

Courage My Friends Podcast Series II – Episode 5
Covid, Capitalism, Climate: The Standard of Double-Standards Between the Global North and the Global South

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ANNOUNCER: You're listening to *Needs No Introduction*.

Needs No Introduction is a rabble podcast network show that serves up a series of speeches, interviews and lectures from the finest minds of our time

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COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: COVID. Capitalism. Climate. Three storms have converged and we're all caught in the vortex.

STREET VOICE 1: It's been two years already. If we can't get it together to deal with this world-wide pandemic, how are we going to deal with the climate crisis?

STREET VOICE 2: The future just seems so uncertain. What do say to my kids?

STREET VOICE 3: This is outrageous! The rich are getting richer, the are getting poorer. Where is the compassion? Where is the solidarity?

[music]

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: What brought us to this point? Can we go back to normal? Do we even want to?

Welcome back to this special podcast series by rabble.ca and the Tommy Douglas Institute (at George Brown College) and with the support of the Douglas-Coldwell-Layton Foundation. In the words of the great Tommy Douglas...

VOICE 4: Courage my friends; 'tis not too late to build a better world.

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: This is the *Courage My Friends* podcast.

RESH: The Global South is the birthplace of humanity and civilization. It has been the site of transformative struggles and ideas that have shaped the world and the modern world. And it is home to 80% of the world's peoples. Yet within dominant Western discourse, its memories, voices, and visions tend to be largely ignored.

As the Global South stands on the front-lines of the converging crises of COVID, capitalism and climate, isn't it time to pay attention to the world's majority? Isn't it time for their knowledge, expertise and even leadership?

In this episode of the *Courage My Friends* podcast, *COVID, Capitalism, Climate: The Standard of Double-Standards Between the Global North and the Global South*, we are very pleased to welcome Vijay Prashad.

Executive Director of Tri-Continental Institute for Social Research, Vijay is an historian, journalist, researcher, activist,, and a prolific writer. He has over 30 books to his name, including: *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*, *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South*, *Red Star Over the Third World*, and *Washington Bullets: A History of CIA, Coups, and Assassinations*.

He is the chief correspondent for *Globetrotter*, a columnist for *Frontline News* and chief editor of *Leftword Books*.

Here now is my conversation with Vijay Prashad.

VJ, welcome.

VIJAY: Thanks a lot. It's great to be with you. Thanks a lot for having me.

RESH: It's lovely to have you here. So as mentioned you are the Executive Director of Tri-Continental Institute for Social Research. Can you tell us a bit about its mission?

VIJAY: Yes. Sure. But in a way to get to the mission, I think it's useful to tell the story of the Institute.

In 2015, the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil [the MSD] called a meeting in the school outside San Paolo. At that meeting, which was called "Dilemmas of Humanity", there was a discussion about the cascading problems in the world. Some of them having to do with the climate catastrophe, others to do with the permanent crisis of capitalism, austerity, neoliberalism, so on. And then underneath all that, the terrible turn to militarism and arms.

And so there was this meeting, let's discuss the dilemmas and so on. That was the easy part. There's broad agreement that there's serious crises in the world. The difficult part is what to do about it.

You see the Landless Workers Movement had been involved partly in the *World Social Forum* Project, which emerged as a critical voice against the *World Economic Forum* - A meeting held every year in Davos in Switzerland which brings together essentially the billionaires and their friendly politicians to talk about, you know, how wealth is good and austerity must be imposed on people. So, as a counterpoint to the World Economic Forum, the World Social Forum was created, initially in Brazil at Porto Alegre and then in other cities, began to spread around the world.

This was an important moment and I think had been an advance for people's struggles to have something like the World Social Forum. But it was not able to really go beyond the annual meeting. And so at the "Dilemmas of Humanity" conference, there was a serious discussion about creating a platform for political and social movements. And out of that was born the International People's Assembly, which has now grown to include about 200 political and social movements; including, of

course, the Landless Workers of Brazil, Patria Grande from Argentina, Democratic Way which is a Left political force in Morocco, the largest trade unions in Africa are members, Workers' Party in Bangladesh and so on and so forth.

As part of that discussion, there was a sense that in three different arenas, the people's movements, the Left was weakened. And the three arenas were pretty clear and they were put on the table.

The first is: we are at a disadvantage when it comes to the information question. Many years ago there was a report by the United Nations called the *McBride Report* - actually the Chair of that report was Canadian. The McBride report in the 1970s came out and said that there's a serious information gap in the world and there needs to be a kind of Commons of Information. Well, look from the McBride report in the 1970s to 2015, things had only gotten much worse with corporate consolidation of media, the West really dominating the voice and so on. So one of the issues on the table was media and the information war.

Second issue on the table was political education for young activists and so on. You know, it's one thing to get involved in struggles, but is there really a space for political training? And so that was the second set of issues debated.

The third was, is there really sufficient research conducted that lifts up and amplifies the theories of political and social movements? And part of that debate of course, deeply interested me because I've been interested for a long time in bridging the gap between movements and intellectual activity and lifting up and amplifying the embedded theories in movements. So as part of that third element, the Tri-Continental Institute for Social Research was created and I came on as the Director of it.

So we are actually associated with this project of internationalism. And our agenda as a research institute is essentially to amplify the voices of movements. To bridge the gap between movements and intellectual activity. And to create a kind of intellectualism that develops its confidence, its clarity from the lessons learnt by people in struggle. That's where we came from and we rooted ourselves in our own movements; so we have offices in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in San Paolo, Brazil, in Johannesburg, South Africa, and in New Delhi in India.

Our teams of researchers are basically people who are themselves involved in political activity, but of course at the same time, we are deeply interested in the facts. You can't build political projects based on illusions. So we are actually committed to a factual, hard-boiled analysis and so on, but again, rooted in the temperature of political and social movements.

RESH: And this is very core to a great deal of your work. Certainly as you've described at the Tri-Continental, and then we see it through your writings as well; *the Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* being a really stunning example. Is it safe to say then that this is not just about providing the perspectives of

the Global South and an international solidarity movement, but also about countering and speaking back to centers of Western Eurocentric power?

VIJAY: Well, certainly that's the case and I think you've put it very well. It's been a struggle for a hundred years now for intellectual activity taking place outside the Atlantic states, outside North America which actually doesn't include Mexico, even though Mexico is part of the continent of North America. We think generally of the United States and Canada and then of Western European countries.

The center of a lot of what was institutionally and ideologically seen as the truth emanated from somewhere in the Atlantic world. This area dominated intellectual activity, from the period of high colonialism right up to the present. You know, the university systems of North America, of Europe, shaped and fashioned a lot of the intellectual agenda around the world. They imposed it around the world.

So it's not like from Johannesburg, or it's not like from the universities in Kuala Lumpur, or it's not like Tsinghua University in China, UNAM in Mexico. I mean, they were not able to generate agendas that were anything more than regional perhaps, perhaps national. They were not able to actually contest the kind of knowledge systems that emerged from Paris and Cambridge, Massachusetts, and so on.

So this is a hundred year struggle. I mean, we see ourselves rooted in a very long tradition that goes back to early scholarship in the 19th century. For instance, in India there was an important writer, Dadabhai Naoroji who in the 19th century contested British colonial claims about a mission civilization in Britain. And Naoroji wrote a book on the drain of wealth from India. A very significant book where he started to calculate how much of Indian wealth was drained to Europe, to England in particular, to benefit England at the detriment of the livelihood of people in India. And that book was published in the 19th century.

We see ourselves in the tradition of the Pan-African scholars; people of course like WEB DuBois, later Walter Rodney, CLR James, and so on. People who tried to make the argument very strongly about not only how the histories of parts of the world were set aside, not only that. But even the kind of values that begin to dominate in the stories we tell ourselves. Are values that essentially shaped the world through the eyes of the West. So whether it's Eduardo Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America*, Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, these are the kinds of long-term traditions of trying to contest the narrative that comes from the West.

And it's not to contest the narrative based on just different opinions. It's actually to lift up facts which have been buried underneath the enormous mountain of ideology. The facts that have been buried. And uncontested facts by the way. Simple and uncontested facts such as the draining of the wealth of South America. The mountain of Potosi emptied of its silver. That silver drawn to first Spain, the Iberian Peninsula, and then eventually to Northern Europe, to the Netherlands and to Britain. That fact is uncontested. But what's the meaning of that?

I mean, how can you understand today's Bolivia and today's Argentina without understanding the massive drain of wealth that took place for hundreds of years from those parts of the world.

A lot of these facts again, are uncontested. The fact that in the Congo, millions of people were slaughtered by the Belgians so that Belgium could essentially drain the country of its rubber, drain the country of its wealth, to benefit Belgium against the Congo. Going all the way to the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in 1961.

Nobody contests these facts. But what's the value of these facts? The value of these facts actually turns the tables a little bit on the self image of Western countries. And so actually we don't see ourselves as pioneering, anything. We are part of a tradition, and we want to both uphold the tradition and advance it.

RESH: What you speak of in terms of advancing the tradition and sort of countering what has become a really, a really myopic lens. I mean, when you think about it Western dominance of the world has only, as you say, been a reality for what, the last, couple of centuries or less - that's a lot less than 1% of human history. While Western populations right now, account for around 15% of the current global population. Again, this is an exceptionally narrow prism; yet this shapes the dominant hegemonic perspective in global politics, international norms, human rights. And so when we hear about the Global South, very often it's accompanied by descriptions of poverty, debt, underdevelopment, instability, corruption, the list is very long. But this is part and parcel of discussions about the Global South coming from the Global North. While at the same time as you've pointed out, there seems to be an amnesia or denial about what you have called the colonial crimes that led to this.

Could you talk a bit more about what this colonial project was about?

VIJAY: It's so important to establish again for new generations I suppose, some of these uncontested facts. It's really important to establish it, not merely for historiographic reasons. We're not contesting the past alone.

Take into consideration for instance, that the British leached £45 trillion from India between the 19th and early 20th century, I mean, it's extraordinary the amount of money that was taken out of India in that a hundred and some year period. It's extraordinary that that number is really high.

What does that then say when India approaches the International Monetary Fund in 1991 and says, "Look, we have a balance of payments problem. We need a bridge loan". And what the IMF indicates to India, is that India has to actually go into its own Reserve Bank, pull out actual gold ingots, drive those gold ingots to the airport in Bombay, put them on a plane and send the actual gold ingots to England. That happened in 1991. That's incredible! The link between the drain of wealth in the 19th and 20th century from India to England. And then 45 some years after Independence, when India goes through a balance of payments problem, the West insists that India actually airlift gold to England. Okay. That's to me, not about the

past alone, it's about the present; where the debt crisis is somehow anchored in old colonial histories.

So is the debate around the climate catastrophe. One has become used to, in fact this habit of finger-waving. Whether it's the British Prime Minister, the American President, the Canadian Premier, whoever; these leaders have got used to wagging their fingers in front of the faces of world leaders from the Global South. It's a habit. They do it habitually. They can't seem to avoid doing it.

Maybe Justin Trudeau can do some sort of version of the Bhangra. That's fine. Doesn't impress me that he can do that. Because it's hardly rocket science to learn how to do somebody else's dance, but he gets mighty praised for it. At the same time he'll wag his finger in the face of world leaders from South Asia, as if that's just something that one does.

So on climate, there's a lot of finger-wagging to countries like India and so on saying, "you got to stop using coal." And that interested me that argument itself, "you've got to stop using coal."

Well, let's consider that. Before the British arrived in India, of course, that was a period of early industrialism. There was no massive use of coal in India. Coal was a product of colonialism. The British came. Through their various explorations discovered coal and in the area of India now called Jharkand. They sent in Indian workers to build the early coal mines. And India in 1947 was left by the British reliant upon coal and has never been able to get the resources together to pivot away. You can't just leave coal tomorrow when the country is basically reliant on it. What's the pathway out of coal?

The West, which has accepted in Rio de Janeiro, that there are what are called "differential responsibilities" for the climate and environmental crisis - part of that rooted in the history of colonialism. The West has accepted by treaty that there are differential responsibilities and yet puts very low amount of money into the Climate Adaptation and Transition Funds of the United Nations. Last year the global expenditure on arms, on weapons was over \$2 trillion. The UN is merely trying to raise \$100 billion a year and can't even do that.

So, this discussion about colonialism, it's not a discussion about the past. This is not litigating the past in a history seminar. All of this has deep implications about policies today. Yes, the policies of today. But also deep, deep implications about the attitude.

I mean, Canada, for instance, is home to 60% of the world's mining companies. Sixty percent of the world's mining companies are domiciled in Canada, including Barrick Gold. The behavior of these Canadian mining companies in South America, in places like Papua New Guinea and Australia.. The behavior of these Canadian mining companies is extraordinary and well documented. Well documented! And yet Canada is able to position itself as a highly civilized liberal, " Well, we're not quite as bad as the United States" kind of country.

Well, no actually it's worse. Because Canadian interference in places like Bolivia and Venezuela and so on is significant. In fact, it's Canada that took the leadership to create the so-called Lima Group to overthrow the government of Venezuela. For what reason?

And that reason need not be articulated by Justin Trudeau as the Premier. That reason was articulated by one of the leaders of Barrick Gold, Peter Munk who wrote in the Toronto newspapers after Hugo Chavez won a democratic election. Mr Munk wrote that the government of Mr. Chavez needs to be overthrown because he's an authoritarian. He just won a massive mandate in an election. Why did Munk say he's an authoritarian? Because Venezuela's government was exerting its right to sovereignty over its resources and saying Canadian companies cannot set the terms for what happens to Venezuelan resources. That's the colonial attitude. Peter Munk in that op-ed was demonstrating a colonial attitude.

And by the way, Peter Munk is not some marginal figure. The University of Toronto, the respectable School of International Studies is named the Munk School. So, he is a highly celebrated figure who called for the overthrow of a democratic government in Venezuela. Canada will be able to smile and say, "look, we are a great liberal country". Meanwhile, the colonial attitude and the colonial structures persist.

RESH: In terms of this in *Washington Bullets* you've written, "that humiliation of the older colonial past was now refracted into the modern era. At no time were the people of the Third World allowed to live in the same time as their contemporaries in the West. They were forced into an earlier time. A time with less opportunity and social dignity."

So again, this point that this colonial legacy; still very much persistent is very powerful within a contemporary colonial mindset in the present era.

VIJAY: Well, let's take an example of that. Haiti is an extraordinary country. It has an extraordinary history. The people of Haiti, who had been enslaved by the French and by the planters of France, they triumphed in 1804; overthrew French plantation rule and created a Republic. I mean, the Haitian revolution is an extraordinary revolution. It's the first anti-colonial revolution in the world and they triumphed! That's extraordinary. We should never forget that; that the Haitian people were able to overthrow colonialism.

They were immediately punished for that. And they were forced by point of gun to pay the French planters for the loss of their property. Now we may ask what is that property? That property is human beings. Haiti, which had won its freedom in the name of Liberty, in the name of Equality, in the name of Fraternity - the slogan of the French Revolution - Haiti, which won its freedom by struggle, was now forced to pay people for their loss of property, which was other people. Those payments continued right into the 1960s.

The debt of Haiti was purchased by Chase Manhattan Bank in New York. They bought the debt from the French. And so the Haitians had to pay a New York bank right into the contemporary era. By the way, it's not just Haiti.

The government of Britain paid plantation owners of British ancestry from Jamaica right up to the 2000s. It's so vulgar!

They dismiss conversations about reparations for being enslaved, but they continue to pay the plantation owners. They continue to pay plantation owners right into the modern period.

RESH: I think it was only a couple of years ago that they finished paying off those reparations. And then for some reason, the Treasury in the UK sent out a tweet to everybody. "Now's the time to celebrate" or something like that, "that we have finally paid off the reparations for slavery", not really talking about who those reparations went to.

VIJAY: That's right. That was during the government of David Cameron. It was deeply embarrassing for the government in the UK, but not embarrassing enough for them to open an inquiry and say, "okay, let's deal with the question justice for those who had been enslaved. And also let's open the question of the mistreatment of the Windrush Generation." People who came from the Caribbean into Britain, who had been deeply mistreated and some were then being deported. This was all happening contemporaneously.

So Haiti was forced to pay this indemnity by force of gun really. That was one part of it. And then over the course of the period, when Haiti kept trying to assert its sovereignty, it experienced repeated military intervention and a long period of military dictatorship under the Duvalier father and son, backed entirely by the United States and the French.

After the Duvalier dictatorship ended, the United States intervened to overthrow the democratically elected government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide twice! He was coupéd twice. He actually should enter the Guinness Book of World Records as a world leader who has been coupéd twice. I don't think any other world leader, same person, has had two coups. Many countries have had multiple coups. Recently Mali had two coups, one in 2020, 2021; but they were different leaders who were coupéd. Jean-Bertrand Aristide was coupéd twice. That's incredible.

Then after all of that, after the entry of US multinationals to convert Haiti into a manufacturing unit for their corporations and so on. The Haitian parliament attempted to raise minimum wages in Haiti. Minimum wages to a modest amount; it was hardly a dramatic increase. The United States State Department, under the leadership of Hilary Clinton, intervened into the Haitian domestic discussion about raising minimum wages and stopped the raising of the minimum wages.

Now, why am I telling that story? Why is it so important to the US State Department to prevent minimum wages rising in Haiti? Well, it's deeply important because the

way imperialism functions is that there's a decision - and I don't mean this in any kind of conspiratorial way - but there's a decision by the structure, by the history that we have, that large parts of the world, labor in those parts of the world are paid a subhuman standard where they cannot actually make a life of full bellies, education for their children, proper housing, good healthcare, and so on. No. They are treated in a subhuman fashion. Wages are sub par, much below the wages in any other parts of the world. They're prevented from migrating. That's why the question of immigration is so fraught; capital can move anywhere, but not labor. They are prevented from migrating. In their areas, in their territories, wages held down. Why? Because super-profits that can then be earned by the big corporations.

This is nowhere more clear than in the example again of Haiti, where Haitian seamstresses create sweatshirts for the North American market. Where they are paid cents on the dollar and those sweatshirts retail for \$60, \$70 in the shops in North America. Who's getting that profit? Not the seamstress who's making, as I said, pennies on the dollar.

And it's nowhere more clear than in the copper mines in Zambia, where Zambian copper miners, who work in the Copper Belt region of Zambia, they go on into the ground, they bring the copper out, they get again pennies on the dollar. And now copper is essential for computers and phones and so on. Nonetheless, 60% of the children who live above the copper seams in Zambia cannot read. They are kept in that condition. And that's one of the most repulsive parts of both the contemporary world and about how narrow is our discussions about human rights.

RESH: And all of this is very much structural adjustment, right? And so in this podcast series, we've been talking about neoliberalism. And what is not often known is that neoliberalism actually was inflicted upon the Global South first, before anywhere else. As these types of austerity policies that were attached to loans, saying that you need to deplete your social welfare system and really open your borders to all of this corporate activity and whatnot. And therefore the people within those nations have no choice really but to work, as you say, at these very, very low wages for these corporations in highly exploitative conditions.

VIJAY: Well, you know, it's interesting because when the International Monetary Fund was created, the Articles of Association of the IMF were pretty humane. The point of the International Monetary Fund was to prevent short term liquidity problems faced by governments to escalate into inflation or hyperinflation and create political problems. Essentially it was to prevent what happened to Germany in the Weimer era. So if a country, for instance, is reliant on export of sugarcane and there's a problem with the sugarcane harvest, the harvest fails. Then the country is not able to earn foreign exchange and there's difficulty in paying its bills, like to import energy and so on. And in that case, the IMF would walk into town and say, "okay, look, we're going to give you bridge funding this year, because we know that next year the sugarcane harvest will come back. And we'll work out a payment scheme to pay back the problem you've had this year, which is not going to actually damage the fundamentals of your country."

That was essentially the purpose of the IMF. It's a very humane institution if it followed its Articles of Association, to come in to help out a country which suffered a balance of payments or distress. And then create a system of payment that wasn't going to damage the country. It's a perfectly decent thing.

In the 1970s, there was a debate in the IMF, a very serious debate. And in fact, the Director General of the IMF at the time - who happened to be a Dutchman, who by the way was also a Sufi, quite an interesting character - he opened the debate around the massive oil profits that were accruing to the Gulf Arab states. And he said, let's ask the Gulf Arab states to invest these profits in a recycling fund, which can be used to develop other countries. Again, another perfectly humane way to use these massive profits. Instead of his approach, these funds went into international capital markets and then essentially fueled the massive expansion of finance in the world.

But anyway, he had an alternative proposal. Let's use this money essentially for development. Pretty good idea. It's an idea that Hugo Chavez put into place when he was governing Venezuela and the oil profits were used as kind of development funding for Latin America.

So the IMF then was transformed and the U S government played a major role in the transformation. They fought politically. Expelled economists who were sympathetic to not so orthodox ideas. And they brought in a lot of people from Stanford and Harvard and other economics departments, University of Chicago, with different attitude towards, what the IMF could be. And what they created was something called a Structural Adjustment Policy. Very interesting policy. Because now what they said was, "Look, your sugar-cane harvest has failed. Okay, we commiserate with you. But the problem for you is not that you've had one year's failure of harvest. The problem for you is your system is not organized the way we want it to be organized."

So now imagine this. A country, with some form of democratic participation, has decided to organize its system in a certain way. The IMF will show up and say: "Wait a minute. We don't like the way your system is organized. Sorry, guys. We don't care about democracy. We just don't think it's efficient. So what we're going to say is if you want bridge financing from us, to help you for this year or maybe one or two years, you're going to have to change these 20 things in your own country. In other words, you're going to have to allow us to exercise sovereignty over your economy. You're going to have to cut subsidies. You're going to have to open up trade. You're going to have to do X, Y and Z. And you're going to have to do Austerity against your own public." That essentially was structural adjustment from the 1970s onward, right till today.

Every few years under pressure, the IMF takes the old wine of Structural Adjustment and pours into new bottles. They create new vehicles, new ideas, pretending that it's more humane and whatever. But it's still Austerity; the same kind of denial of countries, their own sovereignty. It's where the IMF says: "Okay, you can steer democracy; but your economic policy, that comes with us to Washington". That's totally undemocratic! And it has destroyed the world. And we don't pay enough attention to it.

I've been writing a lot recently about the Sahel region of Africa. In 2009 Alpha Oumar Konaré, who was a very decent head of government in Mali, was begging the West saying, "if you canceled Mali's debt - Mali a country of 27 million people - if you cancel our debt, we'll be able to deal with the insurgencies of the Tuareg in the north, we'll be able to deal with the differences between the Fulani and the Dogon in the centre. We'll be able to deal with our crisis of poverty in the country. And that will go some way towards stopping the cycle of violence in Mali." He had a very good agenda.

The United States basically said: "Sorry, you have to pay for your past; we can't forgive anything". Then what do you see? That's 2009. Two years later, NATO destroys Libya. Opens a can of worms. The Tuareg insurgency in the north links up with Al-Qaida and then later ISIS. They seize Timbuktu. Make a run to Bamako. The French intervene. There's enormous amount of violence that the French also visit on the Malian people. And then you have two coup d'états.

Mali has been destroyed. A combination of structural adjustment policies of the IMF and then this hideous NATO war in Libya. And look what you have now. You have a country in deep distress. This is a product, not of Mali's own history alone, but of a history imposed upon it.

RESH: And despite all of this and what has been done to countries like Mali and Haiti; when it comes to understanding the poor nations of the South, the immediate response of the North, aside from structural adjustment, is charity, aid and development. The international development and aid industries are huge.

What is your response to the, aid industry? This idea that, northern countries are sending millions of dollars every year in aid to the Global South, to continental Africa. What would be your response to that?

VIJAY: Well look, it's hard to say; oh, stop all aid and so on, because in the context of austerity, in the context of the violence of structural adjustment, some of this aid is certainly a balm and is necessary. Countries just don't have the wherewithal to marshal resources to do a lot of things. You know, you can't just close the tap on aid overnight. It's going to have to keep coming; because many countries just can't survive. Afghanistan cannot survive. In fact, it's having a hard time because the aid has just dried up. So that's important.

On the other hand, the aid industry works hand in glove with structural adjustment. Cause what structural adjustment did was something quite political. As I said, it essentially said that the democracy or the sovereignty of countries was not important and the economic policy can be driven by Washington. The economic policy that Washington drove was privatization of everything in many countries. Privatize healthcare systems, privatize education, stop subsidizing farmers, privatize pension schemes, and all of that. And it was done pretty ruthlessly; the cuts were quite severe.

Having cut healthcare, healthcare systems essentially went towards the rich. You have to think about this. It's never going to be really profitable for a private healthcare provider to offer healthcare to destitute people. Where's the money to be made?

We're talking about people let's say in a country like India, where the very destitute can't even pay for an Aspirin, let alone anything else. So once you privatize healthcare, healthcare is going to tend towards providing for the rich and for the upper middle-class. Basically that's what has happened in most countries where healthcare has been privatized. And what do I mean by that? I mean, hospitals become expensive. If you go to many countries in the Global South, hospital rooms look like hotel rooms because they cater to the very rich. It's expensive to provide care in those institutions.

And then the expertise in those countries in private healthcare becomes for the ailments of the rich. It's not going to deal with the ailments of the poor, which are often best handled through public healthcare systems; dealing with malnutrition, dealing with, for instance, the diseases of the poor. That's a public health question. You need mass public health campaigns for that. Educational campaigns and so on. No private health care provider is going to deal with that.

So what happens is that in the gap between private healthcare for the few and no healthcare for anybody else, the NGOs arrive. And they established themselves in the infrastructure of a country providing care for this or that group. And sometimes they are religious-based NGOs, healthcare NGOs in particular, which have their own agenda which they pursue and that's disturbing itself.

The real issue here is that in lieu of building genuinely robust public healthcare systems, you allow these private charities to provide 10% of what you should have. Then governments become reliant on them and they become like a necessary part of the agenda. And then they start to set the agenda. That's really when the problems appear.

You know, it's great that Bill Gates has all his money. I don't know why he's not just taxed and the money then used in a global fund for healthcare and start public healthcare systems and so on. No. Instead the caprice of the rich will enter and they'll say, Oh, we are interested now in dealing with influenza. Oh, now we're fed up with influenza, we're going to do something else.

So there's no way for a government to democratically plan for what are the needs of the people. And again, you don't have democratic control over systems of healthcare or systems of education. And that's a big issue for countries.

I think structurally there's a serious problem with the kind of charity-based approach towards dealing with basic needs. We're not going to meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goals through charity. That's very clear even to the UN.

So I would say on the one hand, yes of course, in a time of absolute desertification of the social good, charities play a role. But charities are not a solution to anything. What you need is you need publicly financed democratic systems that deal with the basic needs. And there simply is no appetite for that now, given the kind of intense US Treasury Department, IMF pressure on countries to cut.

I mean, during the pandemic almost 30 countries in the Global South spent more money paying off wealthy bond-holders in the North than they did on their healthcare systems. That tells you a little bit about the structural adjustment kind of world we live in.

RESH: Well, speaking of the pandemic, right? COVID yet another crisis, like the climate crisis, where the Global South nations are on the frontlines of the disaster, but at the back of the line when it comes to the response, in this case vaccines.

So for instance, we in Canada are already on our fourth dose while many poorer nations have barely gotten through their first. So what's going on here? And why is this situation being described as actually a "Vaccine Apartheid" by the World Health Organization among others?

VIJAY: So that's really interesting. The UN agencies and the various healthcare agencies, including the WHO, came up with a number. The argument made was that at least 70% of the world must be vaccinated. That was the figure that was developed by various models, by epidemiologists and public health experts and so on. I don't know how they came up with that number, but that number was dancing around. 70% of the country must be vaccinated.

At our Institute, we took a look at some of this and we suggested that - I think this was now six months ago - we suggested that at the rate of vaccination for Burundi one example country on the African continent, at the rate of vaccination in Burundi, they would reach 70% vaccination in the year 2100.

RESH: Wow.

VIJAY: Let me just repeat that in the year 2100. That was at the rate of vaccination.

Now, given the fact that the Northern countries have been largely vaccinated to the 70% level and given the fact that vaccine manufacturers themselves are finding that vaccines are just not moving because people don't have the funds to buy them. So a number of vaccine manufacturers in India started to slow down vaccine production. And now a new discussion is developed; which is to say, do we really need to vaccinate to 70% of the population? And there was an article in no less a place than the New York Times suggesting that on the African continent, we may just basically stop at the rate we are at now. There's no need to actually proceed further. I thought that's very interesting and awfully convenient.

It's true, of course, that in many parts of the Global South other important vaccination programs had been held off as a result. Such as for polio and various things, for even influenza. And there's been a spike, particularly in children, of some other diseases for which they had previously been vaccinated against.

So there's a debate in some countries about what to use the syringes for. If you think about all this in practical terms, there are only so many syringes available to a country; because they have to buy these syringes. They don't just appear in the world. And so countries already depleted healthcare systems have to make a choice. Do we use the syringe to inoculate for X? Or are we going to use it for Y?

And all of these kinds of debates have just vanished. As the North has gone above the 70% margin, discussions about Peoples' Vaccine, and not just Peoples' Vaccine, Peoples' Health Systems or even Peoples' Syringes. All of that has just vanished. You know, it demonstrates the hardness of the soul; that at one point there had been some pretty robust discussions about Peoples' Vaccine. All of that now long-forgotten once the West crossed the threshold of 70%. What does it matter now if people are going to die in large numbers elsewhere? That's the attitude. And that's an extremely disturbing attitude.

RESH: It's disturbing because it also doesn't make a lot of sense. In a pandemic, the virus anywhere is the virus everywhere. So when you have a largely unvaccinated population, eventually you're going to have the outbreak of variants and then those variants are going to spread and then everybody has to lock down again. So it doesn't seem to make a lot of practical long-term sense in terms of Western wellbeing as well,

VIJAY: But nor does the arms industry. For the last, I don't know, 70 odd years the weapons manufacturers have flooded West Asia, North Africa, parts of Sub-Saharan Africa with small-arms. And they made a lot of money on it. They have made a lot of money on the arms-trade.

Last year, the world spent \$2 trillion on weapons. Most of it was spent by the advanced countries of the Western world. \$2 trillion in weapons sales one year.

We know that what is called terrorism is fueled not only by ideology, but largely by the amount of weapons that swirl around these parts of the world. We know that the destabilization of countries creates what Chalmers Johnson called "blowback". The attack in New York and in Washington in 9/11 was a consequence of economic and foreign policies that were quite clearly... you can draw a straight line. But that doesn't change much, does it? There is an arrogance, a belief that these countries can live in a bubble. That they can somehow immunize themselves from the conflicts of the rest of the world.

It's the same attitude that's there with climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change routinely says "red alert, red alert, red alert"; but there's an attitude that, well, you know, maybe half a dozen islands in the South Pacific will vanish and maybe sea waters will rise and there'll be coastal flooding in Bangladesh,

and maybe there'll be more droughts and desiccation of the Sahel and there'll be conflict in Sudan and conflict in Mali and so on.

But by and large Western countries will be to some extent immunized and therefore you don't have to do anything. I mean, you can even propagate the idea that climate change is a hoax.

What's the difference?

To my mind, the callous attitude towards the pandemic is equivalent to the callous attitude towards arms-sales is equivalent to the callous attitude to climate change is equivalent to the callous attitude towards austerity. It's all one and the same. And it comes from this sense of superiority and this sense of being somehow immune from the challenges of the world.

Well, sorry, it doesn't work like that, but there's a belief that it does.

RESH: Last year in Glasgow during the COP26 global climate conference, you were on a people's panel where you brought up many of these points and then a video of that suddenly went viral. I know people who saw it and just even if they were alone, they just stood up and started to applaud, they would later tell me. Why do you think that this analysis has now resonated so strongly with people?

VIJAY: You should ask the people with whom it's resonated. I don't know. Because frankly I've been saying this kind of thing for years. And I was extremely surprised when this particular clip went.... You know, it's now been watched by hundreds of millions of people. On one website in China, it was watched by close to a hundred million people. Just that one clip, five minutes long with subtitles in Chinese. I keep getting messages from people in India, from the Caribbean, from South America and so on. They say, "Oh, my right-wing uncle forwarded this to our family WhatsApp group" and so on. It's extraordinary. I have no idea how these things happen.

But I can say that there is an appetite now. There is a kind of way in which people are fed up with things. I'll give you another example. Actually, it's an amazing example.

India has a government which is right-of-center. No surprise to anybody, the government of Narendra Modi. The External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar - he's a pretty interesting guy, pretty soft-spoken guy. He's the Foreign Minister of a right-of-center government. A government that has very close ties with the United States. A member of the US project called the Quad with Australia and Japan and the United States. Votes often with the United States in various forums and so on.

On this question of Russia and Ukraine, the Indian government has just not gone along with the United States and with the Europeans, saying; look, you people are exaggerating what's happening. That's been the attitude. So the US President Biden spoke to Narendra Modi and a few hours later, Anthony Blinken the Secretary of

State, Lloyd Austin the Secretary of Defense and the Indian External Affairs Minister were at a press conference.

And again, Blinken did his typical finger-wagging, saying that India must do this and India must do that and so on. You know, this is familiar; we've heard this kind of attitude for years. Now a question was asked of the Indian Foreign Minister: What do you think about the fact that India continues to buy energy from Russia? And it was asked in quite a rude way.

Now, he paused and he said something quite interesting. He said: "Well, I've been looking into that." And then he said, "What India buys in a month from Russia, Europe buys in an afternoon. Look into it." That's what he said to the reporter in front of Blinken and Lloyd Austin, the Secretary of Defense of the United States. "Look into it," he says. You are hypocrites! So interesting to see this.

Actually, I'm not saying this with any kind of pride because I'm completely opposed to the government of Mr. Modi. But after that thing from Glasgow went viral, Mr. Modi gave a speech where he picked up two of the phrases that I used in the speech: One is he talked about "colonial mentality" and then he talked about "colonial institutions". And I was quite surprised to hear that.

But obviously there is a kind of frustration with the world of finger-wagging. We know that this frustration is very clear on the African continent. Cyril Ramaphosa, the President of South Africa, has publicly said that the West is not being honest with the world in terms of how it's reacting to what's happening in Ukraine and so on.

I think we're at a point where people have just got a little annoyed and this annoyance has a material basis. The material basis is now out of 193 countries in the world, 130 of them - that's a lot of countries out of one ninety three - a hundred and thirty of those countries have as their principle trading partner, China and not the United States.

And I think many of these countries are looking at the US and saying: "Hey listen, you have nothing to trade with us. You're not investing in our country. You're lecturing us. You're screwing us with more debt through the IMF. We don't want this; we have choices now." And I think that's the material basis for the new sense of buoyancy in this criticism of the arrogance of the West.

RESH: And it is interesting. Because even though the world fairly roundly condemns the violence within the Ukraine; when it comes to, as you say the response to Russia, we see again much of the Global South - China, the Middle East, India, much of Africa - are actually choosing to remain neutral.

In *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South*, you write that: "The Third World was not a place, it was a project." And the project that you are referring to is one that came out of a particular moment of hope earlier in the 20th century for the world's poorer nations - many of them at a time when they were newly independent. And this was within the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement.

So could you go a bit briefly into what the Non-Aligned Movement was and why do you see it - because I know you've been writing about this. Why do you see the Non-Aligned Movement as possibly being reinvigorated and really re-emerging at this moment?

VIJAY: Well, the Non-Aligned Movement emerged out of the anti-colonial struggles. It was a claim made by countries that were newly independent saying, "Hey listen, we don't want to any longer be ' - as one African diplomat famously said - "we don't want it to be Veranda Boys. We don't want to sit in the veranda and watch you make history. We are making history ourselves and have always made history. Now we want to actually have some power." That was a pretty bold stand made in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955 and then when the Non-Aligned Movement was created in Belgrade in '61. That movement was really killed off by the debt crisis that struck most of the Third World in the 1980s.

Interestingly, the phrase "Non-Aligned" has made a return in many of the political forces that had basically stayed away from it for decades. Our institute, Tri-Continental, partnered with the Peace and Justice Project of Jeremy Corbyn and with GlobeTrotter with which I work and Morning Star newspaper in London. We partnered to do a 12-part series on *Non-Alignment and Peace*. And we're publishing pieces written by people - from Brazil, Marco Fernandez has written a superb piece, from South Africa, Non-Tobacco Halela has written a piece, Prashant Radha Krishna written one from India and so on. And this series is reflecting on the re-emergence of the idea of Non-Alignment.

But actually the attempt to found Non-Alignment is not exactly just reemerging now. The language of Non-Alignment was there in some of the discussions in the BRICS in 2009, in various bilateral discussions between countries around the world. It was there in fact, in the reemergence of regionalism in South America, in the Bolivarian project led by the Venezuelans in the 2000s.

Why should a country, let's say Zambia - Why should Zambia choose between the United States and China? Zambia has to derive its own national agenda and it should have relations with all countries. Why should it choose?

There's a refusal by countries, even like India, South Korea, Japan - these are all close US allies - they refuse to allow the United States to throw an iron curtain around Eurasia.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, after the Non-Aligned Movement itself began to get a little irrelevant, there has been an attempt to refound it for some decades. But now I think people are returning even to the language of Non-Alignment and that should be actually promoted. Because it's true; why should countries have to pick and choose? Why does El Salvador have to pick the IMF over the Belt and Road Initiative? Why can't it get the best from both? Why does it have to choose? And I think this attitude of choice - which factually is not being imposed by the Chinese, but is being imposed by the United States. Why should that govern the world? We don't want to live behind the iron curtains.

RESH: Now, I just want to go back to another project. The Tri-Continental also spearheaded *A Plan to Save the Planet*. And I wonder if you could talk about that.

VIJAY: In the middle of the pandemic, our team began to do a lot of research in the simple concept that the pandemic hadn't created the crisis, it merely revealed the crisis. And we started work on a series called *CoronaShock*. And we made the case that the coronavirus was a shock to a system that was already deeply in crisis and damaged. And it revealed the depth of problems in public healthcare, revealed the lack of savings-rate for people - they just didn't have the savings to deal with a crisis and so on.

Our best text in that series was *CoronaShock and Patriarchy* about the way in which patriarchal relations were really strengthened during the pandemic. And we saw rates of violence against women rise and so on. So we did that series of studies. I'm very proud of them; I think it's an excellent documentation of how to understand the pandemic.

When the series was happening, we opened the discussion with the trading block called Alba TCP, which is a block of seven countries in the Caribbean and South America. They said, we are seeing the World Economic Forum and others put together a post-pandemic plan. And we don't have a plan from People's Movements. We don't really know what to say, how to address some of these issues. And so, we at Tri-Continental along with the Simon Bolivar Institute in Caracas, Venezuela, assembled a team of 26 research institutes from Zimbabwe, from India, from Cuba and so on. And we put together a pretty good provisional plan, which looks at things like education, healthcare, housing, the care economy, questions of human dignity . And building from the demands of social and political movements, we put together a pretty expansive *Plan to Save the Planet*, which we understand is a provisional document.

We had a good series of online meetings about it in Latin America and Africa and so on. And now we are building in a kind of bilateral way; two, three, four research institutes together. They're looking at say just at health and we're going to expand each of these into longer, much richer debates and discussions.

And we think that we play a good role in lifting up some of these debates and making sure that people are not convinced of the idea that only the bankers and so on, have ideas for a policy on how to save the world. In fact, they don't. We have to come up with our own plan to save the planet. And we did

RESH: It is very comprehensive. And it's very interesting, the analysis that there's actually three apartheidisms that have long been inflicted on the Global South: the Food Apartheid, the Money Apartheid, and of course the Medicine Apartheid and vaccines would be a part of that.

And it's also a really powerful example of South-South Cooperation. The number of stakeholders that you brought from these different institutes as well. Just to say that, the Global South, in Western attention, it's sort of like a tree in the forest. Unless it's

somehow subject to Western mediation, intervention, or involvement, we don't often hear very much about these kinds of initiatives. So this is fantastic.

Finally Vijay, this moment of converging crises of COVID, capitalism, climate, conflict as well - with all of its revelations and struggles - can also be seen as a moment of great possibility. Arundhati Roy talked about this as a portal to perhaps something better in the post-pandemic world. So in terms of global power, where do you see us heading? Will the post-pandemic world continue to be one of only few or even a single center of power? Or could we be heading into an age of multipolarity?

VIJAY: Well, initially we have entered into an age of terrible war and conflict. The United States made it very clear in 2018 in the National Security Doctrine that they created, that the objective of US power must now be prevention of China and Russia - what they call "near peer rivals" - from rising. This is the US government stated policy. And recently the Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin talked about the need to weaken Russia. That was again his phrase, "weakening Russia".

Part of that weakening has been the attempt to focus attention on Ukraine. This goes back a decade in 2010, the United States starts to interfere in Ukrainian politics. 2014, the United States plays a role in the creation of a new political dynamic in Ukraine. Just a little later in 2015, the United States cuts one of the largest weapons deals. \$1.83 billion weapons deal with Taiwan. All of this to essentially send a message to Moscow and Beijing.

And the message was actually made even clearer in 2019, when the United States walked out of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty; essentially again telling Moscow and Beijing that the U S government is prepared to use nuclear weapons in a battlefield context. Basically the United States just junked the whole arms-control system. The whole arms control system. And all of that is extremely chilling to me.

I mean, I know that the war in Ukraine is appalling and I know that the Russians violated International Law by crossing the boundary into Ukraine and are prosecuting the war in a ghastly way. All of that is true.

But there are bigger forces at play here. And one of them is the lack of willingness by North America and the West to accept the fact that Eurasia is integrating. That China has reemerged since the long century of what they call "humiliation" from about the 1820s to 1949, taking its place again as a major power. Russia is emerging from the great crisis it faced after the collapse of the Soviet Union. All of that is seen by Washington DC, London perhaps, maybe other capitals. All of that is seen as not allowed. They don't want to permit the Chinese or the Russians or the Indians, South Africans, Brazilians, whoever; they don't want to see them as full humans. And that's the problem.

What is this attitude? We want to weaken Russia. We will not permit China to rise. Who gave you the diktat to talk like that, to behave like that, to shape the world like that?

Okay. Maybe we want to move towards a multipolar type world, or we want to move towards a more democratic world order. But the road to that is paved with a lot of conflict and that conflict is being imposed on the world by the West. And everybody knows that.

RESH: Thank you so much, Vijay. It has been a great pleasure.

VIJAY: It's great to be with you. Thanks a lot.

RESH: That was historian, journalist, researcher, activist, writer, and Executive Director of Tri-Continental Institute for Social Research, Vijay Prashad

I'm Resh Budhu, host of the Courage My Friends podcast. Thanks for listening.

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