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ISSUE 156

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ISSUES

- 4** GOD WILL IT! – *James Carroll*
- 10** CONTRARY TO REASON – *George Monbiot*
- 12** LEGALISING TYRANNY – *Chris Hedges*
- 16** THE REAL MOTOR CITY – *Michael Kenna*
- 20** LIES AND SELF-DECEPTION IN ISRAEL'S 'MORAL' ARMY – *Jonathan Cook*
- 22** THEY WON'T 'GET' CORBYN ON FOREIGN POLICY – *Richard Seymour*
- 24** CANADA IS ON WRONG SIDE OF VENEZUELA CONFLICT – *Linda McQuaig*
- 26** THE CULT OF CELEBRITY – *CJ Hopkins*
- 30** NO MORE DEATHS – *Ron Fassbender*
- 31** CORMAC MCCARTHY'S UNFILMABLE MASTERWORK – *Christopher Douglas*
- 34** DRAWING PALESTINE – FROM PRISON – *Ramona Wadi*
- 38** WHY WON'T THE WEST LISTEN TO PUTIN? – *Ray McGovern*
- 42** MEDIA GIANT'S NOBLE CHALLENGE TO MOGULS – *Sam Pizzigati*

INSIGHTS

- 45** *Billboards protest Israel's child prisoners* – *Palestine Advocacy Project*
- 46** *It's all in the name: Populism is democracy* – *Rick Salutin*
- 47** *Teaching dissent is part of democracy* – *Sarah Stitzlein*
- 48** *Corporations spend tax cuts -- on themselves* – *Jim Hightower*
- 49** *Jamie Oliver should shut up about child obesity* – *Steve Topple*
- 51** *How to teach your dog to wipe his arse* – *Barry S. Borsitter*

ColdType 7 Lewis Street, Georgetown, Ontario, Canada LG7 1E3

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JAMES CARROLL

God wills it!

The war on terror as the launching of an American Crusade

4

The US may be sinking ever deeper into the moral morass of the Trump era, but if you think the malevolence of this period began with him, think again. The moment I still dwell on, the moment I believe ignited the vast public disorder that is now our all-American world, has been almost completely forgotten here. And little wonder. It was no more than a casually tossed-off cliché, a passing historical reference whose implications and consequences meant nothing to the speaker. “This crusade,” said President George W. Bush just days after the 9/11 attacks, “this war on terrorism...”

That, however, proved to be an invocation from hell, one that set the stage for so much of the horror to follow. The Crusades were, of course, a centuries-long medieval catastrophe. Bush’s Global War on Terror, in contrast, has already wreaked comparable havoc in a paltry 17 years, leading to almost unimaginable mayhem abroad and a moral collapse at home personified by President Donald J. Trump.

Despite the threads of causality woven together as if on some malignant loom that brought about his election -- the cult of reality-show celebrity, the FBI director’s last-minute campaign intervention, Russian mischief, Hillary Clinton’s vulnerability to self-defeat and misogyny, electoral college anomalies, Republican party nihilism, and a wickedly disenchanting public -- the ease with which such a figure took control of the levers of power in this country should still stun us. Some deep sickness of the soul had already

played havoc with our democracy, or Trump wouldn’t have been imaginable. Think of him as a symptom, not the disease. After Trump finally leaves the Oval Office, we’ll still be a stricken people and the world will still be groaning under the weight of the wreckage this country has brought about. How, then, did we actually get here? It might be worth a momentary glance back.

“This is a new kind of evil.” So said the president that September 16th, standing on the South Lawn of the White House. “And the American people are beginning to understand. This crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take a while.” In that way, only five days after the 9/11 attacks, George W. Bush elevated a band of petty nihilists to the status of world-historic warriors. “And the American people must be patient,” he continued. “I’m going to be patient.”

He, of course, is long gone, but what he initiated that day is still unspooling. It could have been so different. September 11th was a tragic moment, but the initial reactions of most Americans to those collapsed towers and a damaged Pentagon were ones of empathy and patriotism. The selflessness of first responders that day had its echo in a broad and surprising manifestation of national altruism. The usual left-right divides of politics disappeared and the flag, for once, became a true symbol of national unity. The global reaction was similar. From across the world, in-

JAMES CARROLL



A paratrooper watches as an aircraft flies overhead while dropping supplies in Paktika Province, Afghanistan, November 9, 2007.

Photo: Spc. Micah E. Clare / US Army

5

cluding from erstwhile adversaries like Russia and China, came authentic expressions of support and sympathy, of grief-struck affection.

But in every phrase the president would speak in those weeks -- “this is war... with us or against us... dead or alive” -- he chose to take this country on quite a different path into the future.

“Our responsibility to history is already clear ... to rid the world of evil”

Two days before invoking the Crusades, for instance, he presided over a religious service, which, though officially defined as “ecumenical,” took place in the neo-Gothic National Cathedral. “Just three days removed from these events,” he said from that church’s pulpit, “Americans do not yet have the distance of history. But our responsibility to history is already clear: to an-

swer these attacks and rid the world of evil... This conflict was begun on the timing and terms of others. It will end in a way and at an hour of our choosing.”

In a specifically Christian setting, that is, George W Bush answered the criminal attacks of 9/11 not by calling on international law enforcement to bring the perpetrators to justice, but by a declaration of cosmic war aimed at nothing less than the elimination of Islamist evil. Labelling it a “crusade” only underscored the subliminal but potent message conveyed by television cameras that lingered on the cathedral’s multiple crucifixes and the bloodied figure of Jesus Christ. Held up for all to see, that sacred icon sent a signal that could not be missed. A self-avowed secular nation was now to be a crusader, ready to display the profoundly Christian character of a culture erected on triumphalist pieties from its Pilgrim roots to the nuclear apocalypticism of the Cold War.

Bush's message was received in the Arab world just as you might expect. There, his reference to "this crusade" was rendered as "this War of the Cross." Even then, many Muslims knew better than to regard the president's characterisation of the conflict to come as purely accidental and of no import, just as they would later disregard the insistence of America's leaders that their country's violent intrusions across the Greater Middle East and parts of Africa were not "religiously" inspired in any way. Today, of course, Donald Trump's brazen denigrations of Muslims have made clear just how on target observers in the Islamic world were about what lay behind Washington's new "global war."

At the time of Bush's cavalier use of crusade, I was one of the few here to take offense and say so. I feared even then that stumbling into sectarian strife, into -- in the argot of the day -- a "clash of civilisations," could set in motion, as the original Crusades had, a dynamic that would far outrun anyone's intentions, loosing forces that could destroy the very principles in whose name that "war of choice" was declared. Little did I know how far short of an accurate damage assessment my thoughts would fall.

In fact, Bush's use of that term wasn't a stumble, however inadvertent, but a crystal-clear declaration of purpose that would soon be aided and abetted by a fervent evangelical cohort within the US military, already primed for holy war. With what Bush himself called "the distance of history," it's now possible to see the havoc his "crusade" is still wreaking across much of the globe: Iraq and Afghanistan are in ruins; Syria destroyed (with Russian, American, Israeli, Turkish, and Iranian warplanes testing one another in its airspace); Yemen gripped by a war-induced famine; the Turks at the throat of the Kurds; the Israeli-Palestinian peace process dead; Libya a failed state; US Special Ops garrisons in Somalia, Niger, and across Africa; and Europe increasingly politically destabilised by refugee flows from these conflicts. Meanwhile, Bush's crusade became the American disease now peaking in the fever dream of President Donald Trump.

The actual Crusades were a multi-phased

series of wars waged in the name of God. They began in 1096 and continued intermittently for almost two centuries until 1291. By the time the Crusading era drew to a close, moral values had been trashed; a nascent structure of capitalism had infused the new economy of Europe with greed; a dark inclination toward mass violence was seething in European consciousness; and the militarisation of religion was taken for granted. The mayhem of modernity followed.

The cross became sacred and an emblem of war against Muslims

To believe that killing could be holy, Christians first had to accept that God willed such violence. So they constructed a theology in which He would ordain the bloody death not just of evildoers (a favourite word of George W. Bush), but of His only begotten Son, whose suffering alone could "atone" for human sin. The instrument of Christ's saving death, the cross, soon became sacred and an emblem of war against Muslims. The Crusaders would wear it proudly on their tunics and shields. This violent theology of "atonement" would sear the religious imagination of Christians forever after, making them all too ready to kill in the name of God. Long before the war on terror, whether explicitly or implicitly, such a theology had come to justify and often motivate similar American campaigns of killing, starting with King Phillip's War, launched by Puritan colonists against the native peoples who had welcomed them to Plymouth. (God wills it!)

The Crusades themselves began with an urge to take back the holy city of Jerusalem from the Saracen infidel. As Western civilisation jelled in the crusading centuries, Europe became fixed on Islam as its existential negative-other. This fixation -- what scholar Edward Said called "Orientalism" -- still undergirds the identity of the West, which is why an anti-Muslim war, fuelled by anti-Muslim prejudice, turns out to fit the American Century like a mailed fist in a velvet glove.

As Said suggested, European Christian con-

JAMES CARROLL

tempt for the “Orientals” of the Levant soon leached into other God-sanctioned projects, especially once the age of the Crusades had given way to the age of exploration. Recall Christopher Columbus’s three crossed-marked caravels, the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa María, as they set out from Spain for the New World, soon enough to be followed by the wooden vessels of other European powers. It didn’t take long before native peoples globally began to fall victim, often genocidally so, to gun-toting European adventurers and slave traders who had learned to think of themselves as “white.” Though Donald Trump has no more idea of such roots of contempt for the Muslim world than George Bush did, he has successfully lifted the relit torch of race hatred yet higher.

The Crusades were an exercise in apocalyptic millennialism, a hot current that also runs just below the surface of twenty-first-century American martial ardour. Is it only an accident that the first Crusade and Bush’s were both keyed to the turning of a millennium? After the year 1000, a Biblical mythology attached to Jerusalem fuelled frenzied End Time expectations that culminated in the never-ending war for that city and a European obsession with it ever since. The first purpose of the primordial Holy War of that era was Jerusalem’s rescue from the Muslim infidel; no one should be surprised that, 11 centuries later, the establishment of an American embassy there remains a flashpoint for the anti-Muslim crusade of the present moment.

More generally, the excesses of the American reaction to 9/11 had an edge of millennial dread from the beginning. The endlessly replayed footage of the collapsing World Trade Center towers had the look and feel of an atomic attack on America (hence the almost instant labelling of the site as “Ground Zero,” a term previously reserved for nuclear explosions). Those scenes plucked unconscious chords strung deep in the American psyche, ones the president promptly played on. A few days after 9/11, he went before Congress to declare that “God is not neutral” and so claimed for his administration the mantle

of being God’s purifying agent.

Almost a year later, before a throng of West Point cadets, he was still at it, insisting that “we are in a conflict between good and evil and America will call evil by its name.” In such a conflict, of course, outcomes are no longer to be measured by real consequences in the lives of actual human beings, but by the transcendent will of God (or, in his stead, the “sole superpower” of planet Earth) to whom actual human beings can naturally be sacrificed.

“For much of the last century,” Bush declared in his Crusader-style West Point address, “America’s defense relied on Cold War doctrines of deterrence and containment... But new threats also require new thinking.” A hard-won twentieth-century assumption that Washington must, in the end, take the path of the lesser evil had, by then, already been summarily replaced by a determination to simply obliterate evil altogether. Deterrence and containment had saved the human species from nuclear apocalypse, but for the country’s new apocalyptic encounter with “terrorism” such modes were obviously insufficiently absolute.

When a nation’s purpose becomes the cosmic destruction of evil, anything goes

And when a nation’s purpose becomes the cosmic destruction of evil, anything goes -- as it has in the American Crusade. Hence the jettisoning of the Geneva Accords, the embrace of torture, the obliteration of prisoners’ rights, the abuses that live on in the unchecked intrusions of government surveillance, or in what Americans are too polite to call the concentration camp at Guantánamo that Donald Trump so devoutly desires to keep open and running.

The Crusading appetite for enemies is insatiable, which is why, in the Middle Ages, the war against Islam morphed so seamlessly into wars against, first, the Rhineland Jews in Europe’s early pogroms; then, Eastern Orthodox believers whose cities, including Constantinople, were besieged and sacked; and finally, Catholic dissent-

ers (think “heretics”) like the Albigensians and Cathars who were brutally eliminated.

In America’s version of such enemy-creep, the war against the al-Qaeda network quickly morphed into a “war” against terror groups in more than 60 nations, starting with Afghanistan and the Taliban, and within a year and a half Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, a country and regime utterly unrelated to al-Qaeda. From there, it was on to Pakistan, Somalia, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Niger, the Philippines, and parts as yet unknown.

When George W. Bush delivered his State of the Union address four months after 9/11, he redefined America’s main enemies as -- again that word -- an “axis of evil,” consisting of Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. By then, it already mattered not at all that Shiite Iran had nothing to do with the Sunni sect led by Osama bin Laden; that Saddam Hussein had nothing to do with 9/11; and that North Korea had not the remotest connection to the September crisis that so traumatized the United States. Once named in this way, the leaders of Iran and North Korea, now knowing that, in American eyes, they were the fonts of (almost) all evil, could, of course, be expected to take immediate measures to brace themselves against future American aggression -- and so they did with nuclear programs that still are at the heart of the aggressively militarized policies being pushed by Donald Trump and his generals today (and with a future war in either of those countries a distinct possibility).

Legislators who were against the invasion wear their votes of opposition as badges of honour

However, the most salient echo of the medieval Crusades in contemporary US military campaigns comes under the heading of failure. For all the romance associated with the knights-in-shining-armor of that era, their God-willed liberation of the Holy City in 1099 did not survive the Muslim reconquest of 1187, a Christian defeat that would make the English king, Richard the Lionheart, a mythic figure, and guarantee Jerusalem’s place in the lost-cause fantasies of

Europe forever after. (It was a defeat that would not be avenged until 1917, when Field Marshal Edmund Allenby finally reclaimed Jerusalem for Christians, with catastrophic consequences for Jews and Muslims alike.) America’s failures in the Middle East, despite Pentagon rhetoric about the US military’s “full spectrum dominance,” have been no less obvious and no less total on a planet that can no longer tolerate decades, no less centuries, of war.

George W. Bush’s 2003 invasion of Iraq remains a marker of virtue (and vice) in contemporary American politics. Those few legislators who were against the invasion still wear their votes of opposition as badges of honour, while those in favour were permanently shamed. (And think of how that played out in the 2016 presidential campaign.) But that’s far too convenient a way to replay our recent history. In fact, the die had already been cast long before that vote, which meant that the invasion of Iraq followed the invasion of Afghanistan as inevitably as wakes follow warships. After all, Operation Enduring Freedom, supposedly meant to target Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda network of a few hundred fighters, began with a massive bombing campaign across large parts of Afghanistan. The unquestioning faith of the US Air Force in the long-discredited tactic of “strategic” bombing would be touching if it didn’t involve such obliviousness to its effects on human bodies -- and almost 17 years later, American bombers, including the latest drones and Vietnam-era B-52s, are still dropping fire on Afghani flesh as that war goes from bad to worse.

The Afghan campaign, which quite literally ignited the war on terror, was officially launched on October 7, 2001. But who remembers that everything to come -- from that Afghan invasion to the deaths late last year of four US Green Berets in Niger -- had already been enthusiastically licensed three weeks earlier when George W. Bush stepped to that cross-shadowed pulpit of the National Cathedral to berate evil. Only hours before, the Joint Congressional Resolution on the Use of Force (“The President is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organisations, or persons

JAMES CARROLL

he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harboured such organisations or persons...” passed the Senate 98 to 0 and the House of Representatives 420 to 1. Those are the numbers that should live on in history, if not infamy.

The lone dissenter that day was Representative Barbara Lee, a California Democrat. In warning against the coming American crusade, she denounced the Joint Congressional Resolution as “a blank check to the president to attack anyone involved in the Sept. 11 events -- anywhere, in any country, without regard to our nation’s long-term foreign policy, economic and national security interests, and without time limit.” She added all too prophetically, “A rush to launch precipitous military counterattacks runs too great a risk that more innocent men, women, children will be killed.”

As they were, as they still are. Lest one assume that responsibility for the catastrophe that followed rests solely upon Bush and his hawkish circle, remember that the administration’s responses were approved by 90% of the American public, the highest presidential approval rating

ever achieved, while a full 80% of them expressly favoured Bush’s open-ended war against Afghanistan. That war would eventually let loose mayhem across a dozen other nations (and it’s still spreading), leaving millions of dead, disfigured, displaced human beings in its wake. Most Americans and nearly all of their congressional representatives were complicit in what remains an unfinished global moral, economic, and political calamity that far exceeds anything the grotesque Donald Trump has so far brought about. He may yet start a nuclear war and has already undoubtedly sparked what could become a cascade of nuclear proliferation, yet for now the malign legacy of the 43rd President -- that American crusade -- exceeds anything the 45th one has yet imagined. And no, God does not will it. **CT**

James Carroll is a Boston Globe columnist and distinguished scholar-in-residence at Suffolk University. He is the author, among other works, of House of War: The Pentagon and the Disastrous Rise of American Power and, most recently, Christ Actually: The Son of God for the Secular Age. This article first appeared at www.tomdispatch.com

9



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Contrary to reason

Stephen Pinker claims to champion Enlightenment values.
But his latest book is an affront to them

10

One of the curiosities of our age is the way in which celebrity culture comes to dominate every aspect of public life. Even the review pages of the newspapers sometimes look like a highfalutin version of gossip magazines. Were we to judge them by the maxim “great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people”, they would not emerge well. Biography dominates, ideas often seem to come last. Brilliant writers like Sylvia Plath become better known for their lives than their work: turning her into the Princess Diana of literature does neither her nor her readers any favours.

Even when ideas are given prominence, they no longer have standing in their own right; their salience depends on their authorship. Take, for example, the psychology professor Stephen Pinker, who attracts the kind of breathless adulation that would seem more appropriate in the pages of Hello magazine.

I am broadly sympathetic to his worldview. I agree with him that scientific knowledge is a moral imperative, and that we must use it to enhance human welfare. Like him, I’m enthusiastic about technologies that horrify other people, such as fourth-generation nuclear reactors and artificial meat. So I began reading his new book *Enlightenment Now* with excitement.

I expected something bracing, original, well-sourced and well-reasoned. Instead, in the area I know best – environmental issues – I found an astonishing mishmash of factoids, mistakes

and outright myths. The alarm began to sound for me when he characterised “the mainstream environmental movement” as “laced with misanthropy, including an indifference to starvation, an indulgence in ghoulish fantasies of a depopulated planet, and Nazi-like comparisons of human beings to vermin, pathogens and cancer.”

Yes, I have come across such views, but they are few and far between. When they are expressed on social media, they are rapidly slapped down by other environmentalists. They are about as far from the environmental mainstream as they are from the humanitarian mainstream.

Bt this is just the beginning of the problem. Rather than using primary sources, Pinker draws on anecdote, cherry-picking and a litany of discredited talking points developed by anti-environmental thinktanks. Take, for example, his claims about the famous Limits to Growth report, published in 1972. It’s a favourite target of those who seek to dismiss environmental problems. He suggests it projected that aluminium, copper, chromium, gold, nickel, tin, tungsten and zinc would be exhausted by 1992. It is hard to see how anyone who had read the report could form this impression. The figures it uses for illustrative purposes have been (I think deliberately) transformed by some critics into projections.

Its actual prediction is that “the great majority of the currently important non-renewable resources will be extremely costly 100 years from now.” It would be perfectly reasonable to take issue with this claim. It is not reasonable to recycle, then attack, a widely circulated myth about the report. That’s called the straw man fallacy. It is contrary to the principles of reason that Pinker claims to champion.

Citing the famous ecologist Stuart Pimm, Pinker maintains that “the overall rate of extinctions has been reduced by 75 percent.” But Pimm has said no such thing: I checked with him. Pinker had latched onto a seven-word quote in *The New Yorker*, invested it with spurious precision, and misunderstood it to refer to all species, rather than only birds. Stuart Pimm’s work has upgraded the overall extinction rate to 1,000 times the natural background rates, while “future rates are likely to be 10,000 times higher.” This is what happens when you rely on a throwaway remark in a magazine, rather than the scientific literature. Like the straw man fallacy, cherry picking offends the principles of reason.

The same dependency on secondary or tertiary sources allows Pinker to claim that “we may have reached ... Peak Car” (in truth global car sales rose 11 percent between 2014 and 2017), and that as countries become richer “their thoughts turn to the environment.” In reality, the Greendex survey of 14 nations shows, environmental concern has consistently been highest in India and China, and lowest in Britain, France, Japan, Canada and the US.

He suggests that the environmental impact of nations follows the same trajectory, claiming that the “Environmental Kuznets Curve” shows they become cleaner as they get richer. To support this point, he compares Nordic countries with Afghanistan and Bangladesh. It is true that they do better on indicators like air and water quality, as long as you disregard their impacts overseas. But when you look at the whole picture, including their carbon emissions, you discover the opposite. The ecological footprints

of Afghanistan and Bangladesh (namely the area required to provide the resources they use) are, respectively, 0.9 and 0.7 hectares per person. Norway’s is 5.8, Sweden’s is 6.5 and Finland, that paragon of environmental virtue, comes in at 6.7.

Pinker insults the Enlightenment principles he claims to defend

Pinker seems unaware of the controversies surrounding the Environmental Kuznets Curve, and the large body of data that appears to undermine it. The same applies to the other grand claims with which he sweeps through this subject. He relies on highly tendentious interlocutors to interpret this alien field for him. If you are going to use people like Stewart Brand and Matt Ridley as your sources, you had better be sure to doublecheck their assertions. Under-researched and over-claiming, deferring to authority rather than data, sloppy and derivative, Pinker insults the Enlightenment principles he claims to defend.

Could he have succumbed to the motivated reasoning these principles are supposed to suppress? If the environmental crisis cannot be so easily dismissed, it threatens his argument that life is steadily improving. What looks like a relentless enhancement in human welfare could emerge instead as an interlude between one form of deprivation and the next.

I doubt such poor scholarship will dim the adulation with which his claims are received. While Pinker is lauded, far more interesting and original books, such as Jeremy Lent’s *The Patterning Instinct* and Kate Raworth’s *Doughnut Economics*, are scarcely reviewed at all. If there is one aspect of modernity that owes nothing to the Enlightenment, it is surely the worship of celebrities. **CT**

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George Monbiot’s latest book, How Did We Get Into This Mess?, is published by Verso. This article was first published in the Guardian. Monbiot’s web site is www.monbiot.com

Legalising tyranny

How the USA has built a terrifying legal and policing apparatus that has placed the poor, victims of corporate pillage, in bondage

12

The students I teach in prison who have the longest sentences are, almost without exception, the ones who demanded a jury trial. If everyone charged with a crime had a jury trial, the court system would implode. Prosecutors, defense attorneys and judges use those who insist on a jury trial – often people who did not commit the crime with which they were charged – as examples. Their sentences, frequently life sentences, are grim reminders as to why it is in the best interests of a defendant, even if he or she did not commit the crime, to take a plea agreement. Ninety-four percent of state-level felony convictions and 97 percent of federal felony convictions are the result of guilty pleas. And studies by groups such as Human Rights Watch confirm the punitive nature of jury trials: Those who go to jury trials get an addition 11 years, on average, tacked on to their sentences. The rich get high-priced lawyers and lengthy jury trials. The poor are shipped directly to jail or prison.

The corrosion of the moral authority of the legal system has ominous implications as we veer closer and closer to despotism. It is an example of one of the fundamental precursors of tyranny, as political theorist Hannah Arendt pointed out in her book, *On Violence*. Arendt wrote that “power and violence are opposites: where one rules absolutely, the other is absent.” When institutions such as the judicial system break down and lose legitimacy, their moral authority is destroyed. To fill the moral vacuum these

institutions turn exclusively to violence. “Violence,” Arendt wrote, “appears where power is in jeopardy.” Violence is no longer an expression of power. Rather, violence and coercion, which disregard any semblance of justice, are the only mechanism left to exert social control. Trust and respect for the rule of law is replaced by fear. And as Arendt warned, “Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it.” The court system collapse now afflicting the poor is working its way like gangrene up the body of the judiciary. Violence is increasingly the only tool left to a discredited corporate state and its bankrupt ideology of unfettered capitalism. What is being done to the poor will soon be done to all of us.

If you are poor, this is how the system works.

First, you get picked up for a crime you may or may not have committed. The police have broad legal tools, such as RICO – the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act of 1970 – that allow them to charge everyone whom they define as a member of a gang or other group involved in crime. Some of those charged may not have been involved in any way in the commission of the crime. One of my students, for example, was in a room with several other people during a drug deal that went bad. A man pulled a handgun and killed another man. My student did not own a gun. He had no part in the mur-

CHRIS HEDGES



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13

der. He did not know the killer or the victim. But he went to prison under a plea deal calling for 11 years, losing his job and leaving his son, whom he was raising alone, to the streets. He is out now. His son is in prison. Our prisons are filled with people like him – poor, black and unfortunate enough to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Police don't have the time, resources or inclination to investigate most homicides. To close a case, what they need is a suspect, or suspects. Suspects always receive several other charges, such as kidnapping, that carry long sentences, in addition to the main charge. It does not matter whether they kidnapped someone. That is not the point. The point is to give them so many charges that they are looking at a virtual life sentence. This makes the reduced sentence of-

ferred in a plea agreement very attractive. Since poor people often cannot afford bail, they sit in a county jail for months and often years before trial, adding to the pressure to accept a plea agreement. If they are young and do not have an outside support system, they can easily be worn down and made to sign a confession. This happened to a student of mine who was 14 years old and who lived on the streets after his stepfather beat his mother to death in front of him. He was pressured into signing a confession to a murder in Camden, NJ, he says he did not commit. The police, he said, told him if he signed he would be released. Like many on the street, he was functionally illiterate and could not read what he signed. He spent two years in the county jail and then went to trial, where, even though he was 16, he was tried as an adult. He

is not eligible for parole until he is 70. He has no money for an appeal. He was fined \$10,000 when he was convicted, a sum that he is slowly paying off out of his prison salary of \$28 a month. He is 40 years old. He still owes the state of New Jersey \$6,000.

Secondly, you are assigned a court-appointed lawyer. This lawyer is so overworked he or she does not have the time to investigate the case and mount a credible defense. The lawyer's real function is as a negotiator with the prosecutor for a plea agreement. A plea agreement, always carried out in secret, means the prosecutor will drop some of the charges. A plea agreement reduces the time in prison significantly, often by half. Go to court, you are warned, and you will face all the charges. The pressure to plead out is effective and intense, which is why most people, even those who did not commit the crime, plead guilty. Since nearly all cases are settled with plea agreements, the public, from which a jury would be selected, is blocked from seeing the travesty our judicial system has become.

A jury trial for the poor is a farce. Court-appointed attorneys sometimes spend only 15 minutes with clients. They often show up at trial unprepared. Prosecutors in many states are allowed to wait until the start of a trial to share evidence. This means that many people are pressured into guilty pleas although the prosecutors have little or no evidence that they committed the crime. It also means the defence has no way to prepare a response.

The judicial system never has been fair to the poor, especially poor people of colour

I had a student in prison who had been on an Army boxing team. He was preparing to go professional. He was charged with a homicide in Elizabeth, NJ. He says he was not in the city at the time of the killing. He refused to take a plea deal of 16 months. He went to court. His public

defender told him to plead self-defence. He refused. This was a good decision because it came out in the trial that the victim was shot in the back. How did he get convicted? A few drug addicts, who were tidied up and given hotel rooms and some cash by the police, testified they saw him do it. He got 30 years.

"We sat in the courtroom in shock," his mother told me. "It was transparent to everyone in the room the drug addicts were lying."

The judicial system never has been fair to the poor, especially poor people of colour. But its propensity for injustice has been expanded over the past three decades, as Michelle Alexander illustrated in her book, *The New Jim Crow*. The number of crimes, especially on the federal level, that people can be charged with has exploded. There were once only three named federal criminal acts: treason, piracy and counterfeiting. Today there are thousands. The law as an instrument of morality at the state and federal levels has been deformed into an instrument of racialised social control. It imposes legal duties on the poor and then imprisons them for not carrying out those duties. For example, if someone in the room where the drug dealer was killed had immediately called the police and reported the crime, a virtual death sentence in a poor community, he or she would be exonerated. Refuse to call and you get charged with murder. Even the courts don't pretend that many of those with murder convictions actually carried out a homicide.

If someone wants to file an appeal, it costs \$100,000. Poor people don't have access to that kind of money. Appeals are usually handled by other prisoners who work as paralegals in the prison. In the case of the boxer it was different. His parents took their entire \$150,000 retirement savings and hired a lawyer and private investigator. They went to court armed with depositions from the drug users who had testified against their son saying they had lied. It made no difference. He is still in prison. And his mother – his father has since died – is liv-

CHRIS HEDGES

ing in poverty, having exhausted her savings trying to save her son.

“My mother,” he told me, “never understood the system is a sham.”

The carcel state – composed of 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 901 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,163 local jails and 76 Indian Country jails, along with military prisons, immigration detention facilities, civil commitment centres, and prisons in the US territories – is a subculture unto itself, with an \$81 billion-budget and tremendous political clout.

We spend a total of \$265-billion on federal, state and local corrections and the police and court systems. The two main political parties compete to see which can be “tougher” on crime. Congress enacted 92 death-eligible crimes from 1974 to 2010. A first-time drug offence in the United States can lead to a life sentence. I taught a student who had been given a life sentence plus 154 years for weapons possession and drugs. He had never been charged with a violent crime. These kinds of sentences are unheard of in most of the industrial world. They are common in despotic states such as China and the Philippines, states we increasingly resemble.

There are now 65-million people in the United States who because of past convictions make up a criminal caste that is denied things ranging from public housing to the right to vote. There are seven-million controlled by parole and probation officers. We have the highest rate of incarceration in the world. These numbers will, as our society unravels, go up.

The judicial system in recent years has been cruelly refined to close the tiny windows that offer any hope of reprieve to the 2.3-million people we lock away in cages. The courts routinely reduce sentences if the defendant gives up his or her right to an attorney and signs a waiver prohibiting him or her from filing an appeal. This bargaining tactic strips defendants of any legal protection.

Corporations have taken over larger and larger segments of prison life, from food service

to money transfers, commissaries and phone communications. A million prisoners work for corporations in prison and are often paid under a dollar an hour. Prisoners and their families are exploited for billions in corporate profits. Corporate lobbyists sponsor legislation to make sure this captive population remains captive. Black and brown bodies on the streets of our cities do not bring in revenue for these corporations; behind bars they each generate \$40,000 to \$50,000 a year.

*Once rights become a privilege
for any segment, they can be
revoked for everyone*

Deindustrialisation left hundreds of thousands of black people in urban areas without work. Their communities decayed and collapsed. Crimes rates rose. The social disintegration was accompanied by harsher forms of social control, militarised police and mass incarceration. But the cause of this social disintegration, as sociologists such as William Julius Wilson have pointed out, has been ignored.

As the rot of deindustrialisation spreads across the country, the experience of people of colour – the lowest stratum in the hierarchy of classes – will become normalised. Once rights become privileges for any segment of a population, as Arendt pointed out, they can be revoked for the rest of the population. We have built a terrifying legal and policing apparatus that has placed the poor of our nation, victims of corporate pillage, in bondage. This system is creeping outward to cement into place an American tyranny

CT

Chris Hedges spent nearly two decades as a foreign correspondent in Central America, the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. He has reported from more than 50 countries and has worked for The Christian Science Monitor, National Public Radio, The Dallas Morning News and The New York Times, for which he was a foreign correspondent for 15 years. This article first appeared at www.truthdig.com



The Rouge, Study 128, Dearborn, Michigan, 1994.

The real Motor City

A photographer looks inside the heart of Detroit's motor industry

Built between 1917 and 1928, Henry Ford's River Rouge complex at Dearborn, Michigan, was the largest integrated factory the world had ever seen. The site, a Ford automobile factory compound, was full of lightweight glass walls that allowed the sun to stream in unfiltered, bathing the factory floor and thousands of workers in brilliant daylight. With eight massive 320-ft high powerhouse stacks at its core, the plant generated enough energy to supply the



The Rouge, Study 1, Dearborn, Michigan, 1992.

needs of a city of a million residents, while it contained miles of railway tracks, blast furnaces, coke ovens, a foundry and vast areas for holding raw materials used to build the company's vehicles. At its peak, the plant employed 100,000 workers and had its own police force, fire department and hospital.

From the start, the Rouge drew visitors: a quarter of a million people a year between 1924 and 1982. They were enthralled by the colossal

size of the Rouge and marvelled at the ingenuity of its owner, architect and builders.

One of those visitors was British photographer Michael Kenna, among the world's most acclaimed photographers working exclusively in black-and-white, who photographed the plant for his book, *The Rouge*, published in 1995.

Long out of print, the book, its title stripped down to the single word *Rouge*) has been reissued by Prestel, with many previously unpub-

MICHAEL KENNA

Photographs © Michael Kenna



The Rouge, Study 99, Dearborn, Michigan, 1995.



The Rouge, Study 5, Dearborn, Michigan, 1992.



The Rouge, Study 132, Dearborn, Michigan, 1995.



The Rouge, Study 55, Dearborn, Michigan, 1994.

18

lished images from his original exhibition.

As Detroit struggles to reclaim its heritage as a commercial and artistic hub, Kenna's photographs resonate more than ever with the stark realities and hidden beauty of the industrial landscape.

In an essay accompanying Kenna's photographs, James Christen Steward, director of Princeton University Art Museum, tell us, "The Rouge that

Michael Kenna visited between 1992 and 1995 was one of deep contrasts. He recalls, 'Parts of the Rouge were active and quite dangerous with moving cranes, trains, and enormous containers of molten steel and slag. Other parts were disused and quiet, rusting and decaying, with vegetation growing in and around long abandoned machinery.'

Today's Rouge, adds Steward, "remains an

MICHAEL KENNA



19

The Rouge, Study 67, Dearborn, Michigan, 1994.

industrial park containing six Ford factories as well as steelmaking operations. ... significant elements have been redesigned, including covering the roof of the 1.1-million sq ft assembly plant with a 'green' roof covering more than 10 acres.

"Factory tours that were suspended during the recession in 1980 were relaunched in 2004 and again welcome tens of thousands of visitors to the Rouge annually."

CT



ROUGE

Michael Kenna

Published by Prestel

\$ 65.00 | £ 45.00

Lies and self-deception in Israel's 'moral' army

Recent abuses have exposed the brutal tactics used
against Palestinians by Israel's military

20

It has been a very bad time for those claiming Israel has the most moral army in the world. Here's a small sample of recent abuses of Palestinians in which the Israeli army was caught lying: A child horrifically injured by soldiers was arrested and terrified into signing a false confession that he was hurt in a bicycle accident. A man who, it was claimed, had died of tear-gas inhalation was actually shot at point-blank range, then savagely beaten by a mob of soldiers and left to die. Soldiers threw a tear gas canister at a Palestinian couple, baby in arms, as they fled for safety during a military invasion of their village.

In the early 2000s, at the dawn of the social media revolution, Israelis used to dismiss filmed evidence of brutality by their soldiers as fakery. It was what they called "Pallywood" – a conflation of Palestinian and Hollywood.

In truth, however, it was the Israeli military, not the Palestinians, that needed to manufacture a more convenient version of reality.

Late last month, it emerged, Israeli officials had conceded to a military court that the army had beaten and locked up a group of Palestinian reporters as part of an explicit policy of stopping journalists from covering abuses by its soldiers.

Israel's deceptions have a long history. Back in the 1970s, a young Juliano Meir-Khamis, later to become one of Israel's most celebrated actors, was assigned the job of carrying a weapons bag on operations in the Jenin refugee camp

in the West Bank. When Palestinian women or children were killed, he placed a weapon next to the body.

In one incident, when soldiers playing around with a shoulder-launcher fired a missile at a donkey, and the 12-year-old girl riding it, Meir-Khamis was ordered to put explosives on their remains.

That occurred before the Palestinians' first mass uprising against the occupation erupted in the late 1980s. Then, the defence minister Yitzhak Rabin – later given a Hollywood-style makeover himself as a peacemaker – urged troops to "break the bones" of Palestinians to stop their liberation struggle.

The desperate, and sometimes self-sabotaging, lengths Israel takes to try to salvage its image were underscored at the end of February when 15-year-old Mohammed Tamimi was grabbed from his bed in a night raid.

Back in December he was shot in the face by soldiers during an invasion of his village of Nabi Saleh. Doctors saved his life, but he was left with a misshapen head and a section of skull missing.

Mohammed's suffering made headlines because he was a bit-player in a larger drama. Shortly after he was shot, a video recorded his cousin, 16-year-old Ahed Tamimi, slapping a soldier nearby after he entered her home.

Ahed, who is in jail awaiting trial, was al-

JONATHAN COOK



Israeli border guards arrest journalist Shadi Hatem and confiscate his pictures.

Photo: Umsebenzi, South Africa

ready a Palestinian resistance icon. Now she has become a symbol, too, of Israel's victimisation of children.

So, Israel began work on recrafting the narrative: of Ahd as a terrorist and provocateur.

It emerged that a government minister, Michael Oren, had even set up a secret committee to try to prove that Ahd and her family were really paid actors, not Palestinians, there to "make Israel look bad." The Pallywood delusion had gone into overdrive.

Events took a new turn as Mohammed and other relatives were seized, even though he is still gravely ill. Dragged off to an interrogation cell, he was denied access to a lawyer or parent. Shortly afterwards, Israel produced a signed confession stating that Mohammed's horrific injuries were not Israel's responsibility but wounds inflicted in a bicycle crash.

Yoav Mordechai, the occupation's top official, trumpeted proof of a Palestinian "culture of lies and incitement." Mohammed's injuries were "fake news," the Israeli media dutifully reported.

Deprived of a justification for slapping an occupation soldier, Ahd can now be locked

away by military judges. Except that witnesses, phone records and hospital documentation, including brain scans, all prove that Mohammed was shot.

This was simply another of Israelywood's endless productions to automatically confer guilt on Palestinians. The hundreds of children on Israel's incarceration production line each year have to sign confessions – or plea bargains – to win jail-sentence reductions from courts with near-100 percent conviction rates.

A second army narrative unravelled when CCTV showed Yasin Saradih, 35, being shot at point-blank range during an invasion of Jericho, then savagely beaten by soldiers as he lay wounded, and left to bleed to death.

It was an unexceptional incident. A report by Amnesty International last month noted that many of the dozens of Palestinians killed in 2017 appeared to be victims of extra-judicial executions. Before footage of Saradih's killing surfaced, the army issued a series of false statements, including that he died from tear-gas inhalation, received first-aid treatment and was armed with a knife. The video disproves all of that.

Over the past two years, dozens of Palestinians, including women and children, have been shot in similarly suspicious circumstances. Invariably the army concludes that they were killed while attacking soldiers with a knife – Israel even named this period of unrest a "knife intifada."

A half-century of occupation has not only corrupted generations of teenage Israeli soldiers who have been allowed to lord it over Palestinians. It has also created an industry of lies and self-deceptions to ensure that the consciences of Israelis are never clouded by a moment of doubt that maybe their army is not so moral after all. **CT**

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Jonathan Cook is a Nazareth-based journalist and winner of the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His web site is www.jonathan-cook.net

They won't 'get' Corbyn on foreign policy

Why those hysterical attacks on Jeremy Corbyn by the tabloid press and right-wing Labour MPs are doomed to failure

22

Fucking livid.” “Once great party.” “Doesn’t reflect the views of our voters.” “Doesn’t reflect my Labour values.” “The mask slips.”

Like the canary in the cage, showing much activity but no progress, the political class is in a flutter about the political fall-out from the attempted murder of former double agent Sergei Skripal. And leading the flutter are just over a dozen Labour MPs from the party’s right-wing, from whom the above quotes are loosely culled.

Skripal had been tried by the Russian state and locked up for his work for British intelligence, but was traded with Britain as part of a spy swap back in 2010. The inference made by Theresa May has been that, eight years on, the Russian state has caught up with him, in a local Zizzi’s, with a full view of the wood-burning oven (how rustic, how delightful). And killed him with a lethal nerve agent, Novichok, a substance originally developed by the Soviet Union but now widely available.

The Corbyn leadership, while demonstrating its bona fides (*condemn, strongest possible terms, investigation, held to account*), was cool on this immediate attribution of responsibility. Press officer Seumas Milne suggested that the poisoning wasn’t necessarily carried out by Russia just because British intelligence said so, while Corbyn’s speech stopped short of assigning blame. In a later statement, he talked about holding the Russian authorities to account “based on the evidence.” Not only that, but in calling for the Magnitsky laws to be passed, he had the bad taste to

mention the Tories’ close relationship with Russian oligarchs. Howls of outrage and execration from the Tory benches.

There is a strange mismatch between the rhetorical hype, and the actual policy consequences. May doesn’t want or need a Cold War-style confrontation with Russia. Her response, expelling some diplomats, is not exactly going to rock the Kremlin. Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson telling Russia to “shut up” and “go away” adds a sense of farce to the ineffectual tough talk. By contrast, Corbyn’s support for Magnitsky powers could have some consequences.

Now, for what little it’s worth, I suspect the Russian state was involved in this attempted killing. It would, moreover, hardly be the worst of Kremlin actions in the post-Stalinist years, from Chechnya to Ukraine to Syria. But with relatively little to go on at a still early stage, people are entitled to reticence, if not a degree of downright scepticism. No one is obliged to agree with the British intelligence services, or Number 10. And the opposition, I would say, has a duty not to militantly fall into line behind the government. However, as always happens when Corbyn departs from whatever foreign policy script Theresa May is reading from, there was a sharp intake of breath among lobby pundits. He’s done it now. It is traditional, in British politics, for the two parties to stick to-



MEDIA HYSTERIA: Britain's notoriously right wing mainstream media launched a frenzied attack on Jeremy Corbyn after his restrained response to PM Theresa May's expulsion of Russian diplomats and threats against Vladimir Putin after a former spy and his daughter were victims of a nerve gas attack in an English town.

gether on foreign policy, sermonised the BBC's chief political correspondent.

And we now find that, according to current dispensations, you have to be certain that Putin did it, right now, and must be so ardently and publicly, and consider any other position a moral and intellectual disgrace objectively on the side of the Kremlin. "Eager to exonerate a hostile power," as the Guardian put it. Regrettably, Emmanuel I, king o'er the water of the British centre, has drawn some of the fire from this attack by taking a position almost identical to that of Corbyn.

Spotting a rare chance to shine, nonetheless, a dozen or so Labour MPs got together and signed an early day motion declaring that they, at least, unequivocally accepted Russian blame for the attempted murder. They're shocked, shocked. Not inconsiderably incandescent with rage, as Private Eye's version of John Major once put it. They align themselves firmly with compulsory certainty in the guilt of the Russian state. How dare Corbyn and his allies desecrate their once fine party, and its history of absolutely unquestioning loyalty to the British security state?

Do they really think this is going to be the one?

We have had: Corbyn the IRA stooge; Corbyn the bloody terrorist symp; Corbyn the anti-British weirdo who won't sing the national anthem; Corbyn the imperfectly-bowing-to-the-cenotaph; Corbyn speaking-too-soon about the election period jihadist attacks; Corbyn the Czech asset. In what ideological universe does this finally unmask their leader? I strongly suspect that the majority of Labour voters, and Labour members, will be unmoved.

They're not going to 'get' Corbyn on foreign policy. Not least because the more times they cry wolf, the less effective they will be if and when they come up with something that could potentially antagonise his supporters. They have overshot many, many times, cranking up a now antiquated apparatus of smears and demoralisation, to generally counterproductive effect. More fundamentally, they're not going to 'get' him on this issue because the cherished foreign policy consensus, the knee-jerk deference to our spooks and men-of-violence, insofar as it ever had a popular basis beyond the state, no longer exists.

CT

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Richard Seymour is the author of Corbyn: The Strange Rebirth of Radical Politics. This article first appeared at his blog: www.patreon.com/posts/why-do-they-keep-17569254

LINDA McQUAIG

Canada is on wrong side of Venezuelan conflict

What's going on in Venezuela is a bitter class war, with millions of poor people committed to defending a revolution carried out in their name, and Canada is taking the side of the wealthy, well-armed opposition

In terms of foreign policy damage, whatever harm Justin Trudeau did by parading around India in colourful outfits is a nothing-burger compared to the severe hardship he is inflicting on Venezuela.

And yet media commentators have been full-throttle in denouncing the prime minister's alleged wardrobe malfunction on his recent India trip, while being silent – or downright supportive – of Trudeau's decision last fall to join the Trump administration in imposing sanctions on the struggling South American nation.

Anyone following the international media coverage would conclude that the Venezuelan government is terribly autocratic and that Western nations, led by the US, have stepped in with sanctions out of concern over human rights abuses there. A closer look suggests a different scenario that puts Western actions in a less laudable light: Washington is waging economic war against a nation that dared to rise up and reject US control over its ample oil reserves.

The Obama administration targeted individual Venezuelans with sanctions, but the Trump administration's sanctions are much broader, taking punishing aim at the country's entire economy.

Sadly, Trudeau is backing up the US bully, apparently hoping to win a reprieve from Trump's arbitrary trade measures – a strategy that seems unfair to Venezuela and also likely futile. I'll return to Canada's sorry role in this saga in a moment.



HUMBLE ROOTS: Hector Chavez. Photo: Wikimedia

Venezuela has been in Washington's cross hairs ever since the dramatic 1998 election of Hugo Chavez, a charismatic, populist leader – and this is one case where the word “populist” legitimately applies.

Unlike the “populist” Donald Trump, Chavez actually came from humble roots as the child of black and Indian parents, and actually championed his country's large peasant population.

Indeed, unlike many Third World leaders who siphon off their nation's wealth in cahoots with foreign multinationals and local elites, Chavez enraged Washington by nationalising Venezuela's oil and redirecting the wealth to health care, education, housing and food for the poor.

Venezuela's wealthy elite, angry about losing their privileged position, vowed to overthrow Chavez – and briefly did in a violent 2002 coup,

LINDA McQUAIG

with the help of Washington, before being repelled two days later when hundreds of thousands of pro-Chavez demonstrators from poor neighbourhoods took to the streets of Caracas.

Many in the elite had worked for the US-owned oil industry when it effectively ran the oil-rich nation. And, like the Cuban elite after Fidel Castro nationalised US-owned industry there, the Venezuelan elite has remained close to Washington. After the failed 2002 coup, Venezuela's elite concentrated on demonising Chavez – and Nicolas Maduro, his hand-picked successor, who narrowly won election following Chavez's death from cancer in 2013.

Although lacking Chavez's charisma, Maduro has continued to win elections even as the country's economy has plunged, along with world oil prices. Frustrated, the opposition has adopted increasingly violent tactics – including a bizarre attack last year when rebels dropped grenades from a helicopter on the country's Supreme Court.

Alfred de Zayas, a UN-appointed expert sent to investigate the chaos last fall, met with dozens of opposition activists as well as church and human rights groups, and concluded that the Maduro regime has made “major mistakes including excessive force by the police.” But de Zayas also found that popular support for the Chavez revolution remains strong. And he accused anti-

government demonstrators of having “attacked hospitals, nursery schools, burned ambulances and buses in order to intimidate the people. Is this not classic terrorism?”

The UN expert also explained that the sanctions – which he considers reminiscent of US measures against Chile's Salvador Allende in the 1970s – are aggravating the suffering of Venezuelans, and he called for them to end. “That would be the greatest help,” he said.

But Canada refuses to listen. Our sanctions aren't as broad as Trump's, but they lend Canadian credibility to penalising Venezuela, thereby providing political cover for the harsh US measures. And so we continue to inflict sanctions on Venezuela, citing the lofty goal of defending human rights – even while we actively trade and sell arms to full-fledged dictatorships, such as Saudi Arabia.

What's going on in Venezuela is a bitter class war, with millions of poor people committed to defending a revolution carried out in their name, and Canada taking the side of the wealthy, well-armed opposition.

CT

Linda McQuaig interviewed Hugo Chavez in Caracas in 2004 for It's The Crude, Dude! a book she wrote on the geopolitics of oil. This column first appeared in the Toronto Star.

25

Behind the Mask of the Apartheid State

The special March issue of **Umsebenzi**, the magazine of the South African Communist Party, focuses on the decades-long struggle against oppression by the Palestinian people, told from the perspective of a society that fought its own long fight for freedom against the evils of apartheid. It provides an excellent – and objective – background for anyone wanting a better understanding of the Israeli Occupation.

DOWNLOAD A FREE PDF OF THE ISSUE AT

<http://www.sacp.org.za/pubs/umsebenzi2/2018/mar.pdf>



The cult of celebrity

Ridiculous Russiagate blather shows how 'serious, grown-up, authoritative' journalists have become so divorced from reality

26

On a recent episode of “Intercepted,” Glenn Greenwald, James Risen, and Jeremy Scahill, three celebrity journalists employed by a billionaire to provide the masses with fearless, adversarial journalism, debated – <https://theintercept.com/2018/02/21/intercepted-podcast-russiamania-glenn-greenwald-vs-james-risen/> – for approximately 57 minutes, whether Donald Trump might be guilty of treason. This debate was prompted by the negative response to Risen’s first investigative piece for The Intercept, *Is Donald Trump a Traitor?*, a lengthy rehashing of the official narrative the corporate ruling classes have been relentlessly disseminating for the last 18 months.

Dedicated readers of The Intercept had wondered aloud on social media how, exactly, this repetition of the evidence-free “Trump is a Putin Puppet” narrative qualified as fearlessly adversarial. Some had even gone so far as to suggest that Risen, a legend in the world of investigative and national security journalism, had been a bit reckless, ethically speaking, in throwing around words like “treason” and “traitor,” and in allowing his status as a journalistic legend to lend further credence to the most ridiculous official propaganda campaign since the “Saddam is stockpiling WMDs for al Qaeda to attack America with” hoax.

In any event, The Intercept, its brand identity under attack, sprang into action and arranged this debate. Scahill and Risen were live in New York, possibly at First Look’s Fifth Avenue stu-

dios, with Greenwald participating remotely from his home in the mountains above Rio de Janeiro.

Following a solemn introduction by Scahill, and after kowtowing to each other at considerable length, Greenwald and Risen get down to the work of defining the word “treason.” This takes 20 minutes. They then move on to ascertaining whether Greenwald believes, and will admit on camera, that “Russia intervened” in the 2016 elections. Mercilessly pressed on this point by Risen, he finally confesses that he probably believes that the Russians likely “did some things.” This takes up another 20 minutes.

The rest of the episode is dedicated to establishing that Greenwald is not a Trump-loving pinko (despite his occasional appearances on FOX), and that Risen agrees that the general public (not to mention fearless, adversarial journalists) should not just accept whatever intelligence agencies tell them without supporting evidence. Scahill then wraps up the episode by joking about Greenwald getting paid in rubles and Risen getting paid by the CIA, and noting how “interesting” it is to be a fearless, adversarial journalist at a serious operation like The Intercept, where extremely affluent, award-winning colleagues are allowed to respectfully disagree about whether the President of the United States should be tried and executed for treason because some Russians bought some Facebook ads and said mean things

about Hillary Clinton.

I realise you'll probably want to break off now and go watch this thrilling debate yourself, but bear with me for just another few minutes, because this essay isn't really about the debate, or The Intercept, or even First Look Media. Believe it or not, I'm a fan of Glenn Greenwald, who is one of the very few celebrity journalists who has had the guts to consistently challenge the ridiculous "Russiagate" narrative from the start. And just because The Intercept is owned by a neoliberal oligarch who backed a fascist coup in the Ukraine, micro-financed a few Indians to death, and employs a personal security detail of ex-Secret Service agents and State Department types who will fly him to safety in his private jet in the event of imminent zombie apocalypse, that doesn't mean The Intercept staff doesn't publish important investigative journalism.

No, what struck me as I was suffering through this debate was how utterly divorced from reality it was, whatever "reality" might mean anymore. Watching Greenwald, Risen, and Scahill sitting there, like rational people, "debating" whether Donald Trump might be part of some convoluted Russian conspiracy to destroy America and Western democracy, I felt like I was finally having one of those apocryphal LSD flashbacks. It was as if I was watching these respected journalists debating whether the face of Jesus may have actually appeared on a breakfast taco at a daycare center in Beeville, Texas.

Now, I mean no offence to The Intercept, or Jesus, or even breakfast tacos. I'm simply trying to point out how, after 18 months of relentless repetition, we have all been barraged with so much ridiculous "Russiagate" and "Collusion" propaganda that it is almost impossible to step back from it enough to recognise how ridiculous it is. Fundamentally. The basic premise of the narrative.

Imagine for a moment, if you can, that you had never heard about "Russiagate," and listen to the story concept as if you were hearing it for the very first time. Ready? OK, here it comes ... "Donald Trump conspired with Putin to brain-

wash Americans with Internet ads into electing him President of the United States so he could help the Russians take over the world!" How is this story concept any more credible than the one where a radical Jewish prophet who's been dead for over 2,000 years, but who rules the universe with his omnipotent father, appeared on a taco in Beeville, Texas?

Well ... OK, I'll tell you how it's more credible. It's credible because "authoritative sources" say it is credible, over and over, and treat it as a "serious" story, in spite of how blatantly ridiculous it is. It's not just the corporate media that does this. It's also fearless, adversarial, "authoritative" organisations like The Intercept. I wish there were a more sophisticated theory I could set forth to explain this phenomenon, but, sadly, it really is that simple.

If you don't want to be excommunicated, you'd better believe, or pretend to believe

In any authoritarian society, social group, culture, or ... cult, those with the power can make up pretty much any official narrative they want and get the members of the group to believe it, or at least conform their behaviour to it. The social hierarchy does all the work. Cults provide the clearest example. The leaders come up with some ludicrous narrative (eg, Helter Skelter, The House of David, Body Thetans from Outer Space, Transubstantiation, et cetera) which is reified by the "inner circle," who conform their behaviour and speech to this narrative, and then pressure the outer members to do likewise. Gradually, everyone gets the message: if you don't want to be excommunicated, you had better believe, or pretend to believe, the official narrative of the cult. It isn't a question of deception, belief, gullibility, or even intelligence. It is a question of power, social pressure, and fear of ostracisation and exile. Anyone invested in any type of social group that functions along authoritarian lines is susceptible to this type of pressure, regardless of how savvy or intelligent they are.

Which brings me back to The Intercept and

this debate about whether Trump is a traitor. If you have an hour to kill, try this experiment. Watch the debate, ignore what they're saying, and pay attention to how they say it and the effect that is generated by how they say it. (You can also do this with any mainstream media political debate-type show, but assuming you're as predisposed as I am to identify with The Intercept's brand, it will be more instructive if you use this debate).

What you'll be watching is a simulation of "seriousness," "authoritativeness," and "credibility," and a demonstration of how "respectable" journalists discuss a "legitimate, newsworthy" story (as opposed to, you know, a conspiracy theory).

In other words, you will be watching a performance ... a performance intended to convince its audience that (a) the nonsense being "debated" is a "serious" story worthy of debate by serious, grown-up, authoritative journalists, (b) that there exists such a creature as a "serious, grown-up authoritative journalist," and (c) that these serious, grown-up journalists, and the "authoritative sources" they rub elbows with, inhabit an exclusive "authoritative" realm populated by "serious people" deserving of our trust and deference.

As it just so happens, in this authoritative realm, where serious people (a/k/a "grown-ups") are dealing with "real," "adult" type matters that are none of our business, and which we wouldn't understand, everyone is extremely well-paid. That's one way you can tell they are serious. That, and various other hallmarks of "seriousness" and "respectability," like their overuse of a certain type of adjective (ie, the type I've been having fun with in this essay), important-sound-

ing but meaningless adjectives such as "major," "serious," "authoritative," "well-respected," "legitimate," and so on. "Serious" people use these adjectives to refer to other "serious" people, or the views or statements of other "serious" people. The more ridiculous the propaganda they are pressuring you to take seriously is, the more they tend to overuse these words. Most of them do not do this consciously. They do it instinctively. They do it out of fear of being excommunicated from the Cult of Authority.

Which might explain why The Intercept has brought a legend like Risen on board to report the ridiculous Russiagate story from the viewpoint of serious, authoritative people, ie, to balance out Greenwald's "collusion rejectionism." After all, at this point, the only people who continue to doubt that Donald Trump is somehow in league with Vladimir Putin and his plot to dominate the entire world by brainwashing folks with Facebook ads are Russian bots, Nazis, traitors, and other such non-authoritative persons. Given all the money they're paying their journalists, First Look Media can hardly afford to allow them to be confused with that lot. Before too long, they would find themselves deranked, and would be reduced to writing for nothing. And who could possibly take them seriously then? **CT**

CJ Hopkins is an award-winning American playwright, novelist and satirist based in Berlin. His plays are published by Bloomsbury Publishing (UK) and Broadway Play Publishing (USA). His debut novel, ZONE 23, is published by Snoggswothy, Swaine & Cormorant. He can be reached at cjhopkins.com or consentfactory.org

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In The Picture



30

No more deaths . . .

A protester holds a placard at a demonstration, organised by Streets Kitchen - Twitter @StreetsKitchen - in London on March 3 following the deaths of rough sleepers during a spell of extremely cold weather.

The rally gathered in Whitehall - opposite the home of the UK Prime Minister Theresa May - and called for an end to the cuts in social spending, welfare provision and affordable housing that led to the current housing crisis.

After briefly blocking the road the protesters headed off to Covent Garden, Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus - all full of tourists and

shoppers - with a large contingent of police in pursuit. Mounted officers were employed - not a common sight during London protests - which many saw as provocative, given that the protesters were quite amiable and hurting no-one.

The march then proceeded to the Sofia Solidarity Centre, a long-vacant office building in central London which has been occupied and provided shelter for the homeless. Sadly, a court order granting possession to the owners may soon see the occupants back on the street. **CT**

***Ron Fassbender** is a London-based photographer. His Flickr feed is www.flickr.com/theweeklybull*

CHRISTOPHER DOUGLAS

Cormac McCarthy's unfilmable masterwork

Blood Meridian is a violent and intensely religious novel that articulates our worst fears – about the world, about each other and about God

We're about 10 years into the much-rumoured development of a film adaptation of Blood Meridian, Cormac McCarthy's most famous novel. The track record of the project has been terrible.

Its writers and producers seem stuck at the script stage. But that's for a good reason. Blood Meridian is probably unfilmable. It's not because of its vistas of gruesome violence, its historical tale of US imperialism in the mid-19th century Southwest, or its narrative lyricism untranslatable to film. Rather, it's because the novel's religious vision is terrifying, and the casting required to capture it probably impossible.

Blood Meridian tells the story of a nameless protagonist known only as "the kid." The kid joins John Joel Glanton's real-life gang of American mercenaries circa 1849-50. Although hired by the Mexican states of Sonora and Chihuahua to combat the Apaches and Comanches with whom they struggled over territory, the notorious gang soon began killing and collecting "receipts" – that is, scalps – from other, peaceful, Indigenous peoples, and then from the very Mexican citizens they were hired to protect.

There have been plenty of violent films depicting historical fiction, including ones made

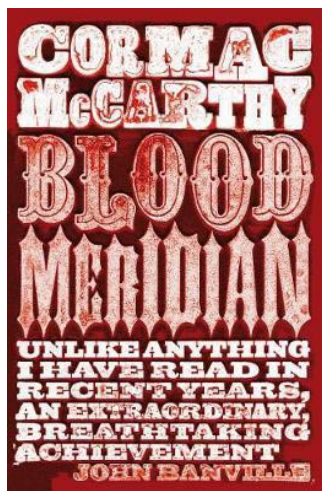
from McCarthy's other work like No Country for Old Men, so it is not impossible to imagine a film adaptation of this critically acclaimed novel following suit. But what makes the film unlikely is the dark religious vision attached to the novel's gruesome excesses. That vision centres around "judge Holden," a terrifying character also based in the historical record.

The judge is a massive, hairless, albino man who excels in shooting, languages, horsemanship, dancing, music, drawing, diplomacy, science and anything else he seems to put his mind to. He is also the chief proponent and philosopher of the Glanton gang's lawless warfare.

Previous plans proposed casting Vincent D'Onofrio in the role of the judge, and he may plausibly have the required size and otherworldly weirdness. Still, it might be impossible to capture the character's quality of almost supernatural evil and strangeness as

depicted in the novel.

The judge has been likened by some critics to a kind of Satan figure, who in one memorable scene brings Glanton's gang the gift of gunpowder – reminiscent of the Satan in John Milton's Paradise Lost, who likewise invents gunpowder during the angels' rebellion from heaven.



Blood Meridian: The cover

CHRISTOPHER DOUGLAS

But unlike Satan, the judge is no rebel; he seems, rather, to be highly attuned to the violent, material world around him. He's not an antagonist of creation, but rather an enthusiast of the violent wickedness he finds already there. This has led several influential critics to interpret the judge not so much as a devilish opponent, but as a kind of sub-deity in the unusual second-century Common Era body of religious ideas known as Gnosticism.

Gnostic thought: The judge as an evil god's deputy

In some sense, the Gnostic thought that briefly flourished in the ancient Mediterranean world turned Judeo-Christian theology upside down, questioning the goodness of the traditional Jewish god. It would come to be seen as a heresy by what eventually became orthodox Christian theology.

To get a sense of the true strangeness of Gnosticism, it's best to think of it as having evolved out of failed Jewish and Christian apocalypticism.

This apocalypticism's modern incarnation is the premillennial dispensationalism animating white American evangelicals today — the expectation that we're living in the End Times, with God soon to return in judgement.

In the apocalyptic worldview, God had a cosmic enemy, Satan, who had been given lordship over the world temporarily. Apocalyptic Jews and Christians imagined their suffering and pain not as punishment from God, but as the consequence of this temporary dominion on Earth of Satan and his worldly servants.

But God would soon send a divine judge and conqueror to sweep away these powers in a cosmic battle that would institute a heavenly kingdom on Earth. Early Christians believed this divine conqueror would be a returned Jesus.

But Jesus didn't come soon. Faced with the collapse of these apocalyptic expectations, some early Christians adapted their views. In this theological innovation, the suffering of God's people — now Christians rather than Jews — wasn't caused by the temporary rule of God's

cosmic enemy and his earthly vassals. Rather, the creator-god himself, Yahweh, was causing human suffering, or was ignorant or uncaring about it.

In some Gnostic cosmology, humans contained a divine spark from an immaterial, good, spiritual plane full of divine beings. Those sparks had been captured and put into base material bodies by this "evil" creator-god Yahweh.

Yahweh, either deceptive or ignorant, claimed to be the only god. He kept us in ignorance of our divine, spiritual origins, but the higher spiritual plane sent messengers to alert us to our true natures. Gnostic Christians believed Jesus to be such a messenger. Meanwhile, this Yahweh, newly reconceptualised as evil, employed deputies to ensure his rule and our continued ignorance. One such deputy has been interpreted as Blood Meridian's judge. He motivates the Glanton gang toward war. He tells parables that ensure their ignorance. He seems highly sympathetic to the material world and the violence he finds therein, "as if," the novel puts it, "his counsel had been sought at its creation." How could one cast this charismatic, evil sub-deity in a film version?

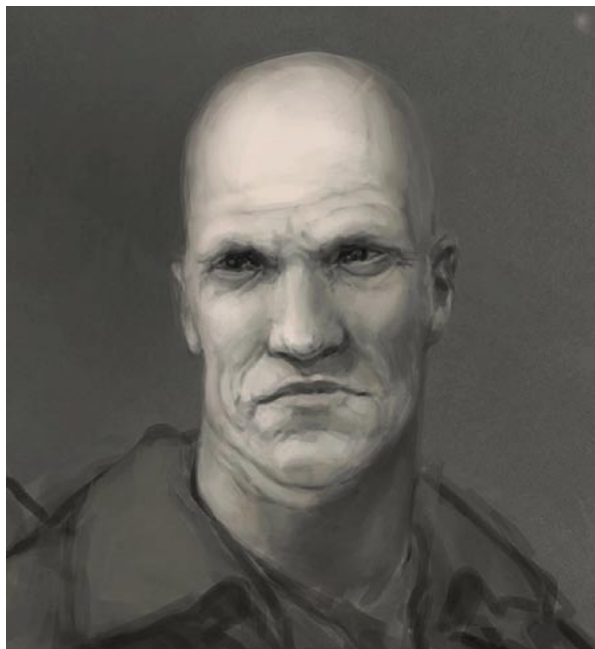
To early Gnostic Christians — and maybe to readers of Blood Meridian today — this scheme seemed to be a reasonable answer to why a good god didn't intervene to stop human suffering, the predation of human on human violence. As the judge asks of this hypothetical good god, "If God meant to interfere in the degeneracy of mankind, would he not have done so by now?"

Even if we don't buy this loopy theology when reading Blood Meridian, we have to somehow account for the sympathy the judge seems to have for the violence and suffering in the world. Perhaps this is why McCarthy portrays the judge as a kind of evolutionary scientist.

The novel takes place around the mid-19th century, a time when advances in geology and biology were leading Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace to articulate their theory of evolution through random mutation and natural selection.

These ideas were in the air at the time, and

CHRISTOPHER DOUGLAS



A fan's depiction of judge Holden. Art: Villains Wiki

McCarthy strangely portrays the judge as on the cutting edge of science. He collects and sketches dinosaur fossils. He sees in the geological record eons of past time, calling the rocks he finds the “words of God.”

He’s also an ornithologist, reminiscent of Darwin in the Galapagos, collecting finches. He gives lectures on the age of the Earth and the fossils of extinct species to the assembled gang, which the novel often refers to as “apes,” recalling the popular caricature of evolution.

And it’s likely that McCarthy had evolution on his mind when he was writing *Blood Meridian* in the early 1980s. A prohibition against teaching evolution had been struck down by the Supreme Court in 1968. In response, Christian fundamentalists had proposed a new, “scientific” version of Biblical creation that could be taught alongside evolution, as an alternative. Legal challenges to this new “creation science” were making their way through the courts across many Southern states while McCarthy was writing his novel.

Opponents – and eventually the Supreme Court – contended that this was mere religion dressed up as scientific method. Like another novel published in 1985, Carl Sagan’s *Contact*,

McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* seemed to be closely attentive to the evolution versus creation science debate that was the context for its composition. And like other American writers, McCarthy was watching the unexpected return of the nascent Christian Right to political power and social prominence.

Blood Meridian seems to share creation scientists’ dark views about evolution: That there’s no way a good God would choose the suffering entailed in natural selection to generate the diversity of our planet’s species. Natural selection is an intensely amoral process. But it’s absolutely immoral if it was chosen by God.

In natural selection, it’s not the organisms that try hard that get to successfully pass on their genes. Rather, the dice are cast before organisms are born, and a huge amount of luck is involved in whether organisms reproduce, or fall to predation or starvation. These forces of selection pressure are not the unfortunate side effect of progress. They are the critical engine for increased complexity and adaptability.

Any God who chooses this method really doesn’t care about animal and human suffering. Apprehending this theological problem, Christian fundamentalists use it to try to persuade mainline and liberal Christians out of their belief in evolution. Perhaps this is why the judge, ultimately, seems to be both a philosopher and enthusiast for what Darwin would call in *On the Origin of Species* the “war of nature” that he discovers. The judge is sympathetic to the violence inherent in this creation.

Whether the judge is a deputy serving an “evil Yahweh” or a scientist discovering God’s dark designs in nature may not ultimately matter. *Blood Meridian* is an intensely religious novel that articulates our worst fears – about the world, about each other, about God himself. Perhaps it’s best to let this novel lie sleeping. Let’s not awake its power for film audiences at all.

CT

Christopher Douglas is professor of American Literature and Religion, University of Victoria, BC, Canada. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

RAMONA WADI

Drawing Palestine – from prison

Palestinian cartoonist Mohammad Sabaaneh discusses the artwork that landed him in an Israeli jail

Mohammad Sabaaneh's incisive artwork has earned him a barrage of antagonism from Israel and Palestinian political factions. In February 2013, he was issued an administrative detention order by Israel and jailed for five months for alleged association with Hamas through his artwork. Some of his cartoons were published in a book written by Sabaaneh's brother, who is affiliated with Hamas. Israel defined his contribution to the book as "collaboration with Hamas."

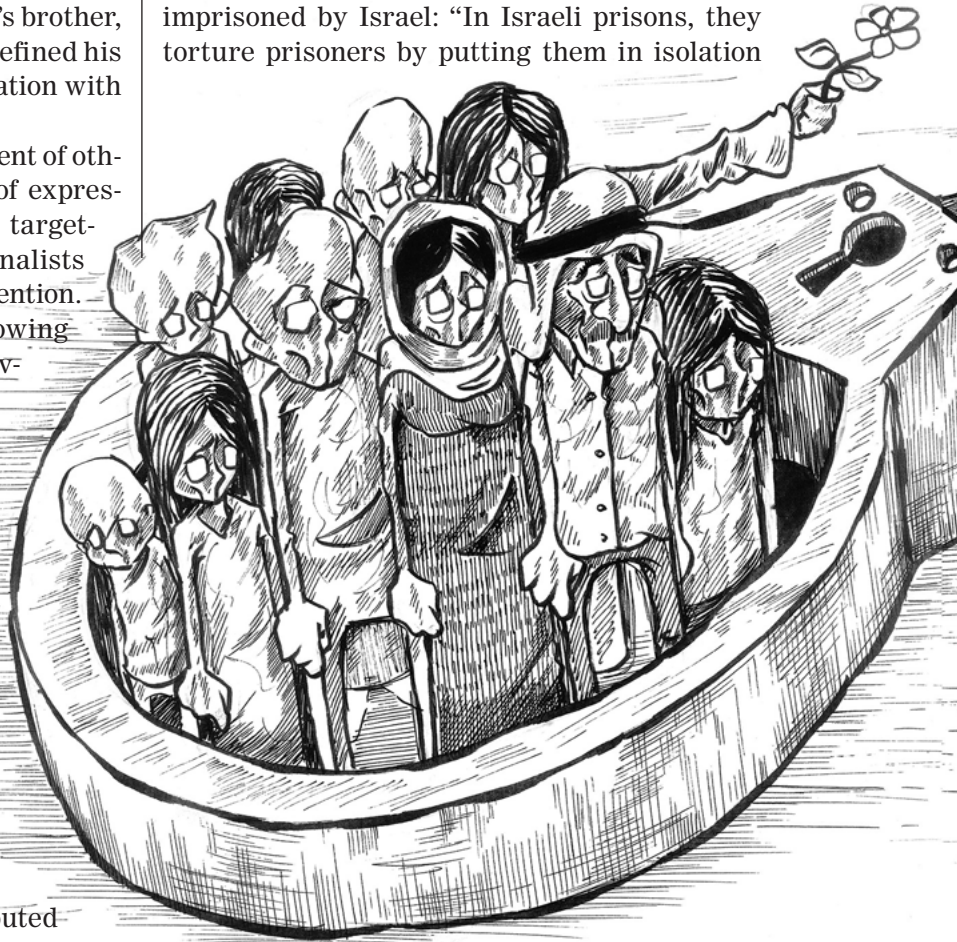
Sabaaneh's experience is reminiscent of other Israeli efforts to target freedom of expression. Palestinian media is regularly targeted, including direct attacks on journalists through physical aggression and detention. With the Palestinian Authority following since passing its Cybercrime Law, avenues for Palestinian independent expression entail censorship risks and punitive measures.

Sabaaneh grew up in Kuwait as part of the Palestinian diaspora, returning to Palestine in September 2000, before the start of the Second Intifada. Sabaaneh's return to Palestine enabled him to discern the difference between the image of the Palestinian prisoner as a "hero" from the outside and the actual human existence of Palestinian political prisoners.

Being imprisoned by Israel contributed

to a new approach in his artistic expression. While in solitary confinement for two weeks, Sabaaneh sought to transcend the dehumanisation, embarking upon an art project that he planned to exhibit upon his release, and that has now been published as a book titled Palestine in Black and White.

Sabaaneh describes his experience while imprisoned by Israel: "In Israeli prisons, they torture prisoners by putting them in isolation



RAMONA WADI

for long periods of time. During this time, the prisoner cannot talk with, or see, anyone.”

He explains further: “I decided to make some artwork to while away these long stretches of time inside the prison, with the intention of exhibiting the art when I was released. The artwork was about Palestinian prisoners, about suffering, questioning and investigations, and family visits.”

To avoid scrutiny, Sabaaneh explains that he drew cartoons without detail: “This was so that

as a “hero.”

This association is not without reason. The practice of administrative detention, which is allowed in international law under exceptional circumstances, has been used by Israel to target any form of Palestinian resistance by detaining individuals indefinitely and renewing their detention periods.

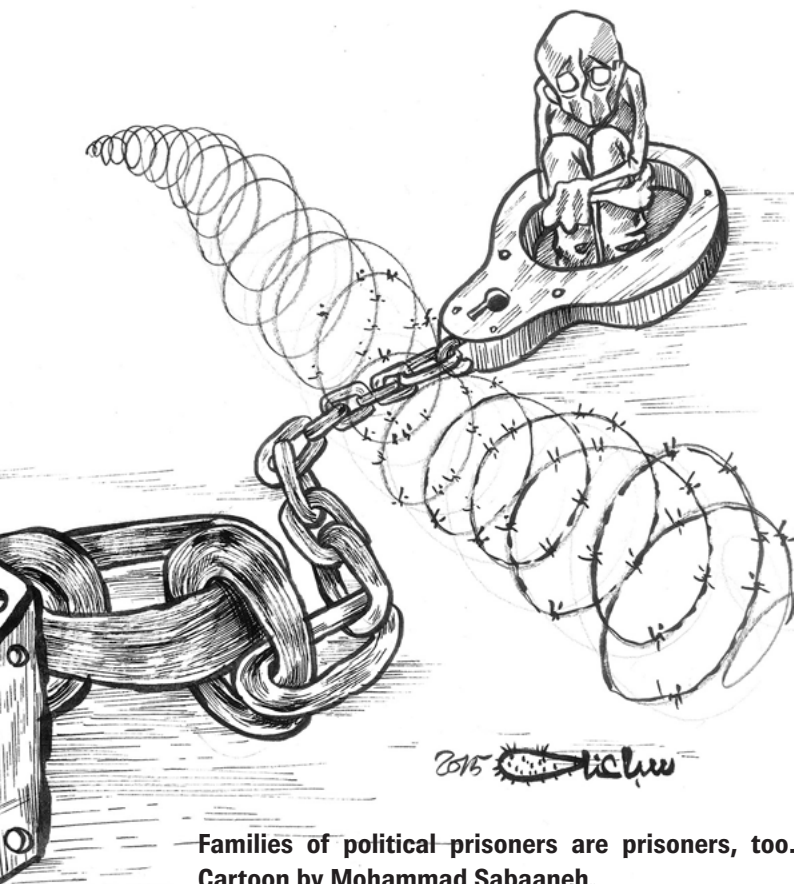
Last month, the Palestinian NGO Addameer released statistics regarding the number of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. The number of Palestinian political prisoners was 6,119 by March 2018.

Without diminishing the status attributed to Palestinian prisoners, Sabaaneh insists upon viewing the human being behind the glorification. On its own, the “hero” image becomes an isolated burden – an identity assumed by the prisoner that is incomplete.

Sabaaneh emphasises the danger of such detachment between the imposed image and the human being, in this case the Palestinian prisoner: “Inside the prisons, the prisoners suffer as human beings. That was what I felt when I was locked in a small bathroom in the Algalami detention centre. They wanted to torture and humiliate me. Yes, I was strong in front of the interrogators and soldiers, but inside I missed my life, my art, my place and my family. And I think that is what I should convey to our audience.”

The art depicting Sabaaneh’s statement is impactful. In one cartoon, titled “Families of political prisoners are prisoners too,” he shows the ramifications of incarceration upon the family, something that is often forgotten when the focus is placed exclusively upon the prisoner.

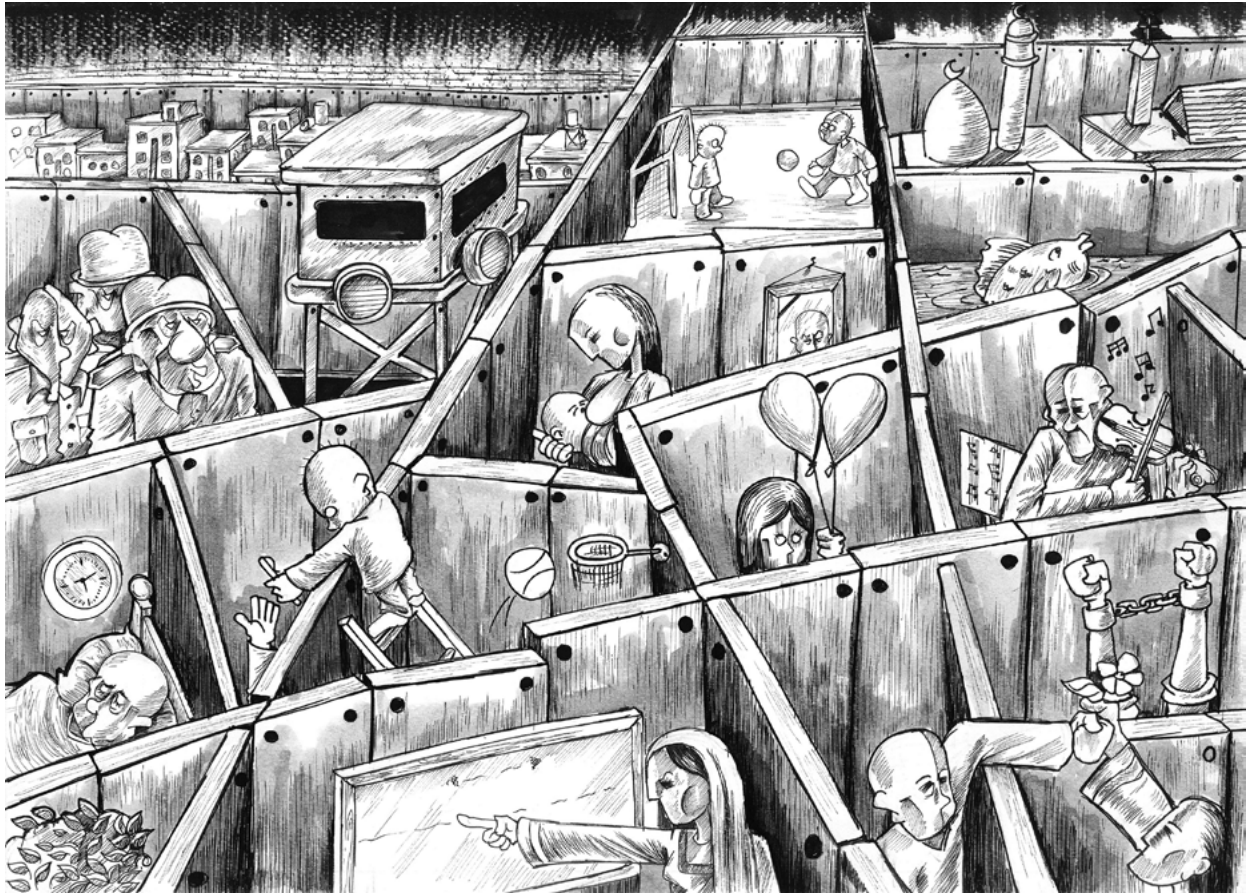
Sabaaneh also believes that “the artist can choose his role.” Keeping to the depiction of Palestinian prisoners, he explains the difference between his expression and that of the mainstream: “Most artists describe the Palestinian as a hero, even if imprisoned or killed by Israelis. Personally, I prefer to convey the message that Palestinians are human beings, so I portray suffering. The hero does not need anyone



Families of political prisoners are prisoners, too. Cartoon by Mohammad Sabaaneh.

nothing would indicate that I was drawing cartoons about the prison experience. When prisoners were released, I would smuggle the cartoons out with them. Upon my release I completed the collection and they are now published in a book.”

One of Sabaaneh’s main subjects is the concept of the Palestinian prisoner. The mainstream narrative, even within Palestine, is the glorification of the Palestinian prisoner



Lives Interrupted, by Mohammad Sabaaneh.

Cartoon courtesy of Saqi Books

36

to stand with him – the hero is strong – but human beings need and demand someone to show solidarity with them.”

He goes on to explain another discrepancy between artistic depiction and reality: “I cannot understand how we can draw children in Israeli prisons as heroes. The stark cartoons in my book convey the reality of the situation and of real people’s lives. In standing with my own people, I will not neglect the duty of explaining the true situation to the people around the world.”

Conveying an understanding of the implosion experienced by Palestinians, Sabaaneh draws upon two experiences – the reactions of the Israeli government and Palestinian factions to his art, and the experience of living under Israel’s military occupation.

Israelis, he says, “attack every cartoon I make. They stop me for hours at the border

when I travel.”

The Palestinian Authority turned out to be no different. In 2015, as a response to the Charlie Hebdo cartoons, Sabaaneh drew a cartoon showing a figure standing on top of the earth, which was interpreted as the artist drawing the Prophet Mohammed. Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas ordered an investigation into the cartoon, which Sabaaneh says was misinterpreted.

Abbas had travelled to Paris with other world leaders, including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, for a march in solidarity for press freedom in the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo killings. However, six months earlier, in the summer of 2014, Netanyahu had launched Operation Protective Edge against Gaza, killing more than 2,000 Palestinian civilians. Before the march in Paris, Netanyahu manipulated the narrative on freedom of expression to

RAMONA WADI

insist: “Israel is being attacked by the very same forces that attack Europe. Israel stands with Europe. Europe must stand with Israel.”

With Palestinians, Abbas has encroached upon freedom of expression – which culminated last year with the Cybercrime Law, largely seen as the means through which the Palestinian Authority can stifle dissent.

Sabaaneh stressed that his art is critical of all Palestinian factions: “In Palestine, the political factions level charges of supporting Hamas, or denigrating faith, to attack my art through social media. Once I received death threat because of my cartoons. It is the hardest for me when I am attacked by my own people.”

One of Sabaaneh’s cartoons, titled “Lives Interrupted,” portrays the restrictions experienced by Palestinians. It shows Palestinians living life in enclosed spaces with little prospect of communication or movement.

Sabaaneh explains that his artistic approach towards these restrictions. He insists that his art is also an emotional expression, or reaction to the human rights violations around him: “I reflect what I feel in my art. I do not decide what to draw when I draw anything. What I know is how stark and dense my artwork in the book is. How I feel it reflects my life.”

Sabaaneh’s words are a reminder of the February 2018 press release by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the occupied Palestinian territory (OCHA), detailing the freedom-of-movement restrictions for Palestinians in Hebron City. It cites “over 100 physical obstacles, including 20 checkpoints” as part of the segregation imposed upon Palestinians. Restrictions in the name of purported security concerns, OCHA stated, has turned “a once thriving area into a ghost town.”

In his art, Sabaaneh reflects those human



Mohammad Sabaaneh:
“Our artistic response will be explosive. If it is not, then you are not an artist and you are not human.”

rights violations: the indignity of checkpoints, military incursions that throttle Palestinian freedom, the Apartheid Wall, and exploitation of labour. His art brings together the Palestinian experience, which is usually summarised in ways that detract from its social and psychological ramifications. He emphasized: “When you travel from any city in the West Bank to another, you will understand what I mean. You will face checkpoints; then you will face settlements; then you will face the segregation wall; then another checkpoint.”

And of the human aspect, Sabaaneh ruminates further:

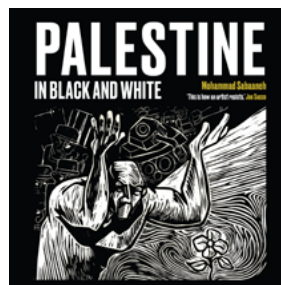
“When you enter a Palestinian city you will meet former prisoners. Then you will see the house of a martyr and posters of him on the wall of a nearby street.”

What of the artistic response to the humanitarian aspect of the political violence suffered by Palestinians? Sabaaneh is unequivocal: “Our artistic response will be explosive. If it is not, then you are not an artist and you are not human. There is no need to decide what you want to talk about in your art. Your feeling will lead you.”

CT

Ramona Wadi is an independent researcher, and freelance journalist. Her articles, book reviews, interviews, and blogs have been published in Middle East Monitor, Upside Down World, Truthout, Irish Left Review, Gramsci Oggi, Cubarte, Rabble.ca, and other outlets.

This article first appeared at www.mintpressnews.com



**PALESTINE
IN BLACK AND
WHITE**

**Mohammad
Sabaaneh**

Published by
Saqi Books, London
£10.99

Why won't the West listen to Putin?

State-of-the-nation speech warns of new dangers to world stability as the US and its allies increase threats of war against Iraq and Syria

Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent state-of-the-Nation speech Thursday represents a liminal event in the East-West strategic balance – and an ominous one.

That the strategic equation is precarious today comes through clearly in Putin's words. The US and Russia have walked backwards over the threshold of sanity first crossed in the right direction by their predecessors in 1972 with the signing of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

Amid the “balance of terror” that reigned pre-1972, sensible statesmen on both sides concluded and implemented the ABM treaty which, in effect, guaranteed “mutual assured destruction” – the (altogether fitting) acronym was MAD – if either side attempted a nuclear attack on the other. MAD might not sound much better than “balance of terror,” but the ABM treaty introduced a significant degree of stability for 30 years.

The treaty itself was the result of painstaking negotiation with considerable understanding and good faith shown by both sides. The formidable task challenging us intelligence specialists was to be able to assure President Nixon that, if he decided to trust, we could monitor Soviet adherence and promptly report any violations. (Incidentally, the Soviets did cheat. In mid-1983 we detected a huge early warning radar installation at Krasnoyarsk in Siberia – a clear violation of the ABM treaty. President Reagan called them on it, and the Soviets eventually tore it down.)

During the US-Soviet negotiations on the ABM treaty, a third of the CIA Soviet Foreign Policy Branch, which I led at the time, was involved in various supporting roles. I was in Moscow on May 26, 1972 for the treaty signing by President Richard Nixon and Soviet Communist Party General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev. I recall not being able to suppress an audible sigh of relief. MAD, I believed, would surely be preferable to the highly precarious strategic situation that preceded it. It was.

In his speech on March 1, President Putin included an accurate tutorial on what happened after three decades, noting that Moscow was “categorically against” the US decision in 2002 to withdraw from the ABM treaty. He described the treaty as “the cornerstone of the international security system.”

Putin explained that under the treaty, “the parties had the right to deploy ballistic missile defence systems in only one of its regions. Russia deployed these systems around Moscow, and the US around its Grand Forks land-based ICBM base [in North Dakota].” (He did not mention the aborted attempt to deploy a second installation at Krasnoyarsk.)

The Russian president explained: “The ABM treaty not only created an atmosphere of trust, but also prevented either party from recklessly using nuclear weapons ... because the limited number of ballistic missile defence systems



Vladimir Putin: no matter how bad – even mad – the MAD concept may seem, it played a huge stabilising role.

made the potential aggressor vulnerable to a response strike.”

Putin was saying, in effect, that no matter how bad – even mad – the MAD concept may seem, it played a huge stabilising role. He added that the US rejected all Russian proposals toward constructive dialogue on the post-ABM treaty situation, and grossly underestimated Russia’s ability to respond. The Russian president then gave chapter and verse, cum video clips, on an array of new Russian weaponry which, he claimed, rendered missile defense systems “useless.” The show-and-tell segment of Putin’s speech has been widely reported.

David Sanger, the New York Times’s go-to guy on key issues, who is among the best in the trade on reporting as “flat facts” things like WMD in Iraq and “Russian meddling,” wrote the lead on Putin’s speech in the Times together with Neil MacFarquhar. The meme this time is

not flat fact, but skepticism: “Do these weapons really exist? Or is Putin bluffing?”

In support of their skepticism, Sanger and MacFarquhar blithely report that “analysts writing on Facebook and elsewhere leaned toward the bluff theory.” So, QED!

And echoing former National Intelligence Director James Clapper’s insight that Russians are “typically, almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favour, whatever,” Sanger and MacFarquhar remind New York Times readers that “deception lies at the heart of current Russian military doctrine.”

The two New York Times journalists did get one thing right at the very end of their article; namely, “For years, Mr Putin has chafed at the perceived disrespect showed to him and Russia by the United States. ‘Nobody listened to Rus-

sia,' he said near the end of his speech, to huge applause. 'Well, listen now.'

Russians, like all proud and gifted people, resent attempts to demean or marginalise them. Putin may have seen his speech, in part, as a blistering response to former president Barack Obama's dismissive comments that "Russia doesn't make anything" and is no more than "a regional power."

It is to be hoped that the marine generals running US defence policy, rather than calling Putin's bluff, will now encourage President Donald Trump to take up Putin's latest offer to "sit down at the negotiating table" and "work together ... to ensure global security" – taking into account that "strategic parity" is now a reality.

Referring to what he called "our duty to inform our partners" about Russia's claimed ability to render ABM systems "useless," Putin added: "When the time comes, foreign and defence ministry experts will have many opportunities to discuss all these matters with them, if of course our partners so desire."

Victory has gone to the what Pope Francis called the "blood drenched arms merchants"

Putin also said, "We are greatly concerned by certain provisions of the revised Nuclear Posture Review," which envisages a nuclear response to "conventional arms attacks and even to a cyber threat."

He described Russia's military doctrine, as "very clear and specific":

"Russia reserves the right to use nuclear weapons solely in response to a nuclear attack, or an attack with other weapons of mass destruction against the country or its allies, or an act of aggression against us with the use of conventional weapons that threatens the very existence of the state."

With burgeoning threats against Iran and Syria, it is to be hoped that someone in Washington thinks to ask Putin which countries he includes among Russia's allies.

After the speech, Pentagon spokeswoman Dana White told reporters, "Our missile defence has never been about" Russia. Now, as Harry Truman would have put it, the Russians "weren't born yesterday." Putin has been extremely derisive toward those promoting the bromide that ABM installations in and around Europe are designed to defend against missiles from Iran – or North Korea.

In an unusually candid remark on missile defence on April 17, 2014, the day before Crimea was annexed, Putin told a national TV audience: "Missile defence ... is no less, and probably even more important, than NATO's eastward expansion. Incidentally, our decision on Crimea was partially prompted by this."

To take some liberties with Shakespeare, "The fault is not in our stars, but in our Star Wars." Ever since President Ronald Reagan was sold on the notion that a "Star Wars" ABM system could provide the US with complete protection from missile attack, exceptional opportunities to restrain – or even put an end to – the nuclear arms race have been squandered. Victory has gone to the arms profiteers – those whom Pope Francis described to Congress as the "blood drenched arms merchants."

The ABM project has been called, with justification, the world's largest corporate welfare programme. Jonathan Marshall today explains quite well what should scare us – still more billions likely to be thrown at the makers of systems that, most serious scientists and engineers agree, can always be defeated, and comparatively cheaply, way or another.

During the mid-80s, I had a front-row seat watching President Ronald Reagan blow what appeared to be a golden chance for a comprehensive peace. I had spent most of my CIA career focusing on Soviet foreign policy and was able to tell the senior US officials I was briefing that Mikhail Gorbachev, in my view, was the real deal. Even so, I was hardly prepared for how far Gorbachev was willing to go toward disarmament. At the 1986 summit with President Ronald Reagan in Reykjavik, Iceland, Gorbachev proposed

that all nuclear weapons be eliminated within ten years.

Reagan reportedly almost rose to the occasion, but was counselled to reject Gorbachev's condition that any research on anti-ballistic missiles be confined to laboratories for that decade. "Star Wars," the largest and most wasteful defense-industry program in recent memory, won the day.

President Putin is as interested in stemming the strategic arms race as was Gorbachev

I know the characters who, for whatever reason, danced to the tune of "Star Wars," Reagan's benighted, wistful wish for an airtight defense against strategic missiles.

The naysayers to peace included ideologues like CIA Director William Casey and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, windsocks like CIA Deputy Director Robert Gates and one of his proteges, Fritz Ermarth, a viscerally anti-Russian functionary and former Northrop Corporation employee, during Reykjavik.

According to author Jim Mann, several years after Reykjavik, Ermarth reflected on how he had been wrong in being overly suspicious of Gorbachev and how the intuition of Ronald Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz had been more perceptive.

By all appearances, President Putin is as in-

terested in stemming the strategic arms race as was Gorbachev. In his address, Putin talked about this particular moment being liminal – he called it "a turning point for the entire world." Will there be anyone in Washington at the other end of the phone, if Moscow calls? If, in effect, the military-industrial-congressional-intelligence-media complex answers, ABM developers will continue to fatten their purses and squander our children's future.

It may be time to recall the admonition of President Dwight D. Eisenhower in a speech he gave 65 years ago: "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its labourers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. ... We pay for a single destroyer with new homes that could have housed more than 8,000 people. ... This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron. [...] Is there no other way the world may live?"

'Nuff said.

CT

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Savior in inner-city Washington. He served 30 years as an US Army Intelligence and CIA analyst, and in retirement co-founded Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

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SAM PIZZIGATI

Media giant's noble challenge to moguls

Newspaper publishing titan EW Scripps would be ashamed at what his company has become

In today's monopolistic media environment, the EW Scripps Company doesn't rate as anything close to a top-tier power. The Cincinnati-based TV and digital media provider's main claim to fame these days may well be its sponsorship of America's National Spelling Bee.

How inconsequential has Scripps become? Scripps CEO Adam Symson, the company reported earlier this month, only took home \$1.9 million in cash and stock last year. The nation's top seven media chief execs, by contrast, averaged \$49.1 million in 2016, the latest year with stats available.

My, how the mighty have fallen. The Scripps company, back in the days of founder EW Scripps, rated as a major powerhouse on the American media scene. In fact, old EW invented the notion of the modern daily newspaper chain. He would not be pleased to see that his company has slid into second-tier status.

But old man Scripps would be even more displeased by how his namesake company handles CEO compensation, only not displeased in the way you might think. CEO Adam Symson's \$1.9 million – and the \$3.9 million that went to his predecessor in his last year as the company's chief exec – wouldn't have struck Scripps as too little. He would have considered these millions much too much.

A century ago, newspaper publisher EW Scripps ranked as one of America's fiercest

egalitarians. The World War I years would see him help guide America's first great national campaign to seriously tax the rich.

World War I more or less officially began for the United States on April 2, 1917, the day President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress to declare war to make the world "safe for democracy." Only days before, on March 31, the Scripps-backed national organization that had led the push for peace – the American Union Against Militarism – had declared a war of its own. Against plutocracy.

The group's activists announced they would now lead a new American Committee on War Finance. Their basic goal: to place the war's financial burden on America's most affluent.

"The strongest pacifist influence in America today," the Chicago Daily News would report, has "suddenly turned from efforts to prevent war to means of financing it."

The war's financial burden, Scripps and his fellow activists believed, would be incredibly massive. To meet the bill for waging actual war in Europe, activists believed, the nation would either have to directly attack plutocratic power and tax the rich at significant rates or borrow from the rich, by selling war bonds, a policy choice that would likely leave the United States even more plutocratic.

The challenge this stark choice posed exhilarated EW Scripps. The war, he felt, would enable a thrust against plutocratic fortune that

SAM PIZZIGATI

peace would never countenance.

“The country will be the gainer by tapping and reducing the great fortunes,” Scripps noted shortly after the American Committee on War Finance went public, “and once the people learn how easy it is, and how beneficial to all parties concerned it is to get several billions a year by an Income Tax, the country hereafter may be depended upon to raise most, if not all, of the revenues for the Nation, and the States, and the cities from this source.”

‘I dread the killing of men. I dread the syph-
lisation of vast numbers of our men,’ Scripps passionately continued, “but I gladly welcome the financial consequences of war.”

Summed up the publishing giant: “From the source which none of us have yet even dreamed of – that of the infliction of a great war – we may draw the greatest reform and the greatest blessings to our people.”

The American Committee on War Finance would be the progressive vehicle for realizing these blessings. Within weeks after the war’s declaration, the Committee had assembled a network of two thousand volunteers across the country, circulated tens of thousands of “pledge” flyers, and started publishing that pledge as an advertisement in America’s major daily newspapers.

Americans who signed the Committee pledge were committing themselves “to further the prompt enactment into law” of the boldest tax-the-rich proposal any American political grouping had ever advanced. They were demanding a cap on income, what the Committee would call “a conscription of wealth.”

No American, the Committee tax plan for the war proposed, ought to be able to retain after taxes “an annual net income in excess of \$100,000,” almost \$2 million in today’s dollars.

“If the government has a right to confiscate one man’s life for public purposes,” Committee chair Amos Pinchot explained. “it certainly ought to have the right to confiscate another man’s wealth for the same purposes.”

“Some of us have very large incomes,” E. W. Scripps added in a memorandum for the House Ways and Means Committee. “We em-

ploy servants who produce nothing for the common good, and only minister to our vices. We purchase costly and showy clothing, houses, food, furniture, automobiles, jewellery, etc, etc, the production of which has taken the labor of many hundreds of thousands of men and women, who, if they were not so employed would be producing other commodities in such quantity as to cheapen them and make them more accessible to the poor.”

“An enormously high rate of Income Tax,” Scripps argued, “would have the effect of diverting all this labor, what is given to practically useless things, into other channels where production would be useful to the whole people.”

The public reaction to the Committee’s income cap proposal would be quick and encouraging. Signed pledges, many accompanied by contributions, poured into the Committee’s office in Manhattan.

The letters came from the nation’s every corner. From labor came endorsements from the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and the United Mine Workers. Agricultural leaders formed a Farmers’ National Committee on War Finance led by the secretary of the National Dairy Union and a past master of the Pennsylvania State Grange. From academia came a statement signed by 309 professors of economics from 47 colleges and universities, Cornell, Harvard, and the University of Chicago among them.

Even a New York banker – George Foster Peabody, a former Democratic Party national treasurer – signed on to the “conscription of wealth” cause.

By mid May 1917, the “conscription of wealth” campaign had completely redefined the nation’s tax-the-rich frame of reference. Less than a year before, after the passage of the 1916 Revenue Act, a top tax rate at 15 percent on the nation’s highest incomes appeared impressive. Now Americans were buzzing about the prospect of a 100 percent top tax rate.

“The people,” as Amos Pinchot testified to the Senate Finance Committee in May, “are solidly behind the movement.”

But Congress would not be. The war revenue

SAM PIZZIGATI

bill finally enacted in October 1917 would deeply disappoint progressives. Everywhere they looked in the war funding legislation, they saw, at best, faltering half-steps toward effective progressive taxation. Instead of taxing the rich, they charged, lawmakers were relying much too heavily on borrowing from them.

Tax historians have generally not shared this harsh contemporary progressive judgment. The 1917 Revenue Act, they note, more than quadrupled the tax rate on income over \$2 million, from 15 to 67 percent. A wealthy American who reported \$300,000 in 1916 income paid less than \$30,000 in federal income tax. That wealthy American's tax bill, after the tax increase in the 1917 Revenue Act, would be almost \$93,000 on the same income.

A significant hike, to be sure. But that wealthy taxpayer, under the "conscription of wealth" proposal, would have faced a \$200,000 tax bill, over twice as much.

EW. Scripps personally pushed for a pay cap even stiffer than the American Committee on War Finance's proposal. Scripps wanted no one

American to pocket more than \$50,000 in annual income, a little over \$1 million in today's dollars, after paying taxes.

Scripps CEO Adam Symson made almost double in 2017, before taxes, what EW. Scripps saw as the nation's appropriate "maximum wage." And Symson, after the GOP tax cut enacted this past December, now faces a top-bracket tax rate of only 38.9 percent, a pale shadow of the 67 percent top rate Congress adopted in 1917 and just a hair over half the 77 percent top rate that Congress would go on to enact in 1918.

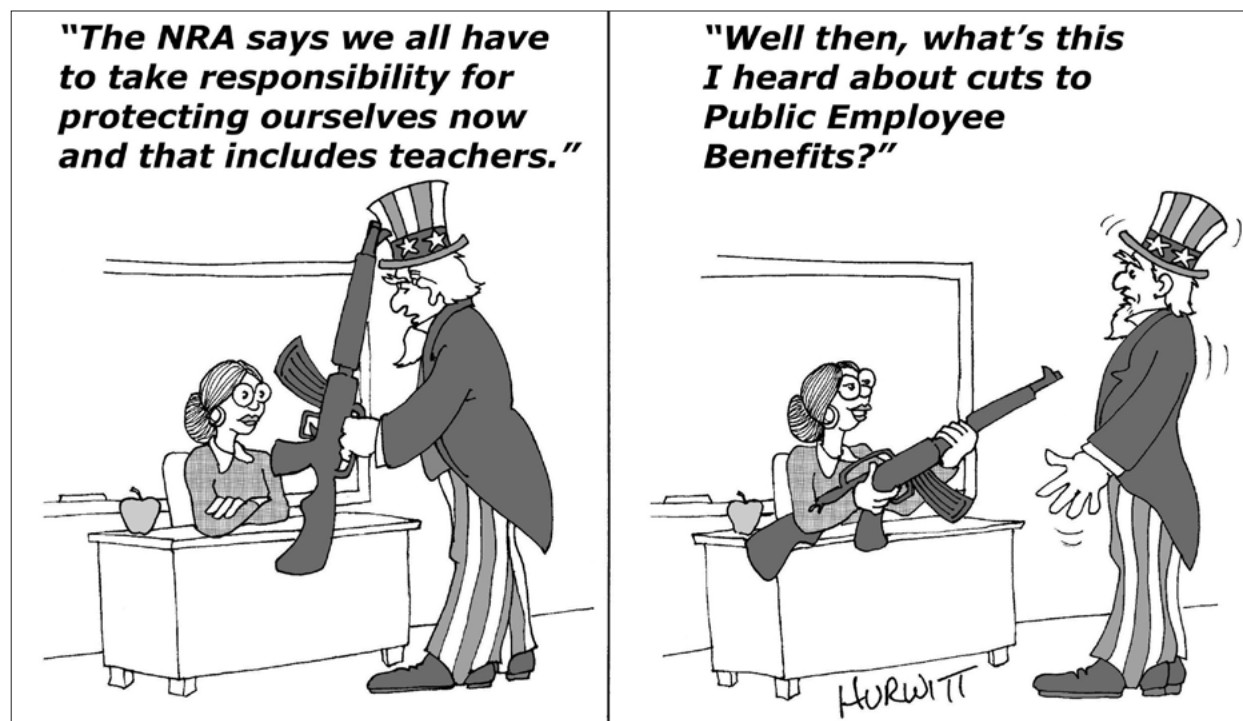
No, EW. Scripps would not be pleased, not by the millions his company is shelling out to executives – and not by the soft-touch tax rate lawmakers have placed on those millions. **CT**

Sam Pizzigati co-edits *Inequality.org*. Among his books on maldistributed income and wealth: *The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970*. His latest book, *The Case for a Maximum Wage*, will appear this spring. Follow him at [@Too_Much_Online.org](https://www.toomuchonline.org)

44

HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitt



ColdType Insights

CONTRIBUTORS: Palestine
Advocacy | Rick Salutin
Sarah Stitzlein | Jim Hightower
Steve Topple | Barry S. Borsitter



Billboard in Bridgeport, CT draws compares apartheid in Israel and the former apartheid regime in South Africa. Photo: Palestine Advocacy Project

Billboards protest Israel's child prisoners

New billboards points out similarity between plight of Nelson Mandela with Israeli treatment of jailed 17-year-old

Palestine Advocacy Project's latest billboard campaign intends to raise awareness about Ahed Tamimi, the 17-year-old Palestinian activist who is facing up to ten years in Israel's military prison following an altercation with Israeli soldiers.

On December 19, the Israeli military raided and ransacked Ahed's home, arresting her, her mother and cousin, and charged Ahed with 12 criminal counts, including assault and incitement.

During a protest, Ahed's

14-year-old cousin was shot in the head at close range by an Israeli soldier. Israeli soldiers then invaded the Tamimi family's home and threatened the entire family. Ahed demanded the soldiers leave. After they refused, the unarmed Ahed slapped one of the heavily armed soldiers. It is clear from a video that later went viral, Ahed posed no actual threat to these soldiers.

The billboard compares the apartheid regime in Israel with the former apartheid regime in South Africa. The text strikes

through the name of Nelson Mandela and instead proposes Ahed Tamimi just below. Both Nelson Mandela (imprisoned for 27 years by South Africa's apartheid government) and Ahed symbolise courageous resistance to a repressive government and apartheid systems.

Ahed, who spent her 17th birthday in military prison, was arrested without charge and can be held up to six months with no due process rights, like so many other Palestinians. When she does go to trial, she will be in a court that has a 99.74 percent conviction rate for Palestinians.

Mona Abdo an activist with the Palestine Advocacy Project said, "Like Nelson Mandela for South Africa during apartheid, Ahed Tamimi has become a symbol of Palestine's 50 years of resistance to Israeli's brutal occupation and apartheid system. The world called for the release of Nelson Mandela then, and now we must call for the release of Ahed Tamimi and the 350 other child prisoners held in Israel's military prisons." **CT**

The Palestine Advocacy Project creates public media and education campaigns that expose Americans to the Palestinian struggle and advocate for an end to Israeli human rights abuses. www.palestineadvocacyproject.org

45

It's all in the name: Populism is democracy

Populism is like the symptom of a disease in the heart of democracy, attempting to heal itself, writes **Rick Salutin**

Is “democracy” dying? I put democracy in “scare quotes” – literally here – since it implies that democracy has one, unambiguous meaning: a system in which “the people” vote every few years, then recede, leaving their interests in the control of elected representatives and parties.

The prime suspect in this death by murder is populism. Panic among the respectable classes hit a new high after the Italian election earlier this month, when populist parties routed the traditional ones on the left and right. The New York Times called the vote “a tidal turn of anti-immigrant, anti-European Union and anti-democratic fervour.” I don’t quite see why anti-democratic gets included in the list, since no party advocated eliminating elections.

Academic Yascha Mounk’s new book is called *The People vs. Democracy*. He calls “the very survival of liberal democracy in doubt ... From Great Britain to the US and from Germany to Hungary,” at the hands of populism.

What I fail to see is any inherent opposition between democracy and populism. Populism isn’t the enemy of



BERNIE SANDERS: Would have got votes – if he had been on offer.

Photo: Wikimedia

democracy; it springs from it and yearns for it. The “people” don’t have to be bullied into “democracy” by bright journalists and academics. They’re the ones who demanded and fought for it. Populism is democratic, that’s why they call it populism.

In fact it’s a kind of slander on the people to accuse them this way. They put up with an unconscionable amount of crap from our liberal forms of democracy. Take Greece, a good example of a battered populous.

For years it choked economically on measures imposed by unelected Eurocrats in Brussels. Then the people tossed out the old parties and elected a brand new one, Syriza. It had a tinge of populism. The EU got more vindictive.

So Syriza held a referendum asking the people, in effect: Are you serious? To everyone’s surprise, they said they were – but Syriza backed down anyway. So if you’re the people, who you gonna turn to? There’s despair there, disillusion, demoralizing emigration – but, at least so far, no anti-democratic momentum.

Take Honduras, where the last election was blatantly stolen (with US and Canadian approval). Or Mexico, where Manuel Lopez Obrador is running a third time, having had victory swiped last time and likely to happen again, despite a huge lead. He’s a “fiery populist.”

What stands out in these cases, isn’t that the people occasionally grow weary with the frustrations of elections, but that they stick with them doggedly despite all the bad experience. Why? They know the alternatives may be even worse. They don’t require lectures, thank you

The US of Trump may be the best example of anti-democratic populism. He has disdain for elections and alternatives. (“I alone can fix it.”) But it wasn’t their fault – or at least those in the rust belt states that gave him his victory – that he was the only candidate who voiced their hard-won insight that “free trade” deals were vast deceptions destroying lives and communities. Many, probably most, would’ve voted for Bernie Sanders, had he been on offer.

Some populist leaders are

anti-democratic; some followers are racists and haters. But at populism's core is the common human need to speak out and be heard. Populism is more like the symptom of a disease in the heart of democracy, attempting to heal itself, with potentially lethal side effects.

OK, but what if the worst happens and liberal democracy as we know it does succumb? It would be mourned, but would it mean the end of democracy?

That depends on whether you take a Eurocentric view of democracy or a broader, anthropological one. Most of us grew up learning that democracy was "invented" or "discovered" in Greece – a sort of political eureka moment. It stirred again

with Magna Carta and the British parliamentary tradition; then was refined by the US founding fathers. Hmm, that does sound a tad Eurocentric.

The late British anthropologist Jack Goody had a different view. Based on his field work, he felt democracy was a universal human impulse that expressed itself in various forms in different eras and locales. Where others saw "Asiatic despotism," he perceived alternate versions of democracy, as in Confucius', "Anyone who loses the people loses the state." That's almost populist. **CT**

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Rick Salutin is a Toronto-based activist and author. This article first appeared in the Toronto Star

promise students that disciplinary actions that stem from peaceful protest will not be held against them when they seek college admission.

Immediately after the Parkland shootings, some scholars urged society to consider "the nature of education and schooling in American society." "Indeed, we need an educational response to the shootings. This response should account for the purposes of our schools within American democracy and offer students opportunities to learn, even in the face of tragedy. As the author of a new book on how schools can get students to become more civically engaged, and a 2012 book on how schools can cultivate the skills necessary for political dissent, I contend that the student protesters that have emerged in the wake of the Parkland shooting offer insight into a worthwhile response.

47

Teaching dissent is part of democracy

Society needs informed, active citizens who will speak out when they find laws to be unjust, writes **Sarah Stitzlein**

In scenes unprecedented in previous school shootings, the past few weeks have been marked by students taking to the streets, to the media, to corporations and elected officials in protest over gun practices and policies.

Responses to these teens have been mixed. Some have celebrated their passion. Some concluded that the students are immature and don't yet fully grasp long-standing issues with the Second

Amendment. Some questioned the voices and perspectives of the teens. Still others see the protests as an inappropriate use of time that might be better spent reaching out to loner students who may be prone to future acts of violence.

Some schools have even threatened to take disciplinary action against students for engaging in protests during school hours. This has prompted universities like my own to

While seldom acknowledged, students have a right to engage in political dissent and, more significantly, the entitlement to an education that nurtures their ability to do so. In the 1969 landmark Tinker case, the Supreme Court ruled that students do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate." But, the court held, it is reasonable to limit protest activities that interfere with the opportunity for others to learn. The right to dissent is not explicitly stated in the Constitution, but rather is a civil right that

arises out of how we understand good citizenship and thriving democracy. Dissent allows for a proliferation of views on the good life. It sparks conversation and ignites change to better align practices and policies with the wishes and needs of the people. It keeps democracy vibrant.

Often, we think of student protest as a type of public self-expression that should not be hindered as long as it meets certain criteria, like not preventing other children from learning. In America, our democracy requires the consent of the governed. Our Declaration of Independence even says that when we are not in agreement or when our well-being is in jeopardy, we have a duty to speak up. It's the American way and has been from the time the nation began.

48

It is only with the opportunity and capacity to dissent that we can determine if our laws and systems guiding us are good or just. Further, in order to invoke our right to dissent, citizens have to know how to dissent, which calls into play the role of schooling.

As a scholar in the philosophy of education, I would argue that our children, as burgeoning citizens, are entitled to such an education in our schools. There, they should learn the skills of dissent, including consciousness-raising, coalition building, persuasion, public demonstration and pursuit of traditional government avenues for change. This type of instruction is happening in some

schools, but not systematically enough across all schools, as courses in civics and social studies have been cut in order to focus on testing and such. Students receive even less of this kind of instruction in poorer schools.

And, our students must learn about the responsibilities of citizenship that correlate with their right to dissent. This includes learning how to evaluate the justice of laws, how to distinguish effective dissent from simple rabble-rousing, and how to protest in ways that do not unduly infringe on others.

Teaching children how to dissent in response to a violent situation that they feel threatens their well-being is aligned with the purposes of democratic schooling. Indeed, a flourishing democracy depends on such an informed and active citizenry who will speak out when they find laws to be unjust. **CT**

Sarah Stitzlein is professor of education and affiliate faculty in philosophy at the University of Cincinnati. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

Corporations spend tax cuts – on themselves

Instead of creating jobs, they are using their tax cut bonanza to hike stock value and CEO pay, says **Jim Hightower**

Remember last year when Donald Trump and his congressional Trumpeters bragged that their “yuge” tax cut for corporations would spark a “yuge” corporate spending spree to create new jobs and higher wages?

Well, just as they promised, we're now seeing corporate chieftains spending wildly – on themselves, not on boosting America's economy. Mainly, they're pouring billions into a self-serving scheme called “buybacks” — buying up shares of their own corporation's stock. Google executives, for example, are spending \$8.6 billion from

their taxpayer bonanza on buybacks, PepsiCo is in for \$15-billion, and Apple for \$30-billion.

Why? Because reducing the total number of shares on the market increases the value of each remaining share, giving those lucky shareholders a bigger piece of the company's profit pie. Yes, less magically means more! But it's not magic, it's manipulation. And the top executives doing the manipulating are primary beneficiaries, since most of their pay comes in the form of millions of dollars' worth of their corporation's stock.

If Trump and the GOP Congress had really intended their



trillion-dollar giveaway of the people's tax revenue be spent for the benefit of all, they would've required the corporate recipients to plow the bulk of the money into our nation's grassroots economy. Instead, once again, our corrupt political officials duped taxpayers into giving away public funds in the name of workers. But they actually stiffed workers, enriched CEOs, increased inequality, and diverted

tax dollars from urgent national needs – and enabled corporate powers to donate even more corrupting campaign cash to the politicians and party doing this to us. In other words, the Trump tax scam worked just as the GOP intended. **CT**

Jim Hightower is a radio commentator, writer, public speaker, and editor of the Hightower Lowdown

Jamie Oliver should shut up about child obesity

Childhood obesity is a serious issue, says **Steve Topple**, but celebrity chef's 'middle class logic' solution is ridiculous

Praise be to the god of celebrity chefs! Jamie Oliver is back with more of his lukewarm advice – all served up on a bed of

condescension, with a garnish of 'hasn't-got-a-fucking-clue.' He's talking childhood obesity, again. And his words show he simply doesn't understand the topic he's

freeloading off.

Oliver has made a name for himself by trying to tackle childhood obesity. From his school dinners project to the sugar tax, he's been there, done that, and got the Ralph Lauren T-shirt. He's now done an interview with the Times newspaper about a report from the Guy's and St Thomas' Charity on tackling childhood obesity.

Oliver says poor people don't have the "middle-class logic" to eat healthily:

Yup. Us poor people are seemingly a different species.

In the report, he recommends four things to try and tackle childhood obesity:

- Restricting junk food marketing and advertising.
- Higher taxes on unhealthy food.
- Stopping so many fast food restaurants dominating our high streets.
- Encouraging employers to offer healthy choices for parents.

Sorry. Would you excuse that large pair of mammals in the corner? Because they're the two elephants in Oliver's room that he's missing.

Firstly, if employers paid a real living wage, if social security was set at a decent level, if we eradicated 'time poverty,' if we stopped the march of globalisation and moved to a sustainable, communitarian model of food production, and if stock markets stopped viewing food as a commodity to bet on (or if stock markets were abolished altogether), then maybe we wouldn't have an obesity epidemic.

Insights

But waking up from my dream, the first three points are currently the most realistic. So maybe Oliver could push for them to try and eliminate poverty in the first place – giving us poor people the same choices as his middle classes.

There is a second elephant in Oliver’s room, though, and it’s the one he doesn’t understand at all. And that’s the psychology of poverty.

It’s no coincidence that, along with obesity, rates of smoking sugary drink intake, and binge drinking have all been historically higher among the poorest people in society. Oliver and policy-makers think these things are a sickness of the poor, when in fact they are a symptom of the underlying illness – a society where poor people are systematically abused and run into the ground.

As George Orwell said more than 80 years ago in *The Road To Wigan Pier*: “The ordinary



POOR, NOT STUPID: celebrity chef Jamie Oliver gets things wrong.

Photo: Wikipedia

human being would sooner starve than live on brown bread and raw carrots... When you are unemployed, which is to say when you are underfed, harassed, bored, and miserable, you don’t want to eat dull wholesome food. You want something a little bit “tasty.”

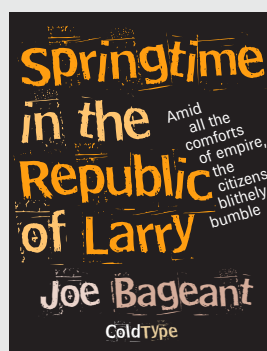
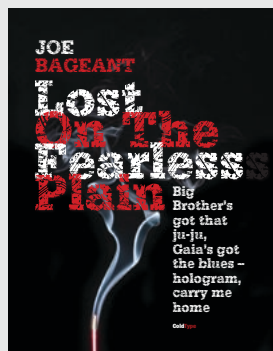
And as ethnographer Lisa McKenzie discussed in her book *Getting By* in 2015: “You don’t want to live in absolute

hardship with no comfort. Struggling to make ends meet is a misery, and, as Orwell surmised, lots of sugar in your tea... goes some way to relieving, even if just for a minute, the endless misery.”

Us poor people aren’t stupid, Jamie – however much you consciously or unconsciously think or imply that. We do what we need to do to make living in this hellhole of corrupt, crony capitalism a bit more bearable. So unless you’re going to join the revolution to help banish the entire system to the dustbin of history, comrade, stop lecturing us and leave tackling the effects of poverty to people who understand it: we who have actually lived it. **CT**

Steve Topp is a journalist and political and social commentator, who contributes to the *Independent* newspaper. He is based at the Canary – www.thecanary.co.uk – where this article first appeared.

50



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How to teach Rover to wipe his arse

Got a new dog? Having trouble with the finer points of toilet training? **Barry S. Borsitter** is here to help

Anyone who's ever taken home a puppy knows how love can turn to hate when it comes to toilet training. Leave him for a moment, and Rover will crap in his bed, your bed, the cat's bed, even in that wonderful curry you've just made for your grandson; everywhere but the place you want him to go – the downstairs lavatory.

As every dog owner will attest, the most daunting part of the training process is getting one message into his thick, canine skull: *No! No! No! Don't wipe your stinking backside all over the living room carpet – use the effing toilet paper like everyone else!!!*

How to solve the problem? Just follow this simple guide and Rover will soon make you proud.

1. Demonstrate, using your youngest child

Feed the child a double helping of curried goat, a bar of chocolate and a pint of beer. Shake him up and down to mix it up, then remove his underwear and place him on the seat. When the child has done his business, ensure Rover to watching closely as you wipe him clean using two sheets of toilet paper.

Note: Don't let Rover lick the child clean, no matter how willing he is to assist. It's unhygienic and bad for the dog's digestion.

2. Now get Rover to follow the child's example

Give him two cans of Dog-O-Chunks, mixed with the child's left-over curry. When he dashes around in circles and scrapes his rear-end on the carpet, lead him quickly to the lavatory.

Note: Speed is important; don't give Rover time to pause and sniff his posterior, or he'll crap all over the floor.

3. Position him correctly

Lift Rover onto the seat (assistance may be necessary if he's a large breed). Spread his legs, then squeeze him gently, firming the action if he's slow to

respond. For a small breed, you will need a *Restrain-A-Pooch* seat to stop him falling into the pan and drowning.

Note: Take care to position Rover's peeing device so that it points into the bowl and not at your clothing.

4. A friendly, but firm, attitude is essential

Maintain a stern countenance at all times, although an encouraging smile is always welcome. Should Rover squirm or jitter, you may find it necessary to jab him in the ribs with a pointed stick to encourage him to sit still while performing his duty.

Note: It is not advisable to take out Grandpa Henry's shotgun and blast off Rover's head if he misbehaves. You will be arrested and can expect to die in prison.

5. Clean the rear end

Once Rover has performed his task, thrust a pad of toilet paper into his paw (taping it in place if he has difficulty holding it). Push the loaded paw towards the soiled area, wiping it over the target area. Replace the toilet paper and repeat until the rear-end is spotless. You may then pat

him on the head and make appreciative comments, such as, "Who's a big boy, then?"

*Note: Don't be over-friendly, for Rover will almost certainly jump off the seat, shit on the floor, wallow in the mess, dash upstairs and roll all over your bed. **CT***

Barry S. Borsitter is the pen-name of a UK magazine editor.



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