion vaccines were promised for poorer countries despite the WHO estimate of an 8-11 billion doses needed.

What is needed is a waiving of intellectual property rights and patents, to enable countries to produce their own vaccines and boost availability - rather than another shot in the arm for pharmaceutical giant profiteering.

Liberation needs to be the voice of a united and diverse movement that can challenge this stale state of affairs. Time is short. The threat to world peace, our health, and our survival, is too serious to dismiss! Let's build our great campaigning organisation!

Jamshid Ahmadi

ABOVE: The G7 summit in Cornwall earlier this month: a theatre of the macabre rather than absurd.
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news/Liberation

The people of Myanmar (Burma) face life under the iron heel of the military and have resolved to free themselves. They deserve our unrelenting support and solidarity



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Solidarity with People of Myanmar (Burma)

Liberation Statement

In response to the brutal suppression of democracy in Myanmar (Burma), Liberation has issued a statement of solidarity with its people as they take to the streets in protest. The statement, which received unanimous support at our recent AGM, is summarised here:

The mass upsurge in Myanmar (Burma) against the military takeover on 1 February 2021 has engaged people from all walks of life – from civil servants and health workers to energy sector employees and railway workers.

The coup was staged to coincide with the planned opening of parliament, following the 8 November 2020 general election,

which yielded a landslide victory for Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD).

Threatened by the growing electoral legitimacy of the NLD and its leader, the military elite proclaimed the result invalid. Stakes were high, the upper echelons of the armed forces having built a powerful network of patronage and business interests.

Now, as protests continue to grow, the police and army are resorting to outright repression, including live fire at peaceful demonstrators. Hundreds have been arrested and imprisoned.

Liberation gives its full backing to the progressive campaign for the return of democracy in Myanmar (Burma), demanding an immediate end to military

rule and the release of all detainees, as well as protection of the lives, human and democratic rights, and livelihoods of the Rohingya and other ethnic minority groups threatened by the return of martial rule.

The people of Myanmar (Burma) face life under the iron heel of the military and have resolved to free themselves. They deserve our unrelenting support and solidarity.

Liberation is organising a public Zoom meeting in solidarity with the people of Myanmar (Burma). For details, please visit our website www.liberationorg.co.uk, where you can also read the full statement on Myanmar (Burma).



Palestine

Solidarity

Liberation held a successful public meeting on Palestine earlier this month. Speakers were Aqel Taqaz, secretary, Palestinian Committee for Peace and Solidarity, Aida Touma-Suleiman, member of Knesset, Israeli parliament, Jeremy Corbyn, MP for Islington North, former Labour party leader, former chair and current council member of Liberation, and Louise Regan, vice chair, Palestine Solidarity Campaign. Titled, "End the Colonial Occupation of Palestine!", the event included a lively question and answer session. The event, held on zoom and live-streamed on Facebook, can be viewed at www.facebook.com/liberationorg



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Taking forward the anti-imperialist struggle

Liberation AGM

The struggles of the peoples of Iran, Iraq, the Chagos Islands and Myanmar against neo-colonialist policies were the subject of lively debate at Liberation's Annual General Meeting on March 13.

Attending delegates, comprising Liberation members and their guests, backed the three motions and statement, and heard Jeremy Corbyn MP deliver an impassioned eulogy for Stan Newens. Jeremy, former Liberation chair and current council member, recounted the valuable contribution of the former longstanding president of Liberation to the

movement for the freedom of colonial peoples both as MP and MEP.

Harsev Bains, presenting on behalf of Liberation's Executive, briefed Liberation members on the organisation's newly drafted education plan. This aims to deepen understanding within the UK Labour movement of Liberation's current anti-imperialist campaigns and its role in anti-colonial history.

The AGM received a report of activities for the period since the previous AGM in 2019 and the annual accounts. The AGM also renewed Liberation's Central Council with all 17 presented seconded and confirmed in place. The Executive,

comprising Jamshid Ahmadi, Katie Ferola, Tom Gill, Ararat Ratoosi and Peter Talbot, were re-elected too.

The meeting, for the first time held online, was delightfully punctuated by two wonderful classical pieces based on old Iranian songs by Sara Bahari, the concert pianist and supporter of Liberation.

Liberation Executive wishes to put on record its heartfelt thanks to Bahari and the chair, Baroness Christine Blower, former General Secretary of the NUT.

Jeremy's dedication to Stan can be viewed on Liberation's youtube account, accessed via Liberationorg.co.uk

interview/Ofer Cassif

The normalisation [following the ceasefire] is, as normally here, abnormal. The occupation and siege go on, ethnic cleansing in occupied East Jerusalem worsens, and within Israel proper there is a continuous persecution of Palestinian political activists

Words not enough to end Israeli occupation of Palestine

Dr. Ofer Cassif, an Israeli member of the Knesset (parliament), talks to Liberation journal about the recent tragic bombardment of the Palestinian people by the Netanyahu-led government and why, as a Jewish politician, he supports the struggle for Palestinian liberation. In his column for *Haaretz*, noted left-wing intellectual, Gideon Levy, has described Dr. Cassif as “a very important person” and a “Knesset leftist of a new stripe” who does not mince his words when it comes to taking a clear anti-Zionist stance.



Dr. Cassif's radicalism has made him a target for assaults, including from the police, and numerous death threats. This, Dr. Cassif says, is not something unique to him - increasingly, Israeli settler colonial violence is being taking aim at Jewish Israelis who offer any type of critique of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu or Israeli occupation policies.

Liberation Following the ceasefire, media and news reports tend to refer to the fighting, and the issues which spurred it, in the past tense. However, the situation on the ground in Israel and the Palestinian Territories is far from normalised, particularly in Israel itself. Could you give us a brief overview of the current situation there?

Ofer Cassif The normalisation is, as normally here, abnormal. The occupation and siege go on, ethnic cleansing in occupied East Jerusalem worsens, and within Israel proper there is a continuous persecution of Palestinian political activists, mainly, but not solely, from the CPI and HADASH. Hundreds are arrested just for their political activism against the occupation and racism.

Liberation At this current juncture, how do you see events unfolding if their current trajectory remains uninterrupted?

Ofer Cassif It does indeed seem that the current trajectory will hold under the coming government, i.e. the occupation, the siege, the ethnic cleansing, the racism and apartheid - all those are not going to be reduced under Bennett and Lapid. Thus, I cannot see the violence, including the seeds of civil war, somehow vanishing. Only the liberation of the Palestinian people - the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, as well as a just solution to the refugee issue in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions - can deliver real peace, stability, tranquillity, and prosperity to our region.

Liberation You and many others have drawn attention to the central role in these events of Benjamin Netanyahu himself, with his rapid transition from beleaguered Prime Minister to the nation's strongman during the recent violence. Could you expand on this? What of the demonstrations against him not so long ago?

Ofer Cassif Netanyahu knows that once he loses his role as a PM he might find himself in prison in a few months. Hence, like a wounded predator, he's been doing whatever he can to keep his power: racial incitement against the Palestinian people, igniting fire in Al-Quds and Gaza, encouraging lynchings and pogroms against Arab-Palestinian citizens in Israel proper, and so forth. Those who have been demonstrating against him, calling for his resignation, are aware of his insanity and thus keep struggling for his removal from office.

Liberation How do you gauge the general mood of the Israeli left regarding the current situation?

Ofer Cassif I think a famous Gramscian imperative would best describe the mood and state of affairs among leftists in Israel: “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will”. That is, we're all hoping and keep fighting for the best, but still expecting the worst and preparing for it.

Liberation Much of the current international coverage - whether before, during, or after the recent onslaught - has tried to conjure an image of parity between the two sides. What is your take on this?

Ofer Cassif This is really outrageous! There is no parity between occupier and occupied, victimiser and victim. We oppose any targeting of innocent civilians, whether in Gaza or in Israel, but only a blinded bigot can ignore the malicious circumstances under which the Palestinians live (particularly in Gaza) and compare the advanced and lethal weapons that Israel has and uses to the relatively primitive missiles in Hamas' possession.

Liberation We witnessed a very swift cessation to Israel's bombardment of Gaza, once the U.S. began to lean on Netanyahu. How do you view the role of the Biden administration regarding Israel-Palestine?

Ofer Cassif International pressure, especially from the US, is crucially important. Without international support or silence, Israel could never pursue its crimes. The Biden administration is clearly pivotal here - and I hope, and believe, that the progressive wing of the Democrats will lead him in the right direction.

Liberation How to you assess the dangers of a wider Middle East conflagration - e.g. aggression towards Iran - and the effects this would have on the situation vis à vis Israel-Palestine?

Ofer Cassif As I have said before, aggression towards Iran is a serious and realistic scenario. Just two weeks ago,

Netanyahu implied that he is prepared to attack Iran, even if the US objects. It seems that it was Biden who called him to order and calmed his madness this time. I hope Biden will keep going that way, that a sort of a new Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action will be achieved, and that the whole region (and world) will be clean of WMD.

Liberation Many well-intentioned external observers and supporters of a peaceful solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict remark that the facts on the ground make the Two State Solution less viable. What is your take on this? What is the official position of Hadash on this?

Ofer Cassif Hadash and I personally still support the two-state solution. Firstly, the Palestinian People are entitled to self-determination in their own sovereign independent state, something that was prevented by Israel since the Nakba: it is their right. Secondly, as Lenin argued more than once; national self-determination is often crucial in reducing hostility between nations, hence a precondition for any progress towards socialism. But at some point in the future, after Palestinian liberation has materialised, the two states might decide to join, by consent, into one state, a federation etc.

Liberation What can observers and the international community do - and what position should they advocate - if they are genuinely concerned for a peaceful resolution to this conflict and the Two State Solution?

Ofer Cassif The international community must raise a clear voice against the Israeli occupation and racist practices and call for the immediate liberation of the Palestinian people. But words are not enough. Real deeds are needed; like boycotts, governmental decisions etc. Another important point is that those who support Palestinian liberation and a just solution must also object loudly to any hint of antisemitism and exclude those who endorse it, explicitly or implicitly. As the famous slogan goes, “Anti-Semitism is a crime, anti-Zionism is a duty.” Besides being a moral duty, the distinction between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism will also undermine the commonplace attempt by the Israeli establishment and its allies to conflate the two, by which they accuse any criticism of Israel as representative of anti-Jewish tendencies and therefore illegitimate.

Dr. Cassif is a member of the Knesset representing the Joint List - an alliance of the four Palestinian-majority political parties in Israel. He serves as a representative of the left-wing Jabha (Hadash) coalition, an Arab-Israeli grouping which includes the Israeli Communist Party.

comment/Palestine

The international community remains incapable, unready, and unwilling to discuss the very essence of the problem, and that is the continuing colonial occupation of Palestine by Israel

A new round of Israeli aggression

One month ago, Palestinians embarked on a general strike to protest Israel’s inhumane war on a people whose only ‘crime’ is to call for the implementation of the relevant UN resolutions regarding the creation of a viable independent Palestinian state.

A ceasefire was agreed to as international public opinion visibly shifted against the Israeli bombardment of civilian targets in Gaza.

by Dr. Aqel Taqaz



Dr. Aqel Taqaz is Secretary of the Palestinian Committee for Peace and Solidarity, former elected mayor of Kobar district in the occupied West Bank and a lifelong activist in the Palestinian struggle. He gives his view on the recent violence, the international reaction to it, and what is next for Palestine and the two-state solution*

A new round of unhindered Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people has only recently come to a close. An aggression that has characterised the State of Israel since its founding in 1948 - and even before then by its early proponents.

The bombardment of Gaza has stopped for the time being - but the aggression against Jerusalem, Jenin, and other areas, continues unabated. Three Palestinians were martyred in Jenin; the siege of Sheikh Jarrah goes on, in preparation for the eviction of its residents, while dozens of families in Silwan from East Jerusalem await the same fate. Extremist Zionist settlers continue to practice their daily rituals of provocation and aggression against the Palestinian people without any deterrence or restraint whatsoever from the Israeli authorities.

Colonial occupation

International envoys flock one after the other to Israel and Palestine, as well as capital cities elsewhere, to discuss one matter: reaching of a long-term agreement to stabilise the ceasefire reached in the early hours of Friday 21 May. The Palestinian question - and the wider long-running issues, that is, legitimate grievances, it encompasses - was crudely and unjustly reduced to a supposed parity between the heavy bombardment of besieged Gaza and the missiles fired from Gaza towards Israel during those terrible eleven days.

This indicates that the international community, represented by the United Nations (whose Security Council was unable to hold a session to discuss the situation in Palestine day after day throughout the crisis in May), the International Quartet, the European Union, and particularly the United States, remains incapable, unready, and unwilling to discuss the very essence of the problem, and that is the continuing colonial

occupation by Israel. No serious observer should be left in any doubt; this issue lies at the core of all the other problems and everything else is incidental to this occupation. The glaring reality is that the international community - despite the dozens of resolutions relating to the Palestinian issue, the necessity of ending the occupation, the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and the establishment of their independent state - is wholly incapable of bringing pressure to bear upon, let alone forcing, Israel to comply with international law, resolutions of international legitimacy, and respect for human rights, as a means to resolving this longest of conflicts.

Let it not be forgotten that Israel was established on the basis of United Nations Resolution 181, which divided then-Palestine into two states. The Palestinian state was supposed to be established as soon as this resolution was implemented, yet this did not happen. Only the part of this resolution relating to the creation of Israel was implemented, while the parallel establishment of the Palestinian state was not. Then, in 1948, Israel occupied more than half of the area that was designated for the Palestinian state, before going on to occupy the rest of it in 1967, and then went on to annex Jerusalem and build hundreds of settlements and a separation wall across the territory it had seized.

Two-state solution

This reality means the possibility of the two-state solution is now in real danger if the international community does not fulfill its obligations.

The future of the two peoples and the cause of peace urgently requires the implementation of the two-state solution, namely the empowerment of the Palestinian people to determine their own sovereign affairs and establish their independent state within the borders as they stood on 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the right of refugees to return in accordance with Resolution 194.

Otherwise, the terrible events of last month will only be another footnote and link in the chain of Israeli violence and crimes against the Palestinian people. This in turn raises major question marks over the fate of the wider region, including that of Israel itself as a state. The complexities of an already fraught regional situation should not be exacerbated further.

Therefore, the continuation of the international campaign of solidarity with the struggle of the Palestinian people to compel Israel to respect its obligations under international law is of great importance, if not more so now.

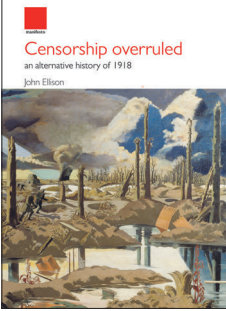
*An affiliate of the World Peace Council, of which Dr. Aqel Taqaz is a secretariat member

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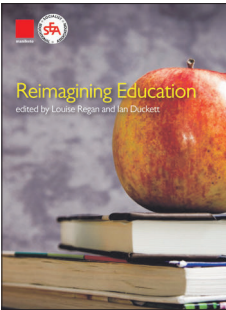
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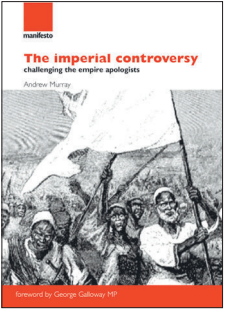
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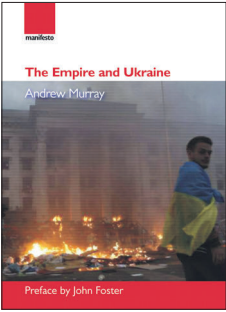
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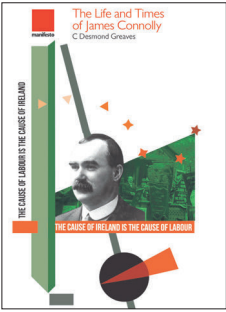
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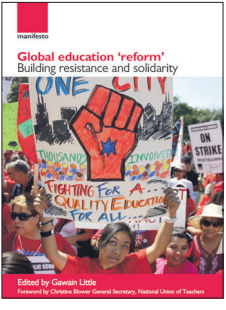
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people's vaccine/interview

If we want to get out of this pandemic as soon as possible, we need to lift patents and share technology not tomorrow, but yesterday



Covid-19:
No one is safe until everyone is safe

The central question is: are our governments ready to confront Big Pharma and put people over profit?

Liberation Could you tell us a little about the 'The People's Vaccine Alliance' and who its main opponents are in Europe and worldwide?

Marc Botenga The People's Vaccine Alliance is a broad and global coalition of organisations and activists campaigning for a "people's vaccine", rather than a "profit vaccine", against COVID-19. This means lifting all obstacles to universal vaccine access. Patents are one of these obstacles. Patents offer a monopoly on the vaccine to one or a few companies. In the European Union, a large citizens' initiative, No Profit on Pandemic, is trying to make the European Commission act upon these principles, because today, mostly rich countries, including European ones, oppose lifting patents, while a large coalition of southern countries supports it.

Liberation The pharma monopolies are infamous for continually extending their intellectual property rights and patents. Could the appearance of Covid variants be used as a strategy to retain and extend patents on vaccines for a very long time?

Marc Botenga Even without variants,



the pharmaceutical industry would try to hold on to their patents as long as possible. But, indeed, the longer the virus circulates, the more variants will appear. And each time we will have to wonder: does the vaccine protect against the new variant? So,

if we want to get out of this pandemic as soon as possible, we need to lift patents and share technology not tomorrow, but yesterday. The vaccine needs to circulate quicker than the virus. Western governments refuse to share technology with third countries in order to protect "their" multinationals' profits.

Liberation How can the private sector be directed or indeed forced to accept coordinated national and global planning for vaccines? What should progressive forces do in this regard?

Marc Botenga The necessary technical tools and instruments exist. We have platforms for technology transfers and patent pooling at the World Health Organization. The World Trade Organization can suspend patents. Even in the United States, the centralized Operation Warp Speed, combined with the threat of the Defence Production Act, pushed several companies to prioritize the production of raw materials for the vaccine. It is a matter of political will. The central question is: are our governments ready to confront Big Pharma and put people over profit? We need to mobilize to make them do exactly that. Big Pharma has huge policy leverage.



Vaccine for all:
necessity not choice

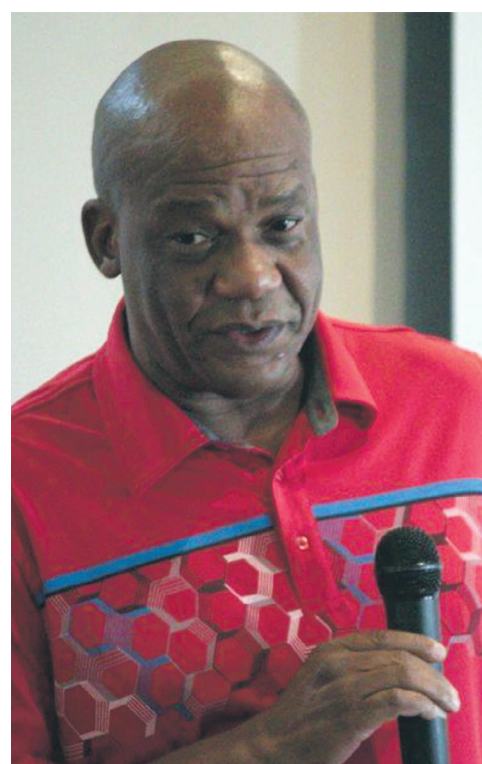
"New medications ... have become commodities whose prices only the rich countries can afford" (Fidel Castro, 2000)

by **Chris Matlhako**

Castro further, he observed: "Vaccines have become the most efficient technology to keep health-care expenses low since they can prevent diseases with one dosage. However, as they yield low profits, they are put aside in favour of medications that require repeated dosages and yield higher benefits. The new medications, the best seeds and, in general, the best technologies have become commodities whose prices only the rich countries can afford" (p. 286).

Today, in the midst of the worst pandemic in recent times, these disparities - between the developed world (Global North) and the Global South - have been emasculated, as the pandemic tears apart the artificial veil over many aspects of health, income, social and other related aspects of the world. The health systems of the developing world have been overwhelmed and unable to cope with the sheer pressure of the pandemic. In the 'core' developed world, racialized disparities have occurred as racial stratifications underpinning racial capitalism - of the poor and rich.

The political economy of the Covid-19 pandemic is also located firmly in the long arch of racial capitalism and shows mechanisms by which Covid-19 has exacerbated the already existing structural racial and colonial inequalities that underpin the global economy. 'Core' countries have insisted that workers, both in their countries and elsewhere, ensure continued production and profits, thereby exacerbating racial and



economic inequalities both within and between their countries. Meanwhile, ordinary people, especially the marginal strata and poor, have been systematically excluded and further marginalised, and denied much needed social protections to cope with the impacts of Covid-19 on their health, income, and overall well-being.

Coming on the back of the 2008/9 financial crisis, the consequences of the

pandemic will leave even deeper scars in the fabric of the developing world and will take longer periods to recover from - if there are indeed prospects for that, given the dynamics of the uneven world system sustained by capitalism and its neoliberal variant. This is what Castro was referring to - the imperative of 'Third World Unite or Die'.

Castro could easily have been referring to the current juncture, in which the novel coronavirus (SAR-CoV-2) has wrecked global health systems. It is reported that almost three 3 million have been killed by the SAR-Cov-2 and almost 200 million have been infected. Recently, variants of the virus have been discovered as waves of infections continue unabated. Almost 8 billion have been vaccinated - which represents a minute 1.5% of the world's population, and 80% of them from only 10 countries, says Vijay Prashad of the Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research (Tricontinental, 1 April 2021).

Medical apartheid has been brought to the fore in the form of 'vaccine nationalism' by the developed countries. The World Health Organization (WHO), which has since 1950 celebrated Global Health Day on 7 April, found it appropriate to theme this year's celebrations as: 'Building a fairer, healthier world.' This goes to the heart of medical apartheid. Anti-imperialist progressives across the globe meanwhile called for 'free vaccine for all' during celebrations of the

peoples' vaccine/EU & Africa

Fidel Castro gave a speech at the opening session of the South Summit, , Havana 12 April 2000, and remarked: “Never before has humanity had such formidable scientific and technological potential, such extraordinary capacity to produce riches and well-being, but never before have disparity and inequality been so profound in the world.”*

In front of their financial firepower, we need to put the people’s mobilization and pressure.

Liberation China, Russia and Cuba are effectively outside the G7 countries pharma cartels. What is their potential for vaccine research and mass production and distribution? How can they be supported?

Marc Botenga The situation in and of these three countries is very different. However, all three have developed their own vaccines, some of which are now on the world market. In particular, the development of a non-profit vaccine by Cuba, a country under embargo, is a huge achievement. The potential of countries like China and India to produce vaccines is of course huge, but there is also unused production capacity in unusual suspects, like Senegal, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. We need to activate it as soon as possible by lifting patents and sharing all relevant technology.

Marc Botenga Are there any estimates of how many vaccines are needed globally and how much it costs annually, in order to ensure continued worldwide immunisation?

The Public Citizen NGO drafted a plan

to produce eight billion vaccine doses by May 2022, which might cover up to 80% of the world population. It can be done. A plan drafted by the IMF proposed vaccinating 60 percent of the world population by mid-2022, with estimated economic benefits of 9 trillion dollars against a cost of 50 billion dollars, a great “return on investment,” Martin Wolf wrote in the *Financial Times*. The total cost will of course depend on who sets the price. If we do not lift patents, Big Pharma will set the price. We already know from leaks that Pfizer wants to increase its prices once the pandemic is over. In the US, they speak of up to 175 dollars a dose.

Liberation How do you see the contractual aspects of the waiving of patents for vaccines? For example, who is paying for the research and development of vaccines? How do you envisage that people will be able to secure complete transparency?

Marc Botenga Public funds have covered much of the investment for the research and development of these vaccines, and even part of the production capacity and the financial risk for side effects. This is what the European Commission itself called de-risking, meaning they transferred the

investment risk from private actors to public authorities. If we use public funds to develop a drug, why should the final product be private property? One option would be to attach stringent conditions to public funds, including on transparency and ownership.

Liberation Is your approach based on solidarity between people living and working under different conditions, political and social situations etc? Is your plan based on the idea of producing generic vaccines in various countries that have the technical ability and know how to mass produce vaccines?

Marc Botenga Yes. Patents reinforce shortages, and in case of shortages, the wealthiest countries buy up most vaccines. But no one is safe until everyone is safe, so the more innovative life-saving drugs can be developed and produced all over the world, the better. Why is it that in the face of a global pandemic, we cannot share technology and activate production capacity all over the world? Local production is key to defeating the pandemic, and so is sharing technology. The positive thing of the new mRNA vaccines is precisely that, while initially

more complicated, they have great potential for rapid development and low-cost local production.

Liberation What is your view about the importance of the public health system? This is important as the EU has been championing cuts in health care budgets and in effect promotes private health care.

Marc Botenga Over the last decade, the European Commission called 63 times for cuts in national health systems. Hospitals throughout Europe were understaffed and under-equipped. A strong national public health system is essential. From community-based primary health care services to well-equipped and staffed public hospitals, and a well-organized national system. The West also needs to get out of its self-centred worldview and draw inspiration from other countries. We can learn something from how some countries in the Asia-Pacific, or the state of Kerala in India, dealt with the pandemic.

Marc Botenga is an MEP for the Workers' Party of Belgium and part of the European United Left–Nordic Green Left party group in the European Parliament

‘International Week of Anti-Imperialist Struggle’ on 1 April.

Even though a large part of the work undertaken to develop vaccines to respond to the SAR-Cov-2 has been supported through public funds, it is the private profit-making market mechanism which has been allowed to play a key part in their distribution and sale. Within a short space of time, upon learning of the early cases of the virus from the Chinese officials, private and public institutions rushed to develop vaccines. Why, therefore, are Covid-19 vaccines not being provided to the whole world?

Both Moderna and Pfizer – who received vast amounts of public funds towards developing a vaccine for Covid-19 have profited significantly by registering patents on the vaccines to secure future profit even though these efforts had been made possible only through public funding.

Poorer nations have not been able to access much needed vaccine doses due to several factors. Many of the Global South countries do not command the revenues in their national budgets to purchase the necessary doses from private providers. Their health-care systems are non-existent in many areas, and they are unable to cope with the burden of Covid-19 implications. Lack of basic infrastructure and beds in many dilapidated hospitals in the poorer nations means that the majority who will succumb will be unable to access healthcare

– the poor and marginalised. It is also acknowledged that many poorer nations will not have vaccines for their citizens before 2023, while the Global North has secured more vaccines than required – enough to vaccinate their populations three times over. In fact, the Global North, with less than 14% of the world’s population, has secured more than half the total anticipated vaccines.

South Africa and India approached the WHO in 2020 asking for a temporary waiver of patent obligations under the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) so that countries could produce generic versions of the vaccines to distribute at low cost for mass vaccination. As expected, this was rejected by the Global North because, it was argued, such a waiver ‘would stifle research and innovation’ – even though the vaccines were developed largely through public funding. In April 2020, the WHO, with other partners, set up the Covid-19 Vaccines Access (COVAX) to ensure equitable access to the vaccines.

For its part, the African Union established a platform through which it could acquire vaccines for its member states. This arose because many AU members states could not on their own procure such vaccines because of the precariousness of their finances and level of indebtedness. The AU’s African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team, through which countries can obtain vaccine doses, plans to procure 670 million vaccine doses

and is working in collaboration with the African Export-Import Bank (AfreximBank).

Despite the almost six decade-long US embargo and illegal blockade, Cuba has shown that it is possible to contain the spread of the pandemic and is in the advanced trial stages for two of its vaccines. The Lancet Infectious Diseases (April 2021) reports that the reason why Cuba has been successful in keeping Covid-19 at bay is its ‘long-standing commitment to health’.

Cuba is due to launch a phase 3 trial of its subunit conjugate vaccine against Covid-19. Soberana-2 is one of four Covid-19 candidate vaccines being developed in Cuba and is produced by the Finlay Institute in Havana.

This period has heralded an important aspect concerning solidarity and the key question of healthcare being a public good. It is important to note the stance of China throughout this period. Unlike the US, China chose global cooperation and has actively participated in international projects on vaccine research and development. It shared the genome sequence of the novel coronavirus with the WHO, thus setting the stage for international vaccine development. Together with more than 140 countries, China adopted a resolution to strengthen global cooperation in response to the pandemic.

Equitable access to vaccines is crucial for the all-round fight against pandemics and

the existence of several candidate vaccines in different phases of trials is good news. ‘In responding to Covid-19 challenges, GAVI – the vaccine alliance consisting mainly of medicine developers in the developed countries, has succeeded in obtaining pledges by governments to cooperate. Further, in addition to GAVI, the developing countries vaccine manufacturers network (DCVMN) is a ready platform for rapid mass production of vaccines prequalified by the WHO’ says Prof Zha Daojiong of Peking University. Given the contraction of the world economy, in large part due to travel and quarantine restrictions for controlling the spread of the virus, cooperation in worldwide deployment of Covid-19 vaccines is not a matter of choice but of necessity.

As the saying goes: “Where there’s a will, there’s a way”. The world can come together to attain equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines. Healthcare provision and access are essential for the poor of the world. Internationalist solidarity, such as the generosity of Cuba Henry Reeve Medical Brigade, is exemplary.

Chris Matlhako is general coordinator of the South African Peace Initiative and Second Deputy General Secretary of the South African Communist Party.

* (Capitalism in Crisis: Globalization and World Politics Today. 2000).

people's vaccine/capitalism

Big Capital has been promoting a policy, where the gap between their monopoly profits and the prices which the poor can pay, are bridged by aid from rich countries and philanthropic institutions. This is a one-time loss that the rich countries are willing to bear for retaining their global monopolies



From vaccine apartheid to vaccine neo-colonialism

Are we seeing, like disaster capitalism, a version of pandemic capitalism where vaccines are the way to prise open the economies of the poor countries?

by **Prabir Purkayastha**

WE ARE USED To extremes when we think about global poverty, the huge gap between the poor and the rich countries. Addressing poverty is a hard problem. It means reversing the hundreds of years of history: the direct colonial looting that took place in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This continues under neo-colonial garb.

Providing vaccines to everybody in the world is a far simpler problem. Even the rich countries have a stake in this. IMF calculations show that if the pandemic continues, the world would lose nine trillion dollars by 2025. According to WHO, with only half a per cent of this \$9 trillion—or \$50 billion—we can vaccinate the entire world by middle 2022 and end the epidemic. Instead, according to ourworldindata.org figures (June 11, 2021), we have less than 1% of Africa and less than 2.5% of Asia which has been fully vaccinated against about 42% in the US and UK. At this rate, the rich countries will vaccinate all their people in the next 3-6 months, while the rest of the world takes another three years. This is not vaccine nationalism but vaccine apartheid on a global scale.

Why did the rich countries led by the US not take a trajectory that would end the epidemic much earlier than it is likely today? Is it simply the selfishness of the rich? Or is there a deeper strategic play in this unfolding of vaccine apartheid?

To answer this question, we need to look at

the options that existed for increasing the production of vaccines which are increasingly being closed out with our current trajectory. We will also examine the emerging geostrategic picture, with China emerging as the global economic powerhouse and weakening of the US, the pre-eminent economic power in the world after the Second World War.

Vaccinating the world against Covid-19 demanded that the production of vaccines be distributed across the globe. For example, Africa, with a population of 1.3 billion, imports 99% of its vaccine requirement. Unless we have a large number of production facilities, the global vaccine supply will be held captive to large producers like the US and India, where domestic considerations can trump international obligations. A robust vaccine supply system cannot afford to have bottlenecks that we saw with the US prioritising its needs using the 1950 Korean Defence Production Act, or India stopping exports after its explosive second wave in April-May this year.

The 73rd World Health Assembly in May 2020 passed a resolution on sharing technology for producing vaccines, medicines and diagnostic kits to combat the threat of Covid-19. The only opposition was from the US. WHO created the Technology Access Pool (C-TAP) to pool patents and other intellectual property to share it with producers across the globe. The move by South Africa and India in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on suspending patents and other intellectual property rights was the other half of this plan.

Big pharma sees a market

Big Pharma saw in vaccines, medicines and diagnostics a new global market and fought this trajectory tooth and nail. They were aided by Bill Gates, who after accumulating a huge fortune from monopoly rents on his Windows operating system, has emerged as the private czar of global health. He and his foundations are the second-largest donors to WHO. Instead of backing the technology pool, Bill Gates, other private foundations and Big Pharma backed an alternate mechanism, the Access to Covid-19 Tools Accelerator, or ACT-Accelerator.

The difference between the two is simple: in C-TAP, technology and knowledge would be accessible to any entity capable of making vaccines or other products and make them self-reliant. In the ACT-Accelerator, the platform would facilitate the transfer of technology while the intellectual property remains with Big Pharma. The rich country governments and various charities will also provide big money to Big Pharma for this “altruism”. It is a policy to continue dependence on Big Pharma to prevent a self-reliant vaccine and pharmaceutical industry to emerge in the third world.

The charity model is at the heart of Big Capital's strategy to defeat self-reliance and local manufacturing. During the AIDS



epidemic, Big Pharma tried to sue South Africa for buying cheap, generic AIDS drugs from India at one-thirtieth the price of their patented drugs. It was possible to manufacture AIDS drugs cheaply in India because of its Patent Laws and indigenous capacity. This was a public relations disaster for Big Pharma. Learning from this fiasco, they have been promoting a policy, where the gap between their monopoly profits and the prices which the poor can pay, are bridged by aid from rich countries and philanthropic institutions. This is a one-time loss that the rich countries are willing to bear for retaining their global monopolies.

Dependency of poor countries

This is why transferring technology—in this case vaccine production—is such a threat to Big Pharma. The game here is retaining the existing dependency that poor countries have on Big Pharma, preventing them from developing their independent production capabilities and thus retaining their market.

Of course, all vaccines are not equal. Some vaccines—the mRNA vaccines—require an ultra-cold supply chain of minus 70 to 80 C, which most countries cannot afford for mass vaccination. But if we look at the other two vaccine alternatives, the inactivated virus that Sinopharm, Sinovac and ICMR-Bharat Biotech have used, or the adenovirus vector route of Oxford-AstraZeneca, Gamaleya and Cansino, they are certainly possible to transfer to many other countries. The inactivated virus vaccines have been used for more than a hundred years and to claim that their technology cannot be transferred to other countries is simply nonsense. With emerging biotechnology capabilities in many countries in Asia and Latin America transferring the adenovirus vector technology to a much larger number of countries is certainly possible.

The US believed in the Quad strategy: using India as the supply hub of vaccines for the low and middle-income countries. That is why Bill Gates and his various vaccine initiatives focussed on Serum Institute of India, the world's vaccine manufacturer by volume as the lynchpin of their vaccine supply. The rich countries would keep their supplies of mRNA and other vaccines for themselves,

WHO's COVAX charitable model with tied technology and captive suppliers would take care of the rest, albeit at a much slower pace than what the world required. The COVAX platform had promised 92 low and middle-income countries that 20% of their requirements of vaccines for 2021 would be met from COVAX supplies.

This policy came a cropper on the Modi government's incompetence in expanding vaccine production rapidly within the country and the huge second wave that it failed to control. It responded by clamping down on India's vaccine exports that had already been paid for by the COVAX platform. The consequence is the huge gap that has now opened up for even the 20% supplies that COVAX had promised low and middle-income countries.

In this gap, Chinese vaccines, which have passed the WHO's emergency use authorisation guidelines, have stepped in. They are now being used in a large number of countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia. China has also ramped up its vaccine manufacturing significantly and is running the world's largest vaccination program with more than 809 million doses delivered compared to the US's 304 million and India's 233 million (Ourworldindata.org, 11th June). It is also the world's largest exporter of Covid-19 vaccines, including the transfer of technology to a large number of companies outside China.

From pandemic to endemic

There is another reason why Big Pharma may not want to end the pandemic but might like to see it becoming endemic requiring booster doses every year. This is the road we are now travelling. As vast swathes of people remain unvaccinated, more and more people will continue to be infected, providing the SARS-CoV-2 virus with a fertile habitat for mutation. This will increase its ability to bypass our vaccine enhanced defences. For us, it is a huge risk as such variants will continue our periodic lockdowns, physical distancing and disrupt a whole range of economic activities. This is why we say no one is safe unless everyone is safe. But such a trajectory will continue to enrich Big Pharma, while we all suffer.

The other question is if the economies of the poor countries are disrupted for the next 2-3 years, while the rich countries emerge in a relatively Covid-19 free environment, what happens to global inequalities between countries? We know that the pandemic has hit the global poor much harder than the rich, whose wealth has even increased under the pandemic by \$4 trillion. Are we seeing then, like disaster capitalism, a version of pandemic capitalism here? Are vaccines then the way to prise open the economies of the poor countries to strengthen neo-colonialism?

Prabir Purkayastha is former General Secretary, All India People's Science Network, Editor, Newsclick

people's vaccine/Germany

In the US and the EU, injections are now being given to adolescents and children with a lower risk of serious medical complications. In the South there is not enough vaccine available to immunise all physicians, let alone other high-risk groups



Patent waiver before big pharma profits

In the EU the German Government under Angela Merkel leads the way in loyalty to Big Pharma. Vaccines have become high-speed money presses for the big conglomerates.

by **Sevim Dagdelen**

BRUTE FORCE, Karl Marx noted, was required to create the original conditions for capitalism. Today, in the midst of Covid, capitalism's giant corporations similarly play with the lives of billions. The object is to extract maximum profit for the very few. The victims are similarly those at capitalism's periphery.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global challenge, one that can only be overcome by a global effort in which rich industrial nations assist the countries of the global South. In April 2020, Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel emphasised that the virus can only be defeated "if we pool our forces and form an incisive alliance". Vaccines, she argued, must be accessible to all people, regardless of the size of their incomes or their country's GDP. Equally the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen never tired of emphasising that vaccines were "a common good" and that the crisis could only be resolved globally. Subsequent events quickly exposed this feigned concern.

To end the pandemic the vaccination of a large proportion of the world's population is essential. The pandemic cannot be contained in Germany or the EU. The safety of any individual depends on the safety of everyone



across the world. Immunisation of the wealthy industrialised nations alone is epidemiologically short-sighted and ethically unacceptable. The longer it takes to push back the pandemic, the greater will be the risk of new virus mutations. In view of the likelihood that mutated variants of the virus will be more easily transmissible, every opportunity must be taken to speed up global immunisation.

For all the global talk of solidarity, little has translated into real political action. That is seen in the uneven global distribution of vaccines as well as in the utterly inadequate assistance given to the countries of the global South in establishing or expanding their own production capacity. In the United States and the EU, injections are now being given to adolescents and children with a lower risk of serious medical complications. In countries of the South there is not enough vaccine available to immunise all physicians, let alone other high-risk groups.

Global inequality

In high-income countries, an average of one in four inhabitants has now received a jab. In low-income countries, the figure is only one in more than 500. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), of the 700 million doses of vaccine that were distributed in the world in the first quarter of 2021, more than 87% went to high-income or upper middle-income countries. Low-income countries received only 0.2%.

Although the EU, for example, exported 43 million doses to 32 countries, the bulk of these went to the United Kingdom, Canada, Mexico and Japan, in other words to countries which manufacture vaccines themselves or can afford to buy them at market prices and/or which have temporarily blocked the export of vaccines or basic substances. In May, the EU – in spite of its own supply problems – finally approved the export of more than 100 million doses of coronavirus vaccine to Japan. In arithmetical terms, this ensures the vaccination of about 40% of the Japanese population. The actual purpose, however, is to ensure that a multi-billion-dollar event goes ahead this summer. Commission President von der Leyen announced candidly that the export authorisations were "a strong sign that

we support any preparation for the Olympic Games", now taking from 23 July to 8 August after being postponed last year. Here we see with the utmost clarity the cynical ruthlessness of the head of the Commission.

Her concern is about securing profits. The German BioNTech firm alone expects to register turnover of EUR 12.4 billion in the current year with its COVID-19 vaccine. Its net profit in the first quarter was about EUR 1.1 billion. By the end of 2021 a net return of six to seven billion or more is expected. For obvious reasons the company, based in Mainz at the aptly named address An der Goldgrube ("At the Gold Mine"), has no wish to share its patents.

Tax payer investment

The global fight against the pandemic must be a common endeavour. Much of the money invested in vaccine development has come from our own pockets as taxpayers. BioNTech alone has received 375 million euros from the German Government over the past year for the development of the mRNA vaccine and the necessary production facilities. There was also a loan of 100 million euros from the European Investment Bank. Other pharmaceutical companies have received similar injections of state aid. A list published in the medical journal The Lancet shows that the manufacturers Sanofi/Glaxo-Smith-Kline and Novavax have received 2.1 billion US dollars in public funding, AstraZeneca and the University of Oxford have received 1.7 billion, Johnson & Johnson 1.5 billion and Moderna 957 million. Yet governments have failed to set reasonable terms for fair pricing or rapid licensing.

Since October 2020 India, South Africa and more than 100 other member countries of the World Trade Organization (WTO) have called for a temporary waiver of patents on vaccines and diagnostic technology for SARS-CoV-2. So far they have waited in vain, even though the transfer of technological know-how and access to the requisite biological resources is an urgent imperative.

In May, US President Joe Biden scored a public relations hit with his call for relaxations of patent protection. At the same time, however, he continues to block the supply of essential basic substances for vaccine



production from the United States to other countries. In the EU the German Government under Angela Merkel leads the way in loyalty to Big Pharma. Vaccines have become high-speed money presses for the big conglomerates.

The unpalatable truth is that the countries of the South have easier access to weapons from Western armaments firms than to vaccines. As of the summer of 2021 the poorer countries are having to wait and see what quantities of vaccine the richer countries have left over and might pass on. The Director-General of the WHO, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, has observed that the world was on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure – paid with lives and livelihoods in the world's poorest countries. South Africa's President, Cyril Ramaphosa, has spoken of a "vaccine apartheid". While clinical trials for vaccine approval were conducted in Africa, the continent now has to beg for vaccines.

Hundreds of thousands of vaccine doses lay unused in the United States because insufficient numbers of people have come forward for vaccination. President Biden, however, in true 'America first' style, has banned the export of the basic components required for vaccine manufacture while the virus has been raging among his country's southern neighbours.

COVID vaccines must be treated as a common good. A great deal of know-how and suitable production facilities are required to manufacture vaccines. So the faster this knowledge and technology transfer can be initiated, the faster the necessary capacity can be developed. There is room for many things in this world but not for cut-throat capitalism where the profits of a minute few weigh more heavily than the lives of millions.

Sevim Dagdelen is the spokesperson for the parliamentary group of The Left Party in the Bundestag Committee on Foreign Affairs.

ABOVE LEFT: Merkel's concern is about securing profits. The German BioNTech firm has received 375 million euros from the German Government. Creative Commons
ABOVE RIGHT: Sevim Dagdelen

Iran/analysis

The regime's preferred candidate is Ebrahim Raisi, a conservative cleric and current chief justice who oversaw the execution of thousands of Iranian political prisoners, mainly socialists and communists

Election boycott further undermines regime's legitimacy

The candidate shortlist represents a very narrow range of political views, reflecting varying shades of support for the regime, while genuine opposition has been excluded altogether.

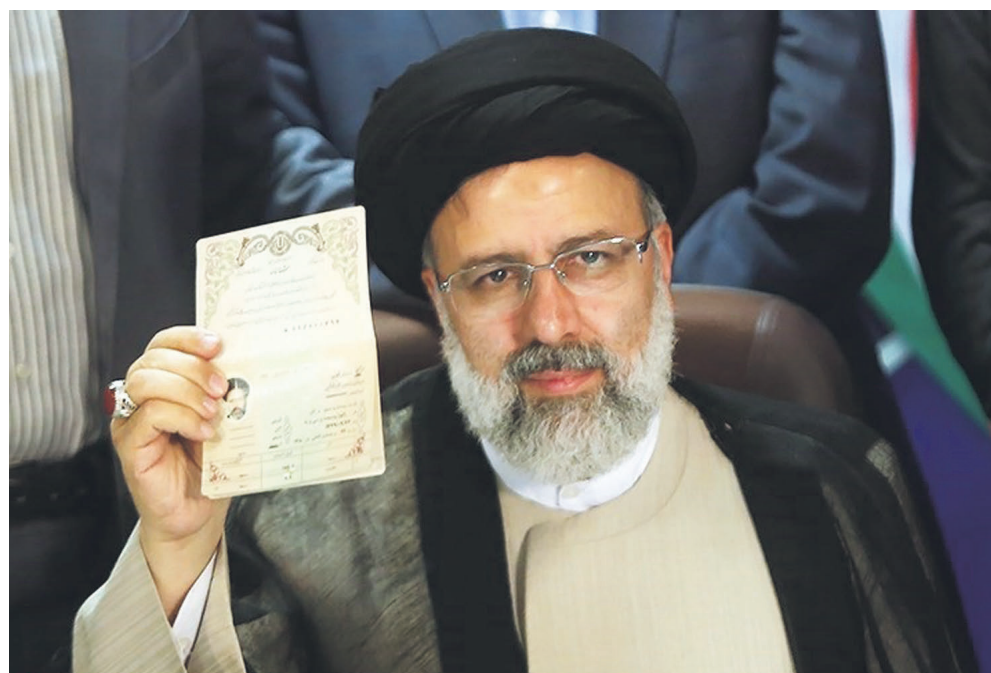
by **Jane Green**

With Iranian presidential elections scheduled for 18 June and the latest round of talks in Vienna aimed at reviving the Iran nuclear deal underway, the Islamic Republic is reaching a critical point. Jane Green, of CODIR, assesses the implications.

The role of the president in a theocratic dictatorship, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, may appear to be superfluous, with ultimate power being concentrated in the hands of Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Within the Iranian system the president can still attempt to exercise some influence but this is distorted by the narrow parameters of the theocracy.

While the president may lay claim to having an elected mandate, this is illusory in any real sense as the choice of candidates open to the public is strictly controlled by the regime and any hint of opposition to the prevailing orthodoxy is swiftly weeded out. Thus, for the upcoming presidential elections, of the 40 candidates that made the original long-list, only 7 have been allowed to stand for the ballot. This shortlist represents a very narrow range of political views, reflecting varying shades of support for the regime, while genuine opposition has been excluded altogether.

The 40-year history of the Islamic Republic has seen the legitimacy of each presidential election questioned as the political differences between candidates has narrowed each time. Gerrymandering, vote rigging, and intimidation have also featured heavily in the election process to ensure that the regime's



preferred candidate is successful.

It is an open secret that the regime's preferred candidate for this week's election is Ebrahim Raisi, a conservative cleric and current chief justice. Raisi is notorious amongst the opposition in Iran for having been a prominent member of the "death committee", which oversaw the execution of thousands of Iranian political prisoners, mainly socialists and communists, who were hanged from cranes in their droves in the late summer of 1988.

Unsurprisingly, there is a widespread call from the Iranian opposition to boycott the election, with initial estimates suggesting that up to 70% of the electorate may indeed stay away from the polls. The fear that this may be the case is reflected in the calls made in recent sermons by Khamenei, for believers not to heed the increasingly loud calls for a boycott of the election. He admitted that there had been some "mistakes" in the vetting of candidates and called for these to be redressed.

Troubled economy

Iran goes into the elections at a time when the country is blighted by economic bankruptcy due to the implementation of macro policies formulated by the clerical regime to serve the interests of the country's capitalists and powerful super-rich class. This is exacerbated by the economic sanctions imposed by the United States in contravention of international law, following the unilateral withdrawal of the US in 2018 from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) or Iran nuclear deal.

As a result, tens of millions of Iranians live below the poverty line; unemployment levels are sky-high, especially among the youth; and inflation is rampant. In addition, Iran has been devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic, wholly exacerbated by the regime's feeble response, which has led to

the deaths of more than 80,000 people and a further sharp deterioration in the economic situation.

As a consequence, opposition to the regime in the form of street protests openly denouncing corruption, economic mismanagement, and demanding economic equality and social justice, have been growing. The spirit of defiance, which is building amongst the population as a whole, is met with increasing ruthlessness by the security forces involving both violence and mass arrests. The human rights record of the Iranian regime continues to be an appalling litany of arbitrary arrest, torture, rape, trumped-up charges, and incarceration with little or no access to legal representation or medical care.

The regime is setting great store by the latest round of negotiations in Vienna, to revive the JCPOA, as a means to reversing the economic decline. While taking a belligerent stance towards the United States in public, the Iranian regime is all too aware that in order to engage in international markets the removal of economic and banking sanctions, and access to US dollars and international financial institutions, is vital.

Behind closed doors, the Supreme Leader and his clerical allies are only too aware of their extremely weak position, with regard to the state of Iran's economy and the key need for big capital interests in Iran to be able to access global financial markets.

IMF restructuring

For its part the US is equally aware of Iran's weakness, and this will no doubt form part of US calculations as the negotiations progress. It will certainly take precedence over any human rights concerns as the US looks to open up Iranian markets and exploit the potential for utilising Iran as a source of cheap labour.

Decades of neoliberal economic restructuring based on IMF prescriptions and massive corruption within the regime, have vastly increased the private wealth of the upper layers of the clergy in Iran while producing a weak and hollowed-out national economy fully reliant on the export of crude



oil, itself restricted due to the sanctions regime.

The outcome of the election on 18 June will no doubt see the installation of an even more vicious, anti-democratic, and fiercely entrenched Islamist administration in Iran. This will in turn necessitate the beginning of an era of reinvigorated campaigning for the rights of the Iranian people. This will be for trade union rights, women's rights, the right to freedom of speech, the right to freedom of association, and much more. The international campaign of solidarity with the struggle of the Iranian people for peace, human and democratic rights, and social justice, must step up to demonstrate its effectiveness.

CODIR calls upon the labour and trade union movement to join its campaign for human and democratic rights in Iran. The new administration in Iran should be left in no doubt that it cannot ignore public opinion whether from inside Iran or around the world.

Jane Green is campaign organiser of the Committee for the Defence of the Iranian People's Rights (CODIR), which campaigns for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy in Iran

ABOVE LEFT: Regime favourite Ebrahim Raisi, here registering at the 2017 Iranian presidential election, is notorious as a prominent member of the "death committee" that oversaw the execution of thousands of Iranian political prisoners in the late summer of 1988S

ABOVE RIGHT: Supreme leader Khamenei has called on believers not to heed the increasingly loud calls for a boycott of the election, admitted that there had been some "mistakes" in the vetting of candidates and stated that these be redressed
Creative Commons

comment/ UK foreign policy

The post war foreign policy consensus has failed so many times, on so many fronts, that it is time to demand a comprehensive change and articulate the concept of a Britain that is global in the truest sense, based on progressive internationalism, solidarity, and peace



Towards a progressive foreign policy

The recently published defence review and the government's view of a post-Brexit Global Britain have put foreign policy issues firmly back on the agenda. **Steve Bishop** considers some of the issues and an alternative approach.

The principles and motivations of Britain's foreign policy have remained largely unchanged since the end of World War 2. It is an area in which there continues to be much common ground between the Tory and Labour Party leaderships.

Certain assumptions have never changed. For example, as a nuclear power, the UK has one of the five permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council. The rationale for Britain being a nuclear power in the first place has been challenged from the Labour backbenches and through the extra Parliamentary work of CND but renewing the Trident nuclear submarine weapons programme at a cost of £205 billion and rising, remains official Party policy. Kier Starmer has made it clear that in his view "support for nuclear deterrence is non-negotiable".

Britain's membership of the nuclear club is an article of faith for the Tories, so alternatives are not deemed to merit serious consideration. Indeed, Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, has just backed the recently published defence review, which committed the UK to lifting its cap on the number of warheads it has from 180 to 260, the first time the UK has increased its nuclear stockpile for decades.

Hand in glove with the 'necessity' of nuclear capability, is membership of the NATO military alliance. NATO was at the cutting edge of Cold War provocation against the former Soviet Union, effectively demarcating a frontline from the Baltic to the Mediterranean in its troop deployment. Since the defeat of the Soviet Union in 1991, NATO has continued its provocative role. By encircling Russia and the former Soviet states, NATO has effectively moved the frontline into Eastern Europe and the European Arctic, while relentlessly co-opting the former socialist states into the military alliance.

The expansion of NATO, along with that of the European Union into Eastern Europe, effectively forms a military and economic pincer movement, expanding the West's sphere of control across the continent.

Having supported the forces which turned back the clock in the Soviet Union, initially through the drunkard Yeltsin and subsequently the autocrat Putin, the re-establishment of capitalism in Eastern Europe was not something the West could easily argue against.

However, the manoeuvrings of Vladimir Putin to retain political control at all costs has made the task of demonising Russia that much easier. Russian actions in the Ukraine, Crimea and intervening at the request of the Assad government in Syria have, for many in the West, sealed the deal.

There is certainly no significant dissent in the leadership of the major UK political parties that Russia is anything other than a threat to Western interests. Capitalism is nothing if not competitive and even a relatively weak capitalist state such as Russia represents a potential threat. Add to this the

growing economic and technological threat which China is perceived to pose and the backs to the wall, increase the military budgets cries which NATO thrives upon, just grow louder.

In political terms this neo-Cold War narrative has profound implications for foreign policy, especially where acceptance of the Russian and Chinese threats is a given. NATO leadership is, to all intents and purposes, the provenance of the United States, as the biggest financial and military contributor.

Yet the failures of US foreign policy, largely slavishly followed by the UK, are manifest in the imminent withdrawal of US troops from the unwinnable war in Afghanistan. Originally CIA funded to undermine the defence of the Afghan revolution by Soviet troops, the Mujahadeen infrastructure built by the United States metamorphosed variously into al-Qaeda and Taliban bases. While the policy objective of preventing the development of socialism in Afghanistan was achieved, it was at a phenomenal cost.

Learning the lessons of intervention has not been a strongpoint of Western policy, as the interventions in Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Syria have demonstrated. The unconditional support of the West for successive Israeli governments, which have eroded the rights of Palestinians in the occupied territories in flagrant violation of international law and UN resolutions has, with no mainstream protest in the UK, been a mainstay of foreign policy across the political spectrum.

While being self-righteous about alleged violations of international law which threaten its own perceived interests, the United States remains firmly committed to its 60 years long illegal blockade of Cuba. The United States has long regarded Latin America as its backyard and the history of open or covert intervention, including Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Grenada, Bolivia and Venezuela is both lengthy and blood stained.

The recent defence review, which also set out the UK's post Brexit international policy, highlighted the United States as the UK's most important ally, as assessment for which there appears to be no dissent on the Opposition Front Bench.

The current pandemic has offered the opportunity for Britain to play a much greater role in the distribution of vaccines to the developing world. The neo-colonial network of the Commonwealth alone ensures significant reach into many developing countries which could have benefitted from more urgent British support. While it is no surprise to find the government slow in its approach on this question, more vocal support for fairer vaccine distribution needs to be heard from the Opposition Front Bench.

Equally, the cut in the UK international development and aid budget by £4bn has justifiably provoked an outcry, at a time when

developing nations need support to tackle the pandemic due to poor health and economic infrastructures. This cut sits badly alongside the UK government continuing to profit from the sale of arms to the Saudi dictatorship, responsible for the bombing and impoverishment of Yemen, resulting in the world's worst humanitarian crisis in decades.

The fact is that many issues in the developing world have their roots in both the racist exploitation of the colonial past and its legacy in the post-colonial present. Resource plundering and imposition of neoliberal austerity programmes, dictated by Western proxies such as the World Bank and IMF, only increases the level of responsibility the West should take to provide support.

A progressive foreign policy for the UK must boldly challenge some long held shibboleths and demonstrate the benefits of the alternative, based upon internationalism, peace and co-operation between the people of all nations.

Possessing nuclear weapons cannot be part of that equation. Supporting US wars of intervention, either to support regime change or against sovereign states, cannot be part of that equation. The sale of weapons to regimes which actively use them to arrest or undermine development must be stopped and the cuts to the international aid budget restored and increased.

Calling for an end to the occupation and actively supporting UN resolutions towards a two-state solution in Palestine, together with lifting the illegal blockade of Cuba, in line with international law, must be cornerstones of any progressive foreign policy. So must a commitment to desist from interventions in support of reactionary governments or which impede in any way the right of the people of independent countries to determine their own future. International relations must be motivated by the quest to achieve mutually cooperative and peaceful coexistence, not hegemonic control of resources and supply routes to facilitate the profits of transnationals.

The post war foreign policy consensus has failed so many times, on so many fronts, that it is time to demand a comprehensive change. It is time to articulate the concept of a Britain that is global in the truest sense, based on progressive internationalism, solidarity, and peace.

Steve Bishop is council member of Liberation and member of the Executive Council of CODIR, a long standing affiliate to Liberation.

ABOVE: Lifting the illegal blockade of Cuba, in line with international law, and calling for an end to the occupation and actively supporting UN resolutions towards a two-state solution in Palestine must be cornerstones of any progressive foreign policy. Creative Commons

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75-77 St John Street,
London EC1M 4NN
Maggie Bowden
general secretary

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Email: info@liberationorg.co.uk

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Die Linke denounces the NATO US-led longstanding policy of antagonism and confrontation which continues to this day against the Russian Federation

by **Sevim Dagdelen**

On 22 June 1941, Nazi Germany launched its invasion of the Soviet Union, codenamed Operation Barbarossa. Three-million Wehrmacht troops, with 600,000 soldiers from Italy, Hungary, Finland, Romania and Slovakia, took part in the invasion - advancing on a wide front stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The objective was to conquer all Soviet territory west of the Urals and occupy it permanently thereafter.

From the outset, the notorious Einsatzgruppen, the advance guard of the Nazi-aligned forces, waged a war of annihilation - unleashing a reign of terror against the civilian population. According to the German war plans, the population of the Soviet Union was to be "reduced" by 30 to 50 million. With the invasion, the Nazis also significantly ramped-up its campaign of systematic murder of Jews. There were massacres such as the one at Babi Yar on 29 and 30 September 1941, where at least 33,000 Jewish inhabitants of the city of Kyiv were driven into a ravine and slaughtered. Soviet prisoners of war and Romani people were also killed. The subsequent Soviet investigation found that 100,000 persons were murdered at Babi Yar alone.

One of the most heinous war crimes committed by Nazi Germany against the population of the Soviet Union was the long brutal siege of Leningrad, which lasted from 8 September 1941 until 27 January 1944. The Wehrmacht and SS encircled the city, almost completely cutting off its food supply leading to the deaths of an estimated more than a million people. The purpose of the siege was not to conquer Leningrad but to starve its citizens to death.

The invasion of the Soviet Union was also planned to be a gigantic imperialist campaign of plunder. In March 1941, the oil company Kontinentale Öl AG was founded for that very purpose. Deutsche Bank was the main corporate partner in the Kontinentale consortium. Kontinentale was responsible for the plundering, processing, and selling of oil and mineral resources in the territories occupied by Nazi Germany. Subsidiaries were then founded for the Baltic region and in anticipation of the capture of the Caucasus oilfields, while special commando units were created to manage the illegally seized oil installations. It was not until 1 November 1950 that Kontinentale Öl AG was eventually put into liquidation.

The Nazis rampaged on for four years until the liberation, which had begun with their spectacular defeat at Stalingrad in September 1942, and over 27-million Soviet citizens did not live to see the victory over the fascism. The country's material losses were likewise immeasurable. Militarily defeated, Nazi Germany left only scorched earth behind them in their forced retreat.

In view of these unimaginable atrocities and crimes committed in the name of Nazi Germany, which exacted the highest toll on the Soviet Union of any country - and one still keenly felt today - it is imperative that this anniversary is not overlooked, and that its historical ramifications are given due proper recognition. Die Linke, The Left Party in Germany, flatly rejects any attempt to play down or even deny the sole responsibility of the German fascists for the outbreak of the Second World War and, upon the 80th anniversary of the invasion, denounces the NATO US-led longstanding policy of antagonism and confrontation which continues to this day against the Russian Federation, and supports reconciliation and cordial relations with the peoples of the former Soviet Union, and a new era of détente with Russia

Sevim Dagdelen is the spokesperson for the Die Linke (The Left Party) in the Bundestag Committee on Foreign Affairs.

ABOVE: Bundesarchive photograph



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