

**Free Assange**

Why pressure on Biden is key

Sevim Dagdelen



**Sri Lanka**

Liberation Journal interviews  
a leader of the left-wing JVP

Bimal Rathnayake



**Paul Robeson**

The first profile in a series of  
Liberation heroes

Harsev Bains

# Liberation

Journal of Liberation formerly the Movement for Colonial Freedom      £1 or solidarity price      Autumn 2022

**Britain needs an independent foreign policy!  
Give peace a chance!**



Page 2: Two hawks.

In Interview:  
Bimal Rathnayake of the People's Liberation Front of Sri Lanka  
and Hanna Amireh of the Palestinian People's Party





# editorial/**Liberation**

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## Britain needs an independent foreign policy! Give peace a chance!

The world is becoming more dangerous by the day. The slide to war and promotion of war hysteria is frightening and a call for calm and considered policymaking, as opposed to rampant jingoism, is being raised from all quarters.

At the same time, the government of Britain has shown itself to be without concern for peace and stability - unwilling to buck the bellicose trend and, indeed, very eager to support it. The Conservative Party's choosing of Liz Truss earlier this week to succeed pro-war Boris Johnson has sent shivers down the backs of all concerned about the danger of a terrible generalised war. Her election by the Tory faithful signals that the disastrous 'Global Britain' foreign policy will be continued and accelerated.

Engulfed by political crisis, the British government has remained committed to stoking the fires of conflict in the Ukraine and throughout this period of self-made political uncertainty, has sought to ensure that the 'spirit' of British colonialism remains to haunt world politics.

From Sri Lanka to the Middle East, the practice of divide and rule policies, covert and overt interference, and economic exploitation has continued to fuel tensions, alongside dangerous and wasteful war preparations.

As Foreign Secretary, Truss showed little interest in the principle of mutual respect between nations, non-interference, and peaceful development. As Johnson's replacement, she seems set to slavishly follow 'Global Britain' with its encapsulation of her hard-right brand of ideological Conservatism.

Already warmongers in every corner of the world are celebrating the news from London on 5 September. Leading Israeli newspaper, Haaretz, reported on Monday that Liz Truss "could be the most pro-Israel British prime minister ever".

Liberation shares the sentiment expressed by Kate Hudson,

General Secretary of CND, in her open letter to the new Prime Minister on Tuesday 6 September:

"None of our problems can be resolved by war, or by nuclear weapons. Our broken society cannot be rebuilt while profits come first, while lies are common currency in politics, while leaders trample on the hopes and aspirations of whole generations - for food, for homes, for warmth, health, jobs, and education.

"This is what we ask of you today, Prime Minister. To turn from war, from nuclear threats, from might makes right; to turn to the values of peace that your parents embodied, and which you turned your back on."

In this Liberation Journal, we cover key issues in world politics and areas where serious threats to world peace are growing. It is in these areas that the democratic struggle against oppression and exploitation would be strengthened by a progressive independent British foreign policy.

From the struggle of the Palestinian people against Israeli oppression and occupation and that of the Iranian people against a bankrupt theocratic regime, to the progressive struggles in Africa and the Southern Hemisphere, as well as the interests and security of the British people - all would be advanced with a new and progressive independent foreign policy.

The Commonwealth, which is the follow-on from the British Empire, has not guaranteed peace and progress. On the contrary, Britain's membership of NATO and its hanging on the coat tails of US military adventurism and overseas economic expansion has undermined the stated embryonic ideals behind the Commonwealth's formation. Securing world peace and international cooperation have been undermined.

The winning of an independent foreign policy for Britain is a key democratic challenge for all progressive organisations committed to peace and democracy.

**Jamshid Ahmadi** Editor

Two hawks: Liz Truss with John Bolton, onetime national security adviser under former US President Trump.



# news/Liberation

Jeremy Corbyn MP launched Liberation's Fenner Brockway Annual Lecture with a brilliant insight into the life of the former British MP who was co-founder and first chair of the Movement for Colonial Freedom and the lessons of his life's work for anti-imperialist struggles today.

## Annual Fenner Brockway lecture launched



### LIBERATION

JEREMY CORBYN MP launched Liberation's Fenner Brockway Annual Lecture with a brilliant insight into the life of the former British MP who was co-founder and first chair of the Movement for Colonial Freedom, Liberation's predecessor organisation, and the lessons of his life's work for anti-imperialist struggles today.

The lecture, which Liberation sees as a key tool in raising consciousness and working towards an equitable, just, and independent foreign policy free from the vestiges of empire, was held at the NEU teaching union HQ near King's Cross in London on June 30.

Jeremy highlighted some of the great crimes of colonialism and strongly criticised the role, since British colonies secured independence of Western countries, the IMF and World Bank through their policies of privatisation and marketisation and the refusal to write off debts, in creating "poverty and inequality for many people in the world". Many of the leaders of the newly independent states, he said, "achieved great things. But the independence wasn't necessarily the independence they thought they were going to get. The independence inherited a system that was unfair."

"Throughout Fenner's life, he experienced from being the height of empire to the point where pretty much every British

colony had achieved its independence, he recognised that independence alone wasn't the whole point. It was about international justice and international solidarity."

Jeremy called for "an international strategy based on peace, based on justice, human rights, equality and the belief that every human being has a right to live and a right to contribute to our world and to our society". He called for a change in education to deliver an "understanding of history that's a bit different, a bit better than what so many of our children receive in our schools, an understanding that racism comes from the history books and comes from a tradition of colonialism and what goes with it."

There was a lively question and answer session including interventions from comrades internationally. Among the guests were senior figures from the RMT and POA unions, the Cuban Ambassador, representatives from Afghanistan, Sudan, National Assembly of Women, Morning Star and affiliated organisations including CODIR.

Liberation's current general secretary, Roger McKenzie, spoke briefly to introduce the event - as did former general secretary, Maggie Bowden (pictured with joint President Jeremy Corbyn), at the end - calling for continuing solidarity for our international affiliates and other progressive organisations fighting imperialism and neo-colonialism, including through Liberation's Observer Status at the UN Human Rights Council.

Liberation wishes to put on record its thanks to: the NEU for so generously making their HQ and staff available for the night; Jeremy for the talk and both the PJP and *Morning Star* for assistance with the livestream, enabling a big audience for the lecture; Baroness Christine Blower for her usual brilliant chairing; and Liberation members and supporters who volunteered, bringing food, leaflets and other materials, setting up and packing up at the end and ensuring the running of a smooth and professional event.

You can watch a video of the lecture at [liberationorg.co.uk](http://liberationorg.co.uk)

## Liberation welcomes Palestine prisoner release

### PALESTINE

Liberation welcomes the announcement, late on 31 August, of the imminent release of Palestinian political prisoner, Khalil Awawdeh, who had been on hunger strike for 182 days to protest his unjust imprisonment under Israeli "administrative detention". The announcement followed an assurance from the Israeli state that it would not seek to renew his detention order when the current term expires on 2 October.

By the end of his horrific ordeal, Mr. Awawdeh had lost 40 kilograms, leaving him weighing just 38 kilograms, and was enduring a sharp deterioration in his basic neurological function.

"Oh free people of the world, this suffering body, of which nothing remains but skin and bones, does not reflect a weakness and vulnerability of the Palestinian people, but rather is a mirror reflecting the true face of the occupation..." stated Mr. Awawdeh in a message circulated on social media on 28 August.

However, Liberation notes with deep concern that the end of Mr. Awawdeh's ordeal does not herald an end to the use of "administrative detention", which countless other Palestinians are subject to - with no hope or idea as to when their situations will be resolved one way or the other.

"Administrative detention", a highly controversial tool and relic of colonial rule under the British Mandate, is used almost exclusively against the Palestinians. It allows for detention without charge or trial for renewable terms of between three and six months, without the possibility of legal appeal or even the detainee knowing the accusation or basis for their imprisonment.

The Palestinian People's Party (PPP) has released a statement calling for urgent solidarity with prisoners held under "administrative detention" and demanding that, "The [international community] must compel the government of the occupying state of Israel to [...] stop the policy of "administrative detention" [...] and to oblige it to apply all international laws and conventions to the occupied Palestinian territories."

Liberation joins the growing international chorus against this particularly cruel aspect of the Israeli occupation and hangover from British colonial rule.

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## "Afghans selling their children due to poverty"

### POST-WAR CRISIS

A YEAR ON from the US troop withdrawal and the seizing of power by the Taliban the people of Afghanistan remain abandoned with international organisations and foreign governments operating "under the influence" of the US and NATO, which continue to use the country to achieve their goals in Central Asia.

In an interview with Liberation, Asadullah Keshtmand, a former Afghanistan diplomat and senior politician, stated: "Most international organisations, including charities, currently operate under the influence of the US and NATO. Governments are worse. The main problem is that the US has made our country a beacon of surveillance, to play a subversive role in Central Asia - ultimately, it was for this reason that the Taliban were re-installed to power. Western countries that could play a role will not do anything without the assent of the US. The people of Afghanistan have been placed in this horrific uncertainty for a year now."

Mr. Keshtmand argued that the re-emergence of the Taliban a year ago is a powerful example of an "ethnicisation" of politics in Afghanistan orchestrated by the US which "spread the seeds of national and ethnic discord" throughout its 20-year long occupation. "From the very beginning, at the Bonn Conference in 2001, the US formed the occupation government by division of power based on two religious and national-ethnic criteria. For this reason, the lives of the people of Afghanistan have been dictated on the basis of ethnic division and hostility for more than 20 years." This colonial-style occupation has helped ensure that there is "no place left for a progressive national vision" and meant "any potential opposition to the Taliban would likely manifest as an ethnic protest".

The security situation has undoubtedly improved, something trumpeted by the Taliban government on the anniversary of the departure of US troops, however this is now deteriorating. "It is true that the Taliban are dominating Afghanistan today, but the nature of the Taliban's policy, despite the US controlling things behind the scenes, is such that it

is unable to stop any nationwide protest should it arise. There are bound to be major developments as security is rapidly deteriorating. Even in recent days, we have seen explosions and killings in some parts of Afghanistan."

The Islamic State - Khorasan Province group has targeted civilians as well as religious seminaries and mosques in Kabul and other parts of the country and on 5 September two Russian embassy staff were among eight killed as a suicide bomber detonated explosives near the embassy's entrance in an attack not immediately claimed by any group according to Al Jazeera.

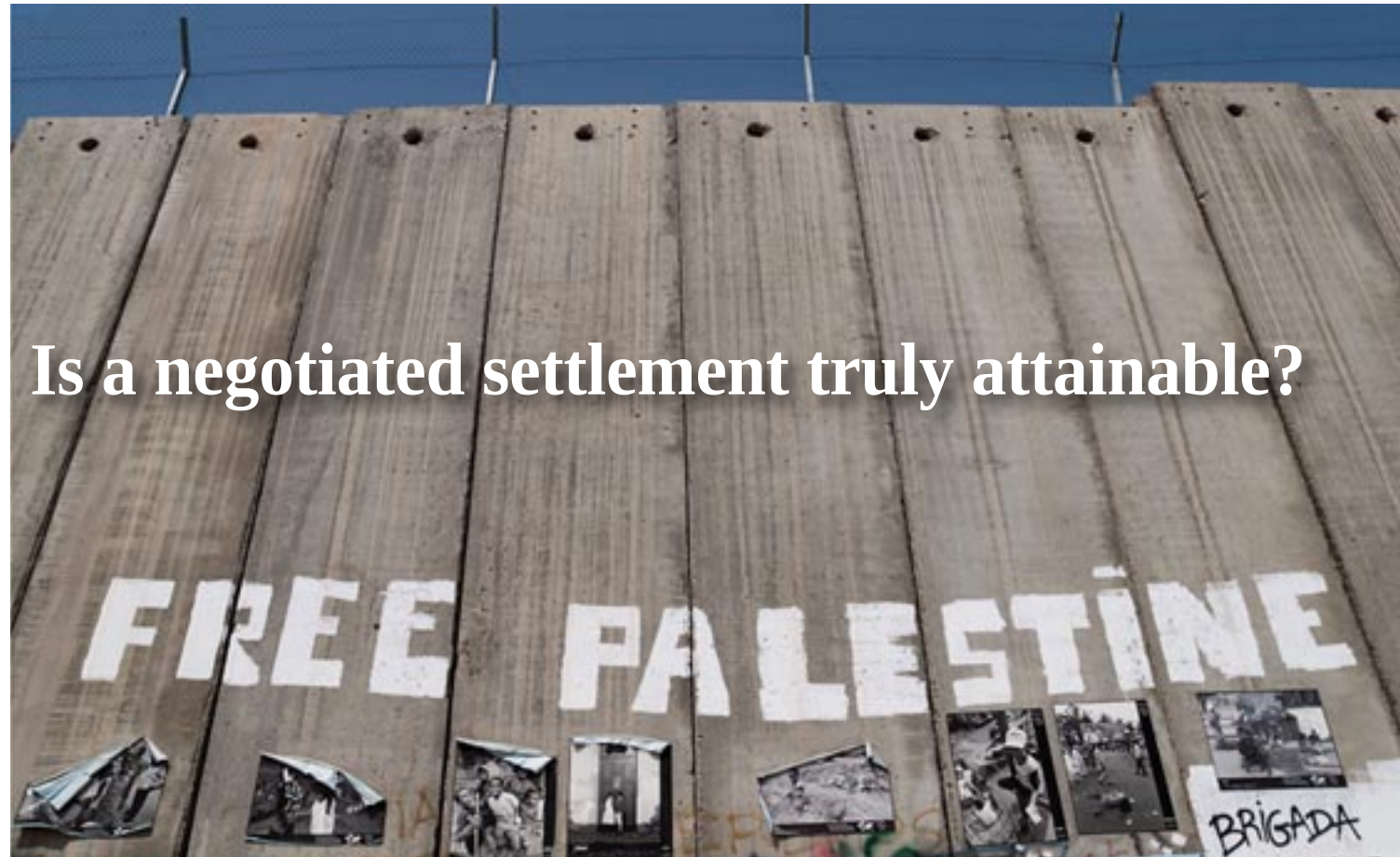
Mr. Keshtmand argued that reports of the impact of international sanctions on the country were at times exaggerated, and some aid was fortunately getting through, however the humanitarian situation was dire, with poverty "at an explosive point." He added: "The situation in Afghanistan is so terrible that people sell their children because of poverty."

Read the full interview at [liberationorg.co.uk](http://liberationorg.co.uk)



# interview/Hanna Amireh

The real issue at stake here is the strength of international solidarity, with the cause of the Palestinian people - namely their legitimate aspirations for statehood and freedom from occupation from those who genuinely seek a just and comprehensive solution in the Middle East, and how it holds up against the concerted attempts of the Israeli government to break it.



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## Is a negotiated settlement truly attainable?

Few would disagree that the ongoing Palestinian problem, and its resolution, is both complicated and multidimensional. To provide some clarity, Liberation speaks to

**Hanna Amireh** of the Palestinian People's Party.



**Liberation** Barely one year after its inauguration back in 2021, Israel's "coalition" led by the right-wing ex Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett, has all but completely collapsed with elections that could see the until recently unlikely comeback of the far-right Likud party and disgraced former premier, Benjamin Netanyahu, due in November. But, why?

**Hanna Amireh** One major factor is the failure of the Israeli government to gain an extension of the Emergency Regulations (Judea and Samaria - Jurisdiction and Legal Aid), first enacted in 1967, which would have consolidated the 'superior' legal status of Israeli settlers in the West Bank - an area the Israeli state bizarrely choose to refer to by its ancient biblical name, as reflected in the ordinance.

In a June plenum of the Knesset (Israeli parliament), the Israeli regime failed to garner the necessary 61 votes in favour to extend the application of the Emergency Regulations, and thereby extend Israeli jurisdiction in the Occupied West Bank.

The *New York Times* has described the law as "the basis of the two-tiered legal system in the occupied West Bank that distinguishes between Israeli settlers and Palestinians, and which is described by critics as a form of apartheid".

It is worth noting here that the current coalition government had chosen to completely ignore the Palestinian problem in its program upon coming to power in 2021. And, it is this formulaic ignorance which is a principal cause of its downfall one year later.

**Liberation** This, of course, means that the Palestinian problem strongly persists and cannot be ignored.

**Hanna Amireh** What followed was the unprovoked Israeli-initiated three-day-long bombardment of Gaza, 5 - 7 August, which resulted in the deaths of at least 49 Palestinians, including 17 children, and more than 300 injured.

Yet another example of aggression served to

amply demonstrate the deep effect of the Palestinian problem on the psyche and political maneuverings in Israel. Thus, as Israel headed towards its fifth election in four years, the interim Prime Minister, Yair Lapid, needed to shore up his security credentials. Here I quote the Associated Press statement that read, "Lapid's political fortunes could rest on the current fighting, either gaining a boost if he can portray himself as a capable security leader or take a hit". While Lapid may have made some short term gains in this respect through the three-day assault, the deep drivers of the continuing Israel-Palestine conflict remain untouched.

As stated in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) debate that followed the Israeli aggression: "Ultimately, the underlying drivers of this and previous escalations remain. These cycles of violence will only cease when we achieve a political resolution of the conflict that brings an end to the occupation and the realisation of a two-state solution on the basis of the 1967 lines, in line with UN resolutions, international law, and previous agreements. The Security Council reiterates its call to the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships, along with the international community, to strengthen diplomatic efforts to return to meaningful negotiations towards a viable two-state solution."

**Liberation** Our main question remains: Is a negotiated peaceful settlement attainable as stated in the UNSC debate?

**Hanna Amireh** In order to answer this million-dollar question, it is important to have a grasp of what Israel's main motivations are in its repeated attacks on Gaza as well as the Israeli rationale whereby in order to form and consolidate an interim government, that will hold up and preserve the status quo, the Palestinian problem must be eradicated and nullified.

Here I am not talking about the reaching of a bona fide solution to the Palestinian problem by Israel, as I simply do not believe in such a scenario! Nor am I talking about the prospects for a political arrangement in the long-term, as our hopes have been

routinely dashed in this respect! I am not even talking about the prospects for a deterrence of Israeli aggression, as any deterrent effect is always proved short-lived if not completely absent - as attested to by the repeated assaults on Gaza with the whole world watching! No, the real issue at stake here is the strength of international solidarity, with the cause of the Palestinian people - namely their legitimate aspirations for statehood and freedom from occupation - from those who genuinely seek a just and comprehensive solution in the Middle East, and how it holds up against the concerted attempts of the Israeli government to break it.

No one should be under any illusion, the principal Israeli target is Palestinian unity and its strengthening through international solidarity - with the aim of keeping Palestinians divided and isolated. Whether it be extremists within the current interim government, or the far-right in opposition, the motivations are the same - to secure their position as the leaders and defenders of Israel as a Jewish state at whatever price or moral cost.

The Palestinians have come a long way in their struggle from the position of "driving the Jewish invaders into the sea" in the aftermath of 1948 (the bloody founding of Israel); through the visions of a secular and pluralistic state as envisaged by the late Yasser Arafat; to the objective of a two-state solution as declared by the PLO, underscored by the Oslo Accords and respective UN resolutions.

Meanwhile, the Israelis have made comparatively little if any progress in their positions, from Golda Meir's famous statement in the early-1970s that "there are no such things as Palestinians", to the recognition in the early-1990s of the existence of "a Palestinian problem".

Fourteen years ago, in 2008, I delivered a speech in Britain in which I stated that owing to Israeli policies, the Gaza Strip had essentially become a mass open-air prison for 1.5-million Palestinians. Now, fast forward, there are 2-million Palestinians there and Gaza is no less a prison - if not worse. I also talked about the military road blocks and the apartheid wall, the so-called 'separation fence', in the Occupied West Bank which isolates a whole nation behind bars. Make no mistake - this is an Israeli modern copy and developed model of colonisation! It is political apartheid on a national basis and scale!

**Liberation** Looking ahead, what does this ultimately mean?

**Hanna Amireh** It means that, all these years later, we are still witnessing an incendiary situation! It means that the Israeli and US strategy to eradicate Hamas through military force is a baseless and spent strategy! It means that the so-called "economically-driven peace" is a false vision! I stated this in my address 14 years ago and I repeat it here and now!

The policy of humanising the occupation through financial aid, will not lead the Palestinian people to their emancipation and statehood. The so-called economical building measures propagated by Israel over the past 20 years are not a solution and will never bring about peace.

The Palestinians are in need of real political solidarity, mass efforts, as well as coordinated pressure by all parties around the world for Israel to comply with a just and comprehensive peace based on the internationally-agreed resolutions.

Through such solidarity, a negotiated peaceful settlement is attainable - however distant and fraught that might seem against the current backdrop!

**Mr. Hanna Amireh** is a member of the Palestinian People's Party and a former member of the Executive Committee of the PLO (2001 - 2018).



# comment/Gaza assault

In a time of supposedly heightened public consciousness and sensitivity all around the world regarding the importance of upholding international law; countering the extraterritorial aggression of one state against another; and the rights and sovereignty of nations, Israel cannot and should not be conferred any sort of special status



**Liberation is dismayed to have borne witness, along with the rest of the world, to the latest act of aggression perpetrated by the state of Israel against the people of occupied Palestine, the worst since the 11-day-long assault on Gaza in May 2021, in yet another brazen violation of international law.**

By **Payam Solhtalab** for Liberation

**C**ITING AS Yet unspecified and unverified “immediate threats” posed by the militant Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) group, the Israeli military launched a “pre-emptive” operation codenamed “Breaking Dawn” that saw repeated airstrikes on Gaza from Friday 5 August, which continued over three days until the reaching of a shaky ceasefire late on Sunday - resulting in at least 44 Palestinians being killed, including 15 children, according to the confirmed figures released by the Palestinian health ministry. (Subsequent violations of the ceasefire have resulted in the death toll rising slightly since.)

Prior to launching its latest bombardment, Israel had stopped the planned transport of fuel into Gaza, effectively incapacitating the territory’s sole power plant and reducing the electricity supply to four hours a day. Increasing concerns over the drastically worsening humanitarian situation in the besieged enclave, where health officials warned that hospitals only had enough fuel to keep generators running for a maximum of two further days, were a major factor in the reaching of a truce on Sunday night.

Despite Israeli claims that their strikes were precision-aimed, it was evident - not least from the footage that quickly spread internationally - that civilians had also been caught up in the bloodshed. And, these are lives that cannot and must not be casually dismissed as collateral damage.

The bare fact that 15 of the casualties - approximately a third of those killed - were under 18-years-old meant that they were innocent victims. Put simply, there can be no argument that their deaths were the unfortunate “overspill” of an operation against otherwise legitimate targets.

The detailed intelligence that Israel would have no-doubt had at its disposal, coupled with the reasonable expectation that children and innocent bystanders would be caught up in the bombardments in densely-populated Gaza (the military equivalent of shooting fish in a barrel) should have rendered the operation as a complete no-go - especially one based

on such a flimsy pretext, the grounds for which Israel continues to refuse to make out before the eyes of the world.

Indeed, the world strays into distinctly dangerous territory when an operation of such magnitude can take place on a “pre-emptive” basis - with vague references being made to threats, but no serious scrutiny taking place of the actual underlying rationale. Israel, as before, remains completely unaccountable.

It would be remiss to view this latest offensive in isolation from other material political developments currently underway affecting Israel...

These latest attacks follow on closely from the latest round of talks aimed at reviving a nuclear deal with Iran akin to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) 2015, essentially in which Iran would receive relief from a sanctions regime that has crippled its economy in return for curbs on its uranium enrichment and the restriction of its nuclear programme to civilian purposes and usage.

The Israeli government remains vehemently opposed to the reaching of such accords with Iran, and the consequent lessening of pressure upon the regime in Tehran, just as it was with the original JCPOA in 2015. Israel had made clear its disgruntlement with these developments shortly before the events of last week.

The PIJ group is quite legitimately viewed by many Israeli and Palestinian observers alike as the Islamic Republic of Iran’s proxy in the Occupied Territories. This particular link should not be overlooked as one of the significant factors behind Israel’s most recent offensive.

Neither can it be dismissed as mere happenstance that the attack took place with yet another election cycle in Israel on the horizon. Many informed observers rightly point out the predictability and regularity with which such offensives take place, neatly coinciding with times of flux in Israeli politics. Thus, we witness the current governing coalition, led by Yair Lapid, taking a tough stance in the lead-up to

elections set for November - elections which could well see the return to power of the hard-right Likud party and disgraced former prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, in a turn of events perhaps unthinkable not so long ago.

Liberation unequivocally condemns the latest act of aggression by Israel against the long-suffering people of Gaza and the rest of the Occupied Territories of Palestine. This latest conflagration, like so many that have come before, manifestly lacked any justifiable ground and should be viewed for what it was - a blatant violation of the rules, norms, and protocols that would ordinarily bind most other states under international law, and one cynically perpetrated largely for domestic political consumption within Israel itself.

Furthermore, while Liberation has consistently argued against the recourse to violence by any party in this long-running conflict - instead holding to the view that the only real solution can be reached through dialogue, diplomacy, and a political process arbitrated by the United Nations and underpinned by international law - we also acknowledge the internationally recognised and inalienable right of peoples living under an occupation to resist.

However, there can be no justification for the wholly disproportionate use of force deployed by the Israeli military against what are densely-inhabited civilian areas.

Contrary to how it might appear on the surface, these acts of aggression by the state of Israel are calculated and cynically employed so as to embolden the very forces it claims to be confronting, while further undermining the Palestinian Authority and all those committed and disposed towards a negotiated political solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Along with the brutal transgressions that are part of the day-to-day reality for Palestinians living under the occupation, as well as the illegal colonisation of territory designated for a future Palestinian state, and the forced clearances of Palestinian districts, these calculated episodic onslaughts by Israel render the prospects for the two-state solution even more bleak and distant.

In a time of supposedly heightened public consciousness and sensitivity all around the world regarding the importance of upholding international law; countering the extraterritorial aggression of one state against another; and the rights and sovereignty of nations, Israel cannot and should not be conferred any sort of special status - whether by the US, UK, EU, or other Western countries - to wantonly flout and transgress against international law.

Full investigations, conducted by UN-tasked agencies, of all attacks and civilian casualties must be carried out without delay - and once culpability is assigned, the perpetrator(s) must be held accountable and punished according to the provisions of international law as well as compelled to make the necessary reparations. The era of impunity for the state of Israel must end if the international rules-based order is to be upheld and international law remain truly sacrosanct.

Liberation reiterates that the two-state solution is the only viable solution to this otherwise intractable conflict and festering wound in the Middle East... That is a sovereign and independent state of Palestine, defined within the borders as they stood on 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the right of return for all Palestinian refugees in accordance with UN Resolution 194.

Liberation calls for the strengthening of solidarity with the struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable national rights.

Destruction following the Israeli airstrike during the escalation in August 2022.



# interview/**Bimal Rathnayake**

Hundreds of protesters have been abducted, arrested, and jailed. Meanwhile, the economic crisis proceeds to spiral. However, the masses are not supporting the current regime and protests continue to take place throughout Sri Lanka despite the looming threat posed by the regime's security forces.

Liberation has followed with deep concern the spiralling political and economic crisis and the alarming general situation in Sri Lanka.

The country has been engulfed in non-stop political unrest since mass protests in March. The Sri Lankan people demand an end to the neoliberal economic policies and endemic corruption that are the hallmarks of the ruling clique desperately clinging to power. .

Sri Lanka is just one of the many countries around the world still grappling with the toxic legacy of colonial subjugation by the British Empire and its after-effects which have continually stunted its development since independence.

This legacy is inseparable from the current state of Sri Lanka.

**Bimal Rathnayake**, the well-known progressive left political leader, former parliamentarian, and leading member of the JVP (People's Liberation Front), and Secretary of PASOS (the Peace and Solidarity Organisation - Sri Lanka), was interviewed in August 2022 by Liberation Journal



**Liberation** Please describe the main essence of the protests that rocked Sri Lanka in early-July and the developments since then.

**Bimal Rathnayake** Well, protests had reached such a point that on 9 July, hundreds of thousands of people flocked to the presidential palace in Colombo, disregarding the security barriers, and overran the compound. This situation led President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee the country. After protesters also occupied the presidential secretariat and the prime minister's official residence, the president resigned.

However, using their parliamentary majority, the incumbent regime forced through the appointment of a non-Rajapaksa (though still reactionary), Ranil Wickremesinghe, as president.

Wickremesinghe proceeded to declare emergency rule, effectively martial law, and ordered the military to storm the Galle Face protest site. Since then, hundreds of protesters have been arrested, and jailed. Meanwhile, the economic crisis proceeds to spiral.

However, the masses are not supporting the current regime and protests continue to take place throughout Sri Lanka despite the looming threat posed by the regime's security forces.

**Liberation** Which political currents and trends were most prominent in the protest movement and what were their main demands?

**Bimal Rathnayake** The main social forces involved in the protest movement are workers, farmers, students, women, intellectuals, the Sri Lankan diaspora, and sections of the middle class.

There are three main focal points in the protest movement: 1) The JVP (People's Liberation Front), the main left political party in Sri Lanka; 2) The TUCC (Trade Unions Coordination Centre), a collective of 2000 trade unions in Sri Lanka; and 3) The Galle Face protest site, a hub around which there was gathered a wide array of political and social forces from across the spectrum in Sri Lanka, the leadership of which was strongly influenced by JVP-aligned activists.

On the 22 July, following the coming to office of Wickremesinghe, the Sri Lankan security forces viciously attacked and dispersed the Galle Face protest site. The occupying protest model adopted at Galle Face was a first for Sri Lanka and despite its violent suppression; its impact will exist in the DNA of generations of activists to come.

The main demands of the masses, as articulated through the aforementioned channels were (and remain) for the immediate resignation of the incumbent president and prime minister; the immediate delivery and supply of basic essential goods; a halt to neoliberal economic policies; an end to

the corrupt political culture; the upholding of national unity and an end to racism and discrimination; the abolition of the executive presidential system; the recovery of all stolen public assets and punishment of the culprits; an end to the expropriation and privatisation of public assets; and the immediate holding of fresh parliamentary elections.

**Liberation** What fundamental change, if any, did the protest movement manage to achieve?

**Bimal Rathnayake** In the immediate term, the protest movement has managed to deal a death blow to the Rajapaksa political dynasty as well as the complete rejection of its brand - which would have perhaps been unthinkable just a short time ago.

Many ordinary Sri Lankans, who might have previously been described as politically passive, have had an awakening in their political consciousness. What is more, this political reawakening has been of a non-violent nature, one that rejects the prevailing political order and has seen increasing numbers of people orientate towards national unity, as well as positions that would have until recently been viewed as the preserve of the political left.

There were undoubtedly mistakes made, not least the failure of coordination between the three main focal points of the protest movement, and these have certainly resulted in setbacks.

As a result, we now see Wickremesinghe using every lever of power at his disposal to suppress the revolt of the general population. Utilising a compliant media apparatus to demonise the opposition, he has dispatched the security forces against the people while failing to address any of the concerns that brought them to the streets in the first place.

**Liberation** What are the effects of neoliberal economics in Sri Lanka and is the protest movement overall aligned against this model?

**Bimal Rathnayake** Since 1977, neoliberal economic policies have been implemented unrelentingly and without restraint in Sri Lanka. Deregulation, rampant privatisation, and harsh curtailments to welfare are the order of the day. Over the years, several loans were taken out under really unfavourable terms, entrapping the country in a cycle of debt and at the mercy of International Monetary Fund and World Bank prescriptions.

Successive Sri Lankan regimes took out fresh loans to repay the original ones leading to a growing massive debt crisis, accompanied by the hollowing-out of the country's local economy and industry.

This crisis was greatly exacerbated under the Rajapaksa regime, which took irrational decisions such as the arbitrary fixing of the exchange rate and the continuous printing of paper money (irrespective

of the national reserve) resulting in sky-high inflation.

Of course, there are political groups that are disposed only towards surface-level reforms and who support the present economic system, but the overwhelming majority of forces making up the protest movement (as well as ordinary Sri Lankans) are opposed to the economic status quo and have an egalitarian outlook.

**Liberation** What roles, if any, have the US and European governments played in this crisis?

**Bimal Rathnayake** Fundamentally, this is an economic crisis which has been growing for the last few decades and sharply accelerated after 2000.

Sri Lanka - through successive corrupt, subservient, and weak governments - has been continuously cajoled into following the suicidal neoliberal economics foisted upon it by imperialist mal-design and greed.

The country's local agricultural and manufacturing/productive sectors were discouraged, consciously undermined, and destroyed - at huge ongoing cost to the Sri Lankan people - to service the interests of foreign capital, while rampant privatisation left only a feeble rentier-based economy in its wake.

As a result of this economic model, Sri Lanka's debt and trade deficit has grown massively - much of the former held by US and British fund management companies. Furthermore, the US, UK, and EU governments have been actively supporting the corrupt and despotic regimes that have sat at the helm in Sri Lanka throughout the decades of this developing crisis.

Many of the culprits are dual-citizens of these countries and own properties there - as well as accounts through which they can launder their ill-gotten gains. (The Rajapaksas, who also enjoy US citizenship, are just one of many examples of this.)

Meanwhile, these 'host' countries and their supposedly robust accounting watchdog mechanisms have done next to nothing to counter what is essentially state theft.

Such governments have instead acted as mentors and guardians for successive mafia-like regimes that have destroyed Sri Lanka.

**Liberation** What can progressives based internationally do to assist and support their Sri Lankan counterparts?

**Bimal Rathnayake** Progressives should, through coordinated action, lobby and pressure their governments to take action on the international stage to reschedule (if not write off completely) Sri Lanka's foreign debt, in recognition of the acute humanitarian disaster looming there for millions of entirely blameless Sri Lankan people.

Furthermore, they should demand that their government use all means at its disposal to take concrete action against those (dual citizens or otherwise) who have attempted to hide and launder the money and assets embezzled from Sri Lanka, and that such proceeds are returned to Sri Lanka's state coffers forthwith.

Immediate aid and assistance are needed from the international community to shore up vital pillars of the Sri Lankan state and prevent them from total collapse, namely the country's health and education sectors.

Finally, Sri Lanka can and should be cited as an example that the people can rise to challenge tyranny, however powerful, and strive to eventually prevail... As well as achieve peace with true solidarity among the peoples of the world.

Watch a video interview of Bimal on our YouTube and Twitter accounts.



# human rights/Julian Assange

With the decision by British Home Secretary Priti Patel in mid-June, Julian Assange's extradition to the US is now one essential step closer. Every decent citizen, every decent democrat is called to stand up for life and liberty. The fight begins now. In United Kingdom where Assange is imprisoned and everywhere else.



## International pressure on Biden key to ending persecution

By **Sevim Dagdelen**  
Campaigners for peace, democracy, sovereignty



- and the truth - around the world owe a debt of gratitude to Julian Assange for his exposing of the double standards, lies, and evils perpetrated by imperialist powers globally.

THERE IS HARDLY any other context in which the hypocrisy of the West on the question of human rights, democracy, and freedom comes to light as starkly as in the case of Julian Assange. For 13 years now, the journalist and founder of the WikiLeaks whistle-blowing platform has been deprived of his freedom. For his investigative work, such as the video "Collateral Murder", which was released in 2010 and documents the murder of Iraqi civilians, including two journalists working for Reuters, by the US Army in Iraq, and the "Afghan War Diaries" on NATO warfare in Afghanistan, Assange is set to remain behind bars until his dying breath. With the decision by British Home Secretary Priti Patel in mid-June, his extradition to the US is now one essential step closer. Every decent citizen, every decent democrat is called to stand up for life and liberty. The fight begins now. In the United Kingdom, where Assange is imprisoned, and everywhere else.

### Appeal

Following the appeal of Julian Assange's legal team against the Conservative hardliner's decision at the British High Court, the seemingly endless proceedings are now entering the next round. Unlike Chilean dictator and mass murderer, Augusto Pinochet, who enjoyed his "extradition custody" in London at the turn of the millennium under house arrest in a posh mansion where he received visits from numerous prominent supporters, including former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Assange has eked out an undignified existence at the high-security Belmarsh prison, the "British Guantánamo", for three years, while the sword of Damocles of extradition to the US hangs over him. Because of his journalistic work in cooperation with media outlets such as the Guardian in the UK, the New York Times, and the German magazine, Der Spiegel, Assange faces up to 175 years in a US prison. On the basis of the Espionage Act - a law dating from the time of the First World War for the prosecution of spies and saboteurs - the WikiLeaks founder is to be locked away for the rest of his life. With this unspeakable charge, journalism has been declared a crime. It is not for no reason that every serious journalist and press freedom organisation

around the world have issued warnings against this setting of a dangerous precedent for other journalists and media by extraditing Julian Assange to the US.

Calls for his freedom are growing louder and louder across the globe, in parliaments as well as in extra-parliamentary protests. It is up to US President Joe Biden to end the political persecution of Assange and to stop this unspeakable attack on press freedom. We must now collectively turn up the pressure on the Democrats in the US and the executive administration there.

In June, an international alliance of journalists' unions reiterated their call for Assange's immediate release from British custody. The British Government's decision to extradite Assange to the US was a "flagrant violation of human rights" and showed "total contempt for freedom of the press" according to the statement issued by union representatives from Germany, France, the UK, Spain, and Australia.

In Australia, thanks to a major solidarity campaign initiated by his family, pressure is growing on the new government to keep its word that it would work to put an end to the political persecution of Assange. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese declared that he would intervene diplomatically and discuss this case with the US administration. While Australia's previous conservative government had for years refrained from publicly calling for the journalist's release, Albanese, as an opposition politician for the Labour Party, had explicitly affirmed during his election campaign that Assange had "already paid a heavy price". "Enough is enough!" he stated publicly.

It is a major achievement that, 18 months after the establishment of the Free Julian Assange cross-party working group, the German Bundestag stated its position on this case for the first time at the beginning of July. By adopting a recommendation for a decision of the Petitions Committee, all parliamentary groups, with the exception of the conservatives, condemned the political persecution of Assange as an "attack on the freedom of the press". The German Government is explicitly called upon to campaign for the release of the journalist and WikiLeaks founder from British custody and for the blocking of his extradition to the US. In a joint cross-party declaration, more than 80 Members of Parliament spoke out against the

extradition of Julian Assange to the US - which means that, following a letter from German MPs to the British House of Commons at the beginning of May, the number of supporters in the German Bundestag for the life and freedom of Julian Assange has more than doubled within the course of just a few weeks.

### Mass campaign

With countless protests and campaigns, a diverse social movement is also drawing attention to Assange's case on the streets. Thanks to persistent work, endless conversations, and courageous people, it has been possible to establish a broad cross-party network of solidarity in Germany consisting of numerous figures from the fields of press, culture, science, and politics. Julian Assange is no longer the political pariah that he was branded for many years.

Pressure is growing on the German Government to no longer abandon the dissident of the West. There are five ministers on the government benches who, shortly before the elections to the Bundestag, called for the persecution of the Wikileaks founder to cease in the interest of defending freedom of the press, including Deputy Chancellor Robert Habeck, and Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, who says that she is committed to a "value-oriented foreign policy". Those who now seriously claim that Assange would receive a "very fair trial" in the US should he be extradited - i.e., in the country whose secret service, the CIA, demonstrably planned the journalist's abduction and murder - are showing their capacity for opportunism as opposed to having a backbone.

The criminal energy of the US government in the context of Julian Assange's political persecution is also reflected in the espionage lawsuit against the CIA and former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo as well as against the Spanish security firm, Undercover Global, filed by two US attorneys representing the Wikileaks founder and two journalists. The plaintiffs accuse the CIA of having copied data from their telephones and computers and of recording confidential conversations during their visits to Julian Assange at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, where he was granted sanctuary and political asylum from 2012 to 2019. They claimed that the CIA had violated the protection of private conversations enshrined in the United States Constitution.

Julian Assange's right to a fair trial has been compromised by CIA espionage. Thanks to its unconstitutional activities, the US government, which is pushing for the journalist's extradition and sentencing, is intimately familiar with the contents of the defence lawyers' discussions.

With the ongoing persecution of Julian Assange, the US government is undermining this fundamental right to freedom of speech and freedom of the press. It is the civic duty of each and every democrat to stand up against this. The chief task of the international solidarity movement is to help to support the creation of a broad-based movement in the US that takes the protest to the streets, the media, and Congress and which raises awareness of what is at stake. The pressure on President Joe Biden must be stepped up. We owe this to Julian Assange, who put his life on the line for our freedom. The persecution of Julian Assange began in the US. It is here that it can and must be put to an end!

More info: <https://assangedefense.org/>

**Sevim Dagdelen** is a Die Linke (The Left Party) member of the Bundestag (German Parliament), chairperson of Die Linke's parliamentary group in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Bundestag, chairperson of the party's working group on foreign policy, as well as the party's spokesperson for international politics and disarmament.



# Iran/JCPoA

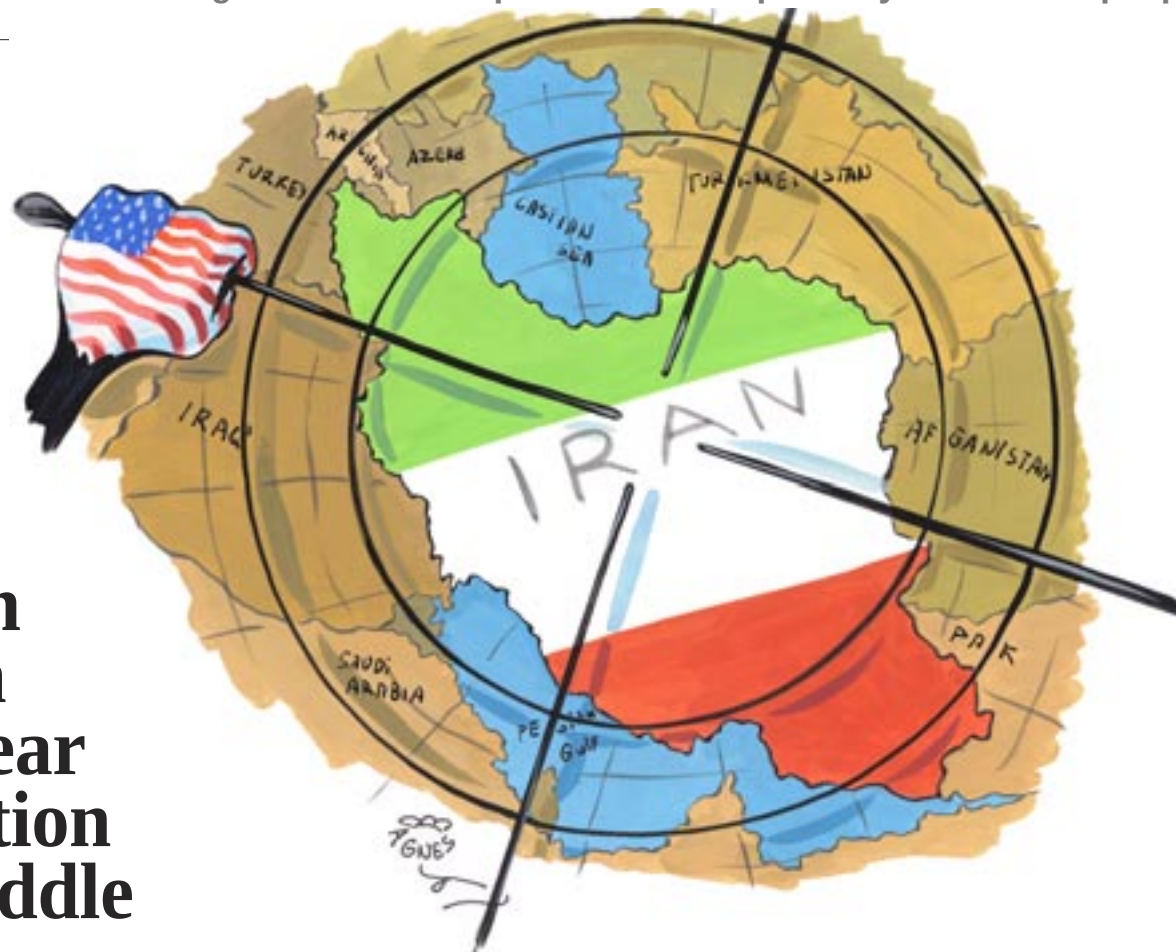
The regime in Iran is under pressure due to the deteriorating economic situation. At the same time the West is under pressure to find some accommodation as a result of its issues with Russia. A revival of some form of the JCPoA may well be expedient for both, while at the same time alleviating some of the pressures of poverty from the people of Iran.

## No to escalation with Iran and nuclear proliferation in the Middle East!

The situation in the Middle East is never far from the news headlines. In recent months that has meant a renewed focus on the Iran nuclear deal, including a

debate in the House of Commons at the end of June this year. **Steve**

**Bishop** assesses the prospects for a new agreement with Iran and the implications of failure to reach a deal.



**T**HE HOUSE OF Commons debate on Iran's nuclear deal on 30 June this year was opened by Robert Jenrick MP and set the terms of the debate in the context of Iran's potential to develop nuclear weapons and what Jenrick referred to as Iran's "other destabilising activities in the region".

Earlier in June, the UK, Germany, and France had released a joint statement saying that they were ready to conclude a deal with Iran. That would have restored the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA), the basis of the Iran nuclear deal which held until May 2018, when the United States unilaterally walked away from the agreement. Following the statement by the European powers, it was revealed that indirect talks between the United States and Iran had resumed in Doha, Qatar.

By mid-August, reports were circulating that a final text had been agreed. Tehran has indicated that, from its perspective, progress has been made but there are still outstanding details to be finalised. There is a sticking point for Tehran on the status of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), which the US regards as a terrorist organisation. Tehran also wants guarantees that any agreement will be binding on future US administrations, so the deal cannot be reneged on as it was in 2018 by President Trump.

### Unpalatable to Washington

It is unlikely that either of these positions will be palatable to Washington. Some observers also see a final agreement as being unlikely given Iran's increasingly close co-operation with both Russia and China. Recent co-operation with Russia in particular, on satellite and weapons technology, has been frowned upon in the West.

The need to reach a deal is widely recognised, however, as a prerequisite for any chance that Iran may be engaged more positively with the international community. The lifting of sanctions could not only reduce Iran's uranium enrichment programme, confining it for purely civilian purposes, but also be used as leverage to address the regime's appalling human rights record. Both issues would send positive messages across the Middle East by reducing the likelihood of conflict and bringing the issue of human rights to the forefront of the debate.

### Corbyn's contribution

In his contribution to the debate, Jeremy Corbyn MP was very clear that, "Any discussion with Iran must include a discussion of human rights". However, Corbyn pressed on to widen the debate to consider the issue of peace in the Middle East, in the context of the non-proliferation treaty review conference this August in New York. In this regard, he expressed the view that,

"While I fully appreciate that Iran clearly has developed centrifuges and enriched uranium almost to weapons-grade, two other countries in the region either have nuclear weapons or could. One is Israel, which clearly does have nuclear weapons, and the other is Saudi Arabia, which could quickly develop nuclear weapons if it wanted. The urgency of having a negotiation and a revamped version of the 2015 agreement, or something like it, is important if we are to try to preserve the peace of the region."

While the issue of peace in the region and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons was central to Jeremy Corbyn's argument, other contributions chose to sidestep the issue and focus upon the trustworthiness of the Iranian regime, going so far as to question whether any kind of deal was even possible.

### Punitive

Steve McCabe MP was keen to revert to a more punitive approach with regard to Iran, focussing upon "the malign activities of those who control the Iranian regime" while failing to see the bigger danger of not addressing the issue of nuclear non-proliferation in the wider context of the Middle East.

The activities of the Iranian regime are indeed "malign" as the Committee for the Defence of the Iranian People's Rights (CODIR) has spent the last 40 years playing a central role in pointing out, while campaigning for peace, human rights, and democracy for the people of Iran.

However, in the context of the geo-political situation in the Middle East, and the increased international uncertainty due to the war in Ukraine, an agreement which could be the beginnings of a more stable region would be worth aiming for.

The situation inside Iran remains finely balanced. The punitive sanctions imposed following the

unilateral withdrawal from the 2015 deal by the United States has seen the Iranian economy contract by 6% year on year according to the IMF. Social unrest has been gathering momentum as a result of the impact of sanctions upon the economy. Widespread job losses have plunged many into poverty with inflation running at over 40% according to the World Bank.

Concern with the situation has been expressed by Taghi Rostamvandi, Iran's deputy interior minister for social affairs, who has observed at a government conference that,

"In recent years, people's tolerance has decreased in correlation with rising economic pressure. The alarm bells should ring for us if people think a secular or non-religious state might be more able to deal with the challenges rather than the Islamic state."

Such fears are exacerbated by the fact that Iran's population is predominantly young, with 45% under 35-years-old and less wedded to the aims of the Islamic regime than some of their elders. It is from this section of the population that demands for better jobs, educational opportunities, and greater democracy are being heard most vociferously.

The imperative for the regime remains to secure a deal. It is believed if US sanctions are lifted, this will bring some economic relief for the government. Tehran would be able to access tens of billions of petrodollars trapped in foreign central banks and rapidly ramp up oil exports. For recently elected President, Ebrahim Raisi, a nuclear deal is seen to be the opportunity to deliver on economic promises and hopefully keep the country calm.

Some hardliners within the Iranian regime, however, are willing to risk a no deal situation arguing that what they term a "resistance economy" has prevailed, in spite of the severity of the sanctions regime to date, and that they could continue with this while maintaining social stability.

The extent of social discontent in evidence across the country may contradict such an assessment, but the fact that some inside the regime see toughing it out as an option will be of concern to much of the Iranian population. Tehran has been forced to freeze many longer-term development plans to tackle issues such as water shortages, and the number of protests over the past four-and-a-half years suggests a clear correlation between economic pressure and social unrest.

### Ukraine

The situation in Ukraine has already had an impact upon the likelihood of a deal being agreed. Talks in Vienna which started in April 2021, aimed at reviving the Iran nuclear deal, were suspended recently when Russia insisted that the US sanctions should not be an impediment to its trade with Iran. The Islamic Republic relies on the import of grain, fertilisers, cooking oil, and meat from Russia, which have been abruptly halted. Ironically, the US and its European allies are attempting to leverage pressure on Iran to step in and provide oil and gas to the West to fill the void in supply from Russia.

There is little doubt that the regime in Iran is under pressure due to the deteriorating economic situation. At the same time the West is under pressure to find some accommodation as a result of its issues with Russia. A revival of some form of the JCPoA may well be expedient for both, while at the same time alleviating some of the pressures of poverty from the people of Iran.

Certainly, any deal should be linked to the wider issue of nuclear non-proliferation.

**Steve Bishop** is a longstanding member of the National Executive Council of the Committee for the Defence of the Iranian People's Rights (CODIR), member of Liberation, writer, blogger, and regular contributor to *Liberation Journal*.



# Liberation heroes/**Paul Robeson**

An advocate in the US for African political independence, in Britain Paul joined political activities with anti-imperialist students and sang to raise money for the Movement for Colonial Freedom at the Royal Festival Hall. Sympathetic with the Chinese revolution, during visits to Australia and New Zealand he denounced the inequality and plight faced by the Aborigines and Māoris



## A life lived without regrets

On the eve of Black History Month, let us reconnect with the life of Paul Leroy Robeson, a scholar, super athlete, concert recording artist, stage and film actor, anti-colonialist, anti-fascist, anti-racist and civil rights social activist, writes

**Harsev Bains.**



Left above: Cinema poster.  
Centre above: Paul Robeson speaks at an anti Korea war rally in New York.  
Right above: Robeson with Jose Ferrer at a baseball game



BORN ON 9 APRIL In 1898, Paul Robeson was raised in Princeton by his father William Robeson. His mother, who was almost blind, died in a house fire when Paul was just six. His father, of Igbo origin, was born into slavery but escaped in his teens and became a Minister of the church until the rise of racism in the US forced him to resign.

While at school in New Jersey, Paul Robeson debuted in a performance of Julius Caesar.

Excelling in multiple sports and athletics he won many competitions where his physical dominance exposed him to racial taunts. Paul did menial work to pay for his studies.

Paul sang at private functions and on campus while attending Rutgers University. He joined the debating society. In his valedictorian speech, Paul called upon his peers to work for equality for all Americans. He received his law degree from Columbia Law School while playing in the National Football League.

### In Britain

Paul landed in Britain in 1925 and achieved further success as a performer and ascendancy to fame with the London premiere of Showboat. Paul remained in London for several years with his wife Eslanda, where he continued to establish himself as a concert artist. During this time, he became involved in political activities with unemployed workers and anti-imperialist students in Britain.

After returning to the US in 1933, he became the first African American to take a lead role in an Hollywood film as Brutus in the film *Emperor Jones*.

In 1934, Paul returned to England and enrolled in the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) where he studied phonetics and Swahili.

On his first visit to the Soviet Union arranged by his friends in the anti-imperialist movement and British socialists, Paul reflected on the events taking place in Nazi Germany and the racism he felt while in the country and remarked that "Here (Moscow) I'm not a Negro, but a human being. For the first time in my life, I walk in full human dignity".

The struggle against fascism during the Spanish Civil War became a pivotal point in Paul's life. He gave performances to advocate this cause and in support of the war refugees. He went to the battle front in 1938.

In 1940, Paul became sympathetic to the cause of Republic of China. He learned the song *Chee Lai! (Arise!)* known as the *March of the Volunteers*, which he premiered in New York and recorded it in English and Chinese. The song became People's Republic of China's national anthem after 1949.

Paul joined the Council on African Affairs in 1941, becoming an advocate for African nationalism and political independence.

After initial hesitation, Paul supported the American and allied war effort during World War II, warning that an allied defeat "would make slaves of us all". Paul recorded and released more than 275 songs including *Swing low, sweet chariot* and *Joe Hill*. He sang for the Scottish miners in Edinburgh in 1949 and for the workers at Sydney Opera House in 1960. Paul was summoned for a Royal Command performance at Buckingham Palace.

After the lynching of four African-Americans in Georgia on July 25, 1946, Paul met with the US President Truman and called for legislation to end lynching or he warned that they would have to defend themselves. Truman rejected the idea, saying that it was not the right time to propose anti-lynching legislation. Paul joined forces with trade unions and the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) and called upon all Americans to demand that Congress passed civil rights legislation.

Paul, when questioned about his affiliation with the CPUSA, denied it but went on to say that "some of the most brilliant and distinguished Americans were about to go to jail for the failure to answer the same question and that he was going to join them, if necessary".

During a speech at the Paris Peace Congress in 1949, Paul said that "We in America do not forget that it was on the backs of the white workers from Europe and the backs of millions of blacks that the wealth of America was built. And we are resolved to share it equally. We reject any hysterical readings that urges us to make war on anyone. Our will to fight for peace is strong. We shall not make war on anyone. We shall not make war on the Soviet Union. We oppose those who wish to build up in Paris and Germany and to establish fascism in Greece. We wish peace with Franco's Spain despite her fascism. We shall support peace and friendship among all nations, with Soviet Russia and the People's republics."

He was blacklisted for making these remarks which were reported in the mainstream media in the USA. In 1952, Paul was awarded the International Stalin Prize by the Soviet Union. Unable to travel to Moscow, he accepted the award in New York. His history of supporting civil rights causes and Soviet policies attracted scrutiny from the FBI.

At the end of the second world war, the Council of African Affairs was placed on the Attorney General's list of subversive organisations. Paul became the subject of witch hunts instigated against communists during the McCarthy era. Paul, a lawyer of great repute, refused to comply with FBI investigations and had his passport seized in the 1950s by the US State Department until 1958.

When propositioned that with his affinity with the USSR and the ideology of the CPUSA why didn't he stay in the Soviet Union, he replied "Because my father was a slave and my people died to build the United States. I am going to stay here and have a part of it just like you and no fascist minded people will drive me from it!". He went on to say "Whether I am or not a Communist is irrelevant! The question is whether American citizens, regardless of their political beliefs or sympathies may enjoy their constitutional rights."

### Blacklisted

Consequently, due to Paul's political views his film recordings were removed from public distribution and he was condemned in the US press. With his art suppressed in mainstream America, the Workers Music Association of Britain helped Paul perform to thousands via trans-Atlantic telephone technology.

In 1960, what became Paul's final concert in Britain, he sang to raise money for the Movement for Colonial Freedom, the predecessor of Liberation at the Royal Festival Hall.

During a visit to New Zealand in 1960, Paul reaffirmed his support of Marxism-Leninism and denounced the inequality faced by the Māori's and efforts to denigrate their culture.

Paul expressed concern about the plight of Australian Aborigines and demanded that they be provided with citizenship and equal rights. He challenged the view of the Aborigines as being unsophisticated and uncultured and declared that "there's no such thing as a backward human being there is only a society which says they are backward." Paul made a profound impact in Australia and New Zealand and went back to the US to participate in the civil rights movement.

Having aroused the people's yearning for freedom from colonial oppression, capitalist exploitation and civil rights, Paul Robeson died following a stroke on 23 January 1976 in Philadelphia.

Liberation with all humility will take forward the colossal legacy of Paul Robeson. Echoing his message to commemorate the Welsh people killed fighting in Spain, "The artist must take sides. He must elect to fight for freedom or slavery. I have made my choice. I had no alternative".

**Harsev Bains** is Chair of Liberation's Education Committee and National Vice President of the Indian Workers' Association GB.

This issue we publish the first in a series of articles on leading lights in Liberation struggles, past and present. Readers can help us. Who is your Liberation hero? Email us yours, with around 150 words about the individual and their contribution [info@liberationorg.co.uk](mailto:info@liberationorg.co.uk)



# black history/reflections on my life

Racism was endemic. There were no 'Black Studies Departments' in our universities. Teachers were as ignorant of the histories of colonisation, as they were of the presence and contributions of Black peoples here. Their only 'early civilizations' were Greek and Roman – there were no civilizations in Africa.



**Marika Sherwood, an immigrant to the Mother**

**Country, on a life dedicated to addressing the lack of Black History teaching in the UK.**

AS AN IMMIGRANT child in schools and then university in Australia I learned about the glories of the 'Mother Country'. In his *Autobiography* Trevor McDonald (2019) tells us that that is also what he was taught in schools in Trinidad. So obviously this was government policy.

I arrived in London in 1965. Though not trained to teach, I got a job primary school. As this was my first experience of even *seeing* 'black' children I asked my fellow teachers about them. 'They are from the West Indies, and a real problem.' What, where were 'West Indies'? The teachers knew nothing, so I went to the local libraries. Nothing. So all I could do was talk with the parents. They were very kind to this curious and very ignorant teacher and taught me so much! Thank you!

I moved to a 'comprehensive' high school in north London. All my classes would be the 'bottom stream' – just had to be kept quiet as they were 'negroes/black' and 'white' pupils who lived in East London post-codes; all were too stupid to learn. That was all the pupils expected of me – but not what I expected of them. I taught; they learned. I didn't last long....the Inner London Education Authority (ILEU) was obviously not very pleased with me.

## Mother Country?

So definitely not the Mother Country I had hoped for. I went travelling, worked here and there, returned to London, worked as a student advisor at a London polytechnic. There were many Black students, and I learned much about the racial discrimination they experienced constantly. I continued searching libraries and then archives for information, on the history of the West Indies, of Africa, and on peoples on African and Indian origins/descent in the UK. Nothing. What could I do about this omission?

Though nowhere to go for advice and support, I did some research. In 1980 I emigrated to New York; taught in schools, a prison and a little at a college, all in Harlem. I rented a flat very near Harlem, so many of my neighbours, not just my students, were Black. I learned much. This stimulated me to write up my research findings: two small books and two articles were published in England.

For various reasons I returned to England in 1985. Was it due to these publications and the ILEU that I found it almost impossible to get a job?

Peter Fryer's superb book, *Staying Power: The history of black people in Britain*, published in 1984, outlined this omitted history from the time of the Romans! Very excited, I attended every possibly relevant meeting, lecture, talk, conference; made

new contacts. From 23 October 1990 until 1992 *The Voice*, the weekly Black newspaper, published history articles by me on the 'Black presence'.

## National Curriculum

The National Curriculum now included an optional course for KS3, 'Black Peoples in the Americas, 1600-1910'. The sources of material for teachers was grossly insufficient, so, with the help of colleagues for the research and my brother and my son for publication, I self-published *Black Peoples in the Americas: A handbook for teachers* (Savannah Press, 1992).

I had many discussions with helpful colleagues: we agreed that much needed to be done. Racism was endemic. There were no 'Black Studies Departments' in our universities. Teachers were as ignorant of the histories of colonisation, as they were of the presence and contributions of Black peoples here. Their only 'early civilizations' were Greek and Roman – there were no civilizations in Africa. Yes, there was Egypt, but in the school texts I looked at Egypt was not in Africa: the maps were of the Mediterranean, of European countries there, and just a little of the coast of Africa, barely extending West from Egypt. There was no African continent.

## BASA

We formed the Black and Asian Studies Association (BASA)<sup>1</sup>, held meetings and conferences all over the UK; published a monthly newsletter; encouraged research. Regarding the curriculum, we had years of correspondence and even meetings with the Department of Education and Ofsted, including their heads. And we published *Whose Freedom were Africans, Caribbeans and Indians defending in World War II?* to add to the curriculum.

As there were no courses at universities, I asked all those attending the monthly seminars I organised to fill in a questionnaire asking if they would be interested in a part-time/full-time MA course on Black British History. Interest was high, but none of the universities we contacted were interested!

We were also concerned about museum exhibitions, so contacted many, including the Imperial War Museum; we also attended some meetings regarding new museums – for example, the Slavery Museum in Liverpool and the Migration Museum in London. We contacted the National Archives on its World War I project; the BBC regarding its 'The Making of Modern Britain' programme, in which no 'Black' people existed. We set up committees to work with/help local activists, archives, and to work on education issues.

To learn about all we did, please read the *BASA Newsletters*.

Trevor McDonald concludes that 'sometimes a single voice is all that it takes to express ...without flourish the pent-up emotions of a multitude'. But expression is insufficient – as it does not necessarily result in the required changes. BASA 'expressed', but 'died' some years ago. Of course, a variety of protests on a variety of issues continues. For example, on the police. Why?

Some reasons:

- 'In the year to March 2021, black people were seven times more likely than white people to be stopped and searched, with the vast majority of stops leading to no further action... black people were about 5.7 times, more likely to have force used on them than white people....' And '....of the 650 children aged 10 to 17 who were strip-searched by the Met police between 2018 and 2020, 58% were black... For 2018 alone the figure rose to 75%. In Greater London 19% of 10- to-17-year-olds are black.'<sup>2</sup>

- Universities – faculty: There is only one professor of 'Black Studies': Kehinde Andrews at Birmingham City University. Hakim Adi is Professor of 'The History of Africa and the African Diaspora' at the University of Chichester. Important: among the Black professors of relevant courses, is Olivette Otele, appointed Professor of the 'History of Slavery' by the University of Bristol in January 2020. Due to 'exhaustion' and 'constant banana skins thrown my way by other academics...backstabbing from colleagues', she resigned and was appointed Professor of the 'Legacies and Memory of Slavery' by SOAS.<sup>3</sup>

- Universities – courses: There is only one BA 'Black Studies' degree and three relevant post-grads: the MA course at Goldsmiths London, has been suspended.

- School curriculums: These have been revised again and again. 240,000 signed a petition calling on the Government to 'teach Britain's colonial past as part of the UK's compulsory curriculum; diversity and racism should be in all school curriculums which should be more inclusive of black, Asian and minority ethnic history'. The Parliament's Petitions Committee did some research; its report included that 'far too often, subjects are not being taught because teachers lack confidence and, above all, proper training. One in four teachers told us that they lack confidence and the ability to develop their pupils' understanding of black history and cultural diversity....'<sup>4</sup>

- Established a few years ago, the Young Historians Project<sup>5</sup> 'formed by young people encouraging the development of young historians of African and Caribbean heritage in Britain', has published two free KS3 and KS4/5 workbooks and publishes *History Matters*, a free online history journal. Hopefully their work will have some/much influence.

## References

- 1 <http://www.blackandasianstudies.org/>
- 2 *The Guardian* 22 April 2022, 8 August 2022
- 3 *Times Higher Education*, 5/5/2022; SOAS Newsletter, 11/4/2022
- 4 Hansard, 28/6/2021
- 5 <https://www.younghistoriansproject.org/>

**Marika Sherood** is an educator, historian, researcher and author and has published prolifically on Black and colonial history. Her latest book is reviewed on page 12.

Picture top: The British West Indies Regiment in camp on the Albert - Amiens Road, September 1916.

Above: Detail from William Hogarth's *Four Times of the Day: Noon* 1738 engraving.



# comment/Roger McKenzie

Politicians have decided to prioritise wealth over people and to ruthlessly suppress any attempts to rise up against the exploitation they have imposed. We have to engage in organising for fundamental and irreversible change in Africa that not only tries to reverse the downward slide that is making most people poorer while the rich get richer but by helping to build real power for people.



## From the Horn of Africa to Palestine, work with us to bring about real change

Malnutrition, disease, conflict and insecurity are the results of climate change and the legacy of colonialism - human made catastrophes within the choice of politicians to decide to reverse. Join us at Liberation to make a real difference, writes Roger McKenzie



**C**HILDREN IN The Horn of Africa and the Sahel could die in devastating numbers unless urgent support is provided, as severe malnutrition and the risk of water-borne disease collide, according to a recent report by UNICEF.

The number of drought-hit people in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia without reliable access to safe water rose from 9.5 million in February to 16.2 million in July, putting children and their families in increased danger of contracting illnesses like cholera and diarrhoea.

The latest data from the World Health Organisation shows that in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger and Nigeria, drought, conflict and insecurity are driving water insecurity, with 40 million children facing high to extremely high levels of water vulnerability.

Already more children die as a result of unsafe water and sanitation in the Sahel than in any other part of the world, according to the latest data.

Most people in the Horn of Africa rely on water delivered by vendors on trucks or donkey carts. In areas worst hit by drought, water is no longer affordable for many families.

Prices have soared in Kenya topped by Mandera at 400 per cent and Garissa by 260 per cent compared to January 2021.

In Ethiopia the cost of water in June this year has doubled in Oromia and increased by 50 per cent

in Somali compared to the onset of the drought in October 2021.

The average water prices in Somalia climbed 85 per cent in South-Mudug, and 55 and 75 per cent respectively in Buurhakaba and Ceel Berde, compared to prices in January 2022.

The stark facts are that more than 2.8 million children across both regions are already suffering from severe acute malnutrition, which means they are up to 11 times more at risk of dying from water-borne diseases than well-nourished children.

In Somalia, outbreaks of acute watery diarrhoea and cholera have been reported in almost all drought-affected districts, with the 8,200 cases reported between January and June, more than double the number of cases reported during the same period last year.

Almost two-thirds of those affected are children under the age of five. Between June 2021 and June 2022, 1.2 million cases of diarrhoea in children under the age of five in the worst drought-hit regions of Ethiopia - Afar, Somalia, SNNP and Oromia were treated.

In Kenya, over 90 per cent of open water sources - such as ponds and open wells - in drought-affected areas are either depleted or dried up, posing serious risk of disease outbreak.

Across the Sahel, water availability has also dropped by more than 40 per cent in the last 20 years due to climate change and complex factors such as conflict, putting millions of children and families at increased risk of waterborne diseases.

Last year, West and Central Africa marked the region's worst cholera outbreak in the last six years, including 5,610 cases and 170 deaths in Central Sahel.

The UN World Food Programme reports that 22 million people across the Horn of Africa are at severe risk of starvation.

Years of insufficient rainfall across Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia have caused the worst drought in 40 years and famine conditions in the hardest-hit areas, aid groups report.

An unprecedented four failed rainy seasons has killed millions of livestock, destroyed crops and forced 1.1 million people from their homes in search of food and water.

Of course this litany of disasters could just be put down to chance or the cycle of the weather.

I think an even cursory look at the situation must lead one to at least two fundamental points.

Firstly the African continent is in the severe grip of the climate emergency. An emergency that

is far from accidental and, from which, escape may already be too late.

Secondly, the continent is still experiencing the impact of colonialism. The imperial powers had no problem dividing up the continent in a way that they could take away the maximum amount of resources which left it almost impossible for the people to survive on their own.

These are human made catastrophes and within the choice of politicians to decide to reverse.

In reality politicians have decided to prioritise wealth over people and to ruthlessly suppress any attempts to rise up against the exploitation they have imposed - whether through their client Governments on the continent or via the transnational companies that have bought and paid for them.

Liberation has always called out these matters but all of us must move beyond rhetoric and merely exposing the real causes of drought and famine on the African continent.

We have to engage in organising for fundamental and irreversible change on the continent that not only tries to reverse the downward slide that is making most people poorer while the rich get richer but by helping to build real power for people.

I invite you to work with Liberation, either by joining as a member or subscribing to our organisation, or by partnering with us on initiatives designed to make a real difference on the ground. Not just in Africa but in other places suffering from the continued impact of colonialism - not least of which is Palestine.

Words on their own simply will not do. We need to look at practical ways of giving people a clear understanding of their own power and how to exert it to bring about radical change.

One thing we know from history is that change does not take place because someone in power wakes up one morning and decides that they have been wrong all this time and that it's time they gave up their power.

Change takes place because people power makes it take place and that's what Liberation is determined to be part of going forward.

**Roger McKenzie** is General Secretary of Liberation



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# book review/anti colonial-struggles

The West African National Secretariat was set up by Nkrumah who argued that only through an alliance of West African states would it be possible to achieve true and lasting independence and resist post-independence domination by the former colonial powers Britain, France and Belgium.

## Liberation

Journal of Liberation  
Volume 62 No 7 Autumn 2022

**Liberation** was founded in 1954 as the Movement for Colonial Freedom. Today Liberation campaigns against imperialism and for social justice, peace and human rights

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Design and production by Manifesto Press. Set in Liberation Sans, Liberation Serif and Liberation Mono

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ISSN 0024-1873



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## Kwame Nkrumah and the Dawn of the Cold War

Drawing on archival research including newly released MI5 files, Marika Sherwood reports on the extraordinary movement founded in 1945 by Kwame Nkrumah and colleagues in London and France to campaign for independence and unity, which led to the beginning of the Cold War in West Africa, writes **Bob Newland**.

AT THE POTSDAM Conference the allied powers sought to agree the shape (and control) of the world after WW2. Winston Churchill fought tooth and nail to maintain British control of its colonies particularly in Africa. Truman on the other hand was focussed on opening up these markets to United States businesses. He was also concerned to keep an ongoing US presence in the air bases in Britain's colonies it had been granted during the war.

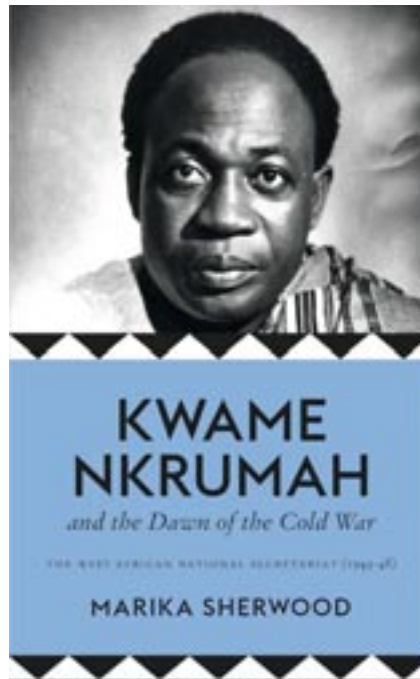
Britain established its right to its colonies but the US succeeded in getting a clause into the constitution of the United Nations expressing support for freedom from colonialism.

The peoples of the colonies believed their support for the war effort against Nazi Germany would be rewarded by independence. To their despair, Britain and the US reconciled their differences and opposed the granting of national independence to the colonies on the basis of a common opposition to an imagined communist threat.

Marika Sherwood's book explores this process in extraordinary detail with a particular focus on Kwame Nkrumah and the West African National Secretariat (WANS). WANS was set up by Nkrumah who argued that only through an alliance of West African states would it be possible to achieve true and lasting independence and resist post-independence domination by the former colonial powers Britain, France and Belgium.

Sherwood has obtained access to many previously withheld British and US Government files and a wide range of newspaper archives but expresses frustration at the many documents to which she was denied access. Interestingly, because of the exceptional degree to which Britain shared information with the US during this period, the author got some of her material from US sources despite being denied them by Britain.

In order for the US to support Britain's foreign policy during this period it had to sell its own actions to an American public largely supportive of decolonisation. The threat of communism was the



means by which it did this. Britain's role was to provide the intelligence proving that communist threat.

Sadly it was a Labour Government, supported by the TUC, which performed that role and denied the peoples of Britain's colonies their independence. Cecil King used the *Daily Mirror*'s newly established Gold Coast (Ghana) and Nigerian editions to support that policy and to seek to persuade the peoples of Africa that their best interests were served by delaying independence or by limiting such independence to such a degree to make it meaningless.

Nkrumah and many other independence fighters were condemned as communists despite their being no evidence for this. Strikes in the colonies were damned as communist plots. MI5 agents were inserted as

journalists writing articles exposing the 'Communist' subversives. These reports were then used by the security services to inform and justify Government policy.

The author breaks down her examination into the actions against a wide range of organisations including WANS, the World Federation of Trades Unions, the International Union of Students and other organisations in Britain, its colonies and in the US. This approach demonstrates the scale of the steps taken to block independence and to support a growing post-war US hegemony not just in Africa but globally.

The extraordinary visions of Kwame Nkrumah and other African leaders shine throughout the book. Sadly, while they failed to build the unity they sought, the present condition of Africa and the ongoing exploitation of former colonies demonstrates that their aims were correct.

This book offers an exceptional record of the actions of Britain and the US to obstruct any development of unity between those seeking national independence. It is not easy to read as one of its strengths is the amazing range of documents to which it refers to prove its thesis that Africa and West Africa in particular paid a high price as a result of the West's post WW2 'Cold War'. Its cost of £50 may make it more a resource for students of this particular period of history although for other readers Pluto Books offer an e-edition at £9.99.

*Kwame Nkrumah and the Dawn of the Cold War. The West African National Secretariat (1945-48).* Author: Marika Sherwood,

Liberation is expanding its reviews of new and classic works on colonial history and anti-imperialist struggles in the former colonies of the British Empire. What are your suggestions on essential reads? Plus, if you are an able writer and keen on reviewing books, get in touch. Email us at [info@liberation.org.uk](mailto:info@liberation.org.uk)

**Bob Newlands** is a member of Liberation



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