

The Socialist Correspondent

£3.00

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COVER PICTURE:

Under construction (2016), Midland Metropolitan Hospital, is a new acute general hospital being built on a 16 acres (6.5 hectares) site in Grove Lane at Smethwick near Birmingham.

Until the company went into liquidation in January 2018, it was being built by Carillion.

Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org>

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Discussion, debate and authors' opinions: To encourage the broadest possible discussion and debate around the aims of exposing capitalism and promoting socialism, we hope our readers appreciate that not all the opinions expressed by individual authors are necessarily those of The Socialist Correspondent.

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The Socialist Correspondent

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Grenfell Tower fire and Carillion

Stormzy, the grime artist, won best British male and British album of the year at the Brits 2018.

He used his performance at the Brit awards to attack Prime Minister May's response to the Grenfell Fire.

He gave a performance that featured a freestyle rap with powerful lyrics about the Tory government's handling of the Grenfell disaster.



"What, you thought we just forgot about Grenfell? You criminals, and you've got the cheek to call us savages. You should do some jail time, you should pay some damages, you should burn your house down and see if you can manage this."

The government's response to the tragedy has been appalling. As of January 2018, 299 of 312 high rise buildings with Grenfell-style cladding have failed safety tests, and only three of these buildings have completed cladding replacement.

There are thousands of towers in social housing schemes, student accommodation and privately-owned blocks across the country in which residents will be sleeping uneasily for fear of a repeat of the Grenfell disaster.

36 councils have approached the government regarding remedial work following the Grenfell fire. As of January 2018, seven months after the fire, the government had not yet approved any requests for post-Grenfell safety work.

The independent Hackitt review of building regulations and fire safety following the Grenfell Tower fire states in its interim report that "the mindset of doing things as cheaply as possible...must stop."

That means ending Private Finance Initiative (PFI) projects done on the cheap, but costing the public purse more in the long run, as Scott McDonald argues in "Carillion, PFI, finance capital and Brexit".

Carillion's collapse is the latest case

Commentary

in point. Carillion was the second biggest construction firm in the UK



until it went bust, resulting in many job losses, a huge hole in its pension scheme and suspension of building contracts.

In the years leading up to its collapse the directors of Carillion had taken huge bonuses and paid out large dividends from the company.

Finance capital

The domination of finance capital over all aspects of society was taken up by Jeremy Corbyn in his speech to the Engineering Employers Federation conference, in which said, "We will take decisive action to make finance the servant of industry not the masters of us all. For a generation instead of finance serving industry, politicians have served finance."

His criticism of the City of London and the banks will strike a chord with the majority of the people. However, although they may be divided over Brexit, the Tories are united in their defence of Finance Capital and the City of London.



President Macron of France is going in the other direction from Corbyn, with plans to lower the tax on dividends, exempt capital investment from tax, shrink the public sector and increase privatisation.

He is also intent on driving through "the most hard-hitting anti-worker measures" as Simon Korner relates in his article, "France further to the right under Macron".

Jerusalem

Brian Durrans opens his article with a quotation from President Trump officially recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and that the US would

be moving its embassy there from Tel Aviv.

Durrans concludes that the US government has effectively ended the Oslo peace process and that without it to hide behind, Israel has never been more vulnerable to a "moral reckoning" and increased boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) action by those in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Inter-imperialist rivalries

In examining inter-imperialist rivalries, Frieda Park contends that the world is now a dangerous place pointing out that "millions of our fellow human beings are suffering death, destruction, displacement, disease and hunger".

In her article, "Rivalries, dangers and possibilities", she argues that "The desire for economic and strategic dominance by the USA and other countries, including Britain, is fuelling this."

Alex Mitchell, in his article, "US could lose the next war it fights", refers to "The Pentagon's...defence strategy (which) regards 'great power competition' not international terrorism as the primary threat to the USA. It plans accordingly to deploy smaller scale nuclear weapons fearing it might lose a conventional conflict"

Korea

North Korea, given its history of destruction by the US, is developing a nuclear capability as a defence, having seen what happened to Iraq and Libya.



We should be more worried about the increased belligerence of Trump and the Pentagon's war preparations than Kim Jong-un and North Korea, which is prepared to work for peace as we saw in the historic joint participation with South Korea at the winter Olympics.

In his article, "West's dangerous view of North Korea", Simon Korner sets out a compelling case, rarely heard, explaining the position of North Korea and why we should be more worried about Trump and the USA and their threats.

Carillion, PFI, finance capital and Brexit

Will the collapse of Carillion bring to an end the notorious Private Finance Initiatives (PFI), which have cost the public purse millions?

By **SCOTT McDONALD**

Carillion was the second biggest construction firm in the UK until it went bust, resulting in massive job losses, a huge hole in its pension scheme of some £1 billion, and suspension of building contracts.

The ineffectiveness of regulators and auditors and the greediness of the directors was exposed. The Tory government's complicity in the debacle is also clear as they continued to award contracts to Carillion despite profit warnings and clear signs of financial instability.

Carillion had 43,000 staff globally with 20,000 in the UK. Included in Carillion's contracts were the H2 high-speed rail line and huge hospital developments in Liverpool and Birmingham. The company also looked after 50,000 homes for the Ministry of Defence as well as hundreds of schools and prisons. It was one of the main suppliers of maintenance services to Network Rail.

PFI

Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts are a form of outsourcing in which the private sector raises the capital for a project.

Outsourcing was originally introduced supposedly as a way of transferring risk from the public to the private sector. It was based on the idea that competition and the profit motive would drive down costs, delivering savings for the taxpayer.

It hasn't worked. PFI contracts have proved particularly expensive. The National Audit Office recently revealed that some PFI contracts are costing the public 40% more than would have been the case had public money been used directly.

Over the next several decades more than £200 billion of taxpayers' money will be channelled into the pockets of private companies.

Currently, the state invites companies to bid for contracts and awards them to whichever company contractor is able to deliver the project most cheaply.

The bidding companies have become specialists in simply winning public contracts. These large conglomerates then sub-contract the delivery of the contracts and have moved for some time now into delivering front-line public services.



Skyline of Midland Metropolitan Hospital. Until Carillion went into liquidation, it was one of its largest construction projects.

Over the last two years, five companies have won over 80% of all the public sector's outsourcing contracts. The company, Capita, has been awarded half of these contracts. In the last two years Capita has been awarded ten times as many public sector contracts as Carillion.

In the wake of the collapse of Carillion, Capita's share price fell by 45%.

The situation in which private companies are delivering front-line public services on behalf of local government and the NHS has proven to be disastrous.

The private sector often delivers these services at a lower quality and higher cost than the public sector.

Public sector contracts should not be awarded solely on the basis of "value for money", in other words, cheapness.

And, then when privatisation fails the public sector is called upon to bail-out the companies.

Private financing of public sector projects should be ended. If the government wants to build a major infrastructure project it should do so through historically cheap public borrowing. Taking public service delivery back into the public sector and ending PFI is what is needed.

Pension scheme

Carillion's pension scheme trustees wrote to The Pensions Regulator (TPR) in 2010 and again in 2013 requesting "formal intervention" to require the company to pay more to reduce its deficit. The company said it could afford no more than £23m per year to reduce the pension deficit.

This was £12m less than the minimum the trustees said was needed. During this time the company was paying a bumper dividend of 12% to shareholders and huge bonuses to directors.

The trustees told TPR that the December 2011 valuations could not be signed off by the statutory deadline of March 2013. The trustees proposed a rescue plan to the company which required it to pay £65m per year in a bid to close a yawning £770m pension deficit.

In response Carillion proposed a final "take it or leave it" offer of just £33.4m per year. As a result, the trustees told TPR an "impasse" had been reached and called for formal intervention by the regulator. The regulator did not take formal action until Carillion collapsed, by which time there was no money left.

The regulator could have rolled out its section 231 powers to impose a schedule of pension contributions on the company. However, the regulator took a "softly-softly" approach as it has done in scores of cases. Indeed, the regulator has used its section 231 powers only once – an extraordinary statistic.

Labour MP Frank Field, chair of Parliament's Work and Pensions Select Committee, said, "Their (Carillion) private pleading that the company could not afford more was in stark contrast to

the rosy picture – and bumper dividends – being presented to the outside world.”

Blacklisting

Carillion was one of those companies which used “The Consulting Association” to create a blacklist of workers, especially in the construction industry.

This secret database of workers - who complained about asbestos, unsafe electrical installations or were active trade unionists - was used as a blacklist to stop certain workers getting jobs.

In 2009 one worker took Carillion to an Employment Tribunal. The company admitted blacklisting because he was a union member who had raised concerns about safety on a building site. Although the holding of a blacklist is unlawful the worker lost the case.

The reason for the decision was that he was not employed directly by Carillion but via an employment agency and as such was not protected by employment law.

The written judgement stated that: “We have reached our conclusions with considerable reluctance. It seems to us that he has suffered a genuine injustice and we greatly regret that the law provides him with no remedy”

The worker appealed and ended up in the European Court of Human Rights but still lost. Carillion then pursued the worker for £3,500 worth of legal costs.

In 2016 at the High Court, Carillion admitted that they had blacklisted workers and paid out millions in an out of court settlement.

Technicalities in the legal system meant that Carillion and the rest of the blacklisting companies were able to buy their way out of a trial. None of the company directors who orchestrated the blacklisting has had to account for their actions.

Unite the union is taking further action in the High Court for breach of privacy, defamation and Data Protection offences against a host of major contractors.

Finance capital

PFI milked the public purse as did the banks when they were bailed-out following the 2008 crash.

This parasitic economy, that is now Britain, was the topic of Labour Party leader, Jeremy Corbyn, speech to the Engineering Employers Federation (EEF) Conference when he claimed that the finance sector’s “destructive” dominance over “the real economy” and “undemocratic” control over politics needed to be tackled so that the economy could be rebalanced.

He said, “We will take decisive action

to make finance the servant of industry not the masters of us all. For a generation, instead of finance serving industry, politicians have served finance. We’ve seen where that ends.”

He added, “When private debt is twice the size of the real economy, when traders no longer understand the products they are trading, and banks are funding their own speculation rather than productive investment, something has gone grossly and badly wrong.”⁽¹⁾

Carillion was one of those companies which used “The Consulting Association” to create a blacklist of workers, especially in the construction industry. This secret database of workers who complained about asbestos, unsafe electrical installation or were active trade unionists were denied work on construction projects.

This criticism of the City of London stands in stark contrast to the position of the Tory Party, which regards the City as the flagship of British capitalism. Although there are deep divisions within the Tory Party over Brexit they are united in their defence of the City and Finance Capital.

Brexit

One major concern among all Tories, hard and soft Brexiteers as well as Remainers, is that a British withdrawal from the EU could have a negative impact on the City of London and its key role in the global financial world.

German and French finance capital see an opportunity for them to gain ground in terms of financial services if Britain were to exit from the EU.

The negotiations over this issue are crucial for the rival capitalisms and seen as much more important than the Irish border, EU citizens or even trade, although that is not how it is presented.

The dominant position within British ruling-class circles for decades has been to ride two horses: remain within the EU and have a special relationship (ie junior partnership) with the USA. The Brexit vote was unexpected, even by many of those in Tory pro-Brexit circles.

The Tories are in a difficult position. Their slender majority in the House of Commons depends on the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), they don’t want another election any time soon, and they are deeply divided over the EU including within the Cabinet. In addition, Remain-

ers across all parties may be able to command a majority in the House of Commons.

The House of Lords is likely to play an important role in the next stage of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. There are 248 Tories in the Lords, less than a third of the total membership of 794. Thus, Remainers with a huge majority in the Lords, will make life very difficult for the divided government.

Mrs Thatcher’s former Chancellor, Lord Nigel Lawson, has written recently about the negotiations with the EU, “So we find ourselves today quite unnecessarily as a supplicant, in a humiliating state of cringe, begging for what is both unnecessary and unattainable – a posture which would have been anathema to Margaret Thatcher. The time has come to call an end to this demeaning process. We must get up off our knees. Enough is enough. The government should instead devote its energies, as is long overdue, to making the necessary arrangements for leaving without a bilateral trade agreement.”⁽²⁾

Lawson’s statement suggests that he understands that the longer the negotiating process goes on the less likely it is that the UK will leave the EU and that the Remainers will get their way.

Organisations campaigning to stop Brexit include “Best for Britain”, funded by the billionaire, George Soros, and chaired by his friend, Labour peer, Lord Malloch Brown; and the European Movement, whose CEO is former Tory Cabinet Minister, Stephen Dorrell, Lord Ashdown is President and Ken Clarke MP, Vice-President. Among its patrons are the Lords Heseltine, Kinnock, Hurd and Baroness Williams.

Given the dominant historical position within British ruling-class circles and the balance of forces at the Palace of Westminster it is conceivable that the referendum result may still be overturned. That is what the hard Remainers are aiming for.

However, they do concede⁽³⁾ that they have a lot of work to do in changing the minds of those who voted to leave the EU, as the majority of the people still see it as an undemocratic and bureaucratic monstrosity, which acts for the few not the many.

FOOTNOTES

1. *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 February 2018.
2. Nigel Lawson, “Margaret Thatcher would have said ‘No!’ to a bad deal”, *Standpoint*, February 2018.
3. See Lord Malloch Brown, <https://bestforbritain.org>

Haiti used by Tories to attack aid budget

‘Deye mon gen mon’ is a favourite phrase in Haiti and means ‘beyond the mountains are more mountains’.

By **KEN CABLE**

It captures not only the difficult and rugged geography of the country but also the difficulties encountered by the majority in everyday life where poverty and acute underdevelopment are stark realities.

It can also act as a metaphor for the latest episode where Haiti has hit the headlines. Oxfam, one of the most prominent non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in Haiti has been accused of sexual misconduct by its employees and a consequent cover-up.

The British government has used the opportunity provided by this to attack Oxfam directly and indirectly the provision of British aid to underdeveloped countries.

The Haitian government has been forced to temporarily suspend Oxfam’s work in Haiti and to review its relations with the many NGOs who work there.

In January 2010 Port au Prince, Haiti’s capital, suffered a devastating earthquake which killed some 250,000 people and made over a million homeless, many of whom remain living under tents and make-shift shelters.

OXFAM was one of the many NGOs which responded, both immediately with emergency aid and in the subsequent reconstruction programme.

In 2011 seven of its staff, including its director of operations, resigned or were dismissed for organising sex parties with prostitutes, including allegedly some who were under-age.

At the time no-one took any interest in this matter, partly because OXFAM covered-up the incident giving only a partial account of what occurred to its regulatory authority, the Charity Commission, and none to the Haitian government.

On February 9, 2018 *The Times* broke the story as its lead item and other newspapers and the electronic media quickly followed suit. Within days the head of OXFAM was summoned to a

meeting with Penny Mordaunt, the British International Development Secretary, who loudly condemned its actions; and then to appear before the House of Commons International Development Committee. In the meantime co-operation between the British Government and OXFAM was suspended pending further enquiries.

The interest of *The Times* and other British media in this matter seven years after the event is a surprise since there is little sustained interest in Haiti in the UK. Indeed the only British agency providing regular coverage of events in Haiti is the website of the Haiti Support Group ...

The interest of *The Times* and other British media in this matter seven years after the event is a surprise since there is little sustained interest in Haiti in the UK. Indeed the only British agency providing regular coverage of events in Haiti is the website of the Haiti Support Group, which maintains an excellent coverage on Haitian affairs.

So also surprising is the interest of the British Government. Formal diplomatic relations with Haiti were only re-opened in June 2013 after an absence of nearly fifty years during which Haiti was monitored, if at all, by British diplomats based in the Dominican Republic or Jamaica.

The current British ambassador to Haiti lives in Santo Domingo, the capital of the neighbouring Dominican Republic, and is conveniently the wife of the current British ambassador to the Dominican Republic. A two-for-one bargain as it were!

Given this record it can only be deduced that the British government’s

prompt intervention in and shrill denouncement of OXFAM in Haiti is motivated by other matters.

The chief suspicion here has fallen on OXFAM’s widely publicised recent report on inequality which pointed out that 82% of all wealth created in 2017 went to the top 1%, and nothing to the bottom 50% (Oxfam, Reward Work, Not Wealth, January 2018).

While this report no doubt discomfited the current Tory government, the real reason is the opportunity it provided to criticise the aid budget which is seen as too generous and not sufficiently attentive of British foreign policy objectives.

In an article in *The Telegraph* on 15 January Penny Mordaunt claimed that aid should be spent ‘in the national interest’, involving collaboration with other government departments – a long-standing objective of the Foreign Office which has argued that foreign aid should be brought back under its direct control as was the case for many years before the Labour government of 1997 created a separate Department for International Development.

The immediate criticism of this article the following day by British NGOs, prominent among them being OXFAM, would not have gone unnoticed by Mordaunt.

Lastly, there is the reaction of the Haitian government.

Politics and government in Haiti is beset with difficulties, and the current government has been in office for little over a year (see *The Socialist Correspondent*, issue 28, summer 2017). Not much has changed but in this matter it has moved with remarkable speed.

On January 13 the president, Jovenal Moïse, condemned OXFAM and promised an inquiry and a week later its minister of planning and external co-operation suspended OXFAM’s activities in Haiti. Behind this lies a long history of distrust of NGOs.

Haiti has been characterised as ‘the Republic of NGOs’. More than 10,000 NGOs have at one time or another been working in the country to make it per

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Rivalries, dangers and possibilities

The Soviet Union was dissolved at the end of 1991 and gangster capitalism took over accompanied by drastic falls in living standards.

By **FRIEDA PARK**

Though Russia inherited the rights and obligations of the former Soviet Union, as the nascent Russian capitalists fought among themselves for control of its resources, it no longer posed the same threat and certainly not the alternative that socialism offered.

In 1989 Francis Fukuyama, the neo-conservative US academic, anticipated that the end of the Soviet Union meant the end of socialism and declared that this also meant “the end of history”.

He believed that the battle for “liberal democracy”, i.e. capitalism, had been won and had been won for ever.

Whilst the transition from socialism to capitalism was chaotic in Russia, the lessons were learned by China’s rulers who have taken it on a more managed and peaceful path to capitalism.

That it is currently more influential in the world than Russia owes much to this process.

As socialism was defeated everywhere else only tiny Cuba soldiered on. Due to its resilience we can celebrate 100 years not just since the Russian Revolution, but 100 years of socialism in practice.

What does the world look like nearly 30 years from the so-called end of history?

War

We see that socialism was not the threat to world peace it was painted as being nor was the conflict between capitalism and socialism the biggest threat to the existence of humanity and our planet.

The conflict between competing capitalisms provides a much greater danger. Though there were points of great tension, including the nuclear stand-off of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 and the Vietnam War, these did not result in all out conflict between the two systems. This was largely due to the Soviet Union’s desire to avoid such a war.

The actual threat posed by the Soviet

Union was one which took swathes of the world out of the imperialist ambit, promoted peace, supported countries in the third world and the non-aligned movement and provided reasonable living standards and opportunities for its people. With that “threat” gone capitalism became unconstrained in imposing its will and with frightening results.



China’s President, Xi Jinping and US President, Donald Trump.

The world is now a dangerous place. Is it more dangerous than it has ever been?

That would be a difficult thing to measure, however it is clear that there are a number of flashpoints which could lead to conflict between nuclear powers and where there are on-going wars.

Millions of our fellow human beings are suffering death, destruction, displacement, disease and hunger. Children are orphaned and injured. Lands are devastated. Cities, industries and agriculture are destroyed. Economies are shattered and even cultural heritage is being attacked.

The desire for economic and strategic dominance by the USA and other countries, including Britain, is fuelling this.

The current most dangerous stand-off

is in the Korean Peninsula which is dealt with in the article on page 11, “West’s dangeous view of North Korea.”

There are continuous wars in the Middle East and there is still a volatile situation in Ukraine, right here in Europe, which has slipped off the mainstream news agenda.

Other significant areas of conflict exist like the competing claims to sovereignty and resources of China, Japan and Russia in the South China Sea.

In any of these numerous conflict zones, an accident, misunderstanding or impetuous act could take us over the brink and into all-out war between big powers.

This includes the possibility of war between the US and Russia, which could happen in Ukraine or Syria. China tends to be more circumspect militarily, but Trump’s volatility and confrontational approach could have similar consequences in Korea and the Asia Pacific region.

Economic crisis

Nor is capitalism, to coin a phrase, “strong and stable” in itself. Less than 20 years into the end of history and the triumph of neo-liberalism came the financial crash from which, 10 years on, it is yet to recover.

Not only has it not recovered, but the underlying problems that caused the crash in the first place were not really addressed and are re-emerging. This includes unsustainable amounts of household debt and mortgage lending.

For example, in Britain average household debt – mortgages plus consumer credit - is 140% of income. Many, many people have debt because they cannot live on what they earn, like the nurses who use food banks.

Even the recent small increase in the Bank of England base rate will have an impact on families with tight finances. The average mortgage for a first-time buyer was 2.6 times their income in 2000, since 2012 it has been 3.45. But partly that is what low interest rates were designed to do to increase debt and consumer spending – no lesson learned from the financial crash there about the

unsustainability of this model.

Despite some nods towards reforming it, the financial system remains volatile, opaque and so complex that even those who work in it have only a limited idea of its actual operation.

Hedging, futures trading and almost incomprehensible financial instruments appear as “wealth”, but lack reality. Yet this parasitic core is what capitalism is now – it cannot be unwound or seriously reformed. Another crisis could happen any time.

The neo-liberal world (dis)order

The themes of the neo-liberal world (dis)order seem clear:

- There is inherent economic instability.
- There is increasing inequality between and within nations and in advanced capitalist countries an actual fall in living standards.
- Imperialism is willing to use war and the threat of war to achieve its ends. In fact it often seems like a first resort, with less and less attempt to find fake justifications. The United Nations and international law have been totally sidelined. ■ There is a threat of nuclear war.
- Imperialism has long used proxy actors, like Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, to pursue its ends. These terrorist organisations now have a life of their own as a major force in Middle East conflicts.
- It has also engaged in divide and rule to maintain its power, however, the regional differences it has fostered have also spun out of control.
- On top of economic crisis and military conflicts, capitalism is experiencing major political crises.

There are open divisions within ruling classes, their machinery of state and their political parties. The US Presidential election had the FBI intervene against Clinton, yet Trump was not the President capitalism wanted.

Since then Trump has not been reined in by the dominant wing of the establishment which is now pursuing him through the Russia investigation. In Britain we had the vote to leave the European Union and since then the Tory Party’s Leave and Remain factions have been openly at war.

Furthermore, it seems democracy can no longer be easily manipulated to give the desired result with the growth of new left-wing forces, nationalism and the far right.

■ The weaknesses of the old imperial powers have meant increasing roles for Russia, and more particularly China, in shaping world events.

Middle East

The Middle East is being totally devastated by imperialism’s mission to defeat any remnants of secular, anti-imperialist governments and gain control strategically and of resources. As well as the invasion of Afghanistan, there has been the overthrow of Saddam, Gaddafi and the war in Syria.

President Assad, however, decided that he was not going to be dispatched with the same ease as the others and has fought back increasingly successfully with Russian and Iranian backing.

Without any seeming irony the western pretext for turning the area into a living hell had been the War on Terror, which it pursues by encouraging terrorists to act on its behalf even though they turn on their benefactor.



**2017 at the G20 Summit:
Russia’s President, Vladimir Putin
and Donald Trump.**

One can see how terrorist threats at home help stoke fear, division and buy support for war, but they can also have the opposite effect.

We have just passed the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration and the 60th anniversary of the partition of India. Imperialism’s long-term technique of playing divide and rule is also being well deployed just now, however having unleashed these forces they too seem to be less and less in the control of their creators.

Regional powers are increasingly in conflict with each other. The stand-off between Saudi Arabia and Qatar is an example. Both are trying to assert themselves as regional powers and Saudi Arabia has also been interfering in Lebanon and launched the devastating war against Yemen.

These moves are also designed to counter Iran’s growing influence. Israel is supportive of Saudi efforts and they are building closer ties.

In an attempt to carve up (partition)

Syria, the US is espousing the cause of the Kurds which annoys Turkey, with its own large Kurdish population. This has caused Turkey to move closer to Russia. The plan is to divide Iraq and Syria and in the service of this, as well as promoting the cause of the Kurds, Sunnis and Shias are played off against each. The hope is to create small client statelets which can be manipulated and which pose no threat to US interests.

Peace movement

With no end in sight to the horror that is happening in the region, never was there a greater need for an active peace movement here with the clarity to oppose US and Western aggression without getting side-tracked by fears of being seen as apologists for Putin or fake atrocities.

The movement in Britain has been relatively silent. Maybe people hope that Corbyn and Thornberry can do the job, but as on every other issue the Labour leadership is under huge pressure from the right. Without a strong movement outside parliament their power is greatly diminished.

The USA

The USA remains by far the world’s strongest nation economically and militarily. Policy under a Hilary Clinton presidency would have been predictable in defending and promoting US interests through further military intervention, trade treaties such as TTIP etc.

However, we have President Trump who by contrast is defending and promoting US interests in an unpredictable way, which serves to undermine the rationale of the neo-liberal world order.

His interpretation of what it takes to “Make America Great Again” is based even more crudely on threats of force, bullying, confrontational rhetoric and unilateral action. Diplomacy seems to be virtually redundant, with little recognition that other actors, including even allies, have interests that need to be the subject of compromise.

So TTIP was killed off, NAFTA is under threat and the Iran nuclear deal likewise. Mexico has one of the more right-wing governments south of the border, yet Trump spends time threatening and insulting it, from demanding it pay for the wall to failing to send condolences on the recent earthquake. These attitudes have also brought us to the brink of nuclear war in Korea.

In the longer-term Trump’s approach may actually undermine the advances made by the right in South/Central America and the Caribbean.



The Port of Shanghai's deep water harbour on Yangshan Island in Hangzhou Bay became the busiest container port in the world in 2010.

Cuba

His policy on Cuba represents a return to the old, failed thinking dictated by right-wing Cuban-American politicians.

All the achievements of Obama's carefully calibrated diplomatic negotiations are in peril and are already being rolled back. For example, restricting travel and business dealings, slashing the numbers of diplomats and a partial closure of the only recently reopened embassy; not to mention the bizarre allegations that the Cubans have been engaged in sonic warfare against the US embassy in Havana.

The blockade and trying to isolate and punish Cuba completely failed in its objective of undermining socialism there. Obama's expressed aim was to undermine it by opening it up to contact with capitalist ideas, consumer goods and tourists.

In this context "reformist" elements within the Cuban government talked about embracing the Chinese model and economic liberalisation was well underway. Where now for Cuba? If there is no payback from the US will the impetus to embrace capitalist relations of production stall?

Inter-imperialist rivalries

For the US, confrontation and the naked use of power may work to an extent, but ultimately it is leaving the world stage open to other actors – rival imperialist powers and rising powers such as Russia and China, who are gaining ground in conflict zones, in developing countries and in forging new trade alliances.

The US is alive to this threat with Trump off and on railing against both countries. The conflict in Ukraine and in the threats against North Korea originated from attempts by the US and other Western countries to encircle and contain Russia and China militarily.

However, the other main imperialist countries or blocs seem to be doing less than Russia or China to exploit US weakness. Whilst in competition imperialist powers also often have common interests and collaborate.

It almost feels as though there is a sort of paralysis arising from uncertainty as

to how to deal with Trump, which is exacerbated by their own problems.

Mostly they seem to hope that they can ride out the Trump administration and get back to business as usual come the next Presidential election.

The EU/Germany/France, Britain, and Japan do not seem to be trying to move in to take the initiative from the US. Each had its own preoccupations.

The European Union

The EU is increasingly less coherent as a bloc as it expands to embrace countries with very different levels of wealth and political cultures.

It appears preoccupied with internal affairs and is still trying to decide whether to centralise more or have different speeds (or categories) of EU membership. Whether to have its own armed forces? How to deal with the threat of separatism in Spain and elsewhere? To expand or not to expand? Etc.

For all the condescension of their negotiators, Brexit is a major blow especially to Germany which always had a solid ally in Britain for out-right neo-liberal policies.

Yet their only tactic is playing hardball to try to punish Britain as it exits or to beat it into submission so that the Brexit decision is reversed. There is no sign of trying to woo Britain back to the fold. Merkel's power is fading as she tries to maintain Germany's dominant role in the EU, providing as it does a big internal market for German goods and services and a ready supply of cheap labour. The consequences of this have proven fertile ground for the growth of the far right.

Emanuel Macron, the new right-wing President of France, is the great white hope of media commentators. How wonderful that France did the sensible thing and elected a pro-EU politician committed to neo-liberalism. It can be done!

The old right-wing and social democratic parties may be moribund, but a new champion can emerge – how the British ruling class must wish it could pull a similar rabbit out of the hat.

Yet a portion of Macron's support

was a vote against Marine Le Pen more than a vote for him, not the ringing endorsement that commentators are deluding themselves with.

His success may be limited and not something which can be replicated elsewhere. He is also facing opposition to his neo-liberal agenda.

Russia and China

Though nothing like powerful enough to challenge US hegemony, Russia and China seem to have got friendlier and both are making a significant impact.

Having said that, Russia is not in the same league as China. The economy is still heavily dependent on the exploitation of natural resources and prices are volatile, particularly oil.

However, Putin has created a sense of order and political stability. He has played his cards well in the international arena, setting the agenda in Syria and disrupting US and EU intentions in Ukraine.

China

It is China, however, which is developing a vast global reach economically, politically and increasingly militarily. This strategy pre-dated Trump's election, but the Chinese government will hope to capitalise on the instability of his administration, Japan's continued weakness and the EU's problems.

The Western media were quick to laud President Xi Jinping as the voice of reason against Trump when he praised globalisation at world economic forum in Davos and for China taking a lead on climate change

China is the world's second biggest economy by GDP after the US. It is the largest manufacturing economy in the world and the largest exporter of goods. It is also the world's fastest growing consumer market and second largest importer of goods. The yuan was made one of the five IMF reserve currencies in 2015 and China is becoming more active in these established international capitalist bodies, for example, participating in the IMF bailout of Ukraine in 2015.

It has been increasingly active in establishing trade agreements with other countries, such as the 16+1 group of central and eastern European countries which encroaches on the EU's territory.

It has set up bodies such as the BRICS Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank which has 70 members including all G7 countries except Japan and the USA.

Throughout the world now Chinese investment can be found which earns it access to natural resources, agricultural

produce, land and industrial production.

These in turn create political and economic leverage. It started out on this strategy by going where imperialist interests were less keen to go making major investments in Africa, which had been written off by others as a “failed continent”.

It is now opening out and making more extensive moves, though mainly still trying to avoid direct conflict with the US.

In the finance sector: The China Development Bank has a bigger overseas book of assets than the World Bank, with the Export-Import Bank of China close behind. The Chinese central bank has extended currency-swap lines to over 30 countries.

Now it has started the ambitious One Belt, One Road project (OBOR), called the new silk road, which was launched in 2013, aiming to span 65 countries in a land corridor (Belt) from China through to Europe.

The other part is a maritime route (Road) embracing the likes of Indonesia, India, Africa, through Suez to the Mediterranean and joining with the end of the land route at Venice.

So far it has invested hundreds of billions of dollars in things like roads and railways. But also, for example, China took a major controlling interest in the privatised Port of Pireaus in Greece and is planning a high-speed railway from there to Hungary and Germany.

The intensive nature of the investment along the route can be seen, for example, in projects being developed in Pakistan which include: a nuclear power station, a hydro-electric power station, a new highway and a coal mine.

So far contracts for OBOR projects have overwhelmingly gone to Chinese companies, but the ones that do go to local and foreign contractors still add up to a lot of cash and the Chinese government is talking of \$4tr investment in the project.

Interestingly, China plans to maintain long-term management of OBOR projects. It is said that China sees itself as central to a European/Asian region. Compared to the US position as central to the trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific regions. In trying to create this new centre it is trying to re-configure the economic/geographic view of the world.⁽⁴⁾

So far China has projected itself as using “soft power” the key word being

“power”, however it is now developing its military strength as well.

It is the fastest growing and modernising military power in the world, including developing its own arms industry and military technologies.

It has the second largest defence budget in the world which has grown 10% annually over the last 15 years. It is the 3rd largest exporter of arms.

Most significantly it established its first overseas military base last year in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa – an area of strategic importance to the success of OBOR.

Dangers and opportunities

We may be witnessing a world which is being reshaped as the dominant imperial powers are mired in difficulties and new ones contend. Historically this is a new phenomenon.

This could also be a very dangerous world, especially since the forces for progress, though not at the low point

alism and the success of Jeremy Corbyn.

Across Europe there has been the rise of the far right and of left parties like Syriza and Podemos, plus nationalist movements as in Catalonia.

In the USA there was the defeat of neo-liberalism’s anointed heir, Hilary Clinton, and the election of an extreme right-winger. But Bernie Sanders also did well and energised a mass movement to support his policies.

In South America there has been the success of left governments of a wide variety of hues and in the Middle East, Africa and Asia the rise of Islam as a political and military/terrorist force.

This does not look like the “end of history”. The prospects for socialism re-asserting itself depend on the crises and contradictions of capitalism, our ability to win people ideologically and organise politically. We seem to be rather short of the mark in terms of these latter requirements.

On balance right-wing and fascist parties seem to be relatively more successful, but then they do not represent a threat to the continued existence of capitalism and have always been an option for the ruling class.

Left parties which have sprung up in Europe like Syriza, are very broad churches without a coherent ideology and have demonstrated their weaknesses in not facing down capitalism.

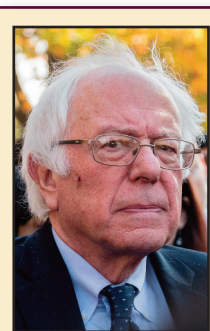
In South America, social democratic and populist parties have struggled and sometimes failed to withstand destabilisation and the onslaught of the right abetted by the US.

The fight in Venezuela for sovereignty and to defend the gains of the Bolivarian Revolution demonstrate just how tough it can get to take on imperialism.

But if neo-liberalism cannot find the means to regulate itself and offers us only a world of chaos, war and inequality, then that only demonstrates all the more the need for socialism.

We must resist the view that things are so dangerous that the best we can do is to try to help capitalism stabilise itself – a hopeless task which will discredit its messengers who will be complicit in its continued crimes.

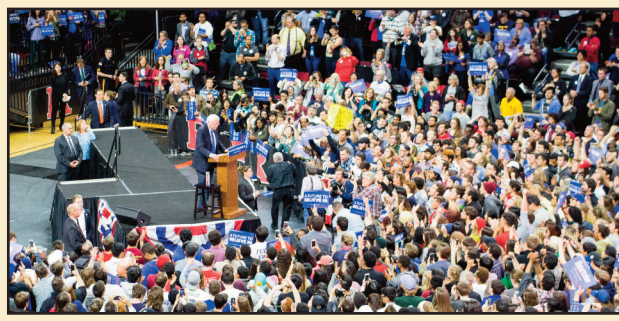
Instead we have a great opportunity in the crises that capitalism faces to expose it as a failed system and to argue for the socialist alternative.



Bernie Sanders

In the USA there was the defeat of neo-liberalism’s anointed heir, Hilary Clinton, and the election of the extreme right-winger, Trump.

But Bernie Sanders also did well and energised a mass movement to support his policies such as that pictured below at Rutgers University in the state of New Jersey.



they reached in the 90s and noughties, nevertheless are not yet motivated by a clear socialist agenda.

But socialism, even though people might not really know what it is, has begun to spark imaginations again.

Capitalism may not yet face the threat of socialism re-establishing itself as a world force, but it has not created stability and certainly not won a consensus to support liberal capitalism, quite the reverse.

In Britain we have seen the vote to leave the EU, the rise of Scottish nation-

FOOTNOTE

1. Our Bulldozers, Our Rules – *The Economist* 2/7/16.

West's dangerous view of N. Korea

Here's a typical western headline on North Korea: **“‘Mentally unstable’ North Korean leader Kim Jong-un threatens war after being pushed over the edge by US ‘fat jibes’** (*Daily Mirror*, 29/2/17).

By SIMON KORNER

Here's another, more middle-class, just as biased: “With or without Donald Trump's help, Kim Jong-un could easily plunge the planet into its third world war inside a century.” (*Independent* 30/4/17).

And here's Stop the War's Lindsey German (14/8/17): “Trump and Kim are both highly unpredictable, making them a danger to us all.”

This view, almost universally accepted now, including on the Left, that North Korea and the US are equal dangers to the world, is a distortion. It ignores the balance of world forces and the still-living effects of the Korean war.

The current crisis cannot be under-

stood without an appreciation of that terrible conflict and how it shaped the North Korea of today.

A pamphlet, *I Saw the Truth in Korea* by Alan Winnington, *Daily Worker* correspondent and one of only two western journalists to report the war from the Northern side, records what he witnessed.

For his pains, he had his passport confiscated by the British government and never returned to the UK, ending his days in East Germany. Winnington describes a visit to the shallow graves dug just after the infamous Daejon Massacre of some 7,000 civilian prisoners by US-led forces.

This massacre, ordered by Syngman Rhee, the south Korean US puppet and former collaborator with the Japanese, was one among many other murders of political prisoners by the regime in South Korea in the first months of the war – 100,000 were killed, according to US Embassy official Gregory Henderson. Winnington put the figure at 200,000 at least, and as high as 400,000.

Using the 38th Parallel a line was drawn without consultation by two American junior officers in the closing days of World War 11, using a National Geographic map of Korea to arbitrarily divide Korea into north and south.

In North Korea in 1945 a democratically elected government, headed by Kim Il Sun, who'd led a guerilla army against the Japanese occupiers since 1932, brought in women's emancipation, land reform, nationalization of industry, subsidized rice, free healthcare, schools and universities built, and a huge expansion of literacy.



Three Koreans are executed for resisting the Japanese occupation (1910-45) of Korea.



May 1948: Korean Communists await execution during the period of US occupation (1945-48) of South Korea.



North Korea's Museum of American War Atrocities

Today, North Korea's health system is the envy of the developing world, according to the World Health Organisation.

Soviet troops withdrew in 1948, after failing to persuade the US to withdraw jointly.

US 1950 invasion of North Korea

Winnington makes the point very clearly that it was America that invaded Korea in 1950, not the other way round: "At dawn, on Sunday, June 25, the South Korean Army - American trained, American equipped and with American officers as advisers... - crossed the Parallel at three points after a two-day artillery preparation ... By three o'clock in the afternoon, the North Korean People's Army had pushed them back and was going over to the offensive..."

"Like trained seals, the entirely illegal body which calls itself the United Nations Commission in Korea had sent to America that Sunday afternoon a document purporting to prove that the North Koreans had begun the attack. Their evidence consisted only of a statement made by the South Korean Government and Syngman Rhee."

During the war, the US dropped almost half a million bombs on Pyongyang alone. Napalm was widely used, 32,500 thousand tons of it, forcing the population to live underground, and germ warfare was used.

Bombing of dams destroyed rice production and led to starvation. Hospitals and schools were systematically destroyed. General MacArthur ordered that "every installation, every facility, and village in North Korea" should become a military target.

More US bombs were dropped on North Korea than the US had used in Asia during the whole of World War 11.

Chief Justice William O. Douglas visited Korea in the summer of 1952: "I had seen the war-battered cities of Europe; but I had not seen devastation until I had seen Korea..." he said.

The war totally destroyed 18 out of the North's 22 cities. General LeMay wrote: "We burned down just about every city in North Korea and South Korea both ... we killed off over a million civilian Koreans."

Current estimates of the total deaths vary. 2.9 million civilian dead is generally accepted by western sources, not in-



A dental clinic at Pyongyang Maternity Hospital

cluding 1.5 Korean and Chinese soldiers, and 54,000 US soldiers. 20% of the North's population was killed. Such a traumatic experience explains the North's deep suspicion of America ever since and its fiercely patriotic stance. This is not a question of brainwashing, but of experience in living memory.

The war ended with a ceasefire but no peace treaty, in 1953. This was regarded as a victory by the North, simply for having survived.

According to the Agreement no reinforcements or weapons could be introduced into Korea. In 1958-9 the US deployed nuclear missiles in South Korea.

The current situation

There are 28,500 US troops stationed in South Korea, with 50,000 more in Japan. \$3.1 billion was spent on reinforcing US forces in South Korea in 2012 alone.

Three aircraft carriers, the USS Ronald Reagan and the USS Theodore Roosevelt and the USS Nimitz, are patrolling the area, each the centrepiece of a strike group of destroyers and other heavily armed warships.

A nuclear-powered submarine, the USS Michigan, with 154 nuclear-capable Tomahawk missiles on board, is docked in Busan.

During its series of almost continuous drills throughout 2017, US and South Korean B1-B strategic bombers and F-35B Stealth fighters flew right up to the border - performing "simulated precision strikes against North Korea's military facilities," according to the U.S. Pacific Command and South Korea's Defense Ministry. These exercises practice pre-emptive "decapitation" raids

aimed at eliminating the leadership in Pyongyang.

Heightened rhetoric has accompanied the drills. Trump told the UN in September 2017 that he would "totally destroy" North Korea, if necessary, and said Kim Jong Un and his foreign minister "won't be around much longer" if they ever develop a nuclear missile capable of reaching the USA.

The threats of annihilation are not new. In 1995, Colin Powell said the US would turn North Korea into a "charcoal briquette". Kim has re-

sponded in kind, but in a David and Goliath situation the rhetoric is also unequal.

Having once been obliterated in war, Korea takes threats seriously and has developed its own nuclear deterrent and missiles, with 22 missiles launched in 15 tests. It now has between 20 and 30 nuclear bombs, and can build at least 7 more a year.

Retired Russian general Viktor Yesin estimates it will take 4-5 years for them to be able to hit American cities, and maybe 3 years to hit US bases in the Pacific. Once it can reach the US, it will have attained deterrence, and can then scale back its conventional forces.

The US has not started evacuating the 125,000-140,000 American civilians from South Korea - so clearly war is not imminent. But in the current standoff, accidents are a real danger. There are no rules of engagement for air encounters. So if the North scrambled fighters to intercept US planes, even if it had no intent to engage, the potential for an accidental collision is high. There have been accidental clashes before - the last one in 2001 was off the coast of China, but then the tension was lower.

How likely is the US to make a pre-emptive strike in future? The development of the new B61-12 nuclear bomb, which can penetrate the earth's surface and destroy North Korea's weapons buried underground, may strengthen the hand of those voices pushing for military action - powerful figures such as retired 4 Star general Jack Keane and the former Ambassador to the UN John Bolton.

Keane says the US was weakened by allowing China and North Korea to believe no military action would happen. Thus, the job now was to shake that belief and "put the military option back

on the table.”

“How much do you fear a nuclear weapon?” asked John Bolton. “That’s the question. We have to look at pre-emptive military action.”

But the hawks in Washington are constrained by public opinion. A Washington Post-ABC News poll found that 67% of respondents opposed pre-emptive US strikes on North Korea and agree to military action only if Pyongyang were to attack the United States or one of its allies.

US Admiral Dennis Blair, former Director of National Intelligence said in a telling interview: “... what we’ve learned over time is, it matters who starts these things, right? When you get the US public behind an administration, it’s when we’re attacked. Pearl Harbor is a classic example ... So, what you want to do in most of these situations is maneuver the other guy into taking the first step, and then you crush him after he started it.” He cites the 2003 invasion of Iraq as an example of what not to do.

Another problem for the US is the difficulty of intercepting intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Philip E. Coyle III, who ran the Pentagon’s weapons-testing program, believes the anti-missile system “is something the US military, and the American people, cannot depend upon.”

So if the US provoked a war, Seoul and other cities would be destroyed. And if Seoul was sacrificed, as the price for destroying North Korea, Japanese trust in the US protective umbrella would be lost. The American system of alliances in Asia would be over.

On the other hand, the price for not acting is loss of credibility. If Trump’s threats remain empty, the whole US edifice of military threat appears hollow and weak. And credibility is becoming

increasingly important to the US in relation to its diminishing power in the world.

So the question is: how long can its provocation go on, without action? What action could it take? It is possible that US rhetoric could force its hand – and US public opinion may be turning in Trump’s direction, infected by the feverish war propaganda.

A poll – of Republicans, note – showed 46% supporting pre-emptive action. Some action does seem possible, on a fabricated pretext – calibrated so as not to provoke a full war but to show, like the mother of all bombs in Afghanistan, and the Cruise missiles attack on the Syrian airbase, that it means business. This would obviously be an extremely dangerous tactic.

So, apart from a risky covert raid to assassinate the North Korean leadership – something the South Koreans, under defence minister Han Min-koo, are rehearsing, with a special brigade – what are the more immediate US options?

Cutting off food and fuel. This is already underway, with a 30% cut in oil supplies to North Korea, and a total ban on the North’s textile exports – its second-biggest earner and providing a livelihood for at least 100,000 workers. Further sanctions applied in December 2017 tightened the net.

While sanctions won’t bring down Kim Jong Un, they will create misery for the population – in a form of collective punishment. The US hopes this will eventually destabilise the government or lead to internal splits.

Sanctions are nothing new, of course. Since the Korean war, the North has been the most heavily sanctioned country in the world. But now sanctions are strangling it, with the majority of its export earnings having been blocked.

80% of North Korean land is mountainous and imports are needed to feed the population, so depriving North Korea of foreign exchange will as Mike Whitney in *Counterpunch* argues, “weaponise” food. According to the 38 North website, which monitors the country using North Korean defectors, “the 2017 growing season has been very challenging for North Korean agricultural producers The impact of further sanctions ... will likely bring further challenges to the situation in North Korea.”

Other countries bullied into imposing sanctions include India, the Philippines, Mexico, Peru, Egypt and Uganda.

Many African countries, such as Namibia, had warm relations with North Korea, dating back to liberation struggles. But now the US has forced them to cancel contracts with North Korea. Treasury secretary Steve Mnuchin said: “North Korea economic warfare works.”

Other US restrictions focus on China – in particular, threatening to cut off China’s access to the US financial system. Ed Royce, chairman of the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, said the US could give Chinese banks and companies “a choice between doing business with North Korea or the United States.”

China

So, what about China’s response to these threats, as North Korea’s oil supplier and main trading partner? Though it is growing in strength and confidence, China is still too weak for war with America.

It fears the growing US presence in Asia, and is now facing the deployment of the Terminal High-Altitude Air Defence (THAAD) system in South Korea. This is a first-strike weapon, aimed at China as much as North Korea.

Despite its reluctance, if the US attacked North Korea, China would be forced to act. It could not let the US bomb its neighbour with impunity or allow US forces up to its border. But it might try to limit the scale of its response to avoid full-scale war.

Hence its interests for now are to try to de-escalate and play for time, to remove the US pretext for flooding Japan and South Korea with new arms. Is agreeing sanctions caving in to US pressure? Yes, and one can see the reason, but a sharper response might be more effective.

If US threats to North Korea are aimed at China, they also threaten Russia too. Russia, like China, shares a land border with North Korea, very short, and Vladivostok, a strategic port city and headquarters to Russia’s Pacific Fleet, is



only about 100 km from this border.

Russia-North Korea trade is growing, doubling in the first quarter of this year – mostly supplying energy. Putin has said he understands the North's position. They “know exactly how the situation developed in Iraq,” he said recently. “They know all that and see the possession of nuclear weapons and missile technology as their only form of self-defence. Do you think they're going to give that up?”

Both Russia and China have called for de-escalation and a “double freeze” – the simultaneous suspension of North Korean missile tests and US/South Korean military drills. But the US has refused, demanding denuclearization upfront – in effect, telling North Korea to disarm as a precondition to any talks.

South Korea

What is South Korea's position? Apart from preparing for covert raids on the North, the South claims it can produce a bomb that can paralyse North Korea's power systems, the ‘blackout bomb’.

But the South Korean population wants peace, and has come out clearly against the deployment of THAAD. And business has been hit by the Chinese anti-THAAD boycott of tourism and other trade.

President Moon Jae-in told the UN General Assembly: “All of our endeavors are to prevent the outbreak of war and maintain peace ... We do not desire the collapse of North Korea. We will not seek unification by absorption or artificial means.” Moon's recent election was a setback for the US.

As for Japan, so far it has not shot down the North Korean missiles flying over its airspace – so clearly we're not at that stage yet. But Abe is using the crisis as a reason to boost Japanese rearmament, and his recent re-election strengthens his hand against Japan's popular peaceful constitution.

Britain

Britain, for its part, would not support a US pre-emptive strike – having learnt from the Iraq war, which not only finished off New Labour but did not provide the hoped-for windfall of lucrative oil contracts, which all went to America.

Boris Johnson said recently: “Maximising diplomatic and economic pressure on North Korea is the most effective way to pressure Pyongyang to halt its illegal and aggressive actions.” On the other hand, if the US provoked North Korea into ac-



The recent election of Moon Jae-in as South Korea's President was a setback for the US.

tion, Britain could be drawn in as a NATO ally. According to the Royal United Services Institute, Britain would provide high-tech satellite communications and reconnaissance, and anti-submarine T-23 destroyers against the North Korean navy.

As for Germany, Angela Merkel warned that “only a peaceful, diplomatic solution to this conflict is possible. Anything else would lead to catastrophe, I am deeply convinced of that.”

Similarly, Macron said that France “will oppose any escalation” in Korea, and *Le Monde* commented, “For the rest of the international community, [Trump's] speech [to the UN] is a terrible challenge.”

US drive to war

To conclude, for North Korea, nuclear weapons are existential in nature. It will never give them up, because it knows what happened to Iraq which had none, and to Libya after it gave up its nuclear programme.

The US sanctions are only hurting the 25 million North Koreans, but will not

alter the country's fundamental self-defence posture. The only rational way forward is a peace treaty – allowing for mutual deterrence, the way mutually assured destruction kept the peace during the Cold War.

The 1994 agreement between the US and North Korea was working – until Bush tore it up and included North Korea in the “Axis of Evil”, making it a target of regime change, with Obama continuing the drive to war, and now Trump.

In January last year, North Korea offered to “sit with the US anytime” to discuss de-escalation. In May 2017 it offered to stop nuclear testing and missile launches if the US would end drills and sanctions, and sign a peace treaty ending the Korean War.

But the US refused to talk. It won't permit any smaller state to defy its world hegemony. The latest North-South dialogue around the Winter Olympics is viewed by the US State Department as an attempt to “drive a wedge” between Washington and Seoul.

The economic value of the US military-industrial complex has risen 31% so far this year, on the S&P 500 index. In Trump's first week of office alone, when he promised to raise spending by \$54 billion, share prices in the defence and aerospace sector jumped 6.8%.

The Korea crisis is producing huge dividends for shareholders as Japan and South Korea buy extra high-tech military equipment.

Trump's cabinet – the so-called ‘adults in the room’ of generals Mattis, McMaster and Kelly, along with CIA director Pompeo – represents a visible manifestation of the military-industrial establishment.

Trump's famous unpredictability is not a personal trait but a deliberate establishment tactic to impose a climate of uncertainty and fear on the rest of the world.

So, what can we do here? We need to counter the liberal propaganda which blames Kim along with Trump, to clarify who the main enemy is. This in effect, like the condemnation of Assad, promotes and prolongs war, rather than inhibiting it.

We need to help get an anti-war Labour government elected and, remembering that Clement Attlee sent 100,000 soldiers to fight the Korean war, maintain pressure for peace after that.

And we need to try to drive a wedge between Britain and the US, by pressing for an end to the dangerous and destructive “special relationship”.



Kim Jong-un



Donald Trump

Jerusalem: US ends Oslo peace process

When US President Trump announced “... it is time to officially recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel” and that consequently the US would be moving its embassy there from Tel Aviv he effectively ended the Oslo peace process.

By **BRIAN DURRANS**

Its assumed significance and rapturous reception by Israel’s friends has prompted comparison with the Balfour Declaration of 1917; but, as with Balfour’s, there is more to Trump’s Declaration, and more to its implications, than initial reactions acknowledged.

What does Trump’s statement mean for the legal status of Jerusalem and for the future of the Palestinian struggle for Freedom, Justice and Equality?

The legal status of Jerusalem

The principle that Jerusalem should be accorded special status relative to the rest of Palestine was agreed by the United Nations shortly before the founding of Israel in 1948, but implementing it was thwarted by Israel’s capture of what is now known as West Jerusalem, in 1949, when it was annexed into the Israeli state.

During that conflict, Arab (mainly Jordanian) forces took East Jerusalem which was, however, always treated as part of the West Bank, despite its annexation by Jordan, until transferred to the Palestine Liberation Organisation in 1989.

In 1960, the Israeli Knesset passed a ‘Basic Law’ declaring the nation’s ‘eternal’ capital to be Jerusalem as a whole, and seven years later, in the Six Day War of 1967, East Jerusalem was seized by Israeli forces along with the rest of the West Bank and Gaza, and is now part of the Occupied Palestinian Territories.⁽¹⁾

Unlike the rest of the West Bank and Gaza, however, Palestinian East Jerusalem, like Palestinian West Jerusalem before it, was illegally annexed into the Israeli state; and although the international community consistently maintained its position that these actions contravene international law, Israel has played a long game, by creating its own

laws designed to ensure a permanent Jewish majority in the City, by a combination of encouraging Jewish-only settlement and making life increasingly difficult for Palestinian Jerusalemites, who have never been accorded Israeli citizenship, only ‘residency rights’ which are frequently withdrawn.

the headquarters of many government ministries.”

For fifty years, UN resolutions have rejected Israel’s claims to sovereignty over the whole of Jerusalem.

But does the US now support the long-established Israeli position which even the US has hitherto rejected even while consistently defending its ally diplomatically, and through financial and military aid?

Here is what Trump goes on to say: “We are not taking a position on any final status issues, including the specific boundaries of the Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem, or the recognition of con-

On paper, therefore, the US position has not changed after all, a conclusion drawn explicitly by at least one prominent minister in the Israeli cabinet, transport minister Yisrael Katz (pictured), a likely Likud Prime Minister if Netanyahu succumbs to financial scandal in an investigation currently underway.



In time, despite the near-universal rejection of its occupations and annexations, Israel’s policy-makers have hoped that if its illegal acts could be consolidated as ‘facts on the ground’, then at least one major power, and subsequently others, would eventually recognise such illegality as irreversible and endorse it. That policy appears to be paying off.

What Trump said

President Trump tries to justify his decision to recognise (undivided) Jerusalem as Israel’s capital in two ways.

One is to say that “Israel is a sovereign nation with the right like every other sovereign nation to determine its own capital”; the other is to claim that he is simply recognising reality: “Today, Jerusalem is the seat of the modern Israeli government. It is the home of the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, as well as the Israeli Supreme Court. It is the location of the official residence of the Prime Minister and the President. It is

tested borders. Those questions are up to the parties concerned.”

On paper, therefore, the US position has not changed after all, a conclusion drawn explicitly by at least one prominent minister in the Israeli cabinet, transport minister Yisrael Katz, a likely Likud prime minister if Netanyahu succumbs to financial scandal in an investigation currently underway.⁽²⁾

Katz, at any rate, recognises that the US has not gone so far as to accept as legitimate Israel’s illegal annexation of East Jerusalem, which therefore questions the real intention of Trump’s statement.

Talking about ‘recognising reality’ means, without explicitly saying so, accepting Israel’s claim to impunity from laws governing all other sovereign nations, as in: “[since 1948,] Israel has made its capital in the city of Jerusalem - the capital the Jewish people established in ancient times”.

The giveaway is saying one thing and meaning another. The whole purpose of

Trump's statement is to legitimize the illegality of Israel's occupation and annexation of Palestinian territory. But to judge by the reaction of Palestinians themselves, and the overwhelming vote in the UN General Assembly on 21 December 2017 against the US decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the effect until now has been far from what he intended.

The racist arrogance of Israel's claim, and of this latest evidence of US complicity in it, is akin to that of Balfour's own cynical belittlement, in 1919, two years after his Declaration was issued, of the "desires and prejudices of the [...] Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land" by comparison with the "age-long traditions, [...] present needs [...] and] future hopes" which he one-sidedly associates with Zionism, as if Palestinians have no such things.

In other words, written claims to ancient title by a small minority of people appeal to imperialists who declare them (as Balfour did) to be "of far profounder import" than those of the majority currently working the land who have done so for many generations.⁽³⁾

Balfour's Declaration was drafted by leading Zionists⁽⁴⁾; and as in 1917, so also now, Trump's promise to move the US embassy to Jerusalem has been rehearsed in meetings with leading figures in the US Israel Lobby.⁽⁵⁾

The clause in the Balfour Declaration that said commitment to the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine would not be at the expense of Palestinian rights (which proved to be observed in the breach) finds an echo in Trump's cosmetic claim to not be taking a position on the "boundaries of the Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem, or the recognition of contested borders",⁽⁶⁾ while continuing to support Israeli policy in practice, creating the very 'reality' he then pretends it reasonable to recognise.

Implications

Mark Regev, Israel's ambassador to the UK and notorious apologist for some of the worst excesses of Israel's attacks on Gaza - is so inspired by Trump's speech that he wants everyone else to follow suit.

Regev said, "the White House's decision helps to advance peace by eroding the dangerous fantasy that the Jews can somehow be wrested from Jerusalem, and that we have neither a valid claim to the city, nor a right to a capital there."⁽⁷⁾



Mark Regev

Regev's rhetoric is familiar Israeli propaganda: Jews are cynically conflated with Israel; here, as in Trump's speech, there is no reference to both parts of Jerusalem having been acquired by military force, contrary to international law; and the claim to possession of the city is then grotesquely caricatured as a "right".

Although Trump's words have no more legal authority than did the Balfour

Declaration, they effectively demolish the pretence which successive US administrations have carefully maintained to act as plausible intermediaries in pursuing or stalling past negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian representatives.

By making plain its 'recognition' of

Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the US formally acknowledges the end of the Oslo 'peace process', which was always more about 'process' than 'peace'.

What may have been a sop to the Israel Lobby, and/or an attempt to win votes at home, may well have implications beyond anything President Trump or his close advisers could have imagined. His 'Balfour moment' in 2017 could be the silver lining to the cloud of fifty years of Occupation and of a century of dispossession.⁽⁸⁾

Without the Oslo 'peace process' to hide behind in creating its 'facts on the ground', Israel has never been more vulnerable to a moral reckoning - a judgement open to and actionable by millions (above all by means of boycott, divestment and sanctions - BDS) - in support of the Palestinians themselves - which could clear a path for the end of the apartheid state.

FOOTNOTES

1. Jonathan Kuttab, 'The Legal Status of Jerusalem', *Palestine-Israel Journal*, vol.2, no.2, 1995: <http://www.pij.org/details.php?id=650>.
2. <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/saturday-israels-jerusalem-victory-turns-draw-1996664702>.
3. quoted and referenced in David Cronin, *Balfour's Shadow: A Century of British Support for Zionism and Israel*. London, Pluto Books, 2017, pp.9, 182.
4. Jeffries, J.M.N, *Palestine: The Reality. The inside story of the Balfour Declaration 1917-1938*. Bloxham, Oxon., Skyscraper Publications Ltd., 2017 (originally published 1939), pp.163-182.
5. Trump's announcement on Jerusalem is also linked to winning financial backing and votes from Israel's supporters in the US: <https://972mag.com/is-sheldon-adelson-behind-trumps-decision-on-jerusalem/131218/>.
6. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-trump-jerusalem/>
7. Mark Regev, 'Britain should follow the US on Jerusalem', the *Daily Telegraph*, 17 December 2017.
8. Of several commentaries on Trump's speech which share this broad conclusion, the clearest and most practical I have come across is that by Mairav Zonzein and Aziz Abu Sarah, 'Israel already controls Jerusalem. Trump's speech only confirmed that. The pretense of U.S. neutrality is finally finished', the *Washington Post*, 7 December 2017, in which the authors argue that political pressure is needed from both state-level diplomacy and accelerated activity in civil society for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel (BDS): https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2017/12/07/israel-already-acts-like-it-controls-jerusalem-trumps-speech-wont-change-that/?utm_term=.a1c5597cfedf; the article is also available on the +972 online magazine: <https://972mag.com/trump-confirms-what-israelis-and-palestinians-already-know/131315/>.

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Prospects for Syria

The eradication of the so-called Islamic State (IS) and other imperialist-backed militias in Syria, achieved by government forces and invited assistance from Russia, Iran and Hizbollah, is a political defeat for the US strategy of ousting the Assad government.

By BRIAN DURRANS

That aim was always meant, however, as only the first step to weakening the country via a polarising ‘Salafist principality’ that would cut through both Syria and Iraq.

Comparable ends - populations too divided either to resist US designs or to attract rival exploiters or supportive friends - were achieved in Libya by toppling Gaddafi and seem to be being met in Afghanistan by the alternative means of endemic conflict with the Taliban, al-Qaeda and the local branch of IS.

As the US committed more troops to Afghanistan, the *Washington Post* on 16 September ran a headline claiming that after 16 years of military involvement in the country, the US and NATO are still trying to map out a strategy.

Only a Pentagon mole could confirm that, and the top brass or field commanders may well need a refresher course, but managing (that is, perpetuating) instability may still suit the managers.

The uncertain future of Afghanistan is a problem not just for Afghans (over 1500 civilians killed during 2016-17 up to September) but also for its neighbours, two of them - Russia and China - respectively the main obstacles to America's regional and global dominance.

The US is reportedly concerned that Russia and Iran are involved in talks on the future of Afghanistan, and Chinese support for Afghanistan in the form of humanitarian aid and professional training is rising from the \$250m level of 2001-2013.⁽¹⁾

Both Russia and China are affected by how events unfold in the middle east as a whole: Russia because of its geopolitical position, and China also geopolitically because it shares a short border with Afghanistan but mainly because of its plans to link its economy through the region and into Europe via its ambitious

‘Silk Road’ partnerships: ‘One Belt, One Road’ (OBOR).⁽²⁾

Syria, however, has proved itself very different from Libya and Afghanistan, so the US must find some other way of undermining the country or at least of neutralising its regional influence.

There seem to be two complementary ways to ensure that result: on the one hand, diplomatic and economic pressure; and on the other, the threat of (or full-scale) war. But each has its drawbacks.

Syrian accord?

According to the World Bank, restoring the Syrian GDP to its pre-conflict level would cost \$180bn.⁽³⁾

Russia is currently working hard for an international agreement that would reinforce Syrian independence and share responsibility (including financial responsibility) for upholding it.

President Putin is prudently consulting with the US president about these diplomatic endeavours. A meeting to broker such a deal on Syria with Iran and Turkey has been announced for some weeks but at the time of writing has yet to happen, one problem reportedly being

Turkish concern about Kurdish participation in the national reconciliation meeting of Syrian government and opposition representatives planned to follow it.

That may be difficult because Syrian success on the battlefield and at least a temporary setback to their own separatist aspirations have shifted Kurdish opinion away from the US towards Russia.

Even so, the prospects for a binding agreement within the country are improved by the resignation of some of the more radical elements from the Syrian opposition's negotiating team.⁽⁴⁾

None of the nations currently interested in an accord that could set Syria on course for recovery, however, could afford to fund it alone; arguably, China might be able to do it, but would resist, probably with good reason, any unnecessary wrangling with the US, with which it has problems enough elsewhere and not yet military parity.

As for an anti-Syrian war, this could be triggered with the help of residual US forces still illegally occupying parts of Syrian territory, together with their diminished but not yet disarmed local proxies.

In the northeast governate of Idlib, local anti-Assad groups have turned on each other but central authority is likely to prevail in the coming months.⁽⁵⁾

The US chooses to retain a significant presence in southeast Syria, which not only includes oil and gas reserves but is also strategically-placed near the Iraqi and Jordanian borders, the practical value of which might prove itself, if and when the bluster of the new ultra-reactionary Saudi, US and Israeli coalition takes concrete form. That bluster is ostensibly aimed at Iran but Iran's neighbours and local allies would also be in the firing line.⁽⁶⁾

For the moment, however, the reality is that of all regional players supporting stable, non-sectarian outcomes against US-sponsored adventurism, Russia alone has the military clout for its diplomacy to be taken seriously, a course of action deserving widespread support.

FOOTNOTES

1. Zhao Huasheng, ‘Afghanistan and China's new neighbourhood diplomacy’, *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House), vol 92, no 4, July 2016, pp.891-908 [903].
2. *ibid.*, p.895; http://news.xinhuanet.com/2013-09/08/c_117273079_2.htm.
3. quoted in Neil Quilliam, ‘Syria is not lost yet’, *International Affairs*, 15 March 2017: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/syria-not-lost-yet>. By ‘not lost yet’, Quilliam seems to mean ‘not yet lost as a Western asset’.
4. Patrick Wintour in the *Guardian*, 21 November 2017. Wintour supposes that Syrian and Russian military success convinced Saudi Arabia to abandon its previous insistence that President Assad's removal would be a precondition for government-opposition talks.
5. <http://www.moonofalabama.org/2017/12/syria-isis-is-defeated-the-us-is-next-in-line.html>.
6. Patrick Cockburn, ‘As Wars End’, *London Review of Books*, 14 December 2017, pp.17-19.

France further to the right under Macron

President Macron is driving through the most hard-hitting anti-worker measures in France since the war. The reforms not only consolidate the controversial El Khomri labour reforms brought in by decree under his predecessor Hollande, but roll back decades of other protective legislation.

By SIMON KORNER

Also targeted in the longer term is the centralized system of public services and ‘fonctionnaires’ (public sector workers) established in 1945 as a concession to the power of the Communist-led Left after the war.

With the highest public expenditure in the world as a percentage of GDP, France cannot compete with lower wage rivals in the EU, particularly Germany and the UK. Macron’s budget cuts of €50 billion will give France a better chance in the race to the bottom.

In line with Germany’s insistence on tight finances, Macron plans to shrink France’s deficit to 2.6% of GDP in 2018, below the 3% limit set out in the Maastricht Treaty.

The method is to follow the UK in creating a workforce with fewer rights and stripped back welfare, driving down wages across the board.

A shrunken public sector will go hand in hand with increased privatization. The government has stakes worth around €100bn in 81 companies, and Macron so far plans to privatise around a tenth of these.

“Flexicurity”

French Labour Minister, Muriel Pénicaud, a former boss of Danone, believes the current Labour Code is a shackle that constrains French companies. Macron justifies its removal by citing “flexicurity” – the Danish model that claims to offset reduced job security by providing training for a flexible jobs market underpinned by state benefits.

He also believes his measures will shrink France’s high unemployment rate of 9.5% (25% youth unemployment), more than double that of the UK and Germany. In reality, as in the UK, in-work poverty will simply grow.



Best pals: President Macron and President Trump.

Macron’s draconian measures will destroy national collective bargaining by allowing smaller companies – the vast majority of French business – to foist agreements on individual workers regarding working hours and pay, outside union negotiations.

The atomization will weaken employment rights. At the same time, union representation on company committees is being significantly weakened, with budget cuts to the works councils which negotiate with management and reduction in their influence through their merging with health and safety commit-

tees into single “social and economic committees”.

Other reforms include capping damages for unfair dismissal at 20 months’ salary for those with the longest service, and limiting the time for any appeals to a year.

The measures will effectively scrap permanent employment contracts by limiting their duration to particular projects – following the short-term contracts in the construction industry.

They will also scrap the law preventing foreign companies from firing French workers when a company per-

forms badly at national level (even if, for instance, a multinational company is profitable internationally).

Some of the first victims will be the soon-to-be sacked workers at PSA Peugeot-Citroën, accelerating the deindustrialization of France, which has lost a quarter of its manufacturing workforce since 2000. From now on multinationals will have far more room for movement when they want to relocate to lower wage economies.

Macron claims the reforms will not lead to the precarious McJobs of Germany and Britain, because France will retain its mini-

imum wage and spend €15 billion on training workers for the new flexible jobs market, along with an “activity bonus” equivalent to a 13th month of salary for the lowest paid workers.

But with union influence severely curtailed, minimum wage jobs will proliferate and there will be no oversight to ensure it is actually paid. British workers have bitter experience in this respect.

9 million below poverty line

Other means of transferring wealth from poor to rich are:

- a rise in charges on pensions, known as the Contribution Sociale Généralisée (CSG), a non-progressive tax;
- a reduction in health cover provided by

the Sécurité Sociale (Secu);

- the weeding out of unemployment claimants to ensure targets are hit has already cut numbers by 14%. Those crossed off the list (for failing to attend an appointment, or refusing a ‘reasonable’ job offer) lose all income for 6-12 months;
- the threat of massive public sector job cuts – 120,000 out of 5.4 million;
- the abolition of the ISF wealth tax, with capital investment exempted from taxation, and a lowering of the tax on dividends to a flat rate of 30%. The estimated cost of all the tax cuts planned will be more than €7 billion.

According to the Catholic Aid (Secours Catholique) charity, 9 million people are living below the poverty line (of just over €1,000 per month), with average incomes of those helped by the charity of just €548.

To reinforce the government’s position, the recently expired state of emergency – brought in after the Paris terror attacks – has been replaced by a permanent anti-terror law that covers much of the same ground, allowing the dismissal of public-sector workers whose beliefs the government declares to be “incompatible” with their duties, as well as searches of private homes or any area declared a “security zone”, mass surveillance, house arrest and electronic tagging.

Having announced his plans before the elections, Macron has acted quickly, signing the new decrees in late September 2017 live on TV and boasting that the changes were “unprecedented” and had been passed in record time for such a major reform.

“We tackled the hardest, symbolic part, the labour code and the taxation of capital, first,” said a presidential spokesperson. “The same actors had been playing out the same drama for decades. We got the theatrical part over.”

Resistance

There has been working-class resistance to the measures. The CGT union – once Communist-aligned but nowadays more politically diffuse – has organised strikes and protests at roughly monthly intervals since September 2017, fairly massive at first, but insufficient to halt the government’s measures.

Other unions have kept their distance, with the Force Ouvrière (FO) federation – created originally as an anti-Communist rival to the CGT – only calling on its members to join the protests in November, and the CFDT (which supported Hollande’s Parti Socialiste) more muted still.

CGT leader Philippe Martinez prom-

ised to continue the fight, but the protests have been smaller than those in March 2016 against Hollande’s reforms, and Martinez sees union disunity as a cause.

The unions are suffering from reduced membership – now down to 8% of the French workforce, the lowest in western Europe, and the new reductions to workplace representation and paid time for union officials will further weaken them. In spite of their small numbers, union deals cover 90% of French employees, and it is this influence that Macron is out to destroy.

Mélenchon’s France Insoumise movement – he eschews the word ‘party’ – with 12-14% of the national vote at the last election has organized demonstrations separately, adding to the disunity on the Left.

The estimated cost of all Macron’s planned tax cuts will be more than €7 billion.

According to the Catholic Aid (Secours Catholique) charity, 9 million people are living below the poverty line (of just over €1,000 per month), with average incomes of those helped by the charity of just €548.

Mélenchon refuses to consider any alliances – for instance, with the reformist Communist Party – and has banned red flags from his rallies, and stopping singing the Internationale at the end of each public meeting, replacing them with tricolour flags and La Marseillaise.

With over 500,000 internet users registered on his movement’s website he claims a mass base, but his decision to cap local groups at 12 members, and to ban co-ordination locally or regionally, has effectively demobilized people, concentrating power in his own hands.

Mélenchon calls this ‘transversal’ rather than vertical organisation – based on the ideas of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau – but his abandoning of traditional Left structures and positions has failed to broaden his appeal.

There are stirrings of resistance against the rightward drift in the French Communist Party, both from within (eg. Faire Vivre et Renforcer le PCF) and from outside the party (eg le Pôle de Renaissance Communiste en France) – but these have yet to materialize in any

sizeable way.

As for the Parti Socialiste, having suffered a historically disastrous election defeat under Benoit Hamon who has since resigned, it may never recover. Francois Hollande is the first president of the 5th Republic not to have stood for a second term.

Far Right

Meanwhile, on the Right, the victory of Laurent Wauquiez to lead The Republicans (LR) following Fillon’s election defeat, moves the conservative, Gaullist party to the far right, echoing Sarkozy’s tactics of adopting much of the Front National’s (FN) programme.

Wauquiez is supported by ex-FN members such as Guillaume Peltier, as well as Geoffroy Didier, whose grouping in LR was founded by the far right. Wauquiez has publicly attacked Muslims and gay marriage.

The FN, meanwhile, are calling for the two parties to work together. FN leader Marine Le Pen told Wauquiez in November to ally with the FN: “Mr Wauquiez cannot sincerely say the same things that we do, and sometimes with words that are even cruder than ours, and at the same time explain that we must be held apart from French political life.”

So far, Wauquiez has refused, partly to appease the pro-Macron wing in his party, the Constructive Opposition, and partly because the FN would overwhelm the feeble LR in any alliance.

In spite of disappointing electoral results, which saw the FN’s 10.6 million votes in the presidential election fall to less than 3 million in the legislative elections, the FN clearly represents the main opposition from the Right.

But the FN itself is divided, with the more working-class north tending to socialist-type positions, and the patriotic anti-immigrant south more conservative.

Further divisions over the EU have emerged, with allies of anti-EU Florian Philippot pitted against those who want to win over rightwing voters from the LR and believe the EU is a divisive issue. Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, who embodied the latter approach, has for the moment stood down, leaving Marine Le Pen to keep the two wings together.

France is entering a phase of intensified capitalist class offensive. The current disunity on the Left points to a rightwing rather than a leftwing popular response to the onslaught – but the Left has not disappeared by any means, and the structures still exist through which resistance could be channeled, should a more militant class-conscious leadership emerge.

What now for South Africa and the ANC?

Jacob Zuma has gone as South Africa's President but huge problems remain. Zuma's departure and Ramaphosa's election as President is seen by some, and hoped by many, as resolving the problems facing the African National Congress (ANC) and South Africa.

By **ALEX DAVIDSON**

However, it will not be as simple as that, as the December 2017 the African National Congress (ANC) conference made abundantly clear.

The ANC has been plagued in recent years by factionalism, scandals involving the President, charges of corruption and 'state capture'. Meanwhile South Africa continues to endure high unemployment and poverty; and huge inequalities between rich and poor.

The ANC has seen its electoral support drop and in the 2016 local elections its vote decreased by 8% to 54%, its lowest point since the end of apartheid in 1994.

This was mainly due to traditional supporters not voting. The ANC lost majority control of the metros: Nelson Mandela Bay, which includes Port Elizabeth, a heartland historically of the ANC; Tshwane (Pretoria), the nation's capital; and Johannesburg, the country's biggest city.

Prior to becoming State President and since, Zuma was plagued by allegations of corruption over defence contracts; Nkandla, his house in Kwa-Zulu Natal; and "state capture". So, it is easy to see why people saw Zuma as the problem.

However, the ANC is riven by factionalism and careerism. In the run-up to the 2016 local elections, 22 ANC members were killed over contests to be selected as councillors. There is a scramble to be in positions of power to award contracts at all levels. Corporate interests are heavily involved in supporting different factions.

The popular base of the ANC has increasingly fragmented into narrow

groupings, each scrambling over the other for tenders, for positions on electoral lists and for a slice of the cake for their own particular sector.

In addition, there have been tensions and divisions within and between the Tripartite Alliance comprising the ANC, Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) for some years.

Zuma's departure may open up opportunities for the ANC to unify and rebuild but there are certainly no guarantees of that happening.

December ANC conference

The problems within the ANC have been acknowledged for some time as the Political Report to the December 2017 conference,

delivered by Zuma as the ANC's outgoing President, stated: "The movement was afflicted by factionalism, gatekeeping, ill-discipline, membership buying and infighting."⁽²⁾

In the Organisational Report delivered to the Conference by the outgoing Secretary-General, Gwede Mantashe, he said: "Gradually, and over a sustained time period since ushering in the democratic dispensation, our movement has experienced a decline. The decline manifests itself in a multi-faceted manner across different areas such as: quality and quantity of membership; ideological outlook and policy articulation; efficiency and effectiveness of our structures; organisational discipline and the waning of our values and principles among leaders and members alike; cohesiveness and cohesion in the Alliance; electoral perform-

ance and ability to govern; and influence in the broader society...However, decline is arrested when there is recognition that something dramatic has to be done, whereupon a new growth trajectory is initiated. Our movement has reached such a moment."⁽²⁾

This acknowledgement, in the Political and Organisational reports to the conference, that the problems within ANC are very serious, deep-seated and multi-faceted suggests that there are no quick nor easy solutions. Jacob Zuma was a problem but not the only one.

At the conference Cyril Ramaphosa was elected President of the ANC narrowly defeating Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma. He won by 179 votes in a ballot of the almost 5,000 delegates.

The other officials elected to the top six national leadership positions in the ANC were:

- David Mabuza, Deputy President. He is currently Premier of the province of Mpumalanga.
- Ace Magashule, Secretary-General. He is currently Premier of the Free State Province.
- Jesse Duarte, Deputy Secretary-General. This is the post she held previously.
- Gwede Mantashe, National Chairperson. He stood down as Secretary-General at the conference.
- Paul Mashatile, Treasurer-General. He is currently Chairperson of the ANC's Gauteng Province.

Can the new ANC leadership rebuild unity, end factionalism, stop corruption and renew itself? This is the question facing the new national leadership and all levels of the organisation.

If it fails to do so, then it runs the risk of threatening the survival of the ANC, not winning a majority at the next election in 2019 and jeopardising the National Democratic Revolution.

"State of Capture"

The publication of the report "State of Capture" on 2 November 2016 by the then South African Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela, concluded that there was evidence of possible corruption at the highest levels of South Africa's government.



Cyril Ramaphosa

The 355 page report implicated Jacob Zuma and several other government ministers in improper dealings with business, in particular the Gupta family, leading to a position of corporate capture of the state.

The report called for the President to establish a judicial commission of Inquiry – to be run by a judge selected by the Chief Justice - not Zuma.

In response, President Zuma, in a question-and-answer session in Parliament, said, “No one, no matter what position they hold, can instruct the president to establish a commission.”

“State Capture” in South Africa refers to those whose who have undue influence on government officials and are able to manipulate them to deliver favours for kickbacks.

The publication of this report, which Zuma tried to stop, was one of a series of events which engulfed the President in a long-running saga of allegations of corruption.

The corruption charges, related to defence contracts, were brought against Zuma and then dropped prior to him becoming President in 2009. These charges have now been re-instated. There are 783 charges of corruption.

Following the December 2017 ANC Conference President Zuma finally announced the establishment of a judicial commission into state capture following the publication of the Public Protector’s report.

The judicial commission will report in a few months time.

Factionalism within the state

There are accusations of factionalism within the state. One example being the charges brought against former Finance Minister, Pravin Gordhan, and two former colleagues at the South African Revenue Service (SARS) for alleged fraud. Gordhan and two others were due in court on 2 November 2016 but the charges were dropped by the National Director of Public Prosecutions, Shaun Abrahams, on 31 October after a public outcry.

The charges related to Gordhan’s authorising an early retirement package for his deputy when he was head of the country’s revenue service. A few days before the case was due in court some documents emerged showing that Gordhan had been advised at the time that his decision to allow the early retirement package was legal.

The charges against Gordhan followed his affidavit, dated 13 October, in which he asked the High Court to order that he shouldn’t intervene in a decision by the country’s largest banks to shut Gupta

family-controlled company accounts. The Gupta family had demanded that he intervene.

Gordhan’s court papers implicated family members and their businesses in 72 suspect transactions totalling R6.8 billion. The Gupta family are friends and business associates of Jacob Zuma.

Gordhan was removed by Zuma from his post as Finance Minister shortly afterwards.

The Guptas

Some of the Gupta family and their close associates have been arrested and charged with money laundering, corruption and theft of state money.

The Gupta family, implicated in the ‘State of Capture’ report, have had some of their assets, estimated at some 1.6 billion rand, frozen by the National Prosecuting Authority’s Asset Forfeiture Unit (AFU).

The Gupta brothers, Ajay, Atul and Rajesh and their families moved to South Africa in 1993 from India and established a company, Sahara computers. The family now have wide business interests in air travel, energy, mining, technology and the media.

Dudzile, Zuma’s daughter, was appointed as a director of Sahara Computers in 2008, six months after Zuma was elected ANC President although she has since resigned.

One of Zuma’s wives, Bongi Nguma-Zuma, worked for the Guptas and one of his sons, Dudzane, was a director in some of the Gupta family-owned companies but stepped down in April 2016 because of what he described as a “sustained political attack”.

There have been allegations that the Gupta family, through their links with Zuma and others, had secured key state contracts and influenced government appointments.

The Deputy Finance Minister, Mcebisi Jonas, said that a member of the Gupta family had offered to promote him to the Minister’s post in 2015 and there are other similar claims.

One of the allegations against the Guptas concerns the Vrede Estina dairy project in the Free State province, in which it is claimed that only 1% of the 220.2 million rand transferred to the project by the Free State government was spent on actual farming. It is alleged that most of the money was siphoned off to Gupta owned companies.

The Free State agriculture minister at

the time was Mosebenzi Zwane. He is now Minister of Mineral Resources in the national government and is further implicated in allegations relating to mineral contracts involving the Guptas.

These contracts involved state owned enterprise, ESKOM, the national energy company. It is alleged that funds were diverted from ESKOM to Trillian, a Gupta-owned company.

Privately owned McKinsey, the world’s largest management consulting firm, has denied doing anything illegal but said in October 2017 that it was embarrassed by mistakes it made while working with ESKOM and regretted working on a contract at ESKOM alongside Trillian, a company controlled by the Gupta family.

“South Africa’s Corporate Registry has accused McKinsey, KPMG South Africa and the German software maker, SAP, of criminal breaches of company law as a scandal over the group’s ties to the controversial Gupta family reignited.”⁽⁹⁾

All of these companies apologised last year after their work with Gupta-linked companies was exposed in a series of leaked emails.

Barclays Africa and Standard Bank stopped working with McKinsey and the South African arm of Coca-Cola was the first major non-bank business to stop working with McKinsey.

South Africa’s Parliament is investigating whether McKinsey knowingly let funds from ESKOM be diverted to Trillian as a way of securing the contract.

The Guptas used the PR company, Bell Pottinger, to try and divert attention from the growing allegations of ‘corporate state capture’ being levelled against them. (see separate article...)

The Premier of the Free State, Ace Magashule, is the newly elected Secretary-General of ANC, and there are claims that he is implicated in the Estina dairy project.

Charges against Zuma

The corruption charges against Jacob Zuma relate to a major arms deal. A cabinet sub-committee on arms procurement from 1996-1999 approved the purchase of R30billion worth of military hardware.

The arms deal eventually cost double that largely owing to the unstable rand. This arms deal is at the root of the corruption charges against Zuma.

The first casualty of the deal was Tony



Jacob Zuma

Yengeni, ANC Parliamentary Chief Whip, charged by the Directorate of Special Operations (DSO), known as “the Scorpions”, and subsequently found guilty of having accepted a big discount on a luxury 4x4 Mercedes Benz.

Then in 2001 Schabir Shaik was arrested after a Scorpions search-and-seize operation on his offices and home.

Accusations of corruption against Jacob Zuma, then Deputy President, emerged during the trial of Schabir Shaik, who was found guilty of corruption and fraud related to the arms deal and sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment on 2 June 2005.

Neither Shaik nor Zuma denied that payments had been made by Shaik to Zuma. Both insisted that the transactions were loans.

In December 2005 Zuma was charged with rape but was acquitted in May 2006 in a very high-profile trial, which stirred much emotion throughout the country.

Corruption charges were to be brought against Zuma by the National Prosecuting Authority. President Thabo Mbeki then relieved Zuma from his post as Deputy State President. Zuma remained Deputy President of the ANC.

The charges against Zuma were dropped on a technicality prior to him becoming State President. The corruption charges were recently reinstated against Jacob Zuma.

Divisions

There have been tensions and divisions within and between the Triple Alliance partners (ANC, COSATU and the South African Communist Party) for some time.

In 1996 with the government’s adoption of its GEAR⁽⁴⁾ plan, serious differences began to emerge. COSATU and the SACP were unhappy with the dropping of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and its replacement by GEAR.

This policy was adopted with only limited consultation with the Alliance partners. The economic policy of the government was seen as neo-liberal, favouring business rather than labour.

Increasingly the SACP and COSATU became critical of the ANC government. Notwithstanding this, Thabo Mbeki was elected President of ANC following the retirement of Nelson Mandela and he was elected President of the country in 1999 and re-elected in 2004.

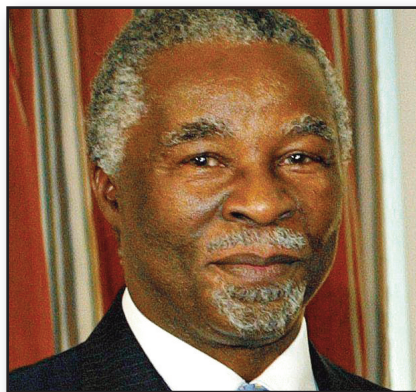
Whilst the economy continued to grow and many advances were made in terms of access to clean water, electrification, sanitation, housing, education and other areas of social policy, the gap between rich and poor grew wider and unem-

ployment remained very high at some 25% officially but nearer 40% in reality.

The SACP drew the following conclusion: “Thanks to our post-1994 state interventions, big capital has been the major beneficiary of 13 years of ‘stabilisation’ and economic growth.

“The subordinate ‘caring’ state dimension of GEAR consisted in reducing the RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme) into a set of technical ‘delivery’ targets funded out of tax derived from this capitalist growth – delivery but without transformation.”⁽⁵⁾

This discontent with the government’s economic policies was exacerbated by Mbeki’s lack of consultation with ANC’s partners, COSATU and the SACP. “For years we have had to endure from some quarters of the ANC consistent displays of contempt and disdain for the elected leaderships of the SACP and COSATU.”⁽⁶⁾



Thabo Mbeki

Jacob Zuma was seen by many as a victim and became the reservoir of discontent within the ANC alliance.

The anti-Mbeki forces united around Jacob Zuma and he defeated Mbeki in the election for President of the ANC at the Polokwane Conference in 2007.

Following Polokwane, ANC recalled Mbeki as State President and he was replaced by Kgaleme Motlanthe as interim president until the 2009 election when Jacob Zuma was elected President of the country.

Mbeki’s removal was brought about by an alliance of disparate forces within the ANC including COSATU, the SACP and the ANC Youth League, led at the time by Julius Malema, who was later expelled by the ANC, and now leads the Economic Freedom Fighters.

Shortly after the election of Jacob Zuma as President of the ANC, a break-away from the ANC launched itself as a new party, “Congress of the People” (COPE), in December 2008, with Mosisoa ‘Terror’ Lekota as leader and Mb-

hazima Shilowa, former Gauteng Premier, as his deputy and some other prominent ANC members joined.⁽⁷⁾

Opportunism

Other factors leading to divisions are the issues of careerism, opportunism and corruption, largely a consequence of ANC holding power.

From 1994 and the first democratic election many leaders of the ANC, COSATU and the SACP had entered government, locally and nationally, as politicians or officials. This weakened the structures of the Tripartite Alliance.

With the introduction of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) many others went into business. At the same time as these departures from the structures of the movement, some people saw that the best and quickest way forward for them personally was to join the ANC.

The first of the ANC leaders to openly talk about these negative tendencies was former president Nelson Mandela. In his political report to the 50th National Conference in 1997, he stated that, “Later in this report, we will discuss the intrusion of this self-same media within our ranks, during the last three years, to encourage our own self-destruction, with the active involvement of some who are present here as bona-fide delegates to the conference of a movement to which they owe no loyalty ... In reality, during the last three years, we have found it difficult to deal with such careerists in a decisive manner. We, ourselves, have therefore allowed the space to emerge for these opportunists to pursue their counter-revolutionary goals, to the detriment of our movement and struggle. During this period, we have also been faced with various instances of corruption involving our own members, including those who occupy positions of authority by virtue of the victory of the democratic revolution... Clearly we have to take all necessary measures to purge ourselves of such members and organise ourselves in a way that will make it difficult for corrupt elements to gain entry into our movement”.⁽⁸⁾

At the same conference Acting Secretary General, Cheryl Carolus, further reflected on the matter: “The competition within the organisation for positions in government has added a new dimension to the contestation of ANC leadership positions. Election to an ANC position is viewed by some as a stepping stone to positions of power and material reward within government. While such views might be inevitable, we need to ensure that personal ambition is sufficiently tempered by the needs of the organisation and the demands of the National

Democratic Revolution. The organisation needs to develop mechanisms which will ensure that the contestation of leadership positions does not divide the organisation and does not detract from the key programme of the movement".⁽⁹⁾

These problems of careerism and corruption continued after Mandela had left office.

The ANC January 8th Statement in 2008 stated: "... while the ANC's organisational strengths have included an ability to broaden its appeal beyond its traditional support base and adapt mass work under new conditions, it has acquired a number of 'accumulated weaknesses'. As conference indicated, these weaknesses include:

- An inability to effectively deal with new tendencies arising from being a ruling party, such as social distance, patronage, careerism, corruption and abuse of power;
- Ineffective management of the interface between the movement and the state;
- A flawed approach to membership recruitment;
- A decline in ideological debate among cadres; and
- A lack of institutional resources to give practical effect to the movement's leadership role.

■ In the run-up to conference, the process of leadership contestation seriously tested the ANC's unity and cohesion, core values, character, and tried and tested organisational practices."⁽¹⁰⁾

The ANC government introduced the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). This led to the creation of a black middle strata of some 6 million, up from 1.7 million in 1994. One consequence of this has been the re-configuration of the multi-class composition of the ANC with a growing hegemony of a new black bourgeois stratum over its structures.

At the same time there have been significant redistributive efforts since 1994.

Some 16 million South Africans (almost 1/3 of the population) benefit from social grants; over 3.5 million RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme) houses have been built; millions of water and electricity connections have been installed and more than 400,000 solar water heater panels have been installed on the roofs of houses of the poor.

However, despite these massive redistributive efforts, the skewed structure of the economy remains untransformed. The post-apartheid economy largely remains in private hands and it is an economy with an excessive reliance on mineral exports.

The state, with its limited resources and rising popular expectations, is increasingly overwhelmed as competing interests and factions scramble competitively over scarce resources.

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Bell Pottinger's PR campaign to inflame racial hatred by ALEX DAVIDSON

In September 2017 the PR company, Bell Pottinger, went into administration following revelations that it had orchestrated a PR campaign in South Africa to 'inflame racial discord'.

In the days before its demise Bell Pottinger had been expelled from its trade body, the Public Relations and Communications Association, which stated that it had never before "passed down such a damning indictment of an agency's behaviour".

Bell Pottinger were being paid £100,000 per month by Oakbay Capital, the holding company of the Guptas. The deal had been set-up by Lord Bell in 2016 although he resigned from Bell Pottinger later that year but was still being paid £1m per month by Bell Pottinger until December 2016.

He denied any involvement with the Bell Pottinger secret PR and social media campaign in South Africa, designed to stir up racial tension, which included attacks on 'white monopoly capital'.

The campaign was designed to turn people's ire away from the Gupta family and their connections with President Jacob Zuma.

Bell Pottinger had been a subsidiary of Chime Communications until a management buy-out led by Tim Bell in 2012. Chime Communications is owned by the US firm Providence and Sir Martin Sorrell's WPP.

WPP was the second biggest shareholder in Bell Pottinger and it handed back its 27% stake in the company for free to escape the scandal just before the collapse.

Tim Bell, a friend of former Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, ran the Tory Party's PR campaigns for the 1979, 1983 and 1987 General Elections. He became a founder of Chime Communications in 1989 and received his peerage from Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1998.

In 1984, Bell was seconded to the National Coal Board (NCB) to advise on media strategy at the start of the miners' strike.

However, he was so highly regarded, that he became closely involved with the overall political strategy. He worked very closely with Thatcher and Sir Ian McGregor in their determination to defeat the miners.

Bell's curriculum vitae includes work-

ing for FW de Klerk in the National Party's election campaign in 1994 in South Africa.

It was Bell, who orchestrated a media operation to protect Mark Thatcher about his business dealings in Oman; and he was instrumental in the campaign that halted the Serious Fraud Squad investigation of the Al-Yamamah arms deal in 2007.

Bell Pottinger started work in Iraq in 2004 and created propaganda videos on behalf of the US Government in a contract worth more than \$500 million. The company employed some 300 British and Iraqi staff. The videos included short news segments made to look like Arabic news networks and fake insurgent videos.

Following Bell Pottinger going into administration, its Far East arm, headquartered in Singapore, has been re-branded as Klareco Communications (Klareco means "Clarity" in Esperanto) following a management buy-out.

Bell Pottinger Middle East has been acquired by Hanover Communications, the agency owned by John Major's former press secretary, Charles Lewington.

Protests shake Iran's dictatorship

Two extremes were reported by mainstream media during recent nationwide protests in Iran. Firstly, Donald Trump's personal support for the demonstrators via *Twitter* gained widespread coverage. Secondly, the Iranian regime claimed to be relaxed about the protests as long as they remained peaceful.

By **BRIAN TOPPING**

Both positions at first glance seem surprising, even plausible. However, all is not what it seems.

It is worth noting that Trump's statements of support came when protests were already underway in 80 towns and cities across Iran.

And while Trump himself in characteristic fashion was acting out of a mixture of political naivety, mischief and ignorance, the US State was attempting something entirely different, adventurous, ambitious and a clear and present danger to world peace.

By offering "support", to Iranian protesters, the American president and his hard-line warmonger allies in the Pentagon were anticipating predictable, violent oppression by the Iranian leadership, thus offering a further pretext for those who would wish to put Iran on the US hit list of states.

The US war against Iran has been discussed many times in the White House, from George W Bush to Obama and now Trump.

The White House has attempted to manipulate international opinion, most recently in the United Nations, when Trump puppet Nikki Hayley followed the example of Colin Powell and presented fake evidence to the UN when he sought to justify the US attack on and destruction of Iraq.

Brandishing a section of an alleged Iranian missile in the General Assembly, Hayley claimed Iran could threaten the US with missiles just as it was threatening US ally Saudi Arabia.

Iran is not Iraq

But Iran is not Iraq. The only superficial common characteristic in this respect is that both countries suffer an anti-progressive and oppressive government.

However, unlike Saddam's Baathist

secular dictatorship, the Iranian regime is a theocratic monster, supported by a vast network of fanatical security forces.

Moreover, Iranian society has one of the biggest and youngest populations in the Middle East region. Over half the population are under 35 years of age, a potentially massive fighting force.

Furthermore, Iran has a large working class with a history of national democratic revolution and resistance under the Shah. This presents a major challenge to the US.

By giving its "backing", to the Iranian demonstrators, some in the US leadership were hoping that option might achieve the highly unlikely outcome of regime change without war, replacing one bad regime with a worse one.

Ultimately of course the Iranian dictatorship can only be replaced by the Iranian people themselves and the US can never be certain that a new regime would be to its liking.

Trump's Tweets maybe fantasy politics, but sometimes can be useful to furthering imperialism's ambitions.

The response of the regime was largely to ignore Trump and was predictably harsh against the protesters. While condemning Trump's words it attacked the demonstrators on all fronts using maxi-

imum state oppression and violence, claiming the protests were part of an international conspiracy.

The regime was far from relaxed and severely shaken by the scale and extent of the protests.

It is of course not possible to consider these developments without taking into account the economic crisis affecting every aspect of Iranian society.

Eighty cities saw widespread strikes by workers and students in response to their growing impoverishment and the decline of social and medical services in Iranian society.

Decades of mismanagement and wealth appropriation by the country's religious elite and their allies, combined with US sponsored international sanctions have brought the oil rich economy to ruin.

Politically too, the Iranian regime is deeply divided between self-professed reformists and fundamentalist bigots.

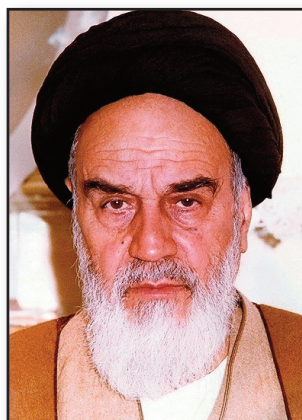
However, this schism is superficial in the Iranian governing leadership and does not hide the fact that the country is ultimately governed by one person and his acolytes, the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, self-appointed God's representative on Earth.

This primitive superstructure in Iranian society inhibits economic, scientific and cultural process on every front.

And in spite of the dictatorship's efforts to win US favour by agreeing to limit its nuclear research and development with the

so called JCPOA agreement, these factors have deepened the country's economic and growing political crisis.

However, while US interference and



Iran's 1st Supreme Leader: the late Ayatollah Khomeini



Iran's 2nd and current Supreme Leader: Ayatollah Khamenei

threats of war are destabilising, the most regressive factor in the politics of Iran is the theocratic regime itself.

Regime response to protests

The regime responded to the protests with arrests and the arbitrary imprisonment of trade union leaders, student activists and representatives of women's organisations.

This follows a habit well established over decades by the Iranian government, including all its factions, flouting basic human rights and attempting to smash organised resistance to its policies and privileges.

In this climate of repression, theocratic fundamentalists are united with so called reformist elements. They all have blood on their hands.

According to CODIR, the UK's leading solidarity organisation with the Iranian people, at the height of the protests the Iranian security forces killed over 20 demonstrators and jailed nearly 4000.

These included trade unionists and many higher education students in an attempt to prevent students, workers and impoverished masses uniting into a single protest movement.

According to a statement by one of its own members of the Iranian parliament, in January 2018, 90 students had been held in custody, most had not been directly involved in protest, but their arrest was a "preventative measure".

The Iranian Interior Ministry stated that the average age of most of the detainees was between 20 and 25 years.

Profound shift

Overall the protests themselves must be considered as a profound shift in the socio-economic and political situation in Iran.

Since 1979 and in particular since the end of the Iran-Iraq war in the early 1980s, there have been many protests against the regime.

The most significant were the widespread demonstrations in 2009 in many major cities which worried the regime. However, in 2017/18 the situation and duration of the demonstrations is very different and of deeper political significance.

In 2009 the demonstrations were highlighting the electoral fraud which had taken place in national elections. Then the demand was for a recount of the votes. The most recent outbreak of mass dissent is different in two key respects.

The demonstrations reached beyond Iran's key cities and engulfed many regions. The protesters were voicing not only political demands but also calls for



Washington D.C, February 2017:
US Secretary of State,
Rex Tillerson (left) with Israeli
Prime Minister,
Benjamin Netanyahu

The Tudeh Party of Iran, which is a banned organisation in the country, has welcomed the protests but has warned against attempts by reactionary forces inside and outside the country (the USA and Israel) hijacking the movement for narrow political ambitions, which are not concerned with the legitimate, economic and political demands of the people.

fundamental economic change.

Demonstrators were angered by the growing impoverishment of the masses and the deepening gulf between the ruling religious classes and the people.

Officially unemployment is 12% and among the under 25's it is nearly 25%. Prices of basic food items have been steadily rising, including, ironically petrol. Simultaneously wages have declined in value and benefits cut.

New protest slogans

The protests have also produced new political slogans. The official and perfunctory slogan; "Death to America", has been replaced by the protesters: "Death to the Dictators", and "Down with the Islamic Republic".

Such sentiments mark a clear shift in class alignments with the middle and professional classes joining the organised working class and urban poor against the privileged ruling and religious class.

The Tudeh Party of Iran (TPI), which is a banned organisation in the country, has welcomed the protests and warned against attempts by reactionary forces inside and outside the country, hijacking the movement for narrow political ambitions, which are not concerned with the legitimate, economic and political demands/rights of the people.

The TPI also highlights the dangers of external interference with Trump and the US attempting to manipulate the situation for its own ends.

Trump in particular is desperate to overturn the 5+1 international agreement on easing sanctions, which are also contributing to the nations poverty and decline. Subsequently, the US has announced further selective sanctions allegedly in response to the regime's

repression. There is also one other factor in the international context. Trump and US imperialism is closely aligned with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Zionist aggression in the Middle-East.

Netanyahu also echoed Trump's support for the Iranian demonstrations. This is the very same individual who has proved many times by word and deed to be among the worst persecutors of Palestinian rights and freedoms.

The real intention and irony will not be hidden from history.

This alliance of the racist US leadership and the Israeli leadership has only one aim, the further destabilisation of the Middle-East region and Persian Gulf, while protecting backward and reactionary regimes such as Saudi Arabia.

Solidarity

For solidarity movements, trade unions and progressive organisations around the world there is an urgent task of supporting the Iranian people in their struggle for democracy and human rights.

The situation in Iran exposes the contradictions and tensions throughout Iranian society.

But Iran's struggle also highlights the international crisis of neo-liberal economics and its manipulation of politics. Internationally, growing numbers are seeing through the neo-liberal mist and protesting against the massive disparities of poverty, wealth and privilege.

The masses, especially young people, cannot be easily manipulated by the agents of imperialism or the anti progressive rhetoric of cold/hot war warriors.

The times are changing, Iran is not alone or immune.

Catalan elections: victory for the right

On 1st October 2017 the Catalan government held a referendum on the question of independence from Spain. This had already been rejected by the Spanish Government making it constitutionally illegal and was designed to provoke a confrontation.

By **FRIEDA PARK**

The Spanish government duly obliged with violent assaults by police on polling stations and voters. In the event only 43% of the electorate voted although 97% of those voted Yes.

It was clear, however, that the vast majority of those opposed to independence boycotted the poll, making the outcome irrelevant in determining the will of the Catalan people.

Despite having no mandate the Catalan President, Carles Puigdemont, proceeded to declare independence and then suspend the declaration.

The government in Madrid took direct control of Catalonia and some leading politicians, who enacted the referendum were arrested, or fled.

Subsequent elections on 21st December served to underline how deeply divided Catalonia is on the issue.

The three pro-independence parties combined, again won a majority of seats, but the total was down from 72 to 70. They got 47.6% of the vote a marginal decline on their previous performance.

The biggest single party, however, was the firmly anti-independence Cuitadans (Cuidadanos) which benefited from a collapse in support for the Popular Party of Spain's prime minister, Mariano Rajoy who was responsible for the harsh measures of repression round the referendum.

A small leftist pro-independence party, Popular Unity also lost seats as did Catalonia in Common, an alliance containing Podem (Podemos). It tried to straddle the pro and anti-independence camps.

Puigdemont's right-wing Together for Catalonia and the Republican Left both gained seats and the Socialist Party which opposed independence gained one.

If you look at this result another way, however, what is concerning is that a majority of Catalans voted for parties of the right. In total they got 51.2% of the vote and the parties with the biggest support on both sides of the independence divide



Barcelona 3 October 2017: two days after the independence referendum when 43% of the electorate voted and 97% of those voted Yes for independence.

were right wing. More than anything this underscores the divisive and anti-working-class nature of nationalism, which frames politics as for or against independence rather than round policies that would improve the lives of ordinary people.

At the time the ever-escalating confrontation between Puigdemont and Rajoy served both their interests. Puigdemont's party gained seats in the election and support for independence was consolidated in the face of police violence.

For many this repression was horribly reminiscent of fascism and was reinforced by an unprecedented speech by the king, supporting the constitutional position of the Madrid Government.

The current king's father was Franco's chosen heir.

In this situation, it must have been harder still for voices of the left opposing independence to make themselves heard. Although the Popular Party did badly in the election in Catalonia, that is not the only arena where politics is being affected by this debate.

Part of Rajoy's uncompromising strategy will be to play to audiences in the rest of Spain who are against Catalan independence and alienated by Puigdemont's tactics.

In Catalonia there seems to be a belief among the pro-independence left that their nation is inherently more progressive than the rest of Spain. One banner I saw in Barcelona at Christmas proclaimed "Spain fascist – Europe supportive".

Neither half of the statement is true as the EU has gone out of its way to support Rajoy and the first part is offensive to the millions of Spanish people and their descendants who supported the Republic and fought fascism tooth and nail.

A video doing the rounds in the aftermath of the referendum appealed for support from people outside Catalonia, including a statement that Catalonia supports European values. What that's supposed to mean, who knows, and why should one assume they are automatically progressive anyway?

A quick glance at the history of colonialism and war should give us pause for thought on the matter. Is it also saying that European values are better than values from Africa or Latin America or any other continent?

Defining ourselves against others in national terms seems to lead to xenophobic assumptions, albeit they may be unconscious.

Catalonia is the richest part of Spain and part of the appeal of the independence cause was that it could be better off keeping its wealth for itself. This is a blatant appeal to a sectional interest rather than unity and the common good.

Further, it also completely ignores the

Continued on page 28

US could lose the next war it fights

The United States of America has not won a major conflict since 1945 so the admission by former Pentagon official David Ochmanek that “we could lose the next war we fight” might come as no surprise to many.⁽¹⁾

By ALEX MITCHELL

The warning made in testimony to the Congress is simply a part of a well-honed tactic by the Pentagon to secure additional funding for itself and for the military in allied nations.

It was ever thus, with the notorious ‘missile gap’ with the USSR publicised by Jack Kennedy to justify the start of the militarisation of space being a prime example.⁽²⁾

Speaking to the World Economic Forum in the Davos ski resort on 26 January, US President Donald Trump promised to increase defence spending and called on America’s friends and allies to “contribute their fair share” towards “our common security” against “rogue regimes, terrorism and revisionist powers”.⁽³⁾

War is in the news. *The Economist* magazine of 27 January stated that “China ... and Russia are entering into a renewal of great power competition with the West.” Whilst having benefited from the international order established by the USA, “they see its pillars – universal human rights, democracy and the rule of law – as an imposition that excuses foreign meddling and undermines their own legitimacy. They are now revisionist states that want to challenge the status quo and look at their regions as spheres of influence to be dominated. For China, this means East Asia; for Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia.”⁽⁴⁾

The Pentagon’s new national defence strategy regards “great power competition” not international terrorism as the primary threat facing the USA.⁽⁵⁾

It plans accordingly to deploy smaller scale nuclear weapons on the battlefield. Otherwise it fears the USA might lose a conventional conflict.

China and Russia are accused of seeking to revise the established doctrine that the USA is the sole super-power in the

world and to be gearing up to challenge Trump’s intention to “make America great again”.

Worryingly, for the defenders of the global market economy, it is not only Beijing and Moscow which intend supposedly to break up the international system of free trade guaranteed by Washington. Trump appears to be pursuing the same goal.

The Pentagon’s new ... defence strategy regards “great power competition” not international terrorism as the primary threat to the USA. It plans accordingly to deploy smaller scale nuclear weapons fearing it might lose a conventional conflict.

The Economist wants to see a halt to America’s twenty years of “strategic drift” by using a combination of technological leadership, soft and hard power – diplomacy and coercion, in other words – to retain its role as the guarantor of “world peace”.

Unfortunately, the magazine continues, “Mr Trump wants America to give up defending the system it created and join Russia and China as just another truculent revisionist power”.⁽⁶⁾

A global war over the Earth’s resources and territories has edged a step closer.

Russia has also been accused of conducting cyber warfare against the West. “We know what you are doing”, Theresa May told the Lord Mayor’s Banquet in November 2017.

She accused Russia of planting fake news, cyber-espionage and weaponizing information to undermine free societies.⁽⁷⁾ Supposedly Russian agents manipulated swing voters in marginal states

to vote for Trump using ads on Facebook and other social media.

An investigation by *Le Monde* diplomatique and *The Nation* found “no concrete evidence to support” the story of Russian meddling in the US, French and German elections or the British referendum.⁽⁸⁾

Nonetheless, the story of Russian interference in the US Presidential election sparked another round of sanctions on (mainly rich) Russian citizens by the Congress.⁽⁹⁾

The scandal has gathered momentum as a result of the FBI’s on-going investigation into the Trump campaign’s contacts with Russian nationals, official or otherwise, who always seem to have alleged ‘Kremlin links’.

The FBI opened its investigation after receiving a dossier of information from Christopher Steele in July 2016. Steele, a former officer in the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) had been contracted in April of that year to undertake an investigation into Trump and his associates by Fusion GPS, a Washington-based political and commercial research company founded by two *Wall Street Journal* reporters in 2009 – the same year as Steele started his own company Orbis.

Steele and Glenn Simpson, one of the founding partners in Fusion, worked together on a number of cases over the following years.

Fusion was commissioned by lawyers acting for the Democratic National Committee (DNC) to probe Trump’s background. Steele had served in Moscow between 1990 and 1993 as a second secretary at the British Embassy and later in a senior position on SIS’s Russian desk.

His dossier, based on information from his Russian contacts, claimed that the Russian intelligence services had spied on Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump in the past. Included were lurid details of Trump’s romp with prostitutes at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, Moscow, in 2013. Steele’s sources also claimed that Trump had paid for the hacking of the DNC’s emails.⁽¹⁰⁾ Wikileaks later released the emails in July 2016.

This puts a different perspective on the short meeting Donald Trump Jr held with Natalia Veselnitskaya, the lawyer representing a number of Russian public officials under US sanction, on 9 June 2016.

The meeting was set up by a long-standing business partner of Trump who suggested he had access to the Russian file on Hilary Clinton. Veselnitskaya, however, stated that the meeting was not held to make an offer to the Trump campaign but solely concerned the 2012 Magnitsky Act that had imposed sanctions on individuals alleged to have been responsible for Magnitsky's death in a Moscow jail.⁽¹¹⁾ (Sergey Magnitsky was an accountant who had investigated government corruption in Russia.)

Perhaps the Trump team saw no need to bargain over the sanctions issue as they already possessed the DNC email trove. In any case, all the emails revealed was the DNC's evident hostility towards Bernie Sanders, who was seeking the Democratic Party's nomination, and which should not have come as a surprise to anyone.

Donald Trump has been portrayed in *The Guardian* as Vladimir Putin's pawn: 'How Trump walked into Putin's web' was the headline in a story by reporter Luke Harding. It brings to mind the spy stories of John Le Carré, with Putin, a former KGB officer, playing the role of George Smiley's wily nemesis Karla.

It suits Trump's opponents in the Democratic Party to give the scandal as much airtime as possible in retaliation for the scandals over Hilary Clinton's emails and Barack Obama's birth certificate.

Trump orchestrated both those affairs, encouraging his supporters to chant "Lock her up" at every opportunity at his campaign rallies and even at his inauguration. (Clinton had used her per-

sonal email account and server for State Department business, posing a potential security risk from those same alleged Russian hackers.)

Trump's role in all of this is clearly not that of a political innocent. According to Edward Luce of the *Financial Times*, Trump colluded with the Republican chair of the House of Representative's intelligence committee, Devin Nunes, to release a critical report, drafted for Nunes, on the opening of the FBI's investigation.⁽¹²⁾

Trump needs to eliminate any evidence that he was behind the 'fake news' stories that weakened Clinton's cam-

paign. That evidence could lead to his impeachment or the annulment of the presidential election by the Supreme Court. Trump's constant complaints about 'fake news' reveal his own penchant for spreading it.

Moreover, Trump's persistent war-mongering in pursuit of Making America Great Again suggests that he was never a secret Russian ally.

He is just a regular American intent on maintaining his country's military and economic dominance and a healthy military-industrial complex, following policies no different to those of his predecessors.

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Catalan elections: victory for the right

Continued from page 26

question of who owns and controls the wealth, a rather more significant issue than what borders are drawn on a map.

Many of the features of Catalan nationalism are very familiar to us in Scotland. The issues have been highly divisive with opinion split in both places. Nationalism appeals to self-interest rather than working-class unity.

The enemy becomes Spain/England and not capitalism. Large sections of the left have been beguiled by the idea that their nation is better than the rest of the state they are attached to and that freed

from that it would be more progressive.

Making the national question the key issue paradoxically, however, opens up space for the right which is able to make headway among those opposed to independence, with their other concerns round social justice pushed to one side.

This is true both in the nation seeking independence and in the one it is seeking independence from.

The Tories have done well out of opposing Scottish independence. In both Scotland and Catalonia, the independence movement is led by pro-capitalist parties, though the Scottish National Party's membership is at present a broad

church of left and right.

In Catalonia Puigdemont is much more clearly of the right and there are separate left nationalist parties.

It looks like Catalonia is set to be embroiled in lengthy constitutional wrangling round the formation of a new government and its future relationship to Spain.

But things can change quickly as they have begun to in Scotland where the SNP is losing its stranglehold on politics and Labour is beginning to recover. Let's hope that in Catalonia working-class interests can reassert themselves soon from the mire of nationalism.

4 Film Reviews By BRENT CUTLER

Resurrecting old and discredited myths

Film 1. *Kingman – the Secret Service* (2014)

Film 2. *Kingman – The Golden Circle* (2017).

There is nothing like resurrecting old and discredited myths; but if it's got to be done make a blockbuster movie or two. This was clearly the case with the two Kingman films; *Kingman – the Secret Service* (2014) and *Kingman – The Golden Circle* (2017).

The concept behind Kingsman is an elite secret service unit based in a Saville Row tailors shop; recruits are selected from all walks of life and have to undergo highly extensive training.

Those selected are provided with the latest weaponry as well as made to measure suits and training in social etiquette for those from less well-heeled backgrounds.

The films centre around the character of Gary Unwin (played by Taron Egerton), known as Eggsy, a working-class youth whose father was killed in military action back in the 1990s.

Eggsy finds himself on the wrong side of the law after an incident of joy riding in the first of the two films and is saved from incarceration by his slightly well-heeled mentor, Harry Hart, played by Colin Firth.

Both films are based around the notion of a benevolent state with it's intelligence service looking after us innocent folk. I seem to hear the term "Greater Good" used rather a lot these days.

The idea of the intelligence services working for the benefit of all comes in the light of relations about spooks infiltrating environmentalist groups and engaging in elicited relationships with their female members; whilst at the same time failing to halt terrorist outrages such as the incident in Greater Manchester.

Perhaps if they had not interfered with Libya in the first place we might have been better off but that is perhaps for another article.

Both films are based around the One-Nation Tory notion of upward mobility and New Labour pure meritocracy. In these days of the housing crisis, zero-hour contracts and tuition fees perhaps we should simply view both films as comedies.

Surveys also suggest that university graduates from working class back-

grounds still earn less than their well-heeled counterparts. In other words, once you have paid off your tuition fees, spent much of your valuable study time working for Deliveroo; you might be lucky enough to work in a call centre.

However, I must confess that in terms of pure entertainment I did enjoy watching both films. They are filled with action packed scenes and excellent special effects.

The second film features two young working-class actors; Thomas Turgoose from the *This is England* series and Kema Sikazwe from *I Daniel Blake*.

Like all action adventure films, they have their bad guys. In both films the villains are from the non-ethical super rich.

In the first film a computer geek played by Samuel L Jackson and in the second film a drug baroness who lives in a 1950s theme park in Cambodia, played by Julianne Moore.

In other words once these few bad apples have been defeated, usually violently, the ethical capitalists can get on with running the world and we need not worry.

A recurring villain in both films is Charlie Hesketh, played by Edward Holcroft from *London Spy*. Charlie, with his sense of upper class entitlement and pure arrogance, is the antithesis of the working class Eggsy.

After failing the Kingman selection process Charlie goes on to work for the bad guys; those of us from a left wing disposition would claim that the likes of Charlie are the Bad Guys. Again, the reality is our ruling class is made up of the Charlie Heskeths and not the likes of Eggsy.

As well as the undeserving, or over entitled rich, the other bad guys in both films are the bad mannered and ignorant poor. In the case of the first film Chavs in a London pub and Rednecks, in an American dinner, in the second.

What is perhaps interesting is the relative ease with which Harry Hart finishes off the lower orders in both cases and the resources needed to defeat the wealthy supervillains. What does this tell us about where real power is?

US teen movie set in Middle America and in a jungle

Film 3. *Jumanji*

Jumanji is essentially a US teen movie, set in what is commonly referred to as Middle America.

The film explores issues of modern society such as overdependence on mobile phones as well as the role of computer games. It also goes into the possibility of individuals changing personal characteristics and even taking on different personas.



At the start of the film the heroes find themselves doing community service for breaching High School rules and become trapped in a computer game. The theme of the story is to get out of the game, *Jumanji*, to do this they must succeed at all levels of the game and complete the quest.

The question I asked myself was whether elements of the film expressed America's view of the world as a Game. Part of the game is set in a jungle – perhaps a reference to Africa.

More poignantly there is a scene set in a bazaar which resembles a Middle Eastern city, Baghdad perhaps. The villains are mindless automatons, with their faces covered, a possible reference to Middle Eastern insurgents.

This could be said to show how the

United States views the outside world; essentially as an exotic game in some kind of separate dimension.

The idea of viewing the world as a Game is not as ridiculous as it sounds. In the 1950s at the height of the Cold War the U.S mathematician, John Nash, developed the concept of Game Theory.

Game Theory, based around the idea of the zero-sum game was used as a guide to U.S foreign policy for a number of years. Perhaps now it has descended

into popular culture.

The film contains elements of Indiana Jones, Harry Potter as well as aspects of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Some of the scenes resemble those from earlier films; for instance, the heroes are chased by stampeding rhinos, this very much resembles the 2005 adaptation of *King Kong*, also starring Jack Black, which features stampeding Bron-tosauruses.

Although essentially a teen film, it can

be enjoyed by films lovers of all ages. As someone who has been watching films, or going to the pictures for some years, I can remember when the only items on sale in the foyer were bags of sweets and obviously popcorn.

I was about to say in my day, you went the cinema and then followed it by a visit to a nearby restaurant or pub.

Now I notice film goers entering the auditorium carrying what appears to be their dinner.

Episode eight of Star Wars' big screen cinematic effects

Film 4. Star Wars The Last Jedi

The Last Jedi is episode eight of the Star Wars series; episode six, *The Empire Strikes Back* saw the Evil Empire of Darth Vader and Emperor Palpatine defeated by the rebel alliance.

In episode seven, *The Force Awakens*, we see the Empire reconstituted in the form of the First Order. We also see Kylo Ren, the son of Han Solo and Leia Organa turn to the Dark Side; meanwhile the rebels return to being rebels, an inter-galactic example of permanent revolution perhaps.

The Last Jedi shows a mixture of good cinematic effects, which perhaps can only be appreciated on the big screen, a complex story and an array of new characters. There is discussion in the film about the past mistakes of the Jedi Order; an order that bears many similarities to the Warrior Monks of the middle ages.

The new characters emanate from the middle and lower ranks of the resistance and have a tendency to disobey orders and act independently; after all they are rebels.



There is one section of the film where a rebel duo visit a planet inhabited by the super-rich, dominated by a mega casino and private security guards.

It is later explained that these people obtained their wealth by selling weapons to both sides in the conflict; a possible attack on the arms trade?

Must I remind readers that good science fiction is as much about the present as about any imagined future.

The use of CGI enabled the film makers to use the late Carrie Fisher to continue to play General Leia. Some may argue about the efficacy of this.

Are there not better ways to honour the memory of someone who may have led a somewhat tragic life but was still an outstanding actress?

It also poses the question if the recently deceased can be reused in films, why not bring long dead actors back to life?

As someone who has seen every Star Wars film since 1977, it probably is worth a trip to your nearest multiplex. Which, unlike in 1977, you may now find surrounded by an array of over-priced restaurants staffed by twenty somethings on zero-hour contracts.

Haiti used by Tories to attack aid budget

Continued from page 6

capita the highest NGO aided country in the world.

Many of these have operated with their own agendas with little co-ordination with other NGOs and virtually no accountability to the Haitian government or their funders for their actions.

The billions of US dollars raised following the earthquake have been badly spent, spirited away or misused leaving little to show in its wake. The needs of the poor majority remain unaddressed (see Haiti Support Group website).

It is this situation which President Moïse had in mind in his article in *The Washington Post* (February 23, 2018).

Referring to the events of the last few weeks he noted: "The general paradigm of aid and power in Haiti, as in the developing world, is not a balanced one. Our government is often sidestepped by aid agencies that refuse oversight as they pursue their own development and humanitarian agendas in our country. The level and direction of aid, and its implementation, is controlled by donor forces with little or no input from Haiti's government or other local stakeholders.

"Something clearly needs to change. Our government must now move into the driver's seat".

His concerns are well made. The question is whether his government has the administrative capacity or political

will to carry them out. The past record of Haitian governments do not give much hope and there are mountains, and even more mountains to climb, to give effect to them.

To do this ordinary Haitians must be put in charge. Haitian civil society groups and community leaders need to be brought into the process and their priorities acted upon. International advocacy needs to prioritise Haiti more than it does and directly tackle those in the British government and elsewhere who have habitually sought to exploit Haiti for their own interests.

In Haitian creole - 'Pise marengwen ogmante larivye' (every little drop counts). Now more than ever.

Keorapetse “Willie” Kgositsile (1938 - 2018)

Keorapetse was known as Bra Willie by his friends and comrades.

By **BRIAN FILLING**

He was a South African poet and member of the African National Congress and spent 29 years in exile during apartheid in other African countries and in the United States. He was inaugurated as South Africa's National Poet Laureate in 2006.

On his death, South African Minister of Arts and Culture, Nathi Mthethwa, wrote, “The nation has lost a revolutionary mind and a major asset in our cultural landscape. His incisive mind and humble personality will be sorely missed.”

Kgositsile's poetry addressed themes of solidarity, displacement and anti-colonialism. His poems *No Serenity Here* and *Anguish Longer Than Sorrow* are fine examples.

In post-apartheid South Africa he did not flinch from criticising those in powerful positions if he thought they were abusing their positions or taking the liberation struggle in a wrong direction.

Willie was born in Johannesburg and attended Madibane High School. He was able (with some difficulty) to find books by Langston Hughes and Richard Wright and he began to write.

On leaving school after a number of odd jobs he found employment as a journalist with *New Age*, a weekly that had been serially banned by the racist regime.

It had first been known as *The Guardian* until it was banned in 1952. It re-appeared as *The Clarion*, retained that title until 1953 when it was banned only to re-emerge as *Advance* which was published until mid-1955 giving way to *New Age*.

New Age under the editorship of Ruth

First, who was later (1982) assassinated in Mozambique by the apartheid regime, and an editorial team including Brian Bunting, Govan Mbeki and MP Naicker, initiated Willie Kgositsile into the craft of journalism. As well as reporting, Willie contributed poems to the journal. Pallo Jordan, Minister of Arts and Culture, in his speech at the inauguration of Kgosit-



sile as South African Poet Laureate, commented on this period of Willie's life, saying, “I have no doubt that it was that rigorous apprenticeship that moulded him into the gifted wordsmith he matured into in later years.”⁽¹⁾

In 1961, under mounting pressure from the apartheid regime, Kgositsile was urged by the ANC to leave the country. He went initially to Tanzania to write for *Spearhead* magazine, edited by Frene Ginwala, later Speaker in the South African Parliament after the end of apartheid.

Pallo Jordan stated, “It is testimony to

the prescience of and foresight of the editor and her team that many of the issues of an African renaissance, African economic independence and political unity that appear on the continent's current agenda were flagged in *Spearhead* as early as 1962 and 1963.”⁽²⁾

Exile in the United States

In 1962 he was sent to the United States on a scholarship where he studied at a series of universities beginning with Lincoln University in Pennsylvania where he “spent a lot of time in the library trying to read as much black literature as I could lay my hands on.”

After studying at the University of West Hampshire and The New School for Social Research he entered the Master of Fine Arts programme in creative writing at Columbia University.

At the same time, he published his first collection of poems, *Spirits Unchained*. The collection was well received, and he was given a Harlem Cultural Council Poetry Award and a National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Award.

He graduated from Columbia in 1971, and remained in New York, teaching and giving his characteristically dynamic readings in clubs and as part of the Uptown Black Arts Movement.

Kgositsile's influential collection, *My Name is Afrika*, was published in that year and included an introduction to the book by Gwendolyn Brooks, the first black author to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize. This collection established Kgositsile as a leading African-American poet.

The Last Poets, a group of revolutionary African-American poets, took their name from one of his poems. The Last Poets included several groups of poets and musicians who arose from the late 1960s African-American civil rights movement.

The Last Poets were one of the earli-

ANGUISH LONGER THAN SORROW by Keorapetse Kgositsile

If destroying all the maps known
would erase all the boundaries
from the face of this earth
I would say let us
make a bonfire to reclaim and sing
the human person

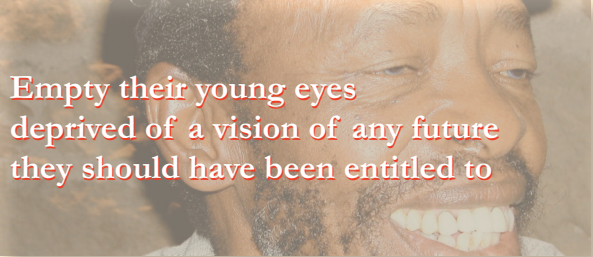
Refugee is an ominous load
even for a child to carry
for some children
words like home
could not carry any possible meaning
but
displaced
border
refugee must carry dimensions of brutality and terror
past the most hideous nightmare
anyone could experience or imagine

Empty their young eyes
deprived of a vision of any future
they should have been entitled to
since they did not choose to be born
where and when they were
Empty their young bellies
extended and rounded by malnutrition
and growling like the well-fed dogs of some
with pretensions to concerns about human rights
violations

Can you see them now
stumble from nowhere
to no
where
between
nothing
and
nothing

Consider
the premature daily death of their young dreams
what staggering memories frighten and abort
the hope that should have been
an indelible inscription in their young eyes

Perhaps
I should just borrow
the rememberer's voice again
while I can and say:
to have a home is not a favour



Empty their young eyes
deprived of a vision of any future
they should have been entitled to

est influences on hip-hop music. Critic Jason Ankeny wrote: "With their politically charged raps, taut rhythms, and dedication to raising African-American consciousness, the Last Poets almost single-handedly laid the groundwork for the emergence of hip-hop."⁽³⁾

Kgositsile's first son, Thebe Neruda Kgositsile (given his middle name after the poet Pablo Neruda), was with Cheryl Harris, a law professor at the University of California, Los Angeles. Thebe is better known as a very successful hip hop artist under the stage name Earl Sweatshirt.

Jazz

Kgositsile lived in exile in the United States from 1962 until 1975. He made an extensive study of African-American literature and culture, becoming particularly interested in jazz.

During the 1970s he was a central figure among African-American poets, encouraging interest in Africa as well as the practice of poetry as a performance art; he was well known for his readings in New York City jazz clubs.

His poems combine lyricism with a call to arms, as in the lines from "*Dawn*" (see page 33).

As he said later, "In a situation of oppression, there are no choices beyond didactic writing: either you are a tool of oppression or an instrument of liberation."

Jazz was particularly important to Kgositsile's sense of black American culture and his own place in it. He saw John Coltrane, Nina Simone, Billie Holiday, B. B. King and many others in the jazz clubs of New York, and wrote to them and of them in his poems.

Jazz was crucial to Kgositsile's ideas including his sense of a worldwide African diaspora united by an ear for a certain quintessentially black sound. His collection, *This Way I Salute You*, is dedicated to these jazz artists and others.

Kgositsile also became active in theatre while in New York, founding the Black Arts Theatre in Harlem. He saw black theatre as a fundamentally revolutionary activity, whose ambition must be the destruction of the ingrained habits of thought responsible for perceptions of black people both by white people and by themselves.

He wrote: "We will be destroying the symbols which have facilitated our captivity. We will be creating and establishing symbols to facilitate our necessary and constant beginning."

The Black Arts Theatre was part of a larger project aimed at the creation of a literary black voice unafraid to be militant.

Return to Africa

In 1975, Kgositsile returned to Africa and took up a teaching position at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.

In 1978, he married another ANC exile, Baleka Mbete, who was also living in Tanzania. She became Secretary-General of the ANC's Women's League and is currently the Speaker of the South African Parliament. They divorced in 1992.

Willie Kgositsile was one of the founders of the ANC's Department of Education in 1977 and its Department of Arts and Culture in 1983; he became Deputy Secretary in 1987. Kgositsile taught at several schools in different parts of Africa, including Kenya, Botswana and Zambia.

Throughout this period, of course, he was banned in South Africa, but in 1990 the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW), decided to attempt a publication within the country. The successful result was *When the Clouds Clear*, a collection of poems from other volumes, which was Kgositsile's first book to be available in his native country.

End of exile

In July 1990, after 29 years in exile, Kgositsile returned to South Africa. He arrived in a country wholly different from the one he had left, transformed by the beginning of the end of apartheid and

NO SERENITY HERE - by Keorapetse Kgotsitsile

An omelette cannot be unscrambled. Not even the one prepared in the crucible of 19th century sordid European design.

When Europe cut up this continent into little pockets of its imperialist want and greed it was not for aesthetic reasons, nor was it in the service of any African interest, intent or purpose.

When, then, did the brutality of imperialist appetite and aggression evolve into something of such ominous value to us that we torture, mutilate, butcher in ways hideous beyond the imagination, rape women, men, even children and infants for having woken up on what we now claim, with perverse possessiveness and territorial chauvinism, to be our side of the boundary that until only yesterday arrogantly defined where a piece of one European property ended and another began? In my language there is no word for citizen, which is an ingredient of that 19th century omelette. That word came to us as part of the package that contained the bible and the rifle. But moagi, resident, is there and it has nothing to do with any border or boundary you may or may not have crossed before waking up on the piece of earth where you currently live.

Poem, I know you are reluctant to sing when there is no joy in your heart, but I have wondered all these years why you did not or could not give answer when Langston Hughes, who wondered as he wandered, asked: what happens to a dream deferred?

I wonder now
why we are somewhere we did not aim
to be. Like my sister
who could report from any
place where people live,
I fear the end of peace
and I wonder if
that is perhaps why
our memories of struggle
refuse to be erased,
our memories of struggle
refuse to die
we are not strangers
to the end of peace,
we have known women widowed
without any corpses of husbands
because the road to the mines,
like the road to any war,
is long and littered with casualties – even
those who still walk and talk

when Nathalie, whose young eyes know things, says:
there is nothing left after wars, only other wars
wake up whether you are witness or executioner –
the victim, whose humanity you can never erase,
knows with clarity more solid than granite
that no matter which side you are on,
any day or night, an injury to one
remains an injury to all

somewhere on this continent
the voice of the ancients warns
that those who shit on the road
will meet flies on their way back,
so perhaps you should shudder under the weight
of nightmares when you consider what
thoughts might enter the hearts of our neighbours,
what frightened or frightening memories might jump up
when they hear a South African accent

even the sun embarrassed, withdraws her warmth
from this atrocious defiance and unbridled denial
of the ties that should bind us here and always
and the night will not own any of this stench
of betrayal which has desecrated our national anthem,
so do not tell me of NEPAD or AU,
do not tell me of SADC
and please do not try to say shit about
ubuntu or any other neurosis of history

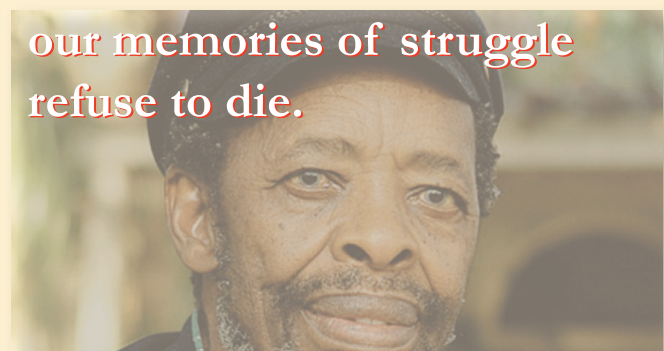
again I say, while I still have voice,
remember, always
remember that you are what you do,
past any saying of it

our memories of struggle
refuse to be erased
our memories of struggle
refuse to die.

My mothers, fathers of my father and me,
how shall I sing to celebrate life
when every space in my heart is surrounded by corpses?
Whose thousand thundering voices shall I borrow to shout
once more: *Daar is kak in die land?* *

*"No Serenity Here" was published by
flipped eye publishing, under the Defeye series in 2009.*

*There is shit in the land.



DAWN (an extract) - by Keorapetse Kgotsitsile

Remember in baton boot and bullet ritual
The bloodhounds of Monster Vorster wrote
SOWETO over the belly of my land
with the indelible blood of infants
So the young are no longer young
Not that they demand a hasty death



**Glasgow 2004:
Brian Filling and Willie below the
statue of Dolores Ibarruri
known as La Pasionaria.**

the release and later the political triumph of Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress.

In 1990, however, it was still apartheid and a place of great conflict as the regime tried to hold on to power.

In a 1991 essay, *"Crossing Borders Without Leaving"*, Kgositsile describes his first trip back to Johannesburg, where he was sponsored by COSAW: "Here are my colleagues and hosts. Can you deal with that? Hosts! In my own country."

He added, "there are no memories here. The streets of Johannesburg cannot claim me. I cannot claim them either."

Kind of Hero

He returned to the country as a kind of hero to young black writers and activists: "Usually, when we met, there would be a little amused giggle or mischievous grin from them as we shook hands and hugged or kissed, depending on the gender.

When I would want to find out what the joke was so that we could share it if I also found it funny, one or several of them would recite some of my work, complete with the sound of my voice to the degree that had I heard the recitation without seeing who was reciting, I would probably have said, 'Wonder when I recorded that.'"

Bra Willie was immediately back into politics and cultural activism.

He became Special Adviser to the Minister of Arts and Culture and joined the editorial board of *This Day* news-

paper in South Africa

Kgositsile returned to the United States several times, including for a visiting professorship at the New School.

Keorapetse Kgositsile played a very important role in the liberation struggle and in the development of post-apartheid South Africa.

We, in the international solidarity movement, are well aware of his role and are grateful for having worked with him in the struggle against apartheid and in seeking to overcome the legacy of colonialism and apartheid. To have known and worked with Comrade Kgositsile was a great privilege.

"Bra Willie" was a frequent visitor to the Edinburgh International Book Festival, where he was highly regarded. He often read some of his poetry alongside some new, young and emerging South African writers.

He was always modest and encouraged these young writers in their development and in speaking to international audiences. I spent many interesting hours in conversation with Willie during his visits to Scotland.

In 2004, on the 10th anniversary of the new South Africa, he participated in a writer's conference, "Exiles Within", at Glasgow University.

One of the seminars, which I chaired, was a fascinating discussion with the Scottish writer and Booker Prize winner, Jim Kelman, and Bra Willie. We all had a love and admiration for Alex La Guma, and his writings were the inspiration for the discussion on the relationship between writers and politics.

Willie was insightful, thoughtful and inspirational during the discussion, as he was generally in life.

On another of his visits to Scotland I took Willie on the "Mandela Walk", the places that Nelson Mandela had been in Glasgow when he came in 1993 to receive the Freedoms of nine UK cities.

As an additional part of the walk I took Willie to the statue (see picture above) of Dolores Ibarruri (La Pasionaria), leader of the Spanish Republicans.

The statue is dedicated to those from Scotland who fought for the International Brigade during the Spanish Civil War.

Willie was very moved by the statue and its inscription, La Pasionaria's words, "Better to die on your feet than live for ever on your knees."

In 2006 he was inaugurated as South Africa's national Poet Laureate.

In 2009 Bra Willie was part of the Beyond Words UK tour that also featured South African poets Don Mattera, Lesego Rampolokeng, Phillipa Yaa de Villiers and Lebo Mashile.



FOR HUGH MASEKALA* by Keorapetse Kgositsile

Manboy of the ages
mirror of my stupidity
and wisdom. Yours too
if you know there is no such
thing as even a perfect god

We are all dispensable
like words or songs
like obsolete tools
like a mother's afterbirth

Rendering. Yes. We travel
we move closer. Or apart
Don't we know that even
the sun can be brutal!

This then is the rhythm
and the blues of it
Home is where the music is.

From *This way I salute you*,
selected poems, pub.
Kwela /snailpress, 2004.

* Hugh Masekala died on
23 January 2018, aged 78.

Awards

The many literary awards he received include the Gwendolyn Brooks Poetry Prize, the Harlem Cultural Council Poetry Award, the Conrad Kent Rivers Memorial Poetry Award, the Herman Charles Bosman Prize.

In 2008, Kgositsile was awarded the South African national Order of Ikhamanga Silver, "For excellent achievements in the field of literature and using these exceptional talents to expose the evils of the system of apartheid to the world."

After a short illness, Keorapetse Willie Kgositsile died aged 79 on 3 January 2018 in Johannesburg.

FOOTNOTES

1. Pallo Jordan, *Speech at the Inauguration of Keorapetse Willie Kgositsile as Poet Laureate*, Bloemfontein, December 2006.
2. *ibid.*
3. Jason Ankeny: <https://www.all-music.com/artist/the-last-poets-mn0000090018/biography>

Mandela centenary memorial appeal

18 July 2018 marks the centenary of Nelson Mandela's birth. A newly formed Scottish charity - the Nelson Mandela Scottish Memorial Foundation (NMSMF) - is campaigning to raise the funds to erect a statue of Mandela in Glasgow, the first city in the world to award him Freeman of the City.

By **MARTIN S. GIBSON**

The NMSMF was launched on 9 October 2017 by two of its Patrons: Glasgow's Lord Provost, Cllr Eva Bolander and Sir Alex Ferguson, Freeman of the City and former Manchester United manager; and NMSMF Chair and Honorary Consul for South Africa in Scotland, Brian Filling.

Sir Billy Connolly, also a Freeman of the City of Glasgow, is the latest living Freeman of Glasgow to support the campaign to raise the funds for a statue in memory of the late South African President.

Glasgow City Council has already granted planning permission for the statue to be erected in the street that bears the South African leader's name, Nelson Mandela Place.

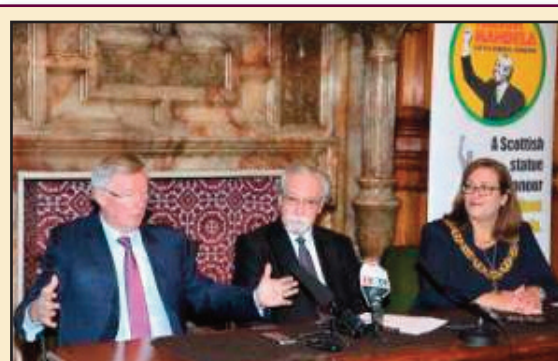
Sir Billy joins a trio of prominent Glaswegians, similarly honoured by the city, who are NMSMF Patrons: Sir Alex Ferguson CBE, Kenny Dalglish MBE and Lord MacFarlane of Bearsden.

Andrew Mlangeni and Denis Goldberg - fellow Rivonia trialists of Mandela who together spent 48 years in prison - are also among the NMSMF's Patrons.

Sir Billy said: "I am honoured, and delighted to join the impressive line-up of worthy Glaswegians as a patron of the campaign to build a statue to Nelson Mandela in Glasgow. I met Mr. Mandela in Oslo, Norway, where he received the Nobel Peace Prize. He left an impression on me that I will never forget."

Imprisoned for 27 years for his resistance to apartheid, the iconic South African leader was made a Freeman of

the City of Glasgow in 1981, while still in jail. Later that year Glasgow's Lord



Sir Alex Ferguson, Brian Filling and Eva Bolander at the press conference to launch the NMSMF. Sir Alex, who met Mandela on three occasions, said, "You have to be special to put to one side what he endured for over a quarter of a century and then go on to lead his country to democracy and to influence his people in such a way. Nelson Mandela was special. An example for the world to follow."

Provost Michael Kelly launched a worldwide Lord Mayors petition calling for the release of Nelson Mandela at the



United Nations in New York. The petition was signed by thousands of Mayors, contributing to the global movement to secure his freedom.

Mandela was finally released from jail on Sunday 11 February 1990.

On 9 October 1993 he collected his honour from Glasgow and 8 other UK cities in person addressing an enthusiastic crowd of 15,000 in Glasgow's George Square. The Scottish Mandela Foundation chose that auspicious anniversary date of 9 October to publicly launch its fundraising campaign.

Now that it is up and running, the foundation regards this Mandela centenary year as vital to its target of raising £250,000 to commission and erect the statue in Glasgow and deliver an associated and longterm educational programme throughout Scotland.

24 August 2018

Gala Fundraising Dinner

And among the many future events it plans to run throughout 2018, the highlight will be a gala fundraising dinner on Friday 24 August 2018 in the Glasgow Hilton Hotel where Mandela stayed on 9 October 1993.

Brian Filling said, "Our plan to erect a memorial for Nelson Mandela in Nelson Mandela Place will complete a piece of Glasgow's history of support for progressive and noble causes and serve as a permanent reminder of South Africa and Glasgow's important and shared history.

"Nelson Mandela Place is the ideal site - politically, historically and functionally - for the NMSMF's proposed memorial statue of Nelson Mandela. The place has a long association with the successful struggle against apartheid in South Africa and the campaign to free Mandela from prison.

"It was THE place where people from all over Scotland and beyond came to protest because it was the residence of the racist apartheid regime's Consulate;

www.mandelascottishmemorial.org



Nelson Mandela Place, December 2013. A small section of the many who mourned and celebrated the life of Nelson Mandela.

on the 5th floor of the Stock Exchange building in what was then St. George's Place. In August 1985 the Anti-Apartheid Movement's Scottish Committee organised a weekly picket of the apartheid Consulate which ran for over a year. Trade Unions, shop stewards committees, CND, churches, NUS and other organisations took turns to staff the picket line.

"2018 marks the centenary of Mandela's birth and is the 25th anniversary of his visit to Glasgow. It will be a vitally important year for the NMSMF in our campaign to raise the funds to erect a statue and so honour his life, legacy and

his special relationship with the people of Glasgow, Scotland and the UK.

"To see the variety of ways you can donate, please go to our website: www.mandelascottishmemorial.org

"We are also in discussions with various organisations and institutions about how they might support the project and we would welcome others willing to assist. We still have a long long way to go, and we need all our supporters and friends help, to reach our aim."

Open Competition for Statue design

An open competition will be held to select the sculptor of the Nelson Mandela statue. Sculptors' interest in designing the statue has been tremendous so far. The chosen artist will be selected by a Judging panel.

History of Nelson Mandela Place

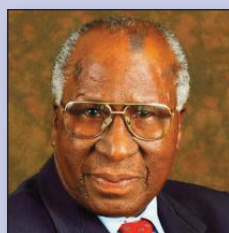
Apartheid South Africa's Consulate - in St. George's Place - was for decades the place of much anti-apartheid protest.

- 1985 - Year long picket begins outside apartheid Consulate;
- 1986 - St. George's Place re-named **Nelson Mandela Place**;
- 1988 - Huge Anti-Apartheid Movement march - via **Nelson Mandela Place** - to Glasgow Green where 30,000 people demand: *Free Nelson Mandela!*;
- 1990 - Mandela released on 11 February after 27 years in prison. The AAM celebrates in **Nelson Mandela Place**;
- 1992 - Apartheid Consulate in **Nelson Mandela Place** is closed;
- 1993 - Mandela in Glasgow to receive his Freedom of the City;
- 1994 - Mandela elected President of democratic South Africa;
- 2013 - Mandela's death leads to a large public gathering in **Nelson Mandela Place** to mourn and to celebrate his life;
- 2014 - Commonwealth Games in Glasgow: Billy Connolly pays special tribute to Mandela and Glasgow's role in campaigning for his freedom. He especially praised the re-naming to **Nelson Mandela Place**.

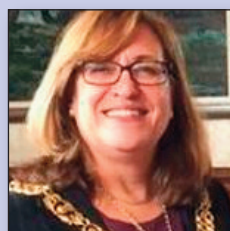
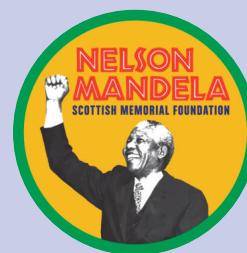
Patrons of the Nelson Mandela Scottish Memorial Foundation



Prof. Denis Goldberg.
Rivonia trialist with Nelson Mandela. Spent 22 years in apartheid prison.



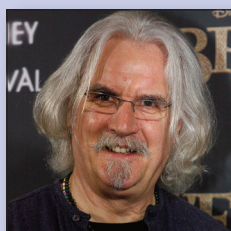
Andrew Mlangeni.
Rivonia trialist with Nelson Mandela. Spent 26 years in apartheid prison.



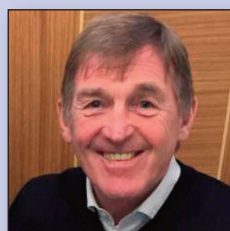
Lord Provost of Glasgow
Clr Eva Bolander



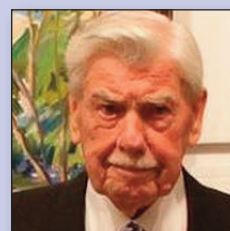
Sir Alex Ferguson CBE
Freeman of the City of Glasgow



Sir Billy Connolly CBE
Freeman of the City of Glasgow



Kenny Dalglish MBE
Freeman of the City of Glasgow



Lord Macfarlane of Bearsden
Freeman of the City of Glasgow