

IN THE LONG SHADOW OF GENERAL PINOCHET | DAVID WOOD
THE JOURNALIST AND THE NEWSPAPER | JONATHAN COOK
BAD LOSERS | DIANA JOHNSTONE

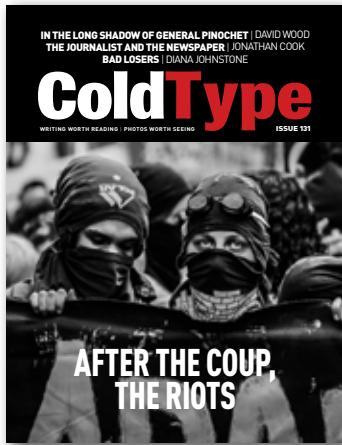
ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING | PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

ISSUE 131



**AFTER THE COUP,
THE RIOTS**



Cover:

Young woman holds sign reading, "Workers and students against the removal of rights," at a Brazilian anti-austerity march that became a riot. Photo: Thales Renato Ferreira – See Pages 6-13

ColdType

Issue 131 / January 2017

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The 2016 awards for stupidity

Conn M. Hallinan delivers his annual list of foul-ups, doublespeak, bad planning and sheer incompetence

Each year I give awards to individuals, companies and governments that make reading the news a daily adventure. Here are the awards for 2016.

The Golden Lemon Award had a number of strong contenders in 2016, including:

General Atomics for its MQ-9 Reaper armed drone, which has a faulty starter-generator that routinely shorts out the aircraft. So far, no one can figure out why. S20 were either destroyed or sustained major damage last year. The Reapers costs \$64-million apiece.

Panavia Aircraft Company's \$25-billion Tornado fighter-bomber that can't fly at night because the cockpit lights blind the pilot. A runner up here is the German arms company Heckler & Koch, whose G-36 assault rifle can't shoot straight when the weather is hot.

BAE's \$1.26-billion Type 45 destroyer that breaks down "whenever we try to do too much with them," a Royal Navy officer told the Financial Times. Engaging in combat, he said, would be "catastrophic."

But the hands down winner is Lockheed Martin, builder of the F-35 Lightning stealth fighter. At a cost of \$1.5-trillion, it is the most expensive weapons system in US history. Aside from numerous software problems, pilots who try to bail out risk decapitation. The Director of Operational Test and Evaluation recently released an assessment of the F-35's performance that states, "In an opposed

combat scenario," the "aircraft would need to avoid threat engagement and would require augmentation by other friendly forces." Translation: "If the bad guys show up, run for your life and pray your buddies arrive to bail you out of trouble."

Lockheed Martin also gets an honourable mention for its \$4.4-billion littoral combat ship, the USS Zumwalt, which had to be towed out of the Panama Canal. The ship also leaks, as do other sister littoral combat ships, including the USS Freedom.

The Dr. Frankenstein Award to the US Air Force for zapping the brains of drone operators with electricity in order to improve their focus. The electrical stimulation was started after scientists discovered that feeding the pilots Provigil and Ritalin was a bad idea, because both drugs are highly addictive and Provigil can permanently damage sleep patterns. Nika Knight of Common Dreams reports that "European researchers who studied the brain-zapping technique years ago warned that the technology is, in fact, extremely invasive, as its effects tend to 'spread from the target brain area to neighbouring areas.'"

The Golden Jackal Award goes to UK oil companies BP and Royal Dutch Shell for their lobbying campaign following the US invasion of Iraq. Executives of the companies met with UK Trade Minister Baroness Elizabeth Symons

At a cost of \$1.5-trillion, the F-35 Lightning stealth fighter is the most expensive weapons system in US history. Aside from numerous software problems, pilots who try to bail out risk decapitation

FINAL ANALYSIS

Turkish authorities also closed down the Smurfs, Maya the Bee, and SpongeBob SquarePants, because the cartoon characters were speaking Kurdish on Zarok TV, a station that does programming in the Kurdish language

five months before the US attack to complain that the Americans were cutting them out of the post-war loot.

According to the 2016 Chilcot Report on the Iraq War, Symons then met with Prime Minister Tony Blair's Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, to tell him it was a "matter of urgency," and that "British interests are being left to one side." Straw dutifully told Blair to raise the issue "very forcefully" with President George W. Bush, because US companies are "ruthless" and "will not help UK companies unless you play hardball with Bush."

Runner up in this category is the Washington Post, which won a Pulitzer Prize in public service journalism for publishing Edward Snowden's revelations about illegal US wire-tapping, then called for the whistleblower to be charged with espionage. Glenn Greenwald – who met Snowden and wrote stories about the scandal for The Guardian – said "The Washington Post has achieved an ignominious feat in US media history: the first-ever paper to explicitly editorialise for the criminal prosecution of its own source . . . That is warped beyond anything that can be described."

The Thin Skin Award is a five-way tie among the governments of Spain, India, Israel, Turkey and Thailand:

- Spain: Under Spain's 2015 public security law – nicknamed the "gag rule" – police are trying to fine a woman for carrying a bag on which was written "All Cats Are Beautiful." The police say that the writing and colour of the bag is "traditionally associated with insults to the police," and that the four capital letters really mean "All Cops Are Bastards."

- India: The right-wing government of Narendra Modi is proposing a law that would make it illegal to publish any map indicating that Kashmir is disputed territory divided between India and Pakistan. Currently such maps are censored by either preventing the publication's distribution or covering the maps with black stickers. The new law would fine violators \$15-million and jail them for up to seven years.

- Israel: The Ministry of Education has removed a novel, "Borderlife" by Dorit Rabinyan about a romance between a Jewish woman and a Palestinian man, from the list of required reading for Hebrew high schools literature classes. Education official Dalia Fenig says, "Marrying a non-Jew is not what the education system is educating about."

- Turkey: In the aftermath of July's failed coup, novelist and journalist Ahmet Altan, and his brother Mehmet, a professor of economics, were arrested for "colluding with the military," even though both men are known to be sharp critics of the Turkish armed forces. The prosecutor had no evidence against the men, but charged them with giving "subliminal" and "subconscious" messages backing the coup during a TV talk show. The authorities also closed down the Smurfs, Maya the Bee, and SpongeBob SquarePants, because the cartoon characters were speaking Kurdish on Zarok TV, a station that does programming in the Kurdish language. According to Al-Monitor, "Many social media users went into lampoon mode, asking, "Who is the separatist: SpongeBob or Papa Smurf?"

- Thailand: Patnaree Chankij, a 40-year-old maid, is to be tried by a military court for breaking the country's *lèse-majesté* law that makes it a crime to insult the royal family or their pets. She replied "ja" ("yeah") to a private post sent to her on Facebook. She did not agree with the post, comment on it, or make it public. One man is currently serving a 30-year sentence for posting material critical of the Thai royal family. Following the military coup two years ago, the authorities have filed 57 such cases, 44 of them for online commentary. One person was arrested for insulting the king's dog.

The Cultural Sensitivity Award goes to Denmark, France, and Latvia.

The centre-right Danish government, which relies on the racist Danish People's Party to stay in government, passed a law that confiscates valuables, including jewels and cash, from refugees. Immigrants can only

keep up to \$1,455. The Danish town of Randers also required pork to be used in all public day care centres and kindergartens in what the Socialist People's Party (SPP) charges is aimed at Muslims. "What do children need? Do they need pork? Actually not," said Charlotte Molbaek, a Randers Town Council member from the SPP. "Children need grown-ups."

Several French towns run by right wing mayors have removed alternatives – like fish or chicken – from school menus when pork is served. On those days Muslim and Jewish children eat vegetables.

The right-wing government of Latvia is banning the wearing of full veils, although, at last count, there were just three such women in the whole country. Former Latvian president Vaira Vike-Freiberga told the New York Times, "Anybody could be under a veil or under a burqa. You could carry a rocket launcher under your veil."

A runner up in this category is former National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, who, during a speech in Kiev, said that Ukrainians should stop complaining about the economic crisis that has gripped the country since the 2014 coup that overthrew President Viktor Yanukovich. "Anyone who believes that life is bad in Ukraine should go to Liberia, where the standard of living is much lower, and then you will be thankful."

The Head In The Sand Award to British Prime Minister Theresa May for closing the government's programme to study climate change. Co-winner is the conservative government of Australia that laid off 275 scientists from its climate change programme. Some were rehired after an international petition campaign, however, the leading international researcher on sea levels, John Church was let go permanently.

Meanwhile, the US Air Force is spending \$1-billion to build a radar installation in Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands. The Atoll is halfway between Australia and Hawaii and is only a few feet above sea level. It is estimated that sea levels will rise at least six feet

by 2100, but the increase is moving far faster than scientists predicted. "The future does not look very good for those islands," says Curt Storlazzi, an oceanographer with the US Geological Service.

The Little Bo Peep Award to the US Defense Department for being unable to account for \$6.5-trillion in spending. Yes, that is a "T." According to Mandy Smithberger, director of Straus Military Reform Project at the Project On Government Oversight, "Accounting at the Department of Defense is a disaster, but nobody is screaming about it because you have a lot of people in Congress who believe in more military spending."

According to UK watchdog group Action on Armed Violence, the Pentagon also can't account for 1.4 million guns shipped to Iraq and Afghanistan. The CIA won some laurels in this category as well. According to an investigation by Al Jazeera and the New York Times, Jordanian intelligence operatives stole millions of dollars in US weapons bound for Syria. Some of the guns were used to kill Americans at a police training school in Amman.

The Annie Oakley Award to the American firearms manufacturers and the National Rifle Association (NRA) for their campaign to arm kids. The guns for tots are lighter than regular firearms and have less recoil. They are also made in "kid-friendly" colours, like pink.

Iowa recently passed legislation making it legal for any minor to own a pistol. According to state Representative Kirsten Running –Marquardt, the law "allows for one-year-olds, two-year-olds, three-year olds, four-year-olds to operate handguns," adding, "We do not need a militia of toddlers."

The Violence Policy Center reports, "As household gun ownership has steadily declined and the primary gun market of white males continues to age, the firearms industry has set its sights on America's children. Much like the tobacco industry's search for replacement smokers, the gun industry is seeking replacement shooters." **CT**

The right-wing government of Latvia is banning the wearing of full veils, although, at last count, there were just three such women in the whole country

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BRAZIL ERUPTS

After the coup, the riots

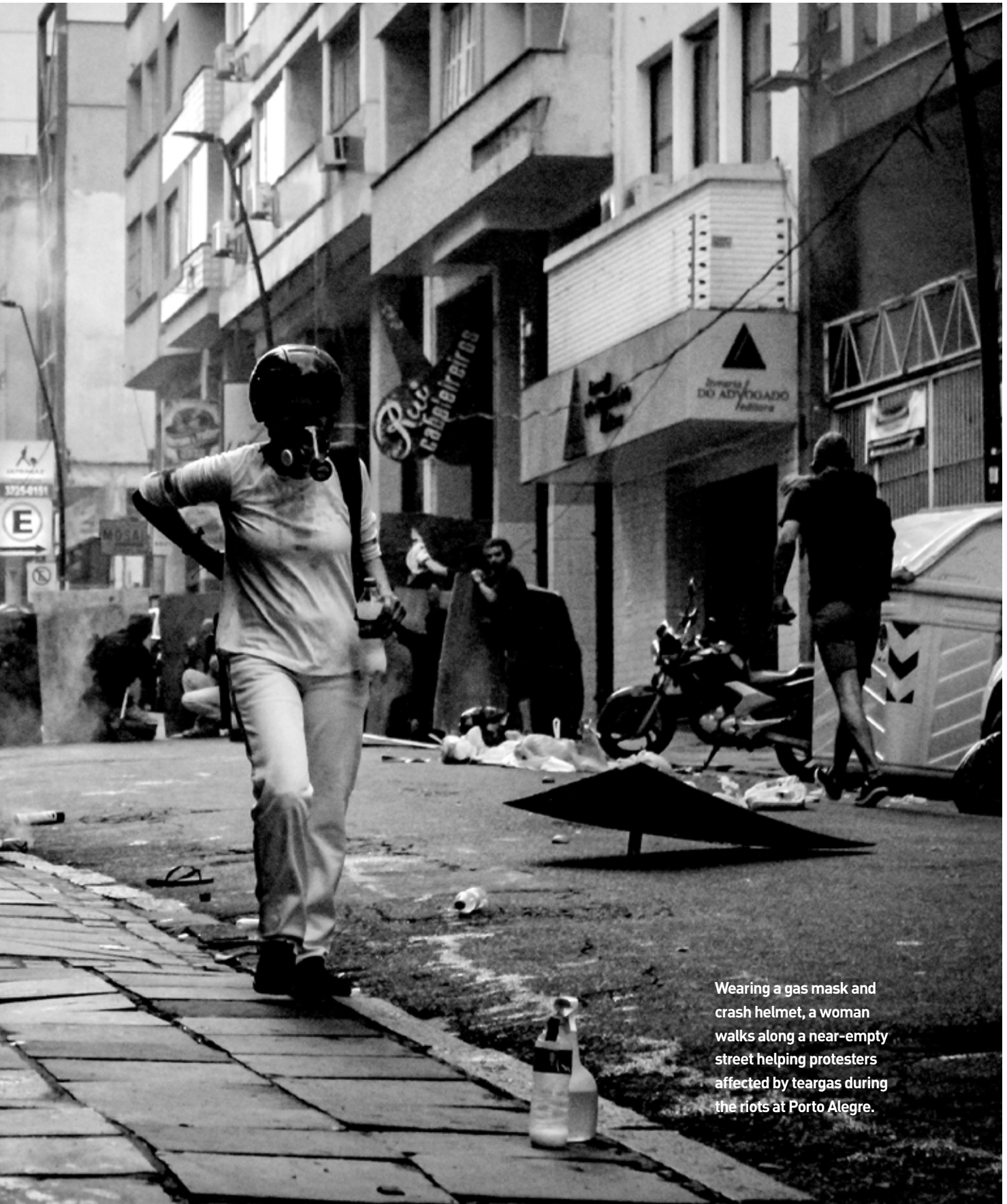
Angry protesters took to the streets as Brazil's government introduced harsh new austerity measures following the recent impeachment of President Dilma Roussef. Photojournalist **Thales Renato Ferreira** reports from São Leopoldo

Brazil has faced an escalation of violent protests since the impeachment and removal of its center-left president Dilma Roussef last August, following a coup led by vice-president Michel Temer. The impeachment process was encouraged by the government-aligned media, which ran a massive propaganda campaign to convince the country that the removal of Dilma and the pursuit of the Workers' Party was the only way to end corruption in the country.

After the installation of Temer as the country's 37th president, the government introduced major changes to the Brazilian constitution – Project PEC 55 – which were approved by the senate on December 13. This plan introduced austerity measures aimed at restoring confidence in the country's ailing economy.

PEC 55, planned without any input from electors, instituted a 20-year freeze on





Wearing a gas mask and crash helmet, a woman walks along a near-empty street helping protesters affected by teargas during the riots at Porto Alegre.

BRAZIL ERUPTS



A huge crowd of angry protesters marches through the streets of Porto Alegre.



Protesters struggle to breathe in a cloud of tear gas during a confrontation with the police.

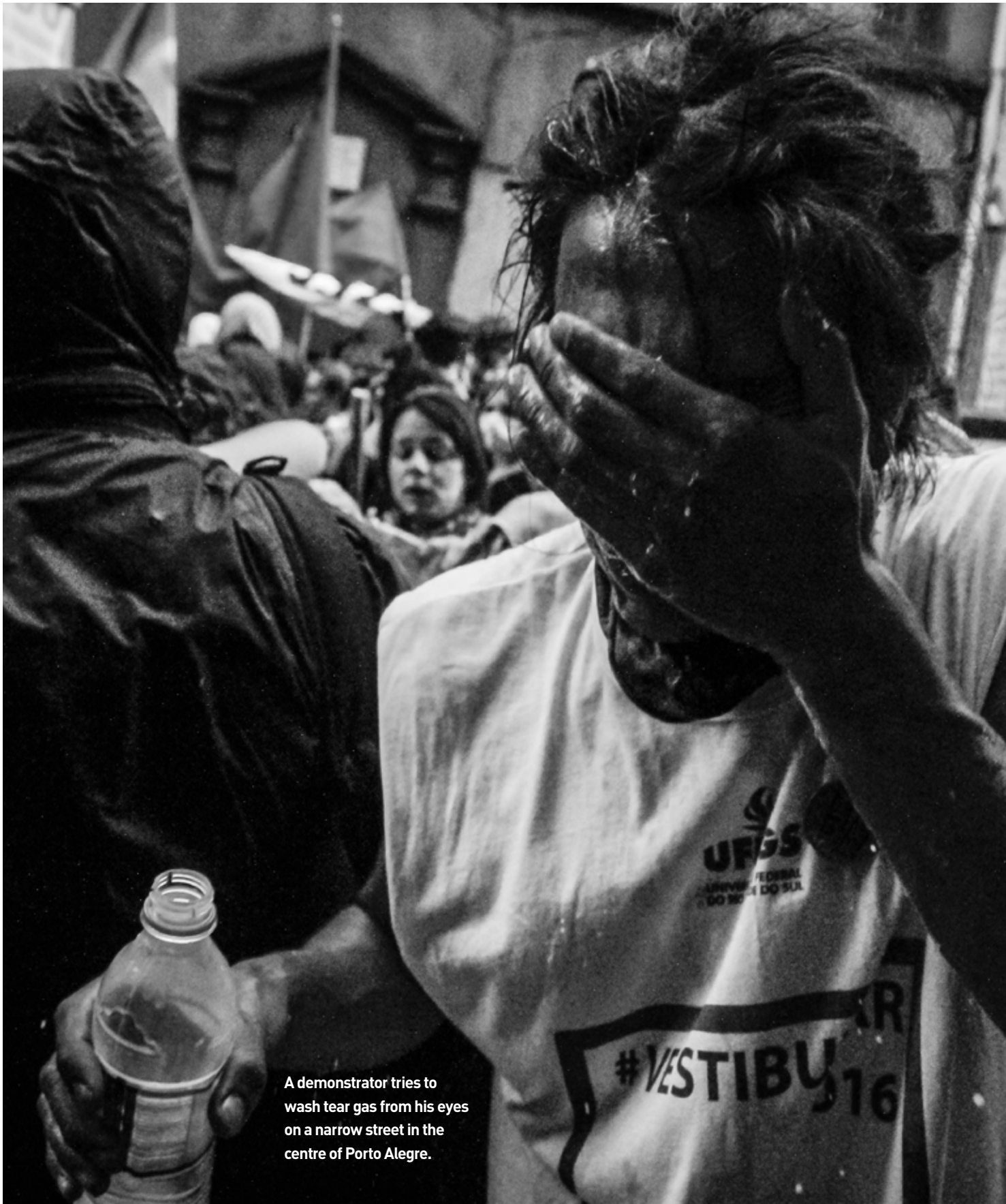
spending on public health, housing, education and other social plans. The action resulted in rioting in the country's major cities, with opposition groups claiming that, while the Brazilian people understand that there is a crisis in the country, its severity has been seriously inflated by the coup government and its supporters in the commercial media.

Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, said the plans were incompatible with Brazil's human rights obligations. "It is completely inappropriate to freeze only



Girl wipes milk of magnesia over her friend's face to relieve the burning effect of tear gas.





A demonstrator tries to wash tear gas from his eyes on a narrow street in the centre of Porto Alegre.

BRAZIL ERUPTS



Marchers use posters as shields as they face police in the riot's frontline.



Boy faces police alone after other rioters retreated from the confrontation.

social expenditure, and to tie the hands of all future governments for another two decades," he said, adding, "It will hit the poorest and most vulnerable Brazilians the hardest, will increase inequality levels in an already very unequal society, and definitively signals that social rights are a very low priority for Brazil for the next 20 years."

Riots were intensified in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, where an additional austerity package was introduced by governor José Ivo Sartori. This package included the closure of institutions such as public TV and radio, and the

BRAZIL ERUPTS



Demonstrators cover their faces to keep the tear gas out of their eyes, and to make it harder to for police to identify them.

Zoobotanical Foundation, which preserves and studies the fauna and flora in Brazil. Those actions, added to those imposed by PEC 55, inflamed violent protests at Porto Alegre, the capital of Rio Grande do Sul – where these photographs were taken – where the voting day protests were met by a violent police response.

Political commentators now wonder if further measures planned by the new government will lead to increasingly-impassioned demonstrations that may make the country ungovernable. **CT**

Thales Renato Ferreira is a 21-year-old journalism student and amateur photographer at São Leopoldo in Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil. He is a member of Mídia NINJA, a collective free media group in Brazil. He may be contacted at thales.renato.ferreira@gmail.com



Feminist graffiti alongside demands for the resignations of Brazilian President Michel Temer and Rio Grande do Sul's State Governor Ivo Sartor.



A young couple finds time for a hug during a brief break in the violent protest.

In the long shadow of General Pinochet

David Wood visits Chile's Estadio Nacional, scene of soccer victories – and mass torture

40,000 men and women were imprisoned at the Estadio Nacional. Some of them were tortured and executed

A decade after General Augusto Pinochet died, Chileans still feel the legacy of his regime and its horrific actions on a daily basis – and perhaps nowhere more tangibly than in football. Despite the celebrations that marked Chile's victory in the Copa América Centenario in June 2016, football is still a highly sensitive area of Chilean culture. At the heart of it all is the country's national stadium, the Estadio Nacional, in Santiago.

The morning after the bloody 1973 coup that brought Pinochet to power and left democratically elected president Salvador Allende dead, tens of thousands of Allende's supporters were detained by the military, first in another sports stadium, the Estadio Chile, and other centres in the capital. (Among those held was singer-songwriter Víctor Jara, after whom the venue was eventually renamed.)

Within days, thousands of these detainees were transferred to the Estadio Nacional. It is estimated that a week later there were 7,000 prisoners being held there, including around 250 non-Chilean nationals. Over the course of the next three months, 40,000 men and women were imprisoned. Some of

them were tortured and executed.

When democracy returned to Chile in 1990, the government launched a commission to investigate the human rights abuses of the Pinochet era. Its report published details of more than 2,500 deaths and disappearances that resulted from political violence under the regime and described the Estadio Nacional and the Estadio Chile as “the most notorious detention centres in the capital”.

Today, when players line up in the stadium at the start of a game, a section of the stands remains empty, bearing the words *Un pueblo sin memoria es un pueblo sin futuro* – a people with no memory is a people with no future. And alongside these public memorials, a lot of work has gone into commemorating and dealing with the stadium's horrific associations.

Chile's first democratically elected president, Patricio Aylwin chose the Estadio Nacional to deliver his highly symbolic speech marking the country's return to civilian government. And just ahead of the 30th anniversary of Pinochet's coup, Carmen Luz Parot's excellent documentary Estadio Nacional featured interviews with some of those who were detained there. A decade later, Amnesty Inter-



Above, right: Names and nationalities of non-Chileans detained in the Estadio Nacional during 1973.

Photo: David Wood

national Chile devised a campaign around the national team's 2013 World Cup qualifier against Venezuela. Under the banner *Gol de Silencio*, they asked players and supporters not to celebrate the anticipated first Chilean goal.

In the event, Chile won the game comfortably and the first goal was cheered as usual, but the campaign nonetheless generated considerable debate around the stadium's connection with the Pinochet era.

Around the same time, a local human rights group started the website *Estadio Nacional, Memoria Nacional*, through which it works to educate Chileans about what happened in the stadium in 1973. Run by a handful of the thousands who suffered detention and torture at the hands of the military, this small grassroots organisation leads visits around the stadium every Saturday morning and works with local schools to help victims tell their stories.

Recently, I visited the stadium, joining a tour mostly composed of Chileans whose family members had been held and tortured in the stadium. We heard how more than 100 men slept in each of the stadium's changing rooms, constantly fearing being called out for "special" treatment. Women prisoners were kept separately in rooms adjoining the nearby swimming pool, where they suffered equally appalling abuses.

We heard how the prisoners would spend their days on the terraces under the gaze of armed soldiers. One of the ways in which they kept their spirits up was by cheering "goal" as the man cutting the grass passed between the posts. He was preparing the pitch for Chile's play-off match against the Soviet Union for the final place at the 1974 World Cup. In the end, the Soviet team refused to travel to Chile, despite FIFA's insistence and assurances that everything in the stadium was "normal."

Most powerfully of all, we learned of the various torture techniques employed in the *caracola*, the circular toilet block of the adjacent velodrome. Because of its detachment



Stadium survivor José Manuel Méndez inside the 'caracola', a toilet block that's been left untouched since its days as the stadium's torture centre in 1973.

Photo: David Wood

from the stadium and ready supply of water, it was converted into a detention centre where the prisoners were tortured.

In 2010, President Michele Bachelet inaugurated Santiago's Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos (Museum of Memory and Human Rights), which documents and relates vital personal stories. Among its thousands of pieces it holds a number of documents, images and objects connected to the people held in the stadium. It's a remarkable effort, but the *Estadio Nacional* visits led by survivors are something else. They offer a unique connection to a physical space, and an uncomfortable contrast to the joyous celebrations it regularly hosts.

It may be that football and the national team have broken away from their associations with the Pinochet regime, helped no doubt by the continental successes that signal a new era on the pitch. But the always-empty section behind one of the goals reminds us that the bright present is always attached to a dark past. For the survivors of the *Estadio Nacional*, their struggle against the ghosts of Pinochet continues. **CT**

David Wood is professor of Latin American Studies at the University of Sheffield in England. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

The prisoners would spend their days on the terraces under the gaze of armed soldiers. One of the ways in which they kept their spirits up was by cheering "goal" as the man cutting the grass passed between the posts

Foreign meddling in our vote? The biter bit . . .

During the Cold War, the CIA did everything that it's accusing Russia of doing today – and much more, writes **Peter Certo**

The CIA is accusing Russia of interfering in our free and fair elections to install a right-wing candidate it deemed more favourable to its interests. Yet during the Cold War, that's exactly what the CIA did to the rest of the world

Even in an election year as shot through with conspiracy theories as the latest one, it would have been hard to imagine a bigger bombshell than Russia intervening to help Donald Trump. But that's exactly what the CIA believes happened, or so unnamed "officials brief on the matter" told the Washington Post.

While Russia had long been blamed for hacking email accounts linked to the Clinton campaign, its motives had been shrouded in mystery. According to the Post, though, CIA officials recently presented Congress with "a growing body of intelligence from multiple sources" that "electing Trump was Russia's goal."

Now, the CIA hasn't made any of its evidence public, and the CIA and FBI are reportedly divided on the subject. Though it's too soon to draw conclusions, the charges warrant serious public investigation.

Even some Republicans who backed Trump seem to agree. "The Russians are not our friends," said Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell, announcing his support for a congressional probe. It's "warfare," added Senator John McCain.

There's a grim irony to this. The CIA is accusing Russia of interfering in our free and fair elections to install a right-wing candi-

date it deemed more favourable to its interests. Yet during the Cold War, that's exactly what the CIA did to the rest of the world.

Most Americans probably don't know that history. But in much of the world it's a crucial part of how Washington is viewed even today.

In the post-World War II years, as Moscow and Washington jockeyed for global influence, the two capitals tried to game every foreign election they could get their hands on. From Europe to Vietnam and Chile to the Philippines, American agents delivered briefcases of cash to hand-picked politicians, launched smear campaigns against their left-leaning rivals, and spread hysterical "fake news" stories like the ones some now accuse Russia of spreading here.

Together, political scientist Dov Levin estimates, Russia and the US interfered in 117 elections this way in the second half the 20th-century. Even worse is what happened when the CIA's chosen candidates lost.

In Iran, when elected leader Mohammad Mossadegh tried to nationalise the country's BP-held oil reserves, CIA agent Kermit Roosevelt led an operation to oust him in favour of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The shah's secret police tortured dissidents



Above, right: German stamp honour Salvador Allende, Chilean president who was deposed by Augusto Pinochet.

by the thousands, leading directly to the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

In Guatemala, when the democratically elected Jacobo Arbez tried to loosen the US-based United Fruit company's grip on Guatemalan land, the CIA backed a coup against him. In the decades of civil war that followed, US-backed security forces were accused of carrying out genocide against indigenous Guatemalans.

In Chile, after voters elected the socialist Salvador Allende, the CIA spearheaded a bloody coup to install the right-wing dictator Augusto Pinochet, who went on to torture and 'disappear' tens of thousands of Chileans.

"I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people," US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger purportedly

said about the coup he helped orchestrate there.

And those are only the most well-known examples.

I don't raise any of this history to excuse Russia's alleged meddling in our election — which, if true, is outrageous. Only to suggest that now, maybe, we know how it feels. We should remember that feeling as Trump, who's spoken fondly of authoritarian rulers from Russia to Egypt to the Philippines and beyond, comes into office.

Meanwhile, much of the world must be relieved to see the CIA take a break from subverting democracy abroad to protect it at home.

GT

Peter Certo is the editorial manager of the Institute for Policy Studies and the editor of www.OtherWords.org

Much of the world must be relieved to see the CIA take a break from subverting democracy abroad to protect it at home

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Bad losers (and what they fear losing)

The US is threatened by internal divisions and the inability of Americans not only to understand the world, but even to understand each other, writes **Diana Johnstone**

The notion that Moscovite hacking could defeat the favourite candidate of the entire US power establishment can only mean that the United States's political structure is so fragile that a few disclosed emails can cause its collapse

If the 2016 presidential campaign was a national disgrace, the reaction of the losers is an even more disgraceful spectacle. It seems that the political machine backing Hillary Clinton can't stand losing an election.

Why is that? Because they are determined to impose "exceptional" America's hegemony on the entire world, using military-backed regime changes, and Donald Trump seems poised to spoil their plans. The entire Western establishment, roughly composed of neo-conservative ideologues, liberal interventionists, financial powers, NATO, mainstream media and politicians in both the United States and Western Europe, committed to remaking the Middle East to suit Israel and Saudi Arabia and to shattering impertinent Russia, have been thrown into an hysterical panic at the prospect of their joint globalisation project being sabotaged by an ignorant intruder.

Donald Trump's expressed desire to improve relations with Russia throws a monkey wrench into the plans endorsed by Hillary Clinton to "make Russia pay" for its bad attitude in the Middle East and elsewhere. If he should do what he has promised, this could be a serious blow to the aggressive NATO build-up on Russia's European borders, not to mention cause serious losses to the US arms industry, which is planning to sell billions of dollars worth of superfluous weapons to NATO allies on the pretext of the "Russian threat".

The war party's fears may be exaggerated, inasmuch as Trump's appointments indicate that the United States' claim to be the "exceptional," indispensable nation will probably survive the changes in top personnel. But the emphasis may be different. And those accustomed to absolute rule cannot tolerate the challenge.

Bad losers on the top

Members of the US Congress, the mainstream media, the CIA and even President Obama have made fools of themselves and the nation by claiming that the Clintonite cabal lost because of Vladimir Putin. Insofar as the rest of the world takes this whining seriously, it should further increase Putin's already considerable prestige. If true, the notion that Moscovite hacking could defeat the favourite candidate of the entire US power establishment can only mean that the United States's political structure is so fragile that a few disclosed emails can cause its collapse. A government notorious for snooping into everybody's private communication, as well as for overthrowing one government after another by less subtle means, and whose agents boasted of scaring the Russians into re-elected the abysmally unpopular Boris Yeltsin in 1996, now seems to be crying pathetically, "Mommy, Vlady is playing with my hacking toys!"

Of course, Russians would quite naturally prefer a US president who openly shies away

from the possibility of starting a nuclear war with Russia. That doesn't make Russia "an enemy," it is just a sign of good sense. Nor does it mean that Putin is so naïve as to imagine that Moscow could throw the election by a few dirty tricks. The current Russian leaders, unlike their Washington counterparts, tend to take a longer view, rather than imagining that the course of history can be changed by a banana peel.

This whole miserable spectacle is nothing but a continuation of the Russophobia exploited by Hillary Clinton to distract from her own multiple scandals. As the worst loser in American electoral history, she must blame Russia, rather than recognise that there were multiple reasons to vote against her.

The propaganda machine has found a response to unwelcome news: it must be fake. The Washington conspiracy theorists are outdoing themselves this time. The Russian geeks supposedly knew that by revealing a few Democratic National Committee internal messages, they could ensure the election of Donald Trump. What tremendous prescience!

Obama promises retaliation against Russia for treating the United States the way the United States treats, well, Honduras (and even Russia itself until blocked by Putin). Putin retorted that so far as he knew, the United States was not a banana republic, but a great power able to protect its elections. Washington is loudly denying that. The same mainstream media who brought you Saddam's "weapons of mass destruction" are now bringing you this preposterous conspiracy theory with straight faces.

When intelligence agencies become aware of the activities of rival intelligence agencies, they usually keep the knowledge to themselves, as part of the mutual spook game. Going public with this wild tale shows that the whole point is to persuade the American public that Trump's election is illegitimate, in the hope of defeating him in the electoral college or, if that fails, of crippling his presidency by labelling him a "Putin stooge."



Hillary Clinton: Can't stand to lose an election

Caricature by DonkeyHotey/Flickr <https://www.flickr.com/photos/donkeyhotey/29781964843>

Bad losers on the bottom

At least the bad losers on the top know what they are doing and have a purpose. The bad losers on the bottom are expressing emotions without clear objectives. It is false self-dramatisation to call for "Resistance" as if the country had been invaded by extra-terrestrials. The US electoral system is outmoded and bizarre, but Trump played the game by the rules. He campaigned to win swing States, not a popular majority, and that's what he got.

The problem isn't Trump, but a political system which reduces the people's choice to two hated candidates, backed by big bucks.

Whatever they think or feel, the largely youthful anti-Trump protesters in the streets create an image of hedonistic consumer society's spoiled brats who throw tantrums when they don't get what they want. Of course, some are genuinely concerned about friends who are illegal immigrants and fear deportation. It is quite possible to organise in their defence. The protesters may be mostly disappointed Bernie Sanders supporters, but whether they like it or not, their protests amount to a con-

The problem isn't Trump, but a political system which reduces the people's choice to two hated candidates, backed by big bucks

ELECTION DISGRACE

The last gasp Clintonite campaign to blame Hillary's defeat on "fake news," supposedly inspired by The Enemy, Russia, is a facet of the growing drive to censor the Internet

Continuation of the dominant themes in Hillary Clinton's negative campaign. She ran on fear. In the absence of any economic programme to respond to the needs of millions of voters who showed their preference for Sanders, and of those who turned to Trump simply because of his vague promise to create jobs, her campaign exaggerated the portent of Trump's most politically incorrect statements, creating the illusion that Trump was a violent racist whose only program was to arouse hatred. Still worse, Hillary stigmatised millions of voters as "a basket of deplorables, racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic — you name it." These remarks were made to an LGBT rally, as part of her identity politics campaign to win over a clientele of minorities by stigmatising the dwindling white majority. The identity politics premise is that ethnic and sexual minorities are oppressed and thus morally superior to the white majority, which is the implied oppressor. It is this tendency to sort people into morally distinct categories that divides Americans against each other, every bit as much – or more – than Trump's hyperbole about Mexican or Islamic immigrants. It has served to convince many devotees of political correctness to regard white working class Americans in the "fly-over" regions as enemy invaders who threaten to send them all to concentration camps.

Terrified of what Trump may do, his opponents tend to ignore what the lame ducks are actually doing. The last gasp Clintonite campaign to blame Hillary's defeat on "fake news," supposedly inspired by The Enemy, Russia, is a facet of the growing drive to censor the Internet – previously for child pornography, or for anti-Semitism, and next on the pretext of combating "fake news," meaning whatever goes contrary to the official line. This threat to freedom of expression is more sinister than eleven-year-old locker-room macho boasts by Trump.

There will and should be strong political opposition to whatever reactionary domestic policies are adopted by the Trump administration. But such opposition should define

the issues and work for specific goals, instead of expressing a global rejection that is non-functional.

The hysterical anti-Trump reaction is unable to grasp the implications of the campaign to blame Hillary's defeat on Putin. Do the kids in the street really want war with Russia? I doubt it. But they do not perceive that for all its glaring faults, the Trump presidency provides an opportunity to avoid war with Russia. This is a window of opportunity than will be slammed shut if the Clintonite establishment and the War Party get their way. Whether they realize it or not, the street protesters are helping that establishment delegitimise Trump and sabotage the one positive element in his program: peace with Russia.

Adjustments in the enemy list

By its fatally flawed choices in the Middle East and in Ukraine, the United States foreign policy establishment has driven itself into a collision course with Russia. Unable to admit that the United States backed the wrong horse in Syria, the War Party sees no choice but to demonise and "punish" Russia, with the risk of dipping into the Pentagon's vast arsenal of argument-winning nuclear weapons. Anti-Russian propaganda has reached extremes exceeding those of the Cold War. What can put an end to this madness? What can serve to create normal attitudes and relations concerning that proud nation which aspires primarily simply to be respected and to promote old-fashioned international law based on national sovereignty? How can the United States make peace with Russia?

It is clear that in capitalist, chauvinist America there is no prospect of shifting to a peace policy by putting peace advocate David Swanson in charge of US foreign relations, however desirable that might be.

Realistically, the only way that capitalist America can make peace with Russia is through capitalist business. And that is what Trump proposes to do.

A bit of realism helps when dealing with reality. The choice of Exxon CEO Rex W. Tillerson

son as Secretary of State is the best step toward ending the current race toward war with Russia. “Make money not war” is the pragmatic American slogan for peace at this stage.

But the “resistance” to Trump is not likely to show support for this pragmatic peace policy. It is already encountering opposition in the war-loving Congress. Instead, by shouting “Trump is not my President!,” the disoriented leftists are inadvertently strengthening that opposition, which is worse than Trump.

Avoiding war with Russia will not transform Washington into a haven of sweetness and light. Trump is an aggressive personality, and the opportunistic aggressive personalities of the establishment, notably his pro-Israel friends, will help him turn US aggression in other directions. Trump’s attachment to Israel is nothing new, but appears to be particularly uncompromising. In that context, Trump’s extremely harsh words for Iran are ominous, and one must hope that his stated rejection of “regime change” war applies in that case as well as others. Trump’s anti-China rhetoric also sounds bad, but in the long run there is little he or the United States can do to prevent China from becoming once again the “indispensable nation” it used to be during most of its long history. Tougher trade deals will not lead to the Apocalypse.

The failure of the intellectual establishment

The sad image today of Americans as bad losers, unable to face reality, must be attributed in part to the ethical failure of the so-called 1968 generation of intellectuals. In a democratic society, the first duty of men and women with the time, inclination and capacity to study reality seriously is to share their knowledge and understanding with people who lack those privileges. The generation of academics whose political consciousness was temporarily raised by the tragedy of the Vietnam war should have realised that their duty was to use their position to educate the American people, notably about the world that Washington proposed to redesign and its history. However, the new phase of he-

donistic capitalism offered the greatest opportunities for intellectuals in manipulating the masses rather than educating them. The consumer society marketing even invented a new phase of identity politics, with the youth market, the gay market, and so on. In the universities, a critical mass of “progressive” academics retreated into the abstract world of post-modernism, and have ended up focusing the attention of youth on how to react to other people’s sex lives or “gender identification.” Such esoteric stuff feeds the publish or perish syndrome and prevents academics in the humanities from having to teach anything that might be deemed critical of US military spending or its failing efforts to assert its eternal domination of the globalised world. The worst controversy coming out of academia concerns who should use which toilet.

If the intellectual snobs on the coasts can sneer with such self-satisfaction at the poor “deplorables” in flyover land, it is because they themselves have ignored their primary social duty of seeking truth and sharing it. Scolding people for their “wrong” attitudes while setting the social example of unrestrained personal promotion can only produce the anti-elite reaction called “populism.” Trump is the revenge of people who feel manipulated, forgotten and despised. However flawed, he is the only choice they had to express their revolt in a rotten election. The United States is deeply divided ideologically, as well as economically. The United States is threatened, not by Russia, but by its own internal divisions and the inability of Americans not only to understand the world, but even to understand each other. **CT**

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Diana Johnstone is the author of Fools’ Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO, and Western Delusions. Her new book is Queen of Chaos: the Misadventures of Hillary Clinton. The memoirs of Diana Johnstone’s father Paul H. Johnstone, From MAD to Madness, are soon to be published by Clarity Press, with her commentary. She can be contacted at diana.johnstone@wanadoo.fr

If the intellectual snobs on the coasts can sneer with such self-satisfaction at the poor “deplorables” in flyover land, it is because they themselves have ignored their primary social duty of seeking truth and sharing it

Ike's rich versus Trump's rich

In the years after World War II, average Americans got ahead. Now they're being hit by a ferociously top-heavy distribution of income, writes **Sam Pizigatti**

If you suddenly found yourself with a nice little job that paid \$10,000 per month, you would have to work over 2,600 years at that job to make what America's top 400 averaged in just 2014 alone

In every society, some people hold more wealth than other people. Every society, in other words, has a rich. But not every society's rich has enough wealth to really dominate. Not every society's rich has enough wealth – and power – to rig the rules at the expense of average people.

In the United States today, our rich certainly does have enough. Researchers from the IRS have just delivered the latest evidence.

These researchers have just released the latest annual breakdown on America's 400 highest reported incomes. In 2014, their new IRS report notes, the US's top 400 collected incomes that individually averaged an astounding \$317.8-million.

Want a little more human perspective on that total? If you suddenly found yourself with a nice little job that paid \$10,000 per month, you would have to work over 2,600 years at that job to make what America's top 400 averaged in just 2014 alone.

We can get an equally telling perspective by comparing today's rich to yesterday's.

The IRS statistical series on top 400 incomes goes back a bit over two decades. In 1992, the first year in the series, the top 400 averaged a mere \$46.8-million. That's less, after adjusting for inflation, than a quarter of what 2014's top 400 took in.

Even more jaw-dropping stats start turning up when we go back further in time.

The IRS doesn't supply top-400 numbers for before 1992, but we can recreate from IRS historical studies some close-to-400 top cohorts.

For 1955, for instance, we can tease out totals for the nation's top 427 reported incomes. Back then, in the middle of the Eisenhower years, the wealthy taxpayers in this near top 400 averaged less than \$1.7-million each, about \$14.6-million in 2014 dollars.

So America's top 400 in 2014 made over four times the real income of 1992's top 400 and nearly 22 times what 1955's richest pulled down.

That's all before taxes. After taxes, the contrast becomes even more striking.

In 2014, the new IRS data indicate, the wealthy residing in the top 400 paid 23.13 percent of their incomes in federal income tax. In 1955, the most affluent 400 paid federal taxes at well over twice that rate, 51.22 percent.

After taxes, and after taking inflation into account, 2014's top 400 had over 34 times more dollars in their pockets than their fellow affluents of 1955.

As a group, 2014's top 400 had almost \$98-billion sloshing around in their pockets after paying their taxes. The top-400 gang in 1955 had less than \$3-billion.

What do today's super rich do with all their extra billions? They expend a ma-

gor chunk of that excess on distorting the democratic process – to their own personal benefit.

Some of contemporary super rich – like the billionaire Koch brothers – invest heavily in obscure “down-ballot” races and help their preferred candidates overwhelm any opposition. Others like Amazon’s Jeff Bezos and gaming magnate Sheldon Adelson buy their own high-profile daily newspapers. Still others like Donald Trump leverage their billions into winning their own elective office.

How much difference does all this rich people political involvement make for everyday Americans? Three of the world’s top inequality analysts – economists Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, and Gabriel Zucman – have just supplied an answer. They’ve released a new report that tracks where the rewards from the growing American economy are going.

Since the 1970s, the trio notes, the size of the American economy has more than doubled. That doubling has been quite good news for the deep pockets of America’s top 1 percent. Their share of the nation’s income has itself doubled, from 10.7 percent in 1980 to 20.2 percent in 2014.

Average top 1 percent incomes, in the meantime, have much more than doubled

after inflation, from \$428,000 in 1980 to \$1.3-million in 2014.

Incomes for the bottom 50 percent of US earners, by contrast, have barely budged up at all. This bottom 50 percent averaged \$16,000 in 1980 – a figure that includes the value of employer-provided fringe benefits and government supports like food stamps – and just \$16,200 in 2014.

The cascading incomes at America’s summit, in short, have hardly provided any lift at all to the Americans whose economic well-being most needs lifting.

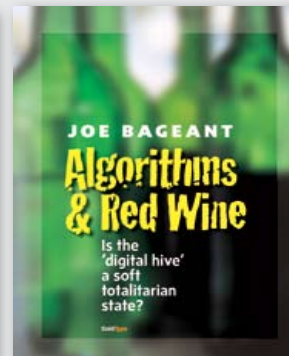
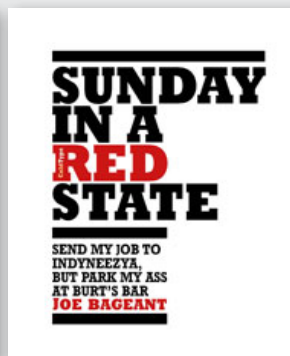
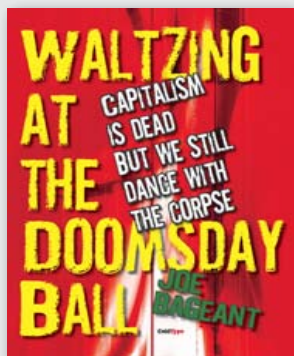
Would everyday Americans be doing any better today if our rich were not getting spectacularly richer?

The history of the years immediately after World War II suggests an answer. In the three decades right after the war – the era that saw America’s richest make only a fraction of what our richest make today – the real incomes of the bottom 90 percent of Americans, the new Piketty-Saez-Zucman data point out, on average doubled. **CT**

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Sam Pizzigati co-edits *Inequality.org*. His most recent book, *The Rich Don’t Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900–1970*. Follow him on Twitter @Too_Much_Online

In the three decades right after the war – the era that saw America’s richest make only a fraction of what our richest make today – the real incomes of the bottom 90 percent of Americans, on average doubled

Read the best of Joe Bageant



www.coldtype.net/joe.html

Imaginary friends

Celebrity is not harmless fun – it's the lieutenant of exploitation, writes **George Monbiot**

Obama did virtually nothing with the federal power at his disposal to curb the daily slaughter of black people in this country

Now that a reality TV star is preparing to become president of the United States, can we agree that celebrity culture is more than just harmless fun? That it might in fact be an essential component of the systems that govern our lives?

The rise of celebrity culture did not happen by itself. It has long been cultivated by advertisers, marketers and the media. And it has a function. The more distant and impersonal corporations become, the more they rely on other people's faces to connect them to their customers.

Corporation means body; capital means head. But corporate capital has neither head nor body. It is hard for people to attach themselves to a homogenised franchise, owned by a hedge fund whose corporate identity consists of a filing cabinet in Panama City. So the machine needs a mask. It must wear the face of someone we see as often as we see our next-door neighbours. It is pointless to ask what Kim Kardashian does to earn her living; her role is to exist in our minds. By playing our virtual neighbour, she induces a click of recognition on behalf of whatever grey monolith sits behind her this week.

An obsession with celebrity does not lie quietly beside the other things we value; it takes their place. A study published in the journal *Cyber psychology* reveals that an

extraordinary shift appears to have taken place between 1997 and 2007. In 1997, the dominant values (as judged by an adult audience) expressed by the shows most popular among nine- to -11-year-olds were community feeling, followed by benevolence. Fame came 15th out of the 16 values tested. By 2007, when shows like *Hannah Montana* prevailed, fame came first, followed by achievement, image, popularity and financial success. Community feeling had fallen to 11th; benevolence to 12th.

A paper in the *International Journal of Cultural Studies* found that, among the people it surveyed, those who follow celebrity gossip most closely are three times less likely than people interested in other forms of news to be involved in local organisations, and half as likely to volunteer. Virtual neighbours replace real ones.

The blander and more homogenised the product, the more distinctive the mask it needs to wear. This is why Iggy Pop is used to promote motor insurance and Benicio del Toro is used to sell Heineken. The role of such people is to suggest that there something more exciting behind the logo than office blocks and spreadsheets. They transfer their edginess to the company they represent: as soon they take the cheque that buys their identity, they become as processed and meaningless as the item they are promoting.

The celebrities you see most often are the most lucrative products, extruded through a willing media by a marketing industry whose power no one seeks to check. This is why actors and models now receive such disproportionate attention, capturing much of the space once occupied by people with their own ideas. Their expertise lies in channelling other people's visions.

A database search by the anthropologist Grant McCracken reveals that actors received 17 percent of the cultural attention accorded to famous people between 1900 and 1910: slightly less than physicists, chemists and biologists combined. Film directors received 6 percent and writers 11 percent. When the time series was extended to 1950, actors had 24 percent of the coverage, and writers 9 percent; by 2010, actors accounted for 37 percent (over four times the attention natural scientists received), while the proportion allocated to both film directors and writers fell to 3 percent.

You don't have to read or watch many interviews to see that the principal qualities now sought in a celebrity are vapidness, vacuity and physical beauty. They can be used as a blank screen onto which anything can be projected. Those who have least to say are granted the greatest number of platforms on which to say it.

This helps to explain the mass delusion among young people: that they have a reasonable chance of becoming famous. A survey of 16-year-olds in the UK revealed that 54 percent of them intend to become celebrities. Going with the flow is something anyone can do. But only a handful are celebrated for it.

As soon as celebrities forget their allotted role, the hounds of hell are let loose upon them. Lily Allen was the media's darling when she was advertising John Lewis's. Gary Lineker couldn't put a foot wrong when he stuck to selling junk food to children. But when they expressed sympathy for refugees, they were torn to shreds. When you take the

corporate shilling, you are supposed to stop thinking for yourself.

Celebrity has a second major role: as a weapon of mass distraction. The survey published in the *International Journal of Cultural Studies* I mentioned earlier also reveals that people who are the most interested in celebrity are the least engaged in politics, the least likely to protest and the least likely to vote. This appears to shatter the media's frequent, self-justifying claim that celebrities connect us to public life.

The survey found that people fixated by celebrity watch the news on average as much as others do, but they appear to exist in a state of permanent diversion. If you want people to remain quiescent and unengaged, show them the faces of Taylor Swift, Shia LaBeouf and Cara Delevingne several times a day.

In Donald Trump we see a perfect fusion of the two main uses of celebrity culture: corporate personification and mass distraction. His celebrity became a mask for his own chaotic, outsourced and unscrupulous business empire. His public image was the perfect inversion of everything he and his companies represent: as presenter of the US version of *The Apprentice*, this spoilt heir to humungous wealth became the face of enterprise and social mobility. During the presidential elections, his noisy persona distracted people from the intellectual void behind the mask, a void now filled by more lucid representatives of global capital.

Celebrities might inhabit your life, but they are not your friends. Regardless of the intentions of those on whom it is bequeathed, celebrity is the lieutenant of exploitation. Let's turn our neighbours back into our neighbours, and turn our backs on those who impersonate them. **CT**

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George Monbiot's latest book, How Did We Get Into This Mess?, is published by Verso. This article was first published in the Guardian newspaper. Monbiot's web site is www.monbiot.com

Strange words to utter about a man who flouted US treaty obligations – which are de facto the law of the land in the US – to prosecute that most heinous of crimes, torture

IN THE PICTURE

Fancy that!

A remarkable new book highlights the work of community historian **Mark Neville**



CORBY CARNIVAL QUEENS go bowling, from *Deeds Not Words*, 2011

Fancy Pictures is the first commercially-available book on the work of British photo-journalist Mark Neville, who usually only disseminates his photo books free of charge. They go either to the communities he photographs, or to authorities and government policy makers, in order to highlight social issues ranging from PTSD among veterans, to toxic waste disposal.

Neville's work over the past 12 years, previously unavailable for general distribution, is showcased in a new book, **Fancy Pictures**, published by Steidl, which features his photographs of working communities taken in a collaborative process that is intended to be of direct, practical benefit to his subjects.

Among the publications featured in the new work include the Port Glasgow Book Project (2004), a book of social documentary images of the Scottish town. Copies were given to every home in the town. For a second Scottish project, Neville lived and worked with the farming community on the Isle of Bute for 18 months.

Deeds Not Words (2011) focuses on Corby, an English town that suffered serious industrial pollution. Assembling photos and scientific data, the photographer produced a book that was given free to



NEWBORN LAMB. Isle of Bute, 2008



IN THE PICTURE

Betty (Port Glasgow Town Hall Xmas Party), the cover image from Mark Neville's 2004 book, *Port Glasgow*, which got a mixed reception from the town's residents.



IN THE PICTURE



US AND THEM. Traders at the London Metal Exchange (above). Children at an adventure playground in Tottenham, London, 2008 (below).



the environmental health services department of each of the 433 local councils in the UK. Then, in 2011, Neville spent three months working on the front line in Afghanistan, as an official war artist, producing the book, *Battle Against Stigma*.

Two projects for the USA are also included in *Fancy Pictures*, where Neville examined social divisions in Pittsburgh, while his photo-essay *Here is London*, commissioned by the *New York Times Magazine*, echoes the style of the celebrated photographers who documented the boom and bust of the '70s and '80s.

Fancy Pictures is notable for the amount of information included about each project, each section separated by illuminating interviews with David Company, along with reproductions of some of

IN THE PICTURE



GETTING DOWN. Sewickley, haven for wealthy residents, Pittsburgh, 2012

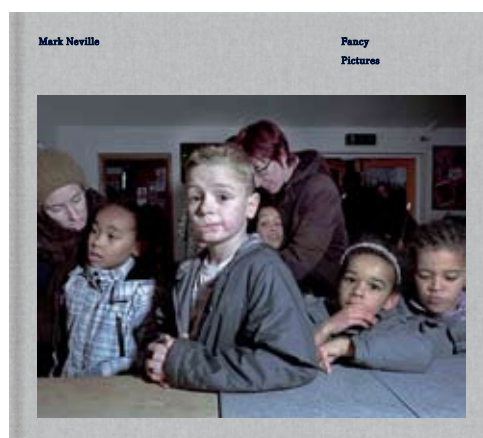
the images as they were produced in the pages of the original publications.

The book also includes responses from members of the communities with which Neville worked. Those respondents, not all favourable, “were both the recipients and the subjects of my books and projects, and the audiences for the work,” says Neville, who wants his work “to open up a dialogue about the nature of audience and purpose in contemporary photographic practice.”

The most extreme reaction to his work followed the publication of his book, *Port Glasgow*. Residents of the town’s Robert Street, “had a meeting and decided there were too many photographs taken in Catholic pubs and clubs and not enough taken in Protestant pubs and clubs. It’s still a sectarian town in many ways. They decided to burn their copies of the book. I literally got a call from the fire station telling me a pile of my books was on fire. I looked at the book again: There were nine photos taken in Protestant pubs and clubs, and seven in Catholic pubs and clubs.”

Some things, it seems, do not change.

CT



FANCY PICTURES

Mark Neville

Published by Steidl / www.steidl.de

\$55 (amazon.com)

Uncomfortable truths about the BBC

David Cromwell and **David Edwards** on the signs that expose the broadcaster's systematic bias towards state, big business, elites and power

Even the most powerful systems of propaganda inadvertently allow uncomfortable truths to slip out into the public domain. Consider a recent BBC News interview following the death of Cuba's former leader Fidel Castro. Dr Denise Baden, Associate Professor in Business Ethics at the University of Southampton, who has studied Castro's leadership and Cuban business models, was asked by BBC News presenter Justine Mawhinney for her views on Cuba and Castro. It's fair to say that Baden's responses didn't follow the standard establishment line echoed and amplified in much of the mainstream media.

Mawhinney kicked off the interview with the standard Western propaganda line about Castro: "He ruled with an iron fist, didn't he?"

Baden immediately challenged the cliché: "Well, that's something that everyone's fond of saying. But when I talk to the people who live in Cuba, and the Cubans who've come to live in the UK, that's not the story that I get. The feeling that comes through is of Fidel Castro almost as a father figure. So, the older generation tend to see him as a hero of the revolution. They're aware that many of them wouldn't even be here if it wouldn't have been for the health advances and the equalisation of resources that he provided."

The academic, who visited the island in 2013 and 2014, "drawn by its record on sustainability," then pointed out that it was the crippling US embargo on Cuba that was responsible for

much of the hardships suffered by the Cubans for over five decades: a crucial point that the BBC interviewer significantly did not pursue.

Mawhinney then raised Castro's human rights record. Baden addressed the issue of free speech first: "When I went to talk to people in Cuba, I found it remarkable how freely they all spoke about Fidel Castro, and Raul Castro, and the policies. I was expecting from the discourse we hear that people would be afraid to speak out. And that wasn't what I found - people spoke out very freely."

The BBC interviewer pressed her on whether Cuban people really did speak out: "Did they criticise the regime?"

Baden: "Oh yes. I had the head of a topical newspaper who was quite critical of the government in some ways. Not all ways, but some ways. And I think what it is, is the [Western] media's been dominated by America. So, for example, when Obama visited Havana [in March 2016] you had the Cuban Ladies in White come out to protest against the human rights abuses. And so, of course, that dominates the headlines. But they're paid for by Americans - people don't realise that; an American agency pays for them. The Cubans don't take them seriously."

Once again, the BBC interviewer didn't pick up the uncomfortable point about US support, including financial sponsorship, of anti-Castro activism. Imagine the reverse case if Cuba, or another foreign power, were responsible for

"When I went to talk to people in Cuba, I found it remarkable how freely they all spoke about Fidel Castro, and Raul Castro, and the policies. I was expecting from the discourse we hear that people would be afraid to speak out. And that wasn't what I found - people spoke out very freely"

MEDIA WATCH / 1

"I think that made me a little bit cross actually because I think we have been exposed to a lot of misinformation, and this quite small minority in Florida has dominated the headlines today and over the past 50 years"

funding or otherwise fomenting activism inside the United States. Indeed, look at the media outrage at alleged interference by 'Putin's Russia' in the recent US election, with a new explosion of coverage devoted to evidence-free assertions made by anonymous CIA officials.

The BBC interviewer returned to Castro: "But he did carry out human rights abuses. Look, let's just take one section. Gay people and those with Aids – completely persecuted."

Again, Baden's response deviated from the 'mainstream' script: "I think when you look back at the time at which the revolution was considered to be a little bit homophobic, which was in the 60s, I'm not sure many countries could hold their heads up high and say that they were as open as they should be. So, I think you have to look at it in context of the period as well."

Trying a different tack, Mawhinney continued: "You seem quite fond of Fidel Castro."

Rather than rise to this bait, Baden pointed out that, like many Western consumers of news broadcasts, she had long "been exposed to the Miami voice [often privileged Cuban exiles], which is the dominant voice, and I think I was just surprised when I went there not to find this browbeaten people who felt oppressed."

She added: "I think that made me a little bit cross actually because I think we have been exposed to a lot of misinformation, and this quite small minority in Florida has dominated the headlines today and over the past 50 years."

This implicit criticism of BBC News was left hanging in the air. Sounding quite incredulous, the BBC interviewer asked: "So, are you saying that what he did, the things that we would see as a human rights abuse was okay?"

Baden's calm challenge was professorial: "Well, do you want to be more specific?"

Mawhinney followed up in hand-waving fashion: "Well, the prisoners, the political prisoners, the problems with gay people, etcetera, etcetera"

Baden replied: "Well no, I don't think political prisoners are ever okay. And I don't think persecuting gay people is ever okay."

Baden then made the point that matters:

"What I'm disputing is that Fidel Castro of Cuba was any worse than any other country. I think if you expose America to the same lens, then you'd have a stack of crimes that would overshadow what Fidel Castro has done."

It's a rare moment when even a mention of American crimes is carried on BBC airwaves, never mind stating that they would dwarf the alleged crimes of an Official Enemy.

Baden continued with the context that was routinely missing from, or downplayed in, recent coverage of Cuba following Castro's death: "I think the important thing to realise is the moment Fidel came into power in the revolution, at the time at which there was very strong anti-Communist feeling, the Americans did everything they could to subvert that. They invaded in the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban missile crisis was a response to an expected additional invasion, and there was, I think, an estimated 638 CIA-sponsored attempts on Fidel Castro's life. So, I think you have to understand the responses and the fear of open speech in context of a constant aggression coming from ninety miles over the water."

Again, the notion of "constant aggression" from the US is virtually verboten on the BBC.

This remarkable segment of BBC News would most likely have been lost down the Memory Hole were it not for Media Lens reader Steve Ennever who captured it, uploaded it to YouTube, and then informed people about it. The clip quickly went viral. At the time of writing, it has had around 140,000 views on YouTube, with around half a million views on the Media Lens Facebook page and 2.7 million views via EvolvePolitics. This truly shows the power of social media.

Most public commentators were highly appreciative of the way Baden handled the BBC interview. A few preferred to say instead: "Well done BBC for showing this," as though the corporation had upheld its commitment to impartiality. But those people are rather missing the point. The BBC line of interviewing – in reality, assertions with a token question mark added at the end – consisted of propaganda bullet points. Thanks to Baden, here was a rare

and welcome example of that propaganda line being dismantled live on BBC News.

Yes, it is possible to praise the interviewer, or BBC News, for “allowing” that to happen here; Justine Mawhinny did at least refrain from constantly interrupting the interviewee in the way of Andrew Neil, Andrew Marr or John Humphrys. By “balancing” praise with criticism, some argue, the BBC will be “encouraged” to “improve” its performance. Perhaps marginally. But the very structure of the BBC means there is a systemic bias in favour of the state, big business, elites and power. Praising a prison guard for being a little less harsh is futile when the prison system remains essentially unchanged. Are we really meant to be pathetically grateful for tiny bits of comfort?

Such are the perils of live television, then, for BBC News. An interviewee may end up querying, perhaps rejecting, the ideological script presented by a BBC News journalist. The script may even be turned on its head, by pointing out that the West is guilty of far worse crimes than the Bogeyman in question – Fidel Castro, – as we saw above.

“A Grand Bargain”

Another potentially vulnerable moment for the BBC in maintaining the correct ideological stance is the live artificial chat that takes place between a BBC News presenter and a journalist who is on location, or sitting across a glossy table from the presenter in the studio. Normally these are such tightly managed affairs between two highly trained and carefully selected media professionals that nothing ‘untoward’ happens. But very occasionally, the impromptu language allows over-reaching or unguarded thoughts to spill out, making alert viewers do a double-take.

For example, BBC Business Editor Simon Jack inadvertently delivered a tasty morsel of newspeak on BBC News at Ten last month (BBC One, November 21, 2016). Jack was describing Prime Minister Theresa May’s keynote speech to business leaders at the CBI conference. Supposedly, her tone was more “conciliatory” compared to a previous “withering at-

tack” a week earlier when she had pointed out ‘some abuses she saw in capitalism and their [business leaders’] behaviour in some corners of British business.’ May’s vague words then about curbing “the worst excesses of capitalism” did not herald a revolution. Instead, they smacked of appeasing “populism” in the wake of Brexit and Trump’s US electoral win.

Jack paraphrased May’s key message to the CBI: “I know you’ve got some problems. And there’s going to be a grand bargain. I’ll do some things, I’ll lower taxes, I’ll invest in productivity. You clean up your act and make sure the wealth is shared.”

BBC viewers may well have thought: “Run that past me again?” Did you really report without comment, far less journalistic scrutiny, that the Prime Minister instructed business elites to “make sure the wealth is shared?” Is the British public expected to believe that big business will actually “make sure the wealth is shared?” As ever, there was no proper scepticism towards government pronouncements or policy. In reality, Jack’s role is the BBC News editor for business – and government. Sometimes the bias is that blatant.

Another point in BBC News where viewers can be rewarded for particular vigilance is at the start of the programme; or when a specific news story is being introduced. Here the required establishment view – the perspective of “our” government or big business – is sometimes especially obvious.

For example, on November 16, Fiona Bruce introduced an item on BBC News at Ten with: “In Iraq, special forces are slowly pushing back so-called Islamic State in the country’s second city, Mosul. But the fighting is hard. . .”

This was propaganda-style reporting once again from BBC News; no doubt similar to how the Russian media report on Russian forces pushing back against terrorists in Syria.

“The world wants America as its policeman”

And then there are those brave people who enter the labyrinthine den of the BBC “complaints system.” This is a soul-crushing experience that even the former BBC chairman Lord

Is the British public expected to believe that big business will actually “make sure the wealth is shared?”

MEDIA WATCH / 1

The requirement to keep awkward facts hidden or marginalised is especially pressing on those BBC journalists who are entrusted to report from the United States

Grade described as “grisly” due to a system that is “absolutely hopeless.” Anyone who makes the attempt is surely disabused of the notion that BBC News engages with, or indeed serves, the public in any meaningful way. Long-time readers may recall that Helen Boaden, then head of BBC News, once joked that she evaded public complaints that were sent to her on email: “Oh, I just changed my email address.”

One of our favourite cases was a challenge made about an article by that avuncular epitome of BBC gravitas, World Affairs Editor John Simpson. In a 2014 article, “Barack Obama’s best years could still be ahead of him,” Simpson claimed that: “The world (well, most of it) wants an active, effective America to act as its policeman, sorting out the problems smaller countries can’t face alone.”

A Medialens readers (name withheld) read the article, then submitted a complaint to the BBC, noting: “In an international opinion poll by Gallup this year the US was found to be the greatest threat to peace in the world, voted three times more dangerous to world peace than the next country. The BBC article is therefore, at worst, incorrect and biased or at best highly inaccurate. Will you be retracting the statement?” Needless to say, the BBC did no such thing. In fact, Sean Moss, whose job title reads “BBC Complaints Adviser for BBC News website,” delivered a comical reply (forwarded to us, 13 November 2014): “In fact the poll referenced in your complaint was from the end of last year rather than this year. It is an annual end of year survey which in this edition “explores the outlook, expectations, hopes and fears of people from 65 countries around the world” from 2013.

“Given that we’re now nearly at the end of 2014 and they will be conducting a new poll next month we’re unclear on what basis you feel these views are still applicable.”

“Unclear” if “still applicable?” Far from being a rogue result, the US regularly tops polls of global public opinion as the world’s greatest threat to peace. As Noam Chomsky noted in an interview earlier this year when discussing nuclear weapons: “Iran is not a threat, pe-

riod. The world doesn’t regard Iran as a threat. That’s a US obsession. You look at global – polls of global opinion taken by Gallup’s international affiliate, the leading US polling agencies – agency, one of the questions that they ask is, ‘Which country is the greatest threat to world peace?’ Answer: United States, by a huge margin. Iran is barely mentioned. Second place is Pakistan, inflated by the Indian vote, that’s way behind the United States. That’s world opinion. And there are reasons for it. Americans are protected from this information.”

Not only Americans. British – indeed, global – audiences too; thanks in no small measure to the BBC. The requirement to keep awkward facts hidden or marginalised is especially pressing on those BBC journalists who are entrusted to report from the United States. Thus, in an online report titled *The Decline of US Power?*, the BBC New York correspondent Nick Bryant had to tread carefully in even mentioning America’s approval rating, as measured by Gallup: “In Asia, America’s median approval rating in 2014, as measured by Gallup, was 39%, a 6% drop since 2011.

“In Africa, the median approval went down to 59%, the lowest since polling began, despite Obama hosting the US-Africa Leaders’ Summit in Washington in August, last year.”

There was no mention that, as mentioned, global public opinion regularly regards the US as the greatest threat to world peace, and by a considerable margin.

However, there was plenty of space for Bryant to churn out the usual BBC boilerplate about America’s “national interest” and Obama’s “pragmatism” and “diplomatic dexterity;” all this about a leader who boasted he had bombed seven countries, rapidly escalated a killer drone programme and broke his pledge to shut down the US Guantanamo torture camp in Cuba.

Dying in a ditch for BBC News “impartiality”

The irony in the ongoing corporate media allegations about fake news is that, as Glenn Greenwald noted, “those who most loudly denounce Fake News are typically those most

aggressively disseminating it.” That is because the corporate media fears losing control of the media agenda. As for BBC News, its privileged, publicly-funded position as supposedly the world’s most trusted broadcaster is under threat. So, while reasonable questions can be asked of the growing behemoths of the media landscape – Google, YouTube and Facebook – mainstream journalists know not to publicly scrutinise their own industry’s output of state-corporate fake news.

Thus, BBC Technology correspondent Rory Cellan-Jones can safely hold Facebook up to the light and ask: “If Facebook or something similar had not existed, would Donald Trump still be heading for the White House? That is hard to say but what does seem likely is that social media served to polarise views in what was already a bitter election and may have encouraged a few hesitant voters to come out for Mr Trump.

“This makes Facebook’s claims that it just a technology platform, rather than a hugely powerful media company with Mark Zuckerberg as editor-in-chief, look very thin indeed. But there are few signs that the company is ready to face up to this heavy responsibility or engage in some serious soul-searching.”

It would be virtually unthinkable for a BBC journalist to write of his employer: “There are few signs that the broadcaster is ready to face up to this heavy responsibility or engage in some serious soul-searching.”

But, as John Pilger noted recently: “Propaganda is most effective when our consent is engineered by those with a fine education – Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Columbia – and with careers on the BBC, the Guardian, the New York Times, the Washington Post.” As a prime example, consider Laura Kuenssberg, the BBC’s political editor. Press Gazette just awarded her the accolade of Journalist of the Year. She told the trade paper proudly that: “I would die in a ditch for the impartiality of the BBC.”

Two former senior BBC figures would dispute that self-serving depiction of wonderful BBC impartiality. Greg Dyke, a former BBC director general, believes that: “The BBC is part

of a ‘conspiracy’ preventing the “radical changes” needed to UK democracy.”

He says that a parliamentary commission should look into the “whole political system,” adding that “I fear it will never happen because I fear the political class will stop it.”

And Sir Michael Lyons, former chairman of the BBC Trust, said earlier this year that there had been “some quite extraordinary attacks” on Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn by the BBC.

Readers may recall that Kuenssberg was behind the on-air resignation of a Labour shadow foreign minister in an apparent attempt to manipulate the news agenda and heap pressure on Corbyn. Former British diplomat Craig Murray describes her as “the most openly biased journalist I have ever seen on the BBC.”

Up to and including dying in a ditch, Kuenssberg would do anything to defend the impartiality of the BBC. Well, perhaps not anything. Asked for her “impartial” view on why 35,000 members of the public had signed a petition calling for her to be sacked for her bias, Kuenssberg replied rather less heroically: “I’m not going to get into that.”

Des Freedman, Professor of Media and Communications at Goldsmiths, University of London, notes that the kind of bias displayed by Kuenssberg “isn’t an accident or a one-off example of ‘bad journalism,’ but is built into a media system that is intertwined with the interests that run the country.”

He adds: “This doesn’t mean that there’s a smoke-filled room somewhere where anti-Corbyn people get together. I think you just call it a routine editorial meeting. The point is many senior journalists . . . reflect the dominant strain that runs through their newsrooms – one based on the assumed benefits of neoliberalism and foreign intervention and the undesirability (or the sheer madness of the idea) of redistribution, nationalisation and people like Jeremy Corbyn who don’t share the same social circles or ideological commitments.”

As Freedman rightly concludes: “We need a wholly different media system: one that’s not afraid to challenge power because it’s not steeped in power in the first place.” **CT**

As John Pilger noted recently: “Propaganda is most effective when our consent is engineered by those with a fine education – Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Columbia – and with careers on the BBC, the Guardian, the New York Times, the Washington Post”

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David Cromwell and David Edwards are co-editors of *Medialens*, the British media watchdog - www.medialens.org

The journalist and the newspaper

Why won't the Guardian support the freelance writer that the Israeli government wants to kick out? asks **Jonathan Cook**

Foreign journalists live in Israel, not the occupied territories, they speak Hebrew, send their children to Israeli schools and expect them to serve in the Israeli army

Israel is reported to be ready to expel an award-winning Australian journalist and writer, Antony Loewenstein, after he asked a too-probing question of an Israeli politician at a media event last week. Government officials have said they are investigating how they can deny him his work visa when it comes up for renewal in March.

It is unsurprising to learn that Israel has no serious regard for press freedom. But more depressing has been the lack of solidarity shown by journalistic colleagues, most especially the Guardian newspaper, for which he has regularly worked as a freelancer since 2013. Not only has the paper failed to offer him any support, but its management and staff reporters have hurried to distance themselves from him.

A deferential foreign press

Loewenstein has been under fire since he attended the event in Jerusalem, hosted by the Foreign Press Association (FPA), on December 12. According to the Israeli media, he asked former government minister Yair Lapid: "Is there not a deluded idea here that many Israeli politicians, including yourself, continue to believe that one can talk to the world about democracy, freedom and human rights while denying that to millions of Palestinians, and will there not come a time soon, in a year, five years, 10 years, when

you and other politicians will be treated like South African politicians during Apartheid?"

Israeli politicians are not used to hearing such difficult questions from members of the FPA, a professional association for journalists working in Israel. The reason for their deference to Israeli officials was explained to me a few years ago by an FPA insider. He revealed that not only are most of these correspondents Jewish – as Loewenstein himself is – but, unlike Loewenstein, they deeply identify with Israel. They live in Israel, not the occupied territories, they speak Hebrew, send their children to Israeli schools and expect them to serve in the Israeli army. Some of the reporters have served in the army themselves.

Perhaps most famously, former New York Times bureau chief Ethan Bronner was embarrassed in 2010 by the disclosure that he and the NYT had not divulged that his son was serving in the Israeli army while Bronner reported from the region. There was nothing exceptional about Bronner's professional conflict of interest. My confidant told me: "I can think of a dozen foreign bureau chiefs, responsible for covering both Israel and the Palestinians, who have served in the Israeli army, and another dozen who like Bronner have kids in the Israeli army."

He added: "The degree to which Bronner's personal life, like that of most lead

journalists here, is integrated into Israeli society, makes him an excellent candidate to cover Israeli political life, cultural shifts and intellectual life. The problem is that Bronner is also expected to be his paper's lead voice on Palestinian political life, cultural shifts and intellectual life, all in a society he has almost no connection to, deep knowledge of or even the ability to directly communicate with."

Most publications appear to believe that the benefits of employing openly partisan reporters – and all of them partisan towards the same party in the conflict – outweighs any potential damage to claims that they are neutral and impartial. The outlets hope their partisanship will offer them an advantage: gaining unfettered access to the corridors of power, whether in the Israeli government or army.

With this background in mind, it is possible to understand why Loewenstein described the tenor of the FPA event in the following terms: "With a few notable exceptions, the vast majority of journalists in attendance were deferential to Lapid and asked him bland questions."

No support from the FPA

Loewenstein's failure to follow the standard FPA rules of politesse when addressing an Israeli politician triggered a campaign against him by Honest Reporting. The group is one of several US-based media lobby organizations whose job is to intimidate foreign media organizations on behalf of the Israeli government. In this way, they have been successful in limiting critical coverage of Israel even further. Staff reporters tend to self-censor, while freelance journalists are pressured to leave the region.

In a transparent manoeuvre, Honest Reporting sought to paint Loewenstein as politically extreme for his past support for BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions), and as an activist rather than a journalist. That is no easy task. In addition to the Guardian, he has written for many leading publications

in Europe, Australia and the US, including the New York Times, the Washington Post, Newsweek, the Nation, Le Monde diplomatique, the Huffington Post, the Sydney Morning Herald, the Age, and many more.

He has also written several books covering a diverse range of topics, including his best-seller *My Israel Question*, in which he considers his own Jewish identity and relates it to issues of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. (Full disclosure: I contributed a chapter to a 2012 volume, *After Zionism*, he edited with Ahmed Moor.) He is currently working on a documentary based on his book *Disaster Capitalism*.

In other words, Loewenstein is not only a journalist; he is the gold-standard for serious independent, critical-thinking journalists. Which, of course, is precisely the reason Israel would want him gone.

Ignoring the deep, but entirely acceptable partisanship of the vast majority of reporters in Jerusalem, Honest Reporting has accused Loewenstein of partiality: "Loewenstein is clearly incapable of reporting on Israel in a fair and objective manner. Yet Honest Reporting has learned that he happens to be a paid up associate member of Israel's Foreign Press Association."

It is the traditional and self-defined responsibility of journalists to hold power to account, yet, sadly, the FPA has failed to come to Loewenstein's defence. In response to Honest Reporting, it said it had accepted him as a non-voting associate member "based on his career as a freelance journalist." But then added only: "While we do not endorse his views, we also do not screen our members for their opinions."

So no words of support from the FPA for Loewenstein as he faces being stripped of the right to report from the region (and not just from Israel, as Honest Reporting dishonestly claims, but also from the occupied territories, since Israel controls all access to Palestinian areas). Not a word of condemnation of Israel from the FPA for crushing press freedom. Just a shrug of the

In a transparent manoeuvre, Honest Reporting sought to paint Loewenstein as politically extreme for his past support for BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions), and as an activist rather than a journalist

MEDIA WATCH / 2

Loewenstein should easily meet the formal requirements for a freelance visa, as he has written far more than seven articles for major publications in the last year

shoulders.

Loewenstein should not be surprised. The FPA has barely bothered to raise its voice in solidarity with journalistic colleagues in the region whose rights are being trampled on a systematic basis. Palestinian journalists have been regularly killed, wounded, beaten up or jailed, earning Israel a ranking of 101 out of 180 countries this year in the Reporters without Borders index. That places it below Liberia, Bhutan, East Timor and Gabon, and a nudge ahead of Uganda, Kuwait, and Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Honest Reporting saw its chance to set a trap for Loewenstein to get him out of the region. More than a decade ago, Israel's Government Press Office (GPO) introduced new rules that tightly controlled coverage in its favour. In a non-transparent procedure, independent journalists have to persuade the GPO that they deserve to be issued with a work visa.

In February, the Committee to Protect Journalists' executive director, Robert Mahoney, criticised Israel for this patronage system. "It is virtually impossible to work as a reporter in Israel and the occupied territories without a press card," he said. "The threat of withdrawing accreditation is a heavy handed approach at stifling unwelcome coverage."

The Guardian distances itself

Honest Reporting has created a phony controversy about how Loewenstein received his work visa in a bid to discredit him. In fact, Loewenstein should easily meet the formal requirements for a freelance visa, as he has written far more than seven articles for major publications in the last year. But Honest Reporting is seeking to confect a row to justify the GPO refusing to renew his visa in March.

It did so by questioning the Guardian about his connection to the paper, hoping that it could get the paper to dissociate itself from him. Without a shred of evidence, it suggested that Loewenstein might have lied

to the GPO, claiming he was a Guardian accredited journalist, to get his visa.

How did the Guardian respond? According to Honest Reporting, its head of international news, Jamie Wilson, told them that "Loewenstein was contracted to write comment pieces for Guardian Australia and remains an occasional comment contributor but he 'is not a news correspondent for the Guardian in Israel'. It was also relayed to us that Loewenstein has now been told to in future make sure he does not reference The Guardian at press conferences unless he is working on a direct commission."

Further, their Jerusalem correspondent Peter Beaumont emailed the group to deny any knowledge of Loewenstein. And its former Jerusalem correspondent and now religious affairs reporter Harriet Sherwood entered the fray on Facebook: "Why is this guy claiming to be a Guardian writer when all I can find in our archive is occasional opinion pieces and nothing since August?" For the record, Loewenstein has written more than 90 articles for the Guardian since 2013.

One might wonder how it is that neither Beaumont nor Sherwood appear to have heard of Loewenstein when he has written several books on Israel and Palestine, and writes for their own paper and other leading publications on a range of issues, including Israel and Palestine. But then I suspect they may have a rather narrow range of reference points for their coverage – most of them doubtless FPA regulars.

But what is more significant is that none of the relevant actors at the Guardian has shown an ounce of solidarity with Loewenstein, as the Israeli lobby seeks to get him kicked out of the country for doing proper journalism. They have also inadvertently conspired with Honest Reporting in misrepresenting him.

Despite Honest Reporting's accusations, Loewenstein says he stated clearly in his GPO application that he was a freelance journalist. And it is simply inconceivable

that he could have professed to be a Guardian reporter to the GPO without being found out. The GPO knows precisely who represents all the big media outlets in Jerusalem.

Further, according to a source at the FPA event, Loewenstein was clear about his status when he addressed Lapid. He said he was freelance journalist who had contributed to various publications including the Guardian.

Predictably, Honest Reporting's managing editor, Simon Plosker, was delighted by the Guardian's response: "The Guardian's distancing itself from Loewenstein is a welcome development."

So far the Guardian appears to have issued no criticism of Honest Reporting for its deceptions in this matter, or retracted its own misguided comments.

The Guardian — far from the fearless watchdog

Loewenstein may have hoped that the Guardian would stand by him. But my own early experiences in Israel with the paper suggest this is part of a pattern of cowardly behaviour when it is under attack from Israeli officials or the Israel lobby.

I had an established relationship with the Guardian when I arrived in Israel as a freelancer early in the second intifada, in September 2001. I had previously worked on staff in its foreign department in London for several years. I used those contacts to begin pitching stories, and a few of the less controversial ones were commissioned by the paper.

It is standard journalistic practice when writing articles to give parties that come in for criticism a chance to respond. Therefore, in a piece on the Israeli army, I called the army spokesperson's office for a comment. As is also standard practice, I introduced myself and cited where the piece would be published.

Less than an hour after the conversation, I was surprised to receive a furious phone call from the Guardian foreign desk

in London. The Israeli army spokesperson had called the paper's then-correspondent, Suzanne Goldenberg, to ask who I was and why I was writing for the paper. Goldenberg called the desk and threw a tantrum about my referring to the Guardian.

Then I had the most bizarre exchange in my journalistic career – and I have had a few. The foreign desk banned me from mentioning the Guardian in calls to any Israeli officials.

"But if I am commissioned by the Guardian to write a piece, like this one, and an official asks me who I am writing for, what am I supposed to say?" I asked incredulous.

I was told: "We don't care – just don't mention the Guardian. Things are difficult for us and Suzanne right now, and we don't need you making more trouble for us."

It was a revealing moment. Far from the fearless watchdog of popular imagination, the Guardian showed its true colours. It was petrified of actually doing its self-professed job of monitoring the centres of power. And the Guardian is one of the most critical publications on Israel. Imagine how much more feeble the rest are, if Guardian staff are so fearful of incurring the wrath of Israeli officials.

Time for the Guardian to step up

The Guardian now needs to make amends to Loewenstein, rather than allowing itself to be implicated in Israel's ugly McCarthyism. It could stand in journalistic solidarity with him. It would not take much, just a simple act of journalistic courage and refusal to allow Israel to control who gets to report on the region.

The Guardian could do it by giving Loewenstein official accreditation. That would remove the GPO's pretext for expelling him. It would not mean he was the paper's Jerusalem correspondent. It would simply be a declaration by the paper that it believes in a free press and does not want to see him silenced. Or is that too much to expect from the Guardian?

The Guardian is one of the most critical publications on Israel. Imagine how much more feeble the rest are, if Guardian staff are so fearful of incurring the wrath of Israeli officials

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Jonathan Cook won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His latest books are "Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East" (Pluto Press) and "Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair" (Zed Books). His website is www.jonathan-cook.net

CT

The Fox returns

Granville Williams explains why Rupert Murdoch's 21st Century Fox company should not be allowed to become sole owner of lucrative British satellite TV service

When Murdoch wanted to bid for another global media group, Time Warner, the company wasn't interested because of the lack of transparency into who actually pulls the strings in the Murdoch empire

Rupert Murdoch conjures up one of those sequences in television wild life programmes of a predator stealthily moving in to seize its prey. Forget that crafted image of the feeble, penitent, "humble" figure who appeared before the British House of Commons Media Select Committee in 2011 at the height of the phone-hacking scandal. Murdoch is a voracious media mogul.

Take these examples solely from the UK: false promises of an independent board for the Times when he was handed both that paper and the Sunday Times as a political reward by Margaret Thatcher in 1981; the move to Fortress Wapping after the brutal sacking of over 5,000 Fleet Street printworkers in January 1986; the use of predatory pricing in 1994 when he drastically reduced the price of his newspapers to successfully weaken his competitors. And now he moves in on his latest and most lucrative target – full control of Sky TV.

Murdoch apologists are wheeled out – former Sun editor David Yelland, former Culture Secretary John Whittingdale – to present slick arguments supporting the £11.7-billion bid for full control of Sky. The media landscape has changed since 2011, they say. News Corporation is now broken up with only 21st Century Fox bidding for full control of Sky, while all the newspapers are in a separate company, News Corp. And

anyway, there's more competition – look at Netflix, Amazon Prime and BT – and newspapers are a weakened force, undermined by Google and other online competitors.

Whittingdale is hardly an impartial observer. Back in 1996, he voted against his own government's Broadcasting Bill by supporting an amendment that would have allowed a publisher with more than 20 per cent of the national newspaper market to buy a TV company. He must have thought News International's interests were more important than his job as a Parliamentary Private Secretary, the job from which he was forced to resign for his rebellion.

Yes, some things have changed: Wendy Deng has gone and Jerry Hall is the new Mrs Murdoch, but the fundamentals of Rupert Murdoch's media power, and how he operates, haven't. The first point is that both 21st Century Fox and News Corp are owned by the Murdoch clan. It's a family affair and that's why, when Murdoch wanted to bid for another global media group, Time Warner, the company wasn't interested because of the lack of transparency into who actually pulls the strings in the Murdoch empire. It's illusory to suggest that Murdoch and his two sons don't have day-to-day control over all of their media assets. James Murdoch, for example, is both chief executive of 21st Century Fox and chairman of Sky, and Rupert Murdoch is executive chairman of News

Caricature: Donkeyhotey – www.flickr.com/photos/donkeyhotey/5605687303



RUPERT MURDOCH: Like a predator who “stealthily moves in to seize its prey.”

Corp and his son Lachlan is co-chairman.

Secondly, while media companies often spend enormous sums of money lobbying to influence media policy, the Murdoch project is different: politics and business are central to it. Murdoch’s world view is right-wing, anti-trade union, interventionist and opportunist, and he deploys the power he has accrued through his global media group to promote his destructive political agenda by direct interventions into politics.

There are lots of examples of this in David McKnight’s excellent book, *Murdoch’s Politics* but the most powerful is in his chapter, *The Road to Baghdad*, where he points out that in each of the countries forming the key military allies for the Iraq invasion of March 2003, the United States, Britain and Australia, News Corporation outlets “were vital in mobilising public support for their leaders . . . No coincidence at all was the uniformity of News Corporation’s media outlets’ support for the war: Murdoch had insisted on it.”

In the UK he has supported both Thatch-

er’s Conservative and Blair’s New Labour governments, but the key point is that such support is conditional on reciprocal favours. Thatcher’s government waived any reference to the Monopoly and Mergers Commission when he took over the *Times* and *Sunday Times*. Murdoch comments, in a footnote in Charles Moore’s biography of Thatcher, “Probably because of the political stance of the Sun, she knew where I stood. I’m sure Biffen (John Biffen, the trade minister) must have got instructions or just read the tea leaves.” In fact Murdoch met Thatcher at Chequers on 4 January 1981 to clear the deal. It wasn’t tea leaves but a face-to-face meeting with Mrs T that clinched the deal.

His influence over the three Blair governments is summed up in the chilling observation by Lance Price, media adviser to Tony Blair, who wrote in 2006, “I have never met Mr Murdoch, but at times when I worked in Downing Street he seemed like the 24th member of the cabinet. His voice was rarely heard . . . but his presence was always felt.”

The pattern of surreptitious, behind the scenes lobbying was exemplified during the BSKyB takeover which revealed the close links between Cameron, Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt and the Murdoch machine. This time, in September, Theresa May met Murdoch privately in New York during a 36-hour flying visit to New York. Nothing has changed. Murdoch waits for the opportunity and pounces.

It is frankly grotesque for him to assert, “I have made it a principle all my life never to ask for anything from any prime minister.”

We have to be clear. We are not in the same situation as 2011. Then, on a wave of revulsion over the industrial-scale use of phone hacking by a media organisation nominally under the control of James Murdoch, the bid for BSKyB was blown away. The timing of the new bid is not accidental. Murdoch has launched it at a time of post-Brexit political uncertainty and the slump in sterling (what attitude will the Scottish National Party take to the bid: the Sun sup-

It is frankly grotesque for Murdoch to assert, “I have made it a principle all my life never to ask for anything from any prime minister”

MEDIA WATCH / 3

Handing full control of Sky to the Murdoch empire will be another boost to their power and influence over UK media, politics, and culture

ported the SNP in Scotland in the 2015 general election?).

The bid proposal announced late on Friday afternoon, December 9, was followed six days later with 21st Century Fox's formal bid to shareholders. Reports have suggested that European competition authorities will not be formally notified of Murdoch's bid for the rest of Sky until late February/March at the earliest. Once this formal notification happens, the Culture Secretary, Karen Bradley, will have 10 days to decide whether to issue a public interest intervention notice and refer the matter to Ofcom.

We need to campaign on a number of fronts.

Firstly, it is crucial that the second part of the Leveson inquiry into police and press corruption goes ahead. The Culture Secretary's diversionary consultation concludes on January 10, but News International and other organisations are fiercely resisting any move towards action on this front. Murdoch's tabloid, the Sun, with sales of 1.6-million, has already published three articles urging its readers to email the consultation calling for Leveson 2 to be cancelled. The reason is very simple. Look at some of the terms of reference for the second stage:

- To inquire into the extent of unlawful or improper conduct within News International, other newspaper organisations and, as appropriate, other organisations within the media, and by those responsible for holding personal data.

- To inquire into the extent of corporate governance and management failures at News International and other newspaper organisations, and the role, if any, of politicians, public servants and others in relation to any failure to investigate wrongdoing at News International

Leveson2 will inevitably mean more negative publicity for the Murdoch clan and their media operations, something they can ill afford at the same time as the Sky bid.

Secondly, online activists, media reform organisations, trade unions and unaligned

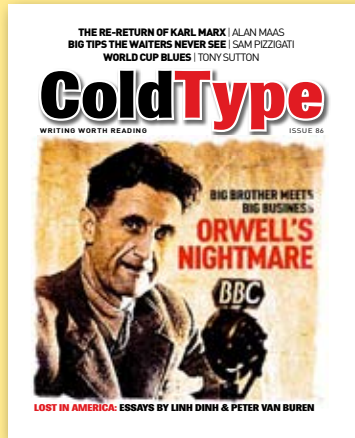
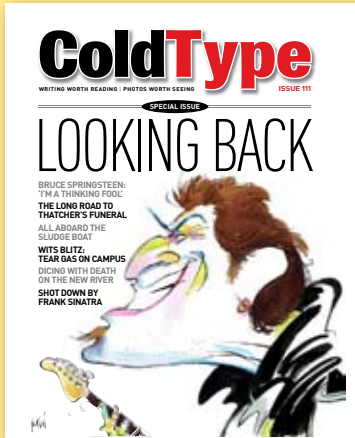
individuals uncomfortable with the disruptive role Murdoch's media play in our democratic life need to mobilise quickly. We have to block the Murdoch takeover of Sky and that requires a political intervention. The former Labour leader, Ed Milliband, made a powerful speech in the House of Commons on December 21: "This bid shows the Murdochs have learned nothing and think they can get away with anything," he said. The Labour Party leadership must also play an active role in building opposition to the Sky takeover.

A reference to Ofcom is essential so that real political and regulatory concerns about a Murdoch-controlled Sky are addressed. These include the fact that Sky is headed by James Murdoch, whom Ofcom criticised in September 2012: it concluded that James Murdoch "repeatedly fell short of the conduct to be expected of him as a chief executive officer and chairman." The market power that Sky, as part of a global media group, will be able to deploy to bid for top-flight sport, TV shows and movies is ringing alarm bells. The fact is that Sky produces little which is distinctive but uses its financial clout to sign exclusive continent-wide deals with HBO and Showtime for programmes which can only be viewed on the satellite subscription channel. UK and European broadcasters fear they will be unable to compete in future. Murdoch also has form through the cross-promotion between his broadcast and newspaper interests. Crucially, the fate of Sky News, which would be part of a media group closely aligned with the conservative, politically partisan Fox News is also a cause for concern.

This case raises key issues about media diversity and plurality. We already have a powerful bloc of right-wing media owners in the UK national newspaper market. Handing full control of Sky to the Murdoch empire will be another boost to their power and influence over UK media, politics, and culture. This will be a key battle we have to fight and win in 2017. **CT**

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Above Bushwick, Brooklyn, 2005. A warning sign from the Latin Kings gang to a snitch. he was found dead.

Right: Bushwick, Brooklyn, 2003. He used to be a crack dealer and then he became a crackhead. He lost his eye in a street fight.

Facing Page, right: BedfordStuyvesant, Brooklyn, 2004. This tough guy is doing life for murder now.



IN THE PICTURE



Projects, BedfordStuyvesant, Brooklyn, 2003. This pitbull was trained to fight by the owner's uncle. The dog bit the guy's baby sister so they put him down.

Lost in New York

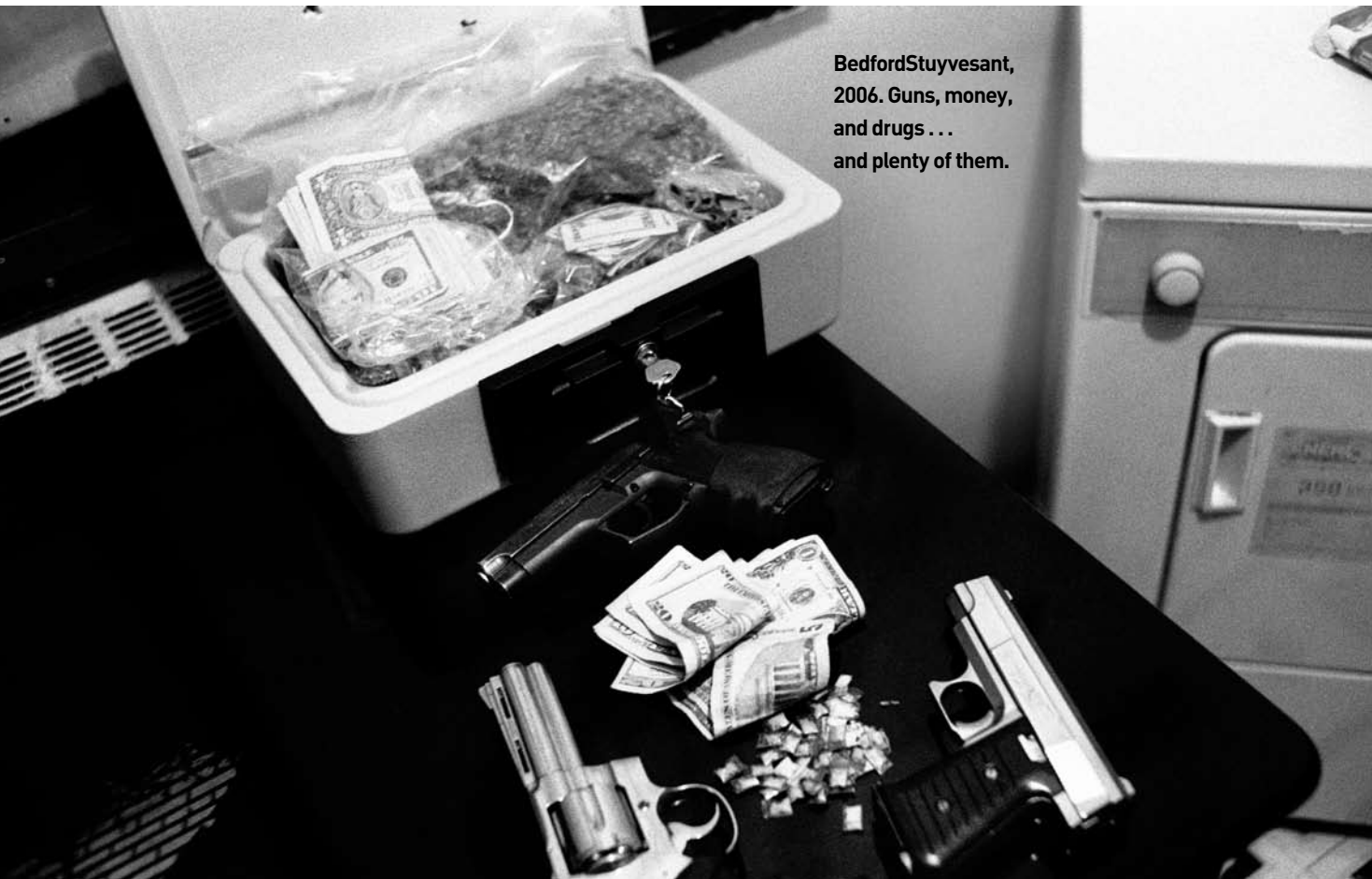
Photographs from a Third World hellhole that just happens to be right inside the richest city in the world. **Boogie** ventures into the violent underworld of New York City

The stark, bleak, images grab and hold your attention. A dead rat hanging from a street sign forecasts a grisly end for an aberrant gang member; a gang banger rolls his staring glass eye in his mouth; gun-strutting young men preen behind erratic, but deadly, machine guns; innocent children play in hellish crackhouses.

You could probably accept these scenes of depravity were the photographs taken in a war-torn, Third World whirlpool of fear. But they weren't. The scenes are from the Bushwick, Bedford-Stuy-



IN THE PICTURE



BedfordStuyvesant,
2006. Guns, money,
and drugs . . .
and plenty of them.

vesant and Queensbridge suburbs of New York City, where the rule of law depends on who's holding the sawn-off shotgun.

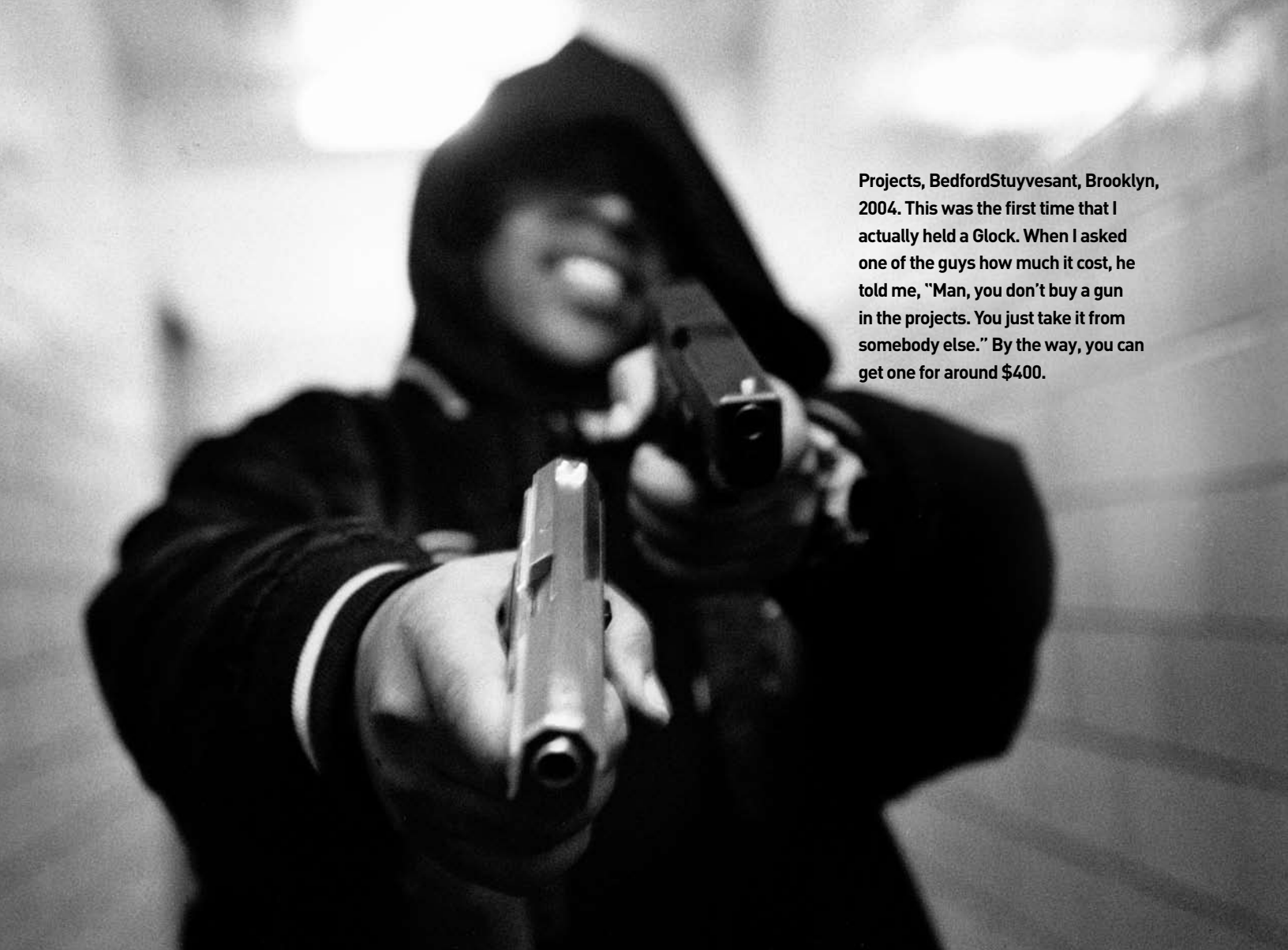
These stark photographs, along with many others that are just as discomfiting, are taken from the 10th anniversary reissue by powerHouse Books, of the ironically-titled monograph, *It's All Good*, by Serbian-born, Brooklyn-based photographer Boogie, who gained access into a world into which few outsiders dare to venture, a world of crackheads, junkies, and gangsters.

From the cops patrolling the project roofs to addicts overdosing on the streets, *It's All Good* chronicles ghetto life in stark, heart-stopping images and intense testimonials. It's a place few will leave and most will stay, a place where escape is one rock, one shot, one Glock away – lost in New York City.

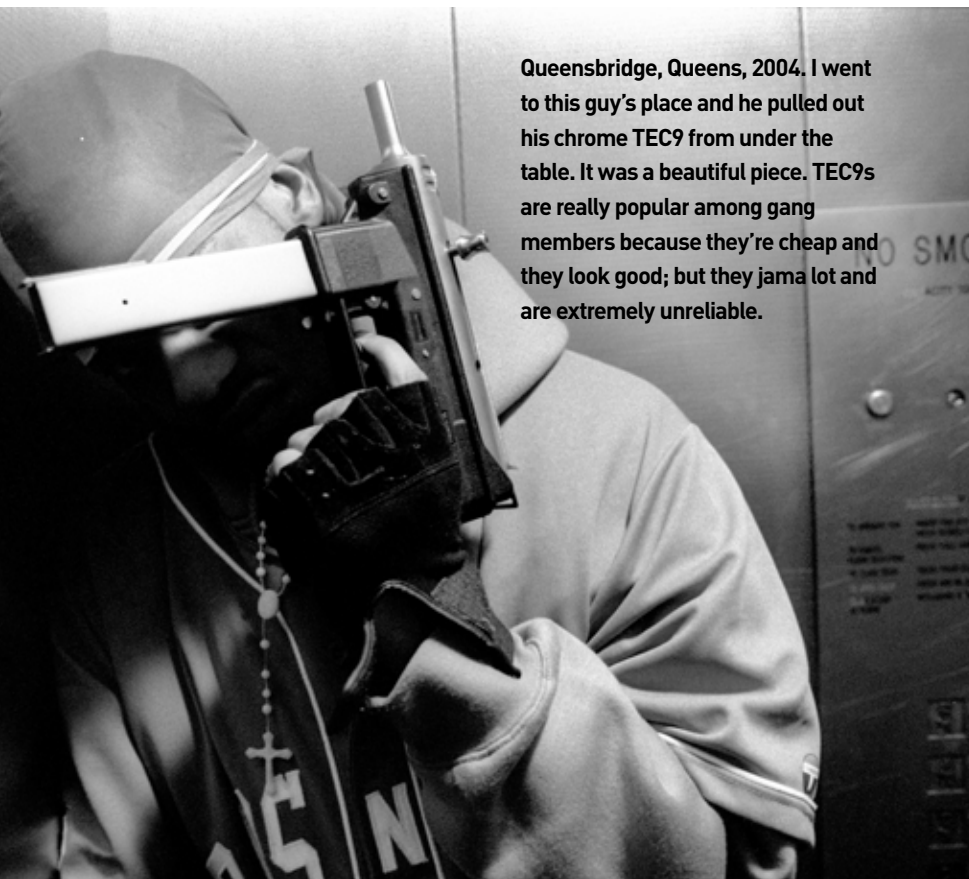
Tony Sutton



BedfordStuyvesant, 2006. After the first edition of *It's All Good* came out, I took it to the gangsters and they loved it. Then they took me to a safe house, an apartment in the projects where they kept their money, guns, and ammo, all in a bunch of fireproof cases . . . I told them, "WTF, I needed that for the book!" They said, "Well, you could've put all of us in jail and you didn't, now we know we can trust you."



Projects, BedfordStuyvesant, Brooklyn, 2004. This was the first time that I actually held a Glock. When I asked one of the guys how much it cost, he told me, "Man, you don't buy a gun in the projects. You just take it from somebody else." By the way, you can get one for around \$400.



Queensbridge, Queens, 2004. I went to this guy's place and he pulled out his chrome TEC9 from under the table. It was a beautiful piece. TEC9s are really popular among gang members because they're cheap and they look good; but they jama lot and are extremely unreliable.



IT'S ALL GOOD

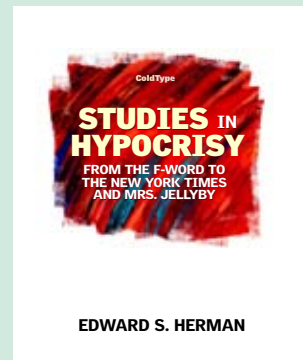
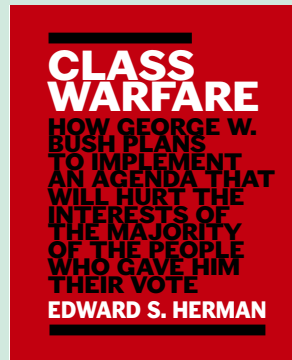
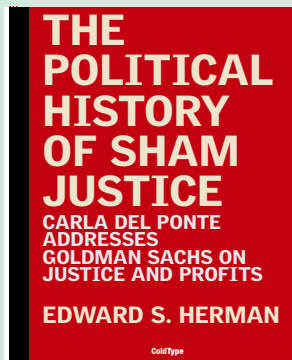
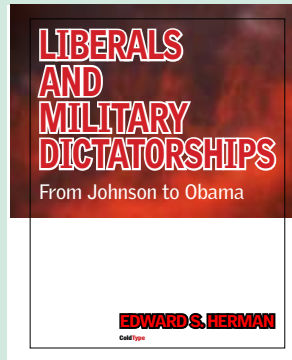
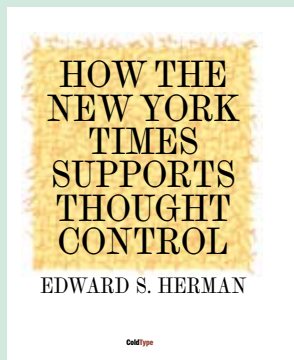
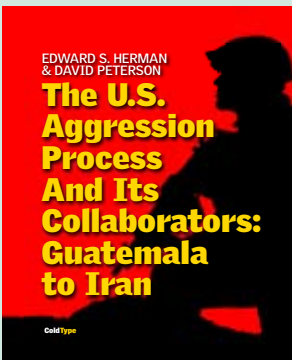
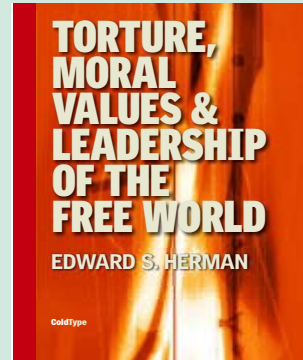
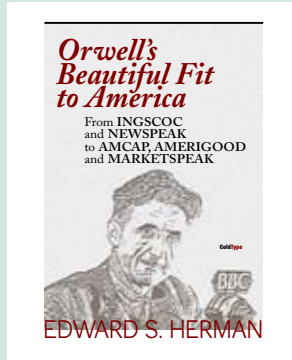
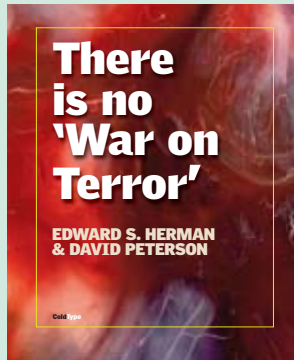
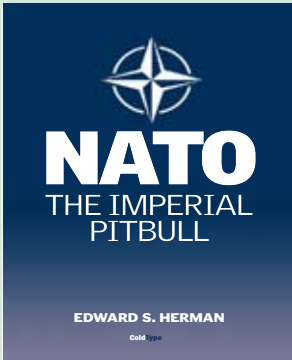
Boogie

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Has the war in Syria also destroyed journalism?

Ramzy Baroud discusses questions raised by the liberation of Aleppo

When veteran war reporter Robert Fisk has to construct his argument regarding the siege of Aleppo based on watching video footage, then one can truly comprehend the near impossibility of adequate media coverage of the war in Syria.

In a recent article in the London Independent, Fisk reflects on the siege, uprising and atrocious Nazi massacres in Warsaw, Poland in 1944. The terribly high cost of that war leads him to reject the French assertion that the current siege in Aleppo is the “worst massacre since World War Two.”

“Why do we not see the defending fighters, as we do on the Warsaw films? Why are we not told about their political allegiance, as we most assuredly are on the Warsaw footage? Why do we not see ‘rebel’ military hardware – as well as civilian targets – being hit by artillery and air attack as we do on the Polish newsreels?” he asks, further demonstrating what he perceives to be the flaw of such a comparison.

Not that Fisk doubts that pictures of the dead and wounded children in eastern Aleppo are real; his argument is largely against the one-sidedness of the coverage, of demonising one party, while sparing another.

Without reserve, I always find comparing massacres – to find out which is worse – tasteless, if not inhumane. What is the point in

this, aside from mitigating the effect of a terrible tragedy, by comparing it to a hypothetically much greater tragedy? Or, as the French have done, perhaps exaggerating the human toll to create the type of fear that often leads to reckless political and military action?

The French and other NATO countries have used this tactic repeatedly in the past. In fact, this is how the war on Libya was concocted, purportedly to stave off the imminent Tripoli ‘genocide’ and Benghazi ‘bloodbath.’ The Americans used it in Iraq, successfully. The Israelis have perfected it in Gaza.

In fact, the United States’ intervention in Iraq was always tied to some sort of imagined global threat that, unsurprisingly, was never proven. Former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, was so eager to take part in the conquest of Iraq in 2003 that he contrived intelligence alleging that Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, was able to deploy weapons of mass destruction within 45 minutes from the moment such an order was given. The US went even further: it was only recently revealed that the US had hired a London-based firm, Bell Pottinger, to create fake al-Qaeda videos and news reports that were designed to appear as if written by legitimate Arabic media.

The propaganda videos were ‘personally approved’ by the commander of the US-led coalition forces in Iraq at the time, General

I always find comparing massacres – to find out which is worse – tasteless, if not inhumane. What is the point in this, aside from mitigating the effect of a terrible tragedy, by comparing it to a hypothetically much greater tragedy?

LOSING TRUTH

Is it too much to ask, then, that we learn from those dreadful mistakes, to understand that when all is said and done, nothing will remain but mass graves and grieving nations?

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Ramzy Baroud has been writing about the Middle East for over 20 years. He is an internationally-syndicated columnist, a media consultant, an author of several books and the founder of *PalestineChronicle.com*. His latest book is *My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story* (Pluto Press, London). His website is: ramzybaroud.net

David Petraeus, Salon and others reported. We still do not know the specific content of many of these videos and to what extent such material, which cost US tax payers \$540-million dollars, influenced events on the ground and our understanding of these events.

Considering the high financial cost and the fact that the company worked directly from inside Baghdad's Camp Victory, side-by-side with high-ranking US officials, one can only imagine the degree of deceit imparted upon innocent viewers and readers for years.

Compounded with the fact that the whole reason behind the war was a lie, the then Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, had no intention of ever informing reporters of what was really transpiring on the ground, and that countless reporters agreed to be embedded with US-British forces, thus further contributing to the one-sided narrative. One is left to wonder if any truth ever emerged from Iraq.

Then, again, we know that hundreds of thousands have died in that catastrophic military adventure, that Iraq is not better off, and that thousands more are still being killed because this is what happens when countries are invaded, destabilised, hurriedly reassembled and then left to lick their wounds, alone. The chaotic violence and sectarianism in Iraq are the direct outcome of the US invasion and occupation, which were constructed on official lies and dishonest media reporting.

Is it too much to ask, then, that we learn from those dreadful mistakes, to understand that when all is said and done, nothing will remain but mass graves and grieving nations? As for the lies that enable wars, and allow the various sides to clinch on their straw arguments of selected morality, few ever have the intellectual courage to take responsibility when they are proven wrong. We simply move on, uncaring for the victims of our intellectual squabbles.

"The extreme bias shown in foreign media coverage of similar events in Iraq and Syria will be a rewarding subject for PhD

students looking at the uses and abuses of propaganda down the ages," wrote war reporter, Patrick Cockburn. He is right, of course, but as soon as his report on media bias was published, he was attacked and dismissed by both sides on social media. From their perspective, a proper position would be for him to completely adopt the version of events as seen by one side, and totally ignore the other.

Yet, with both sides of the war having no respect for media or journalists – the list of journalists killed in Syria keeps on growing – no impartial journalist is allowed to carry out his or her work in accordance with the minimum standards of reporting. Thus, the 'truth' can only be gleaned based on deductive reasoning – as many of us have successfully done, reporting on Iraq and Palestine.

Of course, there will always been the self-tailored activist-journalist-propagandist variety who will continue to cheer for death and destruction in the name of whatever ideology they choose to follow. They abide by no reasoning, but their own convenient logic – that which is only capable of demonising their enemies and lionizing their friends. Unfortunately, these media trolls are the ones shaping the debate on much of what is happening in the Middle East today.

While the coverage of war in the past has given rise to many daring journalists – Seymour Hersh in Vietnam, Tariq Ayyoub in Iraq, photo-journalist Zorah Miller, and hundreds more – the war in Syria is destroying journalistic integrity and, with it, our readers' ability to decipher one of the most convoluted conflicts of the modern era. In Syria, as in Iraq and other warring regions in the Middle East, the 'truth' is not shaped by facts, but opinions, themselves fashioned by blind allegiances, not truly humanistic principles or even simple common sense.

"Loyalty to petrified opinions never yet broke a chain or freed a human soul in this world — and never will," wrote Mark Twain many years ago. It was true then, as it is true in the Middle East today. **CT**

Putin and I

By **Thomas S. Harrington**

I was talking with someone the other day and they said: “Your analyses of things are good, but I am less enamoured of Putin than you are.”

So let’s get a few things clear. I am not enamoured of Putin. He is a cold calculating geo-political strategist who, I am fairly sure, has resorted to strategic murder at times to carry out some of this goals. Since I am not particularly drawn to either cold calculators or murderers it is hard to say how I would be “enamoured” of Putin.

Nowadays it seems, however, that murder and statesmanship seem to go hand-in-hand. By his own admission, Obama calculatingly murders foreign opponents people every Tuesday. Obama has murdered his own citizens by his own admission. Indeed he has drones flying over people in several countries poised to commit murder at any time on his say so.

But in addition to – like Putin – ordering strategic murders (albeit in demonstrably much larger numbers than his Russian counterpart), Obama (and his immediate predecessor as president) have arrogated to themselves and their office several prerogatives that the Russian president could never dream of carrying out and has made no demonstration of wanting to carry out.

1) Destroying entire countries on false pretexts (Iran, Libya and Syria) and leaving their people to rot in the ruined remains.

2) Sponsoring coups on the doorsteps of his major geo-political rivals (Georgia, Ukraine). Last time I checked, neither Canada nor Mexico had been taken over by Putin-sponsored coups. Indeed, the very thought of it is preposterous. But the exact equivalence of this is exactly what the US has done. And we call Putin the aggressor!

3) Organising the world’s second- or third-biggest economic bloc, the puppet-laden EU to adopt sanction designed to cripple the Russian economy, even though Russia, despite what you might have read, has neither invaded no one nor threatened no one with invasions.

Though you may find it hard to believe through he

fog of propaganda, the people of the Crimea overwhelmingly wanted to be reunited with Russia and expressed this idea in a clear vote to that effect. No guns were fired. No smart bombs used.

Rather, people voted to rejoin the people whose language they overwhelmingly speak as their first language, whose culture they overwhelmingly consider their own, and whose salaries and government pensions are roughly the double of what they got as citizens of the Ukraine. What silly irrational people. Must have been all those guns pointed at their heads that made them do it.

4) Arrogating the right to spy on every device-using citizen in the word, down to knowing the most intimate details of their personal lives. Last time I checked Putin was not doing this.

5) Unilaterally abrogating the START 2 nuclear arms treaty (accomplished by Bush in 2003) so the US could seize what it considered its “unipolar moment” to establish unassailable nuclear superiority over Russia once and for all. Imagine if the Russians had done this. We’d all be up in arms (pardon the pun)

I could go on. And I will if asked.

So, am I enamoured of Putin?

No Putin is a man given to the occasional strategic violence and murder. But his record of using murder and strategic violence, as well as his record of coercive threats to other countries and invasions of other countries pales in comparison to the record of the US.

Indeed, beside the US, he looks rather good, which is not a statement of my love for him but rather how inured all of us have become to the insouciantly murderous and aggressive ways of our government. **CT**

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Thomas S. Harrington is a professor of Hispanic Studies at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, and the author of *Public Intellectuals and Nation Building in the Iberian Peninsula, 1900–1925: The Alchemy of Identity*, published in 2014 by Bucknell University Press.

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