

THIRD WORLD

RESURGENCE

ISSUE No. 337-338

KDN PP6738/01/2013 (031741)

www.twn.my



Containing Chavismo **Overthrowing Maduro**

The US war against Venezuela



ISSN 0128-357X



9 770128 357003

Double
issue

Editor's Note

VENEZUELA is currently being crucified by a US-led coalition of states simply because it has chosen to embark on an alternative path of development. Such a brutal response by the US to any nation state opting for a different model of development is not in itself anything new. Cuba has been the victim of US sanctions since 1959 when Fidel Castro emerged victorious in the guerilla war which toppled the corrupt US-backed regime of Fulgencio Batista. Originally limited to the purchase of arms, the restrictions were subsequently expanded to make it a more comprehensive sanctions regime.

When Hugo Chavez became the President of Venezuela in 1999 and proclaimed the Bolivarian Revolution (a socialist political programme named after the South American independence hero Simon Bolivar), the US was anything but pleased. Venezuela is home to the largest proven oil reserves in the world, and the US simply could not countenance the continued possession of such a vital resource by a socialist regime.

Meanwhile, the political contours of the whole Latin American region were fast changing, particularly in the first decade of the 21st century. The election to office of progressive governments in Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Ecuador and Guatemala (the so-called 'Pink Tide') provided a climate of solidarity for Chavez to undertake important social reforms and programmes to uplift the poor and destitute.

But such a respite was shortlived as the Pink Tide governments failed to hold their ground against the assault from the Right. Venezuela was now left alone to face the full force of US imperial might. The US kept ratcheting up the pressure with all the tools in its arsenal, including sanctions, sabotage, lockouts and hoarding. In 2002, the US nearly succeeded in ousting Chavez from office by a military coup.

Having weathered the storm, Chavez moved ahead with his reforms to bring about a more egalitarian society. Unfortunately, he was not able to carry out the most critical structural reform necessary to stabilise the Venezuelan economy – reduce its dependence on oil. This made the country vulnerable to market forces outside its control. It also made it easier for the US to put the squeeze on Venezuela as it was oil revenues which paid for all essentials including food and medicine.

When Chavez died in 2013, his successor Nicolas Maduro inherited these problems. But with oil prices down, he could barely get down to addressing them. An even bigger problem was the new man in the White House, whose main obsession was acquiring Venezuela's rich oil resources for the US. All along, Donald Trump had made it plain that he wanted these resources for US multinationals, and he had even gone

to the extent of consulting his advisers on how he could trigger a war with Venezuela to seize the oilfields as war booty.

Given this obsession, Trump's first concern was to ensure that the man at the helm in Venezuela was a pliable person who would dutifully see to it that US interests were protected. Since Maduro did not fit the bill, the only way out was regime change. In a brazen display of imperial power, Trump even effectively nominated the candidate whom the Venezuelan people were supposed to elect if they wanted the US to lift sanctions.

The US' man was Juan Guaido, who had been groomed by an elite US-funded regime change training academy. Known by its acronym CANVAS, the organisation has, according to award-winning journalist Max Blumenthal, been 'funded largely through the National Endowment for Democracy, a CIA cut-out that functions as the US government's main arm of promoting regime change'. Guaido was only the President of the Venezuelan National Assembly but after a single phone call from Trump's Vice-President Mike Pence, he proclaimed himself President of Venezuela. He was a virtual unknown but a media blitz transformed him into President-in-waiting.

Meanwhile, Canada, numerous European nations, Israel and the bloc of right-wing Latin American governments known as the Lima Group recognised Guaido as the legitimate leader of Venezuela. What is shocking is that almost everything the US has done in prosecuting this war is a breach of international law, yet Canada and the European countries, which regularly pontificate to Third World nations about the importance of the rule of law, are prepared to go along with the US in flouting the law.

The US and its allies have now stepped up their economic warfare against Venezuela, effectively depriving it of the right to import food and medicine for its people. The suffering of the people has been compounded by frequent blackouts, which in turn impact adversely on water supplies. There is strong circumstantial evidence for holding the view that the US is behind this sabotage of the power grid, but that has not prevented Guaido from leading demonstrations against Maduro blaming him for Venezuelans' plight. In the absence of any action by the international community, the only question is how long the people can hold out for.

In our cover story, we seek to highlight the pitiless war that the US and its allies have launched against a Latin American nation whose only crime is its desire to forge its own path of development.

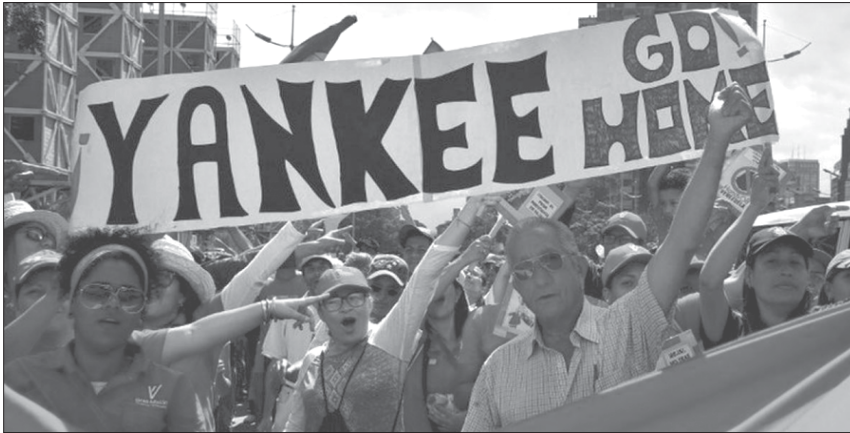
— The Editors

Visit the Third World Network website at: www.twn.my

Third World
RESURGENCE

www.twn.my

No 337/338 Jan/Feb 19 ISSN 0128-357X



The US' attempts to effect regime change in Venezuela have not cowed Venezuelans into submission. Picture shows a rally in Caracas supporting the government of President Nicolas Maduro. 13

ECOLOGY

- 2 Emissions inequality: there is a gulf between global rich and poor – *Nicholas Beuret*

HEALTH & SAFETY

- 4 Why is the US government allowing its own drug research to be monopolised for profit? – *Ryan Cooper*
6 Universal healthcare in Africa is a necessity for genuine development – *Abayomi Azikiwe*

ECONOMICS

- 9 The case for a financial transaction tax – *Kavaljit Singh*

COVER

**Containing Chavismo,
Overthrowing Maduro:
The US War Against Venezuela**

- 13 The crisis in Venezuela – *Alfred de Zayas*
15 Venezuela: The epicentre of the 'Pink Tide' and now of the

right-wing rollback – *Interview with William I Robinson*

- 18 Blackouts as a weapon for regime change – *Max Blumenthal*
20 The origins of Venezuela's economic crisis – *Greg Wilpert*
23 Getting real with the US sanctions imposed on Venezuela – *Alexander Campbell*
25 US sanctions killed over 40,000 Venezuelans since 2017
26 A ship adrift: Cuba after the Pink Tide – *Sujatha Fernandes*

WORLD AFFAIRS

- 29 Algeria's uprising: The beginning of the end of 'Le Pouvoir'? – *Tin Hinane El Kadi*
32 What is behind the economic and political crisis in Sudan? – *Rabah Omer*
34 The ousting of Bashir: Coup or popular uprising? – *Beny Gideon*
36 Africa as colonial as ever: US' 'new Africa strategy' old oil in new bottles – *Cale Holmes* and *Erica Jung*

- 39 Diego Garcia: The 'unsinkable carrier' springs a leak – *Conn Hallinan*
41 India: The Modi years – *Prabhat Patnaik*
44 Campaign to criminalise criticism of Israel: A challenge to free speech, Jewish values – *Allan C Brownfeld*
46 The anti-Semitic con – *Paul Edwards*
48 The Assange arrest is a warning from history – *John Pilger*
50 Why the prosecution of Julian Assange is troubling for press freedom – *Alexandra Ellerbeck* and *Avi Asher-Schapiro*

HUMAN RIGHTS

- 52 Feminist Palestinian law-maker free after 20 months in prison without trial

WOMEN

- 54 No revolution without feminism: Weaving together Venezuela's feminist movements – *Ricardo Vaz*

ACTIONS & ALTERNATIVES

- 57 Yellow Vest movement struggles to reinvent democracy as Macron cranks up propaganda and repression – *Richard Greeman*

VIEWPOINT

- 62 The West's irrational fear of Iran is a disaster waiting to happen – *Sayed Mohammad Marandi*

POETRY

- 64 The dictators – *Pablo Neruda*

THIRD WORLD RESURGENCE is published by the Third World Network, an international network of groups and individuals involved in efforts to bring about a greater articulation of the needs and rights of peoples in the Third World; a fair distribution of world resources; and forms of development which are ecologically sustainable and fulfil human needs.

THIRD WORLD RESURGENCE is published monthly by Third World Network, 131 Jalan Macalister, 10400 Penang, Malaysia. Tel: 60-4-2266728 Fax: 60-4-2264505. Email: twn@twnetwork.org
Printed by Jutaprint, No. 2, Solok Sungai Pinang 3, 11600 Penang, Malaysia.
Cover Design: Lim Jee Yuan
Copyright © Third World Network

Publisher and Chief Editor: S.M. Mohamed Idris; **Managing Editor:** Chee Yoke Ling; **Editors:** T Rajamoorthy, Lean Ka-Min, Evelyne Hong; **Contributing Editors:** Roberto Bissio (Uruguay), Charles Abugre (Ghana); **Staff:** Linda Ooi (Design), Lim Jee Yuan (Art Consultant), Lim Beng Tuan (Marketing), Yap Bing Nyi (Editorial)

Emissions inequality: there is a gulf between global rich and poor

American Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez created waves in Washington with the release of an outline of her Green New Deal. *Nicholas Beuret* comments.

AMERICAN Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez recently shook up environmental politics by releasing a broad outline of a Green New Deal – a plan to make the US a carbon-neutral economy in the next 10 years while reducing both poverty and inequality.

President Donald Trump responded on Twitter in typical style to what was lauded by many as a radical and necessary step: ‘I think it is very important for the Democrats to press forward with their Green New Deal. It would be great for the so-called “Carbon Footprint” to permanently eliminate all Planes, Cars, Cows, Oil, Gas & the Military – even if no other country would do the same. Brilliant!’

The Green New Deal doesn’t directly call for people to consume less meat. But the argument that solving climate change means changing our diets is widespread, and Ocasio-Cortez herself has made the link.

Yet Trump’s tweet was actually on the money in more ways than one. Environmental measures, and solutions to climate change, often appear (or are talked about) as programmes of austerity. To reduce ‘our’ impact, ‘we’ need to consume less: eat less meat, walk and not drive, fly less, buy less fast fashion, and so on.

From personal carbon footprint calculators to articles outlining how many Earths we need to sustain the consumption of the average citizen of the UK, Europe or the US, consumption is identified as the problem. Reduce consumption, runs the argument, and you solve climate change. But is ‘our’ consumption really the problem? Who is ‘we’ anyway?



An affluent suburb in California, USA. In both the US and the UK, the richest 10% produce at least five times the emissions of the poorest 50%.

Globally uneven consumption

This point has been made before, but bears repeating. Most of the world’s population produces very little in the way of either carbon emissions or broader environmental impacts. We can go further here by also looking at imported carbon emissions – that is, the emissions that come from the production of goods and services in countries such as China that are then consumed in the wealthy countries of the Global North. If we include imported emissions, the UK’s overall emissions have only marginally decreased since 1990.

When we approach carbon emissions this way, it’s clear the problem isn’t overpopulation or China, but the richest people on earth. After all, being rich, especially ultra-rich, means

being directly responsible, through either consumption or control, for the majority of the world’s carbon emissions. For instance, the charity Oxfam has found that the richest 10% of people produce half of the world’s carbon emissions, while the poorest half contribute just 10%.

Who are the richest 10%? The figure is not about nations but people – the 770 million or so people who make up the richest tenth of the world’s population. The disparity is even more startling when we look at the differences between the ultra-rich and the bottom 50% at a global level, where a typical ultra-rich individual produces 35 times the carbon emissions of someone in the bottom half, and 175 times the amount of someone in the poorest 10%. This cohort of ultra-consumers are not spread

evenly around the globe. Some 40% live in the US, around 20% live in the EU and 10% in China.

Focusing on the richest 10% is a useful way of looking at things as carbon emissions aren't only globally uneven, they are also uneven within national borders. The key detail here is the massive disparity in most wealthy countries between the emissions of rich and poor households. In both the US and the UK, the richest 10% produce at least five times the emissions of the poorest 50%. And this is just their consumption emissions (and doesn't include those emissions produced by the people who work for them – their cleaners, drivers and so on – which would further expand their impacts).

We could further compound these figures by looking at the imbalance between genders, where men tend to produce more carbon emissions than women, or racial inequality that extends even to emissions, with white people producing more than everyone else.

But that's not all. While it's relatively simple to account for the vast initial disparity – being rich after all is about having more money, more stuff, bigger super-yachts and houses – this fails to account for the entirety of the disparity. Being wealthy gives you more political influence. It means funding political parties and campaigns, having access to lawmakers



'Being wealthy... means control over major corporations, and thus power over the businesses and industries which produce most of the carbon emissions.'

and lobbyists. And it means control over major corporations, and thus power over the businesses and industries which produce most of the carbon emissions.

A problem of choice?

The problem with stories of over-consumption isn't just that consumption is far from even – the problem is that consumption is often made out to be a matter of choice. Discretionary income – the portion of your mon-

ey left over after paying for everything you need – increases the richer you get. For most people, there just isn't much left over once you've paid for the things you need. And if we then include those so-called discretionary items that really aren't anything of the sort – mobile phones, for instance – then most people really don't 'choose' to consume in any meaningful way. More than this, what they can choose from is largely determined by large transnational corporations, which are often controlled by the same ultra-wealthy people whose consumption is disproportionately the problem.

Given the problem is overwhelmingly, dare I say it, rich white men, we don't do ourselves any favours by assigning blame to whole populations – be it humanity, Americans, or even the whole Global North. Thinking this way makes it harder to identify the actual source of the problem and formulate solutions to it. That is to say, rather than signing on for yet another call for meat-free Mondays and giving up meat, we'd be better off 'eating the rich'.

Nicholas Beuret is a lecturer at the University of Essex in the UK whose work focuses on the environmental politics of climate change and resource use. This article is reproduced from The Conversation (theconversation.com).



Overconsumption is often seen as the problem at the root of climate change, but consumption patterns are highly uneven across the world's population.

Why is the US government allowing its own drug research to be monopolised for profit?

Ryan Cooper questions the rationale of the US government granting a pharmaceutical company the monopoly over the distribution of a drug which has been researched at public expense.

HOW do we eradicate HIV/AIDS? One route is a vaccine, but so far that has proved a very difficult research problem. There is an ongoing clinical trial of one promising treatment in South Africa, but unlike the smallpox or polio vaccines, it appears to provide only moderate protection. Another approach is 'pre-exposure prophylaxis', or PrEP – drugs which prevent HIV infection if taken every day. One such treatment called emtricitabine/tenofovir (better known by its brand name Truvada) works very well for this, cutting the risk of infection by up to 93%.

But there is a problem. As *The Washington Post* reports, in the United States, Truvada is monopolised by the pharmaceutical giant Gilead, which charges between \$1,600 and \$2,000 a month for the treatment (the wholesale price is \$1,414). Bizarrely, the studies proving Truvada works for PrEP were conducted and paid for almost entirely by the US federal government (the Gates Foundation also helped). The government's Centers for Disease Control (CDC) even holds a patent on this specific treatment.

Yet the government is doing nothing to prevent this outrageous price-gouging, which places a near-insurmountable barrier to getting the drug out to all who need it. It's an object lesson in the dangers of allowing private companies to profiteer off government research.

First, some background. Truvada was originally developed to treat people who already had HIV, as part of the usual suite of antiretroviral medications to slow down the virus'



The drug Truvada works well in preventing HIV infection but is monopolised by pharmaceutical giant Gilead, which charges up to \$2,000 a month for the treatment.

progress. Two government-funded scientists proved it could be used to prevent transmission – first Thomas Franks at the CDC, who demonstrated it worked with monkeys; then Robert Grant, who showed the same for humans with a grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). That work was completed around 2004.

Gilead immediately set about marketing and selling Truvada for PrEP, which brought in \$3 billion last year and \$36.2 billion since 2004. Yet because of the eye-watering price (and broader dysfunction in the American healthcare system), only about 20% of the people who need the drug are getting it, and many who do have to navigate hellish bureaucracy to get access. The extreme cost also sucks money away from other priorities, particularly for cash-strapped state Medicaid programmes.

Meanwhile, the government isn't even collecting any royalties on this cash cow it paid to develop. Why is that? Georgetown Law Professor Neel U Sukhatme told *The Washington Post* it's because government officials want to facilitate private profiteering from government research:

'Rather, NIH and CDC officials see their role as encouraging the commercialisation of government-financed discoveries, not placing curbs on them, Sukhatme said. That tends to take patent infringement lawsuits off the table. "They may not want to be in the position of suing these companies that arguably are producing valuable stuff," he said.' (*The Washington Post*)

In the first instance, it is outrageous that the government is just handing valuable research it literally paid for itself over to a private com-

pany so it can pillage American society. (A month's supply of the drug in South Africa costs about \$6.) It should demand drastic price cuts, or license its patent to a generics manufacturer. Indeed, it could just manufacture the drug itself and sell it at cost.

But that reasoning shouldn't stop just at government-funded research. A patent is itself a government creation – a monopoly enforced through the state legal system. The purpose, as the Constitution spells out, is 'to promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts'. Patents, and private pharmaceutical companies in general, are useful only insofar as they lead to the creation of broadly useful inventions and treatments.

Now, drug development is expensive, and there could be a place for private companies in the national research portfolio. But especially for vitally important treatments that are only needed for a small fraction of the population, allowing merciless monopolist price-gouging is simply untenable. For instance, Pharmasset (later purchased by Gilead) developed a genuinely revolutionary cure for hep-

atitis C, which affects perhaps 41,000 Americans in acute form. But they charge about \$84,000 for a 12-week course of treatment.

Incidentally, this kind of thing is why Americans spend roughly twice per person what peer nations in Europe do on pharmaceuticals. It's pure corporate profit.

If we want to eradicate HIV, which infects 40,000 Americans ev-

ery year (or hepatitis C, or many other diseases), the obvious best strategy is to make treatment widely available to everyone who needs it as cheaply as possible. That's how it was done with smallpox. All people who need PrEP should have ready and dirt-cheap access to Truvada.

And as demonstrated by Franks and Grant, good old government research laboratories and grants work great to keep the drug development pipeline flowing. For private research, antitrust policy like forced patent licensing to stop monopolist price-gouging could keep other prices relatively cheap – or we could set up a prize system for certain key treatments (like new antibiotics), whereby the government makes a large one-time payment to any company that develops one, after which the drug goes into the public domain.

But allow unrestrained corporate profiteering, and we'll allow these dangerous diseases to fester forever. ♦

Ryan Cooper is a national correspondent at TheWeek.com, from which this article is reproduced. His work has appeared in the Washington Monthly, The New Republic and The Washington Post.



The US government's Centers for Disease Control (CDC) holds a patent on the use of Truvada to prevent HIV infection.



Collecting medications for prescriptions at a pharmacy. Americans spend roughly twice per person what peer nations in Europe do on pharmaceuticals.

Universal healthcare in Africa is a necessity for genuine development

Making the case for a universal healthcare system in Africa, *Abayomi Azikiwe* argues that any genuine development strategy cannot be successful without the maintenance of a healthy and productive youth population, workforce and senior sectors of the population.

MANY of the news stories about African Union (AU) member states focus on the outbreak of infectious diseases, which are a direct result of the legacy of colonialism and neo-colonialism, where healthcare institutions were deliberately left underdeveloped.

A conference held in South Africa in October discussed the potential for building a universal system for providing medical care in the most industrialised state on the continent.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa convened the gathering, which brought together over 600 professionals in the medical field. The aim was to enhance the services provided to the population of a country where poverty and joblessness remain serious obstacles nearly a quarter-century after the demise of the racist apartheid system.¹

In the aftermath of the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Summit, the South African cabinet approved recommendations from the conference by drafting a National Health Insurance bill to be deliberated on within the National Assembly. Such a breakthrough in South Africa could provide a blueprint for the AU member states as a whole.

South Africa at present is undergoing a 'technical recession' characterised by stagnant wages and record unemployment along with instability in the financial sector. These problems make the imperative of revamping the healthcare system more urgent although it poses profound challenges to the state.



A hospital in South Africa. The bulk of spending on healthcare in the country is provided by the National Treasury.

Inside the country there are both private and public healthcare institutions. The more affluent middle, upper-middle and ruling classes largely rely on private physicians, clinics and hospitals.

Statistics published in 2012 indicated that the bulk of spending on healthcare is provided by the National Treasury. This reality stems from the necessity beginning in 1994, after the ruling African National Congress took power, to transform the apartheid-era system where 14 different bureaucracies had been established to cater to people based upon their racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Such a system left the majority African and Black (Asian and mixed race) population groups at an extreme disadvantage. Life expectancy rates were highly racialised, with the African people suffering from premature and unnecessary deaths.

Even today those who can afford the cost utilise private health insurance plans. Conversely the low-wage working class, rural proletarians and jobless people are dependent upon the state for the financial underwriting of their healthcare needs.

South Africa is not alone in the search for more efficient and effective healthcare delivery systems.

Former Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete addressed this issue within the context of the broader global need for universal health coverage.

Kikwete wrote in an editorial published on 5 November: 'It has been three years since world leaders committed to one of the boldest goals ever set in global public health: achieving universal health coverage by 2030. Achieving this objective will mean that every person in every community has access to affordable care, both to prevent them from falling ill and to treat them when they do.'²

The former leader went on by recognising: 'The stakes are simply too high not to deliver on this promise. We cannot eradicate poverty, protect people from pandemics, advance gender equality, or achieve any of the other 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) without accelerating progress toward universal health coverage.'

Within this essay Kikwete emphasised the need to guarantee primary care. Providing primary care to all citizens and residents will address 80% of the problems that could potentially arise from the absence of such services.

President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya is launching a pilot programme to provide universal health coverage to 3.2 million people in four counties. The counties of Kisumu, Nyeri, Machakos and Isiolo are leading the country in communicable and infectious diseases. Kenyatta has given approval for the UHC intergovernmental committee to proceed in developing Memoranda of Understanding between the county administrations and the Ministry of Health. The programme is part of a broader national plan to provide free healthcare to all in need of it in Kenya.

High-profile diseases need immediate attention

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a recent outbreak of the Ebola virus disease (EVD) has presented another major healthcare challenge to this already troubled state. EVD was first documented in



In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a recent outbreak of the Ebola virus disease has presented another major healthcare challenge to this already troubled state.

the DRC in the mid-1970s. Recurrent pandemics have occurred over the previous four decades.

The worst EVD pandemic took place in 2014-15 in the West African nations of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia where tens of thousands were sickened and over 11,000 died. The extent of the West African outbreak prompted international interventions from the United Nations World Health Organisation (WHO), the United States military and hundreds of healthcare professionals from Cuba.

An experimental vaccine has been introduced in the DRC in an effort to contain and halt the spread of the virulent strain of this viral haemorrhagic fever. Since 1 August, there have been 300 confirmed and probable cases of Ebola in the North Kivu and Ituri provinces of the DRC. Of these, 186 people have died, including in 151 confirmed cases and 35 probable cases.

Among other infectious diseases, HIV/AIDS has remained a serious problem in Africa for over three decades. The overwhelming majority of people contracting, living with and dying from HIV/AIDS are in the sub-Saharan regions of Africa.

Of the 34 million HIV-positive persons in the world, 69% are in Af-

rica. It is estimated that 23.8 million people on the continent are infected with HIV. Some 91% of children living with HIV are in Africa, which continues to threaten the well-being of successive generations.

Over a million people die from AIDS every year in Africa, out of the overall 1.7 million who perish due to the disease around the world. Fifty-nine percent of those infected with HIV in Africa are women.

Although many more people are undergoing treatment through the taking of antiretroviral drugs, it is estimated that only half of HIV-positive patients in Africa have access to the medications. As a direct result of the neo-colonial system, which fosters the contraction and lack of adequate treatment for HIV/AIDS, average life expectancy in sub-Saharan Africa is 54.4 years. Research studies suggest that due to the mortality rates related to HIV/AIDS, the average life expectancy in some countries on the continent is as low as 49 years.³

Cholera is another disease which has had a devastating impact in some African states. The ailment is contracted through the consumption of contaminated water. A cholera epidemic erupted last year in the Southern African state of Zimbabwe, requiring the declaration of a health

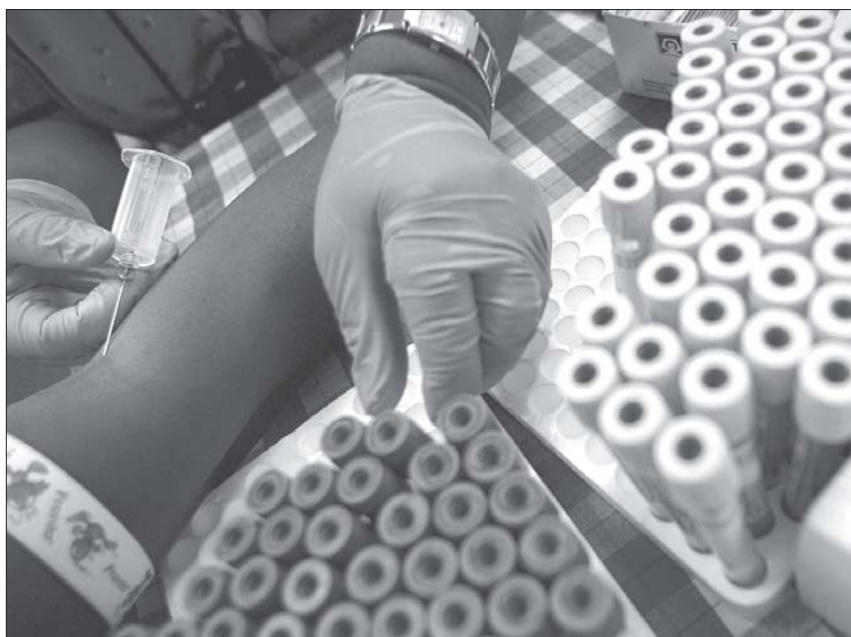
emergency.

WHO said in a report issued in October: 'The cholera outbreak in Harare was declared by the Ministry of Health and Child Care of Zimbabwe on 6 September 2018 and notified to WHO on the same day. As of 3 October 2018, 8,535 cumulative cases, including 163 laboratory-confirmed cases, and 50 deaths have been reported (case fatality rate: 0.6%). Of these 8,535 cases, 98% (8,341 cases) were reported from the densely populated capital Harare. The most affected suburbs in Harare are Glen View and Budiriro. Of the 8,340 cases for which age is known, the majority (56%) are aged between five and 35 years old. Males and females have been equally affected by the outbreak. From 4 September through 3 October, the majority of deaths were reported from health care institutions.'⁴

Nonetheless, Zimbabwe was not the only country impacted in 2018. In the West African state of Niger, there were 3,692 cases of cholera reported in July resulting in 68 deaths. Algeria reported a cholera outbreak in August with at least two deaths. Other African countries where there were problems just in 2018 alone included Cameroon, Somalia, the DRC, Mozambique and Tanzania.⁵

Ebola, HIV/AIDS and cholera are diseases which trigger health alerts on national and international levels. However, other, chronic ailments such as hypertension, heart disease, kidney failure, cancer, malnutrition, alcoholism, drug addiction and diabetes serve to lessen the average life expectancy as well as drain the productive capacity of African societies.

This glimpse into the healthcare crisis in AU member states reveals the desperate need for a UHC system across the continent. Even though there has been substantial economic growth in various nations and regions of Africa over the previous two decades, these levels of expansion can in no way be considered sustainable based upon the continuing dependency of the region on the trade in energy resources, strategic minerals and



A nurse at a clinic in South Africa draws blood from a patient for an HIV test. Of the 34 million HIV-positive persons in the world, 69% are in Africa.

agricultural products. In fact the re-emergence of the African debt quagmire in recent years is directly linked to the decline in commodity prices on the global market, which is still dominated by the Western imperialist countries.

Moreover, the fragility of neo-colonial dominated states is reflected in the often-precarious social positions of healthcare professionals. Leading African states such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya and Nigeria have experienced low salaries for nurses, physicians and medical researchers. Many of these healthcare workers have engaged in strikes demanding the regular payment of salaries, higher wages and improved conditions of employment. Many professionals operating in the medical field have been recruited to work in the capitalist countries of Europe and North America, further hampering the ability of AU member states to address the monumental healthcare problems on the continent.

As discussed at the beginning of this article, South Africa provides a clear example of the burden facing the public sector with regard to providing medical services for the working class and impoverished. Other governments in Africa are facing similar situations, which necessitate the

strengthening of state structures. Private for-profit healthcare schemes can and do have a role to play. Nevertheless, as is illustrated in the United States, millions will go without any medical insurance coverage if profit-making is allowed to determine how healthcare systems are administered.

The healthcare crisis in Africa is inextricably connected to the struggle against the legacy of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Any genuine development strategy cannot be successful without the maintenance of a healthy and productive youth population, workforce and senior sectors of the population. ♦

Abayomi Azikiwe is Editor at Pan-African News Wire. This article is reproduced from Pambazuka News (www.pambazuka.org).

Notes

1. <https://allafrica.com/stories/201811050716.html>
2. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/keys-to-universal-health-coverage-by-jakaya-kikwete-2018-11>
3. <https://www.dosomething.org/us/facts/11-facts-about-hiv-africa>
4. <http://www.who.int/csr/don/05-october-2018-cholera-zimbabwe/en/>
5. <http://www.who.int/csr/don/archive/disease/cholera/en/>

The case for a financial transaction tax

There has been a revival of interest in a financial transaction tax, especially in the US where several Democratic Party lawmakers have even introduced bills in Congress to realise this tax. For all this, however, there is still much confusion about this tax.

Kavaljit Singh attempts to add some clarity in a discussion of this tax.

THE financial transaction tax (FTT) is an issue that never goes away from the public agenda completely. It keeps coming back to the policy and political discussions in different forms across the world. Currently, the idea of an FTT is gaining popularity within the Democratic Party of the United States as a policy tool to curb excessive speculation and high-frequency trading that destabilises markets, and to generate a significant amount of revenue to finance social programmes such as free college tuition.

On 5 March, Democrats in both houses of the US Congress introduced bills to impose an FTT in the US. Senator Brian Schatz of Hawaii introduced a bill titled 'The Wall Street Tax Act of 2019'¹ in the Senate, while Representative Peter DeFazio of Oregon introduced a companion bill in the House of Representatives. The bill proposes a 0.1% tax (i.e., 10 cents on every \$100 financial transaction) on stocks, bonds, foreign exchange, derivatives and other financial assets traded in the US markets. Initial public offerings (IPOs) and short-term debt of fewer than 100 days would be exempted from the proposed FTT. Further, the proposed tax would apply to the actual payment for derivatives contracts between the seller and the buyer, rather than to the notional value of the contracts.

The bills are co-sponsored by more than a dozen lawmakers (including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Kirsten Gillibrand) from the House and Senate. Besides, labour unions, civil society groups and progressive economists have also supported the idea of an FTT.

The likelihood of the bill becoming



The trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange. The potential revenue that could be raised with a financial transaction tax in the US is very large because more than \$1 trillion in stocks and bonds is traded each business day in its financial markets.

ing law in 2019 seems remote, however, because not a single Republican in either chamber of Congress has extended support. Moreover, there is strong resistance from the powerful financial lobbyists. Despite these obstacles, the FTT may become a part of progressive tax ideas with the approach of the 2020 presidential and congressional campaigns. Some presidential candidates – including Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren – have supported versions of an FTT in the recent past.

The history of financial transaction taxes

Contrary to popular perception, financial transaction taxes are not new. Many countries including the US, the UK, Australia, Belgium, France, India, Italy, Sweden and Taiwan have already implemented similar taxes on a variety of financial transactions with mixed outcomes.

In the UK, investors pay a stamp duty reserve tax of 0.5% on the pur-

chase price of shares of a company incorporated in the UK or shares of a foreign company that has a UK share register.

From 1914 to 1965, a federal FTT was levied on sales and transfers of stock in the US. At present, the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) levies a modest 'Section 31 fee' on stock transactions, and the proceeds are used to fund the agency's regulatory costs. In 2018, about \$2 billion was collected by the SEC from this fee.

In 1984, Sweden introduced a tax of 1% on stock transactions. The tax was doubled in 1986, and it was extended to fixed-income securities and derivatives in 1989, albeit at lower rates. In 1991, the tax was abolished. There is a broad consensus in the economic literature that the Swedish FTT was a failure. There are three key reasons why it failed. Firstly, the tax rates on stocks and some derivatives transactions were too high. Secondly, the tax was poorly designed as it was levied only on registered Swedish bro-

kerage services, which encouraged foreign investors to avoid the tax by moving their trading in Swedish stocks to non-Swedish brokers based in London. As a result, more than half of the equity trading volume migrated from Sweden to London. Thirdly, some fixed-income securities were exempted from the FTT due to its narrow scope. Nevertheless, there are many important lessons to be learnt from Sweden's failed experience with the FTT in the 1980s.

The potential revenue

There is no denying that the revenue potential of any financial transaction tax would depend on its specific design. However, the potential revenue that could be raised with an FTT is very large in the US because more than \$1 trillion in stocks and bonds is traded on each business day in its financial markets.

As several FTT proposals have been floated in the US in recent years, the revenue potential estimates vary depending on the design of the FTT and modelling assumptions. Also, it is difficult to predict precisely how the behaviour of financial market participants will change due to a small transaction tax. Besides, actual revenue collections can fall short of the estimates if market conditions deteriorate.

Nevertheless, most estimates show that an FTT in the US could raise between \$35 billion and \$100 billion annually. These are not trivial amounts. A recent Congressional Budget Office report² calculated that a 0.1% tax on the value of the securities and 0.1% tax on payments flows under derivatives would increase revenues by \$777 billion over 10 years (2019-28), based on an estimate by the staff of the Joint Committee on Taxation. This estimate takes into account offsets in income and payroll tax revenues.

Apart from reducing the federal budget deficit, part of the proceeds of an FTT could be used to fund the Green New Deal (proposed recently by Congressional Democrats), health-care and other welfare programmes.



The European Commission headquarters in Brussels. The Commission in 2011 proposed an EU financial transaction tax that would apply to all financial transactions except bank loans and primary markets.

Further, the FTT is a progressive way to generate tax revenues as the top 10% of American households own 84% of all stocks. Therefore, anyone concerned about the growing income and wealth inequality in the US should welcome the FTT as it would be progressive in nature.

Will the FTT drive trading away from the US to FTT-free jurisdictions? Not necessarily. An FTT in the US may encourage other countries to adopt a similar tax, thereby reducing the scope of tax avoidance. As discussed below, some European Union member states are supportive of implementing an FTT within the bloc. If both the US and the EU agree on tax harmonisation, international co-operation on the FTT is also feasible in the long run.

Taxing the bloated financial sector

It is widely acknowledged that the financial sector in the US has remained undertaxed despite achieving unprecedented growth in the last three decades. For instance, most financial services are exempted from value-added tax (VAT) in the US. The same is the case with other developed countries. At its peak in 2007, the financial sector contributed 8.3% to the US gross domestic product (GDP) and accounted for 41% of total corporate profits. Eleven years later, Wall Street profits are heading back to pre-crisis levels.

Strange as it may sound, too much finance could be bad for the economy, as a growing body of economic literature shows that financial development benefits the economy only up to an optimal point, beyond which the costs begin to rise.³

While analysing the relationship between financial development and growth, an International Monetary Fund (IMF) staff discussion note stated that 'the effect of financial development on economic growth is bell-shaped: it weakens at higher levels of financial development'.⁴

On whether the real economy has benefited from the recent growth of the financial sector, Adair Turner, the then chairman of the Financial Services Authority of the UK, wrote in 2010: 'There is no clear evidence that the growth in the scale and complexity of the financial system in the rich developed world over the last 20 to 30 years has driven increased growth or stability, and it is possible for financial activity to extract rents from the real economy rather than to deliver economy value'.⁵

Excessive finance can not only increase the frequency of boom-bust cycles, thereby undermining financial stability, but it can also divert resources, talent and human capital from productive sectors of the economy to the financial sector.

The 2008 financial crisis and the ensuing bank bailouts have clearly shown that a bloated financial sector can impose significant costs on the

broader economy and society. Hence there is a strong rationale for seeking a 'fair and substantial contribution' from the financial sector to the fiscal costs of bank bailouts.

The 2008 crisis has also raised legitimate questions about the benefits of an oversized financial industry in the US. There is a growing consensus that a stable and well-regulated financial sector is vital for the achievement of long-term sustainable economic growth and developmental objectives. Post-crisis, there has been a great deal of discussion on curbing short-term speculative trading in the US financial markets. In this context, a financial transaction tax could be a part of the policy toolkit to dampen the unproductive parts of the financial sector.

Curbing high-frequency trading

Another key objective of a financial transaction tax is to curb high-frequency trading of doubtful social value.

In the last two decades, the landscape of stock market trading has changed drastically after high-frequency trading (HFT) came into vogue during the 2000s. On Wall Street, the high-frequency traders rely on high-speed connections to trading platforms, use high-powered computers to execute trading orders, and take very short-term positions.

These traders belong to a broader group called algorithmic traders. Algorithmic trading is based on a technology-driven, pre-programmed mathematical model that allows execution of trading orders at a very high speed (without human intervention) in order to benefit from the smallest movement in the prices of stocks, commodities and currencies. Computers execute the buy or sell orders not in seconds but microseconds. The high-frequency traders take advantage of tiny differences in prices to book profits at the expense of retail investors with slower execution speeds.

Fears have been expressed that HFT could be a source of market in-

stability as witnessed during the 2010 'flash crash' when a rogue algorithm sparked a sudden 9% fall in the Dow Jones index and wiped out nearly \$1 trillion in market value within a few minutes. There are also legitimate concerns that the high trading volumes generated by HFT firms can push prices away from fundamental values.

The supporters of HFT often highlight its important role as providers of liquidity. However, that role is increasingly being questioned by experts in the light of evidence which shows that high-frequency traders can withdraw from their market-making role if the volatility rises abruptly or if they detect markets are becoming more one-sided.

As most high-frequency traders employ similar algorithms and adopt similar strategies, a simultaneous withdrawal by these traders can pose a systemic risk to the entire market, as happened during the flash crash. As pointed out by Nikolaos Panigirtzoglou of JPMorgan: 'A simultaneous withdrawal by HFTs not only amplifies the initial market move, but also creates step changes or gapping markets as liquidity provision gets impaired and quotes are withdrawn.'⁶

In a relevant research paper, Didier Sornette and Susanne von der Becke noted that 'HFT provides liquidity in good times when it is perhaps least needed and takes liquidity away when it is most needed, thereby contributing rather than mitigating instability.'⁷

After the 2010 flash crash, regulatory authorities in the US and Europe have introduced new measures (such as circuit breakers) to regulate the harmful HFT. A financial transaction tax could also complement such regulatory measures to rein in HFT in the US markets. An FTT will make transactions with a shorter time horizon costlier, hence curbing aggressive short-term trading that benefits high-frequency traders more than ordinary investors.

What is good for high-frequency traders is not necessarily good for ordinary investors.

Europe leads the way

In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, the idea of introducing a financial transaction tax has gained momentum in Europe. After the leaders of the G20 major economies failed to endorse an FTT for raising new resources for poor countries, the European Commission in 2011 proposed an EU financial transaction tax that would apply to all financial transactions except bank loans and primary markets. The base of the proposed EU FTT is very broad, covering a wide range of financial instruments and transactions such as securities, derivatives, repos and money market instruments. Under this proposal, the trading of shares and bonds would be taxed at a rate of 0.1% while derivative contracts would be taxed at 0.01%. Further, the FTT would have to be paid if one party to the transaction is located in the EU.

The proposed tax was supposed to be launched in January 2014 but it got postponed several times due to lack of unanimity among EU member states on how it should be implemented. In 2013, an attempt was made to introduce an FTT in 11 member states through the instrument of 'enhanced cooperation'. After that, the UK's 2016 referendum to leave the European bloc has further delayed this process.

It is important to note that some member states such as France, Belgium, Italy and Greece have already introduced a tax on financial transactions within their jurisdictions. France introduced an FTT on equities in August 2012 while Italy introduced it in March 2013. These countries have confirmed their commitment to introducing an EU-wide FTT despite strong opposition from European financial firms and some member states such as the UK and Sweden.

In the coming years, the FTT is likely to remain on the EU agenda even though the bloc is currently grappling with the potential Brexit fallout.

Financial transaction taxes in India: Alive and kicking

India introduced a securities

transaction tax (STT) on stock market transactions in 2004 and, based on its success, a commodity transaction tax (CTT) on trading of non-agricultural commodity futures contracts in 2013. From 2018 onwards, the CTT has also been imposed on commodity options contracts which were introduced in the Indian markets. The STT rate varies with the type of transaction and security.

In a recent op-ed in the *Financial Times*, Kirsten Wegner, chief executive of Modern Markets Initiative, an advocacy group sponsored by high-frequency traders, claimed that India's experiment with the FTT had failed badly.⁸

Contrary to Wegner's assertion, financial transaction taxes are alive and kicking in India. From a revenue generation perspective, the STT has been a success story, with average collection of \$1 billion for the past eight fiscal years. During 2017-18, the STT collection touched Rs.118 billion (\$1.6 billion), not a trivial amount in a country with a narrow tax base.

The Indian experience shows that both transaction taxes are an efficient instrument of tax collection as the tax is collected by the exchanges which then pay it to the exchequer, thereby overcoming cumbersome bureaucratic processes.

Some of the concerns raised by the critics of India's financial transaction taxes have not yet materialised in the Indian markets. The critics had anticipated a lower trading volume would reduce liquidity, and thereby market quality. There is no evidence to suggest that the transaction taxes have triggered a liquidity squeeze in the Indian markets.

Wegner refers to a fall in trading volume in the Indian commodity markets during 2013-14 and puts the blame solely on the CTT. There is no denying that the commodity trading volume dropped during that period, but the principal reason behind the drop was a Rs.6 billion payment scam that broke out at National Spot Exchange Limited in July 2013, not the CTT of 0.01% as argued by Wegner. In this scam, some 200 big commod-

ity brokers were alleged to have colluded with the exchange to defraud investors. Since 2017, trading volumes and liquidity at the Indian commodity exchanges have gone up.

Besides broadening the taxation of the financial sector, these taxes can enable Indian authorities to trace certain transactions that undermine market integrity. The transaction taxes could be particularly valuable to the authorities as alternative mechanisms to track the flow of illicit money into the Indian financial markets are weak. Besides, a centralised database of money flows helps fill the large information gaps about the real ownership of financial assets.

Is the FTT a silver bullet?

Of course, an FTT is not a panacea to all the ills plaguing Wall Street but its potential to raise substantial tax revenues and to curb high-frequency trading of doubtful social value cannot be overlooked.

The success of an FTT in the US would largely depend on the design of the tax. The tax should be levied widely, covering a wide range of financial instruments, transactions and institutions to prevent tax avoidance. The US authorities need to design the FTT in a manner that maximises revenue and minimises distortions. Achieving multiple policy objectives through an FTT will always be a balancing act. To make it effective and responsive, the proposed FTT may need additional fine-tuning as nowadays market conditions change rapidly.

The US is in an advantageous position as it can learn from different countries' experiences (both positive and negative) with an FTT. It can design the proposed tax based on some successful examples while avoiding the design flaws of the Swedish FTT.

If carefully designed, and used in conjunction with other regulatory measures, an FTT has the potential to rein in the casino mentality and short-termism that characterise the US financial markets. ♦

Kavaljit Singh is Director of Madhyam, a New Delhi-based non-profit policy research institute. The above is reproduced from

Madhyam Briefing Paper No. 24 (23 March 2019). The full paper with illustrations is available at www.madhyam.org.in.

Notes

1. The text of the bill is available at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/647/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22congressId%3A116+AND+billStatus%3A%5C%22Introduced%5C%22%22%5D%7D>.
2. Congressional Budget Office, 'Budget Options: Impose a Tax on Financial Transactions', 13 December 2018. Available at <https://www.cbo.gov/budget-options/2018/54823>.
3. See, for instance, Stephen G Cecchetti and Enise Kharroubi, 'Reassessing the Impact of Finance on Growth', BIS Working Paper No. 381, Bank for International Settlements, July 2012; Stephen G Cecchetti and Enise Kharroubi, 'Why Does Financial Sector Growth Crowd Out Real Economic Growth?', BIS Working Paper No. 490, Bank for International Settlements, February 2015; and Ratna Sahay et al., 'Rethinking Financial Deepening: Stability and Growth in Emerging Markets', IMF Staff Discussion Notes 15/08, International Monetary Fund, 2015.
4. Sahay et al., op. cit., p. 5.
5. Adair Turner, 'What Do Banks Do? Why Do Credit Booms and Busts Occur and What Can Public Policy Do About It?', in *The Future of Finance: The LSE Report*, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2010. Available at <https://harr123et.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/futureoffinance5.pdf>.
6. Quoted in Tyler Durden, 'JPM Explains How HFTs Caused Friday's Sterling Flash Crash', Zero Hedge, 10 September 2016. Available at <https://www.zerohedge.com/news/2016-10-09/jpm-explains-how-hfts-caused-fridays-sterling-flash-crash>.
7. Didier Sornette and Susanne von der Becke, 'Crashes and High Frequency Trading', Swiss Finance Institute Research Paper No. 11-63, August 2011. Available at <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1976249>.
8. Kirsten Wegner, 'US Financial Transaction Tax Would Put Unfair Burden on Savers', *Financial Times*, 11 March 2019. Available at <https://www.ft.com/content/5a0c9816-41b9-11e9-9499-290979c9807a>.

The crisis in Venezuela

A former UN human rights rapporteur who led a mission to Venezuela in 2017 contends that the country's crisis is the result of the cumulative impacts of 20 years of internal and external war, financial blockade and sanctions imposed by the US.

Alfred de Zayas

MY mission to Venezuela in November/December 2017 was the first by a United Nations rapporteur in 21 years. It was intended to open the door to the visit of other rapporteurs and to explore ways to help the Venezuelan people overcome the protracted economic and institutional crisis.

In preparation for the mission, I studied all pertinent reports by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Provea, Fundalatin, Grupo Sures, Red Nacional de Derechos Humanos, etc.

During the mission, thanks to the professionalism of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), I was able to meet with members of the opposition, National Assembly, chamber of commerce, churches, professors, students, representatives of the Organisation of American States (OAS), the Carter Center, victims of violence, and civil society.

Since my mother tongue is Spanish, it was easy to interrelate with Venezuelans, walk the streets, visit the supermarkets. I learnt about the scarcity of foods and medicines, black markets, and smuggling of subsidised petrol, foods and medicines into neighbouring countries.

The situation did not reach and still does not reach the threshold of a 'humanitarian crisis' as we know from Gaza, Yemen, Syria, Sudan, Haiti, etc.

A major obstacle to solving the problems was the polarisation of the population and the dearth of confidence-building measures.

I recognised that the government needed advisory services and technical assistance from UN agencies in order to carry out needed economic and institutional reforms. I convened



The writer (left) meeting Venezuela's Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza (centre) during his 2017 mission to the country as a UN rights rapporteur.

a meeting with UN agencies in order to explore concrete strategies.

In a six-page confidential memorandum to the government and in my report to the UN Human Rights Council, I formulated constructive recommendations, some of which were quickly put into effect.

I had requested the release of 23 detainees; 80 were released on 23 December 2017, more in the course of 2018.

UN agencies, in particular the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the UN Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), noticeably intensified their assistance, especially to manage the impacts of the sanctions.

Following my visit, I continued to follow developments and study documentation, statistics and arguments from all sides.

My diagnosis: The crisis is not caused by the ideological 'failure of socialism as an economic model' (socialism has not failed in Norway, Sweden, China), but by concrete and palpable causes, the dramatic fall in the price of crude oil, the over-dependence on exports, the failure to diversify the economy, an excess of ideo-

logues and relative scarcity of technocrats in government.

Most importantly, the crisis is the result of the cumulative impacts of 20 years of internal and external economic war, financial blockade and sanctions.

The mainstream narrative attributes the crisis to incompetence and corruption, but these also plague most Latin American countries. Besides, the level of corruption in Venezuela in the 1980s and 1990s was higher and Hugo Chavez won the 1998 elections on a wave of disgust at the corruption of the neoliberal governments.

I spent two hours with the current Attorney-General in Caracas, from whom I received ample documentation on the government's vigorous anti-corruption campaign, investigations and ongoing prosecutions.

US efforts to topple Chavez started early, and the CIA cooperated with the Venezuelan oligarchy in the failed coup against Chavez on 11/12 April 2002. The 48-hour President Pedro Carmona had promptly issued a decree doing away with 49 pieces of social legislation, suspending the Su-



Oil facilities on Venezuela's Lake Maracaibo. "Human rights" has nothing to do with the US' Venezuela policy. As it was in Iraq 2003 and Libya 2011, it is OIL.'

preme Court, the Chavez National Assembly, dismissing governors, etc. Although there is nothing more undemocratic than a coup, Carmona and the US media spoke of 'restoring democracy' in Venezuela.

Back in 1970, when Salvador Allende was democratically elected President of Chile, US President Richard Nixon called in his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and told him that the US would not tolerate an alternative socio-economic system in Latin America and that the US would make the Chilean economy 'scream'. When in spite of sanctions the Allende government proved resil-

ient, it was necessary to use more muscle, and General Augusto Pinochet carried out the coup that ushered in 17 years of 'democracy' – and torture – in Chile.

As we know from the studies of Stephen Kinzer and William Blum, US military and CIA interventions in Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Panama, Nicaragua, Paraguay etc. have cost tens of thousands of lives and brought untold misery to millions of Latin Americans.

'Human rights' has nothing to do with the US' Venezuela policy. As it was in Iraq 2003 and Libya 2011, it

is OIL. The US covets the largest oil reserves in the world, as well as the third largest reserves in gold and coltan. If Maduro is toppled, it will be a bonanza for US investors and transnational corporations.

What is sad is that some countries ostensibly committed to democracy, the rule of law and human rights are supporting the sanctions and the Guaido coup. We observe a Machiavellian, cynical instrumentalisation of human rights and humanitarian aid for purely geopolitical reasons.

A solution to the crisis depends on direct dialogue between the opposition and the government. Such dialogue already took place in 2016-18. Former Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero hosted these talks and arrived at a reasonable accord. On the day of signature, 6 February 2018, Julio Borges, the leader of the opposition, refused to sign.

This augurs badly for any kind of international mediation by the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet or by Mexico and Uruguay in the context of the Montevideo mechanism.

History shows us that sanctions kill, and when the level of killing reaches a certain threshold, sanctions become a crime against humanity. This is a worthy challenge for the International Criminal Court.

What Venezuela needs is an end to sanctions and interference in its internal affairs, an end to the violations of Articles 1-2 of the UN Charter and of Articles 3, 19 and 20 of the OAS Charter by the US and its 'coalition'.

Venezuela needs international solidarity and respect of its sovereignty. – IPS



The CIA cooperated with the Venezuelan oligarchy in the failed coup against President Hugo Chavez in April 2002. Picture shows Chavez supporters surrounding the presidential palace during the coup, demanding he be reinstated in office.

Alfred-Maurice de Zayas (USA, Switzerland) is Professor of Law at the Geneva School of Diplomacy. He is a former UN Independent Expert on the Promotion of a Democratic and Equitable International Order, former Secretary of the UN Human Rights Committee, and former Chief of the Petitions Department at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. He is the author of nine books and numerous scholarly articles. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of Inter Press Service (IPS).

Venezuela: The epicentre of the ‘Pink Tide’ and now of the right-wing rollback

The attempt to roll back Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution must be seen as part of a determined effort to pry open all economies to transnational capital – it’s about access, explains sociologist of globalisation *William I Robinson* in a February interview with Greg Wilpert from The Real News Network. The transcript of the interview is reproduced below.

GREG WILPERT: It’s The Real News Network, and I’m Greg Wilpert, coming to you from Baltimore.

On Monday [18 February], US President Donald Trump held an important rally in Miami, Florida, where he reiterated his pressure on Venezuela, giving the Maduro government the choice between resigning and facing a coup or US military intervention. He also promised that socialism, more generally, would soon come to an end in the Western Hemisphere, naming Cuba and Nicaragua as the next governments in the region to fall. Here’s an excerpt of his speech.

DONALD TRUMP: *The days of socialism and communism are numbered not only in Venezuela, but in Nicaragua, and in Cuba, as well. And one day soon, with God’s help, we are going to see what the people will do in Caracas, and Managua, and Havana. And when Venezuela is free, and Cuba is free, and Nicaragua is free, this will become the first free hemisphere in all of human history.*

GREG WILPERT: Indeed, there has been a significant rollback of leftist or centre-left governments in Latin America over the past 10 years, beginning with the coup in Honduras against Manuel Zelaya in 2009, the legislative coup against Fernando Lugo in Paraguay in 2012, the electoral defeat of the Peronists in Argentina in 2014, and of course the legislative coup against Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the imprisonment of presidential frontrunner Lula da Silva

in Brazil last year.

Is there a pattern, and are there larger forces at work behind the reversal of the so-called Pink Tide in Latin America? Joining me to discuss this issue is William I. Robinson. William is professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He has written several books on the political economy of Latin America. His most recent book is *Into the Tempest: Essays on the New Global Capitalism*, which just came out recently. Thanks for joining us today, Bill.

WILLIAM ROBINSON: Thanks for having me on.

GREG WILPERT: So over the course of your books and articles, you make an overall argument about how the governments of Latin America, including the progressive or centre-left ones, did more or less the same thing actually. They integrated their respective economies more tightly into the global economy. If that’s the case, give us some examples of what exactly these progressive or left-of-centre governments did while they were in office.

WILLIAM ROBINSON: Right. Well, I mean, obviously, US intervention played a key role in the resurgence of the right politically in Latin America, as it played a key role in



A protest against the government of President Nicolas Maduro. ‘The very epicentre of the turn to the left in Latin America was always the Venezuelan revolution. And therefore, the epicentre of counter-revolution... has always been the destruction of the Venezuelan revolution.’

reversing the Pink Tide. But there’s a larger structural story that you’re asking me to speak about, and that is what I term the structural power of transnational capital over the direct power of states, or the straitjacket of global capitalism. Now let me unpack that.

The Pink Tide governments had a model, and their model was not only not to break with global capitalism, but as you pointed out, to deepen their economies’ integration into the new circuits of global capitalism. And I’ve been critiquing this and plenty of other people have as well.

In all of the Pink Tide countries, including in the most radical experiments in Venezuela and in Bolivia, the governments deepened the dependence on extractivism. Venezuela, over the last 20 years, became more, not less, dependent on oil exports. In Argentina, in Brazil, for that matter in Bolivia, in Uruguay, there was a vast expansion of soy plantations to

export to the global economy. And these were not small farmers. We're talking about giant transnational agribusiness being invited in and scooping up millions of acres of land which displaced small producers. And then you have the increased [dependence] in Bolivia and Ecuador on gas and oil exports. And then you have, in other countries, increasing dependence on mining. So you see this extractivism intensified in the Pink Tide governments.

And more of this extractivism was based on an alliance with what I call the transnational capitalist class, with transnational corporations. Really, the Pink Tide did not threaten the fundamental interests of transnational capital in Latin America. What instead was the model is that the Pink Tide governments captured surpluses generated by this extractivism and then redistributed those surpluses through social programmes. And as long as prices for these commodities, such as oil, such as soy, were booming, and that boom took place from the early 2000s up until about 2012-13 – it started to deteriorate after the financial collapse of 2008, but it wasn't until 2013-14 that you really felt the impact of the deterioration of those prices.

So it's true that the Pink Tide governments lowered poverty levels and improved health and improved education, but all of that was dependent on high commodity prices. There were no structural changes in the political economy of the Pink Tide countries. Now I want to add another point onto this, and that is that if you have the Pink Tide governments, the Pink Tide countries, becoming more and more dependent on global commodities and financial markets ... that means that the internal agents in Brazil and Argentina, in Venezuela and Bolivia and so forth, the internal agents of these global commodities and global capital markets inevitably are going to have more and more of an influence on state policies and on the whole direction of the political and economic system in these countries. So at a certain moment when the crisis comes and commodity prices

fall, these agents now move onto the offensive. And so, that's the resurgence of the far right.

And if I can make one other point, I know this is a long explanation, but this is the larger background that gets lost in the headlines, such as Trump's speech in Miami the other day. And that is that where we are right now in 2019, well global capitalism is in deep crisis. And summarising very quickly, there's two dimensions. Global capitalism is losing hegemonic legitimacy everywhere. In part, Trump is critiquing so-called socialism in Latin America because he's scared that socialism is gaining popularity in the United States. So there's a loss of legitimacy in hegemony. But the more significant dimension of the global crisis we're in right now is what I call the structural crisis of over-accumulation, meaning the global economy can't expand anymore because there's so much inequality. No one can consume. One percent of the world's population has 50% of the world's wealth. The 23% with affluence has 95% of the world's wealth. So there's this crisis of stagnation and accumulation in the global economy...

In response to that crisis, the system led by the US state, the US government and the transnational capitalist class is seeking to push forward expansion wherever it can, and that includes expansion through wars, conflict and militarisation, it includes expansion through a new round of violent dispossession of peasants, and it includes expansion through a further plunder of the state. And those three dimensions of expansion in the face of stagnation and over-accumulation are most evident in Latin America. Crystal-clear evidence in Venezuela, Guatemala, with Bolsonaro and the Amazon, Colombia. Everywhere you go, this violent new round of expansion the system is trying to undertake really explains a lot of this intensified assault on what remains of the Pink Tide.

GREG WILPERT: I don't know if we're going to have time to get into this, but actually, at one point I would actually question

what these governments could have done differently perhaps. And here I would actually want to point specifically to the case of Venezuela, which I'm most familiar with. Because in the case of Venezuela, they actually did invest billions and billions of dollars in trying to diversify the economy, and this has happened before, this was actually a second cycle of trying to do that. Back in the 1970s they made that effort as well and it failed. And there were some very interesting analyses written back then by Fernando Coronil and by Terry Lynn Karl about why those efforts failed. And I would argue that basically for the same reasons that they failed back then, they failed during the Chavez period. And so, when the commodity boom ended, the economy basically collapsed as a result.

Now, I'm wondering, what would have been the alternative if they really did try to diversify, at least in the Venezuelan case? Now, I can't really speak for the other cases so well. But what could they have done differently from your perspective?

WILLIAM ROBINSON: Sure. Let me respond to that. But let me first say that in part we can critique the governments, but we need to expand that critique. First, as I've already mentioned, we need to see that of course no single country in the world, but especially not Venezuela, not Bolivia, controls these global markets, global oil markets and so forth. But to ask what these governments could have done differently is also to ask: what are the internal political and social processes and class and social forces which made up these governments and which pushed policies in one or another direction?

So one of the problems I see with the left project in which politics is linked to economics is that the model was certainly to try and subordinate the social movements to the state's policies. And those state policies are being dictated by global markets, global financial commodity markets.

So the leftist political model was

also a problem for the economy, because the only model that's viable for revolution, or even for just radical progressive change in the 21st century, is, in my view, the complete autonomy of social movements to be able to press for the interests of the popular classes from below to counter the pressure of transnational capital and elites from above. And that was not the model, and this brought about a lot of conflict in Ecuador and Bolivia, also in Venezuela.

But the other, more practical response to your question ... is that Venezuela still could have done tremendously more, even being dependent on transnational capital and subordination of the global economy. We know, and you know this better than I do, that 70% of the banking system still remains, to this day, in private hands. And any leftist project, the first thing you want to do is nationalise the financial system. That would not have brought any massive negative consequences for the interest of the popular classes in the revolution.

That is certainly one example that could have been done tremendously differently in Bolivia, look at what happened in Bolivia. The natural resources were not nationalised. Actually, they're still in the hands of transnational corporations. It's simply the marketing and the mechanisms that allow the government to capture some of those surpluses. So I mean, I don't have the answer of what I would do if I were in the government in Venezuela or Bolivia or Brazil, but I think unleashing popular forces from below, from a different leftist model of politics, might have forced these governments to do more than they did.

And again, one of the things, Greg, is that there is such a vast difference. Venezuela was, again, a true effort at socialist transformation, whereas Brazil was at best a mild social democracy, and Argentina was a mixture of populism and social democracy. So also it's hard to generalise.

GREG WILPERT: The Trump administration seems to act as if it's representing the interests of national capital in the United States. But

at the same time, it seems to be also doing the bidding of transnational capital. And I'm just wondering, especially because Trump is always decrying the globalists and globalisation and so on, I'm just wondering, what's your take on that? Which role is Trump actually playing and whose interests is he serving, particularly in this effort to roll back the Pink Tide or the socialist governments of Latin America?

WILLIAM ROBINSON: I mean, it's an extremely important question because I think much of the left, and the public in general, gets it wrong because there is a confusion ... the problem is taking discourse at face value rather than looking at underlying essences of these processes and how they're expressed in discourse. So Trump is trying to regain the legitimacy of the US state. I mentioned the crisis of hegemony previously. And so, Trump has to have the rhetoric of populism and nationalism. But we don't judge Trumpist policies on the basis of rhetoric, but what those actual policies are. And those policies have very little to do with nationalism and even less to do with populism. And I think, as you stated correctly, what the US state is doing in Latin America, and more generally around the world, in general is to push forward the interests of transnational capital and the transnational capitalist class.

Even – to look outside of Latin America for just a moment – even with China, the US pressure on China is to open up China further to transnational capital and to integrate China deeper into, or openly into, global capitalism. And for that matter, this trade deficit with China, sure it's a real trade deficit, but a big part of that trade deficit is US-based, and corporations based from all over the world inside China exporting to the United States, so they're transnational corporate exports from China to the US. So it's not nation-state rivalry the way it's posed.

Now going back to Latin America, the same thing. There are two dimensions to this incredible intensifi-

cation of US interventionism. And one is the political, the military, the ideological dimension of putting the transnational capitalist class firmly back in power in Latin America and taking advantage of the conjuncture of crisis to roll back even the mild reforms of the Pink Tide governments. But those politics are in conjunction with that economic project of returning the region fully under the control of the transnational capitalist class and its local agents in each country.

Why specifically Venezuela? Well, that should be pretty obvious. And I've stated this for the last 20 years and I got criticised for it earlier. In fact, I'm sure you did too. It's that the very epicentre of the turn to the left in Latin America was always the Venezuelan revolution. And therefore, the epicentre of counter-revolution, and the reversion of the region to total subordination to global capitalism politically as well as economically, has always been the destruction of the Venezuelan revolution. That's the larger story here that we can't lose sight of.

Yes, it's true that Venezuela has the largest oil deposits in the world. Yes, it's true that [US National Security Advisor John] Bolton recently said, 'We want US oil companies back in' – what he really means is transnational oil companies – to take full control of the oil fields and so forth. But that again needs to be seen in the context of Venezuela being the epicentre both of that turn to the left and the epicentre now of the complete reversal of the [Pink Tide] that the US state is attempting on behalf of global capitalist interests.

GREG WILPERT: Well, we're going to have to leave it there for now. I hope to come back to you very soon to further explore these issues. I was speaking to Professor Bill Robinson, Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Thanks again, Bill, for joining us today. ♦

The Real News Network is a non-profit multimedia news and documentary service headquartered in Baltimore in the US. This interview transcript is reproduced from its website therealnews.com.

Blackouts as a weapon for regime change

Electricity blackouts have been a regular feature in the campaign led by Juan Guaido to overthrow Maduro. Guaido has skilfully used such blackouts as evidence of the incompetence of the Maduro regime. However, it now transpires that Guaido had been a participant in a US-funded organisation geared for regime change.

Max Blumenthal

A SEPTEMBER 2010 memo by a US-funded soft power organisation that helped train Venezuelan coup leader Juan Guaido and his allies identifies the potential collapse of the country's electrical sector as 'a watershed event' that 'would likely have the impact of galvanising public unrest in a way that no opposition group could ever hope to generate'.

The memo has special relevance today as Guaido moves to exploit nationwide blackouts caused by a major failure at the Simon Bolivar Hydroelectric Plant at Guri dam – a crisis that Venezuela's government blames on US sabotage.

It was authored by Srdja Popovic of the Center for Applied Non-Violent Action and Strategies (CANVAS), a Belgrade-based 'democracy promotion' organisation funded by the US government that has trained thousands of US-aligned youth activists in countries where the West seeks regime change.

This group reportedly hosted Guaido and the key leaders of his Popular Will party for a series of training sessions, fashioning them into a 'Generation 2007' determined to foment resistance to then-President Hugo Chavez and sabotage his plans to implement '21st century socialism' in Venezuela.

In the 2010 memo, CANVAS's Popovic declared, 'A key to Chavez's current weakness is the decline in the electricity sector.' Popovic explicitly identified the Simon Bolivar Hydro-



Commuters in a Caracas neighbourhood waiting in line for the bus during a blackout. The Venezuelan opposition has tried to exploit nationwide power outages to stir unrest against the government.

electric Plant as a friction point, emphasising that 'water levels at the Guri dam are dropping, and Chavez has been unable to reduce consumption sufficiently to compensate for the deteriorating industry'.

Speculating on a 'grave possibility that some 70 percent of the country's electricity grid could go dark as soon as April 2010', the CANVAS leader stated that 'an opposition group would be best served to take advantage of the situation and spin it against Chavez and towards their needs'.

Flash forward to March 2019, and the scenario outlined by Popovic is playing out almost exactly as he had imagined.

On 7 March, just days after Guaido's return from Colombia, where he participated in the failed and demonstrably violent 23 February attempt to ram a shipment of US aid

across the Venezuelan border, the Simon Bolivar Hydroelectric Plant experienced a major and still unexplained collapse. Days later, electricity remained sporadic across the country.

Meanwhile, Guaido has done everything he can 'to take advantage of the situation and spin it' against President Nicolas Maduro – just as his allies were urged to do over eight years before by CANVAS.

'A period of suffering'

The Venezuelan government has placed the blame squarely on Washington, accusing it of sabotage through a cyberattack on its electrical infrastructure. Key players in the US-directed coup attempt have done little to dispel the accusation.

In a tweet on 8 March, US Sec-

retary of State Mike Pompeo framed the electricity outage as a pivotal stage in US plans for regime change: ‘No food. No medicine. Now, no power. Next, no Maduro.’

At noon on 7 March, during a hearing on Venezuela at the US Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee, Senator Marco Rubio explicitly called for the US to stir ‘widespread unrest’, declaring that it ‘needs to happen’ in order to achieve regime change.

‘Venezuela is going to enter a period of suffering no nation in our hemisphere has confronted in modern history,’ Rubio proclaimed.

Around 5 pm, the Simon Bolivar Hydroelectric Plant experienced a total and still unexplained collapse. Residents of Caracas and throughout Venezuela were immediately plunged into darkness.

At 5.18 pm, a clearly excited Rubio took to Twitter to announce the blackout and claim that ‘backup generators have failed’. It was unclear how Rubio had obtained such specific information so soon after the outage occurred. According to Jorge Rodriguez, the communications minister of Venezuela, local authorities did not know if backup generators had failed at the time of Rubio’s tweet.

Back in Caracas, Guaido immediately set out to exploit the situation, just as his CANVAS trainers had advised over eight years before. Taking to Twitter just over an hour after Rubio, Guaido declared, ‘The light will return when the usurpation [of Maduro] ends.’ Like Pompeo, the self-declared president framed the blackouts as part of a regime change strategy, not an accident or error.

Two days later, Guaido was at the centre of an opposition rally he convened in affluent eastern Caracas, bellowing into a megaphone: ‘Article 187 when the time comes. We need to be in the streets, mobilised. It depends on us, not on anybody else.’

Article 187 establishes the right of the National Assembly ‘to authorise the use of Venezuelan military missions abroad or foreign in the country’.

Upon his mention of the constitutional article, Guaido’s supporters responded, ‘Intervention! Intervention!’

Exploiting crisis to ‘get back into a position of power’

As Dan Cohen and I reported previously on The Grayzone website, Guaido’s rise to prominence – and the coup plot that he has been appointed to oversee – is the product of a decade-long project overseen by the Belgrade-based CANVAS outfit.

CANVAS is a spinoff of Otpor, a Serbian protest group founded by Popovic in 1998 at the University of Belgrade. Otpor, which means ‘resistance’ in Serbian, was the student group that worked alongside US soft power organisations to mobilise the protests that eventually toppled the late Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic.

CANVAS has been funded largely through the National Endowment for Democracy, a CIA cut-out that functions as the US government’s main arm of promoting regime change. According to leaked internal emails from Stratfor, an intelligence firm known as the ‘shadow CIA’, CANVAS ‘may have also received CIA funding and training during the 1999/2000 anti-Milosevic struggle’.

A leaked email from a Stratfor staffer noted that after they ousted Milosevic, ‘the kids who ran OTPOR grew up, got suits and designed CANVAS ... or in other words a “export-a-revolution” group that sowed the seeds for a NUMBER of color revolutions. They are still hooked into US funding and basically go around the world trying to topple dictators and autocratic governments (ones that US does not like ;)’.

Stratfor subsequently revealed that CANVAS ‘turned its attention to Venezuela’ in 2005, after training opposition movements that led pro-NATO regime change operations across Eastern Europe.

In September 2010, as Venezuela headed for a parliamentary election,

CANVAS produced a series of memos outlining the plans they had hatched with ‘non-formal actors’ like Guaido and his cadre of student activists to bring down Chavez. ‘This is the first opportunity for the opposition to get back into a position of power,’ Popovic wrote at the time.

In his memo on electricity outages, Popovic highlighted the importance of the Venezuelan military in achieving regime change. ‘Alliances with the military could be critical because in such a situation of massive public unrest and rejection of the presidency,’ the CANVAS founder wrote, ‘malcontent sectors of the military will likely decide to intervene, but only if they believe they have sufficient support.’

While the scenario Popovic envisioned failed to materialise in 2010, it perfectly describes the situation gripping Venezuela today as an opposition leader cultivated by CANVAS seeks to spin the crisis against Maduro while calling on the military to break ranks.

Since The Grayzone exposed the deep ties between CANVAS and Guaido’s Popular Will party, Popovic has attempted to publicly distance himself from his record of training Venezuelan’s opposition.

Today, however, Popovic’s 2010 memo on exploiting electricity outages reads like a blueprint for the strategy that Guaido and his patrons in Washington have actively implemented. Whether or not the blackout is the result of external sabotage, it represents the ‘watershed event’ that CANVAS has prepared its Venezuelan cadres for. ♦

Max Blumenthal is an award-winning US journalist and the author of several books, including the best-selling Republican Gomorrah, Goliath, The Fifty One Day War and The Management of Savagery. He has produced print articles for an array of publications, many video reports and several documentaries, including Killing Gaza. Blumenthal founded The Grayzone website (thegrayzone.com) in 2015 to shine a journalistic light on America’s state of perpetual war and its dangerous domestic repercussions. This article is reproduced from The Grayzone.

The origins of Venezuela's economic crisis

Venezuela has become a popular argument against socialism amongst conservatives because of the deep economic crisis it is currently traversing. Defenders of the Bolivarian project, though, say that US sanctions and economic war are to blame for the crisis. The following is the transcript of an analysis by *Greg Wilpert* on The Real News Network that tries to take all the factors into account.

GREG WILPERT: It's The Real News Network, and I'm Greg Wilpert in Baltimore.

One of the main talking points of the Trump administration and the Venezuelan opposition is that Venezuela is suffering a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented proportions because its economy has collapsed. According to them, the reason for the economic crisis and the emigration from Venezuela lies in the effort to build socialism in Venezuela.

DONALD TRUMP: *But it's a very sad thing. We're not looking for anything other than taking care of a lot of people that are starving and dying in the streets. What's happening there is a disgrace. This was one of the wealthiest countries in the world, and all of a sudden it's just, it's greed-stricken, poverty-stricken. No food, no water, no air conditioning, no anything.*

GREG WILPERT: Leaving aside the question of whether the situation deserves to be called a humanitarian crisis, something former UN Special Rapporteur Alfred de Zayas has disputed, what is undisputed is that there is an economic crisis in Venezuela. Exactly how did this economic crisis, with its hyperinflation and shortages, come about? Whose fault is it? Is socialism to blame? And can Venezuela get out of this economic crisis?

Before we examine Venezuela's economic performance during the Maduro presidency, it makes sense to take a brief look at the time before Maduro took office. Ever since the 20th century, Venezuela has been a major oil-exporting country. As a



Customers line up to shop at a state-run supermarket in Caracas. The Venezuelan economy is suffering from shortages and hyperinflation.

matter of fact, in 1920 Venezuela was the world's largest oil exporter. Middle Eastern oil production did not exceed Venezuela's until the 1960s. Just like today, already back then oil exports made up over 90% of Venezuela's export revenues. As a result, all other forms of economic production, such as agriculture, dropped to a very small fraction of the country's economic activity. As long as oil prices rose, which they did fairly consistently until the late 1970s, Venezuela's economy grew in tandem with rising oil prices. The economy boomed when oil prices quadrupled during the 1978 OPEC oil embargo.

However, little by little, oil prices began to enter a phase of instability and even decline, dropping below \$10 per barrel in 1998, the year that Hugo Chavez was elected president of Venezuela. Along with this oil price

instability, Venezuela's economy also lurched from one crisis to the next. This provided the background for Chavez's election in 1998. Venezuelans were fed up with the economic uncertainty and consistent decline. Real per capita GDP had dropped by 27% in the 20 years between 1979 and 1999. Meanwhile, poverty rose from 15% to over 65%.

Chavez's first move on the economic front was to raise oil prices. He toured OPEC member countries and convoked the second ever summit of OPEC heads of state in Caracas in late 2000 to convince OPEC members to adhere to oil production quotas and raise oil prices. Gradually oil prices rose, with an additional boost due to the Iraq war in 2003. Oil prices continued to rise steadily throughout this period, reaching a high of \$140 per barrel before the

Lehman Brothers collapse and the global financial crisis of 2008. Similarly, Venezuela's economy boomed and per capita GDP rose steadily, increasing by 35%, and poverty dropped by half from 54% to 27% of households between 2003 and 2007.

A new period of volatility set in following the global financial crisis when Chavez decided to reduce public spending because oil revenues were down. As prices recovered, the economy recovered as well. A common criticism of Chavez's economic management during this period is that oil revenues were not used to diversify the economy. This, however, is not quite true. Chavez did try to diversify the economy by investing billions of dollars from oil revenues in agriculture and in new industrial production facilities, ranging from cell-phones to automobiles to bicycles to petrochemical products. Also, the massive investments in educational programmes were aimed at helping to diversify the economy.

Ultimately, though, these efforts at diversification failed. They failed for two closely related reasons. First, ever since 2003, the government implemented a fixed exchange rate in order to control capital flight and the depreciation of its currency, and also as a means of subsidising essential goods by allowing importers of things like food and medicine to have access to cheap dollars. The fixed exchange rate system worked reasonably well as long as there were enough dollars coming into the economy. However, when the price of oil began to decline, first in 2008 and then again in 2014, the government reduced its subsidies for the purchase of dollars at the official rate and thereby for imports. This meant that imports went down and their prices went up, heating up inflation. The government tried to maintain low prices by holding on to the fixed exchange rate and by introducing stricter price controls. But black-market activity circumvented these policies, leading to more inflation, more price distortions and countless opportunities for corruption.

Immediately following President Chavez's death from cancer in March

2013, the pressure on the currency in the form of the black-market exchange rate took another hit. The gap between the official exchange rate and the black-market exchange rate began to increase to unprecedented levels, further exacerbating inflation, corruption and shortages. When oil prices declined during Maduro's first year in office, reducing imports, this vicious cycle intensified yet again. Maduro tried to adjust his economic policies periodically by adjusting the official exchange rate slightly, but the gap between the official exchange rate and the black-market rate continued to grow, so that a dollar purchased at the official rate eventually cost merely 1/100 of what it cost in the black market.

The lost revenues due to sanctions, the declining price of oil and the hyperinflation created a perfect economic storm.

Then in 2015 President Obama declared Venezuela to be an 'unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security of the United States', allowing him to impose targeted sanctions against individual government officials that the US accused of being involved in drug trafficking or corruption. These sanctions, although they were targeted on individuals, began a cascade of financial restrictions on Venezuelan financial transactions and on bank accounts, leading to closings of accounts, making imports and financial transactions increasingly difficult for the government.

In August 2017, President Trump drastically intensified the sanctions by prohibiting US institutions and individuals from trading in Venezuelan debt. This made it impossible for Venezuela to restructure its debt, and further restricted the government's ability to engage in international trade. It was no coincidence that Venezuela's oil production began to plummet at

the same time that the Trump administration sanctions took effect. Venezuela's oil industry depends on crucial replacement parts and oil derivatives from the US, which it could no longer import. As a result, Venezuelan oil production decreased from about two million barrels per day to 1.2 million between August 2017 and August 2018. The rapid decline in oil revenues from \$93.6 billion in 2012 to \$30.9 billion in 2018 led to a rapid decline in imports. Imports practically also nosedived from \$66 billion in 2012 to \$11 billion in 2018. This decline in imports, along with the smuggling of its massively subsidised products to neighbouring Brazil and Colombia, inevitably meant that there were shortages of food and medicines.

By late 2017 shortages and inflation had gotten so bad that hyperinflation set in. Inflation kept rising as a result of the vicious cycle of the ever-growing gap between the official exchange rate and the black-market exchange rate. Since more and more products were imported without subsidies, Venezuelans were thus forced into a position of spending their money the instant they earned it, so as to make sure that it did not lose any value while they had it on hand.

Some economists estimate that revenues that Venezuela lost as a result of the decline in oil production are estimated to have been at least \$6 billion per year. In addition, the sanctions have prevented Venezuela from repatriating \$1 billion of dividends per year from its US-based oil company CITGO. The Venezuelan government now estimates that the total losses in revenue to the government over the past four years due to sanctions amount to at least \$30 billion. The lost revenues due to sanctions, the declining price of oil and the hyperinflation created a perfect economic storm that contributed to a dramatic contraction of Venezuela's economy. By 2017, per capita GDP had declined by two-thirds relative to its level in 2012.

The big question at this point that remains is whether Chavez and Ma-



Venezuela's bolivar currency notes. The fixed currency exchange rate has been one of the factors contributing to the Venezuelan economic crisis.

duro could have handled the economy differently so that it would not be in the terrible shape it is now. This question is difficult to answer, but there are perhaps three interrelated macroeconomic issues that Chavez failed to tackle during his presidency. First, as many have argued, Chavez failed to wean Venezuela off oil. However, as mentioned earlier, this is not for lack of trying. Chavez invested billions in a wide variety of efforts to increase oil derivatives, manufacturing and agriculture production. However, what economists call the 'Dutch disease' took hold, whereby domestic currency was overvalued and these new facilities could not compete with far cheaper imports, thus making them uneconomic.

Second, Chavez did not take oil price volatility into account. Actually, in the beginning of his presidency Chavez did consider volatility to be a problem and supported the creation of a sovereign wealth fund called the Macroeconomic Investment and Stabilisation Fund. It was designed to set aside funds from when the price of oil was high, and allowed the government to draw on it when the price was low, thus evening out the flow of oil revenues. However, following the oil industry shutdown in 2003, when revenues were extremely scarce and the price of oil began to rise rapidly, oil industry economists began speculating about peak oil and the inevitability of a decline in oil production. Estimates were circulating at the time

that the price of oil would soon reach \$200 per barrel. Chavez dismantled the fund, believing it was no longer needed.

Third, also following the 2003 oil industry shutdown, Chavez introduced a rigorously controlled fixed exchange rate. This was no doubt necessary at the time because of the run on the Venezuelan currency, the bolivar, in the aftermath of the 2002 coup attempt and the shutdown of the oil industry in 2003. As long as the oil revenues flowed and kept increasing, it was relatively easy to maintain this fixed exchange rate. However, by 2013 when Chavez died, the gap between the official rate and the black-market rate had grown so large that an adjustment would have meant major economic dislocations – which Maduro was unwilling, and politically perhaps unable, to risk.

Finally, we cannot leave out the impact of the sanctions. As mentioned earlier, their effect has been devastating. But they are not the cause of the onset of the economic crisis. Rather, the roots of the crisis can be found in massive capital flight and the related effort to maintain a fixed but overvalued exchange rate. [Following] inaction in the face of ever-growing price distortions and price differences between Venezuela and its neighbours, and an inability to overcome the structural obstacles for diversifying the economy, the sanctions have now made a bad situation far worse, and on top of it have made it almost impossible for the government to take corrective action, because it lacks the resources to do so. ♦

Gregory Wilpert is a German-American sociologist who lived in Venezuela between 2000 and 2008, briefly teaching sociology at the Central University of Venezuela and then working as a freelance journalist, writing on Venezuelan politics for a wide range of publications. He also founded Venezuelanalysis.com, an English-language website about Venezuela. In 2007 he published the book Changing Venezuela by Taking Power: The History and Policies of the Chavez Government (Verso Books). In early 2016 he began working for The Real News Network as host, researcher and producer. Since September 2018 he has been working as Managing Editor at The Real News, from whose website (therealnews.com) the above transcript is produced.



A billboard of former President Hugo Chavez at a gas processing plant east of Caracas. Chavez had tried but failed to wean the Venezuelan economy off oil dependency.

Getting real with the US sanctions imposed on Venezuela

There appears to be some confusion about the sanctions imposed by the US on Venezuela. *Alexander Campbell clarifies.*

ON 29 January, the US formally adopted sanctions on Venezuelan national oil company PDVSA, as well as on CITGO, its US-based distribution arm, as part of its press for regime change in Caracas. US National Security Advisor John Bolton estimated the actions would affect some \$7 billion in assets and would block \$11 billion in revenue to the Venezuelan government over the next year. The US State Department was quick to add, ‘These new sanctions do not target the innocent people of Venezuela...’

But of course they do. *The Wall Street Journal* reported: ‘The sanctions could create deeper gasoline shortages in Venezuela. The country’s refineries are already operating at a fraction of their capacity, crippled by a lack of spare parts and crude. Venezuela only produced a third of the 190,000 barrels of gasoline it consumed a day as of November, according to Ivan Freitas, a leader of the country’s oil union. “Immediately, it’s going to hurt the average Venezuelan,” Mr. Freitas said.’

Meanwhile, *The New York Times* noted: ‘But just across the street, a group of senior citizens waiting in line to collect their pensions worried that the Trump administration’s actions would further bankrupt their country and deepen the humanitarian crisis that has left so many starving, sick and without basic services.’

“‘The United States has no business meddling in this,” said Aura Ramos, 59, a retiree who can barely afford blood pressure medicine. “It’s the regular people who will be affected.””

The Washington Office on Latin America released a statement criticising the announced sanctions, writing: ‘[W]e are deeply concerned at the potential for the recently announced US



The port in Puerto Cabello, Venezuela. The US oil sanctions are expected to hit Venezuela’s capacity both to produce oil and import goods.

sanctions to intensify the severe hardships and suffering that millions of Venezuelans are enduring. Venezuelans are already facing widespread scarcities of essential medicines and basic goods. Venezuela’s oil exports represent the main source of hard currency used to pay for imports. Without this revenue, it is clear that the importation of food and medicine could be put at risk. In turn, this will further accelerate a migration and refugee crisis that has strained neighbouring countries and put many of the over three million Venezuelan migrants and refugees at risk.’

It appears as though there is increasing acceptance of the basic fact that the US sanctions on Venezuela will have a negative impact on the people of Venezuela, but all this analysis misses two important points. First, the Trump administration had already imposed broad economic sanctions in 2017, though apparently both *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* were unaware of this development.

From the same *WSJ* article above: ‘...this week’s sanctions mark the first targeting of Venezuela’s lifeblood industry, which accounts for

nearly all of the country’s hard currency income. Until now, US sanctions were largely limited to individuals in Venezuela’s regime.’

Another example from an *NYT* article a few days earlier: ‘The oil sanctions amount to the first punitive action taken by the United States against Mr Maduro since the power struggle in Caracas erupted last week, and it is intended to starve the government of Mr. Maduro of cash and foreign currency. Oil production in Venezuela has already plummeted because of mismanagement and poor policies, and the country’s economy is in shambles.’

These examples are certainly not alone in their misunderstanding of the sanctions and their impact on the oil industry. But it’s not terribly difficult to find information on the impact of the 2017 sanctions. Venezuelan economist Francisco Rodríguez provided a useful analysis last year explaining just this – and it is even in English.¹

Rodríguez’s basic story: the oil industry is critical to the Venezuelan government; underinvestment and the rapid decline in oil prices caused a significant drop in revenue; then, as oil prices began increasing, Trump

imposed sanctions making any international financial transaction extremely difficult and potentially ‘toxic’. Rodríguez explained how Venezuelan and Colombian oil production both declined at the same rate, until the Trump financial embargo was implemented in August 2017. Then, Venezuela’s oil production collapsed:

‘It is striking that the second change in trend in Venezuela’s production numbers occurs at the time at which the United States decided to impose financial sanctions on Venezuela. Executive Order 13,808, issued on 25 August of 2017, barred US persons from providing new financing to the Venezuelan government or PDVSA. Although the order carved out allowances for commercial credit of less than 90 days, it stopped the country from issuing new debt or selling previously issued debt currently in its possession.

‘The Executive Order is part of a broader process of what one could term the “toxification” of financial dealings with Venezuela. During 2017, it became increasingly clear that institutions who decided to enter into financial arrangements with Venezuela would have to be willing to pay high reputational and regulatory costs. This was partly the result of a strategic decision by the Venezuelan opposition, in itself a response to the growing authoritarianism of the Maduro government.’

It’s not just the media’s apparent amnesia with regard to those 2017 sanctions and their impact on the oil industry that is the problem here. In fact, the impact of those sanctions was even larger. As my colleague at the Center for Economic and Policy Research, Mark Weisbrot, has previously explained, and as Rodríguez notes, the sanctions made it virtually impossible for the Venezuelan government to take the measures necessary to eliminate hyperinflation or recover from a deep depression. Such measures would include debt restructuring and creating a new exchange rate system (Exchange Rate Bases Stabilisation), in which the currency would normally be pegged to the dollar.

But it actually gets worse. When

the US first announced its recognition of Juan Guaidó as president of Venezuela on 23 January, the decision was met largely with applause within the foreign policy establishment. It seemed like nobody bothered to think about what, practically and economically, the decision would mean. Since Trump’s election, and his increasingly threatening rhetoric in relation to Venezuela, there has been wide agreement that a full-scale oil embargo would be terrible, both for Venezuela and the US. Yet somehow hardly anyone realised that by recognising Guaidó, the US was de facto putting an oil embargo in place. Once again we turn to Rodríguez, who, for what it’s worth, has been publicly supportive of the decision to recognise Guaidó and wrote the following on 28 January,² a day before the most recently announced sanctions:

‘By giving it the legal authority to invoice Venezuelan oil, the decision to recognise the Guaidó administration, therefore, would have the same implications for bilateral trade of an oil embargo. Applied by the countries that provide for nearly three-fourths of Venezuela’s imports, the decisions can be expected to have a significant effect on the country’s capacity both to produce oil and import goods. As a result, we expect Venezuela’s oil production to decline by 640tbd to 508tbd in 2019 (a fall of 55.7%), as opposed to our prior forecast of 1,070tbd. Exports will fall to US\$13.5 billion (US\$12.3 billion from oil), nearly half our previous estimate of US\$23.8 billion. Imports of goods will decline to US\$7.0 billion, a 40.3% decline (we expect the entrance of some humanitarian aid as well as the default on payments of all debt to cushion the fall). Venezuela’s economy is highly import dependent, as illustrated by the strong empirical correlation between import and GDP growth. As a result of the additional import crunch, we expect Venezuela’s economy to contract by 26.4%, as opposed to our previous forecast of 11.7%.’

The impact is clear. The decision to formally recognise Guaidó will have a massive economic impact on

the people of Venezuela – irrespective of sanctions, oil embargos or whatever else is announced. The Trump administration succeeded in de facto implementing an oil embargo, without taking any of the heat they would have if it were done explicitly. And then they announced broader trade sanctions that appeared to make explicit the recognition of a parallel government, with some specific carve-outs for American oil companies already in Venezuela, like Chevron and Halliburton.

Of course, there are plenty of people who will argue that this pain and suffering is worth it in order to force Maduro from power. That’s their right, but the media should force them to make that argument openly, and honestly confront the pain and suffering these policies will inflict.

Finally, if asking for the media to get the sanctions story right is too much, maybe they can give some coverage to the fact that National Security Advisor Bolton went on national TV and openly said the following: ‘It will make a big difference to the United States economically if we could have American oil companies really invest in and produce the oil capabilities in Venezuela. It would be good for the people of Venezuela. It would be good for the people of the United States. We both have a lot at stake here making this come out the right way.’

A decimated oil industry in the nation with the largest proven oil reserves in the world would appear to serve some alternative interests beyond ‘democracy’ and ‘human rights’.

This article is reproduced from the website of the Washington-based Center for Economic and Policy Research (cepr.net).

Notes

1. Francisco Rodríguez, ‘Crude Realities: Understanding Venezuela’s Economic Collapse’, Venezuelan Politics and Human Rights blog, Washington Office on Latin America, venezuelablog.org, 20 September 2018.
2. Francisco Rodríguez, ‘Ecuador & Venezuela This Week’, Torino Economics and Torino Capital Group Company, 28 January 2019.

US sanctions killed over 40,000 Venezuelans since 2017

A new study reveals that Trump's animosity towards Venezuela has caused grave harm to the most vulnerable Venezuelan social groups.

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump's economic sanctions against Venezuela are affecting not only President Nicolas Maduro's administration but also the civilian population, with over 40,000 deaths reported in a study released by the Washington-based Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) on 25 April.

'The sanctions are depriving Venezuelans of lifesaving medicines, medical equipment, food and other essential imports,' said Mark Weisbrot, CEPR Co-Director and co-author of the study. 'This is illegal under US and international law, and treaties that the US has signed. Congress should move to stop it.'

The study, titled 'Economic Sanctions as Collective Punishment: The Case of Venezuela', was co-written by Jeffrey Sachs, a world-renowned economist who teaches at Columbia University and was a director of the Harvard Institute for International Development at the Kennedy School of Government.

Besides pointing out that the US actions have been rapidly worsening the humanitarian crisis, the CEPR study notes that a new set of financial and trade sanctions have been deployed to devastate the Venezuelan economy since the US recognised Juan Guaidó's parallel government in January 2019.

'Venezuela's economic crisis is routinely blamed all on Venezuela. But it is much more than that. American sanctions are deliberately aiming to wreck Venezuela's economy and thereby lead to regime change,' the Columbia professor said. 'It's a fruitless, heartless, illegal and failed policy, causing grave harm to the Venezuelan people.'

By prohibiting international transactions with the Bolivarian gov-



Venezuelan migrants in northern Brazil wait in line for food. The US sanctions displaced millions of Venezuelans who fled the country as a result of the worsening economic depression and hyperinflation.

ernment, the United States has 'efficiently' affected Venezuela's oil production, which can be clearly seen when a correlation is drawn between oil production levels and the dates when the sanctions went into effect.

The loss of oil-based incomes has prevented the Venezuelan government from not only improving the country's balance of payments but also buying food and medicines in international markets.

'Since the January 2019 sanctions, oil production has fallen by 431,000 barrels per day or 36.4 percent. This will greatly accelerate the humanitarian crisis, but the projected 67 percent decline in oil production for the year, if the sanctions continue, would cause vastly more loss of human life,' the report warned.

The CEPR report also reveals that Venezuela's economic contraction is clearly not a 'natural fact' but rather a consequence of the current US foreign policy, which represents a 'very serious harm to human life and health.'

'The sanctions reduced the public's caloric intake, increased disease and mortality (for both adults and infants), and displaced millions of Venezuelans who fled the country as a result of the worsening economic depression and hyperinflation. They exacerbated Venezuela's economic crisis and made it nearly impossible to stabilise the economy, contributing further to excess deaths. All of these impacts disproportionately harmed the poorest and most vulnerable Venezuelans,' said the study.

CEPR estimated that US actions since August 2017 prompted more than 40,000 deaths. That figure is based on an estimated 80,000 people with HIV who have not had antiretroviral treatment since 2017; 16,000 people who need dialysis; 16,000 people with cancer; and 4 million with diabetes and hypertension, many of whom cannot obtain insulin or cardiovascular medicine. ♦

This article is reproduced from the teleSUR English website (www.telesurenglish.net).

A ship adrift: Cuba after the Pink Tide

With Venezuela in crisis and the Pink Tide in decline, what's next for Cuba?

Sujatha Fernandes

IN the early years of the post-Soviet period, when Cuba was reeling from the collapse of its main benefactor, a young Cuban emcee known as Rande Akosta rhymed, 'We are a ship adrift that sails aimlessly, and without money, we've lost half our crew.' He was referring to the economic and cultural isolation of Cuba in the 1990s. But with the demise of the regional left-wing allies who boosted the socialist nation during the boom of the Pink Tide, Akosta could have just as easily been rapping about the uncertain fate that Cuba is facing once again today.

Compared with just five or 10 years ago, when Cuba benefited from a net of supportive allies in the region, chiefly Venezuela, uncertainty amid the rise of far-right leaders, the internal turmoil of leftist nations, and the aggressive machinations of the Trump administration determined to break up the Cuba-Venezuela nexus have marked recent years.

On 4 March, the Trump administration announced that it will tighten the embargo against Cuba by authorising lawsuits against Cuban companies which use properties that were confiscated after the 1959 Revolution, under Title III of the Helms-Burton Act. Although the move only applies to about 200 companies and appears largely symbolic, it presages larger measures, more sanctions and travel restrictions against the island nation.

These moves can be read as retribution for Cuba's ongoing backing of Venezuela as the Trump administration has doubled down on its support for a regime-change strategy by means of a coup. The United States was one of the earliest and most enthusiastic supporters of Juan Guaidó



A Venezuelan oil tanker enters the Bay of Havana, Cuba. The crisis in Venezuela has had reverberations in Cuba, which was hit especially hard by decreased Venezuelan oil production.

when he proclaimed himself president of Venezuela on 23 January. Meanwhile, the administration's actions, such as meeting with defecting members of the military last year in Washington, have indicated that it would back a military coup in the country. Sending humanitarian aid trucks to the Colombia-Venezuela border as a way to provoke conflict with the Venezuelan military also provided evidence of this confrontational strategy.

In addition to punishing Cuba, the tightening of the embargo is an attempt to put pressure on the island at a difficult time. Since Trump's early days in office, he has sought to strengthen the economic embargo and reverse the normalisation efforts of the Obama administration. Trump has also threatened to put Cuba back on to the list of countries supporting terrorism, citing the influence of Cuban military advisers in Venezuelan Pres-

ident Nicolás Maduro's government. Cuba was removed from this list in 2015 during the period of normalisation.

Déjà vu

Nearly three decades ago, Cuba faced a similar confluence of events. The Soviet Union collapsed, causing a massive economic crisis in Cuba that famously led Fidel Castro to proclaim a 'special period' on the island. The effect on the living standards of Cubans was drastic, with massive layoffs, reductions in transportation and frequent blackouts. Cold War triumphalism was in full effect, with free-market revolutions taking place in Eastern Europe in the midst of the global rise of neoliberal austerity policies. The Clinton administration also sought to push a beleaguered Cuba towards an Eastern European-style free-market transition by putting im-

mense pressure on the Cuban economy and people through punitive policies like the 1996 Helms-Burton bill.

Through a long and difficult process, Cuba pulled itself out of a severe economic recession by courting foreign investment from a range of countries, establishing joint ventures with foreign firms, developing its tourism sector, encouraging the flow of remittances, earning hard currency through providing overseas medical services, and taxing artists, athletes and musicians working abroad.

Then, in the late 1990s, Cuba's fortunes turned around. Left-wing governments started coming into office across the region, in many cases powered by massive mobilisations of urban movements, peasants, unions and Indigenous peoples. A key ally for Cuba was the oil-rich nation of Venezuela, whose leader, Hugo Chávez, maintained close ties with Cuba's Castro.

The rise of Chavismo helped bolster the Cuban nation, revitalising it after the crisis of the special period. The Cuban economy received a boost through an agreement signed in 2000 which stipulated that Venezuela supply subsidised oil to Cuba in exchange for Cuba's sending healthcare workers, physicians, sports coaches and arts workers to Venezuela, as well as offering free medical treatments to Venezuelans in Cuba. Venezuela also provided loans and grants to Cuba, planned to construct an underwater fibre-optics cable to improve Cuba's Internet capacity, and agreed on a number of production and research projects on rice, nickel and electricity.

The Cuba-Venezuela bloc also had symbolic importance as an alternative to US hegemony. Not just sailing aimlessly, Cuba was at the centre of new regional initiatives such as the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), which sought to strengthen regional sovereignty in the face of ongoing attempts by the United States to impose its free-trade agenda. The Petrocaribe initiative launched by Chávez in 2005, which offered subsidised oil to debt-strapped Caribbean nations, displaced the po-

litical and economic power of US fossil fuel companies. As Bret Gustafson argued in the *NACLA Report on the Americas*, the Petrocaribe initiative brought more energy sovereignty to the region, and although it was dependent on fossil fuels, it provided a vehicle for regional cooperation and a challenge to US oil hegemony over Caribbean nations. Chávez, Castro and Evo Morales of Bolivia were frequently photographed together, representing a new axis of hope for the socialist left.

The rise of the far right

Chávez's death in 2013, along with the collapse of the commodity boom that had financed the Bolivarian revolution, an opposition-led economic war, and economic mismanagement led to a growing crisis in Venezuela under Chávez's successor Maduro. This internal crisis has had reverberations in Cuba, which was hit especially hard by decreased oil production in Venezuela. Cuba currently receives about 55,000 barrels of crude oil per day from Venezuela, down from 100,000 barrels per day five years ago. With the rise of the far right, Cuba also has fewer allies in the region to count on for medical and other exchanges. In January 2019, 8,300 Cuban doctors were set to withdraw from Brazil, after the newly elected far-right president Jair Bolsonaro questioned the terms of their contracts and qualifications.

For Cuba, there would be a significant impact if Venezuela were to succumb to a coup or right-wing takeover because it would mean the loss of a vital trading partner – albeit a weakened one – though it would likely not provoke a major crisis in the Cuban economy. In 2017, trade between the two nations totalled more than \$2.2 billion, or 12% of Cuba's GDP.

Still, Cuba's dependence on Venezuela is far less significant than its dependence on the Soviet Union in 1991. In recent years, the Cuban government has been looking for alternative oil sources, and in 2018 it signed a three-year agreement with

Algeria to exchange crude oil for doctors. And the Cuban economy has some level of autonomy through the growth of diverse foreign investments, revenue received through tourism and remittances, and new trade agreements with US companies initiated under the period of normalisation. Although the stricter travel regulations put in place by Trump reduced the number of American tourists in 2018, by the end of the year numbers had bounced back to 4.75 million international visitors, largely buoyed by a 48% increase in cruise-ship arrivals and visits from Cubans residing abroad. These may mitigate the difficulties somewhat – and enhance the Revolution's chances of survival.

Cuba still has some left-wing allies in the region, especially following the election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico, as well as in Uruguay and Bolivia. While these nations would be unlikely to replace the economic muscle of an alliance like Petrocaribe, they may provide some moral support for Cuba, as they have done to varying degrees for an embattled Venezuela.

What's next for the left – and Cuba?

As far-right forces ascend in the region, what is the current fate of the leftist and revolutionary governments that supported Cuba? As well as being under attack by longstanding imperialist and hegemonic powers, they have become victim of their own developmental logics and extractivist policies, which depend on highly fluctuating and ecologically finite resources such as oil. Like in Venezuela, the massive infrastructural projects undertaken as part of the Citizen's Revolution in Ecuador under Rafael Correa were made possible by oil rents in the context of high oil prices, which collapsed by 2014. This was also the case in Bolivia's gas-fuelled social revolution. The underlying economic model of '21st-century socialism' needs rethinking, especially given the climate crisis currently threatening the planet.

These governments have also been marked by an unbalanced concentration of power in the figure of the presidency and a top-down approach to solving issues such as poverty. Although the Pink Tide as an electoral phenomenon dependent on highly charismatic leaders is in decline, the social forces that brought these leaders to power continue to struggle at the grassroots. From the Landless Workers' Movement in Brazil to the communes in Venezuela and Indigenous movements in Ecuador and Bolivia, social movements hold the key to an ecologically sustainable, democratic, anti-capitalist future for the region.

For these grassroots movements and others, Cuba still stands as a symbolic pole, reminding us that human society can be organised on the basis of solidarity, cooperation and respect. This is a profound vision that stands clearly at odds with the individualist, profit-driven mantras of far-right leaders like Trump and Bolsonaro. Cuban society itself has been undergoing a much-needed transformation from within, as local neighbourhood associations, cultural groups and anti-racist movements are challenging old dogmas and introducing new means of participation.

In a global era, Cuba will find a means of recreating and fostering alliances. At a moment when democratic socialism has come back into the parlance of dominant presidential and parliamentary contenders, and people are looking for an alternative to failing systems of neoliberal capitalism, Cuba may well emerge once more as a buoy. ♦

Sujatha Fernandes teaches political economy and sociology at the University of Sydney in Australia. She is the author of several books, including Cuba Represent! Cuban Arts, State Power, and the Making of New Revolutionary Cultures (Duke University Press, 2006) and Who Can Stop the Drums? Urban Social Movements in Chávez's Venezuela (Duke University Press, 2010). Her latest book is Curated Stories: The Uses and Misuses of Storytelling (Oxford University Press, 2017). She is currently completing a collection of essays entitled The Cuban Hustle. The above article is reproduced from nacla.org, the website of the North American Congress on Latin America.

The EAST ASIAN Development Experience

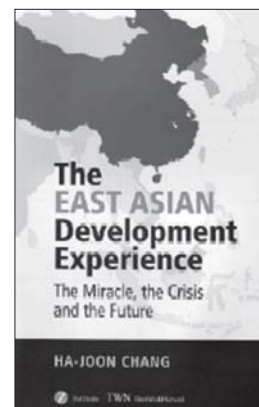
The Miracle, the Crisis and the Future

by Ha-Joon Chang

Today East Asia is the richest part of the world outside the old industrial centres of Western Europe and North America. Despite political authoritarianism, human rights violations, corruption, repression of labour unions, gender discrimination and mistreatment of ethnic minorities, the citizens of the East Asian economies have experienced improvements in income and general well-being unparalleled in human history.

In this book, Ha-Joon Chang provides a fresh analysis of this spectacular growth. He considers East Asian economies' unorthodox methods, and their rejection of 'best practice' and so-called Washington Consensus policies.

East Asia, he claims, can teach us much about the whole process of economic development. Full of new facts and policy suggestions, this is a lively and unconventional introduction to a global phenomenon.



ISBN: 983 2729 72 6 320 pages

	Price	Postage
Malaysia	RM30.00	RM2.00
Developing countries	US\$10.00	US\$5.00 (air)
Others	US\$15.00	US\$7.50 (air)

Orders from Malaysia – please pay by credit card/crossed cheque or postal order.

Orders from Australia, Brunei, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, UK, USA – please pay by credit card/cheque/bank draft/international money order in own currency, US\$ or Euro. If paying in own currency or Euro, please calculate equivalent of US\$ rate. If paying in US\$, please ensure that the agent bank is located in the USA.

Rest of the world – please pay by credit card/cheque/bank draft/international money order in US\$ or Euro. If paying in Euro, please calculate equivalent of US\$ rate. If paying in US\$, please ensure that the agent bank is located in the USA.

All payments should be made in favour of: **THIRD WORLD NETWORK BHD.**, 131 Jalan Macalister, 10400 Penang, Malaysia. Tel: 60-4-2266728/2266159; Fax: 60-4-2264505; Email: tw@twnetwork.org; Website: www.twn.my

I would like to order copy/copies of **The EAST ASIAN Development Experience**.

I enclose the amount of by cheque/bank draft/IMO.

Please charge the amount of US\$/Euro/RM to my credit card:

☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard

A/c No.: _____ Expiry date: _____

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Algeria's uprising: The beginning of the end of '*Le Pouvoir*'?

Tin Hinane El Kadi writes about a revolutionary movement in Algeria which poses a real threat to the survival of the regime. She describes a young generation determined to go beyond the usual arrangements between parties and the establishment to produce radical change. The slogan in the streets is '*El Chaab yourid isskat ennidam*' – 'The people want to bring down the system.'

ALGERIA is going through a revolutionary moment. Algiers, once known as 'the Mecca of Revolutionaries', had the largest demonstrations in its history as millions of citizens protested against President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who is seeking to remain in power after 20 years of continuous rule. The protest movement now demands the removal of the entire regime. The phrase '*Yetnahaw gaa*' (all of them will be removed) has become widespread among protesters and on social media, reinvigorating a wave of mass emancipatory politics in the country.

To what extent can the current protests really challenge the system? Will the country go through a phase of superficial reforms allowing the regime to survive by making a few concessions, or will this mass movement produce revolutionary change? Algeria's regime, referred to among Algerians as '*Le Pouvoir*' (the Power), constitutes an opaque network of military, political and economic elites who have, despite some variations and turbulence, astutely managed to rule the country without interruption since independence. Radical change will depend on the capacity of the popular movement to maintain pressure on the system and shift the balance of power.

Background on recent events

On 22 February, hundreds of thousands of Algerians took to the streets to voice their rejection of Bouteflika's decision to run for a fifth term. Another large-scale demonstra-

tion took place on 24 February at the call of Mouwatana, a political platform in the opposition. These demonstrations grew in the following days to involve millions of Algerians across the country. These mass protests have been mainly peaceful, with the slogan '*Silimya, Silmiya*' (Peaceful, peaceful) emerging as a defining motto of the movement.

The mass contestation includes all social classes, old and young people as well as many women. Students have been leading impressive anti-Bouteflika rallies on weekdays. The government announced the early closure of universities in an unsuccessful attempt to weaken the students' mobilisation. Several corporations have joined the protest movement including lawyers, trade unionists, teachers, journalists, lecturers and even judges.

Bouteflika, 82 years old, has been president since 1999. He has been confined to a wheelchair after suffering a stroke in 2013. The ailing octogenarian rarely appears in public and has not given a public address for the past seven years. Realising the threat posed by the upheaval, the regime responded with a letter attributed to Bouteflika published by Algeria's Press Agency on 10 March. The letter announced the delay of the presidential election initially set for 18 April and promised that the incumbent president would not run for a fifth term. This means that Bouteflika's mandate will be stretched indefinitely until the organisation of a vaguely defined transitional conference, led by the incumbent regime.

Old faces of the system such as Nouredine Bedoui, Ramdan Lamamra and Lakhdar Ibrahimi have been appointed to lead the announced transition.

This manoeuvre failed to appease the movement. On 15 March, millions of Algerians took to the streets in what were arguably the biggest demonstrations in the country's history. People demanded the immediate departure of the president and his entourage and expressed their mistrust of any government-led transition. Protesters chanted slogans like '*Bouteflika Matzidch Edkika*' (Bouteflika, do not stay an extra minute), '*FLN, Degage*' (FLN, get out), '*Djazair hourra, democratia*' (a free and democratic Algeria) and the regionally-famous '*El Chaab yourid isskat ennidam*' (The people want to bring down the system).

A delayed spring

For the past couple of years, Algeria appeared impervious to the popular demonstrations sweeping across the region. Despite the outbreak of sporadic strikes and protests, these have remained contained and failed to transform into confrontations against the regime, until now.

The confluence of two key factors can explain Algeria's long 'stability'. First, Algerians mostly feared a return to the political turmoil and violence of the 1990s civil war. The painful memories of the *décennie noire* (black decade) are still present in people's collective consciousness. Second, oil rents have allowed the

government to buy social peace and co-opt several opposition groups over the past two decades. Government subsidies cover a vast array of goods and services ranging from bread and milk to energy subsidies and social housing programmes. They reached a total of €62.8 billion in 2018. This high level of redistribution makes Algeria Africa's least unequal society.

But as Frantz Fanon, who was a fervent supporter of Algeria's independence, rightly says in *The Wretched of the Earth* published in 1961: 'The big confrontation cannot be indefinitely postponed.' The strength of the two inhibiting forces described above faded with time. Firstly, the wall of fear collapsed thanks to a generational change. Over 70% of Algeria's population today is believed to be under the age of 30. The young generation who have been leading the protests are not old enough to remember the civil war and are thus not impaired by the spectre of political violence. Moreover, the regime's attempt to spread fear by bringing up the Libyan and Syrian scenarios failed miserably, with protesters chanting, among other things, '*Dzayer machi Sourria*' (Algeria is not Syria).

Secondly, the drop in oil prices in 2014 undermined the government's redistributive capacity. Recent financial laws have shown an apparent turn towards austerity, with cuts in social spending and new taxes. While Algeria has free universal healthcare and free education, including tertiary education, the quality of these services has deteriorated tremendously over the years due to lack of investments and tensions created by demographic growth. Besides, the incumbent regime failed to build a vibrant industrial sector and to diversify the economy away from hydrocarbons, resulting in a vulnerable economy and high rates of unemployment, estimated at 30% among the youth.

Public frustration was burgeoning over limited freedoms, decreasing purchasing power and significant corruption scandals. In the summer of 2018, senior politicians and military figures were found involved in a co-

lossal cocaine scandal. The regime's logic was to encourage Bouteflika to run for a fifth term to maintain access to state privileges and sustain accumulation within its networks. However, the announcement of the regime's aim to present Bouteflika for another term came as an unbearable extra humiliation for Algerians. '*Le Pouvoir*' was not prepared for the massive mobilisation the declaration created.

The wall of fear collapsed thanks to a generational change.

In neighbouring Egypt, the deep state emerged intact from its confrontation with the protests. Resistance to the system has been either violently repressed or strategically co-opted, allowing the old order to thrive, behind a new face. In Egypt, as in Algeria, the army holds tremendous political power, and thus the question of whether Algerians will succeed where Egyptians have failed is pertinent. However, the Egyptian scenario is in some respects similar to Algeria's aborted transition of 1988. This time around, Algerians seem determined to break free from the established system despite its renowned tenacity.

'*Le Pouvoir*': A history of survival

After independence from French colonialism in 1962, the National Liberation Front (FLN) emerged as the sole actor with political and historical legitimacy. The critical role played by the FLN in the decolonisation process and its centralisation of power during the last years of the colonial period were the determining factors in the establishment of the postcolonial FLN one-party system. The political and armed wings of the FLN allowed for the creation of a regime based on a strong alliance between the army, the presidency and the party.

The ongoing contestation of the political order is not unprecedented.

The violently repressed 1980s Berber Spring represented the first large-scale rebellion against the system. In 1986, the decline in oil prices reduced Algeria's external revenue by 55% in a single year. This hastened an acute socio-economic crisis characterised by high unemployment, soaring inflation and widespread shortages in essential goods. By October 1988, anti-government riots spread across the country, forcing the abolition of the one-party system, the introduction of the first democratic reforms in North Africa and the Middle East, and the move from a state-socialist economic model to a market-driven economy.

Yet political Islam emerged as a serious challenge to the FLN-military coalition. After the left-leaning opposition had been crushed, the Islamic Front of Salvation (FIS) emerged as the only serious political force channelling popular anger. The idea that a return to Islamic values was the solution to the Algerian predicament was widespread among disenfranchised segments of the population. In the first multi-party legislative elections held in the country in December 1991, the FIS was poised to win the popular vote. Threatened by the loss of its monopoly on power, the military, backed by high officials within the FLN, staged a coup d'état in 1992. The coup radicalised FIS supporters and Algeria entered a decade-long civil war during which the army and various Islamist groups fought mercilessly, causing an estimated 150,000 deaths.

'*Le Pouvoir*' eventually succeeded in crushing the Islamist insurgency, restoring its grip on power. The deep state emerged virtually unscathed from the civil war. In 1998, Bouteflika – who had worked as Fanon's secretary before independence – was elected president after all other candidates had withdrawn from the race claiming that the military rigged the elections. Bouteflika's rule was marked by political repression, the emergence of a prominent oligarchy and rampant corruption. In this period, the regime demonstrated a somewhat confused ideological ori-

entation, which combined features of both economic nationalism and neoliberalism. Depending on whether oil prices were in a 'boom' or a 'bust' cycle, the ruling elite either adopted a protectionist policy or espoused a path of austerity and liberalisation. Most of the opposition was co-opted, including Louisa Hanoune's Parti des Travailleurs (Workers' Party), a Trotskyist party which regularly voiced its support for Bouteflika and the regime.

Power fragmentation

While the regime succeeded in adjusting and manipulating the previous crisis by making concessions on the margins, its current ability to come up with a survival plan appears extremely weak. The mere fact that the ailing Bouteflika was the only option the regime had to sustain itself in power indicates its fragility. The regime's inability to find a successor is partly due to the difficulty in agreeing on a consensual figure from within the system who could guarantee the sustainability of access to existing power networks.

The regime is far from homogeneous, and power struggles between different clans are evident. The 2015 firing of intelligence chief Mohamed Mediène, known as Toufik, who was perceived as the true power-holder in the country, was an illustration of this. After Toufik's eviction, it seemed that the presidential clan, which includes the president, his brother Saïd Bouteflika, and several political and business figures, and the military clan led by General Gaid Saleh, chief of staff of the national army, had settled on a new, more centralised balance of power.

However, signs of power fragmentation were apparent as the country headed towards the electoral period, with a broad restructuring in the army, and a severe institutional crisis within the Algerian National People's Assembly (APN) in 2018. The ongoing popular uprising has further precipitated fragmentation within the regime. Several allies of Bouteflika have voiced their support for the pro-

tests. Mouad Bouchareb, the head of the FLN, has declared in a press conference that he stands with the people. Similarly, Hocine Kheldoun, a senior party figure in the FLN, said during a TV interview that the long-serving president was 'history now'.

The military has so far stayed in its barracks. Recent statements made by the army have expressed sympathy for the protest movement. The messages emphasised the privileged relationship between 'the army and the people'. The protests have, according to General Saleh, shown a 'great sense of patriotism and unparalleled civic behaviour'. Yet no reference has been made to Bouteflika's suggestion that he remain president. While there is no explicit support for the protest movement's demands, it looks like the army is in the process of distancing itself from Bouteflika and his clan.

French interventionism

Former colonial power France has already voiced its support for Bouteflika's plan to unconstitutionally remain in power until a transitional conference is held. French President Emmanuel Macron applauded Bouteflika's move and described it as 'opening a new phase in Algeria's democracy'. Dominique de Villepin, previous French minister of foreign affairs, has praised the regime for avoiding a disaster through the announced reforms.

For the West, the 'security' and 'stability' paradigms have long triumphed over other concerns. Based on a colonial doxa which posits that countries in the region can be 'stable' only under the rule of an autocratic regime, Western powers have not voiced serious support for the protest movement. Europe's incommensurate fear of a new migration wave means that the EU will back the alternative that ensures the most 'stability'. Yet, for the millions of Algerians determined to change the course of history, 'stability' lies in emancipation from a corrupt and repressive

system.

A truly popular and democratic Algeria would undoubtedly challenge France's interests. Algeria's relationship with the old colonial power is based on asymmetric exchange. For years, French firms have benefitted from juicy contracts, including the Metro of Algiers and the management of several airports across the country. These benefits came despite no meaningful technology transfers in return. The free trade agreement between the EU and Algeria has resulted in a significant trade deficit for Algeria. It is estimated that between the agreement's adoption in 2005 and 2016, Algeria lost over €7 billion. New leadership is required for the country to challenge inherited unequal agreements and put structural transformation back on the agenda.

In brief, the historical mobilisation which started on 22 February poses a real threat to the continuity of *'Le Pouvoir'*. Young people leading the demonstrations are aiming to go beyond the usual arrangements between parties and the establishment to produce radical change. A meaningful transition entails dissolving the current political order and building a fresh democratic system based on popular inclusion. The Algerian regime seems quite fragmented, and it has so far failed to find viable alternatives for its endurance. This situation opens the doors of optimism and hope. This being said, the black box of the regime is notorious for its manoeuvres and it may have new cards to play. The interaction of mass mobilisation with organised politics in the coming weeks will determine the rules of the game. ♦

Tin Hinane El Kadi is a member of Le Collectif des Jeunes Engagés (The Collective of Young Algerian Activists), an Algerian organisation advocating political change and youth involvement in public affairs. She is also a political economy researcher working on the ESRC (UK Economic and Social Research Council)-funded research project 'Tale of two green valleys' at the London School of Economics and a data analyst for the Citing Africa project. The above article is reproduced from the blog of the Review of African Political Economy (<http://roape.net/our-blog/>).

What is behind the economic and political crisis in Sudan?

Since the beginning of 2018, demonstrations have erupted in all the major cities of Sudan. Although these protests were ostensibly against the high price of goods, specifically bread, it soon became clear that what the protesters were demanding was the ouster of the ruling regime. To date, while one component of the ruling regime – the National Congress Party of General Omar al-Bashir – has resigned, the other – the Army – is still holding out. The following article by *Rabah Omer*, which was written before the ouster of Bashir, provides a background analysis of these momentous developments.

IN October 2017, Sudanese were thrilled with the decision of US President Donald Trump to lift economic sanctions in place since 1997. Sudanese social media buzzed with great expectation. This enthusiasm was legitimate given the drastic impact of two decades of sanctions on Sudanese society, but how realistic was it?

The US first imposed restrictions in 1993 on Sudan, which was on a US State Department list of countries said to be supporting ‘terrorism’. In 1997 the Clinton administration announced comprehensive economic, trade and financial sanctions against Sudan. Then in 1998, the US bombed a pharmaceutical factory in the capital Khartoum, claiming that the factory was manufacturing chemical weapons. The sanctions remained in place throughout the Bush years until, in 2016, Obama announced they would be lifted after a six-month period. This was later confirmed by Trump when he withdrew the sanctions in October 2017.

Sadly, the hopes of revitalising the Sudanese economy and boosting social and economic development were dealt a blow when drastic inflation hit the economy a month later, causing near-implosion.

Since the start of January 2018, demonstrations spread in all Sudan’s major cities. Protesters cited the high prices of goods, specifically bread. Many Sudanese families reported they were eating only one meal a day. And many claimed they could not afford to buy medications.

The crisis is the result of three

major factors that underpin Sudan’s political and economic interactions with the West.

The first is the Sudanese government’s Altamkeen (empowerment and solidification) policy. In 1989 when Islamists, led by Dr Hassan Al-turabi, first came to power via a military coup, Altamkeen served to empower their affiliates and supporters. In practice, it translates into using the state and its institutions as tools to serve party goals. The Altamkeen policy is better understood by linking it to the Islamist group’s history with the West.

Sudan became independent in 1956. From the outset, the West manoeuvred to influence the new nation’s politics, pushing the government to take right-wing positions. This agenda was aided by coups, interventions in parliamentary politics and assassinations. During the Cold War, Islamists in Sudan, like other political Islamist groups in the region, were nurtured by the West to combat and minimise the influence of leftist parties.

In the mid-1970s the Islamists’ influence was particularly powerful and the ruling party imposed International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies of subsidy cuts, liberalisation and privatisation. The government also worked to impose Sharia law. The IMF policies engendered a climate of profiteering and corruption that benefited the Islamist group through the creation of multiple businesses, banks and companies.

However, in 1985 the Sudanese public rebelled against the IMF poli-

cies and their social impacts, and against Sharia law, toppling the dictatorship through a popular uprising. The election of a democratic government jeopardised the economic clout of the Islamists and threatened their political goals. They then moved to retake power, and eventually did so through a military coup in 1989.

The new regime adopted neoliberal policies such as privatisation and lifting subsidies, and promoted a free-market economy. It sold off major public enterprises, benefiting a small minority linked to the generals and the ruling National Congress Party of General Omar al-Bashir.

The second factor driving the crisis is the long-term effects of the economic sanctions, which affected the technological and social development of the country. Travel restrictions on Sudanese have drastically affected exchange of skills, education and training in the country, and negatively impacted economic development.

The third factor contributing to the current economic debacle in Sudan is the austerity project of the IMF, which has resulted in the staggering accumulation of debt, stunted economic growth, and social and political destabilisation. For instance, in 2001 the IMF praised the economic performance of Sudan – despite the sanctions – and announced it would facilitate debt relief if the government followed its lead. The independence of South Sudan in 2011 caused a loss of 46% of the national income, resulting in a major shock to the Sudanese economy, which the government, expectedly, did not prepare for. The IMF

intervened again in 2013 and 2017 and pushed for further austerity measures and liberalisation. This caused commodity prices to soar. Frustrated Sudanese took to the streets again. In November 2016, the Sudanese public organised a successful civil disobedience campaign for a week, which led to massive arrests. Since the beginning of January 2018, civil society demonstrations have been a constant in Sudanese cities, also triggering a wave of arrests.

The Altamkeen policy could be considered a recipe for corruption and nepotism, yet the IMF policies have emboldened it, giving it international legitimacy even as the liberalisation of the economy has hit the masses hard. Every time the government announces austerity measures, it appeals to the public to be thrifty and patient, attributing the economic difficulties to the sanctions. At the same time, the government spends munificently on its security apparatus. The government also relies on high taxes and other means of collecting money from the public, thereby hindering production and victimising the ordinary Sudanese.

The lifting of sanctions without political reform has not solved the political and economic crisis; it only exacerbated it. If accompanied by political reform to reinforce transparency and accountability, the end of sanctions would have presented a golden opportunity for economic growth and social development. It would have stimulated the economy and potentially drawn thousands of Sudanese in exile to return and participate in the development of the country. The need is thus ever pressing for major political reform that addresses endemic corruption and encourages political and economic participation.

With a weak and divided opposition that lacks a comprehensive plan for a political transition, the only option for young activists and youth movements is to continue demonstrating. ♦

Rabah Omer is a researcher working on Sudanese politics and society. This article is reproduced from the Africa Is a Country website (africasacountry.com).

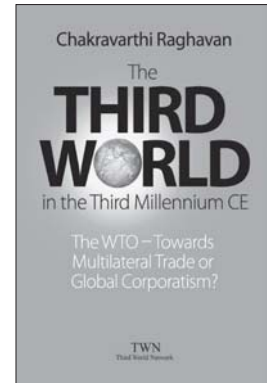
The Third World in the Third Millennium CE

The WTO – Towards Multilateral Trade or Global Corporatism?

By Chakravarthi Raghavan

THE second volume of *The Third World in the Third Millennium CE* looks at how the countries of the South have fared amidst the evolution of the multilateral trading system over the years. Even as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) gave way to the World Trade Organization (WTO) as the institution governing international trade, this book reveals, the Third World nations have continued to see their developmental concerns sidelined in favour of the commercial interests of the industrial countries.

From the landmark Uruguay Round of talks which resulted in the WTO's establishment to the ongoing Doha Round and its tortuous progress, the scenario facing the developing countries on the multilateral trade front has been one of broken promises, onerous obligations and manipulative manoeuvrings. In such a context, the need is for the countries of the Third World to push back by working together to bring about a more equitable trade order. All this is painstakingly documented by Chakravarthi Raghavan in the articles collected in this volume, which capture the complex and contentious dynamics of the trading system as seen through the eyes of a leading international affairs commentator.



ISBN: 978-967-0747-00-2 448 pages
14 cm x 21.5 cm Year: 2014

	Price	Postage
Malaysia	RM45.00	RM2.00
Developing countries	US\$18.00	US\$9.00 (air)
Others	US\$25.00	US\$12.50 (air)

Orders from Malaysia – please pay by credit card/crossed cheque or postal order.
Orders from Australia, Brunei, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, UK, USA – please pay by credit card/cheque/bank draft/international money order in own currency, US\$ or Euro. If paying in own currency or Euro, please calculate equivalent of US\$ rate. If paying in US\$, please ensure that the agent bank is located in the USA.
Rest of the world – please pay by credit card/cheque/bank draft/international money order in US\$ or Euro. If paying in Euro, please calculate equivalent of US\$ rate. If paying in US\$, please ensure that the agent bank is located in the USA.

All payments should be made in favour of: **THIRD WORLD NETWORK BHD.**, 131 Jalan Macalister, 10400 Penang, Malaysia. Tel: 60-4-2266728/2266159; Fax: 60-4-2264505; Email: twn@twnetwork.org; Website: www.twn.my
 Or visit our Online bookstore at www.twn.my to order.

I would like to order copy/copies of *The THIRD WORLD in the Third Millennium CE: The WTO – Towards Multilateral Trade or Global Corporatism?*

I enclose the amount of by cheque/bank draft/IMO.

Please charge the amount of US\$/Euro/RM to my credit card:

☐

Visa

☐

Mastercard

A/c No.: Expiry date:

Signature:

Name:

Address:

The ousting of Bashir: Coup or popular uprising?

This article is an analysis of the eruption of civil disorder motivated by different actors against Sudan's government which successfully led to the ousting of President Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir on 11 April.

Beny Gideon

CIVIL disorder broke out in the eastern town of Atbara on 19 December 2018 and increasingly spread to major towns including the capital Khartoum. The disorder was initially caused by the rise in bread and fuel prices. In just two weeks, the targeted end game of the persistent protest became obvious: the removal of the long-serving Bashir.

In fact, the civil disorder had been planned and coordinated for some time and it was executed by Sudanese professional associations. As confirmation of such plans, it took only two weeks for civil society organisations and the political opposition to adopt what they called the 'Freedom and Change Declaration' calling on Bashir and his government to step down and form a transitional government that could meet the aspirations of the Sudanese people for peace, freedom and democratic transformation.

Until the last hours of the protest, there were three competing forces attempting to remove the National Congress Party-led government: internal political movements led by the Islamist groups; workers federation union represented by Sudanese professional associations; and the army.

The eventual arrest of Bashir and other key political leaders and the subsequent announcement that First Vice President and Defence Minister General Ahmed Awad Ibn Ouf would head a military council to lead the transition for two years sparked a cloud of doubts. As a result, Awad had to step down a day later, and more or less neutral army officer General Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman Burhan took



Sudanese celebrate the ousting and arrest of President Omar al-Bashir.

over.

The protesters not only were against Awad's leadership of the transitional military council but rejected the entire transitional military rule even under Abdel Fattah. The rejection is grounded on the legitimate question of whether the ousting of Bashir is a coup or popular uprising. The answer to this question will enable the Sudanese, regional and international communities to provide correct diagnoses of the situation and appropriate political solutions, particularly on who should form the government and run the state during the transitional period.

Causes of protest

According to an open letter on Sudan by a group of African civil society organisations, the public outcry

'grows out of deeper crises looming over the country for the past fifteen years in terms of regional conflicts, human rights violations and financial mismanagement'. Allegations of corrupt practice furthermore appear to be confirmed by Transparency International, which ranked Sudan 175th out of 180 countries and reported that Bashir and his cronies have likely embezzled up to \$9 billion from the oil sector. This massive alleged corruption is coupled with the government policy of introducing economic restrictions, which has weakened the state's capacity to manage the economic crisis.

At the political level, the opposition alliance has decried a lack of equal representation in the government at all levels and imbalanced services delivery and infrastructural development. After Bashir and the Is-

lamist movement came to power in 1989, Sudan shifted from a multi-party democracy to a typical mirage state where kleptocrats entrenched themselves in power by use of the patronage system and maintaining the political marketplace by auctioning individual loyalties. It is because of these lucrative political-business tactics that the war is not ending in Sudan, as various political or military actors individually negotiated their prices in and out of the government. It depends on who can put in the highest bid for one's loyalties.

Thirty years on, in April 2019, the power of the people finally prevailed over the people in power. Yet there remains a lot to be desired in Sudan's current transition. It is clear that Sudan is still at a crossroads as the professional associations are still strongly holding their ground in rejecting the newly formed transitional military council, and this has seemingly been supported by the regional and international communities.

On 10 April, the troika countries of the United States, the United Kingdom and Norway issued a statement declaring that 'the time has come for the Sudanese authorities to respond to these popular demands in a serious and credible way'. They concluded that 'the Sudanese people are demanding a transition to a political system that is inclusive and has greater legitimacy'. Similarly, on 11 April, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission Moussa Faki said in a statement that 'the military takeover



A sit-in at Armed Forces Square in Khartoum demanding full transfer of power by the ruling transitional military council to civilians.

is not the appropriate response to the challenges facing Sudan and the aspirations of its people'. All these statements are streaming in because what was kickstarted by a civilian-led uprising ended up in the hands of military officials who for one reason or another set a two-year transitional period to conduct general elections.

It is evidently clear that the ousting of Bashir was indeed brought about by a popular uprising and not a coup or military takeover. The Lomé Declaration of 2000 and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance strongly condemn any unconstitutional change of government and commit member states to

respecting the rule of law, democratic principles and human rights. Therefore, the replacement procedures for the office of the President and other top constitutional positions must be in accordance with provisions of the constitution and the electoral laws.

In view of the ongoing developments, one may conclude that Sudan shall never be the same again. The way the Sudanese people protested amid fears of violence was an indication of their determination to change the style of governance in Khartoum. It is therefore highly advisable that the military council accept an inclusive political process that brings in internal Sudanese political forces and armed opposition movements of the SPLM-North, Justice and Equality Movement, Sudan Liberation Movement and the Beja Congress amongst others. Equally important to be included in the political process are the professional associations and civil society organisations, so that an inclusive transitional government is formed that can chart a clear course for a democratic transition. ♦

Beny Gideon is South Sudan's Human Rights Commissioner. This article, which is reproduced from the Sudan Tribune website (sudantribune.com), does not represent the position of any institution or government but solely the author.



It was reported that Omar al-Bashir (pic) and his cronies likely embezzled up to \$9 billion from the oil sector.

Africa as colonial as ever: US' 'new Africa strategy' old oil in new bottles

Months after US National Security Advisor John Bolton announced the 'new Africa strategy', the US' new policy has killed civilians, exploited Africa's resources and used the continent as a battleground for provoking tensions with Russia and China.

Cale Holmes and Erica Jung

IN February 2011, then-US Defence Secretary Robert Gates stated at West Point that 'any future defence secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia, or into the Middle East or Africa, should have his head examined'. While blood was spilled in Libya by NATO coalition forces, killing hundreds from the sky and giving cover for religious extremists to kill thousands, Gates's advice was arguably taken and military engagement has been stretched thin, quietly and discreetly, especially in Africa.

One of the new War on Terror projects the Obama administration inherited from the Bush administration was the United States Africa Command, or AFRICOM. By the time Donald Trump won the presidency in 2016, AFRICOM had grown into a \$250 million behemoth. Much of AFRICOM policy consists of training local forces with a focus on 'counter-terrorism'. Jessica Piombo, editor of *The US Military in Africa: Enhancing Security and Development?*, writes, '[T]he US military has attempted to create new programmes that involve a range of government and nongovernment actors in security programmes that focus on more than training and equipping African militaries.'

In 2018, the administration declared interest in downsizing US military presence in Africa – officially at about 6,000 troops, including 300 who trained forces in Cameroon



Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti is the flagship base under the US' AFRICOM military command.

ahead of the 2018 re-election of France's neoliberal favourite Paul Biya, greenlighting deepened conflict there. However, in 2018 Trump gave free rein to the CIA to expand drone warfare throughout Africa.

There are at least 34 US military sites in Africa now, including three in Libya, where tensions between rival militias have displaced 3,400 and may soon plunge Tripoli into chaos. The focus of AFRICOM's presence is largely in oil-rich nations in West Africa and in the Horn of Africa, adjacent to the oil-rich Arab Peninsula.

Like other military expansions undertaken from Washington, there are very clear economic, profit-driven motives for AFRICOM, and those motives serve as the backbone for US

National Security Advisor John Bolton's 'new Africa strategy'. While petrodollars are on the mind, the continued ability to exploit African economies is a cornerstone of US financial dominance on the continent.

Africa as the frontline for a US-China arms race

Last year at the Heritage Foundation, Bolton said that the West needs to 'wake up' to the threat posed by China and Russia in Africa, warning that 'China's foreign direct investment (FDI) toward Africa totalled \$6.4 billion' between 2016 and 2017, well above US direct investment, which has continued to slump. According to the United Nations Con-

ference on Trade and Development, the FDI decline stems from corporate income tax cuts. From 2017, US multinational enterprises have embarked on a large repatriation of accumulated foreign earnings, indicating a growing reluctance to engage in investment abroad. The speech came months after China's pledge of \$60 billion to Africa in aid and loans.

Djibouti, a focal part of the strategy, is home to the largest known US drone complex in the world, as well as the flagship US base under AFRI-COM, Camp Lemonnier, a former French Foreign Legion outpost. The base hosts 4,000 US and allied personnel, and is close to a Chinese Liberation Army Navy base staffed by 400 personnel. The disparities were just enough to gain the ire of the US last year when the Department of Defence accused China of unverified laser attacks on US pilots, used to justify additional US military spending in Africa.

Bolton's concerns stem from the fact that Djibouti may allow Chinese state-owned enterprises to partially control the Doraleh Container Terminal, a Red Sea shipping port. 'Should this occur,' said Bolton, 'the balance of power in the Horn of Africa – astride major arteries of maritime trade... – would shift in favour of China, and our US military personnel at Camp Lemonnier could face even further challenges in their efforts to protect the American people.'

How Wall Street is underdeveloping Africa

For an Africa strategy, Bolton's speech seemed to express more interest in China-in-Africa's implications for 'American national security', while mentions of the national security of African nation-states were quite sparse – perhaps appropriate, as any mention of the security of African peoples would call into question the arrival of forces from the same country that took enslaved people from the continent mere generations ago.

Bolton did talk of trade though, calling on African countries to prac-

tise fiscal responsibility, promote fair and reciprocal trade, deregulate their economies, and support their private sector. He touted negotiations of bilateral trade agreements and the basing of the new Africa strategy in the Marshall Plan, stating how 'the Marshall Plan furthered American interests, bypassed the United Nations, and targeted key sectors of foreign economies rather than dissipating aid across hundreds of programmes'.

Bolton's seemingly new strategy mirrors the Clinton administration's 'trade not aid' doctrine promoted in the late 1990s. China may have not been a threat to the empire back then, when annual trade of China with Africa totalled only \$10 billion in Clinton's last year in office, compared with the current \$170 billion. Bolton did not give any evidence to prove China's supposed neocolonial role in Africa, but US objectives are countering China's 'predatory' preference to deal with African governments and work towards local priorities, as contrasted with the US approach of transnational corporate and charity-led programmes.

'Prosper Africa' is the Marshall Plan-style approach the administration is taking to reduce aid on top of promoting unregulated capitalism. The potential risks attached to financing infrastructure development will most likely fall on the government rather than the private sector, compromising the transparency of such projects, as seen in the case of Southern Europe. Moreover, there is strong evidence that shows large companies, including multinational corporations and international banks, engage in illicit financial flows from Africa.

In line with Bolton's priorities, the lack of oversight from the United Nations represents the trend of neo-conservative attempts to subvert aspects of the UN system that allow for checks on US power. Zimbabwe, historically known as the 'breadbasket of Africa', is set to join the six fastest-growing economies on the continent, despite being held back in recent years by US sanctions. The geopolitically rising albeit economically isolated country voted against US in-

terests 69 times in 2017 and voted in support only six times. On average, African countries vote in line with the US at the UN 31% of the time, providing the Trump administration a clear motive to operate on the continent with as little multilateral accountability as possible.

Bolton's plans for a new US strategy towards Africa remain vague and largely non-specific. For example, the US Agency for International Development (USAID)'s GEEL project in Somalia calls for coordination between the national government and the local private sector, but the details of this partnership fostered by USAID are not provided and therefore do not take into account the severe corruption that continues to plague the country. According to the Devex development news website, USAID released its first Acquisition and Assistance Strategy 'outlining changes to design and procurement systems promoting innovative methods of collaboration'. However, the page cannot be found. The absence of a transparent and functional financial sector serves as a major obstacle to economic growth in Somalia, especially if there is a de-emphasis on state-led social investment, which Bolton would favour.

While Kenya and Ghana are leading initiatives to promote intra-continental trade, Bolton has been calling for bilateral trade deals between the US and Africa, highlighting the administration's commitment to its 'America First' policy. The US is pushing for the development of an expensive project in Kenya that would cost \$3 billion, which the government will likely need large credit facilities to finance. With countering China a main priority, the US will be incentivised to take over debt management, putting in place additional measures such as demanding the extension of International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailouts to African countries on the condition that such financial assistance would not be used to repay China.

On Libya, much of US diplomatic effort in recent days follows the spike in oil prices that the civil war there is provoking. While Khalifa



US soldiers assigned to the East Africa Response Force prepare to depart Camp Lemonnier for a mission in Gabon, January 2019.

Haftar is threatening the current government in Libya, which has been working with Western governments, he is genuinely Europe's man in Libya – one who intends to guarantee the flow of profits from newly discovered low-sulphur petroleum northward and westward, as opposed to staying in Africa or going to China or Russia, Libya's long-time allies. As such, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, in a break from his usual modus operandi,

is more interested in de-escalating civil tensions in Libya, hoping to get in on the spoils.

Peace by pacification

Under the pretext of fighting Al-Shabab, the resurgence of airstrike diplomacy doesn't skip a beat as US policy, even when the leadership of the people we victimise comes to Washington. Said Bolton: 'Under our

new strategy, we will also take additional steps to help our African friends fight terrorism and strengthen the rule of law. We will assist key African governments in building the capacity of partner forces and security institutions to provide effective and sustainable security and law enforcement to their citizens.'

The US drone war in Africa has hit southern Somalia particularly hard. With General Thomas Waldhauser admitting the US killed 14 Somali civilians in March in five airstrikes, anti-American sentiment is mounting on top of an already existing Somali public debate critical of US policy. It follows last year's deadly US assaults, accompanied by AFRICOM-backed Somali forces, on Somali rural workers in Afgooye, killing people the Pentagon alleged were Al-Shabab militants. After US attacks on Somali people, many local leaders now anticipate how stories will be spun to paint victims as terrorists.

US policy in Africa intends to put more effort into Vietnamisation-style operations in Niger, Mali, Libya and Somalia, and since the French invasion of Mali in 2012, the US has tried to exert its influence within the G5 Sahel Force (with the intent of adding 5,000 troops – Bolton's favourite number) of which Mali is a key member. Mali's northern oil reserves – bordering fellow G5 countries such as Mauritania – are being pursued by oil interests among businesses in Australia, France and Qatar.

The Trump administration is justifying an expansion in US military presence in these African countries as a means of securing an environment that would be stable enough to clear the way for economic pursuits – mainly for US businesses to take advantage of Africa's light industry while profiting from mineral wealth across the continent. As such, it is perhaps no surprise there is very little public support within these countries for US military intervention. ♦

This article is reproduced from MintPress News (www.mintpressnews.com/us-new-africa-strategy-promotes-deep-states-neo-colonial-agenda/257470/).



A camp in Somalia for internally displaced persons fleeing US airstrikes against Al-Shabab militants.

Diego Garcia: The ‘unsinkable carrier’ springs a leak

A court ruling against colonial exploitation could threaten a strategic US military base in the Indian Ocean. Indigenous advocates say it's about time.

Conn Hallinan

THE recent decision by the Hague-based International Court of Justice that the Chagos Islands – with its huge US military base at Diego Garcia – are being illegally occupied by the United Kingdom has the potential to upend the strategic plans of a dozen regional capitals, ranging from Beijing to Riyadh.

For a tiny speck of land measuring only 38 miles in length, Diego Garcia casts a long shadow. Sometimes called Washington's ‘unsinkable aircraft carrier’, planes and warships based on the island played an essential role in the first and second Gulf Wars, the invasion of Afghanistan and the war in Libya. Its strategic location between Africa and Indonesia and 1,000 miles south of India gives the US access to the Middle East, Central and South Asia, and the vast Indian Ocean. No oil tanker, no warship, no aircraft can move without its knowledge.

Most Americans have never heard of Diego Garcia for a good reason: No journalist has been allowed there for more than 30 years, and the Pentagon keeps the base wrapped in a cocoon of national security. Indeed, the UK leased the base to the Americans in 1966 without informing either the British Parliament or the US Congress.

The 25 February Court decision has put a dent in all that by deciding that Great Britain violated United Nations Resolution 1514 prohibiting the division of colonies before independence. The UK broke the Chagos Islands off from Mauritius, a former colony on the southeast coast of Africa that Britain decolonised in 1968. At the time, Mauritius objected, re-



US military planes parked at its Diego Garcia base. Diego Garcia's strategic location gives the US access to the Middle East, Central and South Asia, and the vast Indian Ocean.

luctantly agreeing only after Britain threatened to withdraw its offer of independence.

The Court ruled 13-1 that the UK had engaged in a ‘wrongful act’ and must decolonise the Chagos ‘as rapidly as possible’.

‘The Great Game’ in the Indian Ocean

While the ruling is only ‘advisory’, it comes at a time when the US and its allies are confronting or sanctioning countries for supposedly illegal occupations – Russia in the Crimea and China in the South China Sea.

The suit was brought by Mauritius and some of the 1,500 Chagos islanders who were forcibly removed from the archipelago in 1973. The Americans, calling it ‘sanitising’ the islands, moved the Chagossians more than 1,000 miles to Mauritius and the Seychelles, where they’ve languished in poverty ever since.

Diego Garcia is the lynchpin for US strategy in the region. With its enormous runways, it can handle B-52, B-1 and B-2 bombers, and huge C-5M, C-17 and C-130 military car-

go planes. The lagoon has been transformed into a naval harbour that can handle an aircraft carrier. The US has built a city – replete with fast food outlets, bars, golf courses and bowling alleys – that hosts some 3,000 to 5,000 military personnel and civilian contractors.

What you can't find are any native Chagossians.

The Indian Ocean has become a major theatre of competition between India, the US and Japan on one side, and the growing presence of China on the other. Tensions have flared between India and China over the Maldives and Sri Lanka, specifically China's efforts to use ports on those island nations. India recently joined with Japan and the US in a war game – Malabar 18 – that modelled shutting down the strategic Malacca Straits between Sumatra and Malaysia, through which some 80% of China's energy supplies pass each year.

A portion of the exercise involved anti-submarine warfare aimed at detecting Chinese submarines moving from the South China Sea into the Indian Ocean. To Beijing, those submarines are essential for protecting the ring of Chinese-friendly ports that

run from southern China to Port Sudan on the east coast of Africa. Much of China's oil and gas supplies are vulnerable, because they transit the narrow Mandeb Strait that guards the entrance to the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz that oversees access to the oil-rich Persian Gulf. The US 5th Fleet controls both straits.

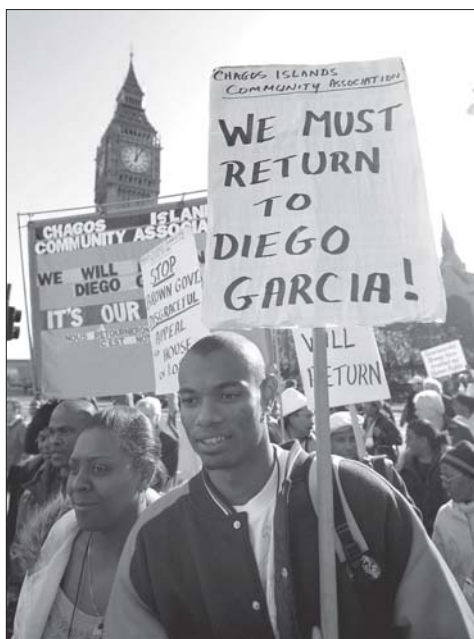
Tensions in the region have increased since the Trump administration shifted the focus of US national security from terrorism to 'major power competition' – that is, China and Russia. The US accuses China of muscling its way into the Indian Ocean by taking over ports, like Hambantota in Sri Lanka and Gwadar in Pakistan that are capable of hosting Chinese warships.

India, which has its own issues with China dating back to their 1962 border war, is ramping up its anti-submarine forces and building up its deep-water navy. New Delhi also recently added a long-range Agni-V missile that's designed to strike deep into China, and the right-wing government of Narendra Modi is increasingly chummy with the American military. The Americans even changed their regional military organisation from 'Pacific Command' to 'Indo-Pacific Command' in deference to New Delhi.

The term for these Chinese-friendly ports – 'string of pearls' – was coined by Pentagon contractor Booz Allen Hamilton and, as such, should be taken with a grain of salt. China is indeed trying to secure its energy supplies and also sees the ports as part of its worldwide Belt and Road Initiative trade strategy. But assuming the 'pearls' have a military role, akin to 19th-century colonial coaling stations, is a stretch. Most of the ports would be indefensible if a war broke out.

An 'historic' decision

Diego Garcia is central to the US war in Somalia, its air attacks in Iraq and Syria, and its control of the Persian Gulf, and would be essential in



Chagossians march by the British Parliament. Will they eventually be allowed to return to their native islands?

any conflict with Iran. If the current hostility by Saudi Arabia, Israel and the US towards Iran actually translates into war, the island will quite literally be an unsinkable aircraft carrier.

Given the strategic centrality of Diego Garcia, it's hard to imagine the US giving it up – or rather, the British withdrawing their agreement with Washington and decolonising the Chagos Islands. In 2016, London extended the Americans' lease for 20 years.

Mauritius wants the Chagos back, but at this point doesn't object to the base. It certainly wants a bigger rent cheque and the right eventually to take the island group back.

It also wants more control over what goes on at Diego Garcia. For instance, the British government admitted that the Americans were using the island to transit 'extraordinary renditions', people seized during the Afghan and Iraq wars between 2002 and 2003, many of whom were tortured. Torture is a violation of international law.

As for the Chagossians, they want to go back.

Diego Garcia is immensely important for US military and intelligence operations in the region, but it's

just one of some 800 American military bases on every continent except Antarctica. Those bases form a worldwide network that allows the US military to deploy advisers and Special Forces in some 177 countries across the globe. Those forces create tensions that can turn dangerous at a moment's notice.

For instance, there are currently US military personal in virtually every country surrounding Russia: Norway, Poland, Hungary, Kosovo, Romania, Turkey, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Georgia, Ukraine and Bulgaria. Added to that is the Mediterranean's 6th Fleet, which regularly sends warships into the Black Sea.

Much the same can be said for China. US military forces are deployed in South Korea, Japan and Australia, plus numerous islands in the Pacific. The American 7th Fleet, based in Hawaii and Yokohama, is the Navy's largest.

In late March, US Navy and Coast Guard ships transited the Taiwan Straits, which, while international waters, the Chinese consider an unnecessary provocation. British ships have also sailed close to Chinese-occupied reefs and islands in the South China Sea.

The fight to decolonise the Chagos Islands will now move to the UN General Assembly. In the end, Britain may ignore the General Assembly and the Court, but it will be hard-pressed to make a credible case for doing so. How Great Britain can argue for international law in the Crimea and South China Sea, while ignoring the International Court of Justice on the Chagos, will require some fancy footwork.

In the meantime, Mauritian Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth calls the Court decision 'historic', and one that will eventually allow the 6,000 native Chagossians and their descendants 'to return home'. ♦

Conn Hallinan is a columnist for Foreign Policy In Focus, from whose website this article is reproduced (fpif.org). He can be read at dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com and middleempireseries.wordpress.com.

The Modi years

The Narendra Modi years in India have witnessed an authoritarian imposition upon society by an increasingly centralised state, the setting up of one segment of society against another and the promotion of a cult of hatred, behind which the state acts directly in corporate interests.

Prabhat Patnaik

IN its attack on civil liberties, its restructuring of the state to effect an acute centralisation of power, and its pervasive purveyance of fear, the Narendra Modi years resemble Indira Gandhi's Emergency. But the resemblance stops there. In fact, the two differ fundamentally in several ways.

First, there were no lynch mobs or street thugs terrorising people and giving them lessons in 'nationalism' during the Emergency. It was only the state that repressed people then; now we have gangs of Hindutva hoodlums who force critics of the government to apologise for their 'misdeemeanours', with the additional threat of arrests still hanging over these intimidated critics. One cannot easily forget the sickening sight of a professor being made to ask for forgiveness on bended knees for a Facebook post that was critical of the government.

Second, unlike the Emergency, the current repression invokes an ideology, that of 'nationalism', interpreted as being synonymous with Hindutva but cashing in opportunistically on the prestige of India's anti-colonial nationalism despite having nothing in common with it. As a result, while Indira Gandhi's repression had the effect (no doubt unwanted by her) of making her critics appear honourable, the current repression deliberately portrays them as dishonourable, as 'enemies of the people'. This vilification is further magnified when state agencies are used to accuse these opponents of 'corruption' and 'wrongdoings' of various kinds; the idea is to destroy their moral standing before the people.

The third difference is the government's capturing of the media.



A Hindu nationalist march in India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been instrumental in effecting a "partnership" between big business and the Hindutva crowd'.

During the Emergency, the print media was subject to pre-censorship; papers would appear with vast spaces inked out, because of which they actually gained people's respect. Now the media, barring a few honourable exceptions which, too, may not remain so for long, are totally in the Hindutva camp, and the task of destroying the moral stature of the opponents is facilitated because of the media's complicity in it.

The media's changed role, in turn, is linked to the fourth difference between then and now: the Modi government is entirely in cahoots with corporate interests, while the Indira Gandhi regime maintained its difference with the corporates and even presented a 'progressive' anti-corporate image. Indeed, no government in post-independence India has been as close to the corporates as the Modi government, a point exemplified by his travelling in an Adani Group-owned aircraft to New Delhi to be sworn in as Prime Minister. (It is worth recalling, by way of contrast,

that Jawaharlal Nehru, the Hindutva bete noire, did not have enough funds to visit his wife, Kamala, when she was dying of tuberculosis in a Swiss sanatorium and had refused G D Birla's offer of financial assistance; eventually Nehru himself managed to raise the money.)

The fifth difference is the Modi government's thrust against minorities, especially the hapless Muslim minority. Indira Gandhi's repression did not have any specific ethnic or communal or caste target. It was repression pure and simple, directed at her opponents and those of her son Sanjay, who was notorious for his shenanigans. Correspondingly, it did not have any grandiose projects of rewriting history, of presenting a narrative vilifying a particular religious community, and of using state power to thrust this narrative down the throats of even schoolchildren, inculcating in them a sense of hatred towards fellow countrymen belonging to a different religion.

The sixth difference, associated

necessarily with this project, is a promotion of unreason, a prioritisation of faith over rational discourse, a cultivation of disdain for evidence and even for the internal consistency of argumentation. This phenomenon has for long characterised the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, but it has now invaded official public discourse, with even the Indian Science Congress not in a position to free itself of this discourse.

The seventh difference is the destruction of institutions that the Modi government has initiated, and this is especially true of public universities and other publicly funded centres of learning. All these institutions are faced with a 'heads I lose, tails you win' situation. If they cave in to the demands of the government to change their ambience and curricula, they become intellectually dead since intellectual survival requires independent critical thinking. But if they persist with independent critical thinking, then they are starved of funds and charged with harbouring 'anti-national' seditious elements, as has happened to Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). The fact that some of the finest institutions in the country, from JNU to the University of Hyderabad to the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune, to the Tata Institute of Social Sciences and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, have been struggling for breath is symptomatic of our times. Nothing like this has happened before; no government in the past has ever shown such disdain for thought.

These differences between the Emergency years and the Modi years can be summed up as follows. The Emergency was an authoritarian imposition by the state, which had got extremely centralised by then, upon society or upon the people at large; it was no doubt a fallout of the contradiction between the logic of capitalist development and a democratic polity, but it did not represent direct corporate rule. The Modi years have witnessed not just an authoritarian imposition upon society by the state, which has also got extremely centralised; they have witnessed in addition



Modi displays his inked finger after casting his vote in the ongoing Indian election.

a setting up of one segment of society against another and the promotion of a cult of hatred, behind which the state acts directly in corporate interests. The difference in a word is between authoritarianism and fascism. The statistics of repression, such as the number of persons jailed, were worse during the Emergency. But the potential for repression being built up now is much greater, more far-reaching.

Every single one of the characteristics mentioned above as being specific to the Modi years is in fact a characteristic of fascism: the rampaging mobs, the 'fusion of corporate and state power' (supposed to have been Benito Mussolini's definition of fascism), the targeting of a hapless minority, the promotion of unreason, the destruction of universities, and so on. To say this does not mean that we shall have a re-enactment of the 1930s. We have fascist elements in power but not yet a fascist state, and today's context being different from the 1930s, we are unlikely to even have one.

To be sure, as in the 1930s, the current tendency towards fascism, which is not just an Indian phenomenon but a global one, arises from the crisis afflicting capitalism. Such a crisis brings with it a threat to the hegemony of the corporate-financial oligarchy, which therefore looks for an additional prop to retain its hegemo-

ny, one that can shift the popular discourse away from the flaws of the system to the danger supposedly posed by the 'other', some hapless minority that can be made the focus of anger. Corporate capital in such situations picks up some 'supremacist' fringe group (such groups spewing hatred against a minority exist in most modern societies) and pushes it centre stage through massive financial backing: what the renowned Polish economist Michal Kalecki had called a 'partnership of big business with fascist upstarts' comes into being.

This is what has happened in India too, with the promise of neoliberal capitalism waning because of the prolonged stagnation that the world economy has entered into after 2008; Modi has been instrumental in effecting this 'partnership' between big business and the Hindutva crowd, whence his current political importance.

There is, however, a basic difference between the 1930s and now, which consists in the fact that the corporate-financial oligarchy in the capitalist countries then was nation-based and engaged in acute rivalry with similar oligarchies of other nations; the apotheosis of militarism which is necessarily associated with fascism inevitably led to war in that situation.

This had two implications: one was that military spending in preparation for war, financed mainly by

government borrowing, got the fascist countries quickly out of the Great Depression and its associated mass unemployment (Japan was the first to recover, in 1931, followed by Germany, in 1933). There was even a brief interregnum, therefore, between the recovery from the Depression and the devastation unleashed by war when the fascist governments actually became quite popular for having overcome unemployment. The second implication was that fascism also burned itself in the process, through the war. The cost extracted for this extinction was, no doubt, terrible, but it did mean the extinction of fascism.

Today, by contrast, we do not find rival corporate-financial oligarchies engaged in intense rivalry. All of them are integrated into a structure of globalised capital, which does not want the world broken up into separate 'economic territories' through war; it would rather have a world that remains open for capital, especially financial, flows. This does not rule out wars, but wars today are directed by leading powers against those states that either are not under the hegemony of globalised finance capital or are challenging it.

Likewise, since finance capital dislikes fiscal deficits, and since the writ of globalised finance capital must run against any nation state (otherwise it would quit that country's shores, causing an acute financial crisis), increased government spending, even military spending, cannot be financed by a fiscal deficit. Nor can it be financed by taxes on capitalists, which finance capital would obviously oppose. But these are the only means of financing government expenditure that can lead to an increase in employment (for government spending financed by taxes on workers who consume most of their incomes anyway does not add to aggregate demand). Contemporary fascism, therefore, is incapable of making any difference to the state of unemployment under neoliberal capitalism. And being corporate-financed, it cannot challenge neoliberal capitalism either.

This means both that it cannot acquire political legitimacy by im-

proving the material conditions of life of the working people, and at the same time, it is not going to extinguish itself through war as fascism in the earlier era had done.

It cannot also do away altogether with the institution of parliamentary elections because of the precious legitimacy that such elections provide to the hegemony of globalised finance. (It is significant that the coups we are witnessing these days against progressive regimes in Latin America that have dared to break away from neoliberal policies are parliamentary coups, which are undertaken in the name of preserving democracy, unlike the Central Intelligence Agency-sponsored coups of an earlier era, such as those that toppled Iran's Mossadegh or Guatemala's Arbenz or Chile's Allende.)

Fascification of society

It is in this context that the following denouement becomes a distinct possibility. Notwithstanding unwarranted interference with the electoral process, notwithstanding the discourse shift away from issues of material life to jingoistic nationalism which occasional terrorist actions make possible (there is a dialectic here between terrorism and the fascist elements in state power, each, objectively, serving to strengthen the other), the Modi government could lose the forthcoming parliamentary election. But the government that follows, if it does not break away from the neoliberal paradigm to provide succour to the peasantry and other segments of the working people, will also lose its popular support after some time, which will once again enable the fascist elements to come back to power in a subsequent election.

We may thus have oscillations with regard to government formation, with the fascist elements never getting extinguished, but on the contrary enforcing a gradual fascification of the society and the polity through such oscillations. For instance, the way that the Congress government that has succeeded the Bharatiya Ja-

nata Party in Madhya Pradesh state is emulating the latter in cashing in on the appeal of Hindutva is a pointer to this phenomenon of a gradual fascification of society through oscillations in government formation.

We could, in short, witness a fascification of society over time, under pressure from the fascist elements who continue to remain strong whether or not they are actually in power. This would be a case of fascification without a fascist state actually being imposed on society in the classical fashion of the 1930s, a case of 'permanent fascism', unless the conjuncture that gives rise to fascism is itself eliminated.

This conjuncture is one of neoliberalism in crisis. To counter fascification effectively in India, it is necessary to go beyond the current regime of neoliberal capitalism that has reached a dead-end and has enveloped the world in a crisis, from which even Donald Trump sees no way out for the United States except by imposing trade protection (which amounts to a certain negation of neoliberalism). A step towards such a transcendence of the current neoliberal capitalism would be the formulation of a programme of action that brings about an immediate improvement in the material conditions of life of the working people.

To say all this is not to underestimate the importance of ensuring the defeat of the Hindutva forces in the coming election and the importance of unity among all the secular forces to achieve this. But while that is a first step, rolling back the fascification of our society and polity would require a lot more than that; it would require above all a programme that provides relief to the people from the depredations of neoliberal capitalism. Only if such relief is provided (and appropriate measures to sustain it are made to follow) can we succeed in overcoming the fascistic legacy of the Modi years. ♦

Prabhat Patnaik is Professor Emeritus at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. This article first appeared in Frontline (12 April 2019, frontline.thehindu.com).

Campaign to criminalise criticism of Israel: A challenge to free speech, Jewish values

The remarkable success of the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) movement against Israel has unnerved some sections of the latter's supporters. Attempts are being made in the US Congress to silence critics of Israel by making it illegal to advocate boycotts against that country even though such moves would violate the US Constitution's First Amendment protecting free speech. *Allan C Brownfeld* explains.

FREEDOM of speech and the right to dissent is under attack by Israel's Washington lobby, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), as well as by most of the organised American Jewish community and casino mogul Sheldon Adelson, the Republican Party's single largest contributor. The goal is to make it illegal to advocate a boycott of Israel in protest of its more than 50 years of illegal occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and its mistreatment of Palestinians.

This effort is being conducted on both the federal and state levels. Already, 26 states have enacted such laws. In the last Congress, legislation introduced in the Senate, called the Israel Anti-Boycott Act, was co-sponsored by Senators Ben Cardin and Rob Portman. In a 20 December 2018 editorial, *The New York Times* characterised the legislation as 'clearly a part of a widening attempt to silence one side of the debate. That is not in the interest of Israel, the United States or their shared democratic traditions'.

The growth of the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) movement, which is the target of this legislation and that in the states, is, in the *Times*' view, a reaction to Israel's move away from a peaceful settlement with the Palestinians, and the movement includes many Jews in its ranks. As the *Times* notes: 'It is not



The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel's Palestinian policy is being targeted by existing and proposed federal and state legislation in the US.

only Israel's adversaries who find the movement appealing. Many devoted supporters of Israel, including many American Jews, oppose the occupation of the West Bank and refuse to buy products of the settlements in occupied territories. Their right to protest in this way must be vigorously defended.'

Senators Dianne Feinstein and Bernie Sanders issued a joint statement saying that 'while we do not support the BDS movement, we remain resolved to our constitutional oath to defend the right of every American to express their views peacefully without the threat of, or actual, punishment by the government'.

This legislation failed in the last Congress, but was introduced in the new Congress in January as part of a larger bill, which fell three votes shy of the 60 needed to overcome a filibuster. Republicans made it clear they weren't giving up, and planned more

votes in the days ahead. A rare Republican dissenter was Senator Rand Paul, who declared: 'I am not in favour of boycotting Israel ... At the same time, I am concerned about what the role of Congress can and should be in this situation. I strongly oppose any legislation that attempts to ban boycotts or ban people who support boycotts from participating in our government or working for our

government. We must be very, very careful here to not let our dislike for something cloud our judgment. America is the land of freedom of expression, and the hallmark of a truly free country is that it allows expressions, speech and actions that we don't agree with.'

Indeed, America has a long history of embracing peaceful boycotts. It was founded amidst a boycott of English tea. Abolitionists boycotted goods produced by slaves. Rosa Parks led a boycott against segregated buses in Montgomery, Alabama, which lasted for 381 days in 1955 and 1956. More recently, a peaceful international boycott helped bring down apartheid in South Africa. In the case of *NAACP v. Claiborne Co.*, the US Supreme Court held in 1982 that the economic boycott of white-owned businesses by blacks was entitled to First Amendment protection. The court found that 'a non-violent, politically motivated boycott' was po-

litical speech and was, therefore, protected.

Consider the extremes to which the laws in 26 states now go in criminalising criticism of Israel. The case of Bahia Amawi is typical. The children's speech pathologist who has worked for the past nine years with developmentally disabled, autistic and speech-impaired elementary school children in Austin, Texas, has been told she can no longer work with the public school district after she refused to sign an oath vowing that she 'does not' and 'will not' engage in a boycott of Israel, or 'otherwise take any action that is intended to inflict economic harm' on that foreign country.

A lawsuit on her behalf was filed in December in a federal district court alleging a violation of Amawi's First Amendment right of free speech. Discussing the oath she refused to sign, Glenn Greenwald wrote in *The Intercept* on 21 December 2018: 'The language reads like Orwellian – or McCarthyite – self-parody, the classic political loyalty oath that every American should instinctively shudder upon reading ... The received certification about Israel was the only one in the contract that pertained to political opinions or activism. In order to get a contract in Texas, then, a citizen is free to denounce and work against the United States, to advocate for causes that directly harm American children and even support a boycott of particular US states – such as was done in 2017 to North Carolina in protest of its anti-LGBT law – to continue to work.'

Greenwald pointed out, 'The sole political affirmation Texans are to sign in order to work with the school district's children is to protect the economic interests not of the US or Texas – but Israel. The anti-BDS oath is the result of an Israel-specific state law enacted on May 2, 2017 by the Texas State Legislature ... when Governor Greg Abbott signed the bill at a ceremony at the Austin Jewish Community Center, he said, "Any anti-Israel policy is an anti-Texas policy".'

The federal courts have agreed with those challenging these laws. In

September 2018, a federal court blocked Arizona from enforcing a law requiring state contractors to certify that they are not participating in boycotts of Israel. The court agreed with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) that the law was likely in contravention of the contractor's free speech rights under the First Amendment. 'A restriction of one's ability to participate in collective calls against Israel unquestionably burdens the protected expression of companies wishing to engage in such a boycott,' US District Judge Diane J Hu-metewa wrote in her decision granting a preliminary injunction against the law.

This was the second federal court to arrive at the same conclusion: A court in Kansas held that the First Amendment protects the right of citizens 'to band together' and 'express collectively their dissatisfaction with the injustice and violence they perceive as experienced by the Palestinians and Israeli citizens'.

The ACLU declared, 'The Kansas and Arizona decisions sent a clear message: The First Amendment right to boycott is alive and well. But our work is far from over. Similar contract requirements are on the books in 24 other states. All of these laws violate the First Amendment.'

Legal scholars on both the right and left agree that these laws criminalising criticism of Israel are in violation of the First Amendment. Walter Olson, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute's Center for Constitutional Studies, expressed the widely shared view that 'It is not a proper function of law to force Americans into carrying on foreign commerce they personally find politically objectionable, whether their reasons for reluctance be good, bad or arbitrary.'

The idea that this legislation somehow is supported by most American Jews is at odds with the growing division between mostly liberal American Jews and the increasingly right-wing Israeli government, which is actively promoting the anti-BDS laws. Editorially, the 8 December 2018 issue of *The Jewish News of Northern California* described the

laws as having 'all the appearances of an overbearing government thought-police pressing down on the little guy, holding pay checks hostage to demand ideological support for a country two continents away. What possible business is it of Texas what a random speech pathologist does or doesn't think about Israel? Condemnation has been swift and brutal and in many cases has crossed partisan boundaries.'

While the organised Jewish community supports Israel's occupation, the majority of American Jews oppose it, and support the creation of a Palestinian state. Many Jewish critics of Israel support the BDS movement, such as the increasingly popular Jewish Voice for Peace. Others, such as J Street, while opposing BDS, do oppose the anti-BDS legislation which criminalises criticism of Israel. J Street notes that these laws could have a harmful effect by treating the settlements in the occupied West Bank as similar to or part of Israel proper.

By embracing the anti-BDS laws, AIPAC, the American Jewish Committee and other establishment Jewish groups are not representing the thinking of the vast majority of American Jews. They are turning their backs not only on the First Amendment guarantees of the Constitution, but upon the Jewish value of free and open discussion as well.

If Israel has a good case to make against the BDS movement, it and its American supporters should use our free speech guarantees to make that case. Only those without such a persuasive case would want to silence its opponents by criminalising their free speech rights. That, it seems, is the path that Israel and its friends have chosen. In a battle against both the Constitution and the Jewish moral and ethical tradition, they are unlikely to succeed. ♦

Allan C Brownfeld is a syndicated columnist and associate editor of the Lincoln Review, a journal published by the Lincoln Institute for Research and Education, and editor of Issues, the quarterly journal of the American Council for Judaism. The above article first appeared in the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs (March/April 2019, www.wrmea.org).

The anti-Semitic con

A favourite tactic of Israeli authorities in responding to any criticism of Israel is to accuse the critic of being anti-Semitic. The effect of such a charge is electric as no one wants to be tagged with Hitler. It quite often silences the critic.

Paul Edwards explains.

WITH the Putin/Russia Collusion Fairytale debunked, the undeniable cancer of real foreign interference in the US government demands an honest airing.

Since American politics is mortally corrupt, one might wonder: Why bother to expose one prime cause of its ethical degeneracy? If the beast is dead, what use is determining what killed it? Well, it isn't quite dead and we have to live with it. If the public knew one country has done more to subvert our government than all others combined, it might raise enough hell to stop it.

In terms of influence, there can be no serious denial that Israel exerts by far the most powerful suasion of any foreign power on America. Influence exerted by a foreign power's registered lobby is legitimate per our toothless protocol. Israel's is not so registered, but... details, details. So, when Republicans invite Israeli premier Bibi Netanyahu to smarmily insult a sitting US President in a joint session of Congress, that's influence, not interference. When, besides financing most Senators' and Representatives' elections, Israel takes them on cushy, free PR junkets to Tel Aviv, that's influence, not interference.

Conversely, when Clintonista subversion of the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign appears on WikiLeaks and this is instantly imputed to Russia and Putin – without proof and against expert technical evidence – that's not influence, it's Russki interference. More absurdly, when – again, without proof – the same Democratic CFOs howl that Putin trolls bought chump change worth of dingy ads on Facebook that swung the election to Trump, that's... but you get the picture.

What is obvious and has long been so – and has been emphasised



A Washington DC conference of AIPAC, a leading pro-Israel lobby group in the US.

by two years of fraud and insanity regarding imagined Russian collusion – is that influence is what your friends have; interference is what your enemies do.

Why, when it is so blatantly obvious as to be a source of outspoken pride for them, is the fact that Israel's right-wing ruling clique brazenly and continually interferes in American government in the most aggressive and offensive way, universally denied? You want flagrant foreign collusion with high officials in US government? Open your eyes. And your mind...

The reason it's officially denied is that Israel's Congressional whores know that not to do so violates their deal. Not to back Israel unquestioningly terminates it, and the loss of that money means loss of office... to say nothing of the beating they'd take in the press and on their reputations.

The great mass of Americans won't admit what many can't help but know because they, too, fear being attacked for such bold honesty. They are equally vulnerable to rough handling from the same source: the mas-

sively powerful Israel Lobby, a unified phalanx of militant American Zionists.

To be clear: Zionism has always insisted that Israel exists for Jews only.

The Israel Lobby – financed by vast American Zionist wealth – potent as it is, could not leverage our politics if its tactics were exposed, and it knows it. History gives it the key that makes rational assessment of Israel's policies impossible: the Holocaust and the true anti-Semitism that was its cause.

Evocation of that horror allows any critique of Israeli government to be sleazily labelled anti-Semitism, thereby effectively nullifying argument. The dishonest and cynical Israel Lobby uses this tactic shamelessly to blunt and derail sound criticism or even plain examination of Israeli state behaviour.

What then is anti-Semitism? By definition, it is antipathy or hatred of the Jewish people as a whole. An anti-Semite espouses that categorical prejudice, and anti-Semitism in word or deed pertains to Jews in toto. In



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addresses a joint session of the US Congress in 2015. 'In terms of influence, there can be no serious denial that Israel exerts by far the most powerful suasion of any foreign power on America.'

contrast, behaviour that is ugly, hateful or injurious but not directed at Jews as a whole, though execrable, is not anti-Semitic, just as it's possible to hate a Catholic or Muslim without hating their religion or their people.

It follows, then, that criticism, even vicious, hateful criticism, of the Israeli state is not inherently anti-Semitic, and the claim is false on its face. To attack the Israeli state is not to attack Jews as a people since Israel is not home to most of Jewry and its polity by no means defines or represents Jews in all their broad, complex range of beliefs, practices and principles.

To say that criticising the brutal, repressive apartheid Israeli government's actions is anti-Semitic is no

more legitimate than to say that condemnation of the American state's vicious imperialist wars makes one anti-American. This disingenuous con needs to be named and refuted around the world.

Is there criticism of Israel that is clearly anti-Semitic? Of course there is! Plenty of it. Anti-Semitism is no less real and evil because it does not apply to all critiques of Israel or all insults to Jews or Jewish entities. Precisely because anti-Semitism is so vile and toxic a disease, and because it will continue to live in its odious carriers, it is critically important not to vitiate the ubiquitous contempt it arouses by cynically muddling its meaning.

The dishonest and defensive crying of wolf that the government of

Israel and the Israel Lobby deploy against any criticism of their history and policy is, in addition to being morally contemptible, deeply counter-productive in terms of Israel's standing in world opinion. Mounting a transparently false, blanket, all-purpose lament as a cover for their most obvious and glaring crimes and cruelties cannot prevent the world from seeing them for the corrupt and unjust power they are and fiercely, adamantly opposing them.

Beyond the damage Israel's cowardly dishonesty does to itself, a more critical concern for Americans pertains to what it has done and is doing to exacerbate the rolling debacle of our misruled and floundering country. The Israel Lobby, Zionism's American voice, wielding the bogus trope of anti-Semitism as a club, infects and pollutes through its agents and activists every niche of our government from the presidency and Congress to federal departments and bureaus, to state and local offices.

Without Zionist acceptance, Trump would not have been President, but neither would Obama. Through the Lobby's diligence, we have made our country hated by carrying Israel's dirty water in the Middle East, crippled and hamstrung enlightened policy at home, and been afflicted with such creatures of nightmare as the Harpy Nikki Haley, bughouse pseudo-Christian loon Mike Pompeo and murderous psychopath John Bolton.

Nothing suggests the death grip Israel and its Lobby have on our fate can be broken. So long as the Anti-Semitic Con is viable, even our security is in jeopardy, with its blind, sick, demented chosen monsters in charge.

The fable of the eagle and the scorpion comes painfully to mind. When the bird, stung and bearing them both down to death, asks how the scorpion could sting it after swearing not to do so, the scorpion replies, 'You knew what I was when you let me ride.' It was all too clear what Israel was in 1947. ♦

Paul Edwards is a writer and filmmaker in Montana, USA. This article is reproduced from CounterPunch.org.



'To attack the Israeli state is not to attack Jews as a people...'

The Assange arrest is a warning from history

The shocking arrest of Julian Assange, says *John Pilger*, carries a message for all those who sow the seeds of discontent: What happened to Assange can happen to you.

THE glimpse of Julian Assange being dragged from the Ecuadorean embassy in London is an emblem of the times. Might against right. Muscle against the law. Indecency against courage. Six policemen manhandled a sick journalist, his eyes wincing against his first natural light in almost seven years.

That this outrage happened in the heart of London, in the land of the Magna Carta, ought to shame and anger all who fear for 'democratic' societies. Assange is a political refugee protected by international law, the recipient of asylum under a strict covenant to which Britain is a signatory. The United Nations made this clear in the legal ruling of its Working Party on Arbitrary Detention.

But to hell with that. Let the thugs go in. Directed by the quasi-fascists in Trump's Washington, in league with Ecuador's Lenin Moreno, a Latin American Judas and liar seeking to disguise his rancid regime, the British elite abandoned its last imperial myth: that of fairness and justice.

Imagine Tony Blair dragged from his multi-million-pound Georgian home in Connaught Square, London, in handcuffs, for onward dispatch to the dock in The Hague. By the standard of Nuremberg, Blair's 'paramount crime' is the deaths of a million Iraqis. Assange's crime is journalism: holding the rapacious to account, exposing their lies and empowering people all over the world with truth.

The shocking arrest of Assange carries a warning for all who, as Oscar Wilde wrote, 'sow the seeds of discontent [without which] there would be no advance towards civilisation'. The warning is explicit towards journalists: What happened to the founder and editor of WikiLeaks



Julian Assange being taken away from the Ecuadorean embassy in London by policemen.

can happen to you on a newspaper, you in a TV studio, you on radio, you running a podcast.

Assange's principal media tormentor, *The Guardian*, a collaborator with the secret state, displayed its nervousness with an editorial that scaled new weasel heights. *The Guardian* had exploited the work of Assange and WikiLeaks in what its previous editor called 'the greatest scoop of the last 30 years'. The paper creamed off WikiLeaks' revelations and claimed the accolades and riches that came with them.

With not a penny going to Assange or to WikiLeaks, a hyped *Guardian* book led to a lucrative Hollywood movie. The book's authors, Luke Harding and David Leigh, turned on their source, abused him and disclosed the secret password Assange had given the paper in confidence, which was designed to protect a digital file containing leaked US embassy cables.

With Assange trapped in the Ecuadorean embassy, Harding joined the police outside and gloated on his

blog that 'Scotland Yard may get the last laugh'. *The Guardian* has since published a series of falsehoods about Assange, not least a discredited claim that a group of Russians and Trump's man, Paul Manafort, had visited Assange in the embassy. The meetings never happened; it was fake.

But the tone has now changed. 'The Assange case is a morally tangled web,' the paper opined. 'He [Assange] believes in publishing things that should not be published ... But he has always shone a light on things that should never have been hidden.'

These 'things' are the truth about the homicidal way America conducts its colonial wars, the lies of the British Foreign Office in its denial of rights to vulnerable people such as the Chagos Islanders, the expose of Hillary Clinton as a backer and beneficiary of jihadism in the Middle East, the detailed description of American ambassadors of how the governments in Syria and Venezuela might be overthrown, and much more. It is all available on the WikiLeaks site.

The Guardian is understandably



A 2010 photo of Assange holding up a copy of *The Guardian* which reported on WikiLeaks' revelations.

nervous. Secret policemen have already visited the newspaper and demanded and got the ritual destruction of a hard drive. On this, the paper has form. In 1983, a Foreign Office clerk, Sarah Tisdall, leaked British government documents showing when American cruise nuclear weapons would arrive in Europe. *The Guardian* was showered with praise. When a court order demanded to know the source, instead of the editor going to prison on a fundamental principle of protecting a source, Tisdall was betrayed, prosecuted and served six months.

If Assange is extradited to America for publishing what *The Guardian* calls truthful 'things', what is to stop the current editor, Katherine Viner, following him, or the previous editor, Alan Rusbridger, or the prolific propagandist Luke Harding?

What is to stop the editors of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, who also published morsels of the truth that originated with WikiLeaks, and the editors of *El Pais* in Spain and *Der Spiegel* in Germany and the *Sydney Morning Herald* in Australia? The list is long.

David McCraw, lead lawyer of *The New York Times*, wrote: 'I think the prosecution [of Assange] would

be a very, very bad precedent for publishers ... from everything I know, he's sort of in a classic publisher's position and the law would have a very hard time distinguishing between *The New York Times* and WikiLeaks.'



WikiLeaks 'has always shone a light on things that should never have been hidden.'

Even if journalists who published WikiLeaks' leaks are not summoned by an American grand jury, the intimidation of Assange and Chelsea Manning will be enough. Real journalism is being criminalised by thugs in plain sight. Dissent has become an indulgence.

In Australia, the current America-besotted government is prosecuting two whistleblowers who revealed that Canberra's spooks bugged the cabinet meetings of the new government of East Timor for the express

purpose of cheating the tiny, impoverished nation out of its proper share of the oil and gas resources in the Timor Sea. Their trial will be held in secret. The Australian prime minister, Scott Morrison, is infamous for his part in setting up concentration camps for refugees on the Pacific islands of Nauru and Manus, where children attempt self-harm and suicide. In 2014, Morrison proposed mass detention camps for 30,000 people.

Real journalism is the enemy of these disgraces. A decade ago, the Ministry of Defence in London produced a secret document which described the 'principal threats' to public order as threefold: terrorists, Russian spies and investigative journalists. The latter was designated the major threat.

The document was duly leaked to WikiLeaks, which published it. 'We had no choice,' Assange told me. 'It's very simple. People have a right to know and a right to question and challenge power. That's true democracy.'

What if Assange and Manning and others in their wake – if there are others – are silenced and 'the right to know and question and challenge' is taken away?

In the 1970s, I met Leni Riefenstahl, close friend of Adolf Hitler, whose films helped cast the Nazi spell over Germany. She told me that the message in her films, the propaganda, was dependent not on 'orders from above' but on what she called the 'submissive void' of the public.

'Did this submissive void include the liberal, educated bourgeoisie?' I asked her.

'Of course,' she said, 'especially the intelligentsia ... When people no longer ask serious questions, they are submissive and malleable. Anything can happen.'

And did.

The rest, she might have added, is history. ♦

John Pilger is an award-winning journalist and documentary filmmaker. This article is reproduced from his website JohnPilger.com.

Why the prosecution of Julian Assange is troubling for press freedom

After a seven-year standoff at the Ecuadorean embassy in London, British police arrested WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange – a development press freedom advocates had long feared.

Alexandra Ellerbeck and
Avi Asher-Schapiro

FOR years, journalists and press freedom advocates worried the US would prosecute Assange under the Espionage Act for the publication of classified information, a scenario that potentially would have set a devastating legal precedent for US news organisations that regularly publish such material.

During the Obama administration, officials ultimately said they would not prosecute because of the possible consequences for press freedom.

It was unclear whether the Trump administration would have the same compunction: while Trump praised WikiLeaks, then-CIA Director Mike Pompeo labelled it a ‘non-state hostile intelligence service’.

Trump has shown little concern for freedom of the press, once allegedly urging then-FBI Director James Comey to jail journalists. (In response to news of Assange’s arrest, Trump said he would leave it to the Justice Department.)

In this context, the charge on which Assange was arrested seemed modest: A single count of conspiracy (with former Army Pfc. Chelsea Manning) to ‘commit computer intrusion’ under the US Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, with a maximum penalty of five years.

Unlike the publication of classified information, hacking computers is not a tool for reporters. Some journalists were quick to point this out.

‘[The] charge here is attempting to help crack a password to steal classified material. Didn’t work but



Journalists outside the Ecuadorean embassy in London in 2017 where Julian Assange had taken refuge. Assange’s subsequent prosecution comes in a time of heightened concern for investigative journalists and national security reporters.

would news orgs do that? (Not in my experience.),’ Greg Miller, a national security reporter at *The Washington Post*, said on Twitter.

But press freedom advocates, and some journalists, have not expressed relief based on the indictment. A host of organisations, including the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), spoke out against the prosecution. Here’s why:

(1) The indictment is flimsy and could simply be a pretext to punish Assange for publishing classified information.

The diplomatic time and resources expended between three countries to detain Assange strike some observers as disproportionate to the single computer misuse charge.

The indictment is vague about the exact nature of the aid Assange allegedly provided Manning in the course of their interaction, but it does not appear that Assange successfully hacked any password. Even if his at-

tempts were successful, they would have helped Manning cover her tracks, but not let her break into a system to which she didn’t already have access.

Prosecutors have a wide range of latitude; it’s worth remembering that the Obama administration likely had all the same information, but declined to pursue an indictment.

Matthew Miller, a former Justice Department spokesperson in the Obama administration, told *The New York Times* that he thought the charge was justified but ‘This is not the world’s strongest case.’

So, is it just a pretext on the part of the US government to punish Assange for the publication of classified information – a practice that should be constitutionally protected? The issue comes in a time of heightened concern for investigative journalists and national security reporters.

Since the 9/11 attacks, the government has increasingly classified

large amounts of material and punished those who share it with the press. CPJ has written extensively about the chilling effect of this crack-down on reporting in the public interest.

‘Given the nature of the charge – a discussion 9 years ago about an unsuccessful attempt to figure out a password – I think it’s fair to debate whether this is a fig leaf for the government punishing someone for publishing stuff it doesn’t want published,’ tweeted Scott Shane, a national security reporter for *The New York Times*.

‘If it wasn’t Julian Assange, it would be very unlikely you’d see this prosecution,’ Cindy Cohn, executive director of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, told CPJ. ‘This is what over-broad discretion in prosecution does, it gives them a pretext for going after people they don’t like.’

(2) The charge could be a placeholder, with more to come.

Another reason why the charge may seem so modest: It could be the first of several. In the week of 8 April, CNN cited US officials promising additional charges against Assange. The press freedom implications of any future charges could be significant – especially if they involve the Espionage Act.

‘It may be part of a larger case,’ Ben Wizner, the director of the American Civil Liberties Union, told CPJ. The current indictment already cites the Espionage Act and describes the cracking of a password as part of a conspiracy to violate it.

The Justice Department’s legal strategy could be to pile on more charges after Assange is extradited. The extradition treaty between the US and the UK says an individual can only be charged for the ‘offence for which extradition was granted’ or similar offences, but it also stipulates how governments can waive this rule.

Assange has an extradition hearing on 2 May, which gives the US government time to develop new charges.

(3) The language of the case seems to criminalise normal journalistic activities.

While the charge against Assange relates to the alleged conspiracy to hack a password, the language of the

indictment sweeps in a broad range of legally protected and common journalistic activity.

Count 20 of the indictment states, ‘It was part of the conspiracy that Assange encouraged Manning to provide information and records from departments and agencies of the United States.’

The indictment goes on to characterise a number of journalistic practices as part of a criminal conspiracy, including use of a secure message service, use of a cloud-based drop box, and efforts to cover Manning’s tracks.

The cultivation of sources and the use of encryption and other means to protect those sources are essential to investigative journalism. While the government may include these details to show intent or to describe the means and context for the alleged criminal action, they seem to go beyond what is necessary.

Barton Gellman, who led *The Washington Post*’s Pulitzer Prize-winning reporting on the Snowden documents, told CPJ, ‘If asking questions and protecting a source are cast as circumstantial evidence of guilt, we’ll be crossing a dangerous line.’

‘A lot of the way the crime is described here could be applied to other journalists,’ Wizner, at the ACLU, told CPJ. ‘If the government wanted to just target the attempted intrusion, they could have written a very different complaint.’

(4) The Computer Fraud and Abuse Act is incredibly broad.

In all of the concern over the Espionage Act, journalists may not have sufficiently raised alarm over the law under which the US charged Assange: the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA). ‘Thinking we should breathe a sigh of relief because it was the CFAA instead of the Espionage Act is premature,’ Cohn, of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, told CPJ.

The CFAA carries its own set of free expression issues. While it encompasses clearly illegal behaviour like hacking, it also criminalises ‘unauthorised access to a computer’.

Manning was prosecuted under the CFAA in addition to the Espionage Act, but prosecuting a publisher under the CFAA for conspiracy in obtaining the classified information

could potentially create a dangerous legal model.

While reporters do not conspire to decrypt passwords, they are often aware of, and might actively discuss with sources, activities that could fall under the broad frame of ‘unauthorised access’.

As the Cato Institute’s Julian Sanchez wrote on Twitter, ‘The way “helping to hack” is being charged is as a conspiracy to violate 18 USC §1030 (a)(1) [of the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act]. And good reporters conspire with their sources to do that constantly.’

‘For almost every reporter working with a source, the source is providing information in digital form. Anyone who is working with a source who obtained that info in a way that they weren’t supposed to has a CFAA risk,’ Cohn said.

She added that any journalists who don’t think there are broader press freedom implications to the Assange prosecution are ‘whistling past the graveyard’.

(5) Ecuador’s withdrawal of asylum raises questions.

Assange’s arrest came after Ecuador withdrew his asylum protection. In a tweet on 11 April, Ecuadorian President Lenin Moreno said the decision came after Assange’s ‘repeated violations to international conventions and daily-life protocols’.

In a video statement accompanying the tweet, he cited Assange’s repeated ‘intervening in the internal affairs of other states’ via WikiLeaks publications.

Ecuador had previously restricted Assange’s access to the Internet based on allegations that he was interfering in US elections and in the referendum for Catalan independence from Spain.

While Assange’s unusual presence in a diplomatic mission created tensions – both inside the embassy and in Ecuador’s broader international relations – withdrawing asylum is an extreme measure, and one that could have troubling implications if it was done in response to publishing. – IPS

Alex Ellerbeck is North America Programme Coordinator at the Committee to Protect Journalists. Avi Asher-Schapiro is CPJ’s North America Research Associate.

Feminist Palestinian lawmaker free after 20 months in prison without trial

The incarceration of a Palestinian lawmaker for nearly two years without trial highlights the abuse by Israeli authorities in the use of administrative detention. This article below exposes this abuse which has been going on for so long without attracting any Western chastisement.

PALESTINIAN parliament member Khalida Jarrar was released on 28 February after nearly two years in Israeli administrative detention.

‘I still do not know what I was arrested for, I was only told that I am dangerous,’ Jarrar said during a reception in Ramallah after her release. ‘This is what we have always said when it comes to administrative detention – that it’s arbitrary. That it’s always political. Therefore we demand an end to this illegal practice.’

This was not the first time Israel had put Jarrar under administrative detention, a practice in which detainees are held without charge or trial.

Jarrar was first arrested in April 2015 and placed under administrative detention for six months, after she refused to comply with a military expulsion order. The Israeli army had ordered her at the time to leave her home in Ramallah within 24 hours and move to Jericho for a period of 1.5 years. Israeli military authorities accused her of being a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a party she represents in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) but which is outlawed by Israel.

Jarrar’s detention led to a global campaign for her release. She was eventually released from administrative detention and put on trial, where she faced 12 charges, the majority of which involved her parliamentary work and activism: her association with the PFLP, participation in protests, giving speeches and interviews to the media, a visit to a solidarity tent for Palestinian prisoners, and incite-



Khalida Jarrar greeting supporters after her release from Israeli administrative detention.

ment to kidnap Israeli soldiers. In December 2015, Jarrar was sentenced to 15 months in prison as part of a plea bargain.

She was released in June 2016, only to be re-arrested a year later, in July 2017. She had been in administrative detention ever since.

‘I met prisoners from all over Palestine, from ’48, from Jerusalem to the West Bank and Gaza,’ she told journalists during the reception in Ramallah. ‘Women prisoners and minors. Their message is one: they want freedom. The second demand is a call for Palestinian unity.’

‘I have mixed feelings. I left behind 48 women prisoners who suffer and want freedom,’ Jarrar continued. ‘On the other hand, I’m very happy to be released because there is nothing like being free. It gives me the strength to continue fighting for imprisoned women.’

According to Jarrar’s attorney Mahmoud Hassan, her family had

been told ahead of time that the administrative order would not be renewed unless significant new information was received. Jarrar was originally supposed to be released on 28 February afternoon, but Israeli authorities decided to let her go in the early hours of the morning, most likely in order not to draw the attention of the media.

Administrative orders can be renewed indefinitely for up to six months at a time, and can be used to extend the jail time of someone who has finished serving their sentence. The orders are reviewed every six months, but the detainees are not always told of what crimes they are being accused of or shown the evidence against them. The result is that it is virtually impossible to defend oneself.

Under international law, administrative detention should only be used in the most extreme cases. In most modern legal systems, police or

prosecutors release suspects when they don't have enough evidence to charge them with a crime. In Israel, especially when the suspect is Palestinian, prosecutors and security forces often find other ways to keep them behind bars.

Several years ago, at the height of mass hunger strikes by Palestinian prisoners, a senior Israeli security official confirmed that the state uses administrative detention in many cases out of laziness and when it just hadn't bothered to collect enough evidence.

Then-public security minister Yitzhak Aharonovich recommended to security officials at the time that administrative detention be used 'only if there is a need and not in all cases', an implicit admission that the practice was being applied in far more cases than the exceptional, extreme circumstances in which international law permits its use. In a number of high-profile cases over the years, Israel has implicitly exposed once again that it is using administrative detention as a first, and not last, resort.

According to Palestinian prisoner rights group Addameer, at the end of December 2018, Israel was holding 480 Palestinians, including eight members of the PLC, in administrative detention.

Jarrar was elected to the PLC in January 2006, following years of political activism in support of women and prisoners. She is married, has two daughters, and was the first woman to be elected to the PLC on behalf of the PFLP. Between 1993 and 2005, she was the head of Addameer, and she remained a member of the PFLP's managing committee after her election.

Beyond her parliamentary work, Jarrar has been a left-wing and feminist activist for years. She was previously involved in the Palestinian Authority's bid to the International Criminal Court over allegations of Israeli war crimes against Palestinians, which many claim was the real reason for her arrest and continued detention. ♦

This article was written by the staff of +972 Magazine (972mag.com), from which it is reproduced.

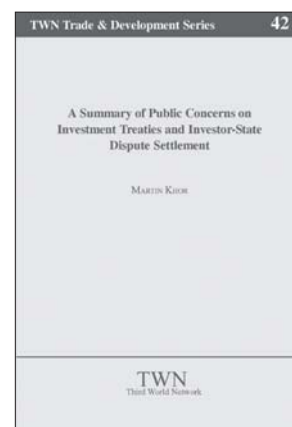
A Summary of Public Concerns on Investment Treaties and Investor-State Dispute Settlement

by Martin Khor

International investment agreements, specifically bilateral investment treaties and the investment chapters in free trade agreements, have come under the spotlight for what are seen as skewed provisions that grant excessive rights to foreign investors and foreign companies at the expense of national policymaking flexibility. Of particular concern is the investor-state dispute settlement framework embedded in many of these treaties, which enables foreign investors to sue host-country governments in opaque international tribunals.

The serious risks involved have prompted a rethink of investment pacts in developing and developed countries alike.

In place of the current lopsided system, calls are growing for agreements which would balance legitimate investor rights with the rights of the state to regulate investment and formulate policies in the public interest.



ISBN: 978-967-0747-28-6

	PRICE	POSTAGE
Malaysia	RM8.00	RM2.00
Developing countries	US\$6.00	US\$3.00 (air)
Others	US\$8.00	US\$4.00 (air)

Orders from Malaysia – please pay by credit card/crossed cheque or postal order.

Orders from Australia, Brunei, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, UK, USA – please pay by credit card/cheque/bank draft/international money order in own currency, US\$ or Euro. If paying in own currency or Euro, please calculate equivalent of US\$ rate. If paying in US\$, please ensure that the agent bank is located in the USA.

Rest of the world – please pay by credit card/cheque/bank draft/international money order in US\$ or Euro. If paying in Euro, please calculate equivalent of US\$ rate. If paying in US\$, please ensure that the agent bank is located in the USA.

All payments should be made in favour of Third World Network Bhd., 131 Jalan Macalister, 10400 Penang, Malaysia. Tel: 60-4-2266728/2266159; Fax: 60-4-2264505; Email: twn@twnetwork.org

I would like to order.....copy/copies of **A Summary of Public Concerns on Investment Treaties and Investor-State Dispute Settlement**. I enclose the amount of US\$/Euro/RM (cheque/bank draft/IMO).

Please charge the amount of US\$/RM to my credit card:

Visa ☐

Mastercard ☐

A/c no.: _____ Expiry date: _____

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

No revolution without feminism: Weaving together Venezuela's feminist movements

Amidst a complex reality, feminist movements in Venezuela look to advance their struggle and build unity.

Ricardo Vaz

INTERNATIONAL Working Women's Day, 8 March, landed this year in the midst of a complex scenario in Venezuela, with an ongoing coup attempt and a simmering threat of foreign intervention. Juan Guaido, the latest opposition leader, had sworn himself in as 'interim president' on 23 January, a move that was followed by escalated international aggression against Venezuela.

In this context, the natural tendency is to close ranks and centralise discourse, as much as possible, against the foreign threat. The tension paralysed popular movements to a certain degree, calling on everyone to defend the country. Nevertheless, as 8 March approached, several feminist movements held meetings to discuss the agenda and struggle.¹

Feminism in times of coup

Alejandra Laprea, a member of the Feminist Spider Network (La Araña Feminista) and of the Purple Ink collective (Tinta Violeta), told us that despite standing firm against a possible invasion, popular struggles cannot be left 'for later'.

'Capitalism, patriarchy, are like weeds. If they're not pulled out at once, at the root, they reproduce. That is why even in a country under threat and under siege we cannot leave it "for later", because otherwise, regardless of the outcome, the right wing will win.'

However, feminist movements internationally were calling for a strike on 8 March. But, with opposition leader Guaido also talking about a strike, there was a risk that a women's strike in Venezuela would end up

boosting the efforts to topple the Bolivarian government. With that in mind, the feminist movements' consensus was to reaffirm their solidarity with feminist struggles worldwide, but without calling their mobilisation a 'strike'. The slogan 'We Strike' (*Nosotras Paramos*) seamlessly turned into 'We Fight', or 'We Struggle' (*Nosotras Luchamos*).

Laura Franco, spokeswoman from the Lydda Franco Farías Popular Feminism Movement, explained this necessary balance: 'We understand the internationalist dynamic and embrace the struggle of all women who, like us, struggle against all kinds of oppression around the world. But in our national context we decided that "we fight", not as something opposed to the call for a strike but simply adjusting it to our reality. Today Venezuela is facing the most serious threat of a war it has seen in the past 20 years, with an ongoing coup.'

The risk of embarking on a mobilisation that in the current context could have ended up playing into the hands of the coup was a concern, which was spontaneously resolved with an unambiguous slogan: 'No Revolution Without Feminism' (*Sin Feminismo No Hay Revolución*).

The march that was prepared was put in doubt by the possible holding of an 'official' march on 8 March. Were that to be the case, the idea would be for these feminist movements to march as a block, since a separate march did not make sense. They would, however, make small detours from the official route to

make specific stops (see below).

In the end, the true obstacle was a power outage that left more than 70% of the country in the dark after an alleged cyberattack against the electricity grid. With no transportation or communications, Caracas and the rest of the country were brought to a standstill. Nevertheless, several women managed to meet and march to Caracas' Plaza Bolívar, with another improvised and appropriate slogan, 'With or without power, we fight.'

Weaving struggles together

There are currently a number of feminist movements in Venezuela. Although many struggles naturally precede Chávez, the feminist movements that debated and prepared ahead of 8 March can be considered part of the Bolivarian camp, with varying levels of closeness and criticism with respect to the state.

To this diversity we must add the 'conflict and cooperation' relation between popular organisations and the state, and the co-optation logic that is always there, regarding both the agenda and bringing people from the popular movement into the state institutions. Once on the inside, the struggle is between the 'normal functioning' of the state and the need to subvert it.

Therefore the current challenge is to build unity among popular feminist movements. Or, as Alejandra puts it, weave them together (*tejer*). 'For us as a network [the Feminist Spider], it is very important to build links between different organisations so that our banners grow stronger. In that sense "weaving" is a metaphor

we have used for many years.'

During several meetings and discussions, feminist *compañeras* from different movements were also literally weaving/knitting, using recycled materials and threads donated in solidarity by the Chilean chapter of the World March of Women. 'Faced with an economic war and blockade, our response is to create, produce and weave solidarity among us,' Alejandra added. The end result was a banner that can be seen in the accompanying photograph.

In this regard, the idea was then to stage a march in Caracas on 8 March with several stops. At each stop a banner would be unfurled, with one or more collectives taking the lead in the action.

One of the struggle fronts that was present belonged to the Tenants' Movement, which is part of the Settlers' Movement, with a particular focus on eviction resistance.

'Patriarchy has as a consequence that most Venezuelan households are headed by women. Therefore most tenants are women! That is why we are taking part in this feminist platform, to defend housing as a fundamental right,' stressed María Fernanda López Leiva, a member of the movement.

María Fernanda said that the number of evictions is on the rise, despite the existence of laws protecting tenants. 'It is a contradiction that in a supposedly socialist state a family can be thrown out on the street. At the end of the day the issue is class struggle, because tenants are from the *pueblo*, they are workers who cannot afford to buy a home,' she explained.

Among the demands or banners, the struggle for sexual and reproductive rights had an important place. Taking advantage of the fact that there is an ongoing constituent process, movements have pressed the National Constituent Assembly to advance their agenda in the new draft constitution on issues such as legalising abortion (which is currently penalised in Venezuela) or same-sex marriage.

There was also an effort to bring *campesino* (peasant) and indigenous movements on board. The social re-



Alejandra Laprea speaking in Caracas' Plaza Bolívar on International Working Women's Day. The banner on the left was woven collectively by members of different women's movements.

production that results in the responsibilities of the home falling on the shoulders of women is not exclusive to urban settings. As a consequence, women in the Venezuelan countryside are also affected by violence. One of the planned stops of the march was precisely the Ministry for Agriculture and Land, to demand answers to several unresolved cases of *campesino* struggles for land.

A common thread to many current feminist battles is the existence of very advanced legislation, such as the law protecting tenants or the land law, which are, however, not enforced. This grants a legal basis to demand action from the state, and at the same time shows that having advanced legislation is not enough to change a macho, patriarchal culture in society and in state institutions themselves.

A very dramatic case was the recent murder of Mayell Hernández. The young mother and dancer was killed and everything pointed towards her ex-partner, yet it took an intense campaign and mobilisation from feminist movements in order to finally spur the Attorney General's office into action.

The Organic Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free from Violence is another important example of an advanced piece of legislation which is not enforced. Be it because prosecutors classify crimes not as gender violence but as crimes of passion, or because the dominant patriarchal culture leads to 'losses' of evidence, the result is a piece of legislation that does not fulfil its role in stopping violence against women.

'Feminist' Chávez as an ally

'The world has always been *machista*. That is why I declare myself a feminist. The socialist revolution should be feminist,' Chávez said in a 2011 speech. This is one of the many cases where one of Chávez's main qualities shone, namely his ability to 'talk' directly to popular movements without the intermediation of the state. Though his notion of feminism is not necessarily the one espoused by feminist movements, his position offers an important tactical advantage.

'We claim the feminist Chávez,' Laura explained. 'While for some feminist movements it may seem contradictory that we claim a man, and a

military man at that, it is thanks to Hugo Chávez that we could open a dynamic of participation that was denied to us before.'

This dynamic of participation is what has generated this plethora of feminist movements under the umbrella commonly referred to as Chavismo, grouped around different banners of struggle and with different levels of tolerance and cooperation with state institutions. The state will continue to be there, with its generally progressive content and its contradictions, and the challenge is to continue building the revolution.

'We have to find a way, as a people and as a feminist movement, to move forward in the construction of the feminist and socialist revolution, without leaving any banner behind, without thinking that one struggle is more important than any other,' Alejandra summarised.

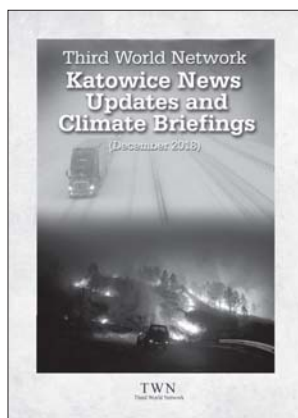
Amidst a coup and amidst an economic war/crisis; with or without the state; with or without power, feminist movements will continue raising their banners and weaving their unity. The progress, or the mere survival, of the revolution will only be assured by the leading role and the achievements of popular movements. And there is no revolution without feminism. ♦

Ricardo Vaz is a writer and editor with Venezuelanalysis.com, from which this article is reproduced.

Notes

1. The movements that took part in the meetings leading up to 8 March were the following (original names in Spanish): La Quinta Ola, Brigada Feminista Latinoamericana, Tinta Violeta, Movimiento de Feminismo Popular Lydda Franco Fariás, La Estafeta, Faldas-R, Frente Cultural de Izquierda, Rebeldía Lésbica, VenezuElla, La Araña Feminista, Universidad Popular de las Comunalidades, Organización de mujeres indígenas Yukpa Oripanto Oayapo Tuonde, Tetas en Revolución, Colectivo Cimarrón, Género con Clase, Movimiento de Mujeres Clara Zetkin, Plataforma Golpe de Timón, Movimiento de Inquilinos (Plataforma de Pobladores).

Katowice News Updates and Climate Briefings (December 2018)



ISBN: 978-967-0747-29-3

This is a compilation of 15 News Updates, an overview and a briefing paper prepared by the Third World Network for and during the recent United Nations Climate Change Talks – the twenty-fourth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 24), the fourteenth session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 14), the third part of the first session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 1-3), the forty-ninth sessions of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI 49) and the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and

Technological Advice (SBSTA 49), as well as the seventh part of the first session of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement (APA 1-7) – in Katowice, Poland from 2 to 15 December 2018.

	Price	Postage
Malaysia	RM10.00	RM2.00
Developing countries	US\$6.00	US\$3.00 (air)
Others	US\$8.00	US\$4.00 (air)

Orders from Malaysia – please pay by credit card/crossed cheque or postal order.

Orders from Australia, Brunei, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, UK, USA – please pay by credit card/cheque/bank draft/international money order in own currency, US\$ or Euro. If paying in own currency or Euro, please calculate equivalent of US\$ rate. If paying in US\$, please ensure that the agent bank is located in the USA.

Rest of the world – please pay by credit card/cheque/bank draft/international money order in US\$ or Euro. If paying in Euro, please calculate equivalent of US\$ rate. If paying in US\$, please ensure that the agent bank is located in the USA.

All payments should be made in favour of: **THIRD WORLD NETWORK BHD.**, 131 Jalan Macalister, 10400 Penang, Malaysia. Tel: 60-4-2266728/2266159; Fax: 60-4-2264505; Email: tw@twnetwork.org Website: www.tw.ny

I would like to order copy/copies of *Katowice News Updates and Climate Briefings (December 2018)*.

I enclose the amount of by cheque/bank draft/IMO.

Please charge the amount of US\$/Euro/RM to my credit card:

☐ Visa

☐ Mastercard

A/c No.: _____ Expiry date: _____

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Yellow Vest movement struggles to reinvent democracy as Macron cranks up propaganda and repression

The Yellow Vest movement has so suddenly burst upon the French political scene that it has left political commentators hard-pressed to explain its rise. Originally viewed as a protest movement against a hike in taxes on diesel fuel, it has since emerged as a massive self-organised social movement which is prepared to challenge the very foundations of French society. *Richard Greeman* traces the development of this phenomenon.

AFTER five months of constant presence at traffic circles, toll booths and hazardous Saturday marches, the massive, self-organised social movement known as the Yellow Vests has just held its second nationwide 'Assembly of Assemblies'. Hundreds of autonomous Yellow Vest activist groups from all over France each chose two delegates (one woman, one man) to gather in the port city of St Nazaire for a weekend of deliberation (5-7 April).

After weeks of skirmishing with the municipal authorities, the local Yellow Vests were able to host 700 delegates at the St Nazaire 'House of the People', and the three-day series of general meetings and working groups went off without a hitch in an atmosphere of good fellowship. A sign on the wall proclaimed: 'No one has the solution, but everybody has a piece of it.'

Their project: mobilise their 'collective intelligence' to reorganise, strategise and prolong their struggle. Their aim: achieve the immediate goals of livable wages and retirements; restoration of social benefits and public services like schools, transportation, post offices and hospitals; taxing the rich and ending fiscal fraud to pay for preserving the environment; and, most ambitious of all, reinventing democracy in the process. Their Declaration ends with the



The Yellow Vest movement held its 'Assembly of Assemblies' in St Nazaire in April.

phrase 'government of the people, by the people, and for the people'. I often wonder if they know who coined it.

Yellow and green unite and fight

Particular attention was paid to the issue of the environment, reaffirming the popular slogan 'End of the week. End of the world. Same logic, same struggle.' (It rhymes in French.) The Assembly went further and called on 'all persons who wish to put an end to the expropriation of the living

to take up a conflictual stance against the present system in order to create, together, a new ecological, popular social movement'.

This shows growth from the original Yellow Vest uprising which began as a protest against a hike in taxes on diesel fuel imposed in the name of 'saving the environment'. (Less well known is that only 17% of that tax was actually earmarked for the environment. In any case, French President Emmanuel Macron rescinded it in an early attempt to pacify the movement.) Since then, the Yellow Vests have tentatively converged with the

environmental groups, whom many poor and working-class Yellow Vests can't help seeing as bourgeois on bicycles wanting to be nice but unwilling to struggle directly against the establishment.

So their call for unity is also in part a challenge to the environmental movement: 'Join us in the struggle for social equality and be ready to fight the whole system.' Brilliant! Who said an unstructured autonomous movement of ordinary, not well-educated people could not come up with strategies and tactics? Psychologists explain that this 'wisdom of crowds' emerges whenever people are on an equal footing and free of constraint. It grows through experience. And discussion. A dialectical process leading to its emergence. 'No one has the solution, but everybody has a piece of it.' This was the basis of direct democracy in Athens, from which the Yellow Vests have also borrowed the idea of choosing representatives by lot.

Autonomy

The Assembly of Assemblies reaffirmed the Yellow Vest founding principle of keeping clear of political parties. Also of leaders. To my mind, this is a genius stroke. Every popular mass movement I have participated in over the past 60 years has been co-opted by the establishment (or crushed). Leaders set up an office, they try to raise money and gain access to power, and end up compromising; they treat the rank-and-file activists like a mailing list and the power and dynamic of the mass movement melts away. For instance, the Nuclear Freeze movement in the US once mobilised millions; eventually, the Democratic Party lured them. Here in France, the Socialist Party swallowed SOS Racism, the embryo of a much-needed civil rights movement for the country.

Instinctively, from the beginning, the Yellow Vests seem to have assimilated and put into practice the profound criticism of representative democracy that goes back to the 18th century and was applied during the



Riot policemen apprehend a Yellow Vest demonstrator in Paris. The government has unleashed unprecedented police brutality against the movement.

Paris Commune in 1871. There delegates were given limited mandates, subject to instant recall, regularly rotated, and paid at workmen's wages. The Communards also called on other cities to rise and link up as a federation. This is precisely the Yellow Vests' modus operandi.

This critique of representation explains the Assembly's attitude towards the upcoming elections for the European Parliament, which will play out as a rehearsal for the next national legislative elections when parties will be competing seriously for votes. The fear of being manipulated for political purposes is strong. Yellow Vests at a Paris demonstration in March recognised a Yellow Vest who had just declared her candidacy to great media fanfare, apparently in the name of the Yellow Vests. They were furious and yelled at her until she withdrew, shaken. Ugly, but a necessary example to anyone else who would rather be a politician than a Yellow Vest (without resigning first).

As far as Europe is concerned, the Assembly, far from calling for a Frexit, reached out to social movements in the other countries of the European Union in a call to come together and struggle against its neoliberal policies. The Assembly saw no

point in voting in this sham election. As everyone knows, the European Parliament has no power or even visibility. It's not even in Brussels, where the important decisions are made by representatives of the German banks and multinational corporations. Moreover, it limits the deficit spending of its member countries, thus making it illegal for France to finance the social services and environmental reconstruction the people are demanding.

Restructuring and reflection

The Assembly of Assemblies coincided with 'Act 21' of the Yellow Vests' long struggle to occupy public spaces and freely proclaim their hopes and grievances. The 21st week brought out only 23,400 people (government count) across France, the lowest number so far. Small wonder after five straight months of bloody repression. The police were as usual out in force, and they stopped and frisked 14,919 people, according to the Paris Prefecture. After 21 weekly battles, many of us are too tired, too scared and/or too old to continue 'running with the bulls' through the streets dodging gas canisters.

'We thought we were off for a

sprint. In fact we were involved in a marathon and we need to prepare ourselves,' admitted one speaker. 'We realise we need to vary our tactics, refine our goals, organise our democratic structures better for the movement to last,' and the Assembly of Assemblies attempted to face this challenge.

Among the new tactics discussed was a huge nationwide protest against the increasing repression being imposed by the Macron government, calling for the liberation of all those in jail for participating in the Yellow Vest movement or in other 'criminalised' struggles, and referring directly to the oppressed North African and immigrant communities in France, whose 2005 youth rising was brutally put down. '[The violent repression] we are experiencing today has been for decades the daily experience in the popular quarters [ghetto-like 'suburbs'] ... Now authoritarianism is being generalised to the whole society.'

Macron's response: Propaganda and violent repression

In contrast to these deliberations, in the same weekend as the Assembly, the Macron government delivered the results of its official 'Great Debate', a publicity stunt organised at a cost of €12 million to showcase the president articulately answering questions from selected audiences of mayors and local notables in towns and villages across the country. (In all, Macron logged 92 hours of speaking.)

France's elected monarch concocted this 'debate', whose limits were set in advance (taxing the rich and the corporations was off the table), as his 'answer' to the Yellow Vests' demand for participatory democracy. The results were unsurprising: the French want 'lower taxes, no cuts to services' (*The New York Times*, 9 April). Asked if the 'Great Debate' was a 'success for Macron and his government', only 6% of those polled by BFM-TV answered 'yes'. Another poll revealed that 35% of French people still approve of the Yellow Vests (down from 70% last Decem-

ber) while only 29% approve of Macron.

PR aside, the Macron government's real answer to public opposition posed by the Yellow Vests has been brutally stark: slander, violent repression and strict new laws limiting the right to demonstrate – a right enshrined in the Declaration of Human Rights and the French Constitution. Macron and his ministers have publicly denounced the Yellow Vests as 'anti-Semites', 'fascists', 'a hateful mob', and a violent conspiracy of '40-50,000' terrorists 'of the extreme left and extreme right' out to destroy French institutions.

This vicious caricature, echoed endlessly by the media and reinforced by scary images of violence and vandalism against the symbols of wealth and power in Paris, is designed to dehumanise the protesters, otherwise easily recognisable as poor provincials who are tired of being ignored. Thus demonised, the Yellow Vests' actual demands for dignity and justice can be ignored. As a threat to France, they must be repressed by any means necessary.

Since November 2018, when the Yellow Vest movement suddenly sprung up 300,000 strong, the government has unleashed unprecedented police brutality, using military-grade weapons against unarmed demonstrators, provoking hundreds of serious injuries (including blindings, loss of limbs and broken faces). Although invisible on French mainstream media (government-subsidised and corporate-owned), this French government violence has been repeatedly condemned by human rights panels in France and the European Union, as well as by Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and former President of Chile.

On 23 March, as Macron was visiting the Riviera, 73-year-old Geneviève Legay, local spokesperson for ATTAC (a 20-year-old international NGO that proposes taxing financial transactions for social purposes), joined the Yellow Vest demonstration at Nice to speak out against this repression. Interviewed on local TV carrying a rainbow peace flag, she

declared: 'We are here to say we have the right to demonstrate ... We will leave this square when we choose. And if they use force... Then we'll see. I'm not afraid. I'm 73 years old, what could happen to me? I'm fighting for my grandchildren. Against tax havens, and all the money the banks are laundering, against fossil energy.'

Moments later, Police Commander Souchi ordered his heavily armed riot police to charge the peaceful group among whom Legay was standing, and she found herself on the ground, surrounded by riot cops, bleeding profusely, with a cracked skull and broken ribs. She is still in hospital with serious injuries.

On 25 March, the Public Prosecutor and Macron categorically denied that she had had any contact with the police. The president, interviewed by the local paper, made a hypocritical apology, 'wishing her a speedy recovery and hoping that she might learn some *sagesse* [literally "wisdom" but typically applied to children in the sense of learning to "behave"]'.

According to Macron, as a fragile elderly person Mme Legay should have known better than to go out to the square in the first place, and so had got herself trampled in the crowd. (The haughty Macron, like the arrogant Trump, seems to enjoy adding insult to injury.) But, as her TV interview makes clear, Geneviève Legay knew very well she was risking her life to defend the democratic freedom to demonstrate and foresaw such an attack moments before it was ordered by the police commander.

Indeed, videos taken on the spot and the testimony of street-medics and other eyewitnesses (including policemen) told a different story from the official version. Apparently a policeman wielding a shield hit her in the head and knocked her down, whereupon he and other cops straddled her and dragged her away bleeding, refusing to allow street-medics to attend to her. They may also have kicked her when she was down, which would explain her cracked ribs.

Later, police entered Legay's hospital room, where she was alone (her daughters having been barred with-

out explanation). They repeatedly tried to get her to admit that a ‘cameraman’ had pushed her down, but when she repeated that it was a policeman, they stopped taking notes.

Meanwhile, videos of the attack were all over the Internet, and the independent, subscriber-supported news site Médiapart gathered eyewitness evidence and presented it to the Public Prosecutor, who on 29 March was obliged to reverse himself and affirm police involvement.

Then, on 8 April, Médiapart exposed the deliberate official cover-up of this attack. It turns out that the person placed in charge of the investigation, Hélène P, one of the police officers who had pressured Legay in her hospital room to declare that she had been pushed down by a ‘cameraman’, was none other than the common-law wife of Commander Souchi, who had shouted the order to ‘Charge! Charge!’ at the peaceful group among whose ranks Legay was standing.

This scandal has finally broken official silence on French police brutality after five months of violent, indiscriminate attacks on Yellow Vests – visible on YouTube but not on TV. Even the death, during a housing demonstration in Marseille, of Zineb Redouane, an 80-year-old woman who was killed on 4 December at her upstairs window when shot directly in the face with teargas grenade, went unacknowledged. (She was only an Algerian.)

Macron’s lies and cover-ups

Thus, the President of the Republic was caught outright lying to cover up police brutality. Not as strange as one might think, given that the scandal that has clung to him like a tick since last summer, also uncovered by Médiapart, is the Benalla Affair – named for Macron’s security chief, who last year was captured on video in a borrowed riot police uniform, viciously clubbing a demonstrator lying on the ground – apparently for the fun of it. It then emerged that Macron’s protégé and left-hand man Benalla was also involved in a variety of international intrigues and



French President Emmanuel Macron speaking during a public meeting held as part of the official ‘Great Debate’. The ‘Great Debate’ has been seen as a PR stunt organised in response to the Yellow Vests’ demand for participatory democracy.

scams, which continue to tarnish Macron’s Mister Clean image in France as new evidence emerges.

Nonetheless, Macron, a former Socialist, is still seen internationally as a progressive, democratic leader efficiently modernising France’s archaic ‘exception’ to neoliberal dogma, basically a friend to human rights. The extraordinary violence of his regime has remained hidden behind a smokescreen of demonisation of the Yellow Vests and de facto censorship by the mainstream media. Even the liberal *New York Review of Books*, which in the 1960s printed a diagram of a Molotov cocktail on its front page, has clung to this line, placing the blame for ‘violence’ on the protesters. So before leaving this subject, let’s look at some unpleasant statistics and then examine the role of the Black Block of so-called *casseurs* (‘trashers’) in sustaining this image.

Whose violence?

The official narrative is that the Yellow Vests have been attacking the forces of order, and indeed they are often seen on TV throwing teargas canisters back at the police. Interior Minister Christophe Castaner has been categorical: ‘I know of no policeman who has attacked the Yellow

Vests.’

Here are the statistics.

No policemen have been reported as seriously injured during the five months of weekly clashes with the Yellow Vests. On the other hand, the latest official Interior Ministry figures list 2,200 wounded demonstrators, 10 eyes permanently put out, 8,700 arrests, 1,796 convictions, 1,428 teargas canisters fired, 4,942 dispersion grenades fired, 13,460 ‘flashballs’ fired.

‘Flashballs’, manufactured in Switzerland, are listed as ‘sub-lethal military weapons’ but when they cross the French border, they magically become crowd-control devices. They are extremely powerful and accurate at 50 yards, and the number of head wounds indicates that they have been deliberately aimed at demonstrators’ heads, as have teargas canisters and grenades.

Médiapart’s list counts 606 demonstrators wounded including one death, five hands ripped off, 23 blinded in one eye, 236 head wounds (including jaws ripped off) and 103 attacks on journalists. The wounded have included 39 minors, 22 bystanders, 61 journalists and 20 medics.

Concerning the Black Block and other *casseurs*, they are certainly guilty of property damage on a fairly

significant scale, but have as far as I know not wounded, blinded or crippled any human beings. That, to me (but apparently not to the French media), is a significant difference.

My problem with the Black Block at Yellow Vest demonstrations is that they never get arrested or struck by 'flashballs'. Go on YouTube and you can see dozens of videos of masked, black-clad guys with crowbars smashing banks and trashing stores in plain sight. No one ever stops them. Why?

A certain number of *casseurs* have been spotted (and videoed) as police provocateurs, infiltrating the demonstrations, smashing stuff and then being exfiltrated through police lines. This is an old French police tactic designed to spoil the image of a demonstration and justify violent repression, but the whole truth is that Europe is full of angry young men, self-styled anarchists, deeply invested in fighting the establishment by smashing its symbols. They come in from all over Europe.

So the cops leave them alone and concentrate on their main mission: brutalising the crowds of ordinary demonstrators to scare them off and stifle dissent. Moreover, the Black Block folks are more likely to kick the shit out of the cops who try to stop them than are high-school kids, parents with children, and old folks like me and Geneviève. I'd like the Black Block much more if they would fight the cops themselves, instead of using us as human shields while expressing their quite understandable rage while we get gassed and shot at.

'Libertycidal' legislation

The new 'anti-*casseurs*' laws that Macron is pushing through the legislature will legalise and set in stone for the future the repressive practices used against the Yellow Vests, making them permanently available to his successors (who could include Marine Le Pen). They have nothing to do with actual *casseurs* (who are obviously breaking existing laws and need only to be apprehended under them) and everything to do with mak-

ing it nearly impossible for ecologists, trade unionists or Yellow Vests to demonstrate.

For example, if you are a small-town Yellow Vest and take the train to Paris on a Saturday, you are likely to be stopped several times between the station and the Champs Élysées. If you have in your backpack Vaseline, eye drops, ski goggles, a bicycle helmet, a face-scarf or, God forbid, a gasmask, you can be arrested, brought to summary trial and convicted the very same day for being part of a 'group organised for the purpose of destroying public order and obstructing the forces of order'.

Of course if you insist on a real trial with lawyers and everything, they will gladly hold you over in jail, but if you're not at work on Monday you'll lose your job and meanwhile who is minding the kids? And if you eventually do get to demonstrate and the demonstration leads to property damage, you may also be made legally and financially responsible. You may also be placed on a list of dangerous people and barred from demonstrating again at the whim of the local prefect.

The chilling prospect of turning these absurd police-state practices into law is what brought pacifists like Geneviève Legay out into the streets with the Yellow Vests. Interviewed in the hospital, where she is still in pain and recovering slowly from multiple injuries, she declared: 'Today I am determined to carry on the fight. It is ever more necessary to do so when you see the anti-democratic drift of this government ... The Yellow Vests support me and I will continue supporting them. I am not going to stop fighting to defend our rights, as I have for 50 years, and to struggle against state repression whatever form it may take.'

She will not be alone. The League for the Rights of Man and more than 50 other civil liberties groups, religious associations, trade unions, civic associations and far-left parties have just called for a massive national demonstration for the right

to demonstrate, along with the Yellow Vests on Saturday, 13 April. I hope it will be massive.

The choice of Saturday is significant as an act of solidarity with the Yellow Vests, who alone have been defending the public's right to assemble in public places, and this at considerable personal risk. For 22 weeks, the Yellow Vests have been acting out this basic democratic right through their principled refusal to beg the police for special permission for citizens to gather in a public square or parade through the streets. Imagine Occupy Wall St happening all around the country, in cities and on traffic circles, on a weekly basis. All alone, the Yellow Vests have sustained thousands of injuries and thousands of arrests through this weekly act of civil disobedience, proclaiming the right to the city. Now, at last, they have recognition and allies.

This new convergence of other groups, along with the new perspectives flowing from the Yellow Vests' Assembly of Assemblies, may mark a new phase in their long struggle against Macron's harsh, anti-democratic, neoliberal regime in its implacable drive to wipe out the relative advantages in living standards, social services and personal liberties won by previous generations of French people in 1936 (the general strike), 1945 (the Liberation) and 1968 (the general strike and student uprising). Indeed, since 1789 (the Declaration of the Rights of Man, which enshrines the people's right to demonstrate grievances). ♦

Richard Greeman is a Marxist scholar long active in human rights, anti-war, anti-nuclear, environmental and labour struggles in the US, Latin America, France and Russia. Greeman is best known for his studies and translations of the Franco-Russian novelist and revolutionary Victor Serge (1890-1947). Greeman also writes regularly about politics, international class struggles and revolutionary theory. Co-founder of the Praxis Research and Education Center in Moscow, and director of the International Victor Serge Foundation, Greeman splits his time between Montpellier (France) and New York City. The above article is reproduced from the LA Progressive (www.laprogressive.com).

The West's irrational fear of Iran is a disaster waiting to happen

The West must come to terms with its irrational fear of Iran, says Seyed Mohammad Marandi. The continuance of the current hostile attitude towards the Islamic Republic can only result in a disaster in which the West comes out worse.

WHILE Western regimes craft a fresh humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, their corporate and state-owned media and corrupted think-tanks embody what Shakespeare's Lorenzo describes as 'this muddy vesture of decay' – and, true to form, frustrate attempts to provide voice to their latest subaltern victims.

Increasingly vitriolic voices, from Paris to Washington, reveal exasperation and express a need to intimidate and justify the eviction of the many increasingly difficult tenants of the Fifth Estate.

Just as advanced capitalism has successfully transformed the first four estates into an almost homogeneous, postmodern utopia for well-heeled Wall Street and Ivory Tower dwellers – amid a deluge of conspiratorial narratives of existential threats – Western regime-affiliated intellectual elites vigorously promote a 'benign' monopoly in this lucrative piece of real estate.

Ethnocentric worldview

As in Palestine, excavation and construction can only begin with a purge of 'inferior' races, religions and social classes, as well as other 'malign' influences. After all, as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reminds his European and North American allies, there is no place for the weak, who are destined for slaughter, while the strong survive.

Based on this Eurocentric, clinical diagnosis and ethnocentric worldview, language is reformed and policed so that anti-apartheid now means racism. When it is stated that Palestinian medics, reporters and children have been killed or maimed in 'clashes', it means that Israeli regime



An oil facility on Kharg Island off the coast of Iran. The Iranian oil sector has been the target of US sanctions.

soldiers have targeted unarmed civilians.

In this brave new world, Humpty Dumpty linguistics and semantics are key to 'civilised' conceptual understandings. Al-Qaeda are 'freedom fighters' and 'rebels' in Syria, but terrorists in the United States, France and the United Kingdom.

US President Donald Trump is condemned for his slurs against Hispanics and Latinos, but praised for his tangible acts to starve Venezuelans. The US-Saudi-imposed mass starvation and genocide in Yemen was entirely acceptable for Western pundits, while a clear schism exists in relation to the Jamal Khashoggi killing.

Now that Iranian, Palestinian, Venezuelan, Russian and even Western detractors – among others – are being purged from the public sphere and even social media platforms, controlling and manipulating the public discourse may seem much more undemanding in the corridors of power. However, as the power and fortune of the US and its European allies con-

tinues to decline, their response to events appears increasingly frantic and crude. They appear to be engaged in imperial overreach.

The rise of the alt-right and fascism, the appalling brutality of France's elitist Macron regime, the incompetence of the British political order, the abduction of Julian Assange, and rising authoritarian political correctness – along with an increased frequency of wars, coups and interventions across the globe – are signs of a rising anxiety in the 'metropolis'.

Massive atrocities in multiple illegal wars, a recourse to crude, old-school imperialism in Venezuela, and increasing repression, discontent and censorship at home have concurrently exposed the underlying nature of dominant Western narratives to a broad, diverse and often subjugated global audience.

Western-funded trolls and bots, along with foreign language media mouthpieces and their comprador intellectuals, no longer have the ability



Refugees wait to board a rescue vessel after being rescued from a boat sailing out of control in the Mediterranean Sea near Libya. 'By staying the current course, Europe and North America will likely soon trigger overwhelming and endless waves of human migration.'

to push the 'free and civilised world' myth with substantial success. Besides the comprador class and Western-based native informants, few gaze at Western manifestations with much awe anymore. Unless, of course, it is 'shock and awe'.

For many, the West is not, in the words of Wordsworth, a 'Utopia-subterranean fields/Or some secreted island Heaven knows where', but rather where they are forced to go when barbarians plunder and wreck their world. Indeed, European and US elite and redneck concerns about migration and refugees would be much better dealt with if their long-cherished tradition of war, strangulation and destruction came to an end.

End it must. Otherwise, they will be destined to reap what they sow. By staying the current course, Europe

and North America will likely soon trigger overwhelming and endless waves of human migration. The socio-political implications for Europe and the US will be staggering.

Inflicting human suffering

Yet, the case of the irrational Western hostility towards Iran is unique. For more than four decades, Europe and the United States have used chemical weapons, starvation and violent extremism to punish Iranians and their allies for asserting independence.

American nastiness, in particular, knows no bounds, as US leaders and their affiliates gloat openly when they succeed in inflicting human suffering through sanctions, yet paradoxically and audaciously censure their prey for

economic mismanagement. These regimes fail to recognise that it is in part their amoral policies that reinforce resistance among so many Iranians.

Along with a natural cultural, religious and political convergence, it is partially this absence of morality, as well as Eurocentric arrogance, that has drawn Turkey and Iraq, among other states, closer to Iran.

The US attempt to impose its will upon newly elected Iraqi members of parliament through threats and coercion – as well as Trump's failure to summon the Iraqi prime minister during an illegal, uninvited and humiliating secret visit to Iraq – show an open lack of respect for the Iraqi people.

US support for PKK affiliates, Jamal Khashoggi's killing and the failed 2016 coup attempt, along with its repeated threats over Turkish military purchases and open engagement in economic warfare against Istanbul, also inform the Turkish public where their interests really lie.

The failure to bring about economic collapse in Iran, the destruction of state institutions in Syria and submission in Yemen, and the inability to intimidate Iraq and Turkey are all further indications that all is not going according to the pied piper's plan to maintain Western domination.

Nevertheless, it is fatefully important for Western leaders to sober up and recognise that those who live in glass houses are in no position to throw stones. Iran's adversaries have so much more to lose than Iran does, and there are more than enough motivated General Qassem Soleimanis in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to make sure everything is lost.

A clear-headed view of a map, and an appreciation of the formidable capabilities of Iran and its allies, should make it clear that if the Trump regime miscalculates, the house can easily come crashing down on its head. Iranians know this all too well. ♦

Seyed Mohammad Marandi is a Professor of English Literature and Orientalism at the University of Tehran. This article is reproduced from the Middle East Eye website (www.middleeasteye.net).



Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi (right) greets Iranian President Hassan Rouhani during the latter's visit to Iraq in March. Iraq is among the states that have been strengthening relations with Iran.

As more countries in Latin America move to the Right, there has been a tendency to whitewash the rule by military dictators during much of the 20th century. The following poem by Nobel laureate *Pablo Neruda* (1904-1973) should serve as a reminder of how bloody the rule of these dictators was.

The dictators

Pablo Neruda

An odour has remained among the sugarcane:
 a mixture of blood and body, a penetrating
 petal that brings nausea.
 Between the coconut palms the graves are full
 of ruined bones, of speechless death-rattles.
 The delicate dictator is talking
 with top hats, gold braids and collars.
 The tiny palace gleams like a watch
 and the rapid laughs with gloves on
 cross the corridors at times
 and join the dead voices
 and the blue mouths freshly buried.
 The weeping cannot be seen, like a plant
 whose seeds fall endlessly on the earth,
 whose large blind leaves grow even without light.
 Hatred has grown scale on scale,
 blow on blow, in the ghastly water of the swamp,
 with a snout full of ooze and silence

Translated by Robert Bly