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ISSUE 144

“RISE, LIKE LIONS AFTER SLUMBER

Photo: Ron Fassbender



“YE ARE MANY . . . THEY ARE FEW”

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ColdType 2017



POWER PLAY: Hamburg cops prepare for a night of anarchy before the Hamburg G20 summit.

Photo: Thorsten Schröder, Flickr.com

Hamburg: The G20 from Hell

Pepe Escobar reports on a 'noxious military dystopia' disguised as a global summit

While leaders worked the rooms, gossiped, listened to the Ode to Joy and indulged in the proverbial banquet, outside there was burning and looting

A future history of the G20 in Hamburg might start with a question posed by President Donald Trump – actually his speechwriter – a few days earlier in Warsaw: “The fundamental question of our time is whether the West has the will to survive.”

What initially amounted to a juvenile/reductionist clash of civilisations tirade written by Stephen Miller – the same one who penned the “American carnage” epic on Trump’s inauguration as well as the original Muslim travel ban – might actually have

found some answers in Hamburg.

The G20 as a whole was a noxious military dystopia disguised as a global summit. “Welcome to Hell” and other assorted protests, on multiple levels, were answering another Trump-in-Warsaw question: “Do we have the desire and the courage to preserve our civilisation in the face of those who would subvert and destroy it?”

While leaders worked the rooms, gossiped, listened to the Ode to Joy and indulged in the proverbial banquet, outside there was burning and looting; a vicious, street-level



FACE-OFF: Protesters sit down in front of the Hamburg riot police.

Photo: Tim Lüddemann,, Flickr.com



Photo: Rasande Tyskar

HELLFIRE: Advance notice of the G20 protests. Photo: Rasande Tyskar, Flickr.com

commentary not only about their concept of “civilisation” but also about Trump-in-Warsaw conveniently forgetting to say that it’s US and NATO’s “policies” which end up generating the terror blowback that threaten “civilisation”, “our values” and our “will to survive.”

And it will get worse. Starting next year, a Bundeswehr/NATO joint production, a ghost town built in a military training camp in Sachsen-Anhalt – incidentally, not far from Hamburg — will become a prime site teaching urban warfare. Austerity is far from over, and euro-peasants are bound to continue rebelling en masse.

The temptation is sweet to identify the emerging new order as a Putin-Xi-Trump-Merkel world. But not yet – and not yet as multilateral. What we’re seeing is the trappings of multilateralism, but not yet the real

War Summit

Everyone knows it, everyone agrees, but that element of Washington's "our way or the highway" geoeconomic policy won't vanish anytime soon



BLACK POWER: Cops spray their way through a crowd of protesters.

Photo: Thorsten Schröder / Flickr.com

deal – resisted by Washington on myriad levels.

Frau Merkel wanted “her” summit to focus on three crucial issues: climate change, free trade and management of mass global migration – none particularly appealing to Trump, a believer in a Darwinian approach to global politics. So what the world got was an unexciting muddle through – inbuilt contradictions included.

The Boss, once again, was Chinese President Xi Jinping, calling on G20 members to privilege an open global economy, strengthen economic policy coordination, and be aware of the enormous risks inherent in financial turbo-capitalism. He duly called for a “multilateral trade regime.”

To back it up, China deftly applied giant panda diplomacy – offering two of them, Meng Meng and Jiao Qing, to the Berlin zoo as a friendship gesture. Merkel’s commentary was not so cuddly, “Beijing views Europe as an Asian peninsula. We see it differently.”

Well, for all practical purposes, what Chinese and German business interests do see

further on down the road is Eurasia integration – with the 21st-century New Silk Roads, aka Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) starting in eastern China and ending in the Ruhr valley. Now that’s a practical definition of how a “multilateral trade regime” should work. Add to it the just-clinched, massive trade deal between the EU and Japan. For all practical purposes, geopolitically and geoeconomically, Germany is moving East.

The BRICs nations – China, India, Russia, Brazil and South Africa – met on the sidelines and, what else, called for a “rules-based, transparent, non-discriminatory, open and inclusive multilateral trading system.”

President Putin went one up – stressing financial sanctions under political pretexts hurt mutual confidence and damage the global economy. Everyone knows it, everyone agrees, but that element of Washington’s “our way or the highway” geoeconomic policy won’t vanish anytime soon.

And then we had the anti-globalisation group Attac, criticising Merkel for staging a “cynical production.” As much as the chan-

cellor was positioning herself as “leader of the free world,” the German government “is actually pursuing an aggressive export surplus strategy.” And here we had left/progressive Attac totally aligned with Donald Trump.

The sherpas in Hamburg were involved in their own brand of “Welcome to Hell.” Merkel’s euphemism – “tense discussions” – masked a de facto mutiny against the US sherpas on both climate change and trade, bitterly fighting to the last minute a US clause on Washington “helping” countries access clean fossil fuels.

In the end we got the proverbial muddle through. Here’s the paragraph in the final communiqué that singles out the Trump administration’s decision to abandon the Paris agreement: “We take note of the decision of the United States of America to withdraw from the Paris Agreement. The United States of America announced it will immediately cease the implementation of its current nationally-determined contribution and affirms its strong commitment to an approach that lowers emissions while supporting economic growth and improving energy security needs. The United States of America states it will endeavour to work closely with other countries to help them access and use fossil fuels more cleanly and efficiently and help deploy renewable and other clean energy sources, given the importance of energy access and security in their nationally determined contributions.”

Directly following that paragraph is this one, concerning the G19: “The leaders of the other G20 members state that the Paris Agreement is irreversible. We reiterate the importance of fulfilling the UNFCCC commitment by developed countries in providing means of implementation including financial resources to assist developing countries with respect to both mitigation and adaptation actions in line with Paris outcomes and note the OECD’s report Investing In Climate, Investing In Growth. We reaffirm our strong commitment to the Paris Agree-

ment, moving swiftly towards its full implementation in accordance with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances and, to this end, we agree to the G20 Hamburg Climate and Energy Action Plan for Growth as set out in the Annex.”

In Hamburg, the Trump Organisation was all over the place. First Daughter Ivanka even took Daddy’s chair at the forum for fleeting moments while he was away on bilaterals. Yet she did perform on substance, unveiling a \$300-million programme at the World Bank providing loans, mentoring and access to the financial markets for women-led start-ups in the developing world. Both the White House and the World Bank credited Ivanka for the idea.

Away from hellish issues, under a sunnier perspective, wind and solar power are set to become the cheapest form of power generation across the G20 by 2030. Already in 2017, over a third of German electricity has come from wind, solar, biomass and hydro, at 35 percent (in the US is only 15 percent). So Germany is not green, yet – but it’s getting there fast.

In Hamburg, Merkel collected a win on climate change, a relative win on trade (with the US self-excluded), but a miserable loss on mass migration. No NATO power at the G20 would have had the balls to publicly connect the dots between ghastly US/NATO wars in Afghanistan, Libya, the Syrian proxy war generating millions of refugees for whom the only hope is Europe.

Geopolitically, Washington is de facto cutting off Germany while England has zero power left. The Trump administration considers both Germany and Japan as enemies who are destroying US industry through currency rigging. In the medium term, it’s fair to expect Germany to slowly but surely re-approach Russia. As much as Washington’s unipolar moment may be fading fast, the Game of Thrones in the G20 realm is just beginning.

No NATO power at the G20 would have had the balls to publicly connect the dots between ghastly US/NATO wars in Afghanistan, Libya, the Syrian proxy war generating millions of refugees for whom the only hope is Europe

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Pepe Escobar
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CT

Pursuing some hard truths in Syria

A UN agency says it found sarin in victims of an April 4 attack in Syria, but the lack of a plausible weapon and unreliability of pro-rebel witnesses make the pursuit of truth difficult, writes WMD expert **Scott Ritter**

Mr Hersh's article has come under attack from many circles, the most vociferous of these being a UK-based citizen activist named Eliot Higgins

On the night of June 26, the White House Press Secretary released a statement, via Twitter, that, “the United States has identified potential preparations for another chemical weapons attack by the Assad regime that would likely result in the mass murder of civilians, including innocent children.”

The tweet went on to declare that, “the activities are similar to preparations the regime made before its April 4 chemical weapons attack,” before warning that if “Mr. Assad conducts another mass murder attack using chemical weapons, he and his military will pay a heavy price.”

A Pentagon spokesman backed up the White House tweet, stating that US intelligence had observed “activity” at a Syrian air base that indicated “active preparation for chemical weapons use” was underway. The air base in question, Shayrat, had been implicated by the United States as the origin of aircraft and munitions used in an alleged chemical weapons attack on the village of Khan Sheikhun on April 4. The observed activity was at an aircraft hangar that had been struck by cruise missiles fired by US Navy destroyers during a retaliatory strike on April 6.

The White House statement came on the heels of the publication of an article by Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Seymour Hersh in the German newspa-

per Die Welt which questions, among many things, the validity of the intelligence underpinning the allegations levelled at Syria regarding the events of April 4 in and around Khan Sheikhun. *(In the interests of full disclosure, I assisted Mr. Hersh in fact-checking certain aspects of his article; I was not a source of any information used in his piece.)*

Not surprisingly, Mr Hersh's article has come under attack from many circles, the most vociferous of these being a UK-based citizen activist named Eliot Higgins who, through his Bellingcat blog, has been widely cited by media outlets in the US and UK as a source of information implicating the Syrian government in that alleged April chemical attack on Khan Sheikhun.

Neither Hersh nor Higgins possesses definitive proof to bolster their respective positions: the latter draws upon assertions made by supposed eyewitnesses backed up with forensic testing of materials alleged to be sourced to the scene of the attack that indicate the presence of Sarin, a deadly nerve agent, while the former relies upon anonymous sources within the US military and intelligence establishments who provide a counter narrative to the official US government position. What is clear, however, is that both cannot be right – either the Syrian government conducted a chemical weapons attack on Khan Sheikhun, or it didn't. There is no middle ground.



REAL OR FAKE? White Helmets clean up after an alleged chemical weapons attack by the Syrian government at Khan Sheikhun.

Search for truth

The search for truth is as old as civilisation. Philosophers throughout the ages have struggled with the difficulties of rationalising the beginning of existence, and the relationships between the one and the many.

Aristotle approached this challenge through what he called the development of potentiality to actuality, which examined truth in terms of the causes that act on things. This approach is as relevant today as it was two millennia prior, and its application to the problem of ascertaining fact from fiction regarding Khan Sheikhun goes far in helping unpack the White House statements regarding Syrian chemical preparations and the Hersh-Higgins debate.

According to Aristotle, there were four causes that needed to be examined in the search for truth – material, efficient, formal and final. The material cause represents the element out of which an object is created. In terms of the present discussion, one could speak of the material cause in terms of the

actual chemical weapon alleged to have been used at Khan Sheikhun.

The odd thing about both the Khan Sheikhun attack and the current White House statements, however, is that no one has produced any physical evidence of there actually having been a chemical weapon, let alone what kind of weapon was allegedly employed. Like a prosecutor trying a murder case without producing the actual murder weapon, Syria's accusers have assembled a case that is purely circumstantial – plenty of dead and dying victims, but nothing that links these victims to an actual physical object.

Human Rights Watch (HRW), drawing upon analysis of images brought to them by the volunteer rescue organisation White Helmets, of fragments allegedly recovered from the scene of the attack, has claimed that the material cause of the Khan Sheikhun event is a Soviet-made KhAB-250 chemical bomb, purpose-built to deliver Sarin nerve agent. There are several issues with the HRW as-

The odd thing about both the Khan Sheikhun attack and the current White House statements, however, is that no one has produced any physical evidence of there actually having been a chemical weapon, let alone what kind of weapon was allegedly employed

Whose Sarin?

If a KhAB-250, or any other air delivered chemical bomb, had been used at Khan Sheikhun, there would be significant physical evidence of that fact, including the totality of the bomb casing, the burster tube, the tail fin assembly, and parachute

essment.

First and foremost, there is no independent verification that the objects in question are what HRW claims, or that they were even physically present at Khan Sheikhun, let alone deposited there as a result of an air attack by the Syrian government. Moreover, the KhAB-250 bomb was never exported by either the Soviet or Russian governments, thereby making the provenance of any such ordnance in the Syrian inventory highly suspect.

Sarin is a non-persistent chemical agent whose military function is to inflict casualties through direct exposure. Any ordnance intended to deliver Sarin would, like the KhAB-250, be designed to disseminate the agent in aerosol form, fine droplets that would be breathed in by the victim, or coat the victim's skin.

In combat, the aircraft delivering Sarin munitions would be expected to minimise its exposure to hostile fire, flying low to the target at high speed. In order to have any semblance of military utility, weapons delivered in this fashion would require an inherent braking mechanism, such as deployable fins or a parachute, which would retard the speed of the weapon, allowing for a more concentrated application of the nerve agent on the intended target.

Chemical ordnance is not intended for precise strikes against point targets, but rather delivery of the agent to an area. For this reason, they are not dropped singly, but rather in large numbers. (The ab-250, for instance was designed to be delivered by a TU-22 bomber dropping 24 weapons on the same target.)

The weapon itself is not complex – a steel bomb casing with a small high explosive tube – the burster charge – running down its middle, equipped with a nose fuse designed to detonate on contact with the ground or at a predetermined altitude. Once detonated, the burster charge causes the casing to break apart, disseminating fine droplets of agent over the target. The resulting explosion is

very low order, a pop more than a bang – virtually none of the actual weapon would be destroyed as a result, and its component parts, readily identifiable as such, would be deposited in the immediate environs.

In short, if a KhAB-250, or any other air delivered chemical bomb, had been used at Khan Sheikhun, there would be significant physical evidence of that fact, including the totality of the bomb casing, the burster tube, the tail fin assembly, and parachute. The fact that none of this exists belies the notion that an air-delivered chemical bomb was employed by the Syrian government against Khan Sheikhun.

Continuing along the lines of Aristotle's exploration of the relationship between the potential and actual, the efficient cause represents the means by which the object is created. In the context of Khan Shiekhun, the issue (ie, object) isn't the physical weapon itself, but rather its manifestation on the ground in terms of cause and effect. Nothing symbolised this more than the disturbing images that emerged in the aftermath of the alleged chemical attack of civilian victims, many of them women and children. (It was these images that spurred President Trump into ordering the cruise missile attack on Shayrat air base.)

The White Helmet role

These images were produced by the White Helmet organisation as a by-product of the emergency response that transpired in and around Khan Sheikhun on April 4. It is this response, therefore, than can be said to constitute the efficient cause in any examination of potential to actuality regarding the allegations of the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government there.

The White Helmets came into existence in the aftermath of the unrest that erupted in Syria after the Arab Spring in 2012. They say they are neutral, but they have used their now-global platform as a humanitarian rescue unit to promote anti-regime themes and to encourage outside intervention to remove

the regime of Bashar al-Assad. By White Helmet's own admission, it is well-resourced, trained and funded by western NGOs and governments, including USAID (US Agency for International Development), which funded the group \$23-million as of 2016.

A UK-based company with strong links to the British Foreign Office, May Day Rescue, has largely managed the actual rescue aspects of the White Helmet's work. Drawing on a budget of tens of millions of dollars donated by foreign governments, including the US and UK, May Day Rescue oversees a comprehensive training program designed to bring graduates to the lowest standard – “light,” or Level One – for Urban Search and Rescue (USAR).

Personnel and units trained to the “light” standard are able to conduct surface search and rescue operations – they are neither trained nor equipped to rescue entrapped victims. Teams trained to this standard are not qualified to perform operations in a hazardous environment (such as would exist in the presence of a nerve agent such as Sarin).

The White Helmets have made their reputation through the dissemination of self-made videos ostensibly showing them in action inside Syria, rescuing civilians from bombed-out structures, and providing life-saving emergency medical care. (It should be noted that the eponymously named Oscar-nominated documentary showing the White Helmets in action was filmed entirely by the White Helmets themselves, which raises a genuine question of journalistic ethics. To the untrained eye, these videos are a dramatic representation of heroism in action. To the trained professional (I can offer my own experience as a Hazardous Materials Specialist with New York Task Force 2 USAR team), these videos represent de facto evidence of dangerous incompetence or, worse, fraud.

The bread and butter of the White Helmet's self-made reputation is the rescue of a victim – usually a small child – from beneath a pile of rubble, usually heavy reinforced concrete. First and foremost, as a “light” USAR

team, the White Helmets are not trained or equipped to conduct rescues of entrapped victims. Yet the White Helmet videos depict their rescue workers using excavation equipment and tools, such as pneumatic drills, to gain access to victims supposedly pinned under the weight of a collapsed building.

The techniques used by the White Helmets are not only technically wrong, but dangerous to anyone who might actually be trapped – the introduction of excavators to move debris, or the haphazard drilling and hammering into concrete in the immediate vicinity of a trapped victim, would invariably lead to a shifting if the rubble pile, crushing the trapped victim to death. In my opinion, the videos are pure theatre, either staged to impress an unwitting audience, or actually conducted with total disregard for the well-being of any real victims.

Likewise, the rescue of victims from a hazardous materials incident, especially one as dangerous as one involving a nerve agent as lethal as Sarin, is solely the purview of personnel and teams specifically equipped and trained for the task. “Light” USAR teams receive no hazardous materials training as part of their certification, and there is no evidence or even claim on the part of the White Helmets that they have undergone the kind of specialist training needed to effect a rescue in the case of an actual chemical weapons attack.

Greater Harm

This reality comes through on the images provided by the White Helmets of their actions in and around Khan Sheikhun on April 4. From the haphazard use of personal protective equipment (either nonexistent or employed in a manner that negates protection from potential exposure) to the handling of victims and so-called decontamination efforts, everything the White Helmets did was operationally wrong and would expose themselves and the victims they were ostensibly treating to even greater harm.

As was the case with their “rescues” of

The bread and butter of the White Helmet's self-made reputation is the rescue of a victim – usually a small child – from beneath a pile of rubble, usually heavy reinforced concrete

Whose Sarin?

We don't see the actual rescue at the scene of the event. What we get is grand theatre as bodies arrive at the field hospital, with lots of running to and fro and meaningless activity that would actually worsen the condition of the victims and contaminate the rescuers

victims in collapsed structures, I believe the rescue efforts of the White Helmets at Khan Sheikhun were a theatrical performance designed to impress the ignorant and ill-informed.

I'm not saying that nothing happened at Khan Sheikhun – obviously something did. But the White Helmets exploited whatever occurred, over-dramatising “rescues” and “decontamination” in staged theatrics that were captured on film and rapidly disseminated using social media in a manner designed to influence public opinion in the West.

We don't see the actual rescue at the scene of the event – bodies pulled from their homes, lying in the streets. What we get is grand theatre as bodies arrive at the field hospital, with lots of running to and fro and meaningless activity that would actually worsen the condition of the victims and contaminate the rescuers.

Through their actions, however, the White Helmets were able to breathe life into the overall narrative of a chemical weapons attack, distracting from the fact that no actual weapon existed and thus furthering the efficient cause by which the object – the nonexistent chemical weapon – was created.

Having defined the creation of the object (the nonexistent chemical weapon) and the means by which it was created (the flawed theatrics of the White Helmets), we move on to the third, or formal cause, which constitutes the expression of what the object is. In the case of Khan Sheikhun, this is best expressed by the results of forensic testing of samples allegedly taken from victims of the chemical attack, and from the scene of the attack itself. The organisation responsible for overseeing this forensic testing was the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, or OPCW.

Through its work, the OPCW has determined that the nerve agent Sarin, or a “Sarin-like substance,” was used at Khan Sheikhun, a result that would seemingly compensate

for both the lack of a bomb and the amateurish theatrics of the rescuers.

The problem, however, is that the OPCW is in no position to make that claim.

One of the essential aspects of the kind of forensic investigation carried out by organisations such as the OPCW – namely the application of scientific methods and techniques to the investigation of a crime – is the concept of “chain of custody” of any samples that are being evaluated.

This requires a seamless transition from the collection of the samples in question, the process of which must be recorded and witnessed, the sealing of the samples, the documentation of the samples, the escorted transportation of the samples to the laboratory, the confirmation and breaking of the seals under supervision, and the subsequent processing of the samples, all under supervision of the OPCW. Anything less than this means the integrity of the sample has been compromised – in short, there is no sample.

The OPCW acknowledges that its personnel did not gain access to Khan Sheikhun at any time. However, the investigating team states that it used connections with “parties with knowledge of and connections to the area in question,” to gain access to samples that were collected by “non-governmental organisations (NGOs)” which also provided representatives to be interviewed, and videos and images for the investigating team to review. The NGO used by the OPCW was none other than the White Helmets.

The process of taking samples from a contaminated area takes into consideration a number of factors designed to help create as broad and accurate a picture of the scene of the incident itself as well as protect the safety of the person taking the sample as well as the integrity of the crime scene itself (ie, reduce contamination).

There is no evidence that the White Helmets have received this kind of specialised training required for the taking of such samples. Moreover, the White Helmets are not an

extension of the OPCW – under no circumstances could any samples taken by White Helmet personnel and subsequently turned over to the OPCW be considered viable in terms of chain of custody. This likewise holds true for any biomedical samples evaluated by the OPCW – all such samples were either taken from victims who had been transported to Turkish hospitals, or provided by non-OPCW personnel in violation of chain of custody.

The dubious motive

Lastly, there is Aristotle's final cause, which represents the end for which the object is – namely, what was the ultimate purpose of the chemical weapons attack on Khan Sheikhun. To answer this question, one must remain consistent with the framework of examination of potential to actuality applied herein. In this, we find a commonality between the four causes whose linkage cannot be ignored when assessing the truth of what happened at Khan Sheikhun, namely the presence of a single entity – the White Helmets.

There are two distinct narratives at play when it comes to what happened in Khan Sheikhun. One, put forward by the governments of the United States, Great Britain, France, and supported by the likes of Bellingcat and the White Helmets, is that the Syrian government conducted a chemical weapons attack using a single air-delivered bomb on a civilian target.

The other, put forward by the governments of Russia and Syria, and sustained by the reporting of Seymour Hersh, is that the Syrian air force used conventional bombs to strike a military target, inadvertently releasing a toxic cloud from substances stored at that facility and killing or injuring civilians in Khan Sheikhun.

There can be no doubt that the very survival of the White Helmets as an organisation, and the cause they support (ie, regime change in Syria), has been furthered by the narrative they have helped

craft and sell about the events of April 4 in and around Khan Sheikhun. This is the living manifestation of Aristotle's final cause, the end for which this entire lie has been constructed.

The lack of any meaningful fact-based information to back up the claims of the White Helmets and those who sustain them, like the US government and Bellingcat, raises serious questions about the viability of the White House's latest pronouncements on Syria and allegations that it was preparing for a second round of chemical attacks.

If America has learned anything from its painful history with Iraq and the false allegations of continued possession of weapons of mass destruction on the part of the regime of Saddam Hussein, it is that to rush into military conflict in the Middle East based upon the unsustained allegations of an interested regional party (ie, Ahmed Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress) is a fool's errand.

It is up to the discerning public to determine which narrative about the events in Syria today they will seek to embrace: one supported by a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist who has made a career out of exposing inconvenient truths, from My Lai to Abu Ghraib and beyond, or one that collapses under Aristotle's development of potentiality to actuality analysis, as the manufactured story line promoted by the White Helmets demonstratively does. **CT**

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Scott Ritter is an ex-Marine Corps intelligence officer who served in the former Soviet Union implementing arms control treaties, in the Persian Gulf during Operation Desert Storm, and in Iraq overseeing the disarmament of WMD. He is the author of *Deal of the Century: How Iran Blocked the West's Road to War* (Clarity Press, 2017). This essay originally appeared in *The American Conservative* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/ex-weapons-inspector-trumps-sarin-claims-built-on-lie>

If America has learned anything, it is that to rush into military conflict in the Middle East based upon the unsustained allegations of an interested regional party (ie, Ahmed Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress) is a fool's errand

“Rise, like lions



after slumber . . .



<https://www.flickr.com/people/theweeklybul/>

Photo: Ron Fassbender

NOT ONE DAY MORE: Thousands of activists take to the streets in protest against UK Prime Minister Theresa May and her Tory party's despised austerity policy.

Shake your chains



Photo: Ron Fassbender

KILL AUSTERITY: Banners show the anger being felt at the way Theresa May's government is mismanaging the UK economy.

After the vote, the rebellion

UK rejects Theresa May and Tory party austerity as marchers salute prime minister-in-waiting Jeremy Corbyn

Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn told a massive anti-austerity march in London on July 1 that he intends to force – and win – another general election later this year. The march came just weeks after the June general election in which Tory leader Theresa May saw an expected rout of Labour turn into a minority government shorn up by a hasty billion pound deal with Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party.

The huge crowd assembled outside the headquarters of the BBC – the state broadcaster criticised by many as being anti-Labour during the election – before heading to a rally in Parliament Square with music and many speakers from other political parties and social movements. Corbyn's message to the crowd was: "We are the people, we are united and we are determined, we are not going to be divided or let austerity divide us. We are increasing in support and we are determined to force another election as soon as we can." **CT**

to earth like dew



Photo: Gerry Popplestone

KING CORBYN: Young marchers show their loyalty to the Labour Party leader – and his people-before-profits anti-austerity programme.

Ye are many – they



Photo: Julian Stallabrass

ANGRY WORDS: Marchers make it clear what they think of Theresa May and her government.

OUR PHOTOGRAPHERS

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Photo: Ron Fassbender



are few”

Headline from **The Masque of Anarchy**, written after the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester on August 16, 1819, by poet **Percy Bysshe Shelley**

Photo: Ron Fassbender



WE, THE PEOPLE: Jeremy Corbyn (above, beard) walks with the crowd before his speech at Parliament Square

Covering fire

The public inquiry into London's Grenfell Tower disaster will be a farce unless it examines the long-running assault on public protections, writes **George Monbiot**

Even before the public inquiry into London's Grenfell Tower disaster has begun, it looks like a stitch-up, its initial terms of reference set so narrowly that government policy remains outside the frame

We don't allow defendants in court cases to select the charges on which they will be tried. So why should the government set the terms of a public inquiry into its own failings? We don't allow criminal suspects to vet the trial judge. Why should the government approve the inquiry's chair?

Even before the public inquiry into London's Grenfell Tower disaster has begun, it looks like a stitch-up, its initial terms of reference set so narrowly that government policy remains outside the frame. An inquiry that honours the dead would investigate the wider causes of this crime. It would examine a governing ideology that sees torching public protections as a sacred duty.

Let me give you an example. On the morning of June 14, as the tower blazed, an organisation called the Red Tape Initiative convened for its pre-arranged discussion about building regulations. One of its tasks was to consider whether rules governing the fire resistance of cladding materials should be removed for the sake of construction industry profits.

Please bear with me while I explain what this initiative is and who runs it, as it's a perfect cameo of British politics. It's a government-backed body established "to grasp the opportunities" Brexit offers to cut "red tape:" a disparaging term for public protections. It's chaired by the Conservative MP Sir

Oliver Letwin, who has claimed that "the call to minimise risk is a call for a cowardly society." It is a forum in which exceedingly wealthy people help decide which protections should be stripped away from lesser beings.

Among the members of its advisory panel are Charles Moore, who was formerly editor of the Daily Telegraph and the chair of an organisation called Policy Exchange. He was also best man at Oliver Letwin's wedding. Sitting beside him is Archie Norman, former chief executive of ASDA and the founder of Policy Exchange (see above). He was once Conservative MP for Tunbridge Wells. He was succeeded in that seat by Greg Clark, the minister who now provides government support for the Red Tape Initiative.

Neoliberal lobby group

Until he became environment secretary Michael Gove was also a member of the Red Tape Initiative panel. Oh, and he was appointed by Archie Norman as the first chairman of Policy Exchange (he was replaced by Charles Moore). Policy Exchange also supplied two of Oliver Letwin's staff in the Conservative policy unit he used to run. So what is this Policy Exchange? It's a neoliberal lobby group funded by dark money, that seeks to tear down regulations.

The Red Tape Initiative's management board consists of Letwin, Baroness Rock and

Lord Marland. Baroness Rock is a childhood friend of former Chancellor George Osborne, and married to the wealthy financier Caspar Rock. Lord Marland is a multimillionaire businessman who owns a house and four flats in London, “various properties in Salisbury,” three apartments in France and two apartments in Switzerland.

In other words, the Red Tape Initiative is a representative cross-section of the British public. In no sense is it a self-serving clique of old chums, insulated from hazard by their extreme wealth, whose role is to decide whether other people (colloquially known as “cowards”) should be exposed to risk.

Letwin’s Initiative appointed a panel to investigate housing regulations. It includes representatives of trade unions and NGOs, though they’re outnumbered by executives and lobbyists from the industry. And there, surprise, surprise, is a man called Richard Blakeway, from Policy Exchange.

Their task on June 14 was to consider a report the Red Tape Initiative had commissioned, whose purpose was to identify building rules that could be cut. Among those it listed as “burdensome” was the EU Construction Products Regulation, which seeks to protect people from fire, and restricts the kind of cladding that can be used.

What was the source of the report’s assertion that this regulation was unnecessary? A column in the Sunday Telegraph by Christopher Booker. He has a fair claim to being more wrong more often than any other British journalist – quite an achievement, given the field. As the panel members watched an ideology go up in flames, they decided that on this occasion they would not recommend that the regulation be removed. But the Red Tape Initiative, gruesome spectre that it is, continues its work.

It is one of many such schemes set up in recent decades, by both the Conservatives and New Labour. Among the recent examples are David Cameron’s Star Chamber (yes, that really was the name he gave it), in which ministers were interrogated

by a panel of corporate executives; and the Cutting Red Tape programme, which boasts that “businesses with good records have had fire safety inspections reduced from 6 hours to 45 minutes.” One of the results of this bonfire of regulation is the government’s repeal in 2012 of the fire prevention measures in the London Building Act. Had they remained in place, the Grenfell fire is unlikely to have spread.

Good for rich, bad for rest

This assault on public protections is just one element of the compound disaster neo-liberalism – promoted by opaquely-funded groups like Policy Exchange – has imposed on Britain since 1979. Its central purpose is not just to empower corporations and the very rich, but actively to disempower everyone else, through austerity, outsourcing and privatisation. An inquiry that failed to investigate such causes would be a farce. It would do nothing to prevent similar catastrophes from recurring. It would do nothing to stop the rich from destroying other people’s protections, as the Red Tape Initiative threatens to do.

But this is what we have been offered so far by a government that can choose charges, judge and jury. There’s an urgent need for an independent commission, whose purpose is to decide when inquiries should be called, what their terms should be, and who should chair them. Governments should have no influence over any of these decisions.

On June 14, a facade caught fire, in more senses than one. A blinkered inquiry threatens to clad the origins of this great crime, shielding their embarrassing ugliness from public view. We cannot and must not accept it.

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

The central purpose is not just to empower corporations and the very rich, but actively to disempower everyone else, through austerity, outsourcing and privatisation

The invisible empire beneath the radar

As long as we debate and march for issues that do not challenge the ruling class, power and wealth, nothing will ever really change, says **Jason Hirthler**

American author Mark Twain wasn't fooled by the jingoistic broadsheets, nor by the administration's claims of support for Cubans, nor by its claims to want to bring democracy to the Philippines, a former panish colony

When the United States went to war with Spain in 1898, it did so in a media environment of “yellow journalism,” that played no small part in the advent of the Spanish-American War. Yellow journalism was basically the use of sensationalism and poorly researched reportage to stir up excitement and pad the bottom line. In February that year, the mysterious sinking of the American cruiser Maine on a quiet night in Havana harbour was seized upon by western media outlets such as William Randolph Hearst's New York Journal and Joseph Pulitzer's New York World to create an atmosphere rife with tension, accusation, and defamation. War fever was loosed upon the population. The McKinley administration was soon ensnared in combat, which it won in 10 weeks across the Caribbean and Pacific theatres, effectively erasing the Spanish imperial footprint from the Philippines and Caribbean, and delivering American control over Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines.

American author Mark Twain wasn't fooled by the jingoistic broadsheets, nor by the administration's claims of support for Cubans, nor by its claims to want to bring democracy to the Philippines, a former Spanish colony. Twain said, “...we have gone there to conquer, not to redeem.”

It's depressingly familiar to see the similarities between the scenario Twain and his

anti-imperialist colleagues faced off against and the ones progressives face today. The imperial machine marches on, subjugating any nation that attempts any sort of free-thinking alternative to indentured servitude to the globalists. The tactics of the state and machinations of the media are little different than they were in 1898: Both seek to cloud imperial crimes behind a façade of moral necessity.

To the modern ear, yellow journalism sounds a lot like “fake news,” with its ceaseless reliance on anonymous sources, fake experts, misleading interpretations, and scare tactics. Yellow journalism and fake news are both euphemisms for state propaganda, typically employed to mask the machinery of empire. Whatever we name it, state deceit is in any case slated to grow more pervasive thanks to Barack Obama. Obama, the vacuous charlatan who infested the security state with his pro-war acolytes, signed into law the Countering Disinformation and Propaganda Act (CDPA) as part of the FY 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). This followed the 2013 NDAA which permitted the State Department to aim its public relations efforts directly at the American people, something previously illegal. Overt state propaganda is now legal on domestic turf, as if the state's media fronts weren't already busily engaged creating domestic propaganda.



After the sinking of the USS Maine in Havana harbour, US newspapers were quick to place responsibility for the loss on Spain. The leading theory now is that a spontaneous coal bunker fire caused the disaster.

A jingoist media drools for war. Hearst had his papers enjoining readers to “Remember the Maine,” just as the Washington Post editorial board did when it claimed the Bush administration’s argument for war with Iraq was “Irrefutable”

If the media that fronts for the imperial state is much the same so, too, is the process by which conflict unfolds. These steps are designed to cast aggression as self-defence. A false flag, or at least an uncertain event, provides a pretext for media hyperbole and state sabre-rattling. The Maine fiasco delivered the same pretext as the misattributed chemical attacks did in Syria. A list of untenable demands ensures conflict. McKinley demanding that Spain quit Cuba had the same escalating effect as NATO’s demand in the ‘90s that Slobodan Milosevic permit it to occupy Serbia.

A jingoist media drools for war. Hearst had his papers enjoining readers to “Remember the Maine,” just as the Washington Post editorial board did when it claimed the Bush administration’s argument for war with Iraq was “Irrefutable.” And, as always, claims of noble aims ring forth from the precincts of power. Washington was principally helping Cuba throw off the onerous shackle of Spanish rule rather than protect its sugar and tobacco interests, while NATO

is backing freedom fighting moderates in Syria against an authoritarian regime rather than seeking to replace Assad. Those that oppose are, as Hermann Goering recommended, denounced for their lack of patriotism, as have been leftists who claim the Syrian state is sovereign and should determine its own future.

We are in the same situation that Twain was in largely because the elites own the media that shape our understanding of the world, an understanding that permits little if any genuine discussion of American imperialism and its criminal destruction of vulnerable peoples, communities, villages, and families across the globe. The absence of this information continues in no small part because the general public remains convinced we live in a society of wide-ranging debate in which no topics are off limits in the great American marketplace of ideas.

The limits of debate

We do have lively debates, by design, and only within acceptable limits. As Noam

Limiting Debate

The intelligence community's supposedly "damning" report on Russian hacking of the election failed to deliver technical evidence of the Russian state's role in the crime and primarily complained about Russian media coverage of America

Chomsky said, "The smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum." Imperialism and its consequences – economic, psychological, and physical violence – are largely off limits. We can discuss racism against blacks in the police force, but not racism as a feature of the imperial state. We can discuss corruption on Wall Street, but not finance as a critical tool of imperial exploitation. We can discuss whether policing borders is racist, but not the role of immigration in creating reserve armies of labor for use by the ruling corporatocracy. We can discuss gay rights and gender pay scales, but not how imperialism destroys the lives of countless women and gays in nations we target. We can discuss the Syrian war, but not Syria as a new chapter in imperialism's history of slaughter.

As long as we debate and march for issues that do not challenge the ruling class power and wealth, nothing structural will change. Racism, bigotry, gender discrimination, financial exploitation of Main Street by Wall Street, debt peonage, wage serfdom, foreign wars of dubious provenance, the canonisation of war criminals past and present, and much more will continue unabated.

Yet the media consistently denies us the imperial context on issue after issue, which leaves us arguing about our response to an event that we misunderstand. We fail to see the root causes of events, and therefore debate symptoms of imperialism, not the imperialist disease itself.

● **Look at the recent Manchester attacks.** The media – from the BBC to the Washington Post – refused to deal with the complexities of the collapse of the Libyan state. They will note that in 2011 Libya suffered a "chaotic collapse." They will mention that Muammar Gadhafi "was toppled from power. They will decry its status as "a failed state." But they won't situate that war on the timeline of global imperialism, which quite transparently marches on, top-

pling 'despots' and 'dictators' and installing puppet regimes willing to facilitate western exploitation of that particular nation's resources, infrastructure, and national wealth. The focus, most especially on the right, will descend on Islam, which is radicalised and thereby 'weaponised' by imperial brutality. Each war is treated as a one-off, an isolated incident that has its own unique motive force. This is essentially the 'rogue actor' excuse writ large, an explanation that is often used to shield corporations from institutional complicity in crimes.

● **Look at liberal criticism of President Donald Trump.** The Washington Post gave Trump four 'Pinocchios' for supposedly lying about NATO. He was first correctly accused of being incorrect for saying nations owed money to the United States. NATO nations are current on their dues. He was then accused of lying for saying NATO nations weren't spending enough on their own security. In fact, NATO members have until 2024 to up their spending to two percent of GDP. Therefore, this statement was likewise deemed to be incorrect, even though the article did not note the probable conflict between what Trump deemed to be sufficient spending and what extant NATO agreements thought sufficient. Nor was a word spent illuminating Trump's overarching criticism, that NATO was a defunct organisation that should have been dissolved when the Warsaw Pact was dismantled at the end of the Cold War. The paper never noted that was, instead, expanded as a tool of western aggression toward Russia in the post-Gorbachev era. The paper failed to note that Washington has increasingly used NATO, and has consequently spent more on NATO, as a Trojan horse by which it can somewhat covertly expand Washington's imperialism to the East.

● **Look at Russiagate.** The probe. The investigation. The hearings. The intelligence community's supposedly "damning" report on Russian hacking of the election failed to deliver technical evidence of the Rus-

sian state's role in the crime and primarily complained about Russian media coverage of America. The supposed consensus of the 17 intelligence agencies is even a dubious claim. Look at the non-stop New York Times coverage of the collusion allegations, a sophomoric attempt to use standard business contacts, cocktail party conversations, media appearance fees, and Twitter contacts to paint the Russian Federation as a wanton imperial power. This baseless investigation steals precious column inches from what could be discussions of the actual empire and its heavy-handed military deployments abroad. Nor is it explained why this fearmongering distraction exists in the first place: because the freewheeling Trump wanted to unwind President Obama's witless aggressions against Russia, from sanctions to NATO to Syria to the election disinformation campaign. That would have directly challenged the globalist strategy to extend US hegemony worldwide.

● **Look at the British parliamentary elections.** Jeremy Corbyn's tattered, divided Labour party clawed 32 seats away from the centre-right, while Theresa May's reactionary Conservative Party dropped 12 seats, losing its majority. This was considered by the mainstream press to be a devastating turn of events, mostly because it had comprehensively demonised Corbyn and his socialist-leaning ideas. The day before the election, the Daily Mail ran a front-page story calling Corbyn a terrorist sympathiser. Context was dutifully elided. It might have been mentioned that May's own party comprehensively supported terror in Northern Ireland in the 1980s, and the DUP party it has now align with to form a majority was a major supporter of anti-Catholic violence as well. More to the point, May now supports a war in Syria that a) represents a war of aggression by the West against a sovereign state that has never invited it inside its borders; and b) is the most transparent instance yet of the dovetailing interests of terrorist organisations and western governments,

namely that the former profitably serve the latter as a lance or trident injecting the triple evils of war, poverty, and racism into the vortex of the post-colonial chaos that is neo-imperialism.

● **Look at the faux scope creep in Syria.** The so-called coalition of western states plus terrorist factions shot down a Syrian jet that was supposedly bombing ISIS. Washington said it bombed the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). They are probably one and the same, as the Russians seem to think. In any case, the Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, New York Times, and Financial Times all skipped the "inciting action" of the US attack on a Syrian jet, an act of war in a nation into which the west's farcical coalition was never invited. These White House flacks instantly published articles announcing that Russia would now "target" and "threaten" US warplanes over Syria. At once, the roles have been reversed and the aggressor is acting in self-defence. Ostensibly there to combat ISIS, something the Russians and Syrians vehemently challenge, the US is really there to overthrow Bashar Al Assad, balkanise Syria in sectarian statelets that Israel can control on our behalf, and sever linkages between Iran and Hezbollah, which will weaken resistance to Tel Aviv's conquest and settlement of all of the West Bank. Not to mention moving toward its feverish vision of one day expanding its Jewish democracy from the Nile to the Euphrates.

Topics aside, the question of empire is rarely included, if ever. Not in a reporter's notes, not in a list of interview questions, not in the video transcript, not in a first or second or final draft.

Corruptions of protocol

We have two actions in particular to thank for the whitewashing of imperialism in modern times. One is the Clinton regime's popularisation of "humanitarian interventions" as a legitimate form of violent aggression in the Nineties. Generally, the UN

Theresa May now supports a war in Syria that represents a war of aggression by the West against a sovereign state that has never invited it inside its borders

Limiting Debate

As George Orwell said, “It is the same in all wars; the soldiers do the fighting, the journalists do the shouting, and no true patriot ever gets near a front-line trench, except on the briefest of propaganda-tours”

Security Council is summoned to provide a patina of legitimacy for such aggression. Simon Chesterton, in his book *Just War or Just Peace?*, examines what he calls, “Security Council activism, notable for the plasticity of circumstances in which the Council was prepared to assert its responsibility for international peace and security.” The related “responsibility to protect” (R2P) was enshrined by UN members as a new international norm in 2005. Among its intellectual underpinnings is the idea that sovereign states are responsible for the safety of their populations and if they fail to live up to that responsibility, including violations of humanitarian law, it falls to the international community to fulfill it.

Both concepts have been used to confuse and co-opt progressive voters and move them into a state of surrender in which they acquiesce to our noble wars in whatever form they materialise – by air, land, sea, or proxy. Both concepts are founded on a fair premise: the desire to protect the weak against the strong. But, predictably, both have been deliberately perverted into justifications for their antithesis: removing legal protections for the weak against the aggression of the strong. A look at Libya, Iraq, Serbia, among other wars makes this plain.

Nature of the beast

But this is the brazen, crass, and intrepid nature of imperialism. It wantonly employs language to erect a curtain of rectitude behind which it prosecutes its vice. As Chesterton points out, the UNSC seems to harbour little fear of invoking R2P for its own uses. Likewise, Washington has no compunction in leveraging the norms of R2P to unilateral-

ly take military action, as though one nation among all has the moral fortitude to stride into the breach and defend the undefended. This has been necessary in Syria since Russia and China have got wise to Washington’s intrigues. Perhaps they have finally learned that the Bretton Woods institutions, as well as the UN, are the legitimising instruments of western hegemony. The “third world” understood this in the ’70s. These institutions are the notary republics that give western violence the stamp of authority.

Twain voiced a popular impulse when he wrote that he was “opposed to having the (American) eagle put its talons on any other land.” But his words were drowned out by imperialists then, and today the globalists and their press flacks continue to refashion the notion of “just war” in fresh raiment to bamboozle a new generation of citizen-readers, and lead them hollering and cheering into the breach. As George Orwell said, “It is the same in all wars; the soldiers do the fighting, the journalists do the shouting, and no true patriot ever gets near a front-line trench, except on the briefest of propaganda-tours.” As long as the yellow press at the Times and Post continues to peddle the narrative of America above all, right or wrong, the march of imperial slaughter will never abate. That tale and its glib raconteurs have to be comprehensively discredited if resistance to empire is ever going to achieve critical mass. **CT**

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The branding agency that delivered Brexit

How did the UK's pro-Brexit campaigns use the same obscure branding agency, if their campaigns weren't coordinated? ask **Peter Geoghegan & Adam Ramsay**

We didn't expect to end up in a suburban street in the town of Ely. But then, we didn't expect to find a Saudi prince or a Danish 'private banker' embroiled in the Democratic Unionist Party's (DUP) Brexit dark money. We didn't expect a connection with a Bengali gun-running incident. Or that the Tories would end up relying on the DUP to secure a wobbly majority. So a quiet corner of Cambridgeshire was hardly the biggest shock.

We went to Ely to find out more about Brexit, and how it was bankrolled. You see, each of the different campaigns to leave the EU was meant to be a separate organisation. You can't simply set up a new front every time your current one is approaching its spending limit. And we know they are all different. The two main ones – Vote Leave and Leave.EU – had a massive fight that was reported all over the media. And the DUP has been very clear with us that there was no co-ordination between their campaign and the others.

But what's also true is that all these different campaigns used the same obscure branding agency. Over the course of the final few weeks of the referendum, the Electoral Commission Website tells us, Arron Banks' Leave.EU, the official Vote Leave campaign, Grassroots Out, Ukip and the Democratic Unionist Party collectively spent more than £800,000 with Soopa Doopa, a branding

agency based, you guessed it, in the tiny Cambridgeshire city of Ely.

As part of their Brexit campaign, the DUP spent almost £100,000 with Soopa Doopa, buying 15,000 Corex Boards, 5,000 bags, 100,000 window stickers, 7,000 t-shirts and 50,000 badges. On BBC Northern Ireland, the Stephen Nolan Show recently asked its listeners if they had seen any of the DUP branded Brexit material. Our organisation, openDemocracy, did spot some of this, but not in Northern Ireland – in Edinburgh.

Meanwhile, Leave.EU spent £20,652.25 with Soopa Doopa, Grassroots Out £42,000, Ukip £18,000, and Vote Leave £637,108.80. In the whole of 2014-15, Soopa Doopa had a turnover of just three-quarters of a million pounds.

Same obscure agency

It's been revealed before – partly by us, (see The Dark Money That Paid For Brexit, ColdType issue 135 – Pages 16 to 19), and partly by the excellent Carole Cadwalladr at the Observer newspaper – that the various different Brexit campaigns all used the same obscure data analytics company: the Canadian firm Aggregate IQ. The campaigns dismissed this as coincidence. DUP's campaign manager, Jeffrey Donaldson, told us he 'couldn't remember' how he heard of them, despite spending more than £32,000 with the company.

Over the final few weeks of the referendum, Arron Banks' Leave.EU, the official Vote Leave campaign, Grassroots Out, Ukip and the Democratic Unionist Party collectively spent more than £800,000 with Soopa Doopa

Referendum Costs



Photo: Adam Ramsey

This small terraced house in Ely is the listed address for the Soopa Doopa agency.

So we decided to head to Ely, to find out what attracted the different Brexit campaigns to Soopa Doopa. First, we went to the address listed for the firm on the Companies House website – and that turned out to be a chartered accountants, who confirmed that they were registered there. Then, we popped down to another address that’s listed in public documents as theirs. It was a house in the centre of town, between a Chinese and an Indian take-away. Someone drew the curtains when we knocked. Finally, we went to the current address listed on both their website and with the Electoral Commission.

It was on the edge of town, at the end of a terrace row, and it appeared to be empty. Nevertheless, Soopa Doopa Branding Ltd

does exist. The company advertises itself as “specialists in the supply and manufacture of branded promotional products,” and its website advertises a whole range of products that you can get your logo on, through them.

When we rang the number on the site to ask if we could buy a DUP Leave campaign branded mug, the firm’s owner, Jake Scott-Paul, answered the phone. Scott-Paul seemed rather surprised when asked if this was Soopa Doopa branding, but confirmed that it was, and explained that the company itself doesn’t print things, but rather organises for their printing. And so they wouldn’t have a mug themselves: they don’t handle the actual products. He also confirmed that they had worked for the various Brexit campaigns, though claimed that “they were all one campaign.” When we asked him to clarify what he meant by that, he hung up.

“Everything you need to know is in the public domain. Those organisations came to us during the referendum and we supplied merchandise to them. That’s all I have to say really,” Soopa Doopa told us when we called back a few weeks later.

Soopa Doopa was founded in 2012, and according to the website Sourcing City News, it won two major awards at the East Cambridgeshire Business Awards last year. As the website says: “The judges recognised the substantial growth achieved by the company, made up of just two directors, Jake Scott-Paul and Gavin Lambert, along with one part time member of staff having grown from a turnover of £750,000 in 2014-2105 to a massive £2.1-million in 2015-2016.” Nevertheless, Soopa Doopa is not on the British Promotional Merchandise Association’s list of distributors.

Jake Scott-Paul has been public about his support for Brexit, and among his 142 Twitter followers are senior members of the Leave movement including Arron Banks and Andy Wigmore. During the campaign, Soopa Doopa’s account retweeted prominent Leave supporters, including newly pro-

moted Brexit minister Steve Baker, showing their merchandise.

There is no suggestion that the firm did anything wrong in working for the various different leave campaigns. But what is worth asking is this: how did all of the different Leave campaigns stumble upon the same obscure branding agency in Ely?

Under UK electoral rules, campaigners are not allowed to agree to work together unless part of a joint campaign. But the rules are less than clear cut. Discussions with other campaigners that do not involve decision making or coordinating your plans are OK, but agreeing which areas or voters to target is not. What you definitely cannot do is agree how to co-ordinate your spending with another campaigner.

“Using the same supplier for goods or services does not necessarily mean ‘working together’ is taking place. Working together is taken to be occurring when two or more campaigners have a common plan or arrangement,” the Electoral Commission said.

In public, Vote Leave and Leave.EU were frequently at loggerheads, often accusing one another of undermining the Brexit cause. But the pattern of spending by the rival Brexit camps displays a marked level of

similarity, with both camps spending millions of pounds with the same firms, some of whom – like Aggregate IQ and Soopa Doopa – are hardly household names.

Of course, one possible explanation might have been that these firms pitched their services to the campaigns, rather than the other way around. So we rang Soopa Doopa again to ask them how they got all this business, and they were clear that this isn’t what happened. As they said, before hanging up again: “Everything you need to know is in the public domain. Those organisations came to us during the referendum and we supplied merchandise to them. That’s all I have to say really.”

Over a year on from the Brexit result, serious questions are still being raised about referendum campaign spending. Perhaps it’s time the different Brexit campaigns explained how they spent their money, and where it all came from? **CT**

*Peter Geoghegan is an Irish writer and journalist based in Glasgow. His books include **A Difficult Difference: Race, Religion and the ‘new’ Northern Ireland.** Adam Ramsay is co-editor of openDemocracyUK and also works with Bright Green. This essay was first published at www.opendemocracy.net*

The pattern of spending by the rival Brexit camps displays a marked level of similarity, with both camps spending millions of pounds with the same firms

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The pill game

Marshall Allen shows how two cheap over-the-counter medications were transformed into one \$455-million speciality pill

Vimovo was created using two readily and cheaply available generic, or over-the-counter, medicines: naproxen, also known by the brand Aleve, and esomeprazole magnesium, also known as Nexium

Everything happened so fast as I walked out of the doctor's exam room. I was tucking in my shirt and wondering if I'd asked all my questions about my injured shoulder when one of the doctor's assistants handed me two small boxes of pills.

"These will hold you over until your prescription arrives in the mail," she said, pointing to the drug samples.

Strange, I thought to myself, the doctor didn't mention giving me any drugs. I must have looked puzzled because she tried to reassure me.

"Don't worry," she said. "It won't cost you any more than \$10."

I was glad whatever was coming wouldn't break my budget, but I didn't understand why I needed the drugs in the first place. And why wasn't I picking them up at my local drugstore?

At first I shrugged it off. This had been my first visit with an orthopedic specialist and he, Dr Mohnish Ramani, hadn't been the chatty type. He'd barely said a word as he examined me, tugging my arm this way and bending it that way before rotating it behind my back. The pain made me squirm and yelp, but he knew what he was doing. He promptly diagnosed me with frozen shoulder, a debilitating inflammation of the shoulder capsule.

But back to the drugs. As an investigative reporter who has covered health care for more than a decade, the interaction was just

the sort of thing to pique my interest. One thing I've learned is that almost nothing in medicine – especially brand-name drugs – is ever really a deal. When I got home, I looked up the drug: Vimovo.

The drug has been controversial, to say the least. Vimovo was created using two readily and cheaply available generic, or over-the-counter, medicines: naproxen, also known by the brand Aleve, and esomeprazole magnesium, also known as Nexium. The Aleve handles your pain and the Nexium helps with the upset stomach that's sometimes caused by the pain reliever. The key selling point of this new "convenience drug?" It's easier to take one pill than two.

But only a minority of patients get an upset stomach, and there was no indication I'd be one of them. Did I even need the Nexium component?

Steep mark-up

I also did the math. You can walk into your local drugstore and buy a month's supply of Aleve and Nexium for about \$40. For Vimovo, the pharmacy billed my insurance company \$3,252. This doesn't mean the drug company ultimately gets paid that much. The pharmaceutical world is rife with rebates and side deals – all designed to elbow ahead of the competition. But apparently the price of convenience comes at a steep mark-up.

Think about it another way. Let's say you want to eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich every day for a month. You could buy a big jar of peanut butter and a jar of grape jelly for less than 10 bucks. Or you could buy some of that stuff where they combine the peanut butter and grape jelly into the same jar. Smucker's makes it. It's called Goober. Except in this scenario, instead of its usual \$3.50 price tag, Smucker's is charging \$565 for the jar of Goober.

So if Vimovo is the Goober of drugs, then why have Americans been spending so much on it? My insurance company, smartly, rejected the pharmacy's claim. But I knew Vimovo's makers weren't wooing doctors like mine for nothing. So I looked up the annual reports for the Ireland-based company, Horizon Pharma, which makes Vimovo. Since 2014, Vimovo's net sales have been more than \$455-million. That means a lot of insurers are paying way more than they should for their Goober.

And Vimovo wasn't Horizon's only such drug. It has brought in an additional \$465-million in net sales from Duexis, a similar convenience drug that combines ibuprofen and famotidine, aka Advil and Pepcid.

This year I have been documenting the kind of waste in the health care system that's not typically tracked. Americans pay more for health care than anyone else in the world, and experts estimate that the US system wastes hundreds of billions of dollars a year. In recent months I've looked at what hospitals throw away and how nursing homes flush or toss out hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of usable medicine every year. We all pay for this waste, through lower wages and higher premiums, deductibles and out-of-pocket costs. There doesn't seem to be an end in sight – I just got a notice that my premiums may be increasing by another 12 percent next year.

With Vimovo, it seemed I stumbled on another waste stream: overpriced drugs whose actual costs are hidden from doctors and patients. In the case of Horizon, the brazenness

of its approach was even more astounding because it had previously been called out in media reports and in a 2016 congressional hearing on out-of-control drug prices.

Gouging insurance companies?

"It's a scam," said Devon Herrick, a health care economist with the National Center for Policy Analysis. "It is just a way to gouge insurance companies or employer health care plans."

Unsurprisingly, Horizon says the high price is justified. In fact, the drug maker wrote in an email, "The price of Vimovo is based on the value it brings to patients."

Thousands of patients die and suffer injuries every year, the company said, because of gastric complications from naproxen and other nonsteroid anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). Providing pain relief and stomach protection in a single pill makes it more likely patients will be protected from complications, it said.

And Horizon stressed Vimovo is a "special formulation" of Aleve and Nexium, so it's not the same as taking the two separately. But several experts said that's a scientific distinction that doesn't make a therapeutic difference. "I would take the two medications from the drugstore in a heartbeat – therapeutically it makes sense," said Michael Fossler, a pharmacist and clinical pharmacologist who is chair of the public-policy committee for the American College of Clinical Pharmacology. "What you're paying for with [Vimovo] is the convenience. But it does seem awful pricey for that."

Public outrage is boiling over when it comes to high drug prices, leading the media and lawmakers to scold pharmaceutical companies. You'd think a regulator would monitor this, but the Food and Drug Administration told me they are only authorized to review new drugs for safety and effectiveness, not prices. "Prices are set by manufacturers and distributors," the FDA said in a statement.

Horizon acquired Vimovo in November

Americans pay more for health care than anyone else in the world, and experts estimate that the US system wastes hundreds of billions of dollars a year

Cash Grab

My doctor said he leaves billing to his staff and doesn't even know how much he gets paid for a lot of the procedures he performs, let alone how much insurers are being charged for drugs

2013 from the global pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca. Horizon knew it faced challenges trying to get top dollar for inexpensive ingredients. “Use of these therapies separately in generic form may be cheaper,” it said in its 2013 report to investors. But the company executed a shrewd strategy to give everyone – insurers, patients, doctors and pharmacies – the incentive to use Vimovo. It’s instructive to review its playbook.

To get Vimovo covered, Horizon made deals with insurance payers and pharmacy benefit managers – the intermediaries who help determine which drugs get reimbursed. The contracts generally included special rebates and even administrative fees for these intermediaries, the Horizon reports said, so the drug maker got paid much less than the sticker price, though it wouldn’t say how much. But the company’s net sales show the deals worked.

Horizon put boots on the ground to get the prescriptions rolling, expanding its sales force by the hundreds and focusing its marketing and sales efforts on doctors who already liked to prescribe brand-name drugs. The company’s message to doctors emphasised the convenience of prescribing the two ingredients in a single pill and that the single pill protected patients by making it more likely they would take their medication as directed.

Horizon also primed the medical community by giving donations totalling \$101,000 to the American Gastroenterology Association, a speciality nonprofit for physicians. Some doctors refuse drug-industry money, if only to at least avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest. ProPublica has done loads of stories showing why doctors taking money is indeed problematic, including one about drug makers’ influence on physician speciality groups. When I went on the American Gastroenterology Association’s website, the first thing I saw was a pop-up ad from a drug company. Several of the association’s board members have received drug-company money, too. Horizon has made clear in its annual

reports that donations to the group “help physicians and patients better understand and manage” the risks of pain relievers causing gastric problems.

Horizon also zeroed in on patients’ worries about drug costs. To encourage them to fill their prescriptions, Horizon covered all or most of their out-of-pocket costs. That’s why my doctor’s office could promise me I wouldn’t spend too much for my Vimovo. The programme, Horizon told investors in reports, addressed the impact of pharmacies switching to less expensive alternatives and could “mitigate” the effect of payers searching for cheaper alternatives.

The strategy worked on me. I didn’t even know why I was getting the prescription, but when they told me it wouldn’t cost more than I would spend on lunch with a friend, I gave it the OK. A pharmacy I’d never heard of sent me a bottle of Vimovo for \$10, even though my insurance company rejected the claim.

Disturbing cost

Turns out paying the patient’s costs motivated my doctor, too. I waited until the end of my next visit to bring up Vimovo, and then we had a follow-up conversation on the phone. Ramani didn’t know the price of the drug and found it “disturbing” when I told him. That was a surprise to me, but not to him. He said he leaves billing to his staff and doesn’t even know how much he gets paid for a lot of the procedures he performs, let alone how much insurers are being charged for drugs. The marketing arms of companies like Horizon must count on this sort of blindness.

Ramani doesn’t receive money or gifts from Horizon. (I confirmed this on ProPublica’s Dollars for Docs website, which lists drug-company payments.) He said he likes Vimovo because Horizon covers the patient’s out-of-pocket costs, entirely in many cases. Prescribing the generics or over-the-counter medications separately would actually cost more, he said. Which, of course, is exactly the

company's plan. But Ramani agreed that the high cost of the drug to insurers ultimately raises overall health care costs for all Americans.

Knowing Vimovo's price, I asked him if he would continue to prescribe it. "It changes my thought process," he said. "But at the end of the day, I have to think about the patient and whether the patient will be able to pay out of pocket or not."

Ramani said the Horizon drug rep told him Vimovo prescriptions had to go through a particular pharmacy for the patient to receive financial assistance. In its 2016 annual report, Horizon wrote that prescriptions for its drugs might not be filled by certain pharmacies because of insurance-company exclusions, co-payment requirements, or incentives to use lower-priced alternatives. So that's why they didn't give me the option of picking up my pills at my neighbourhood drugstore.

Instead, my Vimovo was mailed to me from White Oak Pharmacy in Nutley, New Jersey, which is about 45 minutes from my house. I drove there to find out why. The neighbourhood pharmacy is on the bottom floor of a two-story brick building on a street corner, next to a hair salon.

Vishal Chhabria, the pharmacist who owns White Oak, told me the drug company sets the price of Vimovo. He insisted his pharmacy has no special relationship or contract with Horizon. Maybe the drug company steers prescriptions his way, he said, because his pharmacy will process the coupons that reduce or eliminate the patient costs, which some pharmacies don't. He said there is no approved generic alternative to Vimovo, so he can't suggest one to patients. And while other drugs, like over-the-counter medications, would be cheaper for the health system overall, they are more expensive for the individual patient, he said.

In poring through Horizon's financial filings, it appears the drug's run may be ending. Horizon said in its report for the first quarter of 2017 that fewer insurance compa-

nies have been willing to cover Vimovo and many that do have demanded larger rebates. As a result, Horizon has been eating more of the costs of providing the drug to patients, as they must have in my case. The prescriptions have still been coming in, but net sales were just under \$5-million in the first quarter of this year, down 81 percent from the first quarter of 2016.

Critics of Vimovo say that's still more than patients should be spending on the drug. "That number should be zero," said Linda Cahn, an attorney who advises corporations, unions and other payers to help reduce their costs. "If you want to talk about waste, that's waste."

Herrick, the health care economist, said Horizon cashed in by eliminating many of the barriers in the system that are meant to control costs. The company got patients on board by covering their out-of-pocket costs. It appealed to doctors by promoting the benefits to patients. And it did an end-run around chain pharmacies, which typically might suggest a lower-priced alternative, by steering prescriptions to pharmacists who would participate in their patient-assistance program.

"Somebody brainstormed: 'How can we nullify any consumer check and balance in this supply chain? What can we do to keep the customer from asking questions?'" Herrick said.

The scheme that played out with Vimovo is bound to happen again, Herrick said. Maybe it already is. Drug companies are always on the lookout to deploy similar strategies. I dutifully took my Vimovo for several days, until I noticed it kept me awake until three in the morning – a rare side effect. (Perhaps they need to add a third drug to the combo.) I probably have more than 50 pills left in the bottle on my bedside table. Maybe I could sell it back to Horizon for \$1,500. **CT**

I dutifully took my Vimovo for several days, until I noticed it kept me awake until three in the morning – a rare side effect. (Perhaps they need to add a third drug to the combo)

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Marshall Allen is a ProPublica reporter covering health care and patient safety issues. This story was originally published at www.propublica.org

Why Palestine is still the issue

John Pilger reports on a nation's years-long battle against violent occupation, racial discrimination, and abusive propaganda

What enrages those who colonise and occupy, steal and oppress, vandalise and defile is the victims' refusal to comply. And this is the tribute we all should pay the Palestinians. They refuse to comply. They go on. They wait – until they fight again

When I first went to Palestine as a young reporter in the 1960s, I stayed on a kibbutz. The people I met were hard-working, spirited and called themselves socialists. I liked them. One evening at dinner, I asked about the silhouettes of people in the far distance, beyond our perimeter.

"Arabs", they said, "nomads." The words were almost spat out. Israel, they said, meaning Palestine, had been mostly wasteland and one of the great feats of the Zionist enterprise was to turn the desert green.

They gave as an example their crop of Jaffa oranges, which was exported to the rest of the world. What a triumph against the odds of nature and humanity's neglect.

It was the first lie. Most of the orange groves and vineyards belonged to Palestinians who had been tilling the soil and exporting oranges and grapes to Europe since the 18th-century. The former Palestinian town of Jaffa was known by its previous inhabitants as "the place of sad oranges."

On the kibbutz, the word "Palestinian" was never used. Why?, I asked. The answer was a troubled silence.

All over the colonised world, the true sovereignty of indigenous people is feared by those who can never quite cover the fact, and the crime, that they live on stolen land.

Denying people's humanity is the next step – as the Jewish people know only too

well. Defiling people's dignity and culture and pride follows as logically as violence.

In Ramallah, following an invasion of the West Bank by the late Ariel Sharon in 2002, I walked through streets of crushed cars and demolished houses, to the Palestinian Cultural Centre. Until that morning, Israeli soldiers had camped there. I was met by the centre's director, the novelist, Liana Badr, whose original manuscripts lay scattered and torn across the floor. The hard-drive containing her fiction, and a library of plays and poetry had been taken by Israeli soldiers. Almost everything was smashed, and defiled.

Not a single book survived with all its pages; not a single master tape from one of the best collections of Palestinian cinema.

The soldiers had urinated and defecated on the floors, on desks, on embroideries and works of art. They had smeared faeces on children's paintings and written – in shit – "Born to kill." Liana Badr had tears in her eyes, but she was unbowed. She said, "We will make it right again."

Victims refuse to comply

What enrages those who colonise and occupy, steal and oppress, vandalise and defile is the victims' refusal to comply. And this is the tribute we all should pay the Palestinians. They refuse to comply. They go on. They wait – until they fight again. And they do so even when those governing them col-

laborate with their oppressors.

In the midst of the 2014 Israeli bombardment of Gaza, the Palestinian journalist Mohammed Omer never stopped reporting. He and his family were stricken; he queued for food and water and carried it through the rubble. When I phoned him, I could hear the bombs outside his door. He refused to comply.

Mohammed's reports, illustrated by his graphic photographs, were a model of professional journalism that shamed the compliant and craven reporting of the so-called mainstream in Britain and the United States. The BBC notion of objectivity – amplifying the myths and lies of authority, a practice of which it is proud – is shamed every day by the likes of Mohamed Omer.

For more than 40 years, I have recorded the refusal of the people of Palestine to comply with their oppressors: Israel, the United States, Britain, the European Union.

Since 2008, Britain alone has granted licences for export to Israel of arms and missiles, drones and sniper rifles, worth £434-million.

Those who have stood up to this, without weapons, those who have refused to comply, are among Palestinians I have been privileged to know:

- My friend, the late Mohammed Jarella, who toiled for the United Nations agency UNRWA, in 1967 showed me a Palestinian refugee camp for the first time. It was a bitter winter's day and schoolchildren shook with the cold. "One day . . ." he would say. "One day . . ."

- Mustafa Barghouti, whose eloquence remains undimmed, who described the tolerance that existed in Palestine among Jews, Muslims and Christians until, as he told me, "the Zionists wanted a state at the expense of the Palestinians."

- Dr Mona El-Farra, a physician in Gaza, whose passion was raising money for plastic surgery for children disfigured by Israeli bullets and shrapnel. Her hospital was flattened by Israeli bombs in 2014.

- Dr Khalid Dahlan, a psychiatrist, whose

clinics for children in Gaza – children sent almost mad by Israeli violence – were oases of civilization.

- Fatima and Nasser are a couple whose home stood in a village near Jerusalem designated "Zone A and B," meaning that the land was declared for Jews only. Their parents had lived there; their grandparents had lived there. Today, the bulldozers are laying roads for Jews only, protected by laws for Jews only.

It was past midnight when Fatima went into labour with their second child. The baby was premature; and when they arrived at a checkpoint with the hospital in view, the young Israeli soldier said they needed another document.

Fatima was bleeding badly. The soldier laughed and imitated her moans and told them, "Go home." The baby was born there in a truck. It was blue with cold and soon, without care, died from exposure. The baby's name was Sultan.

For Palestinians, these will be familiar stories. The question is: why are they not familiar in London and Washington, Brussels and Sydney?

In Syria, a recent liberal cause – a George Clooney cause – is bankrolled handsomely in Britain and the United States, even though the beneficiaries, the so-called rebels, are dominated by jihadist fanatics, the product of the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and the destruction of modern Libya.

Unrecognised occupation

And yet, the longest occupation and resistance in modern times is not recognised. When the United Nations suddenly stirs and defines Israel as an apartheid state, as it did this year, there is outrage – not against a state whose "core purpose" is racism but against a UN commission that dared break the silence.

"Palestine," said Nelson Mandela, "is the greatest moral issue of our time."

Why is this truth suppressed, day after day, month after month, year after year?

In Israel – the apartheid state, guilty of a

When the United Nations suddenly stirs and defines Israel as an apartheid state, as it did this year, there is outrage – not against a state whose "core purpose" is racism, but against a UN commission that dared break the silence

A Luta Continua

There is no conflict, no two narratives, with their moral fulcrum. There is a military occupation enforced by a nuclear-armed power backed by the greatest military power on earth; and there is an epic injustice

crime against humanity and of more international law-breaking than any other – the silence persists among those who know and whose job it is to keep the record straight.

In Israel, so much journalism is intimidated and controlled by a groupthink that demands silence on Palestine while honourable journalism has become dissidence: a metaphoric underground.

A single word – “conflict” – enables this silence. “The Arab-Israeli conflict,” intone the robots at their teleprompters. When a veteran BBC reporter, a man who knows the truth, refers to “two narratives,” the moral contortion is complete.

There is no conflict, no two narratives, with their moral fulcrum. There is a military occupation enforced by a nuclear-armed power backed by the greatest military power on earth; and there is an epic injustice.

The word “occupation” may be banned, deleted from the dictionary. But the memory of historical truth cannot be banned: of the systemic expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland. “Plan D” the Israelis called it in 1948.

The Israeli historian Benny Morris describes how David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, was asked by one of his generals: “What shall we do with the Arabs?” The prime minister, wrote Morris, “made a dismissive, energetic gesture with his hand”. “Expel them!” he said.

Seventy years later, this crime is suppressed in the intellectual and political culture of the West. Or it is debatable, or merely controversial. Highly-paid journalists eagerly accept Israeli government trips, hospitality and flattery, then are truculent in their protestations of independence. The term, “useful idiots,” was coined for them.

In 2011, I was struck by the ease with which one of Britain’s most acclaimed novelists, Ian McEwan, a man bathed in the glow of bourgeois enlightenment, accepted the Jerusalem Prize for literature in the apartheid state.

Would McEwan have gone to Sun City in

apartheid South Africa? They gave prizes there, too, all expenses paid. McEwan justified his action with weasel words about the independence of “civil society.”

Propaganda – of the kind McEwan delivered, with its token slap on the wrists for his delighted hosts – is a weapon for the oppressors of Palestine. Like sugar, it insinuates almost everything today.

Understanding propaganda

Understanding and deconstructing state and cultural propaganda is our most critical task. We are being frog-marched into a second cold war, whose eventual aim is to subdue and balkanise Russia and intimidate China.

When Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin spoke privately for more than two hours at the G20 meeting in Hamburg, apparently about the need not to go to war with each other, the most vociferous objectors were those who have commandeered liberalism, such as the Zionist political writers of the Guardian.

“No wonder Putin was smiling in Hamburg,” wrote Jonathan Freedland. “He knows he has succeeded in his chief objective: he has made America weak again.” Cue the hissing for Evil Vlad.

These propagandists have never known war but they love the imperial game of war. What Ian McEwan calls “civil society” has become a rich source of related propaganda. Take a term often used by the guardians of civil society – “human rights.” Like another noble concept, “democracy,” “human rights” has been all but emptied of its meaning and purpose.

Like “peace process” and “road map,” human rights in Palestine have been hijacked by Western governments and the corporate NGOs they fund and which claim a quixotic moral authority. So when Israel is called upon by governments and NGOs to “respect human rights” in Palestine, nothing happens, because they all know there is nothing to fear; nothing will change.

Mark the silence of the European Union, which accommodates Israel while refusing to maintain its commitments to the people of Gaza – such as keeping the lifeline of the Rafah border crossing open: a measure it agreed to as part of its role in the cessation of fighting in 2014. A seaport for Gaza – agreed by Brussels in 2014 – has been abandoned.

The UN commission I have referred to – its full name is the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia – described Israel as, and I quote, “designed for the core purpose” of racial discrimination. Millions understand this. What the governments in London, Washington, Brussels and Tel Aviv cannot control is that humanity at street level is changing perhaps as never before.

More aware

People everywhere are stirring and are more aware, in my view, than ever before. Some are already in open revolt. The atrocity of Grenfell Tower in London has brought communities together in a vibrant almost national resistance.

Thanks to a people’s campaign, the judiciary is today examining the evidence of a possible prosecution of former British prime minister Tony Blair for war crimes. Even if this fails, it is a crucial development, dismantling yet another barrier between the public and its recognition of the voracious nature of the crimes of state power – the systemic disregard for humanity perpetrated in Iraq, in Grenfell Tower, in Palestine. Those are the dots waiting to be joined.

For most of the 21st-century, the fraud of corporate power posing as democracy has depended on the propaganda of distraction: largely on a cult of “me-ism” designed to disorientate our sense of looking out for others, of acting together, of social justice and internationalism.

Class, gender and race were wrenched apart. The personal became the political and the media the message. The promotion of bourgeois privilege was presented as “progressive” politics. It wasn’t. It never is. It is the

promotion of privilege, and power.

Among young people, internationalism has found a vast new audience. Look at the support for Jeremy Corbyn and the reception the G20 circus in Hamburg received. By understanding the truth and imperatives of internationalism, and rejecting colonialism, we understand the struggle of Palestine.

Mandela put it this way: “We know only too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians.”

At the heart of the Middle East is the historic injustice in Palestine. Until that is resolved, and Palestinians have their freedom and homeland, and Israelis are Palestinians equality before the law, there will be no peace in the region, or perhaps anywhere.

What Mandela was saying is that freedom itself is precarious while powerful governments can deny justice to others, terrorise others, imprison and kill others, in our name. Israel certainly understands the threat that one day it might have to be normal.

That is why its ambassador to Britain is Mark Regev, well known to journalists as a professional propagandist, and why the “huge bluff” of charges of anti-Semitism, as Ilan Pappé called it, was allowed to contort the Labour Party and undermine Jeremy Corbyn as leader. The point is, it did not succeed.

Events are moving quickly now. The remarkable Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions campaign (BDS) is succeeding, day by day; cities and towns, trade unions and student bodies are endorsing it. The British government’s attempt to restrict local councils from enforcing BDS has failed in the courts.

These are not straws in the wind. When the Palestinians rise again, as they will, they may not succeed at first – but they will eventually if we understand that they are us, and we are them.

CT

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This is an abridged version of John Pilger’s address to the Palestinian Expo 2017 in London. His film, Palestine Is Still the Issue, can be viewed at www.johnpilger.com

By understanding the truth and imperatives of internationalism, and rejecting colonialism, we understand the struggle of Palestine

Israel's ever-more sadistic reprisals

Jonathan Cook tells how harsh government actions enhance a sense of victimhood while avoiding reality that country is a brutal colonial occupier state

Israel has taken collective punishment – a serious violation of international law – to new extremes, stretching the notion to realms once imaginable only in a dystopian fable like George Orwell's 1984

When Israel passed a new counter-terrorism law last year, Ayman Odeh, a leader of the country's large minority of Palestinian citizens, described its draconian measures as colonialism's "last gasp." He said: "I see . . . the panic of the French at the end of the occupation of Algeria."

The panic and cruelty plumbed new depths last month, when Israeli officials launched a \$2.3-million lawsuit against the family of Fadi Qanbar, who crashed a truck into soldiers in Jerusalem in January, killing four. He was shot dead at the scene.

The suit demands that his widow, Tahani, reimburse the state for the compensation it awarded the soldiers' families. If she cannot raise the astronomic sum, the debt will pass to her four children, the oldest of whom is currently only seven.

Israel is reported to be preparing many similar cases.

Like other families of Palestinians who commit attacks, the Qanbars are homeless, after Israel sealed their East Jerusalem home with cement. Twelve relatives were also stripped of their residency papers as a prelude to expelling them to the West Bank.

None has done anything wrong – their crime is simply to be related to someone Israel defines as a "terrorist."

This trend is intensifying. Israel has demanded that the Palestinian Authority stop

paying a small monthly stipend to families like the Qanbars, whose breadwinner was killed or jailed. Conviction rates among Palestinians in Israel's military legal system stand at more than 99 per cent, and hundreds of prisoners are incarcerated without charge.

Israeli legislation is set to seize \$280-million – a sum equivalent to the total stipends – from taxes Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, potentially bankrupting it.

Israel loyalists will soon introduce in the US Senate a bill to similarly deny the PA aid unless it stops "funding terror." Issa Karaka, a Palestinian official, said it would be impossible for the PA to comply: "Almost every other household . . . is the family of a prisoner or martyr."

Israel has taken collective punishment – a serious violation of international law – to new extremes, stretching the notion to realms once imaginable only in a dystopian fable like George Orwell's 1984.

Israel argues that a potential attacker can only be dissuaded by knowing his loved ones will suffer harsh retribution. Or put another way, Israel is prepared to use any means to crush the motivation of Palestinians to resist its brutal, five-decade occupation.

All evidence, however, indicates that when people reach breaking-point, and are

willing to die in the fight against their oppressors, they give little thought to the consequences for their families. That was the conclusion of an investigation by the Israeli army more than a decade ago.

In truth, Israel knows its policy is futile. It is not deterring attacks, but instead engaging in complex displacement activity. Evermore sadistic forms of revenge shore up a collective and historic sense of Jewish victimhood while deflecting Israelis' attention from the reality that their country is a brutal colonial settler state.

If that verdict seems harsh, consider a newly published study into the effects on operators of using drones to carry out extrajudicial executions, in which civilians are often killed as "collateral damage."

A US survey found pilots who remotely fly drones soon develop symptoms of post-traumatic stress from inflicting so much death and destruction. The Israeli army replicated the study after its pilots operated drones over Gaza during Israel's 2014 attack – the ultimate act of collective punishment. Some 500 Palestinian children were killed as the tiny enclave was bombarded for nearly two months.

Doctors were surprised, however, that the pilots showed no signs of depression or anxiety. The researchers speculate that Israeli pilots may feel more justified in their actions, because they are closer to Gaza than US pilots are to Afghanistan, Iraq or Yemen. They are more confident that they are the ones under threat, even as they rain

down death unseen on Palestinians.

The determination to maintain this exclusive self-image as the victim leads to outrageous double standards.

Last month, the Israeli supreme court backed the refusal by officials to seal up the homes of three Jews who kidnapped Mohammed Abu Khdeir, a 16-year-old from Jerusalem, in 2014 and burnt him alive.

In May, the Israeli government revealed that it had denied compensation to six-year-old Ahmed Dawabsheh, the badly scarred, sole survivor of an arson attack by Jewish extremists that killed his entire family two years ago.

Human rights group B'Tselem recently warned that Israel has given itself immunity from paying compensation to all Palestinians under occupation killed or disabled by the Israeli army – even in cases of criminal wrongdoing.

This endless heaping of insult upon injury for Palestinians is possible only because the west has indulged Israel's wallowing in victimhood so long. It is time to prick this bubble of self-delusion and remind Israel that it, not the Palestinians, is the oppressor.

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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*

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If the US had killed the ISIS leader!

Neil Clark wonders if he's living in a bizarre and one-dimensional world

We still don't have physical evidence that the ISIS head honcho was killed in a Russian airstrike, but we never actually saw physical evidence of Osama bin Laden's death, either

How would Western media have responded if it was reported that it was 'highly likely' that US air strikes had killed the head of ISIS? We'd have been told, of course, how it proved that the US was the 'greatest nation on earth.' We'd also be reminded how grateful we should be that America – aka 'The World's Policeman' – always went after – and got – 'the bad guys.' Then there would be those 'We Came, We Saw, He Died' type of comments from leading US politicians. Donald Trump would be boasting about the killing for the rest of his life.

Al-Baghdadi vs. Osama bin Laden – spot the difference

But Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the head of ISIS, was reportedly killed by Russian airstrikes, not US ones, so there hasn't been much fuss made. In fact, many leading pundits and commentators didn't even bother to tweet the news. It's revealing to compare the low-key coverage of the al-Baghdadi story to the great fanfare that greeted the news that Osama bin Laden had reportedly been killed by US Navy SEALs in Pakistan in 2011. Then, large crowds – waving the stars-and-stripes – gathered in Times Square and other US cities to celebrate. Former President George W. Bush hailed a "momentous achievement." NATO Secretary Rasmussen lauded a "significant success." The media was equal-

ly euphoric. Got Him! Vengeance At Last – US Nails The Bastard, was the splash on the New York Post. 'Justice Has Been Done – Us Forces Kill Bin Laden,' announced the Washington Post. 'Rot In Hell!' Osama Bin Laden Killed In Secret Attack By Us Forces,' exclaimed the Toronto Sun.

The headlines surrounding the killing of the head of ISIS, by contrast, have been rather more muted – and skeptical. "Russia claims to have killed ISIS leader," said Newsweek. "Little proof to back Russian claims they killed al-Baghdadi in air-strike," declared the Toronto Sun. "White House casts doubt on Russia's claims it killed ISIS leader," reported Politico in an article that – surprise, surprise – made it straight to al-Baghdadi's Wikipedia page.

Although it's true that we still don't have physical evidence that the ISIS head honcho was killed in a Russian airstrike, it's worth pointing out that we never actually saw physical evidence of Osama bin Laden's death, either.

But it was the US government that claimed to have killed him, so skepticism did not feature in the newspaper headlines. In fact, any doubting of the official narrative in 2011 would have seen you dismissed as a crazy conspiracy theorist. If Uncle Sam says something is true, well, we are all expected to believe it. It's all very different though if someone else claims to have killed the 'bad

guy’ – particularly if the country in question is an ‘Official Enemy.’ Russia killing the head of ISIS doesn’t fit the State Department-friendly narrative. So let’s either rubbish it or ignore it.

No need to hurry Theresa – we’re on your side!

Just imagine . . . if Labour had been the largest party in the House of Commons following the UK election on June 8, but was nine seats short of a majority. And that Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn had then spent over two weeks trying to do a deal with the Irish Republican party Sinn Fein – who traditionally don’t take their seats in Westminster – to enable him to form a government. We can be sure that the pressure from the Establishment on Corbyn to step aside and let Tory leader Theresa May try to form a government would have been unrelenting. Elite pundits would be on TV 24/7 telling us that Corbyn attempts to form ‘a coalition of chaos’ was endangering our democracy.

But it’s Theresa May who spent more than two weeks desperately trying to get an agreement with a Northern Irish political party (the DUP), and there was no great pressure on her to ‘get a move on.’ More a case of ‘Take your time, Theresa; whenever you’re ready.’ The Establishment is not always this indulgent of prime ministers trying to hang on to power following a loss of seats in a general election. When Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown lost his majority in the 2010 general election, he was told in no uncertain terms that he had to step down with immediate effect ‘for the good of the country.’

“In the space of five tumultuous days, Britain has gone from democracy as we know it to the brink of dictatorship,” declared an editorial in the Sun newspaper, as the ‘squatter’ Gordon Brown hung on. Other commentators accused Brown of trying to carry out a ‘coup.’

While it’s true that Brown polled a significantly lower share of the vote to May



COALITION OF CONVENIENCE: Arlene Foster of Northern Ireland’s DUP with her new best friend, British Prime Minister Theresa May. Photo: Number 10 / Flickr

(29 percent to 42.3 percent) they were both prime ministers who lost their majority, but who still, post-election, had the chance of staying on if they were able to pull off deals with other parties. But their treatment was very different. As Corbyn’s would have been – and indeed will be – if he finds himself in the same position as May next time.

‘Target states bring terrorism upon themselves’

Just imagine . . . if there had been deadly ISIS attacks on Capitol Hill and the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, killing 13, and the Iranian president had issued a statement in response that declared, “we underscore that states that sponsor terrorism risk falling victim to the evil they promote . . .”

Elite newspapers would, I’m sure, be full of ‘outraged’ op-eds saying that the comments showed the ‘moral depravity of the Iranian regime.’ Yet President Trump published those comments following ISIS attacks on the Tehran parliament and the tomb of Ayatollah Khomeini and no one in the mainstream seemed particularly

Iran has been fighting ISIS terrorism in Syria. But, of course, we can’t really big that up, can we, as it goes against the neocon narrative of Iran being “the world’s number one sponsor of terrorism”

Just Imagine

Corbyn achieved his party's success without resorting to angry lefty ranting. His focus was on kindness, compassion, sharing, inclusivity and forgiveness. This approach held up a crystal-clear mirror to the ugly, self-interested cynicism of the Tory party

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outraged – not even professional Trump-bashers.

What made his comments even more shocking is that Iran has been fighting ISIS terrorism in Syria. But, of course, we can't really big that up, can we, as it goes against the neocon narrative of Iran being "the world's number one sponsor of terrorism."

'Target states' like Iran can never be the innocent, undeserving victims of terrorist attacks, even when they clearly are. It's also worth remembering that when the US was hit by the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the Iranian leadership strongly condemned the act of terrorism and candlelight vigils for the victims were held throughout the country. There was no talk of the US falling victim to an 'evil' that they had 'promoted.'

US shooting down YOUR planes inside YOUR own country is self-defense!

Just imagine . . . if the Syrian government and its allies had spent the past six years funding, backing and training anti-government radical Islamist 'rebels' in the US Then the Syrian Air Force had started bombing the US and unilaterally declared its own 'De-Confliction Zones' on American territory to protect its 'assets' on the ground. After this, a US fighter jet that was attacking what the US government called 'terrorists' in Texas was shot down by the Syrian forces. Would the action be called 'self-defence'?

And if the US and its allies then said they would treat Syrian jets bombing the US as potential targets – would they be cast as the aggressors? I think not. But if we reverse the two countries this is exactly what the US has been doing in Syria. They're illegally bombing a sovereign state, but then say they're acting in 'self-defense' when that country's military takes action over its own

territory. The imperial arrogance is off the scale, but we're meant not to notice.

Don't mention who's arming the war! (if the 'good guys' are responsible)

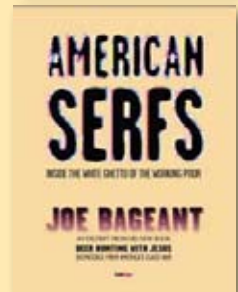
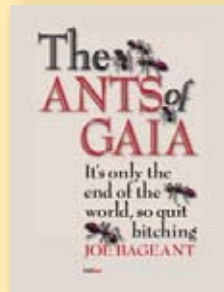
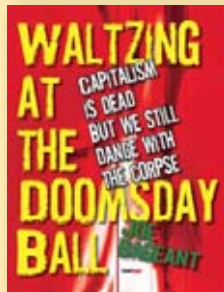
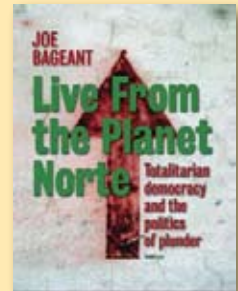
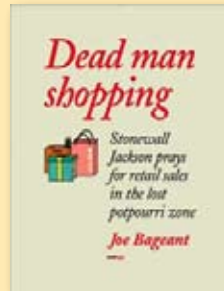
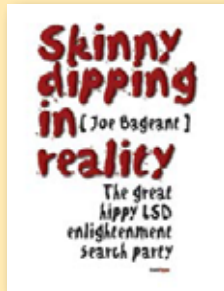
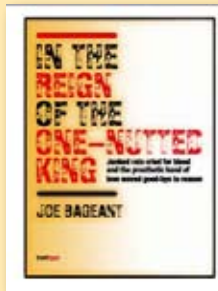
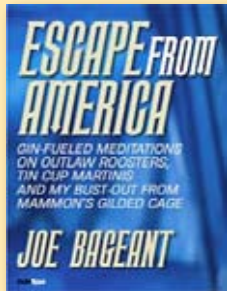
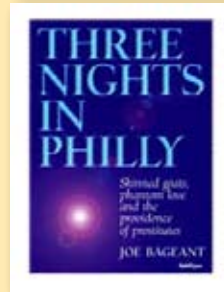
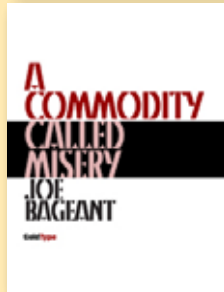
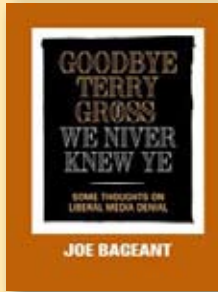
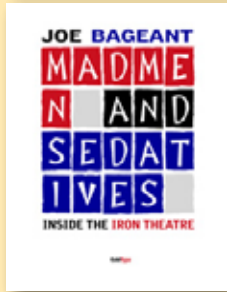
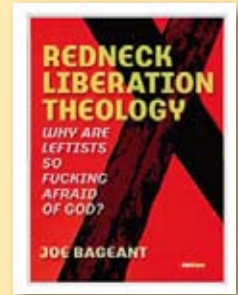
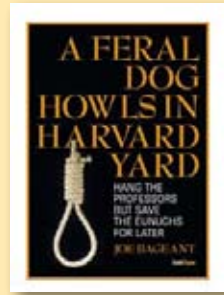
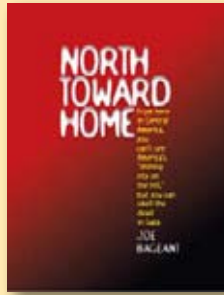
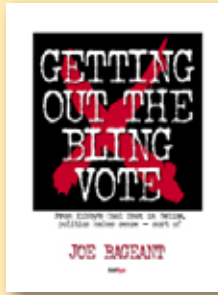
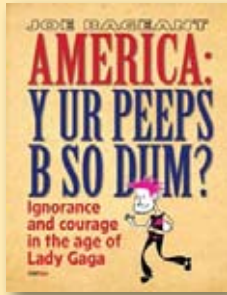
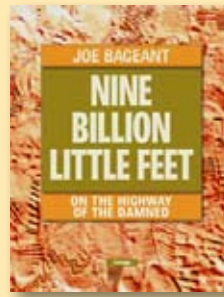
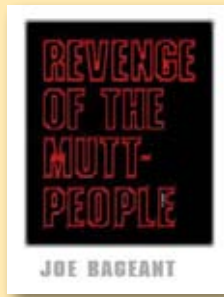
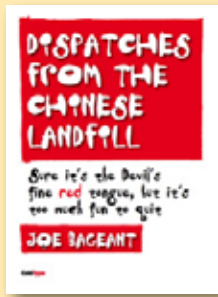
Just imagine . . . if 'the world's worst cholera outbreak' had broken out in a country which a close Russian ally had been bombing back to the Stone Age for over two years? And that the close Russian ally had been armed, trained and given logistical support by Russia. Don't you think the Kremlin involvement would have been mentioned in this report here?

But Yemen has, since 2015, been under assault from a Saudi-led coalition, which has been given every kind of assistance by the UK and US And, because 'we' in the west are always 'the good guys,' our responsibility for the human catastrophe in Yemen can't be mentioned, in the same way as the UK/US role in transforming Libya into a terrorist-ridden failed state is also taboo.

Strange silence of the anti-censorship brigade

Just imagine . . . if Russia, or Iran, gave the tiny country of Qatar a 10-day ultimatum to agree to 13 demands that included taking the international broadcaster Al Jazeera off air and Qatar changing its foreign policy. That's after Russia or Iran had imposed and got others to agree to a diplomatic and trading embargo on Qatar. We can be sure that this obnoxious, bullying behaviour would have made headlines around the world, leading to widespread condemnation as well as calls for military action against Moscow or Tehran. But it's that very close Western ally Saudi Arabia giving the ultimatum to Qatar, so there's silence. Let's keep shtum about the 'threats to media freedom,' and carry on tweeting our attacks on RT, shall we? **CT**

THE NEXT COLDTYPE, ISSUE 145
will be on line in mid-September 2017



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<http://coldtype.net/joe.html>

Canada's contribution to a holocaust

Canada's 150th anniversary offered a unique opportunity to shed light on one of the darker corners of Canadian history, writes **Yves Engler**

Seeing an opportunity to add to his colony, Leopold wanted Stanley to take a circuitous route all the way around South Africa, up the Congo River and across the interior of the continent

In a bid to extract rubber and other commodities from his personal colony, Belgian King Léopold II instituted a brutal system of forced labour in the late 1800s. Individuals and communities were given rubber collection quotas that were both hard to fulfill and punishable by death. To prove they killed someone who failed to fulfill a quota soldiers from the Force Publique, the colonial police, they were required to provide a severed hand. With Force Publique officers paid partly based on the number collected, severed hands became a sort of currency in the colony and baskets of hands the symbol of the Congo Free State.

Between 1891 and 1908 millions died from violence, as well as the starvation and disease, caused by Leopold II's terror. A quarter of the population may have died during Leopold's reign, which sparked a significant international solidarity movement that forced the Belgian government to buy the colony.

William Grant Stairs, from Halifax, Nova Scotia, played an important part in two expeditions that expanded Leopold II's immensely profitable Congolese venture. The Royal Military College of Canada-trained soldier was one of 10 white officers in the first-ever European expedition to cross the interior of the continent. Subsequently Stairs led an expedition that added 150,000 square kilometres to Leopold's colony.

In 1887, Stairs joined the Emin Pasha Relief

Expedition, which was ostensibly designed to 'rescue' the British-backed governor of Equatoria, the southern part of today's South Sudan. Scottish merchant William MacKinnon asked famed American 'explorer' Henry Morton Stanley to lead a relief effort. At the time of the expedition, Léopold II employed Stanley, who had been helping the king carve out the Congo Free State. Seeing an opportunity to add to his colony, Leopold wanted Stanley to take a circuitous route all the way around South Africa, up the Congo River and across the interior of the continent.

One of ten whites, Stairs quickly became second-in-command of the three-year expedition. Read from a humanistic or internationalist perspective, the RMC graduate's diary of the disastrous expedition is incredibly damning. Or, as Canadian parliamentary poet laureate George Elliott Clarke put it, "Stairs' account of his atrocities establishes that even Canadians, blinded by racism, can become swashbuckling mass murderers."

Stairs' diary, which he asked to be published upon his and Stanley's death, makes it clear that locals regularly opposed the mission. One passage notes, "The natives made a tremendous noise all night and canoes came close to us, the natives yelling frantically for us to go away," while another entry explains, "The natives destroyed their food rather than let it fall into the hands of the invaders."

Stairs repeatedly admits to "ransacking the

place.” A December 11, 1887, diary entry notes: “Out again at the natives, burned more houses and cut down more bananas; this time we went further up the valley and devastated the country there. In the afternoon [white officer, A. J. Mounteney] Jephson and I went up to some high hills at the back of the camp and burnt all we could see, driving off a lot of natives like so much game. I managed to capture some six goats and yesterday I also got six, which we gave to the men. The natives now must be pretty sick of having their property destroyed in the way we are doing, but it serves them right as they were the aggressors and after taking our cloth, fired on us.”

On a number of occasions the expedition displayed mutilated bodies or severed heads as a “warning” to the locals. Stairs notes, “I often wonder what English people would say if they knew of the way in which we go for these natives; friendship we don’t want as then we should get very little meat and probably have to pay for the bananas. Every male native capable of using the bow is shot. This, of course, we must do. All the children and women are taken as slaves by our men to do work in the camps.”

Stairs led numerous raiding parties to gather “carriers,” which were slaves in all but name. According to *The Last Expedition*, “[the mission] routinely captured natives, either to be ransomed for food, to get information, or simply to be used as guides for a few days.”

To cross the continent the expedition relied on its superior firepower, which included the new 600-bullet-per-minute Maxim gun. Stairs describes one battle, stating that his men were “ready to land and my Maxim ready to murder them if they should dare to attack us.” On another day, the firearm aficionado explained, “I cleaned the Maxim gun up thoroughly and fired some 20 or 30 rounds at some howling natives on the opposite bank.” Twenty months into the mission Stairs admits “by what means have we travelled over 730 miles of country from the Congo to the lake? Why by rifle alone, by shooting and pillaging.”

Beyond the immediate death and destruc-

tion, the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition opened new areas of the African interior to Arab slave traders, and it is thought to be the source of a sleeping sickness epidemic that ravaged the region. The expedition was also devastating for its participants. With little food and much abuse from the white officers, only 253 of the 695 African porters and soldiers who started the mission survived. Additionally, hundreds of other Africans who became part of the expedition at later stages died as well.

There are disturbing claims that some white officers took sex slaves and in one alarming instance even paid to have an 11-year-old girl cooked and eaten. This story scandalised the British public. For his part, Stairs became almost pathologically inhumane. His September 28, 1887, diary entry notes, “It was most interesting, lying in the bush and watching the natives quietly at their days work; some women were pounding the bark of trees preparatory to making the coarse native cloth used all along this part of the river, others were making banana flower by pounding up dried bananas, men we could see building huts and engaged at other such work, boys and girls running about, singing, crying, others playing on a small instrument common all over Africa, a series of wooden strips, bent over a bridge and twanged with the thumb and forefinger. All was as it was every day until our discharge of bullets, when the usual uproar of screaming of women took place.”

Even with some criticising the expedition in Britain, Stairs’ efforts were celebrated in Canada. An honouring committee established by the mayor of Halifax decided to give him a sword made in London of Nova Scotia steel and the city organized a reception attended by the Lieutenant-Governor with a military band playing “Here the Conquering Hero Comes.”

Within two years of the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition Stairs helped King Leopold II conquer the resource-rich Katanga region of the Congo. Suggested to Leopold by British investors and having already impressed Stanley with his brutality, Stairs headed up a heavily armed mission that swelled to 2,000.

Twenty months into the mission, Stairs admits “by what means have we travelled over 730 miles of country from the Congo to the lake? Why by rifle alone, by shooting and pillaging”

History Lesson

“Only rarely do the natives think of improving their lot – that’s the great weakness among the Africans. Their fathers’ ways are theirs and their own customs will be those of their sons and grandsons,” writes Stairs

The goal of the expedition was to extend Leopold’s authority over the Katanga region and to get a piece of the copper, ivory and gold trade. Stairs’ specific objective was to get Msiri, the ruler of the region, “to submit to the authorities of the Congo Free State, either by persuasion or by force.” In his diary, Stairs says more or less as much, writing that his goals were “above all, to be successful with regard to Msiri ... to discover mines in Katanga that can be exploited ... to make some useful geographic discoveries.”

As leader of the mission, Stairs prepared a daily journal for the Compagnie du Katanga. It details the terrain, resources and inhabitants along the way as well as other information that could assist in exploiting the region. It also explains his personal motivations for taking on the task despite spotty health. “I wasn’t happy [garrisoned with the Royal Engineers in England] in the real sense of the word. I felt my life passing without my doing anything worthwhile. Now I am freely making my way over the coastal plain with more than 300 men under my orders. My least word is law and I am truly the master.” Later, he describes his growing force and power. “I have thus, under my orders, 1,350 men – quite a little army.”

Stairs admitted to using slaves even though Leopold’s mission to the Congo was justified as a humanistic endeavour to stop the Arab slave trade. He wrote about how “the anti-slavery society will try and jump upon me for employing slaves as they seem to think I am doing ... however, I don’t fancy these will disturb me to a great extent.” The RMC graduate also regularly severed hands and reportedly collected the head of an enemy.

The expedition accomplished its principal objective. Stairs had Msiri killed and threatened Msiri’s brothers with the same fate unless they accepted Leopold as sovereign. After securing their submission, Stairs divided the kingdom between Msiri’s adopted son and brothers.

Stairs used a series of racist rationalisations to justify conquering Katanga. He describes the population as “unfortunate blacks who,

very often, are incapable of managing their own affairs,” and asked in the introduction of his diary, “Have we the right to take possession of this vast country, take it out of the hands of its local chiefs and to make it serve the realization of our goals? . . . To this question, I shall reply positively, yes. What value would it have [the land he was trying to conquer] in the hands of blacks, who, in their natural state, are far more cruel to one another than the worst Arabs or the wickedest whites.”

At another point, Stairs cites another standard colonial justification: “Only rarely do the natives think of improving their lot – that’s the great weakness among the Africans. Their fathers’ ways are theirs and their own customs will be those of their sons and grandsons.”

While Stairs died in the Congo, his exploits were lauded in Ottawa when Senator W.J. Macdonald sought to move “a parliamentary resolution expressing satisfaction for Stairs’ manly conduct.” There’s a Stairs Street in Halifax and two brass plaques honour him at the Royal Military College (one for Stairs alone and another dedicated to him and two others). The main plaque reads: “William Grant Stairs, Captain the Welsh Regiment. Born at Halifax Nova Scotia 1 July, 1863. Lieutenant Royal Engineers 1885-91. Served on the staff of the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition 1887 under the leadership of H.M. Stanley and exhibited great courage and devotion to duty. Died of fever on the 9 June 1892 at Chinde on the Zambesi whilst in command of the Katanga Expedition sent out by the King of the Belgians.” Another plaque was erected for Stairs (and two others) at St. George Cathedral in Kingston, Ontario. And a few hundred kilometers to the southwest, “Stair’s Island” was named in his honour in Parry Sound.

Stairs was one of hundreds of Canadians who helped conquer different parts of Africa at the turn of the 20th century. Accounts of Canada’s first 150-years are incomplete without this chapter in our history. **CT**

Yves Engler is a Montreal-based activist and author. His web site is www.yvesengler.com

ColdType Insights

Celebrating the birth of Britain's NHS

Kit Knightly celebrates the anniversary of the greatest social achievement in British political history

"No society can legitimately call itself civilised if a sick person is denied aid because of lack of means." – Aneurin (Nye) Bevan, father of Britain's National Health Service.

July 5 was the 69th anniversary of "The Appointed Day." On that day in 1948, Britain's Labour Party government under Prime Minister Clement Attlee, launched its revolutionary National Health Service. In the 69 years since then, though regularly undermined and underfunded by Tory and New Labour governments, the NHS has saved millions of lives and provided vital support for injured, disabled and chronically ill people who – in any other era of human civilisation – would have been forced to live in ruin or die in the gutter.

The importance of this achievement cannot be understated. Built out of a bombed-out and shell-shocked nation after the World War II, in what Winston Churchill referred to as "a bankrupt nation," where food rationing would continue until 1952, it was the product of the altruism that so often sweeps through a population in the wake



Photo: Wikimedia

ANEURIN (NYE) BEVAN, a former miner, led the fight to introduce Britain's National Health Service. Photo: Wikimedia

of calamity and suffering.

It's easy to look back with hindsight and see the creation of the NHS as somehow inevitable, such is the temptation with history. Obviously it was always going to happen ... because it did.

After all, we're not talking about extreme far-left ultra-statism, but rather common sense and sympathy. By removing the profit motive you reduce costs, and the money can be found by increasing the top rate of tax on the very wealthy. Thus, society as a whole benefits.

But the birth of the NHS was not easy, resisted by the bureaucratic establishment, and a strong propa-

ganda campaign set on frightening the public via comparison to the recently defeated enemy: Nazi Germany.

It met fierce resistance from the British Medical Association (BMA) and the Conservative Party, which voted against the bill 21 times before it was passed. Polls were published claiming that 90 percent of doctors opposed the new system, with one former BMA chairman describing the NHS proposal in 1946, "I have examined the bill and it looks to me uncommonly like the first step, and a big one, to national socialism as practised in Germany. The medical service there was early put under the dictatorship of a 'medical führer.' The bill will establish the minister for health in that capacity."

The driving force behind the NHS, Aneurin Bevan MP – a former miner and trade union official – had to fight tooth and nail to get the bill passed. He described the fight thus, in a speech made on "The Appointed Day," July 5th 1948: "During the last six months to a year there has been a sustained propaganda in the newspapers supporting the party opposite, which has resulted in grave misrepresentation of the nature of the Health Service and of the conditions under which the medical profession are asked to enter the Health Service.

"There has been even worse misrepresentation, sustained by a campaign of personal abuse, from a small body of spokesmen who have consistently misled the great pro-

fession to which they are supposed to belong.

“From the very beginning, this small body of politically poisoned people have decided to fight the Health Act itself and to stir up as much emotion as they can in the profession.”

Today, the NHS is under the greatest threat it has faced since its inception.

In America, millions of people suffer, die or are rendered bankrupt – every year – thanks to a capitalist system of medicine that seeks to squeeze money from the most vulnerable in society. Decades of corporate-funded propaganda has kept this system in place.

This is the way the Conservative Party, and its corporate backers, want the British system to work. Prime Minister Theresa May’s government is at the sharp-end of a slow plan to bloat the NHS with semi-privatisation, cutting budgets, decreasing efficiency and undermining public faith in the system, until the people become turkeys voting for Christmas and demand “change.”

The resistance which Bevan faced – both media-based and political – has not gone away; indeed it has only got stronger. The public mind has been poisoned against the very idea of socialist policies. Large parts of the Western world think fight between free market capitalism and socialism is over, believing Margaret Thatcher’s assertion that “There is no alternative.”

The NHS stands as a reminder that this is not true. The popularity of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, and the simple common sense of the most left-wing Labour manifesto in decades, will bring the “socialism scare tactics” back to the front pages of newspapers and websites all over the UK and the world.

We should remember, amid all the negativity that will flow, that the NHS still stands, and still works – a perfect silent riposte to those who seek to undermine the idea of socialist infrastructure out of selfishness and greed. **CT**

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Kit Knightly is an editor at www.offguardian.com



JEFF BEZOS: Should forget philanthropy, and pay tax instead.

couraged rich individuals in the US and abroad to devote much of their wealth to charity. Buffett and Gates themselves have been generous with their own personal fortunes.

But, as I have discussed in the Florida Tax Review, there is a downside to the Buffett-Gates Giving Pledge: Under current law, the federal treasury loses substantial revenue when appreciated stock is donated by a US citizen to charity. When Buffett’s Berkshire shares, Gates’s Microsoft stock or Bezos’s Amazon shares are transferred to charity, and the federal Treasury loses the income tax on the capital gain which would have been realised had that stock been sold. Moreover, such gifts of appreciated stock to charity remove these assets from the coverage of the federal estate tax. The upshot is that the federal treasury receives neither income tax nor transfer taxes when billionaires such as Buffett, Gates, or Bezos contribute their appreciated stock to charity, stock on which these business founders have paid no federal income tax.

Besides their efforts for charity, Buffett and Gates have been outspoken in calling for higher income taxes on the rich (the so-called

My advice to Amazon’s Bezos: Pay some tax

Edward J. Zelinsky has a simple suggestion for the billionaire businessmen and his contemporaries

Jeff Bezos, the billionaire founder of Amazon, has asked on Twitter for advice about the use of his fortune for philanthropy. My advice is that Mr. Bezos should pay some tax.

Contemporary attention to philanthropy is largely attributable to the admirable work of Warren Buffett and Bill Gates, Jr. Through their efforts, The Giving Pledge, Buffett and Gates have commendably en-

“Buffett Rule”) and for the preservation of the federal estate tax. Notwithstanding their advocacy of higher taxes for the rich, Buffett and Gates conduct their own affairs to avoid any federal taxation on their contributions of their appreciated shares to charity. This is perfectly legal, but hard to square with the Buffett-Gates programme of taxing the affluent.

There is, in short, considerable tension between the Buffett-Gates project to protect the federal fisc and the Buffett-Gates effort to encourage philanthropy as that effort has in practice been implemented.

Mr. Bezos can now set an instructive example. He can sell Amazon shares, pay tax, and then contribute the net after-tax proceeds to charity. This would produce less for charity but more for the federal fisc. In addition or instead, Mr. Bezos could

make a voluntary contribution to the federal treasury to compensate for some or all of the income, estate, and gift taxes avoided by his contributions to charity.

Warren Buffett has eloquently observed that large fortunes such as his result not just from the skill and work of entrepreneurs such as Gates and Bezos, but also from the taxpayer-provided public services which support these entrepreneurial efforts. Mr. Bezos could open a new chapter in charitable giving by acknowledging the role of public overheads in facilitating his success and by paying some tax on the gains he will donate to charity. **CT**

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Edward J. Zelinsky's latest book is The Origins of the Ownership Society: How the Defined Contribution Paradigm Changed America. This article was originally published at Oxford university's oup.com

ny – its finances, products, personnel, culture, competitors, etc. Such knowledge and skills are best gained working within the company, and are not worth much outside.

In fact, a CEO jumping between large companies happens less than once a year. And when they jump, they usually fail.

Lacking a market, CEO pay is set by a series of complex administrative pay practices. Usually a board, often dominated by other sitting or retired CEOs, sets their CEO's pay based on the compensation of other highly paid CEOs. The CEO can then double or triple this target by surpassing negotiated bonus goals.

This amount then increases target pay for his or her peer CEOs, giving another bump. Since 1978, these annual rounds of CEO pay leapfrog have produced a 1,000 percent inflation-adjusted increase in CEO pay. At the same time, the bottom 90 percent of American workers have seen their real incomes decrease by three percent.

American workers were once rewarded for productivity. Real wages and productivity rose in tandem at about three percent annually from 1945 through the mid-70s. But since then the bosses have taken it all. Although productivity growth increased real per capita GDP by 84 percent over the last 36 years, real wages have remained essentially flat.

Where did the money go? It went to the 1 percent, and especially to the 0.1 percent. The latter group, a mere 124,000 households, pocketed 40 percent of all economic gains. Business executives, CEOs, or others whose compensation is guided by CEO pay constitute two-thirds of this sliver. In other words, it's business

Why should bosses make so much more than staff?

Unlike movie stars and athletes, skyrocketing pay for CEOs has nothing to do with markets, writes **Steven Clifford**

CEO pay at America's 500 largest companies averaged \$13.1-million in 2016. That's 347 times what the average employee makes. So CEOs make a lot of money. But, some say, so do athletes and movie stars. Why pick on corporate bosses, then?

First, because the market sets compensation for athletes and movie

stars, but not for CEOs. Teams and movie studios bid for athletes and movie stars. CEO pay is set by a rigged system that has nothing to do with supply and demand.

NBA teams bid for LeBron James because his skills are portable: He'd be a superstar on any team. CEOs' skills are much more closely tied to their knowledge of a single compa-

executives – not movie stars, professional athletes, or heiresses – who grabbed the dollars that once flowed to the American worker.

Outsize CEO compensation harms American companies, and not just in the tens of millions they waste on executive pay. The effects on employee morale is much more costly. When the boss makes 347 times what you do, it's difficult to swallow his canard that "there's no I in team."

Worse, CEO pay encourages a short-term focus. Instead of making productive investments, companies buy back their own stock to keep its price high, which boosts their own pay check. From 2005 to 2014, stock buybacks by America's 500 largest public companies totalled \$3.7-trillion. This consumed over half of their net income. That cash could have been invested in plants and equipment, new technology, employee training, and research and development. Instead, corporate

America cut R&D by 50 percent, essentially eating the seed corn.

If athletes and movie stars were paid less, team owners and studios would simply make more. The hundreds of millions paid to CEOs, on the other hand, hurts their companies, employees, and our economy. It's a principal driver of our country's startling income inequality.

One of the few checks on CEO pay is a rule under the Dodd-Frank financial reform law requiring companies to disclose the ratio of CEO to average worker pay. Congress is now considering repealing this rule. If you think CEOs making 347 times what you do shouldn't be secret, maybe it's time to let your representatives know. **CT**

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*Steven Clifford is the former CEO of King Broadcasting and the author of *The CEO Pay Machine: How It Trashes America and How to Stop It*. This article was first published at www.otherwords.org*

is already planning to use the occasion to stir up fresh tax rage in the land.

That's why it's worth pointing out that, in any thoughtful assessment, the establishment of an income tax would be regarded as a nation-building event – ultimately as important as what was achieved on the battlefield at Vimy or the conference room in Charlottetown.

The income tax made it possible for Canada to develop into the advanced society that we are today, enabling us to raise the revenue to fight World War I and then create strong public programmes in health care, education and social insurance that have pushed us toward the top of every global index of human development.

While the Fraser Institute crowd always tries to convince us we can't afford the things we want, we actually can – thanks to the income tax.

Individually, we may struggle to provide for our needs, but when we pool our resources, we're fabulously rich. This explains why collectively we can create an excellent public health care system for all, while the US, abandoning its citizens to the marketplace, ends up with a far more costly system that leaves tens of millions uninsured.

In addition to raising revenue, the income tax is designed to ensure the burden of supporting government is shared fairly among citizens. So, unlike other taxes, its rates are "progressive" – imposing a heavier burden on those with bigger incomes.

Its role as a "make-the-rich-pay" tax goes all the way back to the beginning. Pressure for the tax arose among working people who were

In praise of income tax on its 100th birthday

The establishment of income tax should be regarded as a nation-building event, writes **Linda McQuaig**

Given the exhausting recent round of celebrating significant national anniversaries – Vimy's 100th, Canada's 150th – some Canadians may feel partied-out when family and friends gather again in a few months to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Canada's income tax.

Of course, many will feel there's nothing to celebrate. After decades of tax phobia, incited by business commentators and right-wing think tanks such as the Fraser Institute, some Canadians may well regard the 100th anniversary of the income tax – September 20 – as a day of infamy. The Fraser Institute

Insights

risking their lives in the trenches of World War I, while back home Canada's elite grew wildly rich in the revved-up war economy. As the Conservative government considered imposing conscription, a rallying cry arose from labour and farm organisations: "No conscription of men without conscription of wealth!"

The day after Parliament passed the contentious conscription bill, the government announced plans for an income tax.

In recent decades, however, the Fraser Institute and much of the business community have conducted a relentless – and fairly successful – campaign aimed at vilifying taxes in general, and taxes on the rich in particular.

They've succeeded in whittling down the progressivity in the income tax. In 1966, the top marginal rate was 80 percent on income above \$400,000 (\$3-million in today's dollars). Today, the top rate (which varies between provinces) is typically just above 50 percent.

They've also won deep cuts to corporate taxes and taxes on capital. Along with sales tax reductions, these cuts have left a gaping hole in government finances.

If Canadian governments (at all levels) collected the same percentage of tax as they did in 2000, they would have had an additional \$78-billion in revenue every year – enough to fund new programs like national childcare and pharmacare.

Instead, we watch as health care, education and other vital programs face ever more cuts, leaving us believing the narrative that government must partner with the private sector if we want these services

– even though that will ultimately drive up costs.

Canadian politicians have largely capitulated to the anti-tax demands of the business elite, apparently fearful of threats that otherwise the rich will leave the country.

Such threats will no doubt continue.

A better response to them may be the one delivered many years ago by William Jennings Bryan, the fiery American Populist Party leader in the 1890s, when populists truly championed the people.

In an impassioned 1894 speech that's worth recalling as we celebrate our income tax's centennial,

Bryan urged the US Congress not to be intimidated by the hundreds of wealthy Americans who signed a petition threatening to leave the country if an income tax were introduced:

"We can better afford to lose them and their fortunes than risk the contaminating influence of their presence," he roared. "Let them depart! And as they leave without regret the land of their birth, let them go with the poet's curse ringing in their ears!"

CT

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