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ISSUE 164

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ● PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

MID-JULY 2018

ADDICTED AMERICA

Trapped in a world in which **Opioids, Donald Trump & Endless War** are the drugs of choice



Illustration:
Anthony
Jenkins

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TOM ENGELHARDT

Addicted to opioids, Trump and war

The president's finest achievement has been to make himself the voluntary drug of choice for most of the country and all of the media

4 **W**HEN you think of addiction in America today, one thing comes to mind: the opioid epidemic. And it should. It's serious. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, almost 64,000 Americans died of opioid overdoses in 2016 (more than died in the Vietnam War), an average of 175 people a day. In that year, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration estimated that 11.5-million Americans "misused" pain medication. (Note that such figures are still on the rise.) Only recently, the surgeon general issued a rare national advisory "urging more Americans to carry naloxone, a drug used to revive people overdosing on opioids". This crisis of addiction has already cost the country an estimated \$1-trillion since 2001 and might, in the next three years alone, cost more than half that much again.

The United States, however, has two other crises that, in the long run, will cost Americans far more. Yet they get remarkably little attention as addiction phenomena. The first is so obvious that no one should have to comment on it. Here's the strange thing, though: it's a rare moment when there's any serious analysis of it or real attention given to it as an addiction.

This country (and above all its media) is addicted to Donald Trump in a way that no population, no media, possibly not even the Communist Chinese press in the days of Mao Zedong, ever was to any figure. Since he rode that Trump Tower escalator into the presidential race in

June 2015 to the tune of Neil Young's *Rockin' in the Free World* and took out after Mexican "rapists" and future Great Walls, no one – nothing – has ever been covered or attended to this way, online or off, in daily life or in our increasingly shared, increasingly addictive media life. (Yes, the Internet and social media are undoubtedly addictions of some sort, too, but let's not head down that road or I'll never stop writing!)

Not Donald Trump's 2016 electoral victory, nor his tax "reform" gift to the one percent, nor his chance to appoint a second Supreme Court justice (with more openings likely to come) – none of these or anything else he's done or is likely to do will qualify as the truest, deepest, most far-reaching of his triumphs. That can only be the unprecedented way he continues to draw attention. It represents a victory of the first order for him of a unique, almost incomprehensible sort, made more so by the inability of those who report on him to take in what's happened to them or analyse their situation in any serious way.

Donald Trump, as candidate and president, has trumped the attention span of this country, possibly of the planet. Eyes have been focused on him, his insults, his tweets, his passing thoughts, his every comment, his acts, major and minor, and the associated acts and reactions of those who circle around him, as never before in history – not for a king, an emperor, or a dictator, and certainly not for a president. His truest tri-



Illustration:
Anthony
Jenkins

www.jenkinsdraws.com

umph has been to make himself into the voluntary drug of choice for most of a country and all of the media in a way we've never imagined possible, and for which, it seems, there is no naloxone.

He has, in the deepest sense, turned the media he loves to loathe, thrives on hating, into a genuine mechanism for producing "fake news" – about him. It's only real news if you think that The Donald should be the focus of essentially everything,

if you believe that nothing else on this planet should take place except refracted through him.

When it comes to the media in particular, Donald Trump is the opioid crisis. He's their drug of choice. He gets them high. They can't help themselves, nor can they stop. As head of CBS Leslie Moonves put it during election campaign 2016: "It may not be good for America, but it's damn good for CBS". And then he added, "The money's rolling in and this is fun. I've never seen anything like this, and this [is] going to be a very good year for us. Sorry. It's a terrible thing to say. But bring it on, Donald. Keep going".

And it's never ended. The president glues eyeballs to papers, to the endlessly talking heads on the cable news networks, to Twitter, to anything that now passes for media, at a time when so many news outfits are in so many other ways coming unglued. More reporters have undoubtedly been assigned to cover him and his acolytes than ever covered anything or anyone else on a day-by-day, week-by-week basis. Every day of Donald Trump's life is, in coverage terms, something like the equivalent of the Kennedy assassination, which might be thought of as the first 24/7 TV event, or perhaps the 1994 OJ Simpson white Ford Bronco car chase that was, in some strange way, a preview of this Trumpian media moment.

It really doesn't matter much what the "story" is when it comes to his presidency. Whatever it is, it's promptly swarmed by that media without the slightest sense of proportion or any feeling for what actually matters on this planet of ours. In almost every sense, in fact, Donald Trump now regularly blots out the sun.

Take a small incident just a few weeks ago. With a party of family members, Trump Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders stopped off at the Red Hen, a tiny farm-to-table restaurant in Lexington, Virginia. Mid-meal, she was asked

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to leave by the owner after staff members raised “concerns”. I’m only reminding you of this because it’s already been consigned to the dust bin of history as other Trump-infused tales – from the resignation of Supreme Court justice Kennedy to prank-calling the president – have swept it aside. Of course, Sanders’s half-eaten dinner also helped sweep aside previous stories of our time like that message on the back of Melania Trump’s coat on her first trip to the US-Mexico border (“I really don’t care. Do U?”).

When Sanders left that restaurant and then tweeted about it, a storm of coverage, as well as a firestorm of tweets, Facebook posts, insults, and praise about the judgment of the restaurant’s owner, arguments over the ideological polarisation of the country, and so much else, including the “weaponisation” of the restaurant-review website Yelp, flooded over us. Unrelated restaurants with “Red Hen” in their name elsewhere in the country (or even the world) received threats of all sorts and were inundated with insulting messages as were shops and restaurants that happened to be located near the actual Red Hen.

The story became front-page news nationwide and, for instance, led NBC Nightly News (which I happened to watch) on the evening that the stock market swooned over trade-war fears. In my own hometown paper, the *New York Times*, it was a front-page story and not one but two reporters were assigned to a crucial sideline piece about why President Trump’s Twitter finger was so slow; why, that is, he waited 48 hours – two full days! – before tweeting his support for his press secretary by attacking the Red Hen for having a “filthy” exterior and undoubtedly being “dirty” inside. The *Times* journalists focused on “the president’s uncharacteristically tepid, delayed response,” wondering whether it was a sign that Sanders was on her way out. (The *Washington Post*, on the other hand, dissected the president’s response in terms of, as the headline on one of its articles put it, “everything Trump got wrong about Red Hen, in one tweet”.) And so it went.

Tell me, then, if this isn’t an addiction, what is it? And what’s the one thing you know about addictions? Whatever high they give you – and let’s not deny that Donald Trump offers us a con-

stant set of highs (whether as rushes of agreement and pleasure or horror and dismay) – if you can’t stop yourself from taking the drug, day after day, night after night, there will be a price to pay. Somebody better have the equivalent of naloxone on hand.

And then there’s that other 21st-century all-American addiction, in some ways far stranger than the Trumpian one and likely to be no less costly in the long run: addiction to war. Almost 17 years after the Global War on Terror was launched, the highs – the invasion of Afghanistan! The taking of Kabul! The smashing of Iraq! The capture of Saddam Hussein! – are long gone. Now exhausted and discouraged, those hooked nonetheless remain unable to stop.

In some ways, addiction may seem like a strange category when applied to this country’s war-making, as for most Americans the very opposite seems to be true. Since a series of historic global antiwar protests faded out with the invasion of Iraq in the spring of 2003, it’s as if most Americans had gone cold turkey on this country’s credit-card wars. Willfully demobilised by the top officials of the Bush administration, who preferred to conduct their military operations without citizen or congressional oversight, they simply turned away and went about their business. Meanwhile, America’s all-volunteer military, increasingly a kind of foreign legion for much of the population, has continued to fight never-endingly and remarkably fruitlessly across a vast swath of the Middle East, Asia, and Africa.

The divorce of most Americans from Washington’s wars and those fighting them may be less than apparent because, according to the polls, the public has a kind of blind trust and soaring “confidence” in the US military, unlike any other part of the government or, for that matter, the society, and because the urge to “thank” the “warriors” is now such a basic part of American life. But all of that is, I suspect, little more than a massive compensation reaction from a public that otherwise could not care less.

When it comes to Washington’s still-spread-

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ing war on terror, the media has, if anything, followed suit. Recently, for instance, Reuters correspondent Indrees Ali posted a photo on Twitter of a large, almost empty room filled with chairs, with the caption: “There are exactly four journalists at the Pentagon briefing on Afghanistan”. That single image sums up the present situation vividly.

Almost 17 years after the invasion of Afghanistan by a military repeatedly hailed as “the finest fighting force the world has ever known”, at a moment when Taliban insurgents are again gaining ground, a Pentagon briefing on developments there is of no interest. Yes, events in such wars are still dutifully reported from time to time, but those reports, often tucked away on the inside pages of papers or deep in the nightly news, don’t hold a candle to Melania’s jacket, the president’s latest tweet, or a Red Hen rebuff.

And yet the photo of that Pentagon briefing is deceptive. It leaves out a key group still in the room: those addicted to an American style of war-making through which, year after year, the still-theoretically dominant power on the planet only seems to induce the spread of terror movements, disorder, destruction, and the displacement of increasingly large populations (contributing to a global refugee crisis that is, in its own way, helping to remake the planet).

Missing from that photo are the characters who have OD’d on US military power and yet can’t stop mainlining it in ways that have become all-too-familiar since 2001. I’m thinking of the generals of the US military, the men who have led an endless set of campaigns as part of what those inside the Pentagon are now grimly referring to as an “infinite war” leading nowhere. And they’re strung out. As Mark Perry reported recently in *Foreign Policy*, Secretary of Defense James “Mad Dog” Mattis and other American generals, unlike the president’s new civilian counsellors, National Security Advisor John Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, are not eager for the next potential war, the one with Iran that already looms on the horizon. They understand that they could launch such a

conflict successfully, destroying much of Iran’s military (and its nuclear facilities), and still, as with Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Yemen, and so on, somehow not get out.

And yet, much as they don’t want a bright, shiny new war (and who could blame them under the circumstances), they can’t imagine leaving the old ones behind either. And that’s America’s war addiction in a nutshell, one that has long had in its grip most of elite Washington and the rest of a national security state set up around a style of infinite-war-making that must always be fed with ever increasing numbers of taxpayer dollars. Thanks to those dollars, we, the taxpayers, could be thought of as so many street-level drug peddlers in this country’s war equivalent of the opioid epidemic. The politicians who feed those dollars into the military maw would be the doctors who prescribe opioids, understanding full-well their ability to hook patients. And the Military-Industrial Complex – the giant weapons companies and the warrior corporations that now go into action in lock-step with that military – would be the drug companies that have profited so off the opioid crisis even as they stoked it.

Returning momentarily to Donald Trump, you can feel the power of that war addiction in his inability to fulfil his promise to fight those conflicts in a winning style and, if necessary, quickly extricate the country from what he termed its “\$7-trillion” Greater Middle Eastern disaster. In his own fashion, he, too, has been hooked. And when the increasingly tired and distraught generals he chose to surround himself with proved unpalatable to him, Trump notably picked as replacements civilians guaranteed to keep the ball rolling when it came to America’s wars from hell.

So, addiction? If you don’t think this country has an addiction crisis (other than opioids), think again.

CT

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Tom Engelhardt is a co-founder of the American Empire Project and the author of a history of the Cold War, *The End of Victory Culture*. His sixth and latest book, just published, is *A Nation Unmade by War* (Dispatch Books). This essay was first published at www.tomdispatch.com

GEORGE MONBIOT

Incompetence by design

As state bodies are dismantled, corporations are freed
to rip the living world apart

It feels like the collapse of the administrative state – and this is before Brexit. One government agency after another is losing its budget, its power and its expertise. The result, for corporations and the very rich, is freedom from the restraint of law, freedom from the decencies they owe to other people, freedom from democracy. The public protections that constrain their behaviour are being dismantled.

8 An example is the cascading decline in the protection of wildlife and environmental quality. The bodies charged with defending the living world have been so enfeebled that they now scarcely exist as independent entities. Natural England, for example, has been reduced to a nodding dog in the government's rear window.

Its collapse as an autonomous agency is illuminated by the case that will be heard next week in the High Court, where two ecologists, Tom Langton and Dominic Woodfield, are challenging its facilitation of the badger cull. That the cull is a senseless waste of life and money is well established, but this is only one of the issues being tested. Another is that Natural England, which is supposed to assess whether the shooting of badgers causes wider environmental harm, appears incapable of discharging its duties.

As badger killing spreads across England, it intrudes upon ever more wildlife sites, some of which protect animals that are highly sensitive to disturbance. Natural England is supposed to determine whether allowing hunters to move through these places at night and fire their guns

has a detrimental effect on other wildlife, and what the impact of removing badgers from these ecosystems might be. The claimants allege that it has approved the shooting without meaningful assessments.

Some of its decisions, they maintain, are farcical. In Dorset, for example, Natural England assumed that overwintering hen harriers and merlins use only one out of all the sites that have been designated for their protection, and never stray from it. It makes the same assumption about the Bewick's swans that winter around the Severn estuary. That birds fly, enabling them to move from one site to another, appears to have been overlooked. Part of the problem, the claimants argue, is that staff with specialist knowledge have been prevented from making decisions. The location of the badger cull zones is such a closely guarded secret that Natural England's local staff are not allowed to see the boundaries. As a result, they can make no meaningful assessment of what the impact might be. Instead, the decisions are made in distant offices by people who have not visited the sites.

I wanted to ask Natural England about this, but its external communications have been shut down by the government: any questions now have to be addressed to Michael Gove's environment department, Defra. Defra told me "staff carrying out this work have all the necessary information. It would be inappropriate to comment on an on-

GEORGE MONBIOT

going legal matter.” How can Natural England be an independent body when the government it is supposed to monitor speaks on its behalf?

Another example of how far Natural England has fallen is the set of deals it has struck with grouse moor owners, allowing them to burn protected habitats, kill protected species and build roads across sites that are supposed to be set aside for wildlife. For several years, the redoubtable conservationist Mark Avery has been fighting these decisions. This May, Natural England conceded, in effect, that he was right. The agency that is meant to protect our wild places has been colluding in their destruction.

A correspondent from within Natural England tells me its staff are so demoralised that it has almost ceased to function. “Enforcement, for example, is close to non-existent ... Gove seems to have somehow both raised the profile of environmental issues whilst simultaneously stripping the resources ... it has never been as bad as this.”

In March, the House of Lords reported that Natural England’s budget has been cut by 44 per cent since it was founded in 2006. The cuts have crippled both its independence and its ability to discharge its duties. It has failed to arrest the catastrophic decline in our wildlife, failed to resist the housebuilders trashing rare habitats and abandoned its regulatory powers in favour of useless voluntary agreements. As if in response, the government cut the agency’s budget by a further 14 per cent.

Dominic Woodfield, one of the claimants in the court case, argues that Natural England has been “on death row” since it applied the law at Lodge Hill in Kent, where the Ministry of Defence was hoping to sell Britain’s best nightingale habitat to a housing developer. Natural England had no

legal choice but to designate this land as a site of scientific interest, hampering the government’s plans. As the government slashed its budget and curtailed its independence, the agency’s disastrous response has been to try to save itself through appeasement. But all this has done is to alienate its defenders, reduce its relevance and hasten its decline. “There are still good people in Natural England. But they’re broken. They talk very slowly because they’re thinking very carefully about everything they say.”

If this is happening before we leave the European Union, I can only imagine where we will stand without the protection of European law. The environmental watchdog that, according to

Michael Gove, will fill the role now played by the European Commission, will know, like Natural England, that its budget is provided by the government and can be cut at the government’s discretion. What is to prevent it from being nobbled as other agencies have been?

Already, the deliberate mutilating of the administrative state, delivering incompetence by

design, has released landowners, housebuilders and assorted polluters from regulatory restraint. Only through European law have government agencies been forced to discharge their duties. Brexit strips away this defence. And if, as some propose, it paves the way for One Nation Under Gove, we should, the evidence so far suggests, be even more alarmed.

But some of us are now mobilising to turn the great enthusiasm for wildlife and natural beauty in this country into political action, and to fight the dismantling of the laws that protect our precious wild places. Watch this space. **CT**

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



ENDANGERED: Location of badger cull zones in England is closely-guarded secret. Photo: Wiikmedia

CONN HALLINAN

Invasion of the big bad bugs

How the US government is helping to create a massive international public health crisis

10

WHEN people contemplate potential disasters ignited by the Trump administration's foreign policy, places like the South China Sea, Central Asia, or the Korean Peninsula come first to mind. Certainly a dustup with Beijing, Teheran or Pyongyang is a scary thing to contemplate. But the thing that should also keep people up at night is Washington's approach to international health organisations and the President's stubborn refusal to address climate change.

Bad bugs are coming, and they are stronger and nastier than they have ever been. A few – like malaria and yellow fever – are ancient nemeses, but they're increasingly immune to standard drugs and widening their reach behind a warming climate. Others – like Ebola, SARS, MERS and Zika – are new, exotic and fearsome. And antibiotic resistant bacteria threaten to turn the clock back to pre-penicillin days, when a cut could be a death sentence.

Trump's disdain for international agencies and treaties, plus cuts in public health programmes, and a relaxation of regulations on the use of antibiotics in animal husbandry could create a worldwide medical catastrophe.

The President recently asked Congress to cut over \$15-billion from health care, especially in

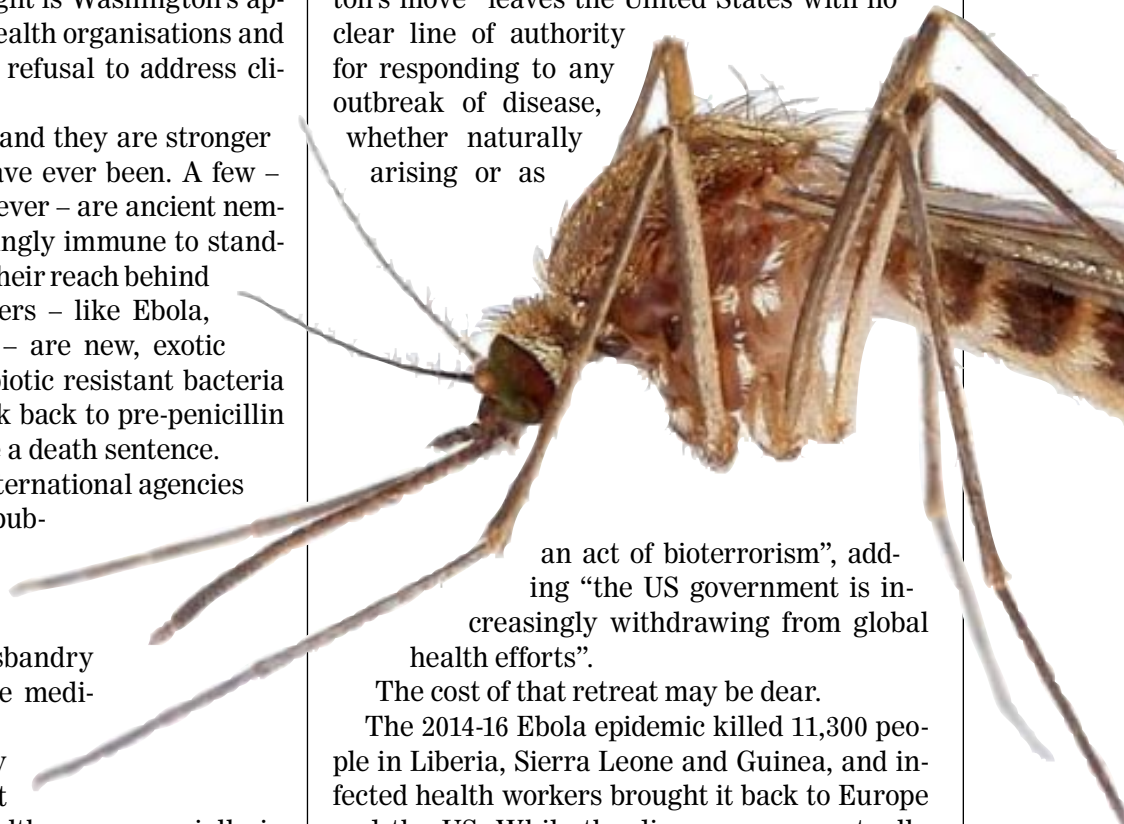
the area of overseas response. On the very day that the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared an emergency over the latest Ebola outbreak, National Security Advisor John Bolton eliminated the National Security Agency's programme for epidemic prevention.

As Laurie Garrett – winner of the Pulitzer Prize for her writings on health care – notes, Bolton's move “leaves the United States with no clear line of authority for responding to any outbreak of disease, whether naturally arising or as

an act of bioterrorism”, adding “the US government is increasingly withdrawing from global health efforts”.

The cost of that retreat may be dear.

The 2014-16 Ebola epidemic killed 11,300 people in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, and infected health workers brought it back to Europe and the US. While the disease was eventually



corralled, it continues to flare up.

WHO found that the key to stopping Ebola's spread is an immediate response that combines vaccination with isolation and hospitalisation, a strategy that stopped a 2018 outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in its tracks. But the Trump budget cuts all Ebola spending and reduces emergency funds for the State Department. A post-epidemic analysis found that an extra 300 hospital beds would have stopped the disease's spread in 2014.

Diseases like Ebola get media attention, in part because Ebola kills more than 80 percent of its victims in a particularly grotesque manner: death by massive haemorrhaging.

But the more familiar diseases like malaria do the most damage. The malaria plasmodium infects 216 million people a year and kills 450,000, many of them children. And after decades of retreat, the disease is roaring back with varieties that are increasingly hard to treat. One by one, the barriers that once kept the disease at bay have fallen. Having overcome chloroquine, and then fansidar, now malaria has begun to breach the latest cure, artemisinin.

Now public health experts predict that if the drug-resistant malaria strain ever reaches Africa, its impact will be catastrophic.

Yellow fever, once a major killer but largely tamed by mosquito control and vaccinations, is also making a comeback. Dengue, or "break-bone" fever, which infects 400-million worldwide and kills over 25,000 people a year, has spread from nine countries in 1970 to over 100 today.

The fact that diseases overcome defences is nothing new. Natural selection will generally find a way to outflank whatever chemicals humans come up with to defend themselves. Penicillin was discovered in 1939, and by 1941 doctor

discovered Staphylococcus bacteria that were immune to the drug.

But bad policies and bad pathogens go hand in hand. The Trump administration's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accords will certainly accelerate climate change in a way that encourages the spread of disease. Earlier springs and later falls mean longer life spans for disease vectors like ticks and mosquitoes, which translates into greater infection rates. Researchers in Scandinavia and Massachusetts suspect that an increase in Lyme's disease is due to climate change, and

malaria is moving up the Andes as the higher altitudes warm.

Other diseases, like chagas – which kills 50,000 people a year – is already moving north as its vector, the assassin bug, migrates out of its base in Latin America. Diseases like West Nile is now part of the standard disease loads of Europe and North America.

Again, pathogen mobility is hardly new.

Malaria, yellow fever, measles and small pox were all introduced to the New World by travelers, conquerors and African slaves. But disease is even less a local phenomenon today than it was in the 15th-century.

As Dr. Don Francis, who played a key role in identifying the HIV virus and was on the first medical team to confront Ebola, points out how disease spreads: "Just sit in an airport and watch all the costumes walk by".

Trump is famously resistant to science. He doesn't yet have a White House science advisor and is relying, instead, on Michael Kratsios, a 31-year-old political science major who studied Hellenic Greece. Kratsios was the former chief of staff of California billionaire Peter Thiel, founder of PayPal, who advocates rolling back Food and Drug Administration regulations.

Those regulations cover the use of antibiotics in animal husbandry. Chickens, cattle and pigs account for 70 percent of the antibiotics used in the US. The animals are not ill, just packed into pens and cages that would sicken them if they



INHUMANE AND DEADLY: Animals packed into cages are a Petri dish for generating drug-resistant germs.

Photo: www.farmsnotfactories.org

12

were not juiced with Bambermycin, Salinomycin or Bacitracin. Antibiotics also increase the animals' weight.

But animals jammed into rarely cleaned cages and pens are the perfect Petri dish for generating drug resistant germs. According to the Environmental Working Group, nearly 80 percent of US supermarket meat is infected with antibiotic resistant germs. Studies of meats in the US show that up to 70 percent are laced with germs immune to antibiotics.

When the European Union banned non-therapeutic antibiotics on animals, drug resistant germ levels declined dramatically. Eventually those pathogens move from animal pens to hospitals and gyms and airports. What you do in an Iowa pig farm does not stay in Iowa.

The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says that 23,000 Americans die each year from drug resistant germs, and a British study predicted that, unless something is done about the crisis, antibiotic resistant bacteria could kill 10-million people a year by 2050. The WHO says "superbugs" pose one of the most serious threats that humanity faces, and the medi-

cal magazine *Lancet* called drug resistant pathogens "The biggest global health threat in the 21st-century".

The White House's hostility to the Obama administration's Affordable Care Act could also have major consequences, not only for Americans, but the world. In 1918, a mild Spanish flu mutated – probably in Kansas – into a fearsome virus that killed between 50- and 100 -million people worldwide.

The 1918-19 pandemic almost certainly started in the digestive tracts of Chinese pigs, then passed to birds, and from birds to people. Those Chinese pigs are still out there, and lethal varieties of bird flu are currently circulating in China and South-east Asia. So far, most can only be passed by direct contact with infected animals, but sooner or later there will be a mutation that will make a virus far more communicable. A deadly worldwide pandemic is a "when," not an "if".

And when that pandemic hits, Americans will find that there are not enough hospital beds – so-called "surge capacity" is non-existent – or robust public health programmes to cope with it. China has also cut back on public health care programs and, as a result, was initially unable to deal with the 2003 SARS crisis that sickened 8,000 people and killed 800.

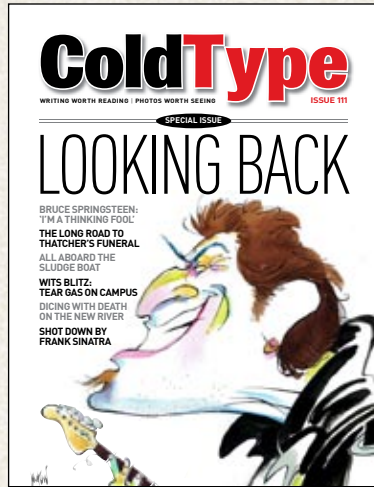
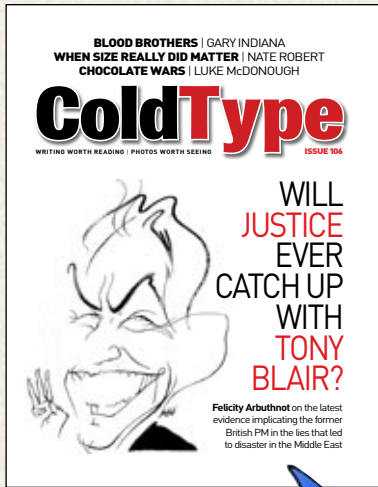
Europeans, with their national health services, are better prepared, but even their public health systems have been hollowed out by years of austerity-driven economic policies. And there is a worldwide shortage of medical workers, particularly nurses.

In his *Second Coming*, the Irish writer William Butler Yeats seems to have foreseen the future: *Some rough beast, its time come round at last, Slouches toward Bethlehem, waiting to be born.*

The beasts are out there, and they will be born. The Trump administration's denial of climate change, hostility to international institutions, and laissez faire approach to governance at home will make those beasts far more dangerous than they have to be. **CT**

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

CATCH THE READER'S EYE



13

ART BY ANTHONY JENKINS

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BIG ORANGE BAG OF WIND: The Trump Baby balloon greets marchers as they arrive in Parliament Square





RON FASSBENDER



BULLY BOY: Poster tells the Prez what Britain thinks of him.

London says 'Hi' to Trump

15

Just the day before his mid-July visit to England and Scotland, US President Donald Trump claimed, "I think they like me there," because of his hard-line stance on migrants and his support for Brexit. Between 150,000 and a quarter-of-a-million people proved him wrong when they took part in the biggest demonstration London has seen since the days before the start of the war on Iraq in 2003. The demonstrations were echoed in other major cities of the UK as Trump met Prime Minister Theresa May – whom he had insulted in an interview in the same-day's tabloid *Sun* newspaper – and played golf in Scotland. Turn the pages for our photo coverage of the day London said Hi to the President.



16

NOT WELCOME:
Protesters point out the hypocrisy of Trump's migrant policies; while the Queen is not amused.



NOT UP FOR GRABS, DONALD!



THIS IS THE
CARNIVAL
OF
RESISTANCE





READ MY QUIPS:
Posters tell the president precisely what Britain thinks of him and his policies.







NOT WELCOME:
The day before his trip, Trump claimed that he was liked by the British. The London protest said something entirely different.



RON FASSBENDER

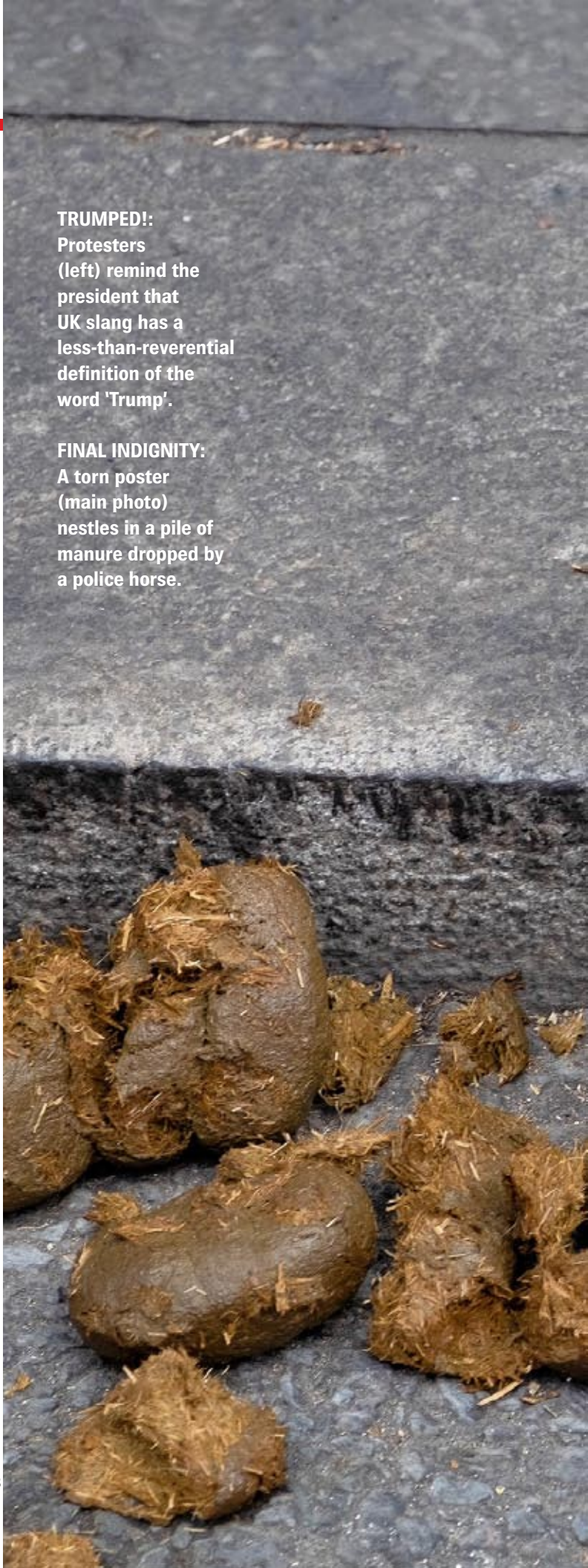


RON FASSBENDER



TRUMPED!:
Protesters (left) remind the president that UK slang has a less-than-reverential definition of the word 'Trump'.

FINAL INDIGNITY:
A torn poster (main photo) nestles in a pile of manure dropped by a police horse.



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OUR PHOTOGRAPHER

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Trump's treasonous Traitor Summit

Or how liberals learned to stop worrying and love the new McCarthyism

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So it appears America and democracy have miraculously survived the dreaded Trump-Putin summit ... or Trump's meeting with his Russian handler, as the neoliberal ruling classes and their mouthpieces in the corporate media would dearly like us all to believe. NATO has not been summarily dissolved. Poland has not been invaded by Russia. The offices of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, CNN, and MSNBC have not been stormed by squads of jackbooted Trumpian Gestapo. The Destabilisation of the Middle East, the Privatization of Virtually Everything, the Conversion of the Planet into One Big Shopping Mall, and other global capitalist projects are all going forward uninterrupted. Apart from Trump making a narcissistic, word-salad-babbling jack-ass of himself, which he does on a more or less daily basis, nothing particularly apocalyptic happened.

And so, once again, Western liberals, and others obsessed with Donald Trump, having been teased into a painfully tumescent paroxysm of anticipation of some unimaginably horrible event that would finally lead to Trump's impeachment (or his removal from office by other means) were left standing around with their hysteria in their hands.

It has become a sadistic ritual at this point ... like a twisted, pseudo-Tantric exercise where the media get liberals all lathered up over whatever fresh horror Trump has just perpetrated (or some non-story story they have invented out of whole

cloth), build the tension for several days, until liberals are moaning and begging for impeachment, or a full-blown CIA-sponsored coup, then pull out abruptly and leave the poor bastards writhing in agony until the next time ... which is pretty much exactly what just happened.

In the days and weeks leading up to the summit, the global capitalist ruling class Resistance deployed every weapon in its mighty arsenal to whip the Western masses up into a frenzy of anti-Putin-Nazi fervour. While continuing to flog the wildly popular baby concentration camp story (because the Hitler stimulus never fails to elicit a Pavlovian response from Americans, regardless of how often or how blatantly you use it), the corporate media began hammering hard on the "Trump is a Russian Agent" hysteria. (Normally, the corporate media alternates between the Hitler hysteria and the Russia hysteria so as not to completely short-circuit the already-scrambled brains of Western liberals, but given the imminent threat of a peace deal, they needed to go the whole hog this time and paint this summit as a secret, internationally televised assignation between Hitler and ... well, Hitler).

In order to render them even more repugnant in the eyes of Western liberals (as if being two Hitlers wasn't repugnant enough), the *New York Times* produced a short *Trump Bites* video graphically depicting Trump and Putin as insatiably horny homosexual lovers. A fusillade of



COSYING-UP? Vladimir Putin meets Donald Trump.

Photo: Wikimedia

apocalyptic op-eds followed, the most shamelessly paranoid and hysterical of which was Roger Cohen's experimental dystopia, in which "The Alliance of Authoritarian and Reactionary States" trick the inherently fascist Europeans into launching a Second Holocaust with a "fake news" story about Moroccan migrants abducting poor little "Tatiana" from a beach resort in Fuengirola.

While faithful *New York Times*-reading liberals were still struggling to regain control of their sphincters and doubling up on their alprazolam prescriptions in a desperate attempt to banish these visions of the coming butch-gay Putin-Nazi Reich, go-to propagandist, Jonathan Chait, who has obviously been watching way too much Homeland, published this paranoid spec-fic novella (complete with a "Carrie is off her meds" flow chart) about how Trump has probably been "a Russian intelligence asset" since 1987.

At the same time, MSNBC's Malcolm Nance took to Twitter to denounce Glenn Greenwald as a treasonous "agent of Trump and Moscow"

for physically travelling to a conference in Russia and speaking with several Russian people. Nance, who usually just makes things up, was actually telling the truth this time. Greenwald really did visit Russia, and was selfied in the company of Edward Snowden, on top of which he's totally gay, and God knows what kind of Commie orgies go on in the Kremlin dungeon!

And the neoliberal "Resistance" was just getting started. As Trump was arriving at Stansted Airport to begin his "destruction of British diplomacy" (and possibly poison the Queen with more of that Novichok oatmeal that has been plaguing the UK), the *Guardian*'s Owen Jones was personally preparing cells of the "London Resistance" for "the biggest demonstration in British history," or "the biggest weekday protest in British history," or a very large protest in any event. The London Resistance's secret weapon was the baby Russian Agent Hitler blimp, which forced Trump and his Nazi goons to retreat to one of his

Scottish golf resorts, but not before humiliating America, and horrifying the *Washington Post*, by failing to grovel before the British monarch. Still, the point is, London was saved. The forces of hatred, bigotry, and Russianness were roundly defeated by the forces of love, and goodness, and democracy, and tolerance, and whatever. If only the French had been willing to deploy a baby Hitler blimp in 1940 ... or had been able to unite the corporate media, the intelligence agencies, the capitalist ruling classes, and thousands of virtue-signalling liberals to disapprove of the original Hitler!

But that wasn't all ... oh no, far from it. No, the weeks of white-eyed editorials warning us of the dangers of peace, the neo-McCarthyite smear campaigns, the virtue-signalling Stop Trump protests, all that was just an extended edition of Orwell's famous Two Minutes Hate, designed to generate mass hysteria and paranoia in the run-up to the summit.

By Friday, the Intelligence Community was issuing warnings of imminent Russian "attempts to undermine America" with September 11 scale "cyber attacks!" National Intelligence Director Dan Coats personally told the Associated Press that the little "Imminent Russia Attack" lights he has on his desk were all "blinking red." Apparently, Trump and the Putin-Nazis are preparing "a crippling cyber attack" against "critical US infrastructure", like "a power outage in New England in January", or even "a cyber attack on banks" that will erase Americans' entire life savings but somehow spare all the Russian accounts, or at least another devastating round of division-sowing Facebook ads!

Then, just in time for the corporate media to milk it throughout the weekend, special counsel Robert Mueller, III released a 29-page indictment accusing a bunch of Russian spies of, well, basically, being Russian spies. The indictment alleges that these Russian spies destroyed the campaign of Hillary Clinton, who everyone knows is supposed to be president, by "hacking" the Democratic Party's servers and stealing and disseminating emails revealing both Clinton and the Democratic Party to be the soulless neoliberal hypocrites most people already knew they

were. The indictment of these Russian intelligence officers (and no Americans, nor any other parties who can ever actually be brought to trial, requiring special counsel Mueller to offer evidence to support his allegations) was followed up by a chorus of voices demanding that the summit be cancelled and that Trump slink home in complete disgrace to confess his crimes to a vindicated nation, and then presumably fire his entire administration, resign, and appoint Hillary Clinton President.

Sometime early Sunday morning, after hours of careful deliberation over cheeseburgers and sodas on Air Force One with the Gorilla Channel streaming on his smartphone for ambiance, Trump decided to go ahead with the summit. This left the Resistance no other choice than to turn up the dial on the manufactured hysteria by repeating the words "treason", "treasonous", and "traitor" as many times as humanly possible on every news site, television channel, and social media platform in existence, and just generally running around like lunatics shrieking about an "IMMINENT RUSSIAN ATTACK!"

On the morning of the summit, Charles M Blow, maestro of alliteration and subtlety, in the *New York Times* (which, we must remember, holds itself to the highest journalistic standards and in no way resembles a rabble-rousing tabloid), published this impassioned piece entitled "Trump, Treasonous Traitor", accusing the President of "betraying the nation", and basically demanding that he be tried for treason. "America is under attack," Blow announces, "and its president absolutely refuses to defend it." If *Mother Jones'* David Corn has his way, Senator Rand Paul, who Corn denounces as "a traitor," would also be taken outside and shot for the crime of noting that the *Attack on America*® Russia allegedly perpetrated is fairly standard clandestine behaviour, engaged in by most developed nations, including the United States of America, whose history of election interference, coup-fomenting, assassinations, and other, more hamfisted forms of regime change is common knowledge, or at least it was, until the ruling classes and the corporate media

CJ HOPKINS

turned the majority of Western liberals into paranoid McCarthyite fanatics denouncing anyone who questions the honesty of the US Intelligence Community as a “traitor”, and seeing Russians and Nazis coming out of the woodwork.

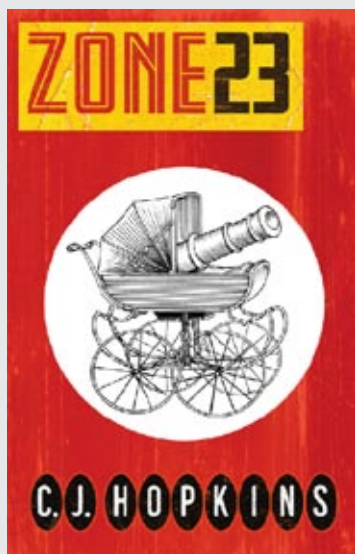
In the wake of Trump’s Treasonous Traitor Summit, which Garry Kasparov has called “the darkest hour in the history of the American presidency” (darker than Truman dropping the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki!), the neoliberal establishment and the corporate media appear to have gone full Joe McCarthy. Virtually every establishment mouthpiece, former spook, official state clown, from Thomas Friedman to Stephen Colbert, has been braying about “treason” and “traitorousness,” and suggesting that Donald Trump be removed from office by, you know, whatever means necessary. At least David Frum, senior editor at the *Atlantic* had the balls to openly call for a CIA-orchestrated military coup, because we can’t afford to wait for the legal process to take its course this time, as we are “facing a national security emergency!”

God knows where we go from here. It’s hard to

believe the ruling classes can keep teasing liberals, and other Trump-obsessives, over and over and over like this, without eventually impeaching or shooting the guy – but then again, maybe they can. Perhaps they intend to continue conducting this experiment all the way up to 2020, just to see how paranoid and mindlessly conformist they make the majority of the Western public. In any event, if they decide not to impeach him, and then try him for treason, or just kill him, or whatever, the Democrats at least have a new campaign slogan that they can use in 2018 and beyond ... “NEXT TIME VOTE FOR WHO WE TELL YOU TO, YOU RUSSIA-LOVING NAZI SCUM!” It kind of has a ring to it, doesn’t it? **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 Snoggsworthy, Swaine & Cormorant. He can be reached at www.cjhopkins.com or www.consentfactory.org

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Bulldozing all illusions of a peace process

There will be no end to the slow-motion erasure of Palestinian communities until western governments find the nerve to impose biting sanctions on Israel

ISRAEL finally built an access road to the West Bank village of Khan al-Ahmar last week, after half a century of delays. But the only vehicles allowed along it are the bulldozers scheduled to sweep away its 200 inhabitants' homes.

If one community has come to symbolise the demise of the two-state solution, it is Khan al-Ahmar.

It was for that reason that a posse of European diplomats left their air-conditioned offices late last week to trudge through the hot, dusty hills outside Jerusalem and witness for themselves the preparations for the village's destruction. That included the Israeli police viciously beating residents and supporters as they tried to block the advance of heavy machinery.

Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain have submitted a formal protest. Their denunciations echoed those of more than 70 Democratic lawmakers in Washington in May – a rare example of US politicians showing solidarity with Palestinians.

It would be gratifying to believe that Western governments care about the inhabitants of Khan al-Ahmar – or the thousands of other Palestinians who are being incrementally cleansed by Israel from nearby lands but whose plight has drawn far less attention.

After all, the razing of Khan al-Ahmar and the forcible transfer of its population are war crimes.

But in truth Western politicians are more con-

cerned about propping up the illusion of a peace process that expired many years ago than the long-running abuse of Palestinians under Israeli occupation.

Western capitals understand what is at stake. Israel wants Khan al-Ahmar gone so that Jewish settlements can be built in its place, on land it has designated as "E1".

That would put the final piece in place for Israel to build a substantial bloc of new settler homes to sever the West Bank in two. Those same settlements would also seal off West Bank Palestinians from East Jerusalem, the expected capital of a future Palestinian state, making a mockery of any peace agreement.

The erasure of Khan al-Ahmar has not arrived out of nowhere. Israel has trampled on international law for decades, conducting a form of creeping annexation that has provoked little more than uncomfortable shifting in chairs from Western politicians.

Khan al-Ahmar's Bedouin inhabitants, from the Jahalin tribe, have been ethnically cleansed twice before by Israel, but these war crimes went unnoticed.

The first time was in the 1950s, a few years after Israel's creation, when 80 per cent of Palestinians had been driven from their homes to clear the path for the creation of a Jewish state.

Although they should have enjoyed the protection of Israeli citizenship, the Jahalin were

forced out of the Negev and into the West Bank, then controlled by Jordan, to make way for new Jewish immigrants.

A generation later in 1967, when they had barely re-established themselves, the Jahalin were again under attack from Israeli soldiers occupying the West Bank. The grazing lands the Jahalin had relocated to with their goats and sheep were seized to build a settlement for Jews only, Kfar Adumim, in violation of the laws of war.

Ever since, the Jahalin have dwelt in a twilight zone of Israeli-defined “illegality”. Like other Palestinians in the 60 per cent of the West Bank declared under Israeli control by the Oslo peace process, they have been denied building permits, forcing three generations to live in tin shacks and tents.

Israel has also refused to connect the village to the water, electricity and sewage grids, in an attempt to make life so unbearable the Jahalin would opt to leave.

When an Italian charity helped in 2009 to establish Khan al-Ahmar’s first school – made from mud and tyres – Israel stepped up its legal battle to demolish the village.

Now, the Jahalin are about to be driven from their lands again, as though they are nothing more than wayward cattle. This time they are to be forcibly re-settled next to a waste dump by the Palestinian town of Abu Dis, hemmed in on all sides by Israeli walls and settlements.

In the new location they will be forced to abandon their pastoral way of life. As resident Ibrahim Abu Dawoud observed: “For us, leaving the desert is death.”

In another indication of the Palestinians’ dire predicament, the Trump administration is expected to propose in its long-awaited peace plan that the slum-like Abu Dis, rather than East Jerusalem, serve as the capital of a future pseudo-Palestinian state – if Israel ever chooses to recognise one.

Khan al-Ahmar’s destruction would be the first demolition of a complete Palestinian community since the 1990s, when Israel ostensibly

committed to the Oslo process.

Now emboldened by Washington’s unstinting support, Benjamin Netanyahu’s government is racing ahead to realise its vision of a Greater Israel. It wants to annex the lands on which villages like Khan al-Ahmar stand and remove their Palestinian populations.

There is a minor hurdle. Last Thursday, the Israeli supreme court tried to calm the storm clouds gathering in Europe by issuing a temporary injunction on the demolition works.

The reprieve is likely to be short-lived. A few weeks ago the same court – in a panel dominated by judges identified with the settler movement – backed Khan al-Ahmar’s destruction.

The Supreme Court has also been moving towards accepting the Israeli government’s argument that decades of land grabs by settlers should be retroactively sanctioned – even though they violate Israeli and international law – if carried out in “good faith”.

Whatever the judges believe, there is nothing “good faith” about the behaviour of either the settlers or Israel’s government towards communities like Khan al-Ahmar.

Saeb Erekat, the Palestinians’ veteran peace negotiator, recently warned that Israel and the US were close to “liquidating” the project of Palestinian statehood.

Sounding more desperate than usual, the Europe Union reaffirmed this month its commitment to a two-state solution, while urging that the “obstacles” to its realisation be more clearly identified.

The elephant in the room is Israel itself – and its enduring bad faith. As Khan al-Ahmar demonstrates all too clearly, there will be no end to the slow-motion erasure of Palestinian communities until western governments find the nerve to impose biting sanctions on Israel. **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

Why it doesn't matter where a Harley is built

Bikes sold in US are assembled in Wisconsin, but many of the parts used in that process are made in other countries

HARLEY-DAVIDSON was one of President Trump's favourite companies less than six months ago. Now it's the latest business to feel his wrath.

That's because on June 25, Harley-Davidson announced it will move some of its production overseas. The iconic American motorcycle brand said it was doing this to avoid retaliatory tariffs imposed by the European Union in response to US import taxes.

"A Harley-Davidson should never be built in another country – never!" Trump tweeted. "Their employees and customers are already very angry at them. If they move, watch, it will be the beginning of the end".

Back in February, things were very different. At a meeting with executives at the White House, Trump praised Harley-Davidson for being "a true American icon, one of the greats," and thanked them "for building things in America".

As an international relations expert who focuses on trade disputes, I can understand Trump's anger at Harley's announcement. He wants to promote Harley-Davidson for his "America First" agenda, the goal of which is to protect and create American manufacturing jobs. With Harley taking the production of its EU-bound bikes abroad, this does not look like a success for Trump.

But this got me to thinking: In a world that depends on global supply chains, what makes a product truly "made in America"? Is a Harley really an all-American bike? Who even cares?

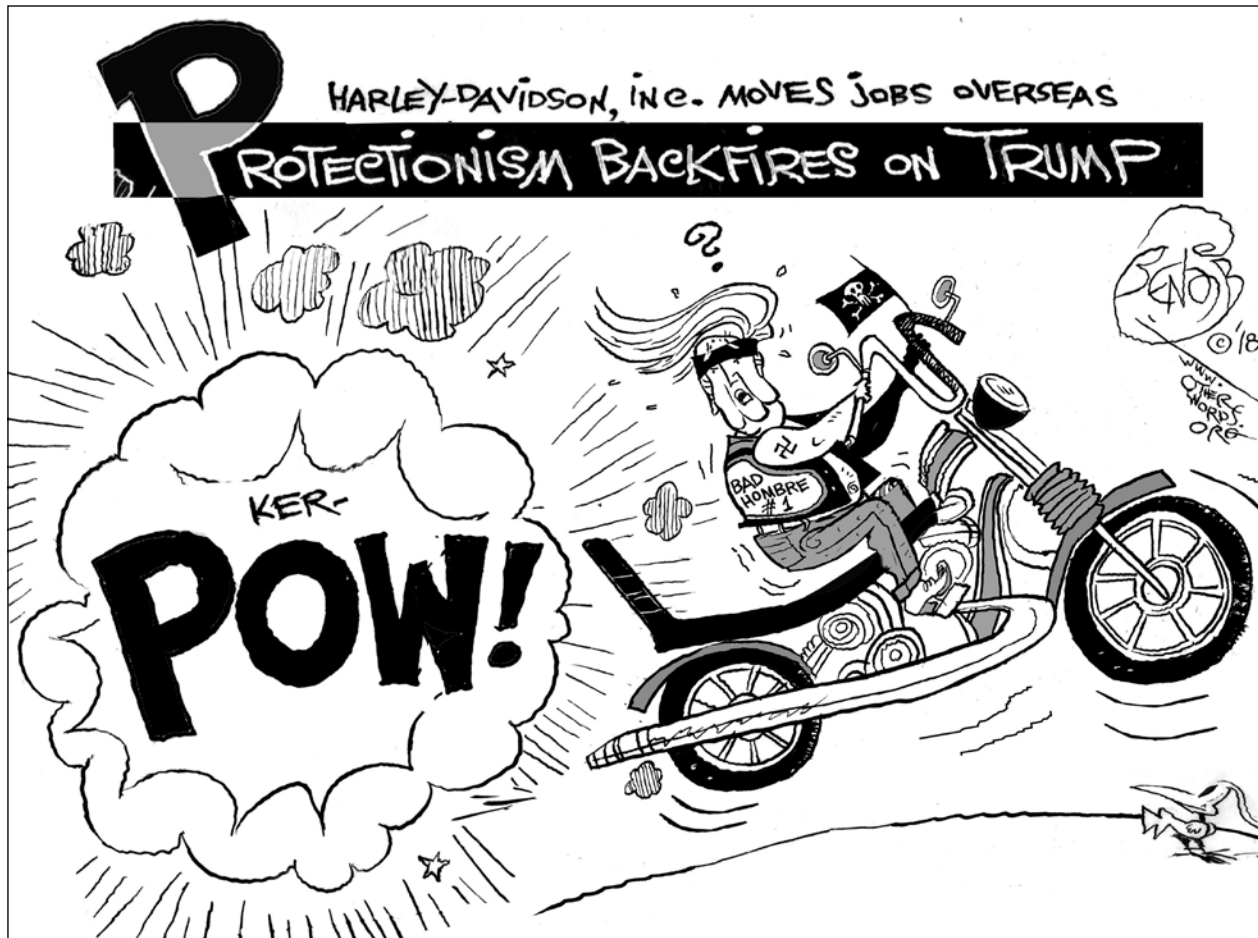
For consumers hoping to figure out if a product is made in the US, it's trickier than you'd think.

Products such as American soybeans or corn are pretty clear-cut: They are grown and harvested in the US by American farmers, in states like North Dakota and Iowa. The only inputs are seeds, land, fertiliser and water – all of which are easily found in the US

"American-made" clothing, on the other hand, becomes more ambiguous. Even when a garment is sewn in a factory in New York or Los Angeles, earning it its "Made in USA" tag, the fabric or thread may have been spun in Bangladesh or India with American-grown cotton.

The Federal Trade Commission has a 40-page document that thoroughly explains what makes an item "Made in USA". Basically, to earn that designation, a product has to be "all or virtually all" made in a US state or territory. Only automobiles, textiles, fur and wool must disclose their US content at the point of sale. Other products may use the tag as long as they follow the guidelines.

Let's take a closer look at vehicles. The parts that comprise "American-made" motorcycles and cars have been shuttled back and forth over North American borders ever since the North American Free Trade Agreement was signed in 1993. American auto manufacturers like Ford and Chevrolet depend on parts from Mexico and



the EU and often assemble their cars in Canada.

In 1994, Congress passed the American Automotive Labelling Act, requiring automakers to reveal the share of the parts that came from the US or Canada, the country of assembly, and the engine and transmission's country of origin. The aim was to encourage more patriotic consumerism on the premise that Americans would buy more of a product if they knew it was produced domestically.

American University business professor Frank DuBois describes some of this data as misleading because it doesn't break down what share of the parts came from the US versus Canada. He created the 2016 Kogod Made in America Auto Index to track this and other information to come up with a more accurate indicator of how much of a car benefits the US economy. His results reveal the fine line between foreign and domestic.

For instance, Japanese carmaker Toyota as-

sembled its 2017 Camry in the US with an American-made engine and transmission. Three-quarters of the parts came from either the US or Canada, giving it a "total domestic content" score of 78.5 percent. Similarly, Tokyo-based Honda built its Accord in the US with an American engine, Japanese transmission and 80 percent US or Canadian parts, giving it a score of 81 percent.

General Motors' Chevy Volt, on other hand, contains only 63 percent domestic content and half its parts are from outside the US or Canada, even though its engine is American. The Ford Fusion is even lower: It has a UK-built engine, and only a quarter of its parts were made in the US or Canada. As for Harley-Davidson motorcycles, they may be considered classic Americana, but the components of the bikes themselves come from many places outside the US, just like in the auto industry.

CHRISTINA FATTORE

Harleys sold in the US are indeed assembled in one of four plants located in Wisconsin, Missouri and Pennsylvania. But the brakes and clutch are imported from Italy, the engine pistons are made in Austria, the bike suspension comes from Japan, and other electronic components originate in Mexico and China.

While Harley-Davidson claims it attempts to use as many American parts as it can, the company is sometimes forced to go abroad to find the right parts in terms of cost and comparable quality. As for its plan to avoid the EU counter-sanctions, Harley plans to shift some production of bikes intended for European markets to facilities in other countries such as Thailand, where it's building a new factory.

But that won't actually change anything for American consumers, no matter what Trump says. In other words, Harleys that Americans buy after its plans go into effect will still be as American as they were a year ago. And all the profits Harley makes will continue to flow to the US

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So back to our original question, what does it really mean to be “made in America”?

Since the 1980s, US companies have been using this label in their advertising to push back against foreign competition as global production expanded into Asia and elsewhere. In this era of “America First,” the Trump administration has doubled down on this branding.

But the truth is it makes little sense. Nor does attacking a US company for moving some of its production – production intended for overseas markets and customers – to another country.

In 2013 political scientist Mike Allison and I wrote an article that showed how the mean-

ing of “domestic” can be very expansive. In the 1990s, for example, the US filed a complaint with the World Trade Organisation against the EU for quotas it set on bananas from Latin America.

None of the products in the dispute were made in the US or Europe, but two of the biggest growers of bananas – Chiquita and Fyffes – were headquartered in the US and the UK respectively. Essentially, both the Clinton and first Bush administrations – as well as officials in the EU – fought over bananas made elsewhere because they figured corporate profits supported by a product mattered more than where it was made.

Furthermore, consumers also look at other things besides where the product is made. In a 2017 poll, 69 percent of Americans surveyed said price is “very important” in considering the purchase of a product. Only 32 percent said not bearing a made in the US label was a dealbreaker.

So the problem with Trump's tariff push is that other things matter more than where something is made. And companies will do what they have to do to stay competitive, even if it means moving overseas.

Following Harley's announcement, fellow bike maker Polaris said it was also considering moving some production from Iowa to Poland.

Other companies in different industries will likely follow. While Trump may be following a hard line with tariffs against US competitors, Americans will likely see negative effects from that move, either in the form of jobs being shipped overseas or prices rising due to reciprocal tariffs. **CT**

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So, where were the Douma nerve agents?

OPCW's Interim Report On Douma says April chemical attack didn't take place

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In terms of suffering caused, there is often not, in fact, much to choose between dismembering and burning people alive with high explosives, shredding them with shrapnel, and choking them with poison gas. Modern “conventional” weapons can be far more cruel and devastating than, for example, chlorine gas. But chemical weapons, prohibited by international law, are extremely potent in allowing Western “humanitarians” to justify “intervention” in response to crimes – real, hyped or imagined – that the West has itself far surpassed using more respectable forms of mass murder.

Noam Chomsky has observed that “propaganda is to a democracy what the bludgeon is to a totalitarian state”. This is certainly true for social control at home, but propaganda also allows nominally democratic states to wield their military bludgeons abroad in much the same way as totalitarian states.

Thus, in April, it happened again: the entire corporate media system rose up with instant certainty to damn an enemy state for crimes against humanity on April 7, in Douma, Syria.

This was not acceptable death by bomb and bullet; this was a nerve gas attack. The villainous agent on every journalist’s lips: sarin, a highly toxic synthetic organophosphorus compound that has no smell or taste, but which quickly kills through asphyxiation.

As I discussed at the time, there was no question that this was a repetition of the fake justification for war to secure non-existent Iraqi

WMDs, or to prevent a fictional Libyan massacre in Benghazi. Instead, the *Guardian* editors insisted that this certainly was “a chemical gas attack, orchestrated by Bashar al-Assad, that left dead children foaming at the mouth”. From the safety of his *Guardian* office, assistant editor Simon Tisdall hammered the drum for a war that risked even nuclear confrontation: “It means destroying Assad’s combat planes, bombers, helicopters and ground facilities from the air. It means challenging Assad’s and Russia’s control of Syrian airspace. It means taking out Iranian military bases and batteries in Syria if they are used to prosecute the war”.

By contrast, Scott Ritter – a former chief UN weapons inspector in Iraq who understands the issues – was more cautious: “The bottom line, however, is that the United States is threatening to go to war in Syria over allegations of chemical weapons usage for which no factual evidence has been provided. This act is occurring even as the possibility remains that verifiable forensic investigations would, at a minimum, confirm the presence of chemical weapons ...”

No matter, on April 14, three days after Ritter’s article appeared, the US, UK and France attacked Syria in response to the unproven allegations.

Robert Fisk of the *Independent* visited Douma and spoke to a senior doctor who works in the clinic where victims of the alleged chemical attack had been brought for treatment. Dr Rahaibani told Fisk what had happened that night: “I was



In this photo supplied to the international media by the Syrian 'White Helmets', medical workers treat toddlers following the alleged poison gas attack in Douma on April 8. A new report from OPCW says no use of chemical weapons was found.

with my family in the basement of my home 300 metres from here on the night but all the doctors know what happened. There was a lot of shelling [by government forces] and aircraft were always over Douma at night – but on this night, there was wind and huge dust clouds began to come into the basements and cellars where people lived. People began to arrive here suffering from hypoxia, oxygen loss. Then someone at the door, a 'White Helmet', shouted 'Gas!', and a panic began. People started throwing water over each other. Yes, the video was filmed here, it is genuine, but what you see are people suffering from hypoxia – not gas poisoning.”

When Fisk’s report wasn’t ignored, it was sneeringly dismissed. A headline in the *Times* read: “Critics leap on reporter Robert Fisk’s failure to find signs of gas attack”.

The *Times*, which is no stranger to controver-

sy, suggested that there were big question marks over Fisk’s record: “Fisk is no stranger to controversy”.

On 6 July 2018, the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), issued an interim report on the FFM’s investigation regarding the allegations of chemical weapons use in Douma. The passage that jumped out of the report: “No organophosphorus nerve agents or their degradation products were detected, either in the environmental samples or in plasma samples from the alleged casualties.”

No sarin! But is it possible that any nerve agents had degraded and disappeared before OPCW investigators reached the site? An April 17, *Guardian* article had reported: “The OPCW

has been racing against the clock to collect samples from the site of the attack, a three-storey house in Douma, in which scores of people died in a basement. Jerry Smith, who helped supervise the OPCW-led withdrawal of much of Syria's sarin stockpile in 2013, said samples of nerve agent rapidly degrade in normal environmental conditions ... The Russian military and Syrian officers have had access to the house since last Thursday, raising fears that the site may have been tampered with. However, Smith said it was likely that residual samples of nerve agent would remain for at least another week, even after an attempted clean-up”.

The OPCW later commented: “On 21 April 2018, after security concerns had been addressed, the FFM team conducted its first visit to one of the alleged sites of interest, and it was deemed an acceptable risk to enter Douma”.

In other words, OPCW's race “against the clock” appeared to have been successful. Charles Shoebridge a former Scotland Yard detective and counter terrorism intelligence officer, observed: “if OPCW find no traces, likely not due to any inspection delay”.

Before we examine “MSM” reaction to the OPCW report, particularly to the failure to find “organophosphorus nerve agents or their degradation products”, let's look at their initial reaction to claims of a nerve agent attack on April 7.

CNN reported on April 14: “Senior US officials expressed confidence Saturday that both chlorine and sarin gas were used in Syria's alleged chemical weapons attack on the Damascus enclave of Douma last week ...”

CNN cited reports “from media, nongovernmental organizations and other open sources” that ‘point to miosis – constricted pupils – convulsions and disruptions to central nervous systems. Those symptoms don't come from chlorine. They come from nerve agents ... It's a much more efficient weapon, unfortunately, the way the regime has been using it, and it's resulted in higher deaths, it resulted in terrible pictures”.

The *Financial Times* cited Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, a former commanding officer of the UK's

chemical biological radiological and nuclear regiment: “There's no doubt this was a major chemical weapons attack. The big question is whether it was chlorine or sarin. I am favouring a mix of the two.” (David Bond and Rebecca Collard, “Experts say gas attack proof will take weeks: Civil war. Douma Inspectors are struggling to access site of alleged atrocity as Assad's troops move in”, *Financial Times*, 12 April 2018)

A *Telegraph* article opened with this harrowing line: “The victims were found exactly where they had been when the gas hit. Their silent killer had given little warning.”

This clearly suggested a very powerful nerve agent, as the article explained: “Medics on the ground reported smelling a chlorine-like substance, but said the patients' symptoms and the large death toll pointed to a more noxious substance such as nerve agent sarin.

“ ‘The number of casualties is so high and that's not typical for chlorine,’ said Dr Ahmad Tarakji, president of the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS), which assists hospitals in Eastern Ghouta. ‘Unfortunately, because of a lack of resources, we can't take blood samples.’”

The claims did indeed suggest something much more powerful than chlorine, as the *Daily Mail* made clear in a report also citing de Bretton-Gordon: “If it was chlorine, they could have escaped. But they died after just taking a few steps.” (Vanessa Allen, “Little girl left foaming at the mouth by horrific gas attack”, *Daily Mail*, 16 April 2018)

The *Mail* cited an “activist” making the same point: “Ibrahim Reyhani, a White Helmet civil defence volunteer, said anyone who touched the bodies started getting sick, and said he believed a mixture of sarin and chlorine had been used.

“He told the *Sunday Times*: ‘If it's just chlorine, if you smell it you can escape. But sarin you breathe and it kills you.’”

The *Telegraph* published an op-ed by de Bretton-Gordon: “There have been a number of chlorine attacks, but it would appear that chlorine, although outlawed by the Chemical Weapons Convention, is below the threshold for the UK and France to strike.

“Saturday's attack, with so many deaths and

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casualties, looks possibly to be a mixture of chlorine and the nerve agent sarin, and this atrocity must surely stretch above their threshold for action.”

It is worth reiterating again – as media responses to the OPCW’s latest report, conspicuously, have not – that chlorine was not a sufficiently deadly agent to cause either the claimed level of carnage or the claimed level of Western moral outrage. In 2015, Barack Obama noted: “Chlorine itself, historically, has not been listed as a chemical weapon.”

Charles Shoebridge commented: “while headlines of chemical weapons are undoubtedly dramatic, the relatively low lethality of chlorine makes it an ineffective – and therefore arguably also unlikely – choice of weapon ...

“Indeed, given the low toxicity of the allegedly small amounts used and the unpleasant bleach smell that always betrays chlorine’s presence, in most instances people could avoid being killed by simply walking away – another indication of its near uselessness as a weapon. Perhaps the only way it could be tactically effective is if used to drive people from trenches or bunkers to allow them to then be killed with bombs and bullets – but again, the amounts of chlorine needed would be far more than is alleged, and the accuracy needed to target in this way is unlikely to be achieved using unguided rockets as alleged this week in east Ghouta, or by dropping a ‘barrel bomb’ from a helicopter.”

Chlorine gas was not included in the list of Syrian chemical weapons reported to the OPCW. It is an unsophisticated weapon that could also be deployed by ‘rebel’ forces and to which they have had access. The OPCW reported in August 2016: “Chlorine is available to all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic”.

A *Guardian* editorial also linked the alleged attack in Douma to sarin: “Dozens of civilians in the Douma district were killed by Syrian government chemical attacks on Saturday.”

It continued: “This is not the first time this has happened. Since the use of sarin at Khan al-Assal in 2013 there have been dozens of chemical attacks by the regime.”

Peter Hitchens commented on the *Guard-*

ian’s coverage in the *Mail on Sunday*: “Here is the *Guardian*, on 9th April 2018: ‘Aid workers and medics described apocalyptic scenes in the besieged city of Douma, where at least 42 people have died from what appears to be a chemical attack, as they scrambled to save the survivors of the latest atrocity in Syria ...

“Doctors said the symptoms had been consistent with exposure to an organophosphorus substance.”

Hitchens asked: “Which doctors? Note the absence of named, checkable sources in a story written some distance from Damascus. This was typical of almost all western media reports of the episode at the time.”

Hitchens observed that OPCW had found no traces of organophosphates but that “The quoted ‘doctors’, being unidentified, cannot now be approached to ask for their response to this.”

The skwawkbox website noted that the BBC had covered, and distorted, OPCW’s July 6 report. A BBC headline read: “Syria attack was chlorine gas – *watchdog*. The deadly attack in Douma in April left dozens of civilians dead and caused and international outcry.”

This was complete invention. As skwawkbox commented: “the OPCW report **emphatically does not say**’ that chlorine gas was used. The report actually said: “Along with explosive residues, various chlorinated organic chemicals were found in samples from two sites, for which there is full chain of custody. Work by the team to establish the significance of these results is on-going. The FFM team will continue its work to draw final conclusions.”

Chlorinated organic chemicals are extremely common, found in degreasers, cleaning solutions, paint thinners, pesticides, resins, glues, and many other mixing and thinning solutions. The BBC amended the article, which later read: “The report said two samples from gas cylinders recovered at the scene tested positive for chlorine.”

Skwawkbox commented again: “This is a classic example of a technically-correct claim that is completely misleading.

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“The [OPCW] report does note the presence of chlorine in some samples tested from the cylinders – but not chlorine gas or the residues that would be expected from its reaction with other substances...

“The relevant page of the OPCW’s full report states that no ‘relevant chemicals’ were found from a swab **inside** the opening of one cylinder:

“In debris and on other items **around** the cylinder, **chlorine compounds** were found – but these are common compounds that would be unlikely to be formed simply by chlorine reacting with something on site.’

In similar vein, Alec Luhn, the *Telegraph*’s Russia correspondent, tweeted: “The April chemical attack in Douma was caused by chlorine gas, the OPCW says. Or it was completely staged, if you still believe the Russian authorities”.

Sharmine Narwani, a writer, commentator and analyst covering Middle East geopolitics, replied brusquely but accurately: “No, the OPCW

didn’t say that. It found traces of chlorine on the scene, which it would find in your house or office or water supply too, if sampled. Try actual #journalism.”

OffGuardian noted several headlines covering OPCW’s findings. Reuters reported: “Chemical weapons agency finds ‘chlorinated’ chemicals in Syria’s Douma”.

The *Independent* wrote: “Syrian conflict: Chlorine used in Douma attack that left dozens of civilians dead, chemical weapons watchdog finds”.

As *Off-Guardian* noted, the headlines should have read: No nerve agents found.

Remarkably, these rare mentions aside, the OPCW interim report has been ignored by most major newspapers and media, including the *Guardian*. **CT**

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David Edwards is co-editor of *Medialens*, the UK media watchdog – www.medialens.org

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War on Assange is a war on press freedom

He is a courageous and fearless publisher who is being persecuted for exposing the atrocities of the corporate state and imperialism

THE failure on the part of establishment media to defend Julian Assange, who has been trapped in the Ecuadorean Embassy in London since 2012, has been denied communication with the outside world since March and appears to be facing imminent expulsion and arrest, is astonishing. The extradition of the publisher – the maniacal goal of the US government – would set a legal precedent that would criminalise any journalistic oversight or investigation of the corporate state. It would turn leaks and whistleblowing into treason. It would shroud in total secrecy the actions of the ruling global elites. If Assange is extradited to the United States and sentenced, the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and every other media organization, no matter how tepid their coverage of the corporate state, would be subject to the same draconian censorship. Under the precedent set, Donald Trump's Supreme Court would enthusiastically uphold the arrest and imprisonment of any publisher, editor or reporter in the name of national security.

There are growing signs that the Ecuadorean government of Lenín Moreno is preparing to evict Assange and turn him over to British police. Moreno and his foreign minister, José Valencia,

The extradition of the publisher would lead to the criminalisation of any journalistic oversight or investigation of the corporate state. It would turn leaks and whistleblowing into treason

have confirmed they are in negotiations with the British government to “resolve” the fate of Assange. Moreno, who will visit Britain in a few weeks, calls Assange an “inherited problem” and “a stone in the shoe” and has referred to him as a “hacker”. It appears that under a Moreno government Assange is no longer welcome in Ecuador. His only hope now is safe passage to his native Australia or another country willing to give him asylum.

“Ecuador has been looking for a solution to this problem,”

Valencia commented on television. “The refuge is not forever, you cannot expect it to last for years without us reviewing this situation, including because this violates the rights of the refugee”.

Moreno's predecessor as president, Rafael Correa, who granted Assange asylum in the embassy and made him an Ecuadorean citizen last year, warned that Assange's “days were numbered”. He charged that Moreno – who cut off Assange's communications the day after Moreno welcomed a delegation from the US Southern Command – would “throw him out of the embassy at the first pressure from the United States”.

Assange, who reportedly is in ill health, took asylum in the embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden to answer questions about sexual of-

fence charges. He feared that once in Swedish custody for these charges, which he said were false, he would be extradited to the United States. The Swedish prosecutors' office ended its "investigation" and extradition request to Britain in May 2017 and did not file sexual offense charges against Assange. But the British government said Assange would nevertheless be arrested and jailed for breaching his bail conditions.

The persecution of Assange is part of a broad assault against anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist news organisations. The ruling elites, who refuse to accept responsibility for profound social inequality or the crimes of empire, have no ideological veneer left to justify their greed, ineptitude and pillage. Global capitalism and its ideological justification, neoliberalism, are discredited as forces for democracy and the equitable distribution of wealth. The corporate-controlled economic and political system is as hated by right-wing populists as it is by the rest of the population. This makes the critics of corporatism and imperialism – journalists, writers, dissidents and intellectuals already pushed to the margins of the media landscape – dangerous and it makes them prime targets. Assange is at the top of the list.

I took part with dozens of others, including Daniel Ellsberg, William Binney, Craig Murray, Peter Van Buren, Slavoj Žižek, George Gallo-way and Cian Westmoreland, earlier this month in a 36-hour international online vigil demanding freedom for the WikiLeaks publisher. The vigil was organized by the New Zealand Internet Party leader Suzie Dawson. It was the third Unity4J vigil since all of Assange's communication with the outside world was severed by the Ecuadorean authorities and visits with him were suspended in March, part of the increased pressure the United States has brought on the Ecuadorean government. Assange has since March been allowed to meet only with his attorneys and consular officials from the Australian Embassy.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled on July 13 that those seeking political asylum have the right to take refuge in embassies and diplomatic compounds. The court stated that governments are obliged to provide

safe passage out of the country to those granted asylum. The ruling did not name Assange, but it was a powerful rebuke to the British government, which has refused to allow the WikiLeaks co-founder safe passage to the airport.

The ruling elites no longer have a counterargument to their critics. They have resorted to cruder forms of control. These include censorship, slander and character assassination (which in the case of Assange has sadly been successful), blacklisting, financial strangulation, intimidation, imprisonment under the Espionage Act and branding critics and dissidents as agents of a foreign power and purveyors of fake news. The corporate media amplifies these charges, which have no credibility but which become part of the common vernacular through constant repetition. The blacklisting, imprisonment and deportation of tens of thousands of people of conscience during the Red Scares of the 1920s and 1950s are back with a vengeance. It is a New McCarthyism.

Did Russia attempt to influence the election? Undoubtedly. This is what governments do. The United States interfered in 81 elections between 1945 and 2000, according to professor Dov Levin of Carnegie Mellon University. His statistics do not include the numerous coups we orchestrated in countries such as Greece, Iran, Guatemala and Chile or the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba. We indirectly bankrolled the re-election campaign of Russia's buffoonish Boris Yeltsin to the tune of \$2.5-billion.

But did Russia, as the Democratic Party establishment claims, swing the election to Trump? No. Trump is not Vladimir Putin's puppet. He is part of the wave of right-wing populists, from Nigel Farage and Boris Johnson in Britain to Viktor Orbán in Hungary, who have harnessed the rage and frustration born of an economic and political system dominated by global capitalism and under which the rights and aspirations of working men and women do not matter.

The Democratic Party establishment, like the liberal elites in most of the rest of the industrialised world, would be swept from power in an open political process devoid of corporate money. The

*The Democratic Party establishment benefits from our system of legalised bribery. It benefits from the curtailment of civil liberties including the right to privacy and due process ...
It is an enabler of tyranny, not an impediment*

party elite, including Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi, is a creation of the corporate state. Campaign finance and electoral reform are the last things the party hierarchy intends to champion. It will not call for social and political programmes that will alienate its corporate masters. This myopia and naked self-interest may ensure a second term for Donald Trump; it may further empower the lunatic fringe that is loyal to Trump; it may continue to erode the credibility of the political system. But the choice before the Democratic Party elites is clear: political oblivion or enduring the rule of a demagogue. They have chosen the latter. They are not interested in reform. They are determined to silence anyone, like Assange, who exposes the rot within the ruling class.

The Democratic Party establishment benefits from our system of legalised bribery. It benefits from deregulating Wall Street and the fossil fuel industry. It benefits from the endless wars. It benefits from the curtailment of civil liberties including the right to privacy and due process. It benefits from militarised police. It benefits from austerity programs. It benefits from mass incarceration. It is an enabler of tyranny, not an im-

pediment.

Demagogues like Trump, Farage and Johnson, of course, have no intention of altering the system of corporate pillage. Rather, they accelerate the pillage, which is what happened with the passage of the massive US tax cut for corporations. They divert the public's anger toward demonised groups such as Muslims, undocumented workers, people of colour, liberals, intellectuals, artists, feminists, the LGBT community and the press. The demonised are blamed for the social and economic dysfunction, much as Jews were falsely blamed for Germany's defeat in World War I and the economic collapse that followed. Corporations such as Goldman Sachs, in the midst of the decay, continue to make a financial killing.

The corporate titans, who often come out of elite universities and are groomed in institutions like Harvard Business School, find these demagogues crude and vulgar. They are embarrassed by their imbecility, megalomania and incompetence. But they endure their presence rather than permit socialists or leftist politicians to impede their profits

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and divert government spending to social programmes and away from weapons manufacturers, the military, private prisons, big banks and hedge funds, the fossil fuel industry, charter schools, private paramilitary forces, private intelligence companies and other pet programs designed to allow corporations to cannibalise the state.

The irony is that there was serious meddling in the presidential election, but it did not come from Russia. The Democratic Party, outdoing any of the dirty tricks employed by Richard Nixon, purged hundreds of thousands of primary voters from the rolls, denied those registered as independents the right to vote in primaries, used superdelegates to swing the vote to Hillary Clinton, hijacked the Democratic National Committee to serve the Clinton campaign, controlled the message of media outlets such as MSNBC and the *New York Times*, stole the Nevada caucus, spent hundreds of millions of dollars of “dark” corporate money on the Clinton campaign and fixed the primary debates. This meddling, which stole the nomination from Bernie Sanders, who probably could have defeated Trump, is unmentioned. The party hierarchy will do nothing to reform its corrupt nominating process.

WikiLeaks exposed much of this corruption when it published tens of thousands of messages hacked from Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta’s email account. The messages brought to light the efforts by the Democratic Party leadership to thwart the nomination of Sanders, and they disclosed Clinton’s close ties with Wall Street, including her lucrative Wall Street speeches. They also raised serious questions about conflicts of interest with the Clinton Foundation and whether Clinton received advance information on primary-debate questions.

The Democratic National Committee, for this reason, is leading the Russia hysteria and the persecution of Assange. It filed a lawsuit that names WikiLeaks and Assange as co-conspira-



JULIAN ASSANGE: Trapped inside embassy.

Photo: Wikimedia

tors with Russia and the Trump campaign in an alleged effort to steal the presidential election.

But it is not only Assange and WikiLeaks that are being attacked as Russian pawns. For example, the *Washington Post*, which has sided with the Democratic Party in the war against Trump, without critical analysis published a report on a blacklist posted by the anonymous website PropOrNot. The blacklist was composed of 199 sites that PropOrNot alleged, with no evi-

dence, “reliably echo Russian propaganda”. More than half of those sites were far-right, conspiracy-driven ones. But about 20 of the sites were major progressive outlets including AlterNet, Black Agenda Report, Democracy Now!, Naked Capitalism, Truthdig, Truthout, CounterPunch and the World Socialist Web Site. PropOrNot, short for Propaganda or Not, accused these sites of disseminating “fake news” on behalf of Russia. The Post’s headline was unequivocal: “Russian propaganda effort helped spread ‘fake news’ during the election, experts say”.

In addition to offering no evidence, PropOrNot never disclosed who ran the website. Even so, its charge was used to justify the imposition of algorithms by Google, Facebook, Twitter and Amazon to direct traffic away from the targeted sites. These algorithms, or filters, overseen by thousands of “evaluators”, many hired from the military and security and surveillance apparatus, hunt for keywords such as “US military”, “inequality”, and “socialism”, along with personal names such as Julian Assange and Laura Poitras. These keywords are known as “impressions”. Before the imposition of the algorithms, a reader could type in the name Julian Assange and be directed to an article on one of these targeted sites. After the algorithms were put in place, these impressions directed readers only to mainstream sites such as the *Washington Post*. Referral traffic from these impressions at most of the targeted

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sites has plummeted, often by more than half. Challenged by these algorithms and the abolition of net neutrality, these sites will be pushed further and further to the outer reaches of the media.

Any news or media outlet that addresses the reality of our failed democracy and exposes the crimes of empire will be targeted. The January 2017 Director of National Intelligence Report spent seven pages on RT America, where I have a show, *On Contact*. The report does not accuse RT America of disseminating Russian propaganda, but it does allege the network exploits divisions within American society by giving airtime to dissidents and critics including whistleblowers, anti-imperialists, anti-capitalists, Black Lives Matter activists, anti-fracking campaigners and the third-party candidates the establishment is seeking to mute.

If the United States had a public broadcasting system free from corporate money or a commercial press that was not under corporate control, these dissident voices would be included in the mainstream discourse. But we don't. Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky, Malcolm X, Sheldon Wolin, Ralph Nader, James Baldwin, Susan Sontag, Angela Davis and Edward Said once appeared regularly on public broadcasting. Now critics like these are banned, replaced with vapid courtiers such as columnist David Brooks. RT America was forced to register under the Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA). This act requires Americans who work for a foreign party to register as foreign agents. The FARA registration is part of the broader assault on all independent media, including the effort to silence Assange.

WikiLeak's publication in 2017 of 8,761 CIA files, known as Vault 7, appeared to be the final indignity. Vault 7 included a description of the cyber tools used by the CIA to hack into computer systems and devices such as smartphones. Former CIA software engineer Joshua Adam Schulte was indicted on charges of violating the

The aim is to pressure Assange out of the embassy so he can be seized by London police, thrown into jail and then delivered into the hands of Pompeo, John Bolton and the CIA's torturer in chief, Gina Haspel

Espionage Act by allegedly leaking the documents.

The publication of Vault 7 saw the United States significantly increase its pressure on the Ecuadorean government to isolate and eject Assange from the embassy. Mike Pompeo, then the CIA director, said in response to the leaks that the US government "can no longer allow Assange and his colleagues the latitude to use free speech values against us". Attorney General Jeff Sessions said Assange's arrest was a "priority".

It is up to us to mobilise to protect Assange. His life is in jeopardy. The Ecuadorean government, violating his fundamental rights, has transformed his asylum into a form of incarceration. By cutting off his access to the internet, it has deprived him of the ability to communicate and follow world events. The aim of this isolation is to pressure Assange out of the embassy so he can be seized by London police, thrown into a British jail and then delivered into the hands of Pompeo, John Bolton and the CIA's torturer in chief, Gina Haspel.

Assange is a courageous and fearless publisher who is being persecuted for exposing the atrocities of the corporate state and imperialism. His defence is the cutting edge of the fight against government suppression of our most important and fundamental democratic rights. The government of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull of Australia, where Assange was born, must be pressured to provide him with the protection to which he is entitled as a citizen. It must intercede to stop the illegal persecution of the journalist by the British, American and Ecuadorean governments. It must secure his safe return to Australia. If we fail to protect Assange, we fail to protect ourselves. **CT**

Chris Hedges has reported from more than 50 countries as a foreign correspondent. This essay was first published at www.truthdig.com



HUNGER GAME: "Please sir, may I have some more?" James Mahoney's illustration for chapter one of Dickens' *Adventures of Oliver Twist*. Photo: Public domain

44

America looks like a Dickens novel

It might be 2018, but it sure feels like 1834

THE news has been full these past few weeks of disturbing stories from the nation's borders. The Trump administration has separated immigrant children from their parents precisely to discourage others from trying to enter the country.

Trump has signed an order to end the practice. But thousands of children have been traumatised as part of an explicit effort to, in Attorney Gener-

al Jeff Sessions's words, send a powerful message to other potential immigrants. Sessions used the Bible to defend the practice: "I would cite to you the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in *Romans 13* to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained them for the purpose of order".

What has struck me, as a professor of English literature, are the startling parallels between

SARAH BILSTON

the Trump administration's policy on immigrant families and the "New" Poor Laws of England in the 1830s, whose cruelty was illuminated by Charles Dickens in novels and other writings.

England tried much the same kind of tactics that Trump's administration has used. Americans may remember the suffering face of Oliver Twist, begging for just a little more food. It may surprise some to realise that Dickens wrote the novel specifically to shine a light on new and brutal laws. Dickens was particularly concerned by the state's assault on the integrity of the family.

England's "New" Poor Laws of the 1830s were designed to "solve" what was believed to be a common problem: the existence of a body of weak, lazy people leeching off the state. How could the government end abuses of the system? How could money be saved, diverted back to the honest hard-working citizens who paid their way?

In 1834, a Royal Commission issued a report insisting that poverty was almost always a result of "fraud, indolence or improvidence". Good news: This, apparently, could be fixed. The commission rolled out a series of recommendations. At the centre of these was a core idea: The poor should be cared for in conditions so abject, so truly humiliating, only the really desperate would turn to them.

Under the "workhouse test", relief would only be given to those willing to relinquish their independence, their human dignity, their spouses and their children. Others, the argument went, would buck up, get a job and stop bothering the righteous rest. Their rights, needs and humanity were disregarded.

The new rules went into effect on June 1, 1835, two years before Victoria became queen.

Children forced into workhouses were either housed in separate buildings from their parents or sent miles away, to live in government-run district schools. The "reformers" proudly trumpeted that children could be fed less than adults when families were separated. They also argued children would learn new and better values once isolated from their parents.

Many families were never reunited. Dickens

was appalled. *Oliver Twist* exposes, on every page, the hypocrisy of those who brutalise vulnerable children and claim to be virtuous in the process. In an early scene, Oliver sobs when the Board of the Workhouse condemns him because he does not know how to pray. Oliver has never been taught to pray – has never been shown kindness, sympathy or compassion of any kind.

"What a noble illustration of the tender laws of this favoured country", Dickens remarks bitterly, as Oliver weeps himself into unconsciousness. "They let the paupers go to sleep!"

In later novels, Dickens continued to expose the hypocrisy of those in power. He particularly loathed all those who used Christianity as a "constable's staff".

Bleak House's horrific Mrs Pardiggle is, as Dickens put it, an "inexorable moral Policeman". She shouts Christian teachings at the poor and suffering and fails in her most basic duties of care. She's so busy spouting religious text, she does not notice when a baby dies in front of her.

Dickens was not the only writer to expose the horrors of the poor laws. The separation of children from their parents was a flashpoint then, as now. Marches and acts of political disobedience followed, including riots and arson against the new-built workhouses, with many Victorians uniting around the sanctity of the family.

The depiction of paupers as suffering people, not just leeches on the system, helped shock the population and precipitate social change. With deliberate use of sentiment and tear-jerking scenes of tragedy and loss, Charles Dickens gave a human face to those who were being treated with profound inhumanity.

I've taught the novels of Charles Dickens for more than 20 years. My students have tended to approach his era as a bizarre and strangely cruel period in human history. But Dickens's world has come to life again. The US government has detained children as young as infants in "tender age" centres in south Texas. It's 2018, but it sure feels like 1834. **CT**

Sarah Bilston is associate Professor of English at Trinity College, Hartford, CT. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

LEO GERARD

Billionaire wolves in workers' clothing

Right-wing "foundations" across the United States have started spending the tens of millions they'd received from billionaires to bust unions.

MULTI-MILLIONAIRE Bruce Rauner, the Republican Governor of Illinois, just couldn't wait to tell his state's workers the US Supreme Court had given them what he considered a gift.

Within hours of the court's ruling in the Janus case, Rauner emailed Illinois state workers to tell them the decision meant they no longer needed to pay either dues or fair share fees to their labor union but the union would still be required to represent them.

What a deal! Free service! And it was brought to them by Rauner! The governor had filed the lawsuit that led to the Janus decision. When a court tossed him as plaintiff, the right-wing foundations whose billionaire donors paid for the lawsuit drummed up replacement plaintiffs including Mark Janus. He's an Illinois child support worker who refused to join the union and pay dues and who didn't even want to pay the smaller fair share fee of \$45 a month charged to non-members to cover the union's costs of bargaining for them.

It was that fee that the Supreme Court said government workers had a free speech right not to pay. The court said unions do not have a corresponding free speech right to refuse to represent non-members. While Rauner was sending his email urging Illinois workers to bankrupt their unions, right-wing "foundations" across the country started spending the tens of millions they'd

received from billionaires like the Walton family and giant corporations like AT&T to do the same thing. These groups are emailing, calling and visiting the homes of government workers.

Of course, right-wing billionaires couldn't be expected to do this work themselves. Work up a sweat walking door-to-door? No way! So they set up these "foundations" to hire stand-ins, people who look like regular Joes and who are trained to mouth billionaire propaganda. These "regular Joes" will tell state and local government workers that they can give themselves a raise by starving their labor union of funds and still get first-rate union representation. These are wolves in workers' clothing.

The *Guardian* newspaper revealed in May that the State Policy Network, a group devoted to causes favouring right-wing billionaires and corporations, had raised \$80 million and organized 66 similarly radical "foundations" across the country to destroy labor unions. They prepared an anti-union toolkit to personally target government workers as soon as the court handed down the Janus decision.

The toolkit includes advice for anti-union canvassers, including: when talking to union members, dumb down language and pretend to care about them. It says canvassers should say to union members, "the best interest of union leaders should never be placed above the best interest of



union members.”

Of course, it neglects to urge the canvassers to say, “the best interests of billionaires should never be placed above the best interest of workers.”

Wisconsin is right-wing union haters’ touchstone. There, an extremist Republican governor and legislature adopted draconian anti-union measures, restricting issues that government workers could raise in collective bargaining, forbidding fair share fees and requiring unions to recertify every year by receiving affirmative votes from more than half of members and assuming those who did not participate had voted against the union.

One Wisconsin labour organisation representing teachers lost 60 percent of its members. Overall in Wisconsin, the percentage of union members in the workforce declined from 14.1 percent in 2011 to 9 percent in 2016. Simultaneously, pay and benefits declined. For teachers, salaries sank 2.6 percent and benefits dropped 18.6 percent.

Losing the power of collective bargaining didn’t work out so well for these workers. But right-wingers believe workers are stupid and must be talked down to, so persuading them to

quit their labor organizations and ultimately bankrupt them will be easy.

This is more than an effort by billionaires to slash workers’ income. It’s also a campaign to steal workers’ political power, to silence them. The more unions that billionaires can bankrupt, the less money available to support candidates and causes that help workers.

None of nonmembers’ fair share fees can be used on politics. But unions spend a small portion of members’ dues money to support issues important to workers and on political candidates who pledge to secure programs like Social Security and Medicare. That is almost always Democratic candidates.

It was, after all, a Democratic president and Democratic Congresses that created a clear legal path for workers to form labor unions and that created Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, and the Affordable Care Act requiring insurance companies to cover people with pre-existing conditions.

Tom McCabe, the millionaire CEO of the Freedom Foundation, one of the State Policy Network

LEO GERARD

anti-union groups, told the Guardian, “Our goal is to help people who we believe are being held in bondage against their will.” The State Policy Network wrote its donors that it would “rescue” government workers from unions.

Right. That’s billionaires riding in on their white stallions to “free” working people from their bonds to labor unions, the organizations workers created to secure better wages and working conditions for themselves.

Economic self-interest could prompt some workers to drop out of unions if they think they can get the benefits of being in a union for free.

But workers may not like being talked down to by flunkies for billionaires. And despite what the State Policy Network thinks, workers are not stupid. They know if their unions have less money, they’ll be weaker in negotiations and politics. They know that what happened to workers in Wisconsin could happen to them.

They know that massive strikes this year by ill-paid teachers in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Arizona and Kentucky – states that forbid teachers to strike – won raises for them and other state employees.

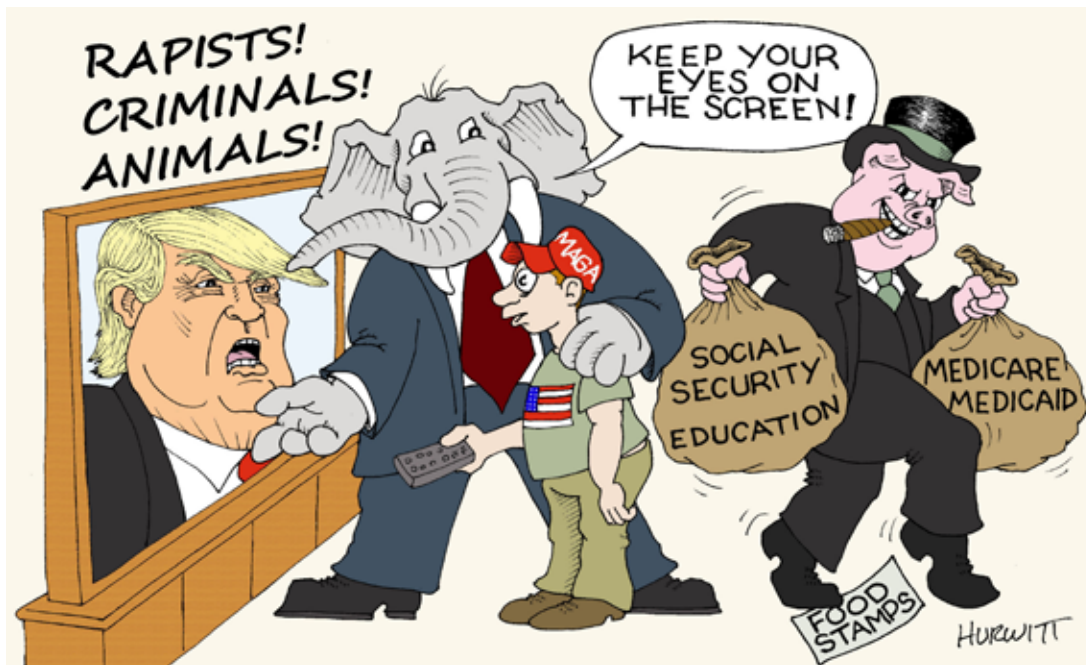
The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) added 1,250 members in West Virginia after the teacher walk out there, and the National Education Association (NEA) signed 2.2 percent more members in states where teachers struck.

Though membership had been declining for decades, unions added 262,000 members last year. And now they’ve got the support of 61 percent of Americans, up from a low of 48 percent in 2009.

Also, union members are talking to union members about the value of sticking with the union. Members of the AFT are meeting one-on-one with teachers in 10 states, asking them to sign cards recommitting themselves to the union. They’ve got 530,000 so far, and are working toward the full 1.7 million members. So that knock at the door might be a fellow union member and not a billionaire’s flunky after all. **CT**

Leo W Gerard is a steelworker and a Canadian and American labour leader. He was elected president of the United Steelworkers in 2001, and is the second Canadian to head the union. He is also a vice president of the AFL-CIO. This article was first published by Campaign for America’s Future at [www. ourfuture.org](http://www.ourfuture.org)

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HURWITT'S EYE
Mark Hurwitt

ColdType Insights

- JOHN PILGER
- LINDA McQUAIG
- CAITLIN JOHNSTONE
- ERIC MARGOLIS
- PHILIP KRASKE



ABANDON HOPE: Entrance to the Parramatta Female Factory, a n Australian prison where women convicts were sent in the early-19th-century.

Hidden history of the women who rose up

John Pilger tells of the Parramatta Female Factory, a prison to which many women convicts were sent to Britain's Australian colony in the early 19th-century

LIKE all colonial societies, Australia has secrets. The way we treat Indigenous people is still mostly a secret. For a long time, the fact that many Australians came from what was called “bad stock” was a secret.

“Bad stock” meant convict forebears: those like my great-grandmother, Mary

Palmer, who was incarcerated here, at the Female Factory in Parramatta in 1823.

According to nonsense spun by numerous aunts – who had irresistible bourgeois ambitions – Mary Palmer and the man she married, Francis McCarthy, were a lady and a gentleman of Victorian property and propriety.

In fact, Mary was the young-

est member of a gang of wild young women, mostly Irish, who operated in the East End of London. Known as “The Ruffians”, they kept poverty at bay with the proceeds of prostitution and petty theft.

The Ruffians were eventually arrested and tried, and hanged – except Mary, who was spared because she was pregnant.

She was just 16 years old when she was manacled in the hold of a ship under sail, the Lord Sidmouth, bound for New South Wales “for the term of her natural life”, said the judge.

The voyage took five months, a purgatory of sickness and despair. I know what she looked like because, some years ago, I discovered an extraordinary ritual in St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney.

Every Thursday, in a vestry, a nun would turn the pages of a register of Irish Catholic convicts – and there was Mary, described as “not more than 4ft in height, emaciated and pitted with the ravages of small pox”.

When Mary's ship docked at Sydney Cove, no one claimed her as a servant or a skivvy. She was a “third class” convict and one of “the inflammable matter of Ireland”. Did her newly born survive the voyage? I don't know.

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They sent her up the Parramatta River to the Female Factory, which had distinguished itself as one of the places where Victorian penal experts were testing their exciting new theories. The treadmill was introduced in the year Mary arrived, 1823. It was an implement of punishment and torture.

The Cumberland Pilgrim described the Female Factory as “appallingly hideous... the recreation ground reminds one of the Valley of the Shadow of Death”.

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Arriving at night, Mary had nothing to sleep on, only boards and stone and straw, and filthy wool full of ticks and spiders. All the women underwent solitary confinement. Their heads were shaved and they were locked in total darkness with the whine of mosquitoes.

There was no division by age or crime. Mary and the other women were called “the intractables”. With a mixture of horror and admiration, the Attorney General at the time, Roger Terry, described how the women had “driven back with a volley of stones and staves” soldiers sent to put down their rebellion. More than once, they breached the sandstone walls and stormed the community of Parramatta.

Missionaries sent from England to repair the souls of the women were given similar short shrift.

I am so proud of her.

Then there was “courting

day”. Once a week, “bereft gentlemen” (whomever they might be) were given first pick, followed by soldiers, then male convicts.

Some of the women found “finery” and primped urgently, as if an inspecting male might provide a way out of their predicament. Others turned their backs should an aspiring mate be an “old stringybark fella” down from the bush.

During all this, the matron would shout out what she called “the good points” of each woman, which was a revelation to all.

In this way, my great-great grandparents met each other. I believe they were well matched.

Francis McCarthy had been transported from Ireland for the crime of “uttering unlawful oaths” against his English landlord. That was the charge levelled at the Tolpuddle Martyrs.

I am so proud of him.

Mary and Francis were married at St Mary’s Church, later St Mary’s Cathedral, on November 9th, 1823, with four other convict couples. Eight years later, they were granted their “ticket of leave” and Mary her “conditional pardon” by one Colonel Snodgrass, the Captain General of New South Wales – the condition being she could never leave the colony.

Mary bore 10 children and they lived out hard lives, loved and respected by all accounts, to their ninetieth year.

My mother knew the secret about Mary and Francis. On her wedding day in 1922, and in defi-

ance of her own family, she and my father came to these walls to pay tribute to Mary and the intractables. She was proud of her “bad stock”.

I sometimes wonder: where is this spirit today? Where is the spirit of the intractables among those who claim to represent us and those of us who accept, in supine silence, the corporate conformity that is characteristic of much of modern Australia?

Where are those of us prepared to “utter unlawful oaths” and stand up to the authoritarians and charlatans in government, who glorify war and, in collusion with an imperial master, invent foreign enemies and criminalise dissent and who abuse and mistreat vulnerable refugees to these shores and disgracefully call them “illegals”.

Mary Palmer was “illegal”. Francis McCarthy was “illegal”. All the women who survived the Female Factory and fought off authority, were “illegal”.

The memory of their courage and resilience and resistance should be honoured, not traduced, in the way we are today. For only when we recognise the uniqueness of our past – our Indigenous past and our proud convict past – will this nation achieve true independence. **CT**

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John Pilger's latest film is *The Coming War On China*. Read more of his work at www.johnpilger.com

Solar panels for Gaza is not asking for much

Officially, Canada opposes Israel's occupation – why doesn't it do something to relieve the suffering? asks **Linda McQuaig**

THE request was so minimal that it was surprising the answer wasn't just an immediate yes.

Tarek Loubani, the Canadian doctor injured treating Palestinian victims of Israeli sniper fire, asked the Trudeau government last month for \$15 million to help pay for solar panels to provide desperately needed energy at Gaza hospitals.

Given the ongoing crisis in Gaza, where 135 Palestinians have been killed and more than 3,000 injured while taking part in weekly protests at the Israeli border over the last three months, it doesn't seem like a lot to ask of Canada, which was once seen as an honest broker – if not an important player – in the Mideast conflict.

So the Trudeau government's hesitation points to the extraordinary power of the pro-Israel lobby, which is determined to keep Ottawa in line with the rigidly pro-Israel stance adopted by Stephen Harper's Conservatives.

Justin Trudeau has differentiated himself from Harper by showing some willingness to criticize Israel, describing its use of live ammunition against protestors as “inexcusable” and calling for an independent



JUSTIN TRUDEAU: Toned down criticism. Photo: Wikimedia

investigation into a particularly bloody day of protest in response to Donald Trump's decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem.

But Trudeau toned down his criticism after attacks from Conservatives and pro-Israel groups, and Canada abstained on a UN General Assembly vote condemning Israel for disproportionate use of force.

For years, Israel has claimed it is acting in self-defence, even though Palestinians have been essentially defenceless against its state-of-the-art military hardware.

But the recent killings have helped dramatize the lop-sided

nature of the conflict – with thousands of unarmed men, women and children gathering in open view at the border as Israeli snipers have picked them off, with about as much difficulty as shooting fish in a barrel.

Loubani, who teaches medicine at University of Western Ontario, was shot in the leg while standing about 25 metres from protestors and wearing full hospital greens.

Beyond denouncing the violence, Canada needs to revive its commitment to dealing with the root of this conflict – that millions of Palestinians have been living under military occupation for more than 50 years, with Israel effectively annexing their land for settlements that now house more than 500,000 Israelis. (Israel “withdrew” from Gaza in 2005, but has maintained a land, sea and air blockade around it.)

Officially, Canada has long opposed the Israeli occupation. According to the Canadian government website, Canada supports UN Resolution 242 calling for Israel to withdraw to its 1967 borders, and endorses “the creation of a sovereign, independent, viable, democratic and territorially contiguous Palestinian state.”

In practice, however, Canada has done little in recent years to advance or even show support for this goal.

In 2016, the Trudeau Liberals supported an outrageous Conservative motion that condemned any Canadian organization or individual promoting the

Palestinian call for boycotts and sanctions against Israel until it abides by international law.

So while Canada officially condemns the occupation, it also condemns bringing pressure on Israel to end the occupation through boycotts or sanctions – even though these non-violent measures are routinely used by many countries, including Canada.

Last fall, for instance, the Trudeau government imposed sanctions on Venezuela – a struggling nation facing a revolt led by its wealthy elite. Ottawa increased its sanctions against Venezuela in May, citing “illegitimate and anti-democratic presidential elections” – while at the same time Israel was killing protestors and shooting a Canadian doctor without prompting any sanctions from Canada. (Indeed, even advocating such sanctions gets you in trouble in Canada!)

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Canadians don't appear to share Trudeau's reluctance to put pressure on Israel.

An EKOS poll last year found that 66 per cent of Canadians consider sanctions against Israel “reasonable” to ensure its respect for international law.

That polling suggests that Canadians, rather than condemning the international boycott movement, might like Canada to join it.

Certainly, I bet Canadians would support Ottawa helping out with solar panels for Gaza hospitals where electricity is

limited to four hours a day, making it difficult to carry out normal hospital functions, let alone treat shooting victims.

Surely even Conservatives and pro-Israel groups wouldn't object to Palestinians having

functioning incubators and dialysis machines. **CT**

Linda McQuaig is freelance columnist for the Toronto Star newspaper. Follow her on Twitter: @LindaMcQuaig

Facing up to life and all its realities

Caitlin Johnstone tells a cautionary tale about the boy who discovered the 'truth'. Then forgot until it was too late

ONCE a little boy told his mum that he reckoned there shouldn't be any more wars, and that people ought to take care of each other and make sure everyone gets enough to eat. She smiled, patted his head and told him he was a sweet child.

The boy stopped sharing his idea as he got older, because it made bigger kids scoff and ridicule him. He learned about economics and foreign policy, and how war is often necessary to stop bad guys from doing bad things. He took on this new understanding so that he wouldn't be made fun of anymore. Sometimes as a grown-up he'd think back on the juvenile thoughts he used to share with his mum, and he'd chuckle at how innocent and naive he had been.

Then the boy got even older, and he learned that that perspective was naive as well. Actually it's all a pack of lies, he discovered, and the politicians

and pundits are deceiving everyone about what's going on in the world for the benefit of a few wealthy ecocidal warmongers. He came to understand that everything is fake and everyone is corrupt, and he spent his days scoffing at people and smugly knowing better than those who believed what the TV told them.

On his deathbed his mind did strange things as his body failed. One day, after spending a weekend in a non-responsive state, the boy sat upright and startled his family gathered at his bedside, screaming, “Fuck! I got it right the first time!”

We are inseparable from the world we live in. This is self-evident in the breathing of air, the eating of food and the drinking of water. Ninety percent of the cells in the human body are bacteria, upon whose ecosystems the health of the entire physiological system depends. Science

tells us that what we take to be separate objects are actually relatively loose clusters of tiny moving particles with no clearly defined boundary line, and when you reduce those particles to their smallest possible components it becomes difficult to say exactly what they even are or to what extent they even exist. The cells in our own bodies are constantly being replaced with proteins, minerals and other nutrients we extract from other organisms, to such an extent that it's difficult to claim with any authority that you're the same creature that came out of your mother's womb.

Yet we think of ourselves as separate. We think if we destroy the planet we live on, if we destroy the ecosystemic context in which we evolved and into which we are inseparably woven, it's no big deal because we can just become a space-faring species like in science fiction books. This despite the fact that our only ventures into space thus far have been glorified scuba diving excursions, with all resources imported from a planet with a fully functioning ecosystem. The difference between living in space independently of Planet Earth and visiting space with imported supplies is the difference between flying and jumping. We only think we're remotely close to the former because we see ourselves as separate from the ecosystemic that birthed us.

A human being is a swirling eddy in a flowing stream, with a mental soundtrack playing in

the background saying "This stream and I, we are separate things." Mental noises are imbued with the power of belief which describe a separate self in a separable world, despite the complete absence of any such thing that can be observed by science or by direct experience.

In direct experience there are thoughts, there are feelings and there are sensory impressions, but in none of them can a hard, tangible thing be found that can be accurately labelled "me", no matter how hard you look. The closest you can get is to tell a story about a particular person with a particular name and a particular history, who inhabits a particular body, and then labelling that cluster of stories "me". But that's all they are. They're stories.

Mental story is the only realm in which separation exists. It's

the only realm in which it makes sense to give all the stuff to Joe because Joe figured out how to make a talking dongle widget that works a bit faster than the other ones. It's the only realm in which it makes sense to drop explosives on a group of human organisms because they are standing on the wrong clump of dirt. Without narratives about separate organisms who need to protect their interests from other separate organisms, fear and greed lose their foothold, and thus can't be used to manipulate people toward certain agendas. The only thing that makes sense is peace and harmony.

This is what human awakening looks like. And, in my opinion, it is where we are headed. The simple, obvious truth you saw as a child was reality. You had it right the first time. **CT**

Caitlin Johnstone blogs at www.caitlinjohnstone.com

'Pay up, you Nato deadbeats or else!'

Bemused Europeans scratch their heads and ask, 'Defence Against Whom?' **Eric Margolis** reports

WE are the schmucks' thundered President Donald Trump, using a favourite New York City Yiddish term for penis. The object of Trump's wrath at his Make America Great Again rally in Great Falls, Montana

was the craven, stingy European members of Nato, only 16 of 22 members are on budget for their US-commanded military spending. Trump wants them to spend much more.

Trump and his fellow neocons want Nato to serve as a sort

Insights

of US foreign legion in Third World wars in Africa and Asia. Nato was formed as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation to defend western Europe, not to fight in Afghanistan and who knows where else?

Equally bad, according to Trump, is that the US runs a whopping trade deficit with the European Union which is busy shipping high-end cars and fine wines to the US. The wicked foreigners don't buy enough American bourbon, corn and terribly abused pigs.

Trump is quite right that America's Nato allies, particularly Germany and Canada, don't spend enough on defense. Germany is reported to have less than 20 operational tanks. Canada's armed forces appear to be smaller than the New York City police department.

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But the Europeans ask, "defence against whom?" The Soviet Union was a huge threat back in the Cold War when the mighty Red Army had 55,000 tanks pointed West. Today, Russia's land and navel power has evaporated. Russia has perhaps 5,500 main battle tanks in active service and a similar number in storage, a far cry from its armoured juggernaut of the Cold War.

More important, Russia's military budget for 2018 was only \$61-billion, actually down 17 percent from last year. That's

4.3 percent of GDP. Russia is facing hard economic times. Russia has slipped to fourth place in military spending after the US, China and Saudi Arabia. The US and its wealthy allies account for two thirds of world military spending. In fact, the US total military budget (including for nuclear weapons and foreign wars) is about \$1-trillion, 50 percent of total US government discretionary spending.

In addition, Russia must defend a vast territory from the Baltic to the Pacific. The US is fortunate in having Mexico and

Canada as neighbours. Russia has North Korea, China, India, the Mideast and Nato to watch. As with its naval forces, Russia's armies are too far apart to lend one another mutual support. Two vulner-

able rail lines are Russia's main land link between European Russia and its Pacific Far East.

Trump's supplemental military budget boost this year of \$54-billion is almost as large as Russia's entire 2018 military budget. As for Trump's claim that Europe is not paying its fair share of Nato expenses, note that Britain and France combined together spend more on their military forces than Russia.

In Europe, it's hard to find many people who still consider Russia a serious threat except for some tipsy Danes, right wing Swedes, and assorted Russophobic East Europeans. The main

fear of Russia seems concentrated in the minds of American neo-conservatives, media, and rural Trump supporters, all victims of the bizarre anti-Russian hysteria that has gripped the US.

Equally important, most civilians don't understand that neither US and Nato forces nor Russia's military are in any shape to fight war that lasts more than a few days. Both sides lack munitions, spare parts, lubricants, and battlefield equipment. The overworked US Air Force, busy plastering Muslim nations, has actually run low on bombs. US industry can't seem to keep up supplies. There has even been talk of buying explosives from China!

These essentials of war have been seriously neglected in favour of buying fancy weapons. But such weapons need spares, electronics, fuel depots, missiles and thousands of essential parts. As former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld observed, "You go to war with what you have". Neither side has enough. A war would likely peter out in days after supplies were exhausted. Besides, no side can afford to replace \$100-million jet fighters or \$5-million apiece tanks after a war, however brief.

President Trump has learned about war from Fox TV. Europeans have learned from real experience and don't want any more. **CT**

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Eric S. Margolis is an award-winning, internationally syndicated columnist. His web site is www.ericmargolis.com

Britain and France together spend more on their military forces than Russia

History in an Amazon box

POETRY by Philip Kraske

From Amazon on Monday I got a vid,
And wondered at all of the lessons it hid,
About people and boxes and imperious chips,
The mingling of robots and fast-churning hips,
In warehouses huge that would park jumbo jets,
With their shelving and time sheets and workaday
sweats.

You plunk down your e-dough and imagine it split
'Tween the picker and packer, for Jeff B a bit,
And on to the studio, for the actors and scribe,
The director and gaffer and whoever's subscribed,
And let's not forget the film's backers and skills,
Who all live so sweet in them Hollywood Hills.

All done in a blink with the only thing left,
Just a statement with numbers of all heart bereft,
But quickly with joy are those cold stats infused,

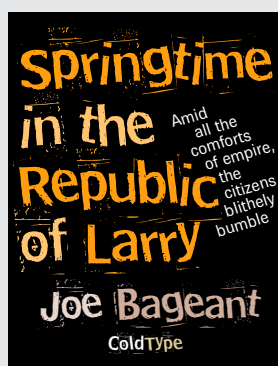
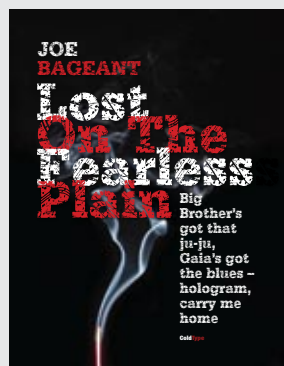
Waved with triumph by the artist enthused,
Or with a rare smile by the top-rich received,
In a world where numbers are all that's
believed.

Well, yes, it's a business and does much to disrupt
The shops and dealing of the quite uncorrupt,
The folks who fill downtowns and pay rent and
tax,
Who never deserved to receive the e-axe,
Which leaves one wondering if there's any safe
harbour,
'Cept for the fireman, the cook and friendly barber.

Yes, there's some history in an Amazon buy,
Which ends with strides of the delivery guy,
A true account 'tis of our life and time,
Of loving works joined to vast fortunes and grime,
Of molecules dispensing misery and cash,
Of acquisitive folks o'er the planet they thrash. **CT**

Philip Kraske lives in Madrid, Spain, where he teaches English on a freelance basis and does some translation. His latest novel, 11/9: A Narrative, is about to be published. His website is www.philipkraske.com

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