

*Theoretical Organ of the New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party*

**Marxist Leninist**

# **New Democracy**

**July 2021**

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**Poetry: Brecht, Mayuran, Sivasegaram**

*Background: Paris Commune image*

# The Victor's Tragedy

M Mayuran

Fear not the eyes, dried-up sans tear  
Fear not the weep, even wind can't hear  
Ye victors, massacrers and celebrators!  
Fear not the cry that can't even be let out  
Fear not the international war crime allegations  
Fear not the released photographic evidences  
Fear not the truths wailing within the hearts  
of the corpses rotten deep into the soil

Fear thy choices, not the deity!  
Fear what ye sow, not the fate!  
Fear the savage whom ye welcomed, waving flag;  
Not the excruciating pain cum agonising scream  
Fear thy path, not the blame  
Fear thy adversity, not the sin  
Fear the oppressing, suppressing authority  
that heightens - ye praised, accorded and upraised

Fear what ye nurture, not the opposed!  
Fear what ye birthe, not the others!  
Fear what ye devised, indoctrinated and hurled  
to revenge, thinking: 'it's just others, let'em die'

Not the unbearable tears of the oppressed  
But thy policies wouldst obliterate thee!

*Written in May 2009.*

*Translation from Tamil: Gugatharsini Rajeevan*

## *Editorial*

The country is ruled by an increasingly corrupt, dictatorial and chauvinist government since Gotabhaya Rajapaksa was elected President in November 2019. The worst nightmares of those who foresaw the return of Rajapaksa family rule, amid unimpressive options before the people, are unfolding. Parliamentary rivals seem to lack thoughts for an alternative that could take the country forward.

Mahinda Rajapaksa's defeat in 2015 was not overwhelming, and much of his support has remained intact. It will take a credible alternative which cannot be the enfeebled UNP or its stronger breakaway SJB. The JVP has yet to apologise for its past opportunism including partnering with not only Mahinda Rajapaksa but also the communal JHU. It has no sound policy on the national question and lacks vision to recognize the need to rescue of the economy from imperialist stranglehold.

The government's foreign policy is confused. It knows that the West and India would prefer it to be less friendly towards China. But it also knows that the Sinhalese masses are more trusting of China as a country that Sri Lanka can count on, regardless of government. But the government relies heavily on the West for its export trade and cannot antagonise it. It has played hot and cold with India and Japan by cancelling the Colombo Harbour East Container Terminal agreement with Indian multinational Adani Group and Japan amid public protest and then placate India and Japan by offering them the development of the West Container Terminal to them through a public-private partnership. It also irked Japan by suspending the \$1.5 billion Japanese-funded light rail project. The US is most irritated by the rejection of the \$480 million Millennium Challenge Corporation compact despite US pressure. The US made no secret of its hate for the Colombo Port City, for fear that it will increase China's say in Sri Lanka. Suggestions are afloat that the US is to be offered a stake in the eastern harbour of Trincomalee. Whether this is foreign policy juggling or a desperate move to secure badly needed money can only be guessed.

It may seem that the government is playing the China card to prevent the West and India from adopting a hostile position towards Sri Lanka for fear of driving the country into the arms of China. But it is more likely that the government has no clear plan or policy, and its assessment of international affairs could be rather naïve.

The economy is in trouble, not solely due to mistakes of this government, but the government has not done much to rescue the economy. There is speculation about whom the government will turn to for saving the country from default on loan repayments. No rescue will be a long term answer, and the crisis will worsen both in the medium and long terms.

Hasty decisions like banning the import of turmeric, a much needed condiment in Sri Lankan homes so that it can be cultivated locally, and the ban on import of synthetic fertilizer to help switch to organic manure, while in the meantime importing luxury vehicles for parliamentarians, are poorly considered ways to save foreign exchange. Announcing an increase in fuel prices was again politically insensitive when people were struggling to recover from the economic blows to their livelihood by lock-downs. Both fertilizer shortage and fuel price increase led to mass protests across the country.

Having relied heavily on chauvinist forces to win elections and having been misled into antagonizing minority nationalities, notably Muslims, the government has found itself in embarrassing situations where retreat from a foolishly stubborn stand meant both loss of face and loss of chauvinist support. In fact the President and the SLPP had opportunity in the changing mood among minority nationality voters seen from their desertion of their dominant political parties. Friendly gestures would have, if not won support, at least muted earlier hard feelings.

Harassment of Muslim politicians and personalities on various pretexts, mainly the church bombings of 21<sup>st</sup> April 2019, goes on. Encroachment of land in predominantly Tamil areas in the North and East now has a new dimension in the form of archaeological surveys. Even the positive gesture to Hill Country Tamils by the award of their long awaited wage

revision to Rs. 1000/- per day lost lustre by undue delays and lack of measures to clear obstacles to its honest implementation.

The support that the government seemed to have gathered among the Sinhalese Catholics by announcing a tough stand pledging finding and punishing the Easter 2019 bombing conspirators is now eroding in the face of government reluctance to publish in full the finding of its inquiry.

Public anger has also been provoked by the move of the government to transform the Kotelawela Defence Academy into a university within the national university framework. On-going protests by teachers and students of schools and universities is an indication of the public mood against government attempts to militarize education the way it did the COVID-19 control programme. Pardoning of convicted criminals for political reasons has not gone well with the public either.

Overall, the government's standing among the public is much poorer than an year ago. The economy is shaky and made worse by the clumsy handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Internal quarrels are spilling into the open. But none of it means that downfall is imminent.

Even in the event of a downfall prospects are bleak for its replacement by a stable alternative. Hasty actions like the recent vote of no confidence by the SJB only help the government to close ranks. Attempts to use foreign forces to destabilize the government will not be in the interest of the country but are also likely to be used by the government to justify political repression.

The country has seen enough of the bourgeois parliamentary system whose failure now risks acceleration towards military backed fascism. Thus it is time to build a serious people's democratic movement based on mass mobilization and mass struggle to the exclusion of temptations of parliamentary political power.

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# **Pandemics in History:**

## **COVID-19 in perspective**

Panic more than the virus seems the problem with COVID-19. Thus there is need to recognize the pandemic and objectively assess its impact on individuals and society. It is also necessary to understand the socio-political undercurrents that drive the different responses to it.

Harsh methods to control spread of infection have transcended essential safety measures to affect the livelihood of large sections of the people as well as harmed the wellbeing of individuals and communities.

A historical view of pandemics, viral pandemics in particular in current context, and their impact on humanity will help us to locate COVID-19 in due perspective and take a stand on the means adopted to prevent spread of infection and to treat the infected.

While most pandemics that wreaked havoc on humanity were virus driven, the Bubonic Plague was caused by the bacterium *Yersinia Pestis*. It was spread by fleas feeding on infected rats, and became a pandemic in the 6<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Among deadlier forms of the plague are the Pneumonic and Septicaemic plagues that, respectively, affect lungs and blood. There are no effective vaccines, and plague epidemics were contained mainly by public health measures. Despite effective antibiotics for treatment, the plague remains endemic to some regions, with a low risk of becoming an epidemic.

The first of seven major cholera pandemics reported across the globe was in India in 1817, with the last in Africa early this century. Cholera, caused by bacterial infection, is endemic to several countries of the Third World, and its persistence is attributed to poor water quality, hygiene and sanitation, which correlate strongly with economic backwardness.

Leprosy, identified in 1873, was once considered highly contagious and devastating. It is caused by *Mycobacterium Leprae*, the first bacterium to be known as a cause of human disease. Its spread was later found to be slow, with complete cure possible using antibiotics. While the epidemic is now said to approach extinction, increased human migration threatens to retain leprosy as a matter of global concern.

Meningitis is a devastating disease caused by bacterial, fungal or viral infection of membranes covering the brain and spinal cord. It is still a major public health challenge, predominated by bacterial meningitis. With several kinds of microorganisms as cause, meningitis refers to a various conditions, of which some are potentially epidemic, transmitted from person to person by droplets of respiratory or throat secretions. Vaccines are available for several but not all forms of meningitis.

Several major epidemics had taken a heavy toll of human life centuries ago but their causes remain uncertain despite fresh archaeological clues. The Mexican epidemic of 16<sup>th</sup> Century that killed an estimated 45% of the native population was for long considered a haemorrhagic fever like Ebola; but recent DNA evidence points to a salmonella that arrived with the European colonizers. [<https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2018/01/one-history-s-worst-epidemics-may-have-been-caused-common-microbe>]

Malaria, caused by a parasitic plasmodium and propagated by certain species of mosquitos, was once a notorious killer and is still a life threat in Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South and Southeast Asia. Death rate has come down from over 20 to less than 0.2 per 10,000 persons, except in Sub-Saharan Africa, where it is stagnant at 16 per 10,000 since 2016. As warned by WHO, shortfalls in prevention and cure of malaria owing to diversion of resources to deal with COVID-19, can lead to a surge in malaria deaths that will dwarf COVID-19 deaths in the region.

## **Viral epidemics**

The deadly *Marburg virus*, identified in 1967 among laboratory staff in Germany, caused haemorrhagic fever leading to shock induced organ

failure and death. Fatality, estimated at 25%, reached 80% in Angola in 1998-2000 and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2005.

The *Ebola virus* epidemic of 1976 in the DRC and Sudan had fatality rates varying from zero to between 50 and 71%, depending on the might of the virus strain. The virus spread by contact with infected body fluids or tissue. The outbreak that started in 2014 in West Africa remains the largest and most complex.

*Rabies* is among the deadliest of viral diseases. Death is a certainty if not treated soon after biting by a rabid animal. In the developed world, Rabies is rare owing to vaccines introduced in the 1920s, but remains a serious issue in South Asia and parts of Africa.

*HIV*, recognized in the early 1980s, has estimatedly killed 32 million people by 2019, and is reputedly the biggest killer among virus diseases. The annual infection and AIDS related death rates were 1.7 million and 690,000, respectively. Powerful drugs let people live for years with HIV. But it has devastated many low- and middle-income countries that have 95% of new HIV infections. Cynicism of the pharmaceutical companies and imperialist governments severely impeded access of anti-HIV drugs to low income groups until early this century. That attitude still persists.

*Smallpox* killed about 1 in 3 of those infected, leaving survivors with deep, permanent scars including blindness until the world was smallpox free in 1980. It killed 300 million in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Fatality rates were high for people without prior exposure to the virus. It is estimated that smallpox from Europe killed up to 90% of infected Native Americans.

*Hantavirus* spreads through droppings of infected deer mice. It received much interest in the US in 1993 as hundreds contracted the Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome and over a third died. More recently, in March 2020, a man tested positive and died in China, prompting strict measures amid the still prevalent COVID-19 pandemic.

*Influenza (flu)* has been the cause of death for up to 500,000 people in every flu season. The spread and/or fatality rates rise when a new strain



emerges to become a pandemic. The most deadly, unfairly called the Spanish flu, which began in 1918 affected 40% of the world's population and killed an estimated 50 million.

*Dengue*, first reported in the Philippines and Thailand in the 1950s, is a viral disease infected by a species of mosquitoes. Annually it affects 50 to 100 million people in tropical and subtropical countries with over 40% of the world's population. With fatality rate around 2.5% it is not called a killer epidemic but, if untreated, it can cause haemorrhagic fever leading to fatality rates of up to 20%.

The highly contagious *Rotavirus* takes the faecal-oral route through small particles of faeces that are consumed to give rise to intestinal symptoms. Stomach and intestinal inflammation leads to diarrhoea, vomiting, fever, belly pain, and dehydration. It is the commonest cause of diarrhoea in infants and young children. Available medicines ease symptoms but do not cure. Vaccines can protect children from infection, and children in developed countries rarely die of it. The virus, however, is a killer in the Third World. The highly contagious virus spreads rapidly through the faecal-oral path, and could recur even in children who have been vaccinated against it.

The *SARS-CoV* (severe acute respiratory syndrome-Corona Virus) first emerged in Guangdong Province in China in 2002 (probably from bats via civets to humans). Following outbreak SARS spread to 26 countries, infecting over 8000 and killing over 770 in two years. Fatality rate for was estimated at 9.6%. Although SARS has no approved treatment or vaccine thus far, no new cases have been reported since the early 2000s.

*SARS-CoV-2* is a member of the family of SARS-CoV viruses and causes COVID-19, first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. Its origins are under investigation. COVID-19 was well contained in Wuhan and nearby cities by extensive quarantine and travel restrictions. But indifference and ignoring of warnings in several countries, even after declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic, led to large scale global spread. Data for reported infection and fatality are, however,

disputed by some. (This will be commented on in an article dedicated to the COVID-19 pandemic.) People older than 70 years or with underlying health conditions are most at risk of severe disease and death.

*MERS* (Middle East respiratory syndrome) broke out in Saudi Arabia in 2012 and in South Korea in 2015. The MERS virus is of the same virus family as SARS-CoV, with bats suspected of being the origin of disease passing through camels to humans. Estimated fatality rate was between 30 and 40%, making the virus the most lethal coronaviruses transmitted from animals to people, with no approved treatment or vaccine.

*Yellow Fever*, a mosquito transmitted acute viral haemorrhagic disease endemic to tropical Africa and Central and South America, is called so owing to the jaundice it causes in some patients. Recent major epidemics were in Angola (2015), DRC (2016), Uganda (2016), and Nigeria and Brazil (2017). Of patients who develop jaundice nearly half die within 10 days, the overall death rate being 3 to 7.5%. Vaccination can control this avoidable disease. But heavily populated mosquito infested areas are prone to epidemics, especially where the shortage of a highly effective vaccine that offers lifetime protection denies immunity.

*Smallpox* was a contagious, disfiguring, deadly infectious viral disease caused by inhalation of large airborne droplets of saliva from an infected person. It has been eradicated by vaccination. Fatality rate was around 1% for milder types of the virus and up to 30% for more virulent forms. It killed some 300 million in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century before eradication in 1977.

*Measles* spreads by direct contact with airborne infectious droplets from an infected person. Although a safe, cost-effective vaccine has reduced the death rate drastically, more than 140 000, mostly children under five, died of measles in 2018.

*Mumps* is prevalent in males, and adolescents and adults suffer most. Without vaccination, it normally occurs in childhood (5 to 9 years of age). Countries that used mumps vaccination (usually measles-mumps-rubella

or MMR vaccine) were rendered free of mumps. But resurgence, not severe enough to be an epidemic, has been reported in this century.

*Chickenpox* or *Varicella*, caused by an airborne virus, occurs across the world. Chickenpox and shingles (caused by the dormant virus in those who earlier had chickenpox) was around 140 million in 2013. This could be an underestimate as chickenpox is a low risk disease (death rate at 1 per 60,000 infections) often treated at home. Immunization diminished the number of infections in the West. Shingles, caused by reactivation of the virus decades later, can be hazardous as it occurs in the nerves.

*Chikungunya*, a mosquito-transmitted viral disease, is marked by fever and severe joint pain besides other painful symptoms. No vaccine or specific drug exists and treatment is to relieve symptoms. Severe cases and deaths are very rare.

## **Concluding remarks**

Eradication of a disease needs a good knowledge of the disease causing pathogen, the hosts enabling its propagation, ability to unambiguously identify the symptoms of the disease, prospects for regional containment and, above all, financial, state and popular support for the effort.

How deadly a virus infection is cannot be judged based on total deaths and death rates, since other factors have played a role in aggravating the impact of an epidemic. The foregoing discussion suggests that COVID-19, despite claimed fatality rates, is not among deadly diseases. It stands out mainly for its ease of spread. Effective response needs close examination of key features such as the form and means of spread of infection and impact on human health.

Several harsh epidemic diseases await elimination either by vaccination or elimination of the carrier of infection. The disease that has been most successfully eliminated is the small pox. Infectious viral diseases take time to eliminate, and vaccines are not instant solutions.

Herd immunisation can attenuate the impact of harsh infectious diseases as confirmed by the negative experience of indigenous Americans, who for lack of prior exposure to like viral diseases fell victim on a colossal scale to smallpox, measles, influenza, bubonic plague, diphtheria, typhus, cholera, scarlet fever, chicken pox, yellow fever, and whooping cough following European settlement. Although infectious diseases have existed in the pre-Columbian Americas, the limited scale of community interactions across the large land mass probably hampered their spread.

Let not the persistent panic about COVID-19 divert our attention from diseases like malaria, HIV, tuberculosis (TB) and chikungunya, which together annually infect more than 250 million people globally, kill more than 2.5 million and remain a continuing challenge. Diseases like polio, lymphatic filariasis, measles, mumps, rubella and leprosy that are said to be close to elimination risk revival for lack of vigilance.

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***“It is time for everyone to come out of this negative trance, this collective hysteria, because famine, poverty, mass unemployment will kill and destroy the lives of many more people than SARS-CoV-2!”***

*Dr Pascal Sacré*

[<https://www.globalresearch.ca/covid-19-rt-pcr-how-to-mislead-all-humanity-using-a-test-to-lock-down-society/5728483>]

# **How Deadly is the Virus?**

## **Avoidance, Prevention and Cure**

Information on the ferocity of the virus SARS-CoV-2 and the impact of the disease it causes (named COVID-19 by WHO) is poor among the public. The overall and category-wise effects of the virus on the infected are not adequately reported in the news media, and the public is at a loss to know the true gravity of the problem and respond suitably. Vested interests seem to wilfully obstruct open discussion of core issues and developing sensible approaches to avoid, prevent and cure COVID -19.

Country wise and region wise real-time data are accessible on the Internet [<https://ourworldindata.org/>] for reported daily rates and cumulative totals of infection, successful treatment and fatality, along with derived data. They have been used variously to study the spread of infection and death and compare the situations in countries and regions. Strong doubts have, however, been expressed over methods used for identifying infection and establishment of COVID-19 as the cause of death.

Sadly, but not unusually, print and social media and government in most countries join hands to blackout deviation from the official narrative on the disease, its spread and control. The news blackout seems worse than that during the campaign of lies against Iraq about weapons of mass destruction, to justify bombing Iraq.

When WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic, most governments and mainstream media agreed, and presented a picture that SARS-CoV-2 is a fast spreading deadly virus. It is now said that the virus has mutated to 'more virulent' forms that spread more rapidly and may resist proven

vaccines. While evidence for the mutants being deadlier is weak, lax attitude of governments facilitated faster spread, and poorly organized medical treatment for the infected led to avoidable deaths. Lack of public discussion helped the impression grow in the public's mind that COVID-19 is a fast spreading killer disease with no assured cure.

The global media uncritically endorse harsh government steps including lockdowns and even curfews as measures that save people from a hitherto unknown deadly disease which, if left alone, would destroy humanity.

We need to separate fact from fiction.

- *Is COVID-19 an altogether new phenomenon?*

It is not. The virus is of the SARS-CoV family. The first SARS viruses identified in 2002 had an estimated overall fatality rate of 8% (revised as 14–15% in 2003 by WHO) but exceeding 50% for people over 64 years. As Corona-type of viruses have existed since long, individual communities could have acquired some degree of inherent resistance to COVID-19 by direct and indirect exposure to corona viruses.

Epidemics vary in behaviour. COVID-19 is coronavirus driven like MERS and SARS. It is faster spreading and far more contagious. Its rapid spread through pre-symptomatic, asymptomatic and mildly symptomatic persons has made it harder to contain than MERS and SARS. But it is far less deadly.

Belief that SARS-CoV-2 is a fast spreading deadly virus dominates policy for all but a few governments. Measures to arrest its spread have been mostly harsh with heavy economic and social cost to persons and communities, in both the short and the long term.

There is, nevertheless, justified fear that the state uses the occasion to tighten its grip on society and weaken the will of the people to stand up for their rights and social justice and defy the state if necessary. There is also fear that global pharmaceutical monopolies, with media backing, wield undue influence on state policy.

- ***Are reported infection rates trustworthy?***

Some groups of medical professionals, like the United Health Professionals, have contested the claimed infection and fatality rates. ([https://www.change.org/p/governments-worldwide-international-alert-message-of-health-professionals-to-governments-citizens-of-the-world/w?source\\_location=petition\\_nav](https://www.change.org/p/governments-worldwide-international-alert-message-of-health-professionals-to-governments-citizens-of-the-world/w?source_location=petition_nav)).

The late Dr Kary Mullis, Nobel Laureate inventor of the RT-PCR test, had reportedly said in 2013 that “PCR detects a very small segment of the nucleic acid which is part of a virus itself. The specific fragment detected is determined by the somewhat arbitrary choice of DNA primers used, which become the ends of the amplified fragment”. Thus RT-PCR detects genetic sequences of virus particles (not whole viruses) and a positive test need not mean infection by the virus. Health authorities now accept susceptibility of RT-PCR tests to error of up to 10%, which weakens it as a diagnostic tool for treatment. But it is still useful for qualitative comparison even with larger error.

Serology is used to detect immunoglobulin G (IgG) antibodies specific to SARS-CoV-2 in a sample of cells from the upper respiratory tract to detect viruses. Test results can disagree based on differences in the type of antibody looked for. Good knowledge of the type of antibody to be measured is thus essential to ensure a meaningful test.

Dr Pascal Sacré, among others, challenged equating a positive test to infection and declaring the number of new COVID-19 cases on that basis. This is important as the media use PCR positives to intimidate the public by assimilating the data to a fresh wave of COVID-19. [<https://counterinformation.wordpress.com/2020/08/07/covid-19-closer-to-the-truth-tests-and-immunity/>]. The credibility and likely abuse of the PCR test are discussed in <https://walkinverse.com/pcr-test-gold-standard/>.

Sacré rejects that a PCR positive confirms viral contact at some point, and argues that serology cannot measure cross-immunity, non-specific innate immunity and cell specific immunity that are essential to

understanding the infection. He considers the attribution of all PCR positives to SARS-CoV-2 specific antibodies as overly simplified. The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) concurs that a positive PCR result does not rule out bacterial infection or co-infection with other viruses, and that the detected agent may not be the definite cause of disease.

Estimates of sensitivity of PCR tests vary. It is accepted that PCR positive at best says that one has (or recently had) COVID-19 but none on potential to infect, while a negative PCR only says that one is currently unlikely to be infectious.

As number of tests per million affects the measured infection rate, confirmed infection rates will rise with testing. But it is likely that all showing symptoms will invariably be tested to confirm disease. Statistical models [<https://ourworldindata.org/covid-models>] have been developed to rectify shortcomings arising from inadequate testing. But modelling itself is subjective and the four statistical models (two now discontinued) showed wide variation in estimates. Thus, this study will use 'confirmed cases' data based on PCR testing despite methodological flaws, which no model can eliminate.

- ***How reliable are COVID-19 fatality rates?***

Current COVID-19 death data comprise all deaths following infection by SARS-CoV-2. This has led to two polarised schools, one counting all persons suspected to be infected at time of death as COVID-19 deaths and the other only deaths solely due COVID-19.

Hospitals in the US have been accused of inflating COVID-19 death data. Even allowing for inflated numbers, the reported death rates are too large and therefore worrying. Another aspect, which concerns the contribution of COVID-19 to any death, is more important.

Breakdown of the fatality data into categories by age group, pre-existing serious ailments, and personal care is necessary to correctly



assess the effect of the pandemic. Data offered to the public often lack in important details.

Ealy, McEvoy *et al.* [<https://childrenshealthdefense.org/news/if-covid-fatalities-were-90-2-lower-how-would-you-feel-about-schools-reopening/>] say: "Had the CDC used its industry standard, Medical Examiners' and Coroners' Handbook on Death Registration and Fetal Death Reporting Revision 2003, as it has for all other causes of death for the last 17 years, the COVID-19 fatality count would be approximately 90.2% lower than it currently is."

CDC, on March 21, 2020 introduced specific guidelines regarding Death Certificates and their tabulation in the National Vital Statistics System. [<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/covid-19.htm>] including: "In cases where a definite diagnosis of COVID-19 cannot be made, but it is suspected or likely (e.g., the circumstances are compelling within a reasonable degree of certainty), it is acceptable to report COVID-19 on a death certificate as "probable" or "presumed" encourage hospitals to claim COVID-19 to be the cause of death".

It is uncertain if countries other than the US adopt such approach. However, given the US lead in reported COVID-19 infection and deaths, it helps to assess correctly the toxicity of the virus.

The infection and death rates assigned to the virus alone tell very little, and knowing the conditions under which infection led to death is more important in the response to large scale infection and appropriate allocation of resources for treatment.

The massive surge in infection in India since April 2021 says how reckless management and ill preparedness can cause a health crisis. The government is desperate to find beds for thousands of patients thronging the hospitals, amid shortages of clinical oxygen and other essentials to treat persons with serious symptoms. Blaming the large outburst in infection and the upsurge in fatalities on a 'new' strain of the virus can deflect attention from a wrong decision that allowed

the gathering of 9.1 million pilgrims between January and April 2021 (3.5 million at peak) around the polluted river Ganga in Haridwar.

There is, on the other hand, a school of thought that actual fatality rates are far more than reported rates, and calling for correction of the 'error' using excess fatality data (comparing number of deaths in the relevant period with that for a matching period preceding COVID-19 set in.) [<https://www.who.int/data/stories/the-true-death-toll-of-covid-19-estimating-global-excess-mortality>]

### • ***Who face the worst threat from COVID-19 infection?***

This matter received scant attention early during the pandemic as stress was on coaxing people into masking noses and mouths, soaping and sanitizing hands, and keeping the mandatory social distance of 2 m in public places. Yet COVID-19 spread wildly. Significantly, in Sweden, with minimal restrictions on people but good advice on safe practices for the infected and the vulnerable, spread rate was not much worse than European average. Death rates were clearly less. By early 2021 COVID-19 was near zero in Sweden, while the US passed Sweden in deaths per million, despite Sweden's older population.

Ioannidis et al. observe that the median age of death for COVID-19 is similar to or slightly less than life expectancy for the population in the location, and that 42–57% of deaths in Europe were in care homes while many deaths in the US occurred in nursing homes. [<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0013935120307854>].

They add that differentiation between dying 'with' and dying 'from' SARS-CoV-2 is important as a vast majority of COVID-19 patients had comorbidities that could equally (if not more significantly) contribute to a fatal outcome as SARS-CoV-2.

The elderly and people with more than one comorbidity are highly vulnerable. The high death rate in care homes and nursing homes is due to the vulnerability of the residents to age-related susceptibility to comorbidities and poorer immunity compounded by lack of

medical facilities. The higher death proportion of middle aged people in South Asia than in Europe and the US may be attributed to poorer age wise physical fitness and thus lower life expectancy.

- ***How do COVID-19 fatality rates compare with those for the ‘seasonal flu’?***

Interpreting COVID-19 data can be subjective. The infection to fatality ratio (IFR) varies widely, depending on how infection rate has been estimated. If infection rate refers only those with symptoms, IFR will be higher than reported. Study of a statistically meaningful sample population to determine the fraction of asymptomatics (symptom-free infected) among the infected will yield more realistic estimates.

Tendency is to use raw data comprising mostly symptomatic cases. A study at Imperial College London in 2020 showed an infection fatality ratio of 1.15% for high-income nations and 0.23% for low-income nations. [<https://www.webmd.com/lung/news/20201030/covid-19-infection-fatality-ratio-is-about-one-point-15-percent>]. WHO estimates seasonal flu fatality at about 0.1%.

Ealy, McEvoy *et al.* argue that 94% of the deaths attributed to COVID-19 had on average 2.6 comorbidities so that the fatality due to COVID-19 would be on par with seasonal flu fatalities.

What matters is the contribution of SARS-CoV-2 infection to death. As the vast majority of COVID-19 victims are elderly, it is unlikely that SARS-CoV-2 infection in itself causes death of healthy young and middle aged individuals. However, serious comorbidities if present will worsen pre-existing conditions and shorten life by some months or even an year. If the effect is to typically shorten life by a few years, then the virus may be called a serious health hazard.

- ***How do COVID-19 fatality rates compare with those for other epidemic or pandemic diseases?***

It is agreed that IFR for COVID-19 is far less than for SARS and MERS (both coronavirus illnesses with a far less spread rate). Cholera, small pox, AIDS and dengue are deadlier. What is disturbing about the state and media hype driven panic about COVID-19 is that poorer countries with a prevalence of HIV, TB and Malaria divert material and human resources from these problems in order to control the spread of COVID-19, thus leading to higher fatality rates related to them. [<https://www.theglobalfight.org/covid-aids-tb-malaria/>].

The BBC reported: “Across the globe, patients have been denied cancer care, kidney dialysis and urgent transplant surgeries, with fatal results at times.... And as with all crises, the current pandemic looks set to hit the poorest countries the hardest. Scientists have warned that, in some places, disruption to the control of diseases such as HIV, tuberculosis and malaria could lead to losses on the same scale as those caused directly by the virus. Similarly, experts fear that deaths from illnesses such as cholera could far exceed those from Covid-19 itself.” [<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200528-why-most-covid-19-deaths-wont-be-from-the-virus>]

COVID-19 has been slow to penetrate Africa and, as dengue and Covid-19 can coexist, victims of serious infectious diseases could be identified with only one disorder and not treated for the other.

- ***Does COVID-19 have a lasting adverse impact on health?***

There is little evidence to justify such fear. However, while the early scare that COVID-19 was deadly and could harm health in the long term has gone the fear psychosis that it created endures. Thus many seek protection by vaccination even when they could do without or wait for the pandemic to ease and thus avoid the vaccination rush.

The spread of infection could have been reduced if governments and the media put more faith in the integrity of the public and informed them correctly about the real risks of COVID-19 and appropriate preventive measures. The hazards faced by the people are the result of bad planning and fear psychosis among the public.

- ***Why do infection and fatality vary between countries and across continents?***

Besides country to country variation, there is urban-rural contrast. The virus spreads far more rapidly in crowded environs than in less urbanized areas. Differences are strong between continents. Infection and fatality in Sub-Saharan Africa, except South Africa (and Namibia and Botswana to a less degree) are much less than in Europe and the Americas. A BBC report attributes it to early action, public support, good community health, warm climate and a large young population. [<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54418613>]

The land area of a country, the time of initiation of infection and geographic distribution are important factors besides control methods. The first wave of infection did not infect more than a fraction of a per cent of the population and control was by restriction of human movement, without educating the public and winning public consent for infection control. Successive waves were stronger, but people were resentful of the restrictions. Also, in countries with large territory the infection could spread over a long period and even show breaks.

East and Southeast Asia seem less prone to infection and death despite high population density. [<https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2021/reasons-for-asia-pacific-success-in-suppressing-covid-19/>]. Pre-existing immunity from exposure to a corona virus helps. Trust in the government and collective spirit support preventive measures and care for the infected. There have, however, been recent surges in Vietnam, Malaysia and China's Taiwan among others owing to lapse of vigilance. But the overall picture is not likely to alter significantly.

North Atlantic countries did not gain from the experience of Asia-Pacific. The US and some European countries seemed to believe that non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) short of locking down the economy cannot control the pandemic. Governments that were loath to close the economy were lax in control measures until too late.

South America fared nearly as badly as Europe and the US. Lock down has not delivered and infection and fatality per million remains high, except in Venezuela with a sound health care system.

Public distrust of government found expression in distaste for NPIs, noncompliance with prevention policies, and resistance to stringent control. Distrust of the state and the media, with reputation for fake news, along with lack of public discussion polarize public opinion to undermine cooperation even in essential control measures.

Preventive measures with public support, emphasis on treatment of vulnerable sections of the population, and care for the infected with serious symptoms would have kept down infection and minimised deaths. It will be worth asking ourselves how Nicaragua, Venezuela, Cuba and Haiti had far less infection and fatality per million than their respective neighbours as well as the wealthier US and Canada.

- ***How do people protect themselves from infection?***

The assumption that vaccination is the only way to protect humanity from COVID-19 rejects the roles of innate nonspecific immunity that one is born with and accumulated immunity that the body develops by exposure to various virus attacks. Without them every viral attack can lead to an epidemic so that human survival will rely on ceaseless vaccinations and a banquet of pharmaceuticals. A body lacking in immunity against an antigen may be immunized by injecting an antiserum containing antibodies formed in another body to offer immediate but far less enduring protection against the antigen.

**Inner immunity to COVID-19:** The US government agency CDC [<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/flu-vs-covid19.htm>] has stated that symptoms wise Covid-19 resembles influenza. But they are caused by different kinds of virus, COVID-19 by coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, and flu by various influenza viruses. Similarity of symptoms makes it hard to tell them apart so that diagnosis requires further testing. It should, however, be noted that the fear campaign about COVID-19 would have been overcome had the public been reassured early that for all practical purposes COVID-19 was like flu.

As SARS-CoV-2 is akin to coronaviruses causing common colds, it is likely that people would have over years developed some immunity to coronaviruses. Cross-immunity between SARS-CoV-1 and cold coronaviruses is now established. Protection by this natural cell-based (not antibody-based) immunity can last 10 years in contrast to less than 3 years for antibody-mediated humeral immunity.

The prospect of such cross-immunity protecting many from SARS-CoV-2 before vaccines arrived deserves thought. Cell-based immunity uses T-lymphocytes (T cells) like CD4+ and CD8+. T cell immune response defends against infection. Cross-immunity between common cold viruses and SARS-CoV-2 can thus act against antigens common to all coronaviruses.

Dr Pascal Sacré explains that it is possible that, even without noticing, one may have eliminated the virus with the help of one's innate immunity, cross-immunity to other cold coronaviruses, and/or T-type cellular immunity, without producing antibodies.

Innate immunity is non-specific and is the automatic first response of the body to an infecting virus. Its defence of healthy people against the virus could circumvent need for specific immunity. This means a low incidence of COVID-19 in healthy individuals.

**Coercive control methods:** Standard of living and good health care are important to one's health. Quality of diet, physical activity and

emotional state are more important. Good mental health is vital to cope with illness. Infection control involving emotional pressure, confinement, forced social distancing and prolonged wearing of a mask is emotionally stressful and harms mental health. Ironically such life-saving measures have tragic consequences.

The effect of stress on immunity is well demonstrated [Segerstrom & Miller, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1361287/>]. Thus the severity of infection, by COVID-19 in this context, depends much on the state of physical and emotional health of the patient.

Also, alongside age and stress, the presence of one or several co-morbidities weakens the system and causes a decline in specific acquired immunity, including humeral antibody immunity.

While innate cellular immunity could overcome SARS-CoV-2 of most people as it is a coronavirus of the cold virus family and T-cell cross-immunity will be effective, immune defence in vulnerable persons as referred to earlier may not respond appropriately. As a result, the old and sickly suffer severe forms of disease while healthy young people and adults stay protected with immunity intact.

**Trusting the masses:** People should be well informed of the disease and its impact on categories of people, based on age group and state of health, and of ways to avoid and survive infection. What often happens instead is that the state and the media frighten the public into accepting hastily mass produced vaccines.

Besides sound scientific information to reassure healthy persons, warnings and advice are necessary regarding vulnerable individuals on precautions to avoid infection, identifying illness if it occurs, and promptly seeking due treatment. Is it to propagate the belief that immunity is possible only by vaccination that most governments and mainstream media, readily equating “positive RT-PCR tests” to “new COVID-19 cases”, do not educate people about the real hazards of infection but coerce them into fear psychosis?



A study of infection data based on PCR tests and fatality regardless of comorbidities would still suggest that most of the population will survive COVID-19 even without a vaccine. With comorbidity counted, COVID-19 will only be a fraction as deadly as what we have been told.

What matter are symptoms whose interpretation decides if one can stay home or shall be quarantined to be seen by a doctor if symptoms worsen. It is wise always to take safety measures that avert infection.

**Mutants and vaccines:** The SARS-CoV-2 has reportedly muted into a several more virile variants resistant to available vaccines. Does this mean that a vaccinated person could be infected by a mutant at some stage? If so, it will be absurd to vaccinate the whole populations.

- *How best can the infection be treated individually and collectively?*

Prevention is the best option if it does not imply undue restrictions on the public. It is wisest to fully inform the public of the proposed measures, explain the reasons and inform them of consequences of failure to implement them. People should be free to collectively arrive at the best course of action by discussion and debate; and where they disagree with a proposed measure they should be encouraged to offer an alternative. Forcibly curtailing human activity to control infection could yield results worse than from the infection.

Such approach will work if the state has a healthy relationship with the citizens who trust the government. For example, in Sweden, preventive measures were implemented voluntarily. Stricter regimes of prevention of infection proved effective in several countries like China, South Korea and Vietnam where people did not question the intentions of the government. In Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, healthy dialogue between the government and people enabled much lower death rates than in neighbouring countries.

Preventive medicine and community medicine are two approaches that would have a positive impact on control of infection and fatality. Faith in the collective wisdom of the people is central to preventive and community medicine. Reliable and scientifically sound information backed by freedom to decide and act collectively is essential to avoiding and surviving any epidemic.

Lock downs cannot offer a lasting solution for a long enduring pandemic. A well informed community acting within reasonable limits of caution can control spread of infection. Even if infection is widespread, risk of death, most for the physically weak with serious comorbidities, is minimised by timely medical treatment.

There is genuine concern that the Covid-19 vaccination drive marks the first time that the entire humanity is obliged to immunise itself with hastily produced vaccines against infection by a virus akin to the common cold virus and causing symptoms rather like a flu.

As the campaign for universal vaccination is part of the business agenda of major pharmaceutical MNCs as well as a political issue, the politics of vaccination is best dealt with separately.

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# **The Vaccine Business:**

## **Creation and Control of a Market**

For the first time in history there is a campaign to vaccinate the entire mankind with hastily produced vaccines to fight a virus whose effect on healthy young and middle aged people is at worst that of flu, despite claims that it is highly infectious and deadly.

Gains of vaccination are hailed without assessment of performance. The issue is not whether vaccination in itself is effective or risk-free, despite harsh side-effects of some (like Astra-Zeneca) that are public knowledge and others (like Pfizer despite 23 deaths in Norway) rather hushed. If the vaccine was risk free, what was Pfizer's need to demand, unsuccessfully, from some nations to put up collaterals for anticipated lawsuits against it for vaccine injury due to its COVID-19 inoculation? The key issue is: is vaccination the only way and are there alternatives to mass vaccination.

Let us look at the infection and fatality data before we look at the need for and impact of vaccination.

### **Measuring infection and fatality**

Uncertainty exists in PCR testing owing to inherent flaws as well as test procedure. While data error can affect comparison of countries and regions, PCR testing remains a fair way to compare infection rates in time and space within a country or even a region.

Ioannidis [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33716331/>] surveyed 61 studies and eight preliminary national estimates and observed that the inferred infection fatality rates tended to be much lower than estimates made

earlier during the pandemic. On the other hand, Katz and Merone [<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1201971220321809#sec0045>], while agreeing that different places will experience different Infection Fatality Ratios (IFRs) relating to age distribution and perhaps underlying comorbidities in the population, hold that the mean IFR of 0.68 for data gathered mostly from Europe and US, as well as China, Japan and Brazil is an underestimate. There are those who say that rates of infection and death are much higher than reported, and those who insist that infection rates and IFRs are grossly overestimated.

There is doubt if it is proper to attribute all reported COVID-19 deaths solely if not mainly to the virus. But, since infection can contribute even marginally to the death of someone with comorbidity, the virus plays a role, however small. Nevertheless, careful distinction between death by and death with the virus is important in addressing the problem

Important facts escape notice in data offered as raw numbers of infections and fatalities. Despite emergence of various strains that allegedly spread faster and have higher toxicity, the virus has infected barely 2% of the world population between January 2000 and the time of study (20<sup>th</sup> May 2021). The worst infection rate for countries with population over 10 million is 15.5% in Czechia, followed by a little over 10% for Sweden and US. Infection averages around 5% in Europe and is below 6% in South America, 1% in Asia and 0.3% in Africa. While global infection rate is falling there is risk of a surge in parts of Africa with low infection rates per million, especially if the low rates result from lack of exposure to the virus.

An infection rate of 10.5% in Sweden, with minimal restrictions, suggests that the inbuilt resistance of the human body could either defy infection or help the body adapt fast to the virus. This may partly explain the low rates of infection and fatality per million in East and South Asia.

Patterns of infection and fatality rates vary. Number of infection waves and waveform, and starting conditions, size and duration of each infection wave differ. Multiple waves can occur when population pockets that were

earlier unexposed to the virus get infected by re-entry of the virus, often following relaxing of restrictions.

Person to person propagation of the virus implies that infection may last long in countries with large territory and isolated communities. A reason why India's huge second wave was of short duration could be that the countrywide infection backed by mass participation in the Kumbhmela started simultaneously but for a slight delay in two southern states.

For a new strain of the virus to initiate an infection wave, there should be a sizeable population lacking in immunity. Even the same strain of virus could trigger multiple waves if a restriction weary public lowers vigil and/or a complaisant state removes restraints after successful control of an infection wave. Risking infection to revive the economy caused strong second waves in Cuba, Vietnam and Venezuela, although the surge did not cause a matching rise in fatality. The upsurge in travel within and between countries in the past several decades has made it hard to isolate infection. Thus, without sustained vigilance, prevention by protective means and locking down all or part of a country faces risk of re-infection until the pandemic passes.

We are informed that waves of infection from around June 2020 were by more virulent and deadlier strains of the virus. While the rise in infections suggests greater infectiousness, data for infection to fatality ratio (IFR) do not support a deadlier strain. India's strong second wave choked hospitals to crisis level. But IFR was 1.1% compared with 1.4% for the earlier wave. Leaving aside IFR exceeding 10% in some European countries during early weeks, IFR for Europe, overall, fell from over 5% to under 2% for waves between October 2020 and May 2021. Infection waves overlapped in Brazil where IFR dipped from 3.2% for the period up to October 2020 to 2.9% from then on until May 2021. Global IFR declined to near 2% from just over 5% for the preceding 12 months. Thus the new strains do not seem to have made much of an impact on IFR.

Infection and fatality depend much on human resistance to infection. A large ageing population, poor general health, shortcomings in public

health care and sanitation, and lack of a sense of community aggravate disease and death. It is now acknowledged that mismanaged health care accounted for many of the deaths in nursing homes and homes for the aged in the US and UK.

Those who claim that COVID-19 deaths are under-reported use excess mortality data for the period concerned over the corresponding period in earlier years. But this ignores the possibility that many sickened people could have avoided hospital during the pandemic for fear of infection. Increase in deaths could also have been caused by increased alcohol and drug usage and stress related issues including suicide during lock downs. In poorer countries, loss of income owing to nation-wide lockdown has led to malnutrition and hunger and consequent ill health. Thus the impact of the virus or its strains cannot be glibly explained in terms of toxicity.

## **How effective have vaccines been?**

Despite media and government claims of vaccination controlling infection, the rate of infection in countries with minimal vaccination (under 10 single doses per hundred people) began to decline even before vaccination took effect. The Coronavirus Resource Center of Johns Hopkins University [<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/vaccines/vaccines-faq>] pertinently observed that: “While some protection may be conferred after a single dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna mRNA vaccines, this protection is far less than after two doses. The second dose acts as a booster, better preparing the immune system to fight infection.”

Two-dose vaccines help only fractionally after the first dose. Israel fully vaccinated 60% of the population (120 doses per hundred) between late December 2020 and late March 2021, during its “Second Wave”. But infection rate passed its peak by the last week of January when about 15% of the population would have completed vaccination, which needs two more weeks to take effect, or after infection rate fell to half the peak value. Thus the benefit of the vaccine seems marginal as 9% of the population had been infected (IFR = 0.76%) compared with 6% infection (IFR =1.13%)

for Palestine where infection is near its end, with vaccination at a mere 10 doses per hundred. It seems, however, that Israel is now protected against a potential Third Wave, if it ever occurs.

British vaccination started in the first week of January. By end of January, when 14 per hundred had the first dose, infection rate had tumbled from a peak of over 60 000 per day in the first week of January to well below half the value. With the first dose having only a small effect and taking two weeks for that, only a few per cent of the population could have been protected. Thus, credit is not due to the vaccine for the fall in infection rate to below a quarter of the peak value in mid-February.

In Hungary, infection rate peaked at around 10 000 per day in the last week of March and fell by half in mid-April, as vaccination rate rose from 5 to 45 per hundred between mid-February and mid-April. Vaccination could have improved the rate of decline by 20% at best, so that infection rate became negligible by late May rather than mid-June.

In the US, infection was on average over 200 000 per day between early December 2020 and mid-January 2021. Vaccination grew from under 10 doses per hundred at start of February to 83 per hundred by 20<sup>th</sup> May. Infection rate fell steadily from the second week of January to below half the peak value by mid-February with hardly 8 per hundred vaccinated fully, so that the role of vaccination could only be minimal.

In Chile, vaccination began in early February to reach 90 per hundred by 20<sup>th</sup> May. Infection persisted with moderate fatality. Failure to arrest infection was attributed to the inadequacy of a single dose and to Chile's premature relaxing of safety measures.

Infection and death rates were low in India, with just 5 doses of vaccine per hundred administered by end of March. But the 'Second Wave' began in late March, aided by reckless government policy to allow a religious gathering of millions. Infection surged 15 fold to 400 000 per day in early May. Vaccination reached 13.5 doses per hundred by 20<sup>th</sup> May, when infection rate was down by a third from its peak. Vaccination rate was too

small to explain even a 5% reduction. Accelerated vaccination could at best help to advance the end of the Second Wave by a few days.

As US embargos denied Iran medical support, including vaccines, barely 3 in hundred were vaccinated by 20<sup>th</sup> May. Infection rate swelled from late March following Iranian New Year (21<sup>st</sup> March) festivity to reach around 25 000 per day in mid-April but fall by a half by 20<sup>th</sup> May.

Japan had three waves, each bigger than the preceding one and taking about 4 weeks to decay from peak value to a quarter of it. An even bigger fourth passed its peak by 10<sup>th</sup> May with barely 6 vaccinated per hundred.

South Africa, the worst hit sub-Saharan state, had two infection waves: with peaks of 13 000 per day in July 2020 and over 20 000 in January 2021. With negligible vaccination, infection rate fell to a quarter of peak value in four weeks for the first wave and in three weeks for the second.

The question here is not about the potential of a vaccine to stop infection but its true role in arresting it. Vaccination started in earnest in February 2021 near the start of the second global wave, overlapping the first that peaked in January. Vaccination picked up slowly (5 first doses per hundred in mid-March to 10 by 10<sup>th</sup> April and 20 by mid-May). But Israel had crossed the 100 dose threshold in mid-March, followed by UK and US at 40 per 100. In all cases infection had passed its peak by mid-February.

However effective, vaccination has thus far not helped COVID-19 control very much globally: Europe passed its peak by 10<sup>th</sup> April with just 20 doses per hundred. Vaccination in Asia lagged Europe by over a month. In most countries infection rate is poised to pass peak before 20 doses per hundred are delivered. US, the most vaccinated in the Americas, had its fourth (weak) wave pass peak in mid-April. Brazil, the most infected in Latin America, rushes vaccination amid falling fatality. But the infection and inoculation patterns suggest that infection rate would fall to half the peak value before 25% of the population is fully vaccinated.

IFR values are for Asia 1.3%, Africa 2.6%; Europe 2.2%, North America 2.2%, South America 3%, and Oceania 1.8%. It should be noted that



fatalities refer to death with COVID-19 rather than by it. The number of PCR tests per million is small for Asia and South America, with 350 000 tests per million for most countries. Africa has tested even fewer, while many European countries and North America tested well over a million per million. This means that many persons who are asymptomatic or with mild symptoms would not have been tested in the Third World.

## **Is vaccination the best option?**

Vaccines arrived too late to arrest infection. Australian veterinary surgeon and Nobel laureate Peter Doherty, anticipating a long delay in arriving at an effective vaccine, said on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020: "I think it's very likely we'll get to good drugs even quicker than we'll get to a good vaccine," [<https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/podcasts/lessons-for-a-future-pandemic>]. That expectation failed as pharmaceutical giants rushed to produce vaccines before the pandemic passed. Why WHO and pharmaceutical companies showed minimal interest in cheap and effective drugs is food for thought.

Five types of COVID-19 vaccines had been developed within an year:

- Viral vector vaccines using a modified unrelated safe virus to deliver SARS-CoV-2 genetic material (AstraZeneca; J&J; Sputnik V)
- Messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) vaccines inducing cells to make a protein that triggers immune response (Pfizer, Moderna)
- Inactivated vaccines using deactivated SARS-CoV-2 virus (SinoPharm; Sinovac; Bharat Biotech)
- Attenuated vaccines using weakened SARS-CoV-2 virus (Codagenix)
- Protein vaccines using COVID-derived proteins to trigger immune response (Novavax; Sanofi/GSK; Cuban vaccines on clinical trials)

Public funding had a major role in the search for COVID-19 vaccines. Over US\$ 5.5 billion went into COVID-19 vaccine R&D. Companies not funded directly had state-backed advance purchase orders. It is not surprising that Pfizer is lobbying hard to ward off the vaccine patent

waiver at WHO when it expects US\$ 26 billion revenue from its COVID-19 vaccine (out of US\$ 71 and 73 billion total revenue) for 2021.

Vaccine efficacy varies. With typically 6 month shelf life, a vaccination programme has to be in place prior to purchase. Reliability of supply is an issue: unfortunate events derailed delivery of 60 0000 'second doses' from India to Sri Lanka. Another issue was the very low storage temperatures for Pfizer and Moderna. But market forces coaxed Pfizer into declaring adequacy of storage at normal refrigerator temperatures instead of the initial -60 to -80°C. Moderna followed suit.

Claims of experience and advances in biotechnology were used to dismiss doubts on hasty production of vaccines, bypassing usual security steps. Serious criticism from reputed medical practitioners about the use of a totally new untested technology in mRNA vaccines has been ignored.

Vaccine safety was at the heart of concerns about hasty development of vaccines. Fears proved justified: 113 post-vaccination deaths, 78 in long term care facilities, occurred within a month of vaccination with the two mRNA vaccines. [<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7008e3.htm>]. People vaccinated with AstraZeneca suffered rare blood clots, causing its suspension in much of Europe and elsewhere. J&J vaccine too was suspended briefly following reports of post-vaccination deaths.

The number of adverse events may be statistically minimal. But vaccine providers are unwilling even to consider possible risks. It seems that the pharmaceutical industry is determined to have the entire humanity vaccinated even after all infection waves pass.

Medical opinion is divided on the best way to fight the pandemic. Yet, the dominant discourse has somehow side-lined a mechanism that protected humanity for millennia from epidemics. Debates juxtapose vaccination and herd immunity as mutually exclusive, whereas humanity will eventually reach herd immunity, either through a vaccine or by natural infections of the past as well as the future. In all likelihood, it will be a

combination of the two as vaccination programmes have reached a significant section of the population in two continents.

## Herd Immunity

Amid health officials' scramble for ways to protect the public from COVID-19, there is occasional mention of herd of immunity as a way to contain it with long term benefit.

The notion that societies should passively allow the virus pass unchecked through the population to achieve herd immunity is flawed, as it will kill many of the old and vulnerable in the process. Sadly, the mention of "herd immunity" often conjures up such impression in the public mind.

Herd immunity is a process by which a population, including members whose immune system lacks resistance on its own, is protected from an infectious disease by immunising a sufficiently large part of the community. The infectant cannot spread if many enough can resist it.

- **How does herd immunity work naturally?** On invasion by a virus or bacteria the body creates antibodies to fight off the invader. [See <https://www.webmd.com/lung/what-is-herd-immunity#1>]. The antibodies are retained even after recovery to help fight another infection.
- **How is herd immunity achieved by vaccination?** A vaccine induces the body to 'imagine' infection by a specific virus or bacteria for which it is designed, and produces antibodies to fight infection when it really occurs. For herd immunity by vaccination, the minimum number needing to be vaccinated depends on the infection rate of the virus or bacteria (known by its reproduction number  $R_0$ , a high  $R_0$  meaning fast spread and a need to vaccinate more people).

$R_0$  for COVID-19 is estimated at around 2 to 3, on par with common cold, slightly above seasonal flu and well above SARS and MERS, explaining why these deadlier diseases did not spread like COVID-19. COVID-19 may require vaccinating a half to two thirds of the population. [<https://www.webmd.com/lung/what-is-herd-immunity#>]

Thus, there is little conflict between the two processes which can even join forces. But the natural process offers longer sustained antibodies. But the vaccination lobby encourages a negative view of herd immunity. ["Five reasons why COVID herd immunity is probably impossible" in <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-00728-2>]

WHO, which in June 2020 held that herd immunity is attainable either by vaccination or as a result of previous infection, changed its position in November 2020 to hold that herd immunity is attained by reaching a threshold of vaccination is reached and not by exposure to the virus (See Chossudovsky in <https://www.globalresearch.ca/>). This stand violates the universally accepted concept of herd immunity to promote vaccination.

Lockdown strategies, by deferring cases into the future, delay herd immunity to risk infection as long as the pandemic lasts. Availability of effective vaccines enables strategies to vaccinate high risk groups with vaccination optional for others who shall report symptoms if any.

## **Vaccination: business and politics ride high**

Never before were vaccines mass produced at speed as now, bypassing conventional procedures. Universal vaccination is urged to fight a virus that only hurts a small vulnerable section of the population. Would not a strategy to vaccinate only the vulnerable as for the seasonal flu in cold climates be saner as it will let the virus pass through the rest to acquire long term herd immunity for all?

On occasion, governments bow to economic and social pressure to lower vigilance to unwittingly undermine well managed infection control and let infection surge as in Vietnam, Thailand and Cuba. However, the countries concerned have acted to restore control and retard infection.

Profiteering by Big Pharma in COVID-19 vaccines is no secret. Unseen by the public are willing partners fetching their share as associated earnings and commissions. Cost of testing and vaccination is already a burden on struggling economies. Peddlers of pharmaceuticals, soaps and detergents,

sanitizers and protective gear cynically exploit the mood of fear sustained by the media. Meanwhile, plans are afoot to prolong the agony.

Overall, the exaggeration of the virus threat has led to serious global economic dislocation, with Third World facing ruin even without much direct impact of COVID-19, as economies are interlinked and dominant economies are in disarray. The economic crisis will help global creditors to bring governments more under their control to impose harsh austerity measures on the ordinary people.

Third World lock downs have hit hard the livelihood of the poor, and countries face economic decay, mass unemployment, poverty and famine. Hunger and malnutrition will kill many more than COVID-19 will.

The state-and-media induced panic has, even temporarily, dulled the will of people to mobilize for their rights. Oppressive states and the exploiting classes miss no chance to tighten their hold on power. Democracy faces a serious threat aggravated by the side-lining of health and welfare issues concerns about the poisoning of the environment and global warming. Little is heard on the environmental impact of the waste generated by measures to protect against infection and the process of vaccination.

These are matters for the global left and progressive forces to take note and set aside factionalism to unite against the imperialist order.

## **Resistance to vaccination**

Not all opposition to mass vaccination is rational. But there are extensive critical studies like the e-book by Chossudovsky using scientific evidence. [<https://www.globalresearch.ca/the-2020-worldwide-corona-crisis-destroying-civil-society-engineered-economic-depression-global-coup-detat-and-the-great-reset/5730652>]. Even subjective arguments have underlying concerns that are serious, like fear of a conspiracy led by vested interests, especially the global pharmaceutical giants. There is also fear that capitalism and the state scent opportunity to secure compliance using fear psychosis driven by the impression of a life threatening pandemic.

Doubts raised by deniers of the pandemic and opponents of vaccination are based on experiences such as the following:

- Declaration of a pandemic by WHO seems premature. China on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019 reported the spread of pneumonia in Wuhan to WHO, and on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2020 identified the virus responsible. Three days later, WHO issued broad interim guidelines for nations to prepare for the virus. With only 1073 cases outside China (counting 621 on the ship Diamond Princess) WHO, On 20<sup>th</sup> February, warned of a global spread of the virus, and declared a pandemic on 11<sup>th</sup> March based on 118 000 confirmed cases and over 4 200 deaths worldwide, with two-thirds of cases and three-quarters of deaths within China.
- Declarations about vaccines in January and February raised suspicion of prior knowledge of announcing a pandemic. Development of a 2019 nCoV vaccine was announced at Davos, two weeks after the 7<sup>th</sup> January statement by China and, on 24<sup>th</sup> February, Moderna Inc. announced that its mRNA vaccine was ready for human testing.
- Days after pandemic was announced, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) changed the methodology for Death Certificates so that the number of “Covid deaths” would be inflated.
- Inflation of COVID-19 fatalities went beyond hospitals. On 17<sup>th</sup> April 2020, China raised its COVID-19 fatality figure from 3 342 to 4 632, seemingly in the face of firm refusal by the US to accept China’s low death rate. Likewise, on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2021, Peru altered its criteria for COVID-19 deaths to raise its death toll from 69 342 to 180 764, to become the South American country with most COVID-19 fatalities.
- The media and the establishment exaggerated the dangers of COVID-19 ignoring the stated position of the WHO that its symptoms are usually mild with about 80% recovering with no need to hospitalise, while others could become ill with breathing difficulty.
- Unfair means were used to muffle search for inexpensive medication to treat COVID-19, a much deplorable one being a paper published in

the reputed medical journal *the Lancet* of 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2020 using faked data designed to decry hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) in favour of a new costly drug, Remdesivir. Though *the Lancet* later revoked the paper, the bad publicity had killed work on HCQ. Ivermectin, an anti-parasitic drug that may be more effective than HCQ, is now under attack. The issue is not the efficacy or otherwise of any medication but institutional hostility to development of inexpensive medication.

- The on-going suppression of free expression is worrying. The medical establishment and media brand all protest against vaccination as anti-social to systematically block and blacklist even reputed professionals who do not toe the “official line”.

## Concluding remarks

The purpose of the study did not entail delving into details of the debate on vaccination but only to help the search for sensible ways to address the infection in the context of how people perceive it. The main observations may be summed up as follows:

- The SARS-CoV-2 virus and its mutants causing COVID-19 may spread fast but are not a fraction as lethal as people have been made to believe.
- Infection rarely leads to fatality but for the old, ones with serious underlying morbidities or in poor health mostly if treatment is delayed.
- The problem concerns the entire humanity, and solutions need to be evolved that will protect people regardless of ethno-social identity.
- Harsh methods of infection control like lock-down have caused more harm than good, and should be replaced by methods that people arrive at via informed collective study and discussion to minimise emotional and material harm and prevent loss of livelihood of individuals.
- Health benefits of vaccination need to be considered based on a long term view of public health, especially general health care and defence

against potentially more hazardous epidemics and taking into account economic and environmental implications.

- If the public had been assured in an informed way that COVID-19 is rather like influenza, it would have helped to evolve people-friendly ways free of fear psychosis to control the epidemic.
- There is lack of transparency about the safety of some vaccines, and there is need to probe the matter further.
- Scientific and socially meaningful debate on vaccination that has thus far been prematurely and unfairly doused in the mass media should be activated free of obstruction by vested interests.
- The extreme response of indefinite worldwide locking down of economies, mass quarantining healthy people, and closing of schools and universities has done much harm in the short and long terms. Such policies should be critically reviewed transparently with public involvement.
- Now that effective vaccines are in place, the possibility of protecting the vulnerable through vaccination if appropriate and allowing choice for the rest, offering opportunity for natural herd immunity should be taken up for serious study.

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# Standing Up to Imperialism

## Latin America Dares

The days of US-installed right-wing dictators and military rule are gone. But client regimes still grovel before neoliberalism. Electoral ascent to power by the centre-left in some South American countries, although insufficient to secure social justice, has positive implications for the anti-imperialism in Latin America. There is room to empower the oppressed although not steer government towards socialism. The Bolivarian model of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela is in this context a welcome development.

That is also why the US wants to destroy the Chavista government and, in the process, Venezuela too if necessary. The US, however, succeeded in toppling Venezuela's allies in Honduras, Ecuador and, briefly, Bolivia. It seeks to subvert even the mildest centre-left in several countries. But 21<sup>st</sup> Century Latin America has frustrated US ambitions.

The immediate Latin American targets are Venezuela and Nicaragua since Cuba is a little too resilient, but not forgotten, as the 'spontaneous' anti-government protests early in July 2021 showed. Spiteful sanctions on Venezuela continue, as do those on Cuba despite total isolation of the US in the UN on its illegal sanctions against Cuba. Yet, there is much to cheer in recent developments in Haiti, Colombia, Peru and Chile besides the defiance of Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Bolivia.

The new context comprises a spectrum of inter-state relations between the US and Latin American states. Venezuela and Nicaragua fully reject US dominance and Bolivia asserts autonomy in several spheres. Brazil and Argentina look at competitive capitalism with risky swings between populism and fascism, but averting antagonising the US. Post-Pinochet

Chile, with a still strong Right, sides with US imperialism while Mexico, Peru and Colombia cooperate within a neoliberal framework.

Anti-imperialist feelings run high where the US helped oppressive rulers stamp down popular struggle. This study is on the main theatres of popular resistance to US imperialism.

## **Venezuela**

The election of Hugo Chavez as Venezuela's President in 1999 inspired the Latin American left that faced retreat on many fronts. Fidel Castro supported Chavez in his endeavours and encouraged using proceeds of oil sales to raise the country's standards of health and education. Local reactionaries resented it, and US imperialism dreaded the thought of the rise of 'another Cuba'. A US sponsored coup d'état ousted Chavez in 2002, but only briefly as armed forces stood by Chavez.

The coup consolidated Chavez's commitment to the Bolivarian project, ALBA (Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, or ALBA-TCP) initiated jointly with Cuba in 2004. The alternative nationalist camp of South America led by Venezuela effectively countered US meddling for over a decade. Chávez used the commodity boom and surge in oil prices to deliver social welfare measures, sustain Venezuela's independent stand and win regional and international allies. Fresh electoral success of the left in Bolivia (2006), Honduras (2006) and Ecuador (2007) and the return of Sandinistas in Nicaragua (2007) inspired Venezuela. ALBA now has 10 members in South America and the Caribbean after losing Honduras in 2009 after a coup and Ecuador in 2018 after betrayal by its president Lenin Moreno. Centre-left success in Chile (2000), Argentina (2003) and Brazil (2003) among others too helped.

While ALBA faced brighter prospects in the emerging scenario, the US saw an opening in 2015 when a less known Nicolás Maduro succeeded Chavez amid economic troubles caused by falling oil prices and a cut back in oil production. US-imposed sanctions from 2017 hit the economy hard and spurred the reactionary opposition in its criminal acts to

exacerbate the economy and law and order, and blame Maduro for the failing economy.

In 2015 the ruling Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSV) lost its majority in the National Assembly. But Maduro was re-elected President in May 2018 and took oaths as President on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2019. On 5<sup>th</sup> January the National Assembly made Juan Guaidó its Leader. Guaidó rejected Maduro as President and declared himself Acting President On 23<sup>rd</sup> January. US and allies endorsed this coup, and imperialist media lied that most countries recognized Guaidó as head of state, while only 38 had recognized him. The military coup attempted by Guaidó on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2019 failed and ruined his credibility. A joint effort in May 2020 by a right wing group and a US private army also was foiled. With the disgraced Right not contesting the National Assembly elections in December, the PSV swept the board, killing all hope for Guaidó.

Maduro's government prevailed but at a price. It was a lesson on over reliance on oil income and misjudging the disruptive potential of the Right. It wiped off the illusion that the Bolivarian model is "21<sup>st</sup> Century Socialism". Many now see the perils of complaisance that let the Right destabilize the economy with Colombia's help. As bad was the hostility of sectarian 'Left' groups towards the PSV, especially when the US-backed Right was poised to strike. Such attitudes still persist.

US-imposed sanctions still hurt Venezuela whose anti-imperialism and welfarist policies passed the test, thanks to a politically alert public. The economy now recoups slowly as oil production and prices pick up. Oil exports rose in the past year, but below levels of a decade ago as US sanctions forbid oil sales to the US and make it hard to export elsewhere. The people of Venezuela deserve to be saluted for standing by their country in the face of US-led subversion.

Despite some lapses on the part of Chavez and the PSV, the Bolivarian model united progressive nationalists in the continent. And it was always the committed leftists who held firm as an alliance to strive for the Bolivarian ideal of uniting South America as a strong socialist bloc.

## **Implications for Cuba**

Fidel Castro, the most prominent leader upholding anti-imperialism in Latin America, was a pillar of strength for Chavez, mainly during the 2002 coup and his fatal illness. The Latin American anti-imperialist surge helped Cuba to forge new alliances. This and Castro's friendship with leaders such as Chávez in Venezuela, Lula in Brazil, Morales in Bolivia and Correa in Ecuador helped Cuba withstand the cruelty of the US and break out of the isolation imposed on it.

Instigated by the US, the OAS in 1961 suspended Cuba, one of its founder members. Following the 'pink tide' of elected centre-left and left governments in Latin America early this century, member states of OAS lifted Cuba's suspension in 2009. Other developments further eased Cuba's diplomatic isolation. But the US persists with economic sanctions against Cuba despite the UN General Assembly voting overwhelmingly against US sanctions 29 times between 1992 and 2021. Of Latin American states, only Colombia and recently Brazil have sided with the US.

## **Nicaragua**

Nicaragua's Sandinistas (FSLN), the longest standing Latin American ally of Cuba and the most military harassed by the US after they ousted the dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle in 1979. Ever since, the US did its utmost to destabilize Nicaragua, in the name of fighting communism.

The FSLN won the national election in November 1984, and Daniel Ortega became President. The US punished Nicaragua with terrorist violence. CIA-sponsored 'Contras' (criminals including supporters of the deposed dictator Somoza) played havoc in Nicaragua between 1979 and 1987. Interestingly, Nicaragua won a historic case (Nicaragua v. United States) against the US at the International Court of Justice in 1986. The US was ordered to pay Nicaragua reparations of around \$12 billion for violating Nicaraguan sovereignty, but it refused to pay arguing that the Court had no jurisdiction in matters of sovereign state relations.

A wrecked economy, US financing of the opposition, and CIA's dirty tricks ensured defeat for FSLN in successive elections in 1990, 1996 and 2001. In 2006 Daniel Ortega returned as President with the FSLN as the largest parliamentary party. The FSLN has grown steadily since. Efforts by US-funded NGOs and CIA operatives working with key opposition figures to oust Ortega and the FSLN culminated in the failed coup of 2018. A smear campaign has been intensified globally against FSLN and Ortega in anticipation of the elections due in November 2021.

## **Brazil**

Election of former trade unionist Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva as President in 2002 and his re-election in 2006 helped Brazil emerge as the world's eighth-largest economy and lift 20 million people ( $\approx$  10% of population) out of abject poverty but left Brazil hostage to extractive capital. Lula who has evaded an explicitly anti-imperialist stand, however, acted to ease tensions between the US ally Colombia and defiant Venezuela and Ecuador. The US resented his defence of Venezuela, leading Brazil into the BRICS partnership with Russia, China, India and South Africa in 2008, and condemning the coup in Honduras in 2009. His Workers' Party (PT) colleague Dilma Vana Rousseff succeeded him in 2011, only to be impeached and stripped of office early in her second term in August 2016, by a right-wing conspiracy helped by the judiciary, which also debarred Lula from the presidential election and imprisoned him in April 2018 on false charges of which he was cleared in March 2021. The corrupt rightist Michel Temer succeeded Dilma, and mass frustration with politicians helped the fascist Jair Bolsonaro to be elected in 2018.

While Temer undid welfare measures of Lula and Dilma, Bolsonaro took neoliberalism further to diminish state welfare and tailor Brazil's foreign policy to suit US imperialism. His declining popularity was worsened by his mishandling of COVID-19. The return of Lula to the political arena holds promise for the South American left, but not without pressure from the progressive popular forces.

## **Bolivia**

The Movement toward Socialism (MAS) emerged in the mid-1990s in the course of defending the right of coca growers against state repression at the insistence of the US to suppress coca production. Founder leader Evo Morales defended indigenous rights, extensive land reforms and use of proceeds of the sale of Bolivia's gas reserves to serve the country and the people. His election as president in 2006 after years of political instability was also that of the first indigenous head of state in Bolivia.

Morales acted on his pledges to reduce poverty among indigenous people, ease restrictions on coca farming, and nationalise gas and oil. He executed land reform by seizing fallow land from absentee landlords and redistributing to the poor. Wealthy Departments (provinces) that opposed the move threatened to secede from Bolivia in 2008. Morales stood firm amid upheaval. A referendum on his leadership in August 2008 showed strong support for him. The new constitution of February 2009 endorsed indigenous linguistic, cultural and land rights and declared Bolivia as the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

Morales' frank criticism of US foreign policy and alliance with Chavez and Castro earned the wrath of US, whose efforts to topple Morales by invoking narrow interests in the mineral resource rich regions failed. A US-backed coup was launched against a background of staged mass protests against alleged irregularities in the presidential election of 20<sup>th</sup> October 2019. Morales was coerced to resign and opposition senator Jeanine Áñez was made President on 12<sup>th</sup> November. Morales went into exile the same day to Mexico, where a supportive President Andrés Manuel López Obrador gave him asylum. The coup regime could not garner much support in Latin America. Fresh elections agreed amid mass protest and repeatedly deferred on pretext of the COVID-19 pandemic were held on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2020, with Morales still in exile. The MAS candidate, Luis Arce won overwhelmingly. Elections for local authorities in April 2021 confirmed mass support for MAS.

The Luis Arce government acted quickly to bring to book perpetrators of anti-people crimes during and after the coup and the usurpers of power who conspired to bring in mercenaries from the US to reverse the verdict of October 2020. However, some key culprits had fled.

## **Argentina**

Six military coups d'état in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (1930, '43, '55, '62, '66 & '76) toppled lawfully elected governments of radicals, Peronists and radical-developmentalists in Argentina. The last yielded a vicious dictatorship under four military juntas that conducted between 1976 and 1983 the "National Reorganization Process" (better known as the "Dirty War"), a campaign to wipe out left-wing opponents and killed or disappeared 30 000 people. The resolve of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo demanding information on the missing since 1976 culminated in mass protests in 1982 that ended the military rule in 1983. The loss of credibility of the Army following its defeat in the naval war with the UK over Malvinas (Falkland Islands) in June 1982 expedited its downfall. The reactionary Right has since not attempted a coup in Argentina. But the Far Right took advantage of the weakening economy to win elections.

If subsequent regimes seemed to deviate from the neoliberal line laid by the US they did so out of desperation. In 2003, the Néstor Kirchner government was forced by serious economic and political crises to confront the IMF and other lenders by defaulting payment on external debt to redirect export revenues for productive social investments to reverse mass unemployment and stimulate national economy. As a result of the recovery, Argentina settled its debts to the IMF in 2006 with some help from Venezuela as well. Sustaining such momentum calls for a clean break with imperialism, which did not happen and the neoliberal Mauricio Macri was elected President in 2019.

Macri government got the country indebted again to the IMF to the tune of US\$ 50 billion in 2019; and his uncaring domestic policies aggravated poverty. His foreign policy was so subservient to the US that he played a

key role in creating the Lima group of pro-US states in the Americas in 2017 to isolate and punish Venezuela. Backed by Colombia, Chile and Paraguay of the Lima Group, he filed a lawsuit in the International Criminal Court on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019 against Maduro's government. Things fell apart when Alberto Fernández's was elected president in October 2019 with former president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner as running mate. Argentina quit the Lima Group on 24<sup>th</sup> March and dropped out of the ICC lawsuit on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

On 8<sup>th</sup> July 2021 Bolivia provided evidence of Macri's participation in the 2019 coup d'état against the legitimate president Evo Morales, and on 19<sup>th</sup> July President Fernandez apologised to Bolivia's president Luis Arce for his predecessor's misdeed. Argentina's retreat from the Lima Group, impending new presidency of Peru, gains of the left in Chile in the and the shaky position of Bolsonaro in Brazil and growing anti-government militancy in Colombia do not auger well for the Lima group with only faraway Canada remaining as a stable heavyweight.

## **Ecuador**

Ecuador elected centre-left Rafael Correa as President in 2006, rejecting Alvaro Noboa, a wealthy hard-core neoliberal. This was a fillip for the Bolivarian project. More important was the growing political awakening of the masses finding expression through the popular movement that enabled the election of Correa.

Correa won again, more convincingly, in 2009 and 2013 under the new constitution adopted in 2008 by referendum. The constitution declared Ecuador as "a territory of peace" that bars foreign military bases. The US military base in Manta, set up in 1998 by pact with an earlier right wing government was allowed to stay until the agreement lapsed in 2008.

Correa was ineligible to re-contest under the new constitution, and the alliance led by him nominated Lenin Moreno, who was Vice-President under Moreno from 2006 to 2013. Soon after election in April 2017, Moreno distanced himself from Correa's anti-imperialism and adopted



neoliberal domestic and foreign policies. This historic betrayal included a “cooperation agreement” with the US in 2018 that let the US use the Manta base to monitor Ecuador’s coast, reversing Correa’s termination of a similar agreement. The sordid treatment of Julian Assange, who was granted refuge in the Ecuadorean Embassy in London in June 2012, and inviting the British police in April 2019 to take him away, was a measure of the morality of Moreno who pulled Ecuador out of ALBA and joined US allies to attack Venezuela.

His neoliberal policies made him unpopular. Mass protests forced him to flee the capital in 2019. There was much hope after the first round of the presidential election held in February 2021 for the centre-left candidate Andrés Arauz to win. But the CIA outmanoeuvred Arauz. In the second round in April, the hard-right banker Guillermo Lasso, a most corrupt oligarch who lost badly in two previous elections narrowly defeated Arauz, thanks to support from environmental and Indigenous groups that had been co-opted over the preceding 15 years by the soft-power networks of the US government, mainly the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

Leaders of Ecuador’s Indigenous confederation, CONAIE, persuaded followers to cast null votes in the second round. “Green” NGOs played along. The politically driven null vote was vital to Lasso, as null votes totalling 1.76 million far exceeded the 420,000 victory margin. Most tellingly, Yaku Pérez, presidential candidate of Pachakutik (political arm of CONAIE) who closely disqualified for the second round, tweeted after the results: “Pachakutik and the null vote bury Correísmo.”

The defeat of Arauz was a blow the Ecuadorian left and anti-imperialism in Latin America. But it has lessons for the Left in addressing indigenous issues that the soft-power networks of the US manipulate to their gain.

## Chile

Chile took 17 years to shake off Pinochet’s rule. But the ideology lingers. Succeeding governments led by Concertación, a centrist and centre-left

alliance of the Socialist Party, Christian Democracy, and Party for Democracy, upheld neoliberal policies innate to Pinochet's constitution of 1980. Presidents Michelle Bachelet of the Socialist Party and Ricardo Lagos of the Party for Democracy pursued neoliberal economic policies to privatize public services and curtail public spending.

The mass protest movement of late 2019 targeted the country's political elite and inequalities spawned by the neoliberal economic model. A key outcome of the demands from the demonstrations was the constitutional referendum. On 25<sup>th</sup> October 2020, an emphatic 78% of voters supported the drafting of a new constitution. Elections of 15-16 May 2021 for the Convention to Draft the Constitution humiliated the main parliamentary parties. Independents won 48 seats of a total of 155 seats, leftist lists adding to 52 and the right wing ruling party 38.

Symbolic of the deviation from the legacy of Pinochet was the election of the Communist Party candidate Ms Iraci Hassler as Mayor of the capital Santiago in the mayoral and gubernational elections held alongside that for the convention. General elections scheduled for 21<sup>st</sup> November 2021 will elect the President, 27 of 50 members of the Senate, all 155 members of the Chamber of Deputies, and all 278 members of the regional boards. Given the history of the Left in South America, risks of its wasting the opportunity are high. Yet, a process has begun that will clear Chile of the Pinochet legacy and hopefully out of the orbit of US imperialism.

## **Peru**

For long Peru alternated military rule with elected government. In the 1980s, armed struggle led by the "Communist Party of Peru – Shining Path" accompanied military repression. Alberto Fujimori, elected in 1990 amid economic crisis as the anti-corruption candidate of a newly formed rightist party, suspended the constitution in 1992 with military backing. He won elections thereafter to be President until 2000, when Congress sacked him for corruption. Peru was mostly ruled by presidents tainted by financial corruption during the past four decades. The rightist and

centrist governments yielded to neoliberalism, and Peru privatised state enterprises and let in foreign capital. The economy did well, at the expense of rural masses deserted by a state that neglected health care and education. The weak health care system earned Peru the dubious distinction of the highest Covid-19 morbidity rate per million.

Against this background, the slim victory of Pedro Castillo over Keiko Fujimori (daughter of Alberto Fujimori, and under inquiry for fraud) in the second round of voting was remarkable, amid media labelling the contest as “communism v. democracy“, despite Castillo declaring that he will not nationalise local investments but will renegotiate contracts with multinationals to ensure that local communities will benefit. The media mollified Alberto’s criminal record and Keiko’s dubious transactions.

Castillo pledged to hold a constitutional referendum for people to decide if they wish a new constitution or prefer the current one written in 1993 under Fujimori with entrenched neoliberalism. He has also pledged that the new constitution will recognize and guarantee to all the right to health, education, food, housing and internet access, and recognize the cultural diversity of indigenous people and the rights of nature. He has expressed commitment to transparency and citizens’ participation and giving precedence to public interest in affairs of the state.

Of most concern to the US are the pledge to leave the anti-Venezuela Lima Group, call for the expulsion of USAID, proposed closure of US military bases, and desire to strengthen regional alliances at the expense of US-dominated OAS. Yet the US did not back Keiko in her desperate bid to reverse the electoral verdict. That was because Keiko had become a political liability and Castillo still has a hostile Congress (in which the left holds only a third of the seats), press and business class to overcome. With the Biden presidency likely to be more hostile than Trump’s, Castillo to fulfil his pledges needs the support of the poorest of Peruvian society who defended his election and international solidarity.

## **Mexico**

Mexico's foreign policy has aimed to assert independence from the US without confrontation. After decades' long PRI monopoly of power ended in 2000, Mexican presidents have dared a little to differ with the US. While the Election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador as President in 2018 has meant more progress, Obrador has averted confrontation, even on migration. He supported the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, that replaced NAFTA on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020, with strong commitment to economic cooperation. Obrador has, however, sought Chinese assistance to help economic diversification.

His call to lift US sanctions against Cuba, defence of Cuba against recent trouble stirred by Florida-based Cuban exiles, support for Eva Morales after the Bolivian coup of 2019 and offer of asylum for Julian Assange contrast with his reluctance to recognize the elected President Nicolás Maduro against the imposter Juan Guaidó in Venezuela and denounce the US air strike that killed Iranian army commander Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad, and silence on the recent demolition of Gaza by Israel.

Obrador cannot forever walk such diplomatic tightrope as his leftist base at home could lose faith in his progressive credentials as much as the US will lose patience with him in matters of strategic importance. He has done better than many of his centrist predecessors, but that may not be sufficient from an anti-imperialist perspective.

## **Haiti**

In February 1986, Haitian masses ended the rule of dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier. But Haiti has since been dominated by the US. The US wanted total docility from any ruler. Dissent was costly. Jean-Bertrand Aristide, elected with 67% of the vote in 1990, was removed by military coup in 1991 and returned after the coup regime fell to be President from 1994 to 1996. He was elected again in 2001 only to be ousted in 2004 by US-backed paramilitaries and forced into exile in Africa, and returned only in 2011. The US took advantage of the natural disasters that befell Haiti

in this century to plant its armed forces there in the name of the UN and disaster relief. The recently assassinated President Jovenel Moïse was a US-imposed leader who had become unpopular. The motive for killing is unknown, but Haitians suspect US connection as the killers were from Florida and Colombia, and fear that the US will try to stay on in Haiti.

Cuba has over 300 000 Haitians, many fleeing persecution at home. Haitian Creole is Cuba's second most spoken recognized language. Cuba has been a most helpful neighbour during natural disasters. Bolivarian Venezuela helped with subsidized oil under the Petrocaribe alliance until 2015, when its economy weakened. But under US pressure, Haiti recognized the imposter Juan Guaidó as president of Venezuela in 2019.

## **US Gains**

The US overthrew Manuel Zelaya in Honduras in 2009 and Fernando Lugo Paraguay in 2012 through coups. Both regime changes stay. Since then the rightist National Party returned to power in Uruguay by a slim margin in 2019.

The US seems set to impose its order in Haiti. Unsurprisingly Colombian president Iván Duque — perhaps the most reactionary South American ruler — has called upon the Organization of American States (OAS) to intervene in Haiti, as it did in neighbouring Dominican Republic in 1965. The OAS may persuade Colombia, Brazil and a few more like Honduras, to offer some soldiers. But US Marines will be the core of the OAS force.

## **Resistance under Client Regimes**

We now live in a time of resistance and protests in Colombia, Honduras, Brazil, Chile and Ecuador against neoliberal projects of the US and IMF.

*Chile.* Results of elections to the Convention to Draft the Constitution in Chile are encouraging, but without promise of a left government in November 2021. The Centre-Left despises the idea of a left government

that it cannot count on in its deals with imperialism. It is the surging militancy of the awakened masses that will confront US imperialism.

**Colombia.** Colombia, the lynchpin of US strategy in South America, was urged by the US to use state terror to contain communism since WWII. Gunning down Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a Liberal (a left-friendly force) and land-reform leader in 1948 led to left militants and peasant guerrillas in control of parts of south Colombia. Counterinsurgency measures in the early 1960s targeting peasants who resisted the repressive state gave birth to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), marking the start of a half-century long civil war.

Militarization of drug control since 1981 and the US letting its armed forces to join the 'War on Drugs' further aggravated the conflict. In 1986 President Reagan declared that Columbian drug trafficking was a threat to national security of the US and escalated US military involvement. The War on Drugs was all along about crushing revolutionary militancy.

Cuba and Nicaragua enabled talks between Colombian government and FARC to end the 53 years long war, not to the joy of the US and the far right seeking a militarily solution. It was agreed that government will end political repression and FARC will disarm and join civilian politics. FARC kept its side of the deal but not the Colombian oligarchy whose forces have killed more than 400 critics of the government since 2016.

A variety of protests by hundreds of thousands occurred between 21<sup>st</sup> November 2019 and 21<sup>st</sup> February 2020 protesting income disparity, corruption, police brutality and planned economic and political reforms. The long pause induced by the arrival of COVID-19 in March 2020 ended in April 2021 with a national strike against regressive tax reform by the government of President Iván Duque. (The tax reform was later withdrawn, amid killing of dozens and injuring of over a thousand by the police.) The weekly protests paused in June resumed on 20<sup>th</sup> July — Colombia's independence day — and expanded its scope to an array of

demands, including greater economic and educational equity as well as an end to police violence, a sticky point for the government.

Colombia's future is increasingly uncertain following the COVID-19 lockdown, with poverty rate rising from 37 to 42% and unemployment doubling from 10 to 20% of the workforce. Presidential elections are due on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

While Colombia has a rich history of mass mobilisation, including one that led to its commendable democratic constitution of 1991, the protests of 2021 stand out for the diversity of constituencies converging on a single national protest. The youth comprising the core of the protesters are bold in their demands. Thus imperialism has a potentially formidable challenge before it.

The protests primarily concern the sufferings of ordinary people and their resistance against a system that neglects them. The mounting public anger reflects mass resentment of the long Covid-19 lockdown, an economy in free-fall, and surging state oppression. The police killing of an unarmed man in September 2020 triggered a massive protest wave, like how a street vendor's setting himself on fire following humiliation by a policeman triggered riots in Tunisia in December 2010. The state seems at a loss to deal with the protests. It could once keep a lid on protests using the Marxist bogey, war against drug trafficking and law and order issues. But the momentum of the protests may transcend any political change in 2022. On the other hand, the electoral process may be subverted on some pretext and a military dictatorship imposed.

Stakes are too high for US imperialism in Colombia, its strategic partner in South America the way Israel is in the Middle East. Thus the silence of the US on the status of democracy and human rights in Colombia and Guatemala in contrast to vociferous condemnation of their alleged breach in Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua and Bolivia, is hardly surprising.

**Peru.** The outcome of the presidential election, following an unduly long process to decide the winner, was not to the relish of the US. But, given

what a liability its potential ally Keiko Fujimori would be, the US did not help her efforts to overturn the verdict. The US is hopeful that the strong right and centrist presence in the Congress will restrain President Pedro Castillo from taking the country too far left. But US policy on Venezuela will, nevertheless, face a setback.

**Brazil.** Prospects of re-election are getting bleaker for Bolsorano the US ally and fascist since his popularity started to fall steadily this year, owing to his gross mishandling of the pandemic. Brazil under Bolsorano was notoriously hostile to Cuba by supporting US sanctions in the UN. Venezuela nevertheless showed magnanimity in sending medical oxygen to save lives during the pandemic.

**Honduras.** In June 2009 democratically elected president Manuel Zelaya Rosales was overthrown by a military coup backed by the US under President Obama. The coup, aimed to kill constitutional assurance of social justice through a popular constituent assembly, has negated reforms initiated by Zelaya including a rise in minimum wage, land reform, gender equality, greater indigenous rights and social security.

Mass response to the coup was spontaneous, and resistance has been sustained over the past 12 years despite brutal repression by the US-trained police and military and the detention of 11 political prisoners besides hundreds facing serious charges for protesting electoral fraud in 2017. The US protects the dictatorship of Juan Orlando Hernandez, despite its record of violation of human rights, corruption and drug trafficking. Meanwhile people continue to organize.

## **Prospects for US Imperialism**

Colombia, Peru and Chile have thus far been steadfast partners of the US in South America. But recent developments as outlined above suggest that all of it may soon be water under the bridge. Mexico is now more assertive of its independence in world affairs. The regime change in Argentina has gone with the wind, and that and Brazil is poised to fall.



How the Biden presidency will respond to assertion of autonomy by key partners whom the US could once take for granted to assert its regional dominance? Having opted for a harder line than his predecessor on Cuba and Venezuela, an honourable retreat seems unfeasible for Biden.

Amid enduring failure in Venezuela and Nicaragua, Biden slipped up in Cuba by encouraging opponents of the Cuban government to go on the attack in mid-July 2021 only to be outdone by the Cuban leaders who appealed to the people rather than use the police to defend the country.

Yet the sovereignty of Latin American countries is threatened by the US with help from the wealthy classes. When these classes fail to seize power electorally by deception and intrigue, they resort to military coup as in the 1960s. If that too fails they will use all their resources to create chaos as they still do in Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba.

Electoral success of the Left is inadequate to overcome imperialism. The Centre Left has won elections in many countries, but its will to endure assault by US imperialism is doubtful. The left has to rely on mass mobilization and should not rule out armed struggle against a well-armed state and paramilitary and mercenary groups serving the capitalist class. Subversion in the name of democracy and human rights is part of the imperialist game plan, and only a fully informed public and active mass participation that can overcome reaction and imperialism.

The importance that US attaches to dismantling the Chavista government in Venezuela is signal to the Left and all other progressive forces. The international left should note that Venezuela is still at a critical juncture and that US imperialism will not give up until it either has its way or is humiliated the way it has been in Vietnam and Afghanistan.

At this moment, Venezuela holds the key to peace and socialism in South America as much as Palestine holds the key to peace and social justice in the Middle East.

# NDMLP Proposals for Electoral Reform

*Salient features of the recommendations of the NDMLP to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Electoral Reforms (February 2021).*

- 1 Reforms should ensure egalitarian and democratic voting rights to all and in ways to aid resolution of the national question.
- 2 Reforms should ensure fair representation of political minorities including smaller political parties and minorities in parliament as well as in provincial councils, regional councils and local authorities.
- 3 A hybrid system of parliamentary elections, as for example in Germany, combining electorate wise election with countrywide proportional representation. An electorate elects a member who is accessible to the constituents while countrywide election will elect members from different political parties with potential to guide legislation and policy making. This approach will suit provincial councils as well. For regional councils and local authorities the recently introduced hybrid system will suffice.
- 4 The existing system is particularly unfair by parties who cannot win in a single electorate or district despite significant (5 to 10%) support in several districts. The dual ballot scheme is proposed with this handicap in mind, whereby one ballot paper lets a voter identifies an individual to represent his/her electorate and the second ballot paper allows identification of apolitical party of preference regardless of where the voter resides.
- 5 The first ballot paper will carry the names of candidates in an electorate with party affiliation if any. The second will carry names of qualifying political parties. As inclusion of all political parties on a ballot paper will be impractical and restrictive criteria such as criteria such as contesting in a minimum specified number of districts and/or electorates may be used to identify eligible parties. A qualifying party shall announce its list of candidates in order of preference prior to the election date.

- 6 As national list election is party wise and concerns welfare, development and security issues, the Elections Commission shall issue guidelines or even impose restrictions as appropriate on eligibility of candidates, and act to ensure that the national list of each party includes specialists, workers, peasants and fishers. A person not named in the list shall not be elected to Parliament or Provincial Council on national basis.
- 7 Particular attention is needed to enforce rules to ensure that the quota of female representatives is filled. In order that female representation in parliament is increased from 30 to 50% the national list of each party shall be arranged so that the number of electable males will not exceed that of females by more than one. A party seeking placement on the second ballot paper shall ensure that at least a third of its total candidates in individual electorates are females.
- 8 Election rules should be strict on social and political misconduct of candidates and strictly prohibit crossing over to another party. An elected member indulging in anti-social and anti-democratic acts shall be unseated, and all elected members shall be answerable to the public with the voters having the right to recall a member elected by them.
- 8 Delimitation of electorates, especially in districts with an ethnic mix, shall not deny fair representation of any minority group.
- 9 All citizens should be assured of their right to vote with provision for citizens living abroad to vote from abroad and let people register their vote in advance if they so wish.
- 10 The Election Commission shall be free of external influence, and elections strictly governed by election laws with firm enforcement of ceilings on election expenses of parties and candidates. Campaigning shall be environmentally friendly and free of litter, noise pollution and nuisance to the public. The media shall be subject to strict codes of conduct.
- 11 Electronic voting is recommended in view of efficiency of voting and counting and minimal waste of stationery. It is, however, subject to tampering in the absence of strict monitoring. It may hence be first tried out in local government elections as a training exercise for officials.

## International

### **14<sup>th</sup> November: International Day of Struggle for Protecting the Environment**

*Media Statement of the New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party*

*14<sup>th</sup> November 2020*

ICOR, a union of International Revolutionary Parties and Organizations has declared 14<sup>th</sup> November of each year as the International day of Struggle for Protecting the Environment and conducts a variety of activities and struggles in connection with it. ICOR brings together more than sixty revolutionary parties and organizations from the five continents, including the New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party of Sri Lanka.

The global economic and financial crisis, together with the crises poverty, unemployment, hunger and starvation, COVID-19 and the environmental crisis have a harsh impact on the countries and people of the world. Besides tens of millions of people being subject to the above crises, hundreds of thousands are dying as a result. The basic cause for all of these is the plundering of natural resources and wrecking of the environment by multi-national companies and big business in order to feed their hunger for profit. Natural resources of the country, including land, water, air, sky, sea and forests are subjected to capitalist exploitation and super-profit. As a result, the equilibrium of nature has been destabilized, leading to global warming and other disasters. All resources bequeathed to humanity by nature have fallen prey to the damned capitalist greed for profit. As a result, humanity faces cruel

diseases. The COVID-19 pandemic is a creation of capitalism. Capitalism, which has inflicted great disasters upon countries and people, is a dangerous entity that is an enemy of humanity. Under the conditions, it is not capitalism that can rescue humanity but socialism alone. It is by achieving socialism that humanity can benefit and be protected through the use and protection of natural resources in ways that stabilize the balance of nature.

Therefore, let the working people of this country and the world over, on this 14<sup>th</sup> November, the International day of Struggle for Protecting the Environment, unite with revolutionary forces to carry forward the struggle to protecting the natural environment.

SK Senthivel

General Secretary, New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party

## **Tribute to Ramsey Clark**

Ramsey Clark who died April 9, 2021 was a founder of the International Action Center and inspired political activists through the IAC to defend liberation struggles, oppose US wars of aggression and defend political prisoners of US imperialism.

His principled defence of victims of US imperialism, principally Vietnam, Iran, Cuba, Venezuela, Iraq, Sudan and Yugoslavia, at critical junctures was most courageous at times when many intellectuals and public personalities in the post-Cold War context would duck for cover from the wrath of the US imperialist establishment along with his long standing commitment to the Palestinian cause and defence of political prisoners are most commendable.

New Democracy joins the New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party in saluting him for his dedication and commitment to the anti-imperialist cause and his unwavering defence of popular resistance to oppression.

## *National*

The New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party issued the following statements on key national issues.

*25<sup>th</sup> June 2021*

### *Resist the highhandedness of plantation companies*

National Organiser of the Party, Comrade V Mahendran issued on behalf of the Party Politburo a statement calling upon plantation trade unions and workers to come forward to fight the highhandedness of plantation companies

Workers had to struggle for 5 years to win a basic wage of 1000 rupees per day, amid failures due to weak organization by various parties to the campaign. After much procrastination on pretexts of political humbug, the Wages Board affirmed and ordered the higher wage. But plantation companies are resorting to tricks to undermine implementation.

While an objection filed by the plantation companies against the Wages Board ruling is still pending, companies claim that they have unilaterally withdrawn from the Collective Agreement between the companies and unions. Arguing that they are not bound by agreements made under the lapsed Agreement, they resort to anti-worker and anti-union measures. Since the award of the wage of 1000 rupees, they have forced workers to pluck 20 kg of leaves per day in place of 18 kg earlier. Amid indifferent silence of the unions, workers have initiated their own acts of opposition and resistance. But plantation companies continue with bullying and pressure. Workers have been formally told that 6-days of work shall be allocated only for those who pluck 20 kg and 3 days for others. They also resort to malpractices in weighing the leaves.

The Party while strongly denouncing this despotism of the companies called upon all plantation trade unions to set aside differences and unite to resist such oppression of the workers and to call for the full implementation of the 100 rupee wage award. The Party also called upon

the plantation workers to show courage in resisting injustices imposed on them in the same way that various sections of the population are carrying out campaigns to protect their livelihood.

*25<sup>th</sup> June 2021*

***The Government should promptly release all political prisoners***

General Secretary of the Party, Comrade SK Senthivel issued on behalf of the Party Politburo a statement drawing attention to the long standing demand for general amnesty to all political prisoners and their release. The Party along with other campaigners conducted mass struggles and campaigns for the demand and notes that the empty boast by the ruling elite that 16 political prisoners have been set free had ulterior motives of using their release as smokescreen cloud over the release of Duminda Silva, a convicted murder. The statement also noted that the government earlier used the same general amnesty to set free other murder convicts.

The government has thus acted out a drama to the dismay of relatives of political prisoners by releasing under general amnesty Tamil prisoners due to be freed or had served their sentences. The statement rejected this approach to the problem of political prisoners and reiterated the Party's demand for early unconditional release of all political prisoners.

*13<sup>th</sup> June 2021*

***Amid increasing crises, the Government should act responsibly to avoid further difficulties for the people***

General Secretary of the Party, Comrade SK Senthivel issued on behalf of the Party Politburo a statement drawing attention to the rapid spread of the pandemic regardless of decisions and declarations by the Army General heading the COVID-19 Prevention Task Force. Infection deaths have topped 2000, while the government and the health sector vied to issue contradictory statistics and messages that confuse and harass the public instead of taking decisions jointly. The Party sees them as unable

to prevent or control the pandemic. The statement also said that, while the government is at a loss to impartially deliver the necessary vaccines to the people, those in power shamelessly to act on pretext of COVID-19 to serve their own political and economic needs against public interest.

The statement added that prices of food items and essential goods have been recklessly increased. On top of it, a fuel prices increase has also been announced. The ruling Rajapaksa brothers who thus torment the people take decisions that suit the capitalists, upper classes and the rich. Also, moves to sell land and water resources are afoot on the sly behind the façade of COVID-19, while up to 300 luxury vehicles each worth Rs. 50 million are to be imported for use by MPs. The Party strongly condemns such anti-people moves and demands their immediate end.

The statement also denounced the ill-advised misadventure of letting the perilous ship MV Express Pearl enter territorial waters knowing the risk of its sinking and thus creating an environmental disaster by spillage of micro-plastics, oil and hazardous chemicals that have severely harmed marine life and the livelihood of fishers for a long time to come.

Apart from the above, the government is planning a number of anti-people schemes, laws and decisions, and all working people should oppose them. The Party calls upon all left, democratic and progressive forces to come together under a common programme of action.

*15<sup>th</sup> May 2021*

*Let us pay tribute to the war dead by lighting a flame*

The Politburo of the Party issued a statement recalling the killing of over three hundred thousand Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil and Sinhala people, mostly working masses, in the 30 years long war of national oppression and the mass killing of thousands of Tamil people the final battle in Mullivaikal.

To remember all the war dead on each 18<sup>th</sup> May, the calendar date on which the war ended in 2008, is a fundamental right and humanitarian



duty of the people. Based on that, the Politburo of the Party has announced in its statement that we shall pay tribute to the war dead by lighting a flame of remembrance on 18<sup>th</sup> May, while abiding by health guidelines amid the current COVID-19 pandemic.

The statement also reminded that it will be inappropriate to pay tribute by lighting a flame of remembrance as a mere formality or a means to promote narrow nationalism. It is twelve years since the war ended, but there has been no solution to the national question and none who came to power has shown interest in its resolution as they represent interests of the elitist ruling classes and Sinhala chauvinism. The elite of the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil are one with their Sinhalese counterparts. The national question was transformed into war to serve those class interests as well as those of foreign hegemonic forces. The armed struggle launched in the name of the Tamil people was defeated as a result of parochial attitudes and reliance on foreign forces.

The Sri Lankan national question concerns the Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities and national minorities including the Burghers, Malays, the Attho and others. Only a political solution with regional autonomy and sub-autonomous structures based on the right to self determination will be feasible and appropriate. It is not easy and only mobilisation along the revolutionary mass line of struggle can offer the political path to overcome oppression and move forward. Tamil working people's efforts to mobilise for such solutions by methods of mass struggle will be matched by efforts of Sinhala, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities and lead to cooperation. The statement thus called upon comrades to resolve on this day of remembrance of many thousands to prepare in theory and practice to take the road to victory.

**13<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

***The government should act to stop rapid spread of COVID-19***

Party General Secretary Comrade SK Senthivel issued on behalf of the Party Politburo a statement drawing the attention of the government to

the public expectation that, in the context of a fast spread of COVID-19, it should abandon militarised decisions and practices and bring together field specialists and scholars including those in the public health, medical and epidemiology sectors to urgently devise and implement creative schemes to bring the spread of infection under control.

The government is instead using COVID-19 as pretext to undertake anti-people, anti-worker, anti-democratic strips including the increase in price of daily food items. Amid this, planned acts of political revenge are also carried out, aided by executive presidential power, a two-thirds majority in parliament and the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Parliamentary democracy is held to ridicule by such actions.

At the same time, amid the fast spread of infection, the rulers are carrying out chauvinist oppression, land encroachment and a campaign of ethnic hatred against Tamil and Muslim people. Examples of these include the recent encroachment of Kurundur hills in Mullaitivu District with the help of the army and the Department of Archaeology personnel and mobilising a large number of Buddhist priests to conduct a ceremony there and the destruction of the memorial monument where respect is paid to the war dead by lighting flames.

The Party points out that such steps are motivated by plans to confiscate traditional lands of Tamils and giving them a Sinhala Buddhist identity and with intention to deflect the attention of the Sinhalese workers in order to maintain themselves in power, and expresses its vehement condemnation of such acts.

*29<sup>th</sup> April 2021*

### ***May Day activities of the Party***

In consideration of the worsening of the spread of COVID-19 in the country and effects of a large gatherings in rallies and processions, the Party Politburo decided against meetings where a large number of people gather. The Party will conduct its May Day programmes in Jaffna,

Nuwaraeliya-Ragala and Vavuniya under the theme “Towards Working People’s Power” to expose and reject the anti-people anti-democratic acts of the government. The Party has also ensured that the International Workers’ Day will be viewed extensively using the Internet and other means that offer feasibly simple and hygienic practices.

**2<sup>nd</sup> March 2021**

### *The worsening crises and government responsibly*

General Secretary of the Party, Comrade SK Senthivel issued on behalf of the Party Politburo a statement on government performance in today’s political situation. One and a half years of SLPP rule has neither salvaged the economy nor propelled the country to prosperity. Prices of essential goods and cost of living rise badly hurting the lives of working people. Worsening unemployment and poverty place ordinary people in crises. The pandemic is being overly amplified to divert public attention from economic issues while militarisation advances behind scenes.

The ruling elite indulge implicitly and explicitly in oppressing Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people to deflect discontent among the Sinhalese. The Party hence urges the entire working people of Sri Lanka facing class oppression and the minority nationalities facing chauvinist oppression to build a campaign base to put forward common demands.

The economic plight of the country is the result of failure to develop the national economy and offering on a platter the country’s resources and toil to multinationals and big capital since four decades ago. The country and people suffer the consequences of the rulers of the country taking the path of liberalism, privatisation and globalisation. The Gotabhaya government is unwilling to deviate from the disastrous path. The country has now become the playground of foreign powers.

Incapable of building the economy and unwilling to resolve the national question, the ruling elite has only shown interest in oppressing national minorities and transforming oppression into war. As a result, 30 years

after a cruel war, national oppression persists alongside unwillingness of governments to put an end to it. A recent example of this comprises police inquiries against the recent spontaneous peaceful people's march from Poththuvil to Polikandi. The state should cease such intimidatory steps that obstruct mass activities.

Solution has to be found for longstanding public issues like the release of political prisoners, encroachment of land in the name of archaeology and forest conservation, release of sequestered land to owners, and justice for the disappeared. However, the leaders of the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities avoid making demands on issues of common concern and continue to pursue vote gathering politics to secure seats in parliament, provincial councils and regional councils. Meanwhile some Muslim and Hill Country Tamil politicians deviate to prop up Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist rulers from time. A recent instance is the sudden expression of support from several of them to the 20<sup>th</sup> Amendment that seeks to undermine democracy.

The Hill Country Tamil leaders collaborate with plantation owners in their deceptive denial of the just demand of a minimum daily wage of Rs 1000/- to plantation workers who have for generation been denied a residential address their right to ownership of land and housing. The high handed acts of oppression and intimidation of workers as in the Alton Tea Estate, Maskeliya are characteristic of the colonial era.

Tamil leaders saddled with hegemonic attitudes pursue election oriented politics driven by narrow nationalism and slavishly rely on the West and India, despite being repeatedly let down. Most worrying is their pleading with the US, EU and India to intervene in the country, to the extent of treacherously inviting their presence in the North and East, so as to mislead the Tamil people that these powers will be their saviours.

The Party takes the position that the country will have liberation and independence and its nationalities right to self determination only when the call that no foreign power — be it China, India or the US — shall be allowed to establish itself in Sri Lanka echoes throughout the country.

**28<sup>th</sup> December 2020**

***Blasphemy and selective persecution***

National Organiser of the Party, Comrade V Mahendran issued on behalf of the Party Politburo a statement critical of an insensitively offensive image of the Hindu goddess Kaali and attacks on a social activist who shared it on the Internet and calling for her punishment. The statement drew particular attention to inconsistencies on the part of the attackers on Internet and their selective targeting of individuals.

***Award immediately a basic daily wage of Rs 1000 in state controlled plantations***

National Organiser of the Party, Comrade V Mahendran on behalf of the Party Politburo issued a statement drawing attention to the dragging on of negotiations for six years on the matter of basic wage of Rs 1000.

While the government and parliament have agreed to the wage increase in principle and endorsed it as a budget proposal, the Employers Federation is unwilling to change its stand and plantation companies are likely to act in breach of government position. There is also inconsistency in views expressed by government ministers despite a favourable stand of the government and MPs.

In this context, the Party urges the government to immediately award the agreed basic wage of Rs 1000 in all plantations under its purview to set an example for the private sector plantations to follow. In the event of failure of the government award the basic wage of Rs 1000, plantation trade unions should join other trade unions and other left, progressive and democratic forces to launch island wide struggle press the demand.

**1<sup>st</sup> December 2020**

***NDMLP denounces the brutal attack in Mahara prison***

National Organiser of the Party, Comrade V Mahendran issued on behalf of the Party Politburo a statement announcing that the Party denounces

the shooting incident at the Mahara prison complex in which eight prisoners had died and more than seventy have been seriously injured and hospitalized for medical treatment, with some in critical condition. Over 700 prisoners testing positive for COVID-19 and prisoners have been demanding parole, grant of bail or expediting legal cases against them amid deteriorating health conditions in the prison. They also asked for improvement of health conditions within the prison and increasing PCR tests for COVID-19 and the transfer of infected prisoners to other prisons. It was amid protests by prisoners that prison officers had open fire to cause death and grave injury.

The Gotabhaya regime has suppressed the ordinary people's right of expression. The prison incident had exposed the authoritarian nature of the government and brought to light the imbalance in the treatment of different categories of prisoners. While minor offenders face brutality of officers, swindlers of huge sums of public wealth and thieves of state property are released under various pretexts. The statement invited all left, progressive and democratic forces to unite in a campaign to bring to book those guilty of excesses and ensure a fair and gentle prison regime.

**21<sup>st</sup> November 2020**

### *A poor performance by the government after an year in power*

General Secretary of the Party, Comrade SK Senthivel issued on behalf of the Party Politburo a statement on the performance of the government one year after the election of Gotabhaya Rajapaksa as President. The President boasts of coming to power with 6.9 million votes, but crises faced by the people during his first year presidency have only worsened.

In such context, the Budget for 2021 does not offer any consolation or alternative plan for the toiling masses. With estimated revenue at 1886 billion rupees and total expenditure at 3441 billion, the deficit is 1555 billion. The government has no way but to add to the debt burden of the people; and the 75<sup>th</sup> budget in parliamentary history shows the same anti-people pattern of earlier budgets.

The export side of the economy is declining. Prices of food and consumer goods are rising by the day as a result of the fall in foreign exchange rate for the rupee. With no alternative or programme on offer we hear the recital of the old line that we shall increase local production.

The largest allocation of 355 billion rupees (more than 10%) for defence is reminiscent of the war years, while agriculture, industry, fisheries, irrigation and transport receive less than before. Health with Rs 159 billion and education 126 billion disappoint against 25.7 billion for special expenses for the Prime Minister and members of government. Clearly the budget does not signify much good for the toiling masses.

The budget has pledged a daily wage of 1000 rupees from January 2021 for plantation workers, but its feasibility is in doubt as payment is made by the companies and not the government. The Employers' Federation had raised objections immediately. Given the past conduct of plantation owners, hopes are dim for the budget pledge, which could well be a way to divert attention from other important demands of plantation workers.

The budget has nothing on offer to alleviate the poverty, unemployment or to uplift the livelihood of Tamils and Muslims of the North and East. It is noticeable that the North and East that have been severely deprived by 30 years of war are badly neglected in this budget.

Whatever false claims may be made about the budget, the budget clearly stresses militarisation and reinforces the Rajapaksa family dictatorship. It indicates the direction in which today's fascistic chauvinists expect to move. It also points to the likely dangers facing the toiling masses, oppressed nationalities and ethnic minorities. It is an expression of the dictatorial policies that the 20<sup>th</sup> Amendment brought into existence.

**8<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

### ***Abuse of the COVID-19 crisis to oppress the masses***

General Secretary of the Party, Comrade SK Senthivel issued on behalf of the Party Politburo a statement on the surge of the 'Second Wave' of

COVID-19, which has reportedly killed one million people across the world. The cluster of infection that started in the Brandix garment factory in Minuwangoda has spread to other parts of the country and the government led by Gotabhaya Rajapaksa is at a loss to deal with it.

The reason is that preventive health work was militarised at the expense of obtaining professional medical guidance especially that of public health officials with much experience in eliminating deadly epidemics of the past and in controlling and treating the Dengue. The government has adopted a militarist approach and placing the army in control has led to uncontrolled spread of the disease. On the frivolous side government ministers have indulged in superstitious rituals to fight the infection. In the end the President has blamed the public for the spread of the virus. The Party condemns the imprudence of the President.

While COVID-19 spreads fast in the country, the economy seems to head towards a crash. The export of made garments is on the decline while tourism and tea production remain badly affected. Agriculture, fisheries and small industries are badly disrupted. The World Bank forecast for Sri Lanka in 2021 points out that economic stagnation combined with the impact of COVID-19 will severely affect 70% of the workers in the informal sector while personal income will on average decrease by 6% compared with the previous year. It is thus feared that prices will surge while the number below the poverty line will increase several fold.

Under these conditions, the Gotabhaya-Mahinda government is taking advantage the surge in COVID-19 infection to implement their anti-people counter-democratic schemes. It set aside its extreme anti-Muslim campaign during the elections to shamelessly solicit the votes of Muslim MPs to pass the 20<sup>th</sup> Amendment with a 2/3 majority. The forthcoming budget to be passed in parliament allocates 335 billion rupees for defence while health receives 159 billion and education 126 billion alongside poor allocations to agriculture, irrigation and small industries.

No plans to control COVID-19 have been implemented, partly due to a 'cold war' between the health sector and the taskforce for prevention of



COVID-19 under an army general, as a result of which medical experts stood aside. More deplorably, the government encourages the private sector to profiteer from lock downs and means including PCR tests.

Having come to power by whipping up Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism, the government has now turned its back on the Sinhala people as well. It is using the armed forces and COVID-19 protection as shields against all protest so that it can implement various anti-people schemes.

Thus the Party reiterates the urgency for all toiling masses and oppressed nationalities to unite under a common programme to advance along the path of mass struggle.

**15<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

***Safety for plantation workers in Balangoda***

National Organiser of the Party, Comrade V Mahendran issued on behalf of the Party a statement condoning the death of two female workers in Balangoda caused by the fall of a tree. The statement noted that although the death was accidental, such tragedies are avoidable by paying attention to safety features affecting the public and plantation workers in the region who are subjected to recurrent natural disasters besides attack by wild animals and wasps, often leading to death for lack of adequate medical attention.

The statement deplored the indifference of political parties and trade unions, and drew attention to major disasters of the recent past and urged people to demand of the government departments concerned to act pay more attention to prevention of impending disasters, ensuring safety, provision of medical assistance and compensation for victims.

**10<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

***Dangers facing the country***

General Secretary of the Party, Comrade SK Senthivel issued on behalf of the Party Politburo a statement warning about two threats facing the

country, namely the fast spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences of the 20<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution.

It is important for the people to adopt appropriate health practices and self-discipline to protect themselves. Meantime, they should oppose and reject the 20<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution that is due to be hastily passed by parliament.

The government had cunningly used the prevention of the spread of the epidemic to obstruct people from uniting to express their objection to the amendment, while the leadership is compelling MPs to vote for the amendment. Each MP voting for the 20<sup>th</sup> Amendment will be one who has harmed his voters and the act will be a historic betrayal of the people. It is important for the people to realize that it is introduced to re-establish the one leader one party dictatorship set up in 1978 by the UNP and JR Jayewardene.

We do not need the examples of Germany or Italy to illustrate how extreme nationalism leads to fascism as the experiences of Sri Lanka can illustrate it. The Rajapaksas are keen to introduce the 20<sup>th</sup> Amendment to create a dark fascist Sri Lanka. Hence the Party joins all other left, democratic and democratic parties of the country in vehemently opposing this amendment which will be hostile to the interests of all toiling masses and oppressed nationalities.

### **31<sup>st</sup> Annual Commemoration of Comrade Maniam**

The 31<sup>st</sup> annual commemoration of Comrade KA Subramaniam (Maniam) founder General Secretary of the Party, organized by the KA Subramaniam Commemoration Committee was held on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2020 at the Kavignar Murugaiyan Auditorium of the Dhesiya Kalai Ilakkiyap Peravai. The commemoration address titled "Today's Crises and the Budget for 2021" was delivered by Dr Akilan Kadirgamar. Comrade S Thevarajah chaired the meeting.

# Granny's Hairpins

S. Sivasegaram

I never knew how old granny was; nor did granny.  
But I knew how many hairpins she had,  
For granny would, without fail,  
Daily announce their number.  
Without fail, daily she would count them  
Morning and evening.  
Her hairpins found use as ear scoops and toothpicks.  
Once it served to pull out a *manjadi* seed  
From a grandson's nostril, and several times  
To open locks whose keys had gone missing.  
Even so, I have never seen granny with  
A hairpin on her head.  
I dare say that granny, as far as I remember,  
Never had enough hair on her head to hold one.  
Yet no one ever referred to them as  
ear scoop, toothpick, lock pick or surgical instrument.  
They were granny's hairpins to everyone.

Somehow,  
When I think of the government granny's hairpins and  
When I see granny's hairpins the government  
Come to my mind.

*(Author's translation from Tamil)*

Background image:

**Leila Khaled**

Highly regarded Palestinian militant



**Bertolt Brecht**

**The Sixteen-Year-Old Seamstress Emma Ries  
before the Magistrate**

*When the sixteen-year-old seamstress  
came before the magistrate in Czernowitz,  
she was invited to show why  
she had distributed tracts in which  
call was made for revolution, which brings imprisonment.*

*As reply, she stood up and sang  
the Internationale.*

*When the magistrate shook his head.  
she shouted: "Stand up! This  
is the Internationale!"*

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