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# LIES. MYTHS. REALITY

**ROMANO RUBEO**

pays tribute to a murdered Palestinian nurse

**DAVID EDWARDS**

on the UK clothes shop propaganda machine

**GRANVILLE WILLIAMS**

remembers the last stand of Britain's mineworkers

**JONATHAN COOK**

tells how The Guardian helped antisemites

**KEVIN RYAN**

examines the problems with conspiracy theories

# ColdType

ISSUE 162

WRITING WORTH READING ● PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

MID-JUNE 2018

## PARADISE INSIDE A LOST EMPIRE

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**PLUS**

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# ColdType

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# The nurse, the sniper and the ambassador

**Romana Rubeo** has some contrasting thoughts on murdered nurse Razan al-Najjar and Nikki Haley, the US ambassador to the United Nations

**S**INCE the start of Gaza's Great March of Return, on March 30, every day, but especially every Friday, has been marked by bloodshed; at times, even true massacres. Week after week, Israeli forces shot unarmed Palestinians, as they protested at the border to convey to the world a resounding message: end the siege – we will never give up our right of return.

4 I have always believed that the least the world can do to support the Palestinian people's struggle for liberation is to acknowledge their strength, their creativity, and their humanity, and to challenge the image that the Israeli oppressor wants to convey about Palestinians: unruly, worthless and dehumanised.

There is always rays of hope: in the eyes of a child making his own anti-teargas mask, the steps of young people dancing traditional Palestinian dance known as Dakbe, a couple getting married at the border, and the story of young people falling in love while treating wounded people in makeshift tent hospitals.

It is in this reality that the pain of daily life meets the courage of resistance, where the countless injustices of occupation are confronted with the pride of a people determined to fight back, to survive and triumph.

But on Friday, June 1, when Razan al-Najjar was shot dead at the Gaza border while trying to rescue and evacuate injured people, it was hard to find the light of hope in an ocean of sorrow.

However, Razan's story is also the story of a

fighter – her life the symbol of resistance, which doesn't fade and cannot die.

A few days before her death, the 21-year-old medic from Gaza was interviewed by the New York Times. While she was looking at the camera, talking about the role of women along the Gaza border, this beautiful young girl looked stronger than any stereotyped version of WonderWoman.

With her hijab highlighting her face, she looked freer than any clichéd Western feminists shouting empty slogans and confusing freedom with the centimeters of fabric that are taken away from their clothes.

**N**o men, Razan said, could do what she was doing. Indeed, few people could.

Every Friday, Razan left her family home and travelled to the border to rescue the wounded, with a single goal in her mind: "To save lives and to send a message to the world, that (even) without weapons, we can (still) do everything."

Razan carried no weapon while she went to her death while evacuating an injured protester and trying to save his life. She was proudly wearing her medical uniform, which, according to international law and the Geneva Convention, should have guaranteed her safety. Witnesses said that she had raised both hands to show Israeli snipers that she posed no threat.

They killed her anyway, ending her life without showing any mercy. They penetrated her



**Above: Palestinian nurse Razan al-Najjar, was murdered by an Israeli sniper while attending casualties during the Great March of Return. Left: moments before she was shot, Razan and three colleagues march towards the border fence with arms raised.**

Photos via Twitter

chest with a single bullet.

I want to believe that Razan didn't realise she was dying; that, while the sniper was pulling the trigger, she only had one thought in her mind – that she was powerful, stronger than men, stronger than Israelis, stronger than that injustice that forced her and other Palestinian youth

to fight for their right to live in dignity in their own land.

I want to think that she felt invincible.

Razan was shot dead on the battlefield, among friends and coworkers, who immediately surrounded her. trying to save her life, showing their love and expressing their pain.



Razan al-Najjar attends to palestinians injured by Israeli snipers during the Great March of Return.

Photo via Twitter

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Later, Razan’s bloodstained white uniform, which should have protected her, remained in the hands of her mother. The image of that woman, sitting on a bench, her eyes consumed with grief and dignity, will live in my mind forever.

Soon after her death, word got out that Razan had been killed by another woman, a young soldier named Rebecca, who had travelled all the way from Boston, USA, to join the Israeli army. Later, we knew that it was not the case. However, the unbearable, collective pain generated by weeks of losses led to myth-making. “Rebecca” was merely a symbol, utilised to exorcise the demon of pain of all those Palestinian victims – 123 dead and more than 13,000 injured, yet no Israeli killer was been held accountable. Hours, days, weeks, months and years of suffering, without a precise definition of who the executioner was.

The truth is, we don’t need the “Re-

becca” myth to know who is truly behind the murders of Razan and thousands of other Palestinians.

It is not enough to simply blame Israel, its apartheid system, its brutal policies of occupation and colonisation, or its cruel military wing. Every government and every individual who doesn’t publicly condemn Israeli actions is morally responsible for this ongoing massacre, this collective tragedy.



**LITANY OF LIES: Nikki Haley, US Ambassador to the United Nations.**

**H**owever, on that particular day, while Razan was departing our world, another woman, from a mile away, decided to symbolically pull the trigger along with the Israeli sniper at the Gaza border.

No, not “Rebecca” or any other woman in military uniform and boots, but a woman in a business suit, just back from the salon, with her hair

## ROMANA RUBEO

done up – Nikki Haley. While Razan was rushing to her death, devoting herself to the ideal of freedom and justice, Haley, the US Ambassador to the United Nations, was dedicating herself to something completely different.

She decided to veto a resolution put forward by Kuwait on behalf of Arab countries, and to present a rival draft resolution that blamed Palestinian resistance, and demanded they “cease all violent activity and provocative actions, including along the boundary fence”.

She described the vetoed resolution as a “grossly one-sided approach that is morally bankrupt and would only serve to undermine ongoing efforts toward peace between the Israelis and Palestinians”. While Razan al-Najjar was making the ultimate sacrifice in the name of justice and empowered woman the world over, Haley was deliberately condemning innocent people to death, in the name of moral corruption masked as realpolitik.

Her words were a litany of lies, and her reference to those abstract “ongoing efforts towards peace” should make us aware, once and for all, that the so-called “peace process” is nothing but an empty mantra used to demonise and crush

Palestinian resistance of any kind – whether a fighter with a gun or Razan with her white medical gown.

**W**e owe it to Razan that we remember her face every time Haley’s lies try to poison our understanding of the truth about Gaza and Palestine.

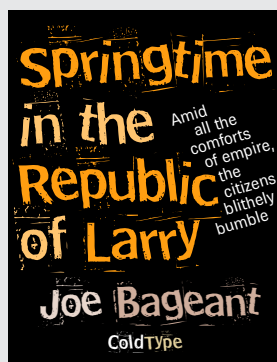
Let’s think of Razan’s words on camera every time the US and its allies give themselves the right to police the world and claim to defend civil rights, freedom, and democracy.

Let’s also think of Haley’s hypocrisy and cruelty as she vetoed a draft that would have provided Razan and millions more Palestinian civilians protection and safety in their land – a place where nobody is safe, not even those with a white medical uniform.

**CT**

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*Romana Rubeo is a freelance translator based in Italy. She holds a master’s degree in foreign languages and literature and specialises in audio-visual and journalism translation. This article was first published at [www.palestinechronicle.com](http://www.palestinechronicle.com)*

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# Duped by the rebel propaganda machine

Operating from an English clothing shop, the supposedly "impartial" Syrian Observatory for Human Rights is funded by the British government, writes **David Edwards**

**W**RITING in the Mail on Sunday, journalist Peter Hitchens commented last month on the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR): "Talking of war, and Syria, many of you may have noticed frequent references in the media to a body called the 'Syrian Observatory for Human Rights', often quoted as if it is an impartial source of information about that complicated conflict, in which the British government clearly takes sides. The 'Observatory' says on its website that it is 'not associated or linked to any political body'.

"To which I reply: Is Boris Johnson's Foreign Office not a political body? Because the FO just confirmed to me that 'the UK funded a project worth £194,769.60 to provide the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights with communications equipment and cameras.' That's quite a lot, isn't it? I love the precision of that 60p. Your taxes, impartially, at work."

This figure was confirmed in communication with the Foreign Office by independent political journalist Ian Sinclair. (Email to Media Lens, May 17, 2018).

In 2011, Reuters reported that Rami Abdulrahman is "the fast-talking director of arguably Syria's most high-profile human rights group", SOHR: "When he isn't fielding calls from international media, Abdulrahman is a few minutes down the road at his clothes shop, which he runs with his wife."

Given the tinpot nature of the organisation, SO-

HR's influence is astonishing: "Cited by virtually every major news outlet since an uprising against the iron rule of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad began in March, the observatory has been a key source of news on the events in Syria."

Described by Reuters as an "opposition group", SOHR is openly pro-regime change: "After three short spells in prison in Syria for pro-democracy activism, Abdulrahman came to Britain in 2000 fearing a longer, fourth jail term.

"I came to Britain the day Hafez al-Assad died, and I'll return when Bashar al-Assad goes."

In December 2011, Stratfor, a research institute formed of former US security officials, cautioned: "Most of the [Syrian] opposition's more serious claims have turned out to be grossly exaggerated or simply untrue ... revealing more about the opposition's weaknesses than the level of instability inside the Syrian regime."

**R**eports from SOHR and other opposition groups, "like those from the regime, should be viewed with skepticism", Stratfor argued: "the opposition understands that it needs external support ... if it is to be a more robust movement than it is now. To that end, it has every reason to present the facts on the ground in a way that makes the case for foreign backing."

The Los Angeles Times described SOHR as "a pro-opposition watchdog". And yet, as Reuters reported, Abdulrahman claims neutrality: "I'm between two fires. But it shows I'm being neutral



## DAVID EDWARDS



**SHATTERED CITY: A destroyed Raqqa neighbourhood lies in ruins.**

Photo: Mahmoud Bali, Wikimedia

if both sides complain,' he said, insisting he accepts no funding and runs the observatory on a voluntary basis."

Two years later, the New York Times described a modified funding model: "Money from two dress shops covers his minimal needs for reporting on the conflict, along with small subsidies from the European Union and one European country that he declines to identify."

Thanks to Hitchens, we now know that the country in question is Britain and the funding in 2012 was £194,769.60.

In 2013, we compared the reflexive respect afforded SOHR with the earlier casual rejection of reports on the death toll in Iraq published in 2004 and 2006 by the Lancet, the world's leading medical journal: "Figures supplied by SOHR, an organisation openly biased in favour of the Syrian 'rebels' and Western intervention is presented as sober fact by... the world's leading news agencies. No concerns here about methodology, sample sizes, 'main street bias' and other alleged concerns thrown at the Lancet studies by critics."

In 2004, one of the Lancet co-authors, Gilbert Burnham of the prestigious Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore, told us: "Our data have been back and forth be-

tween many reviewers at the Lancet and here in the school (chair of Biostatistics Dept), so we have the scientific strength to say what we have said with great certainty. I doubt any Lancet paper has gotten as much close inspection in recent years as this one has!" (Dr. Gilbert Burnham, email to Media Lens, October 30, 2004)

**D**espite this, the Lancet reports were subjected to ceaseless attacks from the US and UK governments, and dismissal by corporate journalists. David Aaronovitch wrote in the Times: "And Harold Pinter invents a statistic. 'At least 100,000 Iraqis were killed by American bombs and missiles before the Iraqi insurgency began.' This is probably some mangling of a controversial estimate of Iraqi civilian fatalities published in The Lancet in 2004 and based, it was claimed, on standard epidemiological methods." (Aaronovitch, "The great war of words," the Times, March 18, 2006)

An op-ed in the Washington Times commented in December 2004: "Or how about the constantly cited figure of 100,000 Iraqis killed by Americans since the war began, a statistic that is thrown about with total and irresponsible

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abandon by opponents of the war”. (Helle Dale, “Biased coverage in Iraq”, Washington Times, December 1, 2004)

As we described at the time, the “mainstream” hosted all manner of confused and baseless criticisms of this kind. By contrast, a recent BBC article noted of the Syrian war: “Over seven years of war, more than 400,000 people have been killed or reported missing, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.”

No-one, it seems, would dream of challenging such a high figure supplied by a clothes shop owner supporting regime change in Syria from Coventry. Nobody challenges SOHR’s methodology, or complains of statistics being thrown about with irresponsible abandon. Why? Because the 2004 and 2006 Lancet reports seriously undermined the US-UK case for conquering Iraq, whereas a high Syria death toll is used to damn the Assad government and to make the case for Western “intervention”.

In a 2015 interview with RT, Abdulrahman was asked how he could trust the hundreds of “activists” supplying information from Syria. Claiming that, “I know all of the activists working for the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights”, Abdulrahman said that he had last visited Syria in 2000. He added: “But I know some of the Observatory activists through common friends.”

Innumerable “mainstream” reports of atrocities blamed on Syrian government and Russian forces have used SOHR as a key source. One of the highest profile claims concerned an alleged massacre of 108 people, including 49 children, in Houla, Syria on May 27, 2012. The claim dominated the Independent on Sunday’s front cover, which read: “SYRIA: THE WORLD LOOKS THE OTHER WAY. WILL YOU?”

The text beneath read: “There is, of course, supposed to be a ceasefire, which the brutal Assad regime simply ignores. And the international community? It just averts its gaze. Will you do the same? Or will the sickening fate of these innocent children make you very, very angry?”

As so often, SOHR loomed large in these accusations. The BBC reported: “The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said more than 90 people had died in the 24 hours since

midday on Friday.”

The Guardian described how SOHR was condemning Western silence: “The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights issued an unusually harsh statement in the wake of the deaths, accusing Arab nations and the international community of being ‘partners’ in the killing “because of their silence about the massacres that the Syrian regime has committed”.

But the picture was not quite so clear cut. Two weeks later, the BBC reported the head of the UN Supervision Mission in Syria, Major General Robert Mood, as saying of Houla: “the circumstances that led to these tragic killings are still unclear”. Mood commented significantly, “Whatever I learned on the ground in Syria... is that I should not jump to conclusions.”

**O**n June 27, a UN Commission of Inquiry said that in apportioning blame, it “could not rule out any of these possibilities”: local militia possibly operating together with, or with the acquiescence of, government security forces; anti-government forces seeking to escalate the conflict; or foreign groups with unknown affiliation. In August of the same year, UN investigators released a further report which stated that they had “*a reasonable basis to believe* that the perpetrators... were aligned to the Government”. (Our emphasis)

SOHR is omnipresent in the great Syrian atrocity claims that have gripped our media for years. On April 14, Donald Trump bombed Syria in response to an alleged Syrian government chemical weapons attack on Douma one week earlier. Reuters reported: “Heavy air strikes on the Syrian rebel-held town of Douma killed 27 people including five children, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.”

On April 7, 2017, Trump launched a missile assault on Syria just 72 hours after an alleged chemical weapons attack on Khan Sheikhoun. Reuters reported: “The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the attack killed at least 58 people and was believed to have been carried out by Syrian government jets. It caused many people to choke and some to foam at the mouth.

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“Director Rami Abdulrahman told Reuters the assessment that Syrian government warplanes were to blame was based on several factors such as the type of aircraft, including Sukhoi 22 jets, that carried out the raid.”

In August 2013, Barack Obama came close to launching a massive attack on Syria in response to an alleged Syrian government chemical weapons attack on Ghouta. The BBC reported: “The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), a UK-based group that gets its information from a network of activists across Syria, later said it had confirmed at least 502 deaths.”

The Los Angeles Times reported: “The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, generally regarded as one of the most reliable sources of information on casualty figures in Syria, says it has confirmed 502 deaths, including 80 children and 137 women.”

Last February, the BBC reported: “The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a UK-based monitoring group, said at least 250 people had been killed in [Syrian government and Russian] air strikes and artillery fire since then. “It said it was the highest 48-hour death toll since a 2013 chemical attack on the besieged enclave.”

The power of these claims lies in the fact that Western journalists have been unable to report from “rebel”-held areas in Syria. Veteran Middle East correspondent Patrick Cockburn made the point: “All wars always produce phony atrocity stories – along with real atrocities. But in the Syrian case fabricated news and one-sided reporting have taken over the news agenda to a degree probably not seen since the First World War... The real reason that reporting of the Syrian conflict has been so inadequate is that Western news organisations have almost entirely outsourced their coverage to the rebel side.”

Many atrocity claims relayed by SOHR and others have been sourced from the White Helmets group in Syria. Former Guardian journalist Jonathan Cook commented: “In the Western corporate media narrative, the White Helmets are a group of dedicated and selfless rescue workers. They are supposedly the humanitarians on whose behalf a western intervention in Syria would have been justified – before, that is,

Syrian leader Bashar Assad queered their pitch by inviting in Russia.

“However, there are problems with the White Helmets. They operate only in rebel – read: mainly al-Qaeda and ISIS-held – areas of Syria, and plenty of evidence shows that they are funded by the UK and US to advance both countries’ far-from-humanitarian policy objectives in Syria.”

In 2016, political analyst Max Blumenthal wrote: “The White Helmets were founded in collaboration with USAID’s Office of Transitional Initiatives – the wing that has promoted regime change around the world– and have been provided with \$23-million in funding from the department.”

**L**iberal corporate journalists and politicians have been impressed by the fact that SOHR and White Helmets claims have been supported by analysis supplied by the Bellingcat website, which publishes “citizen journalist” investigations. As we noted recently, Bellingcat is funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which is funded by the US government and is “a notorious vehicle for US soft power”.

We could link to thousands of corporate media articles citing SOHR as a source. As in these examples, the majority of these claims are directed at the Syrian government and its Russian ally. To monitor the BBC website in 2013, for example, was to witness what appeared to be a relentless propaganda campaign promoting yet one more Western “humanitarian intervention”. This would seem to be an extraordinary scandal, not just for the BBC, not just for British corporate media and democracy, but for media and democracy globally. Yet, our media database search finds exactly one national UK newspaper article containing the terms “Peter Hitchens” and “Syrian Observatory”. That, of course, was the original May 13 piece in the Mail on Sunday in which Hitchens reported the UK government’s £194,769.60 funding of SOHR. His report has been ignored. **CT**

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*David Edwards is co-editor of Medialens – [www.medialens.org](http://www.medialens.org) – the UK media watchdog.*

# Woeful legacy of the Battle of Orgreave

**Granville Williams** tells how prime minister Margaret Thatcher's war on striking miners led to the de-industrialisation of Britain, and the replacement of secure full-time, high-paying jobs with today's fragile 'gig' economy

**S**OME basic facts bear repeating. The gap between rich and poor in the UK was at its narrowest in the 1970s, a decade when trade unionism was at its strongest. In 2018 there is an obscene gap between those flaunting great wealth and working people battered by austerity and privatisation. We have the prospect of millions of people working in low-wage or zero-hour contract conditions.

The word "gig", once used by jazz musicians when they were hired for a performance, has now been appropriated to describe an aspect of working life. It sounds very hip or cool, but the reality is that there is now a permanent class of people who are subject to the whims of their employers. The sheer uncertainty of the number of hours people work from day-to-day creates massive financial instability in their lives.

How did we get to this dire situation? One answer is that a succession of Tory governments in the 1980s under Margaret Thatcher tore up laws giving unions powers that helped them protect fellow trade unionists, replacing them with repressive legislation that allowed the government to grab union funds, limit trade union solidarity, and restrict the numbers of unionists picketing at any one time.

Thatcher and a group of politicians around her were contemptuous of trade unions and were prepared to use the powers of the state to destroy them. One group of workers was a particular target – the miners. The prime minister prepared

meticulously for what she saw as a crucial test of her power. Indeed in 1981, when Thatcher had not had time to prepare for a miners' strike, she retreated and conceded to miners' demands. But, by 1984, coal stocks were high, the police had been trained in aggressive riot control techniques, and, after an election victory buoyed up by the Falklands War in 1983, she was ready for a confrontation with the miners.

**T**he strike began in March, 1984, when the National Coal Board announced the closure of its colliery at Cortonwood, near Barnsley. It was a body blow to the Yorkshire miners because the pit had just had millions of pounds spent on it and miners from another recently-closed pit had just transferred to it.

The closure was the trigger for a national strike by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). It was not a strike about pay but about protecting jobs and communities against a devastating round of pit closures. Dennis Skinner, the veteran Labour MP from the former Derbyshire mining community of Bolsover, a former miner himself, put it well when he spoke at the With Banners Held High commemoration in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, on March 5, 2015, the 30th anniversary of the return-to-work by the miners after the year-long strike. "The very idea that here in Yorkshire a 59-year-old miner, one year away from his retirement, was prepared to risk losing the roof over his own family's head



Police open their wall of riot shields to allow mounted police to charge a mass picket of striking miners at Orgreave. The photograph is taken from a 17-page photo essay by John Harris, of ReportDigital, published in ColdType in May, 2007. [Download the pdf at www.coldtype.net/Assets.07/Essays/0507.MinersFinal.pdf](http://www.coldtype.net/Assets.07/Essays/0507.MinersFinal.pdf)

in order to find a job for a 16-year-old in another part of the British coalfield that he was never likely to meet. That's real honour. It was a battle about jobs and not the pocket," he said.

June 18 marks the 34th anniversary of a pivotal event in the year-long miners' strike – the Battle of Orgreave. On that day, the NUM deployed 5,000 pickets from across the UK to prevent access to the Orgreave coking works by strike-breaking lorries that collected coke for use at the British Steel Corporation mill in Scunthorpe. It was a bright summer day, with many miners dressed in jeans, T-shirts and plimsols, and in a relaxed mood. Ranged against them were 6,000 police officers from 18 forces, equipped with riot gear, supported by dogs and 42 mounted police officers.

What followed was a brutal assault by the police on the pickets. Apart from the assaults by mounted police, short-shield units indiscriminately attacked miners, resulting in 71 pickets later being charged with riot and 24 with violent disorder. However, both the police and most media coverage placed the blame for the carnage that day on violent picketing by miners.

Establishing the truth about who was responsible for organising the police assault has become the focus of the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign (OTJC), a tenacious group which includes striking miners who were arrested and charged at Orgreave. The OTJC was set up in November, 2012, after the report into the 1989 Hillsborough football disaster, which resulted in the deaths of 96 Liverpool supporters, revealed that South Yorkshire police had fabricated evidence about their role in the disaster. A brilliant BBC "Inside Out" programme which exposed South Yorkshire Police's use of fabricated evidence against miners arrested at Orgreave also provided another spur.

**T**he OTJC wants a full public inquiry into who planned, organised and authorised the police assaults at Orgreave. It has organised a march and rally on June 16 near the Orgreave site to keep its work in public focus. The following week, in Sheffield, on Thursday June 21, there will be a public meeting, "It Isn't History: Why The Miners' Strike Matters Today", with Chris Peace

## GRANVILLE WILLIAMS

from the OTJC and Nick Jones, the former BBC journalist who covered the miners' strike for BBC Radio. (Full details of all OTJC events can be found at [www.otjc.org.uk](http://www.otjc.org.uk).)

The defeat of the miners and their return to work on March 5, 1985, had enormous repercussions, with Thatcher embarking on widespread privatisation of public utilities.

**J**ames Bloodworth's book, "Hired: Six Months Undercover in Low-Wage Britain", published in March, on the 34th anniversary of the start of the year-long miners' strike, reveals other grim consequences. Bloodworth spent six months living as a zero-hour worker, his first job in 2016 being at the Amazon "fulfilment centre" in Rugeley, Staffs. In the early days of the 1972 miners' strike I went, as a journalist, to Lea Hall Colliery in Rugeley to meet striking miners. At that time, Rugeley was a prosperous town with, in addition to the pit, two power stations, and several thriving factories. Lea Hall Colliery opened in 1960, and closed in January 1991, throwing 1,250 men out of work. Now the town's biggest employers are Amazon and Tesco.

Amazon went to the town in 2011. The firm's vast warehouse, the size of ten football pitches, contains four floors. Bloodworth's worked as a "picker", which involved rushing up and down the long, narrow aisles selecting items from the two-metre high shelves and putting them in big yellow plastic boxes called "totes". These were wheeled around on blue metal trolleys before being sent down conveyor belts to be packed for delivery. On an average day he was expected to send around 40 totes along the conveyor belts. As he dashed around, he carried a handheld device which tracked his every movement. For every dozen or so workers, a line manager would monitoring their work rate through those devices.

In this highly-pressured environment, with slogans and photographs plastered on the walls ('We love coming to work and miss it when we're

not here"), you were designated as an "associate", not a worker, and if your performance fell below the company's targets you were not sacked, but "released".

What happened in Rugeley has been replicated in former mining areas around the country. Sports Direct's biggest warehouse, which has been compared to a "workhouse" and a "gulag" by the Unite trade union, is located in Shirebrook, Derbyshire, the site of Shirebrook Colliery, which closed in 1993.

ASOS, the mail order company run by the global logistics giant XPO, is located near the former mining community of Grimethorpe in South Yorkshire. The GMB union highlighted the "invasive monitoring and surveillance" at the firm, with agency workers and permanent staff saddled with onerous targets to process high volumes of orders each hour, and being discouraged from stopping to drink water or use the toilet.

A common feature of all these companies offering precarious, low-paid work is a fierce resistance to trade unions. It is only through undercover work by reporters and writers such as James Bloodworth, and the work

of unions like Unite and the GMB, that we have found out what goes on inside these anonymous warehouse structures.

A TUC report in 2017 estimated that one in ten UK workers – three-million – now work in insecure jobs. This situation has come about as a direct result of the assault on trade unions under Thatcher, and the wave of de-industrialisation she unleashed. High-paid, full time jobs with pensions, and holidays with pay disappeared. And, of course, the values for which the miners fought in 1984-85 – jobs and the defence of communities – meant nothing to a prime minister who thought that "there is no such thing as society". **CT**

*Granville Williams is a journalist and author. His most recent book is *The Flame Still Burns: The Creative Power of Coal*. He is on the National Council of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom – [www.cpbf.org.uk](http://www.cpbf.org.uk)*

Read ColdType's collection of essays, photographs and book excerpts from the 1984/5 miners' strike at: [www.coldtype.net/Miners.html](http://www.coldtype.net/Miners.html)



**BANNED BY THE GUARDIAN:** Steve Bell's cartoon was rejected by editor Kath Viner for being "antisemitic".

# How the Guardian aided the antisemites

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Here's a small thought experiment that even the editor of the Guardian, Kath Viner, should be able to manage, writes **Jonathan Cook**

**W**HO do you help when you censor a cartoon depicting Israel's well-documented war crimes against Palestinians – and do so on the grounds that the criticism of Israel is antisemitic?

The answer is: you help antisemites.

At the top of this page is the cartoon the Guardian does not want its readers to see. Drawn by Steve Bell, probably Britain's foremost political

cartoonist, it shows Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu seated alongside his British counterpart, Theresa May, in Downing Street.

Their cosy alliance is shown being promoted to the cameras at a terrible price to the Palestinians. The diminutive figure of Razan al-Najjar, a young Palestinian medic who was murdered on June 1 in Gaza by an Israeli sniper as she came to the aid of other Palestinians being killed and wounded by other Israeli snipers, serves as a

symbol. Burning in the Downing Street hearth between Netanyahu and May, she is the sacrificial victim fuelling their power relationship.

So what, we might ask, could possibly be anti-semitic about the cartoon? Does it make a generalisation about Jews? No. Does it even make a generalisation about Israelis? No. It deals only with the hawkish leader of Israel. In fact, one could argue that it is not even chiefly about Israel or Netanyahu, but is probably best read as an indictment of the way leaders such as May cosy up to Israel as though Palestinian lives are so inconsequential that they do not need to be taken into account.

The cartoon indicts the immoral calculations made in the pursuit of political power, the terrible price paid by the victims, and our – the viewer’s – collusion in a system that privileges the powerful and ignores the powerless. In other words, it represents all that is best about political cartoons, or what might be termed graphic journalism. It holds power – and us – to account.

And yet the Guardian has decided its readers need shielding from this message. It has preferred to side with the powerful against the powerless, and to prioritise the sensitivities of a nuclear-armed state over the suffering of a stateless people held captive by their occupier.

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**B**ut as bad as that is, the Guardian has done something even worse. It has justified this awful act of censorship by accusing the cartoonist of antisemitism. From the correspondence we have seen from Bell, it seems that Viner and other editors believed presenting Razan al-Najjar as a burning piece of human coal might suggest parallels with the Nazis, crematoria and the Holocaust.

We might ponder what this reveals about the limits of the cartoonists’ art when it comes to depicting Israel, a highly militarised state currently celebrating the 51st year of its belligerent occupation of the Palestinian territories. A state that is currently committing regular massacres of non-armed Palestinian demonstrators trying to liberate themselves from the prison of Gaza.

Showing Palestinians as sacrificial victims,



**Gerald Scarfe's rendering of suffering Palestinians a few years ago was declared a "blood libel" by the Sunday Times**

according to the Guardian, is antisemitic.

And, as another major British cartoonist, Gerald Scarfe, discovered a few years ago, presenting the daily reality of Palestinians bleeding under occupation is, according to the Sunday Times, a blood libel.

Meanwhile, the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung just recently sacked its cartoonist for antisemitism after he depicted Netanyahu holding a missile as he celebrated the chance to exploit Israel's victory at the Eurovision song contest.

In a post last month, I described this process as the mystification of antisemitism. I explained





**German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung sacked its cartoonist after he depicted Netanyahu holding a missile as he celebrated the chance to exploit Israel's victory at the Eurovision song contest**

why it is so dangerous and how it is being abused to shut down all sorts of political conversations we desperately need to have – and not just about Israel.

But here I want to make an additional point. Does Viner's act of censorship actually help to realise what she and the other editors claim they want to achieve? Does it contribute to lessening the threat of antisemitism? The answer is that it does not. In fact, quite the reverse: it can only serve to fuel antisemitism.

**W**hen harsh critiques of Israel and its leaders are silenced – and harsh critiques of Israel are precisely what we need – Israel is being treated as a special case. It is benefiting from a kind of reverse antisemitism, or philosemitism.

When a standard caricature of Netanyahu – far less crude than the caricatures of British and American leaders like Blair and Trump – is denounced as anti-semitic, we are likely to infer that Israeli leaders expect and receive preferential treatment. When showing Netanyahu steeped in blood – as so many other world leaders have been – is savaged as a blood libel, we are likely to conclude that Israeli war crimes are uniquely sanctioned. When Netanyahu cannot be shown holding a missile, we may assume that Israel has dis-

pensation to bombard Gaza, whatever the toll on civilians.

And when we see the furore created over a cartoon like Bell's, we can only surmise that other, less established, cartoonists will draw the appropriate conclusion: keep away from criticising Israel because it will harm your personal and professional reputation.

*When harsh critiques of Israel and its leaders are silenced – Israel is being treated as a special case*

In those circumstances, the logic of the real antisemite starts to sound more plausible. He says that “the Jews” secretly control the world, their tentacles everywhere. No one, not even the most powerful countries on earth, can stand up to them. Which is why “the Jews” can get a cartoon of Netanyahu censored, why “the Jews” can intimidate the biggest newspapers and TV stations, why “the Jews” have our politicians in their pockets.

When we fail to hold Israel to account; when we concede to Israel, a nuclear-armed garrison state, the sensitivities of a Holocaust victim; when we so mistake moral priorities that we elevate the rights of a state over the rights of the Palestinians it victimises, we not only fuel the prejudices of the antisemite but we make his arguments appealing to others. We do not help to stamp out antisemitism, we encourage it to spread.

That is why Viner and the Guardian have transgressed not just against Bell, and against the art of political cartoons, and against justice for the Palestinians, but also against Jews and their long-term safety. **CT**

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



9/11 DISASTER IN NYC: Plane crashes into the South Tower of the World Trade Center.

Photo: Wikimedia

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# The problem with conspiracy theories

They rarely find solutions, but divert attention from reality, writes **Kevin Ryan**

**P**EOPLE today spend a lot of time talking about conspiracy theories. These theories often do harm because they divert attention away from the facts and thereby allow real crimes and other harmful effects to continue. Such conspiracy theories can be spotted based on three basic characteristics.

1. They lack evidence.
2. They spread widely before the facts are examined.

3. Much simpler alternatives are not considered.

For example, take the most popular conspiracy theory of recent times – the official account for the crimes of 9/11.

## 1. Lack of evidence

This theory was produced by mythologist Philip Zelikow, who, before the investigation began, created an outline that was kept secret from his

## KEVIN RYAN

own Commission staff. Zelikow's outline determined the outcome of the investigation before any facts were examined. Moreover, the 9/11 Commission claimed 63 times in its report that it could find "no evidence" related to important aspects of the crimes. Evidence that the commission did rely on, as a basis for its report, was later found to be false. Similarly, the evidence collected and held secret by World Trade Center investigating agency NIST was later found to contradict the agency's conclusions. Much of that evidence is still being held secret including the computer model data that NIST was forced to substitute for physical testing that contradicted its conclusions.

### 2. Spread widely before facts examined

The conspiracy theory reports provided by the 9/11 Commission and NIST spread quickly before anyone could examine them. Getting government representatives to commit to any explanation for what had happened on 9/11 took years but, once ready, news media sources were prepped in advance to allow rapid parroting of the official line. The timing of NIST's reports coincided with political events, like each anniversary of the 9/11 crimes, so that media could quickly present the official story while public interest was high but critical review was not possible. With the report on WTC 7, the public was given just three weeks to comment on a report that was nearly seven years in the making. The report was later found to be unscientific and false.

### 3. Simpler alternatives not considered

The official conspiracy theory for 9/11 calls for belief in unbelievable things. That is, to believe the official account you must accept that otherwise honest military leaders will lie repeatedly for years to make themselves look bad. Buildings

will collapse in unprecedented ways, through the path of most resistance, with no scientific evidence to explain it. The Secret Service will fail to do its job, insider trading can occur with no insiders, and "the enemy" – a vaguely defined group of dark-skinned people who just happen to live on strategically critical resources – can remain omnipotent and elusive. All the while, much simpler explanations are evident but cannot be considered.

The official conspiracy theory for 9/11 has led to tremendously harmful effects. Many Americans have forgotten completely what it means to be an American. An ongoing terrorism lottery, that could select any of us as a victim at any time, continues with no end in sight. And the 9/11 wars that were based on the official account are bankrupting the nation both financially and morally.

Yes, conspiracy theories are a problem when not examined closely. Let's all take a closer look at this one. **CT**

*Kevin Ryan's work as site manager for the environmental testing division of Underwriters Laboratories (UL) led him to begin investigating the tragedy of September 11, 2001. UL fired him, in 2004, for publicly asking questions about UL's testing of the structural materials used to construct the World Trade Center buildings, as well as UL's involvement in the WTC investigation being conducted by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). Since 2006, Ryan has been the co-editor of the Journal of 9/11 Studies and a founding member of several action groups. He has also served as a board director at Architects and Engineers for 9/11 Truth and co-authored several books and numerous peer-reviewed scientific articles on the subject. You can contact Kevin at [kncryan@msn.com](mailto:kncryan@msn.com)*

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ROBERT LEBECK



Welders in the production halls of the Volkswagen factory at Woldburg, Germany. June 1968.

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# 1968

German photo-reporter may have missed the student protests, but his photographs captured the spark of change that defined the latter years of a fractious decade

**T**HE year 1968 was one of the most tumultuous of the second half of 20th-century, the culmination of half of decade of radical change and struggle that reached its peak with massive student-led social unrest that threatened to topple elected governments in the West, and armed rebellion that battled authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe.

Robert Lebeck, top photo-reporter for Stern, the top-selling German weekly photo magazine, missed much of this action.



Pope Paul VI in the papal limousine in front of the cathedral at Plaza Bolívar in Bogotá, Colombia. August 1968





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### Richard Nixon's Primary election campaign. February, 1968

“The year of the student protests took place without me,” Lebeck later recalled in his autobiography. “When the barricades were burning in Paris, I was working in Florida on a series about two murdered co-eds; when students began protesting in front of the Springer Building, I was photographing the christening of [actress and singer] Hildegard Knef’s baby; and when Russian troops marched into Prague, I was accompanying the pope’s visit to Bogotá.”

However, a major new book – *Robert Lebeck 1968*, published by Steidl and accompanying a new exhibition of his work – shows the lasting influence of Lebeck, who died in 2014, during that era-defining year,



Children's military academy, USA. March 1968.



**Rudi Dutschke, spokesman of the German student movement, speaks at Charles University, Prague. April 1968.**



**Opening of the marksmen's fest at Wolfsburg, Germany. July 1968.**

“Upon close inspection of all contact sheets, prints, and reportages by Robert Lebeck produced for Stern during this epoch-making year, it becomes clear to what extent – contrary to the photographer’s own assessment – significant events and social changes that took place that year are reflected in his trenchant photographs,” writes Ralf Beil, director of the Kunstmuseum at Wolfsburg, in the first of a series of essays, featuring contact sheets of Lebeck’s photographs and tearsheets from the printed pages of Stern, that introduce each section of the book.

He adds, “The hitherto not-always-perceivable golden thread running through this often-mythicised year, marked by a spirit of optimism as well

## ROBERT LEBECK

Photos © Robert Lebeck 1968. Published by Steidl: <http://www.steidl.de>

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**Jackie Kennedy and sister Lee Radziwill in St. Patrick's Cathedral for the memorial service for Bobby Kennedy, June 1968.**

as by insistence, and failure, is made visible with the help of exemplary photographic series from New York, Bogotá, Kassel, Belfast, and Wolfsburg.

“Many of these photos – and this is what makes the project as a whole so appealing – have never been printed before and are thus for the most part completely unknown to a broader audience.”

Beil also points out other changes that accompanied student protest and free love, including the fact that 1968 was also a year of armed violence. “Lebeck’s photo series documents the ubiquitous presence of weapons and their ill-fated use – even when this is not immediately visible in the photos themselves, such as at the funeral of the assassinated presidential candidate



**Gisela Kreutzmann, who shot and killed the wife of her lover, on day parole in Hamburg harbour. October 1968.**



## ROBERT LEBECK



Photos © Robert Lebeck 1968. Published by Steidl: <http://www.steidl.de>

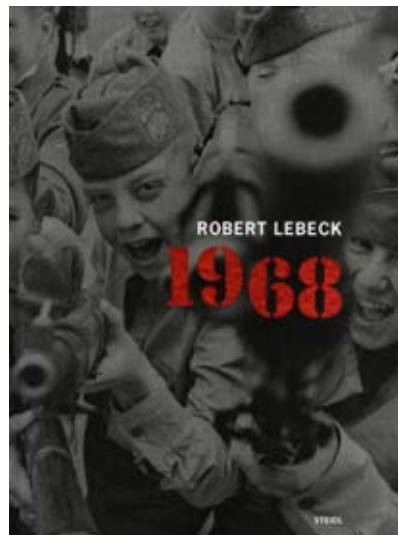
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### The newcomer from Wolfsburg. Stern tests the VW 411. July 1968

Robert F. Kennedy. In contrast, during the papal visit, Colombia virtually bristles with rifles and sub-machine guns; Wolfsburg experiences an emotional rollercoaster between a marksmen's festival and youth protest at the swearing-in ceremony of young soldiers; and at the end of the year in Belfast, although still quiet before the storm up ahead, the patrolling soldiers are already armed with assault weapons."

Lebeck's book also shows the lengths to which publishers would go to scoop their rivals in a decade that saw the beginning of the steady decline of mass market photo-based magazines. They would soon be replaced by the instant imagery and fleeting, often bafflingly incoherent, coverage of world events delivered by 24-hour TV news that is omnipresent 50 years later.

—Tony Sutton



**ROBERT LEBECK**  
**1968**

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# Awaiting the Putin-Nazi apocalypse

People willing to believe absurdities, to switch off their critical thinking faculties in order to conform to an official narrative so blatantly ridiculous, have traded their autonomy for the comfort of the herd

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**DON'T** know about you, but I'm getting a little tired of waiting for the Hitlerian nightmare that the corporate media promised us was coming back in 2016. Frankly, I'm beginning to suspect that all their apocalyptic pronouncements were just parts of some elaborate cocktease. I mean, here we are, a year-and-half into the reign of the Trumpian Reich, and, well, where are all the concentration camps, the SS units with their death's head insignia, the Riefenstahlian parades and rallies? Trump hasn't even banned the Democratic Party, or annexed Canada, or invaded Mexico, or made anybody wear colour-coded armbands. If he doesn't start Hitlering relatively soon, the oracles of the corporate media are going to have some serious explaining to do.

I don't think I'm overreacting. After all, back in 2016, the Guardian promised us an "Age of Darkness", and the end of "civilised order", as we know it. "Globalisation is dead, and white supremacy has triumphed", one of its more hysterical pundits proclaimed. "Donald Trump is actually a fascist", Michael Kinsley assured us in the Washington Post. Charles Blow, of the New York Times, warned that Trump's election was "the beginning of the end", the descent of the republic into "racial Orwellianism", whatever that's supposed to mean. Thomas Friedman called it "a moral 911". Paul Krugman predicted nothing short of "a global recession with no end in sight". Jonathan Chait, after heroically vowing not to flee the country with his terrified family, but to

stay and fight to the bitter end, guaranteed us that the "monster", Trump, would "shake the republic to its foundations".

Perhaps my seismometer is on the fritz, but I haven't detected much foundation shaking. Yes, Trump repulses me, personally. I do not like the man. I never have. I was based in New York for 15 years, in the 1990s and early 2000s, before he became a game show host, when he was still just a shady real estate mogul with alleged ties to organised crime who occasionally appeared on *Wrestlemania* and just generally went about the city making a narcissistic ass of himself and plastering his gold-plated name onto everything. So I have no illusions about his character ... the man is an inveterate snake oil salesman with the moral compass of a Tijuana pimp. All I'm saying is, we were promised Hitler, or Mussolini at the very least, and it seems like all we're getting so far is just regular old narcissistic Donald Trump.

**O**f course, he could just be laying low and holding back on the Hitler stuff as part of the evil master plan personally developed by Vladimir Putin to systematically brainwash Americans (with state-of-the-art mind-control Facebook ads) into embracing all-out National Socialism and marching through the streets in full Nazi regalia singing *Amerika Über Alles* ... at which point Trump will rip off his mask, reveal his true Hitlerian face, Steve Bannon will suddenly



**SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME?:** Protest outside the US embassy in London after Trump's election win.

Photo: Bethan Pridmore

reappear in the turret of an M1 Abrams tank at the head of a division of rebel infantry flying giant Confederate flags as they hideously rumble down Pennsylvania Avenue, and the Putin-Nazi Holocaust will begin.

Or maybe the extremely serious, Pulitzer Prize-winning political pundit David Leonhardt is onto something. In a prominent op-ed in the *New York Times*, he wonders if Putin's "secret plan" is for Trump to destroy "the Atlantic alliance" by arriving late for the G7 meeting and "picking fights over artificial issues", not to mention insulting the Canadian prime minister, which, it doesn't get much more hair-raising than that. OK, I know you're probably thinking that sounds like the hopelessly paranoid jabber of some conspiracy theorist nut on YouTube, but we're talking the *New York Times* here, folks, and a bona fide "respectable pundit" who wrote a whole 15,000-word ebook and has been interviewed by Stephen Colbert, among his many other distinguished accomplishments.

Examined in the context of other blatantly loony theories the corporate media are currently attempting to ram down our throats, Leonhardt's theory kind of makes sense. The *Guardian*, another very serious newspaper, in addition to covering the repercussions of its coverage of Corbyn's Nazi Death Cult, is hot on the trail of

the soon-to-be-infamous Putin-Banks-Brexit Connection. According to "documents seen by the *Observer*," a *Guardian* sister publication, Arron Banks, a "Brexit bankroller", allegedly had brunch with the Russian ambassador three times, instead of just once, as he had claimed. He was also allegedly offered a piece of some shady gold deal in exchange for the number of someone on Trump transition team, which for some reason it was otherwise impossible to obtain. Or whatever. It doesn't really matter what happened. The point is, Putin orchestrated the Brexit, presumably as part of his secret plan to destabilise the Atlantic alliance, and then blackmailed Trump into running for president with that "pee-tape" the Democrats paid a former British spook to allege exists.

**P**aul Krugman of the *New York Times* concurs. In his latest extremely serious piece of totally respectable grown-up opinionating, he once again calls Trump "a quisling" (he's developed a fondness for this term, which goes over well with *New York Times* readers) and reiterates that Trump is "a de facto foreign agent", and that "America as we know it is finished". Tragically, according to Krugman, the FBI, CIA, and other *Guardians* of Western Democracy are utterly powerless

to deal with this quisling, and his evil puppet master, Putin, because it turns out the entire Republican Party is “hopelessly, irredeemably corrupt”. Yes, it appears the only chance we have to save the world from Trumpzilla, and imminent Putin-Nazi Holocaust, is to elect a buttload of Democrats to office, and eventually an Obama-like Democratic President, so they can launch an all-out thermonuclear war against Russia and North Korea ... that’ll teach these Putin-Nazis to screw around with our trade agreements!

Oh, and also, we need to cancel the Brexit, and do away with all these “populist” movements that Putin has fomented all over Europe. For example, according to billionaire George Soros, the refugee-hating League in Italy is likely another Putin-backed front, part of his scheme to “dominate the West”. One can only assume that the AfD, the FPÖ, Rassemblement National, and every other extreme-Right party exploiting people’s rage and fear in Europe are parts of Putin’s grand conspiracy (except, of course, for the Ukrainian Nazis the Western alliance put into power). Soros, like billionaire Bruce Wayne before him, tired of waiting for the West to strike back, is taking matters into his own hands. Not only has he been tirelessly labouring to prevent Donald Trump from “destroying the world”, now he’s financing “Best for Britain”, a campaign to de-brainwash the British people, who, obviously, only voted for Brexit because they’d been brainwashed by the Putin-Nazis.

I could go on and on with this. Have you heard the one about the Putin-Nazis conspiring with the NRA? How about the one where Emmanuel Macron, in order to protect the French from “fake news”, and division-sowing Putin-Nazi memes, wants the authority to censor the Internet? Or have you read the column in which David Brooks, without a detectable trace of irony, laments the passing of international relationships “based on friendship, shared values, loyalty, and affection” ... seriously, he used the word “affection” in reference to the Western alliance, one of the most ruthless, mass-murdering empires in the history of ruthless, mass-murdering empires? Oh, yeah,

and I almost forgot ... MSNBC’s Rachel Maddow is reporting that the North Korea summit was also orchestrated by Putin!

I’m not sure how much more bizarre things can get. This level of bull goose loony paranoia, media-generated mass hysteria, and mindless conformity would be hysterically funny ... if it weren’t so fucking horrifying in terms of what it says about millions of Westerners, who are apparently prepared to believe almost anything the authorities tell them, no matter how nuts. That famous Voltaire quote comes to mind ... “Those who can make you believe absurdities, can make you commit atrocities”, he wrote. Another, more disturbing way of looking at it is, people willing to believe absurdities, to switch off their critical thinking faculties in order to conform to an official narrative as blatantly ridiculous as the Putin-Nazi narrative, are people who have already surrendered their autonomy, who have traded it for the comfort of the herd. Such people cannot be reasoned with, because there isn’t really anyone in there. There is only whatever mindless jabber got injected into their brain that day, the dutiful repetition of which guarantees they remain a “normal” person (who believes what other normal persons believe), and not some sort of “radical” or “extremist”.

These people are the people who worry me ... these “normal” people who, completely calmly, as if what they are saying wasn’t batshit crazy, explain how Trump is just like Hitler, and how Putin is trying to take over the world. I sit there and listen and smile at these people, some of whom are friends and colleagues, people who I genuinely like, and who genuinely like me in return, but who, under the right set of circumstances, would stand by and watch me marched into prison, or worse, and not utter a word in protest.

CT

*CJ Hopkins is an American playwright, novelist and satirist based in Berlin. His plays are published by Bloomsbury Publishing (UK) and Broadway Play Publishing (USA). His debut novel, ZONE 23, is published by Snoggsworthy, Swaine & Cormorant. He can be reached at [www.cjhopkins.com](http://www.cjhopkins.com) or [www.consentfactory.org](http://www.consentfactory.org)*

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SAM PIZZIGATI

# Why we need to cap the boss's pay

Amid rising inequality, the notion of capping income has suddenly become politically plausible

**I**n the United States today, a just-released Federal Reserve report informs us, over a fifth of the nation's families simply cannot afford to "pay all of their current month's bills in full".

Over a quarter of families, the report goes on, skip "necessary medical care" because they can't afford the cost. And an even greater share – 40 percent – wouldn't be able to cover an unexpected expense of \$400 without having to borrow cash or sell something they own.

In other words, many millions of American households have essentially almost nothing in the way of savings. And not much in the way of income either. Two out of every five Americans, the new Federal Reserve study details, have annual household incomes less than \$40,000.

Meanwhile, at the other end of America's economic spectrum, we have households raking in much more than \$40,000 every day. Half the CEOs at America's 200 biggest corporations now make over \$336,538 per week, according to a review of 2017 corporate compen-

sation that Equilar, a pay consulting firm, has just completed for the New York Times.

These top execs and their fellow wealthy can afford to handle any personal emergency life may throw their way. More importantly, they can also afford to buy a level of political influence that turns their needs – and their needs alone – into national priorities.

The end result? We find ourselves in a United States where nearly half the nation lives at the edge of economic disaster while government wallows in a "gridlock" that magically vanishes only when lawmakers have a chance to enrich the already rich.

**S**o what do we do about all this? Maybe we need to start thinking more boldly about solutions to our ever-widening economic divide. One such solution: a maximum wage. I started writing about the idea of a "maximum wage" – a cap on how much richer an already rich person can become over the course of a year – over a quarter-century ago. Back then, few people took the idea of a capping income seriously because serious people just weren't talking about income caps, not anywhere in the world.

But that's changed. Today, we can point to places all around the world where the idea of a cap on income has become a matter of serious political dis-

## THE CASE FOR A MAXIMUM WAGE

Sam Pizzigati

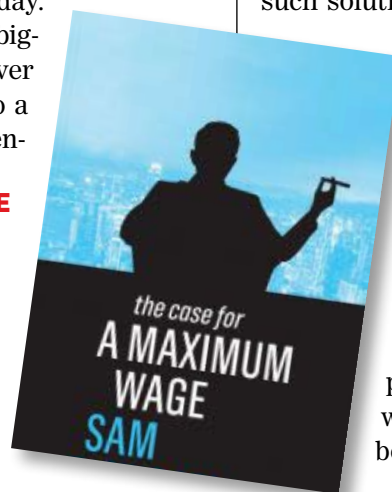
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## SAM PIZZIGATI

cussion, as I relate in my new book, “The Case for a Maximum Wage”.

In France, a progressive candidate in the first round of the 2017 presidential election, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, campaigned on a platform that included a call for a maximum wage. Mélenchon finished just four percentage points behind that election’s eventual winner.

In the UK, the leader of the British Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, muses openly about moving his nation toward a maximum wage. In South Africa, polling just conducted by a business group found 53 percent of that nation’s public supporting a maximum wage for corporate execs and only 18 percent opposing.

We now have serious people, even in the United States, talking capping income. This past March, the deputy chair of the Democratic National Committee, Rep. Keith Ellison, told the Congressional Progressive Caucus that America needs to consider enacting a maximum wage.

### *We have no limits at all on how rich people can become – and that’s not good for anyone*

What’s driving this new interest in capping income? Three pivotal trends stand out.

First, inequality has become significantly worse. Income and wealth have concentrated to a degree unimaginable in the early 1990s.

In the 1992 US presidential primaries, candidates from both major parties railed against CEO pay excess. At that time, CEOs were averaging 86 times the average American worker pay. Today’s top execs are averaging over 360 times worker pay.

The second key factor: We now have a much better sense of how much maldistributions of income and wealth endanger every aspect of social decency.

Societies that let income and wealth concentrate at the top, research over recent decades has made abundantly clear, don’t work particularly well. Inequality distorts our democracy, erodes our economy, and coarsens our culture. Researchers have linked rising inequality to nearly every

social malady that afflicts us, from traffic congestion to mental illness.

The third reason why serious people have begun talking maximum wage: We now have a politically plausible path to an income cap. Here in the United States, we’ve actually started down that path. We’ve entered the age of a new “pay ratio politics”.

This year, for the first time ever, US corporations must disclose the ratio between their CEO pay and the pay of their company’s median – most typical – worker. Many of us working for a more equal America believe this disclosure could turn out to be a real game changer in the struggle against inequality, the first step toward a maximum-wage America.

Corporate America, on the other hand, has been bellowing “foul” against this ratio disclosure mandate, at times almost implying that disclosure will bring the end of civilisation as we know it. In fact, disclosing data on the gaps between corporate execs and what they pay their typical workers will help us become more civilised.

What makes, after all, for civilisation? Limits. In civilised societies, we set limits all the time. We limit how fast motorists can drive. We limit how many ducks hunters can shoot. We limit how much noise our neighbours can make. We set limits like these to make our societies better places to live. We set limits because we understand excess – in anything – never does us any good.

But we have no limits at all on how rich people can become – and that’s not good for anyone.

**W**hat might an appropriate limit on income be? In 1942, Franklin Roosevelt, the President of the United States, had one answer. After paying federal income tax, FDR proposed, no individual American should have an annual income greater than \$25,000, about \$375,000 in today’s dollars.

In effect, FDR was proposing a 100 percent tax rate on income over \$25,000.

Congress didn’t buy Roosevelt’s 100 percent top rate, but Congress did set a top tax rate at 94 percent on income over \$200,000, and that top rate would hover around 90 percent for the next 20 years, years that would see the United States

## SAM PIZZIGATI

become the first mass middle class nation in the history of the world.

But those steeply progressive tax rates in the United States did not last. They could not withstand the fierce political pushback from the rich. The wealthy simply had more of a direct stake in slashing high rates than average Americans had in keeping those high rates in place.

So those top rates fell, to 70 percent in the mid 1960s, to 50 percent in 1982, to 28 percent in 1988, before jumping up a bit. The current top rate: 37 percent, and that's only for paycheck income. On income from investments, America's richest pay taxes at just a base 20 percent rate.

Progressive taxes, as traditionally structured, proved unsustainable in the 20th-century. We need a new structure. We need a tax system that gives average Americans a clearer personal stake in keeping tax rates on high incomes high – and the wealthy a reason to care about those without wealth.

A new tax structure that linked incomes at top and bottom could meet both these goals – by placing a 100 percent top tax rate on income above a set multiple of the annual income that comes from working at the minimum wage. If we had this linkage in place, our richest and most powerful could only see their incomes increase if the incomes of our weakest and poorest increased first.

Imagine a world with this sort of “maximum wage” in effect. Our most privileged would have a direct personal interest in improving the life chances of our least advantaged.

*The rich would only get more if the incomes of our weakest and poorest increased first*

Those of us already greying will likely never see that world in our lifetimes. But we could move meaningfully in that direction if we began challenging the pay practices now common in our single biggest contemporary contributor to inequality, the modern American corporation.

And this takes us back to that new corporate pay ratio disclosure mandate. By the end of this year, every major US corporation that trades on Wall

Street will have made these disclosures. Many already have. At Walmart, we now know, typical employees would have to work 1,188 years to equal the pay that went last year to Walmart's CEO. At McDonald's, typical workers would have to work 3,101 years. At the toymaker Mattel, just under 5,000 years.

**W**hat if we placed consequences on the corporations with outrageous ratios like these? What if we subjected corporations with wide ratios to a higher corporate tax rate? Or denied them government contracts and subsidies?

Work toward these ends has already begun. In Oregon, the city of Portland has raised the business tax rate on companies that pay their CEOs over 100 and 250 times typical worker pay. San Francisco has a similar proposal up for a referendum this November. Six states have legislation pending that either ups business taxes on companies with wide ratios or penalises these companies in the government procurement process. In the UK, the Labour Party is pushing for legislation that would deny government contracts to companies with a CEO-worker pay ratio wider than 20 to one.

If we made pay ratios central to our progressive political project, we wouldn't have to limit ourselves to legislative actions like these. Published corporate pay ratios could inform and inspire grassroots citizen campaigns on a wide variety of fronts.

With pay ratios, almost every social situation would become a potential arena for egalitarian struggle. Students could join with university faculty and staff to demand that their institutions link top administrator salaries to a modest multiple of pay at the base. Donors to nonprofits could insist that the organisations they support limit their executive pay to a similar multiple. Workers could take pay ratio demands to the bargaining table.

Every such grassroots campaign waged would help stitch an awareness of pay ratios into the fabric of everyday life. Every victory won, no matter how small, would help people understand that the level of inequality that surrounds us has been and always will be a human construct. No force of



## SAM PIZZIGATI

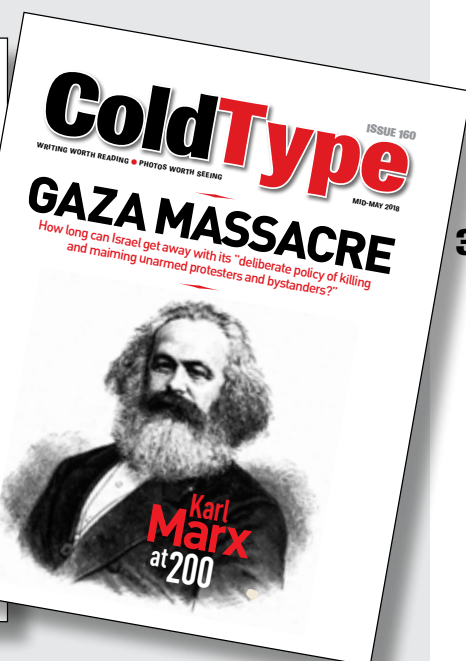
nature leaves some of us enormously richer than others. We can choose to be more equal. Struggles around pay ratios can make these choices plain.

We can wage these struggles at every level, from local to national, calibrating each campaign to whatever political realities confront us. Law-makers not ready to impose consequences on private companies with unconscionably wide gaps? Then the struggle starts in the public sector: No one paid with public funds should walk away with more than 10 or 25 or 50 times what any other person in the public sector makes. A 50-times ratio too politically difficult to achieve, in either a public- or private-sector struggle? Then the push becomes a call for a 100-times standard.

No magic, perfect ratio number exists, just as

no magic, perfect minimum-wage level exists. Our income floors globally have evolved over time. Our income ceilings will evolve over time as well. And every ceiling we set, in whatever setting, will leave society's remaining sky-high incomes less tolerable – and more vulnerable. **CT**

*Sam Pizzigati co-edits [Inequality.org](http://Inequality.org). Among his books on maldistributed income and wealth: *The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970*. *The Case for a Maximum Wage*, will appear this month. Readers who pre-order before June 30 at [www.inequality.org](http://www.inequality.org) get 50 percent off the cover price. Just use promo code PIZMW.*



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BRIAN WAKAMO

# Inequality at the World Cup

A toxic combination of exploitation, corruption, and greed  
tarnish soccer's governing body

**T**HE World Cup kicks off its 21st tournament this month, bringing together 32 nations and their soccer (or, depending on what you call it, football) teams. The tournament is the star event for the world's most popular sport: more than a billion people tuned in for 2014's final game between Germany and Argentina. It's also the showcase for an organisation that embodies much of the world's most persistent inequalities.

FIFA is perhaps best known within the United States for its long-running video game series. A close second claim to fame? The corruption charges brought by US federal prosecutors in 2015. Former Attorney General Loretta Lynch and the Department of Justice indicted 14 FIFA officials for wire fraud, racketeering, and money laundering. The charges represented one of the first times that the organisation's leadership, long accused of corruption, was held accountable for its actions.

More than a dozen individuals made guilty pleas over bribes for World Cup hosting bids, especially related to the 2018 Russia and 2022 Qatar games. The charges also led to the resignation of long-serving FIFA President Sepp Blatter, and the passage of a reform package aimed at hampering corruption.

FIFA execs were also implicated in the Panama Papers. The leaked documents raised questions over current FIFA president Gianni Infantino's role in selling broadcast rights to murky offshore companies while he helmed the legal

division of Europe's governing football body. The papers also revealed a connection between a member of FIFA's ethics committee and one of the officials charged with money laundering.

Corruption, as rampant as it might be, is just one of the institutional failings of soccer's global governing body. FIFA's marked lack of accountability has also led to labour abuses on a grand scale. The news outlet Publica exposed the exploitation of workers building the tournament infrastructure ahead of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. The employees constructing the stadiums – already controversial due to the displacement of low-income Brazilians and the destruction of the Amazon – told reporters of horrific working conditions and inhumane working hours. Workers went on strike at least 10 times to protest for their rights on the job.

**H**uman Rights Watch released a report for the 2018 World Cup in Russia detailing their own documentation of labor abuses. The organisation, using evidence from a trade union tasked with monitoring labour conditions, found that at least 17 workers had died while building stadiums for the tournament. In their report, Human Rights Watch also documented wage theft, exploitation of migrant workers, and unsafe working conditions – such as forcing workers to continue on the job outdoors in frigid Russian weather. The Norwegian sports magazine Josimar noted the exploitation of North Korean migrant workers,



Work on a new stadium in Saransk for the 2018 World Cup.

Photo: Wikimedia

citing “slave-like” conditions that left one worker dead.

All of these abuses took place as FIFA promised – for the first time – to take an active hand in overseeing the conditions for the workers building the stadiums for their games. FIFA, in response to Human Rights Watch, announced that their monitoring system helped improve working conditions on the site. The report emphatically shows otherwise.

The abuses continue to grow for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. Nepalese and Indian migrant workers face particularly gruelling working conditions, with some reports claiming that hundreds of migrant workers die each year on the job. Multinational corporations contracted to do the construction work exploit the Qatari migrant worker employment system for their gain, and fail to provide wages and exit visas for the workers they hire.

Just as in Russia, these violations are happening under the eye of FIFA’s monitoring system. The tournament has already been moved into the winter season due to Qatar’s hot climate; why, then, are these labourers forced to work in the arid summers?

All of FIFA’s corruption and exploitation take place with the support of sponsor corporations

that pay millions of dollars to have their name appear on the advertising boards around the fields. For example, McDonald’s pays between \$10- to \$25-million a year for its position in the second tier of FIFA sponsors.

But companies like the fast food giant often lack the leeway to hold FIFA to account given their own troubling labour histories. Instead of dropping that cash on a tournament, for example, McDonald’s could choose to raise their own workers’ wages – especially as the company’s failure to provide a \$1 an hour wage increase promised in 2015 makes its way back into the news.

Despite FIFA’s toxicity, the World Cup is not only one of the most viewed events around the world, but also one of the most compelling. But as audiences spend the month basking in the globe’s greatest sporting competition, they should also remember the unnecessary costs of the tournament. It’s time to fix FIFA – before the beautiful game is further tarnished by the ugliest exploitation. **CT**

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*Brian Wakamo is a Next Leader at the Institute for Policy Studies and a recent graduate of American University. This article was first published at [www.inequality.org](http://www.inequality.org)*

NATE ROBERT

# Paradise inside a lost empire

We're used to being told how hostile Iran is to Westerners. That's not true, writes Nate Robert, who discovers a long-lost village and spends time with real nomads on his latest visit to the once-powerful Persian empire

**O**NCE upon a time, getting to this secretive Iranian village of Dashtak was really difficult. Little-known and remote, this, is a genuine lost paradise. It's an elevated oasis, hidden 2,000-meters above sea-level, high above the Iranian desert-plateau, inside a protective mountain-crater filled with lush forests of walnuts and pomegranate – one day, I'm going to regret ever mentioning the ancient village named Dashtak.

Down the road, relatively speaking, is the tomb of x the Great. 2,500 years ago, Cyrus united cultures and founded the Persian Empire – the great-

est empire the world had ever known. Around here, the world's first charter on human rights was authored (it's now on display at the British Museum in London), the mighty ceremonial city of Persepolis was built, and kings were laid to rest at the nearby “necropolis” – the wondrous rock-face tombs of the Persian Empire's greatest leaders. All around Dashtak lie the tell-tale ruins of a once powerful, and gracious, empire.

Many of these spectacular sites are visited

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**Left: Nomads tend their goats in Fars Province.**

**Main picture: Watching the sun set, Dashtak, Iran.**

Photos:  
Nate Robert

by travellers from around the world. Indeed, the nearby city of Shiraz, and the incredible ruins of the Persian Empire are firm highlights on the budding Iranian tourist trail. But I wondered aloud if we were the first foreigners to ever visit this secluded village. “No, you’re not the first. Maybe, there’s been about 40,”

That’s about one foreigner every few decades.

Unsurprisingly, there are no hotels in Dashtak. But, we stayed overnight anyway.

Dashtak means “the people who came down to the plains”. More than 1,000 stairs are carved into the sides of the craggy mountain; until recently this long hike was the only way to enter one of the oldest villages in Iran.

Mousavi was our guide. He noted that although the local river had been much drier for the last decade, it’s not really a serious problem – as 800 years of local records indicated all of this has happened before, and all of this will happen again.





**38** The streets of Dashtak, in a photograph taken from the roof of a home.

The village is a scenic amalgamation of styles similar to other ancient Iranian villages. But Dashtak is older, the architectural precursor, a successful template for communal longevity. Hundreds of Dashtaki homes are layered one on top of another, up and down the gentle hills. Constructed from mud walls up to two-meters thick, from any rooftop you may take a stroll around the neighbourhood – peaking into the streets, homes, and courtyards, and glimpsing a lifestyle that has remained this way more-or-less forever.

Mousavi arranged for us to stay in the home of an older acquaintance. Sitting cross-legged on the lounge-room carpet, we got to know each other during our first night together. Mousavi was particularly impressed with the owner’s organic tobacco cultivation skills. “She’s old, but she really knows how to produce the best tobacco.”

He passed me the qalyan (hookah), and continued. “It’s never too dry, it’s so smooth.”

After my turn, I offered the pipe to one of my Shirazi friends. He refused, and Mousavi calmly

interjected. “Ha ha! Don’t offer it to him, he doesn’t want any. This isn’t Tarof, it’s all for you and me!”

Tarof is an Iranian concept. It’s hard to simplify, but Iranians will regularly offer gifts and invitations. Mostly, they’re generous, heart-felt offers, driven by politeness. To be sure, you’re expected to thankfully reject what is being offered, and then dance back-and-forth until the legitimacy of the Tarof is finally revealed. But, in Dashtak, we learned there was no back-and-forth, no Tarof. All the kindness we received was genuine, and final.

At one end of the main room, a blazing fire-place boiled a pot of herbal tea. The kitchen, at the other end of the space, was rustic but functional. Mousavi spread a tablecloth on the floor, next to the big-screen TV perched lopsidedly on the ancient clay wine-barrel. One plate after another began to arrive. The food was organic and local – standing outside the window, the cheese factory was eating grass. A local shepherd walked into the lounge, sat down on the floor beside us, said hello, and helped himself to the communal dinner.



Mousavi, our guide, lights the bedroom fire.

Across Iran, it's estimated there are over one-million nomads. Tending livestock as the seasons dictate, from summer to winter, moving from plains to highlands, they travel around the country and carry on tradition.

Almost all standard Iran tours include a visit to see "the nomadic people". Normally, this happens outside the city of Shiraz, in Fars Province, the area right around here. It's where I spend most of my time in Iran, and yet I've never once visited "the nomadic people".

I have a permanent guide in Iran who has he's previously worked for the biggest names in the country's tourism. He has taken so many tourists to visit the nomads around Fars Province. But, he's never taken me.

"You know, when the other tour groups visit the nomadic people, are they really nomads? Really, are they actually nomadic?"

"No. They're artificial nomads. They're always in the same place. They don't move."

Artificial, nomads, who stay in the same place,

so that tourists can visit them. Huh.

On the plains below Dashtak, I finally met with Iranian nomads. They asked us to refrain from taking photos of the milking-ladies, but they welcomed us to their temporary home. When we arrived, they were washing cooking utensils in the pure water of a nearby stream. Tidying their tents. Milking, and making cheese. Taking care of their herd, sharing the work, spending each night under the stars, among nature. Then, a tight-knit band of friends and family, they'll pack up, and move to greener pastures. When nature says the time is just right.

Once, we all lived this way. And one day, when sanctions have ended and the world descends, all of this will disappear. **CT**

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**Nate Robert** has travelled the world full time since 2012, through 54 countries running "un-tours" to destinations including Iran, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro and Ukraine. His web site is [www.yomadic.com](http://www.yomadic.com).

WILLIAM J. ASTORE

# Enabling Armageddon

The US Air Force's strange love for the new B-21 bomber

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**D** ID you know the US Air Force is working on a new stealth bomber? Don't blame yourself if you didn't, since the project is so secret that most members of Congress aren't privy to the details. (Talk about stealthy!) Known as the B-21 Raider, after General Doolittle's Raiders of World War II fame, it's designed to carry thermonuclear weapons as well as conventional missiles and bombs. In conceptual drawings, it looks much like its predecessor, the B-2 Spirit stealth bomber, all wing and no fuselage, a shape that should help it to penetrate and survive the most hostile air defense systems on Earth for the purposes of a "global strike." (Think: nuclear Armageddon.)

As the air force acquires those future B-21s, the B-2s will be retired along with the older B-1B bomber, although the venerable B-52 (of the Cold War era), much modified, will remain in service for the foreseeable future. At \$550-million per plane (before the inevitable cost overruns even kick in), the Air Force plans to buy as many as 200 B-21s. That's more than \$100-billion in procurement costs alone, a boon for Northrop Grumman, the plane's primary contractor.

If history is any judge, however, a boon for Northrop Grumman is likely to prove a bust for the American taxpayer. The United States has no real need for a new, stealthy, super-expensive, nuclear-capable, deep-penetrating strategic bomber for use against "peer" rivals China and Russia. But before tackling that issue, a little history is in order.

A long time ago (1977, to be exact), in a country far, far away, President Jimmy Carter did a brave thing: he cancelled a major Pentagon weapons system just before it was due to start production. That was the B-1 bomber, a plane with sophisticated – that is, expensive – avionics designed to allow it to penetrate Soviet airspace in the event of a nuclear war and survive. Carter cancelled it for the most sensible of reasons: it wasn't needed.

The Air Force had already developed air-launched cruise missiles that allowed bombers like the B-52 to strike enemy targets with precision from hundreds of miles away. It was also, like all modern weapons systems, outrageously expensive. Why spend vast sums on a new bomber, Carter reasoned, when the plane added little to the nation's nuclear deterrent? In addition, that cancellation was meant to send a message to the military-industrial complex – that he would neither be beholden to nor intimidated by defence hawks who touted each and every new weapons system, no matter how expensive or redundant, as "essential".

**I** was then a teenager with a yen for American warplanes. I'd even made a model of the B-1, complete with "variable geometry" wings that could be extended forward for low-speed flight and swept backward for high-speed, supersonic flight. In my mind's eye, I can still see it, almost all white like the prototype that Rockwell Inter-





**WHITE ELEPHANT?: The B-21 bomber will cost the taxpayer many billions of dollars.**

Photo: Wikimedia

national, its primary contractor, actually built. In a symbolic act of protest against Carter's action, I took my model, taped a couple of firecrackers to it, and dropped it from the top floor of our house, blowing it up in a most satisfying way. So much for the B-1, I thought.

I was too young to know better. When Ronald Reagan became president in 1981, as part of a massive defense buildup (that Carter, ironically enough, had actually begun), he revived the B-1. The air force soon committed itself to buying 100 of them at a then-astronomical \$280-million each. The B-1B Lancer (as it became known) has served in the air force for the last three decades, never (thankfully) fulfilling the purpose for which it was built: a nuclear attack. Plagued by accidents, high operating costs, and maintenance issues, the B-1 has been a disappointment to an air force now eager to replace it with an entirely new bomber, more or less guaranteed to have a

similar history.

However much I loved the prospective plane as a teenager, I felt quite differently once I was in the air force. As a young lieutenant in 1986, I even wrote a paper for a contest within the service in which I argued that the concept of a manned, "penetrating", strategic nuclear bomber was deeply flawed. In essence, I took the Carter position, suggesting that the other "legs" of America's nuclear triad (ballistic missiles launched from silos and similar missiles on nuclear submarines) were more than enough to deter and defeat enemies (no less destroy the world), and that new "precision" technologies like cruise missiles rendered risky manned bombing missions deep into enemy airspace not just obsolete but antediluvian.

Not surprisingly, my paper didn't win and the B-1B did. But it was an absurd addition, even by air force standards, given that the US had an



overwhelming arsenal of missiles at its command, together with a fleet of B-52s that, though lacking in speed and stealth, was aging rather well. In fact, B-52s are still flying today, which isn't that surprising when you consider the development of highly accurate missiles that allow such a plane to "standoff" from targets and so limit its exposure to enemy air defences.

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*The air force has no intention of allowing its strategic bombing force to go the way of the dodo*

Meanwhile, the air force, never a service to say no to expensive, high-tech weapons systems, no matter how redundant, was hard at work on a stealthy bomber that would achieve its vision of "global reach, global power, and global strike". What emerged was the B-2 Spirit, a stealth bomber so expensive (\$2.1-billion a pop) that only 21 were ever built. It was also pricier than the B-1 to operate and less reliable thanks to its fragile "stealth" coatings, which required lengthy, high-cost maintenance. In other words, both planes proved expensive disappointments that, fortunately, were never tested on the primary mission for which they were built: incinerating millions of people in a nuclear war.

Enter the B-21, whose very name is supposed to indicate its cutting-edge nature, as the first bomber of a new century. It's already being readied to reprise the grim, predictable histories of its predecessors.

Old ideas and hallowed traditions die hard, especially when they're so lucrative for the military-industrial-congressional complex. Just look at the staying power of the disastrously overpriced F-35 stealth fighter, projected to cost \$1.45-trillion over the life of the program. Put bluntly, today's future-driven air force still wants to be capable of taking the fight to the enemy in a manned bomber, just as in the past. It still wants its air crews to put bombs on target. At a time when remotely piloted drones such as the Predators and Reapers are rendering redundant so many human fighter pilots sitting in real cockpits, the air force has no intention of allowing its strategic bombing force to go the way of the dodo. Its leaders will always fight for manned strategic bombers because it fits their image of themselves: dodging enemy fighters, missiles, and flak, and taking the fight to the enemy's doorstep.

**I**n fact, not only does the air force want the B-21 as its "fifth generation" bomber, it also wants a new fighter jet to escort it on deep penetrating missions into China, Russia, or other countries. Think here of the legendary P-51 Mustangs, that accompanied US strategic bombers deep into Nazi Germany during World War II. In other words, the Air Force's vision of future aerial war bears an eerie resemblance to the action scenes in the classic 1949 war movie "Twelve O'Clock High", except instead of the B-17s and P-51s of World War II, fifth generation bombers will join with sixth-generation fighters to claw their way



through enemy airspace.

Of course, Pentagon officials have an array of talking points to support their case for the B-21. These include: maintaining parity, if not supremacy, vis-à-vis China or Russia or some future, ill-defined enemy and the need of our heroic troops for the latest and best in weaponry. They emphasise that cancelling a major weapons system like the B-21 is tantamount to unilateral disarmament, that it would betray weakness to rivals and foes, and that manned bombers provide maximum flexibility since, unlike missiles, they can be recalled or redirected after being launched.

*It will allow future presidents  
to strike in a fashion  
devastating to human life*

In truth, however, "Twelve O'Clock High" scenarios look increasingly ridiculous and outmoded in the 21st-century. But don't tell that to the US Air Force. When its strategists visualise bombers, all they see is potential, promise, and even fulfilment. But history shows us something else: the potential for widespread and indiscriminant destruction and massive casualties. If anything, since World War II, America's arsenal of bombers has emboldened the US to strike in places and in ways clearly counterproductive to just about any definition of national security, even as untold numbers of innocents have perished from the ordnance fired or dropped from those planes. The Vietnam War – during which

the US dropped seven million tons of bombs – is a perfect example of this.

**H**ere's the nightmarish reality of actually bringing such weapons systems online: when the US military develops a capability, it seeks to use it, even in cases where it's wildly inappropriate. (Again, think of the massive B-52 bombings in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in a counterinsurgency campaign classically meant to win "hearts and minds".) Fielding a new strategic bomber for global strike, including potential thermonuclear attacks, will not so much enhance national security as potentially embolden future presidents to strike whenever and wherever they want in a fashion devastating to human life. The B-21 isn't a force-multiplier. It's an Armageddon-enabler.

Having marketed himself as a savvy military critic, is there any possibility that Donald Trump will have the smarts of Jimmy Carter when it comes to the B-21 program? Will he save America at least \$100-billion (and probably far more) while eliminating yet another redundant weapons system within the Department of Defense? Fat chance. Even if he wanted to, The Donald doesn't stand a chance against the Pentagon these days.

Flush with billions and billions of new taxpayer dollars, including funds for those F-35s and for new nukes from a bipartisan coalition in an otherwise riven Congress, America's military services will fight for any and all major weapons systems, the B-21 included. So, too, will Congress, especially if Northrop Grumman follows

the production strategy first employed by Rockwell International with the B-1: spreading the plane's subcontractors and parts suppliers to as many states and Congressional districts as possible. This would, of course, ensure that cuts to the B-21 program would impact jobs and so drive votes in Congress in its favour. After all, what congressional representative would be willing to vote against high-paying jobs in his or her own state or district in the name of American security?

**S**o here's my advice to young model-builders everywhere: don't blow up your B-21s anytime soon. Rest assured that the real thing is coming. If the air force wants to ensure that it has a new bomber, in the name of blasting America's enemies to oblivion, so be it. It worked (partially and at tremendous cost) in 1943 in the flak- and fighter-filled skies of Nazi Germany, so why shouldn't it work in 2043 over the skies of who-knows-where-istan?

Why does "your" air force think this way? Not just because it loves big bombers, but also because its biggest rivals aren't in Russia or China or some "rogue" state like Iran. They're right here in "the homeland". I'm talking, of course, about the other military services. Yes, interservice rivalries remain alive and well at the Pentagon. If the US navy can continue to build breathtakingly expensive nuclear-powered aircraft carriers (like the much-troubled USS Gerald R. Ford) and submarines, and if the army can have all its tanks, helicopters, and associated toys, then, dammit, the air force can have what truly makes it special and unique: a new stealthy strategic bomber escorted by an even newer long-range stealthy fighter.

And don't just blame the air force for such retrograde thinking. Its leaders know what's easiest to sell Congress: big, splashy projects that entail decades of funding and create tens of thousands of jobs. As congressional representatives line up to push for their pieces of the action, military contractors are only too happy to oblige. As the lead contractor for the B-21, Northrop Grumman of Falls Church, Virginia, has the most to gain, but other winners will include United Technolo-

gies of East Hartford, Connecticut; BAE Systems of Nashua, New Hampshire; Spirit Aerosystems of Wichita, Kansas; Orbital ATK of Clearfield, Utah, and Dayton, Ohio; Rockwell Collins of Cedar Rapids, Iowa; GKN Aerospace of St Louis, Missouri; and Janicki Industries of Sedro-Woolley, Washington. And these are just the major suppliers for that aircraft; dozens of other parts suppliers will be needed, and they'll be carefully allocated to as many Congressional districts as possible. Final assembly of the plane will likely take place in Palmdale, California, integrating components supplied from sea to shining sea. Who says America's coastal enclaves can't join with the heartland to get things done?

Even if President Trump wanted to cancel the B-21 – and given his recent speech to graduates of the Naval Academy, the odds are that there isn't a weapons system anywhere he doesn't want to bring to fruition – chances are that in today's climate of militarism he would face enormous push-back. As a colleague who's still on active duty in the Air Force puts it, "What makes today worse than the Carter days is our flag-humping, military-slobbering culture. We can't even have a discussion of what the country's needs are for fear of 'offending' or 'disrespecting' the troops. Today, Carter would be painted as disloyal to those troops he was consigning to an early death because every procurement decision centres on a 'grave' or 'existential' threat to national security with immediate and deadly consequences".

And so the Air Force and its flyboy generals will win the fight for the B-21 and take the American taxpayer along for the ride – unless, that is, we somehow have the courage to pry the control sticks from the cold, dead hands of hidebound military tradition and lobbying firepower. Until we do, it's off we go (yet again), into the wild blue yonder, flying high in our B-21s. **CT**

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*William Astore is a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel, who taught history for 15 years at the Air Force Academy, the Naval Postgraduate School, and in Pennsylvania at a technical college. This essay was first published at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com)*

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

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

– **Tony Sutton, Editor**



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# The Spanish labyrinth

Country gets a new socialist-led government, but the Catalan problem could make its success an uphill slog

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**A**s the socialist-led government takes over in Spain, Pedro Sanchez, the newly minted prime minister faces at least two daunting tasks: cleaning up the wreckage wrought by years of European Union (EU) enforced austerity and resolving the Catalan crisis exacerbated by Madrid's violent reaction to last fall's independence referendum. Unfortunately, his party's track record is not exactly sterling on either issue.

Sanchez, leader of the Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), patched together parties in Catalonia and the Basque region, plus the leftist Podemos Party, to oust long-time prime minister Mariano Rajoy of the People's Party (PP). But is the telegenic former economics professor up to the job, and will his party challenge the economic program of the EU's powerful "troika" – the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission?

The answers to those questions are hardly clear, and in many ways the crosscurrents and tides of Spanish politics still resemble Gerald Brenan's classic study of the Civil War, "The Spanish Labyrinth".

While the issue that brought Rajoy down was corruption – a massive kickback scheme that enriched scores of high-ranking PP members – his party was already weakened by the 2015 election, and he has been forced to rely on the conservative Ciudadanos Party, based in Catalonia, to stay in power. In short, it was only a matter of time before he fell.

Sanchez promises to address the "pressing social needs" of Spaniards, although he has been vague about what that actually means. But Spain is hurting. While economic growth returned in 2013, unemployment is still at 16.1 percent, and youth joblessness is 35 percent. Rajoy took credit for the economy's rebound from the massive financial meltdown in 2008, but there is little evidence that budget cuts and austerity did the trick. The two main engines for growth were cheap oil and a weak currency.

The job growth has mainly been in short term and temp jobs, with lower pay and fewer benefits. That is not specific to Spain, however. Of the 5.2-million jobs created in the EU between 2013 and 2016, 2.1-million of them have been short term, "mini" jobs that have been particularly hard on young people, many of whom continue to live at home with their aging parents, and 400,000 have emigrated to other European countries.

**E**ducation, health care, and infrastructure have all deteriorated under a blizzard of budget cuts, and Sanchez will have to address those problems. His party's record on the economy, however, has been more centrist than social democratic, and the PSOE basically accepts the neo-liberal mantra of tax cuts, deregulation and privatization. It was PSOE Prime Minister Jose Zapatero who sliced more than \$17-billion from the budget in 2010, froze pensions, cut child care funds and home care for the elderly, and passed



**New Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez with his wife Begoña Gómez Fernández at the 2018 Goya Awards night in Madrid, celebrating the best Spanish films of the year.** Photo: Carlos Delgado, Wikimedia

legislation making it easier to lay off workers.

It was anger at the Socialists over rising unemployment that swept Rajoy and the PP into power in 2011. The PSOE has never recovered from that debacle, dropping from 44 percent of the vote to 24.9 percent today. It has only 84 deputies in the Parliament, just 14 more than Podemos.

### *The Catalans just elected a government that supports independence*

When Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias proposed forming a government of the left, Sanchez rejected it and instead appointed all PSOE people to the cabinet. However, he will have to rely on support from the left to stay in power, and there is no guarantee that it will be there unless the Socialists step away from their centrism and begin rolling back the austerity measures.

Sanchez has a mixed record on leftism vs. centrism. He was ousted from the party's leadership last year by the PSOE's rightwing when he con-

sidered forming a united front of the left. It was the party's rank and file, angered at the rightwing Socialists that allowed Rajoy to form a minority government that put him back in power. So far, Sanchez has been unwilling to consider the kind of alliance of left parties that has been so successful in Portugal.

The new government will also need the support of the two Catalan parties, and that will likely be an uphill slog. The Catalans just elected a government that supports independence, although its President, Quim Torra, has called for "talks".

**T**he current Catalonia crisis was ignited when Rajoy torpedoed a 2006 agreement between the Spanish and Catalan governments that would have given the province greater local control over its finances and recognised the Catalan's unique culture. Under the prodding of the PP, the Constitutional Court overturned the agreement and shifted the dispute from the political realm to a legal issue.

At the time, the idea of independence was marginal in Catalonia, but the refusal of Rajoy to even discuss the issue shifted it to the mainstream. “Independentism, which until 2010 was a decidedly minority option in Catalonia, has grown immensely,” according to Thomas Harrington, a professor of Hispanic studies at Trinity College, CT.

The Catalans began pressing for a referendum on independence – nearly 80 percent supported holding one – although it was initially seen as non-binding. Although Podemos did not support the idea of independence, it backed the basic democratic right of the Catalans to vote on the issue. The PSOE, however, was as hard-nosed on the issue as Rajoy and the PP. Not only did the Socialists not support the right of the Catalans to vote, they backed Rajoy’s crackdown on the province, although they decried the violence unleashed on citizens trying to vote during last October’s referendum.

Some 2.3-million Catalans out of the 5.3-million registered voters went to the polls and overwhelmingly endorsed independence in spite of the fact that Rajoy sent some 10,000 National Police and Guardia Civil into the province to seize ballots, beat voters and injure more than 850 people. Legal procedures have been filed against over 700 mayors and elected officials, and the Catalan leadership is either in jail or on the run. While Sanchez said the crackdown was “a sad day for our democracy”, he will have a lot of explaining to do to the Catalan government.

Unlike Rajoy, Sanchez says he wants a dialogue with the Catalans, although he also says he intends to uphold the Spanish constitution, which does not permit secession.

**C**atalan society is deeply split. The big cities tend to be opposed to independence, as are many trade unions. The left is divided on the issue, but many young people support it. As the Financial Times’s Tobias Buck points out, “The younger generation, who have been schooled in Catalan and have less contact with the rest of Spain than their parents, are among the most enthusiastic backers of independence.”

It is also clear that the brutality of Rajoy’s assault has moved people in that direction, although polls show independence still does not have a majority. But in a sense, that is irrelevant. When almost half the population wants something that “something” has to be addressed, and if Buck is right about the demographics, time is running out for Madrid.

There are other serious constitutional issues that need to be addressed as well. Rural areas are greatly favoured over cities. While it takes 125,000 voters in Madrid to elect a representative, in some rural areas it takes as few as 38,000. There is also a need to address Rajoy’s draconian laws against free speech and assembly.

*The Catalan issue is political,  
not legal, and force is not  
an option*

Just how stable Sanchez’s government will be is unclear. He must keep the Basques and the Catalans on board and do enough on the economy to maintain the support of Podemos.

The PP is badly wounded, and the rightwing Ciudadanos Party – the only one that voted against the no confidence resolution – will be looking to fill that vacuum. Ciudadanos calls itself the “centre”, but its economic policies are the same as those of the PP, and it is rabidly opposed to separatism. It performed poorly in the last election and in regional elections in Galicia and the Basque region. It did well in the recent Catalan elections, but that is because the Popular Party collapsed and its voters shifted to Ciudadanos.

Sanchez must recognise that the Catalan issue is political, not legal, and that force is not an option. As Napoleon Bonaparte’s Foreign Minister Talleyrand once remarked, “You can do anything you like with bayonets, except sit on them”, summing up the truism that repression does not work in the long run. **CT**

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and middleempireseries.wordpress.com*



# ColdType Insights

- PETER CERTO
- VASHTI KENWAY
- JEREMY CORBYN
- TOULAN & PISANI
- LINDA McQUAIG



Thousands gather on both sides of the US Mexico border on Nov 1-12, 2017, in Nogales, AZ, and Nogales, Sonora, to protest against the of border militarisation and US immigration policies. Photo: Peg Hunter (Flickr)

## Forget the wall, they're building warehouses

Peter Certo on the newest form of immigration enforcement: Kidnapping children and piling them into detention centres

**M**OST mornings lately, I've woken up to two things. First I hear my toddler, sounding off that it's time to get up. Then I see the news stories about other toddlers our immigration authorities ripped away from their parents.

For weeks, I've felt the gnawing need to write something, anything, about it. But God, where even to begin?

First, there are the stories. The

Congolese asylum seeker who heard her six-year-old scream, "Don't take me away from my mommy!" and couldn't reach her. The woman forced to put her 18-month-old in a car seat in an ICE van, the door slamming shut before she could even say goodbye. The man who hasn't seen his son in six months.

Then there are the photos. The rows of children sleeping on thin mats behind chain-linked fences.

The kids being led by guards to make phone calls, hands tied behind their backs. The prison van full of infant car seats.

These are just the earliest fruits of the Trump administration's ghastly new pledge to prosecute every last undocumented immigrant who crosses our border. If they have their children with them, the kids are seized and warehoused in some overflowing detention facility.

**T**he New York Times counted more than 700 kids who'd been separated from their parents this way from October to April. But in the first two weeks of May alone, authorities disclosed that they'd taken nearly 700 more – an astonishingly rapid increase. The ACLU puts the second wave at 1,000 over five weeks.

Already the warehouses are filling up, leaving authorities to prepare holding pens on military bases for the inevitable overflow.

In theory, the children should be released to other family members within 72 hours. But with the administration essentially threatening to deport any undocumented caretakers who come forth to claim them, more and more children are languishing in cells for months. NBC reported recently that over half the kids currently detained had been held past the limit, and that half of those

were under 12.

"We're setting up a long-term incarceration system for children," a former immigration official told VICE. The jackboots orchestrating this plot openly admit they're willing to harm children to scare off parents.

"If you don't want your child separated, then don't bring them across the border illegally," menaced Attorney General Jeff Sessions. "A big name of the game is deterrence," chimed in Trump's chief of staff John Kelly, who promised the captured children "will be put into foster care – or whatever".

The administration isn't just arresting ordinary migrants. It's also arresting asylum seekers who legally present themselves at ports of entry – people fleeing war, crime, and trauma few Americans could understand – and taking their kids, too.

These detention facilities are no place for kids. Even going back

to the Obama era, immigration agents have been reported raping, beating, and threatening kids in their care. When US Senator Jeff Merkley tried to inspect a holding site this month, operators locked him out and called the police. What were they hiding?

The United Nations has warned these detentions constitute "a child rights violation" and should be "halted immediately". Senator Dianne Feinstein has introduced a bill to end family separations for asylum seekers, while Senator Kamala Harris and Rep. Pramila Jayapal want to halt the expansion of new detention facilities. Those would be welcome steps. But if you ask the dad in me, they should shut down the whole agency. **CT**

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*Peter Certo is the editorial manager of the Institute for Policy Studies. He edits Foreign Policy In Focus and Other Words – [www.otherwords.org](http://www.otherwords.org)*

land, for a future, even for water and food, Israel must enact daily and spectacular violence against the Palestinian population.

Destroying Palestinian self-respect, national aspirations and identity is important for the Israeli state in two ways. To fulfil its expansionist aims, it must conquer land – this means Palestinian territory. And to maintain itself as a "democratic" ethno state, it must maintain a Jewish majority. This means ensuring that as few Palestinians as possible are granted rights under Israeli occupation.

They take the land, but expel the people.

So, when unarmed protesters in Gaza, in their tens of thousands, call for the right of return to their traditional lands, Israel considers this democratic demand an existential threat.

Protesters are shot with live ammunition. Bullets blast into the bodies of teenage boys, the skulls of fathers and the backs of women running. Tear gas canisters explode near protesters and babies choke on the fumes.

This spectacular violence is almost routine. Israel was built on brutal dispossession and ethnic cleansing.

During the process of state formation and land clearance, Zionist paramilitary organisations were given free rein to terrorise the Palestinian population.

In one example, in the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin, the Irgun ("the National Military Organisation in the Land of

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## The logic of Israel's brutality

Violence, spectacular and mundane, has always been part and parcel of the Israeli project, writes **Vashti Kenway**

**I**n 2002, Israeli army chief Moshe Yaalon declared, "The Palestinians must be made to understand in the deepest recesses of their consciousness that they are a defeated people".

More than any other quote from any other Israeli official,

this statement reveals the heart of Israeli policy toward the Palestinians.

The levels of obscene violence directed at Palestinian protesters in Gaza over the last month attest to Israel's intentions. To quash aspirations for a home-

# Insights

Israel”) massacred hundreds.

“They ran like cats”, Yehoshua Zettler, the commander of the operation, said, describing Palestinians fleeing from their homes. “I won’t tell you that we were there with kid gloves on. House after house ... we’re putting in explosives and they are running away. An explosion and move on, an explosion and move on and within a few hours, half the village isn’t there anymore.”

Palestinians who resisted were tied to trees and shot. Their bodies were burnt. Yair Tsaban, a former government minister and member of one of the Zionist youth brigades tasked with “cleaning up the village”, described the scene: “I saw a fair number of corpses. I don’t remember encountering the corpse of a fighting man. Not at all. I remember mostly women and old men.

“An old man and a woman, sitting in the corner of a room with their faces to the wall, and they are shot in the back. That cannot have been in the heat of battle. No way.”

Moderate elements of the nascent Israeli state criticised some actions, but this spectacular violence served its purpose: it sent a clear signal that resistance would be obliterated. As Zionist militias entered other Palestinian towns, they reported locals fleeing, yelling “Deir Yassin!”

Menachem Begin, prime minister from 1977 to 1983, had been a leading member of the Irgun. What he began in 1948, he continued in the 1980s. Begin and

defence minister Ariel Sharon presided over the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, another expansionist adventure.

They oversaw massacres at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut. The Israeli military facilitated and encouraged the killing of up to 3,500 Palestinians by members of the Kataeb, also known as the Phalange, a Lebanese Christian party.

**B**ritish journalist Robert Fisk was one of the first on the scene. He described what he saw in horrifying detail: “[T]here were women lying in houses with their skirts torn up to their waists and their legs wide apart, children with their throats cut, rows of young men shot in the back after being lined up at an execution wall. There were babies – blackened babies because they had been slaughtered more than 24 hours earlier and their small bodies were already in a state of decomposition – tossed into rubbish heaps alongside discarded US army ration tins, Israeli army equipment and empty bottles of whiskey.”

Again, this violence had its intended effect. It sent a signal to Palestinian resistance movements: stand down or you will be slaughtered.

Israel’s spectacular violence toward the Palestinians has come with what the Australian journalist John Pilger has called “creeping genocide”. This is the everyday violence that Israel enacts on the Palestinian

population. This is the violence that rarely elicits global press, violence that is all the more shocking for the silence that surrounds it.

Take the Gaza Strip. The territory is suffering an Israeli-imposed economic blockade slowly killing the 2.5-million inhabitants. Between 2007 and 2010, Israeli authorities devised mathematical formulae to determine how much food to allow into the strip, based on a count of how many calories were needed to allow the population barely to survive.

The siege of Gaza results in the strip having only four hours of electricity a day. Running essential services is extremely difficult. Gaza’s hospitals rely on generators that often fail. Death rates in hospitals are high. Ninety-seven percent of Gaza’s drinking water is contaminated. Sara Roy from Harvard’s Centre for Middle Eastern Studies recently said: “Innocent people, most of them young, are slowly being poisoned by the water they drink”.

In the occupied West Bank, daily indignities humiliate Palestinians. To get to work, visit family or go shopping, many thousands of Palestinians are forced to walk through armed checkpoints. These checkpoints resemble cages and are opened or shut at seemingly random intervals. So Palestinians are made to wait, held at gunpoint, sometimes for hours, before they can get to their destination. This is daily violence, largely unquestioned by the world.

Many people were shocked by

the contrast between the images of the bloodshed in Gaza and those of Netanyahu, Ivanka Trump and diplomats celebrating the opening of the US embassy in Jerusalem.

While protesters were weeping over lost friends or family, some of the wealthiest and most powerful people on the planet were drinking champagne and nibbling on expensive canapés.

This callous disregard for Pal-

estinian life is shocking. But it is standard. Violence, spectacular and mundane, is part and parcel of the Israeli project. It always has been. **CT**

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*Vashti Kenway is a Melbourne activist and member of Socialist Alternative. This article first appeared in Red Flag, the organisation's weekly newspaper, at [www.redflag.org.au](http://www.redflag.org.au)*

from many Western governments, including our own, has been shameful.

Instead of standing by while these shocking killings and abuses take place, they should take a lead from Israeli peace and justice campaigners: to demand an end to the multiple abuses of human and political rights Palestinians face on a daily basis, the 11-year siege of Gaza, the continuing 50-year occupation of Palestinian territory and the ongoing expansion of illegal settlements.

President Trump's decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital city, and move the US embassy there, in violation of international agreements, has demonstrated that the US has no claim to be any kind of honest broker for a political settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

A sustainable, just, peace between Israelis and Palestinians, that recognises the rights and security of all, and puts an end to the continuing dispossession of the Palestinian people, is an interest we all share, in the Middle East and far beyond.

We cannot turn a blind eye to these repeated and dangerous breaches of international law. The security of one will never be achieved at the expense of the other. And that is why we are committed to reviewing UK arms sales to Israel while these violations continue.

The UK government's decision not to support either a UN commission of inquiry into the shocking scale of killings of civilian protesters in Gaza, or

## We can't turn a blind eye to Israel's actions

UK Labour Party leader **Jeremy Corbyn** calls for international action to end the killings in Gaza

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*This statement by the leader of the UK Labour Party was read out at the June 6 Right of Return demonstration for justice for the Palestinian people held in London*

**I**n recent weeks, scores of unarmed Palestinian civilians have been killed in Gaza by Israeli forces. Hundreds have been wounded. Most are refugees or the families of refugees from what is now Israel, and they have been demonstrating for their right to return, week after week.

The killing of Razan al-Najjar, the 22-year-old medical volunteer shot by an Israeli sniper in Gaza on Friday, June 1, is the latest tragic reminder of the outrageous and indiscriminate



**NO BLIND EYE: Jeremy Corbyn condemns Israel's actions in Gaza.**

brutality being meted out, under orders from the Netanyahu government.

The silence, or worse, support, for this flagrant illegality,

the more recent UN resolution condemning indiscriminate Israeli use of force – and calling for the protection of Palestinians – is morally indefensible.

Britain, which is a permanent UN security council member and has a particular responsibility for a peaceful and just resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict, should ensure there is a

credible independent investigation, genuine accountability and effective international action to halt the killings – and bring Gaza's ever-deepening humanitarian crisis to an end. **CT**

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*Jeremy Corbyn has been leader of the Labour Party and Leader of the Opposition in the UK Parliament since 2015.*

ended with a record number of store closings, nearly 9,000 while 50 major chains filed for bankruptcy.

Most analysts and industry experts agree that this is largely due to the growth of e-commerce – and this is not expected to diminish anytime soon. A further 12,000 stores are expected to close in the US before the end of 2018. Similar trends are being seen in markets such as the UK and Canada.

Perhaps the most obvious impact of store closures is on the revenues and profitability of established brick-and-mortar retailers, with bankruptcies in the US up by nearly a third in 2017. The cost to investors in the retail sector has been severe – stocks of firms such as Sears have lost upwards of 90 percent of their market value in the last ten years. By contrast, Amazon's stock price is up over 2,000 percent in the same period – more than 49,000 percent when considering the last 20 years. This is a trend that the market does not expect to change, as the ratio of price to earnings for Amazon

stands at ten times that of the best brick-and-mortar retailers.

Although unemployment levels reached a 17-year low in 2017, the retail sector in the US shed a net 66,500 jobs. Landlords are losing longstanding tenants. The expectation is that roughly 25 percent of shopping malls in the US are at

## The domino effect in the High Street

Omar Toulan and Niccolò Pisani on the demise of high street traders under pressure from online traders

**T**RADITIONAL retail is in the centre of a storm – and British department store chain House of Fraser is the latest to succumb to the tempest. The company plans to close 31 of its 59 shops – including its flagship store in Oxford Street, London – by the beginning of 2019. The closures come as part of a company voluntary arrangement, which is an insolvency deal designed to keep the chain running while it renegotiates terms with landlords. The deal will be voted on by creditors within the month.

Meanwhile in the US, the world's largest retail market, Sears has just announced that it will be closing more than

70 of its stores in the near future.

This trend of major retailers closing multiple outlets exists in several Western countries – and its magnitude seems to be unrelated to the fundamentals of the economy. The US, for example, has recently experienced a clear decoupling of store closures from overall economic growth. While the US economy grew a healthy 2.3 percent in 2017, the year



**CLOSING DOWN:** King Street, the main shopping thoroughfare of South Shields is broad and car-free – and almost devoid of shops. Photo: Tony Sutton

high risk of closing one of their anchor tenants such as a Macy's, which could set off a series of store closures and challenge the very viability of the mall. One out of every five malls is expected to close by 2022 – a prospect which has put downward pressure on retail real estate prices and on the finances of the firms that own and manage these venues.

**I**n the UK, high streets are struggling through similar issues. And given that high streets have historically been the heart of any UK town or city, there appears to be a fundamental need for businesses and local councils to adapt to the radical changes affecting the retail sector to preserve their high streets' vitality and financial viability.

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While attention is focused on the direct impacts on company finances, employment and landlord rents, store closures can set off a “domino effect” on local governments and businesses, which come at a significant cost to society. For instance, closures can have a knock-on effect for nearby businesses – when large stores close, the foot traffic to neighbouring establishments is also reduced, which endangers the viability of other local businesses. For instance, Starbucks has recently announced plans to close all its 379 Teavana stores. Primarily located inside shopping malls, they have harshly suffered from declining mall traffic in recent years.

Store closures can also spell trouble for local authorities.

When retailers and neighbouring businesses close, they reduce the taxable revenue base that many municipalities depend on in order to fund local services. Add to this the reduction in property taxes stemming from bankrupt landlords and the effect on municipal funding can be substantial. Unfortunately, until e-commerce tax laws are adapted, municipalities will continue to face financial challenges as more and more stores close.

It's not just local councils, but local development which suffers when stores close. For decades, many cities in the US and the UK, for example Detroit and Liverpool, have heavily invested in efforts to rejuvenate their urban cores after years of decay in the 1970s and 1980s. Bringing shops, bars and other businesses back to once derelict areas has been key to this redevelopment. But today, with businesses closing, cities could once again face the

prospect of seeing their efforts unravel as their key urban areas become less attractive and populations move elsewhere.

Commercial ecosystems featuring everything from large chain stores to small independent businesses are fragile and sensitive to change. When a store closes it doesn't just affect employees or shareholders – it can have widespread and lasting impacts on the local community, and beyond. Controlling this “domino effect” is going to be a major challenge for local governments and businesses for years to come. **CT**

*Omar Toulan is professor in strategy and international management at IMD Business School. Niccolò Pisani is assistant professor of international management at the University of Amsterdam. This article first appeared at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)*

## Pipeline puts Trudeau on wrong side of history

Linda McQuaig explains why the Kinder Morgan deal is a decision that should shame Canada's leader

**D**ESCRIBING something as being in “the national interest” gives it a sense of gravitas, of over-arching public purpose.

So it always struck me as odd to hear Justin Trudeau say that

the building the Kinder Morgan oil pipeline was “in the national interest.”

How can something be in the national interest when it would significantly contribute to the destruction of the very planet that sustains us? Can something

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really serve our interest as a nation when it undermines our more basic interest as humans?

The prime minister doubled down earlier this month, insisting that building the pipeline was so deeply in the national interest that his government would bail out Kinder Morgan with \$4.5-billion of Canadian taxpayers' money to insure it got built.

That's just the cost of buying the leaky 65-year-old pipeline. When construction costs are added – enabling the pipeline to carry triple the volume and transport Alberta's heavy crude – Canadians will be on the hook for at least \$7.4-billion.

To grasp the sheer magnitude of this move, we might ask ourselves: of all the worthy causes we aspire to as a nation, how many would the prime minister be willing to put at risk \$7.4-billion to achieve? None come to mind.

It's disappointing that Trudeau has inappropriately used such an important tool as public ownership. There are times when it's utterly fitting for government to take over something that's been abandoned or mishandled by the private sector – but it should be for a pressing public need, not something moving us closer to climate disaster.

In this case, the private sector got it right: building this pipeline isn't viable. There's too much opposition – from First Nations, the BC government, as well as countless citizens unlikely to be deterred by the razor wire

Kinder Morgan strung across the harbour near its pipeline terminal.

What makes Trudeau's pedal-to-the-floor approach particularly baffling is that the economic case for this bailout is so weak.

As energy economists Jeff Rubin and Robyn Allan have pointed out, the government's claim that there's a huge Asian market – where Alberta's heavy crude will fetch a much higher price than in the US – is largely wishful thinking.

This suggests Ottawa might not be able to sell the pipeline, as it plans, without taxpayers suffering a terrible loss.

"If [Ottawa] ever finds an investor to take the pipeline off its hands in the future," notes Rubin, "it will be for far less than the taxpayer has paid for it."

**E**ven if the economics of the project worked, there would still be the devastating environmental impacts, including the potential sully of BC coastal waters with oil that is exceptionally difficult, if not impossible, to clean up.

Then there's the real party-killer: climate change. James Hansen, the renowned US climatologist, describes Alberta's heavy oil as "one of the dirtiest, most carbon-intensive fuels on the planet." He says it would be "game over" for the climate if Alberta's tarsands were fully exploited.

Under such a scenario, Canadians would be using almost 30

percent of the world's remaining carbon budget, although we represent just half of one percent of the world's population, notes US environmentalist Bill McKibben.

Pipeline supporters generally avoid dealing with environmental impacts, but some, like business columnist Andrew Willis, argue that building Kinder Morgan is like putting a tax on cigarettes to raise money for health care.

"Cigarettes, in an odd way, can help the fight against cancer," writes Willis. "Oil pipelines can help fund a longer-term battle against climate change."

But there's no time for a longer-term battle when the climate wolf is already breaking down our door.

Besides, putting a tax on cigarettes discourages cigarette use. The pipeline allows Alberta to triple its oil production. Here's a better analogy: building the pipeline is like encouraging smokers to buy three times the cigarettes. Bad.

Of course, the smoker mostly hurts herself. The pipeline brings us all closer to the climate abyss.

Trudeau portrays himself as balancing oil interests and the environment. But when push came to shove, he chose the oil interests. In doing so, he's put Canada on the wrong side of history. **CT**

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*Linda McQuaig is an author and journalist. This article first appeared in the Toronto Star. Follow her on twitter @LindaMcQuaig.*

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