

SEND IN THE CLOWN | TOM ENGELHARDT
SLAPPING IS WORSE THAN SHOOTING? | GREGORY SHUPAK
CRYING ELEPHANTS AND GIGGLING RATS | EMILY BIRCH

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CJ HOPKINS | CHRIS HEDGES | JOHN PILGER | DAN LOMAS

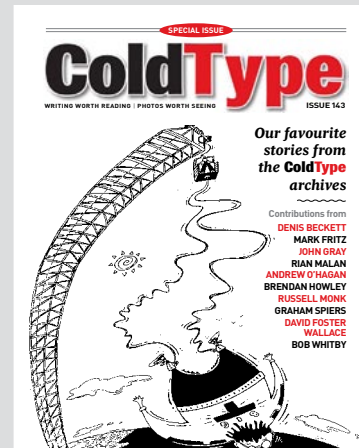
THE WAR ON DISSENT

Just as you thought the [REDACTED] couldn't get more creepily Orwellian, the [REDACTED] Corporation starts sending out emails saying they "have reason to believe" we have [REDACTED] or "liked the content of" an account "connected to a propagand Russia government-link [REDACTED] known as the Intern [REDACTED]. While it's not quite Thought Police telescreen, or po Brother Is Watch or [REDACTED] the same



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Lucas Foglia

The call of nature

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The ruling class wages all-out war on dissent

Their message is, “Try to fuck with us, and we will marginalise you, and demonise you, and demonetise you, and disappear you,” writes **CJ Hopkins**

This propaganda campaign is part and parcel of the roll-out of a new “official narrative.” If it wasn’t so completely depressing, I would say it is awe-inspiring to watch

Just when you thought the corporatocracy couldn’t possibly get more creepily Orwellian, the Twitter Corporation starts sending out emails advising that they “have reason to believe” we have “followed, retweeted,” or “liked the content of” an account “connected to a propaganda effort by a Russia government-linked organisation known as the Internet Research Agency.” While it’s not as dramatic as the Thought Police watching you on your telescreen, or posters reminding you “Big Brother Is Watching,” the effect is more or less the same.

And if that’s not creepily Orwellian enough for you, Facebook has established a Ministry of Counterspeech, manned by “a dedicated counterterrorism team” of “former intelligence and law-enforcement officials,” to “disrupt ideologies underlying extremism” (see *Chris Hedges’ essay beginning on Page 7 for details*). Google is systematically disappearing, deranking, and maliciously misrepresenting non-corporate news and opinion sources, and the “thought criminals” who contribute to them. Meanwhile, the corporate media continues to pump out Russia paranoia propaganda such as a recent segment from Rachel Maddow on MSNBC about “the remarkable number of Russian financiers who’ll be rubbing elbows with the Trump team in Davos.”

These are just the latest salvos in the corporate establishment’s War on Dissent, an expanded version of the War on Terror, which they’ve been relentlessly waging for more than a year now. As you may have noticed, the ruling classes have been using virtually every propaganda organ at their disposal to whip up mass hysteria over a host of extremely dubious threats to “the future of democracy” and “democratic values,” Russia being foremost among them, followed closely by white supremacy, then a laundry list of other “threats,” from Julian Assange to Bernie Bros to other, lesser “sowers of division.”

This propaganda campaign is part and parcel of the roll-out of a new “official narrative.” If it wasn’t so completely depressing, I would say it is awe-inspiring to watch. This full-spectrum type of mass indoctrination, or “reality adjustment,” doesn’t happen that often. It used to only happen on the national level, typically during times of war, when the ruling classes of nation states needed to temporarily unite their populaces and demonise their enemy. It is happening now on a global level, for the second time in the 21st-century.

The first time it happened on a global level was 2001-2002, when the War on Terror narrative was launched to supplant the defunct Cold War narrative that had functioned since the end of



World War II. The End of History/New World Order narrative, which had served as a kind of ideological stop-gap from 1990 to 2001, never really sold well: it was far too vague, and there was no clear enemy. The global capitalist ruling classes (which now reigned unopposed over the entire planet) needed a new official narrative to unite, not just a nation, or region, but everyone within the new global market. This narrative needed a convincing enemy that would function on a global level. “Terrorism” is that enemy.

In the official War on Terror narrative, the term “terrorism” does not refer to any type of actual terrorism (although of course such terrorism does take place) as much as to “terrorism” as a general concept, an essentially meaningless pejorative concept, one which can be expanded to include almost anything and anyone the ruling classes need it to . . . which is what is taking place at the moment. It is being expanded, rather dramatically, to include virtually any type of dissent from global capitalist ideology. In order to understand what’s happening, we need to understand how terms like “terrorism” and “extremism” function ideologically, not just as terms to dehumanise “bad guys” but to designate a type of ur-antagonist, one that conforms to the official narrative. So let’s take a few minutes and try to do that.

Perfect bogeyman

The key to understanding both the original War on Terror official narrative and the expanded variation we are being sold currently is the fact that terrorism is an insurgent tactic employed by weaker militant forces against a ruling government or occupation force. This makes it the perfect bogeyman (in essence, the only bogeyman) for our brave new global capitalist world, where global capitalism takes the place of that “ruling government or occupation force.”

I’ve written a number of essays about this, so I won’t reiterate all that here. The short version is,

we no longer live in a world where nation-against-nation conflict is driving the course of political events. We live in a world where global capitalism is driving the course of political events. The economies of virtually every nation on the planet are hopelessly interdependent. Capitalist ideology pervades all cultures, despite their superficial differences. It is a globally hegemonic system, so it has no external enemies. None. The only threats it faces are internal. Its “enemies” are, by definition, insurgent . . . in other words, “extremist” or “terrorist.”

This even holds true for the Russia paranoia the ruling classes are pumping out currently . . . it’s all just part of the “reality adjustment,” and the launch of a new official narrative, not a prelude to war with Russia. The USA is not going to war with Russia. The notion is beyond ridiculous. Have you noticed, despite all their warlike verbiage, that no one has put forth a single scenario in which war between Russia and the West makes sense? That’s because it doesn’t make sense. Not for Russia, the USA, or anyone else. This is why “the Russian threat” is being marketed as an “attack on democratic values” and “an attempt to sow division,” and so on. Because the war the corporatocracy is waging is not a war against Russia, the nation. The war they are fighting is a counter-insurgency, an ideological counter-insurgency. “Russia” has just been added to the list of “terrorists” and “extremists” who “hate us for our freedom.”

Thus, our new official narrative is actually just a minor variation on the original War on Terror narrative we’ve been indoctrinated with since 2001. A minor, yet essential, variation. From 2001 to 2016, the constant “terrorist threat” we were facing was strictly limited to Islamic terrorism, which made sense as long as the corporatocracy was focused on restructuring the Middle East. White supremacist terrorism was not part of the narrative, nor was any other form of terrorism, as that would have just

The USA is not going to war with Russia. The notion is beyond ridiculous. Have you noticed, despite all their warlike verbiage, that no one has put forth a single scenario in which war between Russia and the West makes sense? That’s because it doesn’t make sense. Not for Russia, the USA, or anyone else.



The message is, “We control reality, so reality is whatever the fuck we say it is, regardless of whether it is based in fact or just some totally made-up story we got The Washington Post to publish and then had the corporate media repeat, over and over, for 14 months”

confused the audience.

That changed, dramatically, in 2016.

The UK’s Brexit referendum and the election of Trump alerted the global capitalist ruling classes to the existence of another dangerous insurgency that had nothing to do with the Greater Middle East. While they were off merrily destabilising, restructuring, privatising, and debt-enslaving, resentment of global capitalism had grown into a widespread neo-nationalist backlash against globalisation, the loss of sovereignty, fiscal austerity, and the soulless, smiley-face, corporate culture being implemented throughout the West and beyond. That this backlash is reactionary in nature does not change the fact that it is an insurgency . . . just as Islamic fundamentalism is. Both insurgencies are doomed attempts to revert to despotic social systems (nationalist in one case, religious in the other) and so reverse the forward march of global capitalism. The global capitalist ruling classes are not about to let that happen.

The corporatocracy wasted no time in dealing with this new insurgency. They demonised and hamstrung Trump, as they’ll continue to do until he’s well out of office. But Trump was never the significant threat. The significant threat is the people who elected him, and who voted for Brexit, and the AfD, and Sanders, and Mélenchon, and Corbyn, and who just stayed home on election day and refused to vote for Hillary Clinton. The threat is the attitude of these people. The insubordinate attitude of these people. The childish attitude of these people (who naively thought they could challenge the most powerful empire in the annals of human history . . . one that controls, not just the most fearsome military force that has ever existed, but the means to control “reality” itself).

The corporatocracy is going to change that attitude, or it is going to make it disappear. It is in the process of doing this now, using every ideological weapon in its arsenal. The

news media. Publishing. Hollywood. The Internet. Intelligence agencies. Congressional inquiries. Protests. Marches. Twitter’s “advisory emails.” Google’s manipulation of its search results. Facebook’s “counter-speech” initiative. Russiagate. Shitholegate. Pornstargate. The ruling class is sending us a message. The message is, “You’re either with us or against us.” The message is, “We will tolerate no dissent, except for officially sanctioned dissent.” The message is, “Try to fuck with us, and we will marginalise you, and demonise you, and demonetise you, and disappear you.”

The message is, “We control reality, so reality is whatever the fuck we say it is, regardless of whether it is based in fact or just some totally made-up story we got The Washington Post to publish and then had the corporate media repeat, over and over, for 14 months.” If that doesn’t qualify as full-blown Orwellian, I’m not sure what, exactly, would.

I wish I had some rallying cry to end this depressing assessment with, but I have no interest in being one of these Twitter-based guerrilla leaders who tell you we can beat the corporatocracy by tweeting and donating to them on Patreon, and then going about our lives as “normal.” It’s probably going to take a little more than that, and the obvious truth is, the odds are against us. That said, I plan to make as much noise about The War on Dissent as humanly possible, until they marginalise me out of existence . . . or the corporate-mediated simulation that so many of us take for existence these days. What do you say, want to join me? **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

Snoggsworthy, Swaine & Cormorant.

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Thought police for the 21st-century

Chris Hedges on the need to defend freedom of speech from the predatory clutches of the corporate state and its servile media

The abolition of net neutrality and the use of algorithms by Facebook, Google, YouTube and Twitter to divert readers and viewers from progressive, left-wing and anti-war sites, along with demonising as foreign agents the journalists who expose the crimes of corporate capitalism and imperialism, have given the corporate state the power to destroy freedom of speech. Any state that accrues this kind of power will use it. And for that reason I travelled to Detroit to join David North, the chairperson of the international editorial board of the World Socialist Web Site, in a live-stream event calling for the formation of a broad front to block an escalating censorship while we still have a voice.

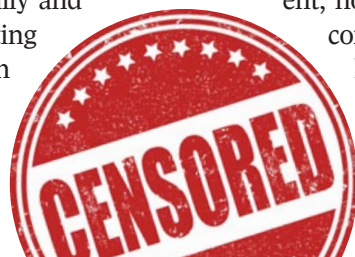
“The future of humanity is the struggle between humans that control machines and machines that control humans,” Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, said in a statement issued in support of the event. “Between the democratisation of communication and usurpation of communication by artificial intelligence. While the Internet has brought about a revolution in people’s ability to educate themselves and others, the resulting democratic phenomena has shaken existing establishments to their core. Google, Facebook and their Chinese equivalents, who are socially, logistically and financially integrated with existing elites, have moved to re-establish

discourse control. This is not simply a corrective action. Undetectable mass social influence powered by artificial intelligence is an existential threat to humanity. While still in its infancy, the trends are clear and of a geometric nature. The phenomena differs in traditional attempts to shape cultural and political phenomena by operating at scale, speed and increasingly at a subtlety that eclipses human capacities.”

In late April and early May, the World Socialist Web Site, which identifies itself as a Trotskyite group that focuses on the crimes of capitalism, the plight of the working class and imperialism, began to see a steep decline in readership. The decline persisted into June. Search traffic to the World Socialist Web Site has been reduced by 75 percent overall. And the site is not alone. AlterNet’s search traffic is down 71 percent, Consortium News’ traffic is down 72 percent. And the situation appears to be growing worse.

The reductions coincided with the introduction of algorithms imposed by Google to fight “fake news.” Google said the algorithms are designed to elevate “more authoritative content” and marginalise “blatantly misleading, low quality, offensive or downright false information.” It soon became apparent, however, that in the name of combating “fake news,” Google, Facebook, YouTube and

It soon became apparent, however, that in the name of combating “fake news,” Google, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are censoring left-wing, progressive and anti-war sites



Facebook, working with the Israeli government, has removed more than 100 accounts of Palestinian activists. This is an ominous march to an Orwellian world of Thought Police, “Newspeak” and “thought-crime” or, as Facebook likes to call it, “de-ranking” and “counterspeech”

Twitter are censoring left-wing, progressive and anti-war sites. The 150 most popular search terms that brought readers to the World Socialist Web Site, including “socialism,” “Russian Revolution” and “inequality,” today elicit little or no traffic.

Monika Bickert, head of global policy management at Facebook, told the US Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation in a hearing last month that Facebook employs a security team of 10,000 – 7,500 of whom “assess potentially violating content” – and that “by the end of 2018 we will more than double” it to more than 20,000. Social media companies are intertwined with and often work for US intelligence agencies. This army of censors is our Thought Police.

The group, Bickert said, includes “a dedicated counterterrorism team” of “former intelligence and law-enforcement officials and prosecutors who worked in the area of counterterrorism.” She testified that artificial intelligence automatically flags questionable content. Facebook, she said, does not “wait for these . . . bad actors to upload content to Facebook before placing it into our detection systems.” The “propaganda” that Facebook blocks, she said, “is content that we identify ourselves before anybody” else can see it. Facebook, she said, along with more than a dozen other social media companies has created a blacklist of 50,000 “unique digital fingerprints” that can prevent content from being posted.

“We believe that a key part of combating extremism is preventing recruitment by disrupting the underlying ideologies that drive people to commit acts of violence,” she told the committee. “That’s why we support a variety of counterspeech efforts.”

“Counterspeech” is a word that could have been lifted from the pages of George Orwell’s dystopian novel 1984.

Eric Schmidt, who is stepping down this month as the executive chairman of Google’s parent company, Alpha-

bet, has acknowledged that Google is creating algorithms to “de-rank” Russian-based news websites RT and Sputnik from its Google News services, effectively blocking them. The US Department of Justice forced RT America, on which I host a show, On Contact, that gives a voice to anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist voices, to register as a “foreign agent.” Google removed RT from its “preferred” channels on YouTube. Twitter has blocked the Russian news service agencies RT and Sputnik from advertising.

This censorship is global. The German government’s Network Enforcement Act fines social media companies for allegedly objectionable content. French President Emmanuel Macron has vowed to remove “fake news” from the internet. Facebook and Instagram erased the accounts of Ramzan Kadyrov, the dictator of the Chechen Republic, because he is on a US sanctions list. Kadyrov is certainly repugnant, but this ban, as the American Civil Liberties Union points out, empowers the US government to effectively censor content. Facebook, working with the Israeli government, has removed more than 100 accounts of Palestinian activists. This is an ominous march to an Orwellian world of Thought Police, “Newspeak” and “thought-crime” or, as Facebook likes to call it, “de-ranking” and “counterspeech.”

Orwellian aims

The censorship, justified in the name of combating terrorism by blocking the content of extremist groups, is also designed to prevent a distressed public from accessing the language and ideas needed to understand corporate oppression, imperialism and socialism.

“Don’t you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought?” Orwell wrote in his book, 1984. “In the end we shall make thought-crime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it.



Every concept that can ever be needed will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten. . . . Every year fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness always a little smaller. . . .”

Corporate capitalism, and the ideology that justifies it – neoliberalism, the free market, globalisation – no longer has any credibility. All of the utopian promises of globalisation have been exposed as lies. Allowing banks and corporations to determine how we should order human society and govern ourselves did not spread global wealth, raise the living standards of workers or implant democracy across the globe. The ideology, preached in business schools and by pliant politicians, was a thin cover for the rapacious greed of the elites, elites who now control most of the world’s wealth.

Troubling times for the elites

The ruling elites know they are in trouble. The Republican and Democratic parties’ abject subservience to corporate power is transparent. The insurgencies in the two parties that saw Bernie Sanders nearly defeat the seemingly preordained Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton, and the election of Donald Trump terrify the elites. The elites, by attacking critics and dissidents as foreign agents for Russia, are seeking to deflect attention from the cause of these insurgencies – massive social inequality. Critics of the corporate state and imperialism, already pushed to the margins, are now dangerous because the elites no longer have a viable counter argument. And so these dissidents must be silenced.

“What’s so specifically important about this is that in a period of growing political radicalisation among young people, among workers, they start to look for oppositional information, they become interested in socialism, revolution, terms like ‘equality,’ those terms which previously would bring thousands of read-

ers to the World Socialist Web Site, now were bringing no readers to the World Socialist Web Site,” North said. “In other words, they were setting up a quarantine between those who may be interested in our site and the WSWS. From being a bridge, Google was becoming a barrier, a guard preventing access to our site.”

The internet, with its ability to reach across international boundaries, is a potent tool for connecting workers across the earth who are fighting the same enemy – corporate capitalism. And control of the internet, the elites know, is vital to suppress information and consciousness.

“There is no national solution to the problems of American capitalism,” North said. “The effort of the United States is to overcome this through a policy of war. Because what, ultimately, is imperialism? The inability to solve the problems of the nation-state within national borders drives the policy of war and conquest. That is what is emerging. Under conditions of war, the threat of war, conditions of growing and immeasurable inequality, democracy cannot survive. The tendency now is the suppression of democracy. And just as there is no national solution for capitalism, there is no national solution for the working class.”

“War is not an expression of the strength of the system,” North said. “It is an expression of profound and deep crisis. Trotsky said in the Transitional Programme: The ruling elites toboggan with eyes closed toward catastrophe. In 1939, they went to war, as in 1914, aware of the potentially disastrous consequences. Certainly, in 1939, they knew what the consequences of war were: War brings revolution. But they could not see a way out. The global problems which exist can only be solved in one of two ways: the capitalist, imperialist solution is war and [. . .] fascism. The working-class solution is socialist revolution. This is, I think, the alternative we’re confronted with.

So, the question that has come up, in the broadest sense, [is]

Allowing banks and corporations to determine how we should order human society and govern ourselves did not spread global wealth, raise the living standards of workers or implant democracy across the globe. The ideology, preached in business schools and by pliant politicians, was a thin cover for the rapacious greed of the elites, elites who now control most of the world’s wealth



“The question of social revolution is not utopian. It is a process that emerges objectively out of the contradictions of capitalism. I think the argument can be made – and I think we made this argument – that really, since 2008, we have been witnessing an acceleration of crisis”

what is the answer to the problems we face? Building a revolutionary party.”

“There is going to be, and there is already unfolding, massive social struggles,” North said. “The question of social revolution is not utopian. It is a process that emerges objectively out of the contradictions of capitalism. I think the argument can be made – and I think we made this argument – that really, since 2008, we have been witnessing an acceleration of crisis. It has never been solved, and, indeed, the massive levels of social inequality are themselves not the expression of a healthy but [instead] a deeply diseased socioeconomic order. It is fuelling, at every level, social opposition. Of course, the great problem, then, is overcoming the legacy of political confusion, produced, as a matter of fact, by the defeats and the betrayals of the 20th-century: the betrayal of the Russian Revolution by Stalinism; the betrayals of the working class by social democracy; the subordination of the working class in the United States to the Democratic Party. These are the critical issues and lessons that have to be learned. The education of the working class in these issues, and the development of perspective, is the most critical point . . . the basic problem is not an absence of courage. It is not an absence of the desire to

fight. It is an absence of understanding.”

“Socialist consciousness must be brought into the working class,” North said. “There is a working class. That working class is open now and receptive to revolutionary ideas. Our challenge is to create the conditions. The workers will not learn this in the universities. The Marxist movement, the Trotskyist movement, must provide the working class with the intellectual, cultural tools that it requires, so that it understands what must be done. It will provide the force, it will provide the determination, the emotional and passionate fuel of every revolutionary movement is present. But what it requires is understanding. And we will, and we are seeking to defend internet freedom because we want to make use of this medium, along with others, to create the conditions for this education and revival of revolutionary consciousness to take place.” **CT**

Chris Hedges has reported from more than 50 countries and has worked for the Christian Science Monitor and the New York Times, for which he was a foreign correspondent for 15 years. This essay was first published at www.truthdig.com



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Mainstream media meets imperial power

John Pilger talks to **Dennis J Bernstein** and **Randy Credico** about the need to combat the undemocratic forces that control so much of the world

Noted journalist and filmmaker John Pilger's collection of work has been archived by the British Library, but deep-rooted problems of Western media create an increasingly difficult landscape for ethical journalism, as Pilger explained in an interview with Dennis Bernstein and Randy Credico by Dennis J Bernstein and Randy Credico

Emmy award-winning filmmaker John Pilger is among the most important political filmmakers of the 20th and 21st century. From Vietnam to Palestine to atomic war, Pilger's work has been on the cutting edge, and his stinging critique of western media has always be revelatory. And, no doubt, his biting analysis is more relevant and important now than ever. His latest film, *The Coming War On China*, powerfully presages the growing potential for war between the US and China.

Credico and Bernstein spoke with Pilger on January 18 about the multiple failures of the corporate press in fanning the phony flames of Russiagate, and turning its back on Julian Assange – acting more like prosecutors than journalists, whose responsibility it is to monitor the centres of power and report back to the people.

They also spoke with Pilger about the recent decision by the British Library to acquire his substantial works and invaluable archives and make

them readily available to a much wider audience:

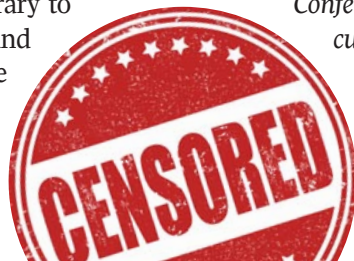
Bernstein: *Congratulations, John, your work has now been made a part of the collection at the British Library.*

Pilger: To see all my written work over the years go onto a single hard drive was a sobering experience. I am pleased, however, because now in the digital age people can access all of my work and I myself can access information I may have forgotten.

Bernstein: *I would like to read a little of what they said on the record when they welcomed your material into the library. They write, "Throughout his career, John Pilger has demonstrated the power and significance of investigative journalism in uncovering stories of people who have been ignored by the mainstream media or left otherwise without voice. His groundbreaking work in Cambodia revealed the devastation caused by the Khmer Rouge and his film *Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia* has subsequently been described as one of the ten most influential documentaries of the 20th-century."*

I would like to read now a little of the statement that you sent to the World's Socialist Conference where they were discussing the deep nature of censorship. You wrote, "Some-

"Throughout his career, John Pilger has demonstrated the power and significance of investigative journalism in uncovering stories of people who have been ignored by the mainstream media or left otherwise without voice"



“There is no doubt that what Wikileaks has done is the most important disclosure journalism of my lifetime. Around the world, politicians who have been deceiving the public have been caught out by the revelations of Wikileaks. It is quite an epic achievement”

thing has changed. Although the media was always a loose extension of capital power, it is now almost fully integrated. Dissent, once tolerated in the mainstream, has now regressed to a metaphoric underground as liberal capitalism moves toward a form of corporate dictatorship.” And it is getting worse at an exponential rate, wouldn't you say?

Pilger: Yes. Chris Hedges is an example of that. He was right in the mainstream at The New York Times and now finds himself outside it. Another example is America's most celebrated investigative journalist, Seymour Hersh, who it appears now can only get published in Germany. Hersh has effectively been ejected from the mainstream in the United States.

In my own case, I navigated my way through the mainstream. My films are still shown on commercial TV in Britain. My written journalism, however, is no longer welcome. Its last home was the Guardian, which three years ago got rid of people like me and others in a kind of purge of those who were saying what the Guardian no longer says.

That has happened right across the liberal media. The Washington Post – which is at the moment going through a period of self-aggrandisement with the release of the film *The Post* – is also the notorious source of a site which listed some of the most distinguished dissenting sites in the United States including Consortiumnews, Black Agenda Report, Counterpunch and others, as sources of Russian propaganda. It is forcing all of us into this margin, when really the mainstream is in the margin and the margin is in the mainstream.

Bernstein: Could you talk about the work of Julian Assange in the context of this corporate censorship machine?

Pilger: Julian Assange has personally borne the brunt of much of this historic shift. He and Wikile-



OUT OF SIGHT? Chris Hedges (above) and Seymour Hersh (below) have, like John Pilger, been removed from the mainstream media. (Photos: Vimeo)



aks have exposed so much, and that is unforgivable. There is no doubt that what Wikileaks has done is the most important disclosure journalism of my lifetime. Around the world, politicians who have been deceiving the public have been caught out by the revelations of Wikileaks. It is



quite an epic achievement.

Anger has been directed at Julian by people in the media who have been shamed by Wikileaks. Because Wikileaks did the job that journalists ought to have been doing for many years. Wikileaks has done it across such a spectrum and put to shame those who are paid to keep the record straight. That has been Assange's crime.

Bernstein: *It has come to the point where to tell the truth is to commit professional suicide.*

Credico: *At the recent World Socialist Conference, Julian Assange warned of what he called the "super states" on the internet and how much power they have – the Facebooks and Googles, etc.*

Pilger: He raised the whole spectre of artificial intelligence and how it can be abused by the undemocratic forces that control so much of the world. I think what he had to say was very interesting and extremely timely. It is important to remember that Assange is a refugee and that the refugee is almost a symbol of our times. There are those who try to cross the Mediterranean and don't make it or who cross deserts to get work to support their families.

Julian is a political refugee who is trying to inform us of something we either don't know about or are unwilling to talk about. The United Nations has recognised that he is being detained unlawfully. It is interesting to hear what he says but we also have to keep an eye on his welfare. His situation should be a burning issue for journalists everywhere. If it can happen to him, it can happen to any of us.

Credico: *A lot of mainstream journalists complain when Trump refers to them as the enemy of the people, but they have shown themselves to be very unwilling to circle the wagons around Assange. What is the upshot for journalists of Assange being taken down?*

Pilger: Trump knows which

nerves to touch. His campaign against the mainstream media may even help to get him re-elected, because most people don't trust the mainstream media anymore.

In my experience as a journalist, the public have always been ahead of the media. And yet, in many news outlets there has always been a kind of veiled contempt for the public. You find young journalists affecting a false cynicism that they think ordains them as journalists. The cynicism is not about the people at the top, it's about the people at the bottom, the people that Hillary Clinton dismissed as "irredeemable."

CNN and NBC and the rest of the networks have been the voices of power and have been the source of distorted news for such a long time. They are not circling the wagons because the wagons are on the wrong side. These people in the mainstream have been an extension of the power that has corrupted so much of our body politic. They have been the sources of so many myths. This latest film *The Post* neglects to mention that the *Washington Post* was a passionate supporter of the Vietnam War before it decided to have a moral crisis about whether to publish the *Pentagon Papers*. Today, the *Washington Post* has a \$6000-million deal with the CIA to supply them with information.

Media in the West is now an extension of imperial power. It is no longer a loose extension, it is a direct extension. Whether or not it has fallen out with Donald Trump is completely irrelevant. It is lined up with all the forces that want to get rid of Donald Trump. He is not the one they want in the White House, they wanted Hillary Clinton, who is safer and more reliable. **CT**

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Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of *Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom*. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net

This latest film, *The Post*, neglects to mention that the *Washington Post* was a passionate supporter of the Vietnam War before it decided to have a moral crisis about whether to publish the *Pentagon Papers*. *The Washington Post* has a \$6000-million deal with the CIA to supply them with information



When the UK last tried to fight ‘fake-news’

Dan Lomas recalls a previous unsuccessful effort by the British government to exploit the flow of information

As the age-old authoritarian saying goes, “If at first your attempts to lie, exaggerate, censor and intimidate don’t work, try, try again”

The decision to set up a new National Security Communications Unit to counter the growth of “fake news” is not the first time the UK government has devoted resources to exploit the defensive and offensive capabilities of information. A similar thing was tried in the Cold War era, with mixed results.

The planned unit has emerged as part of a wider review of defence capabilities. It will reportedly be dedicated to “combating disinformation by state actors and others” and was agreed at a meeting of the National Security Council (NSC).

As a spokesperson for UK prime minister Theresa May told journalists: “We are living in an era of fake news and competing narratives. The government will respond with more and better use of national security communications to tackle these interconnected, complex challenges.”

Parliament’s Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee is currently investigating the use of fake news – the spreading of stories of “uncertain provenance or accuracy” – through social media and other channels. The investigation is taking place amid claims that Russia used hundreds of fake accounts to tweet about Brexit. The head of the army, General Sir Nick Carter, recently told the think-tank RUSI that Britain should be prepared to fight an increasingly assertive Russia.

Details of the new anti-fake news unit are vague, but may mark a return to Britain’s Cold War past and the work of the Foreign Office’s Information Research Department (IRD), which was set up in 1948 to counter Soviet propaganda. The unit was the brain-child of Christopher Mayhew, Labour MP and under-secretary in the Foreign Office, and grew to become one of largest Foreign Office departments before its disbandment in 1977 – a story revealed in the Guardian in January 1978 by its investigative reporter David Leigh.

This secretive government body worked with politicians, journalists and foreign governments to counter Soviet lies, through unattributable “grey” propaganda and confidential briefings on “Communist themes.” IRD eventually expanded from this narrow anti-Soviet remit to protect British interests where they were likely “to be the object of hostile threats.”

By 1949, IRD had a staff of just 52, all based in central London. By 1965 it employed 390 staff, including 48 overseas, with a budget of over £1-million, mostly paid from the “secret vote” used to fund the UK intelligence community. IRD also worked alongside the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS or MI6) and the BBC’s World Service.

Examples of IRD’s early work include reports on Soviet gulags and the promotion of



anti-communist literature. George Orwell's work was actively promoted by the unit. Shortly before his death in 1950, Orwell even gave it a list of left-wing writers and journalists "who should not be trusted" to spread IRD's message. During that decade, the department even moved into British domestic politics by setting up a "home desk" to counter communism in industry.

IRD also played an important role in undermining Indonesia's President Sukarno in the 1960s, as well as supporting western NGOs – especially the Thomson and Ford Foundations. In 1996, former IRD official Norman Reddaway provided more information on IRD's "long-term" campaigns (contained in private papers). These included "English by TV" broadcast to the Gulf, Sudan, Ethiopia and China, with other IRD-backed BBC initiatives – Follow Me and Follow Me to Science – which had an estimated audience of 100-million in China.

IRD was even involved in supporting Britain's entry to the European Economic Community, promoting the UK's interests in Europe and backing politicians on both sides. It would shape the debate by writing a letter or article a day in the quality press. The department was also involved in more controversial campaigns, spreading anti-IRA propaganda during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, supporting Britain's control of Gibraltar and countering the "Black Power" movement in the Caribbean.

Going too far

IRD's activities were steadily getting out of hand, yet an internal 1971 review found the department was still needed, given "the primary threat to British and Western interests worldwide remains that from Soviet Communism" and the "violent revolutionaries of the 'New Left'." IRD was a "flexible auxiliary, specialising in influencing opinion," yet its days were numbered. By 1972, the organisation had just over 100 staff and faced significant budget cuts, despite attempts at reform.

IRD was eventually killed off thanks to opposition from Foreign Office mandarins and the then Labour foreign secretary, David Owen – though that may not be the end of the story. Officials soon set up the Overseas Information Department – likely a play on IRD's name – tasked with making "attributable and non-attributable" written guidance for journalists and politicians, though its overall role is unclear. Information work was also carried out by "alongsiders" such as the former IRD official Brian Crozier.

The history of IRD's work is important to future debates on government strategy in countering "fake news." The unit's effectiveness is certainly open to debate. In many cases, IRD's work reinforced the anti-Soviet views of some, while doing little, if anything, to influence general opinion.

In 1976, one Foreign Office official even admitted that IRD's work could do "more harm than good to institutionalise our opposition" and was "very expensive in manpower and is practically impossible to evaluate in cost effectiveness" – a point worth considering today.

IRD's rapid expansion from anti-communist unit to protecting Britain's interests across the globe also shows that it's hard to manage information campaigns. What may start out as a unit to counter "fake news" could easily spiral out of control, especially given the rapidly expanding online battlefield.

Government pennypinching on defence – a key issue in current debates – could also fail to match the resources at the disposal of the Russian state. In short, the lessons of IRD show that information work is not a quick fix. The British government could learn a lot by visiting the past. **CT**

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Dan Lomas is programme leader at the MA Intelligence and Security Studies, University of Salford, England. This article was first published at www.theconversation.com

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Visions of protest

Milton Glaser and Mirko Ilic present a vigorous collection of activist art, united by its condemnation of authoritarianism



Above: In this anti-Iraq war poster, Mexican designer Renato Aranda Rodriguez transformed a map of the USA into a meat cleaver.

Right: G. Dan Covert produced this poster in 2001 after his grandmother died after a long battle with emphysema

As we suffer increasingly-Orwellian efforts by governments, social media and mainstream press to impose their one-sided world view on us, while manipulating and censoring any opposing thought, it's worth checking out Milton Glaser and Mirko Ilic's book, **The Design of Dissent**. There the reader will find a rebellious counter-narrative in the work of graphic artists whose forté is melding words and images into stark and memorable messages that help counteract the propaganda onslaught from powerful, wealthy and privileged elites.

Their design messages are stark, clear

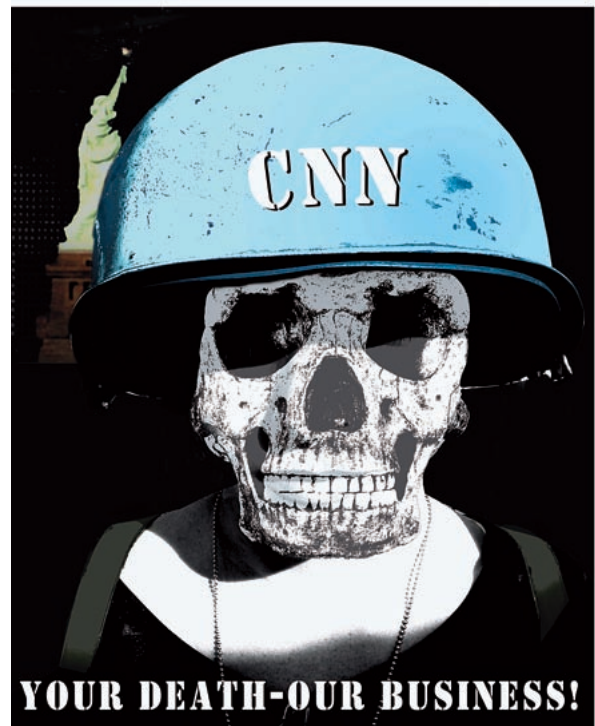
All art © Quarry Books, an imprint of The Quarto Group, excerpted from *The Design of Dissent*





Left: Poster designed by John Yeats, was used during the first Gulf War. The piece is particularly poignant as the US government censored photos of the returning dead after their invasion of Iraq a decade later, justifying their action as a matter of respect for the victims.

Below: This 2002 poster by Agnieszka Dellfina and Thomas Dellert-Dellacroix, pointed out that how wars boosted media profits.



and very, very dynamic: the US map is transformed into a bloody meat cleaver; flag-draped coffins perfectly counteract the partisan call to arms; a few well-chosen words beneath a leering skull decked out in a cable TV helmet provide the perfect indictment for the corporate media's war-time displays of 'patriotism.'

In his introduction to the book, playwright Tony Kushner takes us to Stendahl's play *The Charterhouse of Parma*, where, in 1796, a slightly-mad artist named Gross, angered by the Milanese Archduke's order that "no peasant could sell his crop until his Highness's granaries were full," sketches on a napkin the image of "a French soldier thrusting his bayonet into the obese Milanese Archduke's belly: instead of blood out poured an incredible quantity of grain. . . .

The sketch was printed overnight, and 20,000 copies were sold the next day."

This image, says Kushner, "shares with other successful instances of graphic dissent at least three characteristics: It is shocking, it is clever – even funny in a grim sort of way – and its meaning is instantly intelligible. And perhaps it shares one other characteristic: It is, or at least it seems to be, *samizdat*, dangerous, forbidden. Resistance is sending up a signal flare in the darkness."

The posters and stickers and covers and badges featured in the almost-300 pages of *The Design of Dissent* exhibit those qualities in abundance, signalling their designers' feelings about the evils that threaten our national and personal freedoms.

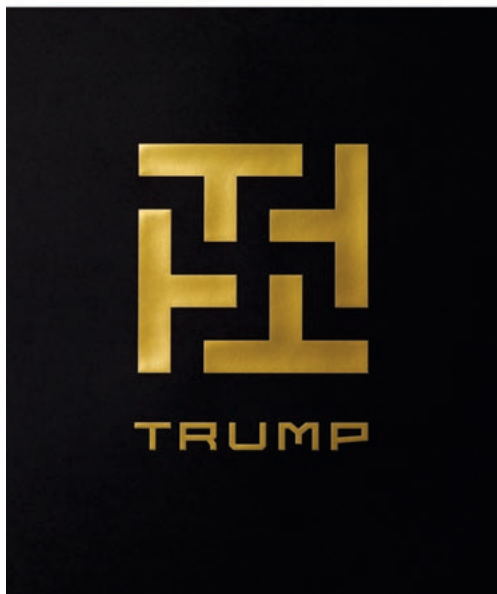
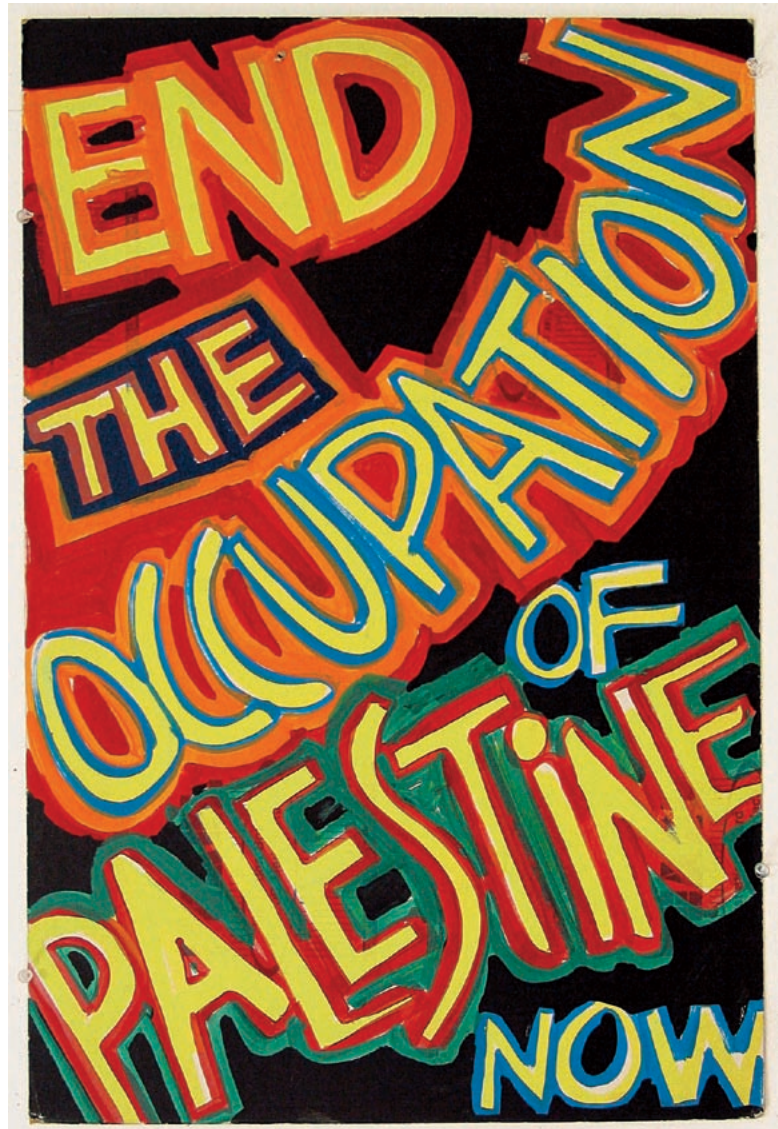
– Tony Sutton



COVER STORY / 5

Right: The black background and bright colours in End The Occupation Of Palestine Now is a homage to Palestinian liberation art of the 1970s and 1989s. This is one of a series of posters designed by Samia A. Halabi, and used in Washington DC

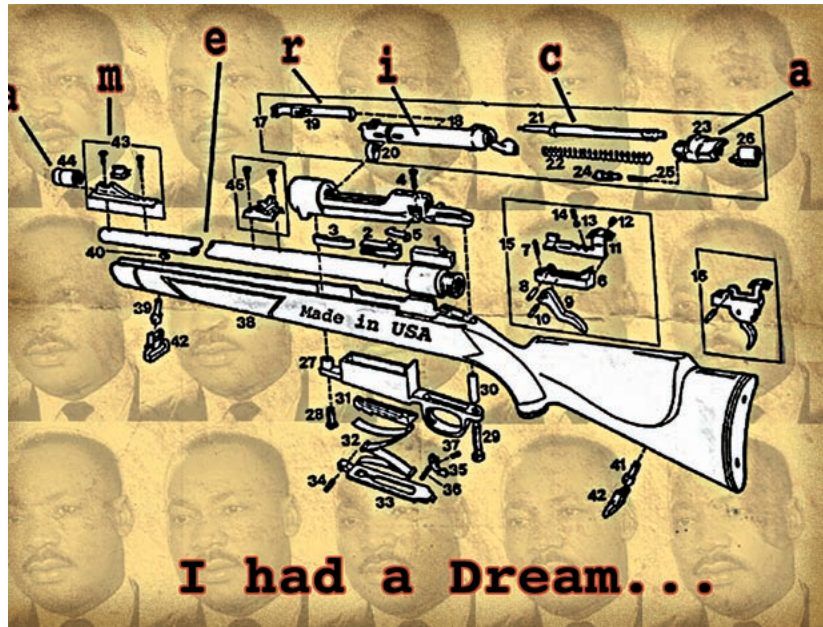
Below: Road signs are often used as references in protest art, because their goal is immediate communication. This poster was designed by Woody Pirtle for Amnesty International in 1999.



Far Left: Mark Fox and Angie Wang designed their Trump 24K Gold-Plated poster for use during the 2016 US election campaign.

Left: Surinder Singh's 1988 poster produced for the London-based Anti-Apartheid Movement, calls for the release of Nelson Mandela.

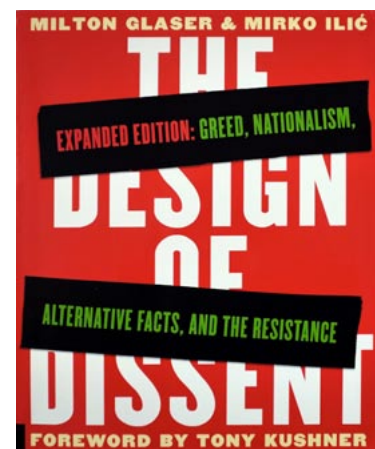
i hate this game



Top, Left: NBA logo was appropriated by designer Jugoslav Vlahovic for this logo used by Yugoslav media to protest Nato bombing in 1999.

Above: Assassinated US leaders form the background to Emek's 1999 poster on gun violence.

Left: Ward Sutton's 2003 poster shows how the news and entertainment industries produce soldiers as beholden to commercial endorsement as are professional athletes.



THE DESIGN OF DISSENT
Milton Glaser & Mirko Ilić
Published by Rockport / US\$25

Is slapping a soldier worse than shooting a child?

US media and television coverage of Ahd Tamimi obscures Israeli violence and occupation, writes **Gregory Shupak**

A Newsweek piece referred to Ahd's actions as "assaults" and an "attack." It failed to report that Israeli soldiers had just shot and severely injured her 14-year-old cousin

Israeli soldiers shot 14-year-old Palestinian Mohammad Tamimi in the face with a rubber-jacketed bullet on December 14, 2017, in Nabi Saleh, a small village in the occupied West Bank. The boy had to undergo six hours of surgery and was placed in a medically induced coma. An hour later, Mohammad's cousin, Ahd Tamimi, slapped and kicked at an armed Israeli soldier. The next week, after video of Ahd's actions went viral, Israeli soldiers raided the Tamimi home at 3am, arresting Ahd and confiscating the family's phones, computers and laptops.

Ahd has been denied bail and could face years in prison. (Nour Tamimi, a 16-year-old cousin of Ahd, who is also in the video, was also arrested and has been released on bail. Ahd's mother Nariman was arrested later that day when she inquired about her daughter. She remains in custody.)

A Newsweek article on January 1 described the incident as Ahd "assaulting Israeli soldiers," "threatening two Israeli soldiers and then hitting them in the face," "pushing the soldiers as well as kicking them, hitting them in the face and throwing stones at them." The piece referred to Ahd's actions as "assaults" and an "attack." It failed to report that Israeli soldiers had just shot and severely injured her 14-year-old cousin.

CNN (1/8/18) also ran a piece that left out the most serious act of violence that day, as did Reuters (12/28/17, 1/1/18). An Associat-

ed Press report (12/28/17) had the same deficiency, leaving the false impression that the soldier was attacked without provocation.

Newsweek also failed to note that the Israeli soldiers are members of a military force that has been occupying the West Bank for 50 years. Nor does CBS's December 21 account mention the occupation, which structures every interaction between Palestinians and Israelis. (The fact that occupied people have a legal right to resist occupation is left out of all of the articles discussed in this piece.)

A report in the New York Times (12/22/17) does not mention that Mohammad Tamimi was shot in the face with a rubber bullet until the 13th paragraph, as though this fact is of minimal importance. The Times describes Nabi Saleh as having "long-running disputes with a nearby Israeli settlement, Halamish, that Nabi Saleh residents say has stolen their land and water." The Times does not note that, as a colony on occupied territory, Halamish is illegal under international law.

The Newsweek piece says Tamimi "has now been indicted on five counts of assaulting security forces," and that she is "charged with interfering with the soldiers' duties by preventing them from returning to their post." It notes that "in May, she was charged with interfering with soldiers who were trying to arrest a protester throwing stones," and refers to her indictment two

other times, including in the headline. At no point does the article mention that the proceedings are taking place in a military court. Similarly, an Associated Press(1/9/18) report refers to “Israel’s hard-charging prosecution” and “the charges” against Tamimi, without mentioning that she is being tried by the same occupying military that shot her cousin.

Omitting that information makes it sound as though Tamimi will receive a fair legal process, but the evidence suggests the opposite. According to the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, Palestinians in the occupied West Bank are subjected to a military court system that “does not grant the right to due process and the rights derived from it,” whereas Israelis illegally colonising the Occupied Territories have the rights and privileges of a civilian legal system.

In military courts, the age of majority is 16, which means that Palestinian teenagers can be tried as adults, while 18 is the age of majority for Israelis. Defence for Children International Palestine (DCIP), a group that has consultative status with the UN, reports that Israeli military court judges, who are either active duty or reserve officers in the Israeli military, “rarely exclude evidence obtained by coercion or torture, including confessions drafted in Hebrew, a language most Palestinian children do not understand.” The Israeli military courts’ conviction rate of greater than 99 percent underscores how stacked they are against Palestinians. The New York Times (12/22/17) placed the same emphasis on life-threatening violence and social media tactics: “The latest incident, filmed in the family’s backyard, occurred within hours after a cousin of Ms. Tamimi’s was shot in the face with a rubber bullet, and it was streamed live on Facebook on December 15.”

The New York Times’ framing of Tamimi’s story suggests that the case’s central issue is whether Palestinians or Israelis would have been better off if the soldier had reacted more violently to being slapped. The Times’ David Halbfinger says: “that Israelis could

not decide whether the soldiers were virtuous pillars of forbearance and strength . . . or an embarrassing advertisement of national paralysis and vulnerability.”

Palestinians, meanwhile, “debated whether the video might have damaged their cause, by showing their oppressors behaving gently, or helped it, by showing that resistance can be effective even when one is unarmed.”

The paper even implied that Palestinians may be happy that Tamimi was arrested, writing that “the scene of the young woman being hauled away may have given Palestinians the clear-cut propaganda coup they had been denied by the original confrontation.”

CNN similarly trivialised Tamimi’s arrest, noting that Israelis call her “Shirley Temper” because of “her long ginger curls” and because they accuse her of “starring in carefully choreographed ‘Pallywood’ videos, a dismissive characterisation of protests considered staged for the camera.”

While the Times and CNN provide a forum for speculation about whether Palestinians want their own children to suffer because it makes for good public relations, there is much this framing overlooks. For example, none of the above-mentioned articles mention the risk of Tamimi being seriously harmed in Israeli jails. Yet UNICEF charges Israel with subjecting Palestinian youth to “practices that amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention against Torture.” These include children “being aggressively awakened in the middle of the night by many armed soldiers and being forcibly brought to an interrogation center tied and blindfolded, sleep-deprived,” and “threatened with death, physical violence, solitary confinement and sexual assault, against themselves or a family member.”

Israel’s well-documented mistreatment of Palestinian youth is ignored in these reports, which suggests it is not Palestinian parents but Western reporters who are interested in crafting a public relations spectacle. **CT**

Palestinians in the occupied West Bank are subjected to a military court system that “does not grant the right to due process and the rights derived from it,” whereas Israelis illegally colonising the Occupied Territories have the rights and privileges of a civilian legal system

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Gregory Shupak teaches media studies at the University of Guelph-Humber in Toronto. His book, *The Wrong Story: Palestine, Israel and the Media*, is published by OR Books. This article originally appeared at www.fair.org

Why the Israeli army is worried about Gaza

Jonathan Cook says Netanyahu and Abbas shouldn't ignore the warnings from Israeli generals' of the likely effect of the catastrophe that may soon hit Gaza

Gaza is effectively an open-air prison, an extremely overcrowded one, with only a few hours of electricity a day and its ground water polluted by seawater and sewage

Last month Israeli military officials for the first time echoed what human rights groups and the United Nations have been saying for some time: that Gaza's economy and infrastructure stand on the brink of collapse.

They should know.

More than 10 years ago the Israeli army tightened its grip on Gaza, enforcing a blockade on goods coming in and out of the tiny coastal enclave that left much of its two-million-strong population unemployed, impoverished and hopeless. Since then, Israel has launched three separate major military assaults that have destroyed Gaza's infrastructure, killed many thousands and left tens of thousands more homeless and traumatised.

Gaza is effectively an open-air prison, an extremely overcrowded one, with only a few hours of electricity a day and its ground water polluted by seawater and sewage.

After a decade of this horrifying experiment in human endurance, the Israeli army finally appears to be concerned about whether Gaza can cope much longer. In recent days it has begun handing out forms, with more than a dozen questions, to the small number of Palestinians allowed briefly out of Gaza – mainly business people trading with Israel, those needing emergency medical treatment and family members accompanying them.

One question asks bluntly whether they are happy, another whom they blame for their economic troubles. A statistician might wonder whether the answers can be trusted, given that the sample group is so heavily dependent on Israel's goodwill for their physical and financial survival.

But the survey does at least suggest that Israel's top brass may be open to new thinking, after decades of treating Palestinians only as target practice, lab rats or sheep to be herded into cities, freeing up land for Jewish settlers. Has the army finally understood that Palestinians are human beings too, with limits to the suffering they can soak up?

According to the local media, the army is in part responding to practical concerns. It is reportedly worried that, if epidemics break out, the diseases will quickly spread into Israel. And if Gaza's economy collapses, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians could be banging on Israel's door – or rather storming its hi-tech incarceration fence – to be allowed in. The army has no realistic contingency plans for either scenario.

It may also be considering its image – and defence case – if its commanders ever find themselves in the dock at the International Criminal Court in the Hague accused of war crimes. Nonetheless, neither Israeli politicians nor Washington appear to be taking the army's warnings to heart. In fact, things



Exasperated: Palestine leader Mahmoud Abbas.

look set to get worse. Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has recently said there could be no improvements, no reconstruction in Gaza until Hamas agrees to give up its weapons – the only thing, in Hamas’s view, that serves as a deterrent against future Israeli attack.

Figures show Israel’s policy towards Gaza has been actually growing harsher. In 2017 exit permits issued by Israel dwindled to a third of the number two years earlier – and a hundredfold fewer than in early 2000. A few hundred Palestinian businesspeople receive visas, stifling any chance of economic revival.

The number of trucks bringing goods into Gaza has been cut in half – not because Israel is putting the inmates on a “diet,” as it once did, but because the enclave’s Palestinians lack “purchasing power.” That is, they are too poor to buy Israeli goods.

Netanyahu has resolutely ignored a plan by his transport minister to build an artificial island off Gaza to accommodate a sea port under Israeli or international supervision. And no one is considering allowing the Palestinians to exploit Gaza’s natural gas fields, just off the coast.

In fact, the only thing holding Gaza together is the international aid it receives. And that is now in jeopardy too.

The Trump administration announced last month that it is to slash by half the aid

it sends to Palestinian refugees via the UN agency UNRWA. Trump has proposed further cuts to punish Mahmoud Abbas, the increasingly exasperated Palestinian leader, for refusing to pretend any longer that the US is an honest broker capable of overseeing peace talks.

The White House’s difficulties are only being underscored as Mike Pence, the US vice-president, visits Israel as part of Trump’s supposed push for peace. He is being boycotted by Palestinian officials.

Palestinians in Gaza will feel the loss of aid severely. A majority live in miserable refugee camps set up after their families were expelled in 1948 from homes in what is now Israel. They depend on the UN for food handouts, health and education.

Backed by the PLO’s legislative body, the central council, Abbas has begun retaliating – at least rhetorically. He desperately needs to shore up the credibility of his diplomatic strategy in pursuit of a two-state solution after Trump recently hived off Palestine’s future capital, Jerusalem, to Israel.

Abbas threatened, if not very credibly, to end a security coordination with Israel he once termed “sacred,” and declared as finished the Oslo accords that created the Palestinian Authority he now heads.

The lack of visible concern in Israel and Washington suggests neither believes he will make good on those threats.

But it is not Abbas’s posturing that Netanyahu and Trump need to worry about. They should be listening to Israel’s generals, who understand that there will be no defence against the fallout from the catastrophe looming in Gaza.

CT

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

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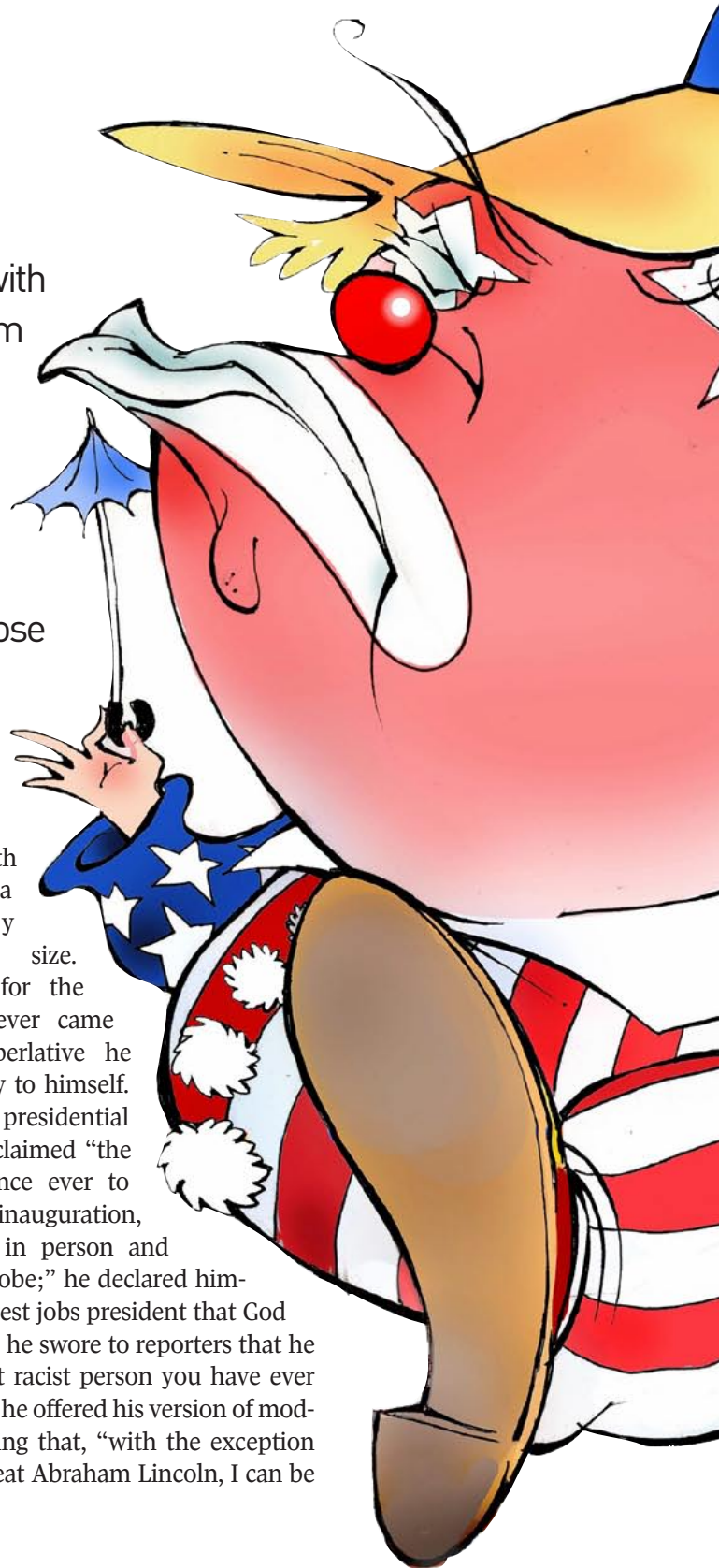
Send in the clown

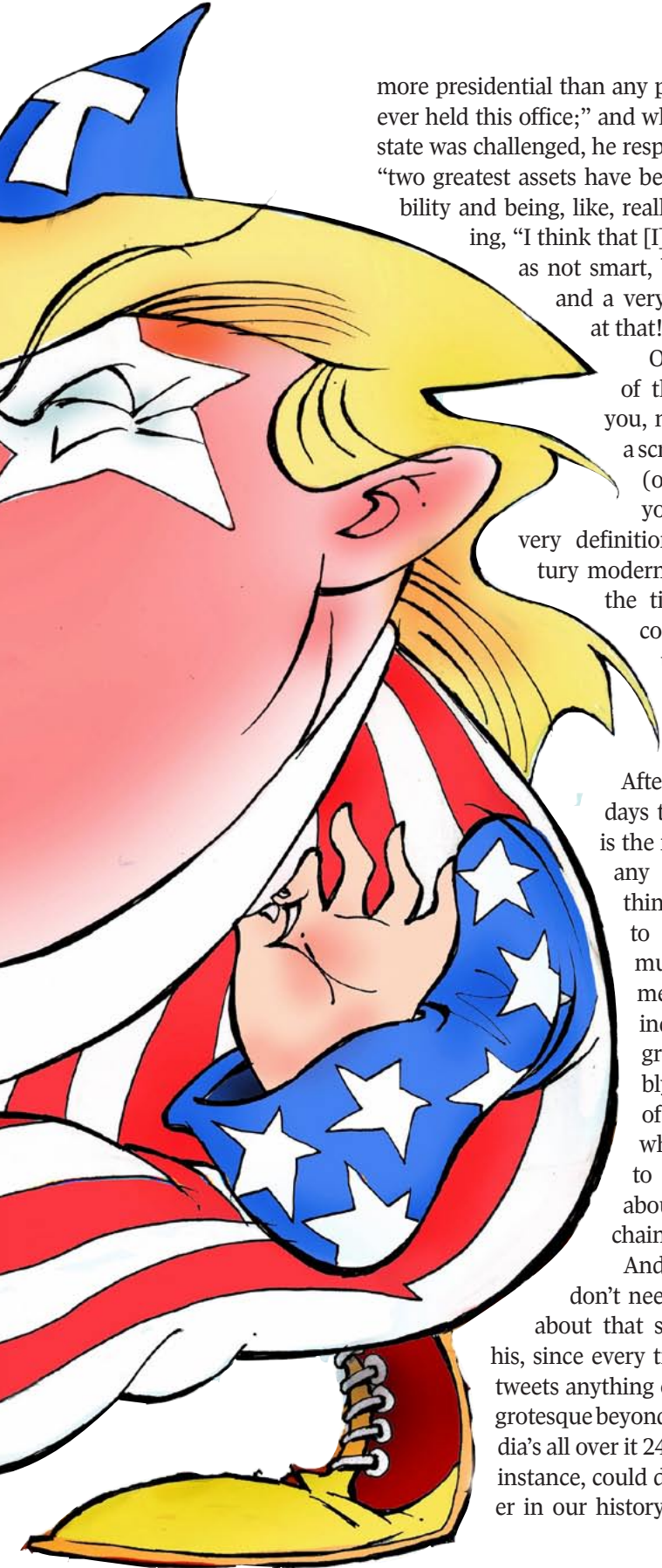
The American electorate voted for the man with the eerily red face, an unearthly shade seldom seen since the perfection of Technicolor. They voted for the overweight man who reputedly ate little but Big Macs, while swinging one-handed from a political trapeze with fingers of a particularly contestable size. **Tom Engelhardt** takes a close look at Donald Trump's Circus of the Bizarre

Recently, a memory of my son as a small boy came back to me. He was, in those days, terrified of clowns. Something about their strange, mask-like, painted faces unnerved him utterly, chilled him to the bone. To the rest of us, they were comic, but to him – or so I came to imagine anyway – they were emanations from hell.

Those circus memories of long ago seem relevant to me today because, in November 2016, the American electorate, or a near majority of them anyway, chose to send in the clowns. They voted willingly, knowingly, for the man with that strange orange thing on his head, the result – we now know, thanks to his daughter – of voluntary “scalp reduction surgery.” They voted for the man with the eerily red face, an unearthly shade seldom seen since the perfection of Technicolor. They voted for the overweight man who reputedly ate little but Big Macs (for fear of being poisoned), while swinging one-hand-

ed from a political trapeze with fingers of a particularly contestable size. They voted for the man who never came across a superlative he couldn't apply to himself. Of his first presidential moment, he claimed “the largest audience ever to witness an inauguration, period, both in person and around the globe;” he declared himself “the greatest jobs president that God ever created;” he swore to reporters that he was “the least racist person you have ever interviewed;” he offered his version of modesty by insisting that, “with the exception of the late, great Abraham Lincoln, I can be





more presidential than any president that's ever held this office;" and when his mental state was challenged, he responded that his "two greatest assets have been mental stability and being, like, really smart," adding, "I think that [I] would qualify as not smart, but genius . . . and a very stable genius at that!"

Of course, none of this is news to you, not if you have a screen in your life (or more likely your hand) – the very definition of 21st-century modernity. In fact, by the time this piece comes out, you'll undoubtedly have a new set of examples to cite.

After all, these days that essentially is the news: him and any outrageous thing he wants to say and not much else, which means that he is indisputably the greatest, possibly in the history of the universe, when it comes to yanking just about anybody's chain.

And you certainly don't need me to go on about that strange skill of his, since every time he says or tweets anything over the top or grotesque beyond belief, the media's all over it 24/7. No one, for instance, could doubt that never in our history has the word

"shithole" (or, in some cases, "s---hole") or even "shithouse" been used more frequently than in the wake of the president's recent wielding of it (or them or one or the other) for unnamed African countries and Haiti in a White House meeting on immigration. That meeting proved an ambush-and-a-half, only spiralling further out of control when, in its wake, the president denied ever using the word "shithole" and was backed by Republican attendees evidently so desperate to curry favour that they pretended they hadn't heard the word, which, by now, just about everyone on Earth has heard or seen in English or some translation thereof.

Since he rode down that Trump Tower escalator into our political lives in June 2015, this sort of thing and more or less nothing else has largely been "the news." It goes without saying – which won't stop me from saying it – that not since Nebuchadnezzar's words were first scratched onto a cuneiform tablet has more focus been put on the passing words, gestures, and expressions of a single human being. And that's the truest news about the news of this era. It's been consumed by a single news hog. Which means that Donald Trump has already won, no matter what happens, since he continues to be treated as if he were the only three-ring circus in town, as if he were in himself that classic big-top Volkswagen filled to the brim with clowns.

The imperial presidency exposed

Who could deny that much of the attention he's received has been based on the absurdity, exaggeration, unsettling clownishness of it all, right down to the zany crew of subsidiary clowns who have helped keep him pumped up and cable newsed in the Oval Office?

In early October 2016, I suggested that a certain segment of voters in the white heartland, feeling their backs against the economic wall and the nation in decline – Donald Trump being our first true declinist candidate (hence that "again" in MAGA

A Vision From Hell

Trump continues to show us in new ways quite an old reality: how terrifying a force for destruction, possibly even on a planetary level, US power can be

– Make America Great Again) – was prepared to send a “suicide bomber” into the White House. And I suggested as well that they were willing to do so even if the ceiling collapsed on them. (Had I thought of it at the time, I would have added that much of the mainstream media also had its back to the wall with its status and finances in decline, staffs shrinking, and fears rising that it might be eaten alive by social media. As a result, some of its key players were similarly inclined to escort that suicide bomber Washingtonwards, no matter what fell or whom it hit.)

In retrospect, that has, I think, proven an accurate assessment, but like all authors I reserve the right to change my imagery in midstream, which brings me back to my son’s childhood fear of clowns. At least for me, that now catches the most essential aspect of the age of Trump: its clownishness. And, although The Donald is often treated by his opponents as a laughing matter, an absurdity, a jokester (and a joke) in the Oval Office, I don’t mean those clowns, the ones that leave you rolling in the aisles. I mean my son’s clowns, the death’s-head ones whose absurd versions of the gestures of everyday life leave you chilled to the bone, genuinely afraid.

Donald Trump fits that image exactly because – though you wouldn’t know it from the usual coverage of him – he isn’t at all unique (except in the details, except in the exaggeration of it all). What makes him so clownish, in the sense I’m describing, is that he offers a chillingly exaggerated, wildly fiery-and-furious version of the very imperial American presidency we’ve come to know over these last seven decades: the one that has long ridden herd on a nuclear apocalypse; that killed millions on its journey to nowhere in Southeast Asia in the previous century; that hasn’t been able to stop itself from overseeing more than a quarter-century of war-making – two wars, to be exact – in Afghanistan of all places; that, in its pursuit of its never-ending “war”

on terror, has made war on so much else as well, turning significant parts of the planet into zones of increasing chaos, failed states, fleeing populations, and wholesale destruction; the one whose “precision” military – the battle against ISIS in Iraq and Syria has been termed the “most precise campaign in history” – has helped transform cities from Ramadi and Fallujah to Mosul and Raqqa into landscapes that, in their indiscriminate wreckage, look like Stalingrad after the battle in World War II (and that now is threatening to develop a “precision” version of nuclear war as well); and that has, in this century, overseen the creation of “Saudi America” on a planet in which it was already easy enough to grasp that fossil fuels were doing the kinds of damage to the human environment that nothing short of a giant asteroid or nuclear war might otherwise do.

Ripped away facade of dignity

From his America First policies to his reported desire to see (and make use of) terrorist attacks on this country, the man who has declared climate change a Chinese hoax, threatened to loose “fire and fury like the world has never seen,” described other countries in language once considered un-presidential by presidents who nonetheless treated the very same countries like “shit-holes,” and given “his” generals a remarkably free hand to “win” the war on terror is but an eerily clownish version of all that has gone before. He has, in a sense, ripped away the façade of dignity from the imperial presidency and let us glimpse just what is truly imperial (and imperious) about it. He continues to show us in new ways quite an old reality: how terrifying a force for destruction, possibly even on a planetary level, US power can be.

And just in case you don’t think that Volkswagen of Trump’s (or maybe I mean that private plane with the golden bathroom fixtures) is filled with other clowns whose acts should similarly chill you to the bone, let’s skip Scott Pruitt as he secretly disman-

tles the Environmental Protection Agency and so many protections for our health, the Energy Department's Rick Perry as he embraces the CEOs of Big Energy, that future oil-spill king, the Interior Department's Ryan Zinke, and the rest of the domestic wrecking crew, and turn instead to "his" generals – the ones from America's losing wars – that President Trump has made ascendant in Washington.

And even then, let's skip their urge to create smaller, more "usable" nuclear weapons (a process started in the Obama years), or hike the nuclear budget, or redefine ever more situations, including cyber attacks on the US, as potential nuclear ones; and let's skip as well their eagerness, from Niger to Yemen, Libya to Somalia, to expand and heighten the war on terror in an exaggerated version of exactly what we've been living through these past 16 years. Let's concentrate instead on just one place, the ur-location for that war, the country about which those in the Pentagon are no longer speaking of war at all but of "generational struggle": Afghanistan.

The graveyard of empires

Think of it: 28 years after the Soviet army limped out of that infamous "graveyard of empires" at the end of a decade-long struggle in which the US had backed the most extreme groups of Islamic fundamentalists (including a rich young Saudi by the name of Osama bin Laden), 16 years after the US returned to invade and "liberate" Afghanistan, they're still at it. In December, with Donald Trump lifting various constraints on US military commanders there, the generals were, for instance, sending in the planes. That month there were more US air strikes – 455 in a winter period of minimal fighting – than not just the previous December (65) but December 2012 (about 200) when 100,000 US troops were still in-country. The phrase of this moment among US military officers in Afghanistan, according to Max Bearak of the Washington Post: "We're at

a turning point." Another: "The gloves are off." (Admittedly, no US commander has as yet reported seeing "the light at the end of the tunnel," but don't rule it out.)

In the meantime, drones of both the armed and unarmed surveillance variety are being reassigned to Afghanistan in rising numbers (as well as more helicopters, ground vehicles, and artillery). With the recent announcement that 1,000 more personnel will soon head for that country, US troop strength continues to grow, bringing the numbers of American advisers, trainers, and Special Operations forces there up to perhaps 15,000 or more (as opposed to the 11,000 or so when Donald Trump entered the Oval Office).

In addition, the military has plans to double the size of Afghanistan's own special ops forces and triple the size of its air force, while the head of US Central Command, General Joseph Votel, is calling for far more aggressive actions by those American-advised Afghan security forces in the upcoming spring fighting season. (To put this in perspective, a 2008 US military plan to spend billions of dollars ensuring that the Afghan air force was fully staffed, supplied, trained, and "self-sufficient" by 2015 ended seven years later with it in a "woeful state" of disrepair and near ruin.) Meanwhile, as part of this ramp-up of operations, the Navy is planning to hire drone-maker General Atomics to fly that company's surveillance drones in Afghanistan in what's being termed "a 'surge' of intelligence, reconnaissance, and surveillance capabilities."

If all of this sounds faintly familiar to you, I'm not surprised. In fact, if you've already stopped paying attention – as most Americans on the nonexistent "home front" seem to have done when it comes to most of America's wars of this era – I just want you to know that I completely understand. Sixteen repetitive years later, with the Taliban again in control of something close to half of Afghanistan, your response couldn't be more all-American. Surges, turning points,

28 years after the Soviet army limped out of that infamous "graveyard of empires" at the end of a decade-long struggle in which the US had backed the most extreme groups of Islamic fundamentalists, 16 years after the US returned to invade and "liberate" Afghanistan, they're still at it

A Vision From Hell

No one can pull the curtains back from the reality of the imperial presidency in quite the way Trump can. No one can showcase our grim American world, tweet by outrageous tweet, in quite his fashion. Yes, it can all look ludicrous as hell, but don't laugh

more aggressive actions, you've heard it all before – and when it comes to Afghanistan, the odds are that you'll hear it all again.

And don't for a moment think that this doesn't add up to another version of sending in the clowns.

If you don't believe that retired General James Mattis, Lieutenant General HR McMaster, and retired General James Kelly, aka the secretary of defense, the national security adviser, and the White House chief of staff, respectively, are clowns, if you're still convinced that they're the "adults" in the Trumpian playroom, check out Afghanistan and think again. But don't blame them either. What else can a clown do, once those giant floppy shoes are on their feet, their faces are painted, and the bulbous red nose is in place, but act the part? So many years later, they simply can't imagine another way to think about the world of American war. They only know what they know. Give them a horn and they'll honk it; give them Hamlet's "to be or not to be" soliloquy and they'll still honk that horn.

For the last decade and a half, through invasions and occupations, surges and counterinsurgency operations, bombing runs and drone strikes, commando raids and training missions, they and their colleagues in the US high command have helped spread terror movements across significant parts of the planet, while playing a major role in creating a series of failing or failed states across the Greater Mid-

dle East and Africa. They've helped uproot whole populations and transform major cities into spectacles of ruin. Think of this as their 21st-century destiny. They've proven to be key actors in what has become an American empire of chaos or perhaps simply an empire of graveyards.

They can't help themselves. Forgive them, Father, for they are clowns led by the greatest clownster-in-chief in the history of this country. Yes, he makes even them uncomfortable because no one can pull the curtains back from the reality of the imperial presidency in quite the way he can. No one can showcase our grim American world, tweet by outrageous tweet, in quite his fashion.

And yes, it can all look ludicrous as hell, but don't laugh. Don't even think about it. Not now, not when we're all at the circus watching those emanations from hell perform. Instead, be chilled – chilled to the bone. Absurd as every pratfall may be, it's distinctly a vision from hell, an all-American vision for the ages. **CT**

*Tom Engelhardt is a co-founder of the American Empire Project and the author of *The United States of Fear* as well as a history of the Cold War, *The End of Victory Culture*. He is a fellow of the Nation Institute and runs *TomDispatch.com*. His latest book is *Shadow Government: Surveillance, Secret Wars, and a Global Security State in a Single-Superpower World*. This essay was first published at www.tomdispatch.com*

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How football is selling out its fans

In a country with food banks and hospital closures, it's becoming harder to tolerate football's excesses, writes **Mark Turley**

Born from the sweat of the industrial working class, among its many nicknames association football has long been known as “the people’s game.” The phrase conjures up quaint images: sweaters for goalposts, local pride and vast stands full of flat caps. Since the Victorians codified it, Britain’s national love of the sport has become perhaps its most binding cultural myth.

But does it deserve this kind of sentiment in the 21st-century? What is football today? And what connection does it hold with working people now?

For many citizens of austerity Britain, January is a fraught and frugal time. Festive excesses weigh heavily, while 2018 looms like a mugger. Somehow the new year must be looked squarely, fearfully in the eye.

Wander through any town at around 8am and you’ll see huddled workers waiting for buses in the rain. More than 20 percent of them are in precarious, minimum wage employment. As Britain’s cost of living rises – food inflation reached its highest point in four years in November– many must be



BIG MOVE: Philippe Coutinho moved from Liverpool to Barcelona for £142-million.

Photo: Wikimedia

wondering how they will get through the month.

Yet, as Britons up and down the country face this grim reality, football indulges in a bi-annual carnival of extravagance. Since the 2002-3 season, the English Premier League has operated a “transfer window” system, giving clubs only two sessions when they can sign or sell players. The summer window runs from June to August, while the winter period occupies January.

For those on their way to work, newspaper back pages relate tales of unimaginable riches. The

opening of the current window has already seen the record sale of Brazilian Philippe Coutinho from Liverpool to Barcelona for £142-million. Coming the other way, Liverpool signed Dutch defender Virgil van Dijk from Southampton for £75-million.

Elsewhere, England international midfielder Ross Barkley joined Chelsea from Everton for an estimated total of £22-million. In a sign of the unreality in which football operates, this figure is widely described as a “bargain.” Everton supporters, whose club

England international midfielder Ross Barkley joined Chelsea from Everton for an estimated total of £22-million. In a sign of the unreality in which football operates, this figure is widely described as a “bargain”

Game Of Plenty

The Premier League average salary currently stands at £50,981 a week. But star names, such as Manchester United's Paul Pogba, or Manchester City's Sergio Agüero earn well over £200,000 for seven days' work

is situated in Liverpool, a city with one of the highest rates of child poverty in the country, are incensed the fee was not doubled. Even the mayor of Liverpool, who should surely have more pressing priorities, has felt it necessary to comment publicly on Barkley's sale. This is the power football has.

It is sobering to read that during the last completed transfer window, of summer 2017, the Premier League's net spend came to £1.47-billion. Consider the funding crises in our hospitals, schools and other public services. Much as we may love football and perceive it as separate from the wider economy, is there not a case for re-balance?

According to the Disposable Income Data index, the typical Brit spent £342 on 2017's Christmas presents. £303 of that spending was put on a credit card. 14 percent of us resorted to payday loans to make it through to the new year. With the average UK salary currently standing at £27,000 per annum, it will take Joe Public an average of four-and-a-half months to clear their Christmas debt. Ironically, as they do so, many will budget to include football support in their spending. Reportedly UK fans splurge an incredible £5-billion annually following the game: merchandise, travel, TV subscriptions – it all adds up.

For purists who savour the live experience, the Premier League is by far the most expensive in the world. Four London clubs; Arsenal, Tottenham, Chelsea and West Ham charge well over £1,000 for a season ticket. By contrast, German champions Bayern Munich, a bigger club than any of them, sells its



CHANGING FORTUNES: Alexis Sanchez (top) reportedly earns £400,000+ a week; while Kevin Keegan (above) earned just £50 a week in 1971.

Photos: Wikimedia

season tickets for just €140, while Spanish giants Barcelona offer one for a similar price. Does this suggest something about British society in comparison to Germany or Spain? What exactly is it about us that makes our game so pricey? And why is criticism of this not more vociferous?

Assisted by the huge sums they charge fans to watch, either in stadia or on TV, for those involved in the Premier League, transfer windows are a kind of festival. They add to the news cycle, providing streams of content and analysis. The climax of each window, known as “deadline day,” has even become a televised event in itself.

Marking the halfway point of the season, the January slot provides those at the top an opportunity to boost their chances of glory. For those near the bottom, it offers a last, often desperate, roll of the dice to avoid relegation, with the accompanying disaster of separation from the Premier League goldmine.

Such is the lure of the Premier League money-pit that most of its 30 clubs aim only to wallow in it. Few outside the “big six” have a realistic chance of success, although Leicester City confounded the bookies in 2016. That blip aside, along with Blackburn Rovers

in 1995, only four clubs have won the title since its inception 26 years ago. But lack of true competition is of little concern. After all, last season's bottom side, Sunderland, earned £99.9-million simply for participating. This is modern football.

Players, meanwhile, receive stratospheric wages. The Premier League average salary currently stands at £50,981 a week. But star names, such as Manchester United's Paul Pogba, or Manchester City's Sergio Agüero

ro earn well over £200,000 for seven days' work. In a recent development, Arsenal's Alexis Sanchez moved to Manchester United on an inconceivable weekly pay packet claimed to be anything from £400,000 to £500,000.

Players cannot be blamed for these obscenities. Many come from working class backgrounds, while their careers are short and it is human nature to try to capitalise on your potential. Unlike banking or high finance, it makes sense for football's billions to go to its frontline staff, rather than those in the boardrooms. Yet a country in which even hardworking people have to resort to foodbanks to feed their kids, while men are given millions to play football, clearly has some thinking to do. It is sad, considering its origins, but football has become one of the most grotesque 21st-century symbols of economic inequality.

Bonding with fans

It wasn't always this way. Players and fans used to share a bond, even mixing in pubs after games. When Kevin Keegan signed for Liverpool in 1971, his basic wage in the old Football League Division One amounted to £50 a week, roughly corresponding to the national average. Win and goal bonuses, and with merchandising contracts pushed up his earnings, making him well-off at the time, but nowhere near modern levels of opulence. Even in the '80s, typical footballer salaries hovered around £50,000 a year. Excellent pay, but not outrageous.

Yet something new was afoot in that decade. In Britain and America, Thatcher and Reagan sought to crush unions and encourage "wealth creators." The discredited theory of trickle-down economics was promoted above all else. The rich should get as rich as possible and everyone would benefit, we were told. Of course, it was a poisonous lie. But the chairpeople of the big six football clubs absorbed this ethos with gusto.

The Premier League was formed in 1992 with a specific purpose. Top clubs broke

away to keep the lion's share of lucrative TV money. ITV was the original intended partner, before Rupert Murdoch's BskyB muscled in. Sky tabled a bid of £304-million over five years for exclusive live rights. And the league has been there ever since.

Over the next 25 years, aggressive marketing made the Premier League a global product, while foreign investment upped the ante. Stars from all over the world joined homegrown talent at the banquet. At the same time, match tickets and TV subscription prices rocketed way above the rate of inflation. None of this happened by accident. It was designed and deliberate. Neoliberal business practice. Hyper-capitalism. Sport was long forgotten.

Most fans are drawn to football because of local attachment, or family influence. For some, team identity gives a sense of belonging. But the Premier League, for all its slickness and glamour, has changed that. Clubs are no longer clubs in any meaningful sense. They are ruthless, profit-driven companies which sell a manufactured product. And fans are customers and consumers, nothing more. While the excesses of bankers or the financial sector receive frequent, deserved criticism, football's immoderation goes largely unchallenged. Old affections are hard to forget, perhaps.

But newspapers that relay hospital closures and rising poverty on front pages, with multi-million transfer deals on the back should provide serious food for thought. It may not seem obvious for football supporters, but there is a connection between the two. Maybe the time has come to re-evaluate exactly what we are supporting. **CT**

*Mark Turley has twice been nominated for Britain's William Hill Sports Book of the Year – in 2015, for *Journeyman*, about boxers who lose for a living, and in 2017 for *Redemption: From Iron Bars to Ironman*, on John Mcavoy, a life sentenced prisoner who became a world record-breaking athlete. This article first appeared at www.thecanary.co.uk.*

Players and fans used to share a bond. They even mixed in pubs after games. When young star Kevin Keegan signed for Liverpool in 1971, his basic wage amounted to £50 a week

In The Picture



Rachel. Mud bathing. Virginia.

Answering the call of nature

Tony Sutton surveys Lucas Foglia's photographic journey into the wild

If you like reading books with just a few words and a selection of excellent photographs, Lucas Foglia's new photobook, **Human Nature**, may be just for you. In his introduction, Foglia tells us, "I grew up on a small farm, 30 miles east of New York City. Growing our food and bartering, my family felt shielded from the strip malls and suburbs around us. The forest that bordered the farm was my childhood wilderness, a wild place

Human Nature, by Lucas Foglia, is published by Nazraeli Press, Price \$60

to play that was ignored by our neighbours who commuted to Manhattan.

"In 2012, Hurricane Sandy flooded our fields and blew down the oldest trees in the woods. On the news, scientists linked the storm to climate change caused by human activity. I realised that if



In The Picture



Matt swinging between trees, Lost Coast, California



Maddie with invasive water lilies, North Carolina.



Wildfire, California.

humans are changing the weather, then there is no place on Earth unaltered by people.”

That’s it! There’s no more text, other than a list of books recommended by the scientists Foglia photographed for the book. It’s only later, while visiting this web site, that I discover Human Nature “is a series of interconnected stories about people, nature, and the science of our relationship to wilderness,” and that Foglia’s photographic journey covers 12 years of travel around the globe, through cities, forests, farms, deserts, ice fields and oceans.

Yes, but what was the purpose of his journey? No information in the book, so it’s back to the Internet: “At a time when the average American spends 93 percent of their life indoors, I photographed government programmes that connect people to nature;

In The Picture



Troy holding a guinea fowl chick, GreenHouse Program, Rikers Island jail complex, New York.

neuroscientists measuring how spending time in the wild benefits us; and climate scientists measuring how human activity is changing the air,” he says, adding, “the book focuses on positive examples – of places, people, programmes, and science – that deserve support. . . . Nature used to mean the Earth besides humans and human creations. But now there is no place on Earth unaltered by people, which has led many to argue that Nature no longer exists. At the same time, research has suggested that time in wild places is integral to our health and happiness.”

Ah, now I know – vaguely – the reasoning behind Foglia’s travels, although I’m still wondering why I had to trawl the Internet to discover the information. That’s not my only criticism, however, for the photo captions are as annoying as the text’s deficiencies. At the beginning of the book, there’s an intriguing photograph of a lady wallowing in a muddy pond (see Page 32 of this issue). My initial thought is, “*What the fuck is she doing?*” Reading the caption, which sits in a page of white space on

the facing page, I’m told: “Rachel Mud bathing. Virginia.” Another web search later, I find more detail: “Rachel immerses herself in the communal mud pit at the Twin Oaks Communities Conference in Louisa, Virginia. People from around the world come to the conference to talk about eco-villages, cooperative housing, and how to live closer to nature.” OK, it’s still not sparkling, but imagine how much better informed I’d be if the captions to the remaining 57 photos have as much detail. But they don’t . . . “Xing in an Aviary, Jurong Bird Park, Singapore.” . . . “Barn, California.” . . . Etcetera, etcetera. I’ll probably discover more if I search the ‘net, but I don’t have enough time or enthusiasm. So I remain ignorant.

Human Nature delivers a simple lesson to photographers and publishers: A great picture may well be worth 1,000 words, but informative text and detailed captions are perhaps as important if you want readers to fully understand your visual adventure. **CT**

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Tony Sutton is the editor of ColdType.

Why we need White House protests

The decision to close the public space where protests are held in front of the White House is a bad move, writes activist **Frida Berrigan**

I was first arrested at the White House when I was 10 years old. My hair was pulled off my face by a blue bandana. I drew a penguin on my sign and wrote: Reagan: Give Kids A Chance to Live. My brother, a year younger, was arrested too, along with the activist and paediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock. The arrest was a novel experience – the police officers were courtly. Jerry and I kept a quiet eye out for the elderly doctor’s pointy ears. It wasn’t until days later that we realised we hadn’t been arrested with Mr. Spock, Captain Kirk’s half-Vulcan science officer.

Over the years, I’ve been arrested in front of the White House many times. As an adult, I’ve always felt a mixture of tension, excitement and righteousness – which is followed by brief terror, before being swept away amid the cheers and solidarity of supporters. Then the emotions switch to a compound of boredom and community-building in the holding areas or cells, as we wait for processing and release.

The beginning of that arrest process over these many years has always been the same: to stand still with a sign along the central stretch of the White House’s south sidewalk known as the “picture postcard zone.”

Not anymore. The picture postcard zone is now inaccessible. There is a permanent cordon that shortens the depth of the sidewalk by half. The White House fence is now



Frida Berrigan, age 10, protesting in front of the White House next to Ched Myers and her father Phil Berrigan (right).
Photo: WNV/Berrigan family

protected by another fence and guarded by an armed officer behind an improvised bulletproof barrier. Pennsylvania Avenue, long a car-free promenade, is now often shut down and inaccessible to even the most appealing tourists.

12ft fence around the White House

This reordering of public space was announced by the Secret Service last April in response to a series of fence jumpings and security breaches that occurred during the final months of the Obama administration and the early days of Trump’s residency.

I’ve been arrested in front of the White House many times. I’ve always felt a mixture of tension, excitement and righteousness – which is followed by brief terror

Public Space

We were at the White House to mark the 16th year of Guantanamo's existence as a prison and torture chamber for Muslim and Arab men deemed to be terrorists and held since the beginning of the War on Terror



War Resisters League protest on the White House lawn in September 1978.

A Secret Service plan for a nearly 12-foot fence surrounding the White House with “pencil point anti-climb fixtures” was approved and work will begin on this project sometime this year. In the meantime, it looks like the sidewalk is a no-go zone.

I took in all these changes from beneath a black hood on January 11. I was at the end of a single-file line of 40 or so friends dressed in orange jumpsuits. We were at the White House to mark the 16th year of Guantanamo's existence as a prison and torture chamber for Muslim and Arab men deemed to be terrorists and held since the beginning of the War on Terror. Now there are just 41 being held, but under President Trump, even those cleared for release have almost no hope of ever being free.

Through the rally and interfaith prayer service, we maintained a spectre-like stillness and silence, representing men like Sharqawi Al Hajj, a Yemeni who is the same age as me and has been held at Guantanamo for 14 years. He has never been charged with a crime. He was subjected to sustained interrogation and torture, undertook protracted hunger strikes to protest his detention and is now weakened and ill.

Our plan after the rally was to go across Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House sidewalk with our Shut Down Guantanamo banners and signs. But, met with cordons and barriers, we set up along the Lafayette Park curb to begin our ceremony of transformation.

As each Guantanamo name was read, the people dressed in orange were handed a cup bearing that name. I took the cup, pulled off my hood, drank the sweet tea and then set the cup down in front of our banner, Land of Liberty: 41 in Guantanamo, 2.3-million in US prisons, 44,000 in immigration detention. “One after another we did this until all 41 lives, stories and humanities were represented. And then five of our group ducked under the police tape and tried to take our message across the street in front of the White House. They didn't get 20 steps before they were intercepted and placed under arrest.

Brian Terrell, an activist with Voices for Creative Nonviolence, has been arrested in front of the White House countless times since the Carter administration and was arrested again on January 11. In a recent article describing his arrest, he noted that the

sidewalk is cut in half. “This public forum,” he bemoaned, “a place of protest and advocacy for more than a century, the place where the vote for women and benefits for veterans were won, has been strangled to the point where no dissent is tolerated there.”

There is a great picture of Grace Paley, Ralph DiGia and other members of the War Resisters League holding a banner on the White House lawn emblazoned with No Nuclear Weapons! No Nuclear Power! USA or USSR. It was 1978 and while their message needs little updating, their simple action would be essentially impossible these 40 years later. In the name of security, space for unfurling banners, holding signs and hearing speakers is too constricting.

And not just in Washington, DC.

A special rapporteur for the United Nations on freedom of assembly toured the United States during the summer of 2016 and concluded that “people have good reason to be angry and frustrated at the moment . . . and it is at times like these when robust promotion of assembly and association rights are needed most. These rights give people a peaceful avenue to speak out, engage in dialogue with their fellow citizens and authorities, air their grievances and hopefully settle them.”

In most places it is not an overt curtailment of free speech but an effort to control, corral, extract permits and fees, the compounding of regulations and ordinances, that all results in more private space and less public space.

San Francisco’s place of protest

However, not all cities are going this route. Perhaps unsurprisingly, San Francisco is redesigning one of its central squares as place to gather, rally, organise and strike out from. Harvey Milk Plaza, named for the civil rights activist who became the first openly gay elected official in the United States, sits right on top of public transportation. The new design for the plaza – approved

and slated to be built by 2020 – is an elevated, universally-accessible amphitheatre and plaza that architects hope will support “a wide spectrum and scale of activity. An afternoon picnic with a friend or a small activist’s meet-up on a Saturday or even a starting point for thousands of people to march down Market Street; the plaza welcomes everyone.” Sounds great, doesn’t it?

There is a lot for us to do in this Trumpian time. Against the backdrop of his administration’s sweeping and systemic affront to us all, the narrowing of public, physical, political space might not seem a big deal. But it is. I have my own attachment to the White House as the site of my first arrest, but it is more than that. Tyrants take away space.

I have always thought of that strip of sidewalk in front of the White House as “America’s front porch.” In one hour, you can talk to a world of tourists, see a world of issues expressed on banners of varying sophistication and art, and hear a cacophony of voices calling out for justice. Do a quick Google search of demonstrations at the White House to get a sense of the span of political issues and voices and faces that converge on that small bit of our shared topography to draw attention to their causes: Stop the Keystone XL Pipeline, No Deportation of Immigrants, Stop the Wars – alongside groups taking aim at everything from circumcision to the cruelty of circuses.

There is a lot for us to do, and unless we have public space – unless we push back against all the ways that politicians at all levels try to privatise, monetise or securitise space – we can’t do the work of building a different kind of society and a different kind of world.

CT

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Frida Berrigan is a columnist for *Waging Nonviolence*, and the author of *It Runs in the Family: On Being Raised by Radicals and Growing into Rebellious Motherhood*. She lives in New London, Conn. with her husband and their three children. This article first appeared at www.wagingnonviolence.org

There is a lot for us to do in this Trumpian time. Against the backdrop of his administration’s sweeping and systemic affront to us all, the narrowing of public, physical, political space might not seem like a big deal. But it is

The sting

Repeated warnings that Britain's Private Finance Initiative was an outrageous rip-off, dumping ultimate risks on the taxpayer, were ignored, writes **George Monbiot**

Value for money hangs on the idea that companies shoulder risks the state would otherwise carry. But in cases like this, even when the company takes the first hit, the risk ultimately returns to the government

Again the “inefficient” state mops up the disasters caused by “efficient” private companies. Just as the army had to step in when G4S failed to provide security for the London Olympics, and the Treasury had to rescue the banks, the collapse of Carillion means that the fire service must stand by to deliver school meals.

Two hospitals, both urgently needed, that Carillion was supposed to be constructing – the Midland Metropolitan and the Royal Liverpool – are left in half-built limbo, awaiting state intervention. Another 450 contracts between Carillion and the state must be untangled, resolved and perhaps rescued by the government.

When you examine the claims made for the efficiency of the private sector, you soon discover that they boil down to the transfer of risk. Value for money hangs on the idea that companies shoulder risks the state would otherwise carry. But in cases like this, even when the company takes the first hit, the risk ultimately returns to the government. In these situations, the very notion of risk transfer is questionable.

Nowhere is it more dubious than when applied to the Private Finance Initiative projects in which Carillion specialised. The Private Finance Initiative (PFI) was invented by John Major's Conservative government, but greatly expanded by Tony Blair and Gor-

don Brown. Private companies finance and deliver public services that governments would otherwise have provided.

The government claimed that the private sector, being more efficient, would provide services more cheaply than the public sector. PFI projects, Blair and Brown promised, would go ahead only if they proved to be cheaper than the “public sector comparator.”

But at the same time, the government told public bodies that state money was not an option: if they wanted new facilities, they would have to use the Private Finance Initiative. In the words of the then health secretary, Alan Milburn, “it's PFI or bust.” So, if you wanted a new hospital or bridge or classroom or army barracks, you had to demonstrate that PFI offered the best value for money. Otherwise, there would be no project. Public bodies immediately discovered a way to make the numbers add up: risk transfer.

The costing of risk is notoriously subjective. Because it involves the passage of a fiendishly complex contract through an unknowable future, you can make a case for almost any value. A study published in the British Medical Journal revealed that, before the risk was costed, every hospital scheme it investigated would have been built much more cheaply with public funds. But once

the notional financial risks had been added, building them through the Private Finance Initiative came out cheaper in every case, sometimes by less than 0.1 percent.

Not only was this exercise (as some prominent civil servants warned) bogus – in some cases fraudulent – but the entire concept is negated by the fact that if collapse occurs, the risk ripples through the private sector into the public sector. Companies like Carillion might not be too big to fail, but the services they deliver are. You cannot, in a nominal democracy, suddenly close a public hospital, let a bridge collapse or fail to deliver school meals.

Partly for this reason, and partly because of the inordinate political power of corporations and the people who run them, governments seek to insulate these companies from the very risks they claim to have transferred to them. This could explain why Theresa May's administration continued to award contracts to Carillion after it had issued a series of profit warnings. Was this an attempt to keep the company in business?

If so, it was one of a long list of measures designed to privatise profit and socialise risk. PFI contracts specify that if there is a conflict between paying the private provider and delivering public services, the payments must come first. However deep the crisis in the NHS becomes, however many people must have their cancer operations postponed or are left to rot on trolleys, the legal priority is still to pay the contractor. Money is officially more valuable than life.

If a PFI consortium is contracted to deliver maintenance and ancillary services, these non-clinical functions are ring-fenced, while the clinical services delivered by the public sector must be cut to make room for them. This forces public bodies to respond perversely to a funding crisis: nurses might be laid off, but the walls will still be painted. Many of the contracts cannot be broken for 25 or 30 years, regardless of whether or not they still meet real needs: again, this insulates the private sector from hazard, leaving

it with the public.

The risk lands not only on the state, but also on the people. Carillion leaves behind a series of scandals, such as the food hygiene crisis at Swindon's Great Western Hospital, and the failings at the Surgicentre clinic it ran in Hertfordshire, revealed in a horrifying report in the Observer. Similar crises have attended many other deals with private providers: operating theatres flooded with sewage, power cuts that have left nurses to ventilate patients on life support by hand, school buildings falling apart, useless services continuing to be delivered while essential services are cut.

None of this was unforeseen. Some of us warned again and again during the New Labour years that this programme would prove to be an expensive fiasco. Even the Banker magazine predicted, in 2002, that "eventually an Enron-style disaster will be rerun on a sovereign balance sheet." But the government didn't want to know. Nor did the Conservative opposition, whose idea it was in the first place. Nor did the other newspapers, now scratching their heads and wondering how this happened. There is no joy in being proved right, just immense frustration.

Risk to a company is not the same as risk to those who own and run it. The executives keep their pay-offs. The shareholders take a hit on part of their portfolios, but limited liability ensures they can walk away from any debts. The company might disappear, but ultimately it's just a name and some paperwork. But the risks imposed on the people – including the company's workers – are real. We pay for these risks twice: first when they are nominally transferred to corporations, again, when they are returned to us. The word used to describe this process is efficiency. **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 newspaper. Monbiot's web site is www.monbiot.com

Theresa May's administration continued to award contracts to Carillion after it had issued a series of profit warnings. Was this an attempt to keep the company in business?

Carillion must face justice for union blacklist

When you invite blacklisting human rights abusers to run the NHS and school meals, don't be surprised when they attempt to suck the taxpayer dry, says **Dave Smith**

Carillion eventually admitted that they had blacklisted workers who complained about safety on their building sites and paid out millions in an out-of-court settlement. I was one of those who received a payment. But compensation is not the same as justice

After the collapse of the international mega-builder Carillion, the UK Cabinet Office went on Twitter to ask if anyone had been affected. I replied: “Yes, I was #blacklisted by #Carillion for raising safety concerns on their building sites. Can the government help me by setting up a public inquiry to bring those responsible to justice?”

I got more than 1,300 retweets in the first 24 hours, which, as I'm not a celebrity or a newspaper columnist, felt like going viral. But what it demonstrates is how the Carillion saga has outraged public opinion. And quite rightly.

I am just one of several thousand construction workers to be blacklisted by major construction companies including Carillion. Their secret database meant workers who complained about asbestos or unsafe electrical installation were denied work on major construction projects. This resulted in unemployment, mortgage repayment difficulties and family tensions. In some cases, blacklisted workers committed suicide.

Back in 2009, I took an Employment Tribunal against Carillion. Six years ago, I was in court and their lawyer handed the judge a document in which the company admitted blacklisting me because I was a union member who had raised concerns about safety on one of their building sites. Carillion even provided the name of the senior

manager based at their Wolverhampton HQ who supplied the information to the unlawful blacklist, information which included a copy of my official safety representative's credentials. Despite this admission, I still lost the case.

The reason for the decision was like so many others in the building industry, I was not employed directly by Carillion but via an employment agency and as such was not protected by UK employment law. The written judgement in my case states that: “We have reached our conclusions with considerable reluctance. It seems to us that he has suffered a genuine injustice and we greatly regret that the law provides him with no remedy.”

We appealed and ended up in the European Court of Human Rights (we still lost). To add insult to injury, Carillion even came after me for £3,500 worth of legal costs.

In 2016 at the High Court, Carillion eventually admitted that they had blacklisted workers who complained about safety on their building sites and paid out millions in an out-of-court settlement. I was one of those who received a payment. But compensation is not the same as justice. Technicalities in the legal system meant that Carillion and the rest of the blacklisting companies were able to buy their way out of a trial. Not one of the company directors who orchestrated the blacklisting conspiracy has

had to account for their actions. This is why blacklisted workers are so angry and are calling for a public inquiry into the national scandal.

Why do multinational companies like Carillion act like this? The simple answer is because they can. For decades, politicians from all the mainstream political parties have become virtual cheerleaders for private enterprise. “Unshackle business from burdensome red tape” became the mantra. It might be good for corporate profits but it’s the increasing number of workers now forced to work on zero hour contracts or via employment agencies without any legal rights who are paying the price.

But the “private is best” ideology has also seen Carillion and the other blacklisting companies being lavished with lucrative public sector contracts. Rampant privatisation resulted in the seedy practices of the construction industry infesting the public sector. At Swindon Hospital, Carillion managers were embroiled in a scandal involving allegations of racist bullying and bribery. At London’s Pentonville prison, the company were reported for being six months behind in repairs.

Carillion is just a symptom of a bigger problem. It’s not about one poorly managed company. The whole neoliberal privatisation agenda is rotten to the core. When you invite blacklisting human rights abusers to run the NHS and school meals, don’t be surprised when vampire capitalism attempts to suck the taxpayer dry.

Why, when education, health and social care are facing a funding crisis, are we giving billions of pounds of taxpayers’ money to private companies and their investors? Whenever privatisation fails, the public sector is called upon to bail out big business, whether it’s Virgin Trains on the East Coast mainline, the G4S security debacle at the Olympics or Carillion. Yet despite the record of failure, the same private companies get invited back to retender for public contracts time and again. And bosses’ bonuses get

ever more eye-watering.

Not another penny of public money should be given to the bosses of the disgraced company. In a civilised society these people would be facing criminal charges. If the government has another magic money tree hidden away somewhere, it should bail out the NHS not Carillion or their bankers.

The time has come to take back control of our public services from the profit-driven leeches who have taken over. The “greed is good” philosophy has had its day. It’s time to think about what is best for society rather than the fat cats. The government should nationalise Carillion now at the current market value of their shares (ie: nothing) and run the projects for the good of our people rather than for private profit.

PFI and the myriad of other privatisation mechanisms need to come to an end. We could make a start by following the recommendation of the select committee investigation into blacklisting that called for all of the construction companies involved in the blacklisting conspiracy to be banned from any publicly funded contracts. We don’t have to wait for a General Election; local authorities, the Scottish government and the Welsh Assembly could implement such a policy tomorrow. Those who suffered at the hands of Carillion don’t need sympathy and kind words from politicians – we need action.

I have been campaigning on the issue of blacklisting for nearly a decade and my Carillion tweet has got the biggest response ever. Perhaps it’s an indication that the tide of public opinion is turning. **GT**

Dave Smith is a blacklisted construction worker, secretary of the Blacklist Support Group, trade union tutor and co-author with Phil Chamberlain of Blacklisted: the secret war between big business and union activists published by New Internationalist. This article was first published at www.opendemocracy.net

Why, when education, health and social care are facing a funding crisis, are we giving billions of pounds of taxpayers’ money to private companies and their investors?

Oh Dear!

The thousand buttons that lead to nuclear war

Conn M. Hallinan points out that, despite what they may claim, the leaders of nuclear-armed nations don't actually control their weapons of world annihilation

During the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, a single commodore on a Soviet submarine off Cuba, Vasili Arkhipov, refused to okay an order by the sub's first and second in command to launch a nuclear tipped torpedo at US warships that were harassing the vessel

When President Donald Trump bragged that his nuclear button was bigger and more efficient than North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un's button, he was perpetuating the myth that the leaders of nuclear-armed nations control their weapons. But you do not have to be Trump, Kim, Vladimir Putin, Theresa May, Xi Jinping, Narendra Modi, Mamnoon Hussain, or Benjamin Netanyahu to push that button. There are thousands of buttons and thousands of people who can initiate a nuclear war.

Indeed, the very nature of nuclear weapons requires that the power to use them is decentralised and dispersed. And while it is sobering to think of leaders like Kim and Trump with their finger on the trigger, a nuclear war is far more likely to be started by some anonymous captain in an Ohio-class submarine patrolling the Pacific or a Pakistani colonel on the Indian border.

In his book *The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner*, Daniel Ellsberg says that the recent uproar over Trump's threats to visit "fire and fury" on North Korea misses the point that "every president has delegated" the authority to use nuclear weapons. "The idea that the president is the only one with the sole power to issue an order that will be recognised as an authentic authorised order is totally false," he told National Public Radio.

If a single button were the case, decapitating a country's leader would prevent the use of nuclear weapons. Take out Washington (or Mar-a-Largo), Moscow, or Beijing and you would neutralise a nation's nuclear force. In reality, the decision to use those weapons merely shifts further down the chain of command. The Russians call it "dead hand:" Moscow goes, and some general in the Urals launches an ICBM or the captain of a Borei-class submarine in the Sea of Okhotsk fires off his multiple war head SS-N-32 Bulava missiles.

During the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, a single commodore on a Soviet submarine off Cuba, Vasili Arkhipov, refused to okay an order by the sub's first and second in command to launch a nuclear tipped torpedo at US warships that were harassing the vessel. If he had not intervened, according to Ellsberg, it is quite likely there would have been a nuclear war between the US, its allies, and the Soviet Union.

The problem with nuclear weapons – besides the fact that they are capable of destroying human civilisations and most life on the planet – is that they are actually quite fragile, with a very limited life span: "use them or lose them" is the philosophy of nuclear war planners, because if you hesitate, your opponent may destroy them before they can be launched.

The more efficient and accurate your

nuclear force, the more destabilising it becomes. For instance, the US has thousands of nuclear weapons deployed in a “triad” – air, land and sea. To attack the US with nuclear weapons would be tantamount to committing suicide, because no matter how large the attacking force was, it would be almost impossible to eliminate every warhead.

Russia also has vast numbers of weapons, although they are more vulnerable than those of the US. Russia has fewer ballistic missile subs, does not really have a modern strategic bomber force, and its land-based missiles are endangered by recent American breakthroughs in warhead technology. According to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, the US now has the capability to “destroy all of Russia’s ICBM silos” in a first strike and still retain 80 percent of its warheads in reserve.

A “first strike” attack – also called “counterforce” – has always been central to US military planning, and was recently adopted by the Russians as well. As a result, both nations keep their nuclear forces on a hair trigger, fearful that the other side could neutralise their nuclear weapons with a first strike.

The danger here, of course, is war by mistake, and there have been at least a half dozen incidents where the two countries have come within minutes of a nuclear exchange. A weather rocket, a flock of geese, an errant test tape, have all brought the world to the edge of disaster.

The time frame for making a decision about whether one is under attack or not is extremely narrow. It is estimated that the US would have about 30 minutes to determine whether an attack was real, but, because the Russians do not have a reliable satellite warning system, that time frame would be about 15 minutes or less for Moscow. China and India had a no-first use policy, but recently New Delhi adopted a “counterforce” strategy. Britain, France and Pakistan all reserve the right to first-use. The Israeli government refuses to admit it has nuclear weapons, so it is unclear what its policies are.

Of all the nuclear-armed countries, North Korea is the most vulnerable, simply because it probably has no more than 50 or so nuclear weapons. There is a caveat here: US intelligence has been consistently wrong on Pyongyang’s capabilities. It underestimated its ability to produce long-range missiles, it disparaged its capacity to produce a hydrogen bomb, and it miscalculated its capacity to wage cyber war. In short, the US has no idea what would happen if it attacked North Korea.

Almost all estimates are that such a war would range from calamitous to catastrophic. And nuclear weapons are likely to make it the latter. The recent talk in Washington about a limited attack on North Korea – the so-called “bloody nose” strategy – could be seen by Pyongyang as an attempt to take out its small nuclear force. Under the rule of “use them or lose them,” North Korea might decide to launch them locally – South Korea; regionally – Japan; or even at the US. Estimates of the outcome of such a war range from the hundreds of thousands to several million dead.

Apparently there is also a plan to take out Kim Jung-Un, but decapitating North Korea’s leadership merely devolves the decision to use nuclear weapons to some commander in the field. Plus eliminating a nation’s leader would make it almost impossible to halt such a war. Who would one negotiate with?

Vulnerability of power

In the end, the problem comes down to the nature of nuclear weapons themselves. Their enormous power and ability to strike quickly makes them vulnerable, and that vulnerability requires that the decision to use them be decentralised.

The recent scare that a ballistic missile was headed toward Hawaii was a bureaucratic screw up, someone pushing the wrong button on a computer. But that is how the world could end. Consider the following scenario:

An Ohio-class submarine armed with 24

The recent scare that a ballistic missile was headed toward Hawaii was a bureaucratic screw up, someone pushing the wrong button on a computer. But that is how the world could end

Oh Dear!

Massive volcanic activity, asteroid strikes, and the release of stored up carbon dioxide in the oceans killed 96 percent of life in the sea and 70 percent of land life 250-million years ago. Some unnamed captain in a submarine could do the same

Trident II ballistic missiles is on patrol in the East China Sea. Each Trident II missile has eight W-76 or W-88 warheads, 192 in all. The former pack a 100-kiloton punch, the latter up to 475 kilotons. In total, the submarine can generate up to 91,200 kilotons of explosive force. The bomb that destroyed Hiroshima was 15 kilotons. The US has 18-Ohio class submarines.

A report comes over the COM that a missile is headed toward Hawaii, and then communications go dead, a not uncommon occurrence, according to Ellsberg. The captain of the Ohio-class sub knows he is not alone out there. Stalking him could be a Russian Yasen-class or Chinese Shang-class hunter-killer submarine. The US captain needs to make a decision: use them or lose them.

One insult from extinction

It doesn't take a major crisis to touch off a nuclear war. Maybe things get a little out of hand between Indian and Chinese troops on a disputed Himalayan plateau. Maybe India employs its "cold start" strategy of a limited military incursion into Pakistan and some local Pakistani field officer panics and launches a tactical nuclear weapon. The recently released US "Nuclear Posture

Review" posits using nuclear weapons in the case of a major cyber attack. As Beatrice Fihn of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons puts it, "Our extinction could be one insult away."

Some 252-million years ago something catastrophic happened to the planet. A combination of massive volcanic activity, asteroid strikes, and the release of stored up carbon dioxide in the oceans killed 96 percent of life in the sea and 70 percent of land life. Called the Permian-Triassic Extinction Event, it was the greatest die-off in our planet's history. Unless we get serious about abolishing nuclear weapons – something 122 nations voted to do last July – some unnamed captain in a submarine could do the same.

There are lots and lots and lots of buttons out there. **CT**

Conn M. Hallinan is a columnist for Foreign Policy In Focus. He has a PhD in anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley and oversaw the journalism programme at the University of California at Santa Cruz for 23 years. He is a winner of a Project Censored Real News Award, and lives in Berkeley, California.

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Crying elephants and giggling rats

Scientists have proved that animals aren't just steaks-on-legs, but have feelings – just like us, writes **Emily Birch**

Years ago, we believed that we weren't animals and that animals were here solely for our use. Indeed, a cow was just a walking burger, steak of Sunday roast, keeping itself fresh and tasty ready for when we were hungry.

Luckily, for their sake, things have progressed significantly from then and now we recognise that animals (including our “superior” human selves in that category) can experience emotions from more simple ones such as happiness and sadness to more complex ones such as empathy, jealousy and grief. Animal sentience is defined as the ability to feel, perceive and experience subjectively. In other words, it's about emotions and feelings and in some respects, having an awareness that “you are you”.

In fact, the scientific evidence for animals being sentient is vast – so clear that three scientists read 2,500 papers studying sentience in non-human animals and concluded confidently that sentience does indeed exist.

If you saw Blue Planet II recently, for example, you'll have seen the footage of a pilot whale carry-



THE EYES HAVE IT: Animals show emotion, according to scientists.

ing around her dead calf. For most humans, this clearly demonstrates a form of grieving, particularly given the behaviour changes in the wider family pod.

Studies have shown that sheep are able to recognise the faces of their sheep friends even after being separated for two years. Elephants form strong family groups with immense memories and they cry when they are hurt (both physically and emotionally). Capuchin monkeys know when they are receiving unequal pay (grapes vs cucumber) and Macaques develop individual cultures, particularly when it comes

to how one should wash a potato.

Chimpanzees like to keep the peace by redistributing bananas if someone complains that their share is unfair and even rats have been shown to demonstrate empathy by giving up their favourite snack to save a drowning friend. They also giggle when being tickled.

Fish use tools and octopus weigh up whether the effort needed to gain a food reward is worth it depending on the type of food. There is also plenty of evidence on how animals have individual personalities and indeed how some are a glass half full type while others are more glass half empty.

But it isn't just from watching their behaviour that we can say animals are sentient. When we examine the brains of species (and indeed individuals), we can draw parallels from what we know about human brains and start to make assumptions.

Emotions mainly stem from a part of our brain called the “limbic system”. Our limbic system is relatively large and indeed humans are a very emotive species. So when we come across a brain that has a smaller limbic system than ours, we assume it feels fewer emotions. But, and here's the big but, when a limbic system is comparatively much bigger than ours, we don't assume it feels more emotions than us. Most likely because we cannot imagine something that we do not feel or even know about.

In some marine mammals, their

limbic system is four times larger than ours is. In addition to this, some marine mammals have spindle cells, which we originally thought were unique to humans, allowing us to make rapid decisions in complex social situations. Arguably, would these evolve if they weren't used for the same (or at least similar) purposes.

One potential reason why we don't like thinking too much about animal sentience is because we like to kill animals. Some to eat and some, quite simply because we do not like them. Look at those poor spiders in autumn, coming in to find some shelter, only to meet their end being smacked by a slipper wielding human. We also turn a blind eye to systematic cruelty on a mass scale to ensure we save some money on meat at the supermarket. It's far easier to pretend these

animals don't have feelings or emotions so that we can enjoy a cheap dinner without the emotion of guilt creeping in.

So is animal sentience a big deal? Yes, it is. We need to ensure we include it everywhere to safeguard the welfare of all animals, not just our pets. We live in a world where a lady putting a cat in a bin causes immense public shaming, yet we'll pop down to the nearest fast food outlet and eat meat that has lived the most abhorrent life ever without thinking twice. It really is time that we spent more time thinking about the thinking beings around us.

CT

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Emily Birch is a research fellow in human canine interactions at Nottingham Trent University. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

changed since 2016. Republicans hostile to Medicaid now have a lock grip in both Kentucky and Washington. In mid-January, these hostiles turned that lock grip into a hammer – on Medicaid recipients.

The Trump administration has given Kentucky a regulatory waiver that will, the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities documents, “reduce the number of people with health coverage and make it harder for those covered to get care.”

Officials in Kentucky claim that Medicaid needs a “work requirement.” But that makes no sense. The vast majority of Medicaid recipients in Kentucky, 77 percent, are already working. Most of the rest are taking care of elderly relatives or disabled kids, or have disabilities of their own. No matter! The hunt for Medicaid malingerers in Kentucky will now move ahead, along with other changes that will hit the state's Medicaid recipients with new co-pays and premiums.

All these changes will create a mountain of required paperwork. If recipients make a mistake on this paperwork, or miss a filing deadline, they'll lose Medicaid coverage for six months. State officials are, in fact, counting on that confusion. They're proudly predicting that 100,000 poor Kentuckians could lose coverage.

The obvious question: Who's driving this push to complicate – and cut – Medicaid? The rarely acknowledged answer: America's wealthy right-wing ideologues. These exceptionally deep pockets expect the elected leaders they bankroll to full-court press the poor.

This pile-on-the-poor ideology of America's awesomely affluent

Do the poor deserve decent health care?

Billionaire-backed politicians are turning Kentucky's health care miracle into a tragedy, says **Sam Pizzigati**

Between 2013 and 2016, the state of Kentucky experienced a veritable medical miracle. In 2013, two of every five low-income people in the state had no health insurance. By 2016, only one in every 13 poor Kentuckians were going uninsured.

As a result, the share of low-income Kentuckians getting annual check-ups increased by a nearly

a third. And the share reporting themselves in “excellent health” jumped by over half.

What generated this medical miracle? Kentucky simply expanded who could qualify for Medicaid. The state funded the expansion with dollars from the Affordable Care Act, the landmark legislation more commonly known as Obamacare.

A great deal, unfortunately, has

spews out from the “think tanks” and academic centres they so lavishly subsidise. The hired hands at these outfits do all the heavy lifting on moves like the Kentucky Medicaid assault. They write the talking points and the legislative language. Then the media outlets the rich underwrite finish the job. They demonise poor people as lazy laggards ever ready to snatch away and waste hard-earned taxpayer dollars.

This demonising has been ratcheting up ever since the Reagan era. The richer America’s rich become, the fiercer the assault on the safety net programs that bring decency to America’s most vulnerable.

Why should that be the case?

Billionaires living in a society where many millions of people have no wealth – and shaky health – have a choice. They can consider their own wealth the product of a deeply flawed society that needs fixing. Or they can consider their good fortune a well-deserved reward for their own “superiority.”

Rich folks who do feel superior see people without wealth as inferior, as lazy no-accounts who deserve no “rewards” – not even health care coverage. And all that talk about the “dignity” of work that pols love spouting as they rip the social safety net? They don’t really mean it.

These self-professed champions of “individual responsibility” have no problem with the idleness of the super rich. This past December, they rammed through Congress tax “reforms” that increase the amount of money that the lazy, no-account progeny of billionaires can inherit. Tax-free, of course.

Conservatives, in short, are cutting taxes for billionaire heirs and throwing 100,000 poor Appalachians off their health care. Exit a miracle. Enter a tragedy. **CT**

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Sam Pizzigati, an Institute for Policy Studies associate fellow, co-edits Inequality.org, where an earlier version of this appeared. Distributed by www.otherwords.org

in the world.

The DSEI is hosted by the Excel Centre London every two years – with the full support of the UK government. The fair is a largely unregulated event, attended by the world’s biggest arms companies – many of which have a track record of selling immoral and illegal equipment – and representatives from a litany of repressive regimes, who are there to browse sophisticated weapons.

Every year, UK arms companies sell billions of pounds worth of weapons to dictatorships and human rights abusing regimes including Saudi, Turkey, Bahrain and Colombia. From 2010 to 2016 the UK government licensed arms sales to 20 of the 30 countries on its own human rights watch list.

The impact can be deadly. The UK has licensed £4.6 billion pounds worth of arms to the Saudi Arabian government since it began bombing Yemen three years ago. The bombardment has left 17 million people (60% of the population) in desperate need of humanitarian assistance and a further 7 million people in need of assistance.

Leaders and representatives of regimes like Saudi should never be welcomed in the UK, and definitely not invited to shop for weapons at arms fairs like DSEI. The UK should not provide them with the means to cause such destruction. Yet, Downing Street has seen a ‘sharp rise’ in arming human rights abusers around the world.

I object to such an unjust and illegal event taking place in the UK, so I joined groups like ‘Campaign Against The Arms Trade’ and ‘Stop the Arms Fair’ in taking action to

Why I disrupted the world’s biggest arms fair

Sophia Lysaczenko is one of 43 people who will appear in court this month charged with disrupting a London arms fair

I was only 15-years-old when millions of people marched against the military invasion of Iraq. Since then it feels like I have watched our world become more and more violent.

Last September, I finally decided

to stand up, be counted and resist the escalation of war and pollution in our society. I am one of thousands that took action, and one of the 43 who stand trail against Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI), one of the biggest arms fairs

shut it down. As part of a week long disruption, to hinder the setup for the DSEI, I joined in with thousands of other concerned people from around the UK in blockading the access road to the ExCel.

I saw a chance where the police, who were acting as security for the DSEI, wouldn't see me pull an extremely heavy concrete filled suitcase into the road. I lay down and 'locked on' my arm to a fellow comrade, inside a tube in the suitcase. We shut down the road, stopping deliveries to the fair. A special cutting police service took hours to pull us apart.

Over the course of the week, 'Shut Down The Arms Fair' saw over 100 arrests, though many charges have already been dropped. Rumours from staff inside the event suggested we had collectively delayed the event by a few days.

The cutting out process scared me, but I was proud to be there. I may have given up some of my freedoms in travelling to certain countries, or working with children, but I am more concerned for our future. Not only does the arms industry cause mass humanitarian destruction, but it also contributes to climate change.

Last year, Former UN climate chief Christiana Figueres warned that 'the next 3 years will be crucial to stopping the worst effects of global warming'. Our entire planet faces the effects and potential risk of runaway climate change. We should be recognising and supporting climate and conflict refugees, instead we have increased free movement for weapons.

The impact of arms sales on our environment is a subject not widely



Front page of the i newspaper: UK's Brexit arms deals, including £1.3-billion of weapons sold to Saudi Arabia, that will soon be used in the war in Yemen.

spoken about, but arms require large quantities of uranium, oil, jet fuel, and harmful chemicals. The use of arms creates immense pollution damage to the environment and it is yet to be directly addressed within the Paris Climate Change Agreement. Shockingly the UK spends 25 times more money on weapons research than renewables.

Only radical change will turn our focus around in time.

Over the coming weeks, 43 of us will be on trial for our role in aiming to shut DSEI down. I will be appealing to the court, telling them that DSEI is an immoral and illegal event that does not respect human rights or our shared planet.

We have a collective responsibility to raise our voices given that UK politicians are complicit in the destruction, displacement and mass murders of thousands of innocent people. Those of us who took action are hopeful that as protests increase and awareness is spread, we can ensure that even more people realise the central role that governments like the UK play in the global arms trade. **CT**

Sophia Lysaczenko will appear in court on 14 February. The Campaign Against the Arms Trade is organising a court solidarity demonstration outside Stratford Magistrates Court. This article first appeared at www.leftfootforward.org

Harnessing the power of political anger

Genuine political anger is an asset in politics but also a rarity. It rings true amidst falseness, **write Rick Salutin**

In the political deserts of the mid-20th-century, Canadian poet Irving Layton wrote, "A friend tells me I should not write/About the workers and their plight/For poetry

like dress admits of fashion/And this is not the year for passion." Actually, it's always time for passion in politics, but only when real.

I'm thinking of the ignoble be-

Insights

haviour of US Democratic senate leader Chuck Schumer recently. First he shut down the US government in the name of “dreamers” – young immigrants who’ve never lived elsewhere, but are threatened by Trump with deportation. Mere hours later, having done some electoral math, Schumer retreated and agreed to keep Washington humming. (For the record, I hate how we follow US politics here in Canada, as if we were there. But that battle’s over, so let’s get on with dissecting their reality.)

It was a defeat and humiliation for anti-Trump forces. Could it have been different? Could Schumer have persevered, giving hope to the dreamers, comforting the afflicted, while also winning political points. Yes, I’d say, but if and only if he’d been able to summon authentic moral outrage, which isn’t in him.

Genuine political anger is an asset in politics but also a rarity. That may be why it’s an asset: it rings true amidst falseness. It comes as a relief. Most anger sounds like it was generated by an outrage program.

Consider an exception: In the first debate of Canada’s 2015 election, the NDP’s Thomas Mulcair was needling Justin Trudeau about the referendum margin Quebec needed to separate. What’s the number, Justin? Give us a number – till Trudeau exploded: “You want a number? Nine! Nine!”

It shattered the calm. It was unnerving. Had he lost it? Was he barking in German? (He meant the nine Supreme Court justices.) Perhaps he’d prepped for this but waited till his eruption was unstoppable. It probably won him the election.

Compare him in Davos last



“Nine! Nine!”: Justin Trudeau.

month. Asked why his concern for workers should be taken seriously when all he offers is some employment insurance, he began, “Obviously, there is concern and sympathy . . .” I quote from memory, but note the passive diction and detached tone.

Yet those Davos elites were meeting in the shadow of stats showing 82 percent of wealth generated in the world this year went to 1 percent at the top, while the 50 percent at the bottom got none of it. They sat like bowling pins before him, begging for it. It was the ideal moment for an angry Nein! (Not nine).

This kind of therapeutic explosion is sometimes called healthy anger. Its opposite is seething rage, which demagogues deliberately manipulate, as a means to their end. Harper stoked resentment; it seemed like the only way to electoral success for someone like him in Canada. Trump seethes, and unbottles it in others. They may yearn for relief, but don’t find it, just more festering.

Bernie Sanders has the healthiest anger on the current political scene. He’s for the dreamers, he voted against Schumer’s gutless

backdown. But he never loses touch with the tap-root of his rage: corporate economic criminals. He just did a TV town hall on public health care. What’s the point? Schumer would say, it’s not what “people” are talking about. This is not the time for your passion. Sanders doesn’t care, it’s who he is and what he feels. People respond to that.

Now imagine, if you can (with difficulty), Sanders in Davos. He denounces the millioneahs and billioneahs before him. How can he resist? Someone corrects him, saying Davos disdains millionaires; here we only have billionaires. He smiles that infectious grin. This is healthy anger. He knows it’s funny and shares the laugh. The smile unlocks something: that we’re all connected, anger notwithstanding.

Chekhov, it’s said, changed drama forever with the stage direction, “She smiles through her tears.” Political passion works if you can smile winsomely through your implacable rage. It’s not easy but it’s worth it.

The healthiest rager I’ve known – to return to workers and their plight – was union leader Kent Rowley. He thundered on behalf of principled, independent Canadian unions. He mostly failed. He was the Don Quixote of Canadian labour. Knowing his end was near and still youngish – in his late 50s – he told his comrades in British Columbia that after he died, they should take his ashes and throw them in the faces of the Board of Trade. He didn’t say it bitterly, he was smiling. **CT**

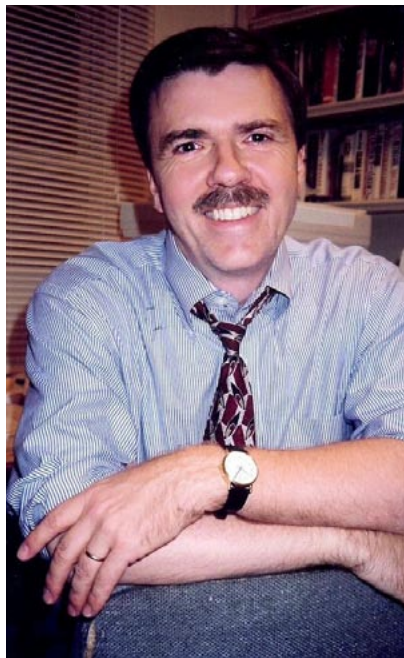
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Rick Salutin is a Toronto-based activist and author. This article first appeared in the *Toronto Star*

Remembering a great investigative reporter

Norman Solomon pays tribute to Robert Parry, who was a trailblazer for independent journalism,

After Robert Parry died on January 27, I asked another great investigative journalist, Seymour Hersh, for some words. “I ran into Bob more than three decades ago when he was the first to warn of the Iran/Contra affair, to little avail,” Hersh replied. “He was widely seen over the next years as a critic of the mainstream media in America. That was not so. He was a critic of lousy reporting, be it in Pravda or the New York Times. He wanted every journalist, everywhere, to do the research and the interviewing that it takes to get beyond the accepted headline.”

What made Bob Parry a trailblazer for independent journalism also made him a bridge burner with the media establishment. He refused to take on faith the official story, whether from governments or news outlets. After winning acclaim, including a Polk Award as an Associated Press reporter who broke many big stories on deadly US policies in Central America, he spent three years at Newsweek – where he saw top editors collaborating with officials of the George HW Bush administration on what should be shared or withheld from the public. Bob left the magazine in 1990, and soon his relations with mainstream media had a whistle-blower quality. His 1992 book, *Fooling America:*



TRAILBLAZER: Robert Parry,, 1949-2018

How Washington Insiders Twist the Truth and Manufacture the Conventional Wisdom, named names and pulled no punches.

Midway through the decade, Bob did a stint as director of the Nation Institute’s investigative unit. His writing for the Nation during 1996 included pieces about the CIA and drug trafficking by the Nicaraguan contras, the bankrolled power of right-wing foundations, and a seven-page expose that is chilling to read more than 30 years later – an investigative report on the Koch brothers.

In 1995, Parry launched a unique journalistic space, Consortiumnews.com, where he worked intensely as publisher, editor, and writer. For the next 22 years, Parry oversaw the website’s scrutiny of elite wisdom. His work, which included authoring six books, won the IF Stone Medal for Journalistic Independence from Harvard’s Nieman Foundation in 2015 and, last year, the Martha Gellhorn Prize for Journalism.

I got to see Bob at work up close, in 1996, when we co-wrote a series on a media darling: *Behind Colin Powell’s Legend*. During interviews, Bob was politely unrelenting. He had a methodical zest for plowing through documents, determined to “master the material.” And he was professionally generous; I wrote just a small proportion of the articles, but he insisted that I share the byline on every one.

Bob was notably non-ideological. What propelled him was a moral core and determination to follow the facts. That devotion led him to expose the lethal deceptions and machinations of Reagan-era figures such as Oliver North, Elliott Abrams, and Caspar Weinberger. Three decades later, the same resolve to separate fact from spun fiction put him on a collision course with the conventional wisdom of Russiagate.

No one knew better than Bob Parry how intelligence agencies and major media outlets can create a cascading frenzy. Beginning in late 2016, Bob was prolific as he debunked the torrent of hyperbolic claims about Russia that became an ever-present flood across the US media landscape. Some progressive sites went from often posting his articles in 2016 to rarely or never post-

Insights

ing them in 2017.

“For years, the mainstream, establishment media have, by their malpractices in covering US-Russian relations from Ukraine to Russiagate, been deeply complicit in the unfolding of this new Cold War and its unprecedented dangers,” said Russia scholar Stephen F. Cohen, a contributing editor at the Nation. “Bob Parry, very often alone, exposed those malpractices, especially those committed by the powerful New York Times and Washington Post, misrepresented story by misrepresented story, sometimes daily. For this, he was ostracised, slurred, certainly ignored by mainstream media.”

At the end of December, a week after a stroke left him with badly blurred eyesight, Bob somehow was able to write what turned out to be

his final article, brilliant and transcendent, a kind of cri de coeur that is a stunning last testament to “the journalistic principles of skepticism and evenhandedness.” Western journalists, he wrote, “now apparently see it as their patriotic duty to hide key facts that otherwise would undermine the demonising of Putin and Russia. Ironically, many ‘liberals’ who cut their teeth on skepticism about the Cold War and the bogus justifications for the Vietnam War now insist that we must all accept whatever the US intelligence community feeds us, even if we’re told to accept the assertions on faith.”

At the close of a lengthy tribute that appeared the day after his fa-

ther’s death, Nat Parry wrote that, “Ultimately, Bob was motivated by a concern over the future of life on Earth. As someone who grew up at the height of the Cold War, he understood the dangers of allowing tensions and hysteria to spiral out of control, especially in a world such as ours with enough nuclear weapons to wipe out all life on the planet many times over.”

Robert Parry carried the lantern high. Now others will need to carry it on. **CT**

Norman Solomon is a journalist with ExposeFacts.org, a project of the Institute for Public Accuracy; the author of War Made Easy; and a co-founder of RootsAction.org. This article first appeared at www.thenation.com

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