
THE GUARDIAN'S WAR ON ASSANGE | JONATHAN COOK
REGISTERING ISRAEL'S USEFUL IDIOTS | PHILIP GIRALDI
BEWARE THE TRUMPENLEFT! | CJ HOPKINS

ColdType

ISSUE 173

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

DECEMBER 2018

PLANET *of* WAR



*Still trapped in a
Greater Middle Eastern
quagmire, the US
military prepares for
global combat*

DANNY SJURSEN (PAGE 14)

PLUS: Killers, drinkers, and traumatised for life. Daniele Ryan on drone pilots

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The Guardian's war on Julian Assange

The newspaper did not make a mistake in vilifying Assange without a shred of evidence. It did what it is designed to do

Tis welcome that finally there has been a little pushback, including from leading journalists, to the *Guardian's* long-running vilification of Julian Assange, the founder of Wikileaks.

Reporter Luke Harding's latest article, on November 27, claiming that Donald Trump's disgraced former campaign manager Paul Manafort secretly visited Assange in Ecuador's embassy in London on three occasions, is so full of holes that even hardened opponents of Assange in the corporate media are struggling to stand by it.

Faced with the backlash, the *Guardian* quickly – and very quietly – rowed back its initial certainty that its story was based on verified facts. Instead, it amended the text, without acknowledging it had done so, to attribute the claims to unnamed, and uncheckable, “sources”.

The propaganda function of the piece is patent. It is intended to provide evidence for long-standing allegations that Assange conspired with Trump, and Trump's supposed backers in the Kremlin, to damage Hillary Clinton during the 2016 presidential race.

The *Guardian's* latest story provides a supposedly stronger foundation for an existing narrative: that Assange and Wikileaks knowingly published emails hacked by Russia from the Democratic party's servers. In truth, there is no public evidence that the emails were hacked, or that Russia was involved. Central actors have suggested instead that the emails were leaked from within the Democratic party.

Nonetheless, this unverified allegation has been

aggressively exploited by the Democratic leadership because it shifts attention away both from its failure to mount an effective electoral challenge to Trump and from the damaging contents of the emails. These show that party bureaucrats sought to rig the primaries to make sure Clinton's challenger for the Democratic nomination, Bernie Sanders, lost.

To underscore the intended effect of the *Guardian's* new claims, Harding even throws in a casual and unsubstantiated reference to “Russians” joining Manafort in supposedly meeting Assange.

Manafort has denied the *Guardian's* claims, while Assange has threatened to sue the *Guardian* for libel.

The emotional impact of the *Guardian* story is to suggest that Assange is responsible for four years or more of Trump rule. But more significantly, it bolsters the otherwise risible claim that Assange is not a publisher – and thereby entitled to the protections of a free press, as enjoyed by the *Guardian* or the *New York Times* – but the head of an organisation engaged in espionage for a foreign power. The intention is to deeply discredit Assange, and by extension the Wikileaks organisation, in the eyes of right-thinking liberals. That, in turn, will make it much easier to silence Assange and the vital cause he represents: the use of new media to hold to account the old, corporate media and political elites through the imposition of far greater transparency.

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The *Guardian* story will prepare public opinion for the moment when Ecuador's rightwing government under President Lenin Moreno forces Assange out of the embassy, having already withdrawn most of his rights to use digital media.

It will soften opposition when the UK moves to arrest Assange on self-serving bail violation charges and extradites him to the US. And it will pave the way for the US legal system to lock Assange up for a very long time.

For the best part of a decade, any claims by Assange's supporters that avoiding this fate was the reason Assange originally sought asylum in the embassy was ridiculed by corporate journalists, not least at the *Guardian*.

Even when a United Nations panel of experts in international law ruled in 2016 that Assange was being arbitrarily – and unlawfully – detained by the UK, *Guardian* writers led efforts to discredit the UN report. Now Assange and his supporters have been proved right once again. An administrative error this month revealed that the US justice department had secretly filed criminal charges against Assange.

The problem for the *Guardian*, which should have been obvious to its editors from the outset, is that any visits by Manafort would be easily verifiable without relying on unnamed "sources".

Glenn Greenwald is far from alone in noting that London is possibly the most surveilled city in the world, with CCTV cameras everywhere. The environs of the

Ecuadorian embassy are monitored especially heavily, with continuous filming by the UK and Ecuadorian authorities and most likely by the US and other actors with an interest in Assange's fate. The idea that Manafort or "Russians" could have wandered into the embassy to meet Assange even once without their trail, entry and meeting being intimately scrutinised and recorded is simply preposterous.

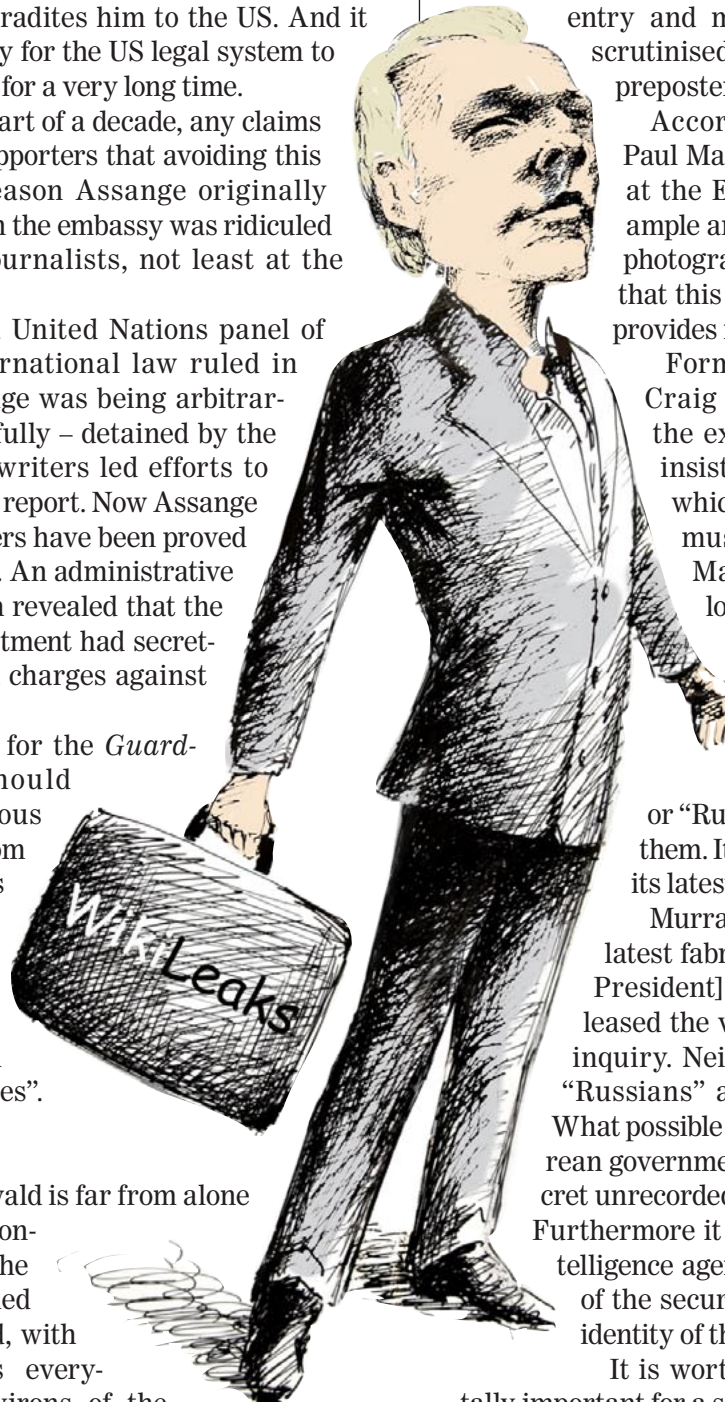
According to Greenwald: "If Paul Manafort ... visited Assange at the Embassy, there would be ample amounts of video and other photographic proof demonstrating that this happened. The *Guardian* provides none of that."

Former British ambassador Craig Murray also points out the extensive security checks insisted on by the embassy to which any visitor to Assange must submit. Any visits by Manafort would have been logged.

In fact, the *Guardian* obtained the embassy's logs in May, and has never made any mention of either Manafort or "Russians" being identified in them. It did not refer to the logs in its latest story.

Murray: "The problem with this latest fabrication is that [Ecuador's President] Moreno had already released the visitor logs to the Mueller inquiry. Neither Manafort nor these "Russians" are in the visitor logs ... What possible motive would the Ecuadorian government have for facilitating secret unrecorded visits by Paul Manafort? Furthermore it is impossible that the intelligence agency – who were in charge of the security – would not know the identity of these alleged 'Russians'."

It is worth noting it should be vitally important for a serious publication like the



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Guardian to ensure its claims are unassailably true – both because Assange’s personal fate rests on their veracity, and because, even more importantly, a fundamental right, the freedom of the press, is at stake. Given this, one would have expected the *Guardian*’s editors to have insisted on the most stringent checks imaginable before going to press with Harding’s story. At a very minimum, they should have sought out a response from Assange and Manafort before publication. Neither precaution was taken.

I worked for the *Guardian* for a number of years, and know well the layers of checks that any highly sensitive story has to go through before publication. In that lengthy process, a variety of commissioning editors, lawyers, backbench editors and the editor herself, Kath Viner, would normally insist on cuts to anything that could not be rigorously defended and corroborated.

And yet this piece seems to have been casually waved through, given a green light even though its profound shortcomings were evident to a range of well-placed analysts and journalists from the outset. That at the very least hints that the *Guardian* thought they had “insurance” on this story. And the only people who could have promised that kind of insurance are the security and intelligence services – presumably of Britain, the United States and/or Ecuador.

It appears the *Guardian* has simply taken this story, provided by spooks, at face value. Even if it later turns out that Manafort did visit Assange, the *Guardian* clearly had no compelling evidence for its claims when it published them. That is profoundly irresponsible journalism – fake news – that should be of the gravest concern to readers.

Despite all this, even analysts critical of the *Guardian*’s behaviour have shown a glaring failure to understand that its latest coverage represents not an aberration by the paper but decisively fits with a pattern.

Glenn Greenwald, who once had an influential column in the *Guardian* until an apparent, though unacknowledged, falling out with his employer over the Edward Snowden revelations, wrote a series of baffling observations about the *Guardian*’s latest story.

First, he suggested it was simply evidence of the

Guardian’s long-standing (and well-documented) hostility towards Assange: “The *Guardian*, an otherwise solid and reliable paper, has such a pervasive and unprofessionally personal hatred for Julian Assange that it has frequently dispensed with all journalistic standards in order to malign him”.

It was also apparently evidence of the paper’s clickbait tendencies: “They [*Guardian* editors] knew that publishing this story would cause partisan warriors to excitedly spread the story, and that cable news outlets would hyperventilate over it, and that they’d reap the rewards regardless of whether the story turned out to be true or false”.

And finally, in a bizarre tweet, Greenwald opined, “I hope the story [maligning Assange] turns out true” – apparently because maintenance of the *Guardian*’s reputation is more important than Assange’s fate and the right of journalists to dig up embarrassing secrets without fear of being imprisoned.

What this misses is that the *Guardian*’s attacks on Assange are not exceptional or motivated solely by personal animosity. They are entirely predictable and systematic. Rather than being the reason for the *Guardian* violating basic journalistic standards and ethics, the paper’s hatred of Assange is a symptom of a deeper malaise in the *Guardian* and the wider corporate media.

Even aside from its decade-long campaign against Assange, the *Guardian* is far from “solid and reliable”, as Greenwald claims. It has been at the forefront of the relentless, and unhinged, attacks on Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn for prioritising the rights of Palestinians over Israel’s right to continue its belligerent occupation. Over the past three years, the *Guardian* has injected credibility into the Israel lobby’s desperate efforts to tar Corbyn as an anti-semitic.

Similarly, the *Guardian* worked tirelessly to promote Clinton and undermine Sanders in the 2016 Democratic nomination process – another reason the paper has been so assiduous in promoting the idea that Assange, aided by Russia, was determined to promote Trump over Clinton for the presidency.

The *Guardian*’s coverage of Latin America,

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especially of populist leftwing governments that have rebelled against traditional and oppressive US hegemony in the region, has long grated with analysts and experts. Its especial venom has been reserved for leftwing figures like Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, democratically elected but official enemies of the US, rather than the region's rightwing authoritarians beloved of Washington.

The *Guardian* has been vocal in the so-called "fake news" hysteria, decrying the influence of social media, the only place where leftwing dissidents have managed to find a small foothold to promote their politics and counter the corporate media narrative.

The *Guardian* has painted social media chiefly as a platform overrun by Russian trolls, arguing that this should justify ever-tighter restrictions that have so far curbed critical voices of the dissident left more than the right.

Equally, it has made clear who its true heroes are. Certainly not Corbyn or Assange, who threaten to disrupt the entrenched neoliberal order that is hurtling us towards climate breakdown and economic collapse. Its pages, however, are readily available to the latest effort to prop up the status quo from Tony Blair, the man who led Britain, on false pretences, into the largest crime against humanity in living memory – the attack on Iraq.

That "humanitarian intervention" cost the lives of many hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and created a vacuum that destabilised much of the Middle East, sucked in Islamic jihadists like al-Qaeda and ISIS, and contributed to the migrant crisis in Europe that has fuelled the resurgence of the far-right. None of that is discussed in the *Guardian* or considered grounds for disqualifying Blair as an arbiter of what is good for Britain and the world's future.

The *Guardian* also has an especial soft spot for blogger Elliot Higgins, who, aided by the *Guardian*, has shot to unlikely prominence as a self-styled "weapons expert". Like Luke Harding, Higgins invariably seems ready to echo whatever the British and American security services need verifying "independently". Higgins and his well-

staffed website Bellingcat have taken on for themselves the role of arbiters of truth on many foreign affairs issues, taking a prominent role in advocating for narratives that promote US and NATO hegemony while demonising Russia, especially in highly contested arenas such as Syria.

That clear partisanship should be no surprise, given that Higgins now enjoys an "academic" position at, and funding from, the Atlantic Council, a high-level, Washington-based think-tank founded to drum up support for NATO and justify its imperialist agenda.

Improbably, the *Guardian* has adopted Higgins as the poster-boy for a supposed citizen journalism it has sought to undermine as "fake news" whenever it occurs on social media without the endorsement of state-backed organisations.

The truth is that the *Guardian* has not erred in this latest story attacking Assange, or in its much longer-running campaign to vilify him. With this story, it has done what it regularly does when supposedly vital western foreign policy interests are at stake – it simply regurgitates an elite-serving, western narrative.

Its job is to shore up a consensus on the left for attacks on leading threats to the existing, neoliberal order: whether they are a platform like Wikileaks promoting whistle-blowing against a corrupt western elite; or a politician like Jeremy Corbyn seeking to break apart the status quo on the rapacious financial industries or Israel-Palestine; or a radical leader like Hugo Chavez who threatened to overturn a damaging and exploitative US dominance of "America's backyard"; or social media dissidents who have started to chip away at the elite-friendly narratives of corporate media, including the *Guardian*.

The *Guardian* did not make a mistake in vilifying Assange without a shred of evidence. It did what it is designed to do. **CT**

Jonathan Cook won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His books include *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

DANNY SJURSEN

Planet of war

Still trapped in a Greater Middle Eastern quagmire, the US military prepares for global combat

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A **MERICAN** militarism has gone off the rails – and this middling career officer should have seen it coming. Earlier in this century, the US military not surprisingly focused on counterinsurgency as it faced various indecisive and seemingly unending wars across the Greater Middle East and parts of Africa. Back in 2008, when I was still a captain newly returned from Iraq and studying at Fort Knox, Kentucky, our training scenarios generally focused on urban combat and what were called security and stabilisation missions. We'd plan to assault some notional city centre, destroy the enemy fighters there, and then transition to pacification and "humanitarian" operations.

Of course, no one then asked about the dubious efficacy of "regime change" and "nation building,"

the two activities in which our country had been so regularly engaged. That would have been frowned upon. Still,

however bloody and wasteful those wars were, they now

look like relics from a remarkably simpler time. The US

Army knew its mission then (even if it

couldn't accomplish

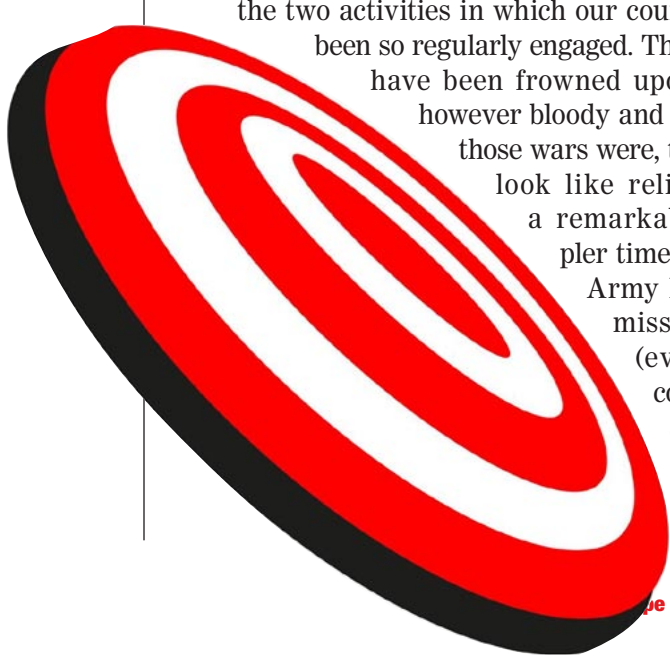
it) and could

predict what each of us young officers was about to take another crack at: counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and Iraq.


Fast forward eight years – during which I fruitlessly toiled away in Afghanistan and taught at West Point – and the US military ground presence has significantly decreased in the Greater Middle East, even if its wars there remain "infinite." The US was still bombing, raiding, and "advising" away in several of those old haunts as I entered the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Nonetheless, when I first became involved in the primary staff officer training course for mid-level careerists there in 2016, it soon became apparent to me that something was indeed changing.

Our training scenarios were no longer limited to counterinsurgency operations. Now, we were planning for possible deployments to – and high-intensity conventional warfare in – the Caucasus, the Baltic Sea region, and the South China Sea (think: Russia and China). We were also planning for conflicts against an Iranian-style "rogue" regime (think: well, Iran). The missions became all about projecting US Army divisions into distant regions to fight major wars to "liberate" territories and bolster allies.

One thing soon became clear to me in my new digs: much had changed. The US military had, in fact, gone global in a big way. Frustrated by its inability to close the deal on any of the indecisive counterterrorism wars of this century, Washington had de-



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decided it was time to prepare for “real” war with a host of imagined enemies. This process had, in fact, been developing right under our noses for quite a while. You remember in 2013 when President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton began talking about a “pivot” to Asia – an obvious attempt to contain China. Obama also sanctioned Moscow and further militarised Europe in response to Russian aggression in Ukraine and the Crimea. President Trump, whose “instincts”, on the campaign trail, were to pull out of America’s Middle Eastern quagmires, turned out to be ready to escalate tensions with China, Russia, Iran, and even (for a while) North Korea.

With Pentagon budgets reaching record levels – some \$717-billion for 2019 – Washington has stayed the course, while beginning to plan for more expansive future conflicts across the globe. Today, not a single square inch of this ever-warming planet of ours escapes the reach of US militarisation.

Think of these developments as establishing a potential formula for perpetual conflict that just might lead the United States into a truly cataclysmic war it neither needs nor can meaningfully win. With that in mind, here’s a little tour of Planet Earth as the US military now imagines it.

Never apt to quit, even after 17 years of failure, Washington’s bipartisan military machine still churns along in the Greater Middle East. Some 14,500 US troops remain in Afghanistan (along with much US air power) though that war is failing by just about any measurable metric you care to choose – and Americans are still dying there, even if in diminished numbers.

In Syria, US forces remain trapped between hostile powers, one mistake away from a possible outbreak of hostilities with Russia, Iran, Syrian President Assad, or even NATO ally Turkey. While American troops (and air power) in Iraq helped destroy ISIS’s physical “caliphate”, they

remain entangled there in a low-level guerrilla struggle in a country seemingly incapable of forming a stable political consensus. In other words, as yet there’s no end in sight for that now 15-year-old war. Add in the drone strikes, conventional air attacks, and special forces raids that Washington regularly unleashes in Somalia, Libya, Yemen, and Pakistan, and it’s clear that the US military’s hands remain more than full in the region.

If anything, the tensions – and potential for escalation – in the Greater Middle East and North Africa are only worsening. President Trump ditched President Obama’s Iran nuclear deal and, despite the recent drama over the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, has gleefully backed the Saudi royals in their arms race and cold war with Iran. While the other major players in that nuclear pact remained on board, President Trump has appointed unreformed Iranophobe neocons like John Bolton and Mike Pompeo to key foreign policy positions and his administration still threatens regime change in Tehran.

In Africa, despite talk about downsizing the US presence there, the military advisory mission has only increased its various commitments, backing questionably legitimate governments against local opposition forces and destabilising further an already unstable continent. You might think that waging war for two decades on two continents would at least keep the Pentagon busy and temper Washington’s desire for further confrontations. As it happens, the opposite is proving to be the case.

Vladimir Putin’s Russia is increasingly autocratic and has shown a propensity for localised aggression in its sphere of influence. Still, it would be better not to exaggerate the threat. Russia did annex the Crimea, but the people of that province were Russians and desired such a reunification. It intervened in a Ukrainian civil war, but Washington was also complicit in the coup that kicked off that drama. Besides, all of this unfolded in Russia’s neighbourhood as the US military increasingly deploys its forces up to the very borders of the Russian Federation. Imagine the hysteria in Washington if Russia were deploying troops and advisers in Mexico or the Caribbean.

To put all of this in perspective, Washington and its military machine actually prefer facing off

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against Russia. It's a fight the armed forces still remain comfortable with. After all, that's what its top commanders were trained for during the tail end of an almost half-century-long Cold War. Counterinsurgency is frustrating and indecisive. The prospect of preparing for "real war" against the good old Russians with tanks, planes, and artillery – now, that's what the military was built for!

And despite all the over-hyped talk about Donald Trump's complicity with Russia, under him, the Obama-era military escalation in Europe has only expanded. Back when I was toiling hopelessly in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US Army was actually removing combat brigades from Germany and stationing them back on US soil (when, of course, they weren't off fighting somewhere in the Greater Middle East). Then, in the late Obama years, the military began returning those forces to Europe and stationing them in the Baltic, Poland, Romania, and other countries increasingly near to Russia. That's never ended and, this year, the US Air Force has delivered its largest shipment of ordnance to Europe since the Cold War.

Make no mistake: war with Russia would be an unnecessary disaster – and it could go nuclear. Is Latvia really worth that risk?

From a Russian perspective, of course, it's Washington and its expansion of the (by definition) anti-Russian NATO alliance into Eastern Europe that constitutes the real aggression in the region – and Putin may have a point there.

What's more, an honest assessment of the situation suggests that Russia, a country whose economy is about the size of Spain's,

has neither the will nor the capacity to invade Central Europe.

Even in the bad old days of the Cold War, as we now know from Soviet archives, European conquest was never on Moscow's

agenda. It still isn't.

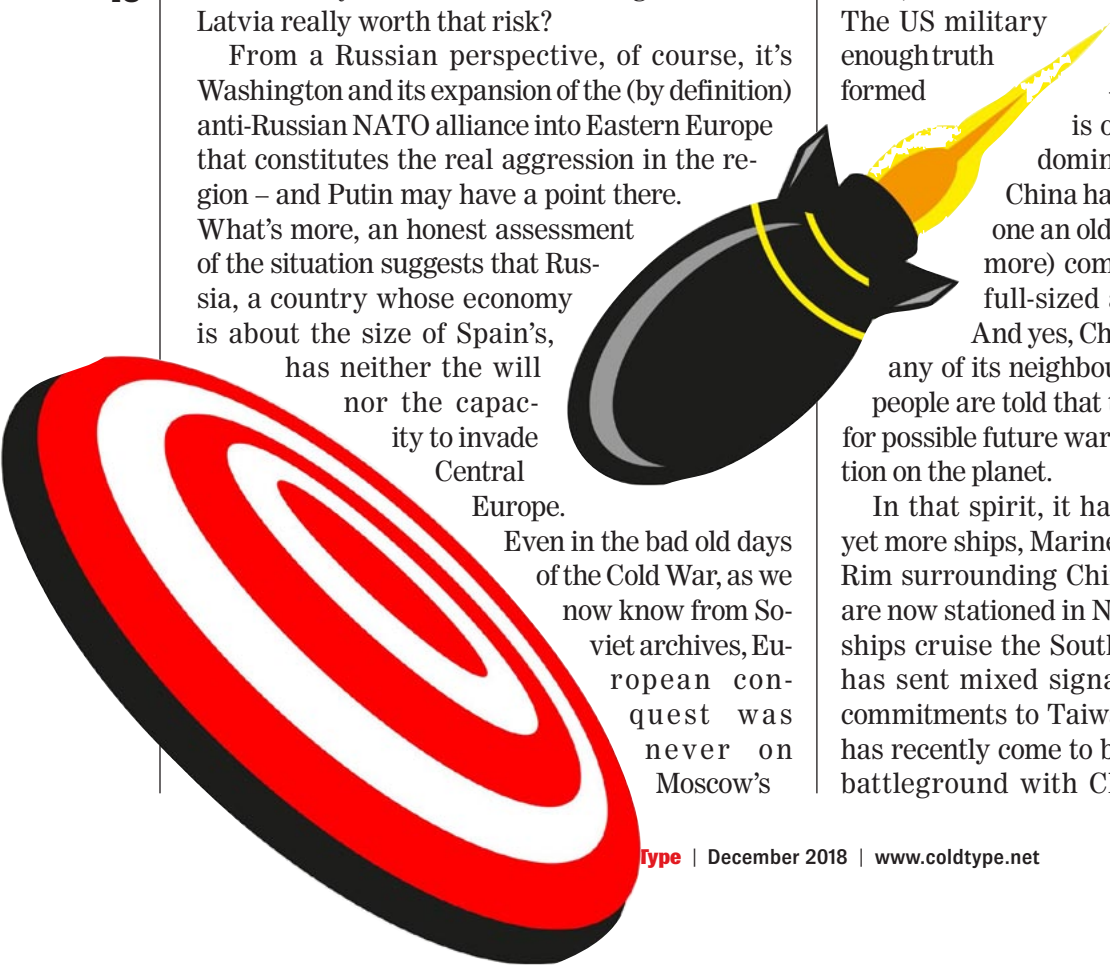
Nonetheless, the US military goes on preparing for what Marine Corps Commandant General Robert Neller, addressing some of his forces in Norway, claimed was a "big fight" to come. If it isn't careful, Washington just might get the war it seems to want and the one that no one in Europe or the rest of this planet needs.

The United States Navy has long treated the world's oceans as if they were American lakes. Washington extends no such courtesy to other great powers or nation-states. Only now, the US Navy finally faces some challenges abroad – especially in the Western Pacific. A rising China, with a swiftly growing economy and carrying grievances from a long history of European imperial domination, has had the audacity to assert itself in the South China Sea. In response, Washington has reacted with panic and bellicosity.

Never mind that the South China Sea is Beijing's Caribbean (a place where Washington long felt it had the right to do anything it wanted militarily). Heck, the South China Sea has China in its name! The US military now claims – with just enough truth to convince the uninformed – that China's growing navy is out for Pacific, if not global, dominance. Sure, at the moment China has only two aircraft carriers, one an old rehab (though it is building more) compared to the US Navy's 11 full-sized and nine smaller carriers. And yes, China hasn't actually attacked any of its neighbours yet. Still, the American people are told that their military must prepare for possible future war with the most populous nation on the planet.

In that spirit, it has been forward deploying yet more ships, Marines, and troops to the Pacific Rim surrounding China. Thousands of Marines are now stationed in Northern Australia; US warships cruise the South Pacific; and Washington has sent mixed signals regarding its military commitments to Taiwan. Even the Indian Ocean has recently come to be seen as a possible future battleground with China, as the US Navy in-

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creases its regional patrols there and Washington negotiates stronger military ties with China's rising neighbour, India. In a symbolic gesture, the military recently renamed its former Pacific Command (PACOM) the Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM).

Unsurprisingly, China's military high command has escalated accordingly. They've advised their South China Sea Command to prepare for war, made their own set of provocative gestures in the South China Sea, and also threatened to invade Taiwan should the Trump administration change America's longstanding "One China" policy. From the Chinese point of view, all of this couldn't be more logical, given that President Trump has also unleashed a "trade war" on Beijing's markets and intensified his anti-China rhetoric. And all of this is, in turn, consistent with the Pentagon's increasing militarisation of the entire globe.

Would that it were only Africa, Asia, and Europe that Washington had chosen to militarize. But as Dr Seuss might have said: that is not all, oh no, that is not all. In fact, more or less every square inch of our spinning planet not already occupied by a rival state has been deemed a militarised space to be contested. The US has long been unique in the way it divided the entire surface of the globe into geographical (combatant) commands presided over by generals and admirals who functionally serve as regional Roman-style proconsuls.

And the Trump years are only accentuating this phenomenon. Take Latin America, which might normally be considered a non-threatening space for the US, though it is already under the gaze of US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM). Recently, however, having already threatened to "invade" Venezuela, President Trump spent the election campaign rousing his base on the claim that a desperate caravan of Central American refugees – hailing from countries the US had a significant responsibility for destabilising in the first place – was a literal "invasion" and so yet another military problem. As such, he ordered more than 5,000 troops (more than currently serve in Syria or Iraq) to the US-Mexico border.

Though he is not the first to try to do so, he has also sought to militarise space and so create a possible fifth branch of the US military, tentatively known as the Space Force. It makes sense. War has long been three dimensional, so why not bring US militarism into the stratosphere, even as the US Army is evidently training and preparing for a new cold war (no pun intended) with that ever-ready adversary, Russia, around the Arctic Circle.

If the world as we know it is going to end, it will either be thanks to the long-term threat of climate change or an absurd nuclear war. In both cases, Washington has been upping the ante and doubling down. On climate change, of course, the Trump administration seems intent on loading the atmosphere with ever more greenhouse gases. When it comes to nukes, rather than admit that they are unusable and seek to further downsize the bloated US and Russian arsenals, that administration, like Obama's, has committed itself to the investment of what could, in the end, be at least \$1.6-trillion over three decades for the full-scale "modernisation" of that arsenal. Any faintly rational set of actors would long ago have accepted that nuclear war is unwinnable and a formula for mass human extinction. As it happens, though, we're not dealing with rational actors but with a defense establishment that considers it a prudent move to withdraw from the Cold War era Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty with Russia.

And that ends our tour of the US military's version of Planet Earth.

It is often said that, in an Orwellian sense, every nation needs an enemy to unite and discipline its population. Still, the US must stand alone in history as the only country to militarise the whole globe (with space thrown in) in preparation for taking on just about anyone. Now, that's exceptional. **CT**

*Danny Sjurzen is a US Army major and former history instructor at West Point. He served tours with in Iraq and Afghanistan. He has written *Ghost Riders of Baghdad: Soldiers, Civilians, and the Myth of the Surge*. This essay first appeared at www.tomdispatch.com*

Hopeless realism

No effective means of stopping climate breakdown is deemed "politically realistic". So we must change political realities

T was a moment of the kind that changes lives. At a press conference held by Extinction Rebellion, two of us journalists pressed the activists on whether their aims were realistic. They have called, for example, for carbon emissions in the UK to be reduced to net zero by 2025. Wouldn't it be better, we asked, to pursue some intermediate aims?

A young woman called Lizia Woolf stepped forward. She hadn't spoken before, and I hadn't really noticed her, but the passion, grief and fury of her response was utterly compelling. "What is it that you are asking me as a 20-year-old to face and to accept about my future and my life? ... this is an emergency – we are facing extinction. When you ask questions like that, what is it you want me to feel?"

We had no answer.

Softer aims might be politically realistic, but they are physically unrealistic. Only shifts commensurate with the scale of our existential crises have any prospect of averting them. Hopeless realism, tinkering at the edges of the problem, got us into this mess. It will not get us out.

Public figures talk and act as if environmental change will be linear and gradual. But the Earth's systems are highly complex, and complex systems do not respond to pressure in linear ways. When these systems interact (because the world's atmosphere, oceans, land surface and lifeforms do not sit placidly within the boxes that make study more convenient) their reactions to change become highly unpredictable. Small perturbations

can ramify wildly. Tipping points are likely to remain invisible until we have passed them. We could see changes of state so abrupt and profound that no continuity can be safely assumed.

Only one of the many life support systems on which we depend – soils, aquifers, rainfall, ice, the pattern of winds and currents, pollinators, biological abundance and diversity – need fail for everything to slide. For example, when Arctic sea ice melts beyond a certain point, the positive feedbacks this triggers (such as darker water absorbing more heat, melting permafrost releasing methane, shifts in the polar vortex) could render runaway climate breakdown unstoppable. When the Younger Dryas period ended 11,600 years ago, Greenland ice cores reveal temperatures rising 10°C within a decade.

I don't believe that such a collapse is yet inevitable, or that a commensurate response is either technically or economically impossible. When the US joined the Second World War in 1941, it replaced a civilian economy with a military economy within months. As Jack Doyle records in his book *Taken for a Ride*, "In one year, General Motors developed, tooled, and completely built from scratch 1,000 Avenger and 1,000 Wildcat aircraft ... Barely a year after Pontiac received a Navy contract to build antishipping missiles, the company began delivering the completed product to carrier squadrons around the world". And this was before advanced information technology

made everything faster.

The problem is political. A fascinating analysis by the social science professor Kevin Mackay contends that oligarchy has been a more fundamental cause of the collapse of civilisations than social complexity or energy demand. Oligarchic control, he argues, thwarts rational decision-making, because the short-term interests of the elite are radically different to the long-term interests of society. This explains why past civilizations have collapsed “despite possessing the cultural and technological know-how needed to resolve their crises”. Economic elites, that benefit from social dysfunction, block the necessary solutions.

The oligarchic control of wealth, politics, media and public discourse explains the comprehensive institutional failure now pushing us towards disaster. Think of Trump and his cabinet of multi-millionaires, the influence of the Koch brothers, the Murdoch empire and its massive contribution to climate science denial, the oil and motor companies whose lobbying prevents a faster shift to new technologies.

It is not just governments that have failed to respond, though they have failed spectacularly. Public sector broadcasters have deliberately and systematically shut down environmental coverage, while allowing the opaquely-funded lobbyists that masquerade as thinktanks to shape public discourse and deny what we face. Academics, afraid to upset their funders and colleagues, have bitten their lips. Even the bodies that claim to be addressing our predicament remain locked within destructive frameworks.

For example, last month I attended a meeting about environmental breakdown at the Institute for Public Policy Research. Many of the people in the room seemed to understand that continued economic growth is incompatible with sustaining the Earth’s systems. As the author Jason Hickel points out, a decoupling of rising GDP from global resource use has not happened and will not happen. While 50-billion tonnes of resources used per year is roughly the limit the Earth’s systems can tolerate, the world is already consuming 70-billion tonnes. Business as usual, at current

rates of economic growth, will ensure that this rises to 180-billion tonnes by 2050. Maximum resource efficiency, coupled with massive carbon taxes and some pretty optimistic assumptions, would reduce this to 95-billion tonnes: still way beyond environmental limits. A study taking account of the rebound effect (efficiency leads to further resource use) raises the estimate to 132-billion tonnes. Green growth, as members of the Institute appear to accept, is physically impossible.

On the same day, the same Institute announced a major new economics prize for “ambitious proposals to achieve a step-change improvement in the growth rate”. It wants ideas that will enable economic growth rates in the UK at least to double. The announcement was accompanied by the usual blah about sustainability, but none of the judges of the prize has a discernible record of environmental interest.

Those to whom we look for solutions trundle on as if nothing has changed. They continue to behave as if the accumulating evidence has no purchase on their minds. Decades of institutional failure ensures that only “unrealistic” proposals – the repurposing of economic life, with immediate effect – now have a realistic chance of stopping the planetary death spiral. And only those who stand outside the failed institutions can lead this effort.

Two tasks need to be performed simultaneously: throwing ourselves at the possibility of averting collapse, as Extinction Rebellion is doing, slight though this possibility may appear. And preparing ourselves for the likely failure of these efforts, terrifying as this prospect is. Both tasks require a complete revision of our relationship with the living planet. Because we cannot save ourselves without contesting oligarchic control, the fight for democracy and justice and the fight against environmental breakdown are one and the same. Do not allow those who have caused this crisis to define the limits of political action. Do not allow those whose magical thinking got us into this mess to tell us what can and cannot be done.

CT

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*George Monbiot's website is www.monbiot.com
– This article first appeared in the Guardian*

Beware the Trumpenleft!

The last thing we need at a time like this is a bunch of leftists thinking for themselves and questioning official leftist dogma

BEWARE the Trumpenleft!

Unless you move in certain leftist circles, you may not have heard about one of the Russians' most insidiously evil active measures, an active measure so insidiously evil that it could only have been dreamed up in Moscow, the current wellspring of insidious evil. Its official Russo-Nazi-sounding code name is still being decided on by leftist cryptographers, but most people know it as the "Trumpenleft".

The Trumpenleft (or "Sputnik Left", as it is also called by professional anti-Putin-Nazi intelligence analysts) is pretty much exactly what it sounds like. It is a gang of nefarious Putin-Nazi infiltrators posing as respectable leftists in order to disseminate Trumpian ideology and Putin-Nazi propaganda among an assortment of online leftist magazines that hardly anyone ever actually reads. The aim of these insidious Trumpenleft infiltrators is to sow confusion, chaos, and discord among actual, real, authentic leftists who are going about the serious business of calling Donald Trump a fascist on the Internet 25 times a day, verbally abusing Julian Assange, occasionally pulling down oppressive statues, and sharing videos of racist idiots acting like racist idiots in public.

The Trumpenleft is determined to sabotage (or momentarily disrupt) this revolutionary work, mostly by tricking these actual leftists into critically thinking about a host of issues that there is no good reason to critically think about ... global capitalism, national sovereignty, immigration,

identity politics, corporate censorship, and other issues that there is no conceivable reason to discuss, or debate, or even casually mention, unless you're some kind of Russia-loving Nazi.

Angela Nagle's recent piece in *American Affairs* is a perfect example. Nagle (who is certainly Trumpenleft) puts forth the fascistic proposition that mass migration won't help the world's poor, and she claims that it creates "a race to the bottom for workers" in wealthier, developed countries and "a brain drain" in poorer, less developed countries. After deploying a variety of Trumpenleft sophistry (ie, fact-based analysis, logic, and so on), she goes so far as to openly suggest that "progressives should focus on addressing the systemic exploitation at the root of mass migration rather than retreating to a shallow moralism" ... a shallow moralism that reifies the dominant neo-liberal ideology that is causing mass migration in the first place.

This is the type of gobbledegook the Trumpenleft use to try to dupe real leftists into putting down their phones for a minute and actually thinking through political issues! Fortunately, no one is falling for it. As any bona fide leftist knows, there is no "mass migration problem". The whole thing is simply a racist hoax concocted by Putin, Alex Jones, and other Trumpian disinformationists. The only thing real leftists need to know about immigration is that immigrants are good, and Trump, and walls, and borders are



SKIN DEEP: Donald Trump, by London street artist Loretto.

Photo: Duncan C, via flickr.com

bad! All that other fancy gibberish about global capitalism, Milton Friedman, labour markets, and national sovereignty is nothing but fascist propaganda (which needs to be censored, or at least deplatformed, or demonetised, or otherwise suppressed).

But Angela Nagle is just one example. The Trumpenleft is legion, and growing. Its membership includes a handful of prominent (and rather less prominent) fake leftist figures: Glenn Greenwald, who many among the “Resistance” would like to see renditioned and indefinitely detained in some offshore Trumpenleft gulag somewhere; Matt Taibbi, who just published a treasonous article challenging the right of the US government to prosecute publishers as “enemy agents” for publishing material they don’t want published; Julian Assange, who is one such publisher, and who the US has scheduled for public crucifixion just as soon as they can get their hands on him; Aaron

Maté of the Real News Network, a notorious Trump-Russia “collusion denialist”; Caitlin Johnstone, an Australian blogger and poet who the Red-Brown Putin-Nazi hunters at CounterPunch have become totally obsessed with; Diana Johnstone, who they also don’t like; and (full disclosure) your humble narrator.

Now, normally, the opinions of some political journalists and rather marginal political writers wouldn’t amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world, but there’s a war on, so there’s no room for neutrality. Over the course of the next two years, the global capitalist ruling classes need to make an example of Trump, and Assange, and anyone else who has had the gall to fuck with their global empire. Part of how they are going to do this is to further polarise the already extremely polarised ideological spectrum until everyone is forced onto one or the other side of a pro- or anti-Trump equation, or a pro- or anti-populist equation ... or

a pro- or anti-fascist equation.

As you probably noticed, the *Guardian* has just launched a special six-week “investigative series” exploring the whole “new populism” phenomenon (which began with a lot of scary photos of Steve Bannon next to the word “populism”). We are going to be hearing a lot about “populism” over the course of the next two years. We are going to be hearing how “populism” is actually not that different from fascism, or at the very least is inherently racist, and antisemitic, and xenophobic, and how, basically, anyone who criticises neoliberal elites or the corporate media is Russia-loving, pro-Trump Nazi.

And this is where this “Trumpenleft” malarkey fits into the ruling classes’ broader campaign to eliminate any kind of critical thinking and force people to mindlessly root for their “team”. See, the problem with us “Trumpenleft” types is not that we support Donald Trump. For the record, none of us really do. Some of us think he is a dangerous demagogue. Others of us think he is a blithering idiot. None of us think he’s Fidel Castro, or that he cares one iota about the working classes, or about anyone other than Donald Trump.

The problem is not that we’re on the wrong team; the problem is that we are asking people to question the propaganda of the team that we’re supposed to be on, or at least be rooting for. We are asking people to pay attention to how the global capitalist ruling establishment is going about quashing this “populist” insurgency (of which Brexit and Trump are manifestations, not causes) so they can get back to the business of relentlessly restructuring, privatising, and debt-enslaving everything, as they’ve been doing since the end of the Cold War. We’re asking folks, not to join “the other team”, but to pay close attention to how they are being manipulated into believing that there are only two “teams”, and that they have to join one, and then mindlessly parrot whatever nonsense their team decides they need to disseminate in order to win a game that is merely a simulation they have conjured up (ie, the ruling classes have conjured up) in order to inoculate themselves

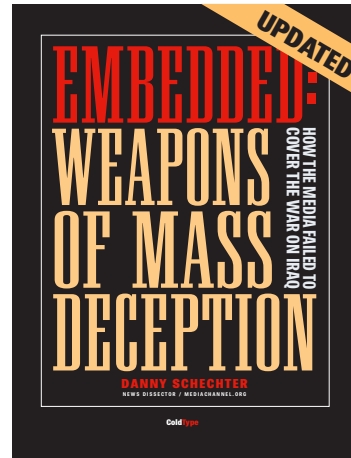
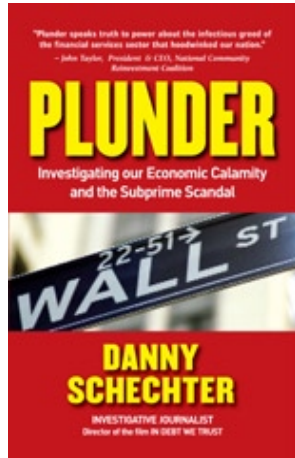
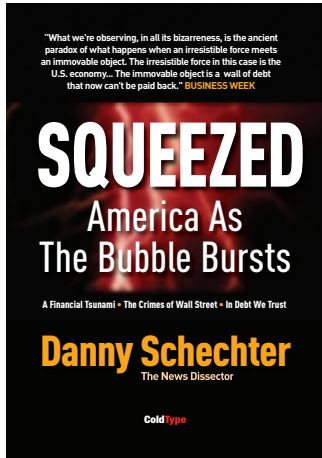
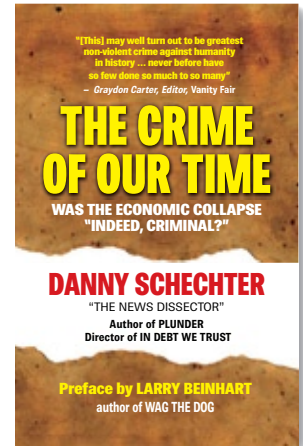
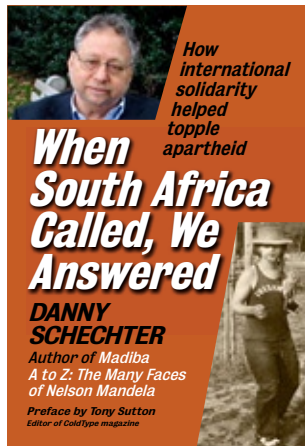
against an actual conflict they cannot win and so must prevent at all costs from ever beginning ... which, they are doing a pretty good job of that so far.

In other words, the problem with us Trumpenlefters is, the prospect of defeating a fake Russian Hitler, and restoring neoliberal normality in the USA and the rest of the West, is just not all that terribly inspiring. So, rather than regurgitating the Russia hysteria and the fascism hysteria that is being produced by the global capitalist ruling establishment to gin up support for their counterinsurgency, we are continuing to focus on the capitalist ruling classes, which are actually still running things, globally, and will be running things long after Trump is gone (and the Imminent Threat of Global Fascist Takeover of Everything has disappeared, as the Imminent Threat of Nookular Terrorist Backpack Attack disappeared before it).

Or maybe all that is just a ruse, an attempt on my part to dupe you into going out and buying a MAGA hat and shouting racist abuse at Honduran kids, assuming you can find some in your vicinity. You never know with us Trumpenleft types. Probably the safest thing to do to protect yourself from our insidious treachery is to start your own personal Trumpenleft blacklist, and spread lies about us all over the Internet, or just report us to Twitter, or Facebook, or somebody, whoever you feel are the proper authorities. The main thing is to shut us up, or prophylactically delegitimise us, to keep us from infecting other leftists with our filthy, nonconformist ideas. The last thing we need at a time like this is a bunch of leftists thinking for themselves and questioning official leftist dogma. Who knows what that kind of behaviour might lead to? **CT**

CJ Hopkins is an award-winning American playwright, novelist and satirist based in Berlin. His plays are published by Bloomsbury Publishing (UK) and Broadway Play Publishing (USA). His debut novel, ZONE 23, is published by Snoggswothy, Swaine & Cormorant. He can be reached at cjhopkins.com or consentfactory.org

REMEMBERING DANNY SCHECHTER 1942 - 2015



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Danny Schechter, the NewsDissector, was acclaimed as one of the most politically astute journalists in recent memory. As a tribute to him and an appreciation of his work with ColdType, we are giving away free downloads of these seven books, all published in association with ColdType.net. Download them at:

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

LINDA McQUAIG

No lessons learned after rail disaster

47 people died in oil train derailment, but Canada's government has done little to prevent similar tragedies happening again

WITH Donald Trump attacking the mainstream media, I find myself warming to it as never before – and thereby losing sight of its many failings. It gives abundant coverage to celebrities and powerful people, while giving short shrift to issues that threaten the planet, and dropping important stories after a short burst of attention.

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I'm reminded of these serious failings after reading Bruce Campbell's magnificent new book, *The Lac-Mégantic Rail Disaster*, which not only vividly captures the horror of the 2013 derailment inferno that killed 47 Quebecers, but also shows how little the Canadian government has done to prevent a similar catastrophe from happening again.

How is it that a preventable tragedy of this magnitude, which received huge coverage and political attention at the time, has passed into media and political oblivion – even though the circumstances that led to the crash remain essentially unchanged?

As Campbell meticulously documents, the crash of that runaway train, with 72 cars carrying almost 10,000 tons of highly combustible oil, was rooted in dozens of decisions by Canadian political leaders that reduced Ottawa's role in overseeing rail safety – all in the name of making things easier and more profitable for the rail industry.

Although deregulation mania reached a peak under Stephen Harper's Conservatives, Justin Trudeau's government remains committed to

weakening, removing or blocking regulations that annoy business, despite signs of ongoing safety problems. Recent figures from the Transportation Safety Board, for instance, show a 21 percent average annual increase in runaway trains in the years since the rail disaster.

And let's not forget that train sped through Toronto before crashing in Lac-Mégantic. Similar kilometre-long trains, laden with oil, pass directly through the heart of Toronto daily.

The Lac-Mégantic fire soared to 1,650°C; water streaming from fire hoses simply evaporated in the intense heat. There were no injured survivors; everyone engulfed in the flames in the little town died. If a derailment like that happened in Toronto, the toll would be in the thousands.

Another key factor leading to the disaster was the enormous boom in transporting oil by rail, which skyrocketed in Canada from 500 carloads in 2009 to an incredible 160,000 carloads in 2013 – even as the rail safety budget was reduced, notes Campbell.

After the 2013 disaster, oil by rail declined for a while, but is now back with a fury – and is projected to soon reach a level almost three times higher than 2013, says Campbell.

And, no, the answer isn't more pipelines. The answer, for God's sake, is proper regulation of our railways – and every other aspect of our economy that requires government oversight to protect us from corporations whose only interest is bottom-



AFTERMATH: 47 Quebecers died in a 2013 oil train derailment.

Photo: National Transportation Safety Board/Wikimedia

line profits. Above all, the Lac-Mégantic tragedy is a story about increasingly aggressive corporations in the era of hedge funds and bare-knuckle profiteering, and about the supine governments that acquiesce to their demands.

We've allowed ourselves to be lulled into believing we're safe. After all, there are government agencies out there with reassuring names like the "Rail Safety Directorate" and the "Transportation of Dangerous Goods Directorate".

But these agencies have been largely stripped of their regulatory muscle, and now operate under political masters who've drunk the Kool-Aid of a new dogma: that corporations should regulate themselves, and that the proper role for government is to "get out of the way".

That was the foolish thinking that led to the disaster in Walkerton, Ontario. A judicial inquiry blamed cutbacks and lax oversight by Mike Harris's Conservative government for seven deaths and 2,300 illnesses from contaminated water. Shortly afterwards, Harris resigned.

In the more serious Lac-Mégantic tragedy, there was no public inquiry. Three railway workers were tried for criminal negligence, and acquitted. Outside the courtroom, someone yelled: "It's not them we want".

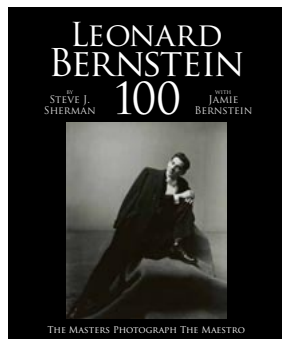
Stephen Harper and his government were never held accountable for their reckless cuts and deregulation. Nor were the greedy rail barons who pushed – and continue to push – for relaxed safety laws.

Five years later, they're scot-free, while 27 children in Lac-Mégantic are without parents due to the catastrophe.

Meanwhile, later today, a massive train loaded with highly flammable oil will be barrelling through Toronto. Let's hope our luck holds. **CT**

*Linda McQuaig is a journalist and author. Her book *Shooting the Hippo: Death by Deficit and Other Canadian Myths* was among the books selected by the *Literary Review of Canada* as the 25 most influential Canadian books of the past 25 years. This article first appeared in the *Toronto Star*.*

The Maestro



L **LEONARD BERNSTEIN** is renowned as one of the greatest conductors, composers, musical inspirations, and creative minds of our time. He is also legendary for his extreme passion, raw charisma, and powerful convictions, with a brash, insatiable lust for life that became etched more clearly into the lines of his face with each passing year.

As with many celebrities, Leonard Bernstein was constantly being photographed, but unlike most, he was photographed by some of

the greatest visual masters of the 20th century, including Richard Avedon, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Alfred Eisenstaedt, Ken Heyman, Yousuf Karsh, Stanley Kubrick, Gjon Mili, Arnold Newman, Ruth Orkin, Irving Penn, and W. Eugene Smith.

To mark his centennial, curator and photographer Steve J. Sherman and Jamie Bernstein, Lenny's eldest daughter, have produced the new large format book, *Leonard Bernstein 100*, a remarkable collection of 100 iconic images, which tell the maestro's life story through the unique vantage point of these image-makers and their sometimes never-before-seen photographs.

A foreword by Bernstein's three children, along with a selection of Bernstein's handwritten music sketches, letters, speeches and poems, further enhances this intimate journey into the life of an artist who changed the face of music during the 20th-century.

LEONARD BERNSTEIN 100

The Masters Photograph the Maestro

by **Steve J. Sherman with Jamie Bernstein**

Published by powerHouse Books / www.powerhousebooks.com

\$40

LEONARD BERNSTEIN



GJON MILI

1945. New York City

Leonard Bernstein in mid-air – one of Mili's stroboscopic “stop-action” movement photographs

Photo courtesy of Gjon Mili/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images; The Library of Congress, Music Division.

LEONARD BERNSTEIN



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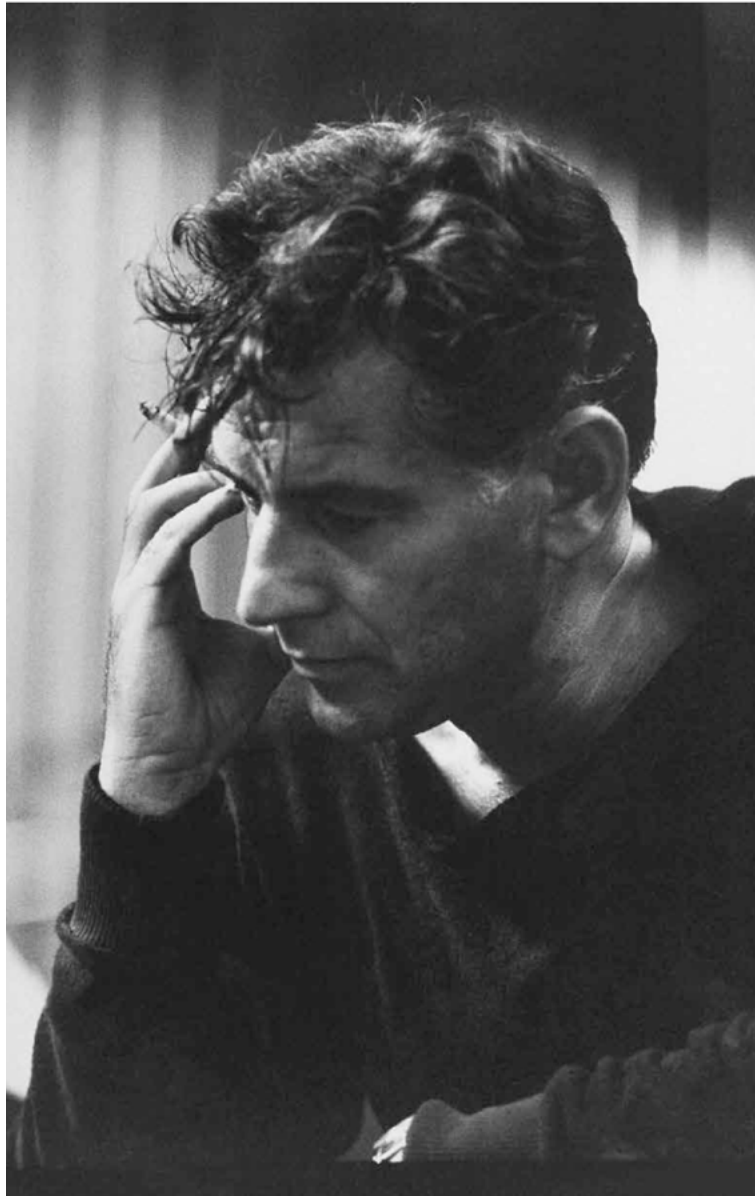
ALFRED EISENSTAEDT

20 December 1956. On West 57th Street, New York City.

Leonard Bernstein leaving Carnegie Hall

Photo courtesy of Alfred Eisenstaedt/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images

LEONARD BERNSTEIN



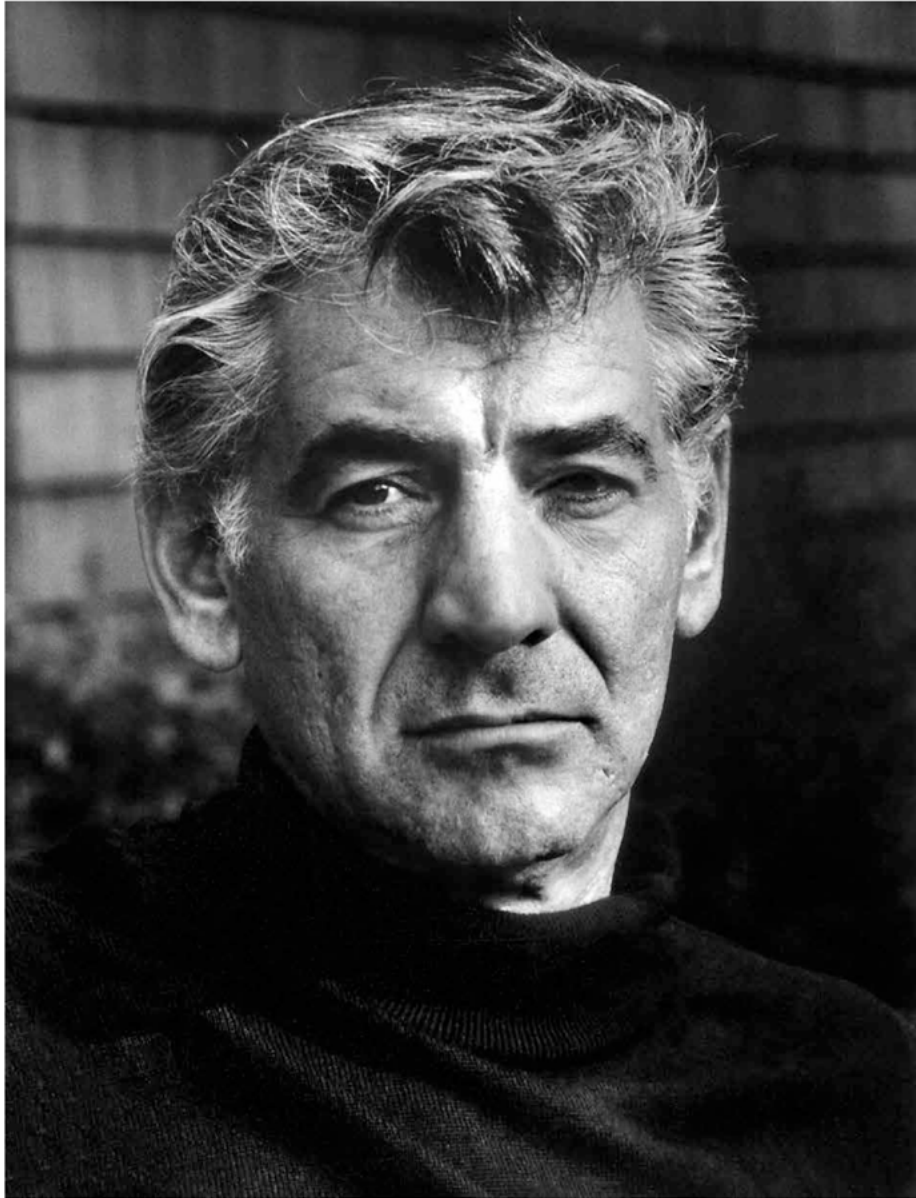
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CARL MYDANS

27 August 1959. Moscow, USSR
Portrait of Leonard Bernstein

Photo courtesy of Carl Mydans/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images

LEONARD BERNSTEIN



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Alfred Eisenstaedt
1968

Portrait of Leonard Bernstein

Photo courtesy of Alfred Eisenstaedt/Pix Inc./The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images

LEONARD BERNSTEIN



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STEVE J. SHERMAN

7 March 1990. Carnegie Hall, New York City

Leonard Bernstein conducting the Vienna Philharmonic in Bruckner's "Symphony No. 9",
in what would be his last performances in Carnegie Hall.

Photo courtesy of © Steve J. Sherman.

CHRISTINE CALDER

Animal crackers

Flying with emotional support animals:
The ups and downs of life in coach

THE US Department of Transportation has been considering new guidelines for flying with emotional support animals since spring 2018, but it doesn't look like those guidelines will be ready in time for the holiday travel season.

No one knows whether the new guidelines could have helped recent Delta Air Lines passenger Matthew Meehan, who claimed that he had to sit in doggie poop from an emotional support animal on a November 1, 2018 flight from Atlanta to Miami. The dog became sick on a previous flight, the airline reported, leaving the mess for Meehan.

And that was after Delta tightened its rules for flying with emotional support animals.

In recent years, the number of animals flying in the cabin on airplanes has increased exponentially, due to an increase of these emotional support animals. United Airlines reported a 77 percent rise in just one year of emotional support animals. These animals fly for free, and sometimes they and their human are upgraded to first class to avoid a kerfuffle in coach.

As an assistant clinical professor of veterinary medicine and veterinary behaviourist, I have experience in small animal care and animal behaviour, and I am concerned about the welfare of animals on planes as well as the humans. The issues are more complicated than many imagine.

Emotional support animals differ from trained service animals, who have been trained to do work or perform a task for the benefit of a person

with a disability. Most emotional support animals are not officially trained to offer support, but their owners consider them a comfort nonetheless.

Oscar Munoz, CEO of United Airlines, told a business group that the situation aboard has become so ludicrous that his airline was expected to fly a support animal for an emotional support animal.

Last year, United drew a line in the sky when a passenger wanted to fly with an emotional support peacock.

For American Airlines, the last straw was a goat (miniature horses are still allowed). American issued new guidelines in July that also restrict support animals from occupying a seat or nibbling food from a tray table. There's no mention about whether they can drink on board. Pet owners, however, claim that it is discriminatory to deny them the comfort of emotional support animals.

The DOT and other government agencies have been exploring a revision in the laws. These stricter proposals have received revision requests and support from both the American Veterinary Medical Association and the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA Union.

The American Veterinary Medical Association pushed back on language, however, that would have made its members accountable for verifying that an animal will behave, because there is no way to guarantee the behaviour of an animal.

CHRISTINE CALDER

This all took off when the 1986 federal Air Carrier Access Act allowed people with mental health disabilities to fly on a plane with an animal free of charge, if it alleviates the person's condition.

Over the years, however, airlines have said that some animal-carrying passengers abuse the rules so they can simply fly with their pets for free. Many passengers travelling without animals have said they are stressed by emotional support animals. Animals trigger phobias in some people and allergies in others; about 10 percent of the human population is allergic to animals. Cats bear most of the blame, but proteins in dog dander and even saliva can cause an allergic reaction.

Many airlines now require advance notification. Many also want a diagnosis letter for the human stating that the person is psychologically disabled and can not be without the stability provided by that pet. Writing such a letter can pose risks and ethical dilemmas for psychologists, however, a study suggested. Nonetheless, people seeking a letter can usually obtain one online.

The airline industry also considered asking for documentation from a veterinarian that the animal can behave in public and that it is healthy and has been vaccinated. The American Veterinary Medical Association emphasised to the DOT that veterinarians cannot vouch for animals' behaviour, so the airlines dropped that requirement. Instead, many airlines ask that the animal just be clean and not have an odour.

There's a lot of scientific evidence that being in close proximity to, and living with, companion animals has many psychological and physiological benefits for humans. In children, animal-assisted therapy has been shown to reduce pain perception and provide better coping skills in the hospital environment. Another study found that in children with autism, social behaviours increased in the presence of animals compared to toys.

Studies also have shown a positive effect of service dogs on war veterans and people with traumatic brain injuries.

But do emotional support animals really help people more than traditional pets? According to a 2016 literature review by two psychologists and a psychology graduate student, the answer is no. There is little evidence to support that emotional

support animals are more effective than traditional pets.

In fact, there are no specific guidelines or standards for evaluating emotional support animals. And, without standards, legal protection is complicated when incidents occur, such as when a pit bull bites a person, as one did on a Delta Air Lines flight, leading the airline to ban that breed.

There's also evidence that the animals themselves may not fare so well. Riding on planes, being in closed-in spaces, and being exposed to loud noises and crowds of people can be overstimulating and scary to an animal, especially one not accustomed to that particular environment.

In a 2002 study, researchers looked at air travel in beagles. They found that blood and salivary cortisol was much higher than baseline in dogs during air transport, an indication they were stressed. The authors noted that just because the beagles were mainly inactive during transport did not mean they were not stressed. Rather, their behaviour indicated that the beagles adopted a conservative-withdrawal approach in response to their stress, rather than fight-or-flight.

In contrast, service dogs are often genetically selected and extensively trained for the tasks they will perform. They need consistent and predictable behaviours in a wide range of situations and environments in order to safely provide service to their humans, especially if a life depends on that particular service.

Training methods, the trainer and training tools used can also have a significant effect on behaviour and coping skills in animals. And, whenever an animal is fearful or anxious, he may be more likely to choose an aggression strategy, such as growling, snapping or biting, especially if he feels cornered or trapped. In the end, airlines and regulators are left to develop ways to avoid the downsides of comfort animals, even as consumers have come to expect this accommodation. **CT**

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Christine Calder is Assistant Clinical Professor of Behaviour, College of Veterinary Medicine, Mississippi State University. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

Media lies about the California fires

It's our job to see through the propaganda, through the spectacle and the bullshit, and to fight for a better world

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DON'T like accurately predicting the future. But it happens to me sometimes. And it's never a good thing. Not once have I predicted that I would stumble upon a great sum of money or that a friendly squirrel would mysteriously leave a fresh, delicious scone on my windowsill. No, the things I've said that have come true years later have always been utterly awful. And the latest one has to do with California.

Donald Trump continues to blame the horrific fires in California on forest mismanagement – basically saying that if the parks service had just raked up a few more dry leaves, then countless people, homes and buildings would not have been incinerated. I unintentionally predicted this kind of idiocy. I said something similar in a 2011 stand-up comedy album titled *Chaos For The Weary*.

To paraphrase, I said, “You notice no matter how close they say the major effects of global warming are, it doesn't change how we all behave. ... Soon they'll be saying, ‘People in California are ON FIRE!’ and everyone will be like, ‘They probably live in a very fiery area. They're probably storing dry stuff in their homes – like old magazines and elderly people’”.

And sure enough, here we are. People in California are on fire, and the president is saying it's because they stored too many dry pine needles around their homes. Trump is able to do this because most of the mainstream media are allowing him to fill a void – a void that represents the answer to these questions: “Why is this happening?

Why is our nation turning into one of the lower circles of hell?”

Don't get me wrong – the corporate media have extensively covered that California is ON FIRE. They have. They just can't bring themselves to say the words “climate change” very often. No. It gets caught in their throat like a dry falafel puck. They look like they want to say it but just can't – like a dog that wants to tell you it has a thorn in its paw. But it's just impossible.

Take, for example, NBC Nightly News. You can't get a finer news programme anywhere (in the building where they tape). I watched a full six-minute segment covering multiple California fires, the destruction, the loss of life; they even had reporters on the ground. And yet throughout the entire report, they never uttered the words “climate change”, “global warming”, or even simply, “We are fucked”. Instead, they made it sound like fires are a tragic yet common occurrence, and the cities will rebuild.

Never speaking the words “climate change” while whole towns literally go up in flames is like covering the drowning death of someone and never mentioning he was being waterboarded at the time. The real cause of these fires is at least half the story, if not more.

NBC host Kate Snow did say these fires are “ones for the history books”, but I guess those books are going to get shorter and shorter be-

LEE CAMP



LAST YEAR'S HISTORY: The 2017 La Tuna Fire was the largest in Los Angeles history.

Photo: Scott L, Flickr.com

cause “1,000-year fires” are quickly becoming “five-year fires”. Saying these fires are “ones for the history books” implies that 20 years from now, the children in California will be reading about the Great fires of 2018.

But they won't.

They won't be in the history books – because in 20 years the history books will be ON FIRE. And the great fires of 2018 will look like nothing but a warm day with a piña colada. Here's an example of what I mean: A headline from HuffPost read, “California's Wildfires This Year Have Been Breaking Records – The state has experienced some of the biggest and deadliest fires in its his-

tory this year”.

Sounds pretty accurate, doesn't it? The only problem is that article is from December 2017. LAST year. Did they go down in the history books? How often does everyone huddle under the blankets and take turns telling scary tales about the 2017 fires?

Acting like each year's fires are a fluke that will never happen again – that in and of itself is denying climate change. It is lying to the American people in order to cover up that we are promoting a system based on big oil, big factory farming

and big environmental destruction. A new Media Matters report found the mainstream media only say “climate change” in reports about these recent fires four percent of the time.

Now, some of you may be thinking, “You can’t prove these fires were caused by climate change”. And you’re right. I can’t. But the Union of Concerned Scientists can.

They said, “The effects of global warming on temperature, precipitation levels, and soil moisture are turning many of our forests into kindling during wildfire season”. The scientists also pointed out that wildfires are increasing and that the wildfire season is getting longer in the US. In terms of forest fires over 1,000 acres in size, in the 1980s, there were 140. In the 1990s, there were 160. And from 2000 to 2012, there were 250. And as mentioned before, 2017 was California’s worst wildfire season. ... Until 2018.

So if they’re not willing to talk about the obvious causes of our pop-up infernos, what was NBC Nightly News reporting on? Well, they spent a good amount of time on the firefighters – correctly informing viewers that these men and women are heroes, and they’re putting their lives on the line to try to save people they’ve never met. Good job, NBC. You only missed one thing. You somehow failed to say that many of the firefighters you highlighted are PRISONERS LOCKED AWAY IN CALIFORNIA’S CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM!

Estimates are that 30 percent of the state’s firefighters are prisoners, and it’s clear from the uniforms that many of the ones NBC filmed were indeed inmates. Sure, they volunteered for that job, but many of them are locked up for small crimes and see no way out of the misery and hardship of prison other than to “volunteer” for fire duty. It’s kind of like how I “volunteered” to give my wallet and shoes to that guy with a gun when he casually noted that he liked my wallet and shoes.

Furthermore, the inmates are working as firefighters for roughly \$1 per hour.

ONE DOLLAR PER HOUR.

They get paid less than the amount of money most people are willing to bend down to pick up if they see it in a puddle. But NONE of this is said by NBC Nightly News even as they show video of the

Watch Lee Camp's new comedy special

If you’d like to hear Lee Camp’s other latest predictions, check out his brand new stand-up comedy special “Super Patriotic Very Uncle Sam Comedy Special Not Allowed On American TV.” It’s only available at

www.leecampcomedyspecial.com

inmates fighting fires. This would be like showing Nike sweatshop workers in Indonesia and saying, “These fine craftsmen are making your shoes. Oh man, do they love making shoes. They volunteered to do it”.

Are you starting to get the point? Kate Snow’s job – like most of those in mainstream media – is to cover up your reality. Her job is to make you think we live in a system that can recover from this carnage WITHOUT large-scale changes, without a new economic paradigm that doesn’t reward waste and planned obsolescence and profiting off the lives of others. Generally speaking, the job of mainstream corporate outlets is to ignore the harsh reality that our endless consumption and furious appetite for fossil fuels are burning our country, turning it into a desert wasteland – and the easiest response is to throw slave labour at the problem.

On the other hand, it’s the job of you and me to see through the propaganda, through the spectacle and the bullshit, and to fight for a better world.

Maybe it will help if I predict that 20 years from now we all will have woken up from this mass delusion and switched to a sustainable, green, egalitarian economic system.

It’s about time I had a positive prediction come true.

CT

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Lee Camp is an American stand-up comedian, writer, actor and activist. Camp is the host of the weekly comedy news TV show “Redacted Tonight With Lee Camp” on RT America.

PHILIP GIRALDI

Registering Israel's useful idiots

Zionist lobby groups operating in the USA
need adult supervision

DEPENDING on what criteria one uses, there are between 200 and 600 groups in the United States that wholly or in part are dedicated to furthering the interests of Israel. The organisations are both Jewish, like the Zionist Organization of America, and Christian Zionist, including John Hagee's Christians United for Israel, but the funding of the Israel Lobby and both its political and media access comes overwhelmingly from Jewish supporters and advocates.

Many of the groups are registered with the Internal Revenue Service for tax purposes as 501(c)3 "educational" or "charitable" foundations, which enables them to solicit tax exempt donations. One might dispute whether promoting Israeli interests in the United States is actually educational, but the Department of the Treasury believes it can be so construed, protected by the First Amendment.

But there is a more serious consideration in terms of the actual relationships that many of the groups enjoy with the Israeli government. To be sure, many of them boast on their promotional literature and websites about their relationships with the Benjamin Netanyahu and his cabinet, so the issue of dual loyalty or, worse, acting as actual Israeli government agents must be considered.

There is a legal remedy to hostile foreigners acting against American interests and that is the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938 (FARA). Originally intended to identify and monitor agents of Nazi Germany propagandising in the United States, it has since been applied to indi-

viduals and groups linked to other nations. Most recently, it was used against Russian news agencies RT America and Sputnik, which were forced to register. It is also being considered for Qatar based al-Jazeera.

FARA requires identified agents to be transparent in terms of their funding and contacts while also being publicly identified as representing the interests of a foreign nation. They must report to the Department of Justice every contact they have with congressmen or other government officials. The text of the Act defines a foreign agent as, "any person who acts as an agent, representative, employee, or servant, or any person who acts in any other capacity at the order, request, or under the direction or control, of a foreign principal or of a person any of whose activities are directly or indirectly supervised, directed, controlled, financed, or subsidized in whole or in major part by a foreign principal, and who directly or through any other person – (i) engages within the United States in political activities for or in the interests of such foreign principal; (ii) acts within the United States as a public relations counsel, publicity agent, information-service employee or political consultant for or in the interests of such foreign principal; (iii) within the United States solicits, collects, disburses, or dispenses contributions, loans, money, or other things of value for or in the interest of such foreign principal; or (iv) within the United States represents the interests of such foreign principal before any agency or official of the Government of the United States".

Despite language that would presumably cover many of the hundreds of Jewish organisations acting for Israel, FARA has never been used to compel registration of any such groups or individuals even when it was public knowledge that they were working closely with the Israeli government to coordinate positions and promote other Israeli interests.

That failure is at a minimum a tribute to Jewish power in the United States, but it is also due to the fact that the organisations are funded from within the United States by wealthy American Jews, not by Israel, which is the argument sometimes inaccurately made by the groups themselves to demonstrate that they are not being directed by the Israeli government.

The difficulty in proving that one is directed by a foreign government has been definitively resolved regarding one group, the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD), which has become the leading neoconservative bastion seeking a war with Iran, Israel's *bête noir*. The recent al-Jazeera expose on the activities of the Israeli lobbies in both Britain and the United States, included a surreptitiously filmed conversation with Sima Vaknin-Gil, a former Israeli intelligence officer who now heads the Ministry of Strategic Affairs, which is tasked with countering what is perceived to be anti-Israeli activity worldwide. The Ministry is particularly focused on the non-violent Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS), which is increasingly active in both the United States and Europe.

Vaknin-Gil was discussing his activities with Tony Kleinfeld, an undercover investigative reporter who was secretly recording and filming his encounters with various members of the Israel Lobby as well as of the Israeli government. Vaknin-Gil provided explicit confirmation that the FDD works directly with the Israeli government, making it an Israeli agent by the definition of FARA.

For those who are unfamiliar with FDD, it is probably currently the most prominent neocon organisation, though it nevertheless claims to be a non-partisan “research group”. It focuses on for-

eign policy and security issues by “Fighting Terrorism and Promoting Freedom”, as it informs us on its website masthead. It works to “defend free nations against their enemies”, which frequently means in practice anyone whom Israel considers to be hostile, most particularly Iran. FDD's Leadership Council has featured former CIA Director James Woolsey, Senator Joe Lieberman, and Bill Kristol. Its Executive Director is Canadian import Mark Dubowitz, who is obsessed with Iran. Its advisors and experts are mostly Jewish and most of its funding comes from Jewish oligarchs.

FDD's auditorium has become a preferred venue for senior officials of the Trump Administration to go and make hardline speeches, just as the American Enterprise Institute was under George W. Bush. Mike Pence, Mike Pompeo, John Bolton and Nikki Haley have all spoken there recently, frequently focusing on Iran and the threat that it allegedly constitutes.

FDD aside, Vaknin-Gil also confirmed that there were other groups in the United States doing the same sorts of things on behalf of Israel. He said “We have FDD. We have others working on this”, elaborating that FDD is “working on” projects for Israel including “data gathering, information analysis, working on activist organisations, money trail”.

So Vaknin-Gil was admitting that FDD and others were working as Israeli proxies, collecting information on US citizens, spying on legal organisations, and both planning and executing disinformation at Israeli direction.

Kleinfeld also spoke with a Jonathan Schanzer, a senior official in FDD, who filled in a bit more of what the foundation is up to in terms of discrediting groups in the US that support the BDS movement. Schanzer admitted “BDS has taken everybody by surprise”, before complaining that the Jewish response has been “a complete mess. I don't think that anybody's doing a good job. We're not even doing a good job”. He then complained that attempts to discredit Palestinian groups by linking them to terrorist groups had failed, as also had the use of the label

PHILIP GIRALDI

antisemitism. “Personally I think antisemitism as a smear is not what it used to be”.

So, when will the Justice Department move on FDD now that its true colours have been exposed by al-Jazeera? The group must be required to register if justice be done, but will it? Its principal partner in crime, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) has avoided registering for more than 60 years by claiming that it is an American organisation working to educate the US public about the all the good things connected to Israel. Even though it meets regularly with Israeli government officials, it claims not to be representing Israeli interests.

But just as in the case of FDD, it is time to require AIPAC to register as what it really is: a foreign agent. As a registered agent, it will still be able to exercise First Amendment rights to defend Israel but it would not be able to be involved in lobbying on Capitol Hill and directing money to politicians who are described as pro-Israeli, as it does now. Its finances will be transparent and it will be perceived as an official advocate for Israel, not as an educational resource for what is happening in the Middle East. Hopefully, when AIPAC stops throwing money around, the politicians and media types will find another place to roost.

To be sure the lovefest for Israel in government extends far beyond FDD and AIPAC. It can be found in many dark corners. National Security Advisor John Bolton recently received the “De-

fender of Israel” award from the Zionist Organization of America. And one might suggest that the US United Nations delegation, headed by Ambassador Nikki Haley, is directed by the Israeli government, particularly given a recent US vote against a motion condemning Israel’s continued illegal occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights, thereby recognising for the first time Israel’s sovereignty over the area.

Whether Haley was speaking for herself or for the administration was characteristically unclear, but it hardly matters. Nikki Haley might be referred to as a useful idiot, as Lenin put it, but her consistent pattern of extreme loyalty in defense of Israel marks her out as being particularly beholden to the Jewish state, which will no doubt arrange to richly reward her through some position in financial services for which she is totally unqualified when she leaves her post in January. And then she will be well funded to run for president in 2020. Having Haley in charge, one might just as well vote for Benjamin Netanyahu. **CT**

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READ THE BEST OF JOE BAGEANT

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The era of easy wars is over

Gaza has demonstrated that resistance is the only language
that registers with Israel

WHEN the Israeli army carried out a limited operation in the besieged Gaza Strip on November 12, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu certainly did not anticipate that this military adventure would destabilise his government and threaten the survival of his right-wing coalition.

But it did, and far more than the multiple police investigations into various corruption cases involving Netanyahu, his family and his closest aides. Thanks to the botched operation in Gaza, which led to the killing of seven Palestinians and an Israeli army commander, Netanyahu's coalition has begun to disintegrate, merely needing a final push for it to collapse completely.

It all began with the resignation of extremist Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who quit his post two days after the Gaza attack in protest at the country's "surrender" to Palestinian resistance. The even more extreme far-right leader Naftali Bennett was expected to pounce on the opportunity and follow suit. But he did not, instead making a calculated move aimed at capitalising on the fact that he had suddenly become the government's ultimate kingmaker.

Now Netanyahu's once-stable coalition is hanging by a thread, with the support of only 61 members in the 120-seat Knesset. This means that the coalition's formerly comfortable majority is now dependent on a single MK.

One wrong move and Netanyahu could find himself forced into snap elections: A choice that,

at least for now, he dreads.

Netanyahu's options are growing ever more limited. It seems that the age of striking Gaza with impunity in order to score political points with Israeli voters, is, perhaps, over.

While much political commentary is being dedicated to Netanyahu's future and the dirty politicking of his right-wing coalition, Israel's burgeoning problem is bigger than any single individual. Tel Aviv's ability to win wars and translate its victories into political concessions from Palestinians and Arabs has been greatly hampered, and this fact has little to do with Netanyahu's supposed "weakness," as his Israeli detractors often claim.

Some Israeli politicians, however, still refuse to accept that the violence paradigm is changing. Almost every time Israel has attacked Gaza in the past, Israel's own politics factored greatly in that decision. Gaza has been used as a stage where Israel flexed its muscles and displayed its latest war technology.

The 2014 war — dubbed "Operation Protective Edge" — was, however, a wake-up call for the overconfident Israeli leaders. More than 2,300 Palestinians were killed in that war and 17,000 wounded, the vast majority of them being civilians. While that is quite consistent with the Israeli war trajectory, the number of Israeli casualties indicated a changing trend, as 66 soldiers were killed and only a few civilians, indicating that the Palestinian resistance had abandoned the ran-

RAMZY BAROUD

domness of its past tactics and grown bolder and more sophisticated.

The four years since that war — coupled with a particularly harsh stage of the siege that has been imposed on Gaza since 2007 — have not changed the equation. The fighting that was instigated by the latest Israeli attack further accentuated this fact. As Israel pounded Gaza with a massive bombing campaign, Gazan fighters filmed a rare attack using anti-tank missiles that targeted an Israeli military bus on the Israeli side of the fence.

Hours later, a truce — facilitated by Egypt — was announced, to the relief of Netanyahu and the jubilation of Palestinians, who marched in their thousands celebrating the end of fighting. Considering the disproportionate military power and desperate humanitarian situation in Gaza, it makes perfect sense that Palestinians perceived the outcome as a “victory.”

Israeli leaders, not only on the right but the left as well, attacked Netanyahu, who understood that continued fighting would lead to another major war, with unpredictable outcomes. Unlike Lieberman, Bennett and others, Netanyahu’s political strategy is not only driven by attempting to pacify Israel’s angry public, many of whom protested the Gaza truce in various parts of the country.

The Israeli PM has a two-fold political outlook: Labouring to politically divide Gaza from the West Bank, and maintaining a degree of “stability” that would give time and space for American political manoeuvring in preparation for Donald Trump’s so-called “deal of the century”. Moreover, Israel’s growing challenges in Syria and Lebanon make a prolonged military operation in Gaza quite dangerous and unsustainable.

It seems that the age of striking Gaza with

impunity in order to score political points with Israeli voters, is, perhaps, over.

But the pressure on the home front is relentless. Some 74 percent of the Israeli public is “dissatisfied” with Netanyahu’s performance in the latest round of fighting in Gaza, according to an Israel Television News Company poll released soon after the truce was announced. Yet Netanyahu has no other option but to commit to the truce in Gaza, which, as per Israeli political logic, means that he must stir trouble elsewhere to send a message of strength and prowess to the disquieted public.

This is precisely why Netanyahu renewed his threats of ethnic cleansing toward the population of Khan Al-Ahmar in the occupied West Bank. “It will be demolished very soon”, he declared in an attempt to move the conversation from Gaza to elsewhere, and to regain the confidence of his right-wing constituency.

While Gazans are getting badly needed respite, however fleeting, Khan Al-Ahmar’s residents will now become the main target for Israel’s political violence and chauvinism. The question is how long will Israel be able to sustain this violent paradigm and what will it take for the international community to hold Tel Aviv accountable?

As for Palestinians, Gaza has demonstrated that only resistance, popular or otherwise, works. It is the only language that registers with Israel, which must understand that the age of easy wars is long gone.

CT

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36 ALL MOD CONS! The old farmhouse now has a single solar panel at the centre of the roof.

Living off the grid

Would I go back to 'civilisation'. Not if I can help it

LIVING off-the-grid always seemed a good idea, but it was beyond reach, for practical and financial reasons. That was until July 2017, when five days of incessant rain in Waikouaiti, 40km north of the New Zealand South Island city of Dunedin, saturated the surrounding farmland, causing streams to flow down the hills, across the main road and into the lowest point of Victoria Street, which happened to be the backyard of the house I was renting.

Initially, I found it a surreal experience having cold water seep under the doors and up through the floorboards to circulate ankle-deep through the house, but the reality of the next few days living with soggy carpets, piles of ruined books

and electrical equipment was somewhat less inspiring.

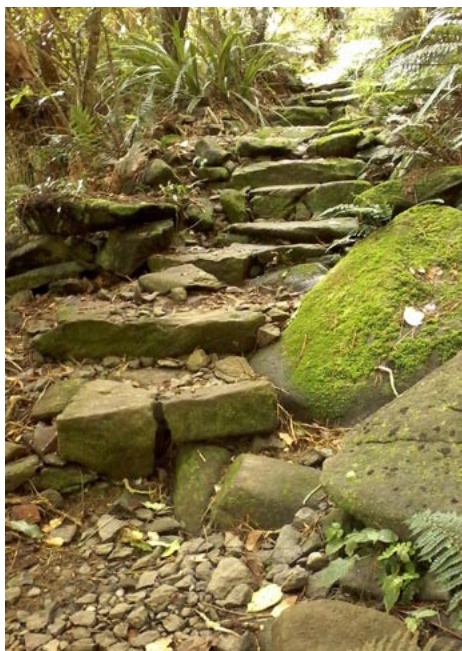
The final insult came when a squad of health department operatives, clad in white hooded jumpsuits and face masks, proceeded to tear down the wall linings and rip up the carpets before spraying every room with a chemical solution, apparently in case of sewage contamination.

Time to move on.

A fortunate text to a friend who was leaving for Cambodia the next day provided accommodation for the next few weeks. Then came a phone call that offered a profound change of lifestyle: Would I like to live at Whare Manuka, an old farmhouse situated in 120 hectares of regenerating native

NIGEL YATES

Photos: Nigel Yates



ABOVE: The wood burner in front of the original fireplace. **LEFT:** The rocky path to the old farmhouse becomes a waterfall after days of rain.



38 BEFORE: Room without a view – the original 'long drop' toilet now surrounded by native fuschia trees.

bush on the slope of a small mountain, seven kms from the nearest water and sewage connections. The land was administered by a charitable trust set up by Lloyd and Dorothy Morris, an elderly Canadian couple who left Ontario in the 1960s after they became worried about government plans to build a nuclear power station.

The old house had its own gravity-fed spring-water supply piped to the kitchen, it was dry inside and had never had electricity or an inside bathroom. There were two rustic toilets, both 25 meters from the house, and rats occasionally scurried inside the walls.

I had lived without electricity in a draughty old wooden house once before, so adapting wasn't as difficult as it might sound. Apart from the need for dry firewood, the biggest issue is the lack of refrigeration in the summer heat – the rest of the time a chill bin with 10 cm of cold water inside keeps food from deteriorating, especially if it is stored in glass.

At the start, burying the contents of the toilet



AFTER: Indoor 'composting' toilet, shower and gas heater.

bucket every few days was an unenviable task, but soon became just another daily chore.

The owner installed a wood burner and promised to build an inside toilet and shower room, and to install a modest solar panel set-up in the near future. These took more than six months to complete so it was a case of candles and torches for lighting and a battery-powered CD/radio and

NIGEL YATES

Photos: Nigel Yates



THE SHINING: The LED lights are as bright as 100-watt bulbs and use minimal power

books for entertainment for the first winter and summer. Cooking and coffee were achieved using natural gas, which is remarkably cheap in New Zealand. A friend in Dunedin let me have hot showers and use a washing machine.

The completion of the shower room, inside toilet and the installation of the solar panel set-up earlier this year felt like luxury; the 12 volt LED lights are bright and use little power and the set-up is good enough to power a PC or stereo for several hours, watch DVDs and run smaller appliances – not all at the same time, though.

Would I go back to “civilisation?” Not if I can help it. The cost of housing in New Zealand has become exorbitant and electricity is over-priced. Going off-grid is a paradigm shift, but at it feels secure to be mostly self-sufficient in the event of a natural disaster.

CT

***Nigel Yates** is a former newspaper photographer and bookseller, who lives near Dunedin, New Zealand.*



ON TAP: The mountain spring water piped to the house is naturally chlorine and fluoride free. The candle awaits, just in case ...

'Fake news' and global stability

Journalists should take a variation of the medical profession's Hippocratic Oath in which they would pledge to tell no lie

JOURNALISTS need to take some sort of Hippocratic oath pledging to tell no lies, otherwise we could end up with a war even more calamitous for humanity than Iraq. As cited by American journalist Sharyl Attkisson in her excellent book *The Smear*, John H. Johnson, author of *Everydata: The Misinformation Hidden in the Little Data you consume every day*, divides fake news into five categories.

1. News that's entirely false.
2. News that's slanted and biased
3. Pure propaganda
4. Stories that misinterpret or misuse data
5. Imprecise or sloppy reporting.

It's interesting, as Attkisson says, that the "public ignition" of the "Fake News movement" can be traced to September 13 2016 – the last eight weeks of the Clinton vs Trump presidential campaign, with the announcement that a group named "First Draft" was forming a partner network to tackle "malicious hoaxes and fake news reports". Then, within days everyone is talking about "fake news". Which is strange, because if we go by Johnson's definition, fake news has been around for an awful long time.

By any objective standards, the most serious example of "fake news" in recent years, in regards to its consequences, was the Iraqi WMDs hoax.

The neocon allegation that Saddam Hussein possessed WMDs which could be assembled and launched within 45 minutes of an order being given, was disseminated, as a proven fact, by major media outlets in 2002-2003, and led to an illegal

war in which up to one million people died. Not only that, the war led directly to the rise of Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS) and greatly boosted the cause of global terrorism.

So why didn't we get an outcry against "fake news" after this? The answer is quite simple – the post-2016 "fake news" hysteria is itself fake. In true Orwellian style, it's been pushed by some of the biggest purveyors of fake news.

What has happened is that those who promoted the WMDs hoax are unhappy that we have a much wider range of sources for our news today, and consequently are less likely to swallow, unthinkingly, their pro-war, establishment-friendly propaganda. They have sought to delegitimise these new competitors by branding their news "fake". It's just like a well-established chain of coffee shops seeking to diss their competitor by saying that the coffee they sell isn't real coffee. These are turf wars, with plenty of virtual signalling.

This does not mean these "new kids on the block" can't also be criticised and held up to scrutiny. If we look at points 2 and 3 of Johnson, "news that's slanted and biased" and "pure propaganda", then almost everyone does that today at some point. But the hypocrisy of those screeching "Fake News" at others is off the scale. While "fake news" has always been around, there are reasons why the problem has got worse since the millenium.

Firstly, look at the way print journalism has changed. I have at home a large collection of British newspapers from 40 years ago. The difference between papers in the 1970s and today is very

noticable. Factual news reporting, from on-the-spot foreign correspondents, with minimal ‘comment’ and editorialising was the norm. Today, it’s the other way round, newspapers have become viewpapers. It wouldn’t be such a problem if news and comment were clearly delineated – very often they are not.

Take the headline of the *Sun* (right), the day after the MH17 plane disaster. It read “Putin’s Missile”. This was pure speculation and propaganda presented as fact. Its aim was to convince readers the Russian president was personally responsible for taking down a passenger aircraft with a large loss of life. A newspaper in the 1970s, even one whose editorial line was not particularly friendly to Moscow, would merely have stated: “Plane comes down in Ukraine – cause unknown”.

To prove the point, take an article entitled “Strong Marxist Lead Needed, Hua Tells Dissenters”, by Nigel Wade, writing from Peking, which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* of May 4, 1979. “China needed stronger leadership by the Communist party, if it was to modernise itself successfully, the party chairman Hua Kuo-feng, said yesterday. ... ‘The socialist modernisation programme we are now carrying out is a magnificent revolutionary cause,’ said Hua. ...He drew a firm distinction between ‘bourgeois democracy’, which he rejected, and ‘socialist democracy’, which he said had to be combined with centralism and discipline. The socialist system was ‘incomparably superior to capitalism’, he emphasised. History since 1919 had proved that ‘only socialism can save China.’”

As I noted in an article for the *American Conservative* magazine, if you read Nigel Wade’s report there is absolutely nothing to tell you that the newspaper it appears in was a supporter of the British Conservative Party and editorially opposed to communism. The *Telegraph*’s man in Peking simply reports, using direct speech, what Hua says, not what he thinks of what Hua says.

That’s how it should be. But how it isn’t today. Look at the coverage of the Skripal case. Allegations have been reported as 100 percent proven facts. We can say that when it comes to the report-



FACT OR OPINION?:

Front page of the *Sun* aims “to convince readers that the Russian president was personally responsible for taking down a passenger aircraft with a large loss of life”.

ing of Russia, “fake news”, as defined by Johnson, is sadly the norm.

Alarmingly for all those who believe in media plurality, “fake news” has been used as a pretext for threatening news outlets which challenge prevailing elite orthodoxies. It’s part of the ongoing campaign in Britain and America against Russian media, such as RT. It’s been used to pressure internet companies and social media giants to operate censorship. Again, it’s those pointing the fingers who are often the most guilty.

That said, all outlets should endeavour to make sure that their news – and comment – is fact-based. We need more objective, forensic journalism – and less cheerleading. Journalists need to take a variation of the medical profession’s Hippocratic oath in which they would pledge to tell no lies.

The polarisation of public discourse hasn’t helped things. Fake news, or more commonly news that hasn’t been properly fact-checked is promoted if it furthers the cause. To counter this we need a lot more honesty, and to break with the binary. Otherwise we could well end up with a war even more calamitous for humanity than Iraq. **CT**

*Neil Clark is a journalist, writer, broadcaster and blogger. He has written for newspapers and magazines in the UK and other countries and blogs at www.neilclark66.blogspot.com – where he invites readers to contribute to his legal fund to pay for court action against Oliver Kamm of *The Times*, who he has sued for libel and harassment. Full details at www.goo.gl/vaxyL*

DANIELLE RYAN

Killers, drinkers, and traumatised for life

What it means to be a US drone operator in the never-ending 'war on terror'

THEY sit in rooms resembling hi-tech shipping containers. Joysticks in hand, they spend hours watching grainy screens, displaying people in faraway lands going about their daily life – and they hold life and death in their hands.

They are the men and women who operate the United States' controversial drone warfare programme – and they frequently get it disastrously wrong.

A newly-released report by the Associated Press claims that one third of people killed by US drones in Yemen this year were civilians with no association to terror groups like Al-Qaeda, the intended targets.

But intention and reality often diverge sharply when it comes to death by US drones – and the horror is not confined to Yemen. From Pakistan to Afghanistan, to Iraq, Syria and Somalia, US drone strikes – which are often hailed by the US military and government as “precise” and even “surgical” – have killed scores of innocent civilians.

In recent years, multiple whistleblowers – former drone technicians, camera operators and image analysts – have come forward to shed light on the horror and reality of what US drone bombing really entails. Perhaps an indicator of the level of stress involved, the people who do these jobs also quit them in record numbers. In 2015, an internal Air Force memo published by the *Daily Beast* revealed that there was a serious “outflow” problem with drone pilots due to the “unrelenting pace of operations”. Even when

the Air Force began to offer six-figure salaries, it did not stem the outflow from the program.

But long, arduous shifts and high pressure are just the “official” explanations for the outflow problem, Laurie Calhoun, the author of *We Kill Because We Can*, an in-depth look at the US drone war, told RT.

Apostate operators and sensors have become disenchanting with the profession and are plagued by feelings of regret and guilt for having agreed to kill on command people who never threatened them personally with death.

In the drone age, Calhoun says, while the operators risk no physical harm, the explanation for their PTSD must derive from “moral factors”.

It's easy to assume that the men and women operating drones are entirely detached and unfeeling maniacs, but often they are ordinary men and women who are lured with high salaries and assured by the military that they will be part of something morally good and justifiable.

Christopher Aaron, a former image analyst, who worked at the Counterterrorism Airborne Analysis Centre in Langley, Virginia and in Afghanistan as an intelligence liaison, told RT that he began to have second thoughts about the work during his first deployment in 2006 when he noticed how the military would celebrate successful kills, but the next day he would see “more than the intended number of targets” in funeral processions on the screens in front of him.



STOP KILLING US: Graffiti in Sanaa, Yemen.

Photo: Khaled Abdullah

Some of Aaron's colleagues also began to doubt what they were doing, but did not know how to express their concerns to senior management, he said. "We kept it internal. The military itself did not want to hear dissenting voices, only the intelligence they required".

When he finished his second deployment in 2009, Aaron became extremely ill, physically and emotionally. It took five years for him to regain his health, through a combination of self-care and being able to speak out publicly about what he had experienced.

The cognitive dissonance amongst those who work in an office killing people on the other side of the planet remotely, and then leave work and go to the grocery store, the gym, or to their families, can only be suppressed for so long.

While many, like Aaron, experienced mental anguish over the drone kills, it is certainly true, Calhoun said, that the military at least tries to select candidates for the job "who are unlikely to experience compunction upon killing their fellow human beings".

Potential candidates can sometimes be "vet-

ted" by testing them on video games and exposing them to "kill TV" in which they view footage of people being incinerated by drone strikes. Anyone who balks or raises questions could be removed from consideration for the programme, she said. Even more disturbingly, she explained, people who are already inclined toward criminal behaviour can now command lofty salaries for killing people without any risk of death or incarceration for doing so.

In *National Bird*, a 2016 documentary about the devastating impacts of US drone wars, investigative journalist Sonia Kennebeck spoke to three other whistleblowers who have been trying to expose the dark realities of the drone program.

One man, identified only as Daniel, was a homeless teen whose male family members were in prison for petty crimes. Another, Heather Linebaugh, was a high-school graduate looking for a way out of rural Pennsylvania – not the kind of callous psychopaths you might imagine are drawn to a job that involves treating human be-

DANIELLE RYAN

ings, who often cannot be accurately identified, like video-game targets.

“I was under the impression that America was saving the world, like, that we were Big Brother and we were helping everyone out”, Linebaugh told Kennebeck.

But reality eventually hit.

“It’s so primitive, raw, stripped-down death. This is real. It’s not a joke”, she said.

“You see someone die because you said it was okay to kill them. I was always shaking. Sometimes I would just go to the bathroom and just sit on the toilet. I mean just sit there in my uniform and just cry”.

For Linebaugh, after three years on the job, the psychological trauma proved too much and she was diagnosed as suicidal. Two of her colleagues committed suicide and many others relied heavily on alcohol.

Another former imagery analyst, Michael Haas, told *Rolling Stone*, that he and his colleagues would call alcohol “drone fuel” because it essentially “kept the program going”.

“Everyone drank. There was a lot of coke, speed, and that sort of thing”, Haas said. “If the higher ups knew, then they didn’t say anything, but I’m pretty sure they must have known. It was everywhere”.

Could it be the case that the higher ups turn a blind eye to this substance abuse because it produces the necessary results? Whistleblower Brandon Bryant told *Rolling Stone* that when he first arrived at the Creech Air Force base outside Las Vegas, Metallica heavy metal music was played to get new recruits prepared for the job. “Gentlemen! Welcome to Creech”, an officer announced. “While here, it will be your job to blow shit up and kill people!”

There is a common misconception that the use of drones minimises civilian casualties, but the facts and figures do not back up that claim. In a shocking 2014 figure on Pakistan, US drones killed an estimated 1,147 people while attempting to take out 41 men with links to terror groups.

Targets are chosen based on intelligence which

comes from informants, but strikes can also be carried out based on observations of suspicious patterns of behaviour in potential targets. Operators technically have “no way of knowing whether the analysis on which an order to kill rests is sound”, Calhoun said, who explained that while the execution of an unarmed and unthreatening person is considered a war crime when committed by a soldier on the ground, it is deemed acceptable if done from the air. “Those who ponder this question are likely to abandon the profession”, she said.

And those who go further and blow the whistle have already faced government intimidation. The man identified as Daniel in Kennebeck’s documentary estimated that as many as 50 FBI agents were involved in a raid on his home, during which documents and electronics were seized. “To me, that’s simply an attempt to silence whistleblowers”, his lawyer, Jesselyn Radack said.

In 2015, hours after Bryant testified before the German parliament about the “essential” role played in the US’ drone war by the Ramstein air base, the whistleblower’s mother was confronted at her home in Montana by two air force officers who told her she was on Islamic State’s (IS, formerly ISIS) “hit list” – another clear case of intimidation according to Radack, who also represents Bryant.

But for people like Aaron, moral questions prevail, because it seems like the killings only lead to more violence and radicalisation on the ground. For Islamist militants and radical preachers, the US drone war has become a rallying cry for more recruits in their insurgency, and each of the innocent casualties only adds to their numbers.

How many more “terrorists” have we now created, from those impressionable boys who see the prophecy of their teacher come true? **CT**

Danielle Ryan is an Irish freelance journalist and media analyst. She has lived in the US and Germany and is currently based in Dublin, where she most recently worked as a digital desk reporter for the Sunday Business Post. She focuses on US foreign policy, US-Russia relations and media bias, and has a column at RT.com, where this article first appeared.

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Dot writes a letter to her soldier friend, Billy.



Photos supplied by author

Dot and Billy: Love torn apart by war

Love letters document the stories of lives torn apart by World War I, writes **Sian Nicholas**

DURING World War I, the only way to keep in touch with loved ones who were serving in the armed forces was through letters. Sent back and forth over periods of months or even years, they tell the day-to-day stories of soldiers' lives and those of the people they had

left behind. We are fortunate that so many of these letters were kept and treasured to this day so that we can retell their tales.

I have been working on the Heritage Lottery Fund-sponsored community project, Aberystwyth at War 1914-1919: Experience, Impact, Legacy, to

bring some of the town's war stories back to life using letters and other evidence. One of the most intriguing that we have uncovered so far is that of Billy and Dot, an army captain and a university student who sent each other love letters during his deployment.

Stanley Wilbrahim Burditt ("Billy") was a captain in the Cheshire Regiment, who spent part of 1915 in camp in Aberystwyth, on the coast of west Wales. Agnes Dorothy French ("Dot") was a undergraduate student at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. They appear to have met at a series of social gatherings arranged between the visiting officers and female undergraduates.

When the Cheshires left Aberystwyth for France in July 1915, Dot promised to write to Billy. Their wartime correspondence, comprising more than 170 letters, provides a personal insight into two young people whose lives were irrevocably shaped by the war.

Billy and Dot's love story was a complicated one. Billy was clearly besotted from the start. Dot's early letters are affectionate but light-hearted. When in February 1917 Billy openly declares his love for

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her, Dot's response is raw in its confusion and honesty. She had no idea he felt that way, indeed would never have written in that tone if she had. She is uncertain of her own feelings – she is desperate to remain friends – but she fears to make promises she can't keep.

Billy is duly apologetic in turn, and Dot agrees to be his “fiancée pendant la guerre” (“girlfriend for the duration”). As the letters continue into the summer of 1917, Billy's feelings persist and Dot's soften. By July they are both desperate for Billy to come home on leave so they can meet again and assess their feelings. For, as Dot notes, she has never actually seen him out of uniform. He finally gets home leave in late August and they spend two chaste but emotionally intense days together. They begin to plan their future. On September 30 Billy is killed by a German bomb.

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Through their letters the correspondents' characters shine through. Dot's are open and impulsive; Billy's are solicitous and romantic. The early letters talk a lot about the books they have read and the plays they have seen, as they find interests and tastes in common (Peter Pan is a constant reference point).

Dot's letters recount in self-deprecating detail her wartime life as, first, an ill-fated voluntary aid detachment (VAD) nurse (she is invalided out

after contracting scarlet fever), and then a sadly disorganised schoolteacher.

Billy's letters are more serious and lyrical, seeking to describe and make order of the world around him, from his “Bairnsfather” farmhouse billet, to – in one striking passage – a “Nevinson” scene of a German plane pinpointed in a black night sky by British searchlights, reminiscent of the artist's depictions of the horrors of modern war.

And throughout their letters they are seeking, haltingly and touchingly, to articulate and analyse their feelings towards each other in a world of strict social and sexual convention.

Like so many letters of this kind, the couple constantly skirt around the grief of war. At one point Dot asks Billy to try to find her young uncle's grave near Couin in northern France and he reassures her of the peacefulness of the spot.

There is a conversation where Dot broaches, very tentatively, how she might find out if the worst does happen to Billy, and another where she dreams of him coming home with a “Blighty” injury (serious but not fatal). The deaths of friends are reported sadly but not lingered over.

And the letters are a story in themselves. They are initially irregular, but eventually Dot and Billy are writing almost daily. They take anything from a few days to several weeks to be delivered,

so their narrative is characteristically fragmented, with conversations jumping across and between letters.

Sometimes there is a lull, filled by what they call “deaf and dumbs” (field postcards with pre-printed messages).

Reading such letters provokes a range of emotions. They are not historically “important” – indeed, they are in places determinedly trivial. They say nothing at all about the horrors of war, that was not why either of them wrote. But we are drawn intimately into the couple's daily lives, thoughts and hopes – whether Billy's reminiscences of tea parties at Aberystwyth, Dot's of university life once the men had gone (very quiet), the disappearance of chocolate biscuits from the shops, the pilfering of Billy's spare kit by person or persons unknown – or the mutual happiness that ends almost as soon as it has begun.

Dot would live to the age of 94. She would never marry. Her letters to Billy were returned to her after his death and she kept the complete correspondence her whole life. That, too, is a story of the war. **CT**

Sian Nicholas is Reader in History at Aberystwyth University in Wales. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

Leveraging information from Archimedes

If that ancient Greek could move the world, we can certainly move Walmart, says **Sam Pizzigati**

THE ancient Greek Archimedes, the greatest scientist of his time, understood the principle of leverage better than any mortal ever. With a long enough lever – a rigid bar resting over a fulcrum – Archimedes believed he could work mechanical miracles.

“Give me a place to stand”, the folklore of science has Archimedes proclaiming, “and I can move the world”.

Down through the centuries, political thinkers and leaders have embraced the majesty of that image. The great pamphleteer of 1776, Thomas Paine, saw the American Revolution as a lever that could move the political world.

“What Archimedes said of the mechanical powers”, Paine wrote in *The Rights of Man*, “may be applied to Reason and Liberty”.

In more modern times, President John F Kennedy invoked Archimedes to make the case for the limited atomic bomb test ban treaty he signed with the Soviet Union. The treaty, JFK acknowledged in a 1963 United Nations address, wasn’t going to “put an end to war”, or “secure freedom for all”. But the agreement, he went on, “could be a lever” that “can move the world to a just

and lasting peace”;

We still, of course, haven’t reached that “just and lasting peace”, in no small part because the world has become a far more unequal place. Today we need a new lever – to move our world toward equity.

What could that lever be? A growing number of egalitarians feel they’ve found a handy one in the ratio of corporate CEO-to-worker pay.

This year, for the first time ever, publicly traded US corporations must disclose the ratio between their CEO and typical worker compensation, a mandate that comes courtesy of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street reform act enacted in 2010. Thanks to this mandate, we now have an official benchmark we can use to see which US corporations are making an effort to share the wealth and which aren’t.

We’ve so far learned from the new Dodd-Frank disclosures that 25 US corporations last year paid their top executives more than 1,000 times what they paid their median – most typical – workers.

Rewards like these are making a significant contribution to the growing divide between

America’s extravagantly rich and everyone else. Some 60 percent of our nation’s top 0.1 percent owe their good fortune to their executive slots in America’s major corporations and banks.

These super rich also owe their good fortune to America’s taxpayers. Nearly every major American corporation is plumping up its profits with tax dollars from government contracts, tax breaks, and subsidies. These tax dollars are widening the gap between worker and CEO pay. But these same tax dollars, advocates for a more equal America believe, could help us significantly narrow corporate pay divides – and the inequality they engender.

Governments, for instance, could deny contracts for goods and services to corporations that pay their top executives outrageously more than their workers. They could condition subsidies and tax breaks on corporate pay practices as well. A company like Amazon wants a subsidy from taxpayers? No subsidies, taxpayers could insist, for corporations that reward the bulk of the benefits from those subsidies to their top executives.

Progressive legislators in half a dozen states have already introduced bills along these lines. One city – Portland, Oregon – has even put this leveraging principle into practice. It has begun taxing at a higher rate those corporations that are paying their top execs at over 100 and 250 times what their typical workers are earning.

CEO pay typically tracks corporate share prices. The more the share price of a CEO's corporation rises, the more in compensation the CEO pockets. That dynamic gives CEOs a powerful incentive to jack up their company share price by any means necessary.

Today's most popular CEO go-to strategy for jacking up share prices? That has become the share "buyback". Top execs simply have their companies "buy back" their own corporate shares on the open market. These buybacks, notes business journalist Valentin Schmid, "artificially" boost earnings per share "by keeping earnings the same but reducing the number of shares". That puts upward pressure on share prices.

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CEOs can even have their companies borrow the money to buy back shares, then deduct the interest they pay on that debt off their corporate tax returns. Average taxpayers, in other words, end up subsidising corporate stock buybacks that balloon the wealth of top corporate execs and other already rich corporate shareholders.

What sort of lever could end the stock buyback games executives play at average taxpayer expense?

US Senator Bernie Sanders has proposed a simple and straightforward answer. The Vermont lawmaker, working with Rep. Ro Khanna from California, has introduced legislation that would ban buybacks at

any major US corporation that either pays its workers less than \$15 an hour or its execs over 150 times what the company's typical workers are making.

The Sanders-Khanna legislation – the "Stop Welfare for Any Large Monopoly Amassing Revenue from Taxpayers Act" – puts a special focus on retail giant Walmart, a corporation that last year pocketed more than \$13-billion in profits and then began buying back \$20-billion of its own stock.

In 2017, Walmart's CEO took home 1,188 times the pay of Walmart's most typical employee.

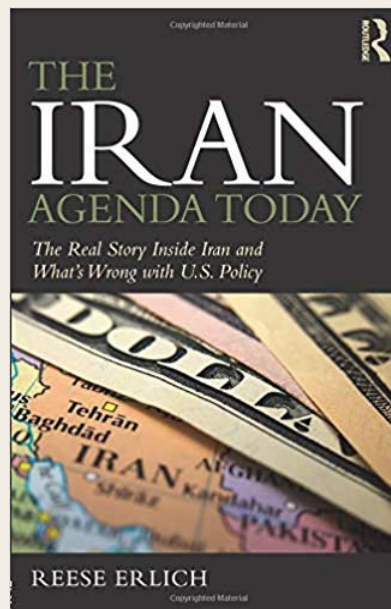
A half century ago, in a much more equal United States, precious few top corporate execs ever pocketed over 30 times what their workers were making. CEOs at major US firms last year averaged 361 times the pay of average American workers.

If Archimedes could move the world, we should be able to move that ratio. **CT**

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Sam Pizzigati co-edits *Inequality.org*. His latest book, *The Case for a Maximum Wage*, has just been published. Follow him at [@Too_Much_Online](#).

Iran: Rumours of war should keep us all awake

If the US continues on its current path, it – and the world – are headed into a long, dark tunnel, writes **Conn Hallinan**



THE IRAN AGENDA TODAY

The Real Story Inside Iran and What's Wrong with US Policy

By **Reese Erlich**

Routledge Taylor & Francis Group

\$32.95 (Amazon.com)

WANT another thing to keep you up at night? Consider a conversation between long-time Middle East reporter Reese Erlich and former US ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Charles Freeman, Jr on the people currently directing the Trump administration's policy toward Iran. Commenting on National

Security Advisor John Bolton's defence of the invasion of Iraq, Freeman says, "The neoconservative group think their good ideas were poorly implemented in Iraq", and that the lesson of the 2003 invasion that killed upwards of 500,000 people and destabilised an entire region is, "If at first you don't succeed, do the same thing again somewhere else".

That "somewhere else" is Iran, and Bolton is one of the leading voices calling for confronting the Teheran regime and squeezing Iran through draconian sanctions "until the pips squeak". Since sanctions are unlikely to have much effect – they didn't work on North Korea, have had little effect on Russia and failed to produce regime change in Cuba – the next logical step, Erlich suggests, is a military attack on Iran.

Such an attack would be a leap into darkness, since most Americans – and their government in particular – are virtually clueless about the country we seem bound to go to war with. Throwing a little light on that darkness is a major reason Erlich wrote the book. For more than 18 years he has reported on Iran, talking with important government figures and everyday people and writing articles on the country that increasingly looks to be our next little war. Except it will be anything but "little".

History matters when it comes to life and death decisions like war, but unfortunately, one of the mainstream media's glaring deficiencies is its lack of

interest in the subject. If newspapers like the *New York Times* had bothered to read Rudyard Kipling on Afghanistan or TE Lawrence on the British occupation of Iraq, the editors might have had second thoughts about supporting the Bush administration's invasions of those countries. Of course, this was not just the result of wearing historical blinders. As Erlich points out, the mainstream media almost always follows in the wake of American foreign policy, more cheerleader than watchdog.

But if that media learned anything from the disasters in Central Asia and the Middle East, it is not apparent when it comes to its reporting on Iran. Most Americans think that country is run by mad mullahs who hate the U. and is – in the words of President Donald Trump – a "terrorist nation". Americans don't hold that image of Iran by accident, but because that is the way the country is represented in the media.

The fact that the US government (along with some help from the British) overthrew Iran's democratically elected government in 1953, and backed Saddam Hussein's attack on Iran in 1980 that resulted in more than a million casualties has vanished down the memory hole.

One of the book's strong points is its careful unravelling of US-Iranian relations, setting the record straight on things like the development of Iran's nuclear infrastructure.

While the Shah was in power, Washington pushed nuclear power plants on Iran, including nuclear fuel enrichment technology, even though the Americans were aware that it could lead to weapon development. Indeed, that is exactly how India produced its first nuclear weapon back in 1974.

Erlich also analyses everything from class structure to Iran's complex ethnicities and explains how the Islamic Republic functions politically and economically. While he is a long-time critic of US foreign policy, Erlich is no admirer of Iran's political institutions. Iran is far more democratic than the absolute monarchies of the Persian Gulf – with which the Washington is closely allied – but it is hardly a democracy.

"Iran is ruled by a reactionary, dictatorial clique that oppresses its own people", he writes, "however, that does not make Iran a threat to Americans". What Teheran does threaten "are the interests of the political, military and corporate elite who run the United States". On a number of occasions Iran has made peace overtures to the US, all of which have been rejected.

Iran is a country with a very long history, and its people have a strong sense of nationalism, even if much of the population is not overly fond of Iran's top-down political system and clerical interference in everyday life. The idea that the Iranian people will rise up and overthrow their government because of sanc-

tions or in the event of a military attack on the government is, according to Erlich, pure illusion.

The Iran Agenda Today covers a lot of ground without bogging down in an overly detailed account of several millennia of history. It certainly provides enough historical context to conclude that an attack on Iran – which would likely also involve Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and possibly Israel – would unleash regional chaos with international repercussions.

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Such a war would be mainly an air war – not even the Trump administration is crazy enough to contemplate a ground invasion of a vast country filled with 80-million people – and would certainly inflict enormous damage. But to what end? Iran will never surrender and its people would rally to the defense of their country. Teheran is also perfectly capable of striking back using unconventional means. Oil prices would spike, and countries that continue to do business with Iran – China, Russia, Turkey and India for starters – would see their growth rates take a hit. No European country would support such a war.

Of course creating chaos is what the Trump administration excels at, and in the short run Iran would suffer a grievous wound. But Teheran would weather the blow and Americans would be in yet another forever war, this time with a

far more formidable foe than Pushtin tribes in Afghanistan or jihadists in Iraq.

Mr Bolton, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman may get their war, but war is a deeply uncertain business. As Prussian Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke, one of the founders of modern warfare, once noted, “No plan survives contact with the enemy”.

Erlich, a Peabody Award winner and the author of five books, has written a timely analysis of US foreign policy vis-à-vis Iran and why, if our country continues on its current path, we – and the world – are headed into a long, dark tunnel. **CT**

Conn Hallinan can be read at dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com and middleempireseries.wordpress.com

How to beat Wall Street: Give it all away

Take it from someone who gave away his inheritance 35 years ago. The act of distributing your wealth will propel you forward, writes **Chuck Collins**

RECENTLY met a person who, with considerable angst, asked what to do about a substantial inheritance. My heartfelt response: Give it away. I did it myself more than 35 years ago, and it was the best decision I ever made. In 1986, faced with my own intergenerational wealth moment, I passed the gift along to several foundations working for “change, not charity”.

My other advice: Find others who are in the same situation and invite them to think things through together. When I did it, four friends and I made a pact to give away substantial assets. We collaborated on a book, *We Gave Away a Fortune*, to chronicle the inspiring stories of people who

gave away their wealth and lived to survive and thrive.

And if you're not ready to give away the wealth, set up your life so that you can give it away later on. Learn how to earn a livelihood that isn't dependent on being wealthy. Build a community of resilience and support. Along the way, try to understand the economic story of the times we are living in and how intergenerational advantage works.

It's true that a \$30-trillion intergenerational transfer is in the works, as the baby boomer generation exits the stage, passing on their accumulated treasure to their children.

But, in a time of gargantuan inequality, most of this wealth

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transfer will take place in the upper canopy of the wealth forest – what we could safely call “dynastic wealth” transmissions among those with \$10-million or more, the richest 10th of the 1 percent.

Trillions also will change hands among the top 10 percent, not as huge trust funds, but in amounts that still will make a huge economic difference to their recipients.

Households in this tier – 9.9 percent of the population, excluding the top 0.1 percent – have maintained a steady share of the wealth pie over several decades of accelerating inequality. As a class, they have witnessed (and in some cases facilitated) the siphoning of wealth from the bottom 90 percent to the powerful top 0.1 percent, while taking their cut.

In the absence of taxpayer-funded investments in public institutions to alleviate poverty and expand opportunity for the non-rich, wealth transfers reinforce a new physics of inequality: compounding advantage for the have-a-lots and accelerating disadvantage for everyone else. This explains the persistence of the racial wealth divide where median White households have 35 times more wealth than Black households and 25 times more wealth than Latino households.

If you find this troubling – or, more viscerally, repulsive, grotesque, or maddening – you have an opportunity to join with movements that are trying to put a brake on the dynastic con-

centration of wealth.

And if you happen to be in the class that won the birth lottery or are a future beneficiary of this intergenerational wealth transfer, and you want to live in an equitable economy, you are not alone. I’ve met thousands of people wrestling with having way more than they need and seeking alternatives. And they want to play a constructive role.

My invitation to them has been to put down a stake, not in an enclave of the wealthy but in a community with race and economic class diversity. Instead of “opting out” of the community and privatising their needs, opt in with gusto by relying on public transportation, education, recreation, and other community resources, and fighting for them alongside everyone else.

I also advise them to bring their wealth home – out from the shadows of the hidden wealth system, the trusts and offshore shell corporations. Shift wealth from the casino of Wall Street to the real economy of goods and services that people depend on. Use it to invigorate regional food systems and local production and services. Divest wealth from the fossil fuel economy and shift capital to the clean energy economy and vibrant new economy enterprises.

Bringing the wealth home means joining a growing field of impact investors and social venture entrepreneurs who are allocating capital directly to socially beneficial enterprises.

It also means recognising the limits of the charitable indus-

trial complex.

The act of considering giving away your wealth will propel you forward. The reality is, wealth is usually only a small part of the package of other intergenerational advantages. I’m a personal sociological experiment: I’m White, male, and with four generations of intergenerational advantage. Even without the inheritance I gave away 35 years ago, I have plenty of other hard-wired advantages: my race and gender advantage, debt-free college education, social networks, a sense of agency, access to health care, and dozens of other benefits.

We must find others in the same boat. Renewal Networks’ “Play Big” conferences bring wealthy people together to share strategies that help align their money to their values. Another group, Resource Generation, is creating a support community for people under 35 seeking to take bold action to leverage their privilege for good.

For the sake of the extended planetary family, it’s time to break the intergenerational cycle of wealth advantage. **CT**

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Chuck Collins is a senior scholar at the Institute for Policy Studies where he co-edits *Inequality.org*, and is author of the new book, *Born on Third Base: A One Percenter Makes the Case for Tackling Inequality, Bringing Wealth Home, and Committing to the Common Good*. This article was written for YES! Magazine, a national, nonprofit media organisation.

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