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A HUMAN CHAIN FOR JULIAN ASSANGE | RON FASSBENDER
STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BOMB | CHRIS HEDGES

Issue 239

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

November 2022



WICKED LEAKS

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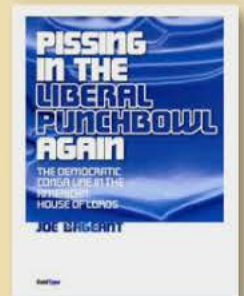
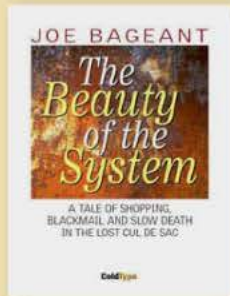
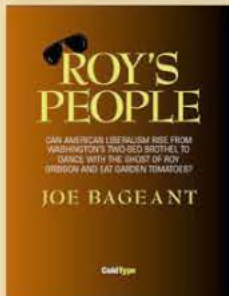
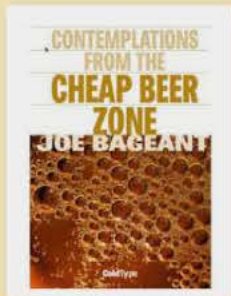
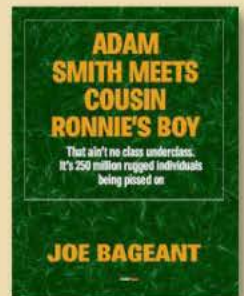
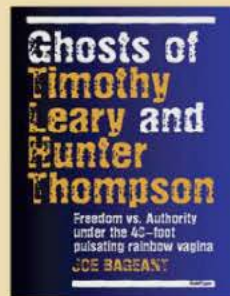
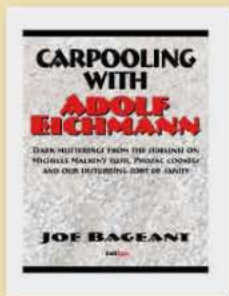
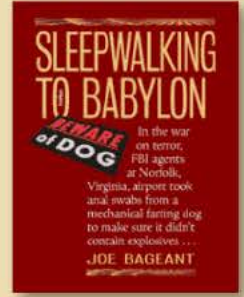
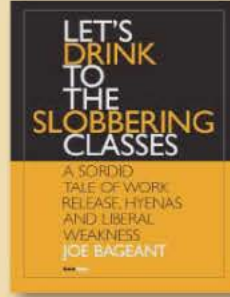
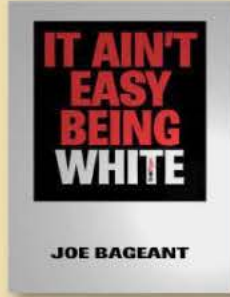
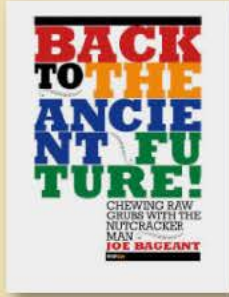
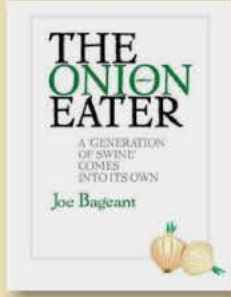
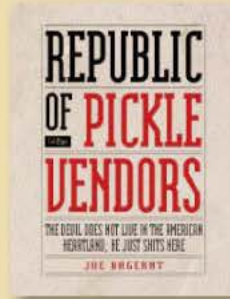
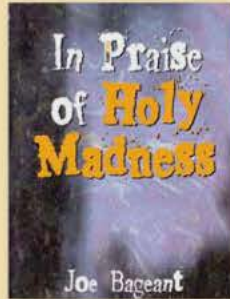
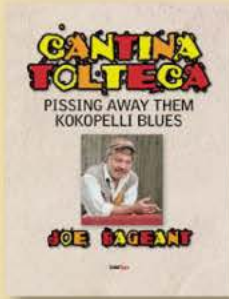
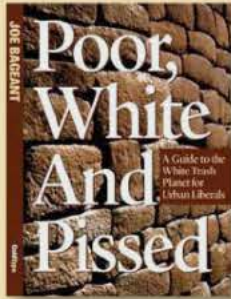
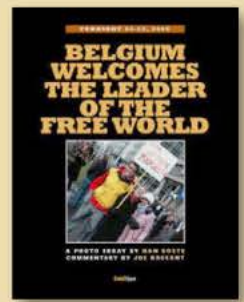
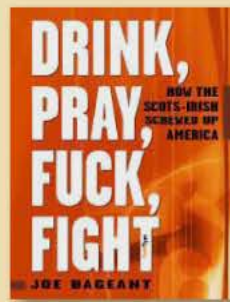
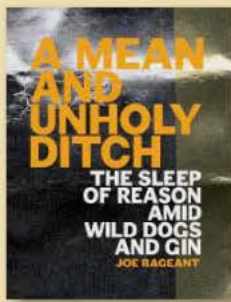
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ColdType 7 Lewis Street, Georgetown, Ontario, Canada L7G 1E3. **Contact:** Tony Sutton – editor@coldtype.net.

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US Army / Flickr

US Army infantryman fires a Javelin shoulder-fired anti-tank missile at Al-Ghalail Range in Qatar.

W.J. ASTORE

The business of America is war

War is the business of the state. That can be read in more than one way. Back in the 17th and 18th centuries, many wars were the work of mercenaries and mercenary-captains, often serving, more or less, nobility who thought they could supplant the king or queen, or expand their own turf and power, pursuing plunder all the while. People gave their support to strong leaders and nation-states partly because they

were tired of constant warfare and being the victims of mercenaries. In the 18th century, war was said to be “enlightened” because it largely didn’t impact the people directly; warfare was “limited” to otherwise under-employed nobility and the so-called dregs of society. And nation-states profited from being able to control warfare.

The French Revolution and Napoleon unleashed a new phase of increasingly unlimited war inspired by ideology (Liberty!

Fraternity! Equality!). Nationalism was heavily tapped. Soldiers were told it was an honour to die for the nation-state rather than for plunder or in the service of some minor nobleman. Sweet and fitting it seemed to die for one’s country, so soldiers were told -- and are still told to this day.

Nowadays, war is the business of the state may be taken literally with war as business. The US federal government spends more than half of its discretionary budget on

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the military, weaponry, and war, though it's disguised as a "defense" budget. As long as war remains a business for the US, and as long as people are profiting from it, not just in monetary terms but in terms of power, war will remain supreme in US foreign policy.

I remember reading a newspaper from the 1930s that stated clearly that the way to end war was to remove the profit motive. That same decade, the US Senate held hearings to expose the "merchants of death," the military contractors that had profited so greatly from wholesale death and destruction during World War I. Since the US in those days didn't have a large standing military and a vast array of private military contractors, those hearings could go ahead in a nation that sought to avoid another world war, especially yet another one in Europe.

Today, the US routinely wages war couched as ever in terms of peace or, if not peace, then security for America. How America is made more secure by troops in Syria helping to facilitate the seizing of oil, or troops in Africa engaging in the latest scramble for that continent's natural resources, is left undefined. Or perhaps there is a tacit definition: if war is business, America needs (and deserves) access to the best markets, to vital natural resources, to oil and lithium and similar strategic materials, and the way to secure those is militarily, using force.

One thing that amazes me, though it shouldn't, is the almost complete lack of emphasis in the US on conservation, on limiting resource extraction by cutting demand. Oil companies are bragging

how they're boosting fossil fuel production in the US. The message is clear: keep consuming! No need to cut back on your use of fossil fuels. Your overlords will secure -- and sell at inflated prices -- the fuel you need and want. Just don't ask any uncomfortable questions.

I suppose it's all quite simple (and depressing) in its obviousness:

War is the business of the state.

The business of America is business.

The business of America is war.

The nation-state was supposed to corral war, to control it, to "enlighten" it by keeping it limited, a sideshow. Yet war in America has become unlimited, the main show, and very much unenlightened as well. Corraling and controlling it is out of favour. Planning for the next big war is all the rage, perhaps most clearly with China, though Russia factors in as well. A new cold war wins nods of approval from America's national security state because it most certainly means job security and more power for those who are part

of that state.

What is to be done? America needs to remember that war is not the health of any democracy, and that no democracy can survive when it's constantly engaged in war and preparations for the same. Yet we know America isn't a democracy, so that argument is effectively moot. Perhaps home-spun wisdom can help: those who live by the sword (or the gun) die by the same, though the American response would seem to be: I'll just buy more swords (or guns), so take that. Or maybe an appeal to Christianity and how blessed the peacemakers are, and how Christ was the prince of peace, except Americans prefer a warrior-Christ who favours his chosen with lawyers, guns, and money. **CT**

William Astore, a retired lieutenant colonel (USAF) and professor of history, is a senior fellow at the Eisenhower Media Network (EMN), an organisation of critical veteran military and national security professionals. He personal blogs at www.bracingviews.com.

NORMAN SOLOMON

Don't worry about nuke war. Do something

This is an emergency. Right now, we're closer to a cataclysmic nuclear war than at any other time since the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. One assessment after another has said

the current situation is even more dangerous.

Yet few members of Congress are advocating for any steps that the US government could take to decrease the dangers of a nuclear

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conflagration. The silences and muted statements on Capitol Hill are evading the reality of what's hanging in the balance -- the destruction of almost all human life on Earth. "The end of civilization."

Constituent passivity is helping elected officials to sleepwalk toward unfathomable catastrophe for all of humanity. If senators and representatives are to be roused out of their timid refusal to urgently address -- and work to reduce -- the present high risks of nuclear war, they need to be confronted. Nonviolently and emphatically.

Russian president Vladimir Putin has made thinly veiled, extremely reckless statements about possibly using nuclear weapons in the Ukraine war. At the same time, some of the US government's policies make nuclear war more likely. Changing them is imperative.

For the last few months, I've been working with people in many states who aren't just worried about the spiking dangers of nuclear war -- they're also determined to take action to help prevent it. That resolve has resulted in organizing more than 35 picket lines that will happen on Friday, October 14, at local offices of Senate and House members around the country. (If you want to organize such picketing in your area, go here.)

What could the US government do to lessen the chances of global nuclear annihilation? The Defuse Nuclear War campaign, which is coordinating those picket lines, has identified key needed actions. Such as:

Rejoin nuclear-weapons treaties the US has pulled out of.

President George W. Bush withdrew the United States from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002. Under Donald Trump, the US withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 2019. Both pacts significantly reduced the chances of nuclear war.

Take US nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert.

Four hundred intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) are armed and ready for launch from underground silos in five states. Because they're land-based, those missiles are vulnerable to attack and thus are on hair-trigger alert -- allowing only minutes to determine whether indications of an incoming attack are real or a false alarm.

End the policy of "first use."

Like Russia, the United States has refused to pledge not to be the first to use nuclear weapons.

Support congressional action to

avert nuclear war.

In the House, H.Res. 1185 includes a call for the United States to "lead a global effort to prevent nuclear war."

An overarching need is for senators and representatives to insist that US participation in nuclear brinkmanship is unacceptable. As our Defuse Nuclear War team says, "Grassroots activism will be essential to pressure members of Congress to publicly acknowledge the dangers of nuclear war and strongly advocate specific steps for reducing them."

Is that really too much to ask? Or even demand? **CT**

Norman Solomon is the national director of *RootsAction.org* and the executive director of the *Institute for Public Accuracy*. He is the author of a dozen books including *War Made Easy*. His next book, *War Made Invisible: How America Hides the Human Toll of Its Military Machine*, will be published in Spring 2023 by *The New Press*.

ROSA MIRIAM ELIZALDE

Cuba: A tale of two hurricanes

Ernest Hemingway learned in Cuba that the best way to get through a hurricane is to have your ears tuned to a battery-powered radio and keep your hands busy with a bot-

tle of rum and a hammer to nail down doors and windows. The American writer appropriated the typical jargon of Cuban meteorologists and fishermen who speak of "the sea" in the feminine and of

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the hurricane as a demon or evil sorcerer, and who, when a storm leaves the island, usually say that “it entered in the channel” or that “it crossed the land.”

From the clashes with the cyclones and the turbulent waters came that jewel of literature, *The Old Man and the Sea*, which made William Faulkner, another giant, exclaim that Hemingway had found God.

On an island located at the crossroads of the winds, it is impossible not to live with the culture of hurricanes that have existed in the Antilles since the most remote evidence of life, some 6,000 years before Christ. The Taínos, Indigenous Cubans, gave the phenomenon its name and drew a spiral to represent the hurricane, a rotating symbol of the wind, which could be embodied in a monstrous serpent capable of wrapping the entire universe in its body.

In both reality and mythology, the hurricane has produced “tremendous fantasies” alike, in the words of the greatest Cuban novelist, Alejo Carpentier, who was inspired by the passage of the 1927 meteor over Havana to write some passages for his novel *Ecue-Yamba – O! The storm*, Carpentier wrote, caused the movement of “houses, intact, several kilometers from their foundations; schooners pulled out of the water, and left on a street corner; granite statues, decapitated from a chopping block; mortuary cars, paraded by the wind along squares and avenues, as if guided by ghost coachmen and, to top it off, a rail torn from a track, raised in weight, and thrown on the trunk of a royal



As Hurricane Ian raged over Cuba, another storm was hitting the airwaves with US-based social media exploding with calls for protest and revolution.

palm with such violence, that it was embedded in the wood, like the arms of a cross.”

There are no significant differences between that description and what we have witnessed again in Cuba. Hurricane Ian left three dead and more than 89,000 homes affected in the province of Pinar del Río, caused the destruction of thousands of hectares of crops, led to trees and street lighting poles falling everywhere, left the country in total darkness for hours and with thousands of stories that turn anything told by two literary geniuses like Hemingway and Carpentier into pale tales.

The destruction can have infinite variations, but the hurricane is one of the few things that has not changed in thousands of years for the people of the Antilles. Whatever it may be called and whatever may be the strength of its fury, both the ancient and modern worlds have considered it a living creature that comes and goes over time and is not always cruel. When the excesses do not occur,

the waters and the winds cool the summer heat and benefit agriculture, and everyone is happy.

However, this will be the first time that such a well known and recurrent natural phenomenon passes through Cuba accompanied by another equal or greater destructive force that has been created artificially in the new digital laboratories and is capable of such an evil that our Taino ancestors could not have foreseen it.

While gusts of wind of more than 200 kilometers per hour blew in the north of Pinar del Río, more than 37,000 accounts on Twitter replicated the hashtag #CubaPaLaCalle (Cuba to the streets), with calls for protests, roadblocks, assaults on government institutions, sabotage, and terrorism, and with instructions on how to prepare homemade bombs and Molotov cocktails. Less than 2 percent of the users who participated in this virtual mobilization were in Cuba. Most of those who made the call to “fire up” the

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streets in Cuba were connected to American technology platforms and did so while hundreds of kilometers away from the country that remained in darkness. Perhaps some on the island kept their battery-powered radio. Still, what millions of Cubans had in the palm of their hands was not a bottle of Hemingway's rum but a cellphone connected to the internet (the country of 11 million inhabitants has 7.5-million people with access to social media).

Let's do an exercise. Imagine this panorama: You are anguished with the here and now. You have no electricity and no drinking water. What little food you have bought with great difficulty and kept refrigerated will go bad in no time. You don't know what has happened to your family that lives in the western provinces, where the damage is apocalyptic. You have no idea how long this new crisis will last. Daily life before the hurricane was already desperate due to the economic blockade imposed by the United States, inflation, and shortages being faced by Cubans. Still, you see on your mobile that "everyone" (on the internet, of course) seems to be doing well and has plenty, while thousands of people on social media (and their trolls) shout that the culprit of your misfortune is the communist government. Your only light source is the mobile screen, which works like Plato's allegory of the cave: you sit with your back to a flaming fire while virtual figures pass between you and the bonfire. You only see the movements of their shadows projected on the walls of the cave,

and those shadows whisper the solution to your desperate reality: #CubaPaLaCalle.

At no other time in history has an immigrant minority had so much economic, media, and technological power to try to sink their country with their relatives still in Cuba before even trying to lend a hand in the midst of a national tragedy. What Mexican who lives in the United States puts political differences above helping their relatives after an earthquake? Why don't Salvadorans or Guatemalans who live abroad do it now that Hurricane Julia has devastated Central America.

It is unprecedented and unheard of that the hurricane of a lifetime, and the hurricane of virtual hatred can arrive simulta-

neously, but that is just what happened in Cuba. **CT**

*Rosa Miriam Elizalde is a Cuban journalist and founder of the site Cubadebate. She is vice president of both the Union of Cuban Journalists (UPEC) and the Latin American Federation of Journalists (FELAP). She has written and co-written several books including *Jineteros en la Habana* and *Our Chavez*. She has received the Juan Gualberto Gómez National Prize for Journalism on multiple occasions for her outstanding work. She is currently a weekly columnist for *La Jornada* of Mexico City. This article was produced by Globetrotter and was first published on *La Jornada**

SAM PIZZIGATI

The wealthy are a greater threat than hurricanes

Hurricane Ian has already faded from the headlines, but local officials and insurers are still tallying up the total damage. The storm may well end up America's second-costliest hurricane ever.

Florida's total damage bill, the global property analyst CoreLogic now estimates, could hit \$70-billion. The good news? Without the federal programme that discourages development in Florida's flood-prone inland area south of Tampa, CoreLogic's Tom Larsen

points out, Hurricane Ian's toll would be running far higher.

Florida's coasts – by far the state's most vulnerable real estate – have no comparable federal protection. On these coasts, Florida's state government calls the shots. Actually, we need to get a bit more precise here. Florida's state government doesn't call the shots. Florida's rich do, and the continuing immensity of their after-tax incomes has turned out to matter far more to state policy than the well-being of Floridian families of

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modest means.

How so? Let's start with CoreLogic's analysis of Hurricane Ian's damage. The "key reason" why Hurricane Ian has been "so economically destructive," notes CoreLogic's Larsen, has been Florida's "massive growth in coastal real estate." That coastal growth has accounted for a disproportionate share of Florida's 50 percent population jump since 1992, the year "when Hurricane Andrew hit Miami".

Florida authorities have been doing everything possible ever since then to keep people flowing into the state's coastal communities most vulnerable to climate-change storm surges. And that hasn't been easy, because the danger from giant windstorms has the private insurance market freaking out. Annual property-insurance premiums in Florida, reports an *Economist* analysis, now run "triple the national average."

Florida officials have not stood idly by. Twenty years ago, state lawmakers created the Citizens Property Insurance Corporation, a government-owned nonprofit insurer of last resort. Citizens currently charges premiums that average up to 40 percent less than commercial property-insurance policies, and this taxpayer-subsidized insurer now covers more Floridian property-owners than any private insurer.

What happens when Citizens Property Insurance can't cover one of its climate-disaster liabilities? The agency has the authority, *The Economist* notes, to "levy a surcharge on almost all other property- and casualty-insurance policyholders in the state."

The state of Florida – with all these insurance subsidies – is essentially doing everything within its power to keep people buying property in the state's most climate change-threatened coastal areas. Why does the state want as many people as possible living in harm's way? The state needs property owners. Taxes on property keep the state of Florida running. The state has no tax on income.

High-income people in Florida – the state's rich – like things that way.

State and local governments, observes the Washington, DC-based Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, "have historically relied on three broad types of taxes": levies on personal income, property, and – through sales and excises taxes – consumption.

State income taxes, ITEP calculates, rate as by far the most progressive of these three tax categories. On average, low-income families in the United States pay just 0.04 percent of their incomes in state income tax. Top 1 percent families pay 4.6 percent, an income share over 100 times greater.

Those numbers reverse when we look at state and local property taxes, with low-income families paying an average 4.2 percent of their incomes in taxes on property and top 1-percenters paying just 1.7 percent. And low-income renters, ITEP reminds us, "do not escape property taxes" since their landlords pass on the tax "in the form of higher rent."

Just how regressive do taxes in Florida turn out to be? Families in the state's richest 1 percent pay

just 2.3 percent of their incomes in total state and local taxes. Families in Florida's middle-income fifth pay state and local taxes at almost quadruple that rate, 8.1 percent of family income, and the state's poorest fifth of families pay 12.7 percent of their incomes in state and local taxes.

An even more striking stat: Only one state in the nation – the gambling-dependent Nevada – has a tax system friendlier to its top 1 percent than Florida.

This Florida tax friendliness – to the wealthy – has turned out to be quite the rich people-magnet. Florida now rates as the home to 10 percent of the nation's households worth at least \$30 million, as a just-published ITEP report on America's "geographic distribution of extreme wealth" documents. The state, *Fortune* noted this past August, is attracting "nearly four times the number of high-rollers" as Texas, the nation's second-most popular state destination for wealthy households on the move.

Florida's well-endowed households, in return, have been quite generous to the pols who keep the Sunshine State so inviting to the superrich. The two fundraising committees supporting the reelection bid of Florida's current rich people-friendly governor, the *Tampa Bay Times* reports, are now sitting on "more than \$115-million." The Democratic Party challenger to Republican incumbent Ron DeSantis has \$5-million in the bank.

Don't expect, in other words, any substantial change anytime soon in Florida's continuing rush to keep average families buying

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homes – and paying property taxes – in the state’s most at-risk coastal zones. Those homes may flood in the next big hurricane. Or even get blown away. A small price to pay to keep rich people happy. **CT**

Sam Pizzigati, veteran labor

journalist and Institute for Policy Studies associate fellow, edits Inequality.org. His recent books include: The Case for a Maximum Wage (2018) and The Rich Don’t Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970 (2012).

media commentators proclaimed that the act had “lost them” to the cause.

It is perhaps with some poetic timing that I’ve just started a project that is an oral history of the environmental movements in the UK. The aim is to contribute to a greater understanding and wider public awareness of the variety of modes of engagement with environmental issues.

This tactic was certainly a provocative act and Van Gogh’s work is undoubtedly some of the most important artwork of modern times. However, many of these commentaries on Just Stop Oil’s actions simply just don’t hold up.

The main critiques of the activist stunt are that it alienates people who are sympathetic to the climate cause by attacking a much-loved and important piece of art. That it smacks of middle-class activism and is overly performative. And, finally, that it has required “explanation”, which if you have to do, you’re losing.

While there is some truth to these critiques, I don’t buy them.

Rather than wade further into the quagmire of social media debate, here is a breakdown of the three arguments and explanations of why I think that this kind of provocative activism deserves our unwavering support.

1. Art is an extension of corporate power

First off, museums and art galleries have long been used by fossil fuel companies for the purposes of artwashing – the ethically acceptable process of funding art and culture to smooth over their very unethical corporate practices.

Just Stop Oil



Saying No to Big Oil: Activists from Just Stop Oil threw tomato soup over Vincent Van Gogh’s Sunflowers painting in London’s National Gallery.

OLI MOULD

Just Stop Oil was right to target van Gogh painting

Waves of controversy were sparked recently when two Just Stop Oil activists threw tomato soup over Van Gogh’s Sunflowers

at the National Gallery in London. Although the painting was behind glass and undamaged, politicians were quick to condemn their “attention-seeking” vandalism while

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Some of the more conscientious institutions (including The National Gallery) have cut ties with any sponsorship from oil companies, but others have doubled down on it.

Art itself, through the networks of global trading, tax avoidance and the creation of freeports (huge walled complexes where art is stored away from prying eyes and tax collectors), has become totally intertwined with global corporate and fossil fuel capitalism. Corporations plough money into art institutions and artworks themselves because it buys them validity in the eyes of the public. Art becomes a shield for their more nefarious planet-destroying practices.

But the art should never be considered above, or separate from, the capitalist content behind it. Millions of treasured pieces of art are now under the purview of corporate power and have become windows – beautiful windows no doubt, but still windows – into the shady practices of global capital and international tax avoidance. As hard as it is to stomach sometimes, art pieces, in this way, become extensions of corporate power and hence are legitimate targets of climate activism.

2. Fighting class oppression and climate change is the same

The second critique, often coming from the left, accuses climate activism of being inherently middle-class. Groups, they argue, are populated by white people and the “mess” they create (be that with soup on paintings or milk on supermarket floors) is often cleared up by working-class cleaning staff.

There is truth in these argu-

ments, which are often missing from the justification of these activist practices. However, taking a more holistic approach, social and economic justice is a fundamental pillar of climate justice – you cannot have one without the other. The Just Stop Oil activists who defaced the Van Gogh recognised these arguments in part when they said that many people “can’t afford to even buy and heat soup because of the energy crisis”.

“Solving” the climate crisis demands total system change. As Greta Thunberg and other prominent voices have constantly said. Capitalism will not solve the problem, it only makes it worse. Capitalism has the oppression of the working class as its core engine. So, fighting against the changing climate means also fighting capitalism’s class (and indeed, racial, gendered and ableist) imbalance. The two are, and need to continue to be, one.

3. Direct action is important

Finally, some people have wheeled out the phrase “if you’re explaining yourself, you’re losing”. Again, there is a kernel of truth to that, but the severity of the climate catastrophe needs no further explanation.

Explaining is not the point of direct action. If you need to be “won over” by the argument, then you’re clearly not doing enough.

Just Stop Oil’s action with soup on Sunflowers was to symbolise that we’re attacking something we love. The level of ire at those symbolically ruining – remember, it was behind glass so has not be destroyed – a precious art piece should be given a million-fold to

those who are actually ruining our precious planet.

Direct climate action will only increase as the situation worsens and our governments continue to actively make things worse with new mines, fracking and new oil drilling contracts. Destroying pipelines, demanding an end to private jets and other direct action against fossil fuel burning infrastructures are important acts in this regard. They highlight how art is also part of that infrastructure and is therefore equally vital.

The current crop of climate activists -- Just Stop Oil, Extinction Rebellion, Insulate Britain etc – will forge their own path because that is what activists need to do to make their points heard. But for all the reasons outlined above, understanding the history (and their successes and failures) will be important to help build a coherent, united and effective climate movement.

That cohesive movement will need art yes, but not as a conduit for the very capitalist vehicles that are destroying our beautiful planet. As Van Gogh himself said: “...it is not the language of painters but the language of nature which one should listen to, the feeling for the things themselves, for reality is more important than the feeling for pictures”. **CT**

Oli Mould is Lecturer in Human Geography, Royal Holloway University of London. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com.

INSIGHTS

JIM HIGHTOWER

My newspaper became a zombie

My newspaper died. Well, technically it still appears. But it has no life, no news, and barely a pulse. It's a mere semblance of a real paper, one of the hundreds of local journalism zombies staggering along in cities and towns that had long relied on them.

Each one has a bare number of subscribers keeping it going, mostly longtime readers like me clinging to a memory of what used to be and a flickering hope that, surely, the thing won't get worse. Then it does.

Our papers are getting worse at a time we desperately need them to get better. Why? Because they are no longer mediums of journalism, civic purpose, or local identity.

Rather, they've been reduced to little more than profit siphons, steadily piping local money to a handful of distant, high-finance syndicates that have bought out our hometown journals. My daily, the *Austin American-Statesman*, was swallowed up in 2019 by the nationwide Gannett chain, becoming one of more than 1,000 local papers Gannett presently mass produces under its corporate banner, "the USA Today Network."

But even that reference is a deception. The publication doesn't confide to readers that it's actually a product of SoftBank Group, a



multibillion-dollar Japanese financial consortium that owns and controls Gannett.

SoftBank has no interest in Austin as a place, a community, or even as a newspaper market,

nor does it care one whit about advancing the principles of journalism. It's in the profit business, extracting maximum short-term payouts from the properties it owns.

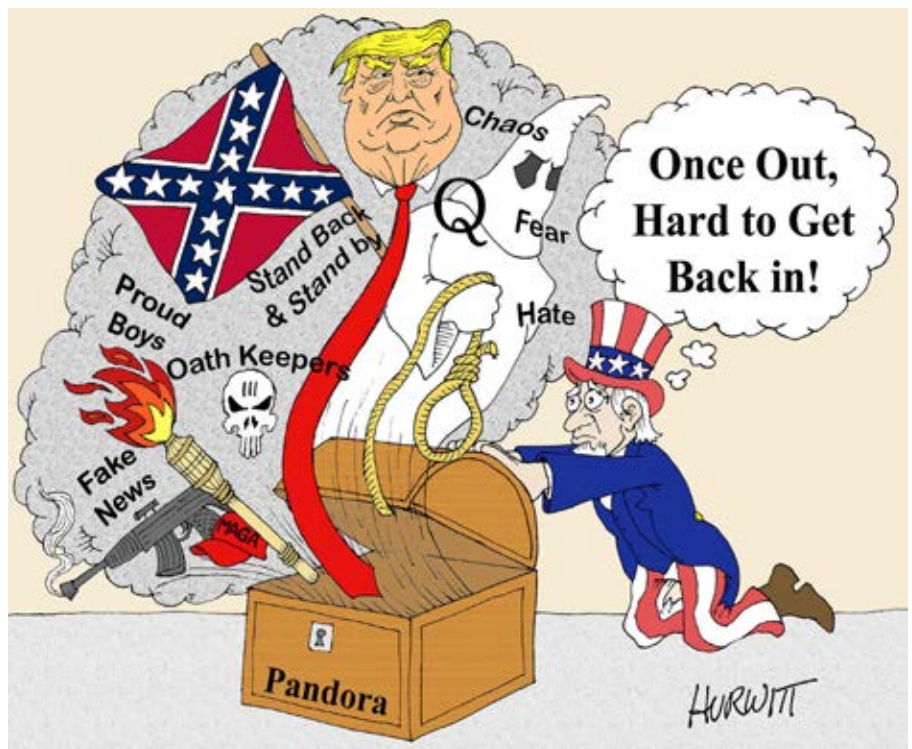
This has rapidly become the standard business model for American newspapering. Today, more than half of all daily papers in America are in the grip of just 10 of these money syndicates. That's why our "local" papers are dying.

It's not a failure of journalism. It's a plunder of journalism by absentee corporate owners.. **CT**

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

HURWITT'S EYE

MARK HURWITT



DAVID EDWARDS

Wicked leaks

Part One: How the media quarantined evidence of the Nord Stream oil pipeline sabotage

Last month, Alex Nunns, author of *The Candidate – Jeremy Corbyn’s Improbable Path To Power* and former Corbyn speechwriter, described the current assault on democracy within the Labour Party:

“What’s happening in the Labour Party is new. The Labour right, having had the shock of their lives in 2015, are now intent on eradicating the left entirely. This isn’t how their predecessors thought. It’s a new departure in Labour history that’ll have long term consequences”.

So why the change?

“Previous generations of Labour right bureaucrats accommodated the left not because they were nicer than the current lot but because 1) the left was part of a power bloc which they needed to advance their own ends & 2) they were confident in containing the left within that bloc.

“This generation of Labour right bureaucrats acts differently because 2) has changed, but 1) hasn’t. Their predecessors weren’t all stupid, so there will be a long-term cost.”

In other words, the Labour right is “eradicating the left entirely” because, as the Corbyn near-miss in 2017 showed, the level of public support for left policies is now so high that it threatens to surge uncontrollably through any

window of opportunity.

This rings true, and not just for the Labour Party. What we have often called the “corporate media”, but which in truth is a state-corporate media system, has followed essentially the same path for the same reasons.

Where once the likes of John Pilger, Robert Fisk and Peter Osborne were granted regular columns in national newspaper and magazines, and even space for prime-time documentaries, their brand of rational, compassionate dissent has been all but banished.

Pilger commented recently: “In recent years, some of the best journalists have been eased out of the mainstream. ‘Defenestrated’ is the word used. The spaces once open to mavericks, to journalists who went against the grain, truth-tellers, have closed”.

In October 2019, Peter Osborne published an article on “the way Boris Johnson was debauching Downing Street by using the power of his office to spread propaganda and fake news”. (Peter Osborne, “The Assault on Truth”, Simon & Schuster). The media response: “This article marked the end of my thirty-year-long career as a writer and broadcaster in the mainstream British

press and media. I had been a regular presenter on Radio 4’s *The Week in Westminster* for more than two decades. It ceased to use me, without explanation. I parted company on reasonably friendly terms with the *Daily Mail* after our disagreement...

“The mainstream British press and media is to all intents and purposes barred to me”.

As with the Labour Party, the reason is that the game – and it always was a game – has changed. In the age of internet-based citizen journalism – heavily filtered by algorithms and “shadow-banning” though it is – elite interests can no longer be sure that the truth can be contained by the “free press” and its obedient ranks of “client journalists”.

In our Media Lens alert of 26 July 2002, we wrote: “This does not mean that there is no dissent in the mainstream; on the contrary the system strongly requires the appearance of openness. In an ostensibly democratic society, a propaganda system must incorporate occasional instances of dissent. Like vaccines, these small doses of truth inoculate the public against awareness of the rigid limits of media freedom”.

That was true two decades ago when we started Media Lens. But, now, the state-corporate media system relies less on inoculation and



more on quarantine: inconvenient facts, indeed whole issues, are simply kept from public awareness. We have moved far closer to a totalitarian system depending on outright censorship.

An example was provided by a remarkable leading article in the *Observer*, titled, “*The Observer* view on the global escalation of Russia’s war on Ukraine”. The title notwithstanding, this October 9 article made no mention at all of the terrorist attacks on the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines just two weeks earlier, on September 26. But why?

The pipelines are multi-national projects operated by Swiss-based Nord Stream AG, with each intend-

ed to supply around 55-billion cubic meters of natural gas annually from Russia to Europe through pipelines laid beneath the Baltic Sea connecting to a German hub. Completed a decade ago, Russian gas giant, Gazprom, has a 51 percent stake in the project that cost around \$15-billion to build.

US media watch site, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), made the key point: “Any serious coverage of the Nord Stream attack should acknowledge that opposition to the pipeline has been a centerpiece of the US grand strategy in Europe. The long-term goal has been to keep Russia isolated and disjointed from Europe, and to keep the countries of Europe tied to US markets. Ever since German and Russian energy companies signed a

deal to begin development on Nord Stream 2, the entire machinery of Washington has been working overtime to scuttle it”.

The evidence for this is simply overwhelming. For example, FAIR noted that during his confirmation hearings in 2021, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken told Congress he was “determined to do whatever I can to prevent” Nord Stream 2 from being completed. Months later, the US State Department reiterated that “any entity involved in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline risks US sanctions and should immediately abandon work on the pipeline”.

If that doesn’t make US hostility to the pipelines clear enough, President Joe Biden told reporters in February: “If Russia invades... then there will be no longer a Nord

Stream 2. We will bring an end to it”.

Asked by a reporter how the US intended to end a project that was, after all, under German control, Biden responded: “I promise you, we will be able to do that”.

No surprise, then, that, following the attack, Blinken described the destruction of the pipelines as a “tremendous opportunity to once and for all remove the dependence on Russian energy,” adding that this ‘offers tremendous strategic opportunity for years to come”.

Former UN weapons inspector and political analyst Scott Ritter commented: “Intent, motive and means: People serving life sentences in US prisons have been convicted on weaker grounds than the circumstantial evidence against Washington for the attack on the Nord Stream pipelines”.

In a rare moment of “mainstream” dissent echoing Ritter’s conclusion, Columbia University economist, Jeffrey Sachs, surprised his interviewer by saying: “I know it runs counter to our narrative, you’re not allowed to say these things in the West, but the fact of the matter is, all over the world when I talk to people, they think the US did it. Even reporters on our papers that are involved tell me, ‘Of course [the US is responsible], but it doesn’t show up in our media.”

Sachs added: “there’s direct radar evidence that US helicopters, military helicopters that are normally based in Gdansk were circling over this area”.

Despite all of this, FAIR reported of US corporate media coverage: “Much of the media cast their suspicions towards Russia, including

**“The fact of the matter is, all over the world when I talk to people, they think the US did it”
– Jeffrey Sachs**

Bloomberg (9/27/22), *Vox* (9/29/22), *Associated Press* (9/30/22) and much of cable news. With few exceptions, speculation on US involvement has seemingly been deemed an intellectual no-fly-zone”.

Thus, the possibility of US involvement has been intellectually quarantined. Instead, US media have been tying themselves in knots trying to find alternative explanations. The *New York Times* wrote: “It is unclear why Moscow would seek to damage installations that cost Gazprom billions of dollars to build and maintain. The leaks are expected to delay any possibility of receiving revenue from fuel going through the pipes”.

In Britain, the *Guardian* affected similar confusion: “Nord Stream has been at the heart of a standoff between Russia and Europe over energy supplies since the start of the Kremlin’s war in Ukraine, but it is not immediately clear who stands to benefit from the destruction of the gas infrastructure”.

If not “immediately clear”, it surely becomes clear after a moment’s honest reflection. Another *Guardian* report commented: “Ukraine, Poland, the Baltic states and the US – including its former president Donald Trump – have been fierce critics of the Nord Stream pipeline, and Germany has announced its intention to wean itself off Russian gas completely and Gazprom has wound down deliveries to almost zero.

“For a Nato ally to have carried

out an act of sabotage on a piece of infrastructure part-owned by European companies would have meant much political risk for little gain, but for Russia to destroy its own material and political asset would also seem to defy logic”.

The risk is not, in fact, that great in a world where politicians and media like the *Guardian* refuse to point the finger of blame at the world’s sole superpower. As we have seen, the assertion that an attack by a Nato ally would be “for little gain” was publicly contradicted by Blinken’s own comment that the destruction of the pipelines “offers tremendous strategic opportunity for years to come”.

The *Guardian* added: “Some European politicians suggested Russia could have carried out the blasts with the aim of causing further havoc with gas prices or demonstrating its ability to damage Europe’s energy infrastructure”.

But as the *Guardian* acknowledged, this “logic” seemed “to defy logic” and suggested journalists were burying their heads in the sand at the bottom of the Baltic Sea.

A further *Guardian* report noted: “A senior Ukrainian official also called it a Russian attack to destabilise Europe, without giving proof”.

Or any reasoning. The report continued: “British sources said they believed it may not be possible to determine what occurred with certainty”.

How convenient. The *Telegraph* reported: “Antony Blinken, the US secretary of state, said that if it was confirmed it was an act of sabotage by Russia it would be ‘in nobody’s interest’.”

Again, a statement directly contradicted by Blinken himself. His “in nobody’s interest” comment was the main focus of most media

coverage.

FAIR discussed a tweet from a Polish member of the European Parliament, Radek Sikorski – a one-time Polish defence minister as well as a former American Enterprise Institute fellow, who was named one of the “Top 100 Global Thinkers” in 2012 by Foreign Policy.

FAIR reported: “Sikorski tweeted a picture of the methane leak in the ocean, along with the caption, ‘As we say in Polish, a small thing, but so much jo.’” He later tweeted, ‘Thank you, USA,’ with the same picture.”

These comments were occasionally reported in the UK press, but Sikorski later tweeted against the pipeline, noting: “Nord Stream’s only logic was for Putin to be able to blackmail or wage war on Eastern Europe with impunity”.

He added: “Now \$20-billion of scrap metal lies at the bottom of the sea, another cost to Russia of its criminal decision to invade Ukraine. Someone...did a special maintenance operation”.

This was clearly an ironic reference to the term ‘special military operation’ used by Russia to describe its illegal invasion of Ukraine.

Significantly, the *Telegraph* reported some but not all of this: “Sikorski posted a photo of the Nord Stream methane bubbling to the Baltic’s surface, with the brief message: ‘Thank you, USA’.

“Sikorski has since deleted his tweet, and has not since elaborated on it... [but] it was widely seized upon by pro-Russian media seeking to make the case for American sabotage”.

But as we have seen, Sikorski certainly had elaborated on it; and media didn’t need to be “pro-Russian” to believe the comments pointed towards Western

Curiously, non-corporate journalists were able to find the evidence and arguments omitted by “mainstream” journalists

sabotage.

The *Daily Mail* also struggled to understand: “On Twitter Radoslaw Sikorski posted a picture of a massive methane gas spill on the surface of the Baltic Sea with the comment: ‘Thank You USA’. The hawkish MEP later tweeted that if Russia wants to continue supplying gas to Europe it must ‘talk to the countries controlling the gas pipelines’.

“Whatever did he mean?”

In fact, Sikorski had been very clear about what he meant.

In a single, casual comment in the *Mail on Sunday*, Peter Hitchens may be the only “mainstream” journalist to actually affirm the likely significance of Sikorski’s comments: “Radek Sikorski may have given the game away. First, he tweeted ‘Thank you, USA’ with a picture of the gas bubbling up into the Baltic. Then, when lots of people noticed, he deleted it. That made me think he was on to something.” (Hitchens, “How could I know...” *Mail on Sunday*, 2 October 2022)

Curiously, non-corporate journalists like Jonathan Cook, Caitlin Johnstone, Glenn Greenwald, Aaron Maté, Bryce Green, even hippy Russell Brand, were able to find all the evidence and arguments omitted by “mainstream” journalists supported by far greater resources.

And this makes the point with

which I began this alert: There is now so much high-quality journalism exposing the establishment outside the state-corporate “mainstream”, that the task of the “mainstream” now is to protect the establishment by acting as a buffer blocking citizen journalism from public awareness.

The *Observer* editorial which failed to even mention this major terror attack on civilian infrastructure talked of a “Putin plague”, describing the Russian leader as “a pestilence whose spread threatens the entire world. Ukraine is not its only victim”.

That’s the Bad Guy. So who are the Good Guys in this fairy-tale? The editors added: “In this developing confrontation, much more is at stake than Ukraine’s sovereignty. On life support, it seems, is the entire postwar consensus underpinning global security, nuclear non-proliferation, free trade and international law”.

It is easy to understand why the *Observer* would prefer to quarantine the possibility of US involvement in a terror attack that would make a nonsense of the editors’ lofty rhetoric about a “postwar consensus’ based on ‘international law”.

Also no surprise, the *Observer* once again found answers in the favoured, fix-all solution beloved of the Western press – regime change: “If the Putin plague is ever to be eradicated, if the war is ever to end, such developments inside Russia, presaging a change of leadership, full military withdrawal from Ukraine and a fresh start, represent the best hope of a cure”. **CT**

David Edwards is co-editor of *Media Lens*, the UK media watchdog. Its website, where this article first appeared, is www.medialens.org.

PRITI GULATI COX & STAN COX

Are green resource wars looming?

The burden of massive EV batteries will be borne by people and ecosystems

Much of the excitement over the Inflation Reduction Act, which became law in the US this summer, focused on the boost it should give to the sales of electric vehicles. Sadly, though, manufacturing and driving tens of millions of individual electric passenger cars won't get us far enough down the road to ending greenhouse-gas emissions and stanching the overheating of this planet. Worse yet, the coming global race to electrify the personal vehicle is likely to exacerbate ecological degradation, geopolitical tensions, and military conflict.

The batteries that power electric vehicles are likely to be the source of much international competition and the heart of the problem lies in two of the metallic elements used to make their electrodes: cobalt and lithium. Most deposits of those metals lie outside the borders of the United States and will leave manufacturers here (and elsewhere) relying heavily on foreign supplies to electrify road travel on the scale now being envisioned.

In the battery business, the Democratic Republic of Congo is referred to as “the Saudi Arabia of cobalt.” For two decades, its cobalt

– 80 percent of the world's known reserves – has been highly prized for its role in mobile-phone manufacturing. Such cobalt mining has already taken a terrible human and ecological toll.

Now, the pressure to increase Congo's cobalt output is intensifying on a staggering scale. Whereas a phone contains just thousandths of a gram of cobalt, an electric vehicle battery has pounds of the metal, and a quarter-billion such batteries will have to be manufactured to fully electrify the American passenger car fleet as it now exists.

Not surprisingly, the investment world is now converging on Congo's capital, Kinshasa. In a remarkable series of articles late last year, the *New York Times* reported how the cobalt rush in that country has been caught up “in a familiar cycle of exploitation, greed, and gamesmanship that often puts narrow national aspirations above all else”. The most intense rivalry is between China, which has, in recent years, been buying up cobalt-mining operations in Congo at a rapid clip, and the United States, now playing catch-up. Those two nations, wrote the *Times*,

“have entered a new ‘Great Game’ of sorts”, a reference to the nineteenth-century confrontation between the Russian and British Empires over Afghanistan.

Fifteen of 19 cobalt mines in Congo are now under Chinese control. In and around those mines, the health and the safety of workers have been severely compromised, while local residents have been displaced from their homes. People sneaking into the area to collect leftover lumps of cobalt to sell are being shot at. The killing of one man by the Congolese military (at the urging of Chinese mine owners) spurred an uprising in his village, during which a protester was also shot and killed.

The *Times* further reported, “Troops with AK-47s were posted outside the mine this year, along with security guards hired from a company founded by Erik Prince”. Prince is notorious for having been the founder and boss of the mercenary contractor Blackwater, which committed atrocities during America's “forever wars” of the 2000s. Among other mayhem, Blackwater mercenaries fired upon unarmed civilians in both Iraq and Afghanistan and were convicted of the killings and woundings that resulted.



This lithium mine at Salinas Grandes salt desert in Jujuy province, Argentina, is featured on the cover of the UTS report's cover.

From 2014 to 2021, he was the chair of a China-based company, Frontier Services Group, that provided Blackwater-style services to mining companies in Congo.

Prince has joined what the *Times* calls “a wave of adventurers and opportunists who have filled a vacuum created by the departure of major American mining companies, and by the reluctance of other traditional Western firms to do business in a country with a reputation for labor abuses and bribery.”

Forbes reported recently that 384 additional mines may be needed worldwide by 2035 to keep battery factories supplied with cobalt, lithium, and nickel. Even were there to be a rapid acceleration of the recycling of metals from old batteries, 336 new mines would still be needed. A battery-industry CEO told the magazine:

“If you just look at Tesla’s ambition to produce 20-million electric vehicles a year in 2030, that alone will require close to two times the present global annual supply [of those minerals] and that’s before

you include VW, Ford, GM, and the Chinese.”

Currently, the bulk of the world’s lithium production occurs in Australia, Chile, and China, while there are vast unexploited reserves in the southern part of Bolivia where it joins Chile and Argentina in what’s come to be known as the “lithium triangle”. China owns lithium mines outright throughout that triangle and in Australia, and two-thirds of the world’s lithium processing is done in Chinese-owned facilities.

Lithium extraction and processing is not exactly a green business. In Chile’s Atacama Desert, for instance, where lithium mining requires vast evaporation ponds, a half million gallons of water are needed for every metric ton of lithium extracted. The process accounts for 65 percent of the total amount of water used in that region and causes extensive soil and water contamination, as well as air pollution.

While evidently uninterested in Mother Nature, Tesla’s electric car tycoon Elon Musk is intensely interested in vertically integrating lithium mining with electric battery and vehicle production on the Chinese model. Accordingly, he’s been trying for years to get his hands on Bolivia’s pristine lithium reserves. Until ousted in a 2020 coup, that country’s president Evo Morales stood in Musk’s way, pledging to “industrialise with dignity and sovereignty.”

When a Twitter user accused Musk of being complicit in the coup, the Tesla tycoon responded, “We will coup whoever we want! Deal with it”. (He later deleted the tweet.) As Vijay Prashad and Alejandro Bejarano observed at the time, “Musk’s admission, however intemperate, is at least honest... Earlier this year, Musk and his company revealed that they wanted to build a Tesla factory in Brazil, which would be supplied by lithium from Bolivia; when we wrote about that we called our report ‘Elon Musk Is Acting Like a Neo-Conquistador for

South America's Lithium.' ”

Bolivia continues to seek to exploit its lithium resources while keeping them under national control. Without sufficient wealth and technical resources, however, its government has been obliged to solicit foreign capital, having narrowed the field of candidate companies to six – one American, one Russian, and four Chinese. By year's end, it's expected to select one or more of them to form a partnership with its state-owned firm, Yacimientos de Litios Bolivianos. No matter who gets the contract, friction among the three suitor nations could potentially kick off a Western Hemispheric version of the Great Game.

And whatever you do, don't forget that Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, a lithium-rich land with centuries of bitter experience in hosting great powers, is another potential arena for rivalry and conflict. In fact, Soviet invaders first identified that country's lithium resources four decades ago. During the US occupation of Afghanistan in this century, geologists confirmed the existence of large deposits, and the Pentagon promptly labelled the country – you guessed it – a potential “Saudi Arabia of lithium”. According to the Asia-Pacific-based magazine *The Diplomat*, the lithium rush is now on there and “countries like China, Russia, and Iran have already revealed their intentions to develop ‘friendly relations’ with the Taliban”, as they compete for the chance to flaunt their generosity and “help” that country exploit its resources.

The greatest potential for conflict over battery metals may not, in fact, be in Asia, Africa, or the Americas. It may not be on any continent at all. The most severe and potentially most destructive

Friction among the three suitor nations could potentially kick off a Western Hemispheric version of the Great Game in Bolivia

future battleground may lie far out in international waters, where polymetallic nodules – dense mineral lumps, often compared to potatoes in their size and shape – lie strewn in huge numbers across vast regions of the deep-ocean floor. They contain a host of metallic elements, including not only lithium and cobalt but also copper, another metal required in large amounts for battery manufacturing. According to a United Nations report, a single nodule field, the 1.7-million-square-mile Clarion-Clipperton Zone (CCZ) in the Pacific Ocean southeast of the Hawaiian Islands, contains more cobalt than all terrestrial resources combined.

A UN agency, the International Seabed Authority, issues exploration licenses to mining companies sponsored by national governments and intends to start authorising nodule extraction in the CCZ as soon as next year. Mining methods for polymetallic nodules have not yet been fully developed or used on a large scale, but the metal hunters are advertising the process as being far less destructive than the terrestrial mining of cobalt and lithium. One can get the impression that it will be so gentle as not even to be mining as we've known it, but something more like running a vacuum cleaner along the seafloor.

Don't believe it for a second. In

just a small portion of the CCZ, scientists have identified more than 1,000 animal species and they suspect that at least another thousand are also living there, along with 100,000 microbial species. Virtually all of the creatures in the path of mining operations will, of course, be killed, and anything living on the surface of those nodules removed from the ecosystem. The nodule-harvesting machines, as large as wheat combines, will stir up towering clouds of sediment likely to drift for thousands of miles before finally settling onto, burying, and so killing yet more sea life.

To recap: In America, the Saudi Arabia of green greed, we now covet a couple of metals critically important to the electric-vehicle industry, cobalt and lithium, the reserves of which are concentrated in only a small number of nations. However, the ores can also be sucked straight off the seabed in humongous quantities in places far outside the jurisdiction of any nation. Environmentally, geopolitically, militarily, what could possibly go wrong?

Plenty, of course. Writing for the Center for International Maritime Security last year, US Coast Guard Surface Warfare Officer Lieutenant Kyle Cregge argued that the Coast Guard and Navy should have a high-profile presence in seabed mining areas. He stressed that the 1980 Deep Seabed Hard Mineral Resource Act “claimed the right of the US to mine the seabed in international waters, and specifically identifies the Coast Guard as responsible for enforcement.”

He did acknowledge that patrolling areas where deep-sea mining occurs could create some dicey situations. As he put it, “The Coast Guard will face the same problem the US Navy does with its freedom of navigation operations in places

like the South China Sea”. But by potentially putting their vessels in harm’s way, he wrote, “the services seek to reinforce the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea as reflecting customary international law”. (Forget the fact that the US has never signed onto the Law of the Sea treaty!) Cregge then predicted that, “[a]mong the most challenging in a future seabed competition would be China and Russia, states that have already used lawfare in the South China Sea and Arctic regions respectively to pursue their territorial gains”.

To make matters worse, sea-floor mining might not only spark military conflict but also become an integral part of warfighting itself. Manabrata Guha, a researcher in war theory at the University of New South Wales, told Australia’s ABC television that data, including topographic or thermal maps of the seabed, obtained through exploration of the seafloor by mining operations projects, could be of great value to a nation’s armed forces. According to ABC, “Just 9 percent of the ocean floor is mapped in high resolution, compared to about 99 percent of the surface of Mars – a blind spot that affects both deep sea miners and military planners. This is all worth keeping in mind, because while the Pacific Ocean is set to be the sea with the most mining potential, it is also home to this century’s most consequential geopolitical tension: the rise of China, and the US’s response to it.”

The resource-rich South China Sea in particular, notes ABC, has long been a potential flashpoint between China and America. As Guha speculated, US use of deep-sea data in the region “could be

Seafloor mining might not only spark military conflict but also become an integral part of warfighting itself

expanded beyond its battle-centric focus to also include attacks on civilian infrastructure, finance, and cultural systems”. He added, “The undersea domain provides another vector, another potential ‘hole’ that the Americans would look to penetrate”, thanks to the fact, as he pointed out, that the US is 20 to 30 years ahead of China in undersea-mapping technology.

“You want to pick and choose where you hurt the adversary to such an extent that their whole system collapses”, he said. “That’s the idea of multi-domain warfare... the idea is to bring about systemic collapse”.

Systemic collapse? Really? Instead of devising technologies to take down other societies, in this increasingly heated moment, shouldn’t we be focusing on how to avoid our own systemic collapse?

A national fleet of battery-powered cars is unlikely to prove sustainable and could have catastrophic consequences globally. It’s time to consider an overhaul of the whole transportation system to move it away from a fixation on personal vehicles and toward walking, pedaling, and a truly effective nationwide public transportation system (as well as very local ones), which could indeed be run on electricity, while perhaps helping to avoid future disastrous resource wars.

Such a transformation, even were it to occur, would, of course, take a long time. During that pe-

riod, electric vehicles will continue to be manufactured in quantity. So, for now, to reduce their impact on humanity and the Earth, America should aim to produce fewer and far smaller vehicles than are currently planned. After all, electrified versions of the big-ass trucks and SUVs of the present moment will also require bigger, heavier batteries (like the one in the F-150 Lightning pickup truck, which weighs 1,800 pounds and is the size of two mattresses). They will, of course, contain proportionally larger quantities of cobalt, lithium, and copper.

The true burden of a massive battery in an electric car or truck will be borne not just by the vehicle’s suspension system, but by the people and ecosystems unlucky enough to be in or near the global supply chain that will produce it. And those people may be among the first of millions to be imperilled by a new wave of geopolitical and military conflicts in what should be thought of as the world’s green sacrifice zones. **CT**

Priti Gulati Cox is an artist and local organizer for CODEPINK Sidewalk Gallery of Congress, a community street art space in Salina, Kansas. Her current visual work *It’s Time* is growing month by month as it chronicles what could be the most fateful era for our country since the 1860s. **Stan Cox** is a research fellow in ecosphere studies at The Land Institute. He is the author of *The Path to a Livable Future: A New Politics to Fight Climate Change, Racism, and the Next Pandemic*, *The Green New Deal and Beyond: Ending the Climate Emergency While We Still Can*. *This article first appeared at www.tomdispatch.com.*



Adel Al Manthari was maimed by US-made weaponised drone in Yemen in 2018.

KATHY KELLY & NICK MOTTERN

Surviving the killing fields

Critic points out that the US's new lethal force drone policy is secret, preventing public oversight and democratic accountability

Awaiting discharge from a hospital in Cairo, Adel Al Manthari, a Yemeni civilian, faces months of physical therapy and mounting medical bills following three surgeries since 2018, when a US weaponised drone killed four of his cousins and left him mangled, burnt and barely alive, bedridden to this day.

On October, President Biden announced, through Administration officials briefing the press, a new policy regulating US drone attacks, purportedly intended to reduce the numbers of civilian casualties from the attacks.

Absent from the briefings was

any mention of regret or compensation for the thousands of civilians like Adel and his family whose lives have been forever altered by a drone attack. Human rights organisations like the UK-based Reprieve have sent numerous requests to the US Department of Defense and the State Department, seeking compensation to assist with Adel's medical care, but no action has been taken. Instead, Adel and his family rely on a Go Fund Me campaign which has raised sufficient funds to cover the most recent surgery and hospitalisation. But, Adel's supporters are now begging for more assistance to pay for crucial physical therapy plus household expenses for Adel

and two of his sons, his primary caregivers during the extended stay in Egypt. The family struggles with precarious finances, yet the Pentagon budget seemingly can't spare a dime to help them.

Writing for the *New York Review of Books*, (September 22, 2022), Wyatt Mason described the Lockheed Martin Hellfire 114 R9X, nicknamed the "ninja bomb", as an air-to-surface, drone-launched missile with a top speed of 995 miles per hour. Carrying no explosives, the R9X purportedly avoids collateral damage. As the *Guardian* reported in September 2020, 'The weapon uses a combination of the force of 100lb of dense material flying at high speed

and six attached blades which deploy before impact to crush and slice its victims.’”

Adel was attacked before the “ninja bomb” was in more common use. Indeed it is unlikely that he would have survived had his attackers hit the car he and his cousins were travelling in with the barbaric weapon designed to slice up their broken bodies. But this would be small comfort to a man who recalls the day when he and his cousins were attacked. The five of them were travelling by car to examine a real estate proposition for the family. One of the cousins worked for the Yemeni military. Adel worked for the Yemeni government. None of them were ever linked to non-governmental terrorism. But somehow they were targeted. The impact of the missile which hit them instantly killed three of the men. Adel saw, with horror, the strewn body parts of his cousins, one of whom was decapitated. One cousin, still alive, was rushed to a hospital where he died days later.

The Biden administration seems keen to depict a kinder, gentler form of drone attacks, avoiding collateral damage by using more precise weapons like the “ninja bomb” and assuring that President Biden himself orders any attacks waged in countries where the United States is not at war. The “new” rules actually continue policies set up by former President Obama.

Annie Shiel, of the Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) says the new lethal force policy entrenches the previous policies. “The new lethal force policy is also secret,” she writes, “preventing public oversight and democratic accountability.”

President Biden can confer upon himself the power to kill other human beings anywhere in the world because he has determined, as he

Watching the horror play out and preparing for more conflicts will not ensure that the climate crisis, poverty crisis, or food supply is addressed

said after he ordered the drone assassination of Ayman al-Zawahiri, “if you are a threat to our people, the United States will find you and take you out”.

Martin Sheen, noted for his portrayal of US President Josiah Bartlet on the 1999-2006 TV series “The West Wing,” has provided the voice-over for two 15-second cable spots critical of US drone warfare. The spots recently began running on CNN and MSNBC channels showing in Wilmington, Delaware, the hometown of President Biden.

In both spots, Sheen, who has a long history of opposing war and human rights violations, notes the tragedy of civilians killed overseas by US drones. As images of press reports about drone operator suicides roll, he asks: “Can you imagine the unseen effects on the men and women who operate them?”

Humanity faces rising perils of climate catastrophe and nuclear weapon proliferation. We need fictive voices like that of Sheen’s West Wing president and the very real, albeit sidelined leadership of people like Jeremy Corbyn in the UK:

“Some say to discuss peace at a time of war is a sign of some kind of weakness”, Corbyn writes, noting “the opposite is true. It is the bravery of peace protesters around the world that stopped some governments from being involved in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen, or any of the dozens of other conflicts going on. Peace is not just

the absence of war; it is real security. The security of knowing you will be able to eat, your children will be educated and cared for, and a health service will be there when you need it. For millions, that is not a reality now; the after effects of the war in Ukraine will take that away from millions more. Meanwhile, many countries are now increasing arms spending and investing resources in more and more dangerous weapons. The United States has just approved its biggest-ever defence budget. These resources used for weapons are all resources not used for health, education, housing, or environmental protection. This is a perilous and dangerous time. Watching the horror play out and then preparing for more conflicts in the future will not ensure that the climate crisis, poverty crisis, or food supply is addressed. It’s up to all of us to build and support movements that can chart another course for peace, security, and justice for all”.

World leaders seem incapable of levelling with their people about the consequences of pouring money into military budgets which then allow “defence” corporations to profit from worldwide weapon sales, fueling forever wars.

We must follow the grass roots movements’ campaign for environmental sanity and seek to abolish war. And we must engage in the gentle personalism which endeavours to tell Adel Al Manthari we’re sorry, we’re so very sorry for what our countries have done to him, and we earnestly wish to help. **CT**

Kathy Kelly and Nick Mottern
co-ordinate the BanKillerDrones campaign. Mottern serves on the board of directors for Veterans for Peace, while Kelly is board president of World Beyond War.

RON FASSBENDER

A human chain for Julian Assange

Thousands of supporters of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange surrounded the UK Parliament in London on October 8, linking hands to form a human chain and call for his release from Belmarsh high security jail where he has been detained on remand since 2019.

Former UK Home Secretary Priti Patel granted an extradition order to the US where Assange faces charges of espionage for which, if found guilty, he could face life behind bars in one of America's notorious supermax jails.

Supporters say the charges are an attempt to shut down scrutiny of US government actions and have been condemned by a plethora of media organisations, including the National Union of Journalists and International Federation of Journalists, as well as human rights groups including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

The case is seen as a threat to journalism and press freedom, while Assange's legal team express fears he may die in the UK while appeals against extradition are made. **CT**





Photographs by Ron Fassbender



Above and left: Demonstrators surround the British Parliament building in London demanding the release of whistleblower Julian Assange from jail and the dropping of an extradition order to the US.



Above:
 Julian Assange's wife Stella is flanked by former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and Claudia Webbe, MP. Right: Marchers demand the release of Assange.

The photographer

● Ron Fassbender is a London-based documentary photographer. See more of his work at www.ronfassbender.com and on Instagram @ronfassbender





Top and left: Scenes from the protest at the House of Parliament. Above: Dominique Pradalié, President International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)

KEN OLANDE

Empire of savages

A beautifully written book for anyone who wants to understand and argue against the idealisation of the British Empire

Our rulers present the British Empire as somehow being a fairer, nicer sort of conquest. At its height, its advocates praised it for providing justice and the rule of law to all of its subjects. Unfortunately, they would occasionally add, many of these subjects were not civilised enough to cope with such rights. And so rule by law was often put aside. US historian Caroline Elkins's new book, *Legacy of Violence*, graphically shows how "exceptional state-directed violence" was used repeatedly, and then "exonerated" by the authorities.

The British air ministry – a government department once responsible for the RAF – circulated a "Forms of Frightfulness" memo when it faced revolt in Iraq in the 1920s. This discussed controlling peasant villagers with "smoke bombs, aerial darts, tear gas, phosphorus bombs, war rockets, long-delay 'action' bombs, tracer ammunition, man-killing shrapnel bombs, 'liquid' fire [the precursor to napalm] and crude oil to pollute water supplies... A year earlier, Churchill had said that he was 'ready to authorise the construction of [gas] bombs at once'."

Winston Churchill is a recurring

figure in this book, from youthful journalist to revered politician, always promoting the empire.

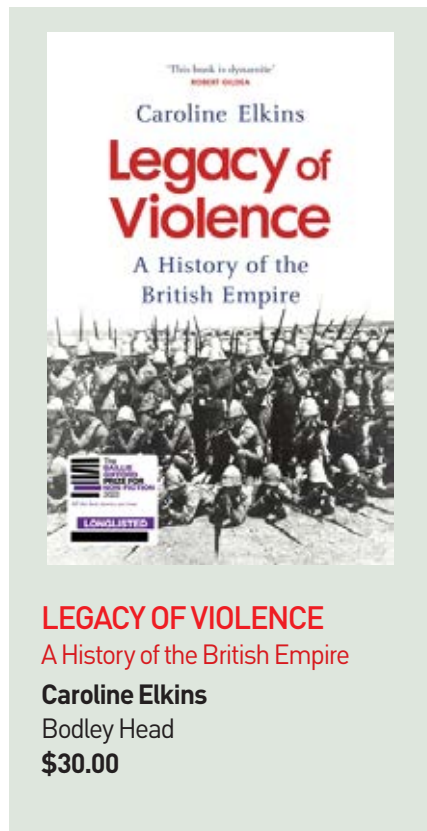
John Newsinger's wide-ranging book *The Blood Never Dried – A People's History of the British Empire* gives a clear Marxist understanding of what imperialism is and how Britain's acquisition of the largest empire the world has ever seen was far from the "fortuitous

accident" loved by the right. Newsinger describes the twin drives of the exploitation of colonised peoples and competition between the big powers, which resulted in two world wars and the Cold War.

But Elkins's book adds something new and valuable, partly because she starts from a different place. This is an exploration of "liberal imperialism". Roughly speaking – how the empire's rulers justified their actions to themselves. One reason the book is nearly 700 pages long is because Elkins prefers to give them enough rope to hang themselves.

Here is a young Churchill singing the praises of dum-dum bullets, "causing wounds that in the body must be generally mortal and in any limb necessitate amputation". The British thought such bullets were important in colonial wars and blocked measures to ban them.

Elkins explains, "Concepts of 'civilised' and 'uncivilised' informed British logic – one senior army medical officer emphasised how conventional bullets often pass through the body. 'As a rule when a white man is wounded... he has had enough, and is quite ready to drop out of the ranks and go to the rear; but the savage, like the tiger, is not so impressionable and will go





American cartoon of John Bull (England) as an Imperial Octopus.

on fighting even when desperately wounded.”

In 1896 the British War Office – a government department once responsible for the army – published its handbook, *Small Wars, On How To Fight in the Colonies*. Its author, Colonel Charles Callwell, was blunt that this was about unleashing havoc to achieve what he called “moral effect” on colonial civilians, and that “regular troops are forced to resort to cattle lifting and village burning and... the war assumes an aspect which may shock the humanitarian”.

Despite this reality, Britain’s leaders saw their own grasping, expansive behaviour as entirely noble. For instance, they justified the Boer War in South Africa “not in self-interested economic terms but rather as a conflict against a xenophobic and racist Boer Republic”.

When he became prime minister in 1940 Churchill told parliament that defeat for Britain in the war would mean “no survival for the British Empire, no survival for all that the British Empire has stood for, no survival for the urge and impulse of the ages, that mankind

will move forward towards its goal”. Here, he casually identifies the empire with freedom and all that is good in humanity – something that would come as a surprise to the millions who had no say in how it was run or how their countries were exploited.

Elkins made a stir with her previous book, *Imperial Reckoning – The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya*. It illustrates the Mau Mau independence struggle in the east

African colony during the 1950s. Conservative historians have argued that her findings cannot be taken seriously because much of her information came from interviews with black Africans who supported the rebellion. Where was the written evidence? Elkins appeared as an expert witness in a 2011 case at the high court in London where several Kenyan victims of torture demanded compensation.

The Foreign Office had denied the existence of any documents that might clarify the British state's role in the atrocities. But just as the case opened, it "discovered" 300 boxes of files "at Hanslope Park, the highly secure government facility... At the time of decolonisation, colonial officials had packed up these newly discovered Kenyan files and spirited them away from Africa".

The victims won their compensation, but Elkins was fascinated; this newly revealed archive contained embarrassing documents from across the empire, far beyond Kenya. This sparked her wider study.

Elkins is very good at showing the messy joins between lofty imperial rhetoric and the reality on the ground. She weaves from the brutality of the suppression of the 1857 Indian Rebellion to the Amritsar Massacre, to Ireland and on to the suppression of the Arab revolt.

Many names pop up again and again in different areas. Douglas Duff was the former head of the savage Black and Tans militia that tried to crush the independence movement in Ireland. He was sent on to use the same methods in Palestine. Elkins says his systematic beating of prisoners led to the phrase "duff them up".

What's more, she shows how the rulers' view of subject peoples evolved not only from their con-

The barbaric treatment of people regarded as lesser races brought into question the whole attitude that had built colonial empires

temptuous treatment of the slaves – whose pitiless exploitation funded Britain's emergence as the workshop of the world – but also Britain's own "native" workers.

Elkins writes, "The Poor Law of 1834 and the Habitual Criminals Act of 1869 created social categories of Britons who, like the empire's subjects, were part of liberalism's underbelly." And the liberals in charge believed these "threats to society" must be reformed through "hard physical labour, thus rendering them more rational and civilised". Variations of these laws emerged across the empire, such as India's Criminal Tribes Act.

British commander Colonel Reginald Dyer explained why he ordered his troops to open fire on a peaceful demonstration at Amritsar in India in 1919, massacring as many as 1,500 people. "I consider this the least amount of firing which would produce the necessary moral and widespread effect it was my duty to produce... not only on those who were present but more specifically throughout the Punjab".

As the atrocity was debated in the British Parliament, a lord said, "One of the mainstays of our empire has been the feeling that every officer whose duty it was to take action in times of difficulty might rely, so long as he acted honestly and in the discharge of his duty, upon his su-

periors standing by him." And this was taken as gospel truth – always assume British troops are right, to the extent that there is no point in investigating.

When prime minister Benjamin Disraeli proclaimed Queen Victoria the Empress of India in 1877 it was part of an ideological redefinition of empire, away from images of trade and exploitation to those of family. This not only made Victoria a supposed mother figure for the whole empire, but also positioned her above political squabbles and, coincidentally, allowed her to be seen as a racial figurehead for the "superior" Anglo-Saxon breed.

This illusion of being above politics and head of a family with common interests has, if anything, grown in the intervening century and a half. So, in 1947 the late queen, then Princess Elizabeth, declared that her life would be "devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family".

Often this idea of a commonwealth or family was achieved by a kind of doublethink that justified barbarism by saying it was a vital part of bringing civilisation. So, at one point Elkins focuses on the fact that Nazi Germany's project of imperial expansion was largely in Europe. Before this, human rights thinking "remained on the periphery until Germany brought colonial counter-insurgency methods to Europe... and unleashing genocidal practices whose impact rippled through the international community".

Even before the new horror of the Holocaust, the barbaric treatment of people regarded as lesser races brought into question the whole attitude that had built colonial empires for Britain, France and the

other imperial powers.

After 1945 Britain's Colonial Office complained that parts of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights "may be extremely difficult to reconcile" in the empire.

The Second World War marked a turning point in the views of both rulers and ruled. Elkins notes, "most British officials believed the Japanese were tiny, weak men... and hardly a worthy enemy for their military". The idea of white superiority was severely damaged by Japanese victories in Malaya and Singapore. Beyond this the cost of the fighting left the country heavily in debt to the US.

The economist John Keynes travelled to the US to negotiate Britain's dire financial position and was outraged to discover they wanted to "pick out the eyes of the British Empire". This outrage is based on an acceptance of the fantasy that Britain was somehow morally different and better than any other imperial project. This was despite the fact that Britain was actively rebuilding other colonial empires, notably those of the French and the Dutch, partly by retaking territory liberated by nationalist rebels from the Japanese.

Britain's newly elected post-war Labour government hoped to go back to extracting wealth from the colonised countries. It thought a resurgence of empire at a higher rate of exploitation could repair the shat-

Elkins does not shy away from talking directly about the hostile environment that attempts to blame immigrants for austerity

tered imperial economy. However, it was faced with increasing numbers of people across the world rising up to free themselves from colonial occupation.

The costs required to keep the empire together undermined its profitability. "Military costs were 20 percent of total public expenditure, or nearly 8 percent of GDP, versus the United States' 5 percent, but they could not be cut without imperilling the very policies on which recovery rested". Eventually this burden forced Britain to let go. But the ruling strata's self-image has never recovered, which is why the empire has become such a non-discussed presence.

Given this excellent book's documentary power, it's a pity there are a few minor errors, often associated with the introduction of background colour. To take two instances. First, England's rulers did not oppress the Irish for their Catholicism from Norman times onwards – England was

itself Catholic for 350 years after the invasion. Second, the city of Kano in Nigeria did not raise £10-million for a Spitfire fighter, though the province of Kano did raise £10,000 to pay for two Spitfires.

There are also a couple of moments of political uncertainty, such as missing Cedric Robinson's argument that all of capitalism is "racial", not just certain exceptional states. However, none of these points undermine her central argument or research.

Legacy of Violence is beautifully written and follows through on its arguments doggedly. It concludes by looking at how the policies of liberal imperialism underlie much of current establishment thinking in Britain. Elkins does not shy away from talking directly about the hostile environment that attempts to blame immigrants for austerity or the Prevent Duty that penalises Muslims.

This is an important book that deserves to be read by everyone who wants to understand and argue against the current attempt to reinvigorate the romance of the British Empire. A knowledge of its contents will really help with arguments over what is the true history of Britain, where its wealth came from and the reality of empire. **CT**

Ken Olande wrote this review for *Socialist Worker* - www.socialistworker.co.uk.

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EDWARD S. HERMAN**
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TREVOR GRUNDY

Dishy Rishi and the sick man of Europe

Britain gets its third prime minister this year as nation is warned of unfolding financial disaster

As a slick Conservative Party public relations machine swings into action telling millions of impoverished Britons to rejoice because they have a new non-white, multi-millionaire and devout Hindu prime minister – the fifth PM in six-and-a-half years – one of the world’s most-respected investors has warned that unless the new government has the courage to renegotiate Brexit, the country is doomed.

Speaking a few hours before Rishi Sunak was installed as PM on October 25, Guy Hands, CEO of Terra Firma, one of the world’s best-respected equity investment firms, startled most commentators when he said on the BBC’s *Today* programme, “If the Tory party can own up to the mistake they made and how they negotiated Brexit and then have somebody leading who actually has the intellectual capability and the authority to renegotiate Brexit, there is a possibility of turning around the economy. But without that, the economy is frankly doomed”.

Britain left the European Union (EU) after a referendum on whether



Rishi Sunak, the latest UK prime minister, is the richest member of parliament.

to leave or stay in 2016. Sunak was a strong supporter of the Leave Europe campaign that saw Boris Johnson lead the Conservative Party into the 2019 general election which resulted in a massive parliamentary majority for the Conservatives.

Mr Hands, a significant donor to the Conservative Party, has been a Brexit critic all along, and now he warns that the UK faces higher

taxes, lower benefits and a possible International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout.

He says Britain’s economic problems started long ago, not just with the newly-ousted PM Liz Truss or her outrageous mini-budget that so infuriated the vast majority of British people by suggesting lower taxes for the super-rich and a huge cut-back in benefits and social services for the poor.

Hands told the *Today* presenter, “The reality is that when they did Brexit they (the Conservatives) had a dream. And the dream was a low-tax, low-benefit economy”.

That, he said, infuriated most Britons and led to the sacking of then-Chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng, who introduced the mini-budget on September 23 and then the dismissal of Truss.

Sterling plunged to a record low against the US dollar and government borrowing costs rose sharply in the aftermath of the mini-budget statement which advocated major tax cuts for the rich without even hinting at how they would be paid for.

UK Treasury / Flickr

The IMF openly criticised the UK Government over its tax-cutting plans, warning they would spark off a cost-of-living crisis.

Truss was forced to make yet another u-turn, so many she must have been dizzy by the time she was told to get out of Number 10 Downing Street.

The rest we all know.

Hello Rishi Sunak.

Around that man, the out-of-touch, arrogant and class-soaked Conservative Party MPs and members cling for survival. Jobs, incomes, pensions, perks, expenses, speaking engagements, newspaper articles, TV and radio appearances. The lot.

The key question on their – and the country’s minds – is: Can Sunak work the miracle?

At 42, the youngest British PM since William Pitt the Younger, he is the richest PM in British history with private wealth topping £730-million. He owns four houses and a huge flat in Kensington, one of London’s most popular playgrounds for the wealthy. It is empty most of the year, waiting to be occupied by Indian relatives shopping at Harrods which is just around the corner.

His growing number of friends in high places call him Dishy Rishi.

Married to one of the world’s richest women, Dishy famously said after he became becoming Chancellor in Boris Johnson’s previous government, “I have friends who are aristocrats. I have friends who are upper class. I have friends who are working class”. But after a slight pause he added, “Well, not actually working class”.

After years at one of Britain’s most expensive private schools, Winchester College, he went to Ox-

He opposed a plan by a Manchester United footballer to give free meals to children whose parents were on the breadline

ford University and then on to a job at Goldman Sachs.

A devout Hindu, he is hard-working and charming, according to his friends.

As Chancellor, he opposed a plan by the Manchester United footballer Marcus Rashford to give free meals to children whose parents were on the breadline. But Dishy Rishi dug deep when it came to making a donation to his old school which charges £44,000 a year per pupil. He thought nothing about signing a cheque for £100,000.

His best friend is James Forsyth, the political editor of the *Spectator* magazine. Right wingers in the media love the man.

Sunak’s rise in politics has been rapid. He has only been an MP since 2015 but in Britain today that’s a helluva long time.

He voted for Brexit in 2016 and was made Chancellor in February 2020. He ran into political trouble that year when it emerged that his multi-billionaire wife Akshata Murty had been benefitting from non-domicile tax status, paying £30,000 a year to maintain it.

She is not thought to have paid tax on £11.6-million in dividends from her family company last year. At the same time, Dishy admitted held a US green card when he was Chancellor.

Britain’s right-wing press just

loves the idea of this fresh-faced, young, eye-wateringly rich man with a happy family as the country’s new leader.

The junk-Press call it Britain’s Obama Moment.

“Rishi Sunak’s victory in the Conservative leadership contest is welcome as a symbol of Britain’s diversity and because he was the best of the possible contenders,” said an editorial in the *Times*, owned by Rupert Murdoch.

The much more working class *Daily Mirror* took another line and, with less sunshine in its voice, pointed out that yet another unelected Conservative has been foisted on the British people.

Like all opposition leaders it wants another general election, and now! Chances of that happening are remote.

Dishy has infuriated many members of his own wonky and wobbling Conservative Party by re-appointing Suella Braverman, another Brexit hardliner, who wants to send immigrants by plane to Rwanda, as Home Affairs Secretary – just a week after she resigned from the same job for breaking a ministerial code and sending official documents deemed ‘sensitive’ on her private email to a Tory backbencher.

Britain’s new poster boy has promised to put honesty and integrity into the heart of his new rule. Whether there’s a woman, man or child left in Britain who believes a single word that seems to roll non-stop out of the ever-open mouths of Tory politicians remains to be seen. **CT**

Trevor Grundy is a British journalist who worked in Africa, now lives in England, and is a life member of the NUJ. His website is www.trevorgrundy.news

CHRIS HEDGES

Stop worrying and love the bomb

The proxy war between Russia and the US in Ukraine all but guarantees direct confrontation with Russia and, with it, the very real possibility of nuclear war

I have covered enough wars to know that once you open that Pandora's box, the many evils that pour out are beyond anyone's control. War accelerates the whirlwind of industrial killing. The longer any war continues, the closer and closer each side comes to self-annihilation. Unless it is stopped, the proxy war between Russia and the US in Ukraine all but guarantees direct confrontation with Russia and, with it, the very real possibility of nuclear war.

Joe Biden, who doesn't always seem to be quite sure where he is or what he is supposed to be saying, is being propped up in the I-am-a-bigger-man-than-you contest with Vladimir Putin by a coterie of rabid warmongers who have orchestrated over 20 years of military fiascos. They are salivating at the prospect of taking on Russia, and then, if there is any habitation left on the globe, China. Trapped in the polarizing mindset of the Cold War – where any effort to de-escalate conflicts through diplomacy is considered appeasement, a perfidious Munich moment – they smugly push the human species closer and closer toward obliteration. Unfortunately for us, one of these true believers is Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

“Putin is saying he is not bluffing. Well, he cannot afford bluffing, and it has to be clear that the people supporting Ukraine and the European Union and the Member States, and the United States and NATO are not bluffing neither”, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell warned. “Any nuclear attack against Ukraine will create an answer, not a nuclear answer but such a powerful answer from the military side that the Russian Army will be annihilated”.

Annihilated. Are these people insane?

You know we are in trouble when Donald Trump is the voice of reason.

“We must demand the immediate negotiation of a peaceful end to the war in Ukraine, or we will end up in world war three”, the former president said. “And there will be nothing left of our planet – all because stupid people didn't have a clue ... They don't understand what they're dealing with, the power of nuclear”.

I dealt with many of these ideologues – David Petraeus, Elliot Abrams, Robert Kagan, Victoria Nuland – as a foreign correspondent for the *New York Times*. Once you

strip away their chest full of medals or fancy degrees, you find shallow men and women, craven careerists who obsequiously serve the war industry that ensures their promotions, pays the budgets of their think tanks and showers them with money as board members of military contractors. They are the pimps of war. If you reported on them, as I did, you would not sleep well at night. They are vain enough and stupid enough to blow up the world long before we go extinct because of the climate crisis, which they have also dutifully accelerated.

If, as Joe Biden says, Putin is “not joking” about using nuclear weapons and we risk nuclear “Armageddon”, why isn't Biden on the phone to Putin? Why doesn't he follow the example of John F. Kennedy, who repeatedly communicated with Nikita Khrushchev to negotiate an end to the Cuban missile crisis? Kennedy who, unlike Biden, served in the military, knew the obtuseness of generals. He had the good sense to ignore Curtis LeMay, the Air Force Chief of Staff and head of the Strategic Air Command, as well as the model for General Jack D. Ripper in “Dr. Strangelove”, who urged Kennedy to bomb the Cuban missile bases, an act that would have probably



ignited a nuclear war. Biden is not made of the same stuff.

Why is Washington sending \$50-billion in arms and assistance to sustain the conflict in Ukraine and promising billions more for “as long as it takes”? Why did Washington and Whitehall dissuade Vladimir Zelensky, a former stand-up comic who has been magically transformed by these war lovers into the new Winston Churchill, from pursuing negotiations with Moscow, set up by Turkey? Why do they believe that militarily humiliating Putin, whom they are also determined to remove from power, won’t lead him to do the unthinkable in a final act of desperation?

Moscow strongly implied it would use nuclear weapons in response to a “threat” to its “territorial integrity”, and the pimps of war shouted down anyone who expressed concern that we all might go up in mushroom clouds, labelling them traitors who are weakening Ukrainian and Western resolve. Giddy at the battlefield

losses suffered by Russia, they poke the Russian bear with ever greater ferocity. The Pentagon helped plan Ukraine’s latest counteroffensive, and the CIA passes on battlefield intelligence. We are slipping, as we did in Vietnam, from advising, arming, funding and supporting, into fighting.

None of this is helped by Zelensky’s suggestion that, to deter the use of nuclear weapons by Russia, NATO should launch “preventive strikes”.

“Waiting for the nuclear strikes first and then to say ‘what’s going to happen to them.’ No! There is a need to review the way the pressure is being exerted. So there is a need to review this procedure”, he said.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the remarks, which Zelensky tried to roll back, were “nothing else than a call to start a world war”.

The West has been baiting Mos-

cow for decades. I reported from Eastern Europe at the end of the Cold War. I watched these militarists set out to build what they called a unipolar world – a world where they alone ruled. First, they broke promises not to expand NATO beyond the borders of a unified Germany. Then they broke promises not to “permanently station substantial combat forces” in the new NATO member countries in Eastern and Central Europe. Then they broke promises not to station missile systems along Russia’s border. Then they broke promises not to interfere in the internal affairs of border states such as Ukraine, orchestrating the 2014 coup that ousted the elected government of Victor Yanukovich, replacing it with an anti-Russian – fascist aligned – government, which, in turn, led to an 8-year-long civil war, as the Russian populated regions in the east sought independence from Kiev. They armed Ukraine with NATO weapons and trained 100,000 Ukrainian soldiers after the

coup. Then they recruited neutral Finland and Sweden into NATO. Now the US is being asked to send advanced long-range missile systems to Ukraine, which Russia says would make the US “a direct party to the conflict”. But blinded by hubris and lacking any understanding of geopolitics, they push us, like the hapless generals in the Austro-Hungarian empire, towards catastrophe.

We call for total victory. Russia annexes four Ukrainian provinces. We help Ukraine bomb the Kerch Bridge. Russia rains missiles down on Ukrainian cities. We give Ukraine sophisticated air defence systems. We gloat over Russian losses. Russia introduces conscription. Now Russia carries out drone and cruise missile attacks on power, sewage and water treatment plants. Where does it end?

“Is the United States, for example, trying to help bring an end to this conflict, through a settlement that would allow for a sovereign Ukraine and some kind of relationship between the United States and Russia?”, a *New York Times* editorial asks. “Or is the United States now trying to weaken Russia permanently? Has the administration’s goal shifted to destabilising Putin or having him removed? Does the United States intend to hold Putin accountable as a war criminal? Or is the goal to try to avoid a wider war – and if so, how does crowing about providing US intelligence to kill Russians and sink one of their ships achieve this?”

No one has any answers.

The *Times* editorial ridicules the folly of attempting to recapture all of Ukrainian territory, especially those territories populated by ethnic Russians.

“A decisive military victory for Ukraine over Russia, in which

Ukraine will leave much of Ukraine in ruins and hundreds of thousands of families convulsed by lifelong grief

Ukraine regains all the territory Russia has seized since 2014, is not a realistic goal”, it reads. “Though Russia’s planning and fighting have been surprisingly sloppy, Russia remains too strong, and Mr. Putin has invested too much personal prestige in the invasion to back down”.

But common sense, along with realistic military objectives and an equitable peace, is overpowered by the intoxication of war.

On October 17, NATO countries began a two-week-long exercise in Europe, called Steadfast Noon, in which 60 aircraft, including fighter jets and long-range bombers flown in from Minot Air Base in North Dakota are simulating dropping thermonuclear bombs on European targets. This exercise happens annually, but the timing is nevertheless ominous. The US has some 150 “tactical” nuclear warheads stationed in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey.

Ukraine will be a long and costly war of attrition, one that will leave much of Ukraine in ruins and hundreds of thousands of families convulsed by lifelong grief. If NATO prevails and Putin feels his hold on power is in jeopardy, what will stop him from lashing out in desperation? Russia has the world’s largest arsenal of tactical nukes, weapons that can kill tens of thousands if used on a city. It also possesses nearly 6,000

nuclear warheads. Putin does not want to end up, like his Serbian allies Slobodan Milošević and Ratko Mladić, as a convicted war criminal in the Hague. Nor does he want to go the way of Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi. What will stop him from upping the ante if he feels cornered?

There is something grimly cavalier about how political, military and intelligence chiefs, including CIA Director William Burns, a former US Ambassador to Moscow, agree about the danger of humiliating and defeating Putin and the spectre of nuclear war.

“Given the potential desperation of President Putin and the Russian leadership, given the setbacks that they’ve faced so far, militarily, none of us can take lightly the threat posed by a potential resort to tactical nuclear weapons or low-yield nuclear weapons”, Burns said in remarks at Georgia Tech in Atlanta.

Former CIA Director Leon Panetta, who also served as Defense Secretary under President Barack Obama, wrote that US intelligence agencies believe the odds of the war in Ukraine spiralling into a nuclear war are as high as one in four.

The Director of National Intelligence, Avril Haines, echoed this warning, telling the Senate Armed Services Committee in May that if Putin believed there was an existential threat to Russia, he could resort to nuclear weapons.

“We do think that [Putin’s perception of an existential threat] could be the case in the event that he perceives that he is losing the war in Ukraine, and that NATO in effect is either intervening or about to intervene in that context, which would obviously contribute to a perception that he is about to lose the war in Ukraine”, Haines said.

“As this war and its consequenc-

es slowly weaken Russian conventional strength...Russia likely will increasingly rely on its nuclear deterrent to signal the West and project strength to its internal and external audiences”, Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier wrote in the Defense Intelligence Agency’s threat assessment submitted to the same Armed Services Committee at the end of April.

Given these assessments, why don’t Burns, Panetta, Haines and Berrier, urgently advocate diplomacy with Russia to de-escalate the nuclear threat?

This war should never have happened. The US was well aware it was provoking Russia. But it was drunk on its own power, especially as it emerged as the world’s sole superpower at the end of the Cold War, and besides, there were billions in profits to be made in arms sales to new NATO members.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki. were wiped out because most of the rest of Japan’s urban centres had been destroyed by saturation bombing campaigns

In 2008, when Burns was serving as the Ambassador to Moscow, he wrote to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice: “Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just Putin). In more than two and a half years of conversations with key Russian players, from knuckle-draggers in the dark recesses of the Kremlin to Putin’s sharpest liberal critics, I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests”.

Sixty-six UN members, most from the global south, have called

for diplomacy to end the war in Ukraine, as required by the UN Charter. But few of the big power players are listening.

If you think nuclear war can’t happen, pay a visit to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These Japanese cities had no military value. They were wiped out because most of the rest of Japan’s urban centres had already been destroyed by saturation bombing campaigns directed by LeMay. The US knew Japan was crippled and ready to surrender, but it wanted to send a message to the Soviet Union that with its new atomic weapons it was going to dominate the world.

We saw how *that* turned out. **CT**

Chris Hedges is a Pulitzer Prize-winning author and journalist who was a foreign correspondent for fifteen years for The New York Times. His latest book is The Greatest Evil is War (Seven Stories Press).

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ADAM HOCHSCHILD

What you don't have and why

The never-ending impact of a forgotten blitzkrieg
against the American Left

Donald Trump has had the urge to crush many things, including the last election. So I must admit I found it eerily amusing that, when the FBI entered his estate at Mar-a-Lago recently, they did so under a warrant authorized by the Espionage Act of 1917. History certainly has a strange way of returning in our world and also of crushing alternatives. Whatever Trump did, that act has a sorry track record in both its own time and ours when it has been used, including by his administration, to silence the leakers of government information. And because my latest book, *American Midnight: The Great War, A Violent Peace, and America's Forgotten Crisis*, is about the crushing of alternatives a century ago in this country, in the midst of all this, I couldn't help thinking about a part of our history that The Donald would undoubtedly have been the first to crush, if he had the chance.

But let me start with a personal event closer to the present. While visiting Denmark recently, I developed an infection in my hand and wanted to see a doctor. The hotel in the provincial city where I was staying directed me to a local hospital. I was quickly shown into a consult-

ing room, where a nurse questioned me and told me to wait. Only a few minutes passed before a physician entered the room, examined me, and said in excellent English, yes, indeed, I did need an antibiotic. He promptly swivelled in his chair, opened a cabinet behind him, took out a bottle of pills, handed it to me, and told me to take two a day for 10 days. When I thanked him and asked where I should go to pay for the consultation and the medicine, he responded simply, "We have no facilities for that".

It's a phrase that comes back to me every time I'm reminded how, in the world's richest nation, we still don't have full national health insurance. And that's far from the only thing we're missing. In a multitude of ways, we're known for having a far weaker social safety net than many other wealthy countries and behind that lies a history in which the Espionage Act played a crucial role.

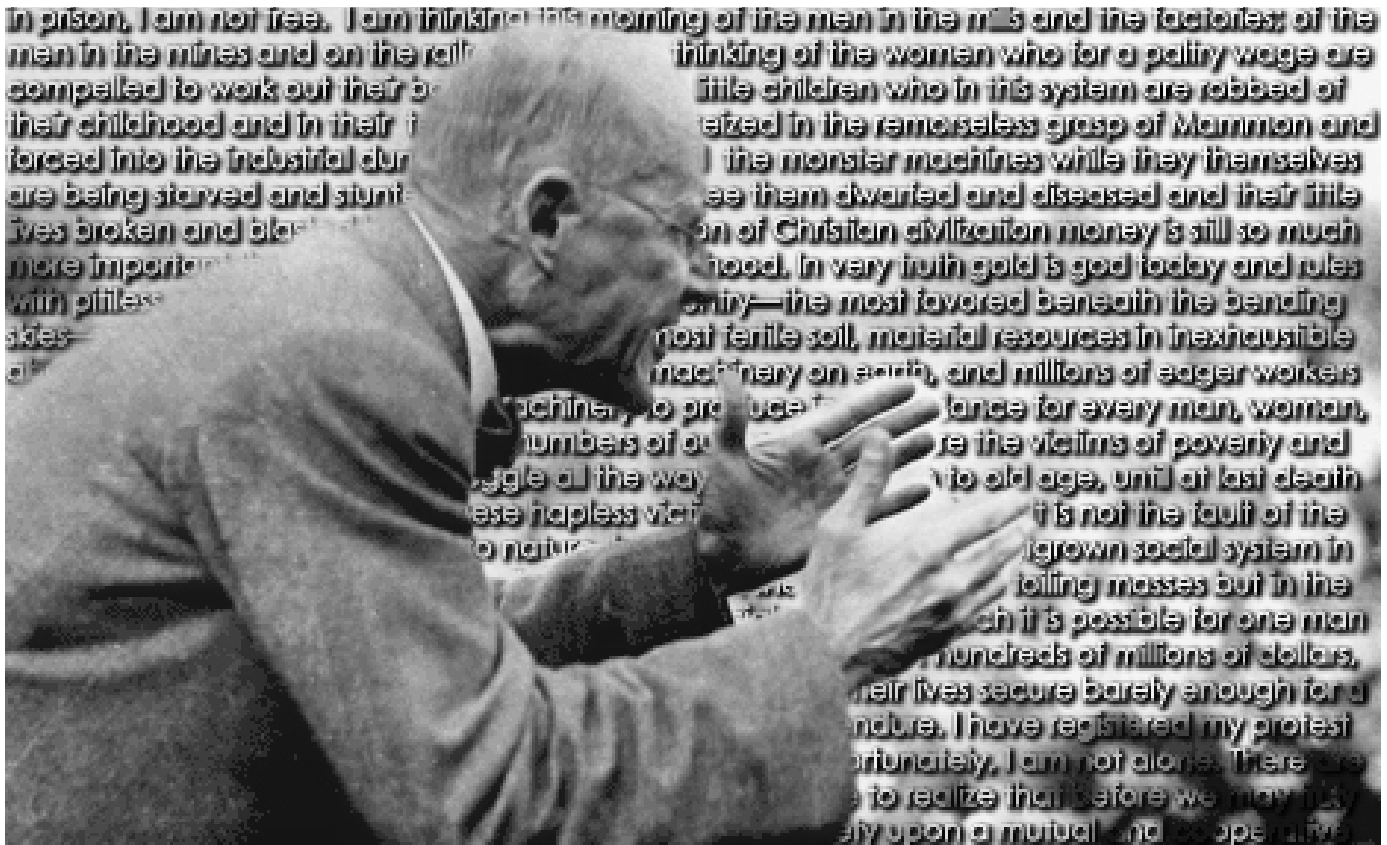
A Danish friend who visited with me recently was appalled to find hundreds of homeless people living in tent encampments in Berkeley and Oakland, California. And mind you, this is a progressive, prosper-

ous state. The poor are even more likely to fall through the cracks (or chasms) in many other states.

Visitors from abroad are similarly astonished to discover that American families regularly pay astronomical college tuitions out of their own pockets. And it's not only well-off European countries that do better in providing for their citizenry. The average Costa Rican, with one-sixth the annual per capita income of his or her North American counterpart, will live two years longer, thanks largely to that country's comprehensive national health care system.

Why hasn't our country done better, compared to so many others? There are certainly many reasons, not least among them the relentless, decades-long propaganda barrage from the American right, painting every proposed strengthening of public health and welfare – from unemployment insurance to Social Security to Medicare to Obamacare – as an ominous step down the road to socialism.

This is nonsense, of course, since the classic definition of socialism is public ownership of the means of production, an agenda item not on any imaginable American political horizon. In another sense, though, the charge is historically accurate



Socialist Eugene V Debs won 6 percent of the popular vote in 1912, “running ahead of the Republican candidate in several states”.

because, both here and abroad, significant advances in health and welfare have often been spearheaded by socialist parties.

The globe’s first national healthcare system, in Imperial Germany, was, for example, muscled through the Reichstag by Chancellor Otto von Bismarck in 1883 precisely to outflank the German socialists, who had long been advocating similar measures. Nor was it surprising that Britain’s National Health Service was installed by the Labour Party when it took power after the Second World War.

And in the United States, early in the last century, some of President Theodore Roosevelt’s modest moves to regulate business and break up trusts were, in fact, designed to steal a march on this country’s socialists, whom he feared, as he wrote to a friend, were “far more ominous than any populist or simi-

lar movement in times past”.

Back then – however surprising it may seem today – the American Socialist Party was indeed part of our political reality and, in 1904, it had come out in favour of compulsory national health insurance. A dozen years after that, New York Socialist Congressman Meyer London introduced a bill strikingly similar to the Obama administration’s Affordable Care Act of more than a century later. In 1911, another socialist congressman, Victor Berger of Wisconsin, proposed a national old-age pension, a goal that wouldn’t be realised for another quarter of a century with the passage of the Social Security Act of 1935.

Socialism was never as strong a movement in the United States as in so many other countries. Still, once

it was at least a force to be reckoned with. Socialists became mayors of cities as disparate as Milwaukee, Pasadena, Schenectady, and Toledo. Party members held more than 175 state and local offices in Oklahoma alone. People commonly point to 1912 as the party’s high-water mark. That year, its candidate for president, Eugene V. Debs, won 6 percent of the popular vote, even running ahead of the Republican candidate in several states.

Still, the true peak of American socialism’s popularity came a few years later. The charismatic Debs decided not to run again in 1916, mistakenly accepting President Woodrow Wilson’s implied promise to keep the United States out of the First World War – something most Socialists cared about passionately. In April 1917, Wilson infuriated them by bringing the country into what had been, until then, primar-

ily a European conflict, while cracking down fiercely on dissidents who opposed his decision. That fall, however, the Socialists made impressive gains in municipal elections, winning more than 20 percent of the vote in 14 of the country's larger cities – more than 30 percent in several of them – and 10 seats in the New York State Assembly.

During that campaign, Wilson was particularly dismayed by the party's popularity in New York City, where Socialist lawyer Morris Hillquit was running for mayor. The president asked his conservative Texan attorney general, Thomas Gregory, what could be done about Hillquit's "outrageous utterances" against the war. Gregory responded that he feared prosecuting Hillquit "would enable him to pose as a martyr and would be likely to increase his voting strength. I am having my representatives in New York City watch the situation rather carefully, and if a point is reached where he can be proceeded against it will give me a great deal of pleasure." Hillquit lost, but did get 22 percent of the vote.

Jubilant Socialists knew that if they did equally well in the 1918 midterm elections, their national vote total could for the first time rise into the millions. For Wilson, whose Democrats controlled the House of Representatives by the narrowest of margins, the possibility of Socialists gaining the balance of power there was horrifying. And so, already at war in Europe, his administration in effect declared war on the Socialists at home as well, using as its primary tool Wilson's sweeping criminalisation of dissent, the new 1917 Espionage Act. The toll would be devastating.

Already the party's most popular woman, the fiery Kansas-born orator Kate Richards O'Hare – known

In 1918, the government went after Eugene Debs. The pretext was a speech he had given from a park bandstand in Canton, Ohio

as Red Kate for her politics and her mass of red hair – had been sentenced to five years under the Espionage Act for speaking out against the war. Still free on appeal, O'Hare, who knew the hardships of farm life firsthand and had run for both the House and the Senate, continued to draw audiences in the thousands when she spoke in the prairie states. Before long, however, her appeal was denied and she was sent to the Jefferson City, Missouri, penitentiary, where she found herself in the adjoining cell to anarchist firebrand Emma Goldman. The two would become lifelong friends.

In 1918, the government went after Debs. The pretext was a speech he had given from a park bandstand in Canton, Ohio, following a state convention of his beleaguered party. "They have always taught you that it is your patriotic duty to go to war and to have yourselves slaughtered at their command", he told the crowd. "But in all the history of the world you, the people, never had a voice in declaring war".

That was more than enough. Two weeks later, he was indicted and swiftly brought before a federal judge who just happened to be the former law firm partner of President Wilson's secretary of war. At that trial, Debs spoke words that would long be quoted:

"Your Honour, years ago I recognised my kinship with all living beings, and I made up my mind that I was not one bit better than the meanest of the earth. I said then, I say now, that while there is a lower class, I am in it; while there is a criminal element, I am of it; while there is a soul in prison, I am not free".

Spectators gasped as the judge pronounced sentence on the four-time presidential candidate: a fine of \$10,000 and 10 years in prison. In the 1920 election, he would still be in the federal penitentiary in Atlanta when he received more than 900,000 votes for president.

The government didn't merely prosecute luminaries like O'Hare and Debs however. It also went after rank-and-file party members, not to mention the former Socialist candidates for governor in Minnesota, New Jersey, and South Dakota, as well as state Socialist Party secretaries from at least four states and a former Socialist candidate for Congress from Oklahoma. Almost all of them would be sentenced under the Espionage Act for opposing the war or the draft.

Not faintly content with this, the Wilson administration would attack the Socialists on many other fronts as well. There were then more than 100 socialist dailies, weeklies, and monthlies and the Espionage Act gave Wilson's postmaster general, segregationist Albert Burleson of Texas, the power to deem such publications "unmailable". Before long, Burleson would bar from the mail virtually the entire socialist press, which, in the prewar years, had a combined circulation of two million. A few dailies, which did not need the Post Office to reach their readers, survived, but for most of them such a banning was a death blow.

The government crippled the socialist movement in many less formal ways as well. For instance, Burleson's post office simply stopped delivering letters to and from the party's Chicago headquarters and some of its state and local offices. The staff of a socialist paper in Milwaukee typically noticed that they were failing to receive business correspondence. Even their mail subscriptions to the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* were no longer arriving. Soon advertising income began to dry up. In the midst of this, Oscar Ameringer, a writer for the paper, called on a longtime supporter, a baker who had suddenly stopped buying ads. According to Ameringer, the man "slumped down in a chair, covered his eyes and, with tears streaming through his fingers, sobbed, 'My God, I can't help it... They told me if I didn't take my advertising out they would refuse me... flour, sugar and coal.'"

Also taking their cues from the administration in that wartime assault were local politicians and vigilantes who attacked socialist speakers or denied them meeting halls. After progressives and labour union members staged an antiwar march on the Boston Common, for example, vigilantes raided the nearby Socialist Party office, smashed its doors and windows, and threw furniture, papers, and the suitcase of a travelling activist out the shattered windows onto a bonfire.

In January 1918, the mayor of Mitchell, South Dakota, ordered the party's state convention broken up and all delegates expelled from town. One party leader was seized "on the streets by five unknown men and hustled into an automobile in which he was driven five miles from town", a local newspaper reported. "There he was set out upon the prairie and... told to proceed

Other targets included the labour movement, the country's two small rival communist parties, and thousands of radicals

afoot to his home in Parkston [an 18-mile walk] and warned not to return".

The Socialists were far from alone in suffering the wave of repression that swept the country in Wilson's second term. Other targets included the labour movement, the country's two small rival communist parties, and thousands of radicals who had never become American citizens and were targeted for deportation. But among all the victims, no organisation was more influential than the Socialist Party. And it never recovered.

When Debs took to the road again after finally being released from prison in 1921, he was often, at the last minute, denied venues he had booked. In Cleveland, the City Club cancelled its invitation; in Los Angeles, the only place he could speak was at the city zoo. Still, he had an easier time than the socialist writer Upton Sinclair who, when he began giving a speech in San Pedro, California, in 1923, was arrested while reading the First Amendment aloud.

By the time Debs died in 1926, the party that had once elected 33 state legislators, 79 mayors, and well over 1,000 city council members and other municipal officials had closed most of its offices and was left with less than 10,000 members nationwide. Kate Richards O'Hare wrote

to her friend Emma Goldman, who had been deported from the United States in 1919, that she felt herself a "sort of political orphan now with no place to lay my head".

Despite their minority status, the Socialists had been a significant force in American politics before patriotic war hysteria brought on an era of repression. Until then, Republican and Democratic legislators had voted for early-20th-century reform measures like child labour laws and the income tax in part to stave off demands from the Socialist Party for bigger changes.

If that party had remained intact instead of being so ruthlessly crushed, what more might they have voted for? This remains one of the biggest "what ifs" in American history. If the Socialist Party hadn't been so hobbled, might it at least have pushed the mainstream ones into creating the sort of stronger social safety net and national health insurance systems that people today take for granted in countries like Canada or Denmark? Without the Espionage Act, might Donald Trump have been left to rot at Mar-a-Lago in a world in which so much might have been different?

The last time you tried to pay a medical bill, might you, in fact, have been told, "We have no facilities for that"? **CT**

Adam Hochschild teaches at the Graduate School of Journalism, University of California at Berkeley. He is the author of 11 books, including *King Leopold's Ghost* and *Spain in Our Hearts: Americans in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*. His latest book is *American Midnight: The Great War, a Violent Peace, and Democracy's Forgotten Crisis*. This article was first published at www.tomdispatch.com



David Ratcliffe

Zero Waste Solution, Wareham, MA

EDWARD CURTIN

The last temptation of things

Every little cubbyhole, closet, and drawer was filled with “saved” items

“I cling like a miser to the freedom that disappears as soon as there is an excess of things.”

– **Albert Camus**, *Lyrical and Critical Essays*.

Let me tell you a story about a haunted house and all the thoughts it evoked in me.

Do we believe we can save ourselves by saving things?

Or do our saved possessions come to possess their saviours?

Do those who save many things or hoard believe that there are pockets in shrouds? Or do they collect things as a magical protection against the shroud?

These are questions that have preoccupied me for weeks as my wife and I have spent long and exhausting days cleaning out a friend’s house. Many huge truckloads of possessions have been carted off to the dump. Thousands of documents have been shredded and thousands more taken to our house for further sorting. Other things have been donated to charity.

This is what happens to people’s things; they disappear, never to be seen again, just as we do, eventually.

Tolstoy wrote a story – “How Much Land Does A Man Need” – that ends with the answer: a piece six feet long, enough for your grave.

As in this story, the devil always has the last laugh when your covetousness gets the best of you.

Yet so many people continue to collect in the vain hope that they are exceptions. Ask almost anyone and they will reluctantly admit that they hoard to some degree.

In capitalist consumer societies, getting and spending and hoarding not only lays waste our powers, but it is done on the backs of the poor and destitute around the world. It is a system built to inflame the worst human tendencies of acquisitiveness and indifference since it teaches that one never has enough of everything.

It denies the primal sympathy

of human care for all humans as it teaches that if you surround yourself with enough things – have ten pair of shoes, twenty shirts, an attic filled with things in reserve – you will be safe from the fate of the majority of the world’s poor who have next to nothing. It is an insidious form of soul murder wherein one pulls the shades on the prison-house, counts one’s possessions, and shakes hands with the Devil. And it is sadly common.

From attic to cellar to garage, every little cubbyhole, closet, and drawer in this relative’s house was filled with “saved” items. Nothing was ever thrown away. If you walked in the front door, you would never know that the occupants were compulsive keepers.

While there were plenty of knick-knacks in evidence like so many houses where the fear of emptiness rules (the emptiness that is the source of freedom and creativity), once you opened a drawer or closet, a secreted lunacy spilled out seriatim like circus clowns from a small car.

Like all clown shows, it was funny but far more frightening, as though all the saved objects were tinged with the fear of death and dissolution, were futile efforts to stop the flow of time and life by sticking a finger in a dike.

Let me begin with the bags. Hidden in every corner and closet, there were bags stuffed in bags. Big bags and little bags, hundreds if not thousands, used and unused, plastic, paper, cloth bags with price tags still on them.

The same was true for boxes, especially empty jewellery boxes. Cardboard boxes that once held a little something, wooden boxes, cigar boxes, large cartons, boxes from

The avidity for things drives many people mad, to get and to keep stuff, to build walls around life so as to protect themselves from death

every device ever purchased – all seemingly being saved for some future use that would never come.

But the bags and boxes filled each other so that no emptiness could survive, although desolation seemed to cry out from within: “You can’t suffocate me”.

Tens of thousands of photographs and slides were squirrelled into cabinets, closets, and their own file cabinets, each neatly marked with the date and place of their taking. Time in a “bottle” from which one would never drink again – possessing the past in a vain attempt to stop time. These photos were kept in places where their taker would never see them again but could find a weird comfort that they were saved somewhere in this vast collection. Cold comfort by embalming time.

It so happens that while emptying the house, I was rereading the wonderful novel, *Zorba The Greek*, by Nikos Kazantzakis. There is a passage in it where a woman has died, and while her corpse lies in her house, the villagers descend on her possessions like shrieking vultures on a carcass.

“Old women, men, children went rushing through the doors, jumped through the open windows, over the fences and off the balcony, each carrying whatever he had been able to snatch – sauce pans, frying pans, mattresses, rabbits Some of them had taken doors or windows off their hinges and had put them on their backs. Mimiko had seized

the two court shoes, tied on a piece of string and hung them round his neck – it looked as though Dame Hortense were going off astraddle on his shoulders and only her shoes were visible....”

The avidity for things drives many people mad, to get and to keep stuff, to build walls around life so as to protect themselves from death. To consume so as not to be consumed. Kazantzakis brilliantly makes this clear in the book. Zorba, the Greek, physical labourer and wild man, is different, for he knows that salvation lies in dispossession.

One day he encounters five little children begging in a village. Their father has just been murdered. “I don’t know why, divine inspiration I suppose, but I went up to them”. He gives the children his basket of food and all his money.

He tells his interlocutor, a writer whom he calls “Boss”, a man whom Zorba accuses of not being able to cut the string that ties him to a life of living-death, that that was how he was rescued.

“Rescued from my country, from priests, and from money. I began sifting things, sifting more and more things out. I lighten my burden that way. I – how shall I put it? – I find my own deliverance, I become a man.”

In the jam-packed attic where there is little room to move with boxes and objects piled on top of each other, I found a large metal four-drawer file cabinet packed with files. In one file folder there was a small purse filled with the following: four very old unmarked keys, six paper clips, two old unworkable watches, a bobby pin, a circular case that contained what looked like a piece of a human bone, a few old medallions, tweezers, four buttons, an eye screw, a safety pin,

a nail, a screw, two ancient tiny photos, and a lock of human hair.

Similar objects were stored throughout the house in various containers, bags, boxes, the pockets of clothes, in old ancient furniture in the basement, on shelves, in cigar boxes, in desks, etc.

Old receipts for purchases made forty years ago, airline baggage tags, ticket stubs, school papers, jewellery hidden everywhere, old foreign and domestic coins, perhaps twenty-five old unworkable watches, clocks, radios, clothes and more clothes, more that anyone could ever have wear, scores of old pens and pencils, handwritten notes with no dates or any semblance of order or meaning, chaos and obsessive account-keeping hiding everywhere in contradictory forms shared by two people: one the neat freak and the other disorganised.

One dead and the other forced by fate to let her stuff go, to stand naked in the wind.

How does it help a person to record that they bought a toaster for \$6.98 in 1957 or a bracelet for \$20 in 1970 or that they called so-and-so some undated time in the past? What good does it do to save vast correspondences documenting your complaints, bitterness, and quarrels? Or boxes upon boxes of Christmas cards received thirty years ago? Or brochures and receipts from a trip taken long ago? Old sports medals? Scrapbooks?

Photos of long dead relatives no one wants? Fashion designer shoes and coats and handbags hidden in a dusty attic where you don't even know they are there? An immigrant mother's ancient sewing machine weighing seventy-five pounds and gathering dust in the cellar?

Nothing I could tell you can come close to picturing what we saw in this house. It was overwhelming,

**Nothing I could tell
you can come close to
picturing what we saw
in this house. It was
overwhelming, horrifying,
and weirdly fascinating**

horrifying, and weirdly fascinating. And aside from the useful things that were donated to charity and some that were taken to the woman's next dwelling, 90 percent was dumped in a landfill, soon to be buried.

In his brilliant novel *Underworld*, Don DeLillo writes about a guy named Brian who goes to visit a collector of old baseball paraphernalia – bats, balls, an old scoreboard, tapes of games, etc. – in a house where “a mood of mausoleum gloom” fills the air. The man tells Brian:

“There’s men in the coming years they’ll pay fortunes for these objects. Because this is desperation speaking Men come here to see my collection They come and they don’t want to leave. The phone rings, it’s the family – where is he? This is the fraternity of missing men”.

Men and women hoarders, collectors, and keepers are lost children, trying desperately to secure themselves from death while losing themselves in the process. In my friend's house I found huge amounts of string and rope waiting to tie something up neatly someday. That day never came.

Zorba tells the Boss, who insists he's free, the following:

“No, you're not free. The string you're tied to is perhaps no longer

than other people's. That's all. You're on a long piece of string, boss; you come and go and think you're free, but you never cut the string in two. And when people don't cut that string

“It's difficult, boss, very difficult. You need a touch of folly to do that; folly, d'you see? You have to risk everything! But you've got such a strong head, it'll always get the better of you. A man's head is like a grocer; it keeps accounts. I've paid so much and earned so much and that means a profit of this much or a loss of that much! The head's a careful little shopkeeper; it never risks all it has, always keeps something in reserve. It never breaks the string. Ah, no! It hangs on tight to it, the bastard! If the string slips out of its grasp, the head, poor devil, is lost, finished! But if a man doesn't break the string, tell me what flavour is left in life? The flavour of camomile, weak camomile tea! Nothing like rum – that makes you see life inside out.”

On the way out of the door on our final day cleaning the house, I found a beautiful boxed fountain pen on a windowsill. I love pens since I am a writer. This one shone brightly and seemed to speak to me: think of what you could write with me, it said so seductively.

I was sorely tempted, but knowing that I didn't need another pen, I left it there, thinking that perhaps the next occupants of this house would write a different story and embrace Camus' advice about an excess of things.

Perhaps.

CT

*Edward Curtin is an independent writer whose work has appeared widely over many years. His website is edwardcurtin.com and his new book is *Seeking Truth in a Country of Lies*.*



JOHN W. WHITEHEAD & NISHA WHITEHEAD

America's death squads

When police become judge, jury and executioner

“You know, when police start becoming their own executioners, where’s it gonna end? Pretty soon, you’ll start executing people for jaywalking, and executing people for traffic violations. Then you end up executing your neighbour ‘cause his dog pisses on your lawn”.

– “Dirty Harry” Callahan,
Magnum Force

When I say that warrior cops – hyped up on their own authority and the power of the badge – have not made America any safer or freer, I am not disrespecting any of the fine, decent, lawful police officers who take seriously their oath of office to serve and protect their fellow citizens, uphold the Constitution, and maintain the peace.

My concern rests with the cops who feel empowered to act as judge, jury and executioner.

These death squads believe they can kill, shoot, taser, abuse and steal from American citizens in the so-called name of law and order.

Just recently, in fact, a rookie cop opened fire on the occupants of a parked car in a McDonald’s park-

ing lot on a Sunday night in San Antonio, Texas.

The driver, 17-year-old Erik Cantu and his girlfriend, were eating burgers inside the car when the police officer – suspecting the car might have been one that fled an attempted traffic stop the night before – abruptly opened the driver side door, ordered the teenager to get out, and when he did not comply, shot ten times at the car, hitting Cantu multiple times.

Mind you, this wasn’t a life-or-death situation. It was two teenagers eating burgers in a parking lot, and a cop fresh out of the police academy taking justice into his own hands.

This wasn’t an isolated incident, either.

In Hugo, Oklahoma, plain clothes police officers opened fire on a pickup truck parked in front of a food bank, heedless of the damage such a hail of bullets – 26 shots were fired – could have on those in the vicinity. Three of the four children inside the parked vehicle were shot: a four-year-old girl was shot in the head and ended up with a bullet in the brain; a five-year-old boy received a skull fracture; and a one-year-old

girl had deep cuts on her face from gunfire or shattered window glass. The reason for the use of such excessive force? Police were searching for a suspect in a weeks-old robbery of a pizza parlour that netted \$400.

In Minnesota, a four-year-old girl watched from the backseat of a car as cops shot and killed her mother’s boyfriend, Philando Castile, a school cafeteria supervisor, during a routine traffic stop merely because Castile disclosed that he had a gun in his possession, for which he had a lawful conceal-and-carry permit. That’s all it took for police to shoot Castile four times as he was reaching for his license and registration.

In Arizona, a seven-year-old girl watched panic-stricken as a state trooper pointed his gun at her and her father during a traffic stop and reportedly threatened to shoot her father in the back (twice) based on the mistaken belief that they were driving a stolen rental car.

This is how we have gone from a nation of laws – where the least among us had just as much right to

be treated with dignity and respect as the next person (in principle, at least) – to a nation of law enforcers (revenue collectors with weapons) who treat the citizenry like suspects and criminals.

The lesson for all of us: at a time when police have almost absolute discretion to decide who is a threat, what constitutes resistance, and how harshly they can deal with the citizens they were appointed to “serve and protect” – and a “fear” for officer safety is used to justify all manner of police misconduct – “we the people” are at a severe disadvantage.

Add a traffic stop to the mix, and that disadvantage increases dramatically. According to the Justice Department, the most common reason for a citizen to come into contact with the police is being a driver in a traffic stop.

On average, one in 10 Americans gets pulled over by police. Of the roughly 1,100 people killed by police each year, 10 percent of those involve traffic stops.

Historically, police officers have been given free range to pull anyone over for a variety of reasons.

This free-handed approach to traffic stops has resulted in drivers being stopped for windows that are too heavily tinted, for driving too fast, driving too slow, failing to maintain speed, following too closely, improper lane changes, distracted driving, screeching a car’s tires, and leaving a parked car door open for too long.

Motorists can also be stopped by police for driving near a bar or on a road that has large amounts of drunk driving, driving a certain make of car (Mercedes, Grand Prix and Hummers are among the most ticketed vehicles), having anything dangling from the rearview mirror (air fresheners, handicap parking

Black drivers are almost two times more likely than white drivers to be pulled over by police and three times more likely to have their vehicles searched

permits, toll transponders or rosaries), and displaying pro-police bumper stickers.

Incredibly, a federal appeals court actually ruled unanimously in 2014 that acne scars and driving with a stiff upright posture are reasonable grounds for being pulled over. The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that driving a vehicle that has a couple air fresheners, rosaries and pro-police bumper stickers at 2 mph over the speed limit is suspicious, meriting a traffic stop.

Equally appalling, in *Heien v. North Carolina*, the US Supreme Court – which has largely paved the way for the police and other government agents to probe, poke, pinch, taser, search, seize, strip and generally manhandle anyone they see fit in almost any circumstance – allowed police officers to stop drivers who appear nervous, provided they provide a palatable pretext for doing so.

Black drivers are almost two times more likely than white drivers to be pulled over by police and three times more likely to have their vehicles searched. As the *Washington Post* concludes, “‘Driving while black’ is, indeed, a measurable phenomenon”.

In other words, drivers beware.

Traffic stops aren’t just dangerous. They can be downright deadly.

Patrick Lyoya was pulled over

for having a mismatched license plate. The unarmed man was shot in the back of the head while on the ground during a subsequent struggle with a Michigan police officer.

Reportedly pulled over for a broken taillight, Walter Scott – unarmed – ran away from the police officer, who pursued and shot him from behind, first with a Taser, then with a gun. Scott was struck five times, “three times in the back, once in the upper buttocks and once in the ear – with at least one bullet entering his heart”.

Samuel Dubose, also unarmed, was pulled over for a missing front license plate. He was reportedly shot in the head after a brief struggle in which his car began rolling forward.

Levar Jones was stopped for a seatbelt offence, just as he was getting out of his car to enter a convenience store. Directed to show his license, Jones leaned into his car to get his wallet, only to be shot four times by the “fearful” officer. Jones was also unarmed.

Bobby Canipe was pulled over for having an expired registration. When the 70-year-old reached into the back of his truck for his walking cane, the officer fired several shots at him, hitting him once in the abdomen.

Dontrell Stevens was stopped “for not bicycling properly”. The officer pursuing him “thought the way Stephens rode his bike was suspicious. He thought the way Stephens got off his bike was suspicious”. Four seconds later, sheriff’s deputy Adams Lin shot Stephens four times as he pulled out a black object from his waistband. The object was his cellphone. Stephens was unarmed.

That police are choosing to fatally resolve these encounters by using their guns on fellow citi-

zens speaks volumes about what is wrong with policing in America today, where police officers are being dressed in the trappings of war, drilled in the deadly art of combat, and trained to look upon “every individual they interact with as an armed threat and every situation as a deadly force encounter in the making.”

Keep in mind, from the moment those lights start flashing and that siren goes off, we’re all in the same boat. Yet it’s what happens after you’ve been pulled over that’s critical.

Trying to predict the outcome of any encounter with the police is a bit like playing Russian roulette: most of the time you will emerge relatively unscathed, although decidedly poorer and less secure about your rights, but there’s always the chance that an encounter will turn deadly.

Technically, you have the right to remain silent (beyond the basic requirement to identify yourself and show your registration). You have the right to refuse to have your vehicle searched. You have the right to film your interaction with police. You have the right to ask to leave. You also have the right to resist an unlawful order such as a police officer directing you to extinguish your cigarette, put away your phone or stop recording them.

However, there is a price for asserting one’s rights. That price grows more costly with every passing day.

If you ask cops and their enablers what Americans should do to stay alive during encounters with police, they will tell you to comply, cooperate, obey, not resist, not argue, not make threatening gestures or

When lights start flashing and that siren goes off, we’re all in the same boat. Yet it’s what happens after you’ve been pulled over that’s critical

statements, avoid sudden movements, and submit to a search of their person and belongings.

Unfortunately, in the American police state, compliance is no guarantee that you will survive an encounter with the police with your life and liberties intact.

Every day we hear about situations in which unarmed Americans complied and still died during an encounter with police simply because they appeared to be standing in a “shooting stance” or held a cell phone or a garden hose or carried around a baseball bat or answered the front door or held a spoon in a threatening manner or ran in an aggressive manner holding a tree branch or wandered around naked or hunched over in a defensive posture or made the mistake of wearing the same clothes as a carjacking suspect (dark pants and a basketball jersey) or dared to leave an area at the same time that a police officer showed up or had a car break down by the side of the road or were deaf or homeless or old.

More often than not, it seems as if all you have to do to be shot and killed by police is stand a certain way, or move a certain way, or hold something – anything – that police could misinterpret to be a gun, or ignite some trigger-centric fear in a police officer’s mind that has nothing to do with an actual threat to their safety.

Now politicians, police unions, law enforcement officials and indi-

viduals who are more than happy to march in lockstep with the police state make all kinds of excuses to justify these shootings. However, to suggest that a good citizen is a compliant citizen and that obedience will save us from the police state is not only recklessly irresponsible, but it is also deluded.

To begin with, and most importantly, Americans need to know their rights when it comes to interactions with the police, bearing in mind that many law enforcement officials are largely ignorant of the law themselves.

A good resource is the Rutherford Institute’s *Constitutional Q&A: Rules of Engagement for Interacting with Police*.

Knowing your rights is only part of the battle, unfortunately.

As I point out in my book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People* and in its fictional counterpart *The Erik Blair Diaries*, the danger arises when the burden of proof is reversed, “we the people” are assumed guilty, and we have to exercise our rights while simultaneously attempting to prove our innocence to trigger-happy cops with no understanding of the Bill of Rights.

CT

John W. Whitehead is a constitutional attorney and author and founder and president of *The Rutherford Institute*. His most recent books are the best-selling *Battlefield America: The War on the American People*, the award-winning *A Government of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State*, and a debut dystopian fiction novel, *The Erik Blair Diaries*. **Nisha Whitehead** is the Executive Director of *The Rutherford Institute*. Information about *The Rutherford Institute* is available at www.rutherford.org.

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