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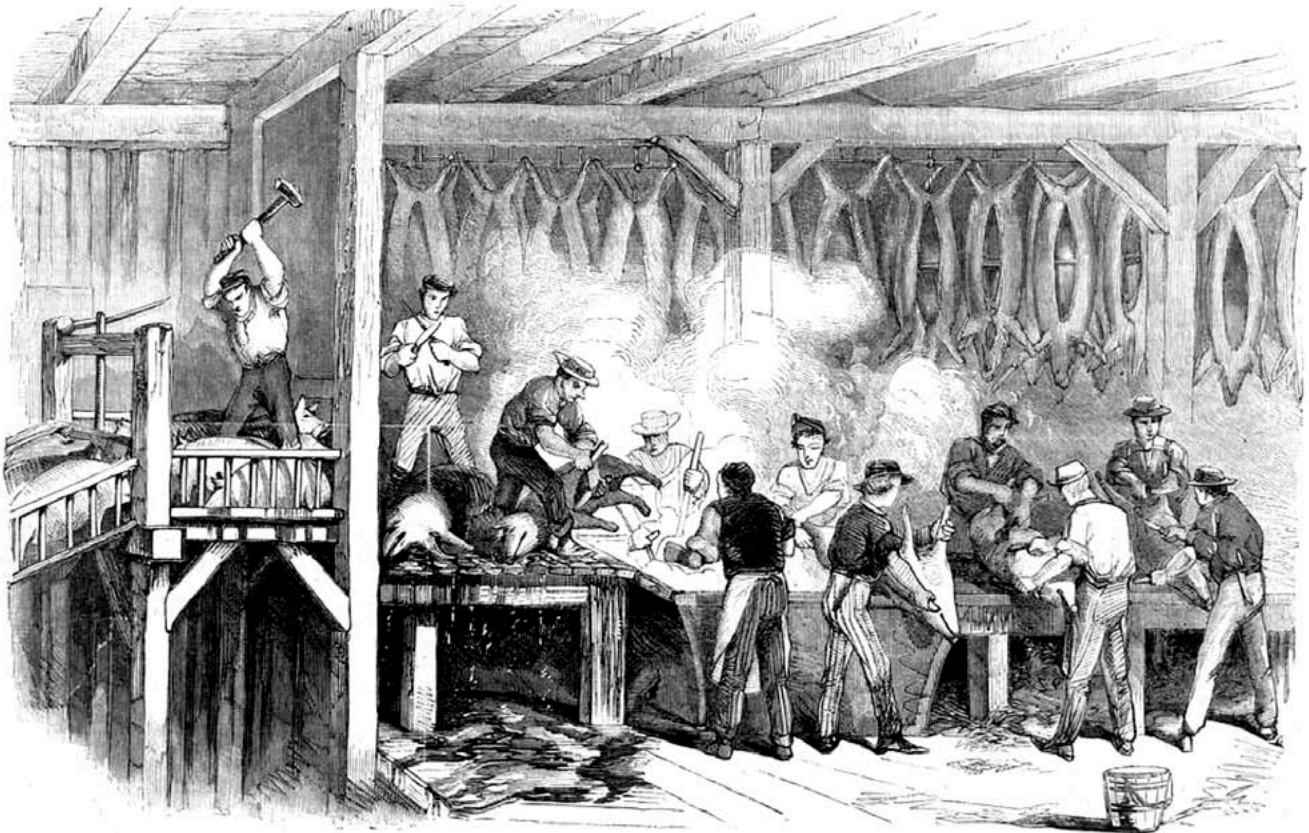
THE SINKING OF JEREMY CORBYN | *Trevor Grundy*  
REMEMBERING AN APARTHEID FREEDOM FIGHTER | *Ronnie Kasrils*  
STAY INDOORS AND KILL ROBOTS | *Joe Allen*

ISSUE 206

# ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

Mid-May 2020



OUR SLAUGHTERHOUSES  
ARE **NOT** JUST FOR ANIMALS



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# ColdType

■ WRITING WORTH READING

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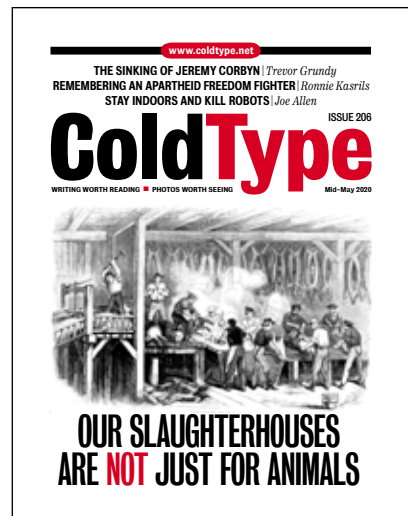
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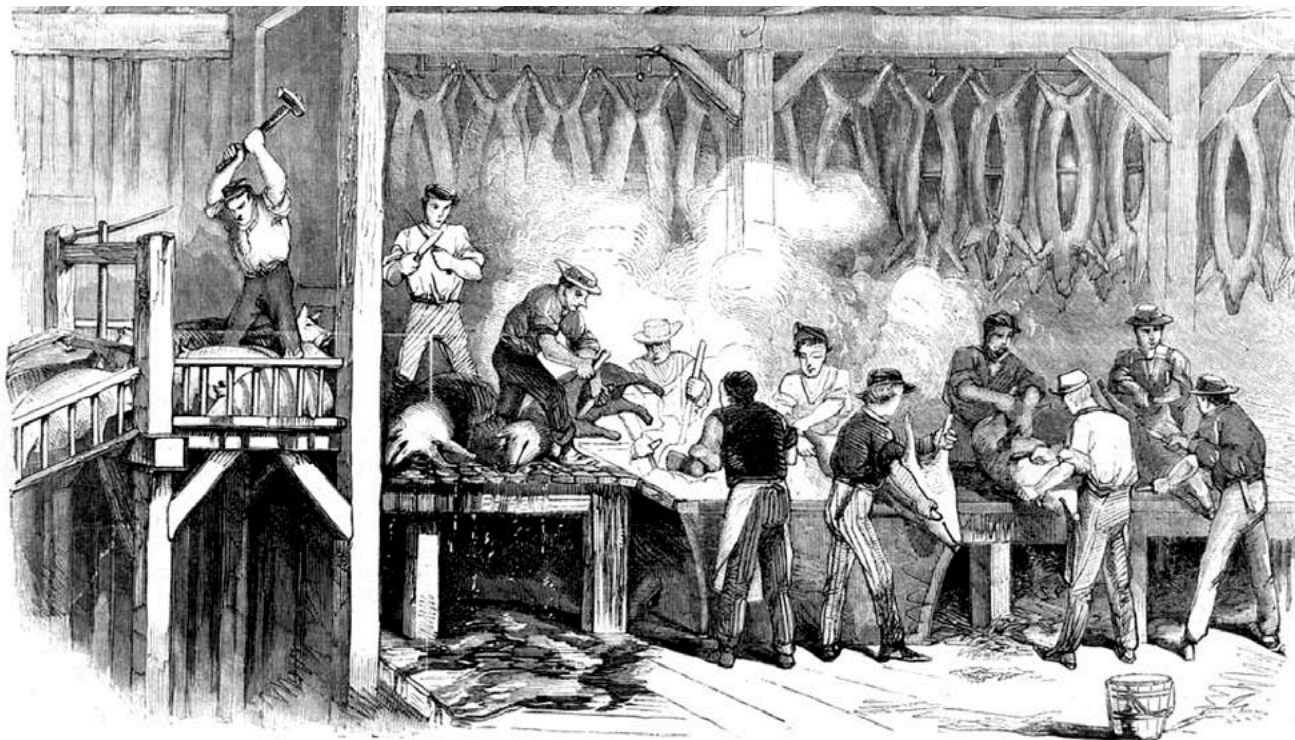
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# Insights



Art: pizy.com

**BAD OLD DAYS:** Slaughterhouse scene in Cincinnati, Ohio. A man kills pigs with a sledgehammer, as others bleed and clean bodies. From *Harper's Weekly*, February 4, 1860.

■ SAM PIZZIGATI

## *Our slaughterhouses are not just for animals*

SOME businesses make us feel all warm and cuddly. Like bakeries. Who can resist smiling just thinking about the smell of newly baked bread? But other businesses – like meatpacking – we do our best to ignore. Who wants to think about blood and guts and squealing pigs?

But think we must. Unsavory enterprises can reveal basic

truths about our times we'd rather not consider.

Back in the early 20th-century, for instance, a young writer forced Americans to confront inconvenient truth with a blockbuster novel about the meatpacking industry. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* detailed slaughterhouse horrors that endangered workers and consumers alike. The resulting public outrage would inspire

the legislation that created what became the federal Food and Drug Administration.

Meatpacking, Americans came to realize generations ago, needed government oversight. We could not trust the moguls who ran the industry to do the right thing. Indeed, we could not trust any moguls. Their business empires needed to be regulated and broken up, their incomes taxed, their power curtailed.

Over the past 50 years, Americans have unlearned all those lessons. Now we face meatpacking empires bigger than any Upton Sinclair ever contemplated. More powerful, too. Our modern-day emperors of meat, pork, and poultry have enough might to imperil the



lives of their workers with a president of the United States cheering them on.

President Donald Trump actually did more than cheer at the beginning of May. He issued an executive order that prevents state and local governments from shutting down meatpacking plants that are infecting workers – and through them their neighbours – by the thousands.

Trump’s order came after meatpacking executives such as Smithfield Foods CEO Kenneth Sullivan pronounced that slaughterhouse shutdowns are “pushing our country perilously close to the edge in terms of our meat supply.”

Some state officials have been reinforcing this impending dinner-disaster line by threatening meatpacking workers inclined not to work in infectious environments. Iowa governor Kim Reynolds announced that her state would treat worried employees who don’t show up at operating plants as “voluntary quits” ineligible for unemployment benefits.

But most public officials in meatpacking-plant communities have, to their credit, been looking on with horror as coronavirus cases multiply. Industrial plants that process cows, hogs, and chicken, they realise, have become more dangerous than any other high-density sites in America apart from prisons. By April’s end, the United Food and Commercial Workers union reports, unsafe meatpacking work-sites had left at least 20 workers dead and more than 6,500 others infected.

The Trump administration

doesn’t seem to see that infection rate as particularly concerning. The two federal agencies most responsible for protecting workers during pandemics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, have merely issued “guidance” on meatpacking and not required any specific serious steps to keep workers safe. The nation’s meatpacking empires can legally ignore the recommendations in the guidance.

Thanks to President Trump’s executive order, the meatpacking execs can essentially ignore lawsuits as well. Trump has now labelled their industry as “critical infrastructure” that must continue to operate. How can meatpackers be sued, their corporate attorneys can now argue, for endangering workers? The president made them do it.

**W**hy this reckless rush to get all meatpacking operations up and running again? The rush has nothing to do with the “protein” that Smithfield Foods says the nation so desperately needs. The haste has everything to do with the rewards that meatpacking’s decision makers – the industry’s top executives – stand to lose if their plants close down or slow down for any appreciable amount of time.

And those rewards can be gargantuan. At Smithfield, for instance, the current CEO’s immediate predecessor grabbed \$62.9-million in compensation his last two years on the job and then walked off

with an \$11.25-million retirement package. The current CEO, Kenneth Sullivan, hasn’t cleared windfall earnings that large yet. Sullivan only pulled down \$14-million last year. But he knows full well that his millions won’t start multiplying if his assembly lines don’t run.

Reporters have done a solid job detailing how execs at Smithfield and the other meatpacking giants have consistently soft-pedalled the corona danger and failed repeatedly to put in place adequate protections for workers who labour in inherently high-risk workplaces.

“In many plants”, one news report points out, “workers cut and debone meat in tight conditions, share meals in crowded cafeterias and walk the same narrow hallways, making social distancing practically impossible.”

Instead of addressing those dangers, the meatpacking industry has been blaming the spread of the coronavirus on their large immigrant workforce. Their “living circumstances” – so different from “your traditional American family” – are driving the pandemic problem, suggested one Smithfield spokesperson.

Smithfield executives might be crowding into tight apartments, too, if they were making as little money as many of their employees. Of the nation’s 194,000 frontline meatpacking workers, the Center for Economic and Policy Research notes, 45.1 per cent live in households officially “low-income”, a designation that covers families of four making less than \$52,400 a year.

Meatpacking workers need

every dollar of their limited incomes. But they want safety even more. At many plants across the country, they're responding to the industry's back-to-work edicts with strikes and mass sick-outs. These workers don't have an easy road ahead. They face both the might of their giant employers and a hostile president.

Meatpacking workers over a century ago had things easier with their occupant of the White House. Theodore Roosevelt shared the public horror at Upton Sinclair's vivid revelations in *The Jungle*. He ordered the outrages investigated.

Sinclair's best-selling book first appeared serialised in the *Appeal to Reason*, a socialist

newspaper then considered the most widely circulated weekly in the entire United States. People of goodwill back then believed wholeheartedly that appealing to reason could bring justice for all.

That notion seems so quaint today. Those we let get rich exploiting others, we see ever more clearly, have reason aplenty not to engage with our appeals. **CT**

**Sam Pizzigati** co-edits *Inequality.org*. His recent books include *The Case for a Maximum Wage* and *The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970*. Follow him at @Too\_Much\_Online.

■ MARCUS RAYMOND

## Coronavirus exposes loneliness in the young

**Y**OUNG people were already the loneliest demographic in the UK, before Coronavirus came along and exposed the depth of their problem.

A study by the Mental Health Foundation found that while one in four adults have felt lonely because of Covid-19, 44 percent of respondents aged 18-24 have experienced loneliness due to the current crisis. The next most affected group, at 35 percent, are those aged between 25-34, while just one in six people over 55 said they have felt lonely as a result of

the lockdown.

17-year-old Beth Palmer's family believe she killed herself because of her feeling of isolation just two days after social distancing measures were enforced. Her father told ITV, "I have no doubt the lockdown played a major part in Beth's death. She couldn't finish college or see friends. She felt as though this lockdown was 300 years."

Loneliness in young people isn't new, of course. In 2018, BBC Radio 4's *The Loneliness Experiment* reported that 16-24-year olds experienced loneliness

more often and more intensely than any other group.

Many people will respond by saying that they, too, felt lonely in their younger years. But the difference is that today's young people have become confined to their homes, often with only the internet and their parents for company, worrying about what *their* world will look like in the future.

The terms *Loneliness* and *Isolation* are often used interchangeably, even by policymakers and researchers, but there is an important difference. *Loneliness* is a subjective feeling about the perceived quality of relationships, essentially the gap between the social contact that someone wants and that which they receive. *Isolation* is objective and quantitative, and refers to the number of social contacts someone has. Often, though, both occur at the same time.

Students may connect with classmates, housemates, professors, and staff, but if the quality of these relationships isn't fulfilling, they feel lonely, although they are not by definition isolated.

Loneliness increases the likelihood of mortality by 26 percent – the same impact as smoking 15 cigarettes a day – and puts people at greater risk of mental health problems.

Jack was living at University when Coronavirus hit, but is temporarily back home with his dad. "It's been extremely hard to cope, being taken away from my close group of friends", says the 19-year-old who, technically, is no more isolated than before: he still contacts his friends online,

but the quality of those relationships has suffered because he can't meet them in person.

Andrew, 25, says, "I love my parents but I haven't seen anyone whom I'm emotionally close to, including my girlfriend, for over a month, and it's really affecting me. I have felt like this before due to mental health issues, but this lockdown has triggered it."

**F**rancesca Specter, host of the *Alonement* podcast, responded to the research on Twitter, "Our approach tends to be blinkered, seeing the 'cure' for loneliness as increased connections with others, rather than stopping to re-address our societal attitudes towards being alone. That's often why young people feel lonely – because they don't have an alternative way of feeling in solitude or when physically estranged from usual social networks."

Catherine, an Isolation and Social Engagement Worker for a mental health charity, adds, "Clients who worked really hard to progress and attend groups – which provide structure, routine and the opportunity to make friendships – have been affected by the measures. Services like mine now have limited face-to-face support. Some clients, especially those living alone, have described feeling very low, no focus to their week and very little social interaction.

"However, the community



response has offered hope to some sufferers, who say that neighbourhood support groups offering help create a feeling that their isolation and loneliness is more visible and recognised than before.

"One of the reasons younger adults struggle is they often face many changes in circumstances in a relatively short period of time – education, employment, moving out of the family home, all of which present challenges with adapting, making friends and feeling comfortable in new environments."

Catherine also spoke about younger adults feeling pressure about the direction their lives should be taking, which is heightened by comparisons on social media, which contribute to anxiety.

**W**hat are the solutions? Clearly projects like Catherine's help, but they're stretched – she

is the only isolation worker in her organisation and works part-time. Consequently, her waiting lists are spiralling. Targeting referrals from younger people, despite knowing they are a key demographic, is almost impossible. So she is limited to responding to those self-referring, who almost always tend to be older.

Charities have been trying to take up the slack, but they are being hit by lack of access to funding. Early reports expected the UK charity sector would lose

£4-billion due to Coronavirus, though a subsequent government promise of £750-million – plus an additional £5-million specifically for mental health charities – will play some part in mitigating this.

Comprehensive support needs to be tailored to young people, ensuring they can communicate feelings and experiences on their terms. They need to know they are not alone in what they are going through, and change is possible.

For all demographics, an existing public health challenge has been exacerbated by the social distancing measures, but with young people feeling it even more than before, fully funded help is needed and now is the time. **CT**

**Marcus Raymond** is a communications and fundraising lead for a UK mental health charity. He also writes articles on a freelance basis and has been published by numerous internationally-recognised magazines and websites.



Photo: YouTube Screenshot



■ LINDA McQUAIG

## *Why Justin Trudeau should lift harmful sanctions*

**T**HESE days, any national leader not actively urging citizens to drink disinfectant is managing to look (relatively) good on the world stage. Certainly, compared to the neurotic leadership south of the border, Justin Trudeau has emerged as a steady hand on the tiller, quickly providing Canadians with a wide economic safety net and behaving like an adult in the crisis.

So it's all the more disappointing that, out of the limelight, he's doing a great deal to make the situation worse during this pandemic for some of the most vulnerable people on the planet.

The impact of sanctions, while always painful, is particularly deadly during the pandemic, when even advanced nations have struggled to obtain life-

saving equipment.

I'm referring to the prime minister's decision to ignore a plea last month from United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres – and the Pope – for nations to lift sanctions against other nations in order to help some of the weakest and poorest countries cope with the coronavirus crisis.

That sounds like a reasonable request, under the circumstances.

Indeed, even if we don't care about the world's vulnerable people, helping them deal with the crisis is in our interests, too. As the UN leader noted: "Let us remember that we are only as strong as the weakest health system in our interconnected world."

Yet Canada, ignoring the plea from the UN's highest official,

continues in the midst of the pandemic to impose sanctions on 20 nations, including Lebanon, Venezuela, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Nicaragua and Yemen.

While Canada's sanctions are typically aimed at punishing the regimes running these countries, the impact of the sanctions falls primarily on ordinary citizens, according to Atif Kubursi, professor emeritus of economics at McMaster University.

Kubursi, who also served as a UN under-secretary-general and has extensive UN experience in the Middle East and Asia, says the impact of Canada's sanctions on the people in these countries is devastating.

While the sanctions often appear to be directed exclusively at military items, they frequently end up being applied to virtually all goods – including spare parts needed to operate machinery in hospitals and pharmaceutical companies, notes Kubursi, who signed a letter from prominent Canadians to Trudeau requesting the lifting of sanctions.

**F**or instance, if a Syrian businessman wants to buy Canadian products, he has to open an account for the transaction. But Kubursi says the Canadian government instructs Canadian banks not to allow such accounts for the purposes of trade with Syria – no matter how benign the Canadian product may be, or how urgently it might be needed in Syria.

For that matter, Ottawa's sanctions prevent Canadians from using our banks or financial

services to transfer money to Syria – for instance, to family members living in Syria.

The impact of sanctions, while always painful, is particularly deadly during the pandemic, when even advanced nations have struggled to obtain life-saving equipment.

While Canada's sanctions mostly date back to the Harper era or earlier, the Trudeau government has generally maintained them and even added new ones against Venezuela.

Ottawa's sanctions appear primarily aimed at appeasing the US, which ruthlessly enforces sanctions against regimes it wishes to destabilise or overthrow. Washington also punishes countries and companies that don't co-operate with its sanctions.

Ottawa's willingness to fall in

line behind Washington is reflected in the fact it doesn't impose sanctions against US allies Saudi Arabia or Israel, despite Saudi Arabia's brutal murder of dissident Jamal Khashoggi and Israel's illegal occupation of the West Bank. Even Israel's announcement that it plans to annex the West Bank in July has produced no sanctions or criticism from Canada.

**T**rudeau's decision to continue sanctioning 20 nations seems quite out of sync with the spirit of the times, when it's hard to find a TV commercial that doesn't proclaim the sentiment that "we're all in this together."

That spirit of international togetherness has been amply demonstrated by Cuba, which sent Cuban doctors to Italy to

help its overwhelmed health care system and has offered similar medical help to First Nations in Canada.

When 36 Cuban doctors arrived in Milan last month, a grateful Italy thanked them and Italians at the airport cheered. Meanwhile, Canada, in the spirit of the international togetherness, rebuffs Cuban doctors, ignores the UN and imposes sanctions on some of the world's poorest nations **CT**

*Linda McQuaig is an author, journalist, and former NDP candidate for Toronto Centre in the Canadian federal election. She is also the author (with Neil Brooks) of *Billionaires' Ball: Gluttony and Hubris in an Age of Epic Inequality*, published by Beacon Press. This article first appeared in the Toronto Star.*

■ DAVID SCHULTZ

## The anatomy of a failing university

**A**MERICAN universities are failing. They are private or public schools. They could be religiously-affiliated or not. They could be in the east, west, north, or south of the United States. They traditionally emphasised liberal arts. They are facing an enrollment and budget crunch for several years, seeing that the declining number of 18-year-olds in the coming years poses an existential threat. It has a modest endowment. It is not an elite

school. It is a school like the one that many professors teach at. It was failing before Covid-19. It may not be around in five years. With Covid-19, it may be around even less than that.

Years ago, I argued that higher education had a failed business plan, one that planted the seeds of its own destruction. It was a plan following the failures of K-12. Now the reality of the failed business plan is imminent. There are many reasons for this failing:

- For years it relied on the

same demographic of white students to recruit, except that demographic is disappearing.

- For years it raised tuition at percentages that far outstripped the cost of living and increases in median household incomes, and now many students cannot afford to go to college.

- For years it raised tuition to convince people that the more expensive it was the better a school it was. Except the school did not invest the money in academic programmes.

- For years it played the *US News & World Report* college rankings game. Except all the other schools played too and all it accomplished was elegant dorms and rising tuition.

- For years it spent increasing amounts of money on lavish meals and events to recruit students. Except all the other schools did the same.

- For years it encouraged students to borrow, except now with student loan debt at nearly \$2-trillion they are tapped out.

- For years it chased adult Baby Boomer learners who wanted additional credentials or thought they had a novel in them. But this demographic is gone.

- For years it jumped on the bandwagon to create pricey graduate programmes such as MBAs to subsidise the liberal arts school. Except this balloon busted.

- It adopted a corporate, private-sector-orientated model for governance, creating high-salaried vice-presidents for every task or problem it encountered. Except when the financial crunch hit it opted to lay off or reduce faculty and cut back on programmes that generated revenue instead of trimming back middle and senior management. It then hired a new vice-president or a consultant to manage the finances.

- When enrollment and retention dipped it hired a new vice-president instead of new recruiters or admissions staff.

- It reduced the percentage of tenured or tenure-track faculty and replaced them with part time contingents. Except it found that

the latter, no matter how well meaning, do not have the same time to provide all the advising and other services full time faculty do.

- It expanded sports programmes as a way to attract attention and recruit students. Except few sports programs provide a positive return on investment.

- It experimented with on-line degree completion programs. Except it did so at the same time that everyone else did across the country and therefore it faced a new group of schools competing for the same students.

- It lowered admissions standards to maintain enrollment but could not then figure out why the retention rates went down.

- It cut requirements such as foreign languages, music, or the arts to make it easier for students to get in and graduate into jobs. Except in doing so it undermined its mission as a liberal arts institution and the reason why students should go to it and not a community college.

- It made it easier for high school students to enter with advanced placement credits. Except it then realised that these students could graduate early and therefore did not pay as much in tuition.

- As its competitors added programmes it duplicated them as opposed to defining what it was good at and focusing on it.

- As the job market changed it developed new programmes to chase the trends. Except the new trend was always one step ahead of the school.

- It jumped on buzz words

and slogans such as high impact learning or stackable to sell itself, yet it did little to really change course offerings or programmes.

- It invested heavily in learning technology letting it drive pedagogy, instead of vice versa.

- It talked about the reality of coming new student demographics, but it did little to change its marketing strategy or services to support them.

- Its administrators and university presidents froze faculty salaries or cut their benefits to make money, trustees gave them bonuses for doing that and then wondered why professors were dispirited and disillusioned.

- It hired presidents who promised big change but kicked the real tough choices down the road to avoid taking responsibility for what might happen.

- It said that we have to be more career-focused like community colleges, except it forgot that an expensive four-year school cannot price compete with a two-year school.

With Covid-19, it is facing an existential threat that has accelerated the problems it has faced for years.

Now the trustees, administrators, and faculty sit around in meetings and wonder why the university is failing. Perhaps they need to hire an expensive consultant to figure it out. **CT**

*David Schultz is a professor of political science at Hamline University. He is the author of *Presidential Swing States: Why Only Ten Matter*. This article was first published at [www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org).*



■ Nigel Yates

# By-passing the lockdown

*Coronavirus restrictions hit New Zealand like a sledgehammer when the country had just 101 infections. Soon citizens were subjected to an Orwellian avalanche of propaganda heralding a new lifestyle in which snitching on their neighbours became a patriotic duty. Undeterred by the restrictions, ColdType's photographer ventured out onto the now-isolated streets of Dunedin*



A lone walker pauses to gaze at a rainbow off St Clair beach, Dunedin on April 25.





*“April is the cruelest month”*  
– T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

**W**HILE April certainly proved to be a cruel month in London and some of the other epicentres of the global pandemic panic, in New Zealand, it was not so much the cruelest as the weirdest.

Here in Dunedin, on the country’s South Island, I noticed the first signs of change at the end of a Sunday tennis game late in March when a normally exuberant fellow player abruptly declined my handshake, gingerly offering his elbow for a virus-free bump. This proved to be our last game for the foreseeable future as life rapidly descended into an Orwellian time-warp, soon dubbed “The New Normal.”

A couple of days later, on March 24, with just 101 Coronavirus infections confirmed in this country of almost five-million souls, a total lockdown – to begin at 11.59 pm the next day – was announced by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. “Treat everyone as if they are infected”, she told the country, in what was to become a daily press briefing accompanied by Dr Ashley Bloomfield, the Director-General of Health, who became a household name overnight.

We were reminded six hours before the lockdown began when our smartphones emitted a painful howl, followed by a Civil Defence announcement outlining the “New Normal”, as our rapidly-changing lifestyle was now being called, on Radio New Zealand. The alert was so loud and so sudden that it triggered a flashback to the scene in the movie *Nineteen Eighty-Four* where doomed hero Winston Smith was startled out of his seat



*A police website was set up so we could inform on our neighbours. It crashed on its first day. Dobbing in your neighbour became an honourable duty*



2) A lost toy on Dunedin's deserted St Clair esplanade.

when his telescreen began barking commands.

The next few days became an avalanche of propaganda as new rules for daily living were instituted. “Stay home, stay safe, and shop normally”, was soon replaced by “You MUST stay home!” in the daily “Covid-19 official Government announcement” on RadioNZ.

Each issue of the local broadsheet *Otago Daily Times* carried a full-page of rules, and advice, along with frequently asked ques-

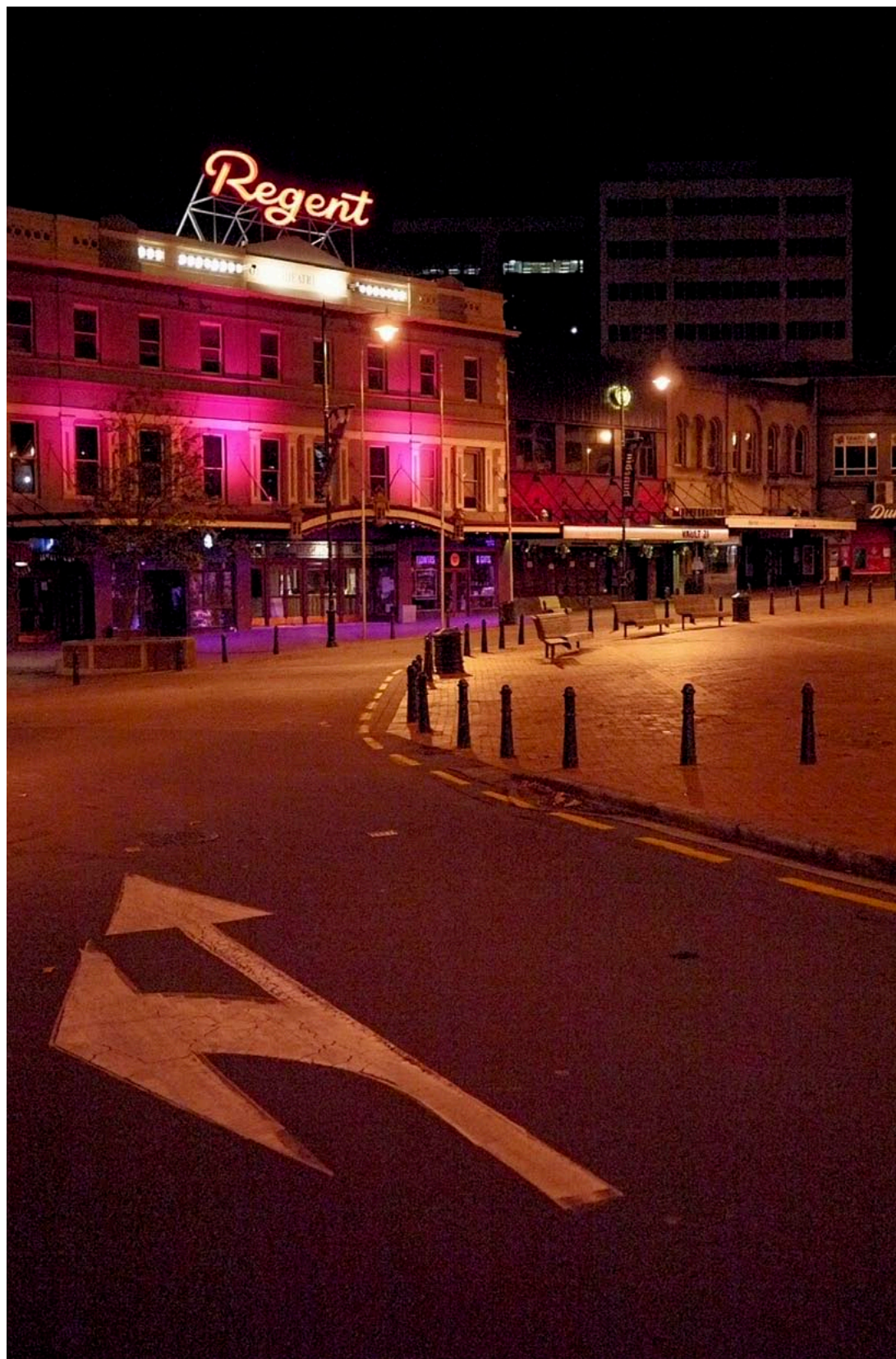
tions, such as: Which types of exercise are OK?, Who can I contact if I see people not following the rules of self-isolation?, and Is the Easter Bunny allowed to visit? Suddenly, teddy bears began to pop up in suburban windows all over town.

“If you see any breaches, please report them”, was another instruction from PM Jacinda. The response from happy-to-obey New Zealanders was so spirited that the police website set up for the purpose crashed on its first day.



Big Teddy is watching!





Right:  
The Octagon,  
central  
Dunedin –  
eerily empty  
at 8 pm on  
April 13.

Photos:  
Nigel  
Yates



*I remembered the array of ultra high-definition CCTV cameras on a nearby pole. I glanced up: Yes, Big Brother was still watching*



An unmistakable hygiene message on a South Dunedin shop window.

Dobbing in your neighbour had officially lost its hint of shame and became an honourable duty.

It became difficult to ignore the suspicion that this unprecedented denial of human rights – a form of home detention – and roll-out of new rules was perhaps pre-ordained, and the virus crisis was just a convenient vehicle to hang it all on. The Newspeak vocabulary for daily living seemed to confirm this: we were ordered to “self-isolate”, stay in our “bubble”, only have contact with those in our “bubble”, and keep a “social distance” when encountering people outside that “bubble” during our

permitted daily exercise.

Certain items could be bought online but only if it was a “contactless transaction”, and – most important of all – we should obey the appropriate “Alert level” with its comprehensive and convoluted system of rules for every eventuality.

If not Big Brother, this was Big Nanny State in action.

Nevertheless, despite all the existential fear, threats and coercion I decided to venture out one evening, ostensibly to visit the supermarket – an “essential activity”, according to Alert Level 4. There were hardly any other vehicles around, apart from large,

empty buses; and, fortunately, not a single police car to be seen. I ventured into the town centre, which was almost deserted, apart from a bored taxi driver and someone in a hoodie staring into his phone.

I wandered around photographing the surreal scene and then remembered the array of ultra high-definition CCTV cameras on a nearby pole. I glanced up: Yes, Big Brother was still watching. I packed up my camera and left. **CT**

*Nigel Yates is former newspaper photographer and bookseller who lives off-the-grid near Dunedin, New Zealand.*

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■ Yves Engler

# Michael Moore versus the environmentalists

*Planet of the Humans* generates major criticism from environmentalists, but just how controversial are the facts Michael Moore's new movie presents?

**T**HE backlash may be more revealing than the film itself, but both inform us where we are at in the fight against climate change and ecological collapse. The environmental establishment's frenzied attacks against *Planet of the Humans* says a lot about their commitment to big-money and technological solutions.

A number of prominent individuals tried to ban the film by Jeff Gibbs and Michael Moore. Others berated the filmmakers for being white, male and overweight. Many thought leaders have declared they won't watch it.

Despite the hullabaloo, the central points in the film aren't particularly controversial. Corporate-industrial society is driving human civilisation/humanity towards the ecological abyss and environmental groups have largely made peace with capitalism. As such, they tout (profitable) techno fixes that are sometimes more ecologically damaging than fossil fuels (such as biomass or ethanol) or require incredible amounts of resources/space if pursued on a mass scale (such as solar and



**POLARISING:** *Planet of the Humans* has created a storm of anger in the environmental community.

wind). It also notes the number of human beings on the planet has grown more than sevenfold over the past 200 years.

**I**t should not be controversial to note that the corporate consumption juggernaut is destroying our ability to survive on this planet. From agroindustry razing animal habitat to plastic manufacturers' waste killing sea life to the auto industrial complex's greenhouse gases, the examples of corporations wreaking ecological havoc are manifold. Every year since 1969

humanity's resource consumption has exceeded earth's capacity to regenerate those resources by an ever-greater volume.

It is a statement of fact that environmental groups have deep ties to the corporate set. Almost all the major environmental groups receive significant cash from the mega-rich or their foundations. Many of them partner directly with large corporations. Additionally, their outreach strategies often rely on corporate media and other business mediated spheres. It beggar's belief that these dependencies don't shape their policy



positions.

A number of the film's points on 'renewable' energy are also entirely uncontroversial. It's insane to label ripping down forests for energy as "green". Or turning cropland into fuel for private automobiles. The film's depiction of the minerals/resource/space required for solar and wind power deserves a far better response than "the data is out of date."

The green establishment's hyperventilating over the film suggests an unhealthy fixation/link to specific 'renewable' industries. But there are downsides to almost everything.

Extremely low GHG emitting electricity is not particularly complicated. In Québec, where I live, electricity is largely carbon free (and run by a publicly owned enterprise with an overwhelmingly unionised workforce, to boot). But, Hydro-Québec's dams destroy ecosystems and require taking vast land from politically marginalised (indigenous) people. Likewise, nuclear power (also publicly owned and unionised) provides most of France's electricity. But that form of energy also has significant downsides.

In the US in 2019 63 percent of electricity came from fossil fuels, 20 percent from nuclear and 17 percent from 'renewables'. But, even if one could flip the proportion of fossil fuels to 'renewables' around overnight there's another statistic that is equally important. Since 1950 US electricity consumption has grown 13-fold and it continues to increase. That's before putting barely any of the country's 285-million registered private automobiles onto the grid. Electricity consumption is growing at a fast clip

## *Nuclear power provides most of France's electricity. But that form of energy also has significant downsides*

in China, India and elsewhere.

Oil is another source of energy that is growing rapidly. Up from 60-million barrels a day in 1980 and 86-million in 2010, 100-million barrels of oil were consumed daily in 2019. That number is projected to reach 140-million by 2040.

**O**n one point I agree entirely with critics of the film. It's unfair to (even indirectly) equate Bill McKibben with Al Gore. Representing the progressive end of the environmental establishment, McKibben has engaged in and stoked climate activism. Gore was Vice President when the US led the destruction of the former Yugoslavia, bombed Sudan and sanctioned Iraq.

Still, it's ridiculous for McKibben and others to dismiss the film's criticism of his decade-long promotion of biomass and refusal to come clean on 350.org's donors as divisive.

"I truly hope that Michael Moore does not succeed at dividing the climate movement. Too many have fought too long to build it", he tweeted with a link to his response in *Rolling Stone* titled "A Bomb in the Center of the Climate Movement": Michael Moore Damages Our Most Important Goal." Echoing this theme, Naomi Klein came

to her 350.org comrade's defence tweeting, "it is truly demoralising how much damage this film has done at a moment when many are ready for deep change." *Democracy Now*, *Common Dreams*, the *Guardian* and other media picked up her remark.

If it is divisive to criticise McKibben's positions, then the same must be said of his own criticisms aimed at those demanding the Pentagon be highlighted in decarbonisation efforts. In a June *New York Review of Books* column titled "The Pentagon's Outsized Part in the Climate Fight", McKibben pours cold water on those who have asked him about the importance of "shrinking the size of the US military" (the world's largest single institutional emitter of fossil fuels) in the fight for a sustainable planet.

In fact, his piece suggests the Pentagon is well-positioned to combat the climate crisis since right wingers are more likely to listen to their climate warnings and the institution has massive research capacities to develop green technologies.

McKibben seems to be saying the green movement should (could) co-opt the greatest purveyor of violence and destruction in the history of humanity!

McKibben's repeated advocacy of the private electric car could also be considered divisive. *In Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?* McKibben calls for "millions and millions of electric cars and buses" (alongside "building a hell of a lot of factories to turn out thousands of acres of solar panels, and wind turbines the length of football fields.") Does anyone believe the planet can sustain a transportation/urban

planning system with most of the world's 7.8-billion people owning 3,000-pound vehicles?

When an electric car is powered from a grid that is 63 percent fossil fuels the GHG it contributes per kilometer of travel is generally slightly less than an internal combustion engine. But the production and destruction phases for electric vehicles tend to be more energy intensive and they still require the extraction and development of significant amounts of resources. Additionally, the private car underpins a land, energy and resource intensive big box retail/suburban economy. (For details see my co-authored *Stop Signs: Cars and Capitalism on the Road to Economic, Social and Ecological Decay*.)

Moreover, as *Death by Car* recently pointed out, “electric vehicles are haloware – a product that exists to distract attention from continuing SUV and pickup sales. If this thesis is correct, then it is a huge mistake for progressive forces to express enthusiasm” for electric vehicles. Of the 86-million new passenger and light commercial vehicles sold globally in 2018 about 1.2-million of them were powered by battery-only electric engines while 37-million were pickups and SUVs. In other words, for every new battery-electric car there were 30 new SUVs/pickups sold. Alongside growing buzz about electric vehicles, the number of SUVs increased from 35-million to 200-million between 2010 and 2018.

McKibben and associates' ability to frame the film as divisive rests on the stark power imbalance between the 'green' capitalist and degrowth outlooks. While there

## *The number of SUVs increased from 35-million to 200-million between 2010 and 2018*

are few profits in the consume-less worldview, McKibben is situated at the progressive end of a network of organisations, commentators and media outlets empowered by hundreds of billions of dollars of 'green' capitalism. This milieu has counterposed solar, wind and biomass to the hyper fossil fuel emitting coal, natural gas and oil industries. But they aren't keen on discussing the limitations of their preferred energies and the fundamentally unsustainable nature of limitless energy (or other) consumption. And they certainly don't want any spotlight placed on environmental groups ties to the mega-rich and an unsustainable model.

But, in reality it's not the criticism that bothers. *Death by Car*, *Wrong Kind of Green*, *Counterpunch* and various other small leftist websites and initiatives have long documented McKibben and associates' concessions to the dominant order. Often more harshly than in the film. What is unique about *Planet of the Humans* is that these criticisms have been put forward by leftists with some power (Michael Moore's name and the funds for a full-length documentary, most obviously.) In other words, the back-

lash is not a response to the facts or argument *per se* but the 'mainstreaming' of the critique.

The environmental establishment's ability to generate hundreds of hit pieces against *Planet of the Humans* suggests the movement/outlook has amassed substantial power. But, it's not always clear to what ends. Most indicators of sustainability are trending in the wrong direction at the same time as top environmental figures have risen to the summits of power. Québec's most prominent environmentalist, Steven Guilbeault, recently became a cabinet minister in the Liberal government while the former head of World Wildlife Fund Canada, Gerald Butts, was Justin Trudeau's chief of staff. These individuals happily participate in a government that oversaw a 15-million tonne increase in Canada's GHG emissions in 2018 and then decided to purchase a massive tar sands pipeline.

The incredible popularity of *Planet of the Humans* – seven-million views on YouTube – suggests many are worried about the ecological calamity humanity is facing. Many also sense that the solutions environmental groups are putting forward don't add up.

The lesson to be learned from the film and the frenzied attacks against it is that questioning the system – be that capitalism or the mainstream environmental movement – won't make you friends in high places. **CT**

*Yves Engler is a Montreal-based political activist. His latest book is House of Mirrors: Justin Trudeau's Foreign Policy. His website is [www.yvesengler.com](http://www.yvesengler.com)*

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■ Trevor Grundy

# The sinking of Jeremy Corbyn

*New book shows how a vicious campaign by right-wing tabloids helped drive the UK Labour Party to a massive 2019 general election defeat*

**I**n his seminal book *In Defence of Politics*, the late academic Bernard Crick wrote: “Boredom with established truths is a great enemy of free men”. He wrote that in 1962. It could have been written yesterday.

The Edinburgh-based socialist said the purpose of his book was to try to restore confidence in the virtues of politics as a civilising human activity, saying that “politics, like Antaeus\* in the Greek myth, can remain perpetually young, strong and lively so long as it can keep its feet firmly on the ground of Mother Earth.” (\*Antaeus was the son of the gods Poseidon and Gaea in Greek mythology. He drew his strength from his mother, earth, and was invincible while he was in contact with her. He challenged people who passed by his area to wrestling matches and always won, as long as he kept both feet on the ground.)

In other words, in politics stick to where you come from and know where you belong.

*It's the Media, Stupid! –The Media, the 2019 Election and the Aftermath*, edited by Granville Williams of the Campaign for



## **IT'S THE MEDIA, STUPID!**

**The Media, the 2019 Election and the Aftermath**

Edited by **Granville Williams**

Published by the **Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (North)**

**£9.99**

Contact: [cpbfnorth@outlook.com](mailto:cpbfnorth@outlook.com)

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Press and Broadcasting Freedom (North) should be praised for having a similar aim as Crick – to restore confidence in opposition politics. He has produced a short,

important book that should be read by socialists wanting to know what went so *wrong* for Labour, and so *right* for the Conservatives in the December 2019 general election.

James Curran, Professor of Communications at Goldsmiths College, University of London, says in the book's foreword, “Here we are in the wake of a catastrophic Labour defeat. In 2019, the Labour Party sustained the second largest drop in its poll share since 1931. It has now the smallest number of MPs since 1935. The cross-class coalition that sustained Labour's rise is now fractured and will be difficult to repair.”

He continues: “British people's trust in the British press is now even lower than that of Serbians in their press, while trust in British broadcasting has fallen below the EU average.”

This reminded me of what Dorothy Byrne, Chair of the Ethical Journalism Network, said about the state of Britain and its media at the Edinburgh Festival last year.

Two things worried her: First, a general election where the two main parties were led by men who were out-of-touch with grass roots





ELECTIONWATCH: Concerned at the manner in which Corbyn was portrayed by the mainstream media.

opinion; and, second, what to do if a confirmed liar was installed as prime minister.

“Isn’t it time”, she asked,” for us to start using the ‘L’ word (liar). I believe that we need to start calling politicians out as liars when they lie. If we continue to be so polite, how will our viewers (on TV) know that politicians are lying?”

Were Johnson and Corbyn listening? They ought to have been.

This book’s origins are interesting. When the 2019 general election was called on October 30, 2019, *MediaNorth*, the magazine of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (North) decided to produce regular “watchdog” magazines (six in all) titled *ElectionWatch\**, to monitor the way the news was handled.

Much of what *ElectionWatch* said is repeated in this book, with several of the publication’s writers expressing their concern at

\* *ElectionWatch* and *mediaNorth* magazines are available at [www.coldtype.net/MediaNorth.Newsletters2.html](http://www.coldtype.net/MediaNorth.Newsletters2.html)

*The moment  
the election was  
announced, the  
opponents of anyone  
who wasn’t for Johnson,  
became the enemy*

the manner in which Corbyn was treated by the top-selling mainstream newspapers including the *Times*, the *Sun*, the *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday*, the *Guardian*, and the BBC.

But why the surprise? Why the shock? The moment the election was announced, anyone who wasn’t for Boris Johnson became the *enemy*.

The media condemnation of Corbyn was predictable, but the way the Labour leader and his advisers retaliated was little short of pathetic. His failure to explain his position on Jews, Zionists, Israel and his commitment to a non-racial Britain and its defence is extraordinary, perhaps the subject of another book.

It was almost as if a group of arrogant Labour Party advisers said, “Look, we’re the antennae of the masses. No-one will believe these arrogant right-wing media billionaires. We have our feet on the ground. We are the masses. We know what they think because they are us and we are them.”

How wrong they were.

Labour’s election defeat was followed by a one-day conference in Leeds in February, organised by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (North) in order to expose what the Communist daily *Morning Star* saw as the links between the right-wing press, the BBC and politicians, which “undermine Britain’s democratic process through the mass spreading of propaganda and outright lies.” *It’s The media, Stupid!* is the book that came out of that conference.

Labour militants can cry if they want to and hold further talks if they feel the need, but unless there is some form of new united front they’ll get nowhere. It is necessary to find out why so many tra-

ditional Labour voters swung to the Tories. And young men from England's most expensive private schools might not be the right ones to do the job, which requires listening to the voices of ordinary men and women in some of the poorest parts of the UK.

It becomes clearer by the day that the majority of working class Northerners voted for Johnson because they felt let down by Labour and confused by Corbyn. Several of the authors make that abundantly clear, and it is to their credit that they've stopped worshipping Corbyn and started to examine what went wrong under his watch.

Traditional Labour Party voters were unsure about Corbyn's attitude towards Europe and Brexit. They were startled about claims Corbyn was anti-Jewish. They were bewildered when presented with policy documents that might be acceptable to graduates doing PhDs but hard to swallow if you were an ordinary Joe from a northern town such as Blyth, Whitley Bay, Seaton Sluice, South Shields, or Ellington Village.

Then, along came Bouncy Boris, oozing what Evelyn Waugh called *creamy English charm*, accompanied by his private-school educated Dominic Cummings, promising the earth with simplistic slogans: *Get Brexit Done. Take Back Control*

Three-word slogans do not constitute policy, but they're comforting when the masses are confused and, above all, bored with established truths.

*It's The Media, Stupid!* is well edited by Granville Williams who calls for all Labour reform groups to work together. "The danger is, if



**SAVAGED:** The UK tabloids dished out stories warning readers of Corbyn and his "Apologists for terror."

we all go off and do our own thing, we will dissipate our effectiveness."

The outstanding chapter of the book, which is well-illustrated with 16-pages of colour reproductions of the front pages of various British papers during the build-up to the election, is Nicholas Jones's *The Vilification of Jeremy Corbyn*, where he shows how the media continually dished out stories warning readers of Corbyn's friends in high terrorist places.

Those charges were reinforced when Peter Dearlove, the ex-head of MI6, joined in the chorus of abuse, saying Corbyn could not be trusted with state secrets.

But perhaps the hardest blow came from Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, who accused Labour of harbouring rampant antisemites, and indicated that Jeremy Corbyn was doing nothing to stop it, on the day Labour released its lengthy policy document and the Muslim Council of Britain issued a scathing attack on Islamophobia in the Tory Party.

Andrew Neil, former editor of Murdoch's *Sunday Times*, now chairman of the company that owns the right-wing *Spectator* magazine, and who gets paid £200,000 a year by the BBC, climbed in and virtually crucified the Labour leader on television for refusing – four times – to say sorry to Britain's 280,000 or so Jewish citizens.

Jones points out just how badly Corbyn (and presumably his special adviser Seamus Milne) handled the whole thing.

Jones also informs us that long before the *Daily Mail* and other papers climbed aboard the "Corbyn is a closet antisemite" bandwagon,



the *Jewish Chronicle* had carried an editorial on August 14, 2015 expressing concern that there was antisemitism in the Labour Party.

Jones says: “An editorial expressed ‘deep foreboding’ at the prospect of his election as Labour leader, although there was ‘no direct evidence of his association and support for Holocaust deniers, terrorists and some outright antisemites.’”

Jones adds: “His failure to address the *Jewish Chronicle*’s challenge that summer and his own subsequent ineptitude and that of his aides in tackling the party’s crisis over charges of antisemitism, would open the floodgates to a virulent press campaign that tarnished Labour’s name throughout the build-up to the 2019 election. In the face of the hostile media environment he was up against there were steps that he could and should have been taken in 2015 to mitigate the damage, but the chance was missed.”

Jones, a former BBC industrial correspondent, also speaks about Corbyn’s “personal ambivalence”

*There are signs that the love affair with Johnson is eroding. His former friends are turning against him – and fast*

towards EU membership and how that confused voters in the Labour Party’s former Northern ‘Red Wall’ strongholds who were seduced, misled, conned and lied to under that so often repeated mantra, *Get Brexit Done*. It was a slogan that warmed the hearts of hundreds of thousands of men and women who felt they had been side-lined by the party they once supported.

However, there are signs that the love affair with Boris Johnson is rapidly eroding. His former friends are turning against him – and fast.

Matthew Parris wrote in the Times (May 9) that Johnson needs to stop his “blustering talk” and

get on with the task of leading. “Can you remember any big event of government he ever tackled and sorted?” he asks.

And the *Guardian*’s John Crace went further, writing on May 11 that Johnson is splitting-up the four country United Kingdom with his mishandling of the Covid-19 pandemic. “Boris is deep down a coward, a man who runs from the first hint of personal responsibility.”

As Oscar Wilde said: “A halo doesn’t have to fall far to become a noose.” **CT**

*Trevor Grundy is an English journalist who lived and worked in Central, Eastern and Southern Africa from 1966-1996 and who represented Time magazine during the Rhodesia War, the Financial Times and the BBC’s Focus on Africa in Zambia and Kenya, and Deutsche Welle, the SABC and Beeld newspaper in Zimbabwe. He is the author of ‘Memoir of a Fascist Childhood’ which was published by William Heinemann, London in 1998.*



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■ *John W. Whitehead*

# A world of digital book burners

*How the internet, hailed as a super-information highway, is increasingly becoming the police state's secret weapon*

**W**E are fast becoming a nation – nay, a world – of book burners.

While on paper, we are technically free to speak – at least according to the US Constitution – in reality, however, we are only as free to speak as the government and its corporate partners such as Facebook, Google or YouTube may allow.

That's not a whole lot of freedom. Especially if you're inclined to voice opinions that may be construed as conspiratorial or dangerous.

Take David Icke, for example.

Icke, a popular commentator and author, often labelled a conspiracy theorist by his detractors, recently had his Facebook page and YouTube channel (owned by Google) deleted for violating site policies by “spreading coronavirus disinformation.”

The Centre for Countering Digital Hate, which has been vocal about calling for Icke's deplatforming, is also pushing for the removal of all other sites and individuals who promote Icke's content in an effort to supposedly “save lives.”

Translation: the CCDH evidently believes the public is too dumb to think for itself and must be protected from dangerous ideas.

This is the goosestepping Nanny State trying to protect us from ourselves.

In the long run, this “safety” control (the censorship and shadow-banning of anyone who challenges a mainstream narrative) will be far worse than merely allowing people to think for themselves.

Journalist Matt Taibbi gets it: “The people who want to add a censorship regime to a health crisis are more dangerous and more stupid by leaps and bounds than a president who tells people to inject disinfectant.”

**D**on't fall for the propaganda. These internet censors are not acting in our best interests to protect us from dangerous, disinformation campaigns about Covid-19, a virus whose source and behaviour continue to elude medical officials. They're laying the groundwork now, with Icke as an easy target, to preempt any “dangerous” ideas that might challenge the power

elite's stranglehold over our lives.

This is how freedom dies.

It doesn't matter what disinformation Icke may or may not have been spreading about Covid-19. That's not the issue.

As commentator Caitlin Johnstone recognises, the censorship of David Icke by these internet media giants has nothing to do with Icke: “What matters is that we're seeing a consistent and accelerating pattern of powerful plutocratic institutions collaborating with the US-centralised empire to control what ideas people around the world are permitted to share with each other, and it's a very unsafe trajectory.”

Welcome to the age of technofascism.

Technofascism, clothed in tyrannical self-righteousness, is powered by technological behemoths (both corporate and governmental) working in tandem. As journalist Chet Bowers explains, “Technofascism's level of efficiency and totalitarian potential can easily lead to repressive systems that will not tolerate dissent.”

The internet, hailed as a super-information highway, is increas-



ingly becoming the police state's secret weapon. This "policing of the mind" is exactly the danger author Jim Keith warned about when he predicted that "information and communication sources are gradually being linked together into a single computerised network, providing an opportunity for unheralded control of what will be broadcast, what will be said, and ultimately what will be thought."

It's a slippery slope from censoring so-called illegitimate ideas to silencing truth.

Eventually, as George Orwell predicted, telling the truth will become a revolutionary act.

We're almost at that point now. We are witnessing the modern-day equivalent of book burning which involves doing away with dangerous ideas – legitimate or not – and the people who espouse them.

**T**oday, the forces of political correctness, working in conjunction with corporate and government agencies, have managed to replace actual book burning with intellectual book burning.

"Free speech for me but not for thee", is how my good friend and free speech purist Nat Hentoff used to sum up this double standard.

This is about much more than free speech, however. This is about repression and control.

With every passing day, we're being moved further down the road towards a totalitarian society characterised by government censorship, violence, corruption, hypocrisy and intolerance, all packaged for our supposed benefit in the Orwellian doublespeak of national security, tolerance and so-called "govern-

## *Big tech wedded to Big Government has become big Brother. We are now ruled by the Corporate Elite*

ment speech."

The reasons for such censorship vary widely from political correctness, safety concerns and bullying to national security and hate crimes but the end result remains the same: the complete eradication of what Benjamin Franklin referred to as the "principal pillar of a free government."

The upshot of all of this editing, parsing, banning and silencing is the emergence of a new language, what George Orwell referred to as Newspeak, which places the power to control language in the hands of the totalitarian state.

Under such a system, language becomes a weapon to change the way people think by changing the words they use. The end result is control. The police state could not ask for a better citizenry than one that carries out its own censorship, spying and policing: This is how you turn a nation of free people into extensions of the omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent police state, and in the process turn a citizenry against each other.

Tread cautiously: Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, which depicts the ominous rise of ubiquitous technology, fascism and totalitarianism, has become an operation manual for the omnipresent, modern-day surveillance state.

*Nineteen-Eighty-Four* portrays a global society of total control in which people are not allowed to have thoughts that in any way disagree with the corporate state. There is no personal freedom, and advanced technology has become the driving force behind a surveillance-driven society. Snitches and cameras are everywhere. People are subject to the Thought Police, who deal with anyone guilty of thought crimes. The government, or "Party", is headed by Big Brother who appears on posters everywhere with the words: "Big Brother is watching you."

What many fail to realise is that the government is not operating alone. It cannot.

The government requires an accomplice.

Thus, the increasingly complex security needs of the massive federal government, especially in the areas of defence, surveillance and data management, have been met within the corporate sector, which has shown itself to be a powerful ally that both depends on and feeds the growth of governmental overreach.

In fact, as I make clear in my book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People*, Big Tech wedded to Big Government has become Big Brother, and we are now ruled by the Corporate Elite whose tentacles have spread worldwide.

We have entered into a global state of tyranny. **CT**

**John W. Whitehead** is a constitutional attorney and founder and president of The Rutherford Institute. His latest book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People* is available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

■ *Ronnie Kasrils*

# Remembering an Apartheid freedom fighter

*When he died of cancer at 87 on April 29, Denis Goldberg was one of Nelson Mandela's two surviving co-defendants in South Africa's 1964 Rivonia Trial. The trial, and the raids that preceded it, decimated South Africa's nascent anti-apartheid underground – it only began recovering a decade later. Mandela and seven others joined dozens of freedom fighters on Robben Island. Goldberg, at 31, the youngest of the trialists, and the only white person sentenced with Mandela to life imprisonment, went to the whites-only Pretoria Central Prison. Ronnie Kasrils, anti-apartheid struggle comrade and friend, pays tribute*

**M**Y enduring memory of Denis Goldberg, who died in Cape Town, just after the 26th anniversary of South Africa's freedom day, comes from his late mother's lips. A frail Annie Goldberg recounted to me in London two years after the conclusion of the 1964 Rivonia Trial, where the death penalty had been anticipated, her impression of Denis calling out to her in jubilation: "Mother it's life. A life to live."

Denis later explained to me, that the words actually were, "Life! Beautiful life". No matter the discrepancy, both are reflective of his effervescent optimism. After the trial he was deeply upset at being separated from Mandela and his comrades who were dragged off to Robben Island the prison complex for blacks, while he was incarcer-

ated at the whites-only section of Pretoria prison. Even in prison apartheid segregation between the races applied.

**D**enis led a remarkable life rich in courage and commitment, kindness and generosity. Where the pendulum swung between pain and joy, breaking-point and strength, he persevered to demonstrate that conviction and principle could trump doubt and adversity.

His lodestar was service to humanity. He sought no personal benefit, privilege or power. His concern was of advancing the welfare and wellbeing of the downtrodden including, as an anti-Zionist Jew, that of the Palestinian people. He was a person of moral integrity, humour and goodwill.

His personal sacrifice was an inspiration for South Africa and the world. Obituaries refer to him as a "giant". My accolade for him is a *mensch* – a good person. He would prefer that.

This is not to say he had no vanity. He enjoyed signing off as "Rivonia trialist 3rd accused" for those who bought his memoir *The Mission*. Mandela and Walter Sisulu were 1 and 2 accused, and a quirk of the charge sheet elevated his status above Govan Mbeki and Ahmed Kathrada, among others.

When I pulled his leg about such effrontery, he waved aside any accusation of egoism, "Well you may say it's my *chutzpah* [Yiddish for audacity] if you wish". He never denied his Jewish origins, was prepared to go to remarkable lengths to debate with Jews of all





Denis Goldberg being interviewed for UCT News at his home at Hout Bay, near Cape Town, before the University of Cape Town gave him a honorary doctorate last year.

persuasions, but was steadfast in his support for the Palestinian struggle.

Denis had been at the Rivonia farm that day of the raid, but not as a member of the leadership. As they were meeting, and the police raid launched, he was resting in another room. He enjoyed relating how he had instinctively run to the toilet, to shred the incriminating pages of his notebook, and tried to flush the paper away.

Lionel “Rusty” Bernstein, pessimist to Denis the optimist, who was also arrested at the meeting, recounts how deep in despair he was as they were being carted away in a police vehicle, and how Denis had got on his nerves with his irrepressible gallows humour. There was seemingly nothing that could quell Goldberg’s spirited way of dealing with adversity right

*‘What was happening in South Africa was like the racism in Nazi Germany that we were supposed to be fighting against’*

through to the end of his life.

Denis might not have been part of the military high command, but he joined the organisation at its inception in 1961, and became a regional commander in the Western Cape. He was 31 at the time of his arrest, by far the youngest of the Rivonia trialists.

His parents settled in South

Africa, as immigrants from to escape the Czarist pogroms. He grew up in a mixed-race area of Cape Town, where his father had a small cartage business. Both parents were members of the communist party and Denis’s upbringing in a non-racist home during World War II, and the struggle against fascism, shaped his views.

“I understood that what was happening in South Africa with its racism was like the racism in Nazi Germany in Europe that we were supposed to be fighting against,” he explained.

It was his revulsion at the racism he witnessed growing up, that became the driving force for his life’s journey, marking him out as so different from 99 percent of the white population.

He began his studies in civil engineering at the University of

Cape Town (UCT) at the age of 16. By the time he graduated he was a member of the ANC-led liberation movement and the underground communist party. In the wake of the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 both he and his mother spent four months in detention for their political activism.

I first met Denis in Durban early in 1961. To me, a relative newcomer, he was an experienced 28-year-old with an irresistible *joy de vivre*. I was five years his junior and had much to learn from him – the kind of fellow you’d like as a big brother. He had arrived in a battered *bakkie* [pick-up truck], and was driving around the country keen to know the rural villages and way of life. In denim trousers and shirtsleeves rolled-up, he struck one as a man who could use his hands and was unafraid to get them dirty.

At the time, unknown to one another, we had been recruited into the armed struggle. In retrospect I came to realise why Denis was driving around the less travelled roads of SA. Rather romantically, I came to see him as like a young Che Guevara on his motorcycle reconnaissance of Latin America. Guevara famously said that “revolution is an act of love”, a maxim illustrative of Denis Goldberg’s humanism.

One would have thought that the vagaries of life would have knocked the stuffing out of Denis. That came close to happening after more than 20 years’ imprisonment. His parents had died, his wife Esme and children were in London, and she was too traumatised to visit him. The void had been filled by a friend, Hillary Kuny



**STRUGGLE HEROES:** Former Rivonia trialists Denis Goldberg and Nelson Mandela.

*From the moment he landed in Israel he lambasted the government for their close ties with the Apartheid regime*

(now Hamburger), his sole visitor. They formed a close bond and she got to know him well, impressed by his cheerful resolve.

But, by 1985 she began to discern a worrying change: “He laughed less, his shoulders were more hunched, and there was a creeping deadness in his eyes. On one of my visits he told me with something akin to despair in his voice that he had said goodbye to 48 comrades who had served their much lesser sentences. While he celebrated their release, the interminability of his sentence was brought into sharp focus.”

A lifeline appeared, in the unlikely guise of an Israeli non-government negotiator, who specialised in getting Jewish prisoners around the world released. The apartheid regime, keen to deepen ties with Israel, agreed to release Goldberg on condition he would not advocate violent struggle against South Africa. He would have to fly directly to Israel where his saviours hoped he would settle. There was much speculation about this but it emerged that Denis’s daughter Hillary, living on an Israeli kibbutz, had a hand in the rescue mission without, it seemed, the direct intervention of the Israeli government.

There was never any basis to claims that he wished to live in Israel. He abhorred Zionism, and unreservedly supported the Palestinian cause. From the moment he landed in Israel he lambasted the government for their close ties with the Apartheid regime. He often explained, “Having lived through apartheid in SA, there’s



no doubt in my mind that Israel is an apartheid state.”

He soon travelled to Britain to join his wife and son, by now man. In exile Denis threw himself into full-time ANC activity, becoming one of the movement’s most impressive speakers. He became involved in many creative enterprises such as transforming a London-based charity called Community HEART into a highly effective distributor of educational books and equipment for schools throughout Southern Africa. It functions to this day as one of his many legacies and their books still arrive in SA.

I brought Denis home to South Africa in 2002 to join me as ministerial adviser in my water and forestry portfolio. This was soon after his wife Esme died and then the tragic death of his daughter Hillary, who had left Israel to live in Britain. He was in his element visiting rural villages, reporting on the progress of water projects. He was passionate about developing some of the forestry resources into small-scale business for nearby villages. At the Pretoria head office he was often mistaken for me – given our common ancestry there was a likeness. In correcting the error, Denis delighted in telling people he was the handsome one.

Denis remained a loyal ANC member, and received the highest honours the organisation and country could bestow. His party loyalty did not restrain him from emerging as a fierce critic not only of the corrupt Zuma Presidency but also the corruption and rot that continues to beset the ANC. We disagreed about



Photo: Juda Ngwenya

**TOGETHER:** Rivonia trialists reunited in 2001 at Lilliesleaf Farm in Johannesburg – the underground headquarters where they were captured in 1963. (Left to right) Arthur Goldreich (who escaped from police cells during the trial), Andrew Mlangeni, Dennis Goldberg, Raymond Mhlaba and Rusty Bernstein (found not guilty).

whether it was better to be a critic from inside or outside the tent. He believed that the only vehicle that could drag us out of the mess was a reformed and rejuvenated ANC.

People from all over the world visited him in his Hout Bay home overlooking the sea before and after the cruel illness that struck him. In pain and adversity he raised funds for upliftment projects of impoverished communities, football equipment for the youth, a rape crisis centre, a music academy.

Phoning him ahead of a visit, he would instruct one to buy packages of fish and chips from a local cafe for a shared lunch. By then he was on an oxygen machine and moved about using a walking frame. If he needed to get somewhere quickly, and there were no helpers around, he connected his breathing apparatus to a battery on the passenger seat of his car,

and sped off.

With his death, after a debilitating illness bravely borne, the government announced four days of national mourning. I can imagine Denis the *mensch* chirping that with the coronavirus lockdown there couldn’t be much revelry anyway. He was twice married – to Esme Goldberg and later Edelgard Nkobi - and twice widowed. He was blessed to meet in his last years, Deidre Abrahams, who worked at his side and in who’s arms he died

South African Zionists are now laying claim to him, as he was prepared to engage in discussions with them. He was, however, prepared to debate with anyone, as he had been with his prison warders, but was firm in his allegiances and was a champion of the Palestinian cause to the very end. **CT**

**Ronnie Kasrils** is an ANC and Communist Party struggle stalwart and former government minister.

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■ Ann Jones

# A journal of the onset of the plague year

*Impressed by the efficiency of Norway's handling of Covid-19, I flew home and found myself in a farcical world of bluster and self-serving fantasies*

**D**ONALD Trump is not a president. He can't even play one on TV. He's a corrupt and dangerous braggart with ill-concealed aspirations for a crown and, with an election coming up, he's been monopolising prime time every day, spouting self-congratulation and misinformation. (No, don't inject that Lysol!) His never-ending absurd performances play out as farce against the tragic background of the Covid-19 pandemic sweeping the nation. If we had a real president, which is to say, almost anybody else, things would be different. We would have seen the pandemic coming. It would not have attacked me in my old age. And most of the dead might still be alive.

The records of other countries make this clear. South Korea, Taiwan, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, New Zealand, and Norway have all had commendable success in protecting their people. Could it be by chance that seven out of eight of the most successful nations in combating the Covid-19 pandemic are headed by women? Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan, Mette Frederiksen of Denmark, Sanni

Marin of Finland, Angela Merkel of Germany, Katrín Jakobsdóttir of Iceland, Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand, and Erna Solberg of Norway have all been described in similar terms: as calm, confident, and compassionate leaders. All have been commended for thorough preparations, quick decisive action, and clear, empathic communication. Erna Solberg has even been hailed as the *landetsmor*, the mother of her country.

Perhaps in such disturbing times as these we feel some primal yearning for a capable, comforting mother, but we need not resort to such psychological speculation. The fortunate countries turn out to be those with the fairness and foresight to have welcomed women into government decades ago.

What seems anachronistic in this critical time is the presence in leadership posts of so many self-aggrandising, sociopathic male autocrats: Jair Bolsinaro of Brazil, Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus, Viktor Orbán of Hungary, Vladimir Putin of Russia, Donald Trump of the United States, and more. Faced with the pandemic, none of these

“powerful” men had a clue. They encountered an invader that could not be bullied, bribed, banished, or bombed. And for their ignorance and vanity, their people pay (and pay and pay).

I know something about the difference good leadership makes because I've been locked down now in two different countries. One kept me safe, the other nearly killed me. I happened to be in Norway when the virus arrived and saw first-hand what a well-run government can actually do. (Yes, I know Norway seems small indeed when compared to the United States, but both of the governments that locked me down, Norway and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, where I now live, represent roughly 5.5-6.5-million people, and Norway's capital, Oslo, is only slightly more populous than Boston. So some comparisons may be revelatory.)

More to the point, with any population, the difference between success and failure is preparation, swift action, and the techniques applied to overcome the pandemic. On February 26, the Norwegianian





**CAMERA HOUND:** President Donald J. Trump and Vice President Mike Pence are joined by health care and nursing association representatives after the signing of a proclamation in honour of National Nurses Day, on May 6 at the White House.

Institute of Public Health announced the first case of Covid-19: a woman who had returned a week earlier from China. The next day, it reported two cases in travellers returning from Italy and another from Iran. After that came two skiers also home from Italy. One of them, an employee of Oslo's largest hospital, went right back to work, where tracers would soon witness just how fast the unseen virus could move.

And here's the key that escapes political leaders in America: in Norway, testers and tracers were on the job from the start. As February rolled into March, they were already testing and tracking 500 Norwegian skiers returning from the Austrian Alps and northern Italy. Some had frequented convivial après-ski taverns there and, once back home, were quick to catch up with friends. One Norwegian tracer labelled such skiers "very sociable people."

Systematically, Norway would

test all its returning travellers (every one of them!), then track down all the contacts of those who had tested positive and test them and their contacts as well, and so on down the line. Working with remarkable speed, the tracers used immediate test results – a tool apparently available in the US only to the rich and famous – to track the trajectories of the virus as it spread. When cases began to multiply without known contacts, the tracers knew that the virus had begun to hitchhike through an unwitting community and were quick to surround it and shut it down.

In response to the pandemic, the government gradually closed down the capital and other centres of contagion. In Oslo, places of assembly went first: theatres, cinemas, concert halls. Norwegians were even asked to stay away from the World Cup Ski Championships being held at Hol-

menkollen, on the edge of Oslo.

Universities and schools moved online, while offices of all sorts soon followed suit. Restaurants and bars shut their doors. By March 12, just two weeks after the first reported case, the capital and much of the country had closed down. On that day, in fact, officials reported the death of an elderly man, the first Norwegian casualty of Covid-19.

By mid-April, five weeks after the shutdown went into effect, the government began to open up public life again, proceeding carefully step by step. Toddlers were the first to return to their pre-schools on April 20, with grade schoolers to follow. By April 30, Norway had administered 172,586 tests and recorded 7,667 positive cases of the coronavirus, 2,221 of them in Oslo. The dead numbered 207, suggesting a per capita mortality rate lower than that of any other European country and far from America's tragic loss of life. But

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how to explain this Norwegian record?

Experts attribute it to the government's early and deep preparations, enabling it to respond immediately to the very first case to appear in the country and, after that, to its quick, unrelenting testing and tracing of the contagion. This painstaking effort, backed by Norway's universal health care system, enabled the state to get ahead of the virus, save lives, and stop the pandemic short.

The country's remarkably effective welfare system has bolstered its population throughout the shutdown. Furloughed workers drew full pay from the government for 20 days, and about 62 percent of their full salaries after that. They'll return to their jobs ready for work in factories, shops, and businesses as the quarantine is lifted. The government's effective and well-targeted expenditures are ensuring smooth transitions; a quick return to production; and, best of all in this troubled time, some peace of mind for employers, workers, and families. The shutdown is bound to be costly, perhaps the worst blow to the economy since World War II, but such thoroughgoing, bottom-up arrangements are less expensive – in both financial and human terms – than America's striking neglect of marginal (aka “essential”) workers, thrown under the bus of crony capitalism with nothing but lectures on the overrated American freedom to fend for yourself.

In Norway, the invasion of Covid-19 was seen from the outset as a national problem and part of a global emergency. It was never

## *In Norway, the invasion of Covid-19 was seen from the outset as a national problem and part of a global emergency*

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politicised. Norway's conservative prime minister, Erna Solberg, is now receiving high marks indeed, even from opposition parties, for her calm leadership. Children like her, too. During the crisis, she gave two nationwide “press conferences” to children to answer questions they submitted about the pandemic. (“Can I have a birthday party?”, “How long does it take to make a vaccine?”) From the outset, she told them it was okay to be scared.

Remarkably, Norway quickly achieved the lowest rate of contagion in Europe. From the start, it aimed to stifle the virus to the point where one infected person might infect only one more. In scientific terms, it aimed for an R-0 rate (a rate of reproduction) of 1.0. By the time Solberg announced that goal on March 24, however, the magic number had already fallen to 0.71. Today, with only 81 Covid-19 patients hospitalised and their contacts already traced and tested, Norwegians can begin to return with considerable confidence to something that edges ever closer to normal life.

The United States has become an example for the world of just the opposite: a corrupt govern-

ment unprepared for, and even in denial of, warnings from within and without. Years ago, President Obama created within the National Security Council a directorate for global health security and bio-defence to prepare for the pandemics sure to come. That directorate even briefed the incoming Trump team on the urgency of pandemic preparations before the president's inauguration. But, on taking office, Trump eliminated the threat by eliminating the directorate.

As president, he was also informed of a viral outbreak in Wuhan, China, in early January, but ignored the message. As has been widely reported, he wasted at least two months in self-serving fantasies, claiming the pandemic would disappear of its own accord, or was Fake News, or a “new hoax” of Democrats plotting his downfall. By March, his conduct had become increasingly erratic, obtuse, combative, and often just flat-out nasty. In April, he abandoned altogether his most pressing presidential duty, first claiming “total power” as president and then shifting the job of testing and protecting the people from an unrestrained pandemic onto state governors already struggling to find basic medical supplies for front-line health care personnel in their own states.

Worse, he roused his most militant followers, some heavily armed, to defy the emergency directives of several states led by Democratic governors. In short, he first unloaded the responsibilities of his office onto state governors, then made it his mission to undermine and threaten some of them. For good measure, he cut off US funding for the World Health Organization, the single UN agency best



equipped to deal with global health emergencies. Trump already had a proud record of getting away with highly offensive, even criminal, acts in plain sight. Now, through egotism, bravado, and ignorance he's made an epidemic great again (MEGA!), for Covid-19 cases and fatalities in the United States have by now far outstripped those anywhere else on Earth.

**O**n March 11, as Oslo was shutting down, President Trump issued an order to take effect in 72 hours: no one flying from Europe would be allowed to enter the United States. It sounded crazy, but – worried about worse to come – I changed my flight home to meet the deadline. The next day, the American embassy clarified the president's ultimatum: the travel ban did not apply to US citizens. By that time, of course, it was impossible for me to change my ticket back, so I left Oslo on March 14, after assuring friends that I would be okay because Massachusetts, home of Elizabeth Warren, is a progressive state.

Hah!

Changing planes in London, I found myself in a different world: packed into the tail section of that flight among a crowd of American students summoned home from European universities by their anxious parents. Some were in transit from northern Italy, the heartland of the European Covid-19 outbreak. From the seats behind me came insistent sounds of boys coughing. The flight attendants wore rubber gloves and made themselves scarce. I wrapped a long scarf round and round my face, feeling as if somehow I'd been

*From behind me  
came sounds of boys  
coughing. The flight  
attendants wore rubber  
gloves and made  
themselves scarce*

suckered into a trap.

Seven hours later, we stumbled into Boston's Logan Airport, destined to spend a few more all-too-intimate hours together. I crept along a zigzag trail, amid those coughing boys, with no way of putting distance between us, to the passport inspectors and then beyond. Finally, one by one, we were ushered into a curtained area to experience that airport's first night of official "screening."

I thought that we were all, at least, to be tested for the virus. But no such luck. When my turn came, the official screener voiced no greetings, asked no questions, offered nothing but a single order: "Go home and take your temperature". Had I been held all that time among those coughing boys for this? Later that week, a local paper reported approvingly that the new airport screening, the first line of defence against the foreign plague, took "less than a minute."

I was angry to have been forced onto that dangerous flight by the president's arbitrary edict and doubly angry that he had terminated travel from Europe without consulting any of his European counterparts. By the look of things that evening, no one from his administration had even told key American airports receiving flights from

Europe until the last minute. I saw a bunch of those coughing boys board a Silver Line bus into Boston and others grabbing taxis. And so we all went off into the night, apparently leaving behind no trace of the state of our health or where we were headed. Some days later, I was not merely angry but very ill.

Ten days after that, in a hospital parking garage, a masked nurse worked a giant Q-tip up my nose. A doctor told me to quarantine myself at home (as I had been doing anyway) until I got the test results in about five days. But why should it take so long? Wasn't the whole point of a test to learn what was going on as quickly as possible? The speed of the test result had been the very point in Norway. Combined with the immediate work of the tracers, it enabled the National Health Service to stay ahead of the pandemic and, in the end, essentially, to shut it down.

I went home and got worse. Five days passed with no word. On the 12th day, I felt well enough to call my doctor, who tracked down the result of my test ("just in"). It was positive, but almost two weeks old. So, over the telephone, the doctor gave me the all-clear to put on my mask (a souvenir of my trip to the ER) and go forth to shop. Knowing no Norwegian doctor would turn me loose so soon without another test, I asked for one. Sorry, short supply, only one to a customer. I've kept in quarantine at home ever since.

On April 10, came news of the death of 59-year-old Vitalina Williams, an immigrant from Guatemala, who worked a full-time job at a Walmart in Lynn, Massachusetts, as well as a part-time job at a supermarket in Salem. Like the nurse and doctor in the ER, this cashier

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was an “essential worker”, the first grocery store employee in Massachusetts to work herself to death. Here’s an immense difference between Massachusetts and Norway. In that country, one job would have paid her a good wage and also given her paid leave to see her own doctor in the National Health Service when she first felt ill. She would have been diagnosed, cared for, and very likely saved. That is how a national health care system works in a social democracy.

So what was my Covid-19 test for? What useful information did it give anyone? I had walked home from the ER in the dark (so as not to endanger others by taking a bus) and gone to bed. Nobody checked up on me because nobody knew my test was positive – something I, of course, didn’t know, either. And throughout those nearly two weeks of waiting for the test results, no tracer called to learn if I lived with other people who might be endangered and available for testing. (There were, in fact, no tracers then.) No one asked me about my family, friends, or others I might have contacted since that “screening” at the airport. And had I died in my bed, no one would or could have traced that bright red line between me, those coughing boys, and Donald Trump’s compulsory flight to a state caught totally off guard in a country both dysfunctional and unprepared.

On April 20th, five weeks after I returned to Boston, Massachusetts was designated a Covid-19 “hot spot”. With 38,077 cases and 1,706 deaths at that time, the state

*This virus is  
smarter, more agile,  
and faster on  
its feet than any  
of its associates  
we’ve met before*

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stood in third place behind New York and New Jersey. This was not an honour, but it may be what prompted Governor Charlie Baker to turn to testing – and belatedly to tracing.

The number of new cases in this state was rising every day, as it has from the first reported case in February. The governor, who also holds a press conference every day, explained that we are now “right in the middle of an expected surge”, apparently unaware that a “surge” is what you get when you have missed the moment for preventative testing and tracing. (This is also what you get when, as in the nation’s capital, politicians rather than scientists run the show.)

Belatedly, Massachusetts started testing people at the rate of about 9,000 per day, while private agencies funded by the state are in the process of hiring perhaps 1,000 tracers to conduct phone interviews with the contacts of all Massachusetts residents who have already tested positive. On May 6, we official “positives” number 70,271, though 4,212 of us are already dead.

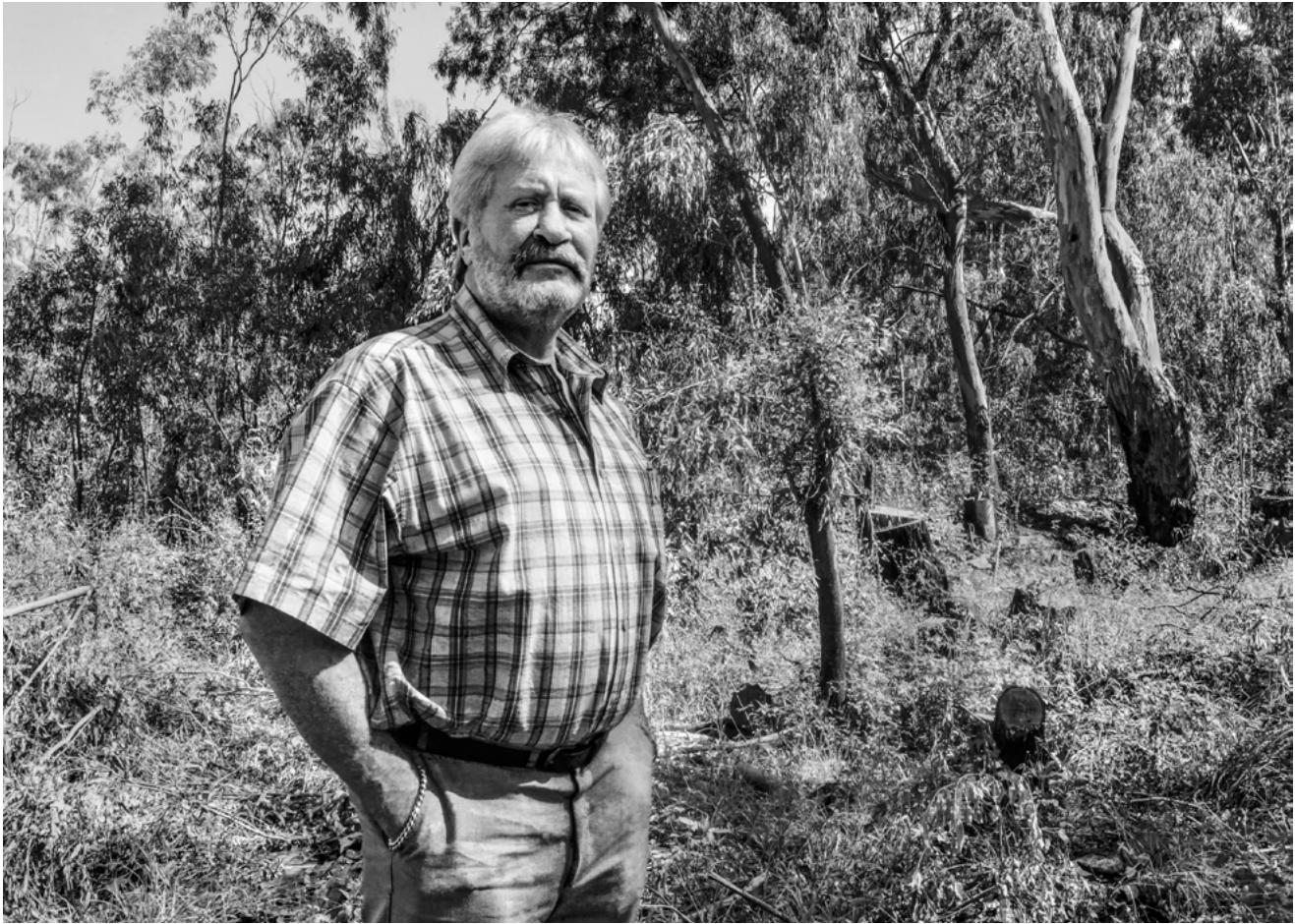
In the first few days of May, the number of positive patients hospitalised fell slightly and state

officials adopted an attitude of “cautious optimism”. Presumably, something of importance will be learned from those belated tests. As Norway recognised, however, if you don’t jump on this virus fast, it rapidly disperses beyond simple person-to-person contacts. It spreads out sociably like so many Norwegian skiers – or American students. It rides the chairlift and the bus. It gets on the plane. It hangs out at the airport. It hitches a ride with someone stopping at the grocery store. To tally its contacts may become simply a matter of counting the dead.

Tracers in Norway have moved on to other tests to find asymptomatic carriers who may be contagious or have developed antibodies. Anyone in that country with even the mildest symptoms may ask for a test. These studies are essential in case the virus should find new life as the quarantine is lifted. What scientists might learn from such studies remains to be seen, but surely one conclusion is that this virus is smarter, more agile, and faster than any we’ve met before. And for any readers who believe in politics more than science, let me just say that without science you won’t even know what hit you. **CT**

*Ann Jones is a non-resident fellow of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. She is at work on a book about social democracy in Norway (and its absence in the United States). She is the author of several books, including *They Were Soldiers: How the Wounded Return from America’s Wars – the Untold Story*. This essay first appeared at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com)*





Heriotdale, Johannesburg – Hennie Gerber, where he tortured and then murdered Samuel Kganakga. April 14, 2010.

**T**HE origins of David Goldblatt's new book, *Ex Offenders at the Scene of Crime*, lie in the photographer's observation that many of his fellow South Africans, regardless of their race and class, are the victims of often violent crime.

"I have asked myself", says Goldblatt, "not least in the fear and fury of holdups with knives and guns, who are you? Are you monsters? Are you 'ordinary' people – if there are such? How did you come to do this? What are your lives?"

And so began in 2008 *Ex Offenders at the Scene of Crime*, for which Goldblatt photographed criminal offenders and alleged offenders at the place that was probably

# CRIME SCENES

**EX OFFENDERS AT  
THE SCENE OF CRIME**

**Photographs by David Goldblatt**

Published by Steidl / www.steidl.de

**US \$65 / Can \$90**

life-changing for them and their victims: the scene of the crime or arrest. Each portrait is accompanied by the subject's written story

in his or her own words, for many a cathartic experience and the first opportunity to recount events without being judged.

To ensure the integrity of his undertaking, Goldblatt paid each of his subjects R800 (about \$70) for permission to photograph and interview them, any profit from the project donated to the rehabilitation of offenders.

*Ex Offenders* also features Goldblatt's portraits and interviews of subjects in England, made in collaboration with the community arts project *Multistory*.

*The essay introducing the book by Erwin James, a journalist who served a life sentence for murder in England.*

**CT**





**Above: Soweto, Johannesburg, South Africa – Bridget Makhomza and her former partner Nomso Mlambo at the house where a man attempted 'corrective' rape on Bridget and stabbed Nomso. May 26, 2012**



**Left: Lakeside, Benoni, South Africa – Paul Tuge where he hid after a shootout with a policeman. February 18, 2010**





Above: London, England – Jonathan Aitken in his Earl's Court home, which he almost lost to bankruptcy after going to jail for perjury. May 8, 2015.

Right: Dudley, England – Yasin Ali Mohammed was carrying a bag with 14 kilograms of heroin and a Harry Potter book to read on the train when he was arrested in 2003. October 11, 2012.





Above: Harrow, Middlesex, England – Richi Ellis served 11 years after being convicted of joint enterprise for a murder that happened here. September 17, 2014.



Left: Bushbury Lane, Wolverhampton, England – Gerry Byrne went through the roofs of pharmacies many times to rob their dangerous drugs safes. October 18, 2012



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■ C.J. Hopkins

# Cowering before the Virus of Mass Destruction

*It isn't yet clear how totalitarian this show will get, but, given the nature of the pilot episode, I am kind of dreading the rest of the series*

**T**HERE comes a point in the introduction of every new official narrative when people no longer remember how it started. Or, rather, they remember how it started, but not the propaganda that started it. Or, rather, they remember all that (or are able to, if you press them on it), but it doesn't make any difference anymore, because the official narrative has supplanted reality.

You'll remember this point from the War on Terror, and specifically the occupation of Iraq. By the latter half of 2004, most Westerners had completely forgotten the propaganda that launched the invasion, and thus regarded the Iraqi resistance as "terrorists," despite the fact that the United States had invaded and was occupying their country for no legitimate reason whatsoever. By that time, it was abundantly clear that there were no "weapons of mass destruction," and that the USA had invaded a nation that had not attacked it, and posed no threat to it, and so was perpetrating a textbook war of aggression.

These facts did not matter, not in the slightest. By that time,

Westerners were totally immersed in the official War on Terror narrative, which had superseded objective reality. Herd mentality had taken over. It's difficult to describe how this works; it's a state of functional dissociation. It wasn't that people didn't know the facts, or that they didn't understand the facts. They knew the Iraqis weren't "terrorists". At the same time, they knew they were definitely "terrorists", despite the fact that they knew that they weren't. They knew there were no WMDs, that there had never been any WMDs, and still they were certain there were WMDs, which would be found, although they clearly did not exist.

**T**he same thing happened in Nazi Germany. The majority of the German people were never fanatical antisemites like the hardcore NSDAP members. If they had been, there would have been no need for Goebbels and his monstrous propaganda machine. No, the Germans during the Nazi period, like the Americans during the War on Terror, knew that their victims posed

no threat to them, and at the same time they believed exactly the opposite, and thus did not protest as their neighbours were hauled out of their homes and sent off to death camps, camps which, in their dissociative state, simultaneously did and did not exist.

What I'm describing probably sounds like psychosis, but, technically speaking, it isn't ... not quite. It is not an absolute break from reality. People functioning in this state know that what they believe is not real. Nonetheless, they are forced to believe it (and do, actually, literally, believe it, as impossible as I know that sounds), because the consequences of not believing it are even more frightening than the cognitive dissonance of believing a narrative they know is a fiction. Disbelieving the official narrative means excommunication from "normality", the loss of friends, income, status, and in many cases far worse punishments.

Herd animals, in a state of panic, instinctively run towards the centre of the herd. Separation from the herd makes them easy prey for pursuing predators. It is the same primal instinct operating here.

It is the goal of every official narrative to generate this type of herd mentality, not in order to deceive or dupe the public, but, rather, to confuse and terrorise them to the point where they revert to their primal instincts, and are being driven purely by existential fear, and facts and truth no longer matter.

Once an official narrative reaches this point, it is unassailable by facts and reason. It no longer needs facts to justify it. It justifies itself with its own existence. Reason cannot penetrate it. Arguing with its adherents is pointless. They know it is irrational. They simply do not care.

We are reaching this point with the coronavirus narrative. It is possible that we have already reached it. Despite the fact that what we are dealing with is a virus that, yes, is clearly deadly to the old and those with medical conditions, but that is just as clearly not a deadly threat to the majority of the human species, people are cowering inside their homes as if the Zombie Apocalypse has finally begun. Many appear to believe that this virus is some sort of Alien-Terrorist Death Flu (or weaponised Virus of Mass Destruction) that will kill you the second you breathe it in.

This is not surprising at all, because, according to the official narrative, its destructive powers are nearly unlimited. Not only will it obliterate your lungs, and liquify all your other major organs, and kill you with blood clots, and intestinal damage, now it causes



### *People are cowering inside their homes as if the Zombie Apocalypse has finally begun*

“sudden strokes in young adults”, and possibly spontaneous prostate cancer, and God knows what other medical horrors!

According to all the “scientists” and “medical experts” (ie, those that conform to the official narrative, not all the other scientists and medical experts), it is unlike any other virus that has ever existed in the history of viruses. It certainly doesn’t follow the typical pattern of spreading extensively for a limited period, and then rapidly dying down on its own, regardless of what measures are taken to thwart it.

Also, “we have no immunity against it”, which is why we all

have to remain “locked down” like unruly inmates in a penitentiary until a vaccine can be concocted and forced into every living person on earth. Apparently, this mandatory wonder vaccine will magically render us immune to this virus against which we have no immunity (and are totally unable to develop immunity), which immunity will be certified on our mandatory “immunity papers”, which we will need to travel, get a job, send our kids to school, and, you know, to show the police when they stop us on the street because we look like maybe we might be “infected.”

Germany (where I live) is way out in front of this. According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the federal government plans to introduce a coronavirus “immunity card” as part of its “Infection Protection Law”, which will grant the authorities the power to round up anyone “suspected to be contagious” and force them into ... uh ... “quarantine,” and “forbid them from entering certain public places”. The Malaysian authorities have dispensed with such niceties, and are arresting migrant workers and refugees in so-called “Covid-19 red zones” and marching them off to God knows where.

Oh, yeah, and I almost forgot ... the germ and chemical warfare researchers at DARPA (ie, the US military’s Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) have developed some new type of fancy blood test that will identify “asymptomatic carriers” (ie, people who display no symptoms



whatsoever). So that will probably come in handy ... especially if the “white supremacists”, “Red-Brown extremists”, and “conspiracy theorists” keep protesting the lockdown with their wives and kids!

And these are just the latest additions to a list of rather dystopian examples of the “brave new normal” narrative that GloboCap is rolling out, right before our very eyes. It’s all right there in black and white. They aren’t hiding the totalitarianism ... they don’t have to. Because people are begging for it. They are demanding to be “locked down” inside their homes, forced to wear masks, and stand two meters apart, for reasons that most of them no longer remember.

**P**lastic barriers are going up everywhere. Arrows on the floor show you which way to walk. Boxes show you where to stand. Paranoid Blockwarts are putting up signs threatening anyone not wearing a mask. Hysterical little fascist creeps are reporting their neighbours to the police for letting their children play with other children. Millions of people are voluntarily downloading “contact tracing applications” so that gov-

## *Hysterical little fascist creeps are reporting their neighbours to the police for letting their children play with other children*

ernments and global corporations can monitor their every movement. In Spain, they bleached an entire beach, killing everything, down to the insects, in order to protect the public from “infection”. The Internet has become an Orwellian chorus of shrieking, sanctimonious voices bullying everyone into conformity with charts, graphs, and desperate guilt-trips, few of which have much connection to reality. Corporations and governments are censoring dissent. We’re approaching a level of manufactured mass hysteria and herd mentality that not even Goebbels could have imagined.

Meanwhile, they’re striking the mostly empty “field hospitals,” and the theatrical “hospital ship” is now gone, and despite their attempts to inflate the Covid-19 death count

as much as humanly possible, the projected hundreds of millions of deaths have not materialised (not even close), and Sweden is fine, as is most of humanity, and ... just like there were no WMDs, there is no Virus of Mass Destruction.

What there is, is a new official narrative, the brave new, paranoid, pathologised “normal.”

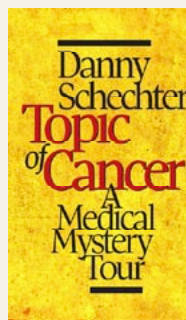
Like the War on Terror, it’s a global narrative. A global, post-ideological narrative. It’s just getting started, so it isn’t yet clear how totalitarian this show will get, but, given the nature of the pilot episode, I am kind of dreading the rest of the series. **CT**

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■ Joe Allen

# Stay indoors and kill robots

*When the last man lays desiccated on a rancid Lazyboy, his goofy grin frozen beneath cheap VR goggles, the robots will have finally won*

**V**IRTUAL reality is the ultimate psycho-technology. Like personal computers and those ubiquitous smartphones, it's a crucial step in our inexorable progress toward mass delusion and total atomisation. It's also a lot of fun.

The first clunky VR helmets appeared in the '90s. In those days, the visual renditions of the mind's eye were already amazing, but there were too many bugs for VR to gain mass appeal. Early users complained that the visual field's tracking was a bit off. Turn your head, and the world moved slightly out of sync. If you kept the goggles on for too long, you'd puke.

Back then, the virtual universe was composed of interlocking polygons and half-baked gaming ideas. You were better off just buying a Nintendo and playing *MarioKart*. Having experienced the new generation of VR, I can assure you, the bugs have been fixed. Like the proverbial auto-fellator of locker room lore, if I had my own VR set at home, I'd never leave the house.

The first time I put on a VR headset was in Amsterdam during the summer of '18. At the time, I

was working as a rigger on a European concert tour. I'd just had a smoke at Abraxas Café, and set out on foot to wander. As I neared the red light district, I passed an open studio with a retro '80s aesthetic. Old school Atari games covered the brick wall. Two people were flailing around inside, feet planted on the ground, plastic pistols in hand, their upper faces covered by goggles.

I stepped inside for a closer look. There were widescreen TVs on the wall showing each user's experience. Rotting zombies shambled up from all directions. I moved closer to one of the players. Without warning, he aimed his pistol at my face and pulled the trigger furiously. Click, click, click. A chill went down my spine. His eyes were seeing someone else inside the headset. Undead humans exploded on the screen behind him.

"Whatchoo writing about, mang?" The shift manager stood beside me, looking down at my notebook. Turns out the public is allowed to snap pics on a smartphone, but longhand notes are for-

bidden. A heated discussion erupted. In the end, I convinced him that the most damning thing I could write about is not being allowed to write. I also explained why I would never try VR. Entering the virtual world is the spiritual equivalent to walking into a strip club or a crackhouse. It violates my sense of the sacred. The guy understood, so he offered me a discount.

To be honest, the HTC Vive goggles were surprisingly comfortable. At first, all I could see was a wide, blank room with a vaulted ceiling. The visual tracking was superb. All was silent except for the manager/spirit guide muttering instructions in my ear.

"Are you ready, mang?"

I nodded. Then – WHOOSH!

In an instant, I'm standing on busy sidewalk in a modern metropolis. Cars honk. Bits of conversation come and go as people pass. Trees wave in green city park across the road. A wall of skyscrapers rises up behind me. It's obviously a simulation – but just barely.

My spirit guide instructs me to go into a door behind me. I find myself inside a golden elevator. I push





Art: Monst' Jangriyavong / 123RF.com

a button. The doors slam shut and up I go. Through the narrow gap between the doors, I can see that I'm rising fast. Suddenly the doors open. I'm 20 stories high. There's a six-foot plank extending out from my feet.

"Whoa!"

"Step out onto the plank, mang."

I do it. They've apparently put a board down at my feet, so the wood feels real beneath me. A breeze hits me from the right. The cars honk far below. The pedestrians scurry like ants. I step up to the end of the plank, testing my nerve. My toes hang over the edge.

"You like it?"

"This is incredible!"

"Great! Now, step off the end."

"Wait... What?"

"Step off."

"What's gonna happen?"

"Just step off."

"No fucking way!"

The reader should understand that in real life, it's routine for me to walk out on narrow steel beams 100 feet in the air. As an arena rigger, I do it all the time. That's just the job. But what riggers never do – no matter what – is step out into the void. Narrow is the gate that leads to life; wide is the path that leads to destruction.

The simulation is suddenly oppressive. My breath quickens and my palms start to sweat. The ground seems much farther away now. Will angels swoop down and catch me at the last minute? Better not test my luck. I try to explain to my spirit guide why I'm not gonna jump.

"Just do it, mang", he insists.

"Just jump!"

I ripped the helmet off. The manager stood there, eyes wide, completely stunned. The studio looked tiny and drab.

"DUDE, I'M TRAINED TO NEVER COME OF THE BEAM! ALRIGHT?! THIS SHIT'S FREAKING ME OUT!!" Passers-by stopped at the door to watch me melt down. "Let's just go to the next game, okay?!"

"Okay, okay, mang", said the manager, helping me put the headset back on. "Has anyone ever told you that you're incredibly stubborn?"

I spent the next half hour shooting intelligent alien life forms by the dozen. They splattered like bugs. The sound was so satisfying. Afterward, in the real world, I asked the manager what happens when you jump off the plank.

"You just fall until you hit the ground. Then everything turns white."

"You mean you just die?!"

"It's an amazing experience, man. A lot of people refuse to do it. But I think everyone should try it once."

There's a reason I swore off video games when I turned twenty. Like many young men, I couldn't get enough of them. My life skills were being stunted. So I've been clean for two decades. I mean, for the most part. You know how it is – one hit now and again never hurt anybody.

The last time I did VR was back in March. It was the last weekend before everyone crawled into the Internet to escape the coronavirus. I got to play *Singularity* at an establishment called Zero Latency, hosted by MGM Grand on the Las Vegas strip. The game was fantastic! All the action goes down in an empty 60' x 40' room, meaning you get to run around inside the simu-

lation, ducking behind objects and chasing down the enemy.

For fifty bucks, you can either mow down zombified humans or shoot up sentient robots. It's like a training camp for sociopathic mass shooters. A group of tourists – two Latin bros led by an older white nerd and his Japanese girlfriend – were waiting outside for their turn. I joined them to fight the robots.

Zero Latency's desk clerk explained that their HP Reverb 2 headset, equipped with noise-cancelling headphones, is top of the line. This rig is hooked up to a computer you wear like a backpack. Its mini ATX motherboard is fitted with a 2070 graphics card, 60 gigs of RAM, two solid state hard drives, and an i9 processor. The sleek rifle they issue looks like something out of Ridley Scott's *Alien*.

*Singularity* starts out fierce. Your team has been sent to investigate a space station overrun by its own robots. The astronauts are dead.

The space station's visual environment is stunning – all complex equipment, intricate keypads, and reflective metallic surfaces. Outside the wide windows, the stars extend into infinity. My teammates jig around in Metroid-style space suits, looking like intergalactic cloggers. We fall over ourselves trying to walk down ramps. We run up walls charged with artificial gravity. We unload our rifles like there's no tomorrow.

I try out each weapon in my arsenal: a laser pulse, a ray gun, a scatter beam. The pulse delivers a sure kill, so I go with that. These dumb AI bots don't stand a chance. Neither do the squadrons of drones flying overhead. While my team-

## *Soon, artificial intelligence will pilot drones carrying mini-nuke payloads. Better hope they get the right address*

mates jig back and forth, drawing enemy fire, I pick off drones like they're robotic clay pigeons.

Next comes the humanoid infantry, flanked by unmanned laser turrets. I duck behind a wall and land kill shot after kill shot. Finally, we face the Big Boss. It's a villainous artificial intelligence that has murdered its masters and taken control of the system. Why it manifests as a giant mechanical crab, I'll never know.

"You humans are so inadequate. Bwa ha ha!"

**B**ack in the Zero Latency armoury, we peeled off our gear, then head out into the MGM casino to see who got the high score. You could tell the one Latin bro was disappointed, but he took it like a sport.

#1: JOEBOT – Kills: 243 – Score: 83,563

If I were a better man, I'd have made an effort to cover my teammates' backs. But you don't get the top score by throwing yourself on pulsar grenades. Game over, suckers. They walked off without saying goodbye, and I stepped out into the searing desert sun.

The world looks so plain when you emerge from virtual reality. Even a place like Las Vegas feels

so limited and mundane. Up in my room at the New York, New York Hotel and Casino, I stared out the window at the rollercoaster winding through the replica of Manhattan's skyline.

The riders climbed up slowly and screamed all the way down, pretending to die for the fun of it. I sipped my wine and thought about artificial life. Programmers have already created AI priests to lead online rituals. Soon, artificial intelligence will pilot drones carrying Amazon packages, or maybe mini-nuke payloads. Better hope they get the right address.

Looking out at the barren mountain range on the horizon, the Vegas neon glittering below, my mind drifted to VR's infinite possibilities. The future belongs to painless love at a comfortable distance – to virtual porn and tele-dildonics. We may never explore alien worlds in outer space, and there's no reason to. Not when we can just create them ourselves.

That's when the lightbulb burst. You can pretend to shoot all you want, but when the last man lays desiccated on a rancid Lazyboy, his goofy grin frozen beneath cheap VR goggles, the robots will have finally won.

Forget about banning assault weapons. We have to make virtual reality illegal before it's too late! The machines must be neutralised before they delete us. If you've ever done VR, you know what I'm talking about. And if you haven't – hurry up and try it now while you still can. You'll love it! **CT**

*Joe Allen writes about race, robots, and religion. Most days, he's based out of tour buses and far-flung hotels.*





Employees of Silvercorp were arrested by Venezuelan authorities after a failed coup attempt in Venezuela.

■ *Bill Van Auken*

# Venezuela ‘invasion’ is Trump’s Bay of Pigs

*Failed Sunday morning seaborne attack led by US mercenaries highlights US attempts to overthrow President Maduro and seize country’s oil reserves*

**A** PAIR of abortive armed landings by US-led mercenaries on Venezuela’s coast early in May made it clear that the global coronavirus pandemic and the death and devastation it has wrought upon the American people have done nothing to curb US imperialism’s predatory and criminal pursuit of geostrategic interests in South America and across the globe.

The first of the two landings

took place early in the morning of Sunday, May 3 in Maputo in the state of La Guaira, barely a half hour’s drive from the Venezuelan capital of Caracas. Eight of the armed men who came ashore, including the leader of the group, an ex-Venezuelan army captain known as “Pantera” (the panther), were killed, and the rest captured.

A second landing took place the following day on the peninsula of

Chua in Aragua state, also on Venezuela’s Caribbean coast, west of Caracas. Here, the armed invaders were detected by local fishermen, who turned them over to Venezuelan security forces.

Among those captured was Josnars Adolfo Baduel, the son of a former Venezuelan defence minister sent to prison on corruption charges, who has been at the centre of a series of coup plots.

Also taken prisoner were two

US citizens, Luke Denman, 34, and Airan Berry, 41, both of whom have been identified as former US special operations troops. Baduel told Venezuelan authorities that the Americans had told him that they worked for the security force of US President Donald Trump.

Venezuelan officials have shown the media passports and military ID cards of the two captured Americans, along with photographs of armaments captured along with the mercenaries. They also released a video of an interrogation of Denman, who said that his mission had been to seize control of a Caracas airport in order to receive planes that would carry out the rendition of Venezuela's President Maduro to the US.

Asked who was directing the operation, he replied, "President Donald Trump."

**A**t the centre of the operation was one Jordan Goudreau, an ex-Green Beret veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, who runs SilverCorp USA, a Florida-based private security contracting firm. By his own account, Goudreau was hooked up with the Venezuelan right and its US-backed coup plots by Keith Schiller, Trump's longtime bodyguard, who served as director of Oval Office operations. Videos have since surfaced showing Goudreau working security at Trump rallies.

The military contractor's ties with US intelligence and the Venezuelan right became apparent when he was hired in February 2019 to provide security for a concert paid for by British billionaire Richard Branson on the Venezuelan-Colombian border as part of a failed CIA Trojan Horse operation

*Asked about the attempted invasion, Trump said he knew nothing about it and it "had nothing to do with our government"*

to force phony aid convoys into Venezuela.

Goudreau has publicly taken responsibility for the latest operation, claiming that it is still ongoing and its objective is "to overthrow the government of Maduro." He said that, despite the abject failure of the maritime invasion, other elements remain active inside Venezuela and were "going to start attacking tactical targets", in other words, launch a wave of terrorism.

In addition, Goudreau confirmed the validity of a contract posted online that was signed between himself and Juan Guaidó, the right-wing political nonentity who proclaimed himself "interim president" of Venezuela in January of last year and was instantly anointed by Washington and its allies as the "legitimate government" of Venezuela.

A taped conversation in English between Guaidó and Goudreau has also been released in which the US puppet agreed to pay \$213-million to the American security contractor to carry out the armed intervention, with the fee guaranteed by oil resources stolen from Venezuela by the US government.

Goudreau claimed that Guaidó failed to make the promised payments. Whatever the exact ar-

rangement, however, it is clear that someone paid for the organisation of a mercenary army and its deployment to the shores of Venezuela. Whether it was the puppet or the puppet master makes little difference.

If Guaidó, who attempted to spark a military coup little more than a year ago, is not behind bars, it is because Maduro's "Bolivarian Socialist" bourgeois government still sees him as a possible interlocutor with US imperialism and the traditional oligarchy in pursuit of a deal to salvage Venezuelan capitalism and prevent a revolutionary explosion from below.

**A**s asked about the attempted seaborne invasion of Venezuela, Trump claimed that he knew nothing about it and that it had "nothing to do with our government."

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo gave a somewhat more conditional answer at a State Department press conference, declaring, "There was no US government direct involvement in this operation". He said he was "not prepared to share any more information about what we know took place."

As for the two captured US mercenaries, Pompeo said that Washington would "use every tool that we have available to try and get them back."

On what grounds the US can demand that they be sent back, the secretary of state did not say. Is there the slightest doubt that a pair of foreign nationals caught invading the US with the objective of kidnapping or killing Donald Trump would be sentenced on terrorism charges to life in prison or worse?



The armed incursions have unfolded in the context of a “maximum pressure” campaign of crippling sanctions against Venezuela that is tantamount to a state of war. An effective embargo against the country has cut off its oil exports and prevented it from importing vitally needed medicine and medical supplies, leading to tens of thousands of deaths, even before the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. Since its outbreak, US imperialism has only tightened the sanctions seeking to employ disease and death as a weapon in forcing the Venezuelan population into submission and completing its drive for regime change.

Even as the death toll mounted in the US and the economy plummeted, Trump ordered the deployment of a naval task force to waters off Venezuela’s Caribbean coast on the pretext of combatting narcotics trafficking, even though the vast majority of drugs flowing into the US are sent via Colombia and the Pacific Ocean through Central America, protected by Washington’s right-wing allies in Bogota, Tegucigalpa and Guatemala City. The destroyers and littoral combat ships sent into this operation are ill-designed for catching drug smugglers.

The sordid events on Venezuela’s coast recall the darkest chapters of US imperialism’s prolonged history of military aggression, semi-colonial exploitation and police state repression in Latin America.

In earlier US imperialist interventions gone bad, including the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961, Washington officials

*This operation is aimed at establishing unfettered control by US energy conglomerates over the country’s oil reserves*

initially also issued categorical denials of US involvement.

Similarly, in the illegal operation to fund the “contra” terrorist war against Nicaragua in the 1980s, Washington maintained deniability until CIA contractor Eugene Hasenfus was shot down flying weapons to the contra mercenaries.

Both the Bay of Pigs and the so-called Iran-contra affair triggered major political crises in Washington and close scrutiny by the American media. The reports of an abortive US-orchestrated invasion of Venezuela, however, have been passed over in near silence by the corporate media and have elicited not a word of criticism from Trump’s ostensible political opposition within the Democratic Party. From Biden to Sanders, they

have all lined up behind the regime change operation in Venezuela.

This operation, serving the interests of America’s ruling oligarchy, is aimed at establishing unfettered control by US energy conglomerates over the country’s oil reserves, the largest on the planet, and rolling back the growing influence of China and Russia in Venezuela and Latin America as a whole, which US imperialism has long regarded as its “own backyard.”

In the midst of the worldwide coronavirus pandemic that threatens the lives of millions, US imperialism is pursuing its predatory interests by means of military aggression, threatening to ignite another world war that would kill billions.

Only the working class, uniting across national boundaries in a common struggle to put an end to capitalism and imperialism, can provide an alternative to the grave threats posed to the survival of humanity. **CT**

*Bill Van Auken is a staff writer for the World Socialist Web Site at – [www.wsws.org](http://www.wsws.org) – where this article was first published.*



**HURWITT'S EYE**  
MARK HURWITT

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■ Conn Hallinan

# Military finds even faster ways to waste money

*Guns or vaccines? US arms manufacturers prepare to cash in as coronavirus pandemic creates international economic chaos*

*“There have been as many plagues as wars in history, yet plagues and wars take people equally by surprise”  
– Albert Camus, “The Plague”*

**C**AMUS’ novel of a lethal contagion in the North African city of Oran is filled with characters all too recognizable today: indifferent or incompetent officials, short-sighted and selfish citizens, and lots of great courage. What not even Camus could imagine, however, is a society in the midst of a deadly pandemic pouring vast amounts of wealth into instruments of death.

Welcome to the world of the hypersonic weapons, devices that are not only superfluous, but which will almost certainly not work. They will, however, cost enormous amounts of money. At a time when countries across the globe are facing economic chaos, financial deficits and unemployment at Great Depression levels, arms manufacturers are set to cash in big.

Hypersonic weapons are missiles that go five times faster than sound – 3,800 mph – although some

reportedly can reach speeds of Mach 20 – 15,000 mph. They come in two basic varieties, one powered by a high-speed scramjet, the other – launched from a plane or missile – glides to its target. The idea behind the weapons is that their speed and manoeuvrability will make them virtually invulnerable to anti-missile systems.

Currently there is a hypersonic arms race going on among China, Russia and the US, and, according to the Pentagon, the Americans are desperately trying to catch up with its two adversaries.

**T**ruth is the first casualty in an arms race.

In the 1950s, it was the “bomber gap” between the Americans and the Soviets. In the 1960s, it was the “missile gap” between the two powers. Neither gap existed, but vast amounts of national treasure were, nonetheless, poured into long-range aircraft and thousands of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). The enormous expenditures on those weapons, in turn, heightened tensions between the major powers and on at

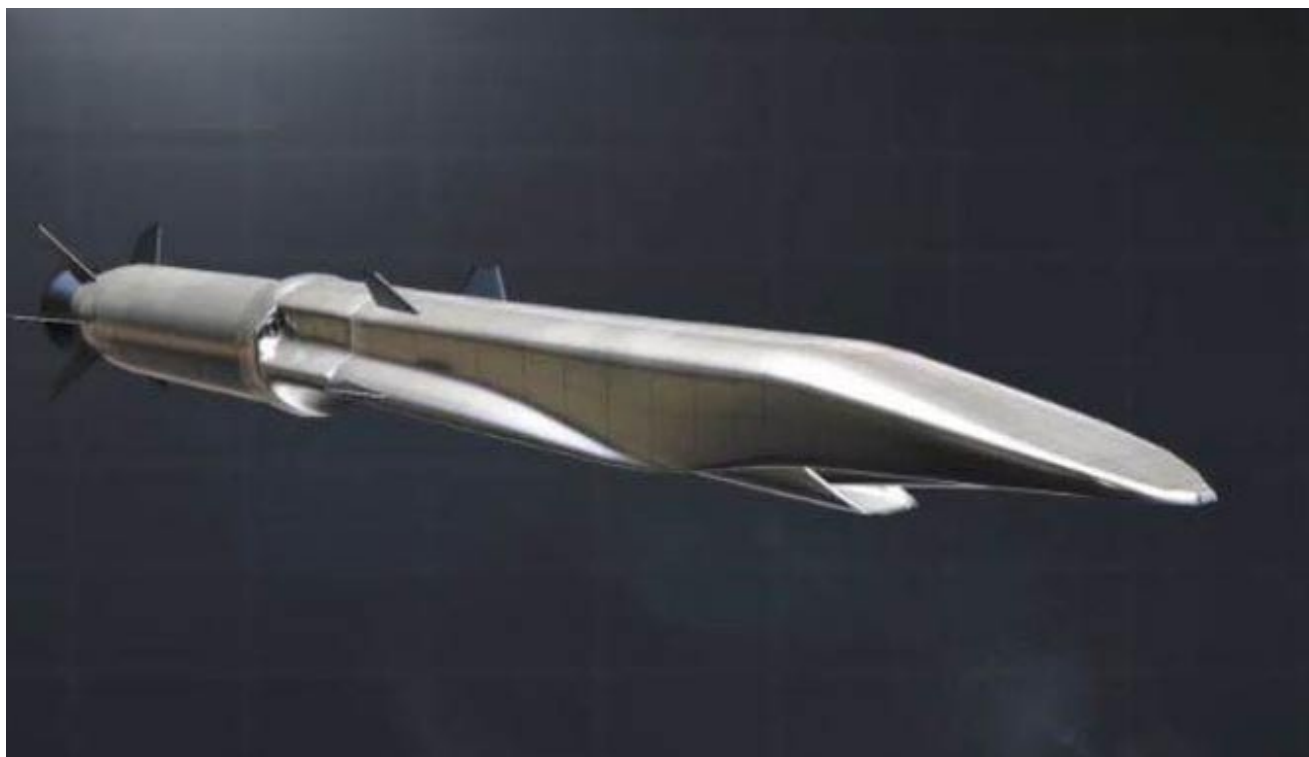
least three occasions came close to touching off a nuclear war.

In the current hypersonic arms race, “hype” is the operational word. “The development of hypersonic weapons in the United States,” says physicist James Acton of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, “has been largely motivated by technology, not by strategy. In other words, technologists have decided to try and develop hypersonic weapons because it seems like they should be useful for something, not because there is a clearly defined mission need for them to fulfill.”

They have certainly been “useful” to Lockheed Martin, the largest arms manufacturer in the world. The company has already received \$3.5-billion to develop the Advanced Hypersonic Weapon (Arrow) glide missile, and the scramjet-driven Falcon Hypersonic Technology Vehicle (Hacksaw) missile.

The Russians also have several hypersonic missiles, including the Avangard glide vehicle, a missile said to be capable of Mach 20. China is developing several hypersonic missiles, including the





**FAST SHOOTER:** A rendering of a hypersonic missile from RAND Corporation.

DF-ZF, supposedly capable of taking out aircraft carriers.

In theory, hypersonic missiles are unstoppable. In real life, not so much.

The first problem is basic physics: speed in the atmosphere produces heat. High speed generates lots of it. ICBMs avoid this problem with a blunt nose cone that deflects the enormous heat of re-entering the atmosphere as the missile approaches its target. But it only has to endure heat for a short time because much of its flight is in frictionless low earth orbit.

**H**ypersonic missiles, however, stay in the atmosphere their entire flight. That is the whole idea. An ICBM follows a predictable ballistic curve, much like an inverted U and, in theory, can be intercepted. A missile travelling as fast as an

*An object  
travelling at  
Mach 5 for a period  
of time “slowly  
tears itself apart  
during the flight*

ICBM but at low altitude, however, is much more difficult to spot or engage.

But that’s when physics shows up and does a Las Vegas: what happens on the drawing board stays on the drawing board.

Without a heat deflecting nose cone, high-speed missiles are built like big needles, since they need to decrease the area exposed to the atmosphere. Even so, they are going to run very hot. And if they

try to manoeuvre, that heat will increase. Since they can’t carry a large payload they will have to be very accurate, but as a study by the Union of Concerned Scientists points out, that is “problematic.”

According to the Union, an object travelling at Mach 5 for a period of time “slowly tears itself apart during the flight.” The heat is so great it creates a “plasma” around the craft that makes it difficult “to reference GPS or receive outside course correction commands.”

If the target is moving, as with an aircraft carrier or a mobile missile, it will be almost impossible to alter the weapon’s flight path to intercept it. And any external radar array would never survive the heat or else be so small that it would have very limited range. In short, you can’t get from here to there.

Lockheed Martin says the tests

are going just fine, but then Lockheed Martin is the company that builds the F-35, a fifth generation stealth fighter that simply doesn't work. It does, however, cost \$1.5-trillion, the most expensive weapons system in US history. The company has apparently dropped the scramjet engine because it tears itself apart, hardly a surprise.

The Russians and Chinese claim success with their hypersonic weapons and have even begun deploying them. But Pierre Sprey, a Pentagon designer associated with the two very successful aircraft – the F-16 and the A-10 – told defence analyst Andrew Cockburn that he is suspicious of the tests.

“I very much doubt those test birds would have reached the advertised range had they manoeuvred unpredictably,” he told Cockburn. “More likely they were forced to fly a straight, predictable path. In which case hypersonics offer no advantage whatsoever over traditional ballistic missiles.”

While Russia, China and the US lead the field in the development of hypersonics, Britain, France, India and Japan have joined the race.

Why is everyone building them?

At least the Russians and the Chinese have a rationale. The Russians fear the US anti-missile system might cancel out their ICBMs, so they want a missile that can manoeuvre. The Chinese would like to keep US aircraft carriers away

*This operation is aimed at establishing unfettered control by US energy conglomerates over the country's oil reserves*

from their shores. But anti-missile systems can be easily fooled by the use of cheap decoys, and the carriers are vulnerable to much more cost effective conventional weapons. In any case, hypersonic missiles can't do what they are advertised to do.

For the Americans, hypersonics are little more than a very expensive subsidy for the arms corporations. Making and deploying weapons that don't work is nothing new. The F-35 is a case in point, but nevertheless, there have been many systems produced over the years that were deeply flawed.

The US has spent over \$200-billion on anti-missile systems and once they come off the drawing boards, none of them work very well, if at all.

Probably the one that takes the prize is the Mark-28 tactical nuke, nick named the “Davy Crockett”, and its M-388 warhead. Because the M-388 was too delicate to be

used in conventional artillery, it was fired from a recoil-less rifle with a range of 2.5 miles. Problem: if the wind was blowing in the wrong direction the Crockett cooked its three-man crew. It was only tested once and found to be “totally inaccurate”. So, end of story? Not exactly. A total of 2,100 were produced and deployed, mostly in Europe.

While the official military budget is \$738-billion, if one pulls all US defence-related spending together, the actual cost for taxpayers is \$1.25-trillion a year, according to William Hartung of the Center for International Policy. Half that amount would go a long way toward providing not only adequate medical support during the Covid-19 crisis, it would pay jobless Americans a salary

Given that there are more than 31-million Americans now unemployed and the possibility that numerous small businesses – restaurants in particular – will never re-open, building and deploying a new generation of weapons is a luxury the US – and other countries – cannot afford. In the very near future, countries are going to have to choose whether they make guns or vaccines. **CT**

*Conn Hallinan can be read at [dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com](https://dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com) and at [middleempireseries.wordpress.com](https://middleempireseries.wordpress.com).*

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■ Andrew Fischer

# The life and times of a politically incorrect sailor

*I feel a bit sad that current under-30s will never know the real Popeye, so here's a short introduction to the greatest sailor ever to enliven the Big Screen*

**T**HIS year marks the 40th anniversary of the theatrical release of the live-action musical *Popeye*. At the time, it seemed like a bad idea to me, and to this day its reviews are mixed. Of course those critics who consider film “art” first and foremost rate it highly (after all, Robert Altman directed), while the audience score on *Rotten Tomatoes* is a feeble 39 percent.

I feel a bit sad that current under-30s will never know the real Popeye the Sailor Man. At least, they won't know him the way previous generations did. Sure, they may stumble across him when googling the nearest Popeye's chicken and biscuit house, and may even watch a few YouTube videos. But they probably won't enjoy him, or even like him – after all, he's just so darn politically incorrect.

**P**opeye first appeared in 1929, in cartoonist E.C. Se-

gar's *Thimble Theatre* strip in the newspaper “funnies,” and soon became the star of the show.

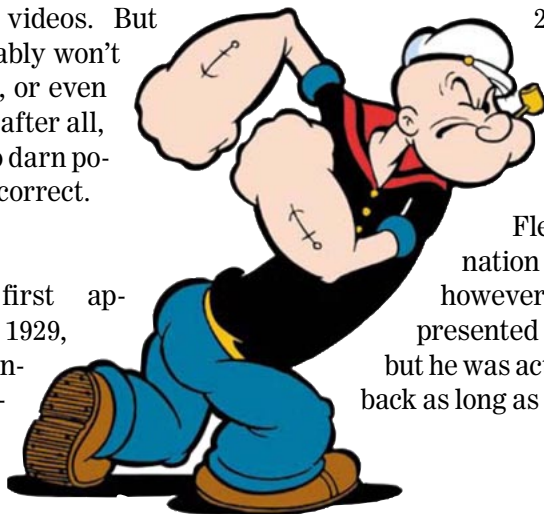
The sailor man's black-and-white animated adventures were shown in movie theatres as an “extra” before the main attraction, and intended for adults. I'm talking about the Fleischer brothers' version of Popeye, 1933 to 1942, not the later cartoons. (When he moved to Famous Studios in '42 he became a rather pathetic version of his prior self. In 1960 a later animated series by King Features Syndicate was even worse – watered down “family friendly” antics created for television audiences comprised of after-school kiddies. Hanna-Barbera's version, 1978-83 and 1997, was the nadir. But wait, there's more – a

2004 CGI version that I won't even discuss.) [Source: popeye.com]

The Fleischer incarnation was excellent, however. Popeye was presented as a tough guy, but he was actually fairly laid back as long as you didn't cross

him. He could eventually run out of patience or solutions, however, and resort to spinach, the magic veggie which gave him extraordinary powers. When eaten – occasionally through a corn-cob pipe – his bicep often showed an icon of power: a battleship, atom bomb, and so forth.

**F**leischer Studios produced three two-reeler (double-length) Technicolor shorts: *Popeye Meets Sindbad the Sailor*, *Popeye Meets Ali Baba's Forty Thieves*, and *Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp*. The first two mentioned are superb, have memorable musical numbers and can be found on YouTube, but the very first animated version of Popeye appeared in *Popeye the Sailor*, actually a 1933 Betty Boop cartoon. He's introduced as a movie star (upgraded from the funnies). He strolls along the deck of a ship and wallops everything he comes across. Each target flies into the air and breaks into smaller pieces: a mounted fish becomes tins of sardines, a wall clock is turned into wrist watches, a flagpole becomes clothespins, etc. – all while Popeye



Art: Pinclipart.com

sings his theme song:  
*I'm Popeye the sailor man. I'm  
 Popeye the sailor man.  
 I'm strong to the finich, cause I  
 eats me spinach.  
 I'm Popeye the sailor man.  
 I'm one tough gazookus, which  
 hates all palookas.  
 Wot ain't on the up and square.  
 I biffs 'em and buffs 'em and  
 always out roughs 'em  
 But none of 'em gets nowhere.  
 If anyone dares to risk my  
 "fisk", it's "boff" an' it's "wham"  
 un'erstan'?*  
*So keep "good be-hav-or", that's  
 your one life saver  
 With popeye the sailor man.  
 I'm Popeye the sailor man, I'm  
 Popeye the sailor man.  
 I'm strong to the finich, cause I  
 eats me spinach.  
 I'm Popeye the sailor man.*

[Source: LyricFind; Songwriters:  
 Sammy Lerner; I'm Popeye the  
 Sailor Man lyrics © Sony/ATV  
 Music Publishing LLC]



Art: Pindipart.com

He does seem to be something of a “gazookus” – a boor or “the real thing” – or perhaps both. Later in 1933 the first in a long series of Popeye-marqueed (not Betty) cartoons was released, *I Yam What I Yam*. In it, the sailor destroys a forest to create a log cabin, he’s followed by ducks that enjoy inhaling his tobacco smoke, and he fights with large-nosed American Indians. At the climax, he uppercuts

## *Popeye chases after the animals, meets a charging moose head-on and all that’s left is its head on a trophy plaque*

the big cheese... er, big chief into the blue. While his blanket settles onto Popeye and Olive Oyl, he is revealed to be a famous political leader – a diapered Mahatma Gandhi. He’s a different type of Indian – get it? Politically incorrect, I’d say. (Maybe even borderline racist.)

A lot of animals appear in these cartoons, and they can suffer if they attack Popeye. A good example of this is 1933’s *Wild Elephinks*. Shipwrecked on a more or less tropical island, Popeye and Olive are attacked by an enormous elephant. Popeye socks it a good one on its trunk, and a bump travels all the way to its head. Meanwhile, a gorilla has absconded with Olive. It also has a penchant for cracking coconuts on her head and slurping down their delicious liquid centres. Popeye chases after them, meets a charging moose head-on and all that’s left is its head on a trophy plaque. He reaches Olive and the gorilla, up in a tree, and ka-pows the tree into the air. When it falls to Earth it becomes a banana cart and the intimidated gorilla totes it away in fear. Then a “monkey alarm” siren blares out and dozens of mean-tempered species assemble to do Popeye in – including snakes, bears, rhinos, tigers and a

lion. The latter is a bit cocky, and states, “I’m king”. To which Popeye replies, “Then I’ll crown ya”. Wham! A lump the size of a volleyball forms on the woolly lion’s head and morphs into a crown, accompanied by the blaring of trumpets.

Meanwhile, the elephant we saw earlier has been stalking Popeye and has finally reached him. It charges. Popeye grabs it by the trunk and swings it so far away that it lands on another island, sending it into the ocean depths. Now all the other animals attack. One by one they’re pummelled high into the sky and come down as fur coats – including the gorilla, which still has its head attached and lands on Olive. Popeye is fooled and whams it, then Olive gets up and gives him the ol’ one-two. The End. I’m pretty sure we won’t see this sort of thing in the 2020s.

The “punch things into the sky” routine was, well, routinely used throughout the series. In *I Eats My Spinach* a charging bull comes back to Earth as a meat market, including steaks, sausages, dog bones(?) and what looks like a kosher ham(!?).

However, Popeye truly likes animals who don’t attack him, and his kindnesses to them are often on display. In a 1935 story, *Be Kind to Animals* [sic], he’s true to its title, perhaps making amends for prior (and future) misbehaviour. Feeding birdies with Olive in the park, along comes his rival and perennial nemesis Bluto, often portrayed as another sailor.

The lowest of villains, Bluto is mercilessly whipping a beleaguered horse barely able to pull



an impossibly overloaded vegetable wagon, while simultaneously verbally abusing the poor creature. He denies the thirsty animal water, glugging it all down himself, then continues the abuse. Olive confronts him, to which he replies, “Mind your own business, you long-legged scarecrow.”

Popeye temporarily rescues the horse. Bluto throws about ten pounds of bananas onto Olive, does the same to Popeye, then starts punching the horse, sending its head into its rear end a couple of times. Popeye recovers with the help of some spinach, and gives Bluto a taste of his own medicine; Olive and the horse gleefully join in.

Soon Bluto is pulling the wagon, being whipped by the horse. Overall, refreshingly politically incorrect, in so many ways – but with a moral attached.

Fleischer would produce many more Popeye tales through 1942. Another animal-oriented story I remember well is 1939’s *Leave Well Enough Alone*. In it, Popeye can’t stand seeing the animals in a pet shop chained and cooped up in cages. So he lets them all out, except for a recalcitrant parrot that refuses to go. He sings:

*Leave well enough alone (awk, awk)*

*Leave well enough alone.*

*I’m always well fed*

*and have a roof over my head.*

*Leave well enough alone*

*(schmock, schmock)*

*Leave well enough alone.*

*I know me stuff and I’m smart enough*

*to leave well enough alone.*

Of course, once freed the pets get into all sorts of trouble, and Popeye has to round them all up

and return them to the store. In the end, the sailor has clearly seen the error in his thinking and with a hang-dog expression listens as the parrot sings his tune once more.

I remember the day I figured out that Popeye had one eye. I’d always thought he was just squinting all the time, but one day I heard Bluto mutter about “that one-eyed runt.” (One of the charms of the Fleischer cartoons was that Bluto and Popeye were always talking under their breath.) I announced my amazing discovery to my friends, but they weren’t very impressed. I guess it was because they were all involved with their wives, mortgages and crown moulding. In any case, you won’t find such cruel comments about people (animated or otherwise) with physical problems on today’s kids’ shows.

In a 1940 episode, Popeye had a dream wherein he had four children. In 1942, those kids – quadruplets – became his “nephews.” However, I’ve always believed that Pipeye, Peepeye, Pupeye and the unfortunately named Poopeye were intended to be seen as his illegitimate children with Olive Oyl. Obviously the “decency codes” of the era wouldn’t allow that particular storyline. In some of the cartoons there were only three kids, as dictated by the plots.

Speaking of Miss Oyl, I always wondered what Popeye – and Bluto – ever saw in her. She wasn’t



exactly attractive, had a screechy voice and a fickle nature. Yet the two men were constantly fighting for her affection. For example, when Olive decides she wants “a clean-shaven man,” the pair goes off to the barber shop to get fixed up. However, the

barber isn’t around, so they agree to groom each other. Naturally Bluto cheats Popeye, making him look worse than when he started, but spinach saves the day and they leave the shop. Surprise! She’s strolling down the street with a man sporting a giant, wiry beard and a similar head of hair. The cartoon ends with the sailors alternately kicking each other in their butts. I’d like to see that in a modern day cartoon – especially if the two kicker/kickees are politicians!

*Strike up the band for Popeye the sailor.*

*Cash in his hand right off a whaler.*

*Stand in a row.*

*Don’t let him go.*

*He’s a cinch but every inch a sailor.*

[Opening theme: “Popeye the Sailor,” a 1933 Betty Boop cartoon.] **CT**

**Andrew Fischer** is an accountant and author of two books.

*Purgastories, a collection of short stories, is available at amazon.com. He enjoys his fiancée and designing board games; the latter can be downloaded at no charge from boardgamegeek.com.*

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