



Afghanistan

Interview with
Asadullah Keshmand



Sudan

Coup d'etat opposition
strengthens



Iran

Vienna talks and prospects
for peace

Liberation

Journal of Liberation formerly the Movement for Colonial Freedom

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Spring 2022



Back to the colonial future

Liz Payne & Andrew Murray on the backward reality of Global Britain
and the fight for a progressive UK foreign policy

Writing for a better world!

The Maggie Bowden Essay Competition launched to engage
young people on how to make the world a better place

editorial/**Liberation**

Women, youth, workers and intellectuals of Iran, Sudan and Afghanistan are making headlines with their brave struggle in the most dangerous of conditions - on the streets and in the factories. Their cries of 'Shame on appeasers of putschists, rapists and bigots!' echo loudly in Brussels, Oslo, and Vienna.

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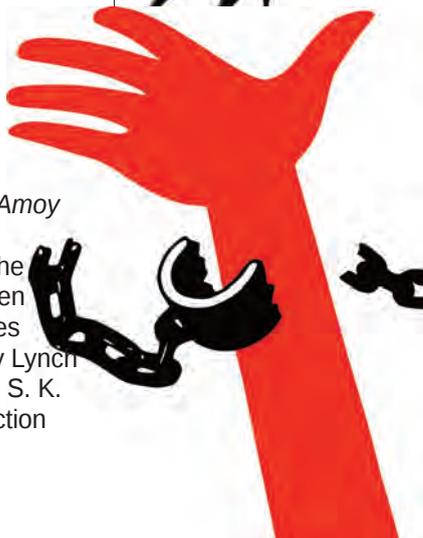
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Michael Angelo Hayes (artist), James Henry Lynch (lithographer) - Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection



Dangers and opportunities!

The world is facing the acute danger of spiralling regional conflicts and tensions escalating towards a global catastrophe. On the other hand, this is also a period in which we are witnessing the renewed growth of democratic movements against exploitation and oppression.

While in Sudan the United States and Britain (backed by their Saudi and UAE reactionary allies) are attempting to steal the popular revolution and empower the military junta despite mass protests, the Left in Chile has successfully revived the sentiments of 1970's Popular Unity and the granddaughter of Salvador Allende, assassinated by the military in 1973, is now heading the country's defence ministry.

In global strategic terms, the USA seeks to reinforce its military and economic dominance, expanding its reach by destabilising national democratic resistance struggles.

However, the new reality of world politics shows a rebalancing of forces. The US is not the sole global power it planned or wishes to be! The recently agreed friendship treaty between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation illustrates that the US can no longer stride the world with impunity.

The British government is hanging on the coattails of US foreign policy, acting as its cheerleader and spending vast sums on bolstering US-led armed aggression and conflict.

From Central and Northern Africa to the Middle East and Eastern and Central Europe, the US with the support of Britain and France, is vigorously pursuing neo-colonialist policies to benefit from access to natural resources, markets, and cheap labour.

Reactionary and fundamentalist regimes and dictatorships such as those in Iran and Afghanistan are manipulated, while their violations of human rights and silencing of opposition are ignored, overlooked, or even given covert support.

However, it is the women and youth, the workers and intellectuals of Iran, Sudan, and Afghanistan, that are making headlines with their brave struggles in the most dangerous of conditions - on the streets and in the factories. The cry of 'Shame on the appeasers of putschists, rapists, and bigots!' from Afghans, Sudanese and Iranians echoes loudly in Brussels, Oslo, and Vienna.

In Eastern Europe, the slavish role of Britain in supporting NATO's expansion risks a new war in Europe and even global conflict. This further underlines the need for Britain to de-couple itself from US and NATO-led aggression. An independent foreign policy can and should enhance the potential for world peace and the struggles for national liberation and independence across the continents.

From Sudan to Iran, Palestine, and across Latin America, there is growing opposition to dictatorship and neo-colonialism. World peace and prosperity for all nations rests on support for such struggles and is the key challenge facing the forces of peace and democracy.

In Britain, Liberation is committed to strengthening the popular movement for solidarity with the peoples of the former colonies, people whose lives have been and are destroyed because of imperialist wars and occupation. It is building on the best traditions of international solidarity with those campaigning for a better life, for human and democratic rights and for changing the priorities of the main political parties in Britain.

Liberation has embarked on an ambitious and imaginative programme of education about the necessary steps for building mass support for a progressive foreign policy for Britain. This will involve not only the public, young and old, but also parliamentarians, social and political agencies, education bodies and progressive organisations.

We are encouraging parliamentarians, individuals, and organisations who support our objectives to join us. There is no better nor more important time than NOW!

Jamshid Ahmadi, editor

▲ Talks between the Taliban and senior US and European officials in Oslo appear to have led to promises of an increase in humanitarian aid - contingent on demands related to human rights, but also a "de facto" recognition of the Taliban government.

news/Liberation

We want to read your ideas and opinions on how to make the world better. Are there people who inspire you? Are there struggles in history that fascinate you? Are there events today you want to bring to light? We want to hear them all!



▲ Liberation's Roger McKenzie and Katie Ferola by our stall at the Latin American conference in London in December where Liberation and other solidarity organisations rallied in support of the struggles for peace progress and popular sovereignty in the region.

Maggie Bowden's essay competition launched

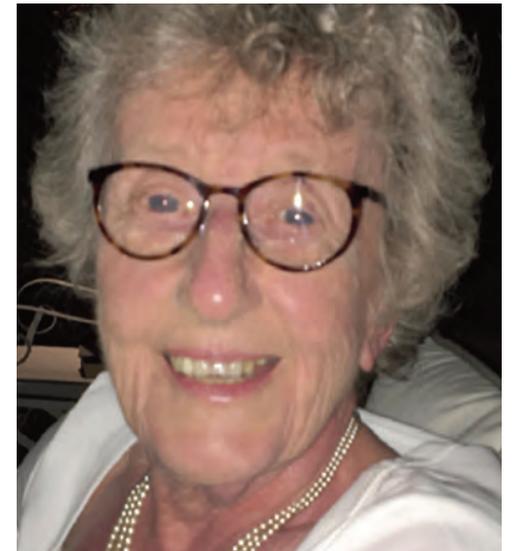
Liberation has launched an essay competition on how to 'Make the World Better!' that aims to promote and 'celebrate the writing talents of young people in Britain'. The Maggie Bowden Essay Competition is inviting children and young people between the ages of 12 and 25 to write an essay on how to make the world better.

Since its founding, Liberation has fought to promote those fighting for their dignity and freedom, a constant vision to make the world better.

Liberation Education Committee chair Harsev Bains says: "We want to read your ideas and opinions on how to make the world better. Are there people who inspire you? Are there struggles in history that fascinate you? Are there events today you want to bring to light? We want to hear them all!"

The competition will be judged by a panel that includes Jeremy Corbyn MP, Liberation joint President, and other members of Liberation.

The prize-winning entries will be published in Liberation's journal and presented a prize by Mr Corbyn at the annual Fenner Brockway Lecture, where Jeremy Corbyn is the keynote speaker. If you are interested in entering simply follow the guidelines right – and we cannot wait to see your entry!



- The competition is now open and closes on 5 April.
 - There are three categories: Young (under 12), Teenager (12-17), Young Adult (18-25)
 - Young Category should submit written essays of up to 400 words
 - Teenager Category should submit written essays of up to 1,000 words
 - Young Adult Category should submit written essays of up to 1,500 words
 - Deadline for submission is 5 April 2022.
- More information at liberationorg.co.uk

Urgent Sudan Appeal: Engineer Amira Osman Hamid arrested



member of Khartoum's Riyadh neighbourhood resistance committee. She was arrested at her family home in the Riyadh neighbourhood, Square 17, house no. 34.

According to a personal eye witness account given by her sister, lawyer Amani Osman Hamid, she was arrested last night when a convoy of vehicles carrying around 30 members of the Sudanese national security forces, heavily armed with Kalashnikovs, AK-47, sticks and hoses, first rounded their home then forced themselves into the house. Once inside they forced themselves into several rooms and bathrooms, terrorising the whole family including their old mother and very small children.

Engineer Amira Osman has special needs and she uses crutches for walking. Her health condition and her use of medication puts her life at imminent risk following her unlawful, barbaric arrest.

The appeal called on 'all human rights and women rights organisations to put maximum pressure on the leaders of the military coup d'état in Sudan demanding the immediate and unconditional release of Amira Osman'

Read our analysis of the Sudanese coup and revolution on page 8

Liberation published on its website and shared on social media an international appeal for the release of activist Engineer Amira Osman Hamid, arrested on 22 January by Sudanese National Security Forces. Ms Osman Hamid is chair of the No to Women's Oppression Initiative and a



For train drivers, trade unions & the Labour Party since 1880

'I always enjoy reading Liberation, and ASLEF has supported the organisation since it was founded, as the Movement for Colonial Freedom, in 1954.'



Mick Whelan, general secretary, ASLEF
Dave Calfe, EC president, ASLEF
ASLEF THE TRAIN DRIVERS' UNION

comment/global Britain

Neither Johnson nor Starmer offer a positive policy for Britain in the world. In the face of headlong climate change, the pandemic, refugee crises caused by poverty and war and global inequality that is not a situation that can be accepted



UK aligned ever closer with US

Policy towards China, the Middle East and Ukraine shows the Tories' 'global Britain' is aligned near-completely with Washington. The challenge for the labour, anti-war and solidarity movements is to build on the widespread, if inchoate, opposition to form a mass movement for change, writes Andrew Murray

TWO FACTORS are common to all zones of confrontation in the world today – in the Far East, in Eastern Europe, in the Middle East. The first is, of course, the hegemonic presence of the USA, and its determination to prevent the emergence of any systemic or even regional challenge to its self-mandated world supremacy. This underlies the new Cold War it has launched against China; the push to bring Ukraine within NATO's orbit and the continuing threats to Iran.

The second is that British policy has aligned near-completely with Washington's requirements. This is not new, but the degree of compliance is nevertheless noteworthy. It seems to form the actual content of Boris Johnson's "global Britain" post-EU project.

Take Europe first. The Ukraine crisis has been the most serious conflict in Europe this century. It has been a long time brewing, since the elected President Yanukovich was overthrown in a nationalist coup, backed by the US and the EU, in 2014. That led to the Russian annexation of Crimea and the conflict in the Donbass. It is rooted, however, in the circumstances of the break-up of the USSR, with sometimes arbitrary internal borders becoming external frontiers, and in the relentless NATO expansion eastwards, in breach of promises given in 1991. Given NATO's aggressive history over the last generation, Russia's security concerns have a certain basis.

Britain has played a major part in the escalation of the crisis at every turn, talking up the danger of a Russian invasion to the point where even the Ukraine government asked that it be toned down, selling fresh weaponry to Kiev and deploying British troops eastwards. Germany and France have played more constructive roles than Johnson's government. What is urgently needed is not military escalation, but a new European security agreement that includes meeting

legitimate Russian concerns, repairing the error of the end of the Cold War when US triumphalism trumped the opportunity for a peaceful and durable settlement.

Flashpoint Iran

In the Middle East, the flashpoint is around Iran. A US or Israeli attack on Iran is a possibility, ostensibly because of concerns over Iran's nuclear programme, which the Tehran regime insists is for peaceful purposes only. The nuclear agreement reached by Obama was scrapped by Trump and has yet to be revived. However, maintaining US hegemony in the region in the face of real or alleged Iranian activities in Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon and elsewhere is surely just as much a motivation.

Britain now has a permanent base in authoritarian Bahrain and has armed and supported the Saudi attack on impoverished Yemen, an epic humanitarian crisis brought about by British arms, British diplomatic support and British military advice. The Johnson government has refused all appeals to change course. And it stands alongside the Biden administration in policy towards Iran.

Still more striking is the Johnson government's alignment with the aggressive anti-China policy in the Far East. Gone is the Cameron-Osborne "golden age" of Sino-British relations at the snap of a US finger. Symbolically, the maiden voyage of Britain's new aircraft carrier, the Queen Elizabeth, escorted by US warships, was to the waters of the western Pacific. The only serious message this sent was that Britain is all-in with Washington in confronting China.

AUKUS

Just as dramatic was the AUKUS pact unveiled with Australia and the USA to much recrimination in September 2021. This aims to supply Australia with nuclear-powered submarines better able to confront China over longer distances at sea.

The AUKUS agreement represents a significant escalation of the arms race in itself. Australia has never been equipped with nuclear-powered submarines before, nor felt the need to be. Its own relations with China have been deteriorating over the last two years.

In the process, the French government was rudely elbowed out of the way – its own contract to supply Australia with regular submarines was scrapped with just a few hours' notice. This was a notable snub to a country which regards itself as a Pacific power and had invested heavily in relations with Australia.

The alacrity with which Britain joined in the pact and its indifference to the offence caused to France is a further indication of British foreign policy's orientation towards a "global" alignment with the USA. All this reflects a desire to be seen as a global player, at Washington's right hand, enforcing imperial order.

The response of Labour's leadership to all this has been supportive of the Tory government. Starmer has set himself on a course of wrapping Labour in the flag, establishing conventionally patriotic credentials and doing everything possible to distance himself from the anti-imperialist politics of his predecessor, Jeremy Corbyn. This forms a key part of his effort to prove to the establishment that, unlike Corbyn, he is a "safe pair of hands" who can be entrusted with the interests of the British state. He has learned nothing, apparently, from the foreign policy disasters associated with Tony Blair.

Starmer and his shadow foreign Secretary (until November 2021) Lisa Nandy have been at the forefront of attacks on China over human rights, and have displayed an astonishing level of commitment to Israel. They are gung-ho for British possession of nuclear weapons, and back the NATO confrontation with Russia.

This is not, nevertheless, the view of the broader Labour Party. At its autumn conference 2021 delegates voted for a militant resolution of solidarity with the Palestinian people and also rejected overwhelmingly the AUKUS pact. Anti-imperialism appears to have deeper roots than Starmer wishes.

The fact is that Corbyn-era Labour foreign policies were popular, despite being more bitterly opposed by the Labour right than any other part of his agenda. His response to the Manchester terrorist attack during the 2017 general election campaign, identifying the outrage as being, at least in part, a consequence of British foreign policy decisions, proved that.

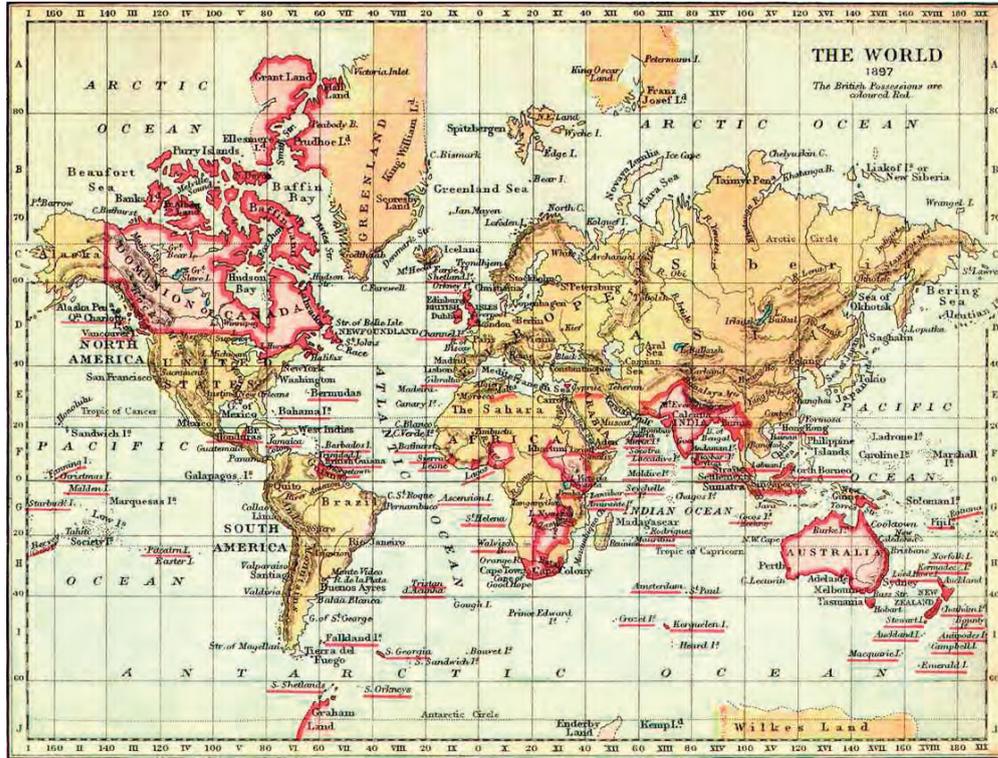
Here then is a major challenge for the labour, anti-war and solidarity movements in Britain. It is to build on the widespread, if inchoate, opposition to the foreign policy course of the government and form a mass movement for change. This means uniting anti-nuclear protest with Palestinian solidarity, and it means warning of the dangers of Britain being drawn into conflicts which have no bearing on any sane definition of "national security", as happened in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. Recent history shows that such a movement can be built. Separation from US policy remains the priority.

Neither Johnson nor Starmer offer a positive policy for Britain in the world. In the face of headlong climate change, the pandemic, refugee crises caused by poverty and war, global inequality and other burning issues demanding international solutions, that is not a situation that can be accepted. Peace and cooperation, not fresh cold war confrontations, are needed. It is time for mass pressure.

Andrew Murray is an author, historian, founder of Stop the War Coalition, former advisor to Jeremy Corbyn and senior figure in the British trade union movement

comment/global Britain

In a revealing Westminster Hall debate one MP regretted that Britain's troops ever left the Indo-Pacific region, citing the 1971 withdrawal from Singapore, and looked forward to more pacts with more countries and more military bases, referring to the importance for Britain's re-entry into the Indo-Pacific of the Chagos Island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean



The enduring vestiges of colonial dominance

Liz Payne on the links between the British Empire a century ago and the present Conservative government's dangerous colonial approach to foreign policy set out in 'Global Britain'

ON THE EVE of the First World War almost a quarter of the world's people were subjects of the British Empire, living under its unrelenting brutality and oppression. With the addition of the victor's acquisitions of that conflict, by 1922 Britain's colonial territories had grown to encompass a fourth of the world's land mass, as well as vital international supply routes by land and sea. The Empire provided natural resources to plunder, cheap labour to exploit, and lucrative markets to control. Geo-strategic terrains acted as buffers against encroachment by competitors. This was global Britain a century ago, holding sway over the largest physical empire ever known, with millions held down by racist colonial administrations, ruthless security, merciless judiciaries, and sheer military might.

Although, over the years, that physical empire dwindled until little remained, its legacy cast dark and lasting shadows. As British-backed reactionary forces took power in many former colonies, progressive movements seeking genuine independence and democracy, were brutally suppressed, opening the way for multi-national corporate exploitation and profiteering on an eye-watering scale. Today, the peoples of those former colonies still face the persistent effects – failing economies, corrupt and often autocratic governments, deficient or non-existent public infrastructure, destitution, instability, and conflict.

But now Britain is set to restore, replicate, and future proof an empire-like position. The security, defence, development and foreign policy review, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age* (March 2021), was heralded as “the most radical reassessment of our place in the world since the Cold War”. Britain would move from defending the international *status quo* to dynamically shaping the post-COVID order in which it would “sit at the heart of a network of like-minded countries and flexible groupings”, active in Africa, the Middle East, and Indo-Pacific.

This vision of ‘Global Britain’ is no mere nostalgic flight of fancy, but a potential reality that big business, the government, and military are determined to create. Its realisation depends on Britain's capacity to draw on its deeply penetrating historical roots and burgeoning new relationships with governments of former colonies.

It is in this context that we should understand Britain's leading role in the voyage of the Carrier Strike Group, headed by the HMS Queen Elizabeth, through the Mediterranean, Indian Ocean, and South China Sea to Japan and the Western Pacific last year. The flotilla's itinerary might well have been titled ‘Empire Re-visited’ as manoeuvres and interoperability exercises were undertaken with the armed services of 40 countries, mostly former colonies. Strike Group commander, Steve Moorhouse, described Britain's elation at being “back out there”.

The recently signed military pact between Britain, Australia, and the US (AUKUS) must also be seen in the light of *Global Britain*. In presenting AUKUS to parliament last September, Boris Johnson's ‘empire-speak’ was blatant, setting out in jingoistic terms the importance to Britain of “the security of the Indo-Pacific” and referring to Australia as a country joined to Britain “by blood and history.” Britain, he proclaimed, would develop defence partnerships around the world as well as continuing with historic ones such as the Five Eyes (Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, and Britain), “the oldest defence arrangement in the Pacific”.

Investment, trade and profit

As in its colonial past, the driver of *Global Britain* is opportunity for investment and the lure of trade and profits. According to Amanda Milling, Minister of State for Asia, by 2030 the Indo-Pacific will yield 40% of the world's GDP and Britain intends to develop a formidable trading presence there backed by state-of-the-art military cover. The strategy includes membership of the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) – an Asian-Pacific free trade agreement set in a growing multitrillion pound market. Britain's ‘qualification’ for membership is possession of the Pitcairn Islands, a colony since 1838, with just 47 inhabitants. This fulfils the prerequisite of having a Pacific coastline and demonstrates that the role of directly ruled colonies and bases, however tiny, is significant and strategic in Britain's plans. And, in this case, another Hong Kong perhaps?

Physical presence was also centre stage in a revealing Westminster Hall debate on 20th October 2021. In what was from the outset a Cold War diatribe, MPs castigated China for its economic, scientific, and technical threat to the UK. One speaker regretted that Britain's troops ever left the Indo-Pacific region, citing the 1971 withdrawal from Singapore, and looked forward to more pacts with more

countries and more military bases – just like the ones Britain has in other parts of the world such as Bahrain. Speakers referred to the importance for Britain's re-entry into the Indo-Pacific of the Chagos Island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. This unlawfully occupied territory, now a military base, from which the British expelled all inhabitants in a campaign of stealth and terror more than fifty years ago, should, according to MPs, be maintained at full strength. One accused Mauritius, from whom Britain seized the now militarised atoll, of trying to “steal” the territory and transfer it to rival France. He even asserted that Mauritius, 1,500 miles away, was too distant to have a valid claim. Colonial type thinking and ingrained belief in British territorial rights prevented him from seeing that, on his argument, with London 6,000 miles away, Britain had no claim whatsoever.

Empire, power and control

Everything above demonstrates that the drivers of Britain's foreign policy and its *modus operandi* fall directly within the tradition of empire, power, and control, which those who govern have never left behind. They know, however, that Britain cannot these days flourish as a stand-alone power. If the government is to succeed on behalf of the vested big business interests on whose behalf it works, it must do so by forging contemporary alliances, deals and military agreements.

And who better to do so with than complicit former colonies strategically positioned across the world?

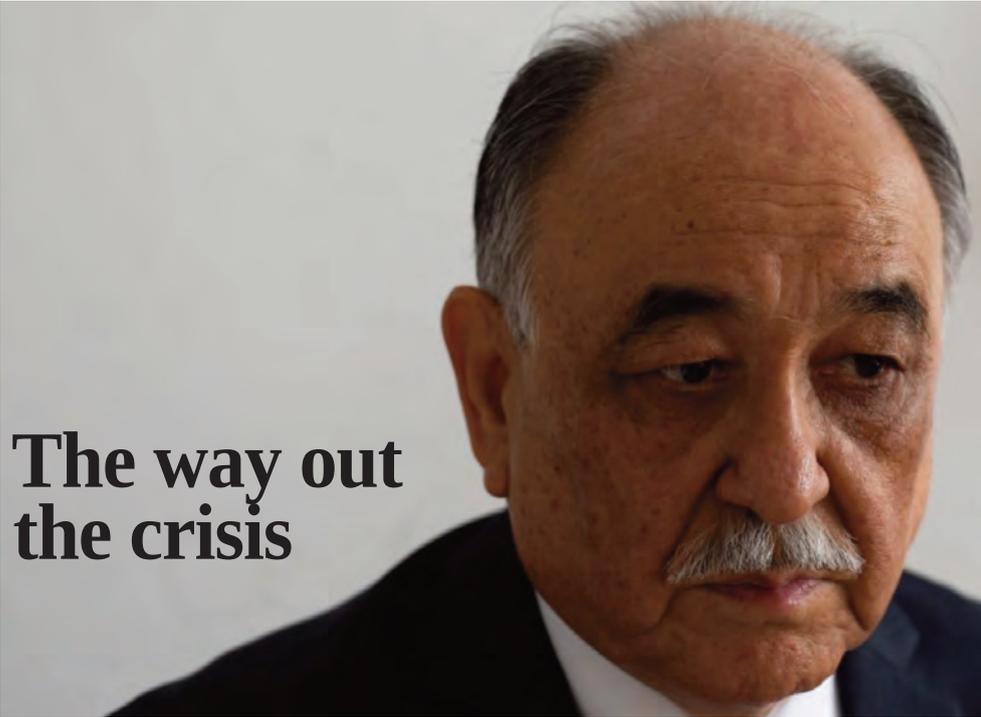
Liberation's response is that our foremost task must be to challenge and defeat what is set out in *Global Britain* and campaign for an end to British occupation of foreign territory, including colonial holdings such as the Chagos and Pitcairn Islands, together with all offshore finance havens and military bases. We must also oppose the commissioning of further giant carrier vessels; these are floating ‘British Overseas Territories’, mini colonies transportable anywhere and everywhere to impose Britain's will.

At the same time, we must win support for a truly independent and progressive foreign policy driven not by profit and war but by the needs of the people of Britain and all the countries with which we deal, a policy that will itself preclude forever the imposition of the evils of colonial exploitation and oppression. Fundamental to winning overwhelming support for this in the face of the mass media's persistent barrage to the contrary will be an all-encompassing programme of anti-colonial education setting out the harsh realities of Britain's history and our responsibility to future generations of building a different world. Only through this will the British Empire, colonialism, racism and all its ghosts be forever laid to rest.

Liz Payne is a member of Liberation's Education Committee

Interview/Assadullah Keshtmand

British peace-loving and progressive forces can play a major role in influencing today's developments in Afghanistan. The world is very attentive and opposed to the Taliban's monopolistic and discriminatory policies.



The way out the crisis

Challenge Magazine

Afghanistan is facing a deepening economic and humanitarian crisis following the Taliban's seizure of power in the wake of the end of the US' 20-year occupation. A solution to the crisis can only be found through meaningful negotiation and a genuine political transition mandated by, and rooted in, the Afghan people themselves

Liberation: The reports from Afghanistan point to a deep and multi-dimensional economic and humanitarian crisis. Human rights and opportunities for justice, peace, and progress, appear to be at their lowest ebb. How durable and stable is the Taliban regime and the general setup that currently prevails in Afghanistan?

Assadullah Keshtmand: First of all, the Taliban's seizure of power in the provinces, culminating in the downfall of the government in Kabul last August, must be evaluated in the context of the complex and covert designs of the US. Common sense cannot hold that the Taliban, with the forces they had at their disposal, could so easily and quickly have overthrown a twenty-year-old occupation regime backed by the world's most powerful country and presiding over a 350,000-strong professional combat force, and proceeded to take control of all its military facilities. This simply stretches the limits of credibility. Today, it is no secret that there has been widespread and extensive collusion between

the US and the Taliban. It is only by bearing in mind this vital context that the current events in Afghanistan can be effectively analysed.

To answer your question, it should be said that the current situation, which will more than probably lead to a huge humanitarian crisis, was utterly predictable in the first days of the Taliban's return to power. For those who foresaw regime change in Afghanistan in the policies of the US, it was also predictable that the US would not allow the Taliban's rule to subsequently collapse as a result of the ensuing economic problems and the revolt of the Afghan people. We now observe the US and its allies reach into their pockets, in the name of obligatory assistance to the people of Afghanistan and to save them from famine, though such aid perhaps owes more to the good luck of coincidence with US and Western interests – and keeping afloat the Taliban regime which would otherwise collapse – than genuine goodwill towards the Afghan people. If such aid was borne of a genuine and real humanitarianism, the question can be legitimately asked as to why similar support is not forthcoming to the beleaguered and starving people of Yemen who are already staring famine in the face. Surely, they are deserving of similar urgent assistance?

Of course, as an Afghan national, I welcome aid that would serve to alleviate the suffering of my people, though I remain fully cognisant of the other interests and motives behind such assistance.

I have stated many times before, and repeat here once again, that power in Afghanistan was consciously and deliberately transferred to the Taliban based upon a calculated and long-term plan from which those involved expect to reap its "benefits" in the not-so-distant future. Such "benefits" could include the fomenting of internal conflicts and wars within the former Soviet republics in Central Asia as well as the Xinjiang region of China – to create obstacles for, and thwart the legitimate interests of, both Russia and China. The Taliban regime will be instrumental in such designs behind the scenes. Extreme Islamist movements, including I.S. Khorasan, comprised of combatants from Chechnya, the wider Caucasus, Central Asia, and Xinjiang, will form the battalions of this insurgency. These fighters are already battle-hardened from their experiences in

Iraq and Syria, and have been moved by the Americans to Afghanistan "for the rainy days", where they have established their bases in the remote north and north-eastern areas of our country.

Unfortunately, Afghanistan's progressive forces, which have been driven into weakness and isolation during the twenty-year occupation of Afghanistan, will not play a significant role in the coming changes. However, the popular resistance to the Taliban's fundamentalist and authoritarian policies will certainly continue to grow in the future. It cannot be disputed that the Taliban have temporarily returned a relative "peace and quiet" to the country, as was the case during their previous time in power. However, it is the "peace and quiet" of the cemetery and the uneasy unsettling calm before the proverbial storm.

What is your opinion about the freezing of foreign aid to Afghanistan – aid that until August 2021 amounted to 75% of the country's public spending budget? Was the international community right to do this?

AK: It is my belief that foreign countries – first and foremost the U.S. and its allies – in light of the prevailing global public opinion, had no other realistic course. However, as I have already stated, if this is left unchecked it will lead to the fall of the Taliban regime – something the US and NATO cannot countenance, having expended much effort and having lost considerable face in bringing about this situation in Afghanistan in the first place. The delay in the provision of aid can be explained, on the one hand, by the weight of world public opinion and revulsion against the Taliban and the aforementioned need of the US and Western powers to save face – and, on the other hand, by the disunity and lack of cohesion within the Taliban, with the Pakistan-influenced current in the ascendancy, and the chaos and fallout that has ensued. However, fortunately, we can see that the prospect of famine is being averted. Though, of course, this also means that the internal crisis will not spiral in a way that threatens the Taliban regime's control.

Afghanistan timeline

1838 Britain wants buffer between India and growing Russian empire and invades Afghanistan to affect regime change. Does not gain hold.

1878-1880 Britain again attacks Afghanistan.

1880 War ends with treaty ceding control of Afghan foreign policy to Britain.

1917 Revolution in Russia brings down Tzar's empire and establishes a peoples' socialist democracy. Events deeply influence Afghanistan.

1919 (May to August) Britain is at war with Afghanistan – Afghan War of Independence. Britain bombs Afghan cities.

1919 (August) Treaty of Rawalpindi brings Afghan War of Independence to an end, establishing recognised border between the Emirate of Afghanistan and the British Raj (the Durand Line) and gives Afghanistan independence (on paper) from all British interference in its affairs.

1919 onwards Emir of Afghanistan pursues foreign policy independent of Britain, while the latter tries unsuccessfully to prevent the conclusion of an Afghan/Russian treaty

1921 Afghanistan signs friendship treaty with nascent socialist republic in Russia.

1929 - 1933 Afghan monarch, Mohammed Nadir Shah, institutes limited modernisation programme.

1931/2 Kabul University is founded.

1933 (8 November) Mohammed Nadir Shah is assassinated.

1950s Social reforms take place, influenced by the Soviet Union.

1950 Kabul University opens doors to women students.

1953 Restrictions are lifted on burqa wearing in public.

1964 Constitutional monarchy established. The Constitution (on paper) gave the vote to all and set down the right of women to stand for public office, enter the professions, etc.

1965 People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) formed.

1967 First trade unions in Afghanistan are formed.

1973 Monarchy deposed. Afghanistan becomes a republic under the presidency of Mohammed Daoud Khan.

1978 (April) The PDPA comes to power (Sowr Revolution). Foreign-armed insurgency begins in southern provinces.

1978 Central Council of Afghan Trade Unions, the CCATU, is established.

1979 The PDPA invites Soviet Union support against foreign attempts to destabilise the government. Soviet Union comes to government's assistance in December 1979.

1986 (May) Mohammad Najibullah becomes leader of the PDPA.

1986 The US arms the Mujaheddin opposition fighters with state-of-the-art Stinger missiles.

This creates an environment conducive to the growth of the activities of British progressive forces in defence of the Afghan people and in support of their legitimate demands

Will there be lasting realignment of Afghanistan's allies under the Taliban and what implications will this have for the people of Afghanistan and the wider region?

AK: By essentially overseeing the transfer of de-facto control and power back to the Taliban, the US has begun playing a complicated and risky game. Will the Taliban, for their part, be able to play this game well until its end? Only time will tell. Part of the Taliban's leadership (which had been based in Qatar) has pitched this disunited and incongruent movement into the whirlwind of the global developments. So far, they have been able to play this game skilfully and cautiously. However, in the future they will face great challenges, the likes of which it is hard to believe they will be able to overcome. On another level, outside of Afghanistan, there seems to be a complete harmony between the different international actors and the specific roles they play, whether Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, NATO, the US, and the EU.

While the outcome of this game might appear to favour the Afghan people – in that the “consensus” would serve to prevent famine, a new catastrophic level of poverty, and the complete breakdown of Afghanistan's social fabric – the consolidation of the Taliban's power will actually drive the country further into the abyss and the tragedy of endless regional wars.

Given the sharply deteriorating situation for women in Afghanistan since August, it seems that little, if anything, has changed regarding the Taliban's backwards and reactionary bent, particularly on this issue, despite their insistent claims to the contrary. Would you agree?

AK: The Taliban do not any longer have the same scope to assert their “vision” for Afghanistan that they enjoyed during their first reign from 1996 to 2001. On the one hand, they have covert dealings and obligations vis à vis the US and NATO, whose

role and activity in Afghanistan is by no means finished despite the current rhetoric – and without whose backing the Taliban really cannot do much. On the other hand, there is some degree of divergence of views within the Taliban itself over the right approach regarding these issues in Afghanistan. Thus, everyday one can witness an about-turn or significant change in their approach to the role of women and other social strata in the economy and life of the country. That is not to say that the Taliban's instinctive regressive stance towards women will not continue to be manifest in their actions. Their resistance to even basic notions of women's rights will remain firm. However, on the other side, especially amongst the courageous and vigilant women's movement in Afghanistan (and a generation of women who have come of age since the last reign of the Taliban), such notions are resolutely held to. And, fortunately, the overwhelming majority of countries that can influence and impact developments within Afghanistan have seemed to make any leniency they afford to the Taliban conditional upon their respect for women's rights.

Indeed, it is apparent that the current Taliban regime's initial approach to these issues has been more restrained than that of their predecessors back in the mid-1990s. This seems to point to the existence of obstacles that act as a restraint on the Taliban reverting to its default.

Considering the increasing threats to freedom of expression; effective sudden suspension of the academic-university scene, including its financing; and the decision this week to resume the issuing of exit papers, can a mass emigration of intellectuals be expected? And, if so, what will be the impact upon Afghanistan?

AK: The first wave of migration in the wake of the Taliban's takeover back in August was sudden and unexpected, in response to the shock of those events and the manifest designs of the West and NATO, for Afghanistan. That wave mainly comprised of

Afghan professionals and intellectuals – with the necessary connections and means to leave – who were integral to the development of the country but represented a nuisance for the incoming Taliban regime. The field was effectively abandoned to the Taliban. Going forward, this is unlikely to remain the case as the vast majority of Afghans who remain are living in deep poverty and do not have the means to get out. However, the powers that be, who “wrote the script” of events in Afghanistan, have factored in the Taliban's following of a more moderate policy that effectively checks any opposition from those who remain behind in the country. Thus, gradually, the people in Afghanistan adapt to cope with the reality of life under the Taliban.

To what degree are the Afghan progressive forces able to organise and how? And, what are their demands?

AK: At the moment, it seems unlikely that the main established and veteran progressive forces of Afghanistan – whose activities even before the Taliban takeover were restricted to limited areas – will be able to do much. However, newer spontaneous forces have arisen among Afghan intellectuals and cultural intelligentsia that offer some glimmer of hope for the future. These emerging forces, unlike the veteran political left, draw upon the advancements made around the world in the humanities and information technology, while adopting the traditions of the progressive struggle of the Afghan people, especially the communists – and have had a significant impact on the collective spirit of the society. These new forces therefore certainly carry and represent the hopes of the Afghan left movement.

Of course, their demands are certainly in accordance with what the international progressives call for in respect of Afghanistan.

In view of the catastrophic situation in Afghanistan, it is expected that many more Afghans will seek refuge in the West – including in the UK. Yet an unchecked

becomes one of the poorest countries in the world.
2001 (November) The Northern Alliance supported by US and Britain ousts the Taliban
2001 (December) 2014(September) Presidency of Hamid Karzai backed by US, Britain, other regional allies
2003 (August) – 2014 (December) US/NATO operation to ensure ‘security’ in Afghanistan. Mission ‘completed’ in 2014. Afghan National Defence and Security Forces are handed the task.
2010 (July) Wikileaks - Tens of thousands of top-secret military documents reveal the true nature of the US occupation, a catalogue of carnage.
2015 (from January) New US/NATO intervention – Resolute Support Mission – to

mass exodus is neither feasible nor desirable for Afghanistan in the longer term. What must progressives do in the UK to support solutions that will not force Afghans to flee their country in the first place?

AK: Yes, I know that the progressive forces in Britain have rushed to help the Afghan refugees with great effort and sincerity and, accordingly, have gained the profound respect of the Afghan progressive forces.

I believe that British peace-loving and progressive forces can play a major role in influencing today's developments in Afghanistan. The world is very attentive and opposed to the Taliban's monopolistic and discriminatory policies. This creates an environment conducive to the growth of the activities of British progressive forces in defence of the Afghan people and in support of their legitimate demands. I believe that progressive forces in Britain should focus their actions and solidarity on the struggles for women's rights; against single ethnic rule [Pashtun supremacy]; against ethnic cleansing, especially that being perpetrated against the Hazara people; religious discrimination, especially against Shi'as and Hindus; against the terrible policy of discrimination against the Farsi language, the historical and common language of the majority of people of Afghanistan; and, the forced migration by the Taliban of Hazaras and Tajiks from their abodes. Then, overall, progressives in Britain can defend the rights and freedoms of the Afghan people effectively and in a balanced manner.

As an Afghan national and patriot who remains tied to, and concerned with, the fate of people, I sincerely thank Liberation, the progressive organisation that has always steadfastly defended the oppressed people of the world and who today continues to stand with the people of Afghanistan.

Assadullah Keshtmand was formerly a key figure in the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and served as ambassador to Hungary, Iran, and Ethiopia. He currently resides in London.

1987 Mohammad Najibullah becomes president and attempts to initiate a national reconciliation process. Begins process of constitutional reform.

1989 (February) Soviet military personnel leave Afghanistan, ending their nine-year mission.

1990 CCATU is renamed as the National Workers' Union of Afghanistan – NWUA.

1992 Government of PDPA - by now renamed Homeland (Watan) Party - is brought down by Islamist opposition backed by US, Britain, and allies. President Najibullah seeks refuge at UN headquarters. Islamic State of Afghanistan is declared.

1992 The NWUA is closed down.

1992 - 1996 Fighting continues. Government unstable.

1994 Taliban come to forefront as faction in Afghan civil war

1996 (September) Taliban seize power and impose Sharia law. Country now styled Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Catastrophic era for women begins.

1996 (27 September) Najibullah is taken from UN headquarters and executed by the Taliban.

1996 - 2001 First Taliban government
2001 (September) Al-Qaeda attack on World Trade Centre, New York.

2001 (7 October) US, Britain, and allies declare war on Afghanistan – bombardment then invasion. Start of 20 years of civil war and US occupation during which the infrastructure and services are forced to depend on foreign aid and Afghanistan

‘help’ the Afghan defence forces ‘fight terrorism’

2014 (September) – 2021(August) Presidency of Mohammad Ashraf Ghani. Corruption is rife, the government is weak and the economy dependent on the US. Situation of women one of the worst in the world.

2020 (29 February) US signs deal with the Taliban on their reinstatement in government in Afghanistan after a long period in which the two tried to reach agreement.

2021 (15 August) Taliban return to power and announce return to Sharia Law. Ashraf Ghani leaves Afghanistan for the UAE.

analysis/Sudan

'General El-Burhan and the warlords never believed in the revolution, but they had to bow [to] the storm [it unleashed]. They wrongly thought it was time to eliminate it, but our revolution is entering its fourth year with the same momentum. In fact, it has become stronger and more organised.'



Hossam el-Hamalawy

Coup d'etat opposition grows stronger

Western governments are keen on a civilian-led government controlled by the military, but the Sudanese revolution is well organised and won't stop until the coup is brought down, reports **Steve Bishop**

IT IS ESTIMATED that more than 70 people have been killed and hundreds of others have been wounded in mass protests across Sudan since the military coup on 25 October last year, which ousted the country's civilian-led government. In January, security forces fired on anti-coup protesters in the capital, Khartoum, where at least seven people were killed.

In response the pro-democracy movement initiated a civil disobedience campaign to protest against the killings and to continue the campaign against the coup, which has been ongoing since the military takeover in October.

The opposition in Sudan is centred around the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) and the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA). The opposition to the coup, which has continued to organise the mobilisation of protesters against the military takeover, reject negotiations with the generals and insist on handing over power to a fully civilian government to lead the transition.

SPA made a significant contribution in the December 2018 revolution, organising the protests and civil disobedience. SPA still fights alongside the revolutionary forces to achieve the revolution's demands: freedom, peace and justice.

In a recent interview with Liberation, SPA spokesperson and human rights lawyer, Mohaned Elnour, was adamant that there should be no negotiation with the government involving the military.

"A partnership with a civilian led government in a stable democratic country based on mutual benefit is the ideal model in the 21st century", insisted Elnour, "otherwise, this is a new colonialism."

The comments come at a time when the United Nations (UN) is attempting to broker discussions to restore democracy. The Friends of Sudan group, including the United States, Britain and other international governments and world financial institutions, convened recently to rally support for UN efforts to end the ongoing deadlock.

While the generals claim to welcome UN efforts to find a way out of the deadlock, they

have said they will only hand over power to an elected government, stating that elections will take place as scheduled next year.

However, whatever the generals may say, the coup last October is regarded by the SPA as the final step in a plan by the military to undermine the gains of the revolution in Sudan, which followed mass protests, starting in December 2018, and resulted in the removal of the 30 year dictatorship of Omar al-Bashir in April 2019.

Continuing coup

As Mohaned Elnour was keen to stress, "It's important to say that this is not a fresh coup as the coup already started on 11th April 2019. What has happened on the 25th October was the last step in the set-up plan and it didn't surprise us. General El-Burhan and the warlords never believed in the revolution, but they had to bow [to] the storm [it unleashed]. They wrongly thought it was time to eliminate it, but our revolution is entering its fourth year with the same momentum. In fact, it has become stronger and more organised."

The West has also been attempting to hedge its bets in order to protect its interest in Sudan, expanding its contacts with political and military forces and militias with this aim.

Western governments initially condemned the coup but once the former Prime Minister, Abdalla Hamdok, joined the coup, this attitude changed. The West is keen for the opposition to accept the deal between the military and Hamdok and to give up its protest campaign. Statements made by the UN secretary-general, António Guterres, have been in support of the agreement, urging the opposition to stop the struggle and accept the agreement, claiming that otherwise Sudan will be in danger.

For Mohaned Elnour it is clear that "Western governments are keen to have a civilian led government controlled by the military. They were embarrassed to engage with the coup's leader, General El-Burhan, but Hamdok has lifted this burden; even though they know this does not change the nature of the coup. They don't need to worry about their interests as these perpetrators are willing to do anything to remain in power and are not being held accountable for their crimes, no different from El-Bashir."

The reality is that the leader of the coup, General El-Burhan and the leader of the Janjaweed militia, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Himidti, aim to avoid punishment and prosecution for the crimes they have committed. They also aim to maintain their grip on the country's resources, of which they control more than 80%, and to continue a proxy war, which provides them with international support, in effect continuing the practice of former head of state (1989 to 2019) Omer El-Bashir.

It is worth noting that in October 2014, the EU implemented what it called the 'Khartoum Process' to decrease the number of African migrants getting to Europe. So, millions of Euros were given to African countries with Sudan alone receiving about 215 million Euros from this fund by April 2017.

That is why the leader of the Janjaweed militia, who benefited from EU money to strengthen his militia, threatened the EU recently by allowing migrants to cross the border if the international community did not support the coup.

Islamic Brotherhood

The military in Sudan is very much guided by the former regime's National Congress Party (NCP), which is basically the Islamic Brotherhood. Hundreds of civil servants have been replaced by NCP members. This includes top civil servants in the General Intelligence Service (GIS) such as the new GIS director.

In addition, as Mohaned Elnour observes, "There are also some opportunist parties that were created either by the NCP or the military after the revolution, in addition to the armed movements that signed the Juba Peace agreement, an agreement that aims to share the power and wealth between warlords, rather than solve the main issues that stakeholders have been fighting for. These opportunists paved the way for the coup."

The recent resignation of Abdalla Hamdok from the military government has led to further complexity on the ground in Sudan, as the opposition Forces of Freedom and Change has conditionally accepted the UN's offer to broker an end to political deadlock. The Sudanese Professionals Association, however, has rejected the UN's offer.

A resolution adopted by the European Parliament in January, covering a wide ranging assessment of the situation in Sudan, included a call on "....all Sudanese leaders to recommit to the country's democratic transition that enjoys the involvement and support of a broad range of civilian stakeholders and that delivers on the Sudanese people's demands for freedom, peace and human rights."

This position chimes with that of the SPA and the protesting opposition in Sudan, who continue to press for a negotiated return to civilian government; with the military returned to barracks; condemnation of the 25th October coup; and a negotiated transition to democracy. The refusal of the SPA to engage in the negotiations offered by the UN is precisely due to the ongoing involvement of the military, who they do not regard as having a legitimate role in the process, having illegally seized power from the elected government.

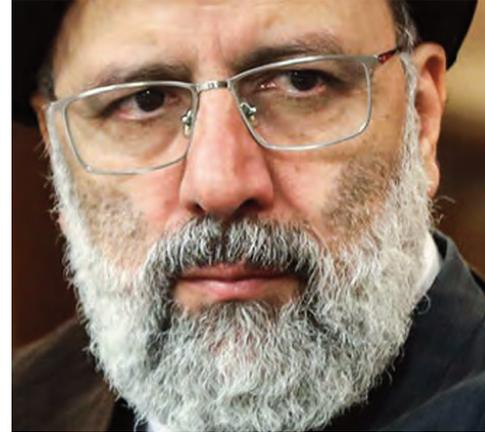
In conclusion, Mohaned Elnour underlines the ongoing determination of those continuing to struggle for the revolution's demands of freedom, peace and justice: "We have had eight demonstrations since the coup on 25th October; our civil disobedience has been very successful, and more is to be announced soon", said Elnour, "we have held sit-ins for one or two days in some cities and we promise more tactics until we bring this coup down."

Steve Bishop is a member of Liberation For the full interview with Mohaned Elnour visit liberationorg.co.uk

Iran/JCPOA

The sanctions have had a crippling impact upon the Iranian economy and the regime is acutely conscious of the resulting growing popular unrest in the country. As a consequence, the regime has begun to moderate its demands and preconditions to ensure the current negotiations do not collapse

Tehran and Washington on a short runway in Vienna



As the negotiations between Iran and the P5+ 1 world powers to revive the Iran nuclear deal progresses, Jane Green considers the issues and the prospects for peace in the Middle East

NEGOTIATIONS TO revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) or Iran nuclear deal, have been ongoing since early December 2021. Vienna has been the venue for these negotiations involving the Islamic Republic of Iran, the United States, Britain, France, Russia, China and the European Union, in an effort to avert a devastating new war in the Middle East.

The process has been complicated by the fact that Iran has opposed the official participation of the US delegation in the negotiations, headed by Joe Biden's special envoy on Iran, Robert Malley, which makes progress slow, as discussions have to proceed through third parties.

Ned Price, the US state department spokesperson, has warned that, "The runway is very, very short – weeks not months." This assessment is confirmed by US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, who has added that any hope of a deal is dependent on getting agreement on reductions in Iran's nuclear programme. With Iran achieving levels of uranium enrichment at 60%, the US argue that faster progress is needed.

Under the 2015 JCPOA, the Obama administration agreed to remove economic sanctions on Iran in return for the latter's guarantee that it would keep the enrichment of uranium at lower levels. Iran remained in compliance with the terms of the JCPOA but, a year after the Trump administration unilaterally withdrew from the deal in 2018, reimposing sweeping sanctions on Iran, the Iranian regime began to suspend some of its commitments, including the cap on uranium enrichment.

The regime in Tehran argues that it had no choice but to go down this path, to find ways to generate leverage to revive the deal, especially

after other signatories to the agreement failed to counter the effects of the reimposed sanctions or tackle the unilateral withdrawal of the US.

Sanctions

The sanctions have had a crippling impact upon the Iranian economy and the regime is acutely conscious of the growing popular unrest in the country, stemming from the sanctions. This is as a result of factories and industrial complexes folding, unemployment skyrocketing and a rapid severe devaluation in the national currency.

As a consequence, the regime has begun to moderate its demands and preconditions to ensure the current negotiations do not collapse. The Islamic Republic more than anything is concerned about the survival of the theocratic regime rather than worrying about the direction of Iranian social and economic policies.

In spite of negotiations not showing any signs of immediate breakthrough, in Tehran the official statements attempt to show that the negotiations are progressing. The Iranian position appears to be that if the negotiation is threatened, the leadership will change tack and proclaim an "heroic compromise" for the negotiations to go forward. Iran seriously needs the sanctions to be lifted.

There has been some movement recently with the US agreeing a waiver on some of the sanctions. The latest US move lifts the sanctions threat against foreign countries and companies from Russia, China and Europe that had been cooperating with Iran under the terms of the JCPOA.

The waivers permit foreign countries and companies to work on civilian projects at Iran's Bushehr nuclear power station, its Arak heavy water plant, and the Tehran Research Reactor without triggering US sanctions. The US position is that the waivers are being restored in order to move forward the negotiations in Vienna.

However, Iran is attempting not to rely entirely upon the outcomes of the negotiations to address its economic crisis. The Iranian foreign minister, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, travelled to China recently to secure a 25-year partnership agreement. Ebrahim Raisi, the Iranian president, has travelled to Moscow recently with the same purpose.

Nevertheless, neither China nor Russia can economically or politically protect Iran's

position. Neither can help to save Iran from the economic catastrophe confronting it if the US and UN economic and banking sanctions continue, or if negotiations fail and Iran continues with its uranium enrichment to weapons grade, 95% purity.

Russia

Russia has taken a more active role in the current negotiations to represent Iran's interests. Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's envoy at the Vienna talks, stated that the traditional meeting of JCPOA members was held in the presence of the US delegation without the participation of Iran.

"We had a targeted discussion on one of the most difficult issues on the agenda of the Vienna talks," Ulyanov emphasised.

Iranian Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian has stated if the Western partners in the negotiations are serious in their intentions, then it would be possible to reach an agreement.

"We want the lifting of sanctions imposed on Iran by Trump, especially those that run counter to the nuclear deal. We want guarantees that include not imposing new sanctions and not returning the current sanctions after they are lifted."

However, differences remain on how to classify whether a sanction relates to the nuclear deal, and so should be lifted, or is related to other issues, such as Iran's missile programme or human rights abuses that the US and others say must remain in place.

The Iranians are also concerned that any deal will not be subject to the vagaries of any change in US administration. Tehran wants binding commitments that if the US quits the deal, the EU will do more to defy secondary US sanctions by injecting real cash into the abortive trading mechanism, Instex, set up by the EU to bypass US sanctions.

Israel's role

The outcome of the negotiations is further complicated by the position of Israel where the Israeli prime minister, Naftali Bennett, has warned that his country will not be bound by any agreement. This underlines once again the precarious balance in the Middle East and the danger that, even if agreement is reached in Vienna, the hardline mavericks in Israel may still plunge the region into conflict.

Iran's economy has been designed to grow

via integration with global capital. It is highly dependent on the value of the dollar. Therefore, the regime is highly unlikely to be able to manage the economic crisis while it remains under financial sanctions.

In addition, it must be noted that even trade between China and Iran is heavily impacted by the US banking sanctions, especially with regard to the use of transaction mechanisms such as SWIFT, from which Iran is currently excluded.

Internationally the Islamic Republic is isolated, with even the support of Russia and China not being sufficient to make a significant difference to the political or economic situation. The regime is conducting talks with other the regional powers, even looking to improve relations with Saudi Arabia.

For the US Biden's policy is in essence the same as Trump with a softer cover. It aims to tame Iran to play a "constructive" part in the Middle East, as the US aims to give its full attention to China and the challenges it faces there. In short, US favours a multilateral confinement approach, as introduced by Obama, with the difference that Biden is protective of Israel and Saudi Arabia. The ideal scenario from a US point of view is that the balance of power between the four big Middle Eastern powers, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt, will keep US interests protected.

Domestically, the Islamic Republic has lost much of its social base of support. Political Islam as an ideology is discredited and associated with corruption. Disastrous economic policies have driven millions of people into poverty. Social and cultural conservatism has alienated youth, women, and intellectuals.

The ongoing actions against trade unionists and the political opposition, a feature of the Islamic regime for over 40 years, are leading to increasing resistance and protests, as the corrupt practices and economic incompetence of the clergy become more evident. More than 60% of Iranians live below the poverty line, there is no economic growth and inflation continues to climb.

While the regime makes a show of resistance to US demands in Vienna all indications suggest that the theocratic regime is running out of options. An agreement behind closed doors with the United States may be all that is left. This is certainly an option that can firmly tie Iran to the global capitalist system.

It may not be the outcome that the US or the Islamic Republic will admit to publicly, but it may yet be a solution both are prepared to live with in the short term.

Jane Green is executive council member and responsible for communications at CODIR, a Liberation affiliate.

▲ Joe Biden and Ebrahim Raisi. 2015 talks in Vienna that led to the landmark deal, from which Donald Trump withdrew the US, had lifted sanctions on Iran in return for controls on its civilian nuclear programme.

human rights/**Julian Assange**

It is vital to create a similar broad-based social and political movement of solidarity with Julian Assange in the UK, so that at the end of the legal process the British Government cannot force through his extradition to the US because the price is simply too high.



Olaf Kostritz

Campaign to free Wikileaks founder must be stepped up

The campaign to ensure the journalist's



release from solitary confinement in Belmarsh and to put an end to the

persecution of the Wikileaks founder by the US administration under President Joe Biden must be stepped up and become more broad-based, writes **Sevim Dagdelen**

THE DECISION By the High Court in London to allow journalist and Wikileaks founder Julian Assange to appeal against his extradition to the US before the UK Supreme Court is a milestone, and yet it feels like an act of mercy. The British appellate judges have granted Julian Assange further recourse to the courts. If the Supreme Court agrees, his defence will be able to present arguments as to why the extradition demanded by the US should be rejected, especially in view of the CIA's assassination plans that have come to light. We should be under no illusions, however. Just because the case continues to be heard in court, this does not mean that Julian Assange will receive justice. His prosecution is neither right nor is it justified under the rule of law. Moreover, it continues to be a scandal that governments in Europe remain silent in the face of glaring injustice. The hunt for Julian Assange is politically motivated - and will also be decided politically after the end of the legal process.

The days of shame and the hypocrisy of Western politics are falling thick and fast at the beginning of the year. January 11 marked the 20th anniversary of the opening of the US detention centre in Guantánamo. The extrajudicial detention centre and the special tribunals there have become a symbol of the brutal excesses of the US' so-called war on terror. Guantánamo is synonymous with arbitrariness, injustice and torture. On 5 January, the journalist Julian Assange, founder of the Wikileaks platform, who blew the whistle on the crimes of the US Government in Guantánamo, Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as on the details of the torture programme of the US secret service CIA, has been detained for a thousand days in the "British Guantánamo". Julian Assange has been rotting away in solitary confinement at the high-security Belmarsh prison for more than two and a half years, constantly threatened with extradition to the US, where he is to be tried for "espionage" on account of his journalistic activities, ultimately risking a 175-year prison sentence.

On International Human Rights Day of all days, on 10 December, the High Court had initially given the green light for Julian Assange to be extradited. This occurred despite the fact that it was known that a key witness for the prosecution admitted to lying - and also despite



the fact that investigative reporters had since uncovered CIA plans to kidnap and murder Julian Assange, meaning that the "security guarantees" issued by the US are not worth the paper that they are printed on. Whatever the Supreme Court decides, the final political decision on extradition to the US rests with the British Government at the end of the legal process in the United Kingdom.

Politically motivated

Criticism of the politically motivated persecution of Julian Assange is broad-based and international. Journalists' associations have issued warnings about the devastating signal that this sends to all whistleblowers whose information and insider knowledge become public. The human rights organisation Amnesty International assesses the conditions at Belmarsh as torture and has clearly expressed grave doubts over Washington's assurances regarding Assange's potential treatment in the United States. UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Prof. Nils Melzer stated the following: "You can think what you want about Assange, but he is not in a condition to be extradited."

In the high-circulation weekly *Die Zeit*, award-winning and bestselling German author Eugen Ruge called for a united effort to prevent Julian Assange's extradition and to put an end to Europe's unspeakable silence in the case: "An important decision is pending in the coming days, weeks and months. If Assange is extradited and convicted without any serious attempt by European politicians to intervene, it disqualifies and makes a mockery of all their future warnings regarding the rule of law and freedom of the press in other countries. For me personally, that would be a political point of no return, an omission that nothing will be able to rectify."

Germany has indeed managed to bring the Julian Assange case out of political isolation thanks to its persistent efforts. The ice was broken here by the hearing of DIE LINKE parliamentary group entitled "Media under fire. Julian Assange and freedom of the press" in the German Bundestag in November 2019. To this end, we brought journalists from well-known newspapers who worked with Julian Assange on the revelations of war crimes committed by the US Army, lawyers from his defence team,

human rights activists and cultural professionals to the table together with Nils Melzer and John Shipton, Julian Assange's father and a tireless advocate for his release. Thanks to their persistent efforts, a network of solidarity was established, and it was possible to turn around the predominantly negative to ignorant attitude towards him in the media. Julian Assange is no longer a political pariah. He is widely seen as a political prisoner who is being made an example of, whose persecution is an attack on freedom of the press and who deserves the solidarity of us all - and who must be released from British custody at long last.

Members of the Bundestag have established the cross-party Free Julian Assange working group. Parliamentary support is now also coming from many other countries in Europe and around the world.

Legendary German reporter Günter Wallraff has organised the broadest social appeal for support, with well over 100 prominent figures from the press, culture, academia and politics. Five ministers who spoke out in favour of Julian Assange's release last year, in addition to two vice-presidents of the Bundestag. We are taking this up in our appeal to the new coalition formed by SPD, Greens and FDP.

It is shameful and totally unacceptable that the new German Government has remained silent on the Julian Assange case instead of showing its political colours against this judicial murder by stealth. Assange cannot and must not be extradited to the US. Anyone who is not prepared to defend freedom of the press and Julian Assange in Washington and to call on the US administration to put an end to the persecution of the journalist, anyone who is not prepared to call out the British Government over the scandalous prison conditions in Belmarsh and to demand Julian Assange's immediate release from the hell of solitary confinement, has no right to pass judgement on human rights issues in other contexts.

It is vital to create a similar broad-based social and political movement of solidarity with Julian Assange in the UK, so that at the end of the legal process the British Government cannot force through his extradition to the US because the price is simply too high.

It is important to strengthen solidarity for Julian Assange in the US itself. I had an opportunity to hold productive talks on this in Washington and New York in December and to open initial doors to Congress. A larger delegation of parliamentarians from Germany and Europe is preparing to travel to the US for talks with a view to laying the groundwork for political decision-makers. The politically motivated campaign against Julian Assange was launched in the White House. It is only there that the attack against the journalist and against the freedom of the press can be stopped.

Sevim Dagdelen is Member of the German Bundestag since 2005. She was the first ever MP to visit Julian Assange in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London in 2012.

comment/Roger McKenzie

Comrades who take part in the struggle for liberation do so with the knowledge that thanks is probably the last thing they will get. This, is more than thanks. This is about recognition for someone who stood up and was counted and was most likely denounced as a race traitor alongside the abuse for her politics.

Sylvia Pankhurst: unyielding warrior against imperialism



Support the campaign for a memorial statue to the socialist

suffragette who devoted a significant part of her life to the liberation of Ethiopia, from the fascist Italian invasion until her death in 1960, writes Roger McKenzie



ONE OF THE features of the fight against slavery and colonialism throughout history has been the imperative for those facing the iron heel of oppression to win collaborators in the struggle from within the belly of the beast itself.

One such collaborator was Sylvia Pankhurst, the socialist suffragette. I award Sylvia far more than the usual ally label. From my reading of history Sylvia was an uncompromising warrior against imperialism.

I write this to urge you all to support the campaign for a memorial statue to Sylvia.

Sylvia was far more than simply one of the Pankhurst women fighting for the right to vote. Her view was much wider than the most important campaign to secure the vote women. She fought for the liberation of all people.

Sylvia was also trained as an artist. In that role she documented the lives of working class women in factories, mills and the potteries. She wrote about how “mothers came to me from patient eyes. I knew then that I should never return to my art.”

She was a fearless campaigner who was imprisoned and force fed for the “crime” of fighting for the votes for women. She was also one of the earliest to speak out against fascism.

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 led to her devoting her life to the liberation of the country and eventually made it her home. I will return to this below.

Sylvia employed the legendary Jamaican poet and activist Claude McKay to write for her paper, the Workers’ Dreadnought. Another poet, Siegfried Sassoon was also a contributor to the newspaper. He shared Sylvia’s opposition the 1914-18 war and is famous for his poems that told of the harsh realities of life in the trenches.

Sylvia was expelled from the Women’s Social and Political Union by her sister Christabel, because of her socialism and support for trade unions. Her family were opposed to



her determination to improve conditions for the working class. To her involvement with the trade union movement and her belief that the campaign for votes for women should not be suspended for the First World War set her at odds with her family.

They felt the war effort should be supported and so suspended campaigning. The break with her family was hastened by Sylvia speaking in support of James Larkin the legendary leader of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union and the other workers in the Dublin lock out of 1913.

Sylvia is not represented on the memorial to them and the women imprisoned during the campaign for women’s suffrage in Victoria Tower Gardens, adjacent to the House of Lords, hence the campaign to raise *A Statue for Sylvia*.

The politics of Sylvia heavily contributed to why she is not represented on the memorial to her family and the women imprisoned during the campaign for women’s suffrage.

Sylvia was a staunch anti-racist. As now many people during her time who called themselves radical or socialists exhibited their racism in full view.

The *Herald* newspaper, the leading socialist paper of the day, ran a headline in 1920 “Black Scourge in Europe”. E.D Morel who became a Labour MP was outraged that the French were deploying black troops – he called them “black savages” in the parts of Germany they occupied after the first world war. He asserted that “primitive African barbarians are perpetuating an abominable outrage upon womanhood, upon the white races and upon civilisation”.

Ethiopia

The second half of Sylvia’s life from 1935 when Italy invaded Ethiopia until her death in 1960 was devoted to the liberation of the country.

Until 1935 Ethiopia was the only independent country in Africa and the only African country to have escaped the domination of European Imperialism. It was therefore a beacon in the anti colonial struggle.

Sylvia understood the significance of Ethiopia for the struggle for freedom of Black Africa and the importance of asserting African values against imperialist counter culture. In her paper, *New Times and Ethiopian News* she printed an article by Marcus Garvey, the Black

Jamaican, leader, protesting against films which were “calculated to create prejudice against the Negro race”.

In the debates and discussion about racism she was astute and prescient in the anti-racist movement by using the term “Afro American” for black Americans in preference to “Negro” an “americanised version” of the African people.“ Her involvement in the Ethiopian struggle led to her contact with black pan African activists including C.L.R James and Jomo Kenyatta.

W. E. B. Du Bois - one of the most important black intellectuals and activists in history expressed the view:

“.....the great work of Sylvia Pankhurst was tomake the British people realise that black folks had more and more to be recognised as human beings with the rights of men and women.”

The Lords blocked the original site proposed which was opposite the Palace of Westminster. Government funding for the project was refused. Rachel Holmes, author of the recent Sylvia Pankhurst, *Natural Born Rebel* wrote “Sylvia was a socialist and an internationalist – and no doubt far too rich for the blood of those running Britain right now.”

Overwhelmingly the statue is financed by donations from trade union branches and individuals. With support from Islington Council the statue will be raised on Clerkenwell Green in London (dubbed the headquarters of republicanism, revolution and ultra-non-conformity) and will look towards the Marx Memorial Library. An excellent site for the statue.

Crowdfunding

I urge everyone to support the campaign by donating to the crowdfunding page: www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/sylvia-statue and check out the campaign website at www.gn.apc.org/sylvia-pankhurst.

Supporting people who stood up against imperialism when it was even more difficult than it is now to do so is something I am proud to ask you all to do.

Comrades who take part in the struggle for liberation do so with the knowledge that thanks is probably the last thing they will get. This, is more than thanks. This is about recognition for someone who stood up and was counted and was most likely denounced as a race traitor alongside the abuse for her politics.

I can only imagine the racist criticism she must have endured, even from the left, for her support for African liberation and also by employing comrades such as McKay. This must be recognised and once again I urge you to support this important memorial.

(I acknowledge the contributions of Philippa Clarke, Mary Davis and Megan Dobney to this article).

Roger McKenzie is the general secretary of Liberation. His regular column will appear in each issue of the journal.



review/anti-apartheid

'This brilliant book contains many moving and informative stories which bring home the scale and scope of solidarity actions. It is also interesting to discover the interconnection between the many different parts of the struggle.'

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Roger McKenzie general secretary

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Secrets of the People's War that liberated South Africa

London Recruit **Bob Newland** is thrilled by the accounts of activists from Britain, Belgium, Canada, Holland and throughout Southern Africa of how they contributed to the victory over Apartheid

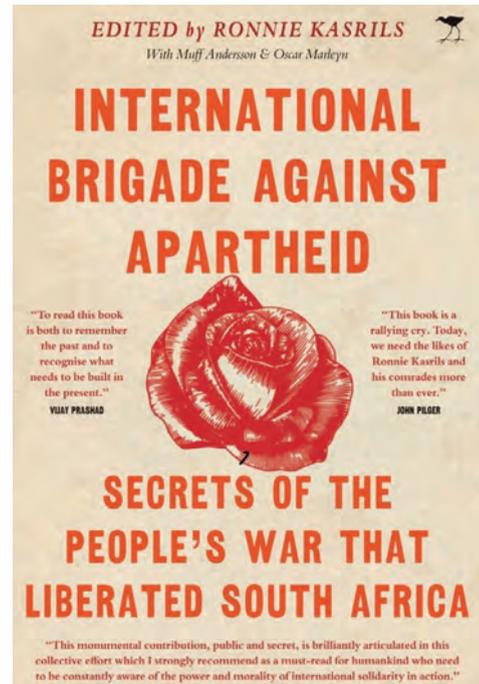
DECEMBER 16TH 2020 was the 60th Anniversary of the founding of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) the army of the African National Congress (ANC). Editor Ronnie Kasrils was a former MK Commander and Chief of Intelligence and a minister in the Governments of Mandela and Mbeki. The title of the book demonstrates Kasrils' belief that armed struggle was key to the defeat of Apartheid – something many recent commentators have tried to underplay.

In the fight against imperialism the battle against apartheid was one of the longest and arguably most successful internationally. The ANC strategy named 'the four pillars of struggle' encompassed mass mobilisation, an effective underground organisation, armed struggle and international solidarity. This brilliant book contains many moving and informative stories which bring home the scale and scope of solidarity actions. It is also interesting to discover the interconnection between the many different parts of the struggle.

Many Liberation readers will be familiar with the 'London Recruits' who, recruited by Ronnie Kasrils and Aziz Pahad, went to South Africa in the 1960s and 70s on clandestine missions providing support for MK. I had the privilege to have been one of them. This volume tells of the many other internationalists who contributed to the victory over Apartheid by their underground exploits.

Pallo Jordan introduces the struggle for National Liberation in a timeline back to the 18th Century. The volunteers' stories are from the 20th Century. In their own words activists from Britain, Belgium, Canada, Holland and throughout Southern Africa share many secrets of this extraordinary saga of leaflet bombings, arms smuggling, safe houses, dead letter boxes and transportation of MK combatants.

What is amazing is the scale of these



activities which remained unknown for 40 years. However, you will have to read the book to discover these secrets for yourselves. Near misses, capture, torture, imprisonment and escapes all add to the drama. Many of the 'Brigaders' did their bit and returned to 'normal' life in their homelands. Others remained in their adopted South Africa continuing to make their contribution towards a better society.

Part two is dedicated to international solidarity organisations including Britain's Anti-Apartheid Movement and groups in France, India, Ireland and Canada. Support for the struggle with arms and training from the Soviet Union, German Democratic Republic and Cuba is also addressed.

Writing for a better world!

The Maggie Bowden Essay Competition

Liberation invites young people across Britain to imagine what a better world may look like. We know many of you have some of the best and most creative ideas and we cannot wait to read them!

How do we achieve that better world?

Are there people who inspire you?
Are there struggles in history that fascinate you?
Are there any current events that you want to bring attention to?

Write and send us your essays for a chance to have your writing published in Liberation's journal and to win a prize presented to you by Jeremy Corbyn!
Deadline for submission is 5 April 2022.
More information at liberationorg.co.uk
Submissions must include your name, age, school/university, title, and postal/email address so we can contact the lucky winners!

A number of contributors illustrate the price paid by the Front Line States (many only just independent) for daring to support MK with training facilities and a safe haven. Others raise controversies about the way the armed struggle developed, life in the camps and not surprisingly issues about post-Apartheid developments. Kasrils looks at the critical victory by Angolan and Cuban troops against the South African Defence Force at Cuito Cuanavale in 1987 which turned the tide of the struggle.

Finally, Kasrils addresses the question 'Was it worth it?' While cataloguing the many problems in today's South Africa, he is clear – 'Yes it was'.

Discussing further aspects of international solidarity, Urko Airtza from the Basque Country recalls the relationship forged between ETA (Basque Country and Freedom), MK and other liberation movements while training in Algeria. He highlights Kasrils' role in helping bring about a ceasefire by ETA and the subsequent arms decommissioning. Urko quotes the last words to his parents of an ETA militant killed fighting in El Salvador in another internationalist initiative: 'Solidarity is the tenderness among peoples', which seems to me a fitting point on which to end.

Bob Newland was a London Recruit and a former London Area Secretary of Liberation.

International Brigade Against Apartheid – Secrets of the People's War that Liberated South Africa by Ronnie Kasrils.

Published by Jacana and distributed in the UK by Central Books. £16.95.

If you want posted entries returned, please inform us upon submission

Guidelines for entry Enter in one of the following categories

- ★ Young (under 12): *Write up to 400 words*
- ★ Teenager (ages 12-17):
Up to 1,000 words
- ★ Young Adult (ages 18-25):
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