

Fred M'membe: a living legend

Firm, resolute leader with an aversion to lies and corruption

Socialist staff reporter

THE SOCIALIST Party says its president and 2021 presidential candidate, Fred M'membe, is one of the few living legends in Zambia.

Socialist Party general secretary and first vice-president Dr Cosmas Musumali addressed a media briefing at Dr M'membe's Garden Compound office in Lusaka, to explain who he is and how he fits into the Socialist Party's programme.

The event was also the official launch of a brochure titled *Dr Fred M'membe Incoming President*.

Dr Musumali, an internationally renowned economist, who authored the brochure, sat with party treasurer general and second vice-president Dr Chris Ngenda Mwikisa, and Rehoboth Kafwabulula, a member of the central committee, general secretary of the party's youth league, and national spokesperson.

Dr Musumali described Dr M'membe as "a firm and resolute socialist leader, with an aversion for lies and theft".

Exceptional

He said that while educational achievements counted for little when it came to leadership in a socialist set-up, Dr M'membe was exceptional.

"In the Socialist Party we don't believe that education necessarily makes you a good leader. Some of the people you are calling corrupt today are highly educated by all standards."

He said that while education did not necessarily make a good leader, it did make people do certain things differently, and that with the exception of the late Robert Mugabe, Fred M'membe would be the most highly educated African president.

Dr Musumali explained how

Dr M'membe is an accountant, economist and lawyer, and that he also has business management and other degrees.

"He doesn't have fake PhDs that are flying around. He is still studying," Dr Musumali said.

He also talked about Dr M'membe's honours and awards, especially in the areas of freedom of the press. Dr M'membe was managing director and editor-in-chief of *The Post* newspaper from July 1991 until the company's liquidation on November 2, 2016.

Dr Musumali went on to describe how Dr M'membe had been awarded for his friendship with the Cuban revolution by Cuba's former president Raul Castro.

"*The Post*, under Fred M'membe, was the only African media house that set up an office in Cuba. This is something we are very proud of."

"Fred M'membe is one of the few living legends in Zambia today. Zambia's history is not going to be complete without mentioning his name."

"He is a legend who is a socialist at the same time. Being a socialist means you are against the system of capitalism that we live under today. He has been a socialist ever since our campus days and he has not changed."

"So we have, for the first time in Zambia's history, a true socialist personality who will come in and be the president of this country."

But Dr Musumali said he regretted to have to say that presently Dr M'membe was being "hunted like a wild animal" by the current regime.

"His house in Chinsali has been occupied [by police] for more than a year now. They see in him a danger," Dr Musumali said.

"But maybe what the Zambian people should be asking themselves is what it is that makes Fred M'membe that dangerous for the authorities in this country. It is because he wants genuine change, transformation."

Dr Musumali said there were

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Dr Cosmas Musumali (below, left) with national spokesperson Rehoboth Kafwabulula and second vice-president Dr Chris Ngenda at the press conference to discuss Dr Fred M'membe (above)



Licence scheme 'a threat to press freedom'

Socialist staff reporter

THE GOVERNMENT'S decision to indirectly license journalists through a media council is ill-intentioned and won't achieve anything good, says Socialist Party president Dr Fred M'membe.

"After 26 years of producing and editing one of Zambia's biggest newspapers, I think I can say that I have some reasonable understanding of journalism and the media in general," he said.

"In addition to this I am a PhD student in journalism and media studies and I am a recipient of many journalism and media awards. This should give me some reasonable understanding of journalism and the media."

"Doctors, lawyers, and every other profession great and humble, are directly or indirectly licensed by the state," he said. "But a journalist is granted the right to do what he or she does by a greater authority. Journalism is a human right protected by international conventions and indeed our constitution."

Dr M'membe said that if a government can say who has the right to be a journalist, it means it can also say who isn't allowed to be a journalist. "And that would mean the end of freedom of the press, of expression, and the end of democracy".

Dr M'membe said a good place to start when considering a proposed solution was to ask what problem the solution was aiming to fix.

"What problem is this bill trying to fix? That's a good way to approach suggestions that journalists should be licensed as a means to address concerns about poor journalism standards."

"But poor journalism standards isn't a new problem. It's something that has been and will be with us forever. What's new is not poor journalism standards, but the ability to distribute the products of poor journalism quickly, easily, and widely, online through social media. Licensing journalists can't prevent that."

"In fact, poor journalism standards now seem to mean factual information that those in positions of authority would rather not see published or broadcast — all the more reason to ensure it is distributed

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Virus response ‘lukewarm, incompetent and arrogant’

Criticism follows the deaths of two MPs

Socialist staff reporter

THE GOVERNMENT’S handling of the COVID-19 crisis has been “lukewarm, incompetent and seemingly arrogant”, Socialist Party general secretary Cosmas Musumali has said.

His criticism follows the deaths of two MPs; Rogers Mwewa and Mwenya Munkonge.

“The Socialist Party wishes to convey its condolences to the families, relatives and friends of the late MP for Mwanabombwe, the Honourable Rogers Mwewa, as well as to those for the late Lukashya MP, the Honourable Mwenya Munkonge,” Dr Musumali said in statement.

“Their deaths are a great loss to the affected families and communities. Zambia has also lost two



Cosmas Musumali: The handling of the pandemic is a national disaster

serving legislators shortly before completing their term of office. This entails more by-elections in the coming months. It is tragic and costly.

“The Socialist Party had previously warned about the lukewarm, incompetent and seemingly arrogant manner in which the COVID-19 pandemic was being managed in this country.

“The party specifically pointed

to the management of human traffic at the border areas, the need for a more systematic contact tracing system, the enhancing of the health workforce, adequate PPEs for frontline staff and, above all, intensive public messaging and socialised behaviour monitoring.

“We also pointed to the substantial financial requirements and the strict use and accountability

of these resources.” Dr Musumali added that, with hindsight, the management of the pandemic was a national disaster.

“In the midst of a global pandemic, the president of the country is burning a lot of aviation fuel moving from one constituency to another dishing out slush funds to traditional leaders and party cadres. The serving minister of health

is caught up in a huge corruption scandal and is mobilising sections of the ruling party for political support.”

Dr Musumali said that from a distance the situation would seem to be “a typical lousy comedy of failed and greedy tinpot dictatorship”.

“But when thousands of innocent lives are about to be sacrificed, then we have to come back to reality and stop the calamity from destroying our homeland.

“Accountability has been zero for decades now. With the emergency of COVID-19 plus, by all standards, the most incompetent and corrupt government since political independence in 1964, the decay is open and painful to watch. “The death of two legislators in a single day is about a failed state of the health system and entire political system of the country.

“Neoliberal capitalism anchored on individualism, greed, unbridled competition and consumerism, is the ultimate cause of death of the two members of parliament.

“It is a system that has given rise to a breed of politicians who are self-serving and arrogant, and yet find joy in sheer ignorance.

“Many more Zambians will continue to die avoidable deaths over the years to come if capitalism is not stopped and a more humane, socialist order put in its place,” Dr Musumali said.

‘Dangerous’ political events are risking lives

Cecilia Lwiindi Nedziwe

SOCIALIST Party Chawama constituency parliamentary aspirant Ntazana Musukuma has described the government’s action of allowing thousands of people to gather during the deadly COVID-19 outbreak as “dangerous”.

Musukuma said that instead of fighting COVID-19, the government was contributing to the spread of the pandemic.

He said the government’s actions had the effect of “cementing” among “some quarters in this country” the false belief that COVID-19 is a hoax.

“When they see officials entertaining huge crowds without social distancing, and many not wearing masks, they sink further into the fallacy that COVID-19 does not exist. That’s how dangerous this is,” Musukuma said, adding, “Should COVID-19 get out of hand in this country, we should

blame the government and the PF party.

“It is sad that for political expediency – and just to try to show that the government is still popular when it isn’t – that they can mobilise large crowds and risk the lives of the masses, yet they are making many go hungry by keeping their bars and nightclubs shut. What a contradiction,” Musukuma said.

He said Chawama residents were risking their lives by attending unnecessary social and political events without observing distancing and often without masks.

Abandoned

“However, when it comes to important things like distribution of free masks and hand sanitisers to the poor in Chawama, officials and the current MP are nowhere to be seen. They have abandoned the people of Chawama. They only remember the people when it suits them,” he said.

Musukuma said the actions



Ntazana Musukuma: How do you expect people to be serious about COVID-19 when the government isn’t?

also discouraged people who were genuinely fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We have serious people like doctors, nurses, lab technicians and many other frontline workers, who are risking their lives every day to protect the nation from COVID-19, but we have a government

that doesn’t seem to be serious. It discourages those who are serious about the COVID-19 fight. Instead of leading by example, the government is discouraging the medical fraternity and misleading the nation with regard to COVID-19.

“What happened recently at the commissioning of the Makeni

flyover bridge is a clear demonstration of mediocre leadership. It leaves much to be desired,” he said.

“How do you expect people to be serious about this when the government isn’t? It is simple: Zambians have relaxed observing COVID-19 guidelines because the leadership of the country has also done so.”

Musukuma, who is a former lecturer in public administration at UNZA and NIPA, said the present government’s lack of seriousness in the fight against COVID-19 was another reason the PF party must be voted out of office in 2021.

But he stressed the issue was just one of many reasons why the party should be rejected; others included worsening youth unemployment, a lack of citizen empowerment and the abject poverty of the Zambian masses.

“We have capable and visionary leaders, such as the Socialist Party’s Dr Fred M’membe. Why then should we keep the visionless PF party beyond 2021?”

Farmers were the founders of human civilisation

FARMERS are the backbone of Zambia and “one could not stand straight if their backbone was broken”, says Socialist Party president Fred M’membe.

Dr M’membe pledged that under the Socialist Party government, agriculture will be the most healthy, useful, and noble employment.

His comments were made as Zambia celebrated Farmers’ Day on August 3.

“The life of a farmer is very tough as he or she works very hard day and night in all seasons for us. Our farmers deserve all our support and respect,” Dr M’membe said.

“Today is August 3, a day celebrated as Farmers’ Day to recognise the ser-

vices rendered by our farmers to our people.” He added that it was known by everybody that Zambia was a land of villages, and that most of the populations residing in villages were farmers. He said the Socialist Party dedicated Farmers’ Day to solidarity with them.

“And on this day, we salute all those who toil in the soil to feed us. Farmers who have made significant achievements should be honoured on this day,” he said.

“The advent of farming was a crucial turning point in the evolution of humankind. Human society has transformed from that of a hunter-gatherer stage to that of a permanently settled one because of agriculture.”

Dr M’membe said farmers were the founders of human civilisation and it was for that reason it was said that “the ultimate goal of farming was not the growing of crops, but the cultivation and perfection of human beings.

“Our food is the result of farmers’ hard work,” Dr M’membe said.

“In the earlier days, farmers had only to face threats from nature. However, today they also have to face threats from the decisions of treacherous politicians, transnational corporations, which are the suppliers and owners of seed and suppliers of fertilisers, and contract farming.

“The welfare of farmers and peasants

has to be ensured. Only then can we ensure the comprehensive development of our society. The social service done by our farmers must be given its due.”

Dr M’membe said that the revival of the country’s agricultural sector was one of the three pillars of the Socialist Party programme, in addition to education and health.

He added that agricultural prosperity formed the basis of the Socialist Party’s comprehensive development of Zambia.

“It is said that agriculture not only gives riches to a nation, but the only riches she can call her own,” Dr M’membe said.

‘Dear brother and comrade who is firm, generous and a true patriot’

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very few people in Zambia who had fought as consistently as Dr M’membe.

“Very few people have been arrested, harassed, persecuted, insulted and abused like Fred M’membe has been while outside of government. Again, this is a living legend whom we have convinced to become the president of this country,” he said.

“We feel privileged to serve with this dear brother, dear comrade. So, come next year Fred M’membe is our president and you’ll have a president who is a true patriot. Fred M’membe loves Zambia.”

Dr Musumali said there were issues he was aware of that some people were perhaps unclear about, especially those created by government propaganda.

“Fred M’membe was known from *The Post* and I have read social media stories [with headlines] like ‘let him pay back Zambian taxes’. All I can say is that the government propaganda has worked.”

He said it was untrue that *The Post* was closed because of taxation. “It was closed because a handful of staff of *The Post* were convinced to go and claim payments that were due because the organisation was not operating.” Linking the closure of *The Post* to a pretext of tax arrears was one of the “biggest lies” he had heard.

Discussing Dr M’membe’s character, Dr Musumali described how he was a very generous person, detailing how he had helped many people over the years.

“It’s not a secret that over 30 people have been assisted by him to get a university or college education. Not [assisted by] *The Post* but by Fred M’membe as a private person. I have travelled with him extensively in the rural areas.”

Nationality

He also talked about Dr M’membe’s nationality.

“If you go to Chitimukulu today and ask ‘who is Fred M’membe’, he will tell you how Fred is part of the royal establishment of the Bembas. You can’t be more Bemba than Fred M’membe. His grandmother is Bisa,” He explained.

“On his mother’s side, he is quite spread. We know about Fred M’membe. We have gone from village to village (his maternal villages). You can’t be more Zambian than that. He is from Northern, Muchinga, Southern, and Western Provinces.”

Dr Musumali said that to be a national leader “you have to be firm and resolute”.

“If you are looking for somebody who is firm and resolute, Fred M’membe is the person. He will accept what you tell him straightaway. [But] the moment he knows you are lying, the moment he knows you have stolen, then you’ll hate him,” Dr Musumali said.

“This is a quality we need in Zambia today. Society is rotten from the bottom up. Without firmness, without being resolute, you’ll always have a state that is spineless.

“We are convinced that with Fred there, we’ll have a person who gives us hope that we can build the socialist society we dream of.”

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Zambia a dictatorship except in name, says Archbishop Mpundu

Bill 10 a ‘shameful’ bid to give Lungu a third term in power

Socialist staff reporter

ZAMBIA is a dictatorship in everything except name, Emeritus Archbishop Telesphore Mpundu, of Lusaka Archdiocese, has said.

He called Bill No 10 “shameful”, designed only to cheat the system and pave the way for a third term for President Lungu.

The archbishop was speaking on *The Assignment* programme, hosted by Andrew Mwansa on Muvi TV.

The bill, he said, was shameful for many reasons. “They are tampering with the constitution to perpetuate themselves in power.

“They will remain there to continue maladministration in this country. It is a shameful bill. Bill 10 should simply have been called Bill Third Term – they want to give a third term to Lungu.”

He said Lungu had already been elected twice and was ineligible to contest the presidency again.

Archbishop Mpundu said a law that was designed to benefit a person or a group of people at the expense of others was “criminal”.

“That’s what it is . . . not only to perpetuate Lungu in State House, but also designed in such a way that perhaps one person among those aspiring to become presidential candidates will be disqualified.

“Why is it that every administration that comes to State House wants to change the constitution in order to perpetuate themselves in power? This is wrong.”

The archbishop said the bill would cause disruption and disagreements in the run-up to, and after, next year’s election.

“That is what happens with dis-

puted elections. What happened to Hakainde Hichilema? Things like that might happen again,” he said.

Archbishop Mpundu said Zambia had lost the opportunity for dialogue and the country’s stability was at stake.

“People are taking the peace we have in this country for granted. It is something that has been hard won, but now it will be destroyed.”

The archbishop said Zambia had become a dictatorship because government institutions had been corrupted by the executive.

“This is not a democracy at all. This is a dictatorship in everything except name. That is it. There are no two ways about it. People should not be going around beating about the bush, this is the situation.”

Archbishop Mpundu said Zambians should take all this into account when they vote next year.

“They have seen what has been going on. All administrations have to be judged by their actions.

“This country is in crisis, a crisis of leadership, a crisis of the economy, people at loggerheads, tribalism, and so on.

“They should ask themselves sincerely if this is a government they want to continue with or if they need a big break.”

Zambia’s not a Christian nation just because you say it is

ZAMBIA is not a Christian nation, Archbishop Mpundu told *The Assignment*’s Andrew Mwansa. It simply declared it was during Frederick Chiluba’s reign.

“You don’t make a nation Christian by a declaration,” he said. “It is what you do, how you behave. We are not a Christian nation, we just claim to be.

“It was done by Frederick Chiluba and a group of people who belong to a very mili-

tant kind of Christianity. I asked Chiluba in one of those meetings when we went to State House, ‘Where did you consult other Christian bodies? It just came one day. We were declared a Christian nation. I said, ‘That is wrong’.

“Zambia is not a theocracy, a democracy – at least we want it to be a democracy – right now it isn’t, because all the elements are pointing to a dictatorial regime in everything

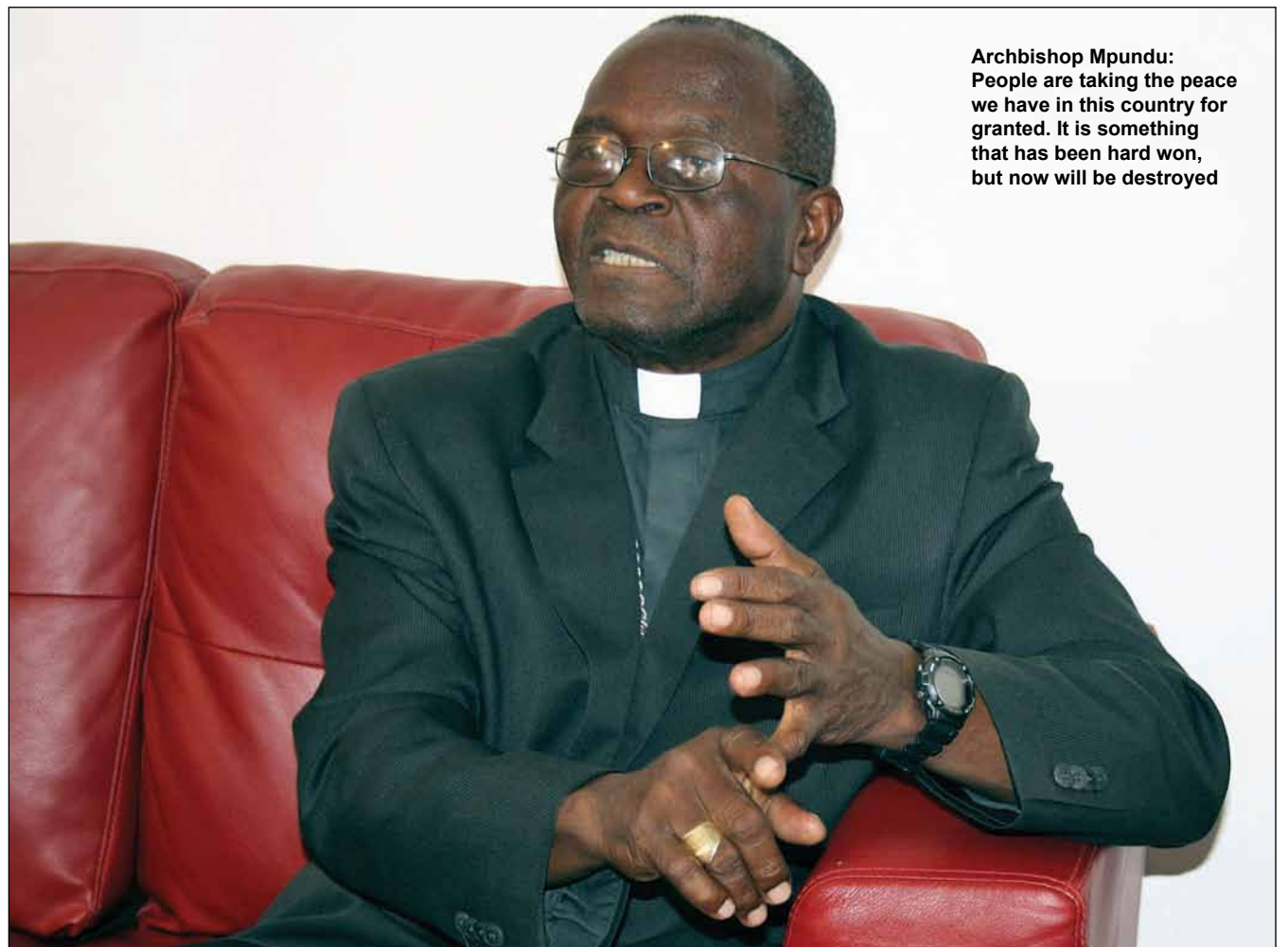
except name.” The archbishop cited as an example of political interference an incident at a bishops’ conference where “a group of people calling themselves Catholic parliamentarians” tried to overrule the bishops after they condemned Bill 10, in a pastoral statement, as being divisive, and called for it to be withdrawn.

“What happened? A group of people calling themselves Catholic parliamentarians

reacted and said, ‘No, it is wrong’. It is unprecedented that Christians will tell bishops, who are teaching from authoritative documents and social teaching of the church, that what they say is wrong.

“If I were in the position now, I would say the leadership of the catholic parliamentarians should resign.

“I would at least tell them: don’t use the name Catholic, because it is a scandal.”



Archbishop Mpundu: People are taking the peace we have in this country for granted. It is something that has been hard won, but now will be destroyed

Politics is my duty, don’t tell me what I can’t do

ARCHBISHOP Mpundu says he won’t accept any politician telling him he is interfering in politics.

Politics “is my duty” he told TV viewers. “I’m also a politician, I’m not seeking political power. I have intelligence given to

me by God. No one is going to frighten me, saying you are coming into politics.

“Yes, politics is my business and I want to see politics done the proper way. I’m not seeking political power. What would I seek political power for?

“No one is going to say ‘you are being fronted, or you are a hired gun’. Do you think it’s so easy to hire me? I’m not a hired one and I’m not a gun. I’m a human being, a Christian, priest, bishop, and nobody is going to tell me, you shouldn’t do this. No.”

‘Nothing good can come from plan to license journalists’

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as quickly and widely as possible.”

Dr M’membe said there were more questions to ask about licensing journalists.

“Let’s start with how to determine who’s a journalist at a time when anyone can distribute text, audio or video widely online. Traditional media are no longer information gatekeepers.

“Today a smart phone is all you need to become a ‘journalist’ and record, edit and distribute any chosen mixture of video, audio, photos, data and/or text.

“Strictly speaking, in today’s world, a journalist is really any person whose main occupation is to contribute directly, either regularly or occasionally, for consideration, to the collection, writing or production of information for dissemination by the media, or anyone who assists such a person,” Dr M’membe said.

“This is a better way to look at a journalist as any other way excludes anyone who starts a blog, tweets, or distributes information other than through ‘the media’ as it was once defined. Such individuals can produce

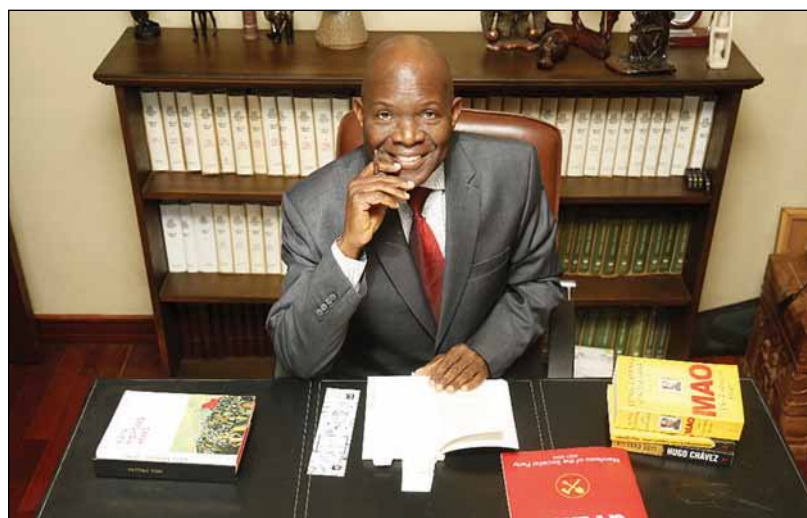
and distribute whatever comes into their minds in whatever format they want, while facing the legal consequences if it’s libellous or violates some criminal laws. Others can pick it up and circulate it through social media. Licensing journalists certainly won’t stop that.”

Dr M’membe said it was difficult to compare journalism to self-regulating professions, such as doctors, lawyers, engineers and architects. “Those professions require lengthy training, specific detailed knowledge and a demonstration that you can apply all that successfully, to be given a licence.

“Journalism is a profession by occupation, not by certificates, diplomas or degrees.

“Moreover, who would determine what knowledge and skills someone should learn and be able to demonstrate to get a journalism licence?

“You don’t need any technical skills – comparable in detail to the other professions – to write, shoot video, record audio, put it all together online and distribute it. You can do it, although perhaps badly, with almost no instruction. It’s no more complex



Socialist Party president Dr Fred M’membe: Journalism is a human right protected by international conventions and our constitution

than figuring out how to use your smartphone and laptop.”

But Dr M’membe said that schools of journalism taught much more than that.

“They teach everything from defining a story to pitching it to editors, interviewing people, digging out infor-

mation that authorities would prefer to remain hidden, structuring and presenting stories to audiences in different formats, not to mention the hands-on experience with the technical elements – shooting, editing, data visualisation, content management systems, and so on and so forth – of

online journalism. That gives journalism graduates the significant advantage of skills training when seeking employment – something someone with just a smartphone doesn’t have,” he said.

Dr M’membe said that licences also meant there were certain rules journalists must obey or risk sanction.

“What are those rules for journalism? As one example, journalism schools tell students they should have at least two sources for every story. If that were applied in practice, every news organisation in Zambia would likely be sanctioned.

“Poor or bad journalism, ‘fake news’, bad reporting and sensationalism, won’t end with the licensing of journalists. It’s much better to focus on educating audiences about the elements of good journalism and the cost of producing it, what to look for when they see, listen to, or read a news story, and how to question and hold to account news organisations and journalists about their reporting.

“That’s something both the education system at all levels and the media itself can do,” he said.

Our system is falling apart, we're in chaos

National spokesperson spells out why Zambia needs a socialist government and sweeping reform

NATIONAL spokesperson Rehoboth Kafwabolula has had a busy month doing the rounds of radio and TV stations being interviewed about the Socialist Party's policies and plans for a more just and equitable society once in government. Here is an edited selection of the answers she gave to a range of questions.

SOCIALISM

Kafwabolula was asked what socialism is, and why Zambia needs it so badly.

"SOCIALISM is about governance that puts people and society as a whole first. So it's people over profit. The market must work for the people and not the people for the market.

"What necessitates socialism is the nature of the structure of Zambian society as a whole. Capitalism isn't working, and it's insane for you to keep doing something that isn't working, to keep doing it over and over and expecting it to work. Our system is falling apart. We are literally falling into chaos. The levels of political violence, crime, joblessness, and no access to education is evidence of this."

ROLE OF WOMEN

Some people are sceptical about women in power. What is the Socialist Party's view?

"JUST because you call yourself a multiparty democracy to the world doesn't mean you are a multiparty democracy.

"One of the things we highlight in our manifesto is, first of all, we need to be democratic and constitutional, and there can be no fair government without women and young people sitting at the table of the decision-making process. They must be at the ballot box too, and that's why at least 50 per cent of our candidates for both parliamentary and local government elections are going to be women.

"As for the men who called your show to say that women are highly emotional, you know national governance is a highly emotional thing. It is the national governance process that determines whether or not young women are going to have access to education in the same way that young men have access to education.

"When you speak to our education system you need to teach things like teenage pregnancy. You have to speak to things like

child marriage. How do we actively put an end to those things? It's only when you include us in the process that we can actually put an end to them. Nobody's going to do it for us. That's not how democracy works. It's the nature of those in power. Sometimes they do not want to relinquish their power. I think that's why men don't want to see women run the system. When men completely run the system nobody says anything, everybody's quiet.

"Even though women are not the leaders a lot of the time in the organisations they represent, they are in fact the ones who run them. No one would get married in this country if it weren't for the women who run marriage committees. It is women who run the churches. When we buy our vegetables it's from the women in the markets. But when it comes to, you know, making actual decisions [at the moment] we must say to them, no, no, that's not going to happen.

"So under the Socialist Government women will take the lead like they have done in the communities, but this time on the national scene as well. But not just younger women, much older, more experienced women will also take the lead. One thing that excites me about our manifesto on a very personal level is that 50 per cent of cabinet positions will be women."

YOUNG PEOPLE

Why is the party putting young people at the forefront? Is it because they are in the majority and the party is looking for an electoral 'favour'?

"PUTTING young people at the forefront is not about favour. It's about equity or fairness. Sixty six per cent of our population is under the age of 25, so it doesn't make sense that this group of people should watch governance from the sidelines. They must be participants.

"One of the things highlighted in our manifesto is equality. You can't speak about equity without including everyone in the process of decision-making, and that's why we're so keen on involving young people in leadership.

"We have a policy that young people must take the lead. The reason we feel the need for this is because young people are the majority and if the majority isn't participating in that process then, really, what are we doing?"

EMPLOYMENT

How does the Socialist Party plan to solve the jobs issue?

"FIRST of all, one of the things that we highlight is agro-processing. One of the greatest mistakes we have made as a country is that we take a lot of our raw material and sell it without it being processed. So that means we're missing out on a lot of income and also means we're not creating industry.

"So, for instance, take a place like Eastern Province, which produces cotton. We shouldn't just sell it without processing it. We're going to do this with all agricultural products, such as sugar for example. Everything's going to be processed, packaged and sold in Zambia, and also sold on the international market, so that we create jobs.

"We need to industrialise the country because that's the only thing that will create jobs. That's the only thing that will lift Zambians out of poverty.

Humility is recognising the fact that on your own you're not that much, not that great, and that you are subject to the collective

"When we speak about industrialisation, we're not speaking about government parastatals – you're not going to see a lot of government-owned-this and government-owned-that. What we are encouraging and what we're going to do is create community-owned industries where profits will be enjoyed by the same communities and who will employ their young people."

EDUCATION

How does the Socialist Party plan to provide free education?

"WE can't build a nation when the great majority don't have access to improving themselves in the first place. We live in a digital world and digital era, but Zambians are not trained to survive in this digital world. What's going to happen is that the great majority are going to be left behind and won't be able to function in this



Party spokesperson Rehoboth Kafwabolula being interviewed on Lusaka-based Capital FM

new world. So for us, a priority is a science-based curriculum.

"It will be provided free all the way up to grade 12 and also free education at university level to ensure that it shouldn't matter where you come from.

"Poor, rural families from the outskirts have limited access to education because they don't have the money. It's more about the people's development rather than who can make money out of what, so that's first things first.

"Secondly, we stated in our manifesto that under the Socialist Government, 25 per cent of our national budget will go to education . . . also, young members of parliament will be taking the lead to make sure things are running properly. That's the only way this can be achieved.

"One of the tragedies of governance [at the moment] is that the people who need services – public services – especially things like education and health, are not participating in the process. So how do you get your voices heard in that instance? The Socialist Party is rectifying this by ensuring the great majority of our candidates will be women and also people as young as 21, 22, 23 or 24."

HUMILITY

Kafwabolula was asked what the Socialist Party's manifesto means when it says it is a party run by the humble for the humble.

"WE understand we're not the smartest people in the world. We're not the wealthiest people in the world. We are just ordi-

nary Zambians. We're students, people who work in the informal sector, some in the formal sector. So that's literally the basic meaning of ordinary Zambians. But when you speak of humility, also, I think the tendency is to think that when you are quiet and timid you are humble, but that's not the case, true unity is, in fact, working as a collective.

"Humility is recognising the fact that you know that on your own you're not that much, you're not that great, and that you are subject to the collective. So humility for us is more about being subject to the decisions of the collective and being tolerant of opposing views."

TAXES, INDUSTRY

How will the party pay for all these changes?

"OUR system is more about people's lives and livelihoods as opposed to the profits. So first of all, the government itself will be taxing itself. The president will be taxed, MPs will be taxed on their salaries, councillors will be taxed.

"The question is more about how do we make Zambia stand on her feet again? Because you know, what's going on in Zambia today is that everything we have is imported. I believe even toothpicks are imported, which is wrong. It's disturbing. You can't run a country like that. So when we're producing our own goods the chances are, the cost of those goods will be lower as opposed to when we're importing from other countries. That means it's likely you'll be able to afford them, and

secondly, we are promoting community industries, community initiatives, community cooperatives. There will be no community in this country without an economic activity going on where people are employed and making money."

CORRUPTION

What can be done about this, one of the most serious problems we face?

"FIRST of all there needs to be one thing you lack in this country, transparency between communities and the state apparatus. If we are going to create industry, if we are going to ensure that millions of Zambians are being pulled out of poverty, if we are going to create an education system with, not only access, but also a quality system based on science primarily and also information technology, then there needs to be transparency in the government as well as in communities, something that the Socialist Party is promoting.

"There will be zero tolerance for corruption. If you are found to be corrupt, you must be jailed. You can't be charged with corruption and found guilty but six months later you are out there living your best life.

"Under the constitution everybody has the right to a free and fair trial, and at the same time, you're innocent until you're proven guilty, so simply being charged with corruption does not make you corrupt. But if it's found that you are in fact corrupt, you must be convicted, sentenced and you must spend a few months or years in jail."

He'll be a president dedicated to solving people's problems

He loves Zambia and has been fighting for human rights for 40 years

The brochure *Dr Fred M'membe Incoming President*, compiled and written by Socialist Party general secretary **Dr Cosmas Musumali**, is designed to answer frequently asked questions about Dr M'membe. This is an edited version

He is a Zambian patriot

FRED IS a true Zambian patriot. He loves the people of Zambia and has been fighting for their human, political, and economic rights for more than 40 years.

Fred took up the fight against injustice in the late 1970s as a student. He founded a socialist student newsletter. Its focus was on Zambian, international and student politics. It was an informative and influential left-wing newsletter that called for justice and equity, and provided solidarity with the national liberation movements in southern Africa.

Later, in 1990, Fred was to build on this student experience by contributing to *Multiparty News*. This was a newsletter initiated by the Movement for Multiparty Democracy advocating for political change in Zambia. This was before he set up *The Post* newspaper in July 1991.

Fred did not come up with *The Post* in order to make money. It was a political move. He wanted to contribute to the consolidation of democracy in our country. *The Post* was a political project – and, ironically, died a political death.

Through *The Post*, he created a platform where Zambians had a loud voice and fearlessly pointed out the shortcomings of the existing establishment. And, because of that, he has been both loved and hated, depending upon the point of view of those who judged him.

Fred has been arrested, insulted and abused. He has been stripped of his earnings and personal effects. His home has been invaded, vandalised and occupied by the state. Few have attracted that much venom from the corrupt, ruling elite. The aim was to cripple him economically and psychologically – to stop him from being a voice of the masses. And this has been going on for almost 30 years now. Yet Fred has grown stronger and more resolute in his fight for justice, equity and peace.

The Fred of today is more resilient than ever before. He is in the true sense uwesu, wathu-wathu, wesu, wetu, waluna and yowetu, for the voiceless masses.

Closure of *The Post* and the price of principles

PRIVATELY, Fredrick Chiluba used to say the greatest mistake he made when he was president was not to close *The Post*. If *The Post* was closed he could have succeeded in changing the constitution to give himself a third term in office.

Chiluba believed it was not easy to rule with *The Post* around, and he is said to have accordingly advised the Rupiah Banda regime. Attempts were made by the Banda regime to close *The Post* using the Zambia Revenue Authority, but failed. The



Fred M'membe: President of the Socialist Party and 2021 presidential candidate

Edgar Lungu regime crudely implemented that strategy, ignoring even the lawful orders of the Revenue Appeals Tribunal.

The Lungu regime used the Zambia Revenue Authority to close *The Post* by moving and closing the newspaper and demanding about \$5 million in all sorts of taxes. *The Post* appealed to the Revenue Appeals Tribunal, which ordered that the newspaper be reopened and the figures being demanded be reconciled with its auditors and tax accountants. The regime ignored that order and proceeded with the dismantling of the newspaper's assets. *The Post* had managed to secure the money, and gave it to its lawyers for onward transmission to the Zambia Revenue Authority. They were ready to pay and reconcile the figures with the Zambia Revenue Authority later, but were advised that a firm decision was made by the regime to close the newspaper and such payment would be just a waste of money.

If he was not principled, Fred could have decided to cut a deal with the regime and compromise its editorial independence to keep the newspaper alive. But he said: "Let them close the newspaper. They can take away everything I own; as long as they don't take my life, it's OK. I am not ready to surrender to evil. It gets dark sometimes, but the morning comes."

Clearly, *The Post* was not closed because of taxes; if it was taxes, all other newspapers would have been closed; it was politics, dirty politics.

He understands the political landscape

FRED, in true internationalist spirit, supported the liberation struggles in southern Africa and other parts of the world. He became a member of the Communist Party of South Africa – now the South African Communist Party (SACP) – in

1978. SACP became his political home during these formative years. Leading revolutionaries, such as Joe Slovo, Chris Hani, and Ben Turok, were his mentors.

Even in the socialist reversals of late 1980s, Fred never wavered in his belief in, and commitment to, socialism. He has been a socialist from his late teens to date. He is blood and soul a socialist.

In 1991, Fred participated in and gave his total support to the formation of the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) in Zambia. Under the coordination of Akashambatwa Mbikusita Lewanika and Mbata Chitala, the key programmatic documents for the MMD were put together by a think tank, and a secretariat was set up. Fred was an active contributor to this process. He participated in editing the MMD's newsletter, *Multiparty News*.

In 1992, Fred significantly contributed to the formulation of the programmatic documents for the Alliance for Democracy in Malawi under the leadership of trade union activist Chakufwa Chihana.

From 1993 until 2014, Fred continued to support and encourage the formation, as well as the work, of various political platforms in Zambia. His desire was the creation of an environment where good governance, human rights, and freedom of the press could be secured.

His support for the National Party under Baldwin Nkumbula and the Patriotic Front under Michael Sata is well documented. Both parties were founded on an anti-corruption and pro-poor stance.

He is a generous person

SOME people have asked, "Is Fred M'membe a generous person?" And the answer is YES. How many people has Fred assisted out of generosity? So many – and we

are not talking about his relatives – just ordinary people, especially schoolchildren who needed help. I am able to count 34 people. And the money didn't come from the party or a company, it came from his own pocket. Fred has always stood for the poor.

I have yet to come across any other presidential candidate who comes close to Fred. Ironically, he has, in the past, extended a helping hand to individuals or political parties who today fight against him.

He is a true Zambian

ZAMBIANS love to know whether their president is truly Zambian – that he is not foreign. They question whether each president is really from this country.

First came Kenneth Kaunda. Zambians questioned whether he was from Malawi. After Kaunda came Frederick Chiluba, and some people argued he was from Congo. Levy Mwanawasa succeeded Chiluba, and it was suggested he was from Mozambique. After Mwanawasa came Rupiah Banda. He was accused of coming from Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. After Rupiah Banda was voted out, Michael Sata became president, and he was said to hail from Tanzania. After Sata came Edgar Lungu and, again, he was accused of coming from Malawi.

Each time a leader comes to power, his origins are questioned. It will probably be the case with Fred. Yes, people will ask where he hails from. Here is the answer.

Every person has two origins, a father's and a mother's side. So I will explain a bit about these two roots. Fred's paternal grandfather originates from Nkulungwe area, Mwika Royal Village, Shiwangan-du District, in Muchinga Province. Fred's Nkulungwe family has produced four Bemba kings or Chitimukulus – Kasansu Kafunikile

ku Ng'wena, Kanabesa, Chibamba wa Manshi, and Lwipa Ichacila Ababyalo.

His paternal grandmother was a Bisa from Makumya village, as well Bemba from Kapota village (Mungwi District), and from Mukuka Muleya village (Chinsali District).

Fred's mother's side is complicated and we need to do some geography to understand it. We start in Southern Province, in the villages among the Toka Leyas. He has relatives there. We then move upwards to Mwene Kahare of the Nkoyas, Nkeyema District. Fred's maternal grandmother is a direct descendant of the Nkoya royal establishment.

Fred's maternal roots are also anchored among the Mbundas of Mwene Kandala (Mongu District), Mwene Muundu (Kalabo District), and among the Kwangwas to the upper lands of the Barotse floodplain.

He is also Lui from the Barotse floodplain – a descendant of Ndiyoyi Mubuyayeta from King Mulambwa's lineage – and served in-charge of economics and foreign affairs (Mukulwakashiko) under King Lewanika. Ndiyo's mother was Totela, from Mulobezi.

Fred is also a Mukwamwenyi from Silayi village in Liuwa, Kalabo, the village and family where Namakando Wina – the longest serving prime minister under three Lozi kings (Yeta, Imwiko and Mwanawina) – hailed from. Silayi is the ancestral home of Zambian freedom fighters such as Arthur Wina, Sikota Wina and Maimbolwa Sakubita. Others, like Mundia Nalumino and Munukayumbwa Sipalo, also had some connections with Silayi village. In short, Fred has villages in Muchinga, Northern, Southern and Western provinces.

The truth is that Fred belongs to us all. He embodies the true spirit of one Zambia one nation. He is yours. He is a true Zambian.

He will be Africa's most educated president

NOW you may ask what Fred's educational background is, although in the Socialist Party we do not think education necessarily makes one a good leader – it may just help a person to do certain things differently. National leadership requires more than education.

However, one thing is certainly true. With the death of Robert Mugabe, Fred will be the most highly educated president in Africa.

He has a bachelor's degree in accountancy. He has a law degree. Having studied at the Zambia Institute of Advanced Legal Education, he is a qualified and practising lawyer. He also gained a master's degree in economic policy management. He has another master's in taxation and he holds a doctorate in business administration. Name me one other living president who has so many qualifications.

And it doesn't end there. Fred hasn't given up studying yet. He is now reading for a doctorate in journalism and media studies. He is a true role model.

Honours and awards

I DON'T know of any journalist in Zambia or Africa who has received as many international awards as Fred for his commitment to defending press freedom and promoting ethical journalism in Zambia and the world.

He is a recipient of the Media Institute of Southern Africa press freedom award, South African Union of Journalists' Pringle award, World Press Review Editor of the Year award, Percy Qoboza press freedom award from the National Association of Black Journalists, and the United Nations-affiliated International Press Institute's Press Freedom Hero award.

But when president Michael Sata wanted to give Fred a national honour on independence day in 2011, he refused to accept it.

Fred's friendship with the Cuban Revolution has been recognised and honoured by former president Raul Castro. He is a decorated, loyal friend of the Cuban Revolution.

He is firm and resolute

TODAY'S Zambia needs Fred more than ever. He is generous but firm. A no-nonsense person when it comes to lying, stealing, laziness, and the many other vices that afflict our country.

Fred sets disciplinary standards for himself. He works a minimum of 15 hours each day, does not drink alcohol, is vegetarian, exercises an hour each morning, and is extremely time conscious and punctual for his appointments.

In Fred M'membe, you will have a Zambian President dedicated to solving people's problems.

● This is an edited version of the text from the brochure *Dr Fred M'membe Incoming President*. Contact the party online or at the address on the back page for a copy.

Care drain causing a shortage of nurses

Debts, austerity budgets cripple health systems

Vijay Prashad

PUBLIC healthcare systems have been weakened by austerity budgets, often enforced by wealthy bondholders and the International Monetary Fund, which demands the debt service payments and does not care that this money comes out of the public health, public education, and public welfare budgets.

Chronic underfunding of the public sector and short staffing of medical workers has plagued much of the capitalist world, especially in the global south, even before the emergence of COVID-19. A “care drain” has further sucked the availability of care workers.

On July 23, World Health Organisation director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus announced that the world now has 15 million people infected by COVID-19.

“The pandemic has disrupted the lives of billions of people. Many have been at home for months,” he said.

The trauma of the great lockdown is taking a serious psychosocial toll. “It’s completely understandable that people want to get on with their lives,” Dr Ghebreyesus said. “But we will not go back to the ‘old normal’.” The pandemic has already changed the way we live our lives. Part of adjusting to the ‘new normal’ is finding ways to live our lives safely.”

Strain

At a press conference on July 23, in Brazzaville (Republic of Congo), Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO regional director for Africa, said, “The growth we are seeing in COVID-19 cases in Africa is placing an ever-greater strain on health services across the continent.”

There are now about 10,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases among healthcare workers in Africa. “This has very real consequences for the individuals who work in [the healthcare sector],” Dr Moeti said.

“One infection among health workers is one too many. Doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals are our mothers, brothers, and sisters. They are helping to save lives endangered by COVID-19. We must make sure that they have the equipment, skills, and information they need to keep themselves, their patients, and colleagues safe.”

Matters are as bad – or worse – elsewhere. In late May, two organisations of Brazilian nurses, the Federal Council of Nursing and the International Council of Nurses, announced that Brazil had the highest numbers of nurses – mostly women – die from COVID-19.

Health is a political choice. Our researchers spoke with healthcare workers in Argentina, Brazil, India, and South Africa to learn about the conditions of their work and their concerns about how their governments have been managing the pandemic.

“Even before we got into COVID-19 our health system was already ailing,” Lerato Madumo, the president of the Young Nurses Indaba Trade Union in South Africa, said. “At the top of the list was the shortage of nurses. We went into this pandemic with a skeleton nursing staff.”

Each of the people we spoke to told us that their public healthcare systems had been weakened by austerity budgets, often enforced by wealthy bondholders and the IMF, which demanded debt service payments and did not care that the money came out of the public health, public education, and public welfare budgets. It is a good reason to join the call to cancel the debt of the developing world.

In April, the WHO, along with the International Council of Nurses and Nursing Now, released a report called “State of the World’s Nursing 2020”.

The key number in this report is that the world has a deficit of nearly six million nurses. Stuningly, 89 per cent of the shortage is concentrated in the global south, “where the growth in the number of nurses is barely keeping pace with population growth”.

It is worth pointing out that pressure by the IMF to keep public sector wages low in exchange for debt relief results in low wages for nurses, many of whom then migrate to higher wage countries, creating what TED University professor Zuhail Yesilyurt Gündüz calls a “care drain”.

When we talk of nurses, we are largely talking of women, and here we need to focus on disregard and discrimination.

A WHO paper from March 2019 has a sentence that should give pause to all the sanctimonious rhetoric about gender equality: “Women represent around 70 per cent of the health workforce, but earn on average 28 per cent less than men”.

At Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, under the leadership of deputy director Renata Porto Bugni, we are conducting a



Henar Diez Villaloz (Spain), *Quien sostiene la vida* (Those who sustain life), 2020

close study of the gendered impact of the CoronaShock.

Based on interviews with health workers conducted by our team for Health is a Political Choice, our dossier developed a 16-point agenda to shift the priority of healthcare systems in capitalist countries. Six of them bear special focus:

- Substantially increase COVID-19 testing for health workers.
- Protect workers by providing high-quality PPE and masks, as well as other necessary equipment. Frontline workers must be adequately trained to confront the disease.
- Immediately disburse funds to set up training schools for health

workers, including doctors, nurses, and public health workers.

- Increase the salaries of health workers and pay them on a frequent and regular basis.
- Acknowledge that workers have the right to withdraw their labour if they decide that to work entails an imminent risk to their health or life (this is based on the International Labour Organisation Conventions 155 and 187).

- Guarantee the inclusion of health workers’ unions on committees that formulate policies for the health sector in general and for the COVID-19 crisis in particular, and that they have a voice in helping to determine such policies.

These are elementary demands, policies that any sensitive person would agree to after having seen the catastrophe inflicted upon the populations in the capitalist states during this pandemic.

Many of these reappear in our Ten-Point Agenda for the Global South After COVID-19. We should add to this list:

- Pressure the IMF and the US Treasury Department to no longer dictate the levels of public sector wages as a condition of loans, so that governments in the global south can compensate their healthcare workers adequately.

Tricontinental

Young population explains low COVID-19 fatality rate

Uwagbale Edward-Ekpu

SINCE the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Africa has seen lower numbers of cases and death compared with other continents, on a “per million” basis. But the numbers have been on a steady rise and recently there has been a spike as the continent crossed the 500,000-mark.

It took about 100 days for cases to reach 100,000 in the continent, about 20 days each to reach 200,000 and doubled 400,000, and only a week to reach 500,000 cases.

As of July 8, there were 524,000 cases, 12,229 deaths, and 225,000 recoveries from COVID-19 on the continent, according to the Africa Centres for Disease Control.

Reuters analysis on July 7 showed just over 4,200 tests per 1 million across Africa, compared with averages of 7,650 in Asia and 74,255 in Europe. But South Africa also dominates testing on the continent, at nearly 2 million. In western Africa, Ghana has had more than 300,000 tests, 23,000 cases and 129 deaths.

This rising number of cases is not deterring African countries from opening up their economies. With limited resources to buffer the cost of an extended locked down and a declining economy, African governments are faced with a pressing need to restore economic activities while at the same time reducing the spread of the virus.

Findings of the Surgo Foundation from a new Africa COVID-19 Community Vulnerability Index, posit that Africa’s relatively young population has been the best explanation for the low fatality rate in the continent, with projected infection fatality rate based on age and gender distribution relatively low in most regions of the continent – between 0.10 and 0.15 per cent compared with 0.66

per cent in the US, which has an older population. Many African countries, particularly in Sub Saharan Africa, have a median age of around 18. The index shows that north African countries and South Africa, with a higher median age, are more vulnerable when it comes to this factor, but that is offset by factors such as better healthcare facilities.

However, the scenarios in many countries and regions across the continent show varying factors, such as socio-economic and health impacts of the outbreak.

Wealthier countries, such as South Africa, and regions and cities such as Lagos, Cape Town or Nairobi, with a vulnerable older and denser population, are more likely to need hospitalisation if the infection spreads. However, most have relatively better access to healthcare, transportation, and housing that reduces fatality and may allow for social distancing and lockdowns to be more feasible.

Lower income countries, such as Ethiopia, or poor regions, such as Nigeria’s northern regions of Zamfara and Yobe with poor access to healthcare, find it difficult to practise social distancing, being more vulnerable to household crowding and transportation difficulties or staying at home during lockdown without financial assistance.

Across countries, the index showed Ethiopia as the most vulnerable in Africa despite having fewer deaths per capita among big African populations in Nigeria, South Africa or Kenya. This is due to vulnerability factors, such as household crowding, transportation difficulties, poor health system, low socioeconomic status, large internally displaced populations, and food insecurity. South Africa, which has a high HIV prevalence, an older population, and the highest number of cases and deaths in Africa, is one of the most vulnerable countries.

Quartz

CHINA WATCH

INTEREST in China is growing, yet most news and analysis outside the country is produced by mainstream media from the global north. To provide access to Chinese perspectives, the *Dong Feng Collective* – researchers from various countries – offers a China digest of news. This is an edited selection.

US senses threat

FROM trade sanctions and fake news to military and diplomatic intimidation, US offensives against China are a reaction to Chinese economic and technological advances. For the first time, the US risks losing technological superiority, with Huawei’s 5G tech the biggest threat.

Frontline

Inefficient moves

ACCORDING to president of the Council on Foreign Relations, US aggressive tactics against China are inefficient and weaken US hegemony. Concerned about maintaining US dominance, Haas has criticised the White House boycott of multilateral bodies and its inability to increase competitiveness against China.

Washington Post

Trading places

FACED with a US trade war and the pandemic in the first-half-year, China is strengthening relations with Southeast Asian countries, now its main trading partners. Chinese investments (US \$6.2 billion) in the region jumped 53.1% annually and trade with ASEAN (US \$297.8 billion) represented 14.7% of the total, surpassing Europe (14%) and the US (11.5%).

Caixin Global

Taiwan boost

TAIWANESE exports to China in first half grew 9.8% year-on-year (US \$66.8 billion), despite rising political tensions. Taiwan’s plan to export more to ASEAN has failed (-4.8%), with increased dependence on China (to 42.3% of exports), followed by the US (14.5%) and Japan (7.4%).

South China Morning Post

Payment in full

THE Chinese government has paid US\$127 billion in arrears to small and medium enterprises and taken measures to help with their steady development. Having already granted cheap credits and tax exemptions, the additional measures ensure timely payments to SMEs – the most affected by the pandemic, accounting for 70% of GDP and 80% of jobs.

China Daily

Bouncing back

THE software industry has recovered, with revenue up 6.7% (to US \$516 billion) and profits increasing 1.3% annually (to US \$60.7 billion) after a five-month decline, but international sanctions loom. In the first half-year, the sector employed 6.73 million people and exports slipped 0.4% year-on-year.

Asia Times Financial

Plastic challenge

CHINA plans to reduce consumption of non-biodegradable plastic by 30% by 2025, but an explosion of delivery services is posing a challenge. In 2018, Chinese consumed 25 million tons (9 million in delivery packaging), one of the highest rates in the world. Beijing is expected to ban bags and other plastic utensils next year.

South China Morning Post

We all float on the same sea, but some are in super yachts

COVID-19 exposes a crisis that leaves others clinging to drifting debris



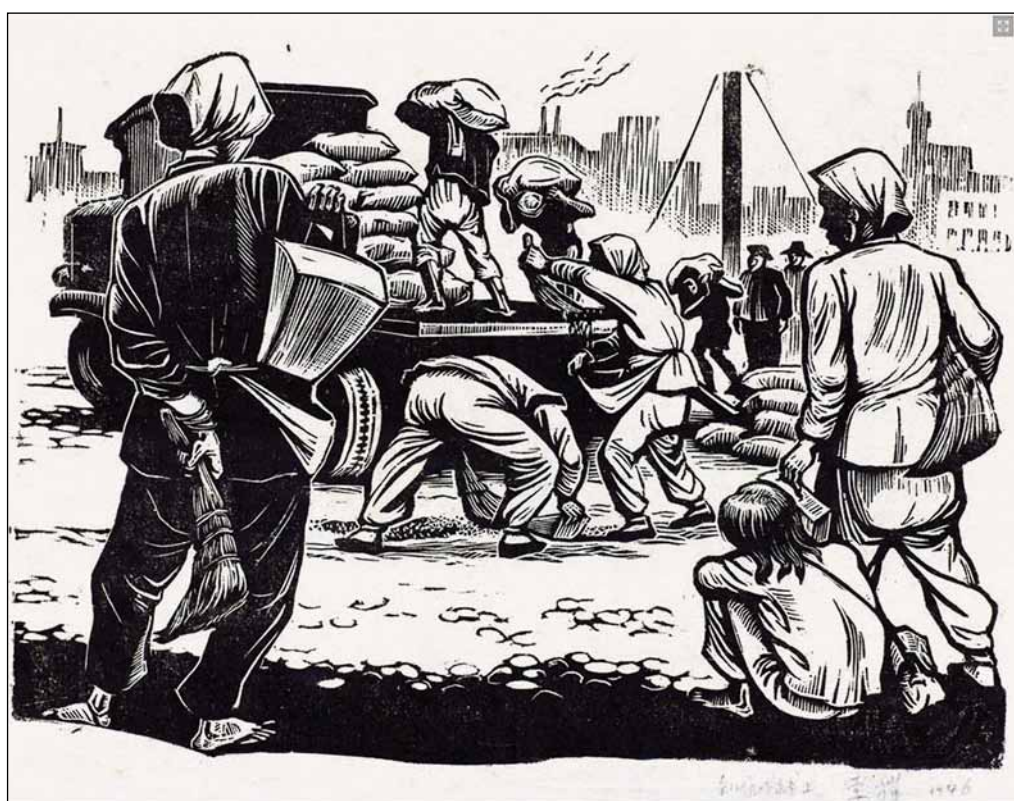
Every dollar that goes towards debt servicing is a dollar that cannot help buy a ventilator or fund emergency food support. During the CoronaShock crisis, this is both morally indefensible and economically irrational. Debt suspension or postponement is insufficient, it merely puts off the reckoning. It is beyond time to cancel these odious debts, which cannot, in any case, be paid during the coronavirus recession

Vijay Prashad

ON JULY 18, United Nations secretary general António Guterres posted the following tweet: “COVID-19 has exposed the lie that free markets can deliver healthcare for all, the fiction that unpaid care work isn’t work, the delusion that we live in a post-racist world. We are all floating on the same sea, but some are in super-yachts and others clinging to drifting debris”.

Dr Rajiv Shah, the president of the Rockefeller Foundation (US), recently said the United States relies upon two “monopoly companies” (Quest and LabCorp) for COVID-19 testing that “don’t have enough capacity in their central processing systems for the volumes that are necessary right now”.

These monopoly companies – promoted by the free markets that Guterres spoke of – are run on the for-profit motive, which means that they are just-in-time processing laboratories that do not have the “capacity” to do more than normal laboratory work; anything more than that is economically inefficient for them.



Top: Gilbert & George (Italy/UK), *Class War*, 1986. Above: Li Hua (China), *Verge of Starvation*, 1946

Dr Shah says the tests cannot be returned in less than a week or two. “With the seven-day lead time”, said Dr Shah, “You basically aren’t testing at all, it’s the structural equivalent of zero tests.” That means the US, with a languishing public sector, is essentially doing no testing.

Subin Dennis, a researcher at Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, has written a clear-headed report on the necessity of a strong public sector.

But to build a public sector requires resources. These resources are being drained by the recession triggered by coronavirus, one that is not endogenous to its own economic fundamentals.

The various debt suspension programmes, such as the Debt Service Suspension Initiative – endorsed by the World Bank and the G20 Finance Ministers – are simply inadequate; a new Oxfam report shows that all of the countries that are eligible for this initiative are still required to pay a minimum of US\$33.7 billion to service their

debts this year. The amount that is being required of them is \$2.8 billion per month, which is “double the amount Uganda, Malawi, and Zambia combined spent on their annual health budget”.

The UN released a comprehensive report that showed in 25 countries, hunger will rise to famine levels

Defaults are on the horizon for a long list of countries. Argentina, Ecuador, and Lebanon have already defaulted. Because of its currency crisis, Lebanon’s medical sector went into chaos. Pharmacies, which import drugs using hard currency, closed. The government failed to reimburse hospitals for services used by patients on social security, and unemployment scuttled access to medical insurance.

With further financial difficul-

ties, these states will once more cut their disbursements to the health sector, scaling back public health services at a time when their value has been clearly demonstrated.

Recently, the UN’s two main agencies that study the situation of food – the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) – released a comprehensive report that showed that in 25 countries, hunger will rise to famine levels. These countries stretch from Haiti to Zimbabwe, from Lebanon to Bangladesh.

In April, WFP director David Beasley said that the situation of hunger risked “a famine of biblical proportions”. Now, Beasley says the updated numbers show that “the world’s very poorest families have been forced even closer to the abyss”.

The debt of these countries is simply not allowing them to properly tackle the three pandemics: coronavirus, unemployment, and hunger.

Tricontinental

CANCEL THE DEBT

DILMA ROUSSEFF
T.M. THOMAS ISAAC
YANIS VAROUFAKIS
JORGE ARREAZA
FRED M’MEMBE
JUAN GRABOIS
VIJAY PRASHAD



IT IS IN the context of the situation that countries now find themselves in that Dilma Rousseff, T. M. Thomas Isaac, Jorge Arreaza, Yanis Varoufakis, Fred M’membe, Juan Grabois, and I, released a statement on debt cancellation. We believe the recession triggered by coronavirus demands far more than milquetoast forms of temporary debt suspension. We believe that debt cancellation is the only way forward in our time of cascading crises. The statement reads:

By all accounts, developing country debt now stands at over US\$11 trillion. In the remainder of 2020 itself, the debt servicing payments on this debt will amount to US\$3.9 trillion. This debt has ballooned over the past several decades, leaving most developing countries in an unsustainable financial situation.

Defaults and debt adjustments seem to be a permanent fixture amongst developing countries, coming punctually for reasons that are often external to the fundamentals of their economies.

Austerity has become a permanent condition, which is what has weakened the public health systems of so many countries and left them vulnerable to this global pandemic. To continue to service their debt and to be obliged by these debt burdens means that developing countries will not be able to efficiently and

effectively tackle the pandemic, nor build the systems necessary for future public health emergencies.

Every dollar in debt servicing that goes to repay a bank or a wealthy bondholder is a dollar that cannot go to buy a ventilator or fund emergency food support. During the CoronaShock crisis, this is both morally indefensible and economically irrational.

Debt suspension or postponement does not provide a foundation for the necessary development of these countries. It merely puts off the reckoning.

It is beyond time for the cancellation of these odious debts, which cannot – in any case – be paid during the coronavirus recession.

Both public and private creditors took a risk with their investments. They exploited the needs of developing countries by lending money with obscene interest rates; it is time that they paid the price for this risk rather than force countries with meagre resources to pay out precious capital.

● *Dilma Rousseff (former President of Brazil), T. M. Thomas Isaac (finance minister, Kerala, India), Yanis Varoufakis (former finance minister, Greece), Jorge Arreaza (foreign minister, Venezuela), Fred M’membe (President, Socialist Party, Zambia), Juan Grabois (Frente Patria Grande, Argentina), Vijay Prashad (Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research)*



The Socialist Party in government will ensure adequate **food** for everyone, equal access to **education**, universal **healthcare** for all, dignified **housing**, safe **drinking water**, and proper **sanitation**

JUSTICE EQUITY & PEACE



*Manifesto of the Socialist Party
2021-2026*

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