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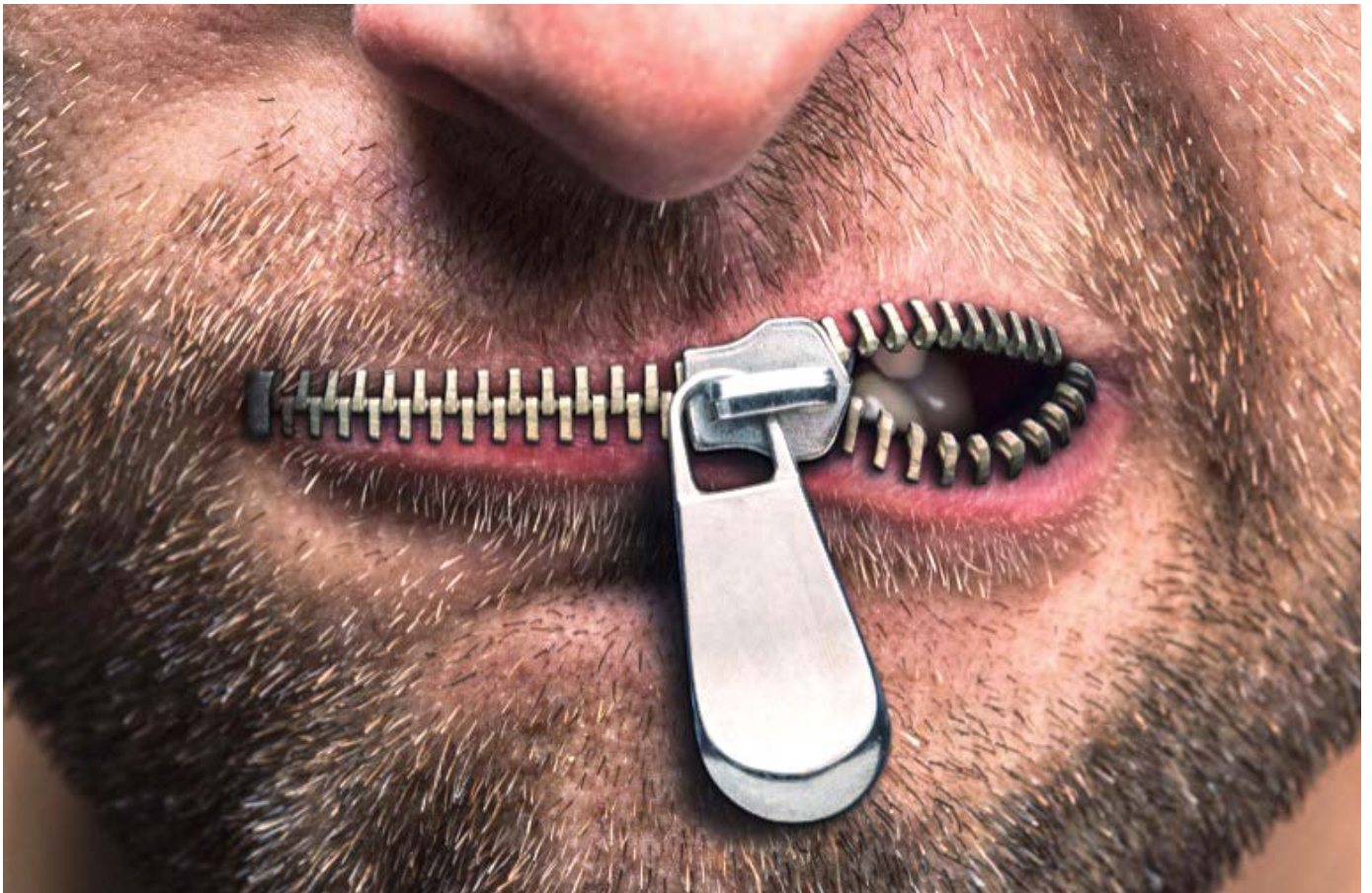
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Issue 237

ColdType

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September 2022



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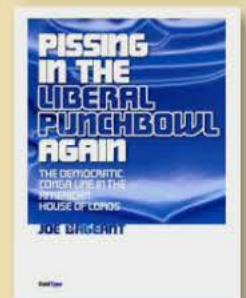
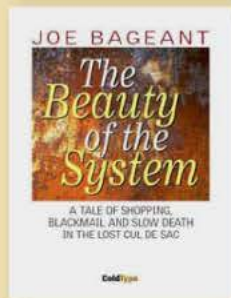
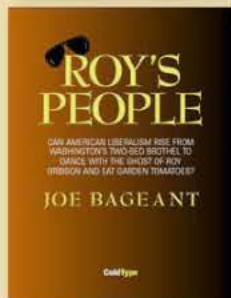
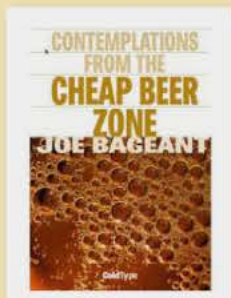
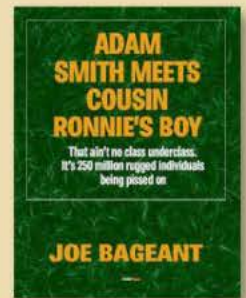
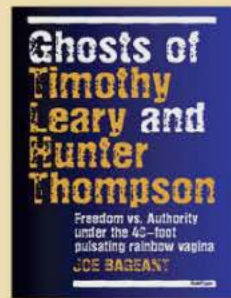
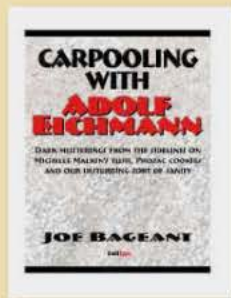
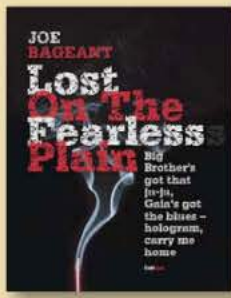
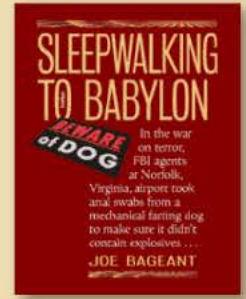
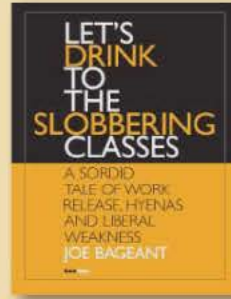
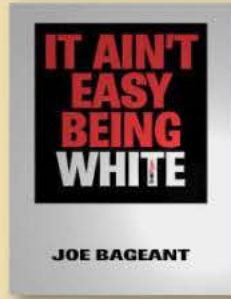
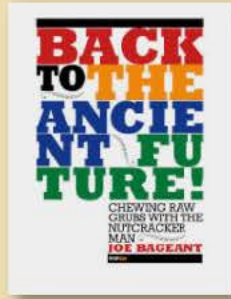
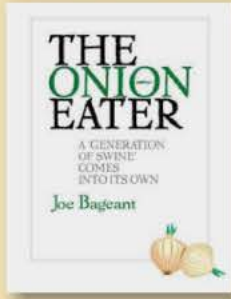
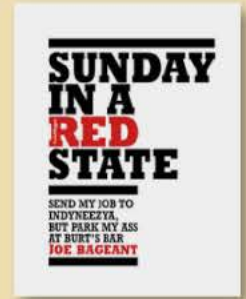
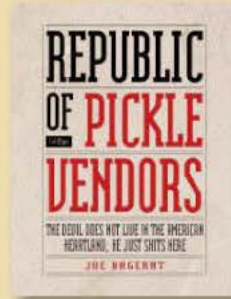
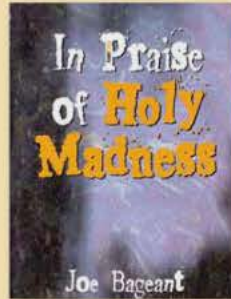
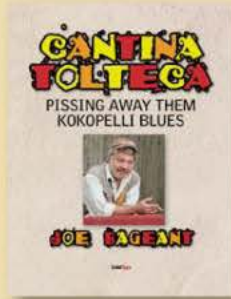
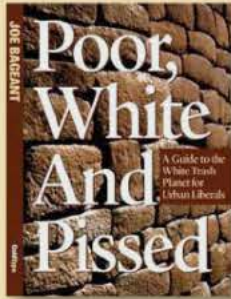
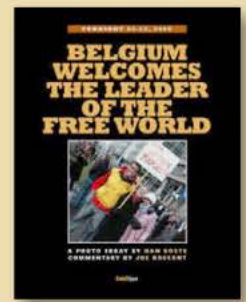
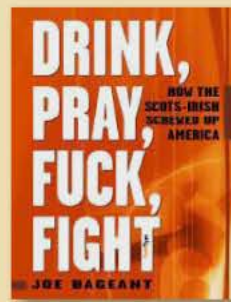
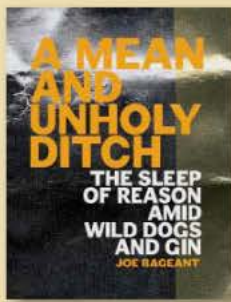
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NEWS | VIEWS | OPINIONS

INSIGHTS

SAM PIZZIGATI

Baseball immortality meets ungodly inequality

The game of baseball's most preternatural young talent, the 23-year-old Juan Soto, has just exited his original team. The Washington Nationals traded him away last week after the young superstar's agent nixed a 15-year, \$440-million contract offer. Soto now figures to snare a substantially larger deal when he hits free-agent status in 2024. His agent, holds the baseball industry scuttlebutt, wants Soto to be the first ballplayer to bust past the sport's \$500-million barrier.

A little financial perspective: The family fortune of the 96-year-old billionaire Nats owner, Ted Lerner, has so far this year jumped by \$365 million, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. In just seven months, the Lerner clan has amassed most of what Soto's agent wants for the rest of his client's entire career. The Lerner's currently have the



Wikimedia Commons

Juan Soto playing baseball for the Washington Nationals.

Nats up for sale. They'll almost certainly collect over \$2 billion when a sale finalises, well over quadruple the \$450-million they paid for the team 16 years ago.

Baseball has always, of course, had wealthy team owners. But the intense concentration of wealth in the United States over the past 50 years has fundamentally altered the sport's landscape.

Back in the much more equal America of the mid-20th-century, owners and fans had a somewhat mutually dependent relationship. Rich people might own baseball's franchises, the industry's movers

and shakers understood, but their teams – to be successful – had to belong to their fans. A franchise simply could not flourish, the conventional wisdom assumed, without support from average families.

That assumption no longer holds. In the exceedingly unequal America that emerged in the 1980s, the economy no longer revolves around average households. In this new America, income and wealth tilt precipitously toward the top, and owners tilt that way, too. Today's owners no longer covet the average fan. The average fan spends only average

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money. The real money, in our much more unequal America, sits in affluent pockets.

Franchise owners have been moving heaven and earth to pick those pockets. A great deal of earth. Bulldozers and backhoes have reconfigured American sports. Deluxe new ballparks have been rising up all across the United States.

These new sports palaces – almost always bankrolled with taxpayer subsidies of one sort or another – have replaced stadiums that still had years of useful life ahead. But the older facilities served a different America. They lacked what owners now crave: luxury accommodations for America's affluent. Ballparks that can't be reconfigured to prominently position luxury seating have simply become obsolete.

Easily affordable seats, in the meantime, have essentially disappeared. Analysts at the Team Marketing Report started tracking a "Fan Cost Index" in the 1990s. These analysts have been calculating how much a typical family of four spends for a day or a night out at the ballpark, including everything from average-price tickets and souvenir caps to hot dogs and parking. By 2002, families were paying an average \$145 to watch a Major League Baseball game in person. The latest tally: an average \$256.

Numbers like these are changing the fan experience. Fans, acting in emotional self-defense, have become consumers. They no longer see sports through the same emotional lens.

"Instead of hoping that your team wins, you begin to demand

it", as sportscaster Bob Costas has noted. "It's like you bought a car and if it doesn't work, you want to know why. When a team doesn't win, instead of disappointment or heartbreak, you now have anger and resentment."

Meanwhile, at the other end of the pro sports spectrum, a new ownership class now dominates. Team owners a half century ago certainly rated as rich, but not nearly as rich as today's billionaire owners. These billionaires see themselves as superstars and credit their business success to their personal superstar status. Success in sports, they assume, must work the same way. Get your team some superstars!

But billionaires can't simply buy success on the ballfield. Ballclubs owe their success, year in and year out, much more to team camaraderie than individual performance, as Matt Bloom, a management expert at the University of Notre Dame, has documented. Bloom subjected nine years' worth of baseball salary and perfor-

mance data to close analysis. His key finding?

"The bigger the pay difference between a team's stars and scrubs", as the *Wall Street Journal* summed up Bloom's findings, "the worse its record."

"Money makes those who pay it resentful and impatient and makes those who receive it feel guilty or inadequate", the now retired ace sportswriter Thomas Boswell once lamented.

"Maybe, someday", Boswell went on to muse, "baseball will attract a core of owners with a sense of balance in their expectations."

Do we have an alternative to simply yearning for a better class of super-rich owners? We sure do. Imagine how good sports could be if we had a society with no super rich at all. **CT**

Sam Pizzigati co-edits *Inequality.org*. His latest books include *The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970*.

GEORGE MONBIOT

Fit to survive another day

Governments tend to define democracy as narrowly as possible. The story they tell goes as follows. You vote. The majority party takes office. You leave it to govern on your be-

half for the next four or five years. If you don't like one of its policies, you can petition your representative, who will put their own ambitions, party loyalty and pressure from powerful interests aside to

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ensure that your voice is heard.

We can trust the government to spend our money wisely; to defend minorities against larger or more powerful groups; to resist undemocratic forces such as oligarchs, the media they control and corporate lobby groups. We can trust it to ensure that everyone's needs are met; that workers are not exploited; that our neighbourhoods and quality of life are not sacrificed to corporate profits. We can trust it not to abuse the political process; not to wage wars of aggression against other nations; not to break the law. There cannot be many people who have lived in the UK – or many other nations – for the past few years and still believe this fairytale.

We have seen what happens if we leave politics to governments. Whether fairly elected or not, they will, without effective public pressure, abuse their power. They will seek to change the political rules to favour their party at the next election. They will subordinate the public interest to the interests of corporations and billionaires. They will hand public money and public assets to court favourites. They will beat up vulnerable groups. They will sacrifice our common future to expediency. And they will impose ever more oppressive laws to bind us.

Trust in governments destroys democracy. Democracy survives only through constant challenge. It requires the endless disruption of the cosy relationship between our representatives and powerful forces: the media, plutocrats, political donors, friends in high places. What challenge and disruption mean, above all, is protest.

Protest is not, as governments like ours seek to portray it, a political luxury. It is the bedrock of democracy. Without it, scarcely any of the democratic rights we now enjoy would exist: the universal franchise; votes for women; civil rights; equality before the law; legal same-sex relationships; progressive taxation; fair conditions of employment; public services and a social safety net. Even the weekend is the result of protest action: in this case strikes by garment workers in the US. A government that cannot tolerate protest is a government that cannot tolerate democracy.



Governments that cannot tolerate democracy are becoming a global norm. In the UK, two policing bills in quick succession seek to shut down all effective forms of protest. They enable the police to stop almost any demonstration on the grounds that it is causing “serious disruption”, a concept drafted so loosely that it could include any kind of noise. They would ban locking on: chaining yourself to railings or other fixtures, that has been a feature of meaningful protest throughout the democratic era. They would ban “interfering” with “key national infrastructure”, which could mean almost anything at all. They greatly expand police stop and

search powers, a highly effective deterrent to civic action by black and brown people, who are disproportionately targeted by these powers. And, astonishingly, they can ban named people from engaging in any protest, on grounds that appear entirely arbitrary. These are dictators' powers.

In the US, state legislatures have been undermining the federal right to protest, empowering the police to use vague, catch-all offences such as “trespass” or “disrupting the peace” to break up demonstrations and arrest the participants. Astonishingly, some proposed laws, in states such as Oklahoma and New Hampshire, have sought to grant immunity to drivers who run over protesters, or to vigilantes who shoot them. In Russia, a new law against “disrespecting the armed forces” has been used to prosecute dissenters making protests as drastic as writing “no to war” in the snow. Similar, draconian laws are being imposed by governments in many other nations.

Why do governments want to ban protest? Because it's effective. Why do they want us to accept their narrow vision of democracy? Because it leaves us powerless.

The disruptive, annoying and inconvenient protests governments seek to ban broaden the scope of democracy. They permit us to challenge malfeasance and resist oppressive policy throughout the political cycle. They are the motor of political change. And they are the early warning system that draws attention to the huge and crucial issues governments tend to neglect.

Almost everything of impor-

INSIGHTS

tance is disintegrating at astonishing speed: ecosystems, the health system, standards in public life, equality, human rights, terms of employment ... It's happening while elections come and go, representatives speak solemnly in Parliament or Congress, earnest letters are written and polite petitions presented. None of this is enough to save us from planetary and democratic collapse. Business as usual is a threat to life on Earth. Disrupting it is a civic duty; the greatest civic duty of all.

They will continue to demonise

us as a threat to the democracy we seek to protect. They will continue to arrest us and to raise the penalties for being a good citizen. And we will continue to come out in defiance, as people have done for centuries, even when faced with extreme state violence and repression. Everything we value depends on it. **CT**

George Monbiot's latest book is *Regenesis: Feeding the World Without Devouring the Planet*. Read more of Monbiot's work at www.monbiot.com.

and days before Joe Biden was inaugurated to replace him, former President Donald Trump put Cuba back on the list on January 12, 2021. The comments made by then-U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo provide a strange justification for this action: despite Cuba having been removed from the list in 2015, five years previously, Pompeo said that “[f]or decades, the Cuban government has fed, housed, and provided medical care for murderers, bombmakers, and hijackers.”

The phrase “for decades” suggests that the Trump administration went back beyond 2015, not assessing the situation in Cuba during the five years since it was removed from the list but going back to an era before Obama’s action. There was no new evidence of anything having changed since 2015, which showed that Trump’s actions were purely political (to curry favour with the hard-right wing that continues to want to conduct regime change in Cuba and to nullify as many of Obama’s policies as possible).

The United States has carried out a blockade against Cuba since 1959 when the Cuban Revolution began a process to transform the country that was ruled by gangsters (including the US mafia) into a country that tended to the needs of its people. The revolution developed programs for literacy and health care and for building up the cultural confidence of the people long suppressed by Spanish and US colonialism. The United States elite was eager to snuff out the example of Cuba, which showed that even a poor country could transcend the socioeconomic

WATERS, PRASHAD & SANTOS

Time to remove Cuba from terror list

The United States maintains a list of countries that it considers as “state sponsors of terrorism.” There are currently four countries on that list: Cuba, North Korea, Iran and Syria. The basic idea behind this list is that the US State Department determines that these countries have “provided support for acts of international terrorism.” Evidence about those “acts” are not provided by the US government. For Cuba, there is not one shred of evidence that the government has offered any such support to terrorism activities, in fact, Cuba has – since 1959 – been a victim of acts of terrorism by the United States, including an attempted invasion in 1961 (Bay of Pigs) and repeated assassi-

nation attempts against its leaders (638 times against Fidel Castro).

Cuba, rather than exporting weapons around the world, has a long history of medical internationalism with Cuban doctors and medicines being a familiar sight from Pakistan to Peru. In fact, there is an international campaign for Cuban doctors to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Why would a country that floods the world with health care be targeted as a state sponsor of terrorism?

Cuba was not on the state sponsor of terrorism list from 2015 onward, when President Barack Obama removed Cuba from that list (it was first added to the list in 1982 by President Ronald Reagan). In his last week in office,

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conditions of poverty. Each year since 1992, almost all the countries in the world – 184 out of 193 at last count – vote in the United Nations General Assembly to condemn the blockade of Cuba.

The designation of Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism by the United States deeply harms the ability of the Cuban government and its people from carrying on with the basic functions of life. The immense power of the United States government over the world financial system means that banks and traders refuse to do business with Cuba since they are afraid of retaliation by the United States government for breaking the blockade.

It is stunning to learn that because of this blockade, and despite the murmurs from the US government about medical exceptions, firms refuse to sell Cuba raw materials, reactive agents, diagnostic kits, pharmaceutical drugs and devices, and a range of other materials necessary for operating Cuba's excellent but stressed public science and health care system.

US President Joe Biden can remove Cuba from this list with a stroke of his pen. It's as simple as that. When he was running for the presidency, Biden said he would even reverse the harsher of Trump's sanctions and revert to the policies of the Obama administration. But he has not done so, which might be for reasons of political expediency. There is a streak of vindictiveness that runs through US policies against Cuba, an island that proved during the pandemic that its revolutionary process cares for its people. The



Jorge Royan

example of public health care in Cuba, despite being a small island nation, should be exported around the world. The country is not a state sponsor of terrorism but a state sponsor of global well-being.

This article was produced by Globetrotter. CT

Roger Waters is a musician. He is in the midst of his tour, *This is Not a Drill*.

Vijay Prashad is an Indian

historian, editor and journalist. He is a writing fellow and chief correspondent at *Globetrotter*. He is an editor of *LeftWord Books* and the director of *Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research*. He is a senior non-resident fellow at *Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, Renmin University of China*. He has written more than 20 books, including *The Darker Nations* and *The Poorer Nations*. His latest books are *Struggle Makes Us Human: Learning from Movements for Socialism* and (with Noam Chomsky) *The Withdrawal: Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and the Fragility of US Power*.

Manolo de los Santos is the co-executive director of the *People's Forum* and is a researcher at *Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research*. He co-edited, most recently, *Viviremos: Venezuela vs. Hybrid War* (*LeftWord Books/1804 Books*, 2020) and *Comrade of the Revolution: Selected Speeches of Fidel Castro* (*LeftWord Books/1804 Books*, 2021). He is a co-coordinator of the *People's Summit for Democracy*.

SANYA OSHER

The significance of Lumumba's tooth

Patrice Lumumba is the hero of the Democratic Republic of Congo's truncated bid for complete independence. He was assassinated by local counter-

revolutionary forces with the help of the CIA and Belgian authorities in 1961. Since then, all over the developing world, Lumumba's name has come to stand for defi-

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ance against colonialism and imperialism.

The manner of his death was particularly distressing. He was humiliated and tortured before he was murdered. His body was then doused with acid to facilitate decomposition. A Belgian official reportedly kept his teeth as mementos as if to add another grisly and macabre dimension to the entire sordid affair.

The return of Lumumba's tooth after 61 years leaves many questions unanswered and threatens to open a can of worms. This inordinately belated gesture came without a formal apology for the damage caused by Belgian colonialism or a pledge of wide-ranging reparations.

Ever since his death, it seems the ghost of Lumumba has plagued his aggrieved country, first with the tortuous and bizarre reign of Mobutu Sese Seko and then with Laurent Kabila.

But it was under Belgian colonial rule that the plunder of the Congo began in earnest. King Leopold II, bloated with colonial self-righteousness, instituted a reign of devastation that left an estimated 10 million people dead. Rubber plantations were transformed into a hell in which the enslaved who didn't meet their production quotas had their limbs chopped off. Since then, the DRC has been gripped by a delirium of dense, impenetrable, equatorial traumas.

Indigenes of the DRC have always been used as disposable pawns in their externally foisted tragedies. And these tragedies

have descended on them as thickly as their famed tropical forests.

What are we to make of the ordeal of Ota Benga, for example, the Congolese teenager who, on account of his unusual teeth, was captured and relentlessly exhibited in the anthropological zoos of America? Treated like a performing monkey, he experienced the most heartless form of visual cannibalism, physical humiliation



Edward Knapczyk

Patrice Lumumba

and psychological torture. Would his teeth be returned to the DRC as well?

Indeed, the handing over of Lumumba's tooth represents a gesture of reparation; the return of pilfered colonial goods to the rightful owners. But what about the tooth's attendant torture? This much delayed political gesture broaches difficult issues surrounding the African quest for genuine reparations from erstwhile colonial overlords.

The world's richest country

The current plight of the DRC – all but a failed state – makes us weep over its enduring state of abjection. A huge country blessed with innumerable natural

resources, with some of the rarest and most important minerals of earth, it remains crippled by conflict and plunder of its vast natural resources.

It is certain that if Lumumba had been allowed to pursue his bold project of emancipation and development, the DRC story would have been vastly different.

It is almost impossible to understand why the potentially richest country in the world remains one of the poorest.

And yet the wealth of the DRC continues to shine through the accomplishments of its talented people. Out of depleted and crumbling infrastructure, governmental emasculation and chronic interne-cine strife, miraculously, creative excellence continues to emerge.

How can one ever forget the timeless music of guitarist Franco Luamabo, vocalists Tabu Ley and M'bilis Bel, singer-songwriter Fally Ipupa and so many other Congolese musical geniuses

Or the accomplishments of phenomenal scholars such as Congolese philosopher V.Y. Mudimbe, whose work singularly redefined the manner in which the west came to understand Africa? Mudimbe reconfigures your mind every time you encounter him. Yet the inhospitality of the DRC keeps him secluded in the US. The rest of the world continues to benefit from Congolese talents and minerals while the country itself regresses.

The eclectic and boisterous urban culture that produced the Congolese rumba and soukous out of the potholed streets of Kinshasa also birthed visual artists such as Monsengwo Kejwamfi "Moke",

INSIGHTS

Cheri Cherin, Chéri Samba, Patrick Mutombo, Marthe Ngandu and many others.

Collectively, their works capture and reflect the life and energy to be found in the DRC's frenetic and teeming postcolonial metropolises. But there is a snag. These largely self-taught artists were cut off from their precolonial artistic heritage due to the violence of the colonial encounter.

As in many other parts of Africa, over 2,000 works of art stolen from what is now the DRC remain in the museums of Europe. These works are not merely aesthetic and symbolic. They are also central to the continuation of integrated cultural evolution. In addition, they encompass swathes of history and tradition spanning millennia. The return of those stolen pieces of cultural heritage and

an awareness of what they truly represent would be a starting point for meaningful reparations for the past.

Ultimately, beyond its cosmetic or even symbolic value, the gesture of returning Lumumba's violated tooth ought to lead to a considerable degree of healing the DRC so desperately needs, in organic, broadly and deeply conceived ways. This means acts of reparations must not only be loaded in meaning but must also be essentially transformative in nature. In other words, they must include socioeconomic and cultural deliverables.. **CT**

Sanya Osha is Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Humanities in Africa, University of Cape Town. This article was first published at www.theconversation.com.

becoming a commentary on Russia's entire propaganda network without bothering to articulate how Dugina's death "provides a glimpse" into its workings.

Without the slightest hint of self-reflection or irony, this CNN article about Russian propaganda cites as its two main experts a think tanker from the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab and a think tanker from the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA). The Atlantic Council is a NATO narrative management firm that is funded by NATO, the US government, the UK government, various other US-aligned states, the arms industry, and numerous billionaires. CEPA's donor list looks similar to the Atlantic Council's and includes US arms manufacturers and the US government through both the US State Department and the CIA cutout National Endowment for Democracy. Both are used to promote the information interests of the US-centralised power alliance in Europe and North America.

As we've discussed previously, the way news media cite corrupt warmongering think tanks to discuss foreign policy without ever mentioning their immense conflicts of interests is plainly journalistic malpractice. But this practice is ubiquitous throughout the western news media because western news media are propaganda outlets.

The article cites RT, the Internet Research Agency, and something called United World International as examples of "Russia's vast disinformation machine", despite every one of those institutions having a degree of influence that is the exact opposite of "vast" in the

CAITLIN JOHNSTONE

Duped by the West's insane propaganda war

One of the weirdest, most insane things happening today is the way the entire western world is being trained to freak out about "Russian propaganda" – which barely exists in the west – while ignoring the fact that we are spending every day marinating in billions of dollars worth of US empire propaganda.

CNN has an article out titled

"Darya Dugina's death provides a glimpse into Russia's vast disinformation machine – and the influential women fronting it" on the recently assassinated daughter of Alexander Dugina, a Russian political thinker of wildly exaggerated influence.

The article uses Dugina's assassination to further stoke its audience's ever-growing panic about Russian disinformation, quickly

INSIGHTS

western world. In 2017 RT accounted for all of 0.04 percent of total TV viewership in the UK. A study found that the much-touted US “election interference” campaign by the Internet Research Agency in 2016 consisted mostly of posts that had nothing to do with the election and comprised “approximately 1 out of 23,000 pieces of content” seen on Facebook. I’d be surprised if anyone reading this has ever even heard of United World International, and CNN’s own article acknowledges that before that outlet was banned from western social media its accounts only ever had a few thousand followers.

Compare those paltry numbers to the nonstop barrage of empire propaganda that westerners are fed every day of their lives by every news media outlet of significant influence – whose coverage of the Ukraine war has eclipsed that of all recent wars the US has been directly involved in – and it becomes clear that this message we’re being fed that we all need to panic about Russian propaganda is itself propaganda.

The CNN write-up criticises RT editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan for saying in 2012, “When Russia is at war, we are, of course, on the side of Russia”. As though CNN ever sides against the US during US wars. Not only does CNN consistently take the side of the US government in every single war, it conducts brazen propaganda operations to help start new ones, like the time it staged a scripted interview with a small Syrian child calling for US military interventionism in Syria.

The only difference between Russian state media and US state media is that Russian state media is honest about what it is.

This wave of nonsensical, artificially created panic about Russian disinformation has been used to dismiss any and all information which comes out that casts the US empire and its lackeys in a negative light as Russian propaganda or the work of Russian agents. We’ve seen this over and over again, from the way Julian Assange has been falsely cast as a Kremlin operative to the way indie media are



falsely framed as Russian propaganda operations.

The latest example of this deception is the way incriminating leaked emails of prominent British figures published by *The Grayzone* have been dismissed in a new *Politico* hit piece as a dishonest representation of emails obtained by Russian hackers per “the Russian playbook”. *Grayzone* staff hastened to point out that not only does the *Politico* article fail to grapple with the rather important question of what the leaked emails actually contain, but that it failed to men-

tion that its primary source is a UK Foreign Office veteran and psyops specialist who has a publicly stated vendetta to get *The Grayzone* censored online.

The manufactured hysteria about a nonexistent epidemic of Russian propaganda in the west has people so blinkered and confused that it’s become impossible to criticise the most powerful government in the world for its planet-threatening brinkmanship with a rival nuclear superpower on any online forum without getting accused of being a secret agent

for the Kremlin. My own social media notifications are continuously lit up with accusations of Putin loyalty and rubles in my bank account just for criticising the most dangerous impulses of the most powerful and destructive government on earth, despite never having worked for Russia or any other government.

What’s funny about all this is that by constantly warning of the dangers

of Russian propaganda, imperial spinmeisters are admitting that they know it’s possible to manipulate public thought at mass scale using media. They’re just lying about who’s doing it to us.

In reality, they’re not worried about Russian propaganda. “Russian propaganda” is just a spooky story we are told to keep us from noticing that our civilisation is saturated in US propaganda.. **CT**

Caitlin Johnstone is an Australian blogger. Find more of her work at www.caitlinjohnstone.com.

INSIGHTS

JIM HIGHTOWER

Franchises are paying workers chicken feed

America's stringent system of corporate capitalism keeps carving out new depths of worker exploitation. Take Chick-fil-A – a right-wing, Atlanta-based fast-food operation that likes to boast about following “biblically-based” principles.

Like slavery?

Well, Chick-fil-A hasn't gone quite that Biblical yet, but one of its North Carolina franchises recently pioneered a novel labour compensation innovation that comes close: literally paying some workers “chicken feed.”

This outlet of the \$11-billion-a-year chain recently called on area residents to “volunteer” for its new Drive Thru Express – but in lieu of wages, they were offering chicken sandwiches! Join the Express team and you'd be “paid” five chicken items per shift.

That worked out to less than minimum wage... plus indigestion.

What we have here is one more absurd illustration of the empty promise that you'll get ahead if you just work hard enough, keep your nose to the grindstone, and stay loyal to the corporate order for life – no matter how vacuous.

But the game is up, for workers across the economy are now seeking more from life than 50 years of serving the company. They're

Wikimedia



even organizing anti-workaholism groups like “I don't want a career,” “Rest is Resistance,” and the “Nap Ministry.”

But don't mistake this rebellion as mere satire by a few puckish slackers. Today's nationwide

shortage of workers from truck drivers to teachers is not a momentary economic blip, but a defiant declaration of independence from a form of work that is life-sucking.

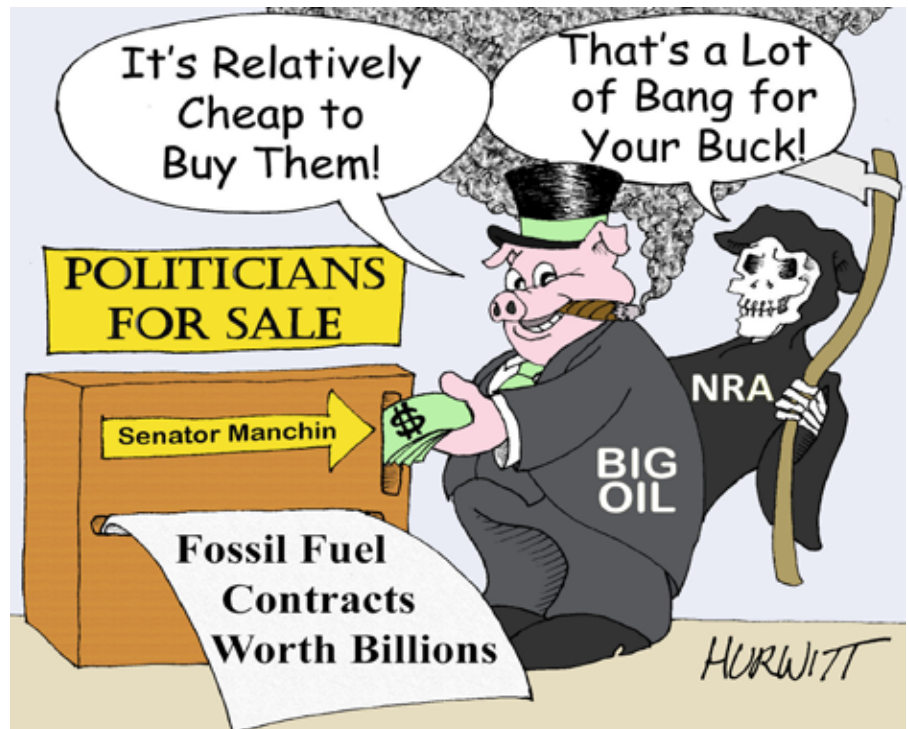
People are not afraid of hard work, nor averse to long hours – if the task and the cause are worth both time and effort. And “worth it” is increasingly being measured in higher values than dollars alone.

Fair compensation means work that includes a sense of purpose, community, respect, fairness, and fun. In short, true worthiness... not a chicken sandwich. **CT**

Jim Hightower is a radio commentator, writer, and public speaker. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

HURWITT'S EYE

MARK HURWITT



TREVOR GRUNDY

Inside a world of upper-class espionage and treachery

New book gives insights into the way MI5 'monitored' upper-class communist wannabes before and after the World War II

The historian and journalist David Caute is a man of the Left. He knows the former Communist world well but has never been a party member or one of its subterfuge acolytes.

In his new book *Red List*, Caute draws on recently de-classified files held at the National Archives (TNA) at Kew in south-west London, to tell the truth about those men and women in MI5 and MI6 who, so many novelists say, were there to guard us while we sleep.

They were tasked with investigating, monitoring and preventing subversion, defined as “activities designed to undermine or overthrow parliamentary democracy by political, violent or industrial means.”

Caute, the author of several seminal works on Africa and a biography of Franz Fanon, tells of the state operation to monitor the activities of a small number of journalists, academics and scientists considered by MI5 and its controllers as candidates for subversion.

When history ended (ho hum),

according to the American political specialist Francis Fukuyama in his 1992 *The End of History and the Last Man*, many people of the so-called left of British politics were certain that for several decades MI5 had abused its powers by monitoring the legal activities of patriotic activists who dared speak openly about subjects they should have been quiet about.

In 400-plus pages, David Caute gives us the names and sketches short profiles of some of the 200 men and women who had been targeted by MI5.

Red List is divided into six chronological sections, with three pages of acronyms, and an introduction by the author. Here is a book that cries out for photographs but sadly the only ones we get are on the front cover. And some of the names mentioned in the text are not included in the index, George Orwell one of them.

Some of the people under MI5's microscope are household names even today, including novelists Doris Lessing and George Orwell

and Christopher Isherwood, poets W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender and C. Day-Lewis, and the singer Paul Robeson.

Others who are not so well-known now but famous in their day include Arthur Ransome, J.B. Priestley, Kingsley Amis, Dorothy Hodgkin, Jacob Bronowski, John Berger, Benjamin Britten, Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, Michael Redgrave, Joan Littlewood, Joseph Losey, Michael Foot, Harriet Harman, P.M.S. Blackett, Joseph Needham, E.P Thompson, Harold Laski, C.L.R. James, Bruce Kent.

(Note to the reader: Look them up on Google. To detail them here would take up too much space).

This is a fascinating, well-written book that should be on the shelves of libraries throughout the land as young, inexperienced politicians who have read Fleming and le Carre but who are unfamiliar with the real world of intrigue and espionage get ready to cope in an isolated post-Brexit Britain which is open to internal as well as external threats.

The book's main selling point



is the widespread belief that MI5 did a Stasi job on so many British intellectuals. Phones were tapped, letters opened, and sexual activities put under the microscope by people with little to do other than glue their eyeballs to the keyholes of upper-class bedroom doors.

The main motive of the those monitored was to bring about a proletarian revolution. However, only a handful of people with working-class credentials appear in this book, for Caute makes clear that if you had a good Oxford voice you were “on side”, but if you spoke showing less salubrious roots, you were most certainly from the wrong side of the track, a possible danger to King/Queen and country.

R*ed List* is never short of background material. When in 1908 the Secret Service Bureau (later MI5) was formed, its principals Commander Mansfield Cummings and Captain Vernon Kell were less concerned with the spread of Bol-

shevism than threat of the Kaiser’s agents.

Caute tells us that the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) was active during that horrendous confrontation between Germany and the rest of the world (1914-1918) and granted powers to censor news and detain, or restrict movements of individuals, without due process of law.

Punitive measures did not need the consent of Parliament, only Order of Council authorised by DORA. Very few editors objected. Magna Carta was operative, it seems, only until it was most needed.

Caute writes, “For Kell, who was to head MI5 until the onset of the Second World War, secrecy and its cousin anonymity, were paramount. Parliament and the Press obliged. The security and intelligence services did not officially exist and their personnel, whether officer or support staff (largely upper-class women) were forbidden to disclose where they worked even to their families.”

MI5 faced little opposition from the Labour Party during the build-

up to war in 1939 and Caute explains that the main dissenting opposition came from the small Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Stop the War Committee.

So many of the people put under MI5’s microscope came from well-off middle to upper-middle class families. When they were young, many of them had their first taste of the world outside the nursery and away from nanny when they went to Eton, Harrow, Winchester College.

Then, when they were 18- or 19-years-old, off they went to Oxford and Cambridge where, as children of the rich, they became champions and self-appointed leaders of the poor, about whom they knew next to nothing. But they knew when university (where life-long loves and feuds were born) ended that they could return to their nursery nests where nanny would be there loving and worrying, that the clock would still be stuck at ten to three and there would be honey for tea.

Caute writes, “Typically, they

(those who fell under the suspicion of MI5) were unafraid to express dissenting views of the national interest. Most were perceived by MI5 as guilty by association, real or imagined, with the Communist Party and the Soviet Union.

Together they constitute MI5's invisible Red List.

At one point in the 1930s, W.H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood and Stephen Spender were suspected of feeding top security stuff to the Soviet Union. Ironically, all three ended-up as pillars of the English literary establishment: Auden a colonel in the American Intelligence Services during World War II, Isherwood an upper-class novelist in America, and Spender appointed Poet Laureate by the USA Library of Congress in 1965.

Today, Isherwood and Auden are poster-boys in the gay community, thanks to a poem by Auden in the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and the musical *Cabaret*, based on Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*.

The long-serving Communist Cyril Connolly was still working for the *Sunday Times* when he died in 1974; and the daddy of them all, Marxist academic Eric Hobsbawm turned turtle and batted for the other side. Caute shows how, in the pages of "designer-socialist" journal *Marxism Today*, the Jewish academic who adored and never criticised Stalin urged the Labour Party of Neil Kinnock to abandon its sectarians and extremists, come to terms with reality, operate in a market economy and go along with its capitalist requirements.

The words of that other Marx – Groucho – must have taken over: "These are my principles. If you don't like them, I have others."

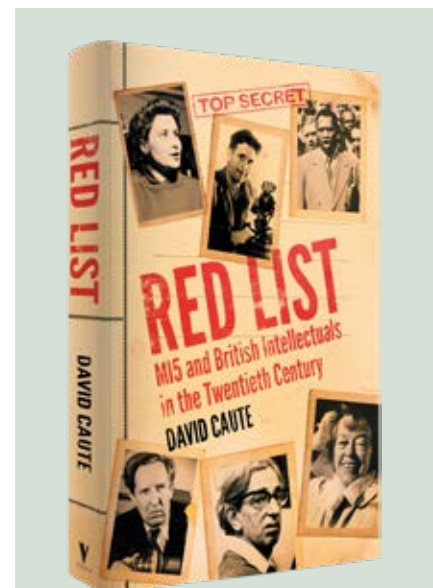
Comments Caute, "It is difficult to explain why the MI5 files released in 2014 should terminate in

Men and women educated at the finest universities money and contacts could afford were stunned to find out that Stalin killed people

1963, when Hobsbawm was only forty-six and had a further fifty increasingly influential years ahead of him as a Marxist luminary."

If these were the enemies of British democracy, it would be embarrassing to meet its friends.

In his review of *Red List* in the *Spectator*, respected historian Alan Judd writes, "Most of the files are boring, largely comprising press cuttings, attendance lists, police reports, gossip from the (bugged)



RED LIST

MI5 and British Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century
David Caute

Verso – www.versobooks.com
£25.00

headquarters of the Communist party and the opinions of colleagues. The truth which emerges is that many of these people were initially thought to be worth looking at because they were active members of the Communist Party, or sympathetic to it, and were in positions to threaten national security."

Very few of those named did anything of significance. And changing minds in the 1950s was common. Men and women educated at the finest universities money and contacts could afford were stunned to find out that Stalin actually killed people.

George Orwell despised these here-today-gone-tomorrow tourists of the revolution. He believed their main aim was to dip toes into places where leftists supported local revolutions, stick around for a week or two, write a book before returning home to check their bank account.

What would any of them add up to when it was all over and revolution turned into reality?

The great historian Arnold Toynbee wrote about the French revolution in his *Introduction to The Gods of Revolution* by Christopher Dawson (Sidgwick & Jackson, London 1972): "While the ideologues and the terrorists occupied the foreground of the stage, the background gave ample room for people whose main concern was not either theories or massacres, but the sly acquisition of real estate on advantageous terms."

Show me a man or woman who ever got close to the aftermath of a revolution who'd disagree with that.

So, the MI5 suspects did nothing new when they fled from the barricades and returned home sadder, some even wiser.

The literary critic William Epton wrote a poem mocking the political postures of young writers such as

those in Auden's circle of mainly homosexual friends that is a catalogue of their useless gestures:

Waiting for the end, boys, waiting for the end.

What is there to be or do?

What's become of me or you?

Are we kind or are we true?

Sitting two and two, boys, waiting for the end.

The story of George Orwell and his denunciation of so many of his erstwhile socialist colleagues in the late 1940s is worth a book on its own. I have always found it odd that an ex-Etonian and former colonial policeman should be a guru for British socialists. That Orwell detested and mocked Stalinists is well-known. Anyone who has read *Homage to Catalonia* knows why. But what he did in 1949 shortly before his death, takes away the breath of even his most fervent admirers.

The Foreign Office-designed Information Research Department (IRD) was a propaganda unit set up by the Labour Government in 1948.

It fed stories to journalists and the BBC, who put them out as the voice of truth, building belief that the World Service of the BBC spoke truth to power fearlessly.

While he was receiving treatment for tuberculosis in March 1949, Orwell wrote down the names of individuals he once knew and worked with but whom he now branded as "fellow travellers" (FTs), admirers of Moscow who might do harm to Britain as the Cold War arrived. The list, in which Orwell names 135 well known writers and artists, didn't become public until 2003, although the media had known about it for several years before it was officially made public.

"I think George was quite right

Auden must have felt a twinge of regret when he re-examined things he had said and written in the 1930s

to do it", said Celia Kirwan, one of Orwell's few close friends and sister-in-law of the novelist Arthur Koestler (*Darkness at Noon*) who visited the author of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* at his sanatorium.

She said, "And, of course, everyone thinks that these people were going to be shot at dawn. The only thing that was going to happen to them was that they wouldn't be asked to write for the IRD."

Red List is full of these small but significant details. MI5 rumbled and grumbled along with a help from its class soaked stooges who believed you were suspect if you spoke like Michael Caine but "onside" if you had the accent, wit and charm of a Guy Burgess.

Clothed in a cloak of red, white and blue, none of the monitors has written memoirs. If they had tears to shed, they won't be shedding them now – The Official Secrets Act makes sure of that. But Auden was a special case as a naturalised American. He must have felt a twinge of regret when he re-examined things he had said and written in the 1930s, a short period of time which in his poem *September 1, 1939* he branded "a low dishonest decade."

He had at long last found the courage to wonder if his plays and poems called for a British form of

fascism, not communism.

One of the cleverest things the Soviets ever did in that "low dishonest decade" was get hold of, honour, flatter and pay heavyweights from Cambridge University. Burgess, Maclean, Philby and Blunt, were just four of them. Who in the establishment would ever suspect these well-educated, typical Englishmen of treason?

The words of Lady Bracknell in Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Ernest* spring to mind. When she was told there was a liar in her family, she screeched, "My nephew, Algeron? Impossible! He is an Oxonian."

So, who is to say that the British didn't do the same, choosing polished, well-mannered intellectuals with social clout and connection to pose as people dangerous to the British state while one of its main security wings waved them towards feeble minded members of the next to useless British Communist Party?

What a book that would be for David Caute, or someone like him, someone willing to lift rocks and stones and see what's under them.

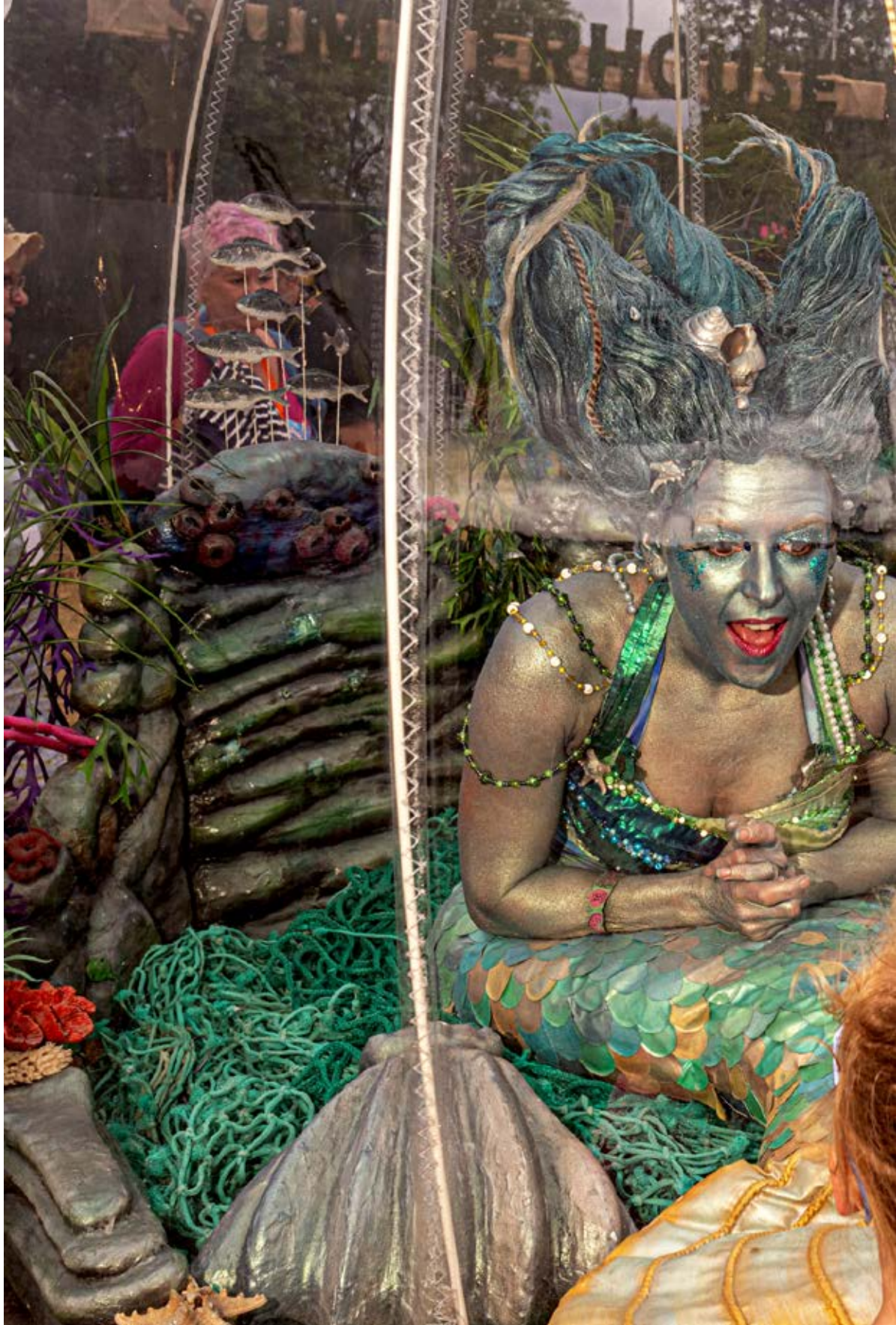
But that depends on things changing at the National Archives at Kew. Will someone say "enough is enough" and open up the vaults of secrecy and reveal the other embarrassing secrets that this sad, declining, isolated country led by fools has to hide?

It should happen. It will happen. But when? Don't hold your breath. **CT**

Trevor Grundy is an English journalist who worked in Central, Eastern and Southern Africa from 1966-1996. He is a life member of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Commonwealth Journalists Association (CJA).

GLASTONBURY

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PHOTOS BY DOUGIE WALLACE

Britain's most famous musical extravaganza, the Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Arts, first held in 1970, was high on the nation's summer agenda again this summer after being curtailed for the past two years by the Covid crisis.

200,000 fans gathered for the five-day event held at Worthy Farm in Somerset in south-western England from June 22-26, watching performances by a galaxy of superstars headlined by old-time icons Paul McCartney, Diana Ross, Hendrick Lamar, and contemporary stars such as Billie Eilish, Megan Thee Stallion and Wet Leg.

Past festivals have been marred by heavy rain creating hellish conditions for mud-spattered campers who tried to find joy in a camaraderie of swampy fields and bad sound systems. But this year global warming came to their rescue – the weather was restrained, only interrupted by mild showers. The photographs on these and the following pages were provided by internationally acclaimed London-based photographer Dougie Wallace, who made his first visit to Glastonbury, to find the soul of the event – created by the exuberant fans, not the performers. **CT**

(Photos shot for the Guardian newspaper)









● See more of Dougie Wallace's work at www.dougiwallace.com

CHRIS HEDGES

Permanent war means permanent censorship

There is little ostensible reason for censoring critics of the war in Ukraine. The US is not at war with Russia. No US troops are fighting in Ukraine

No one, including the most bullish supporters of Ukraine, expect the nation's war with Russia to end soon. The fighting has been reduced to artillery duels across hundreds of miles of front lines and creeping advances and retreats. Ukraine, like Afghanistan, will bleed for a very long time. This is by design. On August 24, the Biden administration announced yet another massive military aid package to Ukraine worth nearly \$3-billion. It will take months, and in some cases years, for this military equipment to reach Ukraine.

In another sign that Washington assumes the conflict will be a long war of attrition it will give a name to the US military assistance mission in Ukraine and make it a separate command overseen by a two- or three-star general.

Since August 2021, Biden has approved more than \$8-billion in weapons transfers from existing stockpiles, known as drawdowns, to be shipped to Ukraine, which do not require Congressional approval.

Including humanitarian assistance, replenishing depleting US weapons stocks and expanding US troop presence in Europe, Congress has approved over \$53.6-billion (\$13.6-billion in March and a further

\$40.1-billion in May) since Russia's February 24 invasion.

War takes precedence over the most serious existential threats we face. The proposed budget for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in fiscal year 2023 is \$10.675-billion while the proposed budget for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is \$11.881-billion. Our approved assistance to Ukraine is more than twice these amounts.

The militarists who have waged permanent war costing trillions of dollars over the past two decades have invested heavily in controlling the public narrative. The enemy, whether Saddam Hussein or Vladimir Putin, is always the epitome of evil, the new Hitler. Those we support are always heroic defenders of liberty and democracy. Anyone who questions the righteousness of the cause is accused of being an agent of a foreign power and a traitor.

The mass media cravenly disseminates these binary absurdities in 24-hour news cycles. Its news celebrities and experts, universally drawn from the intelligence community and military, rarely deviate from the approved script. Day and

night, the drums of war never stop beating. Its goal: to keep billions of dollars flowing into the hands of the war industry and prevent the public from asking inconvenient questions.

In the face of this barrage, no dissent is permitted. CBS News caved to pressure and retracted its documentary which charged that only 30 percent of arms shipped to Ukraine were making it to the front lines, with the rest siphoned off to the black market, a finding that was separately reported upon by US journalist Lindsey Snell. CNN has acknowledged there is no oversight of weapons once they arrive in Ukraine, long considered the most corrupt country in Europe. According to a poll of executives responsible for tackling fraud, completed by Ernst & Young in 2018, Ukraine was ranked the ninth-most corrupt nation from 53 surveyed.

There is little ostensible reason for censoring critics of the war in Ukraine. The US is not at war with Russia. No US troops are fighting in Ukraine. Criticism of the war in Ukraine does not jeopardise our national security. There are no long-standing cultural and historical ties to Ukraine, as there are to Great Britain. But if permanent war, with potentially tenuous public support, is the primary objective, censorship



makes sense.

War is the primary business of the US empire and the bedrock of the US economy. The two ruling political parties slavishly perpetuate permanent war, as they do austerity programs, trade deals, the virtual tax boycott for corporations and the rich, wholesale government surveillance, the militarisation of the police and the maintenance of the largest prison system in the world. They bow before the dictates of the militarists, who have created a state within a state.

This militarism, as Seymour Melman writes in *The Permanent War Economy: American Capitalism in Decline*, “is fundamentally

contradictory to the formation of a new political economy based upon democracy, instead of hierarchy, in the workplace and the rest of society.”

“The idea that war economy brings prosperity has become more than an American illusion”, Melman writes. “When converted, as it has been, into ideology that justifies the militarisation of society and moral debasement, as in Vietnam, then critical reassessment of that illusion is a matter of urgency. It is a primary responsibility of thoughtful people who are committed to humane values to confront and respond to the prospect that deterioration of American economy and

society, owing to the ravages of war economy, can become irreversible.”

If permanent war is to be halted, as Melman writes, the ideological control of the war industry must be shattered. The war industry’s funding of politicians, research centres and think tanks, as well as its domination of the media monopolies, must end. The public must be made aware, Melman writes, of how the federal government “sustains itself as the directorate of the largest industrial corporate empire in the world; how the war economy is organised and operated in parallel with centralised political power – often contradicting

the laws of Congress and the Constitution itself; how the directorate of the war economy converts pro-peace sentiment in the population into pro-militarist majorities in the Congress; how ideology and fears of job losses are manipulated to marshal support in Congress and the general public for war economy; how the directorate of the war economy uses its power to prevent planning for orderly conversion to an economy of peace.”

Rampant, unchecked militarism, as historian Arnold Toynbee notes, “has been by far the commonest cause of the breakdown of civilisations.”

This breakdown is accelerated by the rigid standardisation and uniformity of public discourse. The manipulation of public opinion, what Walter Lippman calls “the manufacture of consent”, is imperative as the militarists gut social programs; let the nation’s crumbling infrastructure decay; refuse to raise the minimum wage; sustain an inept, mercenary for-profit health care system that resulted in 25 percent of global Covid deaths – although we are less than 5 percent of the world’s population – to gouge the public; carries out deindustrialisation; do nothing to curb the predatory behaviour of banks and corporations or invest in substantial programs to combat the climate crisis.

Critics, already shut out from the corporate media, are relentlessly attacked, discredited and silenced for speaking a truth that threatens the public’s quiescence while the US Treasury is pillaged by the war industry and the nation disembowelled.

The war industry, deified by the mass media, including the

We spend more on the military, \$813-billion for fiscal year 2023, than the next nine countries, including China and Russia, combined

entertainment industry, is never held accountable for the military fiascos, cost overruns, dud weapons systems and profligate waste. No matter how many disasters – from Vietnam to Afghanistan – it orchestrates, it is showered with larger and larger amounts of federal funds, nearly half of all the government’s discretionary spending. The monopolisation of capital by the military has driven the US debt to over \$30-trillion, \$6-trillion more than the US GDP of \$24-trillion. Servicing this debt costs \$300-billion a year. We spend more on the military, \$813-billion for fiscal year 2023, than the next nine countries, including China and Russia, combined.

An organisation like NewsGuard, which has been rating what it says are trustworthy and untrustworthy sites based on their reporting on Ukraine, is one of the many indoctrination tools of the war industry. Sites that raise what are deemed “false” assertions about Ukraine, including that there was a US-backed coup in 2014 and neo-Nazi forces are part of Ukraine’s military and power structure, are tagged as unreliable. *Consortium News*, *Daily Kos*, *Mint Press* and *Grayzone* have been given a red warning label. Sites that do not raise these issues, such as CNN, receive the “green” rating for truth and credibility. (NewsGuard, after being heavily criticised for giving Fox News a green rating of approval

in July revised its rating for Fox News and MSNBC, giving them red labels.)

The ratings are arbitrary. The *Daily Caller*, which published fake naked pictures of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, was given a green rating, along with a media outlet owned and operated by the Heritage Foundation. NewsGuard gives WikiLeaks a red label for “failing” to publish retractions despite admitting that all of the information WikiLeaks has published thus far is accurate. What WikiLeaks was supposed to retract remains a mystery. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, which shared a Pulitzer in 2018 for reporting that Donald Trump colluded with Vladimir Putin to help sway the 2016 election, a conspiracy theory the Mueller investigation imploded, are awarded perfect scores. These ratings are not about vetting journalism. They are about enforcing conformity.

NewsGuard, established in 2018, “partners” with the State Department and the Pentagon, as well as corporations such as Microsoft. Its advisory board includes the former Director of the CIA and NSA, Gen. Michael Hayden; the first US Homeland Security director Tom Ridge and Anders Fogh Rasmussen, a former secretary general of NATO.

Readers who regularly go to targeted sites could probably care less if they are tagged with a red label. But that is not the point. The point is to rate these sites so that anyone who has a NewsGuard extension installed on their devices will be warned away from visiting them. NewsGuard is being installed in libraries and schools and on the computers of active-duty troops. A warning pops up on targeted sites that reads: “Proceed with caution: This website generally fails to

maintain basic standards of accuracy and accountability.”

Negative ratings will drive away advertisers, which is the intent. It is also a very short step from blacklisting these sites to censoring them, as happened when YouTube erased six years of my show *On Contact* that was broadcast on RT America and RT International. Not one show was about Russia. And not one violated the guidelines for content imposed by YouTube. But many did examine the evils of US militarism.

In an exhaustive rebuttal to NewsGuard, which is worth reading, Joe Lauria, the editor-in-chief of *Consortium News*, ends with this observation:

“NewsGuard’s accusations against *Consortium News* that could potentially limit its readership and financial support must be seen in the context of the West’s war mania over Ukraine, about which dissenting voices are being suppressed. Three *CN* writers have been kicked off Twitter.

“PayPal’s cancellation of *Consortium News*’ account is an evident attempt to defund it for what is almost certainly the company’s view that *CN* violated its restrictions on ‘providing false or misleading information’. It cannot be known

Negative ratings will drive away advertisers, which is the intent. It is also a very short step from blacklisting these sites to censoring them

with 100 percent certainty because PayPal is hiding behind its reasons, but *CN* trades in information and nothing else.

“*CN* supports no side in the Ukraine war but seeks to examine the causes of the conflict within its recent historical context, all of which are being whitewashed from mainstream Western media.

“Those causes are: NATO’s expansion eastward despite its promise not to do so; the coup and eight-year war on Donbass against coup resisters; the lack of implementation of the Minsk Accords to end that conflict; and the outright rejection of treaty proposals by Moscow to create a new security architecture in Europe taking Russia’s security concerns into account.

“Historians who point out the onerous Versailles conditions imposed on Germany after World War I as a cause of Nazism and World War II are neither excusing Nazi Germany nor are they smeared as

its defenders.”

The frantic effort to corral viewers and readers into the embrace of the establishment media – only 16 percent of Americans have a great deal/quite a lot of confidence in newspapers and only 11 percent have some degree of confidence in television news – is a sign of desperation.

As the persecution of Julian Assange illustrates, the throttling of press freedom is bipartisan. This assault on truth leaves a population unmoored. It feeds wild conspiracy theories. It shreds the credibility of the ruling class. It empowers demagogues. It creates an information desert, one where truth and lies are indistinguishable. It frog-marches us towards tyranny. This censorship only serves the interests of the militarists who, as Karl Liebknecht reminded his fellow Germans in World War I, are the enemy within. **CT**

Chris Hedges is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who was a foreign correspondent for fifteen years for The New York Times, where he served as the Middle East Bureau Chief and Balkan Bureau Chief for the paper. He is the host of The Chris Hedges Report at www.therealnews.com/chris-hedges-report

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EDWARD S. HERMAN**
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MÁIRTÍN Ó MUILLEOIR

A lesson from a bridge in Alabama

A Northern Ireland publisher is shocked by what he finds during a visit to the town that ‘inspired freedom-loving people around the world’

A handful of searing images capture the clear moral certainty of the civil rights struggle in the United States: the Woolworth’s lunch counter protesters being pummelled by white bully-boys in Greensboro, North Carolina; the Memphis, Tennessee balcony of a blacks-only motel on which Martin Luther King lies dying as his colleagues point in the direction of the shooter; German shepherd dogs being sicced by police on protesting children in Birmingham, Alabama all spring to mind.

But for me, one image without any people at all carries more power than all the pivotal images referenced above – the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, scene of the savage attack on peaceful protesters by state troopers some on horseback – on March 7, 1965.

I feel vindicated in that sentiment by the fact that the recently-published and government-sponsored *Official United States Civil Rights Trail* – marking the Deep South struggle for equality and respect across 130 pages of text and pictures – chooses a photograph of that portentous bridge (named for

a Confederate general and Ku Klux Klan member) for its cover.

That fateful march over the bridge – led by the late Congressman John Lewis whose image adorns murals on the famous Falls Road in Belfast and in his native Atlanta – was in response to the police killing of a black man in a nearby town during a protest for the right to vote. (It is always a head-shaking moment to consider that as recently as the 1960s African-Americans were denied the right to vote in their own country.) And it was the courage and tenacity of Lewis, knocked unconscious by a policeman’s baton on the Selma bridge, and his colleagues, that

played a major part in gaining black Americans equality.

Or, at least, equality after a fashion. For while the civil rights movement surely won their war, winning the peace has been a different matter altogether.

Nowhere is that clearer than in Selma itself. For a town which relatively recently lent its name to an award-winning movie and epitomises the black civil rights struggle which inspired freedom-loving people around the world, there is a dire lack of, well ... almost everything a small town needs. No hop-on, hop-off buses or Belfast-style guided tours for visitors here, no downtown lofts

or busy apartment blocks, no bustling bars or restaurant rows, no cultural quarter or college vibe, no taxis, no Uber, no art gallery, theatre or cinema. The list goes on.

Some of this can be blamed on Covid, although the two official guides sitting behind the counter in the Selma civil rights visitor centre, with the sole job of telling tourists that the exhibition is still closed due to pandemic protocols, could, perhaps, be more productively deployed.



Rev Martin Luther King on the 1963 civil rights march on Washington.



Almost all the stores in front of the historic Edmund Pettus Bridge on Broad Street, Selma, Alabama, are now vacant.



An abandoned barber's shop on Selma's main street.



Alabama police prepare to confront peaceful demonstrators at the Edmund Pettus Bridge during Bloody Sunday in 1965.

But most of it is due to the fact that there is no downtown Selma. There is no 'there' there, someone cruelly remarked about Oakland, California, but for the people of Selma – ultimately, who cares about the tourists? – there's a harsh truth in that aphorism. Take Broad Street, the one-and-a-half mile Main Street leading from the Edmund Pettus Bridge to Highfield Avenue.

Bisected by a railway line carrying freight (there is no passenger



The boarded-up Good Samaritan Center apartment block

train to Selma), the thoroughfare is blighted by dereliction and neglect of a scale reminiscent of post-war Germany. Boarded up mansions, blocked-up apartment blocks, abandoned petrol stations, empty stores, long-closed diners, a smashed sign above what had been a barber's, a shuttered office. It is a dismal and depressing vista. Admittedly, American city centres have been cratered by white flight over many decades, but that doesn't explain the dizzying drop in the fortunes of 'The Queen City'.

None of this happened by accident. Selma is what the Americans call a minority-majority town. 80 per cent of the 21,000-strong populace is black, one in every three citizens lives in poverty. The town is the county seat of Dallas County, one of the three poorest counties in the 'Heart of Dixie'. In a state which until recently flew the Confederate flag over its capital, Selma, for all its civil rights acclaim, never had a chance. For this once thriving trading town on the banks of the Alabama River,

it has all been downhill since the glory days of civil rights victories – perhaps even since the days of Civil War victories.

Of course, it's never been easy for working class folks in Sweet Home Alabama. Stats from 2020 place it as fifth poorest state in the nation. 714,000 Alabamians (15 per cent) live below the federal poverty threshold, defined as less than \$13,170 (£11,000) for one adult. It's a hard life, but even harder if you're black: 11 per cent of whites live in poverty, 30 per cent of blacks.

How did we get here? It's hard for this innocent abroad to avoid the impression that the state of Alabama is punishing its black population for having won its 'freedom'. Is this payback time for shaming the white powers-that-be with their racist credo of, to quote Governor George Wallace in his inauguration speech in 1963, "Segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever"? This we do know: at state level,

Alabama is in the vice-like grip of Republican Party legislators, more than a few of whom are from the Make America White Again school of politics. Directing public funds to Selma is very low on their list of priorities – and it shows.

I recount this tale of woe not to denigrate the good people of Selma, Alabama, black or white, who recently made my son, Colm, and I royally welcome in the 'Cradle of the Confederacy', allowing me to fulfil a personal ambition to follow in John Lewis's footsteps by walking (and, in the early morning, running) the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Indeed, we enjoyed the warm hospitality of the St James Hotel on the river's edge and feasted like kings in the incongruously named Tally Ho restaurant.

We had cheering encounters too with some of the folks who are trying to give the down-on-its-luck centre of Selma some of the TLC it needs. Chief among those is Massachusetts implant John Tipmore whose Broad Street Books is a haven for bibliophiles, and the busy Downtowner



An abandoned gas station on Broad Street, Selma.



Firefighter Dalton at the Selma fire house.

diner where we politely declined the grits with our over-easy eggs. A special shout-out too for Dalton at the sparkling fire house who told me his crew had been called out eight times in nine days – primarily to fires in derelict homes.

No, my reason for telling this

bleak tale at all is to remind ourselves of the importance of winning the peace. And you do that through strong leadership and wise investment. “Agitate, agitate, agitate”, roared the escaped slave and revered abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who lectured in Belfast in 1845.

Yes, for sure, but also invest, invest, invest, lest the gains of our own civil rights struggle are squandered.

I have no idea how Selma can get back on its feet, and who am I anyhow other than a fly-by-night visitor to be giving advice to a proud people who with their great wells of courage bent the arc of the moral universe towards justice?

But it’s my hope that, just as John Lewis picked himself up on Selma’s Bloody Sunday so that he could address frightened and injured protesters seeking shelter in a nearby church after the carnage (and ultimately led his people successfully across the Edmund Pettus Bridge), that one day Selma too will rise again. **CT**

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JOE ALLEN

Sci-fi theophany under a mountain

‘If cult-hopping has taught me anything, it’s that communes are just a microcosm of the wider world. Society is basically an excuse to get laid’

The distant Alps are covered in snow. Small flakes dance around red clay statues of giants and voluptuous goddesses, all sculpted in the Egypt style. Most prominent is the falcon-headed god, Horus, facing the Fire Altar where the looming statues converge.

I start to walk into the grove of the Earth Altar, but my guide Shama tells me I should go no further.

“It is dangerous for anyone who is not spiritually prepared”, she warns me. “Very dangerous.”

I’d be willing to chance it, but rules are rules.

In the distance is Monti Pelati, the sacred mountain of the Damanhurians. It’s said that more Synchronic Lines converge there than any place in the world. These lines are like the Earth’s magnetic field – only magic. They were discovered psychically by the founder and leader of the Damanhurians, known as Falco.

This is a place of power. A place of mystery. The perfect place for a secret temple. A nice spot to start a cult.

So what am I doing here?

I have a sweet tooth for communal cults. As the Zendiks say, “Cult is short for culture”. A quick visit to a welcoming sect is like Disneyland

and a voodoo possession wrapped into the same vacation package. It’s invigorating. It’s mind-warping. At times, it’s terrifying.

The Damanhurian Federation

Damanhur is home to The Temples of Humankind. This massive work-in-progress is overseen by the Italian visionary, Oberto Airaudi (aka Falco). Beginning in 1978, the temples were constructed inside man-made caves beneath Monti Pelati.

The work went on in secret for thirteen years – until the Italian authorities were alerted in 1991. This masterpiece testifies to the possibilities of communal art and to the bizarre things people will believe.

Damanhur sits in the Valchiussella Valley, about 30 miles north of Turin, Italy. Called the “Largest Intentional Eco-Community in the World”, it’s a vast complex of farms, homes, shops, art studios, and small manufacturing centers in the Alpine foothills.

Damanhur grew out of the occult fervour that swept through Turin and its surrounding rural areas during the 1960s and ’70s. Italy’s mystic revolution is comparable to New York’s Burned Over District in the 1800s, which spawned the Mormons, the Shakers, the Oneidas, and the Fox Sister séances.

After thirty years, Damanhur is a relatively successful attempt at communal self-sufficiency. The community sustains its own marketplace, the Crea. It boasts its own fire and police departments, schools, medical facilities, construction, insurance, and real estate companies, private banking system, and its own currency, the Damanhurian Credito (with a constant exchange rate equal to one Euro).

Of course, all Damanhurians are expected to donate a sizeable portion of their Creditos for the common good.

This sprawling network, covering nearly 500 acres, is home to over four hundred Damanhurians, from children to old-timers. Hundreds of people in the area are affiliated with the group. Hundreds more participate in the many Damanhurian satellite centres around the world, where you can have cosmic visions or hear the songs of houseplants through bio-machines.

The Communal Panopticon

I take the train from Naples to Turin – train #1666. I interpret this as an important omen. From there, I get another train to Ivrea, where I catch the bus to Damanhur.

I check my Italian phrasebook



The Androgyne in the Hall of Earth, Temples of Humankind, Monti Pelati, Italy.

and stammer, “Scusi, c’è un autobus per Damanhur?”

“Sì.”

“Grazie.”

The driver points to a scruffy ponytail sitting in back and tells me to get off with him.

Patrick is a doe-eyed Austrian in his thirties. He’s a world traveler and patron of various spiritual centers. When he learns I’m an American, he sneers. He says he has a girlfriend in the US, but will never go back.

“America is too much military for me. If I go there, I end up fingerprinting and retina scanning. I get interrogations and strip searches.”

“What about your girl?”

“She is having too many mans, anyway.”

Patrick is visiting Damanhur to receive “Selfic” energy treatments to repair his soul. This is accomplished by laying under a spiraling coil of copper wire known as a “Self.”

The first Selfs were designed and developed by Falco. They’re said to be animated by conscious entities. These devices harness the energy of the Synchronic Lines to harmonise personality, balance sensitivity, and clear negativity. Anyone can receive these services for a modest fee.

Patrick tells me he’d never live at Damanhur because there’s no privacy. The activities of citizens are constantly monitored by the others.

“People talk in small towns”, I remark.

“It is like intentional communities that I stay in Hawaii. There are too many eyes”. he says ominously. “Too many eyes”. He looks around as if they might be peering over the next seat.

We get off the bus into the snow flurry and I prepare my approach. I

don't wanna come off like a tourist or a nosy journalist. Cults don't like that shifty business. So I'll play the curious truth-seeker. The American mendicant.

I'm greeted by Gazza Solidago (Italian for Magpie Goldenrod) at the Welcome Center. Gazza is one of the public faces of Damanhur, very pretty, with curly dark hair.

I pay for a bed in their hostel and arrange for tomorrow's tour of the Temples of Humankind. They hand me a release form that waives Damanhur's responsibility if their underground Temple happens to collapse on my head.

Gazza informs me of the "Contact with the Cosmos" workshop for €160.

"Perhaps another time", I say.

Gazza gives me a warm hug and then I'm turned over to Shama Viola (as in the Hawaiian White-Rumped Shama bird and the Italian for a Violet flower), who takes me on an informal walk around the grounds.

The Dolphin Whisperer

Shama is a longtime Damanhurian resident, about sixty, with silver-gray hair and a youthful face. She came here decades ago, after spending the Psychedelic Sixties in San Francisco and Hawaii.

She guides me through the Altars of the Elements. We pass a concrete Stonehenge that would fit well in a putt putt course and arrive at a wide field covered in painted stones. "These paths follow the Earth's energy fields", she explains.

Shama indicates a special spiral path and encourages me to walk it. One wanders these complex mazes to harness cosmic energies and focus the will. Kind of like hopscotch – only magic.

"But you must wear this". She takes a crude amulet off of a wooden

Back at the hostel, I search my room for spy cameras before going to bed. From bathroom to bedroom, I feel their eyes on me

post and hands it to me. "To protect you from the powerful energies."

Back at the hostel – probably the cleanest in all of Europe – I search my room for spy cameras before going to bed. From bathroom to bedroom, I feel their eyes on me.

The next morning I meet Shama and a Dutch woman named Zoe for the big tour. Zoe is a first time Temple visitor and quick to show her hard-earned New Age credentials. She just arrived from Hawaii, where she was communicating with dolphins.

"All the dolphins here speak Italian", I tell her.

Like most enthusiastic newcomers to a cult, Zoe is highly competitive in an aloof, passive-aggressive way. She doesn't come out and say, "I'm more enlightened than the others. Pick me, pick me!" But she's quick to talk up her psychic abilities, extensive ritual experience, and acute sensitivity to subtle energies.

In typical New Age fashion, she talks about eating food or going for a walk with the solemn reverence of divine revelation. Then she'll discuss sacred visions and magical powers as if they're as commonplace as a fart.

I've seen it a hundred times. It's her bid for a top spot in the hierarchy. That means she's more fun than a cup of Kool-Aid in Jonestown.

Sects and the City

Our first stop is the Crea. It's a large,

pink building situated on the slope of the valley. It houses the Damanhurian construction and real estate offices, an organic food market and cafeteria, art studios, a day care center, and the medical facilities. Imagine a health food store reincarnated as a shopping mall.

One shop specialises in Selfic technology. They have portable Selves for sale that resemble the copper wire jewellery peddled by hippies at music festivals and Rainbow Gatherings – except these little guys have souls that can heal anything from moodiness to colon cancer.

You can get an Insomnia Self for €35, a cell-regenerating Beauty Disc for €145, or a Multi-Functional Self for €60. They also offer Falco's "Selfic" paintings. These are crude, child-like patterns infused with animate spirits (like amateur abstracts – only magic) that go for €1,600 or so.

Walking by the medical facility, I see a sickly old Damanhurian in the waiting room with a portable Self clasped in his hands. Perhaps it's a Terminal Self. He rubs it anxiously. He's so desperate – so hopeful – that for a moment, this absurd place isn't so funny.

As we wait outside for our ride to the Temple, I ask Shama what's up with their names.

"Damanhurians are given an animal name when they first arrive", she explains, "and as they are initiated into the mysteries, they get a plant name."

That's how you end up with names like Furetto Oliva, Iguana Mangrovia, and one that translates as Shrimp Wild Fennel.

"I'll bet all the badass names like Jaguar Thornbush and Viper Petunia got snatched up pretty quick, huh?"

"Yes, yes", Shama says, "the big

cats are all taken.”

I say, “If I were a Damanhurian, I’d be Paramecium Chloroplast. You know, to show my spiritual humility.”

Shama laughs. Zoe scowls. I’d dub her Weasel Chili Pepper.

Our van arrives and we head up the mountain on a slushy one-lane road. George Michael’s “I Want Your Sex” plays on the tape deck and our fur-clad driver honks her horn around every tight corner to alert oncoming drivers. I assume the little Self coiled on the dashboard was made to ward off head-on collisions.

When the “Eighth Wonder” was underground

There are detailed photos of the Temples available on the Internet or in their official book, *Damanhur: The Temples of Humankind*, published by Alex Grey’s CoSM Press. But I refused to look at them before my visit.

There’s nothing worse than seeing a lame picture in a hiking guide before reaching the mountain’s summit. It ruins the element of surprise. I like to go in cold.

I imagine how mysterious the Temples must have been before the Italian police raided the compound in 1991, and again in 1992, on allegations of tax evasion, weapons hoarding, and satanic child abuse – back before their subsequent acquittal made the press.

I imagine Damanhur at the height of its secrecy, as if I were some wanderer following the winds, suddenly blown into the arms of these charming Italians.

I would be shown warmth and hospitality. I would be hypnotised by harmonic chants echoing through the forest and beautiful women in flowing robes. I would

Imagine that you want to be a part of this final battle. There are still some faces yet to be painted. Maybe you want to get your picture on the wall

envy the knowing smiles between these eccentric initiates.

Up on the mountain, we meet two Americans, Mark and Lisa, coming out of the temple. For them, it’s just another stop on a New Age world tour. They’ve done the Israeli kibbutzim, the Indian ashrams, and the Peruvian shamanism. Like tourists – only magic.

Mark’s business card identifies him as a Massage Therapist – Intuitive Counsellor – Spiritual Healer – Venture Capitalist.

Lisa is an “etheric surgeon” with a podcast and a PayPal account. She identifies spiritual ailments in her clients through mystical visions provided by extraterrestrials. Then she heals them by waving her hands around, which provides “12th dimensional shields”. She explains this with a straight face.

These guys know the game. How else could they afford their exotic jaunts?

Not me. I’m going in cold. I imagine I’m entering the Temples in the old days, before Damanhur had PayPal. When hippies flocked to the hills to do magic and find God. When the Machine could still be escaped – and perhaps defeated. When the End was still nigh.

We would share meals at blessed tables and make love in communal beds. We would consume quantities of wine and strange drugs, and become gods – our own will be done. We would follow the falcon-god

Horus into the dawning Age of the Child.

We would call each other Platypus and Ostrich. We would hug trees until they spoke to us. We would take our fill of love. Then one night, they’d take me into the Temple and show me the Secret. It would change my life forever.

Imagine – you’ve been taken deep into the cold belly of the Earth. They take off your blindfold and you’re led through winding corridors by pale lantern light. You pass murals of cells forming into fish, into lush vegetation, into great dinosaurs and flying lizards. Then you enter a vast circular chamber.

This is the Hall of Earth.

Zoe wouldn’t be standing next to you, clasping her hands to her chest as she gasps.

“Wow. There is such a profound energy here”. She closes her eyes and asks me, “Can you feel the energy here?”

I roll my eyes and try to ignore her.

Every piece of the Temple tells a story. Every face is a Damanhurian.

Imagine you walk toward the golden Androgyne painted on the far wall. An ephemeral gray Demiurge separates and blows out spiralling galaxies from a pile of dust in his hand.

In this mural, cavemen give way to the golden city of Atlantis. Its citizens are armed with laser guns and other wizardry. After Atlantis is destroyed, humanity is left with the Egyptian god-kings, the Semitic law-givers, and the Asian mystics.

You follow these images up to the crucial development in history – the Damanhurians. They’re gathered up and led by Falco into a great war against faceless grey automatons. As the robotic monsters approach the battle line, they’re given faces – reflections of the Damanhurians

that fight them.

Imagine that you want to be a part of this final battle. There are still some faces yet to be painted. Maybe you want to get your picture on the wall.

It's time to enter the Hall of Water. The walls are covered with the lunatic patterns of Falco's brainstorms. You're told that these diagrams are a mystical language. Circles, spirals, polygons, and random lines are interwoven in gold paint. It's like standing in a massive circuit board.

Imagine you're purified and primed for the cause. Perhaps you're on psychedelics.

They tell you to step inside the circle of bulbs. There's a sense of apprehension. This apparatus isn't just some nightmare of New Age interior design ...

I stare at Platypus. He doesn't budge.

I say, "It's a what?"

"It's a time machine."

"A time machine", I repeat flatly.

"Yes. A time machine."

"As in, you get beamed back to the dinosaurs, time machine?"

"Yes. This has already happened!" His eyes get wide and his hands go Italian. "The Synchronic Lines converge here". He points into the circle. "Here! Falco harnessed this energy to travel back to Atlantis. He was initiated into the Ancient Mysteries which have been lost for millennia."

Zoe says, "Of course. Of course. This is the work of ancient masters..."

She starts to walk toward the circle, hesitates at the edge, then steps back cautiously to admire the bubbling tubes from a safe distance. This hi-tech "time machine" belongs in a haunted house at a county fair.

I look from Zoe to Platypus. The

She starts to walk toward the circle, hesitates at the edge, then steps back cautiously to admire the bubbling tubes from a safe distance

floodgates break and I bust out laughing. This operation would be evil if it weren't so dumb.

Cult is short for culture

I spend a few days nosing around the compound, asking questions, taking notes, getting the story straight. Zoe's ready to move in. Mark is ready to invest.

Imagine for a moment you bought the whole bit. You're convinced all of history culminates in this budding New Age utopia. You decide to stay forever.

The decades pass and you end up like these old, droopy-eyed Damanhurians shuffling around the commune. You bust your hump to keep things moving. You save the world from ignorance and suffering. You gain experience points and become a wizard supreme.

You pass from spouse to spouse, according to the Damanhurian custom of annual remarriage. You watch your children grow up in a magic fairyland and hope they'll stay. Hell, they couldn't adapt to the outside world if they tried.

You live your life the best you can. Then you die. You're buried peacefully in the Valchiusella Valley. A painting of your face smiles forever in the Hall of Earth. Tourists even pay to come look at it.

If cult-hopping has taught me anything, it's that communes are just a microcosm of the wider world. Society is basically an excuse to get laid. You laugh and you cry. You

eat, shit, and die. Cult is short for culture.

Seriously, what would make a person dumber – a TV set or a make believe time machine?

So I hitchhike out with a smile. A young Italian woman named Taraka picks me up, but she's not going directly back to town.

"You can come up the mountain with me if you like. To meet my friend. Then we take you to the train station tomorrow. Yes?"

"Sure. I'm just happy to be out of that loony bin."

"Damanhur has a dark reputation in this valley."

"Oh yeah?"

She nods and fumbles for a new CD as we swerve all over the tight mountain road.

"They are believing in crazy things and controlling too much", she says.

"It's nice to be with a normal person. Here, let me get that CD for you."

That's when I notice the beaded feathers hanging from her rearview mirror. The amulet wrapped around her wrist. The books emblazoned with arcane symbols in the floorboard.

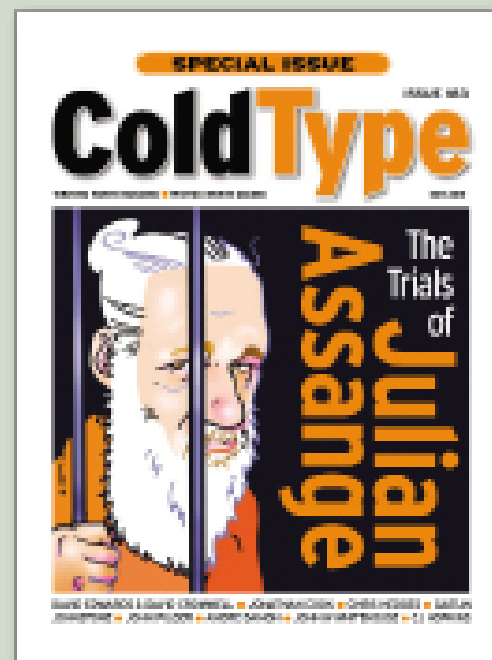
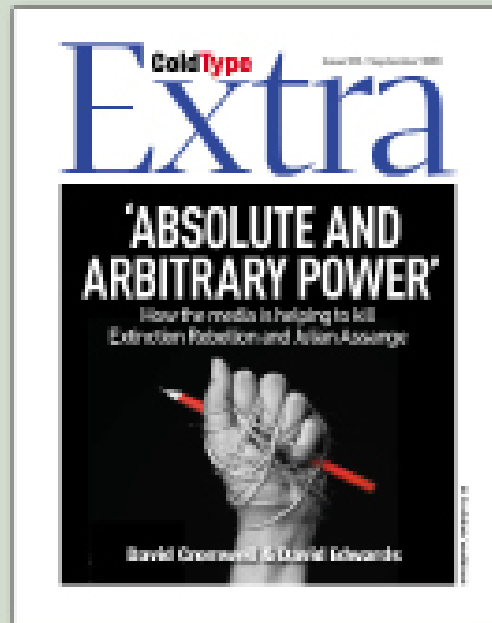
"So where are you going, anyway?" I ask.

"To a Lakota Sweat Lodge in the Alps. We call to the Grandfather spirits of American tribes. You can come if you like. Only €200. You have heard of this?"

I nod my head wearily. "Of course. It's like a sauna – only magic." **CT**

*Joe Allen writes about race, robots, and religion. Presently, he lives in the western shadow of the Rocky Mountains. Read his weekly newsletter at www.JOEBOT.xyz. This article first appeared at *disinformation*, December 17, 2010.*

THE TRIALS OF JULIAN ASSANGE

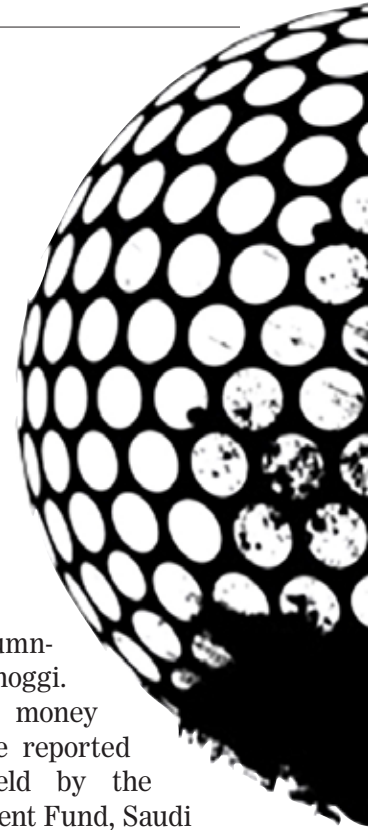


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ROBERT LIPSYTE

Anything but a good sport in Saudi Arabia

Even Donald Trump has a hand in the attempted hijacking of golf



Here's the big question in Jock Culture these days: Is the Kingdom of Golf being used to sportswash the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia? Or is it the other way around? After all, what other major sport could use a sandstorm of Middle Eastern murder and human-rights abuses to obscure its own history of bigotry and greed? In fact, not since the 1936 Berlin Olympics was used to cosmeticise Nazi Germany's atrocities and promote Aryan superiority have sports and an otherwise despised government collaborated so blatantly to enhance their joint international standings.

Will it work this time?

The jury has been out since the new Saudi-funded LIV Tour made an early August stop at the Trump National Golf Course in Bedminster, New Jersey. (That LIV comes from the roman numerals for 54, the number of holes in one of its tourneys.) And I'm sure you won't be surprised to learn that it was hosted by a former president so well known for flouting golf's rules that he earned the title Commander-in-Cheat for what, in the grand scheme of things, may be the least of his sins.

That tournament featured 10 of the top 50 players in the world. They were poached by the Saudis from the

reigning century-old Professional Golfers Association (PGA), reportedly for hundreds of millions of dollars in signing bonuses and prize money. It was a shocking display for a pastime that has traded on its image of honesty and sportsmanship, not to mention an honour system that demands players turn themselves in for any infractions of the rules, rare in other athletic events where gamesmanship is less admired.

No wonder our former president hailed the tour as "a great thing for Saudi Arabia, for the image of Saudi Arabia. I think it's going to be an incredible investment from that standpoint, and that's more valuable than lots of other things because you can't buy that – even with billions of dollars."

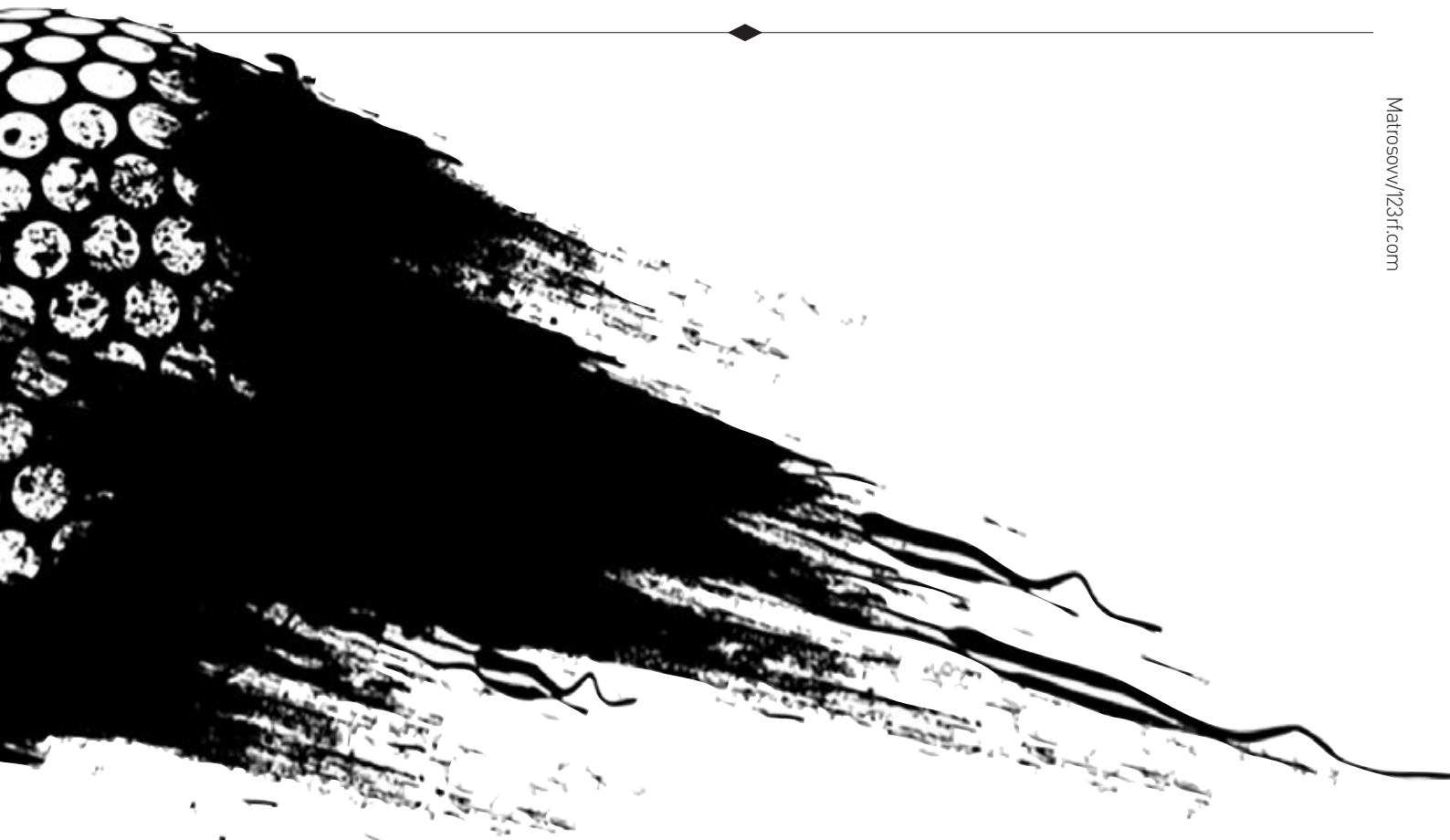
The tournament was held soon after Joe Biden gave that already infamous fist bump to crown prince and de facto Saudi ruler Mohammed bin Salman. The two events radically raised bin Salman's prestige at a moment when, thanks to the war in Ukraine, oil money was just pouring into that kingdom, and helped sportswash the involvement of his countrymen in the 9/11 attacks, as well as the brutal murder and dismemberment of Saudi dissident and *Wash-*

ington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi.

The buy-off money came from the reported \$347-billion held by the Public Investment Fund, Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund. Top golfers were lured into the LIV tour with sums that they couldn't refuse. A former number-one player on the PGA tour, Dustin Johnson, asked about the reported \$125-million that brought him onto the Saudi tour, typically responded by citing "what's best for me and my family."

Phil Mickelson, the most famous of the LIV recruits and a long-time runner-up rival of Tiger Woods, justified his reported \$200-million in a somewhat more nuanced fashion. In a February interview at the website *The Fire Pit Collective*, he admitted that Saudi government officials are "scary motherfuckers", have a "horrible record on human rights", and "execute people... for being gay." Yet he also insisted that the LIV was a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reshape how the PGA Tour operates."

Family needs and the supposed inequities of the PGA's previously hegemonic universe were the explanations a number of golfers used to justify biting the hand that had fed them for so long. Meanwhile,



Tiger Woods, the greatest recipient of PGA largesse and probably the greatest golfer of our time, if not any time, reportedly turned down an almost billion-dollar offer with sharp words for those who had gone for the quick cash.

The PGA obviously agreed and barred any golfer who took up the Saudi offers from its tournaments. In response, some of them promptly sued the PGA.

On the face of it, creating a Kingdom of Golf might not seem like a crucial thing for a morally challenged monarchy to do. After all, golf isn't exactly a charity or a social justice campaign that's likely to signal your virtue. It's just a game whose players use sticks to swat little balls into holes in the ground while strolling around. It's not even good exercise and far less so if you're driving the course in a motorised

cart or hire a caddie to carry your sticks. And it gets worse. After all, the irrigation water and poisonous chemicals necessary to keep the playing fields luxuriantly green at all times are abetting ecological disaster.

Golf symbolised reactionary greed even before the Saudis entered the picture. For starters, its competitors are among the only professional athletes ranked purely by the cash prizes they've won. And the leading golfers invariably earn far more from endorsements and speaking engagements. The sport's almost comic upper-class snootiness sometimes seems like an orchestrated distraction from the profound racism, sexism, and antisemitism lodged in its history and, even today, the discrimination against women that still exists at so many of the leading country clubs that sustain the game.

Golf has long been retrograde, ex-

clusionary, and money-obsessed. To put that in perspective, the estimated revenue of the Professional Golf Association in 2019 was \$1.5-billion – and it boasts a non-profit status that's sometimes been questioned. Lucrative as it is, it also proved distinctly vulnerable to an attack by an oil-soaked autocracy that, in warming up to invade golf, had already invested in Formula One racing, e-sports, wrestling, and its most recent controversial purchase, a British Premier League soccer team (which provoked protests from fans and Amnesty International).

Still, the Saudis' move on golf was even bolder, more ambitious, and somehow almost ordained to happen. Unlike football and baseball, which are convenient amalgams of socialism for the owners (in their collusive cooperation) and dog-eat-dog capitalism for the players and other personnel, golf is more of a monarchy along the lines of, um,

Saudi Arabia. Until the LIV Tour came along, the main PGA tour, that sport's equivalent of the major leagues, had been all-powerful in its control over both golfers and venues.

Over the years, golfers have indeed complained about that, but except for Greg Norman, a 67-year-old Australian former champion, not too loudly. Now a highly successful clothing and golf-course-design entrepreneur, Norman is called the Great White Shark for his looks and aggressive style. No wonder he's now the CEO of LIV Golf and the ringleader of the campaign to recruit the top pros to play in the breakaway tour.

Norman denies that he answers to the crown prince, but his attempts to distance himself from that ruthless Saudi ruler are not taken seriously by most observers of golf, including the *Washington Post's* Sally Jenkins, who wrote:

"Let's be frank. LIV Golf is nothing more than a vanity project for Norman and his insatiable materialism – and an exhibition-money scam for early-retiree divas who are terrified of having to fly commercial again someday. By the way, the supposed hundreds of millions in guaranteed contracts for a handful of stars – has anyone seen the actual written terms, the details of what Phil Mickelson and Dustin Johnson will have to do to collect that blood-spattered coin, or is everyone just taking the word of Norman and a few agents trying to whip up commissions that it's all free ice cream?"

One of the best sports columnists, Jenkins may seem excessive in her attack on Norman, but the passions that golf and Saudi Arabia have raised separately only increase in tandem. On the one hand, there's the outrage when it comes to Saudi Arabia's murderous human-rights

The Saudi golf coup has taken place at an interesting juncture for the sport and its two most compelling figures, Trump and Tiger Woods

abuses and Washington's continuing complicity with the regime, thanks in particular to its ongoing massive arms sales to that country. (The latest of those deals, largely Patriot missiles sold to that country for \$3-billion, feels distinctly like a kind of bribery.)

On the other hand, there's the long-standing resentment of golf as a symbol of rich, white, male supremacy. In fact, it's still seen as a private meeting place to create and maintain relationships that will lead to significant political and business decisions, the sports equivalent of, um, Saudi missile deals.

The pro golfers profiting from the current bonanza may not engender much sympathy, but the derision for their materialism should, at least, be put in context. Until the LIV came along, they had next to no options in their sport and few of them made Mickelson- or Johnson-style money. Worse yet, their lonely gunslinger lifestyles made unionisation at best the remotest of possibilities, especially for figures deeply wired into the corporate community through their sponsorship deals.

The Saudi golf coup (because that's indeed what it is) has taken place at an interesting juncture for the sport and its two most compelling figures, Trump and Tiger, who have indeed played together, both seeming to enjoy the trash talk that went with the experience.

Tiger, who is now in steep decline, has long been the face of the sport at its most accomplished, captivating, and richest despite, or perhaps because of, his paradoxical nature.

His first auto accident in 2009 revealed a tortured soul involved a maelstrom of sexual infidelities and occasioned a re-evaluation of his mythic rise. No surprise then that he's struggled ever since, briefly regaining his form before more accidents and surgeries diminished his dominance.

As long as he continued to show up and hit a ball, popular interest in the game was sustained and the PGA's grip held firm. As he diminished, however, so did public fascination with golf.

In a way, he had been Tiger-washing the sport. It was hard to sustain a critique of golf's retrograde and exclusionary nature, however justified, while it hid behind his black face. Of course, that vision of golf was already wearing thin when Tiger refused to define himself as African-American, preferring "Cablinasian" – meant to reflect his racial mix of Caucasian, Black, (American) Indian, and Asian.

With Tiger, at 46, fading as an active force, PGA golf had already become vulnerable to a coup long before the Saudis and The Donald appeared on the scene. And who could have been a handier guy for those Middle Eastern royals than one with such experience in coups, even if his first try, with all those armed deplorables, failed on January 6, 2021.

This time around, though, Trump had millionaires with golf clubs, Middle Eastern oil royalty, and the equivalent of bottomless sacks of PAC money.

And, of course, with Trump in-

volved, anything could happen. The first time he was infamously linked to sports, in the early 1980s as the owner of the New Jersey Generals of the upstart United States Football League (USFL), he managed to destroy his own organisation in what would emerge as his signature style of reckless, narcissistic malfeasance. An early Trump lie (in an interview with me, no less) was that the USFL would continue its summer schedule so as not to interfere with the National Football League's winter one. Within days of that statement, he led a lawsuit aimed at forcing a merger of his league and the National Football League. It ended badly for Trump and the USFL.

This time around, Trump has

An early Trump lie was that the USFL would continue its summer schedule so as not to interfere with the NFL's winter one

said that the LIV Tour would avoid scheduling tournaments in conflict with major PGA events. That will probably turn out to be anything but the case, too. So how will his latest foray into Jock Culture play out? Will the PGA beat back the Saudi coup (maybe by raising its prize money) or will the Saudis burnish their global image through a sport undeservedly renowned for integ-

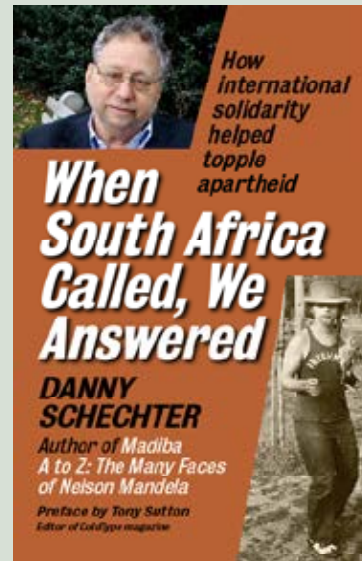
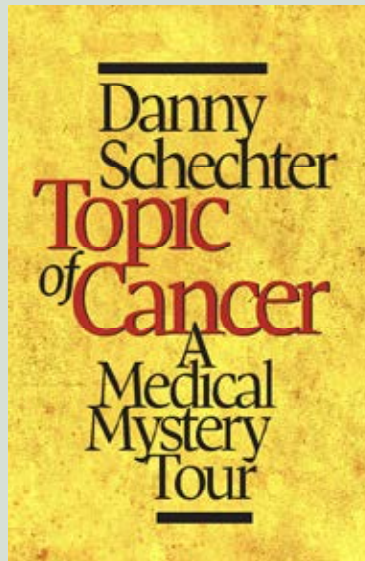
rity and class?

And what about the Commander-in-Cheat? If only this Saudi enterprise would leave him too busy on the links (not to speak of fighting off jail in connection with those purloined secret documents of his) to run for the presidency again in 2024.

Ultimately, whether Saudi Arabia or golf gets sportswashed, it's Trump we need to rinse out of our lives. **CT**

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JONATHAN COOK

Why is Amnesty apologising for telling truth about war crimes?

Allowing only one side to be criticised for its crimes is likely to fuel war rather than resolve it

Should a human rights organisation apologise for publishing important evidence of war crimes and human rights abuses?

If it does apologise, what does that suggest about its commitment to dispassionately uncovering the truth about the actions of both parties to war? And equally, what message does it send to those who claim to be “distressed” by the publication of such evidence?

Those are questions Amnesty International should have pondered far more carefully than it obviously did before issuing an apology last month over its latest report on the war in Ukraine.

In that report, Amnesty accused Ukrainian forces of committing war crimes by stationing troops and artillery in or near schools, hospitals and residential buildings, thereby using civilians effectively as human shields. Such practices by Ukrainian soldiers were identified in 19 different towns and villages.

These incidents did not just theoretically endanger civilians. There is evidence, according to Amnesty, that return fire by Russian troops

on these Ukrainian positions led to non-combatants being killed.

The Israeli army regularly accuses Palestinian factions like Hamas of hiding among civilians in Gaza, while obscuring its own, long-documented practice of using Palestinians as human shields.

But whatever the truth of Israel’s claims, unlike the tiny and massively overcrowded Gaza, which offers few or no hiding places outside of built-up areas for Palestinian fighters to resist Israeli aggression, Amnesty concluded of the situation in Ukraine: “Viable alternatives were available that would not endanger civilians – such as military bases or densely wooded areas nearby, or other structures further away from residential areas.”

In other words, it was a choice made by the Ukrainian army to put its own civilians in harm’s way.

Notably, this is the first time a major western human rights organisation has publicly scrutinised the behaviour of Ukraine’s soldiers. Until now, these watchdog bodies have focused exclusively on reports of

crimes committed by Russian forces – a position entirely in line with the priorities of their own governments. By its own admission, Amnesty has published dozens of reports condemning Russia.

The pushback against the latest report was relentless, coming even from Amnesty’s own Ukrainian team. Oksana Pokalchuk, its head, quit, explaining that her team “did everything they could to prevent this material from being published.”

Under mounting pressure, Amnesty made a statement in which it said it “deeply regrets the distress and anger” caused by its report, while at the same time stating: “We fully stand by our findings.”

The idea that only one side has been committing war crimes in Ukraine was always implausible. In wars, all sides commit crimes. It is in the nature of wars.

Faulty lines of communication mean orders are misunderstood or only partially relayed to those on the front lines. Inevitably, soldiers prioritise their own lives over those of the enemy, including civilians. Terrorising the other side – through human rights violations – can be an



Photo supplied by Ukraine's Ministry of Defence shows soldiers engaged in an anti-terrorist operation on April 15, 2022.

effective way to avoid combat, by sending a warning to enemy soldiers to desert their posts and civilians to flee. Sadists and psychopaths, meanwhile, find themselves with plenty of opportunities to exploit during the fighting.

But conversely, parties to wars invariably struggle to acknowledge their own abuses. They prefer simple-minded, self-serving narratives of good and evil: our soldiers are heroes, morally spotless, while their soldiers are barbarians, indifferent to the value of human life.

Western governments and establishment media outlets have readily peddled this foolish line in Ukraine, too, even though neither Europe nor the United States are supposed to be directly involved in the war. They have reflexively amplified Ukrain-

ian claims of Russian war crimes, even when the evidence is lacking or the picture murky, and they have resolutely ignored any evidence of Ukrainian crimes, such as evidence that Russian prisoners of war have been executed or that Ukraine has been using petal cluster bombs in civilian areas.

In such circumstances, only the human rights community is in a position to provide a more faithful picture of how events are unfolding, and hold to account both sides for their crimes. But until Amnesty stepped out of line, western human rights groups had moved in lock-step with western governments, the same governments that appear to want endless war in Ukraine,

to “weaken Russia”, rather than a quick resolution.

Even the author of Amnesty’s new report, Donatella Rovera, has conceded: “I think the level of self-censorship on this issue [Ukrainian war crimes] has been pretty extraordinary.”

Amnesty should not be apologising for providing a rare window on such crimes. It should be emphasising the importance of monitoring both sides for serious breaches of international law. And for very good reason.

Amnesty’s apology sends a message to those partisans trying to shut down scrutiny of Ukrainian crimes of just how easy it is to put the human rights community on the defensive. Efforts to deter reporting of a similar nature in the

future will intensify.

Ukraine's foreign affairs minister, Dmytro Kuleba, was among those who lost no time vilifying Amnesty by characterising its report as "Russian disinformation".

Amnesty's apology suggests such pressure campaigns have an effect and will lead to increased self-censorship – in a situation where the evidence already indicates that there is a great deal of self-censorship, as Rovera pointed out.

The apology betrays the civilians who have been, and will be, used as human shields – putting them in lethal danger – over the coming months and potentially years of fighting. It means Ukrainian forces will feel even less pressure to rein in behaviour that amounts to a war crime.

Amnesty would never apologise to Russian partisans offended by a report on Russian war crimes. Its current apology indicates to the victims of Ukrainian human rights abuses that they are less worthy than the victims of Russian abuses.

Turning a blind eye to Ukrainian crimes also lifts the pressure on western governments. They have been recklessly channelling arms worth many billions of dollars to Ukraine, even though they have little idea where most end up. (In a further worrying sign of self-censorship in the west, CBS recently postponed the broadcast of an investigation suggesting as little as a third of western weapons reach their intended destination in Ukraine.)

That is all the more dangerous because, even before Russia's invasion in late February, Ukrainian forces – including the neo-Nazi elements now glossed over in western narratives – were engaged in a vicious civil war with ethnic Russian communities in Ukraine's east. That region, the

A failure to scrutinise how western artillery is being used will result in more of the kind of Ukrainian crimes Amnesty has just highlighted

Donbas, is where Moscow has been focusing its military advances.

Human rights violations by Ukrainians against other Ukrainians were regularly committed during the eight-year civil war, as western monitors documented at the time. Such crimes are almost certainly continuing under cover of the war against Russia, but with the aid now of western arms shipments.

Ignoring abuses by Ukrainian forces gives them a free hand to commit crimes not only against Russian soldiers but also against the large number of Ukrainians who are not seen as loyal to Kyiv.

A failure to closely scrutinise how and where western artillery is being used is almost certain to result in more, not less, of the kind of Ukrainian crimes Amnesty has just highlighted.

Western governments, and publics, need to be confronted with the likely consequences of flooding the battlefield with weapons before they prefer such a policy over pursuing diplomatic solutions.

Ultimately, allowing one side only to be criticised for its crimes – reinforcing the simple-minded narrative of good guys versus bad guys – is likely to fuel the war rather than resolve it.

Amnesty's conduct over this latest report is not exceptional. It is part of a pattern of behaviour by a western human rights community

vulnerable to political and financial pressures that detract from its ostensible mission.

As the near-exclusive focus on Russian crimes in Ukraine illustrates, international humanitarian law is all too often interpreted through the prism of western political priorities.

There has long been a revolving door between the staff of prominent human rights groups and the US government. And pressure from elite donors – who are invested in these dominant narratives – doubtless plays a part, too.

Anyone departing from the narrow political consensus imposed by western political and media elites is defamed as spreading Russian "disinformation", or for being apologists for dictators like Syria's Bashar al-Assad or Libya's late ruler Muammar Gaddafi. Criticisms of Israel, meanwhile, are demonised as proof of antisemitism.

Certainly, Russian, Syrian and Libyan leaders have committed war crimes. But the focus on their crimes is all too often an excuse to avoid addressing western war crimes, and thereby enable agendas that advance the interests of the West's war industries.

I experienced this first hand during the month-long conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in the summer of 2006. Israel accused Hezbollah of using its own population as "human shields" – framed by the Norwegian politician and United Nations official Jan Egeland as "cowardly blending" – an allegation lapped up by the western media.

Whatever the truth of that claim, it presented a very one-sided picture of what took place during that summer's fighting. Though no one was allowed to mention it at the time because of Israel's strict military censorship laws, it was common

knowledge among Israel's minority of Palestinian citizens that many of their own communities in northern Israel were being used as locations for Israeli tanks and artillery to fire into Lebanon.

The Israeli army had forcibly recruited these third-class citizens as human shields, just as the Ukrainian army is now accused by Amnesty of doing to civilians.

I saw for myself a number of the locations where Israel had installed batteries in or next to the minority's communities. There were later Israeli court cases that confirmed this widespread practice; Palestinian politicians in Israel raised the matter in the Israeli parliament; and a local human rights group later issued a report documenting examples of these war crimes.

But these revelations never gained any traction with either the western media or human rights groups. Western publics were left with an entirely false impression: that Hezbollah alone had endangered its own civilians, even though Israel had undoubtedly done the same or worse.

The reality could not be acknowledged because it conflicted with western political priorities that treat Israel as a valued ally with a moral army and Hezbollah as a depraved, bloodthirsty terrorist organisation.

Human rights groups reporting on the 2006 Lebanon war actively echoed these self-serving western narratives that unfairly differentiated between Hezbollah and Israel, as I highlighted at the time.

I found myself in a very public row with Human Rights Watch over comments made by one of its researchers to the *New York Times* claiming that Hezbollah had intentionally targeted Israeli civilians

We need more scrutiny of the crimes committed in wars, if only to tear the facade off narratives designed to paint a picture of saints and sinners

whereas Israel had avoided targeting Lebanese civilians.

He stated: "I mean, it's perfectly clear that Hezbollah is directly targeting civilians, and that their aim is to kill Israeli civilians. We don't accuse the Israeli army of deliberately trying to kill civilians."

In my subsequent back-and-forth with HRW the organisation sought to defend this claim. But there were two glaring problems.

First, it completely failed to fit the known facts of the war. Israel's strikes on Lebanon had caused a disproportionately large number of civilian deaths, despite the use of precision weapons. Hezbollah, using far more primitive rockets, meanwhile, had killed mostly soldiers, not civilians.

But more problematic still, HRW had ascribed intentions to each side – good and bad – when it could not possibly know what those intentions were. As I wrote at the time of its researcher's comments:

Was he or another HRW researcher sitting in one of the military bunkers in northern Israel when army planners pressed the button to unleash the missiles from their spy drones? Was he sitting alongside the air force pilots as they circled over Lebanon dropping their US-made bombs or tens of thousands of 'cluster munitions', tiny land mines that are now sprinkled over a vast area of south Lebanon? Did he have intimate conversations with the Israeli chiefs of staff about

their war strategy? Of course not. He has no more idea than you or I what Israel's military planners and its politicians decided was necessary to achieve their war goals.

HRW's comments made sense only in a political context: that the group faced enormous pressure from US politicians and funders to focus on Hezbollah's crimes. It also faced a damaging vilification campaign led by Israel lobbyists who wished to shield Israel from scrutiny. They accused the group's senior staff of antisemitism and spreading a blood libel.

It looked very much like HRW caved into that pressure, just as Amnesty is now effectively doing in apologising for upsetting Ukrainian partisans and those emotionally invested in the one-sided narrative they hear constantly from their politicians and media.

Neither Amnesty nor Human Rights Watch responded to a request for comment.

The reality is that western publics need more, not less, scrutiny of the crimes committed in wars, if only to tear the facade off narratives designed to paint a picture of saints and sinners – narratives that dehumanise official enemies and fuel more war.

The minimum needed to achieve that is an independent, fearless, vigorous human rights community, not an apologetic one **CT.**

Jonathan Cook won the *Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism*. His books include *Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East* (Pluto Press) and *Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair* (Zed Books). Cook's web site is www.jonathan-cook.net.

BINOY KAMPMARK

The Maybe Mob and the attack on Rushdie

The attempted assassination of noted author shows how the inner censoring assassin is everywhere

He has survived death threats and attempts on his life since February 1989. But Salman Rushdie's luck just about ran out at the Chautauqua Institution, southwest of Buffalo in New York State.

On August 12, at a venue historically celebrated for bringing education to all, the writer was stabbed incessantly by a fanatic who felt little sense of guilt or remorse. Hadi Matar only had eyes for Rushdie's neck and abdomen. As a result of the attack, the author is likely to lose sight of one eye and possibly the use of an arm.

It was a chilling reminder that the fatwa condemning him to death never risked going stale, even if it might have been put into a form of archived cold storage. Declared by the Iran's sickly spiritual ruler, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Rushdie's remarkable crime was to have blasphemed against the Prophet Muhammad in the novel *The Satanic Verses*.

The supreme leader, having hardly distinguished himself in a bloody war against Iraq, needed a supreme distraction.

The entire exercise was an example of how irony and humour have no place for dour, dogmatic priest-

liness. How dare an author, in a work of fiction, playfully and plausibly claim that the Prophet was not the sole editor of the message to Angel Gibreel (Gabriel), and that Satan had cheekily inserted his role into it? And that this was done using the medium of Gibreel Farishta's hallucinations?

Dare Rushdie did, and this exhortation to state-sanctioned killing of an author and all those associated with translating and disseminating the book exposed the underbelly of cowardice that often accompanies attempts to defend literary freedoms.

Rushdie's translator Hitoshi Igarashi was, in fact, murdered, while his Norwegian publisher, William Nygaard, was gravely wounded. The Turkish translator, Aziz Nesin, escaped a mob assault that led to 37 deaths in Silvas, Turkey.

It was one thing to find fanatics who had never read the book and wished to do away with the author in a fit of state subsidised zealotry. But then there was that camp: those who, in principle, opposed the fatwa but still wished to attack Rushdie as an act of cultural understanding and solidarity with his enemies. (Grahame Wood of *The Atlantic* calls them the "Team To Be Sure", who rubbish the West's free

speech defence of Rushdie, claiming that mischief might have been averted if only he hadn't been so inclined to offend.)

The events of 1989 cast a long shadow. There were those in holy orders, who thought that the Ayatollah had a point. There was Dr. Robert Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury, who called for a strengthening of blasphemy laws to cover religions other than Christianity, though he was also careful to "condemn incitement to murder or any other violence from any source whatever." Very Church of England.

And there was former US President Jimmy Carter, who seemed to take issue that an author's rights were considered fundamental even in the face of insulting religions. What, came the insinuation, about the insulted? Where would their anger go? Rushdie's First Amendment freedoms might be "important", but there had been "little acknowledgment that this is a direct insult to those millions of Moslems whose sacred beliefs have been violated and are suffering in restrained silence". Contemplated homicide against an author, in other words, was being excused, even if the "death sentence" was an "abhorrent response".

It was even more galling to see

fellow novelists mauling the underdog, showing how solidarity among scribes is rarer than you think. The Marxist author John Berger did not think much of Rushdie's case, hiding behind a sham argument that producing threatening literature might well endanger "the lives of those who are innocent of either writing or reading the book". Berger's ingratiating note



Salman Rushdie was stabbed 12 times by 24-year-old Hadi Matar.

was an attempt to convince other Islamic leaders and statesmen to avoid "a unique 20th-century holy war, with its terrifying righteousness on both sides."

Roald Dahl, man of dysfunctional virtue and author of disturbed children's tales, decided in a letter to *The Times* that Rushdie was a "dangerous opportunist", as if engaging in irony in such matters is to be avoided. He had to have been "aware of the deep and violent feelings his book would stir up among devout Muslims."

His suggestion: a modest dose of self-censorship. "In a civilised world we have a moral obligation to apply a modicum of censorship to our own work to reinforce this principle of free speech." Censors from Moscow to Tehran would have approved.

Nor did John le Carré, consummate writer of espionage novels, disagree. "I don't think it is given to any of us to be impertinent to great religions with impunity," he told *the New York Times* in May 1989.

In November 1997, with le Carré complaining of being unfairly

branded an antisemite, Rushdie wrote a pointed reminder it would have been easier "to sympathise with him had he not been so ready to join in an earlier campaign of vilification against a fellow writer". It would have been gracious were "he to admit that he understands the nature of the Thought Police a little better now that, at last in his own opinion, he's the one in the line of fire."

Le Carré sniped back accordingly, taking the position he claimed to have had in 1989: "that there is no law in life or nature that says great religions may be insulted with impunity".

Little time was spent then, and now, on the malicious, sinister nature of religious totalitarianism that has been a monstrous burden on expression, critique and sober thought. Instead, the creator of *Smiley* and the *Circus* wished to strike a "less arrogant, less colonialist, and less self-righteous note than we were hearing from the safety of his admirers' camp."

As Wood writes, the honourable response to the attack on Rushdie

would have been to admit a failure to protect a brave author and declare "that we are all Rushdie now". Read his work; throw his name in the faces of the regime's apologists and their homicidal dolts. After all, while the Republic of Iran has claimed to have lost active interest in killing the author, it will not object to an independent enthusiast doing the same. The decision encouraging Rushdie's murder, stated

Khomeini's successor, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, "is a bullet for which there is a target. It has been shot. It will one day sooner or later hit the target."

This crippling germ of authorial assassination is incarnated in more current forms, without the lethal element: cancel culture, the desire to actively enact one's offended disposition to liquidate, banish and extirpate the views of your opponent. They offend you because you, somehow, have answers beyond question.

Assassination is simply one of the most extreme forms of censorship, an attempt to silence and kill off the vibrant chatter that makes an intellectual world live. Sadly, as Rushdie recovers, the maybe mob and their complicity should be noted, their names marked on walls high. The inner censoring assassin is everywhere. **CT**

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