

We talk to Sri Lankan minister Bimal Rathnayake

Interview



Why the West's sanctions regimes don't work

Radhika Desai



Anti-migrant attacks in South Africa

Jeremy Cronin

Liberation

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US out of the Middle East!

War ravages Iran, Palestine, Lebanon and Yemen

US warships operating in the Middle East.
Pic: US Department of Defense

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AS THIS edition of the Liberation Journal goes to press, the state of international diplomacy and relations is arguably the worst it has been in at least a generation. The world is increasingly hostage and vulnerable to the maldesigns of a cabal of demagogues and warmongers, with the international consensus reached barely 80 years ago in the wake of the horrors of the Second World War under attack like never before — along with the institutions set up and mandated to oversee it.

The once-resounding refrain: "Never again!" seems more relegated to history with each passing day and with every transgression against established international law.

At the opening of the United Nations General Assembly, Secretary-General António Guterres called for a "new architecture" in international relations to reflect the developing reality of a new multi-polar world in which the United States and a select few cannot pursue their own economic, military, and social aims riding roughshod over other nations.

In a crude riposte, US President Donald Trump proceeded to denigrate the UN, invoking the proverb "to the victor belong the spoils," rambling incoherently about his various "achievements," before returning once more to his bellicose rhetoric towards Iran — a country he has attacked twice in as many years in flagrant violation of the UN Charter and international law. This time, from the podium, he threatened to "annihilate" the entire country.

This is neither diplomacy nor carefully calibrated statesmanship; it is plain gangster-like extortion playing out before the eyes of the world. And with key elections on the horizon in both the US and Israel, the threat of an imminent return to a devastating war on the back of them is very real.

The Islamic Republic regime, which it must be stressed did not start or provoke this war, for its part has made it clear that it is open to a negotiated and peaceful settlement. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian told the UN that Tehran is ready for dialogue and diplomacy, but "not under duress" and that Iran would "never bow its head or bend at the knee" to US diktats and pressure.

Meanwhile, Liberation applauds the recent statement and reframing of policy by Britain's Foreign Minister Ed Miliband vis-à-vis Israel's continued brutal occupation of the West Bank and intransigence over the situation in Gaza and the two-state solution. However, we lament that this still falls far short of condemnation of the Israeli state for the genocide it has perpetrated in Gaza and the necessary implementation of robust sanctions, downgraded diplomatic relations, and real pressure upon Tel Aviv thereafter.

While Liberation believes in giving credit where credit is due and will support genuinely progressive changes in Britain's foreign policy when they occur, we maintain that welcome changes in one aspect of that policy cannot come at the expense of the adoption of, or doubling down upon, a hawkish or unjust stance elsewhere.

We therefore utterly oppose the British government getting drawn into the war on Iran in any way as well as its shameful and completely unnecessary recently announced agreement to provide "defensive" air-to-air refuelling to the fighter jets of Saudi Arabia, where a frighteningly reactionary dictatorship with an appalling human rights record rules, as it bombards neighbouring Yemen. No strategic or long-term interest of Britain is truly served by getting involved in this criminal folly.

Liberation warmly welcomes the call for a new architecture and an equitable approach to international relations in the interests of an enduring peace, human and democratic rights, and social justice.

And if the new administration at Downing Street is true to its stated intention of stepping up on the world stage, then it should play its part in the deliverance of these righteous aims.

End the genocide in Gaza! No to war on Iran! No deals with the reactionary Saudi dictatorship!

Jamshid Ahmadi
Editor

Liberation / the Maggie Bowden AGM

Building solidarity with those struggling against oppression

LIBERATION'S annual general meeting on 29 June reflected upon the vital role the organisation has played in supporting movements for peace and freedom over the past year, as well as looking ahead to the challenges ahead.

Liberation Parliamentaty Chair Brian Leishman MP welcomed colleagues to the meeting and was pleased to introduce Cuban Ambassador Ismara Vargas Walter and transport union TSSA leader Maryam Eslamdoust as guest speakers.

Bringing greetings from the people of Cuba, Ms Vargas Walter stressed the crucial role played by solidarity movements in supporting the struggle of her people against the imperialist designs of the United States and its ongoing illegal blockade of the Cuban economy.

She gave particular emphasis to the impact of the blockade on oil by the US, which is clearly aimed at undermining the Cuban economy and impoverishing the Cuban people.

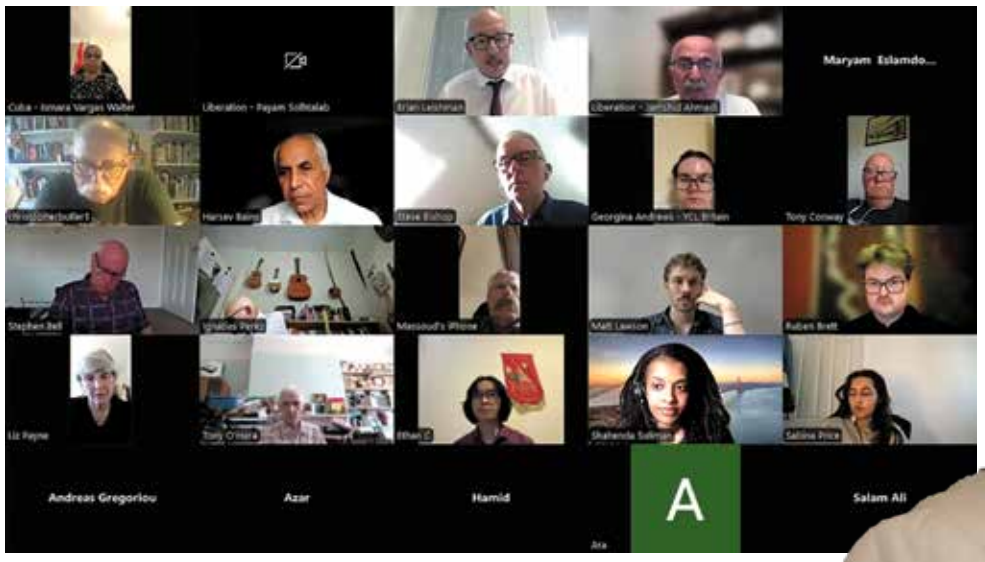
"Cuba is living through one of the most difficult times in almost seven decades," said the ambassador, adding: "The energy crisis within our country is not the result of poor management, failed ideology or any natural catastrophe. It is a result of the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the US."

Castigating the US for its efforts to "weaponise energy against a civilian population," Ms Vargas Walter stressed that the illegal blockade has been condemned year after year at the United Nations general assembly.

"While the blockade has taken much from us it will never take our dignity, our values or our determination," she said.

Ms Vargas Walter praised the work which had been undertaken in Britain, especially by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, to raise £500,000 for the Cuba Vive medical appeal and urged Liberation to continue its action to persuade the US to remove Cuba from its state sponsors of terrorism list.

The meeting agreed an emergency motion expressing solidarity with the Cuban people and opposition to the US threat to the island.





Liberation members held the AGM online (top) with (right) guest speaker Ismara Vargas Walter Credit: International Maritime Organization, CC BY 2.0

Ms Eslamdoust emphasised the fact that the anti-war and trade union movements were inseparable and criticised Western governments for prioritising arms sales over diplomacy, particularly the US-Israeli axis war against Iran.

She pointed out that the NATO drive to increase military spending would likely come at a cost to public services and investment in vital civilian infrastructure, saying: "Every pound spent in preparing for war is a pound that cannot be spent on improving people's lives", through investment in schools, housing transport or decent jobs.

The union leader charged the British government with "increasingly seeking to reach military solutions before diplomatic ones," stressing that where diplomacy has been overtaken by military action it undermines confidence in diplomacy. This meant that such actions were "sending a message that negotiations and diplomacy do not necessarily provide protection from attack."

Ms Eslamdoust highlighted the war on Iran, where attacks by the US and Israel have been carried out while negotiations were underway. Pointing to the wider implications of the new diplomacy, she said: "If countries believe that force is the only language that Washington responds to then everyone becomes less secure."

And she echoed the Cuban ambassador's condemnation of US actions against Cuba, also pointing to Venezuela and the wider region's suffering under US efforts to exercise hegemony over Latin America.



Brian Leishman chaired the AGM Credit: House of Commons, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Liberation's grand ambitions for 2026/27

AS WELL as the speakers, the AGM has the chance to debate the global political situation and make plans for strengthening Liberation's work.

Attendees agreed a motion opposing the illegal US-Israeli war against Iran, with the meeting expressing opposition to foreign intervention, sanctions and regime change not initiated by the Iranian people, while calling for a negotiated settlement of the conflict.

The AGM also passed resolutions calling for negotiations to move towards the unification of Cyprus and a motion calling for an end to the ongoing conflict in Sudan.

Liberation activists also decided on some ambitious initiatives for the coming year, including a history research project in collaboration with the Young Communist League, with speakers highlighting the need to engage more young people in international solidarity work.

The AGM also agreed a joint project between Liberation and the YCL to develop a better appreciation of the complex factors impacting upon the international situation and ensuring the situation of the Global South is better understood and reflected in the work of Liberation.

Work to carry on producing education fact sheets on a range of international issues including, colonialism, International Women's Day and International Human Rights Day also got the green light.

The meeting approved the annual organisational report, presented by assistant general secretary Jamshid Ahmadi, and the finance report presented by Liberation treasurer Bahman Tahouri.

Liberation's newly elected Central Council was tasked with drafting a strategic plan for the year, with prioritised work streams and measurable objectives, as well as continuing to promote the media profile of Liberation, to extend knowledge of its work to a wider public.

The AGM acknowledged the life, work and contribution of former Liberation general secretary Maggie Bowden, agreeing to name the AGM in her honour.

Liberation Parliamentary Chair Brian Leishman MP brought the meeting to a close, hailing the "very positive and productive" AGM and thanking the "fantastic" key speakers for their contributions.

He said: "It is an absolute honour to represent Liberation, inside and outside Parliament, and I look forward to continuing representing our movement in Westminster and beyond."

Palestine / analysis

Will Israel be permitted to kill the two-state solution?

As Tel Aviv tries to make peace impossible, Dr Aqel Taqaz says the international community must act



Illegal Israeli settlements situated southwest of the Dheisheh refugee camp in the occupied West Bank Credit: Shark1989z, CC BY-SA 4.0

ISRAEL appears to be moving quickly to implement what it has referred to as its "decisive plan" to put the Palestinian issue "to bed" once and for all.

This is to be achieved by permanently denying the Palestinian people their legitimate rights, foremost of which is the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent state alongside Israel — in accordance with United Nations resolutions, security council votes, general assembly meetings and elsewhere over the decades.

Of course, this comes on the back of three years of vicious ethnic cleansing with the intention of driving the Palestinian people themselves from their homeland. The world continues to bear witness to the genocide inflicted upon the people of Gaza since October 2023.

This has involved the killing of more than 75,000 Palestinians, many of whom remain under the rubble, a third of them being children. Entire families have been wiped from the civil registry. Over 17,000 children have lost both their parents, while 22,000 have lost one. More than 150,000 have been injured or maimed by the Israeli onslaught.

Then there is the systematic destruction of pretty much all aspects of normal human life in Gaza, rendering the territory a verified hellscape. Much handwringing over this issue has taken place in official circles internationally and it continues to occupy public opinion, reflected in the positions and stances adopted by various international, rights, and humanitarian organisations — all of which the state of Israel ignores with more or less complete impunity.

Gaza still suffers from a severe shortage of all necessities of life, including food, water, medicine, fuel, and other humanitarian needs because of the continuing Israeli blockade, despite the supposed ceasefire based on the "Trump Peace Plan."

While the genocide in Gaza was being livestreamed to the so-called free world, much of which tragically watched on in silence, another act of genocide was unfolding in the occupied West Bank.

Israel began this campaign in the northern West Bank, demolishing hundreds of residences in the Jenin and Tulkarm camps and leaving tens of thousands of innocent people displaced once more and homeless while forcibly dismantling the mandated UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz announced the rollout of this model to encompass the central West Bank, with Qalandia camp near Jerusalem, another major population centre, next in Israel's sights. Other camps elsewhere in the territory remain in the crosshairs of far-right Israeli ministers, Itamar Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich (who openly calls for the dissolution of the Palestinian Authority) as well as other extremist settler leaders — several of whom are explicitly sanctioned by Western governments.

In February 2026, the Benjamin Netanyahu regime also oversaw the passing of a set of legislative measures allowing for the unilateral registering of lands in the West Bank as "state property," thereby moving ahead with the formalising of administrative control over large parts of the area.

These measures essentially allow for the annexation of the occupied West Bank, giving rise to an unprecedented level of expansion of settlements — which are illegal under international law — throughout the territory. This aims to secure a new reality on the ground, one which fatally undermines the two-state solution.

Daily raids, arrests, house demolitions, and the infliction of military checkpoints throughout the West Bank continue as established and once thriving villages, towns, and indeed cities, are gradually encircled and isolated from one another — choking them off and turning them into open-air prisons.

Over 750,000 Israeli settlers live across roughly 160 "authorised" settlements and nearly 400 unauthorised outposts in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem — with plans afoot for expansion into the nearby E1 area, which would be hugely controversial and dangerous. If this goes ahead, it would all but end the hope of an independent and viable Palestinian state. The point must be reiterated that *all* of these settlements, from bare outposts and shacks to sprawling residential areas, are completely illegal under international law.

Given these developments, the question of the continuing viability of the two-state solution is brought into sharper focus than perhaps ever before.

One current of opinion, held by a growing swathe of ordinary Palestinians, is that the two-state solution is becoming increasingly unlikely, if not impossible already, owing to Israel's belligerent actions, including the passing of the Nationality Law, which effectively allows for the annexation of the West Bank; the sharp increase in the growth of illegal settlements; the plans for the mass displacement of Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank, whether to make way for Trump's "Riviera" or the expulsion of residents into Jordan respectively; and the more or less complete inaction of the international community in response, amid a collapse in any discernible political process or framework for negotiations.

In April 2026, Arab League Secretary General Ahmed Aboul Gheit stressed that any belief in the attaining of normalisation and peaceful coexistence in the region while the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and settlement activities within the 1967 borders, including East Jerusalem, continues, is an illusion.

However, despite the somewhat bleak current outlook, one must not lose sight of the fact that a just and peaceful solution is more than clearly prescribed in numerous UN resolutions on the issue and enjoys the overwhelming support of the vast majority of UN General Assembly member states — as evidenced by the Endorsement of the New York Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution, with 142 countries voting in favour last September. Furthermore, the two-state solution remains the official position of, and is supported by, the PLO, PA, and the majority of Palestine's manifold groups and factions.

Of course, Israel shows no signs of an about-turn whereby it suddenly complies with international law and UN resolutions regarding Palestine. Thus, the only option is the pursuing and maintaining of a principled campaign of mass civil and political disobedience throughout the occupied territories, in conjunction with a recalibrated and concerted campaign at international level, between states, bringing a firm stance and real pressure to bear on the state of Israel on account of its continual flagrant violations and criminal behaviour.

It must be made clear to the government in Tel Aviv that it will be held to account, there will be serious consequences for its transgressions in the form of robust sanctions and downgraded diplomatic relations, and the era of its impunity is at an end.

Careful and skilled diplomacy should be employed to bring the US government to the realisation that the continuation of its unquestioning alliance with, and enabling of, the Israeli government and its wanton crimes is no longer in its own national and strategic interests — a realisation it could be argued is already beginning to dawn in the backrooms and corridors of power of Washington.

It is through such a principled, popular, multi-layered, and robust campaign — from conscious and aware citizens in their streets, campuses, and workplaces, right up to the level of international diplomacy — that we can evoke the spirit of the historic international campaign waged against the apartheid regime in South Africa, and indeed underscore the reality that the continuation of the Israeli occupation is no more palatable or sustainable in the longer term than the former was by its end in 1994.

Dr Aqel Taqaz is the co-ordinator for international relations of the Palestinian People's Party and convenor of the Palestinian Committee for Peace and Solidarity. He is a member of the secretariat of the World Peace Council and lives in the West Bank.

Iran / analysis

Diplomacy is hanging by a thread in Iran war

As crucial elections approach in the US and Israel, the counties' war on Iran hangs heavy over the vote. Steve Bishop assesses the current prospects for peace in the Middle East.



THE FATES of both Benjamin Netanyahu and Donald Trump could be changed decisively following the outcomes of elections in late October and early November.

On 27 October, Israelis go to the polls to elect all 120 member of the Knesset, Israel's parliament. The right-wing fundamentalist coalition, headed by Netanyahu at present, is by no means guaranteed a majority, with an opposition bloc led by former military chief of staff Gadi Eisenkot showing strongly in early opinion polls.

Netanyahu has pinned much of his campaign on victory in the war with Iran claiming recently that Israel's mission in Iran is "not yet finished."

He told an Israeli news interviewer: "All of our systems under my direction are working to overthrow this regime. Our pilots were there and they can be there at any moment. We have not yet finished the job. We can be there at any moment. We will defeat this regime."

Asked what defeat meant, Netanyahu replied: "We will bring it down. It's already on its last legs anyway."

Regarding Iran, Eisenkot has suggested that the US create a "kill zone" around the few areas where Iran's 60% enriched uranium is still underground. He also suggests making a clear public commitment to attack any changes in those areas that might involve moving nuclear material. Such a strategy would also require committing long-term aerial resources, as the US did over Iraq in the 1990s.

Mid-term elections for the House of Representatives and the US Senate on 3 November could see the Republicans losing control of both Houses and weakening Trump's room for manoeuvre as president. In an effort to shore up his parties vote Trump has promised every adult in the US $5,000 if the Republicans win. He has urged supporters to "cheat like hell" to secure a Republican win.

Trump is aware that public opinion polls across the United States indicate a consistent lack of support for the ongoing military conflict with Iran. Major surveys, such as those conducted by Marist Poll and Ipsos, have consistently found that a majority oppose the military action, viewing it as a decision that has not been worth the costs. Even Trump's own Vice-President, JD Vance, is known to be lukewarm about continuing the war with Iran.

Attempting to assuage the concerns of voters, Trump has said that while the US is prepared to attack Iran "any time we want," he does not think that the renewed campaign against Iran would last "too long."

Trump's statements come against a background of the US tightening the sanctions regime on Iran, with comparisons being drawn with the situation that faced Iraq from the early 1990s onwards. The US Department of the Treasury has intensified economic sanctions and pressure on Iran's oil exports. In response, Iranian military officials have signalled their readiness to shift from a defensive to an offensive doctrine, while intelligence reports suggest that Iran's power structures are preparing for a protracted standoff.

The deadline outlined in the Iran-US memorandum of understanding (known as the Islamabad Understanding) concluded in August without reaching a final agreement. The 14-point memorandum, signed in June 2026 following more than three months of military conflict, was intended to halt hostilities and establish a framework for a comprehensive accord.

However, escalating tensions and mutual accusations between Tehran and Washington have derailed the implementation of commitments, driving the peace process into a severe deadlock.

Key to the response of the Islamic Republic has been to exert control over access to the Strait of Hormuz, which remains at the epicentre of the conflict. Commercial shipping traffic has plummeted sharply.

Tehran maintains that the complete reopening of the strait is contingent upon the US fulfilling its economic and structural commitments. Conversely, Washington and the Pentagon continue to exert rigid military pressure and issue threats, insisting on the immediate removal of all shipping restrictions.

At present, diplomacy has largely been sidelined by a cycle of mutual recrimination, economic coercion, and military deterrence. The prospect of peace remains precariously dependent on whether either side is willing to adjust its preconditions and take initial confidence-building steps. Direct talks are currently stalled, with diplomatic channels restricted to third-party mediation via countries such as Qatar, Pakistan and Oman, in an effort to establish new navigational arrangements or revive dialogue.

Over the past 14 months, Iran has been the target of two joint military attacks by the US and Israel, the first stating on 13 June 2025, the second on 28 February 2026. According to official Iranian figures, more than 3,500 Iranians were killed during the latter 40-day bombardment alone. Both attacks began while Iran was at the negotiating table regarding its nuclear programme.

Over 100,000 residential units were destroyed. Complexes in Iran's key industries — including steel, oil and manufacturing — were targeted. In addition, hospitals, the pharmaceutical industry, universities, bridges, water treatment plants, and numerous historical monuments across the country were bombed. Iran has estimated the war damage at approximately $270 billion.

The US is now hitting Iran militarily in fits and bursts, due to concerns in US military circles over the capacity of the US to maintain the type of bombardment witnessed during the 40 Day War.

Far from saving the Iranian people, as Donald Trump originally claimed US/Israeli action would, the war and sanctions have caused absolute poverty to skyrocket in Iran. Iran's currency has repeatedly hit new lows since the US and Israel launched the war more than six months ago. It has lost about half of its value in just one year owing to the tightening sanctions and the US-Israeli attacks.

Iranian trade union activists have sounded the alarm that the current minimum wage in the country equates to a mere 10% of the actual cost of a basic household "livelihood basket" (covering baseline food, housing, and living expenses), which is the threshold usually used to set the minimum wage in Iran.

The prospects for peace in the Middle East are not entirely dependent upon the outcomes of elections in Israel and the US. Defeats for Netanyahu and Trump may however put a brake on more belligerent elements in both camps. The fate of those suffering, as the dictatorship in Iran struggles to maintain its grip on power, and US imperialism remains determined to exert its hegemony over the region, will continue to hang by a thread.

Whatever the election outcomes the losers continue to be the people of Iran and the wider Middle East for whom peace, democracy and social justice remain distant goals.

Steve Bishop is an EC member of the Committee for the Defence of the Iranian Peoples Rights (CODIR), the solidarity organisation campaigning for peace and progress in Iran. Steve is a member of Liberation and a regular contributor to Liberation Journal.

Benjamin Netanyahu and Donald Trump meeting in January 2020



Bimal Rathnayake / interview



Building a new and progressive Sri Lanka for everyone

Almost two years on from the historic victory of the National People's Power (NPP) progressive alliance in the Sri Lankan presidential and parliamentary elections, Liberation had the privilege of interviewing Bimal Rathnayake, a member of the politburo of the People's Liberation Front (JVP, the leading constituent of the NPP alliance) and Sri Lanka's minister of transport, highways and urban development and leader of the House since November 2024

The JVP's May Day rally and parade in Malima's Anuradhapura District

Bimal Rathnayake / interview

Liberation: The NPP victory signalled a momentous break with decades of dynastic politics in Sri Lanka. Looking back over two years, what key factors allowed the JVP and NPP to inspire the Sri Lankan people and lead this historic shift towards a new era of governance?

Looking back two years after our victory, I see five main factors that truly paved the way for this historic win:

- **Massive public disillusionment:** People reached a point of deep dissatisfaction and utter disgust with the political parties that had ruled for 70 years — and even those aligned with them. When you look at how traditional parties like the ITAK were completely rejected in the north of the country, it's clear the public was ready to cut ties with the old guard entirely.
- **The crushing economic crisis (2019-2024):** The total economic collapse left people struggling just to survive daily life. Fuel queues, lack of essential medicines, and a shattered future pushed citizens to definitively reject those responsible for taking the country to rock bottom.
- **Six decades of proven integrity:** For almost 60 years, our party, the JVP, stood firmly for public rights and national sovereignty. People trusted our track record untarnished by corruption, our humble political culture, and the fact that we stayed true to our word — standing in stark contrast to the selfish, corrupt politics of the past.
- **A more politically conscious electorate:** Through endless struggles, failures, and crises, as well as thousands of awareness-raising party programmes, the public developed a much higher level of political consciousness. They were no longer easily misled; they were actively looking for genuine systemic change.
- **Building a truly inclusive platform:** Creating the NPP alliance allowed us to bring together ordinary, patriotic citizens from all walks of life under one common banner. This broad people-centric movement gave the country a winning, hopeful vision for the future.

Liberation: Navigating the country out of economic collapse required a delicate balance between fiscal discipline and social protection. How has the new government managed to maintain economic stability while ensuring that relief reaches the most vulnerable citizens?

Navigating out of economic collapse while protecting our citizens has been a core priority. We have proven that strict fiscal discipline and robust social safety nets are not mutually exclusive. Instead of burdening ordinary citizens with higher tax rates, we drove historic revenue growth purely through fiscal integrity, plugging systemic leakages, and digital compliance.

Remarkable revenue growth without adding new taxes

- **Inland Revenue Department:** Looking back, tax revenue was critically low during the crisis period in 2022 (around 2.1% of GDP/850 billion rupees/£1.9bn). Through aggressive tax administration reform and anti-evasion measures, IRD collections grew dramatically to over Rs 1.8 trillion in 2024 — representing an impressive growth rate of over 110% compared to 2022. By 2025, with the full implementation of digital filing, data-matching frameworks, and targeting high-net-worth tax evaders, revenue targets were surpassed with a further 20% to 25% year-on-year surge, ensuring sustainable state revenue without increasing tax rates on everyday consumers.
- **Sri Lankan Customs:** We reached record-breaking revenue collection figures by enforcing strict anti-smuggling protocols, automating customs clearing operations, and eliminating corruption at entry ports.
- **Excise Department:** We achieved historic collection targets by cracking down on illicit alcohol production, unrecorded sales, and tax evasion across the beverages industry.

Direct salary and relief enhancements:

- **Public-sector salary increase:** We executed a major salary restructuring programme, increasing the minimum basic pay by Rs 15,750 — from Rs 24,250 to Rs 40,000. Net monthly salary increments ranged between 24% and 50%+, directly benefiting 1.3 million public servants, teachers, healthcare workers, and armed forces personnel.
- **Strengthening welfare (The Aswesuma Welfare Benefit Scheme):** As part of this overhaul, we significantly scaled up cash support allocations, from Rs 8,500 to Rs 10,000 monthly for those in the poor category and from Rs 15,000 to Rs 17,500 monthly for those in the extremely poor category. Targeted top-ups were rolled out, covering monthly allowances of Rs 5,000 for persons with disability, including kidney disease, and Rs 2,000 for senior citizens.

Strategic Sectoral Spending:

- **Healthcare:** Increased capital allocations were made to resolve medicine shortages, maintain essential drug reserves, and upgrade regional healthcare units.
- **Education:** Funding was expanded for school nutritional programmes to combat child malnutrition, alongside targeted infrastructure investments in universities and vocational institutes.
- **Public infrastructure:** We actively diverted funds away from low-yield, debt-heavy vanity projects towards high-impact local infrastructure, including rural connectivity, irrigation, renewable energy grid links, and agricultural supply chains. By restoring efficiency and transparency in our three main revenue-generating institutions (IRD, Customs, and Excise) we successfully generated the funds needed to cushion our citizens without shifting any new tax burden onto the public.

Liberation: Securing a two-thirds supermajority in parliament was a powerful vote of confidence from the electorate. How has the government utilised this democratic mandate to streamline decision-making and rebuild public trust in legislative institutions?

The Sri Lankan public granted us a supermajority of 159 members in Parliament. Over the past two years, there have only been one or two instances where we have actually needed to draw upon that supermajority — and even then, it did not necessarily reflect a divided legislature. Instead, bills have been passed through mutual consensus and co-operation between the government and the opposition.

Thus, up to this point, our two-thirds majority has functioned primarily as a form of political leverage, rather than something we actively enforce. We have not needed to leverage it to push through radical constitutional amendments or otherwise unpopular acts. However, we have used our 2/3 majority to see through the increase to the minimum wage of the workers, which was a determination of the country's Supreme Court.

That said, circumstances might demand its use in the future. For example, the 1978 constitution was drafted without a public referendum. And one or two pivotal moments may arise down the road mainly when it comes to removing the entrenched privileges of the elite, abolishing draconian anti-people legislation like the hugely controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act enacted in 1979 and made permanent in 1982 (which grants security forces sweeping powers of arbitrary arrest and detention) and so on. We will use our supermajority only when absolutely necessary and strictly in the public interest.

We often describe this power as a "political nuclear weapon," something we keep reserved only for when truly required. Right now, we are advancing without creating deep fractures within Parliament or wider society.

Liberation: The core mandate of this administration was delivering genuine "system change" and restoring integrity to state institutions. What major anti-corruption objectives are being pursued?

A central part of our mandate focuses on anti-corruption through landmark legal and administrative reforms.

First, we transformed the political culture by ending top-level corruption — slashing ministerial perks, including excess vehicles and security, as well as political nepotism.

Institutionally, we empowered the Anti-Corruption Commission through the Anti-Corruption Act and reinforced financial transparency via the Anti-Money Laundering Act. We authorised 25 district offices nationwide, established dedicated recruitment for specialised police and investigators, and provided higher pay scales to attract top talent.

Legally, we introduced provisions under the Declaration of Assets and Liabilities Act, shifting the burden of proof onto individuals to account for unexplained wealth. To expedite justice against high-level corruption, we expanded the judiciary via the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution and the Judicature (Amendment) Act, establishing specialised high courts for trial-at-bar proceedings. In doing so, we are systematically and thoroughly dismantling the previously endemic corruption in Sri Lanka.

Liberation: The NPP's electoral victory was nationwide, signalling a major shift toward national unity across diverse ethnic communities. How did the NPP build this cross-ethnic coalition, what was their core platform, and what were, and still are, the main difficulties in maintaining it?

First, we must acknowledge a hard truth: the deep ethnic and religious divides in Sri Lanka did not manifest on their own. They were engineered. For well over a century, British colonial powers employed a cynical "divide and rule" strategy — weaponising race, caste, and religion across our schools, our land allocation, and our entire political structure.

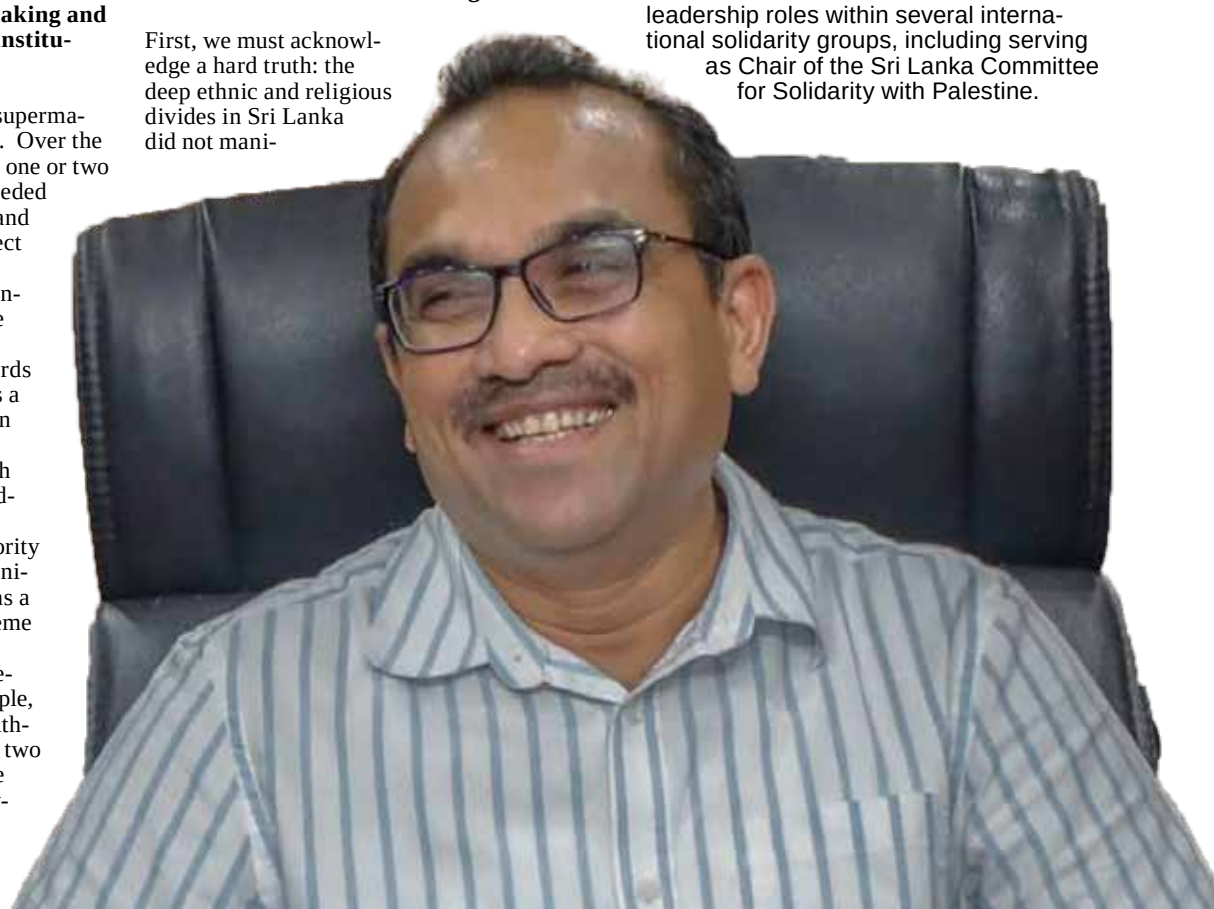
The tragedy is that after independence in 1948, successive political elites did not dismantle this structure — they in fact doubled down on it. Racism and sectarianism became the easiest currencies to buy political power, and that toxic strategy eventually dragged our country into a devastating civil war.

As the National People's Power, we made a conscious decision to break this cycle. Even during our country's darkest moments, like the horrific Easter Sunday terrorist attacks in 2019, we refused to play identity politics. We stood firmly on the principles of absolute equality, non-discrimination, and national unity.

Today, under our administration, we are enforcing a strict zero-tolerance policy against state-sponsored or legal discrimination. Though let us be realistic about the challenge: 150 years of institutionalised division cannot be simply erased overnight. Certain political forces in both the north and the south have invested 50 to 75 years in playing the ethno-sectarian card. They are utterly bankrupt of real solutions, so they rely on social media and sensationalised headlines to turn minor local incidents into major communal flashpoints. Our mission now is to prove that unity is stronger than fear.

Overcoming centuries of engineered mistrust requires more than just passing laws — it takes a fundamental shift in political culture and civic consciousness. We are building a country where every citizen, regardless of their language or faith, feels equally valued, respected, and protected as a Sri Lankan.

Bimal Rathnayake is the Minister of Transport and Leader of the House in the National People's Power (NPP) government in Sri Lanka, as well as a veteran member of the Politburo of the People's Liberation Front (JVP), the NPP's main constituent party. He was first in parliament from 2001-10 then again in 2015-20 before returning as part of the NPP's historic victory in 2024. He has been a long-time representative of Sri Lanka's left at the World Peace Council and has held leadership roles within several international solidarity groups, including serving as Chair of the Sri Lanka Committee for Solidarity with Palestine.



US imperialism / analysis

Why sanctions don't work

Western powers are constantly placing economic embargoes on their enemies, but their enemies remain. Radhika Desai explains why



IN ITS proliferating wars, the US-led West has made increasing use of sanctions. However, they have not worked. Iran and Russia may be among the most sanctioned countries in the world, but they do not do the bidding of the West.

In the case of Russia, the world's most sanctioned country, the US-led proxy war only exposed the impotence of the West. Rather than turning "the ruble into rubble" or catapulting "Russia back into the 19th century," as Biden intended, they did not just fail but boomeranged on practically every front, imposing costs on Europe and the US that are testing the limits of their economic and political tolerance.

In the case of Iran, moreover, its ability to react to military and economic warfare being waged against it by controlling the Strait of Hormuz has imposed high costs on the US, the West and the rest of the world.

Nevertheless, the West does not seem able to give up its addiction to sanctions.

Many questions arise from this. Why don't sanctions work? Why does the West keep imposing them even if they don't? What is the understanding of sanctions the West is relying on?

In this short article, I confine myself to exposing one set of confusions: how western states' liberal foundations fail to understand the counties they are sanctioning.

The literature on sanctions is bifurcated. One stream focusses on efficacy and concludes that sanctions usually fail in deterring the target state from undertaking the action they aim to prevent: if Cuba still stands against more than 60 years of US sanctions, and North Korea remains unbowed, sanctions are hardly going to deter Russia or Iran.

A second stream documents their horrifying effects on civilians, particularly when wielded against weaker states. Here too, consensus reigns: sanctions impose intolerable and entirely illegitimate human costs. British medical journals' documentation of the horrific toll in human and children's lives taken by sanctions on Iraq forced the US and West to impose so-called "smart sanctions" aimed at individuals rather than entire nations, and to lock in humanitarian exceptions, though it is not clear that their effects are any less severe. These effects are compounded by "overcompliance" — the tendency of private corporations to suspend trade not because sanctions apply to their activities but just in case they might. Sanctions continue to devastate societies.

This divergence between effects and effectiveness is not new. It was noted even when the use of the "economic weapon" made a comeback at the end of the Hundred Years' Peace between the Napoleonic wars and the First World War, when sanctions became the foundation of the League of Nations system of "collective security." The fundamental premise that the allied blockade of the central powers had worked in the First World War, was moot: it had indeed inflicted untold suffering, primarily on civilians, and caused considerable resentment against the Allies; but there is no conclusive evidence that it contributed to the central powers' defeat.

The best contemporary western scholarship remains befuddled by this divergence. The principal reason is their liberal ideology, or fantasy, that in capitalism there is some sort of separation of the political and the economic and that the latter is a sphere in which perfect rationality can, should and will prevail.

The Economic Weapon by Nicholas Mulder blames the ineffectiveness of sanctions despite their great and inhuman effect on the rise of "nationalism, fear-mongering and virulent racism." He asks: "Given the power of such ideas to move entire societies, how would economic pressure alone dissuade them from repeating such collective struggles?

"Sanctions would," he continues, "no doubt work better in a world of perfectly rational, consistently self-interested subjects, but this is not the world we actually inhabit." If only people were rational, Mulder seems to say, they would give in to sanctions and sanctions would work.

If mainstream liberal scholarship were able to give due credit to the historical fact that human beings are social; that they have their own interests as individuals as well as those of their fellow human beings at heart; that they understand, implicitly or explicitly, that it is not individuals but societies that produce and that this productive capacity is at the heart of their capacity to survive; liberal scholarship would not need to attribute dastardly motives to people who demonstrate their social resilience against draconian sanctions and would see this for the heroism and social cohesion it actually represents.

Capitalist societies, premised on the ideology of liberal individualism, which claim to separate the political from the economic, are never "pure." Instead, each relies on non-capitalist social structures, within their own societies and those they must subordinate. Nations, as I have argued in my Geopolitical Economy, are primarily not cultural but material. The international relations of capitalism are necessarily imperialist and warlike. Thanks to the logic of uneven and combined development, state intervention becomes necessary for development and to create and maintain competitive advantage in the world economy.

It is interesting that the separation of political and economic in international relations and warfare existed only in a geographically small part of the world for a historically short period: Europe, between the Napoleonic Wars and the First World War. In this period, and only among European countries, something like an international capitalist rule of law obtained.

Before then, European capitalist states engaged in economic warfare routinely. The Congress of Vienna ended those wars and inaugurated an exceptional century. During it, as economic historian Karl Polanyi pointed out in his best-known work, The Great Transformation, the economic and the political were kept separate in relations between the "civilised" nations of Europe. Even in war, this separation was not breached.

"While nationalism and industry distinctly tended to make wars more ferocious and total, effective safeguards were erected for the continuance of peaceful business in wartime," Polanyi writes. "In respect of the status of enemy aliens, the service of loans held by enemy citizens, enemy property or the right of enemy merchantmen to leave ports, the 19th century showed a decisive turn in favour of measures to safeguard the economic system in wartime. Only the 20th century reversed this trend.

That reversal began with the allied blockade in the First World War, when the imperial countries themselves participated in the destruction of the world of rule of law they had built. They had to. The imperialism on which the liberal order of Europe and its offshoots rested, had reached its limits by 1914 when it had brought the entire world under the control, formal or informal, of one or another major power. As Lenin pointed out, once the division of the world among them was complete, only inter-imperialist wars of redivision were possible and that was what the First World War was.

Only a century or so after they had eliminated the use of economic weapons against one another and confined them to colonial wars fought on the cheap against far weaker enemies, they were forced to bring them back into the heart of Europe. From there, economic weapons found their way into the League of Nations, used by its executive council of "great powers." They remained instruments of imperialism, now of a collective variety.

Later, when multilateral sanctions made their way into the United Nations to be used by the security council, the veto-wielding permanent five members included two non-western powers who have tended to prevent their use for imperialist purposes.

The use of unilateral sanctions by the West as a form of warfare that costs less in blood and treasure has since proliferated. However, thanks to uneven and combined development spreading productive power to the rest of the world, making it multipolar, the ability of most societies to resist has grown. They may not be as rich as western countries, but they are rich and strong enough not to succumb.



A Cuban mural saying 'Mister Imperialists, we are not afraid of you at all!' Credit: KPu3uC B Poccuu GNU Free Documentation License, Version 1.2

Radhika Desai is Professor of Political Studies at the University of Manitoba and is convenor of the International Manifesto Group. She has written many articles and books including *Geopolitical Economy* (2013).

South Africa / analysis



Zimbabwean children play having crossed the border into South Africa
Credit: DFID UK Dept for International Development, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Anti-migrant vigilantes in post-apartheid South Africa

Capitalism has provided fertile ground for violent protests against immigrants, says Jeremy Cronin



IN JUNE, a surge of often violent anti-immigrant protests rocked towns and cities in much of South Africa. Immigrants, mainly from South Africa's neighboring states were harassed and threatened, some were chased from their homes and forced to seek temporary shelter in civic halls.

The anti-immigrant actions were led by two "civil society" vigilante formations, the self-styled Operation Dudula ("force out" in isiZulu), founded in Soweto in 2021, and March and March, launched in 2024 by Jacinta Ngobese-Zuma a former radio personality.

These formations demagogically invoke the familiar but factually inaccurate narrative that immigrants bear the prime responsibility for crime, drug trafficking, overcrowded public health care facilities, and for taking away jobs from South Africans.

Through the latter part of 2025, March and March blockaded public health facilities denying immigrants access to dozens of clinics in KwaZulu-Natal province. Despite the brazen illegality of these actions, police intervention was at first half-hearted. Emboldened, March and March, upped the ante, threatening nationwide action and giving government a 30 June deadline to expel all "illegal" immigrants. The deadline caused understandable panic among immigrant communities. Zimbabweans and Malawians flocked to consular offices seeking voluntary repatriation.

On "deadline" day, the police and army were deployed and generally acted swiftly to deal with acts of vigilante criminality. There were some 900 arrests of anti-immigrant vigilantes. Despite 152 reported marches in towns and cities, the scale of direct violence and destruction was largely contained. But in the immediate period before and after 30 June, some 178,000 immigrants left the country voluntarily or via government-assisted return trips, while the South African government officially deported another 82,000 undocumented foreign nationals.

But none of this has resolved any of the clashing realities embedded in the South African and sub-Saharan reality. Sporadic anti-immigrant actions continue, and March and March has now set a new national "deadline" of 30 September.

What are the underlying factors behind these dismal realities? Some have suggested, with a degree of plausibility, that there are foreign hands at work determined to embarrass the South African government for its stand on the ongoing genocide in Palestine. In the year before launching March and March, Jacinta Ngobese-Zuma was in the US as part of the State Department's international visitor leadership programme. Her organisation, with its populist, social media savvy, deploys much of the familiar repertoire of a "colour revolution" destabilisation operation.

In a similar vein, fingers can be pointed at two local right-wing parties with their own anti-government destabilising agendas, former president Jacob Zuma's MK party and Action SA led by businessman Herman Mashaba. Both parties have close relations with anti-immigrant vigilante forces.

It would be surprising if there were no political destabilisation agendas at work, whether foreign or local, but they would not remotely enjoy the present levels of mobilising potential if there were not more deep-rooted factors at play.

For their part, the corporate-controlled mainstream media in South Africa and liberal-aligned research institutes, while morally condemning the anti-migrant mobilisation, have tended from a law-and-order perspective to blame the ANC-led government for "institutional failure."

Again, there is some plausibility in these accusations. The police have at times been lackadaisical, if not directly complicit in anti-migrant actions. The large number of undocumented migrants is not only attributable to South Africa's extensive and porous land borders, but at least partly the consequence of a dysfunctional Home Affairs department, long delays in processing applications, and accusations of corruption in the department.

What the liberal, law-and-order voices don't underline is the degree to which post-apartheid state capacity has been deeply eroded by nearly three decades of neoliberal austerity, privatisation and contracting out of public responsibilities.

Despite one of the more progressive constitutions in the world, despite finally winning a non-racial, one-person, one-vote democracy, 30 years of neoliberal austerity in South Africa have resulted in deepening racialised inequality, mass poverty and world-record levels of unemployment — the latest unemployment figure is 33.6% in the narrow definition, and 43.8% or 13.1 million if one includes more realistically discouraged work-seekers.

The inevitable social dysfunctions and popular frustrations that result from this level of unemployment are open to opportunistic deflection into anti-immigrant mobilisation — let the poor bash the poor. This mobilisation is not directed at immigrants in general, not at European arrivals, not so much at middle-class professionals from the Global South, but at impoverished economic refugees fleeing structurally adjusted, deeply indebted neighbouring countries like Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and the land-locked Lesotho, eSwatini and Malawi. All have a long history of being reserves for the migrant labour that propelled South Africa's industrialisation through the 20th century.

The epicentres of the xenophobic mobilisation are the crowded and still untransformed apartheid-era dormitory townships on the distant outskirts of South Africa's towns and cities. These are places where those who do have work are daily migrants facing long minibus commutes that consume many unproductive hours and as much as 30% of township household earnings.

South Africa's total immigrant population — documented and undocumented — is officially estimated at around 3.1 million people, or about 5.1% of the population. This is not much higher than the global average of 3.7% of the world's population living outside country of birth. But here most immigrants are living in crisis-ridden townships cheek by jowl with impoverished South Africans.

And, if we are to speak of migration, we should also not forget internal immigration. The end of apartheid-era "influx control" measures saw a flood of South Africans moving into towns and cities from the poverty-traps of ex-Bantustan labour reserves. Between 2001 and 2006, for instance, the average number of internal immigrants was over 400,000 each year. And these millions were pouring into largely untransformed urban realities.

As one academic study notes: "Reversing apartheid spatial injustice is far harder than legislating against it. Roads, rail lines, suburbs and townships have a long physical life, and they continue to shape opportunities decades after the laws that created them are repealed."

In the absence of effective pro-poor, rural and urban land reform the current housing market acts with as much sadistic effectiveness as the old apartheid pass law controls. The poor, South African and non-South African alike, are marginalised into the cauldrons of squalid, over-crowded townships geographically displaced from work opportunities and major public resources.

There are no quick fixes to the underlying structural features that open space for xenophobic mobilisation. Apart from being inhumane, mass deportations simply don't work. Official Statistics SA figures demonstrate that deportations result in a revolving door of returnees from economically devastated neighbouring countries and households dependent on remittances from South Africa.

Anti-immigrant discourse and actions must continue to be condemned as they have been by the South African government, by the African National Congress, the South African Communist Party, trade unions and many faith-based formations. But condemnation must avoid a middle-class, moralising aloofness that fails to understand the huge pressures on the poor, South African and immigrant alike.

Nothing short of serious social and economic transformation will convince the reported 60% of South Africans who believe immigrants are a problem. This is not just a South African struggle, but also a regional and international struggle against the wrecking-ball devastation caused by a declining but still immensely powerful global capitalist system.

Jeremy Cronin is a veteran South African Communist Party Central Committee and Politburo member, former SACP deputy general secretary, former government deputy minister, and former political prisoner during apartheid rule. He is also a noted poet and writer.

Liberation hero / Khosrow Roozbeh

A lasting inspiration for the people of Iran

Khosrow Roozbeh has captured the hearts of millions with his swashbuckling heroism and unwavering commitment to socialism, writes Payam Solhtalab

LIBERATION HEROES are not like shooting stars that shine for a brief moment and then vanish into the darkness. Liberation heroes leave a profound and indelible mark upon the minds of the masses; they give strength and hope, warm the hearts of people, inspire them and live on in the thoughts and deeds of the masses.

They are beacons in the darkness, casting their light upon the path of the people of today and tomorrow; they may sacrifice themselves, yet show the way for others to proceed forward. And precisely when the masses have been suppressed and despair is all enveloping, they rise like the pride and dignity of the people of a humiliated land, restoring to them their stolen dreams and aspirations.

At dawn on 11 May 1958, before the sun had spread all its golden rays across Tehran, a resounding cry rang out from the city's Heshmatiyeh Garrison: "Squad! Await my command! Death to the traitorous Shah! Long live the Tudeh Party of Iran!" And then came the sound of a simultaneous volley of gunfire.

That resounding cry belonged to Captain Khosrow Roozbeh. Rope-bound to a post at the barrack's firing range, he issued his cry of defiance at the mercenaries of the Shah's regime stood before him and then, without the hint of a tremble, commanded the firing squad to proceed. He was only 42 years old.

Khosrow Roozbeh was one of the unique heroes of the Iranian people in the country's contemporary history and his name still registers at the forefront of the bona fide people's struggle against dictatorship and imperialism.

Roozbeh was a member of the central committee of the Tudeh Party of Iran and one of the leaders of its clandestine military organisation; a ranked captain before he was cashiered from the then Imperial Amy, a well-reputed mathematician, writer, and chess theoretician, and one of the most beloved figures of Iran's communist movement.

He was born on 24 August 1915 in the historic city of Malayer in western Iran. In 1943, two years after its founding, he joined the Tudeh Party of Iran, revolted by the endemic corruption in the Imperial Army and massive injustice in wider society, at a time when fascism was also raising its ugly head in Iran. Throughout his epic life, he remained an outstanding and sincere example of a committed Tudeh fighter who believed in, and was passionately devoted to, socialism.





A photo of Khosrow Roozbeh just before his execution and (above right) a watercolour by Italian artist Vale Riafino | Vale Riafino [@still.life.1917] Instagram

Drawing upon his exceptional talents, Roozbeh completed the six-year secondary school course in four years and entered the country's military academy while simultaneously enrolling at the Faculty of Engineering of the University of Tehran. After completing his studies in the artillery corps and mechanical engineering, he delivered dozens of scientific and military lectures at the academy, at which he served as a professor, and at the faculties of engineering, agriculture and veterinary medicine — addressing both science and social issues. He authored and translated more than 20 books on military, technical, and mathematical subjects, as well as literature, philosophy, current affairs, and politics.

In his renowned book Blind Obedience, he explicitly criticised Britain's colonial overreach in Iran, as well as the structure of the Shah's army and the concept of "unquestioning discipline and blind obedience." He urged both army officers and non-commissioned officers to raise their political consciousness and refuse orders that either ran contrary to the national interest or were merely issued to preserve the ruling dictatorship.

Among his other output were translations of several works of literature, including the first Persian translation of the play Love and Death by the French writer Romain Rolland, as well as a manual on chess.

"Every single cell in my body and every particle of my being belongs to the Tudeh Party"

Prior to the infamous CIA-MI6-instigated coup d'état on 19 August 1953, which brought about the overthrow of the legitimate government led by prime minister Dr Mohammad Mossadegh and the resurrection of the monarchical dictatorship of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Roozbeh had already been arrested and imprisoned twice by the authorities. On both occasions, he managed to escape from prison and continue with his clandestine revolutionary activities on the outside.

Following the coup, attacks and mass arrests targeting the remnants of Mossadegh's base and the Tudeh Party and its supporters reached an unprecedented high. Thousands of party cadres, members, and supporters were arrested, and dozens of Tudeh fighters, particularly officers in its military organisation, were dispatched to the torture chambers and sent before firing squads. During those bloody years, when dictatorship and repression prevailed in Iran, Roozbeh managed to live underground for four years, continuing throughout this period to organise and struggle against the Shah's brutal regime.

Roozbeh's growing stature in the clandestine opposition to the Shah and his ability to sense the various traps laid out for him and thus evade capture, led the British embassy in Tehran to remark: "Roozbeh was the real-life 'Scarlet Pimpernel,' who in a series of disguises walked into and out of innumerable baited police traps with the swashbuckling courage that made him a figure of legendary proportions, both to the [Tudeh] Party, the security authorities, and the general public in Iran."

Agents of the Shah's regime eventually managed to corner Roozbeh in an armed stand-off on 6 July 1957. He single-handedly held off his pursuers for several hours, during which he was repeatedly shot and severely wounded. He was transferred to a military hospital, healing him up enough to face torture for information.

Once he had recovered from initial surgery, he was transferred to the notorious Qasr Prison where he endured the most prolonged and severe physical and psychological torture imaginable. Through his heroic resistance and steadfastness, he brought the regime and torturers to the point of exasperation. It was nine long months from the day of Roozbeh's arrest until the beginning of his trial before the military court.

In court, in the course of his courageous and historic defence, he declared loudly with his head held high: "My fondness and devotion to socialism, with all my reason, intellect, logic, and judgement, is because I have recognised the superiority of its principles over those of other systems.

"The driving force behind every action I have undertaken has been the desire to realise these principles and, consequently, to build a new structure for Iranian society and, ultimately, to secure the happiness, welfare, dignity, freedom, and honour of my beloved people.

"I have chosen the path of the Tudeh Party of Iran because of the fire that burns within my chest to serve the peoples of Iran … Every fibre of my being recognises this path as a sacred one, and every cell of my body and every particle of my being belongs to the Tudeh Party.

"Even the darkest of clouds cannot deny the existence of the sun!"

Khosrow Roozbeh is a true liberation hero. Throughout his short but fruitful life, during one of the darkest periods in Iran's contemporary history, he rose up against dictatorship, corruption, and injustice.

By keeping the banner of struggle flying, he also kept alive the hopes and dreams of the masses for progressive political and social change in Iran.

A statue depicting him bound in ropes before his execution stands at Piazzale Caroli in the Fiano Romano commune, 40 kilometres from Rome in Italy, itself a testament to his enduring appeal and significance. And to this day, many left and progressively inclined Iranians choose the name Roozbeh for their sons in his honour.

Liberation / in Parliament



Foreign Secretary Ed Miliband announces sanctions against Israeli settlements
Credit: House of Commons, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

International solidarity is more important than ever



Mass public pressure has pushed the government in the right direction. Brian Leishman MP reports from Parliament

ACROSS the world there is rising instability, deepening inequality and an erosion of the international rules-based order. Authoritarianism is on the rise while conflicts are multiplying and safeguards are failing. The need for international solidarity has never been stronger.

It is easy for governments to become insular, turning a blind eye to suffering elsewhere. History teaches us that it is thanks to the activities of citizens and campaigners that injustice is exposed, and that the pressing need for peace is put on the political agenda.

From Palestine to Sudan, from Cuba to Venezuela, and with tensions continually escalating around Iran, we see the working class bearing the brunt of the consequences of war, oppression, economic hardship and tensions between nations.

For those of us in Britain who believe in peace, justice and human rights we must not just observe these struggles from afar, we must stand alongside those seeking a life of freedom and dignity.

Military escalation always means ordinary people suffering the most. Rarely does war deliver peace, instead it brings death, devastation and displacement.

When families are torn apart and communities are destroyed, the human cost is immeasurable, and those terrible effects can echo through generations.

That is why we must continue to argue for dialogue, de-escalation and international co-operation rather than the pursuit of further conflict.

Against this volatile global backdrop, I welcome the British government's recent announcements in relation to illegal Israeli settlements, however overdue they may be.

This action shows a change in outlook from the government; it is a step in the right direction. But there is still much more to do.

The measures do not go far enough, and they will not end the current suffering in Gaza or halt the expansion of illegal settlements alone. The Palestinian people cannot afford to wait six months for the decision to be enacted. We cannot and must not financially facilitate apartheid and ethnic cleansing a day longer.

The repeated criticism of Keir Starmer's leadership on Israel and Palestine from MPs of different parties, including Labour, played a crucial part in a change of tone when Andy Burnham assumed office.

But it was outside Parliament where change really was brought about.

The vital work of organisations such as Liberation, which has championed human rights, justice and anti-colonial struggles for decades, and the determination of campaigners, trade unionists and activists who marched in cities across the country showed the power of people uniting in solidarity. Over one million people took to the streets demanding justice and calling for an end to genocide in Gaza.

The recognition of the Palestinian State and the recent action on settlements is meaningful action and a commitment to peace based on justice. But our solidarity must extend beyond Palestine.

Because in Sudan, we are seeing the world's worst humanitarian crisis continuing to unfold — often with much less media and parliamentary attention.

Millions displaced, civilians suffering unspeakable violence and an international community which has been too slow to respond.

The war is a counter-revolutionary conflict between two military factions, leaving the country's infrastructure largely destroyed.

Agriculture, industry as well as domestic and foreign trade have all been severely disrupted, with approximately 13 million people displaced, 19.5 million people facing acute food insecurity and hundreds of thousands of people living in famine conditions.

Sudan must not be forgotten, and we all have a responsibility to ensure that. We must challenge the abuse of human rights wherever they occur, and aid must reach those in need because every life has equal value, regardless of where you are born. The UK should support independent monitoring, documentation and prosecution in respect of war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law by all perpetrators.

Ordinary people deserve a democratic, Sudanese-led civilian transition, with Britain backing a genuinely inclusive process that excludes the warring parties and the former regime, with no return to power sharing with the military, and the introduction of a single national army under civilian oversight.

Likewise, we cannot ignore the challenges faced by Cuba, which continues to be the victims of economic terrorism by the United States, its actions inflicting hardship on the civilian population.

US-imposed sanctions on Cuba are creating intense poverty, so much so, that the UN Human Rights Council have detailed that without swift action from the international community, Cuba risks becoming "a silent Gaza."

Since June this year, Washington has widened unilateral sanctions on key sectors of the Cuban economy. The US took measures to block oil supplies from entering the country in January, after cutting off shipments from Venezuela, which had previously been a key exporter to Cuba.

Venezuela, of course has also been a recent theatre for US aggression.

The US attack on Venezuela in January was an unlawful use of force under the UN Charter, further threatening the rules-based international order.

The crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Maduro government against the Venezuelan people remain unpunished, without the delivery of justice or guarantees of being repeated.

The US military operation was a violation of the UN Charter that endangered civilians. The Trump administration's use of military force was illegal, and it could encourage unlawful actions by other states and herald similar future actions by the US said Amnesty International Secretary General Agnes Callamard.

As Trump himself has stated, control over resources and geopolitical power in the region were the key drivers of US action in January.

Those are the same goals that has seen the United States attack Iran.

The latest developments in relation to the rapidly re-escalating conflict between Iran and the United States are incredibly alarming.

This could easily become an all-out full-scale war with devastating consequences, not just for the people of Iran but for the wider Middle East region and, of course, for hundreds of millions more, with the economic and environmental impacts reaching across the globe.

By actively seeking to assert unilateral US hegemony, the Trump administration has dragged the Middle East and the wider world into a perilous situation that is worsening by the day.

US action in Cuba, Venezuela and Iran is limiting people's access to food, medicine, fuel and the basics of life many of us take for granted.

To reiterate, the need for international solidarity has never been stronger.

Liberation's work remains important because of that. It is a commitment to anti-racism, self-determination, human rights and peace, providing a vital platform for discussions and issues that struggle to gain enough mainstream attention.

At the recent annual general meeting, delegates once again highlighted the importance of standing with people from around the world when they are oppressed, putting international issues on the domestic and international political agenda.

That work must continue and as we look forward, we look to strengthen campaigns and raise awareness of any abuses of human rights wherever and whenever they occur.

Brian Leishman is MP for Alloa & Grangemouth, Scottish Labour Party, and parliamentary chair of Liberation.

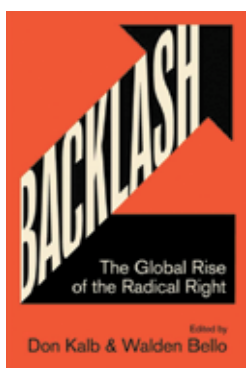
Book review / Latin America



A protest against Germany's AfD Picture credit: Stefan Müller, CC BY 2.0

Backlash: The Global Rise of the Radical Right

Don Kalb and Walden Bello's collection contains valuable information but Steve Bishop warns its theoretical foundations are shaky



EDITORS Don Kalb and Walden Bello have assembled an impressive array of academics to contribute to this volume of 12 chapters, framed by Kalb's introduction, which sets out the volume's basic formulations.

Contributions cover the globe, assessing the rise of the Right in India, Hungary, France, Russia and the US amongst others. There is a wealth of information covering the particulars of each nation, the impact of global economic changes and the dynamics of how these have impacted upon each location.

To this extent much of the work in these essays repays close reading, as the extent to which class forces combine to enable support for the right to flourish, are analysed in detail.

Kalb's Introduction frames the issues addressed across the following 12 chapters as dealing with a worldwide counter-revolution against neoliberalism, which Kalb asserts "had originated as a planned counter-revolution against the coming of popular democracy in the 20th century, with the purpose of disabling electoral socialism and disciplining mass democracies for capital accumulation."

It is only possible to accept this assertion if revolution itself is not seen as the transfer of power from one class to another. However, it is hard to accept the argument that the shift from liberalism to neoliberalism is a transfer of power from one class to another or that the rise of the so-called radical right is a counter-revolution against neoliberalism.

On the contrary, these changes are reflective of the shifting priorities of a moribund capitalist class, desperate to hang onto its power and willing to form and re-form its base of allegiances in order to do so.

There are common threads across the chapters in this book. The impact of de-industrialisation in the West and the former socialist economies, combined with a voracious influx of deregulated foreign capital, is a recurrent theme. The impact of these changes upon working class communities, combined with a shift to the centre and embrace of neoliberalism by the social democratic Left, is seen time and again as the basis for working class voters to fall prey to right wing populism.

Decades of neoliberalism and austerity have left working class communities across the globe in impoverished circumstances, open to the anti-establishment posturing of the populist right while the social democratic left in accepting the tenets of neoliberalism has become detached from its working class base.

This economic impact is combined with a narrative which scapegoats the 'other,' the agenda across the right being anti-"woke," anti-abortion, anti-climate crisis, anti-immigration and linked to an imagined notion of the purity of the nation, having been in some way diluted by these "external" forces and ideas.

As Ewald Engelen notes in his chapter on the Netherlands: "Calling the political opponents of placid liberal pluralism names has the unintended effect of pushing the potential forces of emancipation into political positions, which run the danger of becoming indistinguishable from the "extreme centre" … which from the 1970s onward have increasingly signed up to the agenda of their former political adversaries, that is, capital."

Much time is devoted by Walden Bello to a definition of fascism, questioning whether the rise of the right meets the conditions he outlines as defining fascism. These being that a fascist movement has "the following five features: (1) they show a disdain or hatred for democratic and progressive principles and procedures; (2) they tolerate or promote violence; (3) they have a heated mass base that supports their anti-democratic thinking and behaviour; (4) they scapegoat and support the persecution of certain social groups; (5) they are led by a charismatic individual who exhibits and normalises all of the above."

The debate is taken up by other contributors who indicate the varying degrees to which right-wing populism in their countries align with Bello's definition. However, a simpler and clearer definition was given by Bulgarian Communist Georgi Dimitrov in 1935, that fascism is the "open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, chauvinist and imperialist elements of finance capital."

In that respect, whether the bourgeoisie in particular countries meet Bello's definition or not, the worldwide trend is surely in the direction of Dimitrov's assessment.

Key weaknesses of this volume are that the authors are not explicit that fascism is an integral development of capitalism in crisis; the achievements of the Soviet Union and socialist countries are largely dismissed; and that in accepting the thesis about counter-revolution solutions are framed, not as socialist, but in terms of a return to liberal democracy.

In spite of the doubtful premise many chapters nevertheless do contain useful information and analysis from across the globe. There is much of value here but there is much more than could be added.

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75-77 St John Street, London EC1M 4NN

Email: info@liberationorg.co.uk

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