

**CHELSEA MANNING AND THE NEW INQUISITION** | Chris Hedges  
**BLOODY SUNDAY: THE EMPIRE COMES HOME** | Adam Ramsay  
**WHEN A MILLION BRITS SAID NO!** | Ron Fassbender

ISSUE 181

# ColdType

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APRIL 2019



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# ColdType

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Issue 181

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The events of 30 January 1972 in Northern Ireland weren't an aberration. Britain has been in the business of killing dissenters across its former empire for decades, writes **Adam Ramsay**

# Bloody Sunday - How the British empire came home

4

**A** CRISP winter day in Derry. Fifteen thousand gathered to protest against detention without trial. At ten past four, British paratroopers opened fire. Twenty-eight people were shot, some in the back as they fled. Fourteen were killed: seven, teenagers.

Some, like Northern Ireland secretary Karen Bradley and defence secretary Gavin Williamson, think there's nothing to see here, saying that British soldiers in Northern Ireland were "fulfilling their duties in a dignified and appropriate way", and should be above the law.

Others take Bloody Sunday more seriously. It has been the subject of inquiries and prime

ministerial apologies and, now, a prosecution. Still, the events of that day are treated as an aberration, pathologised like a weeping mole on smooth skin.

If only. In truth the sickness is spread throughout the UK and began long ago. The massacre in Bogside offers a rare window into what the UK really was, only a generation back. And so it helps us to understand what we have become.

To do that, we need to unpick a tangle of tears and torture. This story is one thread in that knot; a strand of barbed wire that winds its way through the late British empire, from Ireland to Kenya to a small island in the Gulf.

It includes a very British



cast of characters, including an Englishman at the heart of the British army, an Irishman who threw himself on a grenade to save his colleagues and a Scotsman who spent 30 years as "the butcher of Bahrain".

Most of all, it's a story about two teenagers, called Kevin and Ali, and how they came to be shot dead.



Derry murals remember the Bloody Sunday tragedy.

The story ends with the announcement last month that one soldier, Soldier F, has been charged with the murder of James Wray and William McKinney; and for the attempted murders of Joseph Friel, Michael Quinn, Joe Mahone and Patrick O'Donnell on Sunday, January 30, 1972.

But it starts 5,000 miles away,

in Kenya, with our Englishman and our Scotsman.

### Frank Kitson and British counter-insurgency from Kenya to Ireland

During the 1950s, the British tried to retain control of lands in Kenya that they had violently stolen from the Kikuyu and other

groups. Native Kenyans fought back in the Mau Mau uprising. Historians have documented widespread torture by British forces, including crushing testicles with pliers and the internment of up to 320,000 people in concentration camps where they endured slavery, starvation, murder and rape with blunt objects. Meanwhile, 1.5-million Kenyans



were confined to a network of detention camps and heavily patrolled villages, as documented by the historian Caroline Elkins in her Pulitzer-winning *Britain's Gulag*.

According to Kenya's biggest newspaper, the *Daily Nation*, a man named Ian Henderson was known in Kenya as the "torturer in chief", and was "the prime mover in the preparation of bogus evidence in the 1953 trial at Kapenguria", where six leading Mau Mau figures were convicted, including the future first president of independent Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta. Henderson, from Aberdeenshire, is our Scotsman. He died in 2013.

The *Daily Nation* discusses how Henderson and his colleagues managed to recruit a significant number of people to a network of underground 'countergangs', and says that one of the key techniques at the time was the use of summary courts through which more than 1,000 Kenyans were executed for crimes such as "consorting with terrorists" and "illegal possession of firearms". As the paper puts it:

"The psychology underlying the treatment prescribed by Ian Henderson for the recruits for the pseudo-gangs... was to trump the fear of betrayal by an even more powerful fear of instant death by hanging".

Ian Henderson was awarded the George Medal – Britain's highest civilian award – on September 28, 1954 for his work in Kenya.

But he didn't earn this dubious honour on his own. During Henderson's time in Kenya, according to the *Daily Nation*, he was "part of the small team developing the pseudo-gangster techniques". The other person the newspaper names as a member of this team was our Englishman: Frank Kitson.

Kitson later wrote about the techniques developed in Kenya in a book entitled *Gangs and Countergangs*. It launched his reputation as a counter-insurgency expert whose theories – including in how to use "countergangs" – shaped British and United States military

### More than 1,000 Kenyans were executed for crimes such as "consorting with terrorists" and "illegal possession of firearms"

strategy for decades to come.

On New Year's Day 1955, Frank Kitson was awarded the British Military Cross "in recognition of gallant and distinguished services in Kenya". Three years later, he gained a bar to that medal for his work in the Malayan 'Emergency'. During Britain's brutal war in Malaysia – waged in part so that Clement Attlee's government could continue to plunder the country's rubber, despite a famine, to fund Britain's post-war reconstruction – half a million Malaysians were forced into concentration camps through a process known as 'villagisation'.

Writing about this cam-

paign, Kitson borrowed tactics from Mao Zedong and learned from his own experience with the Mau Mau, describing the relationship between army and insurgents as like that between a fisherman and fish: "If a fish has got to be destroyed it can be attacked directly by rod or net ... But if rod and net cannot succeed by themselves it may be necessary to do something to the water". In theory, he said, this could include "polluting the water".

**K**itson's career then took him – via Ba rain, Aden and Cyprus, all places where the British state is accused of widespread use of torture – to Northern Ireland. There, Michael Jackson, who went on to be the professional head of the British army during the Iraq war, described him as "the sun around which the planets revolved", saying that he "very much set the tone for the operational style in Belfast".

According to Paddy Devlin of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, Kitson "probably did more than any other individual to sour relations between the Catholic community and the security forces".

The notorious Military Reaction Force (MRF), which has been accused of being behind a string of illegal shootings of Catholic teenagers in the early 1970s, was based at Kitson's headquarters outside Belfast.

One of the units under his command was nicknamed ‘Kitsons Private Army’. Its official name was 1 Para. On that crisp day in Derry, 30 January 1972, it was ‘Kitson’s Private Army’ who fired all 108 shots[1].

One of the victims was our first teenager. Kevin McElhinney, 17, was shot from behind while trying to crawl to safety. Mike Jackson, later head of the British Army, was present on that day. According to his autobiography, Kitson, who was on leave at the time, later berated the acting commander for not having gone far enough.

A fortnight later, on 15 February 1972, Frank Kitson was knighted by the Queen for “gallant and distinguished” service in Northern Ireland.

But his story doesn’t end there. Despite the huge attention given to Bloody Sunday, it’s not the main reason Kitson is known in Northern Ireland.

## The British grenade

The following year, a Catholic joiner named Eugene Heenan was driving his colleagues to a job when a British-army-issue hand grenade was thrown into their minibus. Heenan threw himself onto the grenade, and was killed saving his colleagues. The murder was put down to Loyalist paramilitaries – but the man found guilty of it, Albert Baker, was a former soldier who claimed links to British intelligence.

In 2015, lawyers representing Heenan’s widow began civil proceedings against the British

Ministry of Defence, naming Kitson as a respondent in the case.

They said that they were seeking to “obtain truth and accountability for our clients as to the role of the British army and Frank Kitson in the counterinsurgency operation in the north of Ireland during the early part of the conflict, and the use of loyalist paramilitary gangs to contain the republican-nationalist threat through terror, manipulation of the rule of law, infiltration and subversion all core to the Kitson military doctrine”. Mark Thompson from the Belfast-based campaign group Relatives for Justice has told openDemocracy that the case will soon return to court.

It’s not the only active case involving Kitson. A group of men who say they were tortured – known as the Hooded Men – announced legal proceedings against him earlier this year.

We still don’t know the truth of these cases, and Kitson denies any knowledge of the death of Eugene Heenan. But documents released in recent years have confirmed stories of collusion between the British Army in Northern Ireland and Loyalist paramilitary gangs responsible for murder and torture. One government memo from the 1970s, uncovered in 2006, says that up to 15 percent of soldiers in the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) – then the biggest regiment in the British Army – were linked to Loyal-

ist terrorist groups, and that the UDR was the best source of weapons for Loyalist terrorists.

Relatives for Justice accuse Kitson of being one of the “architects of collusion” and allege that he brought his counter-gangs doctrine from Kenya to Northern Ireland – one of his books on the subject was published while he was serving in Northern Ireland. However, Frank Kitson has always denied that collusion was a product of his theories on the use of ‘counter-gangs’.

At the Saville Inquiry into Bloody Sunday, Kitson said:

“It has been suggested that I might have had some special influence in Northern Ireland because of my earlier experiences of counterinsurgency and peace-keeping and because I had recently prepared a report for the army on these matters, which was published as a book called *Low Intensity Operations* in November 1971. I had also written an account of my personal experiences during the Kenya emergency published in 1960.

“I do not consider that either my experiences or my books would have been of much interest to my superiors at the time, most of whom had been involved in these sorts of operations themselves. Furthermore, *Low Intensity Operations* was only published towards the end of my time in Northern Ireland and did not become very well known until some months after I had left the Province. I very much doubt whether the GOC [general officer commanding]

or the CLF [Commander Land Forces] had read it by January 1972; indeed they may never have read it”.

James Hughes, an expert in conflict and reconciliation at the London School of Economics, has a different perspective, and it’s worth quoting him at length about Kitson’s tenure in Northern Ireland:

“Kitson favoured shock troops like 1 Para and the SAS, and the undercover MRF ... The MRF not only murdered suspects and unarmed Catholic civilians but also colluded with loyalist paramilitaries in a campaign of sectarian murder of innocent Catholics.

The 30-year duration of the conflict in the North is the most obvious evidence of the military failure of these tactics ...

“At the Saville Enquiry [into the Bloody Sunday killings] Kitson’s memory of events was poor, but he was sure that there was no insurgency when he arrived in Belfast in late 1970. By the time of his departure in April 1972 the Catholic community was in all-out revolt”.

Kitson went on to be commander of UK land forces in the early 1980s. In the 2000s, he was a key adviser on US military strategy during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As the *Daily Telegraph* recounts, ‘David Petraeus, the American general who commanded coalition operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, drew heavily on Sir Frank’s work when he devised the US Army’s new strategy for

confronting al-Qaeda and the Taliban, even making the time to visit the 88-year-old retired general at his Devon home.’

Frank Kitson, now in his nineties, still lives in Devon and continues to be treated by the military establishments of the western world as an expert in counterinsurgency.

### **Bahrain: a British island in the Gulf**

To place Bloody Sunday in its proper context, we also need to look at what British officials were up to elsewhere. In 1963, Frank Kitson’s former colleague

**“Their activities are said to have included the ransacking of villages, sadistic sexual abuse and using power drills to maim prisoners**

Ian Henderson was deported from newly independent Kenya. He moved to Bahrain, bringing with him his experience as “chief torturer”. If it seems odd that a British policeman would be given such a job, it’s worth briefly reviewing the history of this island in the Gulf.

**T**he government of British India took control of Bahrain in 1861. In the 1920s, the UK founded the Bahraini police force, and the island remained a British protectorate until 15 August 1971 – six months before Bloody Sunday. From the 1950s, the regime struggled to contain an independence

movement and Britain used violent crowd control techniques to prop up its puppet government. Pro-independence leaders were eventually deported. In 1965 the Royal Navy used helicopters to drop tear gas on Bahraini protesters.

As Marc Owen Jones wrote for openDemocracy in 2013:

“Charles Belgrave, a British official who worked in Bahrain between 1926 and 1957, and whose multiple roles included financial advisor to the Ruler, commandant of the police, and judge, used torture on detainees in a number of high profile cases, as did his British colleague Cap-

tain Parke. Methods included beatings, sleep deprivation, and on one occasion the placing of lighted pieces of paper between the toes of a detainee”.

In the 1970s, the country’s police force was headed by a British officer, Jim Bell. Alistair McNutt, a former police officer in Hong Kong under British rule, was a colonel in the interior ministry until 2002. And from 1968 until 1998, the head of the Bahraini secret police was our Scotsman, Ian Henderson, who became known as the “Butcher of Bahrain”. “During this time”, according to the *Guardian*, “his men allegedly detained and tortured thousands of anti-government activists.

“Their activities are said to have included the ransacking of villages, sadistic sexual abuse and using power drills to maim



prisoners. On many occasions they are said to have detained children without informing their parents, only to return them months later in body bags”.

In 1984, Ian Henderson was awarded a CBE for “services to British interests in Bahrain”.

When he stood down as head of Bahrain’s secret police in 1998, Henderson was replaced in the role by another British ex-serviceman – a colonel, Thomas Bryan.

After the Metropolitan Police deputy commissioner John Yates resigned as Britain’s most senior counter-terrorism officer over the phone-hacking scandal in 2011, he, too, went to work for the Bahraini government for six months. He was to oversee reform of its police force. While there, Yates dismissed some criticism of Bahrain’s police as “malicious propaganda”.

Between 2012 and 2017, the Foreign Office spent significant sums training Bahrain’s security services, including arranging a number of visits to Belfast so that Bahraini officials could learn about crowd-control techniques from Northern Irish colleagues and have a tour of Northern Ireland’s only high-security prison. During one visit to Northern Ireland, Bahraini officers were trained in “community intelligence” and “how to use dogs”.

Until then, our second teenager, Ali al Singace had survived in hiding in Bahrain. Ali had been a teenage protester during the 2011 pro-democracy uprising. Shortly after this visit



**Former Metropolitan Police deputy commissioner Paul Yates went to work for six months with the Bahrain government.**

Photo: YouTube screenshot

to Northern Ireland, Bahrain’s Ministry for the Interior managed to locate him.

Ali was taken to Jau prison, where staff from the Foreign Office-funded company NI-CO were training 400 prison officers. During specific periods that NI-CO staff were training guards in Jao prison, Ali reported being raped and tortured by his prison guards, as did dozens of fellow inmates.

In January 2017, he was shot dead.

Despite its history, Bahrain has managed to retain a positive reputation internationally, to a significant extent because of the British PR firms Bell Pottinger and Weber Shandwick. In the latter case, the country’s account was for a while managed by Priti Patel, who went on to be a Conservative minist-

ter, and continued to visit the country as an MP – funded by its government – and advocate for it in Parliament. Patel was sacked as a minister in 2017 for her off-the-books relationship with the Israeli government.

In 2013, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain – whose family has long been propped up by the British – summarised his regime’s relationship with the UK government:

“The first Treaty of Friendship was signed in 1820, nearly 200 years ago, and it remained until replaced by a new one in 1971 on Britain’s withdrawal from the Gulf – a unilateral decision of which my father said – ‘Why? - No one asked you to go!’ In fact for all practical and strategic purposes the British presence has not changed and it remains such that we believe we shall never be without it”.

In April last year, 47 years after the UK left its original HMS Juffair base in Bahrain, Britain opened a new naval base in the country. Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson explained why, saying, “Our Armed Forces are the face of Global Britain and our presence in Bahrain will play a vital role in keeping Britain safe as well as underpinning security in the Gulf”.

It’s not the only new military base in the region: in 2015, the UK announced a major expansion of its military presence in Oman, where the current sultan is a former UK army officer who secured his role in a British coup in 1970. He

already hosts the only permanent SAS base outside the UK and three GCHQ bases which tap the undersea cables running from the Gulf under the Strait of Hormus. His regime, like that of Bahrain, relies on the use of torture to maintain its control. The UK's biggest corporation, Shell, owns 34 percent of Oman's state oil company – with 60 percent owned by the government. According to historian Mark Curtis, the two bases will provide the UK with its biggest capacity for military intervention in the Middle East since the 1960s.

**What it means to be a person from these islands**

If Britain had a functional media or a sensible government, the debate about the prosecution of a soldier for alleged murder on Bloody Sunday would be a chance to talk about our impe-

**The debate about the prosecution of a soldier for alleged murder on Bloody Sunday should be a chance to talk about Britain's imperial history**

rial history: how it's shaped our post-imperial present and how it's led us to the chaos of today. It would be an opportunity to explore what we did to people across the planet and ask questions about where we are now; to challenge the way that we've started to sell the lessons of empire to the world.

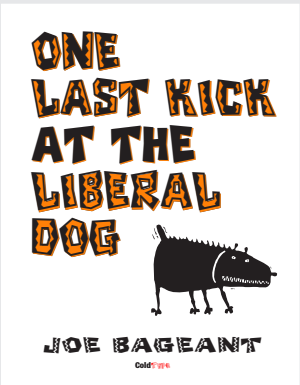
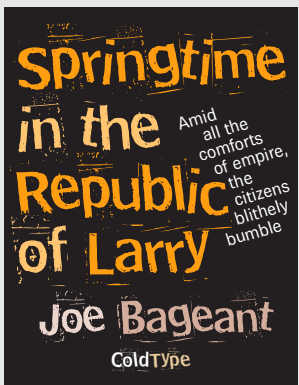
This should be a chance to talk about the tragic fact that the events in Derry that day weren't nearly as unusual as we like to think.

It would be an opportunity for national catharsis, for the start

of a process of truth and reconciliation with the peoples across the world who were subjugated by the British state. This is our moment to talk about what we can make it mean to be a person from these islands.

But instead, we get delusion from the Northern Ireland secretary and praise for the chaps at the top. We get mawkish empire sentimentalism, and our reporters rarely examine the fact that we've become the world centre for mercenary companies, nor think about how that influences our politics. And we rarely discuss the fact that, for millions of people, the feeling of Britishness is still, to this day, the feeling of cold steel on soft flesh. **CT**

*Adam Ramsay is co-editor of opendemocracyUK – www.opendemocracy.net – where this article was first published*



**READ THE BEST OF JOE BAGEANT**

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100 years ago this month, British soldiers massacred 1,000 men, women and children trapped in a public garden. **Trevor Grundy** looks at a new book that recalls one of the most shameful acts in the history of British imperialism

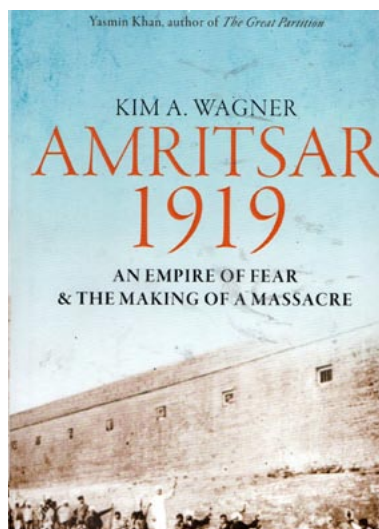
# Exposing the darkest day of the British Raj

**O**N October 2 it will be the 150th anniversary of Gandhi's birth. Expect a tsunami of books, memoirs, articles, radio/tv programmes about the way this remarkable ascetic turned the British Empire upside-down by using Indian soul force (Satyagraha) to undermine British bullet power.

Despite the hundreds of books written about him, there remains an insatiable desire to know more about this extraordinary man and the societies in Britain, South Africa and India that shaped him and formed his ideas.

So a round of applause for Kim Wagner whose compelling book about the massacre at Amritsar on April 13, 1919 should be on the desk of every young student of history throughout the Commonwealth.

As we approach the centenary of the vile act, there is in certain British political closets a yearning, a longing for the days of the Raj. There's also a yearning, too, for an official



## **AMRITSAR 1919**

An Empire of Fear and the Making of a Massacre

**Kim A. Wagner**

Yale University Press

**£20**

apology for the massacre.

In his book *Inglorious Empire* (Hurst & Company, London, 2016) Shashi Tharoor suggests the best form of atonement is not a politician's apology, but rather to start teaching unromanticised colonial histo-

ry in schools because, "the British public is woefully ignorant of the realities of the British Empire and what it meant to its subject people".

In 1919, Winston Churchill condemned what happened at Amritsar describing it as "an event which stands in singular and sinister isolation".

Prime Minister David Cameron didn't get round to formally apologising to the people of India during a trade visit in 2013, but he did describe the massacre as "a deeply shameful act in British history".

But for nearly all Indians, the slaughter at Amritsar following weeks of agitation and demonstration against the Rowlatt Act – a draconian piece of legislation that banned political gatherings, but also succeeded in welding together Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs – was the most murderous single act in the history of the British Empire.

The facts are no longer in doubt, though the meaning remains disputed. The way Wagner sheds fresh light on



an old story makes this one of the most important books of the year.

Late in the afternoon of April 13, 1919, the British officer Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer (born and brought up in India by British parents) with 50 or so troops under his command entered the enclosure known as the Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar in Northern India (Punjab).

A crowd of several thousand civilians had gathered in the high-walled public garden to protest against the imprisonment of two local nationalist leaders, Dr Saifuddin Kitchlew, one of the main leaders of Gandhi's Satyagraha movement in Amritsar, and Dr Satyapal.

Riots had broken out in several cities following the murder of five British citizens in Amritsar and the British officials had introduced a curfew. All political rallies were banned.

Without prior warning, Dyer ordered his men to open up sustained fire on the crowd. It lasted for ten minutes, stopping only when the soldiers ran out of bullets.

According to official figures, 1,650 rounds were spent, 370 people were killed and 1,200 wounded. Indian journalists said the death toll was more like 1,000, including women, children and babies.

The Amritsar Massacre has since become a by-word for colonial brutality and repression, and in India it is remembered as the watershed that irrevocably

put Indian nationalists on the path to independence, a struggle that came to fruition in 1947.

There are no contemporary photographs of the massacre but thanks to the visceral depiction in Attenborough's 1982 film, *Ghandi*, it is now one of the most recognisable images of British India.

Of course, Wagner is not the first – nor will he be the last – to write about Amritsar.

Nigel Collect's biography of Dyer, *The Butcher of Amritsar: General Reginald Dyer* (London, 2005) contributed to the public's knowledge of what happened. Then, on the other side of the Amritsar coin, there is Nick Lloyd's *The Amritsar Massacre: The Untold Story of One Fateful Day* (IB. Tauris 2011), which Wagner described in a review as "a complete whitewash", and a piece of "callous jingoism."

Wagner's book is timely, especially if you live in Britain.

The subject of who is responsible for massacres is a burning issue with the question of impunity arousing strong feeling in England, Ireland and Northern Ireland following a fresh look at the events surrounding the deaths of 13 civilians at Londonderry during Bloody Sunday 47 years ago.

At the Hunter Committee Inquiry following the slaughter in the Punjab, arguments for and against the actions of Dyer were heard. Those there remembered the words of Frederick Cooper, the deputy

Commissioner of Amritsar in 1857, the year of the Indian "mutiny" or India's First War of Independence.

He said violence was necessary to keep people in order and "to show publicly in the eyes of all men that at all events, the Punjab authorities adhered to their policy of over-awing, by a prompt and stern initiative . . ."

Over-awing was certainly used by the British after the uprising of '57 which saw the Mughal practice of capturing rebels and strapping them to the mouths of cannons loaded with gunpowder and blowing them to pieces in front of crowds of local spectators forced to watch the executions. The prisoners had their intestines blown into the faces of their former comrades who stood watching the scenes, horrified and shell-shocked for the rest of their lives.

But it was the Indian atrocities at Cawnpore that entered the history books read by British schoolchildren. Memory of the slaughter of British women and children hang like a bloody cloud over those Anglo-Europeans in the Raj.

The officious policeman McBryde tells the liberal minded Fielding in EM Forster's *Passage to India* to study the records of the Indian Mutiny rather than the Bhagavad Gita if he wants to understand India.

Stiff upper lips and rhinowhips dominated imperial behaviour. There was no place for self-doubt as Orwell tells us in *Shooting an Elephant* (written in 1936) about life in another

part of the empire, Burma. “... every white man’s life in the East was one long struggle not to be laughed at”.

The *Morning Post* newspaper of July 8, 1919, commented: “Whenever the people of India show signs of unrest or of conspiracy or of revolution there rises before the minds of Anglo-Europeans the spectre of the Indian Mutiny and the horror of Cawnpore and they are constrained to ask themselves whether the disturbances are only the precursors of a similar revolution. So a great force is used in quelling disturbances that would be used in other places where British rule is more firmly established”.

Middle class England and the aristocracy rallied to Dyer and raised the massive for that time sum of £26,000 so he need never work again.

Later on, many Indians rejected the relatively paltry

amounts that were offered to the victims as compensation.

Is there a need for another half-hearted but well-worded apology for a crime so little known by the British people?

Wagner writes: “A British apology for the Amritsar Massacre in 2019 would only ever be for one man’s actions, as isolated an unprecedented and not for the colonial rule that in Gandhi’s words, produced Dyer. Rather than being an act of humility, an apology in the centenary year would thus simply sustain a sentimental vision of the British Empire – a vision on which the red blotches on the world-map are not blood but clusters of eternally grateful ‘natives’, and on which the sun stubbornly refuses to set”.

Some readers will remember what Princeton Professor Duncan Spaeth (1868-1954) jokingly remarked about the sun never setting on the British Empire. He said that not even God

would trust an Englishman in the dark.

How a tragedy fuelled Indian loathing of Empire and enabled Gandhi to emerge as a pre-eminent nationalist leader able to bring together different classes, ethnic backgrounds and religions will not be lost on discerning minds throughout India.

But to forgive and forget?

As William Wordsworth said, there are some thoughts and memories that lie “too deep for tears.”

A thorough reading of this well-written, fact packed, beautifully illustrated and keenly researched and clearly indexed book will convince most readers that the tragic and utterly unnecessary events at Amritsar 100 years ago this month is one of them.

CT

*Trevor Grundy is an English author and journalist who lives and works in Canterbury, England.*

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Be it Jacob Rees-Mogg or Nigel Farage, blusterers and braggarts are rewarded with platforms that distort our political debate, writes **George Monbiot**

# How the media let malicious idiots take over

**I**f our politics is becoming less rational, crueller and more divisive, this rule of public life is partly to blame: the more disgracefully you behave, the bigger the platform the media will give you.

If you are caught lying, cheating, boasting or behaving like an idiot, you'll be flooded with invitations to appear on current affairs programmes. If you play straight, don't expect the phone to ring.

In an age of 24-hour news, declining ratings and intense competition, the commodity in greatest demand is noise. Never mind the content, never mind the facts: all that now counts is impact. A loudmouthed buffoon, already the object of public outrage, is a far more bankable asset than someone who knows what they're talking about. So the biggest platforms are populated by blusterers and braggarts.

The media is the mirror in which we see ourselves. With every glance, our self-image subtly changes.

When the BBC launched its new Scotland channel recently, someone had the bright idea of asking Mark Meechan – who calls himself Count Dankula – to appear on two of its discussion programmes. His sole claim to fame is being fined for circulating a video showing how he had trained his girlfriend's dog to raise its paw in a Nazi salute when he shouted: "Sieg heil!" and "Gas the Jews". The episodes had to be ditched after a storm of complaints. This could be seen as an embarrassment for the BBC. Or it could be seen as a triumph, as the channel attracted massive publicity a few days after its launch.

**T**he best thing to have happened to the career of William Sitwell, the then-editor of *Waitrose* magazine, was the scandal he caused when he sent a highly unprofessional, juvenile email to a freelance journalist, Selene Nelson, who was pitching an article on vegan food. "How about a series

on killing vegans, one by one. Ways to trap them? How to interrogate them properly? Expose their hypocrisy? Force-feed them meat," he asked her. He was obliged to resign. As a result of the furore, he was snapped up by the *Telegraph* as its new food critic, with a front-page launch and expensive publicity shoot.

Last June, the scandal merchant Isabel Oakeshott was exposed for withholding a cache of emails detailing Leave. EU co-founder Arron Banks' multiple meetings with Russian officials, which might have been of interest to the Electoral Commission's investigation into the financing of the Brexit campaign.

During the following days she was invited on to BBC Question Time and other outlets, platforms she used to extol the virtues of Brexit.

By contrast, the journalist who exposed her, Carole Cadwalladr, has been largely frozen out by the BBC.

This is not the first time





**Jacob Rees-Mogg**

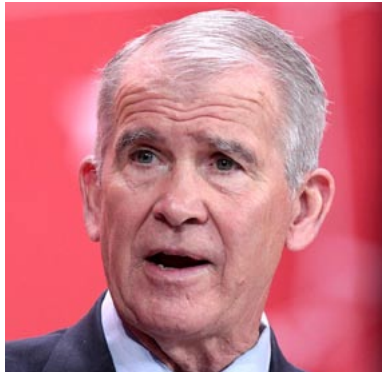
Oakeshott appears to have been rewarded for questionable behaviour. Following the outrage caused by her unevidenced (and almost certainly untrue) story that David Cameron put his penis in a dead pig’s mouth, Paul Dacre, the then editor of the *Daily Mail*, promoted her to political editor-at-large.

The Conservative MP Mark Francois became hot media property the moment he made a complete ass of himself on BBC News.

He ripped up a letter from the German-born head of Airbus that warned about the consequences of Brexit, while announcing: “My father, Reginald Francois, was a D-Day veteran. He never submitted to bullying by any German, and neither will his son.” Now he’s all over the BBC.

In the US, the phenomenon is more advanced. G Gordon Liddy served 51 months in prison as a result of his role in the Watergate conspiracy, organising the burglary of the Democratic National committee headquarters.

When he was released, he used his notoriety to launch a



**Oliver North**

lucrative career. He became the host of a radio show syndicated to 160 stations, and a regular guest on current affairs programmes.

Oliver North, who came to public attention for his leading role in the Iran-Contra scandal, also landed a syndicated radio programme, as well as a newspaper column, and was employed by Fox as a television show host and regular commentator.

Similarly, Darren Grimes, in the UK, is widely known only for the £20,000 fine he received for his activities during the Brexit campaign. Now he’s being used by Sky as a pundit.

**T**he most revolting bigots, such as Tucker Carlson and Donald Trump, built their public profiles on the media platforms they were given by attacking women, people of colour and vulnerable minorities.

Trump leveraged his notoriety all the way to the White House. Boris Johnson is taking the same track, using carefully calibrated outrage to keep himself in the public eye.



**Nigel Farage**

On both sides of the Atlantic, the unscrupulous, duplicitous and preposterous are brought to the fore, as programme-makers seek to generate noise. Malicious clowns are invited to discuss issues of the utmost complexity.

Ludicrous twerps are sought out and lionised. The BBC used its current affairs programmes to turn Nigel Farage and Jacob Rees-Mogg into reality TV stars, and now they have the nation in their hands.

My hope is that eventually the tide will turn. People will become so sick of the charlatans and exhibitionists who crowd the airwaves that the BBC and other media will be forced to reconsider. But while we wait for a resurgence of sense in public life, the buffoons who have become the voices of the nation drive us towards a no-deal Brexit and a host of other disasters. **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](http://www.monbiot.com)

The failure of news organisations such as the New York Times and the Washington Post to vigorously defend Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange will soon come back to haunt them, writes **Chris Hedges**

# Chelsea Manning and the New Inquisition

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**T**HE US government, determined to extradite and try Julian Assange for espionage, must find a way to separate what Assange and WikiLeaks did in publishing classified material leaked to them by Chelsea Manning from what the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* did in publishing the same material. There is no federal law that prohibits the press from publishing government secrets. It is a crime, however, to steal them. The long persecution of Manning, who on March 8 was sent back to jail for refusing to testify before a grand jury, is about this issue.

If Manning, a former Army private, admits she was instructed by WikiLeaks and Assange in how to obtain and pass on the leaked material, which exposed US war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, the publisher could be tried for the theft of classified documents. The prosecution of government whistleblowers was accelerated during the Obama administration, which under

the Espionage Act charged eight people with leaking to the media – Thomas Drake, Shama Leibowitz, Stephen Kim, Manning, Donald Sachtleben, Jeffrey Sterling, John Kiriakou and Edward Snowden. By the time Donald Trump took office, the vital connection between investigative reporters and sources inside the government had been severed.

**M**anning, who worked as an Army intelligence analyst in Iraq in 2009, provided WikiLeaks with more than 500,000 documents copied from military and government archives, including the “Collateral Murder” video footage of an Army helicopter gunning down a group of unarmed civilians that included two Reuters journalists. She was arrested in 2010 and found guilty in 2013.

The campaign to criminalise whistleblowing has, by default, left the exposure of government lies, fraud and crimes to those who have the skills or access,

as Manning and Edward Snowden did, needed to hack into or otherwise obtain government electronic documents. This is why hackers, and those who publish their material such as Assange and WikiLeaks, are being relentlessly persecuted. The goal of the corporate state is to shroud in total secrecy the inner workings of power, especially those activities that violate the law. Movement toward this goal is very far advanced. The failure of news organisations such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* to vigorously defend Manning and Assange will soon come back to haunt them. The corporate state hardly intends to stop with Manning and Assange. The target is the press itself.

“If we actually had a functioning judicial system and an independent press, Manning would have been a witness for the prosecution against the war criminals he helped expose”, I wrote after I and Cornel West attended Manning’s sentencing in 2013 at Fort Meade,





**BACK IN JAIL:** “If we actually had a functioning judicial system and an independent press, Manning would have been a witness for the prosecution against the war criminals he helped expose”.

Md. “He would not have been headed, bound and shackled, to the military prison at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. His testimony would have ensured that those who waged illegal war, tortured, lied to the public, monitored our electronic communications and ordered the gunning down of unarmed civilians in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen were sent

to Fort Leavenworth’s cells. If we had a functioning judiciary the hundreds of rapes and murders Manning made public would be investigated. The officials and generals who lied to us when they said they did not keep a record of civilian dead would be held to account for the 109,032 ‘violent deaths’ in Iraq, including those of 66,081 civilians. The pilots in the ‘Col-

lateral Murder’ video, which showed the helicopter attack on unarmed civilians in Baghdad that left nine dead, including two Reuters journalists, would be court-martialed”.

Manning has always insisted her leak of the classified documents and videos was prompted solely by her own conscience. She has refused to implicate Assange and WikiLeaks. Early



in March, although President Barack Obama in 2010 commuted her 35-year sentence after she served seven years, she was jailed again for refusing to answer questions before a secret grand jury investigating Assange and WikiLeaks.

While incarcerated previously, Manning endured long periods in solitary confinement and torture. She twice attempted to commit suicide in prison. She knows from painful experience the myriad ways the system can break you psychologically and physically. And yet she has steadfastly refused to give false testimony in court on behalf of the government.

Her moral probity and courage are perhaps the last thin line of defense for WikiLeaks and its publisher, whose health is deteriorating in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, where he has been holed up since 2012.

Manning – who was known as Bradley Manning in the Army – has undergone gender reassignment surgery and needs frequent medical monitoring. Judge Claude M. Hilton, however, dismissed a request by her lawyers for house arrest.

Manning was granted immunity by prosecutors of the Eastern District of Virginia, and because she had immunity she was unable to invoke the Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination or to have her attorney present. The judge found her in contempt of court and sent her to a federal facility in

Alexandria, Va. Hilton, who has long been a handmaiden of the military and intelligence organs, has vowed to hold her there until she agrees to testify or until the grand jury is disbanded, which could mean 18 months or longer behind bars. Manning said any questioning of her by the grand jury is a violation of First, Fourth and Sixth Amendment rights. She said she will not cooperate with the grand jury.

“All of the substantive questions pertained to my disclosures of information to the public in 2010 – answers I provided in extensive testimony, during my court-martial in 2013”, she

**“I will not participate in a secret process that has been historically used to entrap and persecute activists for protected political speech”**

said on March 7, the day before she was jailed.

“I will not comply with this, or any other grand jury”, she said later in a statement issued from jail. “Imprisoning me for my refusal to answer questions only subjects me to additional punishment for my repeatedly-stated ethical objections to the grand jury system.

“The grand jury’s questions pertained to disclosures from nine years ago and took place six years after an in-depth computer forensics case, in which I testified for almost a full day about these events”. she went on. “I stand by my previous public testimony”.

Manning reiterated that she

“will not participate in a secret process that I morally object to, particularly one that has been historically used to entrap and persecute activists for protected political speech”.

The *New York Times*, Britain’s *Guardian*, Spain’s *El País*, France’s *Le Monde* and Germany’s *Der Spiegel* all published the WikiLeaks files provided by Manning. How could they not? WikiLeaks had shamed them into doing their jobs. But once they took the incendiary material from Manning and Assange, these organisations callously abandoned them. No doubt they assume that by

joining the lynch mob organised against the two they will be spared. They must not read history. What is taking place is a series of incremental steps designed to strangle the press and

cement into place an American version of China’s totalitarian capitalism.

President Trump has often proclaimed his deep animus for news outlets such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, referring to them as the “enemy of the people”. Any legal tools given to the administration to shut down these news outlets, or at least hollow them of content, will be used eagerly by the president.

The prosecutions of government whistleblowers under the Espionage Act, warrantless wiretapping, monitoring of the communications of Americans and the persecution of Manning and Assange are parts of an

interconnected process of preventing any of us from peering at the machinery of state. The resulting secrecy is vital for totalitarian systems. The global elites, their ruling ideology of neoliberalism exposed as a con, have had enough of us examining and questioning their abuses, pillage and crimes.

“The national security state can try to reduce our activity”, Assange told me during one of our meetings at the embassy in London. “It can close the neck a little tighter. But there are three forces working against it. The first is the massive surveillance required to protect its communication, including the nature of its cryptology. In the military everyone now has an ID card with a little chip on it, so you know who is logged into what.

“A system this vast is prone to deterioration and breakdown. Secondly, there is widespread knowledge not only of how to leak, but how to leak and not be caught, how to even avoid suspicion that you are leaking. The military and intelligence systems collect a vast amount of information and move it around quickly. This means you can also get it out quickly. There will always be people within the system that have an agenda to defy authority. Yes, there are general deterrents, such as when the DOJ [Department of Justice] prosecutes and indicts someone.

“They can discourage people from engaging in this behaviour. But the opposite is also true. When that behaviour is successful it is an example. It

encourages others. This is why they want to eliminate all who provide this encouragement”.

“The medium-term perspective is very good”, he said. “The education of young people takes place on the internet. You cannot hire anyone who is skilled in any field without them having been educated on the internet. The military, the CIA, the FBI, all have no choice but to hire from a pool of people that have been educated on the internet. This means they are hiring our moles in vast numbers. And this means that these organisations will see their capacity to control information diminish as more and more people with our values are hired”.

**T**he long term is not so sanguine. Assange, along with three co-authors – Jacob Appelbaum, Andy Müller-Maguhn and Jérémie Zimmermann – wrote a book titled *Cyberpunks: Freedom and the Future of the Internet*. It warns that we are “galloping into a new transnational dystopia”. The internet has become not only a tool to educate, they write, but the mechanism to create a “Post-modern Surveillance Dystopia” that is supranational and dominated by global corporate power. This new system of global control will “merge global humanity into one giant grid of mass surveillance and mass control.”

“All communications will be surveilled, permanently recorded, permanently tracked, each individual in all their

interactions permanently identified as that individual to this new Establishment, from birth to death”, Assange says in the book. “I think that can only produce a very controlling atmosphere”.

“How can a normal person be free within that system?” he asks. “[He or she] simply cannot, it’s impossible”.

It is only through encryption that we can protect ourselves, the authors argue, and only by breaking through the digital walls of secrecy erected by the power elite can we expose the abuses of power. But ultimately, they say, as the tools of the state become more sophisticated, even these mechanisms of opposition will be difficult and perhaps impossible to use.

“The internet, our greatest tool of emancipation”, Assange writes, “has been transformed into the most dangerous facilitator of totalitarianism we have ever seen.”

That is where we are headed. A few resist. Assange and Manning are two. Those who stand by passively as they are persecuted will be next. **CT**

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**Chris Hedges** spent nearly two decades as a foreign correspondent in Central America, the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. He was part of a New York Times team of reporters awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 2002. He also received the Amnesty International Global Award for Human Rights Journalism in 2002. This essay was first published at [www.truthdig.com](http://www.truthdig.com)









# When a million Brits said **No!** to Brexit

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Photographs by  
Ron Fassbender



**I**t was a sight to behold: a million people marching in a five-hour street-clogging carnival of dissent through the London streets on March 23, just a week before the UK had originally planned its now unsteady and unseemly escape from the “shackles” of the European Union.

Supporters of The People’s Vote campaign – hailed as a lesson in participatory democracy – journeyed from across the country: by cars, trains and hundreds of specially chartered buses, united by a desire to “take back Brexit” and stay in Europe, and by their contempt for the majority of voters who had ticked the “leave” box in the 2016 referendum, a decision that had begun the UK’s headlong slide into political buffoonery.

The ordinary man-(and woman)-in-the-street, campaigners claimed, had had enough of the inde-

cisive dithering of Prime Minister Theresa May and the devious tricks of her arch rivals Boris Johnson, Michael Gove and Jacob Rees-Mogg in the ruling Conservative Party. Their action was a last-ditch effort to force a new referendum that, they hoped, would reverse the vote to leave.

The march was a stirring sight, but some curious onlookers looked on and wondered about the potential consequences:

What if the campaigners get their new referendum – and WIN? Will the people who voted to leave Europe in the 2016 referendum enlist two-million marchers to demand a third vote? Then, will the losers accept a 2-1 defeat, go home and get on with life? Or will they go back onto the streets, a formerly good-humoured crowd transformed into a baying mob? We’ll see . . .

*Tony Sutton*

















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HOW ABOUT  
AN EXTENSION?



Freeing companies from the “red tape” of regulation will inevitably lead to a Wild West in air travel, where accidents like the Ethiopian and Lion crashes occur more frequently, writes **Alan McLeod**

# Why airlines need outside regulators

**T**HE fatal crash of Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302, just months after the Lion Air Flight 610 crash in Indonesia, has led to governments and airlines around the world grounding their Boeing 737 Max 8 aircraft amid concerns that, after two crashes killing 346 people, the model is unsafe to fly. Airlines are attempting to cancel their orders of the aircraft, citing public-safety fears.

However, the 737 Max is already one of Boeing’s best sellers, with 376 planes delivered and an impressive 4,636 more ordered but undelivered. American, United and Southwest Airlines are among the top users of the model, although it is flown around the world by carriers such as Air Canada, Air China and the European giant Ryanair.

While the inquiry is ongoing, it has been revealed that the two planes lacked optional “extra” safety features that might have saved them from their fate. Neither the Ethiopian Airlines nor

Lion Air planes were equipped with sensors or software to prevent the engine from stalling.

Why? Because Boeing charges airlines extra for them.

It transpires that such extra, non-standard features are a huge money-spinner for the aerospace giant. Some of these extras, including luxury seating or more toilets, are more comfort-oriented.

However, many others are directly related to vehicle or passenger safety. For example, Boeing charges extra for a second fire extinguisher in the cargo hold, considered essential by Japanese authorities but not by the FAA.

**A**s one industry expert said, “There are so many things that should not be optional, and many airlines want the cheapest airplane you can get,” adding that extra safety features had become a “great profit center” for the Chicago-based manufacturer. Many carriers choose profits over safety.

This is, unfortunately, the latest example of an industry constantly cutting corners in order to increase profits, in the process risking all of its passengers’ lives. Chief among the corners cut involve pilots’ pay and working conditions.

Acclaimed US Airways pilot Chesley Sullenberger, who expertly landed his stricken plane in the Hudson River, testified before Congress that he had suffered a 40 percent reduction in pay and that most pilots cannot maintain a middle-class lifestyle without having to work multiple jobs on the side. His message was explicit: if this pilots’ pay slashing continues, there will be an increase in crashes.

It is not uncommon for pilots to be on food stamps or to literally make less than pizza-delivery staff. In training, pilots rack up huge levels of debt, something that airlines use as a mechanism of control. Particularly on budget airlines like Ryanair, pilots are not technically employees of the compa-



**GROUNDING:** WestJet Boeing 737 MAX 8 lands in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Photo: Wikimedia.org

ny, but on temporary contracts, allowing airlines to pay them less and provide fewer benefits. Pilots are not even entitled to a free bottle of water while working and cabin crew are threatened if they do not reach sales targets. This creates a race to the bottom, as legacy airlines have to cut costs to compete with their budget competitors.

Industries have a long history of putting their own interests before the safety of consumers, buyers or passengers. The automotive industry opposed Ralph Nader's campaign to make seat belts mandatory and fought against the adoption of catalytic converters and airbags.

The infamous Ford Pinto case is another classic example of the brutal logic of capitalism, where corporations are

by law required to maximize short-term profits and ignore all other considerations.

Internal company documents showed that Ford knew its Pinto's gas tank was highly susceptible to bursting into flames or exploding, but it calculated that the lawsuits resulting from the deaths would be cheaper than spending a few extra dollars per car remedying the problem, resulting in up to 900 people burning to death.

**B**ound by laws and the competition of the market, corporations cannot be trusted to put human life before profit. Freeing companies from the "red tape" of regulation will inevitably lead to a Wild West in air travel, where accidents like the Ethiopian and Lion crashes oc-

cur more frequently.

The merciless logic of capitalism is on display again with the Boeing case, with the business press advising their readers to buy more Boeing stock as the company has a near-monopolistic grip over the market such that there is no alternative; it is "too big to fail." Boeing CEO Dennis Muilenburg personally lobbied President Donald Trump, urging him not to ground the 737 Max. After all, that wouldn't be good for business. **CT**

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**Alan MacLeod is an academic and writer for Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting. His book, *Bad News From Venezuela: Twenty Years of Fake News and Misreporting* was published in April.**



The most important lesson of all for the left is that support among its ranks for Robert Mueller's failed Russiagate inquiry against Donald Trump was foolhardy in the extreme, writes **Jonathan Cook**

# Lessons from the Russiagate inquiry

**H**ERE are three important lessons for the progressive left to consider now that it is clear the inquiry by special counsel Robert Mueller into Russiagate is never going to uncover collusion between Donald Trump's camp and the Kremlin in the 2016 presidential election.

## 1. Painting the pig's face

The left never had a dog in this race. This was always an in-house squabble between different wings of the establishment. Late-stage capitalism is in terminal crisis, and the biggest problem facing our corporate elites is how to emerge from this crisis with their power intact. One wing wants to make sure the pig's face remains painted, the other is happy simply getting its snout deeper into the trough while the food lasts.

Russiagate was never about substance, it was about who gets to image-manage the decline of a turbo-charged, self-harming neoliberal capitalism.

The leaders of the Democratic party are less terrified of Trump and what he represents than they are of us and what we might do if we understood how they have rigged the political and economic system to their permanent advantage.

It may look like Russiagate was a failure, but it was actually a success. It deflected the left's attention from endemic corruption within the leadership of the Democratic party, which supposedly represents the left. It rechannelled the left's political energies instead towards the convenient bogeymen targets of Trump and Russian president Vladimir Putin.

**W**hat Mueller found – all he was ever going to find – was marginal corruption in the Trump camp. And that was inevitable because Washington is mired in corruption. In fact, what Mueller revealed was the most exceptional forms of corruption among Trump's team while obscuring the run-of-

the-mill stuff that would have served as a reminder of the endemic corruption infecting the Democratic leadership, too.

An anti-corruption investigation would have run much deeper and exposed far more. It would have highlighted the Clinton Foundation, and the role of mega-donors like James Simons, George Soros and Haim Saban who funded Hillary's campaign with one aim in mind: to get their issues into a paid-for national "consensus".

Further, in focusing on the Trump camp – and relative minnows like Paul Manafort and Roger Stone – the Russiagate inquiry actually served to shield the Democratic leadership from an investigation into the much worse corruption revealed in the content of the DNC emails. It was the leaking / hacking of those emails that provided the rationale for Mueller's investigations.

What should have been at the front and centre of any inquiry was how the Democratic party sought to rig its primaries to



prevent party members selecting anyone but Hillary as their presidential candidate.

So, in short, Russiagate has been two years of wasted energy by the left, energy that could have been spent both targeting Trump for what he is really doing rather than what it is imagined he has done, and targeting the Democratic leadership for its own, equally corrupt practices.

## 2. Trump empowered

But it's far worse than that. It is not just that the left wasted two years of political energy on Rus-

siagate. At the same time, they empowered Trump, breathing life into his phoney arguments that he is the anti-establishment president, a people's president the elites are determined to destroy.

Trump faces opposition from within the establishment not because he is "anti-establishment" but because he refuses to decorate the pig's snout with lipstick. He is tearing the mask off late-stage capitalism's greed and self-destructiveness. And he is doing so not because he wants to reform or overthrow turbo-charged capitalism but because he wants to remove

the last, largely cosmetic constraints on the system so that he and his friends can plunder with greater abandon – and destroy the planet more quickly.

The other wing of the neo-liberal establishment, the one represented by the Democratic party leadership, fears that exposing capitalism in this way – making explicit its inherently brutal, wrist-slitting tendencies – will awaken the masses, that over time it will risk turning them into revolutionaries. Democratic party leaders fear Trump chiefly because of the threat he poses to the image of the political and economic

system they have so lovingly crafted so that they can continue enriching themselves and their children.

Trump's genius – his only genius – is to have appropriated, and misappropriated, some of the language of the left to advance the interests of the one percent. When he attacks the corporate “liberal” media for having a harmful agenda, for serving as propagandists, he is not wrong.

When he rails against the identity politics cultivated by “liberal” elites over the past two decades – suggesting that it has weakened the US – he is not wrong. But he is right for the wrong reasons.

The corporate media, and the journalists they employ, are propagandists – for a system that keeps them wealthy. When Trump was a Republican primary candidate, the entire corporate media loved him because he was TV's equivalent of clickbait, just as he had been since reality TV began to usurp the place of current affairs programmes and meaningful political debate.

The handful of corporations that own the US media – and much of corporate America besides – are there both to make ever-more money by expanding profits and to maintain the credibility of a political and economic system that lets them make ever more money.

The “liberal” corporate media shares the values of the Democratic party leadership. In other words, it is heavily invested in making sure

the pig doesn't lose its lipstick. By contrast, Fox News and the shock-jocks, like Trump, prioritise making money in the short term over the long-term credibility of a system that gives them licence to make money. They care much less whether the pig's face remains painted.

So Trump is right that the “liberal” media is undemocratic and that it is now propagandising against him.

But he is wrong about why. In fact, all corporate media – whether “liberal” or not, whether against Trump or for him – is undemocratic. All of the media propagandises for a rotten system that keeps the vast majority of Americans impoverished. All of the media cares more for Trump and the elites he belongs to than it cares for the 99 percent.

**S**imilarly, with identity politics. Trump says he wants to make (a white) America great again, and uses the left's obsession with identity as a way to energise a backlash from his own supporters.

Just as too many on the left sleep-walked through the past two years waiting for Mueller – a former head of the FBI, the US secret police, for chrissakes! – to save them from Trump, they have been manipulated by liberal elites into the political cul-de-sac of identity politics.

Just as Mueller put the left on standby, into waiting-for-the-Messiah mode, so simple-minded, pussy-hat-wearing identity politics has been cultivated in

the supposedly liberal bastions of the corporate media and Ivy League universities – the same universities that have turned out generations of Muellers and Clintons – to deplete the left's political energies.

While we argue over who is most entitled and most victimised, the establishment has carried on raping and pillaging Third World countries, destroying the planet and siphoning off the wealth produced by the rest of us.

These liberal elites long ago worked out that if we could be made to squabble among ourselves about who was most entitled to scraps from the table, they could keep gorging on the main course.

The “liberal” elites exploited identity politics to keep us divided by pacifying the most marginalised with the offer of a few additional crumbs. Trump has exploited identity politics to keep us divided by inflaming tensions as he reorders the hierarchy of “privilege” in which those crumbs are offered. In the process, both wings of the elite have averted the danger that class consciousness and real solidarity might develop and challenge their privileges.

### 3. The Corbyn experience

But the most important lesson of all for the left is that support among its ranks for the Mueller inquiry against Trump was foolhardy in the extreme.

Not only was the inquiry doomed to failure – in fact, not only was it designed to fail, but



it has set a precedent for future politicised investigations that will be used against the progressive left should it make any significant political gains. And an inquiry against the real left will be far more aggressive and far more “productive” than Mueller was.

If there is any doubt about that look to the UK. Britain now has within reach of power the first truly progressive politician in living memory, someone seeking to represent the 99 percent, not the one percent. But Jeremy Corbyn’s experience as the leader of the Labour party – massively swelling the membership’s ranks to make it the largest political party in Europe – has been eye-popping.

I have documented Corbyn’s travails over the past four years at the hands of the British political and media establishment.

Corbyn, even more so than the small, new wave of insurgency politicians in the US Congress, has faced a relentless barrage of criticism from across the UK’s similarly narrow political spectrum. He has been attacked by both the rightwing media and the supposedly “liberal” media. He has been savaged by the ruling Conservative party, as was to be expected, and by his own Parliamentary Labour Party. The UK’s two-party system has been exposed as just as hollow as the US one.

The ferocity of the attacks has been necessary because, unlike the Democratic Party’s success in keeping a progressive leftwinger away from the presidential campaign, the UK

system accidentally allowed a socialist to slip past the gatekeepers. All hell has broken out ever since.

What is so noticeable is that Corbyn is rarely attacked over his policies – mainly because they have wide popular appeal. Instead he has been hounded over fanciful claims that, despite being a life-long and very visible anti-racism campaigner, he suddenly morphed into an outright antisemite the moment party members elected him leader.

I will not rehearse again how implausible these claims are. Simply look through my previous blog posts should you be in any doubt.

**B**ut what is amazing is that, just as with the Mueller inquiry, much of the British left – including prominent figures like the Guardian’s Owen Jones and the supposedly countercultural Novara Media – have sapped their political energies in trying to placate or support those leading the preposterous claims that Labour under Corbyn has become “institutionally antisemitic”. Again, the promotion of a simple-minded identity politics – which pits the rights of Palestinians against the sensitivities of Zionist Jews about Israel – was exploited to divide the left.

The more the left has conceded to this campaign, the angrier, the more implacable, the more self-righteous Corbyn’s opponents have become

– to the point that the Labour party is now in serious danger of imploding.

Were the US to get its own Corbyn as president, he or she would undoubtedly face a Mueller-style inquiry, and one far more effective at securing the president’s impeachment than this one was ever going to be.

That is not because a leftwing US president would be more corrupt or more likely to have colluded with a foreign power. As the UK example shows, it would be because the entire media system – from the *New York Times* to Fox News – would be against such a president. And as the UK example also shows, it would be because the leaderships of both the Republican and Democratic parties would work as one to finish off such a president.

In the combined success-failure of the Mueller inquiry, the left has an opportunity to understand in a much more sophisticated way how real power works and in whose favour it is exercised. It is moment that should be clarifying – if we are willing to open our eyes to Mueller’s real lessons. **CT**

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Because male migrants earn more money to send home than females, families in some post-communist countries use sex-selective abortion to improve their lives, writes **Louise Grogan**

# Breeding young men for export

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**L**ARGE-SCALE migration from the poorest countries of Europe, and parts of Asia, began immediately following the collapse of communism in 1990.

State pensions and public health provisions are paltry in these countries, and domestic job opportunities scarce.

That means the migration of young people has become an important part of household survival strategies as younger family members leave and then send wages back home. Those wages are known as “remittance” income.

The majority of all international migrants are male. The reasons for this may be partly cultural and partly economic.

Male migrants generally earn higher wages. And there’s some evidence that reality is serving as an incentive for families in these struggling economies to use sex-selective abortion to try

to improve their lives. The lack of domestic jobs in post-communist countries makes bearing sons even more important to the security of parents as they age. Even before international migration was possible, responsibility for aging parents resided with adult sons.

And so in the absence of functioning social security and health systems, and with the lack of local jobs, the motivation for bearing sons has undoubtedly increased.

**I**n fact, among women aged 40 and older in 2002, 40 per cent had at least one son living abroad. My calculations, using data from the Albania Institute of Statistics and the 2012 World Bank Living Standards Monitoring Survey, suggest that each additional male birth increases the number of sons



residing abroad by about 0.18 per cent

The data also show that more than 50 per cent of women with sons abroad had received remittances in the previous year. Only 23 per cent of daughters residing abroad had sent wages



Photo: Johann Walter Bantz/Unsplash

back home.

Within migrant-sending countries, the availability of prenatal technology and sex-selection abortion has made the economic incentives to bear sons more apparent.

Masculinised sex ratios at

birth have been well-documented for Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, for Nepal and for Albania, where increasing numbers of male babies are being born into both Christian and Muslim families.

In both more traditional and

tribal Albanian regions of the country, and in its urbanized central and south regions, there are more male births than the biological norm of 105:100 male-to-female live births. According to the 2011 census, the ratio for children under five was 109 boys



to 100 girls, while the ratio for children aged five to nine was 119:100.

International migration and increased household size also appear to be household survival strategies that transcend cultures, religion and recent economic history.

And the prevalence of multiple generations living in one household appears to be common to countries that are receiving lots of remittance income.

Nepal, for example, does not share the recent communist history of some eastern European or mid-Asian countries, but it also has both a high fraction of GDP from remittance income (28.3 per cent in 2017) and a high number of multiple-generation households.

More than 95 per cent of Nepalis obtaining permits to migrate are male. Remittance income in 2017 was greater than the sum of official development assistance and foreign direct investment.

The economic motives for son preference, therefore, appear to trump religious and cultural considerations. As mentioned, wages of unskilled males, after all, are much higher in destination countries than at home.

The trend underscores the difficult lives of women in countries that are reliant on remittance income from the boys and men who have gone abroad.

Cultural norms that dictate brides go live with the family of their new husbands are particularly strong in Albania, Armenia, Tajikistan and

Kyrgyzstan.

In Tajikistan, young men leave to work in Russia within months of marrying. The newlywed bride resides with the young groom's parents and bears responsibility for most domestic tasks in the new household. But remittance money is sent by the young man to his parents, not to his wife.

Daughters seldom work, and are not welcomed back into their birth homes in the event of divorce. Children receive relatively little schooling, since resources are focused on the oldest generations.

Why is this happening?

### **The economic motives for son preference, appear to trump religious and cultural considerations. Wages of unskilled males are much higher in Destination countries than at home**

Nearly 30 years after market liberalisation began, most post-communist countries have failed to create environments in which private sector employment thrives.

**A**s a result, remittances from international migration remain a major source of household income. Household members are sent abroad to provide a steady flow of international currency to support those remaining.

Wage gaps among the countries in the region are a key driver for international migration. Wages are much higher in nearby Russia than

in Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan, for example. They are also much higher in Italy and Greece than in Albania.

In 2013, remittances reached a high of 49 per cent of GDP in Tajikistan. In 2017, Kyrgyzstan was the country most dependent on remittances. Nearly 33 per cent of the country's 2017 GDP came from this source. And in Albania from 2008-2017, remittances averaged 9.1 per cent of GDP.

Migration and remittances provide many benefits to receiving households and countries. Migrants provide insurance against shocks to household income, such as poor harvests or illness of household members. As well, they improve the spending power of remaining household members.

But there are several less desirable effects of reliance on remittance income. Governments are less pressed to create jobs, for example. Those who might foment unrest – young unemployed males – are outside the country. They're not around to participate in protests to demand better living conditions and job opportunities.

Remittances are not often spent on investments in children's education or to start up new businesses in home countries. Instead, the money largely goes to housing and the purchase of imported goods. This does not create long-run growth or generate tax revenue for the construction of social safety

nets. The value of remittances varies with economic and political conditions in migrant-receiving countries. As well, migration may have major demographic consequences.

The nature of markets for unskilled labour is likely important. For example, female Tajik migrants in Russia are concentrated in low-paying service industry jobs. To take such jobs, they must speak Russian. Males are concentrated in the construction sector, where Russian language knowledge is less essential, and wages much higher.

Through tax-financed contributions to organisations including the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, western nations can support policies that reduce reliance on migration.

**I**nstitutional environments that foster private sector job creation may both reduce the importance of international remittances and increase the relative status of women in society.

There is evidence from Vietnam that changes in local

labour market conditions may also change attitudes towards female children.

As a condition of concessional international loans, the boards of international organisations should press hard for reforms that will create jobs domestically. Breeding young men for export has never been and should never be a successful economic development strategy. **CT**

*Louise Grogan is a professor at the University of Guelph. This article first appeared at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)*



# Get your **FREE** subscription to **ColdType**

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The decisive lesson of the Kosovo war and what has followed is the necessity of building an international, socialist antiwar movement based upon the working class writes **Bill Van Auken**

# 20 years since the bombs fell on Yugoslavia

**M**ARCH 24 marked 20 years since the US and NATO launched a one-sided war against Yugoslavia, bombing Serbia and its capital Belgrade for 78 straight days. Factories, schools and hospitals were destroyed, along with bridges, roads and the electrical grid in a bid to bomb the Serbian population into submission to US and Western European imperialism's domination of the Balkans.

The airstrikes killed around 2,500 people and wounded another 12,500 according to Serbian estimates.

One of the US-NATO airstrikes used laser-guided bombs to take out a railway bridge in southern Serbia, killing at least 10 people on a passenger train. Another slaughtered 21 people in a nursing home. And a deliberate strike on the TV broadcaster RTS in Belgrade took the lives of 16 civilian workers.

In one of the most provocative acts of the war, the US carried out a strike on the Chinese

embassy in Belgrade, killing three people. Washington claimed that the bombing was an “accident,” but Beijing and the Chinese population rightly saw it as an act of aggression that foreshadowed an escalating US military buildup against China.

**O**peration Noble Anvil, as the bombing campaign was dubbed, was launched without any authorisation from the United Nations after Serbia's President Slobodan Milosevic refused to accept the so-called Rambouillet Agreement, which in reality was a US-NATO ultimatum that demanded Belgrade allow NATO troops to occupy the province of Kosovo and be granted free rein over all of Yugoslavia. Even the veteran imperialist war criminal Henry Kissinger acknowledged that the so-called agreement “was a provocation, an excuse to start bombing.”

The war constituted the final chapter in the imperialist dis-

memberment of Yugoslavia, a country that had existed since 1918.

Having pulled the rug out from under the Yugoslav economy, the major imperialist powers encouraged the growth of ethnic nationalism—spearheaded by ex-Yugoslav Stalinist bureaucrats turned communalist capitalist politicians—warming their hands over the fire as they pushed Serbs, Muslims and Croats to slaughter one another, and using Yugoslavia as a testing ground for military intervention and a new generation of so-called precision-guided munitions.

The essential precursor of the war was the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the hands of the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy. During the Cold War, Washington and its NATO allies had supported the unity of Yugoslavia as a counterweight to the influence of the USSR in the lands to its south. But after the Stalinist bureaucracy's drive for capitalist restoration culminated in the breakup of





**Belgrade in flames: Flashback to the US/UN war on Yugoslavia.**

the Soviet Union, the imperialist powers launched a reckless and ultimately catastrophic scramble for the Balkans.

Germany began by recognizing the independence of the Yugoslav republics of Slovenia and Croatia, flexing its newfound muscles as an imperialist power in Europe following its 1990 re-unification. While Washington first opposed the move, it subsequently threw itself into the carve-up by recognizing Bosnia-Herzegovina as an independent “nation” meriting its own state. This set the stage for a bloody conflict between the territory’s three constituent populations—Muslims, Serbs and Croats—and ultimately imperialist

intervention.

Underlying the drive to war over Kosovo was the imperialist imperative of bringing Serbia, the strongest power in the region, to heel in order to solidify US-NATO hegemony.

**T**he war was launched by the Democratic administration of President Bill Clinton under the thoroughly discredited and hypocritical banner of “humanitarian intervention” and the claim that the US and its allies were intervening to stop a massacre of Kosovo’s ethnic Albanian population at the hands of Serbian security forces.

Washington and its European imperialist allies, backed

by a thoroughly pliant capitalist media, cast Serbian leader Milosevic as a new “Hitler” and the Serbian people as a whole as “Nazis,” obscenely comparing the repression in Kosovo to the Holocaust.

Claims that 100,000 ethnic Albanians had been slaughtered that were floated in advance of the US-NATO war were debunked in its aftermath.

The real death toll in Kosovo before US and NATO bombs began to fall was revealed after the war to have been closer to 2,000, with the majority of the killings committed by the armed separatist group, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA)

The KLA, previously classified by Washington as a terror-

ist organization, was elevated in the run-up to the war as the sole legitimate representative of Kosovo's population. Its extensive ties to organized crime throughout Europe as well as to Al Qaeda were swept under the rug as the CIA poured money and arms into the group, which carried out terrorist bombings and ethnic killings against the Serbian population. The KLA, working in close collaboration with its US sponsors, sought to create as much violence and death as possible in order to pave the way to Western intervention.

Twenty years later, the former chief of the KLA, Hashim Thaçi—proclaimed in Washington as “the George Washington of Kosovo”—has headed a succession of governments, even as control of the landlocked mini-state's economy remains in the hands of European Union officials and its territory is still occupied by 4,000 NATO troops, including 600 US soldiers.

Thaçi has been exposed in numerous investigations as the head of a criminal organization involved in drug trafficking and prostitution as well as in the appalling trafficking in human organs “harvested” from captured Serbs. Washington and the EU have repeatedly intervened to prevent him from being prosecuted for war crimes and other criminal activity.

The “humanitarian” intervention to halt “ethnic cleansing” has resulted in massive ethnic cleansing, including the driving out of two-thirds of the 120,000 Roma and Ashkali liv-

**With all its wealth and military power, US and German imperialism have only managed to create a failed state and a government controlled by a mafia**

ing in Kosovo as well as many thousands of ethnic Serbs.

Despite Kosovo being the largest per capita recipient of foreign aid on the planet, the landlocked mini-state remains the poorest territory in Europe, with an official unemployment rate of 30 percent (55 percent for youth) and wages averaging just \$410 a month. With all of its wealth and military power, US and German imperialism have managed to create only a failed state and a government controlled by a mafia.

**N**one of the wounds inflicted upon the former state of Yugoslavia by imperialist intervention have healed. The Balkans remain a powder keg that can be set off at any moment, igniting—as they did in the 20th century—a wider war that can bring in the major powers.

Among the most politically significant features of the 1999 Kosovo war was the unabashed and enthusiastic support lent to the US-NATO bombing of Serbia by former opponents of the American intervention in Vietnam and even self-proclaimed socialists in both Europe and

America. This emerging pseudo left, whose social base was among privileged layers of the middle class, would go on to provide crucial political support to imperialism in similar bloody “humanitarian” regime change operations that have devastated both Libya and Syria.

The World Socialist Web Site and the International Committee of the Fourth International opposed this reactionary outlook from the start, denouncing the onslaught against Yugoslavia as an imperialist war waged to assert US hegemony over the Balkans as part of a re-division of the territories of Eastern Europe and Central Asia left in a political vacuum following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In June of 1999, after the relentless bombing of Serbia forced Belgrade to withdraw security forces from Kosovo and open the way to US-NATO occupation, the World Socialist Web Site warned in a statement by David North, the chairperson of the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party (US) titled “After the Slaughter: Political Lessons of the Balkan War,” “The bombing of Yugoslavia has exposed the real relations that exist between imperialism and small nations.”

The statement continued, “The great indictments of imperialism written in the first years of the twentieth century—those of Hobson, Lenin, Luxemburg and Hilferding—read like contemporary documents. Economically, small nations are at the mercy of the lending agencies and financial institutions of the

major imperialist powers. In the realm of politics, any attempt to assert their independent interests brings with it the threat of devastating military retaliation. With increasing frequency, small states are being stripped of their national sovereignty, compelled to accept foreign military occupation, and submit to forms of rule that are, when all is said and done, of an essentially colonialist character.”

It went on to warn that the “cult of precision-guided munitions” promoted on the basis of the United States’ casualty-free Kosovo war, ignored the more basic tendencies of economic development. “Neither this advantage [in the arms industry] nor the products of this industry can guarantee world domination,” it said. “Despite the sophistication of its weaponry, the financial-industrial foundation of the United States’ preeminent role in the affairs of world capitalism is far less substantial than it was 50 years ago.”

Nearly two decades later, this prognosis has proven correct. For more than a quarter century, the US ruling elite has sought

**For more than a quarter century, the US ruling elite has sought to sustain its global dominance through the uninterrupted and reckless use of military power**

to sustain its global dominance through the uninterrupted and reckless use of military power. This has resulted in a string of failures from Afghanistan to Iraq, Libya and Syria—as well as Kosovo—that have served only to exacerbate the crisis of the global system, while exposing the limitations of American military power.

**T**he US-NATO war in Kosovo has been followed by NATO’s relentless expansion eastward, bringing US troops to the very border of Russia. While still playing the “humanitarian” card on occasion, Washington has jettisoned the “war on terror” as the central rationale for

global US militarism, adopting a strategy of “great power” conflict, openly preparing for war against nuclear-armed Russia and China, as well as potential challenges from its erstwhile allies in Europe and Asia.

The destructive policies pursued by US imperialism are giving rise to an immense growth of social tensions and class struggle around the world, including in Kosovo, which has seen a wave of strikes against the abysmal conditions facing the working class, as well as in the United States itself. This rising movement of the international working class provides the only viable answer to the growing threat of multiple military conflicts across the globe igniting a new world war. The decisive lesson of the Kosovo war and what has followed is the necessity of building an international, socialist anti-war movement based upon the working class. **CT**

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*Bill Van Auken wrote this commentary for the World Socialist Web Site – [www.wsws.org](http://www.wsws.org)*

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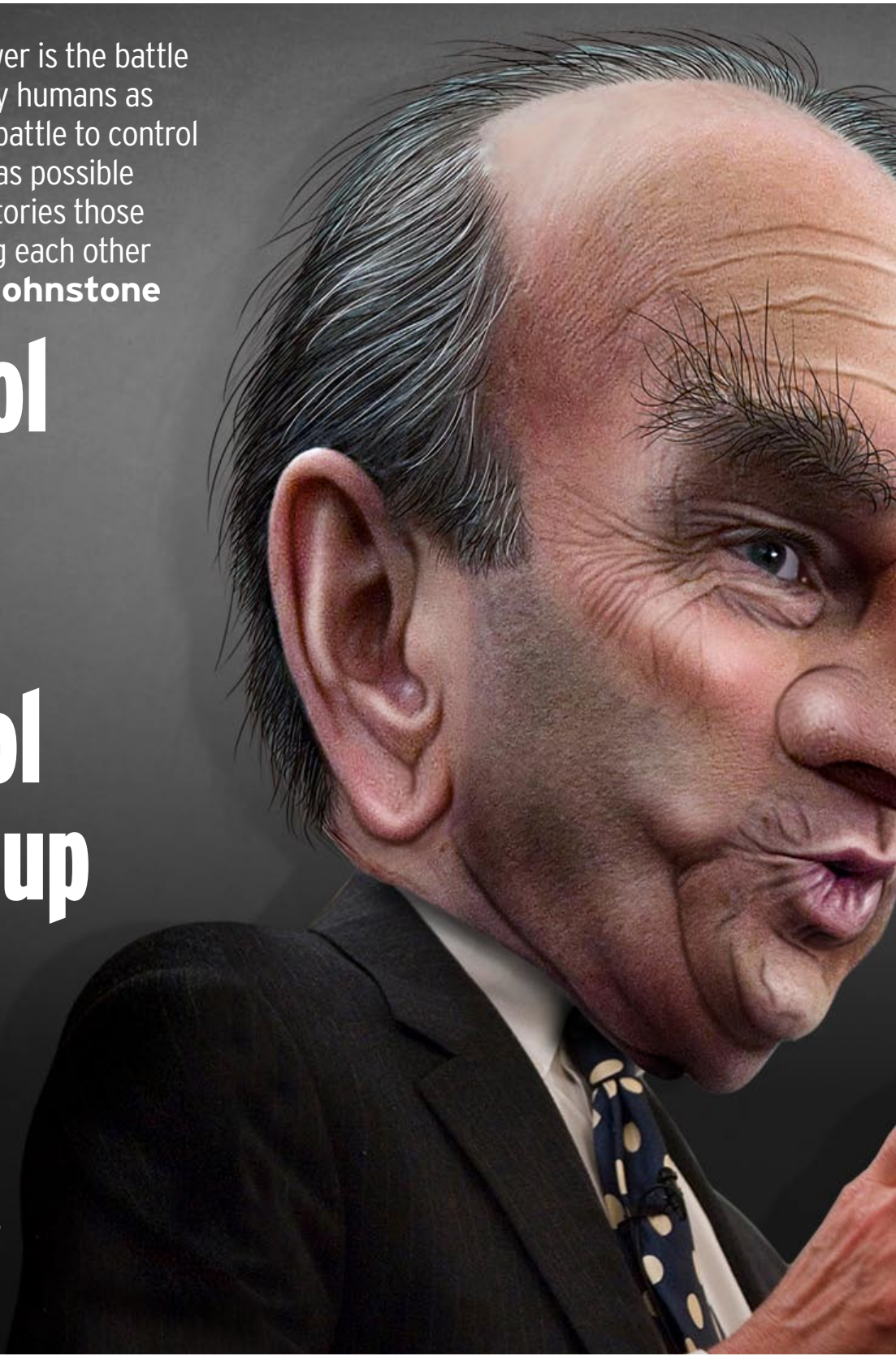


The battle for power is the battle to control as many humans as possible, and the battle to control as many humans as possible is to control the stories those humans are telling each other writes **Caitlin Johnstone**

# Control the story, control the coup

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**Elliott Abrams:**  
War criminal and  
Trump's blustering  
Special Representative  
for Venezuela.





**T**HE Trump administration is working to overthrow the government of Venezuela. Not by military invasion, nor by funnelling thousands of armed militants into the country. Nor even solely with starvation sanctions and CIA ops.

The first and foremost means of overthrowing Venezuela's government being utilised by the United States government is the low-risk, low-cost plan to simply control the stories that everyone tells themselves about who is in charge in Venezuela.

Adept manipulators understand that humans are storytelling animals. The only thing keeping the powerful powerful, keeping money operating the way it operates, and keeping government running the way it runs is the stories we all agree to tell each other about those things. If everyone collectively decided today that poker chips are the new currency and Kim Kardashian is the Supreme Ruler of the Entire World, those stories would be the new reality, and tomorrow we'd all be doing whatever Empress Kim commands and Las Vegas would be the new Wall Street.

The Trump administration is exploiting this exact principle in Venezuela by singling out some guy named Juan and calling him Mister President, despite the fact that he's never received a single vote for that office and holds no actual power.

If they can persuade enough Venezuelans (particularly the ones with the big guns) and the rest of the world's governments

to do the same, then Guaido will indeed become the functional president of the country.

Everything the Trump administration does to Venezuela is done with the goal of controlling the stories people tell about it. They smash the country with starvation sanctions, then tell everyone to believe that Maduro is starving his people. They stage a "humanitarian aid" stunt on Venezuela's border, then they lie and tell everyone that Maduro is blocking all aid to Venezuela and setting aid trucks on fire, because he wants to starve the hungry and kill the sick. It's all about controlling the narrative with the goal of changing who is recognised as the legitimate president of Venezuela.

We saw this illustrated especially clearly in a recent press briefing with the State Department's "Special Representative for Venezuela", war criminal Elliott Abrams. Abrams was asked by a reporter to "explain to us the article under which Mr Guaido declared himself president" because "It is said that it has expired last month."

Indeed, when Guaido declared himself interim president back in January we were told that it would be a month-long position in the interim while a new election is prepared. As Reuters reported at the time, "Venezuela's constitution says if the presidency is determined to be vacant, new elections should be called in 30 days and that the head of the congress should assume the



presidency in the meantime”,

But, since the Trump administration’s coup-by-narrative has not gone as planned, Abrams stumbled all over himself informing the press that the goalposts of the story have been moved:

**Abrams:** As to the Venezuelan constitution, the National Assembly has passed a resolution that states that that 30-day period of interim presidency will not start ending or counting until the day Nicolas Maduro leaves power. So the 30 days doesn’t start now, it starts after Maduro. And they – that’s a resolution of the National Assembly.

**Question:** When did they – they did that after he ...

**Abrams:** They did that – this is roughly a month ago. We could try to find the date for you.

**Question:** When he was – when he was – took the mantle of interim president, that wasn’t there.

**Abrams:** Yes, when – that’s correct. And so people ...

**Question:** Can you do that ex post facto like that?

**Abrams:** When people ask a question how do ...

**Question:** That seems to be like saying I was elected for four years to be president, and then two years in you change the rules so that your term didn’t start – hasn’t even started yet. How does that happen?

**Abrams:** Well, you don’t get a vote because you’re not in the National Assembly.

**Question:** Well, you don’t. You’re not in the National Assembly either.

**Question:** If it matters, does the US view that as constitutional under their system?

**Abrams:** Yes. I mean, we’re taking the – the National Assembly is the only legitimate democratic institution left in Venezuela, and their interpretation of the constitution, as you know, is that as of the date of this alleged term for Maduro, the presidency is vacant. But they have also said that that 30-day period starts when Maduro goes.

**Question:** So Juan Guaido is the interim president of an interim that doesn’t exist yet?

**Abrams:** The 30-day end to his interim presidency starts counting. Because he’s not in power, that’s the problem. Maduro is still there. So they have decided that they will count that from when he actually is in power and Maduro’s gone. I think it’s logical.

**Question:** So then he really isn’t interim president, then?

**Abrams:** He is interim president, but he’s not ...

**Question:** With no power.

**Abrams:** ... able to exercise the powers of the office because Maduro still is there.

**Question:** So their interpretation is that until and unless he actually has the power to run the country, he’s not actually the interim president?

**Abrams:** No. Their interpretation is that the constitution requires a 30-day interim period, but it – those 30 days should not be counted while Maduro is still there exercising the powers of his former office.

So to recap, Guaido is still the

president of Venezuela after his 30-day window closed because his interim presidency doesn’t currently exist, and because he has no power. By those standards, I’m just as much president of Venezuela as Guaido is. When’s my meeting with Mike Pence?

But, of course, facts don’t figure into this equation at all, because this is a coup by narrative. Narrative always takes precedence over fact in these games. They will keep referring to Juan the guy as “President Guaido”, despite the admitted fact that he does not actually have any of the powers or recognition that an actual president has, and despite the fact that there is currently a guy in Caracas who does have all those things. They will keep advancing this narrative control war until it either succeeds or fails, and in the case of the latter they’ll try something else.

The battle for power is the battle to control as many humans as possible, and the battle to control as many humans as possible is to control the stories those humans are telling each other. Humans are storytelling animals, so if you can control the stories you can control the humans. Understand this and you’ll understand the behaviours of governments and media around the world. **CT**

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**Caitlin Johnstone** is an Australian-based blogger. She has a podcast and a new book *Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Preppers*. Follow her at [www.caitlinjohnstone.com](http://www.caitlinjohnstone.com)



# Insights



Margaret Thatcher (right) with friend. Photo: Pubic domain

## Thatcher and the great UK privatisation heist

By **Kenneth Surin**

**M**ARGARET Thatcher was very good at telling tall tales. Ukania's tragedy is that far too many Brits fell for these tales.

Probably the biggest of these tales concerned the notion of a share-owning democracy.

The idea here was simple, but utterly misguided – sell off the publicly-owned enterprises, and everyone will be able to buy shares in the newly privatised companies. By buying however

many shares you want, you will become a part of Thatcher's great British share-owning democracy.

Many of us knew at that time that it was never going to be like this at all. As Marx noted, the stock exchange, where the shares of the newly privatised companies would of course be traded, is “where the little fish are swallowed by the sharks and the lambs by the stock-exchange wolves”.

The wealthy have always used their resources to acquire a monopoly on company shares. So when the public enterprises were put on sale at rock-bottom prices by Thatcher and her cronies, the wealthy rushed to collar the majority of the share offerings, the ensuing demand drove-up the price of the shares, and in so doing put nearly all of them beyond the reach of Joe and Jill Normal.

So what actually happened to the “great British share-owning democracy?”

The state bureaucrats so excoriated by Thatcher have been replaced by private bureaucrats, albeit ones paid astronomical salaries when compared to those received by their counterparts in the annihilated state sector.

The newly privatised state enterprises were never going to be owned by the likes of Joe and Jill Normal, or even John and Jane Bull – instead large foreign corporations and foreign governments now own nearly all these companies.

Indeed the supreme Thatcherite irony is that many of the enterprises privatised by her have now returned to government ownership, but alas for Brits these are foreign governments.

Take the town of Romford, in the London borough of Haver-

ing, which had the distinction of being named as the most Euro-sceptic place in the country in a 2016 YouGov survey.

The Brexit motto is “take back control”, but at Romford station there’s a choice of trains into London: you can travel on one run by the Dutch, or one run by the Chinese. Someone going to neighbouring Basildon has to change at Upminster and buy a ticket from the Italian firm that operates C2C.

Here’s the fuller picture.

- ScotRail is operated by Abellio, which is wholly owned by the Dutch national rail operator Nederlandse Spoorwegen.

- Abellio also owns 60 percent of Greater Anglia trains (the remaining 40 percent is owned by the Japanese company Mitsui).

- West Midlands trains is 70 percent owned by Abellio, the remaining 30 percent is shared between Mitsui and another Japanese company JR East.

- Arriva Rail London is operated by Arriva, which is owned by the German national rail operator Deutsche Bahn.

- Arriva also operates Chiltern Railways and Cross-Country, Grand Central, and Northern.

- The already-mentioned C2C is owned by the Italian government’s Trenitalia.

- Eurostar is operated by EIL, which is owned by the French government’s SNCF (55 percent), Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec (CDPQ) (30 percent), Hermes Infra-

structure (10 percent) which is majority-owned by a US investment fund, and NMBS/SNCB (5 percent) which is the state railway company of Belgium.

- The Chinese corporation MTR owns TfL rail and 30 percent of South Western Railway.

- Transport for Wales is owned by Keolis, a Franco-Québécois private operator of public transport.

In fact, European state railways now own more than quarter of the UK’s passenger-train system.

The same situation exists with regard to the UK’s energy, water, and telephone companies.

- London Electricity, SWEB, Seeboard and British Energy are owned by EDF Energy, a subsidiary of the French Government-owned energy company EDF (Électricité de France) Group.

- Powergen is owned by the German group E.ON.

- Calortex, Independent Energy and Midlands Electricity are owned by Npower, a subsidiary of German energy company RWE Group.

- ScottishPower is a subsidiary of Spanish company Iberdrola, which also owns Manweb, the energy company supplying Merseyside and North Wales.

- Anglian Water is owned by a consortium consisting of Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, Colonial First State Global Asset Management (owned by the Commonwealth Bank of

Australia), IFM Investors (an Australian investment management firm), and 3i. The same consortium also owns Hartlepool Water.

- Northumbrian Water is owned by Cheung Kong Infrastructure Holdings (Hong Kong). Cheung Kong Infrastructure Holdings also owns Essex and Suffolk Water.

- Wessex Water is owned by YTL Corporation (Malaysia)

- Affinity Water is part owned by Morgan Stanley (USA).

- South East Water is owned by Hastings Diversified Utilities Fund/Utilities Trust of Australia.

- Sutton and East Surrey Water is owned by Sumitomo Corporation (Japan).

- Level 3 Communications (USA) owns a national optical fibre network.

- O2 runs a GSM-900 network and is owned by Telefónica (Spain).

- EE runs a GSM-1800 network and is a joint venture of Orange (France) and Deutsche Telecom (Germany)

The UK’s bus and airport companies are also largely foreign owned.

- Arriva buses is owned by the German national rail operator Deutsche Bahn.

- Bus and coach companies are also owned by Comfort-DelGro (Singapore), RATP (France), and Transdev (France).

- Heathrow, Glasgow, and Southampton airports are

owned by the Spanish Ferrovial (25 percent), Qatar Holding (20 percent), and Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec (12.62 percent).

- Gatwick airport is owned by Global Infrastructure Partners (USA).

- The Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan owns 48.25 percent of Birmingham airport.

- IFM Investors (Australia), in addition to part-owning Anglian Water, also owns Manchester airport, the M6 tollway, and the telecommunications company Arqiva.

All this has been the consequence of asset-stripping undertaken on a massive scale.

Assets belonging to the British public were thrown (literally) into the laps of foreign companies and governments.

London, for most excellent reasons, decided recently against erecting a statue of Margaret Thatcher.

Given that she was the

architect of so much largesse extended to the corporations and governments of other countries, there might be a slightly better chance of having this statue put up in any number of western European cities, as well as those in Japan, Australia, Canada, Malaysia, the US, China, and in Qatar and Singapore.

The Iron Lady initiated an act of daylight robbery from which the owners of private wealth and the governments of other countries benefitted immensely.

The British public, which owned these assets, got stiffed.

All this has taken place in a context where the wealth-gap between the Have-Lots and the JAMs (Just About Managing) has grown to levels not seen since the 1930s. **CT**

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noteworthy. It could catch on.

The notion that it is somehow legitimate for a tiny group of humans to cordon off the bulk of the world's bounty for themselves – leaving billions of people begging on the street or scrounging through garbage dumps – is fairly astonishing, on the face of it.

The unfairness is compounded by the fact there's no evidence billionaires are particularly smart or talented, given that some 60 to 70 percent of them inherited their wealth, according to the French economist Thomas Piketty.

Today's extreme concentration of wealth is so palpably unfair -- the richest 26 individuals have as much wealth as the poorest half of humanity – that it cries out for a powerful justification. Mega-billionaire Bill Gates seemed to produce a pretty powerful justification at the recent annual elite gathering in Davos – a spectacular infographic showing that the world poverty rate had plummeted over the past two centuries, from 94 percent to just 10 percent today.

This stunning finding, developed by economist Max Roser of *Our World in Data*, certainly casts billionaires in a more sympathetic light, as mere byproducts of an economic system that has helped the world's people, lifting most of humanity out of poverty.

The finding has been keenly promoted by the Davos crowd as well as by high-profile com-

## Claims about capitalism's benefits are wrong

By **Linda McQuaig**

**I**n the future, people will probably continue to marvel at how creatures with tiny brains once stalked the Earth unchallenged.

For now, however, billion-

aires reign supreme, with only a small stirring of dissent, led by the impressive US congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, or AOC.

Still, that small stirring is



mentators like *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof.

An upbeat Gates tweeted the infographic to his 46-million followers, adding: “A lot of people underestimate just how much life has improved over the past two centuries.”

Easy for him to say. In fact, the claim that life has improved for most people collapses pretty quickly under scrutiny.

Jason Hickel, an anthropologist at the London School of Economics, points out that poverty data before 1981 is sketchy, and data going as far back as the 1820s is meaningless. That’s because in earlier times, most people lived in subsistence economies; they had little or no money but had access to the rich natural resources of the common lands.

But over time people were forced off the land by wealthy interests, and obliged to work for wages in mines and factories. Hickel notes that “the new income people earned from wages didn’t come anywhere close to compensating for their loss of land and resources.”

In other words, far from being a great boon, the arrival of modern capitalism has resulted in vast numbers of people being forced to give up a self-supporting existence and ending up as impoverished labourers, often malnourished and housed in grim, toiletless shacks. (Some 2.4 billion people lack a decent

toilet, according to the World Health Organisation.)

Even in the four decades since 1981, there’s been no decline in global poverty, Hickel insists. On the contrary, he says if we use a more meaningful poverty measure – US\$7.40 a day, rather than the absurdly low US\$1.90 a day used by Roser – the number of people living in poverty has dramatically increased, to 4.2 billion today, more than half the world’s population.

The real story of today’s global capitalism is better captured by Piketty. In his epic 577-page treatise, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, he makes the case that capitalism leads to ever-increasing inequality.

Depressing as Piketty’s case is, it also includes a ray of hope. He notes that an exception occurred in the period following the Second World War (1945 to 1975) when equality actually

increased. This was particularly true in the Anglo-American countries, largely due to the very progressive tax systems enacted by governments, notably in the Anglo-American countries, including Canada.

So the campaign stirred up by AOC – calling for a tax system similar to the early postwar years – could actually make a difference, if the public started paying attention.

Certainly, billionaire claims about capitalism heroically lifting humankind out of poverty turn out to be easily debunked. Imagine if that news got out. **CT**

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

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## Criticising Israel isn’t antisemitic, but this is ...

By Sarah Geller

**W**EEKS ago, when the first accusations of antisemitism were being levelled against Representative Ilhan Omar, I was deeply agitated.

Not long ago I saw her address these accusations at a local town hall. She reminded the world that, as a Black Muslim woman in America, she knows what hate looks like

– and spends her life labouring against it. Her words were clear, bold, and unflinching.

When members of Congress not only continued to gang up and falsely smear Omar as antisemitic, but even created a House Resolution painting her words as hateful, I wasn't just agitated. I was absolutely disgusted.

Omar has criticised the US government's support for Israeli actions that break international law. And she's spoken out against the role money in politics plays in shoring up that support.

Neither is antisemitic.

What is antisemitic is the cacophony of mainstream media and politicians saying that criticising US policy toward the state of Israel is the same as attacking Jewish people.

**L**ike most American Jewish youth, I grew up knowing Israel. During holidays, I sang prayers about Eretz Yisrael, the land of Israel. In Hebrew school, I learned about the country's culture, its cities, its past prime ministers. At my Jewish summer camp, we started every day with the Israeli national anthem, *Hatikvah*.

My image of Israel was a rosy one. When I finally visited it in college, I was spellbound by the lush landscapes and sparkling cities, certain I would one day move to this golden ancestral home myself.

All this emotional buildup made it all the more sickening when, in the years that followed, I learned the realities of the Israeli occupation.

The modern state of Israel was established by Zionists – a nationalist movement started by European Jews with the aim of creating a “Jewish state” as a refuge for persecuted Jews.

It's true that Jews have faced centuries of brutal persecution in Europe. But the Zionists' project shared unmistakably European colonialist roots.

In 1948, Israel's war of independence led to the Nakba, an invasion driving 700,000 Palestinians from their homes. These Palestinians were never allowed to return, creating a massive refugee population that today numbers over seven-million.

While I was able to travel freely up and down Israel, the Palestinians who once lived there are legally barred from returning. While I wandered the marketplaces trying stews and shawarmas, Palestinians in Gaza can't afford even the gas to cook their food because of the Israeli blockade.

Zionism didn't create an inclusive Jewish refuge either. In fact, the diverse Mizrahi – or Arab – Jewish population that was already thriving in Palestine was pushed out of Israeli society as Ashkenazi – or European – Jews became the elite class.

What it did create is an

imperialist stronghold that continues to break international law by building settlements deeper and deeper into Palestinian territory, giving Jewish Israelis superior legal status to Arab Israelis and Palestinians, and attacking all who protest.

Since Israel's origin, the US has supplied tens of billions of dollars of military aid and ardent political support. Congress consistently ignores dozens of UN resolutions condemning Israeli abuses, and year after year gives it more resources to violently oppress impoverished Palestinians.

Pro-Israel lobbying groups' considerable political influence has even pushed Congress to consider bills punishing Americans who support Palestinian rights. (Around half of all states already have such laws.)

More broadly, they rely on villainising critics with false claims of antisemitism – especially when the criticism comes from a person of colour, as we've seen with Angela Davis, Marc Lamont Hill, and Michelle Alexander before Rep. Omar.

I, along with an increasing number of young American Jews, want to discuss US support of Israel. Talking foreign policy is not antisemitism.

What is antisemitic – always – is saying that all Jews support violence and imperialism. **CT**

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*Sarah Gertler is the Newman Fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies. Distributed by OtherWords.org.*

## Springtime for fascists

By Matt Carr

**I**T'S something of a cliché to look back on a society like Nazi Germany say, and shake our heads and ask how the country of Goethe and Beethoven could have descended into barbarism. There are obviously very specific historical reasons why Germany took the path it did, but there is also a more universal lesson that can be applied to other historical contexts.

To put it simply, societies tumble off the abyss and become what the medieval historian RI Moore once called 'persecuting societies' because the forces that might have prevented this outcome either don't recognise the warning signs in time or they don't act on these signs when they have the chance to do something about them.

Here in the UK it is becoming increasingly clear that a transformation has taken place that goes beyond the shenanigans and political convulsions in Westminster, and will not be resolved by 'hard' or 'soft' Brexits or arguments about the kind of deal on offer. Consider recent events.

On Saturday, March 16, a Romanian woman in Doncaster was savagely beaten by a

group of teenagers who called her a "Polish cunt" and told her to "fuck off to your country."

On the following Monday, the yellow jacket thug James Goddard and his followers virtually took over a court hearing at Westminster Magistrates Court and forced the judge to flee the court. Goddard's followers went on to storm the Attorney General's office.

On March 21 the Labour MP for Brighton Kempton Lloyd Russell-Moyle was attacked on the street and called a traitor because he called for a delay to Brexit. In the same week MPs were advised to take taxis to and from Westminster in case they were attacked, and Independent Group MP Anna Soubry announced that she no longer goes home because she is afraid of attacks.

Then, on March 22, the monitoring group Tell Mama reported a staggering 593 percent rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes across the UK since the Christchurch massacre.

**T**hese incidents included attacks on five Birmingham mosques with sledgehammers, another attack on a mosque in Scotland, and the stabbing of a

teenager in Surrey. In Oxford, Southampton and north London, Muslim men and women reported gun gestures or firearms noises being directed at them, and verbal abuse that included shouts of "you need to be shot", "you deserve it", an "Muslims must die".

There was a time when you might have expected people who feel like this to keep their mouths shut – in public at least – in the aftermath of a white supremacist atrocity in which 49 Muslims were savagely murdered.

Instead being chastened by the massacre in Christchurch, however, it's clear that the perpetrators of these hate crimes were inspired by it, and felt confident enough to actually threaten British Muslim men and women with something similar.

Contemptuous disregard for the rule of law; threats against MPs; violent attacks on foreigners; the exultant celebration of mass murder – if these are not warning signs then I don't know what is.

None of this fell out of the sky. It's been clear ever since 2016 that the referendum has actively emboldened and empowered the older far-right and its newer variants, and that Brexit has given these forces a cause celebre and a new constituency that is willing to listen to an ethnonationalist agenda that is profoundly hostile to Muslims, foreigners and immigrants, and also to the



Westminster “traitors” and “liberal elites” who supposedly facilitated the foreign (and Muslim) “invasion”.

This is why Jo Cox was killed. Yet even when an MP was murdered by a white supremacist shouting “Britain first”, this horrific crime was dismissed as the act of an isolated “loner” with mental health issues.

**T**hree-and-a-half years later, we now have a country where an act of mass murder inspires people to openly threaten Muslims with similar actions. We would be very foolish indeed to dismiss the possibility of these threats being realised, and if we are to have any possibility of preventing the country sinking any deeper

into the toxic political sewer, we need to recognise that this transformation is partly due to Brexit.

Neither the Brexit right nor the Lexit left likes to admit that Brexit has contributed to this emboldenment and empowerment. To do so would undermine the image of Brexit as a popular rebellion against the “elite” which both the right and some sectors of the left still adhere to.

Suggest that Brexit is, in part, an ethnonationalist project with racism and xenophobia at its core, and you’re likely to hear the same banal arguments that “not all Leavers are racists”, or “it’s not racist to be concerned about immigration”, or “a few bad apples don’t define a country”, etc, etc.

But we need to join the dots,

even if they produce a picture that we would prefer not to see. We need wide and deep mobilisations across the country to defend our communities and uphold the diverse, open society that an emboldened and empowered extreme right is now looking to “take back”.

We need to take the country back – from them. And unless we can do this, these forces will get stronger and more vicious, till it is no longer possible to ignore or escape from them. **CT**

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**Matt Carr** is a writer, campaigner and journalist. His latest book is *The Savage Frontier: The Pyrenees in History and the Imagination* (New Press/Hurst, 2018). He blogs at [www.infernalmachine.co.uk](http://www.infernalmachine.co.uk)

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