

**WITCHFINDERS READY TO BURN CORBYN** | Jonathan Cook  
**THE WAR ON VENEZUELA IS BUILT ON LIES** | John Pilger  
**'WE DON'T DO PROPAGANDA!'** | Cromwell & Edwards

ISSUE 179

# ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

MARCH 2019



## The Magic Socialist

**Bernie's back!  
And this time he's  
really geared up for  
revolution. Honest!**

**CJ HOPKINS** - PAGE 9

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# ColdType

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Issue 179  
March 2019

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*Cover illustration: Donkeyhotey*

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

**Contact ColdType:** Write to Tony Sutton at [editor@coldtype.net](mailto:editor@coldtype.net)

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The suspension of a Labour MP is a concerted campaign to destroy Jeremy Corbyn before he can become prime minister, writes **Jonathan Cook**

# Now Britain's witchfinders are ready to burn Jeremy Corbyn

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“**M**CCARTHYISM” is a word thrown around a lot nowadays, and in the process its true meaning – and horror – has been increasingly obscured.

McCarthyism is not just the hounding of someone because their views are unpopular. It is the creation by the powerful of a perfect, self-rationalising system of incrimination – denying the victim a voice, even in their own defence. It presents the accused as an enemy so dangerous, their ideas so corrupting, that they must be silenced from the outset. Their only chance of rehabilitation is prostration before their accusers and utter repentance.

McCarthyism, in other words, is the modern political

parallel of the witch hunt.

In an earlier era, the guilt of women accused of witchcraft was tested through the ducking stool. If a woman drowned, she was innocent; if she survived, she was guilty and burned at the stake. A foolproof system that created an endless supply of the wicked, justifying the status and salaries of the men charged with hunting down ever more of these diabolical women.

And that is the medieval equivalent of where the British Labour Party has arrived, with the suspension of MP Chris Williamson for antisemitism.

**W**illiamson, it should be noted, is widely seen as a key ally of Jeremy Corbyn, a democrat-



ic socialist who was propelled unexpectedly into the Labour leadership nearly four years ago by its members. His elevation infuriated most of the party's MPs, who hanker for the return of the New Labour era under Tony Blair, when the party firmly occupied the political centre.

Corbyn's success has also outraged vocal supporters of



**Chris Williamson, outspoken Labour MP, who was suspended for comments that party officials claim to be antisemitic.** Photo: John Whitby, via Wikimedia.org

Israel both in the Labour party – some 80 MPs are stalwart members of Labour Friends of Israel – and in the UK media. Corbyn is the first British party leader in sight of power to prefer the Palestinians’ right to justice over Israel’s continuing oppression of the Palestinians.

For these reasons, the Blairite MPs have been trying to oust Corbyn any way they can. First

through a failed re-run of the leadership contest and then by assisting the corporate media – which is equally opposed to Corbyn – in smearing him variously as a shambles, a misogynist, a sympathiser with terrorists, a Russian asset, and finally as an “enabler” of antisemitism.

This last accusation has proved the most fruitful after the Israel lobby began to expand

the definition of antisemitism to include not just hatred of Jews but also criticism of Israel. Labour was eventually forced to accept a redefinition, formulated by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, that conflates anti-Zionism – opposition to Israel’s violent creation on the Palestinians’ homeland – with antisemitism.

**O**nce the mud stuck through repetition, a vocal group of Labour MPs began denouncing the party for being “institutionally antisemitic”, “endemicly antisemitic” and a “cesspit of antisemitism”. The slurs continued relentlessly, even as statistics proved the accusation to be groundless. The figures show that antisemitism exists only in the margins of the party, as racism does in all walks of life.

Meanwhile, the smears overshadowed the very provable fact that antisemitism and other forms of racism are rearing their head dangerously on the political right. But the witchfinders were never interested in the political reality. They wanted a never-ending war – a policy of “zero tolerance” – to root out an evil in their midst, a supposed “hard left” given succour by Corbyn and his acolytes.

This is the context for understanding Williamson’s “crime”.

Despite the best efforts of our modern witchfinder generals to prove otherwise, Williamson has not been shown to have expressed hatred towards Jews, or even to have made a

comment that could be interpreted as antisemitic.

One of the most experienced of the witchfinders, *Guardian* columnist Jonathan Freedland, indulged familiar McCarthyite tactics in trying to prove Williamson's antisemitism by association. The MP was what Freedland termed a "Jew baiter" because he has associated with people whom the witchfinders decree to be antisemites.

**S**hortly before he found himself formally shunned by media commentators and his own parliamentary party, Williamson twice confirmed his guilt to the inquisitors.

First, he dared to challenge the authority of the witchfinders. He suggested that some of those being hounded out of Labour may not in fact be witches. Or more specifically, in the context of constant claims of a Labour "antisemitism crisis", he argued that the party had been "too apologetic" in dealing with the bad-faith efforts of those seeking to damage a Corbyn-led party.

In other words, Williamson suggested that Labour ought to be more proactively promoting the abundant evidence that it was indeed dealing with what he called the "scourge of antisemitism", and thereby demonstrate to the British public that Labour wasn't "institutionally antisemitic". Labour members, he was pointing out, ought not to have to keep quiet as they were being endlessly

**Chris Williamson  
was denounced for  
saying what he had not:  
that Labour should  
not apologise for its  
antisemitism**

slandered as antisemites.

As Jewish Voice for Labour, a Jewish group supportive of Corbyn, noted: "The flood of exaggerated claims of antisemitism make it harder to deal with any real instances of antisemitism. The credibility of well-founded allegations is undermined by the less credible ones and real perpetrators are more likely not to be held to account. Crying wolf is dangerous when there are real wolves around the corner. This was the reality that Chris Williamson was drawing attention to".

As with all inquisitions, however, the witchfinders were not interested in what Williamson actually said, but in the threat he posed to the narrative they have created to destroy their enemy, Corbynism, and to reassert their own power. So his words were ripped from context and presented as proof that he did indeed support witches.

He was denounced for saying what he had not: that Labour should not apologise for its antisemitism. In this dishonest reformulation of Williamson's statement, the witchfinders claimed to show that he had supported antisemitism, that he consorted with witches.

Second, Williamson com-

pounded his crime by publicly helping just such a ready-made witch: a black Jewish woman named Jackie Walker.

He had booked a room in the British parliament building – the seat of our supposed democracy – so that audiences could see a new documentary on an earlier Labour witch hunt. More than two years ago the party had suspended Walker over antisemitism claims.

The screening was to inform Labour party members of the facts of her case in the run-up to a hearing in which, given the current atmosphere, it is likely she will be expelled. The screening was sponsored by Jewish Voice for Labour, which has also warned repeatedly that antisemitism is being used malevolently to silence criticism of Israel and weaken Corbyn.

Walker was seen as a pivotal figure by those opposed to Corbyn. She was a co-founder of Momentum, the grassroots organisation established to support Corbyn after his election to the leadership and deal with the inevitable fallout from the Blairite wing of MPs.

Momentum expected a rough ride from this dominant faction, and they were not disappointed. The Blairites still held on to the party machinery and they had an ally in Tom Watson, who became Corbyn's deputy.

Walker was one of the early victims of the confected claims of an Labour "antisemitism crisis". But she was not ready to roll over and accept her status as witch. She fought back.

First, she produced a one-



**A Labour Party led by Jeremy Corbyn will never be tolerated by a fanatical pro-Israel organisation like the Jewish Labour Movement.**

woman show about her treatment at the hands of the Labour party bureaucracy – framed in the context of decades of racist treatment of black people in the west – called *The Lynching*.

And then her story was turned into a documentary film, fittingly called *Witch Hunt*. It sets out very clearly the machinations of the Blairite wing of MPs, and Labour’s closely allied Israel lobby, in defaming Walker as part of their efforts to regain power over the party.

For people so ostensibly concerned about racism towards Jews, these witchfinders show little self-awareness about how obvious their own racism is in relation to some of the “witches” they have hunted down.

But that racism can only be understood if people have the chance to hear from Walker and other victims of the antisemitism smears. Which is precisely why Williamson,

who was trying to organise the screening of *Witch Hunt*, had to be dealt with too.

Walker is not the only prominent black anti-racism activist targeted. Marc Wadsworth, another longtime ally of Corbyn, and founder of the Anti-Racist Alliance, was “outed” last year in another confected antisemitism scandal. The allegations of antisemitism were impossible to stand up publicly, so finally he was booted out on a catch-all claim that he had brought the party “into disrepute”.

Jews who criticise Israel and support Corbyn’s solidarity with Palestinians have been picked off by the witchfinders too, cheered on by media commentators who claim this is being done in the service of a “zero tolerance” policy towards racism. As well as Walker, the targets have included Tony Greenstein, Moshe Machover,

Martin Odoni, Glyn Secker and Cyril Chilson.

But as the battle in Labour has intensified to redefine anti-Zionism as antisemitism, the deeper issues at stake have come to the fore. Jon Lansman, another founder of Momentum, recently stated: “I don’t want any Jewish member in the party to be leaving. We are absolutely committed to making Labour a safe space.”

But there are a set of very obvious problems with that position, and they have gone entirely unexamined by those promoting the “institutional antisemitism” and “zero tolerance” narratives.

**F**irst, it is impossible to be a home to all Jews in Labour, when the party’s Jewish members are themselves deeply split over key issues like whether Corbyn is a force for good and whether meaningful criticism of Israel should be allowed.

A fanatically pro-Israel organisation like the Jewish Labour Movement will never tolerate a Corbyn-led Labour party reaching power and supporting the Palestinian cause. To pretend otherwise is simple naivety or deception.

That fact was demonstrably proven two years ago in the Al Jazeera undercover documentary *The Lobby* into covert efforts by Israel and its UK lobbyists to undermine Corbyn from within his own party through groups like the JLM and MPs in Labour Friends of Israel. It was telling that the

party machine, along with the corporate media, did its best to keep the documentary out of public view.

The MPs loudest about “institutional antisemitism” in Labour were among those abandoning the party to join the Independent Group last month, preferring to ally with renegade Conservative MPs in an apparent attempt to frustrate a Corbyn-led party winning power.

Further, if a proportion of Jewish Labour party members have such a heavy personal investment in Israel that they refuse to countenance any meaningful curbs on Israel’s abuses of Palestinians – and that has been underscored repeatedly by public comments from the JLM and Labour Friends of Israel – then keeping them inside the party will require cracking down on all but the flimsiest criticism of Israel. It will tie the party’s hands on supporting Palestinian rights.

In the name of protecting the “Israel right or wrong” crowd from what they consider to be antisemitic abuse, Labour will have to provide institutional support for Israel’s racism towards Palestinians. In doing so, it will in fact simply be returning to the status quo in the party before Corbyn, when Labour turned a blind eye over many decades to the Palestinians’ dispossession by European Zionists who created an ugly anachronistic state where rights accrue based on one’s ethnicity and religion rather than citizenship.

Those in Labour who reject Britain’s continuing complicity in such crimes – ones the UK set

### What Lansman and the witchfinders are saying is that Zionist Jewish sensitivities in the party are the only ones that count

in motion with the Balfour Declaration – will find, as a result, that it is they who have no home in Labour. That includes significant numbers of anti-Zionist Jews, Palestinians, Muslims and Palestinian solidarity activists.

If the creation of a “safe space” for Jews in the Labour Party is code, as it appears to be, for a safe space for hardline Zionist Jews, it will inevitably require that the party become a hostile environment for those engaged in other anti-racism battles.

Stripped bare, what Lansman and the witchfinders are saying is that Zionist Jewish sensitivities in the party are the only ones that count, that anything and everything must be done to indulge them, even if it means abusing non-Zionist Jewish members, black members, Palestinian and Muslim members, and those expressing solidarity with Palestinians.

This is precisely the political black hole into which simplistic, kneejerk identity politics inevitably gets sucked.

Right now, the establishment – represented by Richard Dearlove, a former head of the MI6 – is maliciously trying to frame Corbyn’s main adviser, Seumas

Milne, as a Kremlin asset.

While the witchfinders claim to have unearthed a “pattern of behaviour” in Williamson’s efforts to expose their smears, in fact the real pattern of behaviour is there for all to see: a concerted McCarthyite campaign to destroy Corbyn before he can reach No 10.

Corbyn’s allies are being picked off one by one, from grassroots activists like Walker and Wadsworth to higher-placed supporters like Williamson and Milne. Soon Corbyn will stand alone, exposed before the inquisition.

Then Labour can be restored to the Blairites, the members silenced until they leave and any hope of offering a political alternative to the establishment safely shelved. Ordinary people will again be made passive spectators as the rich carry on playing with their lives and their futures as though Britain was simply a rigged game of Monopoly.

If parliamentary politics returns to business as usual for the wealthy, taking to the streets looks increasingly like the only option. Maybe it’s time to dust off the Yellow Vest. **CT**

**Jonathan Cook** won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism.

His books include *Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East* (Pluto Press) and *Disappearing Palestine: Israel’s Experiments in Human Despair* (Zed Books). His website is [www.jonathan-cook.net](http://www.jonathan-cook.net).



Bernie's back! And this time he's really geared up for revolution. Honest!  
**CJ Hopkins** has all the details

# The Magic Socialist

**S**o here it is, the announcement we've been waiting for ... all aboard for another cruise on the new and improved USS Magic Socialist with your captain Bernie Sanders at the helm! If you're not familiar with this extraordinary vessel, it's like the luxury liner in *The Magic Christian*, except catering to credulous American so-

cialists instead of the British filthy rich. Tickets start at just \$27 ... so hurry, because they're going fast!

That's right, folks, Bernie is back, and this time it's not just a sadistic prank where he gets you all fired up about his fake "revolution" for 15 months, gets cheated out of the nomination, then backs whichever corporate-bought candidate the Democrat-

ic Party orders you to vote for.

No, this time the Bernster really means it! This time, when the DNC rigs the primaries to hand the nomination to Harris, or Biden, or some billionaire android like Michael Bloomberg, Bernie is not going to break your heart by refusing to run as an independent candidate, un beholden to the corporations and oligarchs that own both

political parties, or otherwise make you feel like a sucker for buying his “revolution” schtick.

He’s not going to fold like a \$50 suit and start parroting whatever propaganda the corporate media will be prodigiously spewing to convince you the Russians and Nazis are coming unless you vote for the empire’s pre-anointed puppet!

Bernie would never dream of doing that ... or at least he’d never dream of doing that twice.

There are limits, after all, to people’s gullibility. It’s not like you can just run the same con, with the same fake message and the same fake messiah, over and over, and expect folks to fall for it. If you could, well, that would be extremely depressing.

That would mean you could get folks to believe almost anything, or that we were stuck in some eternally recurring multi-dimensional reality loop. The next year and a half in American politics would play out like one of those *Groundhog Day* knock offs meets *The Magic Christian* meets *The Usual Suspects*, directed by David Lynch, on acid.

We’d be barraged by recycled Feel-the-Bern memes. Hacky-sack shares would go through the roof. That creepy little bird would come fluttering back, land on Bernie’s podium again, and chirp out *L’Internationale*. People would start booking Tim Robbins for interviews. Ben & Jerry’s would roll out another

revolutionary flavour of Bernie ice cream ... and in the end it would all amount to nothing.

**B**ut that’s not going to happen this time. No, this time, the USS Magic Socialist is setting sail straight for Socialismland! This time, it’s really the Revolution! The end of global capitalism! And the best part of the whole deal is, you don’t even have to take up arms, stage a series of wildcat strikes, blockade major highways, occupy airports, or otherwise cripple the US economy ... all you have to do is vote for Bernie!

**It’s not like you can just run the same con, with the same fake message and the same fake messiah, over and over, and expect folks to fall for it. If you could, that would be extremely depressing**

See, that’s the magic of electoral politics!

The global capitalist ruling establishment, despite the fact that they own the banks and the corporations that own the government that owns the military and intelligence services, and despite the fact that they own the media, and all essential industries, and channels of trade, and are relentlessly restructuring the entire planet (which they rule with almost total impunity) to conform to their soulless neoliberal ideology, and are more than happy to unleash their militarized goons on anyone who gets in their way ... despite all that, if we elect

Bernie president, they will have no choice but to peacefully surrender, and transform America into a socialist wonderland!

Sure, they won’t be happy about it, but they will have no choice but to go along with whatever Bernie and his followers want, because that’s how American democracy works!

We’ve seen it in action these last two years, since Donald Trump got elected president. The establishment wasn’t too thrilled about that, but they had to put aside their own selfish interests and respect the will of the American people ... because imagine what might have hap-

pened if they hadn’t!

For example, they might have concocted a story about Trump being a Russian intelligence asset who

was personally conspiring with Vladimir Putin to destroy the fabric of Western democracy so that Russia could take over the entire planet.

They could have had respected newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and television networks like CNN and MSNBC disseminate this story, and subtly reinforce it in endless variations, on a daily basis for over two years.

They could have appointed a special prosecutor to investigate the facts of their made-up story, and indict a bunch of unextraditable Russians and a handful of inveterate DC slimebags to make the whole thing look legitimate.

At the same time, they could have had the media warn everybody, over and over, that Trump, in addition to being a traitor, was also the second coming of Hitler, and was on the verge of torching the Capitol, declaring himself Führer, and rounding up the Jews.

They could have generated so much mass hysteria and Putin-Nazi paranoia that liberals would literally be seeing Russians and Nazis coming out of the woodwork

Fortunately, the global capitalist establishment, out of respect for democracy and the American people, decided not to go that route.

If Americans chose to elect a jabbering imbecile president, that was their right, and far be it from the empire to interfere. Tempting as it must have been to use all their power to demonise Trump in order to teach the world what happens when you get elected president without their permission, they restrained themselves ... and thank God for that!

I don't even want to contemplate the extent of the rage and cynicism they would have fomented among the public by doing those things I just out-

lined above.

That might have left people with the false impression that their votes mean absolutely nothing, and that the entire American electoral system is just a simulation of democracy, and in reality they are living in a neo-feudalist, de facto global capitalist empire administrated by omniscient money-worshipping human parasites that won't be satisfied until they've remade the whole of creation in their nihilistic image.

**T**hankfully, the ruling classes spared us all that, so now we can hop aboard the Magic Socialist and take another cruise with Cap'n Bernie! Considering how magnanimous they've been with Trump, once Bernie wins the election fair and square, the empire clearly won't have any problems with him nationalising the American healthcare system, tripling taxes on the super-rich, subsidising university education, and all that other cool socialism stuff (ie, the stuff we mostly still have here in Europe, along with some semblance of cultural solidarity, although the global capitalists

are working to fix that).

Oh, yeah, and in case you're worried about Bernie backing the empire's ongoing regime change op in Venezuela, don't be.

He's just playing 4D chess, like Obama did throughout his presidency, by pretending to do the empire's bidding while he actually went about the business of resurrecting hope and eradicating racism. Bernie's just being sly like that! It might seem like he's aligning himself with mass murdering thugs like Elliot Abrams and sadistic ass freaks like Marco Rubio, but he isn't. Not really. It's just an act. I mean, he has to get elected, doesn't he?

How else are we going to get to Socialismland? **CT**

.....  
**CJ Hopkins** is an award-winning American playwright, novelist and political 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 Snogsworthly, Swaine & Cormorant Paperbacks. He can be reached at [www.cjhopkins.com](http://www.cjhopkins.com) or [www.consentfactory.org](http://www.consentfactory.org)

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Balham, London, circa 1961, Paul Kaye.  
The Paul Kaye Collection / Mary Evans Picture Library

A new book of photographs showing children at play in the streets of Britain reminds us of a time when suburbia was defined not by the screeching hostility of revving car engines but by the joyful squeals of kids having fun

# Growing up

Ah, nostalgia! Where would we be without our rose-tinted trips back to days of childish bliss, a world of fun and games unencumbered by the responsibilities of adulthood.

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As the boomer generation ages, we're seeing a stream of photo books reviving those memories of growing up in the latter part of the 20th-century, a time when we shared our parents' dreams that our future would become ever more prosperous and fulfilling than theirs had ever been.

One such book is *Paradise Street, The Lost Art of Playing Outside*, published by London's Hoxton Mini Press, that portrays children of the British working class at play in the decades that followed the



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Manchester, 1966, Shirley Baker / Estate of Shirley Baker / Mary Evans Picture Library.

end of World War II, before the avaricious masters of neoliberal capitalism turned their dreams into nightmares: parents trapped in a spiral of never-ending debt, the future of their children first arrested, then driven backwards by low-paying jobs, gravity-defying rents and unaffordable mortgages.

“Growing up”, Lucinda Gosling, of the Mary Evans Picture Library, writes in the book’s introduction, “was different in the middle of the 20th-century. Britain was different. Not always better; but different”.

In those days, before streets were clogged with the screeching hostility of revving car engines, children spent their time outside. “Kids of the seventies might have raced on bikes round cul-de-sacs, or clattered along pavements on roller



Manchester, 1968. Shirley Baker / Estate of Shirley Baker / Mary Evans Picture Library.



Balham, London, circa 1961 Paul Kaye / Mary Evans Picture Library.



Chorlton-on-Medlock, Manchester, 1966. Shirley Baker / Estate of Shirley Baker / Mary Evans Picture Library.

skates”, writes Gosling. “Their mums and dads remember chalking hopscotch squares on the ground or rattling tin cans while others ran to hide.

“Babies sat throne-like in prams, parked in the ‘fresh air’ outside front gates, watched over, perhaps, by an older sibling. Children found opportunities to play with sticks, puddles, an old door to make a den, an abandoned car or mattress, a pit town’s slag heap, a mountainous pile of road chippings, a vertiginous wall to clamber up, or a football pitch in an abandoned brickworks”.

Did the kids really have it so good or are these recollections the result of deeply saturated nostalgia? Gosling wonders, before declaring, “Comparisons with today’s children do not favour



Manchester, 1963 Shirley Baker / Estate of Shirley Baker / Mary Evans Picture Library.

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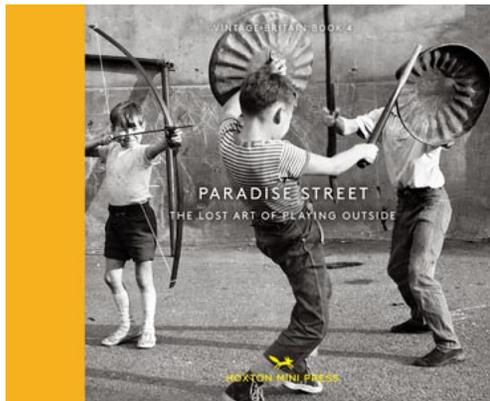
the 21st-century generation, who are reported to be addicted to phones and games consoles, spend most of their waking hours indoors, and whose diet of junk food is apparently contributing to an obesity epidemic. Playing out tends to be in a safe space, a playground or sports ground, watched over by parents or carers; the streets are too choked with traffic to offer a viable alternative”.

Yes, the whole idea of community has changed. In this over-stressed modern world, parents don't encourage their kids to go out to play any more. And children, alerted by their parents' fears, are intimidated by the outside world, feeling safer, and more comfortable, cocooned behind locked doors with cellphone and games console.

However, one thing of which we can be certain is that, in 50 years' time, today's children will wallow in similar nostalgic memories of *their* childhood, while simultaneously bemoaning the nihilist attitudes and incomprehensible playing habits of their own offspring.

Times change, people don't.

– Tony Sutton



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Balham, London, circa 1961.  
Paul Kaye / Mary Evans Picture Library.

The US is a country that is desperately in need of a leader with a vision that doesn't include artificial borders, argues **John Feffer**

# The psychology of Trump's Mexican Wall

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**G**EOPOLITICS, like thermodynamics, has its laws of conservation. If a wall comes down in one place, you can bet that it will go up somewhere else.

It wasn't long after the Berlin Wall fell that different kinds of walls went up in Eastern Europe. New borders separated the Czech Republic from Slovakia, and then, after much bloodshed, the new successor states of former Yugoslavia.

By the end of the 1990s, barriers were being established in small towns in the Czech Republic, in Slovakia, and in Romania to separate Roma and non-Roma populations. Germans on both sides of the former Berlin Wall were declaring that they were one people. But in other countries in the region, the majority population was insisting, rule of law notwithstanding, that the citizenry was not one people and a wall

was necessary to emphasise the distinction.

These discriminatory walls anticipated the next round of walls in the region: to keep out immigrants. Hungary built a wall on its border with Serbia in 2015, and then a second one in 2017 just to be sure. Germany was letting in more than a million desperate people. Hungary and most of the rest of Eastern Europe, after making the earlier case that they belonged in the European Union, were shutting the door after themselves.

**I**t's not just Eastern Europe. The Brexit vote was basically an effort to build a big wall across the English Channel to separate the United Kingdom from Europe. Keeping out immigrants was a major motivating factor.

Walls are practically everywhere, alas. You can find a



very sad set of walls separating Israel from the Occupied Territories. Spain has walled off its cities of Ceuta and Melilla from the rest of Morocco (yes, there are two Spanish towns in North Africa). There's a wall between Saudi Arabia and Iraq. According to Elisabeth Vallet, a geography professor at the University of Quebec-Montreal, there were 15 border walls around the world in 1989. That has jumped to 77 today.

As with so many of his fixations, Donald Trump's call for a wall is hardly original. And this wall, too, is a response to the collapse of walls elsewhere. Economic globalisation was responsible, from the 1980s on, for gradually tearing down all manner of barriers: to trade, to finance, and to the movement of manufacturers. Trump and



A man fishing at the US-Mexico border fence at Playas de Tijuana. [Photo: Wikimedia.com]

his economic populists have done as much as they can to put back some of those barriers, for instance by withdrawing from the Trans Pacific Partnership and by slapping tariffs on products from allies and adversaries.

But Trump's wall along the Mexico border is first and foremost about keeping people out. Economic globalisation removed some barriers to the movement of people, but primarily those with highly sought-after skills. As for the truly desperate who were trying to climb over walls and breach borders, they were often motivated more by war and the violence of non-state actors.

These two types of "open borders" – one for money, the other for bodies – have often been confused in the public

imagination. Or politicians have deliberately conflated the two, as Trump supporters did in the case of the infamous Hillary Clinton quote about "open borders". She quite obviously meant economic globalisation, not immigration, which was troubling in its own right, but for different reasons.

**T**rump is not a big fan of openness, in any of its manifestations. He loves the idea of exclusivity: private jets, elite parties, membership-only clubs such as Mar-a-Lago. He prefers not to reveal his tax returns. He'd like to keep all of his financials well hidden. In Trump's mind, walls define the parameters of privilege. Whenever he can wall off the press, his "low-intelligence" critics, the popula-

tions of "shit-hole" countries, he does so in a New York minute. He devises travel bans. He instructs his press secretary to dispense with the traditional daily press briefings. He stays within his Fox News enclosure. Even when he prances before the public in mass events, he wants to make sure that everyone in the crowd is on his side.

The Trump brand has always been about exclusivity, though of a rather tawdry variety: the appearance of prestige instead of the reality. As the writer Fran Lebowitz once remarked, Trump is "a poor person's idea of a rich person". It could also be said that he's a non-political person's idea of a president. He projects the appearance of a president – handshakes with other leaders, photo ops in the Oval Office – without any of

the substance. All of his talk of “fake news” is just an indirect admission of his own doubts about his own authenticity as a president.

No surprise, then, that Trump is offering the appearance of security rather than the reality of security. A wall is largely a symbol. It means nothing when the United States refuses to address the true causes of insecurity, both at home and abroad.

Nicholas Kristof did a nice column in the *New York Times*, drawn in part from my IPS colleagues’ National Priorities Project data, about all the sensible ways to spend \$5.7-billion: on America’s children, on gun buybacks and drug treatment programs, on job training for prisoners, and on helping people overseas. That’s what a real president would support, not a “fake president”.

But let’s dig a little deeper. The wall addresses a core psychological insecurity. Trump supporters – and many others – feel as if their own privileges are evaporating. Those privileges are connected to race and gender (the angry white men who now swell the ranks of the Republican Party). But they are also connected to class (the blue-collar workers that once formed the backbone of the Democratic Party).

And don’t forget the oft-overlooked privilege of being American. US citizens are feeling increasingly anxious as they watch the United States fail to achieve its objectives in one war after another – even

### In terms of national privilege, liberals also believe in American supremacy, though they speak more in terms of restoring American leadership

as China expands its influence and Russia regains its great power status. Americans watch conflict, extremism, disease, and the other horsemen of the Apocalypse engulf other countries, and they feel as if America can no longer ride in on its white horse to save the day (the last time was perhaps World War II). Worse, they can hear the drumbeat of those hooves approaching the very shores of this country.

**T**ump and his supporters want that wall to prevent all these privileges – individual, communal, national – from leaking out. It’s the architectural equivalent of a gun. It’s for defense, a way for people to “stand their ground”. But it’s also compensation for powerlessness and lack of control. As with guns, the sense of safety and security is almost entirely illusory.

Liberals, unfortunately, don’t offer much of an alternative. They use more inclusive language when it comes to individual and communal privilege – though liberals are also guilty of constructing walls when they live in the ghettos of the

wealthy, send their children to private schools, or expunge any discordant viewpoints from their social media networks. These walls are largely invisible – just like the financial red lines that helped to create America’s urban wastelands – but they are no less powerful.

In terms of national privilege, liberals also believe in American supremacy, though they speak more in terms of restoring American leadership. America, in other words, has not really adjusted to a multipolar world, its more modest place within it, or the resulting anxieties that torment the souls of Americans.

The US military, after all its failures around the world, no longer preserves American privilege. The US dollar, weakened by US debt and the strengthening of other national currencies, may soon lose its special glow.

A wall is a fallback position, and a rather pathetic one at that. The United States desperately needs a leader – actually, a cadre of leaders – who can reconceive America’s relationship with the world, who can redefine US privilege, who can see the importance of a shift from global power over to global power with. It would be a true privilege to elect such visionaries to leadership positions.

The world is waiting. **CT**

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**John Feffer is the director of Foreign Policy In Focus – [www.fpif.com](http://www.fpif.com) – where this article first appeared.**



Hard days ahead: Turkey's President Recep Erdogan.

Photo: Kremlin.ru

Conn Hallinan tells why Recep Erdogan is facing ballot box office rebellion

# Election woes loom for Turkish leader

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“**D**EMOCRACY is like a tram; you get off when you have reached your destination”. The comment by Recep Tayyip Erdogan – made more than 20 years ago when he was first elected mayor of Istanbul – sums up the Machiavellian cynicism of Turkey’s authoritarian president. As Turkey gears up for municipal elections

on March 31, it is a prophecy Erdogan has more than fulfilled: the prisons filled with the opposition, the media largely silenced, the courts intimidated, the bureaucracy tamed, and more than 150,000 people fired.

But for all that, there are dark clouds on the horizon, much of them largely of the President’s own making. And since it is traditional for the Turkish elector-

ate to use local elections to send a message, Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) may be in for a setback.

For one thing, the AKP’s bread and butter issue, the economy, is in trouble, and maybe very serious trouble. Industrial production has fallen 6 percent and retail sales 7 percent, and overall growth has dropped from 7.4 percent in 2017

to a projected 2 percent in 2019. Inflation is at 20.3 percent and unemployment is accelerating. The most recent figures show that more than 11 percent are out of work, with almost twice that for young people age 15 to 24, who constitute some 20 percent of Turkey's population.

In the past, "terrorism" was the major concern for voters, but recent polls show that the economy is the number one issue, followed by unemployment and Syrian refugees.

Erdogan constructed his election juggernaut on economic growth that lifted a considerable section of the population out of poverty and fuelled a major growth of the middle class. Much of that economy was centred on the construction industry and mega-projects such as shopping malls, bridges and the largest airport in the world.

For Erdogan an economy built around massive projects was a win-win formula: the AKP handed out lucrative contracts to big construction firms, which, in turn, filled the electoral coffers of a party that went from the margins of the political spectrum to at one point winning almost 50 percent of the electorate.

But growth fell to an anaemic 1.6 percent in the third quarter of last year, and the construction industry is in a recession, with large layoffs almost certain. The crisis of the building trades has had a domino effect

on allied industries in cement, steel and ceramics. And the combination of the lira's fall in value, coupled with the economic insecurity people are feeling, has depressed sales in the automotive industry, electronics and appliances,

The Turkish economy has long been reliant on foreign capital – so-called "hot money" – to keep the factories humming and living standards rising.

But hot money is drying up and the bills are coming due. Since much of Turkey's debt is in foreign currency, it is harder to pay off those debts with a depressed lira. Ankara has opened talks with the

the HDP, and for the first time in Turkish history many of the Kurdish parties have formed a united front.

The HDP has also decided not to run candidates for the mayoralties of the big cities like Istanbul and Ankara, in order to help elect candidates from the secular centre-right Republican People's Party (CHP). In short, anyone but the AKP.

The AKP used to get a substantial number of Kurdish votes, particularly from conservative rural areas. But when Erdogan launched a crackdown on the Kurds in an effort to marginalise the HDP, he lost many of those voters. While not

all of them have migrated to the left party, they have shifted their votes to other Kurdish parties,

now united under the Kurdistan Election Alliance.

There is a certain amount of irony here. In an effort to make sure the AKP's ally, the extreme rightwing National Action Party (MHP) made it into parliament, Erdogan rammed through a law that allows parties to form electoral alliances. Even if a party doesn't reach the 10 percent threshold required to enter parliament, it will still win seats if it is allied with a bigger party.

But what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. The CHP has formed an alliance with the nationalist Iti ("Good") Party, and most of the Kurdish parties are under one umbrella. It is likely that those alliances will end up winning seats that

## While much of Erdogan's political opposition has been jailed or sidelined, it has not been cowed

International Monetary Fund to explore a bailout, but IMF bailouts come with a price tag: austerity, not exactly a winning electoral programme.

**W**hile much of Erdogan's political opposition has been jailed or sidelined, it has not been cowed. Despite the jailing of nine parliamentary deputies from the Kurdish-based left-wing People's Democratic Party (HDP), that party still managed to get enough votes in the last election to hold their spot as the third largest party in the parliament.

A hunger strike by imprisoned Kurdish activists has also generated sympathy for

they wouldn't have under the old rules.

Besides domestic woes, Erdogan's foreign policy is hardly a major success. The Turkish occupation of northern Syria has failed to scatter the Kurdish-based Syrian Democratic Forces, and it looks increasingly like Ankara has stumbled into a quagmire. Erdogan's plan was to drive the Kurds out and re-populate the area with Syrian refugees. Instead he is in a standoff with the Russians and the Americans, and, to protect themselves, the Kurds appear to be cutting a deal with the government of Bashar al-Assad.

**T**here is a strong streak of nationalism among the Turks, and Erdogan may yet harvest it by pressing the Kurds in Turkey's southeast, Iraq and Syria. But the Turkish army is over-extended and still reeling from the purge of officers and rank and file that followed the failed 2016 coup. And there are credible reports that the military is not happy with occupying part of Syria.

The Turkish president did

score points in his battle with Saudi Arabia over the kingdom's murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi, as well as with his support for Kuwait and Qatar in their dispute with the United Arab Emirates and the Saudis. His willingness to resist US sanctions against Iran is also popular, because it means trade and a lift for Turkey's ailing economy.

However, the March vote is not likely to turn on foreign policy, but rather on pocket-book issues such as unemployment and the wobbling economy. Erdogan is doing his best to head off any unrest over the economy by handing out low-interest loans and giveaways, like paying electrical bills for economically stressed families.

The opposition also claims that the AKP alliance is stuffing the rolls with non-existent voters. HDP investigators found that one house in Hakkari in the Kurdish southeast has 1,108 registered voters.

But Turkish agriculture is a mess, and construction and manufacturing are staggering under an enormous debt load. Erdogan has used the power of

the state to hobble his opposition, but the state of emergency is alienating foreign investors and many Turks are increasingly weary of it.

In the 2017 referendum that bestowed almost unlimited executive powers on Erdogan, he lost Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, Turkey's largest cities. A recent poll showed support for the AKP had dropped from 42.5 percent the Party got in the 2018 election to 35 percent today.

After 17 years of power, after using every device he could – including stuffing ballot boxes – to build a powerful executive system orbiting around him, it is hard to imagine Erdogan suffering a setback. But tossing people in prison and intimidating opposition has had little effect on repairing the economy or raising living standards.

Many Turks may be souring on the “destination” that Erdogan has brought them to, and they could well decide to send that message on March 31. **CT**

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*Conn Hallinan can be read at [dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com](http://dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com) and [middleempireseries.wordpress.com](http://middleempireseries.wordpress.com)*

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Fox News presenter Tucker Carlson and BBC reporters share a common misunderstanding of editorial freedom, say **David Cromwell & David Edwards**

# The deadly myth: 'We don't do propaganda'

**L**AST month, Dutch historian Rutger Bregman, author of *Utopia For Realists*, was interviewed by the high-profile Fox News presenter Tucker Carlson. During a panel discussion at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January, Bregman had bluntly told billionaires that they should avoid taxes and pay their fair share:

"We gotta be talking about taxes. That's it. Taxes, taxes, taxes. All the rest is bullshit, in my opinion".

His comments went viral which, in turn, led to him being invited on to Carlson's television show. It's safe to say that the interview did not go as the right-wing host would have liked. In fact, Fox News decided not to air the segment. However, it was captured on mobile phone footage in the Amsterdam studio where Bregman was doing the interview and it was later distributed via Twitter.

He told Carlson: "The vast majority of Americans, for years and years now, according to the polls – including Fox News viewers and including Republicans – are in favour of higher taxes on the rich. Higher inheritance taxes, higher top marginal tax rates, higher wealth taxes, it's all really mainstream. But no one's

saying that at Davos, just as no one's saying it on Fox News, right? And I think the explanation for that is quite simple, is that most of the people in Davos, but also here on this channel, have been bought by the billionaire class. You know? You're not meant to say these things. So I just went there, and I thought, you know what, I'm just going to say it, just as I'm saying it right here on this channel".

**C**arlson was happy enough at this point. Indeed, he praised Bregman for what he'd said in Davos: "That was one of the great moments - maybe the great moment in Davos history".

Carlson added: "If I was wearing a hat, I'd take it off to you".

The Dutch historian continued: "America is still pretty much the most powerful country in the world, right? So if it really would want to, it could easily crack down on tax paradises. But the thing is, you

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guys have brought into power a president who doesn't even want to share his own tax returns. I mean, who knows how many billions he has hidden in the Cayman Islands or in Bermuda. So I think the issue really is one of corruption and of people being bribed, and of not being, not talking about the real issues. What the family—what the Murdochs [owners of Fox News] basically want you to do is to scapegoat immigrants instead of talking about tax avoidance”.

By this point, it was clear that Carlson was unhappy with how the interview was going: “And I’m taking orders from the Murdochs, that’s what you’re saying?”

Bregman responded reasonably: “No, I mean, it doesn’t work that directly. But I mean, you’ve been part of the [right-wing libertarian think tank] Cato Institute, right? You’ve been a senior fellow there for years”.

The Fox News presenter interjected aggressively, seemingly rattled: “Well how does it work?”

Bregman replied: “Well, it works by you taking their dirty money. They’re funded by Koch billionaires, you know? It’s as easy as that. I mean, you are a millionaire, funded by billionaires, that’s what you are. And I’m glad you now finally jumped the bandwagon of people like Bernie Sanders and AOC [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a newly elected Democrat politician in New York], but you’re not part of the solution, Mr. Carlson. You’re part of the problem, actually. ... All the anchors, all

the anchors of Fox ...”

By this point, Carlson had lost it: “You would have to be a moron, you would have to be ...”

Bregman carried on speaking: “They’re all millionaires. How is this possible? Well it’s very easy, you’re just not talking about certain things.

“You are a millionaire funded by billionaires, that’s what you are ... You’re part of the problem”.

Bregman then correctly predicted: “You’re probably not going to air this on your show”. He added: “But I went to Davos to speak truth to power and I’m doing exactly the same thing right now. You might not like it, but you’re a millionaire funded by billionaires and that’s the reason you’re not talking about these issues”.

Carlson: “But I am talking about these issues”.

Bregman replied: “Yeah, only now. Come on, you jumped the bandwagon. You’re all like, oh, I’m against the globalist elite, blah blah blah. It’s not very convincing to be honest”.

**T**hat was too much for Carlson who exploded: “I wanna say to you why don’t you go fuck yourself ... you tiny brain. And I hope this gets picked up because you’re a moron. I tried to give you a hearing, but you were too fucking annoying ...”

Unflustered, Bregman inter-

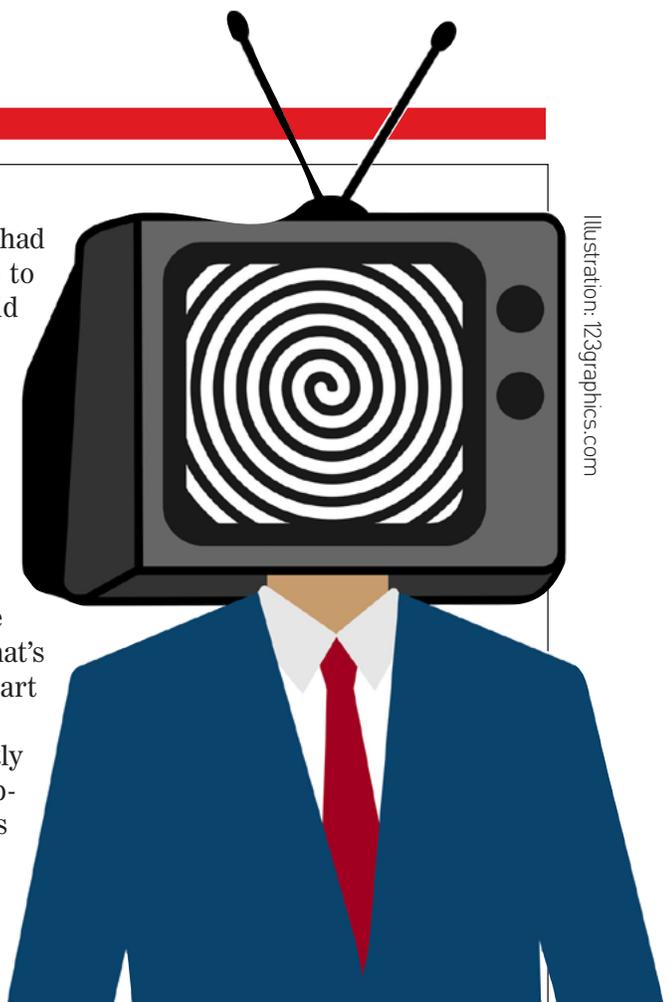


Illustration: 123graphics.com

jected with a smile: “You can’t handle the criticism, can you?”

Afterwards, Bregman shared the clip on his Twitter feed: “Here’s the interview that @TuckerCarlson and Fox News didn’t want you to see. I chose to release it, because I think we should keep talking about the corrupting influence of money in politics. It also shows how angry elites can get if you do that”.

As predicted, Fox News did not air the segment. No doubt prompted by Bregman releasing the exchange into the public domain, Carlson addressed it on his show: “Things went fine for the first few minutes and then Bregman launched into an attack on Fox News. It’s not clear that Bregman has ever seen Fox. But he wanted to

make his point. Fine.

“But then he claimed that [adopts a fierce voice] my corporate masters tell me what to say on the show, and that was too much”.

Carlson continued: “Whatever my faults or those of this channel, nobody in management has ever told us what positions to take on the air – never – not one time. We have total freedom here and we are grateful for that. I have hosted shows on both the other cable channels so I know first-hand how rare that freedom is. On this show, thanks to Fox, we get to say exactly what we think is true, for better or worse.

“But there was no convincing Bregman of that, he knew what he knew. So I did what

I try hard never to do on this show, and I was rude. I called him a moron and then I modified that word with a vulgar Anglo-Saxon term that is also intelligible in Dutch.

“In my defence, I would say that was entirely accurate. But you’re not allowed to use that word on television. So, once I’d said it out loud, there was no airing the segment”.

Carlson then pointed out that Bregman had released the exchange and that you could find it online: “There is some profanity, and I apologise for that. On the other hand, it was genuinely heartfelt and I meant it with total sincerity”.

It was a far from convincing explanation for why Fox News

had not aired the segment. After all, a simple bleep could have overridden any profanity: a standard procedure used in television.

Note that we are not claiming that everything Carlson says can be dismissed as kowtowing to his “corporate masters”. Last year, for example, he admirably challenged the establishment consensus on Syria. That expression of dissent may well have boosted his ratings: always a welcome factor for a media outlet. Our point is that there is no freedom to “say exactly what we think” on

**“I called him a moron and then I modified that word with a vulgar Anglo-Saxon term that is also intelligible in Dutch” – Tucker Carlson**

a corporate outlet.

As Herman and Chomsky explained in *Manufacturing Consent*, there are structural limits in the “mainstream” media: “the ‘societal purpose’ of the media is to inculcate and defend the economic, social and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state. The media serve this purpose in many ways: through selection of topics, distribution of concerns, framing of issues, filtering of information, emphasis and tone, and by keeping debate within the bounds of acceptable premises”.

That phrase, “keeping debate within the bounds of acceptable premises”, is crucial. Thus, for

instance, a Fox News presenter who looked critically at the ownership and advertising behind that network would not last long; indeed, would likely never have been promoted into that trusted position in the first place.

**W**hat was perhaps most interesting in Carlson’s riposte to Bregman was his defence of Fox News: “Nobody in management has ever told us what positions to take on the air – never – not one time. We have total freedom here and we are grateful for that. I have hosted shows on both the other cable channels so I know first-hand how

rare that freedom is. On this show, thanks to Fox, we get to say exactly what we think is true, for better or worse”.

Even former *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger understood the absurdity of this response. In 2000, he told one of us in an interview: “If you ask anybody who works in newspapers, they will quite rightly say, ‘Rupert Murdoch’” or whoever, ‘never tells me what to write’, which is beside the point: they don’t have to be told what to write... It’s understood.”

In fact, Bregman had already noted when he released the exchange: “I stand behind what I said, but there’s one thing I should have done better. When Carlson asked me

how he's being influenced by Big Business and tax-avoiding billionaires, I should have quoted Noam Chomsky”.

He expanded: “Years ago, when he was asked a similar question, Chomsky replied: ‘I’m sure you believe everything you’re saying. But what I’m saying is that if you believe something different, you wouldn’t be sitting where you’re sitting.’”

Long-time readers will recall this example very well. It came up in a BBC2 programme in 1995 called “The Big Idea” when Andrew Marr – then of the *Independent* and now with BBC News – interviewed Chomsky about the propaganda model of the media. The quote in question comes when Marr is struggling to grasp the propaganda system that filters for obedient, power-serving journalists who are able to carve out a successful career in the “mainstream”.

Marr: “I’m just interested in this because I was brought up like a lot of people, probably post-Watergate film and so on, to believe that journalism was a crusading craft and there were a lot of disputatious, stropy, difficult people in journalism. And I have to say, I think I know some of them”.

Chom-

sky: “Well, I know some of the best, and best-known, investigative reporters in the United States – I won’t mention names – whose attitude towards the media is much more cynical than mine. In fact, they regard the media as a sham. And they know, and they consciously talk about how they try to play it like a violin. If they see a little opening, they’ll try to squeeze something in that ordinarily wouldn’t make it through. And it’s perfectly true that the majority – I’m sure you’re speaking for the majority of journalists who are trained – have it driven into their heads, that this is a crusading profession, adversarial, we stand up against power. A very self-serving view. On the other hand, in my opinion, I hate to make a value judgement but, the better journalists and, in fact, the ones who are often regarded

as the best journalists have quite a different picture. And I think a very realistic one”.

Marr: “How can you know that I’m self-censoring? How can you know that journalists are...”

Chomsky: “I’m not saying you’re self-censoring. I’m sure

you believe everything you’re saying. But what I’m saying is that if you believe something different, you wouldn’t be sitting where you’re sitting”.

Chomsky’s phrase, “if you believe something different, you wouldn’t be sitting where you’re sitting” sums up the propaganda system of the corporate media. What Tucker Carlson appears not to understand is that he has “total freedom” to say what he likes on Fox News because he has shown that he can be trusted to remain within acceptable limits. He has obviously never heard Noam Chomsky explain how it works. Nor does he seem to be familiar with US critic Michael Parenti whose riposte to the proud boast by many a corporate journalist that “nobody tells me what to say or write” was: “You say what you like, because they like what you say”.

**P**arenti expanded on the theme during a talk titled “Inventing Reality” in 1993: “And, you know, the minute you move too far – and you have no sensation of a restraint on your freedom. I mean, you don’t know you’re wearing a leash if you sit by the peg all day. It’s only if you then begin to wander to a prohibited perimeter that you feel the tug, you see. So you’re free because your ideological perspective is congruent with that of your boss. So, you have no sensation of being at odds with your boss”.

Perhaps the Pulitzer Prize-winning US author Upton Sinclair put it most succinctly when



he wrote: “It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends upon his not understanding it”.

Obviously, the same applies to a woman. Indeed, Deborah Haynes, then defence editor at the *Times* and now foreign affairs editor at Sky News, tweeted proudly last year: “No one tells me what to think”.

Orla Guerin, a veteran BBC News journalist currently reporting from Venezuela, believes herself to be scrupulously impartial and neutral: “Thank you for watching, but we don’t do propaganda. We call it they [sic] way we see it, even if that does not suit the pre-conceived idea/ideals that some have”.

Jeremy Bowen, the BBC News Middle East editor, opined: “We are the best source of decent, impartial reportage anywhere in the world”.

At first glance, the claims made by Guerin and Bowen sound plausible. After all, the BBC is widely admired and lauded around the world. In reality, the BBC is structurally and institutionally incapable of reporting fully and honestly the crimes of the West and its allies.

It has never told even a fraction of the truth about US-UK crimes in Serbia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Libya, Palestine, Syria, Yemen and elsewhere.

It has never properly reported these crimes or placed them in an accurate historical context, showing how the West has consistently attacked independ-

ent national movements abroad to ensure that local tyrants, armed and supported by “us”, suppress local people to the benefit of Western corporate interests.

**T**his framework of understanding is considered completely beyond the pale in “polite” BBC discourse; it is not even thinkable for them. Moreover, the BBC exactly reverses this apologetic stance in its endless channelling and hyping of condemnatory Western government claims, often

### It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends upon his not understanding it” - Upton Sinclair

fabricated, against Official Enemies such as Iraq, Libya, Syria; thus preparing the way for Western sanctions and other forms of intervention, including full-scale invasion.

BBC reporting on Venezuela is a current ugly example. Because the US, UK and its allies are the world’s leading human rights violators, and because senior BBC News journalists and editors cannot even conceive of this possibility, BBC output must be considered propaganda on every issue relating to international – and, indeed, often domestic – affairs. Our media alerts and books are chock-full of examples and analysis that show this in great detail.

To take just one recent example: if Bowen’s absurd claim about the BBC were true, it would have reported extensively on former FBI Director Andrew McCabe quoting Donald Trump: “I don’t understand why we’re not looking at Venezuela. Why we’re not a war with Venezuela? They have all the oil and they’re in our back door”.

But you will never see this become the lead item on BBC News at Ten. Why not? Because that would sink the story we’re supposed to believe: that the US is acting out of humanitarian concern for Venezuelans.

In a sane media, McCabe’s account of a meeting with Trump would have been central to countless news stories and discussion about Ven-

ezuela. BBC News, ITV News and Channel 4 News would all be leading with this on their news bulletins. The newspapers would have it on their front pages. In fact, our database searches show that not a single “mainstream” UK newspaper has reported the remarks. The left-wing *Morning Star* is the only national newspaper to have covered the story.

Likewise, “mainstream” news media seem supremely disinterested in similar remarks from the notorious US neocon hawk, John Bolton, resurrected from the war crimes of the Iraq invasion, and now anointed as the US National Security Advisor. He made crystal-clear the realpolitik considerations driv-

ing US policy towards Venezuela: “It’ll make a big difference to the United States if we could have American oil companies invest in and produce the oil capabilities in Venezuela”.

Imagine if Putin had made similar remarks threatening war on Venezuela, and been entirely open that the objective was the vast oil reserves there. There would be no end to the headlines devoted to his monstrous intentions and the perfidy of Russian imperial ambitions.

We challenged Paul Royall, the editor of BBC News at Six and News at Ten, about not reporting the former FBI director citing Trump’s desire for war on Ven-

ezeuela: “Hello @paulroyall. You are the editor of @BBCNews at Six and Ten. Why is \*this\* not front and centre in your news reports on #Venezuela? Why have you instead \*buried\* a crucial factor that helps to explain US policy towards #Venezuela?”

As ever, Royall – who follows us on Twitter – remained silent. Similar challenges to Orla Guerin and Andrew Roy,

BBC News foreign editor, also blew past like the proverbial desert tumbleweed. Likewise, an earlier tweet

of ours was ignored:

“Your news reports present a highly partial, US-friendly

view of #Venezuela. By omitting crucial

facts, you are misleading your audiences”

As the veteran journalist John Pilger has long pointed out, this phenomenon is called “lying by omission”. It is a major factor in enabling senior journalists at major ‘mainstream’ news organisations to claim wrongly, as Orla Guerin did, that, “We don’t do propaganda”. This is a deadly myth. Deadly, because it masks the fact that corporate media, especially BBC News, are responsible for propaganda that pushes more Western “intervention”, more war, more stolen natural resources, more mass deaths of innocent civilians, more refugees, more corporate profits, more fossil-fuel burning, more species loss and, ultimately, more planetary destruction; perhaps even human extinction in an era of climate chaos.

**CT**

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**David Cromwell** and **David Edwards** are co-editors of *Medialens*, the UK media watch-dog. First published at [www.medialens.org](http://www.medialens.org)



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**John Pilger** looks back over the Chavez years in Venezuela, including his own travels with Hugo Chavez, and the current US and European campaign to overthrow Nicolas Maduro in a 'coup by media' and to return Latin America to the 19th- and 20th-centuries

# The war on Venezuela is built on lies

**T**RAVELLING with Hugo Chavez, I soon understood the threat of Venezuela. At a farming cooperative in Lara state, people waited patiently and with good humour in the heat. Jugs of water and melon juice were passed around. A guitar was played; a woman, Katarina, stood and sang with a husky contralto.

"What did her words say?" I asked. "That we are proud", was the reply.

The applause for her merged with the arrival of Chavez. Under one arm he carried a satchel bursting with books. He wore his big red shirt and greeted people by name, stopping to listen. What struck me was his capacity to listen.

But now he read. For almost two hours he read into the microphone from the stack of books beside him: Orwell, Dickens, Tolstoy, Zola, Hemingway, Chomsky, Neruda: a page here, a line or two there. People clapped and whistled as he

moved from author to author.

Then farmers took the microphone and told him what they knew, and what they needed; one ancient face, carved it seemed from a nearby banyan, made a long, critical speech on the subject of irrigation; Chavez took notes.

Wine is grown here, a dark Syrah type grape. "John, John, come up here", said El Presidente, having watched me fall asleep in the heat and the depths of Oliver Twist.

"He likes red wine", Chavez told the cheering, whistling audience, and presented me with a bottle of "vino de la gente". My few words in bad Spanish brought whistles and laughter.

**W**atching Chavez with *la gente* made sense of a man who promised, on coming to power, that his every move would be subject to the will of the people. In eight years, Chavez won eight elections and ref-

erendums: a world record. He was electorally the most popular head of state in the Western hemisphere, probably in the world.

Every major chavista reform was voted on, notably a new constitution of which 71 percent of the people approved each of the 396 articles that enshrined unheard of freedoms, such as Article 123, which for the first time recognised the human rights of mixed-race and black people, of whom Chavez was one.

One of his tutorials on the road quoted a feminist writer: "Love and solidarity are the same". His audiences understood this well and expressed themselves with dignity, seldom with deference. Ordinary people regarded Chavez and his government as their first champions: as theirs.

This was especially true of the indigenous, mestizos and Afro-Venezuelans, who had been held in historic contempt by Chavez's immediate prede-



**A man wearing a mask of UK Prime Minister Theresa May holds a bar of gold outside the Bank of England during a protest by the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign and Stop the War Coalition that called for the return of Venezuela's gold, which has been seized by the bank.**  
 Photo: Ron Fassbender

cessors and by those who today live far from the barrios, in the mansions and penthouses of East Caracas, who commute to Miami where their banks are and who regard themselves as “white”. They are the powerful core of what the media calls “the opposition”.

When I met this class, in suburbs called Country Club, in homes appointed with low chandeliers and bad portraits, I recognised them. They could be white South Africans, the petite bourgeoisie of Constantia and Sandton, pillars of the cruelties of apartheid.

Cartoonists in the Venezuelan press, most of which are owned by an oligarchy and oppose the government, portrayed Chavez as an ape. A radio host referred to “the

monkey”. In the private universities, the verbal currency of the children of the well-off is often racist abuse of those whose shacks are just visible through the pollution. Although identity politics are all the rage in the pages of liberal newspapers in the West, race and class are two words almost never uttered in the mendacious “coverage” of Washington’s latest, most naked attempt to grab the world’s greatest source of oil and reclaim its “backyard”.

For all the chavistas’ faults – such as allowing the Venezuelan economy to become hostage to the fortunes of oil and never seriously challenging big capital and corruption – they brought social justice and pride to millions of people and they did it with unprecedented

democracy.

“Of the 92 elections that we’ve monitored”, said former President Jimmy Carter, whose Carter Centre is a respected monitor of elections around the world, “I would say the election process in Venezuela is the best in the world”. By way of contrast, said Carter, the US election system, with its emphasis on campaign money, “is one of the worst”.

In extending the franchise to a parallel people’s state of communal authority, based in the poorest barrios, Chavez described Venezuelan democracy as “our version of Rousseau’s idea of popular sovereignty”.

In Barrio La Linea, seated in her tiny kitchen, Beatrice Balazo told me her children were the first generation of the poor

to attend a full day's school and be given a hot meal and to learn music, art and dance. "I have seen their confidence blossom like flowers," she said.

In Barrio La Vega, I listened to a nurse, Mariella Machado, a black woman of 45 with a wicked laugh, address an urban land council on subjects ranging from homelessness to illegal war. That day, they were launching *Mision Madres de Barrio*, a programme aimed at poverty among single mothers. Under the constitution, women have the right to be paid as carers, and can borrow from a special women's bank. Now the poorest housewives get the equivalent of \$200 a month.

In a room lit by a single fluorescent tube, I met Ana Lucia Fernandez, aged 86, and Mavis Mendez, aged 95. A mere 33, Sonia Alvarez, had come with her two children. Once, none of them could read and write; now they were studying mathematics. For the first time in its history, Venezuela has almost 100 percent literacy.

This is the work of *Mision Robinson*, which was designed for adults and teenagers previously denied an education because of poverty. *Mision Ribas* gives everyone the opportunity of a secondary education, called a bachillerato. (The names Robinson and Ribas refer to Venezuelan independence leaders from the 19th-century).

In her 95 years, Mavis Mendez had seen a parade of gov-

ernments, mostly vassals of Washington, preside over the theft of billions of dollars in oil spoils, much of it flown to Miami. "We didn't matter in a human sense", she told me. "We lived and died without real education and running water, and food we couldn't afford. When we fell ill, the weakest died. Now I can read and write my name and so much more; and whatever the rich and the media say, we have planted the seeds of true democracy and I have the joy of seeing it happen".

In 2002, during a Washington-backed coup, Mavis's sons and daughters and grandchildren and great-grandchildren

and played havoc with prices in a society that imports almost all its food; yet, as the journalist and filmmaker Pablo Navarrete reported, Venezuela is not the catastrophe it has been painted. "There is food everywhere", he wrote. "I have filmed lots of videos of food in markets [all over Caracas] ... it's Friday night and the restaurants are full".

In 2018, Maduro was re-elected President. A section of the opposition boycotted the election, a tactic tried against Chavez. The boycott failed: 9,389,056 people voted; 16 parties participated and six candidates stood

for the presidency. Maduro won 6,248,864 votes, or 67.84 per cent.

On election day, I spoke to

one of the 150 foreign election observers. "It was entirely fair", he said. "There was no fraud; none of the lurid media claims stood up. Zero. Amazing really"

Like a page from Alice's tea party, the Trump administration has presented Juan Guaido, a pop-up creation of the CIA-front National Endowment for Democracy, as the "legitimate President of Venezuela". Unheard of by 81 percent of the Venezuelan people, according to the *Nation*, Guaido has been elected by no one.

Maduro is "illegitimate", says Trump (who won the US presidency with three-million fewer votes than his opponent),

**"There is food everywhere", he wrote. "I have filmed lots of videos of food in markets [all over Caracas] - it's Friday night and the restaurants are full"**

joined hundreds of thousands who swept down from the barrios on the hillsides and demanded the army remained loyal to Chavez.

"The people rescued me", Chavez told me. "They did it with the media against me, preventing even the basic facts of what happened. For popular democracy in heroic action, I suggest you look no further".

Since Chavez's death in 2013, his successor Nicolas Maduro has shed his derisory label in the Western press as a "former bus driver" and become Saddam Hussein incarnate. His media abuse is ridiculous. On his watch, the slide in the price of oil has caused hyper inflation

a “dictator”, says demonstrably unhinged vice president Mike Pence and an oil trophy-in-waiting, says “national security” adviser John Bolton (who when I interviewed him in 2003 said, “Hey, are you a communist, maybe even Labour?”).

As his “special envoy to Venezuela” (coup master), Trump has appointed a convicted felon, Elliot Abrams, whose intrigues in the service of Presidents Reagan and George W. Bush helped produce the Iran-Contra scandal in the 1980s and plunge central America into years of blood-soaked misery.

Putting Lewis Carroll aside, these “crazies” belong in newsreels from the 1930s. And yet their lies about Venezuela have been taken up with enthusiasm by those paid to keep the record straight.

On Channel 4 News, Jon Snow bellowed at the Labour MP Chris Williamson, “Look, you and Mr Corbyn are in a very nasty corner [on Venezuela]!” When Williamson tried to explain why threatening a sovereign country was wrong, Snow cut him off. “You’ve had a good go!”

In 2006, Channel 4 News effectively accused Chavez of plotting to make nuclear weapons with Iran: a fantasy. The then Washington correspondent, Jonathan Rugman, allowed a war criminal, Donald Rumsfeld, to liken Chavez to Hitler, unchallenged.

Researchers at the University of the West of England studied the BBC’s reporting of Venezuela over a ten-year period.

They looked at 304 reports and found that only three of these referred to any of the positive policies of the government. For the BBC, Venezuela’s democratic record, human rights legislation, food programmes, healthcare initiatives and poverty reduction did not happen. The greatest literacy programme in human history did not happen, just as the millions who march in support of Maduro and in memory of Chavez, do not exist.

**W**hen asked why she filmed only an opposition march, the BBC reporter Orla Guerin tweeted that it was “too difficult” to be on two marches in one day.

A war has been declared on Venezuela, of which the truth is “too difficult” to report.

It is too difficult to report the collapse of oil prices since 2014 as largely the result of criminal machinations by Wall Street. It is too difficult to report the blocking of Venezuela’s access to the US-dominated international financial system as sabotage.

It is too difficult to report Washington’s “sanctions” against Venezuela, which have caused the loss of at least \$6-billion in Venezuela’s revenue since 2017, including \$2-billion worth of imported medicines, as illegal, or the Bank of England’s refusal to return Venezuela’s gold reserves as an act of piracy.

The former United Nations Rapporteur, Alfred de Zayas,

has likened this to a “medieval siege” designed “to bring countries to their knees”. It is a criminal assault, he says. It is similar to that faced by Salvador Allende in 1970 when President Richard Nixon and his equivalent of John Bolton, Henry Kissinger, set out to “make the economy [of Chile] scream”. The long dark night of Pinochet followed.

The *Guardian* correspondent, Tom Phillips, has tweeted a picture of himself in a cap on which the words in Spanish mean in local slang: “Make Venezuela fucking cool again”. The reporter as clown may be the final stage of much of mainstream journalism’s degeneration.

Should the CIA stooge Guaido and his white supremacists grab power, it will be the 68th overthrow of a sovereign government by the United States, most of them democracies. A fire sale of Venezuela’s utilities and mineral wealth will surely follow, along with the theft of the country’s oil, as outlined by John Bolton.

Under the last Washington-controlled government in Caracas, poverty reached historic proportions. There was no healthcare for those could not pay. There was no universal education; Mavis Mendez, and millions like her, could not read or write. How cool is that, Tom? **CT**

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**John Pilger** is one Britain’s best-known and most respected journalists and filmmakers. Find more of his work at his web site, [www.johnpilger.com](http://www.johnpilger.com)

Vijay Prashad tells how US aggression is affecting the lives of millions of people who have struggled under the suffocating rigours of colonialism

# How Venezuela regime change is strangling Haiti

**L**AST October, Haitians followed two Twitter hashtags that went viral – #PetrocaribeChallenge and #KotKobPetwoKaribea. If you are not Haitian and do not follow Haitian politics carefully, you can be forgiven for not noticing this development. The complaint was simple: what has happened to the billions of US dollars that was in the Venezuelan-financed Petrocaribe programme?

In 2005, when oil prices began to creep upwards and when the Bolivarian socialists led by Hugo Chavez were at their peak, 14 countries from the Caribbean met in Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela, to launch the Petrocaribe scheme.

The idea was elegant. Venezuela, with one of the world's largest oil reserves, would sell oil to the struggling Caribbean islands through a very lucrative deal. Part of the oil price was paid up front, and the rest was to be paid back over the years at a ridiculously low interest rate (one percent).

Island nations of the Caribbean, who had struggled with

debt and high import prices for energy, now found relief. Haiti and Nicaragua, which were not part of the 14 original members, joined Petrocaribe in 2007. "The Caribbean shouldn't have problem this century and beyond," said a buoyant Chavez.

An economics of solidarity defined the Bolivarian socialist approach to the Caribbean. If the Caribbean countries thrived, then Venezuela would prosper in turn. The test of this generosity came in 2010, when Venezuela decided not only to write off Haiti's debt after the earthquake but provided funds in addition for reconstruction. "It was not Haiti that had a debt with Venezuela", Chavez said then, "but Venezuela had a debt to Haiti." Since 2007, Venezuela had provided \$4-billion in oil through Petrocaribe.

The debt that Venezuela had, in the long-term thinking of Chavez, was because of something that happened in 1815. The first president of the Republic of Haiti, Alexandre Petion, gave Simon Bolivar sanctuary and armed him to return and liberate Gran Colombia (the

vast northern lands of South America). Bolivar had promised Petion that he would emancipate the enslaved Africans in Gran Colombia. This is what he did. Without Petion's demand and Bolivar's victory, Chavez – whose ancestors had been enslaved – said on a visit to Haiti in 2007, "I would not be here".

**N**o such generosity has come from the West. In fact, from the first fires of Haiti's revolution, Western powers – from France to the United States – have attempted to destroy the Haitian republic. In 1804, France forced Haiti to agree to pay it \$21-billion for the "theft" of enslaved Africans and others. It took Haiti till 1947 to pay off this odious, disgusting debt. France has never apologised for it. Nor has Citibank, which made billions off the payments. Neither France nor Citibank has considered replaying the inhumane plunder.

Venezuela's generosity was not matched by any Western country or financial institution. Instead, the West piled debt

upon debt onto Haiti. Even the “assistance” given during the 2010 earthquake made Western companies money. “These guys are like vultures coming to grab the loot over this disaster,” said Haiti’s former minister of defence Patrick Elie. The amount of money stolen from the disaster relief and the increase to Haiti’s debt is as yet uncalculated. Millions of dollars were raised – such as by the American Red Cross – but very little of it was spent to lift up the burdens of the Haitian people.

Last February, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said it would provide Haiti with \$960-million in low-interest loans and grants. But it demanded the Haitian government cut its crucial fuel subsidy. This subsidy has been a part of Petrocaribe’s programme. Protests broke out across Haiti, which led to the resignation of Haiti’s prime minister Guy Lafontant in July.

The IMF demand for cuts in fuel subsidy came after revelations that Haiti’s elite had pilfered the funds from Petrocaribe. In 2017, Lafontant’s government released a 600-page Senate report on Petrocaribe’s previous decade. The investigation found Haiti’s ruling class had stolen enormous amounts of these key funds. No one was called to account. Noises about letting the Superior Court of Accounts and Administrative Litigation take hold of the report seemed to drift into nowhere.

In the midst of this scandal, the IMF policy directive was insincere. The IMF said the Hai-

tian poor, who had not stolen the money from Petrocaribe, should pay higher fuel prices to help set Haiti’s finances in order. No reparations from France or Citibank, no accountability for the theft of the Petrocaribe funds – none of that. Instead, Haitians – almost 60 percent of whom live below the poverty line – must pay high fuel premiums for the IMF’s paltry loans.

Protests broke out in mid-February across Haiti. What motivated the streets to be on fire this time was the rise in prices of fuel and the position taken by Haiti against the government of President Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela.

In the midst of the economic war against it, Venezuela has not been able to provide Haiti with subsidised fuel. Haiti’s people had to now go to US oil companies and pay US prices for fuel. This has created bottlenecks in the supply of fuel and frustration at the rising prices. Novum Energy – of the United States – kept ships sitting in Port-au-Prince harbour, waiting for the cash-strapped Haitian government to pay up before unloading 164,000 barrels of petrol and 205,000 barrels of kerosene. There is no solidarity pricing here (in fact, Haiti has to pay \$20,000 per day to each ship that is sitting in the harbour as a penalty). These firms want cash, and they want full price.

To add insult to injury, Haiti’s government decided to join with the United States in the vote at the Organisation of American States (OAS) against Venezuela. As recently as 2017, Haiti’s rep-

resentative to the OAS – Harvel Jean-Baptiste – had voted against a similar anti-Maduro resolution. But this time, Haiti’s Leon Charles voted with the United States. It was a vote that provoked anger in the streets of Haiti. The one country – Venezuela – that had come to Haiti’s aid was here being betrayed. That is the mood.

**M**eanwhile, other Caribbean countries stood firm. The Caricom (Caribbean Community) group of 15 states from Antigua and Barbuda to Trinidad and Tobago drafted a statement to defend the sovereignty of Venezuela. They have worked to create the atmosphere for dialogue, which resulted in the joint Uruguay and Mexico sponsored meeting in Montevideo, Uruguay, on February 7.

Thesmallislandstatesknow the peril of allowing the anachronistic Monroe Doctrine (1823) to be fully revived. The idea that the American hemisphere is the “backyard” of the United States is not only humiliating, but it is also against the spirit and letter of the UN Charter.

It is this humiliation that motivates the people of Haiti to take to the streets. Their message is simple: if you won’t let us breathe, we won’t let you breathe, and if you suffocate Venezuela, you suffocate us. **CT**

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**Vijay Prashad** is an Indian historian, editor and journalist. This article was produced by *Globetrotter*, a project of the *Independent Media Institute*.

Rory Fanning tells the story of a teenage war resister in Israel who would rather go to military prison than serve in the Israeli army in Palestine

# Teenager who had the courage to say 'No!'

**H**ILEL Garmi's phone is going straight to voice-mail and all I'm hoping is that he's not back in prison. I'll soon learn that he is. Prison 6 is a military prison. It's situated in the Israeli coastal town of Atlit, a short walk from the Mediterranean Sea and less than an hour's drive from Hilel's home. It was constructed in 1957 following the Sinai War between Israel and Egypt to house disciplinary cases from the Israeli Defence Forces, or IDF.

Hilel has already been locked up six times. "I can smell the sea from my cell, especially at night when everything is quiet," he tells me in one of our phone conversations. I'm 6,000 miles away in Chicago, but Hilel and I have regularly been discussing his ordeal as an Israeli war resister, so it makes me nervous that, this time around, I can't reach him at all.

A recent high-school graduate with dark hair and a big smile, he's only 19 and still lives with his parents in Yodfat, an Israeli town of less than 900

"I can smell the sea from my cell, especially at night when everything is quiet"

people in the northern part of the country. It's 155 miles to Damascus (if such a trip were possible, which, of course, it isn't), a two-hour drive down the coast to Tel Aviv, and a four-hour drive to besieged Gaza.

**Y**odfat itself could be a set for a Biblical movie, with its dry rolling hills, ancient ruins, and pastoral landscape. The town exports flower bulbs, as well as organic goat cheese, and notably supports the Misgav Waldorf School that Hilel's mother helped found. Hilel is proud of his mom. After all, people commute from all over Israel to attend the school.

He is a rarity in his own land, one of only a handful of refuseniks living in Israel. Each year roughly 30,000 18 year olds are drafted into the IDF,

although 35% of such draftees manage to avoid military service for religious reasons. A far tinier percentage publicly refuses to fight for moral and political reasons to protest their country's occupation of Palestinian lands. The exact numbers are hard to find. I've asked war resister groups in Israel, but no one seems to have any. Hilel's estimate: between five and 15 refuseniks a year.

"I've thought the occupation of Palestine was immoral at least since I was in eighth grade," he told me. "But it was the March of Return that played a large role in sustaining the courage to say no to military service."

The Great March of Return began in the besieged Gaza Strip on March 30, 2018, the 42nd anniversary of the day in 1976 that Israeli police shot and killed six Palestinian citizens of Israel as they protested the government's expropriation of land. During the six-month protest movement that followed in 2018, Israeli soldiers killed another 141 demonstra-



**Israeli army refusenik Hilel Garmi: "it was the March of Return that played a large role in sustaining the courage to say no to military service".**

Photo: Twitter

tors, while nearly 10,000 were injured, including 919 children, all shot.

"I couldn't be a part of that," he said. "I'd rather be in jail."

However, after 37 days in prison, it was the letter Hilel received from Abu Artema, a key Palestinian organizer of that march, which provided him with his greatest inspiration. It read in part: "Your decision is what will help end this dark period inflicted on Palestinians, and at the same time mitigate the fears of younger Israeli generations who were born into a complicated situation and a turbulent geographical area deprived of security and peace... I believe the solution is near and possible. It will not require more than the courage to take initia-

tive and set a new perspective, after traditional solutions have failed to achieve a just settlement. Let us fight together for human rights, for a country that is democratic for all its citizens, and for Israelis and Palestinians to live together based on citizenship and equality, not segregation and racism."

"This letter excited me a great deal," Hilel said. "It's Palestinians like Artema who have the true courage, the kind that can only come from the moral authority of those resisting occupation and violent oppression. This type of authority is much stronger than the forces that occupy Palestine."

After trying yet again to reach him by phone, I send Hilel a Facebook message: "I hope

everything is all right. Call me when you can. By the way, I was listening to this song and it reminded me of you. Stay strong, brother."

I attach a YouTube video of *The World's Greatest*, by Bonnie "Prince" Billy:

*"I'm that little bit of hope  
With my back against the  
ropes.*

*I can feel it*

*I'm the world's greatest..."*

As a war resister myself while serving in the U.S. Army – I was protesting America's unending wars across the Greater Middle East – I've wondered a lot about what it means to be one in Israel, a country where an antiwar movement is almost non-existent. My friends in the U. who are familiar with the

militarisation of Israel and the population's overwhelming support for their country's still-expanding occupation respect what Hilel is doing, but wonder about the political purpose of an essay like this one about a war resister who lives in a country where such creatures are rarer than a snowy day in Jerusalem.

A valid point: the Israeli antiwar movement (if you can even call it a movement at this moment) is a long, long way from making a dent in the occupation, no less ending it, and I wouldn't want to convey false hope about what such refuseniks mean to the larger question of Palestinian liberation.

Still, I talk to Hilel because I know how much it would have meant to me if someone had contacted me when I was still resisting the Global War on Terror within the 2nd Ranger Battalion nearly 15 years ago. If I had known that there were others like me or at least others ready to support me, it would have made my own sense of isolation during the six months I spent on lockdown inside my barracks less intolerable.

There's more, though. Each time Hilel and I speak, I feel like I'm the one being energized by the conversation. He's smart, reads a lot of the books I also read (despite the 22-year age difference between us), and has a passion for rock climbing in the Shagor mountain range. More than anything else, though, he has a kind of energy that I identify only with those who are standing up for a prin-

**"It's hard being rejected by friends and family who have never questioned the occupation,"**

ciple, whatever the repercussions for their own future. He exhibits no misgivings about what he's doing, but somehow remains remarkably grounded in reality.

"It's hard being rejected by friends and family who have never questioned the occupation," he tells me in one of our phone conversations. (His English, by the way, is superb.) "Very few in my class agree with what I'm doing. But I believe in what I'm doing. That is the most important thing. Although, who knows, my decision to resist may have a positive ripple effect in a way we can't appreciate at this point in time."

He tells me all this in a tone that feels both light and confident, the very opposite of what you might imagine from a teenager who had at that moment been jailed six times in a single year and expected more of the same. His voice is authentic. It's all his and draws strength from a self-possessed sense of the truth.

Like many, I've been exhausted and depressed by Donald Trump's presidency. His administration represents a dark step back when it comes to social-justice issues around the world and makes me question the time I still spend organizing against America's endless wars. The ship appears to be sinking, no

matter what I do, and since the election I've found myself asking why I shouldn't try to just shut out the world. <sup>w</sup>

In such a context, talking with Hilel has been a tonic for me. After our conversations, the all-too-familiar feelings of depression and hopelessness fade, at least briefly, while his courage and optimism energize me. So part of my urge in writing this piece is to convey that very feeling, hoping others will be energized, too. It's a tall order these days, but worth a try.

**A**fter a week in which my calls frustratingly keep going to voicemail, I finally hear back. "They arrested me again," he informs me. "I expected it, but wasn't sure they would come back a seventh time." Surprisingly, he's still in good spirits.

The Israeli government distinguishes between pacifists who reject the use of force for any reason and those with "selective conscience," or those who specifically refuse to fight in protest over the occupation of Palestinian territory. The latter are treated far more severely and are significantly more likely to find themselves in prison.

Hilel's public declaration – which has been circulating in left-leaning outlets in Israel – on why he continues to refuse military service couldn't be clearer on where he stands and helps explain why the Israeli government has sent him back

to prison so regularly:

“I cannot enlist, because from a very young age I was educated to believe that all humans are equal. I do not believe in some common denominator which all Jews share and which sets them apart from Arabs. I do not believe that I should be treated differently from a child born in Gaza or in Jenin, and I do not believe that the sorrows or the happiness of any of us are more important than those of anyone else... As a person who was born into the more powerful side of the hierarchy between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River, I was given the power as well as the obligation to try to fight that hierarchy.”

Refuseniks like Hilel generally spend 20 days in jail. They are then released for a day or two and immediately reprocessed back into prison.

“There is a lot of sitting around in prison. I read a lot. It’s a military prison so I’m in with people who are in trouble for a variety of things while serving in the IDF.” There are different cellblocks (A, B, and C) designated for various infractions – A being the “easiest,” C the “hardest,” according to Hilel:

“I started in A, but worked my way up to C because I continue to refuse to fight. C is where those who commit assaults of varying degree within the IDF are housed. C is used as a threat by the jailors. I was in C for a short time because I wouldn’t tell a group of demonstrators protesting my arrest to disperse. After they left on their own, they sent me back to B.”

### “I do not believe that I should be treated differently from a child born in Gaza or in Jenin”

I ask him how many protesters there were. “About 50,” he replies, “But they gave me a lot of strength. Altit, where the jail is, is not a very big town, so to have anyone out there at all was encouraging.”

**A**n increasing number of Israelis oppose the occupation and some have formed groups to help support war resisters. Yesh Gvul, an organization that backs refuseniks like Hilel (and to which he belongs), for instance, first put me in touch with him. Palestinians like Abu Artema are also reaching out to refuseniks. Palestinian and Israeli activists are working to overcome the barriers that divide them, searching for creative ways to connect and organize against the occupation. In December 2018, Israeli activists, including conscientious objectors, held a video meeting with Artema. “Those who refuse to take part in the attacks on the demonstrators in Gaza, who express their natural right to protest against the siege, those who refuse to take part in the attacks on Gaza’s citizens – they stand on the right side of history,” Artema said during the call.

And now, having grown strangely attached to Hilel, I

feel a small flood of relief that he’s on the phone with me once again. I ask if we can Skype so that I can actually see him and he promptly agrees. It’s December and he’s wearing a ski hat. He’s sitting in his parent’s kitchen and his eyes glimmer. As he talks, I’m taken back to my own 19-year-old self, to the Rory Fanning who was still trying to fit in, get decent grades, and have fun. I certainly wasn’t taking on my government, which only makes me more impressed that he is.

He and I chat more about his family and his town. Yodfat was once a place governed by a group of people called the Kibbutz (from the Hebrew word kvutza, meaning “group”). Inspired in part by Karl Marx, the Kibbutz movement strove to live communally and maintain deep connections to agriculture. “It’s still a progressive town,” he says, “and most people, at least as lip service, will say they oppose the occupation. However, they see obedience to the current law and general support for the military – even though some of them may admit it’s an undemocratic one – as far more important.”

I ask him about the Boycott Divestment Sanction, or BDS, movement. BDS is Palestinian-led and inspired by the South African anti-apartheid movement. It calls on others globally to pressure Israel to comply with international law and end the occupation of Palestine.

“The people of Israel feel isolated from the rest of the world,” Hilel responds. “The govern-

ment and media constantly remind them how Iran and so many others want to destroy the country. The effects of anti-Semitism echo in everyone's head. I think BDS only reinforces the idea that the government promotes that Jews are rejected by the world."

I remind him how an earlier BDS-style movement helped end apartheid in South Africa and ask if he thinks it might be an effective way to end Israel's system of apartheid, too. "Maybe," he responds hesitantly. "I haven't thought about it too much. I could certainly see how it could." I don't press the issue, but as ever I'm struck by how open he is, even on a topic that the Israeli government clearly feels deeply threatened by.

As I can see via Skype, the sun is going down behind Hilel. It's still morning here in Chicago, but six in the evening in Yodfat, so I let him go back to his embattled teenage life.

And I wonder yet again how I'll write about that life, his dilemmas, and the unnerving world both of us find ourselves in. Then, I'm reminded of how encouraging it felt to have many active-duty soldiers reach out to me over the years after hearing my own story of war resistance. I know that there are surprising numbers of people in the US military who question America's endless wars, trillion-dollar national security budgets, and the near-robotic thank-you-for-your-service patriotism of so many in this country, because I've met or talked to many of them and even

**"The government and media constantly remind them how Iran and so many others want to destroy the country"**

seen a few over the years break ranks as I did (and as, in a very different situation, Hilel has done). And obviously there must be many others out there I know nothing about.

**N**ews travels fast these days. Support networks like Veterans for Peace and About Face continue to be built up in this country to support soldiers who question their mission. And I know that, in Israel, there are others who think the way Hilel does and are just waiting for an atmosphere of greater support to develop so that they, too, can begin to resist the injustices of their moment and their country.

That, of course, is what Hilel has helped accomplish. Stories like his create openings for others to act. Sooner or later, those others, inspired by him and perhaps by similar figures to come, will inevitably follow their lead.

Just as I'm finishing this piece, he suddenly calls to tell me that he's been released – for good! The Israeli Defense Forces have freed him from his military obligation. At first, a ruling against releasing him came down from a committee of civilians and officers controlled

by the IDF, because his refusal to fight stemmed from reasons that were "political" rather than from "conscience." Later that day, however, a higher-ranking officer overturned that group's decision and, after his seventh imprisonment, Hilel was suddenly free.

He isn't sure why the decision was overturned, but perhaps the higher-ups finally concluded that he simply wouldn't break under their pressure. Quite the opposite, a determined 19-year-old resister might only get more attention if they kept sending him back to jail. His courage might, in fact, motivate others to resist, the last thing the IDF wants right now.

I look forward to staying in touch with Hilel. He tells me he plans on working with disadvantaged youth in Israel for the next two years. I know there are great things in store for him. Interacting with a fellow war-resister across continents and seas these last few months, and seeing him go from prison to freedom in a matter of weeks, has reinvigorated my own tired spirit in ways I had not anticipated when I sent my first note to him. **CT**

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**Rory Fanning** is the author of *Worth Fighting For: An Army Ranger's Journey Out of The Military and Across America* and co-author of *Long Shot: The Struggles and Triumphs of an NBA Freedom Fighter*. You can reach out to him on Twitter at [@rtfanning](https://twitter.com/rtfanning). This article first appeared at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com)

# ONE MAGAZINE'S 10-YEAR QUEST FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Before I wound up in Toronto and ColdType, I designed **Frontline** magazine, South Africa's top liberal-left magazine, for 10 years during the 1980s as it battled for justice and equality during the final years of Apartheid. Now, we're digitising Frontline, as a case study of prophecy and history. The first digital issues are now on line; more will follow each month.

– **Tony Sutton, Editor**



Read the digital editions of Frontline, exactly as they were published, free of charge, at

[www.issuu.com/frontline.south](http://www.issuu.com/frontline.south)

Bohemian Rhapsody glosses over the bigotry Mercury faced as a queer man with HIV, writes **Laurie Marhoefer**

# Freddie Mercury story that the film avoids

**M**ILLIONS of people tuned in to the Oscars to see *Bohemian Rhapsody*, the biopic of Queen frontman Freddie Mercury, win four awards, including one for the best actor award to Rami Malek. Despite its success, however, *Bohemian Rhapsody* has been dogged by accusations of homophobia, and the film's director, Bryan Singer, was accused of rape and sexual abuse.

But as a gay historian, I keep coming back to something else – the tragic history that's glaringly absent from this movie.

Mercury, along with all the other men and women who tested positive for HIV in the 1980s, was a victim not just of a pandemic but of the failures of his own governments and of the scorn of his fellow citizens. The laughable initial response to the HIV pandemic helped seal Mercury's fate.

None of that is in the movie.

In the early 1980s, when an epidemic of HIV first struck a few population centres in the US, UK and elsewhere, govern-



**Plaque at former home of Freddie Mercury in Fulham, London.**

Photo: Spudgun 67, Flickr.com

ments mounted almost no public health response.

Doctors initially noticed the virus in groups of people who happened to already be stigmatised for other reasons: men who had sex with men, drug users and, due to racism, Haitians and Haitian-Americans.

The prejudiced initial public health response assumed that many of these people were getting the virus because of whatever was already supposedly wrong with them. Gay men, the

thinking went, were getting it because of “risky” behaviours like having lots of partners. HIV was not, therefore, a threat to most straight people. The medical profession's view of HIV was so coloured by the idea that it was intrinsically gay that at first they named the virus “GRID”, an acronym for “gay-related immunodeficiency”.

That was bad science, as we know now. Especially in the absence of good public health information about how to have safer sex, your risk of contracting any sexually transmitted infection goes up when you have more partners. But there was nothing about gay sex in particular that caused AIDS. Lots of straight people had multiple partners in the 1970s and 1980s, but initially, by chance, some communities of gay men were hit harder.

Governments and the general public quietly left people with HIV to their fate. As one activist pointed out, two years into the crisis, the US government had spent more to get to the bottom of a series of mysterious poi-



**Freddie Mercury performing with Queen at New Haven CT, in 1977.** Photo: Carl Lender, via Wikimedia.org

sonings in Chicago that killed seven people than to research AIDS, which had already killed hundreds of people in the US.

**T**he first report of HIV in the UK was in 1981. There was no test for the virus until 1985, and there was no really effective treatment until 1996. In 1985, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher tried to block a public health campaign promoting safe sex; she thought it would

encourage teenagers to have sex, and, she claimed, they were not at risk of infection.

All told, it was an absurd response to the major public health catastrophe of our time and to a disease that would go on to kill 36 million people around the world – about as many as died in World War I.

All this left Mercury and other queer men in a terrible place. Without good public health information, and with research lagging, they were

unnecessarily exposed to the virus. Diagnosed in 1987, Mercury didn't live long enough for the development of antiretroviral combination treatment that could have saved his life.

He faced not just a deadly disease but also vitriolic prejudice against people with HIV and AIDS. Two years before he was diagnosed, a Los Angeles Times poll found that a majority of Americans wanted to quarantine HIV-positive people; 42 percent wanted to close

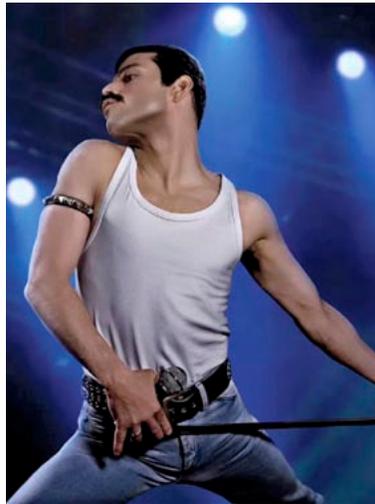
gay bars. As Mercury fought to keep making music as he grew sicker and sicker, the lead singer of the then-popular band Skid Row wore a T-shirt that said, “AIDS kills faggots dead”.

You won’t see this in the movie, either. No one in *Bohemian Rhapsody* is overtly homophobic; when homophobia appears at all, it’s in subtler forms. For example, a bandmate tells Mercury that Queen is emphatically not the openly queer disco act the Village People.

In real life, Mercury faced rampant homophobia – he never really came out publicly, and it’s easy to see why. In 1988, the UK passed a notorious anti-gay law that declared, officially, that homosexuality shouldn’t be promoted and that same-sex couples had “pretend” families, not real families. The law stayed on the books for over a decade.

The era’s glamrock and disco music scenes had queer moments, but it was all predicated on everyone being straight in real life. David Bowie told the press he was queer in 1972 and then loudly took it back in 1983, saying “the biggest mistake I ever made” was telling the press “that I was bisexual.”

The Village People were unique because they were unabashedly out and proud, but they weren’t a hit act because



**Rami Malek plays Freddie Mercury in *Bohemian Rhapsody*.** Photo: Nick Delaney/20th Century Fox

of that. They were a hit because the straight public either didn’t realise it or didn’t want to know. Ask yourself: When you danced to YMCA at your high school talent show, did you know it was about gay romance? I’m going to guess the answer is no.

The same was true of Queen. How many of the rock fans who packed stadiums to see them play *We Are the Champions* knew that the heroic singer was not just a rock god, but a fabulous queer icon, too? Not many.

**I**n the 1980s, Mercury ditched his glam rock look and cut his hair in a style popular in gay subculture, donning a black

leather jacket and sporting an enviable, gorgeous moustache. Many fans hated it. In the US, they threw razors onstage.

When Mercury died in 1991, his bandmates felt it necessary to do a TV interview to dispute what the media was saying – that Mercury had brought AIDS upon himself with his decadent partying.

The Oscar-winning movie also quietly makes it seem as if Mercury’s debauchery was to blame for his fate. In it, Mercury abandons the band to make a solo album in Munich with his diabolical boyfriend, who lures him into a shady queer world. His ex-girlfriend rescues him and he returns to the band. But by then, it’s too late: He has HIV.

In real life, Mercury didn’t break up the band, he wasn’t the first of the bandmates to make a solo album and, of course, partying doesn’t cause AIDS.

I hope someday, someone makes a better Freddie Mercury biopic, one that accurately depicts the historical moment he lived in and the challenges he dealt with. He deserves it. **CT**

**Laurie Marhoefer** is Associate Professor of History, University of Washington. This article first appeared at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)

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# Insights



The cast of the play, *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*.

## Revisiting the Catonsville Nine's greatest day

By **Frida Berrigan**

**C**OURTROOMS are sterile, airless places with strict dress codes and tightly scripted dialogue.

They are places of fear, judgment and dire consequences.

You don't expect declarations like, "We agree that this is the greatest day of our lives." And yet, that was Daniel Berrigan's response upon hearing

the jury's guilty verdict in the trial of the Catonsville Nine – a trial in which he was one of the defendants.

It all stemmed from an action that took place on May 17, 1968, when he and eight other Catholics burned more than 300 1-A draft files in the parking lot of the Knights of Columbus building in Catonsville,

Maryland, using homemade napalm. As the files burned, they stood in a semi-circle and recited the *Lord's Prayer*. Three wore clerics collars: David Darst, Daniel Berrigan and his brother, Philip Berrigan. Darst was a Christian Brother, and Phil Berrigan was a Josephite priest, who was later excommunicated when he and Elizabeth McAlister, a Catholic sister, married. (They had three children, and I am their eldest). Dan Berrigan was a Jesuit priest. The others were neatly dressed: Marjorie Melville and her husband Tom (they met in Guatemala, where they were a nun and priest), George Mische, Mary Moylan, John Hogan and Tom Lewis.

The activists had alerted the press and, as the cameras were rolling, they burned the files that would call young men to military service in Vietnam.

That was a great day for the nine, as they filed into the waiting police van. Some waved peace signs at the cameras and the small crowd that had gathered. Right then, they knew they had accomplished their aim of destroying the records so that young men would not be drafted. They hoped to kindle a movement of draft board raids that would destroy tens of thousands of similar documents across the country over the next few years. They hoped

that the spectacle of nine Catholics being arrested and tried for property destruction would awaken a somnolent Catholic Church into action against the war in Vietnam.

By the time their trial started that fall, they knew they were accomplishing all these aims and more. They were demonstrating the power of community. They were using the trial as a platform for speaking about conscience, racism, economic exploitation, US history and their faith. They were not following the script. They were not cowed by decorum. They were not afraid of the consequences of their actions.

That was more than 50 years ago. All but two of the co-defendants have since died. Wars continue to rage in every corner of the globe. The world moves so much faster today than it did in 1968, and the Catholic Church has lost most of its moral authority.

But the spirit of Catonsville – that freedom from fear, that joy found in resistance, that inspiration drawn from conspiracy – was all very much alive on Saturday, February 9 in a small theatre in Manhattan’s Lower East Side. A sold-out crowd perched on court benches (or church pews) had just heard that incongruous statement of joyous completion – “We agree that this is the greatest day of our lives” – in Jack Cummings III’s new production of Daniel Berrigan’s

award-winning play *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*.

But this time, the words were uttered by actor Eunice Wong, one of just three actors – alongside Mia Katigback and David Huynh – in a play with more than a dozen parts. Together, they inhabit the roles of all nine co-defendants, the judge, the prosecution, the defence and the witnesses. The three actors are members of the National Asian American Theatre Company, which was a partner in the Transport Group’s production. The actors shared and traded roles throughout the production, sometimes speaking lines together, sometimes switching from judge to defendant to prosecutor, and sometimes alternating between interior thought or recollection and testimony. All this is done without conventional gimmicks such as different voices, accents or quick costume changes.

**W**ong, speaking as Daniel Berrigan, begins weeping at one point late in the play while speaking these words to the court, “We have chosen to say with the gift of our liberty, if necessary our lives: the violence stops here, the death stops here, the suppression of truth stops here, the war stops here! Redeem the times! The times are inexpressibly evil, and yet – and yet – the times are inexhaustibly good, solaced by the courage and hope of

many”. I started crying too. And I am sure I was not the only one. I’ve always thought of my uncle, who passed away in April 2016 just a few days before his 95th birthday, as a reserved and self-contained man. He did not weep in public, in my experience. But there he was – vividly resurrected with a full depth of emotion – in Wong’s portrayal, and I felt reunited with him in that moment. It was an incredible gift.

Another, less personal, gift of the Transport Group’s production was how the work put the nine defendants on equal footing. As someone who bears the name Berrigan, I have always been conscious of how the media viewed the Catonsville Nine as the “Berrigans and seven others” and how that celebrity-driven shorthand obviates the contributions of John Hogan, Tom Lewis, David Darst, Mary Moylan, George Mische, Marjorie and Tom Melville. In traditional productions of the play, there are always eight static figures of the defendants who are not speaking. But in the hands, voices and bodies of Wong, Huynh and Katigback there is no room for stardom or media-anointed leadership. The nine defendants’ voices are equalised by their embodiment in the three actors.

Jack Cummings III’s production of the *Trial of the Catonsville Nine* is modern, moving and – most importantly – motivating. There is no separation

between actor and audience. We are implicated; we are the jury that finds them guilty or we are the supporters who must leave the courtroom to continue the work while they are hauled off to prison.

I watched this play as my mother entered her 10th month in a county jail in Georgia for her part in the Kings Bay Plowshares in April 2017. She and her six co-defendants do not yet have a trial date.

Writing from jail, she said, “We came to the Kings Bay Submarine Base animated by the absurd conviction that we could make some impact on slowing, if not ending, the mad rush to the devastation of our magnificent planet. And this

is no extreme overstatement. The six submarines at Kings Bay carry enough destructive firepower to destroy all life on earth ... We come with our voices and our lives. We raise our voices in a cry to dismantle the weapons – all of them. And we risk life and limb and our future hopes to make this plea. Dismantle the weapons”.

The Kings Bay Plowshares – Elizabeth McAllister, Father Steve Kelly, Mark Colville, Martha Hennessey, Clare Grady, Patrick O’Neill and Carmen Trotta – acted in the spirit of the Catonsville Nine. It was an honour to speak their names and share their story after the performance, when I was invited to share

my reactions and thoughts in a discussion facilitated by the show’s dramaturg Kristina Corcoran Williams. I said Uncle Dan would have loved to sit next to me in the audience and see his work, his words and his life-witness revitalised by all who contributed to the production.

Redeem the times. Dismantle the weapons. **CT**

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***Frida Berrigan** is a columnist for *Waging Nonviolence* and the author of *It Runs in the Family: On Being Raised by Radicals and Growing into Rebellious Motherhood*. She lives in New London, Conn. with her husband Patrick and three children.*

## Concentration camps in the South African war?

By Fransjohan Pretorius

**M**ORE than a century after 48 000 people died in concentration camps in what’s known as the South African War between 1899 and 1902 – or the Anglo-Boer War – the events of that period are back in the headlines.

The camps were established by the British as part of their military campaign against two small Afrikaner republics:

the ZAR (Transvaal) and the Orange Free State.

The scandalous campaign is back in the news following controversial comments by British Conservative MP Jacob Rees-Mogg on a BBC television programme. His statements have caused consternation because they were riddled with inaccuracies.

It’s time to set the record straight and to refute his

inaccuracies one by one. I do this based on the historical research I’ve done on the South African War for the last 49 years.

The claim that caused the most upset was Rees-Mogg’s allegation that the concentration camps had exactly the same mortality rate as was the case in Glasgow at the time.

This is incorrect.

In its recent Glasgow Indicators Project, the Glasgow Centre for Population Health gives the death rate of people in the city as 21 per 1000 per annum in 1901.

The death rate for Boer civilians in the concentration camps in South Africa exceeded this by a factor of 10. It’s well

established that 28,000 white people and 20,000 black people died in various camps in South Africa. Between July 1901 and February 1902, the rate was, on average, 247 per 1,000 per annum in the white camps. It reached a high of 344 per 1,000 per annum in October 1901 and a low of 69 per 1,000 per annum in February 1902.

The figures would have been even higher had it not been for the fact that British welfare campaigner Emily Hobhouse exposed the deplorable conditions in the camps. A subsequent report by the Government's Ladies Commission prompted the British government to improve conditions. Another factor that reduced the fatality rate was that Lord Milner, High Commissioner for South Africa and Governor of the Cape Colony, took over administration of the camps from the military from November 1901.

Rees-Mogg also revealed his lack of understanding why the British military authorities established the concentration camps in statements such as:

"Where else were people going to live when ... (the Boers were fighting the war)?"

"People were put in camps for their protection".

"They were interned for their safety".

"They were being taken there so that they could be fed because the farmers were away fighting the Boer War".

The reality was very



**Inside one of the British concentration camps.** Photographical Collection Anglo-Boer War Museum, Bloemfontein SA.

different.

After Lord Roberts, chief commander of the British forces, occupied the Free State capital, Bloemfontein, on March 13, 1900, he issued a proclamation inviting the Boers to lay down their arms and sign an oath of neutrality. They would then be free to return to their farms on the understanding that they would no longer participate in the war.

Eventually about 20 000 Boers – about a third – made use of this offer. They were called the “protected burghers”. Roberts had banked on this policy to end the war. But after the British occupation of the Transvaal capital, Pretoria, on June 5, 1900, there was no end in site. On the contrary, the Boers had started a guerrilla war, which included attacks on railway lines.

In reaction, Roberts issued a proclamation on June 16, 1900,

stating that, for every attack on a railway line the closest homestead would be burned down. This was the start of the scorched earth policy. When this didn't work, Roberts issued another proclamation in September stating that all homesteads would be burnt in a radius of 16km of any attack, and that all livestock would be killed or taken away and all crops destroyed.

**T**his policy was intensified dramatically when Lord Kitchener took over from Roberts as commander in November 1900. Homesteads and whole towns were burnt down even if there was no attack on any railway. In this way, almost all Boer homesteads – about 30 000 in all – were razed to the ground and thousands of livestock killed. The two republics were devastated.

Meanwhile the Boer leaders were reorganising their commandos after some major setbacks. One action was to remobilise the Boers who had laid down their arms.

Roberts felt he should protect his oath takers and gather them in refugee camps. The first two were established in Bloemfontein and Pretoria in September 1900.

But the scorched earth policy had led to more and more Boer women and children being left homeless. Roberts decided to bring them into the camps too. They were called the “undesirables” – families of Boers who were still on commando or already prisoners of war. They were given fewer rations than others in the camps.

These families eventually outnumbered the protected burghers and their families by 7:3.

These families were taken against their will. They were forcibly put on ox wagons and open railway trucks and taken to the camps. They were not, as Rees-Mogg claimed, moved for their protection and safety. Nor were they moved to the camps to be fed. Rather, their internment had everything to do with ending the resistance of Boers still fighting the British.

The administration of the camps was appalling. Food was of a very poor quality, sanitation deplorable, tents were overcrowded and medical assistance shocking. Little was known at the time about how to handle

epidemics of measles and typhoid.

This isn't all. Rees-Mogg is also obviously unaware of the action that the British commanders took against black South Africans. A total of 66 black concentration camps were set up across the Transvaal and Free State where conditions were just as bad and the death rates similar.

These camps were set up to get black people off the land so that the Boers couldn't get supplies from them. In addition, forcing black farmers off their land also enabled the British to

use black men as labourers on gold mines.

Rees-Mogg was right on one point: the concentration camps didn't have the same aims as Adolf Hitler's extermination camps during the Second World War. The aim in South Africa wasn't systematic murder.

But this shouldn't detract from his numerous other falsehoods. **CT**

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**Fransjohan Pretorius** is Emeritus professor of History, University of Pretoria. This article first appeared at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)

## Certainty and the death of democracy

By Emanuele Corso

**J**OHN Dewey's 1929 classic, *The Quest for Certainty*, foretells sorrow unto today. As Dewey put it, “the quest for certainty has always been an effort to transcend belief”. An underlying hunger exists for certainty in an uncertain world, for security in insecure times. Politicians play on fear and promise security to their insecure audiences, it's the “chicken in every pot” meme in one form or another. Little argument can be made against the proposition that, in our times as in the past,

the greatest sources of insecurity are economic uncertainty followed by fear of invading foreigners. In a wobbling economy that promises more than it delivers, racial tensions, and economic insecurity are the go-to populist motivators.

The news is contradictory – people are out of work, jobs have been shipped overseas, but then, we are also told the economy is thriving and corporate profit has never been greater. Uncertainty and its handmaiden confusion, define the moment. The hollow promises

made by politicians of better times just ahead are appealing. And when such promises are publicly asserted in rousing speeches the quest for certainty can and often does overcome common sense. This is how the pernicious effects of cognitive dissonance are exploited. In an economy built on credit, on personal debt for homes, automobiles, recreational vehicles, and motor boats, secured by jobs in manufacturing that are being shipped abroad, angst reigns. You could be next.

Certainty is the mother's milk promised by nearly all politicians. What else do they have to offer and what more do people crave? Does the message resonate with the audience? If it does the message will be calculated, refined, and repeated. This is how politicians calculate their "pitch". If people are out of work or afraid of losing their jobs the pitch must, if you want their votes, be employment certainty and include demonising immigrants who are taking their jobs for less pay. No blame will be assigned to the employers who hire the immigrants nor to those moving their factories to low-wage countries.

When political rhetoric centres on instilling or exploiting feelings of victimhood and loss of self-worth, we are on a well-worn path that has in the past led to fascism. This is how it went down in Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy, and many other countries. When democracy has failed politically and eco-

nomically the path ahead has been trod before. Those who march and chant and scapegoat minorities and immigrants distract themselves.

When an economic system is conflated with democracy we are plying dangerous waters. Uncertainty and fear have always been the nucleus of political implosion. Think about this: The *Economist* recently reported on a 2016 survey that showed more than half of young Americans no longer support capitalism, the country's foundational economic and political belief system. It confirms Juan J Linz's observation in *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*

that, "Legitimacy is granted or withdrawn by each member of the society day in and day out".

And when this divisive current administration finally concludes, and it will, we, like Dante, will say, "Thence we came forth to behold the stars". **CT**

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**Emanuele Corso** taught at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he took his PhD and three Master's degrees. A veteran of the US Air Force's Strategic Air Command, he served as a combat crew officer during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

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## What war films never show you

By Mike Ferner

**N**EWSPAPERS on the other side of the world are calling it "the biggest US cinema event of all time". Critical acclaim has poured in from all corners for the BBC production *They Shall Not Grow Old*, a technical and emotional masterpiece on the First World War – the war Woodrow Wilson said would "make the world safe for democracy".

The way the film brings old footage, and therefore the soldiers, to life is almost magical and powerfully moving. But

because of how director Peter Jackson defined his film, a critical element is virtually invisible: the wounded.

Jackson distilled the stories of 120 veterans who spoke on some 600 hours of BBC audio tape done in the 1960s and '70s. His goal was to have "120 men telling a single story ... what it was like being a British soldier on the Western Front". He artfully presents it, using no narration other than the archive of BBC interviews.

But since dead men tell

no tales, nor do the severely wounded often live into their 70s and 80s, the film narrows its focus to the camaraderie and adventures of young men growing up with shared experiences of tinned rations, trench life, and rats. The dead flit across the screen

in graphic but limited numbers of colourised photos of corpses.

The wounded receive mute witness with brief footage of gas attacks, and a classic photo of seven British troops carrying one wounded comrade through the knee-deep mud of Passchendaele.

Jackson's team brilliantly turned herky-jerky, silent, monochrome youths into breathing, talking, living colour, with compelling

stories. But because of his cinematic goal, this assured award-winner misses the depth of feeling and realism it could have projected by giving similar treatment to the agony of the wounded.

Among the neglected images that failed to benefit from Jackson's alchemy is footage of shell-shock victims filmed at Britain's Netley Hospital in 1917. The footage would have retained its halting, jerking

properties not from erratic frame speeds, but because the young men were tormented with nerve damage.

Nor did Jackson include footage of amputee veterans exiting Queen Mary's Workshop, dozen upon dozen upon dozen, hobbling in rapid succession.

He might've added one or two photos from New Zealand doctor Major Harold Gillies' groundbreaking book *Plastic Surgery of the Face*, showing how red-hot shrapnel can carve bone and muscle into mon-



Publicity shot from Peter Jackson's film, *They Shall Not Grow Old*.

strous forms.

My own experiences revealed the side of war that Jackson left out. Ever since nursing GIs returning from Vietnam, I've firmly believed that no member of Congress should be allowed to vote on war funding until working for a month in the back ward of a VA hospital.

Let them vote only after emptying urine bags, turning sallow bodies, and daubing the

bedsores of formerly healthy youths who will never move on their own again. Or after offloading wounded young people from a passenger jetliner with the seats removed and four vertical rows of stretcher hooks extending all the way down both sides of the aisle.

*They Shall Not Grow Old* allows the reminiscences of 70-year-old veterans to breathe life into the determined, youthful images Jackson shows us on screen. In so doing, we gain a much greater appreciation

of "being a British soldier on the Western Front".

But it could also have given moviegoers a glimpse into the part of war so rarely seen. It might then have been named, *They Shall Suffer Horribly and Die Before Their Time*. Hardly a formula for box office success... which is

perhaps why war movies never go there, and why the next generation always signs up when their leaders beat the drum. **CT**

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**Mike Ferner**, a former president of Veterans for Peace, served as a corpsman on the neurosurgery and psychiatric wards of the Great Lakes Naval Hospital during the Vietnam war. He lives in Toledo. This article was distributed by [www.OtherWords.org](http://www.OtherWords.org)

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