

# The Socialist Correspondent

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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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## Greece: a bailout for German and French banks

It is widely agreed that the so-called bailout to Greece will not work. It will certainly not work for the Greek people.

This is because, as Paul Sutton points out in his article on the Eurozone Crisis, although “the action was presented as a ‘lifeline’ to the Greek economy. It is more accurate to characterise it as a lifeline to the German and French banks...”



The first bailout made the situation in Greece worse and so will this latest bailout. In his article Paul Sutton relates the cost to the Greek people: unemployment is now 21% and among young people it is 48%; there has been a 25% increase in homelessness; some 30% of Greeks are at risk of poverty. This is before the further harsh measures, demanded by the second bailout, are carried through.

The question is asked: “is default such a bad thing?” and examples are given in the article from other parts of the world where this has taken place.

The intention of the bailout is to buy time for the Eurozone but as Paul concludes, “the bailout will fail Greece but will hold the line for the moment on Portugal, the next Eurozone country most at risk of being able to meet its debts.”

The latest bailout undermines Greek sovereignty and democracy and the new changes to the EU Treaty centralise more control over all the weaker Eurozone countries.

## Libya, Syria...

Meanwhile, the West, in the name of democracy, as Pat Turnbull states in her article, has shelled Libya into

## Commentary

devastation and lawlessness. Quoting the Daily Telegraph, “About 25,000 Libyans perished...and the destruction of some cities and villages can only be described as post-nuclear”, she shows the west has the same plans for Syria.

Pat reports on the bloc of aggressive imperialist powers threatening other countries including Syria and Iran and Noah Tucker in his “Deadly games by the ‘humanitarian West’”, looks behind the rhetoric at the real reasons for the West’s intervention in the Middle East.

## Democracy, Bahrein and ex-Cop Yates

The ‘civilising’ Western imperialist powers promote ‘democracy’ throughout the Arab world including they would claim, assisting democratic developments in countries like Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Bahrein.

An example of this assistance to democracy must include the despatching of ex-Assistant Commissioner John Yates (you’ll recall he resigned from the Metropolitan Police over the hacking scandal) to train the police in Bahrein!

Yates had to take some time off from his police training duties in Bahrein to appear by videolink before the Leveson Enquiry, where he was asked to explain an e-mail from a News of the World executive to one of their journalists, since arrested.

The e-mail reads: “Think JY could be crucial here. Have you spoken to him? Really need an exclusive splash line so time to call in all those bottles of champagne...” (Leveson Inquiry: Culture, Practice and Ethics of the Press, transcript of afternoon Hearing, section 36, 1 March 2012).

## US / China

The US is shifting its military priorities towards greater naval and air power in the Pacific as Simon Korner reports, putting “down a clear marker to China that the US will not allow it to compete with it as a superpower.” As he points out in his article “US Strategy in the Pacific” this sets the “stage for future conflict.”

## Venezuela

The Presidential election takes place in Venezuela on October 2012.

Frieda Park writes that it is an election, which poses a “society increasingly run for and by the people versus the interests of private property and capitalism.” There is a lot at stake and it will not just be the Venezuelan people who will have a deep interest in the outcome of the election.

## ANC Centenary

2012 is the centenary of the founding of the African National Congress of South Africa and Alex Davidson relates the heroic resistance of the South African people to colonialism and apartheid.

It was an epic struggle of a people fighting against overwhelming odds and eventually achieving victory. It has many lessons for us today in the fight against imperialism.

## Royal Manuscripts: the Genius of Illumination

This fascinating exhibition of manuscripts at the British Library in London provides a window into the British Monarchy as Sarah Stephenson outlines in her article.



She looks at two of the exhibition’s themes, royalty and the church and royal education and “discusses the continuity between medieval royalty and the present monarchy in relation to these key themes.”

Although most of the artists remain anonymous (unlike the royalty who came to own their works) their beautiful illustrations, decoration and script is a monument to their labour, creativity and skill.

# Capitalist, Eurozone and Greek crises

The 'c' word is with us again. Or rather a whole string of them.

**PAUL SUTTON explains how the latest capitalist debt and banking crisis sweeping Europe will be borne mostly on the backs of the working and middle classes.**

They begin with 'capitalism' followed by 'crisis', 'confidence', 'contagion', 'collapse', 'chaos', 'cuts' and a host more much beloved by commentators in the media, including 'cascading default' and 'catastrophic risk' for those who really appreciate the poetry of financial fear.

The one word beginning with 'c' they studiously ignore is 'class', but there is no mistake that this latest crisis of capitalism will be borne most on the backs of the working and middle classes (in employment and out) unless there is massive resistance to it. Hopefully there are many signs of just such a resistance

throughout Europe and especially in the epicentre of the current crisis, Greece.

We are now in 'phase 2' of the capitalist crisis which began (phase 1) with the financial crisis of 2007/2008. The impact then was felt most in the US, signalled by the collapse of the investment bank, Lehman Brothers, and in the UK with the failure of Northern Rock, Halifax Bank of Scotland and the Royal Bank of Scotland.

The crisis was contained by massive government intervention to bail out the banks. In the UK this amounted to £1.3 trillion with even more being pledged in

different ways in the US.

The Eurozone (1), the 17 member state countries of the European Union (EU) who had adopted the euro as their currency, initially appeared to have escaped the worst effects. While there was a downturn in economic activity the EU leaders were confident that a 200 billion euro stimulus plan agreed in December 2008 would invigorate growth.

Then a year later Greece admitted a debt of 300 billion euros, equal to 113% of GDP and nearly double the Eurozone limit of 60%. Emergency measures were applied, including the first of a series of government cuts and the first of a series of loans.

The most significant action was taken in May 2010. The EU agreed a loan package of 80 billion euros and the IMF added a further 30 billion euros to be disbursed over the next three years. In return the Greek government agreed a



Athens: Protesters outside the Greek Parliament.

30 billion euro austerity programme of cuts in public sector employment and social benefits and increases in taxes, including a 10% increase in VAT.

### Lifeline to German and French banks

The action was presented as a 'lifeline' to the Greek economy. It is more accurate to characterise it as a lifeline to the German and French banks which were the banks which held most Greek debt (a US\$ 34 billion exposure for Germany and US\$ 56.7 billion for France).

The fears were that unless action was taken Greece could default on its loans with losses imposed on the European banking system (including UK banks with an exposure of US\$ 14.6 billion) estimated at some 200 billion euros.

The loans given to the Greek government were therefore designed to be used to pay back the banks and institutional investors, such as pension funds and insurance companies, which held Greek debt. It is a principal feature of the way the second phase of the capitalist crisis has been handled.

The 'bail-outs' of the first phase essentially transferred privately held debt into publicly held debt. The risk in this action is that when economies are weak governments can run into difficulties in repaying the debt they have taken on. It is not only banks that can go bankrupt but also governments: the sovereign debt problem.

The sovereign debt problem is most acute in the Eurozone. It is so because of the way the Eurozone and the euro is constructed. In the colourful, and for once accurate language of William Hague (below), it is 'a burning building with no exits'.



The obvious exit is a devaluation, which is when a country can reduce the value of its currency relative to another so increasing the costs of its imports (it

will buy fewer) and reducing the prices of its exports (it will sell more abroad).

It will improve its balance of trade and allow it to become more competitive. It also has the effect of reducing the value of the debts it holds in its own currency at home relative to others, reducing payments to some of its creditors.

The UK and the US were both able to exercise this option since they issue their own currency. International markets have seen the fall in the value of both the US dollar and the pound sterling relative to other currencies. The Greeks, because they were in the Eurozone, could not.

They were also hampered by a relative lack of competitiveness within the Eurozone and particularly with Germany. The euro has enabled exports from Germany to those in the Southern Eurozone to become cheaper, but these were not matched by the less efficient Southern Eurozone countries, allowing trade balances to be built up in Germany (and other Northern Eurozone countries).

These were recycled through the European banks as loans to the Southern Eurozone countries allowing the Southern Eurozone countries to continue buying from the Northern Eurozone countries.

It is therefore not surprising to find other 'uncompetitive' Eurozone countries in difficulties. In November 2010 the Eurozone and the IMF agreed an 85 billion euro bailout for Ireland and in May 2011 a 78 billion euro bailout for Portugal. Austerity budgets were declared as conditions of the loan in each of them.

In anticipation of others following suit the Eurozone in February 2011 set up another agency, the European Financial Stability Mechanism in addition to the one established the previous year, the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF), to provide jointly up to 500 billion euros in 'emergency funds'.

Later in the year both Spain and Italy faced difficulties in 'rolling-over' their loans, with higher interest rates being demanded by those who were prepared to lend to them.

In this case the European Central Bank (ECB) agreed to buy Italian and Spanish government bonds reducing the cost of the loans (and once again concentrating debt in a public institution allowing private lenders to benefit). In both countries the familiar picture of austerity budgets duly followed.

However, none of this proved sufficient and in October the Eurozone countries had to agree to more than double the ESFS to one trillion euros. In December, under French and German 'strong-arm' persuasion, Eurozone coun-

tries and those not in the Eurozone but with an eventual commitment to enter it, agreed a new inter-governmental treaty (fiscal compact) setting out further mechanisms to stabilise the situation, along with rules to prevent it from arising in the future.

It was this arrangement which Cameron refused to agree to should it involve any changes to the EU treaties. It was eventually signed by 25 of the EU 27 member states at the end of January

The first bailout did not solve the situation in Greece. It made it far worse. The Greek economy has shrunk 16% from its peak when the crisis broke. At the end of 2011 it was in its fifth year of recession, the longest period of recession for any European country since the Second World War.

2012 (excluding the UK and the Czech Republic).

The inevitable consequences of such turmoil were falling rates of growth throughout the Eurozone. At the end of 2011 these sent Italy and the Netherlands into recession to join Greece, Belgium and Portugal. Even Germany witnessed a decline of -0.2% in the last three months of the year compared to the previous quarter.

There were also serious doubts unfolding throughout the EU as to whether any of the measures taken were sufficiently strong enough or in the right direction to resolve any of the issues. This has been brought to a head by the situation in Greece and the conditions of the second bailout announced in February 2012.

### Costs to the Greek people

The first bailout did not solve the situation in Greece. It made it far worse.

The Greek economy has shrunk 16% from its peak when the crisis broke. At the end of 2011 it was in its fifth year of recession, the longest period of recession for any European country since the Second World War. The rate of 'growth' for 2011 was -7%.

The costs this has imposed on the Greek people are starkly recorded in figures on the BBC Europe website. Unemployment is 21% and among young people it is 48%. There has been a 25% increase in homelessness in the last three years with thousands now sleeping in the

streets of Athens.

Some 28% of Greeks are at risk of poverty and social exclusion (the EU's statistical agency puts the figure higher at 33%). One in five of those in poverty cannot afford meals with meat every other day.

And there has been an increase in suicide rates in the country with once the lowest suicide rate in the EU, with 5000 calls to the Athens suicide hotline in 2011, double the figure for 2010.

In addition it is estimated that 150,000 businesses have closed and emigration is at its highest level in 50 years.

In anticipation of a second bailout the Greek Parliament agreed to further harsh measures at the beginning of February bringing tens of thousands onto the streets to protest. These measures included an agreement to sack 150,000 public sector workers by 2015, a cut in the minimum wage of 22%, and a 12% cut in pensions of more than 1300 euros a month.

The total savings made are said to be worth 3.3 billion euros. There is no doubt that there will be more to follow. The terms of the second bailout agreed at a meeting of Eurozone leaders in Brussels on 20 February 2012 ensure this is so.

The principal objective is to reduce the level of Greek debt to 120.5% of GDP by 2020, down from its current figure of 160%. That means an unimaginable eight more years of austerity for the Greek people.

In return Greece will get a loan of 130 billion euros and will have 107 billion euros of bank debt written off. This will enable it to meet repayments of loans due in mid-March without defaulting on its debt.

#### Why not default?

But is default such a bad thing? The experience of Latin America, and specifically of Argentina, Ecuador, Uruguay, Paraguay and the Dominican Republic in the last decade is that annual growth is better after default than before it. Indonesia, Pakistan and Russia show similar experiences.

Default would mean Greece leaving the Eurozone (and possibly suspending its membership of the EU) and re-establishing its own currency, the drachma. It would also be very painful for its citizens for the first few years as experience elsewhere has shown e.g. the Argentine economy fell 11% in the first year but then rapidly began to improve.

But can anything be worse than the misery being imposed now? A default would allow Greece to devalue, become more competitive, and regain control of

its fiscal and monetary policy enabling it to promote job creation and regenerate the economy.

The second bailout, however, is not about rescuing the Greek economy or alleviating the plight of its people. It is about saving the banks and the Eurozone.

The case for this was clearly put by someone in the position to know, Constantine Michalos, President of the Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry. He is reported to have told the BBC on the day the loan was announced: "The funds that are coming in are not staying in Greece, are not being invested in Greece, are not here to help the Greeks out of this crisis. It is simply to repay the banks, so they can retain the

"The funds that are coming in are not staying in Greece, are not being invested in Greece, are not here to help the Greeks out of this crisis. It is simply to repay the banks, so they can retain the balance sheets on the profit side".

**Constantine Michalos**  
President of the Athens  
Chamber of Commerce.

balance sheets on the profit side".

The banks are taking a hit in agreeing to write off part of their debt. The headline figure, including the reduced interest rate, is a loss of 70%. It assumes that most banks will sign up to a deal yet to be concluded. The reality is that the major holders of Greek debt are Greek banks, which have no choice in the matter. Other banks have used their time to lessen their risk.

In the meantime the deal banks are being offered is a better one than default and devaluation.

The second intention of the bailout is to buy time for the Eurozone. The Eurozone ministers who took the decision for the bailout on 20 February were fully aware that the deal they offered would not be enough. They had before them a 'sustainability analysis' leaked to the Financial Times. It spoke of Greece needing "about 245 billion euro in bailout aid, far more than the 170 billion euro which were the 'baseline projections' the Eurozone ministers were using".

These amounts will be impossible to raise. The bailout will fail Greece but will

hold the line for the moment on Portugal, the next Eurozone country most at risk of not being able to meet its debts.

Much of the European press would seem to agree (2). Germany's *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* stated "a bankrupt state has been saved – for now" while the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* expressed caution over whether the debt reduction targets envisioned, or the reforms demanded, could deliver the economic performance expected.

The French paper *Le Monde* noted the bailout was "far from resolving the problems of Greece" while a commentary in the leading business daily in Italy *Il Sole 24 Ore* expressed doubts over whether "this Europe of cold accountants and meticulous lawyers, incapable of seeing beyond even very modest figures and percentages, can ensure the success of Greece's new bailout. The real risks for the survival of the euro come from these false masters".

The 'false masters' have imposed a 'false solution' on the Greek people. It expects them to 'shrink' their economy in order to meet their debts when the only way they could ever meet their debts is to 'grow' the economy. The latest bailout does not allow for this and is likely to reduce the economy further. An economy 25% lower than at its peak has been predicted in the next few years. It is an unprecedented fall and comes close to matching the experience in the US in the Great Depression, which saw a decline of 29%.

The Greek people have already shown a 'fighting spirit' in resisting the cuts imposed on them. The resistance now needs to develop into one rejecting the payment of the debt. The technical and economic solutions are there in default.

The political solutions need the leadership of the Left and the reassertion of the democracy and the sovereignty of the Greek people which are both threatened under the terms of the latest bailout.

And, of course, it needs the solidarity of the European people to reject the 'deformation' of the European ideal of peace and prosperity that has emerged in a European Union now dedicated to the privileging of finance over the wellbeing of its citizens.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. The Eurozone consists of France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Greece, the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, Finland, Luxembourg, Estonia, Cyprus, Malta, Slovakia and Slovenia.

2. BBC News Europe, 'Greece bailout: European press responds', 21 February 2012.

# Imperialism at war in Libya and Syria

On 10th February the Guardian's front page headline read: "In Syria's rebel heartland, it is now a battle to the death."

**PAT TURNBULL shows how a US and British-led aggressive military alliance is now trying to do in Syria what it did in Libya and Iraq.**

The Guardian was playing its particular role of whipping leftist leaning people in behind British imperialism's foreign policy, but propaganda like this is spread all across the British media and may go some way to explain why the British people meekly go along with their ruling class in pursuing one war of aggression after another.

Journalists are drawing parallels between the economic situation now and in the 1930s. But there is another parallel.

The 1930s saw the rise of a group of militarily aggressive capitalist countries – German, Japan and Italy.

Because they believed they could rely on these countries to attack the Soviet Union and thus kill two birds with one stone, the leaders of the other powerful capitalist countries adopted a policy of appeasement.

Hitler was allowed to occupy country after country before any attempt was made to stop him. It was only the invasion of the Soviet Union which spelled his downfall.

Of course, this is where the parallel ends, because there is no Soviet Union.

But there is a bloc of aggressive imperialist powers threatening other countries. The United States is the leader, but Britain is the second most prominent player alongside France. All these are major nuclear powers.

Their Middle East ally, Israel - which is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty but is the region's sole nuclear power - illegally occupies territories of Palestine, Lebanon and Syria, and repeatedly operates outside the most elementary principles of International Law.

Iran, incidentally, is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty – a treaty which also obliges nuclear powers to help non-nuclear countries to develop

the peaceful use of atomic energy.

## Russian and Chinese Veto

Perhaps when Russia and China did not exercise their veto to stop the attack on Libya they genuinely did not predict how fearsome that attack would be.

Perhaps they thought strategically what happened in Libya did not matter, and that this is where the matter would end. Colonel Gaddafi, in wooing acceptance from Britain, had chosen the wrong ally.

Buoyed by their success in Libya, the aggressive imperialist bloc aimed to do the same to Syria. They did their best to bully or persuade Russia and China not to use their veto and burst with rage because the veto was applied.

Russia and China had at least learned from the Libyan experience. Writing on the website 'Russia Today', Yevgeny



Primakov (below), former Russian Prime Minister and Middle East expert, reflected that the resolution on Libya, which Russia and China supported, had practically allowed a military intervention, and Russia and China did not want to be deceived again. The UN resolu-

tion on Syria was aiming to remove another head of state; and while President Assad was being asked to stand down his troops, the armed insurgents were not.

Russia has also a particular interest in Syria. The Daily Telegraph wrote on 8th February: 'Russia is the biggest supplier of weapons to Mr Assad's armed forces, while its warships also use the Syrian port of Tartous. This facility gives the Kremlin its only naval presence in the Mediterranean and its sole military base outside the former Soviet Union.'

Each country which in any way opposes the interests of the aggressive imperialist bloc is under threat – and each one that falls increases the danger of wider war. After Syria comes Iran – the gateway to Russia and China.

The imperialist aggressors did not give up on Syria, despite the veto. The Cuban 'Granma' website pointed out that in Libya and in Syria the armed aggression against the government started in the border areas.

On 18th November Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, was quoted in the Daily Telegraph: "It is not a secret that along with the peaceful demonstrators, there is more and more participation from groups of armed people who have an entirely different agenda from reform and democracy in Syria.

"Their agenda concerns ethnic and tribal interests and these people have received and are continuing to receive weapons in growing amounts from neighbouring countries and they don't particularly hide it. Weapons are being smuggled in through Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, Jordan, and if the opposition uses such methods, this will lead to a full-scale civil war."

Syria has a long border with Turkey. Turkey's plan is to create an armed enclave inside Syria as a basis for attack. They harbour the so-called Syrian Free Army, which was formed only in July last year. On 8th February the Turkish foreign minister flew to Washington for talks with Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State.

Homs, the headquarters of the armed attacks in Syria, is near the border. So is Damascus, the Syrian capital. While the Arab League deputation made its weeks long visit to Syria, President Assad, as requested, withdrew many of his troops from the streets. The insurgents took advantage to seize several suburbs and outlying towns of Damascus. President Assad then had to mobilise his troops to re-take them.

In the words of the Daily Telegraph (30th January): “Brushing off international condemnation, Mr Assad has made a determined effort to reverse gains made by the rebel Free Syrian Army after government troops and tanks were withdrawn from the centre of some cities ... The regime’s return to a strategy of force comes after the rebels seized control of satellite towns on the edge of Damascus, bringing them to within five miles of the city’s historic centre... Thousands of troops yesterday advanced a large mechanised infantry column into the Damascus suburbs of Saqba, Hammouriya and Kfar Batna, as well as the satellite town of Douma.”

No concession made by President Assad has been deemed to be enough. He has promised a referendum on constitutional change in March. A new constitution could pave the way for national elections.

Observers from the Arab League said in January that 4,000 prisoners had been released in line with the Arab League peace plan which President Assad – but not his armed opponents – signed on 19th December 2011.

The tenor of the Syrian insurgents can be measured from an interview published in the Daily Telegraph on 31st January in which Haitham Maleh, a



member of the executive committee of the self-styled Syrian National Council said: “Assad (above) and his family will be killed in Syria, their next steps will be very bloody ... The end for him will be that he is killed like Gaddafi (above).”

From a human point of view the whole scenario is sickening. Not many years ago there were travel articles in the papers about how pleasant Damascus was to visit, how friendly and relaxed the people were.

Riverbend, the Iraqi girl blogger of ‘Baghdad Burning’, finally moved with her family to Syria, where they found a home with many other Iraqis forced out of their native land by the US/British war and occupation. Where are the Iraqi refugees to go next?

On 15th December the US military officially declared an end to its mission in Iraq. On that day Retd Lt Col Nagl, an operations officer with the US 1st Infantry Division stationed in Anbar province, wrote in the Daily Telegraph: “Overwhelmingly the American people would say the war was a mistake, and undeniably the reason we went to war was invalid.” He ended, “... the impact of what has happened there won’t be clear for at least a decade.”

In nine years of war in Iraq more than 100,000 Iraqis have died. So have nearly 4,500 Americans, and 179 British soldiers.

#### Libya after Colonel Gaddafi

Returning to Libya, on 24th October last year the Daily Telegraph wrote: “All was within hours of being lost, until Nato stepped in ... The price has been very high, the Arab world’s highest. About 25,000 Libyans perished before Gaddafi’s death finally stopped the bloodshed, and the destruction of some cities and villages can only be described as post-nuclear.” Russia has called for an independent UN investigation into civilian casualties during the attacks on Libya.

Sparse reports emerge intermittently about what is happening in Libya now. 8,500 prisoners are estimated to be in detention. In January Medecins Sans Frontieres pulled its staff out of detention facilities in Misurata, where 1,500 prisoners are kept, on the basis that they were effectively keeping prisoners alive so the authorities could continue to torture them.

The Daily Telegraph reported (27th January): ‘Some of the 115 inmates that MSF staff treated after torture were beaten so badly they could not stand, had suffered kidney failure and bore signs of electric shock. Hundreds of prisoners, many of them black Africans, also told the organisation they had been victims of torture.’

The human rights watchers who beat the drum for the removal of Gaddafi are now talking about the atrocities committed by the people they backed to replace him.

Nor has the fighting ceased. On 4th January two former Libyan rebel factions were reported as fighting a gun battle in central Tripoli. On 24th January we were told that forces loyal to Colonel

Gaddafi had recaptured Bani Walid. There have been protests against the National Transitional Council in the main cities, including anti-Gaddafi stronghold Benghazi.

Suspicious about what was really going on have turned out to be well founded. On 26th October Qatar revealed that hundreds of its troops had

The human rights watchers who beat the drum for the removal of Gaddafi are now talking about the atrocities committed by the people they backed to replace him.

fought against Gaddafi. Previously Qatar had said only that it had lent the support of its air force.

On 31st October the Daily Telegraph reported that as early as March 2011, the Treasure of Benghazi, a priceless collection of nearly 8,000 ancient coins, had been stolen from a bank vault in Benghazi. This was hushed up at the time.

In Syria the United Nations claims that up to 6,000 lives have been lost in the past ten months. The Syrian government disputes this figure, saying also that 2000 of their army and security personnel have been killed by terrorists. But even if the UN figure is correct, how does it compare with the 25,000 Libyan lives lost in the seven months of the Nato bombing campaign?

#### Britain’s military role

Libya was a testing ground for the British armed forces. The RAF’s Typhoons flew their first combat missions.

The Army launched Apache operations from the sea for the first time. General Sir David Richards, Chief of the Defence Staff, proudly wrote (Daily Telegraph 24.10.11): “This was a truly joint operation by the Armed Forces at the peak of their form.” There has been much gnashing of teeth in the Daily Telegraph about cuts in British defence spending. What is happening, however, is not so much a cut as a re-orientation. If you don’t intend to commit troops on the ground, you don’t need them. Britain has two new state-of-the-art warships. ‘Daring’ and ‘Dauntless’ are Type 45 anti-air warfare destroyers and cost £1 billion each.

On 1st February the Daily Telegraph wrote: ‘The Type 45 destroyer is the most advanced anti-aircraft and anti-ballistic ship in the world ... The Type 45 can track, engage and destroy more targets during a “swarm attack” than five

# Deadly games by the 'humanitarian' West

On 25th February, the Chinese state news agency Xinhua published an article by its analyst Junqing about Western policy on Syria.

**NOAH TUCKER shows the West and its Middle East allies are trying to overthrow Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad.**

Junqing observed, in reference to Western policy on Syria: "most of the Arab countries have begun to realize that the United States and Europe are hiding a dagger behind a smile - in other words, while they appear to be acting out of humanitarian concern, they are actually harboring hegemonistic ambitions."

While several Western media outlets quoted this remark, their commentators did not engage with the substance of the charge - they neither confirmed nor denied it. In the preceding weeks the US and UK media was awash with the strategic interests behind Russia's refusal to agree to the West's position on Syria (on the assumption that China would not feel diplomatically strong enough to exercise its UN Security Council veto alone on the issue, Western opinion formers concentrated on seeking to explain the Russian policy).

The Russian position, they agreed, is derived from its geo-political and economic interests; and we have been reminded repeatedly that Syria is Russia's only Arab ally, Russia has a naval base

in Syria, Russia has lucrative arms contracts with Syria - also that Russia is anxious to maintain a reputation for sticking by its allies, not dropping them when they get into difficulties, hence enhancing the attractiveness to other countries of alliances with Russia.

This useful methodology, of looking at the material and political interests behind policies and actions, rather than the rhetoric of statesmen, is of course only applied to the other side in international disputes, not to 'our own' side.

The presumption that the campaign by NATO countries and their allies for regime change in Syria, is by contrast rooted in altruistic motives - humanitarianism and belief in democracy - is usually conveyed by implication. It is safer that way, as to openly state that proposition would invite people to consider its absurdity. The west purports to promote democracy but its most active allies in the Arab world are the unelected royal rulers of Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The USA also supported Egypt's dictator, Mubarak until that became unten-

able. But the specific facts which refute the assumption that the motivations of the West regarding Syria are primarily ethical are almost unknown in the Western countries, as they have been ignored - to the point of being effectively suppressed - by the mass media.

## Peace plan sabotaged

If the NATO powers, and their Gulf Monarchy allies in the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council), actually wanted a way forward for Syria involving a reduction in violence and a peaceful political process, that was on the table in the form of the original Arab League peace plan. A plan agreed by the Syrian government in principle in October 2011 and in detail in December 2011, but sabotaged by the USA and the GCC by the end of January 2012.

By mid-January, as reported by the Arab League Observer Mission to Syria, that plan was bearing fruit. The Syrian authorities had withdrawn their military units from urban areas and had released several thousand prisoners, and progress was being made towards a situation in which, according to the report of the Mission, the path could be opened towards a process of national dialogue between the opposition and the government. Also, the Observer Mission found the international media presented a distorted account of events in

## Imperialism at war in Libya and Syria

of its predecessor Type 42 destroyers.' It is 'able to hit a target 100 miles away. ...The 8,000 ton destroyer has stealth technology that gives it the radar signature of a fishing vessel.'

'Daring' (pictured) has joined the US Abraham Lincoln Carrier Group in the Gulf. The US group is 'made up of an aircraft carrier with a full complement of fighters, a heavy cruiser and several destroyers' (Daily Telegraph 7th February).

'Dauntless' is set to be sent to the Falklands in late March. Where is the other centre of world resistance to ag-



gressive imperialism? Latin America.

On 10th February, Argentina lodged an official protest at the United Nations

in New York over the dispatching by Britain of warships, planes and a nuclear submarine to the sea round the Falklands. Hector Timerman, Argentina's foreign minister, said: "The UK is using the unjust defence of self-determination for 2,500 inhabitants as an excuse to become a military base."

Argentina said that military bases on the island had been modernised to such an extent that they could be used to attack the whole of South America.

Britain is a key player in the aggressive military alliance.

Syria; it showed the numbers killed by Syrian security forces, as announced by the Syrian opposition and reported in the media, were grossly exaggerated.

Further, they identified the armed opposition as responsible for what would in another context be labelled terrorist, including bomb blasts, killing significant numbers of civilians as well as military personnel.

The mission's observers in Homs concluded that French Journalist Gilles Jacquier was killed by an armed opposition group, not by the Syrian military as officially claimed by the opposition. On January 20th the French newspaper *Le Figaro* published an item giving an account of a Syrian "human rights organisation" representative in Homs shortly after the reporter's death. The spokesperson admitted opposition forces killed Jacquier by mistake along with eight Syrian civilians taking part in a pro-government demonstration in Homs when it was hit by mortar fire from anti-government forces.

A conclusion to be drawn from the Arab League Observer Mission's findings is that the claims by Syrian opposition organisations including the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, broadcast uncritically by the Western media (as well as by Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, the mouthpieces of the royal families of Qatar and Saudi Arabia) on the nature of events, responsibility for killings, and the numbers of casualties, should not be regarded as being closely or even remotely related to the facts.

Navanethem (Navi) Pillay of the UN Human Rights Commission also relies on opposition and emigre sources for cumulative casualty figures which are then cited by the media as 'UN estimates', giving the false impression of an independent corroboration of the figures announced by the opposition.

However, while the Arab League Observer Mission was working in Syria, the UN Human Rights Council ceased giving its estimated death tolls; it may be speculated that this was because the numbers of fatalities claimed by the sources relied on by Ms Pillay bore no relation to the facts as noted by the Arab League observers.

Navi Pillay was a prominent supporter of the campaign for a 'no fly zone' in Libya, ie, the sustained NATO air war against that country.

After it became clear that the forces which were bombed into power by NATO have since been engaged in shocking violation of human rights, including the forced 'removal and dis-



**Hillary Clinton**  
**US Secretary of State**



**Navi Pillay**  
**UN High**  
**Commissioner**  
**for Human rights.**

placement' of many thousands, and the imprisonment, torture and execution of people who are suspected supporters of the former regime or merely black migrant workers, Ms Pillay expressed her disapproval, while claiming, bizarrely, that "the Libyan people have emerged from 42 years of systematic human rights violations".

The Arab League Observer Mission, essential to the League's peace plan, began to be vitriolically attacked in the Western (and GCC) media as soon as it began its work in late December 2011.

An important element in the discrediting in the West of the Observer Mission was the constant repetition by the media of the allegation that the Mission's head Mohammed al-Dabi had previously been associated with human rights abuses by Sudan.

But if that was a factor as far as the most anti-Syrian government members of the Arab League were concerned, it was clearly not a negative one.

Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani heads the Arab League's committee on Syria, and al-Dabi (who had been Sudan's ambassador to Qatar from 2000 to 2004) was appointed as leader of the Observer Mission at a meeting chaired by Qatar.

Sudan voted with the majority in the Arab League for the 'no fly zone' against Libya, and more recently voted to suspend Syria from membership and impose economic sanctions on it. Al-Dabi was evidently trusted by Qatar and the other GCC kingdoms; however, after he arrived in Syria, what he and the other observers saw did not accord with their agenda and that of the West.

On 11th January, Hillary Clinton met the foreign minister of Qatar, after which she gave a public statement that the Observer Mission should be ended; a clear message to the Arab League that the United States required that the peace plan should be terminated.

The USA's public position since August 2011 was that of insistence that

Bashar al-Assad must be removed as president of Syria, but that demand had not been incorporated into the Arab League plan.

The Arab League meeting on 22nd January did not go completely in accordance with US wishes. The meeting ended the peace plan that had been agreed with Syria, by adopting the position that Assad should step down from the presidency (which, inevitably, Syria would refuse to accept).

However, the majority of member states voted to extend the Observer Mission for another month and to provide it with additional resources.

In order to sabotage this decision and ensure firstly the suspension and then the termination of the mission, Saudi Arabia immediately announced that it was pulling out its observers, and was followed in this the next day by Qatar and the other GCC monarchies, then subsequently by the Kingdom of Jordan.

The findings of the mission, presented at the Arab League on 23rd January, were then ignored by Western leaders and Western news outlets. The mission was formally wound up on 12th February, despite proposals by Russia for the mission to resume its work.

### **Massacres of the truth**

The conclusion by the Arab League Observer Mission that the international media are presenting a distorted and exaggerated account of events in Syria is amply demonstrated by the reports on the situation in Homs in the period following Friday 3rd February - which was, not coincidentally, the eve of the UN Security Council meeting which was to vote on a Western-backed draft resolution on Syria.

Following attacks by armed opposition groups on Syrian army checkpoints, and, according to a report in the Jordan Times, mortar fire by anti-government forces against Alawite and Christian areas of the city, the Western media reported, as if it was fact, the Syrian opposition's claim that 217 civilians (reported by the BBC as 'over 200' and by other outlets as 'hundreds') had been killed by the morning of 4th February in an indiscriminate attack by the Syrian army on Homs. This number for the dead, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, had been arrived at by "counting victims whose names it had collected".

By the evening the figure had risen to 285 (Huffington Post), 300 (The Guardian) and even 350 (Sky News), with a detailed number of "at least 337 - with 72 children and 45 women

among the bodies already identified". The figure of 337 killed was also given by the Saudi TV station Al Arabiya.

The next day however, the BBC and others were massively revising down the deaths for that same period, reporting-again on claims by 'activists'- that 55 people (elsewhere phrased as 'dozens of people') had been killed in Homs since the bombardment began on the Friday.

What had happened to those piles of hundreds of dead bodies, whose 'names had been collected' or which had been 'identified' the previous day and provided the precise figures given on the Saturday? Those same discredited organisations were then used as the sources for subsequent daily reports of scores of further civilian deaths in Homs by the Syrian Army; and for the next five days, the media reported each day as having been the bloodiest so far, the bombardment the heaviest.

Without doubt, heavy fighting has been taking place in districts of Homs and there have been significant casualties; though how many of them were fighters on either side, how many were civilians, and how many had been killed by each side is another matter.

But it is difficult not to conclude that the casualty numbers given in the Western media bear little or no connection to the facts, and are instead cooked up to serve a political agenda.

The reports of hundreds of civilians killed by the government side in a 24-hour period, as reported on the Saturday, were very useful given the aim of applying pressure on UN Security Council members, who were to meet late that day, to agree to the motion sponsored by the Western countries and the Arab Gulf monarchies.

But after that motion was defeated by Russia and China, the new media message was that the 'double veto' had given President Assad the green light to step up his 'massacres' of civilians in Homs, so it became important to show that the Syrian army's attacks were becoming more intense and bloody.

Perhaps, it was considered by senior journalists and editors that to start from the figure of up to 350 killed on a daily basis and regularly increase it would be to strain the gullibility of the public.

Many other claims by Syrian 'activists', which in different circumstances would cause suspicion if not outright derision, have also been reported as factual news items in the

Western media.

The story of premature babies dying as electricity was cut off from hospitals, originally concocted with the help of a PR firm in 1990 to mobilise Western support for the plans to attack Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait, was recycled twice- first in Hama in August 2011 (eight babies allegedly died) and then in Homs (18 babies allegedly died) on 9th February.

A third recycling of the tale on February 23rd, stating that seven children had died, again in Hama, when power was cut off to a hospital was broadcast by Al-Jazeera; however by that time it seems that Western news organisations felt that their credibility supplies on that particular theme were running low, and they ignored the story.

### The West and Israel promote sectarianism

Of course, the Syrian conflict has internal causes. Syria's ongoing transition from a centrally-planned economy to market capitalism has increased inequality; youth unemployment is very high and food prices have outstripped wages.

There is also a religious sectarian dimension to the conflict. Despite the sanitised version of the Syrian opposition usually presented in the West, the Guardian reported on 16th February: "One, one, one, Sunni blood is one," a man screamed into a microphone.

Another vented against the Alawite sect. Protesters here say they used to view the Alawites - a heterodox sect aligned to Shia Islam from which Syria's power base is largely drawn - as a privileged elite. Now many openly admit that they see the Alawites through a different prism - that of persecutor; worse, a persecutor acting out both an ancient Islamic rivalry and a contemporary bid

for control of the region on behalf of Iran."

It is currently expedient for US or European strategists neither to admit promoting a sectarian agenda nor to explain the strategic interests on which Western policy on Syria is based.

But fortunately for our understanding, the senior US strategic policy expert Walter Russell Mead wrote an article in April last year, shortly after the NATO air attack on Libya was started, in which he proposed Syria, which he described as a "long term annoyance" for the USA, as the next candidate for a Western military attack.

Mead, a 'centrist' Democrat who supported the invasion of Iraq, is the former Henry Kissinger Fellow at the US Council on Foreign Relations.

His April 2011 article is premised on the keystone of US policy, that American dominance in the Middle East is exercised not only directly but through its client states, chief among them Israel and Saudi Arabia.

By bolstering the power of these states and weakening any challenge to them, the USA shores up its own overall control of the world's major energy exporting region.

Interspersed with the ubiquitous humanitarian cliches and pro-Israeli falsehoods (eg, that what prevents a peace agreement on Palestine is anti-Israel militancy), Mead outlines some of the key motives behind the West's regime change agenda for Syria, including:

- Removing a government that supports pan-Arab nationalism and militant opposition to Israel
- Increasing Western, particularly French, influence in Lebanon
- Enhancing the influence of Saudi Arabia (to this should be added that of Qatar) via a sectarian Sunni agenda

Exemplifying his imperial arrogance, Mead concludes: "Note to aspiring dictators: If France, Saudi Arabia, the US and Israel all have reasons to wish you ill, you should perhaps behave more cautiously than President Assad has recently chosen to do."

By 'caution', Mead means adopting policies acceptable directly to the West, and also to the West's Middle East allies.

### Israeli interest

The Israeli authorities have made certain not to take a prominent position in the campaign for regime change in Syria; were they to do so,



**The family of the late Hafez al-Assad (seated) who became Syria's President in 1971. His son Bashar (second left) succeeded him as President in 2000. The Assad family are Alawite Shia Muslims.**

that could fatally damage support for the campaign in Arab public opinion.

Israeli officials have even sought to muddy the waters by putting it about that they might be concerned about the removal of Assad on the grounds that he is 'the devil they know' or represents stability, or that a refugee crisis caused by regime change in Syria might cause difficulties for Israel.

However, the actual stance of Israel's political and security establishment is not in doubt, as shown in an interview of Efraim Halevy, who was formerly head of Mossad and also of the Israeli National Security Agency, by the Los Angeles Times on 18th February.

The newspaper summarised the interview thus: "Instability in Syria poses stark security risks for Israel, but it also offers a chance to deliver a stinging blow to Iran's regional ambitions and even its nuclear program, Israel's former national security advisor says.

"... Efraim Halevy, who also led the

Mossad spy agency from 1998 to 2002, believes Israel should also focus on exploiting the opportunity to strike Iran politically and diplomatically through the fall of Syrian President Bashar Assad, a staunch ally of Iran ... Halevy, now a leading intelligence analyst here, said Israel should start to look at Iran and Syria as two sides of the same problem."

In addition, Halevy told the L. A. Times: "Iran has invested enormous efforts in trying to secure Syria as a major partner. The Alawite minority is very close to the Shiites in Iran. The Syrian army is mainly based on Alawite command and has units that are purely Alawite. This makes the Iranian investment all the more important. Syria is also the conduit for Iran's arming of the Hezbollah Shiite forces in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza. If the regime falls in Syria and the Iranians are expelled, this is going to be a horrendous defeat for Iran..."

Revealing Israel's interest in promoting sectarian conflict between Arabs, to

deflect from Israel's policy of dispossession and oppression of Arabs, Halevy added: "Israel shouldn't be directly involved for obvious reasons. Once Israel enters the fray, this becomes an Israeli-Arab or Israeli-Muslim confrontation, which deflects attention from the main issues of Sunni-Shiite, and the Shiite repression of a majority in a foreign country.

"Israel should promote through its channels with major powers in the world a dialogue between leaders in Western nations and Russia to try to forge a common policy on Syria, which would entail mutual concessions at the American and Russian level ...

"Israel has certain interests in Syria which have to be taken into account. The ultimate resolution of this crisis should not leave an Iranian presence in Syria with a weakened Assad. I don't want to see Iran having its own finger on the button of Syria's strategic weapons. Israel must make sure this does not happen."

## Walter Russell Mead, from his article 'War in Syria Next?'

From a US point of view, regime change in Damascus has several possible upsides. There is not only the sobering and isolating effect on Iran.

Regime change would likely strengthen the moderate camp among Palestinians (including the more realistic elements in Hamas) and could improve the chances for Israeli-Palestinian peace. It would substantially reduce the chance of new Hezbollah attacks on Israel and could open the door toward a more effective and more democratic government in Lebanon as well as Syria.

There is something else to be gained. The Assads, père et fils, have been among America's most consistent opponents for decades. (Like Gaddafi, they were somewhat more cooperative on anti-Al Qaeda after 9/11; their record on interdicting anti-US fighters crossing into Iraq was more mixed.)

Relying on a hysterical and hypocritical Pan-Arab nationalism, they took every opportunity to frustrate peace negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and did everything they could to whip up reflexive and unthinking anti-Americanism around the region.

They cooperated with the Soviet Union during the Cold War; they work with Iran today, and they apparently have worked with the North Koreans to develop nuclear weapons. The fall of this regime will not only remove a long-term annoyance; it will offer an important intelligence windfall by giving the US access to vast amounts of information about what the bad guys have been up to.

Even though the US and its allies have their hands full with three wars in the region already, I would not discount the possibility of military action to protect civilians if the Syrians continue down their current path.

The list of people who want Assad gone is long and influential. The Saudis have a personal grudge against Syrians for their presumed role in the murder of Rafiq Hariri, a former Lebanese Prime Minister who was very close to the Saudi royals.

More, Syria and the Saudis have been competing for influence in Lebanon for some time, and the Saudis have not been happy to watch the rise of Syria's Shi'ite Hezbollah allies in a country the Saudis think belongs in the Sunni column. Regime change in Syria would knock the keystone out of the "Shi'a Crescent" - the string of countries under Shi'a or Shi'a aligned rule stretching from Iran and Iraq through Syria and Lebanon.

This Crescent haunts the imagination of Sunni Arab strategic thinkers. Some of the fury at the US invasion of Iraq reflected fears that this would give Shi'ites a strategic advantage and offer the Iranians an avenue of influence into the Sunni heartland.

Those fears are not as fanciful as they sometimes sound to American ears. The Syrian connection gives Iran the opportunity to do more than bluster and fume about Israel; by supporting Hezbollah and the Sunni group Hamas Iran is burnishing its credentials as the leader of the Muslim world.

Taking a strong line against Damascus might help the Obama administration repair badly frayed ties with the Saudis, who have been deeply unimpressed by Obama's track record in the Middle East.

The French also have reason to resent Syrian meddling in Lebanon. The French have long had a 'special relationship' with their former colony and many educated Lebanese (especially but not only) Christians speak French and have close personal and business ties with the former imperial power. The marginalization of the Maronite Christians in Lebanon and the reduction of French influence as Syrian power grew did not make many new friends for the Assads on the boulevards of Paris.

Note to aspiring dictators: If France, Saudi Arabia, the US and Israel all have reasons to wish you ill, you should perhaps behave more cautiously than President Assad has recently chosen to do.

# US Imperialism's strategy in the Pacific

The recent announcement that the US is shifting its military priorities - away from the Middle East and Europe towards greater naval and air power in the Pacific - puts down a clear marker to China that the US will not allow it to compete with it as a superpower.

By **SIMON KORNER**

The already formidable US military presence in the Pacific is being beefed up. Currently, Japan is host to the most powerful of the American fleets, and there are US bases in the Philippines, South Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, the Marshall Islands, Guam, Wake and Diego Garcia. The recent \$500 million cuts in military spending specifically exclude the Pacific.

In Australia, 2500 US marines are to be stationed in Darwin: it already has a missile test site in Australia and a navy communication station for nuclear submarines. Now it will gain greater access to Australian military infrastructure, and there will also be more joint exercises and more US equipment stored in Australia.

New Zealand is also forging closer ties with the US, fearing China's influence in Fiji, particularly its naval presence.

The US is offering India aid with nuclear weapons and Star Wars anti missile technology. Boeing Defence, Space

and Security is looking to boost sales of fighter planes, drones, and other high-tech weapons to India, as well as Australia, South Korea, Malaysia and Japan.

On the diplomatic front, the US has reiterated that it would attack China if China attacked the Diaoyu islands, disputed with Japan. Hillary Clinton said: "The US has a national interest in the freedom of navigation and unimpeded lawful commerce."

Naval exercises with Vietnam, allowing the US navy greater access to the South China Sea, are another clear

threat to China, with the US stoking up the smaller east Asian nations against their 'bullying' neighbour. Professor Robert Kaplan, of the rightwing Centre for a New American Security, says that a strong US military presence in the Indo-Pacific region would prevent the Finlandisation by China of Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore.

The US has also begun engaging with Myanmar, a strategically important country that borders on China and also faces onto the Straits of Malacca, one of

as well as lending money and providing education in a country where it has a big Chinese diaspora. The US is making moves to challenge China here.

In a nutshell, the new US strategy is to exaggerate the threat posed by China, build a string of bases encircling it and deploy missiles systems near China against its small force of 20 nuclear missiles.

It is challenging China's control of the South China Sea, where China has important fisheries and through which it brings 80% of its imported energy - particularly oil from Angola, Saudi Arabia and Iran. Its AirSea Battle plan would deny China control of the Taiwan Straits.

In response to the US pressure on its oil supplies, China is building a so-called "string of pearls", friendly ports for its oil tankers, one pearl being Myanmar. It is also building pipelines from Russia and Central Asia to bypass the choke points through which its energy supplies pass, including the straits of Hormuz and the Malacca Strait. Two are up and running but their volume is not nearly enough to supply the 11 billion barrels a day China needs.

Though China has quadrupled its military spending in the last ten years, and overtaken Japan to become the world's second largest economy, it cannot challenge the US militarily.

Its new aircraft carrier is a 1990 Russian ship, half the size of the standard US carrier. Its new missile has yet to be tested, and its submarines still lag far behind America's. Its military spending is one eighth that of the US. It is still a 'big developing nation', according to the Chinese ambassador, with a low per capita GDP, 700 million peasants, and 15% of its population living on under \$1 a day, and over 30% on under \$2 a day. But it is its capacity for growth and the speed of its development that worry the US, whose Pacific strategy sets the stage for future conflict.



the world's busiest shipping lanes - 50,000 ships a year. Myanmar is valuable in itself, rich in oil and gas, coal, tin, tungsten, zinc, lead, copper and precious stones.

The US has voiced concern over Chinese influence in Timor-Leste (East Timor), which has oil and gas fields and commands the Straits of Vetar - a deep water strait submarines pass through from the Pacific to the Indian oceans. China has recently signed a \$378 million contract to build two power plants there, and is selling arms and uniforms,

# Scotland to vote on Independence

The Referendum question is now dominating political discussion in Scotland and looks likely to continue that way for some years.

**JAMES McNEILL argues that there remain many unanswered questions about Scottish independence ahead of the referendum that looks likely to be held in 2014.**

This largely suits those for independence (the Scottish National Party) and those with no appetite to challenge capitalism (Labour Party) or to seriously campaign and take action against the Coalition's (Tory-Liberal Democrat) pro-capitalist austerity measures.

The SNP Scottish Government proposes to hold the Referendum in the autumn of 2014. In their consultation document they propose one question on the ballot paper: "Do you agree that Scotland should be an independent country?", but they are also seeking "views on the inclusion of a second question."

In the consultation paper it is stated that, "The Scottish Government is willing to include a question about further, substantial devolution on the lines of 'devolution max' if there is sufficient support for such a move."

It would appear that the SNP would prefer a second question, to give more powers to the Scottish Government, which would provide a convenient safety net should the independence question be lost.

This could help to continue the drift towards independence, which Tam Dalyell warned about when he described the road to devolution as similar to being on a motorway with no exits.

Of course, the SNP would prefer independence but they are mindful of the Opinion Polls, which consistently show that a majority of Scots are against it.

The SNP Scottish Government in its consultation document is proposing to extend the franchise to include those 16 and 17 year-olds who are on the electoral register on the day of the poll.

Could this be because Opinion polls usually show greater support for independence among young people?

Many people, who have voted SNP in recent years, are not nationalists. Indeed, there is a widely held view among analysts of recent voting patterns that many

to the Scottish Government, would not be such a bad result for them.

They are working on the basis that, as a Scottish Government they are preferable to the Tory Coalition in the UK and with the other parties discredited, they will win the next Scottish election. If they then had more powers it would be another step towards independence.

The issue of a second question has the other parties in disarray. The Scotland Bill, currently going through Westminster, will transfer further fiscal power to the Scottish Parliament.

This Bill closely follows the recommendations of the Calman Commission, the brain-child of the former, short-lived

Scottish Labour leader, Wendy Alexander, which was set up by the Labour, Tory and Liberal Democrat parties. It was intended to kill off independence, like every previous devolution initiative.

The Scotland Bill, the proposals for "devo-max" (all powers to a Scottish Government except Defence and Foreign Affairs) and now "devo-plus" (recently launched by the former Lib Dem leader, Tavish Scott; the former Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament, Tory MSP Alex Fergusson and Labour's Duncan McNeill) come across as knee-jerk, appeasing reactions to the independence bandwagon rather than clearly thought-through principled positions.

During David Cameron's recent visit to Scotland he said that if Scotland voted against independence then the Scottish Parliament would be given more powers.

Alex Salmond's response was to say that the Scottish people would want to know what they were being offered before they voted rather than after. Salmond, although widely regarded as arrogant and bumptious, has a knack of wrong-footing and scoring points off his opponents while seeming to stand up for the Scottish people.

Many supporters of devo-max/devo-plus are against a second question being put in the Referendum so that the question of independence can be settled, like



**SNP First Minister, Alex Salmond MSP and Deputy First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon MSP.**

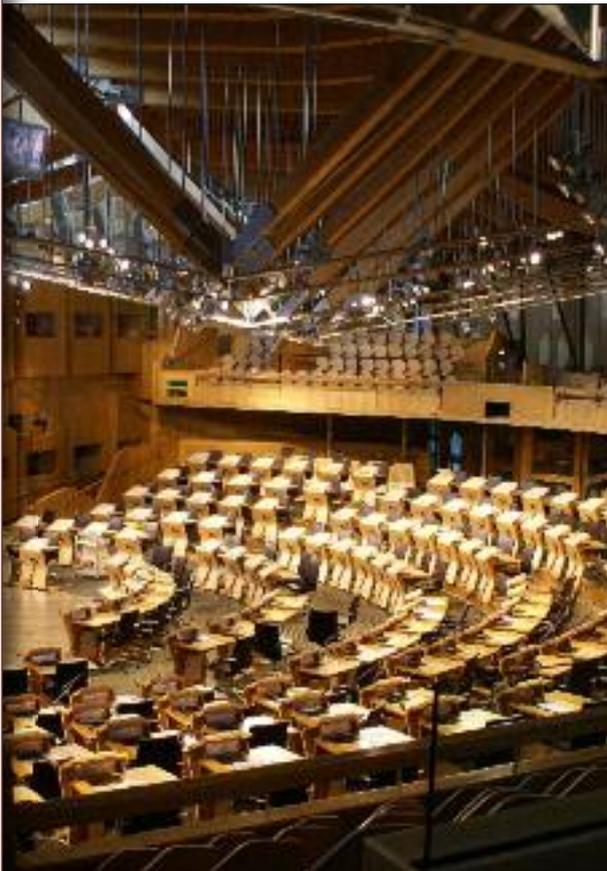
people in Scotland are voting SNP in Scottish elections and Labour in UK elections. This reflects disillusion with Labour and the fact that the Tories are still toxic in Scotland.

The SNP hope that opinion will move in their favour in the debate over the next eighteen months and that there will be a vote for independence.

However, Plan B, a vote in favour of a second question giving more powers



During David Cameron's recent visit to Scotland he said that if Scotland voted against independence then the Scottish Parliament (right) would be given more powers.



that of Proportional Representation, at least for a period of time. Also, there is a lack of clarity as to what might happen if, for example, 51% voted yes to independence and 75% voted yes to the second question: which would be implemented?

Understandably, some on the left see the SNP as better than Labour. Many of those disillusioned with the Labour Party have now joined or support the SNP. In government the SNP have abolished prescription charges, have not charged student fees except for English and non-EU students and are not yet following the Coalition's attacks on the NHS. As a party they were against the Iraq war and are for scrapping Trident.

Although the SNP present themselves as social democratic and to the left of Labour (not difficult), one of their key policies for an independent Scotland (or even just with increased fiscal powers) is to introduce a lower rate of Corporation Tax.

This business-friendly approach has won them some significant capitalist backers. During Rupert Murdoch's recent UK visit to launch the Sun on Sunday he was reported as tweeting in support of Scottish independence and lavishing praise on Salmond.

Two days later as James Murdoch

stepped down as Executive Chairman of News International, his father, Rupert, visited Scotland and met Alex Salmond.

This closeness to Rupert Murdoch belie any serious left (ie socialist) pretensions.

Some on the left see independence as an opportunity to advance a radical left agenda but the weakness of the left will not suddenly be magically solved under independence.

Indeed, the SNP have stated that they will retain the Monarchy so that the Monarch will be Head of State; they will retain sterling as the currency such that the Bank of England will remain in control of interest rates, money supply etc; and they will remain within the European Union.

The reality is that neither independence nor devo-max, or its variations, will deliver a re-distribution of wealth. Perhaps, in the current context of capitalist crisis and working people being made to bear the burden of it, we should be concentrating on how working people can best defend themselves. Neither independence nor devo-max will be a panacea for the ills of capitalism.

The all-UK trade union action on 30 November 2011 showed the strength of the people when united in action and the potential for the future. Would the unity

and organisations of the working people fought for and built up throughout the 300 years of capitalism (broadly the same period as the union) be jeopardised or undermined by independence? This is a key question for trade unionists, socialists and those generally on the left.

### Questions

Many questions at this point in time remain unanswered:

- Would an independent Scotland be able to join the EU as a new country without joining the Eurozone?
- Would an independent Scotland, even if it refused to host Trident, remain in NATO?
- What would happen to the RBS, Halifax/Bank of Scotland debts?
- How much would Scotland depend on oil revenues and how long will the oil last?
- Would Scotland be better or worse off in an independent capitalist Scotland?
- Would an independent Scotland be more vulnerable (like Ireland, Iceland, Greece) in the current capitalist world?
- Would England be saddled with a permanent Tory majority at Westminster to the detriment of working people and how would this affect Scotland and Wales?
- What would be the impact of separation on, for example, the media and the BBC?
- Would solidarity between the working people of Scotland and those of

- Would an independent Scotland, even if it refused to host Trident, remain in NATO?
- Would an independent Scotland make it easier or more difficult to win Socialism?

England, Wales and Ireland be enhanced or lessened by the advent of an independent Scotland?

■ Would an independent Scotland make it easier or more difficult to win socialism?

Some of these questions will feature in the mainstream debate but the questions of how will it assist solidarity among the peoples of the British Isles or how will it affect the advance to socialism are unlikely to get a mention in the main debating forums of the capitalist media.

# African National Congress centenary

100 years  
of struggle

The African National Congress was founded on 8 January 1912. Throughout this year in South Africa and many other countries the centenary is being celebrated.

**ALEX DAVIDSON highlights some of the major milestones in the ANC's 100 years of struggle against colonialism and apartheid.**

The ANC addressed the United Nations General Assembly and Ban Ki Moon, Secretary General, declared, "The ANC is more than a political party. It is a movement and a tangible expression of a vision. The commitment and sacrifice of its members led to the emancipation of a nation from racist colonial rule. This has always been the movement's strength and it is to this vision that the world looks to now. The struggle for freedom, justice, human rights and against racism is a global battle. I see the ANC in the vanguard. Not just in South Africa but throughout the continent and the globe."

The ANC's celebrations began in Mangaung, in the Free State, the birthplace of the movement. Over 100,000 people attended the event including many Heads of State.

The year-long celebrations will take place with monthly events to be spread around all nine Provinces of the country. Each month will highlight a particular theme and the legacy of each of the ANC's Presidents (see table on next page).

The centenary provides an opportunity to reflect on the struggle against colonialism and apartheid as well as debating the issues currently facing ANC and South Africa today.

## Colonialism

Colonialism first began in Africa with the landing of Vasco Da Gama in 1592. The Dutch East India Company established a station in the Cape in 1652 and over the next century Dutch colonists settled there. In 1795 Britain took the Cape from the Dutch. It briefly returned to Dutch control before being regained by Britain in 1806.

British settlers began to arrive in the

Cape from 1820 and gradually established a Cape Colony in which slavery was banned (following anti-slavery campaigns in Britain); the Dutch settlers there began to move north in 1836, a migration which entered Afrikaner mythology as the 'Great Trek'.

From this time onwards the history of South Africa became a three-sided affair. First, the Africans who resisted both Afrikaners and British, at times attempting to use the second against the first; second, the Boers or Afrikaners who founded the Republic of Natal in 1838 and, when that was annexed by the British in 1843, continued northwards to found the Republic of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal; third, the British of the Cape Colony who, for a variety of reasons including the desire to enclose the diamond and gold fields, pursued the Afrikaners, attempting to dispossess them of their Republics.

The economic driving force behind the imperialist's expansion from the Cape was the discovery of gold and diamonds in the 1860's.

The British Imperial government embarked on a policy of expansion in southern Africa. British and colonial troops engaged in war against a number of chiefdoms and overpowered one after the other: the Hlubi in 1873, Gcaleka and Pedi in 1877; Ngqika, Thembu, Mpondo, Griqua and Rolong in 1878. However the African people at every point resisted no matter the huge disparity in arms.

For example, on 22 January 1879 at Isandhlwana the British suffered the greatest single engagement disaster in their military history when the Zulus in open combat killed all but 55 of the 858 European personnel and 500 of their

auxiliaries.

Benjamin Disraeli, British prime Minister (pictured) at the time, said, "The terrible disaster has shaken me to the centre..."

In the midsummer of 1879 when news reached Britain that the young Prince Louis Napoleon, exiled in England, who had volunteered for service with the British in South Africa, had been ambushed and killed by the Zulus while on reconnaissance, Disraeli exclaimed, "A remarkable people these Zulus. They defeat our Generals, they convert our Bishops and now they have settled the fate of a great European dynasty"<sup>(1)</sup>

Following Isandhlwana, the Zulus were defeated by the huge superiority in arms of the British in 1880. The Sotho were also defeated in 1880 and the Ndebele in 1893.

The end of the Wars of Dispossession coincided with the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand. There was a massive inflow of foreign capital, predominantly British, for investment in gold mining.

There was also a large immigration of businessmen and speculators. This disturbed the farming life of the Boers and threatened the continued existence of the Boer Republic.

The Boers had fled from British colonial rule in the Cape and so they would not readily allow the land they had acquired by conquest to fall into the hands of the British. The outcome was the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902.

Of course there were actually three sides in this war: Boers, Britons and Africans. Sol T Plaatje in his fascinating "Mafeking Diary" gave a black man's view of the white man's war. Sol T Plaatje later went on to become Secretary-General of the African National Congress.

The Anglo-Boer war was brought to an end with a Treaty signed in 1902 between Britain and the Boer Republics.



No Africans were consulted about the Treaty.

British imperialism and Boer colonialism found common ground in the destruction of African land ownership and traditional societies; and the enforced exploitation of African labour. This alliance was consolidated by the formation in 1910 of the Union of South Africa

**Scramble for Africa**

In 1880 only the coastal areas of Africa had been colonised but, with what had become known as the ‘Scramble for Africa’, within twenty years the whole of Africa was colonised.

The Entente Cordiale between Britain and France, a Treaty signed in 1904, with its secret agreements, brought an end to this period with the complete division among the imperial powers of the whole continent.

The Entente Cordiale, laid down that the two Powers had “no intention of altering the political status of Morocco”. However, the Treaty carried with it secret clauses envisaging that “force of circumstances” might oblige them to “modify” their policy – and, in that event, France (and Spain) might in effect divide up the territory between them: while France in return renounced all the previous objections to British control of Egypt.<sup>(2)</sup>

In other words, France and Britain had privately entered into a contract with

one another whereby the destruction of the independence and integrity of Morocco was decreed. That is, Morocco, an independent African state of some 219,000 square miles and some 8 million people with great natural wealth, was carved up by France (and Spain) in exchange for untrammelled British control of Egypt.

Thus the Entente Cordiale brought to an end lengthy years of rivalry and military hostility between Britain and France. The imperialists had been busily snatching what they could get in Africa since the ‘Scramble for Africa’ began in 1880. The snarling at one another over the booty had been brought to an end with the complete division among the imperial powers of the whole continent.

(Incidentally, Edward VII, the Queen’s great grandfather, is credited with playing a major role in paving the way for this infamous agreement with his closeness to the French and in particular his state visit to Paris in July 1903.)

**Development of the Apartheid State**

The development of the Union of South Africa, under the Boer Generals Smuts and Botha, brought together an alliance of imperialism, mining monopolies and capitalist large-scale farmers.

The Union adopted a colour-bar constitution. Its first major onslaught on the African’s remaining land rights, the Native Land Bill of 1912, brought home to

Africans the need for a national organisation regardless of tribal origin or language, for an effective struggle against white minority domination.

A clarion call was issued by Pixley ka Seme, “The demon of racialism, the aberrations of the Xhosa-Fingo raids, the animosity that exists between Zulus and the Tsongas, the Basotho and every other Native, must be buried and forgotten...We are one people.”

It was this spirit of African unity that inspired the foundation on 8 January 1912 of the African National Congress. The foundation conference was a most notable occasion in South African history and an outstanding achievement for the times.

In 1912 the ANC sent a delegation to Britain to try and prevent the introduction of the infamous Land Act. Their pleading was ignored by the British.

Sol Plaatje wrote, “The Boers are now ousting the Englishmen from the public scene, and when they have finished with them, they will make a law declaring it a crime for a Native to live in South Africa, unless he is a servant in the employ of a Boer, and from this it will be just one step to complete slavery.”<sup>(3)</sup>

The area set aside for Africans eventually constituted 13% of the country’s total land area.

The Indian people also embarked upon a series of struggles against race discrimination. The Indian community

Month	President	Year	Theme	Province
January	<b>John Dube</b>	1912-17	<b>100 years of Selfless Struggle</b>	Free State
February	<b>Sefako Mapogo</b>	1917-24	<b>From Colonialism to Democratic Dispensation</b>	Western Cape
March	<b>Zacharias R Mahabane</b>	1924-27 and 1936-40	<b>All Shall have Equal Rights</b>	Mpumalanga
April	<b>Josiah Tshanganga Gumede</b>	1927-30	<b>The People Shall Govern</b>	KwaZulu Natal
May	<b>Pixley Kalsaka Seme</b>	1930-36	<b>Workers and the Struggle for Liberation</b>	Eastern Cape
June	<b>Albert Bitini Xuma</b>	1940-49	<b>The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall be Opened</b>	Gauteng
July	<b>Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela</b>	1991-97	<b>Building a Caring Nation</b>	Limpopo
August	<b>James Sebe Moroka</b>	1949-52	<b>Women and the Struggle for Liberation</b>	North West
September	<b>Albert Luthuli</b>	1952-67	<b>African Heritage and Art</b>	Northern Cape
October	<b>Oliver R Tambo</b>	1967-91	<b>International Solidarity</b>	All Provinces with focus on Gauteng
November	<b>Thabo Mbeki</b>	1997-2007	<b>Let a 100 Flowers Blossom</b>	All Provinces with focus on Western Cape
December	<b>Jacob Zuma</b>	2007-	<b>Peace, Friendship and Security</b>	Free State with focus on the Free State

in Natal found themselves increasingly subjected to discrimination. In 1893 a young Indian, Mahatma Gandhi, came to South Africa on legal business. Shocked by the treatment of Natal Indians he began to organise the foundations of the Natal Indian Congress. Contrary to his intentions Gandhi did not leave South Africa until 1914.

The Indians of Natal and the Transvaal responded to the Smuts-Botha government with a series of spectacular passive resistance campaigns and strikes inspired by Gandhi.

From the end of the Boer War, through the formation of the Union of South Africa, and for the following forty years, segregation of the races continued.

### **Apartheid: What it meant**

The National Party came to power in 1948, largely on an agenda set by the Broederbond. A secret society, the Broederbond was established in 1918 composed entirely of Afrikaners devoted to the aim of recapturing South Africa for the Boers.

The National Party government designed a multitude of legislation which created the system of apartheid.

In a report submitted to the General Assembly in 1953, the United Nations Commission on the Racial Situation in the Union of South Africa condensed the main points of official statements which seemed best to express the conception and plans of the Nationalist Government, which at that time was beginning to define and elaborate what it meant by apartheid as follows:

“One of the most striking phenomena of the world in which we live is the diversity of human races. They were created separate. The separation must be maintained even when economic or other circumstances have brought about a certain mingling of racial groups. With this aim in view, the sense of colour must be developed amongst the Whites in such a way that the purity of the race is maintained.

“As the heir to Western Christian Civilisation, the white race in South Africa has a twofold mission to fulfil: one with respect to the other members of the community of nations of Western Christian Civilisation, the other with respect to the coloured races with which events have brought it in contact and which are at a very primitive or backward stage of civilisation.

“Towards the former it owes a duty to maintain fully and to perpetuate its ‘character as a partner in the Western Christian Civilisation’. It is the mission of the white races living in South Africa to protect that civilisation ‘against attacks

from outside and subversion from within’. In other words, though representing a numerical minority, it must at any cost safeguard its position of domination over the coloured races. Naturally therefore it looks askance at any dogma of civic equality...

“This position of domination imposes as a corollary a strict duty of justice and Christian ‘trusteeship’ towards the non-White...

The best service therefore that the Whites can render to the non-Whites is to separate them from the white population, to consider them as distinct social and economic groups, and to see that, as far as possible, they live in territories, zones, or ‘locations’ assigned to them as their own...”<sup>(4)</sup>

Apartheid was a system which maximised profits by regulating labour in such a way that it, all but, reduced it to slavery.

“But Apartheid at its core, is not so much a condition as an engine. Beneath the race laws lies a huge economic machine which, far more than white-only bathing beaches, preserves white domination and prosperity and minimises their political cost. The engine, designed by Hendrik Verwoerd a generation ago, is a labour pump. It sucks in cheap black labour, pours it through the wheels of industry and agriculture, and then expels it to distant pools of unemployment until required again ... its name is ‘influx control’.”<sup>(5)</sup>

The new government opened its programme of trampling human rights underfoot by passing the ‘Suppression of Communism’ Act in 1950. This Act carried clauses of such a sweeping nature that everyone’s right to free association and expression, not just Communists, was removed. ANC, in acknowledging this, along with the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation and the Indian Congress launched the Defiance Campaign on 26 June 1952.

### **Defiance**

The Defiance Campaign saw 8326 people volunteering to defy unjust laws and



thus court imprisonment. Nelson Mandela was appointed ‘Volunteer-in-Chief’.

The Congress of the People met in 1955 at Kliptown to discuss and adopt an all-embracing policy document, ‘The Freedom Charter’. Some three thousand delegates came from all over South Africa to discuss and adopt this historic document.

The Apartheid state reacted to this historic event by preparing a massive attack on the leadership of the movement. In 1956 in a dawn raid they arrested 156 leaders of the Congress movement. The trial became known as “The Treason Trial” and ran for four years until 1960 before the accused were released.

Far from breaking the spirit of the people the years of the Treason Trial saw an upsurge of mass activity. Bus boycotts, demonstrations and numerous strikes took place.

However, hardly one of the Treason Trial accused escaped punishment in the 1960s. Some were placed under house arrest. Many were jailed for life and other long-term sentences. Others were forced into exile. Many were detained and tortured, some murdered.

### **Apartheid State Reaction**

On 21 March 1960, the massacre of peaceful protesters against the Pass Laws took place at Sharpeville. This was a turning point in the struggle against apartheid.

There was an international outcry and the struggle inside South Africa reached new heights. A Day of Mourning and a general stay-away from work was held on 28 March. Thousands upon thousands heeded the call of the ANC. A State of Emergency was declared by the Government.

It was in the aftermath of Sharpeville and the vicious state repression, which followed that led to ANC taking the decision to establish an armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), and to launch the armed struggle. Mandela later said, “One of the lessons I took away from the failed anti-removal campaign was that it is the oppressor who defines the nature of the struggle: in the end, we would have no alternative but to resort to armed struggle.”<sup>(6)</sup>

The armed struggle was launched on 16 December 1961.

In 1962 key leaders were arrested at Lilliesleaf Farm, Rivonia and put on trial for treason. The Rivonia trialists all received life-sentences. Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu (pictured), Govan Mbeki, Andrew Mlangeni, Raymond Mhlabi and Elias Motsoaledi were sent to Robben Island and Denis Goldberg (pic-



tured), as the only white, to Central Pretoria prison. Even prisons were subject to the absurd laws of apartheid.

The movement had been decapitated. It was a huge set-back. The situation for the black majority now entered dark days.

The apartheid regime unleashed a furious period of repression, which included forced removals of millions of people. The minimum estimate is 3.5 million between 1960 and 1983. This figure does not include those people arrested or imprisoned under the dreaded Pass Laws. Every year more than 100,000 Africans were arrested under the Pass Laws; the number peaked at 381,858 in the year 1975-76.<sup>(7)</sup>

### 1970s Resurgence

However, despite the severe repression of the 1960s there was a resurgence of the struggle in the 1970s. This was encouraged in part by developments in other parts of southern Africa.

The overthrow of Portuguese fascism and colonialism in 1974 led to the liberation of Angola and Mozambique.

South African armed forces, in collusion with the United States, invaded Angola in an attempt to prevent the victory of the Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). The Angolan government asked the Cuban Government for assistance and in a historic battle at Cuito

A whole new generation joined the struggle. Many of them left the country to join the ANC and the armed struggle. The ANC, led from exile by Oliver Tambo, had worked hard at developing the underground movement inside South Africa as well as developing international solidarity.

Cuito the South Africans were defeated by a combined Angolan and Cuban force and the Boers had to retreat.

In 1976 the school students of Soweto revolted against being taught in Afrikaans. A whole new generation joined the struggle. Many of them left the country to join the ANC and the armed struggle. The ANC, led from exile by Oliver Tambo, had worked hard at developing the underground movement inside South Africa as well as developing international solidarity.

By 1979 Zimbabwe, after a lengthy armed struggle, won its independence.

With the defeat of Portuguese colonialism and the white settler regime in Rhodesia, Apartheid South Africa was isolated in southern Africa and no longer had friendly neighbours. The Front-Line States became important to the struggle and with that, they also became targets of the Apartheid regime.

### 1980s: The Development of the Mass Democratic Movement

The 1980s saw the development of the Mass Democratic Movement inside South Africa. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was born in 1985 as the heir to the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU); and the United Democratic Front (UDF) was created as an umbrella organisation of many hundreds of people's organisations, uniting trade unions, community organisations, churches and student's organisations.

The international solidarity movement stepped up its activities and especially in reaction to the Apartheid regime's declaration of a State of Emergency in 1985.

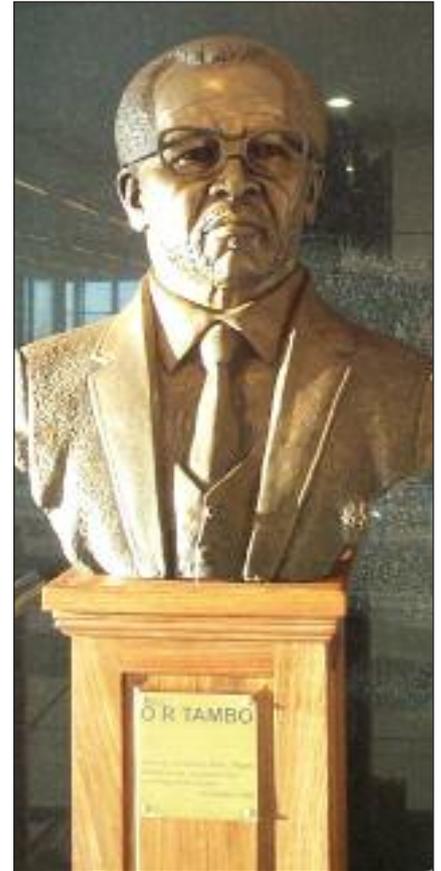
ANC launched the campaign to 'Make South Africa ungovernable and unworkable'. The campaign to release Nelson Mandela and all political prisoners reached new heights.

### Sanctions

ANC's President Albert Luthuli had called for a boycott of South Africa by the British people in 1959. This led to the formation of the Boycott Movement, which soon became the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Britain.

The ANC's lengthy campaign for sanctions against the Apartheid regime eventually gained the support of the overwhelming majority of countries at the United Nations with the notable exceptions of Britain, the USA and Israel.

International sanctions were imposed on South Africa with Mrs Thatcher, British Prime Minister leading the resistance to them. The Commonwealth Heads Summit in 1985 saw one of the



**Bust of Oliver Tambo at the OR Tambo International Airport, Johannesburg**

most public displays of her opposition to sanctions.

"At the Press Conference after the summit, I described with complete accuracy, the concessions I had made on sanctions as 'tiny', which enraged the left...But I did not believe in sanctions and I was not prepared to justify them."<sup>(8)</sup>

"The international pressure on South Africa continued to mount. President Reagan, who was as opposed to economic sanctions as I was, introduced a limited package of sanctions to forestall pressure from Congress."<sup>(9)</sup>

In 1988 the campaign for the release of Mandela at the age of 70 was launched. A concert was held at London's Wembley Stadium and watched by millions around the world on television. The next day, 12 June 1988, 25 marchers, each representing one year spent in prison by Nelson Mandela, set off from Glasgow to march to London. The enormous rally in Glasgow Green, which launched the march to London, was addressed by the ANC's Oliver Tambo and when the march reached London a huge demonstration assembled to hear Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

### 1990: Release of Mandela and ANC victory

On 11 February 1990, Nelson Mandela was finally released. Millions of people celebrated throughout the world. The African National Congress, the South African Communist Party and other organisations were unbanned.

Negotiations between the Government and the ANC began in South Africa and a very difficult period ensued.

The Apartheid regime used, what came to be known as the Third Force, to foment divisions among the black majority and to prevent elections. The Third Force carried out murders of innocents to create an atmosphere of tension and to encourage so-called 'black-on-black violence'. The negotiations had still not produced an election date when Chris Hani, General Secretary of the SACP and a very popular ANC leader, was assassinated.

A huge outpouring of grief was unleashed throughout South Africa. The Apartheid regime tried to use the situation to their advantage in an attempt to cling onto power but, it was the ANC, who organised and channelled this vast outburst of emotion and anger into pressure to fix an election date. An election date of 27 April 1994 was eventually agreed.

The African National Congress won a huge election victory and Nelson Mandela was elected President. Colonialism and apartheid had been brought to an end.

The struggle and huge sacrifices over generations of the South African people – led by the African National Congress, grounded in the unity of the Triple Alliance<sup>(10)</sup> and allied to international solidarity – had brought about the end of apartheid.

### Post-1994

From 1994 the ANC-led government recorded many notable achievements: tens of thousands of people gained access to clean water, electricity, housing and education.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission exposed the old regime and its barbarously inhumane policies and practices. It was a 'crime against humanity' as the United Nations had described it. The end of apartheid saw dignity re-



1992: FW De Klerk and Nelson Mandela

turned to the majority of the people.

However, the legacy of three hundred years of colonialism and apartheid still hung heavily. Mass unemployment, great poverty and huge inequalities were inherited by the ANC government.

Differences with the Mbeki government's policies, especially its economic policies, began to emerge within the Tripartite Alliance. These came to a head at the ANC Polokwane conference in December 2007 and resulted in a change of leadership and the re-call of Thabo Mbeki as President of the Republic.

ANC went on to win the 2009 election and Jacob Zuma (pictured below) became President of the Republic. In President Zuma's January 2012 State of the Nation Address he identified unemployment, poverty and inequality as the central issues to be tackled.

Other issues, such as HIV/AIDS and corruption, hinder and undermine steps



to deal with the key issues. The ANC-led government has a programme to fight corruption and COSATU has established "Corruption Watch", which has been welcomed by ANC.

There are different approaches and perspectives as to how to deal with the central issues of unemployment, poverty and inequality. For example, the ANC Youth League is calling for the nationalisation of the mines. This is rejected by others who refer to the fact that it would cost some 1 trillion rand in compensation. It is also seen by others as a way of bailing-out those who, through the Black Economic Empowerment programme, took shares, which have now lost money. The ANC National Conference commissioned a research report,

which has been rejected by the ANCYL.

This and other debates will go forward to the ANC policy conference on 26-29 June and onto December at the national elective conference when the leadership will be elected.

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# Venezuela's welfare vs US Imperialism

**“The economy is worthless if it doesn't have as its objective the welfare of human beings”, Venezuelan Finance and Planning Minister, Jorge Giordani.<sup>(1)</sup>**

## **FRIEDA PARK reports on the stunning progress made since Hugo Chavez's election over 13 years ago.**

“How and when - not whether - basic programmes of social protection will be cut back is now back on the table. The basic solvency of too many capitalist states seems in question.” Lawrence Summers Former US Treasury Secretary writing in the Financial Times

Series “Capitalism in Crisis”<sup>(2)</sup>

These two quotes summarise what is at stake in this coming October's Presidential Election in Venezuela – a society increasingly run for and by the people versus the interests of private profit and capitalism.

It is 20 years since Hugo Chávez first came to prominence as the leader of a failed military rebellion against the reactionary government of the time. This was not an isolated adventurist action as Chávez subsequent electoral victories demonstrate.

He and others had for some time developed a clandestine leftist movement within the armed forces which they wished to ally to popular anger at the suffering caused by the imposition of neo-liberal economic policies at the behest of the United States.

Indeed three years before the

## **Progress in social, economic and human rights under Hugo Chavez**

- Poverty has been halved. Venezuela reached the UN millennium goals for reducing poverty early, whilst most of the rest of the world is on the verge of giving up the attempt.
- Venezuela is the least unequal country in Latin America.
- A national health service has been established covering 20m people. Estimates are that it has saved as many as 292 000 lives; life expectancy has increased from 72.4 years in 2000 to 73.9 in 2011; and infant mortality rate has dropped by a third in the same period (from 21.4 per 1,000 live births in 1999 to 13.7 per 1,000).
- In recent years state-subsidised food networks and stores across the country have been developed and agricultural production has surged by 44 percent. This has dramatically improved the quantity and cost of food.
- Children have grown taller - from 1998 to 2009 there was an increase of 1.8 cm in the height of children aged 7 years. In contrast the increase in the preceding 8 years was only 8 mm.



■ Venezuela is now committed to provide a high quality, free higher education to all, irrespective of wealth or background. This has resulted in an 83% enrolment rate in higher education institutions - the second highest on the continent and the fifth highest worldwide.

Venezuela had around 93% enrolment in Primary school in 2007, up from 87% in 1999, and this is still increasing. UNESCO's Education Development Index shows Venezuela continuing to rise, ranking Venezuela 59th of 128 countries up from 64th in 2007. It has also been affirmed that Venezuela qualifies for the title of “Territory Free of Illiteracy” to UNESCO standards, with over a million having learnt to read and write for the first time since the socialist government came to power.

■ Venezuela has the highest index of gender equality in the continent

Now

■ The economy grew by 4% in 2011, double what was forecast

■ Construction of new homes in 2011 grew by 10% with 140,000 being built.

■ Unemployment is at a historic low of 6.2%

■ Venezuela has completed the repatriation of most of its gold reserves, which arrived to jubilant scenes in Caracas under the slogan “The Central Bank of Venezuela is with the People”

attempted coup an estimated 3000 people were massacred during a spontaneous up-rising in Caracas known as the Caracazo. After serving 2 years in prison, Chávez continued the struggle politically, developing a new political movement and broad alliances across the left and in popular movements, leading ultimately to his victory in the presidential election of December 1998.

The achievements of successive governments elected over the last 13 years have been stunning.

The continued expansion of social programmes - even with the global capitalist crisis - demonstrates that the working class does not need to pay the price of capitalism's failure and can itself create a better world.

Whilst here in Britain, like some ancient religious practice, we are expected to offer sacrifices of pensions, jobs, homes, education etc., to placate the angry god of capitalism, people in Venezuela have a 21st century response and are shaping their future in their own interests.

#### Anti-Chavez Opposition

With such a stark contrast it is tempting to think that the choice of the Venezuelan people will be easy between Hugo Chávez and his right-wing opponent Henrique Capriles (pictured), especially since Chávez and his supporters have won 14 national elections since they first came to power.



However it will not be as simple as that. Although great swathes of the population have been lifted out of poverty and been brought into political processes that they were once alienated from there are powerful forces on the other side, who literally will stop at nothing to try to defeat Chávez.

The internal opposition, the wealthy and powerful capitalist class in Venezuela is much more united than it has been in the past. It still controls major parts of the economy, including virulently anti-Chávez media outlets. This enables them to propagate all kinds of lies and disinformation and to do economic damage to the country.

The USA is pouring millions of dollars into Venezuela to support opposition groups. The inappropriately named National Endowment for Democracy (NED) alone spent \$1.6 million in Venezuela in 2010. The bulk of NED funding went to the Interna-

tional Republican Institute which has a relationship with the US Republican party and which publicly applauded the 2002 attempted coup against President Chavez in Venezuela.<sup>(3)</sup> (The coup was, of course defeated by popular protests and the sections of the army that remained loyal, with Chávez being returned to power.)

Henrique Capriles party, Justice First, has been a major recipient of US funding which helped it in its early years by spending \$340,000 training its members and other opposition forces in "external party communication and coalition building".<sup>(4)</sup>

Capriles and the right are making a concerted effort to distance themselves from the anti-democratic actions they were involved in in the past, notably the failed coup. Capriles was at that time Mayor of Baruta where the Cuban Embassy was located.

During the coup members of Chávez government sought refuge there, leading to it being attacked by the right who cut off water and electricity and threatened to storm the building. Instead of aiding the besieged embassy as requested, Mayor Capriles broke into the grounds and threatened the Ambassador.

In a further effort to disown their anti-democratic past, the right-wing coalition, the Democratic Unity Coalition (MUD), decided to chose their candidate through an open vote in a primary system.

This has been reported here as a major victory for the opposition, with Capriles receiving overwhelming endorsement and 3 million people allegedly taking part. To attempt to give it more legitimacy the vote was conducted under the auspices of Venezuela's National Electoral Council, however there were significant departures from the usual safeguards put in place to prevent electoral fraud.

Questions have been raised about whether the number of people who allegedly voted could practically have done so. Following complaints from within the opposition itself about the electoral process, a Supreme Court Justice order instructed the MUD to hand over the electoral records. The MUD not only refused to do this, but the records were actually burnt.<sup>(5)</sup>

In this light, the right's attempt to shed its anti-democratic past is clearly nothing more than window-dressing. So also is Capriles attempt to position himself as a vaguely social-democratic centrist.

Capriles comes from a wealthy family of business people and he is deeply embedded in the fabric of the old, pro-US oligarchy whose interests he has to heart.

For a flavour of what the current



front-runners for the Republican candidacy think about Venezuela here are a couple of quotes. During the recent Miami primary Mitt Romney denounced Fidel Castro's (pictured above) and Hugo Chávez's influence on South America. He said they represented "a true threat for our continent" and stated that he would "punish those who are following" these two leaders should he become president.

Not to be out-done Newt Gingrich invoked the cold war leadership of Reagan, Thatcher and Pope John Paul II and recommended that their tactics in over-

The continued expansion of social programmes - even with the global capitalist crisis - demonstrates that the working class does not need to pay the price of capitalism's failure and can itself create a better world.

throwing socialist and progressive governments in the 1980s be applied in Venezuela.

He said: "...the three of them brought moral pressure, psychological pressure, information pressure, economic pressure, covert assistance."<sup>(6)</sup> Not that Obama has been a friend to Venezuela - quite the reverse. The lead up to the US Presidential election has seen a stepping up of hostile actions, such as the recent expulsion of the Venezuelan Consul in Miami over a fake cyber-terrorism plot.

If previous interventions in South America and other places are anything to go by then funding will not just go to the obviously right-wing and anti-demo-

Continued on page 26

# Nuclear power after Fukushima tsunami

“People shouldn’t be allowed to vote on things they don’t understand”, my teenage daughter commented.

**GERRY MARTIN looks at the problems associated with nuclear power and concludes it remains the best option to replace greenhouse emitting fossil fuels. Gerry works for the nuclear industry and has first-hand experience at several nuclear facilities, including those at Sellafield and Chernobyl.**

We were watching the results from the Italian referendum of June last year, which, by a decisive 94%, endorsed the phasing out of nuclear energy.

After a diet of daily bulletins on the struggle to control the runaway nuclear power plant at Fukushima it was not surprising that the popular mood has shifted against atomic energy.

A Gallup poll of world opinion found 49% holding a favourable view about nuclear energy after the Japanese earthquake compared to 57% beforehand (with 43% now holding an unfavourable view, up from 32%). The only countries where there are clear majorities favouring nuclear are China, South Korea, Vietnam, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France and Nigeria.<sup>(1)</sup>

## Down but not out

In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel, herself a scientist and supporter of atomic energy, quickly realised that nuclear power plants (NPPs) posed too great a political risk and with cross-party support reversed course on energy policy.

Having seen the disruption caused at Fukushima, the question became whether the country could afford to evacuate Hamburg in the event of a release of radioactive particles from the nearby Brokdorf NPP. The German government, along with the Austrians, Swiss, Swedes and Italians, has set a course for an electricity supply system built around renewable sources. Even with these countries phasing out nuclear, however, there is still likely to be an expansion in the numbers of NPPs worldwide.

Nuclear is the favoured technology for the transition to a low carbon world. By 2030, 4.9 billion people will be living in

cities, equal to nearly 60% of the world’s population of 8.3 billion.<sup>(2)</sup>

There will be 500 cities with more than a million residents. In India, 34% of people still have no power supply (compared with 99 per cent coverage in China); in Sub-Saharan Africa, 69% of people lack electricity.<sup>(3)</sup>

Meeting these needs without contributing to global warming will require a combination of nuclear and hydroelectricity, and decent, well-insulated housing. There is enormous potential for developing hydro in Africa, but this has not deterred countries like South Africa from examining the nuclear option.

Energy Minister Dipuo Peters announced in May 2011 that “nuclear and renewable energy will have a significant contribution in (South Africa’s) anticipated generation mix”.

He recognised that Africa could experience earthquakes and tsunamis and agreed that nuclear was “not a quick-fix solution”, but the issue concerned “emergency preparedness” not the abandonment of atomic energy.<sup>(4)</sup> Other major developing countries planning to go nuclear include Brazil, Venezuela, Egypt, Nigeria, India, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam.

Under the latest projections by the International Energy Agency, nuclear generated electricity will come close to doubling from 2630 TWh in 2010 to 4520 TWh by 2030. Renewable sources will go up substantially too, especially hydroelectric power.

Even so, the use of fossil fuels, like coal and gas, will also increase, meaning that emissions of greenhouse gases from power generation, such as carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) will rise substantially worldwide.

As the accompanying table shows (see page 25), the share of electricity generated in India and China will jump from 8% of total world output in 1990 to 35% in 2030, whereas the share from industrialised countries will fall from 82% to 47%. In fact, without more capacity coming from nuclear and renewables there is no chance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Nuclear generated electricity is more expensive than power from gas or coal, but more efficient than wind or solar power. Most renewable sources of energy are intermittent, and they need four or five times the capacity to generate a kilowatt from wind or solar, compared to nuclear; hydroelectricity is also less efficient.<sup>(5)</sup>

Even though nuclear and hydro can deliver the power that growing industrial economies need, they are much less popular than wind and solar. A long running campaign by environmentalists concerned at the impact of dams on the livelihoods of local people living in the valley that will be flooded has slowed down the development of hydroelectric schemes.

China was subjected to a great deal of criticism for building the Three Gorges scheme. There remains capacity for additional hydroelectric schemes in the Alps, so Austria, Germany, Switzerland and Italy may choose this option in order to replace their nuclear capacity, though there could well be opposition.

The Himalayan and Ethiopian highlands have great potential, but it is unrealistic to expect renewables alone to replace coal and gas over the coming decades.

Wind and wave power cannot be relied upon so the generating system has to call on gas or coal-fired plant as back-up when the wind is light or the waves and currents are weak.

Unfortunately the Greens never explain that a renewables only strategy is unfeasible and would in practice perpetuate the fossil-fuel share in electricity supply. The reason why the Greens cannot admit the problem is that they are often also opposed to nuclear power on safety grounds.

Accidents will happen but are they catastrophes?

The biggest obstacle to expanding nuclear is the perception that it is dangerous. The nuclear industry cannot guarantee complete safety. While each major accident has led to improvements the technology will always carry some risk.

The Three Mile Island incident in 1979 encouraged more advanced reactor designs to minimise the ‘Homer Simpson’ problem. Reactor operators were overwhelmed when everything started going wrong at once, so control rooms were simplified and passive features – not requiring human intervention – built into the designs, so that gravity and pressure differences force reactors to shut themselves down.

After the Chernobyl disaster, more stringent oversight was introduced by government regulators and nuclear power companies formed an association to exchange safety experience and improve staff training. Russia also realised that a prompt and firm emergency response had to be mobilised rapidly and established a Ministry for Emergencies to take charge when major accidents or natural disasters happened.

At Fukushima it is clear that although the power company TEPCO and the government did the right things, their handling of the emergency response was sometimes protracted and indecisive.

It took them nearly a week to get on top of the situation, with the local fire brigade and police left to manage as best they could, without support from the army until the third day, and all the while TEPCO’s boss refused to come out of his office.

In comparison, British Petroleum and the US government handled the Gulf of Mexico blow-out effectively, putting a coastguard admiral on the spot to take charge.

Luckily, unlike Chernobyl, there should be no casualties from Fukushima. The local population of 100,000 was evacuated quickly and the emergency workers’ exposure to radiation was limited. TEPCO have said that of the 3,700 workers involved in managing the emergency, nine have received doses over the authorised limit for radiation exposure, though not all contract staff appear to have been monitored adequately.<sup>(6)</sup>

At Chernobyl the number four reactor caught fire and released large quantities of radioactive particles over the course of 15 days. The total radioactivity released at Chernobyl amounted to 5,200 PBq, while that from Fukushima is estimated at 570 PBq.<sup>(7)</sup>

If radioactive particles are ingested they can damage cells and stimulate cancers.

Radioactive iodine, which was present in the milk many people in the USSR were permitted to consume in the early stage of the Chernobyl disaster, harms the thyroid gland and is especially dangerous for children.

There have been 6,848 cases of thyroid cancer among young children, of which, Professor Gerry Thomas of Imperial College says, 50 may prove fatal. Amongst the workers who liquidated the reactor fire, 134 suffered acute radiation syndrome; of these victims, 28 died soon afterwards and 19 later, while the remainder have suffered non-fatal conditions, including leukaemia.<sup>(8)</sup>

There is no evidence of further medical harm, although the International Atomic Energy Agency and the World Health Or-

gans of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. It is not known how many died at the time, with estimates ranging from 150,000 to 250,000, but there were around 650,000 hibakusha, or survivors, with health books that entitled them to free medical check-ups and services.

About 230,000 are alive today but only one per cent of them are accepted by the Japanese government as having illnesses caused by radiation. Other independent epidemiological researchers calculate that the number of cancers attributable to radiation is less than one thousand, and only some of these may prove fatal. Excess deaths from leukaemia numbered 98 out of 315 fatal cases so far.<sup>(11)</sup>

Under international rules (overseen by the WHO), employers are allowed to expose workers to radioactive sources provided they maintain a system for monitoring and controlling that exposure.

The hourly/daily dose permitted is set in relation to a worker’s potential exposure over a working lifetime. That lifetime dose is set very low (compared to his or her exposure to radiation from natural and medical sources, which in the UK stands at 2.7 mSv per person per year).<sup>(12)</sup>

So when, in an emergency, the permitted threshold daily/hourly dose is raised, as it was at Fukushima from the normal limit of 50 mSv to 250 mSv, this does not imply that the worker is taking a greater risk. Later on, his or her regular exposure will be lowered to make sure that the lifetime dose is never exceeded.

The rationale also applies to members of the public. A nuclear installation is not allowed to subject its neighbours to a dose of more than 1 mSv a year. This low level is set not because nuclear workers are paid to accept a bigger risk.

The reason is because there is no general system to monitor people’s radiation exposure. So if people are evacuated as a precautionary measure, they are then monitored over the rest of their lives to make sure they are never exposed to higher than normal doses.

The health risk to the 80,000 remaining Fukushima evacuees is the same as it was before the accident. In other words, the evacuees are not thought to have suffered any physical harm, except for the psychological trauma the evacuation itself caused.

The evacuation was necessary while the reactors were not under control but now that they are shut down there should be no obstacle to their returning home. A small number of areas must be decontaminated as the continuing exposure



ganisation issued a press release in 2005 stating that up to four thousand people (out of 600,000 who suffered abnormal exposure) may die earlier than they otherwise might as a result of Chernobyl.<sup>(9)</sup>

But this estimate has never been substantiated properly and was apparently issued on the instruction of Mohamed El-Baradei, the IAEA director general, against the advice of his scientific staff.

The Chernobyl accident remains the most serious nuclear incident so far and its consequences should not be played down. Nevertheless it is clear, in the words of Green campaigner George Monbiot, that the public has been “misled” about the harm from radiation: “the claims (the anti-nuclear movement) made are ungrounded in science, unsupported when challenged and wildly wrong.”<sup>(10)</sup>

Not mentioned by Monbiot but still instructive, is the evidence from the sur-

**Electricity Generation Forecast** (in Tera Watt hours)

	1990	2008	2015	2030
<b>Developed Capitalist Countries*</b> (TWh)	7,560	10,673	11,290	12,694
Fossil fuels (%)	59.6	62.1	57.5	47.6
Nuclear power (%)	22.8	21.3	21.5	22.6
Hydroelectric power (%)	15.5	12.3	12.4	12.2
Other renewable sources (%)	2.1	4.3	8.6	17.6
<b>Former Socialist Countries**</b> (TWh)	2,163	1,922	2,110	2,585
Fossil fuels (%)	74.5	66.4	66.0	58.8
Nuclear power (%)	10.7	15.7	15.3	18.2
Hydroelectric power (%)	14.8	17.7	17.6	17.4
Other renewable sources (%)	0	0.2	1.1	5.6
<b>China</b> (TWh)	650	3,495	5,721	8,776
Fossil fuels (%)	80.5	80.9	78.0	65.4
Nuclear power (%)	0	2.0	4.0	9.2
Hydroelectric power (%)	19.5	16.7	15.1	14.8
Other renewable sources (%)	0	0.4	2.9	10.6
<b>India</b> (TWh)	289	830	1,281	2,538
Fossil fuels (%)	73.3	82.5	81.3	68.4
Nuclear power (%)	2.0	1.8	3.3	5.9
Hydroelectric power (%)	24.7	13.7	12.0	15.2
Other renewable sources (%)	0	2.0	3.4	10.5
<b>World</b> (TWh)	11,821	20,183	24,513	32,696
Fossil fuels (%)	63.4	67.8	66.0	57.3
Nuclear power (%)	17.0	13.5	12.8	13.8
Hydroelectric power (%)	18.2	16.0	15.7	16.0
Other renewable sources (%)	1.4	2.7	5.5	12.9
CO2 Emissions (billion tons)	7.5	11.9	13.4	13.9

\* Members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (USA, Japan, South Korea, EU, etc.).

\*\* Former USSR and some members of the former Council for Mutual Economic Assistance.

would be above 1 mSv a year.

The clean-up will cost around £9 billion according to the Japanese Ministry for the Environment, with all claims for damages against TEPCO amounting to £63 billion (a similar scale to a big bank going under). A nuclear accident is traumatic and expensive, but it is not especially dreadful.

Perhaps we should not be too surprised that radiation carries so little danger of harm. All living organisms are exposed to background radiation from rocks (especially from granite) and cosmic rays. It is probable that life evolved with a degree of tolerance to background radiation and since, for the most part, medical and occupational exposures are kept to a fraction of background exposure it seems that there is nothing to fear.

To be sure, there is no safe dose and we have to be vigilant and apply the precau-

tionary principle, as is the case in the nuclear industry. But neither is there any mileage in worrying over much about low dose exposures, since at such levels it seems that our bodies are pretty good at repairing any damage.<sup>(13)</sup>

#### Comparing risks

Hydroelectricity poses a low incidence but high consequence risk, rather similar to nuclear power. A dam burst that sends a flood down a valley is unlikely unless the parameters for water build up as a result of heavy rain are misjudged or an earthquake undermines the structure's integrity.

During the 1920s there were two major dam disasters: Gleno, in Italy, where 356 died, and Llyn Eigian, Wales, with 17 deaths. In 1928 the St. Francis dam in California burst catastrophically causing 450 deaths, although this was a dam built for irrigation purposes.

There have been 42 deaths from hydroelectric dam failures since then: 39 from the Kelly Barnes dam, in Georgia, USA, in 1977; three from the Grande Dixence dam in Switzerland in 2000; and none from the Delhi dam, Iowa, in 2010.

The history of dam failures concerns mainly ones built by the mining industry or for agriculture, irrigation and flood control. In any case, when things go badly wrong, a local community may need to be evacuated fast.

In practice there are relatively few fatalities, but everyone sees the disruption caused and most will conclude, quite rationally, that if we can avoid this risk so much the better.

For the Left in Italy the nuclear question did not boil down to whether or not radiation poses a tolerable risk. The issue at stake was whether Italians wanted to live in a society where 'technology ruled' and required an extensive system of security and surveillance to protect that technology against misuse.<sup>(14)</sup>

For the Germans a key demand has been for Europe-wide 'stress tests' to check whether NPPs are vulnerable to extreme events, including terrorist attacks.

These considerations influence perceptions profoundly. If one can do without nuclear, then so be it. The attitudes demonstrate that the unease felt arises not just from a lack of understanding about the technology but from the lack of democratic control over the economy under capitalism.

Yet my daughter was right in a way. I prefer to take professional advice on whether harm may result from radiation exposure.

It is not a matter of opinion, whereby the majority is 'right'; it's a matter of fact. On the other hand, the matter of nuclear power concerns the type of society we want to live in.

That is a political choice and there are no easy answers unless we can derive at least half our electricity from nuclear, global warming will accelerate - and that could be truly catastrophic.

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7. See World Nuclear Association information paper on Nuclear Radiation and Health Effects on <<http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/inf05.html>>. A Becquerel (Bq) is a measure of radioactivity; P stands for peta or a factor of 10<sup>15</sup>. An estimate by the group International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War has estimated that 36 PBq of the isotope Caesium 137 were released (42 % of the equivalent amount at Chernobyl) and 17 PBq of Xenon 133 but these

- numbers are consistent with the figure quoted for all isotopes released, which was calculated by the Japanese Nuclear Safety Commission. There is no reason to think that the Fukushima accident was worse than Chernobyl.
8. Cited by George Monbiot, The Guardian, 5 April 2011 and on his website at <[www.monbiot.com/2011/04/04/evidence-meltdown](http://www.monbiot.com/2011/04/04/evidence-meltdown)>.
9. See <[www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2005/pr38/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2005/pr38/en/index.html)>.
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- S128. Out of a total 17,448 cancer cases from a survivor population of more than 100,000, there were 853 excess cases of radiation-related solid cancers.
12. radiation deliver a dose of between 1 and 13 mSv a year, with a worldwide average of 2.4 mSv. The dose we all receive from the above-ground nuclear weapon tests is 0.005 mSv a year.
13. See Dennis Normile, 2011, Fukushima revives the low-dose debate, Science, 20 May, Vol. 332/6032: pp. 908-910; on <<http://www.sciencemag.org/content/332/6032/908.full>>.
14. See comment by Ugo Mattei, II manifesto, 2 June 2011. Mattei argues that nuclear power acts to reinforce the capitalist class much as irrigation and hydraulic projects kept the Pharaohs in power in Ancient Egypt.

## Venezuela's welfare vs US Imperialism

Continued from page 22

cratic forces which supported the coup against Chávez. They will also use their cash to try to sow divisions within the left and support seemingly progressive groups to create conflict and disunity.

As Chávez recovers from cancer, they will also try to focus on his health as an issue. This is one of the few stories the media here is likely to pick up, along with wild allegations about Venezuela supporting terrorism, drug-smuggling and of the many problems which still exist in the country.

What will not be covered will be what has been achieved and the plans for this year designed to deal with outstanding social issues. The contrast between the prospects for progress in Venezuela and the worsening situation for people here and across the “advanced” capitalist world is painfully obvious.

### Chavez's 2012 Plans

Plans announced in parliament by Hugo Chavez for 2012 include:

The national budget is set to grow by 43%, with 40% of that going on social needs. There will be significantly increased spending on housing, social security, health care, science and technology, culture and education.

A new initiative targets older people to improve their health and social services and to ensure that they will all be in

receipt of a pension.

There will be increased financial support for children which will be paid to mothers.

The government will continue to build on the successes of the new National Bolivarian Police Force, which has already led to a reduction in crime.

There will be continued development of unused land and further land redistribution.

A new labour law to be passed on May Day will replace the existing one, which was enacted in 1997 at the behest of the IMF, removing workers rights. Chávez has announced the new law will reinstate these rights and benefits, as well as repay the money taken from the Venezuelan working class since that time.

Chávez has also signalled that he expects banks, which are defined by law in Venezuela as “public services”, to comply with a statutory requirement to invest 10% of their lending in government development projects.

He recently said, “The private banks that do not comply with the constitution and their duty, well, I do not have any problem nationalising them,” He singled out the president of Banesco, Juan Carlos Escotet, ordering him to lend more to Venezuela's cash-strapped farmers. “If you cannot do it, give me your bank.”<sup>(7)</sup>

Venezuela is a dynamo of progressive developments touching all aspects of peoples' lives such that it is impossible

to give any more than a flavour of these in one article. To keep up with developments in Venezuela and counter the lies in the British press, check out:

**[www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/english-edition/http://www.venezuelasolidarity.org.uk/vic/](http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/english-edition/http://www.venezuelasolidarity.org.uk/vic/)**

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# Successful German fridge factory closed

On 18 June 1991, the works committee of dkk Scharfenstein GmbH called the remaining workforce of the Scharfenstein, Niederschmiedeberg and Griessbach factories to an urgent workforce meeting in the yard of the main factory.

**By ERLAND OTTE, a Scharfenstein factory worker. (Translated from the German journal *Rotfuchs* by Pat Turnbull.)**

The previous day the Treuhand [trustee company set up by the German government to decide the future of GDR (German Democratic Republic) firms] had announced the end of refrigerator and condenser production at this factory, with its long tradition.

The 2000 people present agreed unanimously to fight to preserve their former publicly owned factory dkk Scharfenstein and to organise a factory occupation.

They could not imagine that anyone would simply want to allow the biggest end-producers in Europe of household refrigerators to disappear from the scene. After all, their families had worked here before them. They were all proud of its tradition and their own achievements.

Six days later, the yard of the Scharfenstein factory, filled with people in hot debate, was still bathed in bright sunshine. On the next day it would rain and in the end those who were standing there would be left out in the rain.

IG Metall, the metal workers' union of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), had encouraged the chair of the works committee, Manfred Meyer, to do everything to save dkk Scharfenstein GmbH from destruction.

More than 5000 people had worked there. To add to that figure, as many people again earned their living in the numerous subsidiary firms which delivered to the factory.

In 1989 we had produced more than a million fridges and freezers. As always they were literally seized from our grasp. We simply could not produce enough white goods; we often had to run extra shifts. The orders came from GDR trade organisations, from the Soviet Union, the socialist states, from France

**The Treuhandanstalt** (German: Trust agency) was the agency that privatised the East German enterprises, Volkseigener Betrieb (VEBs), owned as public property. Created by the Volkskammer on June 17, 1990, it oversaw the restructuring and selling of about 8,500 firms with initially over 4 million employees

At that time it was the world's largest industrial enterprise controlling everything from steel works to the Babelsberg Studios. It also took over around 2.4 million hectares of agricultural land and forests; the property of the former Stasi (GDR Ministry for State Security); large parts of the property of the former National People's Army, large scale public housing property as well as the property of the state pharmacy network.

At reunification on 3 October 1990 it also took over the property of the political parties and mass organisations of the German Democratic Republic. Its operations drew criticism from some quarters for unnecessary closing of allegedly profitable businesses, misuse and waste of funds and layoffs that were claimed to be unnecessary.

It also drew substantial protests from the workforces affected, as 2.5 million employees (out of 4 million in total) were laid off in the early 1990s.

and also from the FRG mail order house Quelle, where our quality products went under the trademark Privileg and were sold very cheap. In addition

in 1989 we produced 2.3 million condensers and condenser sets.

Even in April 1990 we were boastfully promised a joint venture with Bosch-Siemens Home Equipment GmbH. There was talk of up to 49% participation in a joint German-German business. And now we stood here faced with unemployment - a completely unknown phenomenon in the GDR.

The factory, it was alleged, was bankrupt and, in the 'social market economy' at least, incapable of survival. So it had to be closed. The Treuhand couldn't give out money for such a heap of scrap. Meyer said, "They haven't one sorry Mark left for us."

This development towards the end of the wholesale plant's life had its beginnings at the start of 1990 when suddenly VW and Mercedes limousines from the FRG arrived at the main entrance to the administration block. Every day they came, self-assured as victors do come.

They sat with the director of the works wanting to know everything about the departments for distribution and procurement, the methods of accounting and construction. They wanted to find out all the details of the achievements of the factory in science and technology, the partners in the subsidiary firms and the buyers of our products at home and abroad.

The factory had attained great achievements with its engineering cadre - in the further development of fridges and freezers, new technologies of manufacture, machines and equipment which were produced in our own efficient tool factory.

The workers' hopes of preserving their factory rested on the first CFC-free fridge in the world. It was developed and built by our specialists. When our equipment came on the market at the time of the 'turning point' (end of the GDR), there was a huge clamour in the media.

We read, "This isn't a fridge; it's a butane filled bomb, which could explode in any kitchen and mortally injure people. Do not under any circumstances buy

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# A window into the British monarchy

As 2012 is the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II it is perhaps no coincidence that the British Library held an exhibition between November 2011 and March 2012 entitled “Royal Manuscripts: The Genius of Illumination” which showed the interplay between the monarchy and medieval art.

By SARAH STEPHENSON

This article describes two of the key themes of the exhibition - royalty and the church and royal education - and discusses the continuity between medieval royalty and the present monarchy in relation to these key themes.

## The beauty of medieval manuscripts

The royal illuminated manuscripts reveal the artistry of the finest books produced between the eighth and sixteenth centuries. Despite centuries of warfare as well as social, religious and cultural disruption, royal manuscripts still exist in large numbers.

The state of preservation of the illuminations is remarkably high, their colours often as vivid as when they were first painted and their gold still making their pages flicker and glow. The achievement of the artists (in most cases unknown) in creating these great works is truly remarkable: as one contemporary inscription puts it, “The beauty of this book displays my genius”.

## Medieval monarchy and the church

The illuminated manuscripts show the centrality of Christian religion and the Church in the lives of English monarchs and the importance of English royalty in the creation of richly ornamented and illustrated copies of Christian and Church texts.

The arrival of St. Augustine of Canterbury (the Roman missionary sent by Pope Gregory I) at the court of Ethelberht, King of Kent, in 597 began the process of converting the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity.

The intimate relations between royalty and churchmen that ensued drew the royals into contact with finely crafted books. Though continually redefined and some-



**IMAGE 2**  
**Henry, Prince of Wales, later Henry V, presenting the 2nd Duke of Norfolk with the instructional text: *Regement of Princes* by Thomas Hoccleve, c1411-1413.**

times stormy (most famously in the case of Henry II and Thomas Becket), the relationship between monarchy and church remained fundamental to both institutions: the fact that the most radical change of all involved a king, Henry VIII, separating from Rome to become head of the English church underlines the point.

The king and members of the royal

family had their deeds recorded by monastic historians, sought counsel from esteemed churchmen, attended church councils, and upheld clerical and monastic reforms.

They financed ecclesiastical building works (see Image 1), established monasteries and convents, supported the friars and fraternities, collected relics, and commissioned liturgical furnishings, artworks and manuscripts. The royal manuscripts include Psalters, Bibles, Gospels and Books of Hours and were employed in Christian worship or perused by individuals in the course of their devotions.

Many of these manuscripts are luxurious volumes reflecting the wealth and high status of the individuals who paid for them: they also show the desire of the royals to glorify God, the divine ruler, whose eternal kingdom was mirrored by their earthly court.

## The Queen and church today

The continued strong relationship between established church and crown was exhibited in February 2012 when the Queen delivered a staunch defence of the Church and religion at Lambeth Palace.

Addressing the leaders of Britain’s nine main religions on one of the first events to mark her Diamond Jubilee the Queen said, “The concept of our established church is occasionally misunderstood and, I believe, under-appreciated.” The Church of England is “woven into the fabric of this country” and had helped to build a better society. It had “created an environment for other faith communities and indeed people of no faith to live freely”.

The speech represented an unusual intervention in the war of words between critics of the Church and faith communities. The Queen rarely speaks publicly about her religious beliefs despite being Supreme Governor of the Church.

The Archbishop of Canterbury paid tribute to the Queen’s “personal commitment” to her office as a call from God which he said was at the heart of her understanding of her role.

The Queen still uses the title “Defender of the Faith” which was bestowed by the Pope on Henry VIII in 1521 for his



**IMAGE 1**  
**The King as ecclesiastical builder: William I holds a model of Battle Abbey; William II, the hall at Westminster Palace; Henry I, his foundation of Reading Abbey; Stephen, his abbey of Faversham.**  
 From Mathew Paris, *History of the English*, c 1250.

defence of Catholicism against the German Protestant Martin Luther. The title became a bone of contention between the king and the Pope when Henry broke with Rome: it remains a matter of contention today with Prince Charles contemplating changing the title to “Defender of Faith” in recognition of the many faith communities in Britain.

Interestingly, in counterpoint to these royal views, a recent report conducted for the Richard Dawkins Foundation suggested that more Christians opposed than supported the idea of an official state religion and almost three quarters of Christians agreed that religion should not influence public policy.

Also the High Court ruled that councils could not hold prayers during meetings, although the coalition government is committed to overturning this ruling.

**The training of medieval royalty**

The Aristotelian idea that to rule successfully a prince should first learn how to govern himself was a commonplace of medieval manuscripts. Known as “Mirrors of Princes”, the texts provided exemplars of behaviour, both positive and negative, for the prince to use as a mirror to illuminate his own conduct. (see Image 2).

In particular they stressed the importance of Christian values and chivalric

virtues in the upbringing of a future king. Knowledge of history was recommended too as engendering wisdom, virtue and knightly conduct (see Image 3).

Royalty also read texts featuring heroes and heroines from the Bible, Christian hagiography, ancient mythology and legend. Several heroes from the past gained esteem as models to emulate: Solomon for wisdom; Alexander and Caesar for their military accomplishments; and Hercules for his chivalric virtues.

A model of kingship from the Old Testament was the complex figure of King David, the supposed author of the Psalms (see Image 4). Rich narrative and iconic imagery was developed around these models of power from the past and continually reinterpreted for rulers and their families. Parallel, but distinctively different, models were developed for female members of royalty.

Other moral lessons were conveyed in bestiaries featuring animals as exemplars of virtues and vices (see Image 5). Finally, morally correct conduct was stimulated in aristocratic readers by vividly depicted visions of the end of times in illustrated Apocalypses.

**Royal learning in medieval times**

“An illiterate king is like a crowned ass” states John of Salisbury’s “Policraticus” (1159), one of the first political treatises on kingship.

Medieval works of princely instruction stressed the importance of the intellectual formation of kings and encouraged an appetite for knowledge. The two pillars of medieval knowledge of the world were Isidore of Seville’s “Etymologiae” and Rabanus Maurus’s “De Universo”.

Biblical texts and commentaries and collections of canon law served as the foundation for much medieval learning which were compiled and read at medieval universities. The “Livre des proprietiez des choses” was a handy digest of information about the natural and spiritual world for a busy monarch and was acquired by Charles V of France and Edward IV of England.

Geographical knowledge was an important subject in royal education. Gerald of Wales dedicated his “Topographia Hibernica” to Henry II to encourage the King to progress his conquest of Ireland.

The anthology that combines texts on Alexander the Great’s conquests and Marco Polo’s travels with the itinerary to the Holy Land was probably compiled for Philip VI of France when he was preparing for a crusade. Nearly two centuries later works by Jean Rotz and Jean Mallard were designed to inform Henry VIII about new geographical discoveries.

Some monarchs and princes collected

books on divination and astrology, which were studied exclusively at universities and royal courts. Other manuscripts show Humfrey of Gloucester, Henry VII and Henry VIII to have been receptive to new humanistic currents in the world's knowledge (see Image 6).

### Education and training of today's royals

The Queen was educated privately at home in contrast to the schooling of the royal princes - her husband, Philip, and her sons, Charles, Andrew and Edward - who all attended Gordonstoun school which is characterised by its ethos for instilling self-reliance.

By following in his father's footsteps to Gordonstoun, rather than having a private tutor, Prince Charles became the first ever heir apparent to be educated in that manner.

The Queen's grandsons, Princes William and Henry (known as Harry), went to Eton as was traditional in their mother's family. Princes Charles, Edward and William attended university and obtained degrees: thereby accounting for three of the five princes ever to have done so.

Arguably the single most significant formal training ground for the royals is the armed forces. Prince Philip served with the Pacific and Mediterranean fleets in World War II and reached the rank of naval Commander before leaving active service in 1952.

The Queen bestowed on him the honorary title of Lord High Admiral of the Royal Navy in 2011. Following in the tradition of Princes of Wales before him, Charles served in both the navy and air force.

He qualified as a jet and helicopter pilot, and in his naval career (1971-76) he served on a guided missile destroyer, frigates and latterly commanded a coastal minehunter. Prince Andrew served in the Royal Navy for over twenty years as a helicopter pilot and lead instructor in helicopter flight.

He holds the rank of Commander and the honorary rank of Rear Admiral. He was decorated for his service in the Falklands/Malvinas War (2nd April - 14th June 1982) when the Falkland Islands, a British overseas territory, was claimed by Argentina.<sup>(1)</sup>

Prince William is a flight lieutenant in the RAF: his role as a search and rescue pilot enables him to be on active service without being deployed in combat operations.

However his deployment in the Falkland Islands for a six week tour in February and March 2012, the 30th anniversary of the war, has been condemned by Argentina as a "provocative act". Prince Harry joined the Army and completed training as a tank commander. He served for 77 days in the front line in the Afghan war, the first member of the royal family since Prince Andrew to serve in a war zone.

He was decorated with the "Operational service medal for Afghanistan" and in April 2011 was promoted to the rank of Captain. He has also qualified as a helicopter pilot. This tradition of military training and service goes right back in unbroken continuity to medieval times with royalty then and now seeing its role as defending the realm.



**IMAGE 3**  
King John of England (left) in battle with Prince Louis VIII (right).  
From the *Chronique de Saint Denis*, c1332-1350.



**IMAGE 4**  
King David as royal paradigm, playing the harp.  
From *Westminster Psalter*, c1200.



**IMAGE 6**  
Landscape depicting clerks studying astronomy and geometry showing a sphere, square and compasses. From *Roman d'Alexandre en prose*, c1411-1413.

**FOOTNOTE:**

1. A British overseas territory does not form part of the UK itself but it falls under its jurisdiction. There are 14 such territories which are remnants of the British Empire that have not acquired independence or have voted to remain British territories: Anguilla;

Bermuda; British Antarctic Territory; British Indian Ocean Territory; British Virgin Islands; Cayman Islands; Falkland Islands; Gibraltar; Montserrat; Pitcairn Islands; Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha; South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands; Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and



**IMAGE 5**  
An Elephant with a castle strapped to its back lumbers into battle (top); a small elephant hoists aloft its fallen companion. From *The Rochester Bestiary* c1230.

Dhekelia (in Cyprus); Turks and Caicos Islands.

# Successful German fridge factory closed

Continued from page 27

this equipment from Scharfenstein!”

A couple of months later the competition had got hold of all the patents and suddenly this was the best fridge in the world - but no longer from dkk Scharfenstein! Siemens engineers had invented it now.

Our factory was subject to the Treuhand. A supervisory board oversaw all activities, because everything had to be wound up according to due process of law - FRG law, that is. The factory occupation lasted several days. We were divided into shifts, so that the factories at Scharfenstein and Griessbach were occupied by colleagues round the clock.

Most came during the day, and there were various activities on the part of speakers and visitors. Delegations came from other factories. With the help of the currency union, all our markets had been deliberately cut off. Now none of

our customers could pay for our products any more, and the competition simply took over the recipients of dkk products. No one can tell us that wasn't class struggle!

The representatives of the new power gave us false hopes of eventual employment for at least part of the work force. And so each person was made into a competitor of the other.

There was a lot of bluster: about training, change-of-employment projects, severance payments.

There were international concerns which showed interest in dkk. From Turkey, Korea, the Far East. But that was not what was wanted. It had to be defeat: to win the war against the people for all time and as a warning to anyone who would have the cheek to try again.

No one asked about the fate of the constantly willing, hard-working and highly qualified workers, scientists, the clever constructors, and employees of

the administration; no one asked about the future of their children and grandchildren.

“Collateral damage” in the war against those who for 40 years had deprived capital of the opportunity for exploitation and who now had to swallow the death of industry in the East.

Delivered defenceless to a society which they could not understand, because they had lived all their lives in solidarity and cooperation, because they knew security of jobs and the future and had never been ‘employees’.

We have known for a long time now that the occupation of the factory could not prevent the complete annihilation of our works, could scarcely postpone it.

Bit by bit everything was removed and now they are blowing up the last empty factory buildings, so that in another 20 years no one will guess: the Erz mountains were once a flourishing industrial region.

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