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A FUTURE OF TECHNICAL DOMINANCE | JOE ALLEN
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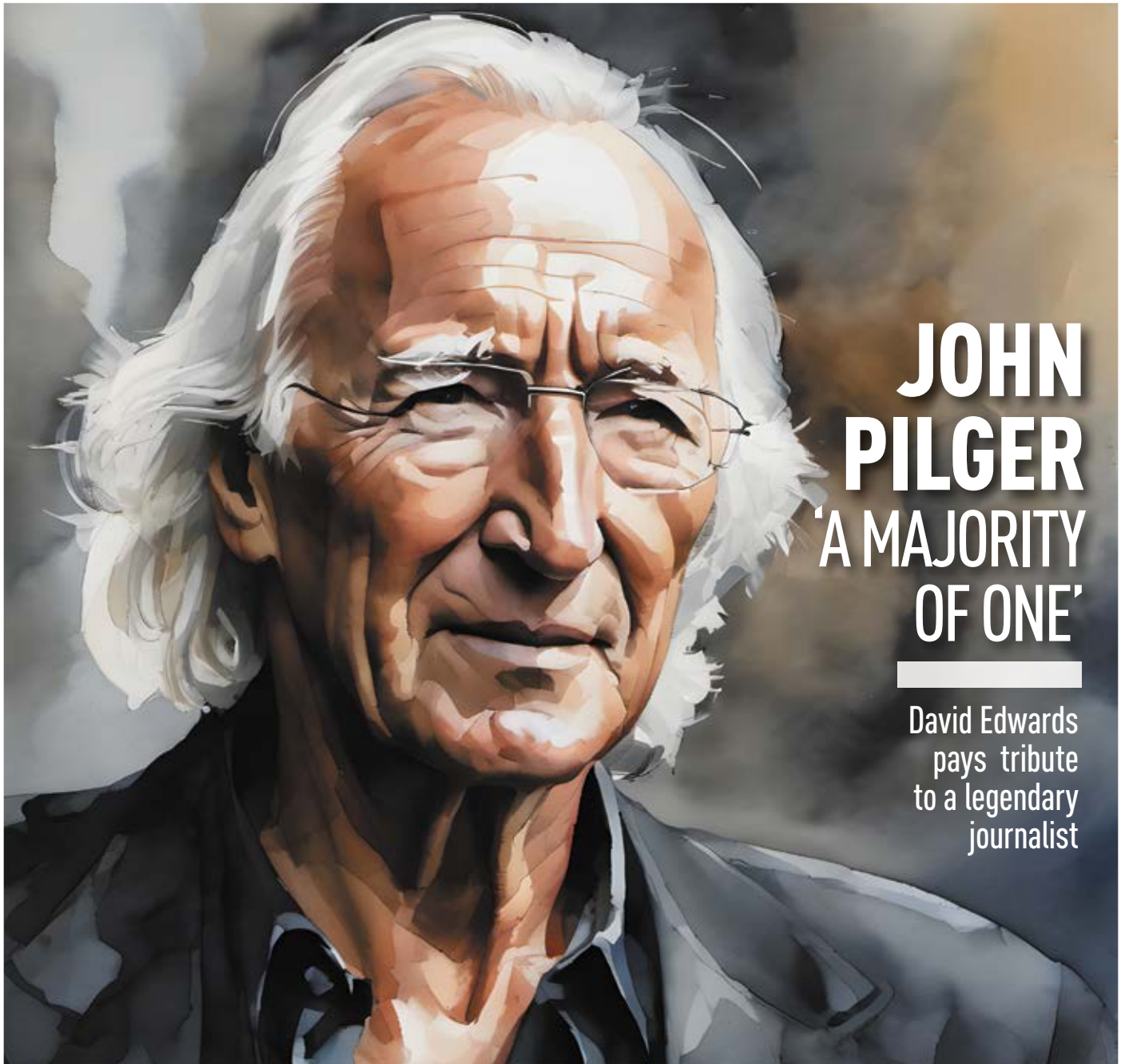
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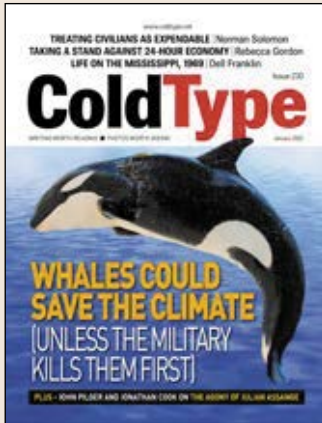


JOHN PILGER 'A MAJORITY OF ONE'

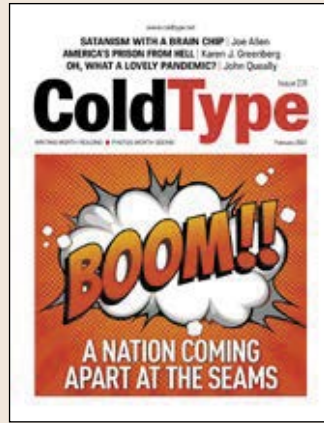
David Edwards
pays tribute
to a legendary
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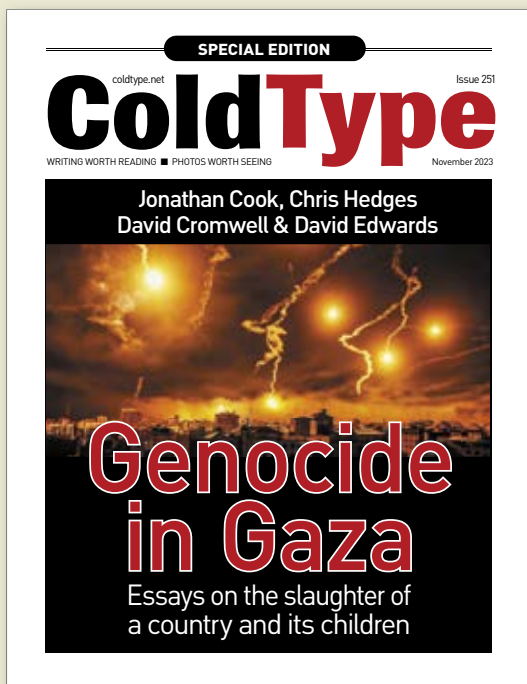


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INSIGHTS



Photo: Yuri Keegstra / flickr.com

Tax protest in Madison, Wisconsin. Oxfam says a global tax on the super-rich could yield \$1.80-trillion a year to benefit society.

Jake Johnson

HERE COMES THE WORLD'S FIRST TRILLIONAIRE

Since 2020, a year marked by the spread of a pathogen that killed millions of people, the world's five richest men have seen their collective wealth more than double as five-billion people across the globe have lost ground and hunger has

surged, underscoring the deep inequality that is fuelling mass discontent and eroding democracies.

The finding by Oxfam International was published last month as elites gathered in Davos, Switzerland for the annual World Economic Forum, a summit that – while

ostensibly aimed at confronting the planet's most pressing crises – has long been seen as a symbol of global capital's stranglehold on key institutions.

Oxfam calculated that the combined wealth of the five richest billionaires on the planet grew from \$405-billion in 2020 to roughly \$869 billion today – a rate of \$14-million an hour. During that same period, 60 percent of the global population got poorer, with the real wages of around 800-million workers across 52 countries falling in the face of high inflation.

Under the status quo, global pov-

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erty won't be eradicated for nearly two and a half centuries – but the world will have its first trillionaire within the next 10 years, Oxfam found.

“We're witnessing the beginnings of a decade of division, with billions of people shouldering the economic shockwaves of pandemic, inflation, and war, while billionaires' fortunes boom,” Amitabh Behar, Oxfam's interim executive director, said in a statement. “This inequality is no accident; the billionaire class is ensuring corporations deliver more wealth to them at the expense of everyone else.”

Overall, the world's billionaires have become \$3.3-trillion richer since the start of the decade, Oxfam said, noting that their wealth grew three times faster than inflation.

Large corporations, too, have

seen their fortunes surge since 2020, with around 150 of the world's biggest companies bringing in a combined \$1.8-trillion in profits – a massive boon for wealthy shareholders that came as workers suffered from the economic turmoil induced by the coronavirus pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, worsening climate impacts, and other global shocks.

Seventy percent of the largest companies have a billionaire as their chief executive or top shareholder.

Oxfam's report spotlights the “sustained and highly effective war on taxation” that powerful corporations have been waging over the past several decades – a war that has yielded a significantly lower corporate income tax rate that has allowed companies to amass vast

riches and entrench their political influence.

“Corporate taxes are disproportionately borne by the richest, thus the collapse in corporate taxes in recent decades has essentially provided another tax cut for the wealthy,” the report states.

“It has also deprived governments around the world, but especially in the Global South, of trillions of US dollars in revenue that could be used to reduce inequality and end poverty. Every tax dollar dodged is a nurse that will never be hired or a school that cannot be built.”

To rein in excessive corporate power and accelerating inequality, Oxfam recommended several broad policy solutions, including the break-up of monopolistic companies such as Amazon and a global wealth tax on the world's millionaires and billionaires, which the group estimated could generate \$1.8-trillion a year in revenue that could be invested in education, healthcare, environmental protection, and other critical priorities.

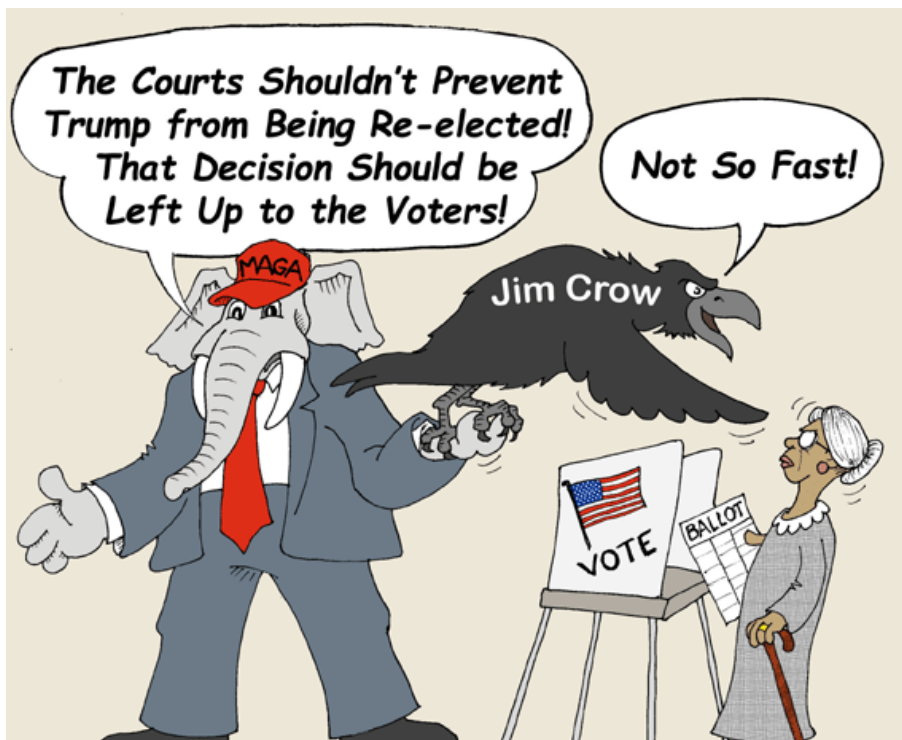
“Runaway corporate and monopoly power is an inequality-generating machine: Through squeezing workers, dodging tax, privatizing the state, and spurring climate breakdown, corporations are funnelling endless wealth to their ultra-rich owners,” said Behar.

“But they're also funnelling power, undermining our democracies and our rights. No corporation or individual should have this much power over our economies and our lives – to be clear, nobody should have a billion dollars.” **CT**

Jake Johnson is a senior editor and staff writer for Common Dreams – www.commondreams.org – where this was first published.

HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitt



INSIGHTS

Norman Solomon

GAZA: BIG NEWS, YET INVISIBLE AT SAME TIME

Zen wisdom tells us that the finger pointing at the moon is not the moon. Yet it's easy to fall into the illusion that when we see news about the Gaza war, we're really seeing the war.

We are not.

What we do routinely see is reporting that's as different from the actual war as a pointed finger is from the moon.

The media words and images reach us light years away from what it's actually like to be in a war zone. The experience of consuming news from afar could hardly be more different. And beliefs or unconscious notions that media outlets convey war's realities end up obscuring those realities all the more.

Inherent limitations on what journalism can convey are compounded by media biases. In-depth content analysis by *The Intercept* found that coverage of the Gaza war by the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times* "showed a consistent bias against Palestinians." Those highly influential papers "disproportionately emphasized Israeli deaths in the conflict" and "used emotive language to describe the killings of Israelis, but not Palestinians."

What is most profoundly important about war in Gaza – what actually happens to people being terrorised, massacred, maimed and traumatised – has remained close to invisible for the US public. Exten-

sive surface coverage seems repetitious and increasingly normal, as death numbers keep rising and Gaza becomes a routine topic in news media. And yet, what's going on now in Gaza is "the most transparent genocide in human history."

With enormous help from US media and political power structures, the ongoing mass murder – by any other name – has become normalised, mainly reduced to standard



Photo: cbcew / flickr

buzz phrases, weaselly diplomat-speak and euphemistic rhetoric about the Gaza war. Which is exactly what the top leadership of Israel's government wants.

Extraordinary determination to keep killing civilians and destroying what little is left of Palestinian infrastructure in Gaza has caused extremes of hunger, displacement, destruction of medical facilities, and expanding outbreaks of lethal diseases, all obviously calculated and sought by Israeli leaders. Thinly reported by US media outlets while cravenly dodged by President Biden

and the overwhelming majority of Congress, the calamity for 2.2-million Palestinian people worsens by the day.

"Gazans now make up 80 per cent of all people facing famine or catastrophic hunger worldwide, marking an unparalleled humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip amid Israel's continued bombardment and siege," the United Nations declared in January. The UN statement quoted experts who said: "Currently every single person in Gaza is hungry, a quarter of the population are starving and struggling to find food and drinkable water, and famine is imminent."

Israel is waging a war toward extermination. But for the vast majority of Americans, no matter how much mainstream media they consume, the war that actually exists – in contrast to the war reporting by news outlets remains virtually invisible.

Of course, Hamas's Oct. 7 murderous attack on civilians and its taking of hostages should be unequivocally condemned as crimes against humanity. Such condemnation is fully appropriate, and easy in the United States.

"Deploing the crimes of others often gives us a nice warm feeling: we are good people, so different from those bad people," Noam Chomsky has observed. "That is particularly true when there is nothing much we can do about the crimes of others, so that we can strike impressive poses without cost to ourselves. Looking at our own crimes is much harder, and for those willing to do it, often carries costs."

With the US-backed war on Gaza now in its fourth month, "looking at our own crimes" can lead to clearly

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depicting and challenging the role of the US government in the ongoing huge crimes against humanity in Gaza. But such depicting and challenging is distinctly unpopular if not taboo in the halls of government power – even though, and especially because, the US role of massively arming and supporting Israel is pivotal for the war.

“For the narcissist, everything that happens to them is a huge deal, while nothing that happens to you matters,” scholar Sophia McClenen wrote last month. “When that logic translates to geopolitics, the disproportionate damage only magnifies. This is why Israel is not held to any standards, while those who question that logic are told to shut up. And if they don’t shut up, they are punished or threatened.”

Further normalising the slaughter are the actions and inaction of Congress. Only 11 senators voted

to support a resolution that would have required the Biden administration to report on Israel’s human rights record in the Gaza war. The sinking of that measure reflects just how depraved the executive and legislative branches are as enablers of Israel.

The horrors in Gaza are being propelled by the US war machine. But you wouldn’t know it from the standard US media, pointing to the moon and scarcely hinting at the utter coldness of its dark side. **CT**

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

Starmer’s official ‘opposition’, which also predictably supports the bombing of Yemen.

It is their constant support for Israel which is escalating the conflict, not the actions of the Houthis which has wide support among Yemenis and across the Middle East. People across the world watch horrified as 100 days on the bombing and ethnic cleansing continue. Journalists are targeted by the IDF in Gaza, there is a major health and humanitarian crisis and various representatives of the government make clear their determination to drive the Palestinians out entirely.

Gazans have no air force, no navy or army. Israel has some of the most sophisticated weapons in the world which it is using against innocent people. As the South African government’s case against Israel in the International Court of Justice made clear, these and previous actions indicate ‘genocidal intent’ and must be stopped.

The US could stop arming Israel, funding it and giving full political support to its murderous government. Secretary of state Anthony Blinken toured the Middle East again in January. At its start he claimed he was seeking peace in the region – by its end his government had bombed Yemen. That was the alternative to calling for a ceasefire and in the process marked an escalation and spreading of the war. That has already happened.

It is very unlikely to deter the Houthis, who have suffered years of bombing from British-armed Saudi Arabia. The war there was largely ignored by the west, despite it killing many thousands and creating famine and humanitarian disaster on a huge scale. No wonder that today many Yemenis identify close-

Lindsey German

US AND UK OPEN SECOND FRONT IN GAZA WAR

It takes some nerve for the old Etonian failed prime minister who now conducts British foreign policy from his unelected perch in the House of Lords to accuse the Houthis of escalating the war in the Middle East. Yet that was his justification for the bombing of Yemen when Britain joined in with the US in launching airstrikes. Ludicrously, the governments argued they were acting in self-defence in protecting international shipping in the Red Sea. They also claimed that this was a total-

ly separate issue from the war in Gaza.

That’s just wrong. The Houthis launched their attacks on ships that are destined for Israel or to countries supportive of Israel in solidarity with the people of Gaza and the Palestinians. They have said that these attacks and disruption will end when there is a ceasefire in Gaza. The British and US governments are in a tiny minority across the world in refusing to call for a ceasefire, a position backed by Keir

INSIGHTS

ly with the plight of the Palestinians.

Yemen is a former colony of Britain, which waged an unsuccessful war there against the national liberation movement in the 1960s. It is a very poor country, which has witnessed ships laden with containers of goods passing through the Bab al-Mandab Strait while its people suffered from famine. Its people may have more concerns than the disruption of international trade and commerce.

The history of the Middle East is littered with attempts by the US, Britain and other imperialist powers trying to maintain economic and political control over countries that wanted to be independent. It would be very foolish to assume that this has been forgotten. Add to it the appalling interventions over recent decades: backing Iraq against Iran in the 1980s war between the two countries; the First Gulf War against Iraq in 1990; the war on terror and invasion and occupation of Iraq; the bombing of Libya; the interventions in Syria. And above all, the complicity in the oppression of the Palestinians which has continued since the Nakba in 1948 and which shamefully allows the US and Britain to deny war crimes.

There are 57,000 US military personnel in the Middle East, including 10,000 each in Kuwait and Qatar, and 12,500 in the east Mediterranean. They are not there for the benefit of the ordinary people of the region but to protect their interests and their allies – Israel and the Arab monarchies and dictatorships.



Houthi military helicopter flies over the Galaxy Leader cargo ship in the Red Sea.

Photo: Houthi Military Media

mer colony's government has no right to question the imperialist agenda.

South Africa has a long history of struggle against apartheid and can easily make connections with the Palestinians. It also recognises how Britain in particular did everything it could to support the apartheid regime until the very last, how Margaret Thatcher regarded Nelson Mandela as a terrorist, and how her governments repeatedly vetoed UN resolutions condemning the apartheid regime. Just as the US does now over Israel.

Just as the US does now over Israel.

Palestine and Gaza are at the cutting edge of international solidarity today, as the recent huge global day of action demonstrates. But solidarity with the people of the Middle East as a whole is vital. This is an area devastated by imperialism and which will only be really free when it comes to an end. First steps would be to stop arming Israel, hands off Yemen, and US and Britain out of the Middle East.

Cameron has also warned of 'red lights flashing' about dangers in the world. It's his government policies that has helped set these lights flashing – and it's only movements from below that can stop them. **CT**

Why should the people not resent their presence and demand that they keep out?

As an article by Patrick Wintour in the *Guardian* recounts:

"The Houthis were particularly proud when a BBC interviewer asked Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, a member of the Houthi supreme council, why they saw fit to interfere in Palestine "miles and miles away". He replied: "As for Biden, is he a neighbour of Netanyahu? Do they live in the same flat, and does the French president live on the same floor and the British prime minister in the same building?"

This exactly encapsulates the arrogance of the former colonial powers and the US in thinking that they can determine what happens in the region.

It's similar to the opposition to South Africa's court case in the Hague. Cameron defends Israel and dismisses the case. Yet the South African case is clearly very strong but still western media journalists react with amazement when the country's ministers assert that there is the case for genocidal intent over Palestine. It is as if a for-

Lindsey German is national convenor of the Stop the War Coalition. Her books include 'Material Girls: Women, Men and Work', 'Sex, Class and Socialism', 'A People's History of London' (with John Rees) and 'How a Century of War Changed the Lives of Women'. This article first appeared at www.counterfire.org.

INSIGHTS

Sonali Kolhatkar

UNIONS CRITICAL IN FIGHT ON ISRAEL APARTHEID

When United Auto Workers (UAW) President Shawn Fain called for a ceasefire in Israel's assault on Gaza in mid-December, his union was among the nation's largest to do so. It was a bold move, fresh from UAW's victorious high-profile contract negotiations with the Big Three auto manufacturers a few weeks earlier. "[U]nions are the best bridge toward fighting all forms of hatred and phobias," said Fain in his ceasefire speech alongside Congressional lawmakers. He added, "As union members, we know we must fight for all workers and people suffering around the world."

UAW's move is part of a major turning of the tide for American labour unions as a whole, which have historically backed the state of Israel and done so unconditionally – so much so that labour historian Jeff Schuhrke told the *New York Times*, "In many ways, you can argue that US unions helped construct the state of Israel."

But the idea of unions is based on collective power to ensure just outcomes for workers in the face of the financial might of bosses: the powerless versus the powerful, working together to tilt the scales of justice in their favour. While Israel may have successfully hijacked the narrative to cast itself as the victim for decades, that story is unravelling as younger Americans – including union members and leaders

– are viewing Palestinians as dispossessed victims of a well-armed apartheid state.

This trend is long overdue. US unions, including UAW, were instrumental in opposing South Africa's apartheid regime. The AFL-CIO led a wave of protests against apartheid South Africa in 1984, with the union federation's secretary-treasurer Thomas R. Donahue being arrested alongside the heads of the Newspaper Guild and the United Steelworkers of America.



UAW President Shawn Fain

A conflict between Starbucks corporation and Starbucks Workers United (SBWU) – the worker union comprising young baristas fighting for unions and contracts at cafes – is symbolic of this trend. In October, SBWU posted a powerful statement of support for Palestinians on its social media account. In response, Starbucks sued SBWU and its parent union for trademark infringement because the barista network's name and logo is similar to that of the corporation. SBWU is countersuing for defamation.

Christian Smalls, the well-

known charismatic young organiser who gained fame for his efforts at unionising Amazon workers, and who has been hailed as "the future of labour," has also backed the Palestinian struggle against Israeli oppression. His organisation, the Amazon Labor Union (ALU), together with the subgroup that wants to reform ALU, released a joint statement calling for a ceasefire, and condemning Israel's genocide of Palestinians and US funding of Israeli weaponry.

Palestinian trade unions representing a broad spectrum, from oil workers to teachers, initiated such cross-border worker solidarity. The Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions in Gaza released a call for global support a week into Israel's latest attack. "We ask you to speak out and take action in the face of injustice as trade unions have done historically," said the workers. They see the Palestinian struggle for justice as "a lever for the liberation of all dispossessed and exploited people of the world."

But Palestinian workers don't want just lip service. They want – and need – concrete action to stop the carnage. To that end, they have specifically called for "trade unions in relevant industries... [t]o refuse to build weapons destined for Israel." Although UAW has answered the call for solidarity, it has not used all its levers of power. A new formation called UAW Labor for Palestine which has taken credit for pressuring union leadership to adopt a call for a ceasefire last October, wants UAW workers in weapons manufacturing factories to actually stop production.

"UAW has taken no concrete steps to stop the production of weapons used to massacre Pales-

Photo: 42-BRT

INSIGHTS

tinians,” said UAW Labor for Palestine. The group added, there is “no excuse in the face of a genocide,” and lauded organised labor in Europe for going much farther by refusing to handle weapons being sent to Israel.

Among the union workers most militantly putting their money where their mouths are, are longshore workers. The International Longshore & Warehouse Union (ILWU) has a long history of cross-border solidarity organizing going at least as far back as 1962 against South Africa’s apartheid regime. The ILWU continued its actions into the 1980s and, unsurprisingly, has supported the call for a ceasefire in Israel’s war on Gaza. ILWU members also refused to work on what was believed to be a load of weapons being sent to Israel last November.

Workers in an oppressive capitalist system experience similar power dynamics as residents of settler colonialism – from Black victims of South African apartheid, to Palestinian residents of Gaza and the West Bank. Palestinian workers have faced a unique set of circumstances, having struggled in an economic system controlled by Israel. Since the war that began last October, Gaza’s already fragile economy was, in the words of one Washington Post story, “pounded to dust.”

As far back as 2005, Palestinian unions signed on to a call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel, and in 2011 formed the Palestinian Trade Union Coalition for BDS. The coalition called on organised labor around the world to “actively show solidarity with the Palestinian people by implementing creative and context-sensitive BDS campaigns as the

most effective way to end Israeli impunity.”

More than a decade later, major US unions have only just begun to take a strong stand in support of Palestinian workers and unions. The narrative of Israeli victimhood – in the face of so much evidence to the contrary – has been a strong bulwark against global worker solidarity for Palestinians. Take the Portland Association for Teachers, which promoted events examining Israel’s war on Palestinians. Denounced for promoting “disturbing” “anti-Israel” content, the union was cowed into pausing its social media activity. Several other teachers’ unions from Minneapolis to Chicago, have faced severe backlash for supporting Palestinians and criticising Israel.

Changing the narrative of who is the oppressor and who is the victim is a critical step in labour solidarity for Palestinian workers. It’s fitting that South Africa has led the international call to charge Israel with

genocide at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The post-apartheid government has such moral weight in light of South African history that the Israeli government has taken the rare step to formally respond to the charges.

For those unions that backed boycotts of apartheid South Africa, the writing is on the wall: Israel is no victim, rather it is a perpetrator of apartheid. There can be no exception to global labor solidarity. **CT**

Sonali Kolhatkar is an award-winning multimedia journalist. She is the founder, host, and executive producer of “Rising Up With Sonali,” a weekly television and radio show that airs on Free Speech TV and Pacifica stations. Her most recent book is Rising Up: The Power of Narrative in Pursuing Racial Justice (City Lights Books, 2023). This article was produced by Economy for All, a project of the Independent Media Institute.

Philip Kraske

FOR ISRAELIS, IT’S PERSONAL

You wouldn’t think that two colourful ceramic bowls decorated with painted flowers and leaves would inspire someone’s hate, but these are tense times for Israelis.

A friend of mine who works in an NGO, flew to Jordan to meet with staff there. Having some free time, he went to the West Bank, to Hebron, this a few weeks after Ha-

mas’s October 7 raid on Israel. My friend took a tourist’s walk and, though nearly all of the businesses were closed, he found a potter’s shop open and bought two small bowls.

Returning to Jordan, he passed through Israeli passport and customs control. The soldier searched his knapsack – lest he was smuggling out Israeli invasion secrets –

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and pulled out the two bowls.

The soldier spat on them.

The war is not business for Israelis, it's personal. It's not captains telling soldiers to shoot, it's soldiers who are itching to kill their enemy – not even the actual enemy, just any Palestinian standing on what they consider their land. To the surprise of those three luckless Israelis who'd accomplished the amazing feat of escaping from captivity, Israeli soldiers shoot at anything that moves in Gaza.

This explains the Srebrenica-style massacre of Palestinians the other day – the raid on an apartment building, separation of the men from all others, their subsequent execution. The Israelis have taken their lessons from the Serbs, from the East German Stasi, from their guards in Nazi concentration camps, from Hitler's and Mussolini's air forces bombing the vil-lagers of Guernika, and – this is Christmas, why not? – King Herod.

It fits with another bit of information I've heard about Israelis, in particular the men. From flight crews of both Iberia Airlines and Air Europa, pilots and flight attendants, I've heard first-hand accounts of the Madrid-to-Tel Aviv run, which female attendants dread. If they take too long to pick up meal trays, many Israeli men simply drop them in the aisle. And from take-off to touchdown, the women face a barrage of ugly comments. To Israeli men, foreign women clearly figure in that category of "human animals," just like Palestinians.

What a term: "human animals." The Israelis have now coined it, and they'll never live it down. Their athletes will be booed in every stadium, their businesspeople will never shake a foreigner's hand without

noting a certain look in the other's eye. Israelis can invoke "self-defence" all they want; nobody but their politicians in Washington will take it seriously.

But to return to the bowls, my friend's anecdote made me wonder about what provoked the ire of that soldier. Was it the bowls as a symbol of a successful Palestinian sale? Was he angry that the potter had made a few shekels that might make the difference between bread and hunger in the potter's home that night?

Or maybe it was my friend, a Spaniard. Was the soldier angry with a country that wasn't wilting before Israel's self-righteous tantrums? A month after the incident, Spanish President Pedro Sanchez, along with Alexander De Croo, the prime minister of Belgium, made a full-throated plea for the two-state solution, this with the backdrop of the Rafah border crossing. Would the Israeli soldier have spat on the newly-bought bowls of an American?

Looking at the picture, however, I am struck by another thought. Perhaps what bothered the soldier was the simple beauty of the two pieces. In defiance of pitiless oppression, the potter could still celebrate something good and lovely in life. The human spirit was still alive. And what he'd made was one of the few expressions of the Palestinian soul that the soldier was forbidden to bust to pieces.

But he could still spit on it, couldn't he?

I read that some 470,000 Israelis have left the country since October 7; the ones that remain rejoice in the war their government is waging. The decades of frustration in dealing with a people that lays

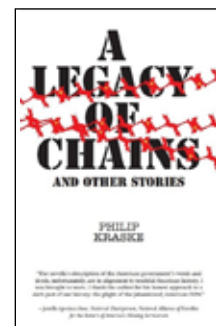
claim to their land, that occasionally attacks them, that makes them tend to all manner of tiresome security measures – this has boiled over into rage, and its high priest is Bibi Netanyahu.

For the moment, pressure from the families of hostages has stayed his hand regarding the worst measures of the IDF, but after making a gesture or two with prisoner-hostage swaps, he will shrug off the last restraints. For nobody should doubt the implications of Israeli forces shooting Israeli civilians on October 7. The Hamas tunnel complex, though an astonishing construction for a people under relentless surveillance, is as much a deathtrap as a resistance network. Flooding it, gassing it or firebombing it to use up all the oxygen is the task of a day for the IDF. Their real mission is finishing the work Israeli settlers started in 1948.

As with any obsessed person, Israelis will pay no attention to the admonishments, rebukes, resolutions, threats, warnings or recommendations of friends. They have the American government in their pocket and nuclear weapons in Dimona. That is enough. This brash people will once and for all rid their land of Palestinians, and turn their obsession into reality.

Obsession: that's what that soldier's spitting meant.

CT



Philip Kraske is an American author who lives in Spain. His latest book is "A Legacy of Chains and Other Stories." His website is www.philipkraske.com.

INSIGHTS

Caitlin Johnstone

FREEDOM FOR ASSANGE. FREEDOM FOR THE WORLD

I haven't written much about Julian Assange lately because I've been so fixated on what's been happening in Gaza, but we should be acutely aware that the 20/21 February may be the WikiLeaks founder's final chance to avoid extradition to the United States to face persecution for the crime of good journalism.

Assange and his legal team will face two High Court judges during the two-day hearing in London, who will determine whether or not the UK will allow the Australian journalist to be dragged to the US in chains for a crooked show trial and cast into one of the world's most draconian prison systems for exposing the war crimes of the world's most powerful government.

Some US lawmakers are attempting to block the extradition from the other end with House Resolution 934, which asserts that "regular journalistic activities are protected under the First Amendment, and that the United States ought to drop all charges against and attempts to extradite Julian Assange." If charges were dropped it would not only prevent the extradition but allow for Assange to be freed from the Belmarsh maximum security prison, where he has been jailed by the British government since 2019.

The fight to free Assange is a fight to protect press freedoms around the world, since the US is using the case in an attempt to set a



RELEASE HIM: Julian Assange

legal precedent for extraditing and imprisoning any journalist or publisher anywhere in the world who shares information with the public that the US doesn't want shared.

And it's worth mentioning that this fight is not actually separate from the fight against Israel's efforts to keep journalism out of Gaza by assassinating reporters and blocking the press from entering the enclave. It's also not separate from humanity's overall struggle to build a truth-based civilisation, nor ultimately from our greater struggle to become a conscious species.

All throughout humanity there are pushes toward truth and seeing and pushes toward secrecy and darkness. In the press we see both: the authentic journalists like Assange who want all that is hidden to be made transparent, and the propagandists of the mainstream media who work to obfuscate and

distort the truth. Those who seek the emergence of a harmonious and truth-based society want as much visibility into what's really happening as possible, while tyrannical power structures like the US empire and Israel are constantly working to dim the lights.

Wherever you see domination and abuse, you see efforts to limit perception and keep human minds from seeing and understanding what's going on. It's true of empires, it's true of governments, it's true of cult leaders, it's true of abusive spouses, and it's true of the unpleasant dynamics within our own psyches that we would rather not look at. The less seeing there is, the more abusiveness is possible; the more seen things become, the closer we get to freedom.

I'm no prophet, but I strongly suspect that our future as a species will be determined by the outcome of this struggle. If the impulse toward truth and seeing wins out, we are probably headed toward a world of health and harmony. If the impulse to keep everything confused and hidden and unconscious wins, we are probably headed for dystopia and extinction.

In any case, all we can do is fight to make things more visible so that health and harmony become possible. Fight to make things conscious within ourselves. Fight to keep journalism legal in the shadow of the empire. Fight to spotlight Israel's atrocities in Gaza. Fight to make the unseen seen. Fight to bring humanity into the light of consciousness. **CT**

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David Edwards

JOHN PILGER – 'A MAJORITY OF ONE'

His work transcended the dry intellectuality of more academic dissidents. He wrote with precision and insight, with an added dimension of passion

On January 7, the *Observer* reported that the slogan “united we will win” is a fixture on Israeli screens “for most TV news and talk shows.” Raviv Drucker, one of Israel’s leading investigative journalists, commented:

“In general, the Israeli media is drafted to the main goal of winning the war, or what looks like trying to win the war...

“The shock [of 7 October] was so brutal, and the trauma is so hard that journalists see their role now, or part of their role, to help the state to win the war. And part of it is showing as little as possible from the suffering in Gaza, and minimising criticism about the army.”

This is better termed anti-journalism, a propaganda system censoring even the most crucial facts.

Thus, Anat Saragusti, press freedom director for Israel’s Union of Journalists and one of the few Israeli journalists to have reported from Gaza independently of the military during previous conflicts, commented:

“They cover the Palestinians only in the framework of security. You hardly see any women, no kids. The spirit is that they are all Hamas. I know it’s not easy, but I think the media are *not* doing their job.”

The Israeli public, then, is not see-

ing the footage of tiny, shivering infants with grotesque head wounds, of injured mothers cradling their dead babies – scenes that have been traumatising the rest of us on social media for three months.

In a moment of stunning self-unawareness, the *Observer* added:

“US president Joe Biden warned Israelis soon after 7 October against repeating America’s mistakes in its wars of vengeance in Iraq and Afghanistan. He could also have warned about the failings of journalists who smoothed the path to those conflicts.”

One of the “failings of journalists who smoothed the path” in the *Observer*, the *Guardian*, and everywhere else, was to portray the 2003 war of opportunity for oil in Iraq as an irrational “war of vengeance” or a paranoid “war of national security.”

To this day, British and US anti-journalism cannot discuss the brute fact that US-UK armies blasted the way open for US-UK oil companies like BP and Exxon to do big business in Iraq at the cost of more than one million Iraqi lives. Why? Because, as in Israel, “journalists see their role now ... to help the state to win the war.”

The global dominance of this anti-journalism is the correct context in which to evaluate the rare, au-

thentic journalism of John Pilger, who died on 30 December, and the response of the corporate critics smearing him.

In exact opposition to the way Israeli “journalists” are now burying the truth of their government’s genocide in Gaza, Pilger wrote in 2006:

“In reclaiming the honour of our craft, not to mention the truth, we journalists at least need to understand the historic task to which we are assigned – that is, to report the rest of humanity in terms of its usefulness, or otherwise, to ‘us,’ and to soften up the public for rapacious attacks on countries that are no threat to us.”

Is it difficult to understand that war-winning propagandists deem the trashing of real journalists like Pilger a key part of their role? Last month, *Declassified UK* reported:

“Recently declassified files show how the UK government covertly monitored Australian journalist John Pilger, and sought to discredit him by encouraging media contacts to attack him in the press.”

Consider that, in 2005, Pilger said of Blair and Iraq:

“By voting for Blair, you will walk over the corpses of at least 100,000 [ultimately, in excess of one mil-



lion] people, most of them innocent women and children and the elderly, slaughtered by rapacious forces sent by Blair and Bush, unprovoked and in defiance of international law, to a defenceless country.” (Pilger, “By voting for Blair, you will walk over the corpses of at least 100,000 people,” *New Statesman*, 25 April 2005)

Naturally, anti-journalism reflexively brands this “an extreme left-wing and anti-American bias” that

“consistently underscored much of” Pilger’s reporting, as the *Times* opined in its obituary.

In fact, there is nothing “extreme,” “anti-American” or even “left-wing” about opposing the mass killing of civilians for profit.

The *Times* noted the Orwellian effort to transform Pilger’s name into a verb:

“... to Pilger, Pilgerise, or be Pilgered. It was defined as: “To pre-

sent information in a sensationalist manner to reach a foregone conclusion; using emotive language to make a false political point; treating a subject emotionally with generous disregard for inconvenient detail; or making a pompous judgment on wrong premises.”

A clearer case of psychological projection can hardly be imagined from a newspaper that has done all this and more in promoting the

West's wars of aggression. Even if everything the *Times* said was true, the fact that Pilger was right in opposing numerous war crimes and the *Times* was not just wrong but complicit in supporting them, renders their criticism absurd.

The *Times* continued that Pilger's "polemical approach" involved "looking at all international conflicts through an anti-American prism" leaving him "a dupe of the eastern bloc and, later, the Putin regime."

No prejudicial prism is required to perceive the unmissable carnage generated by the American empire in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Gaza and Ukraine. Pilger was no more a dupe of Putin than he was "anti-American." He wrote in 2022:

"Russia's invasion of Ukraine is wanton and inexcusable. It is a crime to invade a sovereign country. There are no 'buts; – except one.

"When did the present war in Ukraine begin and who started it? According to the United Nations, between 2014 and this year, some 14,000 people have been killed in the Kiev regime's civil war on the Donbass. Many of the attacks were carried out by neo-Nazis."

Of course, the 'but' was a betrayal for anti-journalism, but this was a rational question raised by a wide range of credible sources like Jeffrey Sachs, John Mearsheimer, Alastair Crooke and many others.

Oliver Kamm, formerly a leader writer for the *Times*, went further in a CapX blog republished in the *Telegraph*: "Pilger was not really an investigative journalist at all," he "fabricated his conclusions in order to accord with his premises." He "operated with a combination of evasion, misdirection and fakery for decades." Kamm lamented "the weakness of his technical grasp of



His writing is ablaze with an outrage rooted, not in some mindless "anti-American" hatred, but a deeply felt love for ordinary people treated as trash by the powerful

almost any given subject."

Back in the real world, Bill Haggerty, former assistant editor at the *Mirror*, wrote:

"Was a time when young students planning a career in print journalism wanted to be John Pilger – even the girls ...

"I have never worked with anyone who came even close to matching the fire, outrage and descriptive power employed by Pilger when reporting from Vietnam, Cambodia and other hotspots for the *Daily Mirror*." (Bill Haggerty, 'Hanging out with celebs has surpassed unearthing news,' 15 November 2004, the *Independent*)

This needs emphasising – no-one else even came close. Schopenhauer observed:

"Talent hits a target no-one else can hit; Genius hits a target no-one else can see."

For thirty years, we have tried to

see the target Pilger so consistently hit. How did his writing stand completely apart in delivering such inspirational, oxygenating impact? Part of the answer is that Pilger's work transcended the dry intellectuality of more academic dissidents. He wrote with precision and insight, but with an added dimension of passion, emotion and personal warmth.

His writing is ablaze with an outrage rooted, not in some mindless "anti-American" hatred, but in its exact opposite: a deeply felt love for ordinary people treated as trash by the powerful. Pilger really did care, injustice tortured him, and it is this compassion that is communicated to readers and viewers in every article, book, film and in the many emails he sent us over two decades. Remarkably, reading and watching Pilger enhances our sense of our own dignity because he reminds us of how much we can care, of how much we do care.

The last message he sent to *Media Lens* on 15 November, six weeks before he died, referred to one of our recent media alerts:

"Dear David,

"So good to hear from you, as ever (and thanks for the BBC piece which I hadn't seen); I'm at my most restorative when my optimism reminds me how blessed I am; the truth is I am on a "journey," as almost everyone says now, and it sometimes feels like I am still waiting for the bus. I am making progress on paper, and I can walk unaided with a protective guard at my elbow. But it's calling on a determination I know I have, but prefer to send on a lifelong sabbatical.

"Terrific piece, mate. What creatures Welby and the rest are...

"All my best, John." (Email to David Edwards, 15 November 2023)

Pilger sent us this kind of positivity time and again, year after year. In the world of left activism – which is rather more competitive and ego-

ridden than we might like to imagine – no-one else has done anything remotely comparable. That Pilger sent us one last message of encouragement at a time when he was gravely ill gives an idea of his inexhaustible generosity of spirit. Note, also, the sense of fun and even joie de vivre even in this last message sent at such a difficult time. Pilger’s love of writing, of word play, of supporting other people, came out of a deep love of life.

Kamm’s claim that Pilger was ‘famously humourless’ is magnificently off. The extra ingredient we haven’t mentioned – the spice that helped him hit the target no one else can see – was a wonderfully understated, sardonic humour aimed at the many ‘windbags’ he so loved to deflate. He emailed us about the BBC’s famous and compromised Middle East correspondent Jeremy Bowen:

‘A few years ago, [Bowen] invited me to take part in a BBC special about war correspondents, and we spent an enjoyable hour or so “in conversation”. Although it was clear that tales of derring-do would have been preferred, I raised the unwelcome subject that the BBC was an extension and voice of the established order in Britain and its reporting on the Middle East and elsewhere reflected the prevailing wisdom – with honourable exceptions from time to time. My contribution was cut entirely from the programme. I emailed Bowen and sometime later received an unsatisfactory response that there wasn’t “time or space” in the film – something unsurprising like that. Censorship by omission is standard, if undeclared practice.’ (Email to David Edwards, 18 April 2008)

Kamm again lamented: ‘while he talked a lot about the power of language, he didn’t know much about it’.

Again, this couldn’t be more ,



“You must see the reaction in a newsroom when one mentions Chomsky or Pilger. They run the other way, and I can see they are afraid by the look on their faces”

wrong. Pilger had an uncanny ability to capture the truth of an individual, idea, or issue with spectacular concision. In this single, witty sentence he caught and burst the much-lauded myth of BBC “objectivity”:

“I’ve always found it amusing, amusing, that so many people in the BBC see themselves as having entered into a Nirvana of objectivity, as if their objectivity and impartiality have been given to them intravenously.”

In October 2003, in 64 words, Pilger demolished the idolatry of Clinton and Blair, the mythmaking of the US-UK “special relationship,” the West’s ethical pretensions, the credibility of the *Independent* and indeed of the entire Westminster press pack:

“‘The New Special Relationship’ was the next good news, with Blair

and Clinton looking into each other’s eyes in the garden at No 10 Downing Street. Here was the torch being passed, said the front page of the *Independent*, ‘from a becalmed and aimless American presidency to the coltish omnipotence of Blairdom.’; This was the reverential tone that launched Blair into his imperial violence.’ (Pilger, “The Fall and Rise of Liberal England,” *New Statesman*, 13 October 2003)

The focus on Clinton and Blair ‘looking into each other’s eyes in the garden at No 10 Downing Street’ pricked perfectly the Disney-fied charade by which so many are gulled. The contrast between the fawning idolatry of the *Independent*’s front page and Pilger’s final, pitch-black sentence was devastating. Just these three sentences left the legions of “journalists of attachment,” the “client journalists,” the “presstitutes,” looking exactly what they are – pitiful and foolish. And he did this endlessly. No wonder a journalist friend working in a major British TV news studio told us:

“You must see the reaction in a newsroom when one mentions Chomsky or Pilger. They run the other way, and I can see they are afraid by the look on their faces. Fact is that once you understand and admit what you are doing, you can’t continue with it. When I mentioned Chomsky, one person commented, ‘Oh, he’s way out there.’ ‘Way out where?’ I asked.” (Email to *Media Lens*, 8 July 2005)

Thoreau observed:

“Any man more right than his neighbours constitutes a majority of one already.’ (Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, Penguin Classics, 1986, p.397)

On all the key issues, Pilger was more right than his neighbours; he was a towering, landslide “majority of one.”

Kamm left his worst till last in speculating on Kosovo “that Pilger

himself invented the tale of extensive Nato losses which were being suppressed by the state and the news media, because he wished to stimulate popular opposition to government policy. He was spectacularly lying for the cause, which in this case was to assist a genocidal regime in its campaign of brutal repression.”

Even from Kamm’s perspective this was ill-advised. How can the author of an article devoted to trashing a journalist’s character finally expose himself as someone willing to stoop so low as to accuse someone who has just died, who cannot defend himself, of “spectacularly lying?: Any decent person, even Pilger’s enemies, must shrink in revulsion.

It is not our intention to suggest that these smears merit serious consideration. But they do provide a reminder of just how blatantly corporate critics are willing to reverse the truth. As Pilger himself said:

“A common recipe for smear is half or quarter truth, conflation, misrepresentation, a pinch of sneer and a dollop of guilt-by-association.



“A common recipe for smear is half or quarter truth, conflation, misrepresentation, a pinch of sneer and a dollop of guilt-by-association. Stir briskly”

Stir briskly.” (Email to David Edwards, 29 June 2011)

Pilger was able to make light of the many baseless smears but they sometimes wounded him deeply. The Scottish philosopher, David

Hume, described Rousseau as “one of the most singular of all human beings... his extreme sensibility of temper is his torment;” “he is like a man who were stripped not only of his clothes but of his skin.” (Quoted, John Hope Mason, *The Indispensable Rousseau*, Quartet Books, 1979, p.5)

Pilger was similarly sensitive to injustices perpetrated against others and against himself; hence his reputation for being “prickly.” If he was sometimes prickly, it was because he was sincere, human; because he felt things deeply, painfully. His great triumph was to use this sensitivity, this pain, in the cause of truth in defence of the powerless.

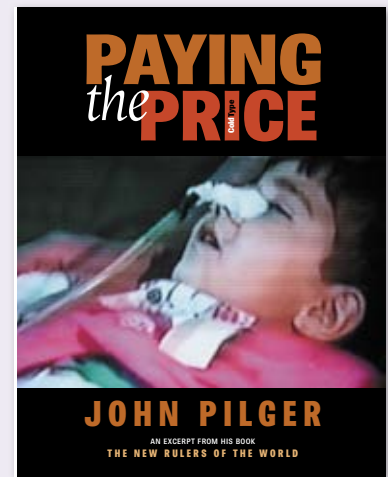
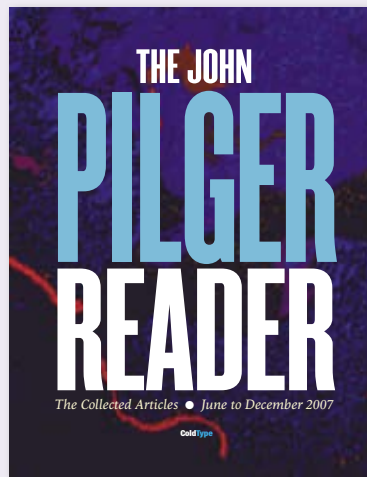
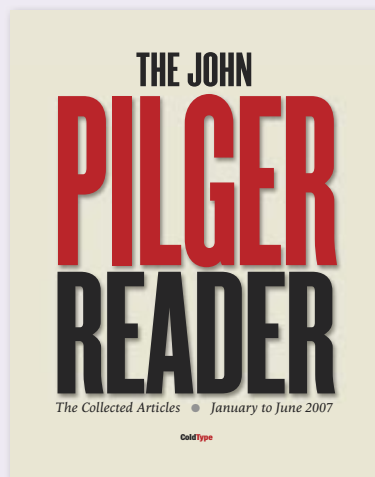
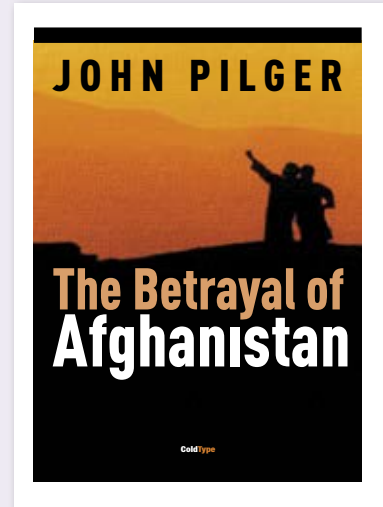
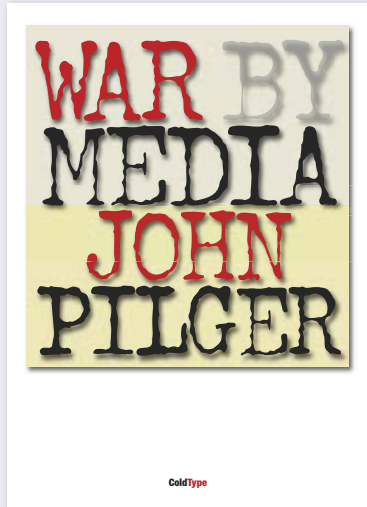
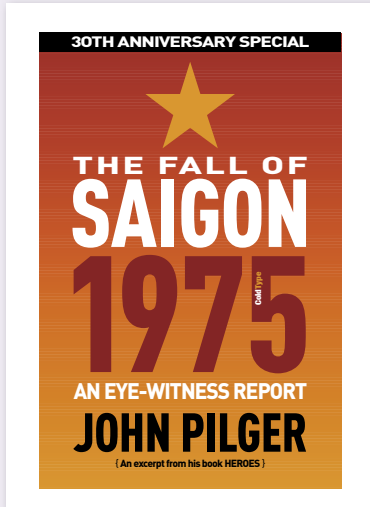
Over the years, through many tests and travails, highs and lows, we developed a habit of ending our emails to each other with the same words. One last time, then, we say with all love and gratitude: “Onwards, John!” US

David Edwards is co-editor of *medialens*, the UK media watchdog. This essay was originally published at the organisation’s website, www.medialens.org.

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John McEvoy

UK GOVERNMENT'S PLOT TO DISCREDIT JOHN PILGER

The legendary foreign correspondent was monitored and targeted by a covert British propaganda unit, declassified files show

Recently declassified files show how the UK government covertly monitored Australian journalist John Pilger, and sought to discredit him by encouraging media contacts to attack him in the press.

Pilger, who died in London on 30 December at the age of 84, was best known for his numerous documentaries exposing US, UK and Australian government policies.

His film, *Stealing a Nation*, showed how Britain expelled the native population of the Chagos Islands to make way for a US military base, while *Death of a Nation* exposed how the genocide in East Timor “happened with the connivance of Britain, the US, and Australia.”

In 1975, the Foreign Office's secret cold war propaganda unit, the Information Research Department (IRD), opened a file on Pilger.

That year, IRD official Mrs J. O'Connor Howe complained that Pilger's television programme *A Nod and a Wink*, broadcast in the UK, had given “entirely sympathetic treatment to the Shrewsbury pickets,” when several trade unionists were wrongfully convicted and imprisoned.

Howe added: “It must be hoped that John Pilger and his sort do not

become influential in their current affairs coverage.” Another official responded that “Pilger's nods and winks need more careful watching.”

Though the IRD was shut down in 1977, Pilger's file was transferred to its successor organisation, the Special Production Unit (SPU), and the Foreign Office continued to track his movements over the following years.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Pilger visited southeast Asia to film *Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia* and *Cambodia: Year One*. The documentaries covered Washington's secret bombing campaign of Cambodia during the Vietnam War, and the partial responsibility of the US and Britain for the brutality under the Pol Pot regime.

Throughout this period, the UK government monitored Pilger's activities and plotted to launch counter-measures against him.

The office of then prime minister Margaret Thatcher privately asked the British embassy in Bangkok for “information on Pilger's journalistic background.” It specifically requested “examples of any Pilger material on Vietnam/Cambodia over the period 1968-78, and examples of his work criticising UK domestic

policies.”

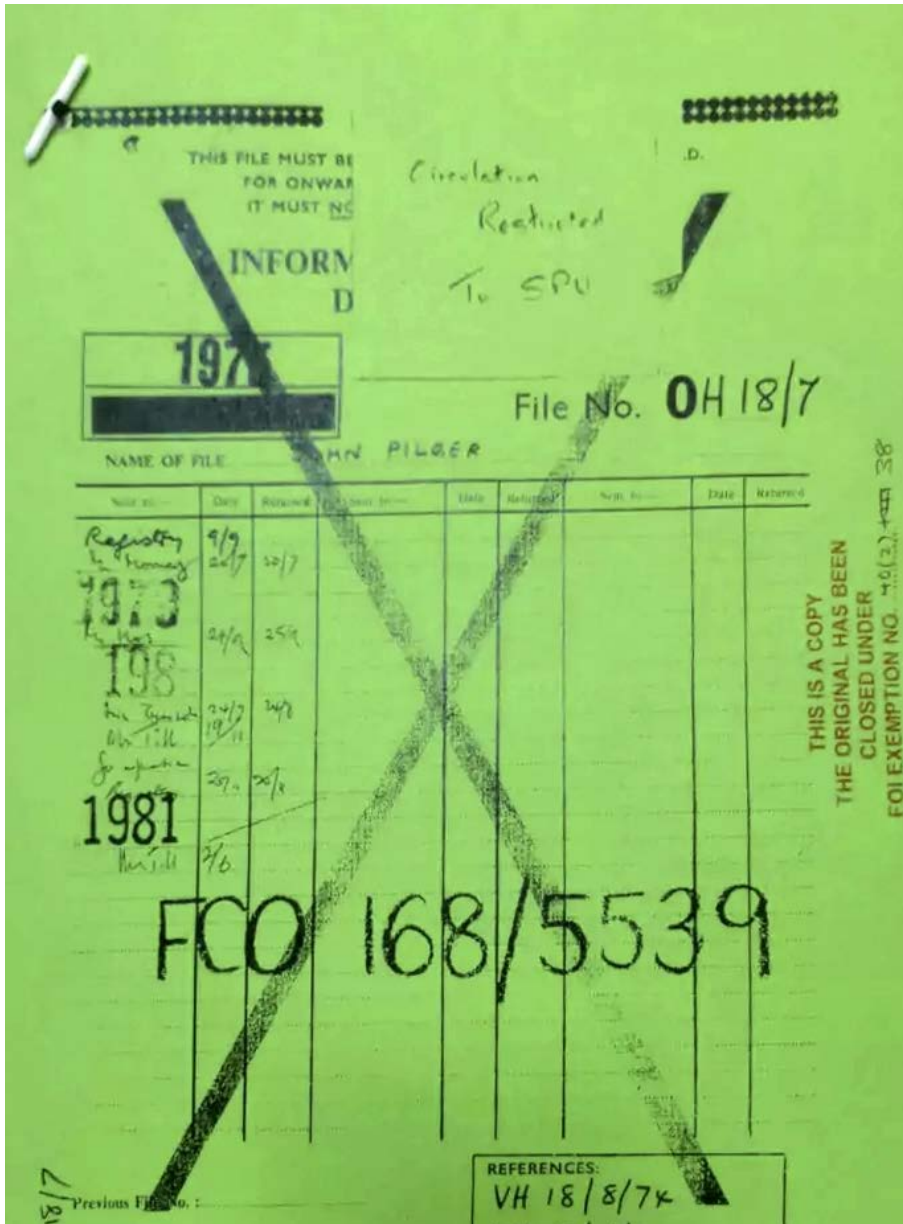
In September 1980, Thomas J. Duggin, a British embassy official in Bangkok, noted that Pilger's work on Cambodia “deserves a rejoinder [response] before his film is shown – a subject worthy of Peter Joy's attention perhaps”.

Peter Joy was no ordinary diplomat. He had been the head of the IRD's top-secret Special Editorial Unit (SEU), which planned and executed “black propaganda” operations worldwide against those deemed to threaten Britain's interests.

In this effort, the SEU worked closely with MI6 to produce reports from fake sources and fictitious organisations, and planted strategically valuable information into the press. What Duggin was seemingly suggesting, in other words, was that the Foreign Office covertly inspire a hit-job on Pilger prior to the release of his film.

The Foreign Office subsequently compiled a charge sheet on Pilger, and sought out a journalist who would be prepared to carry out a “hatchet job” on him. Such an article could draw on “the commentaries from the two Bangkok Embassies [the UK and the US] to counter the impressions created by Pilger's reporting.”

The embassy also obtained in-



CHARGE SHEET: Cover of a document prepared by the UK Foreign Office in its efforts to counter John Pilger's reporting from Cambodia.

information from “one of Pilger’s associates” who privately told them “about his motives and activities” in the region. It is unclear who this was.

Ultimately, “the reluctance of one journalist” to carry out the hatchet job scuppered the Foreign Office plan to counter Pilger’s reporting on Cambodia.

It nonetheless remains unclear whether the Foreign Office succeeded elsewhere in inspiring attack

pieces on Pilger.

Many of the documents in Pilger’s file have been removed, with some due to remain classified until 2041.

The Foreign Office frequently discussed Pilger in seething terms. His work on Southeast Asia read like a “cynical voice from the Kremlin,” one Foreign Office official argued, with another complaining that it “looks

Pilger’s work on Southeast Asia read like a “cynical voice from the Kremlin,” one Foreign Office official argued

like a PR job on behalf of Hanoi and Moscow.”

Before his death, Pilger responded to these revelations: “Some of the documents on me going back to the eighties – and that was when I was reporting from Southeast Asia, Cambodia, Vietnam.

“My reporting, which was really exclusive, it was telling people something that they didn’t know, it was exposing a great deal, it was exposing the tyrants, but it was also exposing who was backing the tyrants secretly – it’s rather embarrassing.

“I was described in one of these documents as pro-Kremlin. I mean, when I read this I, I say many years later, I can only burst out laughing... But we must never make light of it.”

John Pilger privately told me that he was aware of a Foreign Office campaign against him, linked to the US, but had few supporting documents.

“The stories of mine that stung them was their involvement with the Khmer Rouge and Suharto’s war on East Timor,” he said. **CT**

John McEvoy is an independent journalist who has written for International History Review, The Canary, Tribune Magazine, Jacobin and Brasil Wire. This article was first published by Declassified UK at www.declassified.org.

Jonathan Cook

WORLD COURT PUTS ISRAEL AND ITS ALLIES ON TRIAL FOR GENOCIDE

The ICJ ruling has assured that the taint on Israel is not going away. The question is, how far will the disgrace and dishonour spread?

It was easy to miss the welcome news from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on January 26 amid the huge wave of disappointment that swept Palestinians and much of the watching world when its judges failed to order an immediate halt to Israel's slaughter in Gaza.

The World Court's justices decided, by an overwhelming majority, that South Africa had made a plausible case that Israel is committing genocide against the Palestinians of Gaza. In doing so, many members of the 17-strong panel openly defied, and embarrassed, the governments of their own countries – not least the court's president, Joan Donoghue of the United States.

US President Joe Biden's administration had called South Africa's case "meritless, counterproductive and completely without any basis in fact whatsoever".

In a sign of how isolated Israel – and the US – is on the legal facts, its arguments found favour only with its own appointee, Aharon Barak, and Uganda's judge. Even Barak agreed that some of the provisional measures against Israel were needed to protect civilians.

The ICJ ruled that Israel must obey the Genocide Convention, taking urgent steps to avoid the killing

and harming of civilians. It should also avoid creating conditions in Gaza that might make life impossible for Palestinians in the territory.

The court cited remarks from Israel's president, Isaac Herzog, and its defence minister, Yoav Gallant, that Israel had been doing precisely the opposite over the past three-and-a-half months. Their statements suggested the intent was to punish civilians and make Gaza uninhabitable.

The justices strongly implied that Israel had, to date, failed to honour its legal obligations under the convention and would need to prove to the court within a month that it had changed course.

Almost certainly Israel will defy the court and carry on as before. In the wake of the interim ruling, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to continue until "absolute victory."

The ICJ has, in effect, put Israel on trial for the most heinous of crimes, and one that Israel has long cited – in the form of the Nazi Holocaust – as the rationale for its own founding as a necessary sanctuary for Jews from European antisemitism.

In predictable fashion, Netanyahu

called the genocide charge "outrageous" and "a mark of disgrace" on the court. He tried to weaponise the fact that the following day was Holocaust Remembrance Day, implying that only an antisemitic agenda could lead to the conclusion that it was Israel, not Hamas, carrying out a genocide.

In fact, the World Court has brought into the harsh light of day a moral conundrum western powers have long sought to obscure.

By killing, maiming and ethnically cleansing Palestinians over the seven decades since Israel's establishment on the ruins of the Palestinian homeland, has a self-declared Jewish state not become the vehicle by which the victims of one genocide perpetrate another?

After all, what is happening to Gaza today did not emerge out of nowhere.

Israel has been actively disappearing Palestine and the Palestinian people for more than three-quarters of a century. There have been episodes of intense war crimes, such as the ethnic cleansing operations of 1948 and 1967, as well as the invasion and occupation of Lebanon in the early 1980s.

Those events have been interspersed with long periods of a protracted, slow-motion crime – that

WE ARE ALL FRIED 🔪📄



Greg Koenderman

of apartheid – designed to divide, ghettoise and erase the Palestinians as a people.

Back in 2006, in an attempt to bypass the sensitivities of Israelis, as well as overseas Jews and western publics, provoked by a direct accusation of genocide, the renowned Israeli scholar Baruch Kimmerling characterised Israel's crimes as "politicide." He did so the year before Israel began its horrifying 17-year siege of Gaza, turning it effectively into a concentration camp.

In Kimmerling's view, however, Israel's actions even before the siege and current mass slaughter in Gaza amounted to something close to

genocide.

For the next few years of the court's deliberations, the question of whether Israel is committing the "crime of crimes" will be the front and centre of a legal debate.

That will be little comfort to Palestinians, who will have to continue enduring a real-time genocide, while the World Court sifts the evidence on whether Israel is actually carrying out what the judges already implicitly concede looks very much like a genocide.

But the justices will be under intense pressure to move faster than their usual snail's pace. The court itself, and the system of justice it

supposedly upholds, is on trial too. It must do what it is supposed to do: stop a genocide unfolding, not give it label after it has already taken place.

Even more on trial are all the states that have facilitated, sponsored and tried to shield from proper scrutiny Israel's slaughter in Gaza. They are now on legal notice that they could be investigated for complicity in genocide, conspiracy to genocide and incitement to genocide.

Yes, the trial process will take far too long. But it is now a cloud hanging over every Israeli action. Each attack on a hospital, the continu-

ing denial of food, water and power to Gaza's population, the bombing of "safe zones" to which Israel has ordered Palestinians to flee will be listed and investigated as evidence of a genocide.

And in parallel, the pressure will rise considerably on the ICJ's much weaker sister court at the Hague, the International Criminal Court (ICC), to identify the individuals behind those war crimes.

South Africa, the World Court agreed, made a plausible case. If Israel has persuaded 15 of the 17 World Court justices that there is a risk a genocide is taking place, the ICC should be actively seeking out those guilty of the many war crimes on which that assessment rests.

Israel will try to make much of the fact that no order was made for it to halt its military assault.

The court's reluctance to back this demand from South Africa was doubtless driven by political considerations. Had it done so, it would have risked coming into direct confrontation with the real culprit: Washington.

Israel would have refused to end its attacks, and the matter would then have been referred to the Security Council for enforcement. In turn, the Biden administration would have been forced to wield its veto to protect its client state.

Either way, there would have been no end to the slaughter of the Palestinians. But if the court had ordered a halt, it would have been even more evident than now that it is the US, more so than Israel, that is ensuring the genocide continues uninterrupted. Without US money and weapons, Israel would be in no position to keep bombing Gaza.

It seems that identifying Washington as the sponsor of genocide marked the limit of the World Court's courage.

Nonetheless, the US and its allies are now in a tricky position. The day

Western leaders are equally exposed for their role in rhetorically and diplomatically encouraging Israel's assault on Gaza

before the ICJ ruling, the *Haaretz* newspaper reported that Israel and the Pentagon were finalising a major arms agreement.

Israel is to use part of the huge sums of "aid" it receives each year from Washington to buy 50 fighter jets and 12 attack helicopters made by Lockheed Martin and Boeing. It is also buying more "aerial munitions" because its stocks are running low from its relentless bombing of Gaza.

According to *Haaretz*, the need for more attack helicopters, in particular, "is a direct lesson from the current war in Gaza," where existing aircraft have been used to "hit enemy targets and to assist IDF ground forces."

The paper reported senior Israeli officials saying the Biden administration had "expressed a commitment to ensure the rapid provision of weapons and munitions to Israel to assist the IDF in the current war."

The World Court will now be investigating whether that commitment is, in fact, complicity – or even a conspiracy – to perpetrate genocide.

The ICJ's ruling does not exist in a legal vacuum. On the same day, a federal district court in California heard a case brought against the Biden administration for complicity and failure to prevent an "unfolding genocide" in Gaza.

Other states are in similar jeopardy. Before the ruling, Israel's al-

lies could plausibly argue that their transfers of arms to Israel were made in good faith, even if it was later shown that some of those weapons ended up being used, inadvertently or otherwise, in the commission of war crimes.

But a suspicion by the World Court of genocide means that other states must act much more carefully to avoid the risk of being accused of complicity. The justices have raised a red flag over Israel's behaviour. Other states are required to take note.

Most European countries have been supplying Israel with arms for years that have been used against Palestinians. But some, not just the US, are actively assisting Israel as it pounds Gaza, helping to contribute to the death toll of at least 26,000 Palestinians so far, most of them women and children.

The UK has been using an air force base in Cyprus to fly dozens of reconnaissance missions over Gaza whose intelligence findings are being shared with Israel. Germany, meanwhile, is reported to be shipping tank shells to Israel to replenish its depleted stocks.

Western leaders are equally exposed for their role in rhetorically and diplomatically encouraging Israel's assault on Gaza. Ignoring the massive number of Palestinian casualties, as well as Israel's legal status as occupier and its belligerent siege of the enclave, many have prioritised instead a presumed Israeli "right to self-defence."

The degree to which they may be acting in bad faith was underscored last week when it emerged that a group of Dutch officials and diplomats had turned whistleblowers.

They submitted evidence to the Hague arguing that their prime minister, Mark Rutte, sought to conceal from the public an official finding that Israel was committing war crimes.

According to the evidence, Rutte asked his legal affairs ministry: “What can we say to make it look like Israel is not committing war crimes?”

The ruling should put to shame western media organisations as well. It may be too much to expect that the BBC and others will now, when they refer to Israel, append a description that it is “being investigated for genocide” – just as they currently reflexively describe Hamas as “designated a terrorist organisation by the UK and other governments.”

But the ICJ has put a harsh spotlight on news broadcasters like the BBC that have barely been covering what is going on in Gaza over recent weeks.

The World Court fears that a genocide may be taking place, and yet the establishment media has quickly grown tired of covering it – quite unlike its endless revisiting of the events of nearly four months ago, when Hamas fighters attacked Israel, and its reports on the plight of the Israeli captives in Gaza; and, let us also note, quite unlike its year or more of headline news about Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Major media corporations have been taking staff off air who are seen as too critical of Israel’s slaughter – insinuating that their scrutiny is driven by prejudice rather than an appreciation of international law.

Major media corporations have been taking staff off air who are seen as too critical of Israel’s slaughter

ABC, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, sacked an award-winning Australian-Lebanese host, Antoinette Lattouf, after high-level Israel lobbyists threatened legal action if she wasn’t removed.

Notably, Mehdi Hasan, who tweeted about Lattouf’s sacking, was one of three Muslim anchors on MSNBC removed from the airwaves in recent weeks. Hasan had made headlines with confrontational interviews with Israeli spokespeople such as Mark Regev.

Social media companies have been no better. A recent Human Rights Watch report found that Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, has been systematically suppressing content about Palestinians and Gaza, making it easier for Israel to evade public scrutiny of its crimes.

Perhaps not surprisingly, after Gallant and Herzog’s genocidal remarks were quoted so prominently by the court, Netanyahu warned his

ministers to avoid commenting on the ICJ’s decision.

Whether or not the court eventually finds that the evidence against Israel passes the high bar set for genocide, incitement to genocide should be far easier to prove. South Africa’s petition to the court included page after page of genocidal statements made by senior Israeli officials, including Netanyahu himself.

Israel could lose that particular battle much more quickly.

But, of course, Israeli officials will find it hard to reign back their incitement, including against the court.

Gallant responded both by calling South Africa’s case “antisemitic” and by suggesting that the ICJ were only too keen to indulge that antisemitism.

What the ICJ has assured is that the taint on Israel is not going away. The question now is, how far will the disgrace and dishonour spread? **CT**

Jonathan Cook is an award-winning British journalist, who was based in Nazareth, Israel, for 20 years before returning to the UK in 2021. The author of three books on the Israel-Palestine conflict, Cook won the Martha Gelhorn Special Prize for Journalism in 2011. He previously worked for Britain’s *Guardian* and *Observer* newspapers. His website is www.jonathan-cook.net.

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Joshua Frank

MAKING GAZA UNLIVABLE

The lands that have sustained the people for centuries are being desecrated and transformed into a hellscape

On a picturesque beach in central Gaza, a mile north of the now-flattened Al-Shati refugee camp, long black pipes snake through hills of white sand before disappearing underground. An image released by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) shows dozens of soldiers laying pipelines and what appear to be mobile pumping stations that are to take water from the Mediterranean Sea and hose it into underground tunnels. The plan, according to various reports, is to flood the vast network of underground shafts and tunnels Hamas has reportedly built and used to carry out its operations.

“I won’t talk about specifics, but they include explosives to destroy and other means to prevent Hamas operatives from using the tunnels to harm our soldiers,” said IDF Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Herzi Halevi. “[Any] means which give us an advantage over the enemy that [uses the tunnels], deprives it of this asset, is a means that we are evaluating using. This is a good idea...”

While Israel is already test-running its flood strategy, it’s not the first time Hamas’s tunnels have been subjected to sabotage by seawater. In 2013, neighbouring Egypt began flooding Hamas-controlled tunnels that were allegedly being

used to smuggle goods between the country’s Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip. For more than two years, water from the Mediterranean was flushed into the tunnel system, wreaking havoc on Gaza’s environment. Groundwater supplies were quickly polluted with salt brine and, as a result, the dirt became saturated and unstable, causing the ground to collapse, killing numerous people. Once fertile agricultural fields were transformed into salinated pits of mud, and clean drinking water, already in short supply in Gaza, was further degraded.

Israel’s current strategy to drown Hamas’s tunnels will no doubt cause similar, irreparable damage. “It is important to keep in mind,” warns Juliane Schillinger, a researcher at the University of Twente in the Netherlands, “that we are not just talking about water with a high salt content here – seawater along the Mediterranean coast is also polluted with untreated wastewater, which is continuously discharged into the Mediterranean from Gaza’s dysfunctional sewage system.”

This, of course, appears to be part of a broader Israeli objective – not just to dismantle Hamas’s military capabilities but to further degrade and destroy Gaza’s imperilled aquifers (already polluted with sewage that’s leaked from dilapidated



DEATH OF A NATION: Gaza’s infrastructure is rapidly being destroyed by Israel, but we shouldn’t ignore the damage being done to the environment.

uifers (already polluted with sewage that’s leaked from dilapidated pipes). Israeli officials have openly admitted their goal is to ensure that Gaza will be an unlivable place once they end their merciless military campaign.

“We are fighting human animals, and we are acting accordingly,” Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said shortly after the Hamas attack of October 7th. “We will eliminate everything – they will regret it.”

And Israel is now keeping its promise.

As if its indiscriminate bombing, which has already damaged or destroyed up to 70 percent of all homes in Gaza, weren’t enough, filling those tunnels with polluted water will ensure that some of the remain-



ing residential buildings will suffer structural problems, too. And if the ground is weak and insecure, Palestinians will have trouble rebuilding.

Flooding tunnels with polluted groundwater “will cause an accumulation of salt and the collapse of the soil, leading to the demolition of thousands of Palestinian homes in the densely populated strip,” says Abdel-Rahman al-Tamimi, director of the Palestinian Hydrologists Group, the largest NGO monitoring pollution in the Palestinian territories. His conclusion couldn’t be more stunning: “The Gaza Strip will become a depopulated area, and it will take about 100 years to get rid of the environmental effects of this war.”

In other words, as al-Tamimi

points out, Israel is now “killing the environment.” And in many ways, it all started with the destruction of Palestine’s lush olive groves.

During an average year, Gaza once produced more than 5,000 tons of olive oil from more than 40,000 trees. The fall harvest in October and November was long a celebratory season for thousands of Palestinians. Families and friends sang, shared meals, and gathered in the groves to celebrate under ancient trees, which symbolised “peace, hope, and sustenance.” It was an important tradition, a deep connection both to the land and to a vital economic resource. Last year, olive crops accounted for

more than 10 percent of the Gazan economy, a total of \$30-million.

Of course, since October 7, harvesting has ceased. Israel’s scorched earth tactics have instead ensured the destruction of countless olive groves. Satellite images released in early December affirm that 22 percent of Gaza’s agricultural land, including countless olive orchards, has been destroyed.

“We are heartbroken over our crops, which we cannot reach,” explains Ahmed Qudeih, a farmer from Khuza, a town in the Southern Gaza Strip. “We can’t irrigate or observe our land or take care of it. After every devastating war, we pay thousands of shekels to ensure the quality of our crops and to make our soil suitable again for agriculture.”

Israel's relentless military thrashing of Gaza has taken an unfathomable toll on human life (more than 22,000 dead, including significant numbers of women and children, and thousands more bodies believed to be buried under the rubble and so uncountable). And consider this latest round of horror just a particularly grim continuation of a 75-year campaign to eviscerate the Palestinian cultural heritage. Since 1967, Israel has uprooted more than 800,000 native Palestinian olive trees, sometimes to make way for new illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank; in other instances, out of alleged security concerns, or from pure, visceral Zionist rage.

Wild groves of olive trees have been harvested by inhabitants of the region for thousands of years, dating back to the Chalcolithic period in the Levant (4,300-3,300 BCE), and the razing of such groves has had calamitous environmental consequences. "[The] removal of trees is directly linked to irreversible climate change, soil erosion, and a reduction in crops," according to a 2023 *Yale Review of International Studies* report. "The perennial, woody bark acts as a carbon sink ... [an] olive tree absorbs 11 kg of CO₂ per liter of olive oil produced."

Besides providing a harvestable crop and cultural value, olive groves are vital to Palestine's ecosystem. Numerous bird species, including the Eurasian Jay, Green Finch, Hooded Crow, Masked Shrike, Palestine Sunbird, and Sardinian Warbler rely on the biodiversity provided by Palestine's wild trees, six species of which are often found in native olive groves: the Aleppo pine, almond, olive, Palestine buckhorn, piny hawthorne, and fig.

As Simon Awad and Omar Attum wrote in a 2017 issue of the *Jordan Journal of Natural History*:

"[Olive] groves in Palestine could be considered cultural landscapes

Hundreds of mosques and churches have also been struck and 70 percent of Gaza's 36 hospitals have been hit and are no longer functioning

or be designated as globally important agricultural systems because of the combination of their biodiversity, cultural, and economic values. The biodiversity value of historic olive groves has been recognised in other parts of the Mediterranean, with some proposing these areas should receive protection because they are habitat used by some rare and threatened species and are important in maintaining regional biodiversity."

An ancient, native olive tree should be considered a testament to the very existence of Palestinians and their struggle for freedom. With its thick spiralling trunk, the olive tree stands as a cautionary tale to Israel, not because of the fruit it bears, but because of the stories its roots hold of a scarred landscape and a battered people that have been callously and relentlessly besieged for more than 75 years.

While contaminating aquifers and uprooting olive groves, Israel is now also poisoning Gaza from above. Numerous videos analysed by Amnesty International and confirmed by the *Washington Post* display footage of flares and plumes of white phosphorus raining down on densely populated urban areas. First used on World War I battlefields to provide cover for troop movements, white phosphorus is known to be toxic and dangerous to human health. Dropping it on urban environments is now considered

illegal under international law, and Gaza is one of the most densely populated places on earth. "Any time that white phosphorus is used in crowded civilian areas, it poses a high risk of excruciating burns and lifelong suffering," says Lama Fakih, director for the Middle East and North Africa at Human Rights Watch (HRW).

While white phosphorus is highly toxic to humans, significant concentrations of it also have deleterious effects on plants and animals. It can disrupt soil composition, making it too acidic to grow crops. And that's just one part of the mountain of munitions Israel has fired at Gaza over the past three months. The war (if you can call such an asymmetrical assault a "war") has been the deadliest and most destructive in recent memory, by some estimates at least as bad as the Allied bombing of Germany during World War II, which annihilated 60 German cities and killed an estimated half-million people.

Like the Allied forces of World War II, Israel is killing indiscriminately. Of the 29,000 air-to-surface munitions fired, 40 percent have been 2,000-pound unguided bombs dropped on crowded residential areas. The UN estimates that, as of late December, 70 percent of all schools in Gaza, many of which served as shelters for Palestinians fleeing Israel's onslaught, had been severely damaged. Hundreds of mosques and churches have also been struck and 70 percent of Gaza's 36 hospitals have been hit and are no longer functioning.

"Gaza is one of the most intense civilian punishment campaigns in history," claims Robert Pape, a historian at the University of Chicago. "It now sits comfortably in the top quartile of the most devastating bombing campaigns ever."

It's still difficult to grasp the toll being inflicted, day by day, week by week, not just on Gaza's infrastruc-

ture and civilian life but on its environment as well. Each building that explodes leaves a lingering cloud of toxic dust and climate-warming vapours. “In conflict-affected areas, the detonation of explosives can release significant amounts of greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and particulate matter,” says Dr. Erum Zahir, a chemistry professor at the University of Karachi.

Dust from the collapsed World Trade Center towers on 9/11 ravaged first responders. A 2020 study found that rescuers were “41 percent more likely to develop leukaemia than other individuals.” Some 10,000 New Yorkers suffered short-term health ailments following the attack, and it took a year for air quality in Lower Manhattan to return to pre-9/11 levels.

While it’s impossible to analyse all of the impacts of Israel’s nonstop bombing, it’s safe to assume that the ongoing levelling of Gaza will have far worse effects than 9/11 had on New York City. Nasreen Tamimi, head of the Palestinian Environmental Quality Authority, believes that an environmental assessment of Gaza now would “exceed all predictions.”

Central to the dilemma that faced Palestinians in Gaza, even before October 7, was access to clean drinking water and it’s only been horrifically exacerbated by Israel’s nonstop bombardment. A 2019 report by UNICEF noted that “96 percent of water from Gaza’s sole aquifer is unfit for human consumption.”

Intermittent electricity, a direct result of Israel’s blockade, has also damaged Gaza’s sanitation facilities, leading to increased groundwater contamination, which has, in turn, led to various infections and massive outbreaks of preventable waterborne diseases. According to

Makeshift UN hospitals are overwhelmed, food and water are in short supply, and starvation is significantly on the rise

HRW, Israel is using a lack of food and drinking water as a tool of warfare, which many international observers argue is a form of collective punishment – a war crime of the first order. Israeli forces have intentionally destroyed farmland and bombed water and sanitation facilities in what certainly seems like an effort to make Gaza all too literally unlivable.

“I have to walk three kilometers to get one gallon [of water],” 30-year-old Marwan told HRW. Along with hundreds of thousands of other Gazans, Marwan fled to the south with his pregnant wife and two children in early November. “And there is no food. If we are able to find food, it is canned food. Not all of us are eating well.”

In the south of Gaza, near the overcrowded city of Khan Younis, raw sewage flows through the streets as sanitation services have ceased operation. In the southern town of Rafah, where so many Gazans have fled, conditions are beyond dire. Makeshift UN hospitals are overwhelmed, food and water are in short supply, and starvation is significantly on the rise. In late December, the World Health Organisation (WHO) documented more than 100,000 cases of diarrhoea and 150,000 respiratory infections in a Gazan population of about 2.3 million. And those numbers are likely massive undercounts and will undoubtedly increase as Israel’s offensive drags on, having already displaced 1.9 million people, or more

than 85 percent of the population, half of whom are now facing starvation, according to the UN.

“For over two months, Israel has been depriving Gaza’s population of food and water, a policy spurred on or endorsed by high-ranking Israeli officials and reflecting an intent to starve civilians as a method of warfare,” reports Omar Shakir of Human Rights Watch.

Rarely, if ever, have the perpetrators of mass murder (reportedly now afraid of South Africa’s filing at the International Court of Justice in the Hague, accusing Israel of genocide) so plainly laid out their cruel intentions. As Israeli President Isaac Herzog put it in a callous attempt to justify the atrocities now being faced by Palestinian civilians, “It’s an entire nation out there that is responsible [for October 7]. This rhetoric about civilians not aware, not involved, it’s absolutely not true. They could’ve risen up, they could have fought against that evil regime.”

The violence inflicted on Palestinians by an Israel backed so strikingly by President Biden and his foreign policy team is unlike anything we had previously witnessed in more or less real-time in the media and on social media. Gaza, its people, and the lands that have sustained them for centuries are being desecrated and transformed into an all too unlivable hellscape, the impact of which will be felt – it’s a guarantee – for generations to come. **CT**

*Joshua Frank is an award-winning California-based journalist and co-editor of CounterPunch. He is the author of the new book *Atomic Days: The Untold Story of the Most Toxic Place in America* (Haymarket Books). This article was first published at www.tomdispatch.com.*

Joe Allen

CONSUMING A FUTURE OF TECHNICAL DOMINANCE

Social robots, teledildonics, and metaverse muzzles – the Consumer Electronics Show is a toy store for the Fourth Industrial Revolution

It's hard to be a techno-optimist in Las Vegas. How does anyone look at slot machine zombies or smartphone-guided hookers, and think “gadgetry will save the human race”? Here and there, you'll see some whiskey-bent hombre weave across the casino carpet, reduced to nothing but two eyeballs and a brain stem. Parents even bring their kids out here, preparing them for a life of neon hypnosis and impulsive consumption. Everywhere you look, everyone is going nowhere fast.

The Vegas Strip is a parody of human civilisation – from our glorious beginning to our hardwired end. Walled in on all sides by desert mountains, you can stumble from a simulation of ancient Egypt at the Luxor to imperial Rome at Caesar's Palace, tossing fiat currency into the void along the way. Then it's onward to medieval Europe at Excalibur, cosmopolitan France at Paris Las Vegas, and an urban American rollercoaster at the New York-New York casino.

Presently, one side of the Luxor's pyramid is a giant Dorito chip ad. There's something poetic in that image.

If you don't collapse in late modernity, you might end up in a global technodrome at the Sphere. The newly constructed venue is basically a giant LED eyeball outside and

a neurotech cage for eyeballs inside. It's a temple to transhuman illusions. In fact, every tourist attraction in Vegas is designed to capture the eye, bombard its rods and cones with dazzling lights, and imprison the soul in desire. So the city is a fitting milieu for the annual Consumer Electronics Show.

Last month, over 130,000 nerds gathered at venues all over Las Vegas to browse transparent TV sets, puppy-eyed social robots, smart home spyware appliances, dubious autonomous vehicles, and endless virtual reality goggles. The crowd was a mix of tech heads, wealthy investors, and Vegas tens paid to flash their bright smiles at display booths.

CES 2024 was a cross between a science fair and a funny farm, powered by money to burn. There were neuromorphic computer processors and a massive robotic backhoe. There were autonomous lawnmowers and an AI-guided baby stroller. There were battery-powered, genderfluid Tron bikes and Chinese electric cars that are basically smartphones on wheels. There was an Internet of Bodies WiFi system that transmits data through your bodily fluids and an app called Adam to secure your personal data after you die. (To my surprise, the CEO of this afterlife company, Rev-

enant, told me he believes in an eternal soul.)

Most of these gadgets will wind up in the dustbin of imaginary technocracies. However, a few will ride into the Future™ by way of consumer choice, corporate saturation, or government mandate.

Pretty much everyone I met was friendly and well-intentioned. If anything, I was the biggest jerk in the room. It would be easier to condemn this techno-dystopia if its creators were all evil. But by and large, these are innovators toiling away to make life better for other people – or at least for people who share their aesthetics. They're just having fun. It's not their fault so many of us detest the end products.

Let me take you on a brief tour of imagined futures.

The Skyted noise-blocking microphone mask looks like something a fighter pilot would wear. But it's made for chatty commuters and coffee shop patrons – or maybe secret agents and drug dealers – who don't want their phone conversations overheard.

On the one hand, pointless face masks are super annoying. On the other, people who yak on their phones in public are twice as an-



TOASTING THE FUTURE. Warily: Joe Allen meets the hi-tech innovators at Las Vegas and is not mightily impressed.

noying. Until we can abolish speakerphones, this mask may be a tolerable compromise. Seriously, I think we should mandate them along with earbuds.

Volume up? Cover up!

Not to be outdone, the Shiftall crew combined a phone-muzzle tech with virtual reality goggles. When I came upon their demo at the media sneak peek, a little Asian man in overalls was dancing around with his eyes and mouth covered. He looked like a borged out Ghostbuster who'd been shoved into Thunder Dome. On a nearby screen, his virtual avatar was an anime waifu wearing pigtails.

The scene was somewhere between transgender and transhuman. It looked like some sort of psychological torture. In the Metaverse

2.0, no one can hear you scream.

I was reminded of the World Economic Forum's concept of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which Klaus Schwab defines as "the convergence of the physical, digital, and biological worlds." Indeed, one VR company at CES, MetaVu, displayed a slogan promising the same: "Digital Twin: Convergence of the Virtual and the Real World."

Across the metaverse area of the Las Vegas Convention Center, the digital invaded the physical through holographic LED video walls and 3D phantoms hovering inside crystal balls. Meanwhile, attendees escaped the physical world into virtual reality goggles. They donned all sorts of haptic gloves and bracelets and vests. They shot bad guys with machine guns. They grasped Pla-

tonic solids in virtual space. They played drum 'n' bass on airborne sequencers.

The VRLCO virtual reality system looked like it had a brain-computer interface attached. A clawed device is locked onto the player's head like a parasitic crab. Apparently, it just holds the goggles on – for now. But neurotech companies like NextMind and OpenBCI have already developed wearable brain scanners for VR applications. You'll soon see them for sale everywhere.

As consumer BCIs become more common, corporations won't have to wonder if their game-addicted customers are getting brain damage. They can watch the decay in real time.

There were plenty of actual brain interfaces on display at CES – for

the impaired and curious alike.

Laina Emmanuel at BrainSight AI told me about her company's quest to map cognitive function. Their systems track the attention network, executive function, and the structural networks that make humans go. The AI can analyse neural data gathered from either non-invasive scanners or implanted brain-computer interfaces. The end result is a "virtual twin" of a patient's gray matter. This digital double can be used to assist neurosurgery, for early dementia diagnosis, and to help treat various psychiatric disorders.

BrainSight AI is used in more than 20 hospitals in India, and a growing number of American facilities, so obviously they aim to heal. But what about the transhuman goal of enhancement?

"We do get a lot of requests from people coming to us saying, 'Hey, connectomics, can you map my brain – which I can then use to stimulate and become a superhuman?' But we've been very focused on medical devices," Emmanuel assured me. "We've not really gone into the more esoteric cases."

Who are these prospective "superhumans"? High rollers?

"Yes, mostly wealthy people who are well settled and now they are thinking of the next new thing," she told me. "Like at CES, or at various conferences, you have people come in and be like 'Oh, this is so cool! We would love to know how to enhance our language function or enhance our ability to concentrate.'"

People often ask what kind of person would willingly take a 'trode to the dome. Well, look no further than the technophiles at CES. Many are begging for it.

If the metaverse is here to cover our eyeballs with digital worlds, then the Internet of Things and the Internet of Bodies are set to cover our physical world with digital eyeballs. Our homes are to be watched

If you can't bear to bring a new life into this digitised world you can augment your 5-digit relief with the Handy, a "interactive masturbator for penis-owners"

by AI-powered devices, as are our outward behaviours, our personal interests, and our social connections. Likewise, our bodies are to be watched by wearables or even implants – our heart rates and our emotional states, our digestion and our sexual arousal. We are to become data.

Companies like Body Log, Sense-Plus, and SmartSound AI can measure every process in your brain and body like barely visible, but overly curious nurses. For those who want to continue their bloodline into this dystopian web, products like Sperm Tester are there to make sure your boys are swimming straight. The Louise app – named after the first baby conceived through in vitro fertilisation in 1978 – was created to identify the causes of infertility in the hopes of finding an appropriate workaround. Once your baby is born, companies like HubDIC can provide an IoB crib outfitted with a moving camera to monitor the infant's every move and whimper.

But what if you can't bear to bring a new life into this digitised world? Well, you can always augment your 5-digit relief with the Handy – a mechanical "interactive masturbator for penis-owners" that's interoperable with virtual reality. Once you've given yourself over to its grip, the friction of real life just melts away.

Not everyone at CES was starry-eyed and primed for submission,

though. As I meandered around, the technologist Richard Crisp picked me out of the crowd. He was there to promote his memory chip company, Etron. After going over the positive uses of digital tech, I asked him what the downsides might be.

"My biggest fear is we're creating a digital jail," he told me. "I worry a lot about that. So long as the technology's used to improve life, to improve safety, to help prevent problems – I like it."

But the dangers?

"Full time surveillance all the time, everywhere you go," he replied. "Tracking everything. Digital cash – every transaction you make. That stuff is abusive, in my opinion." Like central bank digital currencies? "They're coming whether you like it or not. And I don't want anything to do with it."

Nor do I. Yet here we are.

Keeping up with the latest trends, the Togg car company created an electric SUV that also functions as a smart device. Cameras watch your outward behaviours. Various sensors measure your body's internal states. The idea is to bring the virtual and real worlds "Togg'ether." (Painful, I know.)

Togg had a virtual reality exhibit at CES. You get into their SUV inside a VR tunnel, and the generative AI tailors its output to your biometric input. It's more gimmick than technical wizardry, but I had to give it a go. As it happened, I took the ride with Ehi Binitie – creator of Iyoba Land, an African VR platform. Ehi is originally from Nigeria. He now lives in Atlanta.

Being a half-assed journalist, I attempted to record the experience on my smartphone, but failed to switch the camera to video. All I got was a single blurry photo. Fortunately, Ehi is a professional cyborg. He caught the whole thing on his Meta smart glasses. Like millions of people, he records most of his life on them, and

has done since he got his first pair of Snapchat glasses nine years ago.

After the ride, I asked why he'd submit to full-time self-surveillance. For him, feeding your entire life into artificial intelligence is something like a religious duty – a quest for deeper meaning and digital immortality. "AI is gonna be curating our lives in the future," he insisted. I told him I'd rather God remember and let the physical world forget. He said I was doomed to be left behind.

"It's kind of like cars and horses. If you don't get with the cars, you have to be in the stable. You have to be stuck with that technology," he said. "You know, evolution has always been the majority of the people. So a few people may drop off, and we will still look to you for encouragement and to keep us centred. But you won't be the majority of the people. That's just civilisation."

As we bantered about kids these days getting soft and weak, Ehi told me a story that could be a parable for the entire CES scene. As a boy, he went to a Nigerian boarding school.

If Vegas lost water for even a few days, the neon lights would flicker out and the lizard-like inhabitants would be drinking each other's blood

Every day, he had to lug buckets of water back from the river. "It was something I dreaded."

Then a few years ago, he returned to Nigeria to see his father in the hospital. One day, the water system failed and the staff had no idea what to do. Naturally, Ehi grabbed a bucket and started hauling water back from the river. At first the hospital staff mocked him. Then they realised how helpless they'd become.

"People get dependent on technology," Ehi mused, "they get dependent on water coming out of the pipes. When it doesn't work, they just give up, and say 'There's no water. There's nothing I can do.' While technology makes life easier – and better – you still have to remember your old school ways of doing

things."

That's not happening, though. It's like humanity climbed up a cliff face and forgot how to climb back down.

You know, Las Vegas creeps me out for a lot of reasons. But the biggest is that the city rises out of a lifeless desert valley. If they lost water for even a few days, the neon lights would flicker out and the lizard-like inhabitants would be drinking each other's blood. The trees and grass would wither. Scorpions and sidewinders would pick over the ruins.

For anyone paying attention, CES is a microcosm of humanity's accelerating tech dependency. Our culture is being automated. Our bodies and brains are being digitised. How long before what comes out the other end is no longer recognisable as human? How long can such a creature survive? **CT**

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Dougie Wallace

PEDAL POWER

Amidst the regal pomp of King Charles' end-of-year speech to Britain, he introduced a new government bill, aimed at revolutionising the licensing system for London's three-wheeled rickshaw-style carriages. Describing them as a "scourge" on the capital, Charles said the government seeks to address what they see as the longstanding issue of unregulated pedicabs.

London's pedicabs are treated legally as stage carriages, under an

outdated law from 1869. This enables them to roam freely, in contrast to traditional taxis and other types of public transportation. The new bill promises to hand Transport for London the power to regulate them, control fares, and perform criminal record checks, following reports of tourists getting financially mugged.

In the mid-1990s, a company exploited a loophole in the Public Carriage Act, unleashing bicycle taxis onto the streets. Since then, these three-wheeled jesters have become





regular performers in London's nightlife.

Over the last few years or so, Uber and the Night Tube have helped to push the pedicabs into a kitsch revolution, transforming them from being basic tricycles with extra seating to rolling works of art, complete with glowing, flickering lights and music systems that will put boy racers to shame when it comes to wattage.

In a world focused on eco-friendliness, pedicabs emerge as the unsung heroes of green transportation, navigating the urban jungle with sweat- and pedal-power.

They become the ideal choice for those moments when the decision between walking and cycling seems insurmountable.

This feast of Instagrammable street exotica isn't in Delhi or the back streets of Bangkok – it's in London!

During live gigs and theatre performances, pedicabs position themselves outside venues and take on a musical role by playing the songs of the performances.

Pedicab prices may appear high – as much as £100 per passenger an hour – but these dedicated individuals work long hours. Some pedicabs use electric motors powered by the pedals that drive alternators to charge batteries.

London's pedicabs don't just transport. They're also cultural ambassadors. Some cater to specific markets, playing Arabic or Russian music loudly. The influx of Arab visitors has led to pedicabs adorned with flags





and blaring Middle Eastern music. In the past, Russian-themed pedicabs were also present, playing Russian music. However, the invasion of Ukraine has seemingly driven them away, reflecting the dynamic shifts in London's demographic landscape around the West End.

As the wheels of regulation turn, one can't help but wonder: Will these wheeled jesters be legislated? As such, they run the risk of becoming a sanitised version of themselves, another sponsored vehicle, like the city-bike schemes.

Or, will they maintain their status as underdogs, emerging from the bureaucratic cocoon as the new he-

roes of green transportation? In this latter scenario, they would continue to add a unique flavour to the cityscape. They'll carry on sprinkling a touch of magic, ferrying tourists through selfie spots in and around Soho.

Hopefully their prices will become a bit more affordable, too.

Dougie Wallace is a London-based street photographer. He has published six photobooks, the latest of which, *East Ended*, was recently released by Dewi Lewis – www.dewilewis.com

CT

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





Nicholas Jones

THE ART OF CLASS WAR

40 years after reporting the 1984-5 UK miners' strike for BBC Radio, our writer reflects on how the dispute was seen by news cartoonists

Perhaps the best comparison when looking back at the hundreds of cartoons printed in newspapers and magazines during the 1984-5 UK miners' strike is that they were the equivalent of today's postings on social media, often provocative, abusive, and sometimes downright cruel, intended to prompt comment and debate.

The miners' struggle against pit closures divided the country. Cartoonists from right to left offered their take on an unfolding and unyielding polarisation between the state and the mining communities.

No cartoonist could have asked for more: a cast of larger-than-life characters in a fight to the death. There were plenty of opportunities to poke fun at the leading protagonists, but the overarching challenge was to keep pace with the anger and disarray that erupted during a dispute from which there seemed no way out.

Imagery around the violence gen-



"Sorry Arthur – we were told it was the home of somebody who had worked flat out all though the strike"

Cartoons in Conservative-supporting national newspapers often reinforced the hostile front page headlines and reports attacking the miners



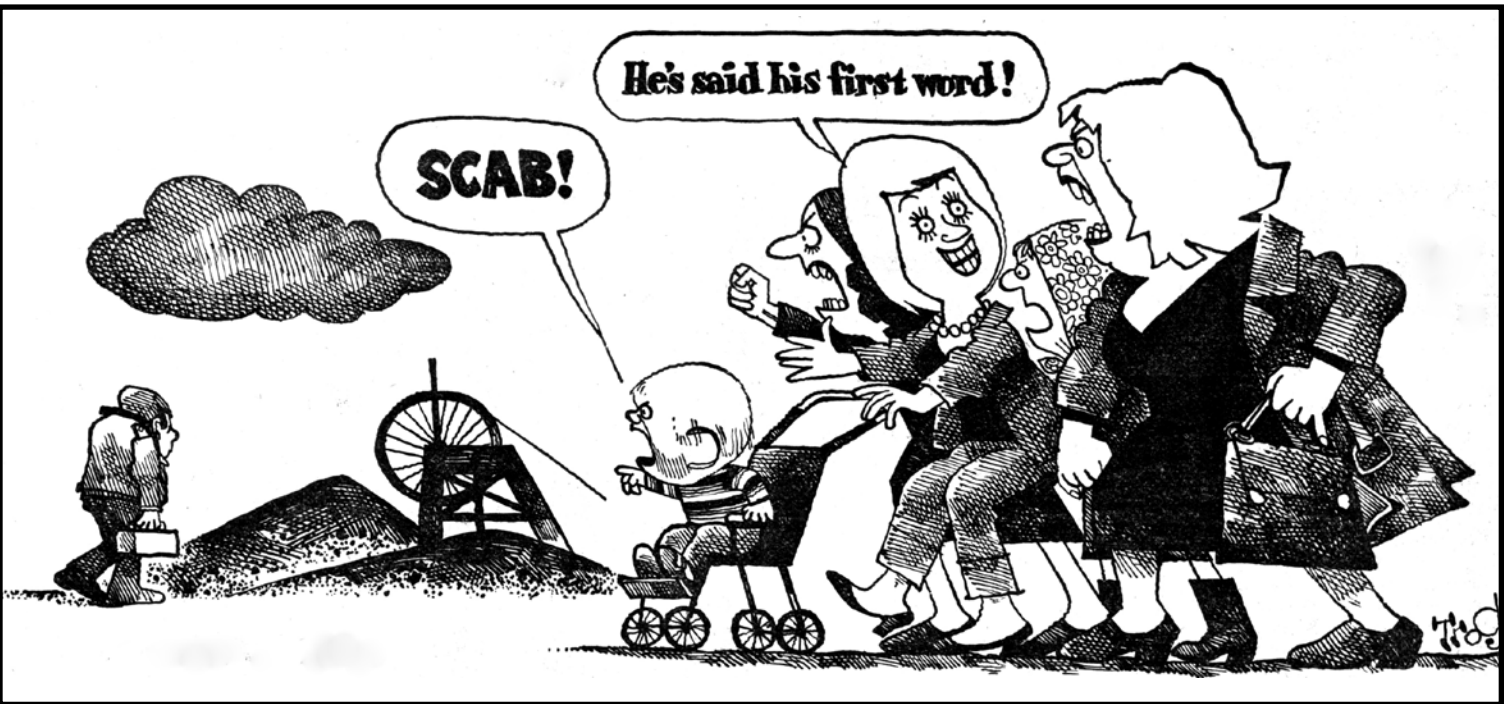
erated by the strike was pushed to the extremes. Some cartoons depicted a country at war with itself. Striking mineworkers were characterised as thugs, wearing hoods, wielding baseball bats; their leader Arthur Scargill a Communist stooge, branded with the hammer and sickle; police officers with truncheons constantly cracking down on the heads of peaceful pickets; and reigning supreme, often above the fray, prime minister Margaret

Thatcher, in a Churchillian pose.

No other British industrial dispute has equalled the year-long pit strike for generating so many cartoons.

National, regional, and local papers were in their heyday in the early 1980s, with ten national dailies selling almost 15 million copies a day. There was no rolling television news or the likes of Facebook and X for the press to compete with.

Most nationals printed a daily cartoon, sometimes two or three a



day. There was no colour printing, but the black and white cartoons had great impact and leapt from the page.

Day after day the imagery on display tended to exaggerate the storylines in newspapers and on radio and television, reinforcing the widening divisions between the British establishment and the miners and their families.

As the violence intensified and the positions of both sides became more

entrenched, the manipulation of the political and news agenda grew.

Conservative-supporting newspapers demonised Scargill in his role as President of the National Union of Mineworkers, whereas Mrs Thatcher, hero of the hour, was the Prime Minister defending the rights of working miners, resolute in her determination to defeat the strike and end unlawful picketing at the pits.

Scargill was portrayed as the law breaker, a representation fleshed out to extraordinary lengths by Michael Cummings, cartoonist for the *Daily* and *Sunday Express*, who visualised the NUM President as a puppet of the Soviet Union, threatening Britain's democratic institutions.

Of all the cartoons published during the strike, Arthur Scargill singled out those by Cummings as causing him the greatest personal offence for the way in which he was smeared and abused. He counted 50 in the *Daily Express* and 34 in the Sunday edition, all intended, he said, to isolate him from union members and his leadership colleagues.

Across the trade union movement there was anger at dire anti-union bias in the coverage of most newspapers and deep frustration over the government's success in manipulating the news agenda so broadcasters became cheerleaders for Mrs Thatcher.

While most trade unionists understood and even sympathised with the violent response when police confronted angry strikers on picket lines, they were horrified that so much of the media criticism was directed at the NUM and its members.

Wildly exaggerated cartoon imagery caused great offence, especially in close-knit mining communities where the miners' wives and their supporters organised soup kitchen and food deliveries.

Why, they asked, were the pickets so often depicted as bullyboys? Their thuggish demeanour was



"Sorry Arthur – we were told it was the home of somebody who had worked flat out all though

highlighted by the *Daily Mail's* cartoonist Mac (Stanley McMurty). In one cartoon, pickets wore hoods and carried baseball bats. Another by Cummings had strikers with clubs corraling working miners.

As the strike progressed and the police gained the upper hand, a constantly recurring image deployed by cartoonists on left-wing newspapers and magazines was that of a constable cracking his truncheon down on the head of a picket.

Here was heartfelt mockery validated by the medieval scenes at the Battle of Orgreave when police on horseback charged through the massed lines of pickets.

Photographer John Harris captured the moment a mounted officer, who had his baton raised, only just missed the head of protestor Lesley Bolton – one of the iconic images regularly reproduced by the left as a reminder of police brutality.

As I leafed through my collection of newspaper cuttings, I was struck by the absence of cartoons depicting the police charges at Orgreave.

Film of mounted police chasing

the pickets is rebroadcast almost without fail when TV news bulletins and programmes revisit the strike. In the aftermath of Orgreave trying to imagine a humorous slant on such barbaric scenes was perhaps a task no cartoonist could stomach or was possibly seen as a step too far by newspaper editors.

Again, in my cuttings, cartoonists appeared to have been absent from action at the end of strike in March 1985. Amid harrowing scenes of men returning to their pits, after a year's sacrifice, without any guarantees for the future of their industry, the Conservative supporting press did not want to remind readers of the dreadful damage inflicted by Mrs Thatcher's victory and cartoonists on the left had no wish to remind their supporters of the fallout from what had been a terrible defeat for the union movement. **CT**

Nicholas Jones was the industrial correspondent for BBC News during the miners' strike.

This article first appeared in *MediaNorth*, the newsletter of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (North) – www.medianorth.org.uk



John & Nisha Whitehead

THE RISE OF THE POLITICAL PSYCHOPATH

We are fast becoming slaves in thrall to a faceless, nameless,
bureaucratic totalitarian government machine

“When the President does it, that means that it is not illegal.”

—Richard Nixon

Many years ago, a newspaper headline asked the question: “What’s the difference between a politician and a psychopath?”

The answer, then and now, remains the same: None.

There is no difference between psychopaths and politicians. Nor is there much of a difference between the havoc wreaked on innocent lives by uncaring, unfeeling, selfish, irresponsible, parasitic criminals and elected officials who lie to their constituents, trade political favours

for campaign contributions, turn a blind eye to the wishes of the electorate, cheat taxpayers out of hard-earned dollars, favour the corporate elite, entrench the military industrial complex, and spare little thought for the impact their thoughtless actions and hastily passed legislation might have on defenceless citizens.

Psychopaths and politicians both have a tendency to be selfish, callous, remorseless users of others, irresponsible, pathological liars, glib, con artists, lacking in remorse and shallow.

Charismatic politicians, like criminal psychopaths, exhibit a failure to accept responsibility for their actions, have a high sense of self-worth, are chronically unstable,

have socially deviant lifestyles, need constant stimulation, have parasitic lifestyles and possess unrealistic goals.

It doesn’t matter whether you’re talking about Democrats or Republicans. Political psychopaths are all largely cut from the same pathological cloth, brimming with seemingly easy charm and boasting calculating minds. Such leaders eventually create pathocracies: totalitarian societies bent on power, control, and destruction of both freedom in general and those who exercise their freedoms.

Once psychopaths gain power, the result is usually some form of totalitarian government or a pathocracy. “At that point, the government

operates against the interests of its own people except for favouring certain groups,” author James G. Long notes. “We are currently witnessing deliberate polarisations of American citizens, illegal actions, and massive and needless acquisition of debt. This is typical of psychopathic systems, and very similar things happened in the Soviet Union as it overextended and collapsed.”

In other words, electing a psychopath to public office is tantamount to national *hara-kiri*, the ritualised act of self-annihilation, self-destruction and suicide. It signals the demise of democratic government and lays the groundwork for a totalitarian regime that is legalistic, militaristic, inflexible, intolerant and inhuman.

Incredibly, despite clear evidence of the damage that has already been inflicted on our nation and its citizens by a psychopathic government, voters continue to elect psychopaths to positions of power and influence.

Indeed, a study from Southern Methodist University found that Washington, DC – our nation’s capital and the seat of power for our so-called representatives – ranks highest on the list of regions that are populated by psychopaths.

According to investigative journalist Zack Beauchamp, “In 2012, a group of psychologists evaluated every President from Washington to Bush II using ‘psychopathy trait estimates derived from personality data completed by historical experts on each president.’ They found that presidents tended to have the psychopath’s characteristic fearlessness and low anxiety levels – traits that appear to help Presidents, but also might cause them to make reckless decisions that hurt other people’s lives.”

The willingness to prioritise power above all else, including the wel-

The goal of the modern corporate state is obvious: to promote, cultivate, and embed a sense of shared identification among its citizens

fare of their fellow human beings, ruthlessness, callousness and an utter lack of conscience are among the defining traits of the sociopath.

When our own government no longer sees us as human beings with dignity and worth but as things to be manipulated, manoeuvred, mined for data, manhandled by police, conned into believing it has our best interests at heart, mistreated, jailed if we dare step out of line, and then punished unjustly without remorse – all the while refusing to own up to its failings – we are no longer operating under a constitutional republic.

Instead, what we are experiencing is a pathocracy: tyranny at the hands of a psychopathic government, which “operates against the interests of its own people except for favouring certain groups.”

Worse, psychopathology is not confined to those in high positions of government. It can spread like a virus among the populace. As an academic study into pathocracy concluded, “[T]yranny does not flourish because perpetrators are helpless and ignorant of their actions. It flourishes because they actively identify with those who promote vicious acts as virtuous.”

People don’t simply line up and salute. It is through one’s own personal identification with a given leader, party or social order that they be-

come agents of good or evil.

Much depends on how leaders “cultivate a sense of identification with their followers,” says Professor Alex Haslam. “I mean one pretty obvious thing is that leaders talk about ‘we’ rather than ‘I,’ and actually what leadership is about is cultivating this sense of shared identity about ‘we-ness’ and then getting people to want to act in terms of that ‘we-ness,’ to promote our collective interests. . . . [We] is the single word that has increased in the inaugural addresses over the last century . . . and the other one is ‘America.’”

The goal of the modern corporate state is obvious: to promote, cultivate, and embed a sense of shared identification among its citizens. To this end, “we the people” have become “we the police state.”

We are fast becoming slaves in thrall to a faceless, nameless, bureaucratic totalitarian government machine that relentlessly erodes our freedoms through countless laws, statutes, and prohibitions.

Any resistance to such regimes depends on the strength of opinions in the minds of those who choose to fight back. What this means is that we the citizenry must be very careful that we are not manipulated into marching in lockstep with an oppressive regime.

Writing for *ThinkProgress*, Beauchamp suggests that “one of the best cures to bad leaders may very well be political democracy.”

But what does this really mean in practical terms?

It means holding politicians accountable for their actions and the actions of their staff using every available means at our disposal: through investigative journalism (what used to be referred to as the Fourth Estate) that enlightens and informs, through whistleblower complaints that expose corruption, through lawsuits that challenge misconduct, and through protests

and mass political action that remind the powers-that-be that “we the people” are the ones that call the shots.

Remember, education precedes action. Citizens need to do the hard work of educating themselves about what the government is doing and how to hold it accountable. Don't allow yourselves to exist exclusively in an echo chamber that is restricted to views with which you agree. Expose yourself to multiple media sources, independent and mainstream, and think for yourself.

For that matter, no matter what your political leanings might be, don't allow your partisan bias to trump the principles that serve as the basis for our constitutional republic. As Beauchamp notes, “A system that actually holds people accountable to the broader conscience of society may be one of the best ways to keep conscienceless people in check.”

That said, if we allow the ballot box to become our only means of pushing back against the police state, the battle is already lost.

Resistance will require a citizenry willing to be active at the

We are fast becoming slaves in thrall to a faceless, nameless, bureaucratic totalitarian government machine that relentlessly erodes our freedoms

local level.

Yet if you wait to act until the SWAT team is crashing through your door, until your name is placed on a terror watch list, until you are reported for such outlawed activities as collecting rainwater or letting your children play outside unsupervised, then it will be too late.

This much I know: we are not faceless numbers.

We are not cogs in the machine.

As I make clear in my book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People* and in its fictional counterpart *The Erik Blair Diaries*, we are not slaves.

We are human beings, and for the moment, we have the opportunity to remain free – that is, if we tirelessly advocate for our rights and resist at every turn attempts by the govern-

ment to place us in chains.

The Founders understood that our freedoms do not flow from the government. They were not given to us only to be taken away by the will of the State. They are inherently ours. In the same way, the government's appointed purpose is not to threaten or undermine our freedoms, but to safeguard them.

Until we can get back to this way of thinking, until we can remind our fellow Americans what it really means to be free, and until we can stand firm in the face of threats to our freedoms, we will continue to be treated like slaves in thrall to a bureaucratic police state run by political psychopaths. **CT**

John W. Whitehead, a constitutional lawyer and author, is founder and president of *The Rutherford Institute*. His book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People* (SelectBooks, 2015) is available online at www.amazon.com. Whitehead can be contacted at john@rutherford.org.

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READ THE BEST OF EDWARD S. HERMAN

www.coldtype.net/herman.html

Pepe Eskobar

THE FIVE VARIABLES THAT WILL DEFINE OUR FUTURE

Are we heading towards techno-feudalism – the AI format of rent-seeking turbo-neoliberalism? Or something similar to the origins of industrial capitalism?

1. The stalemate

That's the new, obsessive US narrative on Ukraine – on steroids. Confronted with the upcoming, cosmic NATO humiliation in the battlefield, the White House and the State Dept. had to – literally – improvise.

Moscow though is unfazed. The Kremlin has set the terms a long time ago: total surrender, and no Ukraine as part of NATO. To “negotiate,” from the Russia point of view, is to accept these terms.

And if the deciding powers in Washington opt for turbo-charging the weaponisation of Kiev, or to unleash “the most heinous provocations in order to change the course of events,” as asserted in mid-January by the head of the SVR, Sergey Naryshkin, fine.

The road ahead will be bloody. In case the usual suspects sideline popular Zaluzhny and install Budanov as the head of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the AFU will be under total control of the CIA – and not NATO generals, as is still the case.

This might prevent a military coup against the sweaty sweatshirt puppet in Kiev. Yet things will get much uglier. Ukraine will go Total Guerrilla, with only two objectives: to attack Russian civilians and civilian infrastructure. Moscow, of course, is fully aware of the dangers.

Meanwhile, chatterbox overdrive

in several latitudes suggest that NATO may even be getting ready for a partition of Ukraine. Whatever form that might take, losers do not dictate conditions: Russia does.

As for EU politicians, predictably, they are in total panic, believing that after mopping up Ukraine, Russia will become even more of a “threat” to Europe. Nonsense. Not only does Moscow not give a damn to what Europe “thinks;” the last thing Russia wants or needs is to annex Baltic or Eastern European hysteria. Moreover, even Jens Stoltenberg admitted “NATO sees no threat from Russia toward any of its territories.”

2. BRICS

Since the start of 2024, this is The Big Picture: the Russian presidency of BRICS+ – which translates as a particle accelerator towards multipolarity. The Russia-China strategic partnership will be increasing actual production, in several fields, while Europe plunges into depression, unleashed by the Perfect Storm of sanctions blowback against Russia and German de-industrialisation. And it's far from over, as Washington is also ordering Brussels to sanction China across the spectrum.

As Prof. Michael Hudson frames it, we are right in the middle of

“the whole split of the world and the turning towards China, Russia, Iran, BRICS,” united in “an attempt to reverse, undo, and roll back the whole colonial expansion that's occurred over the last five centuries.”

Or, as Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov defined at the UN Security Council this process of BRICS leaving Western bullies behind, the changing world order is like “a playground scuffle – which the West is losing.”

3. The Lone Emperor

The “stalemate” – actually losing a war - is directly linked to its compensation: the Empire squeezing and shrinking a vassalised Europe. But even as you exercise nearly total control over all these relatively wealthy vassals, you lose the Global South, for good: if not all their leaders, certainly the overwhelming majority of public opinion. The icing in the toxic cake is to support a genocide followed by the whole planet in real time. Bye bye, soft power.

4. De-dollarisation

All across the Global South, they did the math: if the Empire and its EU vassals can just steal over \$300-billion in Russian foreign reserves – from a top nuclear/military power

– they can do it to anyone, and they will.

The key reason Saudi Arabia, now a BRICS 10 member, is being so meek on the genocide in Gaza is because their hefty US dollar reserves are hostage to the Hegemon.

And yet the caravan moving away from the US dollar will only keep growing in 2024: that will depend on crucial crossover deliberations inside the Eurasia Economic Union (EAEU) and BRICS 10.

5. Garden and jungle

What Putin and Xi have essentially been telling the Global South – including the energy-rich Arab world – is quite simple. If you want improved trade and economic growth, who're you gonna link to?

So we're back to the “garden and jungle” syndrome – first coined by imperial Britain orientalist Rudyard Kipling. Both the British concept of “White Man's Burden” and the American concept of “Manifest Destiny” derive from the “garden and jungle” metaphor.

NATOstan, and hardly all of it, is supposed to be the garden. The Global South is the jungle.

Michael Hudson again: as it stands, the jungle is growing, but the garden isn't growing “because its philosophy is not industrialisation. Its philosophy is to make monopoly rents, meaning rents that you make in your sleep without producing value. You just have a privilege of a right to collect money on a monopoly technology that you have.”

The difference now, compared to all those decades ago of an imperial free lunch, is “an immense shift of technological advance,” away from North America and the US, to China, Russia and selected nodes across Asia.



If we combine all these variants – stalemate; BRICS; the Lone Emperor; de-dollarisation; garden and jungle – in search of the most probable scenario ahead, it's easy to see that the only “way out” for a cornered Empire is, what else, the default modus operandi: Forever Wars.

And that brings us to the current American aircraft carrier in West Asia, totally out of control yet always supported by the Hegemon, aiming for a multi-front war against the whole Axis of Resistance: Palestine, Hezbollah, Syria, Iraqi militias, Ansarullah in Yemen, and Iran.

In a sense we're back to the immediate post-9/11, when what the neocons really wanted was not Afghanistan, but the invasion of Iraq: not only to control the oil (which in the end they didn't) but, in Michael Hudson's analysis, “to essentially create America's foreign legion in the form of ISIS and al-Qaeda in Iraq.” Now, “America has two armies that it's using to fight in the Near East, the ISIS/al-Qaeda foreign legion (Arabic-speaking foreign legion) and the Israelis.”

Hudson's intuition of ISIS and Israel as parallel armies is priceless: they both fight the Axis of Resistance, and *never* (italics mine) fight each other. The Straussian neocon plan, as tawdry as it gets, essentially is a variant of the “fight to the last Ukrainian”: to “fight to the last Israeli” on the way to the Holy Grail, which is to bomb, bomb, bomb Iran (copyright John McCain) and provoke regime change.

As much as the “plan” did not work in Iraq or Ukraine, it won't work against the Axis of Resistance.

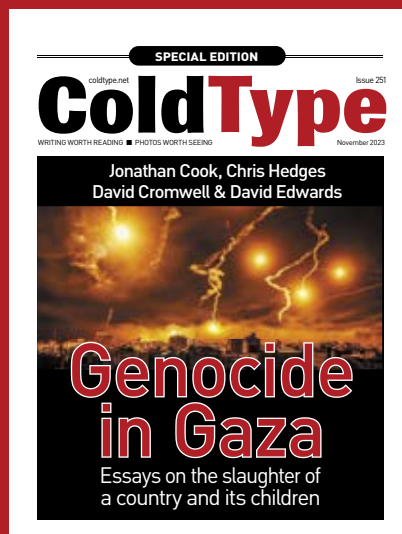
What Putin, Xi and Raisi have been explaining to the Global South, explicitly or in quite subtle ways, is that we are right in the crux of a civilisational war.

Michael Hudson has done a lot to bring down such an epic struggle to practical terms. Are we heading towards what I described as techno-feudalism – which is the AI format of rent-seeking turbo-neoliberalism? Or are we heading to something similar to the origins of industrial capitalism?

Michael Hudson characterises an auspicious horizon as “raising living standards instead of imposing IMF financial austerity on the dollar block”: devising a system that Big Finance, Big Bank, Big Pharma and what Ray McGovern memorably coined as the MICIMAT'T (military-industrial-congressional-intelligence-media-academia-think tank complex) cannot control. *Alea jacta est.* **CT**

PEPE ESCOBAR is an independent geopolitical analyst focused on eurasia. Since the mid-1980s he has lived and worked as a foreign correspondent in London, Paris, Milan, Los Angeles, Singapore and Bangkok. His latest book is “Raging Twenties.”

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