

ISSUE 200

ColdType

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Mid-February 2020



A stronger, more committed, and more determined global peace movement could tame the US war machine / Medea Benjamin & Nicholas JS Davies - PAGE 33

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■ CHELLIS GLENDINNING

What really came down in Bolivia

A tale of struggle, surprise, and – most of all – courage as Evo Morales is sent packing by a revolution that most definitely was *not* a military coup d'état

“When a judge says to me: Evo, in judicial terms you are wrong, what you are doing is illegal, I tell the lawyers, if what I do is illegal, then make it legal.”

– Evo Morales, 2008

¡Democracia Sí, Dictadura No!

– Chant by pro-democracy demonstrators, 2019

HAVING been born into the cloud of illusion blurring reality in post-WWII USA, it didn't occur to me that one day I might be fighting against fascism. It *did* occur to me to fight for peaceful and just means of resolving the injustices of global imperialism, civil-women's-and-indigenous rights, the outlawing of nuclear weapons, and the survival of the planet. But just like David Byrne's bewildered protagonist – *And you may find yourself/In another part of the world* – I found myself living in Bolivia. Call it what you wish; in these parts the government that recently fled is called dictatorship.

It's not news that various brands

of hyper-regimented populism are storming human communities. After all, we've found ourselves living in times of proliferating guerrilla terrorism, technologically-based threats to traditional identities, community stability, and place-based economies; global epidemics that spread like mass murderers, and perhaps most profoundly, panic at losing the very source of life's miracle, planet Earth.

One response to this disaster can be an unconscious wish for a Father Figure, alighting perhaps *deus-ex-machina*-style, to solve the problems for us. But dear democracy lovers: just as Thomas Jefferson once predicted, we're back at the Bastille in the 1790s, with the Luddites in England of the early 1800s, with the worldwide decolonisation movements after WWII, in the forests of Mexico with the Zapatistas. Granted oppression and cruelty never left, but they're back in full force.

I find myself with few words to describe what it felt like to hear that

UP ON THE ROOF. Police mutiny – pledging to fight government attackers and protect protesters. Cochabamba, Bolivia



President Evo Morales, his Vice President Álvaro García, and the Minister of Health Gabriela Montaña had evacuated on the heels of three weeks of long-brewing outrage. Read: citizen rebellion. The news first came to me via a man on a bicycle who whispered as he pedaled by: “*Se fue*” (He left). WHAAAA!?! I was seriously discombobulated. It was like the time I picked the *San Francisco Chronicle* off the front stoop that announced in bold letters JOHN LENNON SLAIN; at that moment my ability to think was so stunned by this unthinkable event, I was sure that the word ‘slain’ meant ‘hurt’. One needs time to process upending information.

Soon enough, though, people began to throng into the Plaza 25 de Mayo, hundreds and hundreds of people smiling, singing, hugging,



laughing, wearing the tri-color of Bolivia like a patriotic cape, waving the *wiphala* flag celebrating its many cultures, crying for joy, and throwing confetti. Fireworks lit up the skies, bands that appeared out of nowhere blared the national anthem, and via loud speakers liberation songs from Argentina and Chile contributed a sense of history. Suddenly the police appeared, but not to beat up pro-democracy crowds. No, they came dancing through the cheering multitudes, some in regimental costume and form, others dropping all semblance of role and leaping for joy. Just days before, they had carried out a countrywide mutiny. Their spouses and children, for Pachamama's sake, were activists in the resistance that had shut down all the major cities and paralysed the country. (For

five minutes of this mind-altering event: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0npSXXHsILk>)

To boot, they were tired of dedicating their lives to defending a state apparatus that, in the name of socialist ideals, had effectively taken iron command of all government agencies to do their bidding – judicial, legislative, elective, cultural, sports-related, military, police, the works. This hyper-controlling apparatus was also neck-deep in cocaine production and trade to enrich personal offshore bank accounts. It revelled in harassing and even offing critics – sometimes by outright execution and others by crafting a passive-aggressive situation that would lead to death. Meanwhile, the administration pursued high-tech extraction of

petroleum, metals, and gas, massive industrialisation projects, the building of colossal dams and super-highways, and laying long-distance gas lines – at the same time as projecting a *Planeta o Muerte*/rights-of-nature image abroad – and was accomplishing its promised goal of cutting ribbons only when elections loomed.

All the while the ‘socialists’ in the Palace were spending billions on state-of-the-art airplanes and helicopters; were demolishing cultural heritage sites to erect skyscraping homages like pyramids for the pharaohs; were fostering million-dollar building projects that mysteriously ran out of money and now speckled the Bolivian countryside like cadavers of corruption. They were also diluting freedom of the press. They bought up hundreds of community radio/



WHY MORALES MUST GO: Demonstrators take part in a protest rally in La Paz, Bolivia.

TV stations to spout propaganda, passed laws containing legal mechanisms to shut down venues that didn't speak the party line, and catalysed violence against *periodistas* on the job.

Through it all, they blamed Chile or the United States or the few right-wingers they had not bought off in Santa Cruz, and when confronted with lawsuits and public opinion, they brashly justified themselves with lies. Ah, the interminable twists of reality that spouted from the Palace! My unofficial estimate is that round about midway through his 13-year grip on power, the president lied maybe 30 percent-40 percent of the time, but when the unity of citizens had taken to the street, he was double-dealing truth 95 percent of the time. Example: when the president's still-loyal followers obeyed his orders, delivered from his ref-

uge in Mexico, to mob the streets and burn down the homes, media outlets, and workplaces of pro-democracy activists, he proclaimed that it was they who were hurling flames at his people's homes, radio stations, and businesses.

The final scene starring the ruling party came at the close of the presidential campaign. A host of opposition candidates were facing down Morales, who was running illegally. He had defied both the Constitution that prohibited running more than twice (he had already run three times) and a legal referendum in which '*Bolivia Dice No*' to his re-election had boldly triumphed. The most threatening challenger among the candidates was the astute, honest, and morally-driven historian/journalist/ex-President Carlos Mesa Gisbert,

who had been among the first to call Morales to answer for his relentless dismissal of citizen involvement in government. According to several non-partisan international and national agencies, the vote counting had suffered severe fraud via some thousands of 'manipulations and irregularities' discovered within the electoral computer. These included wholesale invention of voting districts; fabricating 'votes' at numbers more than a district actually contained; mixing falsified ballot results with real counts so they would not be visible; modifying software so as to permit alterations, and implementing a mysterious computer shutdown in the middle of the night. I was not surprised, but indeed I was aghast. I also had a private chuckle. The methods used, largely technological although not always sophisticated, were ex-

act replicas of those the brilliant Hollywood film director Preston Sturges had highlighted in his 1940 satirical comedy *The Great McGinty*.

My friends and I climbed up the stairs to Los Balcones restaurant and sat down at a table overlooking the plaza. We drank more wine than I usually do; we talked politics, shared what we knew, cried, and laughed up a storm. For me the experience mirrored my imagination of those joyous photos of celebration in New York City after WWII. *The Witch Is Dead, the Witch Is Dead* kept running through my mind, and I could sob at the drop of a *boliviano*.

I'm well aware that this story clashes with how many good folk of the US and European Left wish to see events in Bolivia. I am also aware that any potential threat to one's ideology, and so to one's very identity, can catalyse a person to hurl insults onto others as a way to externalise any sense of vulnerability that may arise. On the other hand, I was impressed with the openness of the warrior-poet-author Margaret Randall at one of our yearly Thanksgiving dinners in New Mexico. She had lived in Cuba for years and wrote several solid books about the socialist effort there to improve the lives of the people. She asked me what was my take on Evo Morales. Upon hearing my answer, she pondered: "Curious... My friends who do not live in Bolivia are adamantly in favour of Morales' presidency, while my friends who live in Bolivia are adamantly against it."

Did he flee because a military coup d'état forced him out with

Most people who organised, blockaded, marched, wrote opinion pieces, and filmed were not 'neo-liberal right-wingers'

tanks, machine guns, and bombers? The real story is that Morales was merely warned by his loyal military commander that he could be in danger of assassination, by whom no one knows as, up until the time of Evo's departure, the citizen movements in the streets were dedicated to non-violence. But this possibility is what propelled him to decide – *on his own* – to leave. There was no 'military coup', and we are now not being governed by a military junta.

Were the activists in the streets 'neo-liberal right-wingers'? I lived and breathed this struggle and all that led up to it over the years, and I can tell you that the majority of people who organised, set up blockades, relentlessly marched, wrote opinion pieces for newspapers, and filmed the actions were not 'neo-liberal right-wingers'. They were young people, women, miners, non-cocaine producing coca growers, health workers, journalists, *campesinos*, motorcycle riders, civic committee members, trade unionists, taxi, bus, and transport drivers; artists and artisans, environmentalists, firefighters, teachers, university administrators, bloggers, liberation theologians, intellectuals, *políticos*. All of them gave their time, intelligence, and determination to achieve what

had been hoped for during this recent stretch when political means matched the steps toward fascism that Naomi Wolfe and others have described. Most were free-thinking, issue-oriented regular folk; in fact, opinion pieces appeared frequently in the media about the contemporary need to leave rigid ideologies behind and invent new ways to think about/work for the collective good – which doesn't mean giving up the fight against inequalities based on race, culture, gender, or economic disparity and for the creation of a just, peaceful, and sustainable world.

Dare I say it? The festivities the night of 10 November 2019 lightened the load, even if only momentarily, that democrats had carried like a backpack full of rocks throughout this 21st-century struggle. Now we find ourselves in a nation enduring the pains of birthing: we are face-to-face with the precarious task of re-defining and re-establishing governmental structures to reflect its diverse notions of honest and just means of citizen participation in communal decision-making. Whether we make it or not remains to be seen. **CT**

Chellis Glendinning is a psychologist and long-time social-change activist. Her latest books are *In the Company of Rebels* (US: New Village Press/NYU Press) and a novel in Spanish, *Objetos* (Bolivia: Editorial 3600). A US/Bolivian citizen, she lives in the department of Chuquisaca and is working on a novel about women in the Chaco War (1932-35). Her website is www.chellisglendinning.org.

Duh, Jared! Who built the PA as a police state?

Kushner, like Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, would rather the endless peace charade could be discarded, freeing him to get on with enriching himself with his Saudi pals

MAYBE something good will come out of the Trump plan, after all. By pushing the Middle East peace process to its logical conclusion, Donald Trump has made crystal clear something that was supposed to have been obscured: that no US administration has ever really seen peace as the objective of its “peacemaking”.

The current White House is no exception – it has just been far more incompetent at concealing its joint strategy with the Israelis. But that is what happens when a glorified used-car salesman, Donald Trump, and his sidekick son-in-law, the schoolboy-cum-businessman Jared Kushner, try selling us the “deal of the century”. Neither, it seems, has the political or diplomatic guile normally associated with those who rise to high office in Washington.

During an interview with CNN’s Fareed Zakaria this week, Kushner dismally failed to cloak the fact that his “peace” plan was designed with one goal only: to screw the Palestinians over.

The real aim is so transparent that even Zakaria couldn’t stop

himself from pointing it out. In CNN’s words, he noted that “no Arab country currently satisfies the requirements Palestinians are being expected to meet in the next four years – including ensuring freedom of press, free and fair elections, respect for human rights for its citizens, and an independent judiciary.”

Trump’s senior adviser suddenly found himself confronted with the kind of deadly, unassailable logic usually overlooked in CNN coverage. Zakaria observed:

Isn’t this just a way of telling the Palestinians you’re never actually going to get a state because ... if no Arab countries today [are] in a position that you are demanding of the Palestinians before they can be made a state, effectively, it’s a killer amendment?

Indeed it is.

In fact, the “Peace to Prosperity” document unveiled last week by the White House is no more than a list of impossible preconditions the Palestinians must meet to be allowed to sit down with the Israelis at the negotiating table. If they don’t do so within four years, and quickly reach a deal, the very

last slivers of their historic homeland – the parts not already seized by Israel – can be grabbed too, with US blessing.

Admittedly, all Middle East peace plans in living memory have foisted these kinds of prejudicial conditions on the Palestinians. But this time many of the preconditions are so patently preposterous – contradictory even – that the usually pliable corporate press corps are embarrassed to be seen ignoring the glaring inconsistencies.

The CNN exchange was so revealing in part because Kushner was triggered by Zakaria’s observation that the Palestinians had to become a model democracy – a kind of idealised Switzerland, while still under belligerent Israeli occupation – before they could be considered responsible enough for statehood.

How was that plausible, Zakaria hinted, when Saudi Arabia, despite its appalling human rights abuses, nonetheless remains a close strategic US ally, and Saudi leaders continue to be intimates of the Trump business empire? No one



SELFIE-TIME: Bibi and Tammy Netanyahu pose with Ivanka Trump and husband Jared Kushner at the dedication ceremony for the US embassy in Jerusalem in May, 2018.

in Washington is seriously contemplating removing US recognition of Saudi Arabia because it is a head-chopping, women-hating, journalist-killing religious fundamentalist state.

But Zakaria could have made an even more telling point – was he not answerable to CNN executives. There are also hardly any western states that would pass the democratic, human rights-respecting threshold set by the Trump plan for the Palestinians.

Think of Britain’s flouting last year of a ruling by the International Court of Justice in The Hague that the Chagos Islanders must be allowed to return home decades after the UK expelled them so the US could build a military base on

their land. Or the Windrush scandal, when it was revealed that a UK government “hostile environment” policy was used to illegally deport British citizens to the Caribbean because of the colour of their skin.

Or what about the US evading due process by holding prisoners offshore at Guantanamo? Or its use of torture against Iraqi prisoners, or its reliance on extraordinary rendition, or its extrajudicial assassinations using drones overseas, including against its own citizens?

Or for that matter, its jailing and extortionate fining of whistleblower Chelsea Manning, despite the Obama administration granting her clemency. US officials

want to force her to testify against Wikileaks founder Julian Assange for his role in publishing leaks of US war crimes committed in Iraq, including the shocking Collateral Murder video.

And while we’re talking about Assange and about Iraq...

Would the records of either the US or UK stand up to scrutiny if they were subjected to the same standards now required of the Palestinian leadership.

But let’s fast forward to the heart of the matter. Angered by Zakaria’s impertinence at mildly questioning the logic of the Trump plan, Kushner let rip.

He called the Palestinian Au-

thority a “police state” and one that is “not exactly a thriving democracy”. It would be impossible, he added, for Israel to make peace with the Palestinians until the Palestinians, not Israel’s occupying army, changed its ways. It was time for the Palestinians to prioritise human rights and democracy, while at the same time submitting completely to Israel’s belligerent, half-century occupation that violates their rights and undermines any claims Israel might have to being a democracy.

Kushner said: “If they [the Palestinians] don’t think that they can uphold these standards, then I don’t think we can get Israel to take the risk to recognize them as a state, to allow them to take control of themselves, because the only thing more dangerous than what we have now is a failed state.”

Let’s take a moment to unpack that short statement to examine its many conceptual confusions.

First, there’s the very obvious point that “police states” and dictatorships are not “failed states”. Not by a long shot. In fact, police states and dictatorships are usually the very opposite of failed states. Iraq was an extremely able state under Saddam Hussein, in terms both of its ability to provide welfare and educational services and of its ruthless, brutal efficiency in crushing dissent.

Iraq only became a failed state when the US illegally invaded and executed Saddam, leaving a local leadership vacuum that sucked in an array of competing actors who quickly made Iraq ungovernable.

Oppressive by design

Second, as should hardly need pointing out, the PA can’t be a po-

Presumably, it is a sign of that US programme’s success that Kushner can now describe the PA as a police state

lice state when it isn’t even a state. After all, that’s where the Palestinians are trying to get to, and Israel and the US are blocking the way. It is obviously something else. What that “something else” is brings us to the third point.

Kushner is right that the PA is increasingly authoritarian and uses its security forces in oppressive ways – because that’s exactly what it was set up to do by Israel and the US.

Palestinians had assumed that the Oslo accords of the mid-1990s would lead to the creation of a sovereign state at the completion of that five-year peace process. But that never happened. Denied statehood ever since, the PA now amounts to nothing more than a security contractor for the Israelis. Its unspoken job is to make the Palestinian people submit to their permanent occupation by Israel.

The self-defeating deal contained in Oslo’s “land for peace” formula was this: the PA would build Israeli trust by crushing all resistance to the occupation, and in return Israel would agree to hand over more territory and security powers to the PA.

Bound by its legal obligations, the PA had two possible paths

ahead of it: either it would become a state under Israeli licence, or it would serve as a Vichy-like regime suppressing Palestinian aspirations for national liberation. Once the US and Israel made clear they would deny the Palestinians statehood at every turn, the PA’s fate was sealed.

Put another way, the point of Oslo from the point of view of the US and Israel was to make the PA an efficient, permanent police state-in-waiting, and one that lacked the tools to threaten Israel.

And that’s exactly what was engineered. Israel refused to let the Palestinians have a proper army in case, bidding to gain statehood, that army turned its firepower on Israel. Instead a US army general, Keith Dayton, was appointed to oversee the training of the Palestinian police forces – to help the PA better repress those Palestinians who tried to exercise their right in international law to resist Israel’s belligerent occupation.

Presumably, it is a sign of that US programme’s success that Kushner can now describe the PA as a police state.

In his CNN interview, Kushner inadvertently highlighted the Catch-22 created for the Palestinians. The Trump “peace” process penalises the Palestinian leadership for their very success in achieving the targets laid out for them in the Oslo “peace” process.

Resist Israel’s efforts to deprive the Palestinians of statehood and the PA is classified as a terrorist entity and denied statehood. Submit to Israel’s dictates and oppress the Palestinian people to prevent them demanding statehood and the PA is classified as a police

■ LINDA McQUAIG

Protests, guns and insults in Canada's oilsands

Indigenous people are treated as criminals and terrorists, rounded up and arrested, even as they are doing us all the favour of slowing down this climate-endangering project

WANT to start by turning myself in to Alberta premier Jason Kenney's investigators.

I admit to being against further developments in Canada's oilsands, making me a person of interest to the sleuths in Kenney's \$30-million 'war room' who are tasked with vilifying oilsands critics. Of course, they're really hoping to unmask 'foreign-funded special interests', and I don't have a single dollar of foreign backing. Still I do what I can!

The war room is just one of the Alberta premier's bullying tactics, along with threatening Western separation from the rest of Canada, as he tries to intimidate critics and pressure the Trudeau government into approving the proposed Teck mine, a vast 293-square-kilometre open pit mine, which would be the biggest tarsands mine yet.

Given that such an approval would hopelessly compromise any Canadian effort to battle climate change – which, let's not forget, threatens the world including us here in Canada – the answer must clearly be no. In the election last fall, two-thirds of the country voted for parties that advocated

strong action on climate change.

The fact that this is seen as a difficult decision reveals the Trudeau government's keenness to be accommodating when dealing with opposition, which is coming from the right and backed by powerful business interests.

Meanwhile, there's a willingness to play hardball when opposition is coming from Indigenous people and powerful business interests are against them.

These hardball tactics have been on display in northwestern B.C. in recent weeks as Wet'suwet'en Indigenous protesters, trying to block a pipeline from crossing their land, have been confronted with highly militarised RCMP officers dressed in combat fatigues, bearing assault rifles, and police dogs.

Chainsawing through a gate marked 'Reconciliation', the RCMP have forcibly removed the occupiers – that is, people occupying their own land – amid prayers for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, sparking nationwide protests. Most of the media

attention has focused on how disruptive the protests have been to southern train travel.

But the hardball tactics are alarming. The RCMP were prepared to shoot the Indigenous protesters, according to a report last December in the *Guardian*. Documents cited in the article show that RCMP commanders argued that 'lethal overwatch is req'd' – a term for deploying an officer able to use lethal force.

What makes the strong-armed clampdown so outrageous is that the natural gas pipeline, approved by the British Columbia government and enforced by a court injunction, is to be built across land that has never been ceded. A 1997 Supreme Court of Canada decision ruled the title was held by the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs.

Canada's Indigenous people have long been on the receiving end of strong-arm police tactics ordered by federal and provincial governments, particularly when they stood in the way of colonial settlement or resource extraction. From the late 1800s, Indigenous people were forcibly relocated



NO ACCESS : RCMP officers approach a roadblock at the entrance to Unist'ot'en territory in British Columbia.

to reserves, with their children sent to now-notorious residential schools.

In recent years, Canada has extended the national security apparatus to prevent protesters – often Indigenous people protecting their lands – from interfering with oil and gas developments.

Casting such protesters as terrorists, Stephen Harper's government – with qualified support from Justin Trudeau's Liberals – passed the 2015 Anti-Terrorism Act, which authorised police surveillance and arrest powers against those interfering with 'critical infrastructure.'

And so it is that oil and gas infrastructure are given the full protection of the state, even as these projects and their corporate backers further cement our reliance on

If Kenney's war room manages to find a protester with an American dollar in her pocket, we'll never hear the end of it

fossil fuels, thereby imperilling all of our futures.

On the other hand, Indigenous people, trying to protect land over which they hold legal title according to Canada's Supreme Court, are treated as criminals and terrorists, rounded up and arrested, even as they are doing us all the immense favour of slowing down or stopping yet more climate-en-

dangering projects.

Meanwhile, Kenney is trying to position Alberta's oil interests as the real victim in all this. In a bizarre twist, he denounced the nationwide protests supporting the Wet'suwet'en as "eco-colonialism coming from people in urban southern Canada" – presumably the next best thing to "foreign-funded special interests."

Certainly, if Kenney's war room manages to find a protester with an American dollar in her pocket, we'll never hear the end of it. **CT**

*Linda McQuaig is a journalist and author of *The Sport & Prey of Capitalists*, which explores the different energy policies of Alberta and Norway. This column originally appeared in the *Toronto Star*.*

■ TONY JENKINS

'My art is just a vehicle for the idea'

Cover artist spent 40 years as a newspaper editorial cartoonist, caricaturist and writer

THE art of Tony Jenkins has enriched many of the most admired covers of *ColdType* since we first ran his black and white image of playwright Samuel Beckett in Issue 23 in 2018.

That illustration perfectly encapsulates his approach to his art for which, he says, he has “developed an ever more minimalist

style, in which the idea is paramount – my art is just a vehicle for the idea.”

Now 68, Jenkins spent 40 years with Toronto’s *Globe and Mail* newspaper, where he worked as editorial cartoonist, full time op-ed illustrator and caricaturist.

Later, he

wrote for the paper, first travel articles during three leaves of absence during which he visited 84 countries, and then feature pieces and interviews.

Jenkins retired five years ago but still finds time to freelance, often as a writer, but “sometimes for quality publications that don’t pay, but put me on the cover!”

Jenkins’ book *Traveler’s Tales*, featuring writing and sketchpad work from Asia and Africa, was published by Lonely Planet. and a career retrospective, *A Fine Line*, was published by Warren Clements’, another former *Globe and Mail* journalist- for his Nestling Press imprint – www.nestling-press.com.

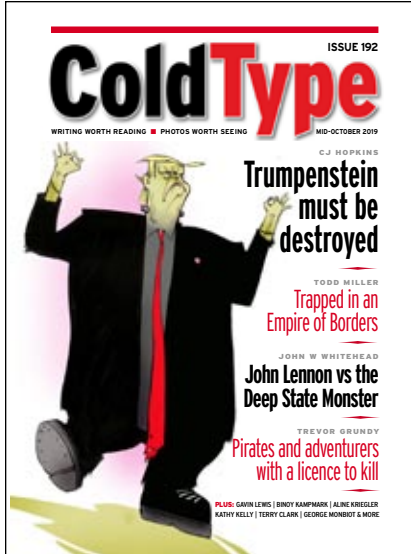
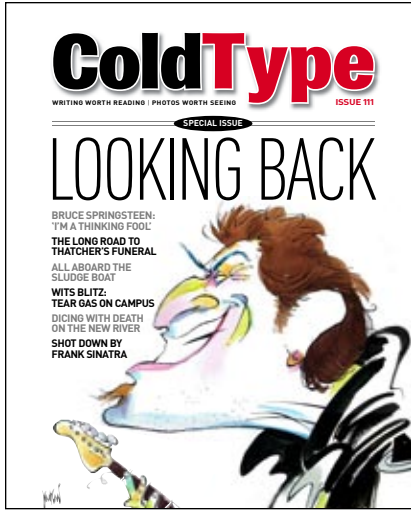
Jenkins lives “on 17 bucolic acres in the country north of Toronto, “where I keep bees, play hockey, do freelance art and writing.” **CT**

● See more of Jenkins’ work at his website, www.jenkinsdraws.com

Donald Trump, Issue 118



Samuel Beckett, Issue 23



Above: Bruce Springsteen, Issue 111;
 Boris Johnson, Issue 189;
 Jeremy Corbyn, Issue 195.
 Left: Donald Trump, Issue 192,
 George W. Bush, Issue 136.
 Below: Tony Blair, Issue 106.
 Main art: Jeremy Corbyn,
 Issue 166.



■ ALAN MacLEOD

Now you can ‘drone’ Iraqis and Afghans

The US Air Force recently unveiled its newest recruitment tool, an online video game that lets players carry out targeted killings by drone in places like Iraq and Afghanistan

THE US Air Force has a new recruitment tool: a realistic drone operator video game you can play on its website, www.airforce.com. The *Airman Challenge* features 16 missions to complete, interspersed with facts and recruitment information about how to become a drone operator. In its latest attempts to market active service to young people, players move through missions escorting US vehicles through countries like Iraq and Afghanistan, serving up death from above to all those designated ‘insurgents’ by the game. Players earn medals and achievements for most effectively destroying moving targets. All the while there is a prominent ‘apply now’ button on screen if players would like to enlist and conduct real drone strikes all over the Middle East.

The game has failed to win over David Swanson, director of the anti-war movement World Beyond War, and the author of *War is a Lie*. “It is truly disgusting, immoral, and arguably illegal in that it is recruitment or pre-recruitment of underage children to participate in murder. It is part

of the normalisation of murder that we have been living through,” he said.

Tom Secker, a journalist and researcher into the influence of the military on popular culture was similarly unimpressed by the latest USAF recruitment strategy, saying, “The drone game struck me as sick and demented... On the other hand, many drone pilots have described how piloting drones and killing random brown people is a lot like playing a video game, because you’re sat in a bunker in Nevada pushing buttons, detached from the consequences. So I guess it accurately reflects the miserable, traumatised, serial killing life of a drone pilot, we can’t accuse it of inaccuracy per se.”

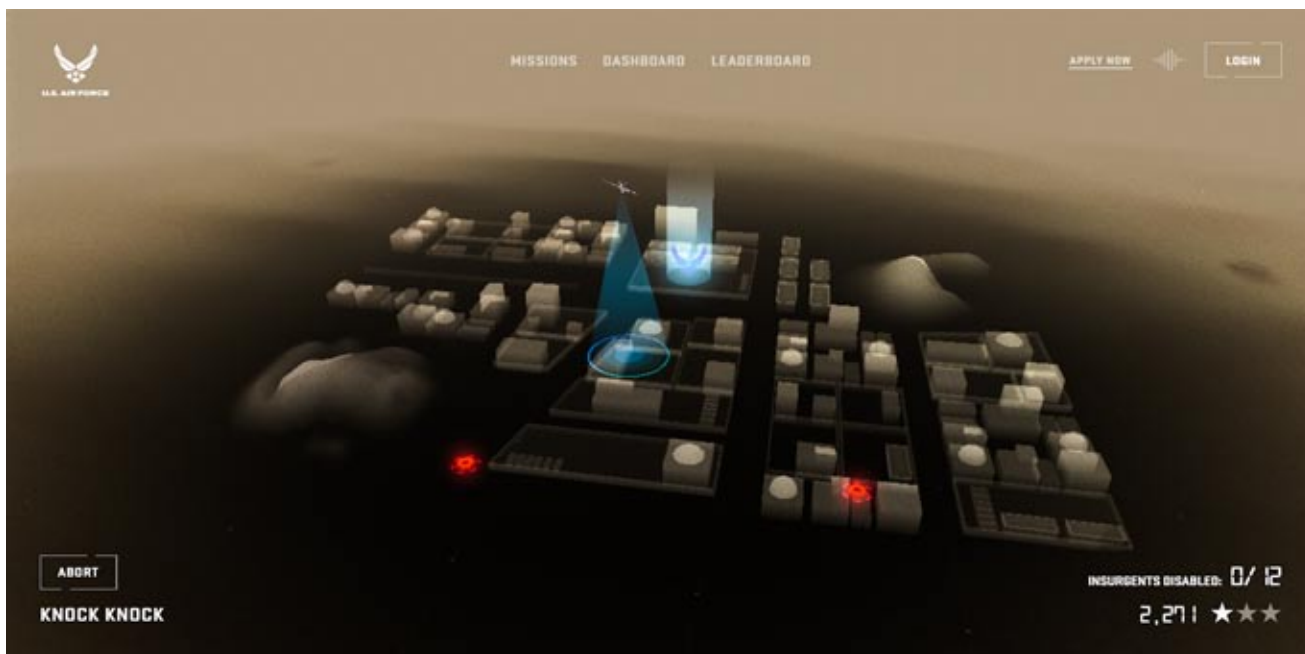
Although they are rarely, if ever in any physical danger, the military has considerable difficulty recruiting and retaining drone pilots. Nearly a quarter of Air Force staff who can ‘fly’ the machines leave the service every year. A lack of respect, fatigue and mental anguish are the primary reasons cited. Stephen Lewis, a sen-

sor operator between 2005 and 2010 said what he did. “weighs on your conscience. It weighs on your soul. It weighs on your heart”, claiming that the post traumatic stress disorder he suffers from as a consequence of killing so many people has made it impossible for him to have relationships with other humans.

“People think it is a video game. But in a video game you have checkpoints, you have restart points. When you fire that missile there’s no restart”, he said.

“The less they can get you to think of what you’re shooting at as human the easier it becomes to you to just follow through with these shots when they come down”. said Michael Haas, another former USAF sensor operator. The *Airman Challenge* game follows this path, using red dots on the screen to represent enemies, sanitizing the violence recruits will be meting out.

“We were very callous about any real collateral damage. Whenever that possibility came up most of the time it was a guilt by association or sometimes we didn’t even consider other people



A screenshot from the US Air Force's latest recruitment tool, a video game called the Airman Challenge

that were on screen”, Haas said, noting that he and his peers used terms like ‘fun-sized terrorist’ to describe children, employing euphemisms like ‘cutting the grass before it grows too long’, as justifications for their extermination. The constant violence, even from afar, takes a heavy toll on many drone operators, who complain of constant nightmares and having to drink themselves into a stupor every night to avoid them.

Others, with different personalities, revel in the bloodshed. Prince Harry, for example, was a helicopter gunner in Afghanistan and described firing missiles as a ‘joy’. “I’m one of those people who loves playing PlayStation and Xbox, so with my thumbs I like to think I’m probably quite useful”, he said. “If there’s people trying to do bad stuff to our guys, then we’ll take them out of the game.”

Drone bombing is a relatively

new technology. Barack Obama came into office promising to end President Bush’s reckless aggression, even being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009. While he slashed the number of American troops on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan, he also greatly expanded US wars in the form of drone bombings, ordering ten times as many as Bush. In his last year in office, the US dropped at least 26,000 bombs – around one every 20 minutes on average. When he left office, the US was bombing seven countries simultaneously: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan.

Up to 90 percent of reported drone casualties were ‘collateral damage’, ie innocent bystanders. Swanson is deeply concerned about the way in which the practice has become normalised: “If murder is acceptable as long as a military does it, anything else is acceptable”, he says, “We will reverse this trend, or we will perish.”

History did not exactly repeat itself with the election of Donald Trump in 2016, but it did rhyme. Trump came to power having made multiple statements perceived as anti-war, strongly criticizing Obama and the Democrats’ handling of the situation in the Middle East. Egged on even by so-called ‘resistance’ media, Trump immediately expanded drone bombings, increasing the number of strikes by 432 percent in his first year in office. The president also used a drone attack to kill Iranian general and statesman Qassem Soleimani last month.

In 2018, the armed forces fell well short of their recruitment targets, despite offering a package of benefits very attractive to working-class Americans. As a result, it totally revamped its recruitment strategy, moving away from television and investing in micro-targeted online ads in an attempt

to reach young people, particularly men below the age of 30, who make up the bulk of the armed forces. One branding exercise was to create an Army e-sports team entering video game competitions under the military brand. As the gaming website, Kotaku wrote, “Positioning the Army as a game-friendly environment and institution is crucial, or even necessary, to reach the people the Army wants to reach”. The Army surpassed its recruitment goal for 2019.

Although the *Airman Challenge* game is a new attempt at recruitment, the armed forces have a long history being involved in the video game market, and the entertainment industry more generally. Secker’s work has uncovered the depths of collaboration between the military and the entertainment industry. Through Freedom of Information requests, he was able to find that the Department of Defense reviews, edits and writes hundreds of TV and movie scripts every year, subsidising the entertainment world with free content and equipment in exchange for positive portrayals. “At this point, it’s difficult to effectively summarise the US military’s influence on the industry, because it’s so varied and all-encompassing,” he said.

The US Army spends tens of millions a year on the Institute for Creative Technologies, which develops advanced tech for the film and gaming industries, as well as in-house training games for the Army and – on occasion – the CIA. The Department Of Defense has supported a number of major game franchises (*Call of Duty*, Tom Clancy games, usually first or



Photo: Michael Shoemaker | USAF

Two US Air Force drone operators fly an MQ-9 Reaper drone from a ground control station on Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico.

Young people, therefore, spend huge amounts of time effectively being propagandised by the military

third-person shooters). Military-supported games are subject to the same rules of narrative and character as movies and TV, so they can be rejected or modified if they contain elements the Department Of Defense deems controversial.”

The video games industry is massive, with hyper-realistic first person shooters like *Call of Duty* being among the most popular genres. *Call of Duty: WWII*, for example, sold \$500-million worth of copies in its opening weekend alone, more money generated than blockbuster movies *Thor: Ragnarok* and *Wonder Woman* combined. Many

people spend hours a day playing. Captain Brian Stanley, a military recruiter in California said, “Kids know more about the army than we do... Between the weapons, vehicles, and tactics, and a lot of that knowledge comes from video games.”

Young people, therefore, spend huge amounts of time effectively being propagandised by the military. In *Call of Duty Ghosts*, for instance, you play as a US soldier fighting against a red-beret wearing anti-American Venezuelan dictator, clearly based on President Hugo Chavez, while in *Call of Duty 4*, you follow the US Army in Iraq, shooting hundreds of Arabs as you go. There’s even a mission where you operate a drone, which is distinctly similar to the *Airman Challenge*. US forces even control drones with Xbox controllers, blurring the lines between war games and war games even further.

Although the military indus-

trial complex is keen to advertise opportunities for pilots, they go to great lengths to hide the reality of what happens to the victims of airstrikes. The most famous of these is likely the *Collateral Murder* video, leaked by Chelsea Manning to Wikileaks co-founder Julian Assange. The video, which made worldwide news, laid bare the callousness towards civilian lives Haas described, where Air Force pilots laugh at shooting dead at least 12 unarmed civilians, including two Reuters journalists.

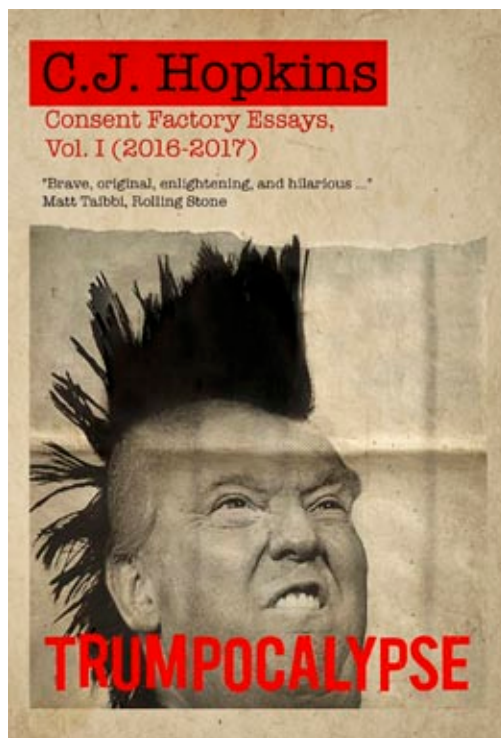
While those commanders ultimately in charge of military operations in the Middle East appear on television constantly, trying to sanitise their actions,

'If they feel they have to do this just to recruit a few hundred thousand people to their cause, maybe their cause isn't worth it'

Manning and Assange remain in prison for helping to expose the public to an alternative depiction of violence. Manning has spent the majority of the last decade incarcerated, while Assange awaits possible extradition to the United States in a London prison.

The *Airman Challenge* video game, for Secker, is merely "the latest in a long line of insidious and disturbing recruitment efforts by the US military". "If they feel they have to do this just to recruit a few hundred thousand people to their cause, maybe their cause isn't worth it", he said. **CT**

*Alan MacLeod is a staff writer with MintPress News. He is the author of *Bad News From Venezuela: Twenty Years of Fake News and Misreporting and Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent*. This article first appeared at www.mintpressnews.com*



Trumpocalypse

Consent Factory Essays
Vol. 1 (2016-2017)

C.J. Hopkins

In this first collection of his Consent Factory essays, C.J. Hopkins irreverently covers the improbable rise of Donald Trump, the political dynamics that led to his presidency, and the media-generated mass hysteria that swept America during his first term in office. "Brave, original, enlightening, and hilarious" (Matt Taibbi, *Rolling Stone*), the essays in this volume capture the insanity of 2016 and 2017. Trump's candidacy, the election, the Resistance, "Putin-Nazis," neo-McCarthyism, fake news, bots, Charlottesville ... the whole mad circus unleashed by America's "insane clown president."

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‘Burned at the stake’

The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture demolishes fake government and media claims targeting Julian Assange

ON the face of it, the task seems almost hopeless. As Tolstoy wrote: “The power of the government is maintained by public opinion, and with this power the government, by means of its organs – its officials, law courts, schools, churches, even the press – can always maintain the public opinion which they need”. (Leo Tolstoy, *Writings on Non-Violence and Civil Disobedience*, New Society Publishers, 1987, p.111)

Last December, we witnessed the awesome capacity of state-corporate power to manipulate public opinion and undermine a democratic election with a ruthless propaganda campaign smearing Jeremy Corbyn, a passionate anti-racist. The campaign depicted Corbyn not just as an antisemite, but as someone who might ‘reopen Auschwitz’. The truth wasn’t just distorted, it was reversed.

Israeli-born academic and author Jamie Stern-Weiner has commented: “No mainstream reporter ever investigated whether the allegations against Labour were true.

“Where journalists did not reflexively endorse the accusations

against Labour, they were content to uncritically relay them alongside the party’s response.

“Accusations by Jewish communal figures or anti-Corbyn MPs were considered inherently significant, whether or not they were accompanied by supporting evidence.”

Careful, credible analysis that made a nonsense of the claims was simply ignored. Vested interests may appear to hold all the cards – they work hard to give that impression – but this is only an appearance. The very fact that they work so relentlessly to shape public opinion indicates the precarious nature of their dominance.

The problem is inherent, structural – a ‘democratic’ society that subordinates the needs of the many to the needs of the few is a society based on lies. Propaganda obfuscating those lies can be disseminated endlessly, day and night, but it will always be vulnerable to individuals and groups with genuine expertise motivated by genuine concern for others.

As the Buddhist sage Je Gampopa commented: “Even a single virtuous act overcomes many

evils... a small good action can overcome a great wrong; it is highly efficient.” (Gampopa, *Gems of Dharma, Jewels of Freedom*, Altea, 1994, p.135)

Following in the footsteps of senior UN officials like Denis Halliday, Hans von Sponeck and Scott Ritter – who, between them, demolished many of the deceptions ‘justifying’ the genocidal 1990s US-UK sanctions regime in Iraq and the 2003 war of aggression on Iraq – consider the ‘highly efficient’ comments made to the Swiss magazine, *Republik*, by Nils Melzer on Julian Assange: “Four democratic countries joined forces – the US, Ecuador, Sweden and the UK – to leverage their power to portray one man as a monster so that he could later be burned at the stake without any outcry. The case is a huge scandal and represents the failure of Western rule of law. If Julian Assange is convicted, it will be a death sentence for freedom of the press.”

The problem for the propaganda system targeting Assange is that Melzer is not just someone blogging

on the internet; he is the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture. In addition, he is a professor of international law at the University of Glasgow and holds the Human Rights Chair at the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights in Switzerland, where he has been teaching since 2009, including as the Swiss Chair of International Humanitarian Law (2011–2013). Melzer even speaks fluent Swedish. In other words, it is hard to imagine anyone better qualified to comment on the Assange case.

Melzer describes how, on August 20, 2010, a headline appeared on the front page of *Expressen*, a leading Swedish tabloid, declaring that Julian Assange was suspected of having committed two rapes. Melzer describes his reaction on investigating these claims: “I speak fluent Swedish and was thus able to read all of the original documents. I could hardly believe my eyes: According to the testimony of the woman in question, a rape had never even taken place at all. And not only that: The woman’s testimony was later changed by the Stockholm police without her involvement in order to somehow make it sound like a possible rape. I have all the documents in my possession, the emails, the text messages.”

The order of events is extraor-

dinary and outrageous: “A woman walks into a police station. She doesn’t want to file a complaint but wants to demand an HIV test. The police then decide that this could be a case of rape and a matter for public prosecutors. The woman refuses to go along with that version of events and then goes home and writes a friend that it wasn’t



her intention, but the police want to ‘get their hands on’ Assange. Two hours later, the case is in the newspaper. As we know today, public prosecutors leaked it to the press – and they did so without even inviting Assange to make a statement. And the second woman, who had allegedly been raped

according to the Aug. 20 headline, was only questioned on Aug. 21.”

As Melzer says, this behaviour demonstrated the ‘willful malevolence of the authorities’. Melzer leaves no doubt about the real significance of the rape claims: “Imagine a dark room. Suddenly, someone shines a light on the elephant in the room – on war criminals, on corruption. Assange is the man with the spotlight. The governments are briefly in shock, but then they turn the spotlight around with accusations of rape. It is a classic manoeuvre when it comes to manipulating public opinion. The elephant once again disappears into the darkness, behind the spotlight. And Assange becomes the focus of attention instead, and we start talking about whether Assange is skateboarding in the embassy or whether he is feeding his cat correctly.”

The goal: “A show trial is to be used to make an example of Julian Assange. The point is to intimidate other journalists. Intimidation, by the way, is one of the primary purposes for the use of torture around the world. The message to all of us is: This is what will happen to you if you emulate the Wikileaks model.”

It is very much to Melzer’s credit that he admits that he was himself initially taken in by the propaganda campaign. He reveals that, in December 2018, he was asked by Assange’s lawyers to intervene. He declined: “I was overloaded with other petitions and wasn’t really familiar with the case. My impression, largely influenced

Image: RIQ / Flickr.com

by the media, was also coloured by the prejudice that Julian Assange was somehow guilty and that he wanted to manipulate me.”

After Assange’s lawyers made a second request in March 2019, Melzer felt that “my professional integrity demanded that I at least take a look at the material”. The result: “It quickly became clear to me that something was wrong.”

With unprecedented clarity, Melzer unpacks the meaning of the many bizarre twists and turns in the political persecution of Assange. Was it true, as so many journalists claim, that Assange sought asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy to evade Swedish justice? Melzer comments: “The [Assange] lawyers say that during the nearly seven years in which Assange lived in the Ecuadorian Embassy, they made over 30 offers to arrange for Assange to visit Sweden – in exchange for a guarantee that he would not be extradited to the US. The Swedes declined to provide such a guarantee by arguing that the US had not made a formal request for extradition.

“Such diplomatic assurances are a routine international practice... I say this on the strength of all of my experience behind the scenes of standard international practice: If a country refuses to provide such a diplomatic assurance, then all doubts about the good intentions of the country in question are justified. Why shouldn’t Sweden provide such assurances? From a legal perspective, after all, the US has absolutely nothing to do with Swedish sex offense proceedings.”

Melzer was asked if it was normal, or legally acceptable, for Swedish authorities to travel

‘The number of breaches of law that accumulated in Sweden in a few weeks during the preliminary criminal investigation is grotesque’

abroad for such an interrogation: “For exactly these kinds of judiciary issues, there is a cooperation treaty between the United Kingdom and Sweden, which foresees that Swedish officials can travel to the UK, or vice versa, to conduct interrogations or that such questioning can take place via video link. During the period of time in question, such questioning between Sweden and England took place in 44 other cases. It was only in Julian Assange’s case that Sweden insisted that it was essential for him to appear in person.”

Melzer’s conclusion: “From my perspective, Sweden very clearly acted in bad faith. Had they acted in good faith, there would have been no reason to refuse to answer my questions. The same holds true for the British: Following my visit to Assange in May 2019, they took six months to answer me – in a single-page letter, which was primarily limited to rejecting all accusations of torture and all inconsistencies in the legal proceedings. If you’re going to play games like that, then what’s the point of my mandate? I am the Special Rapporteur on Torture for the United Nations. I have a mandate to ask clear questions and to demand answers.”

He adds: “There is only a single explanation for everything – for the refusal to grant diplomatic assurances, for the refusal to question him in London: They wanted to apprehend him so they could extradite him to the US. The number of breaches of law that accumulated in Sweden within just a few weeks during the preliminary criminal investigation is simply grotesque.”

The media version was rather different. In 2012, the *Guardian*’s Laura Barton wrote of Assange and the Ecuadorian embassy: “Poor Julian. It can’t be easy to be confined to one building, no matter how prestigious the postcode... And so we decided to assemble a collection of items that Assange might be missing, and deliver them.”

A photograph showed an unsmiling Barton delivering a *Guardian* hamper to their *bete noire* at the Ecuadorian embassy: “we packed our hamper with a selection of edible items not native to Ecuador – Kellogg’s cornflakes fortified with vitamin D to compensate for the lack of sunlight in Assange’s life, a jar of Vegemite (as an antipodean, Julian was likely to spurn Marmite), a packet of chocolate-chip cookies, and a punnet of clementines.

“Recalling that Bill Keller, editor of the *New York Times*, once remarked upon Assange’s questionable hygiene and the fact he wore ‘filthy white socks’, we added three pairs of crisp, white sports socks and a shower gel in the ‘feelgood fragrance of eucalyptus and citrus oils’ that promised to be both ‘revitalising’ and ‘refreshing.’”

Medialens has documented many similar examples of this relentless, ferocious and frankly

weird corporate media mockery of Assange.

Assange is currently being held in London's Belmarsh prison prior to a hearing that will determine if he is to be extradited to the US. He has already served a 50-week sentence for skipping bail. Melzer comments on this sentence: "It is obvious that what we are dealing with here is political persecution. In Britain, bail violations seldom lead to prison sentences – they are generally subject only to fines. Assange, by contrast, was sentenced in summary proceedings to 50 weeks in a maximum-security prison – clearly a disproportionate penalty that had only a single purpose: Holding Assange long enough for the US to prepare their espionage case against him."

A US grand jury has indicted Assange on 18 charges – 17 of which fall under the US Espionage Act – around conspiracy to receive, obtain and disclose classified diplomatic and military documents. Melzer explains why Assange has no chance of receiving justice in the US: "He will not receive a trial consistent with the rule of law. That's another reason why his extradition shouldn't be allowed. Assange will receive a trial-by-jury in Alexandria, Virginia – the notorious 'Espionage Court' where the US tries all national security cases. The choice of location is not by coincidence, because the jury members must be chosen in proportion to the local population, and 85 percent of Alexandria residents work in the national security community – at the CIA, the NSA, the Defense Department and the State Department. When people are tried for harming national security in front of a jury like that,

In Britain, bail violations seldom lead to prison sentences – they are generally subject only to fines

the verdict is clear from the very beginning. The cases are always tried in front of the same judge behind closed doors and on the strength of classified evidence. Nobody has ever been acquitted there in a case like that. The result being that most defendants reach a settlement, in which they admit to partial guilt so as to receive a milder sentence."

Meanwhile, Assange's physical condition has continued to deteriorate: "I visited Assange in his cell in London in May 2019 together with two experienced, widely respected doctors who are specialised in the forensic and psychological examination of torture victims. The diagnosis arrived at by the two doctors was clear: Julian Assange displays the typical symptoms of psychological torture. If he doesn't receive protection soon, a rapid deterioration of his health is likely, and death could be one outcome."

Melzer's conclusions are utterly damning: "We have to stop believing that there was really an interest in leading an investigation into a sexual offence. What Wikileaks did is a threat to the political elite in the US, Britain, France and Russia in equal measure. Wikileaks

publishes secret state information – they are opposed to classification. And in a world, even in so-called mature democracies, where secrecy has become rampant, that is seen as a fundamental threat."

He adds: "We give countries power and delegate it to governments – but in return, they must be held accountable for how they exercise that power. If we don't demand that they be held accountable, we will lose our rights sooner or later. Humans are not democratic by their nature. Power corrupts if it is not monitored. Corruption is the result if we do not insist that power be monitored."

His final thoughts are an urgent warning to us all: "I have seen lots of horrors and violence and have seen how quickly peaceful countries like Yugoslavia or Rwanda can transform into infernos. At the roots of such developments are always a lack of transparency and unbridled political or economic power combined with the naivete, indifference and malleability of the population. Suddenly, that which always happened to the other – unpunished torture, rape, expulsion and murder – can just as easily happen to us or our children. And nobody will care. I can promise you that."

Footnote: Despite the credibility and integrity of the source, and the obvious newsworthiness of the issue, our ProQuest database search finds that Nils Melzer and his comments published in *Republik* on 31 January have not been mentioned in any US or UK media outlet. **CT**

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

■ GORDON PARKS

Famous fists

The photographer and
the world champion

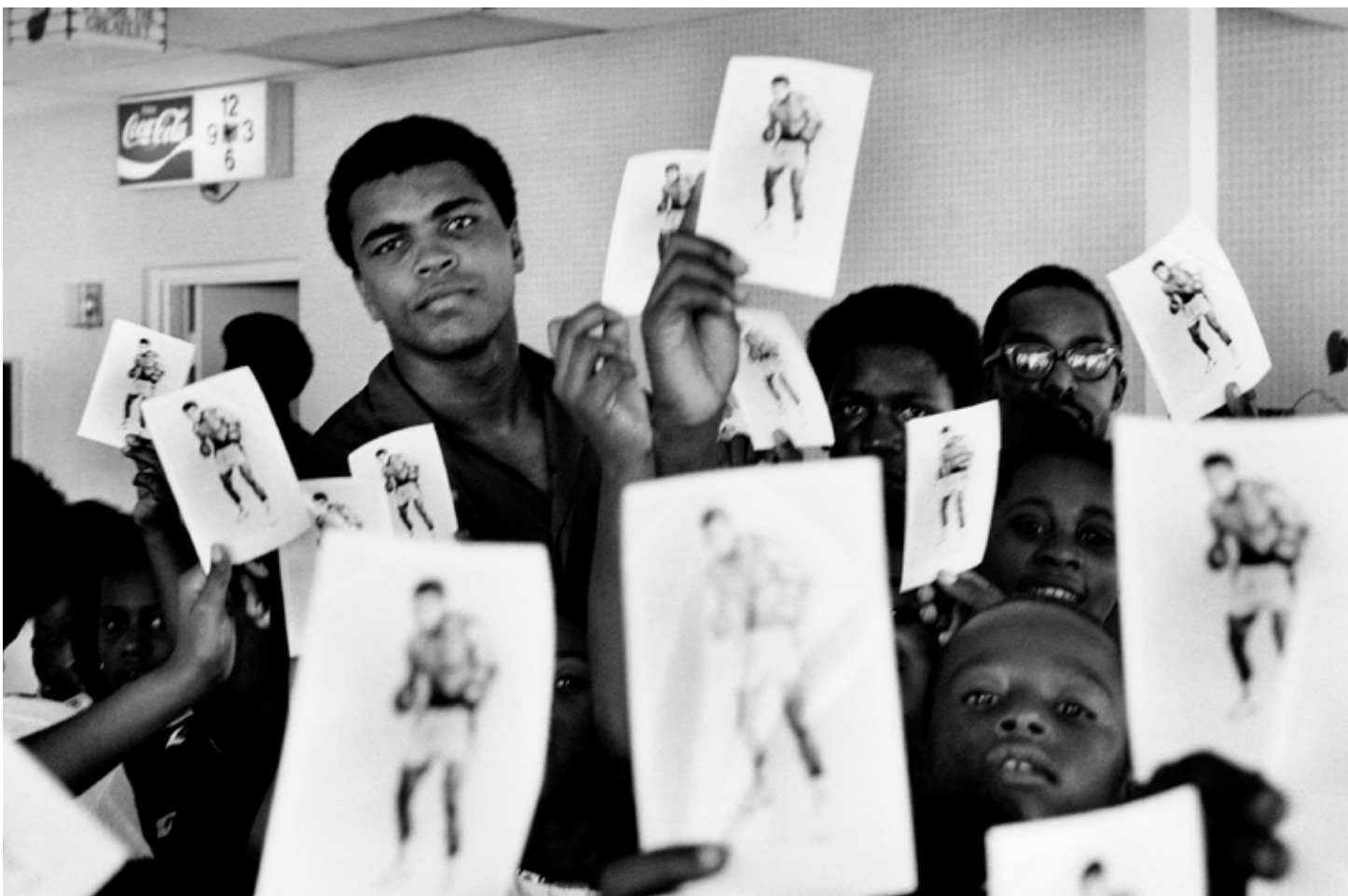


Photos by Gordon Parks (from Gordon Parks x Muhammad Ali, published by Steidl www.steidl.de)

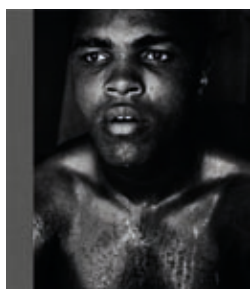
Gordon Parks, American (1912–2006). Untitled (Arsenal Stadium, Highbury), London, England, 1966. Gelatin silver print, 16 x 20 inches. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, anonymous gift, 2019.14.5. Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation.



Gordon Parks, *American*
(1912–2006). *Untitled*, 1966.
Gelatin silver print,
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Gordon Parks, American (1912–2006). *Untitled (Chamburger)*, Miami, Florida, 1970. *Gelatin silver print, 16 x 20 inches.* The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, anonymous gift, 2019.14.12. Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation.



**GORDON PARKS x
MUHAMMAD ALI**

Gordon Parks

Co-published by the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, the Gordon Parks Foundations and Steidl

www.steidl.de

\$55

In 1966 *Life* magazine assigned famed photographer Gordon Parks to cover Muhammad Ali, the brash young boxing champion. Four years later in 1970, the two came together again for a second *Life* feature.

“These encounters “, write Peter W. Kunhardt, Jr., of the Gordon Parks Foundation, and Julián Zugazagoitia, of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, in their foreword to the lavish new book *Parks v Ali*, jointly produced with German publisher Steidl, “framed a critical passage in the career of the controversial heavyweight, whose antiwar and black separatist views had led to widespread vilification in the United States. They also marked a significant moment of transition for Parks, then following up his remarkable success in photojournalism with new projects as an author, filmmaker, art photographer,



Gordon Parks, American (1912–2006). Untitled, Miami, Florida, 1966. Gelatin silver print, 11 x 14 inches. Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation.



Gordon Parks, American (1912–2006). Untitled (5th Street Gym), Miami Beach, Florida, 1966. Gelatin silver print, 16 x 20 inches. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, anonymous gift, 2019.14.8. Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation.



Gordon Parks, American (1912–2006). Muhammad Ali Interviewed by Reporters, London, England, 1966. Gelatin silver print, 11 x 14 inches. Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation.



Gordon Parks, American (1912–2006). Untitled, London, England, 1966. Gelatin silver print, 24 x 20 inches. Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation.

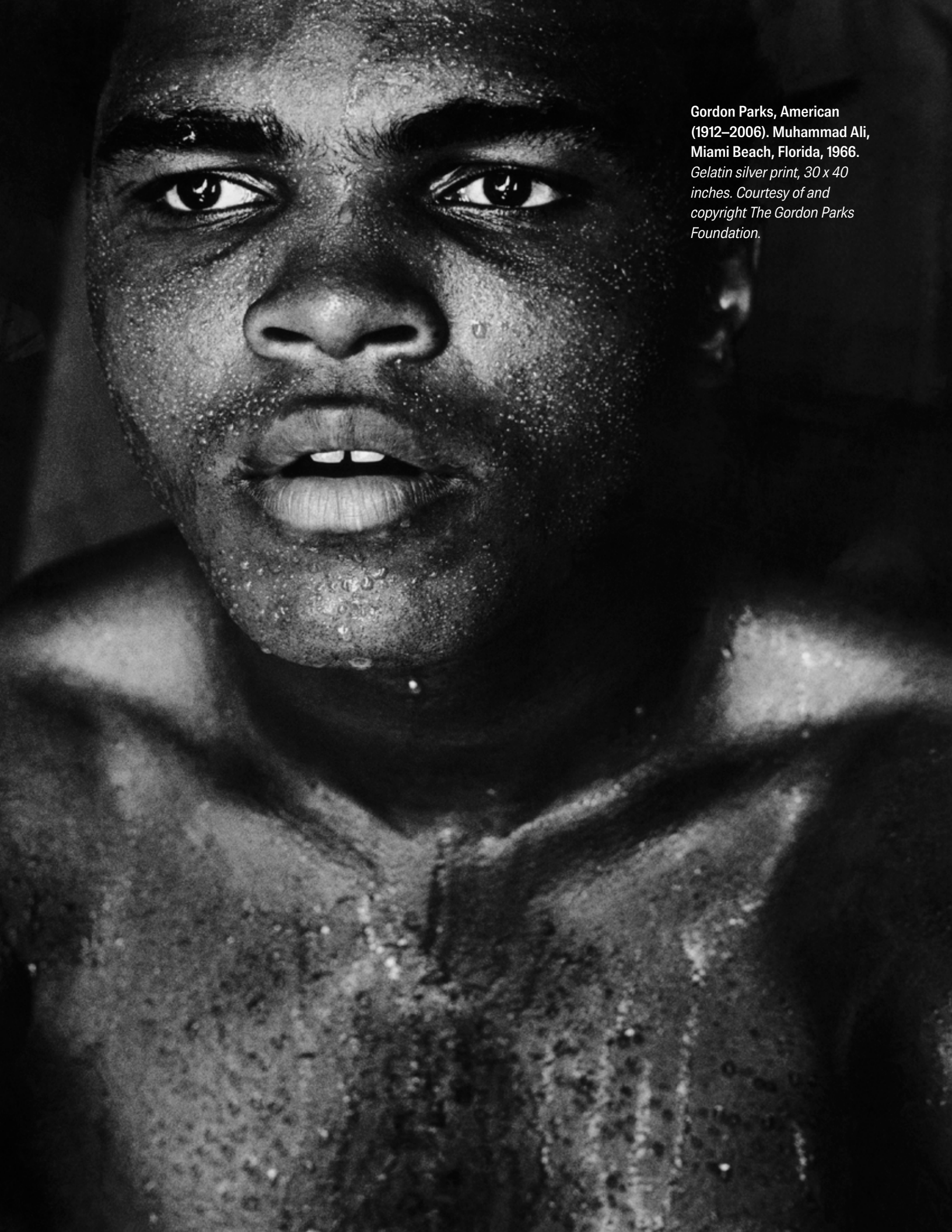
and composer of classical music.”

Collaborating on these two stories, Parks and Ali transcended their routine roles as journalist and athlete to make sense of the struggle against racial inequality, in which both were key players.

Parks’ intimate perspective on Ali during this crucial period is indispensable to understanding the boxer called “the greatest of all time.”

The new large-format book includes an expansive selection of photographs from Parks’ original reportage, many never before published, as well as reproductions of the original stories as they appeared in *Life* magazine. **CT**

● The Gordon Parks x Muhammad Ali exhibition, featuring 55 photographs from the book, is showing at the Nelson Atkins Museum until July 5, 2020 Website: <https://nelson-atkins.org/events/gordon-parks-muhammad-ali>



Gordon Parks, American
(1912–2006). Muhammad Ali,
Miami Beach, Florida, 1966.
*Gelatin silver print, 30 x 40
inches. Courtesy of and
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Foundation.*

Bernie Sanders and his Commie Kill Swarm

The only Democratic candidate with a chance of rescuing the world from the Putin-Nazis is a 78-year-old bloodthirsty Commie with a Khmer Rouge-like army of kill-crazy followers

AMERICA just can't catch a break. After three long years of brutal oppression under Donald Trump's Russia-backed Nazi Reich, it turns out the only Democratic candidate with a chance of unseating him in November and rescuing the world from the Putin-Nazis is a 78-year-old bloodthirsty Commie with a Khmer Rouge-like army of kill-crazy followers.

Yes, I'm afraid the rumours are true. Apparently, elements of Jeremy Corbyn's recently-disbanded Nazi Death Cult have regrouped in the United States, formed an alliance with Bernie Sanders fanatics, and together this Mega-Commie Kill Swarm is roaming the Internet with complete impunity, sadistically mass-murdering Sanders critics and defenceless differently-abled persons with vulgar language and vicious poo-memes.

The corporate media are doing their best to alert Americans to the imminent threat. CNN broadcast a special report explaining how Sanders' 'army of supporters' are 'bullying' and 'frightening' his critics into silence. An 'outspo-

ken Elizabeth Warren supporter whose daughter with Downs syndrome is recovering from cancer' was verbally-abused to within an inch of her life. An 'activist dying of ALS' was instructed to go "f----" himself.

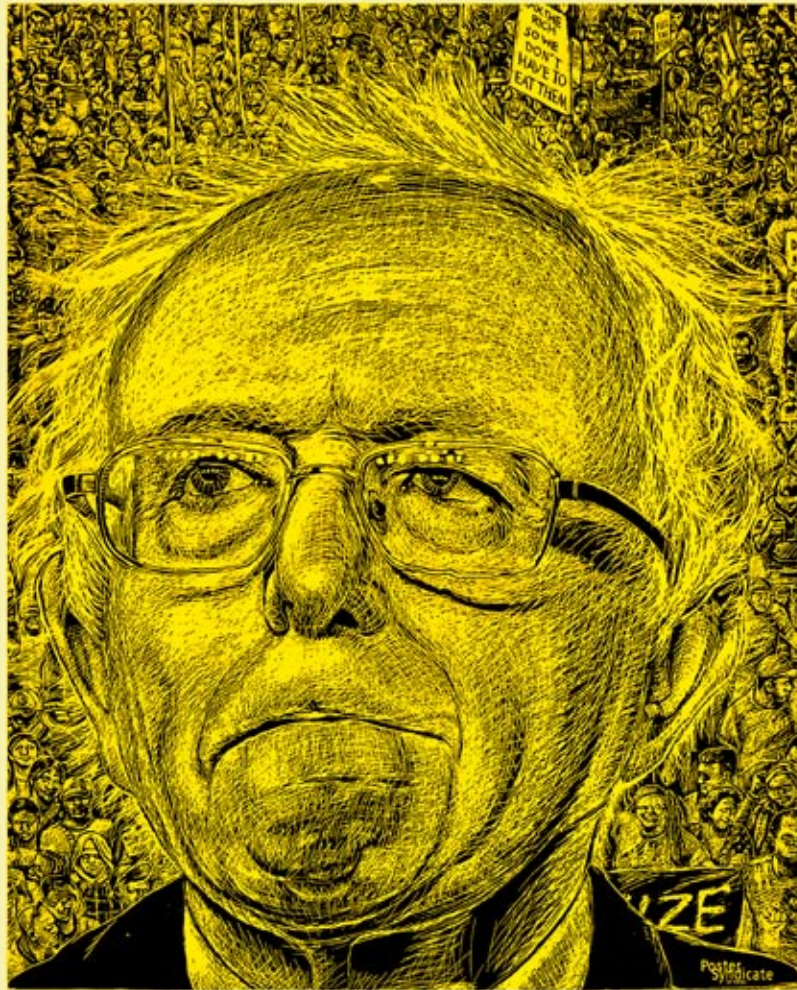
The Working Families Party was subjected to a series of inappropriate adjectives. The Party's leader, an African American and personal friend of Bernie Sanders, was taunted with a racist tweet, which Sanders took to Twitter and condemned, but by that time it was much too late. His Commie Kill Swarm was beyond his control; they started tweeting memes comparing Elizabeth Warren to a snake and Pete Buttigieg to a rat, and otherwise terrorising the American public.

Senior Investigative Correspondent Drew Griffin spoke to several other 'victims' of Sanders' Commie Kill Swarm's tweets who are recovering from their Internet traumas in undisclosed secure locations and so insisted on remaining anonymous. According to Griffin, these emotionally-traumatised victims

are so emotionally traumatised by what they experienced on the Internet that they wouldn't even let him describe the traumatic 'circumstances' surrounding their 'attacks.'

And the proof of Sanders' Commie Kill Swarm's atrocities isn't just anecdotal. No, Griffin also spoke to Ben Decker, CEO of something called Memetica (which appears to be Ben's Twitter account), whose 'Facebook analysis' conclusively proves that Sanders has a lot of online supporters, more than all the other candidates, which creates 'the potential for greater harm.' This type of online "bullying-at-scale", according to Ben, is just ... well, 'crazy.'

Of course, CNN is not the only corporate media outlet on the case. In the days leading up to the Iowa caucuses (which Sanders would go on to attempt to steal from Buttigieg by winning thousands more votes), a spate of dire warnings were issued. According to the *Washington Post*, 'Sanders supporters have weaponised Facebook', and are terrorising people with 'angry memes'. The *New York Times* reported that



TAX THE RICH SO WE
DON'T HAVE TO EAT THEM

MENACE TO SOCIETY!: Poster from wall in San Francisco (colour added).

'Bernie Sanders and His Internet Army' have forced progressives who refuse to back him into hiring private security details to protect them from 'death threats' and off-colour jokes. *Daily Beast* warned of 'Toxic Bernie Bros'. NBC likened them to MAGA supporters, who everyone knows are Russia-loving Nazis. SNL writers went even further, painting Sanders as the darling of 4chan ... and these are just a few examples.

But by far the most bombastic display of unbridled Sanders-Commie-Kill-Swarm-Panic was MSNBC's Chris Matthews, who totally lost it after the last debate and started sputtering about 'socialists' staging public mass-executions in Central Park. Matthews is apparently firmly convinced that Sanders, if he wins the election, plans to dress up like Fidel Castro, march Matthews and his cronies out onto the Great Lawn, and go

full-bore Daenerys Targaryen on them. He sat there, trembling, on national television, eyes afire with paranoia, jabbering about the godless 'Reds' like a scene from Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* that got cut because it was too over-the-top.

Seriously, though, I doubt he has much to worry about. Regardless of who wins the election this year, the supranational corporatocracy that essentially owns the US government is not about to let Bernie Sanders implement the same basic social programmes that most capitalist countries throughout world have provided to their people for decades. Jesus, just imagine the freedomless horror if Americans could go to university, and, you know, maybe raise a child or two, without spending the rest of their lives in debt! Think of the suffering that would inflict on the banks, and insurance companies, and military contractors, not to mention the pharmaceutical industry. God help America, should it go down that road! The next thing you know there'd be high-speed trains, subsidised art, and un-chlorinated chicken ... there's no telling where the nightmare would end.

Look, I don't normally get invested in the quadrennial Simulation of Democracy, but I'm kind of pulling for Bernie this time. I don't believe he has a chance, but if he somehow managed to outfox the Democrats and win the nomination this summer, it would be fun to watch as the corporate media and the rest of the neoliberal Resistance react to a Sanders vs Trump election.

Not that either Sanders or Trump, the men themselves, are a threat to the empire (as we have

witnessed over the course of the last three years). But we're in the middle of a War on Populism, which the global corporatocracy needs to win if it is going to continue to relentlessly destabilise, privatise, and restructure everything, as it has been doing since the end of the Cold War. Sanders and Trump are just symbols, of course, lightning rods for 'populist' anger ... but they are symbols the empire needs to destroy in order to reestablish 'normality.'

The neoliberal Resistance's ham-fisted efforts to prevent a Bernie Sanders nomination are desperate attempts to avoid a scenario where they are forced to ensure Donald Trump's reelection, which, make no mistake, they will do if they have to. (Jonathan Chait has already whipped up some boilerplate to be used in that effort.) They did it to Corbyn, and they

will do it to Sanders, but it is likely to get extremely awkward, pretending to reluctantly support him (because the alternative will be a man they've spent the last three years accusing of being a Russian spy and literally Hitler) while simultaneously painting him as a genocidal commie terrorist whose supporters are a bunch of white supremacist, billionaire-butcherer neo-Maoists.

Thus the 'Sanders Swarm' hysteria, and the Iowa caucuses 'technical difficulties', and whatever other propaganda and dirty tricks the Resistance has planned to prevent a Sanders nomination, so they can lose to Trump with a non-populist candidate and play 'Resistance' for another four years.

So, unless you relish the thought of that, or the thought

of watching a humiliated Bernie obsequiously shuffle around the country campaigning for Buttigieg, like he did for Clinton, please do what you can to get him nominated, so we can enjoy a Pol Pot vs Hitler election.

Do it for purely entertainment purposes. It is mostly just a show, after all. **CT**

CJ Hopkins is an award-winning American playwright, novelist and political satirist based in Berlin. His plays are published by Bloomsbury Publishing and Broadway Play Publishing, Inc. His dystopian novel, Zone 23, is published by Snoggsworthy, Swaine & Cormorant. Volume I of his Consent Factory Essays is published by Consent Factory Publishing. He can be reached at www.cjhopkins.com or www.consentfactory.org.

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■ MEDEA BENJAMIN & NICOLAS J. S. DAVIES

Rising from the ashes of 20 years of war



How a stronger, more committed, and more determined global peace movement could tame the US war machine

FEBRUARY 15 marked the day, 17 years ago, when global demonstrations against the pending Iraq invasion were so massive that the *New York Times* called world public opinion ‘the second superpower.’ But the US ignored it and invaded Iraq anyway. So what has become of the momentous hopes of that day?

The US military has not won a war since 1945, unless you count recovering the tiny colonial outposts of Grenada, Panama and Kuwait, but there is one threat it has consistently outmanoeuvred without firing more than a few deadly rifle shots and some tear gas. Ironically, this existential threat is the very one that could peacefully cut it down to size and take away its most dangerous and expensive weapons: its own peace-loving citizens.

During the Vietnam War, young Americans facing a life-and-death draft lottery built a powerful anti-

war movement. President Nixon proposed ending the draft as a way to undermine the peace movement, since he believed that young people would stop protesting the war once they were no longer obligated to fight. In 1973, the draft was ended, leaving a volunteer army that insulated the vast majority of Americans from the deadly impact of America’s wars.

Despite the lack of a draft, a new anti-war movement – this time with global reach – sprung up in the period between the crimes of 9/11 and the illegal US invasion of Iraq in March 2003. The February 15, 2003, protests were the largest demonstrations in human history, uniting people around the world in opposition to the unthinkable prospect that the US would actually launch its threatened ‘shock and awe’ assault on Iraq. Some 30-million people in 800 cities took part on every continent, including

Antarctica. This massive repudiation of war, memorialised in the documentary *We Are Many*, led *New York Times* journalist Patrick E. Tyler to comment that there were now two superpowers on the planet: the United States and world public opinion.

The US war machine demonstrated total disdain and unleashed an illegal war based on lies that has now raged on through many phases of violence and chaos for 17 years. With no end in sight to US and allied wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Libya, Syria, Palestine, Yemen and West Africa, and Trump’s escalating diplomatic and economic warfare against Iran, Venezuela and North Korea threatening to explode into new wars, where is the second superpower now, when we need it more than ever?

Since the US assassination of

Iran's General Soleimani in Iraq on January 2, the peace movement has reemerged onto the streets, including people who marched in February 2003 and new activists too young to remember when the US was not at war. There have been three separate days of protest, on January 4, January 9 and a global day of action on January 25. The rallies took place in hundreds of cities, but did not attract nearly the numbers who came out to protest the pending war with Iraq in 2003, or even those of the smaller rallies and vigils that continued as the Iraq war spiralled out of control until at least 2007.

Our failure to stop the US war on Iraq in 2003 was deeply discouraging. But the number of people active in the US anti-war movement shrank even more after the 2008 election of Barack Obama. Many people did not want to protest the nation's first black president, and many, including the Nobel Peace Prize Committee, really believed he would be a 'peace president.'

While Obama reluctantly honoured Bush's agreement with the Iraqi government to withdraw US troops from Iraq and he signed the Iran nuclear deal, he was far from a peace president. He oversaw a new doctrine of covert and proxy war that substantially reduced US military casualties, but unleashed an escalation of the war in Afghanistan, a campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria that destroyed entire cities, a tenfold increase in CIA drone strikes on Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia, and bloody proxy wars in Libya and Syria that rage on today. In the end, Obama spent more on the military and dropped more bombs on more countries than Bush did. He also refused to

Obama moved America's wars farther into the shadows and gave the American public an illusion of peace in the midst of endless war

hold Bush and his cronies responsible for their war crimes.

Obama's wars were no more successful than Bush's in restoring peace or stability to any of those countries or improving the lives of their people. But Obama's 'disguised, quiet, media-free approach' to war made the US state of endless war much more politically sustainable. By reducing US casualties and waging war with less fanfare, he moved America's wars farther into the shadows and gave the American public an illusion of peace in the midst of endless war, effectively disarming and dividing the peace movement.

Obama's secretive war policy was backed by a vicious campaign against any brave whistleblowers who tried to drag it out into the light. Jeffrey Sterling, Thomas Drake, Chelsea Manning, John Kiriakou, Edward Snowden and now Julian Assange have been prosecuted and jailed under unprecedented new interpretations of the WWI-era Espionage Act.

With Donald Trump in the White House, we hear Republicans making the same excuses for Trump – who ran on an anti-war platform – that Democrats made for Obama. First, his supporters

accept lip service about wanting to end wars and bring troops home as revealing what the president really wants to do, even as he keeps escalating the wars. Second, they ask us to be patient because, despite all the real-world evidence, they are convinced he is working hard behind the scenes for peace. Third, in a final cop-out that undermines their other two arguments, they throw up their hands and say that he is 'only' the president, and the Pentagon or 'deep state' is too powerful for even him to tame.

Obama and Trump's 'disguised, quiet, media-free approach' to war has inoculated America's wars and militarism against the virus of democracy, but new social movements have grown up to tackle problems closer to home. The financial crisis led to the rise of the Occupy Movement, and now the climate crisis and America's entrenched race and immigration problems have all provoked new grassroots movements. Peace advocates have been encouraging these movements to join the call for major Pentagon cuts, insisting that the hundreds of billions saved could help fund everything from Medicare for All to the Green New Deal to free college tuition.

A few sectors of the peace movement have been showing how to use creative tactics and build diverse movements. The movement for Palestinians' human and civil rights includes students, Muslim and Jewish groups, as well as black and indigenous groups fighting similar struggles here at home. Also inspirational are campaigns for peace on the Korean peninsula led by Korean Americans, such as Women Cross the DMZ, which has brought together women from

North Korea, South Korea and the United States to show the Trump administration what real diplomacy looks like.

There have also been successful efforts pushing a reluctant Congress to take anti-war positions. For decades, Congress has been only too happy to leave war-making to the president, abrogating its constitutional role as the only power authorized to declare war. Thanks to public pressure, there has been a remarkable shift.

In 2019, both houses of Congress voted to end US support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen and to ban arms sales to Saudi Arabia for the war in Yemen, although President Trump vetoed both bills. Now Congress has passed bipartisan bills to explicitly prohibit an unauthorised war on Iran.

Another bright light in Congress is the pioneering work of first-term Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, who recently laid out a series of bills called Pathway to PEACE that challenge our militaristic foreign policy. While her bills will be hard to pass Congress, they lay out a marker for where we should be heading.

The presidential election offers an opportunity to push the anti-war agenda. The most effective and committed anti-war champion in the race is Bernie Sanders. The popularity of his call for getting the US out of its imperial interventions and his votes against 84 percent of military spending bills since 2013 are reflected not only in his poll numbers but also in the way other Democratic candidates are rushing to take similar positions. All now say the US should rejoin the Iran nuclear deal; all have criticised the bloated Pentagon budget, despite

We cannot just walk out of the voting booth and leave it to a champion in the White House to end our wars and bring us peace

regularly voting for it; and most have promised to bring US troops home from the Middle East.

As we look to the future in this election year, what are our chances of reviving the world's second superpower and ending America's wars? Absent a major new war, we are unlikely to see big demonstrations in the streets. But two decades of endless war have created a strong anti-war sentiment.

On Iran, a September 2019 University of Maryland poll showed that a mere one-fifth of Americans said the US "should be prepared to go to war" to achieve its goals in Iran, while three-quarters said that US goals do not warrant military intervention. Along with the Pentagon's assessment of how disastrous a war with Iran would be, this public sentiment fuelled global protests and condemnation that have temporarily forced Trump to dial down his military escalation and threats against Iran.

So, while our government's war propaganda has convinced many Americans that we are powerless to stop its catastrophic wars, it has failed to convince most Americans that we are wrong to want to. As on other issues, activism has two main hurdles to overcome: first to

convince people that something is wrong; and second to show them that, by working together to build a popular movement, we can do something about it.

The peace movement's small victories demonstrate that we have more power to challenge US militarism than most Americans realise. As more peace-loving people in the US and across the world discover the power they have, the second superpower we glimpsed briefly on February 15, 2003, has the potential to rise stronger, more committed and more determined from the ashes of two decades of war.

A new president like Bernie Sanders in the White House would create an opening for peace. But as on many domestic issues, that opening will only bear fruit and overcome the opposition of powerful vested interests if there is a mass movement behind it every step of the way. If there is a lesson for peace-loving Americans in the Obama and Trump presidencies, it is that we cannot just walk out of the voting booth and leave it to a champion in the White House to end our wars and bring us peace. In the final analysis, it really is up to us. Please join us! **CT**

Medea Benjamin, co-founder of CODEPINK for Peace, is the author of several books, including Kingdom of the Unjust: Behind the US-Saudi Connection. Nicolas JS Davies is an independent journalist, a researcher for CODEPINK, and the author of Blood on Our Hands: The American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq. This article was produced by Local Peace Economy, a project of the Independent Media Institute.

Why is Turkey looking for quagmires?

Erdogan may get his early election, but it probably won't turn out the way he expects

ON the surface, Turkish intervention in the Libyan civil war appears to be a savvy move on the Eastern Mediterranean energy chessboard, a check on plans by a consortium of the European Union (EU), Greece, Egypt, Israel and Cyprus to exploit offshore gas and oil deposits. In exchange for military support, the beleaguered UN supported Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli signed an agreement last November that re-draws maritime boundaries in the region, giving Ankara a seat at the table.

Or at least that is what Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hopes. But 'hop' and 'Libya' are not words that easily mesh, and Ankara is finding that the Turkish intervention is less like a move in a game of skillful manoeuvre than an old fashioned quagmire. Why the Turkish autocrat thought choosing sides in a civil war was a good idea is hard to fathom, especially after his debacle in Syria.

When the Syrian civil war broke out in 2011, Erdogan jumped in with both feet, arming and feeding the opposition to the Bashar

al Assad government, aiding Al Qaida extremists crossing the Turkish border, and predicting that the Damascus regime's days were numbered. Nine years later, Turkey is swamped with 3.8-million refugees, and Ankara's allies are barely clinging to Syria's Idlib Province in the northwest.

While last year's invasion of Syria did drive most of the Kurds from Syria's eastern border, Syrian and Russian troops blocked Ankara's plans for a 20-mile deep *cordon sanitaire* to which it could re-locate millions of refugees. After almost a decade of intervention, Erdogan finds his army bogged down on the losing side of a civil war, growing discontent at home over the refugees and the economy, and looking outmanoeuvred by Moscow and Damascus.

And yet once again Turkey is picking sides in a civil war, and this one more than 1,000 miles from the Turkish border.

There is a certain logic to Ankara's move. Turkey's claim to energy resources is based on its occupation of northern Cyprus,

and Turkey objects to being left out of the regional energy agreement drawn up by the consortium. But since no country in the world recognises the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Ankara's claims for a slice of the energy pie have been ignored.

When Egypt, Israel, Cyprus, Italy, Jordan and Palestine formed the Eastern Mediterranean Forum last year, Ankara was left out. Some Forum members want to build a pipeline to ship natural gas through Crete to Italy and Greece.

The confrontation over energy has, at times, got ugly. Turkish warships drove off Italian drillers last year, but backed down from an American energy company accompanied by a US destroyer. Tensions are high between Athens and Ankara, and some sort of military clash is not out of the question, although Turkey and Greece are both members of NATO.

The Turkish president's usual sure footedness seems to have deserted him. By openly declaring for one side in Libya, Turkey has damaged its ability to influence events. The Russians and French are also



CHOOSING SIDES: Libyan intervention has caused problems for Recep Erdogan.

deeply involved in Libya, backing the eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA) based in Tobruk. Italy backs the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli.

The French have been sneaking weapons to the LNA, and a Russian private company, the Wagner Group, is supplying mercenaries and trainers. But the European involvement is undeclared and unofficial, allowing those countries to play a mediating role in the future.

However, by guaranteeing it would protect the Tripoli-based

GNA government, Turkey has painted itself into a corner. Its only real ally is Qatar and (clandestinely) Italy.

Openly arrayed against the GNA are the United Arab Emirates and Egypt which, along with French supplied rockets and Russian mercenaries and drones, have driven the Tripoli government out of Surt and are knocking on the door of the capital. Erdogan's plan to use Turkish soldiers was scotched by the unanimous opposition of the 22-member Arab League and the January. 20 Berlin Conference on the war. And Turkey's plan to use

Syrian mercenaries seems to have died. That Erdogan really thought Syrians would want to fight in Libya suggests a certain disengagement from reality.

Erdogan initially assumed that his intervention would be supported by Morocco, where the President's Justice and Development Party (AKP) is closely aligned with Rabat's Ennahda Party. But instead of opening its airfields to Turkish warplanes, Morocco is remaining adamantly neutral, as is Algeria.

At home, however, Erdogan's intervention has been popular. Many Turks are nostalgic for the old days when the Ottoman Empire ruled the Middle East and North Africa, and the GNA is allied with the ethnically Turkish militias in Misurata. Libya was the last Ottoman holding to break free from Istanbul's rule.

But how long that popularity holds is an open question. The Turkish economy is in recession and unemployment is at 14 percent. Turkey will soon have to cope with hundreds of thousands more Syrian refugees fleeing from the Syrian Army and Russian air power in the northwest.

A number of other foreign adventures have gone south as well. Last month several Turkish contractors and policemen were targeted by a roadside bomb in Somalia. Turkey has poured more than \$1-billion into that war-torn country, taking over its major airport and sea port. But if you want the definition of "quagmire" you do not have look much further than Somalia.

In the last round of local Turk-

ish elections, Erdogan's AKP took a thrashing, losing the mayoralty races in Turkey's six largest cities. His hugely expensive scheme to dig a massive canal to link the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara has run into a buzzsaw of opposition in Istanbul, and was one of the reasons the AKP lost the election.

The loss was a double blow because Istanbul was where Erdogan got his start in politics. It was also a piggy bank for the AKP, which cashed in on kickbacks by construction firms. The city represents more than 30 percent of Turkey's GDP.

Has the most powerful and successful politician since Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey, started to stumble? For almost 20 years, Erdogan has dominated the country through a combination of clever politics and an iron fist. He has built a formidable election machine through his construction schemes – the canal is the latest – stuffed ballot boxes, virtually eliminated any opposition media, and tossed thousands

Syria is a disaster, Libya looks like a bridge too far, and the African Union is considering withdrawing troops from Somalia

of his opponents into prison.

But Syria is a disaster, Libya looks like a bridge too far, and the African Union is considering withdrawing troops from Somalia, leaving Turkey to inherit the two-decade old war. Erdogan is at odds with the EU and every country in the Middle East save Qatar. And even Qatar seems to be positioning itself to settle its differences with two of Turkey's regional foes, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

At home, the Turkish lira is plummeting, unemployment remains stubbornly high, and massive construction projects no longer keep the economy humming. In the past Erdogan could rely on religiously conservative Kurds to back the

AKP, but his repressive policies toward the Kurdish community has alienated that minority.

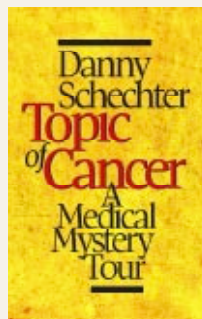
Lastly, the AKP has splintered, spinning off a centre-right party attracting those who are weary of Erdogan's one-man rule. Counting Erdogan out, however, would be premature. He can keep the EU at bay by threatening to unleash millions of refugees now residing in Turkey. He can count on the loyalty of the military and the police to keep much of the opposition cowed, and he can still rely on most religious Turks.

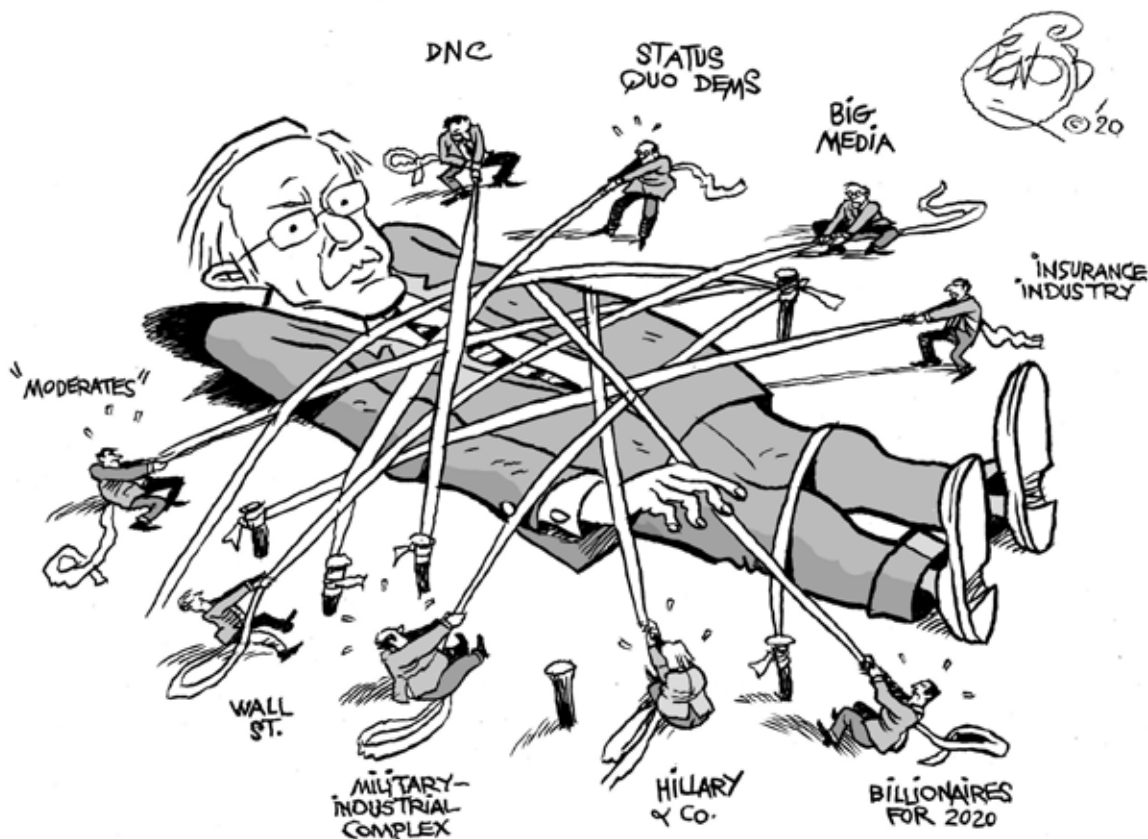
While there are no national elections scheduled until 2023, Erdogan is likely to push that up to 2021, if not before, figuring he can pull out another victory. But the AKP has never gone into an election with the opposition controlling the major cities and divisions with in its own ranks. Erdogan may get his early election. It may not turn out the way he wants. **CT**

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

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Art: Khalil Bendib

FOR decades, Republicans have painted anyone left of Barry Goldwater as a ‘socialist’. Why? Because for a generation raised on the Cold War, ‘socialist’ just seemed like a damaging label.

And, probably, it was.

You can tell, because many liberal-leaning figures internalised that fear. When Donald Trump vowed that “America will never be a socialist country”, for instance, no less than Senator Elizabeth Warren stood and applauded.

But while older Americans retain some antipathy toward the word, folks raised in the age of ‘late capitalism’ don’t. In Gal-

■ PETER CERTO

Who’s afraid of socialism?

lup polls, more millennial and Gen-Z respondents say they view ‘socialism’ positively with each passing year, while their opinion of ‘capitalism’ tumbles ever downward.

As a result, it’s not all that surprising that self-described democratic socialist Senator Bernie Sanders tops Trump in most head to head polls – and just scooped up popular vote

victories in the Iowa and New Hampshire primaries.

Still, old propaganda dies hard. What else could explain the panicky musings of Chis Matthews, the liberal-ish MSNBC host, who recently wondered aloud if a Sanders victory would mean “executions in Central Park?”

Never mind that Sanders is a longtime opponent of all executions, as any news host could surely look up. The real issue is a prejudice, particularly among Americans reared on fears of the Soviet Union and Maoist China, that ‘socialism’ implies dictatorship, while ‘capitalism’ presumes democracy.

Their Cold War education serves them poorly. Yes, it's easy to name calamitous dictatorships, living and deceased, that proclaim socialist or communist commitments. But it's just as easy to point to Europe, where democratic socialist parties and their descendants have been mainstream players in democratic politics for a century or longer.

The healthcare, welfare, and tax systems built by those parties have created societies with far greater equality, higher social mobility, and better health outcomes (at lower cost) than we enjoy here. These systems aren't perfect, but to a significant degree they're more democratic than our own.

But we don't have to look abroad (or to Vermont) for a rich social democratic history.

Milwaukee mayor Daniel Hoan – one of several socialists to govern the city – served for 24 years, and built the country's first public busing and housing programmes. And ruby-red North Dakota is, even now, the only state in the country with a state-owned bank, thanks to a socialist-led government in the early 20th-century. Today, dozens of elected socialists hold office at the state or municipal levels.

While plenty of socialists embraced democracy, plenty of capitalists turned to dictatorship.

In the name of fighting socialism during the Cold War, the US trained and supported members of right-wing death squads in El Salvador, genocidal army units in Guatemala, and a Chilean military regime that disappeared or tortured tens of thousands of peo-

ple while enacting 'pro-market reforms.'

Only last year, the US government was cheering a military coup against an elected socialist government in Bolivia. And in 2018, the *Wall Street Journal* praised far-right Brazilian leader Jair Bolsonaro, an apologist for the country's old military regime, for his deregulation of business.

Even here at home, our capitalist 'freedoms' have coexisted peacefully with racial apartheid, the world's largest prison system, and the mass internment of immigrants and their children.

Sanders has been clear his socialist tradition comes from the social democratic systems common in countries like Denmark, with their provisions for univer-

sal health care and free college.

Should Matthews next wonder aloud if candidates who oppose Medicare for all or free college also support death squads, genocide, mass incarceration, or internment camps? If that sounds unfair, then so should the lazy fear mongering we get about 'socialism.'

The sobering truth is that all political systems are capable of either great violence or social uplift. That's why we need resilient social movements, whatever system we use – and why we're poorly served by propaganda from any corner. **CT**

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

■ CHRISTINE BERRY

Ditch cartoon Corbynism if the Left is to move forward

THERE have always been two versions of Corbynism: what I'd call 'actually existing Corbynism', and a sort of cartoon Corbynism that exists mainly in the minds of its political opponents. You'll be familiar with cartoon Corbynism, even if you don't know it, because it has dominated media discussion of the UK Labour Party for the last five years. They're top-down state socialists; they just want to

nationalise everything; they're going to take us back to the 1970s (or maybe the 1940s).

Theresa May set the tone in the 2017 election campaign, responding to the leaked Labour manifesto by accusing it of harking "back to the disastrous socialist policies of the 1970s". But it wasn't just Tories that peddled this line: many Labour politicians privately and not-so-privately did the same. As it turned out, the electorate didn't seem to agree,

with the manifesto leak later seen as the turning point of a campaign that deprived May of her majority. This inconvenient fact silenced Corbyn's internal critics for a while, until they found new sticks with which to beat him. Now Labour has finally suffered the resounding defeat that 2017 so unhelpfully failed to produce, cartoon Corbynism is enjoying a comeback.

Writing for the *Independent*, Rob Newman of the Independent Group for Change repeats Margaret Beckett's dismissal of the Corbyn wing as "the 'moron' tendency", insisting that the country "reject[ed] nationalisation out of hand" at the election. This is certainly a bold take from someone representing a party that has just lost every single one of its MPs. But more than this, it's one that willfully refuses to engage either with the evidence that Labour's policies on public ownership are still overwhelmingly popular, or with the detail of the policies themselves.

Suzanne Moore has been at it as well. Last month the *Guardian* published her rambling diatribe that implicitly accused the Corbyn wing of having nothing to offer: "shouting about austerity and neoliberalism may have felt righteous, but it was never policy", she observes. Good job Labour also had some policies then, eh? The left must be "optimistic, visionary and inclusive instead of just ranting slogans about how awful everything is." Honestly, it's as though 2017 never happened. Corbyn's opponents never truly got their heads around the

fact that people were presented with a bold vision for change and actually seemed to quite like it. Now that Corbyn has been defeated and order is restored, they have simply written this episode out of history.

A January 27 *Guardian* article from John Harris is another example. Labour is "stuck in the 20th century", we're told; its 2019 platform amounted to little more than "old-fashioned statism", and represents a "failure to understand that 1945 was a long time ago". Harris will be relieved to know that he's not alone in his view that Labour must embrace radical democracy and empowerment rather than "leaving the basic structure of the state untouched". Nor is he the only one looking to "things written many years ago", such as 1989's *New Times*. One senior Labour figure has been re-reading the 1979 pamphlet *In And Against The State*, which declared: "it is the state's resources we need – its relations we don't". He has argued that "the old, Morrisonian model of nationalisation centralised too much power in a few hands in Whitehall", and that Labour must instead embrace more localised models that genuinely empower ordinary people and communities: "democracy and decentralisation are the watchwords of our socialism". The name of this maverick innovator? John McDonnell.

On February 4, Liz Kendall and Alison McGovern became the latest to add their voices to the chorus. In a piece for *PoliticsHome*,

they accuse Labour of being "stuck in the past", and of focussing on what it is against rather than what it is for. Bafflingly, the piece then goes on to set out a list of five 'challenges' which could have been written ten years ago, and to which they offer no solutions.

But as Joe Guinan and I show in our book *People Get Ready!*, the Corbyn project has always been about reinventing 20th-century socialism rather than reviving it – and, moreover, reinventing it in precisely the ways Harris identifies. Hence their work on new approaches to public ownership: for instance, "passengers, rail workers and government too, co-operatively running the railways". The 2019 manifesto pledged to expand community energy, promising that "utilities won't be run from Whitehall but by service-users and workers". The party set up a Community Wealth Building Unit to help replicate and scale the much-lauded Preston Model in Labour councils across the country.

So why is this agenda still so poorly understood? Why has cartoon Corbynism proved so resilient? Part of the answer lies in Labour's toxic factional politics. A large swathe of the party seems to have decided what Corbyn and McDonnell represented from day one, and despised them so much that they couldn't bring themselves to listen to anything they actually said or did.

Of course, the leadership must also take their share of responsibility. Preoccupied with the pressures of developing this agenda whilst fighting on many

fronts, they never did enough to popularise it, either within the party itself or outside it. Intellectually, they knew that developing an agenda for radical democracy from the top down was an oxymoron – but practically, they were unable to do anything else. And, as many commentators have now observed, the 2019 election campaign did not put this radical agenda front and centre, instead spraying spending pledges around like confetti in what proved to be a disastrous strategic mistake.

Rebecca Long-Bailey appears to have taken these criticisms on board, and has put democracy and empowerment at the heart of her campaign – going further than Corbyn on the need to extend this to the state itself as well as the economy, with radical devolution and reform of parliament. Her launch speech in Manchester promised to “put power back where it belongs: in your hands”. But the anti-Corbyn brigade clearly aren’t listening. While the *Daily Mail* correctly identified democracy as the top line of Long-Bailey’s launch, it was largely ignored by the left-wing commentariat.

Suzanne Moore claims that only Lisa Nandy understands that “our institutions are not for purpose” [sic] and “the answer does not lie in more centralisation”. Harris accuses Long-Bailey, along with Starmer, of “trying to convey a sense of purpose while saying nothing much at all”. If I were Long-Bailey (or indeed Corbyn or McDonnell), I would find all this absolutely exasperating. It’s one thing to be

attacked based on your actual positions; it’s quite another to be attacked based on something diametrically opposite to what you are actually saying, by people who seem to stick their fingers determinedly in their ears whenever you open your mouth.

After the election, in the discussion about the media’s treatment of Corbyn, a comment on social media conjured up an image that has really stuck with me: “if you challenge power in this country, you’re not even on the pitch – instead there’s an evil cartoon version of you, saying things you never said”. It’s bad

enough when this is coming from the Tories and the right-wing media. It’s no longer good enough for it to be peddled from within the left itself. By all means, let’s debate the limits and the legacy of Corbyn’s leadership. But let’s do so based on the reality – not the tired old myths of cartoon Corbynism. **CT**

Christine Berry is a freelance researcher and writer and was previously Director of Policy and Government for the New Economics Foundation. This article first appeared at www.opendemocracy.net

■ ADAM BEHR

Beethoven or Brexit? Battle for UK chart domination

TWO songs were vying for the top spot in the UK’s music charts last month. Beethoven’s *Ode to Joy*, also the EU’s *Anthem for Europe*, and *17 Million Fuck Offs*, by pro-Brexit comedian, writer and commentator Dominic Frisby.

The competition between these two pieces signified a much starker divide than a merely musical one. The melodic passage of the final movement of *Beethoven’s 9th Symphony* – originally the setting for a vocal rendition of Friedrich Schiller’s poem *Ode to Joy* – had been adopted as the European anthem by the Council of Europe in 1972

and in 1985 by the European Community. Pro-Europeans in the UK launched a campaign to get the song into the charts, with a recording by André Rieu, with the Johann Strauss Orchestra.

*O friends, no more these sounds!
Let us sing more cheerful songs,
more full of joy!
Joy, bright spark of divinity,
Daughter of Elysium,
Fire-inspired we tread
Thy sanctuary.
Thy magic power re-unites
All that custom has divided,
All men become brothers
Under the sway of thy gentle wings.*

Meanwhile, Frisby's song listed some of the more prominent Remain campaigners and told them all where they could go:

*It was the greatest democratic turnout in British history,
I do not scoff
And when the time came to speak
the British said fuck off.
Fuck off.*

Lyrically and tonally, the two pieces could hardly be further apart, *Ode to Joy* deriving from a widely acknowledged masterpiece of music in the western classical tradition in contrast to Frisby's ukulele-driven ditty that, by his own account, was written "almost by accident."

Ode to Joy pipped *17 Million Fuck Offs* to the top of the singles download charts, and scraped into the Top 30 of singles overall, with Frisby's song narrowly missing the Top 40. But the charts aren't a fixed marker of musical style – and the music itself here was arguably a secondary consideration to the expression of a political point.

Expressing political views through music isn't new, of course, and neither is this the first time the charts have been used for that purpose – although the competition between two such bluntly divergent tunes (politically and aesthetically) – and by opposing political campaigns – does represent further evolution in the coalescing of popular cultural and political practice.

It has its roots in popular music's debates about authenticity and was given



Dominic Frisbee: Brexit chart-hopeful.

extra impetus by frustration at The X Factor's domination of the top spot at Christmas in the mid-2000s. After an unsuccessful attempt in 2008 to supplant the TV competition winner Alexandra Burke's cover of Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah* with Jeff Buckley's version of the same song, a similar 2009 campaign to get Rage Against the Machine's *Killing in the Name Of* – a swear-y, angry, rock song – to the top of the singles chart for Christmas in place of X Factor's Joe McElderry was a key success for online protest purchases.

The ideological objections of rock fans about what they deemed to be inferior pop are nearly as old as the music charts themselves. But they are both commercial forms, so these challenges were made easier by changes in the chart process. Once downloads started to count towards chart positions from 2004 and social media became ever more pervasive,

these technological and market developments put a new tool into the hands of campaigners. It also vastly widened the choice of songs available to them, since they were no longer restricted to what was available in the shops.

This technique shifted from pop's politics to party politics in 2013 when the death of Margaret Thatcher pushed into the limelight a hitherto obscure Facebook page geared towards getting the song *Ding Dong the Witch is Dead*, from *The Wizard of Oz*, into the charts to mark the occasion.

The combination of social media campaigning and the easy, instantaneous purchase of music from 1939, drove the song up the charts. It reached Number Two within a week of Thatcher's death.

This caused problems for the BBC over how to respond in its chart rundown. The national broadcaster had to live up to its charter obligation to maintain 'generally accepted standards' in the face of a song ostensibly celebrating the death of a major public figure. But at the same time it faced objections to it acting as a censor.

The difficulty, as academic researcher on music and censorship Martin Cloonan has noted, is that there were no generally accepted standards in a nation so divided on the death of Thatcher and around a song whose actual content had nothing to do with the matter in hand. The BBC fudged the issue in 2013 and played a snippet of the song in the middle of an explanatory news piece.

In 2017, broadcasters took a more explicit line when a chart-oriented campaign pulled matters even further into the political realm in the middle of the general election campaign. Activist band Captain Ska re-mixed their 2015 broadside at David Cameron to feature the then Conservative prime minister Theresa May – using excerpts from her speeches and media appearances and weaving them into a chorus calling her a *Liar, Liar*.

The BBC and others refrained from playing it, on the grounds that to do so would be a breach of impartiality codes set out by the statutory regulator, Ofcom. Again, changes to the chart proc-

ess in 2014 had helped the musical campaign, with streams now counting towards chart position, albeit that many more streams than downloads are required to make an impact.

And once more, accusations of censorship were levied against broadcasters, along with concerns that they were failing in their duty to represent public opinion.

If public opinion in the UK is divided about anything, it's Brexit. The recent battle for chart supremacy, with rival campaigns, reflects that and is the latest step in what is becoming a part of the furniture in our musical and political culture.

Frisby's portrayal of himself as "an ordinary bloke who wrote a tune with his mate one day, up against a European colossus" may be disingenuous – he's an established media performer and published author who, at one point, was selected as a parliamentary candidate for the Brexit party. But this latest salvo in an ongoing culture war highlights the normalisation of the charts as a political tool, and just how at odds with itself Britain has become. **CT**

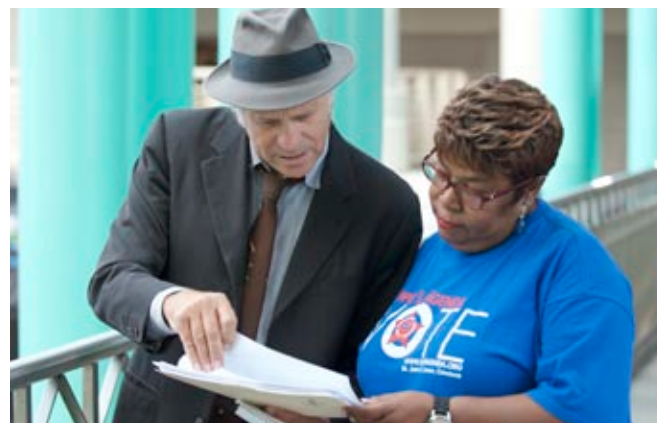
Adam Behr is Lecturer in Popular and Contemporary Music, Newcastle University. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

■ NICOLE POWERS

Reporter wins suit against US voter purge

IN an extraordinary and unexpected move, US Federal Judge Eleanor Ross has declared Gov. Brian Kemp the loser in a lawsuit brought by investigative journalist Greg Palast for the State of Georgia to open up its files on the mass purge of over half a million voters from the rolls.

Surprising all parties, the



Greg Palast and Helen Butler, co-plaintiffs in the Kemp lawsuit

judge ruled that Kemp's defence was so weak that no trial is needed. The judge acted *sua sponte* – on her own initiative, un-requested by Palast's attorneys.

Palast has been fighting Kemp to release his hidden purge lists and methods for six years, for *Rolling Stone*, *al Jazeera*, *Salon*, *Democracy Now*, and currently, the *Guardian*.

Palast said, "Kemp and the new Secretary of State of Georgia want to keep the lid on their methods for removing literally hundreds of thousands of low-income, young and minority voters on the basis of false information. They cannot hide any more. This is a huge win and precedent for reporters trying to pry information from

the hands of guilty officials.”

A key issue at stake are the ‘Interstate Crosscheck’ purge lists secretly provided to Georgia by the Kansas Secretary of State in 2015 and 2017. Kemp had turned over Georgia’s voter rolls to Kansas official Kris Kobach, who worked closely with Donald Trump, and is known for his racially biased vote suppression techniques.

“Kemp tried to hide the Crosscheck lists which he got from his crony Kobach. The lists are at least 99.9 percent wrong. Kemp’s office claimed he did not use the lists to purge voters, an assertion contradicted by his GOP predecessor. Moreover, Zach D. Reports of the Palast investigative team obtained the Georgia 2013 purge list provided by Kobach through (legal) investigative techniques – so we know, and the judge knows, he has more squirrelled away.

“Kemp finally turned over evidence that he purged 106,000 voters, overwhelmingly voters of colour, that were on the Crosscheck list. But that’s just the tip of the purge-berg.”

Palast’s co-plaintiff Helen Butler is the Executive Director of the Georgia Coalition for the Peoples Agenda, a non-partisan group founded by civil rights legend Rev Joseph Lowery. Lowery, commenting on the Crosscheck purge system, told Palast, “It’s Jim Crow all over again.”

Oddly, one of Kemp’s defences was that he turned over Georgia’s confidential voter information to Kobach so it could be used to

purge voters in 29 other states, but not Georgia. Kobach’s list showed thousands of Michigan voters supposedly also registered or voted in Georgia. Michigan removed tens of thousands of voters with names like ‘James Brown’ and ‘Mohammed Mohammed’ – almost all with mismatched middle names.

The Michigan purge of Georgia voters was key to Trump’s official victory margin of 10,700 in Michigan, putting Trump over the top in the electoral college.

While Palast says, “The evidence is overwhelming that Kemp used the Crosscheck list in some way to purge

Georgians – 106,000 is not a ‘coincidence’ – I do want to find out why Kemp was using Georgia voter rolls to remove voters in other states.”

The Crosscheck list identifies more than half a million Georgians – including one in seven African-Americans in the state – as having moved out of Georgia, according to an investigative report on Kemp and Kobach published by Palast in *Rolling Stone* in 2016. **CT**

Greg Palast and his team are providing investigative reports to the Guardian’s Fight for the Vote series. His website is www.gregpalast.com

■ GEORGE MONBIOT

Political actions take us on a trip to the roots of facism

IT is not a sufficient condition for facism to take root, but it is a necessary one. The willingness of political leaders not only to break the law, but to revel in breaking it, is a fatal step towards the replacement of democracy with authoritarian terror.

We see this at work in the United States today, where the Republican Party’s blatant disregard for the constitution will allow Donald Trump to escape impeachment. If Trump is elected for a second term, he will test the potential for wielding uncon-

stitutional power to the limit. But the phenomenon is not confined to the US. Several powerful governments now wear illegality almost as a badge of honour.

Fascist and pre-fascist governments share (among others) two linked characteristics: they proudly flout the laws that are supposed to restrain them, while introducing new, often unconstitutional laws to contain political opponents or to oppress minorities.

In Brazil, outrages against indigenous people, opposition politicians and journalists are

encouraged and celebrated at the highest levels of government. Jair Bolsonaro won the presidential election with the help of a judicial coup, in which due process was abandoned to secure the imprisonment of the front-runner, Luiz Inacio Da Silva (Lula). He has been photographed embracing two of the suspects in the murder of the left-wing councillor Marielle Franco, and has sought to block corruption investigations into his son Flávio, who allegedly has close links with members of the paramilitary gang accused of killing her.

In response to democratic protests, Brazil's economy minister has threatened to impose martial law. Bolsonaro has called for the police to execute suspected criminals: "These guys are going to die in the streets like cockroaches – and that's how it should be." His racist comments about indigenous people, and curtailment of the agencies supposed to protect them, could help explain a new spate of murders by loggers, miners and ranchers. Human rights groups are seeking to persuade the International Criminal Court to investigate Bolsonaro for incitement to genocide.

The investigative journalist Glenn Greenwald, who has published explosive reports about corruption and crime in Bolsonaro's government, and his husband, the left-wing congressman and *Guardian* columnist David Miranda, have received repeated death threats, containing details about their lives that only the state could know. Greenwald has now been spuriously

charged with cybercrimes.

In India, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, after discovering that his alleged association with the 2002 Gujarat massacres no longer appeared to tarnish his name, is laying the foundations for a vicious ethno-nationalism. His new Citizenship Act deliberately denies rights to Muslims, and could render millions of people stateless. People protesting against this act are brutally attacked by the police. Police and armed gangs have raided



Photo: David dos Santos

Glenn Greenwald: Death threats

two Delhi universities, randomly beating up students, to spread generalised terror. In Uttar Pradesh, political opponents are routinely imprisoned without charge and tortured.

Modi has ripped up the constitution to annex Jammu and Kashmir. The police have fired on people protesting peacefully against this illegal action, blinding some of them with shotgun pellets. Political leaders have been arrested and communications shut down. Officials treat this illegality as a brutal joke. The chief minister of Haryana,

Manohar Lal Khattar, a close Modi ally, boasts that "now we will bring girls from Kashmir", as colonial booty.

The president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, has bragged of riding around the streets of Davao on his motor-bike when he was mayor of the city, shooting people he suspected of being criminals. Since becoming president, he has, in effect, turned the police into a giant death squad, empowering them to murder people they suspect of involvement in drugs crime. Unsurprisingly, this general licence has led to the murders of political opponents, land and environmental defenders.

Even as he applauds the killing of drug suspects, Duterte jokes about taking illegal drugs to keep himself awake at international summits. Opponents are imprisoned, judges are sacked and replaced, journalists are prosecuted on trumped-up charges. The imposition of martial law on the island of Mindanao is used to crush dissent: objectors are treated as terrorists and murdered.

Like these other killer clowns, Trump may now feel he can get away with anything. His legal team has in the past suggested he has total immunity, boasting that he could literally get away with murder. A culture of impunity is spreading around the world. "Try to stop me" is the implicit motto in nations ranging from Hungary to Israel, Saudi Arabia to Russia, Turkey to China, Poland to Venezuela. Flaunting your disregard for the law is an expression of power.

It's happening in the UK too,

though so far on a smaller scale. The Brexit vote, which eventually enabled Boris Johnson's government to take office, was secured with the help of blatant illegality. The government intends to carry out a legislative cleansing of Romani and Travellers, knowing that this offends our own Equality Act, and is likely to lead to a case before the European Court of Human Rights. It's almost as if it welcomes the confrontation.

These are experiments in absolutism. They don't amount to fascism in their own right. But in conjunction with the elevation of preposterous and desperate men,

the denigration of minorities and immigrants, political violence, mass surveillance and widespread mockery of liberalism and social justice, they suggest that some countries, separately and together, are beginning to head towards the darkest of all political places. The normalisation of impunity is possibly the most important step towards authoritarian rule. Never let it be normal. **CT**

George Monbiot is a columnist for the Guardian, where this article first appeared. His website is www.monbiot.com

tion Rebellion had its own venue. The radical Russian punk outfit Pussy Riot were the headline act on Sunday evening.

The festival is a spin-off from the independent news outlet, Byline, run by Peter Jukes and Stephen Colegrave. Jukes is a TV dramatist who decided there was more drama in current events and turned to journalism; Colegrave an advertising executive and co-author of the best-selling book *Punk: The Definitive Record of a Revolution*. The idea of a journalism festival came to them after they put on an event involving Nick Davies, the *Guardian* journalist who broke the telephone hacking scandal, in 2016.

"It's difficult to get people to pay for independent journalism," says Colegrave, "but we found that people were interested in hearing from journalists. It was an amazing evening and we thought that a festival based on the same idea might just work."

The festival is growing year by year and on track to break-even in the next two years. "After three years of steady growth, we're confident that we're starting to get the format right – and that the festival will soon be able to stand on its own two feet", says Jukes. That optimism is shared by backers who've invested £250,000.

Now Jukes and Colegrave are poised to expand – with a northern festival based in Manchester and a European Byline, perhaps in Berlin. **CT**

Tickets are on sale for the 2020 Byline Festival (28-31 August) – the website is www.bylinefestival.com

■ PADDY FRENCH

Big surprises in store at UK journalists' festival

DEEP in the Sussex countryside, an hour south of London, a unique festival is taking place – the world's only event bringing together independent journalists, their readers and all those interested in promoting free speech and forging a new media culture.

Now in its fourth year, the Byline Festival is a hybrid of events like Britain's Hay Literary Festival, which brings authors and readers together, and a conventional music festival. By day, its marquees and tents deep in the Ashdown Forest are a hive of talks, panels and workshops where journalists, academics, lawyers and activists discuss

the issues of the day from Brexit to climate change. By night the same venues host music and comedy.

More than 5,000 people – including 500 speakers and performers – attended last year's four-day event. The festival aims to attract as wide a range of people as possible and families, children and dogs are all welcome. Last year speakers included *Guardian* journalist Carole Cadwalladr, who helped break the Cambridge Analytica scandal, and the British-Guyanese activist Gina Miller who successfully challenged the British government over Brexit. The climate campaign group Extinc-

