

THE FACES OF PROTEST | JOHN COMINO-JAMES  
STRANGE DAYS: MY YEAR AS DAVID BOWIE | WILL BROOKER  
BRITAIN – BREXIT TAX HAVEN | LESLEY RIDDOCH

# ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING | PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

ISSUE 133

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**THE AGE OF TRUMP:** OBAMA HAS LEFT THE WHITE HOUSE. THE WOMEN HAVE MARCHED. DONALD TRUMP IS PRESIDENT. JOHN FEFFER, PETER CERTO, RICK SALUTIN, THOMAS S. HARRINGTON AND JOHN PILGER ASK: WHAT'S NEXT?



## Cover

Women's March on London, January 21, 2017:

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# ColdType

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Photo: John Comino-James

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

# Just imagine . . .

**Neil Clark** wonders what would the US say if Russian troops were amassed on its borders? And what if Russia had planned to 'take down' a British politician?

**A**ll we have to do to highlight the enormous hypocrisy and double standards which are the hallmark of domestic and international politics is to switch the names around.

Actions taken by Western establishment approved countries and actors that are deemed to be totally uncontroversial would be deemed to be "absolutely outrageous" if done to them. Here's a few examples:

**Just imagine . . .** if a close Russian ally, whose forces were trained by Russia, was bombing the poorest country in the Middle East, with cluster bombs supplied by Moscow. Furthermore, in the country that was being attacked, a famine threatened the lives millions of people.

Well, the poorest country in the Middle East is Yemen, and it's being bombed to smithereens by the one of the richest, Saudi Arabia, a close ally of Britain, using UK-made cluster bombs. And guess what, the West's "something must be done" brigade, which had expressed so much humanitarian concern over the fighting to regain Aleppo from Al-Qaeda/Al Nusra terrorists, is silent. How strange.

**Just imagine . . .** if a plane carrying members of a famous French military choir had crashed on Christmas Day, killing everyone on board. And that shortly after-

wards, a leading Russian satirical magazine had mocked the tragedy, drawing cartoons of the choir singing to "a new audience" on the seabed and posted a caption saying that the only "bad news" about the crash was that French President Francois Hollande had not been on board. There would, I'm sure, have been plenty of discussion in Western media about the moral depravity and the dark soul of the Russian character. But the plane that crashed was carrying Russian singers. And it was the elite-approved Charlie Hebdo magazine which poked fun at the dead. So there was no outcry in the West. And no accusations of racism.

**Just imagine . . .** if it had been NATO, and not the Warsaw Pact, which had been disbanded at the end of the old Cold War. And then Russia, breaking the promises it had made to the US president, had expanded the Warsaw Pact right up to the borders of the USA, deploying thousands of troops and dozens of tanks and other military hardware in Mexico and Canada. Would commentators in "respectable" establishment journals be calling this American aggression? I think not.

**Just imagine . . .** if a senior political officer at the Russian Embassy in London had been caught on film talking about the "take down" of a British Foreign Office minis-

***If Russia had expanded the Warsaw Pact right up to the borders of the USA, deploying troops, tanks and other military hardware in Mexico and Canada, would commentators in "respectable" establishment journals be calling this American aggression?***

## Double Standards

**Trump won on November 8, and not Clinton, so he's fair game for "Deep State" attacks. All in the name of democracy**

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**Neil Clark** is a journalist, writer, broadcaster and blogger. He has written for many newspapers and magazines in the UK and other countries. He is a regular pundit on RT and has also appeared on BBC TV and radio, Sky News, Press TV and the Voice of Russia. He is the co-founder of the Campaign For Public Ownership. His award winning blog can be found at [www.neilclark66.blogspot.com](http://www.neilclark66.blogspot.com). He tweets on politics and world affairs @NeilClark66

ter deemed to be too critical of Russia and who was causing the country "a lot of problems." That there was a group called Labour Friends of Russia, and the political officer said the embassy had a fund of more than £1-million for them? We can be sure that the revelations would have led, at the very least, to diplomatic expulsions, the announcement of a full-scale government investigation, as well as a plethora of articles on the outrageous interference by Russia in British political affairs. But the senior political officer caught on film was working for Israel, so a potential plot about the "take down" of a UK minister was deemed to be not a very important news story, by more or less the same people who would have been telling us it was a very important news story if it had involved Russia.

**Just imagine . . .** if Hillary Clinton and not Donald Trump had won the US presidential election in November and Trump's supporters had behaved in the way that Clinton's have. That intelligence officials had tried to de-legitimise Clinton's victory by claiming Saudi interference in the election, and producing as proof of this a document that drew attention to Saudi TV's alleged pro-Clinton stance.

Then, a week before the inauguration of President-elect Clinton was due to take place, the US media publicised a dossier compiled by an ex-intelligence officer from another country claiming Saudi Arabia was blackmailing Clinton, even though the dossier was unverified and contained glaring factual errors. The papers would I'm sure be full of commentary from liberal pundits raging about a coup and anti-democratic attempts to overturn the election result. However, Trump won on November 8, and not Clinton, so he's fair game for "Deep State" attacks. All in the name of democracy.

**Just imagine . . .** if UK Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn had urged MPs to support a

socialist "Peace Rocket," costing the British taxpayer at least £31-billion and possibly as much as £205-billion, over its lifetime. That Corbyn had praised the Peace Rocket as being "worth every penny" and absolutely essential for Britain and for the peace of the world. Then, after Parliament had voted in favour, it came to light that the Peace Rocket had misfired on a test and that Corbyn had kept schtum about it. That four times he had been asked by the BBC's Andrew Marr if he had known about the misfire, and four times he had avoided answering the question.

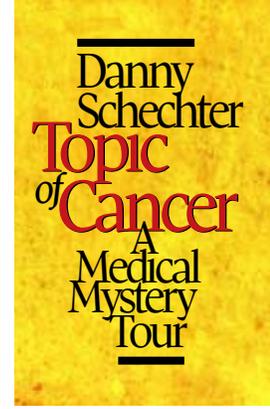
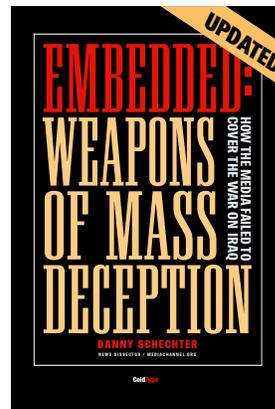
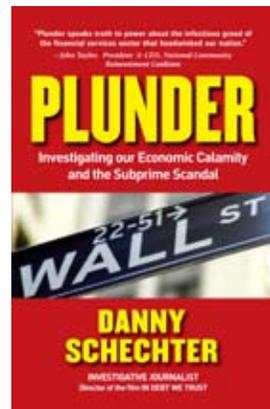
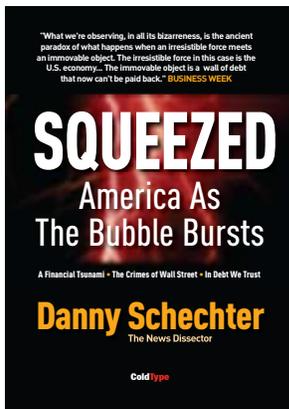
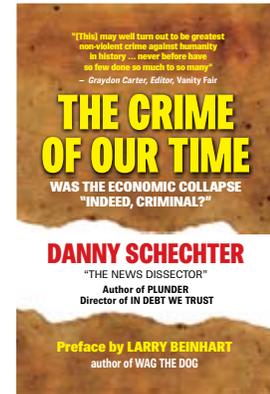
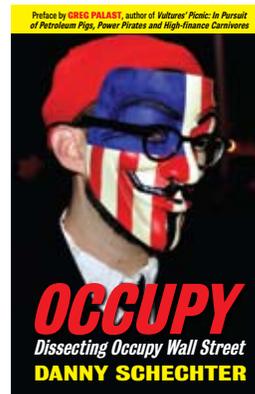
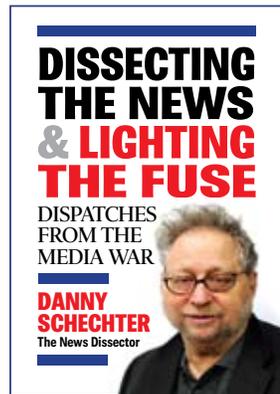
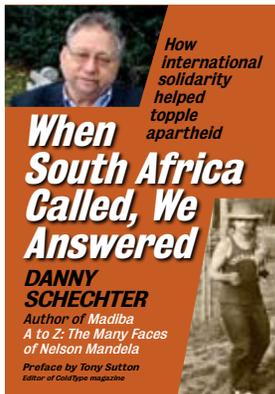
We can be sure the calls for Corbyn to resign would have been deafening. That there would have been fearsome denunciations of the enormous waste of taxpayers money on a socialist vanity project. And that the vote on the Peace Rocket would be held again. But it was the elite-approved Trident and not a socialist Peace Rocket that misfired, so the response has been very different.

We're told the malfunction of Britain's independent nuclear deterrent, and the failure of the government to mention it before Parliament voted on renewal, is no big deal. That the misfiring Trident is still worth spending billions of pounds of taxpayers money on at a time of austerity. And of course, there is absolutely no need for Parliament to debate the issue again.

**Just imagine . . .** if Russia had spent \$5-billion in trying to bring about a regime change in Canada, with neo-Nazis providing the cutting edge of anti-government protests. That torchlight processions by neo-Nazis and ultra-nationalists – commemorating wartime SS divisions were held in the new "democratic" Canada.

We could expect widespread condemnations and denunciations of Russia's links to the far right. But it's happening in Ukraine. And guess what? The West's "fascism is coming" brigade are not the slightest bit interested. **CT**

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# We all curse, so why can't judges and politicians?

A British judge was heavily criticised for swearing in court. She apologised afterwards, but **Simon Horobin** can't see why she had to . . .

*If the judge's swearing had been prompted by having trapped her finger in the courtroom door, it may have caused a snigger or two, but would have hardly been grounds for an enquiry*

A British judge has been criticised for swearing at a defendant in court. When confronted with an offensive phrase from a repeat offender, Patricia Lynch QC retaliated in kind by saying he was “a bit of a cunt” himself. Her retort triggered a few blushes and resulted in a number of complaints. But why shouldn't judges, politicians and other public figures swear? We all do it, so why not them?

To answer this question, we need to distinguish between different kinds of swearing. If you shout some expletive in response to slamming your finger in a door, you might offend someone who happens to overhear you, but that is an indirect, unintentional, outcome. This kind of swearing, in response to pain, grief, astonishment or other triggers, is very common. Since it is a reflex action, the obscenity is frequently out of our mouths before we have had a chance to determine whether it is contextually appropriate.

Research has shown that swearing in such situations has hypoalgesic benefits – increasing pain tolerance and decreasing pain perception. Replacement of the swear word with a less offensive alternative – “shoot” or “sugar” for “shit” – lessens the cathartic effect. If the judge's swearing had been prompted by having trapped her finger in the courtroom door, it may have caused a

snigger or two, but would have hardly been grounds for an enquiry.

As well as helping us deal with unpleasant physical and emotional sensations, swearing plays an important role in aiding social cohesion. Along with other kinds of slang usage, swearing serves to promote group identity and helps to define youth culture in opposition to the polite world of adult speech.

## **Positive politeness**

In such contexts, it is common to hear offensive language being used as part of what linguists term “positive politeness strategies” – intended to promote friendliness, camaraderie and solidarity. As such, offensive terms like “bugger”, “bastard”, “fucker” and even – in parts of the UK, Ireland and Australia – “cunt,” function as terms of endearment.

But in formal environments, such as the law courts or the Houses of Parliament, it is expected that speakers will instead employ negative politeness strategies – using polite forms of address and terms of respect to emphasise social distance, deference and independence. Parliamentary discourse is regulated by the speaker, who has the right to request that an MP considered to have used unparliamentary language withdraws it.

But exactly which words are likely to incur the speaker's wagging finger is unclear;

in the past, these have included “black-guard,” “coward,” “git,” “guttersnipe,” “rat” and “swine.” In March, 2016, Michael Fabricant apologised for using an “eight-letter word beginning with b and ending with cks” during a debate over the EU. He was upbraided by the speaker for the “unseemly utterance,” but, since it was spoken spontaneously and from a sedentary position, no further action was deemed necessary.

Similar problems bedevil the policing of the language of the broadcast media. Research by Ofcom, the British media watchdog, into attitudes towards swearing on television found that respondents were willing to tolerate bad language where it was felt to be contextually justified, according to factors such as the timing of the broadcast, likely and potential audiences, frequency of offensive language, and the tone and intention of the programme.

In determining the acceptability of bad language, therefore, programme makers are expected to balance potential audience responses alongside artistic integrity. But, since what constitutes bad language is conditioned by a range of factors, such as age, gender, social background and geography, this is something of a moving target. What prompts a letter to a newspaper from Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells may also be greeted with a smiley-face icon by a viewer live-tweeting a show.

It may be hard to imagine a time when the word “cunt” wasn’t offensive, but in the Middle Ages it was found in street names – such as Gropecunte Lane in Oxford (now modified to the more respectable Magpie Lane) – and personal names – such as Godewin Clawecunte and Simon Sitbithecunte. The word was acceptable in medical usage and is even found in literary writing,

including the works of the poet Geoffrey Chaucer, where it appeared as “queynte.”

**The age of prudery**

But in the 18th-century, a period of linguistic prudery in which concepts of decorum and refinement were established, it was seen as crude and unacceptable in polite discourse. It was omitted from Dr Johnson’s Dictionary of the English Language (1755) and in Francis Grose’s Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue (1785) it appeared as a rather coy four asterisks, and was defined as “a nasty word for a nasty thing.” It did not appear in another English dictionary until the 1960s.

While there may be a grey area around exactly which words are unacceptable in a court of law, the Houses of Parliament and the media, most people would agree that the word “cunt” remains strongly taboo. Many of the newspapers reporting the judge’s use of the word chose not to print it in full, preferring the sanitised form “c-t.” Other euphemistic alternatives it has spawned over the years include the “c-word,” “berk” (from Cockney Rhyming Slang “Berkeley hunt”), “cunny,” and even “quaint.”

The judge subsequently apologised for her language – and has been cleared of judicial misconduct. Despite this, her response was widely celebrated on social media, with many people branding her a hero. This reaction was presumably prompted by the sense that in this case the defendant had been found guilty of racially abusing strangers and it was therefore a perfectly just riposte. **CT**

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*Simon Horobin is professor of English language and literature at Oxford University. This article originally appeared at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)*

**What prompts a letter to a newspaper from Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells may also be greeted with a smiley-face icon by a viewer live-tweeting a show**

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# We're being ripped off by billionaire populists

Should Trump, Trudeau and their mega-rich buddies be allowed to define the fight for economic equality for the rest of us? asks **Linda McQuaig**

***Billionaire Trump, with his Wall Street cabinet and his sweetheart tax-cut for billionaires, has turned "populism" into just another fake news concept***

**W**e toss around the word "billionaire" pretty freely these days, as if it's just another word for a rich guy. And yet, try this little quiz: You are given a dollar every second, 24 hours a day. At that rate, it takes 12 days for you to become a millionaire. But how long does it take for you to become a billionaire?

Answer: 32 years.

Being a billionaire isn't just about being rich; it's about being mind-bogglingly rich – rich beyond most people's comprehension. And yet the mega-fortunes being amassed these days by the newly-emergent class of billionaires – and the enormous influence and control this gives them over our economy and politics – barely registers as a political issue.

What makes this particularly odd is that we're told we live in a time of popular revolt against the "elites" and that Donald Trump just won the US presidency because of his "populism."

Of course, billionaire Trump, with his Wall Street cabinet and his sweetheart tax-cut for billionaires, has turned "populism" into just another fake news concept.

Still, his surprise election has alerted us to the depth of dissatisfaction with the status quo – a revelation that promises to shake up the political firmament.

The real question is whether Trump and his crowd get to define and shape that anti-

status quo sentiment, moulding it into a hateful juggernaut to be used against immigrants, women needing health care, and people saying "Happy Holidays" when they should be saying "Merry Christmas."

Another possibility is that progressives will tap into that vein of popular dissatisfaction with a more broadly appealing message – one that truly challenges the elite, including the billionaires in Trump's cabinet.

In recent years, progressive political parties – the Democrats in the US, and the New Democratic Party (NDP) in Canada – have shifted their focus onto fighting for gender and racial equality, scoring important gains in these areas. But they've largely abandoned the fight for greater economic equality, which helps explain the huge losses on this front, as the distribution of income and wealth in both countries has become more radically skewed to the top.

What's needed – and what Bernie Sanders' upstart campaign in the US Democratic primaries revealed to be popular – is a revitalised progressive movement that openly challenges the set of pro-market economic policies that have enabled corporate interests to suppress labour and redirect wealth to themselves in recent decades.

A revival of economic populism would likely reverberate in Canada as well. Back in the early 1970s, NDP leader David Lewis stirred up Canadians with a fiery campaign

against “corporate welfare bums” capturing the balance of power and wielding real influence in the minority Liberal parliament.

Over the years, the idea of challenging corporate power has remained popular among the NDP grassroots but the party leadership, succumbing to the dominant corporate mindset, drifted towards the centre – an approach that hasn’t worked out well. This allowed a sham-progressive like Justin Trudeau to claim vast swaths of the centre-left, but his allure is fading as he disappoints progressives on electoral reform and pipelines, while cosying up to the rich and powerful.

The NDP should appeal to disaffected workers by reclaiming populist ground: demanding higher taxes on the rich, opposing trade deals that simply enhance corporate power, and pushing for green versions of deals like the Auto Pact, which used to ensure manufacturing jobs were located in Canada.

The NDP should also throw the spotlight on the growing gap between rich and poor – a trend that riles a lot of Canadians, yet gets little attention.

A new Oxfam report shows how far the

rich have pulled ahead of everyone else, noting that the two richest men in Canada – David Thomson and Galen Weston – now have as much wealth as the bottom 30 per cent of Canadians (11-million people).

Another way to grasp the size of these fortunes is to imagine how long it would take our richest man, David Thomson, head of the Thomson media empire, to count his \$27-billion. If he counted it at the same rapid rate mentioned above – one dollar every second – and he counted non-stop day and night, he’d have it all tallied up in 864 years.

Or another way to look at it: if David Thomson had started counting his fortune at that rate back in 1153 AD – around the time the Egyptian sultan Saladin was putting giant hooks on the side of his castle to impale those who fell over its walls – he’d just be finishing up the counting now. **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 two richest men in Canada – David Thomson and Galen Weston – now have as much wealth as the bottom 30 per cent of Canadians (11-million people)**

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# Look out World. Here comes Donald

John Feffer on the birth of a new and intensely nationalist world order run by rich white men

*Just as wealthy Americans often slight the role the domestic infrastructure has played in the making of their fortunes, Trump routinely disregards how much his depends on the infrastructure of the global economy*

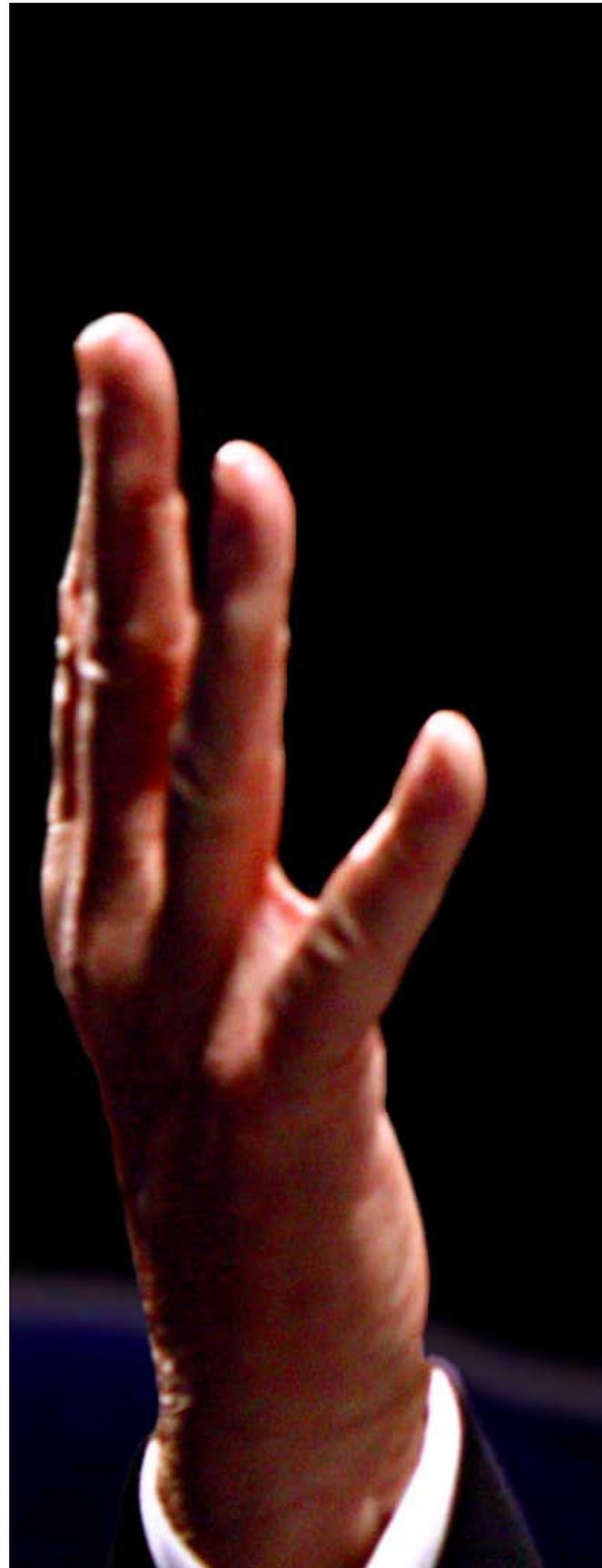
Donald Trump is a worldly fellow. He travels the globe on his private jet. He's married to a Slovene and divorced from a Czech. He doesn't speak any other languages, but hey, he's an American, so monolingualism is his birthright.

His fortune depends in large part on the global economy. He has business interests in nearly two-dozen countries on four continents. Many of the products anointed with

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the Trump brand roll off a global assembly line: Trump furniture made in Turkey and Germany, Trump eyeglasses from China, Trump shirts via Bangladesh and Honduras (among other countries). Just as wealthy Americans often slight the role the domestic infrastructure has played in the making of their fortunes, Trump routinely disregards how much his depends on the infrastructure of the global economy.

The new president's cabinet nominees





Caricature: Donkeyhotey ([www.flickr.com/photos/donkeyhotey/18058245844](http://www.flickr.com/photos/donkeyhotey/18058245844))

# The Age Of Trump / 1

***The incoming administration is, in fact, united around one key mission: it's about to declare war on the world***

are a similarly worldly lot, being either generals or multi-millionaires (or both), or simply, like their president, straight-out billionaires. Rich people jet off to exotic places for vacations or to make deals; generals are dispatched to all points of the compass to kill people. With an estimated net wealth of more than \$13-billion, Trump's cabinet could be its own small island nation. Make that a very aggressive island nation: the military men in his proposed cabinet – former generals Mike Flynn (national security adviser), James Mattis (defense secretary), and John Kelly (head of Homeland Security), as well as former Navy Seal Ryan Zinke (interior secretary) – have fought in nearly as many countries as Trump has done business.

As worldly as they might be, Trump's nominees don't look much like the world. Mostly rich white men, they look more like the American electorate . . . circa 1817. Still, the media has bent over backward to find as much diversity as it could in this panorama of homogeneity. It has, for instance, identified the nominees according to their different ideological milieus: Wall Street, the Pentagon, the Republican Party, the lunatic fringe. In this taxonomy of Trumpism, the media continues to miss the obvious. The incoming administration is, in fact, united around one key mission: it's about to declare war on the world.

Don't be fooled by the surface cosmopolitanism of the new president and his appointees. For all their international experience, these people care about the planet the way pornographers care about sex. Their interactions are purely transactional, just the means to an end. There couldn't be less empathy for the people out there involved in the drama. It's all about the money and that piercing sense of conquest.

The Trump team's approach, a globalism of the 1%, benefits themselves even as it reinforces American exceptionalism. Their worldview is a galaxy distant from the sort of democratic internationalism that values

diplomacy, human rights, and multilateral cooperation to address planetary problems like climate change and economic inequality. Such a foreign policy of mutual engagement is, in fact, exactly what's under immediate threat. As with Obamacare, the incoming administration wants to shred an inclusive project and substitute an exclusive one for it. In so doing, it will replace a collection of liberal internationalists with something worse: a confederacy of oligarchs.

For such an undertaking that so radically privileges the few over the many, the next administration needs a compelling rationale that goes beyond assertions that the status quo is broken, international institutions are inefficient, and the United States is the indispensable power on the planet. America isn't facing just any old crisis like failing banks or nuclear wannabe nations. For someone like Donald Trump, the threat has to be huge, the biggest ever.

So brace yourself for a coming clash of civilizations. The new president is circling the wagons in defence of nothing less than the Western way of life. As if it were a town in South Vietnam in 1968, Trump aims to destroy the international community in order to save it.

## **Industrial-strength Islamophobia**

In the summer of 2010, anti-Islamic sentiment was cresting in the United States. There were protests against a proposed Islamic centre in New York City, arson attacks against mosques around the United States, and a fundamentalist preacher in Florida threatening to burn the koran. A campaign was starting up to stop Muslims from imposing sharia law in America. By the end of August, the confrontations had become so intense that Time magazine put Islamophobia on its cover. "It was the Summer of Hate," I wrote in my book *Crusade 2.0* back then, "and the target was Islam."

The Islamophobes that summer were as misguided about Islam as the terrorists they loathed. Both sets of extremists transformed

a religion practiced by 1.6-billion people, the overwhelming majority of whom despise terrorism, into an enemy of Western civilisation. Just as al-Qaeda found few adherents in America, the Islamophobes, too, were at that time on the fringes of society. Pamela Geller, who led the charge against the Islamic centre in New York, was an obscure blogger. The man who popularised the campaign against the imaginary imposition of sharia law, Frank Gaffney, headed up a think tank that no one except radical right radio hosts took seriously. That Florida preacher, Terry Jones, had a minuscule congregation. The Islamophobia industry was well funded, but aside from a few kooks in Congress it was not well connected in Washington policy circles. The fringe continued to advance their fabricated stories – including the supposedly secret Muslim faith of President Obama – but the mainstream media moved on (or so it seemed at the time).

As it turned out, Islamophobia did anything but disappear. In 2015, hate crimes against Muslims in the United States increased by 78 percent, reaching levels not seen since the aftermath of September 11th. As the presidential election season intensified in 2016, so did those attacks on Muslims, as tallied by the Huffington Post and analysed in a Georgetown University-affiliated study. In the months since Trump's victory in November, the Southern Poverty Law centre has recorded more than 100 anti-Muslim hate crimes around the country.

What makes the current moment different, however, is that the previously well-funded margins have become the well-connected mainstream. Would-be officials of the Trump administration are now proclaiming as fact what only conspiracy theorists babbled about seven years ago. The dangerous twaddle begins with Donald Trump himself who, of course, spearheaded the birtherism movement against Barack Obama until he ran for president. During the campaign, he promised to keep any new Muslim immigrants from American shores and draw

up a registry of all those who'd somehow managed to get in before the gates shut. He pledged to close down mosques. In March 2016, in a remarkable example of projection, he told CNN that "Islam hates us."

True, Trump also pledged to work with "all moderate Muslim reformers" in the Middle East. That category, however, mainly seems to include authoritarian democrats like Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, coup leaders like Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Egypt, and even war criminals like Bashar al-Assad in Syria. In hindsight, Trump would have supported autocrats Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi because they so effectively eliminated potential terrorists. For the new president, "reformers" really means those willing to kill large numbers of people who conveniently happen to be Muslims. Why should the United States get its hands dirty? Trump, ever the businessman, appreciates the value of sub-contractors.

President Trump's choice for national security adviser, Michael Flynn, is even more notoriously Islamophobic. He has compared "Islamism" to Nazism and communism, calling it a "vicious cancer inside the body of 1.7-billion people." He has perpetuated the sharia law myth, cultivated so strenuously by Frank Gaffney.

In his State of the Union address of 2002, George W. Bush infamously linked Iran and Iraq, two countries that hated each other, in an "axis of evil" with a putatively Communist nation, North Korea, that had few dealings with either of them. In a book he co-authored with neocon Michael Ledeen, Flynn went several steps further, imagining radical Islamists creating a global anti-American network that linked North Korea, China, Russia, Iran, Syria, Cuba, Bolivia, Venezuela, and Nicaragua.

He also attacked not just "radical Islam" but Islam in general and cast aspersions on both the Prophet Muhammad and the Koran, arguing that Islam as a whole is a religion utterly incompatible with modernity.

However objectionable the foreign poli-

**Trump's new national security adviser, Michael Flynn, is notoriously Islamophobic. He has compared "Islamism" to Nazism and communism, calling it a "vicious cancer inside the body of 1.7-billion people"**

# The Age Of Trump / 1

***During his confirmation hearing, Tillerson made the ludicrous claim that the Muslim Brotherhood has been “an agent for radical Islam like al-Qaeda,” proving that he’s at least as ignorant of divisions within the Islamic world as Donald Trump***

cies of the George W. Bush administration, its officials at least attempted to distinguish between al-Qaeda and Islam. Not Flynn, who doesn’t have to go through the confirmation process. Count on one thing, though: he won’t be an isolated nutcase in the Trump administration. His deputy, K.T. McFarland, has made similarly inflammatory statements about Islam, as have Mike Pompeo (CIA director), Steve Bannon (White House chief strategist), and Jeff Sessions (attorney general).

Not all Trump nominees are as fond of fake news as Mike Flynn. There are some shades of nuance in the otherwise over-the-top bunch that Trump has assembled. Desperate for a sign that the next administration is not a Saturday Night Live parody, Democratic legislators and liberal commentators have looked for “voices of reason” among Trump’s nominees. They’ve praised Secretary of Defense James Mattis and his somewhat more conventional Pentagon view of the world, while prospective Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has attracted support for his somewhat more conventional CEO view of the world.

But even Mattis and Tillerson share a hostility toward Islam. During his confirmation hearing, for instance, Tillerson made the ludicrous claim that the Muslim Brotherhood has been “an agent for radical Islam like al-Qaeda,” proving that he’s at least as ignorant of divisions within the Islamic world as Donald Trump (who once said that he wouldn’t bother to learn the difference between Hamas and Hezbollah until it was absolutely necessary). Tillerson’s claim just happens to coincide with the latest piece of anti-Islamic legislation making its way through Congress: the fifth attempt in five years to put the Muslim Brotherhood on the State Department’s list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations. This time, with support from Trump and possibly even Mattis, who has come out against “political Islam,” it might just pass.

Political Islam, like political Christianity

or political Judaism, takes some noxious positions, particularly on civil liberties, but it can also be a force for stability and an ally against terrorist organisations like the Islamic State. And whatever you might think of the Muslim Brotherhood, it simply isn’t a terrorist organisation. Indeed, because of its focus on achieving its goals through participation in the political process, the Brotherhood has earned the hatred of the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and virtually every other Islamic terrorist outfit around. It bodes ill for the Muslim world – and the world at large – when top administration officials can’t make these elemental distinctions.

Islam is, of course, an easy target in a country that has been fed a nonstop diet of misinformation on the subject, but hardly the only target. The Trump administration has far larger ambitions.

## **Unravelling the institutions**

At the end of December, the UN Security Council voted to condemn Israel for its policy of building settlements in territory slated for a Palestinian state. Instead of wielding its veto power, for the first time the United States abstained on such a vote, allowing the resolution to pass 14 to 0. Donald Trump almost immediately tweeted: “The United Nations has such great potential but right now it is just a club for people to get together, talk and have a good time. So sad!”

In fact, it’s hard to imagine an institution less devoted to having a good time. The soul of sobriety, the Security Council might be thought of as the exact opposite of a Trump casino. For all its flaws and contradictions, the UN sustains the flame of democratic internationalism and a belief that rules and regulations might be able to contain the chaos of conflict and help solve the world’s most pressing problems. That, not its supposedly wasted potential, is what has really earned it the wrath of Trump.

The president-elect’s first salvo in his attack on that institution was his nomination of Nikki Haley as the US ambassador to it.

The South Carolina governor has zero experience in foreign affairs. Choosing her was as much a gesture of contempt as picking Rick Perry to head the Department of Energy, an agency he once expressed a desire to disband. For a UN-averse administration, that ambassadorship is the equivalent of Siberian exile.

If former UN Ambassador John Bolton becomes number two at the State Department – he’s still in the running despite some Republican opposition – he’ll immediately put that institution in his crosshairs. Bolton has never concealed his enmity toward the UN, declaring at one point that its New York headquarters would be no worse off with 10 fewer floors. Bolton was furious over the recent Security Council vote on settlements, urging the Trump administration to immediately push for its repeal. “If that fails, and that’s the most likely outcome,” he said, “we should cut our contributions to the United Nations, perhaps in toto, until this resolution is repealed.”

Indeed, the easiest way for the Trump administration to undermine the UN would simply be to unleash the anti-internationalist attack dogs in Congress who have long been eager to cut its financing. Now that they’re fully in charge, expect the Republican leadership to target funding for refugees (the United States is the leading contributor to the UN Refugee Agency), the UN Population Fund (which the anti-abortion crowd has been itching to challenge), the UN Green Climate Fund (a concrete way to undercut the Paris accord on climate change), and peacekeeping (a frequent target of right-wing think tanks). Even Rex Tillerson, lauded by the UN Foundation for his philanthropic efforts to fight malaria as Exxon-Mobil’s CEO, would find it hard to beat back the anti-UN sentiments of the congressional budget hawks.

Keep in mind that the UN represents a potential source of organised resistance to the Trump administration, a way that the “rest” can mobilise against the “West.” But

it’s increasingly clear that the “West” itself is going to pose some challenges for the incoming administration. Trump, for instance, intensely dislikes the European Union (EU). He openly supported the British vote to leave it and invited Brexit campaign leader Nigel Farage to his inauguration. The transition team has been on the lookout for the next exit votes to support. “I do think keeping [the EU] together is not gonna be as easy as a lot of people think,” Trump said ominously in a recent interview with the Times of London. Like the UN, the EU has come to represent the values of inclusive internationalism, whether it’s Germany’s willingness to accommodate Syrian refugees or the diplomatic efforts of Brussels to resolve conflicts in Eurasia and the Middle East.

In its eagerness to unravel internationalism, the Trump administration won’t simply take aim at institutions like the UN and the EU. It will also target for demolition the diplomatic accomplishments of the Obama administration, including the Iran nuclear deal and détente with Cuba. It will seek to undermine liberal values of every sort, ranging from support for human rights and multiculturalism to an abhorrence of torture. A wrecking ball with Trump’s name on it is poised to demolish the house of internationalism that Eleanor Roosevelt, Ralph Bunche, Jody Williams, Jimmy Carter, and so many others laboured so hard to build.

As with any real estate developer, however, Trump isn’t interested in simply tearing down the old. He wants to build something big and gaudy in its place.

### **The New Globalists**

The first front in the Trump administration’s war to take back the world will, of course, be against Islam, which is expected to surpass Christianity as the world’s largest faith in the second half of the 21st-century. From the Crusades to the wars against the Ottoman Empire, the very concept of “Western” developed in opposition to Islam. So it makes a certain perverse sense for Trump

***Even Rex Tillerson, lauded by the UN Foundation for his philanthropic efforts to fight malaria as ExxonMobil’s CEO, would find it hard to beat back the anti-UN sentiments of the congressional budget hawks***

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**Trump, Bannon, and others are not interested in democratising globalism. They want to create an internationalism of their own**

to tap into this longstanding tradition in establishing his supposed defence of Western (read: American) civilisation.

Trump's White House special adviser Steve Bannon, the white supremacist who made Breitbart News such a popular mouthpiece for the far right, clearly feels at home with this clash-of-civilisations framework. "We are in an outright war against jihadist Islamic fascism," he has written, a movement that wants to "completely eradicate everything that we've been bequeathed over the last 2,000, 2,500 years." Bannon can count on others in the administration just as eager to wage such an epic battle, including Deputy National Security Adviser-in-waiting K.T. McFarland, who believes that "Global Islamist jihad is at war with all of Western civilisation."

But Bannon and his Trumpian ilk aren't just focused on Islam. Think of the war against that religion as just a wedge issue for them. After binge-watching nine films that the alt-right guru has directed over the years, journalist Adam Wren summed up Bannon's message in Politico this way: "Western Civilisation as we know it is under attack by forces that are demonic or foreign – the difference between those is blurry – and people in far-distant power centres are looking to screw you."

Bannon dislikes Islam, but it's the "globalists" who, as he sees it, represent the chief threat. "I'm not a white nationalist, I'm a nationalist. I'm an economic nationalist," he says. "The globalists gutted the American working class and created a middle class in Asia. The issue now is about Americans looking to not get f—ed over." According to their critics, the globalists are a liberal elite that has benefited from free trade, pushed for multiculturalism, and joined hands with their counterparts around the world in conclaves like Davos and at institutions like the UN. They despise national traditions and disparage religious (Christian) values. Politically correct, they care only about minorities, not the majority. They

want to tear down borders in order to line their own pockets. The cabal responsible for the "American carnage" joins a long list of conspiratorial groups that have supposedly poisoned the body politic. It's just a matter of time before The Protocols of the Elders of Globalism spreads virally through the fake news Webosphere.

But don't Rex Tillerson, CEO of a major energy company, or the multiple minions of Goldman Sachs who will join the administration fall right into this category of globalists? Surely these Trump nominees are enamoured of free trade, the structural adjustments of the International Monetary Fund, and other institutions of economic globalisation. That's where Bannon comes in. He's the right-wing equivalent of Friedrich Engels, the industrialist who supported Karl Marx in birthing Communism. Every new ruling elite needs a certain number of turncoats ready to bite the hand of the ancien régime that fed them. Having worked at Goldman Sachs before putting in time in Hollywood and at Breitbart, Bannon aspires to transform the titans of industry and finance into America-first nationalists.

## **Global casino economy**

It's one thing to criticise liberal internationalism for its concentrations of wealth, political privilege, and cultural snobbery. You don't have to be a conspiracy theorist to find fault with a global economy that functions like a casino. But Trump, Bannon, and others are not interested in democratising globalism. They want to create an internationalism of their own. Think of it as a new globalism of the 1% that is Christian, deeply conservative, and subordinate to nationalist demands. Despite its appeals to the silent majority, this globalism 2.0 will benefit an even narrower slice of the elite. Moreover, Trump and Bannon have already lined up international backers for it, figures like Russian President Vladimir Putin, French presidential hopeful Marine Le Pen, and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

Putin is the linchpin of this de facto Nationalist International. In 2013, the Russian leader outlined an agenda that anticipated the Trump campaign in nearly all its particulars.

“We can see how many of the Euro-Atlantic countries are actually rejecting their roots, including the Christian values that constitute the basis of Western civilisation. They are denying moral principles and all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious, and even sexual. They are implementing policies that equate large families with same-sex partnerships, belief in God with the belief in Satan. The excesses of political correctness have reached the point where people are seriously talking about registering political parties whose aim is to promote paedophilia.”

In Russia, the appeal to these old-fashioned values has concealed an old-fashioned looting of the economy, along with a beefing up of the military. That Trump has nominated so many titans of the corporate sector and the military-industrial complex

suggests that his administration will closely follow the Russian blueprint, much as Viktor Orban has already done in Hungary.

As Donald Trump settles into the Oval Office say goodbye to the one-worlders of the Obama-Clinton years and say hello to a new era of the one-per centres. America’s oligarchs will profit handsomely from the administration’s infrastructure program, its reconfigured trade deals, and its accelerated emphasis on resource extraction.

For the rest of us, much pain will accompany the birth of this new nationalist world order, this confederacy of oligarchs. The world urgently needs a new generation of democratic internationalists – or there won’t be much of a world left when Trump and his cronies get through with it. **CT**

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***In Russia, the appeal to these old-fashioned values has concealed an old-fashioned looting of the economy, along with a beefing up of the military***

## BENDIB'S WORLD

Khalil Bendib



# Beware of all those alternative facts

If Trump can sell a plain-as-day lie about his inauguration crowd, he can lie about anything – including things that hurt his own supporters, writes **Peter Certo**

**The Trump administration used its inaugural press conference to tell bald-faced, easily falsifiable lies – and many Americans believed them**

About an hour after Donald Trump was sworn in, I was having lunch with my wife and our five-month-old. As we picked at our food outside my office in DC's Dupont Circle neighbourhood, groups of tourists trickled by in Trump regalia.

Early the next morning, as I dumped a pail of diapers in the trash can out front, I ran into a much different crowd: throngs of people wearing pink and carrying anti-Trump signs, passing through, on their way to the Women's March.

It was scarcely 7 am, yet already I'd seen more pink hats than I'd seen red ones the day before. Surprised – and still in my pyjama pants – I scurried inside.

DC's Women's March alone attracted three times as many visitors as Trump's inauguration, crowd experts quoted by The New York Times estimate. According to ridership data from the DC Metro system, only one other event topped it: Barack Obama's inauguration in 2009. This was obvious to anyone who lives here, and to anyone who's seen aerial photos of the crowd.

Of course, whose crowd is bigger matters only a little more than whose hands are bigger, among other appendages Trump likes to size up. But sometimes he can't help himself.

At a moment you'd expect a new president to be busy with other things, Trump di-

rected his press secretary to announce that his crowds had been "the largest audience to ever witness an inauguration, period." Any media outlet that told you differently, he said, was lying.

It was laughably untrue. But it wasn't a lie, Trump adviser Kellyanne Conway told NBC. It was just an "alternative fact."

If that doesn't set your Orwell alarm off, I don't know what will. Yet almost immediately, Trump's version of events started circulating through conservative news sites and social media outlets. The Trump administration, in short, used its inaugural press conference to tell bald-faced, easily falsifiable lies – and many Americans be-

lieved them. Aerial photos, crowd experts, Metro data, even TV ratings be damned – all that mattered were the "alternative facts" of the Trump team. There's more at stake here than a "whose is bigger?" contest – including for millions of Trump supporters. To see how, let me tell you something else about Trump's first day in office.

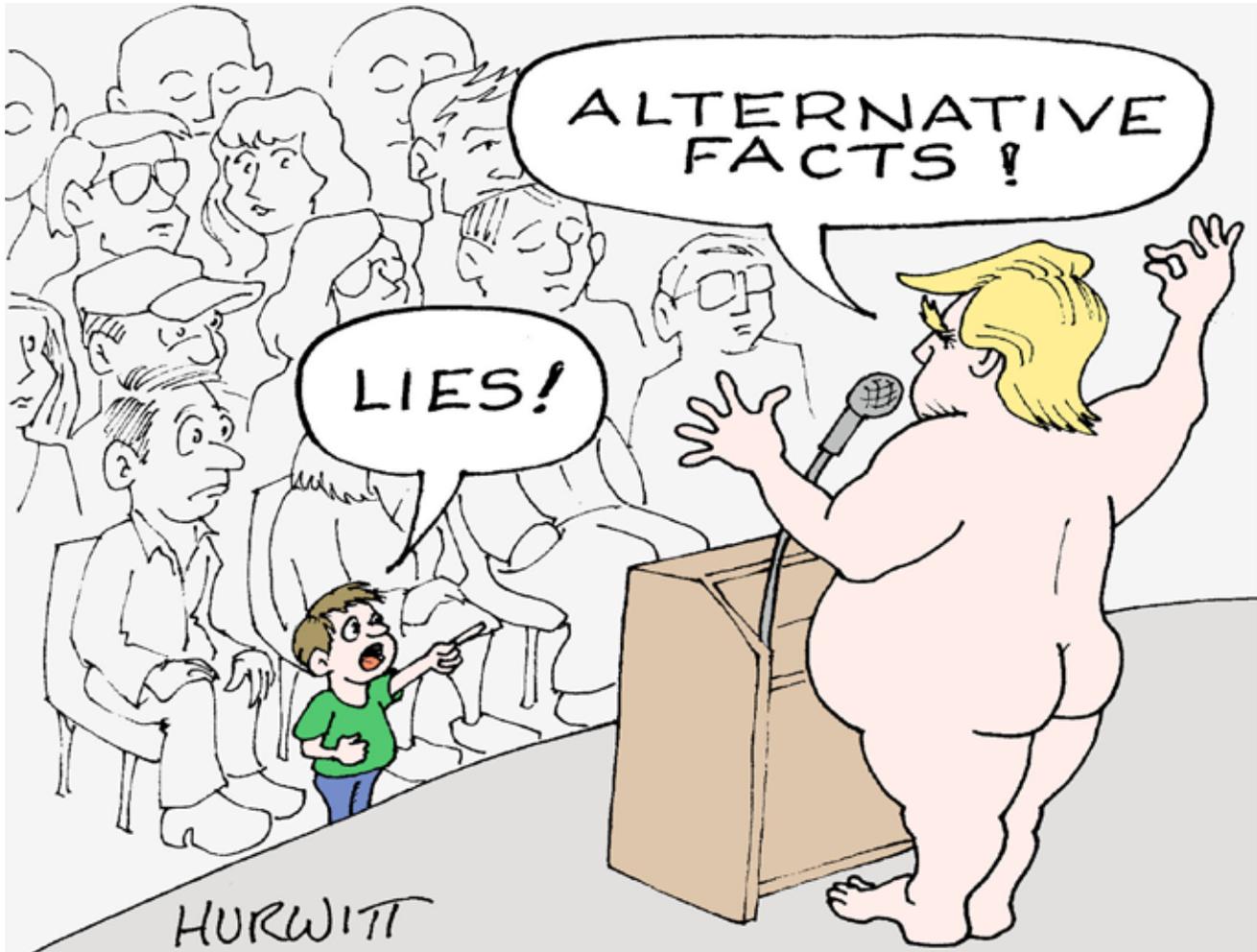
Shortly after announcing that "every decision" will be "made to benefit American workers and American families," Trump retreated to the Oval Office to sign his first directives as president.

The first raised mortgage fees for working families, including many who probably supported Trump. Another began the proc-

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WHAT'S NEXT?

HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitz



ess of dismantling a health care law that's helped 20-million people get insurance.

Trump voters in red states could be especially hard-hit.

From Florida to Pennsylvania, in fact, more than six-million people getting health insurance subsidies live in states that Trump won. Combined with the law's Medicaid expansion and protections for people with pre-existing conditions, that's helped deep-red states like Kentucky and West Virginia cut their uninsured rates by half.

But here's the question: If Trump can tell you your own eyes are lying about a simple aerial photograph of his inauguration, can he also convince you your mortgage fees

didn't just go up? Or that you'll still have health care after he axes your subsidy and gives your insurer permission to drop you?

Talk about "alternative facts." If those things slide, what else can he get away with?

Trump voters are famously sceptical of Washington. Of all people, I hope they'd agree that watching what a politician does tells you more than hearing what he says. If they shut their eyes now, they're going to get sucker punched. **CT**

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**If Trump can tell you your own eyes are lying about a simple aerial photograph of his inauguration, can he also convince you your mortgage fees didn't just go up?**

# The two Trumps of Week One

Which Trump were you watching on inauguration weekend: the moronic mediocrity or the shrewd new president? asks **Rick Salutin**

***How did Trump's tiny mind get it so right on stuff like NAFTA? No one else in his class did***

Which Trump were you watching at the inaugural weekend: The moronic mediocrity with a skimpy vocabulary who can't keep focussed and who's as self-absorbed as an infant? Or the shrewd new president who bolstered his crucial constituency in the rust belt and dealt with an economic abyss that no one else over the past 30 years dared touch? Me – I'm riveted by both and, as a result, more than a bit confused.

There's that dolt obsessing over crowd size at his inauguration or nonexistent voter fraud versus the guy who went straight after humanly catastrophic trade deals like NAFTA, just as he promised "workers" he would – while being the only one happy to use that word, once a trademark of the left. Even if he never fully delivers, they'll be grateful, after being overlooked and overflowed for so long. "He sees us," they say.

For those of us who've opposed these trade deals since the 1980s, it's bizarre. Someone finally does something about them not in the name of social justice but of racism and scapegoating. "What we want is fair trade," he told CEOs on Monday. That's what we should've been saying all along – and we were. Union leaders are delighted that the issue is finally being treated, even if it means they're with Stupid.

How did his tiny mind get it so right on

stuff like NAFTA? No one else in his class did. Did he alone get the memo merely from watching Morning Joe and the Sunday news panels? Someone suggested it's because he only has one neuron in his brain so when it latches onto something that makes sense, he doesn't get distracted by all the other neurons banging around in bigger brains like Obama's, who reads too much and consulted too many experts. That would also account for Trump's idiocies.

The protest marches were inspiring but they won't take a single voter from him. The only thing that would is a counter-position on trade and the economy, of the sort Bernie Sanders had. Meanwhile his fatuous outbursts keep opponents

fixated on lesser stuff: "over his head . . . unfit . . . dumpster fire . . . erratic . . . inappropriate . . . insecure . . . continues to unravel." (That's from Salon.) He tosses out more crazy stuff: the wall, Putin, sanctuary cities, torture. Could there be an actual mind at work here, strategising? That's a truly scary thought. Or is it just dumb luck, literally?

On the sentient side: Isn't it better to look like a petty narcissist than a racist? Make yourself an object of derision versus menace? That also goes for his attacks on media. Who really cares, besides journalists, who get diverted onto their enthralling selves. (And he has a case, as did Sanders.)

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Whether he's savvy, instinctively canny, or just lucky, it's all functional, it works for him, though it would be a letdown to find out he isn't as totally barmy as he appears. Could Two Trumps be an actual plan?

Either way, you can't take your eyes off him: because he's so unpredictable and entertaining, or because if you do, he'll grab your wallet. He's more complex than we expected and perhaps than he knows, unless he really does know – I told you, it gets highly perplexing. Then, when I'd pretty much decided he's being consciously manipulative, I watched ABC's "first interview with the president" Wednesday night.

Could anyone genuinely "act" this stupid? He'd have to be a dramatic genius. Or is stupidity itself a form of manipulation – so he's his own secret weapon? He draws you down to his level and you have little choice. It's truly like dealing with a baby. He makes

everyone around him behave infantilely, too. ABC anchor David Muir tried having a solemn conversation for awhile, then gave up, echoing Trump's claims about the inevitable wall (Trump: "Now it has to go up." Muir, nodding: "That's the challenge, Mr. President") the way you'd say googoo to a kid. Trump looked like the smart one.

So beware the man who chooses to be seen as a buffoon, even if he really is. Especially if he is, because then he can play the part so convincingly. But fear him why? Because his buffoonery may conceal elements more sinister, which you overlook as you chuckle and condescend. Like what? For me it has to do with democracy. This president has never said a fond word in its favour. **CT**

***It's truly like dealing with a baby. Trump makes everyone around him behave infantilely, too.***

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**BY THE NUMBERS**  
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# Donald Trump is not the problem. We are

If they're to help combat the surge towards rapacious power, sycophantic liberals should reflect on their own cultish acceptance of Obama's aggression, writes **John Pilger**

**Martha Gellhorn's words echo across the uncton and violence of the Obama era and the silence of those who colluded with his deceptions**

Before President Trump was inaugurated, thousands of writers in the United States expressed their indignation. "In order for us to heal and move forward . . .," said Writers Resist, "we wish to bypass direct political discourse, in favour of an inspired focus on the future, and how we, as writers, can be a unifying force for the protection of democracy."

And: "We urge local organisers and speakers to avoid using the names of politicians or adopting 'anti' language as the focus for their Writers Resist event. It's important to ensure that nonprofit organisations, which are prohibited from political campaigning, will feel confident participating in and sponsoring these events."

Thus, real protest was to be avoided, for it is not tax exempt.

Compare such drivel with the declarations of the Congress of American Writers, held at Carnegie Hall, New York, in 1935, and again two years later. They were electric events, with writers discussing how they could confront ominous events in Abyssinia, China and Spain. Telegrams from Thomas Mann, C Day Lewis, Upton Sinclair and Albert Einstein were read out, reflecting the fear that great power was now rampant and that it had become impossible to discuss art and literature without politics or, indeed, direct political action.

"A writer," the journalist Martha Gellhorn told the second congress, "must be a man of action now . . . A man who has given a year of his life to steel strikes, or to the unemployed, or to the problems of racial prejudice, has not lost or wasted time. He is a man who has known where he belonged. If you should survive such action, what you have to say about it afterwards is the truth, is necessary and real, and it will last."

Her words echo across the uncton and violence of the Obama era and the silence of those who colluded with his deceptions.

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That the menace of rapacious power – rampant long before the rise of Trump – has been accepted by writers, many of them privileged and celebrated, and by those who guard the gates of literary criticism, and culture, including popular culture, is uncontroversial. Not for them the impossibility of writing and promoting literature bereft of politics. Not for them the responsibility to speak out, regardless of who occupies the White House.

### "Deplorable" voters

Today, false symbolism is all. "Identity" is all. In 2016, Hillary Clinton stigmatised millions of voters as "a basket of deplorables, racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Is-

lamophobic – you name it.” Her abuse was handed out at an LGBT rally as part of her cynical campaign to win over minorities by abusing a white mostly working-class majority. Divide and rule, this is called; or identity politics in which race and gender conceal class, and allow the waging of class war. Trump understood this.

“When the truth is replaced by silence,” said the Soviet dissident poet Yevtushenko, “the silence is a lie.”

This is not an American phenomenon. A few years ago, Terry Eagleton, then professor of English literature at Manchester University, reckoned that “for the first time in two centuries, there is no eminent British poet, playwright or novelist prepared to question the foundations of the western way of life.”

No Shelley speaks for the poor, no Blake for utopian dreams, no Byron damns the corruption of the ruling class, no Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin reveal the moral disaster of capitalism. William Morris, Oscar Wilde, HG Wells, George Bernard Shaw have no equivalents today. Harold Pinter was the last to raise his voice. Among today’s insistent voices of consumer-feminism, none echoes Virginia Woolf, who described “the arts of dominating other people . . . of ruling, of killing, of acquiring land and capital.”

There is something both venal and profoundly stupid about famous writers as they venture outside their cosseted world and embrace an “issue.” Across the Review section of the Guardian on December 10 was a dreamy picture of Barack Obama looking up to the heavens and the words, “Amazing Grace” and “Farewell the Chief.”

The sycophancy ran like a polluted babbling brook through page after page. “He was a vulnerable figure in many ways . . . But the grace. The all-encompassing grace: in manner and form, in argument and intellect, with humour and cool . . . [He] is a blazing tribute to what has been, and what can be again . . . He seems ready to keep fight-

ing, and remains a formidable champion to have on our side . . . . The grace . . . the almost surreal levels of grace . . .”

I have conflated these quotes. There are others even more hagiographic and bereft of mitigation. The Guardian’s chief apologist for Obama, Gary Younge, has always been careful to mitigate, to say that his hero “could have done more:” oh, but there were the “calm, measured and consensual solutions . . .”

None of them, however, could surpass the American writer, Ta-Nehisi Coates, the recipient of a “genius” grant worth \$625,000 from a liberal foundation. In an interminable essay for the Atlantic entitled, “My President Was Black,” Coates brought new meaning to prostration. The final “chapter,” entitled “When You Left, You Took All of Me With You,” a line from a Marvin Gaye song, describes seeing the Obamas “rising out of the limo, rising up from fear, smiling, waving, defying despair, defying history, defying gravity.” The Ascension, no less.

One of the persistent strands in American political life is a cultish extremism that approaches fascism. This was given expression and reinforced during the two terms of Barack Obama. “I believe in American exceptionalism with every fibre of my being,” said Obama, who expanded America’s favourite military pastime, bombing, and death squads (“special operations”) as no other president has done since the Cold War.

### **72 bombs every day**

According to a Council on Foreign Relations survey, in 2016 alone, Obama dropped 26,171 bombs. That is 72 bombs every day. He bombed the poorest people on earth, in Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan.

Every Tuesday – reported the New York Times – he personally selected those who would be murdered by mostly hellfire missiles fired from drones. Weddings, funerals, shepherds were attacked, along with

***One of the persistent strands in American political life is a cultish extremism that approaches fascism. This was given expression and reinforced during the two terms of Barack Obama***

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**Reminiscent of the Scramble for Africa in the late 19th-century, the US African Command (Africom) has built a network of supplicants among collaborative African regimes eager for American bribes and armaments**

those attempting to collect the body parts festooning the “terrorist target.” A leading Republican senator, Lindsey Graham, estimated, approvingly, that Obama’s drones killed 4,700 people. “Sometimes you hit innocent people and I hate that,” he said, but we’ve taken out some very senior members of Al Qaeda.”

Like the fascism of the 1930s, big lies are delivered with the precision of a metronome: thanks to an omnipresent media whose description now fits that of the Nuremberg prosecutor: “Before each major aggression, with some few exceptions based on expediency, they initiated a press campaign calculated to weaken their victims and to prepare the German people psychologically . . . In the propaganda system . . . it was the daily press and the radio that were the most important weapons.”

Take the catastrophe in Libya. In 2011, Obama said Libyan president Muammar Gaddafi was planning “genocide” against his own people. “We knew . . . that if we waited one more day, Benghazi, a city the size of Charlotte, could suffer a massacre that would have reverberated across the region and stained the conscience of the world.”

This was the known lie of Islamist militias facing defeat by Libyan government forces. It became the media story; and Nato – led by Obama and Hillary Clinton – launched 9,700 “strike sorties” against Libya, of which more than a third were aimed at civilian targets. Uranium warheads were used; the cities of Misurata and Sirte were carpet-bombed. The Red Cross identified mass graves, and Unicef reported that “most [of the children killed] were under the age of ten.”

Under Obama, the US has extended secret “special forces” operations to 138 countries, or 70 percent of the world’s population. The first African-American president launched what amounted to a full-scale invasion of Africa. Reminiscent of the Scramble for Africa in the late 19th-century, the US African Command (Africom) has built a

network of supplicants among collaborative African regimes eager for American bribes and armaments. Africom’s “soldier to soldier” doctrine embeds US officers at every level of command from general to warrant officer. Only pith helmets are missing.

It is as if Africa’s proud history of liberation, from Patrice Lumumba to Nelson Mandela, is consigned to oblivion by a new master’s black colonial elite whose “historic mission,” warned Frantz Fanon half a century ago, is the promotion of “a capitalism rampant though camouflaged.”

It was Obama who, in 2011, announced what became known as the “pivot to Asia,” in which almost two-thirds of US naval forces would be transferred to the Asia-Pacific to “confront China,” in the words of his Defence Secretary. There was no threat from China; the entire enterprise was unnecessary. It was an extreme provocation to keep the Pentagon and its demented brass happy.

### **Coup led by fascists**

In 2014, the Obama’s administration oversaw and paid for a fascist-led coup in Ukraine against the democratically-elected government, threatening Russia in the western borderland through which Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, with a loss of 27-million lives. It was Obama who placed missiles in Eastern Europe aimed at Russia, and it was the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize who increased spending on nuclear warheads to a level higher than that of any administration since the cold war – having promised, in an emotional speech in Prague, to “help rid the world of nuclear weapons.”

Obama, the constitutional lawyer, prosecuted more whistleblowers than any other president in history, even though the US constitution protects them. He declared Chelsea Manning guilty before the end of a trial that was a travesty. He has pursued an entirely bogus case against Julian Assange. He promised to close the Guantanamo concentration camp and didn’t.

Following the public relations disaster of George W. Bush, Obama, the smooth operator from Chicago via Harvard, was enlisted to restore what he calls “leadership” throughout the world. The Nobel Prize committee’s decision was part of this: the kind of cloying reverse racism that beatified the man for no reason other than he was attractive to liberal sensibilities and, of course, American power, if not to the children he kills in impoverished, mostly Muslim countries.

This is the Call of Obama. It is not unlike a dog whistle: inaudible to most, irresistible to the besotted and boneheaded, especially “liberal brains pickled in the formaldehyde of identity politics,” as Luciana Bohne put it. “When Obama walks into a room,” gushed George Clooney, “you want to follow him somewhere, anywhere.”

### **Assured Trump’s victory**

William I. Robinson, professor at the University of California, and one of an uncontaminated group of American strategic thinkers who have retained their independence during the years of intellectual dog-whistling since 9/11, wrote this in Obama’s final weeks in power: “President Barack Obama . . . may have done more than anyone to assure [Donald] Trump’s victory. While Trump’s election has triggered a rapid expansion of fascist currents in US civil society, a fascist outcome for the political system is far from inevitable. . . . But that fight back requires clarity as to how we got to such a dangerous precipice. The seeds of 21st-century fascism were planted, fertilised and watered by the Obama administration and the politically bankrupt liberal elite.”

Robinson points out that “whether in its 20th or its emerging 21st-century variants, fascism is, above all, a response to deep structural crises of capitalism, such as that of the 1930s and the one that began with the financial meltdown in 2008 . . . There is a near-straight line here from Obama to Trump

. . . The liberal elite’s refusal to challenge the rapaciousness of transnational capital and its brand of identity politics served to eclipse the language of the working and popular classes . . . pushing white workers into an ‘identity’ of white nationalism and helping the neo-fascists to organise them.”

The seedbed is Obama’s Weimar Republic, a landscape of endemic poverty, militarised police and barbaric prisons: the consequence of a “market” extremism which, under his presidency, prompted the transfer of \$14-trillion in public money to criminal enterprises in Wall Street.

Perhaps his greatest “legacy” is the co-option and disorientation of any real opposition. Bernie Sanders’ specious “revolution” does not apply. Propaganda is his triumph.

The lies about Russia – in whose elections the US has openly intervened – have made the world’s most self-important journalists laughing stocks. In the country with constitutionally the freest press in the world, free journalism now exists only in its honourable exceptions.

The obsession with Trump is a cover for many of those calling themselves “left/liberal,” as if to claim political decency. They are not “left,” neither are they especially “liberal.” Much of America’s aggression towards the rest of humanity has come from so-called liberal Democratic administrations – such as Obama’s. America’s political spectrum extends from the mythical centre to the lunar right. The “left” are homeless renegades Martha Gellhorn described as “a rare and wholly admirable fraternity.” She excluded those who confuse politics with a fixation on their navels.

While they “heal” and “move forward”, will the Writers Resist campaigners and other anti-Trumpists reflect upon this? More to the point: when will a genuine movement of opposition arise? Angry, eloquent, all-for-one-and-one-for all. Until real politics return to people’s lives, the enemy is not Trump, it is ourselves.

**CT**

***“The seeds of 21st-century fascism were planted, fertilised and watered by the Obama administration and the politically bankrupt liberal elite”***

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**John Pilger’s latest film, *The Coming War On China*, has just been released. His web site is [www.johnpilger.com](http://www.johnpilger.com)**

# The willful ignorance of mainstream liberalism

They need to understand how policy is currently made, and how future social change might be undertaken, writes **Thomas S. Harrington**

**In the nine months between June, 2008 (when he wrapped up the Democratic nomination) and the beginning of April, 2009, Obama told us all we needed to know about what his presidency was going to be about**

In 1543, with the publication of *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*, Copernicus radically changed our understanding of the physical world. Before this, most humans had presumed that the earth rather than the sun was the prime axis of the universe. The key to effecting this important conceptual leap lay in the Polish thinker's ability to imagine the world from a wholly different perspective and to entertain the possibility that there may in fact be important, indeed determinative, realities existing somewhere beyond the plane of his most immediate perceptions.

Talking politics with most liberals I know is like dialoguing with Pre-Copernican cosmologists. Like the famous astronomer's Ptolemaic predecessors, they have an abiding and often quite smug confidence that the most important and consequential elements of our civic life are precisely those that most frequently populate their immediate field of vision – things like policy papers, elections and speeches by political leaders.

Very few of them seem to be willing to contemplate in any halfway systematic fashion the set of factors that might actually be driving our public policies in far more consequential ways. Sure, most of them are aware that special interests skew political decisions in toward certain proprietary ends.

But in general, they vastly under-estimate the true power of such lobbies, thinking of them as *centres of influence* upon otherwise independent actors rather than the *forces of wholesale domination* they so often are. And in their refusal to admit the depth of today's political system's bondage to entrenched centres of power, they fall prey to facile, and often quite child-like explanations of how and why policy is made.

## **All we needed to know about Obama**

Mainstream Liberal behaviour during the Obama years has been a constant testament to these unfortunate habits of mind.

In the nine months between June, 2008 (when he wrapped up the Democratic nomination) and the beginning of April, 2009, Obama told us all we needed to know about what his presidency was going to be about, that is, if we could tear ourselves away from the texts of his well-crafted and well-delivered speeches and look beyond the self-congratulatory buzz derived from finally having a black face at the helm of the nation.

With his early July vote in favour of the 2008 FISA bill, which provided retroactive immunity to those who had collaborated with the government in its programme of massive illegal spying on the American people, he signalled to the Deep State that, should he be elected, they had little to wor-

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**Barack Obama: Well-crafted speeches and deep fealty to the neo-cons.**

Photo: Pete Souza – Obama White House Flickr stream

ry about in terms of legal accountability for their actions.

When he named Rahm Emanuel his chief of staff on November 6, 2008, he signalled that his administration would continue to express deep fealty to the neo-con worldview as well as the siren song of Wall Street money. And should anyone in the power structure have missed this first signal of his slavish acquiescence to Zionist and

neo-con designs, he reaffirmed the message with his eloquent silence in the face of Israel's savage, shooting-fish-in-a-barrel attack on Gaza between December 27, 2008, and January 18, 2009.

In late March, 2009, he summoned the CEOs of the nation's most important banking houses to the White House. At the time, US taxpayers were the effective owners of all their firms. When, instead of demanding

***When he named Rahm Emanuel his chief of staff, Obama signalled that his administration would express fealty to the neo-con worldview***

## The Age Of Trump / 5

***Well before congressional negotiations on what became Obamacare began, he had already given the insurance companies his word that no variety of the single-payer or the “public option” would ever see the light of day***

concessions on behalf of those same taxpayers, he offered the assembled executives his help in explaining their morally untenable position to an angry world, he showed he had absolutely no desire to leverage his power and popularity in the pursuit of even marginal benefits for the needy.

In short, by the end of his second month in office he had laid bare to all with minds open and curious enough to gaze beyond the “Ptolemaic” narratives pumped out daily by National Public Radio and the New York Times, that he was firmly in the pocket of all of the major power centres of US life and, this being the case, would make no attempt at fundamental social change.

To admit this salient fact, however, would have robbed the liberal mind of two of its prime articles of faith: that they, as well-informed and well-educated people understand what is going on by consuming the “quality” media, and that our elections are, in fact, the unique “festivals of democracy” we are constantly told they are.

Instead, we were subjected to endless explanations about how mean Republicans and diehard racists were preventing him from pursuing his agenda. We had to sit through patently absurd talk in the wake of his Cairo Speech in June, 2009, about the dawn of a new day for US policy in the Middle East, and some months later, about the possibility of his proposing the single payer health plan that a clear plurality of Americans, and an overwhelming majority of his own Democratic voters, were on record as preferring.

Only a small number of so-called “cynics” (the derisive name liberals apply to those who challenge their self-serving and often fantasy-laden narratives) had the bad taste to point out that a) George Bush Jr. changed the relationship between the people and the government in his first term more than anyone since Roosevelt with party support in congress that was far lower than what Obama had in 2008;

b) that the Democratic Party’s overwhelmingly Zionist stable of major donors would never permit him to embark on a radically different Mid-East policy; and c) that his beholdenness to large insurance interests would never allow him to propose or pursue anything close to a single payer approach to health care.

Indeed, in this last case we know for a fact that well before congressional negotiations on what became Obamacare began, he had already given the insurance companies his word that no variety of the single-payer or the “public option” would ever see the light of day.

For liberals, it was, and continues to be, all about their good, but beleaguered, man getting the best deal he could forge in the face of an obstructionist Republican congress. Yes, and I don’t get the girls because my good looks and brains intimidate them.

But perhaps more consequential in the long run than this liberal failure to analyse the structural drivers of present-day policy, is a generalised inability to understand how, within the admittedly very narrow parameters of our system, the people can still sometimes force change to occur. This lack of understanding – one which, significantly I think, Conservatives generally do not suffer from – is rooted in a fundamental misreading of how political change has tended to occur across the centuries.

### **Cultural change dictates policy change**

In a 1989 speech to a joint session of the US Congress, the then still refreshingly iconoclastic Czech president and playwright Vaclav Havel admonished his audience to always remember that “Consciousness precedes Being, and not the other way around, as Marxists claim.” Translating this maxim to the more narrow realm of political action, we might render it as “cultural change dictates policy change and not the other way around, as Liberals claim.”

There are many reasons why so many people on the so-called left underestimate

the role of culture in the creation of new life alternatives. One of the more important of these is the rise to prominence within our educational institutions, and from there, in our most influential organs of public opinion, of the Political Science discipline over the past half-century or so.

Though there are numerous and honourable exceptions to this tendency, political scientists generally seek to explain political occurrences in terms of purposeful actions undertaken from within the purely political realm, changes that are, as they see it, generally catalysed by the conscientious efforts of individual members of that particular social caste. To put in slightly different fashion, the rise of Political Science, with its implied cult of the managerial class, in the post-World War II era is no accident. Empires require docile populations. And there is no better way of inducing docility than by constantly telling the country's young that our collective welfare depends largely on the actions of policy-making "experts" who have made it up the social and academic ladder on the basis of their own vision and brilliance.

This is not to say that such a "technocratic system," with its deeply embedded hierarchical mentality, always fails to deliver reasonable amount of social welfare to the general populace. It could be argued, for example, that this occurred in greater or less measure in the US from 1945-1975 and in much of Western Europe from the 50s to the early 2000s.

The problem comes when these liberal elites face abrupt historical changes and/or find themselves captured by extremely narrow and demanding special interests such as the neo-cons or the defence industries. Rather than surveying the new reality and thoughtfully changing course, they tend, as they are doing now, to double down on their own sense of intellectual and moral infallibility.

The only thing that can save these liberal elites from their impending demise is a gen-

eral population that forcefully rejects the structural paradigms that govern their comportment, and with it, the shape and tenor of our public discourses, replacing them with a whole new set of suppositions.

To put it more concretely: If you want a world of peace and security, of the very type so many liberal claim to want, you cannot acquiesce in any way, shape of form to – just to name a few things – the rampant use of killer drones, unprovoked attacks on sovereign countries, the periodic "mowing of the lawn" in Gaza, the monetisation of all public goods and the mass surveillance of the entire world. Nothing will change in the realm of *policy* until we mindfully engage in the creation of a set of *new cultures and vocabularies* that call these systems of human degradation by their names and forcefully proscribe them from any list of the "normal" elements of life.

If their reaction to the election of Trump is any indication, most liberals are still quite far from engaging in this Copernican turn in their understanding of civic culture, this urgent task of cultural regeneration. Most continue to seek answers in a corrupt establishment that, owing to its own compromises with pitiless and largely amoral centres of power, cannot possibly provide them with new alternatives. Most are still content, it seems, with endless war, limitless surveillance, and huge upward transfers of wealth as long as one of the "right people," that is, one of their own well-credentialed brethren, is in charge.

What it will take for this sizable mass of people to face up to the dead-end nature of the path they are on, I honestly do not know.

**GT**

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*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.*

***If you want a world of peace and security, you cannot acquiesce in any way, shape of form to – just to name a few things – the rampant use of killer drones, unprovoked attacks on sovereign countries, the periodic "mowing of the lawn" in Gaza, the monetisation of all public goods and the mass surveillance of the entire world***



The People's Assembly, Protest the Tory Party Conference, Manchester, October 4, 2015.

# The faces of protest . . .

**John Comino-James** captures two years of political demonstrations in Britain

John Comino-James has been photographing demonstrations in the UK over the past two years, from the 2015 general election through to the 2016 EU referendum.

In his new book, **Shout It Loud, Shout It Clear**, Comino-James offers extensive photographic evidence of the astonishing breadth of causes that are embraced by British protestors. These include climate change, the replacement of Trident nuclear missiles, the refugee crisis, the government's austerity policies, detention of prison-

ers at Guantanamo Bay, Israeli policy towards Palestinians, Chinese repressions in Tibet, Saving the Bee, and Fracking. The list is seemingly endless and, whether the protest involves small groups of campaigners or marches numbering tens of thousands, the anger and indignation of the protesters brings passion and commitment to the streets. Yet, many of these protests pass unacknowledged in the mainstream media.

We may pride ourselves that it is the mark of a civilised community that it can accommodate **To Page 34**

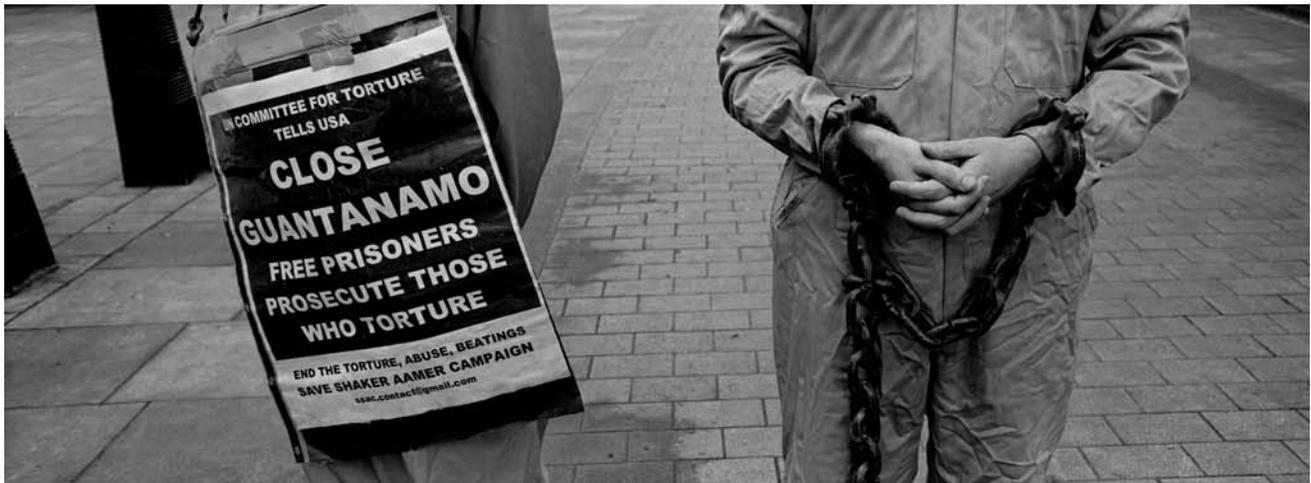


People's Assembly Anti-Austerity March, City of London, June 20, 2015.

## In The Picture



Protest against fracking in the Forest of Dean, Shire Hall, Gloucester, September 2015.



London Guantanamo Campaign vigil at the US Embassy, Grosvenor Square, London, December 3, 2015.



Palestine Solidarity Campaign Protest on the occasion of Binyamin Netanyahu's UK visit, Whitehall, London, September 10, 2015.



The People's Assembly: Protest the Tory Party Conference, Manchester, October 2015.



Hiroshima Day – 70th Anniversary Reigate and Redhill Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, near Redhill, Surrey, August 6, 2015.



Compassion in World Farming, #AnimalsAreNotFreight, Parliament Square, London, August 29, 2016.

## In The Picture



Above: March for Europe, London, July 2, 2016. Below (book cover): People's Assembly Anti-Austerity March, London, June 20, 2015.



### SHOUT IT LOUD, SHOUT IT CLEAR

John Comino-James

Published by Dewi Lewis

[www.dewilewis.com](http://www.dewilewis.com)

£25 ([www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk))

From Page 30 protests and demonstrations, but, as Comino-James shows, we must never forget that there are societies in which any form of protest carries the certainty of draconian penalties. We must also remember that while the protests on our streets may be permitted – even facilitated – they are also closely monitored by the authorities: Big Brother watches, even in what is claimed to be the world's most liberal democracy. There is no room to be complacent.

Accompanying the photographs are reflective texts that explore the nature of these protests. Quoting from the banners and placards carried by protesters, Comino-James weaves together a powerful and deeply moving commentary on this important, though often overlooked, backdrop to democracy in the UK. **CT**

*John Comino-James lives near Thame in Oxfordshire. He has published seven previous books of photographs and has exhibited his work in the UK and in Cuba.*



Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Scrap Trident march, Marble Arch, London, February 27, 2016.

# Why ridiculous official propaganda still works

The main aim is not to deceive the public, but to generate a narrative that can be mindlessly repeated by the ruling class, writes **CJ Hopkins**

***The primary aim of official propaganda is to generate an “official narrative” that can be mindlessly repeated by the ruling classes and those who support and identify with them***

For students of official propaganda, manipulation of public opinion, psychological conditioning, and emotional coercion, it doesn't get much better than this. As Trump and his army of Goldman Sachs guys, corporate CEOs, and Christian zealots slouch away from the inauguration, we are being treated to a master class in coordinated media manipulation that is making Goebbels look like an amateur. This may not be immediately apparent, given the seemingly risible nature of most of the garbage we are being barraged with, but once one understands the actual purpose of such official propaganda, everything starts to make more sense.

Chief among the common misconceptions about the way official propaganda works is the notion that its goal is to deceive the public into believing things that are not “the truth” (that Trump is a Russian agent, for example, or that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction, or that the terrorists hate us for our freedom, et cetera). However, while official propagandists are definitely pleased if anyone actually believes whatever lies they are selling, deception is not their primary aim.

The primary aim of official propaganda is to generate an “official narrative” that can be mindlessly repeated by the ruling classes and those who support and identify with them. This official narrative does not have

to make sense, or to stand up to any sort of serious scrutiny. Its factualness is not the point. The point is to draw a Maginot line, a defensive ideological boundary, between “the truth” as defined by the ruling classes and any other “truth” that contradicts their narrative.

Imagine this Maginot line as a circular wall surrounded by inhospitable territory. Inside the wall is “normal” society, gainful employment, career advancement, and all the other considerable benefits of cooperating with the ruling classes. Outside the wall is poverty, anxiety, social and professional stigmatisation, and various other forms of suffering. Which side of the wall do you want to be on? Every day, in countless ways, each of us are asked and have to answer this question. Conform, and there's a place for you inside. Refuse, and . . . well, good luck out there.

## **Subtle consequences**

In openly despotic societies, the stakes involved in making this choice (to conform or dissent) are often life and death. In our relatively liberal Western societies (for those of us who are not militant guerillas), the consequences of not conforming to the official narrative are usually subtler. Despite that, the pressure is still intense. Conforming to the consensus “reality” generated by these official narratives is

price of admission to the inner sanctum, where the jobs, money, professional prestige, and the other rewards of Capitalism are. Conforming does not require belief. It requires allegiance and rote obedience. What one actually believes is completely irrelevant, as long as one parrots the official narrative.

In short, official propaganda is not designed to deceive the public (no more than the speeches in an actor's script are intended to deceive the actor who speaks them). It is designed to be absorbed and repeated, no matter how implausible or preposterous it might be. Actually, it is often most effective when those who are forced to robotically repeat it know that it is utter nonsense, as the humiliation of having to do so cements their allegiance to the ruling classes (this phenomenon being a standard feature of the classic Stockholm Syndrome model, and authoritarian conditioning generally).

The current "Russian hacking" hysteria is a perfect example of how this works. No one aside from total morons actually believes this official narrative (the substance of which is beyond ridiculous), not even the stooges selling it to us. This, however, is not a problem, because it isn't intended to be believed . . . it is intended to be accepted and repeated, more or less like religious dogma. (It doesn't matter what actually happened, i.e., whether the "hack" was a hack or a leak, or who the hackers or leakers were, or who they may have been working for, or what whoever's motives may have been. What matters is that the ruling classes have issued a new official narrative and are demanding that every "normal" American stand up and swear allegiance to it.)

The ruling classes are not exactly making it easy for their followers this time. Their new official narrative (let's go ahead and call it "The Putinist Putsch to Destroy Democracy") is so completely fatuous that it's beyond embarrassing. The plot is more or less what you'd expect from a mediocre young adult novel or a Game of Thrones-

type fantasy series. And if that wasn't already humiliating enough for the liberals being asked to pretend to believe it, the PR folks in charge couldn't even be bothered to assemble a new collection of liars to market their childish fairy tale for them. Not only are they insisting that liberals take the word of the "Intelligence Community" and the mainstream media that sold the world the "Saddam Has Secret WMDs" hoax, they actually dispatched James R. Clapper to sit there, in more or less the same spot he sat in the last time he lied to Congress, and do his dog and pony show again.

### **Neither Russians nor hackers**

Meanwhile, the ruling classes' papers of record, which cosmopolitan liberals rely on to provide a simulation of "serious journalism," highbrow "arts and culture," and so on, have descended to the level of the National Enquirer. Among the recent highlights was The Washington Post's "Russians Hacked the Vermont Power Grid" story, which it turned out involved neither Russians nor hackers, nor the Vermont power grid's actual computers, and was basically just another made-up story, like the one about Putin's Fake News Army. The New York Times, which has also been dutifully rolling out the new official narrative, has taken the leash off Charles M. Blow (aka "The Withering Gaze"), who is accusing Trump of being Russia's appointment" and proclaiming his election "an act of war." And, as I was writing this piece, they hit us with the "Golden Showers" story, in which Trump paid a bunch of Russian hookers to pee on the bed where Obama slept. Any day now we are going to be told that Elvis is secretly working with Putin to deploy a Zhirinovskian gravitational weapon in a UFO disguised as Jesus that Assange and Snowden will personally pilot across the Atlantic to sink America. It's like some kind of loyalty test in which the ruling classes are trying to determine just how far they can go with this crap before liberals refuse to salute any more of it.

***Any day now we are going to be told that Elvis is secretly working with Putin to deploy a Zhirinovskian gravitational weapon in a UFO disguised as Jesus that Assange and Snowden will personally pilot across the Atlantic to sink America***

## Thought Control

**The neoliberal ruling classes have no intention of giving up control of the global capitalist pseudo-empire they've been working to establish these last 60 years**

The point of all this propaganda is to delegitimise Donald Trump, and to prophylactically reassert the neoliberal ruling classes' monopoly on power, "reality," and "truth." In case this wasn't already abundantly clear, the neoliberal ruling classes have no intention of giving up control of the global capitalist pseudo-empire they've been working to establish these last 60 years. They're going to delegitimise and stigmatise Trump (and any other symbol of nationalist backlash or resistance to transnational Capitalism), bide their time for the next four years, and then install another of their loyal servants . . . after which life will go back to "normal," and liberals will do their best

to forget this unfortunate period where they pretended to believe this insipid neo-McCarthyite nonsense.

If I wasn't worried that Trump is going to launch an all-out War on Islam, or that one of "our boys" in the tanks Obama has theatrically ordered to the Russian border was going to go bonkers and try to "git some" for Clinton, I'd be looking forward to seeing just how batshit crazy it's going to get. **CT**

*C. J. Hopkins is an award-winning American playwright and satirist based in Berlin. His plays are published by Bloomsbury Publishing (UK) and Broadway Play Publishing (US). His website is [www.cjhopkins.com](http://www.cjhopkins.com) – This article first appeared at [www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org)*

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# Tories plan UK tax haven after Brexit

Philip Hammond revealed that the UK could become a tax haven if it is left without access to the European single market, writes **Lesley Riddoch**

Never mind Theresa May, her natty tartan trouser suit, or her much analysed speech to financial bigwigs at Davos on January 19. Philip Hammond, her Chancellor of the Exchequer let the cat out of the bag a day earlier, when he laid bare the political project behind Brexit.

Describing the new Golden Era that lies ahead for those Brits who are bold, smart and rich enough to grasp the opportunity, the Chancellor predicted that: “A low tax Britain with a US trade deal could be a magnet for businesses wanting to escape regulation and tax.”

Asked by a German reporter if the UK aims to become a “tax haven,” he said: “I personally hope we will be able to remain in the mainstream of European economic and social thinking. But if we are forced to be something different, then we will have to become something different.

“If we have no access to the European market, if we are closed off, if Britain were to leave the European Union without an agreement on market access, then we could suffer from economic damage at least in the short-term. In this case, we could be forced to change our economic model and we will have to change our model to regain competitiveness.”

In plain speech folks, he means a model of tax cuts and low wages. A size zero economic model. That wee “contribution to

the debate” is extraordinary on a number of levels.

Firstly, the language – “if we are forced” to leave the mainstream of European economic and social thinking.

*Forced?* Ya what?

The Westminster Government chose to have a referendum on EU membership, and then chose to pursue the hardest kind of Brexit, despite a fairly close result. It has chosen to leave the single market and to lend a rubber ear to any devolved government that might support a different course – even though the Supreme Court has ordered them to consult. Every step of the way has been May’s chosen step. And the British Government suggests it is the victim of some spiteful European gang?

Purlease.

The Prime Minister doubled down on this crazy notion of a European “threat” in her Brexit speech. “We want to remain in the mainstream of a recognisable European-style taxation system,” her official spokeswoman told journalists. “But if we are forced to do something different, if we can’t get the right deal, then we stand ready to do so.”

*Forced?* Unbelievable.

And keeping the bully-turned-victim theme going for a third day, Boris Johnson piped up, warning the French president against trying to “administer punishment

***The British government has chosen to leave the single market and to lend a rubber ear to any devolved government that might support a different course – even though the Supreme Court has ordered them to consult***

## New Tricks



Philip Hammond, right, and Theresa May head to the British government's first Regional Council Meeting.

Photo: Downing Street Flickr stream

***What lies ahead is a lifetime of Tory Governments administering tax cuts for the rich, deregulating every area of commerce and industry so the nightmare of precarious, low wage work extends to almost everyone***

beatings” in the manner of “some World War II movie” to any country that tries to leave the EU.

Yup.

“Our” foreign secretary evoked memories of the darkest period of recent French history because an adviser to Francois Hollande said Britain should not expect a better trading relationship outside Europe than it currently enjoys inside.

It was a statement of the bleedin’ obvious, but the British riposte was offensive, aggressive and way over the top. But we must learn to live with it. Foreign, macro economic and trade policies are all reserved to Westminster, so this petulant, British Bulldog-like excuse of a negotiating stance is being struck in OUR name and there is no way out – except independence.

But if the language of hard Brexit is of-

fensive, the reality being described by these Tory unions is far, far worse.

What lies ahead is a lifetime of Tory governments administering tax cuts for the rich, deregulating every area of commerce and industry so the nightmare of precarious, low wage work extends to almost everyone, and shrinking every aspect of the welfare state until the NHS will appear positively well-funded.

Is that what you thought the Brexit vote was all about? Did any Leave campaigner ever explain that Britain would “be forced” to become a “bargain basement” economy – a world centre for job insecurity, low pay, speculators and spivs? Did you know a vote to leave Europe was actually a vote to leave this century and return to a Dickensian

society characterised by greed, poverty and chronic inequality?

Did anyone who voted Leave realise they were flashing the green light for Amazon, Facebook, Google, Apple and all the other multi-nationals without taxable British profits during 2014 to come back and do it all over again? Did Leavers know Brexit would mean an end to deals with nations which believe in workers rights and welfare states and the start of life as the traumatised 52nd state of Donald Trump’s half-wrecked America?

It’s all a very far cry from the Great Lie of Brexit – the promise that money saved from EU contributions would give the NHS an extra £350-million a week.

But there it is.

The Tory government at Westminster is about to embark on a political project so

right-wing and so far-reaching even Mrs Thatcher couldn't have conceived it.

Without explaining that Brexit would pull Britain back into the failed austerity of George Osborne's programme, Theresa, Philip and Boris think they've found a way to wrap up all the flapping loose ends of Brexit and change British society forever. It's called Dancing with the Devil.

There's one wee problem. Hell no. There are masses.

Firstly, cosyng up to a barking US President didn't work for Tony Blair with George Dubya, and it won't work for Theresa May and Donald Trump. Of course, we all know The Donald's views on Mexicans, locker room chat, women, Muslims, wind turbines and Obama ("the founder of ISIS"). We know, we quake and we comfort ourselves that he's safely ensconsed on the other side of the Atlantic, waging phoney wars against so many minorities that he hasn't time to visit his golfing interests in Scotland.

Wrong.

Trump may be a nightmare for the USA, but a hard Brexit makes him our nightmare, too.

Leaving the single market means not having a trade deal with members of the EU or (in all probability) the European Economic Area (except, of course, for all those cherry-picked opt-outs including the City of London and the British car industry. Hard Brexit therefore means a near total reliance on an American trade deal. And relying on America means relying on Trump.

With every week that goes by, that becomes a scarier and scarier prospect.

Nine members of Trump's cabinet are climate change deniers – so May won't find investment for Scotland's excellent renewables industry in an American trade deal. Mind you, that's fine, because her government doesn't believe in wind, wave or community hydro energy either.

Trump describes Syrian refugees in Europe as "illegals," thinks NATO is obsolete and suggests Germany's Angela Merkel –

not Vladimir Putin – is the biggest threat to Europe. So don't expect a conscience, a tolerance of human rights or even a consistent foreign policy once May has hitched Britain on to Trump's tawdry and garish star-spangled jalopy.

Don't even expect the moneymen to be happy. Sterling rallied from its lowest level since the 1980's when Theresa May finally delivered some detail about the style and pace of Brexit. But the surge proved short-lived. By the close of trading the following day, sterling was one per cent lower against the dollar and the euro. Nice.

And there's another wee snag.

Scots have rejected this Tory vision of a tax-haven society (actually not a society at all, just a gigantic market) in every possible way at every different ballot box for decades.

We haven't signed up to chum Trump, to detach Britain from European social and economic values, to dismantle the welfare state and dispense with the workers' rights Thatcher didn't manage to trample decades back. Scots didn't vote to leave the European Union – sure. But we voted to stay in far more ways than just in trade.

We voted to live in Europe not America. We voted for broadly social democratic politics. We voted for workers' rights. We voted for PR, consensus, an end to winner takes all in the economy and at the ballot box. We voted for a respect for minorities and refugees, and a combined, concerted approach to tackling wars and displacement.

The European Union isn't perfect. But its flaws are our kinda flaws. The issues it grapples with are largely the issues we also need to tackle. Indeed, compared to Trump's America, the EU looks like Nirvana.

The minute May starts making formal overtures to Trump is the minute that Britain's post-war consensus dies. And the minute that goes is the minute Scots must decide whether we are in that crazy charabanc or are instead finally setting off in a direction of our own choosing. **CT**

**Hard Brexit therefore means a near total reliance on an American trade deal. And relying on America means relying on Trump. With every week that goes by, that becomes a scarier and scarier prospect**

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**Lesley Riddoch** is an awarding winning broadcaster and journalist who writes regularly for the Scotsman and Guardian. She is the author of Blossom: What Scotland needs To Flourish, and her website is [www.lesleyriddoch.com](http://www.lesleyriddoch.com)

# Guns for hire on the Welsh border

Cathedral, cows and the SAS: **Matt Kennard** visits the sleepy city of Hereford, the unlikely centre of England's thriving global security industry

***The world's private military-security industry is always controversial, with critics arguing that it operates in a lawless regulatory climate and undermines the very fundamentals of democracy***

There is a mysterious feel to Hereford, a picture-book English cathedral city on the Welsh border. When I stop people in the street to ask if they know the city houses a massive private security industry that operates in conflicts all over the world, some say they don't even know what private security is. But many other residents have military or intelligence connections themselves. One man tells me: "I am local but I don't want to say what I do." He continues: "A lot of stuff goes on in Hereford; it's a right little hub. There's a lot of very deep stuff here, but it's kept very hush-hush."

The world's private military-security industry is always controversial, with critics arguing that it operates in a lawless regulatory climate and undermines the very fundamentals of democracy: the idea that only an accountable state has the right to the legitimate use of force.

Many Hereford locals remain unaware that this burgeoning industry is being developed on their doorstep, but, with new groups emerging to represent the security and defence industries in the city, that could be about to change. A recent report from War on Want called the UK the globe's "mercenary kingpin," and found that 14 private military and security companies are based in Hereford. That number is growing, and has made this city of 60,000 a major hub

for an industry which has boomed during the "war on terror."

The business model involves providing "soldiers for hire" to companies and governments around the world, to protect assets and important people from criminals and terrorists (and sometimes dissidents). It is a multi-billion-dollar industry operating in virtually every country in the world.

## **No one will speak**

As the rain comes down and evening descends, it starts to feel as though we're in a Kafka novel, and there's a conspiracy going on: everyone is part of this strange ex-military, ex-intelligence milieu, but no one can speak about it. One man, who won't give his name, says he "used to work for the Ministry of Defence in the security business . . . Hereford has become a private military centre because of the SAS," he explains. "There's other units too, and a lot of them tend to settle here after they've finished their time, so they go into that sort of field."

And a woman I speak to doesn't know what a private military company is, but agrees: "There's a lot of people involved in the SAS or military here, so yes, people will know what is happening. On the private military industry, lots of people here are probably profiting from it – so they wouldn't be complaining about it, and it

wouldn't be in the newspaper. "You don't see soldiers around in uniform here," she adds, "but they are all over the place in their civilian clothing. And if there's a pub fight, it's always shut down pretty quickly by the SAS guys..."

The main reason for Hereford's position at the centre of global conflict is its location right next to the village of Credenhill, where Britain's SAS – Special Air Service – is based. There is, of course, no official acknowledgment of this fact, but when you drive into Credenhill and pass the RAF base, you see the layers of armed police and military manning the entrance. Signs invoking the Official Secrets Act and banning photos are tacked to the walls of buildings here. In 2010, the undercover nature of the base became controversial when Google Maps refused to take off images of it on the maps of the area.

The War on Want report noted that "at least 46 companies [throughout the UK] employ former members of the UK Special Forces." Since George W. Bush launched the war on terror in 2001, Hereford has become the UK's – maybe even Europe's – principal location for private security and military companies, or PMSCs. Now, there is a move to formalise and consolidate this community of security services in the city, under the banner of the Herefordshire Security & Defence Group (HSDG).

"If someone had said to me that British private security companies have ex-intelligence or special forces in their membership, I wouldn't have been surprised by that," says Sam Raphael, a senior lecturer in International Relations at Westminster University and author of the War on Want report. "But what is surprising is the extent to which that's the case; the sheer number of operations and outfits [in the UK] that are employing ex-special forces, who have operated in a shadowy world working for the state, and now continue to operate in a shadowy world."

Hereford has a long military history and

always adapted to the changing nature of war. The SAS base at Credenhill was previously RAF Hereford. In World War I, the Herefordshire Regiment was a territorial force – but it was one of the first to volunteer for overseas service, and went on to serve in Egypt, Palestine and France. The SAS was formed in North Africa in 1941 by David Stirling, who had grown weary of the failures of large operations and wanted to switch to faster-moving, four-man patrols. Since 1960, 22 SAS, the regular army unit, has been based in Hereford, the regiment moved to the RAF base at Credenhill in 2000, where it is thought to have four operational squadrons, each comprising around 60 men.

Most of the private security companies in Hereford were started by ex-special forces soldiers, their offices located all around, from quaint old houses to industrial estates on the edge of the city.

### **Greenery and selling guns**

The walk from the centre of the city to the Thorn Business Park offices of Ambrey Risk – a private security company focused on maritime protection against modern-day pirates – is a country affair. About five minutes of walking brings you to a bridge across the River Wye, with greenery as far as the eye can see. Inside Ambrey's nondescript office, 40 people man the phones, working on securing the assets of some of the world's biggest companies in some of the most dangerous places in the world, from Somalia to Nigeria. When they look outside their window, however, all they can see are freight lorries standing on a rainy, windswept industrial estate on the outskirts of Hereford. It's a bizarre juxtaposition of worlds.

John Thompson was in the Parachute Regiment from 2003 to 2009, working mainly within the special forces support group. He then worked for a big international security company in Africa, before setting up Ambrey Risk in 2010. Thompson set up shop in Hereford because it's his home town,

***Inside the nondescript office, 40 people man the phones, working on securing the assets of some of the world's biggest companies in some of the most dangerous places in the world, from Somalia to Nigeria***

## Conflict City

**A number of these private-sector actors are using Hereford as a stepping stone into a world of hyper-violence and big money – to the discomfort of some locals**

and also because “there is a small pool of security companies here that are born out of people being in the regiment, and there is a small mini-hub of security and defence companies in Hereford. It’s a good place to be if you want to be in this line of work; one of the few areas in the country where there is a small cluster of companies that do what we do.”

### **Guns for hire**

Hereford is a particularly attractive location – office space is cheap and readily available, and the city sits in the middle of huge expanses of countryside, where residential training courses can be easily organised. One of these training centres lies on the outskirts of Hereford in the sleepy village of Madley – population 1,200. It’s the closest thing to a bucolic idyll that one can imagine, with its Red Lion pub, parish church and post office the only signs of life apart from the grazing cows in the surrounding fields. But nearby stands an unremarkable, converted barn which, every six weeks, is filled with prospective recruits for the global private security industry from places as diverse as Eastern Europe, the US and Latin America. Here’s where some of the next generation of “guns for hire” start their journey – from those guarding VIPs in war zones to corporate assets in the developing world. Madley and Baghdad couldn’t seem further away, but they are intimately linked by conflict.

John Geddes is the founder and owner of Ronin Concepts, a private security company set up in 2004. Geddes spent his long military career in the parachute regiment and SAS, before quitting and going to Iraq as a private soldier with British company Olive Group. He became disillusioned with the quality of those applying for jobs, and saw an opportunity to move into training.

“In 2004 I came back to the UK, and threw all my money into creating Ronin Concepts,” he tells me. Inside the barn, dummies lie on the floor with plastic heads

strewn around. The main wall has a big screen on which Geddes puts his training videos, showing live-fire training in Poland and the US (he has training properties in both countries as well).

Geddes explains the unlikely success of the UK in dominating this multibillion-dollar industry. “The answer goes back a couple of hundred years to the rise of the East India Company, which was a private military army. They occupied huge tracts of the globe, and mostly were ex-services patched throughout the empire.”

Now Hereford finds itself at the centre of this industry, whose continued growth carries deep significance for the future of global conflict. “Private security and military companies mean that being able to constrain the use of force and making sure it complies with morality and the law becomes increasingly hard,” says Sam Raphael, the academic who has highlighted the UK’s – and Hereford’s – leading role. “Holding states to account, and ensuring regular armies use force in proportionate and legal ways, is hard enough – never mind the number of different actors we see proliferating now.”

A number of these private-sector actors are using Hereford as a stepping stone into a world of hyper-violence and big money – to the discomfort of some locals, at least. As one exclaimed when told about the industry in the city’s midst: “How is that legal? That’s not legal, surely!”

While the legality of these industries is not at issue, there is no specific regulatory framework – and a visit to this sleepy cathedral city raises many questions in these turbulent times.

**CT**

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***Matt Kennard** is an investigative journalist at the Centre for Investigative Journalism in London. He worked for the Financial Times and is the author of Irregular Army and The Racket. This is an edited version of an article that first appeared at the Guardian and is published by permission of the author.*

# Strange days indeed: My year as David Bowie

The fans knew University professor **Will Brooker** wasn't a superstar, but they all wanted him to pretend that he was

I woke up in Los Angeles. That was fine, except I was meant to be 8,000 miles away. I was supposed to be in Melbourne to give the opening talk at the international David Bowie conference, in about 24 hours. The flight time from LA to Melbourne is 14 hours. I didn't have a flight booked. I didn't have any luggage.

It was July 2015, and I was in an airport hotel with hair the colour and cut of David Bowie in *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, circa 1976. I had nothing else except the clothes I was wearing – a suit from 1973 – and a small black carry-on bag.

It had all gone wrong the day before, on a flight from San Diego to LA. The flight was meant to be a short hop, taking an hour. But it took three hours, and so my connection left without me, and my luggage was lost.

Technically, it had gone wrong. But in a way, it was all going perfectly. I embraced the sense of lostness, of being dislocated out of time and space: the wandering around LAX airport, the glossy anonymity of the airport hotel. I rode the shuttle buses in loops around the 1961, space-age architecture of the Theme Building, the airport's Futureland-style flying saucer. Staring out of another window at planes taking off and landing, I noticed that a wall was stencilled with the message "GROUND CONTROL." It was literally a sign. I took it as a good sign. I was doing it right.



**Selfie Time:** Will Brooker checks out his flaming red Bowie wig before a performance.

*I was in an airport hotel with hair the colour and cut of David Bowie in *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, circa 1976. I had nothing else except the clothes I was wearing – a suit from 1973 – and a small black carry-on bag*

I was one month into an immersive research project, which would ultimately lead to a book. It had started as an attempt to enter into the experiences of David Bowie – to surround myself with the culture he had engaged with, to gain some understanding of his thought processes, and how they shaped his art.

I was listening to nothing but music from the early to mid-1970s, reading the novels of Evelyn Waugh in paperback, and

## Jean Genie

***The plane landed in Melbourne. An academic drove me into town, to my hotel. “Get changed,” he said, “and I’ll be waiting outside.” He wanted to drive me straight to the university, to give my first lecture***



**Waiting for the spotlight: Brooker nurses a drink before a performance.**

wearing only vintage clothes. The 24 hours in LA gave me an opportunity to consume nothing but coffee. I walked down long, empty corridors, seeing where my sleepless, caffeinated thoughts fell. I sat down and recorded them as fragmented snatches, on scraps of paper tucked into the back of Vile Bodies.

Bowie, after all, had written Jean Genie on a Greyhound bus, the rhythm of its wheels between Cleveland, Memphis and Manhattan driving the blues riff. Drive-In Saturday was inspired by a glimpse of silver domes from a train at 2am, somewhere between Seattle and Phoenix.

Bowie’s songs of the period span America’s states and states of mind, from the “New York’s a go-go” of Jean Genie through Panic in Detroit to the Hollywood highs of Watch that Man. His LPs of the time are travel albums, snapshots of a man stranded and allowing himself to go a little insane: a man abandoning his previous, English self in the new world, a man watching through windows. His own LA period was a spiral into paranoia and hallucination, fuelled by stimulants and insomnia. I let myself ex-

plore how it felt to be lost in Los Angeles, if only for a short while.

Next morning, I woke up on a plane. I say “morning” but I’d long since lost track of time and its zones. The plane landed in Melbourne. An academic drove me into town, to my hotel. “Get changed,” he said, “and I’ll be waiting outside.” He wanted to drive me straight to the university, to give my first lecture.

I washed my face, unpacked a cream linen suit. I drank a few cups of coffee. Half an hour later – 90 minutes after landing – I stood in front of 100 strangers and strung sentences together. They clapped at the end.

He drove me back to the hotel. “I’ll pick you up at five,” he said. “You’ll want to sleep.”

I thought I wanted to sleep, but it turned out that I couldn’t. My body clock was too screwed up. So I sat on the bed. It wasn’t a glamorous hotel. It wasn’t glamorous at all. It had white walls, a kettle, metal clothes hangers on a rail. After a few hours, I stood up and began to get ready. I unpacked my red wig, my blue suit, my turquoise eye-

shadow, my orange blusher. The bathroom was little more than a closet.

When I was finished, I went out to the hotel reception to wait for my new friend, the academic. I was now in full regalia, a tribute to the Life On Mars video of 1971. The guy behind the counter looked at me. "I'm going to a David Bowie thing," I explained.

"Fair play, mate," he nodded.

The academic drove me to the opening of the David Bowie Is exhibition, in downtown Melbourne. It was evening now. I realised it also was winter now; it had been summer the day before. I switched from coffee to champagne. People immediately came up to me asking for photographs. I obliged, of course.

A strange thing happens at moments like this. They know you're not David Bowie, but they want to pretend you are, and they want you to pretend you are. They want you to be an avatar. So you find yourself doing the poses, the pouts. You find yourself preening and standing in an angular fashion, and performing in an airy manner, with an exaggerated version of your own London accent and a pronounced laugh, like he did. The same way he adopted the style and delivery of Anthony Newley: strutting like a peacock, declaiming like a grown-up urchin from Oliver! or an early-70s incarnation of Oscar Wilde.

They know you're not Bowie, but you're the nearest substitute at the time. And you act it, until you almost believe it. After a few more glasses of champagne, it becomes easier for everyone to believe it.

Later, I woke up and didn't know where I was. I searched for my phone and found it somewhere in the white cell of my hotel

room. It was still July, and I was still in Melbourne. In an hour, I was due to give two radio interviews. I drank a few cups of coffee. My blue eyeshadow was a strong pigment: it had lasted overnight. I didn't need to reapply it. I successfully strung together sentences, somehow.

I gave another lecture, this time in mid-70s Bowie drag. It was a big lecture to a big audience, in a big theatre. Afterwards, lots of people knew who I was, though I didn't know them.

When I tried to get away from the crowd, to have a coffee on my own, people would come and sit with me, starting conversations – or just carrying on conversations, as if they'd been talking to me beforehand in their heads. I don't know if they expected me to know who they were. These strange things happen; these strange dynamics of almost-fame, borrowed celebrity. I didn't get any peace or privacy. Maybe I asked for that. I didn't get much sleep. After a while, I stopped trying.

After five days, I caught another flight. It took me via Dubai where, once again, nobody knew me at all – it was a relief.

I woke up. It was still July. It was summer again. I was in London. It was 2015. It was 1975, in my ongoing year of David Bowie. Planning ahead, I booked my tickets for Berlin. **CT**

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*Will Brooker is professor of film and cultural studies at Kingston University in London. His year of immersive research into David Bowie resulted in the book *Forever Stardust*, published by I B Tauris, and the documentary *Being Bowie*. He. This article was first published at [www.theconversation.co.uk](http://www.theconversation.co.uk)*

**People know you're not David Bowie, but they want to pretend you are, and they want you to pretend you are. They want you to be an avatar. So you find yourself doing the poses, the pouts**

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