

**DEAR MERYL | PETER VAN BUREN**  
**POOR LITTLE AMERICAN LAMBS | THOMAS S. HARRINGTON**  
**SPY-TECH INVADES THE OFFICE | IVAN MANOKHA**

# ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING | PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

ISSUE 132

**DRAMA. COMEDY. TRUMP!**

On the US election beat with photographer **Mark Peterson**





**Cover:**

Mark Peterson, from his book, Political Theatre

Published by Steidl – [www.steidl.de](http://www.steidl.de)

Pages 12 – 17

# ColdType

Issue 132 / Mid-January 2017

- 
- |     |   |                                |
|-----|---|--------------------------------|
| 3.  | <b>POOR LITTLE AMERICAN LAMBS</b>                   | THOMAS S. HARRINGTON           |
| 7.  | <b>THE PANTHERS AND THE WHITE WORKING CLASS</b>     | COLETTE GAITER                 |
| 10. | <b>HORNETS IN MY HAIR</b>                           | GEORGE MONBIOT                 |
| 12. | <b>COVER STORY – DRAMA. COMEDY. TRUMP!</b>          | MARK PETERSON / JOHN HEILEMANN |
| 18. | <b>CREEPING PRIVATISATION PUTS MEDICARE AT RISK</b> | LINDA McQUAIG                  |
| 20. | <b>FLEEING A BROKEN VENEZUELA</b>                   | MAGNUS BODING HANSEN           |
| 24. | <b>DEAR MERYL, ABOUT THAT GOLDEN GLOBE SPEECH</b>   | PETER VAN BUREN                |



**DOG DAYS: Pages 26-39**

Photo: Tony Sutton

- |     |  |                                     |
|-----|--|-------------------------------------|
| 26. | <b>IF YOU WANT TO GET AHEAD, GET A DOG!</b>  | TONY SUTTON / VARIOUS PHOTOGRAPHERS |
| 30. | <b>ISRAEL'S TRUMP MOMENT</b>                 | JONATHAN COOK                       |
| 32. | <b>WHEN SPY-TECH INVADES THE OFFICE</b>      | IVAN MANOKHA                        |
| 35. | <b>WHEN FEAR COMES</b>                       | CHRIS HEDGES                        |
| 38. | <b>WAKING UP TO THE REAL FACE OF AMERICA</b> | TOM ENGELHARDT                      |
| 44. | <b>WAR IN BLACK-AND-WHITE</b>                | JASON HIRTHLER                      |

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Editor: Tony Sutton – [editor@coldtype.net](mailto:editor@coldtype.net)

# Poor little American lambs

We were flooded with propaganda, during the Cold War, so why's it such a problem for us today? asks **Thomas S. Harrington**

One of my favourite pastimes in high school was to go to the school library in my free periods and to engage in the following activities in the following order of priority: a) flirt with whichever apple of my eye happened to be there b) provoke the humourless old librarian to a full-throated rage, and c) read issue after issue of Soviet Life magazine.

My understanding then and my understanding now was that the Soviet government sent free copies of the visually sumptuous publication to each and every high school in America in order to positively “influence us” regarding their county and its socio-economic system.

Though we were in the midst of the Cold War, a time in which both American and Soviet nuclear arsenals were overflowing and ready to fly on a moment's notice, and when tank divisions were obsessively engaging in war games on both sides of the so-called Iron Curtain in Central Europe, nobody thought that granting me virtually unlimited access to Soviet propaganda dur-

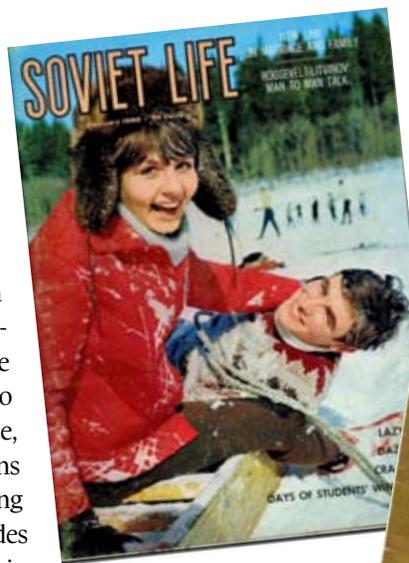
ing school hours was a big deal.

Why?

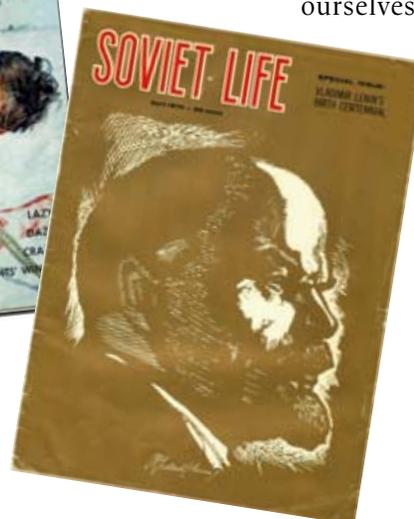
Because the people in charge of the society at the time had – rightly or wrongly – a sincere and quite iron clad belief in the superiority of our own system, and this being the case, felt little need to protect me from such obviously “inferior” points of view. I also like to think that these same civic grown-ups took a hands-off approach to matters like these because they had at least some conceptual understanding of the Founders' belief in the absolutely essential link between the free and unfettered flow of ideas in the public square and the maintenance of democratic values and institutions.

Forty years later, we find ourselves

***Though we were in the midst of the Cold War, nobody thought that granting me virtually unlimited access to Soviet propaganda during school hours was a big deal***



**THE RUSSIANS ARE COMING:** Soviet Life magazine was once freely available in most US high schools



## On Propaganda

***Russia depends heavily on trans-Ukrainian pipelines to sell its abundant stores of natural gas to the Europeans. Having an American-backed regime in this location would allow the US to disrupt this mutually beneficial relationship***

in a very different place. If you read the report issued on January 6 by the US “intelligence community” and presented to the public by the confessed but still unpunished perjurer James Clapper regarding Russian “interference” in the US political process, the only thing that truly “sticks” in any definitive way is the fact that Russia used the propaganda tools at its disposal, most notably the RT network, to paint a relatively more critical picture of Hillary Clinton than of Donald Trump.

As a daily reader of RT, I can affirm that this appears to be the case. In other words, Russia was trying, just as the Soviet Union did when I was a kid, to influence American thinking in ways that coincide with what they perceive as their national interests.

So why is it such a big deal now?

### **‘Mighty Wurlitzer’**

The core reason is that the US Deep State, rightfully fearful of seeing its long-term geopolitical agenda disrupted by the unplanned and essentially unvetted presidency of Donald Trump, is applying the full capabilities of its “Mighty Wurlitzer” to the domestic audience with an intensity it has seldom felt the need to do before.

What do we mean when we speak of the Deep State’s “geopolitical agenda”?

For the last 15 years its strategic blueprint, the design of which was heavily mediated by a compact core of neo-con activists working in the highest policy-planning levels in Washington, has been anchored in three key precepts. The first is to fragment the Arab states of the Middle East into as many pieces as possible so as to insure long-term Israeli, and to a lesser degree, Saudi dominance in the region.

The second is to prevent the formation of unified Russian-European trading bloc capable of challenging the US as an economic and geopolitical power.

The third goal, unveiled during the Obama years (and whose first key milestone was to have been the ratification of the TPP) was to insure that the US remains the unchallenged commercial and military power of the Pacific

basin.

The first of these goals was largely accomplished by the US invasions of Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011), which were until then two of the more wealthy and politically independent (which is another way of saying cohesive and stubbornly resistant) Arab nations.

They hoped to cap these efforts off with the carving up of the last relatively powerful and independent Arab state, Syria, an eventuality that would have the additional benefit of cutting the supply lines between Hizbullah (which effectively defeated Israel when the latter country invaded southern Lebanon in 2006) and its prime military and financial backer, Iran. This is the reason that, as soon as the Libyan government fell, the CIA began trans-shipping Gaddafi’s abundant stocks of arms to the US’s supposed mortal enemies, the radical Islamist (as in Al-Qaida) rebels in Syria.

The hot phase of the efforts to accomplish the second goal – the expansion of NATO toward the east in the ’90s and early 2000s being the initial “cold” phase of the operation – of keeping a mineral-rich Russia separated from its natural partner, the highly industrialized European Union, began with the US-planned and financed coup in Ukraine in 2014.

Russia depends heavily on trans-Ukrainian pipelines to sell its abundant stores of natural gas to the Europeans. Having an American-backed regime in this location would allow the US to disrupt this mutually beneficial relationship. It would have the additional benefit of robbing Russia of its most important Black Sea port, Sebastopol in Crimea, a development which would, in turn, effectively cancel Russia’s ability to project its military power into the Middle East and the Mediterranean.

Putin foiled this gambit by a) backing the Eastern Ukrainian insurgency (a majority of eastern Ukrainians identify much more heavily with Russia, its language and its culture than they do with those of Ukraine) against the US-backed and fascist-allied government in Kiev and b) offering the Crimeans – who, like the Eastern Ukrainians, largely self-identify with the culture of their larger eastern neighbour –

the opportunity to re-join Russia.

Despite what you might have read or heard, there was no Russian invasion of Crimea. Rather, there was a referendum in which the people of the peninsula voted overwhelmingly once again become Russians. It is not difficult to see what they would do so. If, given the choice between joining a failed state with intense hostility toward your native language and culture, or becoming part of a highly developed polity offering much better public services salaries where your native tongue also happens to be spoken, what would you do? As my father like to say, *res ipse loquator*, at least, that is, outside the Atlanticist media bubble.

After neutralising the US Deep State/neo-con manoeuvrings in Ukraine, Putin turned his attentions to Syria, where, American and European news reports notwithstanding, the US has been intensely involved in the conflict from the very beginning, serving, as mentioned earlier, as a key source of arms for a number of the conflict's many Islamist factions and turning a blind eye to the Saudi, and until quite recently, Turkish support of the same fundamentalist elements.

Realising that the US's planned fragmentation of Syria would rob it of a key regional ally and its only base on the Mediterranean (in the Syrian city of Tartus), Putin decided to intervene in the conflict in late 2015. The move has been decisive. With the defeat the Islamist forces in Aleppo, the Deep State/neo-con/Israeli dream of a divided Syria is now pretty much in the rear view mirror.

### **Doubling down against Putin**

Had the Deep State's chosen candidate Hillary Clinton won as planned in November, the idea was to double down against Putin in both Ukraine and Syria with the aim of finally achieving the requisite level of "strategic chaos" in both places.

Trump's out-of-the-blue victory completely ruined these well-laid plans. His unambiguous opposition to TPP has cancelled out one key pillar of the Deep State's blueprint. His insistence on re-establishing positive relations with

Russia will soon nullify its second Ukrainian pillar, and might even ensure that the third pillar, the planned fragmentation of the Middle East for Israeli geo-political ends, goes no further than it already has.

This, my friends, is why the most preternatural element of statecraft, that of trying to influence the internal affairs of other countries in ways that reinforce your country's geo-political goals (an element of statecraft, by the way, that no other country even comes close to pursuing with the resources and cold-bloodedness that the US does), is now being hysterically treated as a new and grave problem.

Aware that they are about to lose the ability to pursue their long-cherished geo-political goals (and the enormous "defence" and "security" budgets that go with them), they are treating the American people to the 100 proof version of the "perception management" techniques they have perfected during their long history of overseas coup-making.

An interesting adjunct to all this, at least for me, is why the citizenry of the US has become so susceptible to these waves of manipulation. One important factor is the precipitous decline of historical and social consciousness among the nation's so-called educated elites, especially among journalists. As the recently departed Zygmunt Bauman makes clear, modern consumerism is absolutely dependent on historical amnesia and thus its kingpins use all of the tools at their disposal to foment it. Not only does hearing the same story over and again in the 24-hour news cycle (remember news is now mostly viewed by elites as a consumer product) not make you more informed, but it robs you of the time and energy to reflect on these fast-moving "happenings" from within any structural or historical frame.

Another factor not often adduced is the abuse of the so-called "linguistic turn" in humanistic studies over the last three decades. As someone whose understanding of culture has been enormously enriched by this emphasis on the importance of language to the creation and maintenance of most people's understanding of "reality," I would be the last to call for end

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## On Propaganda

***In letting me leaf through issue after issue of Soviet Life in the school library back in the '70s, the elders in my life were sending me the clear message that they had trust in my ability to sort things out and not turn into anybody's dupe in the process***

to the deployment and institutionalisation of these practices. That said, I would be remiss if I were to avoid addressing some of the unfortunate by-products of this generally positive movement.

I am talking about the tendency – especially marked among faculty members and students at elite colleges and universities – to treat perceived verbal aggressions as essentially the same, in moral terms, as acts of physical mayhem. In general, the destructive capabilities of the former are not and never will be of the same intensity as the latter. Only those who never actually experienced a fistfight or a physical beating can make this ludicrous claim.

### **Trusted my ability to sort things out**

But more pernicious in the long-run is what this outlook does to its adherents' sense of personal agency. Human communication is messy and rife with imprecision under the best of circumstances. To posit the eradication of its inevitable misunderstandings as a core social goal is, in addition setting one's self up for futility, to necessarily assume a defensive posture before life, to effectively see one's self much more clearly through the metaphor of the defenceless lamb than that of the self-confident and autonomous lion.

All of which brings us back to Putin and

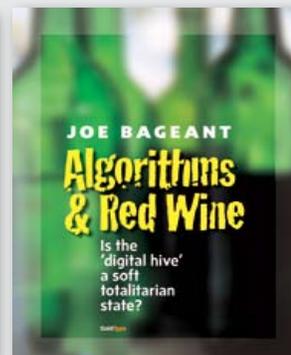
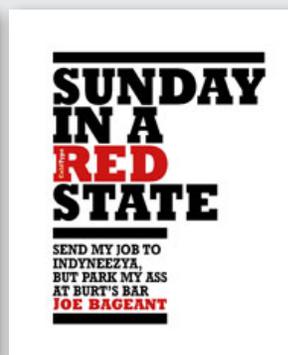
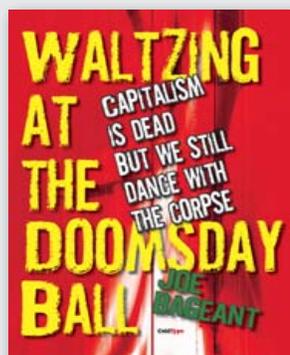
his campaign to influence us. Only a nation of people deeply out of touch with their own power of discernment and their own inherent ability to resist the importunements of others could be whipped into a frenzy of the type the Deep State is now fomenting.

In letting me leaf through issue after issue of Soviet Life in the school library back in the '70s, the elders in my life were sending me the clear message that they had trust in my ability to sort things out and not turn into anybody's dupe in the process. That message is no longer being sent to anyone in our present educational and media environment. Rather, we are constantly being infantilised in regard to the set of "intellectual threats" that supposedly surround us and poised to destroy our "way of life."

The Deep State knows this and believes it can use our fearful quietude to salvage its crumbling post-communist vision for long-term US domination of the world. Will they succeed? **CT**

*Thomas S. Harrington is a professor of Hispanic Studies at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, and the author of Public Intellectuals and Nation Building in the Iberian Peninsula, 1900–1925: The Alchemy of Identity, published in 2014 by Bucknell University Press.*

## Read the best of Joe Bageant



[www.coldtype.net/joe.html](http://www.coldtype.net/joe.html)

# The Panthers and the white working class

**Colette Gaiter** recalls the long-forgotten alliance between black and white activists to battle working class oppression

In the 2016 presidential election, Donald Trump won the white vote across all demographics except for college-educated white women. He did especially well among working class white voters: 67 percent of whites without a college degree voted for him.

Some post-election analysis marvelled at how the white working class could vote against its own interests by supporting a billionaire businessman who is likely to support policies that cut taxes for the rich and weaken the country's social safety net. Since the New Deal, the Democratic Party has been seen as the party of working people, while Republicans were considered the party of the elites. Donald Trump was able to flip this narrative to his advantage. Election 2016 balkanised issues and made it seem impossible to work on racism, sexism, poverty and economic issues all at once. A core question moving forward for social justice advocates and the Democratic Party is how they can move beyond identity politics and attract working-class voters of all races, building stronger coalitions among disparate groups.

One place to look for inspiration and instruction might be 1960s social movements that understood the power of alliances across identities and issues. During this period, a radical coalition formed that might seem impossible today: A group of migrant

southerners and working-class white activists called the Young Patriots joined forces with the Black Panthers in Chicago to fight systemic class oppression.

So how did this alliance form? And how can its lessons be applied to today's political moment?

## **An unlikely alliance**

In the post-civil rights era, a militant Black Power movement emerged, with the Black Panther Party for Self Defense forming in 1966. Inspired by Malcolm X and other international black thought leaders, the group embraced armed struggle as a potential tool against organized racial oppression – a radical break from the philosophy of nonviolent protest. A large faction of the group developed in Chicago, where one of the party leaders was a young man named Fred Hampton.

Chicago in the 1960s was a brutal place for poor people. Black, brown and white people all dealt with poverty, unemployment, police violence, substandard housing, inadequate schools and a lack of social services. Ethnic and racial groups each created their own social service and activist networks to combat every kind of oppression.

One was the Young Patriot Organization (YPO), which was based in Hillbilly Harlem, an uptown neighbourhood of Chicago populated by displaced white southerners.

***Chicago in the 1960s was a brutal place for poor people. Black, brown and white people all dealt with poverty, unemployment, police violence, substandard housing, inadequate schools and a lack of social services***

## Working Together



Despite many differences, the two groups united under the umbrella of economic justice.

Photo: Redneck Revolt

***Assumed to be natural enemies, these groups united in their calls for economic justice***

Many YPO members were racist, and they flaunted controversial symbols associated with southern pride, such as the Confederate flag. But like blacks and Latinos, the white Young Patriots and their families experienced discrimination in Chicago. In their case, it was because they were poor and from the South.

In his short time as a Black Panther leader, Fred Hampton wanted to advance the group's goals by forming a "Rainbow Coalition" of working class and poor people of all races.

Former members of the Chicago Panthers and YPO tell different versions of the same story of how the groups connected: Each attended the other's organizing meetings and decided to work together on their common issues. Over time, the Black Panthers learned to tolerate Confederate flags

as intransigent signs for rebellion. Their only stipulation was that the white Young Patriots denounce racism.

Eventually, Young Patriots rejected their deeply embedded ideas of white supremacy – and even the Confederate flag – as they realized how much they had in common with the Black Panthers and Latino Young Lords.

Assumed to be natural enemies, these groups united in their calls for economic justice. In the Aug. 9, 1969 issue of *The Black Panther* newspaper, the party's chief of staff, David Hilliard, admiringly called the Young Patriots "the only revolutionaries we respect that ever came out of the mother country." Recalling his work with the YPO, former Black Panther Bobby Lee explained that "The Rainbow Coalition was just a code word for class struggle."

In the end, the Illinois Panthers brought together various elements of the black community, Confederate flag-waving southern white migrants (Young Patriots), Puerto Ricans (Young Lords), poor white ethnic groups (Rising Up Angry, JOIN Community Union, and the Intercommunal Survival Committee), students and the women's movement. The disparate groups under the coalition's umbrella pooled resources and shared strategies for providing community services and aid that the government and private sector would not. Initiatives included health clinics, feeding homeless and hungry people, and legal advice for those dealing with unethical landlords and police brutality.

### In 2016, a stark racial divide is exposed

Almost 50 years after the original Rainbow Coalition, the US electorate remains divided along racial lines. Even though Donald Trump asked black Americans, "What do you have to lose?" by voting for him and abandoning the Democratic Party, it didn't work: Only 8 percent of black voters (and 28 percent of Latino and 27 percent of Asian voters) cast ballots for Trump. Blacks and Latinos are well-represented in the working class, and people of colour will become the majority in the working class in 2032.

Much 2016 post-election attention has focused on working-class white voters, who have been characterized as "forgotten" and "angry" for being left out of the economic recovery. Yet African-Americans have been far worse off; since the 2007 recession, the unemployment rate of African-Americans is nearly double that of Hispanics and more than twice that of whites.

Hillary Clinton was the candidate who collected the most diverse voter base – the 2016 Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia looked like the Rainbow

Coalition redux – and she was expected to win the election. However, that visual hid racism's residual and deeply entrenched place in US society. One of the lessons of the 2016 election is that the country is not as advanced in its work on ending racism and discrimination as most would like to believe. Donald Trump did not have to do much to capitalize on this.

The Rainbow Coalition members in 1960s Chicago understood how difficult it is to build coalitions across identities. Former Black Panther Bobby Lee recalled working with the Young Patriots:

"It wasn't easy to build an alliance. I advised them on how to set up 'serve the people' programs – free breakfasts, people's health clinics, all that. I had to run with those cats, break bread with them, hang out at the pool hall. I had to lay down on their couch, in their neighbourhood. Then I had to invite them into mine. That was how the Rainbow Coalition was built, real slow."

The coalition, bringing together seemingly polar opposite Black Panthers and Young Patriots, showed that real interactions allow people to understand that their struggles are not essentially different. Donald Trump probably was sincere when he invited African-Americans to join his movement. He simply didn't realize that a glib invitation would not produce the same results as real coalition-building over a period of time.

The lesson to learn from studying 1960s social movements is that lasting change toward economic and racial justice will probably be built brick by brick, person to person and "real slow."

**CT**

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*Colette Gaiter is associate professor, in the department of art and design at the University of Delaware. This article first appeared at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)*

***The coalition, bringing together seemingly polar opposite Black Panthers and Young Patriots, showed that real interactions allow people to understand that their struggles are not essentially different***



# Hornets in my hair

When a swarm of giant hornets descended in West Papua I feared I was going to die. but a local was at hand with an antidote. Or so I thought, writes **George Monbiot**

*Halfway up the slope, I brushed against a rotten stump. I took another step and found myself under attack*

This story has no message or purpose. It is one of the winter's tales – accounts of the many bizarre incidents that have marked my life – that I tell at this time of year. For once, I am not trying to make a point.

In 1987, I was working with the photographer Adrian Arbib in the occupied territory of West Papua. Annexed by Indonesia in 1963, it was being governed with characteristic brutality by the Suharto regime. The indigenous people were being forced off their land and replaced, in a programme sponsored by the World Bank, by migrants from Java and Bali. Many had been tortured and killed. Timber and minerals were being stripped from the territory; palm oil plantations were replacing the rich forests and their remarkable wildlife. Much of this continues today.

We had made contact with the Papuan rebels who were trying to fight the Indonesian state with old rifles and bows and arrows. They had told us to wait in a hotel in Jayapura, the sweaty, sagging capital of the stolen province. They would send someone to collect us and take us by sea to their camp on the border with Papua New Guinea.

The town, swarming with soldiers and secret services, was dangerous to them. After



a few days, a man in mirrored sunglasses came into the hotel, bundled us into his jeep and took us to a tin hut in the adjoining shanty town, where the local rebel commander sized us up and eventually agreed to send a boat for us. His messengers would stay in touch.

We waited. And waited. Days went by, during which the messengers came and went, always promising to pick us up the following dawn, then producing a reason later in the day why it couldn't happen.

Bored rigid, I set off one morning for a walk. The forest close to the town was in tatters, broken up by shifting cultivation. It was a hot day, and I soon took off my shirt and slung it over my shoulder. I followed a trail that took me down to a small stream. I crossed it and began to climb through the burnt trees on the other side. Halfway up the slope, I brushed against a rotten stump. I took another step and found myself under attack.

Giant hornets swarmed over my body, buzzing frantically. I knew how dangerous they were: plenty of people had died from their stings. I also knew that if I stood stock still, they would eventually fly away. For a while, I managed not to twitch. The buzzing became louder as reinforcements poured out of the stump. One of them was climbing

up the inside of my leg, into my shorts.

Suddenly I could bear it no longer. I lunged up the slope, shouting and beating them with my shirt. Every sting felt like being punched with a knuckle duster. I panicked more, lashing at the hornets, screaming. Then I suddenly stopped, aware that I was being stung to death.

Heart pounding, breathing raggedly, I waited until the last of them disentangled themselves from my hair and they returned to the stump. I could feel every sting: there were eight. I suspected I was as good as dead.

I stumbled across the clearings, shouting for help. In a clump of trees I saw a rickety house on stilts. A ladder led to the platform, 10 feet from the ground. I clung to the steps, shouting. No one emerged, so I climbed up and looked in. There were five people inside: two children, their parents and their grandmother. They looked terrified. I remembered that my shirt was off, my eyes were rolling and I was trembling. I had to reassure them.

"Hello," I said. "I'm George." I stepped forward to shake hands with the man, hit my head on the lintel and fell on top of his wife. She screamed. The children began to cry. I picked myself up, babbling apologies. I had to win their trust. I spoke slowly. "It's very important you understand me. I have just been attacked by hundreds of insects." The man's mouth fell open; he didn't seem to believe what I said. "A swarm of insects. They came out of a tree and started flying round my head. Then eight of them bit me."

But instead of serangga – which means insects – in my panic I said semangka; or watermelons. The grandmother backed away from me, shaking her head and feeling for the back door. The children began to scream more loudly.

I sat down beside the man and tried to explain it carefully. "I need help. I was walking in your field when I was attacked by watermelons. Eight of them bit me, eight watermelons."

He stared at me, unable to move, his eyes becoming bigger and rounder as I nodded assurances at him. "Look –" I began again. The young woman was whimpering with terror.

Then her husband suddenly smiled. "Ahh, serangga!" He stood up. "You stay there, I have some medicine for you."

I was going to be saved! These people lived with the hornets, didn't they? They must have an antidote, refined over millennia from forest herbs. The man told me to lie on my front. He began to rub something into my back. It felt warm and soothing, and the pain began to ebb. The smell of the medicine was strangely familiar.

I turned my head and saw in his hand a jar of Vicks VapoRub. "No, no! I'm going to die!" I cried. I ran from the room, forgetting that it was 10 feet from the ground. I crashed into the undergrowth, picked myself up and fled. A backward glance revealed the man in his doorway, holding a small jar in one hand, my shirt in the other, staring after me.

Just before I reached the town, the convulsions began. I felt as if I were being picked up by the shoulders and shaken. I began to drool. I stumbled along the streets, shuddering and sobbing, holding on to buildings to stay upright as my legs began to buckle. I fell through the door of the hotel and into our room, where Adrian was sitting on his bed, reading.

He started up. "God you look awful." I tried to speak, but my mouth didn't seem to work. I fell face down on to my bed, shivering violently. He must have noticed the welts on my back, because he forced a couple of antihistamines down me. The fit began to subside, and I blacked out almost immediately.

I was gone for 12 hours, and when I woke I felt cleaned out, bereft, as if I had just suffered some great loss. It took me a while to realise that all I had left behind was my shirt.

***I sat down beside the man and tried to explain it carefully. "I need help. I was walking in your field when I was attacked by watermelons. Eight of them bit me, eight watermelons"***

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**George Monbiot's latest book, *How Did We Get Into This Mess?*, is published by Verso. This article was first published in the *Guardian* newspaper. Monbiot's web site is [www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com)**

CT



## In The Picture

Photographs from *Political Theatre* by Mark Peterson, published by Steidl – [www.steidl.de](http://www.steidl.de)



# Drama. Comedy. Trump!

On the US election beat with  
photographer **Mark Peterson**.  
Words by **John Heilemann**

No journalist covering the 2016 election in any medium has more beautifully and harrowingly captured the campaign and our politics more generally than Mark Peterson. In *Political Theatre*, Peterson presents the drama and comedy, the transparent fakery and moments of accidental authenticity, and the abject chaos that has transfixed and often mortified anyone paying attention. What





## In The Picture

Photographs from Political Theatre by Mark Peterson, published by Steidl – [www.steidl.de](http://www.steidl.de)



***Peterson's focus on the candidates exposes and then strips away their and their handlers' relentless efforts to craft prettified, prefabricated personas for public consumption***

makes Political Theatre so compelling is that Peterson trains his lens with equal acuity on the action playing out on stage and in the audience.

Using techniques inspired, fittingly, by *Citizen Kane*, Peterson's focus on the candidates exposes and then strips away their and their handlers' relentless efforts to craft prettified, prefabricated personas for public consumption. He lays bare Trump, Clinton, Sanders, and the rest for what they are: impres-





## In The Picture

Photographs from Political Theatre by Mark Peterson, published by Steidl – [www.steidl.de](http://www.steidl.de)



***Peterson has given us an indispensable record of an election at once more raw, divisive, and shot through with a sense of desperation***

sive but flawed, confident but vulnerable, idealistic but narcissistic human beings consumed by a fierce and unyielding hunger for power.

When Peterson turns his camera from the proscenium and towards the voters, he casts a wide and withering but finally sympathetic eye on an electorate in the throes of an upheaval that few of them (which is

to say, few of us) fully comprehend.

The result is a series of images that are vivid, stunning, surprising, and searingly revealing. They are also deeply true. In this, Political Theatre is something more than a captivating collection of photographs. Peterson has given us an indispensable record of an election at once more raw, divisive, and shot through with a sense of despera-

## In The Picture



tion – and, perhaps, for good or ill, more lastingly consequential – than any in our lifetime. **CT**

*John Heilemann, from Brooklyn, New York, is the author of Game Change, and Double Down. This is excerpted from his essay that accompanies Mark Peterson's photographs in the new book, Political Theatre*



### **POLITICAL THEATRE**

**Mark Peterson**

Published by Steidl

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**\$40** (amazon.com)

# Creeping privatisation puts medicare at risk

If Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau wanted to control healthcare costs, he would not open more services to the private sector, writes **Linda McQuaig**

***In Canada, if we're sick, we can spend weeks in a hospital, receiving top-level medical care, and walk out at the end – without paying a penny***

**A**t Canada's Wonderland amusement park, you can buy your child a "Fast Lane Pass" so he or she can experience the thrill of pushing ahead of all the other children waiting to get on a ride.

It's excellent preparation for today's world of hyper-privilege – where the rich get to buy their way to the front of just about every line.

We live in a society that's riddled with elitism and special privilege. One of the few hold-outs is medicare, Canada's public health care system, where a billionaire can't bypass a fast-food worker waiting for medical care. Access is determined by medical need, not wallet size. We all pay for medicare through our taxes. And, if we're sick, we can spend weeks in a hospital, receiving top-level medical care, and walk out at the end – without paying a penny.

It's not surprising that, in a national contest sponsored by CBC Television, Canadians voted Tommy Douglas, father of medicare, the greatest Canadian of all time.

It's easy to lose sight of the truly inspiring aspects of medicare in the midst of federal-provincial wrangling, like recent negotiations, over health care financing. What's ultimately at stake is whether there will be sufficient public funding to prevent provinces from turning over more of our health care system to the private sector.

The push for private, for-profit medicine really got going after the Chrétien Liberals deeply cut federal health care funding in 1995. Ottawa had contributed 25 percent of total health spending in 1977, but that contribution dropped down to just 9.8 percent by the late 1990s, leaving the provinces reeling and sending hospital wait-times climbing. Advocates of private health care eagerly moved in, and have been a loud part of the public debate ever since.

Since the late 1990s, Ottawa has been increasing the federal contribution, restoring it to about 23 percent today. Now the government of Justin Trudeau, roughly following the course laid out by Stephen Harper's Conservatives, plans to slow the growth of the federal contribution. The provinces insist the Liberal offer would reduce the federal share to about 20 percent, leaving them struggling with rising health costs.

All this creates conditions that embolden those pushing for privatisation, including conservative think tanks and private clinic operators. In British Columbia, orthopedic surgeon Dr Brian Day is in court trying to strike down health care laws that restrict his business opportunities. He operates two highly profitable private clinics and wants to ensure he and other medical entrepreneurs can collect fees from the public system while charging patients whatever extra amounts they wish. If he wins, the flood-

gates could open.

Privatisation advocates want us to believe public health care is no longer affordable. But in fact, it's private, for-profit medicine that's unaffordable. The publicly funded portion of our health care spending – doctors' fees and hospital stays – has remained fairly stable as a percentage of GDP for more than 30 years. What is out of control is the part controlled by the private sector – drugs, home care, physiotherapy, etc.

If we want to control health care costs, we should extend the publicly funded portion, not open more services to the private sector. But that would require more public funding, which provincial and federal governments, after years of deep tax cutting, are reluctant to commit to.

High drug prices, for instance, are a major contributor to rising costs. The solution, as many studies have shown, would be a national universal pharmacare programme, which would cost money to get started but ultimately save Canadians billions of dollars a year.

But while extending the public system would make sense, the political winds are blowing in the opposite direction, particu-

larly with a Republican White House and Congress planning to move the US even farther into the weeds of private medicine, with its special privileges for those with money.

So we must expect to hear privatisation advocates try to destroy our faith in Canada's public system, pointing out that a dog can get a hip replacement faster in Canada than a human can. That may be true – because veterinary care is private and, with enough money, you can get whatever you want as soon as you want it.

On the other hand, if an owner can't pay, the dog is put down.

In an age when the rich demand a fast lane to the front of every line, it will require resolve and determination to preserve our medicare system, a bastion of equality sharply at odds with the heartless corporate world we inhabit. **CT**

*Linda McQuaig is a journalist and author. Her most recent book is *The Trouble with Billionaires: How the Super-Rich Hijacked the World and How We Can Take It Back* (with Neil Brooks). This article first appeared in the *Toronto Star*.*

**The publicly funded portion of our health care spending – doctors' fees and hospital stays – has remained fairly stable as a percentage of GDP for more than 30 years**

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# Fleeing a broken Venezuela

It's not just poverty and need that is forcing people out of Venezuela, it's also crime and fear, writes **Magnus Boding Hansen**

**Venezuela is now one of the most dangerous countries in the world. Its homicide rate is second only to El Salvador, according to a recent report by the Observatory of Venezuelan Violence**

Isabelli Delgado has been planning her escape from Venezuela ever since her car was stolen from outside her family's apartment in the middle-class Caracas neighbourhood of La Vega two years ago.

The police helped her get her car back but then threatened her with violence if she didn't pay them a large sum of money. A few days later, the thieves returned, on motorcycles. This time, they were armed. A brave neighbour saved the Delgados by convincing the robbers that the family no longer lived there.

Delgado, 26, spoke to me a few days before she and her two children were due to fly to Chile to begin a new life.

"The most difficult challenge will be to leave my parents," she said, as her seven-year-old daughter, Sofia, played on the floor between half-packed suitcases. Delgado explained how the little girl had been asking her how they could leave her grandparents when there was nothing to eat and the robbers might return. "I don't always know what to answer her," she sighed.

According to some estimates, close to two-million Venezuelans out of a population of 31-million have left the country over the past 15 years, most of them dispersing across the rest of Latin America, but some going to Spain or the United States.

The exodus picked up pace in 2016, spurred primarily by Venezuela's severe

economic crisis. Runaway inflation and acute shortages of food and medicine have contributed to spiralling rates of violent and organised crime. The government of President Nicolas Maduro, which has become increasingly authoritarian in its efforts to cling to power over the past year, has been widely blamed for creating the conditions that have allowed organised crime and corruption to flourish.

## Crime central

Venezuela is now one of the most dangerous countries in the world. Its homicide rate is second only to El Salvador, according to a recent report by the Observatory of Venezuelan Violence (the government no longer releases regular crime statistics), and cases of kidnapping for ransom reportedly doubled in 2016.

In a poor neighbourhood in Caracas, a few days before Christmas, I met a gang of kidnapers in a deserted house normally used for hostages. The 30-year-old masked leader of the gang agreed to a meeting because of a connection with one of his childhood friends.

He said he'd carried out five kidnappings in 2016, typically after being tipped off by his victims' own security guards. He usually asks for a ransom of around \$1,100 and gives the police a 15 percent cut, in return for leaving the gang alone. He added that



A mural of former president, Hugo Chavez in Antimano, a district of Caracas.

Photo: Helena Carpio/IRIN

**Venezuela's security forces have been engaged in an increasingly violent crackdown on criminal gangs, but soldiers and police are often either complicit with the criminals or are themselves the perpetrator**

the police always warn gang leaders before raiding slum areas to target “bandits.”

Venezuela's security forces have been engaged in an increasingly violent crackdown on criminal gangs, but soldiers and police are often either complicit with the criminals or are themselves the perpetrators.

A few months ago, Delgado's cousin was stopped by Venezuela's military police, La Guardia Nacional, while driving home from a family party. He was forced into a patrol car and given a motorcycle helmet, which he was told to put on backwards so he would not witness the theft of his car. He was then driven into the mountains, pushed out of the moving patrol car, and left to find his way home.

Even top government officials have been accused of having links with crime. Nestor Reverol, who is in charge of La Guardia Nacional and formerly headed up Venezuela's anti-drugs agency, was promoted to interior minister in August 2016, just one day after US authorities had charged him with facilitating international drug trafficking.

### Health problems

Criminality and corruption have spread to most sectors of society, including the healthcare system. The Pharmaceutical

Federation of Venezuela estimates that the country only has 15 percent of the medical supplies it needs, but doctors can be fired for speaking openly about the crisis at public hospitals.

La Guardia Nacional officers and pro-government militias, who are supposed to be guarding the hospitals, regularly steal the few medicines that are still available, according to a young doctor who works at the renowned University Hospital in Caracas.

“Each month I see 15 to 20 patients die from easily curable diseases,” he said. “We need everything: medicine, plastic gloves, syringes.”

The doctor completed his education a year ago. Out of 214 students in his graduating class, 184 have already left the country. Many are now working as maids or at fast food restaurants where their tips from one weekend exceed the \$20 he earns in three months. “If I didn't love my country and the medical profession, I'd be long gone as well,” he told me.

Instead, he smuggles medicines donated by foreign NGOs and pharmaceutical companies past the guards, who would otherwise steal it and sell it on the black market.

Even supplies of food to the country have allegedly fallen victim to systematic corrup-

## Faded Dreams

**Colombian authorities reported that about 1.6 million Venezuelans (mostly day trippers) have crossed into Colombia each month since August**

tion. According to a recent investigation by the Associated Press, the military, which oversees food imports and distribution, deliberately overpays for food in exchange for bribes from suppliers, further driving up food prices.

According to a study by CENDAS-FVM, a federation of professors dedicated to social investigations, by April 2016 Venezuelans had to be earning 16 times the minimum wage in order to afford the cost of basic groceries needed to sustain a family.

Even in the food-producing regions of the country, the situation is now desperate. Two hours east of Caracas, in the village of Lavapie, 37-year-old Jose Aguirre cultivates a half-hectare of fertile land. Before the financial crisis, he never wanted for anything. "Now, my wife and I often skip a meal so that our four-year-old son, Eliangel, won't have to. Even rice has become the dinner of the rich," said Aguirre.

"No one visits us anymore, since we can't offer our guests anything. It is humiliating. I want to go to Spain, where I have an aunt," said his wife, Fabiola Parra. But there's no money for the family to emigrate to Spain. They can't even afford toothpaste. Instead, they clean their teeth with salt and use lime fruit as deodorant.

Parra says many of her former school friends have become members of criminal gangs and vigilante groups. Three months ago, a local boy was reportedly killed by a landowner for stealing a pumpkin.

Venezuela has historically received far more migrants than it has produced. After the Second World War, several hundred thousand southern Europeans came to the country and today many well-to-do Venezuelans are using their European ancestry to apply for passports that allow them to travel the other way.

Those without the resources or connections to move to Europe or the United States are looking at options closer to home. Many countries in the region don't require Venezuelans to apply for visas but allow them in

as tourists, after which they disappear into the informal economy.

Colombian authorities reported that about 1.6 million Venezuelans (mostly day trippers) have crossed into Colombia each month since August when the border re-opened after being closed for nearly a year. Most come to buy food and supplies before returning home but authorities estimate that more than 20,000 a month have stayed.

Neighbouring Brazil is another popular destination for border-crossers from Venezuela. Here, they are often able to find informal work and have access to free medical treatment.

"The Brazilians are very hospitable. They let you create a new life for yourself," said 24-year-old Julianny Hernandez. An engineer from Puerto Ordaz in eastern Venezuela, she has found a job as a waitress at a steakhouse in Manaus, capital of Brazil's Amazonas State.

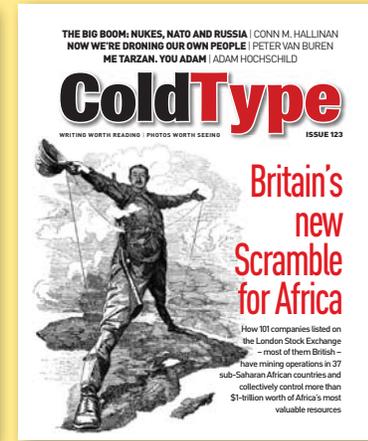
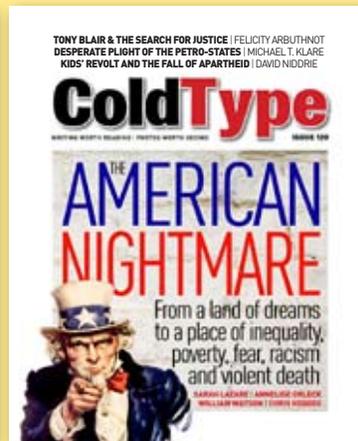
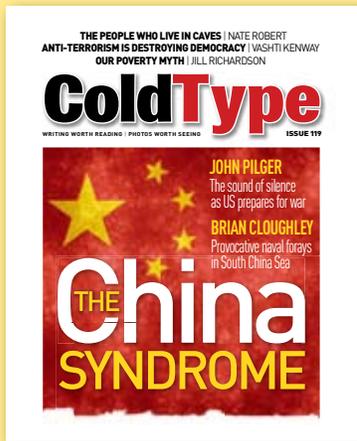
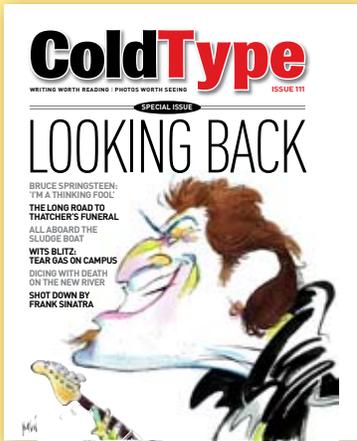
But other countries in the region are starting to adopt a less lenient attitude towards Venezuelan migrants.

The Caribbean islands of Curaçao and Aruba, near Venezuela's northern coast, now demand that Venezuelans show \$1,000 in cash before admitting them as tourists. The regulation has increased business for smugglers like Jean Carlos Navas, a 36-year-old painter who himself came to Curaçao as a boat migrant from Venezuela several years ago. Now he ferries 20 to 25 migrants at a time by motorboat from the Venezuelan coast to the island, where most end up working as day labourers on building sites. He earns \$200 per passenger but does not believe what he is doing is wrong.

"Hungry people will always find a way to escape, and we boatmen need the money," he said. **CT**

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*Magnus Boding Hansen* writes for IRIN, the Inside Story on Emergencies. This article was first published on the organisation's web site – [www.irinnews.org](http://www.irinnews.org)

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# Dear Meryl, about that Golden Globe speech

Peter Van Buren explains why people are pissed off with people like her



Meryl Street Illustration:

Lincoln Townley

## Dear Meryl

I love so many of your movies. Sophie's Choice and French Lieutenant's Woman were especially faves. When we were both younger I had a total fan-boy crush on you (full disclosure.)

And Trump is an ass, he did indeed mock

a disabled person, hate breeds hate. Thank you, Meryl, for saying those truths.

However, by confining your criticism, and not speaking out against Obama and his NSA, drones, Gitmo, wars (Libya, Syria, Iraq, etc), use of the Espionage Act, poor record on Freedom of Information Act requests, shielding CIA torturers from prosecution, never mind just making nice speeches while doing nothing practical to curb racism and mass killings, you leave all those bad things on the table.

Silence insulates Trump from criticism for, for example, future drone terror, because he'll be able to say, "Well, Obama did it and no one complained."

You had a platform, a chance to lay down a marker to not allow the coming Obama revisionism to protect Trump, and you did not use it.

By levelling criticism at Trump only, you spoke to the same group of people that already dislikes Trump. You squandered any credibility with the people you need to speak to, those who supported Trump but need to understand what is happening going forward. You made yourself and your pals feel all revolutionary and warm, but do you think you gathered any new support for the Dems heading forward into midterms? Nope.

And by slipping in your snark against wrestling and MMA, Meryl, you flipped off a

huge segment of the nation, some of whom the Dems may want as voters. I'm pretty sure very few people think of wrestling as what you called "The Arts" but sure, reinforce that idea that the Dems are cut off from regular people and that because those folks don't watch black and white movies (how do you even know?) they are yokels.

You really don't get it, do you, Meryl? Your near-total misunderstanding of what is going on outside your happyland (Meryl, it seems your net worth is \$75-million, and the only job you have held since graduating from Vassar and Yale has been actress) makes your "stand" seem pretty sad. People are hurting.

So let me try and put it in terms you might "relate" to. One of your early roles was in the movie *The Deer Hunter*, about a group of blue collar steel workers who go off to Vietnam and are mentally and physically destroyed there. I spent a good part of a summer in the towns in West Virginia and Ohio where a lot of the movie was filmed. The factories are gone. The mills used as background scenery for your movie are cold and empty. The towns suffer from meth and opioid epidemics because of the pain. Nearly everyone is on some sort of food aid. An awful lot of the sons and daughters of the people who fought in

Vietnam went on to fight in other pointless wars.

Those people are pissed off, Meryl. They are pissed off at people like you who want to dismiss them as simple racists and women haters. They are pissed off at being told they are too stupid to realise Obama fixed their economy, and that people like you know better. They do not see Hillary's defeat as a martyrdom operation. The election was less about Trump than it was about people like you.

You made a movie in their backyard and then left them behind. That's what happened, Meryl.

Oh, and Meryl, an underappreciated bit of stupidity in your speech was stressing the diversity of your attendees like Sarah Jessica Parker by saying she was from Ohio, and someone else starring in something was from New Jersey. What the hell was that even about? **CT**

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*Peter van Buren* blew the whistle on State Department waste and mismanagement during the "reconstruction" of Iraq in his book *We Meant Well: How I Helped Lose the Battle for the Hearts and Minds of the Iraqi People*. His latest book is *Ghosts of Tom Joad: A Story of the #99 per cent*. He blogs at [www.wemeantwell.com](http://www.wemeantwell.com)

***The factories in the towns in West Virginia and Ohio where you made The deer Hunter are gone. The towns suffer from meth and opioid epidemics because of the pain. Nearly everyone is on some sort of food aid***

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## In The Picture



**BATH, Somerset:**  
A seller and his dog,  
Ronnie, rest in a  
shop doorway.

Photo: Daz Smith  
(via Flickr.com)

# If you want to get ahead, get a dog!

But make sure it doesn't eat all your profits . . .  
On the streets with England's Big Issue sellers



Life's tough if you're trying to make a living selling Big Issue magazine on the streets of Britain. The magazine's vendors are homeless, or recently homeless, people struggling to improve their lives by becoming small-time entrepreneurs, flogging magazines to often hostile pedestrians.

You'll spot them in their bright red tunics, selling Big Issue – for which they've had to cough up half of the cover price of £2.50 –

standing in the main streets of larger towns and cities. If they're sitting on the pavement, or aggressively trying to persuade passers-by to buy their wares, they're breaking the company's code of conduct that forbids them from, "Selling in any way associated with begging, including sitting or lying down, or using a cup or bowl to collect money."

Wondering whether Big Issue vendors – who, being self-employed, are also respon-

**LINCOLN:**  
Let sleeping dogs lie. A Big Issue seller awaits customers in the city's High Street.

Photo: Tony Sutton

## In The Picture



**LINCOLN:** Sometimes a seller has to break the 'no-sitting' rules. After standing for hours in the same spot, even the hard, unyielding, pavement feels comfortable.

Photo: Tony Sutton

sible for sorting out their own income tax and national insurance contributions – make a decent living, I asked a seller in Lincoln (“No name, no photo, please”) how he managed to survive.

“It’s a hard life. I make about £20 a day, rooted to the same spot whatever the weather for eight hours,” he said. “I’d make even less if I didn’t have my dog with me. Apart from keeping me company, she’s a great conversation starter – everyone wants to pet her, although it’s hard to persuade them to shell out £2.50 for the magazine. But, before I got her I was ignored so much that I often felt invisible.

“So,” he confided, casting a pitying glance at my

shabby leather jacket and tatty jeans, “if you’re thinking of becoming a seller, you should take a dog with you. But make sure it’s not too big, or the bugger will gobble up all the profits.”

Aware of my journalistic responsibility to cover all sides of the story, I asked the seller’s dog how she found life on the street. “Ruff,” was all she said, before curtly closing the conversation by turning her back on me and energetically wagging her tail at a smiling young lady offering the remnants of her lunchtime snack.

Hmm, lesson learned: Next time I do a street interview I’ll wear a suit and fill my pockets with Dog-O-Bites!

– Tony Sutton

## In The Picture



**LIVERPOOL:** Big dogs are great company, but they'll gobble the day's takings if you don't take care.

Photo: Tim Dutton (via Flickr.com)



**BATH:** The tools of street-selling success: a bag of magazines and a friendly dog.

Photo: Daz Smith (via Flickr.com)



**CAMDEN, London:** Street life can be tough; often your only pal is the four-legged type.

Photo: Victoria Johnson (via Flickr.com)

# Israel's Trump moment

**Jonathan Cook** on the fury that erupted in Israel after a young soldier was convicted of manslaughter

**By prosecuting Azaria in a case where the filmed evidence was unequivocal, Israel hopes to ward off war crimes investigations by the International Criminal Court**

The UK has Brexit. The United States, an incoming president Trump. And Israel now has Elor Azaria. It may not have the same ring, but ultimately the turning point could prove as decisive.

Two fallacious narratives have greeted the army medic's manslaughter conviction last week, after he was filmed firing a bullet into the head of a wounded and helpless Palestinian, 21-year-old Abdel Fattah Al Sharif.

The first says Azaria is a rotten apple, a soldier who lost his moral bearings last March under the pressure of serving in Hebron. The second – popular among liberals in Israel – claims the conviction proves the strength of Israel's rule of law. Even a transgressing soldier will be held accountable by the world's "most moral army".

In truth, however, the popular reaction to the military court's decision was far more telling than the decision itself.

Only massed ranks of riot police saved the three judges from a lynching by crowds outside. The army top brass have been issued bodyguards. Demands to overrule the court and pardon Azaria are thunderous – and they are being led by prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Azaria is no rogue soldier. He is "everyone's child", according to much of the public. The unexceptional nature of his act is vouched for by the complete indifference of



**FATAL SHOT:** Azaria (ringed) moves into the roadway and kills the wounded Abdel Fattah Al Sharif.



**ARRIVING AT COURT:** Azaria was found guilty of manslaughter by an Israeli military court.

his colleagues as Azaria pulled the trigger. Polls show overwhelming support – 84 per cent – for Azaria among 18- to 24-year-olds, the age of Israel's conscript army.

The trial, meanwhile, reflected not the law's sanctity – it is 12 years since the last soldier, a Bedouin, was convicted of manslaughter. It revealed only the growing pressures on Israel. Cameras in phones are mak-

ing it harder to cover up soldiers' crimes. By prosecuting Azaria in a case where the filmed evidence was unequivocal, Israel hopes to ward off war crimes investigations by the International Criminal Court.

As Israeli columnist Nahum Barnea noted, Azaria's defence team also erred. Riding a wave of populist indignation, they accused Azaria's superiors of lying and bullying. Prosecutors had already reduced a murder charge to manslaughter. The court would probably have settled for convicting a repentant Azaria of misusing a firearm. But given the defence's framing of the case, the judges had to choose: side with the soldier or the army.

Like Brexit and Trump, Azaria's trial exposed not only a deep social fissure, but also a moment of transition. Those who see a virtuous system punishing a rotten apple are now outnumbered by those who see a rotten system victimising a hero.

Polls show the Israeli public's faith plummeting in most institutions, from the courts to the media, which are seen, however wrongly, as dominated by the "extreme left". Only the army is still widely revered.

That is in part because so many Israeli parents must entrust their sons and daughters to it. To doubt the army would be to question the foundational logic of "Fortress Israel": that the army is all that prevents Palestinian "barbarians" such as Sharif from storming the gates.

But also, unlike those increasingly despised institutions, the army has rapidly adapted and conformed to the wider changes in Israeli society.

Rather than settlers, we should speak of "settlerism." There are far more settlers than the 600,000 who live in the settlements. Naftali Bennett, leader of the settlers' Jewish Home Party and education minister, lives in Ranana, a city in Israel, not a settlement.

Settlerism is an ideology, one that believes Jews are a "chosen people" whose Biblical rights to the Promised Land trump those of non-Jews such as Palestinians. Polls

show 70 per cent of Israeli Jews think they are chosen by God.

The settlers have taken over the army, both demographically and ideologically. They now dominate its officer corps and they direct policy on the ground.

Azaria's testimony showed how deep this attachment now runs. His company, including his commanders, often spent their free time at the home of Baruch Marzel, a leader of Kach, a group banned in the 1990s for its genocidal anti-Arab platform. Azaria described Marzel and Hebron's settlers as like a "family" to the soldiers.

By their very nature, occupying armies are brutally repressive. For decades the army command has given its soldier free rein against Palestinians. But as settler numbers have grown, the army's image of itself has changed too.

It has metamorphosed from a citizens' army defending the settlements to a settler militia. The middle ranks now dictate the army's ethos, not the top brass, as ousted defence minister Moshe Yaalon discovered last year when he tried to stand against the swelling tide.

This new army is no longer even minimally restrained by concerns about the army's "moral" image or threats of international war crimes investigations. It cares little what the world thinks, much like the new breed of politicians who have thrown their support behind Azaria.

The soldier's trial, far from proof of the rule of law, was the last gasp of a dying order. His sentence, due in the next few days, is likely to be lenient to appease the public. If the conviction is nullified by a pardon, the settlers' victory will be complete. **CT**

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**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 [www.jonathan-cook.net](http://www.jonathan-cook.net)

**Settlerism is an ideology, one that believes Jews are a "chosen people" whose Biblical rights to the Promised Land trump those of non-Jews such as Palestinians**

# When spy-tech invades the office

**Ivan Manokha** tells why he believes the rise of wearable tech to monitor employees is worrying



**Wearable technology, such as Fitbit (above) is being introduced by employers. But do you really want your boss to keep tabs on you for 24 hours a day?**

**By 2018, estimates suggest that more than 13-million of these devices will be part of worker wellness schemes**

An increasing number of companies are beginning to digitally monitor their employees. While employers have always scrutinised their workers' performance, the rise of wearable technology to keep tabs has more of a dystopian edge to it. Monitoring has become easier, more intrusive and is not just limited to the workplace – it's 24/7.

Devices such as Fitbit, Nike+ FuelBand and Jawbone UP, which can record information related to health, fitness, sleep quality, fatigue levels and location, are now being used by employers who integrate wearable devices into employee wellness programmes.

One of the first was BP America, which introduced Fitbit bracelets in 2013. In 2015 at least 24,500 BP's employees were using them and more and more US employers have followed suit. For instance, the same year, Vista

Staffing Solutions, a healthcare recruitment agency, started a weight-loss programme using Fitbits and wifi-enabled bathroom scales. Appirio, a consulting company, started handing out Fitbits to employees in 2014.

In the UK similar projects are under consideration by major employers. And this trend will only intensify in the years to come. By 2018, estimates suggest that more than 13-million of these devices will be part of worker wellness schemes. Some analysts say that by the same year, at least 2-million employees worldwide will be required to wear health-and-fitness trackers as a condition of employment.

According to some, this is a positive development. Chris Brauer, an academic at Goldsmiths, University of London, argues that corporate managers will now be comparable to football managers. They will be equipped with a dashboard of employee performance trajectories, as well as their fatigue and sleep levels. They will be able to pick only the fittest employees for important business meetings, presentations, or negotiations.

It seems, however, that such optimism overlooks important negative and potentially dangerous social consequences of using this kind of technology. History here offers a word of warning.

## **Historical precedent**

The monitoring of workers' health outside

the workplace was once attempted by the Ford Motor Company. When Ford introduced a moving assembly line in 1913 – a revolutionary innovation that enabled complete control over the pace of work – the increase in productivity was dramatic. But so was the rise in worker turnover. In 1913, every time the company wanted to add 100 men to its factory personnel, it was necessary to hire 963, as workers struggled to keep up with the pace and left shortly after being recruited.

Ford's solution to this problem was to double wages. In 1914, the introduction of a \$5 a day wage was announced, which immediately led to a decline in worker turnover. But high wages came with a condition: the adoption of healthy and moral lifestyles.

The company set up a sociology department to monitor workers' – and their families' – compliance with its standards. Investigators would make unannounced calls upon employees and their neighbours to gather information on living conditions and lifestyles. Those that were deemed insufficiently healthy or morally right were immediately disqualified from the \$5 wage level.

Analysing Ford's policies, Italian political philosopher and revolutionary Antonio Gramsci coined the term "Fordism" for this social phenomenon. It signalled fundamental changes to labour, which became much more intense after automation. Monitoring workers' private lives to control their health, Gramsci argued, was necessary to preserve "a certain psycho-physical equilibrium which prevents the physiological collapse of the worker, exhausted by the new method of production."

Today, we are faced with another great change to how work is done. To begin with, the "great doubling" of the global labour force has led to the increase in competition between workers around the world. This has resulted in a deterioration of working and employment conditions, the growth of informal and precarious labour, and the intensification of exploitation in the West.

So there has been a significant increase in the average number of hours worked and an increase in the intensity of labour. For example, research carried out by the Trade Union Congress in 2015 discovered that the number of people working more than 48 hours in a week in the UK was rising and it warned of a risk of "burnout Britain."

Indeed, employee burnouts have become a major concern of employers. A UK survey of human resources directors carried out in 2015 established that 80 percent were afraid of losing top employees to burnout.

Ford's sociology department was shut down in the early 1920s for two reasons. It became too costly to maintain it in the context of increasing competition from other car manufacturers. And also because of growing employee resistance to home visits by inspectors, increasingly seen as too intrusive into their private lives.

Wearable technology, however, does not suffer from these inconveniences. It is not costly and it is much less obviously intrusive than surprise home visits by company inspectors. Employee resistance appears to be low, though there have been a few attempts to fake the results of the tracking: for example, workers strapping their employer-provided Fitbits onto their dogs to boost their "activity levels". The idea of being tracked has mostly gone unchallenged.

### **Labour commodified to the extreme**

But the use of wearable technology by employers raises a range of concerns. The most obvious is the right to privacy. The use of wearable technology goes significantly further than computer systems where emails are already logged and accessible to employers.

Surveillance becomes continuous and all-encompassing, increasingly unconfined to the workplace, and also constitutes a form of surveillance which penetrates the human body. The right to equal employment opportunities and promotion may also be compromised if employers reserve

***Employee resistance to tracking devices appears to be low, though there have been a few attempts to fake the results of the tracking: for example, workers strapping their employer-provided Fitbits onto their dogs to boost their "activity levels"***

## Keeping Tabs

**Monitoring worker health both inside and outside the workplace involves the treatment of people as machines whose performance is to be maximised at all costs**

promotion for those who are in a better physical shape or suffer less from fatigue or stress.

It may also be argued that the use of wearable technology takes what the Hungarian historian Karl Polanyi called the “commodification” of human labour to an extreme. Monitoring worker health both inside and outside the workplace involves the treatment of people as machines whose performance is to be maximised at all costs. However, as Polanyi warned, human labour is a “fictitious commodity” – it is not “produced” for sale to capital as a mere tool. To treat it as such risks ultimately leading to a “demolition of society”.

To protect individual rights, systems have been introduced to regulate how data that is gathered on employees is stored and used. So one possible solution is to render

the data collected by trackers compulsorily anonymous. For example, one company that collects and monitors employee data for companies, Sociometric Solutions only charts broader patterns and connections to productivity, rather than individual performance.

This, however, does not address concerns about the increasing commodification of human labour that comes with the use of wearable technology and any potential threats to society. To prevent this, it is perhaps necessary to consider imposing an outright ban on its use by employers altogether. **CT**

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# When fear comes

“Unlimited power in the hands of limited people” – **Chris Hedges** discusses Solzhenitsyn and the resistance of state oppression

Alexander Solzhenitsyn in “The Gulag Archipelago,” his profound meditation on the nature of oppression and resistance in the Soviet gulags, tells the story of a man who was among prisoners being moved in the spring of 1947. The former front-line soldier, whose name is lost to history, suddenly disarmed and killed the two guards. He announced to his fellow prisoners that they were free.

“But the prisoners were overwhelmed with horror; no one followed his lead, and they all sat down right there and waited for a new convoy,” Solzhenitsyn writes. The prisoner attempted in vain to shame them. “And then he took up the rifles (thirty-two cartridges, ‘thirty one for them!’) and left alone. He killed and wounded several pursuers and with his thirty-second cartridge he shot himself. The entire Archipelago might well have collapsed if all the former front-liners had behaved as he did.”

The more despotic a regime becomes, the more it creates a climate of fear that transforms into terror. At the same time, it invests tremendous energy and resources in censorship and propaganda to maintain the fiction of the just and free state.

Poor people of colour know intimately how these twin mechanisms of fear and false hope function as effective forms of social control in the internal colonies of the United States. They have also grasped, as the

rest of us soon will, the fiction of American democracy.

Those who steadfastly defy the state will, if history is any guide, be decapitated one by one. A forlorn hope that the state will ignore us if we comply will cripple many who have already been condemned. “Universal innocence,” Solzhenitsyn writes, “also gave rise to the universal failure to act. Maybe they won’t take you? Maybe it will all blow over.”

“The majority sit quietly and dare to hope,” he writes. “Since you aren’t guilty, then how can they arrest you? It’s a mistake!

“Does hope lend strength or does it weaken a man?” Solzhenitsyn asks. “If the condemned man in every cell had ganged up on the executioners as they came in and choked them, wouldn’t this have ended the executions sooner than appeals to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee? When one is already on the edge of the grave, why not resist?”

“But wasn’t everything foredoomed anyway, from the moment of arrest?” he asks. “Yet all the arrested crawled along the path of hope on their knees, as if their legs had been amputated.”

Resisting despotism is often a lonely act. It is carried out by those endowed with what the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr calls “sublime madness.” Rebels will be persecuted, imprisoned or forced to become hunted

***The more despotic a regime becomes, the more it creates a climate of fear that transforms into terror***

## Warning Signs

**The right-wing cable shows were lynching me almost hourly. Soon I was given a written reprimand and public rebuke by the newspaper. I was a leper**

outcasts, much as Chelsea Manning, Julian Assange and Edward Snowden are now. A public example will be made of anyone who defies the state. The punishment of those singled out for attack will be used to send a warning to all who are inclined to dissent.

“Before societies fall, just such a stratum of wise, thinking people emerges, people who are that and nothing more,” Solzhenitsyn writes of those who see what is coming. “And how they were laughed at! How they were mocked! As though they stuck in the craw of people whose deeds and actions were single-minded and narrow-minded. And the only nickname they were christened with was ‘rot.’ Because these people were a flower that bloomed too soon and breathed too delicate a fragrance. And so they were mowed down.”

“These people,” he goes on, “were particularly helpless in their personal lives; they could neither bend with the wind, nor pretend, nor get by; every word declared an opinion, a passion, a protest. And it was just such people the mowing machine cut down, just such people the chaff-cutter shredded.”

When I returned to the newsroom at The New York Times after being booed off a commencement stage in 2003 for denouncing the invasion of Iraq (see below), reporters and editors lowered their heads or

turned away when I was nearby. They did not want to be touched by the same career-killing contagion. They wanted to protect their status at the institution. Retreat into rabbit holes is the most common attempt at self-protection.

The right-wing cable shows were lynching me almost hourly. Soon I was given a written reprimand and public rebuke by the newspaper. I was a leper.

The machinery of the security and surveillance state, the use of special terrorism laws and the stripping of civil liberties become ubiquitous. The lofty rhetoric of liberty and the reality of the chains readied for the public creates magic realism. Reality and the language describing reality are soon antipodal. The pseudo-democracy is populated with pseudo-legislators, pseudo-courts, pseudo-journalists, pseudo-intellectuals and pseudo-citizens. Nothing is as it is presented.

Demagogues, Solzhenitsyn reminds us, are stunted and shallow people. “Unlimited power in the hands of limited people always leads to cruelty,” he writes.

“The overall life of society comes down to the fact that traitors were advanced and mediocrities triumphed, while everything that was best and most honest was trampled underfoot,” he observes. Ersatz intellectuals, surrogates “for those who had been destroyed, or dispersed,” took the place of real intellectuals.

“After all,” Solzhenitsyn writes, “we have gotten used to regarding as valour only valour in war (or the kind that’s needed for flying in outer space), the kind which jingle-jangles with medals. We have forgotten another concept of valour – civil valour. And that’s all our society needs, just that, just that, just that!”

This kind of valour, he knew as a combat veteran, requires a moral courage that is more difficult than the physical courage encountered on the battlefield.

“This unanimous quiet defiance of a power which never forgave, this obstinate, painfully protracted insubordination, was

## SILENCING DISSENT

### NIGHTMARE ON COMMENCEMENT DAY

Read the **ColdType Special** from 2003 featuring the text of the speech that led to **Chris Hedges** being booed off the stage at Rockford college in 2003. Introduced by **Danny Schechter** with an interview with **Amy Goodman**, read and download it at

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somehow more frightening than running and yelling as the bullets fly,” he says.

The coming arrests mean that a wide range of Americans will experience the violations that poor people of colour have long endured. Self-interest alone should have generated sweeping protest, should have made the nation as a whole more conscious. We should have understood: Once rights become privileges that the state can revoke, they will eventually be taken away from everyone. Now those who had been spared will get a taste of what complicity in oppression means.

“The traditional image of arrest is also what happens afterward, when the poor victim has been taken away,” Solzhenitsyn writes. “It is an alien, brutal, and crushing force totally dominating the apartment for hours on end, a breaking, ripping one, pulling from the walls, emptying things from wardrobes and desks onto the floor, shaking, dumping out, and ripping apart – piling up mountains of litter on the floor – and the crunch of things being trampled beneath jackboots. And nothing is sacred in a search! During the arrest of locomotive engineer Inoshin, a tiny coffin stood in his room containing his newly dead child. The ‘jurists’ dumped the child’s body out of the coffin and searched it. They shake sick people out of their sickbeds, and they unwind bandages to search beneath them.”

“Resistance,” he writes, “should have begun right there, at the moment of the arrest itself. But it did not begin.” And so the mass arrests were easy. And what at that point constitutes victory?

“From the moment you go to prison you must put your cozy past firmly behind you,” he writes. “At the very threshold, you must say to yourself: ‘My life is over, a little early to be sure, but there’s nothing to be done about it. I shall never return to freedom. I am condemned to die – now or a little later. But later on, in truth, it will be even harder, and so the sooner the better. I no longer have any property whatsoever. For me those

I love have died, and for them I have died. From today on, my body is useless and alien to me. Only my spirit and my conscience remain precious and important to me.”

“Confronted by such a prisoner, the interrogation will tremble,” Solzhenitsyn writes. “Only the man who has renounced everything can win that victory.”

The last volume of Solzhenitsyn’s trilogy chronicles camp uprisings and revolts. These revolts were impossible to foresee.

“So many deep historians have written so many clever books and still they have not learned how to predict those mysterious conflagrations of the human spirit, to detect the mysterious springs of a social explosion, not even to explain them in retrospect,” Solzhenitsyn writes. “Sometimes you can stuff bundle after bundle of burning tow under the logs, and they will not take. Yet up above, a solitary little spark flies out of the chimney and the whole village is reduced to ashes.”

How do we prepare? Solzhenitsyn, after eight years in the gulag, answers this too.

“Do not pursue what is illusory – property and position; all is gained at the expense of your nerves decade after decade, and is confiscated in one fell night. Live with a steady superiority over life – don’t be afraid of misfortune, and do not yearn after happiness; it is, after all, all the same: the bitter doesn’t last forever, and the sweet never fills the cup to overflowing. It is enough if you don’t freeze in the cold and if thirst and hunger don’t claw at your insides. If your back isn’t broken, if your feet can walk, if both arms can bend, if both eyes can see, and if both ears can hear, then whom should you envy? And why? Our envy of others devours us most of all. Rub your eyes and purify your heart – and prize above all else in the world those who love you and who wish you well. Do not hurt them or scold them, and never part from any of them in anger; after all, you simply do not know: it might be your last act before your arrest, and that will be how you are imprinted in their memory!” **CT**

***We should have understood: Once rights become privileges that the state can revoke, they will eventually be taken away from everyone***

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**Chris Hedges** has reported from more than 50 countries and has worked for *The Christian Science Monitor* and *The New York Times*, for which he was a foreign correspondent for 15 years. T his essay was first published at [www.truthdig.com](http://www.truthdig.com)

# Waking up to the real face of America

**Tom Engelhardt** looks back on the less-than-great country that has just been handed to Donald Trump

*Somewhere deep inside, I simply didn't believe that, of all countries on this planet, the United States could elect a narcissistic, celeb billionaire who was also, in the style of Italy's Silvio Berlusconi, a right-wing "populist" and incipient autocrat*

**K**now thyself. It was what came to mind in the wake of Donald Trump's victory and my own puzzling reaction to it. And while that familiar phrase just popped into my head, I had no idea it was so ancient, or Greek, or for that matter a Delphic maxim inscribed in the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo according to the Greek writer Pausanias (whom I'd never heard of until I read his name in Wikipedia). Think of that as my own triple helix of ignorance extending back to . . . well, my birth in a very different America 72 years ago.

Anyway, the simple point is that I didn't know myself half as well as I imagined. And I can thank Donald Trump for reminding me of that essential truth. Of course, we can never know what's really going on inside the heads of all those other people out there on this curious planet of ours, but ourselves as strangers? I guess if I were inscribing something in the forecourt of my own Delphic temple right now, it might be: Who knows me? (Not me.)

Consider this my little introduction to a mystery I stumbled upon in the early morning hours of our recent election night that hasn't left my mind since. I simply couldn't accept that Donald Trump had won. Not him. Not in this country. Not possible. Not in a million years.

Mind you, during the campaign I had written about Trump repeatedly, always

leaving open the possibility that, in the disturbed (and disturbing) America of 2016, he could indeed beat Hillary Clinton. That was a conclusion I lost when, in the final few weeks of the campaign, like so many others, I got hooked on the polls and the pundits who went with them. (Doh!)

In the wake of the election, however, it wasn't shock based on pollsters' errors that got to me. It was something else that only slowly dawned on me. Somewhere deep inside, I simply didn't believe that, of all countries on this planet, the United States could elect a narcissistic, celeb billionaire who was also, in the style of Italy's Silvio Berlusconi, a right-wing "populist" and incipient autocrat.

Plenty of irony lurked in that conviction, which outlasted the election and so reality itself. In these years, I've written critically of the way just about every American politician but Donald Trump has felt obligated to insist that this is an "exceptional" or "indispensable" nation, "the greatest country" on the planet, not to speak of in history. (And throw in as well the claim of recent presidents and so many others that the US military represents the "greatest fighting force" in that history.) President Obama, Marco Rubio, Jeb Bush, John McCain – it didn't matter. Every one of them was a dutiful or enthusiastic American exceptionalist. As for Trump's opponent, Hillary Clinton, she hit

the trifecta plus one in a speech she gave to the American Legion's national convention during the campaign. In it, she referred to the United States as "the greatest country on Earth," "an exceptional nation," and "the indispensable nation" that, of course, possessed "the greatest military" ever. ("My friends, we are so lucky to be Americans. It is an extraordinary blessing.") Only Trump, with his "make America great again," slogan seemed to admit to something else, something like American decline.

Post-election, here was the shock for me: it turned out that I, too, was an American exceptionalist. I deeply believed that our country was simply too special for The Donald, and so his victory sent me on an unexpected journey back into the world of my childhood and youth, back into the 1950s and early 1960s when (despite the Soviet Union) the US really did stand alone on the planet in so many ways. Of course, in those years, no one had to say such things. All those greatest, exceptionals, and indispensables were then dispensable and the recent political tic of insisting on them so publicly undoubtedly reflects a defensiveness that's a sign of something slipping.

Obviously, in those bedrock years of American power and strength and wealth and drive and dynamism (and McCarthyism, and segregation, and racism, and smog, and . . .), the very years that Donald Trump now yearns to bring back, I took in that feeling of American specialness in ways too deep to grasp. Which was why, decades later, when I least expected it, I couldn't shake the feeling that it couldn't happen here. In actuality, the rise to power of Trumpian figures – Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Viktor Orban in Hungary, Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, Vladimir Putin in Russia – has been a dime-a-dozen event elsewhere and now looks to be a global trend. It's just that I associated such rises with unexceptional, largely tinpot countries or ones truly down on their luck.

So it's taken me a few hard weeks to come

to grips with my own exceptionalist soul and face just how Donald Trump could – indeed did – happen here.

### **It can happen here**

So how did it happen here? Let's face it: Donald Trump was no freak of nature. He only arrived on the scene and took the Electoral College (if not the popular vote) because our American world had been prepared for him in so many ways. As I see it, at least five major shifts in American life and politics helped lay the groundwork for the rise of Trumpism:

### ● **The Coming of a 1 percent Economy and the 1 percent Politics That Goes With It:**

A singular reality of this century has been the way inequality became embedded in American life, and how so much money was swept ever upwards into the coffers of 1 percent profiteers. Meanwhile, a yawning gap grew between the basic salaries of CEOs and those of ordinary workers. In these years, as I'm hardly the first to point out, the country entered a new gilded age. In other words, it was already a Mar-a-Lago moment before The Donald threw his hair into the ring.

Without the arrival of casino capitalism on a massive scale (at which The Donald himself proved something of a bust), Trumpism would have been inconceivable. And if, in its Citizens United decision of 2010, the Supreme Court hadn't thrown open the political doors quite so welcomingly to that 1 percent crew, how likely was it that a billionaire celebrity would have run for president or become a favourite among the white working class?

Looked at a certain way, Donald Trump deserves credit for stamping the true face of 21st-century American plutocracy on Washington by selecting mainly billionaires and multimillionaires to head the various departments and agencies of his future government. After all, doesn't it seem reasonable that a 1 percent economy, a 1 percent society, and a 1 percent politics should

***I deeply believed that our country was simply too special for The Donald, and so his victory sent me on an unexpected journey back into the world of my childhood and youth***

## New Realities

**Donald Trump deserves credit for stamping the true face of 21st-century American plutocracy on Washington by selecting mainly billionaires and multimillionaires to head the various departments and agencies of his future government**

produce a 1 percent government? Think of what Trump has so visibly done as American democracy's version of truth in advertising. And of course, if billionaires hadn't multiplied like rabbits in this era, he wouldn't have had the necessary pool of plutocrats to choose from.

Something similar might be said of his choice of so many retired generals and other figures with significant military backgrounds (ranging from West Point graduates to a former Navy SEAL) for key "civilian" positions in his government. Think of that, too, as a truth-in-advertising moment leading directly to the second shift in American society.

● **The Coming of Permanent War and an Ever More Militarised State and Society:**

Can there be any question that, in the 15-plus years since 9/11, what was originally called the "Global War on Terror" has become a permanent war across the Greater Middle East and Africa (with collateral damage from Europe to the Philippines)? In those years, staggering sums of money – beyond what any other country or even collection of countries could imagine spending – has poured into the US military and the arms industry that undergirds it and monopolises the global trade in weaponry. In the process, Washington became a war capital and the president, as Michelle Obama indicated recently when talking about Trump's victory with Oprah Winfrey, became, above all, the commander-in-chief. ("It is important for the health of this nation," she told Winfrey, "that we support the commander-in-chief.") The president's role in wartime had, of course, always been as commander-in-chief, but now that's the position many of us vote for (and even newspapers endorse), and since war is so permanently embedded in the American way of life, Donald Trump is guaranteed to remain that for his full term.

And the role has expanded strikingly in these years, as the White House gained the

power to make war in just about any fashion it chose without significant reference to Congress. The president now has his own air force of drone assassins to dispatch more or less anywhere on the planet to take out more or less anyone. At the same time, cocooned inside the US military, an elite, secretive second military, the Special Operations forces, has been expanding its personnel, budget, and operations endlessly and its most secretive element, the Joint Special Operations Command, might even be thought of as the president's private army.

Meanwhile, the weaponry and advanced technology with which this country has been fighting its never-ending (and remarkably unsuccessful) conflicts abroad – from Predator drones to the Stingray that mimics a cell phone tower and so gets nearby phones to connect to it – began migrating home, as America's borders and police forces were militarised. The police have been supplied with weaponry and other equipment directly off the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan, while veterans from those wars have joined the growing set of SWAT teams, the domestic version of special-ops teams, that are now a must-have for police departments nationwide.

It's no coincidence that Trump and his generals are eager to pump up a supposedly "depleted" US military with yet more funds or, given the history of these years, that he appointed so many retired generals from our losing wars to key "civilian" positions atop that military and the national security state. As with his billionaires, in a decisive fashion, Trump is stamping the real face of 21st-century America on Washington.

● **The Rise of the National Security State:**

In these years, a similar process has been underway in relation to the national security state. Vast sums of money have flowed into the country's 17 intelligence outfits (and their secret black budgets), into the Department of Homeland Security, and the like. (Before 9/11, Americans might have associ-

ated that word “homeland” with Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union, but never with this country.) In these years, new agencies were launched and elaborate headquarters and other complexes built for parts of that state within a state to the tune of billions of dollars. At the same time, it was “privatised,” its doors thrown open to the contract employees of a parade of warrior corporations. And, of course, the National Security Agency created a global surveillance apparatus so all-encompassing that it left the fantasies of the totalitarian regimes of the 20th-century in the dust.

As the national security state rose in Washington amid an enveloping shroud of secrecy (and the fierce hounding or prosecution of any whistleblower), it became the de facto fourth branch of government. Under the circumstances, don't think of it as a happenstance that the 2016 election might have been settled 11 days early thanks to FBI Director James Comey's intervention in the race, which represented a historical first for the national security state. Argue as you will over how crucial Comey's interference was to the final vote tallies, it certainly caught the mood of the new era that had been birthed in Washington long before Donald Trump's victory. Nor should you consider it a happenstance that possibly the closest military figure to the new commander in chief is his national security adviser, retired Lt.Gen. Michael Flynn, who ran the Defense Intelligence Agency until forced out by the Obama administration. No matter the arguments Trump may have with the CIA or other agencies, they will be crucial to his rule (once brought to heel by his appointees).

Those billionaires, generals, and national security chieftains had already been deeply embedded in our American world before Trump made his run. They will now be part and parcel of his world. The fourth shift in the landscape is ongoing, not yet fully institutionalised, and harder to pin down.

- **The Coming of the One-Party State:**

Thanks to the political developments of these years, and a man with obvious autocratic tendencies entering the Oval Office, it's possible to begin to imagine an American version of a one-party state emerging from the shell of our former democratic system. After all, the Republicans already control the House of Representatives (in more or less perpetuity, thanks to gerrymandering), the Senate, the White House, and assumedly in the years to come the Supreme Court. They also control a record 33 out of 50 governorships, have tied a record by taking 68 out of the 98 state legislative chambers, and have broken another by gaining control of 33 out of 50 full legislatures. In addition, as the North Carolina legislature has recently shown, the urge among state Republicans to give themselves new, extra-democratic, extra-legal powers (as well as a longer term Republican drive to restrict the ballot in various ways, claiming nonexistent voter fraud) should be considered a sign of the direction in which we could be headed in a future embattled Trumpist country.

In addition, for years the Democratic Party saw its various traditional bases of support weaken, wither, or in the recent election simply opt for a candidate competing for the party's nomination who wasn't even a Democrat. Until the recent election loss, however, it was at least a large, functioning political bureaucracy. Today, no one knows quite what it is. It's clear, however, that one of America's two dominant political parties is in a state of disarray and remarkable weakness. Meanwhile, the other, the Republican Party, assumedly the future base for that Trumpian one-party state, is in its own dishevelled condition, a party of apparatchiks and ideologues in Washington and embattled factions in the provinces.

In many ways, the incipient collapse of the two-party system in a flood of 1 percent money cleared the path for Trump's victory. Unlike the previous three shifts in American life, however, this one is hardly in place yet. Instead, the sense of party chaos and weak-

***The National Security Agency created a global surveillance apparatus so all-encompassing that it left the fantasies of the totalitarian regimes of the 20th-century in the dust***

## New Realities

**Trump will inherit a country that is ever less special, a nation that has an increasingly third-worldish transportation system, an infrastructure that has been drastically debased, and an everyday economy that offers lesser jobs to ever more of his countrymen**

ness so crucial to the rise of Donald Trump still holds, and the same sense of chaos might be said to apply to the fifth shift I want to mention.

● **The Coming of the New Media Moment:** Among the things that prepared the way for Trump, who could leave out the crumbling of the classic newspaper/TV world of news? In these years, it lost much of its traditional advertising base, was bypassed by social media, and the TV part of it found itself in an endless hunt for eyeballs to glue, normally via 24/7 “news” events, eternally blown out of proportion but easy to cover in a nonstop way by shrinking news staffs. As an alternative, there was the search for anything or anyone (preferably of the celebrity variety) that the public couldn’t help staring at, including a celebrity-turned-politician-turned-provocateur with the world’s canniest sense of what the media so desperately needed: him. It may have seemed that Trump inaugurated our new media moment by becoming the first meister-elect of tweet and the shout-out master of that universe, but in reality he merely grasped the nature of our new, chaotic media moment and ran with it.

### **Unexceptional billionaires and dispensable generals**

Let’s add a final point to the other five: Donald Trump will inherit a country that has been hollowed out by the new realities that made him a success and allowed him

to sweep to what, to many experts, looked like an improbable victory. He will inherit a country that is ever less special, a nation that, as Trump himself has pointed out, has an increasingly third-worldish transportation system (not a single mile of high-speed rail and airports that have seen better days), an infrastructure that has been drastically debased, and an everyday economy that offers lesser jobs to ever more of his countrymen. It will be an America whose destructive power only grows but whose ability to translate that into anything approaching victory eternally recedes.

With its unexceptional billionaires, its dispensable generals, its less than great national security officials, its dreary politicians, and its media moguls in search of the passing buck, it’s likely to be a combustible country in ways that will seem increasingly familiar to so many elsewhere on this planet, and increasingly strange to the young Tom Engelhardt who still lives inside me.

It’s this America that will tumble into the debatably small but none-too-gentle hands of Donald Trump on January 20th. **CT**

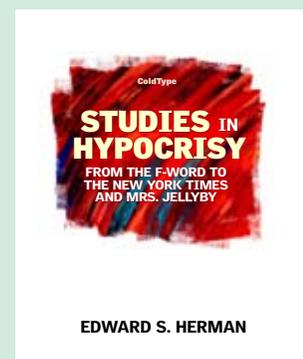
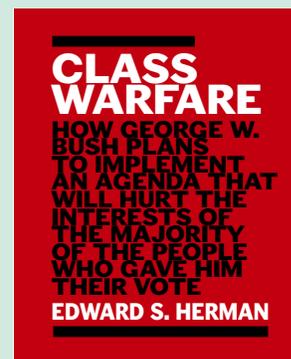
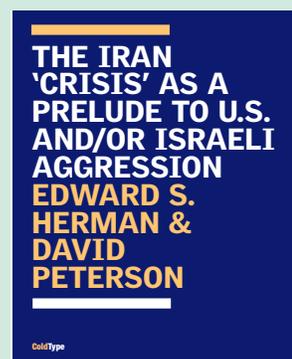
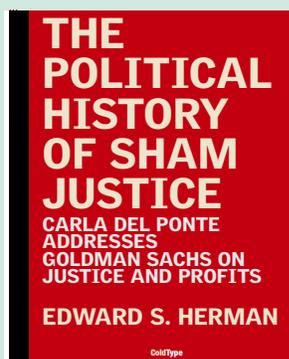
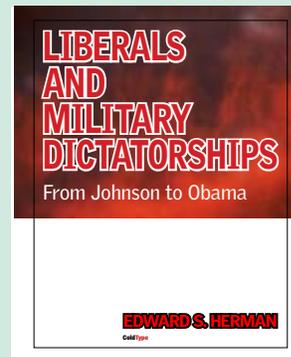
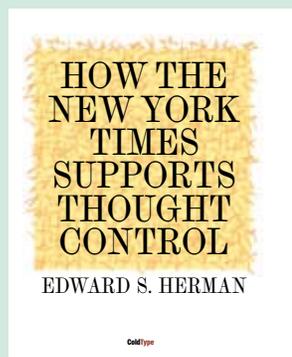
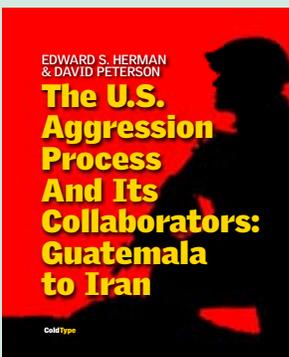
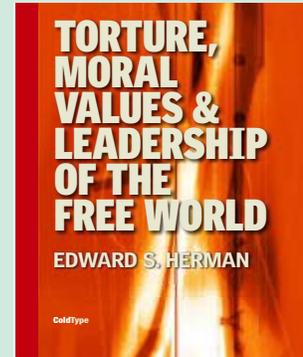
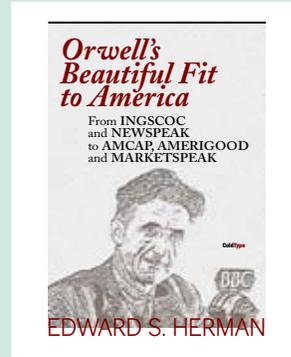
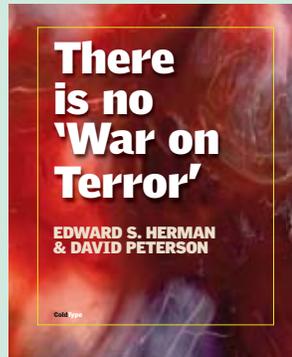
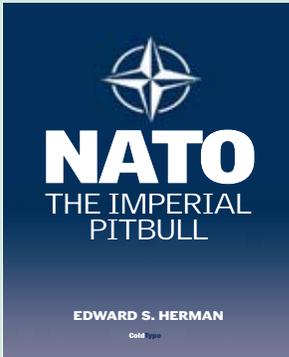
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**Tom Engelhardt** is a co-founder of the American Empire Project and the author of *The United States of Fear* as well as a history of the Cold War, *The End of Victory Culture*. A fellow of the Nation Institute, his latest book is *Shadow Government: Surveillance, Secret Wars, and a Global Security State in a Single-Superpower World*. This essay first appeared at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com)

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# War in black-and-white

The power-worshipping Western media never learns – it still only sees one side of the conflict in Syria, writes **Jason Hirthler**

***The trouble with this latest fairy tale is that the media has swallowed the state-sponsored story without demanding a scintilla of evidence, and has turned the entire factitious endeavour into a witch hunt aimed at alternative media***

In Christopher Buckley's book, *They Eat Puppies, Don't They?*, an executive of a defence contractor describes his vision of the general population in the Middle East: "Look here, we're talking about a part of the world where one-third of the so-called general public are in their kitchens making IEDs to kill American soldiers. Another third are on the Internet recruiting suicide bombers. And the last third are on cell phones planning the next 9/11."

Buckley's book is satirical, but the reality we currently inhabit is no less hysterical than the profiteering CEO cranking up his Congressional hype machine. On the strength of assertions of hacking, President Obama banished 35 Russian diplomats from the United States, declaring them "personas non grata." A report generated by the Orwellian Department of Homeland Security (DHS) offers no proof of state-directed hacks, just a bland and tedious recitation of various digital methodologies it presumes to have been initiated by Vladimir Putin, perhaps as he stomped his scythe on the ground, rattling the ghostly Kremlin floorboards. (Even as Michelle pens her outgoing cards to beltway friends, admonishing everyone to take the high road.)

Howard Friel insightfully explores, at the Common Dreams web site – <http://www.commondreams.org/views/2016/12/30/>

[nyt-iraq-and-russia-newspaper-record-or-journalistic-home-intelligence-sources-and-white/](#) – how The New York Times' response to this coordinated farce is no different from its embrace of the Bush administration's groundless tale of Iraqi WMDs. Recall Colin Powell wielding nefarious exhaust pipes and banging on about mobile WMD labs racing around Lower Mesopotamia (later found to be high-powered falafel food trucks). In other words, the mainstream media has learned nothing from the Iraqi yarn. Still besotted with power. Still insensate to fact. Still asleep at the switch of critical journalism. But let's not kid ourselves: the media never intended to learn anything from Iraq except how to better peddle fables, and it hasn't even learned that.

## **Where's the evidence**

The trouble with this latest fairy tale is that the media has swallowed the state-sponsored story without demanding a scintilla of evidence, and has turned the entire factitious endeavour into a witch hunt aimed at alternative media. The binary constructs of the Bush era are being reanimated for another Halloween of imbecilic fearmongering. So those that apply the withering lens of the scientific method to this latest myth making program are quickly labelled as pro-Russian, anti-Democratic, or worse, traitors.

Anthony DiMaggio recently penned an

interesting Counterpunch article suggesting there were two propaganda fronts open in the post-election media. The first includes naive leftists who whitewash Russia and Syria and pretend they haven't committed "atrocities" in the Syrian War. The second include the mainstream media, which predictably whitewashes US military action in the Syrian War and pretends they haven't committed "atrocities" in Syria. DiMaggio is probably right, these two fronts may exist, though the latter is far larger and more influential than the former.

Even so, there's a big difference between being an apologist for Russia and being a critic of US foreign policy. And the two are too often conflated. DiMaggio doesn't go this far, but many do. One grows sick and tired of the relentlessly rehearsed trope that if you aren't against Russia, you're for it. This plays well with armchair flag-wavers hooked up to the Fox News media drip and pushing Pizzagate stories to the top of Reddit. It also plays well with latte liberals who think Obama is a civil rights champion and a judicious peacenik. But the charge is only the basest and most vulgar form of either/or thinking. It is naturally easier to draw a red line down the middle of reality and pick a side; that's probably why we do it. Cuts down on the cognitive dissonance. Our panoply of superhero flicks depicting the world in infantile good/bad dichotomies isn't helping hammer-wielding studs and ironclad defence contractors beating back the fearful hobgoblins of the netherworld, or Midgard, or Krypton. But we should try to separate the reactionary apologists from the rest of the left that revile imperialism and authoritarianism in all of their disguises, be they cloaked in the Russian tsarist tricolour, a Chinese five-star steeped in revolutionary red, or the stars and stripes.

But isn't the left's primary task to critique its own rulers? Criticism of foreign governments is already more prevalent than Coca-Cola. It's catnip for the mainstream; why should the left add to the already staggering

pile of invective levelled at alien flags? The pickings are too easy. For instance, if you need to reinforce your collapsing faith in American exceptionalism, why not have a comforting look at the Russian Federation's "foreign agent" law, ostensibly designed to deter foreign interference in Russian affairs, but predictably now serving as a kind of scarlet letter affixed to any organisation taking money from abroad. Or you can always check up on the state of the death penalty in China and Iran, two countries that just can't seem to get enough domestic bloodletting. It is evidently impossible to assign a credible number of Chinese state-sponsored killings; they number in the thousands. Hmmm, could this be part of the reason why a new protest erupts in China about every three minutes or so (at least in 2010)? Still feeling delicate about our place in the cosmos of high ideals? Look at the way our NATO ally and closet Islamist (not-so closeted anymore) Recep Erdogan has leveraged a post-coup environment to annihilate freedom of speech in one of the most secular Middle Eastern nations. Or look at Syria's record of extrajudicial murder, torture, disappearances, and more – prior to the 2011 outbreak of war. Remember, Syria signed up for our rendition program some years ago. Don't even ask about that other ally, Saudi Arabia, with whom we share the universal value of eternal profit.

Just because leftist writers don't focus on the crimes of foreign countries, doesn't mean they are whitewashing them. Likewise, many on the left also recognise the reason we know so much of this has to do with the openness of our society and the principles of free speech, assembly, and religion that, though under constant assault, continue to persevere. We might add that those rights should always be companion to a right to know, since knowledge precedes speech in an ideal sense, and without that sequence, the latter loses much of its force.

### **Taking sides on Syria**

If we are thus capable of critiquing practic-

***One grows sick and tired of the relentlessly rehearsed trope that if you aren't against Russia, you're for it. This plays well with armchair flag-wavers hooked up to the Fox News media drip . . . It also plays well with latte liberals who think Obama is a civil rights champion and a judicious peacenik***

## Narrow Vision

***Why persist in this farcical ruse of referring to these mercenaries as “rebels,” as though this war is some wildly noble democratic revolution of Syrian farmers?***

es inside and outside our borders, could it not also be true that no sane leftist would look at the Syrian War and not know that both sides in the conflict were killing innocents? Can there be any doubt that Russian and Syrian and NATO coalition militaries are killing civilians in Syria when they bomb from the sky? You’ve seen the photos of Aleppo, just to take the latest instance. It is a canvas of one bomb-blown civilian building after another. Yes, the Russian/Syrian contingent went to some lengths to set up “humanitarian pauses” in their shelling to ostensibly permit civilians to flee. Evidently some thousands were able to escape, while unnumbered others were kept from leaving by the terrorist factions controlling the east. How many were executed by terrorists, or slaughtered by Syrian/Russian bombs, or starved to death in the siege, will likely never be accurately tabulated. But in war, all sides are guilty of killing innocents.

That raises the question of whether or not the conquest of east Aleppo amounts to a liberation. Hard to see an abandoned ghost town of blown infrastructures as liberated. But one can see how the Syrian government and its allies would view it that way. Syria was invaded by a NATO-supplied army of mercenary terrorists – from Jordan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and China, and elsewhere (wherever willing jihadists could be found to wage war on the Assad government).

What else do you call it when a democratically-chosen government clears a city of an invading army? Sure, there was a climate change-induced drought in the eastern Mediterranean that caused an upswing of protest against the Syrian state in 2011. But that peaceful protest was quickly buried beneath a surge of violent jihadist extremism supplied by an opportunist West. So why persist in this farcical ruse of referring to these mercenaries as “rebels,” as though this war is some wildly noble democratic revolution of Syrian farmers?

Some scene out of Zola’s *Germinal* with a pitchfork-wielding Gerard Depardieu in the vanguard of a seething agrarian horde. Please.

When they could, civilians fled for Syrian government areas, suggesting they feared the “moderates” more than the Assad regime. It should also be noted, as it rarely is in the mainstream media, that the Russians are in Syria on the invitation of the Syrian government.

The NATO coalition is there uninvited, which is aggression in international law. Aside from that obscured fact (how insignificant international law becomes when we’re violating it), the Syrian government is one of the most secular in the region, with modern institutions and nominally democratic infrastructure. The terrorist factions our allied team is backing are quite openly anti-democratic, pro-theocracy, and have little regard for anyone they brand as infidel or kafir, to the point of summary executions and all manner of social repression for whatever frightened populace they rule. And yet to say that one supports Syria and its allies winning the war against NATO- and GCC-backed terrorists is not to sanction all the domestic or battlefield behaviour of those nations. It is rather to support the rule of international law.

### **Lies of the West**

The point is never that foreign governments are pure, but rather the fact our government is anything but. This is an essential criticism to make because it is so much harder to find serious criticism of US foreign policy. By “serious criticism,” I mean appraisals that don’t make tidy work of American war crimes by excusing them as noble blunders: you know, sniffing napalm in the morning and reminding yourself you meant well before things got a little out of hand.

Instead of doing the real job of investigative journalism and holding power accountable, the Western media is by far the most sophisticated purveyor of state-sponsored

bullshit on the planet. Other nations are making strides in their use of media to disseminate and influence opinion, but the US has been building and fine-tuning its doctrinal system for a century now. Studies by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, as well as relentless documentation by organisations such as Fair.org, lay plain the in-built bias of Western mainstream media and its subservience to powerful corporate interests. It has now reached the point of pure sycophancy. Our doctrinal system is perversely effective at a) selectively using facts to create a false narrative (spinning Iran's civilian nuclear energy programme as a military initiative aimed at the production of warheads); b) omitting facts to support a false narrative (the erasure of the successes of Latin leftist governments in countries such as Venezuela and Argentina, and the omission of Israeli provocations and international law within the Israel-Palestine narrative); and c) promoting whole-cloth falsehoods to create or sustain a false narrative (Iraqi WMDs).

### **A faithless left**

More immediate examples include the disparate coverage of the Mosul and Aleppo battles. Military.com reported that since October 21, the US-led air attack on Mosul has dropped 1,300 bombs in and around Mosul, and one every eight minutes at the outset of the campaign. Yet coverage of that under reported "liberation" is dwarfed by hyperventilating condemnations of the "liberation" of Aleppo. Western readers have also been bombarded with ceaseless reports of hospital bombings in east Aleppo supplied by Al Qaeda-sanctioned reporters, and the relentless promotion of the supposedly selfless and valiant work of the "White Helmets," a shadowy Western-backed front that seems only to work in Al Qaeda-held areas, uses jihadists in its videos, and stages rescues. All of this facilitated by the feckless ruse of the "moderate rebel," the unicorn of the Syrian war.

That is the failure of the mainstream: it doesn't seriously question its government and instead legitimates its lies. Yet no government should be trusted, only held to account. So it falls the citizenry and alternative media to do the media's job. Citizens of every nation ought to hold their own governments to an unrelentingly high standard. And this should be the first order of business, not something taken up reluctantly after hammering every other nation on earth for its failures. Or after posturing about one's own noble intentions.

This is one of the lessons of the profound failure of lesser evilism: that without significant pressure from the left, governments – and the media, too – will drift right, enmeshing themselves with corporate industrial-finance megaliths that profit by authoritarian regimes and hawkish foreign policies, the better to betray the will of the populace to line the pockets of the elite. The media should represent a society's capacity for self-reflection. When it ceases to do this, it partakes in a kind of sophomoric good/bad dualism that is better left to teen fiction and Marvel Universe backstories.

Glenn Greenwald says it's tribalism writ large, this seemingly hardwired need to paint such stark distinctions between ourselves and others, always and revealingly in the most self-serving manner feasible. Which is why it is hard to answer the question of when was the last time anyone inside the beltway uttered that once-famous maxim to take the plank out of your own eye before removing the speck from your neighbour's eye. Not a bad piece of advice. Washington and its mainstream media flacks might pay it some heed. **CT**

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*Jason Hirthler is a veteran of the communications industry and author of The Sins of Empire: Unmasking American Imperialism. He lives in New York City and can be reached at [jasonhirthler@gmail.com](mailto:jasonhirthler@gmail.com)*

***When was the last time anyone inside the beltway uttered that once-famous maxim to take the plank out of your own eye before removing the speck from your neighbour's eye***

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