
ON THE ROAD TO ANNIHILATION

A Mother's Fear, a Political Warning, and a Short Story

Frida Berrigan | Philip Giraldi | Chellis Glendinning

ColdType

ISSUE 169

WRITING WORTH READING ● PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

OCTOBER 2018



DOWN WITH THE
WORKING CLASS!

The political Left calls them racists and fascists,
so why should we be surprised when they flock into the arms
of hard-Right populists – **CJ HOPKINS** (PAGE 14)

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A child at world's end

Frida Berrigan remembers the days when she lived in fear of nuclear war as she wonders about the inheritance of her – and your – children

“**DON'T** want to live in a world without cheetahs, Mom”.

Seamus loves cheetahs and what's not to love – unless you are a Thomson's gazelle?

Cheetahs are the fastest mammals on the planet, formidable predators, sleek, saucy looking, and they even have spots.

My six-year-old boy can't imagine a future without his favourite animal, but we live in the small city of New London, Connecticut. Unlike coyotes, cheetahs are, to say the least, rare here. The nearest zoo is more than an hour away. I'm not sure where his love for cheetahs came from, since he doesn't watch much television, not even nature shows. Still, here we are, my six-year-old boy and me talking about those cheetahs and the end of nature on a Sunday morning.

His observation actually turned out to be remarkably on point when it comes to our current situation, globally and environmentally. He made it during a week in which nature was hitting back hard. If cheetahs are indeed endangered, so were a surprising numbers of human beings that week as killer storms struck from the Philippines to North Carolina. With rage and rain, an increasingly overheated, climate-changed Mother Nature briefly reclaimed some of her territory, which we had defiled, dividing it up into endlessly buildable lots all the way to the high-tide line, pocking it with hog farms, studding it with nuclear power plants. Hurricane Florence and Super Typhoon Mangkhut flooded the works, making the whole sodden mess hers

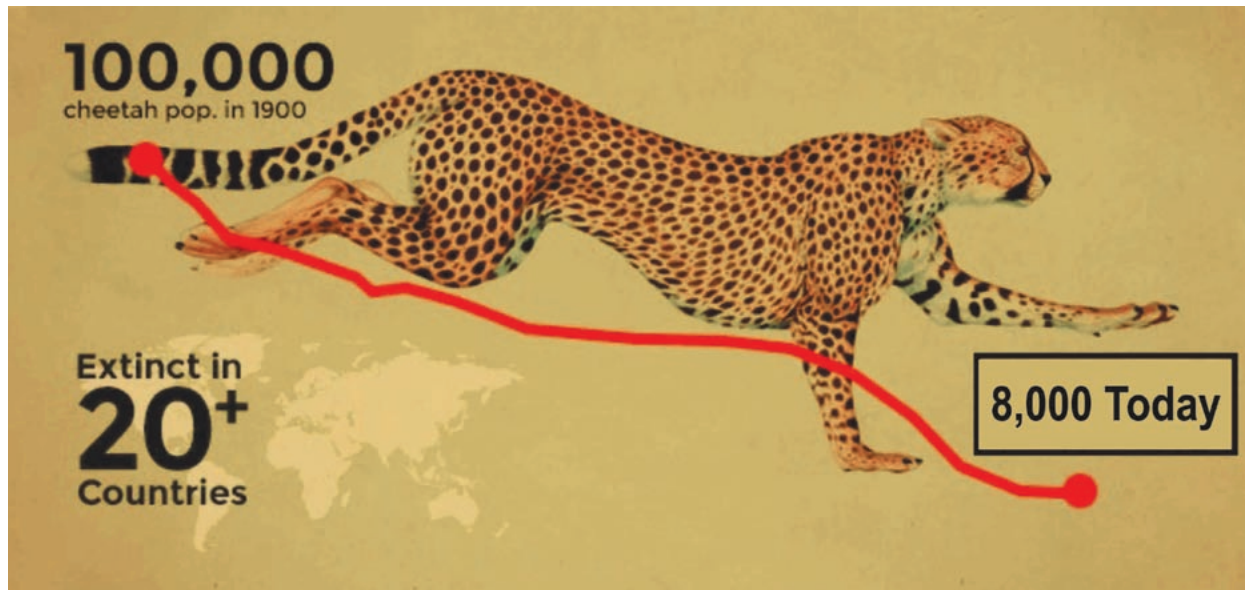
again, at least for a time, and sending a signal about what humans and cheetahs are up against in the decades to come.

Unlike Seamus, I haven't given cheetahs much thought. Still, after he expressed his worries about that cat and his life, I did a little research. Cheetahs, you won't be surprised to learn, live throughout Africa (northern, eastern, and southern), as well as – and this was news to me – in India and Iran. There are only seven or eight thousand cheetahs left on Earth. Once upon a time (and not so long ago) there must have been 100,000. They are speedy and range widely over their habitats. They want to move. They are also killed as pests by farmers, taken as trophies by big-game hunters, and regularly hit by cars careening down the growing number of roads criss-crossing their territories.

I've never seen a cheetah in real life. Neither has my son. And, if truth be told, I'm no cheetah champion either. I don't even particularly like tabby cats. Still, I found that, in the wake of our conversation, I didn't want to live in a world without them either.

In 2012, when Seamus was born, 196 species of mammals were already “critically endangered”, the animals closest to extinction. Today 199 are in this most endangered category and 37 more species than when he was born are “endangered”, the next level down, according to the “Red Lists” maintained by the International Un-

FRIDA BERRIGAN



As Africa's most endangered cat, the cheetah is mostly found in eastern and southern Africa (and in a few parts of Iran). It is estimated that only 7,000 cheetahs remain in existence today. 50 percent of the population lives in southern Africa.

Art: Cheetah Conservation Fund Canada - www.cheetahconservationfund.ca/a

ion for the Conservation of Nature. We don't see this dramatic decline of species variety in our little corner of the world. It's all squirrels and raccoons here and they seem to be winning always, but what scientists are calling "the sixth extinction" is as real as the possum now going through my recycling bin.

From cheetahs and other endangered big mammals, it's only a short hop to what environmental reporter Elizabeth Kolbert says are "a third of all fresh-water mollusks, a third of sharks and rays, [...] a fifth of all reptiles, and a sixth of all birds" that are "headed toward oblivion". And it's but another short hop to other forms of obliteration and climate collapse, including the rapid decline of coral reefs, the growth of ocean dead zones, the retreat of sub-Arctic boreal forests, the "new-normal" of a raging fire season, the cracking and melting of what was once the strongest ice in the Arctic ...

I could, of course, go on, but the mind shudders. Or thought of another way, the mind shutters. It forms a protective shell against what it can't truly take in – or, at least, what it can't comprehend without radical change.

Seamus and I could head deeper into the world

of the potentially vanishing cheetah. I could find a cheetah sanctuary in southern Africa and encourage him to use his piggy bank coins to "adopt" one of those cats. But I haven't gone there yet. I haven't told him why cheetahs are teetering on the edge of oblivion. We haven't started talking about why people kill such animals for sport or how increasingly few truly wild corners of this planet are left for "wild animals".

Still, I must admit that, after our conversation, I started to wonder why I hadn't taken his cheetah angst and turned it into the sort of teachable moment that parents are supposed to love when it comes to all that's wrong in the world. Could my mind have been shuddering and shuttering at the same time? Might I have feared sinking into an abiding helplessness in the face of catastrophic climate change and passing that on to my son?

I mean ... what in the world can I – or Seamus – really do about the fate of the cheetah? About the fate of the whole miraculous wild world? What in the world could I really teach my child to do?

I don't want you to think that our family does

FRIDA BERRIGAN

nothing. My husband and I do what we can and frame it for our kids in the context of ecological responsibility. We live below the poverty line in intentional simplicity. We grow vegetables and conserve water. We eat a largely vegetarian diet, compost, and brew our own beer. We have solar panels and we shower only when necessary. We live in a dense urban area and can both walk to work. We don't fly a lot and drive only when necessary. None of these are exactly radical sacrifices, but they are not nothing either.

Still, they aren't faintly enough to save the cheetahs ... or ourselves, for that matter.

Remembering my own fears as a six year old, my son's seem decontextualised and vague. And thank God for that. As a child, I lived in concentrated, daily, physical dread of nuclear war.

When I was six, in 1980, the Cold War was still a hot worry and, for reasons I'll explain, I already lived in terror of becoming extinct.

In that very year, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* moved the hands of its famed Doomsday Clock from nine to seven minutes to nuclear midnight, chiding the Soviet Union and the United States for acting like "nucleo-holics, drunks who continue to insist that the drink being consumed is positively 'the last one,' but who can always find a good excuse for 'just one more round.'"

In the spring of 1979, my family and I had driven from our home in Baltimore to the mountains of West Virginia to stay with friends after the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania suffered a critical meltdown. We lived less than a two-hour drive from that ill-fated plant, which went critical on March 28 – just days before my fifth birthday. We stayed with our friends for two weeks. I have a vague memory that their similarly-aged daughter and I had the same flowered corduroy overalls and bonded over how painful wearing our hair in pig-tails could be.

But mostly I was afraid. So afraid. Nuclear disaster seemed both real and imminent to me then – and no wonder I felt that way. My parents, Phil Berrigan and Liz McAlister, were well-known

antinuclear activists, as well as members of a radical Christian community of people committed to nonviolent resistance to war and nuclear culture. In those days, it seemed to me that all they did was focus on nuclear weapons and nuclear power, while experimenting with different ways to get other people to acknowledge the terrible danger we were all in. Their daily focus was on rising up against those who were making the bad decisions that left this planet prone to a nuclear Armageddon instead of ensuring a future for all of us.

At six, I already had a front row seat at their experiments. Or, more accurately, there were no seats. Like everyone else, I stood. Over and over and over again, I watched as my parents and their friends and fellow travellers in the peace movement of that time made dramatic, noisy, provocative messes all over Washington, DC, and beyond. They dug graves on the parade ground at the Pentagon. They made giant cardboard warheads painted with the American and Soviet flags and set them afire in front of the building that housed the Pentagon's nuclear division.

Men dressed as spectres screamed, moaned, and laughed maniacally, while other friends dusted themselves with ashes and writhed on the ground in front of the White House. Women cut off their hair and burned it in a bowl on the steps of the Pentagon's river entrance (from which I can still conjure up the cloying, sick smell of nuclear death that wafted over us that morning). I can remember my father – more than once – pulling a bottle of blood from his coat pocket and hurling it as high as he could at the pillars of the Pentagon, so that it would drip dramatically down the white marble.

My parents and their friends made such messes at least 100 times in attempting to remind a distracted public that nuclear war could be imminent and that it was both unwinnable and close to inevitable unless the two superpowers made the decision to disarm. I certainly wasn't their target audience, but I doubt anyone saw what they did more often than me. Most people – even Pentagon employees – caught such mini-spectacles just once or twice a year. I saw it repeatedly and nearly 40 years later, I'm still freaking out about it.

FRIDA BERRIGAN

After all, today the danger isn't the mutual assured destruction tango of the massive superpowers. There are nine nuclear weapons states with an estimated 14,500 nuclear weapons and quarrels aplenty between some of them. Just imagine that in a "limited" nuclear war between India and Pakistan up to 20 million people could die from the blasts, fire, and radiation, while a nuclear winter could be triggered in which, it is believed, up to a billion people might starve to death. And keep in mind that the technology has been democratised to a point where some analysts fear that a "dirty bomb" detonated by some non-state actor might be more likely than an Israeli or Pakistani nuclear strike or, for that matter, a post-Cold War face-off between the Russians or the Chinese and ourselves.

Keep in mind as well that we're no longer at seven minutes to nuclear midnight. We're now at two minutes, according to the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, and the clock is still ticking. As the president and CEO of that publication put it at the beginning of this year: "In 2017, world leaders failed to respond effectively to the looming threats of nuclear war and climate change, making the world security situation more dangerous than it was a year ago – and as dangerous as it has been since World War II".

Some people find the prospect of Trump's small hands on the nuclear button particularly unsettling, but the capacity to destroy the world and the notion that a nuclear war might in any sense be winnable made Washington a "crazy-town" long before he hit the Oval Office. The United States may not have detonated a nuclear warhead as an act of war since August 1945, but it's spent an incredible fortune endlessly developing its nuclear arsenal and continues to do so. The 30-year "modernisation" of that arsenal alone (started under the president who won the Nobel Peace Prize for his urge to abolish them) is expected to cost some \$1.7-trillion dollars. And the US has already been spending about \$20-billion a year to maintain the US nuclear advantage and that is set to increase under President Trump.

As the dangers and the dollars rise, nuclear weapons aren't even a concern or a preoccupation around here, much less a worry. They represent little but minor background noise in this country. Catastrophic climate change is so much more likely to claim front-page real estate these days with the epic storms, fires, and floods that occur ever more often. But the big question is: What do we do about it (especially in the age of Donald Trump)? How do we conquer our fears with action? And what kind of action will that be?

Those are hard questions to answer. My parents answered them one way and even though their answers terrified me, I appreciate that they tried – and that, at 78, my mother is still trying. (She is in jail now, awaiting trial for trespass and property destruction at the Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base in Georgia.)

Save the cheetahs almost seems simple by comparison!

The human polluting of the planet with the emissions from the burning of fossil fuels represents a slower-paced Armageddon than the red-button pushing "we begin bombing in five minutes" of thermonuclear warfare. But they are both too big for any one of us to hold alone: me or you or my six-year-old son. Today, at 44, facing a world in which there are now two forms of potential humanly induced global annihilation – the fast and slow ones – I don't simply want to dump them on Seamus.

It's true that the last decades have brought us closer to the nuclear brink even as the world slowly warms toward another kind of annihilation entirely, but for so many, fear doesn't activate. It doesn't lead to meaningful change. In fact, it's just as likely to shutter us all in.

So I don't want my son's fears to be my starting point – or his. I want to start with his love, his hope. Save the cheetahs! **CT**

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One click closer to nuclear destruction

Philip Girdaldi tells how Washington threatened Iran, Syria, China, Venezuela and Russia during one week at the end of September

THE nuclear war doomsday clock maintained on the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists' website has advanced to two minutes before midnight, the closest point to possible atomic apocalypse since the end of the Cold War. In 1995 the clock was at fourteen minutes to midnight, but the opportunity to set it back even further was lost as the United States and its European allies took advantage of a weakened Russia to advance NATO into Eastern Europe, setting the stage for a new cold war, which is now underway.

It is difficult to imagine how the United States might avoid a new war in the Middle East given the recent statements that have come out of Washington, and, given that the Russians are also active in the region, a rapid and massive escalation of something that starts out as a minor incident should not be ruled out.

President Donald Trump set the tone when he harangued the United Nations on September 25, warning that the United States would go it alone in defence of its perceived interests, with no regard for international bodies that exist to limit armed conflict and punish those who commit war crimes.

Trump's speech featured an anticipated long section targeting Iran. He commented that: "Iran's leaders sow chaos, death, and destruction. They do not respect their neighbours or



Donald Trump

borders, or the sovereign rights of nations. Instead, Iran's leaders plunder the nation's resources to enrich themselves and to spread mayhem across the Middle East and far beyond... We cannot allow the world's leading sponsor of terrorism to possess the planet's most dangerous weapons. We cannot allow a regime that chants 'Death to America', and that threatens Israel with annihilation, to possess the means to deliver a nuclear warhead to any city on Earth".

There are a number of things exaggerated or incorrect in Trump's description of Iran as well as in the conclusions he draws. The Middle East and other adjacent Muslim countries are in chaos because the United States has destabilised the region starting with the empowering of the Islamist Mujadeddin in the war against Soviet Afghanistan in the 1980s. It then invaded Afghanistan in 2001, followed by Iraq in 2003, enabling the rise of ISIS and giving local al-Qaeda affiliates a new lease on life, before turning on Damascus with the Syria Accountability Act later in the same year and then destroying the Libyan government under Barack Obama. These were, not coincidentally, policies promoted by Israel that received, as a result, bipartisan support in Congress.

The emotional description of disrespecting "neighbours, borders and sovereign rights" fits the US and Israel to a "T" rather than Iran. The

PHILIP GIRALDI

US has soldiers stationed illegally in Syria, while Israel bombs the country on an almost daily basis, so who is doing the disrespecting? Washington and Tel Aviv are also the principal supporters of terrorists in the Middle East, not Iran – arming them, training them, hospitalising them when they are injured, and making sure that they continue their work in attacking Syria’s legitimate government.

And as for “most dangerous weapons”, Iran doesn’t have any and is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which Israel and the US have not signed. Nor would Iran have any such weapons in the future but for the fact that Trump has backed out of the agreement to monitor and inspect Iranian nuclear research and development, which will, if anything, motivate Tehran to develop weapons with which to protect itself.

Trump also elaborated the next day about Iran’s alleged, but demonstrably non-existent, nuclear programme when he indicated to the Security Council that Washington would go after countries that violate the rules on nuclear proliferation. He clearly meant Iran but the comment was ironic in the extreme, as Israel is the world’s leading nuclear rogue nation with an arsenal of 200 nuclear devices, having stolen the uranium and key elements of the technology from the United States in the 1960s.

Trumpp’s new appraisal of the state of the Middle East is somewhat a turnaround. Five months ago he said that he wanted to “get out” of Syria and bring the soldiers home. But in early September, the secretary of state’s special representative for Syria engagement, James Jeffrey, indicated that the US would stay to counter Iranian activities.

And John Bolton has also recently had a lot to say about Iran, Syria and Russia. On September 24, he confirmed that Washington intends to keep a military presence in Syria until Iran withdraws its forces from the country. “We’re



John Bolton

not going to leave as long as Iranian troops are outside Iranian borders, and that includes Iranian proxies and militias.”

The next day, speaking at a Sheldon Adelson-funded United Against Nuclear Iran Summit, he said the “murderous regime” of “mullahs in Tehran” would face serious consequences if they persist in their willingness to “lie, cheat and deceive. If you cross us, our allies, or our partners; if you harm our citizens there will indeed be hell to pay. Let my message today be clear: We are watching, and we will come after you”.

Bolton’s desire to exonerate Israel and always blame Iran is inevitably on display

John Bolton also warned the Russians about their decision to upgrade the air defences in Syria in the wake of the recent Israeli bombing raid that led to the shooting down of a Russian intelligence plane. He said absurdly and inaccurately, “The Israelis have a legitimate right to self-defence against this Iranian aggressive behaviour, and what we’re all trying to do is reduce tensions, reduce the possibility of major new hostilities. That’s why the president has spoken to this issue and why we would regard introducing the S-300 as a major mistake”.

Bolton then elaborated that “We think introducing the S-300s to the Syrian government would be a significant escalation by the Russians and something that we hope, if these press reports are accurate, they would reconsider”. And regarding who was responsible for the deaths of the Russian airmen, Bolton also has a suitable explanation, “There shouldn’t be any misunderstanding here... The party responsible for the attacks in Syria and Lebanon and really the party responsible for the shooting down of the Russian plane is Iran”.

Bolton’s desire to exonerate Israel and always blame Iran is inevitably on display. He is curious-

ly objecting to the placement of missiles that are defensive in nature, presumably because Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has asked him to do so. The only way one can be threatened by the S-300 is if you are attacking Syria, but that might be a fine point that Bolton fails to grasp as he was a draft dodger during the Vietnam War, and he has since that time not placed himself personally at risk in support of any of the wars he has been promoting.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis also spoke on September 24, at the Pentagon. His spin on Iran was slightly different but his message was the same. “As part of this overarching problem, we have to address Iran. Everywhere you go in the Middle East where there’s instability you will find Iran. So in terms of getting to the end state of the Geneva [negotiations] process, Iran, too, has a role to play, which is to stop fomenting trouble.”

To complete the onslaught, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, speaking at the same United Against Nuclear Iran Summit as Bolton, accused European nations seeking to avoid US sanctions over the purchase of Iranian oil as “solidifying Iran’s ranking as the number-one state sponsor of terrorism. I imagine the corrupt ayatollahs and IGRC [Revolutionary Guards] were laughing this morning”.

Even the US Congress has figured out that something is afoot. A bipartisan group of US senators, who were carefully briefed on what to think by the Israeli government, warned after a trip to the Middle East that war between the United States and Iranian proxies is “imminent”.

Iran may be fun to kick around but China has also been on the receiving end of late. On September 26, the U. Security Council meeting was presided over by Donald Trump, who warned that Beijing is “meddling” in US elections against him personally. It is a bizarre claim, particularly as the only country up until now demonstrated as having actually interfered in American politics in any serious way is Israel. The accusation comes on top of Washington’s latest foray into the world of sanctions, directed against the Chi-

nese government-run Equipment Development Department of the Chinese Central Military Commission and its director Li Shangfu for “engaging in significant transactions” with a Russian weapons manufacturer that is on a list of US sanctioned companies.

If this is Making America Great Again, I think I would settle for just making America “good”

The Chinese sanctions are serious business as they forbid conducting any transactions that go through the US financial system. It is the most powerful weapon Washington has at its disposal. As most international transactions are conducted in dollars and pass through American banks, that means that it will be impossible for the Chinese government to make weapons purchases from many foreign sources. If foreign banks attempt to collaborate with China to evade the restrictions, they too will be sanctioned.

So if you’re paying attention to Trump, Bolton, Mattis, Pompeo and Haley you are probably digging a new bomb shelter right now.

We have told Iran that it cannot send its soldiers and “proxies” outside its own borders while Syria cannot have advanced missiles to defend its airspace, which Russia is “on notice” for providing. China also cannot buy weapons from Russia while Venezuela is also being threatened because it has what is generally believed to be a terrible government. Meanwhile, America is in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan to stay while nearly all agree a war with Iran is coming soon. Everyone is the enemy and everyone hates the United States, mostly for good reasons.

If this is Making America Great Again, I think I would settle for just making America “good” so we could possibly have that doomsday clock go back a couple of minutes. **CT**

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This article was originally published by Unz Review at www.unz.com

ON THE ROAD TO ANNIHILATION



Illustration: 123RF Stock Photo

"It is the duty of a shepherd", said Tiberius (42 BC-37 AD), "to shear his sheep, not to skin them". The emperor was referring to taxation, but the statement could be applied to most situations in which one person holds power and responsibility over someone else, presumedly for the benefit of the whole. This short story by **Chellis Glendinning**, recounts a soldier's experience of duty in the early days of the thermonuclear age

11

"**HAVE** an idea!" Manuel laughed a raspy, staccato laugh. Then reaching out to me with his sad, round eyes, he popped the question. "Why don't you marry me?"

The bones in my body recoiled. I'm a research psychologist, and Manuel was my interviewee. There was a way about him, for sure. But I'd only known him for a few minutes.

"Hey, I'm kidding". He caught my discomfort. "No woman ever wanted to marry me ... you know ... not since 1951".

Before this day in 1985, I had never met a man who had seen the raw force of an atomic blast. Now I had. He was Manuel Cordero, former US

Marine, former soft drink driver, now surviving, or, I should say, barely surviving, on his mother's welfare check.

Manuel insisted we meet at the research centre, not at his mother's house in the valley. When he arrived, he was wearing a blue plaid flannel shirt and jeans. It looked to me like he'd just taken the shirt off the cardboard and put it on his back. He was a stocky man, over fifty, with a black moustache set in the centre of an etched brown face. He walked into the conference room, limping slightly, and, a foot behind him, hovered the quiet outline of Felipe. I wasn't supposed to do the interviews in the presence

CHELLIS GLENDINNING

of a third person. An awkwardness took hold of every molecule in the room, yet looking more closely, I detected that Manuel and Felipe were inseparable.

“Can Felipe stay with us?” Manuel asked.

Thinking quickly, I reached out to shake Felipe’s hand. He was slight, shorter and thinner than me, and he responded to my gesture shyly. Manuel explained that Felipe had also been injured in the service, but not by radiation.

The two of them were bonded together, he said, by the missions they made to the Veteran’s Association for health care that never materialised. They were also bonded by the fact that Felipe brought Manuel water at night and held his shoulders down when he writhed on the sheets in pain.

“Yes, please, Felipe”, I said. Please. Come in”.

I pulled my tape recorder out of the briefcase and set it on the table, while Manuel signed a form assuring me I could use the interview for the book I was writing. He would be the twenty-third person I had spoken with, each one in deteriorating health from contact with some dangerous technology. There had been, before him, Jane Glendon, a housewife from Love Canal. There had been Catherine Wallace, a Long Island Dalkon Shield survivor, George “Gung Ho” Smithson, Agent Orange veteran from Las Cruces, and Danny Toms, exposed to pesticide drift in Texas. Now there was Manuel Cordero, atomic veteran.

We sat down, facing each other, at one end of the long conference table. Felipe silently seated himself a few chairs down the side. We began to talk. Manuel apologised for being the kind of person who would talk on and on. He spoke with the melodic lilt of Spanish translated into English.

These moments before the interview were, as always, like stuck ice. Just before melting into the connection, my interviewee and I would feel strange, adrift, as if departed from the normal world where technology-induced illnesses were

not spoken of, but not yet arrived in a place where they could surge forth. Luckily, I had stock questions I asked at the beginning of each encounter. “What technology do you think caused your illness? Tell me how your exposure contributed to your health problems”.

I felt stiff, but Manuel plunged right in. He told me how he had gone into the Marines, the only man in boot camp who did not speak English. He told me how everyone back in the barrio had seen him as a hero and how hard he had pushed to fulfil their vision. He told me about the maladies that had beset his body since seeing the blast in 1951.

“I got lesions”, he said, rolling back his shirt sleeve and pointing to scars on the skin. “Lesions as big as silver dollars, and the doctors at the VA always say they don’t know what they are. Then I gain weight for no good reason. I only eat once a day, just beans and tortillas and chili once a day”. I had heard these symptoms before.

“I was engaged to be married to this girl”, he explained, “but then I found out I got sterile and she left. Then I was hauling Coca-Cola and Pepsi, my bones began to ache so bad I couldn’t pick up a case of bottles. I had to quit, and I haven’t worked since”.

The details of each person’s life were always unique. I sighed. The stories were all the same.

“I got bouts of pain”, he went on, “usually in the night. Then last year I went blind in this one eye. They gave me a prescription for glasses but I don’t have the money ... and you know what? Once when I went to the VA, the doctor took me into the hall. He said he thought my conditions came from radiation, but he couldn’t write that down. So they don’t give me much medical care”.

I’d heard this before. Inside my mind, an assemblage of psychology professors instructed me to make note of the common theme. I wondered. They would not be so pleased if they knew that

“I got lesions. Lesions as big as silver dollars, and the doctors at the VA always say they don’t know what they are”

CHELLIS GLENDINNING

my blood was boiling in rage.

Then Manuel told me about the blast. It took place in Yucca Flats, Nevada. There along with thousands of other teenage boys dressed in combat fatigues, Manuel was trucked into the barren landscape and told to wait in a foxhole. Then they set off the bomb.

I could see by the relief he felt after telling me the story that, while this moment had laid the ground for all the anguish and lost opportunities of his life, it had also lain like a bird with no throat. Now he was bubbling over in song plaintive, quivering, hopeful song. Here was I, leaning toward his face, nodding my head, thirsty to hear what every other person, from the doctor at the VA to the waitress at the corner restaurant, did not want to hear.

Just then, the recorder clicked off. Our bodies jerked from the sound. Manuel pushed his chair back to regain balance, and its legs screeched against the wooden floor. I turned the cassette over, nervously moved the microphone an inch closer to Manuel, and asked another question. “What did you learn from this experience?”

He sat for a moment staring into the air and then shook his head. “No. I can’t say”.

I switched to something more concrete. “How far from it were you?”

He leaned toward the window at the end of the table and squinted across a field of fenced backyards and one-story adobe houses.

“Uh ... you can’t really see from here, maybe to University or Girard”.

“A mile?”

“Oh yes. A mile. More”. A stillness lodged in the room, punctuated by Manuel’s lungs softly wheezing in and out, in and out. I was beginning to feel at ease with him and with his friend Felipe who sat so quietly with us at the table.

Then, resolve lifting Manuel’s ribcage and turning it back from the window, he faced me eye to eye.

“There is something else that will be with me

forever”, he announced. “The blast, it was awesome. I had never seen anything so destructive, but this other thing, it is totally different because it is something inside you that you can’t cope with”.

He shifted his hips from side to side, and the chair creaked as he set them down.

“My mother always told me you don’t pray for yourself”, he said. “You pray when you know someone is sick and hurting and you want them to get better. Or for someone who is in trouble. But you don’t pray for yourself. So when I pray for other people, I see them. When I was in Korea, I saw the babies running around lost. We couldn’t stop. We were marching through a village and getting rid of the enemy. But the children, their

houses were blown up. God knows where their parents were, and they’re running around scared and lost and naked... ”.

Manuel dropped his head and stopped breathing. “I can’t anymore”.

“Speak?” I asked. “ ... yuh”.

He could just barely get the word out. I turned off the recorder, and Manuel sat slumped over for a long minute. I felt uneasy. I looked to Felipe. His eyes, his heart, every cell in his body were focused on Manuel, and he was breathing with a slight exaggeration, as if to encourage his friend to stay alive.

Then, without signal, Manuel started again.

“Their bellies”. he said, “they were big and round, but you know, they were starving to death. We had to keep walking fast, and what I would do is I would take a can of beans out of my pack and open it and drop it on the ground for them”. Manuel was speaking fast now, almost panting.

“There was this one little girl”, he said. “She had a great big belly, but her arms and legs were like sticks. I handed her a can. Then all the other kids surrounded her like vultures. They grabbed it away, and she was screaming. She ran after me and clung to my leg as I marched ... and I had to keep marching... ”.

“There was this one little girl. She had a great big belly, but her arms and legs were like sticks. I handed her a can of beans”

CHELLIS GLENDINNING

By now my skin was prickling and my eyes brimming with hot tears. “Oh God!” I wanted to call out. “Why?!” An urge rose up through my chest, an urge as strong as a flood tide, and it streamed down my arms. I wanted to protect this man. I awkwardly groped for his hand. I couldn’t find it. Then I lurched forward to him, and as I did, I sent the tape recorder flying across the table into a tangle of plastic and wire.

Everything stopped. I am sure all three of us stopped breathing. Then, slowly, unmistakably, the silence was infused with embarrassment. The tape recorder had landed in front of Felipe, and he began, meticulously, to reassemble it into some order.

“What was that you asked before?” Manuel interjected, his words chafing against a raw throat. “What did I learn from all this? I learned, yeah, I learned that war is stupid. It just ... doesn’t ... make ... any ... sense. And if I’d known about that radiation, I wouldn’t have gotten into that trench. I’d have been court-martialed and gone through whatever trial and punishment they had. If I had to come out of the service with a bad discharge, then I’d have come out healthy ... and I’d have been a father”.

Without a sound, Felipe stood up and floated to Manuel’s side. He placed his hands lightly on his friend’s back.

“I wanted a family so bad!” Manuel cried out. “You don’t know how much I wanted a family.

The last vestiges of my role as detached professional dissolved. Sure, I had brought more compassion to the job than most researchers. I had felt my interviewees’ pain. I had tried to get them free health care and encouraged them to join survivors’ organisations, but always afterward, always when my actions would not influence the interview. But now I no longer cared about the rules. “When I stood up”, Manuel told me, “I saw the mushroom, the bright red streamers of fire flying down from

it, a donut of fire billowing out in all directions”.

“I completely forgot to tie my helmet and put my gas mask on. I didn’t know what was happening”, he said.

“The helmet blew off. I completely forgot everything. I was just looking at that cloud. Then the blast came. It roared louder than anything you ever heard, and it threw me against the hole!”

The roar that threw him against that hole still reverberated. Every breath he now took was overshadowed by that moment in 1951. Every day was a challenge greater than any Marine hero could know, and every day Manuel faced that challenge. I could see this. Felipe could see this. Now the two of them sat side by side, Felipe’s arm draped over Manuel’s shoulder, Manuel wrenched in quiet pain.

In my own body, I felt not just the sense of futurelessness that had vibrated in me for the duration of the Nuclear Age. I felt the full roar of the bomb. What could I possibly do to offer this man some sustenance? He needed the life he had been denied. He needed to know that despite the Marines and the VA and nuclear blasts, he was loveable and worthwhile. Now, entering into the

final stages of radiation poisoning, he wondered, “What am I here for?” It was this moment that – however humble a gesture – I decided to accept Manuel Cordero’s proposal of marriage. **CT**

“I saw the mushroom, the bright red streamers of fire flying down from it, a donut of fire billowing out in all directions”

Chellis Glendinning won the *New Mexico Council for the Humanities 1989 First Times Award for Short Story Writing* for this story – with the title, “The Interview”. She is the author of eight books, the latest being *Las relaciones de objetos* (La Paz BO: Editorial 3600, 2018) and *The History Makers: Meetings with Remarkable Bohemians, Rebels, and Deep Heads* (New York: New Village Press), to be published in 2019. She lives in Chuquisaca, Bolivia. Her website is www.chellisglendinning.org

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HANK O'NEAL

Road trips

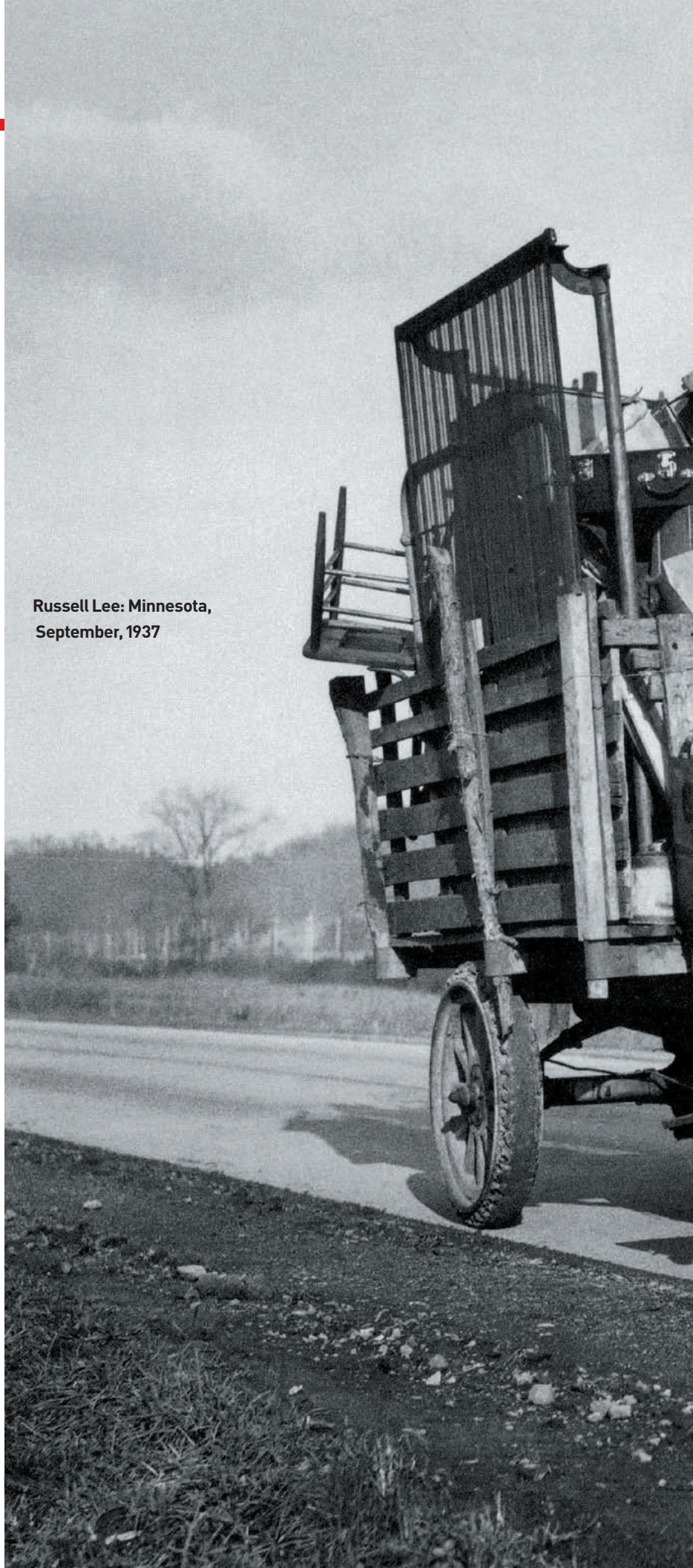
Classic photographs show the depth of poverty in the USA during the years after the Great Depression

16 **F**ORTY years ago, a remarkable book – *A Vision Shared: A Classic Portrait of America and Its People 1935–1943* – was published highlighting the work of 11 photographers – John Collier, Jack Delano, Walker Evans, Theo Jung, Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee, Carl Mydans, Arthur Rothstein, Ben Shahn, John Vachon and Marion Post Wolcott – who worked for the US Farm Security Administration. The much-lauded book was named one of the 100 most important books of the decade by the Association of American Publishers.

The FSA photography unit had been set up by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to show the challenges of rural poverty in the wake of the Great Depression. Initially, the photo division focused on sharecroppers in the south and agricultural workers in the mid-west and western USA. Later, the photographers began recording rural and urban conditions throughout the United States and mobilisation efforts for World War II.

For the fortieth anniversary edition of the book, edited by Hank O'Neal, Steidl, the German-based publisher, has reproduced all of the photographs, text and historical material that made up the original edition, and added a new af-

Russell Lee: Minnesota, September, 1937





HANK O'NEAL



Marion Post Wolcott helps change a tyre with a fence post as a jack. Creek Red Road, South Fork of Kentucky River, 1940

terword by O'Neal detailing the events that followed the book's initial release.

A Vision Shared is not only a collection of superb photographs, but with its accompanying notes and essays, it provides a stark commentary on a society struggling to regenerate itself after the disastrous stock market crash of 1929.

They provide a symbolic warning to today's business titans, who obsess over stock market shenanigans that boost their own wealth, while deliberately ignore the plight of their own workers, many of whom are taking their first steps down that long road to penury and misery. – *Tony Sutton*



Jack Delano: Car advertisement, Fort Bragg



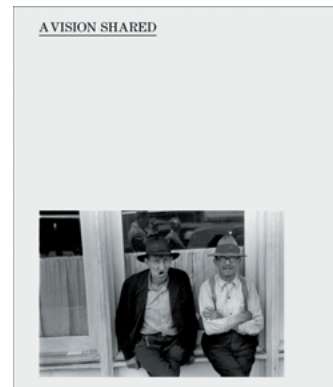
Dorothea Lange: Drought refugees from Abilene, Texas, following the crops of California as migratory workers. California, August 6, 1936



John Vachon: Nebraska November, 1941



Dorothea Lange at work. Photo by Paul S. Taylor



A VISION SHARED

A VISION SHARED
Edited by Hank O'Neal

Published by Steidl
www.steidl.de \$75

Down with the working classes!

The political Left is so busy calling them racists and fascists, so why should we be surprised when they flock into the arms of hard-Right populists

20

If the Left is ever going to come together to save the world from Donald Trump and his legions of fascistic Putin-Nazis, we're going to need to confront our primary enemy ... the international working classes. Yes, my comrades, I'm afraid it's time to face the facts, depressing as they are. The working classes are not our friends. Just look at how they've been betraying us ... and after all we've done for them all these years! This cannot be allowed to continue, not if we are going to rescue democracy from Trump, Putin, Assad, the Iranians, and Palestinian kids with terrorist kites, and eventually stem the blood-dimmed tide of neo-fascist anti-Globalism!

Now, OK, I know you're probably asking, "how can the international working classes possibly be the enemy of the Left?", and "wouldn't that render the whole concept of the Left completely absurd and essentially meaningless?", and other pertinent questions like that. And that's totally fine, you're allowed to ask that. Questioning aspects of the official narrative the ruling classes are forcing everyone to conform to as if they are members of a worldwide cult doesn't make you a Nazi or anything. It's perfectly OK to ask such questions, as long as you don't continue to ask them, over and over, and over again, after the facts have been explained to you. Here are those facts, one more time.

The international working classes are racists. They are misogynists. Xenophobic transphobes. They do not think the way we want them to.

Some of them actually still believe in God. They are white supremacists. Antisemites. Gun-toting, Confederate-flag-flying rednecks. Most of them have never even heard of terms like "intersectionality", "TERF", and so on. They do not respect the corporate media. They think that news sources like the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, CNN, MSNBC, BBC, and so on, are basically propaganda outlets for the global corporations and oligarchs who own them, and thus are essentially no different from FOX, whose pundits they believe every word of. Their minds are so twisted by racism and xenophobia that they can't understand how global capitalism, the graduated phase-out of national sovereignty, the privatisation of virtually everything, the debt-enslavement of nearly everyone, and the replacement of their so-called "cultures" with an ubiquitous, smiley-faced, gender-neutral, non-oppressive, corporate-friendly, Disney simulation of culture are actually wonderfully progressive steps forward on the road to a more peaceful, less offensive world.

Now this has been proved in numerous studies with all kinds of charts and graphs and so on. And not only by the corporate statisticians, and the corporate media, and liberal think tanks. Why, just last month, Mehdi Hasan, in an exasperated jeremiad in the pages of the *Intercept*, that bastion of fearless, adversarial journalism owned by billionaire Pierre Omidyar, proved,



once again, that Donald Trump was elected because PEOPLE ARE GODDAMN RACISTS!

Apparently, Hasan has just about had it with these Putin-loving Trump-apologists proposing that general dissatisfaction with global capitalism, neoliberalism, and identity politics could have had anything to do with Americans electing a bombastic ass clown with absolutely no political experience to the highest office in the land. Hasan cites a number of expert studies, among them one by the Democracy Fund, which just happens to be another Omidyar outfit. But let's not get all paranoid or anything. There are literally hundreds of such studies at this point, each and every one of which has been cited by the mainstream media, the alternative media, the far-alternative media, and virtually every Trump-obsessed loon with a blog or a Facebook or Twitter account.

Look, I realise the truth is painful, but the science of statistics leaves no room for doubt. As much as some of us may want to deny it, the fact is, the country that elected Barack Obama (who

is Black) president, twice, has been transformed by Putin's brainwashing agents into a cesspool of xenophobia and racism, and it is up to us lefties to set things right!

Now, to do this, we need to unite the Left, and get everyone marching in lockstep, and so on. Which means that we need to identify and weed out all the fake leftists among us. Then, and only then (ie, after we've tracked down, sanctimoniously denounced, and exiled any and all neo-Stasserist "alt-Right" infiltrators, Sputnik-leftists, and Assad-apologists), can we turn our attention to meeting face-to-face with the international working classes and sanctimoniously denouncing them as a bunch of filthy racists.

OK, that sounds a little harsh, and possibly totally idiotic, but what other choice do we really have? If we're going to defeat these Putin-Nazis, a few eggs are going to have to get broken. This is not the time to abandon our commitment to imposing our identity-based ideology on every last

person on the planet Earth, or to indulge in that ugly kind of old-fashioned leftism that is based on what the working classes want. Who gives a damn what the working classes want? What's important is what we want them to want. This isn't the 1990s, after all. All that nonsense about globalisation, and supranational entities like the WTO, and the World Bank, not to mention "American jobs" ... only fascists talk like that these days!

But, seriously ... if you've made it this far in my essay, and you consider yourself a leftist of some sort, you're probably extremely frustrated with what passes for the Left these days, and with how the working classes are flocking to the Right, both in the United States and all over the world. If I've got that right, you might want to read a recent essay by Diana Johnstone, titled *Disobedient Hungary: From the Soviet to the European Union* – <https://www.unz.com/article/disobedient-hungary-from-the-soviet-to-the-european-union/> (which we lefties are technically not allowed to read, because it's posted in the *Unz Review*, where a lot of "alt-Right" pieces are also posted ... and you don't want to get any of that stuff on you!)

What she is writing about is the ongoing "populist" insurgency against globalised capitalism, which is what I've also been writing about for the better part of the last two years. This is the historical moment we are experiencing, a clumsy, sloppy, partly fascistic, partly non-fascistic democratic uprising against the continuing spread of global capitalism, the erosion of what is left of national sovereignty, and ... yes, people's cultures and values.

The international working classes understand this. The neo-nationalist Right understands this. The majority of the Left does not understand

this, and is refusing to admit that it's happening, and so is standing around on the sidelines calling everybody "racists" and "fascists" while the global capitalist ruling classes and the neo-nationalists sort things out.

Which is exactly what the ruling classes want, and what the official Putin-Nazi narrative was designed to achieve from the very beginning. The "Overton Window" (ie, the range of ideas tolerated in public discourse) works best when divided into two clean halves. During the so-called "War on Terror", it was Democracy versus the Islamic Terrorists. Now, it's Democracy versus the Putin-Nazis. Both of which narratives are fairy tales, of course – the reality, as ever, being rather more messy.

If what is left of the Left expects to play any meaningful part in our historical moment (other than sanctimoniously cheerleading for the global capitalist ruling classes), it is going need to get its hands a littler dirtier, mingle a bit more with all those working class "populists", talk to them, and, I don't know, maybe even listen to them.

Or maybe I'm completely out of my mind ... I mean, actually listening to the working classes? Some of them are sure to say racist things, and antisemitic and transphobic things, which we cannot ignore for even one second, or rationally discuss and disagree with, because that would mean giving their racism a platform. Yeah, screw it, I don't know what I was thinking ... forget all that stuff I just made you read. Down with the fascist working classes! **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. He can be reached at cjhopkins.com or consentfactory.org

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When fact checkers get the facts wrong

Social media notices and advertisements calling for the election of Trump and/or the defeat of Clinton do not count as evidence of Russian interference

THE *Washington Post* has a regular “fact checker”, Glenn Kessler, who checks the accuracy of statements made by politicians and other public figures. On September 3 he announced that President Trump’s first 592 days in office had produced 4,713 false or misleading claims; that’s about 8 per day.

The article included a list of the types of claims, including the investigation into “Russian interference in the 2016 election” and whether people in the Trump campaign were in any way connected to it. Kessler believes they were. “All told, more than 200 times the president has made claims suggesting the Russia probe is made up, a hoax or a fraud”.

The “fact checker” needs to be fact-checked. He takes it as gospel that Russia consciously and purposefully interfered in the election, but like all the many other commentators offers no evidence. It’s conceivable that evidence of such has actually been presented and I was in a coma that day. (Would I remember that I was in a coma? Probably only if someone told me. So far no one has told me that I was in a coma.)

– Keep in mind that a statement from the CIA that Russia interfered in the election does not count as evidence. It’s merely a statement.

– Keep in mind that a statement from the FBI that Russia interfered in the election does not count as evidence. It’s merely a statement.

– Keep in mind that a statement from the NSA that Russia interfered in the election does not

count as evidence. It’s merely a statement.

– Keep in mind that a statement from a dozen other US intelligence agencies that Russia interfered in the election does not count as evidence. It’s merely a statement.

Here’s James Clapper, former Director of National Intelligence: “To me it stretches credulity to think that the Russians didn’t have profound impact” on the outcome of the election. Clearly if the man had any evidence to substantiate his statement he would have provided it at the time. He did not provide any. So all we get is another statement.

There are not many government bureaucrats who would publicly contradict the CIA, the FBI and the NSA on an important intelligence matter. How impressed would you be if a dozen Russian intelligence agencies all declared that Russia did not interfere in any way in the US 2016 election?

Moreover, keep in mind that numerous notices and advertisements posted to Facebook and other social media calling for the election of Trump and/or the defeat of Clinton do not count as evidence of Russian interference in the election even if some or most of the postings were seemingly made by Russians. Countless other notices and advertisements called for the election of Clinton and/or the defeat of Trump.

Moreover, many of these social-media postings (which members of Congress and the media like to make so much of) were posted well before

the candidates were chosen, or even after the election took place.

So what do we make of all this? Well, it's been pointed out that most of these postings were to so-called "click-bait" Internet sites that earn payments based on their volume of traffic. I have not come across any other explanation of the huge number of electoral postings during 2014-2017.

And forget about Trump aides like Paul Manafort and his partner Rick Gates, who've been charged with various financial crimes such as money laundering, tax and bank fraud, failure to register as a lobbyist, and more; in part the charges involve Ukraine – But NOTHING to do with Russian interference in the 2016 US election, although their cases have undoubtedly fed that story.

The idea of Russian interference in the US election has been repeated so many times in so many places that it's now taken as unquestioned history. *Guardian* reporter Luke Harding has a book out titled *Collusion: Secret meetings, dirty money, and how Russia helped Donald Trump win*, which reinforces this myth, and wouldn't be worth mentioning except that Harding was interviewed by that rare breed, a skeptical journalist, Aaron Maté. Harding repeats one anti-Russian cliché after another, but Maté refuses to allow him to get away with any of it. It's indeed refreshing. Have a look – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Ikf1uZli4g>

Even if you assumed that all the charges made about "Russian interfering in the elections" were true, and put them all together, they still wouldn't have a fraction of the impact on the 2016 elections as did Republicans in several states by disenfranchising likely Democratic voters (blacks, poor, students, people in largely Democratic districts), by purging state voting lists.

Noam Chomsky has pointed out that Israeli intervention in US elections "vastly overwhelms" anything Russia has done. Israeli leader Netanyahu goes directly to speak to Congress without even consulting the president.

The United States joined a grand alliance with the forces of the communist Soviet Union under

Joseph Stalin in World War II, but Washington can't even talk civilly now with capitalist Russia. When your goal is world domination any country that stands in the way of that is an enemy. American conservatives in particular have a most difficult time shaking this mind-set. Here's the prominent conservative host of National Public Radio (NPR), Cokie Roberts, bemoaning Trump's supposed desire to develop friendly relations with Russia, saying: "This country has had a consistent policy for 70 years towards the Soviet Union and Russia, and Trump is trying to undo that".

If Trump were to establish good relations with Russia, the lack of a European enemy would also leave NATO (= the US) even more obviously unnecessary. Then we have the Skripal poisoning case allegedly carried out by Russia in the UK: There are just two things missing to support this allegation: 1) any verifiable evidence, AT ALL, and 2) any plausible motive for the Russian government to have carried out such a crime. But stay tuned, the Brits may yet find Vladimir Putin's passport at the scene of the crime.

Lest we forget. One of Washington's greatest crimes

The world will long remember the present immigrant crisis in Europe, which has negatively affected countless people there, and almost all countries. History will certainly record it as a major tragedy. Could it have been averted? Or kept within much more reasonable humane bounds?

After the United States and NATO began to bomb Libya in March 2011 – almost daily for more than six months! – to overthrow the government of Muammar Gaddafi (with the completely phoney excuse that Gaddafi was about to invade Benghazi, the Libyan center of his opponents, and so the United States and NATO were thus saving the people of that city from a massacre), the Libyan leader declared: "Now listen you people of Nato. You're bombing a wall, which stood in the way of African migration to Europe and in the way of al Qaeda terrorists. This wall was Libya. You're breaking it. You're idiots, and you will burn in Hell for

thousands of migrants from Africa”.

Remember also that Libya was a secular society, like Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, all destroyed by America while supporting Saudi Arabia and various factions of al Qaeda. It's these countries that have principally overrun Europe with refugees.

Gaddafi, like Saddam Hussein, had a tyrant side to him but could in important ways be benevolent and do very valuable things. He, for example, founded the African Union and gave the Libyan people the highest standard of living in all of Africa; they had not only free education and health care but all kinds of other benefits that other Africans could only dream about. But Moammar Gaddafi was never a properly obedient client of Washington. Amongst other shortcomings, the man threatened to replace the US dollar with gold for payment of oil transactions and create a common African currency. He was, moreover, a strong supporter of the Palestinians and foe of Israel.

In 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was the prime moving force behind the United States and NATO turning Libya into a failed state, where it remains today. The attack against Libya was one that the New York Times said Clinton had “championed”, convincing President Obama in “what was arguably her moment of greatest influence as Secretary of State”.

The American people and the American media of course swallowed the phoney story fed to them, though no evidence of the alleged impending massacre has ever been presented. The nearest thing to an official US government account of the matter – a Congressional Research Service report on events in Libya for the period – makes no mention at all of the threatened massacre. Keep this in mind when reading the latest accusations against Russia.

The US/NATO heavy bombing of Libya led also to the widespread dispersal throughout North African and Middle East hotspots of the gigantic arsenal of weaponry that Gaddafi had accumulated. Libya is now a haven for terrorists, from al Qaeda to ISIS, whereas Gaddafi

had been a leading foe of terrorists.

Oh my god, I've been called an anti-Semite!

British Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, and many others in the UK and the US are attacked for being anti-Semitic if they criticize Israel. But John McCain had very friendly meetings, and posed for photos, with prominent neo-Nazis in Ukraine and the Middle East – without being accused of being anti-Semitic. People involved in political activity on the left have to learn to ignore charges of antisemitism stemming from their criticism of Israel. These accusations are just thrown out as a tactic to gain political advantage – like with “anti-American” and “conspiracy theorist” – and do not deserve to be taken seriously. Whenever possible, such name-calling should be made fun of.

There's an unwritten rule in right wing circles: It's okay to be anti-Semitic as long as you're pro-Israel. Evangelical preacher Pat Robertson is such an example. While in the past an “anti-Semite” was someone who hates Jews, nowadays it is the other way around: An anti-Semite is someone the Jews hate.

“God appointed America to save the world in any way that suits America. God appointed Israel to be the nexus of America's Middle Eastern policy and anyone who wants to mess with that idea is a) anti-Semitic, b) anti-American, c) with the enemy, and d) a terrorist”. – John LeCarré

George Bush, Sr's Secretary of State, James Baker, famously said to a colleague: “Fuck the Jews! They don't vote for us anyway”.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Adviser under Jimmy Carter: “An anti-Israel bias is not the same as antisemitism. To argue as much is to claim an altogether unique immunity for Israel, untouchable by the kind of criticism that is normally directed at the conduct of states”. **CT**

William Blum is the author of Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II, Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Super Power, West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Political Memoir, and America's Deadliest Export – Democracy: The Truth About US Foreign Policy and Everything Else. His website is www.williamblum.org

GEORGE MONBIOT

Seal of approval

How an animal welfare charity ended up endorsing seal killing – and what this says about our age

As the drive for growth and profit intrudes into all relationships, it captures even the bodies that exist to hold capital to account. Agencies of the state, newspapers and broadcasters, campaign groups and charities that claim to restrain corporate power fall under its spell. As their mission becomes confused and their purpose dissipates, substance is replaced with spectacle.

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Fifty years ago, in his book *The Society of the Spectacle*, the French philosopher Guy Debord argued that “the spectacle” (the domination of social relationships by images) is used to justify the “dictatorship of modern economic production”. It both disguises and supplants the realities of capitalism, changing our perceptions until we become “consumers of illusion”. Here is an example of how it happens.

In September, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) issued a press release about the “incredible story” of Marina, a seal it rescued, that had become trapped under a rock on a beach in South Wales. “Moving a three-tonne boulder presents numerous challenges, but we were able to work with partners to free this seal, before giving her the six months of rehabilitation she so urgently needed”. Marina’s rescue is “testimony to the RSPCA’s tireless commitment to wild animals, and their welfare”.

On the same day, the RSPCA’s head of campaigns, pushed into a corner during an online argument, wrote this: “Seal shooting is not culling it’s about humane pest control”. He was de-



SAVE OR SHOOT?: The RSPCA spoke of the “incredible rescue” of a seal on the same day that it called seal culling “humane pest control”. Photo: Tony Sutton

fending the slaughter of seals by Scottish salmon farms.

The contradiction is at first sight incomprehensible. But alongside its spectacular rescues of animals like Marina, the organisation has another role, which is to assess livestock farms, and award those that meet its standards its RSPCA Assured label. This seal of approval ensures that “you can feel good about your choice when shopping and eating out”. Of the 280 million animals whose production and slaughter it approves

GEORGE MONBIOT

whose production and slaughter it approves every year, salmon account for 200 million. The RSPCA accredits 63% of Scottish salmon farms.

It won't publish a list of the farms it has approved, citing a "contractual clause in the membership agreement". But of the 24 people who sit on the advisory group for its assurance scheme (according to the most recent published list), 20 work for salmon farming companies. These companies include the four named in an investigation into seal shooting in 2013, by the Global Alliance Against Industrial Aquaculture, as "the worst offenders".

There is no closed season for shooting seals. When lactating mothers are shot, their orphaned pups starve to death on remote beaches. The RSPCA does not deny that farms it certifies shoot seals. It tells me it is urgently trying to bring the practice to an end. I might have found this more convincing if it hadn't said the same thing in 2008. It also maintains that shooting seals is "a last resort". But the majority of Scottish salmon farms fail to double-net their cages to exclude seals. This is more expensive than bullets, but you might have hoped it would be the minimum requirement for an RSPCA Assured farm.

The RSPCA tells me that "double netting is not suitable for all sites", but is unable to tell me what proportion of the farms it certifies could use double netting. Where this method cannot be used, you might have hoped the society would say "that seals it: we will not certify salmon farming here".

It insists that farms that want its accreditation that are at high risk of predation by seals must have "acoustic deterrent devices in place where appropriate". These make a loud noise intended to scare seals away. Unfortunately, they also cause pain and distress to dolphins, porpoises and whales, disrupting their behaviour and driving them out of their feeding grounds. These are by no means the only problems caused by salmon farms.

Recent footage filmed inside a Scottish salmon cage shows fish being eaten alive. Much of their

skin, flesh and fins has been consumed by sea lice, which have reached epidemic proportions on many farms. Sea lice are not only ripping through the caged population, where the mortality of salmon has risen from 7 to 14% in four years, but spill out to hammer the wild salmon and sea trout trying to migrate through the lochs, pushing their populations closer to extinction. Yet the RSPCA standards for sea louse numbers in the farms it certifies are no higher than the legal minimum, which fisheries scientists say is far too low.

In the hope of controlling this infestation, salmon farms dose their fish with organophosphate pesticides. These are likely to devastate crustacean populations in the sea lochs, and many other species that depend on them. Some of the companies providing the fish meal on which farmed salmon are fed trawl and grind up entire marine ecosystems, arguably causing greater environmental damage than any other fishing operation.

The harder you look at this industry, the more obvious it becomes that it is inherently incompatible with either animal welfare or environmental protection. Yet the Scottish government, which sees salmon farming as a crucial growth industry, wants it to double by 2030. It seems to me that the RSPCA's assurance provides the necessary figleaf.

The RSPCA insists that it is not motivated by the fees it receives for certifying salmon farms. These, it says, "are ploughed back into the scheme's running costs". I'm sure this is true. The problem, I feel, runs much deeper: to my eyes, its mission seems to have slipped from preventing cruelty to modifying industrial animal farming. If its objective is to prevent cruelty, surely it should instead endorse the rapid shift towards veganism?

Marina is the spectacle: the actor in the spotlight, who helps to seal the RSPCA's public image. The unapproved seals of Scotland and their orphaned pups, in the darkness behind the stage, are reduced to the status of pests. Debord defined the spectacle as "a negation of life that has invented a visual form for itself". He was right.

CT

Tangled up in the garden of good and evil

Shaking off a propagandised worldview requires seeing not only what we abhor in others but also what others abhor in us

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THE most widely acclaimed TV series ever about the Nazi occupation of France is a relentless epic with little use for the familiar images of craven collaborators and selfless resisters. *Un Village Français* focuses on a fictional rural community that endures a tightening vice of German control for more than four years. The villagers live far away from black-and-white tropes. Even a ruthless Nazi official eludes the usual monochrome. The humans are all too human.

Un Village averaged about 3.4 million French viewers during 72 episodes between 2009 and 2017. The dramatic series has also aired in upward of 40 countries, according to producers. Now gaining an audience in the United States via online platforms (under its English title *A French Village*), the series is far afield from routine US media assumptions about bright lines between good and evil.

From the start of the series, when German troops suddenly arrive in mid-June 1940, the choices for locals are bad and keep getting worse. *Un Village* is riddled with dilemmas that often go from painful to insoluble. The drama's creators aimed "to bring some shades of grey to the public memory of World War 2 in France", historian Marjolaine Boutet wrote; they had "the ambition to evoke an empathetic response from the audience towards every character" – while bypassing the timeworn formula of "collaborators as villains and Resistance fighters as heroes". Based on solid historical research, the poignant

and often heartbreaking script comes alive with a superb ensemble cast in more than 20 major roles. The result is a dramatic tour de force that undermines Manichean views of the world.

After watching the 63 hours of *Un Village Français*, I was eager to interview its head scriptwriter, Frédéric Krivine. We met on a rainy Paris morning at a café not far from Place de la République. My first question: "How and why did you want to make a Nazi human?"

Krivine, who is Jewish, responded with a fleeting quip – "It's a good Jewish story" – and quickly turned serious. "A good show, especially a show to last for a while, needs to have characters who are really representative of the complexity of human nature", he said. "Otherwise, you mustn't use them". Nazis, he went on, "were human beings, with desires and problems", at the same time that "in another point of view, they were kind of monsters".

The main Nazi character in *Un Village* is a powerful intelligence officer whose romantic charm and steely wit co-exist with willingness to torture and execute if necessary to get the job done. I asked Krivine whether there was a message in the mixture.

"People who do horrible things are human beings", he said. "We have to find a way to talk about them without hiding what they do and without treating them as nonhuman people, nonhuman beings. They are human beings; like us they belong to, we are in, the same species, human species.... It's humans who kill now eve-



"People who do horrible things are human beings" – a scene from *Un Village Français*.

rywhere in the world where people are killed. It's because they are human beings that we have problems – because if they were just extraterrestrial or monsters we could just erase them".

Un Village is an intricate counterpoint to Marcel Ophüls's landmark 1969 documentary *The Sorrow and the Pity*, which left many viewers with the broad-brush impression that occupied France was virtually a nation of collaborators, except for a few heroes. Krivine balks at such sweeping categories. In his script, some of the resisters are unable to resist their own egotism, opportunism, dogmatism, or lethally displaced rage. The purpose of the plot points is to engender not cynicism but realism.

Overall, Krivine commented, most people are apt to remain bystanders. In the case of wartime France, an overwhelming majority of the population were neither resisters nor collaborators and didn't do anything, "bad or good". (Meanwhile, many more French citizens cooperated with the occupiers than resisted them.) When I asked

about human tendencies to go along with evils, Krivine replied that "it's a very complex matter", and then swiftly reframed my question this way: "Of what is made indifference, and what are the consequences of indifference?"

Krivine brought up two current examples. He pointed out that several million people have died of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa over the past decade – yet life-saving medicines exist and could be delivered for use in a far-reaching programme. "But we don't do it". Krivine then spoke of how snipers in the Israeli military had recently been killing Palestinians along the Gaza border. Yet scant opposition came from the Israeli public.

When I remarked that such cases are forms of collaboration by the majority, Krivine demurred. "I don't feel it as collaboration", he said. "But it's not nothing". When I suggested the word "complicity", he differed again, and said: "People don't react when they don't have the horror in their eyes".

During the first year of the occupation, the

tightening repression of Jews caused little critical response from the French public, he said. It was only when police began to separate Jewish parents and their children in 1942 that a widespread negative reaction from the population set in. German authorities took note and started to implement similar policies more discreetly; the public concern dissipated.

Near the close of *Un Village Français*, two scenes notably bring the past into the present.

After barely eluding the dragnets of Vichy and German forces, Rita and Ezechiel escape to Palestine. But, contrary to boilerplate story lines, the Jewish couple doesn't get a happy ending in the Promised Land. On a desert road one day in 1948, they come under attack from Palestinians; when Rita expresses bafflement at the ambush, Ezechiel tells her that Jewish settlers have recently massacred Palestinian families in a village called Deir Yassin. More than one layer of tragedy hangs in the air.

The postwar trajectory of the central Nazi character – Heinrich Müller, the top SD (Sicherheitsdienst, or Security Service) intelligence official in the town – also goes against the familiar grain. As German forces retreat from advancing Allies in the late summer of 1944, Müller deserts with his French lover in an unsuccessful effort to reach Switzerland. Soon the American military captures Müller and discovers his identity. Later, when he resurfaces in the series, the year is 1960, the country is Paraguay, and – as a CIA operative – Müller is overseeing a torture session. The goal is to extract information from a woman who is part of a guerrilla insurgency against a fascist regime being propped up by the US government.

With both narrative twists, so different than what we're apt to see in US mass entertainment, I asked Krivine: What's the big idea?

"The idea was", he said, "we need to show the long-distance consequences of an event like occupation. And it was interesting to show one guy in Paraguay in the sixties. And the Jews who escaped – it was so for Rita and Ezechiel a narrow escape, they were survivors, and then they're in another place, in another story. The idea was to say: there is no ending to that kind of story".

The next day, I crossed a bridge over the Seine

and kept walking toward an appointment with the Nazi intelligence officer Heinrich Müller – or so it almost seemed, against all rational thought, because the chilling portrayal of that character in *Un Village Français* demands the suspension of disbelief, willing or otherwise. As I hurried toward our rendezvous, there were moments when I couldn't help wondering whether Müller's icy fascist gaze might confront me at the little café where we were to meet.

Richard Sammel greeted me with a smile and a wave as he came through the door, carrying a motorcycle helmet in the other hand. I'd read that (like Krivine) he was born about 15 years after the end of the Second World War, that he speaks several languages fluently in addition to his native German, and that he has acted widely since the early 1990s. Concentrating on his big role in *Un Village* for much of a decade must have absorbed a lot of psychological energy. I wondered what insights he might share after "being" a Nazi for so long.

Early in our conversation, I mentioned the assumption that there's nothing human about really bad people like Nazi officials.

"That's the biggest mistake you can make", Sammel said. Moments later he was citing Hannah Arendt's book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, "where you actually found out that Eichmann was a completely normal guy". High-ranking Nazi officers "were wonderful fathers and wonderful husbands and actually very tender", he added, "which would not fit at all with this common idea that they're all brutal sadists". Nazis were "normal people who turned into murder machines".

Soon Sammel brought up the famous experiment that Yale University psychologist Stanley Milgram began in 1961 (the same year as Adolf Eichmann's trial for overseeing large-scale Nazi crimes against humanity). The professor found it easy to "make people torture other people, for the benefit of science. And they go until three times administering a potential lethal electrical charge on another person, who is an actor who mimes the pain, but still – those people do not know it".

What about mass entertainment that, like so

NORMAN SOLOMON

much nationalist rhetoric in the United States, thrives on depicting people as all good or all bad? “I guess in terms of catharsis, I get the Hollywood recipe”, Sammel said. “It’s complete crap. But it’s an ideology that pumps us up. It will not help society grow”.

“If we come to understand that people who are ‘bad’ have some good qualities”, I said, “then maybe also we would be confronted that people who we know are ‘us’ and good might have some really bad qualities”.

“Yeah, that’s exactly it”, he replied. “Isn’t it like that in America? You are the only society in the world who have only good guys. How amazing for you. But then explain to me how come that you are the very nation who have the biggest rate of people imprisoned. Tell me about that – if you are so good, how come? You tell me. You are believing in shit. Excuse me, to say that”.

He went on: “How come that you do not understand – I mean, it’s not [only] you, it’s even Europe – you bomb the Middle East 30 years and then you are kind of surprised that there is a refugee movement, people go out, or a terrorist movement even. Every fucking terrorist movement that was born in the Middle East was funded primarily in the beginning initially from us. They have our weapons because we gave them to them. So we play the fucking game and then it gets out of control. So the bad game is not started by them, it’s started by us. And now we blame it on them”.

Sammel grew up in West Germany, near Heidelberg. During childhood, he saw horrific footage from concentration camps. “I got to know all those documentaries the American soldiers filmed when they discovered the camps.... It traumatised me for the rest of my life. But I tell you what – you get your lesson.... Never ever again. That’s how you learn from history”.

An imperative is “understanding human behavior”, Sammel said. “How the hell could that happen? And you will not understand how this has happened if you say, ‘They’re all bad, we killed them all, let’s kill them all as quickly as possible, done, good job.’ ... In a historical analysis, you have to go deep into society to find out where it started, how was the process of indoctri-

nation, how a whole nation turned into believing an ideology completely disconnected from reality, and how this collective fury or enthusiasm could have happened – in order to prevent it”.

The German official whom Sammel portrayed for eight years “took the ideology of the Nazis because it’s the most powerful, the best way to make a career and a good living. And that’s what he did. So, he’s not a convinced Nazi, he’s a convinced Darwinist”. When his capture by the US military leads to a new career with US intelligence, “he’s very happy that the Americans take him over. Very happy – perfect – safe”.

The café was closing, so we found a quiet spot in a bar around the corner. “Know your biggest enemy most”, Sammel said as we sat down. “All kind of caricature doesn’t help you understand the other side”.

He added: “Don’t put the Nazis in a place where you think it has nothing to do with yourself. That’s the biggest danger, historical danger, I think we can make”.

“A historical series, like a historical book, speaks of the period that it talks about and also of the period it was made”, Frédéric Krivine told me. In the current era, his deeply nuanced scripting of *Un Village Français* is at odds with countless tales of sheer goodness in the fight against evil-doers – the kind of narratives that have retained huge power in spite of diminished credibility. Shaking off a propagandised worldview requires seeing not only what we abhor in others but also what others abhor in us – a sharp departure from outlooks that have dominated the US political culture. Facile accusations about the crimes of others beg the questions about our own. In such light, *Un Village Français* can be viewed (with English subtitles) as particularly relevant for Americans, whose country – while never experiencing a successful invasion by a foreign power – has often occupied other lands. **CT**

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*This essay originally appeared in *The Nation* – www.thenation.com*



EVICTED: Police shepherd rain-soaked protesters out of Takaru Park in Oamaru, New Zealand, after a 7-day occupation.

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Arresting times

How I photographed a protest in New Zealand and lost my job

TWENTY years ago a rare, spontaneous, land occupation occurred in the town of Oamaru on New Zealand's South Island. Throughout the year a dispute had been percolating over council plan to build an "aquatic centre" on the town's only green space, a reserve known as Takaro Park, that had, in pre-colonial times, been a swamp where Maori occasionally camped and fished for eels.

Despite overwhelming public opposition, the council voted to proceed with the project, and a local construction company was contracted to build it. Many locals were incensed, including my flatmate who swore he was going to save the park by occupying it until the council saw rea-

son. And so, on a cold Monday morning, he woke me to take him down to the park with a mattress on the roof of his Mini, to meet another protester, a local Maori woman.

It was the start of an eventful seven days.

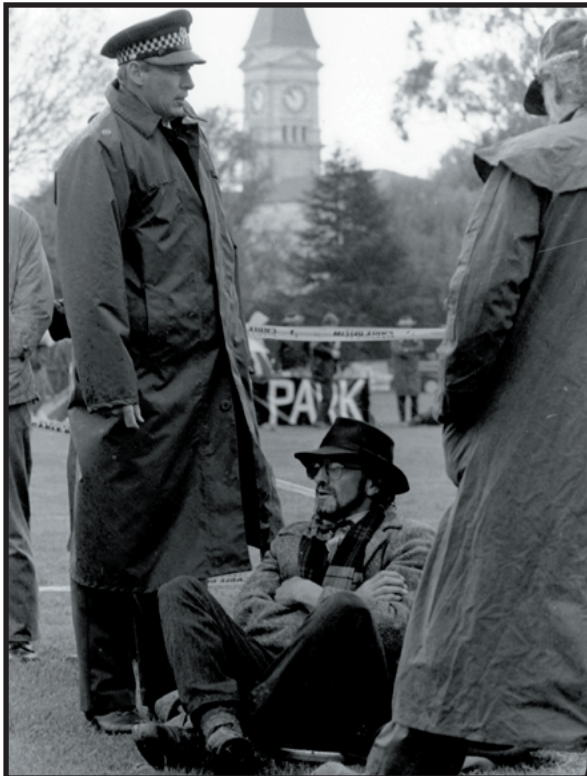
The occupation gained momentum on its second day when the famously eccentric "Wizard of New Zealand", British-born Ian Brackenbury, arrived from Christchurch to encourage the protesters. Undeterred by his intrusion, the police immediately served an eviction notice under the Reserves Act for the removal of the occupiers' tent, which was soon re-erected.

Early on Wednesday morning, there was a suspicious fire in an office at the nearby council

NIGEL YATES



Photographer Nigel Yates was sacked by the local newspaper after exhibiting these pictures of the protest at a local cafe.



building, which had also acquired protest graffiti overnight.

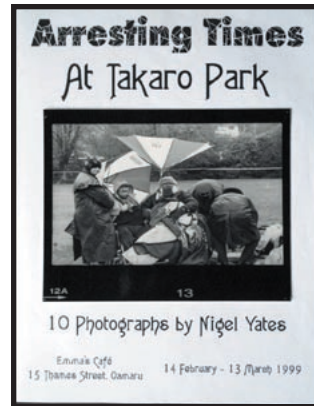
The front page headline in the *Otago Daily Times* on the following day declared: *Pool site protest turns fiery*, despite including a police statement in the same story that there was nothing linking the fire to the protesters on Takaro Park”.

On Saturday morning, the council advertised a change of designation of the park from “Reserve” to “Construction Site”, and the mood of the protest changed from one of intoxicating freedom to brave foreboding. My flatmate, who had spent every night on the park, implored me to stay over on Sunday night as the following day was my day off. At around 5 am on a miserable Monday morning I was shaken awake to photograph what became the last “night shift” of the occupation.

Soon after dawn, things started to change: Council staff erected a temporary fence around the camp site with a Keep Out sign, and the numbers of police, journalists and protesters in-

NIGEL YATES

Photographs: Nigel Yates



FAR LEFT: Giving voice to the protest. **LEFT:** Poster for the exhibition that cost Yates his job. **BELOW:** Days later, local residents find Keep Out notices at the park entrance.



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creased. Then the occupiers were given a final warning before the cops moved in, arresting 13 of them for trespass. They were later convicted in an entertaining, if farcical, court hearing. Several months later, a local man was arrested and found guilty of the arson of the council office. The aquatic centre was constructed.

Early in 1999, a local cafe owner asked me if I had any recent photos to exhibit and I suggested a series of the protesters being arrested, with the tongue-in-cheek title *Arresting Times at Takaro Park*. On the morning the exhibition opened – my first day off in 10 days – an answerphone message delivered a humourless instruction from my newspaper, “Don’t bother coming in any more”. I’d been fired!

This was a clear breach of New Zealand employment law, so I called the journalists’ union which told me, “We can’t help you”. A friendly lawyer drafted a personal grievance action which was settled out of court in my favour, and I

was offered a modest redundancy payment, half of which went on legal fees.

I called a friend at a newspaper where I had previously worked about an upcoming vacancy for a photographer. “We’ve made other plans”, was his reply. And that was the end of my career as a journalist: after 23 years working for newspapers in New Zealand, I was never able to find employment, so, with my flatmate, I opened a secondhand shop and a couple of used-book shops.

CT

*Nigel Yates is from West Yorkshire, and grew up in southern New Zealand. After leaving university due to a lack of funds he landed a job in a newspaper photography department and subsequently worked as staff photographer for seven NZ newspapers. His two books of analog photographs are *Dunedin - An Essay* (1988) and *Notes From Underground* (2007). He now lives off-the-grid near Dunedin, NZ.*

Do CIA guys laugh at us over lunch?

A poem by Philip Kraske

I wonder if those guys at the CIA
Don't laugh till they cry o'er the things we say:
"The Company did this and prob'ly did that,
They knocked off Allende and then did my cat,
They overthrew X and discredited Y,
Who kept local peace and was a pretty good
guy".

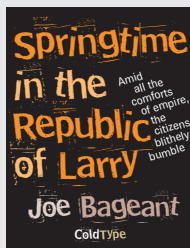
Does amazement abound in their lunchtime
canteen?
"They say we've infected the native Chad bean!
We're talking to E.T.s, poleaxing left pols,
Slip Pope Francis mickies, down-dumb all the
prols.
On mainstream reporters we keep a choke-hold,
And woe is the scribe who tries to go rogue!"

Do they laugh all that off over good rosé?
Or moan "if only!" and get on with their day?
Or maybe perusing those wild scandal hacks,
Who scream the Agency some Nazi-type backs,
They rub chinny-chins and pull out yellow pad,
Saying, "No, that ain't us, but the idea's not bad".
Of course I'm referring to them and their

Friends,
'Cause Central's a word that both long ways
extends:
"Is linked to", "on orders of", "sometimes
worked with":
It seems half the earth enjoys CIA pith.
Of course, just which half and how much we
don't know
That this Deus ex machina has changed our
tableau.

Which ends our history, fallen right off the cliff,
And since '45 has been one big "What if?"
What if the Company was behind Watergate?
What if Obama from their dish first ate?
Until we know sure what the CIA's zapped,
Our story's redacted, all threadbare and
gapped. **CT**

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READ THE BEST OF JOE BAGEANT

www.coldtype.net/joe.html

Gaza's economy has collapsed. Now what?

Hope for peace dwindles as Palestinian banking sector struggles to fight impact of humanitarian crisis created by Israeli blockade

THE moment long feared is fast approaching in Gaza, according to a new report by the World Bank. After a decade-long Israeli blockade and a series of large-scale military assaults, the economy of the tiny coastal enclave is in “freefall”.

At a late-September meeting of international donors in New York, coinciding with the annual meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, the World Bank painted an alarming picture of Gaza's crisis. Unemployment now stands at close to 70 per cent and the economy is contracting at an ever faster rate. Countries attending the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee were told. Gaza's collapse could bring down the entire Palestinian banking sector.

In response, Europe hurriedly put together a €40-million aid package, but that will chiefly address Gaza's separate humanitarian crisis – not the economic one – by improving supplies of electricity and potable water. No one doubts the inevitable fallout from the economic and humanitarian crises gripping Gaza. The four parties to the Quartet charged with overseeing negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians – the United States, Russia, the European Union and the UN – issued a statement warning that it was vital to prevent what they termed “further escalation” in Gaza.

The Israeli military shares these concerns. It has reported growing unrest among the enclave's two million inhabitants and believes Hamas will be forced into a confrontation to break out of the

straightjacket imposed by the blockade. In recent weeks, mass protests along Gaza's perimeter fence have been revived and expanded after a summer lull. On Friday, September 28, seven Palestinian demonstrators, including two children, were killed by Israeli sniper fire. Hundreds more were wounded.

Nonetheless, the political will to remedy the situation looks as atrophied as ever. No one is prepared to take meaningful responsibility for the time-bomb that is Gaza. In fact, the main parties that could make a difference appear intent on allowing the deterioration to continue.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has ignored repeated warnings of a threatened explosion in Gaza from his own military.

Instead, Israel is upholding the blockade as tightly as ever, preventing the flow of goods in and out of the enclave. Fishing is limited to three miles off the coast rather than the 20-mile zone agreed in the Oslo accords. Hundreds of companies are said to have folded over the summer.

Intensifying the enclave's troubles is the Trump administration's decision to cut aid to the Palestinians, including to the United Nation's refugee agency, UNRWA. It plays a critical role in Gaza, providing food, education and health services to nearly two-thirds of the population.

The food budget is due to run out in December, and the schools budget by the end of October. Hundreds of thousands of hungry children with nowhere to spend their days can only fuel the protests – and the deaths.

JONATHAN COOK



Mass protests along Gaza's perimeter fence have been revived and expanded after a summer lull. Israel's military leaders have warned of greater trouble ahead if the blockade of Gaza is not loosened.

Photo:
Wikimedia
Commons

The Palestinian Authority of Mahmoud Abbas, headquartered in the West Bank, has no incentive to help. Gaza's slowly unfolding catastrophe is his leverage to make Hamas submit to his rule. That is why the Palestinian Authority has cut transfers to Gaza by \$30-million a month.

But even if Mr Abbas wished to help, he largely lacks the means. The US cuts were imposed primarily to punish him for refusing to play ball with US President Donald Trump's supposed "deal of the century" peace plan. Israel, the World Bank notes, has added to Mr Abbas's difficulties by refusing to transfer taxes and customs duties it collects on the PA's behalf. And the final implicated party, Egypt, is reticent to loosen its own chokehold on its short border with Gaza. President Abdel Fattah El Sisi opposes giving any succour either to his domestic Islamist opponents or to Hamas.

The impasse is possible only because none of the parties is prepared to make a priority of Gaza's welfare. That was starkly illustrated earlier in the summer when Cairo, supported by the UN, opened a back channel between Israel and Hamas in the hope of ending their mounting friction.

Hamas wanted the blockade lifted to reverse Gaza's economic decline, while Israel wanted an end to the weekly protests and the damaging images of snipers killing unarmed demonstrators.

In addition, Mr Netanyahu has an interest in keeping Hamas in power in Gaza, if barely, as a

way to cement the geographic split with the West Bank and an ideological one with Mr Abbas.

The talks, however, collapsed in early September after Mr Abbas objected to the Egyptians. He insisted that the Palestinian Authority be the only address for discussions of Gaza's future. So, Cairo is again channelling its energies into a futile attempt at reconciling Mr Abbas and Hamas.

At the UN General Assembly, Mr Trump promised his peace plan would be unveiled in the next two to three months, and made explicit for the first time his support for a two-state solution, saying it would "work best". Mr Netanyahu vaguely concurred, while pointing out: "Everyone defines the term 'state' differently". His definition, he added, required that not one of the illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank be removed and that any future Palestinian state be under complete Israeli security control.

Hamas has made notable compromises to its original doctrine of military resistance to secure all of historic Palestine. But it is hard to imagine it agreeing to peace on those terms. This makes a reconciliation between Hamas and Mr Abbas currently inconceivable – and respite for the people of Gaza as far off as ever. **CT**

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Blanket silence

How the UK corporate media ignored a new report exposing distorted and misleading coverage of Jeremy Corbyn

38

F there's one thing we've learned in the 17 years since Media Lens began, it's that media professionals generally hate being challenged, critiqued or criticised. This fierce antipathetical belligerence underlies the corporate media's total refusal to mention, far less discuss, a recent damning report on how they have been misreporting Labour and its supposed "problem" with antisemitism.

The report was published in late September by the Media Reform Coalition (MRC), set up in 2011 in the wake of the News International phone hacking scandal, to promote debate about the media and democracy. The MRC coordinates effective action by civil society groups, academics and media campaigners, and is currently chaired by Natalie Fenton, Professor of Communication and Media at Goldsmiths, University of London.

The urgent need for such a media initiative is highlighted by the disturbing reality that Britain has one of the most concentrated media environments in the world, with just three companies in control of 71 percent of national newspaper circulation and five companies running 81 percent of local newspaper titles.

In the MRC study, articles and news segments on Labour and antisemitism from the largest UK news providers, both online and television, were subjected to in-depth analysis. The research was undertaken by Dr Justin Schlosberg, Senior Lecturer in Journalism and Media at Birkbeck, University of London, together with Laura Laker, an

experienced freelance journalist.

In their study, Schlosberg and Laker identified: "myriad inaccuracies and distortions in online and television news including marked skews in sourcing, omission of essential context or right of reply, misquotation, and false assertions made either by journalists themselves or sources whose contentious claims were neither challenged nor countered. Overall, our findings were consistent with a disinformation paradigm".

In other words, the corporate media have been pumping out reams of "fake news" promoting a narrative that Corbyn and Labour are mired in an "antisemitism crisis."

Out of over 250 articles and news pieces examined by Schlosberg and Laker, fully 95 examples were found of misleading or inaccurate reporting. In particular, there were:

- 29 examples of false statements or claims, several of them made by news presenters or correspondents themselves, six of them on BBC television news programmes, and eight on the *Guardian* website.

- A further 66 clear instances of misleading or distorted coverage including misquotations, reliance on single-source accounts, omission of essential facts or right of reply, and repeated value-based assumptions made by broadcasters without evidence or qualification. In total, a quarter of the sample contained at least one documented inaccuracy or distortion.



FIGHTING BACK: Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn was critical of the mainstream media at the recent Labour Party conference, saying “a free press has far too often meant the freedom to spread lies and half-truths, and to smear the powerless, not take on the powerful”.

Photo: YouTube screengrab

• Overwhelming source imbalance, especially on television news, where voices critical of Labour’s code of conduct on antisemitism were regularly given an unchallenged and exclusive platform, outnumbering those defending Labour by nearly 4 to 1. Nearly half of *Guardian* reports on the controversy surrounding Labour’s code of conduct featured no quoted sources defending the party or leadership.

This is, to say the least, totally unacceptable from any supposedly responsible news outlet. It is even more galling when it comes from the *Guardian* and BBC News, both with large global audiences, who constantly proclaim their credentials for “honest and balanced reporting”.

Much recent corporate media coverage has focused on the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of “an-

tisemitism”. Corporate media across the spectrum have argued that in refusing to accept the IHRA definition in total, with all of its accompanying examples, Corbyn has promoted antisemitism, alienated Britain’s Jewish community and divided his own party.

Philip Collins wrote in the *Times* of Corbyn: “He has, for some reason he cannot articulate, insisted that the Labour Party should be just about the only institution that does not accept the definition of antisemitism approved by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance”.

In July, a *Times* editorial stated of Labour’s National Executive Committee: “Instead of adopting a standard definition of antisemitism formulated by the International Holocaust Re-

membrance Alliance, and endorsed by governments around the world, the NEC has amended it in unacceptable ways... Let there be no doubt: these are unconscionable and antisemitic accusations”.

In September, another *Times* leader opined (our emphasis): “Labour’s national executive committee will vote today on whether to adopt the internationally recognised definition of antisemitism. It is essential that it does. Governments and organisations worldwide have adopted the carefully worded text developed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Jeremy Corbyn’s hamfisted attempt to rewrite it, without consultation and with the apparent aim of protecting certain activists, shames his party”.

The *Times* added: “British Jews are well placed to define what constitutes racism towards them, just as any minority deserves the last word in the debate as it applies to them. Gordon Brown has called for Labour to ‘unanimously, unequivocally and immediately’ adopt all the examples. Anything less would mark a dark day indeed for the party”.

Noting that three leading British Jewish newspapers had declared that a Corbyn-led government would pose “an existential threat to Jewish life in this country”, senior *Guardian* columnist and former comment editor Jonathan Freedland asked: “How on earth has it come to this?”

Part, but not all, of the problem, Freedland suggested, was: “Labour’s failure to adopt the full text of the near universally accepted International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, including all its illustrative examples”.

He added: “When Jews hear that the IHRA is not good enough, they wonder: what exactly is it that Labour wants to say about us?”

And yet, as the MRC report makes clear, although the IHRA is an international body with representatives from 31 countries, only six of those countries have, to date, formally adopted the definition themselves. Several high-profile bodies have rejected or distanced themselves

from the working definition, including the EU’s Fundamental Rights Agency – a successor to the body that drafted the original wording on which the definition is based – and academic institutions including the London School of Economics and School of Oriental and African Studies. Moreover, academic and legal opinion has been overwhelmingly critical of the IHRA definition, including formal opinions produced by four leading UK barristers.

But, note Schlosberg and Laker: “Virtually none of this essential context found its way into news reports of the controversy. Instead, the Labour Party was routinely portrayed by both sources and correspondents as beyond the pale of conventional thinking on the IHRA definition”.

Nearly 50 percent of *Guardian* reports failed to include any quotes from those critiquing the IHRA definition or defending Labour’s code of conduct on antisemitism. In fact, media reporting: “effectively gave those attacking Labour’s revised code and championing the IHRA definition a virtually exclusive and unchallenged platform to air their views. By comparison, their detractors – including a number of Jewish organisations and representatives of other affected minorities – were systematically marginalised from the coverage. Furthermore, Labour MPs adopting even moderate positions defending the code were subjected to far more aggressive questioning from interviewers than those adopting extreme positions attacking it”.

In a calm, methodical and rigorous manner, the MRC has exposed to public view the blatant anti-Corbyn bias of even the “best” media outlets: the BBC and the *Guardian*.

Response to the Media Reform Coalition report

Our searches using the ProQuest newspaper database reveal that there has not been a single news article or editorial published about the report. This is a remarkable symptom of the glaring tendency of the media to reject, or simply blank, reasoned, well-researched criticism.

When the *Canary* website published an article about the MRC report, they approached both the *Guardian* and the BBC for comment. The *Guardian*

ian's response was boilerplate rhetoric – “The *Guardian* has featured a wide range of voices in this debate”, etc - that failed to acknowledge the paper's unambiguous distortions and omissions. The BBC did not even provide a comment.

The sole newspaper mention to date is a letter in the *Guardian* which may only have been published because Noam Chomsky is one of the signatories, along with high-profile figures such as Brian Eno, Yanis Varoufakis, Ken Loach and a number of media academics. They make a crucial point that relates to criticism of the *Guardian* itself (mentioned earlier): “In relation to the IHRA definition of antisemitism that was at the heart of the dispute, the research found evidence of ‘overwhelming source imbalance’ in which critics of Labour's code of conduct dominated coverage, with nearly 50 percent of *Guardian* reports, for example, failing to include any quotes from those defending the code or critiquing the IHRA definition”.

The letter also notes the MRC researchers' conclusion that media distortions and inaccuracies: “were not occasional lapses in judgment but ‘systematic reporting failures’ that served to weaken the Labour leadership and to bolster its opponents within and outside of the party.”

Chomsky and his co-signatories add: “In covering the allegations that Labour is now ‘institutionally antisemitic’, there have been inaccuracies, clear distortions and revealing omissions across our most popular media platforms. We believe that significant parts of the UK media have failed their audiences by producing flawed reports that have contributed to an undeserved witch-hunt against the Labour leader and misdirected public attention away from antisemitism elsewhere, including on the far right, which is ascendant in much of Europe”.

Given the *Guardian*'s appalling record of boosting fake news of a Labour “antisemitism crisis”, and given its vehement opposition to Corbyn's brand of moderate socialism, it is no wonder that #DumpTheGuardian and #BoycottTheGuardian were trending in the UK last Friday as part of a dedicated Twitter campaign.

Pro-Corbyn Labour MP Chris Williamson tweeted his support in response to the MRC report: “My reference to McCarthyism vindicated by this report. The *Guardian* newspaper's deplorable contribution explains why so many people are saying #BoycottTheGuardian”

On September 26, Jeremy Corbyn gave a speech to the Labour Party conference in which he dared to criticise the British corporate media who have been gunning for him ever since he became the party's leader: “It turns out that the billionaires who own the bulk of the British press don't like us one little bit.

“Now it could be because we're going to clamp down on tax dodging. Or it may be because we don't fawn over them at white tie dinners and cocktail parties.”

He added: “We must, and we will, protect the freedom of the press to challenge unaccountable power.

“Journalists from Turkey to Myanmar and Colombia are being imprisoned, harassed or sometimes killed by authoritarian governments and powerful corporate interests just for doing their job.

“But here, a free press has far too often meant the freedom to spread lies and half-truths, and to smear the powerless, not take on the powerful.

“You challenge their propaganda of privilege by using the mass media of the 21st century: social media.”

Pippa Crerar, *Guardian* deputy political editor, responded with the standard kneejerk conflation of Corbyn's reasoned comments with the idiotic “fake news” mantra of Trump. She tweeted: “Corbyn criticises some parts of British media, claiming they ‘smear the powerless, not take on the powerful’. As a journalist, makes me very uncomfortable to hear him leading attack on our free press. Dangerous, Trumpian territory”.

We responded: “Honest, rational criticism is not an ‘attack’, and it is not ‘dangerous’. A corporate press that refuses to listen or respond to this kind of reasonable criticism is itself dangerous. If anyone has a right to criticise media smears, it is @jeremycorbyn.”

The level of popular support for this view is indicated by the fact that our tweet has so far

received 518 retweets and 1,222 likes; a massive response by our standards.

To her credit, Crerar did engage with us reasonably, unlike the vast majority of her media colleagues over many years: “Totally agree media has to reflect/listen. Not for a minute saying we’re perfect (some elements extremely *imperfect*). But orgs also do invaluable work eg Windrush, grooming scandal, MPs expenses so just not true to say we don’t hold power to account”.

We answered: “Thanks for replying, Pippa, very much appreciated. Glad you agree ‘media has to reflect/listen’. Doesn’t that mean taking Corbyn’s thoughtful, reasoned criticism seriously, rather than lumping it in with Trump’s awful tub-thumping? Corbyn and Milne really aren’t ‘dangerous.’”

Her follow-up: “I’ve sat back today & watched pile-on. I’d always rather engage but not when abusive. Like I said, media far from perfect, but I fear JC’s comments ignored excellent journalism that does exist & undermined journalists who produce it. Of course, nowhere near as extreme as Trump”.

And our reply: “Our response generated nearly 800 [now 1,700] likes and retweets – that gives an idea of the strength of feeling. Like other media, the *Guardian*’s smearing of Corbyn has gone way too far. It’s time to start listening to your readers @KathViner”.

To date, there has been no further exchange; and certainly not a peep out of *Guardian* editor, Katharine Viner; which is typical for this extraordinarily unresponsive media professional.

Justin Schlosberg, lead author of the MRC report, told the *Canary*: “Neither the *Guardian* nor the BBC have acknowledged or even directly responded to the myriad reporting failures highlighted in our research. It is completely inadequate to offer blanket dismissals or simply kick into the long grass of their respective complaints procedures”.

Schlosberg pointed out: “The failure to answer to these allegations is even more serious than the reporting failures themselves”.

Conclusion

As a further, related example of bias, consider

the corporate media’s stunning indifference to the bomb threat that interrupted the screening of a new film, *The Political Lynching of Jackie Walker*, in Liverpool on September 25. Walker is a former Momentum vice-chair who was suspended from the Labour party as part of a propaganda blitz attempting to silence critics of Israel. The screening was organised by Jewish Voice for Labour which has been supportive of Jeremy Corbyn.

If the corporate media were genuinely motivated by concerns about alleged rising antisemitism, this shocking threat would have generated headline coverage. Instead it was met by a blanket of silence. A brief online *Guardian* piece was, to say the least, ambiguous in its narrative. Ex-*Guardian* journalist Jonathan Cook noted: “Another ‘fake news’ master-class from the *Guardian*. A bomb hoax to stop Corbyn-supporting, Jewish Labour members screening a film about how Labour’s ‘antisemitism crisis’ has been manufactured is framed as *more* evidence of Jew hatred in the party!”

According to our ProQuest database search, the only mentions in the print press have been in the *Liverpool Echo* and the *Times of Israel*. Where are all the editorials and major comment pieces in the *Guardian*, the *Times* and elsewhere?

As for the Media Reform Coalition report itself, it is no surprise that the BBC, the *Guardian* and the rest of the corporate media should brush away detailed reasoned criticism of their biased reporting, or pretend such clear evidence does not exist. These media outlets sell themselves as publicly accountable; or, at least, as defenders of the public interest; a valiant fourth estate standing up for the truth and honest, neutral news coverage. And yet, when the alternative media makes a mistake, or says “the wrong thing”, there are angry howls and screaming mockery from the corporate commentariat. The hypocrisy is staggering, and, again, entirely predictable. **CT**

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David Cromwell and David Edwards are co-editors of *Medialens* - www.medialens.org – the UK media watchdog.

Still running wild

Jeremy Corbyn's long-established support for Palestinian self-determination is readily reframed as opposition to Israel and then parlayed into an existential threat to the Jewish state

THE issue of antisemitism in the Labour Party has not gone away, nor will it. It first arose ahead of the local elections in 2016, the first electoral test of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. The local elections of 2017 were subsumed under the general election campaign, but the matter recurred before the local elections this year. There are further such elections next May, when it may be expected to resurface with new supposed outrages from the past.

There is a very simple reason why this will happen. As a means to damage Corbyn and to weaken his chance of leading the party into the next general election, it is a proven success. It is very tricky for him to refute decisively: denial is readily twisted into the ineffectual state of being deemed to be psychologically "in denial". Corbyn's long-established support for Palestinian self-determination is readily reframed as opposition to Israel and then parlayed into an existential threat to the Jewish state. His widely recognised reputation both as an anti-racist and as a straight talker – two of his great strengths – is readily tarnished as the charges against him accumulate. His conception of leadership is based on democracy, justice and a hearing for all, which stays his hand when he might reasonably wield a big stick, decry his enemies and expel alleged wrongdoers. Instead, he turns the other cheek, even to those who abuse him to his face, eschews personal criticism of others and insists on the party bureaucracy dispensing discipline

according to the regulations.

Because all civilised people agree that antisemitism is morally bankrupt, any suggestion of it is apt to generate heat ahead of light. Where it occurs, it must be condemned, opposed and curtailed. And of course it does occur, in the Labour Party as everywhere else. But every Labour supporter knows in their heart that Labour's history has depended more extensively on Jews than has that of any other political organisation in Britain, that to suggest that antisemitism is "rampant" and "endemic" in the Labour movement is a calumny intended only to damage its leader and which, in its repercussions, hurts the whole party. It is further overlooked that false accusations may be just as wounding and resented as the enmity and detriment of prejudice.

Because of the Palestinian dimension, Jews who do not support a two-state solution do not support Corbyn. There are also Jewish organisations like the Board of Deputies and the UK Jewish press (under its current editors) that actively support the Conservative Party. For such as these, contention within Labour is its own reward. By the same token, there are Labour MPs who are exploiting the Jews for their own ends, leeching off the emotion of the antisemitism paroxysm unleashed over the summer.

That this is opportunism is clear enough. Some of us recall the vile attacks in the press made on Ed Miliband when he was party leader, attacks the antisemitism of which was barely confined to a subtext. The most naked defamation was

against Miliband's late father as "the man who hated Britain", a nation which, as a refugee, he had served fully in World War II, unlike the father of the editor of the *Daily Mail*. What we do not recall is any sustained outcry from Labour MPs, any demonstrations on Fleet Street, any confrontation wherein *Mail* editor Paul Dacre was called an antisemite to his face. Many now sitting on the backbenches then served in Miliband's shadow team; though they found him a bit too left wing, they thought they would be able to rein him in in government. Attacks on him kept him in his place for their purposes. Corbyn is much more of a threat to their retirement directorships in big pharma, academy schools and outsourced jails. He must be stopped.

I am told that I cannot understand the "hurt" caused by the alleged hatred in the Labour Party because I am not Jewish. As a gay man, I do know what being a pariah is like. 78 nations and territories presently make male homosexuality illegal and ten of them punish it with the death penalty. Yes, the Islamophobes concede, but look what happens to faggots in Palestine: they get thrown off buildings. No, that's Daesh in Iraq and the Levant. There is no record of such horrors in Palestine. It's true that in Gaza, homosexuality is illegal, a hangover from the laws introduced under the British mandate. Unless they agree to being coerced into spying against their own people, Gazan gays entering Israel are routinely returned. In the West Bank, though, a very light touch is applied over sexual transgression, legally if not socially. Following Jordan's lead, same sex relations were decriminalised there 67 years ago, 16 years earlier than in Britain and 37 before Israel. It's a fact that the West Bank is considerably more sexually progressive than, say, Northern Ireland.

I don't know how many countries presently have laws against being Jewish – none that I know of. But I do know that neofascism is on the march in many parts of the world – via Pegida in Germany, Front National in France, xenophobes and other kinds of fundamentalist in government in Italy and several *mittelEurop* countries. This

is very different and very much more serious than what is actually happening in the Labour Party or indeed anywhere else in Britain; serious for Jews and for LGBT people alike. Those who are concerned about the wellbeing of Jews in Israel and the diaspora face greater threats among the nations in whose community most of the previously evoked MPs wish to stay. As prime minister, Corbyn would lead our country against these eruptions as a matter of principle. That's what his backbench enemies would deny us.

These are unexpectedly comforting days for the banking class. The left can no longer safely characterise the money people as pantomime villains because Jeremy Corbyn has criticised them, and as all bankers are apparently Jewish and Corbyn's every observation is more or less anti-Semitic, it follows that capitalism has become a sacred cow. Such inconvenient facts as that Corbyn's remarks about being a threat to bankers were first made last year and that his particular target was Morgan Stanley, well-known to be a gentile company, do not detain those who wish to blackguard Corbyn and neither should they detain us. Justice is not relevant to this matter.

By extension, musical theatre is also now impervious to question. All the major composers and lyricists of Broadway and Hollywood song and dance were Jewish (save for Cole Porter) and by association the British contributors to the form, as well as Lionel Bart, who was indeed Jewish, are now protected, however goyish they might be. Scoff at *Jesus Christ Superstar* or *Half a Sixpence* at your peril. And then, of course, clothes are not referred to as *shmotte* for nothing. Have a pop at someone's outfit and you're sure to be hauled up in front of the disciplinary committee of the Jewish Tailors' Association, no matter that your victim was the House of Givenchy or Ozwald Boateng.

Who would have guessed that speaking out about the denizens of high finance, the musical or haute couture might become politically incorrect? Truly, we live in strange times. **CT**

W Stephen Gilbert is the author of Jeremy Corbyn – Accidental Hero [Eyewear] and a delegate to the Labour Party Conference.

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- PETER FORD
- GEORGE GALLOWAY
- LINDA McQUAIG

Mandela show: History or corporate whitewash?

Omissions abound in London exhibit sponsored by apartheid-era mining giant, writes **Andy Higginbottom**



The “Mandela and me” exhibition includes posters from the Anti-Apartheid Movement’s campaign

THE “Mandela and Me” exhibition at the British Council in London marks the centenary of Nelson Mandela’s birth in 1918. The exhibition is sponsored by Anglo American, the mining giant that was the biggest corporation in South Africa during apartheid and has, since 1999, been headquartered in London.

This corporate connection influences the narrative that is spun at the exhibition. For example, it completely ignores Anglo’s own role as a founder and principal beneficiary of both British colonial rule and later

the apartheid regime.

A film shown as part of the exhibition features young South Africans relaying what Mandela means for them. They appear inspired. Yet, I couldn’t help feeling that this was an exercise in the construction of public memory that has connotations of manipulation.

The inter-generational theme is repeated in the form of Mandela’s image, constructed as a mosaic of young South African faces. There is also a section interspersing anti-apartheid movement placards with protest concerns today.

Choices have been made in this selection. The British Council building is just off Trafalgar Square, close to the South African embassy, the scene of a non-stop picket to release Mandela and all political prisoners from April 1986 until just after Mandela’s release from prison in February 1990. The picket doesn’t bear a mention.

The exhibition shows video loops on Mandela’s life and apartheid. What’s missing is that Mandela was born into a British colony, founded after the second Anglo-Boer war to secure the country for immensely profitable gold and diamond mining interests. It was into this racial capitalism, already established 100 years ago, that Anglo American – the corporation – and Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela – the person – were born.

For most of the 20th-century South Africans were ruled by the white minority. Their role was accepted by successive UK governments as long as profits flowed to the City of London (of which, again, no reference in the exhibition). The narrative of black struggle against oppression has been co-opted. “Mandela and Me” applies another lick of paint to the ever thickening layers of corporate whitewash.

In 2017 Anglo American celebrated its own centenary. The company’s story about itself is

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Illustration: Duncan Hull, via Flickr.com

unsurprisingly sanitised. You won't find anything about colonial labour exploitation, or even apartheid.

What is the untold history?

In the middle of World War I, Ernest Oppenheimer bought into goldfields that were being opened up on what was known as the Far East Rand. Anglo American was formed to attract US and UK finance. By 1928 Anglo was a middle ranking gold producer. In 1929 it took over the De Beers diamond monopoly, and by 1958 it had become the biggest mining company, as academic Duncan Innes wrote in his seminal study, *Anglo American and the Rise of Modern South Africa* (1984).

Anglo paid African workers industry standard rates, which were a tenth of white workers' pay. Anglo's affiliate De Beers had already built its diamond business by paying extreme poverty wages to migrant workers held in prison-like compounds, as Innes wrote. At the urging of mining magnate and prime minister of the Cape Colony, Cecil John Rhodes, the same labour system was transferred to the gold mines.

Mandela was born in the Eastern Cape, one of the labour reserve areas. Cheap labour required dispossession that had already been institutionalised under British colonial rule. In 1913 the Natives Land Act was passed, designating 87 percent of the land for white ownership.

In 1948 the National Party won the election and institutionalised apartheid. The regime



Nelson Mandela:

imposed even more segregation, intensifying discrimination. Pay differentials increased up to 20 to one by 1970. Anglo American's business boomed during the apartheid era, and by 1990 the group was South Africa's dominant economic actor, according to David Pallister et al in *South Africa Inc: the Oppenheimer empire* (1988).

The British Council's wider purpose is to generate "soft power", as acknowledged in its 2012 report *Influence and Attraction*. The then Foreign Secretary William Hague wrote in the foreword, "Britain remains a modern day cultural superpower".

Indeed. This exhibition begs the question when does cultural superpower become cultural imperialism? The exhibition extracts from the anti-apartheid struggle what can be reshaped into a cultural asset of soft power empire.

The iconisation of Mandela goes well beyond this exhibition,

but this is a particularly blatant attempt to harness his legend to a corporate agenda.

After his release from 27 years in prison, Mandela was heavily courted by Anglo's Oppenheimer and then British prime minister Margaret Thatcher as the moderate solution in the end game of apartheid. My view as an activist scholar is that the pressure worked, and Mandela made a U-turn and decided not to nationalise the banks and mines as promised in the ANC's strategic programme, the Freedom Charter.

Huge economic interests are still involved. London is the world's financial centre for mining majors. Anglo made \$5.5-billion operating profits worldwide in 2017, of which \$3-billion came from South Africa. The Johannesburg-London axis constructed by Rhodes still revolves.

Why should this matter? The British Council's mission to build trust between peoples is fundamentally undermined by its co-option by corporate interest. Britons need to challenge the official narratives that leave out the imperialism of their establishment. Where the exploitation continues, the struggle continues. **CT**

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Andy Higginbottom is Associate Professor of International Politics, Human Rights and Social Justice at Britain's Kingston University. This article was first published at www.theconversation.com

12 ways to justify the bombing of Syria

As the West get ready for war against Syria, **Peter Ford** looks at the lies being used in the propaganda build-up

THE propaganda mills of the British and American governments – spokespersons, media, think tanks – are working overtime churning out “talking points” to justify the upcoming large scale bombing of Syria on the pretext of use of prohibited weapons.

Here is a guide from a former insider to the top dozen of these lies.

1. There are more babies than jihadis in Idlib.

As it happens this gem of moral blackmail is untrue. There are twice as many jihadis (about 100,000) as babies (about 55,000) 0-1 year (55,000). What is this factoid meant to say anyway? Don't try to free an area of jihadis because you might harm a lot of children? The Western coalition scarcely heeded that consideration in razing Mosul and Raqqa in order to crush ISIS. They are still pulling babies out of the rubble in Raqqa.

2. The reports [of the imminent chemical weapons ‘attack’] must be true because Assad has done it before.

False. Since 2013 when Assad gave up chemical weapons under supervision of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) the OPCW have not visited the sites

of alleged attacks in jihadi-controlled areas but have accepted at face value “reports” from pro-jihadi organisations like the White Helmets and the Syrian American Medical Society, along with “evidence” from hostile intelligence agencies. In the case of the one site the OPCW did visit, Douma, their report said they found no evidence of sarin, no untoward traces in any of the blood samples taken from “alleged victims” (their term), no bodies and only ambiguous evidence of use of chlorine.

3. The OPCW report on Douma was flawed because the Russians and Syrians caused delay.

False. As documented in the OPCW report, delay was caused by UN bureaucracy and jihadi snipers. The inspectors do not say their findings were to any significant degree invalidated by the delay.

4. Assad uses chemical weapons because they frighten large numbers of people into fleeing.

False. They don't. This desperate argument is trotted out to counter the fact that Assad would have to be stupid to use chemical weapons knowing what the result would be and that he would derive minimal

military benefit. To date, not one of the alleged chemical attacks has precipitated an exodus any greater than flight caused by the legendary “barrel bombs”. The inhabitants of Douma by their own testimonies given to Western journalists were even unaware there might have been an attack until they heard about it in the media.

5. The OPCW won't be able to investigate because it won't be safe.

A feeble excuse to preempt calls for establishing facts before bombing. The Turks escort Western journalists into Idlib. They have hundreds of troops there and the jihadis kowtow to them because they control all logistics. The Turks could escort OPCW. And wouldn't the jihadis be keener than anybody for the inspectors to visit if their claims were true?

6. The upcoming strikes are not aimed at regime change.

False. The plan is to decapitate the Syrian state with attacks on the presidency. Failing that the aim is to make Idlib a quagmire for the Russians. Anything to deprive Assad and Putin of victory, regardless of whether it prolongs the war.

7. It's all Russian disinformation.

Yeah, like the arms inspectors before the Iraq war who said no WMD in Iraq. Reality: the Russians have got great intelligence on what Western powers with their jihadi clients are up to and are calling out the phoney moves.

8. There won't be enough

time for parliamentary debate.

Pull the other one. Reality: the government are terrified of a rerun of 2013 when Labour and 30 brave Tory MPs voted against bombing, causing then PM Cameron and then Obama to back off.

9. MPs can't be told what is planned because it would jeopardise the safety of service personnel.

Feigning concern for flyers when it's really just about keeping the people in ignorance of how big the strikes are going to be.

10. There are going to be massacres, a bloodbath, or 'genocide'.

False. We heard all this hysteria before Aleppo, before Eastern Ghouta and before the campaign in the South. All vastly exaggerated. The Syrian Arab Army has not been responsible for a single massacre, while the jihadis have been responsible for many (source: quarterly reports

of the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria).

11. People have nowhere to go.

False. The Russians have opened safe corridors but the jihadis are not allowing people to leave. They can still leave for the northern border strip which Turkey controls, where there are camps, and many (including jihadi fighters) will be able to cross temporarily into Turkey.

12. We can't tell you which armed groups we support because it would make them targets for Assad.

Really? You think he doesn't know? Isn't it because you are terrified it will come out that we have been supporting some real head-choppers? **CT**

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Peter Ford is a retired British Diplomat who was Ambassador to Bahrain from 1999-2003 and Syria from 2003-2006. This article was first published at www.21stcenturywire.com

orthodoxy. I'm usually more noble than savage in the teeth of them – apart from anything, where else would I eat vegan schnitzel for lunch – but this time the savage beast broke free.

The motion was that the Trump presidency represents an “aberration” – a disruption of the “rules-based” world order. Speaking in favour was the chairwoman, Mary Ann Sieghart, an achingly liberal feminist, a first-rate intellectual herself, a fine writer and thinker, who has been a member of the Broadcasting Content Board of Ofcom. She's therefore currently contemplating taking me off both television and radio.

Also in favour of the motion was another head-aching liberal, my debating partner, Mark Leonard, though he was not quite up the standard of the chair (it is always two against one when I'm involved, except in some years when it is three against one).

At one point (while telling me to speak more softly when talking about wars that have killed, maimed and destroyed the lives of tens of millions of people – well, we were in Hampstead after all, and it doesn't do to frighten the horses), the chair accused me of being “passionately against the rules-based order”. In fact, I was passionately against the absence of a rules-based order and, worse, the hypocritical pretence that there was one, or had been until the vulgarian Trump showed up.

In fact, there is nothing exceptional about Donald Trump

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The hypocrisy of rules-based world order

Former MP **George Galloway** disagrees with neo-liberal panelists on the wars that have killed millions of people

LAST month, I was a guest speaker as usual at the How the Light Gets In festival, which normally takes place in the village of Hay-on-Wye on the English-Welsh border, but the venue this time

was in the liberal lands of North London. I'm the token “noble savage” at this event, the short-sword fighter amid the better or more expensively educated cognoscenti, virtually exclusively wedded to the neo-liberal

except perhaps that, so far, he's killed far fewer people than his predecessors and way fewer than his rival Hillary Clinton would have done. Without doubt, the Hampstead classes would have rolled out the vegan schnitzel then nevertheless.

When challenged to "show us the beef" of this liberal order, its protagonists have no choice but to concede there have been "breaches" or, worse, "mistakes" made by the prevailing orthodoxy. But how many breaches or mistakes does it take to invalidate the existence of a claimed "rules-based order?" How many before it becomes clear that it is a cruel chimera?

Let's start with the one which caused me to raise my voice: Iraq. What rules were followed in the invasion and occupation of Iraq? The UN Security Council refused to agree to the invasion, so George W. Bush and Tony Blair did it anyway. And look at the consequences, which scarcely need spelling out here or in Hampstead. Not only were no rules followed, every rule in the domestic book was broken too.

Intelligence was twisted beyond recognition, warnings by the security services were disregarded, parliament and people were lied to, the United Nations was bugged, banned weapons were used, non-belligerent allies like France were treated just as rudely by the belligerent powers as any Trumpian tweet.

Yet while they'd probably turn their noses up at Bush (though give it time), Tony Blair



Barack Obama

would slot into this festival of ideas with ease if they could afford him.

What rules were followed in Obama's misadventure in Libya, which has turned a dysfunctional state into a non-state with black-slave markets and multiple "governments" ceaselessly struggling for power (and money)?

What rules are being followed – long before Trump – in the Calvary of Syria, the crucifixion of a whole nation by wholesale illegal intervention by the very European and American besuited brigands who talk loudest about a "rules-based order" whilst shovelling money, weapons and propaganda blitzes into the knapsacks of the throat-cutting mass murderers of IS, Al-Qaeda and associated head-choppers, all without a scintilla of legal approval. **CT**

George Galloway was a member of the British Parliament for nearly 30 years. He is a filmmaker, writer and a renowned orator. This article was first published at www.rt.com

Double standards over anti-Muslim video

Canadian prime minister ignores blatant racism, but attacks pro-Palestine activist who exposed it, writes **Linda McQuaig**

WE'VE become accustomed to the up-is-down, black-is-white nature of US politics – such as when Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham suggested that Christine Blasey Ford's claim of being sexually assaulted amounted to a "drive-by shooting" of Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh.

Canadian politics usually seems less crazy. But then

there's this.

Last month, two Toronto women posted a 20-minute video in which they denounce the "sewage, garbage" coming into the country, and call for the death of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, several Liberal MPs with Muslim and racial identities, as well as NDP leader Jagmeet Singh.

The video – watch it at www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5o8JKBENk8 is

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alarming, possibly qualifying as hate speech.

But instead of Trudeau denouncing such racial vitriol, he ended up smearing pro-Palestinian activist Dimitri Lascaris, who brought the video to public attention.

The episode highlights the extent to which debate over Palestinian rights has been all but shut down by our political leaders. Indeed, one advocates for Palestine at one's peril.

Lascaris, a lawyer and former Green Party candidate, participated in a protest last month after the pro-Israel organization B'nai Brith criticised the Canadian Union of Postal Workers for siding with Palestinian postal workers.

50 A counterprotest was staged by the Jewish Defense League. Two female supporters of B'nai Brith, who attended the counterprotest, later posted the video in which they openly denounce Palestinians, and call for them to "go home".

"We're traumatised by the kind of sewage, garbage, whatever, coming into our country", say the women, who seem middle-class, and declare themselves supporters of newly-elected Ontario Premier Doug Ford.

"I just think we should bring in the death penalty ... start with some of our politicians ... Justin Trudeau, he'd be the first one to go. And (Maryam) Monsef. And Iqra Khalid. And Ahmed Hussen. And Omar Al-ghabra ... And Singh, Singh, let's make him sing, you know, as he walks toward the guillotine!"



An alarming video by two women (above) called for the death penalty for Liberal and NDP politicians.

Photo: YouTube screenshot

Let's just stop right there. Imagine the reaction if two Muslims made a video calling for the death of our prime minister and Jewish MPs. They'd be denounced, placed under surveillance or arrested.

But nothing happened here. Instead, it was Lascaris who soon found himself under attack after he posted the video in a tweet and called on B'nai Brith and two leading pro-Israel Liberal MPs, Anthony Housefather and Michael Levitt, to denounce calls for the death of their Liberal colleagues.

When there was no denunciation, Lascaris tweeted that the MPs seem "more devoted to apartheid Israel than to their

own prime minister and colleagues in the Liberal caucus".

While the attacks on Muslims didn't provoke any reaction from our prime minister, that tweet did. Trudeau responded: "Vile antisemitic smears like this are completely unacceptable, and should always be called out. Thank you @LevittMichael and @AHousefather for standing up to this, and for everything you do for your communities and our country".

Singh joined in: "Antisemitism has no place in Canada. I know what it's like to experience racism and discrimination, and to have my loyalty to Canada questioned.

@LevittMichael and @AHousefather, I stand with you today".

Not a word from these party leaders about the anti-Muslim venom from the two B'nai Brith supporters.

These reactions show how our political leaders have fallen in line behind the pro-Israel lobby in its attempt to stifle critics with charges of "antisemitism".

Lascaris is a controversial figure because he – along with groups like Independent Jewish Voices and Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East – are trying to encourage a public debate over Ottawa's refusal to pressure Israel to stop its illegal settlements on Palestinian land.

They point out that Ottawa applies sanctions to 19 nations but not Israel, even though Canada acknowledges that Israel's settlements violate international law.

Interestingly, 66 per cent of Canadians support sanctions against Israel, according to an EKOS poll last year, but the pro-Israel lobby has effectively banned this topic from political discourse in Canada.

Maybe there's a good reason not to sanction Israel – despite its violation of international law – but then let's hear our political

leaders articulate that reason, rather than simply smacking down anyone who dares to question their silence on the issue. **CT**

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Foreign Ministry spokesman, Emanuel Nachshon, called the incident was “shameful” and a “disgrace to the sport’s values”. Nachson’s tweet read, “What a shame, Real Madrid accepts a terrorist that incites to hatred and violence, what is the connection between this and soccer values?”

Additionally, Israel’s ambassador to Spain, Daniel Kutner, tweeted, “Ahed Tamimi does not fight for peace; she defends violence and terror, the institutions that have received and celebrated her indirectly encourage aggression and not the dialogue and understanding that we need”.

Ahed was detained on December 19, 2017 after a video went viral on social media platforms, showing her slapping and kicking an armed Israeli soldier, after troops had raided her hometown, Nabi Saleh, in the occupied West Bank district of Ramallah and shot her 15-year-old cousin Muhammad in the face.

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Real Madrid honours Gaza hero Ahed Tamimi

Israel criticises pro-Palestine gesture by one of world’s leading soccer teams. Report from **Middle East Monitor**

A **HED** al-Tamimi, the 17-year-old Palestinian who was imprisoned for eight months in an Israeli prison after slapping an Israeli soldier, was honoured by the Spanish soccer club Real Madrid on Sept 29, at the team’s home stadium.

Ahed arrived at Real Madrid’s Santiago Bernabeu Stadium before the derby match between the club and rivals Atletico Madrid. While there, she met Emilio Butragenio, a former striker for Real Madrid, who is now one of the club’s senior managers. He handed a team jersey with her name and number nine printed on its back.

Ahed was accom-

panied by her father, Basem al-Tamimi, during her trip to Spain, where she attended events to discuss the Palestinian resistance movement and her experiences during her eight-month imprisonment by Israel.

In response to Real Madrid honouring Ahed, the Israeli



Ahed Tamimi is presented with a Real Madrid soccer shirt.

Photo: Ma'an News Agency

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***This article** was first published by Middle East Monitor at www.middleeastmonitor.com*

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