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REBECCA GORDON

Psychologists say ‘No’ to torture

When we're smart, committed, and organised, the good guys can win

SOMETIMES the good guys do win. That's what happened on August 8th in San Francisco when the Council of Representatives of the American Psychological Association (APA) decided to extend a policy keeping its members out of the US detention center at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

The APA's decision is important – and not just symbolically. Today we have a president who has promised to bring back torture and “load up” Guantánamo “with some bad dudes”. When healing professionals refuse to work there, they are standing up for human rights and against torture.

It wasn't always so. In the early days of Guantánamo, military psychologists contributed to detainee interrogations there. It was for Guantánamo that US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld approved multiple torture methods, including excruciating stress positions, prolonged isolation, sensory deprivation, and enforced nudity. Military psychologists advised on which techniques would take advantage of the weaknesses of individual detainees. And it was two psychologists, one an APA member, who designed the CIA's whole “enhanced interrogation program”.

Here's a disclaimer of sorts: ever since I witnessed the effects of US torture policy firsthand in Central America in the 1980s, I've had a deep personal interest in American torture practices. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, I wrote two books focused on the subject, the latest being *American Nuremberg: The US Officials Who*

Should Stand Trial for Post-9/11 War Crimes.

For a year-and-a-half, I also served on a special ethics commission established by the APA after ugly revelations came out about how that organisation's officials had, in the Bush years, manoeuvred to allow its members to collude with the US government in settings where torture was used. In fact, an independent review it commissioned in 2015 concluded that “some of the association's top officials, including its ethics director, sought to curry favour with Pentagon officials by seeking to keep the association's ethics policies in line with the Defense Department's interrogation policies”. Indeed, those leaders colluded “with important DoD officials to have [the] APA issue loose, high-level ethical guidelines that did not constrain [the] DoD in any greater fashion than existing DoD interrogation guidelines”.

In the wake of that independent review, the APA's Council of Representatives voted that same year to keep psychologists out of national security interrogation settings. It's modestly encouraging that this August two-thirds of its governing body voted against a resolution that would have returned psychologists to sites like Gitmo.

What makes the new vote less than completely satisfying, however, is this: The 2015 vote establishing that policy was 157-to-1. This year, a third of the council was ready to send psychologists back to Guantánamo. Like much of the rest of Donald Trump's United States, the APA seems to be in the process of backsliding on torture.

The details of the parliamentary wrangling at



the August meeting are undoubtedly of little interest to outsiders. The actual motion under consideration was important, however, because it would have rescinded part of the organisation’s historic 2015 decision, prohibiting its members from providing psychological treatment, as it put it, “at the Guantánamo Bay detention facility, ‘black sites’, vessels in international waters, or sites where detainees are interrogated under foreign jurisdiction unless they are working directly for the persons being detained or for an independent third party working to protect human rights or providing treatment to military

personnel”.

Proponents of the new motion argued that keeping psychologists out of places like Guantánamo deprives detainees of much needed psychological treatment. If the association really cared about detainees, they claimed, it would not deny them the treatment they need.

Opponents argued that allowing psychologists to work at Guantánamo gives ethical cover to an illegal detention site where detainees are still being tortured with painful forced feedings, solitary confinement, and the hopelessness induced by indefinite detention without charges. It’s worth not-

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ing that the military still refuses to allow the UN's special rapporteur on torture to speak privately with detainees at Gitmo. In addition, at such a detention and interrogation site, any psychologist who was a member of, or employed by, the US military would face an inevitable conflict of interest between the desires of his or her employers and the needs of detainee clients.

The 2015 resolution also prevented APA members from participating in national security interrogations, declaring that they “shall not conduct, supervise, be in the presence of, or otherwise assist any national security interrogations for any military or intelligence entities, including private contractors working on their behalf, nor advise on conditions of confinement insofar as these might facilitate such an interrogation”.

Military psychologists within the APA were not happy in 2015 about being shut out of national security interrogations and they'd still like to see psychologists back in the interrogation business. This time around, they strategically chose to focus their rhetoric on treatment rather than interrogation. However, the long-term goals are clear. Indeed, in response to a request from those military psychologists, the APA's Committee on Legal Issues recommended to the board of directors “broadening” the resolution “to allow psychologists to be involved in the practice and policy of humane interrogation”. The board declined – this time, anyway.

Here's the problem with “humane interrogation”: no one ever admits to using inhumane methods. Unfortunately, there's a recent and sordid history of US officials claiming that torture is actually humane – albeit “enhanced” – interrogation. In the George W. Bush administration, John Woo and Jay Bybee, who worked in the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel, were among those who wrote memos justifying torture. As Bybee explained in an August 2002 memo to Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, “real” physical torture must involve pain similar to that experienced during “serious physical injury, such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function, or even death”. And the effects of psychological interrogation must last “months or even years” to constitute mental torture – ob-

viously an impossible standard to meet, since no one knows for sure what will happen in the future. In that way, they essentially redefined any form of cruelty, including waterboarding, in any of the CIA's black sites then scattered around the world or at Guantánamo, as anything but torture.

As it happened, even as defined by the Bush administration, much of what was done in those years would have qualified as torture. Certainly, isolating people, depriving them of sleep, bombarding them with heat, cold, light, and endless loud noise, beating them, and providing them with no hope of eventual release were not exactly acts conducive to long-term mental health. In fact, in 2016 the *New York Times* interviewed several freed Guantánamo detainees, who reported that the effects of their abuse had indeed lasted “months or even years”.

The role of American psychologists in designing torture programs goes back at least to the 1950s, as historian Alfred McCoy documented so graphically in his book *A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation from the Cold War to the War on Terror*. At that time, research psychologists at elite universities in the US and Canada experimented on unwitting subjects – including mental patients – in an effort to develop techniques to produce a condition of compliancy in future prisoners, a condition that the CIA called “DDD” (for debility, dependency, and dread).

Much of this research culminated in that Agency's now-infamous 1963 KUBARK manual on interrogation, which the United States used to train the police and military forces of client states. That manual would be resurrected in 1983 and used in the CIA's training of the US-backed Contras in Nicaragua's civil war. Many of the “enhanced interrogation techniques” that became so familiar to us in the George W. Bush years – sensory bombardment, sleep deprivation, exposure to extremes of heat and cold, sexual humiliation – were first laid out in that manual. But the CIA evidently misplaced it somewhere in their voluminous files because, after 9/11, instead of hauling it out yet again, they paid \$80 million to

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two psychologists to reinvent the torture wheel. Those two, James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen, repackaged DDD as “learned helplessness” (borrowing a concept developed by another psychologist, Martin Seligman).

Seligman’s role in developing the CIA torture programme has been in dispute ever since. At most, he seems to have willingly discussed his theories with CIA personnel. In December 2001, he met at his home with both James Mitchell and Kirk Hubbard, who was then the chief of research and analysis in the CIA’s Operational Division, among others. In 2002, at the invitation of CIA personnel, he lectured on learned helplessness at the Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape school where US military are trained to resist torture. Seligman claims he had no idea how his work was being used until “years later”, when he read a *New Yorker* article by Jane Mayer about CIA torture practices in the post-9/11 era. “If I had known about the methods employed”, says Seligman, “I would not have discussed learned helplessness with” Agency officials.

Mitchell and Jessen, however, had no such compunctions. They cheerfully designed an interrogation program for the CIA that included such “enhanced techniques” as slamming detainees against walls and locking them in tiny boxes. As no one is likely to forget, they also retrieved waterboarding from history. This practice had bluntly been called “the water torture” in medieval Europe, and American soldiers were using it in the Philippines, where it was referred to ironically as “the water cure”, as the 20th-century began. To waterboard is essentially to drown a prisoner to the point of unconsciousness, a “technique” the CIA used 83 times on one man (who didn’t even turn out to be an al-Qaeda leader). The whole programme was implemented at CIA black sites in Afghanistan, Thailand, Poland, and Romania, among other places.

For part of this time, Mitchell was a member of the APA and so presumably subject to its code of ethics, which, theoretically at least, prohibited involvement in interrogations involving torture. When concerned APA members tried to bring an ethics claim against him to the group (whose only real sanction would have been to publicly

expel him), they got nowhere. Eventually, Mitchell quietly resigned from the association.

Meanwhile, military psychologists were also working on interrogation matters for the Department of Defense. At Guantánamo, they participated in behavioural science control teams (BSCTs, pronounced “biscuits”). Despite the homey-sounding name, those BSCTs were anything but benign. Staffed by psychologists and psychiatrists, the teams, according to a 2005 *New England Journal of Medicine* op-ed by knowledgeable insiders, “prepared psychological profiles for use by interrogators; they also sat in on some interrogations, observed others from behind one-way mirrors, and offered feedback to interrogators”.

Guantánamo’s BSCTs, the *Journal* piece continues, favoured an approach to behavioural control taught at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center, which “builds on the premise that acute, uncontrollable stress erodes established behaviour (eg, resistance to questioning), creating opportunities to reshape behaviour”. This was to be achieved by introducing “stressors tailored to the psychological and cultural vulnerabilities of individual detainees (eg, phobias, personality features, and religious beliefs)”.

But where did the BSCTs get their information about the vulnerabilities of those individual detainees? The International Committee of the Red Cross discovered that it came from their medical records at the detention centre, which, according to general medical ethics and the Geneva Conventions, are supposed to be confidential.

Those APA members who continue to argue for bringing military psychologists back to Guantánamo insist that it’s possible to keep a firewall between their work as clinicians and the role of interrogator. But how realistic is this, especially within an organisation like the military, where obedience and hierarchical loyalty are key values? As the *New England Journal of Medicine* concludes, “[The] proximity of health professionals to interrogation settings, even when they act as caregivers, carries risk. It may invite interrogators to be more aggressive, because they

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imagine that these professionals will set needed limits. The logic of caregiver involvement as a safeguard also risks pulling health professionals in ever more deeply. Once caregivers share information with interrogators, why should they refrain from giving advice about how to best use the data? Won't such advice better protect detainees, while furthering the intelligence-gathering mission? And if so, why not oversee isolation and sleep deprivation or monitor beatings to make sure nothing terrible happens?"

When it comes to torture, why should the internal politics of one professional association with relatively little power matter? The answer is: because what happens there offers a vivid illustration of how organisations (or even entire nations) can be deformed once torture gains an institutional home. And as in the APA, in the United States, too, the fight over torture has not ended. On the first day of his presidency, Barack Obama issued two executive orders. One de-authorized the use of those "enhanced interrogation techniques", and closed the CIA's black sites. The other was meant to shut Guantánamo as well (but the fervent opposition of most congressional Republicans ultimately prevented this).

Obama also argued that nothing would be "gained by spending our time and energy laying blame for the past". He couldn't have been more mistaken. Had America's elected officials spent their time and energy that way, those in George W. Bush's administration who authorised widespread acts of torture and those who committed them might have been held legally responsible – which is exactly what the UN Convention Against Torture (of which the US is a signatory) requires. As a nation, minimally we would have got a much fuller accounting of the many cruel and illegal acts committed in our names by top officials, intelligence agencies, and the military after September 11, 2001.

And had all of that happened, we might not be backsliding on torture the way we are. It's just possible that this country might not have elected a man who campaigned on the promise that he would bring back "waterboarding and a hell of a lot worse than waterboarding", and who, on entering the Oval Office, signed an executive order

keeping Guantánamo open.

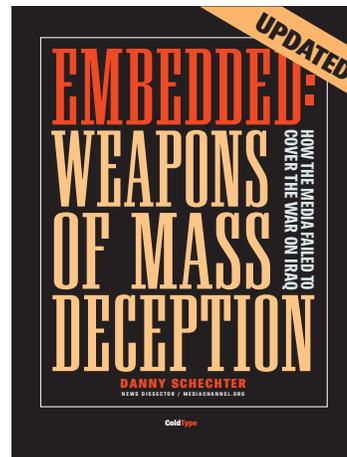
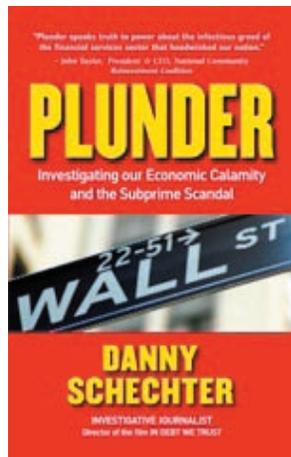
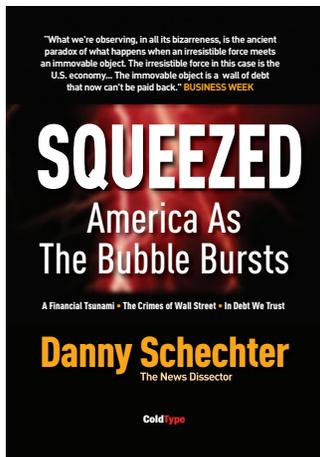
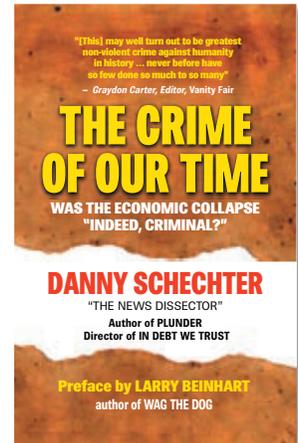
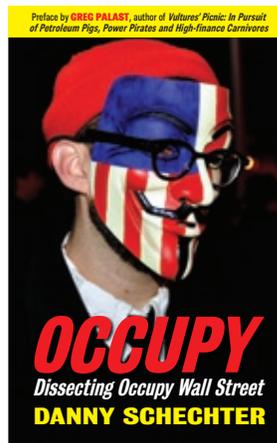
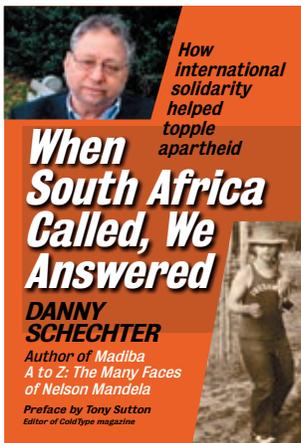
In addition, the Senate would probably not have approved Gina Haspel, who oversaw a CIA black site in Thailand (where acts of torture did take place), to run the Agency. She might have been prosecuted, not promoted to CIA director. And perhaps the president wouldn't have nominated a Supreme Court justice, Brett Kavanaugh, who worked as staff secretary in the George W. Bush White House and was involved in detainee policy. The *Washington Post* reports that he attended more than one meeting on the treatment of detainees, suggested that they weren't entitled to legal counsel and strategised about how to keep the Supreme Court from granting them habeas corpus rights. Now, President Trump, citing "executive privilege", is even withholding 100,000 pages of records from Kavanaugh's service in the Bush White House – and who knows what they might contain on the subject.

What happened at the APA convention recently also matters because it illustrates the power of organised ethical action. Association members who were determined to keep psychologists out of the torture business formed the APA Watch: Alliance for an Ethical APA. They consulted thoughtfully with each other and allies (including Veterans for Peace), developed and distributed materials aimed at persuading APA members in general, and made personal phone calls to most of the 170 members of the association's governing Council of Representatives. They combined the wisdom and values of their profession – including the all-important Hippocratic injunction not to harm one's patients – with energetic, organised action.

It's an encouraging example for the rest of us, as we enter this crucial election cycle. When we're smart, committed, and organised, the good guys can win. **CT**

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*Rebecca Gordon teaches at the University of San Francisco. She is the author of *American Nuremberg: The US Officials Who Should Stand Trial for Post-9/11 War Crimes*. This essay first appeared at www.tomdispatch.com*

REMEMBERING Danny SCHECHTER 1942 - 2015



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Danny Schechter, the NewsDissector, was acclaimed as one of the most politically astute journalists in recent memory. As a tribute to him and an appreciation of his work with ColdType, we are giving away free downloads of these seven books, all published in association with ColdType.net. Download them at:

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Led Zep: Plagiarists or innovators?’

How can a band so slavishly derivative – and sometimes downright plagiaristic – be simultaneously considered so innovative and influential?

FIFTY years ago – in September 1968 – the legendary rock band Led Zeppelin first performed together, kicking off a Scandinavian tour billed as the New Yardbirds.

The new, better name would come later that fall, while drummer John Bonham’s death in 1980 effectively ended their decade-defining reign. But to this day, the band retains the same iconic status it held back in the 1970s: It ranks as one of the best-selling music acts of all time and continues to shape the sounds of new and emerging groups young enough to be the band members’ grandchildren.

Yet, even after all this time – when every note, riff and growl of Zeppelin’s nine-album catalogue has been pored over by fans, cover artists and musicologists – a dark paradox still lurks at the heart of its mystique. How can a band so slavishly derivative – and sometimes downright plagiaristic – be simultaneously considered so innovative and influential?

How, in other words, did it get to have its custard pie and eat it, too?

As a scholar who researches the subtle complexities of musical style and originality as well as the legal mechanisms that police and enforce them, such as copyright law, I find this a particularly devilish conundrum. The fact that I’m also a bassist in a band that fuses multiple styles of music makes it personal.

For anyone who quests after the holy grail of creative success, Led Zeppelin has achieved something mythical in stature: a place in the mu-

sical firmament, on its own terms, outside of the rules and without compromise.

When Led Zeppelin debuted its eponymous first album in 1969, there’s no question that it sounded new and exciting. My father, a baby boomer and dedicated Beatles fan, remembers his chagrin that year when his middle school math students threw over the Fab Four for Zeppelin, seemingly overnight. Even the stodgy New York Times, which decried the band’s “plastic sexual superficiality”, felt compelled, in the same article, to acknowledge its “enormously successful ... electronically intense blending” of musical styles.

Yet, from the very beginning, the band was also dogged with accusations of musical pilfering, plagiarism and copyright infringement – often justifiably. The band’s first album, “Led Zeppelin”, contained several songs that drew from earlier compositions, arrangements and recordings, sometimes with attribution and often without. It included two Willie Dixon songs, and the band credited both to the influential Chicago blues composer. But it didn’t credit Anne Bredon when it covered her song “Babe I’m Gonna Leave You”.

The hit “Dazed and Confused”, also from that first album, was originally attributed to Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page. However in 2010, songwriter Jake Holmes filed a lawsuit claiming that he’d written and recorded it in 1967. After the lawsuit was settled out of court, the song is now credited in the liner notes of re-releases as

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STAIRWAY TO CRITICISM: Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant and guitarist Jimmy Page on stage.

Photo: Jim Summaria, via Wikimedia Commons

“inspired by” Holmes.

The band's second album, “Led Zeppelin II”, picked up where the first left off. Following a series of lawsuits, the band agreed to list Dixon as a previously uncredited author on two of the tracks, including its first hit single, “Whole Lotta Love”. An additional lawsuit established that blues legend Chester “Howlin’ Wolf” Burnett was a previously uncredited author on another track called “The Lemon Song”.

Musical copyright infringement is notoriously challenging to establish in court, hence the set-

tlements. But there's no question the band engaged in what musicologists typically call “borrowing”. Any blues fan, for instance, would have recognized the lyrics of Dixon's “You Need Love” – as recorded by Muddy Waters – on a first listen of “Whole Lotta Love”.

Should the band be condemned for taking other people's songs and fusing them into its own style?

Or should this actually be a point of celebration?

The answer is a matter of perspective. In Zep-

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pelin's defense, the band is hardly alone in the practice. The 1960s folk music revival movement, which was central to the careers of Baez, Holmes, Bredon, Dixon and Burnett, was rooted in an ethic that typically treated musical material as a "commons" – a wellspring of shared culture from which all may draw, and to which all may contribute.

Most performers in the era routinely covered "authorless" traditional and blues songs, and the movement's shining star, Bob Dylan, used lyrical and musical pastiche as a badge of pride and display of erudition – "Look how many old songs I can cram into this new song!" – rather than as a guilty, secret crutch to hold up his own compositions.

Why shouldn't Zeppelin be able to do the same? On the other hand, it's hard to ignore the racial dynamics inherent in Led Zeppelin's borrowing. Willie Dixon and Howlin' Wolf were African-Americans, members of a subjugated minority who were – especially back then – excluded from reaping their fair share of the enormous profits they generated for music labels, publishers and other artists.

Like their English countrymen Eric Clapton and The Rolling Stones, Zeppelin's attitude toward black culture seems eerily reminiscent of Lord Elgin's approach to the marble statues of the Parthenon and Queen Victoria's policy on the Koh-i-Noor diamond: Take what you can and don't ask permission; if you get caught, apologize without ceding ownership.

Led Zeppelin was also accused of lifting from white artists such as Bredon and the band Spirit, the aggrieved party in a recent lawsuit over the rights to Zeppelin's signature song "Stairway to Heaven". Even in these cases, the power dynamics were iffy.

Bredon and Spirit are lesser-known composers with lower profiles and shallower pockets. Neither has benefited from the glow of Zeppelin's glory, which has only grown over the decades despite the accusations and lawsuits levelled against them.

So how did the band pull it off, when so many of its contemporaries have been forgotten or diminished? How did it find and keep the holy

grail? What makes Led Zeppelin so special?

I could speculate about its cultural status as an avatar of trans-Atlantic, post-hippie self-indulgence and "me generation" rebellion. I could wax poetic about its musical fusion of pre-Baroque and non-Western harmonies with blues rhythms and Celtic timbres. I could even accuse it, as many have over the years, of cutting a deal with the devil.

Instead, I'll simply relate a personal anecdote from almost 20 years ago. I actually met frontman Robert Plant. I was waiting in line at a lower Manhattan bodega around 2 a.m. and suddenly realized Plant was waiting in front of me. A classic Chuck Berry song was playing on the overhead speakers. Plant turned to look at me and mused, "I wonder what he's up to now?" We chatted about Berry for a few moments, then paid and went our separate ways.

Brief and banal though it was, I think this little interlude – more than the reams of music scholarship and journalism I've read and written – might hold the key to solving the paradox.

Maybe Led Zeppelin is worthy because, like Sir Galahad, the knight who finally gets the holy grail, its members' hearts were pure.

During our brief exchange, it was clear Plant didn't want to be adulated – he didn't need his ego stroked by a fawning fan. Furthermore, he and his bandmates were never even in it for the money. In fact, for decades, Zeppelin refused to license its songs for television commercials. In Plant's own words, "I only wanted to have some fun".

Maybe the band retained its fame because it lived, loved and embodied rock and roll so absolutely and totally – to the degree that Plant would start a conversation with a total stranger in the middle of the night just to chat about one of his heroes.

This love, this purity of focus, comes out in its music, and for this, we can forgive Led Zeppelin's many trespasses. **CT**

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Conjuring up the next recession

Fabricated money, financial gangsters
and the upcoming stock market crash

DURING the financial crisis of 2008, the world's central banks, including the US Federal Reserve, injected trillions of dollars of fabricated money into the global financial system. This fabricated money has created a worldwide debt of \$325-trillion, more than three times global GDP. The fabricated money was hoarded by banks and corporations, loaned by banks at predatory interest rates, used to service interest on unpayable debt or spent buying back stock, providing millions in

compensation for elites. The fabricated money was not invested in the real economy. Products were not manufactured and sold. Workers were not reinstated into the middle class with sustainable incomes, benefits and pensions. Infrastructure projects were not undertaken. The fabricated money reinflated massive financial bubbles built on debt and papered over a fatally diseased financial system destined for collapse.

What will trigger the next crash? The \$13.2-trillion in unsustainable US household debt? The

\$1.5-trillion in unsustainable student debt? The billions Wall Street has invested in a fracking industry that has spent \$280-billion more than it generated from its operations? Who knows. What is certain is that a global financial crash, one that will dwarf the meltdown of 2008, is inevitable. And this time, with interest rates near zero, the elites have no escape plan. The financial structure will disintegrate. The global economy will go into a death spiral. The rage of a betrayed and impoverished population will, I fear, further empower right-wing demagogues who promise vengeance on the global elites, moral renewal, a nativist revival heralding a return to a mythical golden age when immigrants, women and people of colour knew their place, and a Christianized fascism.

The 2008 financial crisis, as the economist Nomi Prins points out, “converted central banks into a new class of power brokers”. They looted national treasuries and amassed trillions in wealth to become politically and economically omnipotent. In her book *Collusion: How Central Bankers Rigged the World*, she writes that central bankers and the world’s largest financial institutions fraudulently manipulate global markets and use fabricated, or as she writes, “fake money”, to inflate asset bubbles for short-term profit as they drive us toward “a dangerous financial precipice”.

The rage of a betrayed population will further empower right-wing demagogues

“Before the crisis, they were just asleep at the wheel, in particular, the Federal Reserve of the United States, which is supposed to be the main regulator of the major banks in the United States”, Prins said when we met in New York. “It did a horrible job of doing that, which is why we had the financial crisis. It became a deregulator instead of a regulator. In the wake of the financial crisis, the solution to fixing the crisis and saving the economy from a great depression or recession, whatever the terminology that was used at any given time, was to fabricate trillions and tril-

lions of dollars out of an electronic ether”.

The Federal Reserve handed over an estimated \$29-trillion of this fabricated money to American banks, according to researchers at the University of Missouri. Twenty-nine-trillion dollars! We could have provided free college tuition to every student or universal health care, repaired our crumbling infrastructure, transitioned to clean energy, forgiven student debt, raised wages, bailed out underwater homeowners, formed public banks to invest at low interest rates in our communities, provided a guaranteed minimum income for everyone and organised a massive jobs program for the unemployed and underemployed. Sixteen million children would not go to bed hungry. The mentally ill and the homeless – an estimated 553,742 Americans are homeless every night – would not be left on the streets or locked away in our prisons. The economy would revive. Instead, \$29-trillion in fabricated money was handed to financial gangsters who are about to make most of it evaporate and plunge us into a depression that will rival that of the global crash of 1929.

Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers write on the website *Popular Resistance*, “One-sixth of this could provide a \$12,000 annual basic income, which would cost \$3.8-trillion annually, doubling Social Security payments to \$22,000 annually, which would cost \$662-billion, a \$10,000 bonus for all US public school teachers, which would cost \$11-billion, free college for all high school graduates, which would cost \$318-billion, and universal preschool, which would cost \$38-billion. National improved Medicare for all would actually save the nation trillions of dollars over a decade”.

An emergency clause in the Federal Reserve Act of 1913 allows the Fed to provide liquidity to a distressed banking system. But the Federal Reserve did not stop with the creation of a few hundred billion dollars. It flooded the financial markets with absurd levels of fabricated money. This had the effect of making the economy appear as if it had revived. And for the oligarchs, who had access to this fabricated money while we did not, it did.

The Fed cut interest rates to near zero. Some

CHRIS HEDGES

central banks in Europe instituted negative interest rates, meaning they would pay borrowers to take loans. The Fed, in a clever bit of accounting, even permitted distressed banks to use these no-interest loans to buy US Treasury bonds. The banks gave the bonds back to the Fed and received a quarter of a percent of interest from the Fed. In short, the banks were loaned money at virtually no interest by the Fed and then were paid interest by the Fed on the money they borrowed. The Fed also bought up worthless mortgage assets and other toxic assets from the banks. Since Fed authorities could fabricate as much money as they wanted, it did not matter how they spent it.

“It’s like going to someone’s old garage sale and saying, ‘I want that bicycle with no wheels. I’ll pay you 100-grand for it. Why? Because it’s not my money,’” Prins said.

“These people have rigged the system”, she said of the bankers. “There is money fabricated at the top. It is used to pump up financial assets, including stock. It has to come from somewhere. Because money is cheap there’s more borrowing at the corporate level. There’s more money borrowed at the government level”.

“Where do you go to repay it?” she asked. “You go into the nation. You go into the economy. You extract money from the foundational economy, from social programmes. You impose austerity”.

Given the staggering amount of fabricated money that has to be repaid, the banks need to build greater and greater pools of debt. This is why when you are late in paying your credit card the interest rate jumps to 28 percent. This is why if you declare bankruptcy you are still responsible for paying off your student loan, even as 1 million people a year default on student loans, with 40 percent of all borrowers expected to default on student loans by 2023. This is why wages are stagnant or have declined while costs, from health care and pharmaceutical products to bank fees and basic utilities, are skyrocketing. The enforced debt peonage grows to feed the beast until, as with the subprime mortgage crisis, the predatory system fails because of massive defaults.

There will come a day, for example, as with all financial bubbles, when the wildly optimistic projected profits of industries such as fracking will no longer be an effective excuse to keep pumping money into failing businesses burdened by debt they cannot repay.

“The 60 biggest exploration and production firms are not generating enough cash from their operations to cover their operating and capital expenses”, Bethany McLean writes of the fracking industry in an article titled “The Next Financial Crisis Lurks Underground” that appeared in the *New York Times*. “In aggregate, from mid-2012 to mid-2017, they had negative free cash flow of \$9-billion per quarter”.

Fed authorities could fabricate as much money as they wanted, so it did not matter how they spent it

The global financial system is a ticking time bomb. The question is not if it will explode but when it will explode. And once it does, the inability of the global speculators to use fabricated money with zero interest to paper over the debacle will trigger massive unemployment, high prices for imports and basic services, and a devaluation in which the dollar will become nearly worthless as it is abandoned as the world’s reserve currency. This manufactured financial tsunami will transform the United States, already a failed democracy, into an authoritarian police state. Life will become very cheap, especially for the vulnerable – undocumented workers, Muslims, poor people of colour, girls and women, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist critics branded as agents of foreign powers – who will be demonised and persecuted for the collapse. The elites, in a desperate bid to cling to their unchecked power and obscene wealth, will disembowel what is left of the United States. **CT**

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Chris Hedges is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, a New York Times best-selling author, a professor in the college degree programme offered to New Jersey state prisoners by Rutgers University, and an ordained. This article first appeared at www.newsdig.com

Canada's role in the Other 9/11

Few Canadians remember their country's role in the US-backed coup that murdered Salvadore Allende and put Pinochet in power

FORTY-FIVE years ago, on September 11 1973, the democratically elected president of Chile, Salvador Allende, was overthrown by General Augusto Pinochet. In the aftermath, 3,000 leftists were murdered, tens of thousands tortured and hundreds of thousands driven from the country.

Since it doesn't serve to justify further domination by the powerful few in the Canadian media commemorated the "original 9/11", few will recognise Canada's role in the US backed coup.

The Pierre Trudeau government was hostile to Allende's elected government. In 1964 Eduardo Frei defeated the openly Marxist Allende in presidential elections. Worried about growing support for socialism, Ottawa gave \$8.6-million to Frei's Chile, its first aid to a South American country. When Allende won the next election, Canadian assistance disappeared. Export Development Canada (EDC) also refused to finance Canadian exports to Chile, which contributed to a reduction in trade between the two countries. This suspension of EDC credits led Chile's Minister of Finance to criticise Canada's "banker's attitude". But suspending bilateral assistance and export insurance was not enough: In 1972 Ottawa joined Washington in voting to cut off all money from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to the Chilean government. (When Allende was first elected, western banks, including Canada's, withdrew from Chile.)

From economic asphyxiation to diplomatic isolation. Ottawa's policy towards Allende's Chile

was clear. After he won office in 1970 Allende invited Pierre Trudeau to visit Santiago. Ottawa refused "for fear of alienating rightist elements in Chile and elsewhere".

Days after Pinochet ousted Allende, Andrew Ross, Canada's ambassador to Chile, cabled External Affairs: "Reprisals and searches have created panic atmosphere affecting particularly expatriates including the riffraff of the Latin American Left to whom Allende gave asylum ... the country has been on a prolonged political binge under the elected Allende government and the junta has assumed the probably thankless task of sobering Chile up". Thousands were incarcerated, tortured and killed in "sobering Chile up".

Within three weeks of the coup, Canada recognised Pinochet's military junta. Ross stated: "I can see no useful purpose to withholding recognition unduly. Indeed, such action might even tend to delay Chile's eventual return to the democratic process". Pinochet stepped down 17 years later.

Diplomatic support for Pinochet led to economic assistance. Just after the coup Canada voted for a \$22-million (\$100-million in today's money) Inter American Development Bank loan "rushed through the bank with embarrassing haste". Ottawa immediately endorsed sending \$95-million from the International Monetary Fund to Chile and supported renegotiating the country's debt held by the Paris Club. After refusing to provide credits to the elected government, on Octo-

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ber 2nd, 1973, EDC announced it was granting \$5-million in credit to Chile's central bank to purchase six Twin Otter aircraft from De Havilland, which could carry troops to and from short makeshift strips.

By 1978, Canadian support for the coup d'état was significant. It included:

- Support for \$810 million in multilateral loans with Canada's share amounting to about \$40 million.

- Five EDC facilities worth between \$15- and \$30-million.

- Two Canadian debt re-schedulings for Chile, equivalent to additional loans of approximately \$5-million.

- Twenty loans by Canadian chartered banks worth more than \$100 million, including a 1977 loan by Toronto Dominion to DINA (Pinochet's secret police) to purchase equipment.

- Direct investments by Canadian companies valued at nearly \$1-billion.

A 1976 Latin America Working Group Letter noted that "Canadian economic relations, in the form of bank loans, investments and government supported financial assistance have helped consolidate the Chilean dictatorship and, by granting it a mantle of respectability and financial endorsement, have encouraged its continued vio-

lation of human rights".

Canadian leftists were outraged at Ottawa's support for the coup and its unwillingness to accept refugees hunted by the military regime. Many denounced the federal government's policy and some (my mother among them) occupied various Chilean and Canadian government offices in protest. The federal government was surprised at the scope of the opposition, which curtailed some support for the junta. A 1974 cabinet document lamented that "the attention... focused on the Chilean Government's use of repression against its opponents has led to an unfavourable reaction among the Canadian public—a reaction which will not permit any significant increase in Canadian aid to this country".

The Pierre Trudeau government sought to placate protesters by allowing 7,000 refugees from Pinochet's regime asylum in Canada. But, they continued to support the dictatorship directly responsible for the refugee problem.

We should commemorate Canada's role in the "original 9/11". CT

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*Yves Engler is a Montreal-based activist and author. His latest book is **Left, Right: Marching to the Beat of Imperial Canada**. His web site is www.yvesengler.com*

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LEFT, RIGHT

Marching to the Beat of Imperial Canada

YVES ENGLER

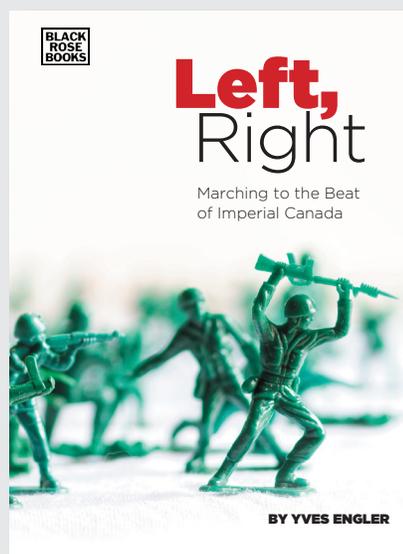
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DAVID CROMWELL

Empire journalism

**Brutal imperialism will continue for as long as empire-friendly journalism
and tame public opposition exist**

THE US political commentator Michael Parenti once observed that: “Bias in favor of the orthodox is frequently mistaken for ‘objectivity’. Departures from this ideological orthodoxy are themselves dismissed as ideological”.

Once you understand the truth of that remark, seeing the daily biases and distortions of the corporate media becomes obvious. Thus, there is plenty of space on the BBC News website, and plenty of time on the BBC’s airwaves, to discuss the Venezuela migrant crisis, hyper-inflation and food shortages. Rob Young, a BBC News business correspondent, wrote: “Venezuela, now in its fourth year of recession, has joined a sad list of other countries whose economies imploded as hyperinflation tore through them”.

Young quoted a senior official of the International Monetary Fund: “The situation in Venezuela is similar to that in Germany in 1923 or Zimbabwe in the late 2000s”.

A BBC News clip headlined, “Begging for food in Venezuela”, emphasised: “Food has become so scarce in Venezuela after the economy collapsed that people are getting desperate”.

Likewise, there has been ample heart-wrenching coverage of Venezuelans fleeing to other countries. But you will struggle to find any substantive analysis of the severe US sanctions and long-standing threats to bring about a US-friendly government in Caracas, including an attempted coup in 2002 to remove Hugo Chávez, Venezuela’s then president.

On August 19, BBC South America correspondent Katy Watson reported for BBC News at Ten: “President Nicolas Maduro is doing little to stop his country’s economic freefall. Last week, he announced plans to devalue the country’s currency; an attempt to rein in inflation that the International Monetary Fund says could hit one million per cent by the end of the year”.

But there was next to no context. BBC viewers were led to believe that the blame for the crisis in Venezuela lay squarely at Maduro’s door.

By contrast, consider the analysis of Gabriel Hetland, an expert academic on Latin America. He stated that the Venezuelan government’s actions – and inactions – have made the crisis “far worse”. But crucially: “the government has not acted in a vacuum, but in a hostile domestic and international environment. The opposition has openly and repeatedly pushed for regime change by any means necessary”.

Viewers were led to believe the blame for the crisis in Venezuela lay squarely at Maduro’s door

On August 4, there was even an attempt to assassinate President Maduro, with responsibility claimed by a clandestine opposition group made up of members of the Venezuelan military.

Hetland continued: “The US government has not only cheered, and funded, these anti-democratic actions. By absurdly declaring that Venezuela is an ‘unusual and extraordinary threat’

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to US national security and pressuring investors and bankers to steer clear of the Maduro administration, the White House has prevented Venezuela from obtaining much-needed foreign financing and investment”.

The *Morning Star*'s Tim Young pointed out that: “Sanctions now form a key part of what is a strategic plan by the US to ruin the Venezuelan economy”.

These US sanctions have even impacted Venezuela's health programme, with the country's vaccination schemes disrupted, dialysis supplies blocked and cancer drugs refused. Young added: “It is clear that the US sanctions – illegal under international law – are part of an overall strategy to bring about what the US calls ‘regime change’.

“Its aim is to undermine and topple the elected government of President Nicolas Maduro and secure control of Venezuela's vast oil reserves and other natural resources and wealth”.

In a news report in the *Independent* last year, Andrew Buncombe quoted remarks by Mike Pompeo, then head of the CIA, suggesting that: “the agency is working to change the elected government of Venezuela and is collaborating with two countries [Mexico and Colombia] in the region to do so”.

As Buncombe observed: “The US has a long and bloody history of meddling in Latin America's affairs”.

That is an accurate and truthful headline you are very unlikely to see on BBC News.

To realise how incomplete and distorted is BBC News coverage, you only have to listen to the superb independent journalist Abby Martin, who has risked her life to report what the corporate media is not telling you about Venezuela. It is little wonder that, as she discusses, her important news programme, *Empire Files*, is currently



off-air as a result of US sanctions against left-leaning TeleSUR, the Venezuela-based television network.

A report by media analyst Gregory Shupak for US-based media watchdog FAIR, notes the repeated usage of the word “regime” to describe Venezuela by the US corporate media. As Shupak observes, a ‘regime’ is, by definition, a government that opposes the US empire. He goes on: “Interestingly, the US itself meets many of the criteria for being a ‘regime’: It can be seen as an oligarchy rather than a democracy, imprisons people at a higher rate than any other country, has grotesque levels of in-

equality and bombs another country every 12 minutes. Yet there's no widespread tendency for the corporate media to describe the US state as a ‘regime’”.

In short, if you rely on the corporate media, not least the BBC, for what's going on in Venezuela, you will get the US-friendly version of events, downplaying or simply ignoring the crippling effects of US sanctions and threats.

On Venezuela, as with so many other issues, BBC News regularly violates its own stated *Editorial Values*: “Accuracy is not simply a matter of getting facts right; when necessary, we will weigh relevant facts and information to get at the truth”.

The notion that BBC News journalists perform a balancing act, sifting through ‘facts and information’ to present ‘the truth’ to the public is simply pure fiction, as the ample evidence presented in our forthcoming book, *Propaganda Blitz*, (see review on Page ?? of this issue), makes clear.

Consider coverage of the recent death of US politician John McCain. McCain was the Republican nominee in the 2008 US presidential election which he lost to Barack Obama. In 1967, dur-

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ing the Vietnam War, he was shot down while on a bombing mission over Hanoi and was seriously injured. Captured by the North Vietnamese, he was tortured during his incarceration, before being released in 1973. In later years, the media would call him a ‘war hero’ and depict him as a political ‘maverick’ in not always supporting Republican Party policy on certain issues.

Theresa May declared: “John McCain was a great statesman, who embodied the idea of service over self. It was an honour to call him a friend of the UK”.

Con Coughlin, the *Telegraph’s* defence editor and chief foreign affairs columnist, echoed the mantra that McCain was a “war hero”.

In similar vein, “neutral” and “impartial” Nick Bryant, the BBC’s New York correspondent, intoned loftily on BBC News at Ten on August 27: “Washington without John McCain is a lesser place. He was a human landmark; an American hero whose broken body personified the Land of the Brave”.

Senior reporters from Channel 4 News and ITV News added their own eulogies to warmonger McCain, dubbed “McNasty” by people who had observed his “inexplicable angry outbursts”. C4 News political correspondent Michael Crick said via Twitter: “I’ll always be grateful to John McCain. When I was #C4News Washington Correspondent in the late ’80s, he was one of the few senators happy to do interviews with us, and always very friendly & accommodating”.

McCain always promoted the use of force as the primary feature of American foreign policy

Robert Moore, ITV News Washington Correspondent responded: “Agreed. And that continued almost until the end – for the foreign press,

McCain was the single most accessible political figure in Washington. He always had time for an interview, and a joke – including teasing me for my choice of ties”.

Other Twitter users put things in stark perspective: “My thoughts are entirely with his victims and their families”.

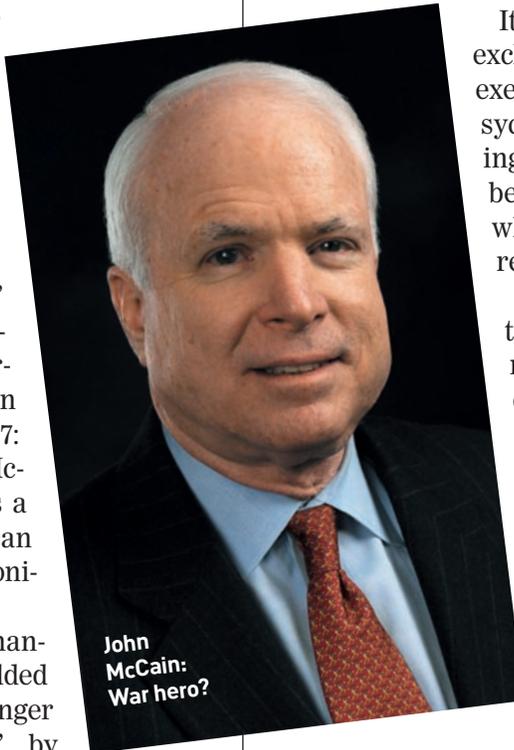
And: “How hard did you grill him about the decisions he made that killed innocent civilians in hundreds of thousands?”.

It would be hard to find an exchange on Twitter that better exemplifies the divide between sycophantic journalists fawning before power, and members of the public refusing to whitewash a politician’s ugly record.

Patrick Martin, writing for the World Socialist Website, makes a vital point: “The overriding feature of McCain’s career [...] was his reflexive hawkishness on foreign policy. He supported war after war, intervention after intervention, always promoting the use of force as the primary feature of American foreign policy, and always advocating the maximum allocation of resources to fuel the Pentagon”.

Peace activist Medea Benjamin told Amy Goodman in a Democracy Now! interview: “We had constantly been lobbying John McCain to not support all these wars. Amy, I think it’s so horrible to be calling somebody a war hero because he participated in the bombing of Vietnam. I just spent the last weekend with Veterans for Peace, people who are atoning for their sins in Vietnam by trying to stop new wars. John McCain hasn’t done that. With his life, what he did was support wars from not only Iraq, but also Libya”.

Benjamin founded Code Pink: Women for Peace, a grassroots peace and justice movement that McCain once disparaged as “low-life scum”.



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She continued: “He called John Kerry delusional for trying to make a nuclear deal with Iran, and threw his lot in with the MEK, the extremist group in Iran. He also was a good friend of Mohammad bin Salman and the Saudis. There was a gala for the Saudis in May when the crown prince was visiting, and they had a special award for John McCain. He supported the Saudi bombing in Yemen that has been so catastrophic. And I think we have to think that those who have participated in war are really heroes if they spend the rest of their lives trying to stop war, not like John McCain, who spent the rest of his life supporting war”.

You'd think that he was dropping flowers or marshmallows or something

Norman Solomon, executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy, made clear his empathy for McCain for having suffered through brain cancer. But he castigated the corporate media phenomenon of ‘obit omit – obituaries that are flagrantly in conflict with the real historical record”.

He told Goodman: “We really have to fault the mass media of the United States, not just for the last few days, but the last decades, pretending that somehow, by implication, almost that John McCain was doing the people of North Vietnam a favour as he flew over them and dropped bombs. You would think, in the hagiography that we’ve been getting about his role in a squadron flying over North Vietnam, that he was dropping, you know, flowers or marshmallows or something. He was shot down during his 23rd mission drop-

ping bombs on massive numbers of human beings, in a totally illegal and immoral war”.

As Branko Marcetic noted in an accurate assessment of McCain’s political legacy: “John McCain’s greatest achievement was convincing the world through charming banter and occasional opposition to his party’s agenda that he was anything other than a reactionary, bloodthirsty war hawk”.

In a recent article, Joe Emersberger, an insightful writer on foreign affairs, notes that corporate media coverage of both Venezuela and John McCain illustrates two main features:

1. The uniformity of empire-friendly reporting across the corporate media.
2. The complicity of major human rights groups in this empire-friendly ‘journalism’.

As an example: “Amnesty International has refused to oppose US economic sanctions on Venezuela, and has also refused to denounce flagrant efforts by US officials to incite a military coup”. Emersberger also points to a statement on John McCain’s death from Human Rights Watch: “Senator McCain was for decades a compassionate voice for US foreign and national security policy”.

For anyone able to think critically and speak openly, such statements are risible. Brutal imperialism will continue for as long as empire-friendly journalism and tame public opposition exist.

CT

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David Cromwell is co-editor of Medialens, the UK media watchdog and the author, with co-editor David Edwards, of Propaganda Blitz: How the Corporate Media Distort Reality. The web site for Medialens is www.medialens.org

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Putin-Nazi paranoia

We should let the capitalist ruling classes finish destroying Donald Trump, and think about what the left has to offer as an alternative to the global-corporate, post-fascist, neo-feudal future

THEY'RE out there. Trump-loving, Assad-apologist, Putin-Nazi sleeper agents, posing as regular normal Americans. They could be anyone. They could be your neighbours, the guys in the copy room, your Uber drivers, even some of your Twitter followers. They're sitting there, right now, glued to their televisions, waiting for Jewish Nazi law clerks to perform a series of secret hand signs, blinks, hiccups, sneezes, coughs, and almost undetectable, low-frequency flatulence that will signal the launch of the "Attack on America." It could come at any moment now.

Zina Bash is definitely one of them. Don't let her Mexican-Jewish ancestry, or the fact that her grandparents were Holocaust survivors, fool you into thinking otherwise. She made that "OK" sign at the Kavanaugh hearings, which, all right, apparently wasn't the cue for the millions of American Putin-Nazis to rip off their rubbery masks of normality and storm into the streets in their polo shirts singing *Tomorrow Belongs to Me* ... but it was some kind of secret Nazi code.

Certainly, Alex Jones is one of them. Why else would patriotic global corporations like Apple, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube suddenly ban him from all their platforms after allowing him to spew his bile there for years? It's probably only a matter of time until Google's "algorithms" unperson him entirely (at which point I'll receive instructions to delete any reference to him in this essay, or risk being further deranked myself. I will, of course, comply immediately, as no one

despises Alex Jones more than I, even though, oddly, I've never watched him. Thank God for that, as who knows how my mind could have been permanently warped by whatever Nazi content he's been forcing less fortunate Americans to consume!)

And then, God help us, there's Jeremy Corbyn and his genocidal communist Nazi Death Cult! If he isn't one of them, no one is. If you haven't been following the British media, the story is, basically, that Jeremy Corbyn is a terrorist-loving, antisemitic, conspiracy theorising, racist traitor to everything the British ruling classes stand for, and has transformed the UK Labour Party into a homicidal mob of Jew-hating brownshirts. Gangs of slaving Corbyn-Nazis are roving the lanes of Kensington and Knightsbridge accusing Jews of lacking irony and saying mean things about the State of Israel. British Jews have been advised to flee the country or to shelter in place until the tabloids, the *Guardian*, the ruling classes, and Tony Blair can hound this Hitlerian devil out of office, which, the way things are going, should be any day now.

Meanwhile, the British soldier on under the imminent threat of Putin-Nazi Novichok perfume assassin hit squads, which Putin could send at any moment directly from Moscow to Gatwick airport to incompetently attempt to murder their targets by spraying the deadliest nerve agent in existence onto the doorknobs of their suburban homes and then stroll around getting filmed by every CCTV camera in Britain. As far as I know,



the British tabloids haven't yet published surveillance photos of Corbyn welcoming the Skripal assassins at Gatwick with a wreath, or a bottle of Stoli (and wearing his Russian-stooge hat, of course), but I won't be terribly shocked when they do.

The Putin-Nazis are not just on the march in the United States and Great Britain. They're coming out of the woodwork in Europe! As I'm sure you're aware, here in Germany, in a city called Chemnitz in the Free State of Saxony, which has never had any kind of Nazi problems (except for the fact that the entire region has been infested with neo-Nazis for decades and is generally known here as Neo-Nazi Central), thousands of just regular foreigner-hating "Volk" joined a few hundred neo-Nazis in marching around with German flags, barking xenophobic slogans, heil-

ing Hitler, harassing assorted "non-German-looking" human beings, and various other forms of "protest." Such unprecedented eruptions of Nazism occur on a regular basis in Saxony, albeit on a smaller scale, so it was rather awkward for the corporate media to link the events in Chemnitz to Trump, but nevertheless they managed to sneak a few references to his "emboldenment" in. The best they could do to tie in to Putin was to publish a lot of photos of skinheads hanging around that humongous statue of Marx in the centre of Chemnitz's central square, because, you know, Putin, Trump, Marx, Stalin, Assad, Saddam, Gaddafi ... whoever, they're all just different brands of Hitler!

Seriously, though, all comedy aside, I have to hand it to David Brock, or Jennifer Palmieri, or whoever it was that came up with the Putin-Nazi narrative. OK, granted, the Putin part hasn't quite worked, except on die-hard Obama disciples, Hillary-worshippers, and other bull-goose loonies, but the Nazi stuff is going gangbusters ... and not just with the liberal public (because that has always been an easy sell), but also with the more leftist left. It has taken a while, but we've arrived at the stage where even "hardcore anti-capitalist leftists" are dedicating most of their time and energy to calling Donald Trump a fascist, and likening him to Hitler, and so on, over and over, and over again, in increasingly exasperated tones. Why, in Marx's name, these leftists want to know, won't other leftists join the chorus of voices screaming, "TRUMP IS A FASCIST!" in all caps on a daily basis? How could these other leftists not see that this is not the time to attack the corporate media, the "intelligence community," global corporations, or anyone other than DONALD TRUMP, who is LITERALLY ADOLF FUCKING HITLER?

Anthony DiMaggio's recent essay in *Counter-Punch* is a prime example of the effect the Putin-Nazi paranoia is having on leftists. According to DiMaggio, Donald Trump, by tweeting mean things about Attorney General Sessions and bombastically threatening the *New York Times*, is no longer just a normal fascist. He is now offi-

cially a “full-on fascist,” or a “real world fascist,” or a super duper fascist! DiMaggio doesn’t have any qualms about the deep state, or rather, the steady state, sabotaging an elected president (or at least pretending to be doing do so in print), because, well, you know, “the stakes are far higher” than mere democracy, what with Hitler in the White House. William Kristol would agree wholeheartedly.

How often do I need to call Trump a fascist before I am allowed to criticise the corporate media?

But calling Trump a fascist again is just an overture for DiMaggio’s main theme, which is that it’s time to unite the left against the growing Putin-Nazi threat. See, the problem is not just the Putin-Nazis. It is also the fellow Putin-Nazi travellers, and the Assadists, and the Red-Brown infiltrators! Yes, you know who we are, do you not? Glenn Greenwald is our leader, naturally, but Caitlin Johnstone is second-in-command. We refer to her in our secret meetings as “Caity, Queen of the Putin-Nazis”. DiMaggio links to a helpful list of other traitorous Strasserist spies compiled by the crackpot Louis Proyect, folks like Norman Finkelstein, Mike Whitney, Diana Johnstone, Patrick Cockburn, Tom Engelhardt, and Michael Hudson, whose essays have been published in the *Unz Review*, which also publishes a lot of “alt-right,” racist, and antisemitic essays. (Full disclosure: Proyect contacted me, demanding to know how I can allow my work to appear on a Nazi website like *Unz*, but I ignored him, as I assumed he was just trolling me, again, but it appears he was fishing for incriminating comments for his groundbreaking piece of investigative journalism. In any event, I seem to have escaped inclusion on his Red-Brown blacklist. For the record, I’m with Norman Finkelstein. I don’t stop anyone from reposting my essays, no matter what I think of their other contributors. I wouldn’t even stop the *New York Times* from publishing my stuff, though, of course, they never would, and they publish actual mass murdering war criminals.)

Anyway, according to Anthony DiMaggio,

“leftists who focus on the propagandistic nature of the corporate media, while shilling for the far right and failing to condemn right-wing fascism, provide comfort to the reactionary right’s efforts to suppress journalistic freedom.” Well, Jesus, I wouldn’t want to do anything like that. I hope DiMaggio will follow up with a breakdown of exactly how many times I need to call Donald Trump a fascist before I am allowed to criticise the propagandistic nature of the corporate media, or the global capitalist ruling classes, or any type of “full-on fascism” that doesn’t neatly fit into his simplistic category ... like the type that seeks to impose a regime of anus-puckering ideological conformity on those it determines are members of its camp, and that gets off punishing deviations from its norms.

Look, the truth is, I don’t like Donald Trump. I haven’t liked him for about 30 years. I have no problem whatsoever with leftists like DiMaggio calling him names until they’re blue in the face if that makes them happy. What I do find problematic is the growing atmosphere of neo-McCarthyite paranoia which has been gradually spreading into leftist quarters, and the witch-hunting, and the Putin-Nazi-baiting, and the compiling and distributing of pseudo-blacklists, and the cheering on of global corporations as they ideologically sterilise the Internet. We get enough of that from the corporate media. So how about we lighten up on the paranoia, let the global capitalist ruling classes finish destroying Donald Trump, and maybe think about what the left has to offer as an alternative to the global-corporate, post-fascist, neo-feudal future. While it might not feel like it at the moment, it’s coming ... we’ll be there before you know it. **CT**

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

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On the brink with Russia – again

It's deja-vu all over again in Syria, with the US on the verge of a confrontation with Russia as Donald Trump faces his biggest decision yet as president

THE New York Times, on September 11, 2013, accommodated Russian President Vladimir Putin's desire "to speak directly to the American people and their political leaders" about "recent events surrounding Syria." Putin's op-ed in the *Times* appeared under the title: "A Plea for Caution From Russia." In it, he warned that a military "strike by the United States against Syria will result in more innocent victims and escalation, potentially spreading the conflict far beyond Syria's borders ... and unleash a new wave of terrorism. ... It could throw the entire system of international law and order out of balance."

Three weeks earlier, on August 21, there had been a chemical attack in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was immediately blamed. There soon emerged, however, evidence that the incident was a provocation to bring direct US military involvement against Assad, lest Syrian government forces retain their momentum and defeat the jihadist rebels.

In a memorandum for President Barack Obama five days before Putin's article on September 6, the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) had warned President Barack Obama of the likelihood that the incident in Ghouta was a false-flag attack.

Despite his concern of a US Attack, Putin's main message in his Op-Ed was positive, talking of a growing mutual trust: "A new opportunity to avoid military action has emerged in the past few days. The United States, Russia and all

members of the international community must take advantage of the Syrian government's willingness to place its chemical arsenal under international control for subsequent destruction. Judging by the statements of President Obama, the United States sees this as an alternative to military action. [Syria's chemical weapons were in fact destroyed under UN supervision the following year.]

"I welcome the president's interest in continuing the dialogue with Russia on Syria. We must work together to keep this hope alive ... and steer the discussion back toward negotiations. If we can avoid force against Syria, this will improve the atmosphere in international affairs and strengthen mutual trust ... and open the door to cooperation on other critical issues."

In a lengthy interview with journalist Jeffrey Goldberg published in the *Atlantic* much later, in March 2016, Obama showed considerable pride in having refused to act according to what he called the "Washington playbook".

He added a telling vignette that escaped media attention, when he confided to Goldberg that, during the crucial last week of August 2013, National Intelligence Director James Clapper paid the president an unannounced visit to caution him that the allegation that Assad was responsible for the chemical attack in Ghouta was "not a slam dunk".

Clapper's reference was to the very words used by former CIA Director George Tenet when he characterised, falsely, the nature of the evi-

dence on WMD in Iraq while briefing President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney in December 2002. Additional evidence that Ghouta was a false flag came in December 2016 parliamentary testimony in Turkey.

In early September 2013, around the time of Putin's Op-Ed, Obama resisted the pressure of virtually all his advisers to launch cruise missiles on Syria and accepted the Russian-brokered deal for Syria to give up its chemical weapons. Obama had to endure outrage from those lusty for the US to get involved militarily. From neoconservatives, in particular, there was hell to pay.

Atop the CNN building in Washington, DC, on the evening of September 9, two days before Putin's piece, I had the fortuitous opportunity to watch the bitterness and disdain with which Paul Wolfowitz and Joe Lieberman heaped abuse on Obama for being too cowardly to attack.

In his appeal for cooperation with the US, Putin had written these words: "My working and personal relationship with President Obama is marked by growing trust. I appreciate this. I carefully studied his address to the nation on Tuesday. And I would rather disagree with a case he made on American exceptionalism, stating that the United States' policy is 'what makes America different. It's what makes us exceptional'. It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation. There are big countries and small countries, rich and poor, those with long democratic traditions and those still finding their way to democracy. Their policies differ, too. We are all different, but when we ask for the Lord's blessings, we must not forget that God created us equal".

In recent days, President Trump's national security adviser, John Bolton, has left no doubt that he is the mascot of American exceptionalism. Its corollary is Washington's "right" to send its forces, uninvited, into countries like Syria.

"We've tried to convey the message in recent days that if there's a third use of chemical weapons, the response will be much stronger", Bolton said on Monday, September 11. "I can say we've been in consultations with the British and the French who have joined us in the second strike and they also agree that another use of chemi-

cal weapons will result in a much stronger response".

As was the case in September 2013, Syrian government forces, with Russian support, have the rebels on the defensive, this time in Idlib province, where most of the remaining jihadists have been driven. On September 10 began what could be the final showdown of the five-year war. Bolton's warning of a chemical attack by Assad makes little sense, as Damascus is clearly winning and the last thing Assad would do is invite US retaliation.

US Ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, has, with remarkable prescience, already blamed Damascus for whatever chemical attack might take place. The warnings of direct US military involvement, greater than Trump's two previous pin-prick attacks, is an invitation for the cornered jihadists to launch another false-flag attack to exactly bring that about.

Sadly, not only has the growing trust recorded by Putin five years ago evaporated, but the likelihood of a US-Russian military clash in the region is as perilously high as ever.

Seven days before Putin's piece appeared, Donald Trump tweeted: "Many Syrian 'rebels' are radical Jihadis. Not our friends & supporting them doesn't serve our national interest. Stay out of Syria!".

In September 2015, Trump accused his Republican primary opponents of wanting to "start World War III over Syria. Give me a break. You know, Russia wants to get ISIS, right? We want to get ISIS. Russia is in Syria – maybe we should let them do it? Let them do it".

At the beginning of this month Trump warned Russian and Syria not to attack Idlib. Now he faces his biggest test as president: can resist his neocon advisers and not attack Syria, as Obama chose not to, or risk the wider war he accused his Republican opponents of fomenting? **CT**

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Shifting alliances

Countries in Asia and the Middle East are charting a course of their own away from the often-malign influence of the United States

BOXING the compass” is an old nautical term for locating the points on a magnetic compass in order to set a course. With the erratic winds blowing out of Washington these days, countries all over Asia and the Middle East are boxing the compass and re-evaluating traditional foes and old alliances.

India and Pakistan have fought three wars in the past half-century, and both have nuclear weapons on a hair trigger. But the two countries are now part of a security and trade organisation, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), along with China, Russia and most of the countries of Central Asia. Following the recent elections in Pakistan, Islamabad’s Foreign Minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, has called for an “uninterrupted continued dialogue” with New Delhi to resolve conflicts and establish “peace and stability” in Afghanistan.

Pakistan’s new Prime Minister, Imran Khan, is a critic of the US war in Afghanistan and particularly opposed to the use of US drones to kill insurgents in Pakistan.

Russia reached out to the Taliban, which accepted an invitation for peace talks in Moscow on Sept. 4 to end the 17-year old war. Three decades ago the Taliban were shooting down Russian helicopters with American-made Stinger missiles.

Turkey and Russia have agreed to increase trade and to seek a political solution to end the war in Syria. Turkey also pledged to ignore

Washington’s sanctions on Russia and Iran. Less than three years ago, Turkish warplanes downed a Russian bomber, Ankara was denouncing Iran, and Turkey was arming and supporting Islamic extremists trying to overthrow the government of Bashar al Assad.

After years of tension in the South China Sea between China and a host of Southeast Asian nations, including Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei, on Aug. 2 Beijing announced a “breakthrough” in talks between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). After years of bluster – including ship-to-ship face-offs – China and ASEAN held joint computer naval games Aug. 2-3. China has also proposed cooperative oil and gas exploration with SEATO members.

The Americans turned a blind eye to India’s violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

Starting with the administration of George W. Bush, the US has tried to lure India into an alliance with Japan and Australia – the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or “quad” – to challenge China in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean. The Americans turned a blind eye to India’s violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and dropped the ban on selling arms to New Delhi. The Pentagon even re-named its Pacific Command, “Indo-Pacific Command” to reflect India’s concerns in the Indian Ocean. The US is



Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India greets China's President Xi Jinping.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

currently training Indian fighter pilots, and this summer held joint naval manoeuvres with Japan and the US – Malabar 18 – in the strategic Malacca Straits.

But following an April Wuhan Summit meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, New Delhi's enthusiasm for the Quad appears to have cooled. New Delhi vetoed Australia joining the Malabar war games.

At June's Shangri-La Dialogue held in Singapore, Modi said "India does not see the Indo-Pacific region as a strategy or as a club of limited members", and pointedly avoided any criticism of China's behaviour in the South China Sea. Given that Indian and Chinese troops have engaged in shoving matches and fistfights with one another in the Doklam border region, Modi's silence on the Chinese military was surprising.

China and India have recently established a military "hot line", and Beijing has cut tariffs on Indian products.

During the SCO meetings, Modi and Xi met

and discussed cooperation on bringing an end to the war in Afghanistan. India, Pakistan and Russia fear that extremism in Afghanistan will spill over their borders, and the three have joined in an effort to shore up the Taliban as a bulwark against the growth of the Islamic State.

There is also a push to build the long-delayed Iran-Pakistan natural gas pipeline that will eventually terminate in energy-starved India.

India signed the SCO's "Qingdao Declaration", which warned that "economic globalisation is confronted with the expansion of unilateral protectionist policies", a statement aimed directly at the Trump administration.

The Modi government also made it clear that New Delhi will not join US sanctions against Iran and will continue to buy gas and oil from Teheran. India's Defence Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman also said that India would ignore US threats to sanction any country doing business with Russia's arms industry.

Even such a staunch ally as Australia is having second thoughts on who it wants to align itself with in the Western Pacific. Australia currently hosts US Marines and the huge US intelligence gathering operation at Pine Gap. But China is Canberra's largest trading partner, and Chinese students and tourists are an important source of income for Australia.

Canberra is currently consumed with arguments over China's influence on Australia's politics, and there is a division in the foreign policy establishment over how closely aligned the Australians should be with Washington, given the uncertain policies of the Trump administration. Some – like defence strategist Hugh White – argue that “Not only is America failing to remain the dominant power, it is failing to retain any substantial strategic role at all”.

White's analysis is an overstatement. The US is the most powerful military force in the region, and the Pacific basin is still Washington's number one trade partner. In the balance of forces, Canberra doesn't count for much. But the debate is an interesting one and a reflection that the Obama administration's “Asia pivot” to ring China with US allies has not exactly been a slam-dunk.

Of course, one can make too much of these re-alignments. There are still tensions between China and India over their borders and competition for the Indian Ocean. Many Indians see the latter as *Mare Nostrum* [Our Sea], and New Delhi is acquiring submarines and surface crafts to control it. However, since some 80 percent of China's energy supplies transit the Indian Ocean, China is busy building up ports in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Djibouti to guard those routes.

India has recently tested a long-range ICBM – the Agni V – that has the capacity to strike China. The Indians claim the missile has a range of 3,000 miles, but the Chinese say it can strike targets 5,000 miles away, thus threatening most of China's population centres. Since Pakistan is already within range of India's medium range missiles, the Agni V could only have been developed to target China.

India is also one of the few countries in the region not to endorse China's immense “One Belt,

One Road” infrastructure initiative to link Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe into a vast trading network.

A number of these diplomatic initiatives and re-alignments could easily fail.

Pakistan and India could fall out over Kashmir, and resolving the Afghanistan situation is the diplomatic equivalent of untying the Gordian Knot. The Taliban accepted the Russian invitation, but the Americans dismissed it. So, too, has the government in Kabul, but that could change, particularly if the Indians push the Afghan government to join the talks. Just the fact that the Taliban agreed to negotiate with Kabul, however, is a breakthrough, and since almost everyone in the region wants this long and terrible war to end, the initiative is hardly a dead letter.

There are other reefs and shoals out there. Turkey and Russia still don't trust each other, and while Iran currently finds itself on the same side as Moscow and Ankara, there is no love lost among any of them. But Iran needs a way to block Trump's sanctions from strangling its economy, and that means shelving its historical suspicions of Turkey and Russia. Both countries say they will not abide by the US sanctions, and the Russians are even considering setting up credit system to bypass using dollars in banking.

The Europeans are already knuckling under to the US sanctions, but the US and the European Union are not the only games in town. Organisations like the SCO, ASEAN, the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), and Latin America's Mercosur are creating independent poles of power and influence, and while the US has enormous military power, it no longer can dictate what other countries decide on things like war and trade.

From what direction on the Compass Rose the winds out of Washington will blow is hardly clear, but increasingly a number of countries are charting a course of their own. **CT**

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LEE CAMP

Wall Street? Just another Ponzi scheme

The stock market is a system where you buy into something and the only way you make money is by convincing someone else to buy it.
If no one does, then you lose everything

MAYBE it makes me unsophisticated, but I don't think about the stock market that much. I know that many say it's the central nervous system of our economy. I know its estimated worth is around \$30-trillion. And I know that when it tanks, the lives of millions of Americans are wrecked, ruined and upended. I know that when that happens, the powerful millionaires (and billionaires) who caused said destruction generally grab their money and their well-coiffed dogs and run for it. (Sometimes our government has to step in to make sure the elites get all of their money and don't have to share in the devastation they've dispensed to the lower classes.)

But in my day-to-day life, I don't think much about the stock market. So maybe I shouldn't care that the entire thing is a gigantic fraud. But I do. I do care. And you should too.

In a few minutes' time you will see that our stock market is a Ponzi scheme. (And unfortunately, it doesn't matter whether you're happy or sad or ambivalent about that fact. It will be true nonetheless.)

When you picture buying stock in a company, what do you picture? You

probably imagine a company like PepsiCo, and you are an investor in that company. You own a tiny piece of it, and because of that, you get a tiny proportion of the profits, which are called "dividends". Well, that's not what a stock is. That's what stocks used to be, but that was back when top hats were worn by non-magicians, and if a lady showed her knees in public, she was considered a floozy who should die alone.

In modern times, you almost never receive the profits of the business. Dividends are rarely paid out, and they don't usually amount to much. Plus, the company is not obligated to pay you anything for your stock – ever.

Don't take it from me, take it from someone much smarter than me. Here's an example about Google from Tan Liu's book *The Ponzi Factor*.

A share of Google can trade around \$900, but Google explicitly states in writing that the par value of their stock is only 0.001-dollars. Google also says that they do not pay their investors any dividends, and their class C shareholders have no voting rights. So, if you own a share of GOOG, you won't receive any money from Google, you won't be allowed to vote on corporate issues, and Google isn't obligated to pay you anything more than 0.001-dollars for that share you bought for \$900.

So this begs the question, "What the hell do you own?" The gut-wrenching answer is nothing. You own nothing. You own a slip of toilet pa-



per that you might be able to convince someone else to pay you for.

Next, if you're feeling cheeky, you might ask, "Then where do the profits come from? If I buy Google at \$20 and sell it for \$220, where did that \$200 come from?" The answer is it came from other investors who were willing to buy the stock. As Tan Liu puts it, "This is actually a negative-sum situation because the underlying company isn't involved in the transaction. The investors are just cannibalising each other for profits, and there are fees attached to every transaction".

Ah, cannibalising each other for profits – now this is starting to sound like an American enterprise! It says it right there on our flag, "America: Cannibalising each other for profits since 1776!"

The money you make from most stocks, if you make money, is coming from other investors pumping new money in. And if there aren't new investors willing to buy your stock, then you're just screwed, standing there with your thumb up your ass (which is an odd expression if it's supposed to mean the person is doing nothing; in fact, it sounds like they're involved in a very significant event).

So, to rehash, this is a system where you buy into something and the only way you make money is by convincing someone else to buy it. If no one does, then you lose everything. Why does that sound familiar? Oh, I know. It's the dictionary definition of a Ponzi scheme.

Again, don't take my word for it. The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) defines a Ponzi scheme as "[a]n investment fraud that involves the payment of purported returns to existing investors from funds contributed by new investors."

The stock market is a Ponzi scheme. A Ponzi scheme is the stock market.

Some may argue that a Ponzi scheme usually involves lying to the investor. But Wall Street has that in spades as well. Most investors don't understand that they own literally nothing. They don't know that they are simply gambling. And they don't know that their profit relies on every-

one still believing the fraud is real.

This means that the only way to get your money back or to profit is to find another person willing to buy it. Now, don't get me wrong. Your argument may be, "This is America – there's always another chump! We are based on a long, time-honoured tradition of never running out of chumps! We're infested with 'em".

That's a fair point, but I don't think you see anyone proudly touting that as the definition of the stock market. I would actually respect the whole system if right on the front of the stock exchange it said, "Put your money into the stock market! The only way you'll make more money is if you find a dolt to buy whatever stocks you just bought. But there are an infinite number of dolts! This gravy train is powered by morons. So you have nothing to worry about."

If it said that on the door of the stock exchange, I would invest.

You buy into something and the only way you make money is by convincing someone else to buy it

But the fact that our stock market is a house of cards built on idiocy, stacked on spider webs, hanging tenuously from the Hindenburg, is actually kind of a big deal. Think about this:

As of Sept. 2017, the NASDAQ and the NY Stock Exchange had a combined value of over \$30-trillion. ... [This] means investors believe they are entitled to \$30-trillion in real money. But there is only \$1.6-trillion of cash circulating in the US economy, and \$3.8-trillion in existence in the entire US economic system.

Only \$3.8-trillion in hard cash, which means the stock market is built mostly on nothing (much like Jared Kushner). And if a fraction of investors wanted their cash at the same time, it would collapse.

Let me just say, I don't have any problem with gambling. If you want to gamble at a casino, then gamble your little heart out. Stay up all night until you're on your last \$2 trying to give a handie to a slot machine in hopes it might pay ya afterwards. Go for it. But the casinos are honest with you. They tell you it's gambling. The front of a ca-

sino doesn't say "Invest your pension in roulette. Do you have a child with a degenerative disease? Then put all your savings on red-32 so that he'll be taken care of after you're gone."

Casino's don't say that. The myth of the stock market does.

And some people may think that if it were truly gambling, that would mean it's not predictable. Yet finance professionals claim they know how to analyse and predict the market. So you put your money in their (greasy) hands, and they help you grow your fortune. Well, multiple tests have been done to see whether the professionals know how to predict the market. Liu referenced one contest that was also covered by Forbes: "[The contest] was between amateur students, finance professionals, and a cat named Orlando, who did all his investing by tossing his favourite toy mouse onto an electronic grid. Orlando, the cat, won the competition".

I repeat: A cat was able to better predict the stock market. And yet, trillions of dollars in pensions and life savings are dumped into stocks by people hoping that whomever they trusted that money to is smarter than a cat.

Yet they aren't. They aren't smarter than the fucking cat.

*Jeff Bezos is now worth
150-billion padoodles of
Amazon stock while his workers
are on food stamps*

What other profession is that true for? Anything from math teacher to maintenance man to tennis player, if you were worse than a cat, they would get rid of the whole profession. (And at some point, someone would say, "Besides, the kitten tennis players draw a far bigger audience anyway".)

But it's true for financial advisers – because the stock market is a Ponzi scheme. It's a racket, a hustle, a con, a fast one, a hose job, a crooked calzone! (I think I made up that last one.)

And yet, in many cities gambling is illegal. They'll send in armed police to break up poker games. You have to get a permit for a raffle. But when a sociopath in Chicago bets your entire

pension and loses, there's no SWAT team, no arrests. Because it's a legalised Ponzi scheme.

By the way, these ideas are not allowed on our corporate media or financial websites. The almighty stock market does not permit even the slightest doubt to creep in. Tan Liu has tried to put his ideas on popular finance blogs and web forums, and they are often either deleted or he's been banned altogether. He's been banned from Quora and from editing Wikipedia. They act like he went on a Scientology website and wrote, "You know Tom Cruise is not an alien messiah. He's just a short weirdo!"

It's tough to overstate the impact this con game has on our world and our lives. For example, when the news came out that North Korea had brokered peace with South Korea, the stocks of the major weapons contractors crashed. Billions of dollars were "lost". That exerts major pressure on powerful people to ensure peace does not happen. This is just one example of how strong the gravity of this Ponzi scheme is.

There are some steps we could take to make the stock market less exploitative. We could stop speaking about stocks as if they're money. You know, stop saying you have \$1,000 of Apple shares and instead say you've got "1,000 padoodles of Apple shares." If you sell them, only then do you have \$1,000.

Step two is to realise that the market economy in general is designed to exploit billions of us while a tiny number get ridiculously rich. It doesn't care about the health or sustainability of our society as it facilitates the extraction of all the wealth and resources by sociopaths. Just ask Jeff Bezos – he's now worth 150-billion padoodles of Amazon stock while his workers are on food stamps.

CT

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Lobby attacks on Corbyn will backfire

Not only is the role of pro-Israel partisans in the UK now visible, but their ugly assumptions are under closer scrutiny than ever before

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BACK in the 1950s, the US intelligence community coined a term: “blowback”. It referred to the unintended consequences of a covert operation that ended up damaging one’s own cause. There are mounting indications that the intensifying campaign by the Israel lobby in the UK against Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the parliamentary opposition, is starting to have precisely such self-harming repercussions.

In the three years since he was elected to lead the Labour party, Corbyn has faced non-stop accusations that his party has an endemic “antisemitism problem”, despite all evidence to the contrary. Of late, Corbyn himself has become the chief target of such allegations.

Last month the *Daily Mail* led a media mauling of Corbyn over disparaging comments he made in 2013 about a small group of pro-Israel zealots who had come to disrupt a Palestinian solidarity meeting. His reference to them as “Zionists”, it was claimed, served as code for “Jews” and was therefore antisemitic.

Mounting evidence in both the UK and the US, where there has been a similar escalation of attacks on pro-Palestinian activists, often related to the international boycott movement (BDS), suggests that the Israeli government is taking a significant, if covert, role in coordinating and directing such efforts to sully the reputation of prominent critics.

Corbyn’s supporters have argued instead that he is being subjected to a campaign of smears to

oust him from the leadership because of his very public championing over many decades of the Palestinian cause.

Al-Jazeera has produced two separate undercover documentary series on Israel lobbyists’ efforts in the UK and US to interfere in each country’s politics – probably in violation of local laws. Only the UK series has been aired so far.

It showed an Israeli embassy official, Shai Masot, both plotting to “take down” a Conservative government minister seen as too sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and helping to create an anti-Corbyn front organisation in the Labour party. Masot worked closely with two key pro-Israel groups in Labour, the Jewish Labour Movement and Labour Friends of Israel. The latter includes some 80 Labour MPs.

Under apparent pressure from the Israel lobby in the US, the series on the US lobby was suppressed.

At the end of August, Alain Gresh, the former editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, published significant quotes from that censored documentary after viewing it secretly in Dubai. The US lobby’s aims and practices, as reported by Gresh, closely echo what has happened in the UK to Corbyn, as he has faced relentless allegations of antisemitism.

The US documentary reportedly shows that Israel’s strategic affairs ministry has taken a leading role in directing the US lobby’s efforts. According to Gresh, senior members of the lobby are caught on camera admitting that they have



Illustration: Jacob Anikulapo, Flickr.com

built up a network of spies to gather information on prominent critics of Israel.

In Gresh's transcribed excerpts, Jacob Baime, executive director of the Israel on Campus Coalition, a group of organisations fighting BDS, states: "When I got here a few years ago, the budget was \$3,000. Today it's like a million and a half [dollars], or more. ... It's a massive budget".

"It's psychological warfare", he adds, noting how the smears damage the targeted groups: "They either shut down, or they spend time investigating [the accusations against them] instead of attacking Israel. It's extremely effective".

David Hazony, a senior member of another lobby group, The Israel Project, explains that a pressing aim is to curb political speech critical of Israel: "What's a bigger problem is the Democratic Party, the Bernie Sanders people, bringing all the anti-Israel people into the Democratic Party. Then being pro-Israel becomes less a bipartisan issue, and then every time the White House changes, the policies towards Israel change. That

becomes a dangerous thing for Israel".

These reported quotes confirm much of what was already suspected. More than a decade ago scholars John Mearsheimer and Steven Walt wrote a book, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy*, examining the composition and role of the powerful pro-Israel lobby in the US. But until the broadcasting of the Al-Jazeera documentary last year no comparable effort had been made to shine a light on the situation in the UK. In fact, there was almost no discussion or even acknowledgment of the role of an Israel lobby in British public and political life.

That is changing rapidly. Through its constant attacks on Corbyn, British activists are looking less like disparate individuals sympathetic to Israel and more recognisably like a US-style lobby – highly organised, on-message and all too ready to throw their weight around.

The lobby was always there, of course. And, as in the US, it embraces a much wider body of support than right-wing Jewish leadership organisations like the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Leadership Council, or hardline lobby-

ists such as the Community Security Trust and BICOM.

That should not surprise us. The earliest Zionists were not Jews but fundamentalist Christians. In the US, the largest group of Zionists by far are Christian evangelicals who believe that the return of Jews to the Promised Land is the key to unlocking the second coming of the Messiah and an apocalyptic end-times. Though embraced by Israel, many of these Christian fundamentalists hold antisemitic views.

Israel's partisans in the UK were caught off-guard by the unexpected rise of Corbyn

In Britain, there is an unacknowledged legacy of antisemitic Christian support for Zionism. Lord Balfour, a devout Christian who regularly voiced bigotry towards Jews, was also the man who committed the British government in 1917 to create a home for Jews in Palestine. That set in motion today's conflict between Israel and the native Palestinian population.

In addition, many British gentiles, like other Europeans, live with understandable guilt about the Holocaust.

One of the largest and most effective groups in Corbyn's parliamentary party is Labour Friends of Israel (LFI), most of whose members are not Jewish. LFI takes some of the party's most senior politicians on all-expenses-paid trips to Israel to wine and dine them as they are subjected to Israeli propaganda.

Dozens of Labour MPs have remained loyal to LFI even as the organisation has repeatedly refused to criticise Israel over undeniable war crimes.

When Israeli snipers executed dozens of unarmed demonstrators in Gaza in May, the LFI took to Twitter to blame Hamas for the deaths, not Israel. After facing a massive backlash online, the LFI simply deleted the tweet.

Historically the Israel lobby could remain relatively low-profile in the UK because it faced few challenges. Its role was chiefly to enforce a political orthodoxy about Israel in line with Britain's role as Washington's foreign policy junior

partner. No British leader looked likely to step far from the Washington consensus.

The Israel lobby in the UK now faces a double whammy. First, since Donald Trump entered the White House, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has dropped any pretence that Israel is willing to concede a Palestinian state, whatever the Palestinians do. Instead, Israel has isolated the Palestinian leadership diplomatically while seeking to terrorise the Palestinian population into absolute submission.

That was all too clear over the summer when those Israeli snipers picked off demonstrators each week in Gaza. As a result, the Israel lobby stands more exposed than ever. It can no longer buy time for Israeli expansionism by credibly claiming, as it once did, that Israel seeks peace.

Second, Israel's partisans in the UK were caught off-guard by the unexpected rise of Corbyn to a place that puts him in sight of being the next prime minister. The use of social media by his supporters, meanwhile, has provided a counter-weight to the vilification campaign being amplified by the British media.

The media have been only too willing to assist in the smearing of the Labour leader because they have their own separate interests in seeing Corbyn gone. He is a threat to the corporate business interests they represent.

But not only has the messenger – the Israel lobby – now come under proper scrutiny for the first time, so has its message. The success of the lobby had depended not only on it remaining largely out of view. It also expected to shore up a largely pro-Israel environment without drawing attention to what was being advocated, beyond unquestioned sound bites. In doing so, it was able to entirely ignore those who had paid the price for Israel's diplomatic impunity – the Palestinians.

The campaign against Corbyn has not only forced the lobby to come out into the open, but the backlash to its campaign has forced the lobby to articulate for the first time what exactly it believes and what is at stake.

The latest furore over Corbyn concerns

JONATHAN COOK

a YouTube video of him speaking at a pro-Palestinian meeting in 2013, two years before he became Labour leader. He has been widely denounced in the media for making disparaging remarks about a small group of hardline pro-Israel partisans well-known for disrupting such meetings.

He referred to them as “Zionists” and suggested that the reaction of this particular hardline group to a speech by the Palestinian ambassador had betrayed their lack of appreciation of “English irony”.

Israel’s lobby, echoed by many liberal journalists, has suggested that Corbyn was using “Zionist” as code word for “Jew”, and that he had implied that all Jews – not the handful of pro-Israel zealots in attendance – lacked traits of Englishness. This, they say, was yet further evidence of his anti-semitism.

Jonathan Sacks, Britain’s former chief rabbi, told the *New Statesman* late in August that Corbyn’s comment was “the most offensive statement made by a senior British politician since Enoch Powell’s 1968 ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech”. In that notorious speech, the right-wing politician sought to incite race hatred of immigrants.

Calling Corbyn an “anti-Semite”, Sacks added: “It undermines the existence of an entire group of British citizens by depicting them as essentially alien”.

In a now familiar pattern to lobby claims, Sacks relied on the false premise that all Jews are Zionists. He conflated a religious or ethnic category with a political ideology. The Labour leader has held his ground on this occasion, pointing out that he was using the term “in the accurate political sense and not as a euphemism for Jewish people”.

Others have noted that his accusers – many of them senior journalists – are the ones lacking a sense of irony. Corbyn was not “otherising” Jews, he was highlighting a paradox not confirming a prejudice: that a small group of Britons were so immersed in their partisan cause, Israel, that it had blinded them to the “English irony” employed by a foreigner, the

Palestinian ambassador.

However, the terms “antisemitism” and “Zionism” are likely to prove more treacherous to weaponise against Corbyn than the lobby thinks. As the antisemitism controversy is constantly reignited, a much clearer picture of the lobby’s implied logic is emerging, as illustrated by the hyperbolic, verging on delusional, language of Rabbi Sacks.

The argument goes something like this:

Israel is the only safe haven for Jews in times of trouble – and the only thing that stands between them and a future Holocaust. The movement that created Israel was the Zionist movement. Today most Jews are Zionists and believe Israel is at the core of their identity. Therefore, if you are too critical of Israel or Zionism, you must wish bad things for the Jewish people. That makes you an anti-Semite.

It probably doesn’t require a logician to understand that there are several highly problematic premises propping up this argument. Let’s concentrate on two. The first is that it depends on a worldview in which the non-Jew is assumed to be antisemite until proven otherwise. For that reason Jews need to be eternally vigilant and distrustful of those outside their “tribe”.

Israel’s core ideology, political Zionism, is premised on the idea of tribal and sectarian exclusivity

If that sounds improbable, it shouldn’t. That is exactly the lesson of the Holocaust taught to children in Israel from kindergarten onwards.

Israel derives no universal message from the Holocaust. Its schools do not teach that we must avoid stigmatising others, and discourage sectarian and tribal indentifications that fuel prejudice and bigotry. How could it? After all, Israel’s core ideology, political Zionism, is premised on the idea of tribal and sectarian exclusivity – the “ingathering of exiles” to create a Jewish state.

In Israel, the Holocaust supplies a different lesson. It teaches that Jews are under permanent threat from non-Jews, and that their only defence is to seek collective protection in a highly militarised state, armed with nuclear weapons.

This idea was encapsulated in the famous saying by the late Israeli general Moshe Dayan: “Israel must be seen as a mad dog; too dangerous to bother”.

Israel’s ugly, self-serving tribal reading of history has been slowly spreading to Jews in Europe and the US. Fifteen years ago, a US scholar, Daniel J Goldhagen, published an influential essay in the Jewish weekly *Forward* titled “The Globalisation of anti-Semitism”. In it, he argued that antisemitism was a virus that could lie dormant for periods but would always find new ways to reinfect its hosts. “Globalized anti-Semitism has become part of the substructure of prejudice in the world”, he wrote. “It is relentlessly international in its focus on Israel at the center of the most conflict-ridden region today”.

This theory is also known as the “new antisemitism”, a form of Jew hatred much harder to identify than the right-wing antisemitism of old. Through mutation, the new antisemitism had concealed its hatred of Jews by appearing to focus on Israel and dressing itself up in left-wing garb.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given his latest comments about Corbyn, that is also an approximation of the argument made by Rabbi Sacks in a 2016 essay in which he writes: “Antisemitism is a virus that survives by mutating”.

In a sign of how this kind of paranoia is becoming slowly normalised in Europe too, the *Guardian* published a commentary by a British journalist last month explaining her decision, Israel-style, to teach her three-year-old daughter about the Holocaust and antisemitism. That, she hoped, would prepare her child for eventualities such as Corbyn becoming prime minister.

But the increasing adoption of Israel’s tribalist doctrine among sections of the British Jewish community – and the related weaponisation of anti-Semitism – is likely to shed further light on what kind of a state hardline Zionists uphold as at the core of their identity.

Paradoxically, the new antisemitism turns the tables by legitimising – in fact, necessitating – Jewish racism towards gentiles. Rather

than Corbyn stigmatising Jews – except in some feverish imaginations – it is the pro-Israel lobby stigmatising non-Jews, by claiming that they are all tainted by Jew hatred, whether they know it or not. The more the lobby kicks up a hysteria about Corbyn’s supposed antisemitism, the clearer it becomes that the lobby regards much of the non-Jewish public as suspect, too.

The other obvious lacuna in the lobby’s logic is that it only works if we completely remove the Palestinians from the story of Zionism and Israel. The idea of a harm-free Zionism might have been credible had it been possible to establish a Jewish state on an empty piece of land, as the early Zionists claimed Palestine to be. In reality there was a large native population which had to be displaced first.

It needed to deny Palestinians inside Israel the same rights as Israeli Jews

Israel’s creation as a Jewish state in 1948 was possible only if the Zionist movement undertook two steps that violate modern conceptions of human rights and liberal democratic practice. First, Israel had to carry out large-scale ethnic cleansing, forcing more than 80 percent of the native Palestinian population outside the new borders of the Jewish state it created on the Palestinians’ homeland.

Then, it needed to deny the small surviving community of Palestinians inside Israel the same rights as Israeli Jews, to ghettoise them and stop them from bringing their expelled relatives back to their homes.

These weren’t poor choices made by flawed Israeli politicians. They were absolutely essential to the success of a Zionist project to create and maintain a Jewish state. The ethnic cleansing of 1948 and the structural racism of the Jewish state were unmentionable topics in “legitimate” public debates about Israel until very recently.

That has been changing, in part because it has become much harder to conceal what kind of state Israel is. Its self-harming behaviour includes its recent decision to make explicit the state’s institutionalised racism with the passage

in July of the Nation-State Basic Law. That law gives constitutional weight to the denial of equal rights to a fifth of Israel's population, those who are Palestinian.

Sacks, it seems, cannot identify apartheid when it is staring him the face

The backlash against Corbyn and other Palestinian solidarity activists is evidence of the lobby's fears that they can no longer hold the line against a growing realisation by western publics that there was a cost to Zionism's success.

That price was paid by Palestinians, and there has yet been no historical reckoning over their suffering. By veiling the historical record, Israel and the Zionist movement have avoided the kind of truth and reconciliation process that led to the ending of apartheid in South Africa. The lobby prefers that Israel's version of apartheid continues.

If there is one individual who personifies the loss of a moral compass in the weaponisation of anti-Semitism against Corbyn and Israel's critics, it is Rabbi Sacks.

Asked by the *New Statesman* what he thinks of the new Nation-State Basic Law, the normally erudite Sacks suddenly becomes lost for words. He asks a friend, or in his case his brother, for the answer: "I'm not an expert on this. My brother is, I'm not. He's a lawyer in Jerusalem. He tells me that there's absolutely nothing apartheid about this, it's just correcting a lacuna... As far as I understand, it's a technical process that has none of the implications that have been levelled at it".

Sacks, it seems, cannot identify apartheid when it is staring him the face, as long as it is disguised as "Jewish". Similarly, he is blind to the history of Zionism and the mass dispossession of Palestinians in the 1948 Nakba.

He tells the *New Statesman*: "Jews did not wish to come back to their land [Palestine] to make any other people [Palestinians] suffer, and that goes very deep in the Jewish heart". Not so deep, it seems, that Sacks can even identify who had to suffer to make possible that Jewish "return".

In a critique of Sacks' lengthy 2016 essay on

antisemitism, a liberal Jewish commentator Peter Beinart noted that the rabbi had mentioned the "Palestinians" by name only once.

He berated Sacks for equating anti-Zionism and antisemitism: "By denying that [Palestinians] might have any reason besides bigotry to dislike Zionism, it denies their historical experience and turns them into mere vessels for Jew-hatred. Thus, it does to Palestinians what antisemitism does to Jews. It dehumanises them".

In a world that was not topsy-turvy, it would be Sacks and the Israel lobby that were being publicly upbraided for their racism. Instead Corbyn is being vilified by a wide spectrum of supposedly informed opinion in the UK – Jewish and non-Jewish alike – for standing in solidarity with Palestinians.

It is, remember, the Palestinian people who have been the victims of more than a century of collusion between European colonialism and Zionism, and today are still being oppressed by an anachronistic ethnic state, Israel, determined to privilege its Jewishness at all costs.

The lobby and its supporters are not just seeking to silence Corbyn. They also intend to silence the Palestinians and the growing ranks of people who choose to stand in solidarity with the Palestinians. But while the lobby may be winning on its own limited terms in harming Corbyn in mainstream discourse, deeper processes are exposing and weakening the lobby. It is overplaying its hand.

A strong lobby is one that is largely invisible, one that – like the financial and arms industries – has no need to flex its muscles. In making so much noise to damage Corbyn, the Israel lobby is also for the first time being forced to bring out into the open the racist premises that always underpinned its arguments.

Over time, that exposure is going to harm, not benefit, the apologists for Israel. **CT**

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GEORGE MONBIOT

Plastic soup

Disposable coffee cups made from new materials are not just a non-solution: they are a perpetuation of the real problem – consumerism

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Do you believe in miracles? If so, please form an orderly queue. Plenty of people imagine we can carry on as we are, as long as we substitute one material for another. Last month, a request to Starbucks and Costa to replace their plastic coffee cups with cups made from corn starch was retweeted 60,000 times, before it was deleted.

Those who supported this call failed to ask themselves where the corn starch would come from, how much land would be needed to grow it, or how much food production it would displace. They overlooked the damage this cultivation would inflict: growing corn (maize) is notorious for causing soil erosion, and often requires heavy doses of pesticides and fertilisers.

The problem is not just plastic: it is mass disposability. Or, to put it another way, the problem is pursuing, on the one planet known to harbour life, a four-planet lifestyle. Regardless of what we consume, the sheer volume of consumption is overwhelming the Earth's living systems.

Don't get me wrong. Our greed for plastic is a major environmental blight, and the campaigns to limit its use are well motivated and sometimes effective. But we cannot address our environmental crisis by swapping one overused resource for another. When I challenged that call, some people

asked me, "So what should we use instead?"

The right question is, "How should we live?" But systemic thinking is an endangered species.

Part of the problem is the source of the plastic campaigns: David Attenborough's *Blue Planet II* TV series. The first six episodes had strong, coherent narratives but the seventh, which sought to explain the threats facing the wonderful creatures the series revealed, darted from one issue to another. We were told we could "do something" about the destruction of ocean life. We were not told what. There was no explanation of why the problems are happening and what forces are responsible, or how they can be engaged.

Amid the general incoherence, one contributor stated: "It comes down, I think, to us each taking responsibility for the personal choices in our everyday lives. That's all any of us can be expected to do". This perfectly represents the mistaken belief that a better form of consumerism will save the planet. The problems we face are structural: a political system captured by commercial interests, and an economic system that seeks endless growth.

Of course we should try to minimise our own impacts, but we



cannot confront these forces merely by “taking responsibility” for what we consume. Unfortunately, these are issues that the BBC in general and David Attenborough in particular avoid. I admire Attenborough in many ways, but I am no fan of his environmentalism. For many years, it was almost undetectable. When he did at last speak out, he avoided challenging power – either speaking in vague terms or focusing on problems for which powerful interests are not responsible. This tendency may explain *Blue Planet’s* skirting of the obvious issues.

The most obvious is the fishing industry, which turns the astonishing life forms the rest of the series depicted into seafood. Throughout the oceans, this industry, driven by our appetites and protected by governments, is causing cascading ecological collapse. Yet the only fishery the programme featured was among the one percent that are in recovery. It was charming to see how Norwegian herring boats seek to avoid killing orcas, but we were given no idea of how unusual it is.

Even marine plastic is in large part a fishing issue. It turns out that 46 percent of the Great Pacific garbage patch – which has come to symbolise our throwaway society – is composed of discarded nets, and much of the rest consists of other kinds of fishing gear. Abandoned fishing materials tend to be far more dangerous to marine life than other forms of waste. As for the bags and bottles contributing to the disaster, the great majority arise in poorer nations without good disposal systems. But because this point was not made, we look to the wrong places for solutions.

From this misdirection arise a thousand perversities. One prominent environmentalist posted a picture of the king prawns she had bought, celebrating the fact that she had persuaded the supermarket to put them in her own container rather than a plastic bag, and linking this to the protection of the seas. But buying prawns causes many times more damage to marine life than any plastic in which they are wrapped. Prawn fishing has the highest rates of bycatch of any

fishery – scooping up vast numbers of turtles and other threatened species. Prawn farming is just as bad, eliminating tracts of mangrove forests, crucial nurseries for thousands of species.

We are kept remarkably ignorant of such issues. As consumers, we are confused, bamboozled and almost powerless – and corporate power has gone to great lengths to persuade us to see ourselves this way. The BBC’s approach to environmental issues is highly partisan, siding with a system that has sought to transfer responsibility for structural forces to individual shoppers. Yet it is only as citizens taking political action that we can promote meaningful change.

The answer to the question “How should we live?” is: “Simply”. But living simply is highly complicated. In Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, the government massacred the Simple Lifers. This is generally unnecessary: today they can safely be marginalised, insulted and dismissed. The ideology of consumption is so prevalent that it has become invisible: it is the plastic soup in which we swim.

One-planet living means not only seeking to reduce our own consumption, but also mobilising against the system that promotes the great tide of junk. This means fighting corporate power, changing political outcomes and challenging the growth-based, world-consuming system we call capitalism.

As last month’s *Hothouse Earth* paper, which warned of the danger of flipping the planet into a new, irreversible climatic state, concluded: “Incremental linear changes ... are not enough to stabilise the Earth system. Widespread, rapid and fundamental transformations will likely be required to reduce the risk of crossing the threshold”.

Disposable coffee cups made from new materials are not just a non-solution: they are a perpetuation of the problem. Defending the planet means changing the world. **CT**

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George Monbiot’s latest book, *How Did We Get Into This Mess?*, is published by Verso. This article was first published in the *Guardian*. Monbiot’s web site is www.monbiot.com

40 years in the media frontline

Britain's Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom fought a long battle against government and media owners. Now it is about to die

THE UK-based media reform group, the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom was launched in September 1979 at the Trades Union Congress in Blackpool and got an immediate and positive response. However, by the end of October 2018, the organisation which sprang to life in the early months of Margaret Thatcher's first government will cease to exist.

The CPBF (originally launched as the Campaign for Press Freedom – Broadcasting was not inserted in the title until 1982) was a unique organisation in that it represented everyone who worked in and cared for the media: trade unionists, people in academic life, and private individuals, all of whom cared about a media that informed people accurately about the world in which we live.

The Thatcher years were, perhaps, the prime years of influence for the CPBF, which faced a hostile prime minister, whose instincts were to curb and control and deregulate the media at the same time as she led an assault on trades unions,

From its vigorous work on the Right of Reply during the 1984-85 miners' strike to the Wapping dispute that finally broke the back of the printers' unions; from the assaults on the BBC over



programmes like Real Lives and the banning of the programme on Zircon (a surveillance system kept under complete wraps) in the BBC's Secret Society Series, we were there in defiance. We showed the banned TV programmes to packed audiences. We got hold of copies of Peter Wright's *Spycatcher*, the memoirs of a UK spook, published in Australia, which Thatcher tried to ban in Britain, and had public readings. And, in a first for the CPBF,

produced a record, *Ballad of a Spycatcher* with Leon Rosselson and Billy Bragg and the Oyster Band.

Then, of course, there was the Broadcasting Ban, introduced by the Tory Home Secretary Douglas Hurd, in October, 1988, and operated until 1994, which we challenged vigorously. We produced a book *Interference On The Airwaves*, with contributions from Liz Curtis and Mike Jempson, documenting all the programmes on Northern Ireland that had been censored, banned or delayed. It was one of a stream of pamphlets and books produced: *Rejoice!* on the media and the Falklands War, *Media Hits the Pits*, on me-

Left: Final issue of Free Press. Below: Cover of Ballad of a Spycatcher.



GRANVILLE WILLIAMS

dia coverage of the 1984-85 miners' strike; *Switching Channels* on broadcasting deregulation; and *Labour Daily?*, making a case for media ownership that represented the working class.

For me, one of the memorable meetings from that time was the one we organised in the Bluecoats, Liverpool, after the Hillsborough disaster on 15 April 1989. (*I've written about this in a previous piece for Coldtype.*) It is to the credit of the CPBF that *Free Press* publicised and challenged the lies and distortions heaped on the Liverpool fans until finally the families whose relatives died there were vindicated.

Before Tony Blair's love affair with Murdoch and the emergence of New Labour, a large number of local Labour Party branches were also affiliated to the CPBF. I went to speak to the Redcar Constituency Labour Party in the North East. Mo Mowlem was the local MP then, and I still vividly remember her dynamic presence at the meeting. When she was briefly given the job of Shadow National Heritage Secretary in 1993 she was initially accessible and receptive to CPBF's media policies. But, by July, 1994 Labour Party media policy was firmly on the trajectory which would lead Tony Blair the following summer to address Murdoch's top brass in Australia and then return to address Labour's 21st Century Communications Conference. One of the speakers at this conference was Sir David English, former *Daily Mail* editor, then chairman and editor-in-chief of Associated Newspapers. The writing was on the wall and,

CRITIQUING THE UK MEDIA: Three of the pamphlets produced by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom during the Thatcher years.



after the 1997 election, we were frozen out of any role in shaping New Labour's media policies.

But we were a determined, tenacious organisation. We produced media manifestoes for general elections which kept alive a body of ideas and policies which stood in marked contrast to those pursued by New Labour. One policy we did support though – the pledge for a Freedom of Information Act, and we worked closely with the Campaign for Freedom of Information to win that one.

One of the core campaigning issues over the last two decades has been media ownership.

We alerted people to the fact that local newspapers were local in name only as groups

like John Press, Newsquest and Trinity Mirror gobbled up local newspaper groups. When the going was good they raked in fabulous profits, but in the last decade we have witnessed the closure of local newspapers and jobs slashed. The result is a serious democratic deficit summed up by a National Union of Journalist leaflet: *Who will ask the questions when we are gone?*

The push by New Labour to deregulate the media was exemplified by their Communications Bill which gave the green light for the end of what had been a diverse range of regional ITV companies to merge into a single ITV company in England and Wales. But resistance to the Bill

GRANVILLE WILLIAMS

was fierce. An important victory by a committee of MPs and Lords, led by Lord Puttnam, was the insertion of a clause in the 2003 Communications Act on the need for a public interest test for changes in media ownership.

It was this clause that allowed us to mobilise twice against the Murdoch empire. In 2010 Murdoch, with full support from the Tories, launched a bid for full control of BSkyB. The bid went down when the phone-hacking crisis engulfed Murdoch in July 2011. We predicted he would be back and again we had to mobilise, working with an impressive coalition of media groups, to oppose the second bid launched in Spring 2017.

Involvement with the CPBF has been a central and liberating part of my life since 1979. I have met some great people, taken part in inspiring conferences and events in Europe and the USA, edited *Free Press* and written books. I was proud to edit the final issue of *Free Press*, but I'm very clear that whilst the CPBF has gone media reform remains a vital campaigning issue. **CT**

Granville Williams edited Free Press from September 1992 to December 2005. His books include Britain's Media: How They Are Related (2nd edition 1996) and Shafted: The Media, the Miners' Strike and the Aftermath (2009)

● Why the CPBF had to close is explained in the final issue at Free Press: www.cpb.org.uk

Amazon's worth \$1-trillion, so why is it robbing taxpayers?

It's like Bonnie and Clyde, but instead of robbing banks, Amazon has enticed city and state officials to rob their own citizens

44

HOW much are you paying Amazon? I don't mean how much you're shelling out for stuff you bought. I mean how much you and your neighbours are simply giving to this uber-rich on-line retailer.

If you live in Indianapolis, Austin, Chicago, Atlanta, or 16 other lucky cities, congratulations! You're a finalist in the "Throw-Your-Money-At-Amazon" Sweepstakes! It's like Bonnie and Clyde, but instead of robbing banks, Amazon has enticed city and state officials to rob their own citizens – then hand over the loot in the form of tax breaks, land, and other bribes to Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon. The locality that offers the most booty "wins" the prize of having this thieving corporate behemoth become its new neighbour.

At least until Bezos gets a better offer.

So, again I ask: How much are your officials offering? Shhhh, that's a secret. Nearly all of the 20 contestant cities won't tell city council members (much less taxpayers) how many billions they're throwing at Bezos. Many cities even turned their

negotiations over to business groups like the Chamber of Commerce, letting this handful of unelected, self-interested, private elites secretly make binding promises that would affect all residents without consulting them.

In the few places that did release information, it's amounted to an unfunny joke. Montgomery County, Maryland, for example, made public a 10-page document listing "incentives" it was offering, but every word on every page was blacked out!

This whole flim-flam is abominable and ought to be criminal. Amazon will rake in a quarter-trillion dollars in sales this year, and Bezos is sitting on \$166 billion in personal wealth. Shame on him for demanding public handouts, and shame on local officials for robbing the public till to further bloat his ego and fortune. **CT**

Jim Hightower, is a radio commentator, writer, and public speaker. He's also editor of the newsletter, The Hightower Lowdown. Distributed by www.otherwords.org

ColdType Insights

- PEPE ESCOBAR
- BRIAN TERRELL
- TREVOR GRUNDY
- ALISON WEIR

The weaponisation of the US dollar

Crashing currency chaos spreads across the global south, writes **Pepe Escobar**

THE Iranian rial: crash.
The Turkish lira: crash.
The Argentine peso:
crash. The Brazilian real:
crash. There are multiple, complex, parallel vectors at play in this wilderness of crashing currencies. Turkey's case is heavily influenced by the bubble of easy credit created by European banks. Argentina's problem is mostly to do with the neoliberal austerity of President Mauricio Macri's government admitting it won't be able to fulfil payment targets agreed with the IMF less than three months ago. Iran's has to do with harsh United States sanctions imposed after the Trump administration's unilateral pullout from the Iran nuclear deal.

This is a serious currency crisis affecting key emerging markets. Three of these – Brazil, Argentina and Turkey – are G20 members, and Iran, absent external pressure, would have everything to qualify as a member. Two – Iran and Turkey – are under US sanctions while the other two, at least for



the moment, are firmly within Washington's orbit.

Now, compare it with currencies that are gaining against the US dollar: the Ukrainian hryvnia, the Georgian lari and the Colombian peso. Not exactly G20 heavyweights – and all of them also inside Washington's influence.

Independent analysts from Russia and Turkey to Brazil and Iran largely agree that the overwhelming factor in the current currency crisis is a reversing of the US Federal Reserve quanti-

tative easing (QE) policy.

As investment banker and risk manager Jim Rickards noted, QE for all practical purposes represented the Fed declaring a currency war against the whole planet – printing US dollars at will on a trillion-dollar scale. That meant mounting US debt was devalued, so foreign creditors were paid back with cheaper US dollars.

Now, the Fed has dramatically reversed course and is all-out invested in quantitative tightening (QT).

No more liquid dollars flooding emerging markets such as Turkey, Brazil, Argentina, Indonesia or India. US interest rates are up. The Fed stopped buying new bonds. The US Treasury is issuing new bond debt. Thus QT, combined with a global, targeted trade war against major emerging markets, spells out the new normal: the weaponisation of the US dollar.

It's no wonder that Russia, China, Turkey, Iran – nearly every major regional player invested in Eurasia integration – is buying gold with the aim of progressively getting out of US dollar hegemony. As JP Morgan himself coined it over a century ago, "Gold is money. All else is credit".

Every currency war though is not about gold; it's about the US dollar. Yet the US dollar now

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is like an inscrutable visitor from outer space, dependent on massive leverage; a galaxy of dodgy derivatives; the QE printing scheme; and gold not being awarded its true importance.

That is about to change. Russia and China are heavily invested in buying gold. Russia has dumped US Treasuries en masse. And what the BRICS had been discussing since the mid-2000s is now in motion; the drive to build alternative payment systems to the US dollar-subordinated SWIFT.

Germany appears to be coming around to the idea. If that does happen, it could possibly lead the way towards Europe redefining itself geopolitically in terms of its military and strategic independence.

46 When and if that happens, arguably at some point in the next decade, US foreign policy configured as an avalanche of sanctions may be effectively neutralised.

It will be a long, protracted affair – but some elements are already visible, as in China using US trading markets to help the emergence of a wider platform transference. After all key emerging markets cannot wiggle out of the US dollar system without full yuan convertibility.

And then there are nations contemplating the creation of their own cryptocurrencies. Digital finance is the way to go.

Some nations, for instance, could use a cryptocurrency denominated in SDRs (special drawing rights) – which is, in practice, the world money as

designated by the IMF. They could back their new digital coins with gold.

Mired-in-crisis Venezuela is at least showing the way. The “sovereign bolivar” has just started circulating – pegged to a new cryptocurrency, the petro, worth 3,600 sovereign bolivars.

The new cryptocurrency is already posing a fascinating question: “Is the petro a forward sale of oil or an external debt backed by oil?” After all, BRICS members are buying a large chunk of the 100-million petros – confident that they are backed by a surefire reserve, the Ayacucho block of the Orinoco Oil Belt.

Venezuelan economist Tony Boza nailed it when he stressed the peg between the petro and international oil prices: “We are not going to be subject to the value of our currency being determined by a website, the oil market will determine it.”

And that brings us to the key question of the US economic war on Iran. Persian Gulf traders are virtually unanimous: the global oil market is tightening, fast, and it will run short in the next two months.

Iran oil exports will likely drop to just over two-million barrels a day in August. Compare it to a peak of 3.1-million barrels a day in April.

It looks like a lot of players are folding even before Trump’s oil sanctions kick in.

It also looks like the mood in Tehran is “we will survive”, but it’s not exactly clear the Iranian

leadership is really aware of the nature of the incoming tempest.

The latest Oxford Economics report seems pretty realistic: “We expect the sanctions to tip the economy back into recession, with GDP now seen contracting by 3.7 percent in 2019, the worst economic performance in six years. For 2020, we see growth of 0.5 percent, driven by a modest recovery in private consumption and net exports”.

The authors of the report, Mohamed Bardastani and Maya Senussi, say “the other signatories to the original deal [the JCPOA, especially the EU-3] have yet to spell out a clear strategy that would allow them to circumvent US sanctions and continue importing Iranian oil”.

The report also admits the obvious: there will be no internal push in Iran for regime change (that’s a thing only happening in warped US neocon minds) while “both reformers and conservatives are united in defying the sanctions”.

But defying how? Tehran has not come up with a win-win roadmap capable of being sold to anyone – from JCPOA members to energy importers such as Japan, South Korea and Turkey. That would represent true Eurasia integration. Just having Ayatollah Khamenei saying Iran is ready to pull out of the JCPOA is not good enough.

What about a Persian cryptocurrency? **CT**

Pepe Escobar is correspondent-at-large at *Asia Times*. His latest book is *2030*.



A young survivor of August 9 Saudi-led attack on his school bus, with fragment of US made missile. Photo: Ahmad Alghobarya.

Catholic support for war: more child abuse

For too long, the Church has abetted the abuse, exploitation and murder of children, writes **Brian Terrell**

ON August 14, a report from a grand jury investigation in Pennsylvania identified 300 Catholic priests across the state who had sexually abused more than 1,000 children.

“Priests were raping little boys and girls, and the men of God who were responsible for them not only did nothing; they hid it all. For decades”, the grand jury wrote in one of the

broadest inquiries into church sex abuse in US history.

Five days earlier, on August 9, in northern Yemen, a Saudi-led coalition airstrike hit a school bus with a missile made by Lockheed Martin and supplied to the Saudis by the US government and 44 children were killed. Just as the horror of abuse of children by priests goes beyond the scope of the report from Pennsylvania, the

children traumatised and killed by the US military and its proxies globally number far more than those 44. Only one of these events sparked a crisis and soul-searching both in and out of the Catholic Church, but they both should have.

Some Catholic activists for peace and justice have long lived in a state of crisis with our church and have recognised the scandal of “men of God” who bless and cover for the abuse and murder of innocents through war, economic injustice and institutional racism.

“Over and over again in history the Church has become so corrupt it just cries out to heaven for vengeance”, Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement said in a 1970 interview. “The crisis is something terrific”, she said then, before the problem of sexual abuse of the young was well known. This crisis, she said, was “a result of the corruption in the institutional Church, through money and through their acceptance of the lousy, rotten system”.

A radical even before she became a Catholic in 1927 (“I have said, sometimes flippantly, that the mass of bourgeois smug Christians who denied Christ in His poor made me turn to the Communists, and it was the Communists and working with them that made me turn to God...”) Dorothy never had the “honeymoon” of blind love enjoyed by many new converts and was always conscious of the Church’s flaws and failings. “I was just as much against capi-

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talism and imperialism as ever, and here I was going over to the opposition, because of course the Church was lined up with property, with the wealthy, with the state, with capitalism, with all the forces of reaction”, she wrote in her autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*. “This I had been taught to think and this I still think to a great extent”.

Even as a new convert, Dorothy deplored “the scandal of businesslike priests, of collective wealth, the lack of a sense of responsibility for the poor, the worker, the Negro, the Mexican, the Filipino, and even the oppression of these, and the consenting to the oppression of them by our industrialist-capitalist order – these made me feel often that priests were more like Cain than Abel. ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’ they seemed to say in respect to the social order... There was plenty of charity but too little justice. ‘The worst enemies would be those of our own household’, Christ had warned us”.

While the use of the word “scandal” to describe the Catholic Church is new and painful for many contemporary Catholics, it was constituent to Dorothy Day’s vocabulary: “I loved the Church for Christ made visible, not for itself, because it was so often a scandal to me”, she said. More than once she applied Jesus’s caution that our enemies are “of our own household” to priests and bishops. She confessed that it was these “enemies”, not the Viet Cong, not even the industrial war

profiteers and generals, that she found the hardest to love and to forgive as Jesus bade her.

In a 1967 column entitled “In Peace Is My Bitterness Most Bitter” Dorothy wrote about Cardinal Spellman and his support for the war in Vietnam: “But what words are those he spoke – going against even the Pope, calling for victory, total victory? Words are as strong and powerful as bombs, as napalm” ... “I can sit in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament and wrestle for that peace in the bitterness of my soul, a bitterness which many Catholics throughout the world feel, and I can find many things in Scripture to console me, to change my heart from hatred to love of enemy”.

In 2002, after growing awareness of clerical abuse of children and 22 years after Dorothy Day’s death, the priest/activist Father John Dear decried the scandal of the Church’s support of the war in Afghanistan: “Last November, nearly all the US Catholic bishops voted to bless and support the bombing and mass murder of the people of Afghanistan. We know that some 4,000 civilians were killed during the first two months of that US war. Hundreds of children were killed by the United States, and the Catholic bishops condoned their murder”. John Dear stated what should be obvious: “Talk about child abuse! The Church cannot condemn child abuse by paedophiles and yet bless the government’s murder of children in its

wars, if it wants to be consistent and faithful to Christ”.

Many Catholics are now struggling with the question, “How can I remain in this abusive Church?” In her meditation on Cardinal Spellman, Dorothy Day asked “as to the Church, where else shall we go, except to the Bride of Christ, one flesh with Christ? Though she is a harlot at times, she is our Mother”. Dorothy often quoted theologian Romano Guardini, who said “the Church is the Cross on which Christ is always crucified. One cannot separate Christ from his bloody, painful Church. One must live in a state of permanent dissatisfaction with the Church”.

Long time peacemaker and resister, Father Daniel Berrigan once said “I don’t know a more irreligious attitude, one more utterly bankrupt of any human content, than one which permits children to be destroyed”. In a situation like the present, satisfaction with the Church and its institutions is unnatural, sinful, even, and to view the suffering of children without scandal is inhuman. For too long, the Church has abetted the abuse, exploitation and murder of children. I pray that the rising outrage in the Church over the exploitation of children, and the resolve to protect them, will encompass also the children who are victims of war. **CT**

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Will South Africa go same route as Zimbabwe?

Whites fear South Africa will be a hungry continent's next farming basket-case, writes Trevor Grundy

THAT men do not learn much from the lessons of history is the most important lesson of history, wrote Aldous Huxley, the author of *Brave New World*.

So, listen up, Cyril Ramaphosa, current leader of what the world once hailed as Brave New South Africa, where most white farmers fear that he's sending his country down the same road that destroyed his once food self-sufficient neighbour, Zimbabwe.

On July 31, Ramaphosa confirmed that the African National Congress (ANC) plans to pass an amendment to the SA Constitution allowing the seizure of land without compensation.

Ramaphosa says he means to clarify Section 25 of the existing constitution – hailed in 1996 as one of the most freedom-giving constitutions in the world. Ramaphosa claims the new amendment is designed to “outline more clearly” the conditions under which the state can expropriate land without paying compensation. In other words, the ANC is changing the “just and equitable” compensation clause to mean “no compensation” if that's necessary. The big question is: Why has so little been done during 24 years of ANC power since independence?



SA President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Photo: Wikimedia

History is partly to blame. The 1913 Native Lands Act declared that almost 90 percent of all South Africa's best arable land should remain in the hands of whites forever. (This act was also the template for the Southern Rhodesia Land Apportionment Act of 1930, which was approved without debate by the British government of the time.)

For almost a quarter of a century after coming to power, the ruling ANC sat on its hands and did next to nothing about changing land ownership. In 2018, whites still own about 72 percent of the best land, while four percent is owned by black South Africans, and the rest is unusable or devoted to wildlife.

The overall population of the

country is nine percent white and 76 percent black, with the rest comprising small ethnic groups of Asians and people of mixed race.

Most white farmers agree there's a need to change the ratio when it comes to land ownership, but they say those who will take over the farms must be trained before they do so. They also say the fat cats in the ANC fear being overthrown by militants in Julius Malema's small but increasingly volatile Economic Freedom Front (EFF) which wants total nationalisation without compensation right now, not at some distant point in the future.

At the Lancaster House Conference in London at the end of 1979, Robert Mugabe wanted the same terms, and walked out because he couldn't tolerate British insistence that land could only be transferred in the new country on a willing seller/ willing buyer basis up until 1990 – a ten year grace period. He was reeled back in by Mozambique's Samora Machel.

The result was that, between 1980 and the middle of the 1990s, white farmers in Zimbabwe saw themselves as untouchable. It was only when war veterans turned against the ruling Zanu (PF) for neglecting their pensions and enriching themselves and their cronies, that Mugabe acted.

Whites were threatened and landless peasants and veteran freedom fighters occupied farms

which had been in the hands of white settlers since the arrival of Cecil Rhodes' Pioneer Column in 1890. Twelve white farmers were killed in scenes of incredible violence. Mugabe then became the de facto leader of the campaign to rid the country of white landowners by cleverly diverting African anger against him towards white landowners. Chaos followed, although Mugabe survived another 17 years, ruining farming and bankrupting his country in the process.

Zimbabwe's economy is acknowledged as a wreck. The fear among many – blacks as well as whites – is that South Africa will go the same way. Already, some white farmers say 'enough is enough and plan to leave South Africa for more hospitable places.

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Recently, a delegation of 30 white South African farming families tuned up in Russia's

Stravropol region, where they told a correspondent from the state-owned TV channel Rossiya 1 that they now live in fear of their lives. In Russia there are 43-million hectares of unused farmland, the climate is temperate, and the Putin government has started to give free land to citizens to cultivate farming.

White farmers leaving their homeland to set up elsewhere is not new. At the turn of the century, many white farming families from Zimbabwe moved to Zambia, Mozambique, Australia, New Zealand, Nigeria and other parts of Africa, and continue to do well in their new homes.

Perhaps Cyril Ramaphosa should take another look at that quote by Aldous Huxley. **CT**

Trevor Grundy worked as a journalist in Central, Eastern and Southern Africa from 1966-1996.

arsenal”.

Israel is the only nuclear power in the Middle East.

The country is reported to have between 100 and 400 nuclear weapons. While Israel has never officially admitted this fact, Israeli leaders periodically threaten their use. In 1973, when Israel was losing what it calls the Yom Kippur War, Defence Minister Moshe Dayan came close to using nuclear weapons, until US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger engineered a massive airlift of US weaponry to Israel, the largest airlift in US history.

During his speech, at Israel's notorious Dimona nuclear facility, Netanyahu said: “I am not spouting slogans. I am describing a persistent, clear and determined policy. This is our policy. It is backed by appropriate deployment, equipment, preparedness and – in the hour of need – appropriate orders”.

Netanyahu added, “In the Middle East, and in many parts of the world, there is a simple truth: There is no place for the weak. The weak crumble, are slaughtered and are erased from history while the strong, for good or for ill, survive”. The way to peace, he said, was for Israel to be strong.

While Netanyahu said Israel has “many enemies”, the speech particularly focused on Iran. Netanyahu said that Israel is “working against Iran establishing a permanent military presence in Syria”.

Netanyahu's 'veiled threat' of nuclear attack

PM used visit to an Israeli atomic reactor to warn that Israel has the means to destroy enemies, writes **Alison Weir**

SPEAKING at Israel's main nuclear weapons facility on August 29, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced: “Our enemies know very well what Israel is capable of doing. They are familiar with our policy. Whoever tries to hurt

us – we hurt them”.

Reuters reported that Netanyahu “used a visit to a secretive Israeli atomic reactor on Wednesday to warn the country's enemies that it has the means to destroy them, in what appeared to be a veiled reference to its assumed nuclear

“We will not relent in pursuit of this goal”, said Netanyahu, ” just as we did not relent in bringing about the cancellation of the bad nuclear agreement with Iran, a goal which was seen as impossible when I put it on the international agenda for the first time several years ago”.

On May 8th, President Trump pulled out of the Iran agreement, a move promoted by Israel partisans in and out of his administration. Unlike Israel, Iran has no nuclear weapons. And, despite oft-repeated claims by Netanyahu, US politicians, and many in the American media, US intelligence agencies and others have concluded that Iran is not working to acquire them. Iran, unlike Israel, is a signatory to the non-proliferation agreement.

The 1976 Symington and Glenn Amendments to the Foreign Assistance Act prohibit US aid from being given to countries that have not signed the nuclear non-proliferation agreement. Senator Stuart Symington, who had earlier been Secretary of the Air Force, explained: “In effect, this amendment says to other nations, if you wish to take the dangerous and costly steps necessary to achieve a nuclear weapons option, you cannot expect the United States to help underwrite that effort



able in 1986 when the London Times published information from Israeli whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu, who was kidnapped by Israel and imprisoned for 18 years, 12 of them in solitary detention.

The following year, a Pentagon report also documented the

indirectly or directly”.

US governmental agencies had long suspected Israel of having a nuclear programme, despite Israel’s lying about it to the US. In 1961, an infuriated US Senator exploded at a secret session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: “I think the Israelis have just lied to us like horse thieves on this thing. They have completely distorted, misrepresented and falsified the facts in the past. I think it is very serious, for things that we have done for them to have them perform in this manner in connection with this very definite production reactor facility [meaning it was specifically designed to produce plutonium] which they have been secretly building, and which they have consistently, and with a completely straight face, denied to us they were building”.

Public evidence of Israeli weapons finally became avail-

Israeli nuclear weapons programme.

Despite that fact, US aid to Israel has continued. According to the think tank Research: Middle East Policy, Israel has so far received approximately \$234-billion in illegal aid, while a package to give Israel another \$38-billion over the next ten years is currently before Congress, the largest such aid package in US history. So far, US media have failed to tell Americans about the legislation.

Aid to Israel is also illegal under the Leahy Laws, which prohibit US aid to countries guilty of human rights violations. **CT**

Alison Weir is executive director of If Americans Knew, president of the Council for the National Interest, and author of Against Our Better Judgment: The Hidden History of How the US Was Used to Create Israel. This article was first published at www.ifamericaknew.org

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