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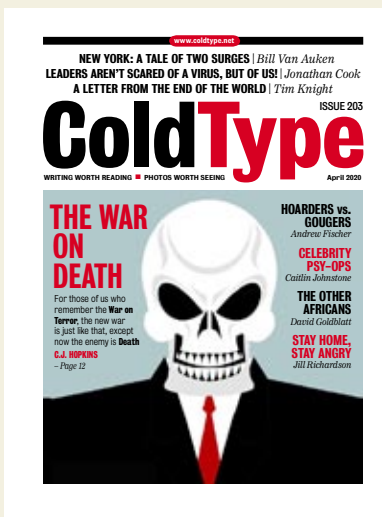
Commuterland
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ON THE BUSES

A photo essay
by Dougie Wallace



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Issue 217 December 2020

Contents

WRITING WORTH READING | PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

Insights

- 5** **Britain's class war on children** / *John Pilger*
 - 7** **The never-ending war in Afghanistan**
Kathy Kelly
 - 9** **Breaking the chain in UK's food supply**
George Monbiot
 - 10** **Meatpackers and farmers team up**
Sarah Anderson
-

Issues

- 12** **Pompeo spells out the new normal on Israel**
Jonathan Cook
- 18** **10 transitions that will define 2020** / *Joe Allen*
- 23** **The Germans are back!** / *C.J. Hopkins*
- 26** **On the buses** / *Dougie Wallace*
- 32** **Canadians versus the war machine** / *Yves Engler*
- 35** **Hurwitt's Eye** / *Mark Hurwitt*
- 36** **The history of the Decline and Fall of the American Empire** / *Tom Engelhardt*
- 41** **Batmen, unicorns, and men on the moon**
Keith Williams
- 44** **Sideroad safari** / *Arnaud Montegard*
- 48** **It's a long road from law to justice** / *Paul Magno*
- 52** **Maradona's complicated legacy**
Matthew Brown
- 54** **Only the rich can cheer Wall St's new record**
Sam Pizzigati



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Insights

Photo: John Garrett



SUFFERING: A British family from John Pilger's film *Smashing Kids*, 1975.

John Pilger

Britain's class war on children

When I first reported on child poverty in Britain, I was struck by the faces of children I spoke to, especially the eyes. They were different: watchful, fearful.

In Hackney, in 1975, I filmed Irene Brunsdén's family. Irene told me she gave her two-year-old a plate of cornflakes. "She doesn't tell me she's hungry, she just

moans. When she moans, I know something is wrong".

"How much money do you have in the house? I asked.

"Five pence", she replied.

Irene said she might have to take up prostitution, "for the baby's sake". Her husband Jim, a truck driver who was unable to work because of illness, was next to her. It was as if they shared a private grief.

Insights

This is what poverty does. In my experience, its damage is like the damage of war; it can last a lifetime, spread to loved ones and contaminate the next generation. It stunts children, brings on a host of diseases and, as unemployed Harry Hopwood in Liverpool told me, “it’s like being in prison”. This prison has invisible walls. When I asked Harry’s young daughter if she ever thought that one day she would live a life like better-off children, she said unhesitatingly: “No”.

What has changed 45 years later? At least one member of an impoverished family is likely to have a job -- a job that denies them a living wage. Incredibly, although poverty is more disguised, countless British children still go to bed hungry and are ruthlessly denied opportunities..

What has not changed is that poverty is the result of a disease that is still virulent yet rarely spoken about – class.

Study after study shows that the people who suffer and die early from the diseases of poverty brought on by a poor diet, sub-standard housing and the priorities of the political elite and

its hostile “welfare” officials -- are working people. In 2020, one in three preschool British children suffers like this.

In making my recent film, *The Dirty War on the NHS*, it was clear to me that the savage cutbacks to the NHS and its privatisation by the Blair, Cameron, May and Johnson governments had devastated the vulnerable, including many NHS workers and their families. I interviewed one low-paid NHS worker who could not afford her rent and was forced, to sleep in churches or on the streets.

At a foodbank in central London, I watched young mothers looking nervously around as they hurried away with old Tesco bags of food and washing powder and tampons they could no longer afford, their young children holding on to them. It is no exaggeration that at times I felt I was walking in the footprints of Dickens.

Boris Johnson has claimed that 400,000 fewer children are living in poverty since 2010 when the Conservatives came to power. This is a lie, as the Children’s Commissioner has confirmed. In fact, more than 600,000 children have fallen into poverty since 2012; the total is expected to ex-

ceed 5 million. This, few dare say, is a class war on children.

Old Etonian Johnson is may be a caricature of the born-to-rule class; but his “elite” is not the only one. All the parties in Parliament, notably if not especially Labour – like much of the bureaucracy and most of the media -- have scant if any connection to the “streets”: to the world of the poor: of the “gig economy”: of battling a system of Universal Credit that can leave you without a penny and in despair.

Last week, the prime minister and his “elite” showed where their priorities lay. In the face of the greatest health crisis in living memory when Britain has the highest Covid-19 death toll in Europe and poverty is accelerating as the result of a punitive “austerity” policy, he announced £16.5-billion for “defence”. This makes Britain, whose military bases cover the world, the highest military spender in Europe.

And the enemy? The real one is poverty and those who impose it and perpetuate it. **CT**

John Pilger's 1975 film, Smashing Kids, can be viewed at www.johnpilger.com/videos/smashing-kids

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Insights

Photo: RAWA



WHOSE FAULT?: People in the United States continue to pretend that the despair and futility we've caused isn't our fault

Kathy Kelly

The never-ending war in Afghanistan

Late last month, I learned from young Afghan Peace Volunteer friends in Kabul that an insurgent group firing rockets into the city centre hit the home of one volunteer's relatives. Everyone inside was killed. Today, word arrived of two bomb blasts in the marketplace city of Bamiyan, in central Afghanistan, killing at least 14 people and wounding 45.

These explosions have come on the heels of other recent attacks targeting civilians. On November 2, at least 19 people were killed and at least 22 wounded by gunmen opening fire at Kabul University. On October

24, at least two dozen students died, and more than 100 were wounded in an attack on a tutoring centre.

"The situation in our country is very bad and scary", one young Afghan friend wrote to me. "We are all worried". I imagine that's an understatement.

A new report released by Save the Children, regarding violations against children in war zones, says Afghanistan accounts for the most killing and maiming violations, with 874 children killed and 2,275 children maimed in 2019. Since the United Nations started collecting this data in 2005, more than 26,000

Afghan children have died.

Under President Donald Trump, the United States signed a "peace" deal with the Taliban in February 2020. It pertains to troop withdrawal and a Taliban pledge to cut ties with Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. The agreement certainly hasn't contributed toward a more peaceful life for Afghans, and a UN report indicates the Taliban has continued its ties with insurgent groups.

Now, Afghans face constant battles between insurgent groups, US forces, Afghan government forces, NATO forces, various powerful Afghan warlords, and paramilitaries organised by ruthless mafias which control much of the drug industry and other profitable enterprises.

Under President Biden, the United States would likely abide by Trump's recent troop withdrawals, maintaining a troop presence of about 2,000. But Biden has indicated a preference for intensified Special Operations, surveillance and drone attacks. These strategies could cause the Taliban to nullify their agreement, prolonging the war through yet another presidency.

Mujib Mashal, a correspondent for the *New York Times*, was born in Kabul. When he was interviewed recently by one of his colleagues, he recalled being a little boy in the early 1990s, living through a civil war in Kabul, when rockets constantly bombarded his neighbourhood.

Taliban groups were fighting

Insights

Taliban groups were fighting various mujahideen. Mujib's father cultivated a vegetable garden outside their home. One day, a rocket hit the garden, cutting an apple tree in half and burrowing deep into the ground. But it didn't explode. Mujib remembers how his father watered the area where the rocket hit, for years, hoping the bomb would rust and never explode. Now he worries that Afghanistan is headed toward an explosion of violence.

"And the fear is that in that space of war, things only get more extreme", he told the *Times*. "The violence only gets more extreme. The brutality gets more extreme. That if this slips into another generational conflict, what we've seen over the past forty years in terms of the brutality will probably pale in comparison to what will come".

I recently saw a video of a talk given last June by Dr Zaher Wahab, an Afghan professor in Portland, Oregon, who laments the intensifying havoc and violence war is causing in Afghanistan. He and his wife lived there for six years, until 2019, when they concluded the city was unlivable. Dr. Wahab believes there is no military solution to Afghanistan's woes and calls for the United States to demilitarise as soon as possible. He urges forming a multinational trust fund to justly assist with reconstruction in Afghanistan, including efforts to clear mines and clean up unexploded ordnance. Billions of dollars would be needed, commensurate to the

sums spent on funding the war. He believes the United Nations should form a peacekeeping presence in Afghanistan relying on non-NATO countries.

The publication of the "Afghanistan papers" late last year highlighted the failure of the United States to accomplish any of its stated missions in Afghanistan. John Sopko, the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction, expressed his astonishment over the "hubris and mendacity" he had witnessed on the part of US military and civilian personnel in Afghanistan.

Despite its failures, the United States continues to bomb Afghan civilian areas. In 2019, the US dropped 7,423 bombs and other munitions on Afghanistan.

For Afghan civilians, ongoing war means continued bereavement, displacement, and despair. Bereft of income or protection, many Afghan householders join militias, pledging their support and possibly their willingness to fight or even die. Hence the rise of the Afghan Local Police, numerous militias fighting for various warlords, the Afghan governments' fighting forces, including "ghost soldiers" who appear in name only, CIA-trained paramilitaries, and military contractors working for NATO contingents.

Afghanistan is a cauldron waiting to explode.

US Army Major Danny Sjursen, retired, notes that in the 2020 election, neither presidential

candidate questioned status quo norms about US foreign policy being based on threat, force, and killing. Sjursen assures that pressure to change must, necessarily, flow from the grass roots.

The United States has landed in Afghanistan like a rocket in a garden. It refuses to rust, it poisons the Earth, and even US voters can't budge it. Normal life can't continue with us there.

Meanwhile, an inevitably arriving Taliban-led government – one already in control of most of the country – is growing more fanatic and deadly.

Many US voters, and too many Afghans, weren't yet born when the current war was begun by the United States in 2001. Much of the US public regards the Afghan people with deadly indifference.

Year after year, President after President, Americans continue to pretend the despair and futility we've caused in Afghanistan isn't our fault. We don't hold ourselves accountable.

But the forever wars, illegal and immoral, bankrupt our economy and our society as well. The military contractors become a sort of mafia. They are like a bomb in our garden, liable to explode.

And, unlike our Afghan counterparts, it's not a bomb we can complain about. After all, we put it there. **CT**

KATHY KELLY co-coordinates *Voices for Creative Nonviolence* and has worked closely with the *Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers*. She can be reached at: Kathy@vcnv.org

Insights

George Monbiot

Breaking the chain in UK's food supply

A few days ago, I carried out a small experiment. I sent almost identical requests to two government departments. I asked the business department whether the UK holds strategic oil reserves. Yes: the UK keeps stocks equivalent to 90 days of net imports. I asked the environment department whether the UK holds strategic food reserves. No: they aren't necessary, because "the UK has a highly resilient food supply chain". The government treats oil as a strategic asset but food as a matter for the market.

So what happens if our "highly resilient food supply chain" breaks after Brexit transition, on 1 January? It won't, the government promised. "Our risk assessments show there will not be an overall shortage of food in the UK", whether or not there's a deal. But when I pressed it to show me these risk assessments, the plural turned out to be misleading. There's just one assessment: a "reasonable worst-case scenario" for the UK's borders.

This is grim enough. It suggests that the flow of freight through the ports could be reduced by between 20 percent and 40 percent, while trucks travelling in either direction could be delayed by up to two

days: a big problem for fresh food. This month, the National Audit Office reviewed the government's border arrangements, and found them to be late, untested, "inherently complex", "high-risk" and "very challenging". The government's brinkmanship, intended to wrongfoot the EU, has instead wrongfooted our own hauliers and traders, who have been unable to prepare with confidence.

So far, so bad. But the UK's



Photo:Wikimedia

Tesco: Food shortages likely.

border is only one link in the food supply chain, and it may not be the weakest. If the ports are congested and the flow of goods reduced, we will need stocks to bridge the gap. Food traders will have to build reserves, now and in December, to cover the likely shortfall in January. This means warehouse capacity. One minor hitch: there isn't any.

Because of the shift to online sales caused by the pandemic, and the need to store protective equip-

ment, much of the spare capacity was mopped up before the second lockdown. Now, because non-essential shops are closed, plenty of stock is stuck in warehouses. Any remaining space has been swallowed by Christmas: tinsel, toys and turkeys. Goods for the domestic market will have to compete for warehouse space with goods for export, as traders expect snarls in both directions.

A survey by the UK Warehousing Association found that there is less than 3 percent spare capacity nationwide. Most of this consists of small corners, useless for major wholesalers. The association believes "the situation will quickly become critical".

While the government has spent £1.4-billion this year on border arrangements that would usually be made by the private sector, it has done nothing to ensure there is sufficient storage space, or that food is prioritised. Such issues, it believes, are best left to business.

But its confidence in the food industry is not shared by the industry itself. In October, the chair of Tesco warned of fresh food shortages for "a few weeks, possibly a few months" after 1 January. The UK imports 62 percent of its fresh food, much of it from Europe. We rely on European trade for most of our onions, mushrooms, tomatoes and salad, and for a critical portion of many other vegetables and fruits. In the dead of winter, with trucks stuck at the border, possible

Insights

tariffs, a weaker pound and no warehouse space, the price of fresh produce could go through the roof. If you can find it at all.

Last year, before the transition deadline was extended, the government did conduct wider risk assessments. When they were leaked, we discovered that it foresaw “potential consumer panic and food shortages”. This year, though the situation is greatly complicated by the pandemic, it seems to have decided that it’s best not to ask.

Is the problem confined to fresh food? With neither strategic food reserves nor a strategic risk assessment of warehouse capacity, I’m beginning to wonder. Without testing every link in the chain, the government has no grounds for dismissing the threat of an overall shortage. While it now seems almost certain that we will face a dearth of fresh fruit and vegetables, could there also be deficits of some kinds of frozen, tinned and dried food?

Already, thanks to a combination of austerity and the coronavirus, plenty of people in the UK struggle to afford a good diet. According to the UN, a healthy diet costs five times as much as one that is merely adequate in terms of calories. The number of people using foodbanks this year has risen by nearly a half. Any interruption of supply will hit those in poverty first, and worst.

When the government was challenged on this issue in par-

liament last year, it claimed it was “not responsible for the supply of food and drink to the population in an emergency”. That is up to “the industry”. In other words, little has changed since the Irish famine of the 1840s and the Indian famines of the 1870s. It’s the same reckless, uncaring attitude that has helped kill 50,000 people in the pandemic.

Because we are leaving the single market and the customs union, the disruption is likely to

be brutal, whether or not a deal is struck. If Brexit causes further economic rupture, the shops are half-empty and even the foodbanks can’t find enough supplies, there is a real prospect of chronic hunger. But search as you may, you will find no one in government who gives a damn. **CT**

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

Sarah Anderson

Meatpackers and farmers team up

For family farmers like Hans Breitenmoser, the odds of catching Covid-19 on the job are slim. Social distancing is not exactly a challenge when you’re farming more than 1,300 acres in rural Wisconsin.

But Breitenmoser is one of many Wisconsin farmers who are showing solidarity with others in the food supply chain who are at the pandemic’s epicentre – meatpackers and food processing plant employees.

According to the Food and Environment Reporting Network, more than 65,000 food production industry workers have tested positive for Covid-19, and at least 268 have died.

Through the Wisconsin Farmers Union, Breitenmoser is part of

a farmer-labour alliance calling for increased testing and other protections for these vulnerable workers, along with measures to insulate family farmers from pandemic-related economic losses.

For Breitenmoser, who’s always lived on his family’s Lincoln County dairy and grain farm, joining forces with this heavily immigrant factory workforce makes total sense.

“If you look at where value comes from and where the money goes in the food industry”, Breitenmoser told me, “I, as Joe Farmer, have more in common with Bob, the guy in the slaughtering plant, than I do with the CEO of a foreign agribusiness corporation”.

While the CEOs are profiting,

Insights

food workers of all kinds are taking serious risks. Wisconsin's largest Covid-19 outbreak so far was in a JBS pork processing facility in Green Bay, where 348 employees became infected.

As a foreign company, JBS is not required to disclose how much their CEO makes. But at Tyson's, the second-largest US meat processor, the top executive made more than \$10-million last year. "A disproportionate amount of profits goes straight to the top – to people who have very little to do with raising and slaughtering those cows", says Breitenmoser.

The Wisconsin initiative is not the first time farmers have joined with meatpacking workers to demand stronger Covid-19 protections.

In May, the United Food and Commercial Workers union, which represents over 250,000 meatpacking and food processing workers, partnered with several groups representing American farmers and ranchers to call on companies and governments at all levels to take stronger steps to safeguard frontline workers.

"From frontline food processing workers to farmers and ranchers, we are all critical to keeping American families fed during this crisis", UFCW International President Marc Perrone said in a statement. "Enacting strong worker safety standards inside meatpacking plants will help people outside of them as well and ensure every link in our



Photo provided by Hans Breitenmoser

SOLIDARITY!: Farmer Hans Breitenmoser is part of a project in Wisconsin to protect meatpacking workers from Covid-19.

food supply chain is secure".

Breitenmoser explained the interconnections this way: "Since so few companies control the meatpacking industry, if Covid shuts down a plant, the meat-packer is out of a job, the consumer pays more for a pound of hamburger, and the farmers like me get lower prices. Everybody gets screwed".

He'd like to see the United States eventually adopt supply management systems like they have in Canada, which ensure producers a decent, stable price, instead of relying on foreign export markets.

"You don't see Canadian farmers asking for government handouts", Breitenmoser points out. Meanwhile, under President Trump's trade war, federal government payments to farmers are expected to hit a record \$46-billion this year.

What does he see as the most

urgent change? Getting money out of politics.

"Right now we've got the Cargills and the Monsantos in DC lobbying for the food industry", Breitenmoser says. "Unless and until we get money out of politics, we'll never get the public policy that farmers, meatpackers, and all the rest of us need".

Right now, farmers and meatpackers may not have the financial resources their employers spend on lobbying. But, in the face of a deadly pandemic and the president's destabilising trade wars, they do have each other. **CT**

Sarah Anderson directs the *Global Economy Project* at the *Institute for Policy Studies* and co-edits of the *IPS website Inequality.org*. This op-ed was distributed by www.OtherWords.org.

Jonathan Cook

Harsh penalties are needed to stop Israel annexing Palestinian territory. But western states are outlawing even peaceful boycotts

Pompeo spells out the new normal on Israel

It is tempting to dismiss recent statements by Mike Pompeo, the US secretary of state, equating anti-Zionism with antisemitism and suggesting the global movement to boycott Israel is driven by hatred of Jews, as the last gasp of a dying administration. But that would be foolhardy. Pompeo's decision to label all but the most tepid criticism of Israel as antisemitism is fully in line with the current redrawing of the limits of western political debate about Israel.

To underscore his message, Pompeo issued his statement as he headed to an illegal Jewish settlement in the West Bank – the first such official visit by a US secretary of state. New guidelines announced that in future the US would mark settlement goods as “Made in Israel”, concealing the fact that they are produced in the occupied Palestinian territories.

For good measure, Pompeo described the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement (BDS), widely supported by Palestinians,

as a “cancer”. “We will regard the global, anti-Israel BDS campaign as antisemitic”, he added. The state department would identify any individual or group opposed to “doing business in Israel or in any territory controlled by Israel” – that is, in the settlements – “and withdraw US government support”.

The settlement visit was doubtless intended as affirmation by the departing Trump administration of its recognition of Israel's right to annex swaths of the West Bank seized by settlers. That position was cemented into a so-called “peace plan” earlier in the year.

Hanan Ashrawi, a veteran Palestinian peace negotiator, warned that Pompeo's declarations would be hard for the new Democratic administration under Joe Biden to reverse, either rhetorically or substantively, when it takes office in January. “Such malicious measures are intended to corner



Photo: US Government. Effects: Boynton

the incoming US administration with layers of legal and administrative measures that maintain the destructive Trump legacy beyond his disruptive term”, she said.

To change course, Biden will have to declare the settlements illegal and come to the defence of the BDS movement – incurring the wrath of Israel’s lobbyists in Washington and opposition from the overwhelming majority of his own lawmakers in Congress.

It is fanciful to imagine he will do either.

The reality is that Israel’s endless facts on the ground, all ultimately pushing towards annexation, will continue as before, whether Biden or Trump is in charge. More significantly still, however, Pompeo’s statement marks the logical endpoint of a new foreign policy consensus on Israel that has rapidly taken shape in the US and Europe.

By this stage, only concerted action from western states to penalise Israel can alter the cost-benefit calculus that has so far made expanding the settlement enterprise pain-free. But trenchant criticism of Israel – of the kind so urgently necessary – is now increasingly off-limits. Instead western states are actually defaming and outlawing even the most limited forms of grassroots, non-violent action against Israel, like the BDS movement.

Pompeo’s statement, in fact, marks a complete inversion of the United Nations’ decision in 1975 to declare Zionism “a form of racism and racial discrimination”. At the time, supporters of Resolution 3379 made a self-evident case: any

state is structurally racist if its founding ideology, as with Zionism, accords superior rights to citizens based on their ethnicity or religion.

An international convention further makes clear that such a political arrangement amounts to apartheid.

While in the 1970s Israel made efforts to obscure its ideological character, it has long since abandoned such pretence. In 2018 Israel passed the Nation-State Law making its apartheid explicit. The law affirmed superior legal rights for Jewish citizens over a large minority of Palestinian citizens.

In late 1991, however, the UN was browbeaten into revoking the “Zionism is racism” resolution after the Soviet Union fell and the US, Israel’s patron, emerged as the sole global superpower. We have now reached the point where, as Pompeo’s statement underscores, it is criticism of Israel and Zionism that is viewed as racism.

In this topsy-turvy worldview, nuclear-armed Israel is the victim, not the Palestinians who have been dispossessed and ethnically cleansed by Israel for decades. This derangement is so entrenched that last year the House of Representatives passed a near-unanimous resolution – pushed by the Israel lobby group AIPAC – denouncing any boycott of Israel as antisemitic.

Some 32 US states have passed legislation uniquely denying First Amendment rights to those who support a boycott of Israel in solidarity with oppressed Palestinians. Other states have similar

In 2018 Israel passed the Nation-State Law making its apartheid explicit

legislation in the pipeline.

The absurdity extends beyond the US.

The German parliament passed a resolution last year that declared boycotting Israel – a state occupying Palestinians for more than five decades – comparable to the Nazi slogan “Don’t buy from Jews”. Bonn has the power to deny public funds to any group that supports, however tangentially, such a boycott.

Last month, Israeli Jewish academics in Berlin became the latest group targeted. Their art school removed their web page and cut funding for a series of workshops critical of Zionism after an outcry from German anti-racism groups and the media.

A similar inversion of reality is taking place in the UK, where the government has ruled that local authorities are not allowed to divest pension funds from Israel. These investments, some in illegal Jewish settlements, are assessed at nearly £3.5-billion (\$4.7bn), meaning ordinary Britons heavily subsidise Israel’s occupation.

The decision by Boris Johnson’s government was struck down by Britain’s highest court in April, but the government has vowed to bring in new anti-BDS legislation that would nullify that ruling.

In France, meanwhile, support for boycotting Israel has long been treated as a criminal offence under anti-discrimination legislation. A group of 12 Palestinian solidarity activists lost a series of court battles in France after they were convicted a decade ago of calling for a boycott outside a supermarket. The activists received a reprieve in June only after the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg ruled that their convictions violated Europe’s human rights convention.

That judgment serves only to highlight the growing chasm between, on one side, the political and legal environments being shaped by lobbyists in individual western states and, on the other, the principles of international law and human rights established in the wake of the Second World War.

Pompeo’s claim that opposition to Zionism – the ideology oppressing Palestinians – is antisemitic has taken widespread root because pro-Israel activists have managed to advance an entirely novel definition of antisemitism. In 2016 the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance adopted a highly contentious and politicised “working definition” of antisemitism – one promoted by Israel. The definition is illustrated with 11 examples, seven of which refer to various criticisms of Israel, including that it is a “racist endeavour”.

A conclusion reached by the UN 45 years ago – that it is racist for a state to promote rights based not on our shared humanity but on ethnic or religious difference – is now defined as antisemitic. Donald Trump used an executive order to

incorporate this weaponised definition into the Civil Rights Act last year, thereby chilling speech about Israel, especially on US campuses.

The IHRA definition is now widely accepted in the West, making it all but impossible to mount a defence against the malicious characterisation of support for Palestinian rights as equivalent to hatred of Jews. Pompeo is simply echoing a discourse that has rapidly become entrenched.

This became obvious when the British Labour party found itself plunged into a manufactured controversy in early 2016 that, overnight, it had become uniquely and institutionally antisemitic. The campaign began shortly after the membership elected as leader Jeremy Corbyn, one of a handful of socialist MPs in Labour and a vocal advocate of Palestinian rights.

The degree to which Israel has become untouchable – even when criticisms accord with international law – was highlighted when the United Nations compiled a list of businesses colluding with Israel’s illegal settlements on occupied Palestinian land.

Publication of the database was repeatedly delayed for fear of the backlash the UN would receive for offending Israel and its lobbyists. The list finally saw daylight last February.

But the firms identified in the list have not come under any significant pressure to pull out of the settlements. In fact, what pressure they have faced has been for them to stay put, or otherwise face accu-



Photo: Maty Stern/Us Embassy, Tel Aviv

Mike Pompeo meets Benjamin Netanyahu, during a 2018 visit to Israel.

Pompeo is simply echoing a discourse that has rapidly become entrenched

sations of unfairly discriminating against Israel.

Countervailing pressure on them could come through the actions of popular, grassroots groups calling for a boycott. But western states now characterise the BDS movement that organises such boycotts as antisemitic too.

Quiescence and inaction are the only options allowed, if one wishes to avoid being labelled antisemitic.

Pompeo’s remarks in support of the settlements last week were foreshadowed by reports last

month that the State Department is considering a mechanism for labelling the world’s most prominent human rights groups as antisemitic. The US would then urge other states not to deal with organisations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Oxfam.

Pompeo’s approach – ridiculous as it might have seemed a decade ago – does not stray far from the current logic in western capitals. Their officials have ridden roughshod over international law for some time – especially with their “interventions” in Arab states such as Iraq, Libya and Syria.

As the Palestinian cause is progressively sidelined by both western states and Arab states, groups like Amnesty and Human Rights Watch have found themselves solitary critical voices on Israel. They are almost alone in continuing to articulate concerns

about Israel's egregious violations of international law, especially in relation to the settlements. As a result, Pompeo's moves to silence them may face much less resistance than many observers might assume.

Sadly, there is a self-fulfilling logic to these moves by the Trump administration. From Corbyn to Amnesty International and the BDS movement, those trying to uphold human rights and international law are being forced on to the defensive. They have been strong-armed into the dock and must prove to their accusers the impossible: their innocence, measured not in concrete, public positions but in what supposedly lies behind them, in the form of private

Antisemitism is the insidious charge that sticks to anything it touches. The stain is all but impossible to remove

and unprovable motives.

This is safe ground for right-wing politicians and lobby groups. Antisemitism is the insidious charge that sticks to anything it touches. The stain is all but impossible to remove. Which is why those standing up for human rights – and against racism and oppression – are going to find themselves ever more aggressively

condemned as antisemitic. This is a path not towards peace and reconciliation but towards greater tribalism, confrontation and violence. It strips out the tools of argument and persuasion, as well as non-violent forms of pressure like boycotts, and ensures a world ruled by “might makes right”. **CT**

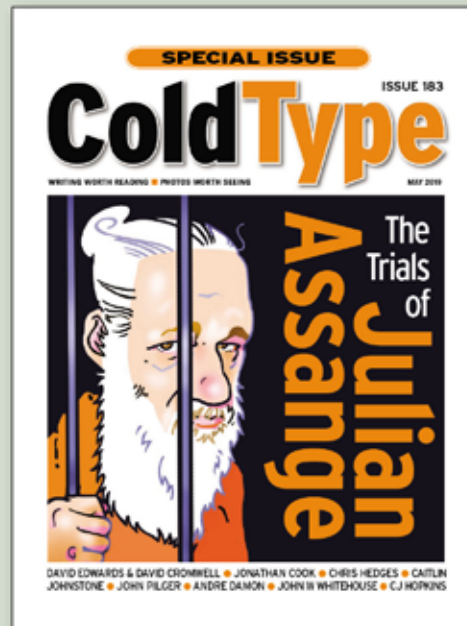
Jonathan Cook won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His books include “Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East” and “Disappearing Palestine: Israel’s Experiments in Human Despair”. His website is www.jonathan-cook.net. This essay was first published by Middle East Eye at www.middleeasteye.net



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THE TRIALS OF JULIAN ASSANGE



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Joe Allen

10 transitions that will define 2020

As we round off the weirdest year in living memory, let's recount the transformations that gave it character

1 From Orange Scapegoat to Sacrificial Lamb

In five short years, Donald Trump managed to conjure more hate than the Devil himself. By accident or design, this jerk exposed the Blue Tribe's black heart, channeling the full bandwidth of their bad vibes onto his mean, orange mug.

On a spiritual level, Trump functioned as a scapegoat for liberal America's sins. So long as he was telling showroom lies or bullying the nearest reporter, the Left's bloodthirsty media pundits, academics, actors, activists, and social media mobs could ignore their own malevolence and screech at the satyr onscreen.

Assuming the ritual purge actually occurs, this unmasked scapegoat shall be driven into the desert, carrying the sins of the community with him. In his stead, a rickety old ram is being

prepared for sacrifice. In the full glory of time, Biden's decomposing visage will give way to the luminous spirits of the righteous and the powerful. Those two will be the same from now on, at least in polite conversation.

2 From Social Life to the New Normal

Remember when you could wander into a public library or museum at your leisure? It seems like only yesterday that stepping into a cafe or local market was a social event, with off-hand jokes and smiling faces. Universities were flashpoints of vitality, rather than cradles of neurosis. Now we're singin' the blue state blues.

In the old days, you could seek refuge in a church, or sidle up to strangers at the bar without first performing a protective mask ritual. Back then, people still had faces, and social interactions were

organic. Those days are gone.

Soon enough, the relentless "mask up" and "socially distance" propaganda will segue into vaccine promotion. But the subconscious effects will remain. Many will continue to see their neighbours and co-workers as potential bio-hazards. Deep down, they'll harbour suspicion of the Other – and uphold trust in authority – just as they were conditioned to do.

Long after the lockdowns are (tentatively) lifted, the intuition will remain that our aloof rulers can lock us down any time, at their pleasure. And we'll have to pretend it's for our own good.





3 From Fleshly Muck to Cyberian Lifestyles

The best thing about the New Normal – at least for snobs and introverts – is that you never have to leave the comfort of home. Why expose yourself to other people’s germ clouds?

If you don’t work with your hands, there’s no reason to get them dirty at the office. Just do a Zoom meeting! It really is a miracle technology. As the holidays roll around, you can even do a Zoom Christmas – pants optional! Ho ho ho!

Let’s say you find your soul-mate, but don’t wanna choke on

the in-laws’ germs. Do a Zoom wedding! If they all die of boredom, do a Zoom funeral! It’s like real life – only Zoomtastic!

You can work, shop, worship, enjoy time with family and friends, meet new lovers, or catch a live concert – all online! And since every last detail of your personal data is aggregated along with everyone else’s, tech oligarchs are well-equipped to create artificial worlds we’re willing to inhabit.

From inside, it’s like a virtual beehive where the shoes are always on sale. From above, it looks like a billion tiny Zoom screens filled with digital larvae, each one

squirming in their sanitised cell.

4 From Indie Culture to Corporate Dominance

It really is sad that your favourite bookstore went under, but sentimentality won’t bring it back. No dinosaur can live forever.

Fortunately, multinational corporations are functionally immortal. Wal-Mart, Whole Foods, Purdue, Pfizer, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Citigroup, Goldman Sachs, Microsoft, Facebook, Twitter – you know, Harris/Biden-supporters – they’ll be there for you ’til the bitter end.

This year, Apple broke records as the first publicly traded company to hit \$2-trillion in value. How'd they do it? Ask their customers, who never have to endure screen-freezes during back-to-back Zoom meetings.

Jeff Bezos is another prime example. Starting in the '90s, this tech icon brought us Amazon.com, the Alexa eavesdropping device, the Ring home surveillance camera, and now the AWS cloud, where the CIA keeps its boring paperwork. By mid-2020, Bezos managed to reach \$200-billion in personal wealth. What was his secret? The Google God only knows.

5 From Earthly Toil to Robot Slaves

Three months before Covid infected the news, PBS debuted its dystopic *In the Age of AI*. This documentary presents the most anti-human inventions to emerge since the vibrator. Armies of automated lobster claws are coming for your job. In one interview, artificial intelligence mogul Kai-Fu Lee predicts that “50 percent of jobs will be somewhat or extremely threatened by AI in the next 15 years or so”.

Not long after the film aired, public health experts kicked off the beta test for mass unemployment.

Back in 2018, Kai-Fu published his eerily optimistic *AI Superpowers: China, Silicon Valley, and the New World Order*. In it, he warns that many cognitive gigs will be axed by automation, including telemarketers (hello, robocalls!), customer service reps, basic translators, accountants, tour guides, teachers, and eventually, medical doctors. (Incidentally, he says

The PBS documentary *In the Age of AI* presents the most anti-human inventions to emerge since the vibrator

CEOs, criminal defence attorneys, PR directors, and psychiatrists will remain in demand.)

He also says that antiseptic robots will rapidly replace factory workers, assembly line inspectors, truck-drivers, fruit-harvesters, cashiers, dishwashers, restaurant cooks, and even waiters. (Pro tip: nursing home caregivers, physical therapists, hair stylists, and dog-trainers should still enjoy job security.)

So what are working people gonna do once we've become obsolete? You can be sure the experts will think of something fun and fulfilling, and not at all humiliating

6 From Riots to Mostly Peaceful Protests

Mainstream media is totally sold out. That's why the social media sleuths who follow underground media – like the *New York Times*, CNN, MSNBC, NPR, PBS, the *Washington Post*, the *Atlantic*, ABC, NBC, CBS, and Drudge Report – are the only ones sharing news about white males shooting unarmed black men.

As the 2020 election heated up, these tireless gumshoes uncovered cut-up videos of Ahmaud Arbery gunned down while jog-

ging, George Floyd crushed under a cop's knee for eight minutes, and disturbing audio of Jacob Blake shot in the back. Social media caught fire like a UU church sign proclaiming BLACK LIVES MATTER.

Protests were organised in America's city centres. Yes, there were a few ... incidents ... in Atlanta, Ga., Minneapolis, Mn., Kenosha, Wi., Portland, Or., Seattle, Wa., New York City, Chicago, Il., and Philadelphia, Pa., among other locales. Videos show black-clad anarchists setting whole blocks ablaze while inner city kids looted anything not nailed down. When skeptics called these gatherings “super-spreader events”, courageous medical experts declared that, actually, racism is more dangerous than the coronavirus.

In response, spin-doctors on the Right began circulating alternative facts. For instance, the full jogger video shows Ahmaud Arbery attack his shooter first, George Floyd's coroner report suggests he'd just swallowed a fatal dose of opiates, and cellphone footage of Jacob Blake clearly shows the unarmed man leap into his SUV, presumably to arm himself, before being shot. These suppressed facts, decoupled from sympathetic story-telling, gave rise to a separate worldview.

As the election season winds down, such incidents have ceased to be of use to the media. But because the full range of facts now fall into two distinct sets, America's psyche has been split down the middle.

Some might say there are good people on both sides. But we all know, in the mind's darkest recesses, one side wants their enemies barbecued in concentration

camp, while the other would love to see oppressors wiping robot ass in the gulag. And who knows? Maybe Silicon Valley will create a simulation where both sides can see their dreams come true.

7 From Cashier to Covid Cop

After the recent replication crisis in psychology, I thought classics like the Milgram study and the Stanford prison experiment were headed for history's dustbin. You might get a few college kids to electrocute strangers or take a game of cops-n-robbers too far, but that doesn't mean it's human nature to be an asshole.

Then the pandemic hit, and our leaders set out to prove an authoritarian personality lurks in the average goober. Health experts deputised normal citizens to police their neighbours. "If you see something, say something". Suddenly, half the world was primed to squash an invisible evil. Cough droplets formed a lethal mist in the atmosphere, and the new public health police accused maskless farmers in the Midwest of killing old folks in New England.

And woe unto the nakedface who steps inside a coffee shop. The only thing more ridiculous than hearing a maladjusted barista bark "Excuse me, sir! Where's your mask?!", is seeing a surly hayseed scramble to put one on. This lunacy is everywhere – in gas stations and hardware stores, in restaurants and watering holes, in classrooms and even outdoor venues. The over-enunciation of the plural "masks" is absolutely maddening.

"Those anti-lockdown protest-

The pandemic hit, then our leaders set out to prove an authoritarian personality lurks in the average goober

ers weren't wearing *masks*..."

Perhaps, in time, we can all learn to love compliance. In that case, I suppose the theory behind Stockholm Syndrome will survive, too.

8 From Boys & Girls to Trans Adolescents

If you judge a book's importance by how much hate it attracts, Abigail Shrier's *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* is the most important book of the year. It builds on recent research that found an explosion of girls who – under the influence of social media friend-groups – decided to become boys together. It's like they got matching BFF tattoos on their souls.

Despite everything we're told to affirm – or else – Shrier contends that grown-ups encouraging children to permanently alter their biochemistry is misguided. Case studies suggest that, for most kids, gender dysphoria is just a phase.

The author correlates her own trans research with huge increases in teen anxiety, depression, anorexia, autism, cutting, suicide, and other forms of self-harm that Boomers never imagined. In tandem with these trends, a 2017 Harris Poll found that a full

8 percent of Millennials now identify as "non-cisgender, not strictly heterosexual". What accounts for this massive increase from previous generations?

Shrier argues persuasively, and respectfully, that adolescent gender transitioning has become a way for troubled teens to gain acceptance and positive attention. The problem is – after seeing huge suicide rates, even after surgery – this doesn't seem to be a healthy solution.

Trans activists screamed bloody murder. "If you don't affirm a child's gender, they'll die!!! That's just Science!!!" In response, Target pulled *Irreversible* from its shelves – at least until the death angel passed over.

Given this obvious ethical crisis, where are all the brave doctors willing to speak out against the consensus? Probably drinking their shame away with closeted Covid-skeptics.

Personally, I think the trans issue is blown out of proportion. Since the '50s, permissive parents have allowed birth control, rock 'n' roll, TV sets, McDonald's burgers, psychedelics, full-contact football, and 24/7 screen-time. All these fads alter a kid's brain and overall biochemistry. So who cares if a few prog moms and licensed medical experts are encouraging confused girls to inject testosterone and have their vaginas turned into penile simulacra. That's just their lane on the super-highway to The Future.

9 From Dirty Apes to Transhuman Glory

Back in 2000, only big shots had a cellphone. These days,

every schmoe and his granny has a touchscreen computer in his pocket. Soon, the same will be true of VR goggles. Once the computer-brain interface has been perfected, most of us will basically live in virtual reality.

As usual, the wealthy will inhabit an elaborate paradise, flying from one pleasure to the next in artificial Elysian Fields. This privileged class will be held in thrall by cyber-erotica and an intense communion with sentient neural networks. Meanwhile, their physical needs will be attended to by wall-to-wall automation – sort of like Pee Wee Herman’s house – until they undergo the final transition into silicone-based lifeforms.

The pathetic masses will content themselves with high-resolution shooting sprees and fully immersive tactile porn, not unlike today. Grown women will forego marriage and children to nurture agent-based AI kittens. If the history of elite cruelty is any guide, this virtual conveyor belt will terminate in a purring meat-grinder, where the poor and obsolete will be processed into robot fuel.

The most important thing is to look happy – all the fucking time – that frowny face is bad for business

My advice? Learn to code. Fast.

You might ask, “What happens when everyone checks out and the physical world becomes a barren landscape dotted with tumbleweeds and man-eating Room-bas?”

A better question would be, “With graphics this good, who’s gonna care?”

10 From Free Speech to Survival

Say one foul word about any of this, and you’re done. As we transition to top-down control – whether it’s a Google technocracy or a Chinese century – you’d be

well advised to keep the nay-saying to yourself.

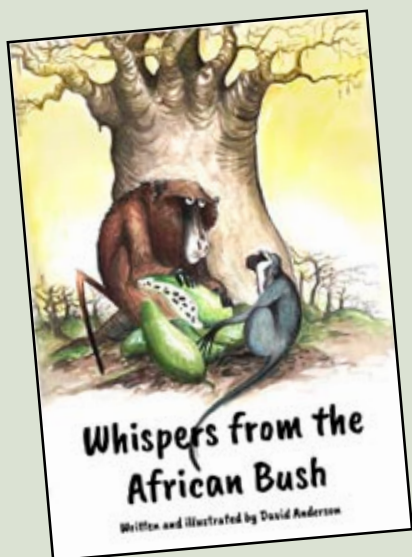
Confucius say, “Raised nail get the hammer”.

If you’re freaked by the onrush of The Future, just chill out and take a virtual walk. I hear Cyberia’s nice this time of year. Or maybe set up a Zoom session with your trusted psychiatrist. Before you can say “Two plus two equals five”, an Amazon Rx drone will leave happy pills at your doorstep. If you’ve gotta open that mouth of yours, it better be to take your meds.

Like it or not, the entire globe’s gonna morph into this imaginal state of perfection. So, going forward, the most important thing is to look happy about it – and I mean all the fucking time – because there are cameras everywhere, and that frowny face is bad for business.

Everyone wants to be real, but trust me, you’re better off just wearing a mask. **CT**

Joe Allen writes about race, robots, and religion. These days, he’s based out of a survivalist bunker on wheels. His website is www.JOEBOT.xyz.

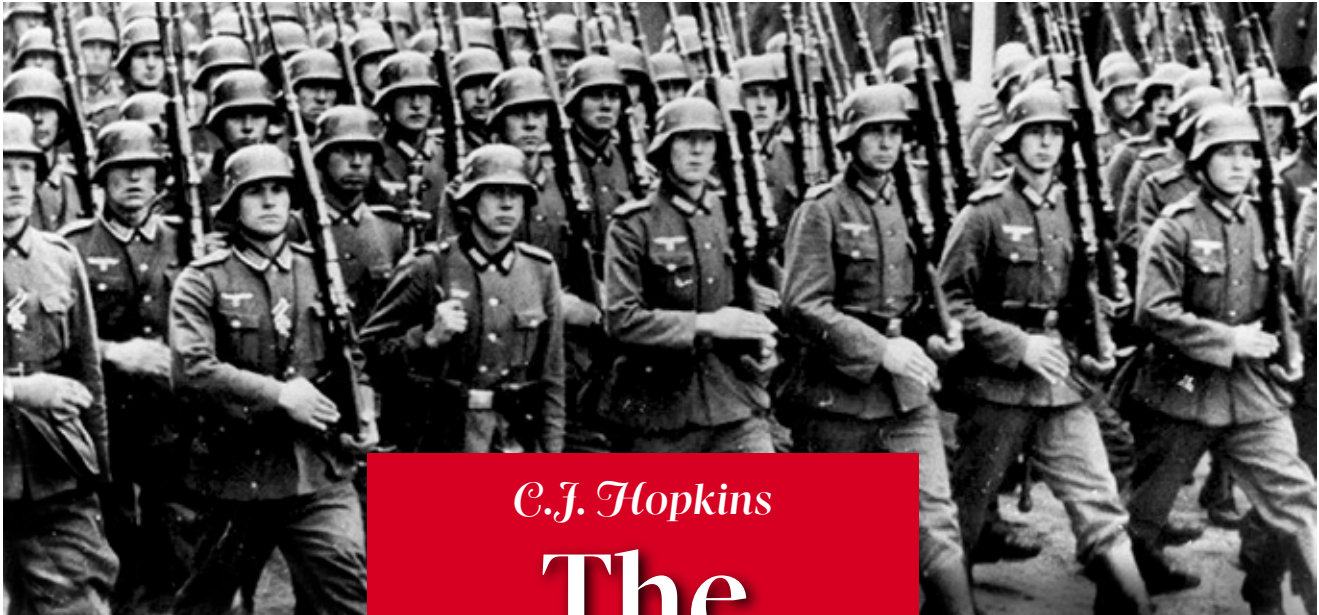


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C.J. Hopkins

The Germans are back!

The narratives and symbols may change, but it doesn't matter which uniform totalitarianism wears, or which language it speaks, it's the same abomination

Break out the Wagner, folks ... the Germans are back! No, not the warm, fuzzy, pussified, peace-loving, post-war Germans ... the Germans! You know the ones I mean. The “I didn't know where the trains were going” Germans. The “I was just following orders” Germans. The *other* Germans.

Yeah ... those Germans.

In case you missed it, on November 18, the German parliament passed a law, the so-called “Infection Protection Act” (“Das Infektionsschutzgesetz” in German) formally granting the government the authority to issue whatever edicts it wants under the guise of protecting the public health. The government has been doing this anyway – ordering lockdowns, curfews, travel bans, banning

demonstrations, raiding homes and businesses, ordering everyone to wear medical masks, harassing and arresting dissidents, etc. – but now it has been “legitimized” by the Bundestag, enshrined into law, and presumably stamped with one of those intricate official stamps

that German bureaucrats like to stamp things with.

Now, this “Infection Protection Act”, which was rushed through the parliament, is not in any way comparable to the “Enabling Act of 1933”, which formally granted the government the authority to issue whatever edicts it wanted under the guise of remedying the distress of the people. Yes, I realize that sounds quite similar, but, according to the government and the German media, there is no absolutely equivalence whatsoever, and anyone who suggests there is is “a far-right AfD extremist”, “a neo-Nazi conspiracy theorist”, or “an anti-vax esotericist”, or whatever.

As the Protection Act was being legitimized (i.e., the current one, not the one in 1933), tens of thousands of anti-totalitarian protesters gathered in the streets,

many of them carrying copies of the Grundgesetz (i.e., the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany), which the parliament had just abrogated. They were met by thousands of riot police, who declared the demonstration “illegal” (because many of the protesters were not wearing masks), beat up and arrested hundreds of them, and then hosed down the rest with water cannons.

The German media – which are totally objective, and not at all like Goebbels’ Ministry of Propaganda in the Nazi era – dutifully reminded the German public that these protesters were all “Corona Deniers”, “far-right extremists”, “conspiracy theorists”, “anti-vaxxers”, “neo-Nazis”, and so on, so they probably got what they deserved. Also, a spokesperson for the Berlin police (who bear absolutely no resemblance to the Gestapo, or the Stasi, or any other notorious official-ideology-enforcing goons) pointed out that their water cannons were only being used to “irrigate” the protesters (i.e., not being aimed directly at them) because there were so many

Heavily-armed German police are arresting YouTubers (although it isn’t clear exactly what for

“Corona Denier” children in their ranks.

According to the government, the German media, the intelligentsia, and, basically, anyone in public life who wants to remain there, these “Corona Deniers” are becoming a problem. They are spreading baseless “conspiracy theories” that are threatening the public health and causing distress to the German people (e.g., that the vast majority of those infected suffer only mild to moderate flu symptoms or, more commonly, no symptoms at all, and that over 99.7 percent survive). They are walking around without medical-looking masks, which is making a mockery of the government and media’s efforts to convince the public that they are under attack by an apocalyptic plague. They are posting scientific facts on the Internet. They are staging these protests and otherwise challenging the government’s right to declare a “health emergency”, suspend the German constitution indefinitely, and rule society by decree and force.

Despite the German government and media’s efforts to demonise anyone not obediently parroting the official “New Normal” narrative as a “dangerous neo-Nazi Corona

Denier”, the “Corona Denialism” movement is growing, not just in Germany, but all throughout Europe. Clearly, the time is coming for Germany to take stronger measures against this threat. The health of the Vater ... uh, the nation, is at stake! Fortunately, this “Infection Protection Act” will provide the government with the authority it needs to conceive and carry out some kind of ... well, you know, solution. Allowing these degenerate anti-social deviants to run around challenging the German government’s absolute power is not an option, not in a time of national health emergency! These “Nazi-sympathising Corona Deniers” must be rooted out and dealt with, mercilessly!

I’m not privy to the details, of course, but, it being Germany, I imagine some sort of Special Task Force has been set up to efficiently deal with the “Corona Denier Problem”. Steps are clearly already being taken. Alternative media outlets are being deplatformed (because, according the media, they are “Querfront magazines”). In April, a well-known dissident lawyer was forcibly committed to a psychiatric ward (but the authorities and the media assured us that it had nothing to do with her dissident views, or with the lawsuits she was filing against the government; she just coincidentally became completely paranoid). Heavily-armed police are arresting YouTubers (although it isn’t clear exactly what for, as the authorities have released no details and the mainstream media is not reporting it).

In the run-up to the 29 August



demonstration, at which the government granted some neo-Nazi de-facto permission to “storm the Reichstag”, so that the media could film it and discredit the real protest, one German politician went so far as to call for “Corona Deniers” to be deported ... presumably on trains, somewhere to the east.

But seriously, I don't mean to pick on the Germans. I love the Germans. I live in Germany. And they're hardly the only ones implementing the new pathologised totalitarianism. It's just that, given their not-too-distant history, it is rather depressing, and more than a little frightening, to watch as Germany is once again transformed into a totalitarian state, where the police are hunting down the maskless on the streets, raiding restaurants, bars, and people's homes, where goose-stepping little Good German citizens are peering into the windows of Yoga studios to see if they are violating “social distancing rules”, where I can't take a walk or shop for groceries without being surrounded by hostile, glaring, sometimes verbally-abusive Germans, who are infuriated that I'm not wearing a mask, and otherwise mindlessly following orders, and who robotically remind me, “Es ist Pflicht! Es ist Pflicht!”

Yes, I am fully aware that it is “Pflicht”. If I had any doubt as to whether it was “Pflicht”, the Berlin Senat cleared that up when they commissioned and ran this charming advert instructing me to fuck myself if I don't want to follow their “Corona orders” and profess my belief in their new Big Lie.

One day you find yourself taking orders from some twisted little nihilist on a mission to remake the world

And OK, before the Literalist Society starts flooding me with outraged emails, no, I'm not calling these Germans “Nazis”. I am calling them “totalitarians”. Which, at this point, given everything we know, if you're still pretending that this coronavirus in any way warrants the increasingly ridiculous “emergency measures” we are being subjected to, I'm sorry, but that is what you are.

You may not believe that is what you are ... totalitarians never do, not until it is far too late.

It functions like a cult, totalitarianism. It creeps up on you, little by little, little lie by little lie, accommodation by accommodation, rationalisation by rationalization ... until one day you find yourself taking orders from some twisted little narcissistic nihilist on a mission to remake the entire world. You don't surrender to it all at once. You do it over the course of weeks and months. Imperceptibly, it becomes your reality. You do not recognize that you are in it, because everything you see is part of it, and everyone you know is in it ... except for the others, who are not part of it. The “deniers”. The “deviants”. The “foreigners”. The “strangers”. The “Covidiot”. The “virus spreaders”.

See, although the narratives and

symbols may change, totalitarianism is totalitarianism. It doesn't really matter which uniform it wears, or which language it speaks ... it is the same abomination. It is an idol, a simulacrum of the hubris of man, formed from the clay of the minds of the masses by megalomaniacal spiritual cripples who want to exterminate what they cannot control. And what they want to control is always everything. Everything that reminds them of their weakness and their shame. You. Me. Society. The world. Laughter. Love. Honour. Faith. The past. The future. Life. Death. Everything that will not obey them.

Unfortunately, once this kind of thing gets started, and reaches the stage we are currently experiencing, more often than not, it does not stop, not until cities lie in ruins or fields are littered with human skulls. It might take us ten or twelve years to get there, but, make no mistake, that's where we're headed, where totalitarianism is always headed ... if you don't believe me, just ask the Germans. **CT**

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





As soon as I saw her I knew I had got a good shot. This image provokes an immediate reaction, which is my signature style but it is also project-specific, with the buses in the background and the masks and banners above the streets providing a not-so-subtle reminder that Covid is a serious threat.

Dougie Wallace

On the buses

London's commuterland masks up to battle Covid



"Never mind the pandemic, I need to put my face on." Caught in the early stages of lockdown, the social distancing rules on buses stipulated middle door entry only. I quickly hopped on and off the bus to get this image.

Life, as Londoners knew it, stopped on March 23 when Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a full lockdown in an unprecedented broadcast to the nation. Dougie Wallace's depiction of the nation's capital, crippled by the Covid-19 pandemic, told through his snapshots of London's iconic red buses, shows how the city's commuters coped with the spring lockdown, the temporary reprieve, and its return to lockdown, in his distinct direct style of expressive social documentary photography.



TOP: We're in the middle of an epidemic, but some people manage to keep cheerful – even when the mask slips.

ABOVE: Sometimes the message – and the threat of fines – doesn't get through to the customers. Or perhaps they have an exemption from mask wearing.

RIGHT: This is what happens when wear-a-face-covering and wash-your-hands goes over the top, or so it appears at first glance. The truth is a lot of people are still really scared – as this outfit, looking more like a beekeeper's protection gear, exemplifies.



TOP: The threat of a huge fine persuaded many travellers, including this one, to mask up for their journey.

ABOVE: The Covid pandemic sparked theories about the dangers of 5G, all of them baseless, according to the science. Personally, I believe in nothing. Thankfully I haven't been hijacked. Yet!

LEFT: Time for sinners like me to repent! At least, Covid keeps the city's bible-bashers occupied.



ABOVE: There's something très Cancan about these young dancers. They bring pleasure, fun, and a sense of freedom into dark times.

RIGHT: More fun and games as a couple decide that, although the bus is probably more comfortable, piggyback riding is definitely more fun.

Dougie Wallace has published six photobooks. The latest, *East Ended*, was recently released by Dewi Lewis – www.dewilewis.com





For some people, especially the elderly, the Covid threat is a very real. This lady was literally taking her life into her hands every time she stepped onto a big red London bus.

Yves Engler

Canadians versus the war machine

Despite favourable polls, campaign against war plane purchase by Canadian government won't be easy

Despite polls that suggest most Canadians do not support warplanes used to kill and destroy things around the world, the federal government seems determined to spend tens of billions of dollars to expand that capability.

While there is a growing movement afoot to block the Liberals' fighter jet purchase, it will require significant mobilisation to overcome the powerful forces seeking cutting edge new warplanes.

At the end of July, Boeing (Super Hornet), Saab (Gripen) and Lockheed Martin (F-35) submitted bids to manufacture fighter jets for the Canadian Air Force. The sticker price for 88 new warplanes is \$19-billion. However, based on a similar procurement in the United States, the total cost of the jets' lifecycles could be almost twice as much.

In response to the government moving forward with the planned warplane purchase, a campaign has taken off to oppose the massive government outlay. There have been two days of action at two dozen MPs' offices against

the warplane purchase, which is planned for 2022.

Hundreds of people have sent emails to all MPs on the issue and a recent Canadian Foreign Policy Institute and World BEYOND War webinar pierced parliamentary silence on the planned fighter jet purchase. The October 15 "Challenging Canada's \$19-Billion Warplane Purchase" event included Green Party MP and foreign critic Paul Manly, NDP defence critic Randall Garrison and Senator Marilou McPhedran, as well as activist Tamara Lorincz and poet El Jones.

Manly spoke out against the fighter jet purchase and recently raised the issue during question period in the House of Commons (Green party Leader Annamie Paul echoed Manly's opposition to the purchase in a recent *Hill Times* commentary). For her part, McPhedran suggested more sensible priorities for the large sums devoted to the warplane procurement. A noted anti-Palestinian, Garrison equivocated. He said the NDP opposed purchasing the F-35

but was open to purchasing some other bombers depending on industrial criteria.

The no warplane campaign should take heart from a recent Nanos poll. Bombing campaigns were the least popular of eight options offered to the public when asked "How supportive, if at all, are you of the following types of Canadian forces international missions?". Only 28 per cent supported "Having the Canadian Air Force involved in airstrikes", while 77 per cent of those polled backed "Participating in natural disaster relief abroad", and 74 per cent supported "United Nations peacekeeping mission".

Fighter jets are largely useless for natural disasters, humanitarian relief or peacekeeping, let alone a 9/11 style attack or a global pandemic. These cutting-edge new planes are designed to enhance the air force's ability to join belligerent US and NATO bombing campaigns.

But, using the military to support NATO and allies was also a relatively low priority of those polled. Asked by Nanos, "In your opinion, what's the most appropri-



UP IN SMOKE: F-35A Lightning II performs during the Heart of Texas Airshow in 2019. Already the most expensive weapons programme ever undertaken, the F-35 may never truly be ready for combat.

ate role for the Canadian Armed Forces?”, 39.8 percent chose “Peacekeeping”, and 34.5 percent “Defend Canada”. “Support NATO missions/allies” received the backing of 6.9 percent of those polled.

The no fighter jet campaign should link the \$19-billion warplane purchase to Canada’s recent history of participating in US-led bombings such as Iraq (1991), Serbia (1999), Libya (2011) and Syria/Iraq (2014-2016). All these bombing campaigns – to varying degrees – violated international law and left those countries worse off. Most obviously, Libya remains at war nine years later and violence there spilled southward to Mali and across much of Africa’s Sahel region.

The no fighter jets campaign is also right to highlight warplanes’ contribution to the climate crisis. They are carbon-intensive and purchasing a fleet of expensive new ones is completely at odds with Canada’s stated commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2050.

During the 2011 bombing of Libya, for instance, Canadian jets burnt 14.5-million pounds of fuel and their bombs destroyed the natural habitat. Most Canadians have no idea about the scope of the air force and military’s ecological destruction.

To mark Disarmament Week,

NDP MP Leah Gazan recently asked on Twitter “Did you know that according to the 2017 Canadian Armed Forces Defence and Environment Strategy, all military operations and activities are EXEMPT from national emission reduction targets!?!?”

DND/CF is the single largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the federal government. In 2017 it released 544-kilotons of GHGs, 40 percent more than Public Services Canada, the next largest emitting ministry.

While the background issues and polling numbers suggest campaigners are well placed to mobilise public opinion against the \$19-billion fighter jet purchase,

there is still a huge hill to climb. The military and associated industries are well organised and conscious of their interests. The Canadian Forces want new jets and the CF/DND has the largest public relations operations in the country.

There are also powerful corporations set to gain substantial profits off the contract, including the two main competitors, Lockheed Martin and Boeing, finance think tanks such as the Canadian Global Affairs Institute and Conference of Defence Associations. All three companies are also members of the Aerospace Industries Association of Canada, which supports the fighter jet purchase.

Boeing and Lockheed advertise aggressively in publications read by Ottawa insiders such as

Only by opposing the warplane purchase can we hope to overcome the power of war profiteers and their propaganda

iPolitics, *Ottawa Business Journal* and *Hill Times*. To facilitate access to government officials Saab, Lockheed and Boeing maintain offices a few blocks from Parliament. They lobby MPs and DND officials and have hired retired air force generals to top executive positions and contracted retired air force commanders to lobby for them.

Scrapping the entire 88 warplane purchase won't be easy. But people of conscience can't sit idly by as huge sums are devoted to one of the most destructive parts of the military, which is among the most damaging elements of our government.

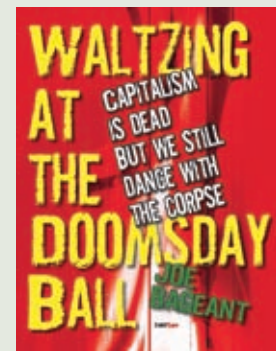
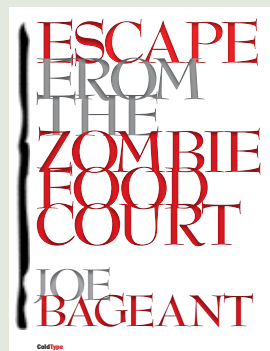
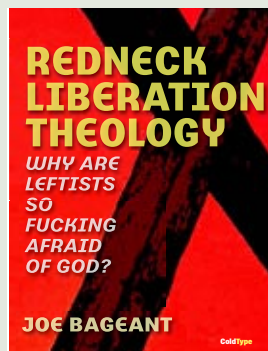
To stop the fighter jet purchase, we need to create a coalition of those who oppose war, are concerned about the environment and anyone who believes there are better uses for our tax dollars. Only by mobilising large numbers to actively oppose the warplane purchase can we hope to overcome the power of war profiteers and their propaganda machine. **CT**

Yves Engler is a Montreal-based writer and political activist. His website is www.yvesengler.com.



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Tom Engelhardt

The history of the Decline and Fall of the American Empire

*Or what it means to fall
on a failing planet*

We're now living in an age of opacity, as Rudy Giuliani pointed out in a courtroom recently. Here was the exchange:

“In the plaintiffs’ counties, they were denied the opportunity to have an unobstructed observation and ensure opacity,” Giuliani said. “I’m not quite sure I know what opacity means. It probably means you can see, right?”

“It means you can’t,” said US District Judge Matthew Brann.

“Big words, your honour,” Giuliani said”.

Big words indeed! And he couldn’t have been more on the mark, whether he knew it or not.

Thanks in part to him and to the president he’s represented so avidly, even as hair dye or mascara dripped down his face, we find ourselves in an era in which, to steal a biblical phrase from Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman, all of us see as if “through a glass darkly”.

As in Election Campaign 2016, Donald Trump isn’t the cause but a symptom (though what a symptom!) of an American world going down. Then as now, he somehow gathered into his one-and-only self so many of the worst impulses of a country that, in this century, found itself eternally at war not just with Afghans and Iraqis and Syrians and Somalis but increasingly with itself, a true heavyweight of a su-

perpower already heading down for the count.

Here’s a little of what I wrote back in June 2016 about The Donald, a reminder that what’s happening now, bizarre as it might seem, wasn’t beyond imagining even so many years ago:

“It’s been relatively easy... – at least until Donald Trump arrived to the stunned fascination of the country (not to speak of the rest of the planet) – to imagine that we live in a peaceable land with most of its familiar markers still reassuringly in place... In truth, however, the American world is coming to bear ever less resemblance to the one we still claim as ours, or rather that older America



looks increasingly like a hollowed-out shell within which something new and quite different has been gestating.

“After all, can anyone really doubt that representative democracy as it once existed has been eviscerated and is now – consider Congress Exhibit A – in a state of advanced paralysis, or that just about every aspect of the country’s infrastructure is slowly fraying or crumbling and that little is being done about it? Can anyone doubt that the constitutional system – take war powers as a prime example or, for that matter, American liberties – has also been fraying? Can anyone doubt that the country’s classic tripartite form of gov-

ernment, from a Supreme Court missing a member by choice of Congress to a national security state that mocks the law, is ever less checked and balanced and increasingly more than ‘tri’?”

Even then, it should have been obvious that Donald Trump was, as I also wrote in that campaign year, a wildly self-absorbed symptom of American-style imperial decline on a planet increasingly from hell. And that, of course, was four years before the pandemic struck or there was a wildfire season in the West the likes of which no one had imagined possible and a record 30 storms that more or less

used up two alphabets in a never-ending hurricane season.

In the most literal sense possible, The Donald was our first presidential candidate of imperial decline and so a genuine sign of the times. He swore he would make America great again, and in doing so, he alone, among American politicians of that moment, admitted that this country wasn’t great then, that it wasn’t, as the rest of the American political class claimed, the greatest, most exceptional, most indispensable country in history, the sole superpower left on Planet Earth.

In that campaign year, the United States was already something else again and that was more

than four years before the richest, most powerful country on the planet couldn't handle a virus in a fashion the way other advanced nations did. Instead, it set staggering records for Covid-19 cases and deaths, numbers that previously might have been associated with third-world countries. You can practically hear the chants now as those figures continue to rise exponentially: USA! USA! We're still number one (in pandemic casualties)!

Somehow, in that pre-pandemic year, a billionaire bankruptee and former reality TV host instinctively caught the mood of the moment in an ever-less-unionised American heartland, long in decline if you were an ordinary citizen. By then, the abandonment of the white working class and lower middle class by the "new Democrats" was history. The party of Bill and Hillary Clinton had long been, as Thomas Frank wrote recently in the *Guardian*, "preaching competence rather than ideology and reaching out to new constituencies: the enlightened suburbanites; the 'wired workers'; the 'learning class'; the winners in our new post-industrial society".

Donald Trump arrived on the scene promising to attend to the abandoned ones, the white Americans whose dreams of better lives for themselves or their children had largely been left in the dust in an ever-more-unequal country. Increasingly embittered, they were, at best, taken totally for granted by the former party of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. (In the 2016 campaign, Hillary Clinton didn't even consider it worth the

Donald Trump arrived on the scene promising to attend to the abandoned ones – white Americans

bother to visit Wisconsin and her campaign underplayed the very idea of focusing on key heartland states.) In the twenty-first century, there were to be no "new deals" for them and they knew it. They had been losing ground – to the tune of \$2.5-trillion a year since 1975 – to the very billionaires whom The Donald so proudly proclaimed himself one of and to a version of corporate America that had grown oversized, wealthy, and powerful in a fashion that would have been unimaginable decades earlier.

On entering the Oval Office, Trump would still offer them blunt words, which would ring bells in rally after rally where they could cheer him to death. At the same time, with the help of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, he continued the process of abandonment by handing a staggering tax cut to the 1% and those very same corporations, enriching them ever so much more. So, of course, would the pandemic, which only added yet more billions to the fortunes of billionaires and various corporate giants (while granting the front-line workers who kept those companies afloat only the most meager and passing "hazard pay").

Today, the coronavirus here in the United States might be more accurately relabelled "the Trump

virus". After all, the president really did make it his own in a unique fashion. Via ignorance, neglect, and a striking lack of care, he managed to spread it around the country (and, of course, the White House itself) in record ways, holding rallies that were visibly instruments of death and destruction. All of this would have been clearer yet if, in Election Campaign 2020, he had just replaced MAGA as his slogan with MASA (Make America Sick Again), since the country was still going down, just in a new way.

In other words, ever since 2016, Donald Trump, wrapped up eternally in his own overwrought self, has come to personify the very essence of a bifurcated country that was heading down, down, down, if you weren't part of that up, up, up 1%. The moment when he returned from the hospital, having had Covid-19 himself, stepped out on a White House balcony, and proudly tore off his mask for all the world to see summed up the messaging of this all-American twenty-first-century moment perfectly.

Unique as Donald Trump may seem in this moment and overwhelming as Covid-19 might be for now, the American story of recent years is anything but unique in history, at least as so far described. From the Black Death (bubonic plague) of the fourteenth century to the Spanish Flu of the early twentieth century, pandemics have, in their own fashion, been a dime a dozen. And as for foolish rulers who made a spectacle of themselves, well, the Romans had their Nero and he was anything but unique in the annals of history.

As for going down, down, down, that's in the nature of history. Known once upon a time as "imperial powers" or "empires", what we now call "great powers" or "super-powers" rise, have their moments in the sun (even if it's the shade for so many of those they rule over), and then fall, one and all. Were that not so, Edward Gibbon's classic six-volume work, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, would never have gained the fame it did in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Across the planet and across time, that imperial rising and falling has been an essential, even metronomic, part of humanity's story since practically the dawn of history. It was certainly the story of China, repeatedly, and definitely the tale of the ancient Middle East. It was the essence of the history of Europe from the Portuguese and Spanish empires to the English empire that arose in the 18th century and finally fell (in essence, to our own) in the middle of the last century. And don't forget that other superpower of the Cold War, the Soviet Union, which came into being after the Russian Revolution of 1917 and grew and grew, only to implode in 1991, after a (gulp!) disastrous war in Afghanistan, less than 70 years later.

And none of this, as I say, is in itself anything special, not even for a genuinely global power like the United States. (What other country ever had at least 800 military garrisons spread across the whole planet?) If this were history as it's always been, the only real shock would perhaps be the strikingly bizarre sense of self-adulation felt

A quarter-century later, Donald Trump would be the living evidence that this country was not immune to history

by this country's leadership and the pundit class that went with it after that other Cold War superpower so surprisingly blew a fuse. In the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the Soviet Union's plunge to its grave in 1991, leaving behind an impoverished place once again known as "Russia", they engaged in distinctly delusional behaviour. They convinced themselves that history as it had always been known, the very rise and fall and rise (and fall) that had been its repetitious tune, had somehow "ended" with this country atop everything forever and beyond.

Not quite three decades later, in the midst of a set of "forever wars" in which the US managed to impose its will on essentially no one and in an increasingly chaotic, riven, pandemicised country, who doesn't doubt that this was delusionary thinking of the first order? Even at the time, it should have been obvious enough that the United States would sooner or later follow the Soviet Union to the exits, no matter how slowly, enveloped in a kind of self-adoration.

A quarter-century later, Donald Trump would be the living evidence that this country was anything but immune to history, though few then recognized him as a messenger of the fall already

underway. Four years after that, in a pandemicised land, its economy a wreck, its military power deeply frustrated, its people divided, angry, and increasingly well-armed, that sense of failing (already felt so strongly in the American heartland that welcomed The Donald in 2016) no longer seems like such an alien thing. It feels more like the new us – as in US

Despite the oddity of The Donald himself, all of this would just be more of the same, if it weren't for one thing. There's an extra factor now at work that's all but guaranteed to make the history of the decline and fall of the American empire different from the declines and falls of centuries past. And no, it has next to nothing to do with (blare of trumpets!) Donald Trump, though he did long ago reject climate change as a "Chinese hoax" and, in every way possible, thanks to his love of fossil fuels, give it as much of a helping hand as he could, opening oil lands of every sort to the drill, and dismissing environmental regulations that might have impeded the giant energy companies. And don't forget his mad mockery of alternative power of any sort.

I could go on, of course, but why bother. You know this part of the story well. You're living it.

Yes, in its own distinctive fashion, the US is going down and will do so whether Donald Trump, Joe Biden, or Mitch McConnell is running the show. But here's what's new: for the first time, a great imperial power is falling just as the earth, at least as humanity has known it all these thousands of years, seems to be going down, too.

And that means there will be no way, no matter what The Donald may think, to wall out intensifying storms, fires, or floods, megadroughts, melting ice shelves and the rising sea levels that go with them, record temperatures, and so much more, including the hundreds of millions of people who are likely to be displaced across a failing planet, thanks to those greenhouse gases released by the burning of the fossil fuels that Donald Trump loves so much.

Undoubtedly, the first genuine twist in the rise-and-fall version of human history – the first story, that is, that was potentially all about falling – arrived on August 6th and 9th, 1945 when the US dropped nuclear bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It soon became apparent that such weaponry, collected in vast and spreading arsenals, had (and still has) the power to quite literally take history out of

Donald Trump was the messenger from hell when it came to a falling empire on a failing planet

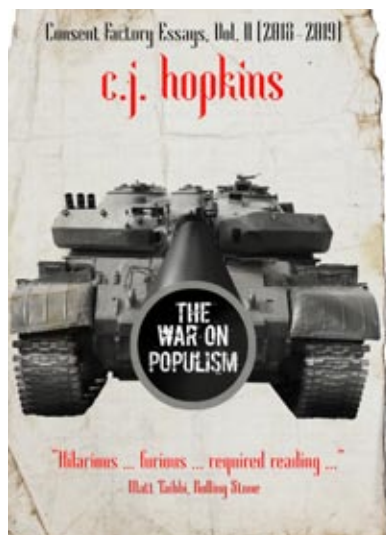
our hands. In this century, even a “limited” regional war with such weaponry could create a nuclear winter that might starve billions. That version of Armageddon has at least been postponed time and again since August 1945, but as it happened, humanity proved quite capable of coming up with another version of ultimate disaster, even if its effects, no less calamitous, happen not with the speed of an exploding nuclear weapon, but over the years, the decades, the centuries.

Donald Trump was the messenger from hell when it came to a falling empire on a failing planet. Whether, on such a changing world, the next empire or empires, China or unknown powers to come, can rise in the normal fashion remains to be seen. As does whether, on such a planet, some other way of organizing human life, some potentially better, more empathetic way of dealing with the world and ourselves will be found.

Just know that the rise and fall of history, as it always was, is no more. The rest, I suppose, is still ours to discover, for better or for worse.

CT

*Tom Engelhardt is a co-founder of the American Empire Project and the author of a history of the Cold War, *The End of Victory Culture*. He runs *TomDispatch.com* – where this essay was first published. His latest book is *A Nation Unmade by War*.*



The War on Populism

Consent Factory Essays Vol. 2 (2018-2019)

C.J. Hopkins

In this second volume of his Consent Factory essays, C. J. Hopkins continues his irreverent coverage of the mainstream media and political establishment's reaction to the presidency of Donald Trump and the so-called “new populism” that put him in office.

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Phantasmoria: how the New York Times portrayed the moon and its inhabitants. University of Dundee.

Keith Williams

Batmen, unicorns, and Men on the Moon

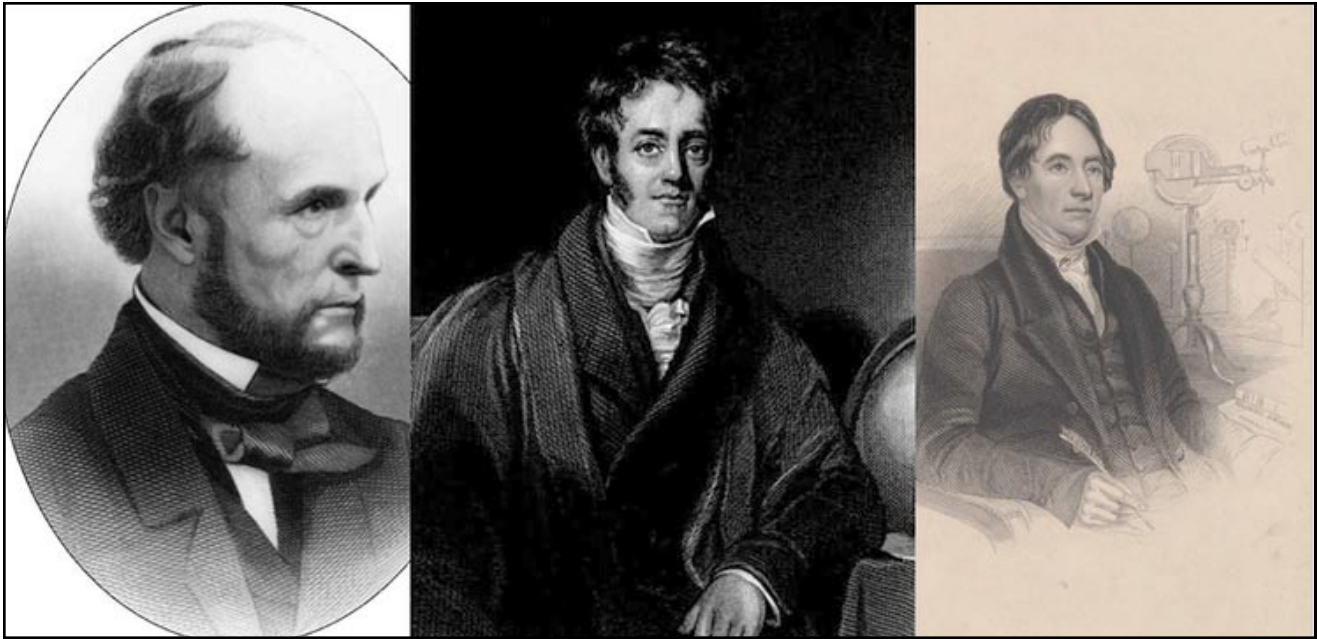
If you think 'fake' news is something new, just read this ...

In 16th-century Britain a common saying to describe hoaxing someone was “to make one believe the Moon is made of green cheese”. Absurd, of course. So perhaps people were more credulous by the middle of the 19th-century, when a news-

paper editor perpetrated what became known as the Great Moon Hoax, persuading gullible readers that on the Moon you could find unicorns and other fantastic beasts.

The Great Moon Hoax refers to six articles in the *New York Sun*

headlined “Great Astronomical Discoveries” and allegedly reprinted from the *Edinburgh Journal of Science*. Beginning on August 25 1835, they revealed a lunar ecology and civilisation. The hoax tested the parameters of media credibility and “fake news” in the



THE MAIN PLAYERS: Richard Adams Locke, Sir John Herschel and the Rev Thomas Dick.

pre-telegraphic age. The stories circulated to other papers around the world.

The newspaper published these supposed reports from observations by astronomer royal, John Herschel, using the most powerful telescope yet invented. According to the reports, this telescope was connected to an “oxy-hydrogen” projector which enabled it to screen moving pictures. They visualised forests, seas and vast deposits of precious minerals, teeming with life forms, including unicorns, intelligent beavers and “man-bats” (*Vespertilio-homo*). These flew around naked and worshipped in triangular temples.

The wonders of the moon were revealed ever more sensationally, until the telescope apparently caught fire – its enormous lens exposed to South African sunlight acting as a “burning glass”.

New York Sun reporter Rich-

ard Adams Locke (1800–1871) later admitted writing the articles, satirising speculations by the Rev Thomas Dick (1774-1857), the most widely read popular astronomer on both sides of the Atlantic at the time, who kept to what he saw as a literal interpretation of the Bible’s account of creation. This despite geological finds dating back into “deep time” and Charles Darwin’s observations about evolution offering evidence to the contrary. So Dick’s descriptions of the planets – and even the *Sun* – included details about populations of “unfallen” beings that God had put there – as the Bible told the story, it was only Earth that had been corrupted by “original sin”. The hoax was Locke’s way of satirising what he called Dick’s naïve “science fiction”.

The Moon Hoax is a significant event in the Scottish city of Dundee’s cultural history – but also science fiction in general. It’s a springboard for issues still

topical today: clashes between cosmic views of faith and science as well as the growth and power of modern media and their relationship with public trust, facts and imagination.

Googling “moon hoax” immediately directs you to internet conspiracy theory sites dismissing NASA’s 1969 landing as simulated, ironically inverting debates sparked in 1835 by dismissing documented facts as mere fictions.

Dick’s *The Christian Philosopher, or the Connexion of Science and Philosophy with Religion* (1823) predicted that signs of “lunarian” life would soon be detected once telescopes could observe them in sufficiently close-up detail. He devoted himself to scientific, philosophical and religious works, acquiring widespread popularity and influence among politicians, writers and thinkers, particularly in the evangelical United States.

Dick promoted the “plurality of worlds” – the theory that every planet must be inhabited because the divine plan would never create without purpose. His magnum opus *Celestial Scenery or The Wonders of the Planetary System Displayed* (1838) showcased this, calculating our solar system contained more than 21-trillion inhabitants. He based this calculation on planetary surface areas multiplied by English population density. Hence the Moon might contain “beings far more numerous, and perhaps more elevated in the scale of intellect, than the inhabitants of our globe”.

Ironically, *Celestial Scenery* also rebuked the Hoax author’s disregard for facts: “The “Law of Truth” ought never for a moment to be sported with ... It is to be hoped that the author of the deception to which I have adverted, as he advances in years and wisdom, will perceive the folly and immorality of such conduct”.

Locke responded with an open broadside: “So far from feeling that I deserve the coarse reproaches of Dr Dick, I think it quite laudable in any man to satirise ... that school of crude speculation and



A German lithograph purporting to show Herschel's apparatus and its method of projection.

cant of which he is so eminent a professor”.

Locke’s lunar paradise hoodwinked a global readership because of expectations raised in the popular imagination by Dick’s “outrage upon science”, which prepared them “to swallow any thing however absurd ... recommended by this peculiar stamp”.

Though not destroying Dick’s reputation, the hoax challenged his prioritisation of belief over evidence, foreshadowing the fundamental intellectual crises of the mid-Victorian age.

Nevertheless, Dick continued to popularise science and democratise access to astronomy. Dundee’s unique public observatory is a bequest from one of Dick’s devotees, John Mills.

Whether or not Dick’s speculations constituted science fiction, they inadvertently midwived the modern genre through Locke’s parodies. The editor and owner of the *New York Herald*, James Gordon Bennett, credited Locke with inventing what he called “A New Species of Writing” – “the scientific novel”.

The Dundee Moon Hoax certainly inspired the “lost Scottish father” of American sci-fi, Robert Duncan Milne who grew up in nearby Cupar in the 1840s. His own tales of astronomical discovery bear many similarities to Locke’s lunar utopia. It provided a rich context which shaped Milne’s imagination, driven by creative tensions between scientific secularism, fantastic new technologies and orthodox beliefs. **CT**

Keith Williams is Reader in English, University of Dundee. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

READ THE BEST OF EDWARD S. HERMAN

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Southern Winds, Arizona.

Arnaud Montagard

Sideroad safari

*French photographer travels through the heart
of a country that is afraid of itself*



Daily Fresh Eggs, Oregon.



Somewhere in New Mexico.

In *The Road Not Taken* (Setanta Books, London), French photographer Arnaud Montagard undertakes a cross country road trip deep into the heart of America, following trails blazed by painter Edward Hopper and photographer William Eggleston.

During his coast-to-coast trek, Montagard finds isolated figures caught in their own deep thoughts, old-fashioned delis, fifties-flashback diners, and the almost-deserted streets of a vintage society that

shouldn't – but still does – exist in this 21st-century.

However, the images are neither as tranquil nor as homely as they seem, for the *The Road Not Taken* exposes the dark heart of a country that is afraid of itself. Look again and you'll find scenes straight from a Hitchcock movie, in which anything can – and probably will – happen. Then remember, this is the country that gifted us Donald Trump and his sinister horde of MAGA discontents.

– Tony Sutton

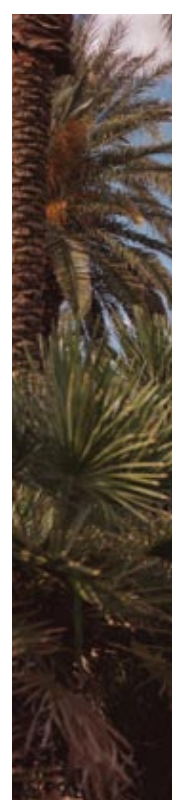


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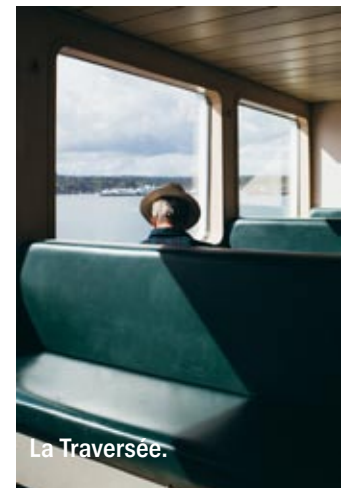
Monterey, Lastone.



Diner nightmares.



The Nail Salon, Brooklyn, New York.



La Traversée.

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

Arnaud Montagard

Published by Setanta Books

www.setantabooks.co.uk

Paul Magno

It's a long road from law to justice

The model for policing isn't going to be changed even as Donald Trump is set to be replaced by "shoot them in the leg" Joe Biden

For the past two-and-a-half years it has been my privilege to support the Kings Bay Plowshares. They are seven disarmament activists who entered the Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base in Georgia by night on April 4, 2018 – the anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr's martyrdom – to confront the Trident nuclear weapon system and engage in an act of disarmament. The seven poured human blood on signs and missile models, unfurled peace banners and used household tools to begin symbolic disarmament of Trident, a submarine based first strike nuclear missile, termed by the Navy as a "strategic" weapon.

The seven have subsequently been charged and convicted in a jury trial of three felonies and a misdemeanor in federal court. All but one have been sentenced, to date, some as recently as last month, by Federal Judge Lisa Godbey Wood in Brunswick, Georgia. Their legal odyssey has been protracted, in part by important legal proceedings and in part by the limitations imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

My invitation to walk with

these peacemakers came in 2018 as an outgrowth of longstanding personal friendships with each of them. It also came as a result of my own experience and commitment to explaining and supporting the basic idea of these Plowshares actions, as they have proliferated a hundred-fold since 1980.

Patrick O'Neill, a participant in the Kings Bay action, and I were involved together with six others in the 1984 Pershing Plowshares action at Martin Marietta (now Martin Lockheed) in Orlando, Florida. I also served as a primary support person for the three Transform Now Plowshares activists who similarly acted at the Y12 nuclear weapons facility in Oak Ridge, Tennessee in 2012. They won a federal appeal of their sabotage conviction and were released from prison after two years.

The Kings Bay Plowshares, from the outset of their 2018 action, placed it in the context of non-violent resistance compelled by conscience, as all the Plowshares actions are. They understand it as rooted in the powerful nonviolent

vision of Martin Luther King Jr, who decried the triple evils of racism, militarism and capitalism. King proclaimed "our only hope lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism and militarism".

At the sentencing of the defendants in June, October and November, Judge Wood made a great deal of the issue of acceptance of responsibility for their actions. She spoke to each of the activists about the need to follow the law and not to pick and choose which laws one would follow. In this, she was giving voice to the recommendations of the pre-sentencing report and the prosecution led by the US attorney's office. In addition, she accepted the prosecution's argument that they had in the course of their action precipitated "the risk of death", which was a novel element never asserted before in such a case. But that served to increase their legal liability and procedurally required imprisonment rather than lesser punishment such as home confinement.

The veneer of reasonability that



The Kings Bay Plowshares 7, from left to right: Mark Colville, Martha Hennessy, Clare Grady, Patrick O'Neill, Liz McAllister, Steve Kelly and Carmen Trotta.

Judge Wood attempts to impart is exposed as a lie, however, if we resist the amnesia that is necessary for her and the prosecution to make these claims with a straight face. A verse of scripture (Mark 8:18) offers pertinent perspective here: “Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?”

These defendants have never denied that they entered the Kings Bay Naval Base on April 4, 2018 to confront the Trident nuclear weapon system. They signed a statement of conscience to that effect and used video equipment to memorialise their act of disarmament. In fact, the whole point of their entry onto the base was an attempt to unveil

Trident as illegal and immoral for its intended purpose – to threaten and, when launched, to destroy hundreds of millions of human lives. They carried banners denouncing Trident as “illegal and immoral” and as “omnicide”. Their indictment of the government, the Pentagon and the Kings Bay base specifically invoked the Nuremberg Principles, that were established after World War II to hold Nazis accountable for horrors shocking to the conscience.

They have used that message in the courtroom during the pretrial proceedings and at trial through their arguments and testimony. They persisted, despite objections and restrictions that prevented a trial jury from hearing much of their claim, that it is Trident and

the legal apologia for it that is the great underlying crime leading to their action.

Bluntly put, it is our legal system that is deeply afflicted by the blindness and deafness described by the Gospel of Mark. This malady was on display again at the sentencing of the Kings Bay Plowshares defendants. The court has ignored the trial record and its own findings, recognising a prima facie case that the seven acted from sincerely held religious beliefs consistent with their Catholic faith and acknowledging the “sacramental and prophetic action of denuclearising”. The court acknowledged that fact in a lengthy pretrial ruling on defence of the action under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act,

or RFRA. However, it found that a compelling government interest in national security was even more important than the exercise of religious freedom.

Liz McAlister, in pretrial testimony concerning the relevance of RFRA, reprised her longstanding thesis that there is a state religion of nuclearism complete with all the elements of a religion – including deities and high priests – that compels allegiance. It prohibits dissent and exercise of religious faith contrary to nuclearism, including exercise of conscience, nonviolence and justice. As the court affirmed, nuclear idols are primary under the law. Her full exposition of this argument can be found in her book, *The Times Discipline: The Beatitudes and Nuclear Resistance*, written with her late husband Philip Berrigan.

Rev. Steve Kelly, on the eve of his sentencing, declared himself “a political prisoner of conscience for Christ”, pledging not to comply with any terms of release the court may impose on him, adding that, “In conscience, I can’t let any court order or threaten to restrict me from imitation of the Good Shepherd, Jesus, when he placed himself, laying down his life between the wolf, the thief and the flock. In this case, the wolf is the Trident aimed at millions and the thief is the larceny from the poor predicted by Eisenhower in his Oval Office departure”.

Clare Grady offered a powerful presentation of 12 points of personal meditation, and encouraged listening to women, confronting and resisting Trident and the triple evils as fidelity to God and to higher law. She said to Judge Wood, “I believe it is a Christian

A state religion of nuclearism complete with the elements of a religion – including deities and high priests

calling to withdraw consent, interrupt our consent, from killing in our name. To do so is an act of love, an act of justice, a sacred act that brings us into right relationship with God and neighbour. This is what brings me before this court today for sentencing”.

Martha Hennessy presented four character witnesses and then addressed the court, “I stand here as a result of my conviction that calls me to point out that nuclear weapons are illegal ... I am attempting to help transform the fundamental values of public life. I am willing to suffer for the common good and for our sin of not loving our brothers and sisters, a condition that leads to war ... I have no criminal intent; I want to help prevent another nuclear holocaust. The spirit of the law contained in international treaties for disarmament is very clear, to prevent mass murder on an incomprehensible scale”.

She closed her heartfelt sentencing allocution by saying, “In these times of dire economic conditions for millions of US citizens, we can no longer afford this military machine, and must work to save our society’s soul from the seductions of empire. Our manifesto is the

Sermon on the Mount”.

To date, six of the activists have been sentenced. In June, Liz McAlister was sentenced to time served, given the 17 months she had spent in pretrial detention at Glynn County Jail in Georgia.

In October, Steve Kelly was sentenced to 33 months imprisonment, roughly time served. He had been detained from the day of the action until sentencing, which is almost 30 months. He still remains at Glynn County Jail, awaiting transport by US marshalls to Tacoma, Washington, to answer a federal warrant from a previous Plowshares action. Patrick O’Neill was sentenced to 14 months in prison and is due to report in mid-January to begin that sentence.

In November, Carmen Trotta was sentenced to 14 months imprisonment; he expects to begin his sentence in December. Clare Grady was sentenced to 12 months and expects to begin her sentence in February. Martha Hennessy was sentenced to 10 months and expects to begin her sentence in December.

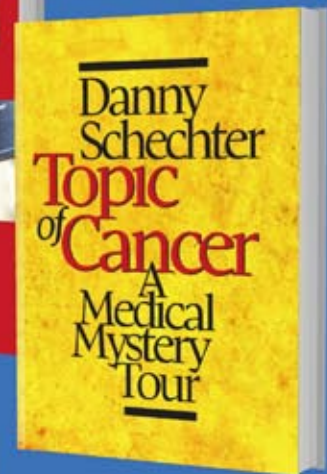
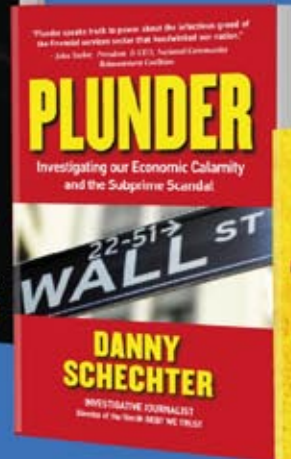
The final defendant, Mark Colville, is scheduled to face Judge Wood for sentencing on Dec. 18.

A line from the song *I Had No Right* by Dar Williams reverberates in my head as I think of the spirit the Kings Bay Plowshares embody with their action, courtroom presence and coming prison witness: “It’s a long road from law to justice”.

CT

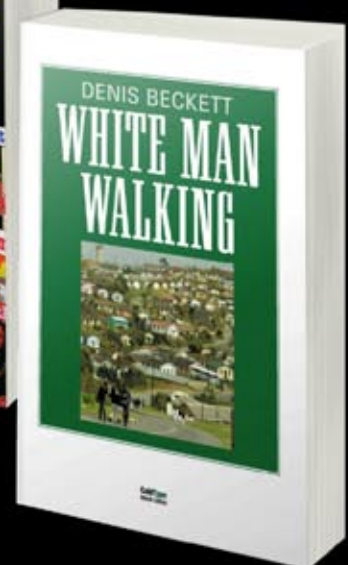
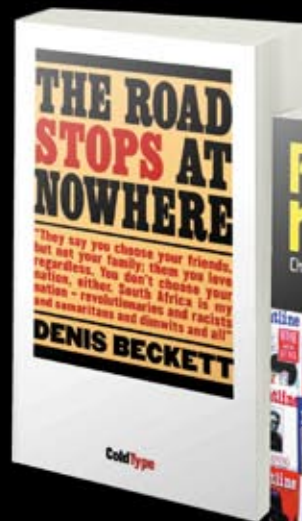
Paul Magno lives at the Jonah House community in Baltimore, MD and is a member of FOR’s National Council. This story was produced by Fellowship of Reconciliation.

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Matthew Brown

Maradona's complicated legacy

Why the English can't let go of the Hand of God and why Latin Americans love it

The death of the greatest player in the history of the game of football, Diego Armando Maradona, on November 25 produced an outpouring of grief and nostalgia around the world. He was such an important figure in his native Argentina that the president declared three days of mourning.

In England, though many have praised his skill and achievements, his death has provided the opportunity to dig up the Hand of God goal at the 1986 World Cup, which involved Maradona's fist knocking the ball into England's goal. For some, even in death, Maradona was still the cheat who could not be forgiven. Yet, it was precisely his refusal to recognise the presumed superiority of the Englishmen flailing before him that gave joy to millions worldwide.

The inability of a few in England to move on from that goal speaks to the historical processes that underpin Britain's relationship with Latin America, which in my research I have characterised as a combination of "culture, capital and commerce that formed an in-



Photo: Wikimedia

CHEAT: The moment of the Hand of God goal against England in 1986.

formal empire" from the mid-19th to the early 20th-century.

The problem is that "football was created in England, but perfected in South America", as the historian Brenda Elsey has written. We saw this when Peru's Teófilo Cubillas punctured Scottish

dreams in 1978 and in Maradona's performance in 1986. Then there was Brazilian Ronaldinho's lob that left English goalkeeper David Seaman questioning gravity and the universe itself at the 2002 World Cup. Britain's relationships with South America have been defined more by football than by anything else.

The Hand of God goal and "Goal of the Century", which came minutes later in the same game, brought joy and spiritual uplift to so many people in Latin America. It represented a "cosmic" rupture in the universal order of things (to quote the classic commentary on the match by Victor Hugo Morales) which up-ended English assumptions of superiority that had been accepted by some elites across the continent. This was particularly the case in Argentina, where English-speaking communities had reached into the hundreds of thousands by the 1980s.

The depth of feeling that accompanies Maradona's death speaks to the abiding sense that he was somehow responsible for a moment



CHAMPION: Maradona holds the World Cup in 1986.

that has acquired spiritual meaning for the way it broke historical patterns.

In his autobiography *Yo Soy El Diego (I Am The Diego)*, Maradona reflected on the World Cup victory over England, which happened in the wake of the war over the Falklands/Malvinas. “Somehow we blamed the English players for everything that had happened, for everything that the Argentinian people had suffered. I know that it sounds crazy but that’s the way we felt. The feeling was stronger than us: we were defending our flag, the dead kids, the survivors”.

Sport, in these terms, had become a surrogate for warfare, an opportunity for the defeated to inflict pain on the victors through whatever means possible. In addition to the Malvinas/Falklands conflict, this sentiment was shaped by the strong British influence on Argentinian economic and cultural life.

Argentinian nationalism was

marked in different ways by the British construction of the railways, as well as the 1890s Baring Bank crisis that nearly bankrupted Argentina and left Britain relatively unscathed. There was also the Harrods luxury shop in Buenos Aires, the polo clubs and the substantial British community in the city and in the pampas (fertile flatlands surrounding Buenos Aires).

In England, the continuing anger that Maradona “got away with it” comes out of the ashes of empire. With historical perspective, we can see the British refusal to relinquish the Falklands/Malvinas in 1982 in its refusal to accept the loss of the match, and subsequently, as part of a reluctance to step back from two centuries of imperial engagement with Latin America.

As many have noted since Maradona’s death, he left a trail of destruction in his wake. He can be seen as a victim of some of the

people who surrounded him, as well as the maker of much of that destruction. The drugs, revolutionary politics, domestic abuse and emotional outbursts, which are the most visible parts of the media narrative, fit snugly into the British stereotype of the combustible Latin American firebrand.

Yet as Argentinian scholars such as Eduardo Archetti and Pablo Alabarces pointed out, football and masculinity were wrapped up together over a century ago. This combination makes Maradona the stand-out figure of a football culture that gloried in the humiliation of the opponent. It saw defeat as a result of feminine weakness while also marvelling at the artistic beauty of the footballer’s body in flight and the perfect arc of the ball as it nestled into the top corner.

As the writer Ayelén Pujol has observed, Maradona’s achievements and his rebellions were an inspiration to millions of marginalised citizens; including the women footballers who today strive to transform the football establishment in their own ways.

With the current prohibition of fans in stadiums due to coronavirus, we are ever more anxious for legends and heroes who will unite us. We long for community and public spaces where we can share moments of joy and sadness together. Diego Maradona was central to many of those moments in the past, and his life will remain a key reference point in the history of the world as a result. **CT**

Matthew Brown is Professor in Latin American History, University of Bristol. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

Sam Pizzigati

Only rich can cheer Wall St's new record

But the nation's woefully inadequate response to the pandemic is jeopardising millions of retirement futures

The all-time record highs that Wall Street registered last month have given some Americans – the nation's already rich – considerable cause for celebration.

And the rest of the nation? Tens of millions of Americans are paying precious little attention to the chirpy tale of Wall Street's ticker. The simple reason: They own no stocks at all. Millions of other Americans who do own stocks don't see any reason to celebrate either. They're finding themselves forced, amid pandemic economic collapse, to start selling the stocks that make up the bulk of their retirement savings.

How best to start understanding this story? The best place to begin: The latest numbers on stock ownership from the Federal Reserve. Fed researchers have been tracking who exactly owns the stocks that trade every business day on Wall Street ever since 1989.

Back nearly 30 years ago, in 1992, the share of stock nationally that belongs to America's poorest half of households hit an all-time high. That "high" amounted to all

of a miniscule 1.6 percent.

How much of America's stock wealth does the bottom 50 percent hold these days? At the end of this past June, the most recent Federal Reserve data point available, the nation's poorest half held less than 1 percent of the nation's stock holdings, just 0.6 percent.

The nation's poorest 90 percent, all combined, now hold just 11.8 percent of the nation's stocks.

Numbers like these help explain why massive numbers of Americans didn't rush out onto the streets to cheer last month when two top Wall Street benchmarks, the Dow Jones industrial average and the S&P 500, hit their own all-time record summits. Shares of stock – either held directly or through mutual funds – make up just 2.3 percent of the total assets of households in the bottom 50 percent and a mere 7.6 percent of the assets the rest of the bottom 90 percent hold.

America's richest 1 percent, on the other hand, have plenty of reason to celebrate Wall Street records. Stock holdings make up

over 40 percent of top 1 percent household wealth. These 1 percenters, overall, hold 52.4 percent of the nation's stock, a share almost five times greater than all the stock that households in the bottom 90 percent hold.

This top 1 percent share has been steadily increasing. Since 1989, the year the Fed started keeping track, the top 1 percent share of the nation's stock holdings has jumped 22 percent. The bottom 90 percent share has dropped 33 percent.

What does that mean in actual dollar terms for average American households? Fed research conducted last year found that 55.8 percent of households in the middle 20 percent of US income-earners hold stocks. The median – most typical – value of these stocks for those average Americans who held them: just \$15,000, down \$1,000 from three years earlier.

And that value is shrinking this year as increasing numbers of Americans start taking advantage of changes Congress made this past spring – via the Covid-19 relief legislation – that let economically reeling Americans under age 59 1/2 withdraw dollars out of their



401(k), IRA, and other retirement accounts without having to take the standard 10 percent early withdrawal penalty.

The Covid-19 calamity, notes Denver CPA Celeste Schimmenti, “has forced many Americans to exhaust their savings and emergency funds”, and that’s left them agonising over whether they’ll need “to dip into retirement savings to cover current expenses”. But dipping into retirement accounts – selling the stocks in these funds – can have a devastating impact on future retirement security. Withdrawing \$10,000 from a 401(k) today can cost a 35-year-old \$100,000 by the time retirement comes around.

The rules around 401(k)s and other retirement accounts have traditionally used penalty fees to discourage cashing out account holdings. In Covid-19 America, with withdrawal penalty fees now off the table for this calendar year, Americans have begun making those withdrawals anyway.

The nation’s largest 401(k) pro-

vider, Fidelity Investments, reports that 5.2 percent of its clients made withdrawals from the start of April through October. Vanguard, another major provider, says the Covid crisis had 4.5 percent of those eligible making withdrawals. T. Rowe Price computes a 7 percent 401(k) raiding rate.

Some analysts are claiming that numbers like these present no real cause for concern. Americans “undeterred by the Covid-19 economic downturn”, writes Ted Godbout for the national association of retirement plan advisors, have “overwhelmingly continued saving for retirement”.

But the trend lines are all going the wrong way. The number of Americans cashing out the stock they hold in their retirement accounts is rising as the income support for average Americans provided through the CARES Act expires. Through May, for instance, fewer than 2 percent of Vanguard 401(k) holders were withdrawing

funds. By the end of the summer, that rate had more than doubled.

By the end of the year, the Employee Benefit Research Institute’s Lori Lucas estimates, 10 percent of Americans with 401(k)s could be raiding their retirement futures.

And those who need Covid economic relief the most – gig and other low-income workers who’ve lost jobs or hours to the pandemic – don’t have retirement accounts to withdraw from. Overall, the Economic Policy Institute reported last year, “nearly half of working-age families have nothing saved in retirement accounts”.

On Wall Street, that reality still doesn’t particularly matter. Let the good times keep rolling. **CT**

Sam Pizzigati co-edits *www.Inequality.org*. His latest 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](#).

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