

Vijay Prashad - Washington Bullets: A History of the CIA, Coups, and Assassinations

This transcript may not be 100% accurate due to audio quality or other factors.

Moderator Die Linke: I had this political theorist who always told me, you're way too emotional with books and those series, and he was right. Sometimes I would like to throw this book. But this book I didn't want to throw. Although it doesn't have any sources. And at the end, when he's talking about the sources, he says: "Distance is for sure useful but distance can also be the wrong feeling because it can mean no passion".

Welcome here today. This is a very passionate book. It doesn't have sources, but at the same time we feel very close to what you have written. At least I do. And I also wonder, and we are going to elaborate later how you don't get angry and sad writing this – like, how were you feeling. You are going to start with some anecdotes, so we get to listen.

Vijay Prashad (VP): Okay. First, thanks a lot. It's great to be here. It's a historical building. It's the building of the communist movement in the DDR, in fact. And it's a real pleasure to be here. I hope the residue of some of those people rubs off on us today, some of the mystique and magic.

I wanted to just recognise some people. I want to recognise my friend Peter Mertens, who is the chairman of the Belgian Workers Party. It's great to have Peter here, thanks for coming. I want to recognise my comrade and friend Ghassane Koumiya. Ghassane is from the Moroccan Workers Democratic Green Party. Thanks, great to have you here. I also want to recognise my friends and partners from IFDDR whose materials you can see in the back. It's an interesting project. We work closely at Tricontinental with them. Part of the project, it seems to me, is to recover the authentic history of German Marxism. It's funny, but German Marxism, at least the theoretical sector, often does a wide detour around the DDR. It's like they start obviously with Marx and then go some way to maybe Adorno. But then there's a

wide detour around what's happening in at least a third of the German territory, where there were great Marxists from whom I learned personally, including Ernst Bloch, who I think is one of the shining lights of the Marxist tradition. So our friends in IFDDR, in a way, are bringing the train, driving that 325 kilometre fast train right through the history of German Marxism by bringing the DDR back into the conversation. And I think on the one hand it's extremely brave to do that because after 1990 it was hard to have that conversation. But I also think it's accurate, it's inaccurate to cast out that traditional thinking that took place in this city, in fact, a long time ago. So [here] the IFDDR.

MDL: You know I am too a radical leftist to be calling people specifically, so I want to say thank you to all of you for joining the fight because everybody is needed.

VP: Yes, I think that was the last thing I was going to say. Thanks everybody for coming. Well, I want to tell you a little bit about this book, because I wrote this book in two weeks. I'm not joking about that.

MDL: So that explains the "no sources".

VP: Yes. I was super angry when I wrote this book. Really angry. And I was really angry because this book was written in the weeks after the coup against Evo Morales in Bolivia. And what made me so angry were two things. The first thing was that they were actually people on the left saying it was not a coup and that Morales had been there too long. The first major indigenous head of state in the Americas was being told by white leftists, It's time for you to take a hike. Meanwhile, Angela Merkel had been chancellor longer than Morales, but that was fine. You know, she could go on forever, as far as the G7 was concerned. But Evo Morales had been there too long. A statement made by the US State Department. He has been there too long. Who is asking you? Isn't this the mandate of the Bolivian people? Who cares what the US State Department says? That really angered me. I was really quite angry at that attitude of the left. Forget The New York Times and the Washington Post and so on. The left was making those arguments.

Secondly, I was interested that a lot of young people online had simply no idea about the history of these coups and the overthrow of governments and the ceaseless, punctual nature of the way in which the US government, on behalf of its allies in Europe and Japan and so on, overthrows governments. Even like the history of Guatemala or Iran, and more recently the 50th anniversary of the coup in Chile. When I lived in Santiago, it was completely obscure. People have no clue about these things. And I was interested in that. We've done a really bad job. As people of the left, communicators, intellectuals, whatever, we have done a really bad job of reminding generation after generation of some of these things.

There's a way in which you can write the same book for every generation, and we must. We must write the same book for every generation. So in that sense, there's nothing original in

this book. It's written just for this generation. It's merely a recitation of the things pretty well known. So I did not have sources because of all of that, but because I didn't want the book to become so expensive. That was the only reason. We published it in India, 100 pages. It was sold for basically the price of a cup of coffee and it sold a lot. And it's translated into a lot of languages because it's short and therefore it's available. And also, I wanted to use this book to make a point. See, people say young people don't read. I completely disagree with that because young people are reading Facebook posts or Instagram posts or they're reading all kinds of things. So why can't the form of this social media engagement enter the book? So each section of this book is really short. And the idea was, if you're on a train, you just read one section and put a bookmark and close it, and forget. You don't have to read a whole chapter, which requires a different kind of investment of time. So the book is written in these quite short, as possible as I could for these stories, but with a narrative.

Let me tell you a story about the CIA. Just one story, and then we'll chit chat. The US ambassador was killed in Libya. You may remember this. He was killed in Benghazi in a very strange incident in Benghazi. So people were horrified. The US Ambassador has been killed. So I thought, wait a minute. A US ambassador was killed before and it's not discussed at all. And that was an ambassador who was killed in Afghanistan in 1978. His name was Adolph Spike Dubs. He was a Soviet specialist. Adolph Spike Dubs was sent by the US to Afghanistan because the US wanted to understand what was this government after the 1978 revolution, the Saur revolution? What are they? So they sent Soviet specialists. Dubs send a number of dispatches back to Washington saying, Look, they are not actually puppets of the USSR. And they're also completely going to fall apart by themselves because they are constantly fighting. Indeed, that was happening. There was even a shootout in the presidential palace. Tariq and others were firing at each other. So he said this is not an issue. Suddenly one day Dubs is going to the embassy. And he's kidnapped by mysterious people, taken to a hotel in Kabul. And he's held in this hotel room. There's an attempt by the government to rescue him and everybody gets killed. Dubs is killed, the kidnappers are killed, everybody. The US government later says that the kidnappers were Shiite Maoists and this Shiite Maoist group had kidnapped him for god knows what reason. There's no reason given. The files are basically all almost empty. And for years, I've been trying to find out. I wanted to write a book called The Murder of Adolph Dubs and the Start of the War on Terror. Something like that. Making the case that after Dubs was killed, Brzezinski sent a lot of money to the Mujahideen, which Dubs kept saying, Don't do it. So I always thought the Yanks killed him.

Anyway, there was no evidence because the files were all empty. And I was asking around. I went to Belfast, met an agent of British intelligence and met lots of people. One day I got a call. I was in Beirut, in Lebanon. I got a call from this guy. He said, Listen, can you meet me next week in Cambridge, Massachusetts, at this hotel? And he told me his name and I couldn't believe it. I was like, There's no way this guy's calling me. So first I was really scared. But then I thought, It's too good. So I went to Massachusetts. He called me in the evening. He walked in, in a big jacket. It was a warm day. I was like, What is he hiding under

that jacket? He came, sat down and ordered a tee. A distinguished man drank his tee, didn't take the big jacket off. He talked to me for several hours. Then he said, come back tomorrow. Again, for several hours he talked to me. He was the CIA station chief in Paris. A very important man who before that was the CIA head for the whole of Central Asia. He was based in Tehran. Remember, this is before the revolution in Iraq. His station was in Tehran. He was in charge of the whole thing. And this is what he told me. First thing he told me was, I heard that you've been asking about us. He said, Don't ask about us anymore. It will be bad for your health. Now let me tell you my whole life story. And for two days, he told me all the operations they did, all kinds of things. Super interesting.

I've met tons of these people. When they retire, they want to tell you. There's something interesting about all these CIA agents. They've written so many memoirs where they come and they tell you, I did all this terrible stuff. And it gets reviewed, it gets read. But it makes no impact on the culture. The culture doesn't digest that this is some diabolical stuff. Like, they go into countries and they destabilise governments that have a popular mandate. And they did it in Europe. That's what I enjoyed most about what this guy told me a lot. He told me in detail about how the intelligence services just before the CIA started work in France and Italy right after World War Two. And I didn't know this. I'm not an expert in all this, but he told me how the Nazis were brought into German intelligence in the Bundesrepublik Deutschland, in the Federal Republic, almost the entire Gehlen network became the intelligence network. I didn't know this. I mean, I didn't know much about the European intelligence services. But I was agog, you know, how is this not impacting our culture?

So I just wanted to tell this story, to say that, you know, it doesn't matter whether people believe it or not, because most of this stuff is now publicly available at the CIA's own library. They just tell you, we did all this stuff. We destabilised the elections in Italy, we destabilised the election in France. This is right after the war. It's all available on their website, but it simply hasn't had an impact on the culture. And that's what really distresses me, that you can know things to be true, but it doesn't impact the culture. It's so interesting that today US interventions overseas don't de-legitimize the people who are organised. Even today, well-meaning, sensible people would say things like Saddam Hussein was a butcher. Now he may very well be the butcher. In fact, let's just for the hell of it, say he was a butcher. But Saddam Hussein didn't kill millions of Iraqis. That was the US illegal war in 2003.

Madeleine Albright was the US representative to the United Nations. She goes on a morning show, sorry, a 60 Minutes evening show on Sunday evening on CBS News in the US, a mainstream show. The reporter asks a question – this is during the 1990s – she asks her on national television. She says the UN has just released a report which says as a consequence of US sanctions, 500,000, half a million Iraqi children have died. It was the famous UNICEF report from 1990, some of you may remember it. She asked the question, a very sincere question: "The UN report says half a million Iraqi children have died as a result of US sanctions". Madeleine Albright could have said three things that I could think of. The three

possible answers. Number one, we don't believe the report. It's wrong. It's filled with lies. It is Iraqi propaganda. She could have said that. She didn't say that. Second thing she could have said is it's terrible that half a million children are killed, but they're not because of US sanctions, but because of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi regime, whatever. She didn't even say that. She said the third thing. She said the death of half a million children is a price worth paying. She actually says that on US national television, and yet the culture doesn't de-legitimize her. The US State Department has just named a Young Women Leaders International Award for Madeleine Albright. The culture simply doesn't de-legitimize them. The barbarian is always going to be the Arab or the Asian or the like. It's always going to be over there. The West somehow, very cleverly, and this is part of the information warfare I suppose, very cleverly is able to have us know all this information. The US overthrew Mossadegh in 53', the US overthrew Árbenz in 54', the US invaded the Dominican Republic in 65', the US overthrew Salvador Allende in 1973, the US overthrew Manuel Zelaya. Jean Bertrand Aristide in Haiti, twice. He was caught twice. World Record. The only person caught twice by the US, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Evo Morales, etc., etc.. You know Castillo in Peru. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And it doesn't impact the culture and that bewilders me. So this book is not just written to inform people, Oh, this coup, this coup, this coup. This book is actually asking the question, How come this doesn't affect the culture? How come it doesn't enter into that level? You know, the kind of subsoil level of thinking.

MDL: I do actually exactly have that pointed out. You wrote at one point: "The coloniser can never be the terrorist, at all only the savage can be". And at the same time, a couple, like probably 20 pages earlier, you write about the main contradiction in the Cold War, which is not between East and West, but between North and South. So now you ask, why is that? Why do we not care about those things? And you said you were very happy to hear that Italy and France also had this happen. And from those two things you said, I would say we don't care about it because it is the other. It's not us, right?! It's something until, like January 6th, it's something that the CIA was on the other side and not on the side of the rioters. So I feel like it is not something that makes us – I'm talking as us although I'm like both, the other and the white person – is it something that has to do with that it doesn't affect us? It's in a sense far away. Although we have a globalised world, everything is close, but we can put it away; it's a book of story tales. Unless we are leftists. Here, we are leftists. So it makes us very angry. Like, at least me. I got very angry and sad and I have all these feelings. And you said you were carrying anger. So do you think it's a main division between us and the other? Because I was teaching a class today mainly from the Global South, and I was reminded of your book and I went to ask some questions about this and I felt that they are way more on the side that this makes them angry. So, is the reception, do you feel like the reception and you said in India, many people read it because they maybe identify as the other, as a victim. What do you think, could that be the reason?

VP: Yeah. I'm not sure I say this, that yes, it's correct. The angle is correct. The book is also filled with poetry, because part of my feeling is that, you know, I never liked the term

survival. How for sexual violence and so on, people talk about survival. I don't like the term survival because it defines you by the violence somebody else did to you. That's not your integral part of your life. Your dignity is not based on somebody else's brutality. Your dignity is your own. And people should not be defined by somebody else's actions. They must be defined by their own life. And it goes the same with countries. That in a sense, I think this feeling of not caring comes from a deep sense – I'm talking now about the Atlantic countries – it comes from a deep history of a sense of superiority. I think it's as simple as that. That you can cavalierly say that somebody has been the President for too long. They can go, you know, cavalier, Evo Morales has been there too long, he should go, but we don't need to consult the Bolivian people.

You know, this is the 50th anniversary of the coup in Chile. Now, Chile is an interesting country. It's probably the most European of all South American countries; frankly. Salvador Allende was a great aficionado of European culture. Personally, he was a super cultured man, if you go to his museum, it's amazing. I mean, he was quite a man. You should read the record, which is available at the National Security Archive, which is a non-profit group in Washington. Just read how the US administration talked about the Allende government. It's extraordinary, the way in which they felt entitled to say that because Allende was challenging US multinational copper companies and they simply didn't have the mandate to be the president; that mandate to be the president didn't come from the Chilean people. And I must say, Allende only won with 34% of the vote to become president. It was a split mandate. But in the last congressional election before the coup, his group Unidad Popular, got 44% of the vote. So they increased the vote share. That's a considerable achievement. But yet his mandate comes through Washington. It is that attitude that I find stunning.

I've been telling some people in the book I did earlier called *The Border Nations*. I wrote the history of the G-7 in part of it, and I went to the Gerald Ford archive and looked at the transcript of the conversation of G7 leaders. And Helmut Schmidt comes off really badly in that. Because Schmidt at one point, you know, the seven leaders are sitting there, there is a person taking notes who actually takes verbatim notes. I'm not sure if there was a tape recorded, but it's pretty verbatim sounding notes. And Schmidt starts to talk about the textile industry in Germany. They talk about the Italian textile industry, which they say because it's high end clothing, it'll survive the integration of the world economy. Mind you, this is 1974, the word globalisation is not being bandied about. Helmut Schmidt says, Look, the leader of the Textile Workers Union in Germany is a great friend of mine. That's how he starts this intervention. See the contempt they have for the people, not just the people of the South, but the people. Here is what he says: The Textile Industry Union head, is a great friend of mine, he says, And yet that industry in Germany has to go. Then he says, Of course the industry is competitive and could survive, but it still has to go. It's that contempt that these people have for the people, whether it's the people in Turkey or the people in Bolivia, or even their own workers in their own countries. You know, people say, Oh my God, that's a conspiracy theory. This was not a conspiracy. Seven leaders of seven industrialised countries were sitting around

in France, in Rambouillet, at a palace – a palace of the ancient regime. Sitting around in this palace, the British had used the bathroom as their office; a big, giant bathroom, you can imagine, in these palaces. And here they were talking about how their working classes are going to have to suffer because of the nature of integration. I mean, it's that condemned. So I actually don't think the other is always another country. It's their own working classes as well.

MDL: You might be happy that I still teach Wallerstein, A World System theory, which seems to be very dusty. But it's still about centre - periphery. Like the colonisers can only colonise because there are local elites and also see themselves as elites.

I was in Portugal and we were meeting different comrades from all over the world and I was talking to the Angolan left leader. He was the president of the Angolan Democratic Bloc Party, and he was asking me to do some cooperation with Germany. He was asking me, What do Germans know about Angola? And how can we do something? I'm like, Well, I'm afraid they might only know that it is in Africa. And then I was like, But I don't think we can make them care. I almost think that I don't know how we can make people care.

And then the other day, a couple weeks ago, I met some leaders from Peru and we were talking about cooperation again. And I was trying to – how can we make people care and see each other as people? And then fortunately, they found this horrible company that exploits labourers there that are selling some raspberries and blueberries here. And I was like, Oh, we can use this as anger, maybe. Maybe if we talk about the exploitation of blueberry companies, we can actually get it into the German news or something like this. At least get it somewhere placed in the news. But when we do a solidarity declaration, nobody would care. And I am reminded of it now when I reflect about the observations and so on, I'm always reminded about Angela Merkel being spied on by the NSA and Germany not even caring about that. So this is why actually this book kind of left me hopeless and I wonder – you are not that much older than me – but you still are doing this a little bit longer, let's say a decade, so how do you keep going? I understand here you channelled your anger in a book, but how shall we keep hope?

VP: Look, I mean, let's give some more examples, first of the misery and then come back to that. You mentioned this thing about Angela Merkel and the spying. I mean, I remember the debate in Germany about Huawei. This thing about the Chinese may spy on you. But the Yanks already spied on you. And it is okay that the Yanks spied on you because you have to worry about the Yellow peril. You know they may spy on you, must block them, but let the Yanks continue. It's not logical. The culture is not logical right now, in my opinion. I'll give you two quick examples of that and then I'll answer your question, because they lead to it.

One is, recently George W Bush gave a speech. I don't know if you watched the clip of it. It was quite hilarious. He first said something about the illegal invasion of Iraq. Then he said, I mean, Ukraine. And then he said, But Iraq also. And then he said, There is an advantage of being in my 70s. He just said the Iraq invasion is illegal, which he was the signer of on; and

no impact on the culture. We just laughed and said, Bush is an idiot, he is an old man, blah, blah, but no impact on the culture. That was an illegal invasion. And then US officials over the last two years have been saying there's not been an illegal invasion like Russia entering Ukraine, since 1940, whatever, 39' and nobody says anything. The culture is silent. The US officials speaking on television. I saw Susan Rice, an ex-official saying, there has not been an invasion like this since the Second World War. And I was like but you authorised the illegal invasion of Iraq. Don't take my word on illegal, that's from Kofi Annan. He said that to the BBC in 2004 exactly a year after the war. He said it was an illegal invasion. But the culture doesn't react.

I keep saying the culture and I want to come back to why. The other example of that is NATO. The complete benign NATO, you know, NATO is only for defensive needs. NATO destroyed Libya, completely wiped out of the historical imagination. Muammar Gaddafi was killed, brutally in Sirte, wiped out of the historical imagination. Libya is still destroyed. I first went to the country in 1974. I reported on the war a little bit, not as much as I wanted to. I wrote a book about it called Arab Spring Libyan Winter. That war was nasty. And I will never forget this. That's why I wanted to give this example about the culture. Many of us wrote to NATO headquarters and asked, Will you give permission? Will you give us the sighting map for your bombing where you would land the bomb. So then we can say if you had planned to bomb this area and the bomb missed killed civilians, but you didn't intend to target the civilians. Can you send us your sighting map? Peter Olson, who is the lead attorney at the time for NATO, wrote a public letter in response, including to Amnesty International. Donatella was the investigator from Amnesty, an excellent investigator. Anyway, Peter Olson wrote a letter back, which was released in the public domain, in which he said that NATO never conducts war crimes. Full stop. This is by definition, we cannot conduct war crimes. Others do, but we do not. Full stop. We don't need to be investigated. Even though NATO purportedly went to Libya on a UN mandate, UN Resolution 1973. If you read UN Resolution 1973, it says after the hostilities, there must be an After Action Review. That's what it says in the mandate, NATO refused. But it's a benign organisation. Jens Stoltenberg, such a clean guy, clean hands, and so on, everybody wants to join NATO. It is ridiculous. What's wrong with the culture? The culture simply doesn't absorb the facts. Why is that? Is it racism? Is it simply that other people conduct war crimes, Europeans cannot? Is it simply racism? What is it? And I don't have an answer to that question. But I want to keep asking the question, because I want you to answer the question for yourselves and for us. I want a public discussion on: How is it that these facts are all known, but they don't impact the culture? Do you understand what I'm constantly repeating? Like, there's got to be something blocking the actual absorption of these facts into a narrative. Something is blocking it. What is it? Is it merely racism? Is it the old habits of imperialism? What is preventing us from digesting? So the reason I don't just go into desolation, although I am pretty depressed a lot, but the reason I don't go to desolation is I feel like this is the question I would like people to be asking. And I feel that this is the kind of conversation that should be asked around the conflict in Ukraine. Everybody suddenly becomes an expert on the conflict. You know, this town, that town.

What's happening? People don't know anything. War zones; don't know anything about anything. But everybody is suddenly an expert. You know, this is the aggressor, this is the... The first question I ask you is, How do you ipso facto, believe that NATO is the innocent party in this? How do you ipso facto believe that? Because guess what? People around the world don't accept that. That is the reason why even the right wing government in India is not going along with the European and US storyline, the right wing government. The right wing government in India.

The Foreign Minister, Jaishankar, was asked about how India might be invited to join NATO Plus. He was invited to NATO Plus, that means the baby, you know, the children's table at the Christmas party. Who can't come to NATO, you can come to NATO Plus. Okay, that's what Macron wanted; BRICS Plus. All the BRICS will sit and Macron will sit at the baby table. Not anymore, I don't think. But he was asked this question. And his answer is interesting. Mind that it is a right wing government in India. And he said, In India, we don't accept the NATO template. That's the phrase he used. We don't accept the NATO template. So around the world, the cultures are beginning to size up to this. I met the people in South Africa. They're sizing up to this. They are like, No, look, guys, let's be frank, okay? We don't want to believe you anymore. We simply don't want to believe you anymore. Naledi Pandor, foreign minister of South Africa, sitting like you and I are now, sitting with Antony Blinken, and she looks him directly in the eye and says, You can't bully us anymore. Wow. Wow. So no point being angry. Some parts of the world are cluing into the culture. The culture is cluing in, but somehow here, I don't see it.

MDL: I'm a little bit afraid it's going to be too late; I work with climate change mainly. So my answer would actually be, if we stop believing the lies, we have to act. So I think there is a huge potential for cognitive dissonance. So I feel like this happy narrative of NATO not being able to do bad means also for us that we are excused not to do anything and that we are excused with our living standards. And our living standards are just, the way I live is just, my electric car, my cell phone and everything. I achieved this, I worked for it, I paid for it and so on. So I deserve this. So once you get rid of this narrative and you talk about all those places in the world that have been subject to imperialism, which is basically almost all the places in the world. We would have to also see ourselves maybe not as part of the perpetrators, but at least as part of the resistance. Because we do recognise this is unjust and you do recognise that we have a privileged voice here.

Like most of us probably have some European citizenship or we don't have to be afraid of going to prison. Maybe some climate activists by now, they do. But typically we can say whatever we want and without anything. And still we are not fighting. In the Global South, climate activists are dying on a daily basis, they are being killed by multinational corporations that have their seats here and all our richness, all our comfort, is built on the exploitation of those resources. We also profit from multinational corporations, otherwise we wouldn't have this lifestyle. So my answer is actually that we are too comfortable. We don't

want to lose the fairytale we are living in and admitting that those crimes are made. Even though they are committed by the capitalist class and not by the typical people, we are still benefiting and we would have to fundamentally question our imperialist lifestyles. So I feel like that is the main problem. And when you say the Global South is waking up, I hear that also about UN talks, the United Nations talks and so on, and then we can wonder why the General Secretaries are always saying those beautiful words, I would say, because they have no power. So they get to even [inaudible] sometimes they are even in charge, right?! And say something in a really bold way, like, Yes, let's run out behind this – what you just said. So I feel like one part of it is that we have to give up our lifestyles unless it is part of – you were quoting somebody else – I think some African leader. And he's talking about that you have to be crazy to fight. You have to be crazy to be a socialist, to be a real leftist, to fight the system. So can you elaborate on why you quote this thing about the craziness that we need? And also, I would like you to convince us all to be crazy. Or like those that are already crazy, to be even crazier, to really be able to make a change, to change the culture.

VP: That quote is Sankara from Burkina Faso, who in 1983, when Sankara came to power in Upper Volta, I was a student activist and something about him really dazzled me. Like I felt he was like the Che Guevara of my generation, you know, it was amazing. And then we heard, I was following the news from India and news we got from Africa, there were two or three sources. There was one guy who ran a magazine, African Affairs, but I never saw it at the time. I would just read the press. Sankara decided that, Why should my country be called Upper Volta? What a stupid name. It's a colonial name. So they changed the name to Burkina Faso. Land of Upright People. And I thought, Wow, he's my hero, you know? And then they coup'd him and killed him in 87. This guy spoke at the UN; amazing speeches about the environment. In Burkina Faso he said one day of the week, only one day women will not do any housework. One day of the week only men can do housework. He was thinking in very unique ways. Now, you would say he was a military dictator. He's my kind of military dictator. If he said something like that, that one day of the week, men will go in the kitchen, cook, do the laundry, all that. Can you imagine the world I grew up in, if the government had told that, my God, that government would be voted in by women forever. You know, because let's face it, guys, when we were young, we were all feminists. The moment we get older, the gender division of labour starts in our homes. I mean, it's extraordinary how this happens. But Sankara was okay. He said no. Then he talked about food sovereignty. We've got to grow our own food. If you import food, you are in debt. You are in debt for life. I mean, he was extraordinary. They coup'd him and killed him on 15th of May, 1987. A real black day for the life of the left in that period. It had a big impact on me; the killing of Sankara. You have to be crazy to be in the left. This is a fact. But let's go back to the Sahel region of Africa.

What you said about people here having a lifestyle. We used to call it the perks of imperialism. It's a little bit as if large sections of the North have become what Lenin called the labour aristocracy. They basically bought into a kind of world view, impossible to break. In the last two years there have been four coups in Mali, two, and in Burkina Faso, two, four

coups by young military officers. The second coup in both countries, young military officers; almost no ideology. They're young guys. They come from the military. They are not like Thomas Sankara. He was a marxist. He had read Marxism. He came into office as a marxist into office. The coup was done by them very deliberately. These guys did the coup because they said the government is crap. The previous coup government. There's a double coup in both countries. The second government young military officers one of the first things they said is: France, get out. You're colluding with Al Qaeda. You are colluding with the Tuareg secessionists. Get out. Mali, mind you, one third of the country is out of the control of the government. And that is a consequence directly of the NATO war in Libya, a direct consequence of that war. Nobody will answer for that. The way that war was conducted. Sarkozy is a criminal. He conducted that war and will never have to answer, why did you go ahead of the US and start bombing, you know, French bombs first? Why? What was Sarkozy? Later, it came out that Gaddafi had funded Sarkozy's election campaign. You remember that? That story was on page 55 of Le Monde, not on the front page. But that has got to be in his mind somewhere. Because also remember, Sarkozy backed Ben Ali in Tunisia right till the very end. He didn't want Ben Ali to go; right to the very end. But with Gaddafi, they sent the jets immediately, and bombed him quickly.

So in Burkina Faso and in Mali, I've written a lot about travelling in that region. There is this great feeling against the French. I remember being in Bamako and discussing with some people, not left people, mind you, these are just all state bureaucrats, been there for ages, asking them what is this atmosphere against the French? In fact, things were so bizarre that last year there was a demonstration in Bamako when middle class looking people were carrying Russian flags. It was puzzling. I was puzzled, what is going on? And they said, you know, it's very interesting that you ask this question because he said we are passionate about another issue. The Western media, including France 24 and so on, keep talking about the Chinese colonisation of Africa. Okay. There's a lot of news reporting coming into Africa, of the Chinese coming in. The Chinese, by the way, have no military bases in Africa, only one military base in Djibouti, a naval base which is used as part of the UN piracy mission. But they don't have a military base. And he said – this one guy told me –you need to go again to Niger because you're going to see in Niger. Okay. So I had never been in that depth in Niger, and I've been to Sabah Libya. And so anyway, I went to Agadez in Niger. Agadaz in Niger is interesting because the Yanks keep saying, you know, be careful of these other people doing this and that in Africa.

In Agadez, there is a drone base, the US drone base, which is the largest drone base in the world. It is enormous. It goes on for miles. It's huge. All these signs don't come here, don't come here, whatever. That's not the real thing. I got in the car and went north east of Agadez to a town called Arlit. Now, those who are veterans of the fight against the Iraq war will remember yellowcake uranium from Niger. You may remember that an accusation was made that Saddam Hussein was getting yellowcake uranium from Niger. A US State Department official went to investigate. He wrote a report saying this is not true. And then the Bush

administration leaked that his wife, Valerie Plame, was a CIA agent. You may remember the story. Some of you in some far distant recesses, some details may be coming back. Yellowcake uranium in Niger. So I went to Arlit, and in Arlit there is a big sign: Welcome to Arlit, but it's in French. You go in, it's completely garrisoned by the French military. It's like the French Foreign Legion friends. It's at the edge of the Sahara, a super dusty area. That northern Sahel belt, super dusty area. The French are all over the place in this town. Why? Because one in three light bulbs in France is powered by that town. One in three light bulbs in France is powered by the uranium from Arlit. That one town in Niger, completely garrisoned by the French military. Now, what you said is true. If France is thrown out of Niger and Niger has the right to sell uranium to whoever – which they don't have, it's a captive market. French company, based on top of that mine. If they are removed and the Nigerian people get a better deal, the lights would go out in France and you could see already there's anger in France. There's anger of the French people being mistreated. Imagine if the perquisites of French imperialism were denied further. One in three light bulbs. That's not a joke, guys. That's not like 10% of the electricity, that's one third of the electricity which comes from this one town in Niger, a town nobody knows about. Nobody seems to care. And that's the key. I'll tell you a quick story. I was at the COP meeting in Glasgow. Remember we had to go to Glasgow Airport to get a COVID test.

MDL: I took a train from here.

VP: No, but I wasn't flying. I had to just go to get the test there. In front of me was what? About seven or eight US based oil executives. But they were not all US people. There was an Indian guy also. Anyway, I was in the queue behind them and they were all talking and they were in suits and I was also in a suit, but with my COP badge. Francisco was in Glasgow with me at that time. One of the guys turned to me and he said, What are you doing here? So I started telling him about a story from Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, about natural gas finds, French TOTAL, about ExxonMobil, the people protesting because they were not getting a deal. Then they called themselves al-Shabab, which is like a bad branding idea. Don't use the Arabic name for your organisation. Call your organisation the Youth Committee for the Future. Don't call...

MDL: It is freedom, something [like this].

VP: Yes, Freedom Committee of Mozambique, not al-Shabab, which just means the youth, you know, and then these idiots went and they called themselves Isis of Mozambique. But there was no Isis there, I can inform you that these were ex-police officers, many of the fighters in that thing. There was no real sheikh or anything. They just were not well trained in the proper way of doing struggle. Political education was low in that region. Anyway, I mentioned all this and one of the guys, very sincere, very nice guys, they asked question, one of the guys turned to me and said, It is very interesting. And then he said to me, Everything you say is true. He said, I take your word for it. You look like a sincere person. Everything

you say is true, but nobody cares. So I went back into the hall and I exploded in the thing. And that bloody video, 7 minutes long, watched now by 400 million people. Why? Because I was angry. And I am generally never angry. But I can tell you when the guy said, Even if they know, they won't care. That tells you so much about the culture we live in. That he could say exactly what we've been talking about. We know that the US did this, that and the other, but nobody cares. That is the remark about the culture, not a remark about knowledge or whatever.

MDL: I actually am a fan of anger. I feel like that's why I am coming to the distance thing, right? I feel like these are things we should be genuinely angry about. And then you just said you almost never feel anger. Yet you said that you wrote this book in anger...

VP: But I don't lose my temper. That's what I mean. I don't lose my temper.

MDL: There is this German songwriter, her name is Bettina Wegner and she's talking about sadness, actually. And there's a song called I'm Sad Anyway. I think it's from the 80s or something like that; early 80s. And she says, I'm sad, it is okay. The division of labour, other songwriters, I will do something else, but I'm sad anyway. And that's okay, because if enough people are sad, we can be angry together and change something. So I feel this is a very Western idea that anger is something bad. And also like that I would come back to this idea of savages. So then we are savages. Like as soon as somebody is angry – like you are angry, don't talk to me like that. It is used as a delegitimization, right? We already used this against somebody. Even if they are justified to be angry, we turn it to like, Oh, be more reasonable, or be more rational. And I'm kind of blaming Enlightenment on that. I never liked Enlightenment philosophy. Because they are saying, reason is on one side and emotion is on the other side. So the savages have emotions, they are not reasonable, while we are the clear-headed ones with logic. And you said Isis, and this reminded me of something and I'm going back also to the question of sources.

I had this recent interview with Der Spiegel, somebody from Der Spiegel, and it was about Erdogan and Putin. So I said, for me Erdogan and Putin, no difference. Except one of them is in NATO and the other one is not. And then I was talking about the fact that there are a lot of sources that show that Erdogan supported Isis, right? And then we had this interview and later he called me back and he's like, We can't say this "Erdogan is supporting Isis thing". The fact checker said, You can't say it. So they weren't going to print it. And I'm like, But I insist. This is the case. I answered this as a politician, not as a political scientist. So why don't I get to say what I want, right? And then I think it got weakened a little bit, but it got printed. I insisted on that and I had this before. I was insulting Erdogan, I wrote something like, Fuck Tayyip Erdogan, which is not my most brilliant tweet, but yet I got this court document that told Twitter to delete this tweet. So I got this message by Twitter, please delete this tweet, otherwise we have problems with this Istanbul court. Over the long-haul document were other people's tweets. So I started following everybody else. It's a virtue putting people in

exile together. Because I documented all those tweets from the Istanbul court, the plaintiff was Erdogan versus all of us, I guess. So I wrote back to Twitter, No, I'm not going to delete it because I'm in this position. I'm in Germany. And so I can say, I can use my privilege and say this. So I stuck with the same with Der Spiegel also, although it got weakened. But then my friends in Turkey were very happy about it, that I called Erdogan Putin, and that was a headline. So they got very happy with me and they were like, Oh, for sure, if not the sultan, the Ministry of Communications saw this. And you're talking about this like lists, right? There is some point where you're talking about different lists. Government obviously, or the CIA prepares who they should get rid of. I assume you are on such a list. I haven't been in Turkey actually for six or seven years because I keep poking the sultan. I can't help it. Do you want to give us any advice on how we should best all get on those lists, so the lists get too long? I think this is a thing, right? During 2013 Erdogan started to put up denunciation boxes for people to denounce their neighbours. They were not allowed to make noise anymore and so on for slogans and so on. So he put up boxes in front of the police office and you're going to remember the word because the word for denunciation in Turkish is ihbar. Ibah/ ihh baa something a German child would say that's not tasty, so the ihh baa box. And then people weren't putting too much in it. And we were putting stuff for fun, to overflow those things. So do you think we should all try to get on those lists? So they can't even cope anymore? We should all do something for all of those secret agencies to be like, Oh wait, we have to write this person down and this and this, which is, I guess Breakfast Club or something where everybody gets up? If I remember correctly.

VP: I mean, you know, it's funny that we call this Russian roulette. You know, the game with the gun where you spin the – because it is played with a colt 45, which is made in Springfield, Massachusetts, and not in Russia. But anyway, I don't know where the phrase comes from. Unfortunately, I think playing a game like that with Western intelligence is dangerous because the roulette wheel stops and somebody will get taken down. Just look at this idea that we have of, you know, in the West, the state operates without anger. It's interesting because, in fact, they have a different way and they sublimate their anger into weapons. You don't need to stand there and yell, you just press a button and they die. I mean, when The New York Times actually broke the story of the kill list, that was really monumental. Because here's Obama, constitutional lawyer, supposed to be this cool president of the United States on Thursday morning would sit in the Oval Office with the National Security team and they'd have a list of names and he would pick – they would recommend, we need this weeks authorisation to kill the following 15 people in the world. And he would sign the kill list. And in that kill list were US citizens, including Anwar al-Awlaki who was a US citizen. His 16 year old son was killed. Obama signed off on the execution of a 16 year old boy who was sitting in Yemen at a sidewalk restaurant eating with his family and they targeted a 16 year old US citizen and killed him. Why? Because his father was the great Anwar al-Awlaki, who was a preacher in California before he moved to Yemen. He was radicalised in the United States. So, yes, Obama, whose reputation has not been damaged at all.

Talk about the culture. Complete zero reputation damage; who is sitting in his office every Thursday, signing off on the execution of people in Waziristan, in Yemen, in Somalia. You know, I don't even know how – like how does one, you know, how do you know this and then not feel like what's going on in the world?! And Obama today has high popularity around the world. High popularity. You know, that's extraordinary to me. So people would say, you know, Xi Jinping of China is a dictator, so they'll say he's a dictator. But I don't know how you can square the circle when you have somebody sitting there in an office and is deciding who to execute. What would be the use for that? You know, democratically elected executioner without a judicial mandate. I mean, you know, what the hell, man? We don't have a way to talk about these acts of brazen violence. And what I found amazing about that story, I mean, what's really striking is The New York Times reveals this. The US government doesn't deny it. And then what we learn two, three years later is that those kill lists continue to be signed. So it's not like this story broke and they were like, Oh my God, look, we have to stop doing this. They continued to sit down and just clinically talk about industrial murder. Okay. I know this phrase has sensitivity in Germany, you know, industrial scale killing. There is sensitivity here, but this is industrial scale assassination. They were not killing one person at a time, they were signing entire lists.

And if you ever travelled to Waziristan, look, my father's family comes from that area in the Khyber Pass, you would travel to that area; it's interesting because the whole civilisation of Waziristan is basically built on ridges. It's not a valley culture as much as a ridge culture. So these villages and these ridges and then there is terrace farming and so on, and there are so many videos that the CIA has, which again got leaked by WikiLeaks, so many videos of people, farmers walking along the ridge just getting hit by a drone strike. In the film *Shadow World* there's one particular grisly scene of a guy just walking and he gets struck. What I found later, talking to people in the intelligence world in the US, is that they killed a lot of men over six feet tall in the region, not because of a kill list, but because they kept thinking that's bin Laden. So bin Laden is extremely tall, but men in Waziristan are also very tall and also very thin. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the great socialist leader of that region, was a very tall man. He was about 6'3, and he was also like bin Laden's body, quite spindly. Bin Laden was extraordinarily tall for a desert area. You know, in Saudi Arabia, people are not that tall. He was quite tall, but they targeted people for their height. So there were people sitting in Las Vegas watching tall men walk around Waziristan and they just kept taking them out. There are Hollywood movies made about this, and yet it doesn't come into the soul. It doesn't disgust the soul. You know, that's what I mean by the culture is not moving. You can say this a million times, but it has zero impact. That puzzles me. I keep returning to that. What's the barrier? Why is it that it's easier to call Erdogan a brutal dictator or whatever it is, or compare Erdogan to Putin, but not Erdogan to Obama, for instance? You know, why isn't that comparison going to the other side of the Atlantic? We always compare this side. You know, we always say you're a barbarian like the other barbarian. But in Washington, there are no barbarians. They are all upstanding citizens, you know.

MDL: I had this very pleasurable experience. I was reading a student paper and a student was writing about something, but then the student was like, like the human rights violations in the US about clean water. And she was from Morocco. And I was like, Yes, she learned something in my class, complaining about this. In our party we have people that now write articles about Christian Lindner, Bundesfinanzminister being one of the most dangerous people, which I think is wrong. We know what Christian Lindner wants. He is one of the most open books. He is not dangerous at all. Obviously his ideology is dangerous and he's an actor who acts his ideology, but everything is in line. Everything he does is in line with the narrative.

By the way, I also have a saying against Obama. He always did like terrible things, like there is this taxes for the rich cuts he put into place, which Bush could have never done. But this is the whole thing about the supposed leftist candidate being able to be more destructive than anybody else because he has this charismatic face. Maybe some of you are reminded of Slavoj Zizek being happy about Trump because that would be somehow a possibility for leftist social movements to actually get up and form against something. While somebody like Obama, he's so calming and for those people that don't want to struggle, you know, he gives us this peaceful, good feeling. And I'm a big fan of Trevor Noah. I don't know who else is? Of The Daily Show. But I'm very upset that he's a fan of Obama. Like, every time I see them in an interview together, I really struggle with this. Having this really intellectual South African comedian being a fan of Obama while I think Obama was one of the most dangerous man. Because he is so charismatic, right? He uses language so well. I think he had more drone strikes than anybody else before. He was – you know of the axis of evil. Which is also a brilliant way. The savages are the axis of evil, so we are the axis of good. Like the whole narrative that I wonder...

VP: It's not even an axis. Axis is a bad word. We are the allies. The West, they are always the allies. The axis, don't forget is...

MDL: I wonder when we get to do the framing. But I have marked this saying how the US became the ones that are standing for human rights and liberalism and so on. So you said, people are waking up, nations are waking up to the struggle and they're like, No, you're exploiting us. So I'm wondering if you have thought about how do we – after you answer, I'm going to give it to the audience – how do we change the narrative? Do you have any advice for us? Us all political people and so on. How do we change the, you call it culture, I call it narrative? How do we get to like populism? How do we win at populism? I understand that as leftists a lot of times we are like all populism, something dirty, right? I think also the Enlightenment status taught us that populism is dirty because it plays into emotions and so on. But do you have any advice? How do we become more populist? How do we take this book and not get totally depressed but learn the lessons? I'm not saying to assassinate any American leaders or something. Let's not try to do coups and so on. But how do we take

those lessons and put it into action for solidarity, for global justice, or maybe some kind of revolution?

VP: Yeah. So I took a deep breath because there's a lot to say that I actually find myself with a question like that stumbling a little bit. Because I generally don't like to tell people what to do because I feel that maybe you should figure it out yourself.

MDL: One second. Let's think of it as a recipe. So you have this great recipe and everybody thinks this is very tasty. How do we do it? So it's more like giving us advice. Don't don't think of it as a command.

VP: I mean, I think that I'm also distressed by this disavowal of populism because I think that is somebody else's framing. In the tradition of the left from which I come we are very keen on the mass line, you know, where are the people, what are the people thinking? So, for instance, take the Western way in which they've really absconded with ideals like human rights. They have stolen it from the world and corrupted it. Words like human rights, you know, dignity even has been corrupted by them. The very fact that the CIA can do an ad saying that, you know, I'm gay and I'm the CIA, I'm an immigrant, I'm in the CIA. This was an ad they released. I mean, what the hell is that, man? There's a US helicopter battalion, which is a gay helicopter battalion, which did a photo shoot where they painted the bomb with the rainbow colour. I mean, when the bomb lands on Iraq or whatever, it's going to be the same bomb. It's not a happy bomb or a human rights bomb or whatever. It's still the same nasty bomb.

There's a way in which they've taken these things from us, and we have a hard time taking the language back. So if you look at the term human rights, um, you know, it's bizarre because here is the continent of Africa, 54 countries. During the pandemic, a lot of Western bond holders, particularly in Western Europe, refused to downgrade or give a haircut to loans taken by African countries. So 27 of the 54 African countries during the pandemic paid more in debt servicing payments to European banks than they did on their health care. Forget the vaccine apartheid and all that. There was some conversation about vaccine apartheid and so on. There was no conversation about the bondholders taking their debt servicing during the pandemic, almost no conversation. So human rights then becomes this abstraction, which is meaningless to people on the ground, because what people require is debt relief. The number one problem in the South today is the question of Western banks and the suffocation that they are doing in these countries. But movements in the north are just not foregrounding the issue of the debt crisis and partly because of the austerity being done in their own countries. Like it would be strange for a left political project in Europe to say, Let's forgive the debt in Zambia, let's just give a complete debt relief.

MDL: Do you like that our party does have that program?

VP: Yes, I know that. That's why I'm raising it, because at the same time the government is doing austerity against its own people. How to balance and create new ways of thinking about human rights. How can a person have human rights if they can't have sovereignty over their income, you know, where their currency has no sovereignty and so on? So we have to take some of these concepts and deepen them and challenge our own neoliberal austerity, governments and politicians, they need to be challenged. They have had an open lane to say whatever the hell they want for years. And the other thing is that a lot of governments of the right in the south, including in Turkey, are not going to be out there challenging the West on human rights because what they're basically doing is Western human rights are bogus, which is true. And so we reject it and we'll do whatever the hell we want. Same thing you see in Hungary. The government says, you know, Western European human rights are bogus. We junk it all, we'll do our own thing. We have our own Hungarian tradition.

MDL: You know who still sells weapons to Hungary? A lot last year?

VP: Probably Germany. Sweden is a great example of this hypocrisy. Okay, great example of this hypocrisy. Sweden is one of the world's biggest exporters of battlefield guns. Bofors company sells howitzers and so on. And then these countries go out there and give Nobel Prizes for Peace to Obama and whatever. I mean the way we have to take back from them our traditions – I don't want to say that human rights is a garbage term. I want that to have meaning for a Marxist project because we believe in the actual dignity of people. Not this bogus CIA dignity, you know, of having ads to say to people, we are so happy, you know, we can have a gay CIA agent or a Dominican migrant CIA agent or something like that. That's not human rights. We have to fight in a way to de-legitimize that, but not to junk the actual content of human rights. And I think for the left, this is a very difficult dance.

My friends, it's really hard because there's a tendency to go in the other direction and say the whole thing is garbage. Because they're lying to us so much, imposing suffering on us on the basis of those kinds of Enlightenment ideas or whatever it might be, those traditions. So I think for us to be forthright, I mean, to challenge these politicians, not allow them to have an open lane. Look, when Biden comes to Germany, for instance, and they talk about how they're all going to stand for human rights, you know, against Russia, Ukraine is like the front line and so on. At the same time, they're out there trying to provoke a war against China. Now, why are they provoking a war against China? It's got nothing to do with human rights. As long as China was providing cheap labour, high quality, cheap labour for Western corporations, they were happy with China. The moment China said we're going to produce our own stuff with our own companies, our own brands like Huawei and so on, the West said this is an existential threat to Western companies, so we are going to provoke a war against you. So how is it, again, that we allow these people to talk in the name of human rights when this is their history? Biden, for instance, was sitting there in a congressional hearing for the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court. And he was so sexist to Anita Hill, who was giving a testimony for sexual harassment by Thomas. Biden was so sexist against

Anita Hill. And today people say, Well, you know, he's a great American. America is such a great country. There is hope for, you know, against patriarchy and so on. How do we let them get away with it? We should never let them get away with this anymore. Got to stand up to make a real culture, not a culture of autocracy.

MDL: I think like one last note before I give over the microphone. So when I was 17, I went to the US for a year. My communist father probably died inside, but he still had financing. And so I went to the US and I was really amazed. I mean, I obviously got indoctrinated by television because why would I want to go to the US? And I was amazed how there are people in trailer parks next to me saying things like, Oh, we are the richest country in the world. So I think, and this was between my late father and me, like when he was older, he actually sometimes listened to me because he felt like now I have to say something or I can say something. The thing with the American population is also that they don't have it easy right? They have the human right to die from a treatable disease or going into debt. And if you don't have enough insulin, and you can't even pay for insulin. So I feel like we should not forget this, how the American public itself was deceived and then remembered a Hobbs and Lenin how you point out the other and be like, Oh, the other is worse off. You are better off in America than some other chiefs/dictators [around the world]. So be happy with whatever wages we give you. Although you die in horrible conditions and so on; the other side of the world is worse. And we are the strongest and best and all we are Americans. So I'm always wondering and you are part of the – we can get to this again later on – the Democratic Socialists of America.

VP: Me? No, no.

MDL: It says you're supporting them or something on Wikipedia.

VP: Wikipedia? Wikipedia is an interesting source. Because many years ago there was a debate. It took place on my Wikipedia page about Israel. People kept changing things and so on. Democracy is peculiar.

MDL: So currently you are somehow with the American Democratic Socialists, and I think we should keep that in mind.

VP: My own political party will expel me if that's the case. So I'll have to check on that.

MDL: I was also surprised to hear that.

VP: No, I am seriously worried I'll be expelled.

MDL: You better get that changed.

MDL: Thank you for this wonderful discussion.

VP: Please, and thank you.

END