
ColdType

ISSUE 191

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

OCTOBER 2019

THE DARK WORLD OF INVISIBLE GOVERNMENT

Chris Hedges
and **Stephen**
Kinzer show
how US
intelligence
agencies
kidnapped,
tortured
and
executed
innocent
people in
top-secret
mind control
experiments



**PLUS: LINH DINH, CONN HALLINAN, BINOY KAMPMARK,
YVES ENGLER, GEORGE MONBIOT, PHILIP KRASKE & MORE**

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ColdType

Issue 191 | October 2019

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Gareth Roderique-Davies and Bev John discuss the need for tighter regulation in the relationship between gambling and sports

Turning football fans into betting addicts

NOT that long ago UK sports fans could indulge their passions by watching the rugby league Silk Cut Challenge Cup, one day cricket's Benson and Hedges Cup, or the Embassy World Snooker Championship. Not to mention the excitement and glamour of cars branded to look like Marlboro packets on wheels being driven on Formula 1 racetracks around the world.

Cigarette branding was once integral to sport and a crucial marketing strategy for the industry. But research into the powerful impact of advertising these products – particularly on young people's awareness, attitudes and intentions to use them – led to legislative changes that ended the relationship between tobacco and sport.

The gap in the market left by the cigarette industry has now been filled by the gambling industry. The Challenge Cup is now the Coral Challenge Cup, and football fans can watch teams take part in

competitions such as the Sky Bet Championship. Football, in particular, has seen a rise in commercial arrangements with gambling companies, not just competition sponsorship but stadium and shirt sponsorship, too. In fact, in England's 2019-20 Premier League, half the clubs have betting companies as shirt sponsors.

In the UK, gambling-related TV and radio advertising was banned until the 2005 Gambling Act came into force, which relaxed the rules. Since then, spending has increased significantly, with UK betting firms putting £328-million into direct advertising, such as adverts in commercial breaks in sports programmes, in 2018 alone.

This figure is almost certainly an underestimate of the total amount spent on marketing as it doesn't include online advertising or indirect advertising, such as sponsorship logos on shirts and stadium hoardings.

New evidence is beginning

to reveal the negative effect of gambling adverts. Research from Australia suggests that advertising exposure through "push marketing", such as promotional text messages, uses techniques to reduce the perception of risk – for instance, by showing gamblers winning – and can result in them betting for longer and losing more money, while believing that these bets are less risky.

Perhaps more worrying is the potential impact of this advertising on people (under-18s) not old enough to gamble legally. Evidence suggests that gambling adverts on TV and social media capture their attention.

An Australian study found that not only could young people recall the names of sports betting brands, they were also able to describe distinctive features of brands (such as colour) and accurately match brands with promotions.

Similar results have been found in the UK, with children and teenagers, age eight to 16, identified as "super-fans" – who



WHERE THE MONEY IS: It's West Ham versus Newcastle United, and both teams display betting company logos on the front of their shirts.

watch a lot of football on TV – being more likely to be able to match sponsor brands to club logos.

The potential effect of this on subsequent behaviour is worrying. A fifth of the young people (age 11-16) in the Australian study indicated that they wanted to try gambling. In Britain, it was reported that 14 percent of children aged 11-16 had gambled in the past week, with 1.7 percent of those aged 11-16 classified as “problem” gamblers and 2.2 percent as “at risk” of problem gambling.

Our latest research shows that for young adults the strongest motive to gamble is increased excitement. In televised sporting events, gambling adverts ramp up the feeling of excitement and give the perception that gambling is a fundamental part of watching sports.

Concerns about the exposure of young people to gambling adverts have already and led to voluntary industry commitments, such as the new “whistle-to-whistle” ban on gambling advertising during televised sports (except horse racing) before 9pm. But embedded promotions, such as stadium sponsorship, league sponsorship, promotional logos on team uniforms and pitch signage, are not covered by this measure and so remain visible to viewers.

Critics of embedded promotion are most concerned with its subtle and deceptive assimilation into live screen time. From this perspective, the promotional intent is concealed, as the gambling-endorsing advertisements are carefully integrated into the spectator’s emotional experience.

This was perhaps no more aptly demonstrated than by high-profile former England captain Wayne Rooney signing for Derby County – an English second-tier club sponsored by the betting brand 32Red – and being assigned the number 32 shirt, a move the sports minister, Nigel Adams, called “very crafty”.

We are currently researching the social impact of gambling and looking at developing screening measures to identify people at risk of gambling harm. Existing screening measures, used by addiction and recovery services, are ineffective and open to misinterpretation. A consequence of this is the possibility of the under-representation of gambling harm in the population and the perception that “problem gamblers” are a tiny minority. Gambling has become increasingly advanced and accessible and this potentially puts many more people at risk than previously indicated.

As global research has established the problems that gambling can cause, the UK government now needs to impose strict tobacco-like restrictions on gambling adverts, and break the perception that gambling and sport are integral to each other. **CT**

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Chris Hedges and **Stephen Kinzer** show how US intelligence agencies kidnapped, tortured and executed people for clandestine mind control experiments

Inside the dark world of invisible government

THERE are two forms of government in the United States. There is the visible government – the White House, Congress, the courts, state legislatures and governorships – and the invisible government, or deep state, where anonymous technocrats, intelligence operatives, generals, bankers, corporations and lobbyists manage foreign and domestic policy regardless of which political party holds a majority.

The most powerful and important organs in the invisible government are the nation's bloated and unaccountable intelligence agencies. They are the vanguard of the invisible government. They oversee a vast "black world", tasked with maintaining the invisible government's lock on power. They spy on and smear domestic and foreign critics, fix elections, bribe, extort, torture, assassinate and flood the airwaves with "black propaganda".

They are impervious to the chaos and human destruction

they leave in their wake. Disasters, social upheavals, economic collapses, massive suffering, death and rabid anti-American blowback have grown out of the invisible government's overthrow of democratically elected governments in Iran, Guatemala and Chile and the wars it fostered in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria.

The United States and the rest of the globe would be far safer if our self-styled shadow warriors – who failed to foresee the Iranian revolution, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the 9/11 attacks or the absence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, and whose widespread use of torture makes them the most potent recruiters for radical jihadism – were made accountable to the public and the rule of law.

There are periodic glimpses of the moral squalor and ineptitude that define this shadow world, such as those provided by the 1970s hearings led by Sen. Frank Church and the leaking

of photographs of prisoners being tortured at Abu Ghraib in Iraq. But those who attempt to defy or expose the pernicious inner workings, including Edward Snowden and Julian Assange, are usually discredited, persecuted, silenced and sometimes "disappeared".

The invisible government justifies its secrecy and criminality as necessary in the face of existential threats, posed first by communism and later by Islamic terrorism. The ends always justify the means. Anything, no matter how immoral or criminal, is permissible.

The best window we have into this shadow world comes with historical accounts of its crimes, including those in Stephen Kinzer's new book, *Prisoner in Chief: Sidney Gottlieb and the CIA Search for Mind Control*. The black sites and torture techniques pioneered by the Central Intelligence Agency in the decades after World War II – developments that saw people kidnapped, tortured and often executed – were "an



POISONER IN CHIEF

Sidney Gottlieb and the
CIA Search for Mind Control

Stephen Kinzer

Henry Holt and Co, New York

\$30

indispensable link in this grim chain”, he writes.

The medical experiments carried out by the Nazis in concentration camps and the Japanese in the occupied Chinese region of Manchuria elicited two responses after World War II. There were some in the visible government who sought to hold the war criminals accountable. But there were many in the invisible government who wanted to obtain and exploit the results of these experiments and recruit the war criminals who had overseen them to work for US intelligence services and the military.

The backgrounds of the Nazi scientists who had directed chemical and biological warfare projects, murdering thousands of helpless victims, including children, with agents such as the gas sarin, were sanitised by the invisible government in what became known as Operation Paperclip. No criminal, including Kurt Blome, who had overseen the Nazis’ research into biological warfare, was too heinous or sadistic for the United States to welcome and use.

“Whenever a scientist they coveted turned out to have a blemish on his record, they rewrote his biography”, Kinzer

writes. “They systematically expunged references to membership in the SS, collaboration with the Gestapo, abuse of slave labourers, and experiments on human subjects. Applicants who had been rated by interrogators as ‘ardent Nazi’ were re-categorised as ‘not an ardent Nazi’. References to their exemplary family lives were added. Once they had been thus ‘bleached’, they became suitable candidates for Paperclip contracts”.

Shiro Ishii, who between 1936 and 1942 killed as many as 12,000 captured Chinese soldiers, anti-Japanese partisans, Koreans, Mongolians, prisoners, mental patients and, by some accounts, American prisoners of war in medical experiments on behalf of the Japanese government, was a highly valued asset to the invisible government.

Ishii oversaw a four-square-mile complex, called Unit 731, that housed 3,000 scientists and other employees. Kinzer writes that victims “were exposed to poison gas so that their lungs could later be removed and studied; slowly roasted by electricity to determine voltages needed to produce death; hung upside down to study the progress of natural choking; locked into high-pressure chambers until their eyes popped out; spun in centrifuges; infected with anthrax, syphilis, plague, cholera, and other diseases; forcibly impregnated to provide infants for



Men, women, and children were tied to stakes, and ‘their legs and buttocks were bared and exposed to shrapnel from anthrax bombs exploded yards away’

vivisection; bound to stakes to be incinerated by soldiers testing flamethrowers; and slowly frozen to observe the progress of hypothermia. Air was injected into victims’ veins to provoke embolisms; animal blood was injected to see what effect it would have. Some were dissected alive, or had limbs amputated so attendants could monitor their slow deaths by bleeding and gangrene.

According to a US Army report that was later declassified, groups of men, women, and children were tied to stakes so that ‘their legs and buttocks were bared and exposed to shrapnel from anthrax bombs

exploded yards away,’ then monitored to see how long they lived – which was never more than a week. Ishii required a constant flow of human organs, meaning a steady need for ‘logs’ [the euphemism for victims]”.

After each experiment, “Ishii’s microbiologists would meticulously remove tissue samples and mount them on slides for study”, Kinzer writes. “Technicians used their research to prepare poisoned chocolate and chewing gum, as well as hairpins and fountain pens rigged with toxin-coated needles for use in close-quarters killing. In industrial-scale laboratories they bred plague-infested fleas and manufactured tons of anthrax that were placed in bomb casings and used to kill thousands of Chinese civilians”.

America’s invisible government went to great lengths to recruit Ishii and obtain the extensive records and slides from his gruesome experiments. These types of experiments would soon be replicated by the CIA in a top-secret program, MK-ULTRA, with the assistance of Ishii and an assortment of ex-Nazis.

Kinzer builds his book around Sidney Gottlieb, an elusive, quirky and powerful operative in the CIA who in his quest for mind control – something he and others in the CIA had convinced themselves the Soviets had mastered – oversaw medical experiments that had been originated by his German and

Japanese collaborators. These experiments were coded-named Bluebird and later Artichoke, which Kinzer calls “one of the most violently abusive projects ever sponsored by an agency of the United States government”.

The torture sessions often permanently shattered the minds of his subjects. Victims were kidnapped (later this would be called “extraordinary rendition”) and sent to clandestine centres around the globe – now known as “black sites” – or were picked from the prison population abroad and at home. Those forced into taking part in these experiments included impoverished African Americans at the Addiction Research Center in Lexington, Ky. Many of the victims were labelled “expendables”, meaning they could be murdered after the experiments and disappeared. The corpses were usually burned. Anyone who was powerless, or could be made powerless, was a potential target.

Mentally handicapped children at the Walter E. Fernald State School in Massachusetts, for example, were fed cereal laced with uranium and radioactive calcium and their induced sicknesses were monitored. Gottlieb oversaw the administering of LSD and other drugs to induce psychotic states at the federal prison in Atlanta and a youth correctional facility in Bordentown, N.J. None of his subjects consented to being a human guinea pig, and many ended up psychologically impaired for life. The Boston gangster James “Whitey”



Mentally handicapped children in Massachusetts, were fed cereal laced with uranium and radioactive calcium and their induced sicknesses were monitored

Bolger, being held in the Atlanta penitentiary, was told he would be part of an experiment on curing schizophrenia but then was surreptitiously given LSD nearly every day for 15 months. CIA scientists also conducted experiments on terminally ill patients at an annex of Georgetown University Hospital in Washington, DC.

Gottlieb searched for years for a cocktail of drugs that, in Kinzer’s words, would draw “prisoners away from their identities, induce them to reveal secrets, and perhaps even programme them to commit acts against their will”.

It was a vain quest. But with

each failure he and the CIA became ever more zealous, working closely with former German Gen. Walter Schreiber, the onetime surgeon general of the Nazi army who had “approved experiments at the Auschwitz, Ravensbrück, and Dachau concentration camps in which inmates were frozen, injected with mescaline and other drugs, and cut open so the progress of gangrene on their bones could be monitored”.

Kinzer adds that according to one American researcher, the experiments “usually resulted in a slow and agonising death”.

Gottlieb had a habit of secretly lacing the drinks of colleagues with LSD to see their reaction. Some never recovered. One of his victims was Frank Olson, a CIA scientist who was appalled by the brutal interrogations he witnessed and planned to resign from the CIA. Gottlieb and his secretive group of torturers and assassins were terrified Olson would go public. Olson was found dead in 1953 on a sidewalk in Manhattan after allegedly diving through a hotel window. His son Eric had his father’s body exhumed in 1994 and turned over to James Starrs, a forensic pathologist at George Washington University in the District of Columbia. “Starrs had found no glass shards on the victim’s head or neck, as might be expected if he had dived through a window”, Kinzer writes. “Most intriguingly, although Olson had reportedly landed on his back,

the skull above his left eye was disfigured”.

“I would venture to say that this hematoma is singular evidence of the possibility that Dr. Olson was struck a stunning blow to the head by some person or instrument prior to his exiting through the window of room 1018A”, Starrs concluded.

Starrs was later more emphatic: “I think Frank Olson was intentionally, deliberately, with malice aforethought, thrown out of that window”.

Gottlieb also oversaw the production of an array of poisons intended to be used on leaders and others deemed hostile to the United States, including Patrice Lumumba and Fidel Castro. He and the CIA pursued bizarre schemes, including finding a chemical that would make Castro’s beard fall out, leaving the Cuban leader, in the minds of CIA operatives, open to ridicule that would result in his overthrow.

The CIA also experimented with implanting electrodes in brains to control behaviour. “‘An Agency team flew to Saigon in July 1968; among them were a neurosurgeon and a neurologist ...’”, Kinzer says in quoting a study of American intelligence. “‘In a closed-off compound at Bien Hoa Hospital, the Agency team set to work. Three Vietcong prisoners had been selected by the local station. How or why they were chosen would remain uncertain. In turn each man was anaesthetised and, after he



Each man was anaesthetised and, after he had hinged back a flap in their skulls, the neurosurgeon implanted tiny electrodes in each brain

had hinged back a flap in their skulls, the neurosurgeon implanted tiny electrodes in each brain. When the prisoners regained consciousness, the behaviourists set to work. ... The prisoners were placed in a room and given knives. Pressing the control buttons on their handsets, the behaviourists tried to arouse their subjects to violence. Nothing happened. For a whole week the doctors tried to make the men attack each other. Baffled at their lack of success, the team flew back to Washington. As previously arranged in case of failure, while the physicians were still in the air the prisoners were shot by

Green Beret troopers and their bodies burned’ ”.

The depth of moral squalor and criminality that can be reached by those given unlimited resources, no oversight or public accountability and total secrecy is breathtaking. Gottlieb and the CIA lured clueless victims in New York City to a “safe house” on Bedford Street and gave them drinks laced with LSD. CIA operatives directed by the thuggish George Hunter White monitored the effects.

“[White] regularly used illegal drugs, keeping for himself a share of whatever he confiscated”, Kinzer writes. “His consumption of alcohol – often a full bottle of gin with dinner – was legendary. His other appetite was sexual fetish, especially sadomasochism and high heels. He bought his second wife a closet full of boots, and patronised prostitutes who bound and whipped him. One of his few emotional bonds was with his pet canary. He loved to hold and stroke it. When the bird died, he was deeply pained. ‘Poor little bastard just couldn’t make it’, he wrote in his diary. ‘I don’t know if I’ll ever get another bird or pet. It’s tough on everyone when they die’ ”.

White, who as a narcotics officer had hounded and often framed jazz musicians including Billie Holiday, was later moved to a safe house in San Francisco that functioned as a CIA brothel. Gottlieb, Kinzer writes, “wanted to systematise the study of how sex, especially in combination with drugs, could loosen men’s tongues”.

The prostituted women were hired by the CIA to lure clients to bedrooms, decorated with photos of manacled women in black stockings and studded leather collars, and lace their drinks with LSD and other drugs.

“While his prostitutes and their clients had sex, White would watch through a one-way mirror, sitting on his portable toilet”, Kinzer writes. Gottlieb, on visits to the safe house, demanded the women have sex with him as if they were part of his personal harem.

White was given a second safe house in Marin County outside San Francisco where he used his prostituted women not only to drug men but test an array of Little-Shop-of-Horrors gadgets on his victims, including stink bombs, itching powder, sneezing powder, diarrhoea inducers, drug-laced swizzle sticks and aerosol cans filled with LSD.

After the long quest for a mind-control drug was abandoned, the CIA destroyed most of the records of its experiments. White, in a letter to Gottlieb thanking him for hiring him, wrote: “Where else could a red-blooded American boy lie, kill, cheat, steal, rape and pillage with the sanction and blessing of the All-Highest? Pretty good stuff, Brudder!” That would make a far more honest motto for the CIA than the biblical passage from John 8:32 carved on the walls of its original headquarters at Langley, Va: “And

ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free”.

Prisoners, the CIA eventually concluded, were best broken through extreme isolation and sensory deprivation. These techniques, pioneered by CIA-funded research at McGill University in Canada, were laid out in a 1964 manual titled *KUBARK Counter-Intelligence Interrogation*. KUBARK is the CIA’s cryptonym for itself. The 128-page manual was not fully declassified until 2014. It was the primary resource used by CIA interrogators in the 1960s, including in Vietnam, where at least 20,000 captured Vietnamese were killed, often after being tortured.

An updated version of the manual called *Human Resources Exploitation Training Manual* came out in 1983. These forms of torture, which include shackling, sleep deprivation, electroshock, sexual and physical humiliation, prolonged cramped confinement, and hooding for disorientation and sensory deprivation, became routine after 9/11 in American intelligence black sites at home and abroad. CIA psychologists, like Gottlieb’s earlier stable of mad scientists and torturers, monitor and perfect these techniques to ensure complete psychological collapse and a childlike dependence on the interrogator.

It would be naive to relegate the behaviour of Gottlieb and the CIA to the past, especially since the invisible government has once again shrouded the activities of intelligence agen-

cies from congressional oversight or public scrutiny and installed a proponent of torture, Gina Haspel, as the head of the agency.

When an intelligence service resorts to torture, it has failed. When it relies on sadists and thugs, it has failed. When it treats human beings, including its own citizens, as unwitting pawns to be experimented upon and murdered, it has failed. When it uses dirty tricks, provides billions of dollars in weapons to renegade militias and Islamic radicals, overthrows governments and assassinates leaders, leaving in its wake mayhem and disasters it did not foresee, it has failed.

Intelligence gathering, like investigative reporting, is a process that requires immense patience, trusted sources cultivated over long periods and a cultural, historical and linguistic literacy that is the result of years of study. It is not a summer camp for creeps who revel in human degradation, dirty tricks and murder. All countries need good intelligence officials and agents, not the buffoons, gangsters, sadists and killers who, in the name of national security, do us so much damage. **CT**

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Chris Hedges is a *Truthdig* columnist, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, a *New York Times* best-selling author, a professor in the college degree program offered to New Jersey state prisoners by Rutgers. This essay first appeared at www.truthdig.com



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DAY JOB: Linh Dinh at the plastic recycling plant where he works at Ea Kly in Vietnam.

Most writers devote their time to writing and reading, not painting houses, cleaning toilets, or washing dishes. **Linh Dinh** is the exception

Sweating out my words

THERE is a dearth of writing about work, its variety, tedium and grind. This is understandable, since most writers have devoted much of their time to writing and reading, and not painting houses, cleaning toilets, washing dishes, planting crops or performing mind numbingly monotonous tasks on an assembly line, etc. This blind spot or ignorance has become worse in

contemporary America, where your typical writer spends nearly his entire adulthood inside academia. There is no more surreal theme park than a college campus.

During my few cameo appearances as a university professor, I'd encourage students to write about their work experiences, especially if they appear pointless, for this in itself is meaningful, as hard as it is to

believe as you're flipping endless beef patties, with burnt marks on your fingers, grease in your hair and sweat on your face, dreaming of sleep.

I'm typing this during stolen moments while working at a plastic recycling plant. Our grinding machine is chopping sorted yellow plastic into bits. Its loud, constant roar is a muscular, minimalist music that's punctuated by the sure hack-



FIT ONLY FOR A DOG: Lou the puppy enjoys nosing around in the filth for jars of fermented shrimp paste.

ing of our steadfast women, who must remove metal from plastic, separate all the colours. Heliophobic and stench averse, most have their faces well-covered, lest they darken or sniff something too foul or even toxic. Among the plastic garbage are not quite empty bottles of insecticides or weed killers, with one advertised as having the “Strength of a German tank”!

The worst funk, though, comes from jars or bottles of fermented shrimp paste. Even when fresh and delicious, this purplish delicacy already smells like garbage. It can hearten, complicate and anchor a broth, or be mixed with lime juice and chili pepper to serve as a dip for boiled meat. Our

puppy, though, likes it fine raw, as fished from our many tons of plastic trash, and it’s useless to chastise Lou for her bad taste or derelict table manners.

With its iron stomach, a dog will lap up dish water or even eat shit. Last time I checked, I wasn’t a dog. While sorting through some plastic garbage yesterday, I touched something that looked, smelled and felt exactly like shit, but maybe it wasn’t, I optimistically hoped. At least I didn’t have to eat it.

As a house and office cleaner for several years, I’m not unfamiliar with that malodorous purview. I’ve written in a poem, *Belonging to the lower class, you’re expected / To cater*

to the upper class’ lower bodily functions, / Not to engage their minds but to wipe their asses, / Kiss their cunts on demand, suck cocks for tips.

The lower you’re on the ladder, the more buttocks you have to stare up at, the more shit you must deal with, the more unpleasantness you’re forced to swallow, and this goes for entire societies, and that’s why plastic recycling is only feasible in a poorer country like Vietnam.

Our sorters work at their own pace and, to leaven their days, chatter and joke, so you’ll hear laughter episodically, for felicitous language is the cheapest entertainment. Visiting large factories, I’ve witnessed assembly lines and isolated workstations where humans

functioned like machines, but that's the whole point. Their mind is supposed to be blank, and their spirit snuffed out, so there is nothing left but the task. They can't slow down or even speed up. Just do it! I'm glad we're more primitive.

Repeatedly overburdened by loads beyond their stature and calling, some men quit, sometimes after mere days, though most are way tougher than their size suggests. This place stinks. A young man throws up, a woman must lie down and well tucked metal shards will cut through rubber sandals and draw blood, but days will go by uneventfully, tediously, as folks soldier on, waiting for pay day.

We bring nearly three tons of plastic garbage a day, so we swim and wade through the stuff. Trash, we live garbage, with a smile.

Though the oldest at our plant at 55, I'm the foreman, so don't have to bust my ass like the others. Still, it's a half marathon. A constant sweater, I rehydrate myself with Zero Degree iced tea, hot matcha tea or an ungodly concoction of hot water, spicy instant noodle seasoning and soy sauce. Though obviously nutrition-free, this broth yields a jolt of energy, or at least quickens my senses, thus lessening fatigue.

One of our strongest workers likes to reward himself with plenty of beer or rice wine after work, but Diep has missed two days already this week, so should be fired tomorrow. It's unfortunate, since I've drank

and eaten with this guy, and find his conversations alert and funny.

Many among us get together to feast, get drunk, joke, share stories and sing songs of love and loss going back half a century. With a shared heritage, our lives have meanings, and that's why we work, not just to eat. A poet may leave us with just one memorable phrase, but that's enough, and he should do at least that. Often, there's a woman who takes pride in out-drinking any man.

Diep reminds me of a Philly friend, Jay, for not only would they drink themselves out of a job, but they're both good looking enough to expect someone to accommodate them always, so if a door should close, another must soon open. They imagine life to be an endless series of open legs. It is rare to be blessed with such a curse. For such a man, even pussies can get tiresome.

Jay was my housemate for a year, and we were on the same housepainting crew. In the morning, we'd leave the house together, but once, Jay lagged behind on the walk to the bus stop, so missed the bus, and was fired.

We actually occupied an unheated loft, over a printing shop that steadily exhaled noxious fume through our floorboards. Like us, Jay's two cats often froze. When Betty became gravely ill, Jay had to deliver her from this earth with a soiled pillow. We were trying

to become artists.

It's apt for American bars to pitch afterwork boozing "happy hour," for it is the happiest, though many drink sullenly, alone, like Johnny the Hat at my old neighbourhood haunt, Friendly Lounge. Enough Jamesons downed, the 55-ish car mechanic would cordially say goodbye to each before weaving home, but sometimes, he'd turn nasty, as when he growled at Aurelia, "When did they let you out of the zoo?"

At 19, I heard some old guy wheeze, "I like to work because it makes my food taste better, and I sleep better," and I do agree that physical exhaustion makes just about anything delicious, and sleep become heavenly, but what I had for lunch today may challenge this thesis.

I wiped the dirt off my hair, face and neck, then sat down in my grimy tank top to enjoy Cung Dinh [Royal Palace] brand's Kool Spaghetti, and on the label, there's a convincing image of some firm and long pasta covered with a crimson meat sauce, with even fresh basil on top. Opening the plastic lid, your kingship discovered that it's just ordinary instant noodles, with two seasoning packets. Combined, they yielded a measly, greasy paste that's slightly sweet and almost tomato free. Paying only 60 cents for this mess, I had no right to kvetch, and I did in fact wolf it down, like a poofed, famished dog.

The poetry quoted above was published in *Harper's*, my one appearance in that magazine, and I was surprised they had

wanted such a naked depiction of working class life. I've never been a Harper's reader and didn't submit. In my early 20's, I did subscribe to the New Yorker and New York Times, but the social milieus they depicted, especially in the ads, seemed super exotic to me. What fanciful travels, restaurants and nightclubs, and what preposterous prices, even those touted as bargains! It's a different world.

Occupying the top half, many will vehemently defend the bottom, in theory, without any intimacy with it, with some openly despising it, but these ignorant trash must be spoken for, so exclaim the righteous snobs.

Illegal immigration is a classic example of this. Although this stream of cheap labor benefits the ownership class while hurting the poorest, it is presented, often earnestly, as an act of solidarity with the downtrodden. Blacks, brown citizens and legal immigrants are among illegal immigration's worst victims, and of course, poor whites, but if these dare to demand their lowly jobs back, they must be racists! No wonder so many are killing themselves.

I'm across the globe from all that. Here, 9/11 came and went without anyone remembering anything. It's someone else's fairy tale.

It's past five, so I'm done. I can't wait to eat, then lie down.

Tomorrow, I'll get up before four to read some, then be at Mrs. Ha's cafe as dawn pales



MOTORCYCLE TAXI MAN: Once a cop, he was fired for marrying a woman who was a security risk.

over our negligible village. Each morning, a hen leads her chicks across our empty gas station, with each bird perusing the ground, when not pecking. Pinned cocks crow. Since it's rice harvesting time, tractor trucks bring Rade farmhands to paddies. Black peppers wait their turn. Durians drop. So much land and work to fill just one scrawny belly.

Slumped in a corner where my head can rest, I'll have two cups of slow drip Perfect coffee with condensed milk, plus unlimited green tea, free of charge. The tin tea pot is labelled Phoenix. I am indeed royalty. Once, I showed up with my shirt inside out and my fly unzipped, but no one said shit. I've discovered my true calling as the village idiot. When not serving customers, Mrs. Ha lies on a hammock or laughs as she watches dating shows on television.

Her cafe is also a tiny store and parking garage, and she charges just 22 cents a day for commuters to park a

motorbike.

"This is just the country, uncle."

"And they can keep it here until what time?"

"Seven or eight."

"And if they don't pick it up by then?"

"I'll just lock up, then go to sleep. Sometimes, though, a man would get drunk, show up in the dark to bang on my gate."

"And you'd let him have his bike?"

"Of course, but that'd the last time he parks here!"

Sharing my plastic table will be a motorbike taxi man. Once a cop, he was fired for marrying a tribal woman, a security risk. Seeing me, he rarely fails to gleefully shout, "How many cups already? Two? Four?" Whenever I tried to introduce a new topic, he'd just grin, this worn man of few words. Practically mindless, perhaps he's a Zen master? Last week, I spotted a T-shirt, "THINK LESS LIVE MORE." Deep, man.

Luridly dressed as if going to a party, with a large, blood red rose on the back of her black jacket, a middle-aged lady will totter on the cheapest high heels across the road, to wait for a bus to deliver her to her daily toiling. She'll bend until she's bent.

At 6:40, I'll stroll to mine. **CT**

Linh Dinh's latest books are "Postcards from the End of America" (non-fiction) and "A Mere Rica" (poetry). He maintains a photo blog at www.linhdinhphotos.blogspot.ca

For the sake of life on Earth, we should set an upper limit on the money any person can amass, writes **George Monbiot**

Why there should be a limit on wealth

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IT is not quite true that behind every great fortune lies a great crime. Musicians and novelists, for example, can become extremely rich by giving other people pleasure. But it does appear to be universally true that in front of every great fortune lies a great crime. Immense wealth translates automatically into immense environmental impacts, regardless of the intentions of those who possess it. The very wealthy, almost as a matter of definition, are committing ecocide.

A few weeks ago, I received a letter from a worker at a British private airport. “I see things that really shouldn’t be happening in 2019,” he wrote. Every day he sees Global 7000 jets, Gulfstream 650s and even Boeing 737s take off from the airport carrying a single passenger, mostly flying to Russia and the US. The private Boeing 737s, built to take 174 seats, are filled at the airport with around 32,000 litres of fuel. That’s as much fossil energy as

a small African town might use in a year.

Where are these single passengers going? Perhaps to visit one of their superhomes, constructed and run at vast environmental cost, or to take a trip on their superyacht, which might burn 500 litres of diesel per hour just ticking over, and is built and furnished with rare materials, extracted at the expense of stunning places.

Perhaps we shouldn’t be surprised to learn that when Google convened a meeting of the rich and famous at the Verdura resort in Sicily this July to discuss climate breakdown, its delegates arrived in 114 private jets and a fleet of megayachts, and drove around the island in supercars. Even when they mean well, the ultrarich cannot help trashing the living world.

A series of research papers shows that income is by far the most important determinant of environmental impact. It doesn’t matter how green you think you are. If you have surplus money, you spend it. The

only form of consumption that’s clearly and positively correlated with good environmental intentions is diet: people who see themselves as green tend to eat less meat and more organic vegetables. But attitudes have little bearing on the amount of transport fuel, home energy and other materials you consume. Money conquers all.

The disastrous effects of spending power are compounded by the psychological impacts of being wealthy. Plenty of studies show that the richer you are, the less you are able to connect with other people. Wealth suppresses empathy. One paper reveals that drivers in expensive cars are less likely to stop for people using pedestrian crossings than drivers in cheap cars. Another revealed that rich people were less able than poorer people to feel compassion towards children with cancer. Though they are disproportionately responsible for our environmental crises, the rich will be hurt least and last by planetary disaster, while the poor are

hurt first and worst. The richer people are, the research suggests, the less such knowledge is likely to trouble them.

Another issue is that wealth limits the perspectives of even the best-intentioned people. This week Bill Gates argued in an interview with the Financial Times that divesting (ditching stocks) from fossil fuels is a waste of time. It would be better, he claimed, to pour money into disruptive new technologies with lower emissions. Of course we need new technologies. But he has missed the crucial point: in seeking to prevent climate breakdown, what counts is not what you do but what you stop doing. It doesn't matter how many solar panels you install if you don't simultaneously shut down coal and gas burners. Unless existing fossil fuel plants are retired before the end of their lives, and all exploration and development of new fossil fuels reserves is cancelled, there is little chance of preventing more than 1.5°C of global heating.

But this requires structural change, which involves political intervention as well as technological innovation: anathema to Silicon Valley billionaires. It demands an acknowledgement that money is not a magic wand that makes all the bad stuff go away.

On September 20, I joined the global climate strike, in which

adults stood with the young people whose call to action has resonated around the world. As a freelancer, I've been wondering who I'm striking against. Myself? Yes: one aspect of myself, at least. Perhaps the most radical thing we can now do is to limit our material aspirations. The assumption on which governments and economists operate is that everyone strives to maximise their wealth. If we succeed in this task, we inevitably demolish our life support systems. Were the poor to live



Private jet unloads passengers in the Maldivian Islands

like the rich, and the rich to live like the oligarchs, we would destroy everything. The continued pursuit of wealth, in a world that has enough already (albeit very poorly distributed) is a formula for mass destitution.

A meaningful strike in defence of the living world is, in part, a strike against the desire to raise our incomes and accumulate wealth: a desire shaped, more than we are probably aware, by dominant social and economic narratives. I see myself as striking in support of a radical and disturbing concept: Enough. Individually and collectively, it is time to

decide what enough looks like, and how to know when we've achieved it.

There's a name for this approach, coined by the Belgian philosopher Ingrid Robeyns: limitarianism. Robeyns argues that there should be an upper limit to the amount of income and wealth a person can amass. Just as we recognise a poverty line, below which no one should fall, we should recognise a riches line, above which no one should rise. This call for a levelling down is perhaps the most blasphemous idea in contemporary discourse.

But her arguments are sound. Surplus money allows some people to exercise inordinate power over others, in the workplace, in politics, and above all in the capture, use and destruction of natural wealth. If everyone is to flourish, we cannot afford the rich. Nor can we afford our own aspirations, that the culture of wealth maximisation encourages.

The rich are able to live as they do only because others are poor: there is neither the physical nor ecological space for everyone to pursue private luxury. Instead we should strive for private sufficiency, public luxury. Life on earth depends on moderation.

CT

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George Monbiot is a columnist at the Guardian, where this was first published. His website is www.monbiot.com

ALONG HIGHWAY 61

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A photographic
journey with
Jessica Lange





Photo: Jessica Lange, Highway 61 / powerHouse Books



This page:
Minnesota

Next page:
Arkansas



“**I**N 1965 I bought my first album, *Highway 61 Revisited*, by a fellow Minnesotan. Dylan’s Highway was different from mine, but he put it out there. He made it seem important. And I felt like I was in on the secret”, writes Oscar-winning actress Jessica Lange in the text accompanying the stark, grainy, black and white images in her hefty new photographic volume, *Highway 61*, published this month by New York’s powerHouse books.

The stunning oversized book contains 84 photographs she took along the road, which stretches 1,600 miles through eight states, beginning at Northern Minnesota’s border with Canada, heading due south along the Mississippi River, through the US Midwest and the Mississippi Delta

HIGHWAY 61

Jessica Lange
powerHouse Books
www.powerhousebooks.com
\$75 (US)
\$99 (Canada)



Above and next page: Mississippi

(where it's known as the Blues Highway), before ending at New Orleans, where the now 70-year-old actress now lives. The photographs, she says, "are a chronicle of what remains and what has disappeared. It has a long memory".

Although best known as an actress – she won Oscars for *Tootsie* and *Frances* and numerous TV awards, Lange studied photography at the University of Minnesota, after winning a scholarship in 1967. However, it was only in the 1990s, when her then-partner, playwright and actor Sam Shepard bought her a Leica camera when he returned from a trip to Germany, that she began to shoot seriously, documenting her travels in black and white photographs. She released her first book, *50 Photographs*, in 2008, followed by *In Mexico* a couple of years later. Her third book, *It's About A Little Bird*, was a departure: a children's picture book originally produced for her grandkids that featured 40 pages of hand-coloured images.

In the afterword to *Highway 61*, Lange quotes lines from a song by blues musician Roosevelt Sykes:

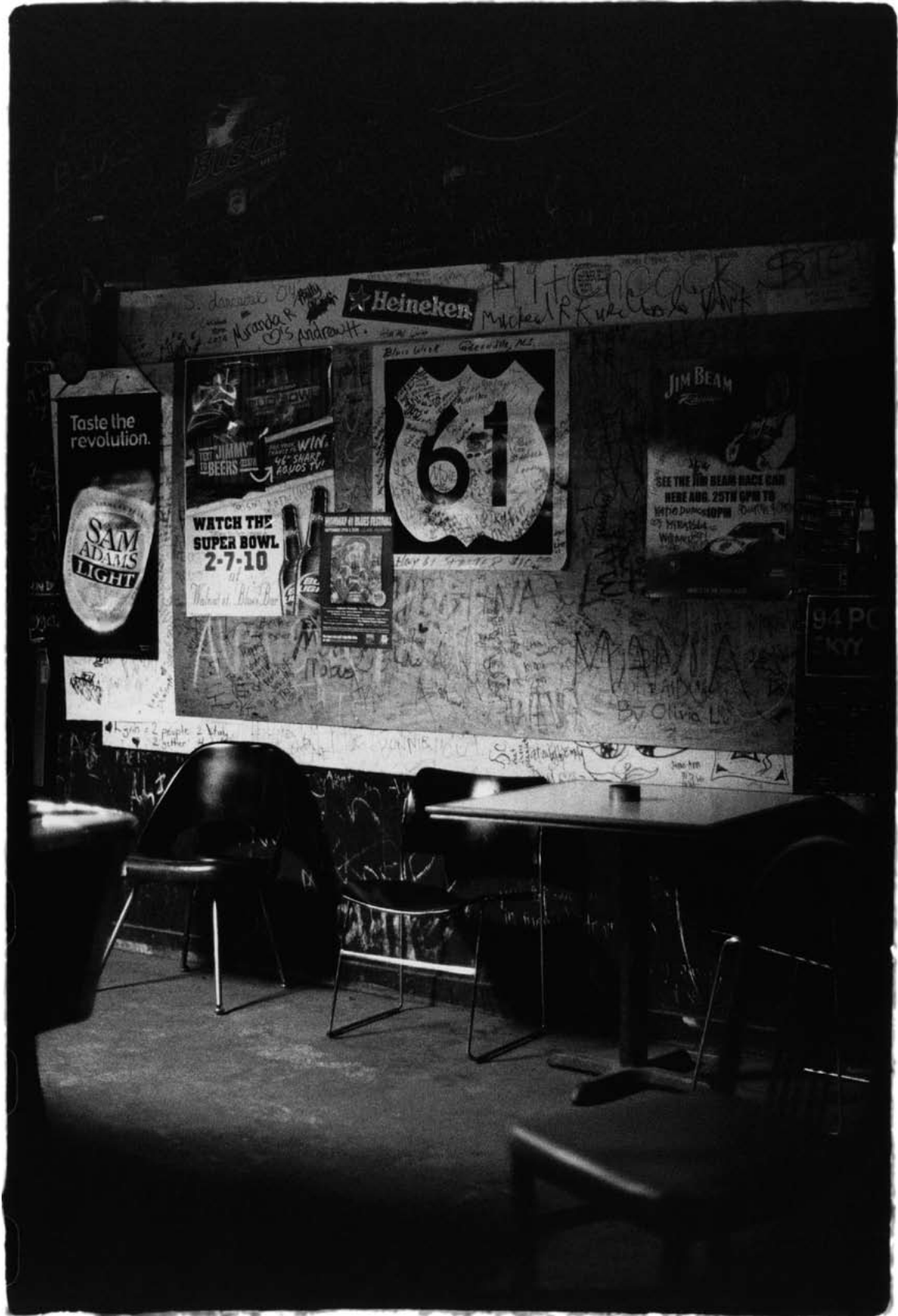
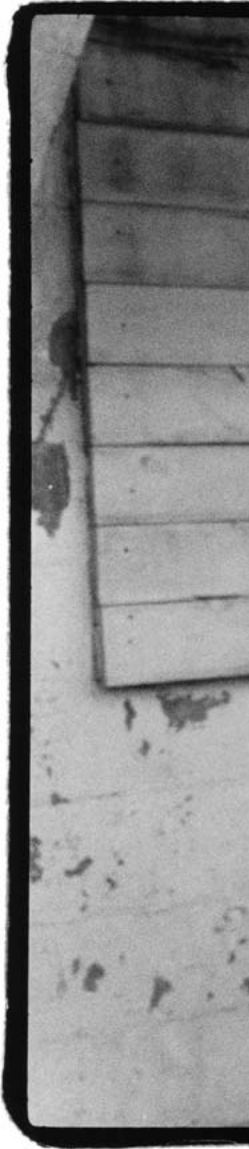


Photo: Jessica Lange, Highway 61 / powerHouse Books





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*Lord, it wrecked my heart
to think about Highway 61
I felt so blue, Lord, while I was out on that lonely highway ...*

Above and
previous page:
New Orleans

She adds, “I felt that loneliness as a child and I feel it even more acutely now. Long stretches of 61 are empty, forlorn, as if in mourning for what has gone missing – the hometowns, the neighbourhoods, family farms, factories, and mills. Even the strip malls have failed. Stores all boarded up, weeds growing through the asphalt of countless vacant parking lots. Some of the people left, creating a ghostly beauty in their leave-taking. Some remain, perhaps yearning for that more vibrant past but reluctant to abandon the place called home.

“If, as Roland Barthes says, ‘every photograph is a certificate of presence’, then these photographs are a chronicle of what I witnessed along and near Highway 61. It has been a long drive, wrapped in my story”.

— *Tony Sutton*

The latest version of the Joker's story comes at a time of widespread public cynicism about our national leaders, writes **Ari Mattes**

Clowns – in comedy and politics – define our times

THE joker, the trickster, the jester, the provocateur - there is a rich cultural history of these roles going back at least as far as Greek mythology's Hermes.

One of the most famous jester figures of the modern age is the Joker, who made his debut in the first issue of *Batman* comics in 1940. As Batman's arch-nemesis, the Joker offers a reprieve from the less interesting narcissistic, angst-ridden histrionics of the hero. The Joker's punishment of society is often comical, and his relentlessly ironic spirit of rebellion contrasts with Batman's dour moral self-righteousness.

The Joker is funny, cool, and refreshingly intelligent. He is also back in theatres in the aptly named *Joker*, which won the award for Best Film at the Venice Film Festival.

In a deck of cards the joker is (most of the time) formally useless. The two joker cards are omitted from most games, yet the deck is incomplete without

them. The joker is a necessary non-card, the exception that glues together the rest of the pack. A card of shifting rank and use, the joker offers a spark of improvisation within a rigidly hierarchical order.

Culturally, the joker reaffirms the social order through his lampooning of it, turning socially significant places into spaces of carnival and clowning, revealing the comical and absurd cracks in a spirit of anarchic play.



The first comic-book appearance of the Joker.

Yet this role has always been intimately tied up with the institutions it appears to subvert. The court jester, for example, functioned in part to legitimise the social order. He maintained a performative relationship with the people, but his acts of subversion of power reaffirmed its very boundaries in the first place.

There are many of these self-styled “maverick” figures in global politics today, who strategically position themselves as somehow outside of the power structures they in fact serve to reproduce.

The words and actions of such provocateurs flirting with the boundaries of social good taste and etiquette should always be taken with a grain of salt. Power can reproduce itself in multiple ways – including through its apparent critique.

Within the Batman franchise, the most effective characterisations of the Joker have him tottering dangerously between comedic whimsy and psychopathic sadism – that lim-



PLAYING FOR LAUGHS: Joaquin Phoenix in *Joker* (2019): the Joker’s humour-filled rebellion has typically contrasted with Batman’s dour moral self-righteousness.

inal space in which, arguably, all great comedy occurs.

Perhaps the greatest actor to portray the role is Jack Nicholson in Tim Burton’s *Batman* (1989). Nicholson’s Joker embraces the wackiness of Cesar Romero’s earlier interpretation in the 1960s TV series but adds a genuinely nasty edge, and this combination of colourful zaniness with lethal brutality makes for a disturbing experience for the viewer.

“I make art until someone dies”, Nicholson’s Joker says to journalist Vicki Vale (Kim Basinger) in an art museum after he and his goons have defaced several pieces whilst bopping along to Prince. “See, I am the

world’s first fully functioning homicidal artist”.

By the late 1980s, Nicholson, appearing as the perfect sleazeball in films like *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987), was the man behind some of the most hated characters in cinema. He was, thus, perfectly cast as the Joker – it helps that the Joker’s demonically twisted face isn’t that far from his own.

Nicholson received first billing in *Batman* and, as Roger Ebert commented, the viewer’s tendency is to root for the Joker over Batman. It is this ambiguity that makes Burton’s film so compelling.

Heath Ledger’s Joker from *The Dark Knight* (2008), for which he received a posthumous Best Supporting Actor Oscar, was virtuosically full-bodied. Ledger is eerily, vitally intense. Yet the famous question he asks in the film – “Why so serious?” – could easily be turned back on Ledger’s own performance.

Ledger endows the role with a psychological realism that, paradoxically, makes for a less interesting (and less complex) experience for the viewer than more ambiguous portrayals.

The uncomfortable mixture of the comical and the sadistic is what makes the character perennially appealing – we nev-

er know which Joker we will be getting at any time. Ledger, by making the character “real”, turns him into, merely, a rather humourless creep.

The symbiotic nature of the relationship between Batman and the Joker usually remains unexplored. *Wonderfully, The Lego Batman Movie* (2017) makes this relationship centre stage.

The film follows the Joker (Zach Galifianakis) as he tries to get Batman (Will Arnett) to admit that he needs the Joker as much as the Joker needs him. Batman refuses to acknowledge the bond the two share throughout most of the film; when he finally does, their bromance can fully mature.

The latest version of the Joker is played by Joaquin Phoenix, an actor whose career has oscillated between the absurdly intense (*Walk the Line*) and the disarmingly clownish (*I'm Still Here*). Todd Phillips's film promises to revitalise the character in an origin story following down-on-his-luck comedian/clown Arthur Fleck who transforms into the Joker as his mental health deteriorates.

Early reviews have praised the film's representation of the current political landscape. *Time Out* calls it a “nightmarish vision of late-era capitalism”, and *IndieWire* suggests it is “about the dehumanising effects of a capitalistic system that greases the economic ladder”.

In the context of the incel movement - in which men rally around the perception of their



The Joker card offers ‘a spark of improvisation’.

own unjust victimhood - a narrative of a violent folk hero forming through the failure of his dreams of celebrity glory seems strikingly poignant.

The frequency with which mass shootings now occur in America (in 2012 James Holmes killed 12 people at a screening of *The Dark Night* in Aurora, Colorado) has also lead to concerns about how the story will be read. The same *Indiewire* review criticised the film as “a toxic rallying cry for self-pitying incels”.

Given the necessity for a law and order stalwart against which the Joker can launch his antics, it is notable that there is no Batman in this film. Will the Joker be able to sustain a feature-length narrative on his own?

Clownish figures seem to be becoming the new normal in professional politics. In April,

comedian Volodymyr Zelensky was elected president of the Ukraine. The UK's new prime minister, Boris Johnson, has been dubbed “Bojo” by the press – and they're not just alluding to his name.

And much of the popularity of Donald Trump has emerged from his presentation of himself as an outsider to the elite willing to lampoon and ridicule power – never mind that, as a rich New York City businessman, he is power personified.

The broader significance of this phenomenon is a little trickier to diagnose. It makes sense that, in an age when everything is valued in terms of its entertainment function (and when most people are aware of the common sleights of hand of the mainstream media they consume), clownish reality TV stars, provocateur comedians and gregariously sleazy entrepreneurs would amass unprecedented levels of power in the public domain.

Politicians entertain us by donning the outfit of the jester and making fun of politicians. Perhaps this reflects a more widespread public cynicism regarding professional politics, or perhaps it is simply a reflection of a desire to be perpetually distracted by entertaining clowns.

At any rate, the film should be a hoot to watch. **CT**

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CHANGING THE RULES:
Drone Attack on Saudi oilfield
showed how defenceless
Western interests really are.



Conn Hallinan tells how the recent Saudi oilfield attack changed the balance of military power in the Middle East

Overturning America's Middle East applecart

IN many ways it doesn't really matter who – Houthis in Yemen? Iranians? Shiites in Iraq? – launched those missiles and drones at Saudi Arabia. Whoever did it changed the rules of the game, and not just in the Middle East. “It's a moment when offence laps defence, when the strong have reason to fear the weak”, observes military historian Jack Radey.

Despite a \$68-billion a year defence budget – the third highest spending of any country in the world – with a world-class air force and supposed state-

of-the-art anti-aircraft system, a handful of bargain basement drones and cruise missiles slipped through the Saudi radar and devastated Riyadh's oil economy. All those \$18-million fighter planes and \$3-million-a-pop Patriot anti-aircraft missiles suddenly look pretty irrelevant.

This is hardly an historical first. British dragoons at Concord were better trained and armed than a bunch of Massachusetts farmers, but the

former were 5,000 miles from home and there were lots more of the latter, and so the English got whipped. The French army in Vietnam was far superior in firepower than the Viet Minh, but that didn't count for much in the jungles of Southeast Asia. And the US was vastly more powerful than the insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq, but we still lost both wars.

The September 14 attack on Saudi Arabia's Aramco refineries at Abqaiq and Khurais did more than knock out 50 percent of Saudi Arabia's oil production,

it shook the pillars of Washington's foreign policy in the region and demonstrated the fragility of the world's energy supply.

Since 1945, Washington's policy in the Middle East has been to control the world's major energy supplies by politically and militarily dominating the Persian Gulf, which represents about 15 percent of the globe's resources. The 1979 Carter Doctrine explicitly stated that the US reserved the right to use military force in the case of any threat to the region's oil and gas.

To that end Washington has spread a network of bases throughout the area and keeps one of its major naval fleets, The Fifth, headquartered in the Gulf. It has armed its allies and fought several wars to ensure its primacy in the region.

And all that just got knocked into a cocked hat.

Washington blames Iran, but the evidence for that is dodgy. The Americans have yet to produce a radar map showing where the missiles originated, and even the Trump administration and the Saudi's have scaled back blaming Teheran directly, instead saying the Iranians "sponsored" the attack.

Part of that is plain old-fashioned colonial thought patterns: the "primitive" Houthis couldn't pull this off. In fact, the Houthis have been improving their drone and missile targeting for several years and have

demonstrated considerable skill with the emerging technology.

The US – and, for that matter, the Saudis – have enormous firepower, but the possible consequences of such a response are simply too costly. If 18 drones and seven cruise missiles did this much damage, how much could hundreds do? World oil prices have already jumped 20 percent, how high would they go if there were more successful attacks?

The only way to take out all the missiles and drones would be a ground attack and occupation. And who is going to do that? The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has already begun withdrawing its troops from Yemen and has been holding talks with the Houthis since July, (which is why UAE oil facilities were not attacked this time around). The Saudi army is designed for keeping internal order, especially among Shiites in its Eastern provinces and Bahrain. The princes in Riyadh are far too paranoid about the possibility of a coup to build a regular army.

The US? Going into an election with prices already rising at the pump? In any case, the US military wants nothing to do with another war in the Middle East, not, mind you, because they have suddenly become sensible, but as Gen Joseph F Dunford Jr, chair of the Joints Chiefs of Staff put it, it drains resources from confronting China.

Starting with the administration of George W. Bush, and accelerated during the Obama

presidency's "Asia Pivot", the US military has been preparing for a confrontation with China in the South and/or East China Sea. The Pentagon also has plans to face off Russia in the Baltic.

One suspects that the generals made it clear that, while they can blow up a lot of Iranians, a shooting war would not be cost free. US Patriot missiles can't defend our allies' oilfields (or American bases in the region) and while the anti-missile capabilities on some US naval ships are pretty good, not on all of them are armed with effective systems like the Sea Sparrow. Americans would be coming home in boxes just as the fall election campaign kicked into high gear.

Whether the military got that message through to the Oval Office is not clear, but Trump's dialing down of his rhetoric over Iran suggests it may have.

What happens now? The White House has clearly ruled out a military response in the short run. Trump's speech at the UN focussed on attacking globalism and international cooperation, not Iran. But the standoff is likely to continue unless the Americans are willing to relax some of their "maximum pressure" sanctions as a prelude to a diplomatic solution.

The US is certainly not withdrawing from the Middle East. Despite the fact that shale oil has turned the United States into the world's largest oil pro-

ducer, we still import around a million barrels per day from Saudi Arabia. Europe is much more dependent on Gulf oil, as are the Chinese and Indians. The US is not about to walk away from its 70-plus-year grip on the region.

But the chessboard is not the same as it was six months ago. The Americans may have overwhelming military force in the Middle East, but using it might tank world oil prices and send the West – as well as India and China – into a major recession.

Israel is still the dominant local power, but if it picks a fight with Iran or Hezbollah those drones and cruises will be headed its way. Israel

relies on its “Iron Dome” anti-missile system, but while Iron Dome may do a pretty good job against the primitive missiles used by Hamas, mobile cruises and drones are another matter. While Israel could inflict enormous damage on any of its foes, the price tag could be considerably higher than in the past.

Stalemates can be dangerous because there is an incentive to try and break them by introducing some game changing weapon system. But stalemates also create the possibility for diplomatic solutions. That is certainly the case now. If a more centrist government emerges from this last round

of Israeli elections, Israel may step back from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s relentless campaign against Teheran. And Trump likes “deals,” even though he is not very good at them.

“This is the new strategic balance”, says Editor-In-Chief Prabir Purkayastha in the *Asia Times*, “and the sooner the US and its NATO partners accept it, the quicker we will look for peace in the region”. **CT**

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Conn Hallinan writes a regular column at www.dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com and at middleempireseries.wordpress.com

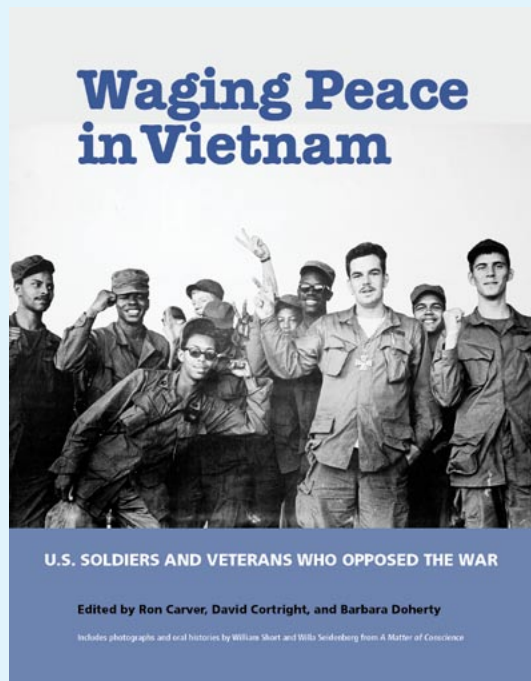
WAGING PEACE IN VIETNAM

U.S. Soldiers and Veterans Who Opposed the War

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Though the forms of US democracy are respected, the stage-management of it all has shifted to ever-darker, ever-smaller, forces skirmishing amongst themselves far from the public spotlight, writes **Philip Kraske**

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9/11 in history: The last stage of American Empire

WAS the purpose of 9/11 to provoke America into an attack on Afghanistan?

It is time to ask if the most spectacular crime in American history was really planned to goad a gargantuan superpower into attacking a destitute, rustic, landlocked Himalayan nation ruled by a Medieval-minded clique. Or was it to achieve something more in keeping with the sheer

grandeur of the attacks?

That Osama bin Laden delegated his greatest work of terrorism to four bumbling, loose-lipped teams armed with box cutters is a conspiracy theory that may be safely dismissed: history for Army grunts.

In his last authenticated statements, bin Laden himself, with almost superhuman honesty, denied taking part in the attacks, and said that America should look for the culprits

closer to home. His statement must have been sincere – the logic of terrorism requires taking credit for an attack – and surely correct. We need only to ask “Cui bono?” to understand that the authors of the attack have eaten more apple pie than couscous.

Investigation over the past 18 years, some by people who paid for their heroic efforts in lost jobs and smear campaigns, has shown that the Twin Tow-

New York City's Manhattan downtown skyline at night with the Statue of Liberty and light beams in memory of September 11 viewed from the New Jersey waterfront.



ers and Building 7 were felled by demolition explosives. To keep this in mind, and to watch the two towers bursting floor by floor and melting into shrouds of dust, is to understand that the attacks derived from the most venal Shakespearean ambition. And so were the goals of their authors in the American elite.

Was the aim Afghanistan? Yes, but only as a stepping stone. Iraq? Yet another, and Syria as well. Progressives who decry these “endless wars” seem to have never considered that, far from any attempt to “conquer” the Middle East and western Asia, the goal itself was endless war: nothing else so empowers the military-security sector. To attack Afghanistan simply because Osama bin Laden had Taliban protection there in the run-up to 9/11 is surely the flimsiest *raison de guerre* in history. But the war served

the real objective: the military-security complex’s final ascension to power.

For the planes crashing into the Twin Towers heralded the beginning of the American empire’s terminal phase: military domination of the government. The rich had had a fine run at the helm of plutocracy since the time of Ronald Reagan, and it was time for them to start relinquishing their grip. Like everyone else, they quickly came to relish security.

Which doesn’t seem to trouble them even now. The rich no longer use their massive wealth to create domestic jobs and invest in America, which might reinforce their strength in society. No, they have used their bloated fortunes to buy back stock, pay dividends to investors all over the world, and send their money to flashier investments abroad. They have happily partnered with the Pentagon and the security agen-

cies, lining up at their overflowing troughs of funding. They silence critics by eliminating their accounts on social media or cancelling their electronic means of payment and funding. It’s nothing personal; it’s just business. To the rich, a country is only as good as the protection it provides them to trade derivatives and go to smart restaurants in peace.

What Democratic candidates, with the exception of brave Tulsi Gabbard, would say straight out that they intend to transfer the Pentagon’s billions to social use? Do any of them want to sweep Homeland Security – infamous name – into the dustbin of history? Indeed, this tumorous department, now the government’s third-largest, is the most obvious manifestation of the military-security milieu’s move to power: a domestic defense department that controls what little the private sector couldn’t.

So now airline passengers and Super Bowl fans and concert-goers docilely line up for detecting wands and take off their shoes and check their pockets. Cameras watch every street. Cops patrol school hallways. Cell phones track parents' trips to school soccer games. Government spying is a proverb.

The fight now isn't against communism, but "terrorism". This was the other maximal objective of 9/11: to completely change the conversation, to eliminate the worldwide relief at the end of the Cold War and replace it with a new paradigm of fear. Communism was tangible. It had been headquartered in a distant country with a capital and a flag and scowling presidents so dour they might have been taken out of a comic book. But that threat petered out in the early '90s, to the worldwide delight of citizens and the alarm of American elites. Probably it was then that planning for 9/11 began.

A new threat was needed, and this time around it would be a tougher sell to a distracted public to whom international affairs was the duller part of the newscast. Which is why it wasn't enough to have airliners smash into the buildings: the



**How splendidly
"terrorism" has worked
out. Terror is personal, it's
a ghost, it's whatever one
makes of it, it's around the
corner and under the bed**

crucial half-dozen videos shot by startled cameramen would last but seconds; office fires would be put out before the six-o'clock news, the buildings eventually repaired, a commemorative plaque unveiled in the plaza a few months later.

No, the towers had to be mined with demolition explosives and crash to the ground in a roaring tantrum of destruction. Everything depended on this, and no effort was spared, including an entire back story on how the terrorists, thinking themselves undetected but discreetly nursed along, miracu-

lously eluded American intelligence, air defences, and both national and local law enforcement. Surely the symbol of the operation's momentousness was the explosive material used on the buildings: the amount applied must have been several times the necessary, burning red-hot in the debris for months despite the tons of water poured on it.

And how splendidly "terrorism" has worked out, the selling job a success. For terror is personal, it's a ghost, it's whatever one makes of it, it's around the corner and under the bed, requiring neither country nor flag, though a long gloomy face and tattered beard like Bin Laden's certainly help to focus passions. But anybody will do. Iranians. Kim Jong-un. Bashar al-Assad. Jeffrey Epstein. Limping Central Americans hoping for a fresh start in America. Vladimir Putin, regarded as something of a modern saviour in his own country, especially in Crimea, is regularly set down as the greatest terrorist of them all in western media.

Mass shootings continually refresh the scare, and as usual truthers, like a sand-and-shovel brigade, trot along behind police reports cleverly pointing out inconsistencies and gaps in

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the evidence. Mainstream reporters loathe them. Truthers make them taste their self-censorship in security matters, whether they involve the local sheriff or the CIA. Nobody tells these coiffured, orotund hustlers to say one thing and not another; nobody needs to: they know what their newsrooms want. To them, a David Ray Griffin or a Richard Gage is a pathetic idiot gabbling in the wilderness; truthers are “nobodies”.

The reporters’ job on 9/11 was to terrorise the public, and later to pound away at the theme of an America in peril. ISIS and al Qaeda have now passed their primes, but Homeland Security grows by the day. The media masters are well-pleased.

For they are acolytes of the military-security complex,

Terrorism a convenient new fear to add to the old and familiar danger of a resurgent Russia and a now prodigiously competitive China

whose bid for power was 9/11. It was the final downward step of American empire, terrorism a convenient new fear to add to the old and familiar danger of a resurgent Russia and a now prodigiously competitive China. The smearing of the former is complete; of the latter it is still taking shape. The anti-democratic theme rings loudest, a fact that attests to the difficulty of vilifying a polite people determined to extend a decent standard of living to all of their stupendous population.

Though the forms of US democracy are respected – elections, congressional investigations, a Supreme Court, the appearance of debate in mainstream media – the stage-management of it all has shifted to ever-darker, ever-smaller forces skirmishing amongst themselves far from the public spotlight. Since 9/11, American history is Plato’s shadows on the cave wall. **CT**

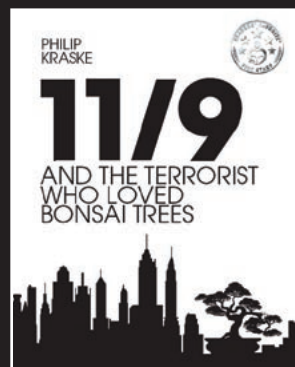
Philip Kraske's latest novel is 11/9 And The Terrorist Who Loved Bonsai Trees. Kraske lives in Madrid, Spain, where he teaches English on a freelance basis and does some translation. His novels, of varied plots but centring on American politics and society, began to appear in 2009. His website is www.philipkraske.com

A FALSE-FLAG OP THAT LEADS TO WAR WITH IRAN? IT JUST GOES TO SHOW: LIFE IMITATES ART.

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“Very entertaining.” – John Kiriakou

**11/9 AND THE
TERRORIST
WHO LOVED
BONSAI TREES**
By Philip Kraske



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Thomas Scripps contrasts the treatment by the British legal system of two political detainees held inside London's high security Belmarsh prison

Assange tortured, but fascist gets kid-glove treatment

BRITISH class justice was on full display last month, as WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was detained indefinitely at Belmarsh prison, beyond the completion of his sentence, while fascist leader Tommy Robinson was released 10 weeks early from the same jail.

With the stark contrast in the fate of the two, the ruling class is sending a clear message: Whistleblowers who expose government crimes will be hounded and persecuted, but fascists who incite anti-Muslim hatred and violence against immigrants and socialists can be assured kid gloves treatment.

Assange has suffered worsening forms of arbitrary detention for almost nine years and is facing, if extradited, a US sentence of 175 years under the Espionage Act. His health is deteriorating rapidly. United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer warned after visiting him in May that Assange was showing symp-

toms of “psychological torture, including extreme stress, chronic anxiety and intense psychological trauma”.

Assange's only “offence” is years of investigative journalistic work in which he has exposed government corruption, complicity in human rights abuses, and war crimes.

Robinson, in contrast, was imprisoned for a crime that he committed in line with his anti-democratic and fascist outlook. He was arrested in May 2018 for “aggressively confronting and filming” defendants at a child-grooming trial at Leeds Crown Court. He defied temporary court reporting restrictions to livestream a fascist rant against “Muslim paedophiles” and “Muslim rapists” while the jury was considering its verdict.

His actions risked collapsing a serious rape trial and were an attack on the democratic right to the presumption of innocence. His intention was to incite anti-

Muslim hatred – promoting, in the words of the court, “vigilante justice”.

Yet while Assange received almost a year's jail time – near the maximum sentence – for a minor bail offence, Robinson was sentenced to just nine months of a potential maximum of two years. In the end, he spent just nine weeks in prison, and in relative comfort.

According to Canadian-based far-right news site Rebel Media's Ezra Levant, Robinson had a “suite of cells to himself including showers and exercise rooms”, having been kept separate from other prisoners for the duration of his imprisonment. He was also able to receive visitors three or four times a week and to make unlimited calls between 9 am and 11 am each morning.

Levant reported that “the governor of the prison, the warden as we call it in North America, actually visits him every day even, just for a moment just to say ‘how's it going’”. Robin-

son has explained since being released that, after he made a special request to the governor, staff came into the prison early twice a week to escort him to the prison gym.

The stark contrast between the two cases does not end there. Since being illegally dragged out of the Ecuadorian embassy, where he had been granted UN-backed diplomatic asylum, Assange has been railroaded through the courts in a series of sham half-hour sessions in front of prejudiced judges. The judge at Assange's first bail hearing, Deborah Taylor, attacked him as a "narcissist" and falsely referred to Assange facing "rape" and "sexual abuse" "charges" in Sweden. Assange corrected her that no charges have ever been brought against him in Sweden for anything.

The judge selected to preside over Assange's US extradition hearings, Emma Arbuthnot, refuses to recuse herself from the case when there are flagrant conflicts of interest. Her husband, James Norwich Arbuthnot, is a Conservative member of the House of Lords and intimately connected with the British armed forces and security services – whose criminal operations were exposed by WikiLeaks.

While imprisoned, Assange's ability to prepare his legal case has been severely and deliberately impeded – not least by the ill health caused by his cruel treatment. But Robinson has been afforded every legal courtesy and pro-



STARK CONTRAST: Julian Assange (above) faced 52 weeks in Belmarsh prison, while Tommy Robinson was released after just 19 weeks



tection. He was released from an original 13-month sentence handed to him in May 2018 after only two months in prison, following an appeal. The appellate judges ruled that Robinson had been sentenced

too soon after his arrest and that the original judge had failed to clearly set out the basis for his contempt ruling. These concerns were enough to grant him another three months of freedom to pursue his far-right campaigning.

The fascist leader gained another, still unexplained, reprieve during his retrial in October 2018. After Robinson sent a private note to Judge Nicholas Hilliard, the case was suddenly referred to the attorney general, with Hilliard declaring that "all the evidence must be rigorously tested". The attorney general set the date for a new trial at the end of March 2019, leaving Robinson free for another five months.

The March date was delayed again on the request of Robinson's lawyers, who asked for more time to prepare his defence. He was eventually given a nine-month sentence on July 5 – reduced from the original 13 months given in May 2018. Taking into account time spent in prison for the same offence last year, this meant jail time of just of 19 weeks, of which Robinson has served half.

Throughout these events, Robinson, the founder of the fascist English Defence League and former British National Party member, has been guaranteed a battery of media cameras and microphones hanging on his every word.

As a result, Robinson's court case was transformed into

a financially and politically lucrative publicity campaign. During his series of court cases, Robinson claimed to have received upwards of £350,000 in donations, at least £47,000 of which came from the right-wing Middle East Forum in the United States. Trump's former fascist advisor Steve Bannon referred to Robinson as "the backbone of this country [the UK]" in an interview with LBC radio.

Buoyed by official support, Robinson's supporters organised a far-right rampage through the central streets of Manchester at the end of July. The fascists marched through the city and held an unprecedented rally, without hindrance from the authorities, inside a privately-owned shopping centre. They then swarmed into one of the city's main public squares where they trashed the stall of a left-wing organisation, the Revolutionary Communist Group, in the presence of police who didn't lift a finger.

By contrast, Assange's case, including protests and rallies to defend him, have been subjected to a total media blackout – a special performance of "Wish You Were Here" by world-famous songwriter Roger Waters in tribute to Assange, performed outside the Home Office in London to a crowd of a 1,000 people, was not reported on by a single mainstream newspaper or broadcaster.

The polar opposite treatment of Assange and Robinson underscores the bogus charac-

Robinson is not a "truth teller" or a free speech martyr. He is a fascist poster boy who uses "freedom of speech" to incite racist violence

ter of attempts by the far right to equate the two.

After leaving prison, Robinson wrote on his Telegram blog, "As I lay in bed early on this Sunday night all I can think is FREE JULIAN ASSANGE". This is a transparent attempt to give his filthy politics some credibility by associating himself with WikiLeaks's heroic work – on the spurious basis that he and Assange are both persecuted journalists.

There is no comparison. Robinson is not a "truth teller" or a free speech martyr, as his supporters claim. He is a fascist poster boy who uses "freedom of speech" to incite racist violence.

In his "journalism" for Rebel Media, Robinson has referred to Islam as "a backward, barbarian, medieval, molesting culture" and to "British Muslims" as "enemy combatants who want to kill you, maim you, and destroy you".

He has claimed that Britain is suffering a "rape jihad", that "thousands" of Muslim men in Rotherham engaged in the child abuse of "thousands" of children, and defended the chant "Muslim paedos off our

streets". Robinson calls on the West to respond and "take their gloves off and start really tackling what the problem is, which is Islam", and says, "We must unite to protect the civilisation that we love, before it's too late".

Robinson carries out his fascist campaigning in close parallel with the most right-wing forces within the official political set-up of the same state that seeks to destroy Julian Assange.

Just a few days before his release, Robinson's Telegram channel declared, "21 Tory traitors decided to side with [Labour leader Jeremy] Corbyn and the Labour traitors and try and block the Brexit that the majority of people voted for. ... We back [British Prime Minister] Boris [Johnson]."

This is the same Johnson who as mayor of London until May 2016 oversaw a multimillion-pound operation to surround the Ecuadorian Embassy with police tasked with arresting Assange if he ever stepped outside.

In April, as then front-runner for the Conservative Party leadership, Johnson responded to Assange being brutally dragged out of the Ecuadorian embassy by a police snatch squad by tweeting, "It's only right that Julian Assange finally faces justice. Credit to @foreign office officials who have worked tirelessly to secure this outcome". **CT**

Thomas Scripps wrote this article for the World Socialist Web Site - www.wsws.org

Insights

Photo: Our Revolution



Workers rally outside the Schneider Electric plant in Peru, Indiana.

Dear Mr Trump: I'm one of the workers you lied to

By Tracey Aikman

MY entire working life has been dictated by offshoring. I've spent my career jumping from one factory closing to another.

When President Trump was elected, he said: "Companies are not going to leave the United States anymore without consequences." His promises ring hollow to me after I got my latest layoff notice.

My first job out of high school was at a factory owned by United Technologies in

Wabash, Indiana. I showed up to work in March 1991 and a sign on the door read: "Moved to Mexico." My mother, who worked for a sister factory, also lost her job when her factory was sent south of the border.

I eventually got a union job at Chrysler in Kokomo, Indiana, which allowed me to give my family a middle-class life and build our dream house on five acres of land. In 2008, I got laid off. I lost my house and

had to start over financially.

When I got my job at Schneider Electric's "Square D" plant in Peru, Indiana five years ago, making electrical boxes and equipment, I hoped that this job would sustain me until I was ready to retire.

Unfortunately, the multinational corporation that owns our plant announced this summer that they would be moving our work to Mexico and other plants. Once our plant closes, all of Schneider Electric's North American factories will be non-union.

Now I'm facing another layoff, even though our Peru plant was profitable. In fact, the same week I was laid off, Schneider Electric announced profits of \$2.2 billion for the first half of 2019.

I'm not alone. Workers across the Midwest are suffering the same fate. And President Trump continues to fail us. Instead of punishing companies like Schneider Electric, he has rewarded them with \$120 million in federal contracts and a massive tax break. The closure of my factory is sad proof that Trump's lies have consequences.

Trump's broken promises have become a broken record destroying our communities, even though here in Miami

County, we gave him the vast majority of our votes in 2016.

Right now, Our Revolution, a political advocacy organization inspired by Sen. Bernie Sanders's historic presidential run in 2016, is helping to organize a miracle effort to save our plant. Joined by workers from the shuttered GM plant in Lordsburg, Ohio and workers from the Carrier plant in Indianapolis, we are calling on Trump to sign an executive order that would prevent taxpayer dollars from going to companies that are shipping American jobs overseas.

With the next round of layoffs scheduled for September 27, there is no time to waste.

We have one request for President Trump: Use the power of the government over federal contracts to stop our jobs from leaving the United States. Show us that you mean what you said when you promised to be a workers' champion.

We need your help now – and we'll remember if we don't get it. **CT**

Tracey Aikman is sick and tired of mass layoffs in the Midwest. He has been laid off by global corporations United Technologies, Chrysler, and now Schneider Electric. He is married and is a father of two. This op-ed was distributed by www.otherwords.org

sion as deception. According to George Steiner, humanity's Babel dilemma – having a multiplicity of languages that seek to confuse rather than clarify – had as much to do with the need to deceive than anything else. Learn the language, learn the deception.

The modern attempt to evade such deceptions is conventional as much as it is flawed. It questions the very media that was meant to disseminate accounts at speed and attributes traditional monopolies of truth to a Fourth Estate long in tooth and very much on its sick bed. The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Financial Times* have looked rather haggish at points.

There is a charmingly naive assumption here: that the old press houses were somehow incapable of deception and censorship. The influence of media moguls; the cuts and modifications of the editorial boards and government censors, are all historically distant in such arguments.

All that is Fake is new because – and here an element of snobbery creeps in – it is generated by the vox pops brigade.

That viral freight helped along by social media is being treated as the problem, the medium as dissimulated message. The *Four Corners* episode which aired on Australia's

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Fake arguments on fake news

By **Binoy Kampmark**

THE constipated tedium that follows each call, denial and condemnation after another round of fake news and its giddy effects has become daily fare.

Entire episodes with the sanctimonious and the solemn are being created to show up the citizen journalist, the blogger, the self-opinionated masturbator of news, in the hope that some high priest set will reclaim the ground.

That ground, supposedly, is “truth”, a truly big word merely assumed by its advocates.

None of this is to deny that there is something dreary and depressing about accounts that are fabricated. But this is an age old matter, and one that centres on the old question: Should you trust what is ever published?

The facility to use language is as much a means of expres-

national network recently is one such example, shrill in its concerns that the fake in news is undermining to democracy and its institutions.

Its list of interviewed subjects supply us a Who's Who of sceptics and critics about modern journalism and the dark steed called Fake News.

Claire Wardle, Executive director of *First Draft*, is one who earns her crust attacking this wave and engaged in the process she regards as "verification training for journalists". Her organisation supplies "Training and resources for journalists in an age of disinformation".

In her interview with *Four Corners*, she suggests how: "we need to worry about fake news. People dismiss it as frivolous. It's not. I think it's the biggest crisis that we face as humankind because it is dividing us. And as we're divided we're going to get to a point where democracy is no longer functioning".

Such a considerable over-egging of that pudding is supplemented by other comments.

Veteran journalist John Carlin makes no secret of his aversion to social media platforms, and their means of getting the message through an intemperate scream rather than a sober debate. "What social media does is give more weight and more value to the people who shout loudest".

But years before the clans of shouters got into the social

media bubble, the Murdoch empire, through such trusty emissaries as the *Sun*, were happy pushing voters with reactionary prods and embellished accounts.

Behind such comments on the fakery of social media news is a paternalistic sneer, one directed against the great unwashed. Sometimes, the sneer targets a specific group, the abominations, the gullible freaks, the marginalised.

Phil Howard, director of the Computational Propaganda Project at Oxford, suggested in February last year that the condition for consuming and gorging the fake in news coverage is limited.

There is an upside to all of this. It appears that only one part of the political spectrum – the far right – is really the target for extremist, sensational and conspiratorial content. Over social media, moderates and centrists tend not to be as susceptible".

That is all fine, if you treat terms such as "moderate" and "centrists" as fundamentally immutable and immune to the witch's brew of conspiracy. All groups are susceptible, and the artery busting fury at WikiLeaks in exposing the underbelly of the Clinton campaign machine in 2016 all suggested that groups of any political persuasion are very happy to entertain dark pulls and urges.

Julian Assange, the celebrated truth sayer one day; pilloried Russian agent the next.

Technological reach has also given birth to a vibrant form of citizen journalism, the very sort frowned upon by conventional, often regulated networks.

In 2014, *Time* noted that "the growth of social media, facilitated by technological advances that allow Internet access even in a war zone, has made detailed, ground-level information on the war available online".

Such journalism is praised as fresh and fair when it seems to shed good light on a position; dark, bought and compromised when it does not. The term "fake" is as much tactical as anything else.

But press traditionalists remain wary: the global cutting back of the press corps has led to an increasing reliance on freelancing, leading to such fears as those of John Owen at City University in London: "news organisations can't contract out their duty of care and moral responsibility if they choose to air or publish freelancers".

The battle over what is the fake and authentic in news easily dovetails into regulations of control and limitations on expression. It emboldens the censor and the police version of history. Laws criminalising it have been passed in countries as diverse as Malaysia, France, Germany and Russia.

Some of this is being done

with the connivance of the Fourth Estate, keen to accommodate the interests of state. Much information and content, as a result, is being inadvertently blocked.

Singapore's own effort, the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act 2019, ostensibly targets electronic communications of false statements of facts, the use of online accounts to facilitate such communication and "enable measures to be taken to enhance transparency of online political advertisements, and for related matters".

It reads like a gentle, sanitised effort, but its implications are beastly, permitting ministerial determinations on what, exactly, fake news might be.

Such laws, it follows, tend to be used with impunity, targeting any revelations and disclosures that might embarrass the state and its bumbling officials.

Sandra González-Bailón of the Annenberg School for Communication does make a sensible and cautionary point on such efforts. "The risk of governments regulating social media is that they will regulate something that we don't fully understand".

Nor, for that matter, do they.

While the authenticity verifiers marshalled across platoons of fact checkers might well be thinking they are

doing us a service, nothing ever replaces the sceptical reader who covers multiple sources to identify an account and question it. Never just read lines, but between them; never just accept news, but monitor its content and those who produce it. To the informed sceptic go

the spoils of enlightenment. **CT**

Binoy Kampmark teaches core legal courses within the Legal and Dispute Studies programme for the Bachelor of Social Science at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia.

Shattering the claims of Labour Party antisemitism

By Nick Clark



BAD NEWS FOR LABOUR

Antisemitism, the Party & Public Belief

Greg Philo, Mike Berry, Justin Schlosberg, Antony Lerman and David Miller

Pluto Press, London, New York

www.plutopress.org

£14.95

LABOUR Party members in the UK can be demonised, disciplined and even attacked in the press simply for denying that their party has a widespread problem with antisemitism.

So this new book on Labour, antisemitism and the media is bold – and very useful for left wing activists. *Bad News for Labour*, a study by lecturers in journalism, communications, sociology and combating antisemitism, describes how we got here.

As an academic study, it's rigorous, precise and clear with evidence. But as a tool for activists, it's also accessible.

It dismantles the right, and tells us how to cut through the media distortion that blurs the lines between antisemitism and anti-Zionism.

The first few chapters by

Greg Philo and Mike Berry look at how the perception that Labour is antisemitic was influenced by the way it was reported in the media.

Through a survey of more than 1,000 people, they found the average belief is that about a third of Labour Party members are antisemitic.

There's obviously a huge gulf between that belief and the fact that, as they were writing, Labour was investigating 453 cases of alleged antisemitism – 0.1 percent of members.

In a number of focus groups, Philo and Berry found most people got this belief from the saturated coverage in the media. People who took part talked about the “constant” headlines, and the prominence given to claims that Labour has a major problem with antisemitism.

Throughout the book, its authors describe how those accusing Labour of antisemitism usually suggested that certain criticism of Israel – usually claims that it is racist – is antisemitic.

There are three chapters on the row over whether the Labour Party would adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of antisemitism with examples restricting criticism of Israel. They're all very clear on the difference between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitism – and describe

methodically how the IHRA definition is not.

But problems with the IHRA definition were all but ignored by the media. Instead of presenting it as the contested definition it is, most gave the false impression that it was straightforward and widely accepted.

The study found that voices criticising it got far less prominence than those who backed it – particularly by the *Guardian* newspaper.

The study is also very clear that simply backing down over accusations of antisemitism didn't make the problem go away – it just reinforced it.

In focus groups, even those against Labour were able to see media bias.

Many reconsidered how widespread antisemitism is in Labour when pushed to think

critically about the claims they read in the press.

The authors' answer is that rebutting and challenging the misinformation works best.

They suggest a media strategy that includes strong rebuttal of false claims, and clarity on what is and isn't antisemitism.

They don't quite go as far as to say Labour should openly say that the right to criticise Israel is at stake.

That's a shame, because the book itself is very good at showing that. But for those who are bewildered, disheartened and intimidated by the onslaught of accusations of antisemitism, this book is very useful. **CT**

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Nick Clark wrote this review for the UK's *Socialist Worker* newspaper – www.socialistworker.co.uk

Iran seizures highlight Canadian hypocrisy

By **Yves Engler**

WHILE France, Germany, Russia and China seek detente, Canada is increasingly part of the US-Saudi Arabia-Israeli axis stoking conflict with Iran.

Canada recently seized and sold \$30-million of Iranian properties in Ottawa and Toronto to compensate

individuals in the US who had family members killed in a 2002 Hamas bombing in Israel and others who were held hostage by Hezbollah in 1986 and 1991. The Supreme Court of Canada and federal government sanctioned the seizure under the 2012 Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act, which lifts immuni-

ty for countries labelled “state sponsors of terrorism” to allow individuals to claim their non-diplomatic assets.

While not much discussed by Canadian media or politicians, this is a substantial development. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Seyyed Abbas Mousavi called the seizure “illegal” and in “direct contradiction with international law”, while a spokesperson for Iran’s Guardian Council, Abbasali Kadkhodaei, accused Canada of “economic terrorism”. A senior member of Iran’s parliament said the country’s military should confiscate Canadian shipments crossing the Strait of Hormuz.

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In a right-side-up world, the Iranian asset sale would lead to various more legitimate seizures. Relatives of the Lebanese Canadian el-Akhras family Israel wiped out, including four children aged one to eight, in 2006 are certainly at least as worthy of Canadian government-backed compensation.

Ditto for Paeta Hess-Von Kruedener, a Canadian soldier part of a UN mission, killed by an Israeli fighter jet in Lebanon in 2006. Or Palestinian Canadian Ismail Zayid, who was driven from a West Bank village demolished to make way for the Jewish National Fund’s Canada Park.

In Haiti there are hundreds, maybe thousands, of indi-



ILLEGAL ACTION: Iranian spokesman Seyyed Abbas Mousavi

viduals whose family members were killed at peaceful protests by a police force paid, trained and politically supported by Canada after US, French and Canadian troops overthrew the country’s elected president in 2004.

Ten months after the coup I met a young man in Port-au-Prince who fled the country after armed thugs searching for him came to his house and killed his aunt. Before the coup Jeremy had been a journalist with the state television, which was identified with the ousted government. Should US or Canadian assets be seized to compensate him?

There are hundreds of Canadians and countless individuals elsewhere who have been victimised by Israeli, Canadian and US-backed terror more deserving of compensation than the Americans paid with Iranian assets for what Hamas and Hezbollah purportedly did decades ago. Should Israeli, US and Canadian government

assets be seized to pay them?

It’s insightful to look at the double standard – approved by the Supreme Court – from another angle. In 2012 that court refused to hear a case against Anvil Mining for its direct role in Congolese troops killing 100, mostly unarmed civilians, near its Dikulushi mine in Katanga in October 2004. After a half-dozen members of the little-known Mouvement Revolutionnaire pour la Liberation du Katanga occupied the Canada-Australian company’s Kilwa concession, Anvil provided the trucks used to transport Congolese soldiers to the area and to dump the corpses of their victims into mass graves. The company also published a press release applauding the Congolese military’s dastardly deed. Though the company was managed from Montréal and its main shareholders were Vancouver’s First Quantum and the Canadian Pension Plan, the Québec Court of Appeal and Supreme Court concluded the survivors had to pursue remedies in either the Congo or Australia.

The Canadian media has devoted little attention to the seizure of Iranian assets. But, *Forbes*, *Sputnik*, *Xinhua* and a host of Iranian media have covered the story. At least three Iranian newspapers put it on their front page.

The Trudeau government’s failure to speak against the

asset seizure, de-list Iran as a “state sponsor of terror” or repeal former PM Stephen Harper’s Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act puts further lie to its commitment to a “rules based international order”. It is also another broken promise. Before the 2015 election Justin Trudeau told the CBC, “I would hope that Canada would be able to reopen its mission [in Tehran]. I’m fairly certain that there are ways to re-engage [Iran]”.

But, don’t expect NDP foreign affairs critic Guy Caron or the media to ask why Canada hasn’t re-established relations with the nation of 80-million. By breaking his promise to restart diplomatic relations with Iran Trudeau has empowered those hurtling us towards a major conflict. **CT**

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Yves Engler’s latest book is *Left, Right: Marching to the Beat of Imperial Canada*. His web site is www.yvesengler.com

Now UAW workers are once again making headlines, demanding just as they did decades ago that General Motors share the wealth with the workers who toil to create it. And GM is sitting on plenty of wealth. Since 2015, the company has posted \$35-billion in North American profits alone. But GM workers today find themselves struggling in a far different – and more difficult – political and economic environment than their UAW forbears.

The GM strike and a century of context

By **Sam Pizzigati**

WARS end with treaties. In the middle of the 20th century, the “class war” that finished off America’s original plutocracy ended with the “Treaty of Detroit”.

Fortune, the business magazine, came up with that catchy turn of phrase back in 1950 to describe the landmark collective bargaining agreement that the United Auto Workers union had just reached with General Motors. What made the pact so historic? America’s most powerful corporation was essentially agreeing to “share the wealth”.

In exchange for labour peace, notes historian Nelson

Lichtenstein, GM guaranteed auto workers what amounted to “a 20 percent increase in their standard of living” over five years, along with a new health care benefit and a standard \$125 monthly pension, the equivalent of about \$16,000 annually in today’s dollars.

This “Treaty of Detroit” would help energise a huge postwar shift in the distribution of US income and wealth. In the quarter-century after 1945, the real incomes of average Americans would double, in the process manufacturing the first mass middle class the world ever seen.

In 1950, the US labour movement was beginning a third decade of sustained and significant growth. By the mid 1950s, over one out of every three workers in the nation carried a union card. Last year, by contrast, only 6.4 percent of American private-sector workers belonged to a union.

The executives who run General Motors are operating in a different environment, too. In the 1950s, the US tax code subjected the nation’s rich to consistently steep tax rates. Individual income over \$200,000 faced a 91 percent federal income tax throughout the decade. In 1950, GM’s top executive, Charlie Wilson, paid 73 percent of his \$586,100 total income in taxes.

With tax rates on high incomes that high, top corporate executives had little incentive to squeeze their workers ever tighter. Most all of any extra personal rewards that squeez-

ing might bring would soon funnel, via the tax code, to Uncle Sam.

Today, the opposite dynamic. GM's top executives get to keep the lion's share of whatever they can grab. And they're grabbing plenty. The five highest-paid General Motors executives last year averaged nearly \$10-million each. Not one dollar of those millions faced a tax rate higher than 37 percent.

All these millions for GM execs have come at the expense of GM workers, especially those hired since 2007. GM employees hired before 2007 have the protection of a traditional pension that guarantees a set income. They earn about \$31 an hour.

Workers hired since 2007 have no traditional pension guarantee and start at \$17. About 7 percent of the GM workforce – the temps that GM has begun hiring over recent years – don't even get that. They earn, the *New York Times* reports, about \$15 per hour and don't get full benefits.

These sorts of attacks on workers reflect the current weakness of the labor movement in the United States. The tax rates of the 1950s that discouraged corporate attacks on worker well-being reflected the labour movement's strength. Unions helped establish those high mid-century tax rates on the rich.

During World War II, the UAW and other progressive

unions pressed President Franklin Roosevelt to push for a 100 percent top tax rate. FDR did just that, proposing that no individual American should have over \$25,000 – about \$400,000 today – after paying federal taxes.

Congress didn't go along with that 100 percent top rate. But lawmakers did set a 94 percent top rate for the war's last two years, and the nation's top tax rate would hover around 90 percent for the next two decades, creating in the process a much more equal America.

This greater equality meant more dollars in the pockets of average people. Americans of modest means could suddenly afford to buy cars, and auto makers like GM rushed to serve the huge new mass middle-class market with modestly priced auto offerings.

Today, in a top-heavy America with a shrinking middle class, companies like GM can make more money selling high-mark-up expensive products to small numbers of affluent consumers than they can make by selling large numbers of affordably priced products to people of modest means.

In our unequal contemporary America, in other words, corporations like GM don't need to sell lots of product to make big profits. They can get richer running companies that produce less. Last November, GM announced plans to shut down four US plants that make product that's not moving. This

past February, GM announced the elimination of 8,000 additional white-collar jobs.

The not-so-subtle message to GM workers from GM's executive class: You may need your jobs. But we don't need you. So swallow whatever we offer.

By going out on strike this past Monday, some 49,000 GM workers have served notice that they don't intend to swallow that whatever. But are today's GM workers facing a war they cannot win? Does our ferociously unequal America leave them little chance of success?

A little more history might help here and give GM workers – and all of us who want to see a more equal America – some real reason to feel hopeful.

A century ago, in the early days of mass auto production, jobs in auto plants ranked among the worst that Americans could get. In 1927, a young Walter Reuther started working for a company just outside Detroit that made auto bodies for Ford. Reuther worked the night shift, from 5:30 in the evening to seven in the morning. Each shift had just one half-hour break. At one point, young Reuther laboured 21 consecutive nights.

Auto workers had to struggle for years to change these sorts of working conditions. But change them they did, with Reuther their most illustrious

union leader.

In 1961, a retired UAW rank-and-filer by the name of Frank Tuttle would write Reuther – and the UAW – a heart-felt tribute. Tuttle had a special distinction. He had been the first Chrysler worker to start collecting a UAW-negotiated pension.

“On my 65th birthday in January 1950 I had three important messages before me,” Tuttle wrote, “from Social Security, telling me that I had an assured life income of exactly \$38.69 a month; from Chrysler Corporation, declaring it would never grant the ‘preposterous’ pension demands of our union; and one from you saying that those demands would be won, either at the bargaining table or at the picket line.”

Chrysler workers went to that picket line, Tuttle continued, and won that “preposterous” pension.

“Without the protection of our union it is highly improbable that I would have lived to be 65 at all and without the union who would want to?” Tuttle summed up. “Before our union, the best a worker could hope for was to die on the payroll – before he became old enough to be replaced by a younger worker.”

Change can happen. Inequality just makes that change harder – and more necessary. **CT**

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Sam Pizzigati co-edits *Inequality.org*. For more on the 20th-century struggle that ended America’s original Gilded Age, check his 2012 book, *The Rich Don’t Always Win*.

The corporate elites won’t fix inequality

By **Jim Hightower**

RALPH Waldo Emerson once wrote of being leery of a fast-talking huckster who visited his home: “The louder he talked of his honour, the faster we counted our spoons,” Emerson exclaimed.

Likewise, today’s workaday families should do a mass inventory of their silverware, for the fast-talking CEOs of 181

union-busting, tax-cheating, environment-contaminating, consumer-gouging corporations are asking us to believe that they stand with us in the fight against ... well, against them.

From Wall Street banksters to Big Oil polluters, these profiteers are suddenly trumpeting their future intentions to serve not just their own greed, but

every “stakeholder” (which is what they call employees, customers, suppliers, et al).

But vague proclamations are cheap, and it’s worth noting that these new champions of the common good propose no specifics — no actual sacrifices by them or benefits for us.

A few media observers have mildly objected, saying it’s “an open question” whether any of the corporate proclaimers will change how they do business. But it’s not an open question at all. They won’t. They won’t support full collective bargaining power for workers, won’t join the public’s push to get Medicare for All, won’t stop using monopoly power to squeeze out small competitors and gouge consumers, won’t support measures to stop climate change, and won’t back reforms to get their corrupt corporate money out of our politics.

All told, they won’t embrace any of the big structural changes necessary to reverse the raw economic and political inequality that has enthroned their plutocratic rule. In fact, their empty proclamation is what West Texas cowboys might call “bovine excrement,” meant to fend off the actual changes that real reformers are advancing. Corporate elites won’t fix inequality for us — they’re the ones doing it to us. **CT**

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Jim Hightower is a radio commentator, writer, and public speaker. Distributed by www.otherwords.org

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