

# THE GIVERS THAT TAKE

“In this important book Barker explains how radical reformers have compromised their missions by accepting foundation funding and/or elite understandings of social problems. It includes a timely section in which he argues that Bill Gates, the World Health Organization, and pharmaceutical corporations have steered the COVID response in ways that do not promote the best interests of humanity.”

Joan Roelofs, Professor Emerita of Political Science, author of *Foundations and Public Policy: The Mask of Pluralism* (SUNY Press, 2003).

“Scholar and labor organizer Michael Barker is one of the leading authorities worldwide on so-called philanthro-capitalism. His new book builds on his earlier magisterial study, *Under the Mask of Philanthropy*. It examines a wide range of instances around the world in which the ruling classes have operated through philanthropic foundations to cement their rule by co-opting into the capitalist fold radical movements for social and political change. This is a must read for all those who wish to understand how global capitalism constructs its hegemony. Brilliantly researched, written with great clarity and urgency, this book is an essential tool in the struggle for social justice around the world.”

William I. Robinson, Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Global and International Studies, author of *The Global Police State* (Pluto Press, 2020).

“In this sequel to his *Under the Mask of Philanthropy* (2017), union and socialist activist Michael Barker provides a hard hitting and well researched critique of how foundations, such as that of the Gates family, continue to set a policy agenda that maintains the world capitalist system with all its inequitable outcomes for the most disadvantaged. The book has the attractive feature of being very current in examining how powerful philanthropic actors have shaped

responses to COVID-19 that benefit Big Pharma rather than the global many. Other chapters document the ‘cooling-out’ function that older foundations (Rockefeller and Ford) played in moderating the radicalism of the United Farm Workers and black power movements in the United States, as well as that of German philanthropies (e.g., the German Social Democrats Friedrich Ebert Foundation) in mitigating the radicalism of trade unions opposing the plundering of the mineral resources of Nigeria. Barker, throughout the book, poses collective social action inspired by ‘Alternate Socialism’ as the principal counterweight to the ravages of capitalism and as the path forward to more just and democratic societies.”

Robert F. Arnove, is Chancellor's Professor Emeritus of Education, editor of *Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism: The Foundations at Home and Abroad* (GK Hall, 1980).

“Barker presents a thorough unmasking of the ideological pretensions of philanthropic foundations and a masterful exposition of their role in reproducing capitalist hegemony.”

Peter Seybold, Associate Professor of Sociology, contributor to *Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism: The Foundations at Home and Abroad*.



## About the Author

Michael Barker is a trade unionist and works as a support worker in a college in the United Kingdom. He is also an Assistant Secretary to the Leicester & District Trades Union Council. Michael is the author of four books: *Lockdown Leicester: Notes From a Pandemic* (2020); *Under the Mask of Philanthropy* (2017); *Fighting For Our Future: Ongoing Struggles Against Big Business and New Labour* (2016); and *Letters to Mercury: The Socialist Fightback in Leicester* (2015). He is also the author of two political pamphlets, *Why Socialists Oppose the EU* (2018) and *How and Why Labour Councils Should Fight All Cuts Now* (2019). In his spare time Michael writes about local and international issues for a variety of publications. He is a member of Socialist Alternative.

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Michael Barker

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For Mum and Dad.





# Contents

	Introduction	1
ONE	Ruling-Class Givers?	9
TWO	Billionaires Are Not Our Friends	19
THREE	Why the CIA Cares About Marxism	31
FOUR	Of Union Dreams and Nightmares: Cesar Chavez and Why Funding Matters	47
FIVE	Black Power Philanthropy	63
SIX	Bob Geldof and the Aid Industry: “Do They Know it’s Imperialism?”	97
SEVEN	The Watchful Eye	123
EIGHT	Pharisaic Philanthropy and the Plunder of Greece	137
NINE	Privatizing Public Health	167
TEN	Violence in Nigeria	243
ELEVEN	How Big Pharma and Big Philanthropy Consume the World	307
TWELVE	COVID-Planning For Humanity	327
THIRTEEN	The COVAX Smokescreen	353
FOURTEEN	Preventing the Next Pandemic	371
	Index	387



# Introduction

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Marxists have a realistic view of humanity. We believe that history is replete with examples demonstrating that our species strongest instinctual urges move us in the direction of cooperation not violence. To put it simply, humans are more prone to give than to take. At the same time, Marxists understand that a small clique of self-centred individuals, the ruling-class, use their power to undermine our ability to work together and help one another. Hence socialists continue to organize collectively to fight for improvements in our classes daily living conditions with the aim of running society in a way that embraces the positive not the negative aspects of human nature.

With the advent of technologically advanced societies that by their nature are highly interdependent on one another, capitalism's survival, now more than ever, relies upon our division: hence the need for ruling-class propagandists to relentlessly emphasize our brutal natures to the exclusion of our caring habits. Elites repeat *ad Infinitum* that there is no alternative to their preferred capitalist system - a bankrupt political and economic system that asserts the dominion of profit making over all other human priorities. Thus, to justify this nonsense they repeatedly assert that their preferred capitalist system is well adapted to harnessing humanities true biological inclinations which they characterize as being dominated by aggression and competition.

Yet it is the cooperative actions of mutual aid that remain the habits that best define the day-to-day lives of ordinary people, and it for this reason that the ruling-class are forced to work so hard to suppress such emancipatory instincts. This everpresent fear of our collective power remains the primary reason why a certain section of the ruling-class feels compelled to cloak their exploitative ways under the mythology of their own altruistic beneficence.

As Frederick Engels put it simply in 1845: the super-rich “is charitable out of self-interest; it gives nothing outright, but regards its gifts as a business matter...” Or as William Morris wrote in 1884:

We many of us have experienced the bitter hostility of these philanthropists to Socialism, which in point of fact they realise as the foe doomed if successful to make an end of their occupation; a foe which would quite change that class on which they try their benevolent experiments, and which they look upon meantime as a necessary appendage of capital, would convert it into an all-powerful organisation that would at last absorb all society, and become nothing less than the State.

And yet, though these well intentioned people look upon us as their enemies, I don't think we need accept the position; we must at least take what we can get from them; take for instance as an instalment of a decent London - the parks and gardens which their efforts have done much to get for us. What we would press upon them is that they should set a higher ideal before them than turning the life of the workers into that of a well conducted reformatory or benevolent prison; and that they should understand that when things are done not for the workers but by them, an ideal will present itself with great distinctness to the workers themselves, which will not mean living on as little as you can, so as not to disturb the course of profit-grinding, but rather living a plentiful, generous, un-anxious life, the first quite necessary step to higher ideals yet.

Under capitalist relations, profit-grinding always trumps human life. Deaths continue to multiply as the billionaire-class engorges itself at our expense, as can be seen by the perpetuality of famines amidst a world of plenty. Hence as long as profitability acts as the guiding principle determining the production and distribution of food millions

will continue to needlessly starve. The scale of this exploitation of course varies immensely across the world, but even in Leicester, the UK city where I live, the percentage of children living in households mired in poverty has increased from 30% to 39.9% over the past five years alone. And we should be clear that charitable works designed to feed the needy are simply not up to the task of eradicating such inequality, which is why socialists struggle to overturn the economic and political system that, by its design, withholds food from the poor.

Over a hundred years ago, the revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin along with the Russian working-class responded to the task at hand - and their collective actions brought about the Russian Revolution of October 1917. In the decades running up to this successful revolution Lenin had understood the urgent need for the working-class to come together in an organized fashion to overthrow the political system that starves the poor, but he also acknowledged the positive (albeit temporary) role that could be played by charitable efforts if they were coordinated by the working-classes and their democratic organizations. This type of aid was far-removed from the type of disempowering charity that has always been inflicted upon the needy by the ruling-class. In 1912, with the plight of starvation again facing millions of peasants, Lenin had explained:

The peasants can find a way out of their condition only by abolishing the landed estates. Only the overthrow of the tsarist monarchy, that bulwark of the landlords, can lead to a life more or less worthy of human beings, to deliverance from starvation and hopeless poverty.

It is the duty of every class-conscious worker and every class-conscious peasant to make this clear. This is our main task in connection with the famine. The organisation, wherever possible, of collections among the workers for the starving peasants and the forwarding of such funds through the Social-Democratic members of the Duma—that, of course, is also one of the necessary jobs.

Needless to say, while socialists across the world have been busy organizing against their oppressors, capitalist elites have always

emphasized their own lofty ambition to make the world a better place for all. But other than by throwing crumbs at the poor, the ruling-class have no real interest in disrupting the capitalist system that they sit atop of. They merely throw scraps from their bountiful feasts to the workers beneath them – to the workers whose labour creates all the world’s food in the first place. Contrast this miserly charity with the more significant way in which the ruling-class have shown us how they really feel about our welfare, which has seen these same elites involved in ethnic cleansing, promoting the eugenic sterilization of the poor, instigating international wars in their perpetual struggles for wealth and global domination, and doing everything in their power to neuter the working-classes ongoing efforts to fight for a socialist future. And always present at the forefront of this violent battle for the future have been the philanthropic funds/foundations of the ruling-class.

We know that for most of the twentieth century the primary philanthropic foundations that helped the American ruling-class prop up their bankrupt system were the Rockefeller Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, and the Ford Foundation. These big three foundations still exist today, but they are now joined by tens of thousands of other foundations. However, the most significant philanthropic body to build upon the anti-democratic legacy of the big three is the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation – a philanthropy which currently has over \$51 billion in assets. The activities of the Gates Foundation therefore feature quite heavily in the following pages.

*The Givers That Take* presents few novel arguments, but what it does do is document the manifold ways in which the charity of the American ruling-class has been utilized to consolidate the rule of capital. Again, this is a story that has been told many times before, but it is still a story that many people are not fully aware of, and so for this reason this book aims to progress earlier analyses by bringing many different streams of philanthropic criticism together in one place.

The first essay featured in this book introduces some of the problems to do with elite philanthropy by providing a critical engagement with the writings of David Callahan, who is the founder and editor of *Inside Philanthropy* – a web site that says it was created with one “simple goal” in mind: “To pull back the curtain on one of the most powerful and dynamic forces shaping society.” As a firm

supporter of the Democratic Party establishment, an investigation into Callahan's views on the elite's charitable impulses provides a useful means of dismantling such self-serving philanthropic propaganda. This chapter is then followed by a debunking of the Malthusian narrative featured in the popular 2019 documentary *Planet of the Humans*. Such population-obsessed solutions have long been promoted by the major foundations, but this review of the film also investigates the strange overlaps that exist between liberal causes and those of the notorious Koch brothers.

For most of its history the US government's Central Intelligence Agency has worked in coordination with the major philanthropists. So, Chapter 3 interrogates a 2017 essay (that was published in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*) which focused on why the ruling-class became interested in the evolution of French political theory.

Thereafter the analysis turns to the concrete organizing efforts of the United Farm Workers union to understand how the union's militant orientation was undermined by elite forces that were external to the union and their membership. This historic examination of trade union activism, and its eventual undoing, then segues to a discussion of the Ford Foundation's troubling interventions in the black power movement of that era (the 1960s and 70s). Part of this chapter explores the significant linkages that came to exist between black nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and the "community development" policies that were favoured by philanthropic elites to undercut the popular allure of socialist politics.

The book then moves on to an examination of the politics of charity and famine relief, looking at the world-famous "Band Aid" phenomenon. This humanitarian case study is used to demonstrate how genuine public concern with inequality can be unwittingly harnessed to imperialist policy agendas. After this a critical review of Yasha Levine's 2018 book, *Surveillance Valley: The Secret Military History of the Internet*, then explores the various related surveillance projects that were incubated by the US government with the aid of philanthropic elites.

The middle section of the book is composed of three chapters which shed further light on the anti-democratic machinations of the big

foundations. The slippery connections between philanthropy and fascism are initially discussed in the Greek context, with Chapter 8 providing an overview of how US foreign aid was instrumentalized in an ongoing attempt to obliterate class struggle. A longer essay then examines how global public health interventions have been used by philanthropic elites to promote their own favoured technocratic disease fixes at the expense of both democracy and life. The concluding chapter in this section then uses the long line of “humanitarian” interventions in Nigerian affairs to demonstrate how ostensibly charitable initiatives have been used to prop up a despotic status quo which allows immense profiteering to coexist alongside extreme poverty.

Drawing the book to an end, the final section is composed of four inter-linked essays which are concerned with responses to the deadly COVID-19 pandemic that continues to ravage the world. The first two essays examine the history of Big Pharma’s profiteering from managing public health, and discusses the toxic role played by Bill Gates’ and his foundation in facilitating this dire situation over recent decades. These two essays were first published online in April and May of 2020 by *CounterPunch* as a means of rebutting the fawning coverage given by the corporate media to Gates’ philanthropic initiatives. Following on from these chapters is another shorter essay bringing such pandemic related criticisms up to date, with a particular focus on the central role that has been played by Gates in defending corporate patent rights pertaining to the production of much-needed vaccines. And the closing chapter of the book, while not specifically focusing on philanthropic intrigues, reviews Debora MacKenzie’s important 2020 book *The Pandemic that Never Should Have Happened and How to Stop the Next One*. As this review shows, despite her pro-capitalist inclinations MacKenzie does at least understand that changes are needed if we are to right our sinking ship. As she states:

Covid-19 has been, by anyone’s reckoning, a crisis—and it’s just getting started. Things are going to happen or change now, whether people take control of them in the broad interests of humanity or not.



Workers across the world are of course already fighting for control of their lives and the future. So, the modest aim of *The Givers Who Take* is to contribute towards developing a critical story about past philanthropic interventions so the working-class can more effectively anticipate future attempts by the ruling-class to undermine each and every mass struggle that lies ahead.



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**ONE**

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## Ruling-Class Givers?<sup>1</sup>

Every day that passes us by the wealth and power of the billionaire-class is further consolidated. The gap between rich and poor grows, a process that is umbilically-linked to the immense profits that continue to be amassed by a greedy handful at the expense of the rest of us. Under capitalism the only true givers are the working-class. But as the rich know all too well, this anti-democratic method of misrule is inherently unstable, hence the capitalist takers are compelled to give us back a little. This institutionalized system of take and give is the subject of David Callahan's just-released book *The Givers: Wealth, Power, and Philanthropy in a New Gilded Age* (Knopf, 2017).

Callahan sets himself a big task, which it seems he is not really up to. He notes how critical "scholars like C. Wright Mills worked to gain an understanding of a new ecosystem of power that included major corporations, government, and the military." Thus Callahan sees his task as being to "reckon with the rise of big philanthropy – and the givers behind it." Loosely inspired by *The Power Elite* (1953), Mills' classic exposition on the mechanics of class rule, *The Givers* set out to describe the activities of this "new philanthropic power elite."

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter was first published online by *CounterPunch* on April 18, 2017.

The major difference is that while funding from the philanthropic community for studies on what Mills' referred to as "The Cultural Apparatus" were blocked, Callahan's own ahistorical boosterism has been well-received.

Hardly a philanthropic outsider, Callahan had — prior to setting up the website Inside Philanthropy — cofounded a think tank called Demos in the late 1990s which received generous funding from the historic big three philanthropic foundation giants, Ford, Rockefeller and Carnegie. He waxes lyrical about his hopes for a future overseen by loving givers only because he closes his eyes to any alternative more egalitarian future, and to the seriously problematic history of liberal philanthropy itself. "Even if you worry about inequality, it's hard not to feel hope as super-empowered, high-minded givers looks to solve problems" - problems that are at root caused by the actions of his billionaire takers.

Over a century ago, Callahan reminds his readers, "John D. Rockefeller's proposed foundation had been denounced by the U.S. attorney general as 'an indefinite scheme for perpetuating vast wealth' that was 'entirely inconsistent with the public interest.'" At the time, the then germinal Rockefeller Foundation was correctly referred to as a "Trojan horse" in a devious plot by one of America's most infamous robber barons to undo democracy. Nevertheless, Callahan confidently asserts, "these early criticisms of mega-givers" have now "faded." "As distrust of robber barons and their monopolies became a distant memory, so too did fears that philanthropy was yet another tool of oligarchical control..."

Callahan acknowledges that huge foundations like those created by Ford, Rockefeller and Carnegie "went on to wield huge influence in America and the world." Likewise he is well aware of the benefits that accrue to the ruling class through their dedicated philanthropy: giving "can be yet another tool to advance partisan goals and class interests," he says. "In effect, it can be a way of taking." Bearing these critical statements in mind, it is worrying that he holds so much hope for the future of elite philanthropy, breathlessly pronouncing that his time round "everything is bigger — both the wealth and the clout that comes with it." "Not only do philanthropists indeed have more power than ever before," he reiterates, which is not a bad thing, "but that influence is likely to grow far greater in the coming decades."

This power shift is one of the biggest stories of our time,” Callahan observes, before adding his own proviso that this tale is “a hard one to tell properly,” not least because “Just figuring out what philanthropists are up to is no easy thing.” He explains how “philanthropists often operate subtly, working behind the scenes to set agendas and shape decisions – backing ideas, research, and pilot projects. Even as they emerge as the new social engineers of our time, their fingerprints can be hard to see.” Yet in Callahan’s latest ode to the mega-givers, this lack of democracy is a good thing because:

The truth is that democracies just aren’t so good at some things – like tackling over-the-horizon threats, for example. ... We need people with big plans, a drive to make a difference, and the money and power to do so, even if they sometimes get behind bad ideas.

By his own accounting he believes mega-philanthropy will continue to grow to subsume all manner of democratic processes, so the best we can apparently hope for is that *The Givers* will become more accountable. At the same time Callahan is *cognizant* of the “bigger risk” caused by the acceptance of such elitism which “will further push ordinary Americans to the margins of civic life in an unequal era when so many people already feel shoved aside by elites and the wealth.” Needless to say Callahan finds this disempowering vision of the future “deeply troubling” as his “givers are becoming more powerful while ordinary Americans struggle to get their voices heard at all.” His troubles are, however, a little disingenuous.

Here clued up and eager readers of Callahan’s text, will have noticed that this review has strictly limited itself to a discussion of the books prologue (which can be read online here), as to be completely honest I don’t particularly want to *give* my hard-earned money to Callahan no matter how much he loves *The Givers*. This viscerally felt impulse not to give is further strengthened by my possession of Callahan’s previous book on much the same topic, *Fortunes of Change: The Rise of the Liberal Rich and the Remaking of America* (2010). So in my own small gesture of charitable benevolence to anyone who is planning to read *The Givers*, I will do you a favour by not detailing the contents of this brand new book, but instead will

continue this review of Callahan's muddled politics by reflecting upon the philanthropic arguments presented in *Fortunes of Change*.

Devoting elaborate energy in *Fortunes of Change* to proving that systemic inequality is, and always will be, a fact of life for the majority of American citizens, Callahan, as he does today, still has a few nagging doubts. The "outsized wealth" wielded by rich liberals — many of whom "aren't in the business of dismantling their class privileges" — "is bad for representative democracy," he correctly observes. "Whatever our ideology," we should be united in recognizing that the "swelling ranks of the liberal rich pose their own special threat to democracy" when these "rich 'super-citizens' push into every last corner of America's civic space and drown out the voices of ordinary Americans."<sup>2</sup> But as Callahan accepts that capitalism and inequality are the only conceivable game in town, this is the price the public must pay for the philanthropic "help" provided by ruling liberal elites.

As one might expect, Callahan's liberalism is as simple-minded as it is contradictory. On the one hand he concludes: "The left's traditional prism of class politics... is no longer operative. The world has changed, and it is silly to pretend that it hasn't." Then just a few pages later he points to a dismayed hedge fund manager, who had been a major Obama fund-raiser, who reportedly said: "I'm surprised that Obama is turning out to be so left-wing. He's a real class warrior."<sup>3</sup> Evidently many elites still view society through the "prism of class politics", even if in distorted form. If anything, Obama was always a determined warrior, fighting on behalf of the ruling-class — despite all the misleading liberal rhetoric of hope and change.

Callahan's political muddling on the history of philanthropy is exemplified by his comments on Bill Gates's "early ventures into large-scale charity" which he believes "followed the model established by John D. Rockefeller — namely, to avoid politics and throw vast resources into solving big problems."<sup>4</sup> By any account this statement is nonsensical. The immense philanthropic resources marshalled by the numerous Rockefeller Foundations (as well as the Gates Foundation

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<sup>2</sup> Callahan, *Fortunes of Change*, p.9.

<sup>3</sup> Callahan, *Fortunes of Change*, p.273, p.277.

<sup>4</sup> Callahan, *Fortunes of Change*, p.160.

in its wake) have always well-served elite interests in undermining all manner of progressive forces of social change. Not wanting to take Callahan's limelight, but here I would like to give a little plug to my own book, *Under the Mask of Philanthropy* (2017) which synthesizes much of the critical literature on this subject.

Talking specifically about the legacy of the Ford and Rockefeller foundations, Callahan glowingly recounts how "The wealthy left-wing heirs of the sixties generation built a funding machine that has transformed activism in the United States, nurturing a vast universe of social change groups that might not otherwise exist." Not wanting to be outdone by their forerunners he explains that now "an even wealthier generation of liberal heirs - determined to 'leverage privilege' - is setting out to do much the same thing" but "on a scale that dwarfs anything seen so far." Again despite his excitement at such prospects, he still finds a few words to acknowledge that there are "rich ironies at play."

In the name of redistributing wealth and power, a tiny group of the most privileged members of U.S. society will help decide which social justice groups - and causes - will thrive in the next half century and which will wither. (p.266)

Nevertheless he feels obliged to add: "To some degree, of course, none of this can be helped - not given the current nature of our economic system." So as far as Callahan is concerned, it is acceptable that anti-democratic elites, whose first and foremost priority is to a capitalist economic system premised upon inequality, should have the ability to determine which organizations will flourish (with funding) and which will wither (without funding). Holding out no hope for a socialist alternative, Callahan condescendingly explains that "realistically, it is neither possible nor desirable to create total economic equality." So while he thinks it realistic that poverty continue to be imposed upon the poor majority by an elite minority, he is emphatic: "Egalitarianism cannot be imposed on the rich. Instead... the upper class must uphold this spirit voluntarily."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Callahan, *Fortunes of Change*, p.267, p.290.

Callahan's unwavering faith in liberalism necessarily means that he still maintains high hopes for the politics of the Democratic Party. Here he even believes that the interests of big business are actually helping move the party in a more progressive direction! "Far from corrupting the Democratic Party, then, some wealthy liberal donors are actually doing the exact opposite: they are helping the party find its moral backbone."<sup>6</sup> In this instance Callahan leans upon the individual example of Tim Gill, a liberal activist who went on back the spineless Hillary Clinton against the left-leaning alternative Bernie Sanders, thereby making his own unique contribution to ensuring the un-electability of the Democrats.

Proud of his elitism, Callahan aims to correct non-liberal critics writing: "'Corporate Democrats' and special interests - reliable culprits in the left's narrative about stymied reform - are only part of the problem."<sup>7</sup> Thus according to Callahan, the real "obstacle to progressive ambitions" are the "less educated white voters of modest means". As proof of this problem he draws his readers' attention to Thomas Frank's already discredited *New York Times* best-seller *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (2004). The reactionary conclusions of Frank's book were of course quickly debunked by political scientist Larry Bartels, who moved beyond wild speculations and actually examined the voting records of Callahan and Frank's culprit, the working-class. Thus writing in 2005 - as covered in *The Nation* - Bartels concluded:

Working-class whites have not become more Republican in their presidential voting behavior. They have become less Democratic in their party identification over the past forty years, but at a considerably slower rate than middle- and upper-income whites... Insofar as the data presented here suggest anything about how to appeal to working-class whites, they suggest that bread-and-butter economic issues are likely to be more potent than social issues. At least, that has been the case over the past 20 years, and especially in 2004.

Bartels conclusion is particularly pertinent as far as challenging

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<sup>6</sup> Callahan, *Fortunes of Change*, p.101.

<sup>7</sup> Callahan, *Fortunes of Change*, p.31.



Callahan's narrative of future change is concerned, as Callahan himself admits: "although rich donors do tend to push the Democrats rightward on economic policy, they often push the party to the left on social issues."<sup>8</sup> This would imply that rich liberal donors are precisely the problem, not the solution, because, as Bartels makes clear, it is economic policies which play a decisive role in determining the voting patterns of the working class. Nevertheless, later in *Fortunes of Change* Callahan does dwell briefly upon the findings of Bartels subsequent and more detailed study of American politics.

Things have become so bad that 'the preferences of people in the bottom third of the income distribution have *no* apparent impact on the behaviour of their elected officials.' Or at least that is a conclusion of *Unequal Democracy*, the authoritative study of politics in the new Gilded Age by the political scientist Larry Bartels. (p.278)

This observation leads Callahan to the illogical conclusions that: "The influx of wealthy liberals into politics may serve to mitigate the downsides of such quasi-plutocratic rule..."<sup>9</sup> Yet, as you may have guessed, the findings of Bartels book *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* (2009) did not describe how the American public were holding out for the aid of rich economically conservative liberals. In fact what Bartels found was "an astonishing level of public support for what would have to be a very radical program of social transformation," including not least the outlawing of inherited wealth.

Such a progressive and transformative program as outlined by Bartels was certainly on the cusp of coming to fruition during the massive upheavals that accompanied the growth in the civil rights movement during the 1960s. It is for this reason that liberal philanthropists saw fit to intervene to head-off such emancipatory threats to their class privileges. Callahan however touches on this issue to simply celebrate the fact that the civil rights movement "attracted

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<sup>8</sup> Callahan, *Fortunes of Change*, pp.100-1.

<sup>9</sup> Callahan, *Fortunes of Change*, p.278.

serious liberal money starting the early 1960s.” On this point he references and selectively paraphrases the seminal critical research that was undertaken by William Domhoff in his book *Fat Cats and Democrats: The Role of the Big Rich in the Party of the Common Man* (1972). But what Domhoff makes abundantly clear, and what Callahan doggedly ignores, is that this massive increase in liberal funding for civil rights activism came precisely in response to a surge in civil rights militancy from 1960 onwards – a newfound radicalism that was characterized by the rapid spread of student sit-ins and then Freedom Rides that sought to break segregation in buses and bus terminals.

As Domhoff writes: “It was into this ferment that the liberals and their foundations hastily entered with the promise of lots of money if the students [who had just formed the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee] would only turn their energies to a voter-registration drive.” Liberal support coordinated by America’s most powerful liberals was always considered problematic by leading civil rights activists. Hence Domhoff explains how early offers of funding for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) “started a controversy... that almost split the group asunder.” The money provided by liberal foundations “as always, had strings attached to it. They were attempting to define the limits of acceptable civil rights activity.” So when SNCC made the not uncontested “decision to push into voter registration, Northern liberal money came raining down.” “As usual, the concern appeared to be as much in moderating the new activists as it was in supporting them.” More significantly through, Domhoff also explains that by 1964, amid concerns about the students more radical approach to social change, most wealthy liberals “withdrew their personal financial support from SNCC... It was the beginning of the end for SNCC.”<sup>10</sup> As far as Callahan is concerned, this history is irrelevant. Nevertheless, later in *Fortunes of Change* Callahan observes:

In his 1972 book *Fat Cats and Democrats*, an early look at the role of big money in the Democratic Party, the leftist academic William Domhoff wrote that politics is in the ‘hand of the

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<sup>10</sup> Domhoff, *Fat Cats and Democrats*, p.126, p.127, p.128, pp.134-5.

grasping rich, whether of a halfway humane or a reactionary hue.’ Like C. Wright Mills before him, Domhoff didn’t see much difference between Democrats and Republicans, lumping them all into the ‘Property Party.’ (p.164)

Callahan then reluctantly concedes: “This critique if basically right: there is no real debate in the upper classes about capitalism versus something else, and most of the liberal rich described in this book would probably be on the right in Europe.” But he then goes on to belittle Domhoff’s serious critique of the Democrats adding: “But if the differences among the wealthy might seem trivial to a Marxist, the battle between reactionaries and the ‘halfway humane’ is actually a big deal in the U.S. context.”<sup>11</sup> This conclusion is hardly surprising, as Callahan concludes that the only battle worth fighting for is for the election of the nicer (more liberal) representatives of the billionaire class. Callahan does not acknowledge the existence of the class war that is being waged upon the majority by his elite friends, so needless to say he discounts the need to build a genuine and alternative democratic party funded by the working-class to fight for the interests of the working-class. This fighting alternative which is a “big deal” was as necessary in 1972 as it is now. Thus after Domhoff made the aforementioned comments about the dead-end politics of the grasping rich, Domhoff continued:

Even the Democratic Party, the wondrous political organization sometimes unjustly celebrated as the party of the common man, is little more than an unending series of broken promises. To say that it is the best Americans can do anytime soon ... is hardly encouraging, for that means wealth and income will remain concentrated to an incredible degree in the hands of the very rich, the tax system will remain regressive and unfair to the struggling wage earner, and the costs of an anaemic welfare state will rest on the shoulders of middle Americans. (pp.175-6)

This is exactly why Marxists (like Socialist Alternative in America) provided critical support for Bernie Sanders in his fight for the

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<sup>11</sup> Callahan, *Fortunes of Change*, p.164-5.

presidential nomination against Hillary Clinton, while at the same time highlighting the need to build an independent party of the working-class. A good case has already been made that the reactionary politics of Donald Trump were only able to come to the fore because the working-class were repulsed by discredited right-wing politics of the Democrats, best exemplified by Hillary Clinton and her corporate benefactors. Sanders was thus presented with a unique opportunity to break with the Democrats. He had the opportunity to stand as an independent, and in doing so Sanders could have built upon the colossal financial support that his campaign had already received from ordinary, not wealthy, citizens. That Sanders did not break with the Democrats was a costly mistake. But it also provided his supporters with an important lesson: the Democratic Party would rather lose an election than win with a socialist leader. Millions of disillusioned Americans who are now desperately seeking a progressive alternative to politicians that are bought and paid for by the big rich; and contrary to Callahan's uninformed demands, millions of working-class citizens are well aware that the influx of more liberal billionaires into politics will not "mitigate the downsides of such quasi-plutocratic rule" in America.

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**TWO**

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## **Billionaires Are Not Our Friends<sup>1</sup>**

*Planet of the Humans* demands our attention and most of all it demands our action. This widely-watched documentary, directed by Jeff Gibbs and produced by Michael Moore, presents a dystopian overview of the destruction that capitalism has wrought on our planet. Importantly the film castigates the ongoing attempts by liberal environmentalists to prevent the consumption of our planet and concludes: “We must take control of our environmental movement and our future from billionaires and their permanent war on Planet Earth: they are not our friends.”

Now if that was the only message that viewers took away from this documentary, I for one would be happy. But tragically, Moore and his environmentally concerned filmmakers, in telling an epic story of our times, get an awful lot wrong... very wrong.

Emulating the ending of the 1968 movie, *Planet of the Apes*, where Charlton Heston (Taylor) discovers that the alien planet he had returned to was a future planet Earth, *Planet of the Humans* ends with a dark glimpse of our own future if we do not act now. This is achieved

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter was first published online by *Socialist Alternative* on May 29, 2020.

by borrowing a long section of footage from Patrick Rouxel's 2012 documentary *Green*, wherein we watch the devastating impact of corporate logging in Indonesia as told from the point of view of a dying orangutan. But while the 1968 monkey classic that inspired Moore's latest contribution managed to cover timely issues of war and racial oppression that contributed towards a greater public understanding of the pressing issues of the day, *Planet of the Humans* unwittingly does the reverse.

Despite fingering the billionaire-class as the problem, the film simultaneously blames the daily inaction of ordinary people for the world's problems. The closing sequence of the film ends with these words:

Less must be the new more and instead of climate change, we must at long last accept that it's not the carbon dioxide molecule destroying the planet, it's us. It's not one thing, but everything we humans are doing. A human-caused apocalypse. If we get ourselves under control, all things are possible.

This was a bad ending for an otherwise interesting film, but it is a conclusion that flows from the population-obsessed narrative that undergirds the entire documentary. Contrary to its depiction in *Planet of the Humans*, this fixation on human population numbers as representing a suitable focus for environmental action is as old as the environmental movement itself. So, when Nina Jablonski, an anthropologist at Penn State University, states that "population growth continues to be not the elephant, [but] the herd of elephants in the room," she is badly wrong.

The most significant billionaire funders of the environmental movement have always blamed the reproductive habits of the working classes for the environmental destruction and inequities caused by capitalism. And ironically, it has only been in the last decade or so that such dead-end priorities were largely forced out from the ranks of most green organizations - a refreshing process of clarification that owed much to the more class-conscious activists active within a parallel environment justice movement. So when population growth is described as the "elephant in the room", it is in reality because socialist and environmental activists have only recently succeeded in kicking it out.

*Planet of the Humans* peddles the myth that the environmental movement has only recently been contaminated by the crooked fingers of corporate power. In reality, its history is far more nuanced. Take, for example, the “green” practices of General Motors – the destructive corporate giant that formed the focus of Moore’s documentary, *Roger & Me* (1989). Indeed, just a few years after this film was released the chairman of General Motors board of directors, John Smith Jr., was a signed-up member of the environmental establishment when he became a trustee of The Nature Conservancy (or “the logging conservancy” as *Planet of the Humans* accurately describes it).

Corporate influence over many modern environmental organizations however goes much deeper than this, and it is significant that the main historic reference point for *Planet of the Humans* is Earth Day – an annual event that was launched on April 22, 1970. The documentary begins with a perfunctory introduction to this birth of the modern environmental movement before skipping on to footage of President Obama promising \$100 billion for green energy, Van Jones promising green energy for all, and Al Gore promoting green issues by cozying up to corporate elites like Sir Richard Branson. But although the first Earth Day was a genuinely mass event, corporations and pro-capitalist figures were always there from the start, sometimes in the background but sometimes at the forefront.

This facet of green history, in which conservative conservation groups like the Sierra Club and WWF, backed by billionaires (including from the oil industry), have consciously sought to undermine democracy within the environmental movement, is studiously ignored in *Planet of the Humans*.<sup>2</sup> This historical process is

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<sup>2</sup> WWF is the famous panda-branded conservation outfit that was founded by British elites in the early 1960s, and which from the 1970s onwards obtained funding from all manner of despotic billionaires. These wildlife funders included those from the same political background as the infamous Koch brothers, and also included a wide variety of other environmental plunders, one being Daniel Ludwig, the “reclusive American billionaire, whose companies destroyed thousands of miles of the Amazon rain forest.” Raymond Bonner, *At*

discussed in detail by Robert Gottlieb in his ground-breaking 1993 book, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement*.

### **Logging the history of the environmental movement**

The filmmakers debased appreciation of environmental history consequently renders them incapable of comprehending why even the most sinister climate-change deniers like the Koch brothers would seek to profit from the so-called greening of capitalism. We should remember that amongst the most brutal elements of the ruling class there has always been a strong preservationist streak that runs alongside their relentless consumption of living resources. An example from the early twentieth century is the Save-the-Redwoods League which included, amongst its 1918 founders, a racist ultra-conservative eugenicist named Madison Grant - someone who could easily fit the bill as a dark forerunner to the Koch brothers. The League was always backed to the hilt by logging interests - which pretty much dictated the direction of the League's preservation efforts - and the green outfit was also always wedded to the Rockefeller family's (of Standard Oil, ExxonMobil fame) Republican vision of conservation.<sup>3</sup>

90 years later and the capitalists are still at it. In 2005, the Koch Brothers purchased the US's second biggest logging company, Georgia-Pacific Corporation. The following year the Koch family then made a \$1 million donation to the long-corporatized Nature Conservancy, on the proviso that the federal government would be excluded from ownership of the land of their newly established Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve. This relationship was no flash in the pan, as in 2011 Phillip Ellender, the Koch brothers' chief propagandist and arch-anti-environmentalist was recruited to serve as a trustee of The Nature Conservancy in Georgia. This was also just a few years after the Koch brothers helped launch a new and highly

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*the Hand of Man: Peril and Hope for Africa's Wildlife* (Vintage, 1993), p.68.

<sup>3</sup> Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (University of California Press, 2005).



profitable greenwashing web site called the Mother Nature Network. In 2012 this corporate advertising outlet then merged with TreeHugger.com, which *Planet of the Humans* states was “founded and funded by Georgia-Pacific... which is owned by our friends, the Koch brothers”. Almost true, but not quite. TreeHugger was actually founded in 2004 by an individual not by Georgia-Pacific, and before its acquisition by the Koch-funded Mother Nature Network the website had regularly published articles attacking Koch Industries and Georgia-Pacific. After the takeover such critical articles were no longer commissioned.<sup>4</sup>

So, while few environmentalists would disagree with the documentary’s assertion that the Koch brothers are the “devils themselves”, *Planet of the Humans* completely distorts reality when trying to prove how fossil-fuel capitalists have only recently hijacked environmentalism. But should it really be surprising that Koch Industries, which is the second largest private company in America, should seek to turn a profit from every facet of industrial civilization? The question always resting heavily on the minds of the Koch brothers is *can this make us money?*<sup>5</sup> And if they understand one thing, it is how to hedge their investments to minimize risk in the ever-chaotic world of capitalist trading. Their father did the same when he opportunistically helped Stalin build oil refineries in the Soviet Union in 1928, despite being an avid supporter of fascism.<sup>5</sup>

Hence, at the same time that the Koch brothers continue to publicly attack government subsidies (for everything), they have actively lobbied to expand their share of the subsidy, provided because of their massive investment into biofuels and renewable biomass plants. This *old* news renders *Planet of the Humans*’ apparent revelation that Georgia-Pacific and the Koch brothers “are likely the largest recipient of green energy biomass subsidies in the United States” somewhat less shocking.

On the matter of so-called green alternatives to fossil fuels, like

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<sup>4</sup> Abigail Goldman, “Eco-friendly consumption? Critics don’t buy it,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Jane Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (Random House, 2016).

biofuels and biomass, *Planet of the Humans* is partially right in saying that many pro-corporate environmental groups continue to push forward all manner of worse than useless solutions to the ongoing climate catastrophe. But the documentary presents itself as groundbreaking while ignoring the existence of a huge literature, produced by leading environmentalists, that has already addressed the limitations of technological capitalist utopianism that is so rife within the green movement. Leading British environmentalist George Monbiot is one prominent example. In response to the documentary's bizarre claim that they "found only one environmental leader willing to reject biomass and biofuels," Monbiot correctly reminds his readers that he has been speaking out on this issue since 2004; but he goes further, explaining that: "Almost every environmental leader I know opposes the burning of fresh materials to generate power."<sup>6</sup> Ignorant of this history, the single environmental leader that the filmmakers found who was willing to reject biomass and biofuels was Vandana Shiva - a famous critic of industrial civilization whose romanticized views of peasant life in India and opposition to imperialism (particularly that of Bill Gates) had led to her forming various toxic alliances with far-right Hindu nationalists.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> George Monbiot, "How did Michael Moore become a hero to climate deniers and the far right?," *The Guardian*, May 7, 2020. For those who want to engage with serious criticisms of the environmental movement see Okbazghi Yohannes' excellent 2018 book *The Biofuels Deception: Going Hungry on the Green Carbon Diet*.

<sup>7</sup> These serious criticisms are explored by Regina Cochrane, in her highly critical article, "Rural Poverty and Impoverished Theory: Cultural Populism, Ecofeminism, and Global Justice," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 34(2), April 2007. Fundamentally, Cochrane takes issue with Shiva's "left" populist notion of "culturally-perceived" poverty, which she argues "is not only elitist but also complicit with globalized capitalism and reactionary currents that are on the rise worldwide." According to Cochrane, as a highly regarded subsistence ecofeminist, Shiva attempts to make the case "that much of what is thought to be rural poverty is not poverty at all, but simply manifestations of culturally 'other' forms of 'difference'." Also see, Valay Singhrui, "Vandana Shiva's support for Sri Sri: Cocktail of

## Socialist or liberal analyses?

Michael Moore is famous for using his documentaries to expose the deep inequalities that permeate society's core – films like *Sicko* (2007) and *Capitalism: A Love Story* (2009). His longstanding failing is that he then calls for the people to support the Democratic Party. Such dangerous missteps (for us) are symptoms of his liberal analysis of society which frustrates his ability to see the nature of oppression as being rooted in class divisions. That being said, liberals like Van Jones, President Obama's former "czar of green jobs", whose involvement in colluding with green capitalists is repeatedly touched upon (albeit fleetingly) in *Planet of the Humans*, should really know better given his early fling with socialist politics during his youth.

Yet Jones' political confusion has been germinating for years and his contradictory (now liberal) analyses are woven throughout his bestselling 2008 book *The Green Collar Economy* – a book which on the one hand castigates corporate greenwashing, while simultaneously acting to legitimize it. Thus he highlights how "since the 1980s, the United States has had a shameful secret: its environmental movement is almost explicitly segregated by race," with the mostly white mainstream movement set against environmental justice activists (who are "made up almost entirely by people of color"). But Jones then embraces the insane logic of corporate America (which is what Moore correctly lambasts him for), which leads Jones to confidently conclude that the new green wave being propelled forward by "venture capitalists" is likely to be "infinitely more expansive and inclusive [in racial terms] than previous environmental upsurges... because it is centered on investment and solutions".<sup>8</sup>

In a final bizarre twist, which echoes Vandana Shiva's own cross-class activism, Jones is now the leading liberal booster of

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environmentalism and Hindutva is not new for her," *DailyO*, March 10, 2016; Nathanael Johnson, "Why Vandana Shiva is so right and yet so wrong," *Grist*, August 20, 2014; Richard Lewontin, "Genes in the food!," *New York Review of Books*, June 21, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Jones, *The Green Collar Economy*, pp.50-1, p.52, p.54.

bipartisan alliances with the far-right. Jones actually formed his first highly problematic alliance with the Koch brothers in his efforts to reform the prison system.<sup>9</sup> But Charles Koch is clear that he will fight on single issues alongside anyone whose interests align with his own, and in an interview carried out late last summer Koch confirmed *Planet of the Humans'* false hypothesis when he boasted of his newfound green investments. Sickeningly he stated that Koch Industries' two main priorities are "keeping people safe" and "protecting the environment."<sup>10</sup> Laudable concerns that contradict the

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<sup>9</sup> For a succinct explanation of how the Koch brothers are profiting from their prison reforms, see James Kilgore, "Fighting mass incarceration under Trump: new strategies, new alliances," *Truthout*, December 26, 2016; also discussed briefly here, Mark Jay, "From mass incarceration to mass coercion," *Monthly Review*, December 1, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> During this wide-ranging interview Koch talks about his two favourite authors, the first is his free-market guru Friedrich Hayek and the second is the famed promoter of positive psychology, Abraham Maslow. Oftentimes Koch's words sound like they might be coming from a grassroots environmental activist with his talk of the need for "bottom-up approaches" to solve society's ills; but all he is really describing is his desire for a world free from government regulations and democratic oversight. He talks about his father's strong work ethic but forgets to mention that his father was a firm support of fascist and Nazi movement. Writing in 1938 Fred Koch wrote: "Although nobody agrees with me, I am of the opinion that the only sound countries in the world are Germany, Italy and Japan..." Charles Koch's explains his free-market philosophy in this way:

"I don't like the term capitalism, that assumes that what we are after is a system where a lot of people have a lot of capital and that's not what we are about. What we are after is a system where everybody has the opportunity to realize their potential including those who start with nothing, and business should only profit to the extent that their helping other people improve their lives; and polluting and making people sick, killing people, shouldn't profit. There are costs for that. You talk about failures, our biggest failures in my mind and what we work the hardest on are safety problems, when there is an accident and people

truth; with Koch's lies being exposed in *Company Town* (2017), a documentary that tells the tale of ordinary people fighting back against the Koch brothers and the carcinogenic output of a huge Georgia-Pacific paper mill in their small town.

Of course, with President Trump's 2016 election victory, the minimal support from organizations like the US Environmental Protection Agency vanished overnight, as Trump quickly appointed a former Koch lobbyist/climate-denier to head (or rather dismantle) the Agency. Trump, whose "symbiotic" relationship with the Koch family is well-established, thus topped this appointment when in 2017 he made another Koch-consort named Daniel Simmons his Assistant Secretary for the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy – an office which Simmons' former fossil-fuel funded employer had actively tried to dissolve.

Another billionaire who, like the Koch brothers, is featured as a baddie in *Planet of the Humans* is Jeremy Grantham – a maverick capitalist who loves "Keynesian" calls for strict environmental regulations on corporate polluters, but strenuously asserts that the world is massively overpopulated. The documentary, however, doesn't make all these points and instead with no sense of irony introduces him by noting that...

...the reason why we're not talking about overpopulation, consumption and the suicide of economic growth is that would be bad for business. Especially the cancerous form of capitalism that rules the world, now hiding under a cover of green. ... And who are these new partners? One of them was Jeremy Grantham, billionaire, world's leading timber investment advisor.

*Planet of the Humans* then "reveals" that Grantham recently funded

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die. I mean that's monstrous. Job one is keeping people safe, and job two is protecting the environment. I think the last five years the EPA has ranked us either number one or number two of US companies in pollution reduction initiatives." "Charles Koch interviewed by Tim Ferriss," *The Tim Ferriss Show podcast*, August 11, 2019, 1hr 30min onwards.

the Sierra Club to the tune of \$3 million. But what they don't say is that Grantham has been funding green projects for decades and, according to Naomi Klein, actually "underwrites a large proportion of the U.S. and British green movement, as well as a lot of related academic research" "ranging from The Nature Conservancy to... 350.org."<sup>11</sup> This is all true. Grantham likes to describe himself as "one of the last liberal Republicans" which sets him at odds with the Kochs and Trumps of the world. Yet Grantham maintains a disturbing fixation upon the total world human population which he believes needs to be reduced to about 2 billion over the coming generations. In a disturbing example of what has been referred to as the "greening of hate"<sup>12</sup> Grantham made his appalling politics clear in a speech delivered in 2018 where (getting the numbers wrong as well as the ideas) he stated:

The problem is Africa. In Nigeria the desired family size today is nine. They don't achieve it, they only achieve about seven, but they would like nine, if they could... This is a cultural thing, very difficult to deal with. In the future all of the gains [in global population growth] are in Africa, 3.3 billion extra in Africa, 0.5 [billion for] the rest of the world added together - less than Nigeria alone.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism Vs. The Climate* (Simon & Schuster, 2014), p.234. His funding of green groups is discussed in this 2013 interview, wherein the interviewer states: "For years he has remained, Oz-like, behind the curtain of the environmental movement." Leo Hickman, "Interview: Jeremy Grantham, environmental philanthropist: 'We're trying to buy time for the world to wake up'," *The Guardian*, April 12, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Chris Lehmann, "How the threat of apocalypse justifies american empire," *In These Times*, May 23, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> In March 2018 he made the point about the carrying capacity of the planet being around 2 billion (see at 34min in YouTube video "2018 UNC Clean Tech Summit: Jeremy Grantham - Dealing with Climate Change: The Race of Our Lives"). In April 2019 he repeated the points about the need to reduce the global population and highlighted his concerns with plummeting fertility rates in the developed world caused by pollution. (see at 4min and at 9.30min in YouTube video

Grantham then went on to aggressively make the case that the only solution is to impose strict immigration controls to prevent countries like Britain being flooded by hundreds of millions of Africans. In reality, decades of capitalist exploitation and a collapsing social care system have played a big part in rising populations in countries like Nigeria. This oppression is very much connected to the ongoing exploitation of Nigeria's oil reserves by Grantham's former employer, Shell Oil - a company whose former chairman currently chairs the advisory board of Grantham's environmental foundation.

Finally, another paranoid bugbear of Grantham's is the declining sperm count of certain men, owing to pollution, which he says "may be contributing already to the declining fertility rate of the Western world". This, he states, means "we" "may face the problem of low fertility in the long term in the developed world while we face the problem of too-high a fertility rate in Africa."

### **The end? The future?**

In concluding this review, it is important to be crystal clear: population growth is not the problem facing our planet; the problem is capitalism. This is contrary to the conclusion presented within *Planet of the Humans* which ends by blaming "us" as being the primary problem. The suggestion that uncontrolled population growth is the elephant in the room misses the point, but it flows from the filmmakers inverted version of history. Over the last hundred years corporate elites have always sought to play a major role in environmental movements, and one of their abiding concerns has been limiting the reproduction of the working class and poor masses. Successes in recent decades in diverting the narrative away from population growth and towards addressing structural issues such as capitalist exploitation and environmental destruction has pushed the idea of population growth as a key concern into a more marginal position.

Population growth is in no way the elephant in the room. It is a right-wing ideological specter that perpetually haunts the

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"2019 Summit: Keynote Speaker - Jeremy Grantham").

environmental movement to its detriment. It is not a new idea and it is not being suppressed by corporate environmentalists whose role in the green movement goes back to its beginnings. All that being said we can still agree with the filmmakers that billionaire elites have always stood in the way of building the type of democratic mass movements that can save our planet; and yes, “We must take control of our environmental movement and our future from billionaires”.

For all its many faults, *Planet of the Humans* has already helped start a conversation about the limits of social democracy, and for its many millions of viewers it will have posed the need for fighting for an alternative to capitalism. We would say that we need a socialist alternative that puts power to decide our collective future into the hands of ordinary working-class people. Tragically, if also typically for Moore, *Planet of the Humans* offers poor analysis and no way forward. This documentary should be contrasted with the powerful and inspiring storylines of films like *Salt of the Earth* (1954), which exposed the destructive nature of class society and demonstrated that only workers’ solidarity could lead to a brighter future. But unlike Moore’s films, *Salt of the Earth* - which was written by the same person who went on to write *Planet of the Apes* - was banned for decades precisely because of the threat it posed to the powerful. So, while the title of Moore’s latest cinematic contribution may have aped its forerunners’ positive aspirations, it falls short, leaving its viewers as paralyzed as the lonely orangutan featured floundering for its life in the documentary’s apocalyptic and depressing closing sequence.



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**THREE**

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## Why the CIA Cares About Marxism<sup>1</sup>

In a widely read essay for the *Los Angeles Review of Books* entitled “The CIA reads French theory: on the intellectual labor of dismantling the cultural left” (February 27, 2017), Gabriel Rockhill spins an intriguing yarn about the CIA and their interest in keeping abreast of French political theory throughout the Cold War. “According to the spy agency itself,” Rockhill observed, “post-Marxist French theory directly contributed to the CIA’s cultural program of coaxing the left toward the right, while discrediting anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism...” Here the professor was making particular reference to a recently declassified CIA report, authored in 1985, that focuses on the intellectual milieu around Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan.

Abundant evidence of course exists of the CIA’s complex cultural interventions into French intellectual affairs — but it is critical to recognize that it was the political shortcomings of communist

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter was first published online by *CounterPunch* on June 15, 2017.

organizations themselves (i.e., Stalinists) that had the determinant impact on the obscurantist trajectory of left-wing academic ideas. The CIA's own determined cold warriors were well aware of these problems on the Left, and hence these are exactly the arguments they put forth in 1985 within their then internal document "France: Defection of the Leftist Intellectuals." This "research report" — referred to within Gabriel Rockhill's essay — is clear, the CIA sought to examine the changing attitudes of French intellectuals so as to "gauge the probable political impact on the political environment in which policy is made." So considering the intriguing theoretical focus of this report it is worth dwelling upon some of the arguments presented therein, if only as a starting point for exploring the failures of the most influential parts of the French Left in the aftermath of World War II.

Certainly bearing in mind the ferocity with which the CIA waged the intellectual war against the Left — with the aid of assorted liberal elites<sup>2</sup> — it is notable that the imperialist logistics of this battle remain largely overlooked within the CIA's own report. Leaving aside this significant oversight, the anonymous CIA author does at least emphasize that it was the repeated disillusionment of the working-class with the French Communist Party (PCF) that undermined the popularity of Communist and socialist ideologies. Indeed, time and time again the French working-class sought out political ideas on the Left to help them in the critical task of democratizing society, but all too often they were betrayed by Communist intellectuals who ultimately had no faith in the working-class to change society for themselves.

The CIA report thus touches briefly upon the betrayal of the socialist Mitterrand government in the 1980s, and Mitterrand's backtracking from his party's progressive economic policies and "adopt[ion of] austerity measures that drew embarrassing criticism from both the left and the right..." The intelligence author writes: "the dose of austerity that these policies eventually forced rang the death knell of leftist ideology for many informed observers." This fatal

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<sup>2</sup> Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* (Columbia University Press, 2014).

reversal served to compound the destructive and more “traumatic events of May 1968” which were characterized by the PCF’s betrayal of a genuinely revolution movement of working-class solidarity (yet again). Thus the CIA report accurately surmized:

In May-June 1968, after months of intensifying protests, students threw up barricades in the university section of Paris and initiated a period of guerrilla warfare in the streets of the Latin Quarter. The protest spread to other university cities; students were joined by 7 million striking workers (who occupied the factories); transportation and public services ground to a halt; and the 10-year-old government of General de Gaulle tottered. Marxist students looked to the Communist Party for leadership and declaration of a provisional government, but PCF leaders were already trying to restrain worker revolt and denounced the student radicals as woolly-minded anarchists. Many students concluded that the PCF had made a deal with de Gaulle, who eventually put down the riots.

In the wake of the PCF’s abandonment of the revolutionary uprising of May 1968, and the failure to overthrow capitalism, it is rather unsurprising that conservative forces of reaction would seize this opportunity to intensify their challenge to Marxism. On this score, the CIA report refers to the success of the “New Philosophers,” whose anti-Stalinist and anti-Marxist ideas were widely championed in the mainstream media (throughout the 1970s) with the aid of Bernard-Henri Levy’s highly influential Grasset publishing house.<sup>3</sup> The CIA

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<sup>3</sup> For an enlightening exposition on how anti-Marxist scholars (in the tradition of both liberalism and postmodernism) successfully capitalized on the major betrayals of the PCF, see Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (Berghahn Books, 2004). “Originating less in profound reflection on supposedly totalitarian regimes than in domestic political disputes, the critique of totalitarianism proceeded along lines that were largely determined by domestic politics and for that reason did little or nothing to advance understanding of regimes or politics consider to be ‘totalitarian.’”

author then describes how these New Philosophers had become disillusioned with the Left, observing how “the traditional leftist parties’ pusillanimity during the student revolt of 1968 tore the scales from their eyes, causing them to reject their allegiance to the Communist Party, French socialism, and even the essential tenets of Marxism.”

The report’s author goes on to explain how “Raymond Aron, the revered dean of contemporary conservative thought in France,” had worked long years in his efforts to discredit “the intellectual edifice of French Marxism.” But importantly the report acknowledges: “Even more effective in undermining Marxism, however, were those intellectuals who set out as true believers to apply Marxist theory in the social sciences but ended up rethinking and rejecting the entire tradition.”<sup>4</sup> On this score, the CIA analyst suggests:

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Further, it did much to confuse the issues by identifying French revolutionary political culture with totalitarianism and by failing to consider that ‘totalitarianism’ might have roots outside of revolutionary ideology and the revolutionary project. The price of this confusion would become evident by the late 1980s when, for example, [Francois] Furet, confronted with reactionary appropriations of his work, would be forced to admit that his formulations of the 1970s were too strong and [Paul] Thibaud would find himself criticizing the ‘antitotalitarian vulgate’ of the 1970s.” (p.274)

<sup>4</sup> In *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968* (South End Press, 1970), Daniel Singer accurately characterizes Professor Raymond Aron as “France’s most subtle and sophisticated defender of the western establishment” (p.19). Later Singer observes how “the student demonstrations in Paris occurred just at the time when the one-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx was being celebrated. In the elegant, modern building of UNESCO, nearly next-door to the provisional headquarters where the North Vietnamese delegates were giving their press conferences, distinguished academicians from all over the world had gathered for the occasion.” (p.30) Famed Communist Party historian Eric Hobsbawm was one of the many attendees at this moribund conference. Also of interest, see Gerd-Rainer Horn, *Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

Among postwar French historians, the influential school of thought associated with Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, and Fernand Braudel has overwhelmed the traditional Marxist historians. The *Annales* school, as it is known from its principal journal, turned French historical scholarship on its head in the 1950s and 1960s, primarily by challenging and later rejecting the hitherto dominant Marxist theories of historical progress. Although many of its exponents maintain that they are ‘in the Marxist tradition,’ they mean only that they use Marxism as a critical point of departure for trying to discover the actual patterns of social history. For the most part, they have concluded that Marxist notions of the structure of the past – of social relationships, of patterns of events, and of their influence in the long term – are simplistic and invalid.

In the field of anthropology, the influential structuralist school associated with Claude Levi-Strauss, Foucault, and others performed virtually the same mission. Although both structuralism and *Annales* methodology have fallen on hard times (critics accuse them of being too difficult for the uninitiated to follow), we believe their critical demolition of Marxist influence in the social sciences is likely to endure as a profound contribution to modern scholarship both in France and elsewhere in Western Europe.

What the CIA author leaves unmentioned in this concise historical statement is the role that US elites played in nurturing the theorists of the *Annales* school as a central facet of the cultural Cold War. Thankfully this important moment in history is reviewed in Kristin Ross’s book *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (MIT Press, 1996).

The French social sciences we are familiar with now were thus a postwar invention, and in all aspects of French modernization after the war their ascendancy bore some relation to U.S. economic intervention. To a certain extent the turn to this kind of study was funded and facilitated by the United States in a kind of Marshall Plan for intellectuals. A review of the literature makes a convincing case that the foremost American export of

the period was not Coca-Cola or movies but the supremacy of the social sciences. In October 1946, the director of the social science division of the Rockefeller Foundation proclaimed, 'A New France, a new society is rising up from the ruins of the Occupation; the best of its efforts is magnificent, but the problems are staggering. In France, the issue of the conflict or the adaptation between communism and western democracy appears in its most acute form. France is its battlefield or laboratory.' By expanding the social sciences in Europe, American sought to contain the progress of Marxism in the world. (p.186)

Ross writes that the "main tactic" employed the Western-backed intellectuals at the Annales school "was that of cannibalism: encompass and absorb the enemies as a means of controlling them." She refers to this approach as a "Science of empirical and quantitative sociology - the study of repetition - was erected against the science of history, the study of event."

In the 1950s and 1960s Braudel, Le Roy Ladurie, and others, ensconced after 1962 in the Maison des sciences de l'homme, produced what Braudel called 'a history whose passage is almost imperceptible ... a history in which all change is slow, a history of constant repetition, ever recurring cycles.' Their most formidable enemies within the field of history lived across the street: the long lineage of Marxist historians of the French revolution - Georges Lefebvre, Albert Soboul, and the like - housed at the Sorbonne. For what is at stake in the erasure of the study of social movement in favour of that of structures is the possibility of abrupt change or mutation in history: the idea of Revolution itself. The old-fashioned historians of the event par excellence of French history, each in turn occupying the chaired professorship for the study of the French Revolution institute by the Sorbonne after 1891, looked askance at their thoroughly modernized, well-funded, and well-equipped (with photocopiers and computers) colleagues across the way. (p.189)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For more on Braudel's close work with American philanthropic elites, see Giuliana Gemelli, *Fernand Braudel* (Paris, 1995); Brigitte Mazon, *Aux origines de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales*.

With specific relevance to the CIA's comments on the rise and rise of French structuralism, it is useful to reflect upon Ross's analysis of this field of study. As she states:

[T]he rise of structuralism in the 1950s and 1960s was above all a frontal attack on historical thought in general and Marxist dialectical analysis in particular; its appeal to many leftist French intellectuals after 1956 was overdetermined by the crisis within the French Communist Party and Marxism following the revelations of Stalin's crimes and the Soviet invasion of Hungary at the end of that year. After such messy historical events, the clean, scientific precision of structuralism offered a kind of respite. (p.180)<sup>6</sup>

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*Le rôle du mécénat américain (1920-1960)* (Paris, 1988); and Ioana Popa, "International construction of area studies in France during the Cold War: Insights from the École Pratique des Hautes Études 6<sup>th</sup> Section," *History of the Human Sciences*, 29(4-5), 2016. American sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld, who was a consultant for the Ford Foundation, cooperated with Braudel in developing the research programs of the VI Section of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes. Also see Giuliana Gemelli and Roy Macleod (eds.) *American Foundations in Europe: Grant-Giving Policies, Cultural Diplomacy and Trans-Atlantic Relations, 1920-1980* (European Interuniversity Press, 2003). "In retrospect, it seems clear that the [Rockefeller] Foundation's grants to France, whilst small, were the most important made to the social sciences anywhere in the world in the late 1940s and early 1950s." Darwin Stapleton, "Joseph Willits and the Rockefeller's European Programme in the Socialist Sciences," *Minerva*, 41, 2003, p.109.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to the Soviet Union's crushing of the Hungarian Revolution, the failure of the PCF to resist either the Algerian War or the coming of the Fifth Republic also served to undermine popular support for communist ideas. For more on this history, see Irwin Wall, *French Communism in the Era of Stalin: The Quest for Unity and Integration, 1945-1962* (Praeger, 1983); and Martin Evans, *The Memory of Resistance: French Opposition to the Algerian War, 1954-*

Other than Febvre and Braudel, at this stage it is worth briefly reflecting upon the career of another famous proponent of French structuralism, Claude Lévi-Strauss. This is because in 1941, while living in exile in America, Lévi-Strauss had been offered a job at the New School for Social Research in New York City, where with the aid of the Rockefeller Foundation he helped found the *École Libre des Hautes Études* with an official charter from de Gaulle's government in exile.<sup>7</sup> After the war Lévi-Strauss then went on to work as cultural attaché to the French embassy in Washington, before returning to France in 1948 whereupon he became the director of studies in anthropology (1950-74) at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études'* newly established VI section. As Kristen Ross writes:

A grant from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1947 helped finance the founding of the VI section of the *Ecole pratique des hautes etudes* under the directorship of historian Lucien Febvre, who had seized the initiative from a rival group of sociologists headed by Georges Gurvitch. Home to François Furet in the early 1960s, this institution would be central to the future of the social sciences in France: in 1962, when Febvre's successor Fernand Braudel gathered all the various research laboratories scattered around the Latin Quarter and housed them in a single building on the Boulevard Raspail, the *Maison des sciences de l'homme*, the Ford Foundation helped finance the operation. In 1975 the VI section would in turn emancipate itself from the *Ecole pratique* and become the *Ecole de hautes etudes en sciences sociales*, with university status and the authorization to grant degrees. (p.187)

The Ford Foundation's decision, in 1959, to finance of the *Maison des sciences de l'homme* proved to be a critical moment for the evolution of French social sciences as Ford's \$1 million grant certainly brought them great influence. Moreover shortly after this grant was

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*1962* (Berg, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Another notable refugee scholar temporarily based in New York at the *École Libre des Hautes Études* was the political thinker Henri Bonnet, the father of the European Economic Community.



dispensed, Ford also helped Raymond Aron to launch his Institute of European Sociology in Paris. Certainly it is not coincidental that Aron was already playing a prominent role in the undertakings of the CIA-backed Congress for Cultural Freedom – a famous anti-communist enterprise that had been set up in Paris in 1950 with the full support of America’s most influential liberal foundations.<sup>8</sup>

Such assorted philanthropic interventions into French affairs “were complemented by support for the building of transnational institutions at the level of the European Community and for the fostering of transatlantic ties.”<sup>9</sup> A key intellectual broker in this regard was French economist Jean Monnet, who, while working hand-in-hand with American philanthropists, had been one of the founding fathers of both NATO and the European Union. Monnet enjoyed his own liaisons with economic and political elites at the Bilderberg Club, and in the 1950s formed his own Action Committee for a United States of Europe. Furthermore, on top of such transatlantic efforts to consolidate capitalist interests, the “Ford Foundation invested in American-style management education all over Western Europe, and by 1960 the European Association of Management Training, with Pierre Tabatoni as its president, acted as a roof organization for these schools...”

Philanthropic projects seeking to guide European academic enquiries away from Marxism were of course not limited to the social sciences – a matter of influence that is expanded upon in John Krige’s

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<sup>8</sup> Another French sociologist who with the support of the Ford Foundation worked closely with Raymond Aron during the 1960s was Michel Crozier. In the 1970s Crozier would go on to co-author the European section of a controversial report published by the Trilateral Commission called *The Crisis of Democracy: On the Governability of Democracies* (New York University Press, 1975); for a useful discussion of Crozier’s contribution to this report see, Alan Wolfe, “Capitalism shows its face: giving up on democracy,” In: Holly Skar (ed.), *Trilateralism: The Trilateral Commission and Elite Planning for World Management* (South End Press, 1980).

<sup>9</sup> Volker Berghahn, “Philanthropy and diplomacy in the ‘American Century,’” *Diplomatic History*, 23(3), July 1999.

book *American Hegemony and the Postwar Reconstruction of Science in Europe* (2008). In reference to the development of French science most particularly, Krige points out how Warren Weaver, who was the director the Division of the Natural Sciences at the Rockefeller Foundation (1932-55)...

...and the foundation were not simply interested in supporting good science and new directions in France. They wanted to use their financial leverage to steer French scientists along quite definite lines. Weaver in particular believed that the French were parochial and inward-looking. He wanted to transform them into outward-looking, “international” researchers, using techniques and tackling questions that were current above all in the United States. It was a vision inspired by the conviction that, without a radical remodeling of the French scientific community on American lines and the determined marginalization of Communist scientists in the field of biology, the country could never hope to play again a major role in the advancement of science. (p.81)

Another integral part of the ongoing post World War II battle for French minds was more fundamentally concerned with defanging the mass organizations of the working-class themselves – trade unions. This battle was eagerly taken up by the AFL’s Free Trade Union Committee, with many American trade union officials proving themselves more than ready to take up the war against Communism (and union democracy) by covertly intervening in the day-to-day affairs of foreign trade unions. In their developing connections with the Free Trade Union Committee the CIA was in luck and “found a dedicated and experienced ally, with extensive networks and years of experience in the covert manipulation of international labor movements.”<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>10</sup> Quenby Olmsted Hughes, *In the Interest of Democracy: The Rise and Fall of the Early Cold War Alliance Between the American Federation of Labor and the Central Intelligence Agency* (Peter Lang, 2011), p.64. CIA funding of students organizations was also considered to be a key part of the war against communism, a story recounted in Karen Paget’s *Patriotic Betrayal: The Inside Story of the CIA’s Secret Campaign to Enroll American Students in the Crusade*

underhand nature of this long and undemocratic relationship is well summed up by “a government memo, unsigned but attached to a November 1948 letter from David Bruce, the Chief of the Special Mission to France addressed to Paul Hoffman, the Administrator of the Economic Cooperation Administration”:

[...] it will not be enough to pump hundreds of millions of dollars into food, machinery, coal, and raw materials. We must find a means of not only aiding industry, of directly aiding the direct representatives of the workers. This is very difficult. The unions will not accept any aid from a foreign government. (If such aid does become available, it must be disguised and under no circumstances can the people here know anything about it. The whole matter therefore requires the utmost of discretion.) They will accept only trade union aid.<sup>11</sup>

After administering the Marshall Plan for imperial interests, Paul Hoffman then moved on from his role as head of the Economic Cooperation Administration to become the president of the Ford Foundation (1950-3) in America. The interrelated and sophisticated nature of such sophisticated interventions into France’s political affairs are usefully laid bare in Giles Scott-Smith’s incisive study *Networks of Empire: The US State Department’s Foreign Leader Program in the Netherlands, France, and Britain, 1950-70* (Peter Lang, 2011). Scott-Smith surmizes:

The ability of the US to interfere in French affairs was unparalleled during that first decade [after the end of World War II], yet the governments in Paris were still able maintain an independent outlook and steer their own course, benefitting from their special place within US strategy towards Western Europe. The European Cooperation Administration, with its headquarters in Paris, exerted a tremendous influence on the French socioeconomic scene, yet it implemented it via its own version, the Monnet Plan. US financial and military aid was recycled to enable long-running colonial wars to be fought in

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*against Communism* (Yale University Press, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Hughes, *In the Interest of Democracy*, p.65.

Indochina and North Africa. French reluctance to support an economic revival of Germany soon became sublimated into structural plans for European integration, with Paris leading the way. While the CIA supported the Force Ouvrière trade union and a host of other anti-communist outlets like the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Paris, French political elites willingly adopted their own strategies to undermine communist influence. US influence was therefore constrained by French political and social imperatives. (p.327)

Returning to the analysis presented in the CIA's now declassified report, it is noteworthy that the report's authors downplay the fascist/traditionalist orientation of the New Right forces that rose to prominence in the wake of 1968. In fact, the CIA initially simply refer to these forces in their report as the "new liberals." Later on the CIA analyst states:

Encouraged by writers and publishers who are associated in some way with right-wing press baron Robert Hersant, the New Right in France has taken up the ideas of reviving classic European liberalism as the elixir that France needs to recover from Socialist 'mismanagement'.

In a more revealing appendix to their report, entitled "Cultural aspects of New Right thought," the CIA however go on to point out how:

Conservative writers, many of them associated with the group for Research and Study of European Civilization (GRECE) and the Clock Club (Club de l'Horloge)... have found an outlet for their arguments in Hersant publications, notably *Figaro Magazine*, which is edited by GRECE kindred spirit Louis Pauwels.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> GRECE leading light, Louis Pauwels, had, in earlier years, been the coauthor of the 1960 irrationalist, Romantic treatise, *Les matin des magiciens*. This book was subsequently published in the United States as *Morning of the Magicians* in 1964, and had the dubious distinction of helping launch a revival of interest in the occult and Traditionalist ideas more generally. In 1977 Pauwels was selected to become the founding director of *Figaro Magazine*, a project formed as a side-

Here the CIA also draw attention to “the anti-egalitarian and even anti-Christian elements of GRECE/Horloge thinking”, but only to observe, how in recent years, this element of their thinking had apparently been toned down to better spread their toxic ideas. That said, the CIA report at least admits that GRECE were not really “new liberals,” as they point out that even: “Raymond Aron, the revered dean of contemporary conservative thought in France, detested the New Right intellectuals, often equating their elitist anti-egalitarianism with the worse antidemocratic strains in French conservatism.”

Nevertheless in the wake of 1968 it is clear that the capitalist establishment in both America and France sought to do everything in their power to undermine the national and international unity of working-class struggle. Expressed in a blunt form this led a renewed focus on excluding certain left-wing voices from the mainstream media. Here a good example of such practices is provided by the activism of right-wing financier Sir James Goldsmith who in 1977 purchased the left-wing *L'Express*, a popular newspaper which the new owner had previously identified as “the source of intellectual sickness of France”. Sir James’ first move upon acquiring this newspaper was to impose Raymond Aron upon the papers staff.<sup>13</sup> On a more mundane academic level, elite funding agencies also continued to support scholarly efforts to learn more about the threat posed by an increasingly militant trade union movement across Western Europe.<sup>14</sup>

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project of the conservative daily newspaper *Le Figaro* (a newspaper that had been purchased by Robert Hersant two years earlier). At this newly launched magazine Pauwels used his authority to bring leading GRECE members like Alain de Benoist onto the magazine’s payroll – a popular magazine that was soon reaching half a million readers.

<sup>13</sup> Ivan Fallon, *Billionaire: The life and times of Sir James Goldsmith* (Arrow Books, 1992), p.312.

<sup>14</sup> A good example is provided by the Ford Foundation funded study that resulted in the publication of Colin Crouch and Alessandro Pizzorno’s (eds.) two volume series, *The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe since 1968, ii. Comparative Analyses* (Macmillan, 1978).

Ultimately, however, despite many notable gains and inspiring victories, left-wing forces were tragically beaten back by a resurgent and coordinated neoliberal assault upon democracy worldwide. As in France, this process of neoliberal transformation was made easier by the willing collaboration of the Communist Party with members of the ruling-class, and by the stark betrayals of the working-class by left reformists like Mitterrand. It was in these unfavourable conditions that the intellectually debilitating but well-funded postmodern theories of French post-structuralists subsequently gained an unwelcome foothold within both academia and to some extent the mainstream media. As the Marxist literary theorist Terry Eagleton argues:

Post-structuralism was a product of that blend of euphoria and disillusionment, liberation and dissipation, carnival and catastrophe, which was 1968. Unable to break the structures of state power, post-structuralism found it possible instead to subvert the structures of language. Nobody, at least, was likely to beat you over the head for doing so. The student movement was flushed off the streets and driven underground into discourse. Its enemies... became coherent belief-systems of any kind - in particular all forms of political theory and organization which sought to analyse, and act upon, the structures of society as a whole.<sup>15</sup>

Of course these dead-end and intellectually incoherent currents of 'leftist' retreat did not remain confined to France — as exemplified by the Ford Foundation's support of a two-year program of seminars in the mid-1960s which gave a boost to French structuralism on American shores.<sup>16</sup> Yet in spite of such academic set-backs for those

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<sup>15</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Blackwell, 1983), p.142.

<sup>16</sup> Among the many intellectuals flown across the Atlantic as part of this process were Roland Barthes, Paul de Man, Lucien Goldman, Jean Hyppolite, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida; and the main event in this groundbreaking Ford-backed initiative was a conference titled "The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" held at Johns Hopkins University in October 1966. For an uncritical discussion of the germination of this transatlantic relationship, see Francois Cusset's

on the Left, the possibility of emancipatory working-class struggles developing are once again visible on capitalism's inhumane horizon. Early signs of this revival can be seen by the resurgent popularity garnered for socialist political candidates like Bernie Sanders (in America), Jean-Luc Mélenchon (in France), and Jeremy Corbyn (in Britain).

No doubt, the ruling-class and their intelligence agencies will, at this very moment, be frantically drafting up new "research reports" so that they may orientate their political activities in a vain attempt to neutralize this growing mood of resistance. So this time around we have to ensure that we have learned the appropriate lessons from history. First and foremost we must refuse to allow any new socialist leaders to mislead us in our bid for freedom. And so we must be clear that if our leaders are not up to the task of helping us build a democratic and socialist alternative to the bankrupt status quo then we must be ready to replace them, and ultimately be willing to seize power for ourselves.

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text *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, and Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008). Cusset highlights the impact of post-structuralist and postmodern French authors on the arguably problematic resurgence of interest in identity politics and cultural studies in America during the 1990s.





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**FOUR**

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# **Of Union Dreams and Nightmares: Cesar Chavez and Why Funding Matters<sup>1</sup>**

Once upon a time, in the most hostile of organizing environments, Cesar Chavez and his farm workers movement successfully mobilized workers and their communities against a powerful array of unaccountable corporate forces in a historic fight for social justice. Chavez initially succeeded where others failed and forced the most powerful industry in California to negotiate with the state's poorest workers. His life's work in building the United Farm Workers union is now memorialized in American history. President Barack Obama's 2008 campaign slogan was inspired by Chavez's rallying cries in the fields, while as President, Obama went on to proclaim March 31 as the national Cesar Chavez Day. Nevertheless, fame and dedication to a good cause are not enough to invoke immunity from criticism, so it is important to scrutinize Chavez's serious shortcomings, as part of a

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter was first published online by *CounterPunch* on April 27, 2017.

broader attempt to understand why his decades of organizing in the fields ultimately floundered.

Frank Bardacke's book, *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (Verso, 2011), provides an insightful reckoning of the conflicting pressures that eventually undermined Chavez's union. One of the many external forces that simultaneously facilitated both union successes (in the short-term) and failures (in the long-term) was the ever-present pressures generated by the need for funding. Many financial lessons for how activists can sustain powerful movements for social change can be gleaned from the example of the United Farm Workers, but the significant interventions of elite philanthropists into Chavez's organizing — alongside the cynical manipulations of conservative trade union bureaucrats — must be factored in to any such observations. This is why Erica Kohl-Arenas' important contribution to this field of research, *The Self-Help Myth: How Philanthropy Fails to Alleviate Poverty* (University of California Press, 2015) should be considered a must-read for all trade unionists and social justice activists. Drawing primarily upon these two books, along with the biographical interrogations carried out by Miriam Pawel, this essay seeks to draw attention to the enduring problems of financing democratic movements for progressive change.

Drilling to the root of the divisions caused by elite financing of working-class activism, it is important to reflect upon the organizations and people which provided guidance to Chavez's initial community organizing work. The key individual to be considered in this regard is Fred Ross, a founder of the Community Service Organization (CSO) — a project which had been set-up by Saul Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) in 1947. Ross was the first person to recognize Chávez's potential as a fellow-organizer when their paths crossed in 1952, and Ross quickly recruited him to paid employment with his CSO — a position that Chávez maintained for the next decade. These formative years are integral to understanding Chavez's later developments: "Not everything that Alinsky and Ross taught Chavez in the years between his twenty-fifth and thirty-fifth birthday stuck, but understanding Alinskyism is one way of making sense of Cesar Chavez and the foundational architecture of the United Farm Workers."

(*Trampling Out the Vintage*) For a little informative background on the funding of this early activism, *Kohl-Arenas*' writes:

By the 1950s, Alinsky had become one of the premier thinkers and practitioners of neighborhood-based community organizing. Despite Alinsky's popularity in the 1950s, he was refused funding by both the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations based on the "political nature" of his approach to building power among local residents to confront unequal opportunity structures. However, through Alinsky's connections at the University of Chicago, the Emil Schwarzhaupt Foundation generously funded him and the CSO.

During this period the Schwarzhaupt Foundation also provided much-needed funding to the Highlander Folk School, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Migrant Ministry, but the "main recipient [of their largesse] was Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation."

Starting in April 1953, the IAF received a direct grant of \$150,000, which in the next ten years expanded to \$608,486. More money went to other organizations and groups that had ties to Alinsky but were not directly funded by the IAF. Add it all up, and over a twelve-year period of intense giving nearly \$3 million of Schwarzhaupt's fortune went to fund Alinskyism. (*Trampling Out the Vintage*)

Social movement philanthropy was certainly not commonplace in the early fifties (as it would become increasingly so following in the wake of sixties radicalism), as "liberal, corporate foundation money primarily went to institutional intellectuals or charity operations." There was however a good reason why foundation money flowed to Alinsky and his numerous community-based projects, and this was because his work was seen as an alternative means of organizing for social justice in ways that bypassed the explicitly political class-based approaches to social change. The usefulness of such activism as a counter to socialist organizing is provided in Alinsky's famous book *Reveille for Radicals* (1946) where his counsel for activists seeking to tackle the increasingly right-wing turn of trade unions leaders was

simply to organize outside of them: “Another obvious alternative – for workers to fight within their unions for democratic unionism – is not even mentioned.” Thus, “Despite Alinsky’s rhetorical accent on democracy, this approach left Cesar Chavez ill-equipped to think about the actual dynamics of union democracy.” (*Tramplng Out the Vintage*)

Gabriel Thompson’s historical overview of Alinsky-styled activism, *America’s Social Arsonist: Fred Ross and Grassroots Organizing in the Twentieth Century* (University of California Press, 2016), actually puts concerns over both outside funding and the related middle-class orientation of the CSO as one of the key factors that led to Chavez’s resignation from Ross’s CSO in 1962. “It didn’t matter that, earlier in the day, the CSO had approved a plan to form a ‘Farm Labor Committee’ or that a wealthy private citizen, sympathetic to farmworkers, had agreed to donate fifty thousand dollars for the cause. Chavez wanted freedom. Money would come, if it came, later.” Thompson then concludes that “the need to not be constrained by funders” as demonstrated by this split provides the clearest example of Alinsky’s influence upon Chavez. But this analysis is not really accurate, as Alinsky and Ross’s own activism was always constrained, despite their best efforts, by their funders. In fact in 1962, Ross’s own CSO work was hanging in the balance on the basis of continued funding from the Schwarzhaupt Foundation.

Of course this fundamental problem is not entirely sidestepped by Thompson who later drew attention to the perennial “problem of money. The CSO, like nearly every organizing group save labor unions,” Thompson wrote, “could never find a way to pay for itself.” Moreover, besides the CSO’s “money woes” Thompson highlights “a bigger issue, which is that by the early 1960s the CSO lacked an overarching mission – and it was this vacuum that the middle-class moderates filled.” These problems, linked to outside funding, are precisely the reasons why socialists (like myself) maintain that it is critical that social change should be funded by concerned activists (be they trade unionists or otherwise) not philanthropic elites. Either way although Ross remained in the employ of Alinsky’s broad network for the next few years he attempted to get some cash diverted in Chavez’s direction, but Alinsky “didn’t believe farmworkers could be organized, and he rejected the request”. Despite this opposition Ross would still

attend the founding convention of Chavez's Farm Worker Association (on September 30, 1962), and later in the sixties would become a key aide within Chavez's movement.

Money was clearly always at the centre of debates with the farm workers movement, but contrary to Chavez's ongoing claims about financial independence, during its early years vital support for his Farm Worker Association (FWA) was derived from the Californian Migrant Ministry (CMM), which itself was supported by the Schwarzhaupt Foundation.

The support started slowly. In the early 1960s, the CMM had a budget of about \$100,000 a year. It bought the FWA its first mimeograph machine and Cesar some meals and gas. When Migrant Minister were assigned to be trained by Chavez, they worked as his assistants. Although Chavez pointedly never took money from the CMM for his own salary, the Migrant Ministry would sometimes pay the salary of other FWA organizers. This began in late 1964... At one time in the mid-sixties there were twenty-six of these worker priests, most of them with little religious background at all, working under the UFW's directions. (*Trampling Out the Vintage*)

To reiterate the developing contradictions within the farm workers movement: the early stated ethos of Chavez's organizing ventures was clear:

Having studied the failures of past attempts to organize migrant farm labor, Chavez believed that organizing workers in a traditional union would never work. Instead, in keeping with his CSO training and his Catholic upbringing, and inspired by his contemporaries Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi, Chavez sought to organize farmworkers as a cultural and religious people, situated in their geographic communities, into a social movement. Central to the early philosophy of the movement was the spirit of volunteerism, community service, and collective ownership. According to Dolores Huerta, the main organizing principle emphasized the importance of an all-volunteer, dues-paying membership: "There was a strong belief in not taking money from the outside and in insisting that

farmworkers pay and volunteer for the movement...’ (*The Self-Help Myth*)

Through sheer hard work and persistence during their first two years Chavez, Huerta, and a small group of volunteer organizers travelled door to door, organizing endless house meetings, and in doing so were able to recruit membership-paying field workers. Early Farm Worker Association advocate Don Villarejo, recalled that the movement “would not take a dime of money from outside their own pockets—if there was any money or meaning in the movement it had to be based in workers.” (*The Self-Help Myth*) Yet even at this early stage Chavez recognized the “benefits” that could be accrued to his organizing efforts if they accepted external funding. Thus, in late 1964:

Chavez, the pragmatist, was willing to jettison one of his cardinal rules: don’t take outside money. The application submitted to OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity] asked for more than \$200,000 to create seventy jobs, sixty-three for farmworkers who would work in the credit union, start a cooperative, and run a gas station. Chavez, as director, would receive a salary of \$15,000.<sup>2</sup>

During its initial years the Farm Worker Association attempted to build from the tradition of *mutualistas*, a community self-help model popular in the 1920s and 1930s in Mexico. This desire for self-help meshed well with Chavez’s desire to work outside of traditional methods of union organizing; but soon his Association had to evolve to keep up with other developments in the fields. In this manner the union model of organizing was “quickly thrust” on the Association in 1965...

...when the mostly Filipino-American members of the AFL-CIO- supported Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), led by Larry Itliong, walked out on strike against grape growers in the Delano area. Under pressure from AWOC and their own members, Chavez’s mostly Latino

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<sup>2</sup> Miriam Pawel, *The Crusades of Cesar Chavez: A Biography* (Bloomsbury Press, 2014)

NFWA decided to join AWOC and was unexpectedly thrown into a five-year grape strike. In the course of only a few months, the dogged door-to-door community organizing and mutual aid approach quickly transformed into the largest union movement of its time. (*The Self-Help Myth*)

External union cash soon came flowing in from Walter Reuther, the president of the United Auto Workers (UAW), which then progressed to direct support from the AFL-CIO: that is, after Chavez's Association's merger with AWOC led to the formation of the newly named United Farm Workers of America (which later changed name to become the United Farm Workers, UFW, in 1972). The money that now became available for grassroots organizing was growing by the day and far outstripped union dues. So considering the founding ideals of this still developing farmworkers movement, it is not surprising that some of their "key leaders" were wary of the political implications of external funding, especially that from outside the trade union movement. Illustrating the paradoxical nature of the centrality of financial issues, it is significant that this problem was also raised by groups that were wholly reliant on philanthropic benefactors themselves.

Despite its own funding from the National Council of Churches and the Max L. Rosenberg Foundation, Migrant Ministry argued that publicly and privately funded self-help housing and infrastructure programs risked co-opting the advocacy and organizing potential of the movement. Regardless of the moral and political stance against outside funds, movement leaders changed their minds when they found out that multiple farmworker-serving organizations were receiving large grants from the OEO's War on Poverty. According to lead organizer Gilbert Padilla in an interview with Marshall Ganz, Chavez feared that if 'the NFWA did not get the OEO funds, others would who might not share the NFWA's organizing agenda... and by reversing itself on rejection of outside money, the NFWA tried to preempt claims of others who might use funds in less productive ways.'

In 1965, only a year after claiming that public funds would corrupt a volunteer led farmworker movement, the NFWA applied for an OEO grant of \$500,000. The NFWA was forced to return these funds amid protest among growers and mainstream stakeholders who were upset that the OEO was supporting strikes and unionization. However, by 1966, the movement was seeking support from private funders, resulting in a heated debate on the limits to farmworker self-help and the incorporation of the private, nonprofit movement institutions to which Chavez eventually retreated. (*The Self-Help Myth*)

The Ford Foundation-backed initiatives in California, of which the most visible was their “War on Poverty” Community Action Projects (CAPs), were at the time dominated by affiliates of the American Friends Service Committee. Millions of dollars flooded into these CAPs from the government, while simultaneously the government’s ODO funders “began to reign in CAP staff eager to join the strikes and vetoed poverty funding that had anything to do with organizing farmworkers.” (*The Self-Help Myth*) These efforts to control their activist staff did not always play out as planned, and the ODO-initiated California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) – whose employees included Jerry Cohen, who went on to become the farmworkers primary lawyer – maintained close working relationships with Chavez’s movement despite the best-efforts of their government paymasters. (This intimate link is not unsurprising as Chavez himself was included upon California Rural Legal Assistance’s board of directors when they had been set-up in 1966.)

With the increasing pressures of so many conflicting forces bearing down upon union organizing efforts, “Chavez and a small group of preacher activists from Migrant Ministry redirected decision-making away from workers toward a centralized leadership after the strike went public.” With the flow of money drying up for the more radical CAPs, new streams of funding would soon bolster farm worker activism from groups like the Citizens’ Crusade Against Poverty (CCAP). This CCAP had been initiated in late 1964 by soon-to-be allies of the farm workers which included Walter Reuther, Senator Robert Kennedy, and the former OEO director Richard Boone. The Ford Foundation had provided the grant to launch CCAP and movement leaders including Huerta, Martin Luther King Jr., and



Bayard Rustin were quickly drawn in to reside on the organizations board of directors. With a \$4 million four-year commitment from Ford, money now began to cascade more freely:

A CCAP grant to the UFW in 1967 introduced the farmworker movement to program staff at both the Ford Foundation and the Field Foundation, both major funders from 1967 through the early 1970s. Headed up by Reuther, CCAP granted the UFW \$200,000 to train emerging farmworker leaders in the Central Valley through the UFW's then unincorporated National Farm Worker Service Center (NFWSC). The UFW hired Fred Ross (CSO founder and longtime ally) to develop and implement a training program in which farmworker leaders would learn how to organize and represent farmworkers to local agencies. Ross was also charged with establishing the NFWSC as a viable institution to serve the needs of local farmworkers. After only one year of the UFW/NFWSC/Fred Ross training program, the CCAP informed the UFW that the Ford Foundation was ending funding to CCAP. With additional funds from the Ford Foundation, a new organization called the Center for Community Change (CCC) was founded to absorb OEO- and CCAP-related projects. (*The Self-Help Myth*)

As part of ongoing efforts to channel external funds into the movement, in 1966 Chavez's union set-up the National Farm Worker Service Center which received its "first large grant... through the Ford Foundation for the CCAP organizer-training program." In 1969, the Centre was subsequently able to be directly funded by philanthropic foundations (like Ford) when it was formally incorporated as a nonprofit organization, but this change led to unforeseen problems that "limit[ed] the kind of farmworker self-help that was possible." Hence, "Strict lines were quickly drawn between the social service work and economic justice organizing." Here it should be noted, that the unions increasingly problematic "relationship with private funders, particularly the Field Foundation, paved the way for the retreat from organizing to a nonprofit institutional model—a space that became all too comfortable when crisis intensified within movement leadership and in the fields." (*The Self-Help Myth*)

After the 1969 incorporation as a 501(c)(3) organization, several private foundations, including the Ford Foundation, granted support to the service center for more farmworker service programming (for example, the creation of a community school and a clinic) and general administrative support. All of these programs fell within the acceptable logic of philanthropic self-help. Unlike the early mutual aid and cooperative associations, which were owned and led by farmworkers and poor migrant families, these programs depended on resources from outside stakeholders. They also focused primarily on how farmworkers could help themselves improve their own behaviors and conditions, without challenging individual growers or the structure of the agricultural industry. The revolutionary interpretation of mutual aid to foster self-determination and ownership, and the subsequent union approach, were both replaced by a more traditional charitable model. (*The Self-Help Myth*)

That the *need* to attract funding affected the political priorities of the union is obvious, which is why, over the years, members continually opposed Chavez and his Executive on such matters. In regular, democratic unions the majority, if not all, of the organizations funding is reliant upon membership dues, but prior to 1969, “dues were no more than 16 percent” of union income. (*Trampling Out the Vintage*) In particular, this delinking of the union leadership from its membership base meant that it was foundation money not the workers themselves who would play an important role in building farmworker leadership and institutions. But while Chavez had “initially assumed that private funding could also be used to support strikes, boycott, and union organizing,” it soon became clear that this was not the case. “Through highly charged debates documented in print mail correspondence, foundation program officers convinced Chavez that foundation grants to the movement could not include union organizing or confrontation with the agricultural industry.”<sup>3</sup> As a result of these barriers to action, Chavez channelled such external funds to

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<sup>3</sup> Erica Kohl-Arenas, “The presentation of self in philanthropic life: the political negotiations of the foundation program officer,” *Antipode*, 49(3), June 2017.

less confrontational service work; changes which wrought a large effect on the political priorities of the union.

Foundation grants kept flowing during the 1970s for the National Farm Worker Service Center along with the seven additional nonprofit organizations that were eventually founded by the union leadership; and it is true that managing this money presented different challenges in the form of “bureaucratic inundation” for Chavez and his largely uncritical cadre of union activists. “Consumed with developing his new organizations, Chavez ultimately accepted a foundation-approved translation of farmworker self-help that featured poor field hands in need of philanthropic charity—but not a movement in struggle for self-determination, labor rights, and collective ownership among workers.” Arguably it was exactly these additional unforeseen problems that “eventually distracted movement leadership from union organizing when the movement faced its most severe challenges.”<sup>4</sup>

What makes these problems all the more vexing is that during his lifetime Chavez was never held accountable for his many mistakes. This was in large part because the entire farm workers’ movement rested upon Chavez’s own mythmaking. We should of course be realistic about the weighty political pressures that were brought to bear upon Chavez as his organization gradually became more dependent on external benefactors with ulterior motives. The remedy for such perennial problems, which face all organizations (big or small), would have been the promotion of internal democracy within his union. But we should recognize that from the start Chavez never really had much time for internal democracy.

Ongoing state surveillance from the FBI no doubt increased Chavez’s paranoia in the context of his long internal fight against union members of his union harbouring democratic inclinations; and on this score it is notable that the FBI never unearthed any evidence of Communist infiltration into the union. The lack of such a so-called

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<sup>4</sup> Erica Kohl-Arenas, “The self-help myth: towards a theory of philanthropy as consensus broker,” *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 74(3), September 2015.

Communist threat however did not quiet Chavez's own desire to revive the worst elements of McCarthyism. "For Chavez, red-baiting became a convenient excuse to get rid of people who asked too many questions, grumbled about the drudgery of picket work, objected to the AFL-CIO alliance, broke up marriages, exhibited too much independence, or drew too much attention to themselves."<sup>5</sup> "As Fred Hirsch had pointed out as early as 1968, Chavez viewed almost everyone as expendable." (*The Crusades of Cesar Chavez*) When Fred reluctantly parted company with the union in the wake of raising his democratic concerns, he left his teenage daughter, Liza, living with Chavez and his family. Liza then stuck it out with Chavez (her mentor) until 1978 when she was unceremoniously ejected from the union after attempting to stick up for a fellow activist whom Chavez had arranged to be arrested by the local police: "Chavez denounced Liza as a Communist and ordered her thrown out." (*The Crusades of Cesar Chavez*) This was just the latest in a long string of expulsions and resignations, and Chavez's unaccountability continued to have a toxic effect as far as the future of the union was concerned.

In addition to his daily obsession with communist troublemakers, Chavez's destabilizing paranoia asserted itself in other ways too, like when he accused the flood of undocumented workers from Mexico into the Californian fields as being part of a devious "CIA operation." At this historical juncture of CIA ranting, in 1974, Chavez evidently had faith in Liza Hirsch's obedience to his rule, and he set her the task of coordinating the unions controversial "Illegals Campaign," which sought to report illegal immigrants to the authorities. Here it is interesting that in that same year, Fred Hirsch had published a short book entitled *The Foreign Policy of the AFL-CIO in Latin America: or Under the Covers with the C.I.A.* The release of this ground-breaking text is relevant here because it illustrated how, from 1962 onwards, the right-wing leadership of the AFL-CIO had colluded with the U.S. government and the CIA to create the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD): the goal of this Institute was to promote business unionism in opposition to radical democratic alternatives across the world. Fred's

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Yates, "The dubious legacy of César Chávez," *Left Business Observer*, 2009.

volume focused particularly on “the part AIFLD took in the bloody termination of the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende in Chile.”

In 2011, Fred wrote a thoughtful essay reflecting upon this real-life conspiracy titled “Did Ties to CIA-Labor Penetration Abroad Blowback at Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Union?” As he points out:

One strong factor for the decline of the United Farm Workers Union may have derived from its celebrity among good liberals, the awesome allegiance of genuinely humane church people and its early-on dependence on the financial support and “guidance” of George Meany’s AFL-CIO.<sup>6</sup> Chavez came to be dependent upon outside financing for the work of the Union. Without the generosity of progressive and religious groups, and regular checks from the AFL-CIO, the growth and power of the UFW would have had to depend upon the farm workers themselves in a democratic, self-sustaining, dues paying union.

Although he didn’t realize its significance at the time, Fred recalled how during his time in the fields with the United Farm Workers a delegation of foreign trade unionists from the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor paid them a fleeting visit: “It was the official labor organization that operated at the pleasure of the CIA and in service to Presidents Ngo Dinh Diem and Nguyen Cao Ky.” Although Fred is unclear of the exact date, in either 1974 or 1976, he subsequently met with Chavez to warn him of the vile practices that taken place in Chile, and were still being undertaken elsewhere, by the CIA and AFL-CIO leadership (without the knowledge of the AFLO-CIO’s membership).

Cesar did not say whether or not he cooperated with such AIFLD visits. He was, however, uncharacteristically fidgety and

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Buhle, *Taking Care of Business: Samuel Gompers, George Meany, Lane Kirkland, and the Tragedy of American Labor* (Monthly Review Press, 1999).

stone-faced. He made no commitment to act on the information. We would not expect so intelligent a leader, a man so publicly committed to non-violence, to allow his organization to be tied to the corporate friendly schemes of the Nixon administration through AIFLD. More than three thousand men and women many selected from an AIFLD list of “subversives.” Many or most of those who were killed following the overthrow of democracy in Chile by Pinochet were progressive trade unionists like many of us. They were made martyrs for their names being put on a list.

Chavez took no heed of Fred’s warnings, and worse still, in 1977, Chavez visited the Philippines to endorse the right-wing dictator Ferdinand Marcos and his associated CIA-backed Trade Union Congress of the Philippines. This disastrous trip was undertaken not without substantial opposition from other leaders and members of his union, all of whose warning were vehemently denied by Chavez. The serious nature of the problems raised by Chavez’s dalliance with a bloody dictator are also briefly touched upon in *Trampling Out the Vintage*, where particular attention is focused on some of the many reasons why the AFL-CIO benefited from diverting so much funding and energy towards Chavez’s ever-popular union of dreams.

Chavez provided [George] Meany with progressive cover for his steadfast opposition to most rank-and-file organizing and his long-term betrayal of American liberals. Chavez came relatively cheap when compared with all that had to be ignored or forgotten: Meany’s failure to support an organizing drive in the South following the civil rights movement; his opposition to affirmative action in his federated unions; his support for the war in Vietnam; and his tacit support of Nixon against McGovern. Chavez’s need was more direct. Having lost about 80 percent of his membership to the Teamsters, he needed political and financial support to rebuild, and he had to win that help from a man who disagreed with the way Chavez did business. They negotiated intermittently. Chavez’s need was more profound, so Meany could extract favors: La Paz would be on the itinerary of various Latin American labor leaders who were being wooed by the AFL-CIO’s CIA-aided operation, the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD); Chavez would refrain from criticizing Meany to West Coast

reporters; the UFW would contribute to the AFL-CIO fund for Israel and issue a statement of support for Israel in the aftermath of the 1973 war. (*Trampling Out the Vintage*, pp.460-1)

Such untoward manoeuvrings on the part of conservative misleaders of the American trade union movement were also played out in the longstanding relationship between the United Farm Workers and the United Automobile Workers (UAW) (which “still had pretences as the standard bearer of ‘social unionism,’ as opposed to Meany’s ‘business unionism’”) – first under the influence of Walter Reuther and then by his successor Leonard Woodcock. Yet at the end of the day:

The UAW’s reasons for supporting the UFW were not too different from those of its old rival, Meany. In a series of Detroit wildcat strikes in 1973, UAW officials had led the opposition to the strikers, hoping to secure their own position as junior partners of the Big Three auto manufacturers. In the last wildcat strike at Chrysler, endorsed by leaders of the UAW local at the struck plant, more than 1,000 UAW officials, many wielding baseball bats, attacked the picket line and broke up the strike. That finished off the rebellion within the UAW, and brought a symbolic end to the short era of U.S. rank-and-file militancy. At a UAW conventions nine months later, however, in an attempt to assure others (and themselves) that they were still progressive unionists, many of these same bat-swinging officials endorsed Woodcock’s decision to fund the UFW and gave their guest speaker, Chavez, a series of standing ovations. (*Trampling Out the Vintage*, pp.461-2)

The democratic trade union myth that is Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers persists to this day, and that is all well and good if it can persuade more people to fight for a better world with the aid of the trade union movement. But what is clear is that the membership of Chavez’s union lies in tatters in no small part because of his failure to allow democracy to flourish,<sup>7</sup> and by his inability to resist being used

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<sup>7</sup> “By the early 2000s, UFW membership had shrunk to under 5,000, yet movement organizations were collectively receiving more than \$1

as a tool by elite forces external to his union, whether they be the right-wing bureaucracy of the AFL-CIO or that of the liberal philanthropic community.

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million a year for service and educational programs, from funders including the California Endowment, the Packard Foundation, the Kellogg Foundation, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Unfortunately, from the late 1970s to the present day, scandals of fraud, nepotism, and mismanagement have plagued the movement institutions.” (*The Self-Help Myth*)



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**FIVE**

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## **Black Power Philanthropy**

Revolutionary ideas matter, and internal political clarity is a prerequisite for any working-class organizations that seek to overturn capitalism and ensure its replacement with a socialist alternative. Recognizing the centrality of the working-class and its democratic organizations in forcing this transition is one the ABC's of Marxism, and so is the ability of revolutionaries to keep their leaders democratically accountable to their membership. But political confusion amongst socialist leaders has oftentimes meant that even these basics have been jettisoned. Such failures presented a particularly serious problem for the American Trotskyist Left during the 1960s, some of whose tragic consequences can be viewed through the mistaken actions of various Marxist groups during the now infamous New York teachers strike of 1968.

However, before discussing the historical relevance of this strike it is important to first provide some context; that is, to outline some of the concrete material factors that led to the disorientation of the revolutionary left during this turbulent period. First off, during the Second World War, petty bourgeois influences wreaked havoc within the internal politics of the socialist opponents of Stalinism. This led to the parting of ways from the Trotskyist tradition of some of the leaders of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), including James Burnham who tragically soon went on to work with the CIA, and Max Shachtman,

who took nearly half the SWP's membership into a new organization. A group which by the late 1950s had dissolved itself into the Socialist Party of America where Shachtman continued to move every rightwards in closer collaboration with the Democratic Party.

Demonstrating the tangible political pressures that were brought to bear upon socialist leaders during the Second World War, Felix Morrow -- who had remained with the SWP after their break with Shachtman -- was prescient in criticizing the leadership of his party (the SWP) for their inability to recognize that the ability of the capitalist class to maintain a formal commitment to democracy in the post-war period. Morrow (and his supporters) historically accurate political perspectives were unfortunately defeated within an internal debate that took place within their Party. This defeat also contributed towards Morrow's drift away from Trotskyist politics and tragic decision to commit the next few decades to promoting his belief in UFOs and all matters occult. Notwithstanding this tragic turn away from Marxism, it was notable that Morrow's analysis of capitalist restoration was shared by a group of British Trotskyists gathered around Ted Grant -- who in contrast to the Trotskyists based in America, weathered the coming decades well, and maintained a firm commitment to Marxist ideas, which precipitated their eventual break with the Fourth International in 1965.<sup>1</sup>

The background to this 1965 political split is central to understanding the completely wrong approach that American Trotskyists within the SWP had adopted with reference to the New York teachers strike. This is because in 1965 Grant had accused the leadership of the Fourth International of abandoning the idea that the working-class represented the true revolutionary force in society. Grant's comrades had correctly criticized the international Trotskyist leaders, then led by Ernst Mandel, who had adapted themselves to the difficult political period by mistakenly arguing that Marxists should prioritize organizing within a layer of radicalized students, instead of within the workers' movement itself. Grant also made it clear that the Mandelites and the SWP's uncritical embrace of the revolution in

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<sup>1</sup> The Fourth International is a revolutionary socialist international organization that was formed in 1938 and inspired by the anti-Stalinist traditions of Leon Trotsky.

Cuba, and support of guerrilla warfare more generally, would lead the Fourth International to fail in its historic task of helping lead a world revolution of the working-class.<sup>2</sup> It was as a direct result of these fundamental divergences from a genuine socialist program that, in 1968, led the SWP to join with black nationalists along with elements of the ruling-class in a destructive and unprincipled political block against fifty-thousand striking teachers.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, especially when

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<sup>2</sup> Tragically these mistakes went uncorrected and at the February 1968 IEC meeting of the Fourth International only one delegate opposed a resolution that committed the International to supporting guerrilla warfare, that person being SWP member P'eng Shu-tse. In an attempt to correct the dangerous position of the Fourth International, P'eng Shu-tse subsequently wrote a document which was circulated as an *International Bulletin* ("Return to the road of Trotskyism," March 1969); and in 1982 he once again took up these issues within the Fourth International's bulletin with his document, "Criticisms on the U.S. SWP's opinion on Cuba." It was in response to the failures of the Fourth International to adopt a Marxist approach to the emerging revolutionary movements that Ted Grant and Peter Taaffe formed a new International in 1974, that is, the Committee for a Workers International, whose legacy is now maintained by International Socialist Alternative. For more concrete exposition on the dangerous shortcomings of the Fourth International, see Taaffe's *A Socialist World is Possible: The History of the CWI* (Socialist Books, 2004), pp.56-61.

<sup>3</sup> The teachers' strike wasn't the first time that the SWP had made major mistakes in intervening in the developing mass movements for socialist change, a case in point being their activities in building opposition to the Vietnam War. This point was well made in the 1970 issue of the newspaper of the newly formed International Socialists which observed: "For all its claims to be the 'left-wing' of the anti-war movement, the YSA [Youth Socialist Alliance]/SWP's conception of the anti-war movement as a 'united front' of all political persuasions committed only to immediate withdrawal can only lead to absorption of the movement into the Democratic Party." (p.3) "Sometimes [the SWP's] fetishism of the single-issue approach becomes grotesque. A

understood alongside the Communist Party's longstanding accommodations to the Democratic Party, and the ultra-left posturing of assorted Maoists, it is perhaps it is understandable why broad swathes of the American working-class felt alienated from Marxist politics during the 1960s.

### **Socialist scabs during the New York teachers strike**

Without going into all the details of this historic strike, which have been well-covered elsewhere, it should be noted that the dispute initially grew as a result of the ongoing efforts by black activists to improve the quality of education for children living in de-facto segregated areas of New York. This was a commendable grassroots campaign, but unfortunately the ruling-class were quick to seize upon the black communities' genuine demands for "community control" of education as a means of dividing the working-class, which they did by playing off the democratic aspirations of the local community against a strong and well-organized trade union. Writing in 1972, Grant's co-thinker in England, Peter Taaffe observed:

In their intervention in a number of New York teachers' struggles the SWP have discarded bag and baggage the teachings of Marxism. One glaring example was 'the dispute over 'community control' of education in the Ocean Brownsville area of New York in 1968.

The SWP found themselves during this dispute in concert with every stripe of black nationalist, Rap Brown, Floyd McKissick and [Mayor] Lindsay together with the capitalist

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few years back, the YSA alone opposed attacking racism as another demand for the anti-war movement because it would 'divide; the movement, that is, because it would keep racists from marching against the war." (p.4) Joel Jordon, "Strategy and politics in the anti-war movement," *International Socialist*, No.16, February 1970. Ironically, around this time the US-based International Socialists were collaborating closely with the British based Trotskyists led by Tony Cliff who had made similar mistakes to the US SWP in their uncritical orientation towards students and Third World liberation movements.

news media in fighting the teacher's union.

The appointment of a black administrator, as a step towards 'community control', on a salary of 30,000 dollars a year, with money provided by the Ford Foundation, led to the white teachers being sacked. These were the Union representatives in the locality. When the rest of the teachers walked out, they were transferred and the teachers' union called a strike. Black teachers were brought in as replacements and this act of strikebreaking was supported by the SWP in its coverage of the strike!<sup>4</sup>

As Taaffe continued:

The SWP's whole position flew in the face of everything that Trotsky ever said on the issue of elementary class solidarity during a strike struggle. Trotsky remarked once that even if a strike against the employment of black labour were to take place, while opposing it and fighting for black and white unity and a return to work, a revolutionary would still have to go on strike with the workers. To cross the class lines would mean the loss of any opportunity to influence those workers again. This cardinal principle of Marxism was broken by the SWP during this dispute.

The net result was to inflame racial passions both on the side of the black population and from the teachers themselves. Because the teachers came predominantly from Jewish backgrounds, the 'nationalist' sects whipped up a wave of anti-semitism amongst the black population. The teachers' union bureaucracy, on the other hand, had done nothing to involve the teachers with the black workers in a struggle to combat

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Taaffe, "Which way forward for American blacks," *Militant International Review*, No.5, January 1972. "The mistakes of those tendencies who uncritically supported the Black Power movement were rooted in a misinterpretation both of American working class history and particularly Trotsky's writings on the question of black nationalism. They have attempted to show that black people have, in the main, had an underlying 'nationalist' and separatist orientation."

the worsening educational position or the monstrous social conditions in the ghettos. An attitude of haughtiness and contempt towards the black population, and the terrible squalor surrounding them, undoubtedly exists amongst a section of white teachers. But these attitudes were only hardened by the racial overtones displayed towards them and their union, by the black nationalists. Instead of a struggle against Lindsay, the Mayor of New York, Rockefeller, the Governor of the State and their supporters, and the whole rotten capitalist system, vicious infighting between the working class opened up. The "racism" of the black nationalists has in turn been one of the contributory factors in the organisation of the racist 'Defence' organisations amongst the Jewish population e.g. [Rabbi] Kahane's reactionary 'Jewish Defence League'.

Bringing the story up-to-date, the Ford Foundation's involvement in this controversial affair has now been laid bare in Karen Ferguson's insightful book *Top Down: The Ford Foundation, Black Power, and the Reinvention of Racial Liberalism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). Ferguson demonstrated how liberal elites based at the Ford foundation in the mid-1960s, after having already spent years engaged in efforts to undermine the more radical parts of the civil rights movement, now changed tack to support those aspects of the black power movement that were dedicated to promoting separatism and self-determination (of which the calls for black community control were intimately linked). This, it turns out, was considered by liberal elites to be a far less conflictual approach to managing socialist change than continuing the necessary push for school integration.

Needless to say, the Ford Foundation "would never have responded to the urban crisis in this way, if not for the fact that black people were so vocally and actively fighting against their marginalization in an ongoing freedom struggle". Yet respond the establishment did, and in pushing forward with their calls for "community control" the Foundation's goals were twofold: first, to drive a wedge between impoverished local communities and a well-organized trade union;<sup>5</sup> and second, to weaponize racial separatism all

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<sup>5</sup> Ferguson, *Top Down*, pp.3-4. Ferguson states that some of the Ford

the better to contain the threat of a united working-class – a divisive intervention whose legacy has “helped to contribute to cementing the identity politics and racial essentialism of post– civil rights America.” Furthermore, as Justin Podair made clear in his book, *The Strike that Changed New York* (Yale University Press, 2012), this cynical approach to social change had the full support of New York’s corporate leaders who “viewed community control as a hedge on their economic investments, a down payment on social stability.” He adds: “It also had the advantage of costing them little.”<sup>6</sup>

When the strike of tens of thousands of schoolteachers took place, things were made worse still when Al Shanker, the social democratic leader of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), escalated the dispute in an unnecessarily antagonistic fashion. One might say that Shanker’s divisive role during this strike flowed quite naturally from his intimidate and longstanding relationship with Max Shachtman, the former radical who (in 1961) had supported the CIA-

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Foundation’s goals in the teachers’ dispute included “the dismantling of an entrenched public bureaucracy and unionized workforce, and the promotion of local control, self-help, and private-sector involvement in the public schools...” Ferguson, *Top Down*, p.13.

<sup>6</sup> Ferguson, *Top Down*, p.161; Podair, *The Strike that Changed New York*, p.37. “The business community’s two major vehicles of support for local control of education in black neighborhoods were the New York Urban Coalition and the Ford Foundation. The Urban Coalition, whose slogan exhorted businessmen to “give a damn,” attempted to link minorities and the city’s corporate world. It provided pro-community control grassroots organizations with funding and advice through its Education Task Force. The Task Force, which received financial support from the Carnegie Corporation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the Taconic and Ford Foundations, drew its corporate membership from the ranks of the city’s top business executives. They met regularly with the Task Force’s minority members, which included representatives from EQUAL, the Harlem Parents Committee, and HARYOU-ACT. No representative of the city’s fifty-seven thousand public school teachers, however, appeared on its roster.” (p.38)

sponsored invasion of Cuba and then went on to back the Vietnam War.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it is no small matter that Shachtman's wife, Yetta, was employed as one of Shanker's key advisors throughout the New York teachers strike.<sup>8</sup>

### **Heightened racial tensions: on anti-Semitism and the FBI**

In the wake of the June 1967 Middle East war, tensions within New York's Jewish community were already running at fever pitch, and there couldn't have been a worse time for black nationalists to be lined up in opposition to the city's teachers – the majority of whom were Jewish. This source of conflict was however ruthlessly exploited by Shanker whose “willingness to polarize the conflict arose in part from his need to consolidate control over the union and suppress internal dissent.”<sup>9</sup> So when at the height of the dispute an unsigned anti-Semitic letter was placed in the mailboxes of a handful of UFT teachers, Shanker, rather than attempting to find out who was responsible for writing the letter, immediately sought to portray the local community activists as bigots and he even had half a million copies of the letter distributed across the city as a union leaflet. This was a recipe for disaster, and more conservative elements of the Jewish community quickly seized upon this controversy to launch their own nationalist organizations. One of the first fruits of this were born in May 1968 when Rabbi Meir Kahane – then based in Queens – launched the

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<sup>7</sup> Max Shachtman and Hal Draper, *Two Views on the Cuban Invasion: A discussion pamphlet* (Oakland, 1961). During the 60s, Shachtman played a critical role lending theoretical weight to undemocratic trade union bureaucrats within the leadership of the AFL-CIO, which included both Shanker and George Meany (who served as the AFL-CIO president between 1955 and 1979).

<sup>8</sup> For a related biography, see Peter Drucker, *Max Shachtman and His Left: A Socialist's Odyssey Through the 'American Century'* (Humanities Press, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Marjorie Murphy, “Militancy in many forms: teachers strikes and urban insurrection, 1967-74,” in Aaron Brenner (ed.), *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below During the Long 1970s* (Verso, 2008).



Jewish Defence League.

Rabbi Kahane and his newly founded nationalist street-fighting unit now went on to engage in all manner of extremist actions. But it is particularly notable that just a few years prior to forming his Defence League that Rabbi Kahane had worked as an FBI informant against “against leftist groups, while also attempting to generate support for the Vietnam War among Orthodox Jews at the behest of the Central Intelligence Agency.”<sup>10</sup> Mirroring the same trajectory as the most reactionary elements of the black power movement, Kahane’s extremism soon led to his publicly calling for the “creation of a ‘world-wide, Jewish anti-terror group’ that would ‘spread fear and shatter the souls’ of Israel’s Arabs, forcing them to flee for their lives.”<sup>11</sup> Bearing all this in mind, it is significant that a memo from the FBI’s COINTELPRO that was dated September 10, 1969, actually discussed how the FBI planned to send a series of anonymous letters to Rabbi Kahane accusing the Black Panthers of planning to bomb a Jewish store in an attempt to get his League “to act” against the Panthers.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Jacob Dorman, “Dreams defended and deferred: the Brooklyn schools crisis of 1968 and black power’s influence on Rabbi Meir Kahane,” *American Jewish History*, 2016, 100(3), p.417. James Baldwin “borrowed the title from his influential 1967 *New York Times* essay “Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They Are Anti-White” from a study by the Anti Defamation League, and indeed a number of studies by the ADL and the American Jewish Congress consistently showed that blacks as a whole were less anti-Semitic than non-Jewish whites.” (p.422) Moving with the times, the ADL, which was now moving in a conservative direction, was soon to come under the right-wing leadership of Abraham Foxman who had joined their international affairs division in 1965 having previously served as a minor leader in Shachtman’s political orbit (through the Socialist Party/Social Democratic Federation).

<sup>11</sup> Dorman, “Dreams defended and deferred,” pp.434-5.

<sup>12</sup> Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI’s Secret Wars against Domestic Dissent* (South End Press, 1990), p.135. Read the full memo on

As we now know, fuelling religious divisions was one “of the FBI’s favorite tactics” in their relentless war against socialists and the civil rights activists, and the FBI regularly employed such deceptive letters “to accuse the Panthers and other black nationalists of anti-Semitism, a tactic designed to destroy the movement’s image ‘among liberal and naive elements.’”<sup>13</sup> Little wonder that historians now believe that the FBI may have provided the anti-Semitic source material that was reproduced in Shanker’s notorious UFT leaflet.<sup>14</sup> Likewise it is entirely appropriate that many of Shachtman’s right-wing consorts within the trade union movement, including both Shanker and AFL-CIO head George Meany, would go on to work closely with state intelligence agencies in fomenting all kinds of reactionary agendas within the international trade union movement. This would involve such union misleaders in pushing a variety of duplicitous anti-democratic schemes that, as it turns out, were all too often supported the increasingly conservative politics of the State of Israel.

During the sixties, revolutionary socialists, especially black ones, were of course deemed a top priority for repression by the American government. Thus, a central part of the FBI’s COINTELPRO was to run a “black propaganda” operation that intended to catalyse murderous hostility between the activists of the Black Panther Party and Ron Karenga’s United Slave (US) Organization. Karenga’s reactionary cultural nationalist organization differed starkly from the socialist Black Panthers, and hence even received funding from the government funding. This support contrasted sharply with the violent repression that was meted out upon the Panthers.<sup>15</sup> The FBI’s pernicious work to sow seeds of hatred

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pp.136-7.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth O’Reilly, *“Racial Matters:” The FBI’s Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972* (The Free Press, 1989), pp.275-6.

<sup>14</sup> Earl Lewis, “The need to remember: three phases in Black and Jewish educational relations,” in Jack Saltzman and Cornel West (eds.), *Struggles in the Promised Land: Toward a History of Black-Jewish Relations in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1997), p.255.

<sup>15</sup> Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI’s Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American*

however delivered its first prize on January 17, 1969, when Karenga's cronies assassinated two leading Panther organizers (John Huggins and Bunchy Carter) ostensibly over a dispute about the future of a Black Studies program at the *University of California, Los Angeles*. Celebrating this early success, the FBI responding by increasing their dedication to “foment[ing] tensions between the two organizations through covert counterintelligence actions”.<sup>16</sup>

### **The institutionalization and segregation of black power**

Around this time universities were forced to make concessions to the militant organizing efforts of students who were demanding new curriculums that acknowledged that black lives matter. Reacting quickly to such changes, under Bundy's canny leadership, in late 1968 the Ford Foundation had already provided the majority of the funding to enable the launch of Yale University's first Black studies program. This early success was repeated elsewhere across America by elites who “hesitantly envisioned the institutionalization of Black studies as a mechanism for managing the racial and class fault lines ripping the United States apart.”<sup>17</sup> On this subtle co-option of black study programs Robert Allen wrote:

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*Indian Movement* (South End Press, 1988), p.42. The Black Panthers although socialists were largely inspired by Maoist forms of Marxism that downplayed the centrality of the organized working-class in overthrowing capitalism. On the other hand, another revolutionary black group that was active around this time, the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, did not make the same mistakes as the Panthers, but nevertheless failed to organize a united working-class struggle because of their separatist ambitions. Dan Georgakas, *Detriot: I Do Mind Dying* (St. Martin's Press, 1975).

<sup>16</sup> Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (University of California Press, 2014), p.222.

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Ferguson, *Philosophy of African American Studies: Nothing Left of Blackness* (Palgrave, 2015), p.31.

Just as Slavic Studies rose to prominence following World War II when the United States was seeking ways of opposing the communist thrust in Eastern Europe, it soon became apparent that Asian Studies, African Studies and Black Studies were to become new focal points of government and private foundation interest. By selecting certain programs for funding while denying support to others, government agencies and foundations could manipulate the political orientation of these programs and the direction of academic research. With hundreds of such programs competing for limited funds, effective control of the future of Black Studies was thereby shifted away from black scholars and students, and instead...to the funding agencies -college administrations, government and foundations. Departments which were thought by the establishment to be dangerously independent or radical could thus be crippled or destroyed without the necessity of resorting to violent repression. At the same time, departments which were more moderate or conservative might find themselves being used as tools for researching better ways of manipulating and controlling black communities.<sup>18</sup>

These astute observations were published in the early 70s, and have since been reinforced by other critical research like that undertaken by Karen Ferguson. She pointed out how the...

[Ford] Foundation promoted a balkanizing ethic for the black urban poor that emphasized the need for the continuing isolation of minority communities so that they could experience a cultural revitalization that would lead to what Bundy called 'social development' and eventual assimilation into the mainstream American political economy. At the

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Allen, "Politics of the attack on Black Studies," *The Black Scholar*, 6 (1), September 1974, pp.4-5. For a related discussion with regard the educational priorities of liberal foundations, see Edward Berman, "The foundations' role in American foreign policy: the case of Africa, post 1945," in Robert Arnove (ed.), *Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism: The Foundations at Homes and Abroad* (Indiana University Press, 1982).

same time, the Foundation fostered the creation of a new black leadership class that could be integrated into its elite model of American pluralism.

The Foundation's advocacy of ongoing racial separatism for all but a small black elite emerged out of experiences in the early 1950s when it faced political attack for advocating school desegregation even before the *Brown* Supreme Court decision. Cowed by the right-wing firestorm that resulted, the Foundation quickly abandoned racial integration as a policy choice. Actions like this one and others that followed demonstrated the Foundation's aversion to controversy and ultimately damaging unwillingness to face down its conservative opponents. However, the Foundation's reluctance to stand up for desegregation also calls into question its leadership's commitment to this principle in the first place and, more broadly, the commonplace portrayal of assimilation through integration as a shibboleth of postwar racial liberalism.<sup>19</sup>

In her *Top Down* study, Ferguson provided a detailed examination of three demonstration projects supporting "minority rights" which were "actually initiated, and not simply funded, by the Ford Foundation." The first, already covered in this essay, involved first looking at the controversy surrounding the Foundation-led school decentralization plans in New York; the second example detailed the evolution of Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration and Development and Service Corporations ("the Foundation's first and greatest commitment in its national CDC initiative"); and the third and final case study scrutinized the Ford Foundations' engagement with the Black Arts movement via the theatre scene. Here for example, she describes how between 1967 and 1972 Ford funded the work of the Harlem-based New Lafayette Theatre which "was explicitly nationalist and separatist in its orientation."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ferguson, *Top Down*, pp.7-8.

<sup>20</sup> Ferguson, *Top Down*, p.16, p.190.

## Black power in Newark: Amiri Baraka and another teaching strike

Perhaps the most prominent black nationalist linked to the elite-backed black arts scene was LeRoi Jones. In 1965 Jones had established his Harlem Black Arts Repertory Theater/School (BARTS) with the support of Harlem Youth Opportunity Unlimited (HARYOU-ACT) -- a department of the US government's Office of Economic Opportunity (which in previous years been overseen by Dr Kenneth Clark). When funding was removed from BARTS, primarily because the government had become wary of funding such controversial nationalist projects, Jones picked up sticks and returned to his hometown of Newark, New Jersey.<sup>21</sup> Here he continued his various art projects, and in late 1966 Jones' -- who had now changed his name to Amiri Baraka -- came under the ideological influence of fellow black nationalist, Maulana Karenga. Baraka now developed a relationship that "ultimately grew into a very close political friendship, particularly between 1968 and 1970" such that Baraka became "fanatical, almost religious, in his faith in Karenga's leadership and doctrine."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> LeRoi Jones' famous *Dutchman* (1964) play was originally "staged for a resolutely left-liberal, activist, but decidedly integrationist audience. In contrast, when produced on Harlem street corners the next year as part of the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School's cultural outreach program, this Obie Award-winning play was deemed racist and just cause for the revocation of funds. The most corrosively ironic aspect of this revocation was that it was called by foundation administrators who had given Baraka the money precisely because of the acclaim the play had received at the Cherry Lane Theatre. Having gone home, Baraka's play became too black for comfort." Mike Sell, "The drama of the Black Arts Movement," David Krasner (ed.), *A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p.265.

<sup>22</sup> Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power* (University of North Carolina Press, 1999), p.85, p.120. Around this time "Baraka became a leading critic of the Black Panther Party alliance with Abby Hoffman's Yippies, insisting that it was better for the black liberation movement to establish

It was during this period that Karenga's influence over the emergent Black Power movement reached its apotheosis through the central role he played in organizing a series of National Black Power Conferences. The first of these Conferences took place on July 20, 1967, just days after an insurrection had convulsed the streets of Newark. This meeting had been planned with the aid of Harlem Representative Adam Clayton Powell Jr, who had also taken over the running of HARYOU from Dr Clark a few years earlier in mid-1964. And the five men who served on the organizing committee of the initial Black Power Conference were Karenga, Powell's congressional aide, Chuck Stone, Isaiah Robinson (who shortly after the teachers strike joined the New York City Board of Education where he chaired their Decentralization Committee), Harlem CORE member Omar Ahmed, and the Conference chair, Dr. Nathan Wright Jr, who had just published his own book *Black Power and Urban Unrest* which had "virtually equated black power with black capitalism".<sup>23</sup> This founding Conference received the grateful backing of fifty American corporations - a fact that was revealed only after the event had passed - but:

By the time of the Philadelphia Black Power Conference the following year, there was no longer even the slightest effort to conceal that this meeting was partly a front for channeling black militancy into the arms of corporate capitalists.<sup>24</sup>

In keeping with Baraka's attempts to cojoin black power with capitalist power, Baraka soon threw his organizational muscle behind the political campaign of Ken Gibson, who in 1970 was elected as the city's first-ever African-American Mayor. Considering the precedents that had been set in New York, it didn't take long for the newly elected Mayor to clash with the teaching unions, where following the line taken

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alliances with the NAACP than to join with white radicals. In other words, he argued for the primacy of a black united front-in [Marcus] Garvey's terms, 'race first.'" (p.118)

<sup>23</sup> Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, p.161,

<sup>24</sup> Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, p.163.

by the Mayor of New York, Gibson was happy to use “community control” of local schools as his weapon of choice against organized workers. This time Baraka and various other black groups who were now in his orbit were (willingly) used “as a battering ram against the Newark Teachers Union,” this despite the fact that 38% of the Newark teachers were black (compared to 10% in New York).<sup>25</sup> The Newark teachers’ strike then took place over three weeks in 1970 and for a record-breaking eleven weeks in 1971, and as in the earlier New York strike, the destructive and often violence clashes between advocates of black power and trade unionists only served to drive a further racial wedge through the heart of Newark. This artificial divide and ensuing violence that marked this dispute were further heightened when Baraka’s longstanding enemy, the white conservative populist Anthony Imperiale sided with the teachers.<sup>26</sup>

### **Revolutionary mistakes on the question of black nationalism**

Tragically, the legacy of the racial conflicts in New York and Newark (and many other cities beside) live on today, and:

Even those vestiges of racism that were supposed to have been wiped out by the civil rights struggle of the 1960s—namely segregation—have reappeared in America’s public school systems. Ironically though, the five most segregated cities in the U.S. today are in the North: Detroit, Milwaukee,

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<sup>25</sup> Steve Golin, *The Newark Teachers Strikes: Hope on the Line* (Rutgers University Press, 2002), p.126, p.125.

<sup>26</sup> This violence flowed on from the violent tensions that had developed between Baraka and Imperiale during the late 1960s which contributed toward the development of “a new urban nationalism that organized ethnic-based groups into vigilantes that furthered the popular acceptance of racism.” Kevin Mumford, *Newark: A History of Race, Rights, and Riots in America* (New York University Press, 2008), p.170



New York City, Newark and Chicago.<sup>27</sup>

These shocking comments were penned in 2003 by a leading member of the International Socialist Organization (ISO), a once influential Trotskyist grouping which traces as one of its forerunners, Hal Draper's New York based Independent Socialist Clubs of America (which had formed in 1967). But more shocking still is the fact that the leadership of this organization had failed to learn from the mistakes of the New York teachers strike, and in an ISO article celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville teachers strikes, a member of the union at the time of the strike recalls how he came to the "gut-wrenching and difficult choice" to cross the picket lines.<sup>28</sup> This divisive decision, which is still defended – even with the benefit of hindsight – was however in keeping with the opportunist positions adopted by the SWP and by Draper's Independent Socialist Clubs, both of whose incorrect demands for community control failed because they were not "formulated within a broad perspective that

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<sup>27</sup> Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "Civil rights and civil wrongs: Racism in America today," *International Socialist Review*, Issue 32, November-December 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Marc Pessin, "The picket line that it was right to cross," *Socialist Worker* (ISO), November 21, 2018. In another commemorative review of the 1968 strike, the ISO again failed to criticize those unions organizers (like Richard Parrish) who advocated that union members cross picket lines during the dispute, see Ronnie Almonte, "Richard Parrish, the Black Caucus, and the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville strikes," *International Socialist Review*, Issue 111, Winter 2018-19. Related to criticisms to the legacy of the Ford Foundation and of liberal philanthropy more generally, in 2008 Shaun Joseph writing for the ISO undertook a useful review of INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence's edited book *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (South End Press, 2007) wherein Joseph correctly criticized some of the contributors for their rejection of class politics in favour of identity politics. This review also references a useful article published by Ji Giles Ungpakorn as "NGOs: enemies or allies?" (*International Socialism*, 104, 2004).

puts emphasis on working class as well as community issues.”<sup>29</sup>

In the case of the Independent Socialist Clubs they would have done well to taken to re-read the first issue of their own newspaper – published in January 1967 – which had explained how:

In the absence of enough Negro teachers to staff the schools, the community groups seeking black power are placed in a quandry. To change the schools, it appears to them that they must first fight against the white teachers who appear as the establishment's representatives. But if the teachers are the enemy and education cannot proceed without them, then all hope must be lost. In demanding the right to hire and fire teachers, the community groups further alienate the teachers by threatening their just rights to job security. Unfortunately, placed in a quandry. To change the schools, it appears of social change from the white power structure. Their approach has been to restrict their demands to changes at the top, at the level of the school board or the local school administration, rather than to develop a program which might win teachers over into an alliance with them against the educational power structure.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Milton Fisk, *Socialism From Below in the United States: The Origins of the International Socialist Organization* (Hera Press, 1977), see Chapter 5.

<sup>30</sup> Jules Sorel, “Education for revolt: radical teachers in American schools,” *Independent Socialist*, Issue 1, January-February 1967, p.16. Sometime around 1969 David Friedman edited a pamphlet for Independent Socialist Clubs (ICS) of America which was titled *Crisis in the Schools: Teachers and the Community*. Tragically only three groups on the far-left supported the teachers strike, these being the Spartacist League, the Workers League, and the New York SDS Labor Committee, the latter of which was being led by the former Trotskyist/ rapidly evolving fascist cult-leader Lyndon LaRouche. The latter leaders conspiratorial approach to interpreting the philanthropic endeavours of the American ruling-class meant he acted in a ultra-sectarian fashion that led to his forming divisive alliances not only with the State but also with leading figures on the far-right. For a detailed examination of LaRouche’s involvement in the teachers strike, see

Acting as scabs during the New York strike was never going to help unite the working-class against the conservative powers that be, whether that of the local city political leadership or that of a right-wing bureaucracy within the trade union movement. Instead, each and every teacher in New York with any socialist inclinations at all should have joined the strike so that they could appeal to other striking teachers to hold the leadership of their union to account to working-class demands. Such a battle would have been difficult, but it was necessary, and the failure of many socialists to adopt this principled course of action only played into the hands of conservative trade union bureaucrats like Shanker. This was exactly the type of fighting socialist strategy that was proposed by Ted Grant and Peter Taaffe's British-based Trotskyist organization in 1964 when they wrote:

The only way out is the creation of a mass Labour Party based on the trade unions and the Negro movement, that will counterpose socialist policies to the reactionary ones of both Democrats and Republicans.

This is a gigantic task. it means fighting to overcome a centuries-old legacy of anti-socialist propaganda.

It means a fight to kick out the despicable bureaucrats in the AFL-CIO, who have provided an armour plating to the soft underbelly of American capitalism.<sup>31</sup>

At that time, Grant and Taaffe's own organization did not have a base on America's shores; while those revolutionary groups that could have fulfilled such a uniting vision were clearly ideologically ill-equipped to undertake such a task. Thus, the SWP, which was the most sizable and influential Trotskyist grouping in America during the 1960s,

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*Hylozoic Hedgehog, How It All Began: The Origins and History of the National Caucus of Labor Committees in New York and Philadelphia (1966-1971)* (Last updated June 2016), Chapter 3.

<sup>31</sup> "Neither Goldwater nor Johnson for US labor," *Militant for Youth and Labour*, No. 1, October 1964,

instead of fighting to bring the working-class together in struggle regardless of the colour of their skin, opportunistically tail-ended the black power movement and opposed one of the most important strikes of the period. The following year, the SWP's opportunist embrace of black separatism then led to their equally ridiculous decision to take a vote at their September 1969 National Convention where they supported the creation of a new independent Black political party.<sup>32</sup> The passing of this motion once again only placed another barrier in the way of uniting the entire American working-class.

That all being said, at the end of the day the SWP made no progress in building such a separatist political party. This is despite the fact that they cited a *Newsweek* poll from mid-1966 that had determined that "7 per cent of the black people said they were in favor of operating as a 'separate force' in politics, rather than through the Democrats or Republicans."<sup>33</sup> This failure meant that efforts to build a Black political alternative to the Democrats and the Republicans now fell into the hands of other activists, like for instance, Amiri Baraka and his Congress of African People (CAP).<sup>34</sup>

Baraka's most famous attempt to create a new black political party would lead to his organizing more than 2,500 delegates to attend the National Black Political Convention held in March 1972, in Gary, Indiana. However, despite the best intentions of many of this Convention's participants, the event was in short "a shotgun wedding

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<sup>32</sup> For more details, see the SWP's document "The Transitional Program for Black Liberation," 1969.

<sup>33</sup> "The case for an independent Black Political Party," *International Socialist Review*, 29(1), January-February 1968.

<sup>34</sup> The Black Panther Party also took a more limited localized turn to electoral politics in the early 1970s building from their newly consolidated base in Oakland. For more on this, see Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle For Postwar Oakland* (Princeton University Press, 2003), pp.298-327; also Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, pp.380-6. In 1968 the Panthers had previously stood for election as a means of raising awareness of their then revolutionary socialist politics when they stood under the platform of the Peace and Freedom Party.

of the radical aspirations of Black Power and conventional modes of politics”; which in essence represented an attempt by Baraka and his fellow co-organizers “to form an elite, race brokerage apparatus.”<sup>35</sup>

This eventual and monumental failure to build a new party then helped pave the way for Baraka’s turn away from black cultural nationalism and embrace of another authoritarian form of organizing, Maoism. His thinking on this score was arguably consolidated in June 1974, when Baraka and several CAP delegates attended the Sixth Pan Afrikan Congress in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Here the Tanzanian President Mwalimu Julius Nyerere’s Maoist-tinged socialism apparently “made a grand impression on a number of the conference’s black American attendees, especially Baraka.”<sup>36</sup> Hence upon returning to America, Baraka squared up to the developing economic recession by becoming a devoted proponent of a Chinese brand of Marxism that was utterly incapable of uniting the working-class.

### **The limits of Pan-Africanism**

Baraka’s final embrace of Maoism via the anti-colonial struggle in Tanzania is befitting for a man who spent so much of his life opposing democracy and socialism. I say this because Baraka’s new-found enthusiasm for Marxism coincided with the increasingly authoritarian manoeuvres being taken by President Nyerere to enforce socialism upon ordinary people from upon high. Moreover, in spite of the close financial ties that China maintained with Tanzania, and Nyerere’s fondness for revolutionary rhetoric, American elites were also keen to ensure the “closer integration” of Nyerere’s country into the world market. So, in many ways it is fitting that in 1969 Nyerere’s latest five year plan “was worked out by an international team of economists,

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<sup>35</sup> Cedric Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p.129.

<sup>36</sup> Robeson Taj Frazier, “The Congress of African People Baraka, Brother Mao, and the Year of ’74,” in: Manning Marable and Elizabeth Kai Hinton (eds.), *The New Black History: Revisiting the Second Reconstruction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.147.

funded by the Ford Foundation”.<sup>37</sup> This connection to Western elites was it seems already well established, and between 1966 and 1974 an American development economist – who had initially travelled to West Africa as a Ford Foundation Area Studies fellow (in 1960-61) – Professor Reg Green, served as a personal adviser to Nyerere while carrying out his daily work in Tanzania’s Treasury. Green of course would not have been the type of economic advisor that would have been suited to the revolutionary aspirations of genuine revolutionary leaders like Lenin or Trotsky.

Lest we forget, the US ruling-class, intelligence apparatus, and their philanthropic enablers (the big three at the time being Ford, Rockefeller, and Carnegie) were all busy shoring up America’s imperialist interests in the post-war period, whether this be linked to supporting pliable political leaders or facilitating the overthrow of unfriendly governments. Hence the pressing threat of imperialist interventions were felt everywhere in Africa, with 1966 bearing special witness to yet another US-backed military coup that succeeded in ousting Ghana’s authoritarian ‘socialist’ leader Kwame Nkrumah. As it turns out Professor Reg Green had been advising Nkrumah in the period running up to the coup;<sup>38</sup> and shortly after departing from Ghana in December 1965, Green published a book about his economic contributions to the Pan-African cause. *Green’s liberal contribution, Unity or Poverty? The Economics of Pan-Africanism* (Penguin, 1968), was as one might imagine completely shorn of revolutionary content. Worse still, his suggestions for future institutional arrangements for Africa were simply modelled on already-existing pro-capitalist projects like the European Economic Community and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance of the Socialist Nations.<sup>39</sup> These limitations were hardly unexpected given the

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<sup>37</sup> Jarle Simensen, "The Norwegian-Tanzanian aid relationship - a historical perspective," in: Kjell Havnevik and Aida Isinika (eds.), *Tanzania in Transition: From Nyerere to Mkapa* (Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2010), p.60.

<sup>38</sup> After completing a PhD in economics at Harvard University in 1960 Professor Green had travelled to Ghana with the aid of a Ford Foundation scholarship.

<sup>39</sup> Kofi Ankomah, “*Unity or Poverty? the economics of pan-*

authors petty-bourgeois politics, which, it turns out were quite compatible with Nkrumah's own disavowal of a class analysis. Marxist historian Walter Rodney highlighted this irony when he wrote that it was a tragedy that an honest leader like Nkrumah had continued to deny "the existence of classes in Ghana until the petty bourgeoisie as a class overthrew him."<sup>40</sup>

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*Africanism* by Reginald H. Green and Ann Seidman London, Penguin Books, 1968," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 7(1), 1969, pp.160-1. This book evolved out the research that the coauthors had embarked upon in 1963 working within the Department of Economics at the University of Ghana. the research project was titled 'The Economics of African Unity' and included amongst its contributors, Jan Drenowski, the head of the prestigious Department of Economics. Drenowski had also been drafted to serve in Ghana in the early 1960s, but on the side of Communism, although it was apparent that his ideas better approximated those relating to capitalist development than anything Marxist. But it was "Only when President Nkrumah frequently expressed his displeasure at Drenowski, claiming that he was an outspoken 'reactionary' and supporter of Western economic thought, did the fact become known to the Polish Embassy in Accra." This resulted in Drenowski's return to his academic life in Poland. Gerardo Serra, "Continental Visions: Ann Seidman, Reginald H. Green and the economics of African Unity In 1960s Ghana," The Center for the History of Political Economy (CHOPE) Working Paper No. 2014-08, 2014, p.9; Przemysław Gasztold, "Lost illusions: the limits of Communist Poland's involvement in Cold War Africa," in: Philip Muehlenbeck and Natalia Telepneva (eds.), *Warsaw Pact Intervention in the Third World: Aid and Influence in the Cold War* (I.B. Tauris, 2018), p.205.

<sup>40</sup> Walter Rodney, "Marxism and African liberation," Speech by Walter Rodney At Queen's College, New York, 1975. Rodney went on to explain: "For years Nkrumah went along with this mish-mash of philosophy which took some socialist premises but which he refused to pursue to their logical conclusion - that one either had a capitalist system based upon the private ownership of the means of production and the alienation of the product of people's labour, or one had an,

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alternative system which was completely different and that there was no way of juxtaposing and mixing these two to create anything that was new and viable.”

False illusions in Kwame’s so-called ‘socialist’ government were sown by writers who should have known better, most notably by former Trotskyist CLR James and by American academics like St. Clair Drake and Horace Mann Bond. However, it was the misguided political assistance that Pan-African guru George Padmore provided to Kwame during the 1950s that arguably did most to ensure that Kwame’s political party failed in its historic class to mobilize the African masses to push forward with the socialist transformation of society. Padmore’s most serious shortcoming arose from his apparent internalization of the Communist Party’s stageist approach to social change.

For most of his career St. Clair Drake obtained little funding from American foundations precisely because of his “open support for Pan-Africanism and black liberation”, but this changed in the 1950s as the philanthropic world sought to harness intellectuals “to advance U.S. national security interests.” This change, and the need for greater knowledge about African affairs in order to guide ruling-class policy, led to Drake eventually obtaining a Ford Foundation fellowship in 1954 to study the mass media in Nigeria and Ghana. In later years Drake went on to serve as the head of the Sociology Department at the University College of Ghana between 1958 and 1961. Jerry Gershenson, “St. Clair Drake, Pan-Africanism, African Studies, and the politics of knowledge, 1945–1965,” *Journal of African American History*, 98(3), 2013, p.423. p.426.

Paul Trehwela, “George Padmore: a critique. Pan Africanism or Marxism?,” *Searchlight South Africa*, 1(1), September 1988; Baruch Hirson, “Communalism and socialism: the misdirection of C.L.R. James,” *Searchlight South Africa*, 1(4), 1990. For an example of the type of uncritical writing about Ghana, as outlined by a leading member of the Communist Party in the UK, see Jack Woddis, “Ghana’s changing economy,” *The African Communist*, 17, April-June 1964, pp.14-32. Raya Dunayevskaya provided an appropriate Marxist response to the tragic mis-steps taken by Kwame and his varied ‘socialist’ advisors, “The African Revolution, I,” *News &*



Unfortunately, Nkrumah's disavowal of revolutionary politics left him vulnerable to accepting the technocratic 'socialist' advice offered by Fabian imperialists whose goal was to sustain the British empire by institutionalizing a new 'humanitarian' form of colonialism. These exploitative aims were very much in tune with the ambitions of the American foundations, which is why Leon Trotsky referred to such Fabian socialists as the "main prop of British imperialism and of the European, if not the world bourgeoisie." Furthermore, considering the close working relationship that evolved between these Fabians and the Rockefeller Foundation from the 1920s onwards it is fitting that in the same essay that Trotsky would describe their philosophy as that "of a socially-minded philanthropic bourgeois who feels 'pity' for poor folk and makes a 'religion of his conscience' out of this pity without, however, upsetting his business habits unduly."<sup>41</sup> And in the case of Ghana, the Fabian elitist who most successfully ingratiated herself into Nkrumah's favour was the British economist Barbara Ward, who, as it happens was also serving as an advisor to the American ruling-class.

In 1953 Barbara Ward had moved to Ghana with her husband, Sir Robert Jackson, a man who had been recruited to the country to study the Volta River Project which was to become Nkrumah's flagship development project.<sup>42</sup> Barbara then assisted Nkrumah by

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*Letters*, January 1959; and Dunayevskaya, "Out of colonization into the fire," *Africa Today*, 9(10), December 1962. For an analysis of what went wrong with Nkrumah's leadership, see Manning Marable, *African and Caribbean Politics: From Kwame Nkrumah to the Grenada Revolution* (Verso, 1987).

<sup>41</sup> Leon Trotsky, "The Fabian 'theory' of socialism," in: *Trotsky's Writings on Britain*, Vol.2 (New Park Publications, 1974). For another useful essay, see Ted Grant's 1952 essay "Marxism versus New Fabianism," in: Grant, *The Unbroken Thread: The Development of Trotskyism Over 40 Years* (Fortress Books, 1989), pp.384-92.

<sup>42</sup> By 1957 Jackson had become the director of the Development Commission of Ghana (an esteemed position he held until 1961) and he was responsible for ensuring that Kwame's fledgling government secured the foreign funding they needed to complete extremely costly

lobbying the US government and the World Bank to come through with the funding for this controversial mega-project. It is said that Barbara's foreign connections had been "Jackson's secret weapon in the campaign for the Volta Project," but Jackson was hardly a person short of connections himself as he had previously served as the leader of the vast post-War relief operations that had been undertaken by the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. Either way, the highly profitable contract for the construction of the Volta dam ended up going to an American multinational corporation, and as part of the ongoing negotiations for the American government's support of this project Nkrumah was forced to downplay his opposition to US imperialism. As Osei Boakye observed, the US government used their support of Nkrumah's project to maintain their "tenuous grasp on Africa, even if it meant building a lucrative hydroelectric dam for a potentially communist-sympathizing leader."<sup>43</sup> Yet despite all his accommodations, the US government still decided that Nkrumah had to be removed from power.

Returning to Tanzania, President Nyerere never did learn the correct lessons from the US-backed ouster of Nkrumah, and despite his militant rhetoric and support for armed resistance to anti-imperialist forces across the continent the President "detested the notion of 'class struggle'". The politics of class are however unescapable, and so whether Nyerere believed in class struggle or not his leadership was still responsive to the pressures exerted by both the Tanzanian working-class and by the violence of the American ruling-class. And so immediately after yet another US-backed coup in Africa,

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source of hydroelectric power.

<sup>43</sup> David Satterthwaite, *Barbara Ward and the Origins of Sustainable Development* (International Institute for Environment and Development, 2006); Craig Murphy, *The United Nations Development Programme: A Better Way?* (2006), pp.121-31; Thomas Noer, "The new frontier and African neutralism: Kennedy, Nkrumah, and the Volta River Project," *Diplomatic History*, 8(1), 1984; Osei Boakye, "Prophets of development: An investigation into Kaiser Industries' economic relationship with Ghana, 1957-1965," *Journal of African Political Economy and Development*, 2, 2017, p.193.

this time in Uganda (which brought Idi Amin to power in January 1971), the National Executive Committee of Nyerere's party were pressed to adopt the *Mwongozo* (or 'Guidelines'). This significant concession to ordinary people then "lit the fire of class struggle against the 'new class', the state-based proto-bourgeoisie" in service to Nyerere.<sup>44</sup> But for all Nyerere's talk about empowering ordinary people during this period of crisis,...

...when that same 'people' actually began to move [into democratic struggle] - workers at the Mount Carmel Rubber Factory, peasants in Ruvuma, students at the university - Nyerere joined with the state and its bureaucrats, political and administrative, to slash back: to crush the workers; to smash the Ruvuma Development Association, and then forward ujamaa vijini only from on high and by means of a self-defeating policy of 'enforced villagisation'...<sup>45</sup>

By 1974 it was now clear that Nyerere's always ambiguous commitment to "socialist militancy" had been foreclosed, and his authoritarian state was now in the process of escalating the "forced villagisation in which millions of peasants were resettled in villages."<sup>46</sup> But it was at precisely this historical juncture that Baraka began his honeymoon period with Nyerere. And while Baraka was evidently impressed by Tanzania's flirtations with Maoism, Nyerere's ideological commitments were far broader and encompassed developmental theories that were quite compatible with the type of

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<sup>44</sup> Issa Shivji, "Nationalism and pan-Africanism: decisive moments in Nyerere's intellectual and political thought," *Review of African Political Economy*, 39(131), 2012, p.109.

<sup>45</sup> John Saul, "Tanzania fifty years on (1961-2011): rethinking ujamaa, Nyerere and socialism in Africa," *Review of African Political Economy*, 39(131), 2012, p.118.

<sup>46</sup> Shivji, "Nationalism and pan-Africanism," p.109, p.110. "To be sure, Nyerere was not a dictator. That is commendable of the man. But the same cannot be said of the constitutional order which he created and presided over." (p.110)

liberal platitudes promulgated the world over by humanitarian elites.

For a start, Nyerere had always been heavily influenced by the reformist ideas of Fabian socialism which were deeply held by his longstanding personal assistant, Joan Wicken. Wicken furthermore, was an influential powerbroker in her own right and had joined forces with Nyerere in 1960 after previously serving as the founding secretary of the British-based Africa Educational Trust – a group formed in 1958 as a liberal offshoot project of David Astor's Africa Bureau.<sup>47</sup> Another of Nyerere's close friends was Lady Marion Chesham who, in addition to serving in his first Parliament, had founded the Tanganyika Community Development Trust Fund (CDTF). This NGO in-turn acted as a vital conduit to facilitate foreign support for Tanzania's ujamaa rural development programs. And even as Nyerere's government increased their repression of their rural population in the mid-1970s, groups like Oxfam, Catholic Relief Services and Christian Aid were quite content to identify their "own mission in Tanzania more closely with the priorities of the state" and the so-called participatory priorities of CDTF.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Paul Bjerck, *Building a Peaceful Nation: Julius Nyerere and the Establishment of Sovereignty in Tanzania, 1960-1964* (Rochester Press, 2015), p.56.

<sup>48</sup> Michael Jennings, *Surrogates of the State: NGOs, Development, and Ujamaa in Tanzania* (Kumarian Press, 2008), p.101. Included in this category were other NGOs like Christian Action and Oxfam. As Jennings explains: "The 1970s saw an increase in support from the NGO community for villagization, even as the state was turning to force and compulsion to achieve its ends." (p.105) One of the ways that NGOs sought to do this more effectively was by working more closely with the CDTF, which was well known for its close relations with the state.

An intriguing power couple based in New York who devoted their lives to the promotion of community development is presented by the marriage of Glen Leet and Mildred Leet. Mildred had served as an active member on the Women's Advisory Committee on Poverty in the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity (between 1968 and 1970), and in 1979 had established a global microfinance non-

## Community development in the service of imperialism

Particularly in relation to the importance of President Nyerere's ujamaa rural development programs, close attention should be paid to the ideological continuities that existed between these projects and those of the global "community development movement" -- a movement that was bankrolled by the US government in the post-war period.<sup>49</sup> With the Cold War raging, community development had

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profit known as Tricke Up. Glen on the other hand had spent most of his career with the United Nations where he served as their first chief of community development, and in the 1960s he acted as the president of Save the Children Foundation -- an organization which in the 1950s "presented its projects as evidence that personal liberties and free markets need not be sacrificed to bring about better living conditions." Sara Fieldston, *Raising the World: Child Welfare in the American Century* (Harvard University Press, 2015), p.97. During the 1960s and 1970s Glen also served as the President of the Community Development Foundation (New York), a non-profit that eventually subsumed the work of the Tanganyika committee of New York (which coordinated support for Lady Chesham's Community Development Trust Fund).

<sup>49</sup> In 1954, the US government established a Division of Community Development, which within two years had advisers working in 23 countries around the world. By the late 1960s, however, the field of "community development" lost favour with many in the philanthropic community, who now latched upon the Green Revolution as a new developmental strategy to export to the world. As Vijay Prashad observed: "Tanzania tried to move a socialist agenda, but like much of the Third world, it did so without a genuine attempt to organize the population into the ideas. It tried to act from above. When villagization failed, the state resorted to an embarrassing policy. A country with the highest rate of food grain production in Africa in the early 1960s now imported \$180 million of food grains in late 1974. This exhausted Tanzania's foreign exchange reserves and set it up to beg for foreign aid. Then the state welcomed U.S.-based agribusinesses to build large (fifty-thousand acre), capital-intensive

been seized upon by American elites in both the military and the philanthropic community as an ideal way to limit the contagion of communism. And, under the guidance of the Ford Foundation, community empowerment projects were now rolled out far and wide across India – forming an allegedly participatory movement that proved “central to the development apparatus of the Nehruvian state”. These types of development projects also meshed well with Gandhi’s fictional notions of a harmonious village life that is devoid of class conflict (as popularized by the bhoodan movement). Although these strategies had been first pioneered by British imperialists and then fine-tuned by American elites, what was clear was that: “The whole programme was quite explicitly an attempt to create plausibly democratic institutions without serious dislocation of the vested interests of the status quo.”<sup>50</sup>

Community development was now seen to the perfect means by which to realize “political stability” for American imperial interests, and as such it soon “came into currency as a form of counterinsurgency, as a weapon for putting down peasant rebellions” – a use to which it was utilized to full affect in the Philippines.<sup>51</sup> As one

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farms. The Green Revolution bailed out ujamaa.” Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (The New Press, 2007), p.202.

<sup>50</sup> “An idealized and supposedly democratic version of village life, the ‘Panchayat’, was to be recreated, as part of this scheme to promote rural development without offering any explicit challenge to existing property or power and caste relationships.” Marjorie Mayo, “Community development: A radical alternative?,” in: Roy Bailey and Mike Brake (eds.), *Radical Social Work* (Pantheon Books, 1975), p.131.

<sup>51</sup> Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Harvard University Press, 2015), p.100. “The power of community development to direct attention away from larger structural problems towards small-scale ones was, in fact, precisely why the CIA found it so promising as a counter to rural communism. Community developers, confronted with poverty, ask what the poor can do, locally, to overcome it. But that is rarely the most productive question to ask, since it implicitly places the

early critic writing in 1975 put it, community development served a useful political purpose for capitalist states “as an attempt to build up local bulwarks (and vested interests) opposed to communism”. The examination of this history, furthermore, led this author to focus on the “striking parallels” that existed between the goals of such development strategies with those implemented by the American ruling-class in the Deep South during ‘reconstruction’ (as exemplified by the philanthropic support lent to self-help projects of Booker T. Washington). Likewise, this same critic went on to highlight the similarities that ran through such self-help projects to those that undergirded the American governments own War on Poverty.<sup>52</sup>

The drawing of a connection between the international community development projects undertaken by the US and those applied (or reimposed) back to America is important. This is because the Community Action Program’s that were a centrepiece of President Johnson’s so-called War on Poverty owed their initial roll-out to the schemes pioneered in the early 1960s via the Ford Foundations Gray Areas project.

The resemblance to overseas community development was nearly impossible to miss. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who had been one of the principal architects of the War on Poverty, explained it in a six-page article in 1966. ‘From the time of the Point Four program the American government has been sponsoring programs of community development in backwards nations throughout the world,’ Moynihan wrote. ‘The program was and is a great success, and the idea of doing something of the sort through Community Action Programs with the “under-

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responsibility for alleviating poverty on the victims of poverty themselves. In the guise of ‘empowering’ the poor, it drops the rich from the equation.” (p.179)

<sup>52</sup> Marjorie Mayo, “Community development: A radical alternative?,” p.132, p.134. Mayo quotes from another book that documented the rise of community development which explained “by far the greatest American expenditures on community development occur in those countries (Vietnam, Thailand, Laos) considered to be most threatened by communism.” (p.132)

developed peoples of the United States came as direct and obvious carryover.”<sup>53</sup>

In retrospect, such efforts by both the Ford Foundation and President Johnson to stabilize America’s crumbling democratic institutions through the selective application of community development were ultimately found wanting. Thus by “disconnecting the poverty problem from the issues of urban transformation..., and in purposely avoiding the issue of race, the thinking behind Gray Areas and the War on Poverty perpetuated the notion of poverty as a problem confined to *other* people and diverted attention from its links to economic restructuring, population movements, racial discrimination, and government policies that perpetuated inequality.”<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, such attempts to co-opt dissenting voices into government sanctioned channels – which, under the Ford Foundations tutelage then morphed into encouraging separatist elements of the black power movement – did serve to undermine the efforts of revolutionary activists from building more significant bases of support in America. Elite efforts at co-optation, which when combined with the mistaken approaches taken by various socialist groups during that period of intense struggle, meant that the ruling-class were able to maintain the reins of power – this, in spite of the ongoing combativity of the American working-class.

But even in the face of Richard Nixon’s eventual rise to Presidential power in 1968, liberal elites never vacated their perpetual struggle to repress the working-class, neither at home or overseas. Drawing upon their experience of the multiple political uses of community development, the Ford Foundation, in addition to backing black separatism, therefore neatly transitioned from promoting a participatory approach to the War on Poverty to doing the same with Nixon’s War on Crime. Hence, with the launch of Ford’s new Police

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<sup>53</sup> Immerwahl, *Thinking Small*, p.135.

<sup>54</sup> Alice O’Connor, “Community action, urban reform, and the fight against poverty,” *Journal of Urban History*, 22(5), 1996, p.617. For a more critical discussion of the influence of liberal foundations on the direction of the civil rights movement, see Michael Barker, “Elite philanthropy, SNCC, and the Civil Rights Movement,” *Swans Commentary*, November 1, 2010.



Foundation in 1970: “Community action had thus evolved into a form of community policing, which sought to control urban unrest by stitching structures of surveillance into the social life of the neighborhood itself.”<sup>55</sup> This focus on “law and order” was, it turns out, not an entirely new development, as in addition to backing the War on Poverty (which is perhaps best understood as “a manifestation of fear about urban disorder” and the behavior of young African Americans), President Johnson’s government had been happy to increase police funding and deploy “new military-grade weapons and surveillance technologies” against the poor, which included overseeing the enactment of harsh and racially biased sentencing laws.<sup>56</sup>

The long mobilization of the War on Crime was not a return to an old racial caste system in a new guise -- a ‘New Jim Crow.’ Rather, the effort to control and contain troublesome groups with patrol, surveillance, and penal strategies produced a new and historically distinct phenomenon in the post-civil rights era: the criminalization of urban social programs. In the two decades preceding Reagan’s War on Drugs, this phenomenon laid the groundwork for the continued rise of mass incarceration and its deep racial injustices into the twenty-first century.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Sam Collings-Wells, “From community action to community policing: the Ford Foundation and the urban crisis, 1960-1975,” *The Metropole*, July 16, 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Harvard University Press, 2016), p.32, p.13, p.15. “By expanding the federal government’s power in the pursuit of twinned social welfare and social control goals, Johnson paradoxically paved the way for the anticrime policies of the Nixon and Ford administrations to be turned against his own antipoverty programs.” (p.14)

<sup>57</sup> Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, pp.25-6.



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## **Bob Geldof and the Aid Industry: “Do They Know it’s Imperialism?”<sup>1</sup>**

The central role that celebrities maintain within global society provides a good illustration of the essentially hollow and manipulative nature of contemporary democracies. Corporate elites literally manufacture all-star celebrities, and acting through these malleable figure-heads, freely flood the world with imperialist propaganda. Much like the economic forces acting to misguide politicians, institutional pressures ensure that only right thinking individuals become trusted celebrities. However, the main difference between celebrities and politicians is that the public cannot exert democratic control over celebrities. Bob Geldof’s is no different in this regard, and as the consummate celebrity-power broker he stands clear of many of contemporaries as a pioneer of celebrity-led imperialism: acting in the service of capital. It is for this reason that this article critically excavates this largely overlooked history to help unearth an explanatory framework for understanding

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter was first published in 2013 by the journal *Capitalism Nature Socialism*.

exactly why the ongoing tragedy of famines will never be *solved* under a capitalist framework.

Geldof first rose to fame in the 1970s as the lead singer of the Irish band the *Boomtown Rats*, and having learned how to play the music industries game to perfection, Geldof went on to become a rare beneficiary of the stifling culture industry. But that was not enough for Geldof, and at the peak of his musical career he attempted to give something back to the world; call it something akin to musical social responsibility. For Geldof, this time of charitable maturation arrived in 1984, when having been shocked by a news report about the ongoing famine in Ethiopia he sought to harness his celebrity power to challenge of solving global injustice. Such good intentions are all well and good, but seeing that Geldof explicitly set upon this task in a manner that ignored any systematic critique of the politics of exploitation, his actions ending up bolstering the very same unjust capitalist system that created the problem in the first place. In fact a good case can be made that it is precisely the imperialism-lite of ostensibly good-intentioned liberal elites – whose activities are subsumed under the kind-sounding rhetoric of 'philanthropy', 'democracy' and 'human rights' – that has facilitated the institutionalization of neoliberalism.

## **Celebrities and the politics of starvation**

In our interconnected world, extended famines do not occur when harvests fail, or because there are too many mouths to feed; quite the opposite, they occur with unfortunate regularity precisely because geopolitical priorities place profit before people.<sup>2</sup> Scrutinizing the case study provided by the Ethiopian famine is important, as not only did it mark Washington's "first hundred-million dollar commitment to international disaster relief" but the intervention has provided a "blueprint for future policymakers to follow".<sup>3</sup> Thus to advance a

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Keneally, *Three Famines: Starvation and Politics* (PublicAffairs, 2011); Madhusree Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India during the Second World War* (Basic Books, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Poster, "The Gentle War: Famine Relief, Politics, and

realistic and useful solution to starvation one needs to look beyond the mainstream media's propaganda of futility, and strive to examine the role of capital in catalysing 'natural' disasters.<sup>4</sup> Celebrity actorvists cannot be relied upon to search for such solutions, as embedded within capitalist networks of power they tend to be amongst those few individuals least likely to engage in such a rational approach to problem solving.

Counter to the rational nature of anti-capitalist thought, the latest tried and (media) tested method of addressing capitals wrongdoings is to harness the angry voice of a celebrity (or better still a group of celebrities) to rant and rave about individual greed.<sup>5</sup> Illustrating the latest iteration of a longstanding trend that has seen capitalists harness the power of philanthropy to the extension and consolidation of capitalist relations worldwide. This smokescreen approach to social change channels public attention away from any discussion of meaningful issues, and ensures that capitalists are empowered to 'solve' the very same problems they caused in the first place. Geldof is singled out in particular because he took this basic formula for corporate success and then engorged this model for celebrity-led reaction to such an extent that celebrities are now a vital part of the 'aid' industry.

Geldof clearly does not interpret his own actions in such a negative way, and seems to believe that the moral suasion of celebrities can force the hands of the very same political and economic elites that sustain their careers. There may be a limited grain of truth in this way of thinking, but it is to state the obvious that a celebrity campaign to expose capitalist injustice is hardly likely to be instigated by corporate sanctioned celebrities, let alone gain active elite support in corporate circles. This is why a good case can be made that Geldof's entire Band

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Privatization in Ethiopia, 1983-1986," *Diplomatic History*, 36(2), 2012, pp.424-5.

<sup>4</sup> Mike Davies, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World* (Verso, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Michael Barker, "Celebrity philanthropy: in the service of corporate propaganda," in: Gerald Sussman (ed.), *The Propaganda Society: Promotional Culture and Politics in Global Context* (Peter Lang, 2011).

Aid/Live Aid phenomenon actually shifted...

... the focus of responsibility for the impoverishment of the Third World from western governments to individuals and obscured the workings of multinational corporations and their agents, the IMF and the World Bank. Worse, it made people in the West feel that famine and hunger were endemic to the Third World, to Africa in particular (the dark side of the affluent psyche), and what they gave was as of their bounty, not as some small for what was taken from the of the Third recompense being poor World. ... [A] discourse on western imperialism was transmogrified into a discourse on western humanism.<sup>6</sup>

Geldof's own humanitarian campaign thus exemplified itself as a stereotypical attack on governments and the existing aid industry: the visual problem was identified (famine), blame was then squarely placed on the local (foreign) government, and a 'new' uncorrupted form of charity was then promoted. Along with such myths, he also pushed the equally misleading idea that foreign governments allowed the famine to continue because they were apathetic. Geldof's serviceable response to these 'problems' was obvious, he had to *force* Western government's to care more for distant others, and rail against the existing aid industry's inefficiencies. In both instances this meant that Geldof dismissed the primary institutional reason for the existence of the aid industry. This is because governments *do not* donate food out of generosity; rather their food distribution networks are considered to be an *integral* weapon through which to promote their foreign policies - a selection of critical books that Geldof might have read at the time include.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A. Sivanandan, "All that melts into air is solid: the hokum of New Times," *Race & Class*, January-March 1990, p.22. For a musical critique of Live Aid see Chumbawamba's album *Pictures of Starving Children Sell Records: Starvation, Charity and Rock & Roll - Lies & Traditions* (1986).

<sup>7</sup> Nicole Ball, *World Hunger: A Guide to the Economic and Political Dimensions* (Clio Press, 1981); Susan George, *How the Other Half Dies: The Real Reasons for World Hunger* (Penguin, 1976); Teresa Hayter, *The Creation of World Poverty: An Alternative View to the*

Paradoxically, writing in 1986, Geldof was evidently aware (at the rhetorical level anyway) of the strategic use of aid:

Aid is given in direct proportion to how friendly a government is towards the donor. It is used as threat, blackmail and a carrot. This is wrong. ... Aid by and large benefits the donor country as much as the recipient, more so in fact as it stimulates, by trade, the donor's economy, but leaves the recipient aid-dependent.<sup>8</sup>

Such critical words however never informed his actions.

### **Band Aid imperialism**

Considering the exploitative nature of government food aid, the actions of the glut of “Bloody Do-Gooders” that Geldof brought together under the remit of Band Aid in 1984 certainly need to be viewed in a critical light.<sup>9</sup> Released in December 1984, Band Aid's humanitarian anthem “Do They Know It's Christmas?,” quickly became the fastest-selling UK single of all time and marked Geldof's return to the public stage as a born-again humanitarian rabble rouser. Reflecting on his initial experiences in his autobiography *Is That It?* (1986), Geldof acknowledged that the result of Band Aid's fund raising “would be so small in the context of the problem that it would be like putting a tiny plaster on a wound that required twelve stitches.”<sup>10</sup>

With the benefit of hindsight, I would suggest that this is an extremely bad misdiagnosis. Instead a more accurate description of Band Aid's work would be to say that they put a plaster over capitalism's body politic, and sutured the public's eyes shut. Here Geldof would vehemently disagree, as he insists that Band Aid carried out its work

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*Brandt Report* (Pluto Press, 1981); Marcus Linear, *Zapping the Third World: The Disaster of Development Aid* (Pluto Press, 1985).

<sup>8</sup> Bob Geldof, *Is That It?* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1986), p.318.

<sup>9</sup> Geldof's initial suggestion for Band Aid's name was “The Bloody Do-Gooders.”

<sup>10</sup> Geldof, *Is That It?*, p.223.

without involving itself in regional politics.<sup>11</sup> Such claims however are patently false, especially given the fact that he recruited some of Britain's leading elites to serve as trustees of the charity, the Band Aid Trust, which was set up to distribute the funds raised in the course of his activism.<sup>12</sup>

So how did it all start? Well if one returns to the initial seven minute BBC story broadcast on October 24, 1984 that fueled Geldof's humanitarian impulses, it turns out that the two reporters who filed the report (Mo Amin and Michael Buerk) were working under the auspices of World Vision - a well publicized, imperialist, evangelical Christian charity. World Vision being just one, often overlooked, part of imperial counterinsurgency efforts carried out by conservative evangelists who wage 'spiritual warfare' upon recalcitrant populations.<sup>13</sup> Little wonder that the television report described Ethiopia as the scene of a "biblical famine" which was the "closest thing to hell on earth".<sup>14</sup> Thus it is appropriate that in the early stages of Geldof's frantic organizing efforts, the head of World Vision UK, Peter Searle, "kept phoning" Geldof in a bid to influence his activities. Having never heard of World Vision, Geldof recalled that he was "very suspicious" of Searle's offers of help; but he seems to have been reassured when told that "they were an excellent organization but with roots in the right-wing American evangelical revival." As Geldof

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<sup>11</sup> Geldof was also involved in the US version of Band Aid which under the organization of Harry Belafonte released the song "We Are the World" in March 1985, which became the fastest-selling American pop single in history.

<sup>12</sup> The Band Aid Trust was initially chaired by Lord Gowrie, then Minister for the Arts. Other founding trustees included Lord Harlech, the head of Harlech TV, Michael Grade, the controller of BBC1, Chris Morrison, the manager of Ultravox, Maurice Obserstein, the chairman of the British Phonographic Institute, John Kennedy, a pop industry lawyer, and Midge Ure. Geldof, *Is That It?*, p.256.

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right* (South End Press, 1989), p.220.

<sup>14</sup> Ibrahim Shaw, "Historical frames and the politics of humanitarian intervention: from Ethiopia, Somalia to Rwanda," *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 5(3), 2007, p.359.



continues: “Later we backed several of their projects”.<sup>15</sup> But to be more precise, it should be noted that as reported in May 1986, the “largest sum spent so far [by Band Aid] on a single project, dollars 1m, went to the charity World Vision” for their work in the Sudan.<sup>16</sup>

Lest one forgets, the Cold War was in full swing, and Ethiopia was in the grip of a protracted Civil War fighting against rebels of the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). Geldof thankfully recognized the existence of this war, but when he met the officials of the Ethiopian government’s relief commission he told them: “It seems to me that your basic problem is one of PR”. He added, that while “I may not know anything about famine... I do know a lot about PR”. The narrow solution as viewed through Geldof’s celebrity eyes was that Ethiopia should see the international media as their natural ally, because, he continued, “once people in the West appreciate the scale of what is going on here you won’t be able to stop them from helping”. Geldof’s naivety certainly didn’t make him receptive to the contrary idea presented by members of the Ethiopian government, that the western media was part of the problem, and that it had actually consciously acted against the best interests of their country. Further given Geldof’s gross ignorance about Ethiopian politics it is no surprise that he missed the fact that the Ethiopian government was deliberating withholding food aid from the “huge areas of Tigray where TPLF guerrillas held sway,” because as their acting foreign minister Tibebe Bekele, made clear at the time: “Food is a major element in our strategy against the secessionists”.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> On his first visit to Ethiopia Geldof bumped into another conservative religious ‘aid’ worker, Mother Teresa, who according to Christopher Hitchens “has consoled and supported the rich and powerful, allowing them all manner of indulgence, while preaching obedience and resignation to the poor.” Geldof, *Is That It?*, p.239; Hitchens, *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice* (Verso, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Moore, “The Band’s last big number / The future of Band Aid,” *The Sunday Times*, May 11, 1986.

<sup>17</sup> Geldof, *Is That It?*, p.249; Shaw, “Historical frames and the politics of humanitarian intervention,” p.359. One should look to Ethiopia’s

One might note that the only aid group active in Ethiopia at the time challenging the hegemonic imperialist discourse of the famine was Médecins sans frontières; and for doing so they were promptly ejected from the country. At the time, the longstanding trend of manipulating humanitarian aid to serve the donor countries' geostrategic interests is most clearly demonstrated in the provision of aid on the borders of Pakistan-Afghanistan, and Honduras-Nicaragua during the 1980s. In the former case, Fiona Terry concludes: "Whether they believed they were neutral or not, NGOs that received U.S. funding either in Pakistan or for cross-border operations were assisting the foreign policy strategy of the U.S. government." With respect to Honduran 'aid,' some NGOs themselves were openly critical about such manipulations, and a report by Catholic Relief Services concluded: "The border relief programs are not designed to meet the long or short-term interests of the Miskitos, but rather are designed for political purposes as a conduit of aid to the contras".<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, in Ethiopia Catholic Relief Services appear to have maintained a somewhat antagonist stance vis-a-vis their role in promoting U.S. foreign policy objectives, but despite rhetorical objections still retained their prestigious position as the largest

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recent past for similar examples that illustrate the political nature of famines. For example, "During the final two years (1973-1975) of the U.S.-supported Haile Selassie regime, some 100,000 Ethiopians died of starvation due to drought. At least half the amount of grain needed to keep those people alive was held in commercial storage facilities within the country. In addition, Emperor Selassie's National Grain Corporation itself held in storage 17,000 tons of Australian wheat which it refused to distribute. While commercial interests thrived by selling hundreds of tons of Ethiopian grain, beans and even milk to Western Europe and Saudi Arabia, the Ethiopian government received 150,000 tons of free food from aid donors." Frances Moore Lappe, Joseph Collins and David Kinley, *Aid As Obstacle: Twenty Questions About Our Foreign Aid and the Hungry* (Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1980), p.115.

<sup>18</sup> Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?: The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Cornell University Press, 2002), pp.74-5, p.104;

recipient of U.S. disaster grants.<sup>19</sup>

It is therefore far from surprising that more recent reports demonstrate that some of the relief monies entering Ethiopia were used to buy arms for the rebels via the TPLF's aid front-group, the Relief Society of Tigray (REST). The US government was of course well aware of this situation as a now declassified CIA report written in 1985 made clear. The report observes that: "Some funds that insurgent organizations are raising for relief operations, as a result of increased world publicity, are almost certainly being diverted for military purposes".<sup>20</sup> Geldof no doubt ignored such possibilities as belonging to the realm of conspiracy theories, but this did not stop him from accepting aid from the shadowy employee of a former CIA agent. As Geldof recounts in this autobiography, the influential CIA agent in question was Miles Copeland, whose philanthropic minded boss was the longtime Saudi arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi - whose militaristic background remained unmentioned by Geldof. Thus Geldof adds, he was informed by Miles Copeland's son, Stewart Copeland (who was the drummer in the rock group The Police), that...

... Khashoggi was interested in donating some planes for us to use. On the eve of my departure for Ethiopia I met up with Khashoggi's son who was passing through London. The planes would be for famine relief in the Sudan only, he said, and a meeting would be arranged between me and President Numeiri's personal adviser, Baha Idris. It all seemed very complex, but the offer for the planes was firm, I was assured.<sup>21</sup>

Then while on his subsequent foray to the Sudan, Geldof had lunch with Andrew Timpson of Save the Children where his briefing provided...

... one enlightening piece of information. Adnan Khashoggi was

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<sup>19</sup> Poster, "The Gentle War," p.418.

<sup>20</sup> Vijay Prashad, "Bad Aid: Throw your arms around the world," *Counterpunch*, March 29, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Geldof, *Is That It?*, p.251. Khashoggi was the arms dealer in the Iran-Contra scandal.

said to have oil interests in the Sudan and a special relationship with President Numeiri which led him to getting a remarkably good return on his investment. It was said that if anyone could arrange a cease-fire in the civil war which was disrupting development in the oil field which was thought to be the biggest in black Africa, it was he. (p.252)

Geldof's follow-on sentence is: "Curiouser and curiouser." But as far as he is concerned that is the end of the story, as he fails to return to this intriguing subject. He does however mention in passing that during the preparations for the Band Aid concert, "all the Band Aid office expenses were being paid for by a Malaysian oil millionaire called Ananda Krishnan"; and contrary to Geldof's own personal intentions for the project, Krishnan "was interested in turning Band Aid into a permanent institution".<sup>22</sup> Such curious humanitarian contacts befit a man with little enthusiasm for challenging the legitimacy of powerful political interests. In Geldof's own words:

[A]s in England, where I didn't want to get involved in party politics, so too in Africa. 'I will shake hands with the devil on my left and the devil on my right to get to the people who need help,' I would say, when I first asked questions about the political complexion of some local government. That was crucial, for you could become bogged down in the myriad moral uncertainties of dealing with an imperfect political system. (p.318)

### **Geldof versus the American government?**

Despite Geldof recognizing the fact that aid is regularly used by powerful governments "as threat, blackmail and a carrot," in 1985 Band Aid strangely sought to gain the support of the best organized imperialist aid agency in the world, the US Agency for International Development (AID). No need to worry about such incongruous behaviour though, as Geldof would have us believe that "the greatest single donor in the world" didn't really know what it was doing in terms of coordinating its global operations. Geldof recalls that he "was

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<sup>22</sup> Geldof, *Is That It?*, p.266.

frightened” that USAID “would have the better of me or have a better grasp of the facts.” “But they didn't” he continues, “we were *all* tap dancing”.<sup>23</sup> This seems most peculiar, and I would argue that this interpretation of events owes more to his naivety than to reality, but either way this false impression certainly gave Geldof the confidence boost he needed to argue for their help. That said he didn't have to argue much, as USAID already knew his plans as he “had stipulated the agenda before” he arrived in America. As he recalled: “They knew that we were not prepared to leave without firm undertakings from them that they should match us on a dollar-for-dollar basis on some of our mutually beneficial projects”. So in the end it is not surprising that the US State Department came though for Band Aid. The Ethiopian government on the other hand was, as Geldof reports, “not delirious to have help from U.S. Aid”.<sup>24</sup>

But are we to really to believe that it was Band Aid that manipulated the US government and not vice versa? If we just consider the quantitative issue of food aid, the total value of US aid for Ethiopia in fiscal 1983 was around \$3 million; this then increased to some \$23 million the following year, and then “jumped to more than four times that amount (about \$98 million) between October 1 and December 1, 1984.” Given that approximately two-thirds of this last increase was committed after the initial NBC broadcast of the famine in the United States (October 24, 1984), one way of interpreting this change would be to say this boost in aid was due to the change in media coverage and the resulting public outcry.<sup>25</sup> Alternatively, one could just

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<sup>23</sup> Geldof, *Is That It?*, p.320. “The impact of food aid can only be understood within the context of the broader US aid programme. Two-thirds of the total aid package is security assistance: military aid and cash transfers to governments deemed 'strategically important' to the US national interest. So whatever worthwhile may be achieved by feeding some people or supporting some useful development efforts is far outweighed by the propping up of anti-democratic elites and regimes whose policies perpetuate inequality.” Kevin Danaher, “US food power in the 1990s,” *Race & Class*, 30 (3), 1989, p.34.

<sup>24</sup> Geldof, *Is That It?*, p.322, p.323.

<sup>25</sup> Christopher Bosso, “Setting the agenda: Mass media and the

as easily interpret this change as illustrating that the media became more receptive to the issue once the U.S. government signaled that they were increasing, and no longer decreasing, food aid to the region.<sup>26</sup> Support is lent to the latter argument by the fact that in March 1984 Senator John Danforth (Republican-Missouri) - who throughout 1984 played an important role in lobbying for famine relief in Ethiopia - successfully introduced a bill (H.J.Res. 493) that provided \$90 million in food assistance for emergency food assistance for Africa. This money was not however freed up until an earlier bill (H.J.Res. 492) aiming to provide \$150 million to famine stricken areas in Africa (of which the \$90 million represented part of) stalled, passing into law in July 1984, but only when proposed amendments to add covert funding for the Contras in Nicaragua had been dropped from the bill.<sup>27</sup>

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discovery of famine in Ethiopia,” in: Gary Mauser, Michael Margolis (eds.), *Manipulating Public Opinion: Essays on Public Opinion As a Dependent Variable* (Thomson Brooks, 1990), pp.168-69

<sup>26</sup> As early as August 1983 *The New York Times* reported: “The Reagan Administration has decided to press for increased relief assistance for Ethiopia, where drought and famine now threaten hundreds of thousands, according to officials of the Agency for International Development.” The article continued: “The United States effort, which represents a shift in policy, is being pursued partly through the United Nations. But officials of A.I.D., at a meeting in New York Monday, also invited all major private American aid agencies to become involved in improving food distribution in the area and asked them to formulate plans.” In late October, Rev Dr Charles Elliott argued that it was only in the past two months that Washington and Whitehall had begun to change their attitudes with regard to the deliberate denial of aid to Ethiopia. Kathleen Teltsch, “U.S. presses for increased relief aid for famine-stricken Ethiopia,” *The New York Times*, August 19, 1983; Annon, “The Rev Dr Charles Elliott, until recently director of Christian Aid, has accused Britain and the US of deliberately withholding aid from Ethiopia,” *The Observer*, October 28, 1984.

<sup>27</sup> Poster, “The Gentle War,” p.408; Raymond Copson, *African Famine: Chronology of U.S. Congressional and Executive Branch Action in 1984* (Washington: Congressional Research Service, The

Counter to Geldof's recommendation to Ethiopian officials that they only needed better PR to get their story out to the global public, *US* journalists had been attempting to air stories about the famine for some time, but they simply had no takers in the mainstream media. As far as the media were concerned: "It was not 'new' news, for the roots of the 1984 disaster lay in conditions known for years before the disaster hit the headlines".<sup>28</sup> But by the end of the year Ethiopia was now considered to be an issue that deserved political attention. One wonders if this was in any way related to ongoing attempts to coerce the Ethiopian government to accept more aid from the West. For example, it is interesting to observe that just after the increase in aid and media attention (in October), Reuters reported, on December 1, 1984, how: "The Marxist Government of Ethiopia has agreed to move toward a free market policy to improve the country's agricultural production..."<sup>29</sup> Thus extensive economic and diplomatic pressure were clearly being brought to bare on Ethiopia well before the rise in media attention. By way of another example, the Italian government had its own important role to play in ramping up the political pressure, "and the Italian ambassador is generally credited with making it clear to Mengistu in early October 1984 that Ethiopia could not continue to suppress information about the famine, but must publicize it in order to attract Western relief".<sup>30</sup>

Ethiopia was now the medias number one story, but during the seemingly endless deluge of one-dimensional coverage at no stage did the mainstream media help the public understand what was happening and by making any significant effort to explain the root causes of the famine. One would have been hard pressed to have heard of the ambitious land reform program - launched in 1975 when the military Marxists (known as the Derg) rose to power - that was "very successful in eliminating large holdings, absentee landlordism and landlessness."

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Library of Congress, 1984).

<sup>28</sup> Bosso, "Setting the agenda," p.157.

<sup>29</sup> Reuters, "Ethiopians consider free market," *The Globe and Mail*, December 1, 1984

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.238.

Similarly there was no talk of how the Derg's top-down control over their agrarian reform programme had the net effect of "lessen[ing] farmer's incentives for good natural resource management by decreasing both the security of land tenure and the profitability of agriculture".<sup>31</sup> Factors which combined with the prolonged civil war, and the Derg's massive resettlement program (which was undertaken in the wake of the 1984-85 famine), exacerbated farmer land insecurity and mismanagement, thus depressing agricultural production in Ethiopia's time of need.

Instead of providing historically informed investigative journalism that explored such issues, the racist media delivered up a nightmarish story about a natural disaster of biblical proportions. An outcome that was entirely predictable given the propagandist nature of the mainstream media which was well aligned to celebrate the successes of the imperialist development narratives upon which the nongovernmental (NGO) aid industry operates. Thus the media and the international aid community simply latched upon well-worn neo-Malthusian environmental degradation narratives to justify ongoing aid in the post-famine period (1985-1990). Likewise, little or no mention has been made of the deleterious effect that the Soviet Union's policy of disengagement had on the nominally Marxist government.<sup>32</sup>

Such an ill informed development narrative was supremely useful to imperialist donors, as it promoted an intervention in a geostrategically important region that "was narrowly technical, largely bypassed the Ethiopian government, was targeted directly on the rural poor and would be welcomed by the growing environmental lobby in Washington." With respect to the utility of this massive influx of aid

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<sup>31</sup> Allan Hoben, "Paradigms and politics: the cultural construction of environment policy in Ethiopia," *World Development*, 23 (6), 1995, p.1011.

<sup>32</sup> Emma Miller, *Viewing the South: How Globalization and Western Television Distort Representations of the Developing World* (Hampton Press, 2006); Melissa Leach and Robin Mearns, *The Lie of the Land: Challenging Received Wisdom on the African Environment* (James Currey, 1996); Robert Patman, *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa: The Diplomacy of Intervention and Disengagement* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).



(for the people of Ethiopia), “in retrospect, it is clear that much of this effort was wasted or counterproductive.” It is not coincidental that it was during this golden period of 'development' aid that the Derg “moved away from socialist agriculture”.<sup>33</sup>

One might point out that neo-Malthusian arguments drawn upon in Ethiopia are intimately enmeshed with the ideological underpinnings of the mainstream environmental movement, especially to the environmental lobby in Washington. Indeed, since the 18<sup>th</sup> century such specious logic has rendered yeoman's service to imperial elites who falsely argue that humans simply cannot cultivate enough food to feed the entire human population.<sup>34</sup> Thus given Ethiopia's positioning in the ongoing Cold War it is appropriate that the leading proponents of neoliberal environmentalism played a major role in justifying the aid communities' protracted interventions in the region. For example, from late 1984 to mid-1986 the executive coordinator of the United Nations Office for Emergency Operations in Africa was none other than Maurice Strong, the immensely powerful former oil executive who, over the past four decades, has arguably done more than any other individual to promote the misnomer of sustainable development.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Hoben, “Paradigms and politics,” pp.1013-4, p.1007, p.1017.

<sup>34</sup> Ian Angus and Simon Butler, *Too Many People? Population, Immigration and the Environmental Crisis* (Haymarket Books, 2011); Eric Ross, *The Malthus Factor: Population, Poverty, and Politics in Capitalist Development* (Zed Books, 1999).

<sup>35</sup> Barker, “Taking Strong action for capitalist-led environmental destruction,” *Swans Commentary*, January 11, 2010. Finally, considering the politicized nature of the food aid to Ethiopia it is of more than passing interest that the the Chief of Mission in the US Embassy in Ethiopia from 1988-91 was Robert Houdek. In former years Houdek had served as a Special Assistant to then National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger (1969-1971), and retired in 2007 having worked for ten years as the National Intelligence Officer for Africa. One should also recognize that during the 1970's Kissinger had been a forthright proponent of using food aid to promote an openly neo-Malthusian US foreign policy.



## Capitalists for just exploitation

Old humanitarian habits die hard and having already proved their ability to neglect the role of imperial power politics in global affairs, Geldof and his Band Aid friends have continued to act as willing implementers of capitalistic responses to capitalist-bred inequality. But if one had to choose the one Band Aid contributor who best followed Geldof's own model of leadership on behalf of imperial elites it would have to be Bono, who in 2005 was voted *TIME* magazine's Person of the Year alongside the well-known 'humanitarian' couple Bill and Melinda Gates. After contributing to the Band Aid single and the Live Aid gig in 1985, Bono had even emulated Geldof's commitment to the right-wing evangelical charity World Vision, and spent six weeks volunteering at one of their orphanages in Ethiopia. Bono's overt commitment to Christian missionary work was then put on hold, that is, until 1997 when Jamie Drummond encouraged him to become a spokesperson for a church-based campaign known as Jubilee 2000, a group which was set up to campaign to cancel Third World debt. Fresh from this spiritual revival, Bono then began spending weekends at the World Bank with his friend Bobby Shriver, who himself was an old colleague of the World Bank's president, James Wolfensohn, having worked with him within the venture capital division of the Wolfensohn Firm.

Having gained his humanitarian apprenticeship under leading imperialists like Wolfensohn, it is appropriate that Bono's education was completed by economist Jeffrey Sachs. Bono, like Geldof, was pioneering new ground within the realm of celebrity activism, moving from the former archetypal celebrity-as-fundraiser, to the realm of celebrity-as-corporate lobbyist. With the zeal of a born-again zealot, Bono endeavored to work the circuits of power of the hallowed nonprofit-industrial complex, and in 2002 he turned to Geldof who helped devise the name DATA (Debt, AIDS, Trade, Africa) to christen his and Bobby Shriver's new group; an organization which flourished with \$1 million start-up grants flowing in from the likes of global democracy manipulator George Soros,<sup>36</sup> software businessman

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<sup>36</sup> Nicolas Guilhot, "Reforming the world: George Soros, global

Edward W. Scott, Jr., and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Once set up, DATA recruited like-minded high profile corporate lobbyists - the two main ones being the Democrat AIDS activist /defence contractor lobbyist Tom Sheridan, and Scott Hatch, who formerly ran the National Republican Campaign Committee.<sup>37</sup> Much like Geldof, Bono sees his work as bipartisan; that is, encompassing of all political views as long as they stand firmly on the side of capitalism.

In 2004, Bono extended his activist commitments, and with the backing of Bread for the World, the Better Safer World coalition and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation he created "ONE: The Campaign to Make Poverty History"; which merged with DATA in 2007 and is now known as ONE Campaign. All board members of ONE are leading representatives of the US power elite, but three who exhibit an outstanding service to capitalist propaganda are president and CEO Michael Elliott (who most recently served as the editor of TIME International), board chair Tom Freston (who is the former CEO of Viacom and MTV Networks), and Joe Cerrell (who presently works for the Gates Foundation, but formerly served as the vice president of the philanthropy practice at APCO Worldwide, and as assistant press secretary to former US Vice President Al Gore). A significant recent addition to ONE's board of directors is World Bank Managing Director Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala who is active on the board of Friends Africa where he sits alongside African 'friends' like Jeffrey Sachs and the chairman of De Beers, Jonathan Oppenheimer. While yet another especially noteworthy ONE board member is Helene Gayle, who as a former employee of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is now employed as the president of the leading international 'aid' outfit, CARE.

Here it is noteworthy to recall that CARE was formed by Herbert Hoover as the Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe, and since its inception in 1945 has provided a valuable means of promoting imperialism via the strategic provision of food aid. Indeed as Susan George suggests in her excellent book *How the Other Half Dies: The Real Reasons for World Hunger* (Penguin, 1976), Hoover

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capitalism and the philanthropic management of the social sciences," *Critical Sociology*, 33(3), 2007, pp.447-77.

<sup>37</sup> Josh Tyrangiel, "The constant charmer," *Time*, December 19, 2005.

was given the opportunity to form CARE primarily because he had demonstrated his ability to use of food aid as a weapon during and after World War I. In fact she suggests that Hoover was arguably the “first modern politician to look upon food as a frequently more effective means of getting one's own way than gunboat diplomacy or military intervention”. As recent critical scholarship on the international role of CARE demonstrates, it still serves much the same imperial purpose that it was created to perform.<sup>38</sup>

CARE thus provides a vital training ground for budding 'humanitarians,' and for instance, many of their former staff are involved in a relatively new venture known as Build Africa - a 'charity' working in rural Uganda and Kenya which helps “young people” better themselves through learning about the wonders of “business enterprise.” One particularly significant trustee of Build Africa - who also heads their board of ambassadors/investment bankers - is the investment banker and private equity power broker Mark Florman (who is the CEO of the British Venture Capital Association). In addition to acting as one of the co-founders of the UK based Centre for Social Justice - a think tank that was set up in 2004 by the former leader of the Conservative party, Iain Duncan Smith<sup>39</sup> - Florman worked with Bob Geldof to raise \$200 million to launch a private equity fund in 2012 with the aid of J.P Morgan called 8 Miles, which, bluntly put, aims to capitalize on Africa. According to the *Financial*

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<sup>38</sup> Timothy Schwartz, *Travesty in Haiti: A True Account of Christian Missions, Orphanages, Fraud, Food Aid and Drug Trafficking*. London: BookSurge Publishing, 2008).

<sup>39</sup> It is interesting to note that the Executive Director of the Centre for Social Justice, Philippa Stroud, was recently employed by the charity known as Christian Action Research and Education, which is also known as CARE, and whose activities are separate from the aforementioned 'aid' agency with the same acronym. The long-serving chair of Christian Action Research and Education is Lyndon Bowring, who is a council member of the conservative Christian group The Evangelical Alliance and a member of the board of reference of the equally zealous Christian Solidarity Worldwide which is very active in promoting 'aid' in the Sudan.

*Times*:

Among others that Mr Geldof has approached for advice on the [8 Miles Fund] venture are Mo Ibrahim, the Sudanese-born telecoms tycoon turned philanthropist, and Arki Busson, the founder of hedge fund EIM. He has also discussed his plans with Tony Blair, the former British prime minister who sits with Mr Geldof on the Africa Progress Panel, monitoring donor commitments towards increased aid to Africa.<sup>40</sup>

To flesh out the backgrounds of Geldof's new friends, one might note that Mo Ibrahim was soon to be a board member of the ONE Campaign and is currently chair of the advisory board for an investment firm focused on Africa called Satya Capital whose small portfolio includes Namakwa Diamonds – a mining group whose board members notably include a former executive vice president of the notorious Barrick Gold. In 2004, Ibrahim founded the Mo Ibrahim Foundation “to recognize achievement in African leadership and stimulate debate on good governance across sub-Saharan Africa and the world.” In this context “good governance” means implementation of neoliberal reforms.<sup>41</sup> Hedge fund tycoon, Arki Busson, like Ibrahim is well versed in the power of philanthropic propaganda, and on the side of his main business interests he runs an educational charity known as Absolute Return for Kids (ARK), which is one of Britain's powerful

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<sup>40</sup> William Wallis and Martin Arnold, “Geldof seeks \$1bn for African investment,” *Financial Times*, September 2, 2010. The “core funding 2008 – 2010” for the Africa Progress Panel “comes from two sources: the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID).”

<sup>41</sup> Issa Shivji, “The Mo Ibrahim Prize: Robbing Peter to pay Paul,” *Pambazuka News*, November 1, 2007. Mo Ibrahim is one of many elite counselors of a group called One Young World which describes itself as “the premier global forum for young people of leadership calibre.” Bob Geldof is also counted as one of their counselors, and One Young World's cofounder, marketing executive David Jones boasts of “work[ing] closely” with David Cameron and the Conservative Party in the UK and having been tasked to “create and lead the Tck Tck Tck, Time for Climate Justice Campaign.”

new academy chains which runs academies on US charter school lines. In 2007, at ARK's seventh annual fundraiser, Geldof and Tony Blair were in attendance so it is appropriate that ARK's patrons include two close associates of Geldof's, the first is the 'human rights' crooner Sir Elton John and the second is the former World Bank economist Dambisa Moyo.

Moyo is the author of *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa* (2009), and she vividly expresses her humanitarian commitment through service on the boards of Barclays, SABMiller PLC and the global independent oil and gas exploration and production company, Lundin Petroleum.<sup>42</sup> With “her total unflinching faith in markets as the ultimate solution, and her silence on issues of social justice” Moyo's book sits comfortably with the ambitions of the “Bono-Bob Geldof-driven development industry that is convinced that the ingredients of lifting the wretched of the earth out of poverty include higher economic growth, liberalised markets, good governance, better-funded NGOs and, most important of all, more aid”.<sup>43</sup>

As one Leftist critic of the aid industry (and of Geldof in particular) reminds us:

To understand the Geldof phenomenon, we need to look historically at the role that Africa has played in the European imagination and in global capitalism. Geldof's crusade and attitude is not new. He is only the latest in a long line of European men whose personal mission has been to transform Africa and Africans. David Livingstone, the celebrity of his day, embarked on a similar crusade in the late 19th century, painting Africa as a land of “evil,” of hopelessness and of child-like humans. His mission was to raise money to pursue his personal ambitions.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Lukas Lundin a board member of Lundin Petroleum serves as the chair of Lundin Mining, a corporation whose CEO, Phil Wright, is the former president of Freeport-McMoran's Tenke Mining.

<sup>43</sup> Rasna Warah, “The development myth,” *Znet*, May 12, 2009.

<sup>44</sup> Patricia Daley, “Bob Geldof and the Livingstone connection: Africa not yet saved?,” *Pambazuka News*, Issue 214, 2005.

In this manner, “Livingstone’s and Geldof’s humanitarianism fits well with the demands of global capitalism, serving to obscure distinct phases in the exploitation of Africa”.

### **Making a Commission *from* Africa**

Considering Geldof’s commitment to capital, it is fitting that in the process of creating the 8 Mile Fund that he should have sought out the muscle of JPMorgan Chase adviser and former British Prime Minister/war criminal, Tony Blair. Blair is also the founder of the Tony Blair Africa Governance Initiative a charity that seeks to implement the findings of the 2005 Commission for Africa, a Commission which Blair set up (with the help of Geldof) to ostensibly review the international community’s role in Africa’s development path. But given Britain’s ongoing commitment to imperialism and neo-colonialism it is impossible to see the Blair Commission for Africa as anything other than a whitewash of Britain’s brutal foreign policy. Thus while in existence the Commission clearly served a useful PR function for the ruling class, providing a vital strategizing arena for neoliberal elites (especially for those of African origins), as it was tasked with producing clear recommendations for the G8 summit that was to be held in Gleneagles, Scotland, in 2005.

This was ground on which Geldof felt at home, and he happily joined the former head of the IMF, Michel Camdessus (1987-2000), and many of Africa’s most powerful leaders in planning the continued and expanded exploitation of Africa by transnational capital. Another prominent Commission member worth mentioning by name was the head of the African Center for Economic Transformation, K.Y. Amoako, who went on to become a key advisor to Bono’s ONE Campaign. Another notable policy adviser to the ONE Campaign is former Commission on Africa senior adviser and recent World Bank employee, Paul Collier, who in 2008 published the humanitarian imperialist propaganda spiel *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ashley Smith points out that Collier’s book is a “modern recasting of the old colonialist ‘civilizing mission,’” which “calls for outside intervention by wealthy nations such as the United States into what he



Perhaps the key person involved in Commission for Africa was the former World Bank chief economist, Lord Stern, who acted as the Commission's director of policy and research; another notable individual who worked closely with Lord Stern on the Commission was Paul Valley, the person who ghost-wrote Geldof's autobiography, *Is That It?* (1986) and had "travelled with Geldof across Africa to decide how to spend the \$100m raised by Live Aid." Valley himself is a leading theorist of Christian-inspired humanitarianism and is the author of numerous books, although his most influential contribution was *Bad Samaritans: First World Ethics and Third World Debt* (1990) which is widely credited as providing inspiration for the Jubilee 2000 campaign. He was also involved with the organization of Live8, and in 2005 Valley coauthored (with Geldof) one of his latest books titled *Geldof in Africa*.

Under Blair's watchful chairmanship of the Commission for Africa Geldof happily worked with fellow neoliberal oppressor, Meles Zenawi: no doubt the dubious couple reminisced about their joint experiences of Geldof's first 'aid' foray. Zenawi of course being the former chair of the Tigrayan Peoples' Liberation Front, who since 1995 has been the dictatorial Prime Minister of Ethiopia (prior to this he had been President since overthrowing the Derg in 1991). Likewise, another Commission for Africa participant, former Tanzanian national, Anna Tibajjuka, could connect with the good 'aid' days as she currently works with Maurice Strong (the UN's former aid point man in Ethiopia) at the 'sustainable development' venture LEAD International, and is herself a leading 'humanitarian' activist at the UN. Also of relevance, Tibajjuka is a trustee of the British-based Television Trust for the Environment created by neoliberal development agencies and media outlets, which describe their role as "mak[ing] films that set agendas and change lives." The future of humanitarian imperialism is clearly in safe hands.

The final and perhaps most significant person, other than

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calls 'post-conflict' poor nations, combining targeted aid and economic restructuring under long-term military occupation." Ashley Smith, "Haiti after the quake: Imperialism with a human face," *International Socialist Review*, March-April 2010.

Geldof, who worked with Lord Stern and Valley in organizing the Commission for Africa was the Head of the Secretariat to the Commission, 'food aid' impresario Myles Wickstead; who just prior to joining the Commission had been based in Addis Ababa as the British Ambassador to Ethiopia and Djibouti. Wickstead's imperial resume is particularly impressive, as after completing his work at the Commission he went on to become the vice chair of the (Orwellian) Westminster Foundation for Democracy, serve on Comic Relief's international grants committee, and become the chair of the 'humanitarian' One World Media - a group whose patron is television journalist Jon Snow, the bastion of liberal imperialists.<sup>46</sup> One might add that longtime broadcasting executive, Carol Haslam, who embarked on her media career in Ethiopia in the 1960s, is a fellow trustee of One World Media, and in the past served as the communications adviser to Maurice Strong's Brundtland Commission.

Bearing this in mind, it is significant that in 2008 One World Media teamed up with the Television Trust for the Environment (where Haslam was also formerly based) to support five journalists to go to developing countries to provide supportive propaganda for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, contrary to such feel good PR, Professor Ian Taylor brings us back to earth when he points out that: "to set in place structures to allow Africa to reach the MDGs would require a fundamental political and societal change, not some mere technocratic policy tinkering, nor a development policy merely predicated on increased aid giving".<sup>47</sup> Such changes are certainly not on the cards, and Taylor's scathing criticisms of both the Commission on Africa and the MDGs have been received with outright hostility by Wickstead and the rest of the development establishment.

### **Close Your Minds and Give Your Money!**

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<sup>46</sup> Michael Barker, "Jon Snow's big society," *Swans Commentary*, August 29, 2011

<sup>47</sup> Ian Taylor, "The Millennium Development Goals and Africa: Challenges facing the Commonwealth," *The Round Table*, 95 (385), 2006, p.378.

Contrary to the pleasant sounding rhetoric accompanying the entire Band Aid phenomena, Band Aid and its offshoots have always worked closely with imperialist policy agendas. Thus the Band Aid Trust still exists, with the most recent revival of their formula for deception being the Live8 concert, which was held in 2005 and again relied heavily upon the two most famous celebrity big hitters, Geldof and Bono. While Geldof and Bono's initial approach to humanitarianism could at best be described as naïve, the power-struck duo are now quite obviously working hand-in-hand with neoliberal elites, not in solidarity with the poor and oppressed. So while the musicians involved in the first Band Aid project might argue that they were unaware of the means by which food aid is tied to imperialism the same could be not true of the artists who participated in the monumental corporate aid bonanza that was Live8. It was there after all that Geldof introduced Bill Gates to the millions watching Live8 as “the world’s greatest philanthropist”; George Monbiot appropriately observed that: “Geldof and Bono’s campaign for philanthropy portrays the enemies of the poor as their saviours.”<sup>48</sup>

Over the past three decades the formidable Bono-Geldof tag-team have provided a vital propaganda service to ruling elites. On a broader level too, it could be argued that their celebrity activism is a natural corollary to the politics of privatization. C. Wright Mills, in his seminal book *The Power Elite* (1953), dedicated an entire chapter to celebrities, observing that with the rise of national means of mass communication, “the institutional elite must now compete with and borrow prestige from these professionals in the world of the celebrity.” He thereby outlined the integral function that celebrity lives fulfill vis-a-vis the requirements of managing democracy, noting that “the liberal

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<sup>48</sup> George Monbiot, “Bards of the powerful,” *The Guardian*, June 21, 2005. For a critical discussion of elite interference in the anti-G8 protests, see Paul Hewson, “It’s the politics, stupid.” How neoliberal politicians, NGOS and rock stars hijacked the Global Justice Movement at Gleneagles... and how we let them. In: David Harvie, Keir Milburn, Ben Trott, and David Watts (eds), *Shut Them Down! The G8, Gleneagles 2005 and the Movement of Movements* (Dissent! and Autonomedia, 2005).

rhetoric - as a cloak for actual power - and the professional celebrity - as a status distraction - do permit the power elite conveniently to keep out of the limelight". Writing so many years ago, Mills was unsure as to whether the power elite would be content to rest uncelebrated; however, now, under neoliberal regimes of media and social management, the differences between interests of the jet setting crowd and other parts of the power elite have converged. Celebrities become political leaders, and politicians become world class 'actors,' while the real power behind these media-friendly figureheads remains in the hands of an increasingly concentrated economic elite.

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**SEVEN**

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## The Watchful Eye

With the Cold War running at full throttle, in 1957 the US ruling-class was waging wars against the working-class on numerous fronts. Overseas the CIA was sustaining the military budget of the Royal Lao Government in its civil war against local communists, while at home, the FBI was in the process of institutionalizing a secret war against their own population through their Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO). By October 1957, however, paranoia within military circles had reached newfound heights when the Soviet Union launched their Sputnik satellite into space. The resulting shockwaves that reverberated around the American establishment led to the Department of Defense creating the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), which soon “morphed into the agency within the Pentagon that funded advanced, ‘blue-skies’ research which could have military applications.” And perhaps the most famous outcome of ARPA’s diverse research experiments was the initiation of the forerunner of the modern-day internet, something that was first known as the ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network), and which first went online in the late 1960s.

Military utility was of course at the forefront of all ARPA’s exploratory research projects. So, during the early years of the

ARPANET – which originally operated via telephones lines -- its military progenitors were involved in honing other networking technologies too. One good example is the development of a packet-switched network known as ALOHA, that operated via radio communications and whose development was able to allow more effective “command-and-control in battlefield conditions.” Likewise, ARPA was simultaneously promoting research that utilized satellite communications “for linking seismic monitoring stations in Scandinavia (established to monitor Soviet nuclear testing) with the US”. With all these new computational networks rapidly evolving, in 1975 ARPA then transferred operational responsibility for the ARPANET to the Defense Communications Agency; and it was only in 1990 that the “era of formal military involvement in the operation of the Internet” came to an end, with the tried and tested networks soon being turned over to the corporate world.<sup>1</sup>

This militaristic history of the internet is fairly well-known, but what is less well understood is the internet’s longstanding entanglement with the US government’s anti-democratic counterinsurgency efforts. It is therefore a welcome development that this issue has now been taken up in Yasha Levine’s book, *Surveillance Valley: The Secret Military History of the Internet* (2018). Rather than simply focusing on the military roots of the internet -- which is connected to the huge role that defence funding played in steering university priorities with the launch of the Cold War -- Levine highlights some of the more direct ways that ARPA ensured that newly networked computers could be used to repress those forces in society that dared to question the US government’s capitalist growth priorities. But while Levine’s fresh take on this history helps provide relevant context to the darker side of the internet’s history, his analysis, especially in the later parts of the book, all too often veers off into the realm of unhelpful conspiracy theories. What is not a conspiracy though, is that the ruling-class looked to the internet as a sophisticated means of fulfilling their longstanding efforts to stifle anti-capitalist dissent.

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<sup>1</sup> John Naughton, “The evolution of the Internet: from military experiment to General Purpose Technology,” *Journal of Cyber Policy*, 1(1), 2016.

Especially in the late 1960s, the global agents of big business were facing ongoing threats to their efforts to impose their rule upon the working-class. This was as true in the United States as it was in France 1968. In America, the establishment dealt with this management dilemma with both the carrot and the stick. Direct military repression was therefore accompanied by the social engineering efforts of the mammoth capitalist philanthropies. With the most powerful philanthropies, which included the Ford and Rockefeller foundations, maintaining an intimate relationship with both the defence establishment and the CIA in directing research initiatives to shore up their collective imperial ambitions. These liberal foundations of course were better-known for their strategy of funding the type of moderate research/organizations that could undermine more radical (particularly revolutionary) efforts to break society away from its capitalist pathway, whether this be in the sphere of the trade unions or the civil rights movement. But the foundations always understood where their bread was buttered, and alongside their liberal activism they worked closely with the military establishment to sharpen the state's weapons of bloody intervention. ARPA's initial work in funding the creation of the ARPANET was instrumentalized as just one part of this class war.

Computers were viewed as a sophisticated means by which American capitalists could more efficiently organize their global "pacification efforts". They hoped the emergent opportunities opened-up by the ARPANET, and by networked computers more generally, would allow them "study and analyse people and political movements with the ultimate goal of predicting and preventing social upheaval."<sup>2</sup> Although far from democratic, these goals are hardly shocking, and they dovetailed with exactly the types of management strategies that led the big foundations and government agencies to invest so much of their wealth in encouraging a behaviourist turn within American universities. In 1969 the radical *Ramparts* magazine undertook a much-needed early expose of the foundations social engineering efforts, and in the second instalment of their three-part series they explained:

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<sup>2</sup> Levine, *Surveillance Valley*, p.7.

In backing the behaviorists, the foundation trustees had not only backed men whose goodwill they enjoyed (the very mechanism of grant-giving assures this) but whose ideas had a definite utility from their interested point of view. The emphasis on observable behavior, and the acceptance of the given socio-economic framework as the basis of analysis, together with a scientific bias against the kind of theoretical probing which calls into question the basis of the status quo order itself, were naturally congenial to the men who put up the millions (as, no doubt, was the fact that behavioral information which the scientists gathered about 'masses' exceeded that gathered about 'elites' by a factor of 100-1, according to behaviorist Karl Deutsch).

Moreover, the information gathered in survey research into the mass behavior of consumers, voters, trade unionists and organization members generally, as well as the techniques (e.g., of administration) developed out of the research, were obviously very useful from a manipulative point of view to the elites responsible for managing social systems and maximizing returns from the status quo. Behavioral studies soon were in high demand, from government to business directorates, from the military to the CIA.<sup>3</sup>

One short section of the final part of this *Ramparts* series outlined how a Ford Foundation grant had given rise to the creation of a Comparative Political Elites Archive Program at University of California, Berkeley in 1965. The article surmized: "In practice, the political elites studied [in this Program] turned out to be the ruling elites in communist countries and the potential revolutionary elites in countries within the U.S.'s imperial orbit." It then notes how "the Defense Department and the RAND Corporation were also participants in the Archive Program, which until recently was developing a kind of computerized international mug file."<sup>4</sup>

In spite of this history, the philanthropic patronage of networking technologies is something that is completely absent from

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<sup>3</sup> David Horowitz, "Billion dollar brains: How wealth puts knowledge in its pocket," *Ramparts*, May 1969.

<sup>4</sup> David Horowitz, "Sinews of empire," *Ramparts*, October 1969, p.39.



Levine's book. Nevertheless, in laying out the contours of ARPA's funding of various counterinsurgency programs (in coordination with both UC Berkeley and the RAND Corporation), Levine does cite a 1970 *Ramparts* article that did provide a useful discussion of how the big foundations (including Ford and Rockefeller) worked in coordination with ARPA and other US aid agencies on counterinsurgency research in Thailand. Skating over these facts, Levine only draws attention to the activities of the CIA-connected American Institutes for Research (AIR) – which received over \$1 million from ARPA. AIR's proposal had, as discussed in the *Ramparts* piece, assured the Pentagon that it would “help the Defence Department and the Thai government evaluate counter-insurgency programs, show both organizations how to do this for future programs, and indicate to the U.S. government how to apply similar counter-insurgency programs and evaluate them in other countries, including the United States.”<sup>5</sup> Levine notes that such foreign pacification methods were then applied within the US “to the thorny issues of class, race, and economic inequality” (which, it turns out, were funded by Ford and carried out by the Air Force think tank, RAND). He however neglects to draw a direct parallel between these domestic pacification efforts and the FBI's COINTELPRO against the left, which in December 1969 included the assassination of Black Panther leader Fred Hampton.

Another significant example of ARPA's interest in counter-insurgency operations that is discussed by Levine is something called Project Cambridge (known as Project CAM), which was proposed in 1968 by the then head of APRA, J.C.R. Licklider, and by the political scientist/“hardcore anticommunist” Ithiel de Sola Pool. Pool had ran MIT's Center for International Studies, which was funded by the CIA amongst others, and had worked in South Vietnam on ARPA's pacification programs between 1961 and 1968.<sup>6</sup> Not coincidentally, Pool had been a vocal defender of the disgraced Project Camelot, an earlier ARPA-run counter-insurgency initiative that was closed down

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<sup>5</sup> Banning Garrett, “The Dominoization of Thailand,” *Ramparts*, November 1970, p.12. Levine, *Surveillance Valley*, pp.30-1.

<sup>6</sup> Levine, *Surveillance Valley*, p.65.

in 1965 owing to the public controversy that surrounded its planned activities in Chile. In later years, the anti-democratic legacy of Project Camelot was seen in the organization of the CIA-sponsored coup that overthrew the socialist government of Salvador Allende in 1973. As Ellen Herman highlights in her book *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (University of California Press, 1995), this connection came through former Camelot consultant, Clark Abt, who in 1965 had previously been contracted by ARPA “to design a computer simulation game to be used for monitoring internal war in Latin America.” Herman explains:

Except for the addition of sophisticated computer technology, Camelot’s goal remained intact. Dubbed *Politica*, the game was first loaded with data about hundreds of social psychological variables in a given country: degree of group cohesiveness, levels of self-esteem, attitudes toward authority, and so on. Then it would ‘highlight those variables decisive for the description, indication, prediction, and control of internal revolutionary conflict.’

In the case of Chile, according to Daniel Del Solar, one of *Politica*’s inventors, the game’s results eventually gave the green light to policy-makers who favored murdering Allende in the plan to topple Chile’s leftist government. *Politica* had predicted that Chile would remain stable even after a military takeover and the president’s death. (pp.170-1)

Little wonder that when students first heard about Project CAM in 1968 they quickly organized protests against this ARPA project which they correctly saw as an attempt by the ruling elites to computerize data as a means of enabling better government control.<sup>7</sup> These protests

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<sup>7</sup> Levine, *Surveillance Valley*, pp.68-71. Andrew Benedict Mamo points out that the “claims made by the Cambridge Project scientists that computerized information processing would create a vastly expanded system of control worried activists. The Project made an easy target, given that it was funded almost entirely by ARPA and that many scholars in the Project were based at the CIA-funded Center for International Studies at MIT, where some scholars affiliated with the

ultimately proved unsuccessful, at least in as far as shutting down Project CAM was concerned. And rather than fade away, the military's interest in utilizing such research only grew, with the primary lesson seemingly learned being that such controversial research was better undertaken in the private sector (not in public institutions). "By the early 1970s," this led to the situation whereby "the knowledge that the national security state used for decision-making was not less but more opaque."<sup>8</sup> Moreover, a Senate investigation undertaken in 1971 only confirmed the fears of many activists about the extent of digital surveillance. Levine writes that the Senate Committee...

...established that the US Army had amassed a powerful domestic intelligence presence and had 'developed a massive system for monitoring virtually all political protest in the United States.' There were over 300 regional 'record centers' nationwide, with many containing more than 100,000 cards on 'personalities of interest.' By the end of 1970, a national defence intelligence centre had 25 million files on individuals and 760,000 files on 'organizations and incidents.' These files were full of lurid details - sexual preferences, extramarital affairs, and a particular emphasis on alleged homosexuality - things that had nothing to do with the task at hand: gathering evidence on people's supposed ties to foreign governments and their participation in criminal plots. (pp.85-6)

Drawing upon the evidence presented in 1975 by NBC journalist Ford Rowan, Levine argues that rather than these files being destroyed (as

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Project (such as Ithiel Pool) were studying Vietnamese society and communist movements." Mamo, *Post-industrial engineering: Computer science and the organization of white-collar work, 1945-1975*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2011, p.166.

<sup>8</sup> Joy Rohde, "From expert democracy to beltway banditry: How the antiwar movement expanded the military- academic- Industrial complex," in: Mark Solovey and Hamilton Cravens (eds.), *Cold War Social Science: Knowledge Production, Liberal Democracy, and Human Nature* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), p.148.

was promised by the military), it seems that the data was simply fed into “a new real-time data analysis and retrieval system hooked up the ARPANET.”<sup>9</sup> But whether more conclusive evidence ever eventuates to prove whether this happened or not, what is clear is that the military and intelligence agencies had everything to gain from using the ARPANET in this way, and had (and still have) no qualms about undertaking illegal activities in their relentless pursuit of power. As liberal historian Frank Donner concluded in his 1980 book *The Age of Surveillance: The Aims and Methods of America’s Political Intelligence System*, even in the wake of the “unprecedented scrutiny” of the domestic intelligence community:

...the prospect is far from remote of a revival of domestic political intelligence activities in response to the same social and political pressures that have in the past dominated American public life. Intelligence as a means of containing movements for change, as a system of control, is simply too powerful a weapon in a highly conservative economic and social order lightly to be abandoned. The continuing worldwide erosion of capitalist economic and social structures has clothed the defense of the status quo with a new urgency in a political order governed by constitutional norms restraining official state action. Intelligence is an almost inevitable weapon of choice: secrecy permits it to function without accountability or control by the constitutional standards that prohibit interference with political expression. (pp.452-3)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Levine, *Surveillance Valley*, p.87. Other evidence cited included Norman Sandler and Mike McNamee, "Computers carried Army files' MIT investigation underway," *The Tech*, 96 (17), April 11, 1975, p.1. After making his controversial revelations on NBC, Rowan would go on to publish them in his book *Techno-Spies: The Secret Network That Spies on You-and You* (G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1978).

<sup>10</sup> As Donner goes on to explain: “The theme of a foreign espionage threat is not confined to the propaganda of rightists and their intelligence establishment allies. Early in 1978 President Carter issued an executive order imposing limitations on intelligence agencies but authorizing electronic surveillance of a subject, even though a citizen of the United States, if the government has reason to believe that he

Fast forward to the 1990s; and with the eventual turning of the internet over to corporate profiteers it was only a matter of time before the surveillance opportunities offered by such far-reaching networks would become dominated by corporate giants. The likes of Facebook and Google, and a wide range of other powerful corporate interests, have already proved more than willing to sell our personal information to the highest bidder, or simply hand it over to intelligence agencies in the interest of allegedly protecting national security. However, it is at this point in the dark story of state and corporate surveillance, that Levine makes the unfortunate choice to plunge into the world of conspiracy theories. He does this by asserting that even the widely used encryption tools used by privacy activists, like The Tor Project, primarily serve as a simple means by which the US intelligence apparatus is able to monitor the online activities of those who believe their communications are encrypted. After showing that Tor was created by the intelligence community (true); that Tor obtains funding from US propaganda agencies (true); and that intelligence agents utilize Tor to disguise their presence on the internet (true); he then suggests that Tor is not able to protect the privacy of online activities (most likely false). On the latter point he cites evidence from Edward Snowden's leaked NSA documents which included a 2012 PowerPoint presentation, which according to Levine apparently...

... showed that multiple NSA programs could punch through Tor's defences and possibly even uncloak the network's traffic on a 'wide-scale.' They also showed that the spy agency saw Tor as a useful tool that concentrated potential 'targets' in one convenient location. In a word, the NSA saw Tor as a honeypot. (p.264)

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or she may be 'an agent of a foreign power.' Under this order an intelligence agency could wiretap an American citizen by convincing the Attorney General in secret representations that the such is such an agent. This, in effect, reaffirms the Nixon administration claim to an inherent executive power to bypass the search and seizure warrant requirements of the Fourth Amendment." (p.455)

But the leaked “Tor Stinks” slide presentation referred to here should not be counted as definitive proof that Tor is unsafe. For one, Tor programmers are continually making its protocols more effective. Moreover, it is not beyond the realms of possibility that the NSA presentation is itself disinformation, and as one writer noted: “it may be easier to scare people away from Tor, rather than cracking the network itself.”<sup>11</sup>

That said, Levine is correct in outlining that Tor’s receipt of funding from the ruling-class is highly problematic, and he is right that encryption activists should be more critical of the motives of such elite funders. Hence looking at new ways to build sustainable sources of funding which is obtained directly from the working-class must now become a priority for privacy activists utilizing Tor.

So, even though Levine is correct in stating that Tor is receiving money from US government agencies that themselves have served as covert propaganda outlets for the government, considering the important nature of Levine’s concerns he needs to be more careful about laying false accusations against others. For example, Levine has previously argued that some of his critics have “tried to discredit” his writings “with crude insults, misdirection, and outright lies, even going as far as to claim that I’m funded by the CIA.”<sup>12</sup> Here on the accusation of CIA-funding Levine explained that the *Los Angeles Review of Books* “ran an essay by a freelance journalist alleging that my reporting was funded by the CIA.”<sup>13</sup> Yet the author of this essay -- a post-modern

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<sup>11</sup> Robbie Fordyce, “Sorry NSA, but the Tor network is secure - and it’s here to stay,” *The Conversation*, October 7, 2013; also see Eerke Boiten and Julio Hernandez-Castro, “Can you really be identified on Tor or is that just what the cops want you to believe?,” *The Conversation*, July 25, 2014; J.M. Porup, “Building a new Tor that can resist next-generation state surveillance,” *ARS Technica*, August 31, 2016; and Laurent Gayard, *Darknet: Geopolitics and Uses - Volume 2* (Wiley, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Levine, “How leading Tor developers and advocates tried to smear me after I reported their US Government ties,” *Pando*, November 14, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Levine, *Surveillance Valley*, p.217. Halpin stated: “If Levine is

theorist and anarchist named Harry Halpin (who has a Ph.D in Informatics) – didn't allege that Levine was financed by the CIA. Instead, Halpin merely ridiculed Levine because of his overwhelming focus on Tor's elite funding.<sup>14</sup>

All the same, it is ironic that the million-dollar financier of Halpin's own work, Radio Free Asia, does actually have its roots in the CIA's covert propaganda war; as Radio Free Asia is an organization whose operations are presently overseen by the US Agency for Global Media (the agency that funds The Tor Project). The generous financier of Halpin's activities, it turns out, is the Open Technology Fund – a Fund that was established in 2012 by Radio Free Asia. Here, Levine raises an important observation in his book when he highlights that the Open Technology Fund's imperial...

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looking for a pot of magical money that has not been touched by the evils of this world, he could always look at his own employer PandoDaily. Levine and PandoDaily are publicly funded by Greylock Partners, who share senior partners with In-Q-Tel, the venture capital wing of the CIA. So one could argue that the CIA funded Yasha Levine when he exposed that the State Department funded Tor in order to defend CIA agents. The problem with conspiracy theories – including any analysis of conspiracies as networks – is that one immediately runs up against the incommensurable reality of late capitalism: everything is actually connected.”

<sup>14</sup> Harry Halpin, “What is Enlightenment?: Google, Wikileaks, and the reorganization of the world,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, November 2, 2014; Levine, “Almost everyone involved in developing Tor was (or is) funded by the US government,” *Pando*, July 16, 2015. “Turns out that Halpin's next-generation secure communications outfit, called LEAP, took more than \$1 million from Radio Free Asia's Open Technology Fund. Somewhat ironically, LEAP's technology powers the VPN services of RiseUp.Net, the radical anarchist tech collective that provides activists with email and secure communications tools (and forces you to sign a thinly veiled anti-Communist pledge before giving you an account).” Levine, “Internet privacy, funded by spooks: A brief history of the BBG,” *Pando*, March 1, 2015.

...advisory board [has] included big names from the Columbia Journalism School, the Electronic Frontier Foundation, the Ford Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Google, Slack, and Mozilla. Andrew McLaughlin, the former head of Google's public relations team who had brought in Al Gore to talk a Californian state senator into cancelling legislation that would regulate Gmail's email scanning program, was part of the OTF team. (p.256)

Another key person involved in running Radio Free Asia's Open Technology Fund includes their Director of Digital Safety, Lindsay Beck. Prior to joining the Fund in 2014 Beck had helped organize internet freedom projects for two agencies that are part of the US government's global democracy manipulating apparatus, Freedom House and the National Democratic Institute, both of which work closely with the US government's so-called National Endowment for Democracy (NED).<sup>15</sup>

So, in the same way that "human rights" and "democracy" are instrumentalized as a weapon in the service of US imperialism, elites continue to promote aspects of an "Internet Freedom" campaign to serve the same ends. This means that Levine is right to say that the US government is content to weaponize social media against their political enemies, and this of course has included the use of Tor.<sup>16</sup> But we should be clear that this does not mean that the US government can utilize such cyber weapons to instigate revolutions in enemy countries: all it means is that elite policy makers have recognized the utility of using such technological tools to gain influence among certain dissident circles.

Of course, the US government's aim to manipulate social media is problematic for all working-class activists who are risking their

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<sup>15</sup> For two important critiques of the National Endowment for Democracy, see Kim Scipes, *AFL-CIO's Secret War against Developing Country Workers: Solidarity or Sabotage?* (Lexington Books, 2010); and William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, U.S. Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> Levine, *Surveillance Valley*, pp.248-51.



lives to struggle to democratize their own societies, which, again, is why privacy activists must determinedly resist all efforts for powerful elite interests to ingratiate themselves into the promotion of encryption technologies. However, adopting a more conspiratorial understanding of such imperialist interventions, Levine massively overstates the influence of tools like Tor and the power of the ruling-class when he mistakenly writes:

The Arab Spring provided the US government with the configuration it was looking for. Social media, combined with technologies like Tor, could be tapped to bring huge masses of people onto the streets and could even trigger revolutions. (p.251)

Liberals, like Levine, who quite clearly do not have the faith in the ability of working-class movements to abolish capitalism, consequently, remain confused about how to move forward to democratize society. Levine firstly, and incorrectly, presents capitalist elites as all-omnipotent in their ability to manipulate social media and social change, and then secondly, offers no meaningful solutions for how to remedy his Orwellian nightmare. His only solutions involve making abstract calls for people to “understand and democratize the internet” so we can “deploy its power in the service of democratic and humanistic values”.<sup>17</sup>

Limited intellectual arguments like these are promoted by other liberals too, like for instance leading Electronic Frontier Foundation activist, Jillian York, who is cognizant of the same problems as Levine but believes that at the present moment the only way forward is for progressive activists to continue to collaborate with imperialist funding agencies. York has therefore acknowledged that she “fundamentally believe[s] that the State Department’s ‘Internet freedom agenda’ is at heart an agenda of regime change”<sup>18</sup> -- a statement from a blog post she made that is approvingly cited by Levine to support his own mistaken

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<sup>17</sup> Levine, *Surveillance Valley*, p.274.

<sup>18</sup> Jillian York, “There are other funding options than the USG,” February 6, 2015. Levine, *Surveillance Valley*, p.251. (n.101, p.348)

conclusions. But, bound by her own elitist proclivities, York's next sentence (and main argument) -- which is ignored by Levine -- leads her to conclude:

And yet I also sit on the advisory committee of the Open Technology Fund because I believe that, if this money exists, then we have the obligation to guide it in the right direction, rather than allowing it to be funneled to snake oil projects, groups that don't accept criticism of their potentially risky tools, and other bad actors (you know who you are).

Distressed by the power of capitalist funders to hijack progressive forces in society she ends by saying:

It pains me to say this, but this is not an ideal world that we live in, and therefore I cannot stand as strongly against the US Internet freedom agenda as I would like, lest it result in the defunding of all of these important projects. I do, however, think that it's our duty to ensure that these projects and tools have alternative revenue streams, so that we can cease to be dependent on a pot of money that is most often in direct contradiction to our goals.

This final point highlights the problematic nature of activists who are committed to progressive causes having their activism sustained by capitalists as there can be no doubting that their well-intentioned hard work is ultimately always going to be undermined and co-opted by ruling elites. Nevertheless, York, although arguably wrong for making the case to continue to work as an advisor for an imperial funding agency, does correctly point to the idea that the central obligation of any truly emancipatory project must be to continually seek to break with the dictates of capitalism. This means that such projects must seek to only be dependent on the direct funding provided by millions of ordinary people, the working-class. No small task, but one that is necessary if we are ever to create the type of socialist mass movements that will be needed to truly break the back of capitalism!

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**EIGHT**

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## Pharisaic Philanthropy and the Plunder of Greece

*“To give away money is an easy matter and in any man’s power. But to decide to whom to give it, and how much, and when, and for what purpose and how, is neither in every man’s power nor an easy matter.”—Aristotle*

The ongoing and historic abuses that have been imposed upon the citizens of Greece by their so-called leaders are illustrative of the undemocratic lengths by which the ruling-class will go to suppress the collective aspirations of the working-class. Over the past century Greek workers have been waged in a perpetual struggle for a socialist alternative to their ongoing oppression. This has brought the Greek people into confrontation with all manner of political obstacles, whether this be the eliminationist forces of fascism, or the false promises of emancipation that have been sown by their political leaders (most recently by Syriza).<sup>1</sup> However, one enduring capitalist barrier to socialist social change that demands closer scrutiny remains the charitable business of philanthropy.

Etymologically-speaking, the word philanthropy is derived from the Greek *philanthropia* or love of mankind, and so it bears

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<sup>1</sup> Costas Lapavitsas, *The Left Case Against the EU* (Polity Press, 2018).

emphasizing that in the case of the do-gooding practices undertaken by capitalist elites, the guiding premise of their activities is merely the love of money. Hence philanthropy remains a vital tool in the armoury of the ruling-class that they use to disguise their defence of capitalist-driven inequality.

Writing in 1845, revolutionary socialist Frederick Engels fumed that the members of the ruling-class act as though they have rendered the working-class “a service in first sucking out their very life-blood and then practising [their] self-complacent, Pharisaic philanthropy upon them, placing [them]selves before the world as mighty benefactors of humanity,” when they “give back to the plundered victims the hundredth part of what belongs to them!”<sup>2</sup> This point was repeated a few years later in Karl Marx’s and Engels barnstorming pamphlet, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), wherein they explained that a certain part of the capitalist class including so-called “philanthropists [and] humanitarians” has always been “desirous of redressing social grievances, in order to secure the continued existence” of their class-based privileges.<sup>3</sup>

Two hundred years after first being published as a touchstone for revolutionary activism, one wonders what Marx and Engels would have made of Yanis Varoufakis’s 2018 introduction to their *Manifesto*. Especially because Syriza’s former finance minister remains rather famous for his well-vocalized pessimism about the ability of the working-class to transform society: a belief which helps explain why Varoufakis serves up the counterproductive political counsel that promotes the need to reform the anti-democratic bosses club that is the European Union. Making matters worse Varoufakis admits to his lack of faith in the class struggle in his introduction to the *Communist Manifesto* of all places. Thus, when reflecting upon the contents of his memoirs – which concerned the time that he served as Syriza’s finance minister – he writes that seen from the perspective of *The Communist Manifesto*...

...the true historical agents were confined to cameo appearances

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<sup>2</sup> Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845).

<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848).

or to the role of quasi-passive victims. ‘Where is the proletariat in your story?’ I can almost hear Marx and Engels screaming at me now. ‘Should they not be the ones confronting capitalism’s most powerful, with you supporting from the sidelines?’<sup>4</sup>

Too right! I am sure they would be shouting that at him, just as many other living Marxists already are; it is just that Varoufakis isn’t willing to listen to such criticisms. Admittedly, at some esoteric level Varoufakis may have a partial grasp of Marxism, but it was his profound pessimism in the power of the working-class that ultimately led to his refusal to confront the undemocratic dictates of the EU with the full weight of the people behind him. Both Varoufakis and the leadership of Syriza had every opportunity to take on the EU, but this was an approach that they never once countenanced.

Nevertheless, the one positive thing that can be said about Varoufakis is that at least he appreciates how ruling-class philanthropy/governmental aid has been used to undermine mass struggle. For elites, giving has two purposes: first, it helps them feel generous (which is critical for their sense of righteousness), but second, and most importantly it helps them smooth off the harsher edges of capitalist exploitation. Money that is distributed as ‘aid’ also has obvious strings attached to it, which means that philanthropic largesse can always be withheld if its recipient fails to prove themselves suitably supine. Thus, as Varoufakis observed in his 2011 book *The Global Minotaur: America, The True Origins of the Financial Crisis and the Future of the World Economy*, following the Second World War the US government instigated a colossal philanthropic effort known as the Marshall Plan – a project which in many ways “may be regarded as the progenitor of today’s European Union (EU).” He adds how: “Washington decided, early on, that Europe and Japan could only be ‘stabilized’ politically if some rather unsavoury characters were co-opted.”<sup>5</sup> Here in a footnote to this point Varoufakis explains:

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<sup>4</sup> Yanis Varoufakis, “Marx predicted our present crisis – and points the way out,” *The Guardian*, April 20, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Yanis Varoufakis, *The Global Minotaur: America, The True Origins of the Financial Crisis and the Future of the World Economy* (Zed

For example, in 1946 America altered course drastically in Greece, forging an alliance with Greek Nazi collaborators against the Left. At around the same time, it made its peace with the Franco and the Salazar regimes on the Iberian Peninsula. Soon after, it turned decidedly against anti-colonial movements in Africa, Indochina and even Cyprus - movements toward which it had been hitherto, if not sympathetic, at least neutral. (p.231)

These are significant points, and Varoufakis then goes on to observe (albeit in passing) how Robert Marjolin, a leading figure in the implementation of the Marshall Plan, “had spent his formative pre-war years as a Rockefeller [Foundation] fellow at Harvard.” Adding that “while there, he participated in a reading group dedicated to understanding Keynes’ General Theory” with John Kenneth Galbraith and Paul Samuelson.<sup>6</sup> But while it is important to acknowledge that Rockefeller monies supported some of the Keynesian economists whose ideas rose to prominence in the post-1945 period, Rockefeller grants likewise funded the neoliberal research of individuals like Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, whose academic explorations would only come to the fore in the 1970s.<sup>7</sup>

Although Varoufakis does not specifically address the issue of foundation philanthropy within his 2011 book, the Rockefeller

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Books, 2011), p.73, p.79. “Students of European integration are taught that the European Union started life in the form of the ECSC [European Coal and Steel Community]. What they are less likely to come across is the well-kept secret that it was the United States that cajoled, pushed, threatened and sweet-talked the Europeans into putting it together.” (p.75)

<sup>6</sup> Varoufakis, *The Global Minotaur*, p.231.

<sup>7</sup> Arguably, the ruling-class was forced to promote Keynesian economic policies in the West in the post-war period as a means of placating the increasingly militant demands of a well-organized working-class. And the implementation of these policies in part relied upon the previously unforeseen availability of cheap oil which fuelled the economic boom until the 1970s.

Foundation's connection with Greece is particularly pertinent to understanding this country's turbulent history. Thus, in the year following the formation of the foundation (in 1913), the Rockefeller family facilitated the Ludlow massacre wherein around 200 largely Greek immigrant miners were slaughtered by armed forces working in the service of John D. Rockefeller, and his son John D. Rockefeller, Jr. In this ultimately tragic act of workers' resistance to America's most powerful robber baron, the local leader of the United Mineworkers of America during this strike was the Greek immigrant Louis Tikas, and for this honour he was summarily executed by Rockefeller's men on the day of the massacre. Labor historian Philip Foner summarizes some of the findings of the official investigations into the role played by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. during this massacre.<sup>8</sup>

After explaining that he had not visited Colorado for ten years and had relied completely for information about the labor situation on the word of the officials of the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company (a statement which the Commission on Industrial Relations later characterized as bearing no semblance to the truth), Rockefeller gave his complete support to the company officials in Denver. He insisted, first, that the strike was simply the work of outside agitators and that the miners themselves had no legitimate grievance; and secondly, that the 'open shop' represented a great American principle in defense of which no sacrifice was too great. (p.209)

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<sup>8</sup> Philip Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States: Vol 5 - The AFL in the Progressive Era, 1910-1915* (International Publishers, 1980). Also read Scott Martelle's *Blood Passion: the Ludlow Massacre and Class War in the American West* (Rutgers University Press, 2008); Randall McGuire, *Archaeology as Political Action* (University of California Press, 2008); Graham Adams, *The Age of Industrial Violence, 1910-1915: The Activities and Findings of the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations* (Columbia University Press, 1966); and Anthony DeStefanis, "The road to Ludlow: breaking the 1913-14 Southern Colorado Coal Strike," *Journal of the Historical Society*, 12(2), September 2012.

Foner continued:

The two government agencies that heard Rockefeller's testimony concluded that the strike could have been settled, but that 'Rockefeller would rather spend the money of the company for guns, pay of detectives and mine guards and starve the miners into submission.' (p.210)

In many ways we should be thankful that Louis Tikas' role in fighting for justice against Rockefeller has now been immortalized in the powerful 2014 documentary *Palikari: Louis Tikas and the Ludlow Massacre*. As you might expect, all the talking heads featured in the film were united in believing the massacre was wrong and that the workers were suffering unbearable living conditions as a result of their exploitation by the Rockefeller family. But when it comes to casting critical judgement on the powerful mine owner the documentary makers hedge their bets. One featured professor simply states that Rockefeller was misinformed and was basically an okay guy, while another professor, whose grandfather lived through the massacre, gives the tyrant the benefit of the doubt. The most critical voice is provided by poet laureate David Wilson (author of the 2007 novel *Ludlow*) who stated that he holds more mixed views on Rockefeller's personal responsibility stating "it reminds me of the right-wing in America now; they think they are being virtuous, they think they are doing good for America..."<sup>9</sup> The highlighting of these dubious views

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<sup>9</sup> The two uncritical professors were Thomas Andrews (author of *Killing for Coal*) and Annaliese Bonacquista (whose grandfather lived through the Ludlow Massacre). Only three experts featured in the section on the documentary focusing on Rockefeller, so it is noteworthy that the academic work of some of the other featured talking heads were on the record as being extremely critical of Rockefeller. The first of these writers is Professor Elliott Gorn author of *Mother Jones: The Most Dangerous Woman in America* (Hill & Wang, 2002), a book which highlights how even Mother Jones was temporarily taken in by Rockefeller Jr.'s pretence of ignorance. The second critic of Rockefeller Jr., who appears to be the only revolutionary academic featured in the documentary (and who is the



represents a serious shortcoming on the part of the filmmakers. Nevertheless, this whitewashing of the Rockefeller's role in this massacre remains in keeping with the ideological orientation of the documentary's executive producer, Gregory Pappas – a patriotic PR executive and stalwart Democrat (and keen supporter of Hilary Clinton).<sup>10</sup>

In light of Pappas' support of the Democrats, in 2016 the filmmaker penned an obituary for John Brademas (1927-2016), a Greek-American who had served as the Democratic Congressman for Indiana from 1959 until 1981 before being recruited to join the Rockefeller Foundation's board of trustees.<sup>11</sup> In writing the obituary Pappas however makes an important historical point when he highlights how "Throughout the military dictatorship in Greece" – which extended from 1967 until 1974, –Brademas had stood apart from most other Democrats by opposing the military generals who had seized power and by "vehemently" opposing U.S. aid to the Greek despots. Pappas explained how Brademas had "clashed" with fellow Greek American Democratic Party Congressmen, Peter Kyros and Gus Yatron, who had wrongly "believed that the junta saved Greece from communism." This is all true, which is why it so grating that the

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only talking head to speak in Greek) is Dr Kostis Karpozilos, who was the scriptwriter of the documentary *Greek-American Radicals: the Untold Story* (2013). The final academic to feature in the documentary as a talking head is Zeese Papanikolas author of *Buried Unsung, Louis Tikas and the Ludlow Massacre* (University of Nebraska Press, 1991); in this book whose foreword (written by Wallace Stegner) notes that the massacre "may or may not have touched the conscience" of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. – "he seems to have been more misled and confused than personally guilty." (p.xvii)

<sup>10</sup> In 1997 Pappas even emulated Rockefeller's charitable work when even established his Greek America Foundation to "promote, preserve and perpetuate the Greek culture, history and heritage in America."

<sup>11</sup> John Brademas was still listed as a Rockefeller trustee in 1982, and in later years he went on to serve as the chair of the US governments notorious National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

Tikas-documentary gives the Rockefeller interests a free pass.

To this day the US government continues to court far-right forces to defend their own capitalist investment interests, whether that threat comes from communists or social democrats. Rockefeller wealth likewise has its own long and sordid interests in supporting such anti-democratic intrigues. For instance, in the early 1930s Rockefeller, Jr. had, like many other elites, been inspired by Mussolini's fascist movement in Italy. In fact, the Rockefeller Center's Palazzo d'Italia was initially to be rented to the National Fascist Confederation of Industry, although the deal ended-up falling through. Moreover, in 1937 "Junior's flirtation with the fascist regime" was again emphasized when he commissioned Jose Maria Sert (who was soon to become Franco's ambassador to Italy), to paint an "unmistakeable fascist tableau" over the top of Diego Rivera's famous Marxist mural *Man at the Crossroads* (a controversial socialist themed mural which, in a fit of fury, Rockefeller had literally smashed from his walls).<sup>12</sup> Likewise, another far-right artist whose work still adorns the Rockefeller Center is the Italian American sculptor Attilio Piccirilli, whose crypto-fascist artwork had to be temporarily boarded up with planks during the World War II. Continuing this reactionary theme, in 1975 a bronze bust of Charles Lindbergh was then installed in the lobby of the Rockefeller Center - Lindbergh being most famous not only for his aeronautical feats but also for the support that he had leant to the Nazis during the War.

In contrast to the much-demonized socialist critics of fascism,<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Fitch, *The Assassination of New York* (Verso, 1993). Fitch mistakenly dates the creation of Sert's mural to 1940. For more on these controversies see Jules Stewart's *Gotham Rising: New York in the 1930s* (I.B. Tauris, 2016), pp.185-8. Sert was also considered to be a good friend of fellow fascist artist Salvador Dali; see Ian Gibson, *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dali* (Faber and Faber, 1997). Sert's pro-fascist contribution to the 1937 Paris World Fair is discussed in Miriam Basilio's *Visual Propaganda, Exhibitions, and the Spanish Civil War* (Routledge, 2016), p.174.

<sup>13</sup> In the twenties and thirties, the exiled leader of the Bolshevik Revolution, Leon Trotsky, was a prescient critic of the growing threat posed to the working-class by fascism across the world. Writing in

American agents of capitalism were, for the most part, reassured by the determined anti-Communism of both Mussolini and Hitler. American elites therefore actively courted favor with Il Duce throughout most of the twenties and thirties.<sup>14</sup> Indicative of such reactionary views, in November 1934 an editorial published in the *San Francisco Examiner* by conservative media mogul William Randolph Hearst asserted that:

Fascism is definitely a movement to oppose and offset Communism, and so prevent the least capable and the least creditable classes from getting control of government. Fascism will only come into existence in the United States when such a movement becomes really necessary for the prevention of

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1932 he argued that “Italian fascism was the immediate outgrowth of the betrayal by the [social democratic] reformists of the uprising of the Italian proletariat.” Mussolini’s violent seizure of power in October 1922 was warmly received by members of the American ruling-class precisely because Mussolini’s new fascist state – “a plebian movement in origin, directed and financed by big capitalist powers” – set about to ensure the annihilation of independent organizations of the working-class. But most tragically, despite Trotsky relentless efforts to counsel the German working-class on how to avoid Italy’s fate, the leading Communist and social democratic leaders in Germany failed to unite to defeat the Nazis. Trotsky’s writings on fascism were later brought together in the short pamphlet, *Fascism: What It Is and How To Fight It* (Pioneer Publishers, 1944); also see Clara Zetkin, “Fascism,” *Labour Monthly*, August 1923, pp.69-78.

<sup>14</sup> Gian Giacomo Migone, *The United States and Fascist Italy: The Rise of American Finance in Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2015); for earlier criticisms of the fascist inclinations of the American ruling-class, see George Seldes, *Facts and Fascism* (In Fact, Inc., 1943) and Seldes, *One Thousand Americans* (Boni & Gear, 1947). For a discussion of the relationship between Spivak and the Jewish community, see Laura Rosenzweig, *Hollywood’s Spies: The Undercover Surveillance of Nazis in Los Angeles* (New York University Press, 2017), chapter 7.

Communism.<sup>15</sup>

Liberal elites likewise drew consolation from fascism. Columbia University president, Nicholas Murray Butler, speaking to his students in September 1931, heaped praise upon Europe's "totalitarian" societies which had begun to emerge in Europe. He argued that totalitarianism produces "men of far greater intelligence, far stronger character and far more courage than the system of elections." This statement was delivered during Butler's term as the president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (a position he held from 1925 to 1945) – an organization that backed US entry into World War I, and for the duration of that bloodbath allowed its offices to be used by the "notorious war propaganda agency, the Committee on Public Information."<sup>16</sup> Little wonder that the Carnegie Endowment has always worked closely with the various Rockefeller foundations.

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<sup>15</sup> William Randolph Hearst, "Mr. Hearst on Communism and Fascism," *San Francisco Examiner*, 26 November 1934, p.1, quoted in Bradley Galka, "The business plot in the American press," MA Thesis, Kansas State University, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Inderjeet Parmar, "American power and philanthropic warfare: from the war to end all wars to the democratic peace," *Global Society*, 28(1), 2014, pp.54-69. The Endowment, following the same philanthropic trajectory of the Rockefeller Foundation, was first and foremost concerned with defending capitalist interests against the mobilization of the working-class. Hence much like the many manipulative labour management strategies that were promoted by Rockefeller concerns in the wake of the Ludlow Massacre, we can see a continuity with the evolution of the International Labor Organization, which James T. Shotwell, who represented the Endowment at the ILO, described as existing to act as "an alternative to violent revolution". James T. Shotwell, "The International Labor Organization as an alternative to violent revolution," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 166, March 1933. For a more recent discussion of such efforts at class collaboration, see Guy Fiti Sinclair, *To Reform the World: International Organizations and the Making of Modern States* (Oxford University Press, 2017), p.87. In 1927, Shotwell had served as the first chair of the advisory committee on international relations

Following the end of World War I, and especially in the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1917, elite ‘humanitarianism’ flourished in Greece and was sustained by the interventions of the American Red Cross. As one critic surmised regarding the political nature of this ostensibly charitable aid: “A steady flow of U.S. capital” along with humanitarian assistance would help “relieve the social and economic grievance of millions of civilians, and contain Bolshevism, impeding its spread into East Central Europe.”<sup>17</sup> By this time the Red Cross had already established a stable relationship with the Rockefellers’ philanthropic goals, and so it is appropriate that one of the first significant projects that the Rockefeller Foundation financed in Greece was a public health initiative (which had initially been pushed forward in the mid-twenties via the Rockefeller-backed League of Nations).<sup>18</sup>

Small matters like the 1936 seizure of power by General Metaxas’ regime may have meant violence for the people of Greece, but this did not stop the Rockefeller Foundation from working under his dictatorship on their anti-Malarial initiatives.<sup>19</sup> The foundations ambivalent respect for democratic rights was also informed their related health interventions in fascist Italy. So, when Mussolini forced

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of the Social Science Research Council – a research body which had been formed with support from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1923.

<sup>17</sup> Dimitra Giannuli, “American philanthropy in action: the American Red Cross in Greece, 1918-1923,” *East European Politics & Societies*, 10(1), 1995, p.108. Giannuli cites the following books: Benjamin Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921-1923* (Hoover Institution Press, 1974); Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (Hill and Wang, 1982).

<sup>18</sup> M. Patrick Cottrell, *The League of Nations: Enduring Legacies of the First Experiment at World Organization* (Routledge, 2018); Josep Barona, *The Rockefeller Foundation, Public Health and International Diplomacy, 1920-1945* (Pickering & Chatto, 2015).

<sup>19</sup> Dimitra Giannuli, “Repeated disappointment!: The Rockefeller Foundation and the reform of the Greek public health system, 1929-1940,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 7(1), 1998, pp.47-72.

his way to power in 1922 the Rockefeller Foundation was there on hand to help him launch a war on Malaria.<sup>20</sup> This significance of this intervention should not be downplayed, as this was a health campaign that “formed a central part of Fascist domestic policy, involving both the substance of the regime and the image it sought to project to the world.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Darwin Stapleton, “Internationalism and nationalism: The Rockefeller Foundation, public health, and malaria in Italy, 1923-1951,” *Parassitologia*, 42(1-2), June 2000, pp.127-34. Although Stapleton is an apologist for the Rockefeller philanthropies, he notes how in 1934 the medical fascists sent a personal message of thanks to John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (the then chairman of the trustees of the foundation) “who by coincidence was on holiday in Taormina in Sicily.” (p.222) In another essay, “Intellectuals flee from fascism: Rockefeller support of social scientists, 1933-1945” (2005), Stapleton, in an effort to defend the Rockefeller Foundation, makes a good case that one of primary drivers for the foundation to save selected Jewish intellectuals from fascism owed much to the fact that “the Rockefeller Foundation as a whole saw that its investment in research and ideas might disappear”.

<sup>21</sup> Frank Snowden, *The Conquest of Malaria, Italy, 1900-1962* (Yale University Press, 2006), p.142. Snowden writes: “Perhaps the most sinister aspect of the Fascist antimalarial campaign in the Pontine Marshes was its integration into an overarching scheme to transform Italy into a racial utopia as well as a sanitary one. The newly reclaimed Pontine Marshes became the testing ground for a program to breed an Italian superrace.” (p.173) Moreover, with the end of World War II, the Rockefeller’s apparent success with the mass application of DDT apparently demonstrated that they had mastered a new technofix to combat the scourge of Malaria. The evidence from the Italian test-case however did not support such conclusions, and the Rockefeller’s primary successor in the health field, the World Health Organization, ending up drawing “misleading lessons from the Italian triumph. Contrary to the expectations of its ardent proponents, DDT—like quinine and Paris Green before it—was not a panacea but a tool with its own uses and limitations.” (p.212) “Here was the strategy that Fred Soper and the Rockefeller Foundation later made famous as

The small issue of providing strategic philanthropy to murderous regimes has never bothered the conscience of the ruling-class. For such elites, international health programs are considered just another weapon in the class war, a tool which has the added bonus of increasingly the productivity of workers and hence of boosting corporate profits. In 1954, a vice-president of Boston-based United Fruit Company -- a business whose vast wealth was extracted from farmers in Guatemala -- succinctly explained the undergirding reasons for his company's support of local public health programs when he said:

The work that has been done was done for a very practical hard-headed reason -- that of self-interest ... sick people cannot work.... It may have been an enlightened self-interest but it was largely done because they [American Companies] could not get out the ore, or raise the bananas or pump the oil unless these fundamentals were taken care of.<sup>22</sup>

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the “American” strategy to combat malaria by relying solely on chemicals, with no need to tackle complex issues involving living conditions and the relationships of human beings to one another and to their environment. In the words of the malariologist Socrates Litsios, “With the arrival of DDT, the detailed understanding that had been built up in the course of tens of thousands of studies was put aside and a monolithic approach took hold. With victory in sight, there was no need for further studies.” (p.215) The commitment of the Rockefeller Foundation to a high-tech, engineering approach to disease is discussed by Brown, “Failure-as-success: multiple meanings of eradication in the Rockefeller Foundation Sardinia Project, 1946-1951,” *Parassitologia*, XL, 1998, pp.117-30.

<sup>22</sup> Harry Cleaver, “Malaria and the political economy of public health,” *International Journal of Health Services*, 7(4), 1977. This statement was made by a close Rockefeller ally, the militant anti-communist and former diplomat, John McClintock -- who was a former Basic Economic Division chief of Roosevelt's new Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs which was itself headed by Nelson Rockefeller. “Rockefeller Foundation chairman John Foster Dulles as

This was the same United Fruit Company that, in the same year, was at the forefront of aiding Ambassador John Peurifoy in overthrowing Guatemalan democracy. All the same, as one medical critic of the Rockefellers global health interventions concluded: “No conspiracy was needed to assure that these ostensibly humanitarian programs served the needs of imperialism.”<sup>23</sup>

If one needed another reminder of the pragmatic manner by which ruling-class elites approached the issue of democracy, then consider the 1924 Democratic presidential candidate, John W. Davis, who mid-way through a term serving as a trustee of the Rockefeller Foundation (1922-39) was anointed as a leader of the fiercely anti-communist American Liberty League. The latter group representing a particularly paranoid organization that served as an incubator of the type of far-right politics that became the bread-and-butter concerns of the John Birch Society, and now the American alt-right.<sup>24</sup> The stridently nationalist and libertarian politics of the American Liberty

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chief partner of the Sullivan Cromwell law firm in 1936, had personally drafted United Fruit's 1936 contract with the Ubico dictatorship that gave the banana company its ninety-nine-year lease with exceptional tax benefits." Gerard Colby and Charlotte Dennett, *Thy Will Be Done: The Conquest of the Amazon: Nelson Rockefeller and the Conquest of the Amazon* (HarperCollins, 1995), p.849.

<sup>23</sup> E. Richard Brown, “Public health in imperialism: early Rockefeller programs at home and abroad,” *American Journal of Public Health*, 66(9), 1976, p.902.

<sup>24</sup> Jared Goldstein, “The American Liberty League and the rise of Constitutional Nationalism,” *Temple Law Review*, 86, 2014, p.287; Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2009). In fact, many of the ruling-class founders of the American Liberty League, including the DuPont family, Alfred P. Sloan, and J. Howard Pew, would go on to play a critical role in funding far-right politics in the coming decades. At the time that Davis joined the League while he was acting as chief counsel for the fascist-obsessed powerhouse of J.P. Morgan.



League ensured that they associated the allegedly socialist regulations of the New Deal with tyranny and fascism; with Davis himself declaring that “Regulation is a term behind which every form of tyranny, great and small, can hide itself.”<sup>25</sup>

Yet even after the defeat of the Nazis at the end of World War II, such paranoia and anti-democratic actions only reached new heights within elite circles, as the preservation of their profits reigned supreme. This was true within the tops of the British labour movement too, with social democratic leaders happily enforcing imperial discipline overseas. In fact, subverting the Greek trade union movement was of particular concern to Labour elites, and even before the defeat of the Nazis leading members of the Labour Party were developing cosy relationships with ultra-conservative Greek trade unionists who had previously collaborated with the Metaxas regime. This utterly despicable act of subterfuge was carried out behind the

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<sup>25</sup> Goldstein, “The American Liberty League and the rise of Constitutional Nationalism,” p.300. This was the same League that was implicated in a planned overthrow of the American government, a coup that was investigated by the Special House Committee on Un-American Activities in November 1934. But ultimately none of the Leagues members were even interviewed by the Committee who were “perhaps frightened by the implications” of such investigations. “Corporate leaders who were implicated in the conspiracy by sworn testimony, including the Du Ponts, were never even called for questioned. “The Congressional Committee investigating un-American activities has just reported that the Fascist plot to seize the government . . . was proved,” observed Roger Baldwin, head of the American Civil Liberties Union, “yet not a single participant will be prosecuted under the perfectly plain language of the federal conspiracy act making this a high crime. Imagine the action if such a plot were discovered among Communists! Which is, of course, only to emphasize the nature of our government as representatives of the interests of the controllers of property. Violence, even the seizure of the government, is excusable on the part of those whose lofty motive is to preserve the profit system.” Gerard Colby, *Du Pont Dynasty: Behind the Nylon Curtain* (Lyle Stuart, 1984).

backs of millions of ordinary union members, who went on to elect the Labour Party to power on a program of socialist transformation in July 1945. A transformation that tragically, at least within the upper echelons of the Labour leadership, did not extend to a reversal of Britain's imperialist foreign policy. Writing at the time, one Marxist critic noted:

Immediately [after the 1945 election] result was announced, Harold Laski, Chairman of the Labour Party, declared that the Labour Government would not aid reaction in Europe. Discredited kings and monarchs, and fascist dictators such as Franco, could not expect support from the Labour Government. It would support the peoples against the reactionaries. The workers must take the Labour leaders at their word. Laski said this in the first exuberance of victory. But obviously, this is the elementary duty of any government claiming to represent socialism. The workers must demand through their organisations, an immediate break with the butcher Franco. No truck with fascist gangsters and monarchists—such as the King of Italy and Greece, stained as deeply as Hitler and Mussolini, with the crimes of fascism. No support to quisling reactionary regimes such as that of Voulgaris and Damaskinos in Greece! Full support to the peoples in their struggle for free elections and a government of their own choice.<sup>26</sup>

These were correct demands to place upon the Labour Party, and the subsequent betrayals vis-à-vis the government's foreign policy concerns meant the Labour "aroused much opposition among its own followers."<sup>27</sup> Making matters worse still, in the aftermath of the War, Labour politicians continued to intervene in Greece to support the rise of new reactionary regimes. But British dominance in this field

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<sup>26</sup> Ted Grant, "Labour must fulfil its promises - 'no excuses this time' say workers," *Socialist Appeal*, 7(11), August 1945.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Weiler, *British Labour and the Cold War* (Stanford University Press, 1988), p.189; Chapter 4 of Weiler's book ("British intervention in the Greek Trade Union Movement") provides an incisive analysis of how trade union bureaucrats undermined the socialist ambitions of the Greek trade union movement.

was short-lived. By 1947 it was the anti-democratic interventions undertaken by the corrupt leaders of the American trade union federation (the AFL) in collaboration with the CIA (and the big bucks flowing from the US Marshall Plan), that, against the determined activism of most Greek people, further consolidated the incorporation of former Nazi collaborators within the leadership of both the Greek government and the trade union movement.<sup>28</sup>

No area was off limits when it came to the US governments attempts to crush the socialist resistance in Greece, and the services of Carl Blegen, the famed archaeologist, were soon turned to the task at hand. Blegen had first worked in Greece as early as 1910 while he was a student at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (ASCSA), but it was not until World War II that he was recruited to head the Greek desk of the Foreign Nationalities Branch in Washington. Thereafter his academic skills were more firmly harnessed to the American government's propaganda line. He thus returned to Greece in 1945 to serve as a cultural Attaché for the American Embassy and to employment as ASCSA's Director, where he started work on a historical book on Greek-American relations for Harvard University Press. Although the book remained uncompleted, a draft of the manuscript illustrated how Blegen's anti-communist hysterics wreaked havoc upon his writings. Key among the many controversial issues raised in his unpublished manuscript was the assertion that Greek people had a natural inbuilt proclivity to supporting capitalism! This is even though a large majority of the Greek population remained receptive to the ideas of revolutionary socialism and communism, with support for socialism only growing because of the key role that revolutionaries had played in fighting the

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<sup>28</sup> Lawrence Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece, 1943-1949* (Columbia University Press, 1982); Jon Kofas, *Under the Eagle's Claw: Exceptionalism in Postwar U.S.-Greek Relations* (Praeger Publishers, 2003); Kofas, *Intervention and Underdevelopment: Greece During the Cold War* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), see Chapter 5 ("The American mission and the Greek labor movement"). The AFL's antidemocratic trade union was coordinated by International Federation of Free Trade Unions.

## Nazis throughout World War II.

Reassuring his prospective American readers about the deserving character and nature of the Greek people and implicitly eradicating any popular concerns about their dubious ethnic and racial characteristics is Blegen's main concern. After all, the Immigration Act of 1924, which radically restricted the immigration of Eastern and Southern Europeans to the U.S. out of fear of the ethnic and racial degeneration of the country, was still in place. In addition to the lively intelligence of the modern Greek, Blegen stresses his "highly developed individualism," "perhaps the most conspicuous of the qualities inherited from his ancient ancestors who invented the concept of democracy." Intelligent, individualistic, albeit often excessively, and keen to finance and banking, with an "almost universal desire to acquire and hold individual property," Blegen asserts "the fundamental anti-communist philosophy of the majority of the population. Indeed, in this individualistic and essentially unindustrialized state, the ground is not normally favorable to the sowing of communist seed."<sup>29</sup>

Financial patronage remains a powerful way of shaping research agendas, and early American support for Greek archaeologists can be traced back to the start of the twentieth century when the Carnegie Foundation played a key role in funding ASCSA's activities. Carnegie's role in sustaining this research was then passed on to the Rockefeller philanthropies, whose final and very sizable donation to the school's work (worth approximately \$360,000) was made in December 1936 -- funding that was used to enable the ongoing excavation of the Agora at Athens. In the late twenties it appears that such historically significant excavations had become a matter of national importance for American elites, and when the Agora dig had first commenced (in 1931) its foreign benefactors had no qualms in forcibly removing the poor working-class residents of Athens to make way for their historical project of mythmaking.

Undeterred by the brutality of these compulsory evictions at the

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<sup>29</sup> Despina Lalaki, "On the social construction of Hellenism: Cold war narratives of modernity, development and democracy for Greece," *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 25(4), 2012, p.562.

site of the Agora, the ideological tone of American journalistic reports on this mammoth and controversial archaeological undertaking was breathless. One critic of such nonsense observed:

...the land of freedom, democracy, and the free market will be excavating the birthplace of democracy—and not just any part of it, but its ‘marketplace.’ Nationalism and a strong belief in free enterprise, capitalism, and Western democracy were to meet in the trenches of the ancient Agora, provided that the dirty old houses were gotten out of the way.<sup>30</sup>

Another historian arrived at the following scathing conclusion:

The approach to urban archaeology used by the Americans was not that different from that being practiced in Fascist Rome at the same time. There, Benito Mussolini’s urban planners and archaeologists were destroying whole quarters of the medieval city to expose the remains of an ideologically approved past. For Mussolini, it was the Rome of the Caesars. For the Americans, it was the Athens of Pericles. Members of the American social and cultural elite on the whole approved of Mussolini’s actions and were not expected to object to their application in Athens.<sup>31</sup>

Later, in the wake of World War II, the persistent efforts of a few immensely wealthy Americans then ensured that the reconstruction of the Stoa of Attalos could now become a reality, with leading American car manufacturer Ward Canaday playing a significant role in pressing John D. Rockefeller Jr. for a \$1 million contribution. Here, once again, Rockefeller seems to have shared ASCSA’s “long-term vision

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<sup>30</sup> Yannis Hamilakis, “Double colonization: The story of the excavations of the Athenian Agora (1924–1931),” *Hesperia*, 82(1), 2013, p.173.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Dyson, *Ancient Marbles to American Shores: Classical Archaeology in the United States* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), pp.181–2. On a related subject, see Suzanne Marchand, *Down from the Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750–1970* (Princeton University Press, 1996).

regarding the impact of the Agora project on the fabric of society and its function as a symbol of America's faith in the superiority of democratic values to those of Communism."<sup>32</sup> A critic of this colossal act of hypocrisy pointedly wrote:

That America with the recreation of such a building honoured not Pericles or Socrates, but a petty Hellenistic despot and would shortly aid in the military overthrow of Greek democracy was an irony lost on most Americans and even on most American classicists.<sup>33</sup>

This archaeological imperialism, which received an extra boost during the 1950s, was now considered to fulfil a vital part of an ongoing effort to "show that democracy had originated in a NATO member state." Hence, as far as US elites were concerned: "The exaltation of Greek

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<sup>32</sup> Another key individual who helped ensure the financing of this huge project was the founder of 20th Century Fox Studios, Spyros Skouras, who was successful in mobilising support from the Greek-American community. Niki Sakka, "A debt to ancient wisdom and beauty': The reconstruction of the Stoa of Attalos in the ancient Agora of Athens," *Hesperia*, 82(1), 2013, p.214. For a general overview of other related issues, see Thomas Patterson, "The political economy of archaeology in the United States," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 28, 1999, pp. 155-74. For a discussion of the propaganda efforts made by the US government to educate the Greek military and paramilitary forces with the requisite dose of anti-communism, see Zinovia Lialiouti, "American cultural diplomacy in Greece, 1953-1968," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 15(3), 2017. Also mentioned is the role played by Spyros Skouras, with an "example of his contribution in Cold War propaganda" being "the one-week celebration involving strong propaganda messages that was organised at the ending of the Greek Civil War (March 1949) and was based on the collaboration and coordination between the US Embassy, Spyros Skouras and the Greek government." (p.239)

<sup>33</sup> *Dyson*, *Ancient Marbles to American Shores*, p.260.

antiquity was a geopolitical imperative.”<sup>34</sup> But the true role played by the American ruling-class at this point in Greek history was about as far from democratic as can be and can be aptly summed-up by the nickname, the “Butcher of Greece,” which given to John Peurifoy, the man who served as the US ambassador to Greece between 1950 and 1953. The accurate nature of this revealing nickname had its roots in the close relationship that Peurifoy had maintained with the CIA during his time in office. This was a time when the US had decided that the best way to combat communism was by working in alliance with Nazis. As if that were not enough, Peurifoy’s deadly reputation was further solidified when he left Greece to serve as the ambassador in post in Guatemala. From his new position, Peurifoy working with executives from the United Fruit Company and other assorted forces on the far-right of the political spectrum helped to organize a successful military coup against the country’s social democratic leader, Jacobo Arbenz.<sup>35</sup>

In a pattern that was repeated across Europe, American support for the Greek government delivered via their Marshall Plan proved decisive in promoting the forces of reaction during these murderous years – including the duration of the Greek Civil War (1946-1949).<sup>36</sup> And when American economic aid to Greece was “substantially reduced” following the termination of the Marshall Plan in June 1951, new financial connections ensured that from then onwards the Greek economy would become increasingly tied to that of West Germany. One thoroughly disreputable industrialist who played an important role in guiding this process of imperial consolidation was Prodromos Bodasakis-Athanasiadis,<sup>37</sup> a man who in addition to having “been the

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<sup>34</sup> Alexander Clapp, “The twin faces of Athens,” *New Left Review*, November/December 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Sinclair Browne, 1982), p.132.

<sup>36</sup> Note: the first administrator of the Marshall Plan, Paul Hoffman, moved smoothly into gainful employment as the president of the Ford Foundation (a position he held between 1950 and 1953).

<sup>37</sup> Mogens Pelt, *Tying Greece to the West: US-West German-Greek*

head of the largest and most important armament firm in the Balkans and the Near East” had “cultivated close personal relations with the inner circles of the political entourage of Metaxas and with the dictator himself.”<sup>38</sup>

Bodasakis had been quick to reap further personal profits from the devastation wrought on his homeland. Thus, upon returning to Greece (at the end of World War II), Bodasakis had ingratiated himself with leaders of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration – the body through which most foreign aid flowed before the launch of the Marshall Plan. And when this UN organization closed, Bodasakis was able to recruit its head to his own staff which placed him in a prime position to act as go-between for elites on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>39</sup> With the backing of the US, Bodasakis succeeded in pushing forward closer economic integration between Greece and West Germany, such that by 1950, West Germany was the most important destination for Greek exports, while by 1957 West Germany had become the main source of Greek imports.<sup>40</sup> It was ultimately as a result of Greece’s intimate economic relationship with the resurgent West German economy that in 1961 Greece gained admission, as an associate member, to the European Economic Community. So, with his own wealth firmly wedded to the interests of reactionary elites, it is fitting that in 1973 -- during the dark days of the dictatorship – that Bodasakis would establish his own philanthropic foundation bearing his own name.

American elites, having spent years collaborating with far-right forces to stop the Greek working-class from seizing political control of their own country, also understood that working with fascists wasn’t always the safest way to ensure stability for their capitalist investments.

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*Relations 1949-74.* (Museum Tusculanum Press, 2006), p.71.

<sup>38</sup> Pelt, *Tying Greece to the West*, p.71. He had fled Greece during the War and eventually settled in America, where: “A report from the director of Naval Intelligence written in 1942 entitled ‘Greek American Fascism’ referred to Bodasakis as a ‘thoroughly disreputable character, by some considered the most dangerous of all Greeks.’” (p.71)

<sup>39</sup> Pelt, *Tying Greece to the West*, p.73.

<sup>40</sup> Pelt, *Tying Greece to the West*, p.92, p.357.



This is because while it is true that the ruling-classes actions are guided in part by geostrategic priorities, it remains the case that their decisions are balanced by their estimations of the strength and constellation of the class forces in society. At certain times this means that they may attempt to impose more authoritarian methods of government upon foreign nations, while at other times democratic forms of governance are encouraged - all for reasons of political expediency. For this reason, while the US ruling-class was openly backing Greek reactionaries, they were simultaneously working to build-up a liberal pole of political power. In this way, the Fulbright Foundation which was established in Greece in 1948 was to act as a central plank of America's Cold War strategizing. And although the Fulbright's programs only began to bear fruit with the end of the Civil War, the program had set themselves the important propaganda "task of winning hearts and minds and countering Soviet depictions of the United States as a cultural black hole and the land of fierce racial discrimination."<sup>11</sup>

During this turbulent period of Greek history other philanthropic initiatives, like those undertaken by the Ford Foundation, would now play a catalytic role in facilitating the rise to power of new liberal elites like Andreas Papandreou, who returned to Greece in 1959 having previously served as the chair of the Economics Department at the University of California, Berkeley. With pressure applied from his close friends in the US government, upon arriving back in Greece Andreas secured an important meeting with the arch-reactionary Prime Minister Constantine Karamanlis whereafter

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<sup>11</sup> Despina Lalaki, "The cultural Cold War and the new women of power: Making a case based on the Fulbright and Ford Foundations in Greece," *Histoire Politique*, 35, 2018, p.6, p.5. The first unofficial founder of the Greek Fulbright program was Alison Frantz who was a close associate of Carl Blegen. For more on how "the program was designed to implement the general aims of US foreign policy while avoiding 'appearances of cultural imperialism'," see Sam Lebovic, "From war junk to educational exchange: The World War II origins of the Fulbright program and the foundations of American cultural globalism, 1945-1950," *Diplomatic History*, 37 (2), 2013.

“Andreas quickly responded with a memorandum which proposed the establishment of a Center of Economic Research (KOE)”. The aim of this Center, according to Andreas, was “to 'fill a large gap in the organization of applied economic research in Greece' by developing and overseeing 'a flexible program for the country's rapid economic development', as well to train technocrats 'for the executive staffing of the public and private economy'.”<sup>42</sup> In late 1960, with funding for his project still awaiting final authorization...

A week after [President] Kennedy's election, the new chair at Berkeley's economics department, Robert Gordon, flew to New York to meet Ford and Rockefeller foundation executives face-to-face. Gordon assured them of Papandreou's unequivocal intent to commit himself to the work of the Center for the foreseeable future. At the Rockefeller Foundation, Gordon made an explicit political appeal, declaring that Papandreou 'feels [Greece] will go Communist in ten years unless something is done to develop skills in this field'. The injection of Cold War considerations apparently raised no eyebrows. But then, Gordon's invocation of an alleged Communist threat in Greece invoked their shared but tacit understanding that KOE also had a political purpose, especially in the aftermath of the Greek Left's strong showing in the 1958 elections.<sup>43</sup>

By the end of the year the two foundations had committed \$500,000 for the creation of Andreas's Center, funds which were to be drawn upon over a five-year period.<sup>44</sup> But the political situation in Greece was quickly moving out of the control of the authoritarian clique at the helm of the Greek state apparatus. And with the 1963 assassination of United Democratic Left (EDA) deputy Grigoris Lambrakis by para-state vigilante groups who were “covertly funded by official Greek security forces, likely using secret funds the CIA provided to Greek ministries for combating Communism,” all hell was breaking loose. Military leaders were now beginning to broach the topic of instigating

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<sup>42</sup> Stan Draenos, *Andreas Papandreou: The Making of a Greek Democrat and Political Maverick* (I.B. Tauris & Co., 2012), p.25.

<sup>43</sup> Draenos, *Andreas Papandreou*, p.28.

<sup>44</sup> Draenos, *Andreas Papandreou*, p.31.

a coup if the Left could not be excluded from the political class.<sup>45</sup> This violent course of action came to pass on April 21, 1967, when a coup that was organized by the Colonel's brought the murderous dictatorship of the Greek junta to power. Although the exact role played by the US government in giving the go-ahead for this coup remains undocumented, it is clear that:

The dispute about the United States' complicity in the junta is, in any case, based on a false antithesis. The United States administration had sown the dragon's teeth that sprang up in the shape of the junta. The administration gave encouragement, training and materials to the anti-constitutional forces before the coup, and it became their patron and protector for seven years afterwards.<sup>46</sup>

During these long years of violent repression, the working-class remained organized, and with the eventual collapse of the military junta in 1974, the political ground was now set for a resurgence of socialist politics.

It is important to observe that in the years preceding the 1967 coup, Andreas had been forced to move left in response to the mass pressure of the working-class: yet despite his radical rhetoric he remained a favourite among America's liberal ruling-class. It was this trust in Andreas that would lead his US supporters to secure his exile from the junta's prisons and which helped them normalize their political relations with the dictatorship, which allowed them to maintain their own ("virtually indispensable") military bases in the

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<sup>45</sup> Draenos, *Andreas Papandreou*, p.49. Dimos Theos's film *Kierion* (1967).

<sup>46</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *Hostage to History: Cyprus from the Ottomans to Kissinger* (Verso, 1997), p.64. For details of how CIA funding to Greece (channelled via Tom Pappas) made their way back to the US to support the Richard Nixon's electioneering, see p.75; and Theodore Sedgewick, "Books behind the coup," *The Crimson*, February 28, 1970.

region.<sup>47</sup> But upon his release from prison in 1968, Andreas quickly moved even further leftwards in reaction to America's open support for the Greek dictatorship, and he soon launched his own Panhellenic Liberation Movement (PAK) which worked in collaboration with the communist resistance organization, the Patriotic Anti-Dictatorial Front (PAM).<sup>48</sup> Initially, at least, Andreas had been hopeful that his relentless appeals to American (and European) elites to bring down the Colonel's regime would prove successful, but it was the decision of the Nixon Administration to pursue "an increasingly cozy relationship with the junta," that ultimately pushed him "in the direction of Third World revolutionary politics."<sup>49</sup>

With the people of Greece having been pushed to their limits by the junta, the rising social unrest eventually brought an end to the regime in mid-1974, and a weak conservative government (led by Karamanlis) assumed power amidst a renewed atmosphere of industrial militancy. Capitalizing on this mood, Andreas launched his Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) just a few months after the fall of the junta – which he then led from 1974 until 1996. Yet contrary to his populist appeals, Andreas was quick to revert back to his true liberal colors and within just a few years virtually all active Marxists had

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<sup>47</sup> Stan Draenos, "Andreas Papandreou's exile politics: the first phase (1968-1970)," *The Historical Review*, Vol.11, 2014, p.33. Andreas's wife Margaret Papandreou, through her contacts with well-heeled American liberals, also helped press the US government to force the Greek junta to release her husband from prison. For example, in October 1967, Margaret helped ensure that Stanley Sheinbaum published Andreas Vachliotis and Kyriakos Diakogannis' story, "The framing of Andreas Papandreou," in *Ramparts* magazine. In his introduction to this important article Sheinbaum notes how he had "joined a committee... dedicated to bringing freedom to Greece and saving the life of a Keynesian, suddenly alleged to be a communist." For a discussion of the CIA's repressive response to *Ramparts'* revelations, see Angus Mackenzie and David Weir, *Secrets: The CIA's War at Home* (University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>48</sup> Draenos, *Andreas Papandreou's exile politics*, p.57 PAM was organized by the newly formed KKE Interior.

<sup>49</sup> Draenos, *Andreas Papandreou's exile politics*, p.65.

been expelled from the ranks of his new party.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, PASOK's socialist rhetoric still proved immensely popular with the Greek working-class and in October 1981 Andreas finally won electoral power.

Notably, just prior to PASOK's victory in the elections, Greece had become a full member of the European Community/Union, which was a critical event that had been vigorously opposed by PASOK who had spent the previous year's campaigning against its anti-democratic structures. But PASOK in power soon ditched their radical rhetoric and were quick to assure the international community that they were just a moderate party. They pledged their support of both the European Community and of NATO, and made it clear that they would be committed to implementing austerity upon the masses, and most certainly would not be organizing for the removal of the US military bases located in Greece.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Despite their expulsion, Marxists continued to support the Greek working-class in their ongoing efforts to democratize PASOK. It was only with "the mass radicalisation of the Greek working class during the political crisis of 1989 that produced a revival of activity within PASOK, and created the conditions" that enabled Marxists to openly re-join PASOK's ranks against the wishes of PASOK's bureaucratic leadership. "For the Scottish Turn: Against dogmatic methods in thought and action," Marxist.net, September 1991.

<sup>51</sup> Andreas Stergiou and Christos Kollias, "Between pragmatism and rhetoric: a critical assessment of Greece's defence and foreign policy in the 1980s in light of new primary sources," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 18(4), 2018, p.5. "Despite former promises and fears that PASOK's election could have profound consequences for Western interests and place the future of some base activities in jeopardy, in 1983 the new administration signed an agreement with the United States, providing for a five-year extension of the US bases in Greece." (p.5)

A recently declassified CIA memorandum entitled "Economic and political outlook for Greece" (July 1, 1985), observed: "In an ironic counterpoint to Prime Minister Papandreou's anti-EC campaign broadsides, EC subsidies have become an increasingly

Even U.S. politicians in their meetings with [Andreas] Papandreou expressed their satisfaction with the pragmatism that seemed to characterize Papandreou's approach to foreign policy, although there was some scepticism and concerns about statements made during Papandreou's electoral campaign. Papandreou himself appears to have appeased them that there was little difference in foreign policy aims between himself, the President of Hellenic Republic Karamanlis and conservative party (New Democracy) leader [Evangelos] Averoff.<sup>52</sup>

In an early "intelligence assessment" produced by the CIA on the new PASOK governments future prospects, in April 1983 the intelligence agency's authors began by highlighting that at first PASOK's election "was a source of deep concern to the Greek officer corps, which is politically conservative, staunchly pro-West, and heir to a long tradition of intervention in politics." But the report quickly added, that given Andreas' ability to convince these officers that "he is not a reckless ideologue but a pragmatist" things were looking up. They continued: "We believe his performance in office thus far has left the majority of active duty officers content to remain in the barracks," albeit "nursing a reputation badly bruised during the 1967-74 dictatorship". The intelligence assessment later stated that Greece "appears to be evolving gradually towards a pattern more in line with the West European [capitalist] norm"; before going on to conclude that the acceptance of such norms "will be the surest guarantee against the praetorian politics so prevalent in the past."

So far, the praetorian politics that have dominated much of Greece's past have thankfully not resealed hold of the country. But that is not to say that during the ongoing global financial crisis that such anti-democratic forms of repressing the masses will not be looked upon with favour by ruling elites. For the time being, neo-Nazi

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important source of invisible earnings to Greece since its accession to the community in 1981. These transfers soared from \$148 million in 1981 to \$834 million in 1983 before falling back to \$715 million in 1984 - mainly because of the depreciation of the European Currency Unit (ECU) against the dollar." (p.3)

<sup>52</sup> Stergiou and Kollias, *Between pragmatism and rhetoric*, p.5.

movements like Golden Dawn have been forced back, and have suffered significant electoral defeats. Nevertheless, their ability to capitalise on a climate of escalating austerity will largely be determined by whether forces on the left of politics can fill the political void with a genuine socialist alternative. In recent years, new left formations like Syriza have failed workers and only replicated PASOK's criminal failure to build a genuine democratic mass workers party. Like PASOK they rose to power on the basis of socialist platitudes and were subsequently torn apart by their unwillingness to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the working-classes in fighting for a socialist alternative to the politics of big business. As one frustrated commentator observed: "Syriza was a horizon of hope. Now it is a vortex of despair."<sup>53</sup> And while international foundations like Ford and Rockefeller remain active in Greece – acting to paper over the opening chasms in social welfare created by the ongoing dismantling of public services -- they now work in conjunction with the philanthropies of Greek's own oligarchs, like that of the Bodossaki Foundation and the Stavros Niarchos Foundation. Capitalism and their associated philanthropy however are both unwilling and unable to offer any way forward for the majority of Greek citizens. This means that the urgent task at hand for all socialists is to learn from the mistakes made by both PASOK and Syriza and to continue to stand alongside revolutionaries like Xekinima to fight for a genuine democratic and socialist alternative that can topple capitalism.

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<sup>53</sup> *Helena Sheehan, Syriza Wave: Surging and Crashing with the Greek Left* (Monthly Review Press, 2016), p.185.





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## NINE

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# Privatizing Public Health

Within the dog-eat-dog world of capitalism, death has a canny way of ensuring that its cold hand comes earliest to those born to the poorest families. Across the world, 1 in 9 child deaths can be traced to diarrhoea, making this disease of poverty the second leading cause of death among children under the age of 5. If that wasn't bad enough, the parasitic exploits of war further serve to expunge the lives of the working-poor, whether they be soldiers or civilians. So it becomes normalized that hundreds of millions suffer ill health through no fault of their own, while military budgets across the world continue to surge.

In America, the US Department of Defense's budget during President Trump's last year in office ran at a parasitic \$705 billion a year - which represents a £122 billion jump on President Obama's own warmongering budget. Now President Biden apparently aims to go one better than Trump and in April 2021 it was announced that the Department of Defense's newly revised budget would be upped to a bloodthirsty \$715 billion! Come Democrats or Republicans, funds are evidently always available when it comes to devising more effective ways of destroying life. However, when it comes to preventing disease, demands for funding always seem to remain unfulfilled.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Considering the important coordinating role carried out by the

## A pandemic in a time of revolution

When it comes to protecting humanity from impending pandemics the capitalist states of the world choose not to learn any lessons from history – lesson that might help ordinary people anyway. For example, in 2016 the Commission on a Global Health Risk Framework for the Future (the GHRF Commission) “estimated that an additional \$4.5 billion annually is needed to create a global pandemic preparedness system.”<sup>2</sup> And following this simple funding guidance was exactly what Laura Spinney suggested in the conclusion of her book *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World* (PublicAffairs, 2017). This advice, however, was not followed.

It is true that the inability of the capitalist powers to respond to the needs of ordinary people remains a common theme in history. But at least when you go back to 1918, global elites had the excuse that their medical know-how wasn't up to the task of preventing the spread of the Spanish Flu – a pandemic that eliminated up to 100 million people (a fifteenth of the world population). All the same, the

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WHO its annual budget is hardly a drop in the ocean compared to the US government's military expenditures. The WHO proposed total budget for 2020-21 (a two year period) is \$5.8 billion (which itself is \$1.4 billion more than it was for 2018-19), which is still low, representing “less than the budget of many major hospitals in the United States”. To add insult to injury since the late eighties the vast majority of the funds that the WHO receives are given in a way that “creates a situation where external donors dictate the organization's priorities and action agenda.” This means that the proportion of income that the WHO has direct control over (which is derived from assessed contributions) is actually decreasing by the year. Srikanth Reddy, Sumaira Mazhar and Raphael Lencucha, “The financial sustainability of the World Health Organization and the political economy of global health governance: a review of funding proposals,” *Globalization and Health*, 14(119), 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Center for Policy Impact in Global Health, “Intensified multilateral cooperation on global public goods for health: three opportunities for collective action,” Policy Paper, November 2018, p.11, p.2.

willingness of ruling elites to place profits before human life have not changed much as evidenced by the First World War which itself took the lives of 17 million people.

Furthermore, it is worth emphasizing that when the Spanish Flu engulfed the world the working-class had the recent success of the Bolshevik Revolution to inspire their struggles for a better world. It was the success of this Revolution after all that helped bring an end to the First World War, a fact not acknowledged by Spinney, who nevertheless makes a related point that severe malnutrition in the German trenches would likely have increased speed with which the Spanish Flu devastated their soldiers.<sup>3</sup> In another significant historical oversight, Spinney fails to mention the German Revolution of 1918 by name, even though the Flu would have undoubtedly contributed towards the working-class discontent that helped propel this highly significant revolutionary movement forward. Spinney however skirts past this revolutionary moment and simply describes such events in rough outline like this:

The autumn of 1918 saw a wave of workers' strikes and anti-imperialist protests across the world. The disgruntlement had been smouldering since before the Russian revolutions of 1917, but the flu fanned the flames by exacerbating what was already a dire supply situation, and by highlighting inequality. It hurled a lightning bolt across the globe, illuminating the injustice of colonialism and sometimes of capitalism too. The eugenically minded who had noticed how badly the underclasses had suffered tended to blame their inferior stock. But the underclasses had also noticed the disparities, and they

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<sup>3</sup> Spinney writes: "Most historians are reluctant to suggest that the flu determined the victor of the war, though they do agree that it accelerated the end of hostilities. Two have broken ranks, however, and suggested that the flu 'punished' the Central Powers more severely than the Allies, thereby biasing the outcome. Military historian David Zabecki agrees with Jünger's claim that malnutrition in the German ranks exacerbated the flu among them, while political scientist Andrew Price-Smith argues that the lethal autumn wave may have been the last straw for the tottering Austro-Hungarian Empire."

interpreted them as proof of their own exploitation at the hands of the better-off.

Spinney's point regarding the eugenic proclivities of the ruling elites is particularly pertinent to developing an understanding of the utter contempt in which British and American elites maintained for ordinary workers. Although not highlighted in her book, in a more recent article published in *Time* magazine Spinney wrote:

In 1918, the explanation for these inequities was different. Eugenics was then a mainstream view, and privileged elites looked down on workers and the poor as inferior categories of human being, who lacked the drive to achieve a better standard of living. If they sickened and died from typhus, cholera and other crowd diseases, the reasons were inherent to them, rather than to be found in their often abysmal living conditions. In the context of an epidemic, public health generally referred to a suite of measures designed to protect those elites from the contaminating influence of the diseased underclasses. When bubonic plague broke out in India in 1896, for example, the British colonial authorities instigated a brutal public health campaign that involved disinfecting, fumigating and sometimes burning indigenous Indian homes to the ground. Initially, at least, they refused to believe that the disease was spread by rat fleas. If they had, they would have realized that a better strategy might have been to inspect imported merchandise rather than people, and to de-rat buildings rather than disinfect them.<sup>4</sup>

The contrast could not have been any greater than with the healthcare approach being experimented with in Russia,<sup>5</sup> which evolved at the

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<sup>4</sup> Laura Spinney, "The world changed its approach to health after the 1918 Flu. Will it after the COVID-19 outbreak?", *Time magazine*, March 7, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> "Whereas 95% of Russian health rubles had been spent before 1918 on treatment and only 5% on disease prevention, the new commissariat had by 1920 substantially reversed these figures, allotting somewhat more than half of the available funds to prevention." William Rosenberg (ed.), *Bolshevik Visions: First Phase of the Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia, part 1* (University of Michigan

same time as the armies of various foreign countries (including the US and the UK) waged a dirty civil war against the newly formed peoples' state. Spinney is alive to some of these people-centred alternatives and thus points out how Russia, in 1920, "was the first [country] to implement a centralised, fully public healthcare system." As she adds: "It wasn't universal, because it didn't cover rural populations (they would finally be included in 1969), but it was a huge achievement nevertheless, and the driving force behind it was Vladimir Lenin." Critically, such reforms were considered far beyond the pale for imperialist elites whose concerns were never with maintaining the health of ordinary people, and as Spinney points out such longstanding elite "fears of a 'socialist plot' are the reason Americans still don't have a universal healthcare system today."

It was for such reasons that many people around the world – but particularly the oppressed inhabitants of imperial colonies – "looked longingly to Russia and its system of universal [healthcare] coverage." Hence in an effort to counter the threat posed to the ruling class by the growth in such desires, "The capitalist west had to come up with its own solution, and often that solution was furnished by the Rockefeller Foundation." Spinney continues:

The Rockefeller Foundation was the philanthropic offshoot of Standard Oil, and it had been set up in New York State in May 1913 by that company's owner, John D. Rockefeller, his philanthropic advisor, Frederick Taylor Gates, and his son, John D. Rockefeller Jr. The foundation's International Health

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Press, 1990), p.128. "At resorts where formerly there appeared the members of a capitalists society in order to cure their bloated stomachs and gouty limbs, the working people are now restoring their health." "Special attention is paid to health in general. Free feeding of children below the age of sixteen was decreed by the Council of People's Commissars. Thousands of children in winter, and many more in summer, enjoy a stay in the children's colonies and sanatoriums, for which purpose the estates of the former landed proprietors are used." N. Semashko, "Work of the People's Commissariat of Health," in: Rosenberg, *Bolshevik Visions*, p.144.

Division, created six weeks later, would become one of the most important players in international public health between the wars, helping to fight disease, not only in many colonies and newly independent states, but also in western Europe.

Unencumbered by any critical thoughts on such philanthropic matters, let alone Marxist ones, Spinney however raises no concerns with the elitist priorities of such foundation-backed health projects. Although, almost in passing, she acknowledges that “Rockefeller was suspected by some of practising neocolonialism under the guise of philanthropy.” She also admits that the Rockefeller Foundations efforts to bring “American-style enlightenment” to the world “would later be tarnished by its involvement in Nazi eugenics programmes”. This much is certainly true, but Spinney remains ignorant of the simple fact that it was the American government’s own earlier eugenic obsession with the sterilization of the unfit (i.e. the working-class) that had preceded and inspired the eugenic horrors of the Nazi state.

### **Containing Bolshevism: the weapon of selective healthcare**

Leaving the Spanish Flu behind, in the wake of the First World War, inspired by the lofty imperial ideals of the Rockefeller Foundation, a “steady flow of U.S. capital” along with ‘humanitarian’ health assistance was now distributed across Europe to “relieve the social and economic grievance of millions of civilians”. For the capitalist class this had the benefit of helping to “contain Bolshevism,” thereby “impeding its spread into East Central Europe.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Dimitra Giannuli, “American philanthropy in action: the American Red Cross in Greece, 1918-1923,” *East European Politics & Societies*, 10(1), 1995, p.108. For more on the American Red Cross (ARC), see Julia Irwin, “The Great White Train: typhus, sanitation, and U.S. international development during the Russian Civil War,” *Endeavour*, 36(3), 2012. Irwin writes: “Joined with representatives from the other co-belligerent nations to fund a mobile treatment clinic, dubbed the Inter-Allied Typhus Train. Over the next year and a half, ARC personnel used the train to carry out a major anti-typhus campaign for both soldiers and civilians at points all along the Trans-Siberian

When Mussolini later forced his way to power in 1922 the Rockefeller Foundation quickly moved to help him launch his war on Malaria. This represented a health campaign that “formed a central part of Fascist domestic policy, involving both the substance of the regime and the image it sought to project to the world.”<sup>7</sup> Of course defeating the ever-present communist threat in Europe formed a key ideological component of most Rockefeller-backed health strategies. And in many ways the top-down and technocratic approach that was institutionalized by their early health interventions now find their modern form in the elitist philanthropic initiatives of billionaires like Bill Gates.

Like today the philanthropies of the ruling-class funded whatever ideas happened to bolster the longevity of their capitalist system. This however did not mean that such philanthropies only fund conservative or fascist causes, and:

Addressing the sociopolitical conditions underlying ill health was an important political rationale for public health in the 1930s climate of anti-fascist-, labor-, and socialist activism. The RF [Rockefeller Foundation] drew on, listened to, and even bankrolled certain progressive political perspectives, including those of avowed left-wing scientific researchers and public health experts, although such support was always subordinate to its technical model and to bolstering U.S. capitalist power.<sup>8</sup>

By the end of World War II, the Rockefeller Foundations apparent success in holding back disease in Italy – which they were only able to

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Railway. In so doing, ARC workers played a critical role in fulfilling the humanitarian, diplomatic, and military objectives of the United States.” (p.2)

<sup>7</sup> Frank Snowden, *The Conquest of Malaria, Italy, 1900-1962* (Yale University Press, 2006), p.142.

<sup>8</sup> Anne-Emanuelle Birn and Judith Richter, “U.S. philanthrocapitalism and the global health agenda: the Rockefeller and Gates Foundations, Past and Present,” in: Howard Waitzkin (ed.), *Health Care Under the Knife: Moving Beyond Capitalism for Our Health* (Monthly Review Press, 2018).

achieve with the mass application of DDT -- was now held up as proof that the foundation and its allies had mastered another new techno-fix to combat the scourge of Malaria. But the evidence from this Italian test-case never did support such overly optimistic conclusions. Yet this disturbing truth didn't stop the Rockefeller's primary successor in the health field, the World Health Organization (which was founded in 1948), from drawing "misleading lessons from the Italian triumph. Contrary to the expectations of its ardent proponents, DDT-like quinine and Paris Green before it--was not a panacea but a tool with its own uses and limitations."<sup>9</sup>

Here was the strategy that [American epidemiologist] Fred Soper and the Rockefeller Foundation later made famous as the 'American' strategy to combat malaria by relying solely on chemicals, with no need to tackle complex issues involving living conditions and the relationships of human beings to one another and to their environment. In the words of the malariologist Socrates Litsios, 'With the arrival of DDT, the detailed understanding that had been built up in the course of tens of thousands of studies was put aside and a monolithic approach took hold. With victory in sight, there was no need for further studies.'<sup>10</sup>

Battling malaria now became a central project of the World Health Organization, with most of the fledgling organizations financial support coming from the United States. Here, however, it is worth remembering that the Soviet Union had signed up to support the WHO before the US government; but within a year of its formation the Soviet Union and the other Eastern Bloc countries decided to withdraw when they became "suspicious" of American intentions.

This meant that the WHO's first major campaign, the

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<sup>9</sup> Snowden, *The Conquest of Malaria*, p.212. The commitment of the Rockefeller Foundation to a high-tech, engineering approach to disease is discussed by P.J. Brown, "Failure-as-success: multiple meanings of eradication in the Rockefeller Foundation Sardinia Project, 1946-1951," *Parassitologia*, XL, 1998, pp.117-30.

<sup>10</sup> Snowden, *The Conquest of Malaria*, p.215.



ambitious effort to eradicate malaria that began in 1955, was largely a US-backed initiative. It had no Soviet participation and, moreover, it blatantly reflected US Cold War strategic concerns, focusing on regions, such as Southeast Asia, where Washington wanted to increase its influence, and slighting those, such as Africa, that were deemed less important.<sup>11</sup>

This political calculus of the US governments intentions were plainly stated in 1950 by James Stevens, the dean of Harvard University's School of Public Health, at a launch of a series of "Industry and Tropical Health" meetings that were organized "for the leaders of the medical departments of the biggest U.S. corporations." As Stevens explained to his audience:

Powerful Communist forces are at work... taking advantage of sick and impoverished people, exploiting their discontent... to undermine their political beliefs. Health is one of the safeguards against this propaganda. Health is not charity, it is not missionary work, it is not merely good business—it is sheer self-preservation for the United States and for the way of life which we regard as decent. Through health we can expand industrial production, strengthen our military forces, and maintain the high morale of all our people. Through it we can prove, to ourselves and to the world, the wholesomeness and rightness of Democracy. Through health we can defeat the evil threat of communism.<sup>12</sup>

And even though the US government outwardly professed that their

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<sup>11</sup> Erez Manela, "The politics of smallpox eradication," in: J. R. McNeill, and Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Cambridge World History: Volume 7: Production, Destruction and Connection, 1750–Present, Part 1: Structures, Spaces, and Boundary Making* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), p.265. For more on this see Bob Reinhardt, *The End of a Global Pox: America and the Eradication of Smallpox in the Cold War Era* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Marcos Cueto, *Cold War, Deadly Fevers: Malaria Eradication in Mexico, 1955–1975* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2007), p.7

primary ambition was to only eradicate malaria, this was never really their intention. This is most evident by their decision to exclude Africa from their so-called eradication project.

Their real aim was to contain communism to particular regions of the world. Malaria eradication also became a containment strategy that resembled the actual practices of U.S. foreign policy. As a result, what might appear as a fantastic operation covering the whole globe was really understood by health experts and politicians as a limited, and defensive intervention.<sup>13</sup>

As a corollary to this, the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) during its heyday in dominating the fields of international health...

...rarely addressed the most important causes of death, notably infantile diarrhea and tuberculosis, for which technical fixes were not then available and which demanded long-term, socially oriented investments, such as improved housing, clean water, and sanitation systems. The RF avoided disease campaigns that might be costly, complex, or time-consuming— other than yellow fever, which imperiled commerce. Most campaigns were narrowly construed so that quantifiable targets (insecticide spraying or medication distribution, for example) could be set, met, and counted as successes, then presented in business-style quarterly reports. In the process, RF public health efforts stimulated economic productivity, expanded consumer markets, and prepared vast regions for foreign investment and incorporation into the expanding system of global capitalism.<sup>14</sup>

### **Eradication campaigns: malaria vs. smallpox vs. humans?**

With the progression of the Cold War, by May 1958 the Soviet's new policy of "peaceful coexistence" with the West led to them rejoining

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<sup>13</sup> Cueto, *Cold War, Deadly Fevers*, p.45.

<sup>14</sup> Anne-Emanuelle Birn and Judith Richter, "U.S. philanthrocapitalism and the global health agenda: the Rockefeller and Gates Foundations, past and present," in: Howard Waitzkin (ed.), *Health Care Under the Knife: Moving Beyond Capitalism for Our Health* (Monthly Review Press, 2018).

the WHO, and in doing so they called upon the “organization to launch a global campaign to eradicate smallpox, one of humankind’s oldest and deadliest diseases.” Despite an effective vaccine having already been developed, the US government (which still remained the WHO’s largest donor) was not impressed by this suggestion, and although tackling smallpox was adopted as an ostensible priority of the organization, “without US support the program existed largely on paper, with few funds and only a handful of staff.”<sup>15</sup>

For a variety of reasons, the WHO’s priorities would soon change, in part because by the early 1960s the shortcomings of the Americans DDT-driven malaria eradication campaign were becoming hard to hide as resistant mosquito populations hindered any serious progress.<sup>16</sup> But it was not until 1965 that President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Administration publicly dropped their anti-malarial efforts to swing around to supporting what they now saw as the more politically expedient goal of eradicating smallpox. Yet even here the US ruling-class had to rely upon the Soviet Union’s manufacturing

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<sup>15</sup> Manela, “The politics of smallpox eradication,” p.265, p.266.

<sup>16</sup> “Although public health officials were acutely aware” of the problems associated with DDT “by 1950, they nevertheless championed its use. During the 1950s and 1960s, the *Aedes* and *Anopheles* mosquitoes, which spread yellow fever and malaria, respectively, became resistant to the pesticide. By 1969, because DDT was no longer effective, the global malaria eradication campaign came to an end.” Some four years later the Administrator of the US Environmental Protection Agency “announced the domestic ban of DDT in Stockholm, Sweden, against the backdrop of the first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment.” Nevertheless, throughout the rest of the 1970s the US continued exported DDT to foreign markets with “US foreign policy officials continued to purchase large quantities of DDT for international public health projects.” (p.121) David Kinkela, “The paradox of U.S. pesticide policy during the age of ecology,” in: Erika Marie Bsumek, David Kinkela, Mark Atwood Lawrence (eds.), *Nation-States and the Global Environment: New Approaches to International Environmental History* (Oxford University Press, 2013), p.118.

base to produce the necessary smallpox vaccines (which required more than 2 billion doses). It turns out that only the communists “had the necessary infrastructure in place to produce that many doses, because Western manufacturers had found smallpox vaccine unprofitable to make.”<sup>17</sup>

With the dropping of the malaria campaign a more ominous ‘eradicationist’ campaign now rose to the fore as a new priority for the racists running the US government, that is, the reduction of certain foreign human populations. This reorientation led to the formation of a new population division being established within the United Nations in 1967, which was followed, a couple of years later, by the launch of the UN Fund for Population Activities, an institution which the WHO correctly viewed as a rival organization to their own more progressive minded health initiatives. In the preceding years:

The World Bank led the way in blaming malaria eradication for igniting a population explosion in developing countries with its concomitant pressure upon subsistence resources and national economies. The World Bank’s president, Eugene Black, endorsed a [1962] book titled *Does Overpopulation Mean Poverty?*<sup>2</sup> questioning the role played by ‘miracle drugs and insecticides’ in the decline of infectious diseases within a context of high birth rates and poor living conditions. A table in the book titled ‘How Much Does the United States Government Spend Each Year on Health Programs in the Underdeveloped Countries?’ blamed malaria eradication for absorbing more than 38 percent of all nonmilitary foreign aid. Leaders of industrial countries followed, augmenting the fear that in the near future, developing countries would have to confront Thomas Malthus’s prediction that increased poverty was unavoidable unless fertility rates were reduced.<sup>18</sup>

One country in which the US government’s transition from malaria control to population control had particularly devastating consequences for ordinary people was India where the forcible

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<sup>17</sup> Manela, “The politics of smallpox eradication,” p.270.

<sup>18</sup> Cueto, *Cold War, Deadly Fevers*, pp.146-7.

sterilization of the poor soon became state policy.<sup>19</sup> However, before discussing this policy it is important to recognize that India's Malaria Eradication Program had made serious gains in reducing the death toll from this deadly disease. Thus, when India became independent (in 1947), an estimated one in four people (or 75 million people) suffered from malaria infections, which resulted in the early deaths of around one million people a year. While by 1964, shortly after the peak of India's eradication efforts, annual malaria cases had been reduced considerably to just 100,000 cases a year. US foreign aid for such anti-malarial efforts however had peaked in 1960 and were then slashed as the 1960s progressed. Making matters worse, in the context of ensuing wars with Pakistan and China, the Indian government diverted increasing sums of money away from health budgets towards the military which gave further impetus to a resurgence in malaria cases in the 1970s (to 6.4 million cases in 1976).<sup>20</sup>

At first, at least, ruling-class concerns about human population growth in the early 1960s was not felt to contradict the economic benefits that were hoped to be attained by combatting malaria in India. But with the hope of eradication being quashed, population-obsessed elites made their presence felt and...

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<sup>19</sup> *Something Like a War* (1991) is Deepa Dharaj's enlightening documentary about the coercive history of family planning in India.

<sup>20</sup> "In material terms, WHO's role in assisting malaria eradication was rather insignificant. In 1958, the organization supplied a little over 7 per cent of the overall expenditure of the NMEP [National Malaria Eradication Project] - but that amount shrank to 1 per cent or less from 1959 onwards. At the program's peak in 1961- 1962, WHO contributed a paltry \$210,000 to the overall cost of roughly \$42 million." Most of the funding for Malaria eradication was provided by the Indian government, with most of the rest coming directly from the United States in the form of bilateral assistance which at its peak in 1960 was worth around \$15 million. Thomas Zimmer, "In the name of world health and development: the World Health Organization and malaria eradication in India, 1949-1970," in: Marc Frey, Sönke Kunkel, and Corinna Unger (eds.), *International Organizations and Development, 1945-1990* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.137, p.139.

...voices grew louder that regarded efforts to fight malaria not only of little use but even detrimental to economic development. A report on the Indian NMEP [National Malaria Eradication Program] written by WHO and USAID experts in November 1970 went so far as to conclude that ‘the antimalaria campaign was the major factor in the acceleration of population growth after 1951. ... The economic consequences of a population explosion in retarding economic development are well-known and need not be gone into here’.<sup>21</sup>

### **The battle for global health: vaccinating missions and emancipatory alternatives**

In the 1960s President Johnson had proved happy to position himself at the centre of the imperialist bloodbath in Vietnam. So, it was not surprising that democratic ideals were low on the list of priorities informing America’s newfound mission to vaccinate the world against smallpox. The same held true for the involvement of the Soviet Union’s brutal Stalinists, whose only very partial saving grace was their commitment to a socialized healthcare system – albeit one far removed from democratic oversight by ordinary workers. Ultimately it was such state-led commitments to elite-driven solutions that ensured that the WHO’s newfound efforts to eradicate smallpox utilized all manner of coercive pressures (verbal, legal, and economic), and “at the extreme, forcible vaccination conducted through military-style raids.” Hence the logical response of many ordinary people on the receiving end of such forcible measures was resistance, even if it was in their best interests to accept vaccinations. And the lesson that health practitioners eventually learned from the WHO’s heavy-handed approach to their vaccination crusade was that persuasion through education is the best means of ensuring popular compliance with vaccination programs.

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<sup>21</sup> Zimmer, “In the name of world health and development,” p.140. Zimmer explains that this shift in orientation still remained highly contested in the international arena. He writes: “For the conflict over population growth within WHO, see also Matthew Connelly (2008: 119–130, 145–151).”

Early assumptions that resistance was the result of ‘traditional’ beliefs opposed to modern science proved shaky as studies found that such beliefs did not correlate well with resistance to vaccination. Rather, it was often the association of vaccination campaigns with the exercise of power by the government or outsiders that explained suspicion of the program, especially in relatively isolated areas where residents associated government officials on the scene with taxation, conscription, or other predations and were generally suspicious of the intentions and motives of outsiders.<sup>22</sup>

Still, much like the earlier attempt to eradicate malaria, when the campaign against smallpox finally succeeded in the late seventies, there remained one major problem, as this victory further encouraged many health bureaucrats to refocus upon promoting narrowly technical interventions to manage disease.

Nevertheless, at the same time as they achieved their success with smallpox, global institutions like the WHO were coming under increasing pressure to respond to the pressures being placed upon them by the working-class uprisings that were taking place across the world. In 1978 some of these popular demands were then codified at the WHO’s Alma-Ata Conference where delegates supported a new “health for all” declaration which represented a break from the technocratic approaches to global health that had so far dominated the WHO’s history. But although Alma-Ata’s proposed horizontal approach to care delivery was widely interpreted as progressive, socialists from outside the Stalinist tradition were quick to point out that much more need to be done as the Alma-Ata declaration still reflected the agendas being pushed by the “hegemonic development establishments of the Western world”. Either way, leaving this issue aside...

As these events were unfolding, the idealistic content of the [Alma-Ata] declaration—and its prospects for ‘Western-style’ implementation via WHO—faced a full-scale assault from rising

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<sup>22</sup> Manela, “The politics of smallpox eradication,” p.273.

neoliberal quarters. The Rockefeller Foundation sponsored a 1979 conference at Bellagio on *selective* PHC [primary healthcare] that advocated a technical version of PHC based on more feasible and cost-effective measures such as vaccines and vector control instead of the ample sociopolitical-health measures advanced at Alma-Ata that were ‘unattainable... in an age of diminishing resources’. Soon the declaration’s overall vision was watered down into a package of ‘child survival’ interventions, whose application was spearheaded by UNICEF. It was further diluted in attempts to ‘privatise’ PHC, as witnessed by the American Public Health Association’s efforts to push WHO into ‘mobilization of the private sector for primary health care delivery systems in the developing countries’.<sup>23</sup>

Elites associated with the Rockefeller Foundation may not have shared the same political priorities as President Ronald Reagan, but in the age of ascendent neoliberalism both sets of rival elites were vigorously opposed to the type of social democratic ideas being promoted under the auspices of the WHO. Rockefeller interests therefore lobbied from within existing health infrastructures to undermine democratizing influences within the WHO, while the Reagan Administration, as the primary financier of internationalist bodies like

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<sup>23</sup> Anne-Emanuelle Birn and Nikolai Kremmentsov, “‘Socialising’ primary care? The Soviet Union, WHO and the 1978 Alma-Ata Conference,” *BMJ Global Health*, 24(3), October 2018. For two socialist interpretations of the Alma-Ata Conference see Vicente Navarro, “A critique of the ideological and political positions of the Willy Brandt Report and the WHO Alma Ata Declaration,” *Social Science and Medicine*, 18, 1984, pp.467-74; and Jaime Breilh, “Community medicine under imperialism: a new medical police?,” *International Journal of Health Services*, 9(1), 1979, pp.5-24. More recently, see Vicente Navarro, “Neoliberalism and its consequences: the World Health situation since Alma Ata,” *Global Social Policy*, 8(2), August 2008. In many ways the Alma-Ata Conferences exaltation of community-based politics echoed the co-optive policies pursued by American liberal philanthropists (most particularly the Ford and Rockefeller Foundation) in the late 1960s.



the United Nations and the WHO, simply withheld their funding to 'encourage' the WHO to re-establish the 'correct' priorities vis-à-vis the needs of the powerful.<sup>24</sup>

Even establishment health commentators like Chelsea Clinton have documented how elite manipulations have stymied the WHO's evolution, but like any good liberal commentators such critics remain silent about the anti-democratic machinations of the philanthropic giants. Clinton, in her partial summary of this period, thus writes:

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the failure of member states to pay even their frozen levels of contributions presented a significant challenge for WHO. The United States in particular withheld funds, a move largely interpreted as expressing dissatisfaction with WHO's list of essential medicines (its international guide for governments of the minimum medicine needs for a basic health-care system listing the most efficacious, safe, and cost-effective medicines for priority conditions), in line with public opposition from US pharmaceutical companies. Then WHO's Director-General Halfdan Mahler called the

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<sup>24</sup> In an effort to reign in the anti-democratic power of transnational corporations, in the 1970s Health for All was part of a larger UN effort, the New International Economic Order (NIEO). As part of these reforming efforts UNESCO acknowledged that there were serious problems with the world's media organizations and took active steps to expand the democratic potential of global media systems, leading to their proposal for a New World Information and Communication Order. This plan suggested the need for a radical departure from (then current) media trends and recognized that the current domination of media systems by Western states was inherently undemocratic. William Preston, Jr. Edward S. Herman, Herbert I. Schiller, *Hope and Folly: The United States and UNESCO, 1945-1985* (University of Minnesota Press, 1989). The successful launch of this Plan resulted in the US government eventually withdrawing their support for UNESCO.

withholding of assessed contribution payments ‘financial hostage.’<sup>25</sup>

## **Eradicating polio: a new global mission**

A new war was now being waged for the future of public health. And the external pressure exerted by neoliberal elites upon Halfdan Mahler, who served as WHO’s head from 1973 to 1988, was unrelenting, and just two months before he stepped down, he finally committed the WHO to launching a new Rockefeller-backed plan to eradicate polio by the year 2000.

In many ways this ‘new’ project, the Global Programme for Polio Immunization (GPPI), flowed on from previous eradication efforts, and represented a way to reimpose a technocratic orientation upon the wayward WHO with all its talk of “health for all.” Of course, no positive lessons were learned from the failures that accompanied the oppressive implementation of previous vaccination campaigns. Worse still, with the neoliberal turn in the 1970s, financial institutions like the World Bank simultaneously set about coordinating the privatization and dismantling of global health services.

It is fitting that a predecessor for the WHO’s newly launched polio eradication project was their Expanded Programme on Immunization, which had been set up in 1978 and had been characterized by the way it was violently forced upon the poor. In India, for example, this earlier campaign was accurately described as being “ill-conceived” “ill-designed” and “technocentric.”; and in 1990, similar criticisms were made of the Pulse Polio Programme Indian which represented the Indian component of Global Programme for Polio Immunization.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, despite the reassertion of elite priorities over the WHO’s operations, as far as its Western funders

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<sup>25</sup> Chelsea Clinton and Devi Lalita Sridhar, *Governing Global Health: Who Runs the World and Why?* (Oxford University Press, 2017), p.91.

<sup>26</sup> Debabar Banerji, “Crash of the immunization program: consequences of a totalitarian approach,” *International Journal of Health Services*, 20 (3), 1990.

were concerned the WHO had never been their favoured method of dictating global health projects. Hence:

Once the Cold War ended, the anti- communist rationale for Western bloc support for WHO disappeared (WHO faced unprecedented invective targeting its perceived bureaucratic inefficiency in a 1994 BMJ [*British Medical Journal*] series penned by its current editor- in- chief [Fiona Godlee]), leaving in its wake the promotion of trade, the commodification of health, disease surveillance, and health security as justifications for international health, all priorities of powerful countries and wealthy interests. By this time, apart from its role— usually underfunded— addressing surveillance, notification, and control of resurgent infectious diseases (e.g., TB), and, especially, pandemics, (e.g., influenza), WHO was no longer at the heart of international health activities, as had been stipulated in its 1948 Constitution.<sup>27</sup>

Another early sign that top-down immunization programs would face roll-out problems became clear in 1990 when the government of Cameroon launched a sweeping campaign to protect their country from tetanus. In this case the government embarked upon an intrusive health campaign that was pushed forward by squads of mobile vaccinators: a coercive campaign that was felt to be even more shocking to those on its receiving end as it followed on from years of leaving the matter of immunizations largely in the hands of parents. Moreover, in the context of deep political instability in the region, the political opponents of the government of Cameroon were able to successfully mislead large numbers of people into believing that the vaccination campaign was really a covert sterilization plot. Sadly, for many reasons this was not a difficult interpretation to impose upon the tetanus campaign. People already had vivid memories of the forced vaccination campaigns that had characterized Cameroon's colonial

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<sup>27</sup> Anne-Emanuelle Birn, Timothy Holtz, and Yogan Pillay, *Textbook of Global Health* (Oxford University Press, 2017), p.75. This book provides one of the best critical overviews of the interaction between capitalist exploitation and global health projects.

past, and such fears of the past repeating itself were not aided by the fact that the government had simultaneously initiated a national campaign to limit population growth (a campaign which promoted the legalization of contraception at a “time of cutbacks in medical services and supplies”).<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the fears of ordinary people need to be understood in the broader context of western-backed population control efforts that had forcibly sterilized tens of thousands of women in poorer nations.<sup>29</sup>

### The awakening of health conspiracies

Considering the anti-democratic manner in which the powerful continue to impose their own favoured health interventions upon the world, it is easy to understand how rival political elites have been able to sow panic by deliberately fuelling public beliefs in dark eliminationist conspiracies. For example, the idea that the US government might be waging biological warfare (BW) on black populations via public health campaigns were unfortunately all too believable for many, which only enabled the intelligence agencies of foreign powers to stoke such false fears to help enrage their target audiences. For example:

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<sup>28</sup> Pamela Feldman-Savelsberg, Flavien Ndonko, and Bergis Schmidt-Ehry, “Sterilizing vaccines or the politics of the womb: retrospective study of a rumor in Cameroon,” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 14 (2), 2000, p.160, p164. The authors note how “1990 was a time of suspicion. Six people had just been killed at a demonstration launching a newly created opposition party in Bamenda, the capital of the Northwest Province.” (p.162) Religious leaders in Cameroon also received conspiratorial assistance from overseas with one particularly influential far-right Catholic being Dr Philippe Schepens (from Belgium) who warned the people “against accepting a vaccine that focuses on the same population as that of a family planning initiative”. (p.163)

<sup>29</sup> This deeply eugenic global health project had only ended in the late 1970s because of a coordinated fightback being led by those very same communities which had been on the receiving end of such state directed violence.

Between 1972 and 1975, a Soviet-organized disinformation campaign was directed against the Malaria Control Research Unit in New Delhi, India, which was operated by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Indian Council of Medical Research with US financial aid. The allegations were that (1) malarial mosquito studies were being carried out to aid US efforts to use mosquitoes and yellow fever virus as BW agents; (2) trials of low-application dosages of malathion as a mosquito-control agent were actually efforts to test the dispersal of BW agents; and (3) another subproject involving birds as carriers of arthropod-borne viruses was an attempt to find the best way to disperse BW agents on the Indian subcontinent. Despite the absence of any scientific basis for these charges and despite the thorough, documented denials by the WHO, the disinformation campaign was successful in causing the Indian government to close the unit in 1976 and to end the malaria research carried out by the WHO on India's behalf.<sup>30</sup>

That millions of people would fall for such propaganda demonstrates how little trust ordinary people had in the US government. True, the US government might have publicly dismantled their biological warfare/weapons program in 1969, but they didn't do themselves any favours by spending the next two years drenching Vietnam with Agent Orange. Or what about their antidemocratic actions during the 1980s when they openly supported the military endeavours of the Iraqi government whom they knew were engaging in chemical warfare.<sup>31</sup> We

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<sup>30</sup> Milton Leitenberg, Raymond Zilinskas, and Jens Kuhn, *The Soviet Biological Weapons Program: A History* (Harvard University Press, 2012), pp.411-2.

<sup>31</sup> Colin Schultz, "The U.S. knew Iraq was using chemical weapons, helped out anyway," *Smithsonian magazine*, August 26, 2013. "Following the Nixon decision [in 1969], the CIA retained small amounts of anthrax and shellfish toxin as well as cultures for tularemia, brucellosis, Venezuelan equine encephalitis, and smallpox. This defiance of the president's authority was made public in Senate hearings in 1975 and likely attracted Soviet attention." Jeanne

should also remember that throughout the 1980s the Reagan administration was falsely demonizing migrants and the LBGTQ community for causing the spread of AIDS,<sup>32</sup> while refusing to take suitable actions to limit the diseases spread. Such inhumane commitments on the part of the US government meant that Soviet spies found it easy to weaponize the issue of disease. So, another Soviet disinformation campaign was soon launched in 1983 when an anonymous letter was planted in an Indian newspaper which stated that AIDS owed its roots to biological warfare experiments that were apparently being supervised by the CIA. This very successful psy-ops campaign then picked up momentum in the mid-1980s with the fictitious story featuring on the frontpage of the *Sunday Express* (a conservative British newspaper) in October 1986.<sup>33</sup> And soon this deadly AIDS lie became a lynchpin of a variety of far-right conspiracy theories that set out their stall against all manner of Rockefeller-backed medical interventions, be they immunizations, socialized health care, or so-called genocidal population control programs.<sup>34</sup>

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Guillemin, *Biological Weapons: From the Invention of State-Sponsored Programs to Contemporary Bioterrorism* (Columbia University Press, 2004), p.130.

Although it is regularly asserted that the US government supplied Iraq with the biological ingredients for its chemical weapons, the historical record suggests this was not the case. It is argued that in reality the United States “did not create the program nor facilitate [Iraq’s chemical weapons program] in any direct way. Facilitation in an indirect way, by simply establishing relations, and therefore, in retrospect, by morally abetting chemical warfare, is a sturdier conclusion to reach.” David Walker, “An agonizing death’: 1980s U.S. policy on Iraqi chemical weapons during the Iran-Iraq War,” *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 8(2), 2017, p.189.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Farmer, *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame* (University of California Press, 1992). This is by far the most incisive of Farmer’s numerous books.

<sup>33</sup> *The Soviet Biological Weapons Program*, pp.414-5.

<sup>34</sup> One far-right author who linked these conspiracies was Dr Leonard Horowitz, author of many screeds including his 1996 best-seller *Emerging Viruses: AIDS & Ebola. Nature, Accident or Intentional?*

Such misinformed rejection of public health interventions however is a world removed from the valid criticisms made of such policies by socialists. Mass vaccination programs have done much to extend human longevity, but all too often we can see how the forcible roll-out of such programs has often sacrificed democratic norms, which only gives ammunition to those on the far-right who oppose all such programs. Likewise, the right of women to regulate their own reproductive status is a must for any democratic society, but the appalling way in which elites impose population control strategies on the poor gives the far-right all the evidence they need to oppose all forms of family planning. This enables the Right to promote and justify their own religious observance of abstinence – an act of devotion that has been rewarded by successive Republican governments.<sup>35</sup>

### **Sterilizing the poor: the far-right intervene**

As we have seen already, all too often the top-down global health projects pushed by philanthropists and their consorts has only served to undermine efforts to improve public health. What to make of the fact that in 1969, the head of the Rockefeller-backed Population

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Such tall tales then found a perfect breeding ground in America with the Reagan Administration hell-bent in pursuing a violent and deeply paranoid global war against communism. This was a government that willingly brought far-right political activists (particularly of a religious bent) into the heart of their government, including conspiracists who had made their names opposing all Rockefeller-influenced institutions be they the United Nations or the WHO. During the Reagan years, as during the twin Bush legacies, and then throughout Trump's reign, religious opposition to state 'interference' in health matters received further important state support, with public opposition to vaccinations and family planning (particularly abortions) gaining legitimacy by virtue of the regressive religious doctrines being espoused by the White House.

<sup>35</sup> Such favouritism ensures that any organizations involved with promoting women's rights through the provision of abortions are deprived of federal dollars, while religious non-profits are rewarded.

Council, Bernard Berelson, busied himself by discussing the potential of limiting population growth in India by adding sterilizing agents to their water supply.<sup>36</sup> Likewise although the WHO always remained a cautious participant in population control programs, from the early 1970s onwards they unfortunately became involved in international research that aimed to produce a vaccine that could limit the reproduction of women. And in 1972 this work led to the creation of the WHO's Task Force on Vaccines for Fertility Regulation.

By the early 1990s trials for developing such a fertility vaccine had been in process for years and researchers were now optimistic that a vaccine would soon be available that would "afford protection" against unwanted pregnancy for a period of 12 to 18 months. The head of the WHO Task Force summarized the scientific views put across at one of their meetings by describing their proposed anti-fertility vaccines as representing "an unprecedented effective instrument for demographic control". Here it is worth noting that the hCG-vaccines in question were being developed using tetanus toxoids, which perhaps goes some way to explaining why the tetanus vaccination campaigns (like that implemented in Cameroon) ignited fears amongst young women who thought they were being sterilized. So, we can be thankful that after many years of activism, in the 1990s an international coalition of women's rights activists finally succeeded in forcing the hCG-vaccine researchers to drop their efforts to devise an anti-fertility vaccination for mass production.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Matthew James Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Harvard University Press, 2009), p.245.

<sup>37</sup> Judith Richter with Sarah Sexton, "'Vaccination' against pregnancy: the politics of contraceptive research," *The Corner House*, April 2, 1996; Anita Hardon, "Negotiating safety and acceptability of new contraceptive technologies," *Medicine Anthropology Theory*, March 1, 2004; Anita Hardon, "Contesting claims on the safety and acceptability of anti-fertility vaccines," *Reproductive Health Matters*, 5(10), 1997. In more recent year's researchers appear to have undertaken further research to make the use of hCG fertility vaccines a reality with recent research undertaken in India being financed as part of the ongoing Indo-US collaboration Program on Contraception and Child Health. This research is being undertaken by G.P. Talwar



This feminist-led battle against the production of an anti-fertility vaccine was also waged with some success in public, and in November 1995, just prior to the campaigners eventual success, a BBC *Horizon* documentary titled “The Human Laboratory” discussed the hCG controversy while highlighting the unethical use of “population control” drugs like Quinacrine. Here on the topic of Quinacrine the documentary did a good job of exposing the toxic role played by two racist Americans, Stephen Mumford and Dr Elton Kessel, who had spent the past twenty years sterilizing women in developing nations while simultaneously leading campaigns to oppose immigration to America.<sup>38</sup> That two individuals could have sterilized up to 100,000

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(one of the founding hCG researchers), see Shilpi Purswani and GP Talwar, “Development of a highly immunogenic recombinant candidate vaccine against human chorionic gonadotropin,” *Vaccine*, 29, 2011. In another 2005 article “Recent advances in contraceptive vaccine development: a mini-review” published in the journal *Human Reproduction*, in which Talwar is a listed co-author, the article begins like this: “Besides the availability of the present methods of birth control, the population explosion and unintended pregnancies continue to pose major public health issues worldwide. The world population has exceeded  $6.43 \times 10^9$  (World POPClock projection, 2005) and increasing by  $1 \times 10^9$  every 12 years. Ninety-five percent of this growth is in the developing nations.” (p.3271)

While in another related scientific article dealing with the utility of conceptive vaccines (CV) that was published in 2014 the author concludes: “Recent advances in the fields of vaccinology, adjuvants, and nanotechnology will help to expedite CV development. In the WHO meeting on Contraception in Geneva, Switzerland, November 13-14, 2012, development of CV was enlisted as one of the highest priorities. An International Task-Force has been set for CV development. Development of single-shot, reversible CV will be a significant advancement in the field of contraception. It appears that Izumo and YLP<sub>12</sub> can provide suitable candidates for CV development.” (p.866)

<sup>38</sup> Mumford has been happy to work with white supremacists in the US to oppose immigration. In 1998 he summarized his reactionary

women owed much to the cheapness of the dangerous drug they were using, and as Mumford boasted: "For \$10,000's worth of Quinacrine pellets, 70,000 women can be sterilised." Mumford was however no small bit actor, and at the time that the documentary was released he was in the process of publishing his own book on population control that went on to receive rave reviews from many leaders of the mainstream population establishment. The positive reception to Mumford's work ignored the fact that his book propounded a huge conspiracy asserting that the Vatican had "hijacked the international feminist movement".<sup>39</sup> But while he opposed the Catholic religious hierarchy because of their archaic opposition to 'artificial' forms of birth control, in the early 1990s Mumford went on to find a useful Quinacrine ally in India in the form of a conservative medical doctor turned media-guru named Dr J.K. Jain. Dr Jain was a then-BJP

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arguments when he stated: "The threat of immigrants invading and taking over is real, they are swarming all over and draining the resources." Mumford cited in Rajashri Dasgupta, "Quick-fix medicinal ethics: Quinacrine sterilization and the ethics of contraceptive trials," in: Mohan Rao (ed.), *The Unheard Scream: Reproductive Health and Women's Lives in India* (Zubaan and Panos Institute, 2004), p.289; Rao, "Quinacrine sterilisation trials: a scientific scandal?," *Economic & Political Weekly*, 33(13), March 26 - April 3, 1998. For a must-read critical history of the abuse of Quinacrine, see Judith A.M. Scully, "Maternal mortality, population control, and the war in women's wombs: a bioethical analysis of Quinacrine sterilizations," *Wisconsin International Law Journal*, 19(2), 2001.

<sup>39</sup> Mumford attacks all women fighting back against population controllers by calling them "the pope's handmaidens". Stephen Mumford, *The Life and Death of NSSM 200: How the Destruction of Political Will Doomed a U. S. Population Policy* (Center for Research on Population, 1996).

Mumford even concludes that the "leaders of the population movement (with the exception of Lader, Ravenholt and a few others) have been essential to the Vatican-created illusion that the Church is not really thwarting population growth control".

Mumford is now the chairman of the Network for Church Monitoring.

member of Parliament whose own Indian-based media empire had produced crucial videos that helped fuel the anti-Muslim Ayodhya pogroms of 1992.<sup>40</sup> In spite of Mumford's powerful boosters in the Hindu nationalist community, women continued to keep up their pressure in opposing his sterilization crusade; and in 1998, as a direct result of years of campaigning, government authorities in America finally clamped down on his groups illegal activities. Although unfortunately the problem never completely disappeared as the FDA only ever "urged" him to dispose of his stockpile of 290,000 Quinacrine pellets.<sup>41</sup>

But in returning to the same BBC documentary that had helped expose Mumford's evil exploits, it is important to note that the same program went badly wrong in its effort to shed light on the then raging hCG vaccine controversy. Instead of trying to uncover any facts of the case the documentary ended by promoting the conspiratorial arguments of conservative Catholics. The BBC's producers did this by interviewing a Phillipino activist named Sister Mary Pilar Verzosa who asserted that tetanus vaccines being given to women living in their

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<sup>40</sup> As a young boy Jinendra Kumar Jain had joined the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) which provided the pathway for his BJP assisted launch of JAIN TV in 1985. He was elected as a member of parliament (Upper House, Rajya Sabha) by the BJP from 1990 to 1994; and was only expelled from the BJP's National Executive on January 3, 2001. This expulsion arose because Jain had been "accused of being an agent of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan. In the light of Jain's involvement in RSS and BJP politics, particularly with respect to the Ayodhya controversy between 1989 and 1992, this accusation seems almost surreal." Christiane Brosius, *Empowering Visions, A Study on Videos and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism in India* (Anthem Press, 2005), p.52. Jain served as a president of Mumford's group in India.

<sup>41</sup> Dasgupta, "Quick-fix medical ethics," p.300. Part of this grassroots pressure led to a front-page expose in the *Wall Street Journal*, see Alix Freedman, "Population bomb: two American contraceptive researchers export sterilization drug to Third World," *Wall Street Journal*, June 19, 1998.

country's slums had been laced with the hCG vaccine. If the producers of the documentary had done any background research at all they would have realized that the Sister in question was the founder of Pro-Life Philippines – a group that she'd set-up in the 1970s with the help of Father Paul Marx – the leader of a far-right Catholic group based in the US known as Human Life International. This is an infamous group that represented "a significant force in the militant wing of the antiabortion movement" that distributed books with titles like *Sex Education: The Final Plague*.<sup>42</sup> We should add that the same Belgium doctor (Dr Philippe Schepens) who had helped inspire eugenic conspiracies in Cameroon in the early 1990s had been an active member of the international advisory board of Human Life

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<sup>42</sup>Chip Berlet and Matthew Lyons, *Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort* (Guilford Press, 2000), p.251. The feminist who responded in the documentary to the revelations about alleged wrongdoings in the Philippines was Angeline Faye Schrater author of the excellent article "Immunization to regulate fertility: biological and cultural frameworks," *Social Science & Medicine*, 41(5), 1995. In the documentary however Schrater was only asked to respond to the accusation that drugs were being tested upon the poor, which is sadly an all-too-common phenomena, and so her comments made it look like she too believed in the latest hCG conspiracy theory. This issue remains relevant today as the comments she made in the documentary are still being used by right-wing media outlets to assert that tetanus vaccines were used to covertly sterilize the poor. The latest iteration of this conspiracy led to a 2017 article in an online 'journal' that was titled "HCG found in WHO tetanus vaccine in Kenya raises concern in the developing world." One of notorious co-authors of this article is Christopher Shaw, a campaigner who believes that vaccinations cause autism: Shaw is chair of the scientific advisory board of the anti-vaccine Children's Medical Safety Research Institute, a group that is founded and funded by a multi-millionaire named Claire Dvoskin. (Leading the charge in making the conspiratorial accusations in Kenya is a conservative pro-life catholic bishop who is in charge of the Kenya Catholic Doctors Association, Stephen Karanja, whose opposition to any form of birth control led him to attend "a symbolic burning of the evil that is the condom.")

International during the 1980s and is presently a board member of the far-right American Life League. It is also significant that around this same time similar claims about covert vaccination sterilization trials were being made by related pro-life Catholic activists in Tanzania, Mexico and Nicaragua;<sup>43</sup> in the latter instance the concerns were raised by Cardinal Obando -- an outspoken religious activist who had formerly acted as one of the leading supporters of the far-right paramilitary (contra) forces that had terrorized ordinary Nicaraguans throughout the 1980s.<sup>44</sup>

But while certain right-wing religious activists have at times played a central role in opposing all forms of reproductive gains for women, the other side of the demographic coin are those white supremacists who literally fear that their own 'race' will be eradicated by a growing tide of darker skinned individuals. Here a particularly relevant example is provided by the former white enforcers of apartheid in South Africa, who ensured that a secret state-sanctioned biological warfare project (codenamed "Project Coast") was run throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Overseen by Dr Wouter Basson, this project saw Basson link-up with a far-right scientist from the US (an avid reader of the literature of the Christian Identity militia movement) -- who helped him in his failed attempts to develop a vaccine that would permanently sterilize South Africa's black population.<sup>45</sup> As part of their sinister state-backed project the duo had

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<sup>43</sup> Julie Milstien et al., "Damage to immunisation programmes from misinformation on contraceptive vaccines," *Reproductive Health Matters*, 6, November 1995.

<sup>44</sup> Stephen Kinzer, "Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, key figure in Nicaraguan turmoil, dies at 92," *New York Times*, June 3, 2018.

<sup>45</sup> Jerome Amir Singh, "Project Coast: eugenics in apartheid South Africa," *Endeavour*, 32(1), 2008; Alastair Hay, "The South African biological warfare program," in: Lentzos Filippa (ed.), *Biological Threats in the 21st Century: The Politics, People, Science and Historical Roots* (Imperial College Press, 2016); Dr Adriaan Goosen a reproductive scientist who was recruited by Basson and gave evidence against him during the Reconciliation Trials recalled how in undertaking background research for his assignment he found that the

also tried and failed to develop a bacterial agent that would selectively kill Black people.

Dr Basson, who is called Doctor Death by the media, is still at large today, as despite all the evidence against him he was found to be innocent during what was to be the last major trial relating to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This exoneration was a farce, especially considering the doctors ongoing connections to far-right networks across the world. As one exhaustive academic report concluded:

Perhaps even more troubling is the possibility that Basson or other [Project] Coast personnel may have transferred dangerous CBW [chemical and biological weapons] materials or know-how to elements of a loose international network of right-wing extremists. Some civilian Afrikaner paramilitary groups, whose pro-apartheid members remain violently opposed to black majority rule, have publicly threatened to attack their enemies with chemical and biological agents. Investigative journalists are currently following certain leads in an effort to determine if former members of the SF [Special Forces] or various SADF- and SAP-sponsored 'death squads' may have subsequently collaborated with the civilian paramilitary right inside South Africa, which in recent months has again begun carrying out terrorist attacks.<sup>46</sup>

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WHO "had pinpointed immunological techniques as the future effective way to control populations and particularly in third world countries where you don't have to take a pill every day and so forth for obvious reasons." Nevertheless, although Basson most likely thought otherwise, Goosen was clear that "developing a vaccine that only works in blacks or that's colour or ethnic based" was never going to be possible as "Biochemically, blacks, white, Chinese, whatever, are identical."

<sup>46</sup> Jeffrey Bale, "South Africa's Project Coast: 'death squads,' covert state-sponsored poisonings, and the dangers of CBW proliferation," *Democracy and Security*, 2(1), 2006, p.50. Ongoing terrorist connections are similarly discussed in Tom Mangold and Jeff Goldberg's 2001 book *Plague Wars: The Terrifying Reality of Biological Warfare*. Also see Helen Purkitt and Stephen Burgess,

## Old wine into new bottles: from Rockefeller to Gates

And so while the eugenic inclinations of white terrorists certainly remain a threat to democracy, it remains the case that the daily activities of conservative activists play a larger role in shaping ongoing narratives around population control. This is a subject matter that has unfortunately, in the US context, brought all too many Malthusian-inspired environmental campaigners into intimate working relationships with anti-immigration activists.<sup>47</sup> Both groups being united in their wish to limit the reproductive capacity of the inhabitants of the developing world. This stands in sharp contrast to other powerful right-wing forces, like the Christian Right, who have long railed against the population control establishment and the Rockefeller Foundation.<sup>48</sup> But while both the religious Right and the Rockefeller Foundation (and their allies) may differ in many respects, both remain united in their efforts to bolster the forces of capitalism, which comes at the expense of promoting the very real health needs of the vast majority of our planet's inhabitants.

Bill Gates and his own foundation has now taken over from the Rockefeller Foundation in dominating the funding of family planning and global health care partnerships worldwide. And like the Rockefeller philanthropies before it, Gates' own multi-billionaire dollar foundation has acted with such arrogance that it was always destined to become the latest whipping boy of conservative conspiracists. Gates with no hint of irony even credits the inspiration for his initial involvement in health philanthropy to his attendance at

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*South Africa's Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Indiana University Press, 2005).

<sup>47</sup> I have covered this topic in my book *Under the Mask of Philanthropy* (2017).

<sup>48</sup> Sara Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right* (South End Press, 1989).

a Bellagio meeting in 1994 where he was apparently enamoured by the World Bank's work in largely pushing the WHO aside. The multi-billionaire also took much inspiration for his philanthropic direction from his father who himself served on the board of directors of Planned Parenthood in the times before Roe vs. Wade. Hence Gates was eager to use his new-found non-profit corporation "not only to shape the research priorities in [global] health issues, but also to impose a strictly private-sector managerial logic for the undertakings of its funds."<sup>49</sup>

### **Global healthcare, a private concern**

With a new billionaire in tow to the public health cause, the removal of global health budgets from meaningful democratic oversight continued unabated during the 1990s. In fact, the Bellagio meeting that pressed Gates into action had already pushed forward the need for a 'new' corporate partnership agenda (otherwise referred to as GHPs or Global Health Partnerships). This elite agenda-setting event that was held at the Rockefeller Foundations offices in Bellagio then led on to the 1996 launch of the International Aids Vaccine Initiative and formation of UNAIDS - both new bodies acting as more corporate-friendly replacements for the WHO's own AIDS program which, as it eventuates, had just been dismantled. In 1998 further corporatizing initiatives were then incorporated within global health infrastructures with the aid of Gro Harlem Brundtland's leadership of the WHO, whose ongoing work with the Gates Foundation led to the creation of GAVI (the Vaccine Alliance) in 2000. Profits always trump human life, and...

GAVI has been criticized for emphasizing new vaccines instead of ensuring that existing effective vaccination against childhood diseases is universally practiced. It has been characterized as a top-down arrangement emphasizing technical solutions that pay

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<sup>49</sup> Nitsan Chorev, *The World Health Organization between North and South* (Cornell University Press, 2012), p.233; also see Chorev, "Restructuring neoliberalism at the World Health Organization," *Review of International Political Economy*, 20(4), 2013.



scant attention to local needs and conditions, and underwriting already hugely profitable pharmaceutical corporations in the name of ‘saving children’s lives.’ Indeed, GAVI has subsidized companies such as Merck for already profitable products such as pneumococcal vaccine, while countries eligible for GAVI support are expected to take on an increasing proportion of costs, eventually losing both direct subsidies and access to lower-negotiated vaccine prices.<sup>50</sup>

But while GHPs professed intention was to increase levels of private sector financial contributions in health programs even this has not happened. Take the example of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (the Global Fund) which was launched in 2002 “with a commitment to leveraging private sector resources”. It turns out that even in the case of this famous Gates-backed initiative around 94 per cent of the Fund’s finances are derived from the national governments of developed countries.<sup>51</sup> The important point as far as the Gates Foundation is concerned is that the power to determine how to spend tax-payers money had now been wrested from any form of democratic scrutiny.

### **Polio extremism in Nigeria and Pakistan: a technocrat’s dilemma**

Although the Gates Foundation has now supplanted the Rockefeller Foundation as the key mover behind the funding and development of new global health projects, it was not until the year 2000 that Gates formally threw his foundations full weight behind global efforts to eradicate polio. In one typically over-optimistic assessment of the potential of the WHO’s Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI),

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<sup>50</sup> Anne-Emanuelle Birn and Judith Richter, “U.S. philanthrocapitalism and the global health agenda: the Rockefeller and Gates Foundations, past and present,” in: Howard Waitzkin (ed.), *Health Care Under the Knife: Moving Beyond Capitalism for Our Health* (Monthly Review Press, 2018).

<sup>51</sup> Simon Rushton and Owain David Williams (eds.), *Partnerships and Foundations in Global Health Governance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.17.

David Oshinsky wrote -- in his authoritative book *Polio: An American Story* (Oxford University Press, 2005) -- how:

By 2000, the promise of a world without polio seemed well within reach. The number of cases had fallen dramatically, from a thousand per day in 1987 to fewer than two thousand per year by century's end. Vowing to end polio by 2005, the WHO focused on the three countries that account for 95 percent of the remaining cases--Nigeria, India, and Pakistan. But the goal has proved elusive. Fresh outbreaks were reported in remote parts of northern India and northwest Pakistan, where logistical problems and cultural resistance to vaccination have put large populations at risk. Far worse was the situation in the northern Nigerian state of Kano, a largely Muslim area, where local politicians and clerics halted the immunization programs by claiming that the oral polio vaccine was purposely tainted to cause infertility and AIDS. (p.288)

The problems faced in northern Nigeria echo earlier concerns from the people of the neighbouring Cameroon, that is, that the rapid roll-out of vaccines was really just another covert ploy of imperial elites to lower their reproductive status. After all Nigerians had been forced to suffer under years of a military dictatorship which Western countries supported to gain access to Nigeria's abundant oil reserves. Making matters much worse, the impoverished, near-on completely illiterate population of Kano had further good reasons for not trusting Western medical aid. This is because they were still fighting for justice after their anti-democratic encounter with Pfizer, a New York-based drug company who had decided to conduct a deadly medical trial in Kano when a particularly severe epidemic of meningococcal meningitis ripped through their communities in early 1996. Amidst the carnage wrought by this ongoing epidemic, Pfizer arrived to test their new cure, Trovan, an experimental antibiotic that turned out to be "so dangerous that it left deafness, paralysis, and death in its wake." Some semblances of justice were only reached for the people of Kano after years of painful struggle in the courts, when in April 2010, Pfizer -- amidst much foul-play -- was forced to make a \$75 million to the Kano regional authorities to make amends for all those who suffered or died

because of their unethical medical trial.<sup>52</sup>

It was during this shocking episode of corporate-driven turmoil that the Gates Foundation ramped up Nigeria's polio eradication program in the early 2000s. The desire for immediate results once again led to coercive attempts to ensure full compliance with the vaccination teams, which led many people living in the poorest largely Muslim Northern regions of Nigeria to worry that those pushing the vaccinations had ulterior motives. Combined with the intense worldwide persecution of Muslims in the newly launched "war on terror" and the living memory of the Pfizer 'trial', it is hardly surprising that some conservative religious leaders would attempt to benefit from local concerns about the polio campaign.<sup>53</sup>

These developing events led to the Governor of Kano State to eventually take the decision to cancel the National Immunization Days in Kano in October 2003, with events heating-up further when scientists working for the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), the umbrella organization for Muslims in Nigeria, revealed that the polio vaccines were contaminated with anti-fertility products. It appears that these contaminants were probably derived from other sources, not from the vaccines, but the controversy was dealt with poorly by the authorities which did nothing to allay public fears. Further JNI tests later determined that the vaccines were not actually contaminated, but the damage had been done. Nevertheless by 2010, despite parents remaining angry that their federal and state governments were refusing to invest in basic primary health care provision while simultaneously

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<sup>52</sup> The Pfizer case is covered in depth in Harriet Washington's book *Deadly Monopolies: The Shocking Corporate Takeover of Life Itself, and the Consequences For Your Health and Our Medical Future* (Doubleday, 2011). In an otherwise useful book, Washington however seems unaware of the criticisms raised against organizations like the Gates Foundation. This leads her to conclude her book with undue optimism that big pharmaceutical corporations with the help of the Gates Foundation are now making good on their prior misdeeds.

<sup>53</sup> Maryam Yahya, "Polio vaccines – difficult to swallow: the story of a controversy in northern Nigeria," IDS Working Paper 261, March 2006.

expending so much time pushing vaccination campaigns, the one good outcome of this narrowly focused campaign was that polio infection rates were apparently now decreasing.

All this was taking place at the same time as huge general strikes against government corruption were rocking the country, with nine such strikes taking place between 2000 and 2012. The Nigerian government was widely seen to be utterly corrupt, and as a direct consequence of the failure of the trade union movement to organize to pose a real alternative to the bankrupt status quo far-right religious groups like Boko Haram were able to fill the void particularly in the Northern regions. But rather than address any of the urgent economic needs of the poor that had pushed them into the arms of religious extremists, the government simply intervened with brutal military force against the religious uprising ordering the extrajudicial murder of the leader of Boko Haram in July 2009. This action only inflamed local tensions in the region, driving even more people into the orbit of what in the following months and years would soon become a terrifying terrorist insurgency.<sup>54</sup> Trade unions leaders of course had always maintained the ability to hold the government to account, but tragically despite the massive industrial militancy of the Nigerian working-class, union leaders kept selling out the mighty struggles of

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<sup>54</sup> The *Financial Times* reported how the government's "heavy-handed counterinsurgency has been blamed for creating sympathy for the insurgents in north-east Nigeria". Xan Rice and James Blitz, "Spiral of revenge claims 200 victims in Nigeria," *Financial Times*, January 22, 2012. (Also see "Timeline: Boko Haram's deadly evolution") For a socialist perspective on the origins and growth of Boko Haram, see Hassan Taiwo Soweto, "Boko Haram's abduction of school girls horrifies the world," *Democratic Socialist Movement (Nigeria)*, May 12, 2014; Adam Mayer, *Naija Marxisms: Revolutionary Thought in Nigeria* (Pluto Press, 2016); and for liberal, albeit fairly insightful investigations into Boko Haram, see Kate Meagher, "Beyond terror: addressing the Boko Haram challenge in Nigeria," Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, Policy Brief, November 2014; and Abdul Raufu Mustapha and Kate Meagher (eds.), *Overcoming Boko Haram: Faith, Society and Islamic Radicalization in Northern Nigeria* (James Currey, 2020).

ordinary people. It was this unwillingness of union leaders to tackle government corruption head-on that also helped push many desperate people into accepting terrorism as a more suitable terrain of resistance than collective struggle within the trade union movement.

Here it should be emphasized that it was never preordained that so many people would turn away from trade unions to embrace terrorism. Indeed, January 2012 had been marked by Nigeria's biggest general strike in recent history, with the country shut down for six days, which included the effective closure of Kano's state capital. In response to this strike, state repression was stepped-up with the police being mobilized to murder striking workers in Kano. But most importantly, as socialists reported at the time:

A key feature of the struggle was the unity of the working class and all oppressed people. While the general strike lasted, not a single bomb exploded. With the masses on the street struggling through collective action, even Boko Haram became isolated. This is because with the class struggle on the rise, belief in collective mass action dominated the hearts and minds of millions over and above individual terrorism. Kano supplied one of the iconic images of the January movement with online media pictures of Christian protesters standing guard in a circle around a crowd of Muslims observing their midday prayers.<sup>55</sup>

By forcing the government into a drastic U-turn on their proposed fuel price hike, the general strike concretely demonstrated what was possible when the working-class stood united; but systemic poverty and government corruption were not ended, and “many people” believed that “the strike could have won far more had the labour leadership been more resolute. Put simply, this was another lost opportunity to transform Nigeria.”<sup>56</sup> Thus in lieu of a socialist

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<sup>55</sup> H T Soweto, “Nigeria’s general strike/mass protest against fuel price hike,” Democratic Socialist Movement, April 17, 2012.

<sup>56</sup> After the nine general strikes, ending with the one in 2012, “without any end results from this colossal exertion of energy by the masses, there was less and less support for more general strikes without clear aims. However, the economic crisis combined with the failure of the

alternative being posed to address the fact that just 1% of Nigerians continue to profit from 80% of their countries immense oil wealth, Boko Haram were able to opportunistically pose as a group willing to challenge the ongoing capitalist abuses of ordinary people. Tragically just weeks after the 2012 general strike, Boko Haram unleashed a reign of terror upon the city of Kano which took the lives of around 200 people, but despite this violence the polio vaccinators had learnt no lessons, and their heavy-handed door-to-door polio eradication campaign continued unabated.

For the hundreds of thousands of residents of the district of Kumbotso, in the city of Kano, the persistence of this intense polio campaign in February 2012 must have seemed particularly peculiar when routine vaccination coverage was just 9%. Thus, the impoverished residents of Kumbotso were faced by the strange contradiction that “polio vaccine is delivered to their doorstep every other month” while the government continue to fail to provide health service to provide for even their most basic needs. Yet the Gates Foundation and WHO elites overseeing their own polio eradication campaign simply ignored all these contextual factors and blamed the people of Kano for being ignorant of the benefits of vaccines. This arrogance was laid bare in an academic article (that ironically was funded by the Gates Foundation) which observed that GPEI administrators deliberately deceive everyone in their public utterances when vaccine refusals “are frequently described as resulting from ignorance” – which is just another way of blaming anyone other than themselves. But as the authors of this research correctly highlight: “Distrust and refusals are driven in large part by the disconnect

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trade union leaders to show a way forward generated an increase in national and religious tensions especially in the north-east where Boko Haram is based, and in violent repeated clashes between Muslim herdsmen and largely Christian arable farmers in central Nigeria. This year [2018] saw a partially successful general strike called on the issue of increasing the minimum wage, but the trade union leaders called it off simply on the basis of a promise of negotiations which have, so far, produced nothing.” See “World perspectives: capitalist system faces political and social upheavals,” *Socialist Alternative*, December 16, 2018.

between weak health services and intense polio campaigns.”<sup>57</sup>

Notably the researchers of the aforementioned journal article extend their arguments to a number of other countries, which included Pakistan, noting that the “CIA’s use of a fake vaccination campaign in Abbottabad, Pakistan in 2011 likely hurt the credibility” of ongoing global vaccination efforts. This was a covert fake

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<sup>57</sup> Svea Closser *et al.*, “The global context of vaccine refusals: insights from a systematic comparative ethnography of the global polio eradication initiative,” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 30 (3), 2016, p.16. The research “was carried out in February 2012, just a few weeks after attacks by Boko Haram killed nearly 200 people in the city. Even in this context, door-to-door polio vaccination continued.” (p.12) With Gates support for such research it is apparent that the very philanthropic elites who have proven so happy to impose top-down campaigns upon people are once again busy funding research in the hope of finding a way to impose top-down health initiatives with as little resistance as possible. In a similar vein in 2015 the Rockefeller Foundation funded a Bellagio conference titled “Fear of the Foreign: Pandemics and Xenophobia.” One insightful article that flowed from this conference was Samuel Cohn and Ruth Kutalek’s “Historical parallels, ebola virus disease and cholera: understanding community distrust and social violence with epidemics,” *PLOS Currents Outbreaks*, 2016.

Desperate attempts to enforce eradication of polio has meant that “In Kano, Kwara and Niger States, parents may be arrested for failure to vaccinate their children.” (p.304) Although it seems that such “coercive actions have been tempered by various sorts of incentives and community projects.” (p.305) Since 2013, the Gates Foundation has therefore provided “substantial monetary awards” to reward “governors of states with significantly reduced polio transmission and increased immunisation levels”; while in the same year, “Nigerian industrialist Aliko Dangote announced a plan to provide cooperating mothers with his products - sugar, salt and macaroni”. (p.305) Elisha Renne, “Polio vaccination, political authority and the Nigerian state,” in: Christine Holmberg and J. Hillis Miller (eds.), *The Politics of Vaccination: A Global History* (Manchester University Press, 2017).

vaccination campaign that had been used in efforts to track down Osama Bin Laden – an appalling abuse of science that only served to give further ammunition to political popularists who sought to use this as an excuse to reject all vaccinations. Of course this sort of blowback is nothing new for US imperialists, and we should remember how in the 1980s the US government had thrown their financial muscle behind far-right Muslim extremists (like Osama Bin Laden) in a bid to defeat their communist enemies in Afghanistan. Such blowback is however born by all those who have lost their lives to terrorist extremists all over the world, including not least the nine female polio vaccinators who were murdered in Kano in February 2013.

Yet despite organizations like the Gates Foundation blaming vaccinate hesitancy upon the ignorance of ordinary people, a closer inspection of the Pakistani case is revealing. Thus, we find that across Pakistan “as a whole, refusal rates for polio vaccine are much lower than in many wealthy countries. The program’s best estimate of refusals nationwide is that they make up about 0.5% of the population.” Moreover, determined resistance to vaccination efforts tend to be limited to highly localized pockets in “key districts” with a notable one being SITE town, a sector in the city of Karachi which is home to “many who moved to the area to escape [American] drone strikes in their home communities.” Is it any wonder that the US-backed polio eradicators therefore stir up fear among those populations who have suffered most from the US government’s violent commitment to war? It is after all natural to question why experts, who are ostensibly committed to promoting better global health for the poor, would, as one expert put it, plough so many billions of dollars “into repeated polio campaigns rather than attempting to fight the fecal-oral spread of polio by improving sanitation infrastructure or strengthening routine immunization services.”<sup>58</sup>

### **Optimism and ignorance – a ruling-class problem**

Instead of learning from so many failing disease eradication efforts, billionaire donors continue to focus their efforts on silencing the

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<sup>58</sup> Closser, “The global context of vaccine refusals,” p.13, p.7.



voices of ordinary people. Donors therefore continue to harp on about the need to remain positive that their aid initiatives will solve all the world's problems, but this...

...optimism in global health goes beyond simple strategy: it is a *cultural* characteristic of the [Global] Polio Eradication Initiative, one with important effects. First, the culture of optimism ensures the continuation of the project by obscuring existing problems and convincing donors and officials alike that eradication is imminent. Second, the culture of optimism makes polio eradication more difficult by preventing open, objective analysis of the problems the project faces.<sup>59</sup>

Again, there are many historical reasons why those on the receiving end of aid from ruling-class institutions do not always feel that grateful. In the context of efforts to eradicate polio in India, many people still harboured memories of the genocidal actions of the British elites during the Second World War, whose actions allowed the Bengal Famine of 1943 to take the lives of upwards of 4 million people.<sup>60</sup> It was exactly these types of murderous actions that informed the vigorous opposition to the WHO/UNICEF BCG vaccination campaign that was undertaken in south India throughout the 1950s. In this case Indians were rightly sceptical about the mass roll-out of a new vaccine in their own country, especially when they knew that the same vaccine was not considered safe enough to give to the poor in Britain. It was therefore understandable that they might not want their

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<sup>59</sup> Svea Closser, *"We can't give up now": global health optimism and polio eradication in Pakistan,* *Medical Anthropology*, 31(5), 2012, p.386. "At the 2010 Rotary International Convention in Montreal, the importance of eradicating polio was a central theme" with big star speakers including Greg Mortenson. (p.397) Mortenson is a particularly poor choice given his controversial role in Afghanistan see Nosheen Ali, "Books vs bombs? Humanitarian development and the narrative of terror in Northern Pakistan," *Third World Quarterly*, 31(4), 2010.

<sup>60</sup> Madhusree Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India during World War II* (Basic Books, 2010).

children being used as guinea pigs for Western medicines. Moreover, other common arguments that were marshalled in India at the time correctly asserted that “BCG was an example of a quick-fix technical approach” in that ignored the urgent need for “sanitary reforms, clean drinking water, proper housing, and sewage.” This shocking example of deliberate material neglect is teased out in Randall Packard’s important 2016 book *A History of Global Health: Interventions into the Lives of Other Peoples*. As he notes:

This argument would become a recurrent element in Indian critiques of disease-eradication campaigns, as well as other biotechnical solutions to complex health problems, including more-recent attempts to distribute Vitamin A capsules to prevent child mortality. (p.129)

Concerns about health interventions imposed from afar also need to be considered in the context of the eugenic ideological proclivities of most Western elites, which included Brock Chisholm, the founding director-general of WHO. In 1951 Chisholm had apparently jumped at the opportunity to respond to a request from the health minister of India to help them implement a family planning strategy, this move however was quickly blocked by Catholic representatives to the WHO, even though the main form of birth control being promoted in the WHO’s initial proposal was the rhythm method. The following year Chisholm’s efforts to promote population control strategies at the WHO were once again blocked by Catholic delegates which led to any discussion of such health concerns being side-lined at the WHO for the next nine years.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Packard, *A History of Global Health*, pp.197-8. For a useful overview of the external pressures that led the WHO to join the UN in contributing to population control efforts in the late 1960s, see Jason Finkle and Barbara Crane, “The World Health Organization and the population issue: organizational values in the United Nations,” *Population and Development Review*, 2(3/4), 1976. After leaving the WHO in 1988, Halfdan Mahler would immediately go to lead the International Planned Parenthood Federation (from 1988 until 1995). The decision to recruit Mahler to head this organization may be

## Reproduction in India: a global concern for elites

Yet unlike the WHO, the Rockefeller Foundation was unhindered by any significant internal opposition, and between 1953 and 1960 the foundation embarked upon their Khanna study in the Punjab region of India – a population control strategy whose misplaced Malthusian logic was laid bare in Mahmood Mamdani’s ground-breaking book *The Myth of Population Control: Family, Caste and Class in an Indian Village* (Monthly Review Press, 1972). Mamdani’s book proved especially timely as in the sixties the focus of Western elites had now been decisively turned towards efforts to limit population growth in developing countries. In India this demographic obsession was given a welcome hand when Indira Gandhi came to power in 1966, a politician who had no qualms in using the authoritarian powers of her state in her efforts to control the reproductive capacity of the poor.

With the Cold War heating up and Marxist uprisings spreading across the Indian subcontinent, population control strategies were now seized upon by the government as a part of a constellation of tools to help maintain their political authority. Here it is critical to note that the Indian National Congress’s authoritarian form of democratic socialism stood in marked contrast to the politics of more principled socialist leaders like Periyar (1879-1973), who as early as the 1930s

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connected to the liberal turn the population establishment was forced into taking in the 1980s which was forced upon the organization by the vigorous opposition they received from women all over the world. For a review of the activities of the main population actors in the mid-1990s, see Betsy Hartman, “Population control II: the population establishment today,” *International Journal of Health Services*, 27(3), 1997. And for a useful overview of the WHO’s ongoing “Malthusian muddle” see Lee Humber, *Vital Signs: The Deadly Costs of Health Inequality* (Pluto Press, 2019), Chapter 9 (“Who’s WHO?”). Humber concludes: “It is the market-driven demand for cheap labour that governs fertility rates, not high fertility rates developing in isolation that hold people in poverty as Malthus – and WHO – would have us believe.”

promoted sexual freedom for women. Indeed, Periyar's approach to sexual politics remained a truly emancipatory position when compared to Mahatma Gandhi's own famed advocacy of abstinence. As Periyar explained at the time:

There is a fundamental difference between our reasons for the necessity of contraception and those of others. That is, we say contraception is essential for women to be free and autonomous. They say it is essential for women's health, national economy and to prevent fragmentation and destruction of family property. First of all, whether a woman needs birth control or not should be entirely a woman's decision. Secondly, the objective of birth control is not to control the growing population or to advance the economy, but to create an environment for women to have rights and decision making power.<sup>62</sup>

It is therefore a tragedy for the people of India that the Congress Party, with the firm backing of the Western-backed population control

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<sup>62</sup> Cited in Mohan Rao, *From Population Control to Reproductive Health: Malthusian Arithmetic* (Sage, 2004), pp.22-3. For a discussion of Periyar's health activism, see Jayabrata Sarkar, "Interrogating social justice: Periyar, patriarchy and birth control," *Round Table India*, December 30, 2015. An early and influential Malthusian group, the Family Planning Association of India, was established in 1949 and worked closely with the Rockefeller Foundation. One of the groups founding members, Lady Rama Rau, who blamed the Bengali famine of 1943 on overpopulation went on to serve as the president of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (1963-1971). Rao writes: "What is curious is that although the proportion of finances from international donors has never been significant—never, ever, exceeding a tenth of the total health budget, they have exerted a disproportionate share of influence. The greatest foreign involvement came after the droughts and economic crises of 1966 when the World Bank pressurised the Indian government to intensify population control measures and the USAID replaced the Ford Foundation as the leading agency providing assistance to population control in India." (p.35)

establishment, chose to apply increasingly militaristic means to wage their war against their own population. And it is important to remember that even at the pinnacle of the Indian government's human rights abuses, foreign funding continued to give the green light to india's compulsory sterilization programs.

By October 1976, when SIDA [Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency] sent one of its staff, Peter Hegardt, for a joint inspection of the Swedish-World Bank projects in Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka, the oppressive nature of the program was plain for all to see. 'Obviously the stories...on how young and unmarried men more or less are dragged to the sterilization premises are true in far too many cases,' he reported. There were many 'shocking stories.' In fact, in the two weeks he was in India, there were three incidents in Uttar Pradesh of police killing people for protesting the population control program. Nevertheless, in December 1976 SIDA decided to fund a second India project to the tune of 75 million kroner (\$17 million, or \$60.2 million in today's dollars).<sup>63</sup>

But with hundreds "being killed from botched sterilizations" and countless others "being hauled away to sterilization camps against their will" mass protests continued to grow in size. "The people of India... had had enough." The final result was that during the 1977 elections the Congress Party lost by a landslide and was swept from power.

To this day the issue of sterilization and consent remains a troubling subject, and as mentioned earlier, conservative activists love to make out that the Gates Foundation is still trying to depopulate the world by sterilizing the poor, which links to their false propaganda about vaccines providing a covert means of regulating population growth. The subject however is still a live issue today precisely because the Gates Foundation remains committed to helping (largely poor) women limit their rate of reproduction -- although the foundation now cloak this assistance "in the language of saving and empowering

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<sup>63</sup> Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Belknap Press, 2008), p.322.

women.”<sup>64</sup>

Furthermore, what we do know is that in its formative years many of the health projects financed by Gates’ philanthropic organizations maintained an unhealthy obsession with population growth.<sup>65</sup> This was a Malthusian-inspired fear that Gates shared with other ruling-class health practitioners based at the World Bank, with his father – who initially ran Bill Gate’s philanthropic enterprises – and with another financial and intellectual contributor to Gates’ emerging philanthropic health empire, Warren Buffett.<sup>66</sup> It is also a matter of historical record that in 2000 Gates acted to ensure a strong degree of continuity between the old “population control” establishment that had been powered by the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations and his own modernizing philanthropy. Gates did this by recruiting the Ford Foundations former population expert, Gordon Perkin, to oversee the Gates Foundation newly emergent global health programs. (Notably for the five years prior to this Perkin’s had been an informal advisor to Gates Senior on fertility issues.) Yet despite his enduring worries about other peoples’ reproductive habits, it has been Bill Gates’ ongoing vaccine related work which has brought him most

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<sup>64</sup> Betsy Hartmann, “Will World Population Day open the Gates to coercive contraception?,” *Common Dreams*, July 9, 2012;

<sup>65</sup> During the first year of Gates’ philanthropic contributions (running from April 1, 1997 until March 31, 1998) Gates gave away \$14.5 million to state libraries in the US (through his Gates Library Foundation), and \$18.9 million to other causes through the William H. Gates Foundation – a lot of which (\$6.8 million) went to supporting reproductive/family planning research. The following were the 1998 family planning grants: \$2.3 million (over five years) for training for leaders in developing countries through the Family Planning Leadership Education Institute; \$1.7 million (over three years) for the UN Population Fund; \$1.5 million for contraceptive research at the Eastern Virginia Medical School; \$0.6 million for Population Communication International; \$0.4 million for Family Care International; \$0.2 million for the Population Resource Center; \$0.1 million for Planned Parenthood.

<sup>66</sup> Karen Weise, “Warren Buffett’s family secretly funded a birth control revolution,” *Bloomberg*, July 30, 2015.

fame and infamy.

### **Searching for some cures, fighting some diseases**

One of the first health projects that Gates backed with his ill-gotten billions was the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative – a project which had been initially established two years earlier by the World Bank with the aid of a \$3 million grant from the Rockefeller Foundation.<sup>67</sup> Gates then got on board with this Initiative when he gave them a \$1.5 million donation in 1998. This support was followed by a \$25 million donation the following year (which happened to be the same year that Big Pharma giant Glaxo Wellcome started funding the Initiative), and a further \$100 million in 2001.

The philanthropic power from Gates' Microsoft fortune had now well and truly erupted, and in 2000 another related project, the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI Alliance), was launched with a \$750 million donation; soon to be followed by the creation of The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in 2002.<sup>68</sup> The Seattle-based Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (which was formerly headed by Perkins) was also another early recipient of Gates' largesse, with this program receiving a ten year grant

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<sup>67</sup> The other founding funders of IAVI were the United Nations Joint Program for HIV/AIDS, the Alfred P. Sloan and Mérieux Foundations, and the Until There's a Cure Foundation. (Source: "Rockefeller Foundation Annual Report 1996")

<sup>68</sup> By 2005 The Global Fund had received £150 million from Gates with the vast majority of their funds being derived from the US government (\$2.3 billion) – a pattern that holds true for most global health initiatives. And illustrative of the health priorities of the various Gates' backed projects, during its first decade of operations The Global Fund spend only 3% of the money the Fund distributed was spent on the strengthening of primary healthcare systems. With most of this funding, being "directed at improving the delivery of specific disease interventions and was routed through NGOs, rather than governmental health services." Packard, *A History of Global Health*, p.296.

worth \$50 million (in 1999) which enabled PATH to launch their own Malaria Vaccine Initiative. While another early beneficiary of the Gates Foundation millions was the WHO's polio eradication project (which obtained a \$50 million grant in 1999).

Following Africa's devastating meningitis outbreak of 1996 – which took more than 25,000 lives – the WHO became involved in brokering attempts to remedy the problem, but only with a vaccine.<sup>69</sup> Corporate vaccine manufacturers however decided that the profit margins were not great enough for them to support such a solution, and it was only when the Gates Foundation came on board with a \$70 million grant that this project finally moved forwards. A new partnership called the Meningitis Vaccine Project was then established in 2001 between PATH and the WHO which utilized the services of the Serum Institute of India, Ltd – a family-owned biotechnology manufacturer that was already involved in producing most of the vaccines distributed globally by the WHO.<sup>70</sup> But progress still moved at a glacial pace, and after many delays it was only in 2010 that a vaccine for Meningitis type A (MenAfriVac) was finally ready for mass production. Yet despite the Meningitis Vaccine Project being widely hailed as a heroic success story, the GAVI-backed project remains more complicated, as the vaccine only provides protection from one of many types of meningitis. And while it is true that the Serum Institute does sell their vaccines at a fraction of the price charged by

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<sup>69</sup> By now WHO's earlier commitments to addressing the deeper systemic health needs of African countries had been well and truly side-lined.

<sup>70</sup> The billionaire founder of the Serum Institute, Cyrus Poonawalla, recalled how his companies "major breakthrough came in the mid-1980s when we got pre-qualified or accredited for supplying vaccines to the UN agencies." Hence by 1998, the company was exporting vaccines to 100 countries and was recognized as the world's largest producer of measles vaccine. They are currently the largest vaccine manufacturer (by volume) in the world and the Serum Institute are presently involved in the mass production of vaccines for COVID-19. Manu Balachandran, "Serum Institute: How an Indian horse breeder built Asia's largest vaccine company," *Quartz India*, September 22, 2015.



other pharmaceutical giants, the original problem that the WHO should have been addressing remains ignored, that is, the lack of strong public health systems. Furthermore, at the moment “Meningitis A certainly appears to be under control. But Men B, C, W-135, X, Y, and Streptococcus pneumonia have filled the gap created by the control of MenA.” This meant that while the development of MenAfriVac has had its benefits, it was never going to be enough. Summarizing this needlessly tragic situation, one critical medical anthropologist explained:

First, publicly funded resources (scientists, regulators, public health officials, donors, and citizens) were captured within an ideology that vaccines are the only solution, and that they must be developed through the private sector as an industrialized science. Second, general health systems were neglected while a multilateral program was prioritized. And third, it targeted a single disease subgroup across an entire continent despite long-term epidemiological evidence of community outbreaks of different subgroups over time.<sup>71</sup>

Contrast this approach with the development of vaccines for diseases effecting patients in wealthy countries where investment in public health is much higher. Here we find that pharmaceutical corporations were happy to invest in developing a vaccine after 1,000 British people lost their lives to MenC infections over the course of the 1990s, that is, over the same period more than 100,000 died from meningitis in sub-Saharan Africa. “The immunization needs of the United Kingdom trumped those of Africa—MenA ‘was not considered a market driver’. No manufacturer was interested in developing a vaccine for 300 million people too poor to purchase it.”

### **Gates does AIDS**

Another controversial area in which the Gates Foundation has acted to usurp power and influence from an increasingly castrated WHO

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<sup>71</sup> Janice Graham “Ambiguous capture: collaborative capitalism and the Meningitis Vaccine Project,” *Medical Anthropology*, 35(5), 2016.

has been in AIDS research. As part of these efforts, in 2002, the Gates Foundation decided to locate their first overseas office in India to help them combat the growing AIDS epidemic in the region. This followed on the heels of the World Bank's own failing and destructive attempts to fight AIDS on the subcontinent.<sup>72</sup> And this new foundation-driven project, known in India as Avahan, ran from 2003 until 2010 at a total cost of around \$300 million.<sup>73</sup>

Once again, as part of this huge Gates-backed health project no efforts were made to improve India's increasingly privatized health infrastructure. Instead, the Gates Foundation pumped millions into creating a new layer of non-profit organizations that were set the goal of educating truck drivers, migrant labourers and sex workers that they should use condoms. Rather than seek institutional solutions that could minimize the death toll from India's AIDS crisis, the Foundation therefore focused their attention on individuals and their

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<sup>72</sup> "In the Indian context, it is apparent that the [World] Bank's policy has distorted priorities as far as communicable disease programmes are concerned. Excessive importance had been given to AIDS and a vertical approach is once again being advocated, which in the past has failed. During the early nineties, the Bank allocated more for Aids and tuberculosis than malaria or other diseases. The loan for tuberculosis also involved a policy shift from an integrated National Tuberculosis Programme to a Revised National Tuberculosis Programme which relies on expensive second-line drugs for the treatment of tuberculosis." Rama Baru and Amar Jessani, "The role of the World Bank in international health: renewed commitment and partnership," *Social Science and Medicine*, 50, 2000, p.183. For an overview of the World Bank's destructive health interventions, see Sophie Harman *The World Bank and HIV/AIDS: Setting a Global Agenda* (Routledge, 2010). Also see, Matthew Gandy and Alimuddin Zumla (eds.), *The Return of the White Plague: Global Poverty and the New Tuberculosis* (Verso, 2003).

<sup>73</sup> This amount of money is about equal to the \$300 million that the Gates Foundation spent between 2006 and 2017 on getting advice from two healthcare privatizers, McKinsey and BCG. Julia Belluz and Marine Buissonniere, "How McKinsey infiltrated the world of global public health," *Vox*, December 13, 2019.

sexual choices (bad as they may be) in addition to attempting to developing new medical silver bullets.<sup>74</sup>

In this instance the Avahan initiative appears to have had some successes in preventing the spread of AIDS, but the long-term consequences of this intervention still need to be understood; especially as similar AIDS projects run by the Gates Foundation in Africa look to be failing. As Kim Yi Dionne states in her book *Doomed Interventions: The Failure of Global Responses to AIDS in Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 2018):

Billions of dollars have been spent to curb the AIDS epidemic. Donor governments spent \$8.6 billion in 2014 alone on anti-AIDS initiatives. While this outpouring has had a tremendous impact – particularly in increasing treatment access in resource-poor countries – many donor-supported AIDS interventions have shown little objective impact on stemming the spread of HIV and bettering the lives of those affected by AIDS. For example, between 1997 and 2006, only 18% of projects in the World Bank’s African Multicountry AIDS Program had satisfactory outcomes according to internal evaluations (Independent Evaluation Group, 2009, 38). When a mobilized international community commits billions of dollars to fight a disease, what impedes its efforts to improve outcomes for intended beneficiaries? (p.3)<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> For criticisms of the Avahan initiative see Robert Lorway, *AIDS Activism, Science and Community Across Three Continents* (Springer, 2017), pp.73-103; Mohan Dutta, *Neoliberal Health Organizing: Communication, Meaning, and Politics* (Left Coast Press, 2015); Elizabeth Grace Williams, *Non-governmental organizations and HIV/AIDS in Kolkata, India: a discursive analysis of policy and programming*, PhD. Thesis, University of Plymouth, November 2009; and for an informative examination of how NGOs attempted to protest against the Gates Foundations priorities for HIV/AIDS activism, see Srigowri Vijayakumar, *Viral Politics: Sex Worker Activism and HIV/AIDS Programs from Bangalore to Nairobi*, PhD. Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, Spring 2016.

<sup>75</sup> In 2000 the Gates Foundation launched a \$100 million “test case”

It should also be borne in mind, that for obvious reasons relating to funding pressures, critical reviews of Gates' philanthropic initiatives remain few and far between. That being true, one particularly scathing commentary that was published in *Forbes India* (in 2009) had this to say:

When it started on the ground in 2003, Avahan set for itself three goals: Arrest the spread of HIV/AIDS in India, expand the programme from the initial six states to across the nation, and develop a model that the government can adopt and sustain so that the project could be passed on to it. More than five years later, Avahan hasn't achieved any of these goals. Doubtless, the initiative has made a dent into the HIV/AIDS problem, but the impact is marginal for a bill of \$258 million. And now Avahan is leaving, handing over the reins to the government-run National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), which doesn't want to inherit it. It is too expensive for the budget-starved establishment that is as nimble as a sloth.<sup>76</sup>

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project in Botswana with the drug firm Merck & Co. to show that" mass AIDS treatment and prevention could succeed in Africa." But by failing to listen to the needs of ordinary people the project failed. "Dean Jamison, a health economist who was editor of *Disease Control Priorities in Developing Countries*, a Gates Foundation-funded reference book, blamed the pressing needs of Botswana's AIDS patients. But he added that the Gates Foundation effort, with its tight focus on the epidemic, may have contributed to the broader health crisis by drawing the nation's top clinicians away from primary care and child health." Charles Piller and Doug Smith, "Unintended victims: the Gates Foundation's generous gifts to Fight AIDS, TB and malaria in Africa have inadvertently put many of those with other healthcare needs at risk," *Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 2007. Also see Jennifer Chan, *Politics in the Corridor of Dying: AIDS Activism and Global Health Governance* (John Hopkins University Press, 2015).

<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth Flock, "How Bill Gates blew \$258 million in India's HIV corridor," *Forbes India*, June 5, 2009. As Flock points out the McKinsey consultant heading the Avahan project (Ashok Alexander)

The bigger picture here is that billionaire philanthropists like Gates are unwilling to adopt the necessary political tools that have a chance of resolving the global AIDS crisis. As one writer recently put it: "The World Bank and the Gates Foundation – the biggest funders of AIDS prevention" simply "cannot be entrusted" with the task of resolving the AIDS crisis because "they have clear interests in the very policies (debt service, structural adjustment and patent laws) that have created the problem in the first place."<sup>77</sup> Likewise, speaking in 2006 at the XVI International AIDS Conference in Toronto, Canada, Gregg Gonsalves called for the "need to re-politicize AIDS." He made it clear that the so-called humanitarian interventions being orchestrated by the philanthropies of the super-rich are failing the world because their aid is organized in a way that is both unaccountable and undemocratic. "No wonder things aren't getting better," he stated.

We've created a system designed to fail. Yet in the margins of this system, there remain men and women, true heroes, who are largely forgotten, unknown, ignored or reviled by those who make this machine run. It's not Bill Gates or Bill Clinton who have made a difference in this [AIDS] epidemic despite their being treated at this conference as some sort of royalty – the seduction of the money and power they represent have blinded us to what they've really delivered...

We are at a terrible anti-political moment right now, where the powers-that-be have taken our rhetoric and told us that everything is fine— 'we're on your side; you can demobilize and leave the epidemic to us.' That is the pernicious message of this conference. Don't believe a word they say.<sup>78</sup>

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was being paid an annual package of US\$424,894.

<sup>77</sup> Jason Hickel, "Neoliberal plague: AIDS and global capitalism," *LSE Blog*, March 8, 2013.

<sup>78</sup> Gregg Gonsalves, "Reflections on 25 years of AIDS," the XVI International AIDS Conference, pp.76-7. For criticisms of the Clinton administration, see Gonsalves, *The Invisible People: How the U.S. Has Slept Through the Global AIDS Pandemic, the Greatest*

At the same time, it is worth reiterating the point that the drugs needed to treat AIDS have been available since the mid-1990s, but the corporations producing them refused to make them affordable. Worse still, corporate giants, which included Microsoft, had lobbied hard to introduce TRIPS (which came into effect in 1995), a legal precedent which effectively made it illegal for poorer nations to produce generic versions of life-saving drugs. With millions dying every year, President Bill Clinton then threw the entire weight of his Administration behind efforts to protect the profits of Big Pharma; a decision that was exemplified by his Administration's scandalous decision to sue the South African government for daring to break their monopoly on the provision of AIDS drugs.<sup>79</sup> Yet by late 1999, Clinton was finally forced to flip-flop on this issue as a result of the global public outcry at their prioritizing profits over human life. Bill Gates however took a few more years until he felt the need to respond to this public outrage.<sup>80</sup> But that being said, there is no doubting that Gates

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*Humanitarian Catastrophe of Our Time* (Free Press, 2004). One of the radical groups that helped force the ruling-class to U-turn on their refusal to help the victims of AIDS was the South African based Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), which had been formed in late 1998. However, even the important work of this group proved unable to cope with the massive influx of funding that they received from elite philanthropists, which saw their budget increase from “nothing [in 2000] to over R50 million per annum (approximately US\$5 million)” by 2009; thereafter it dropped precipitously. For an insightful insider perspective on the problems linked to the receipt of this funding, see Mark Heywood, “The Treatment Action Campaign’s quest for equality in HIV and health: learning from and lessons for the trade union movement,” *Global Labour Journal*, 6(3), 2015.

<sup>79</sup> It was only after years of struggle by grassroots activists across the world that access to affordable drugs was made possible, with the initial help of CIPLA, an Indian-based generic drug manufacturer.

<sup>80</sup> “Microsoft, Gates Foundation timeline,” Knowledge Ecology International, January 4, 2011; Joaquim Campoy Rubio, “The impact of the TRIPS Agreement on the access to antiretroviral therapy in Sub-Saharan Africa,” A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

still believes that Big Pharma has a God-given right to profiteer from AIDS or any other disease for that matter. And in a vain attempt to salvage their credibility, in 2002 Gates and Clinton (who had only left his presidential office a year earlier) teamed up to launch a new HIV-related philanthropy that professed to help ordinary people access affordable drugs.<sup>81</sup> Yet a more critical view on this new initiative would suggest that: “Clinton and his foundation walk a fine line between negotiating lower (but still profitable) prices for Big Pharma drugs sold to LMICs [Low-to-Middle-Income Countries] and threatening trade sanctions against LMICs that produce and sell generics.”<sup>82</sup>

One could also say that Gates too walks a fine line between continuing to amass immense profits from Microsoft and presenting himself as a global health saviour. For instance, just the day after Gates launched his \$100 million contribution to the fighting HIV/AIDS in India, he merrily donned “his Microsoft hat” and announced that his company was investing \$400 million into expanding their corporate operations in India.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore it is indicative that the person selected to manage the HIV initiative was a former director of the global management firm McKinsey & Company; while the links

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the requirement for the Degree of LLM in Intellectual Property and IT Law, University of Derby, 2015.

<sup>81</sup> Dylan Matthews, “The key question on the Clinton Foundation is whether it saved lives. The answer is clearly yes,” *Vox*, September 22, 2016.

<sup>82</sup> Birn *et al.*, *Textbook of Global Health*, p.166. “Microsoft played an important role in pushing through the TRIPS agreement, and, together with other corporations, it is still lobbying to strengthen IP rights even further. At the 2007 G8 meeting in Germany, for example, a joint letter from various corporations, including Microsoft, helped push through an agreement that higher levels of IP protection should be demanded in emerging economies, especially regarding the issuing of compulsory licences for the manufacture of medicines.” People’s Health Movement, *Global Health Watch 2: An Alternative World Health Report* (Zed Books, 2008), p.255.

<sup>83</sup> Editorial, “Philanthropist or commercial opportunist?,” *Lancet*, November 23, 2002.

between Gates' corporate friends and his powerful philanthropic health predecessors can be seen by the fact that the former chairman of Microsoft India (2004-2011) has now spent the best part of the last decade serving on the board of trustees of the Rockefeller Foundation.<sup>84</sup> In fact the year that Ravi Venkatesan (the former chair of Microsoft India) joined the Rockefeller Foundation was also the year that Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist BJP first gained a parliamentary majority. And Venkatesan in his excitement of this rise to power of the far-right wrote: "Almost every CEO I've talked to, before and after the polls, believes that Modi is a shrewd, pragmatic, and decisive leader, who can kick-start economic growth and development in India by fostering a more business-friendly policy environment." Venkatesan went on to mention that the US government "may be on the defensive because it denied Modi a diplomatic visa in 2005," but he adds that "American multinationals, like all foreign companies, will find him extremely approachable."<sup>85</sup> Funnily enough the former Microsoft chairman fails to mention that Modi was banned from visiting the US because of the support that he and the BJP had lent to the infamous anti-Muslim pogrom of 2002.

### **India, cleaning things up, and ethnic cleansing**

If Narendra Modi shares one commonality with Bill Gates, it is that he brooks no opposition. Or as Ravi Venkatesan puts it, Modi was

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<sup>84</sup> Although the Gates Foundation likes to talk about empowerment and community, the fundamental solution they always promote is capitalism, and at a local level, entrepreneurism, as exemplified by microcredit schemes. These libertarian ideas like those embodied with the Avahan scheme were given a boost by the publication of an influential management classic, C.K. Prahalad's *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid: Eradicating Poverty through Profits* (2006). For a pro-capitalist albeit liberal debunking of this book, see Aneel Karnani's *Fighting Poverty Together: Rethinking Strategies for Business, Governments, and Civil Society to Reduce Poverty* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>85</sup> Ravi Venkatesan, "A crossroads for India, and its business landscape," *Harvard Business Review*, May 23, 2014.



always going to be someone who the US ruling-class could work with because of his ability to “get things done.”<sup>86</sup> Indeed, part of the reason why many corporate leaders have been willing to support Modi so openly owes much to the fact that the authoritarian leader has worked hard to placate his critics by mainstreaming his image as a dedicated opponent of corruption. One way he initially attempted to do this (with some success) was through his Clean India initiative (“Swachh Bharat Abhiyan”) – a top-down project that used many of the same coercive practices that elites have commonly deployed in the field of disease eradication.<sup>87</sup> So, initially at least, Modi’s murderous Hindu

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<sup>86</sup> Ravi Venkatesan, “A government in India that, for the first time in 30 years, can actually get things done,” *The American Bazaar*, November 7, 2019.

<sup>87</sup> One of the main targets of the Clean India scheme was to make good on longstanding attempts by all politicians to stop the poor from defecating in the open. Prior to the BJP’s electoral breakthrough this sanitation aspect of the project already existed but this schemes success had been massively overstated by the Congress Party, which like the BJP adopted a top-down and coercive approach to the problem. For more on this see, Liz Chatterjee, “Time to acknowledge the dirty truth behind community-led sanitation,” *The Guardian*, June 9, 2011; Andrés Huesoa and Brian Bell, “An untold story of policy failure: the Total Sanitation Campaign in India,” *Water Policy*, 15(6), 2013. The reasons for the failure of the Clean India initiative were summed up by Sangita Vyas, a research fellow at the Rice Institute, who said: “For Swachh Bharat to have made huge progress, they would have needed to address caste hierarchies and beliefs in purity and pollution. We found that it seems to have exacerbated caste hierarchies. Sanitation is used as a method for elite groups to suppress marginalised communities.” Vidhi Doshi, “Narendra Modi to face down critics by hailing Clean India scheme a success,” *The Guardian*, September 30, 2019. For other earlier and detailed criticisms of Clean India’s failures on Modi’s own political doorstep, see Sagar’s article “Down the drain: how the Swachh Bharat Mission is heading for failure’, *The Caravan*, May 1, 2017. And for centrality of violence to Modi’s campaign, see this 2017 press releases from the People’s Health Movement-India,

nationalism was downplayed (especially for foreign audiences) because of his apparent commitment to fighting corruption.<sup>88</sup> However, as it became increasingly evident that Modi could not maintain the lie that capitalist reforms could bring prosperity to all, or even fulfil the targets of his Clean India project, the BJP began to lean more heavily upon Hindu nationalist fearmongering to mobilize their supporters.<sup>89</sup>

The BJP, like Gates, also maintain divisive concerns with population growth; although the former is only really worried with the growth that occurs within the non-Hindu community. On February 14, 2020, the BJP's Vice President, Venkaiah Naidu, drew attention to India's "galloping population" before adding: "unfortunately no body is paying attention to the issue of population. Political parties are feeling shy, politicians are feeling shy, Parliament also do not adequately discuss about the issue".<sup>90</sup> This has been a longstanding

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"JSA demands an end to vigilantism in the name of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan." The coercive nature of such activities is sadly all too common, see Susan Engel and Anggun Susilo, "Shaming and sanitation in Indonesia: a return to colonial health practices?", *Development and Change*, 45(1), 2014.

<sup>88</sup> With regard the influence of foreign foundations supporting Indian NGOs, this became a big issue in 2015 when Modi launched a nationalist campaign against so-called anti-Indian funders from overseas. One of the philanthropies targeted by the Modi government was the Ford Foundation, which was singled out because they had given a \$250,000 grant to Teesta Setalvad, the human rights lawyer who was attempting to prosecute Modi for his involvement in the 2002 pogrom. "NGOs slam Govt for cancellation of licences, vow to counter 'persecution,'" *Outlook*, April 29, 2015.

<sup>89</sup> Another critical factor that allowed Modi to remain in power was that the main opposition party, the Congress Party, was utterly bankrupt and had failed to represent the needs of the working-class for many long decades; in fact, it was the Congress Party itself who do much during the 1990s to mainstream a soft version of Hindutva which paved the way for communal riots and the eventual rise to power of the BJP.

<sup>90</sup> "Netas must pay attention to galloping population: Naidu," *Times of*

argument that is deployed by Hindu nationalists; and writing in 2002, in the wake of Modi's own anti-Muslim bloodbath, one commentator highlighted how: "There is a dark sexual obsession about allegedly ultra-virile Muslim male bodies and overfertile Muslim female ones, that inspire and sustain the figures of paranoia and revenge."<sup>91</sup>

Following on from such racialized obsessions, in 2004 the BJP and their supporters famously distorted demographic data to present Muslim population growth as a threat to their religious destiny. As Naidu, the then BJP President said to the press at the time, the findings were "a cause of grave concern for all those who think of India's integrity in the long run".<sup>92</sup> Misrepresenting similar census data, in 2011 Yogi Adityanath, another up-and-coming hard-line BJP MP, demanded the creation of a new law to check Muslim population growth;<sup>93</sup> while in April 2015 another Hindutva activist named Sadhvi Thakur, was reported as saying to a gathering of her devoted followers that:

The population of Muslims and Christians is growing every day. To control this, the government should bring in a law to stop

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*India*, February 15, 2020.

<sup>91</sup> Tanika Sarkar, "Semiotics of terror: Muslim children and women in Hindu Rashtra," *Economic & Political Weekly*, 37(28), 2002, p. 2874.

<sup>92</sup> Naidu added that he was worried by the "decline in the Hindu population" which played up on the media deliberate efforts to try to pretend that Hindus now only represented 23 per cent of India's population when the reality was that Hindus constituted as much as 81.4 per cent of the total population. This ethnic fearmongering is discussed in Prateep Lahiri, *Decoding Intolerance: Riots and the Emergence of Terrorism in India* (Roli Books, 2009).

<sup>93</sup> Justin Huggler, "Hindu alarm over surge in Muslim population," *Independent*, October 10, 2011; Abdur Rahman, *Denial and Deprivation: Indian Muslims after the Sachar Committee and Ragnath Mishra Commission Reports* (Routledge, 2019); Patricia Jeffery and Roger Jeffery, *Confronting Saffron Demography: Religion, Fertility, and Women's Status in India* (Three Essays Collective, 2006).

Muslims and Christians from producing so many children. They should be forced to undergo sterilisation so that they can't increase their numbers.<sup>94</sup>

Bloodletting on a massive scale was the logical consequence of such incitements. And extremist to her core, in 2019, Thakur stood in a safe BJP seat and was duly rewarded for her far-right credentials when she became a member of Parliament for Bhopal; while in 2017 Yogi Adityanath reaped the electoral rewards of his own relentless hate-speech when he became the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh – the largest state in India. And so, it is precisely because of the BJP's now very visible far-right agenda that people were outraged when the Gates Foundation gave Modi a 'Global Goalkeeper Award' in September 2019 for the 'successes' of his Swachh Bharat Abhiyan project. This is also why many people maintain very real concerns about the 2018 news reports that Dr. G.P. Talwar was celebrating the good news that clinical trials funded by the Indian Council of Medical Research were about to commence on his long sought-after plans to develop a hCG anti-fertility vaccination. Sharon Batt, a bioethicist at Canada's Dalhousie University, highlighted her correct fear that any such vaccine, if ever deployed, would be used to target the poor.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> "Gun-loving India 'God-woman' who shot wedding guests," *BBC*, November 18, 2016.

<sup>95</sup> Killugudi Jayaraman, "A shot at contraception: in India, a nonagenarian renews testing of a birth control vaccine," *Nature Medicine*, 24(2), 2018, pp.118-9. "Vaccines were made against infections and not contraception," Sarojini Nadimpally, a feminist bioethicist and the founder of Sama, a Delhi-based resource group for women and health, told *Nature Medicine*." (p.119) Nadimpally is a member of the organizing committee of the World Congress of Bioethics and on the steering committee of the global People's Health Movement (see their detailed Indian "People's Health Manifesto" for 2019). The *Nature Medicine* article pointed out how Talwar's CV research "was revived" in 2006 after he received a grant from the Indo-US Committee on Contraception Research. (p.120)

## Sterilization on the cheap: the return of Quinacrine

As if the BJP's populationist obsessions were not dangerous enough, what should we make of the 2015 article published in an ostensibly respectable academic journal (*Contraception*) that served to whitewash the history of Quinacrine so as to encourage its use.<sup>96</sup> This article, by no coincidence, was published some years after Bill Gates' philanthropic best buddy, Warren Buffett, had revived research interest in Quinacrine by delivering a \$2 million grant (in 2001) to Family Health International – a grant which allowed Dr Jack Lippes, (the author of the aforementioned 2015 journal article) to embark upon a clinical trial of Quinacrine in the United States.<sup>97</sup> Of course it is widely known that this cheap and dangerous sterilization method is still being used (illegally) in India. And so as part of this attempted rehabilitation of the use of this abusive sterilization technique the far-right Quinacrine salesman Stephen Mumford helped a couple of dubious doctors from Calcutta publish another dubious academic article (again in the journal *Contraception*). This article outlined the results of an unethical trial of an antibiotic (known as erythromycin) that had proved unsuccessful as a chemical reagent to sterilize women.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Jack Lippes, "Quinacrine sterilization (QS): time for reconsideration," *Contraception*, 92(2), August 2015. Longstanding feminist campaigner Marge Berer provided a useful rebuttal to the journals decision to publish the deceptions contained within Lippes puff-piece for Quinacrine, see "Quinacrine: the non-surgical sterilisation method that refuses to die."

<sup>97</sup> Betsy Hartmann, "Quinacrine update: FDA grants approval for human trial in Buffalo, New York," *Woman's Global Network for Reproductive Rights Newsletter No.72*, May 2001.

<sup>98</sup> Ganapati Mudur, "Use of antibiotic in contraceptive trial sparks controversy," *British Medical Journal*, 328(7433), 2004. This article mentions that Mumford assisted in the writing-up of the unethical journal article. And although Mumford denies knowing about the antibiotic research in advance of writing it up, it is important to note that Biral C. Mullick, one of the Indian doctors who undertook the

Tying all these trials together, Mumford recently launched a web site for the International Services Assistance Fund, a non-profit he'd founded in 1976 to distribute Quinacrine. The Fund boasts of Dr Jack Lippes as their main medical advisor, but the most significant person involved in this group is the far-right population control activist Donald Collins, who helped Mumford launch the Fund in the 1970s while he was employed as a philanthropic advisor to the nativist billionaire Cordelia Scaife May.<sup>99</sup> It is a tragedy for women all over the planet that for over half a century Collins has already been able to play a central role in pushing his own reactionary politics within the more liberal institutions comprising the population control establishment like, for instance, the Population Institute (whose politics were already bad enough without his help).<sup>100</sup> His anti-immigrant interests and access to the Scaife purse strings were furthermore key to the work of the right-wing Federation for American Immigration Reform. Likewise, Collins' wife, Sarah Epstein, has also been a determined Quinacrine advocate, anti-immigration activist, and has been involved in the leadership of various population control groups including Population Services International. She is also an emeritus director of the Pathfinder International, another group obsessed about population growth in the developing world that was formed in the late fifties by Sarah's wealthy father, who then used the group to inflict his eugenicist doctrines upon the world's poor.<sup>101</sup>

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erythromycin 'trial,' had worked with the US-based Quinacrine-promoting doctors since the 1970s as he was a co-author of a 1975 journal article with Mumford's colleague, Dr Elton Kessel. In April 1997, the *New Scientist* made clear this connection reporting that Mullick "says that he has sterilised some 10 000 women" using Quinacrine. ("Row over sterilisation divides India.")

<sup>99</sup> Nicholas Kulish and Mike McIntire, "The new Nativists: why an heiress spent her fortune trying to keep immigrants out," *New York Times*, August 14, 2019.

<sup>100</sup> The Population Media Center even promotes Donald Collins Quinacrine propaganda on their website.

<sup>101</sup> Sarah Epstein's father, Dr. Clarence Gamble (heir to the Procter & Gamble fortune) helped launched the Human Betterment Society in 1947 which soon helped turned the state of North Carolina "into the

What is worse is that many population-orientated groups, who are now apparently concerned about extending the reproductive rights of poor women, are still promoting exactly the type of population fearmongering that allows coercive sterilization practices to continue to this day. For example, although the Population Foundation of India, like many other reproductive rights groups, regularly rails against the coercive implementation of population control strategies, at the same time they take a very soft line against those groups and individuals promoting such violent strategies. Thus the head of the Population Foundation of India, Poonam Muttreja, recently wrote:

Rather than enforcing punitive policies, we need empowering actions that give girls and women the ability to exercise their rights – as Prime Minister Narendra Modi aims to do through the ‘Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao’ campaign. We hope that Modi’s reference to a ‘population explosion’ in his 2019 Independence Day speech will lead to higher public investments, more appropriate spending and increased focus on the requirements of young people, so that every couple is able to plan their families as per their desire and needs.<sup>102</sup>

Muttreja fails to mention that there is already plenty of evidence that the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (save the daughter, educate the

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nation’s most active sterilizer.” James Trent, *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Intellectual Disability in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2017), p.284. For more on this history, see Ian Dowbiggin, *The Sterilization Movement and Global Fertility in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford University Press, 2008). Dr. Elton Kessel served as the Executive Director of the Pathfinder Fund in Boston from 1966 to 1969; while the racist population control hysteria of later Pathfinder leader Dr. Roger Bernard is accurately contextualized by Amy Kaler, "Fertility running-wild: elite perceptions of the need for birth control in white-ruled Rhodesia," in: Andrew Russell, Mary Thompson and Elisa Sobo (eds.), *Contraception across Cultures: Technologies, Choices, Constraints* (Routledge, 2020).

<sup>102</sup> Poonam Muttreja, “India’s best population strategy? Ensure women have the right to limit their families,” *Scroll.In*, September 16, 2019.

daughter) campaign will remain underfunded as it has been for years, and that Modi's reference to a "population explosion" was mostly targeted at India's Muslim population.<sup>103</sup>

### **Pfizer's latest injectable solution**

Corporations and powerful philanthropies like those of the Rockefeller and Gates Foundation have already contributed towards creating the abysmal living conditions which mean that each and every year millions of Indian women are forced to choose to be sterilized in lieu of having access to, or being able to afford access, any form of meaningful public healthcare. Billionaire philanthropists have of course ruled out supporting socialized health provision, and instead continue to push forward new technocratic solutions to limit the reproduction of those deemed by the state to be unfit to reproduce.<sup>104</sup>

Thus, on November 13, 2014, to much international fanfare the Gates Foundation, working in collaboration with Pfizer, announced in the pages of the *New York Times* that they were rolling out, for wider use, a product called the Sayana Press. A product whose main selling-point was that it provided a more reliable means of delivering Pfizer's already controversial Depo-Provera contraceptive to the rural poor.<sup>105</sup> The numerous critics of this contraceptive quickly pointed out that in addition to the many problematic known side effects of using Depo-Provera, another recently discovered problem was that its use was associated with increased risk of spreading HIV/AIDS.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, it was not coincidental that the day before

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<sup>103</sup> See Manira Chaudhary, "More PR, less change: the impact of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme in one Rajasthan district," *The Caravan*, April 29, 2019; Vivian Fernandes, "Dear PM Modi, let's not mix 'population explosion' & patriotism," *The Quint*, August 19, 2019.

<sup>104</sup> Kalpana Wilson, "For reproductive justice in an era of Gates and Modi: the violence of India's population policies," *Feminist Review*, 119(1), 2018.

<sup>105</sup> Kati Thomas, "Pfizer and aid groups team up on contraceptive for developing world," *New York Times*, November 13, 2014.

<sup>106</sup> Zena Stein, Erica Gollub and Ida Susser, "The right to know:



the *New York Times* ran their 2014 Sayana Press puff-piece they had run a front-page article exposing the deadly nature of India's "sterilization camps".<sup>107</sup> Hence Pfizer's Sayana Press was, not so subtly, presented as the latest technocratic solution to India's violent sterilization problem.

Under friendly pressure to act from billionaires like Bill Gates, in 2016 Modi announced that the Sayana Press' injectable contraceptives were going to be delivered to the poor for no cost. The *New York Times* in reporting on these "modernizing" changes however remained perplexed that "the keenest opposition to these newer methods of birth control" originated "from some women's activist groups that distrust the safety of these methods and believe that profit-hungry Western pharmaceutical companies are pushing them."<sup>108</sup> They added that these activist groups, many of whom had

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women's choices, Depo-Provera and HIV," *Open Democracy*, July 20, 2012. In June 2019 the *New York Times* gave an update on the Depo-Provera's connection to increased rates of HIV infection noting that "a major new study found that women who did were not at a much greater risk than they were from other contraceptive methods controversy". ("Depo-Provera, an injectable contraceptive, does not raise H.I.V. risk.") However, critics of the drug continue to argue that the trials undertaken so far support the conclusion that Depo-Provera was a safe choice of contraception for women, see Gollub *et al.*, "ECHO: context and limitations," *The Lancet*, February 8, 2020.

<sup>107</sup> Ellen Barry and Suhasini Raj, "Web of incentives in fatal Indian sterilizations," *New York Times*, November 12, 2014. The story ran "after at least a dozen women died and others became seriously ill following mass sterilization surgeries meant for population control." This particular incident had occurred in the BJP-run state of Chhattisgarh, but such backward practices remain widespread with around four million female sterilizations taking place every year in India.

<sup>108</sup> Ellen Barry and Celia Dugger, "India to change its decades-old reliance on female sterilization," *New York Times*, February 20, 2016. In September 2015, 70 activists and scholars working in the field of medicine, public health and women's rights signed a "public

also opposed the use of such contraceptive drugs when the country was run by the Congress Party, were concerned that the drugs “had not been proved safe and could be used coercively”. But the reporters didn’t give any serious credence to the fact that these remain very legitimate fears, especially given the anti-Muslim sentiments of Modi’s far-right regime.

A welcome corrective to such dangerously blasé attitudes had, as it turns out, already been published, but not in the mainstream press. Writing in 2015, Betsy Hartmann and Mohan Rao drew attention to the Gates Foundations role in helping the Indian state reverse all the gains that had been made possible by the “sustained and courageous efforts of feminist, health and human rights activists” who “have taken a leading role in exposing sterilisation abuse, pushing for contraceptive safety, and demanding systemic reforms.” They wrote:

The top-down, neo-Malthusian prerogatives of the [Gates-initiated Family Planning 2020] FP2020 mesh well with other features of today’s international development industry, including its managerial ethos, obsession with measurable outcomes and technical fixes, and the privileging of the private sector. Add to this the immense power of wealthy philanthropic interests, such as the BMGF [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation], that wed technocracy with plutocracy.<sup>109</sup>

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statement” protesting the government’s approval to introduce injectable contraceptives in the National Family Planning Programme. Aditya Nigam, “A statement protesting approval to introduce injectable contraceptives in the national family planning programme,” *Kafila Online*, September 24, 2015.

<sup>109</sup> Betsy Hartmann and Mohan Rao, “India’s population programme: obstacles and opportunities,” *Economic & Political Weekly*, 1(44), October 31, 2015, p.12, p.11. Launched to international laurates in 2012, Family Planning 2020 (FP2020) is headed-up by Dr. Chris Elias (from the Gates Foundation) and by Dr. Natalia Kanem (the executive director of the UN Population Fund who formerly was employed as a Ford Foundation officer from 1992 to 2005). Another notable current member of FP2020’s leadership is Dr. Senait Fisseha, who since 2015 has been in charge of the Buffett Foundation’s global population control programs; she has also acted as a Chief Advisor to the Director

## India's big brother – surveillance as cure

When it comes to the implementation of efforts to limit population growth, public concerns about the potential for state abuses of power should not be understated. This is especially the case in a country that has one of the largest and most pervasive state-operated surveillance systems in the world. Known as Aadhaar, this Unique Identity (UID) surveillance project was initially rolled out in 2010 and overseen by Nandan Nilekani, the cofounder of India's powerful IT giant Infosys. To minimize public opposition to this Orwellian scheme, at first the project was deceptively sold to the public as a voluntary initiative that would give the poor and the undocumented a digital identity which would not only help them access state benefits but would also prevent fraud. This marketing fiction, however, didn't last long, and by 2012 it had become clear that coercion was to play a central role in the push-out of Aadhaar. So it was that Indian citizens soon found out they would be denied benefits if they refused to allow the state to digitize their biometric data through fingerprint and retina scans.

It is interesting to note that during Aadhaar's early days, the BJP had stood opposed to the Congress Party's intrusive intervention into public life. In fact, in 2014, just prior to his becoming Prime Minister, Narendra Modi had characterized the project it as a "political gimmick" and as a potential threat to India's national security (owing to the scheme being co-operated by foreign surveillance corporations).<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless upon riding to power in the 2014

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General of the World Health Organization since his election in 2017.

<sup>110</sup> One of the most controversial foreign corporations involved with Aadhaar from the start was the US-based L-1 Identity Solutions which included numerous former luminaries from the US intelligence community upon its board of directors. Usha Ramanathan, "Aadhaar unmasked: what we (don't) know about the companies," *The Statesman*, July 12, 2013; for a related discussion of how L-1 Identity Solutions (which is now owned by Safron Group) had already profited from undermining democratic norms in the United States, see Robert Koulisch, *Immigration and American Democracy: Subverting the Rule*

national elections, Modi and the BJP quickly became devout advocates of the surveillance project which “emerged as a foundational component of the BJP’s governance plans”.<sup>111</sup> All pretence of voluntary compliance with the scheme were now dropped, with registration strictly enforced by the state.

The Digital Empowerment Foundation has regularly exposed the failures of Aadhaar, and in early 2018 they pointed out, that rather than help the poor, over the “last two years we have seen that Aadhaar has only made access to schemes and entitlements more difficult.”<sup>112</sup> Aadhaar thus remains a problematic scheme that legal researcher and activist Usha Ramanathan says has “innovatively violate[d] norms of privacy” and created a structure that can be utilized as a tool of mass surveillance.<sup>113</sup> Nearly the entire nations biometric data is now stored by the government, and the immense power that such data yields in the hands of Modi should rightly concern the political targets of his regime. But this is not a concern that is shared by Bill Gates who remains an enthusiastic supporter of Modi’s surveillance system.<sup>114</sup> Ever the techno-optimistic, Gates says:

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*of Law* (Routledge, 2010); and for more on the abuses of surveillance systems in the US, see Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor* (St. Martin’s Press, 2018).

<sup>111</sup> Devjyost Ghoshal, “The world’s largest biometric ID programme is a privacy nightmare waiting to happen,” *Quartz India*, March 28, 2017; Saikat Datta, “The end of privacy: Aadhaar is being converted into the world’s biggest surveillance engine,” *Scroll.in*, March 24, 2017.

<sup>112</sup> Osama Manzar, “The questionable foundation of Aadhaar,” *Digital Empowerment Foundation*, March 2, 2018.

<sup>113</sup> Usha Ramanathan speaking on August 25, 2017, <https://www.defindia.org/defdialogue-with-usha-ramanathan/>

<sup>114</sup> Ravi Venkatesan, the former chairman of Microsoft India, after leaving Microsoft in 2011 went on to join the board of directors of Infosys where he served between 2011 and 2017. Nandan Nilekani rejoined Infosys in 2017 as their chairman and is currently advising the World Bank in helping other countries “design and roll out their own digital identification programs.”

Thanks to the work Nandan [the head of Aadhaar] is doing the world is moving closer to the day when everyone will have access to an official ID. The sooner we can achieve this goal, the sooner the world's poorest residents will not only be able to prove who they are, but also realize their aspirations for better lives.<sup>115</sup>

For capitalist oppressors like Gates, surveillance of the global polity is essential in their ongoing efforts to help members of the billionaire-class realize their own aspirations for better lives, or at least lives in which they gain even more power over the rest of us. But access to a biometric ID card is not solving the deeply inequitable distribution of wealth and power in India, and nor will it do so for the rest of the world. Instead for anyone serious about helping the global working-class realize their aspirations for better lives it should be clear that a starting point for enabling such dreams to come true is to expand their democratic rights, not restrict them by forcibly incorporating them within a global surveillance network. A deep-seated antipathy towards democracy however continues to characterize the mindset of a billionaire-class which lives in fear of the type of socialist ideas which could transfer decision-making away from themselves and towards ordinary people.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Bill Gates, "Making the world's invisible people, visible," *GatesNotes*, January 29, 2019.

<sup>116</sup> Top-down planning is the *raison d'être* of ruling-class elites of this world. In pushing forward these autocratic ambitions Bill Gates is cojoined by members of the Indian ruling-class with a fine example being Ms. Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw who was the second Indian to join Gates' global Giving Pledge initiative. As a founder of India's leading biotechnology enterprise, Biocon, Mazumdar-Shaw like Gates also boasts of philanthropic efforts aimed at fighting diseases, earns a decent salary from the IT industry (as a board member of Infosys), and is a director of one of India's largest private healthcare providers, Narayana Health. The "political economy of health care in India has been characterised by widespread privatisation". Moreover, despite

## Of trust and health: the need for socialist priorities

If the health of hundreds of millions of impoverished Indians is ever to significantly improve, they will require a complete reordering of their countries political system. Most of all this will involve the termination of capitalism and the nationalization of all major corporations so they can be run under the direct democratic control of the working-class. Only such a socialist transformation of society will enable the Indian economy to be turned towards meeting the needs of ordinary people. And so long as the state remains in the hands of the capitalists the vast majority of the nation's citizens will continue to needlessly suffer from reforms imposed upon them from above. This remains just as true for India as it does for the rest of the world.

The longstanding efforts to eradicate polio across the entire world provides the perfect example of how even a positive vaccine can, when it is literally rammed down people's throats, end up eroding trust in useful medical interventions. Thus, while the majority of people in India are left stranded to suffer without adequate access to basic healthcare provision, their government (with due prodding from Gates and company) have spent billions of dollars trying to eradicate polio. These priorities quite clearly make no sense if the government

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having a "heavily interventionist state" since independence successive Indian governments have "never... made health a priority in public policy or in the allocation of public resources." Sunil Amrith, "Health in India since independence," *Brooks World Poverty Institute*, Working Paper No.79, February 2009, p.3.

Another good example of a health profiteer who maintains close links to Gates is Ms. Sangita Reddy, who is the boss of India's largest private healthcare provider, Apollo Hospitals, and an advisor to the GAVI Alliance. Her skills at turning a profit from other people's misfortune have been recognized by the Rockefeller Foundation, who selected her to be the sole Indian representative on a global working group run in 2008 to lay out plans for corporate healthcare provision may be best run alongside existing public healthcare provision.

was first and foremost concerned about the health of ordinary people; so, it is little wonder that people sometimes fall prey to conspiracies.

Ironically, under such circumstances even success can build distrust, like when, to huge international laureates, India was finally declared polio-free in 2014. This is because for many ordinary people even this apparent victory was hard to believe as the coercive polio vaccination campaigns never relented.<sup>117</sup> William Muraskin, an

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<sup>117</sup> Sabin type oral poliovirus vaccine (OPV) had initially been used in the global campaign as it could lead to eradication if only around 85 per cent of a target population was successfully vaccinated. However, the downside of OPV is that mutated forms of the virus could still spread. (This is why this vaccine was finally phased out for use in the United States in 2000 where it was completely replaced with the Salk vaccine.) In April 2016, with most of the wild poliovirus eradicated globally, the decision was taken to phase out the use of trivalent OPV (which contained vaccines for wild polio viruses—types 1, 2, and 3) and replace it with a bivalent OPV (which excluded the type-2 vaccine because this was the form that could most easily mutate in faecal matter and cause vaccine-associated paralytic polio). But given health cuts and a lack of government oversight of the pharmaceutical industry, in 2018 an accident occurred whereby type-2 strain was reintroduced into 150,000 vials of the OPV vaccine which was then given to children in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Telangana. This issue is discussed by Sylvia Karpagam in “Why India’s Health Ministry cannot take contamination of polio vaccines lightly,” *Random Thoughts*, October 5, 2018; and by Pushpa Bhargava’s article “The politics of polio,” *The Hindu*, June 11, 2008. These articles also highlight the problems associated with the WHO’s decision to use the Sabin oral poliovirus vaccine (OPV). They note that “the cases of non-polio acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) in those vaccinated with OPV have shown a dramatic rise.” This has become a matter of some controversy in India, see Bharat Dogra, “Why health systems need more caution than ever before,” *The Statesman*, May 5, 2020; for the counterargument see Ian MacKay, “But 40,000+ cases of AFP in India must mean polio is thriving, right? No,” *Virology Down Under*, March 28, 2019. For further criticism of the Global

academic – who had spent most of his academic career writing history texts for first the Rockefeller Foundation and then for the Gates Foundation – laid bare the dangers posed by such misconceived health priorities in his book *Polio Eradication and its Discontents: A Historian’s Journey Through an International Public Health (Un)civil War* (Orient BlackSwan, 2012). As he puts it, countries like India were pushed to “subordinate their own public health goals to engage in a fight against a relatively minor disease,” not merely doing it “for the stated goal of vanquishing polio, but to prove the point that disease eradication can be maintained as a major tool of public health.”<sup>118</sup> This commitment to eradication remains particularly counterproductive, especially as it was being undertaken at exactly the same time that the eradicators philanthropic advocates were doing their best to eradicate public health systems across the world.

Finally, it is widely acknowledged that the most effective way to obtain mass compliance with vaccination targets is by winning the trust of the target population, not by undemocratically mandating vaccination regimes. But a global eradication campaign by its very nature can brook no opposition, hence the coercive way in which the polio campaign has been pursued has damaged trust in vaccination

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Polio Eradication Initiative’s decision to launch their campaign using the OPV, see Claire Panosian Dunavan, “Polio’s precarious future a review of *Polio: The Odyssey of Eradication* and an Interview with Dr. T. Jacob John,” *The American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, 100(3), 2019.

<sup>118</sup> William Muraskin, “Polio eradication was an ideological project,” *British Medical Journal*, December 19, 2012. Maintaining a friendly, albeit highly sharp, line of criticism Muraskin concluded that with respect to the deep problems inherent in Bill Gates’ GAVI Alliance that: “Donors (governments, philanthropies, and the general public that supports them both) must face up to the fact that short-term gains, no matter how much they lend themselves to public relations sound bites or fit neatly into donor funding cycles, do not achieve their stated humanitarian objectives. It is time to try another approach.” Muraskin, “The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation: is it a new model for effective public-private cooperation in international public health?,” *American Journal of Public Health*, 94(11), 2004.



schedules more generally.<sup>119</sup> This issue was touched upon by a 2018 editorial in the medical journal *The Lancet* which discussed some of the political reasons why people might be hesitant to take some vaccines. The editorial went on to call for a re-evaluation of the global vaccination approach concluding:

A systems-driven approach putting more power in the hands of the countries will allow for the design of vaccination programmes tailored to the cultural specificities of their populations... Moving forward, the global health community will need to shift its focus: after the Decade of Vaccines, more muscular efforts must be made to integrate investments in immunisation services into programmes for universal health coverage.<sup>120</sup>

Hence this once again highlights the reason why it is so important that we must now take the opportunity raised by the ongoing pandemic to collectively wrest control of global health from the ruling-classes!

### **A pandemic response**

The actions of arrogant and unaccountable elites in imposing their capitalist agendas upon our global health systems has meant that the likelihood of pandemics wreaking havoc on life has only intensified in recent decades. Making matters worse, the very elites whose actions brought us to this health precipice have now positioned themselves as the people we are meant to trust to resolve this crisis. Bill Gates presents himself as the anti-pandemic campaigner in chief – the one person in the world who had the foresight to recognize that a pandemic was coming, and that the world must start preparing to meet this impending threat. This coming from the very same billionaire

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<sup>119</sup> Madhurima Shukla discusses the problems encountered in India regarding ongoing measles and rubella vaccination campaigns and how they are being undermined by a lack of trust in the government, which has been aggravated by the “use of force or coercion”, see “The global threat of vaccine hesitancy,” *YaleGlobal Online*, March 12, 2019.

<sup>120</sup> Editorial, “Looking beyond the decade of vaccines,” *The Lancet*, November 17, 2018.

whose philanthropic interventions have, time and time again, failed ordinary people in the most catastrophic fashion all the while undermining democratic norms in healthcare provision all the while bolstering the bank balances of corporate health profiteers. Hence we are told by the corporate press that Gates and the pharmaceutical giants -- whose actions have consistency demonized and ignored the urgent health needs of ordinary people -- are apparently the ones who are meant to save us from this pandemic, and from futures ones too?! This is beyond a joke, but it is a very real scenario that the global ruling-classes are attempting to foist upon us all, and it will be up to us to bring an end to such dangerous games. As Alison Rosamund Katz, an activist for the People's Health Movement wrote in April 2020:

Covid 19 in OECD countries is revealing to many citizens the role of austerity measures in weakening health system capacity. In poor countries with poorly functioning health systems that were seriously damaged by IMF-imposed Structural Adjustment Programs, among other neoliberal policies, the virus is likely to overwhelm health system capacity within days. For half the world's population who lack access to essential health services, *there may be no care at all..*

The only positive outcome of a pandemic of infectious disease, such as Covid 19, is that the world's people will demand the independence of the WHO from corporate control and a genuine revival of Primary Health Care, through the visible hand of social justice rather than the invisible hand of the market.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Alison Rosamund Katz, "Controlling epidemics? The WHO had the answer 40 years ago," *Europe - Third World Centre (CETIM)*, April 16, 2020. In terms of the shifting global health priorities of the billionaire-class, in 2013 Katz provided a useful warning about their decision to make a new focus of their priorities, see "Noncommunicable diseases: global health priority or market opportunity? An illustration of the World Health Organization at its worst and at its best," *International Journal of Health Services*, 43(3), 2013. Also see, Hayley MacGregor, "Global public health,

This is an important initial demand, as globally speaking the working-class urgently need a democratic organization that can coordinate the response to the ongoing pandemic, and it would be a step forward if the corporate predators who currently dominate the WHO's operations could be marginalized from its work. But they can be no pleading with the billionaire-class; they are not part of the solution, and the only positive role they can fulfil is to step aside and allow democratic control over the immense health resources that they presently profit from. I say this because aside from former President Trump's conspiratorial attempts to scapegoat the WHO for his own mistakes, the two most significant funders of the WHO are the US government and the Gates Foundation.

Katz is correct when she states:

Unequal power relations are themselves the root of poverty – and therefore poor health; and inequality, over and above any material wealth or deprivation, is bad for health and for cohesive, safe, societies.

So, to guarantee that the world's resources are harnessed in a democratic fashion that can bring us safely through this pandemic we will need to fight for a socialist political alternative in each and every country of the world. Capitalism has had ample opportunity to demonstrate that it can benefit us, and it has failed. For many people, this failure to secure the health needs of our planet has been obvious

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noncommunicable diseases, and ethics,” in: Anna Mastroianni *et al.* (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Public Health Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2019); Global Health Watch, *Global Health Watch 4: An Alternative World Health Report* (Zed Books, 2014). Highlighting the work of the NCD Alliance (which was formed in 2009), the latter text points out how their leadership “provides insights regarding the deep penetration of the private sector.” Although NCDs have yet to become the major focus for capitalist health priorities it is recognized that they represent a massive area for future profits for both Big Pharma and for private health providers.

for too long, but the current pandemic moment represents a fitting time to reclaim democracy worldwide. This is nothing less than a fight for our lives. Immediate demands must include taking the many corporations dominating our lives into public ownership, so that they can be run democratically by workers themselves. This will only be possible under the pressure of mass movements of ordinary people, and so the immediate task at hand is now to raise the types of demands that can unite such a working-class movement in every country across the entire world and fight for such demands tooth-and-nail. A socialist world is not only possible, it is the future; and the only people with the desire and power to bring an end to this capitalist nightmare is us.

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**TEN**

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## Violence in Nigeria

Murder is something that comes easily to capitalists, and their political system is caked with blood of ordinary workers whose lives fall apart under the hammer blows of oppression. In the eternal quest for cheap oil and colossal profits, power hungry elites drain our planet of its living sap, justifying their destruction of *our* environment and *our* lives with a brazen cynicism that remains foreign to the ranks of the working-class. Nigeria is one such country whose immense mineral wealth has meant that the lives of its 200 million people are held back by the violence of capitalism. Yet amidst a country of deep hardship, the heroic resistance of ordinary people continues undeterred. Such ongoing demands for justice rose to international prominence in the wake of the outrageous carnage that was inflicted upon the #EndSARS protest movement. Mass outrage spread globally following the Lekki tollgate massacre last October. A bloodletting that had occurred just days after the Nigerian government had been forced to pretend they were disbanding their murderous Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) – a paramilitary outfit by any other name, which they simply relaunched as the Special Weapons and Tactics Team (SWAT).

### **#EndSARS: a parliamentary contribution**

As the ex-colonial masters of Nigeria, British elites have always

participated in the plunder of Nigeria's natural resources, with the country's oil reserves representing an especially plentiful bounty. Hence this legacy of exploitation goes a long way toward explaining the Tories' diplomatic silence in the aftermath of the Lekki massacre. Yet, the British government was eventually forced to respond when over 200,000 people signed an e-petition calling upon them "to impose sanctions on members of the Nigerian government and police force involved in any human rights abuses by the Nigerian police." This successful petition thus led to a parliamentary debate (that took place on November 23) during which the Tories attempted to pose as concerned humanitarians - albeit as politicians whose own government facilitates human rights abuses across the world.

Labour politicians while plainly unable to effectively respond to the nonsense that was espoused by the Tories, did shed limited light on some elements of the Tories' ongoing lies and hypocrisy. Thus, despite the Tories previously denying that their government had helped train members of the SARS units, Labour MPs were able to highlight how the Tories had spent the past four years supporting a police force who were known "to have been involved in extrajudicial killings, corruption and torture". They also noted that the dozens who had been killed during the EndSARS protests only represented the "tip of the iceberg". These so-called socialist politicians however completely failed to implicate capitalism and Western companies in encouraging such state violence. The closest the opposition came to making this point was when Labour MP Stephen Doughty acknowledged the "close political, economic and security relationship" that exists between the UK and Nigeria. He continued:

What we are discussing today is just one example. Whether it is this example, the ongoing supplying of arms to the Saudi Arabian Government for use in the Yemen crisis or the training of the special investigation unit in Bahrain, which has been complicit in the torture of prisoners—of course, that country uses the death penalty—the UK Government are having to repeatedly come and justify their involvement with organisations and institutions that appear to breach our own standards, let alone international law and human rights.

These are valid points, but Doughty was always unlikely to say

anything critical of capitalism itself. Indeed, Doughty's lack of commitment to the basic principles of justice and solidarity meant that one of his first actions after being appointed to serve as the Shadow Foreign Office Minister was to oppose Labour's new leader (Jeremy Corbyn) by siding with the Tories to support air strikes against Syria (this vote took place in December 2015).

Still the award for the most outstanding hypocrite participating in the #EndSARS debate should go to the Tory chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Tom Tugendhat. Uninformed arrogance was the measure of the day for Tugendhat, who with elegant delivery, regurgitated a truly offensive ode to imperial deceit - with none of his odious arguments being challenged by other politicians. Tugendhat drew upon his years of experience as a purveyor of "public relations" for the powerful, beginning his speech by pretending he was on the side of ordinary Nigerians. Sanctimoniously he explained...

...the greatest book in the English language is 'Things Fall Apart' by Chinua Achebe, the great Nigerian writer. The beauty of that book is the way it explains the challenge to changing generations of living together, and the way it speaks about values falling away and community being eroded by outside pressure.

Of course, when Achebe published this anti-imperialist masterpiece in 1958 the "outside pressure" that the author spoke of were the colonial butchers residing in the British parliament. Tugendhat understands this point, but instead uses his professed admiration for Achebe to launch into a gross distortion of history. Tugendhat warned:

What we are seeing in Nigeria today is part of that story. It is a tragedy that we are all watching and witnessing. As we see things falling apart, the pressure this time is not foreign colonialism, but corruption, violence and attempts at control. I totally agree with my friend, the hon. Member for Edmonton, that we need to call out the corruption and use the powers we have in this country to stop those who are profiting from the wealth of that great nation and hiding it here.

Some people will remember when General Gowon left Nigeria with half the Central Bank of Nigeria, so it is said, and moved

to London. We know that today, even now in this great city of ours, there are some people who have taken from the Nigerian people and hidden their ill-gotten gains here. Sadly, we know that our banks have been used for those profits and for that illegal transfer of assets. That means that the UK is in an almost unique position in being able to do something to exert pressure on those who have robbed the Nigerian people.

Instead of highlighting the ongoing role of foreign colonial elites profiting from Nigeria at the expense of the tens of millions of people, Tugendhat's rhetorical outburst takes us back to 1975 when General Gowon was deposed in military coup. Yet the irony is that at no point since that coup has anyone ever accused General Gowon of running off with half the Central Bank of Nigeria. The inverse is true, and he is one of the few ex-dictators to have never been accused of such corruption! More to the point, Gowon, who had received his military training at Sandhurst, had always been close to British elites. Thus, after he seized power in 1966, he first presided over a pogrom against the Igbo people. Then after the Igbo people seceded to create the Republic of Biafra, Gowon persecuted a bloody Civil War with the full support of British elites - a war that ultimately took the lives of more than two million people. Chinua Achebe, as an Igbo man himself, was one of the best-known public defenders of the new Biafran state. And as Tugendhat must understand, both Conservative and Labour MPs were content to facilitate the slaughter of Achebe's comrades to allow corrupt foreign companies to sustain their removal of Nigeria's sizable and lucrative oil resources.

The one correct point made by Tugendhat was that a small number of people are profiting from the wealth of that great nation, Nigeria. And it is true that *some people* are hiding their ill-gotten gains in British banks.<sup>1</sup> But rather than place the blame on profiteering

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<sup>1</sup> Tugendhat opportunistically called for *'Magnitsky'-style sanctions* to be adopted by the leaders of his own party knowing full well that the Tories were quite happy to simply communicate their concerns to their friends in the Nigerian ruling-class without the use of any form of sanctions. Yet the urgent need for more significant trade sanctions were not even raised as a possibility by Labour politicians. Either way even the use of limited sanction has yet to be applied, and as John



politicians, of which there are many in Nigeria as in the UK, it is far more fruitful to look towards the imperial interests that benefited the most from such corruption and violence. It is true that UK “is in an almost unique position in being able to do something to exert pressure on those who have robbed the Nigerian people,” and British elites have been in this position for decades. But it seems that British elites would rather side with the oppressors of the Nigerian people than do anything to stop the robbery of the Nigerian people.

### **Independence falls apart**

A suitable way of getting to grips with the multiple factors undergirding the continuing violence of the Nigerian state would first involve analysing the key role that foreign powers have played in their affairs since they were granted independence in 1960. Yet before looking at this new era of ostensible freedom, we must also acknowledge the scale of the brutality that was inflicted upon ordinary people throughout the preceding period of direct colonial subjugation. Indeed, “the Nigerian state was created largely by colonial conquest and violence. The motives were clear: the British sought to acquire territory for purposes of economic exploitation and political domination.” With a special relevance to understanding Nigeria’s enduring legacy of police brutality, professor Toyin Falola goes on to explain how:

Nothing represents the permanence of violence in Nigerian political culture better than the police and the army. The main purpose of both was to maintain domestic order and security. During the two world wars, the size of the army expanded as thousands were recruited to serve as soldiers and carriers

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Campbell and Matthew Page observe in their short book *Nigeria: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford University Press, 2018): “By not directly confronting corruption using travel bans and financial sanctions, the international community has done little to prevent kleptocrats from undermining Nigeria’s political, security, and economic stability.” (p.106)

outside the country. Involvement in colonial wars turned soldiers against their own people. The goal of maintaining an army was not to defend the interest of Nigerians but to defend the colonial state.<sup>2</sup>

It is critical to observe that throughout these long years of colonial imposition, the Nigerian people were always organizing and fighting back. And as a direct result of the potential of revolutionary ideas to truly democratize society, Marxists were all too often hounded out from positions of political influence through a process that has been referred to as “Nigeria-McCarthyism.” Democracy was clearly something to be feared by colonial authorities. So, when independence finally arrived, Western elites were keen to make sure the right type of people were elected, hence the rigging of elections proved essential. The owners of British corporations who were already profiting from Nigeria’s economy were also keen to share notes on efforts to stop Marxists from agitating within workplaces, and vast sums of money were invested in providing training programs for trade unionists to promote a partnership approach to industrial organizing. Indeed, this strategy of defanging the labour movement was nothing new, as:

A narrative of antileftist labor education in colonial Nigeria is incomplete without mentioning several training and workshops organized by the British TUC and the ICFTU [International Confederation of Free Trade Unions] during the 1950s. Without repeating what the colonial state and the Western labor organizations accomplished in the area of labor education, one should mention that many Nigerians were sent to Canada, India, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Kampala in Uganda, and West Germany for training and better education. They were sponsored by the colonial state as well as by a variety of benefactors, among them the ICFTU, the British TUC, and the United States’ AFL/CIO, and foreign companies such as British Petroleum (BP) and Royal Dutch Shell.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Toyin Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria* (Indiana University Press, 2009), p.178

<sup>3</sup> Hakeem Ibikunle Tijani, *Union Education in Nigeria: Labor,*

Yet in spite of the best efforts of the British ruling class, workers continued to inspire one another in their ongoing struggles against oppression. A good example is provided by Nigerian seaman on board the *M. V. Apapa* who in June 1959 walked ashore in Liverpool to strike against their employer, with the workers accusing Elder Dempster (the powerful shipping line) “of gross color discrimination, inequality, and ‘slavery.’”<sup>4</sup> Sidi Khayam was the man who had inspired the Liverpool strike as the militant general secretary of the Nigerian Union of Seamen. And Khayam would then go on to help organize a major dock strike in 1963 which played an important role in paving the way for the historic thirteen-day General Strike of June 1964 - a critical strike that illustrated the power of a united working-class in bringing their rulers to heel.<sup>5</sup> As part of this momentous General Strike:

The strikers won a significant victory in that they only returned to work once the government conceded to their demands - that there should be no victimization, that legal proceedings against arrested strike leaders should be withdrawn, that the ban on the *Pilot* and *Daily Comet* [two working-class newspapers] should be lifted and that an impartial commission should be set up to consider their grievances. This commission was to grant to workers a large increase in wages.<sup>6</sup>

However, despite this victory, workers were ultimately left disillusioned by the anti-democratic machinations of the leaders of their trade unions. Many of these leaders had chosen to align their politics with either the emergent capitalist class in Nigeria or with the

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*Empire, and Decolonization since 1945* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.67.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas White, “‘Ferry off the Mersey’: the business and the Impact of Decolonization in Liverpool,” *History*, 96(322), 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Adam Mayer, *Naija Marxism: Revolutionary Thought in Nigeria* (Pluto, 2016), p.60.

<sup>6</sup> Robin Cohen, “Michael Imoudu and the Nigerian labour movement,” *Race and Class*, 18, 1977, pp.355-6.

Stalinist regime in Moscow; with both representing an elite caste who, for different reasons, were opposed to workers seizing democratic control of society for themselves.<sup>7</sup> During these turbulent years, independent socialists who remained critical of the Communist Party sought to chart an independent working-class course for Nigeria, yet they too stumbled and exhibited many of the same shortcomings that beset other revolutionary groups vying for power around this moment in history.

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Waterman, "The foreign impact on Lagos dockworker unionism," *South African Labour Bulletin*, 5(8), 1979. "In 1964," shortly after the General Strike, "the Trotskyist Nigerian Labour Party was set up by Eskor Toyo and [Michael] Imoudu [as a breakaway from the Socialist Workers' and Farmers' Party]. There soon followed a split when in 1964/65 a splinter group led by Ola Oni, Baba Omojola, Jonas Abam and Sidi Khayam formed the Revolutionary Nigerian Labour Party." Mayer, *Naija Marxisms*, p.63.

It is important to point out that while the meddling of the Colonial Office "failed to prevent a militant or politically orientated trade union movement from developing," what can be said is that "their interference helped to foster divisions within the movement that weakened it as a political force." Peter Weiler, *British Labour and the Cold War* (Stanford University Press, 1988), p.44. Nigeria only gets this very brief mention in Weiler's otherwise excellent introduction to trade union imperialism, and for further information he refers his readers to the Robbie Cohen, *Labour and Politics in Nigeria, 1945-71* (Heinemann, 1974). For another analysis of the General Strikes shortcomings, see Eskor Toyo, *The Working Class and the Nigerian Crisis* (Sketch Publishing, 1967). Critically one of the key leaders of the 1964 General Strike, Michael Imoudu, was opposed to the interventions from both the capitalist and communist trade union federations, and "observed with scorn and bitterness how other Nigerian trade union leaders accepted gifts, scholarships and funding from such bodies, and often referred to his colleagues as being 'bought' by them." (p.358)

## Taking the risk out of Independence

The Nigerian masses evidently had a lot to contend with during the first years of independence, with American elites maintaining high hopes that Nigeria would blossom as a jewel of capitalist development. Post-independence therefore meant that a democratic farce came to pass, and vast sums of money flooded the country. Generous aid packages were dispensed courtesy of imperialist institutions like the World Bank, and during its early years Nigeria became heavily dependent on direct American aid and investment. Two key US powerbrokers providing in situ ‘help’ with such nation building efforts were Arnold Rivkin and Wolfgang Stolper whose work in Nigeria “helped convince Washington to offer the newly independent nation \$225 million to help finance the National Development Plan of 1962–68, making Nigeria one of the largest recipients of American economic aid.”<sup>8</sup> Rivkin had formerly worked in Europe managing the Marshall Plan for the US government before reorientating his specialisms towards conquering Africa for capital. From his base at the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Rivkin, had prior to his moving to Nigeria, founded the African Economic and Political Development Project at the Center for International Studies (CENIS) – an institution whose work was closely coordinated with the state department, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the big three

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<sup>8</sup> Larry Grubbs, “Bringing ‘the gospel of modernization’ to Nigeria: American nation builders and development planning in the 1960s,” *Peace and Change*, 31(3), 2006, p.286; Obed Mfum-Mensah, *We Come as Members of the Superior Race: Distortions and Education Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Berghahn, 2020); for details of the role that philanthropic foundations played in the creation of the World Bank, see Bruce Nissen, “Building the World Bank,” in: Steve Weissman (ed.), *The Trojan Horse: A Radical Look at Foreign Aid* (Ramparts Press, 1975); Jyrki Käkönen, “The World Bank: a bridgehead of imperialism,” *Instant Research on Peace and Violence*, 5(3), 1975; Teresa Hayter and Catherine Watson, *Aid: Rhetoric and Reality* (Pluto Press, 1985).

American philanthropies, Ford, Rockefeller and Carnegie.<sup>9</sup> Stolper on the other hand had been an associate at Rivkin's centre, and was posted to work in Nigeria in 1960 (with the assistance of the Ford Foundation) and soon became the head of the Economic Planning Unit within the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Economic Development.

Nigeria's new elite were simply being empowered by American financiers to continue colonial oppression of the masses by other means. This much was apparent to ordinary Nigerians who continued to resist the dictates of their new rulers. Writing in 1962, Immanuel Wallerstein, who was then employed as an Africanist political scientist lambasted the analyses presented by the likes of Rivkin and Stolper, writing: "There is a widespread belief that of all the newly independent African nations Nigeria is the outstanding example of a fairly stable, relatively pro-Western, liberal democracy. This belief is largely an illusion, nourished on superficial analysis and self-deception."<sup>10</sup> Likewise other intellectuals, even those of a less radical pedigree, recognized the limitations being imposed upon their country by foreign elites. In fact, according to Ibadan University economist Ojetunji Aboyade, who had succeeded Stolper as the head of the Economic Planning Unit in 1962 before himself going on to study in America on a Rockefeller Foundation scholarship...

...Stolper's plan was ill suited to the needs of Nigeria and was at heart a neoliberal project that fetishized the market mechanism,

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<sup>9</sup> Africa Research Group, "M.I.T. in Africa: the theory and practice of controlling the lives of black people," Undated (early 1970s); Africa Research Group, "David and Goliath collaborate in Africa," 1969.

<sup>10</sup> Cited in Grubbs. Wallerstein had obtained his PhD in 1959 having received a fellowship from the Ford Foundation that allowed him to complete "a dissertation that would compare the Gold Coast (Ghana) and the Ivory Coast in terms of the role voluntary associations played in the rise of the nationalist movements in the two countries." Wallerstein's work was later strongly influenced by the French historian Fernand Braudel, whose own research was well supported by the Ford Foundation funding. For criticisms of dependency theory, see Anthony Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism: A Critical Survey* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

profit maximization, and an export-orientated economy. He also criticized Stolper for not having drawn up anything approaching a plan – which implies a reasonable degree of state ownership and control – because he proposed privatization at every turn.<sup>11</sup>

These democratic limits were later discussed by Marxist critics of this philanthropic colonization of state functions. In one such study which focused on Nigeria's system of higher education, the author concluded that the “many tangible benefits which did accrue to Africans as a result of foundation expenditure were incidental outcomes of a policy which held that support for educational networks in Africa should be beneficial primarily to American foreign policy planners and corporate interests.”<sup>12</sup> Likewise as part of this war of ideas the leaders of America's most powerful philanthropic foundations were keen that other cultural institutions should be fully utilized – alongside economic and political forces – in making Nigeria safe for capitalism. And as just one small part of this endeavour Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka returned to Nigeria in the early 1960s with the backing of the Rockefeller Foundation and the CIA-backed Congress for Cultural

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<sup>11</sup> Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie and Rockefeller in the Rise of American Power* (Columbia University Press, 2012), p.175 (see chapter 6 “Ford, Rockefeller, and Carnegie in Nigeria and the African Studies Network”). Ojetunji Aboyade's critiques were published in *Foundations of an African Economy* (Praeger, 1966). Parmar concludes that “In the long run, American aid and modernization strategies delivered little by way of benefits to the mass of Nigerians but did a great deal to build and maintain pro-American elite networks, mindsets, and agendas – and an economy and polity increasingly undermined by corruption, deep indebtedness, and inequality.” (p.150)

<sup>12</sup> Edward Berman, “The foundations' role in American foreign policy: the case of Africa, post 1945,” in: Robert Arnove (ed.), *Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism: The Foundations at Home and Abroad* (Indiana University Press, 1982), p.226.

Freedom.<sup>13</sup>

## **An oil-powered civil war**

Under capitalism profits always trump democracy, but the degradation of basic democratic norms is worsened when the distribution of lucrative natural resources is at stake. Shell, having controlled Nigeria's oil sector since the 1930s, had only been able to develop their first commercial oil fields in 1957 and were of course loath to share their profits with ordinary Nigerians. So, in 1966, after a series of military coups brought General Gowon's military regime to power, Shell was comforted by the fact that the leaders of the British Labour government were keen to come to their aid when it came to sustaining their profits; even if this meant backing Gowon in persecuting a civil war that represented "one of the greatest annihilations of humanity since the Second World War". With regard to Labour's support for the Biafran civil war:

Prime Minister Harold Wilson set the tone in a memo sent to Michael Stewart, his foreign secretary, three weeks after the start of the conflict. In it, Wilson said it was of 'national importance' to protect the Nigerian investments of Shell and BP, which were

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<sup>13</sup> In his autobiography Soyinka recalled: "Soon enough, we would discover that we had been dining, and with relish, with the original of that serpentine incarnation, the Devil, romping in our postcolonial Garden of Eden and gorging on the fruits of the Tree of Knowledge! Nothing—virtually no project, no cultural initiative—was left unbrushed by the CIA's reptilian coils." Nevertheless, although Soyinka was perturbed by the CIA funding, as a social democrat (albeit a radical one) he never raised any qualms about the massive support he received from philanthropic foundations. For an insightful discussion of this important subject, see Christopher Balme, "Building theatrical epistemic communities in the Global South: expert networks, philanthropy and theatre studies in Nigeria 1959–1969," *Journal of Global Theatre History*, 3(2), 2019; also, Caroline Davis, *African Literature and the CIA: Networks of Authorship and Publishing* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).



crucial to Britain's balance of payments position and post-Second World War economic recovery. Everything should be done 'to help Shell-BP and the federal Nigerian authorities to establish effective protection of our oil investments'.<sup>14</sup>

In the case of this specific bloodbath where "regional and ethnic tensions" had previously been inflamed by US oil companies who were jockeying for oil supremacy with Shell -- it turned out that the American superpower didn't need to dirty their hands supplying weaponry, in this country anyway.<sup>15</sup> This is because Britain provided the vast majority of Nigeria's arms imports throughout the civil war. This however did not mean American could wash its hands of all guilt, as:

Roger Morris, a senior State Department official at the time, described American policy as characterised by 'outer public compassion veiling its inner bureaucratic callousness', driven by a commitment to the 'maintenance of the traditional Anglo-American patronage in Nigeria at almost any price'.... According to Morris, Prime Minister Wilson informed US Ambassador-at-large Clyde Ferguson that 'casualties of the famine were no object. He would accept a half million dead Biafrans ... if that was what it took to secure the old Nigeria'.<sup>16</sup>

On top of this, the Russians -- ever keen to side with an oppressor -- kindly supplied military aircraft to Gowon's regime, something that the British government felt unable to do because it would be seen by their own population as a step too far. This caution can be explained

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Peel, *A Swamp Full of Dollars: Pipelines and Paramilitaries at Nigeria's Oil Frontier* (Lawrence Hill Books, 2010), p.54.

<sup>15</sup> Kairn Klieman, "U.S. oil companies, the Nigerian Civil War, and the origins of opacity in the Nigerian oil industry, 1964-1971," *Journal of American History*, 99(1), 2012.

<sup>16</sup> S. Elizabeth Bird, Rosina Umelo, *Surviving Biafra: A Nigerwife's Story* (Hurst & Company, 2018), p.35. Also see Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe, "The Igbo genocide, Britain and the United States (Pt.1)," *Pambazuka News*, July 9, 2015.

by the fact that throughout the civil war the Labour government and their Conservative opposition were fearful that British people wouldn't support their warmongering, and so they were forced to keep up the pretence that Britain had adopted an essentially neutral position in the war.<sup>17</sup> Effectively sheltered from meaningful democratic scrutiny, which was aided and abetted by the connivance of the media, by late 1968 the Wilson government – in an effort to secure the future flow of oil wealth from their former colony – “agreed to supply Nigeria with aircraft for the first time in a covert deal.”<sup>18</sup> None of this should be too

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<sup>17</sup> “During the 30-month-old war, six emergency debates on British arms deliveries to Lagos were held in the House of Commons. The main criticism of government policy always came from the Labour back-bench parliamentarians, who called for the termination of arms support for the Nigerian government, so as to enable Britain to play a 'constructive' mediating role in the conflict. Government critics were not, however, able to mobilise sufficient votes to force the government to change its position. Their most impressive attempt in parliament to alter the government's policy came during a very heated debate in March 1969, when 62 members (mostly Labour) voted against the government-tabled resolution to continue arms supplies. Another 160 Labour parliamentarians abstained from the voting, and support for the government (232) had to be bolstered by Conservative MPs.” Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe, *Conflict and Intervention in Africa: Nigeria, Angola, Zaïre* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), p.31.

<sup>18</sup> In communicating to Gowon's regime: “Wilson said that Britain could not supply these directly but there were such aircraft in South Yemen and Sudan previously supplied by Britain. The Nigerians, he said, should procure the aircraft from them which 'would not directly involve the British government'. The company to deal with in those two countries was Airwork Limited, which was later to be again used by the British government to conceal its involvement in its covert dirty war in Yemen. The British government also agreed to put the Nigerians in touch with 'suitable pilots.’” Mark Curtis, *Unpeople: Britain's Secret Human Rights Abuses* (Vintage, 2004), p.178; Curtis, “How Britain's Labour government facilitated the massacre of Biafrans in Nigeria – to protect its oil interests,” *Daily Maverick*, April 29, 2020.

surprising, and such state-sanctioned violence against those with a different colour skin was nothing new for British rulers whose were well versed in such divide and rule tactics. Closer to home Wilson's Labour government had overseen a growth in state-sanctioned racism: a racist commitment that will forever be etched in the working-classes memory by the brutal police murder of David Oluwale, a British Nigerian whose needless death in April 1969 went down in history as the first *recorded* case of a murder in police custody.<sup>19</sup>

Shell's central involvement with the British state in the corruption of Nigeria is hardly exceptional. And like many other oil companies Shell maintains an appalling reputation when it comes to democracy and are just as prone to preventing their own employees from organizing in trade unions as they are to spilling other people's blood.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, coinciding with Biafran civil war a parallel historic example of Shell's abuse of power is provided by the role that they and the British government played in supporting another despotic regime, this time in the de facto British colony of Oman. Here with the support of Shell and the "active and consistent backing of the British government" the Sultan of Oman's "regime of tyranny and sadism" -- which had legalized feudalism using African slaves -- was able to successfully quash a series of democratic uprisings that arose in the late 1960s. Then, during the Biafran civil war, Omani oil wells that were being operated by the Shell were quickly brought online to

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<sup>19</sup> Kester Aspden, *Nationality: Wog - The Hounding of David Oluwale* (Jonathan Cape, 2007). Robert Moore discusses Oluwale's murder in the opening pages of his book *Racism and Black Resistance in Britain* (Pluto Press, 1975) which also documents the regressive role played by the Labour Party in fuelling home-grown racism. For example, Moore explains how: "In 1965 Harold Wilson, a Labour Prime Minister, introduced a White Paper on Commonwealth immigration which contained all the principles on which a full colour bar was subsequently to be erected." (p.19)

<sup>20</sup> Barry Weisberg, "Our lives are at stake: workers fight for health and safety," *United Front Press*, July 1973; Orla Drohan, "Corrib Gas -- Fianna Fail's rotten deal with Shell," *Socialist Party Ireland*, August 5, 2005.

make up for the shortfall in loss of supply from Nigeria, with Omani oil also helping to make up for losses caused by reduced oil exports from Arab states after the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war. (Oil “royalty payments to the Sultan rose from £8 million in 1967 to over £40 million in 1970.”) From 1966 onwards the British government also engaged in another secret war which saw them assist the Sultan in his efforts to put down a rebellion among the people of Dhofar province – a war that only ended in 1976. Part of the anti-democratic legacy involved the British helping organizing a coup to oust the Sultan (who was flown to Britain and exile) to be replaced with his son – who moved to abolish slavery and was seen to be a more capable ally in extinguishing popular uprisings and defending Shell’s lucrative oil stakes in the Gulf region such that he remained in power until his death in 2020.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Fred Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans: A Political Survey of Instability in the Arab World* (Penguin, 1975), p.279, pp.286-7. “The outbreak of guerrilla war in the Omani interior on 12 June 1970 spurred the Shell oil company to urge action on the part of the British.” (p.288); Ian Cobain, “Britain’s secret wars,” *Guardian*, September 8, 2016; James Barr, *Lords of the Desert: Britain's Struggle with America to Dominate the Middle East* (Simon & Schuster, 2018). “Said bin Taimur was one of the nastiest rulers the world has seen for a long time. His brutality affected both the way the country was ruled and the treatment he meted out to those individuals over whom he chose to exercise his powers. Under the guise of respecting Ibadhism a savage regime was upheld. Said's rule prevented Omanis from leaving the country; discouraged education and health services, and kept from the population a whole series of objects, including medicines, radios, spectacles, trousers, cigarettes and books. Even the oil prospecting companies were prevented from carrying out welfare programmes and they were discouraged from any but the most minimal contacts with the local people. In 1958 the British set up a Development Department to ward off criticism but Said prevented anything being done. 'I always felt he was not really interested in development,' his development adviser later wrote;11 'the Sultan was, I felt, half-hearted about plans for health, education, agriculture and so on.' On one occasion he told the adviser: 'This is why you lost India,

## Fighting the zombie state

Marxist activist and theorist Walter Rodney in his classic book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972) briefly touches on Nigerian affairs, and his lucid prose makes clear the crippling role carried forth by the former colonial elites profiting from the oil industry. As Rodney wrote:

The civil war in Nigeria is generally regarded as having been a tribal affair. To accept such a contention would mean extending the definition of tribe to cover Shell Oil and Gulf Oil! But, quite apart from that, it must be pointed out that nowhere in the history of pre-colonial independent Nigeria can anyone point to the massacre of Ibos by Hausas or any incident which suggests that people up to the 19th century were fighting each other because of ethnic origin. Of course there were wars, but they had a rational basis in trade rivalry, religious contentions, and the clashes of political expansion. What came to be called tribalism at the beginning of the new epoch of political independence in Nigeria was itself a product of the way that people were brought together under colonialism so as to be exploited. It was a product of administrative devices, of entrenched regional separations, of differential access by particular ethnic groups into the colonial economy and culture.

Tragically such racist discourses of African tribalism are still deployed to throw salt into the eyes of the working-class, who are told the lie that only the powerful can save the poor from their own shortcomings. This erasure of the “tremendous revolutionary daring” of Africans is utter nonsense, and as CLR James correctly explained in 1939 “The

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because you educated the people.' Just before he was ousted in 1970 he had decided to close the three existing primary schools in the country - because they had become 'centres of communism!.'” Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, pp.275-6. For more on Shell’s anti-democratic role in Oman, see Stephen Dorrill, *MI6: Fifty Years of Special Operations* (Fourth Estate, 2000), p.731.

only place where Negroes did not revolt is in the pages of capitalist historians.”<sup>22</sup> So, as the oil boom generated immense wealth for Nigeria’s new dictatorial class, both before and in the wake of the civil war,<sup>23</sup> ordinary people continued to revolt.

One person who helped define this tempo of resistance during the dark years of state repression was the Afrobeat originator and revolutionary activist Fela Anikulapo Kuti.<sup>24</sup> His songs of resistance gave heart to the daily struggles of millions, with his 1977 smash hit album *Zombie* casting derision upon the Nigerian military regime. His popular album *Beast of No Nation* railed against corruption with a particular focus on the violence of then military head of state, Muhammadu Buhari (1982-5) – an authoritarian leader, who since 2015 has served as Nigeria’s President. In the lyrics of *Beast of No Nation* Fela also focused his anger upon the hypocrisy of the United Nations. Fela’s other famous anthems include *ITT* (International Thief Thief) which attacked the well-known American multi-national and another is *Government of Crooks*, highlighting the degradation and destruction of southeastern Ogoniland by foreign oil companies.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> CLR James, “The Revolution and the Negro,” *New Internationalist*, Volume V, December 1939.

<sup>23</sup> Shown as a percentage the oil share of total state revenue increased from 1% in 1959-60 to 26% in 1970-1 and ballooned to 52% the next year. In 1989-90 the percentage reached an all-time high of 97%. Eghosa Osaghae, *Crippled Giant: Nigeria since independence* (Indiana University Press, 1998), p.20.

<sup>24</sup> Fela had first become introduced to socialist politics during his bands tour of America in 1969 where he met his long-time collaborator Sandra Smith (now Sandra Izsadore), an African-American activist who most importantly been involved with the inspirational work of the Black Panther Party.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Veal, *Fela: The Life and Times of an African Musical Icon* (Temple University Press, 2000); Veal, “Everyone Say Ye-Ye!,” *Humanities Underground*, February 2, 2013.

Fela’s two brothers were also political activists in their own right although far from socialists. Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti pursued a medical career and became the deputy leader of the Nigerian Medical Association, before going on to help form the Campaign for

This latter song would go on to have greater relevance with the 1995 judicial execution of Ogoni environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa.

### **Privatizing resistance and the socialist alternative**

Although the anti-worker character of the assorted regimes that have governed Nigeria has been fairly constant over the past six decades, the material conditions shaping the lives of ordinary people have always been in flux, as have the strengths of their resistance movements. For example, the eighties witnessed a massive upsurge in grassroots organizing against the military government. An explosive uprising that was brought to a head when international funding agencies tacked rightwards by imposing their hated Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS) upon the poorest of the world.<sup>26</sup>

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Democracy, where he was able to act as the chairman for Nigeria's "first human rights organisation" which soon entered into the NADECO. Like Fela, Ransome-Kuti served many years in prison because of his determined opposition to the military regime governing Nigeria. Since 1989 he had also served as a member of the international body for the non-governmental Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI). Fela's other brother, Professor Olikoye Ransome-Kuti, became a well-known AIDS campaigner who served as the Federal Minister of Health and Human Services (1985-92) in General Ibrahim Babangida's regime. He later served on the boardrooms of many NGOs including the including the Center for the Right to Health (CRH).

<sup>26</sup> Julius Ihonvbere and Eme Ekekwe, "Dependent capitalism, structural adjustment and democratic possibilities in Nigeria's Third Republic," *Africa Spectrum*, 23 (3), 1988; Eskor Toyo, *The Economics of Structural Adjustment: A Study of the Prelude to Globalisation* (First Academic Publishers. 2002). One of the leading left-wing institutions criticizing SAPs was CODESRIA; and the following interview sheds some light on some of their own funding problems and attempts to shield themselves from undue influence from the liberal foundations that fund their work. Kuan-Hsing Chen and Ikegami Yoshihiko, "CODESRIA as a Pan-African intellectual

Financial aid provided by institutions like the World Bank was now more explicitly tied to the demand that recipient states dismantle their already substandard welfare provisions. And not unexpectedly, the Nigerian regime responded to the increased militancy of the masses resistance to such economic 'restructuring' by stepping-up their repression and doing whatever they could to destabilize and defang the trade union movement.

If life was hard for the masses in the eighties, things got worse when General Sani Abacha's military junta seized power in November 1993. His new regime had scant regard for democratic norms, adopting a more brutal approach to dispatching with their political opponents. Socialists now not only had their work cut out staying alive, but at the same time also had to contend with fresh floods of foreign philanthropic aid. New forms of aid that sought to bring all opponents of the dictatorship into a tame opposition movement that prioritized legal reforms over class struggle. Not particularly pleased by the instability of the latest dictator, Western donor priorities had once again metamorphosed to meet the evolving needs of Capital. Foundation elites now sought to render politics safe for ruling-class domination by exploring new (additional) means of privatizing state functions by creating hundreds of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In 1994 the journal *Africa World Review* focused on the issue of "NGOs and the recolonisation process" with their journal's editorial referring to a "new strategy of global control which now places less emphasis on the state and prioritises direct influence and control over communities through funding NGOs".<sup>27</sup> These critical arguments were later given further credence by the writings of Firoze Manji and Carl O'Coill, who in a 2002 article published as "The missionary position: NGOs and development in Africa" described how...

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community: An interview with Professor Sam Moyo', " *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 17(1), 2016. Note: prior to helping found CODESRIA in 1973 Samir Amin had served as the Director of the UN African Institute of Economic Development and Planning (1963-70).

<sup>27</sup> Editorial cited in Julie Hearn, "African NGOs: the new compradors?," *Development and Change*, 6(38), 2007.



...such widespread [public] opposition [to repressive regimes] also forced the multilateral and bilateral aid agencies to rethink their approach to development promotion, particularly, how to present the same neo-liberal economic and social programmes with a more ‘human face’. The outcome of these deliberations was the ‘good governance’ agenda of the 1990s and the decision to co-opt NGOs and other civil society organizations to a repackaged programme of welfare provision, a social initiative that could be more accurately described as a programme of social control...

And what of the welfare initiatives that accompanied the good governance agenda? The bilaterals and multilaterals set aside significant volumes of funds aimed at ‘mitigating’ the ‘social dimensions of adjustment’. The purpose of such programmes was to act as palliatives that might minimize the more glaring inequalities that their policies had perpetuated. Funds were made available to ensure that a so-called ‘safety net’ of social services would be provided for the ‘vulnerable’—but this time not by the state (which had after all been forced to ‘retrench’ away from the social sector) but by the ever-willing NGO sector.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Firoze Manji and Carl O’Coill, “The missionary position: NGOs and development in Africa,” *International Affairs*, 78(3), 2002, p.578. Manji and O’Coill’s argue that the work of NGOs “contributes marginally to the relief of poverty, but significantly to undermining the struggle of African people to emancipate themselves from economic, social and political oppression.” (p.568) In a recent interview Manji explains how “NGOs are facing a crisis because their funding is dropping. I think the access to serious funds is waning because money is now not going to NGOs so much as to the militarization of aid.” While rejecting the so-called “dogma” of the revolutionary left Manji has a lot of positive things to say about the less than Marxist work of Samir Amin. “After the African Awakenings: An interview with Firoze Manji by Nokoko Editors, Toby Moorsom and Christopher Webb,” *Nokoko*, 7, 2019.

Yet in distinction to the multitude of NGOs that proliferated throughout Nigeria during the nineties -- who, we should acknowledge, still faced intense state repression -- the formation of the National Conscience Party provided a rare opportunity to organize in a democratic fashion against the military junta even if the Party's leadership proved unwilling to reject capitalism. Founded in October 1994 by the renowned human rights lawyer Chief Gani Fawehinmi, the National Conscience Party thus represented an important step forward for mass struggle in the face of the "unprecedented right-ward shift by the leadership of the trade union movement." This new political party also provided a welcome alternative to the elitist National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) -- an umbrella organization that had been formed earlier in 1994 to plead that the military regime should rethink its seizure of power... a self-defeating strategy to say the least.<sup>29</sup>

In August 1993, during this period of mass struggle, even the National Labour Congress (NLC) -- despite its leaders' intimate relations with the former military regime -- felt pressed to organize a General Strike -- a strike which "virtually paralyzed the economy". But to the fury of the working masses the NLC's president called off the General Strike after just three days, leaving workers at the mercy of further state repression. Workers in the oil sector however responded in typically militant fashion by taking measures into their own hands and in defiance of the NLC relaunched their strike action. But with the working-class now divided, just days later General Abacha successfully overthrew the interim government and ordered the oil strikers to return to work. And as if this sell-out by the trade union leaders were not disgraceful enough, in the summer of 1994 the

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<sup>29</sup> Segun Sango (ed.), *DSM and the Struggle for a Working Peoples' Political Alternative* (DSM, 2013), p.118. Consistent in their siding with the powerful: during these violent years, the British government preferred to highlight the democratic potential of General Sani Abacha's new military dictatorship. As noted earlier, extreme violence was Abacha's *modus operandi*, but so too was the deployment of empty promises that his regime would oversee a transition to democracy (a pledge for change that was much played up by his Western boosters).

frustrations of rank-and-file union members received further justification when oil workers once again brought the country to standstill with an epic eight-week strike. And again, “The inability of the NLC to come out in full support of NUPENG and the strike led many Nigerians to reach the conclusion that ‘the conscience of most members of the [NLC’s] National Executive Council have been mortgaged.’”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Julius Ihonvbere, “Organized labor and the struggle for democracy in Nigeria,” *African Studies Review*, 40(3), 1997, p.85, p.94. Further research into the rightward drift of trade union leaders like those running the NLC might look at the activities of Thomas Medley, the program director for the AFL-CIO’s African American Labor Center, who had been based in Nigeria during this period. For a discussion of the imperialist role of the American trade unions in Africa, see Nathan Gottfried, “Spreading American corporatism: trade union education for third world labour,” *Review of African Political Economy*, 1987; Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, “Trade union imperialism: American labour, the ICFTU and the Kenyan labour movement,” *Social and Economic Studies*, 36(2), 1987; and for an excellent overview, see Kim Scipes, “The AFL-CIO’s foreign policy program: where historians now stand,” *CounterPunch*, November 6, 2020. Very little seems to have been written about the AFL-CIO’s ongoing work in Nigeria, although a glimpse of this work is provided in this insider account, Peter James Cannon, *The Unmaking of a Conservative Africa: Anything Is Possible* (AuthorHouse, 2014).

Although less conservative than the AFL-CIO, the German Social Democrats’ Friedrich Ebert Foundation has also played a significant role in promoting capitalist ideologies within the Nigerian trade union movement. This is not to say the Foundation does nothing useful, but it does highlight the dilemmas that revolutionary activists face while organizing against repressive regimes. Indeed, the only way for a revolutionary party to represent the needs of the working-class is by only relying upon funding from the working-class itself. However, it is possible that Marxists, may through their own working lives end up periodically obtaining funding from dubious sources. An interesting example of this issue is provided by Professor Femi

## Shell's dictatorship continues

In the face of the many mass struggles that dominated the nineties, it was the nonviolent campaign targeting Shell that garnered most international opprobrium. Led by Ken Saro-Wiwa, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People led mass demonstrations against the oil giant, highlighting the company's complicity in working with the Abacha's regime to promote the systematic abuse of both humans and the environment. Abacha's junta responded in typical fashion with massive coordinated state repression which led to the state-sanctioned murder of thousands - with international outrage being sharply focused on Wiwa's final arrest (in May 1994) and his subsequent hanging (on November 10, 1995) along with eight other Ogoni activists.<sup>31</sup> Significantly in Britain, at the height of this fit-up, the Tories

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Aborisade, who remains one of Nigeria's most influential Marxists, who, in 1997 had served as a Project Manager for the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation in Nigeria. This is particularly noteworthy because at the time he was the Secretary of the NCP, and had been a founding member of *Militant Labour*.

For a discussion relating to the deradicalizing effect of German philanthropy within African trade unions, see Munyaradzi Gwisai, *Revolutionaries, Resistance and Crisis in Zimbabwe: Anti-Neo-liberal Struggles in Periphery Capitalism* (Harare: I.S.O. Pamphlet, 2002). Gwisai explains how: "In Zimbabwe the critical middle-class body that negotiated the neoliberal takeover of the rising workers' movement was the NCA [National Constitutional Assembly]. The NCA had been formed in 1997 as a vehicle for mobilizing the middle class around the demand for a new constitution, and was financed and mentored by German and Scandinavian social democratic foundations and unions." Note that before playing a key role in founding the NCA, Professor Lovemore Madhuku had just been employed as a labour law consultant based in Nigeria for the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. Also see Antonio Muñoz Sánchez, "The Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Spanish socialists during the transition to democracy, 1975-1982," *Contemporary European History*, January 2016.

<sup>31</sup> One day soon we can be hopeful that Shell will be found guilty in

led a Parliamentary debate on human rights in Nigeria (held on March 7, 1995). A debate that once again demonstrated how the British ruling-class refuses to put human life before corporate profits. During this democratic debacle, Lord Thurlow, the former High Commissioner to Nigeria, defended the actions of the British government in delivering 80 military tanks to the dictatorship. With no hint of irony, he explained how “Successive military governments have, in terms of human rights, had commendable records.” Lord Thurlow evidently had high democratic hopes for Abacha’s military regime, saying that Abacha “has assured us—we welcome it—that (these are his own words) there is no going back on the commitment to restore democracy.” The economic importance of Shell’s operations in Nigeria were also raised in the debate. Yet sadly it was ensuring the continuation of Shell’s operations that was at the forefront of the government’s mind, not their involvement in the murder of Abacha’s democratic critics.<sup>32</sup>

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the courts for murder, as evidence exists which “reveals that the notorious military commander Lieutenant-Colonel Paul Okuntimo, whose troops were implicated in murder and rape, was in the pay of Shell at the time of the killings [of the Ogoni 9] and was driven around in a Shell vehicle.” Unfortunately, one of the first efforts to prosecute Shell in the courts failed, although four of the widows connected to executions of the Ogoni 9 have now filed a civil case against Shell in The Netherlands - a case which is currently in progress with one witness having testified that a Shell employee attempted to bribe him to testify in court against Wiwa. Andy Rowell and Eveline Lubbers, “Ken Saro-Wiwa was framed, secret evidence shows,” *The Independent*, December 5, 2010; Rowell, “Ogoni 9: 24 years after their execution, court told by key witness: ‘Yes Shell bribed me,’” *Oil Change International*, October 11, 2019. The initial Wiwa case never made it to court as the case was settled in May 2009 for \$15.5m. For details of some of the evidence presented at the ongoing case in the Netherlands, see John Donovan, “Shell and the Abacha regime operated in tandem,” August 1, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Debate in the House of Lords, “Nigeria: Human Rights,” March 7, 1995; Stephen Delahunty, “Bloody cheek’ a Tory government’s

These inhuman political priorities on the part of both Shell and the British government remain unaltered today, and as one criminologist surmizes:

While Shell has been the dominant foreign player in Nigeria's oil and gas sector (eclipsing its global and national competitor, ExxonMobil), it runs an almost parallel and draconic government in the Niger Delta. In complicity with the Nigerian corrupt political and military elite, the corporation has become what [Ike Okonta and Orono Douglas describe in this 2003 book *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights, and Oil in the Niger Delta*] as 'a Gulliver on Rampage' - destroying natural ecosystems and the local economy and funding the government repression of those who demand responsible corporate behaviour. Representing the worst of corporate abuses in the Niger Delta, Shell's activities reflect those of other corporate players in the sector. The result of decades of crude oil and gas production in the Niger Delta manifests in billions of dollars for both the Nigerian government and transnational corporations; an expansive ecology of poverty for the local population; and arbitrary arrests, detention and repression of those who question or protest the reckless corporate behaviour and the complicity of the Nigerian government. These repressions,

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response to calls for oil sanctions on Nigeria after it executed nine environmental activists," *Byline Times*, January 15, 2020; Tijen Demirel-Pegg and Scott Pegg, "Razed, repressed, and bought off: the demobilization of the Ogoni protest campaign in the Niger Delta," *Extractive Industries and Society*, 2, 2015. "The strategy of paying off militants has also been accompanied by the selective cooptation of Niger Delta moderate leaders. Orono Douglas, a recently deceased Ijaw activist and a member of Saro-Wiwa's legal defense team worked with Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan from his days as deputy governor of Bayelsa State. At the time of his death, he was Special Adviser to the President on Research, Documentation and Strategy. Von Kemedi, another former Ijaw activist, served as a Special Consultant to the President. Saro-Wiwa's eldest son Ken Wiwa has served as an advisor to three Nigerian presidents, most recently as Goodluck Jonathan's Senior Special Assistant to the President on Civil Society and International Media."

including the judicial murder of environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, were funded either by the pillaging transnational corporations like Shell and Chevron or at their behest.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ifeanyi Ezeonu, *Market Criminology State-corporate Crime in the Petroleum Extraction Industry* (Taylor & Francis, 2018), p.87. Shell's chairman at the time of Wiwa's execution was Cor Herkströter, who after retiring from Shell's leadership in 1998 went on to become the chairman of ING Group. Herkströter retired from ING in 2005, but the close connection between the two corporations continues as ING's current chairman Hans Wijers is a former board member of Shell; he is also an advisor to Temasek a Singapore-based global investment company whose board members includes Peter Voser (a former Shell CEO) Robert Zoellick (the former head of the World Bank), Fu Chengyu (the chairman of the China Petroleum & Chemical Corporation), and Lim Boon Heng, an individual who many years ago served as the Secretary-General of the Singapore National Trades Union Congress.

The open links between Shell and state corruption are also seen through the case of Diezani Alison-Madueke, Nigeria's former oil minister (2010-15), who had started working for Shell in 1992 and in 2006 became the External Affairs Director for their Nigerian operations. This important background is relevant to ongoing charges of corruption linked to her ministerial position that are currently being investigated in the UK (where she currently lives) owing to her dealings with Kolawole Aluko - an individual who at the time of the alleged crimes was the Deputy CEO of Seven Energy. Seven Energy is no small player in the oil industry and between 2013 and 2015 the chairman of their board was Andrew Jamieson OBE, the former Managing Director of Shell subsidiary, Nigeria LNG Ltd (1999-2004). Thus, even after extremely serious allegations of corruption were levelled against Seven Energy concerning their activities in Nigeria (which concerned the period just prior to Jamieson's becoming their chair), the World Bank's International Finance Corporation continued to divert over \$100 million to Seven's operations. For a thorough examination of these sordid practices which took place under Diezani Alison-Madueke's leadership, see Nicholas Hildyard,

Illustrating this point further, in 1996 former Shell Nigeria General Manager Nnameka Achebe shed further light upon the truth when he told *Harper's magazine* that “for a commercial company trying to make investments, you need a stable environment. Dictatorships can give you that.” Shell of course maintains their innocence whenever they are accused of supporting the murder of democratic activists; we would expect no less from one of the world’s most exploitative corporations. Nevertheless, when it comes to defending their corporate profits, life hardly enters the equation. There is after all a clear connection between the immense economic hardship faced by tens of millions of Nigerians and the normal business operations of multinationals like Shell.<sup>34</sup> In fact, it is hardly surprising that Shell,

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*The World Bank, Red Flags and the Looting of Nigeria's Oil Revenues. The IFC's investment in Seven Energy: What would have been your call?* Corner House Research, October 2018. For more general history, see Nicholas Hildyard, *Licensed Larceny: Infrastructure, Financial Extraction and the Global South* (Manchester University Press, 2016).

<sup>34</sup> Owolabi Bakre, “Looting by the ruling elites, multinational corporations and the accountants: the genesis of indebtedness, poverty and underdevelopment of Nigeria,” Unpublished 2008 research paper on file at the School of Accounting, Finance & Management, University of Essex, UK. “While both the government and Shell have been denying their alleged genocide against Nigerians, such denial became public as a result of a shocking revelations made by an aggrieved Nigerian arms supply contractor to Shell, Chief Gabriel Akinluyi. While testifying in a suit for alleged breach of contract in payment default by Shell, filed by his firm, in a Lagos High Court, on Monday June 10, 2008, Chief Akinluyi alleged that in 1995 at the peak of the Ogoni crisis led by the slain leader of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) Ken Saro Wiwa, Shell Management had made fruitless efforts to get the approval from the Inspector General of Police, Ibrahim Commassie, to import arms and ammunitions. He was then invited by Shell to persuade the former Inspector General of Police, to give approval to Shell to import ammunition, which he successfully achieved and Shell imported some



which has a long history of working with brutal mercenaries to indulge their shareholders, maintained its own cosy relationship with the Abacha regime's most notorious Mobile Police Force (known locally as the 'kill-and-go mob'). A murderous police unit which, to this day, works with the assistance of powerful multi-nationals like G4S. Hence we can see how Shell's favoured 'kill-and-go mobs' acted as a natural petri dish of corruption that is umbilically connected to the murderous deployment of the SARS units.<sup>35</sup>

### Capitalist spOILs

Shell has continued to work alongside Nigeria's political elites such that the plunder and murderous reign of oil-fuelled mayhem continues to this day, with little changing with the transition to civilian rule in 1999. Tom Curtis, a journalist working for the *Financial Times* has provided a lucid overview of the continuation of Shell's business-as-normal approach to corruption.

Shell admitted paying bribes worth \$2 million to Nigerian customs officials between 2004 and 2006. One installment of a \$5 million bribe paid by Kellogg, Brown & Root (KBR) was so bulky when converted into naira that it had to be loaded onto vehicles for delivery. As part of a slush fund worth some \$180 million deployed over ten years to 2004, the kickbacks helped to win KBR contracts to build one of Nigeria's biggest oil

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sophisticated ammunition." (p.29) Also see, Owolabi Bakre and Sarah Lauwo, "Privatisation and accountability in a 'crony capitalist' Nigerian state," *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 39, 2016.

<sup>35</sup> G4S state on their web site that: "AssetGuard /G4S is licensed to utilize the services of dedicated squadrons and officers from the Nigerian Mobile Police Force (MOPOL)." Note that G4S's Chief Financial Officer, Tim Weller (who had been a board member since 2013), previously served as the CFO of oil sector giant Petrofac (between 2011 and 2016) and is a board member of a Shell greenwashing project known as The Carbon Trust. While at Petrofac Weller served alongside just retired Shell board member Matthias Bichsel.

facilities, the \$6 billion liquefied natural gas plant at Bonny Island, on the lip of the Niger Delta. At the time KBR was a subsidiary of the American engineering giant Halliburton, whose chief executive, Dick Cheney, departed in 2000 to be George W. Bush's vice president.

Bribe by bribe, these companies and others help to make Nigeria's public servants instruments of illicit private gain. And these are merely the cases in which the foreign perpetrators of corruption have been caught. Nigeria has the distinction of being the African nation most frequently involved in international bribery schemes exposed by anticorruption prosecutors, behind only Iraq and China worldwide. Other transactions are structured in an effort to enrich officials without crossing the threshold of illegality. In 2011 Shell and the Italian oil company Eni paid \$1.3 billion to the Nigerian government for the rights to a choice offshore oil prospect. The government promptly transferred \$1.1 billion to an offshore company called Malabu. One substantial shareholder in Malabu was, as a UK High Court judge found in 2013, a man called Dan Etete. Etete, a convicted money-lauderer, awarded his own company the rights to the prospect while serving as oil minister under the military dictator Sani Abacha. The deal was described by a fixer involved in the deal as a 'safe sex transaction' in which the government served as a 'condom' protecting Etete and the oil companies.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Tom Burgis, *The Looting Machine: Warlords, Oligarchs, Corporations, Smugglers, and the Theft of Africa's Wealth* (PublicAffairs, 2015), pp.190-1. "When the gunmen of MEND launched their oil war a decade after Saro-Wiwa's uprising Shell faced a new threat. It responded with a mixture of co-optation and confrontation. In 2006 Shell admitted that it had given contracts to companies connected to MEND. Shell executives were also privy to the details of operations conducted by the Joint Taskforce, or JTF, the special contingent of the Nigerian military stationed in the Delta to keep the oil flowing and known for its heavy-handed tactics." (p.195)

KBR later pleaded guilty to a bribery charge in the United States and settled with the US government for \$579 million. "KBR admitted that, at crucial junctures before the award of the EPC contracts, KBR's

Yet while Tom Tugendhat MP recently and falsely accused General Gowon's earlier regime of industrial-scale corruption, it is more usual for mainstream commentators to focus their disgust upon General Abacha's regime - perhaps because his dictatorship only ended because of his sudden death in 1998. But ordinary people disagree with such limited scapegoating, and as Michael Peel, another *Financial Times* journalist, made clear in his own insightful book...

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former CEO, Albert 'Jack' Stanley, and others met with three successive former holders of a top-level office in the executive branch of the Nigerian government to ask the office holder to designate a representative with whom the joint venture should negotiate bribes to Nigerian government officials." Stanley was sentenced to 30 months in prison. "Kellogg Brown & Root LLC pleads guilty to foreign bribery charges and agrees to pay \$402 million criminal fine," *US Department for Justice*, February 11, 2009. The Nigerian anticorruption agency filed charges against Dick Cheney but later dropped them for reasons of political expediency when Halliburton worked out a \$35 million settlement.

Another notable billionaire involve in the KBR affair was Gilbert Chagouri who was known for his close business association with Nigeria's military dictator, Sani Abacha. To avoid prosecution for his dirty past, in 2001 he returned \$65 million to the Nigerian government, and he has now reinvented himself as a philanthropist who works closely with the former US President, Bill Clinton. Joseph Tanfani, "He was a billionaire who donated to the Clinton Foundation. Last year, he was denied entry into the U.S.," *Los Angeles Times*, August 28, 2016.

Legal cases against Shell and Eni are still ongoing, but Eni have now upped the ante and are attempting to sue Nigeria for lost earnings, see "Eni files ICSID arbitration request linked to controversial Nigeria oil deal," Bretton Woods Project, December 10, 2020. A similar ongoing case against the Nigerian state involves the now defunct Irish gas company P&ID who are outrageously claiming nearly \$10 billion in lost profits.

For many Nigerians, Abacha is not a one-off, but rather a roughly hewn archetype for the behaviour of the political élite and their Western accomplices before and since, as hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of oil revenues have been squandered. Under Abacha's predecessor, General Ibrahim Babangida, for example, more than \$12bn of revenue windfalls generated by the spike in the oil price during the first Gulf War were never properly accounted for. A later investigation into the fate of the money was never published. The charming, gap-toothed general – who enjoyed then prime minister Margaret Thatcher's hospitality at Downing Street – earned himself a set of picaresque nicknames back home. (p.161)

Furthermore, in relation to Abacha's much-discussed crimes – which heavily implicate corporations from all over the world – what we do know is that the powerful global elites who have profited from Nigeria's oil spoils refuse to hold their own leaders to account. Michael Peel, who succeeded in interviewing the lawyer working to recover the stolen assets for the Nigerian government (Enrico Monfrini), highlights how: “One of the biggest problems Monfrini faced was following the many money trails that led to and from Britain. While other states were willingly providing information, Britain was proving singularly recalcitrant.” Moreover while “Britain's Financial Services Authority said it had disciplined 15 banks” for their involvement in the Abacha affair “they remained anonymous” and it seems unlikely that anyone was punished.<sup>37</sup> This forgiving view would

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<sup>37</sup> Peel, *A Swamp Full of Dollars*, p.121, p.131. This is in keeping with the premises of capitalist exploitation where profiteers are promoted not punished for their moral shortcomings, see William Black, *The Best Way to Rob a Bank is to Own One: How Corporate Executives and Politicians Looted the S & L Industry* (University of Texas Press, 2014). Peel explains: “Foreign countries have enjoyed a grotesque double benefit from the Abacha theft. Not only did they buy Nigerian crude, but their banks took a hefty portion of the proceeds from the sale of it.” (p.115)

“With its highly developed financial and legal services industries, Britain has long been a favoured destination for people seeking to launder dirty money.” Yet in the face of such open plunder

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of Nigerian resources “it remains unusual for direct beneficiaries” such as James Ibori (who was a PDP governor for the Delta State in southern Nigeria from 1999 to 2007) and Bhadrash Gohil “to be held to account.” Even when the first of this criminal duo was sent to prison a decade ago attempts to return stolen funds to Nigerian state coffers are still ongoing. Estelle Shirbon, “UK seeks to seize \$39 million from lawyer who helped corrupt Nigerian politician,” *Reuters*, September 24, 2020.

Ibori and Gohil were reportedly both linked to profiteering from the private fertilizer company known as Notore, with evidence suggesting that current Notore board member Mike Orugbo played a critical role in this money laundering scheme. Nicholas Ibekwe, “Ibori owns 50% equity in Notore – British prosecutors,” *Premium Times*, September 19, 2013, also see here for a discussion of related concerns raised by NGOs in Britain. It is noteworthy that Notore presently has a famous chairman in the form of General Gowon, who also serves as a goodwill ambassador for the Nigerian Women Trust Fund. Other high-profile ambassadors for this latter NGO (which is supported by the US government’s National Endowment for Democracy) include Daisy Danjuma (the wife of General Danjuma – a two-time former defence minister and owner of Sapetro, which is probably Nigeria’s biggest private indigenous oil and gas company), Tony O. Elumelu and Alhaji Dangote; while the chair of the Nigerian Women Trust Fund’s advisory board is Amina Salihu, the senior program officer for the MacArthur Foundation. The Fund’s former CEO was Ayisha Osori, who prior to taking on this post had served as the chair for George Soros’ Open Initiative for West Africa. (The MacArthur Foundation have also been a major funder of the anti-corruption journalism promoted by “Sahara Reporters” – a reporting agency that was founded in 2006 by Omoyele Sowore; while another journalist who has received significant backing from the foundation is social critic Funmi Iyanda.)

Demonstrating the manner by which philanthropic elites attempt to co-opt resistance for their own means, for many years the MacArthur Foundation has funded the Calabar International Centre for Research, Information and Documentation (CIINSTRID) which

be reinforced by the pro-market leadership provided by New Labour leader Tony Blair who...

...mounted an attack on Britain's financial regulators, as big banks based in London gorged on frauds on their customers and trillion-dollar risk-taking at taxpayers' expense. The Financial Services Authority, Blair said, 'is seen as hugely inhibiting of efficient business by perfectly respectable companies that have never defrauded anyone'. He chided regulators' tendency 'to regulate to eliminate risk: to restrict rather than enable. We pay a price if we react like this. We lose out in business to India and China, who are prepared to accept the risks.' This was the leader of the Labour Party effectively urging Britain to degrade its laws, and even to degrade its labour force to the level of developing-country sweatshops.<sup>38</sup>

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has been led by Professor Bene Madunagu, a longstanding socialist feminist. Madunagu of course understands the limitations of accepting foreign funding, but nevertheless her acceptance of pursuing such avenues for fomenting social change have clear limitations. Bene actually made this point in an academic article when discussing the 1983 founding of the organization Women in Nigeria. She highlighted the need for financial independence of working-class organizations noting that: "In its first ten years of existence, WIN never received subventions from the government and so was able to maintain its independence. It could therefore take action without compromising itself since, as the saying goes, 'the person who pays the piper dictates the tune.'" Madunagu, "The Nigerian feminist movement: lessons from Women in Nigeria (WIN)," in: Meredeth Turshen (ed.), *African Women: A Political Economy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.157. Bene Madunagu's husband is the well-known Marxist Edwin Madunagu (who founded CIINSTRID in 1994). As one socialist commentator observes: "Albeit fully conscious that most NGOs perpetuate the political and economic status quo - in fact, so much so that they become part of the very power structure, Madunagu thought that by maintaining a free public library and his NGO, he did what his Marxist conscience dictated." Mayer, *Naija Marxisms*, p.146.

<sup>38</sup> Nicholas Shaxson, *The Finance Curse: How Global Finance is Making us all Poorer* (Vintage, 2018); latest estimates of the extent of

This was the same capitalist leader of the Labour Party who obliterated Iraq, killing millions in the process, while simultaneously waging a war on the working-class at home by severing the Labour Party's democratic linkages to the trade union movement. Little wonder that Blair was quick to embrace Nigeria's new authoritarian governments, increasing military exports, and generally backing-up the Nigerian state in their attempts to repress their own people.<sup>39</sup> This was par for the course for New Labour, who had proved happy to back the creation of death squads in Iraq, and by way of another example, had provided "ethical policing skills training" to a Bangladeshi paramilitary force (the Rapid Action Battalion) – a rabid group which had been accused of implementing hundreds of extra-judicial killings.<sup>40</sup>

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cross-border corporate tax abuse and offshore tax evasion demonstrates that "the UK itself is responsible for around 10 per cent of all global losses inflicted on other countries." UK's tax avoidance network "is responsible for more than a third of all global losses, roughly \$160 billion a year." Alex Cobham, "The UK's #ImperialInequalities: past, present and future," *Tax Justice Network*, December 4, 2020.

<sup>39</sup> Sarah Shoraka, "Armed extraction: the UK military in Nigeria," *Platform*, 2013

<sup>40</sup> Fariha Karim and Ian Cobain, "WikiLeaks cables: Bangladeshi 'death squad' trained by UK government," *The Guardian*, December 21, 2010. Promoting capitalist greed was always the priority of Tony Blair. Immediately after retiring from the leadership of the Labour Party Blair went on to work as an advisor for JPMorgan (earning £2 million a year). On related matters: former Tory chancellor Sajid Javid has now returned to employment at JPMorgan, while the Tories current Minister for Africa, James Duddridge, has previously made the point that "Africa is a place of opportunity" by personally investing in twelve companies in twelve different African countries. In choosing his investments in Nigeria Duddridge fortuitously turned to a former senior executive at JPMorgan, a Nigerian businessman named Bola Adeeko who is now a leading light based at the Nigerian Stock Exchange. James Duddridge, "Why I am investing in 12 companies

## The peoples' struggle continues

Here it is worth reflecting upon the fact that despite the huge differences between the living conditions facing the working class in Britain and Nigeria, there are many similarities between their peoples' ongoing popular struggles for a better life. We might also observe that in the post 1999 period the workers' movements in both countries have suffered historic setbacks, which, in the manner of previous sell-outs, manifested themselves in the betrayal of mass struggles by their leaders. In most cases all that many workers wanted was a greater share of the wealth that they generated for the billionaire-class, but the misleadership of their trade unions saw to it that such an equitable redistribution of wealth never came to pass.

As a precursor of sorts to such failures in Britain, the huge groundswell of opposition to the Labour Party's war on Iraq was ultimately frittered away by reformist anti-war leaders. Political leaders who failed to adopt a strategy that could turn mass public outrage into militant industrial action. Moving on a few years: following the financial crisis of 2007/8 successive governments forced the British working-class to pay the price for the crimes of the ruling-class. These attacks on ordinary people finally led to the momentous public sector strike on 30 November 2011, a dispute that was tragically sold-out by the cowardly leaders of Trades Union Council and, most notably, by Dave Prentis the Secretary General of Unison (which is the biggest public sector union in the UK).<sup>41</sup> When, by a fluke of history, Jeremy Corbyn later became the leader of the Labour Party, Prentis felt forced

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in Africa (next stop Nigeria and Kenya)," *African Arguments*, October 31, 2013.

<sup>41</sup> Dave Prentis soon received a knighthood from the government for his role in selling out workers and enjoyed serving on the board of directors of the Bank of England between 2012 and 2019, and until he recent replacement Prentis remained in charge of Unison despite the best organizing efforts of rank-and-file trade unionists. Likewise, Prentis' retrograde politics were tragically exported globally when he was elected as the President of Public Services International in 2010, and he served in this position for the next ten years.



by working-class expectations to endorse Corbyn. But true to form Prentis soon reversed his position, attacking Corbyn because he feared that his election threatened to embolden a socialist transformation of both society and the trade union movement itself. As we now know, the fierce opposition that Corbyn faced from within his own Party, combined with his own political shortcomings, meant that the Blairites were eventually able to resume control of Labour. A significant setback for socialist struggle which once again sharply poses the need for the creation of a new and democratic mass party run by and for the working-class.<sup>42</sup>

In Nigeria, like in Britain, the need to unite the working-class in a bid for political power remains a work-in-progress. With the formal transition from military dictatorship to democracy in 1999, socialists organizing within the National Conscience Party (NCP) vigorously challenged the anti-poor business-as-usual attitude of President Olusegun Obasanjo. The new Nigerian government's so-called campaign against corruption was just so much hot air, which meant that Shell's domination of the country remained totally unchallenged by Nigeria's neo-colonial capitalist state. Struggle however moved forwards, and in late 2002 the NCP was finally allowed to register as a political party, meaning that socialists could now contest elections. But in a political system drowning in corruption, where vote buying and rigging was the norm, socialists needed to do much more than simply stand in elections to oppose Obasanjo's democratic regime, and mass struggles and General Strikes became an everyday part of life.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Frances Perraudin and Daniel Boffey, "Unison head faces leadership challenge from the left," *The Guardian*, December 16, 2015; Tom Barker, "Another round of suspensions in Labour: we need a party of the working class to take on the Tories," *Socialist Alternative*, December 21, 2020.

<sup>43</sup> In mid-2002 the Democratic Socialist Movement observed: "Nothing functions or is functioning as it is supposed to, despite Nigeria's super-abundant natural and human resources. At the same time, you have opposition parties that are completely indistinguishable in all essential features from the PDP, which they all, individually and collectively, wish to remove from power. And most unfortunately, you

Unfortunately, politically-speaking little had changed by the next election cycle (in 2007), and Chief Gani Fawehinmi spoke out against the “brazen and bizarre corruption by highly placed public officers at the federal level and in the states caused by the electoral robbery in the April 2007 elections.” But socialists faced continuing battles on other fronts too, and even before these elections right-wing opportunists among the leadership of the National Conscience Party acted to expel one of the party’s leading Marxist organizers, Segun Sango. His supposed crime was that as the Lagos chairman of the NCP -- which was one of the largest sections of the Party -- he had agitated for greater internal democracy with the NCP, while arguing and organizing for an escalation of the type of mass industrial action that could bring the working-classes to power.<sup>44</sup> Although representing a

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have a labour movement led, at best, by elements who generally make a correct analysis/critique about the inherent failure of the capitalist system, but permanently shy away from adopting the necessary political and economic strategy that can bring an end to the system which has turned life into a permanent nightmare for most ordinary people.” DSM, *Nigeria: Civil Rule in Danger* (DSM, August 2002).

In spite of the many barriers including vote rigging, Laure Arogundada, the Marxist senatorial candidate for the NCP in Lagos West, still managed to get a commendable 77,000 or 9.4% of the votes counted during the April 2003 elections. A DSM member who did well in these elections was Ayodele Akele who stood in the Agege constituency gaining 15% of the votes.

“Gani Fawehinmi, “The role of the election tribunals,” *The Guardian (Nigeria)*, May 2, 2007. On July 24, 2006, Segun Sango, Lagos Chair of the NCP and General Secretary of the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) received an expulsion letter issued “by the Dr. Osagie Obayuwana led national leadership of the NCP.” The takeover of the NCP leadership by right-wing careerists “was based upon the legal requirement for any party wishing to stand in Nigerian elections to have offices in two-thirds of the country’s 36 states and its national headquarters in the federal capital, Abuja. As all these state units had to have representation on a party’s National Executive it meant, in the NCP’s case, that Lagos, the largest and most active state party, was nationally outvoted by people who in reality represented no-one but

set-back for socialists, Sango's expulsion (and those of many other leading Marxists) was years in the making. And it was the "climax" of a witch hunt that had been persecuted with increased vigour against the left, particularly since September 2004 when Chief Fawehinmi had stepped down from the NCP's leadership. The attack also coincided with efforts by those careerist right-wing leaders of the NCP to work more closely with the former PDP Vice President, Atiku Abubakar; and with the backward proposal that the NCP endorse the Presidential candidature of the former military dictator General Buhari for the 2007 general election. (At the time Buhari was standing for the All Nigeria Peoples Party.)<sup>45</sup>

During these same elections, Adams Oshiomhole, the militant former president of the Nigeria Labour Congress - the man who had led seven general strikes against President Obasanjo -- stood in the governorship elections in Edo for the bourgeois Action Congress; a candidature which socialists gave critical support to in order to raise the need for left candidates to help launch a new mass workers party. Adams, who was widely seen as a serious opponent of the government, ended up winning this important election: but vote rigging meant that his success was denied, with his election only being recognized many months later after mass protests had forced the Nigerian ruling-class to admit defeat. Adams' subsequent incorporation into the capitalist

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themselves." *DSM and the Struggle for a Working Peoples' Political Alternative*, p.23.

<sup>45</sup> The Lagos State chapter of the NCP fought back against the undemocratic manoeuvrings of the right-wing leaders, who had also undemocratically imposed a candidate upon their region. The chapter did this by announcing (on March 27, 2007) that they were collectively refusing to participate in the forthcoming general election. With the battle for democracy within the NCP lost, later that year the NCP chapter then decided the time was right to quit the party in order to work towards building a "genuine pan-Nigeria working masses' political party, committed to the struggle for the betterment of the poor in or out of political power." After attempts to launch a mass party, in 2012 members of the Democratic Socialist Movement launched the Socialist Party of Nigeria.

establishment was not in any way preordained, and it was always possible that his umbilical connection to the working-class might have dragged his politics further left. But this was not to be, and as socialists warned Adams is now very much part of the Nigerian ruling-class. In fact, until very recently he served as the chairman of the ruling All Progressive Congress.

### **Philanthropic corruption**

Running parallel to the titanic struggles and general strikes of the past two decades, Nigeria's oligarchs have always sought novel ways to disguise their flagrant profiteering. So, it is no surprise that NGOs "have become one of the fastest growing industries in Nigeria," with the activism of many well-intentioned individuals being co-opted into the type of work that serves the needs of neoliberalism.<sup>46</sup> One famous example is provided by the CLEEN Foundation (formerly known as the Center for Law Enforcement Education in Nigeria), which had been established in 1998 by Innocent Chukwuma. Chukwuma still serves on CLEEN's board of directors, but since 2013 he has been employed directly by the Ford Foundation where he directs their regional operations from his base in Lagos. Another famous alumni from the Civil Liberties Organization who also played a leading role at the CLEEN Foundation is Ayo Obe, whose activism has been closely intertwined with that of George Soros. (Ayo Obe served for four years on the board of his Open Society Initiative for West Africa – which had been first established in late 2000.)

As part of these disempowering processes of NGOization, the global financial institutions that had supported the immiseration of all developing nations had already been going through a rhetorical transition, repackaging themselves as kindly humanitarians intent on expunging the scourge of corruption! Subterfuge is nothing new to the ruling-class, but the new idea that the focus should be on tackling the "cancer of corruption" had ironically been formally placed on the development agenda in 1996 by the bankrupt luminaries at the World

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<sup>46</sup> Omolade Adunbi, "Embodying the modern: neoliberalism, NGOs, and the culture of human rights practices in Nigeria," *Anthropological Quarterly*, 89(2), 2016, p.432.

Bank.<sup>47</sup> And the global NGO tasked with taking forward this new field of hypocritical intrigue was Transparency International, an organization that had been founded in 1993 by Peter Eigen (himself a former World Bank staffer) and the Ford Foundation. One founding member of this transparency NGO was General Obasanjo, who during the Abacha dictatorship had chaired its advisory board from prison; and who remained a determined supporter Transparency International's mission during his own government's anti-worker marketization frenzy.<sup>48</sup> Codified as capitalism's latest moralizing project, opposition to corruption now became a handy tool with which to attack state-run enterprises in the name of accountability and openness; with receipt of foreign aid tied to the embrace of capitalism's 'good governance' agenda - that is, a commitment to enacting deeper neoliberal reforms.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> For a detailed critique of Transparency International, see Julie Bajolle, "The origins and motivations of the current emphasis on corruption: the case of Transparency International," presented at the International Anti-Corruption Movement's *European Consortium for Political Research Joint Sessions of Workshops*, April 25-30, 2006.

<sup>48</sup> General Obasanjo had been imprisoned in 1995 using "concocted evidence heard at a secret trial alleging an offence being committed in Nigeria at a time when he was shown to be in New York attending a board meeting of the trustees of the Ford Foundation" (as Transparency International put it at the time). In later years Transparency International would obtain most of their funding from development agencies, USAID, corrupt corporations like Shell, and billionaires like George Soros.

<sup>49</sup> With the 1999 transition to civilian rule, President Obasanjo's new regime famously served the needs of international financial institutions like the World Bank: "Hence the dominance of anti-people reform policies that formed the bed rock of [his] administration from 1999 to 2007." Nigerians were thus compelled to organize their first general strike within a year of Obasanjo's assumption of power -- a militant response by workers which had the desired effect of forcing his government to backtrack on their initial neoliberal 'reforms'. But with powerful capitalist allies salivating at Nigeria's plentiful oil reserves --

Once again, many NGOs found a comfortable niche in accommodating themselves to neoliberal attacks on the working class, and in Nigeria as elsewhere they effectively served as a shadow government whose activities were funded by foreign capitalist states and unelected billionaires like George Soros and Bill Gates. Global groups like Publish What You Pay, which was founded in mid-2002 by Soros, actively progressed such neoliberal agendas under the guise of aiding good governance among government and extractive companies “to ensure that revenues from oil, gas and mining help improve people’s lives.” Something that has yet to happen. Britain’s imperialist warmonger in chief Tony Blair happily jumped on the anti-corruption bandwagon, announcing their plan to launch a twin project known as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) - an initiative at which Peter Eigen would play a leading role during its formative years. Nigeria naturally became the main focus for EITI’s activities, with then-president Olusegun establishing his own Nigerian

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Tony Blair and Bill Clinton being two notable examples - Obasanjo’s administration is best remembered for its unswerving dedication to deregulation, privatization and cronyism. Nkolika Obianyo, “Globalization and democracy in Africa - the Nigerian experience 1999-2007,” *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Political Science (NAJOPS)*, 3(1) August 2012, p.3.

Lucy Baker, “Facilitating whose power? WB and IMF policy influence in Nigeria’s energy sector,” *Bretton Woods Project*, April 2, 2008. “Deregulation of the downstream petroleum market (refining, supply and distribution) has been a key ingredient of World Bank and IMF policy advice since 1999. The most contentious of the IMF’s structural benchmarks was the sale of the Kaduna and Port Harcourt oil refineries. The process turned into a mockery. The sale was first put on hold due to the difficulty in attracting high quality international investors. Then having been valued at \$800 billion, the refineries were sold off during Obasanjo’s last days in office in May 2007 for a paltry \$500 million to a consortium close to the president called Bluestar Oil Service Limited. The ensuing protests which contributed to a June national strike saw Bluestar withdraw from the deal and its money refunded.” Although not mentioned in this article one of the key members of this controversial consortium was Dangote Industries.

Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. In this way NGOs provided much needed cover for the criminal oil corporations operating in Nigeria. As one critic puts it:

Through this re-configuration of power, these NGOs [which include Publish What You Pay] become part of the oil enterprise. By calling for transparency and good governance, they take for granted the continued exploration and extraction of oil and other natural re-sources. They fail to challenge the legitimacy of the oil industry itself, but rather build their activism upon the underlying neoliberal assumption that oil extraction will continue, grow, and bring net benefits to the community if there is transparency and accountability in how such revenue is distributed by the state. The maximization of these benefits, these organizations claim, is achievable through incremental changes to management and governance structures.<sup>50</sup>

### Whose debt?

Around the same time that all this was happening, the same philanthropic powerbrokers had positioned themselves at the head of global efforts to curtail the growing popular anger that was being directed at the exploitative lending practices of capitalist' states and their financial institutions. A significant demand of this swelling movement was for the cancellation of all existing debt owed by Africa to western elites. Such "illegitimate and immoral debt" was being correctly viewed as "an instrument of domination, control and plunder, used to promote Western countries' economic, political and strategic interests."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Omolade Adunbi, "Extractive practices, oil corporations and contested spaces in Nigeria," *The Extractive Industries and Society*, 7(3), 2020, p.6. Former Shell vice president Alan Detheridge is presently a board member of Publish What You Pay - a global organization that has includes more than 700 member groups.

<sup>51</sup> Demba Moussa Dembele, "Toronto, Naples, Lyon, Cologne and London: G7 leaders and the debt trip to nowhere," *Pambazuka News*, March 10, 2005.

But despite all the high-minded talk of world leaders about their magnanimous acts of debt cancellation, crippling levels of debt continue to plague most developing nations. In fact, it should come as no surprise that when the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund launched their Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative in 1996, their plans carefully linked debt relief to anti-corruption reforms, reforms, as discussed previously, plans that were part and parcel of neoliberalism's advance. We should be clear, debt relief was never intended...

...to free up development for the HIPCs, but merely to render their debts sustainable. The difference is huge. The idea is to cancel just enough [debt] to keep the DCs [developing countries] paying to the maximum of their capabilities. Essentially, it is what could not be paid that is cancelled.<sup>32</sup>

In Britain this Orwellian plan for 'justice' had enthralled New Labour, and so it is fitting that this method for allowing the sustainable looting of the poor was first raised by the Tories in the late eighties, although for a variety of reasons this strategy was not adopted at the time.<sup>33</sup>

Nigeria, however, was excluded from the HIPC initiative because Western elites decided that the country's lucrative oil

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<sup>32</sup> Damien Millet and Eric Toussaint, *Who Owes Who: 50 Questions about World Debt* (Zed Books, 2013 [2004]), p.96

<sup>33</sup> Mike Hall, "The international debt crisis: recent developments," *Capital and Class*, 35, 1988, pp.14-5. Although not acted up at the time, the early proposals made in April 1987 by Nigel Lawson, the Tory British Chancellor were, "to a great extent, an acceptance of the inevitable. As Lawson himself recognised 'there is no realistic prospect of actually securing anything like full repayment if rates are not reduced' (*The Financial Times*, 23rd July 1987)." "While the Lawson plan affects official debt only, it is not, on this count, without potential benefit to Africa's private creditors. In reducing the burden of servicing the continent's \$200bn. of external debt, the majority of which is official, the plan makes default and interest payment moratoriums less likely on the minority private component of that debt." (p.14)



resources meant that despite the poverty of the people the country was not so poor after all. Nevertheless, while it is true that Africa as a whole “groans under the weight of an excruciating debt burden”:

...the Nigerian experience is particularly devastating. Endowed with large quantities of high grade oil, from which the country generated a total of nearly \$300 billion from oil exports between 1973 and 2000, one would have expected Nigeria to rank among the richest countries of the world. Unfortunately, the reverse has so far been the case, as Nigeria is highly indebted with an egregious debt profile. As of 31 August 2001, Nigeria’s debt stock, including penalty interests, amounted to \$28.42 billion, made up of obligations to: the Paris Club of Creditors at \$22.04 billion; non-Paris club bilateral creditors at \$111.6 million; multilateral creditors at \$2.89 billion; and commercial creditors at \$3.37 billion.<sup>54</sup>

So, when the G8 announced in mid-2005 that were agreeing to allocate \$40 billion in debt relief to 18 countries as part of the HIPC initiative, it was never going to be enough as it only represented around \$2 billion per country. Yet this ‘aid’ was dwarfed by the separate \$18 billion of relief that the G8 provided to Nigeria: yet this relief only applied to their loans from the Paris Club which by then had ballooned to \$30 billion. More to the point, this so-called reprieve was given on the proviso that the Nigerian people paid back the remaining \$12 billion owed to the Paris Club shortly thereafter, with the G8 knowing full well that this would only be possible if the Nigerian state axed vital public services. Making matters worse we should be clear that between 1992 and the time of the so-called ‘hand-out’ the money Nigeria owed to the Paris Club creditors had almost doubled from \$16

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<sup>54</sup> Shola Omotola and Hassan Saliu, “Foreign aid, debt relief and Africa’s development: problems and prospects,” *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 16(1), 2009, p.92. “Available statistics indicate that between 1970 and 2002, Africa received a total of \$540 billion in loans and paid back \$550 billion – \$10 billion more than the original loans – over the same period. Yet, Africa owed \$293 billion at the end of 2002.” (p.87)

billion to \$30 billion, even though the state had paid out almost \$8 billion in repayments over those years and had “received virtually no new loans from the Paris Club creditors after 1992.”<sup>55</sup>

Working in tandem with all these duplicitous aid efforts U2’s world famous rock star, Bono, gained widespread notoriety by giving political cover to this so-called debt relief, and of course by lending his support to the Iraq war. With the aid of one of Bill Gates’ many philanthropic lieutenants (Trevor Neilson in this case) Bono with the additional assistance of George Soros had formed DATA (Debt AIDS Trade Africa) in 2001, and then the US-based non-profit ONE: The Campaign to Make Poverty History (with the two eventually merging in 2007 to be known as ONE). Some debts were of course cancelled, but this was not owing to Bono’s actions, as was made clear in Harry Browne’s excellent 2013 book *The Frontman: Bono (In the Name of Power)*. Indeed, Bono’s fame was merely harnessed to promote the extremely limited debt relief program that serviced the needs of the billionaire-class, not ordinary people. And here the appalling extent to which Bono served his capitalist masters that Browne eventually came to conclude that:

In truth, in recent years Bono may have begun to outlive his usefulness as a fashionable accessory to power. If anything, he has probably been too loyal to the forces and figures that were so widely discredited in the post-2007 global crisis – to the Rubins, Clintons and Browns who opened the door to the financial catastrophe, to the Bushes and Blairs who unleashed hell on Third World countries. (p.154)

Yet such is the current desperation of the capitalist class in deflecting public attention from their despicable policies of plunder and privatization that Bono’s promotional apparatus still remains of benefit to them today. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is one recent member of ONE’s board of notables – an influential member of Nigeria’s oligarchy who has moved seamlessly between senior positions in the

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<sup>55</sup> Iraq was the other country that like Nigeria received huge levels of debt assistance, obtaining an “80% reduction of the Paris Club debt” which had reached a massive \$42.5 billion. Victor Okafor, “The Paris Club deal: reason to celebrate?,” *Africa Update*, XIII (1), Spring 2006.

World Bank hierarchy and within government, twice serving as Nigeria's Finance Minister, the first from 2003-2006 and the second between 2011 and 2015. Other current ONE board members include the former Tory leader David Cameron, and Nigeria's (if not Africa's) wealthiest businessman, Aliko Dangote.

Billionaire superstar Aliko Dangote is of course a good friend of Bill Gates, and as you might imagine he likes to propagate the same fictitious public image that Gates projects to the world by pretending to be a self-made entrepreneur. In reality, Dangote made his concrete billions with state assistance by engorging on the newly unregulated financial environment opened-up by President Olusegun. It is also worth remembering that Dangote's good fortunes can be traced back to the familial influence of Alhassan Dantata, "who was the richest African during the colonial era". Dangote's mother, billionaire businesswomen Mariya Sanusi Dantata was the eldest daughter of one of Alhassan Dantata's sons, Sanusi Dantata; whose brother (Alhaji Dantata) became a board member of Shell's Nigeria operations in 1963.<sup>56</sup> Finally, Aliko Dangote's personal connections to infamous war

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<sup>56</sup> Aliko Dangote made the bulk of his fortune through Dangote Cement and the active financial aid he received from President Olusegun's Backward Integration Policy (BIP) in Nigeria which led to the "transformation of Dangote Cement from a trading entity to the dominant cement manufacturing company in Nigeria." Akinyinka Akinyoade and Chibuike Uche, "Dangote Cement: an African success story?", *African Studies Centre Leiden*, ASC Working Paper No.131, 2016, p.6. Other multinational cement manufacturers like Lafarge were able to profit from Nigeria's privatization of state-run cement industries deregulatory but owing to their foreign ownership were more sensitive to public outrage than Dangote when it came to engaging in corrupt activities in Nigeria. All the same Dangote and Lafarge continue to work closely together. For example, Gbenga Oyeboode, who previously served as in-house counsel at Gulf Oil, joined Lafarge Africa's boardroom last year, and is currently a trustee of the New York based Africa Center that was established as a project between Halima Aliko Dangote (Aliko's daughter) and Chelsea Clinton (Bill's daughter). (Since 2019 Oyeboode has also served on the

criminals like Tony Blair have been further cemented in recent years when Dangote invited Cherie Blair to join the board room of his construction conglomerate (a position she has held for the last two years).

## Unleashing the ‘free’ market

Aliko Dangote follows in his family’s predatory traditions and yet amazingly is being celebrated as the only billionaire who can turn Nigeria’s corrupt oil industry around. Dangote is thus in the process of finalizing the construction of Africa’s biggest oil refinery – located just a stone’s throw from Lagos in the Lekki Free Zone, which is a tax haven that is majority owned by a Chinese company. So, it becomes clear that this new privately-run refinery is unlikely to really benefit Nigerians. Like many other tax-free zones’, the creation of the Lekki one has always been accompanied by numerous controversies that owed to the prioritizing of foreign investment over the needs of ordinary people. Yet since 1999 the creation of such anti-worker tax-free zones has been central to the actions of successive Nigerian governments whose policies of economic liberalization has committed them all to the establishment of “Free Trade Zones”.<sup>57</sup>

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board of trustees of the Ford Foundation.)

<sup>57</sup> Omolade Adunbi, “(Re)inventing development: China, infrastructure, sustainability and special economic zones in Nigeria,” *Africa*, 89(4), 2019, p.666. The Lekki Free Zone is majority owned by the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (which owns 60%) of the Lekki Free Zone Development Corporation. The famous human rights lawyer Felix Morka played an important role in overcoming public resistance to the creation of the Lekki Free Zone, and subsequently Morka “joined the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC)–the party in power in Lagos.” (p.669) For more background, see Jeremiah Ikongio, “The cultural protocols of free trade,” *e-flux Architecture*, “New Silk Roads,” February 2020. A report from August 2019 noted: “Chinese investment in Nigeria’s oil and gas industry has reached \$16 billion, according to Nigeria’s state-run oil company.” This investment came via the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC). Note that the former CEO of CNOOC from

Further illustrating the point about how oil profits trump life, another very sizable free zone is the Lagos Deep Offshore Logistics Base (LADOL), officially LADOL Free Zone. This tax haven is headed by Amy Jadesimi and is chaired by her father, Ladi Jadesimi, who is the chairman of Nigeria's first integrated oil and gas investment company, the Niger Delta Exploration & Production plc (NDEP). Elite connections come easy to such exploitative projects and for the past five years a leading member of LADOL's three-person strong advisory board has been Lord Mark Malloch-Brown, who is the head of George Soros' Open Society Institute. Until late 2016 Malloch-Brown had also served as a trustee of Shell's philanthropic foundation, and he is a current board member of Seplat Petroleum Development Company plc where he serves alongside fellow board member Basil Omiyi, who is the former head of Shell's Nigerian operations.

Given the systemic corruption that undergirds the oil sector it is understandable how the creation (in 1992) of Ladi Jadesimi's Niger Delta Exploration & Production plc (then known as the Midas Drilling Fund) was highly reliant upon their symbiotic relationship with the state-run Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation. Comfortable and corrupting relations continue to this day, and during the final years of General Abacha's dictatorship, current NDEP board member Pastor Afolabi Oladele – a notorious oil fixer himself – had conveniently served as the Group Executive Director for downstream operations at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation. While prior to joining NDEP Oladele had, in the early 2000's, famously joined the board of Addax Petroleum – a company that had ingratiated its way into the favour of the former dictatorship when in 1998 it obtained generous Nigerian oil concessions for “the equivalent of pocket change”.<sup>58</sup> Now

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2003 to 2011 was Fu Chengyu, who then went on to become the chair of Sinopec (from 2011 to 2015) and is presently a board member of a global investment company headquartered in Singapore known as Temasek where he serves alongside the former CEO of Shell (Peter Voser) and the former president of the World Bank, 2007 to 2012 (Robert Zoellick).

<sup>58</sup> “Addax's man in Nigeria until 2000, Richard Granier-Deferre,” was “fined approximately \$200,000 in 2007 by a Paris court as an

however Addax is a mere subsidiary of the mammoth China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation (Sinopec), ensuring that capitalists of all flavours are well positioned to reap the profits from the enactment of the African Continental Free Trade Area which came into effect in January 2021.<sup>29</sup>

### **Of power politics and energy poverty**

But while oil continues to remain key to Nigeria's economy most Nigerians still live without access to electricity. Therefore, to partially remedy this dire situation, in recent years energy conglomerates have been positioning themselves to meet the needs of some people by selling them green energy obtained from renewables. This task appears to serve a dual task for corporate energy giants. On the one hand companies can make money out of selling small quantities of green energy all the while the wholesale plunder of extraction of Africa's oil resources intensifies. And corporate energy companies can simultaneously make a big show out of aiding those who have been left-behind and remain off-grid by promoting the privatization of the type of renewable technologies that can enable more localized energy

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accessory to Mr. [Dan] Etete's money laundering." Eric Reguly, "Off the map in Africa," *The Globe and Mail*, January 11, 2008; Will Fitzgibbon, "Secret documents expose Nigerian oil mogul's offshore hideaways," *Premium Times*, July 25, 2016.

Another notable individual who served alongside Oladele on Addax Petroleum's board room was Brian Anderson, who had been the head of Shell's Nigeria operations between 1994 and 1997. Anderson is presently the chairman and Managing Director of Anderson Energy (Hong Kong) Limited, a consulting firm for the energy sector, mostly in Africa and China; and he is a board member of Kaisun Holdings Limited.

<sup>29</sup> "In the first three days of 2021, China launched its first free trade agreement (FTA) with an African nation," that country being Mauritius. Wang Cong and Xie Jun, "With first FTA, diplomatic trip, China to boost cooperation with Africa in 2021," *Global Times*, January 3, 2021.

provision.<sup>60</sup>

In Nigeria the issue of energy poverty represents a huge problem, as 95 million people out a country of 190 million live without access to electricity. And one of the many Shell-backed initiatives that addresses some aspects of this exclusion is Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL) – a project which was launched in 2011 with the assistance of the United Nations and is supported by philanthropic giants like the Rockefeller Foundation and the Aliko Dangote Foundation.<sup>61</sup>

With the new turn to renewables, the promotion of

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<sup>60</sup> Oil companies spent decades opposing the science of climate change and are still acting to slow action to this day. For example, between 1979 and 1998 Shell “supported a campaign to sabotage climate policy” by funding the research of Professor Frits Böttcher who “was a high ranking Dutch scientist, co-founder of the Club of Rome and member of the Scientific Council for Government Policy.” “Smoking gun found hidden in an archive,” *Code Rood*, February 20, 2020.

<sup>61</sup> Prior to become the new CEO of SEforALL at the start of 2020, Nigerian national Damilola Ogunbiyi obtained \$350 million from the World Bank to help launch the Nigerian Electrification Project, an initiative promoting the construction of solar mini-grids and the deployment of solar home systems to meet the needs of Nigeria’s energy deprived.

In 2019 the Rockefeller Foundation launched the Global Commission to End Energy Poverty to contribute towards capitalism new humanitarian mission. Tony Blair joins Damilola Ogunbiyi among the group’s many commissioners, as does Akin Adesina, a central Nigerian intellectual who previously helped push forward an earlier philanthropic ‘aid’ project known as the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa. For detailed criticisms of this Alliance, see Timothy Wise, “False Promises: the ‘Green Revolution in Africa’ is failing on its own terms,” *Climate and Capitalism*, July 14, 2020; also see Wise’s useful book *Eating Tomorrow: Agribusiness. Family Farmers and the Battle for the Future of Food* (New Press, 2019) which shows “how in country after country agribusiness and its well-heeled philanthropic promoters have hijacked food policies to feed corporate interests.”

Africapitalism remains the order of the day, and in keeping with the neoliberal ethos undergirding most aid projects, management gurus are propounding the myth that only “impact investing” cojoined with the spirit of entrepreneurialism can save the poor. Shell’s most significant contribution to this new form of solar capitalism is their “All On” project, which during their first three years of operation invested a rather underwhelming \$2.4 million in 24 off-grid energy companies.<sup>62</sup> And even here, where the focus is on small-scale technologies like “solar home systems” powered by 80W solar panels, much of the solar wealth generated within Nigeria is being expatriated. Thus, one of the first off-grid solar operations to benefit from Shell’s largesse was the Netherlands-based corporation Lumos Global, which in early 2018 received financial support from Shell even though they had previously obtained \$50 million from the US government and were already

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<sup>62</sup> Overseeing Shell’s contribution to helping the poor access green energy is Nigerian management guru Dr. Wiebe Boer, who in 2010 became the inaugural CEO of the Tony Elumelu Foundation (established by the Nigerian banking giant of the same name) after serving his philanthropic apprenticeship as an Associate Director for the Rockefeller Foundation in Kenya. More generally in recent years oil companies like Shell have begun investing more of their profits in purchasing renewable energy companies, but this still remains a small overall investment. For example, “Shell’s investment target for green energy projects was set between \$4bn and \$6bn for the period from 2016 until the end of 2020 - but with less than a year to go, *The Guardian* says the sum is “well below” those figures.” James Murray, “How the six major oil companies have invested in renewable energy projects,” NS Energy, January 16, 2020. During those same four years Shell “more than \$120bn developing fossil fuel projects and set out plans to increase its total spending to \$30bn a year in the early 2020s.” The lack of urgency in moving away from fossil fuels recently led to the resignations of a number of Shell’s senior executives whose jobs entailed promoting renewables. (Note: in 2019 one of the most ambitious schemes that has backed by the Shell Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation is the CrossBoundary Energy Access, “Africa’s first project financing facility for mini-grids,” which aims to “unlock” more than US\$11 billion for mini-grids.)



Nigeria's leading supplier of solar home systems.<sup>63</sup> While another company backed by All On is the US-based Renewvia Energy whose CEO, prior to receiving Shell funding, was featured in an exuberant article published in *Forbes*' business magazine in which he highlighted the "potential for [solar] profit" in Africa with its "nascent regulatory environment" which could lead to "a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the Wild West." "With electricity prices across Africa exponentially higher than in the U.S.," Renewvia's CEO explained to the magazine, he believed his commitment to rural electrification was both "gratifying" and "profitable."<sup>64</sup> Evidently impressed by his actions, in June 2020 All On

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<sup>63</sup> Lumos Global has been a key partner of international finance institutions keen to invest in the solar field; indeed two years prior to receiving support from "All On" Lumos had obtained a \$50 million investment from the US government's Overseas Private Investment Corporation. Since early 2020 Adepeju Adebajo has been employed as the CEO for Lumos Nigeria. She had previously served as the Commissioner of Agriculture in Ogun State and as the CEO-Cement for Lafarge in Nigeria.

Lumos' cheapest product, Lumos ECO, comes with a 80 watt solar panel and a 200Wh battery set, they offer full ownership "after 48 continuous monthly instalments". The initial down payment is N22,000 (£42), and 48 months of hiring costs N178,500 (£340). In Nigeria a worker earning minimum wage takes home around N30,000 a month (£57) which is not actually not even paid by most states and private sector employers. In the UK a worker earning minimum wage earns approximately £1,500 a month, and (on average) the cost of providing for an entire household's gas and electric for a year is around £800 (for a small house/flat that uses 11,000kWh). Contrast this to Nigeria where to get a tiny fraction of the energy (perhaps around 200kWh) workers must pay N50,000 a year, which is the equivalent of nearly two months pay (on minimum wage).

<sup>64</sup> Ethan Chorin, "Electron rush: why U.S. renewable energy is converging on Africa," *Forbes*, May 1, 2017. One UK-based company to benefit from All On's investments is iKabin, whose Managing Director is a senior executive at PwC UK. However, it is true that homegrown companies have also benefited from Shell's All On

announced they would be providing Renewvia with a further commitment of \$1.2 million to enable them to develop and operate a series of solar minigrids, with the government “protect[ing] investors by granting a 20-year exclusivity period for the operation of energy installations.”

But in a country where exploitation and mass employment are rife, and where privatized energy companies expose millions of people to daily blackouts,<sup>65</sup> it is apparent that private provision of solar alternatives will continue to exclude millions from gaining equitable access to energy. For example, “reductions in the total number of kWh drawn from fossil fuel sources among those privileged enough to access individually maintained renewable systems could serve to drive up the prices of fossil fuel sourced energy as utility companies seek to recapture losses.”<sup>66</sup> Indeed, when left to the free market even the sale of 80 watt solar panels has the potential to further intensify

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funding, with another up-and-coming outfit being Arnergy Solar, which recently raised \$9 million in a round of funding led by Breakthrough Energy Ventures (a funded with more than \$1 billion in green investments which is chaired by Bill Gates). Launched in 2014, Arnergy’s current COO (and early advisor) is Stephen Ozoigbo, the founder of African Technology Foundation (a corporation based in Silicon Valley). For some years he has been overseeing the management of the US State Department’s Lions@frica program which had been launched at the 2012 World Economic Forum on Africa. In 2015 Arnergy received earlier backing from the Bank of Industry and the United Nations Development Programme.

<sup>65</sup> Nigeria’s power companies generate only about 4,000MW daily. This means that “Power sector specialists are placing their hopes in mini-grids, independent solar panel systems of up to 1MW capacity — the threshold at which a developer must apply for a full-scale power generation licence — that can power up to a few thousand households.” Emily Feng, “Off-the-grid thinking to end Nigeria’s blackouts,” *Financial Times*, November 21, 2018.

<sup>66</sup> Julius Alexander McGee and Patrick Trent Greiner, “Renewable energy injustice: The socio-environmental implications of renewable energy consumption,” *Energy Research & Social Science*, 56, October 2019, p.8

class divisions and lead to the further stratification of society by creating a “new class of ‘energy-elites’”.<sup>67</sup> A recent survey undertaken for Lumos supports some of these points when the corporation noted: “Whilst the study found many of Lumos’ customers are estimated to

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<sup>67</sup> Hilman Fathonia, Abidah Setyowati, James Prest, “Is community renewable energy always just? Examining energy injustices and inequalities in rural Indonesia,” *Energy Research & Social Science*, 71, January 2020; Festus Boamah and Eberhard Rothfuß, “From technical innovations towards social practices and socio-technical transition? Re-thinking the transition to decentralised solar PV electrification in Africa,” *Energy Research & Social Science*, 42, August 2018. In South Africa for instance: “Many poor Africans who were off the grid now have access to electricity, but do not have the money to pay for its use.” Akhil Gupta, “An anthropology of electricity from the Global South,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 30(4), 2015; C.G. Monyei, A.O. Adewumi & K.E.H. Jenkins, “Energy (in)justice in off-grid rural electrification policy: South Africa in focus,” *Energy Research & Social Science*, 44, 2018.

One early investigation into emerging energy transitions to cater to the needs of the energy poor in sub-Saharan Africa demonstrated how investment across the whole of Africa “had grown six-fold between 2003 and 2013, respectively from USD\$750 million to over USD \$4.7 billion.” Most of this investment (around 79%) had been focused on sub-Saharan Africa, “but even that figure was well below the estimated USD \$55 billion annual spend required to meet the target of universal access by 2030.” Yet as “most initiatives focus on how to facilitate the creation of energy markets and attract private sector investment” little is being done to address the deeper capitalist explanations of why such systemic poverty and exploitation continue to exist. This led the authors of this study to state that “the number of people without access [to energy] seems to be rising—not decreasing—due to a combination of natural population growth, increase in energy exports, as well as an intensification in demand through urbanization.” Idalina Baptista, “Space and energy transitions in sub-Saharan Africa: understated historical connections,” *Energy Research & Social Science*, 36, February 2018.

live below the poverty line (based on the World Bank's \$3.20 a day definition), it also found that the company's customers in Nigeria are generally better off and better educated than the average citizen in the country."<sup>68</sup> It is also worth bearing in mind that many of the renewable initiatives being rolled out in Africa are being undertaken on a far larger scale than that of promoting home solar panels. For instance, in 2013 the US government created an international grouping of elite investors known as Power Africa which states that they aim to de-risk investment opportunities in sub-Saharan Africa's energy sector thereby "Opening markets for U.S. businesses eager to expand into Africa."<sup>69</sup> Such so-called investing merely represents a new form of

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<sup>68</sup> The research found that "51 per cent of Lumos customers live below the World Bank international poverty line of \$3.20 per person per day (2011 PPP). In relation to the national rate - 73 per cent of the population of Nigeria live below the \$3.20 poverty line - Lumos is reaching a slightly wealthier group. Twelve per cent of Lumos customers are estimated to live below the extreme poverty line of \$1.90 per person per day compared to 43 per cent of the Nigerian population...They are generally well educated, with 85 per cent of customers having someone in the household who had attained tertiary level education (polytechnic or university), consistent with the earlier finding that Lumos customers tend to be better off than average." Insight, "What is the impact of solar home systems in Nigeria?," *CDC Investment Works*, March 25, 2020.

<sup>69</sup> "Power Africa: A U.S. government-led partnership," Updated November 30, 2020. For a discussion of the problems inherent in neoliberal approaches to large-scale solar production, see Hamza Hamouchene, "The Ouarzazate solar plant in Morocco: triumphal 'green' capitalism and the privatization of nature," *Jadaliyya*, May 23, 2016; and Julius Alexander McGee and Patrick Trent Greiner, "How long can neoliberalism withstand climate crisis?," *Monthly Review*, April 1, 2020. For a critical review of the privatization of Nigeria's energy sector, see Sandra van Niekerk, Yuliya Yurchenko and Jane Lethbridge, "Nigeria energy sector transformation, DFID, USAID, and the World Bank," Public Services International Research Unit (PSIRU), 2016. The report notes that the only part of energy provision that remains in public hands are the transmission networks, which are

sustainable colonialism, a renewable extractivism that simply supplements not replaces a fossil fuel industry that is destroying our planet.<sup>70</sup>

All these developments illustrate that energy provision cannot be left to the anarchy of the free market. Energy provision must be taken out of the hands of profiteers. Global energy infrastructures can and must be run democratically by bodies of ordinary workers. But this would involve the type of socialist planning and investment that has always been anathema to corrupt state bureaucrats. Particularly in the case of Nigeria, the people must enforce public ownership over the entire energy sector, which of course will include the oil and gas industries. The need for such action is urgent, and in just the latest international scandal to surface regarding Shell's destructive activities in Nigeria, their employees have been accused of "deliberately causing oil spills in various locations in the Niger Delta."<sup>71</sup> Anti-democratic companies like Shell should be banned from any involvement with energy production; and their assets should be seized so their company can be run democratically by workers. Companies like Shell would have no place in a genuinely democratic society.

### **The people strike back**

For the vast majority of ordinary people, the situation is already

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of course in the process of creeping privatization.

<sup>70</sup> Steffen Haag, "Finance for renewable energy in Africa follows colonial roots," *OpenDemocracy*, February 10, 2020.

<sup>71</sup> Alagoa Morris en Akpotu Ziworitin and Hilde Brontsema, "Traces of Shell in Nigeria's oil spills," *Friends of the Earth Netherlands and Environmental Rights Activists*, Amsterdam, December 2020, p.7. "Those who perpetrate the spills (often young people) first inform their Shell Nigeria contact by telephone that they are interested in sabotaging some pipelines. They are then given the green light or are requested to wait until a later time. Once the sabotage has been completed, the same Shell Nigeria employees will call these same Ikarama youths and clean-up contractors to arrange a meeting in a Yenagoa hotel." (p.13)

intolerable. Life is almost impossible to sustain as energy prices continue to rise, and despite the labour movement winning occasional reprieves in relation to fuel price hikes, the future still looks very uncertain. Very much like Obama, President Buhari rode to power with the fake although hopeful slogan of “change,” but, after six years in power nothing has changed and if anything the President has been a stalwart defender of the billionaire-class. “The latest unemployment figures show 27.1 per cent of Nigerians are unemployed and another 28.6 per cent are underemployed,” and the cost of living is going through the roof.<sup>72</sup> So, last year when the Buhari regime announced there was going to be a 100% increment in electricity tariffs and another increase in petrol prices, ordinary people once again rose up in defiance.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Neil Munshi, “Why Nigeria struggles to win its security battle,” *Financial Times*, October 27, 2020. “Extortion is a potent symbol for a state whose modus operandi is the extraction of oil revenue from central coffers to pay for a bloated, ruinously inefficient, political elite. Security is not the only area where the state is failing. Nigeria has more poor people, defined as those living on less than \$1.90 a day, than any other country, including India.”

<sup>73</sup> For recent background on the struggles against corporate looters in the energy sector, see Wole Olubanji, “Kick out the profiteers... for a socialist alternative!,” *Movement for a Socialist Alternative*, September 21, 2020. On December 8, the same national trade union leaders agreed to a tiny reduction in fuel prices which still put pump prices above before they called off the General Strike. Important to note is that in early September the “cost of fuel at the pump has risen by around 15% in recent days, hitting a record high of 162 naira per litre”. Then after the strike was called off the government further increased the pump price to 168 naira per litre, which then led to a meeting with the union leaders who walked out the meeting happy that the government would reduce the price to 162.44 naira. In the run-up to the December 8 meeting it was reported that “The Nigeria Labour Congress has asked the Nigerian government to revert to the old pump price of N158 petrol or face indefinite strike from workers.” The prices never came down, and yet the NLC failed to initiate any form of strike action.

Under pressure from the masses, the otherwise lacking leaders of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and Trade Union Congress (TUC) reluctantly responded to rank-and-file demands for organizing a 48-hour General Strike and a date was set for September 28. Yet like so many other out-of-touch trade union bosses around the world, Nigeria's national labour leaders sold-out their members at the last minute. Not only was the strike called off without any significant concessions having been gained, but the trade union bosses went so far as to sign up to an agreement that represented a "clear endorsement of deregulation".<sup>74</sup> In some places the people openly rebelled against their so-called leaders, and "In states like Edo and Oyo, the state leaderships of the NLC and the TUC defied the suspension and went ahead to lead a protest against the call off, this is one positive development that cannot entirely be ignored." This public show of contempt for the national trade union leaders was important, as: "In this act is the seed of potential for an alternative leadership of the unions around a programme of defending the interests of the working masses, as opposed to the interests of the ruling elites and their quest for super-profits." Speaking at the Edo State protest, the local NLC chair, Sunny Osayande, correctly criticized the actions of the national union leadership warning: "We cannot continue to remain in the hands of the few who will mortgage our conscience because next time when we call on our labour leaders, they will not believe in us or the struggle."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Dagga Tolar, "Workers must reject the endorsement of deregulation and fuel price hike by Labour's official leadership: for a 48hrs general strike now!", *Movement for a Socialist Alternative*, October 5, 2020. The Labour leaders who called off the general strike were led by Ayuba Wabba (who has been President of the NLC since 2015) and Olaleye Quadri (who has been the President of the TUC since 2017). Notably, for the past two years Wabba has also served as the President of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), a successor organization to the imperialist International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU).

<sup>75</sup> Frankmoore Ike and Ronke Idowu, "Edo organised labour rejects strike suspension by national labour leadership," *ChannelsTV*,

Further illustrating the mistaken approach in calling off the General Strike – a retreat that had been supported by NUPENG President Williams Akporeha and PENGASSAN President Festus Osifo – just days later, on Independence Day, Chevron flexed their corporate muscles by sacking 1,000 workers without even consulting with the two oil sector unions (NUPENG and PENGASSAN). This was a blatant case of fire and rehire – an odious form of workplace abuse that is similarly being opposed by thousands of British Gas workers in the UK. Of course, such bullying practices apply equally if not more so to Shell. This much was clear at an international meeting of Shell workers that was organized by IndustriALL last November. A report on this network meeting stated: “Unions have been asking Shell to be sustainable, limit precarious work and recognize IndustriALL as a counterpart for years, but the company continues to refuse to engage.”<sup>76</sup>

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September 28, 2020.

<sup>76</sup> “Unions not consulted on Chevron Nigeria plans to lay-off 1,000 workers,” IndustriALL Global Union, October 15, 2020; “Shell workers determined to overcome Covid-19 challenges,” IndustriALL Global Union, November 6, 2020. Issa Aremu is the vice president of IndustriALL, and he is a member of the executive council of the Nigerian Labour Congress and served as the vice president of the congress during the tenure of Adams Oshiomole. On November 30 Aremu was a member of a IndustriALL delegation (including representatives from NUPENG and PENGASSAN) that visited the site of the new Dangote Refinery to “deepen harmonious industrial relations” with the billionaire. “President of NUPENG, Comrade Williams Akporeha whose Union is seen as a critical stakeholder in the downstream sector of the Petroleum industry on his part extolled the virtues of the President of Dangote Group, Alhaji Aliko Dangote... He added that the company should have it behind their back that they have a Labour movement that is ready to collaborate with them to achieve greater and fruitful results in the industry.” Emmanuel Ajibulu, “IndustriALL Global Union pays courtesy visit to Dangote refinery,” *NUPENG*, November 30, 2020. In keeping with the pro-capitalist orientation of such right-wing trade union leaders it is worth recalling that Mele Kolo Kyari, the current head of the Nigerian



The continual abuses of workers and their rights by energy corporations surely vindicates the need for a more far-reaching socialist approach to be adopted by the trade union movement.<sup>77</sup> As if that were not reason enough for fighting back, the Nigerian state does nothing to tackle the capitalist root causes of the violence inflicted upon the working-class by terrorist groups like Boko Haram, and by armed bandits more generally. A General Strike could play an important part in transforming this situation. This is because it is only through taking such collective action that workers will be able to grow in confidence and determine what needs to be done next to take their struggles forward. This is even more important in the wake of the anti-SARS insurgency and the betrayals that workers continue to encounter at the hand of their so-called labour leaders.

There is not a moment to waste for workers to act decisively. President Buhari's government is "teetering on the brink" of collapse, and the President finally "replaced the four heads of the country's armed forces after years of resisting widespread calls to do so, in a belated acknowledgment of the swiftly deteriorating security situation". Like most political leaders the world over, the President has totally mishandled the pandemic – at every turn placing the need of profiteers before the needs of people. Even the bourgeois press has turned against him, and the editors at the *Financial Times* are correct in describing the Nigerian government as representing a "bloated, ruinously inefficient, political elite," and their editors are right that the existence of "the EndSARS movement against police brutality provides a shard

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National Petroleum Corporation once served as the NNPC Group Chairman of PENGASSAN from 1997 to 1999.

<sup>77</sup> In other related strike news, in December the Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria "declared an indefinite strike over the sacking of 500 workers" by INTELS and one of their subcontractors with the state then intervening to outlaw the strike. INTELS provides logistics services for the Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry, and until recently was most famous for counting the former Vice President of Nigeria, Atiku Abubakar, among its major shareholders. INTELS most famous owner is the billionaire profiteer Gabriele Volpi, who until recently served on the advisory board of Dangote's Gateway Partners.

of optimism.” But the newspaper’s neoliberal solutions are all wrong... a “slimmed-down state” won’t allow the people to get access to the basic “public goods” like “security, health, education, power and roads” that they need to survive.<sup>78</sup>

Improving the economic situation of Nigerians toiling masses will not be possible by simply reducing the size of the corrupt state or by reducing their country’s reliance on “foreign borrowing”. Instead, what is needed is a struggle for a socialist Nigeria. Workers can have no faith in either the military elites or the capitalist politicians with all their promises of change. Socialist organizing, which is already happening across the country, must be coordinated more effectively, and be given a sharp political focus – a focus that can envisage a future beyond the chains of capitalism. General Strikes can form a critical part of this transformative struggle for democracy, but most of all people need a new political party that can use “to build a new Nigeria where no one will be poor, hungry, illiterate, homeless or jobless.” A base for such organizing already exists in the form of the Socialist Party of Nigeria. And with spiralling electricity costs, the energy sector will remain a key focus for continuing organizing, as the only way to guarantee that all Nigerians have access to cheap and reliable electricity is by taking the entire sector back into public ownership. As the Socialist Party of Nigeria state this will involve:

Re-nationalisation of the electricity sector. Placing all electricity generation, transmission and distribution companies under the democratic control and management of elected committees of workers, consumers and representatives of the government in order to ensure that public resources spent to improve the power sector is not mismanaged or looted. What this means is that instead of a few bureaucrats appointed by the government to run public utilities and enterprises, decisions must be taken among rank-and-file workers and consumers elected into management committees at local government, state and national levels with the mandate to oversee the affairs of the power sector

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<sup>78</sup> Neil Munshi, “Nigeria’s Buhari overhauls military as security crisis worsens,” *Financial Times*, January 26, 2021; Editorial Board, “Nigeria is at risk of becoming a failed state,” *Financial Times*, December 22, 2020.

in compliance with the needs of the people and economy.

Capitalism has failed Nigeria, and has brought war, ruin and poverty to the lives of billions of working-class people across the world. Now is the time to bid farewell to the predators who at the expense of life and the planet have gorged themselves on Nigeria's immense resources, and now is the time to fight for a socialist future.



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**ELEVEN**

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# How Big Pharma and Big Philanthropy Consume the World<sup>1</sup>

Under capitalism, disease is an immensely profitable industry, and huge pharmaceutical corporations excel at extracting enormous amounts of wealth from our public health. Of course, Big Pharma would have us believe that without their investments in scientific research, millions of people would not benefit from the dizzying array of drugs they sell us, but the truth is far less savoury. This is because instead of reinvesting their huge profit margins in cutting-edge research, the powerful corporations that dominate the medical landscape prefer to let fledgling scientific enterprises take all the risks to push research agendas forward. Then, when a small company creates a new drug that corporate predators think they can sell – to at least the richest proportion of the global citizenry – corporations mobilize their immense financial resources to wrest control of any new patents from their rivals. It is this perpetual cannibalism of smaller

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter was first published online by *CounterPunch* on April 16, 2020.

businesses that guarantees maximum profits with minimum risks – a dark process which includes the consumption of other companies to ensure their drugs never see the light of day. This, more than anything else, demonstrates where the real priorities of corporations lie. What system other than capitalism would encourage the disembowelment of life-saving knowledge so that Big Pharma can gratify their macabre pursuit of profit?<sup>2</sup>

Flowing from the relentless drive for super-profits, we can also understand the process by which Big Pharma makes decisions on the type of drugs they will prioritize for mass production. Medicines that can be sold to wealthy consumers in developed countries, are fast-tracked, while drugs and treatments that might benefit the poorest billions simply fall by the wayside. Human life is secondary to the pursuit of profits. This is why the chaos of the free market must be superseded by a more scientific system of planning – a socialist system, where drugs are produced to meet the needs of the mass of humanity. Pills for greed must be replaced by pills for need.

But, for the short-term at least, we remain lumbered with an inhumane Big Pharma juggernaut, that is both unable and unwilling to serve the needs of the many, and the rapid spread of COVID-19 is once again laying bare the corrupt and bankrupt nature of corporate powerbrokers. The difference between how ordinary people and Big Pharma react to this crisis are worlds apart. A new and deadly disease throws the masses together in a desperate effort to see off this harbinger of death, but rather than help, big corporations see the pandemic as just another opportunity to turn a buck. All those whose lives are presently threatened by coronavirus are simply viewed as a captive market for our globes marauding health profiteers. So where should we look to if we want to expose the mechanism by which such flagrant profiteering takes place?

### **Pandemic profiteering**

US-based Gilead Sciences is a good as a place to start as any, a powerful member of the Big Pharma community closely associated

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<sup>2</sup> Colleen Cunningham, Florian Ederer and Song Ma, “Killer acquisitions,” *Journal of Political Economy*, 129(3), March 2021.

with Donald Rumsfeld and the former Secretary of State George Shultz — a corporation that is most famous for its profiteering from Tamiflu and desire to undermine scientific efforts to submit their research on this antiviral treatment to democratic scrutiny.<sup>3</sup> Historical examples of exploitation tend to repeat themselves when democracy fails to intervene and Gilead once again made international news last year for its “heartless and cruel price-gouging practices toward vulnerable groups” like those suffering with HIV. Now with the COVID-19 pandemic bringing death and mayhem to the globe, Gilead have discovered that remdesivir, an antiviral drug they developed in the wake of the 2014 Ebola outbreak with “at least \$79 million of US government funding,” could be used to alleviate the worst effects of COVID-19.<sup>4</sup> Ready to seize another opportunity to line their pockets, Gilead quickly moved to prevent other companies from selling generic versions of “their” drug. Amusingly they had assumed that these actions would go unopposed... but how wrong they were. Mass opposition to this pandemic profiteering soon forced the corporation to rescind their plans, in the United States at least. However, as Médecins Sans Frontières correctly point out, the company “has yet to commit to not enforcing its patents globally.”<sup>5</sup>

Another corporate giant with similar ambitions to swell their bank accounts from this pandemic is the US-based diagnostic test maker Cepheid — a company which has “just received US FDA Emergency Use Authorization for a rapid COVID-19 test (Xpert Xpress SARS-CoV-2) that delivers results in just 45 minutes, using

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<sup>3</sup> Ben Goldacre, “Questions in Parliament, and a briefing note on missing trials: updated,” October 23, 2012; Stefan Elbe, *Pandemics, Pills, and Politics: Governing Global Health Security* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Donato Paolo Mancini and Hannah Kuchler, “Gilead did not seek US exclusivity on PrEP with Truvada,” *Financial Times*, August 18, 2019; Thomas White, “The profiteering of big pharma,” *Socialist Party Ireland*, March 25, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> “MSF calls for no patents or profiteering on COVID-19 drugs, tests, and vaccines in pandemic,” *Médecins Sans Frontières*, March 27, 2020.

existing testing machines that have been routinely used for tuberculosis (TB), HIV and other diseases.” Aghast at such profiteering Médecins Sans Frontières state:

Cepheid just announced they will charge US\$19.80 per test in developing countries, including the world’s poorest countries where people live on less than two dollars per day. MSF and others’ research on Cepheid’s TB test (which uses a similar test cartridge for TB for which the corporation charges \$10 in developing countries), shows that the cost of goods, including manufacturing, overhead, and other expenses, for each cartridge is as low as \$3, and therefore each test could be sold at a profit for \$5.

Here Cepheid provides a perfect example of how smaller and successful pharmaceutical companies get gobbled-up by Big Pharma. This is because at the time of Cepheid’s 2016 acquisition by Danaher, it was just one in the latest of 400 odd companies that its new parent had purchased since 1984. (That said not all mergers of this hue involve small companies and last year Danaher acquired General Electric Biopharma for \$21 billion.)

Quite rightly Médecins Sans Frontières maintains a critical eye on other more systemic forms of pharmaceutical exploitation which, as they explain, create corporate barriers which “stop people living with TB from getting the lifesaving medicines they need.” This is a critical issue because approximately 1.5 million people die every year from TB, a disease that, if there was the political will, could have easily been eradicated. The tragic scale of this needless suffering also vastly increases the number of vulnerable people who will die from COVID-19.

In an important article titled “5 barriers from Big Pharma preventing people getting lifesaving TB drugs” (March 23), Médecins Sans Frontières provide their readers with a forensic examination of the devious way in which Big Pharma corporation Johnson and Johnson (J&J) engages in such murderous practices. J&J produce the TB drug bedaquiline and then multiply the cost of making it by “eight times” or more when selling it to markets in poorer developing nations, states Médecins Sans Frontières. The profits from this despicable behaviour going directly to the corporation even though it



is “estimated that taxpayers put three to five times the amount of funding into the development of bedaquiline as J&J.” Ever prescient of the fact that such price-gouging makes their corporation look greedy (which they are), the corporation pumps out a great deal of nice-sounding propaganda to advertise to the world that they donate *some* bedaquiline to the needy. Thus, despite the fact that 130,000 people in India require treatment with their drug they have only donated 20,000 treatment courses to the country – a drop in the ocean considering the corporation’s rampant profiteering.

Making matters worse, Johnson and Johnson are currently in the process of “trying to wring out yet more profits by blocking more affordable versions of bedaquiline in India for an additional four years.” And contrary to all their nice sounding words about helping the poor, the corporation, having found their own personal golden goose for TB profiteering, have along with other pharmaceutical corporations “shut down their R&D units for new antibiotics that could potentially cure the disease”.

When human life is treated with so little respect, it should come as no surprise that the board rooms of Johnson and Johnson, like many Big Pharma corporations, tend to overlap with those military profiteers. Thus, just taking the example of J&J, four current board members include the CEO of Lockheed Martin, the chairman of Rolls-Royce, a board member of Boeing, and a board member of Honeywell.

Not one to look a pandemic in the eye and not see a profit, Johnson and Johnson have now teamed up with the US Department of Health and Human Services’ Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) to collaborate on a potential vaccine for coronavirus. J&J note on their web site, they are “closely monitoring the COVID-19 (coronavirus) situation” and have “robust business continuity plans in place across our global supply chain network to prepare for unforeseen events and to meet the needs of the patients, customers and consumers who depend on our products.” (April 2) These business plans – to rake in profits from their consumers – are of course being funded by a \$0.5 billion investment

from the America tax-payer, an act of corporate welfare which led to a 3.8% rise in the value of J&J's shares.<sup>6</sup>

## Rethinking philanthropy: Gates vs Trump

Most people are of course already aware that corporate profiteering is a big problem, but in the context of never-ending global healthcare crises, the philanthropy of the billionaire-class is often held up by the corporate media as the solution to the deep inequities caused by our capitalist system. Indeed many of the global health initiatives pioneered by the philanthropies of the super-rich, like that of the Gates Foundation, dominate the international news as so many “good news” stories. So, it more than a little ironic that one of the main benefits of philanthropic foundations, to the super-rich that is, is that they provide a perfect way for billionaires to avoid paying tax!

In the wake of the pandemic, ruling-class philanthropy, not their oppression of workers, is making the news in a big way. For instance, the world's richest person, Jeff Bezos, has announced he is giving 0.1% of his \$125 billion fortune to a charity feeding America's poor. His \$100 million donation going to a group (Feeding America) whose board room is dominated by the leading representatives of the corporate food giants that helped create the social and economic conditions that allowed COVID-19 to arise and take so many lives.<sup>7</sup> Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey, however, has gone one step further and done something that most other philanthropists dare not do, he will be giving \$1 billion to coronavirus related charities - a sizable sum of money which represents a sizable 28% of his personal savings.<sup>8</sup> But

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Brewster, “The U.S. just signed A \$450 million coronavirus vaccine contract with Johnson & Johnson,” *Forbes*, February 28, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Maria Di Mento, “Jeff Bezos gives \$100 Million to Feeding America's Covid-19 Response Fund,” *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, April 2, 2020; Yaak Pabst and Rob Wallace, “Capitalist agriculture and Covid-19: A deadly combination,” *Climate and Capitalism*, March 20, 2020; Rob Wallace, *Big Farms Make Big Flu: Dispatches on Influenza, Agribusiness, and the Nature of Science* (Monthly Review Press, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Kara Swisher and Scott Galloway, “It's lipstick, not philanthropy,”

this funding is not as good as it sounds and the first charity to receive funds from Dorsey is distributing most of the millions it raises to the same elite food project that is being backed by Bezos. And finally, now in just one more of a long line of ostensibly generous healthcare handouts, the Gates Foundation has stumped up \$20 million to launch a COVID-19 Therapeutics Accelerator Fund.

Gates' COVID-19 Fund is now in the process of helping coordinate a variety of essential research to test potential medicines and vaccines for the pandemic. Scientific undertakings, which, if we lived in a sane world would already be financed in a systemic and organized way by taxing big business. Why after all should the safety of life on our planet ever have to rely upon receiving piddling handouts from serial tax avoiders? Nevertheless, not all the Therapeutics Accelerator research is that useful, and we are meant to be thankful that some of the money from 'Gates' COVID-19 Fund is being used to investigate the usefulness of hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine. These drugs are both generic antimalarials, which controversially "have been hailed by US president Donald Trump [since late January] as potential game-changers" in the battle against the pandemic. It is also not insignificant that immediately after Trump's backing of these non-proven 'cures', the major US-based pharma company producing these drugs, Rising Pharmaceuticals, decided to double the price of chloroquine.<sup>9</sup> Again, history appears to be repeating itself, as in December last year Rising was forced to admit to price-fixing and as 'punishment' had to pay \$3m in fines and restitution. So, when questioned about their latest pandemic profiteering by the *Financial Times*, Rising executives were forced to backtrack and explain that the price rise was "coincidental"; and apparently shamed by their

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*Intelligencer*, April 10, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Hannah Kuchler, "Gates Foundation and Wellcome Trust to fund Covid-19 drug trials," *Financial Times*, March 30, 2020; Charles Piller, "'This is insane!' Many scientists lament Trump's embrace of risky malaria drugs for coronavirus," *Science*, March 26, 2020; Hannah Kuchler, "US drugmaker doubled price on potential coronavirus treatment," *Financial Times*, March 19, 2020.

humiliating expose immediately Rising bosses moved to reduce its price.

In many ways Trump's insane advocacy efforts on behalf of unproven drugs are a mirror image to Bill Gates' relentless promotion of elite philanthropy as a panacea to the eternal wrecking ball of capitalism. Fake news seems to reign supreme, whether it be coming from Trump or Gates. *The New York Times* (April 6) – which itself is perhaps the number one booster for Gates' brand of fake news – prefers to focus their ire upon Trump, writing: “Day after day, the salesman turned president has encouraged coronavirus patients to try hydroxychloroquine with all of the enthusiasm of a real estate developer.” The *Times* article then goes on to observe that if hydroxychloroquine becomes an accepted treatment, then even Trump himself will stand to profit because he has “a small personal financial interest in Sanofi, the French drugmaker that makes Plaquenil, the brand-name version of hydroxychloroquine.” But let's not forget that Trump is not the only profiteer in this vile game, and the Gates Foundation likewise maintains financial investments in Sanofi, but his foundation goes further still and disperses philanthropic grants to the company too!<sup>10</sup>

Blatant personal profiteering – whether large or small – however is not the worst aspect of capitalisms varying reactions to this pandemic. And another disastrous but entirely foreseen consequence of Trump's talk about the “strong” healing potential of anti-malarial drugs is that those who can afford to buy them have literally been “vacuuming up supplies” which has led to global shortages and sent the prices of the drug “skyrocketing” out of the reach of many who need them. To make matters worse, at the same time Trump has been busily lobbying the Indian government – a country where malarial drugs are a matter of life and death to millions of people – to promise India will be prioritizing America for future deliveries of chloroquine, Trump's so-called miracle drug.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Baker *et al.*, “Trump's aggressive advocacy of malaria drug for treating coronavirus divides medical community,” *New York Times*, April 6, 2020; Tim Schwab, “Bill Gates's charity paradox,” *The Nation*, March 17, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Joe Parkinson and David Gauthier-Villars, “Trump claim that

## War and healthcare

Here, once again, the role of military profiteering can help us understand the special relationship that has developed in recent years between Trump and India's far-right Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. Hence Trump's latest request for stocks of India's anti-malarial drugs will be considered more seriously as a result of Modi's latest (February 25) \$3 billion purchase of military hardware which included six Boeing-built Apache helicopters.<sup>12</sup> On the evolution of these important warmongering ties, the *New York Times* has provided some context, explaining in an article published in late November how:

The Trump administration's efforts to woo India are in many ways a continuation of a foreign policy pursued by Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Both Mr. Bush and Mr. Obama aspired to move closer to India strategically, and succeeded measurably in areas like arms sales.

According to data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, exports of American weapons to India from 2013 to 2017 increased 557 percent over the previous five-year period. American arms sales to India currently stand around \$18 billion, and could climb after the approval of a deal on Wednesday to allow India to buy \$1 billion worth of naval guns and ammunition.<sup>13</sup>

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malaria drugs treat coronavirus sparks warnings, shortages," *Wall Street Journal*, March 23, 2020; Denise Grady and Andrea Kannapell, "Trump urges coronavirus patients to take unproven drug," *New York Times*, April 9, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> "India, US sign contract for additional Apache attack choppers," *The Economic Times*, February 25, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Zach Montague, "U.S.-India defense ties grow closer as shared concerns in Asia loom," *New York Times*, November 20, 2019.

Like in the United States itself, the Indian government's decision to waste money on war at the expense of public healthcare is just one of the vile legacies of capitalism. India currently spends a colossal \$67 billion a year on their military (2.4% of their total GDP) which is just a tad short of the \$100 billion a year (3.7% of GDP) they spend on public healthcare. The irony here is that while the United States is the biggest military spender in the world (by a huge amount), they actually spend more than five times the amount on public health provision than the \$649 billion (3.2% GDP) they spend on their military. Although most of this annual \$3.5 trillion (17.1% of GDP) healthcare spend goes straight into private healthcare providers and does little to benefit the tens of millions of Americans who continue to suffer without any form of health insurance.

So, in India, even without the huge amount of money being spent on their military budget, it is clear that their largely privatized healthcare system is not in a position to cope with the growing pandemic. The depth of these problems is truly shocking as India presently has one of the lowest numbers of Intensive Care Units (ICU) per capita in the entire world with just 2.3 ICU beds per 100,000 of its population. This is very bad, because we already know that Italy's health care system quickly became overwhelmed when the pandemic struck and Italy had 12.5 ICU beds per 100,000 of its population. Furthermore, after decades of neglect of basic health services, ventilators are a rare commodity too, with the most optimistic estimates suggesting that India might be able to utilize up to 57,000 ventilators - which is only if every ICU bed in the country is able to access a ventilator. (This however is extraordinarily unlikely as other sources suggest that India only has access to 20,000 ventilators.) Contrast these numbers to Britain which has just over 8,175 ventilators, which is already considered far too few, with government plans (admittedly very uncertain ones) to increase capacity to 30,000 ventilators.<sup>14</sup> If India were to have access to an equivalent number, on

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<sup>14</sup> Prachi Singh, Shamika Ravi, and Sikim Chakraborty, "Is India's health infrastructure equipped to handle an epidemic," *Brookings Institution*, March 24, 2020; Ramanan Laxminarayan, "What India needs to fight the virus," *New York Times*, March 27, 2020; Rob Davies, "Ventilator crisis lands Britain's manufacturers with greatest

a per capita basis, they would have 580,000 ventilators not the 20,000 they have at present!

The latest data available from the World Health Organization similarly foreground the dark existential threat facing the Indian working-poor in relation to their countries lack of preparedness to face the pandemic. For instance, 2.7 million Indians suffer from TB, and another 10 million have Malaria. While in a country where economic inequality runs rampant, access to food is a major health issue, with research demonstrating that malnutrition is “the predominant risk factor for death in children younger than 5 years of age in every state of India”.<sup>15</sup> The contrast between the super-rich minority and ultra-poor super majority in India also shows up in ways that have become normalized under capitalism. Thus “India’s burden of disease is dominated by 2 apparently divergent clusters of disease—on the one hand, cardiovascular conditions that are classically associated with overnutrition and affluence; and on the other, diarrheal disease and lower respiratory tract infections that are classically associated with undernutrition and poverty.”<sup>16</sup> Collectively these poor health indicators, combined with the lack of ICU beds and ventilators, mean that millions of Indians are at risk of dying from the coronavirus pandemic.

### **Will philanthropy ‘help’ us?**

So, considering the dire future facing India and the rest of the world, is philanthropy going to step in to save us from this pandemic? This, of course, is not the type of question that most ordinary people will be asking themselves, especially those in India and America who know

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test,” *The Guardian*, April 5, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Banjot Kaur, “India fourth in number of global malaria cases: Lancet report,” *DownToEarth*, September 8, 2019; “The burden of child and maternal malnutrition and trends in its indicators in the states of India: the Global Burden of Disease Study 1990-2017,” *Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 3(12), December 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Shivani Patel et al., “Chronic diseases in India—ubiquitous across the socioeconomic spectrum,” *JAMA Network Open*, April 5, 2019.

from past experiences that elite philanthropy, especially that flowing from Bill Gate's purse, is often accompanied by more problems than it cures. That said, this is a question that many well-meaning people will be pondering over in the coming weeks, if only because of the relentless propaganda being pumped out by the ruling-class. As a curative to such intellectually debilitating nonsense, one of the most insightful critics of Bill Gates' global health interventions is Professor Linsey McGoey, author of the 2015 book *No Such Thing as a Free Gift: The Gates Foundation and the Price of Philanthropy*.

In one of her latest articles, McGoey highlights how the Gates Foundation has "aggressively pursued vaccination campaigns at the expense of initiatives championed by health experts in poor nations, who often call for universal healthcare strengthening, rather than what's called 'vertical' disease targeting (campaigns focused on eradicating single diseases)." Although she acknowledges that not everything his foundation does is bad, and that Gates and other elites have stepped in improve diagnostic testing for coronavirus, McGoey correctly concludes that "billionaires won't save us". This is because billionaire philanthropists like Bill Gates are the very same people who created and profited from the problems that led us to the current impasse, where global health systems are in crisis, and where 26 billionaires' control as much as the 3.8 billion people who make up the poorest half of the planet's population. As McGoey writes:

During the unfolding coronavirus crisis, Gates is not simply 'stepping in' to help with government failure; he is also doing a little bit (and compared to his overall fortune, it is only a little bit) to offset his own business failures: the failure to treat his workforce as they deserve to be treated. He's placing a plaster on the gaping chasm of healthcare support and sick-pay protections for America's poorest citizens that his own corporate policies played a fundamental role in creating. Sure, it's good to applaud home-test kits. But today, the US and other wealthy nations are suffering from problems of wide-scale labour precarity fuelled by anti-worker attitudes at places like Microsoft over the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Linsey McGoey, "Bezos, billionaires and the problem with big philanthropy," Institute of Art and Ideas, March 16, 2020.



Despite these stark contradictions, the Gates Foundation has still been highly influential in directing the priorities of health bodies like the World Health Organization and the United Nations. That being said we should remember that the foundation's total annual giving towards health is dwarfed by both the American and Indian governments, which respectively distribute \$3.5 trillion and \$100 billion a year to their own populations alone, with the Gates Foundation only giving a touch over \$1.3 billion a year towards international health projects.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the influence of Bill Gates philanthropy is still important in setting health agendas, whether that be in the United States or further afield.

So, the heavy involvement of Bill Gates and his personal philanthropy in Indian politics is something worth dwelling on, especially considering the looming threat that coronavirus poses to a country which is home to over 1.3 billion people. India representing the one country in which the Gates Foundation has focused the majority of their international health interventions, with the foundation focusing most of their efforts in recent years on 'aiding' the state of Bihar — a state which has one of the lowest numbers of government hospital beds in the whole of India (just 11 beds available per 100,000 population).<sup>19</sup>

The Gates Foundations work in Bihar was formally launched ten years ago when, as the foundation put it, they “formed a partnership with the state government called Ananya (Hindi for “unique”) to work with the private sector and community organizations on several health-related issues.” Rather than focusing assistance on supporting the development of a tax-payer funded public healthcare system, it turns out that the foundations emphasis is on involving “business in addressing poverty and inequality,” which, as a recent report produced by one critical non-profit put it, “is far from a

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<sup>18</sup> Gates Foundation 2019 Annual Report.

<sup>19</sup> Singh et al., “Is India’s health infrastructure equipped to handle an epidemic.”

neutral charitable strategy but instead an ideological commitment to promote neoliberal economic policies and corporate globalisation.”<sup>20</sup>

While Gates’ dedication to Bihar is related to the state’s extreme poverty, one health expert who has interviewed numerous members of the foundation in India pointed out that the philanthropic organization made the decision “in part because they were impressed by the leadership of the then chief minister Nitish Kumar and his focus on poverty alleviation.”<sup>21</sup> In the world of global politics, billionaires like Bill Gates most assuredly prefer to work with leaders who they are sure they can get along with on a political level. And so, it should come as no surprise that “political opportunist” is a more accurate characterization of Nitish’s leadership. Nitish’s opportunism is astounding on many levels, as despite being ostensibly on the left side of the political spectrum, he had come to state power (in 2005) as a direct result of a longstanding electoral coalition he had maintained with the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). He subsequently broke off his alliance with his far-right friends in 2013, apparently because he was opposed Modi’s leadership of the BJP. But with free-market capitalism not the needs of the working-class to the forefront of his mind, in 2017 Nitish chose to re-establish his toxic alliance with Modi and the far-right BJP. This disgusting level of political opportunism represented a fundamental betrayal of the ordinary people who elected him, but does echo the political whims of his philanthropic benefactor. I say this because just two years earlier (in 2015) Bill Gates had received India’s second highest civilian honour (the Padma Bhushan) from the BJP national government. A reward that Gates reciprocated last year when his foundation bestowed a humanitarian award upon Modi during a meeting of the UN General Assembly.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Mark Curtis, “Gated Development Is the Gates Foundation always a force for good?,” *Global Justice Now*, January 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Jean Dreze and Preetha Nair, “Bihar will take worst hit due to reverse migration,” *Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières*, April 1, 2020; Manjari Mahajan, “Philanthropy and the nation-state in global health: The Gates Foundation in India,” *Global Public Health: An International Journal for Research, Policy and Practice*, 13(10), 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Annalisa Merelli “The problem with the Gates Foundation’s award

This cosyng up to India's far-right leader led one high-profile Gates Foundation employee to tender his resignation in dismay. The individual in question, who had previously coordinated Microsoft's propaganda machine across India (in his role as their Lead for Corporate & Citizenship Public Relations), then published a horrified opinion piece in the *New York Times*. He explained that the foundation "has completely disregarded how [Modi's] politics have filled the lives of marginalized communities in India and the territories it controls with fear and insecurity, let alone that he has transformed India into a majoritarian, Hindu nationalist state." In this powerful, albeit naïve statement, he concluded:

The celebration of Mr. Modi by an organization that stands for the betterment of the most vulnerable simply cannot be justified. If major, powerful nonprofit organizations endorse such polarizing politicians, then who speaks for the vulnerable and the neglected?

The Gates Foundation has crossed the wide gulf between working with a regime and endorsing it. That is not the pragmatic agnosticism of an organization working with the government of the day, but a choice of siding with power. I will choose to walk a different path.<sup>23</sup>

Siding with power has never been a genuine or sustainable option for the global working class either, and our class now needs to collectively choose to walk a different path than the capitalist one we have been railroaded onto for years. The farcical efforts by capitalist philanthropists like Gates to put a human face on the global violence inflicted upon our lives by capitalism will no longer gain traction, even in the sense of narrow propaganda victories. A looming global recession has been brewing for years, and the coronavirus pandemic has merely brought the day of reckoning forward and the capitalists know it all too well... and they are panicking. As the *Financial Times*

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to Narendra Modi," *Quartz*, September 27, 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Sabah Hamid, "Why I resigned from the Gates Foundation," *New York Times*, September 26, 2019.

(April 8) stated, some of the more far-sighted corporate CEOs are now even taking voluntary pay cuts in “advance of the pitchforks”.<sup>24</sup>

Pay cuts or not, this is just window-dressing. We know that nearly every capitalist state across the world made no meaningful preparations to deal with the predictable threat posed by the outbreak of a global pandemic. In fact, the opposite is true, with governments actively pursuing policies of austerity which demonized the poor, making the working class pay the price with their lives for the profit-driven ambitions of economic elites. These elites likewise acted to further exacerbate health inequalities between themselves and the rest of us by a relentless process of privatization of public services consigning the vast majority of the world's human population to suffer without functioning health care systems.

### **The future beyond COVID-19**

Even in the world's richest countries, COVID-19 is having devastating effects, but for “many Asian nations, however, the pandemic will be an even more appalling disaster, made worse by the dire state of healthcare and infrastructure.”

Across India, homeless shelters are struggling with a surge in demand as massive numbers of people have their livelihoods devastated. According to the ILO, over 80% of India's non-agricultural workers are in informal work, while rural labourers face losses over disruption to supply chains. Informal workers make up 77.6% of Pakistan's workforce, while the percentage in Nepal is even higher, at 90.7%

This crisis will also bring the issue of migrant workers' oppression under capitalism to the fore. The lockdown in India has also meant that massive numbers of migrant workers have lost their jobs and their homes, causing a mass exodus as they try to return home. In the words of one 28-year-old migrant

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<sup>24</sup> Darren Dodd, “The EU's ‘moment of truth’,” *Financial Times*, April 8, 2020.

worker: ‘We will die of walking and starving before getting killed by corona.’<sup>25</sup>

We know that people with hypertension and diabetes are more prone to experience severe COVID-19 and die from it. In India hypertension afflicts about 400 million people, and one in ten adults is diabetic, likewise “high rates of tuberculosis, pneumonia, smoking and poor air quality won’t help when it comes to a respiratory disease.”<sup>26</sup> But Modi’s government has done absolutely nothing to assuage the fears of hundreds of millions of Indians. After imposing a three-week nationwide curfew commencing on March 25, it was not until the following day that the government announced a \$22.6 billion economic stimulus plan “to provide direct cash transfers and food handouts to India’s poor.” This was no way near enough money, and by March 29, critics were publicly highlighting the woeful inadequacy of such plans. Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo – two of the three winners of the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2019 – said that without more aid “the demand crisis will snowball into an economic avalanche, and people will have no choice but to defy orders”.<sup>27</sup>

Notably states like Kerala, that have a past record of socialist organizing amongst the working classes, so far appear to be responding to the pandemic in ways that prioritise the needs of the poor. Kerala can boast, as of March 26, of having “tested the highest number of samples for the coronavirus in India so far.”<sup>28</sup> And compared to most of India, Kerala has a “relatively strong public health system” with twice the national average for number of hospital beds (which means

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<sup>25</sup> Chris Jameison, “Covid-19 in Asia: the disaster still to come,” *Socialist Alternative*, March 30, 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Ramanan Laxminarayan, “What India needs to fight the virus,” *New York Times*, March 27, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Alexandra Ulmer and Swati Bhat, “Updated a year ago Modi seeks ‘forgiveness’ from India’s poor over coronavirus lockdown,” *Reuters*, March 29, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Vijay Prashad and Subin Dennis, “An often overlooked region of India is a beacon to the world for taking on the coronavirus,” *CounterPunch*, March 26, 2020.

it has ten times more beds per 100,000 people than in ). Indeed, in spite of all the setbacks faced by the Indian working class in recent years, most notably the reactionary rise to power of the BJP, earlier this year over 200 million workers took part in a one-day General Strike. This mass action concretely shows the potential for opposing Modi if there existed the type of socialist leaders within society who were consistent fighters for their class. This leadership however is lacking, being held back in part by Stalinist politicians, many of whom still dominate Kerala's state apparatus. Illustrating such enormous shortcomings, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPI(M) managed to secure 91 of the 140 Kerala assembly seats in 2016, but the unwillingness of such so-called Marxists to lead the type of social struggle that can upend capitalism, meant that in last year's national elections Kerala only succeeded in electing one individual to the Indian Parliament. Independent Marxist commentator, Achin Vanaik (author of the 2017 book *The Rise of Hindu Authoritarianism*) surmised the Stalinists shortcomings fairly bluntly in this way:

Long reduced to primarily an electoral force with a diminishing cadre base that clings to old Stalinist verities when it does think about Marxism, their cadres with a few exceptions in a few places, have lost the capacity and interest in pursuing the politics of popular mobilization around genuine and justified grievances.<sup>29</sup>

This is a tragedy for 1.3 billion Indians. But, this failure of political will on the part of so-called socialists is one that can be reversed. Now is the time to unite and fight back!

Similarly, in America Donald Trump may momentarily garner a certain level of public support in this moment of national crisis and collective mourning, but his grip on power will quickly unfurl as more and more people die, and as workers fight-back for their lives. The same is true across the world, and in India Modi's authoritarian curfew instigated to enforce physical distancing has, as Arundhati Roy writes "resulted in the opposite – physical compression on an unthinkable

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<sup>29</sup> Achin Vanaik, "The Indian catastrophe," *Jacobin*, May 30, 2019.

scale.”<sup>30</sup> This has created a desperate situation which has seen tens of millions of the urban poor “sealed into cramped quarters in slums and shanties.” But as Roy points out, like with the great influenza of 1918 which took the lives of tens of millions of people – the vast majority of whose deaths were counted amongst India’s impoverished working-class – pandemics have...

...forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.

We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.

Around the time of the 1918 influenza, millions had been inspired to fight for another better world by the mass movement that had just seized power in Russia. And it was this hope for a socialist future amid so much social turmoil that explained why workers fought back all over the world, with one inspiring American example occurring in Seattle, a city which was brought to a standstill in 1919 by their historic General Strike.<sup>31</sup>

Today Seattle is considered home to many of the world’s richest men, including Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos, but it is also one of the epicentres of global resistance to capitalism, as it is home to Socialist Alternative city councillor Kshama Sawant. She takes heart from the enraged resistance of ordinary workers to the pandemic profiteering of the billionaire-class, and having visited India to support their 2019 General Strike, Kshama intends to support those same types of mass action in the United States. “Workers are facing a

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<sup>30</sup> Arundhati Roy, “The pandemic is a portal,” *Financial Times*, April 3, 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Whitney Kahn and Tony Wilsdon, “When workers ran Seattle: lessons from the 1919 General Strike,” *Socialist Alternative*, August 20, 2017.

double crisis, coronavirus and capitalism,” Kshama recently stated, and it is “very clear that billionaire wealth and profit is more important than the safety, health, and lives” of workers. And in response to Arundhati Roy’s call to action, Kshama posted:

The operative word is “fight”. The #COVID19 pandemic is thoroughly exposing the logic of global capitalism, of the rich exploiting the working class and the poor even if it literally kills us. The pandemic is forcing billions to think about a different kind of society. But it will take an organized fightback. We need to start with getting organized for massive strike actions on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Strike actions with social distancing.



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**TWELVE**

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# COVID-Planning For Humanity<sup>1</sup>

Pharmaceutical corporations make billions providing drugs to help improve some people's lives, in much the same way that privately-run hospitals provide care to those who can afford to pay. But Big Pharma is not a caring industry. Big Pharma has done some truly despicable things over the past hundred years or so. This is why Big Pharma and the management of our health should not remain in the hands of huge corporations. It is high time that we bring vital private health industries under democratic public ownership. This is the only way to remove the perverse financial incentives that places profit before human need.

Of course, Big Pharma and their political enablers would like us all to believe that they should have even more power over our health services. This essay therefore aims to put the lie to this self-serving propaganda. It will do so by initially bursting the bubble on the ways that Big Pharma PR to deflect attention away from its profiteering through propaganda work. It will debunk some of the nonsense surrounding the ostensibly humanitarian actions undertaken by two corporate giants meddling in the politics of global health: the first is the world's largest vaccines company, GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), which

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter was first published online by *CounterPunch* on May 15, 2020.

happens to be the only pharmaceutical giant that has committed to making any COVID-19 vaccine that they develop “affordable” for all.<sup>2</sup> The second is the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, a non-profit corporation which is controlled by Bill Gates — a philanthropist whose personal wealth has, with the help of tax loopholes, doubled over the past decade. By examining the activities of these two corporations in relation to health profiteering both before and during this ongoing pandemic, this essay will prove beyond all reasonable doubt that there is no reason to be optimistic that corporations can be trusted to promote the best interests of humanity.

### **Selling Big Pharma: the good ship “SS Hope”**

Big Pharma’s flagrant disregard for human life has already been the subject of many exposés. Yet the only thing that really seems to improve is the industry’s ability to funnel record-breaking sums of money into the pockets of politicians, doctors, regulatory agencies, and journalists to help them flog their often dangerous and many times unnecessary pharmaceutical wares. To be generous to all involved, the unhealthy fixation with using propaganda to shield Big Pharma’s activities from democratic scrutiny rather than addressing inadequacies is hardly new. Take for example, the late 1950s when psychological warfare experts enlisted the support of Big Pharma and the weapons industry in donating medical supplies to the globe’s poor. Project HOPE was the name given to this enterprise and the bulk of their work was undertaken in public by Dr William Walsh, a medical doctor, but other better known voices involved included C.D. Jackson (an executive vice president at the Time-Life Corporation and a former psychological warfare advisor to President Eisenhower), Frank Pace, Jr., (the president of defense contractor General Dynamics), John T. Connor, (the president of pharmaceutical giant Merck & Company), and George Meany (the right-wing head of the AFL-CIO).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> They state on their web site that they do “not expect to profit from our portfolio of collaborations for COVID-19 vaccines during this pandemic.” Whether this turns out to true or just more corporate hot air is another matter.

<sup>3</sup> Zachary Cunningham, “Project HOPE as propaganda: a

With Big Pharma stumping up medical supplies and much more beside, the long voyage of SS Hope – the converted war ship delivering all this aid for Project HOPE – was a propaganda coup par excellence for the US national security state. Moreover, its aid efforts were aimed not just at winning the hearts and minds of foreign subjects, but also the domestic audience too. The domestic element of this strategy eventually paid handsome dividends in projecting the pharmaceutical industry from the regulatory gaze of the state.<sup>4</sup> In lieu of any meaningful democratic reform of the pharmaceutical industry, actual change has been supplanted by ‘hope’ for change. ‘Hope’ provides a critical weapon in the industries ongoing efforts to divert public attention their systemic profiteering. Thus, Project HOPE is still busily promoting their novel brand of medical diplomacy across the world; and even before the coronavirus pandemic burst forth from Wuhan they were proud of their longstanding humanitarian operations covering the world which even included their having a base in this fateful city. Although Project HOPE are controversially still funded by weapons manufacturers like General Dynamics, their board room now only has room for representatives of Big Pharma: current

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humanitarian nongovernmental organization takes part in America’s total cold war,” MA Thesis, Ohio University, March 2008, pp.54-5; Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination 1945-1961* (University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> In April 1960 Dr Walsh was wheeled out during congressional investigations as a key witness in defence of the industry where he happily made the case that Big Pharma were genuinely compassionate about delivering care to the needy. Led by Senator Estes Kefauver these hearings did eventually wrangle some positive outcomes in terms of improving regulatory oversight of the industry – which mainly owed their implementation to the public outrage that was generated in response to the thalidomide tragedy of 1962 – but the one significant area in which absolutely no progress was made was in forcing corporations to make their drugs affordable to the majority of American citizens. Combatting such price gouging was one of the key objectives that Kefauver had set out to remedy, but it is a problem that, to this day, still haunts America.

dignitaries serving in this capacity includes Merck's current CEO (Richard Clark), the former CEO of GlaxoSmithKline (Charles Sanders), and two representatives from Quest Diagnostics - the company that was involved with the ongoing cervical smear scandal in Ireland.

### **Putting GlaxoSmithKline on trial**

One key question that should be at the forefront of any discussion of the health outcomes promoted by GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) is whether they have been involved in any activities that may be construed as endangering public health. And on this issue you don't have to look too far to find evidence of wrongdoing. Earlier this year it was reported that the European Court of Justice had decided to support a disputed decision made by the UK's Competition and Markets Authority that fined the drug-maker £37.6 million. As the article in the *Financial Times* noted, the Court "found that the pay-for-delay deals had deprived the NHS of significant price reductions, after the average price of a GSK drug dropped by 70 per cent over two years after independent generics were introduced to the market." (Pay-for-day referring to the practice of paying off rival companies to prevent them launching cheaper copycat versions of drugs after their patent expires.)

In other news, last year GSK was implicated in a tax scandal in the UK; while earlier in the year another article in the *Financial Times* pointed out how the UK Serious Fraud Office had "closed its investigations" into GSK which the paper observed only sought to highlight the Office's inability (rather unwillingness) "to prosecute individuals whose companies have been linked to criminal activity."<sup>5</sup> This political decision to offer a reprieve to the company is itself a crime as the Fraud Office had initially opened its criminal investigation into GSK shortly after the Chinese authorities had accused GSK of earning hundreds of millions of pounds "in 'illegal revenues' by bribing hospitals and officials to buy its medicines." These criminal actions in China led to £300 million fine; while GSK's CEO Sir Andrew Witty of six years standing was slapped on his wrists too and

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<sup>5</sup> Barney Thompson, "SFO ends investigations into Rolls-Royce and GSK," *Financial Times*, February 22, 2019.

had “his total pay temporarily cut almost in half (to £3.89 million). Making matters worse instead of listening to their employee who blew the whistle about GSK’s involvement in bribery, the company’s immediate response was to attack the whistleblower and to dismiss the allegations as an unfounded “smear campaign.”<sup>6</sup>

Crime seems to pay, or at best goes barely punished; and certainly few positive lessons were being learnt at GSK as, just two years prior to the Chinese scandal, GSK had to pay \$3 billion “in fines for promoting its best-selling antidepressants for unapproved uses and failing to report safety data about a top diabetes drug”. This was, and still is, the largest fine of its kind in US history. As the *New York Times* states:

Prosecutors said the company had tried to win over doctors by paying for trips to Jamaica and Bermuda, as well as spa treatments and hunting excursions. In the case of Paxil, prosecutors claim GlaxoSmithKline employed several tactics aimed at promoting the use of the drug in children, including helping to publish a medical journal article that misreported data from a clinical trial.

A warning was later added to the drug that Paxil, like other antidepressants, might increase the risk of suicidal thoughts in teenagers. Prosecutors said the company had marketed Wellbutrin for conditions like weight loss and sexual dysfunction when it was approved only to treat major depressive disorder.

They said that in the case of Avandia, whose use was severely restricted in 2010 after it was linked to heart risks, the company

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew Ward, “GSK fires 110 staff in China after corruption scandal,” *Financial Times*, March 6, 2015; David Barboza, “Drug giant faced a reckoning as China took aim at bribery,” *New York Times*, November 1, 2016.

had failed to report data from studies detailing the safety risks to the F.D.A.<sup>7 8</sup>

As the press explained at the time, GSK chief executive Sir Andrew Witty desperately “sought to portray the illegal actions as part of the company’s past.” Reporters also noted that despite the size of the fine GSK would be unlikely to amend their ways because it was well understood that the billions in profits derived from their illegal activities far exceeded the size of their fine.

As another illustration of the way that GSK’s corporate executives who oversee such criminal activities seem to be rewarded not punished we might take the related example of Tachi Yamada, who between 1999 and 2006 served as the chairman of Research and Development at GSK. In 2006 Yamada then became a senior advisor to a private equity firm (Frazier Healthcare) and was headhunted to become the President of Global Health Programs for the Gates Foundation. But his past GSK misdemeanours followed Yamada to the Gates Foundation and within a year of starting work at the philanthropic foundation a US Senate Report highlighted how the esteemed scientist had acted to silence a renowned diabetes researcher for daring to suggest that users of GSK’s highly profitable diabetes drug (Avandia) had a high risk of heart disease. Jacob Stegenga, the author of *Medical Nihilism* (Oxford University Press, 2018) summarises this sickening episode in this way:

When secrecy of evidence about harms of medical interventions is threatened by vigilant researchers,

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<sup>7</sup> Even after this fine, GSK were adamant they would not be prepared to settle claims in the UK (their base of operations) without a court fight. This is a kick in the teeth for all those who may have suffered as a result of taking Avandia, but in many ways their inhumane behaviour is the norm: hence a newspaper report from 2013 observed that “GSK is also still defending cases in the UK from people who claim to have been badly affected by Seroxat” an anti-depressant which is known as Paxil in the US.

<sup>8</sup> Katie Thomas and Michael Schmidt, “Glaxo agrees to pay \$3 billion in fraud settlement,” *New York Times*, July 2, 2012.

manufacturers can respond belligerently. Rosiglitazone [trade name Avandia], again, provides a good illustration. John Buse, a diabetes researcher, gave two talks arguing that rosiglitazone may have cardiovascular risks. GlaxoSmithKline executed an orchestrated campaign to silence him. This plan appears to have been initiated by the company's head of research [Tachi Yamada], and even the chief executive officer was aware of it. The company referred to Buse as the 'Avandia Renegade,' and in contact with Buse and his department chair there were threats of lawsuits. Buse responded to the company with a letter that asked them to 'call off the dogs.' Later Buse expressed embarrassment that he caved in to the pressure of GlaxoSmithKline. By 2007, the year that Nissen's metaanalysis was published, the FDA [US Food and Drug Administration] estimated that rosiglitazone had caused about 83,000 heart attacks since coming on the market in 1999. (p.149)

Thankfully Buse's scientific career was not entirely derailed by this smear campaign, and in 2008 he was elected to serve as the President of the American Diabetes Association. Justice however was still some way off, and it would not be until July 2010 that an FDA advisory committee to finally take concrete action based upon Buse's early warnings wherein they recommended "a recall" of Avandia and placed severe restrictions on its availability.<sup>9</sup>

Just a few months later GSK made the news again (for all the wrong reasons) when it had to pay the US government \$750 million

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<sup>9</sup> "GlaxoSmithKline tried to silence the scientist who exposed the dangers of its drug Avandia," *Union of Concerned Scientists*, October 12, 2017. In a 2012 interview with the *Journal of Clinical Investigation* Yamada recalled how he had been "shocked and embarrassed" when "in 2000, GSK sued Nelson Mandela and the government of South Africa over the pricing of HIV medicines." He said in the interview that "I told the board of directors I thought we should actually be making medicines for people who need them." Thus, with funding "largely" coming from the Gates Foundation he explains that he helped GSK set up a laboratory that focused on malaria and TB production.

“to settle civil and criminal charges that it manufactured and sold adulterated drug products.”<sup>10</sup> Afterwards, in another case revolving around an issue first raised in 2012, in 2016 a former GSK biostatistics manager took the decision to file a whistleblower lawsuit “accusing the drug maker of firing him for alleging dodgy study data was used to tout the effectiveness of a smoking-cessation product.”<sup>11</sup> While in 2018 it was reported that a former GSK sales representative in India had initiated legal action against the company after being sacked for trying to expose the culture of bullying and bribery.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, considering all the problems that GSK has encountered with following any form of regulatory guidance, they were probably relieved when Dr Jesse Goodman, the former Chief Scientist for the US Food and Drug Administration (2009-2014) resigned from his position of authority at the FDA so he could join GSK’s illustrious board of directors.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Graeme Wearden, “GlaxoSmithKline whistleblower awarded \$96m payout,” *The Guardian*, October 27, 2010. In this instance the case was first raised by a determined and brave whistleblower in 2003 and concerned products of a “factory in Cidra, Puerto Rico, where GSK made a range of products including an antibiotic ointment for babies, and drugs to treat nausea, depression and diabetes.” On January 2, 2011, 60 Minutes aired a program titled “Bad Medicine: The Glaxo Case” which focused on this case.

<sup>11</sup> The case is yet to be resolved and the whistleblower “claims the company engaged in an ‘illegal, deceptive marketing program’ to promote the product ‘without justification’ as a ‘significant advance’ in nicotine treatment.”

<sup>12</sup> Ed Silverman, “Whistleblower lawsuit filed by ex-GlaxoSmithKline manager Ed Silverman,” *StatNews*, January 7, 2016; Jim Armitage, “Glaxo faces lawsuit as salesman claims he was bullied for whistleblowing,” *Evening Standard*, June 15, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Famously, precisely because corporate executives are so rarely prosecuted for wrongdoings, in 2010 a former GSK senior executive was charged in a drug fraud case and stood accused of lying to the US Food and Drug Administration. In what would have been a landmark case, the individual was later acquitted of all charges. Duff Wilson, “Ex-Glaxo executive is charged in drug fraud,” *New York Times*, November 9, 2010.



## Pharma philanthropy?

In the turbulent world of Big Pharma, chief executives are changed as often as corporations face public crises of democratic accountability. But the one thing that always remains the same is their relentless pursuit of profits. In 2017 Sir Andrew Witty vacated his position at the head of GSK after nine years' service (at the time drawing an annual salary £6.7 million) to be replaced by Emma Walmsley, who only last December joined the board of directors of the Microsoft Corporation. Witty was subsequently shunted sideways into another industry, which runs parallel to Big Pharma, private health. Witty became the President of America's largest health insurer, UnitedHealth Group. This gargantuan insurer is the former employer of Britain's arch-health privatiser-in-chief Simon Stevens — the current CEO of the National Health Service (NHS). With the pandemic now upon us, last month Witty was granted a leave of absence from UnitedHealth so he could join the World Health Organization's (WHO) ongoing efforts to develop a vaccine for COVID-19.<sup>14</sup>

While it is true that the largely US-funded WHO always had the potential to help coordinate an international response to this deadly pandemic, Witty's secondment to their ranks merely emphasizes the organizations increasing reliance on Big Pharma. One of the most notable individuals steering the agenda of the WHO in recent years has been Bill Gates — a man who first linked up with Witty and Tachi Yamada in 2008-09 to combat neglected tropical diseases in the poorest parts of the world. Yet as the poor already know, humanitarian efforts, when driven by the pay checks of the tax-avoiding super-rich like Gates rarely end up serving the interests of the working-class.

The collaboration between the Gates Foundation and Big Pharma was initiated in 2009 when the foundation organized a project to “study the cost and feasibility of incorporating HPV vaccines,

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<sup>14</sup> The WHO has always been a political tool of capitalist elites, but in recent years corporate interests have staked out a more direct control in directing the organizations priorities.

produced by Merck and GlaxoSmithKline, into India's public sector immunisation programme." However, the trial which set about vaccinating 14,000 adolescent girls from poor families soon ran into trouble when seven of the girls died shortly after receiving the vaccine. In all likelihood the vaccine was not the cause of these deaths, but the ensuing public anger led to a formal investigation which did reveal a rather dark side to the whole affair. In 2013 the *Financial Times* reported:

In August, an Indian parliamentary committee set up to probe the issue concluded the PATH [Program for Appropriate Technology in Health] project was a clinical trial in all but name and that the organization had used 'subterfuge' to avoid the 'arduous and strictly regulated process' of such a trial.

The committee report said many of the girls' consent forms had apparently been signed by school principals and hostel wardens, and expressed scepticism that the girls' parents were fully briefed on the pros and cons.

The committee also found there was no rigorous process to track adverse events, leading to 'gross underreporting'. It came down hard on Indian government agencies for alleged dereliction of duty.<sup>15</sup>

The parliamentary committee made the additional claim that GSK were lining their own corporate pockets with their so-called aid. They explained that the "sole aim" of the project had been "to promote the commercial interests of HPV vaccine manufacturers, who would have reaped windfall profits had PATH been successful in getting the HPV vaccine included" in India's immunization protocols. Linsey McGoe, author of *No Such Thing as a Free Gift: The Gates Foundation and the Price of Philanthropy* (Verso, 2015), argues that the "most alarming" aspect of this so-called trial was that the overseers' of the Foundation project "did not implement any system for recording

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<sup>15</sup> Amy Kazmin, "Vaccination scandal taints reputation of India drug trials," *Financial Times*, November 18, 2013.

major adverse reactions to the vaccines,... something legally mandated for large-scale clinical trials.”<sup>16</sup>

As this controversy was raging in India, local non-profits like the All India Drug Action Network made useful political interventions into the intense public debate. In 2010, the Network said that, in addition to the aforementioned ethical concerns, the one issue that was regularly ignored was the importance of promoting cervical cancer screening which “is almost non-existent in India.”<sup>17</sup> To make matters worse, in 2018 the Network also explained that there is still “a lack of evidence” that the HPV vaccine “is effective and cost-efficient.” Yet despite that fact that the importance of screening is well understood, many health activists are concerned that there is a worrying decrease in its use (this includes in the UK). This needs to change, and even Dr Vivien Tsu, the Director of PATH’s controversial HPV vaccine project now emphasises the need for more screening. In fact only last year Dr Tse co-authored an academic paper (financed by the Gates Foundation) that determined “that immediate implementation of HPV testing has the potential to save the lives of hundreds of thousands of women in India who are beyond the target age of HPV vaccination”.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Lindsey McGoey, p.162. The initial rapid roll-out of HPV vaccines in America was already considered controversial. One critic noted that in the US context: “Without regular Pap smears and followup, Gardasil and Cervarix will be at best expensive Band-Aids.” Melissa Haussman, *Reproductive Rights and the State: Getting the Birth Control, RU-486, and Morning-After Pills and the Gardasil Vaccine to the U.S. Market* (Praeger, 2013), p.141; also see Judith Siers-Poisson, “Women in Government, Merck’s Trojan Horse: Part 3 in a Series on the Politics and PR of Cervical Cancer,” *PR Watch*, July 10, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Sarojini N B, Sandhya Srinivasan, Madhavi Y, Srinivasan S, Anjali Sheno, “The HPV vaccine: science, ethics and regulation,” *Economic & Political Weekly*, November 27, 2010 p.32.

<sup>18</sup> Nicole Campos, Vivien Tse *et al.*, “Health impact of delayed implementation of cervical cancer screening programs in India: A modeling analysis,” *International Journal of Cancer*, 144 (4), 2019.

But even on the fairly uncontroversial issue of promoting cervical smears in India, US-based agencies (including the Gates Foundation) managed to undermine scientific protocols and public trust again. Thus, screening research undertaken in India between 1998 and 2015 resulted in the unnecessary sacrifice of 254 women's lives because research agencies "exploited local regulatory weaknesses and economic and social inequities" in a process that has been referred to as "ethics dumping". This meant that "effective methods of screening for cervical cancer were therefore withheld from 141,000 women in areas where it was known to be of high incidence and prevalence."<sup>19</sup> The sickening nature of this systemic exploitation are sadly nothing new. In her 2006 book *The Body Hunters: Testing New Drugs on the World's Poorest*, Sonia Shah wrote that given all the incentives that the Indian government has made for foreign investors...

...the potential for abuse of research subjects in India appears nearly unlimited. But if in the past government officials tolerated ethical lapses because most experimentation was oriented toward public health goals, no such trade-off exists today, for the modern body hunt in India proceeds by the logic not of public health but the profit-driven needs of distant drug companies.

The ongoing HPV debacle in India is not the first time that corporate powerbrokers have tried to force their 'help' upon the poor, but it has had lasting effects upon many people's faith in both Big Pharma and in vaccines more generally. In this regard, it is understandable that billions of people across the world have little trust in huge corporations to look after their health needs. This is why it is so vital that socialists continue to raise the popular demand that the powerful and largely unaccountable corporations that dominate our health landscape be nationalized and run under democratic control by the workers

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The paper notes that "an estimated 3.1% of women in India reported receiving a Pap smear in the last 3 years."

<sup>19</sup> Sandhya Srinivasan, Veena Johari and Amar Jesani, "Cervical cancer screening in India," in: Doris Schroeder et al. (Eds.), *Ethics Dumping: Case Studies from North-South Research Collaborations* (Springer, 2018), p.42, p.33.

themselves. This is critically important because fear of vaccines is dangerous for us all, as vaccines represent a critical health intervention that, despite the rampant profiteering on the part of corrupt elites, continues to serve the needs of the majority of humanity. So, when Big Pharma persist in subverting democratic norms by failing to develop drugs in an open and transparent manner they are damaging trust in medicines. It is clear that we must take away their monopoly powers over the life-saving vaccines that we do need.

One of the most insightful writers on the philanthropic abuses of Bill Gates in India is the Mumbai-based journalist Sandhya Srinivasan. She has written eloquently about the Gates Foundations scandalous involvement in all manner of interventions from the HPV nightmare through to their Malthusian-inspired efforts to regulate the fertility of the poor.<sup>20</sup> Writing in 2014 she states that the Gates Foundation's aim in India is...

...to install a public health model driven by private corporations, and revolving around the use of privately-owned technological interventions, a 'magic bullet' for each disease. While such a model is incapable of delivering public health, it is geared to deliver a private profit.<sup>21</sup>

As history shows, pharmaceutical companies have a reputation for burying awkward results from clinical trials on drugs which show harm to human life. In a sane world clinical trials would be conducted by scientists who are financially independent from pharmaceutical corporations. This is rarely the case. Independent scientists of course continue to do their best at critically scrutinizing all available research (although much remains hidden by corporations) to make evidence-

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<sup>20</sup> Sandhya Srinivasan, "Trials and tribulations: Ethics of clinical trials and vaccine research in India," *Himal*, April 17, 2016; Srinivasan, "Shifts in Medical Research: Influence of Private Capital," in: Imrana Qadeer (Ed.), *India: Social Development Report 2014: Challenges of Public Health* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> Sandhya Srinivasan, "The Gates Foundation in India: a primer," *Aspects of India's Economy*, 57, May 2014.

based recommendations as to the efficacy of various drugs and treatments. Often-times this leads to sharp disagreement and debates, and an important example of this is provided by recent meta-analyses of the health effects of the HPV vaccine.

On one side of this ongoing controversy are HPV vaccine advocates, many of whom work closely with the very corporations and foundations (GSK, Merck, and Gates) that seek to continue expanding the global use of the vaccine. While on the other side we have independent scientists, who have drawn attention to serious shortcomings in the manner in which the decision was made to roll-out HPV vaccines; and in doing so highlight the fact that their meta-analyses of HPV trials raise serious concerns about adverse health impacts associated with HPV vaccines. With billions of dollars of profits at stake, the unfortunate response to these reasonable if challenging questions about HPV vaccines has been to attack the messenger. This has involved launching a witch hunt against HPV critics which, amongst other things, has involved accusing critical scientists of being anti-vaxxers. Such smears are about as far from the truth as one can get.

### **Viral profiteering: how disease breeds greed**

Profiteering takes many forms but perhaps the most despicable of all is pandemic profiteering, and getting to the root of the history of this matter is more important than ever. In an opinion piece for the *New York Times* Gerald Posner, the author of *Pharma: Greed, Lies and the Poisoning of America* (Simon & Schuster, 2020), reminds us how profits trumped human need during the 1976 swine flu outbreak. He explains how for “several months, four drug firms – Merck’s Sharp & Dohme, Merrell, Wyeth, and Parke-Davis – refused to sell to the government the 100 million [vaccine] doses they had manufactured until they got full liability indemnity and a guaranteed profit.”<sup>22</sup> This wouldn’t be the first or last time that profiteering obscured access to life-saving drugs.

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<sup>22</sup> Gerald Posner, “Big Pharma may pose an obstacle to vaccine development,” *New York Times*, March 2, 2020.

The story of the anti-viral drug Oseltamivir (known as Tamiflu), a treatment that is still reaping millions for Big Pharma despite the fact that it was initially developed (as often is the case) by public researchers at the expense of ordinary taxpayers, is also revealing. Tamiflu profits keep flowing even though the considered evidence suggests that the anti-viral is next to useless. Tamiflu is the brand name drug produced by Roche and Gilead Sciences. The other related anti-viral that is manufactured by GSK to combat flu symptoms is Zanamivir (brand name Relenza), and it too does next to nothing except make huge sales. The release of both drugs for sale is mired in controversy. As Sid Wolfe and his coauthors noted in their book *Worst Pills, Best Pills: A Consumer's Guide to Avoiding Drug-Induced Death or Illness* (Pocket Books, 2005):

Zanamivir was reviewed by the FDA's Antiviral Drug Advisory Committee on February 24, 1999. This committee of 17 outside experts was asked by the FDA: 'Does the information presented by the applicant [Glaxo Wellcome] support the safety and effectiveness of zanamivir for treatment of influenza?' The committee voted 13 to 4 that it did not. (p.755)

This democratic and evidence-based decision did not please GSK profit-makers who immediately dispatched a furious and threatening letter to the FDA, who then capitulated to the pharma bully and approved the useless drug. The seventeen-page letter that had such a dramatic impact upon the FDA was written by James Palmer (who after 2000 assumed the position of GSK's second in charge of Research and Development working under Tachi Yamada). In his warning Palmer made it clear that refusal to approve zanamivir would endanger global efforts to stockpile drugs needed to respond to a future pandemic. Thus, as a direct result of this letter the lead biostatistician who oversaw the FDA's independent review, Michael Elashoff, was removed from his duties. Soon after this shameful episode the FDA decided to neglect organizing an independent scientific review of Tamiflu and simply approved it for use. Of course like zanamivir there was never any "convincing evidence that Tamiflu prevents influenza complications or reduces the spread of influenza to

other people.”<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, as the Director of Emergency Care Research at the US National Institutes of Health states: “Tamiflu often gives you some of the very symptoms you are trying to relieve, and at best will shorten your misery from influenza by a day.”<sup>24</sup> Little wonder that many people remain unconvinced by the sincerity of Big Pharma’s efforts to help those other than their shareholders, especially during times of global crisis. This dire situation is aptly summed up by Peter Gøtzsche who notes:

During the ten years leading up to WHO’s pandemic declaration of 2009, scientists associated with the companies that were to profit from the WHO’s ‘pandemic preparedness’ programmes, including Roche and GlaxoSmithKline, were involved at virtually every stage of the development of those programs. Roy Anderson, a prominent British epidemiologist and adviser to both the WHO and the UK government, gravely warned a BBC radio audience [in May 2009] that only Relenza and Tamiflu would prevent a catastrophe on the scale of the 1918 influenza pandemic. At the time, Anderson was receiving £116,000 per year from GlaxoSmithKline, manufacturer of Relenza. By declaring a pandemic and linking the response to

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<sup>23</sup> For a detailed discussion of this case, see Stefan Elbe, *Pandemics, Pills, and Politics: Governing Global Health Security* (John Hopkins University Press, 2018); also reviewed by Peter Gøtzsche, *Deadly Medicines and Organized Crime: How Big Pharma Has Corrupted Healthcare* (Taylor & Francis, 2013); On November 13, 2003, PBS’s Frontline aired a documentary entitled “Dangerous Prescription” that included an interview with FDA reviewer Michael Elashoff who stated: “Simply stated, Relenza just didn’t work in the United States clinical trials. It really had no effect at all on the symptoms of influenza. It had no effect at all on influenza complications. It maybe knocked half a day or less off the duration, and even that wasn’t established statistically. So, it was pretty much no different from placebo as far as efficacy.”

<sup>24</sup> Jeremy Brown, *Influenza: The Quest to Cure the Deadliest Disease in History* (Text Publishing, 2019), see chapter 8 (“The fault in our stockpiles: Tamiflu and the cure that wasn’t there”).



Tamiflu stockpiling, the WHO could not have done a better job of promoting Roche's interests.<sup>25</sup>

In fact, Sir Roy Anderson had joined GSK board of directors in October 2007 and remained there until May 2018.<sup>26</sup>

### **Pandemic UN-preparation in the UK and US**

When it comes to the huge pharmaceutical corporations that dominate the world of Big Pharma organized crime we should not be too surprised to find their dirty fingers dug deep within the public health sector. The British government's Chief Scientific Adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, who prior to taking up this prestigious appointment had been a President of Research and Development at GSK, is a case in point. Another high-profile individual overseeing the Tories pandemic 'response' is Jonathan Van-Tam who previously held senior positions at GSK, Roche, and Aventis Pasteur. Currently he is the UK's Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England. This is the same individual who acted as the chair of the government's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threat Advisory Group (NERVTAG) that oversaw "Exercise Cygnus" in late 2016. Exercise Cygnus was the pandemic-training exercise that demonstrated to the world that the

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<sup>25</sup> Peter Gøtzsche, *Vaccines: Truth, Lies and Controversy* (People's Press, 2020).

<sup>26</sup> Moreover, since December 2009 Sir Roy Anderson has served on the international advisory board of Hakluyt a "private intelligence firm... founded by former officials with MI6." We might add that in other related breaking news, on April 19<sup>th</sup> Lord Paul Deighton, the chairman of Hakluyt's holding company (Holdingham Group Ltd) was appointed by the UK government (at the last minute) to become Britain's PPE Czar. Whether this turns out to a good decision is by the way, as what is most critical is that the British government should have had a pandemic plan in place for manufacturing and delivering PPE many years ago. Jonathan Ansfield and Ian Johnson, "China's security ministry suspected slain businessman was a spy," *New York Times*, November 6, 2012.

NHS was totally unprepared for any future pandemic. As the *Daily Telegraph* revealed: “Minutes from a NERVTAG meeting held in the wake of Cygnus show that Dr Van Tam agreed to write to the Department of Health to repeat the committee’s concerns over the NHS stockpile of personal protective equipment.” But surprise, surprise, it turns out that this advice was never acted upon. In reality, Exercise Cygnus was undertaken specifically to demonstrate how *well* our health services “would cope with a major influenza outbreak with a maximum national death toll of 500,000.”<sup>27</sup> This is exactly the situation we are facing today.

Ultimately, however, the underlying reason why the British government was so ill-prepared for this pandemic is because the Tories initial ‘response’ was to sacrifice hundreds of thousands of people’s lives through the so-called ‘herd immunity’ strategy. In many respects this implicit tolerance of mass mortalities is a central part of any privatized health care system: those who are wealthy enough and can afford treatment and those who can’t... well, they die. This was emphasized in an article published in the *New Statesman* which stated that the British government’s “planning documents - which date from 2005 to 2018 but are mainly based on the 2011 ‘Influenza Preparedness Strategy’ - suggest that Britain may in fact have been prepared, just for the wrong outcome.” That is, the Tories were wholly reliant on the initial plans first devised disgracefully by New Labour, plans which only ever planned to “mitigate rather than suppress” the impact of any pandemic.<sup>28</sup>

## Gates to the rescue?

In contrast to almost all governments across the world, which failed to prepare for the type of pandemics they knew were just around the corner, in January 2017 a new group was formed in a last ditch attempt

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<sup>27</sup> Chris Smyth, “NHS fails to cope with bodies in flu pandemic test,” *The Times*, December 27, 2016; Bill Gardner and Paul Nuki, “England’s deputy chief medical officer ‘JVT’ warned ministers about PPE three years ago,” *Daily Telegraph*, April 26, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Harry Lambert, “Why weren’t we ready?,” *New Statesman*, March 30, 2020.

to overcome these serious problems. This was an initiative launched at an annual meeting of billionaires at the World Economic Forum in Davos which was called the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI). Early founders included the governments of Norway and India, the Gates Foundation and the Wellcome Trust. The billionaires present at Davos however weren't so keen to part with their own wealth, and by December 2018 CEPI were still \$250 million short of their initial \$1 billion funding target. It seems unlikely that capitalists will ever act to protect the public good: with a pandemic now in full deadly affect CEPI is still short of money – although last month they received a \$150 million boost from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a country which is still pursuing a war on Yemen with the active support of the British government.

As it turns out CEPI's founders were fully aware of the difficulties of getting capitalists to plan to prevent mass fatalities, and at its launch, Sir Jeremy Farrar (the head of the Wellcome Trust)<sup>29</sup> stated that...

...there has not been until CEPI came along, not been an ability to take those things forward when there's no commercial drive, when there's no market incentives, when there is no way of selling that, of making a profit. And the Coalition is determined to change that, to make sure that we have vaccines for everything that we are going to need.<sup>30</sup>

Three years later, on March 30, 2020, leading members of CEPI published a report in the *New England Journal of Medicine* concluding that: "A global financing system [that CEPI aims to be] that supports end-to-end development and large-scale manufacturing and deployment, ensures fair allocation, and protects private-sector

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<sup>29</sup> Sir Jeremy Farrar is currently serving alongside the GSK double-act (Sir Patrick Vallance and Jonathan Van-Tam) and others (including not least a Google executive) on the UK government's Scientific Advisory Group on Emergencies (SAGE).

<sup>30</sup> "Interview with Jeremy Farrar, Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations," *DW.com*, January 19, 2017.

partners from significant financial losses will be a critical component of future pandemic preparedness.”<sup>31</sup> The stand-out part of this statement emphasized the protection of corporations from financial losses. This is a fitting priority given that the lead author of this article (Nicole Lurie) is married to the former FDA boss turned current GSK board member Jesse Goodman. Thus, considering CEPI’s professed ambitions it is appropriate that GSK’s former President of Global Vaccines is a Strategic Advisor to CEPI’s CEO. Further illustrating the pernicious way in which Big Pharma’s interests weigh heavily upon CEPI’s potentially useful activities, in late 2018 Medecins Sans Frontieres pulled out of the Coalition citing concerns that it’s revised policy “no longer guarantees that the vaccines CEPI funds will be made available at an affordable price.”<sup>32</sup>

In the US context, pandemic preparedness has, like in Britain, a nearly non-existent priority in government circles. “Crimson Contagion” was the code-name for President Trump’s pandemic preparation project which was carried last year and was overseen by longstanding corporate lobbyist Robert Kadlec,<sup>33</sup> an individual who presently serves as the US Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and

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<sup>31</sup> Nicole Lurie *et al.*, “Developing Covid-19 vaccines at pandemic speed,” *New England Journal of Medicine*, May 21, 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Jenny Lei Ravelo, “Battle over CEPI’s access to vaccines policy deepens,” *Devex*, March 11, 2019; Medecins Sans Frontieres, “Open letter to CEPI board members: revise CEPI’s access policy,” March 5, 2019.

<sup>33</sup> In 2007 Robert Kadlec had left his position at the global management consulting firm PRTM to be appointed special assistant to the president for homeland security and senior director for biological defense policy, serving as the president’s principal advisor on issues pertaining to bioterrorism and pandemic influenza preparedness. Then in 2009 he rejoined PRTM as a vice president in its Global Public Sector business. This is a highly profitable business, and in 2014 alone Kadlec reportedly earned \$451,000 “advising a number of intelligence-related companies, including Invincea, a DARPA project, and Scitor, a contractor to the NSA.” Lee Fang, “Lobbyists for spies appointed to oversee spying,” *Intercept*, April 9 2015,

Response. Like in Britain the results of this secretive training exercise “drove home just how underfunded, underprepared and uncoordinated the federal government would be for a life-or-death battle with a virus for which no treatment existed.”<sup>34</sup> Unsurprisingly, nothing was done to address this problem.<sup>35</sup> Kadlec once worked closely with current CEPI board member Rajeev Venkayya in drafting the government’s 2006 Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act – a relationship that developed while Kadlec was serving as the Director for biodefense on the Homeland Security Council.

Like other Big Pharma executives, Rajeev Venkayya is well immersed in the controversies swirling around powerful vaccine manufacturers. Thus, after working on biodefense issues for the US government he became the head of vaccine delivery projects at the Gates Foundation (where he worked under Tachi Yamada), and then moved on to employment at Takeda Pharmaceutical – Japan’s largest drug manufacturer. Takeda has not been immune from the lurid crime of health profiteering. In April 2014 they made international headlines when a \$9 billion fine for punitive damages was levied against Takeda and Eli Lilly “for concealing possible health risks linked to their blockbuster diabetes drug Actos.” So, when Christophe Weber, Takeda’s new CEO arrived in post at exactly this moment of global notoriety, he drew upon his years of experience in leading executive positions at GSK. Later that same year celebrated his first success when it was announced that the proposed \$9 billion fine had been reduced to a paltry \$36.8 million!<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> David Sanger *et al.*, “Before virus outbreak, a cascade of warnings went unheeded,” *New York Times*, March 19, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> On March 3, 2020 Robert Kadlec reported that the government only had 10% of the required respirator masks that would be needed for medical professionals if the COVID-19 outbreak erupts into a “full-blown” pandemic. But even here Kadlec had done his maths wrong and he later corrected his statement to say they only had 1% of the required masks in stock.

<sup>36</sup> Andrew Ward, “Takeda and Eli Lilly fall foul of jury in Actos trial,” *Financial Times*, April 8, 2014; Jessica Dye, “U.S. judge slashes \$9 billion award vs Takeda, Lilly over diabetes drug,” *Reuters*, October

That profit-seeking individuals like Venkayya can flit so easily between the shadowy world of the national security state, foundations, and Big Pharma is disturbing, but especially so for conservative conspiracy theorists. But there is no conspiracy at work, as in each instance we should appreciate that such revolving doorways exist precisely because their abiding interests remain the same. All are united in their promotion of capitalist interests at the expense of human life. This helps explain why President Obama's chose Sylvia Mathews Burwell, a former President of the Gates Foundation's Global Development Program to serve as the US Secretary of Health and Human Services. Burwell is a millionaire, who after her tenure in this high-ranking government position then joined the board room of one of America's leading health insurers (GuideWell Mutual Holding Corporation) where she remains to this day.

Whether Democrats or Republicans the one thing that unites them is the profit motive, and so on the other end of the corporate political spectrum we might look at one of Burwell's Republican forerunners, Tommy Thompson, who served as the US Secretary of Health and Human Services (holding this post between 2001 and 2005) under President George W. Bush's administration. A focus upon Thompson is interesting in the context of the current crisis because when he retired he freely admitted that what worried him most was the threat posed by a human flu pandemic which, as he put it, could take the lives of up to 70 million people. "This is a really huge bomb that could adversely impact on the health of the world," he said at the time.<sup>37</sup> Yet on his watch, which overlapped and oversaw the biodefense efforts undertaken by Venkayya and Kadlec, his department...

...and the Pentagon spent \$14.5 billion to safeguard national security against largely hypothetical biological threats like smallpox and anthrax, even as they pursued a penny-pinching strategy to deal with the most dangerous and likely 'bioterrorist': avian influenza. The administration's lackadaisical response to

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28, 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Pear, "U.S. health chief, stepping down, issues warning," *New York Times*, December 4, 2004.

the pandemic threat (despite Secretary Thompson's personal anxiety) is only the tip of the iceberg. Over the last generation, writes *Lancet* editor Richard Horton, "The U.S. public-health system has been slowly and quietly falling apart."<sup>38</sup>

This was the opinion of socialist historian Mike Davis, author of *The Monster at Our Door: The Global Threat of Avian Flu* (The New Press, 2005), who went on to add:

Under Democrats as well as Republicans, Washington has looked the other way as local health departments have lost funding and crucial hospital surge capacity has been eroded in the wake of the HMO [Health Maintenance Organization] revolution. (A sobering 2004 Government Accounting Office [GAO] report confirmed that "no state is fully prepared to respond to a major public-health threat.") The federal government also has refused to address the growing lack of new vaccines and antibiotics caused by the pharmaceutical industry's withdrawal from sectors judged to be insufficiently profitable; moreover, revolutionary breakthroughs in vaccine design and manufacturing technology have languished due to lack of sponsorship by either the government or the drug industry.

So, the current healthcare problems facing the world were hardly unexpected; instead they were planned for by a dangerous economic system that is only programmed to care for its own profits.

### **Pandemic self-care and the fight for democracy**

Although this essay has only touched upon the full extent of the criminal corporate profiteering that takes place under the guise of delivering health care for all, what should be apparent is that this cannot be allowed to continue. Time and time again corporations have been found guilty of the most heinous of crimes, and capitalist politicians of all flavours have been sedated by their gifts and soothing

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<sup>38</sup> Mike Davis, "Avian Flu: A state of unreadiness," *The Nation*, January 29, 2005.

assurances that they have amended their bad old ways. Big Pharma have had their chances to change and they have failed.

In the early 1980s, John Braithwaite undertook the task of interviewing scores of the most powerful executives in the pharmaceutical industry and therein gave the world a horrifying insider's view of the world of Big Pharma. This exhaustive research led to a book titled *Corporate Crime in the Pharmaceutical Industry*, which documented the "abominable harm which group decision-making in the pharmaceutical industry has caused on many occasions." Yet although it is enlightening to explore the specific wrongdoings of corporate leaders it is vital that we delve below the level of such superficial symptoms so we can understand the underlying causes of such destructive practices. Braithwaite therefore observes that...

... most corporate crimes in the pharmaceutical industry cannot be explained by the perverse personalities of their perpetrators. One must question the proclivity in an individualistic culture to locate the source of evil deeds in evil people. Instead we should 'pay attention to the factors that lead ordinary men to do extraordinary things'. Rather than think of corporate actors as individual personalities, they should be viewed as actors who assume certain roles. The requirements of these roles are defined by the organization, not by the actor's personality. (p.2)

The required cure which flows from such a systemic view of corporate crime is that the political and economic system itself must be changed, although it wouldn't hurt if a few of the worst perpetrators of the pharmaceutical atrocities against humanity were punished too. Ultimately this must involve eradicating capitalism (to use a medical term) and replacing it with a democratic and socialist alternative.

But in order to prepare the way for achieving such revolutionary goals we must demand immediate reforms that can inoculate our body politic from the draining depredations of Big Pharma. A pandemic continues to wreak havoc across our planet, and under no circumstances can the proponents of Big Pharma be allowed to continue with business-as-usual. We urgently need a health system that can meet the needs of the global working-class and that cannot be delivered by the status quo. This means we must organize to seize



control of Big Pharma's assets so that their potentially life-enhancing knowledge and resources can be turned to the immediate goal of serving real human needs. Corporations must be democratically run by workers for workers, a process which will need to expand to other industries too. This will be a difficult task and in many situations will require the construction of new and democratic mass organizations of the working-class, but if we are to learn anything from this pandemic then it must be that the only people who are capable and willing of steering us through this current crisis will be ourselves, the global working-class.



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## THIRTEEN

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# The COVAX Smokescreen<sup>1</sup>

The rich get vaccines, and the poor get empty promises. The world thus remains divided between the greed of a handful of billionaires and the urgent health needs of the billions: all the while a self-obsessed ruling-class engorge themselves at the expense of our futures. Ordinary people in their billions, are thereby forced to endure poverty and degradation, while philanthropists like Bill Gates shout out from the rooftops about their humanity while propping up a failing economic system that thrives upon inequality.

In the midst of this deadly pandemic, pharmaceutical corporations happily join with Gates in celebrating his tech-savvy saintliness, but for the majority of the world's poor Gates (the mortal) is seen in a less flattering light. He is correctly seen as the embodiment of everything that is wrong with the world. He is the gentler side of capitalism personified. Gates doesn't just take... he gives back too; if only to ensure that the global capitalist machine that he worships can keep ploughing our bodies into the earth to yield profits for the few.

Over recent decades Bill Gates has moved frictionlessly from the world of computers to that of global public health, and in doing so has reinvented himself as the architect of health interventions that,

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter was first published on my blog on May 5, 2021.

most of all, benefit the powerful. This, of course, is not how Gates likes to present his almsgiving to the public. But he, more than any other individual, has succeeded in bringing the principles of privatization into the heart of global health systems; working to synchronize the goals of multi-lateral organization like the World Health Organization with the needs of Big Pharma.

Now it is common-sense that with effective vaccines in existence, these should be made available to the entire world, not just to those people residing in the richest countries. But this solution remains but a utopian dream. This distribution problem therefore represents a serious concern for ordinary people, and it is one that Bill Gates is fully aware of; in fact, it is an issue that Gates himself never stops warning the world about. For instance, on March 31, 2021, he blogged that:

The more the virus that causes COVID-19 is out there in the world, the more opportunities it has to evolve—and to develop new ways of fighting our defenses against it. If we don't get the vaccine out to every corner of the planet, we'll have to live with the possibility that a much worse strain of the virus will emerge.<sup>2</sup>

He then referred his readers to his own preferred COVAX initiative which he boasted had “recently announced that it’ll be able to deliver 300 million doses by mid-2021” – doses that will go to some of the poorest countries in the world. But this effort, as nice sounding as it is, represents far too little far too late; and even the philanthropic king himself admitted that “the world is going to need a lot more if we’re going to truly stamp out the threat of COVID-19.” Moreover, considering that his COVAX facility still represents the main means of getting vaccines out to every corner of the planet, it is more than a little concerning that COVAX is totally incapable to doing its stated job. We should also remember that COVAX’s existence would not even be necessary if it were not for Bill Gates’ own early and ongoing efforts to oppose the waiving of patent rights on vaccines: an inhumane

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<sup>2</sup> Bill Gates, “5 things you should know about variants,” *GatesNotes*, March 31, 2021.

action which helps ensure that vaccines remain largely inaccessible and unaffordable to the world's poor.

### **The roots of COVAX**

Launched in June 2020, COVAX is the vaccine pillar of the “Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator” (ACT-Accelerator) which had been set up in April by Gates and his lackeys as a means of counteracting popular demands that any forthcoming vaccine roll-out should prioritize global public health instead of protecting patents and corporate profits. The launching of this initiative therefore quickly marginalized the World Health Organization's own COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP), a project which took a more progressive approach to the pandemic by calling for “the global community to voluntarily share knowledge, intellectual property and data necessary for COVID-19.”

As the influence of Gates' billionaire lobbying had been central to the emergence of COVAX it is unsurprising that its day-to-day operations are currently being led by GaVi, the Vaccine Alliance, a well-known pro-corporate health initiative that was established by the Gates Foundation in 2000. The prioritizing of markets and corporate profits (through the use of public-private partnerships) has always been central to Gates' personal *modus operandi*, although you would be forgiven for missing this aspect of his so-called humanitarian work if you have ever read any of the propaganda about his do-gooding that saturates the mainstream media. Nevertheless, although studiously side-lined by Gates' many powerful corporate-backed sycophants, the philanthropist's many critics have always made their numerous and well-informed concerns with Gates' charitable work crystal clear to all who were willing to listen.<sup>3</sup> Writing just over a decade ago two such public health authors observed:

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<sup>3</sup> Tim Schwab, “Journalism's Gates keepers,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, August 21, 2020; Howard Waitzkin and the Working Group on Health Beyond Capitalism (Eds), *Health Care Under the Knife: Moving Beyond Capitalism for our Health* (Monthly Review Press, 2018).

At the first GaVi-partners meeting, the head of SmithKline Biologicals outlined the conditions for industry participation. These included ‘a guarantee for ‘reasonable prices’, support for a credible and sustainable market, respect for international property rights, a tiered pricing system including safeguards against re-export of products back from developing countries to high-priced markets, and a prohibition on compulsory licensing.’ Each of these conditions prioritizes profits over children’s lives. Moreover, industry representatives opposed technology transfer arrangements, claiming that vaccines were too complex for public research institutes and local production in developing countries.<sup>4</sup>

These are very much the same priorities that have been enshrined within COVAX’s operations. Indeed, one of the novel financing method utilized for securing COVAX’s ambitions is based upon the International Finance Facility for Immunisation (IFFIm), a facility that was founded in 2006 to better inoculate GaVi’s global health decision-making from democratic oversight. As described on their web site:

IFFIm receives long term, legally binding pledges from donor countries and, with the World Bank acting as Treasury Manager, turns these pledges into bonds. The money raised via Vaccine Bonds provides immediate funding for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

Critics of Gavi’s “vaccine bonds” however have demonstrated how the use of such bonds means that the setting of public health care priorities can now effectively “bypass national governmental control in recipient countries while simultaneously providing an ethical cover for business as usual by pharmaceutical companies”.<sup>5</sup> And it this model of

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<sup>4</sup> Anne-Emanuelle Birn and Joel Lexchin, “Beyond patents: The GAVI Alliance, AMCs and improving immunization coverage through public sector vaccine production in the global south,” *Human Vaccines*, 7(3), March 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Katharyne Mitchell and Matthew Sparke, “The New Washington Consensus: Millennial philanthropy and the making of global market

financing - overseen by GaVi — that was meant to help undergird COVAX’s so-called Advance Market Commitment (AMC), which as of April 7 had raised the hardly awe-inspiring sum of US\$6.3 billion. (Presently the UK government remains one of the few countries making heavy use of COVAX’s IFFIm option and has made a US\$675 million commitment for the period covering 2021 to 2025 but has only offered a direct payment to COVAX of US\$61 million. Other large direct payments have come from the Gates Foundation which has chipped in US\$156 million, with the biggest contributor being the United States, who had made a direct payment worth US\$2.5 billion.)

In addition to utilizing IFFIm, the COVAX AMC - as their own report (dated April 15) notes - “builds on the experience of the US \$1.5 billion Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV) AMC launched in 2009” by Gavi. This earlier “model” AMC is not however without its own significant problems and last June the campaigning group Doctors Without Borders criticized the PCV’s supposedly successful use of AMC funding. They pointed out that:

While the funding was intended to help encourage competition to reduce the overall price of PCV, in reality the bulk of the money essentially served as a subsidy for Pfizer and GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), which until December 2019 were the only two manufacturers of PCV. Of the \$1.5 billion, \$1.238 billion (82%) was disbursed to Pfizer and GSK.<sup>6</sup>

Their report concluded that while the vaccination effort had some successes, often partial,...

...the AMC mechanism in effect increased profits of multinational pharmaceutical corporations at rates higher than necessary to incentivize their involvement to achieve vaccine access in developing countries, while doing nothing meaningful

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subjects,” *Antipode*, 48(3), June 2016.

<sup>6</sup> “Analysis and critique of the Advance Market Commitment (AMC) for Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccines (PCVs) and impact on access,” *MSF Briefing Document*, June 2020.

to stimulate competition from developing-country vaccine manufacturers.

## **COVAX inequality**

On April 15, 2021, COVAX optimistically boasted that “around 1.8 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been reserved, but not yet locked in, through the COVAX AMC from a range of manufacturers.”<sup>7</sup> But these doses are for potential use into 2022, which means that even if all these doses do arrive at their planned destinations, then COVAX is still absolutely failing in its efforts to vaccinate the world. But of course, COVAX’s aims were far more limited in the short-term, as they are only attempting to vaccinate 2.5% of people in the poorest 92 AMC-eligible countries by the end of May – countries which have a combined population of nearly 4 billion people.

Of course, COVAX does plan to provide more than 2.5% coverage in later months and years, and pledge to vaccinate 20% of any given country’s population, but these conservative ambitions are nowhere near good enough to prevent the global spread of the pandemic in the here and now! After all what is the point of a handful of rich countries being able to vaccinate most of their own populations while the pandemic continues to ravage human life in the rest of world while undergoing dangerous potentially vaccine-resistant mutations?

Making matters worse, many of the COVAX vaccines that were planned to be distributed all over the world over the past few months were to be produced and shipped from India, but owing to the devastating nature of the pandemic surge in India, their government – which is COVAX’s main supplier – has taken the decision to block most vaccine exports. This means that COVAX is now only able to potentially “deliver 145 million doses instead of about 240 million” by the end of May (enough to vaccinate less than 2% of the populations of the poorest 92 countries).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, contrast the woefully

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<sup>7</sup> *One World Protected: The Gavi COVAX AMC Investment Opportunity*, GAVI, April 15, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Gabriele Steinhauser, “What is Covax and how will it deliver Covid-19 vaccines to poorer countries?,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 19, 2021.



insufficient 1.8 billion doses that COVAX has so far managed to reserve (but has not locked in) with the more than 500 million doses that were ordered by the UK government alone. Or consider the fact that richer countries are still able to purchase vaccines directly from COVAX stocks: the most recent example being the Venezuelan government which purchased around 11 million doses from COVAX for an initial outlay of US\$64 million (with another US\$60 million to be paid later).

Finally, it is important to contextualize the relatively small sums of money being ‘donated’ to COVAX and other critical global health initiatives by the most powerful countries in the world. For example, total annual funding for the World Health Organization runs at just over US\$2 billion – representing “less than the budget of many major hospitals in the United States”.<sup>9</sup> And while COVAX has received just over US\$6 billion – with the largest chunk of funding coming from the US government (with another US\$2 billion pledged) – it is informative to compare the scale of this funding to the recent increase in US military funding. Thus just before the pandemic broke President Trump announced a record-breaking annual request of US\$740.5 billion for national security, which President Biden evidently deems insufficient as last month he requested a life-sapping US\$753 billion (a 1.7% increase) to be spent on warmongering, and this is their military budget for just one year!

### **Releasing the patents**

Socialists and critical public health experts have always opposed the use of market-based solutions to resolve pressing public health problems that are inflicted upon the world by the likes of Bill Gates and his friends in high places at the World Bank. But in mid-February even the president of the World Bank went on the record to express his concerns with COVAX’s severe limitations, stating the obvious fact

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<sup>9</sup> Srikanth Reddy, Sumaira Mazhar and Raphael Lencucha, “The financial sustainability of the World Health Organization and the political economy of global health governance: a review of funding proposals,” *Globalization and Health*, 14(119), 2018.

that “manufacturers are reluctant to commit the doses to developing countries while they have the chance to sell it, or provide it, at a higher price to the advanced economies”. As if all this were not bad enough, around the same time Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the director general of the WHO, noted that their ACT-Accelerator (of which COVAX was just one part) was “still \$19 billion short of the funds it needs to expand access not just to vaccines but also to diagnostics and treatments like oxygen.” Little wonder that the *Lancet* medical journal concluded that “COVAX is wholly unequipped to resolve many of the most pressing threats to its mission.”<sup>10</sup>

A rising tide of public anger at the major shortcomings of the global response to the pandemic, however, is now serving to push more critical arguments in the mainstream press. For example, last month Dr. Tedros finally felt pressurized to raise more far-reaching criticisms about COVAX in an opinion piece he wrote for the *New York Times* (April 22). First off, he pointed out the increasing disparity of health outcomes between rich and poorer nations highlighting how:

[O]f the more than 890 million vaccine doses that have been administered globally, more than 81 percent have been given in high- and upper-middle-income countries. Low-income countries have received just 0.3 percent.<sup>11</sup>

The WHO head had seemingly reached the end of his tether and he emphasized that COVAX had so far proved “totally insufficient” having only “distributed 43 million doses of vaccine to 119 countries – covering just 0.5 percent of their combined population of more than four billion.” Dr. Tedros went on to point out how “many of the world’s biggest economies” currently funding the COVAX initiative had simultaneously “undermined it” with “a handful of rich countries

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<sup>10</sup> George Parker *et al.*, “G7 leaders vow to boost vaccine supplies to developing world, *Financial Times*, February 19, 2021; Editorial, “Access to COVID-19 vaccines: looking beyond COVAX,” *Lancet*, March 13, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, “I run the W.H.O., and I know that rich countries must make a choice,” *New York Times*, April 22, 2021.

gobbling up the anticipated supply as manufacturers sell to the highest bidder”. Likewise, he added, “vaccine diplomacy has undermined Covax as countries with vaccines make bilateral donations for reasons that have more to do with geopolitical goals than public health.” It is for such reasons that Dr. Tedros asked medical companies if they could now step up and support the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool – the WHO’s more progressive alternative to Gates’ ACT-Accelerator. Yet perhaps the most significant solution proposed by Dr. Tedros to redress the ongoing problems caused by COVID-profiteering was “to waive intellectual property rights on Covid-19 products” - something that was argued for last October at the World Trade Organization (WTO) by the governments of South Africa and India amongst others.

Similar demands for opening access to vaccine patents have been repeatedly made by health experts throughout the pandemic. A recent article published by four influential health commentators made the obvious point that for “low-income countries, COVAX is a vaccine lifeline when the prices of bilateral agreements become too high.” They then went on to highlight how the limited resources devoted to COVAX by high-income countries means that vaccine hoarding countries can falsely emphasize to the world how caring they are while still relying on COVAX supplies as “an insurance mechanism should their bilaterally-agreed supplies fall short.” Little wonder that the writers concluded that “COVAX is serving as a smokescreen to cover up vaccine nationalism.” They continued:

The cost of medicines is seen as the root problem of access to vaccines and technology. Hence the campaign for a temporary suspension (waiver) of intellectual property rights protected under the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) agreement of the WTO for all medical products required to fight the pandemic.

South Africa and India put forward a proposal for a vaccine waiver supported by developing countries and civil society campaigns. However this was blocked by the EU, US, UK, and Switzerland among other high-income states.

This deadly blockage on the production of the necessary vaccines — which can help alleviate the spread of the pandemic — serves to endanger us all, but particularly those in the world’s poorest countries. This is why it is necessary for trade unions and community groups in high-income states to demand that their governments place the need of humanity before protecting the needs of corporate profiteers. An example of such effective organizing can be seen through the recent activism of Socialist Alternative council member Kshama Sawant.<sup>12</sup> By working alongside various trade unionists and civic groups Sawant managed to force Seattle City Council to pass a resolution (on April 26) calling on President Biden to end his government’s opposition to the international campaign for an Intellectual Property Rights waiver from the WTO for COVID-19 vaccines. On the day this resolution was passed, Sawant said:

I congratulate our movement on winning today’s City Council resolution, urging the Biden administration to put human lives before billionaire profit, and remove the WTO patent restrictions to allow all billions of people to have access to the life-saving vaccine. This resolution demonstrates our movement’s rejection of the status quo of profit-driven vaccine apartheid and vaccine nationalism, and our fight for vaccine internationalism, for a People’s Vaccine!...

Billionaires are lying when they claim that these profits are necessary to develop future vaccines and treatments, because clinical innovations have been possible only thanks to overwhelming amounts of public funding, and the hard work of many publicly-funded salaried researchers, not by billionaires.

But passing resolutions is not enough to force the hands of the billionaire-class, which is why Sawant continues to organize on the streets to build the type of socialist mass movement that can wrest a People’s Vaccine from the capitalist class. On May Day this saw Sawant and her supporters take their protest to the offices of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in Seattle where they demanded that

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<sup>12</sup> Kshama Sawant, “Big Pharma puts the world in danger,” *International Socialist Alternative*, April 30, 2021.

Biden and Gates immediately act to remove patent restrictions to allow the production of generic versions of all lifesaving COVID-19 devices.

### **Bill Gates and the question of public funding**

The focus on Bill Gates' unique role in blocking solutions to the COVID nightmare enveloping the planet is worth reflecting upon here for two reasons: firstly because of his widely publicized defence of the indefensible, that is the protection of patents for COVID vaccines; but also because of his role in ensuring that one of the first vaccines that made it to market remained accessible only to those with the requisite buying power. The vaccine in question is now widely referred to as the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, but we should recall that when it first successfully developed by researchers at Oxford University in April 2020, the researchers involved in its discovery had promised that the rights for producing their vaccine would be made freely available to all drug manufacturers. This after all was a vaccine that was developed, like most vaccines, as a direct result of public sector funding - with less than 2% of the identified funding for the development of the Oxford vaccine derived from private industry.<sup>13</sup> But Gates knew better than to allow a vaccine to be used to help the world, and with a little persuading a "few weeks later, Oxford—urged on by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—reversed course. It signed an exclusive vaccine deal with AstraZeneca that gave the pharmaceutical giant sole rights and no guarantee of low prices".

AstraZeneca subsequently arrived at a rare compromise with the rest of the world when they promised that, in the short-term, the corporation would not turn a profit from its COVID-19 vaccine. But it turns out that there remains an important clause in this agreement, which determined that as soon as the corporation believes the

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<sup>13</sup> Leigh Phillips, "Thank socialism for the vaccine. Blame capitalism for its distribution," *Jacobin*, December 22, 2020; Michael Safi, "Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid vaccine research 'was 97% publicly funded'," *The Guardian*, April 15, 2021.

pandemic is over, then their profiteering can begin.<sup>14</sup> Other problems similarly reside in the small print, as prices paid for the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine vary considerably. Such discriminatory variations, as one might expect, caused some controversy in South Africa – one of the countries where the Oxford-AstraZeneca was trialled on humans – who found out that they were sold the vaccine at nearly 2.5 times the cost it was sold to the European Union (with the EU paying less for the vaccine than the UK government – costs per dose were US\$2.15 for the EU, US\$3 for the UK, and US\$5.25 for South Africa).<sup>15</sup>

## Global solidarity?

As this pandemic has starkly illustrated, we are struck in the tragic position where the most powerful countries in the world are refusing to take the necessary actions to help prevent the spread of the pandemic. It seems that the only time that such capitalist powerbrokers ever act with any urgency is when they feel they can turn a profit, either for their country or for their billionaire friends.

So, with good knowledge of the funding problems that laid ahead, in March 2020 the World Health Organization created the first means by which members of the global public could contribute towards their COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund. Yet as is so often the case, in reality it seems that the main target donors for this so-called solidarity fund were members of the billionaire-class seeking to garner some cheap publicity. I say this because by the end of last year the WHO had observed that “more than 650,000 leading companies, organizations and individuals [had] committed over US\$239.2 million” to the Fund – which works out to be an average rate of funding of US\$370 per donor... hardly much of a sacrifice for the world’s leading companies. Individual donors are not listed on the Fund’s web site, but corporate donors who are prominently advertized include the likes of Facebook, Google, GlaxoSmithKline, Johnson &

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<sup>14</sup> Donato Paolo Mancini, “AstraZeneca vaccine document shows limit of no-profit pledge,” *Financial Times*, October 7, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Owen Dyer, “Covid-19: Countries are learning what others paid for vaccines,” *British Medical Journal*, January 29, 2021.

Johnson, Morgan Stanley, and Walmart.<sup>16</sup> However, as if this poor show of international solidarity were not bad enough it seems that the rate of support for this Fund had slowed considerably, and a further 19,000 donations had only garnered another US\$8 million from the global ruling-class. Compare this paltry sum to the trillions of dollars that the super-rich have amassed in savings during this pandemic. Or contrast this lacklustre display of corporate aid with the generosity of ordinary members of the public: where, in the UK alone, the public donated £5.4 billion to charitable causes between January and June 2020 (equivalent to just short of US\$7.5 billion).<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps partly born out of frustration with the dangerously slow pace of global vaccinations, in February 2021 the “co-creator of the Oxford University/AstraZeneca jab” Professor Sarah Gilbert lent her name to support a new funding initiative called “Arm in arm” which sought to collect donations from the public to help pay for the costs of vaccinating the rest of the world. Although the money generated through this program is again being channelled to the WHO’s COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund, the difference between this initiative and the official WHO fundraising project is that the Arm in arm project has used their social media channel to raise important criticisms of the pro-corporate narrative being pushed by the likes of Bill Gates. Thus one of Arm in arm’s first tweets highlighted the results of a public survey that highlighted how the majority of British people believed “the UK government should press pharmaceutical companies to share their Covid vaccine formula to allow doses to be rolled out faster.” More recently still, on May 1, Arm in arm tweeted an article that outlined the devastating impact that Tory cuts to foreign aid budgets would have for an ongoing academic study being undertaken in collaboration with the University of Oxford that was concerned with developing “vital coronavirus research, including a project tracking variants in India”. On the same day the fund-raising

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<sup>16</sup> <https://covid19responsefund.org/en/supporters/>

<sup>17</sup> Chase Peterson-Withorn, “The world’s billionaires have gotten \$1.9 trillion richer in 2020,” *Forbes magazine*, December 16, 2020; *UK Giving - Covid-19: A Special Report*, Charities Aid Foundation, October 2020.

initiative also retweeted a post calling for Big Pharma to waive vaccine patents – providing a link to an article that lambasted Bill Gates for promoting the lie that it would be impossible to scale up vaccine production if patents on vaccines were ever relaxed.

In contrast to adopting such a critical position on the issue of drug patents, the same questioning attitude is never likely to be vocalized by the WHO Foundation, a new philanthropic body that was formed in May 2020. The creation of this foundation is not a good omen, and in many ways only serves to reflect the increasing influence that the Gates Foundation has exerted over the recent evolution of the WHO and the corporatization of global health care provision. In explaining why this new philanthropy was established the WHO Foundation pointed out that its formation owed much to the fact that the WHO itself “is not set up to approach individual or corporate donors.” As they went on to note:

For example, High Net Worth Individuals (HNWIs) look for a personalized process in which they can invest and engage, and the WHO Foundation can provide that. Furthermore, the WHO Foundation, as an independent entity, can offer tax incentives to donors.

In December the WHO Foundation subsequently announced that their inaugural CEO would be Anil Soni, an elite powerbroker who was recruited directly from the ranks of Big Pharma – with Soni having the added ‘benefit’ of being a former senior advisor to the Gates Foundation. And while High Net Worth Individuals seem to remain the WHO Foundation’s primary target audience, last week (on April 28) the WHO Foundation launched a new project called “Go Give One” to fund the work of COVAX. In many ways this new initiative duplicates the work being undertaken by Arm in arm, however, the primary difference between the two fund-raising initiatives is that the WHO Foundation’s messaging is unlikely to stray from neoliberal narratives that promote only personalized cross-class solutions to the deep-rooted problems that are caused by capitalist greed.



## Real solutions

In February 2021, the South African delegation to the World Trade Organization reaffirmed what most ordinary people of the world already know, that the pandemic represented a huge threat to us all and that COVAX was not a solution that was able to remedy this global problem.<sup>18</sup> The South African representative observed that “the model of donation and philanthropic expediency cannot solve the fundamental disconnect between the monopolistic model it underwrites and the very real desire of developing and least developed countries to produce for themselves.” Simply put, they said, the “problem with philanthropy is that it cannot buy equality.” That is right, but to get to the real root of the issue we really need to see the underlying problem as capitalism itself. Philanthropy is after all just one tool among many that the billionaire-class relies upon to prop up a political and economic system that is premised upon inequality. This is why nice-sounding platitudes about Bill Gates (and other capitalists) wanting to help the poor need to be perpetually rammed down our throats by the mainstream media. But in peering beneath all the billionaire-classes harmonious mantras, philanthropic investments are continuing to play a critical role in sustaining a crumbling status quo that is premised upon exploitation. In this way we can see how...

COVAX presents a high-stakes demonstration of Gates’s deepest ideological commitments, not just to intellectual property rights but also to the conflation of these rights with an imaginary free market in pharmaceuticals—an industry dominated by companies whose power derives from politically constructed and politically imposed monopolies. Gates has been tacitly and explicitly defending the legitimacy of knowledge monopolies since his first Gerald Ford-era missives against open-source software hobbyists. He was on the side of these monopolies during the miserable depths of the 1990s African

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<sup>18</sup> “23 February 2021: South Africa’s interventions at the WTO TRIPS Council,” *Knowledge Ecology International*, March 1, 2021.

AIDS crisis. He's still there today, defending the status quo and running effective interference for those profiting by the billions from their control of Covid-19 vaccines.<sup>19</sup>

Owing to Gates' ongoing ability to reap immense profits from the current system – with his personal wealth actually increasing during the pandemic – his ability to interfere in global politics knows few boundaries and is certainly not limited to facilitating private profiteering from public health.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Gates is also at the forefront of pushing false solutions to the ongoing climate disaster facing our planet, and earlier this year he even found the time to publish a book titled *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster: The Solutions We Have and the Breakthroughs We Need*. Herein Gates makes a number of “depressingly familiar” proposals for how to prevent the unfolding climate disaster, none of which include the urgent need to transition away from capitalism towards a socialist alternative.<sup>21</sup> His rhetoric, even if it is not intended to, does however give some indications of the direction of travel that is necessary to embark upon if we are to generate real solutions to both the climate and COVID crises.

Gates is right that “Every country will need to change its ways.” And it is true, as he asserts in his book, that “It would be immoral and impractical to try to stop people who are lower down on the economic ladder from climbing up.” This is precisely why socialists continue to campaign for the ending of a global economic system that prioritizes profit before human life – a system that deliberately divides the world between the haves and the have-nots, and between two classes, the ruling-class and the working-classes. And in terms of the serious environmental problems facing our planet, Gates is correct in stating:

[T]his isn't primarily a technological problem. It's a political and economic problem. People cut down trees not because people

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<sup>19</sup> Alexander Zaitchik, “How Bill gates impeded global access to covid vaccines,” *The New Republic*, April 12, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Tim Schwab, “While the poor get sick, Bill Gates just gets richer,” *The Nation*, October 5, 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Grace Blakeley, “Bill Gates can't save the planet,” *Jacobin*, March 3, 2021.

are evil; they do it when the incentives to cut down trees are stronger than the incentives to leave them alone.

Such incentives are of course driven by capitalism's life-degrading priorities. And, yes, there is a very urgent need for ordinary people to deal with the very real political and economic problem that enables the ruling-class to direct and profit from the daily grind and impoverishment of the rest of us.

Finally, Gates is right that the primary answer to the ongoing oppression of our class and the destruction of our planet revolves around ordinary people taking "concerted political action". As he puts it:

It's easy to feel powerless in the face of a problem as big as climate change. But you're not powerless. And you don't have to be a politician or a philanthropist to make a difference. You have influence...

But while Gates emphasizes the role of individuals as political actors who content themselves with working strictly within the strict limits of a capitalist system, increasing numbers of people are coming to the important realization that the working-class will always feel powerless so long as capitalism exists.

So, if we are serious about creating the type of democratic and socialist society that works to benefit the many not just the few, billions of people will need to take "concerted political action" — whether this be through protests on the streets or by linking up to organize powerful general strikes. Only then, when we take such powerful militant actions, will we be able to begin the process of transforming society so that human priorities are able to inform our politics and economics. As ultimately it will be through this process of struggle, a fight that needs to be waged worldwide in a climate of genuine solidarity, that the working-class will be able to prevent the impending climate catastrophe and safeguard our collective futures against this pandemic and any other future health disasters.



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## FOURTEEN

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# Preventing the Next Pandemic<sup>1</sup>

“After weathering the initial onslaught of Covid-19, we can’t go back to normal. Normal is what led to this, and more of it means there will be more pandemics, and they could well be worse.” This is the measured conclusions of the influential scientific journalist, Debora MacKenzie, who is the author of the just-released book *The Pandemic that Never Should Have Happened and How to Stop the Next One*.

Moving forward “We have to take the obvious preventive measures,” she says, to protect our society from future pandemics. But her conclusions fail to offer up solutions for how we might overcome the limitations of the old normal. Like the elephant in the room, missing from her many recommendations is the most the obvious preventive measure, that is ensuring the thoroughgoing democratization of political decision-making processes. A transformative action that can only be achieved by ordinary people rising-up and pushing forward a global transition to the type of socialist society whereby human needs direct political choices not the need to make profit.

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter was first published online by *International Socialist Alternative* on July 29, 2020.

MacKenzie, despite her pro-capitalist solutions to a crisis that many accept was caused by capitalism, is at least able to understand that the “political action” of ordinary people will be key to ensuring that society moves forward to help prevent future pandemics. Pushing her readers to action, she writes:

The more people understand what we need to do, the more likely it is to be done. People vote. People march. People pressure. People decide to study virology or public health or nursing or vaccine engineering or communications. Public activism drove the development of HIV drugs and made them affordable. It drove the introduction of sanitation, the massive success of vaccination, the beginning of the end of smoking.

Yet this liberal call for action has its limits, as our entire political system is opposed to the working-class having a genuine democratic say in how our society is organized.

The barriers to change ahead of us are massive: after all, even by her own analysis it is absolutely clear that the extent of the devastation being wrought by the latest pandemic on our planet, but particularly upon its poorest residents, was foreseeable and completely avoidable. For more than a century we have known how to protect people from pandemics, but the problem we face is that the capitalist politicians who rule the globe have never been particularly bothered about protecting human life if it infringes upon their ability to make money. MacKenzie lays out the relevant evidence to highlight this point, but veers away from the anti-capitalist solutions that would seem to logically flow from her own observations. By way of an example, she illustrates how in two of the richest countries of the world, capitalist politicians not only failed to make pandemic preparation plans but also systematically undermined their own countries health care systems. She writes:

The minimal importance accorded public health was reflected in widespread cuts after the financial crisis of 2008. There has been a surge in hepatitis, Legionnaires’, and diseases transmitted by sex or drinking water across the US, which public health experts attribute to health departments losing a fifth of

their employees during that time. This is now hampering efforts to contain Covid-19.

In Europe, too, investment in public health plummeted after 2008. In 2019, a British think tank calculated that public health spending in England had fallen by £870 million just since 2014 and that this may have caused 130,000 deaths and a rise in chronic conditions, like diabetes, that incidentally also make you more likely to die from Covid-19.

MacKenzie doesn't delve into the nefarious ways that ruling-class politicians have even more ruthlessly engaged in the undermining and privatization of the already extremely limited healthcare systems provided in poorer countries. She does however focus on the unwillingness of richer countries to support meaningful pathogens surveillance in poorer nations. "It's almost as if rich countries are interested in riding to the rescue in emergencies, but not in preventing the disease emergence that causes emergencies in the first place," she concludes. That is true: this is all evidence of a vicious class war being waged by the ruling-class upon the rest of us.

### **Capitalist glitches?**

MacKenzie's criticisms of the current political systems inability to protect human life are carried out gently, perhaps because she understands how "surprisingly fragile" our "globalized, interdependent world" really is. Apparently: "Profit-driven markets can do wonderful things, but not everything." Elsewhere she explains how "China's bureaucracy is not the only system failure in this saga of global disease mismanagement. Western capitalism has its glitches as well." Here MacKenzie misses the point that the common factor linking these two political systems is that both are capitalist, and both have a lot more than a few glitches... exploitation of the working-class is something that is hard-wired into both China's authoritarian blend of capitalism and the West's more democratic iterations.

Moving on to the obvious problems that render our societies vulnerable to pandemics, she states that "state-owned" pharmaceutical

companies that “undertake work for the public good” are now a thing of the past in the West.

Hence since the 1980s, drug development “is all done by private companies that are required to turn a profit.” She continues: “It’s not because they’re mean, it’s because we decided as a society to do it that way, influenced by ideas that as much as possible should be done by the market rather than government.” But did “we” really make this decision to prioritize the profits of the super-rich? Or were the popular political alternatives simply not presented to us as “viable” by our capitalist leaders?

“Despite increasing alarm among researchers and global health experts about emerging infectious disease for almost three decades now, the mainstream attitude, especially in rich countries, has been complacency” says MacKenzie. It appears that a handful of elites who have been able to accumulate immense riches at power at the expense of the majority of humanity, has felt entitled to wash their hands of any responsibility for helping develop the medicines that can help protect us against pandemics. So, while vaccine production has been privatized, “in many cases, profits have been too low to encourage new investment,” so we are left stranded without access to the vaccines that we might need. This refusal of elites to invest in life-saving medicines when the profits are deemed too low is a much broader problem, as the “same market failure stifles R&D for other vital medicines...most worryingly new antibiotics.” This means that “we risk losing antibiotics” that are effective. As MacKenzie explains:

In 2014, a blue-ribbon commission in the UK reported that 700,000 people a year were already dying worldwide of antibiotic-resistant infections, 50,000 just in Europe and the US—but by 2050, this number could jump to 10 million a year, more than die of cancer and more than seven times the number who die in road accidents...

This really matters to our risk of viral pandemics. We need new antibiotics to treat the bacterial complications of viral disease, especially in a pandemic where rocketing antibiotic use might lead to rocketing resistance to our existing drugs.



Again, the obvious solution to this systemic problem would be to simply nationalize the entire pharmaceutical sector, bringing it under the direct democratic control of workers and their democratic trade unions.

After all, why should corporations be allowed to make billions selling us “blood pressure pills, arthritis drugs, or Viagra,” all highly profitable drugs, but then refuse to undertake the research necessary to protect the entire world from future pandemic? Not to mention the immense profiteering such companies make from hugely expensive cancer treatments which are often of questionable merit (in terms of extending life expectancy).<sup>2</sup>

### **Fake alternatives**

In part MacKenzie agrees with encouraging some level of public ownership to address the so-called glitches of capitalism when she states: “Producing medicine for the public good rather than profit may be coming back, and it’s about time.” Her limited solutions are however highlighted by the success story she goes on to recount, that being the “public-private partnerships [that] have emerged to develop drugs and vaccines for diseases mostly found in poor countries, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and others.” But we should be clear that these highly unequal and undemocratic partnerships are being promoted by the same type of elite ‘philanthropists’, like Bill Gates, who have spent their lives opposing government involvement in the provision of public health services. Such “public-private partnership” non-solutions can only possibly be viewed as positive if you start from the failed premise that the implementation of democratically planned public services is impossible. It is therefore wrong to view such partnerships as representing a potential “silver lining to the dark cloud of Covid-19.”

Capitalist markets are not only unwilling but are institutionally incapable of helping humanity “develop products we desperately need for the public good”. MacKenzie leans in the direction of making such

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<sup>2</sup> Deborah Cohen, “Cancer drugs: high price, uncertain value,” *British Medical Journal*, October 4, 2017.

arguments when she states: “We need to stop relying on [profit-driven markets] to do what only governments can do and develop products we desperately need for the public good, including new antibiotics, vaccines that everyone can afford—and better ventilators”. Yet, ever the optimistic, she believes that some capitalist governments had “tried” to do this in the United States but had just “failed.” Perhaps they just needed to try harder. But this is not really an issue of trying, because when it comes to the issue of killing people there is always plenty of public money to finance private profits. Hence successive US governments never fail in securing hundreds of billions of dollars of public money to finance their capitalist war machine. As MacKenzie muses: “There are dozens of calculations showing the cost equivalent in fighter jets or nukes, which governments apparently can afford, compared with the costs to develop, produce, and stockpile the lifesaving medical goods we need.”

In contrast to many other academic writers MacKenzie also highlights the key role that the working-class play in keeping the global economy going; a matter which has become even clearer because of role played by essential workers during this pandemic. She explains how...

...a lot of critical infrastructure depends on low-income people. It has long been known that low-income people are more likely to die of infectious disease generally, due to underlying poor health and, in some countries, lack of access to medical care. The worse outcomes with Covid-19 among disadvantaged racial minorities in the US suggest that, unsurprisingly, this applies to pandemic disease too. A massive British study released in May found the poorest patients with Covid-19 were almost twice as likely to die as the richest, and it mostly wasn't because they had pre-existing illnesses. Meanwhile, say economists, income inequality already showed every sign of continuing to deepen, while research has found that epidemics disproportionately hurt the poor, making things worse.

As a socialist these all represent good reasons for the global working-class to fight back to address this institutionalized inequality. However, MacKenzie is mainly making these points to demonstrate how fragile our extremely interconnected world is when it comes to the threats

posed by pandemics (including that of COVID-19). This is because the “less those [lower-income] people can withstand a pandemic, the more the system that supports everyone is at risk of collapse. More inequality, and more poverty, means more risk.” Indeed, to help make our society pandemic proof MacKenzie states that we to ensure that all workers get paid sick leave “so employees do not engage in “presenteeism”—going to work sick”. This final demand is one that socialists and trade unionists across the world have continued to fight for throughout this pandemic and will do so with even more insistence in its wake. But we should be sure that capitalists are not going to give into such workplace demands without us launching an almighty fight-back against their institutionalized oppression.

### **Lessons learned from the Swine flu pandemic**

Reflecting her largely uncritical engagement with the toxic role played by capitalism in laying waste to human life globally, MacKenzie continues to defend Big Pharma against some of their best-informed detractors - — a cause she rallied to in the wake of the 2009 Swine flu (H1N1) pandemic. To recap, the 2009 pandemic killed an estimated 300,000 worldwide, but controversially - — owing to a lack of testing - — the initial global body count for the pandemic was reported as being just short of 20,000 individuals. This led to obvious questions being raised about why the pandemic alarm had been activated by the World Health Organization (WHO) at all, which led to the related questioning of how this might be linked to the profits of Big Pharma. MacKenzie responded, then as now, by joining with Big Pharma in denigrating such critics.

Big Pharma’s influence over the setting of global health priorities including at the WHO is of course hardly new. But with the increasing privatization of global health systems the influence of Big Pharma has certainly become more visible, especially with the growing promotion of public-private partnerships. So, in some ways it is understandable why the Swine flu pandemic triggered closer scrutiny of the WHO’s decision-making process, all the more so because of the misreporting in the media. MacKenzie however is outraged that anyone could question the good intentions of all involved in sounding

the alarm on the pandemic, saying that those individuals who challenge the official Swine flu narrative are promoting “poisonous claptrap, of the kind that has only gotten louder in the years since.” As she states...

...part of the attack on the WHO was led by the kind of people who have come to be called denialists: people who reject scientific information—even observable reality—that doesn’t fit with claims that we are all victims of a giant conspiracy between big companies, corrupt governments, and (to them) shadowy scientists and international agencies. Swine flu was not really a pandemic, they claimed....

And while it is a problem that some people do reject all scientific information, the issue that seems to have infuriated MacKenzie most was that a democratic and public inquiry had been organized by the Council of Europe. A far-reaching critical examination which focused not just upon issues of corporate interference but also upon the legitimacy of the scientific protocols that were followed during the pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> As Sudeepa Abeysinghe explains: “One of the loudest voices of criticism of the actions of the WHO came from the German epidemiologist/physician and Council of Europe parliamentarian Wolfgang Wodarg. Wodarg was the first institutional critic of the WHO’s handling of H1N1, and emphasized what he described as the undue influence of pharmaceutical manufacturers upon the WHO’s actions. His voice was prominent in the Council of Europe’s discussion of the events. In addition, key expert witnesses (most notably, the epidemiologists Ulrich Keil and Tom Jefferson) were deployed by the Council of Europe to testify to the scientific evidence surrounding the case.” Sudeepa Abeysinghe, “Contesting a pandemic: The WHO and the Council of Europe,” *Science as Culture*, 26(2), 2017. For a useful summary of key concerns about how the H1N1 pandemic was handled, see Ulrich Keil, Peter Schönhöfer, and Angela Spelsberg, “The invention of the swine-flu pandemic,” *European Journal of Epidemiology*, 26(3), 2011.

Kicking off the investigation in December 2009, the Council of Europe had raised a motion entitled “Faked pandemics: a threat for health” which asserted:

In order to promote their patented drugs and vaccines against flu, pharmaceutical companies have influenced scientists and official agencies, responsible for public health standards, to alarm governments worldwide. They have made them squander tight health care resources for inefficient vaccine strategies and needlessly exposed millions of healthy people to the risk of unknown side-effects of insufficiently tested vaccines.

The ‘birds-flu’-campaign (2005/06) combined with the ‘swine-flu’-campaign seem to have caused a great deal of damage not only to some vaccinated patients and to public health budgets, but also to the credibility and accountability of important international health agencies. The definition of an alarming pandemic must not be under the influence of drug-sellers.

The member states of the Council of Europe should ask for immediate investigations on the consequences at national as well as European level.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Flynn, “The handling of the H1N1 pandemic: more transparency needed,” Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee; Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2010. This report is typical of the reporting that questioned the response to the H1N1 pandemic, and is portrayed as the presenting a conspiratorial view of history – an accusation levelled again Flynn in Meirion Evans’ article “The swine flu scam?” *Journal of Public Health*, 32(3), September 2010. Despite highlighting the “long history” of corporate influences on epidemiology, citing an article that refers to the pioneering work of Archie Cochrane (one of the founders of the Cochrane Collaborative), Evans’ says “the swine flu affair smells more of cock-up than conspiracy.” Here the problem seems to be one of conspiracy, as for the most part the critics of how the swine flu pandemic was handled point not to a dark conspiracy but the simple delivery of global health care under the stifling confines of capitalism. Nevertheless, Evans does agree with the main thrust of the Council of Europe critics when

There followed the official inquiry, where arguably the most damning evidence for wrongdoing was presented by flu epidemiologist Dr Tom Jefferson, who as part of his testimony argued that the scientific evidence does not support the promotion of flu vaccinations. On this matter MacKenzie of course disagrees with Jefferson. In addition, MacKenzie fervently believes that “flu is the one virus for which we have effective antiviral drugs,” which again contradicts Jefferson’s (and many other scientists) views on the utility of drugs. These disagreements are fundamental with regard the parlous state of global pandemic preparedness because, as made clear by MacKenzie, where countries did have pandemic plans in “they were mostly devised for flu” and rely upon the stockpiling of anti-viral of dubious scientific merit. For instance, Jefferson and his supporters at the *British Medical Journal* continue to argue that the main flu anti-viral that has been stockpiled by governments, Tamiflu, is next to useless. Mackenzie disagrees, writing:

Thankfully, the antiviral Tamiflu still works against most flu, and it is stockpiled in some countries in case of a flu pandemic. But this illustrates another kind of threat. There has been a denialist crusade against the drug and the pandemic stockpiles, based on claims that the manufacturer’s drug trials show it doesn’t do much against ordinary winter flu. One critic told a British parliamentary committee there was no evidence that Tamiflu was better than ‘a stiff whisky.’

Yet the unnamed critic in question, Fiona Godlee, the Editor in Chief of the *British Medical Journal*, actually said:

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concluding: “It is vital that such influential decisions [relating to pandemics] are made in the clear light of day and that the decision-making bodies involved can demonstrate that they have effective mechanisms to deal with conflicts of interest. In this regard, the WHO arrangements can be seen to be woefully inadequate.”

Tamiflu, as far I am aware, has only ever been compared with a placebo. It hasn't ever been compared in a direct comparison with, for example, paracetamol or indeed a stiff whisky.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, the main point to highlight in this heated discussion is that Tamiflu has been mired in controversy from the day that it was approved by the FDA in 1999 – an approval that significantly bypassed the normal process of having to be subjected to an independent scientific review. And although MacKenzie demonstrates that former Roche employees like Jonathan Van-Tam (the British government's current Deputy Chief Medical Officer) have undertaken studies that suggest that the use of Tamiflu lowered fatality rates during the Swine flu pandemic, these results are disputed. According to MacKenzie the Van-Tam study published in 2014 “found that among 168,000 people with flu severe enough to need hospitalization in the 2009 pandemic, people who received Tamiflu within two days of falling ill were half as likely to die—a significant effect.” But the conclusion of this Roche-funded study was immediately challenged by Cochrane Collaborative researchers in the pages of the *British Medical Journal*, and more definitively debunked two years later when it was reported that there was “no evidence that early treatment [with Tamiflu] significantly reduces the risk of death when compared with no treatment.”<sup>6</sup>

None of this scientific evidence presented by so-called science “denialists” is good enough for MacKenzie, who after asserting that

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<sup>5</sup> Adrian O'Dowd, “UK regulators deny claims that their access to oseltamivir trial data was insufficient,” *British Medical Journal*, June 18, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Zosia Kmietowicz, “Study claiming Tamiflu saved lives was based on ‘flawed’ analysis,” *British Medical Journal*, March 19, 2014; Nigel Hawkes, “Debate on whether Tamiflu prevents flu deaths reignites after new analysis,” *British Medical Journal*, June 1, 2016. For a recent timeline of events see Owen Dyer, “What did we learn from Tamiflu?” *British Medical Journal*, February 19, 2020; or watch Tom Jefferson's lecture “The Tamiflu story” delivered at the Symposium about Scientific Freedom, Copenhagen, March 9, 2019.

“there is plenty of evidence” to support the use of Tamiflu, fumes that “the crusade against the flu drug continues, with a lawsuit launched against the manufacturer, Roche, in the US in January 2020 for allegedly ‘bilking’ the US government of the money it paid for its stockpile.” The individual pursuing this important legal challenge is Dr Tom Jefferson who, in my mind, is correct in asserting that the \$1.5 billion that the government spent on stockpiling Tamiflu was a waste of money.

Yet no matter what side of the flu debate you fall on, it is the issue of pandemic preparedness that is most critical, as the only pandemic that the ruling-class and Big Pharma bothered to prepare for revolved around influenza. This is important because even if you ignore the question of the effectiveness of flu vaccines and the associated anti-virals, governments around the world still remained totally unprepared for the type of flu pandemic they were actually preparing for. As MacKenzie writes:

Are we prepared? No. ... [W]e can't make flu vaccine fast enough, in large enough quantities for a flu pandemic. And although flu is the one virus for which we have effective antiviral drugs, it isn't clear we have enough of those either.

If we're not ready for the pandemic we can see coming, how can we be ready for the ones we don't?

A point well made. Capitalist world leaders were aware that public health systems in place globally could never cope with any impending influenza pandemic and yet they did nothing to arrest the fire-sale of our health services. In fact, if anything capitalists acted to speed up the destruction of our public services because they are beholden to a political and economic system that is based upon exploitation not mutual aid. This explains why Boris Johnson was initially content to promote a “far-right ‘herd immunity’ fantasy” in Britain (as MacKenzie tweeted on July 23) until, that is, public outrage forced him to see reason.



## A time for change

Globally, things were bad enough during the first wave of the pandemic, but things are only likely to get worse. And MacKenzie is right when she says: “Lots of us will continue to die, either from the virus itself or from the long-term poverty, political and economic dislocation, and overloaded medical systems that will be the pandemic’s legacy.” Yet even when searching for answers to the question of how we got into this dire situation, she still manages to blame ordinary people. In the opening pages of her book she observes:

How did we find ourselves in this situation? In short, there are more and more people, and too many of them have had to put ever-increasing pressure on natural systems to get the food and jobs and living space they need. That means pushing into wilderness that harbors new infections and intensifying food production in ways that can breed disease. Covid-19, Ebola, and worse come from destroying forests. Worrying flu strains and antibiotic-resistant bacteria come from livestock. Yet we have neglected to invest in the things that discourage infectious disease: public health, decent jobs and housing, education, sanitation.

Who is this “we” that MacKenzie refers to? The answer is that the “we” she talks of so indiscriminately is not us, but in reality it is the ruling-class and neoliberal governments who have consistently attacked the working-class, and so it is no surprise that they neglected our needs. But rather than point out how we, the working-class, are suffering because capitalists seek to extract more and more profits from our labour (even if that means destroying our worlds natural systems), she misdirects her readers with her talk of human numbers being a key problem. Although this argument is not a mainstay of her book, she later restates a similar point saying: “A lot of our problems, as we have seen, stem from the way we are managing our unprecedentedly huge numbers, including the pressures of poverty and economic competition that lead to our encountering new pathogens.” But huge population numbers do not simply lead to

poverty or economic competition; this is a Malthusian fallacy that is happily promoted by the ruling-class to keep us looking in the wrong direction. MacKenzie however gives such conservative arguments more credence than they are worth, continuing:

A friend of mine was once listening to me going on about bird flu and pandemic threats, and said, 'Look I don't want to sound callous or anything, but, well, wouldn't it be better in some ways if there were fewer of us?' That was the question I set out to answer.

In answering this question — which was no — at no point does MacKenzie query the misplaced logic of such a misanthropic question in the first place. Instead she merely responds by arguing that the world was now so complex and interconnected that the deaths of the people who were most vulnerable to pandemics - — the poor and the working-class - — were the very people whose labor the entire capitalist system depends upon for its continued existence. So, apparently it would not be in the self-interest of the super-rich to allow such deaths to happen — hence her conclusion: “More inequality, and more poverty, means more risk.” This conclusion is then followed by an unsatisfactory liberal demand that her readers should put pressure on capitalist politicians to act in the interests of the planet's inhabitants to create a less unequal society. “We really are all in this together, and we'd better start acting like it,” she mistakenly states.

Still MacKenzie does at least understand that changes are needed if we are to right our sinking ship. She states:

Covid-19 has been, by anyone's reckoning, a crisis—and it's just getting started. Things are going to happen or change now, whether people take control of them in the broad interests of humanity or not.

Likewise, few would disagree when she says, “We desperately need to redesign the systems that failed to contain this pandemic if we are to, with luck, prevent or at least contain the next one.” This however will entail a lot more than trying to hold our leaders and institutions to account for their political crimes... although that would be a start. We need to redesign our entire global political and economic systems,

which will entail scrapping the capitalist system and erecting a democratic and socialist system in its place.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> It is the working-class who have the power in society to force change upon our capitalist exploiters, and coordinated strike actions taken globally will play a central role in enabling the transformation of society in a democratic direction. This power to affect change was highlighted by MacKenzie when, in attempting to describe the interconnectedness of the world, she wrote: “In 2000, a strike by truck drivers blocked nearly all gasoline deliveries from Britain’s oil refineries for ten days. Public transport collapsed, grocery stores emptied, hospitals ran minimal services, hazardous waste piled up, bodies went unburied. The government had to step in. A subsequent study predicted economic collapse in Britain if all road haulage, not just fuel deliveries, was shut down for only a week.”



# Index

- Aadhaar, 252, 253, 254  
 Abacha, Sani, 282, 284, 292, 293  
 Aborisade, Femi, 285  
 Aboyade, Ojetunji, 272  
 Achebe, Chinua, 264, 265  
 Achebe, Nnameka, 290  
 ACT-Accelerator, 379, 384, 385  
 Adityanath, Yogi, 243  
 Adnan Khashoggi, 113  
 Advance Market Commitment, 381  
 Advanced Research Projects Agency, 132  
 AFL-CIO, 55, 60, 61, 62, 63, 65, 73, 76, 87, 144, 285, 352  
 Agora, 166, 167  
 AIDS, 121, 203, 214, 216, 229, 230, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 239, 249, 280, 309, 393  
 Alinsky, Saul, 50  
 Alison-Madueke, Diezani, 289, 290  
 All On, 316, 317, 318  
 Allen, Robert, 78  
 Allende, Salvador, 62, 137  
 Alma-Ata Conference, 195, 196  
 ALOHA, 133  
 American Civil Liberties Union, 162  
 American Friends Service Committee, 56  
 American Institute for Free Labor Development, 61, 64  
 American Liberty League, 161, 162  
 American Red Cross, 157, 158, 186  
 American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 164  
 Amin, Samir, 281, 283  
 Amoako, K.Y., 127  
 Ananda Krishnan, 114  
 Annales school, 36  
 Anti Defamation League, 75  
 Arogundada, Lanre, 300  
 Aron, Raymond, 35, 40, 45  
 Astor, David, 96  
 AstraZeneca, 388, 390  
 Avahan, 233, 234, 235, 239  
 Babangida, Ibrahim, 280, 294  
 Baldwin, Roger, 162  
 Band Aid, 5, 108, 109, 110, 111, 114, 115, 116, 121, 129  
 Baraka, Amiri, 81, 82, 88  
 Basson, Wouter, 210  
 BCG vaccination, 223  
 Bengal Famine, 223  
 Benoist, Alain de, 45  
 Berelson, Bernard, 204  
 Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, 248  
 Bhoodan movement, 98  
 Biafra, 265, 275  
 Biden, President, 180, 384, 386  
 Big Pharma, ii, vii, 6, 229, 237, 260, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 350, 351, 352, 358, 359, 362, 364, 366, 367, 370, 371, 372, 374, 375, 378, 386, 390, 391, 402, 407  
 Bihar, 342, 343, 347  
 Bin Laden, Osama, 221, 222  
 Biofuels, 24  
 Biological warfare, 201, 202, 203, 210  
 Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, 333  
 BJP, 207, 208, 239, 240, 242, 243, 245, 250, 252, 343, 347

Black Panthers, 75, 76, 77  
 Black Studies, 77, 78  
 Black, Eugene, 192  
 Blair, Cherie, 311  
 Blair, Tony, 124, 125, 126, 297, 298,  
 305, 306, 311, 315  
 Blegen, Carl, 164, 171  
 Bodasakis-Athanasiadis, Prodrimos,  
 169  
 Bodossaki Foundation, 178  
 Boer, Wiebe, 316  
 Boko Haram, 218, 219, 220, 326  
 Bond, Horace Mann, 91  
 Bono, 121, 122, 125, 127, 130, 309,  
 310  
 Brademas, John, 154  
 Braudel, Fernand, 36, 38, 40, 272  
 Breakthrough Energy Ventures, 318  
 British Gas, 324  
 Bruce, David, 42  
 Brundtland, Gro Harlem, 214  
 Buffett Foundation, 251  
 Buffett, Warren, 229, 245  
 Buhari, General, 302  
 Burnham, James, 66  
 Buse, John, 356  
 Busson, Arki, 125  
 Butler, Nicholas Murray, 156  
 Calabar International Centre for  
 Research, Information and  
 Documentation, 296  
 California Rural Legal Assistance, 57  
 Callahan, David, 5, 9  
 Camelot, 137  
 Cameroon, 200, 205, 210, 216  
 Carbon Trust, 291  
 Carnegie Corporation, 4, 73  
 Catholic Relief Services, 96, 113  
 Center for Community Change, 58  
 Center for International Studies,  
 137, 138, 271  
 Charles Lindbergh, 155  
 Chavez, Cesar, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54,  
 61, 62, 64  
 Cheney, Dick, 292, 293  
 Chesham, Lady, 97  
 Chile, 62, 63, 137  
 China, 89, 193, 289, 292, 297, 312,  
 314, 354, 367, 398  
 China National Offshore Oil  
 Corporation, 312  
 Chisholm, Brock, 224  
 Christian Aid, 96, 117  
 CIA, vii, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 38, 40,  
 42, 43, 44, 45, 61, 62, 63, 67, 73,  
 99, 113, 132, 134, 135, 136, 137,  
 138, 142, 143, 164, 168, 172,  
 173, 174, 176, 202, 203, 221, 273  
 CIPLA, 237  
 Clark, Kenneth, 81  
 Clean India, 240, 241  
 CLEEN Foundation, 303  
 Clinton, Bill, 236, 237, 293, 305  
 Clinton, Chelsea, 197, 198, 311  
 Clinton, Hillary, 14, 18  
 Club of Rome, 315  
 Coalition for Epidemic  
 Preparedness Innovations, 369,  
 370  
 CODESRIA, 281  
 Cohen, Jerry, 57  
 COINTELPRO, 75, 76, 132, 136  
 Collins, Donald, 246  
 Colorado Fuel & Iron Company,  
 152  
 Commission on a Global Health  
 Risk Framework for the Future,  
 181  
 Committee for a Workers  
 International, 68  
 Commonwealth Human Rights  
 Initiative, 280  
 Communist Party, 33, 34, 35, 36, 39,  
 46, 69, 92, 270  
 Communist Party of India (Marxist),  
 347  
 Community Action Program, 100  
 Community Action Projects, 56  
 Community Service Organization,  
 50  
 Congress for Cultural Freedom, 40,  
 44, 273  
 Corbyn, Jeremy, 47, 264, 299  
 Council of Europe, 403, 404

- COVID-19 Solidarity Response  
     Fund, 389, 390  
 C-TAP, 379  
 Cuba, 68, 73  
 Danaher, 115, 332  
 Danforth, John, 117  
 Dangote Industries, 305  
 Dangote, Alhaji, 296  
 Dangote, Aliko, 221, 310, 311, 315,  
     325  
 Danjuma, General, 295  
 Dantata, Alhassan, 310, 311  
 Davis, John W., 161  
 DDT, 159, 187, 188, 191  
 Debt, AIDS, Trade, Africa, 121  
 Democratic Party, 5, 14, 17, 18, 25,  
     67, 69, 154  
 Demos, 10  
 Depo-Provera, 249  
 Derrida, Jacques, 32, 47  
 Digital Empowerment Foundation,  
     253  
 Dodge Revolutionary Union  
     Movement, 77  
 Domhoff, William, 16, 17  
 Doughty, Stephen, 263  
 Drake, St. Clair, 91, 92  
 Draper, Hal, 73, 84  
 Drewnowski, Jan, 90  
 Duddridge, James, 298  
 Dwoskin, Claire, 209  
 Ebola, 203, 331, 409  
 École Pratique des Hautes Études,  
     39  
 Economic Cooperation  
     Administration, 42, 43  
 Elder Dempster, 268  
 Electronic Frontier Foundation, 143,  
     145  
 Eli Lilly, 372  
 Ellender, Phillip, 23  
 Elumelu, Tony O., 296  
 Engels, Frederick, 2, 148  
 Eni, 292, 293  
 Epstein, Sarah, 246, 247  
 Etete, Dan, 292  
 Ethiopia, 106, 107, 110, 111, 112,  
     113, 114, 116, 117, 118, 119,  
     120, 121, 128  
 Eugenics, 183  
 European Association of  
     Management Training, 41  
 European Economic Community,  
     39, 90, 170  
 European Union, 41, 148, 149, 150,  
     388  
 Expanded Programme on  
     Immunization, 199  
 Extractive Industries Transparency  
     Initiative, 306  
 Fabian, 93, 96  
 Family Health International, 245  
 Family Planning Association of  
     India, 226  
 Fawehinmi, Gani, 283, 301  
 FBI, 60, 74, 75, 76, 132, 136  
 Federation for American  
     Immigration Reform, 246  
 Financial Services Authority, 294,  
     297  
 First World War, 182, 185  
 Ford Foundation, 4, 5, 38, 40, 41,  
     43, 46, 56, 57, 58, 70, 71, 72, 77,  
     79, 84, 89, 90, 92, 98, 100, 101,  
     102, 135, 143, 169, 171, 227,  
     241, 251, 271, 303, 304, 311  
 Foucault, Michel, 32  
 Fourth International, 67, 68  
 Frank, Thomas, 14  
 Frederick Engels, 148  
 Free Trade Union Committee, 42  
 Freedom House, 143  
 Friedman, Milton, 150  
 Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 285,  
     286  
 Fulbright Foundation, 170  
 G4S, 291  
 G8, 127, 130, 238, 309  
 Gandhi, Indira, 225  
 Gandhi, Mahatma, 54, 226

Gates Foundation, 4, 13, 122, 124,  
 214, 215, 216, 220, 221, 222,  
 228, 229, 230, 232, 233, 234,  
 236, 238, 239, 244, 248, 249,  
 251, 257, 261, 334, 335, 336,  
 341, 342, 343, 344, 351, 355,  
 357, 359, 360, 361, 363, 369,  
 371, 372, 379, 381, 387, 388,  
 391, 400  
 Gates, Bill, 6, 12, 24, 130, 186, 213,  
 229, 235, 236, 238, 240, 245,  
 250, 253, 254, 257, 259, 305,  
 309, 310, 318, 336, 337, 340,  
 341, 342, 343, 349, 351, 359,  
 363, 377, 378, 384, 387, 390,  
 392, 393, 400  
 GAVI, 214, 230, 231, 255, 257, 380,  
 382  
 Geldof, Bob, vii, 105, 109, 123, 125,  
 126  
 General Motors, 21  
 General Strike, 268, 269, 284, 322,  
 323, 324, 326, 347, 349  
 Georgia-Pacific Corporation, 22  
 German Revolution, 182  
 Ghana, 90, 92, 93, 94, 271  
 Ghebreyesus, Tedros Adhanom,  
 384, 385  
 Gibbs, Jeff, 19  
 Gibson, Ken, 83  
 Giving Pledge, 254  
 GlaxoSmithKline, 350, 353, 354,  
 356, 357, 359, 366, 381, 389  
 Global Fund to Fight AIDS,  
 Tuberculosis and Malaria, 214  
 Global Health Partnerships, 213  
 Global Polio Eradication Initiative,  
 215, 257  
 Global Programme for Polio  
 Immunization, 198, 199  
 Go Give One, 391  
 Golden Dawn, 177  
 Goldsmith, James, 45  
 Gordon, Robert, 172  
 Gottlieb, Robert, 22  
 Gowon, General, 265, 274, 294, 295  
 Grant, Madison, 22  
 Grant, Ted, 67, 68, 86, 93, 163  
 Grantham, Jeremy, 28, 29  
 GRECE, 44, 45  
 Greece, vii, 147, 150, 151, 154, 157,  
 158, 163, 164, 165, 167, 168,  
 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174,  
 175, 176, 177, 186  
 Greek America Foundation, 153  
 Green Revolution, 98, 315  
 Green, Reg, 89, 90  
 Guatemala, 160, 168, 169  
 Guerrilla warfare, 34, 68  
 Halpin, Harry, 142  
 Harvard University, 90, 102, 165,  
 188, 202, 204  
 HARYOU-ACT, 73, 81  
 Hayek, Friedrich, 26, 150  
 hCG-vaccine, 205  
 Hearst, William Randolph, 156  
 Hersant, Robert, 45  
 Heston, Charlton, 19  
 Hirsch, Fred, 60, 61  
 Hoffman, Paul, 42, 43, 169  
 Hoover, Herbert, 123, 158  
 House Committee on Un-American  
 Activities, 162  
 HPV vaccine, 360, 361, 363, 364  
 Huerta, Dolores, 54  
 Hydroxychloroquine, 335, 336  
 Ibrahim, Mo, 124, 125  
 IMF, 108, 127, 259, 305  
 Independent Socialist Clubs, 84, 85,  
 86  
 India, 24, 98, 106, 183, 192, 193,  
 199, 201, 204, 205, 207, 208,  
 215, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227,  
 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 239,  
 240, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246,  
 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253,  
 254, 255, 256, 258, 268, 278,  
 297, 322, 333, 337, 338, 339,  
 340, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346,  
 347, 348, 349, 357, 359, 360,  
 361, 362, 363, 369, 383, 385,  
 386, 390  
 Industrial Areas Foundation, 50, 51  
 IndustriALL, 324



- In-Q-Tel, 142  
 Intensive Care Units, 339  
 International Aids Vaccine Initiative, 213  
 International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, 267, 323  
 International Federation of Free Trade Unions, 164  
 International Finance Facility for Immunisation, 380  
 International Labor Organization, 157  
 International Socialist Organization, 84, 85  
 International Socialists, 69  
 International Trade Union Confederation, 323  
 Iraq, 202, 292, 297, 299, 309  
 Jablonski, Nina, 20  
 Jack Dorsey, 335  
 Jackson, Robert, 93  
 Jain, J.K., 207  
 Jama'atu Nasril Islam, 217  
 James, CLR, 91, 279  
 Jeff Bezos, 334, 349  
 Jefferson, Tom, 403, 405, 407  
 Jewish Defence League, 71, 74  
 John Birch Society, 161  
 Johnson and Johnson, 333  
 Johnson, Lyndon B., 191  
 Jonathan, Goodluck, 288  
 Jones, LeRoi, 81, 82  
 Jones, Van, 21, 25  
 Jubilee 2000, 121, 128  
 Kadlec, Robert, 370, 371  
 Kahane, Rabbi Meir, 74, 75  
 Karamanlis, Constantine, 171  
 Karenga, Ron, 76  
 Kefauver, Estes, 352  
 Kellogg Foundation, 65  
 Kellogg, Brown & Root, 291  
 Kennedy, Robert, 57  
 Kenya, 123, 209, 298, 316  
 Kerala, 346  
 Kessel, Elton, 206, 246, 247  
 Khayam, Sidi, 268, 269  
 Kissinger, Henry, 120  
 Koch, Charles, 26, 27  
 Koch, Fred, 27  
 Kumar, Nitish, 343  
 Kuti, Fela Anikulapo, 279  
 Lacan, Jacques, 32, 47  
 LADOL Free Zone, 313  
 Lafarge, 311, 317  
 Lambrakis, Grigoris, 172  
 LaRouche, Lyndon, 86  
 Laski, Harold, 163  
 Leet, Glen, 97  
 Leet, Mildred, 97  
 Lekki Free Zone, 312  
 Lenin, Vladimir, 3, 184  
 Levy, Bernard-Henri, 34  
 Licklider, J.C.R., 137  
 Lippes, Jack, 245, 246  
 Live8, 128, 129  
 Louis Pauwels, 44  
 Ludlow Massacre, 151, 152, 153, 157  
 Lumos, 317, 320  
 Lumos Global, 317  
 MacArthur Foundation, 296  
 MacKenzie, Debora, 6, 396  
 Madunagu, Bene, 296  
 Madunagu, Edwin, 296  
 Mahler, Halfdan, 198, 225  
 Malaria, 159, 160, 186, 187, 188, 189, 193, 194, 201, 230, 339  
 Malaria Eradication Program, 193, 194  
 Malaria Vaccine Initiative, 230  
 Malloch-Brown, Mark, 313  
 Malthusian, 5, 119, 120, 212, 225, 226, 228, 251, 363, 410  
 Mandel, Ernst, 68  
 Marcos, Ferdinand, 63  
 Marjolin, Robert, 150  
 Marshall Plan, 37, 43, 149, 150, 164, 169, 170, 271  
 Marx, Karl, 35, 148  
 Marx, Paul, 209

Maslow, Abraham, 26  
 Max L. Rosenberg Foundation, 56  
 May, Cordelia Scaife, 246  
 McKinsey & Company, 239  
 Meany, George, 62, 73, 76, 352  
 Meningitis, 230, 232  
 Meningitis Vaccine Project, 230, 232  
 Merck, 214, 234, 352, 353, 359, 360, 364  
 Metaxas, General, 158  
 Microfinance, 97  
 Microsoft, 229, 237, 238, 253, 341, 344, 358  
 Migrant Ministry, 51, 53, 56, 57  
 Miles Copeland, 113  
 Millennium Development Goals, 129  
 Mills, C. Wright, 9, 17, 130  
 Mitterrand, 33, 46  
 Modi, Narendra, 239, 240, 241, 248, 252, 337, 344  
 Monbiot, George, 24, 130  
 Monnet, Jean, 41  
 Moore, Michael, 19, 24, 25  
 Morris, William, 2  
 Morrow, Felix, 67  
 Mother Teresa, 111  
 Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, 286  
 Moynihan, Daniel Patrick, 100  
 Mumford, Stephen, 206, 207, 245  
 Mussolini, 154, 155, 156, 158, 163, 166, 186  
 Muttreja, Poonam, 248  
 Naidu, Venkaiah, 242  
 National Black Power Conferences, 82  
 National Conscience Party, 283, 300, 301  
 National Democratic Coalition, 284  
 National Endowment for Democracy, 143, 144, 154, 295  
 National Farm Worker Service Center, 57, 58, 59  
 National Labour Congress, 284  
 NATO, 41, 168, 175  
 Nature Conservancy, 21, 23, 28  
 New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threat Advisory Group, 368  
 New International Economic Order, 197  
 New Lafayette Theatre, 79  
 Newark teachers' strike, 83  
 NGOs, 85, 97, 112, 126, 230, 234, 241, 280, 282, 283, 295, 297, 303, 305, 306  
 Niger Delta Exploration & Production plc, 313  
 Nigeria, 29  
 Nigeria Labour Congress, 302, 323  
 Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, 313, 325  
 Nigerian Women Trust Fund, 295  
 Nilekani, Nandan, 252, 254  
 Nkrumah, Kwame, 90, 93  
 NUPENG, 284, 324, 325  
 Nyerere, Julius, 88, 96  
 Obama, 12, 21, 25, 49, 180, 322, 338, 372  
 Obayuwana, Osagie, 301  
 Office of Economic Opportunity, 54, 81, 97  
 Ogoni 9, 287  
 Oluwale, David, 276  
 Oman, 277, 278  
 ONE Campaign, 122, 124, 127  
 Open Technology Fund, 143, 145  
 OPV, 256  
 Osayande, Sunny, 324  
 Padmore, George, 91, 92  
 Pakistan, 112, 193, 208, 215, 221, 222, 223, 345  
 Pan-Africanism, 5, 89, 90, 92  
 Panhellenic Liberation Movement, 174  
 Panhellenic Socialist Movement, 175  
 Papandreou, Andreas, 171, 172, 173, 174  
 Pappas, Gregory, 153  
 Paris Club, 308, 309  
 Pathfinder Fund, 247  
 Patriotic Anti-Dictatorial Front, 174  
 Pauwels, Louis, 44

- Peace and Freedom Party, 88  
 PENGASSAN, 324, 325  
 People's Health Movement, 238,  
 241, 244, 259  
 Periyar, 226  
 Peurifoy, John, 161, 168  
 Pew, J. Howard, 162  
 Pfizer, 216, 217, 248, 249, 381  
 Piccirilli, Attilio, 155  
 Planned Parenthood, 213, 225, 226,  
 228  
 Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine,  
 381  
 Police Foundation, 102  
 Pontine Marshes, 159  
 Pool, Ithiel de Sola, 137  
 Population Council, 204  
 Population Services International,  
 247  
 Post-structuralism, 46  
 Powell Jr, Adam Clayton, 82  
 Power Africa, 320  
 Prentis, Dave, 299  
 Procter & Gamble, 247  
 Program for Appropriate  
 Technology in Health, 230, 359  
 Project CAM, 136, 138  
 Project HOPE, 351, 352  
 Public Services International, 299,  
 321  
 Publish What You Pay, 306  
 Quinacrine, 206, 245, 246  
*Ramparts*, 134, 135, 136, 174, 271  
 RAND Corporation, 135, 136  
 Rapid Action Battalion, 298  
 Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 208  
 Rau, Lady Rama, 226  
 Reagan, Ronald, 197  
 Reddy, Sangita, 255  
 Relief Society of Tigray, 113  
 Renewvia Energy, 317  
 Reuther, Walter, 55, 57, 64  
 Rivera, Diego, 154  
 Rivkin, Arnold, 270  
 Roche, 365, 366, 367, 406, 407  
 Rockefeller Brothers Fund, 73  
 Rockefeller Center, 154  
 Rockefeller Foundation, 4, 10, 37,  
 39, 41, 93, 151, 154, 157, 158,  
 159, 160, 161, 172, 184, 185,  
 186, 187, 189, 196, 197, 212,  
 213, 215, 221, 225, 226, 229,  
 239, 255, 257, 272, 273, 315, 316  
 Rockefeller, John D., 10, 12, 151,  
 153, 159, 167, 185  
 Rodney, Walter, 91, 278  
 Ross, Fred, 50, 52, 57, 58  
 Rouxel, Patrick, 20  
 Rowan, Ford, 139  
 Rumsfeld, Donald, 331  
 Russian Revolution, 3, 157  
 Rustin, Bayard, 57  
 Sachs, Jeffrey, 121, 122  
 Sanders, Bernie, 14, 18, 47  
 Sango, Segun, 284, 301  
 Sanofi, 336  
 Saro-Wiwa, Ken, 281, 286, 287, 289  
 Save the Children, 97, 114  
 Save-the-Redwoods League, 22  
 Sawant, Kshama, 349, 386  
 Sayana Press, 249, 250  
 Schepens, Philippe, 200, 210  
 Schwarzhaupt Foundation, 51, 52,  
 53  
 Serum Institute of India, 231  
 Setalvad, Teesta, 241  
 Shachtman, Max, 67, 73  
 Shanker, Al, 73  
 Shell, 29  
 Shiva, Vandana, 24, 25, 26  
 Shriver, Bobby, 121, 122  
 Shultz, George, 331  
 Sierra Club, 21, 28  
 Skouras, Spyros, 167, 168  
 Smallpox, 188, 190, 191, 192, 194,  
 195, 202, 373  
 Smith, Iain Duncan, 123  
 Socialist Party of Nigeria, 302, 327  
 Socialist Party/Social Democratic  
 Federation, 75

Socialist Workers Party, 66  
 Soros, George, 122, 296, 303, 304,  
 305, 309, 313  
 South Africa, 92, 210, 211, 212, 319,  
 357, 385, 386, 388, 392  
 Southern Christian Leadership  
 Conference, 51  
 Soyinka, Wole, 273  
 Spanish Flu, 181, 182, 185  
 Special Anti-Robbery Squad, 262  
 Srinivasan, Sandhya, 361, 362, 363  
 Stavros Niarchos Foundation, 178  
 Stevens, James, 188  
 Stevens, Simon, 358  
 Stolper, Wolfgang, 270  
 Strong, Maurice, 120, 128, 129  
 Structural Adjustment Programs,  
 259, 281  
 Student Non-Violent Coordinating  
 Committee, 16  
 Sustainable Energy for All, 315  
 Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, 240, 241,  
 244  
 Swine flu, 402, 403, 406  
 Syriza, 147, 148, 149, 177  
 Taaffe, Peter, 68, 70, 86  
 Tabatoni, Pierre, 41  
 Takeda, 371, 372  
 Talwar, G.P., 205, 244  
 Tamiflu, 331, 364, 365, 366, 405,  
 406, 407  
 Tanzania, 88, 89, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98,  
 210  
 Task Force on Vaccines for Fertility  
 Regulation, 205  
 Teachers strike, 66, 67, 69, 73, 82,  
 84, 86  
 Tetanus, 200, 205, 208, 209  
 Thakur, Sadhvi, 243  
 Thatcher, Margaret, 294  
 Therapeutics Accelerator Fund, 335  
 Tigrayan People's Liberation Front,  
 111  
 Tikas, Louis, 151, 152, 153  
 Tony Elumelu Foundation, 316  
 Tor, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144  
 Toyo, Eskor, 269, 281  
 Transparency International, 304  
 Treatment Action Campaign, 237  
 Trilateral Commission, 40  
 TRIPS, 237, 238, 392  
 Trotsky, Leon, 67, 93, 155  
 Trovan, 216  
 Trump, 18, 26, 27, 180, 203, 260,  
 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 348,  
 370, 383  
 Tsu, Vivien, 361  
 Tuberculosis, 190, 232, 233, 332,  
 346  
 TUC, 267, 323  
 Tugendhat, Tom, 264, 293  
 UN Fund for Population Activities,  
 192  
 UN Population Fund, 228, 251  
 UN Relief and Rehabilitation  
 Administration, 94  
 UNAIDS, 214  
 UNESCO, 36, 197  
 UNICEF, 196, 223  
 United Automobile Workers, 64  
 United Democratic Left, 172  
 United Farm Workers union, 5, 49  
 United Federation of Teachers, 73  
 United Fruit Company, 160, 161,  
 168  
 United Mineworkers of America,  
 151  
 United Slave (US) Organization, 76  
 Urban Coalition, 72  
 USAID, 115, 194, 227, 304, 321  
 Vallance, Patrick, 367, 369  
 Valley, Paul, 127  
 Van-Tam, Jonathan, 367, 369, 406  
 Varoufakis, Yanis, 148, 149, 150  
 Venkatesan, Ravi, 239, 240, 253  
 Verzosa, Mary Pilar, 208  
 Vietnam War, 69, 73, 74  
 Volta Project, 94  
 Voser, Peter, 289, 312  
 War on Poverty, 56, 99, 100, 101,  
 102, 103  
 Ward, Barbara, 93, 94  
 Weaver, Warren, 41  
 Wellcome Trust, 336, 369

- WHO Foundation, 391  
Wicken, Joan, 96  
Wickstead, Myles, 128  
Wilson, Harold, 274, 276  
Witty, Andrew, 354, 355, 358  
Wodarg, Wolfgang, 403  
Wolfensohn, James, 121  
Women in Nigeria, 296  
Woodcock, Leonard, 64  
World Bank, 94, 108, 121, 122, 125,  
127, 192, 198, 213, 227, 228,  
229, 232, 233, 234, 236, 254,  
270, 281, 289, 304, 305, 307,  
310, 312, 315, 320, 321, 380, 384  
World Health Organization, 159,  
181, 187, 188, 193, 201, 213,  
224, 251, 260, 339, 341, 358,  
378, 379, 383, 389, 402  
World Vision, 110  
Wright Jr, Nathan, 82  
WWF, 21  
Xekinima, 178  
Yamada, Tachi, 355, 356, 359, 365,  
371  
Zanamirvir, 365  
Zimbabwe, 286  
Zoellick, Robert, 289, 312