

Beware the puppets of imperialism

These leaders are at the service of the same bandits who ruined our lives

Socialist staff reporter

MANY African leaders have been co-opted as puppets by the same imperialists who carved up the continent into bantustans hundreds of years ago to serve their own interests, Socialist Party President Fred M'membe told a TV and internet audience on Africa Day.

Interviewed by Roxy Jones Kangwa for Mwebantu Live TV, Dr M'membe said imperialist powers were "planting puppets all over".

"These are not leaders, they are simply puppets . . . how long did it take us to win our independence struggles? How many of our people died just to be declared an independent country from the same people who today we are kneeling before? Today they are back again and we are following them like puppets. We are following the same people who came and colonised us, con-



Socialist Party President Fred M'membe being interviewed by Roxy Jones Kangwa for Mwebantu Live TV on Africa Day

quered us, enslaved us, humiliated us in the most cruel forms."

Dr M'membe said imperialists were even controlling African institutions. "They have taken over the African Union, they have seats in the AU, they have observer status in the AU – the same people we liberated ourselves from. Even in our defence and security committees in the AU, they are there."

"These leaders are at the service of the same bandits who ruined our lives. They think they are leaders when they are puppets, imperialist lackeys. They are not good for the bantustan they are running. They are not good for the African continent."

Dr M'membe explained that Africa was divided into bantustans – now called countries – at

meetings in Berlin by Europeans with American representation between December 1884 and April 1885, "without our participation".

"The countries we occupy today aren't even countries," he said. "They are just simply bantustans created in Berlin by our colonisers, by those who subjugated us for centuries, those who humiliated us for centuries, those who enslaved us for centuries. The only country that is supposed to be there is Africa."

Arbitrary

Dr M'membe said the arbitrary division of Africa by "white men with big maps of Africa and very long rulers for drawing lines" was "necessitated by greed" and set in motion a process of colonisation and plunder-

ing of the continent's resources that was still taking place today. "They would go in the night, discussing who should get what portion. Sometimes they just took a river (as a border). The Luapula River was the boundary between what later came to be known as Zambia and DRC. If your village was built on both sides of the Luapula River you'd find one part of your village was in Congo, the other part in Zambia."

Dr M'membe spelled out the many migrations that had taken place in Africa over hundreds of years and said, "We are one bantu group of people coming from the Niger Delta through the Congo. Even those who had to come back later from South Africa also come from the Niger Delta through the Congo. We are all one group of

bantu-speaking people." He said it was time to reintegrate Africa.

"Our dream is for a united Africa. That was the dream of those who founded African Unity, that was the dream of Kwame Nkrumah and his comrades, that was the dream of Marcus Garvey, that was the dream of African patriots – not to perpetuate these bantustans that were created in Berlin."

Dr M'membe said the division, colonisation and plundering of Africa was the reason for its poverty.

"Why are we so poor with all our immense resources? At one point Africa was better than Europe. This is the mother continent of all human beings. The homo sapiens occupying the planet today all came from Africa."

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Cynicism doesn't achieve anything

I'd rather help shape the future, M'membe says

THE MANY disappointments, failures and capitulations of our leaders – political, religious, traditional and otherwise – are turning many of our people into cynics, Socialist Party President Fred M'membe says.

"We are repeatedly being told, 'all you politicians are just the same – liars, crooks, hypocrites – we have heard this before. We have been promised this before'," Dr M'membe said in a Facebook post. "This is the cynicism we have faced so often."

"But communities, nations, are not built by cynics. Cynics build no bridges; they make no discoveries; no gaps are spanned by them. Cynics may pride themselves in being realistic in their approach, but progress and the onward march to a better society and a better life demand an inspiration and motivation that cynicism never affords. If we want progress, we must take the forward look. Cynics have never built a community."

Dr M'membe said he tried to think of cynicism as "coming in two flavours". "One is stylistic, working mostly at the surface level. It's the *sotto voce* side comment that notes something true, but relatively trivial. In most contexts, it's relatively harmless, and it can be funny. I'll admit occasionally indulging in this myself."

Projection

"The second, which is much more dangerous, goes to motives. It's what is sometimes referred to as 'enlightened false consciousness', a sort of illusion of wisdom. It's an outward projection of strength and resolve that's based on a deeper fear. This is the school of 'it's all bullshit anyway', or 'they're all liars', or 'everyone just looks out for number one'."

"In the name of preventing disappointment or betrayal, it preemptively rejects the possibility of anything good, then congratulates itself on not being sucked in. By defeating any attempt to make things better, it becomes self-confirming: 'See, I told you it wouldn't work!'"

Dr M'membe said that as he grew older he was much less bothered by the first kind of cynicism, and much more bothered by the second.

"The first is basically the accent with which a personality speaks," he said. "The second is what that person says, and what they're afraid to say."

"The sneaky appeal of the second kind is that even as it greases the skids towards appalling inhumanity, it offers a cheap high of personal superiority. But the high is fleeting, and the damage immense. If everybody is a liar, and nothing matters anyway, then on what basis can you criticise a liar who promises heaven

but can't even deliver purgatory, a tyrant or crook who is using public office to cut all sorts of complicated business deals using proxies?

"If anything, a cynic might give them props for at least being brazen about what they're doing. This is the political base of the strongman leader, the authoritarian whose buffoonery doesn't seem to stop him. To the second kind of cynic, the idiocy is part of the appeal. 'He doesn't bullshit', with that term here defined as 'consider the needs of other people'. After all, other people are entirely corrupt too, right? So it follows that their needs are false too, right? Maybe they don't even exist, right? Right?"

Dr M'membe said "cheap nihilism" didn't even believe itself, when pressed.

"The point is to press it. People committed to the second kind of cynicism get nervous when they see good people act in admirable ways. It threatens them. They immediately seek reassurance by trying to suss out nefarious underlying motives. When that fails, they'll make some up."

"When pressed on the fabrications, they'll double down. As annoying and even destructive as that can be, there's a logic to it. If some people are capable of doing good – at least sometimes – then it's possible their cynicism is both selfish and factually wrong. The implications of that are devastating. Worldviews, when threatened, fight back."

"Some threats are real. They can be beaten, but only if people can get past their cynicism and take the risk of actually trying to make things better. Not perfect, just better. That means taking the risks of trusting people, of giving up easy certainties, and of stepping into roles that may feel awkward or even scary."

"It often means accepting only partial victories. It's one thing to say that the poor will always be with you, it's another to deliberately create more of them as a matter of policy and then congratulate yourselves on making tough decisions."

"Improvement is partial, uneven, and hard. It requires effort. It requires accepting the possibility that the way things are right now isn't the way they have to be. It requires accepting the possibility that people can be more than just metabolisms with feet. The world was built by people who actually tried."

"Yes, some people lose sight of the big picture over time, and start acting from the wrong motives. It happens. But the core of what we do is about the future. That's the point of the entire enterprise. If there isn't going to be a future, or if it's all just bullshit anyway, who needs all these struggles?"

"But there will be a future, and the kind of future is up for grabs. Dark cynics will have the future happen to them. I'd rather have a hand in shaping it. It doesn't have to be this way," Dr M'membe said.

KAPASA Makasa Kalulu, who was the Socialist Party's parliamentary candidate for Shiwan-gandu constituency in last year's general election, says the party is now seen as a viable alternative to UPND and must be ready to govern in 2026.

"People are not truly free when they are unable to feed their family. They are not truly free when they are unable to retire with dignity, or when they are unemployed, or exhausted by working long hours with little pay," he said.

"People are not truly free when they have no healthcare, proper farming inputs or live in abject poverty. Under these circumstances, no one voted into a political position should abuse their power and use it to further their personal interests, as is the case with the UPND today."

"Very soon the Socialist Party will take over Muchinga,



Kapasa Makasa Kalulu

Luapula, Northern and Eastern Provinces as its strongholds, and strongholds are needed in politics to be able to win elections. They can also help us unite our Socialist Party movement in other provinces.

"People are now accepting us as an alternative political party to UPND, so stay steady and be ready to govern this nation in 2026," he said.

Meanwhile, Socialist Party Lusaka Province youth chairperson Aubrey Mwale has held a consultative meeting with youth leaders from all seven constituencies and wards in Lusaka district.

Mwale urged youth leaders not to relent in the mobilisation drive that kicked off recently.

"Comrades, we have no time to relax. The task we all have is to mobilise more members in our respective wards. For starters, each youth leader will be required to form and adopt one branch in his or her locality by the end of June," he said.

Mwale also called for discipline, commitment, and unity of purpose among youth leaders in the province if the party is to be

strong and viable in the Lusaka district.

● Socialist Party Lusaka Province secretary Aldridge Kabungo has also urged members in the province to start mobilising and campaign for the party and President Fred M'membe.

"The best time to mobilise is now," he said. Kabungo, who was in Kafue for party mobilisation activities with other provincial leaders, said there was no time to waste.

"We need to mobilise and remind the people how they were duped by current leaders in government," he said.

"We are all ambassadors of the Socialist Party's progressive ideologies which seek to bring about real change in our country."

Kafue district will be headed by Manex Wamunyima, who has been tasked to form ward committees by the end of the month.



The consultative meeting with youth leaders from all seven constituencies and wards in Lusaka district, and, below: party mobilisation activities with provincial leaders in Kafue

Mobilising with sights set on 2026



We must understand global connections

SOCIALIST Party central committee member Faston Mwale says that unless and until we understand how we are connected to the global capitalist system, we will find it difficult to grasp how the Russia-Ukraine war impacts the world economic, social and political realities of today.

"The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is not an isolated event. It has global consequences," he said. "Even the imposition of sanctions on Russia has global ramifications. In consequence, all of us, without exception, will suffer 'shrapnel wounds' as a result of the conflict one way or another."

"To claim a position of neutrality in the face of aggression is effectively to side with the aggressor. I applaud the 24 countries that voted against the motion to remove Russia from the Human Rights Council of the UN."

"It is clear that the conflict was instigated by the United States and its allies in a bid to expand its military infrastructure east, and compromise Russia's security situation. But the US's hegemonic appetite for global dominance is cracking under severe challenges from rising powers."

"The US is reacting to its hegemonic decline in many ways. One way is through a new neoliberal offensive by staging proxy wars – hybrid war mongering that includes running the most unscrupulous campaign of lies and slander against challengers," he said.

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Women's vital role in Zambia's evolution

SOCIALIST Party Women's League member Grace Natasha Namunyola says women's movements have played a historical role in Zambia's development.

"Even though it has not always been recognised, women have played crucial roles in the various stages of Zambia's social evolution, including our liberation in both the country and the region," she said in a Facebook post. "Good examples of women who have been recognised historically for the roles they played include Mama Kankasa, Betty Kaunda, Julia Chikamoneka and Alice Lenshina. We need to dig deep and tell their stories."

"There are also the untold stories of our grandmothers who housed freedom fighters, protecting them from our enemies, women who fought with babies on their backs. These are women who helped end the yoke of colonialism."

"After independence, however, many women fell victim to continued marginalisation. Some played simple roles in the women's league, while others went to form their own organisations to continue to campaign for a better life, spearheading the fight against the many vices against women."

"We in the Socialist Party believe in the socialisation of the home space. We believe in creating an environment that allows for justice, fairness and equity, enabling a move away from the oppressive conditions that many of our women find themselves in."

We need a new type of Africans who have a sense of destiny

● From Page 1

“How have they surpassed us? Which continent has suffered the slave trade like we have suffered? How many human beings were taken out of this continent?”

He said Africans lived in “perpetual fear” as a result and were still beholden to their colonisers, who continue to play them off against each other.

“They are coming and giving a little money to this bantustan, a little money to that bantustan leader, befriending this bantustan leader, making him feel he is more important than other bantustan leaders, and they continue to serve their interests, not the interests of Africa.

“They give them a few dollars, they give them a few shares in some corporation, and they (the leaders) feel they are becoming billionaires so they get excited. They build small, cheap houses here and there that look better than their people and they feel very important. They put on expensive suits. They fly in expensive jets. They think they have gotten there. And they are ready to sell their people’s destiny.”

Dr M’membe said it was a familiar story. “We have been on this path in this country since 1891. We were colonised by a company, by an individual foreign investor. We are still dependent on foreign investors for our economic wellbeing. We are still looking for a new Cecil Rhodes. When are we going to learn? Nobody will get us out of this. Nobody will give us our liberation. Nobody will unite us. It is we who will liberate ourselves.”

Brutalised

Dr M’membe said “emancipation is a struggle” and it would take solidarity to combat imperialists who “control information”. “It is a battle of ideas . . . look what they did to Julian Assange just for showing what they are doing behind our backs. There is no lie he told. That’s the kind of world we are rejecting. That’s the kind of world we are struggling against.”

Dr M’membe said African unity – pan Africanism – was the answer, and he told viewers that Nkrumah “defined that better for us”.

“His conclusion was that African unity that is anchored on equity, that is anchored on solidarity, that is anchored on an honest understanding of life, is necessary; and today we can conclude, as Nkrumah concluded, that that type of African unity can only come through socialism, through a socialist revolution on the continent.”

But he said Africans would have to change to combat “our enemies, those who brutalised us for centuries”.

“We need a new type of Africans; Africans who are proud of being Africans, Africans who understand their history, Africans who understand the place they should occupy in the world, Africans with a sense of destiny, Africans who are true to themselves and to humanity,” he said.

Dr M’membe said the liberation of Africa was his hope, “The same way we fought for the independence of the small bantustans is the same way we should fight for the reintegration of our continent based on equity, solidarity, humility and honesty.”

They’re not here to save us, they’re here to rob us

The same people have been stealing our minerals for years

Socialist staff reporter

MILITARY bases, lies, bribes, material inducements and picking off Africa’s best brains at a very young age are just a few of the methods imperialists are using to combat African unity and further their interests, Socialist Party President Fred M’membe told a conference in South Africa.

Billed as an Africa Liberation Day Dialogue on the topic Defending Our Sovereignty, the meeting, streamed on internet platforms, was held at The Forge mixed-use space in Braamfontein, Johannesburg.

Dr M’membe told the audience that the modern-day methods of combating African unity to further their interests was just an extension of the colonialism they had inflicted on the continent for hundreds of years.

“Sovereignty has always been threatened by the same people; the Belgians, French, Americans and so on. For 600 years they have been doing the same thing to us. Are we going to let them continue to do so?”

Dr M’membe said plundering mineral resources had always been their reason for interfering in Africa’s affairs and continued to be so.

He reminded his audience that these were the same people who “robbed us of our sovereignty in the first place” when they met in Berlin in 1884/1885 to carve up the continent into manageable bantustans – now called countries.

“They met to take away our sovereignty, the sovereignty of our motherland, Africa. We were one continent, one country,” he said, adding that although there had been partial victories fighting back, the imperialists had killed those who were a serious threat to them, including Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice



Socialist Party President Fred M’membe taking part in the Africa Liberation Day Dialogue in Johannesburg, South Africa

Lubumba, Chris Hani, and Muammar Gaddafi, among others.

“Today they are coming back, the same people, telling us they want to set up military bases, they want to set up military offices to defend our sovereignty. Really? They are advancing something else,” he said.

“They are defending American interests, they are defending French interests, and they are defending British interests.

“They were not there in our fight against neo-colonialism because our fight was against them. They can’t fight against themselves. Since when did they commit suicide to defend us against themselves?”

“Let’s not deceive ourselves, what they are here to advance is their economic interests, mainly to do with our minerals. They came here for wealth, and for that wealth, for those minerals they were ready to kill. And indeed they killed. They are here again and all the time they find puppets to recruit from among our people. There

are hunters, mainly Africans, they use to hunt their own fellow brothers and sisters for very few pieces of silver,” he said.

“They are putting puppets as presidents all over the bantustans they have created in Africa. Puppets, funded by the same mining corporations. Anglo American today is still creating puppets, an offspring of the company that colonised the bantustan that I call my country, Zambia.

Foundations

“They are funding puppets in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya. And who is at the head of the Anglo American Foundation? They have another puppet, the former president of the great bantustan of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo.

“They are creating foundations to establish new ones, but they

want to pick them from a very early age, to take the best brains of our young people under their leadership programme, like the Mandela Foundation. Again, to advance their interests.”

Dr M’membe said it was unthinkable that the imperialist powers and corporations were defending Africa’s sovereignty against other threats.

“They are coming to protect our sovereignty . . . from who? From the Chinese? From the Russians? Is that possible? Are we threatened by the Chinese in terms of national sovereignty? Are we threatened by the Russians in terms of our national sovereignty? Who are they protecting us from?”

“And they don’t go where there are no minerals. Their focus is where their strategic minerals are. Today their focus is DRC, a country, a Bantustan, they have never given peace to ever since King Leopold (of Belgium) set foot on

that territory, to take slaves, to take our ivory, to take our minerals, to take our timber. DRC has never known peace.”

Dr M’membe said the time had come for Africa to unify and rise up against them.

“It gets dark sometimes but the morning comes. Our morning must come. Wherever there is a crucifixion, there must be a resurrection. Our resurrection must come. When you go to sleep there is a time to rise. Our time to rise has come.”

He said there were many African comrades and fighters to look up to and seek inspiration from, “and for the light to see where we are going”.

The Africa Day dialogue also featured Vijay Prashad, Tricontinental Institute’s Executive Director; Kwesi Pratt Jnr, Secretary General of the Socialist Movement of Ghana; and Philip Dexter, Chief Operating Officer, Nehawu Investment Company.

Something ‘is seriously wrong’ with safari tender cancellation

SOCIALIST Party president Fred M’membe says “there is something seriously wrong, questionable or even corrupt” with this government’s cancellation of the tender for the granting of safari hunting/ photographic tourism concessions said to be “due to public interest”.

“There is no public interest in the cancellation of safari hunting concession agreements by tourism permanent secretary Evans Muhanga,” he said.

Muhanga cancelled safari hunting concession agreements signed in 2020, against the advice of Attorney General Mulilo Kabesha, as the hunting season opened on May 1 this year.

Instead, Muhanga ordered a re-advertisement of the concessions in his memorandum to director of national parks and wildlife in the Ministry of Tourism, Dr Chuma Simukonda, dated April 22.

Several stakeholders have expressed concern that this amounted to “lawlessness” and could cost the country huge sums of money if the original bidders sued the government.

Dr M’membe said those involved wanted to award the tenders to themselves.

“Clearly, there is no ‘public interest’ being pursued here, it’s all about personal interest. They want to corruptly award the concessions to themselves, their friends or associates.

“We demand that they immediately cancel their cancellation of the awarded tenders and follow the Attorney General’s advice,” he said.

“There’s something seriously wrong, questionable or even corrupt with this government’s cancellation of the tender for the granting of safari

hunting/ photographic tourism concessions ‘due to public interest’.

“This cancellation is against the Attorney General’s very well-reasoned legal advice. This government has deliberately ignored the Attorney General’s warning that this cancellation is legally unsustainable. And that it will lead to law suits against the government which will tarnish its image in terms of creating an enabling investment environment and respect of the law.”

Dr M’membe questioned why the government had decided to terminate Dr Simukonda’s contract after he advised them not to go against the Attorney General’s advice.

He also said the government should respect the voices of people in the affected 19 hunting blocks.

“This government has also totally ignored the pleas of the Zambia Community Resources Board Association and other stakeholders not to cancel the awarded tenders,” Dr M’membe said.

“And they have decided to terminate the contract of the Director General at Department of National Parks and Wildlife for advising them correctly that they cannot go against the Attorney General’s Advice over those cancelled safari tenders.”

According to the Attorney General’s advice in a letter dated January 5, 2022 addressed to President Hakainde Hichilema on tender No. MTA/SP/001/2020, there was nothing illegal about the tender and cancelling it would attract lawsuits against the government.

Xi is a brilliant socialist thinker, says M’membe

SOCIALIST Party President Fred M’membe has described President of China Xi Jinping as “a brilliant, outstanding socialist thinker of our time”.

“We Zambian socialists and all progressives trying to build a better society in our homeland have great lessons from Xi Jinping’s Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics,” Dr M’membe said.

“It has very important implications for a new era and to the world and to us African socialists in particular. There’s no doubt Xi Jinping is a brilliant and outstanding socialist thinker of our time.”

Dr M’membe said this was his take on Xi Jinping’s Thought on Socialism:

- Insist on socialism as a long-term cause, use and contain the market forces, keep state-owned enterprises in key sectors, increase net investment to sustain and develop economy.

- Insist on keeping an open mind, actively practise self-criticism, while keeping the class consciousness and mass line spirit

(in part through fighting corruption).

- Learn and master all necessary tools in managing so-called modern society.

- Enable and allow different social groups to perform different roles under the central leadership of party.

- Pay long-term attention to a wide range consensus buildup (as wide a united front as possible).

- Strong political leadership, constant political education for cadres and for people, especially the young generation, is critical.

- Common prosperity and shared destiny need long-term commitment, need BRI and Global Development Initiative (GDI) development on the continent.

- All these factors entail paying attention to many developmental, sociological and international factors beyond the building of the requisite infrastructure.

“Which socialist or progressive in the times we live in can disagree with these brilliant ideas or ignore them?” Dr M’membe asked.

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We will never be 'one land, one nation' until we have equality

Americans are devoted to individualism, which leads to greed, unbridled competition and consumerism. Our traditional society, culture and religious beliefs are not anchored on individualism, but on Ubuntu – equity. They have very little in common, writes Socialist Party President **Fred M'membe**

OUR PRESIDENT recently told visiting United States Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and Environment Jose W. Fernandez that “we have shared values” with them.

In life it is always very important to be clear about things. It is important to understand the core or real values and assumptions of the people we are dealing with.

“Values” are ideas about what is right and wrong, desirable and undesirable, normal and abnormal, proper and improper. “Assumptions” are the unquestioned standards about people, life, and “the way things are”.

People who grow up in a particular culture share certain values and assumptions. This means that most of them, most of the time, agree with each other's ideas about what is right and wrong, desirable and undesirable. They also agree, mostly, with each other's assumptions about human nature and social relationships.

The values and assumptions of a culture shape the way people act. Understanding these values and assumptions help us understand why people from a certain society behave the way they do.

The most important thing to understand about Americans is probably their devotion to “individualism”. This is their main value, the value on which all their other values – greed, unbridled competition and consumerism – are anchored. They have been trained from early in their lives to consider themselves separate individuals who are responsible for their own situations in life and their own destinies. They have not been trained to see themselves as members of a close-knit, tightly interdependent family, religious group, tribe, nation, or other group. And all their values are subsets of individualism or are there to serve and reinforce it.

Individualism is certainly not our core value. Our traditional society, culture and religious beliefs are not anchored on individualism, but on Ubuntu – equity. In this respect, the American values are not our values.

Our leaders shouldn't turn themselves into parrots, parroting things they don't even understand just to win acceptability by the Americans. Political ideas are worthless if they are not inspired by noble, selfless sentiments. Likewise, noble sentiments are worthless if they are not based on correct and fair ideas.

For us, we have chosen to defend certain principles that are



Inequality has divided our country into two nations – the Kwa and Ku nations – the nations of the poor and the well to do. Photo from the Socialist Party manifesto

of tremendous value at a time of confusion and opportunism in our country and in the world, a time when many politicians are feathering their own nests, are struggling for recognition by the imperialists.

We will never be hired or hire ourselves out to be lackeys or the puppets of imperialism. We are striving to build a new society anchored on the values of equity, honesty, humility and solidarity.

Zambians will thrive best in a decent community of people with principles, standards, common aims and values. The most important value for us is equity, and not individualism as it is for the Americans and their puppets. All our other values are subsets of “equity” to serve or reinforce it.

You do not suffer just because you are getting fewer calories than required. There is another sort of suffering; social inequality, which makes you feel constantly debased and humiliated as a second-class citizen in your own country.

Divided

Inequality has divided our country into two nations – the Kwa and Ku nations – the nations of the poor and the well to do. As such, we cannot today truly speak of one Zambia as one nation. Those who live in Kwa have poor water supply, sanitation, shelter, nutrition, schools, healthcare, roads, and very high rates of unemployment. Those who live in Ku have the best of everything.

And whereas in the past it was easy to move from Kwa to Ku, today it is very difficult to do so. In those days, all one needed was to work very hard at school, college or university. Today, hard work is not a guarantee that one will finish school, college or university. It is money that determines that, the ability to pay school, college or university fees. If you are born in Kwa, it is highly unlikely you will marry someone from Ku. Where are you going to meet? You live in different places, you go to different schools, churches, shopping centres, places of entertainment,

and even bury your dead in different graveyards.

To unite our people in “one land and one nation” – as is our cry in our national anthem – will require equity of access to necessities such as education, healthcare, water, housing, sanitation, transportation, physical security, land and food. Most, such as health, education and physical security, should be public goods, and others should at least be distributed according to the level of need in order to ensure access for all. Zambian society is a long way from realising this requirement. The rich have “first-world standard” goods and services, whereas the poor masses have access to poor-quality services or none at all. There should be no such gap.

The Zambian masses are suffering from poverty, injustice, humiliation and inequality. This suffering is both material and moral. Even when no one lives in absolute poverty, the existence of a glaring disparity in income levels indicates an intolerable imbalance in the way wealth and resources are distributed, where average rural poverty is 76.6 per cent. Western Province has poverty levels of 82.2 per cent, Lusaka Province 81.1 per cent, North-

It is very clear that the value systems that Zambians had at one time hoped to create for their country; those of equity, non-violence, a sense of justice and national unity, are becoming a distant vision

ern Province 79.7 per cent, Eastern Province 70 per cent, North Western Province 66.4 per cent, Southern Province 57.6 per cent, Central Province 56.2 per cent, Copperbelt Province 30.8 per cent and Lusaka Province 20.2 per cent.

In a compassionate society, there should be no differences in outcomes based on factors for which people cannot be held responsible. Zambia has one of the worst situations globally. There is a glaring gap between the rich and poor. Between 2010 and 2015, the Gini coefficient increased from 0.65 to 0.69. This is a very high rate of income inequality. It is

volatile and dangerous for national development.

It could be argued, of course, that those who enjoy the highest levels of income have achieved it through hard work, and that they deserve the benefits of their efforts, regardless of the poverty afflicting others. There are many reasons to reject this argument. Firstly, from a religious point of view, it is sinful to keep for oneself an overabundance of wealth when one's sisters and brothers are suffering, and even dying for want of simple necessities. In such a situation, it is of no consequence how and why some people come to be excessively wealthy while others starve. Distributive justice demands that sufficient sharing takes place to ensure the basic needs of all are met.

Secondly, even if the demands of charity are rejected, and were it possible to argue that those enjoying excessive wealth are fully justified in doing so, commonsense dictates that our society cannot prosper under such conditions. The good of each of us in the long term is secured and promoted by the common good. Failure to do so can only precipitate social instability and threaten the wellbeing of all, rich and poor. History abounds

with instances where the rich and powerful have brought about their own downfall by refusing to recognise in good time the legitimate demands of the poor. And as long as this gap remains at its current scandalous level, the future of our country is at risk. If the gap between the rich and poor is unacceptable, then so, too, is the actual degree of poverty in our society.

By tolerating such high levels of poverty, the Zambian economy undermines the common good, and fails to demonstrate the solidarity that our shared human dignity demands.

It's very clear that the value systems that Zambians had at one time hoped to create for their country; those of equity, non-violence, a sense of justice and national unity, are becoming a distant vision. Instead, today, Zambia has become a shameful example of how capitalism is creating and reproducing itself under conditions of extreme injustice, inequity and state-sponsored violence.

If nothing is done to address this decay, a total collapse of the social, political, cultural and economic life of Zambia as we know it, or might have hoped it to be, is imminent.

Attacks an attempt to redefine imperialism

Socialist Party central committee member **Faston Mwale** defends party president Fred M'membe's stand against the setting up of an AFRICOM office in Zambia, and accuses his attackers of siding with capitalist imperialists against the country's interests

THE ATTACKS on Socialist Party President Fred M'membe following his criticisms of plans to accommodate an AFRICOM office in the US Embassy in Lusaka are hardly surprising.

The comments by UPND sympathiser **Simon Mwewa**, for example, alleging that Dr M'membe is “angry and misleading Zambians” is nothing more than an insidious attempt to redefine imperialism and defend its resurgence here. The attacks on Dr M'membe can only be the work of those who have sold their souls to imperialist capitalism.

As Dr M'membe has said, one of our main problems today is that people too easily

forget our history, and we have a leadership now that defends imperialism without any sense of shame. They are the lackeys of foreign capital at the expense of our sovereignty.

Like every patriot, Dr M'membe has every right to be angry that the UPND government is undermining the sovereignty of our nation by advancing and servicing the aims of imperialists.

We will not sit idly by and watch the negation of the historic struggles for our independence that were waged by our forebears. It is our sacrosanct duty to defend, preserve, and advance our independence gained through blood, sweat and tears.

The neoliberal trajectory pursued by the UPND demonstrates the contradictions in our country. Our critique of UPND shortcomings is objective. We do not want the government to fail. It is our hope that it will see sense in what we are saying and avoid turning our country into a bitter arena of political conflict.

We know, as do many others, that the aim of setting up AFRICOM offices is just another tactic used by the US government and its allies to try to undermine the sovereignty of countries, and we will not allow this.

The attempt by Mwewa to attack socialism and slander those committed to its ideals is an obnoxious effort to undermine the vision of a more just society.

As the resentment against this mediocre UPND government grows, hired “trojan horses” attempt to carry out offensives against the noble ideals of socialism. What the UPND has done to the masses is nothing less than a betrayal, but it will suffer political consequences.

Dr M'membe has become the target of attacks by UPND stooges simply because of his patriotic stand against the greedy ruling elite, and his attempt to protect our sovereignty by defending the oppressed and exploited masses.

Socialist Party President Fred M'membe: Care is the essence of power, of strength – strength without care is savage, brutal and selfish



This is the true meaning of revolutionary democracy

THERE IS no doubt that the question of socialism is today commanding the attention of the best minds in our country. It is a growing force in the political and economic thought of our people, and whether we agree or disagree with it, we have to reckon with it, and we may as well begin by understanding it.

I begin by pointing out that the growth of our national wealth, instead of bringing comfort to the masses of our people, is imposing additional burdens on them. A few people have gotten relatively very wealthy, while at the bottom of scale there's a mass of poverty and misery unequal in magnitude to that of 30 years ago.

Today, Zambia is the seventh most unequal nation in the world. I submit that the true test of progress is not the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few, but the elevation of a people as a whole.

The first verse of our national anthem reads: "Stand and sing of Zambia, proud and free, Land of work and joy in unity, Victors in the struggle for the right, We've won freedom's fight. All one, strong and free."

Are the masses of our people today "proud and free?" For the masses of our people, is Zambia today "land of work and joy in unity?"

It cannot be denied that we are today a struggling people with no time to lose.

Our tomorrow has become our today. And as they say, we are confronted with the fierce urgency of now, in the unfolding life and history.

We must struggle without respite, we must work ceaselessly to lift the downtrodden masses of our people to the higher destiny – a more just, fair and humane society – full of honesty, equity, humility and solidarity; a new plateau of compassion.

Care is the essence of power, of strength – strength without care is savage, brutal and selfish. Strength with care is compassion – the strength needed to help our poor people lift themselves out of poverty and to their full stature. But where do we get that strength to provide that care? From some Macgyver, some 21st century Moses? No.

We cooperate, we collect, we coordinate, so that everyone has responsibility, everyone has rights. That is how we make the weak strong, that is how we lift the poor out of poverty, that is how we cure the sick, that is how we give talent a chance to flourish. We do it together.

This is the true meaning of revolutionary democracy – people deciding together, building together to transform their country and thus transform themselves. It's a growth in fraternal love.

The sad reality of poverty

"CAPITALISM means that the masses will work, and a few people – who may not labour at all – will benefit from that work. The few will sit down to a banquet, and the masses will eat whatever is left over," Julius Mwalimu Nyerere said.

Pope Francis says capitalism is "the root of all social ills . . . the cause of violence and tyranny".

In our country today, our sad reality under capitalism is such that poverty levels in some of our provinces are above 80 per cent and rural poverty averages 76.6 per cent.

By tolerating such high levels of poverty, the Zambian economy undermines the common good, and fails to demonstrate the solidarity that our shared human dignity demands and consequently undermines national unity.

And as long as this gap remains at its current scandalous level, the future of our country is at risk and our people will look for alternative leadership.

Leadership 'Alzheimer's'

"THEY are no longer answering our calls. If they answer it's just to say, 'I am in a meeting. I will call you back'. But they never call back."

This is the complaint that is on the lips of many ruling party cadres and supporters. Things have changed. Their leaders have become less acces-

sible. This is not unusual. We often see a lot of what one would call "leadership Alzheimer's disease". It consists of losing the memory of those who nurtured, mentored and supported us in our own journeys.

We see this in those who have lost the memory of their encounters with the great leaders who inspired them; in those who are completely caught up in the present moment, in their passions, whims and obsessions; in those who build walls and routines around themselves, and thus become more and more the slaves of idols carved by their own hands.

It's not business as usual

OVER the past few days, weeks and months, we have gladly and warmly received many new comrades into the ranks of our party.

In the Socialist Party we train our members, especially the leading cadres, ideologically, politically, and otherwise.

The numbers joining us are stretching to the utmost our training capacities and facilities. But what encourages us is the great appreciation that our new members have shown towards our humble approach to politics; it is not business as usual. We believe that training our members and cadres politically and ideologically is a vital, progressive step in an effort to achieve the more just, fair and equitable nation we so desire.

Bob Marley sings:

"Rise up fallen fighters

Rise and take your stance again

'Tis he who fight and run away

Live to fight another day . . ."

Aluta continua

It takes a certain madness

AS A country, our problems will not be solved by the same level of consciousness that created them.

As Thomas Sankara said, "You cannot carry out fundamental change without a certain amount of madness. In this case, it comes from nonconformity, the courage to turn your back on the old formulas, the courage to invent the future."

This neoliberal path that we continue to embrace knowingly (and in some cases unknowingly) will lead us nowhere but to a neverending cycle, out of the frying pan to the fire and back. Let us for once consciously and truly find our path to real revolutionary change.

Lies and false promises

WHEN we give our leaders multiple opportunities to lie for their own benefit they start with little lies which then get bigger and bigger over time. They would rather win with false promises, lies, than lose with the truth.

But as a society, we need to understand that when we don't punish people promising us heaven when they know very well they can't even deliver purgatory, we increase the probability they will make false promises, lie again.

When politicians face no consequences for dishonesty, their falsehoods tend to get even more sensational.

We need a paradigm shift

THERE is a need for a psychological paradigm shift in terms of how we view ourselves and our development.

No amount of foreign direct investment (FDI) will help us develop. Even in the face of enormous challenges, we need to find ourselves and gain the courage and the confidence to use our resources and capabilities to rebuild our country.

We don't have a blueprint

THERE is no blueprint anywhere in the world on how to build socialism in Zambia. We have to chart our own path based on our history and circumstances.

Every path is different. Every country's situation is different. You cannot decorate your tomorrows with other people's yesterdays. We are indeed charting our own path, without, of course, ignoring the experiences of others. Learning from others doesn't mean copying.

Defamation law is being used to 'fix' opponents

It's abuse of the criminal justice system

UPND is abusing the criminal justice system to fix its political opponents, Socialist Party President Fred M'membe says.

"We are witnessing a very worrying abuse of the criminal justice system by the UPND leadership, its cadres, and the police under its control and direction," he said in a Facebook post.

"In a clearly coordinated manner, some cadres of the UPND are made to launch complaints of defamation of the President in far flung areas of our country against individuals living in Lusaka. These individuals are then arrested in Lusaka and transported to these areas where they have no lawyers, family or friends."

Dr M'membe said this was the case with Raphael Nakachinda, who was arrested in Lusaka and transported to Solwezi and made to find his way back to Lusaka.

"It's now the case with Chilufya Tayali, who has been arrested in Lusaka and taken to Lukulu in Western Province. We hear there are plans to arrest Sean Tembo and take him to Ikelenge in North-Western Province.

"We know they are relying on the argument that the alleged defamation was committed on social media, which can be accessed anywhere in the country. But this is not the rule of law, which they had promised us; this is rule by law.

"What is the difference between rule by law and rule of law? Briefly, rule by law indicates that decisions are forced upon a citizenry, while rule of law is to control the unlimited exercise of the power by the supreme lawmaking authority of the land. It is a just application of the law for everybody, keeping in mind that the law doesn't go against basic precepts of humanity."

Dr M'membe said rule of law empowered citizens to live and work safely.

"Citizens will not be subjected to arbitrary laws of the government and are protected against any abuse of power by the state.

"What they are doing is actually punishing these individuals before they are convicted by making them suffer unnecessarily.

Modesty

"What they are doing is not different from what the PF government did to them and many other citizens. In principle, this not different from what the PF government did to them in those road traffic treason charges.

"This is all about ego – 'I am the President! How dare you say such things about me? I will fix you so that you know where power lies'. But as we have repeatedly warned, the exercise of power must be a constant practice of self-limitation and modesty.

"These abuses of our criminal justice system are unacceptable and must be opposed and stopped. As we have repeatedly stated, it is a well-known fact that throughout history, those who administer or control the criminal justice system hold the power with the potential for abuse and tyranny.

"The statutory powers to arrest and prosecute those who commit crimes should be reasonably exercised and in good faith.

"By allowing people to be unjustifiably arrested, detained and prosecuted, those in power are sending a dangerous signal that the criminal justice system can be used to persecute and fix opponents of the President. There's need to administer justice fairly and impartiality.

"In *Freedom under the Law*, Lord Denning wisely remarked, 'All power corrupts. Total power corrupts absolutely. And the trouble about it is that an official who is the possessor of power often does not realise when he is abusing it. Its influence is so insidious that he may believe that he is acting for the public good when, in truth, all he is doing is to assert his own brief authority. The Jack-in-office never realises that he is being a little tyrant.'

"We should at all times uphold the rule of law, integrity of the criminal justice system and the right to a fair trial."

SP pays tribute to murdered AbM land rights campaigner

THE SOCIALIST Party has issued a statement of solidarity with Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM) following the murder of leader and land rights activist Nokuthula Mabaso.

Mabaso was shot and killed while her children watched outside her home in eKhenana informal settlement in Cato Manor. She suffered five gunshot wounds and died in the arms of women who had rushed to her side.

Cosmas Musheke Musumali, the Socialist Party's general secretary and first vice-president, said the murder confirmed finally that AbM was the target of vicious and deliberate attacks meant to shatter the organisation.

"Comrade Nokuthula's murder follows barely two months after the murder of another AbM activist, Comrade Ayanda Ngila," he said.

"Routinely, the authorities display no urgency to arrest those responsible, proving that the poor are always last in line for everything, even justice.

"The setting of Comrade Nokuthula's life and the scene of her murder was the community of eKhanana. eKhanana is a product of the brutality, barbarity and injustice of life lived under capitalism. It is a product of the misery suffered by our people.

"Whoever wants evidence of the promise of 'a New South Africa' betrayed can find it in eKhanana. But eKhanana is also



Nokuthula Mabaso (right) at work on the eKhenana settlement

the site of the resistance, defiance and struggle against the suffering our people endure.

"Whoever wants to witness the construction of a socialist project aimed at improving the lives of our people should visit eKhanana. We owe the establishment and growth of eKhanana to the service and sacrifice of comrades Nokuthula, Ayanda Ngila, Thuli Ndlovu and others."

Dr Musumali said the Socialist Party "cannot accept the murders of our comrades quietly".

"We commit to act with purpose and intention, to broadcast our anger and disgust at the killing of AbM activists and to demand that the South African

authorities bring those responsible to justice.

"We hold Comrade Nokuthula's family close in our thoughts. We hope they find solace and comfort in the knowledge that she contributed invaluable to the struggle for land, housing and dignity. Comrade Nokuthula lived a life that we should all emulate – one in service to our people.

"As the poet Federico Garcia Lorca said: '[We] will always be on the side of those who have nothing and who are not even allowed to enjoy the nothing they have in peace'."

● Tribute to commune leader Nokuthula Mabaso – Page 9

NATO expansion and

Organisation expanded eastward for 40 years

Eugene Puryear

IN HIS State of the Union address, US President Joe Biden said that nothing could have averted Russia's invasion of Ukraine: that it was "premeditated and unprovoked". He asserted that repeated "efforts at diplomacy" were rejected by the Russians, the upshot being there was no possibility that the war could have been averted, and, by implication, the claims made by many that NATO's actions set the stage for war were false.

Since the war began, the view expressed by Biden has become an article of faith in Western media and political circles. "Blaming NATO" is now akin to treason or genocide denial. This, of course, serves a few important purposes. Most importantly it fits perfectly with the attempts of NATO to justify its existence. If Russia is marching inexorably westward, determined to drop a curtain of tyranny across Europe from Brussels to the Urals, then NATO must continue to exist. According to this argument NATO's role as a defensive alliance is as relevant, perhaps more so, than in the Cold War days.

Secondly, and relatedly, it marginalises any resistance to US and NATO actions by setting-up a framework that puts any anti-escalation or anti-sanctions arguments on the back foot by framing Russia as the aggressor and NATO as a legitimate forum for self-defence.

The reality, however, is very different. In fact, for nearly 40 years the implications of NATO's eastern expansion, in particular up to and into Ukraine, have been crystal clear, and warned against by voices from across the political spectrum, including numerous "eminent" voices in the West. In fact, it was so clear that in retrospect it's hard to understand the actions of successive administrations in any other way than as a stance designed to provoke conflict, or capitulation – not build peace or partnership.

Russia chose the winter of 2021 as its moment to make its implicit "red lines" clear to the entire world. What needed to be done explicitly to resolve the conflict was not only known but easily within reach. It would, however, have required a significant shift in the US posture towards Europe. The United States was and is unwilling to make such a shift, making build-ups and wars inevitable.

Regional security

MOST OF those conducting an uncritical defence of Ukraine bristle at the idea that Russia has a legitimate interest in the broader region in which it is situated, and that this should play any role in evaluating the conflict. From their point of view any idea that Russia does, or should have any influence in its Western border regions is endorsing a form of "Russian imperialism".

This, clearly, ignores almost all the relevant facts. Most notably being the long shared history of the various post-Soviet nations as part of the USSR and before that the Tsarist empire. In fact, Russia as a country has a "Ukrainian" origin. Most of these nations, Ukraine included, have strong

cultural, religious, personal, economic and political ties to Russia. Russia also tends to host, by far, the largest diasporas of the various former Soviet republics, and Russian is widely spoken across various countries. That the countries are interlinked is unquestionable, and that their politics and views of "security" would be tied to this history is undeniable.

Add to that, Russia has been invaded through its Western borders more than once. This includes the two most "iconic" invasions, that of Napoleon and that of Hitler, both of which left indelible impacts on the psyche of Russia and near environs.

Taken as a whole – whether one accepts or rejects Russia's specific negotiating positions – it's clearly logical that Russia would assume a military alliance of those with declared anti-Russian sympathies that view the country as not just an enemy state but an enemy culture moving along the routes of traditional invasion directly into a zone of great historical, cultural and economic relevance would be a topic of great sensitivity to Russia.

Why NATO after 1991?

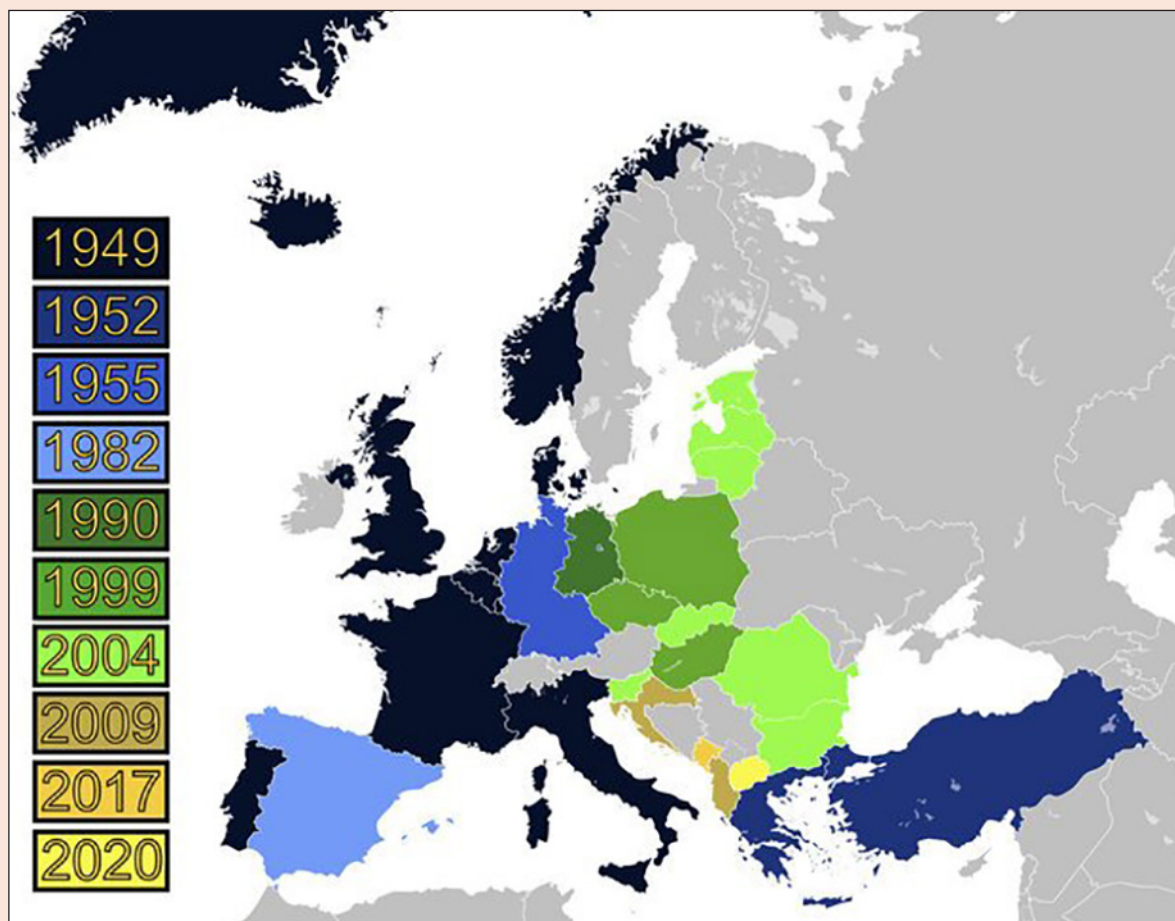
KNOWING the above facts and considering Russia's status as a nuclear power, if US strategists actually wanted to avoid war then that would be taken into account when determining policy. However, looking back at the historical record from the George HW Bush administration onwards, the United States knowingly pursued a policy of NATO expansion and clearly misrepresented its position to Russia. In other words, it pursued a war-like policy knowing full well that it was exactly that.

The dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the unravelling of the Soviet Union created both "risks and opportunities" for the United States, as then National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft wrote to then President Bush. The opportunities could only be seized, in his mind, by making sure NATO was "vital in these new circumstances".

He further told the president that there was room for a more "robust" role for the United States in Central Europe, later asking his staff how the US could "get between Germany and the USSR". This was a common theme among US planners in their views of the post-Cold War era, the need to make sure a new security architecture centred on the Soviet Union – or else a German (Western European) axis outside of US influence could emerge. Indeed, in 1990, the State Department planning staff were writing to their top leadership noting that the United States, through NATO, could create an "active buffer" and "organise the region".

There was significant discussion about the issue of the US role throughout 1990. Just after German reunification, high-level discussions took place at the National Security Council and the State Department where one scholar stated interest was "pervasive" in NATO enlargement into Eastern Europe.

Despite the interest, however, the United States had cold feet about making the issue public, specifically because it would be seen as a majorly aggressive move by the Soviet Union. National Security Advisor Scowcroft wrote to the president that it was critical to broader US goals of defeating the Soviet Union to avoid "steps that could push the



ABOVE: Map of NATO expansion by year. RIGHT: 2006 G8 Summit. Front row (left to right): Hu Jintao of China, Jacques Chirac of France, Vladimir Putin of Russia.



The United States committed to a policy of NATO expansion in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a matter of central importance. Keeping the risks in mind, however, it would embark upon a 'smoke-and-mirrors' sort of strategy

A new world order

THE NEW post-Soviet geopolitical environment was seen as highly challenging to the United States because of the movement by France and the newly reunified Germany to press for further European integration. To the United States, this portended the possible end of the US role as a "European Power" – something the ESSG stated as a "principal challenge" to US "interests". A briefing for President Bush additionally noted that this would challenge the US ability to "harness European power in support of our broader alliance of values and global interests".

As the national security advisor put it in a memo to the president, the United States had to avoid an "independent European security identity" that would "reduce our influence in Europe and weaken domestic support for our European presence". NATO was seen as the "foundation for Atlantic cooperation in addressing political and security concerns". And, to underline how imperial the thinking in Washington was, the national security council staff noted that the United States had to determine "what limits . . . to place on the development of a common European foreign and security policy in order preserve a vital North Atlantic alliance".

The general point is driven home by the department of defence "Defence Strategy for the 1990s" (the public version of the infamous "Wolfowitz doctrine") which noted that the principal goal of US engagement with Russia and former Soviet states was to "reduce their [military] forces", through "military budget cuts"

and "conversion . . . [of] military industries", and, more bluntly, "demilitarisation". In other words, Russia and any potential post-Soviet Eastern European alliances must pose no actual threat to US hegemony.

In short, enlarging NATO in Eastern Europe was seen as key to preventing the consolidation of rivals to American unipolar power by preventing pan-European cooperation – including with Russia – that stood as its own pole. While the United States would become more open about NATO expansion, it attempted to continue the rhetoric begun in the Soviet days, cloaking its aggressive orientation behind the rhetoric of peace and cooperation.

The eastward push

RISKS aside, the United States committed to a policy of NATO expansion in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a matter of central importance. Keeping the risks in mind, however, the United States would embark upon a "smoke-and-mirrors" sort of strategy, steadily expanding NATO eastward while pretending it was not about the obvious goal of containing not just Russia but the possibility of European-Russian cooperation that could rival US hegemony. This was done very much in the face of clear warnings.

The Clinton administration would pick up on the policy of the HW Bush administration, presenting NATO expansion as being done in partnership with Russia, and even created a framework for such: the "Partnership for Peace". The real challenge, and what ultimately placed the two nations at odds, was Russia's unwillingness to completely knuckle under to the West.

While then-Russian president Boris Yeltsin had played a key role in dismantling the USSR and was more or less selling his own country for parts, he thought that the rise of the capitalist kleptocracy would open the door for the United States and Russia to cooperate as "superpowers" and shape the post-Soviet era together. Yeltsin, for instance, wrote to Clinton on the eve of the G7 meeting in 1994 – now dubbed the G8 as "a symbolic gesture to keep Yeltsin engaged" – that he hoped that the United States and Russia would "set the pace and thrust", in terms of major issues from

European Security to nuclear proliferation in North Korea. On Europe he expressed a desire for "a model which would co-opt in a natural way the European Union, the Council of Europe, NATO, the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, the West European Union, and the CIS".

Later in 1994 Yeltsin would write to Clinton that "there should exist a basic understanding that Russian-American partnership constitutes the central factor in world politics" and that he felt the relationship must exist "on the basis of equality".

This was antithetical to the United States, which, as laid out in the 1992 Defence Strategy, wanted Russia to be the opposite of a great power. Instead, the United States was seeking for Russia's military power to be totally extinguished as a companion to a smash and grab raid on the powerful former Soviet economy. Capitalist Russia was only welcome to play a role in the US-led club if it accepted a totally subordinate position.

Misleading

The United States, however, kept using phrases like "inclusion not exclusion", "no surprises", and said that the Partnership for Peace was "for real", to make it seem like it was interested in addressing Russian concerns. There were a series of misunderstandings, however, in 1994, over the issue of NATO setting a timetable for when and how to admit new members. This was something the United States had previously told Russia it would not do.

Combining that with "US press reports and European complaints", the Russians were feeling that the United States was "pushing harder" for NATO expansion than the partnership language they pushed in official government-to-government interactions with Russia. Clinton implicitly admitted the US designs were deliberately misleading when he asked Nicholas Burns, one of his top advisors on Russia, if they needed to be "more frank" with the Russians.

The United States did not end up being more frank and quite a bit of work went into reassuring the Russians that the obvious was not true, including sending signals they would delay any NATO expansion until af-

and the war in Ukraine



Vladimir Putin of Russia, Angela Merkel of Germany, and US President George W Bush

ter the Russian elections in 1996. A key issue was that the idea of total surrender to US designs for Europe was the subject of “strong domestic opposition across the political spectrum”.

Ultimately, however, the Russians were correct that the United States was set to expand NATO, a central part of its vision of global “leadership” (read: dominance). This was something confirmed by Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, who wrote a memo to the president advising him on how to handle Yeltsin given that US policy was “that the NATO expansion track will proceed even if the Russians refuse to permit progress on the NATO-Russia track”. And, in fact – just three days after Clinton pledged to Yeltsin that he was pursuing a path of partnership in European security – Vice-President Gore briefed Secretary of Defence William Perry that Clinton was “committed to a rapid expansion of NATO right after 1996, rather than taking the much slower route through the Partnership for Peace”.

Red flags

THAT this was likely to lead to conflict with Russia was clear enough. As mentioned earlier, fears of the obvious negative reaction from the Soviets to NATO expansion caused the Bush administration to smother its own discussions about the issue. And, in conjunction with its erstwhile allies, went out of their way to reassure the Soviets they’d never do such a thing.

When testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1997, Jack Matlock, US ambassador to the USSR from 1987 to 1991, told senators NATO expansion would “go down in history as the most profound strategic blunders made since the end of the Cold War”, and “could produce the most serious security threat to this nation since the Soviet Union collapsed”. In later remarks Matlock clarified he feared the possibility of a nuclear stand-off.

William Perry, Secretary of Defence during a critical phase of the expansion, related in later years that he had pushed back in internal meetings against expansion, saying he felt so strongly it was wrong and dangerous that he “in the strength of

my conviction . . . considered resigning.” And that, in retrospect, “I regret I didn’t fight more effectively.”

Also in 1997 a letter of prominent foreign policy voices including three former senators called NATO expansion a “policy error of historic proportions”. In 1998 George Kennan, the chief architect of the Cold War, stated that NATO expansion into Eastern Europe was a “tragic mistake”, that “no one was threatening anyone else”, and that “of course there is going to be a bad reaction from Russia, and then [the NATO expanders] will say that we always told you that is how the Russians are – but this is just wrong”.

In his 2015 memoirs, Robert Gates, former CIA Director and Deputy National Security Advisor in the Regan and HW Bush administrations, noted that he met with President George W Bush after the 2007 Munich Security Conference where Putin criticised the West, saying of NATO expansion that it “represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended? And what happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact?”

Provocation

Gates stated that he gave an assessment to W Bush noting that Russia had deep resentments at US “arrogance” in attempting to direct all elements of Russian domestic and foreign policy during the Yeltsin era. Amazingly, Gates notes he withheld from Bush his judgement that a significant amount of the expansion agenda had been a “mistake” and a “needless provocation”

Omissions aside, Bush likely sought Gates’ counsel as someone somewhat outside the “neoon” circle and his spoken judgements about US hubris clearly could only be read as warning. But it was a warning that Bush ignored, moving forward with what Gates would deem a “monumental provocation” – stating that Ukraine would become a candidate for NATO membership. US Ambassador to Moscow, William J. Burns, would write via cable that top Russian officials made it clear that: “Rus-

US policy has been deliberately provocative, it has moved forward in an environment that any observer could see was potentially leading to conflict, and thus can only be interpreted as a move designed to test Russia

sia would view further eastward expansion as a potential military threat. NATO enlargement, particularly to Ukraine, remains ‘an emotional and neuralgic’ issue for Russia, but strategic policy considerations also underlie strong opposition to NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia. In Ukraine, these include fears that the issue could potentially split the country in two, leading to violence or even, some claim, civil war, which would force Russia to decide whether to intervene.”

Sound familiar?

BURNS would double down in another memo calling Ukrainian entry into NATO as the “brightest of all red lines for the Russian elite (not just Putin)”. Saying that even among Putin’s “sharpest liberal critics” he had not found anyone who “views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests”.

In a 2014 op-ed, Henry Kissinger stated clearly, “Ukraine should not join NATO.” Clearly there was no doubt that NATO expanding eastward generally, and especially including or seeking to include Ukraine, was likely to become a serious conflict between NATO and Russia.

Road to war

PRESIDENT Obama, known to be partial to the “realist” philosophy pushed by people like Gates and Kissinger, did not initially push to fulfil Bush’s vision of Ukraine as a NATO member. In fact, he tried to, infamously, “reset” relations between

the two countries. In the context of the “pivot to Asia” rearranging US power to confront China, Obama sought to keep Russia engaged with the West and prevent the formation of a powerful Eurasian bloc of the two nuclear powers. This was advice shopped around by Kissinger.

Obama was, in fact, widely considered by “Russia hawks” to be “soft” on Russia, particularly when it came to Ukraine. After interviewing Obama on the subject, Atlantic Magazine writer (now editor) Jeffery Goldberg stated, “Obama’s theory here is simple: Ukraine is a core Russian interest but not an American one.”

Obama also notably resisted calls coming from both within his administration from various “Russia hawks” and the “foreign policy community” like the Atlantic Council to start massively arming Ukraine after the Maidan coup in 2014. When a documentary filmmaker asked arch-neocon Robert Kagan in 2016 about Obama’s Ukraine policy he responded, “[Obama] said to me [that he wouldn’t arm Ukraine because] he doesn’t want a nuclear war with Russia,” he added, rolling his eyes dismissively”

Blockage

Obama did, however, provide key backing to the post-2014 Ukrainian governments. The Maidan events totally changed the status quo between Ukraine and Russia. It brought the ascension of extremely anti-Russian governments, rising to power with the aid of the United States and Europe. After the signing of the Minsk II accords, which froze the civil war that broke out in Ukraine, the Obama administration gave political support to the Ukrainian-side as they dithered about implementing the deal.

This support was critical because it buttressed the position of two successive Ukrainian governments to avoid the key implementation issue: autonomy for two breakaway republics in Eastern Ukraine. As one European diplomat told Politico at the time, “The implementation of Minsk now is more or less frozen. Unfortunately, the Ukrainians are now actually carrying a big part of the responsibility of the blockage.” When the Ukrainian

parliament tried to consider measures to implement Minsk in the summer of 2015, far-right (including Nazi) forces rioted outside the legislative building, killing several and injuring over 100.

For Russia, even though Ukraine was not a NATO member it was not only now NATO adjacent, but governed by an extremely anti-Russian government backed diplomatically by the United States. Even if the US government was holding back on the most lethal weaponry, it was also willing to provide material support of other kinds in addition to imposing sanctions on Russia.

Further, the Ukrainian government, in addition to prolonging a civil war with forces that could be deemed “pro-Russian”, was also shaping the internal political environment in the most nationalistic and anti-Russian of ways, including giving large sums to Nazi groups to train the population both to fight and in far right ideas. In other words, Ukraine was clearly becoming something of an anti-Russian garrison state.

As regimes changed in Washington and Kyiv, however, it seemed things might pull back from the brink. President Trump was far less resistant to sending lethal military aid, something he began in 2018. That said, Trump too, seemed not terribly enthusiastic about a conflict with Russia over Ukraine, and clearly shared Obama’s core conviction that Russia was a lesser threat, potentially even an asset, in a greater conflict with China.

In 2019, President Zelensky won a landslide election in which a major campaign promise was to resolve the conflict in the East. This, ultimately, did not come to pass. While Zelensky did expend some effort, by 2020 the effort was bogged down. Ultimately Zelensky was not able to bridge the gap around the key issue of what level of autonomy the breakaway eastern regions would have in a new political dispensation.

It is in this context, that things truly began to shift in terms of our current moment.

On the brink

ZELENSKY, in early 2021, shifted gears, leaning into a more aggressive nationalistic stance in an attempt to shore up his political position. He moved to sideline his opposition, closing down television networks, charging the leader of the largest opposition party with “treason” and even levelling charges against previous President Petro Poroshenko for being involved in illegal schemes with Russia despite Poroshenko’s demonstrated hostility to the Russian government and their positions vis-à-vis Ukraine.

At least one report detailed that the United States played some role in this crackdown, potentially implicating the United States in what was clearly an attempt to silence opposition media and parties deemed “pro-Russia”. This sparked a small Russian troop build-up near Ukraine in March. Shortly thereafter NATO launched one of its largest exercises in decades, Defender Europe 2021, involving nearly 30,000 soldiers, sailors and airmen from across NATO countries. The exercises were, in the words of the Pentagon, to show NATO’s “readiness, lethality and interoperability, as a method of deterrence”. In other words, it was aimed at sending an intimidating message to Russia. The start of the exercises prompted Russia to increase its troops from a reported few thousand to reportedly over 40,000 in an obvious counter signal from the Russians.

At the same time, both Ukraine and the Donbass People’s Republics

were trading claims of increased attacks on either side, further increasing tensions. The situation was clearly a tinderbox and by May the United States was warning that a Russian invasion was a “real threat.”

Then, on September 1, the United States and Ukraine issued a joint communiqué where the US pledged to “support” Ukraine’s aspirations to join NATO, reaffirmed Ukraine’s status as a NATO partner, announced a new US-Ukraine joint defence framework and pledged to help Ukraine work around the existing roadblocks to joining NATO. Just about a month later Russia started to harden its negotiating position, beginning the escalation of the war of accusations that ran from November 2021 to the invasion in February of 2022.

Who is to blame?

IT IS beyond dispute that Russia did in fact invade Ukraine, they themselves argued that their “special military operation” was a pre-emptive defensive move. In that narrow sense it is easy to blame Russia for everything that has happened since. As the above history details, however, from 1989 on the United States and NATO more broadly moved in only one direction: escalation.

At no point was there an attempt to do anything other than lead us to this moment. As the documents from the early 90s clearly prove, the entire US strategy and approach is about using military force to contain Russia’s influence, basing any possibility of partnership on capitulation to US unipolar hegemony.

US policy has been deliberately provocative, it has moved forward in an environment that any observer could see was potentially leading to conflict, and thus can only be interpreted as a move designed to test Russia: either give up on its “red lines” or to fight. Obviously, Russia has chosen to fight.

Whether one agrees with that decision or not, it is impossible to deny that the entire context in which the decision took place was set up by the United States. The US government and NATO more or less constructed the bomb, placed it, lit the fuse, and then acted shocked and surprised when it exploded. This has deep implications for how the conflict can potentially be solved.

Escalation by NATO, from the 90s on, only hardened the sense of bitterness towards the West across the Russian political spectrum. It seems likely that escalation now, via sanctions and military shipments, is likely to do the same. To many Russians, the situation is bound to appear as deeply unfair and instigated by NATO, meaning Russia is more likely to pursue a course of deeper confrontation. This may be what some in NATO want, but it raises the danger of all-out war in Europe and nuclear war.

Everyone from the *Wall Street Journal* to the British Labour Party is pushing the idea that the West should try to “defeat Russia” in Ukraine. This the final and logical stage of NATO’s eastward expansion, a direct attempt to engender regime change in Russia and force it to comply with the NATO vision of Europe (and the world) – at the expense of Ukrainian lives. While this is extolled as righteous in the West these days, it should be seen for what it is: reckless war-mongering.

Liberation

● The original article with footnotes and sources can be found on the Liberation website at www.liberationnews.org/should-we-really-blame-nato-for-the-ukraine-war/

Colombian ex-rebel fighter in presidential run-off vote

Petro pledges action on pensions, education and inequality

A LEFT-WING former rebel fighter has come out on top in the first round of Colombia's presidential election and is set to face a populist businessman in a second round showdown on June 19.

Gustavo Petro, a 62-year-old former member of the M-19 guerrilla movement, had 40.3 percent of votes, office tallies showed, with 99.9 percent of ballot boxes counted on May 29.

Rodolfo Hernandez, a septuagenarian real estate tycoon whose spot in the runoff contest came as a surprise, won 28.1 percent.

Surveys ahead of the first round showed Hernandez – who now has the support of third place candidate Federico Gutierrez and likely many of his supporters – would lag just a few points behind Petro in a run-off vote.

Petro, a former mayor of Bogotá, has consistently led opinion polls on promises to redistribute pensions, offer free public university and begin to change what he says are centuries of profound inequality.

"What's not in doubt today is change," Petro told cheering supporters in central Bogotá. "Now it's about seeing what we will do with Colombia, what Colombian society wants for its own country."

Petro has promised to fully implement a 2016 peace deal with the FARC rebels and seek peace talks with the still-active ELN rebels, as well as halt all new oil and gas development.

"People are showing they are tired of the same thing, that they want a change," said sound engineer Cristian Riano, 35, before listening to Petro's speech.

That sentiment was backed by Daniela Cuellar, senior consultant at FTI Consulting in Bogotá, who said Colombians' thirst for something different was clearly demonstrated now the two candidates promising change were heading to the run-off.

Brutality

"This election is not about Petro, or a move to the left," she told the Reuters news agency. "This is about the Colombian population being tired of the traditional political class and are seeking a better life."

Petro, for whom youth are a major demographic, has rejected oft-repeated accusations he will mimic the policies of deceased former Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and his successor Nicolas Maduro. He says it is his opponents – whom he accuses of making the country reliant on oil income and of brutality toward anti-government protesters – who most resemble the Venezuelan leaders.

Hernandez rose in the polls only in the last two weeks, boosted by his colourful social media presence, especially on the TikTok app. The former mayor of the north-central city of Bucaramanga has promised to "clean" the country of corruption and to donate his salary.



Gustavo Petro of the Historic Pact coalition reacts after coming top in the first round of the presidential election in Bogotá, Colombia

"Now, we enter the second period, and these next few days will be decisive in determining the future of the country," Hernandez said in a livestream after early results showed he advanced to the runoff.

He said he remains firm on his commitment to end "corruption as a system of government".

Despite Hernandez's rhetoric, he is facing a graft investigation by the attorney general's office over allegations he intervened in a trash collection tender when he was mayor to benefit a company his son had lobbied for.

Hernandez denies the accusations and insists they are designed to derail his presidential bid.

Supporters said his anti-corruption ideas were more important than the investigation against him.

"I think he's a new person, a person for change," Miguel Ci-

endua, 49, a karate instructor in central Fusagasuga, told Reuters. "Getting out of corruption will improve everything else."

Petro's main rival for most of the campaign was Gutierrez, a former mayor of Medellín who was seen as the continuity candidate and ran on a pro-business, economic growth platform.

Corruption

Gutierrez, who struggled to push back on accusations he is an ideological successor to unpopular President Ivan Duque, told supporters he would back Hernandez in the June runoff.

"Knowing that our position is decisive for the future of Colombia, we have made a decision . . . we do not want to lose the country," Gutierrez said, adding that he

would support Hernandez because he does not want to put Colombia "at risk".

Turnout in the election was 21 million people, out of 39 million eligible voters. It was similar in percentage terms to the first round of voting in 2018, with about some 54 percent of eligible voters participating.

Colombia's next president faces complex challenges, including those to do with the economy, security and corruption.

The COVID-19 pandemic set back the country's anti-poverty efforts by at least a decade. Official figures show that 39 percent of Colombia's 51.6 million residents lived on less than \$89 a month last year, which has a slight improvement from 42.5 percent in 2020.

Inflation reached its highest levels in two decades last month. Duque's administration said

April's 9.2 percent rate was part of a global inflationary phenomenon, but the argument did nothing to tame discontent over increasing food prices.

Meanwhile, the Red Cross last year concluded Colombia reached its highest level of violence in the last five years. Although the peace agreement with the FARC has been implemented, the territories and drug-trafficking routes that it once controlled are in dispute between other armed groups, such as the National Liberation Army, or ELN, a guerrilla group founded in the 1960s, FARC dissidents and the Gulf Clan cartel.

Duque's successor will have to decide whether to resume peace talks with the ELN, which he suspended in 2019 after an attack killed more than 20 people.

Aljazeera

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 *Dongsheng Collective* – researchers from various countries – offers a China digest of news. This is an edited selection.

Xi calls for closer ties

AT THE BRICS foreign ministers' meeting, President Xi Jinping reaffirmed the need to resist the cold war mentality and strengthen cooperation between developing countries. In an official communiqué, countries supported China's proposal to initiate discussions on criteria and procedures for BRICS expansion. In attendance were Kazakhstan, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal, the United Arab Emirates, Thailand, and two other G20 members, Argentina and Indonesia, likely candidates for the new vacancies.

South China Morning Post

US criticised by allies

DURING his Asian visit, US President Joe Biden announced a new Indo-Pacific Economic Framework to counter China in the region, but didn't give any further details. Formed by the US and 12 "Indo-Pacific" countries, the agreement proposal addressed infrastructure, supply chain, clean energy, and digital commerce. However, Washington suffered criticism from its own allies for not opening up its market, as China has done.

Financial Times

Economy boost plan

THE STATE Council has introduced 33 measures to boost the economy amid falling indicators in April, including tax relief of up to US\$396 billion. Measures include subsidies to guarantee employment and accelerate infrastructure investment planned for the year, reduction of US\$9 billion in taxes for car purchase, and US\$45 billion in railway construction bonds.

Bloomberg

\$1.5bn grain subsidy

THE government has announced a US\$1.5 billion subsidy to grain producers, helping to reduce high costs during the summer harvest and autumn sowing season. Despite harvest delays caused by COVID-19 and floods, record high wheat stocks could meet domestic demand for more than a year despite global shortages due to conflict in Ukraine.

Global Times

Heavenly pit sinkhole

EXPLORERS have discovered a preserved ancient forest inside a giant sinkhole in southern China's Guangxi region. The 192-metre-deep "heavenly pit" is the 30th found in the region known for its karst landscape, formed by the dissolution of bedrock by groundwater, and could be home to undiscovered plant and wildlife species.

South China Morning Post

Eco sites recognised

THREE sites have been recognised as Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems for their unique ways of using traditional practices and knowledge. Valued for maintaining biodiversity and unique ecosystems, the sites are a tea production area in Anxi (Fujian Province), Ar Horqin nomadic grazing system in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, and the rain-fed Shexian Dryland Stone Terraced System (Hebei Province).

China Daily

US China policy based on 'bizarre illusion'

WE SHOULD stop pretending China is trying to take over the world, a former head of the US Army's criminal law division at the Pentagon, and former Virginia state senator, told a conference on the "threat of nuclear war".

Addressing the May 26 conference held by the Schiller Institute – a German-based political and economic think tank with members in 50 countries – retired Colonel Richard H. Black said the claim about China's international ambitions was a "bizarre illusion".

"China only has five overseas bases compared with the 900 or so US-UK bases," he said. "We have created this bizarre illusion because the deep state, the war industrial complex, must have enemies. You cannot manufacture weapons when you don't have enemies."

"And so we create this illusion that they are coming to get us, that they are on our doorstep."

"The fact of the matter is that China is out to make a buck. They want money. Yes, the Belt and Road Initiative is very important, but they have a different paradigm."

"Our paradigm is, we go into a country, we set up NGOs, we take over, you know, the government by coup if we can't, and we just bomb the place to smithereens half the time."

An Executive Intelligence Review interview

U.S. Leading World to Nuclear War

Col. Richard H. Black (ret.)



A video still from the Schiller Institute conference at which Colonel Richard H. Black (retired) addressed US foreign policy on China, among other issues

"You compare that with the foreign policy of China, which is that you go in, you work with whatever government is there, you're not judgmental, but you make hard business decisions, you make investments."

"And I think for people who are comparing the foreign aid paradigms of US and China, they are saying: 'You know, my likelihood of surviving is much higher if I follow the Chinese paradigm.'"

Colonel Black told the conference there was a need to "get away from this feeling that we have to constantly be at war with the entire world".

"Where has China fought? Who have they invaded? They have had a couple of border disputes, and that's it. They don't invade people."

"We invade people. We need to get away from this illusion. If we can break away from the illusion that they are out to get us, which is totally false, we can start chopping back on our defence budget, world tensions could reduce, and we could get back to making cellphones or whatever we do for a living, and have a genuine economy that wasn't based on killing people in foreign countries. That's what we ought to do."

Land activist who helped the poor murdered in front of her children

Tribute to Nokuthula Mabaso, Abahlali baseMjondolo commune leader

AB AHLALI baseMjondolo leader and activist Nokuthula Mabaso was shot and killed while her children watched outside her home in eKhenana informal settlement in Cato Manor.

She suffered five gunshot wounds and died in the arms of women who had rushed to her side.

Abahlali leadership speculated that the motive for the murder was to prevent Mabaso from testifying against

the man who killed one of their own, Ayanda Ngila, in early March. Mabaso had been prepared to go on the stand should the matter go on trial.

The movement has accused police of dragging their feet in bringing perpetrators to book saying the legal system only benefited those with deep pockets and since Mabaso lived among the poorest, there was no hope of killers being jailed.

Thapelo Mohapi, general secretary of Abahlali baseMjondolo, described Mabaso as a militant who served the poor and their struggle for land and dignity.

"She was a brave woman, she not only became one of the leaders who led the establishment of the occupation, she also was a key figure in the development of the occupation into a commune and its projects. She played an important role in the communal gar-

den, the poultry project, the communal kitchen and the communal shop.

"These communal projects have ensured that no family goes to sleep without food and that no child goes to school on an empty stomach.

"Her crime is that she was part of the strong poor, the poor who work to build an autonomous politics from below, the poor who insist that the full and equal recognition of our dignity is

non-negotiable, the poor who struggle to occupy land, produce food and build democracy and community from below," Mohapi said.

"She will join the roll of honour of all those who have fallen in our movement: Nqobile Nzuza, Thuli Ndlovu, Nkululeko Gwala, Sifiso Ngcobo, Ayanda Ngila and many others. Her name will live in our struggle and in new songs, new occupations and new communal projects."

Nomfundo Xolo

AT 17 years old, Nokuthula Mabaso was faced with the double standards masquerading as traditional norms when she fell pregnant while still in high school.

The "shameful" act enraged her father. He kicked her out of their family home and sent her to live with the father of her child. She remembered how her mother cried but did not have the choice or courage to plead her daughter's case.

"I left feeling shameful and regretful," she said in an interview earlier this year.

"My father told me I had disgraced the family name and the only way it was to be fixed was for my boyfriend to pay damages and marry me, but we were both in school. I was still in standard six (grade 8). I loved school and had prospects of a better future. I knew that it was the key to my independence. I had already endured a life filled with hardship merely because of my womanhood."

She returned to school shortly after giving birth. Her father heard about it and demanded she quit school in grade 9 because she was unmarried. After a year, her boyfriend finished matric and got a job as a security guard. The family moved from KwaMaphumulo in rural KwaZulu-Natal to a shack in Mayville, Durban.

After a few years, they had established a family with three children. But her husband became abusive and threatened to kick her out with nothing but her "bags and underwear".

Not finishing matric put Mabaso in a vulnerable position, as it would be difficult to get a job that could help support her family. But she fought. "I finally gathered the courage to leave him," she said. She rented a shack from an old woman in a different section of Mayville, but the municipality later offered her landlady alternative accommodation to make way for a road. Mabaso didn't have long to find a new home before hers was razed. "In the midst of that uncertainty and chaos I heard about an occupation nearby."

eKhenana hadn't been named yet, but committed to the quest for land, Mabaso sacrificed nights away from her children. Using the little money she received from child grants, she hired someone to care for them after school. She would quickly cook for the children and then return to work on the settlement.

"It was important for me to have something I could finally call mine. When we got here, we didn't know each other but we shared the



Nokuthula Mabaso (centre) and other mourners from eKhenana settlement attend the funeral of Ayanda Ngila in Mthlala Village in March

struggles of landlessness," she said. The settlement gave her and many others independence and a sense of identity and belonging.

"From the beginning, we had a plan to first clear the site we had identified and built our first shack, called isitimela (after a train, the long and narrow hall resembling a carriage), where we would camp together and hold meetings," she said.

"We were facing demolitions from the municipality and their security every day, but as soon as they would leave we would start over again. After a few days, we decided to each start building our homes and show the municipality that we were serious. Even that was tough, so some people didn't make it to the first round."

Exclusion

Finally, she had a place to call her own and a home for her and her children, who now numbered four. For eKhenana residents, establishing a life course that was completely independent from the state that had abandoned, killed and brutally demolished their homes was the fundamental rule. Mabaso's emancipation plan was plotted using simple yet radical politics. She led sustainability projects to eradicate poverty, economic exclusion, crime and unemployment.

"Cato Manor is like an ANC den," she said. "Almost everyone here is an ANC member, and so it was very easy for the neighbouring communities to cast us aside

and deem us land thieves. We were told that we did not belong there. At some point, there was a group of local community members who came, accompanied by the ward councillor, to attack us and chase us away. Other strategies came from the city itself. They once told us that they wanted to move us to an area in Umkomaas in a block of flats."

The residents of the settlement collected money to buy rolls of plastic and they used logs from trees to build houses, beds and tables. The trick was not to place any valuable items inside their structures because they knew that the municipality would be there the next day to burn them down.

"But we lived there, we cooked together and slept in our houses. Each day, each of us had to have at least R30 to be able to contribute to the rolls of plastic that were burned with each demolition," she said.

"I wanted to have my own place so desperately because I had seen how quickly you can lose your dignity and power as a woman without land or independence. It was so easy for men to take advantage of me and mistreat me because they knew I had no options, nowhere to go. In a way, it was liberation."

Mabaso and the father of her children reconciled and in 2018 they both moved to the commune. She dedicated her time to communal projects and activism as a member of shack dwellers' movement Abahlali baseMjondolo.

She was instrumental in developing the commune's food sov-

eighty projects, which included a poultry farm. This allowed the residents to generate enough revenue to sustain their community. But the numerous court cases they had to attend in their fight against the municipality depleted their savings, and with many leaders detained or living outside the area owing to bail conditions, the vegetable garden and poultry farm fell apart.

"We knew that jobs are scarce and all of us agreed that we would instead create work for ourselves using our knowledge and skills. Everything, profits and food, was to be shared equally among each other to make sure nobody would go to bed hungry."

Mabaso described her understanding of this new way of life in which independence coexists with social unity.

"You must first know who you are, your role in society and then identify where you need improvement, and when you work together with progressive people who want the same things it becomes easier. That's why eKhenana operates like one big family. We know our strengths and weaknesses and maximise on what works," she said.

"We made a collective decision that we would not sell or lease any piece of land here in eKhenana. We would keep it as it is and instead use the land available to improve our economic and living conditions."

The eKhenana commune was inspired by Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra,

or MST), which is based on Marxist and liberation ideologies. The MST emphasises equality and the transformation of capitalist society through agriculture, cooperation and protecting the environment.

In March 2021, when the commune had established a working schedule for the food sovereignty projects, violent repression from the state began to hit the community. Ayanda Ngila, Lindokuhle Mnguni and Landu Shazi were charged with murder that same month. They were held at Westville prison without bail for six months. The charges were later withdrawn and they were released on October 1.

Salvage

Two months later, Maphiwe Gasela, Siniko Miya and Abahlali deputy president Mqapheli Bonono were arrested on charges of conspiracy to commit murder. They were also denied bail and detained at Westville prison for two weeks before bail was granted. The charges against the trio were withdrawn on October 4.

During this time, Mabaso continued to lead the community, often doing fundraising and maintaining what they could salvage from the garden and poultry project. But she, along with Thozama Mazwi and Sindiswa Ngcobo, were arrested on October 8 and charged with assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm related to an incident that had taken place more than a year before.

They were initially refused bail

in the Durban magistrate's court, but were later granted bail of R500 each. Their bail conditions included prohibiting them from returning to eKhenana. All charges against them were withdrawn on February 4 this year.

When she returned to her home in eKhenana, Mabaso described how even though the community had no money, seed or chicken eggs left, they were still adamant to keep going.

"My heart sinks when I look at what the garden and poultry now look like. It will take a lot of work to get them back into shape, and even harder to return hope to people who are mostly feeling scared now because of the violent suppression and attacks we continue to face."

On March 8, Ngila, a leader in the commune who had recently returned home after yet another unwarranted arrest, was shot in broad daylight in eKhenana. Mabaso, a witness to his murder, was assassinated at her home on May 5, shot five times – four in the back – in front of her children.

On May 12, family, members of Abahlali and other activists came together at the commune to mourn her death. The tent pitched next to the poultry farm and Mabaso's home rang with songs of liberation, struggle and mourning.

Eulogies were delivered by Abahlali president S'bu Zikode and its women's league, residents of eKhenana, the Church Land Programme, Coalition of the Poor, and other activists.

All of them remembered Mabaso's calm and fierce dedication to the movement, her compassion and visionary leadership. She was described as a polite and practical leader who encouraged women in the movement to create their own paths for sustainability through agriculture.

"She led the commune with calm and respect. She died believing in the idea of unity, health and wealth through land. She lived this practice and, as we saw it coming to life, they decided to silence her too," said Zandile Nsibande, who leads Abahlali's women's league.

"She now follows women activists Nqobile Gwala and Nqobile Nzuza, whose deaths we will never forget. The justice system as we see it does not care or value the lives of poor black women. This is why we want to send a strong message to Minister [of Police] Bheki Cele that we demand justice for Nokuthula and Ayanda Ngila. We will be coming out in numbers to take to the streets and say out loud that we want justice."

Mabaso leaves behind her partner, four children, mother, two sisters and two brothers. Her funeral took place at her home in KwaMaphumulo on Saturday, May 14.

New Frame

The planet burns but arms are a priority

Report shows shame of broken climate promises

Vijay Prashad

TWO IMPORTANT reports were released recently, neither getting the kind of attention they deserve. On April 4, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Working Group III report was published, evoking a strong reaction from the United Nations' Secretary General António Guterres.

The report, he said, "is a litany of broken climate promises. It is a file of shame, cataloguing the empty pledges that put us firmly on track towards an unliveable world".

At COP26, the developed countries pledged to spend a modest US\$100 billion for the Adaptation Fund to assist developing countries adapt to climate change. Meanwhile, on April 25, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) issued its annual report, finding that the world military spending surpassed US\$2 trillion in 2021, the first time it has exceeded the US\$2 trillion mark. The five largest spenders – the United States, China, India, the United Kingdom, and Russia – accounted for 62 percent of this amount; the United States, by itself, accounts for 40 percent of total arms expenditure.

There is an endless flow of money for weapons but less than a pittance to avert planetary disaster.

That word "disaster" is not an exaggeration. UN Secretary General Guterres has warned that, "we are on a fast track to climate disaster... it is time to stop burning our planet". These words are based on the facts contained in the Working Group III report.

It is now firmly established in the scientific record that the historical responsibility for the devastation done to our environment and our climate rests with the most powerful states, led by the United States. There is little debate about this responsibility in the distant past, a consequence of the ruthless war against nature carried out by the forces of capitalism and colonialism.

But this responsibility also extends to our present period. On April 1, a new study was published in The Lancet Planetary Health demonstrating that from 1970 to 2017 "high-income nations are responsible for 74 percent of global excess material use, driven primarily by the USA (27 percent) and the EU-28 high-income countries (25 percent)".

The excess material use in the North Atlantic countries is due

to use of abiotic resources (fossil fuels, metals, and non-metallic minerals). China is responsible for 15 percent of global excess material use and the rest of the Global South is responsible for only 8 percent. The excess use in these lower-income countries is driven largely using biotic resources (biomass). This distinction between abiotic and biotic resources shows us that the excess resources use from the Global South is largely renewable, whereas that of the North Atlantic states is non-renewable.

Such an intervention should have been on the front pages of the newspapers of the world, particularly in Global South, and its findings debated widely on television channels. But it was barely remarked upon. It proves decisively that the high-income countries of the North Atlantic are destroying the planet, that they need to change their ways, and that they need to pay into the various adaptation and mitigation funds to assist countries that are not creating the problem but that are suffering from its impact.

Degradation

Having presented the data, the scholars who wrote this paper note that, "high-income nations bear the overwhelming responsibility for global ecological breakdown, and therefore owe an ecological debt to the rest of the world. These nations need to take the lead in making radical reductions in their resource use to avoid further degradation, which will likely require transformative post-growth and degrowth approaches". These are interesting thoughts: "radical reductions in resource use" and then "post-growth and degrowth approaches".

The North Atlantic states – led by the United States – are the largest spenders of social wealth on arms. The Pentagon – the US armed forces – "remains the single largest consumers of oil", says a Brown University study, "and as a result, one of the world's top greenhouse gas emitters". To get the United States



An atomic test as part of Operation Crossroads, Bikini Atoll (Marshall Islands), in 1946

and its allies to sign the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, the UN member states had to allow greenhouse gas emissions by the military to be excluded from the national reporting on emissions.

The vulgarity of these matters can be put plainly by comparison of two money values. First, in 2019, the United Nations calculated that the annual funding gap to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) amounted to US\$2.5 trillion. Turning over the annual US\$2 trillion in global military expenditure to the SDGs would go a long way toward dealing with the major assaults on human dignity: hunger, illiteracy, homelessness, lack of medical care, and so on. It is important to note here, that the US\$2 trillion figure from SIPRI does not include the lifetime waste of social wealth given to private arms manufacturers for weapons systems. For example, the Lockheed Martin F-35 weapons system is projected to cost nearly US\$2 trillion.

In 2021, the world spent over US\$2 trillion on war, but only invested – and this is a generous calculation – US\$750 billion in clean energy and energy efficiency. Total investment in energy infrastructure in 2021 was US\$1.9 trillion, but the bulk of that investment went to fossil fuels (oil, natural gas, and coal). So, investments in fossil fuels continue and investments in arms rise, while investments to transition to new forms of cleaner energy remain insufficient.

On April 28, US President Joe Biden asked the US Congress to provide US\$33 billion for weapons

systems to be sent to Ukraine. The call for these funds comes alongside incendiary statements made by the US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin, who said that the US is not trying to remove Russian forces from Ukraine but to "see Russia weakened". Austin's comment should not come as a surprise. It mirrors US policy since 2018, which has been to prevent China and Russia from becoming "near-peer rivals".

Human rights are not the concern; the focus is preventing any challenge to US hegemony. For that reason, social wealth is wasted on weapons and not used to address the dilemmas of humanity.

Humanitarian

Consider the way the United States has reacted to a deal between Solomon Islands and China, two neighbours. Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare said that this deal sought to promote trade and humanitarian cooperation, not the militarisation of the Pacific Ocean. On that same day of Prime Minister Sogavare's address, a high-level US delegation arrived in the nation's capital Honiara. They told Prime Minister Sogavare that if the Chinese establish any kind of "military installation", the United States would "then have significant concerns and respond accordingly". These were plain threats. A few days later, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said, "Island countries in the South Pacific are independent and sovereign states, not a backyard of the US or Australia.

Their attempt to revive the Monroe Doctrine in the South Pacific region will get no support and lead to nowhere."

Solomon Islands has a long memory of the history of Australian-British colonialism and the scars of the atom bomb tests. The practice of "blackbirding" abducted thousands of Solomon Islanders to work the sugarcane fields in Queensland, Australia, in the 19th century, eventually leading to the Kwaio Rebellion of 1927 in Malaita.

Solomon Islands has fought hard against being militarised, voting in 2016 with the world to prohibit nuclear weapons. The appetite to be the "backyard" of the United States or Australia is not there. That was clear in the luminous poem "Peace Signs" (1974) by Solomon Islands writer Celestine Kulagoe:

A mushroom sprouts from an arid pacific atoll disintegrates into space leaving only a residue of might to which for an illusory peace and security man clings. In the calm of the early morning the third day after love found joy in the empty tomb the wooden cross of disgrace transformed into a symbol of love service peace. In the heat of the afternoon lull the UN flag flutters hidden from sight by national banners under which sit men with clenched fists signing peace treaties.

Tricontinental

Doubts as US says it will lift some Cuba sanctions

THE BIDEN administration has announced a change in some of the United States' measures against Cuba, reversing several Trump-era restrictions.

The US government will now allow air travel between the country and Cuban cities beyond Havana and allow for more remittances – although their scope is limited.

The announcement came a few weeks after the US embassy in Cuba resumed issuing visas for travel in May, for the first time in four years.

The US State Department is to reinstate the Cuban Family Reunification Parole, which will allow for more travel between the two countries. The sanctions will also lift a US\$1,000 cap on family remittances and provide for more US internet access.

It should be noted that the US government and its CIA agencies USAID and NED have used the internet extensively to encourage opposition elements inside the island to carry out subversion. In the heat of the US-sponsored July 11, 2021 disturbances, Cuba temporarily blocked the internet to stop hundreds of thousands of automated social media messages flooding Cuba.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez said in a tweet that, "this decision in no way modifies the blockade, Cuba's fraudulent inclusion on the list of countries as sponsors of terrorism or most of Trump's maximum pressure coercive measures that still affect the Cuban people".

In another tweet, he said, "content of announcement confirms that neither the goals nor the main instruments of the United States failed policy against Cuba has changed".

A Cuban government press release noted the Biden administration's use of language. "In taking these steps, the State Department uses an openly hostile language, accompanied by traditional slanders and new fallacies that have become fashionable in the last few months, which show that neither the goals pursued by the US policy against Cuba nor its main instruments have changed."

Some commentators see Biden's announcement as a way to overcome opposition among Latin American and Caribbean leaders who plan to boycott the US-sponsored Summit of the Americas.

Cuban officials say that understanding the true implications of this latest announcement will depend on their implementation.

Liberation

Ghana pledges to manage debts without IMF assistance

GHANA is committed to managing its debt without assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Finance Minister Ken Ofori-Atta said, expressing his confidence that government measures were moving the country in the right direction.

Ghana's total public debt, which stood at about 77 percent of its gross domestic product at the end of 2021, according to government data, has pushed one of West Africa's largest economies to the brink of crisis.

The government in March announced a raft of spending cuts to tackle inflation, reduce the public deficit, restore a

depreciating local currency and reassure spooked investors.

But it has consistently refused to ask the IMF for help.

"We have committed to not going back to the fund because ... the fund knows we are [moving] in the right direction," Ofori-Atta said at a media conference in the capital Accra.

"It's about validating the programme we have in place and finding other ways of handling our debt."

The gold, oil and cocoa producer saw consumer inflation rise to an 18-year record of almost 24 percent in April despite

efforts to contain price hikes and spur recovery.

Ofori-Atta said the priority would be to solve the country's domestic debt, which has interest rates that are three to four times higher than foreign debt. "We need to decide ourselves what structure would be useful to us," he added.

The central bank in March raised its main lending rate by a record 250 basis points and was expected to review this at a next Monetary Policy Committee meeting on May 23.

Ofori-Atta said another interest rate hike would be a "knee jerk reaction" to

"imported inflation", noting that prices had continued to increase since the March increase. "We need to figure out an approach that in a way gives us fiscal space," he said.

Ghana's credit ratings have been downgraded over concerns about the government's ability to pass legislation to raise revenues. There has been fierce opposition to a tax on electronic payments approved in April and presented as a panacea to financial woes, with critics saying it will unfairly impact lower-income people and small business owners.

Reuters

World food price increases and shortages a recipe for disaster

The war in Ukraine, COVID-19 and the failure of the capitalist system have sent food price inflation soaring, causing ‘a hunger catastrophe’ according to a UN World Food Programme report. Nearly 50 million people are ‘on the very edge of famine’ and ‘risk starvation’. **Jacob Crosse** reports

AROUND the world, in developing and so-called advanced countries alike, millions are facing food insecurity and hunger amid soaring prices and shortages of food.

Last month, the World Bank estimated that food prices would increase by 22.9 percent this year, driven largely by a spike in global wheat prices.

The FAO Food Price Index, which tracks monthly changes in the international prices of a basket of food commodities such as sugar, dairy, cereal and vegetable oil, is nearly 30 percent higher than in April 2021.

In the United States, the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that overall food prices rose 9.5 percent last month, and the cost of meat was 20 percent higher than in 2021. As inflation continues to rise, workers’ wages are failing to keep pace.

Calculations by Business Insider recently found that when factoring in inflation, “real wage growth” for workers in the US in the information technology, utilities, financial activities, mining and logging, manufacturing, construction, education and retail trade sectors decreased from January 2021 to April 2022. Most industries, including trade, manufacturing and construction, saw a decline between three and four percent.

As real wages decline for millions of workers throughout the world, the more than 40 percent increase in wheat prices this year has already led to a substantial increase in global hunger. A report released by the UN’s World Food Programme (WFP), titled “A hunger catastrophe”, estimates that 811 million people around the world, or one-seventh of humanity, face “food insecurity” and “go to bed hungry” every night.

The same report noted that the number of people suffering from “acute food insecurity has more than doubled”, from 135 million in 2019 to 276 million last year, to an estimated 323 million this year. An estimated 48.9 million people are “currently on the very edge of famine” and at risk of “starvation”.

This “seismic hunger crisis”, the report notes, was driven by four factors: war, ongoing crop failures due to the effects of climate change, “economic consequences” from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the overall increased cost of food. The WFP remarked that the organisation paid 30 percent more in 2022 for the same food products than it paid in 2019.

The increase in food prices has



Russia and Ukraine account for 30 percent of all global wheat exports. More than 26 countries, including Egypt and Somalia, rely on the two countries for between 50 and 100 percent of their wheat. Below: ‘palliative’ food aid in Nigeria for the vulnerable, suffering from shortages as a result of disruptions in supply chains because of COVID-19

led UNICEF to release an emergency “child alert”, warning that without emergency funding, 600,000 children are at immediate risk of “severe acute malnutrition”. The report revealed that this leading cause of preventable death in children, also known as “severe wasting”, has increased “by more than 40 percent” since 2016.

In a statement accompanying the report, UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell wrote, “The world is rapidly becoming a virtual tinderbox of preventable child deaths and child suffering from wasting.” According to UNICEF/WHO/World Bank statistics, India leads the world in children affected by severe wasting, with in excess of 5.7 million children under the age of five suffering from severe malnutrition.

Following India, 812,564 children in Indonesia are suffering from severe wasting, putting them at risk of dying from common childhood illnesses. This is followed by 678,925 children in Pakistan, 482,590 in Nigeria and 327,859 in Bangladesh.

The food crisis is not limited to developing countries. Expressing the globalised nature of modern production and the catastrophic impact of inflation on the working class the world over, a survey conducted in the United Kingdom and released by Sky News recently found that, to alleviate inflation burdens, 27 percent of Britons aged 16 to 75 “skipped meals” in April. Another 65 percent sought to reduce costs by not turning on their heating.

Apocalyptic

Speaking before the Treasury Committee at the House of Commons on the danger of rising inflation, already at a 30-year high of 7 percent, Bank of England Governor Andrew Bailey frankly admitted, “There’s a lot of uncertainty.” Bailey confessed, “Sorry for being apocalyptic for a moment, but that is a major concern.” Verifying Bailey’s concerns, British retailer Marks & Spencer warned the following day that food price inflation could increase by a further 10 percent in the UK by the end of the year.



In the United States, parents around the country are unable to locate baby formula. In some instances, parents have been forced to drive to Mexico to find formula, while others have nowhere left to turn but the hospital.

Multiple news outlets reported recently that two children, a toddler and a pre-schooler, had to be hospitalised at the Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, in cases “directly related to the formula shortage”, Dr Mark Corkins told WHBQ-TV.

“This is literally not just Memphis, not just Tennessee, or the South. This is literally all of North America being affected,” Dr Corkins said. He added that he was forced to treat the children with IV fluids and nutrients because neither the hospital nor any stores carried formula the children could tolerate. He said he expected more children to end up in the hospital unless action was taken soon.

Driving up the cost of food prices is a global fuel shortage that is affecting farmers and workers alike. In the United States, for the first time ever, the auto club AAA reported that the average price for a gallon of gas in the US was more than US\$4 in all 50 states, with California leading the nation at an average of US\$6.02 a gallon.

“High prices at the pump most profoundly affect lower-income families, as they spend a higher

According to UNICEF/WHO/World Bank statistics, India leads the world in children affected by severe wasting, with in excess of 5.7 million children under the age of five suffering from severe malnutrition

proportion of their earnings on gas and are less likely to drive electric vehicles,” Mark Finley, a fellow at Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy, told Bloomberg.

There are many factors that are contributing to the rise in fuel and food prices, including the war in Ukraine. When it comes to wheat, Russia and Ukraine account for 30 percent of all global wheat exports. More than 26 countries, including Egypt and Somalia, rely on these two countries for between 50 and 100 percent of their wheat imports. Currently, some 4.5 million tons of wheat are sitting in Black Sea ports unable to be shipped out due to the hostilities.

Data from the International Food Policy Research Institute’s food trade policy tracker shows that since the outbreak of the war, 23 countries have imposed export restrictions on food, affecting more

than 17 percent of the total calories traded in global markets. In addition to restricting staple foods, countries have placed restrictions on potash and nitrogen fertiliser, leading to increased prices. These price increases have in turn forced farmers globally to compensate by planting fewer crops, further driving down supply and increasing consumer prices.

While US President Joe Biden and the Democratic Party have attempted to pin rising food and gas prices on Russian President Vladimir Putin, repeatedly referring to inflation as “Putin’s price hike”, the reality is very different. The war in Ukraine has contributed to further increases, but, as any worker who has had to pay rent or buy groceries knows, prices were soaring long before February 2022.

Oligarchy

In reality, the surge in prices and inflation is the outcome of bipartisan monetary policies pursued by both big business parties, particularly since the 2008 financial crisis, during which President Barack Obama, through the Federal Reserve, printed up trillions of dollars to prop up the financial markets and guarantee the wealth of the super-rich.

In March 2020, the US government passed another massive bailout for the financial oligarchy in

the form of the multitrillion-dollar CARES Act, which has led to a more than doubling of the Fed balance sheet, from US\$4.1 trillion in February 2020 to in excess of US\$8.9 trillion as of May 2022.

The direct intervention of the US government to save the banks and stock prices of the ultra-wealthy has resulted in American billionaires increasing their wealth by 62 percent during the pandemic, while workers’ nominal wages have risen by only 10 percent over that same period, according to an April report by Oxfam.

The ruling class is determined to make the working class pay for the bailouts of the rich and the cost of the war. While there is supposedly no money for COVID vaccines, child tax credits or pandemic-related unemployment programmes, the two big business parties have provided the Ukrainian military with some \$53 billion this year.

The surging cost of living and the unavailability of basic goods have triggered mass protests around the world. This has been most vividly seen in the mass movement of workers in Sri Lanka. Similar large-scale protests against food and energy prices have also taken place in Tunisia and Peru.

These protests are coupled with a growing movement of the working class in the United States. Recently, in a powerful show of the power of rank-and-file health care workers, nurses organised independently of the unions to oppose the unjust persecution of Tennessee nurse Radonda Vaught, forcing the judge to ignore prosecutors’ demands for an outrageous six-year prison term and instead grant probation.

In Detroit, Michigan, 79 percent of Detroit Diesel workers overwhelmingly rejected a contract that would raise wages just 8 percent over the span of six years.

The soaring level of hunger, amid the vast and continual enrichment of the financial oligarchy, is a testament to the bankruptcy of the capitalist system. As workers enter into struggle all over the world, they must demand that the financial oligarchs, not the workers, pay for the crisis of capitalism and fight to replace this irrational social order with socialism.

wsws.org



WE ARE LIVING IN UNPRECEDENTED TIMES

Over the last few months, weeks, and days we have been meeting leaders of our people from various walks of life – political, traditional, religious, cultural and the arts – to exchange views, share ideas, concerns and anxieties.

These unprecedented times we are living in call for more cooperation and less exclusion. We need to truthfully and without any dogmas talk to each other, listen to each other with broad mindedness and without thinking we

are the owners of absolute truth. There will no longer be one single thinker, genius in our country. What we need is a collective genius.

New ideas and approaches are needed to prepare our people for a future that appears so desperate and sombre. No one can silence or extinguish the aspirations of a people on the cusp of transformative times. The age of lies, false promises, hypocrisy, imperialist and transnational corporations puppeteering is over.

Fred M'membe, Socialist Party President

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