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Mid-December 2019

THE UK GENERAL ELECTION **X** 16-PAGE SPECIAL REPORT

Hope, illusion,
betrayal,
tragedy
and despair

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The corporate party Johnson's victory has unleashed is going to lead, sooner or later, to a truly terrifying hangover - now we must head to the streets to reclaim the public space, writes **Jonathan Cook**

Corbyn's defeat has slain the UK Left's last illusion

THIS was an election of two illusions.

The first helped persuade much of the British public to vote for the very epitome of an Eton toff, a man who not only has shown utter contempt for most of those who voted for him but has spent a lifetime barely bothering to conceal that contempt. For him, politics is an ego-trip, a game in which others always pay the price and suffer, a job he is entitled to through birth and superior breeding.

The extent to which such illusions now dominate our political life was highlighted two days ago with a jaw-dropping comment from a Grimsby fish market worker. He said he would vote Tory for the first time because "Boris seems like a normal working class guy."

Johnson is precisely as working class, and "normal", as the billionaire-owned *Sun* and the billionaire-owned *Mail*. The *Sun* isn't produced by a bunch of working-class lads down the pub having a laugh, nor is the

Mail produced by conscientious middle managers keen to uphold "British values" and a sense of fair play and decency. Like the rest of the British media, these outlets are machines, owned by globe-spanning corporations that sell us the illusions - carefully packaged and marketed to our sectoral interest - needed to make sure nothing impedes the corporate world's ability to make enormous profits at our, and the planet's, expense.

The *Sun*, *Mail*, *Telegraph*, *Guardian* and BBC have all worked hard to create for themselves "personalities". They brand themselves as different - as friends we, the public might, or might not, choose to invite into our homes - to win the largest share possible of the UK audience, to capture every section of the public as news consumers, while feeding us a distorted, fairytale version of reality that is optimal for business. They are no different to other corporations in that regard.

Supermarkets like Tesco,

Sainsbury, Lidl and Waitrose similarly brand themselves to appeal to different sections of the public. But all these supermarkets are driven by the same pathological need to make profits at all costs. If Sainsbury's sells fair trade tea as well as traditionally produced tea, it is not because it cares more than Lidl about the treatment of workers and damage to the environment but because it knows its section of consumers care more about such issues. And as long as it makes the same profits on good and bad tea, why should it not cater to its share of the market in the name of choice and freedom?

The media are different from supermarkets in one way, however. They are not driven simply by profit. In fact, many media outlets struggle to make money. They are better seen as the loss-leader promotion in a supermarket, or as a business write-off against tax.

The media's job is to serve as the propaganda arm of big business. Even if the *Sun* makes an



CELEBRATION: Johnson prepares to make victory speech after crushing Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party.

economic loss, it has succeeded if it gets the business candidate elected, the candidate who will keep corporation tax, capital gains tax and all the other taxes as low as possible without stoking a popular insurrection.

The media are there to support the candidate or candidates who agree to sell off more and more public services for short-term profit, allowing the corporate vultures to pick hungrily at their carcasses. They are there to back the candidate who will prioritise the corporations' interests over the public's, quick profits over the future of the NHS, the self-destructive logic of capitalism over the idea – socialist or not – of a public realm, of the common good. The corporations behind the *Sun* or the *Guardian* can afford to make a loss as long as their other business interests are prospering.

It's not the *Sun* wot won it,

it's the entire corporate media industry.

The real revelation at this election, however, has been the BBC, the most well concealed of all those illusion-generating machines. The BBC is a state broadcaster that has long used its entertainment division – from costume dramas to wild-life documentaries – to charm us and ensure the vast majority of the public are only too happy to invite it into their homes. The BBC's lack of adverts, the apparent absence of a grubby, commercial imperative, has been important in persuading us of the myth that the British Broadcasting Corporation is driven by a higher purpose, that it is a national treasure, that it is on our side.

But the BBC always was the propaganda arm of the state, of the British establishment. Once, briefly, in the more politi-

cally divided times of my youth, the state's interests were contested. There were intermittent Labour governments trying to represent workers' interests and powerful trade unions that the British establishment dared not alienate too strongly. Then, countervailing popular interests could not be discounted entirely. The BBC did its best to look as if it was being even-handed, even if it wasn't really. It played by the rules for fear of the backlash if it did not.

All that has changed, as this election exposed more starkly than ever before.

The reality is that the corporate class – the 0.001 percent – has been in control of our political life uninterrupted for 40 years. As in the United States, the corporations captured our political and economic systems so successfully that for most of that time we ended up with a choice between two parties of capital only: the Conservative

party and New Labour.

The corporations used that unbroken rule to shore up their power. Public utilities were sold off, the building societies became corporate banks, the financial industries were deregulated to make profit the only measure of value, and the NHS was slowly cannibalised. The BBC, too, was affected. Successive governments more openly threatened its income from the licence fee. Union representation, as elsewhere, was eroded and layoffs became much easier as new technology was introduced. The BBC's managers were drawn ever more narrowly from the world of big business. And its news editors were increasingly interchangeable with the news editors of the billionaire-owned print media.

To take one of many current examples, Sarah Sands, editor of the key Radio 4 Today programme, spent her earlier career at the Boris Johnson-cheerleading *Mail* and *Telegraph* newspapers.

In this election, the BBC cast off its public-service skin to reveal the corporate Terminator-style automaton below. It was shocking to behold even to a veteran media critic like myself. This restyled BBC, carefully constructed over the past four decades, shows how the patrician British establishment of my youth – bad as it was – has gone.

Now the BBC is a mirror of what our hollowed-out society looks like. It is no longer there to hold together British society,

We stopped caring about a society that Margaret Thatcher had told us didn't exist anyway

to forge shared values, to find common ground between the business community and the trade unions, to create a sense – even if falsely – of mutual interest between the rich and the workers. No, it is there to ringfence turbo-charged neo-liberal capitalism, it is there to cannibalise what's left of British society, and ultimately, as we may soon find out, it is there to generate civil war.

The second illusion was held by the left. We clung to a dream, like a life-raft, that we still had a public space; that, however awful our electoral system was, however biased the red-tops were, we lived in a democracy where real, meaningful change was still possible; that the system wasn't rigged to stop someone like Jeremy Corbyn from ever reaching power.

That illusion rested on a lot of false assumptions. That the BBC was still the institution of our youth, that it would play reasonably fair when it came to election time, giving Corbyn a level playing field with Johnson for the final few weeks of the campaign. That social media – despite the relentless efforts of these new media corporations

to skew their algorithms to trap us in our own little echo chambers – would act as a counterweight to the traditional media.

But most importantly, we turned a blind eye to the social changes that 40 years of an unchallenged corporate-sponsored Thatcherism had wreaked on our imaginations, on our ideological lives, on our capacity for compassion.

As public institutions were broken apart and sold off, the public realm shrank dramatically, as did our moral horizons. We stopped caring about a society that Margaret Thatcher had told us didn't exist anyway.

Large sections of the older generations profited from the sell-off of the public realm, and policies that flagrantly disregarded the planet's future. They were persuaded that this model of short-term profit, of slash-and-burn economics from which they had personally benefited, was not only sustainable but that it was the only possible, the only good model.

The younger generations have never known any other reality. The profit motive, instant gratification, consumer indulgence are the only yardsticks they have ever been offered to measure value. A growing number have started to understand this is a sick ideology, that we live in an insane, deeply corrupted society, but they struggle to imagine another world, one they have no experience of.

How can they contemplate what the working class achieved decades ago – how a much poor-

er society created medical care for all, an NHS that our current one is a pale shadow of – when that history, that story of struggle is rarely told, and when it is it is told only through the distorted prism of the billionaire-owned media?

We on the left didn't lose this election. We lost our last illusions. The system is rigged – as it always has been – to benefit those in power. It will never willingly allow a real socialist, or any politician deeply committed to the health of our societies and to the planet, to take that power away from the corporate class. That, after all, is the very definition of power. That is what the corporate media is there to achieve.

This is not about being a bad loser, or a case of sour grapes.

In the extraordinary circumstances that Corbyn had overcome these institutional obstacles, all the smears, and won, I planned to write a different post – and it would not have been celebratory. It would not have gloated, as Johnson's supporters and Corbyn's opponents in the Conservative party, large sections of the Labour parliamentary party, and the rightwing and liberal media are doing.

I'd have been warning that the real battle for power was only just beginning. That however bad the past four years had been, we had seen nothing yet. That those generals who threatened a mutiny as soon as Corbyn was elected Labour leader

The corporate party Johnson's victory has unleashed is going to lead, sooner or later, to a truly terrifying hangover

were still there in the shadows. That the media would not give up on their disinformation, they would intensify it. That the security services that have been trying to portray Corbyn as a Russian spy would move from insinuation into more explicit action.

Nonetheless, we have the future on our side, dark as it may be. The planet isn't going to heal itself with Johnson, Donald Trump and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro in charge. It's going to get a lot sicker, a lot quicker. Our economy isn't going to become more productive, or more stable, after Brexit. Britain's economic fate is going to be tied even more tightly to the United States', as resources run out and environmental and climate catastrophes (storms, rising sea levels, flooding, droughts, crop failures, energy shortages) mount. The contradictions between endless growth and a planet with finite resources will become even starker, the crashes of 2008 more familiar.

The corporate party Johnson's victory has unleashed is going to lead, sooner or later, to a truly terrifying hangover.

The likelihood is that the Blairites will exploit this defeat

to drag Labour back to being a party of neoliberal capital. We will once again be offered a "choice" between the blue and the red Tory parties. If they succeed, Labour's mass membership will desert the party, and it will become once again an irrelevance, a hollow shell of a workers' party, as empty ideologically and spiritually as it was until Corbyn sought to reinvent it.

It may be a good thing if this coup happens quickly rather than being dragged out over years, keeping us trapped longer in the illusion that we can fix the system using the tools the corporate class offers us.

We must head to the streets – as we have done before with Occupy, with Extinction Rebellion, with the schools strikes – to reclaim the public space, to reinvent and rediscover it. Society didn't cease to exist. It wasn't snuffed out by Thatcher. We just forgot what it looked like, that we are human, not machines. We forgot that we are all part of society, that we are precisely what it is.

Now is the time to put away childish things, and take the future back into our hands. **CT**

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The reluctance of senior British journalists to accept their failures has put us all in greater jeopardy. The election result will probably just embolden them, writes **Callum Alexander Scott**

Journalists have betrayed the ideals of Fourth Estate

HOW unpleasant it has been to observe senior establishment journalists sit cosily alongside senior centrist and right-wing politicians and commentators, all agreeing on a single issue: Jeremy Corbyn and Labour's policies have led us to this point. Moreover, what indifference – even admiration – many of them seemed to display for the disturbing majority won by one of the most callous, deceitful and self-centred prime ministers the UK has had in living memory.

As the data emerges, there will be comprehensive analyses of what went wrong for Labour over the coming weeks (hint: Brexit will be a key factor), but at this moment it is worth highlighting something else, something arguably more important, because it cuts right to the heart of our so-called democracy: senior British journalists, across press and broadcasting, have failed the electorate, and their refusal to admit it and reform is putting us all in

greater jeopardy.

No matter that the British public overwhelming supports Labour's policies. And I'm not just talking about how establishment journalists have systematically delegitimised Corbyn and his party for the past four years, or how they've accommodated a coordinated effort by the UK military and intelligence establishment to undermine him. I'm talking about their increasing subordination to, and amalgamation with, the political establishment, which this election has been a textbook example of. Let's recap.

Dog doesn't eat dog, wrote the award-winning journalist Nick Davies in his 2009 book *Flat Earth News*. He was referring to journalists scrutinising other journalists. It has "always been the rule in Fleet Street", he explained, that "we dig wherever we like – but not in our own back garden".

This rule was jettisoned

back in October when veteran journalist Peter Osborne broke ranks (not for the first time) to criticise his colleagues' conduct: "From the *Mail*, the *Times* to the BBC and ITN, everyone is peddling Downing Street's lies and smears", he boldly proclaimed. As he explained to a visibly uncomfortable and defensive Krishnan Guru-Murthy on Channel 4 News, senior British journalists have allowed themselves to be "gamed, to be managed [and] to be manipulated" by their Downing Street sources to pass on "smears, lies [and] fake news" to the public. Their callousness is "debauching British political discourse", he added.

A day earlier, in an article for *openDemocracy*, Osborne had outlined multiple examples of senior British journalists uncritically publishing information that their anonymous Downing Street sources had told them – all of which later turned out to be untrue. Journalists and their news organisations, he wrote, are operating

as a “subsidiary part of the government machine [...] turning their readers and viewers into dupes”.

Particularly brave was his naming of the negligent journalists and the organisations they worked for, including his own employer the *Daily Mail* (unsurprisingly, it was soon revealed that he would not renew his contract with the newspaper). For the first time in a while, dog had very publicly eaten dog.

For those unfamiliar with Osborne, he is not your typical media-bashing leftie. He has a long and distinguished career working as a political journalist at various conservative-leaning publications.

Admired by colleagues, he’s been described as a freethinker and a maverick who “does not share any paper’s, editor’s or [...] publisher’s agenda”, and he had previously resigned from the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Telegraph* on matters of principle.

In a more recent article for the *Guardian*, he described himself as someone who has “voted Conservative pretty well all my life”, yet in his three decades of political reporting has “never encountered a senior British politician who lies and fabricates so regularly, so shamelessly and so systematically” as Boris Johnson. The media, he said, have been letting Johnson get away with it (he has even compiled a dossier of the prime minister’s lies and



UNRELENTING ASSAULT:
Vicious attacks on Jeremy Corbyn from the *Sun* and *Daily Mail*.

distortions).

As interesting and important as Osborne’s intervention was, however, perhaps more interesting – and even more revealing – were the reactions of some of his fellow journalists. Those whom he named retreated into self-preservation, defending their failures rather than simply apologising for them and pledging to do better.

The hostility toward him was palpable. A key moment came when he was interviewed by journalist Amol Rajan on BBC Radio 2. Live on air, as Osborne named leading journalists who he said operated as mouthpieces for power, Rajan defensively interjected: “I think that’s out of order.” When the exchange intensified, Osborne accused Rajan of sucking up to power and engaging in “client” and “crony” journalism: “It’s time this system was exploded,” he emphatically declared.

The situation was reminiscent of an occasion back in 2018, when journalist and activist Owen Jones claimed that British journalism is afflicted by a “suffocating groupthink” and is “intolerant of critics”. His claim caused outrage among many of his colleagues, who, seemingly unaware that they were proving his point, collectively berated him via Twitter. “Never has a single tweet caused such consternation among the British commentariat”, wrote journalist Ian Sinclair.

This reluctance to accept

criticism and admit what is obvious should, by now, have mortally damaged the already tarnished reputations of these journalists. In the final weeks of the election campaign yet more criticism emerged, as the press regulator IPSO ruled that the *Mail on Sunday* had falsely claimed that Labour was planning to scrap a tax exemption on homeowners.

In addition, few media outlets reported how a detailed study by a non-partisan group of advertising professionals found that 88 percent of the Conservative Party's most widely promoted campaign ads were either misleading or lying. They also found hundreds of Lib Dem ads to be at fault. The number of Labour Party ads they found to be misleading or lying? Zero. How much of the electorate was actually made aware of this?

The 2019 general election is likely to go down in history as a textbook example of when a media system failed to uphold its democratic ideal. We already know from comprehensive academic research undertaken by Loughborough University that coverage of the Labour Party across the press was overwhelmingly negative. The Conservatives, on the other hand, received consistently positive coverage.

Of course, this was to be expected from a majority right-wing press owned by billionaires. But even broadcast media, which is obligated by law to be impartial during elections, fell short of its standards,

The BBC, with its fabled commitment to accuracy and impartiality, was twice forced to apologise for painting Johnson in a positive light

as research by academic Justin Schlosberg has shown. Moreover, the BBC, with its fabled commitment to accuracy and impartiality, was twice forced to apologise for painting Johnson in a positive light – it has enabled Johnson to get away with a “tsunami” of lies and has been “behaving in a way that favours the Tories”, wrote Osborne.

And what was the BBC's response to the criticism? In an article for the *Guardian*, the corporation's director of news and current affairs, Fran Unsworth, simply denied that there were any problems with its reporting. She brushed the criticism off as just a “couple of editorial mistakes” and condescendingly described accusations of bias as “conspiracy theory”.

As the academic Tom Mills, author of *The BBC: Myth of a Public Service* (2016), pointed out, this kind of failure to engage meaningfully with its critics may well lead to the BBC's downfall. Of course, in some sense, one can understand why BBC staff and senior journalists refuse to accept criticism: their jobs depend upon their perceived legitimacy

as reliable news sources. As the US muckraker Upton Sinclair observed: “It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.” The problem, however, is that these senior BBC staff and journalists simply won't have a salary to depend on if they continue down the path they're on. Their sense of self-importance – that they are the only legitimate arbiters of information for the public – is repugnant to citizens across the political spectrum.

Reinforcing the point, Osborne alleged that senior BBC executives told him they believed it was wrong for them “to expose lies told by a British prime minister because it undermines trust in British politics”. The BBC denied this accusation, but if true, the arrogance of those executives' belief that it's within their right to withhold such information from the electorate is contemptible – and anti-democratic.

British politics has been haemorrhaging trust for decades, and, by now, levels are well known to be flatlining. A big reason for this is the consistent failure of journalists to distance themselves from the political classes and serve their democratic purpose of holding them to account. Osborne has documented this. In the 1990s and 2000s, the capitulation of journalists to New Labour's unprecedented use of information management, PR and spin did wonders to elasticise the truth and encourage the revolving door between media and poli-

tics. In many ways this led to the media's subsequent failures in the build-up to the Iraq war, its failure to provide sufficient knowledge and understanding of the 2008 financial crash, and its failure to show that austerity was a political choice, not an economic necessity.

Indeed, British political journalism has a lot to answer for. Many of the journalists who presided over the failures of the past decades are still working as gatekeepers and opinion leaders today, and their reluctance to admit to their mistakes and encourage reform of their organisations and practices has left them and the rest of us stewing in their mess. According to last year's Edelman Trust Barometer, when 33,000 people across 28 countries were asked which institutions they trusted to do the right thing, "the media in general" came out as the least trusted in 22 countries (yes, the UK was one of them).

This is partly why so many people have turned to new and alternative media, which, in their infancy, are untainted by the distrust that lingers around legacy outlets. The new generation of journalists working these media have injected a fresh burst of energy and plurality into what had become a stagnant and parochial environment. The failure of legacy organisations to adapt and reform will continue to push people into their hands. But on the flip side, it will also continue to push people into the hands of individual politicians and their parties who

Many of the journalists who presided over the failures of the past decades are still working as gatekeepers and opinion leaders today

can, in turn, push unmediated, unchecked and unregulated information back to them via digital platforms. That will embolden deceitful politicians and parties to lie and misinform. We had a taste of this during the election campaign when the Conservative Party absurdly changed its twitter account to factcheckUK.

One of the tragedies of this election result is that many senior journalists who always despised Corbyn and the policies he stood for will now attempt to use it as a tool to berate him with, beat back criticism with and vindicate themselves. Together with those centrist and right-wing politicians and commentators, they will say that Corbyn and his supporters are to blame, that they should 'own their defeat', and that they should, furthermore, stop blaming the media and journalists. While it's certainly true that the Labour Party and its activists have some long, hard self-reflecting to do (particularly over the cultural issue of Brexit), that the British media and its senior journalists have nothing to do with the outcome of this election is bollocks.

In many ways, journalists have now become their own worst enemies: their refusal to accept their failures will almost certainly continue to erode what little is left of their already tarnished reputations and public trust levels. Moreover, for all the good they do serve, there is no avoiding the perception amongst much of the public that the media and politicians are 'all the same', because, to a large extent, this is correct.

Will Davies has recently commented recently on the 'Berlusconification' of British politics, where the once separate domains of politics and media have become indistinguishable: Johnson and Michael Gove are both former journalists, George Osborne now heads the *Evening Standard*, and so on. The failure of journalists to keep these domains separate goes a long way to explaining the current crisis of legitimacy befalling the media, and the result of this election. Journalists and politicians who ignore this are placing us all in deeper jeopardy as the principle of an independent 'Fourth Estate' falls further from sight. Given the scarcity of truth during this general election, one thing can be known for certain: the British media is in desperate need of radical democratic reforms. **CT**

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Photographs by Ron Fassbender - www.flickr.com/photos/theweeklybull

Socialist surprise

Labour Party dreams were shattered soon after the voting closed when the Exit Poll forecast projected onto the wall of BBC's Broadcasting House in London suggested that Boris Johnson's Tories would win a landslide victory. The forecast was so close to the official figures - 365 to the Tories, 203 for Labour - that bemused observers wondered why they need bother with an election at all: just ask 1,000 voters in each constituency how they'd vote and let that be it. - *Tony Sutton*

Election Insights



The Tory hack pack

By Nicholas Jones

SHAMEFUL and shameless – two words that best sum up the post-election reaction of political journalists to the relentless campaign that was pursued by most of the British press to demonise Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell.

Some of my former colleagues were aghast at the extent of the vilification printed by newspapers that did all they could before polling day to terrify their readers about the prospect of a Labour government.

The Mail and The Sun went to ever-greater extremes in re-hashing anti-Corbyn diatribes



By contrast most correspondents and columnists employed by pro-Conservative newspapers were entirely shameless. They just shrugged their shoulders; they were simply writing what their papers wanted; they had no alternative.

The effectiveness of tabloid propaganda was highlighted in countless vox pop interviews with voters in constituencies across the so-called Red Wall of seats that Labour lost to the Conservatives in the Midlands, Yorkshire, the north west and north east. Elderly passers-by in deprived working-class towns frequently repeated the words and smears they had been fed for months in headlines about the ‘terrorists’ friend’ who could not be trusted, and who would turn Britain into a Marxist state.

Just as had happened in the EU Referendum, there was sophisticated co-ordination between the attacks mounted by pro-Brexit Tory politicians and their media allies.

Instead of the torrent of scare stories about immigration that we saw in 2016 – backed up by the slogan of Take Back Control – there was

endless press denigration of Corbyn which Boris Johnson constantly reinforced with his own personal savaging of the Labour leader.

I had not witnessed the same level of synchronisation since the height of the Thatcher era when her political messages integrated so well with the vicious press campaigns, as seen during sustained assault on the National Union of Mineworkers during the 1984-85 pit strike.

The Tory tabloids had played the same hand – supporting Brexit and delivering a Corbyn demolition job – during the 2017 general election.

Photographs of Corbyn and McDonnell dredged up from 30 years ago were regularly reprinted under alarmist headlines, but the then Prime Minister Theresa May failed lamentably to follow through the attack lines supplied by the press. Johnson would not repeat her mistake.

In the aftermath of the 2016 vote to Leave and the 2017 election, there was some rowing back by the tabloid press and an acknowledgement, at least by the Daily Mail and Daily Express, that their scare tactics on immigration needed to be scaled down.

Initially Geordie Greig, Paul Dacre's replacement as Mail editor, did shift towards a more balanced approach but that caution was cast aside after Johnson launched his Get Brexit Done campaign and triggered a December election.

As the Mail and The Sun went to ever-greater extremes

in rehashing anti-Corbyn diatribes that had already been recycled several times before there was some limited internal resistance, but it was soon dissipated.

There was to be no letting up in the campaign to help Johnson secure the parliamentary majority he needed to deliver Brexit by the end of January 2020 and that meant the trash-

ing of Corbyn – viler even than that meted out to Michael Foot or Neil Kinnock – would plumb new depths of viciousness. **CT**

*Nicholas Jones was a BBC industrial and political correspondent for 30 years until retiring in 2002. His books include, *The Lost Tribe: Whatever Happened to Fleet Street's Industrial Correspondents?**

The Shakespearean tragedy of Jeremy Corbyn

By Neil Clark

THE Jeremy Corbyn project has ended in tears with an utterly demoralising general election defeat for Labour, but it could – and should – have been very different, if only Corbyn had trusted his own instincts.

There is a distinctly Shakespearean air to the political demise of UK Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, which took place, appropriately enough, on Friday the 13th of December 2019 (or you could say 15 March would have been even more appropriate).

“There is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and miseries, “the great bard wrote in *Julius Caesar*.

Jeremy Corbyn was never in



UNDER FIRE: More scare tactics from Rupert Murdoch's Sun

a stronger position than on the morning of the day after the general election of June 2017. Against all the odds and punditocracy predictions, he had taken Labour to the brink of a

stunning victory. The 40 per cent of the vote Labour attained in that election represented the biggest increase in the share of the popular vote the party had achieved in over 70 years. But fatally, Corbyn didn't take the tide at the flood. He should have used the moment to move swiftly and decisively against his 'centrist' enemies in the party who had done so much to undermine him. Instead, he held out an olive branch to them. They repaid his magnanimity by plotting the downfall which came to a head so spectacularly this time round.

Phase One of the plan was to get Labour to sign up to an electorally suicidal shift on Brexit. Labour did so well in 2017 largely because it gave a clear manifesto commitment to respect the result of the 2016 referendum. But great pressure was exerted on Corbyn to agree to a change in policy and pledge Labour to support a second referendum. Years earlier, Corbyn had, quite rightly, attacked the EU for making the Irish vote again after they had rejected the Lisbon Treaty. But asking Labour Leavers to vote again on whether to leave the EU is precisely what Corbyn was doing in the 2019 general election. It's true that others were constructing his political coffin, but it's also true that Corbyn handed them the nails.

Phase Two of the plan to 'Get Corbyn' was to promote a narrative that Labour under his leadership was absolutely awash with antisemitism. Corbyn's enemies wanted us to believe

that Labour, a party which always prided itself on its anti-racist credentials, and which had a Jewish leader as recently as 2015, was in fact a racist party. Incredibly, this audacious campaign succeeded because Corbyn failed to call it out. The level of actual antisemitism in Labour was tiny, but the Labour leader accepted the narrative that there was a big problem to deal with. The result of his continually going on the back-foot was that he and his party were denounced as 'antisemitic' on an almost hourly basis. Chris Williamson, a loyal Corbyn ally, was thrown under the bus on trumped-up charges. But this appeasement only led to the campaign being ratcheted up still further.

Corbyn paid a very heavy price for the mistakes he made in the period 2017-19. The party's backtracking on Brexit saw them haemorrhage support in their traditional pro-Leave Northern heartlands and lose working-class seats that they had held for generations. Labour lost Blyth Valley for the first time ever. Wrexham in North Wales went Conservative for the first time ever. Great Grimsby was lost by Labour for the first time in 74 years. 71 per cent of voters there had voted Leave in 2016. Yet Labour was asking them to vote again, next year. How absurd.

Bearing in mind all the hope of real, meaningful change that Corbyn had inspired in the first years of his Labour leadership,

it is shattering to contemplate how it all went horribly wrong.

How Shakespearean that Corbyn, a lifelong Eurosceptic, should be politically destroyed by agreeing a pivot towards Remain – which he must have known was quite crazy. How Shakespearean that Corbyn, a veteran supporter of Palestinian rights, should be so submissive in the face of what the great Israeli journalist Gideon Levy described as a 'contract' taken out on him by the 'Israeli propaganda machine'.

Corbyn's failure to hit back forcefully – or indeed hit back at all – against the smear campaigns of his enemies was praised by some as signs of his Zen-like calm, but to millions of others it looked like weakness. In the final leaders' debate, Boris Johnson labelled Corbyn a supporter of the IRA. Corbyn said nothing in response.

For all his decency, it's undeniable that Corbyn – when he got to the brink of power – treated his enemies much better than he did his friends. That, sadly, will be his epitaph. A golden opportunity for the left in Britain has been squandered.

"Men at some times are masters of their fates. The fault, Dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings." **CT**

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Neil Clark is a journalist, writer, broadcaster and blogger. He has written for newspapers and magazines in the UK and other countries and blogs at www.neilclark66.blogspot.com.

A ruthless masterclass in media control

By Granville Williams

HAVE just finished editing six issues of *ElectionWatch*. This involved buying all the national daily and Sunday newspapers since the election was called on October 30 and reading their election coverage.

We did a similar election monitoring exercise back in 1992 when Neil Kinnock was the Labour leader.

One of the best political commentators back then was the *Independent's* Anthony Bevins (he sadly died of pneumonia in 2001, aged 58).

On February 3, 1992, he wrote: "Having worked for nine years as a political correspondent on the *Sun* and the *Daily Mail*, I count myself as something of an expert on the insidious nature of the process.

"To survive and rise in, or on, the 'game', you pander to the political prejudice of your paymasters, giving them the stories that you know will make them salivate.

"That means putting a sparkling gloss on anything to do with the Conservatives and their policies, whilst deni-

grating, or 'ratting', Labour."

Press coverage of Labour and Kinnock was pretty vile back in 1992 but what we have witnessed in this election is far, far worse.

It has been a disturbing experience, especially after reading what can only be described as undiluted propaganda day after day in the bloc of avid Tory-supporting newspapers, which worked closely with the Tory HQ election campaign to maximise the assault on Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party's election policies.

The *Sun* front page of December 3 was typical. Interviewing Boris Johnson the paper's

political editor, Tom Newton Dunn, warned readers, "Red Jez's threat to UK: Corbyn is a security risk", backed up by a double-page spread with the headline ENEMY OF THE STATE splashed across them.

The same message has been spread across the broadsheet papers, the *Sunday Telegraph*, and *Daily Telegraph*, owned by the billionaire Barclay brothers, and Rupert Murdoch's *Sunday Times*.

His other papers the *Sun on Sunday*, the *Sun* and the *Times* have also been 'on message' in promoting this caricature of Jeremy Corbyn.

Finally we have the *Daily Mail* and the *Mail on Sunday*, owned by another billionaire, Lord Rothermere. For my money the *Mail on Sunday* is the worst of the lot – a nasty, vindictive right-wing rag. The November 18 edition, for example, had 12 pages of relentless attack journalism.

These newspaper titles represent 80 per cent of UK newspaper circulation. Newspapers



SCARE TACTICS: The Daily Mail linked Corbyn with Joe Stalin's Russia.

representing alternative and more balanced reporting and different perspectives on the election are the *Daily Mirror*, the *Guardian* and the *Morning Star*.

But their impact and influence is put in the shade by the relentless assaults and smears of the Tory press. These papers have had a malign influence on the flow of accurate information in this election. Indeed their lies make a mockery of democracy. Those who brush aside the impact of these papers, and say people can make their own minds up, ignore the evidence.

An LSE report, *Journalistic Representations of Jeremy Corbyn in the British Press*, provides that evidence. It found that 75 percent of stories about the opposition leader are either distorted or failed to represent his actual views on subjects.

The authors assert, “Jeremy Corbyn was represented unfairly by the British press through a process of vilification that went well beyond the normal limits of fair debate and disagreement in a democracy.

“Corbyn was often denied his own voice in the reporting on him and sources that were anti-Corbyn tended to outweigh those that support him and his positions.

“He was also systematically treated with scorn and ridicule in both the broadsheet and tabloid press in a way that no other political leader is or has been.

“Even more problematic, the British press has repeatedly associated Corbyn with terrorism and positioned him as



LASHING OUT: The *Daily Mail* turns a mishap into a catastrophe.

a friend of the enemies of the UK.”

Back in 1992 Anthony Bevin gave another warning: “The partisan mendacity of papers like the *Express* and the *Mail* has a wider impact though.

“Stories planted on their front pages about rifts in the Labour leadership are taken up by television and radio news editors.

“While the rat pack hacks are paid to dance to predominantly Tory tunes, television and news editors should consider their influential role. They should remember that they are free agents, and that their first duty is to the voter at large.”

This process has been magnified in this election as the lies deliberately disseminated by the Tories seep through into the broadcast media. The most striking example was Jewish Voice for Labour’s (JVL) criticism of the BBC’s coverage of the relentless Tory newspaper coverage of charges of antisemitism in the Labour Party.

JVL said: “Over recent months, and with no remission during the election campaign, coverage of allegations of Labour antisemitism has featured repeatedly in the BBC News, and often as the lead item.

“In news programmes the allegations have been reported as quasi-factual, with no indication that they are fiercely contested. In more discursive formats, such as the *Today* programme or *Newsnight*, presenters have consistently adopted a negative, attacking stance towards anyone who questions the basis of the allegations.”

The Conservative’s 2019 election campaign was a ruthless masterclass in media control. It was also the most persuasive example of why we need media ownership reform and effective press regulation.

That is why the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (North) is holding a national conference – *It’s The Media, Stupid! Post-Election Policies For Media Reform* in Leeds in the Henry Moore Room, Leeds Art Gallery on Saturday February 8, 11.00-5.00pm. **CT**

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Granville Williams runs the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (North). He was editor of *ElectionWatch*, a CPBF (North) election initiative. All the issues of *ElectionWatch* are available at the MediaNorth web page – www.coldtype.net/MediaNorth.html

Now's the time for us to resist and rebuild

By George Monbiot

YES, it's dark. Darker, arguably, than at any point since the World War II. We have a government not of conservatives, but of the radical right, who will now seek to smash the remaining restraints on capital and those who accumulate it. They will take their sledgehammers to our public services and our public protections. They cheated and lied to assist their victory; they will cheat and lie even more to implement their programme.

They are led by a man who has expressed overtly racist views, who won't hesitate to stir up bigotry and xenophobia whenever he runs into trouble, scapegoating immigrants, Muslims, Romani Gypsies and Travellers, the poor and the weak. They will revel in outrage and affront, using every attack on common decency to normalise the unacceptable. This government has no vision for the country, only a vision for the oligarchs to whom it is bound, onshore and offshore.

So I don't want to minimise the scale and horror of what we face. But documenting it is one task; the other is resisting it.

Here, roughly and briefly, is an outline of how we might

begin. I am as tired and shocked and frazzled as you are, so please forgive me if I have missed some essential elements.

First, we must park the recriminations and blame. We need to be fully occupied fighting the government and its backers, not fighting each other. Solidarity is going to be crucial over the coming months.

We should seek, wherever possible, to put loyalty to party and faction aside, and work on common resolutions to a crisis afflicting everyone who wants a kinder, fairer, greener nation.

All the progressive manifestos I've read – Labour, Green, SNP, LibDem, Plaid – contain some excellent proposals. Let's extract the best of them, and ideas from many other sources, and build an alliance around them. There will be differences, of course. But there will also be positions that almost everyone who believes in justice can accept.

I believe we need to knit these proposals into the crucial missing element in modern progressive politics – a restoration story. A powerful new narrative is the vehicle for all political

transformations. While all the progressive parties in the UK have proposed good policies, none of them have told a story that exactly fits the successful narrative template. Let's work together to craft the story of change.

We should use the new story, and the proposals this narrative vehicle carries, to build mass resistance movements, taking inspiration from – and building on – highly effective mobilisations such as the youth climate strikes. We will draw strength from the movements in other nations, and support them in turn. A major part of this resistance, I believe, must be the reclamation of a culture of public learning. Acquiring useful knowledge requires determined study. Yet we have lost the habit of rigorous learning in adulthood, once seen as crucial to social justice. This makes us vulnerable to every charlatan who stands for election, and every lie they amplify through the billionaire press and on social media.

Those who govern us would love to keep us in ignorance. When they deride "elites", they don't mean people like themselves – the rich and powerful. They mean teachers and intellectuals. They are creating an anti-intellectual culture, to make people easier to manipulate. Let's reinvigorate the workers' education movements. Let's restore a rich public culture of intellectual self-improvement, open to everyone. Knowledge is the most powerful tool in politics.

We must expose every lie, every trick this government will play, using social media as effectively as possible. We must use every available tool to investigate its financial relationships, interests and strategies. We should use the courts to sue and prosecute malfeasance whenever we can.

But while all this is happening, more and more people will fall through the cracks. I recognise that charity is no substitute for justice, and we can never fully compensate for the failures of the state. Even so, we must enhance the support and giving networks for the people this government will neglect or attack. No one should have to face the coming onslaught alone.

We will create, to the greatest extent possible, a Resist-

ance Economy. This means local cooperative networks of mutual support, that circulate social and material wealth within the community. The astonishing work of Participatory City, with the Barking and Dagenham Council, shows us one way of doing this.

We will find each other and ourselves through volunteering, which provides the most powerful known defence against loneliness and alienation, helps support the people this government will abandon, and can defend and rebuild the living world.

We will throw everything we have into defending our public services – especially the NHS – from the government’s attempts to degrade or destroy them. There will be many public service failures over the coming years, as a result of cuts and “restructuring”. Let’s

remember where blame for these failures will lie: not with the massively stressed and overloaded practitioners, but with those who made their jobs impossible.

The long-standing strategy of governments like this is to degrade these services until we become exasperated with them, whereupon, lacking public support, they can be broken up and privatised. Don’t fall for it. Defend the overworked heroes who keep them afloat.

No one person should attempt all these things. We will divide up the tasks, but always in the knowledge that we’re working together, with mutual support through the darkest of times. Love and courage to you all. **CT**

George Monbiot is a columnist for the Guardian newspaper. His website is www.monbiot.com

So, what's new ... ?

The media devoted its attention to conjuring up threats to Britain should a socialist government led by Jeremy Corbyn come to power. But look at the headline on the front page of this 1945 issue of the Daily Express and you’ll find the same scare tactics being used against Labour by Winston Churchill’s Tories. Fortunately Clem Atlee’s Labour Party won – and Britain soon gained its National Health Service. The paper is being held by revolutionary mime artist Neil Goodwin, aka Charlie X, at Trafalgar Square during the NATO summit on December 3.



A broken head or even a broken window in Hong Kong or Venezuela can and often does lead the news, yet the year-long social upheaval in France has largely been ignored by the Western media, writes **George Galloway**

Yellow Vests & brass necks: France's invisible brutality

THOUGH they wear high-visibility, French protesters have been all but invisible in the so-called mainstream media, also provoking deafening silence from the labor and trade union movement, and even the so-called 'left' within it.

While a broken head or even a broken window in Hong Kong or Venezuela can and often does lead the news, more than a year of weekly upheaval, mass movements of working people met with extreme violence by the French state and its achingly liberal President Macron has been ignored by Western print and broadcast journalists with studied arrogance.

There can be no rational justification for this. Hong Kong is almost 6,000 miles (9,656km) from England, Caracas almost 5,000 (8,047km). France is 31 miles (50km) away. It's not cheap to send and maintain news crews at the other ends of the earth. Cheap awaydays proliferate to Paris.

No news judgement could

possibly justify the almost complete absence of coverage of widespread disorder amid massive crowds in our nearest European neighbour over an entire year. Indeed, such is the antipathy between the English elite and the French (and vice versa), to borrow a German word, one might have expected a sense of schadenfreude to drive British coverage, in top gear! But not a bit of it.

So much for the Yellow Vests. Of course, what has now happened is that the entire organized working class of France has taken to the battlefield. Great unions – like the moderate CFDT as well as the militant CGT – with millions of members are now physically confronting the power of the French state.

The proximate cause of this new development is Macron's pension "reforms." Nowadays, reforms are bad things, whereas in former times they were good things – essentially making French workers work longer for less pension upon retirement.

But as with the Yellow Vests – whose original casus belli was a tax on fuel – this is about far more than pensions now.

The French working class are sick and tired of austerity, sick of the corruption and excess of the peacock throne of President Macron, sick of the EU, sick of the whole political class. Precisely the formula which drove the Brexit victory on our side of La Manche.

Traditionally the French – predisposed over centuries to revolution – are far from sedate soft-shoe shufflers on protests. Conversely, the French "riot police" take no prisoners. An irresistible force meeting an immovable object.

But it is one thing the police battering students or even ordinary workers. It is another thing to see the police wading into firefighters in full gear – protective gear – as has been happening these last two weeks. No one has seen two uniformed disciplined services knock seven bells out of each other on the streets of Paris since, well,



PARIS IS BURNING: Flames illuminate the street during pitched battles in the French capital.

since forever.

The crisis appears to be spiralling out of the control of the French state; Christmas could literally have to be cancelled. Tourism has been hit hard, I personally know three couples who have cancelled romantic Christmas breaks in the French capital. Air, bus, and train travel threatens to grind to a halt. One would be less surprised to wake up to the news that the National Assembly had been sacked than Louis Bourbon was to learn of the storming of the Bastille.

Given the almost existential challenge being mounted against one of the EU's twin pillars, one can begin to understand the near universal silence in Western capitals – not least their fear of the power of example.

But why the silence on the “left”?

Partly it is a sense of shame that the French workers are putting up the kind of fight they wouldn't even dream of contemplating. But partly it is the absence of liberalism among the massed ranks of French workers. They have cast away with disdain the identity politics which so infests what passes for the left in most Western countries.

This not about gay rights, about black emancipation, about gender-neutral right-on fads. This is not about asylum seekers or against racism in defense of immigrants or about Bolivia or Venezuela or against France's dismal colonial record or current French wars in Africa. This is about the French working-class confronting the

capitalist system, head-on, and with real red blood in the streets. French workers black and (overwhelmingly) white, gay and (overwhelmingly) straight, men and women, self-identifying only as workers tired of being robbed. It's all a little too... proletarian for what has become of the “left.”

And so like Nelson before them at the Battle of Copenhagen, they raise the telescope to the blind eye and declare “I see no ships.” The left sees not the French men o' war, but the French workers can see them. And it is not a belle vue. **CT**

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George Galloway was a member of the British Parliament for nearly 30 years. He presents TV and radio shows (including on RT). He is a film-maker, writer and a renowned orator.

Dahr Jamail visits his former home in Alaska and finds a state in the crosshairs of disruption

Savouring what remains of a climate-changed world

22

RECENTLY, I was in Homer, Alaska, to talk about my book *The End of Ice*. Seconds after I had thanked those who brought me to the small University of Alaska campus there, overwhelmed with some mix of sadness, love, and grief about my adopted state – and the planet generally – I wept.

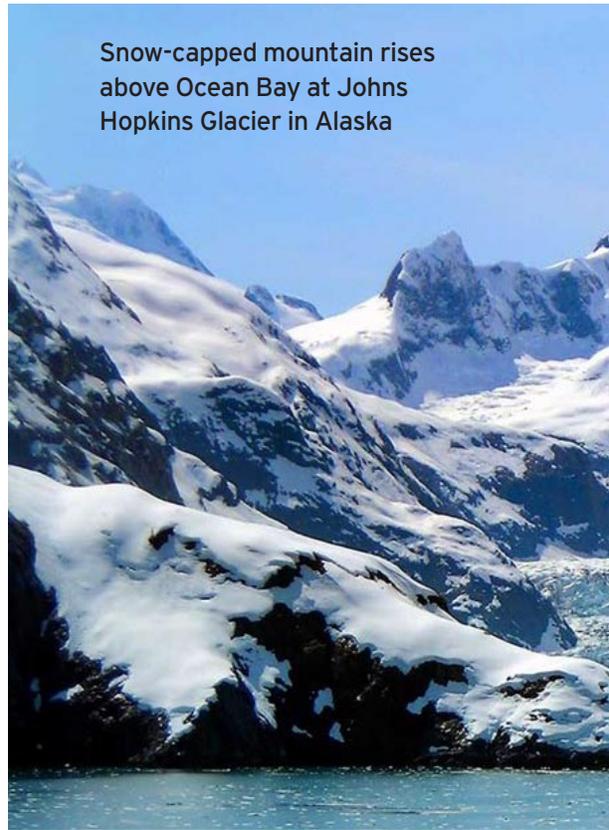
I tried to speak but could only apologise and take a few moments to collect myself. It's challenging for me, even now, to explain the wash of emotions and thoughts that suddenly swept over me as I stood at that podium on a warm, windy, rainy night on the southern Kenai Peninsula among a group ready to learn more about what was happening to our beloved Earth.

"Sorry for that", I finally said after a few more breaths,

as my voice cracked with emotion, "but I know you'll understand. You live in this state and you know as well as I do that once Alaska gets in your blood, it stays there. And I love this place with all my heart". Most of the listeners in that room were already nodding and at least one person had begun to cry.

I lived in Alaska for a decade, starting in 1996, and it's been in my blood since the year before that when I first laid eyes on Denali National Park and the spectacular Alaska Range. In fact, five of the nine chapters of my new book are set in Alaska and its mournful title is a kind of bow to my abiding love for this country's northernmost state. That moment in 1995 when the clouds literally parted to reveal Denali's lofty summit and its

Snow-capped mountain rises above Ocean Bay at Johns Hopkins Glacier in Alaska



spectacular spread of glaciers proved to be love at first sight. In fact, most summers thereafter I would visit that range as well as others in Alaska, volcanoes in Mexico, the Karakorum Himalaya of South Asia, or the South American Andes.

Then, in the summer of 2003, several months after the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq, I listened to radio reports on the beginning of the grim American occupation of that land from a tent on Denali while volunteering with the Park Service. It was there as well, strangely enough, that I first felt the pull of Iraq – or rather of the gaping void in the mainstream media when it came to what that occupation was doing to the Iraqi people. I then decid-



ed to travel from ice to heat, from Denali to the Middle East, to find out what was happening there and report on it.

That strange mountainside call led me into a career in journalism that pulled me away from my beloved Alaska whose vastnesses, largely devoid of a human presence, I've never experienced elsewhere. And as far as I travelled from its unique landscape, the feeling that the climate was already being disrupted in dramatic ways there stuck with me through my years of war reporting. The thought of the ever-receding glaciers in my former home state pained me and somehow drew me from America's forever wars to another kind of war – on the planet itself – and into nearly a

decade of climate reporting.

I told the audience all of this, occasionally pausing so as not to cry again thanks to a sadness born in part from the convulsions of wildfires, droughts, rapidly thawing permafrost, native coastal villages melting into the seas, and fast-shrinking glaciers. And don't forget a Trumpian lapdog of a governor who, just like his darling president, seems unable to cut services fast enough or work hard enough to open yet more of this great state to drilling, logging, and pollution (despite his growing unpopularity).

The evening before, November 20, I'd spoken at the University of Alaska in Anchorage and it was 48 degrees Fahrenheit (and raining, not snowing), a

full 20 degrees warmer than the normal high temperature for that month. And that's a reality that has become ever more the new normal there, even though the top third of the state lies inside the Arctic Circle. That, in turn, reflects another new reality: 'Arctic amplification,' which means that the higher latitudes of this planet are warming roughly twice as fast as the mid-latitudes. In other words, Alaska is in the crosshairs of climate disruption.

Put another way, the audiences I was speaking to that month and all of my friends in Alaska are now living in what feels like a chronic state of shock as things unravel in their state at warp speed.

It's no secret that vast numbers of climate scientists are now grieving for the planet and humanity's future, with some even describing their symptoms as a climate-change version of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. Several of the scientists I interviewed for my book said as much. Dan Fagre, who works for the United States Geological Survey at Glacier National Park, was typical. When I asked him what he felt like while watching the glaciers (for which that park was named) disappear – they are expected to be gone by 2030 – he responded, "It's like being a battle-hardened soldier, but on a philosophical basis, it's tough to watch the thing you study disappear."

And it's not just climate sci-

entists like him. Others living near areas where the changes are happening most dramatically seem to be experiencing such symptoms as well. “You wouldn’t believe what it was like to be in Anchorage last summer”, my friend Matt Raftery told me when we met in that city on the morning I returned from Homer. “We saw 90 degrees on July 4 and then, later in the summer, the wild-fire smoke was so thick on some days you literally could not see across the street downtown.”

An environmentalist who has long been working to protect Alaska from the extraction vultures, Matt is, like me, in love with the natural beauty of the place. I’ve travelled with him to the remote Alaskan back country and think of him as upbeat and indefatigable when it comes to his work, whatever the odds of success. But listening to him describe the climate convulsions wracking his home state recently, I couldn’t help but think of interviews I had done with family members in Iraq who had lost loved ones to US military attacks. People with PTSD – and I know this from my own personal experience with it – tend to repetitively tell stories about the trauma they’ve experienced. It’s our way of trying to process it.

And this was exactly what Matt, normally not a guy given to overemphasis, was doing that morning, which shocked me. “We had rivers in south-central Alaska that were so warm the salmon were dying of heart attacks”, he continued,

Arctic sea ice had melted away at record speed and that, by the fall, permafrost was thawing at rates not predicted for another 70 years

barely stopping to take a breath. “The river water reached 80 degrees in some of them! The water was 80 degrees! Can you believe that? There were literally tens of thousands of dead salmon floating belly up in many of the rivers. I did a pack-raft trip in the Talkeetna Mountains wearing nothing but a t-shirt and shorts! That is absurd! You know how cold the water usually is in the rivers here. It literally got so hot in the sun we had to pull out and sit underneath a tree in the shade!”

He recounted much that I already knew, including that Arctic sea ice had melted away at record speed and that, by the fall, permafrost was thawing at rates not predicted for another 70 years. On the coast of the Arctic Ocean in northern Alaska, whaling towns that traditionally used permafrost cellars to store, age, and keep their subsistence food cool throughout the year – the Inupiat use them for tons of whale and walrus meat – now find them pooling with water and sprouting mould thanks to the thawing permafrost.

By that September, Matt told

me, he was struggling with depression. “I lost all hope, as it truly felt apocalyptic here”, he continued more slowly and quietly now, rubbing one of his arms in what I imagined was a sort of self-consoling gesture. Spending more time meditating, doing yoga, and finding helpful spiritual podcasts has, he added, become mandatory for him – and he’s far from alone in that among Alaskans as southern weather is visibly migrating north.

That day in Anchorage, I stopped at my favourite bookstore to check out the latest volumes on the state. One of them, *Alone at the Top: Climbing Denali in the Dead of Winter*, caught my eye. Arctic explorer Lonnie Dupre had made history in 2015 by summiting Denali in January ... solo. It was an incredible feat that he writes about in his book, but the moment I won’t forget was when he described being trapped in his tent on that mountain at 11,200 feet during a storm that raged for days. At one point, he heard what sounded like small rocks pelting the tent, unzipped the door, poked his head out, and was shocked to find that, on December 31, it was sleeting, not snowing. We’re talking about a moment when the average temperature for that elevation should have been something like 35 degrees below zero.

It hurt my heart to know that such weather paroxysms were afflicting even Denali, a mountain, standing so high and so near the Arctic Circle, that changed my life by drawing

me to Alaska when I was in my twenties. Despite everything I now know, it still stunned me.

And here I am, like my close friends in that state, telling this story to anyone who will listen. I know this will sound over the top to non-Alaskan readers, but even writing this brings tears to my eyes. It's simply not supposed to be this way. Just about nothing that's happening there, climatologically speaking, today is what we once would have thought of as 'natural', even though it's now the new norm.

Hearing so many of these stories while visiting proved too much to take in, as did knowing what's now starting to happen to salmon, bears, moose, and other wildlife of all sorts. Thanks to chaotic climatic shifts, such creatures are beginning to migrate from what once were their home territories due to lack of familiar food. And all of it is, in its own way, traumatising.

During a recent lecture at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, Rick Thoman, a climate specialist at the Alaska Center for Climate Assessment and Policy, presented a grim overview of radically changed conditions across our northernmost state. In his 30 years with the National Weather Service in Alaska, Thoman has watched as the climate in his home state was disrupted by the anthropogenic climate crisis. Originally from Pennsylvania, he told the audience how reading about such a different world in works that ranged from Jack London's

Alaska is suffering climate death by a thousand cuts, while I struggle daily to accept the new reality: that the state is already irreparably changed

turn-of-the-twentieth-century short story *To Build a Fire* to Barry Lopez's book *Arctic Dreams* had led him to Alaska. London, for instance, had written about a place in which minus 70 degree temperatures were part of everyday life. "But the fact of the matter is", he told us grimly, "the environment described in these books doesn't exist anymore". He added, "That's really hard. But it's what we've got, it's what we live in."

Thoman spoke of how, thanks to radically warming waters, the Bering Sea is literally experiencing a mass exodus of marine life, while the state itself is, like a beloved friend, in the midst of a health crisis that no one in power is truly trying to treat.

No wonder all of this leaves me with a feeling of utter impotence. Each new weather shock feels like another body blow. Or yet further evidence of how I'm losing a loved one. Alaska, in other words, is suffering climate death by a thousand cuts, while I struggle daily to accept the new reality: that the state is already irreparably changed.

Deep waves of love and sadness had already begun coursing through me as my

flight descended into Anchorage when this trip began. And such feelings only continued during the time I spent there. Time with old climbing buddies proved bittersweet, as it was never long before we couldn't help but speak of the changes already occurring, even as we planned future forays into Alaska's mountains.

The last full day, I knew I needed to be alone in those mountains. I'd brought the necessary gear with me for late-November hiking temperatures, or at least for the way I remembered them from the years when I lived there: crampons, an ice axe, extra layers of warm clothing for deep snow and mountain temperatures that should have been in the teens (even without taking the wind-chill factor into account).

Before sunrise that day, I headed south from Anchorage on the Seward highway as it dropped down beside the waters of Turnagain Arm. I was heading for a trail that would take me into the Chugach Mountains, one of my old stomping grounds.

Delicate pastel blues and soft buttery yellows illuminated the sky ahead as the lazy winter sun rose. While snow still covered the tops of the surrounding mountains, lower down the colours on them faded from bright whites to browns and greens – hardly a surprise, since temperatures here have been so warm and snow so scarce in this year's disrupted lead-up to winter.

I passed several areas where, in the mid-1990s, I would already have been ice-climbing atop frozen waterfalls at this time of year. Now, they were visibly bone dry with temperatures too warm for ice to form.

After arriving at my trailhead, I hiked alone toward a nearby peak. Out of habit, I began with a heavy jacket on, but soon removed it, along with my gloves, in temperatures well above freezing. I wasn't used to this and it felt abidingly strange to alter my old habits as I climbed.

I gained elevation quickly. Within a couple of hours, I was in something that finally seemed Alaskan to me, genuine winter conditions as I post-holed through the snow – which means having your legs regularly break through the surface snow to perhaps knee- or mid-thigh-height – making my way toward the summit. I paused from time to time to breathe in the smell of the trees and watch the occasional snow flurry flutter down into the valley below.

Only when it began to grow dark and Denali was no longer visible could I allow myself to walk off, even as I wiped away more tears

The summit ridge was blanketed in snow. As I arrived there, I suddenly realised that I had been chasing winter – that is, my own past life and dreams – up these mountains on this last full day of my visit, seeking to find an Alaska that no longer was.

I marvelled at the grand 360-degree view, taking photos of the snowy peaks around me, drinking it all in, before I had to descend and head home to Washington State and back to a climate-changed present on a burning planet where I would continue to dream of the Alaska I had once known. I knew I would be planning future ascents here, while at least some

of it remains as it once was.

Shortly before boarding my flight home from the Anchorage airport, the cloud cover to the north cleared, revealing Denali's still majestic white silhouette against a dark blue backdrop.

I stood there, transfixed, for nearly half an hour unable to take my eyes off that mountain. Only when it began to grow dark and Denali was no longer visible could I allow myself to walk off, even as I wiped away more tears. **CT**

*Dahr Jamail is a recipient of numerous honours, including the Martha Gellhorn Award for Journalism for his work in Iraq and a 2018 Izzy Award for Outstanding Achievement in Independent Media. His newest book, *The End of Ice: Bearing Witness and Finding Meaning in the Path of Climate Disruption*, was published this year. He is also the author of *Beyond the Green Zone* and *The Will to Resist*. This article was first published at www.tomdispatch.com.*

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Bob Lord says that for decades in the mid-20th-century, the US's grandest private fortunes were becoming less pronounced. Then it all changed

The U-turn that made the US staggeringly unequal

WEALTH in America has concentrated dramatically over the past four decades. Since 1980, note wealth researchers Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman, the top 0.1 percent share of the nation's total wealth has more than doubled, from under 10 percent in 1980 to over 20 percent today. In a nation of over 125-million households, just one ten-thousandth of those households – 12,500 – now control over 10 percent of our wealth.

But can numerical abstractions like these help us truly grasp the reality of the inequality that's overtaken America? Or are these numbers too, well, abstract?

Let's come at this from a slightly different angle. Let's look at actual wealthy American families.

Forbes magazine has been annually spotlighting our nation's 400 largest fortunes since 1982. By comparing the 1982 and 2019 *Forbes* listings, we can get a remarkably vivid pic-

ture of how America's wealthiest families have fared over recent years. We can even use the *Forbes* data to help us compare how the grand fortunes of the original and today's Gilded Age have unfolded.

The inaugural *Forbes* wealth list in 1982 conveniently included wealth numbers for two sets of intergenerational wealth dynasties: those whose fortunes had taken root before 1900 – clans like the Rockefellers and the Du Ponts – and those whose fortunes blossomed much closer to 1982, like the Waltons of Walmart and the Mars candy empire. The 2019 *Forbes* list, in turn, offers up numbers that help us trace how that second set of dynasties has evolved.

With all this information, we can compare the fate of the Rockefellers and Du Ponts between the original Gilded Age and 1982 to the fate of the second set of intergenerational wealth dynasties between 1982 and today.

The comparison couldn't be starker.

In 1982, the old-line Rockefeller and Du Pont families dominated the initial *Forbes* 400, with 13 Rockefellers and a stunning 27 Du Ponts making the list. The 13 Rockefellers listed by *Forbes* held a total wealth of \$2.85-billion. The Du Ponts appearing on the 1982 *Forbes* list held \$5.13 billion. In 1982, *Forbes* estimated that all the then-living descendants of Pierre Samuel duPont de Nemours, some 1,700 of them, held a combined fortune of \$10-billion.

How does this 1982 Rockefeller and Du Pont net worth compare with the Rockefeller and Du Pont net worth back at the tail-end of the original Gilded Age? In 1918, US total wealth hovered around \$200-billion. John D Rockefeller, according to a contemporary *Forbes* analysis, controlled \$1.2-billion in wealth at that time, giving him over half of 1 percent of the nation's entire wealth.

By 1982, the Rockefeller

family share of the nation's wealth had dropped by over 90 percent, to less than one-20th of 1 percent of America's total wealth.

Similarly, in 1929, the country's total wealth sat around \$350-billion. At that time, the stock of the DuPont corporation remained privately held within the Du Pont family, and that makes valuing the net worth of the Du Ponts difficult. But we do know that the DuPont corporation held a 36 percent stake in General Motors at the time, a company then worth \$3.1-billion. If we add in the value of the DuPont chemical empire, the Du Pont family share of the nation's wealth in 1929 must have been at least 1 percent, much greater than the one-tenth of 1 percent share the Du Ponts held in 1982.

In other words, at America's economic summit, the wealth of the original Gilded Age's richest deconcentrated in the mid-20th-century decades before 1982.

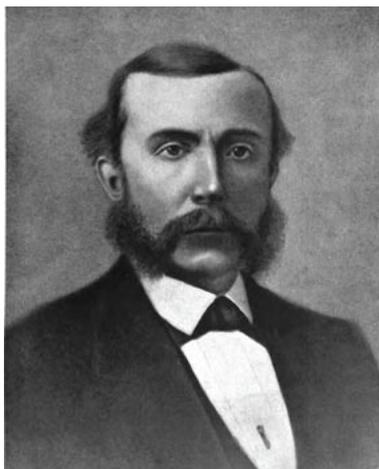
Unfortunately, by the early 1980s, America's wealth had begun to concentrate all over again.

The Institute for Policy Studies Billionaire Bonanza report last year identified 15 family wealth dynasties whose richest individuals appear on both the 1982 and 2018 *Forbes* 400 lists. Among these families, three – the Walton, Koch, and Mars dynasties – have seen their wealth increase nearly 6,000 percent since 1982. These three

dynasties now hold a combined \$348.7-billion.

And what about the share of the nation's wealth these families hold? The wealth share held by the Walton, Mars, and Koch families has increased 29-fold, 9-fold and 11-fold, respectively, since 1982.

America's wealthiest families aren't just increasing their share of the nation's wealth. Even more stunning: The individual heirs of the new wealth dynasties *Forbes* identified in 1982 hold a greater share of the



GILDED AGE: John D Rockefeller.

nation's wealth today than did the patriarchs who forged these dynasties.

That didn't happen with the Rockefeller and Du Pont fortunes. John D Rockefeller's grand private fortune dispersed into ever smaller chunks, first to his children, then to their children. By the third generation, no individual Rockefeller had a personal fortune – and a share of the nation's wealth – anywhere close to the fortune and wealth share that John D personally held.

In the Du Pont family, the wealthiest individual Du Pont heir on the 1982 *Forbes* list – Lamot du Pont Copeland – held just a tiny fraction of the national wealth share his uncle Pierre controlled during the Gilded Age. How tiny? Pierre's wealth share outpaced Lamot's by over 100 times.

Compare that to the trajectory of the Walton family fortune after 1982. The three living children of the legendary Sam Walton each hold a share of the nation's wealth over eight times the share held by their old man in 1982. Lukas Walton, Sam's grandson, sports a net worth of over \$18-billion and a share of American wealth nearly triple the wealth share his grandfather held.

Will the current trajectory continue? Will our richest families hold ever increasing shares of the country's wealth, with individual members of these families each holding wealth far greater than their fortunate forbears held? A generation from now, will Sam Walton's great-grandchildren own a larger share of the nation's wealth than Sam did in 1982?

Unless American tax policy changes, the answers to those questions will all be "yes."

So let's change that policy. Let's tax our billionaires! **CT**

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Bob Lord, an Institute for Policy Studies associate fellow, practices tax law in Phoenix. This article first appeared at www.inequality.org

Gideon Lewin takes us on a fascinating journey through the work of one of the 20th-century's most influential photographers

Inside Avedon's world

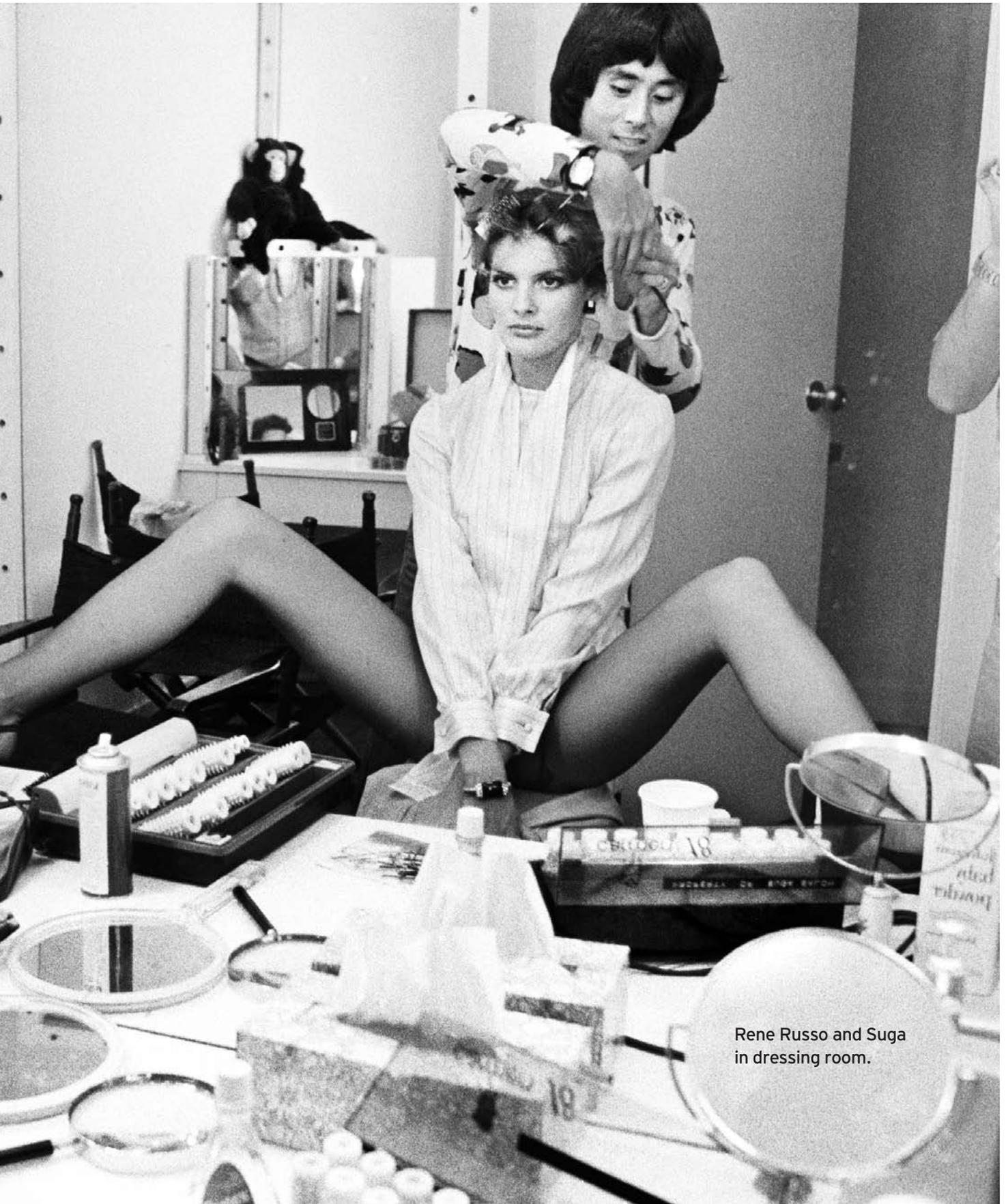
30 **R**ICHARD Avedon, the most influential fashion photographer of the 20th-century, was renowned for his iconic celebrity photographs. Now, a sparkling new monograph – *Avedon: Behind the Scenes 1964-1980*, by Gideon Lewin, master printer and Avedon's assistant for many years, reveals moments never told, stories never heard, and a life that only a few ever experienced. It is a story of a close working relationship and collaboration with a master.

In the oversized work of love, published by New York's powerHouse Books, Lewin relates his experiences working with Richard Avedon for 16 years.

It is about the hard work, the intrigues, the energy, the mysteries, the humour, and the commitment to creating images that were larger-than-life and will last for generations.

Not just a volume of glitzy photographs, this volume illuminates many details of the preparations for





Rene Russo and Suga
in dressing room.

Avedon's major exhibitions, the master classes of which he was a part, and many behind-the-scenes stories working on fashion collections in Paris and in New York for *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*, photographing the world's most famous personalities and most beautiful women: Sophia Loren, Audrey Hepburn, Catherine Deneuve, Cher, Jean Shrimpton, Veruschka, Twiggy, Rene Russo, Patti Hansen, and Lauren Hutton.

Finally, this book opens a window on the lighter side of Richard Avedon, as well as his total dedication to the art of photography in his determination to leave a legacy unlike that of any other photographer. **CT**



Ara Gallant creating a bracelet for Veruschka, Tokyo, 1966.

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Avedon and Ben Fernandez,
The Master Class, 1967



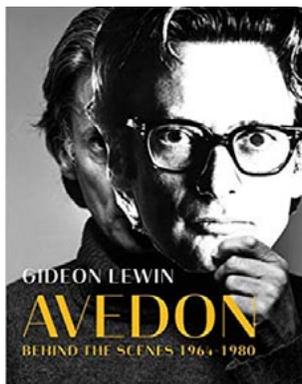
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Top: Inspecting the tan, with Rene, for Vogue, Baja, 1974.
Left: Lauren Hutton on set, Vogue, September 1974.



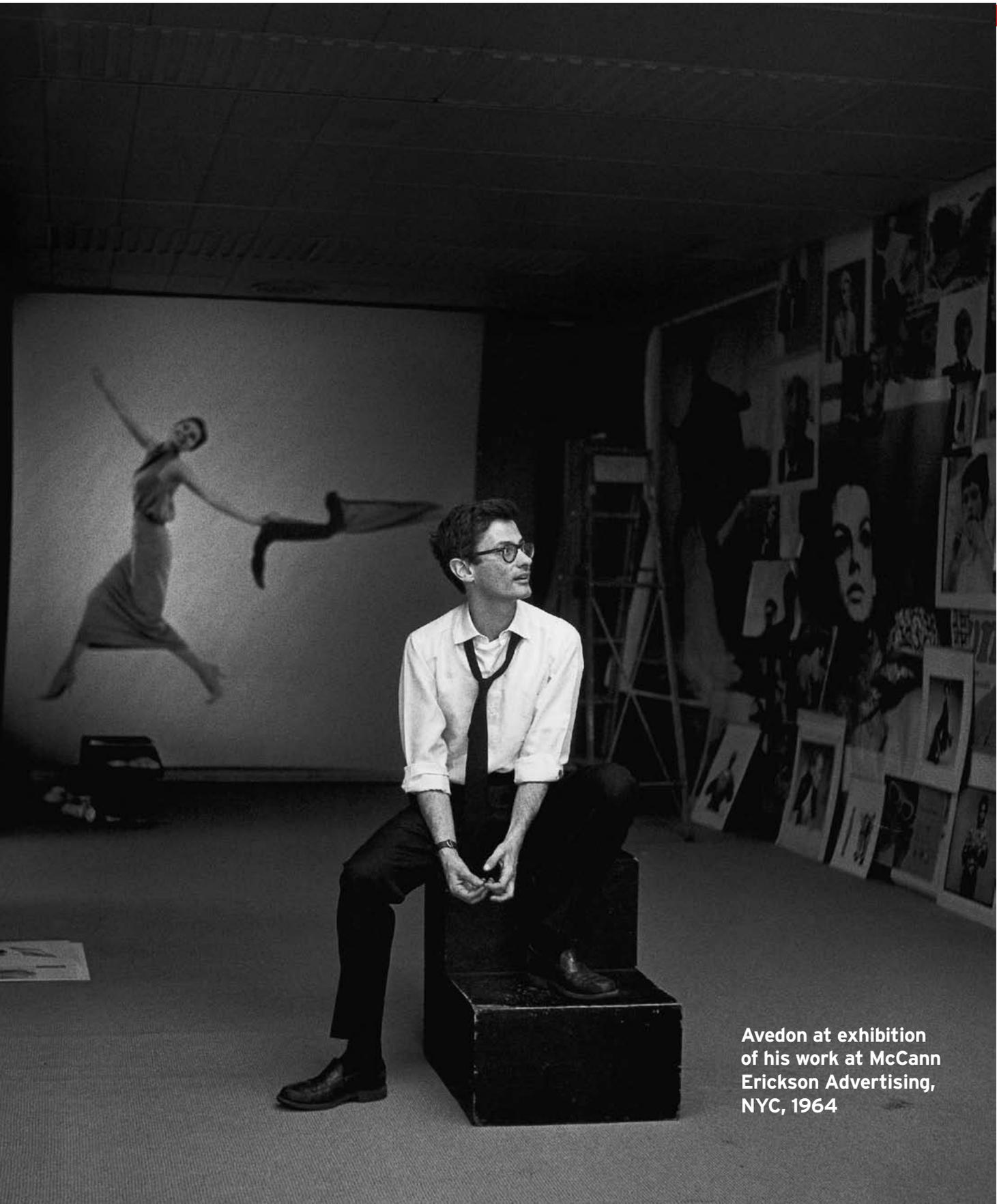
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Above:
Avedon and
serpent eagle,
Ireland, 1969.
Right:
Father and
son, 1974.
Left: Cover
of Lewin's
book.



AVEDON
Behind the Scenes 1964-1980
Gideon Lewin
powerHouse books
www.powerhousebooks.com
US \$75 / Canada \$99



Avedon at exhibition
of his work at McCann
Erickson Advertising,
NYC, 1964

John Pilger joins the women and children and grandmothers on their long journey through a maze of sealed areas and yellow lines and biometric stops

Visiting Julian Assange, Britain's political prisoner

SET out at dawn. Her Majesty's Prison Belmarsh is in the flat hinterland of south east London, a ribbon of walls and wire with no horizon. At what is called the visitors centre, I surrendered my passport, wallet, credit cards, medical cards, money, phone, keys, comb, pen, paper.

I need two pairs of glasses. I had to choose which pair stayed behind. I left my reading glasses. From here on, I couldn't read, just as Julian couldn't read for the first few weeks of his incarceration. His glasses were sent to him, but inexplicably took months to arrive.

There are large TV screens in the visitors centre. The TV is always on, it seems, and the volume turned up. Game shows, commercials for cars and pizzas and funeral packages, even TED talks, they seem perfect for a prison: like visual valium.

I joined a queue of sad, anxious people, mostly poor women and children, and grandmothers. At the first desk, I was

fingerprinted, if that is still the word for biometric testing.

"Both hands, press down!" I was told. A file on me appeared on the screen.

I could now cross to the main gate, which is set in the walls of the prison. The last time I was at Belmarsh to see Julian, it was raining hard. My umbrella wasn't allowed beyond the visitors centre. I had the choice of getting drenched, or running like hell. Grandmothers have the same choice.

At the second desk, an official behind the wire, said, "What's that?"

"My watch," I replied guiltily.

"Take it back," she said.

So I ran back through the rain, returning just in time to be biometrically tested again. This was followed by a full body scan and a full body search. Soles of feet; mouth open.

At each stop, our silent, obedient group shuffled into what is known as a sealed space, squeezed behind a yellow line. Pity the claustrophobic; one

woman squeezed her eyes shut.

We were then ordered into another holding area, again with iron doors shutting loudly in front of us and behind us.

"Stand behind the yellow line!" said a disembodied voice.

Another electronic door slid partly open; we hesitated wisely. It shuddered and shut and opened again. Another holding area, another desk, another chorus of, "Show your finger!"

Then we were in a long room with squares on the floor where we were told to stand, one at a time. Two men with sniffer dogs arrived and worked us, front and back.

The dogs sniffed our arses and slobbered on my hand. Then more doors opened, with a new order to "hold out your wrist!"

A laser branding was our ticket into a large room, where the prisoners sat waiting in silence, opposite empty chairs. On the far side of the room was Julian, wearing a yellow arm band over his prison clothes.

As a remand prisoner he

is entitled to wear his own clothes, but when the thugs dragged him out of the Ecuadorean embassy last April, they prevented him bringing a small bag of belongings. His clothes would follow, they said, but like his reading glasses, they were mysteriously lost.

For 22 hours a day, Julian is confined in “healthcare”. It’s not really a prison hospital, but a place where he can be isolated, medicated and spied on. They spy on him every 30 minutes: eyes through the door. They would call this “suicide watch”.

In the adjoining cells are convicted murderers, and further along is a mentally ill man who screams through the night. “This is my One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest,” he said. “Therapy” is an occasional game of Monopoly. His one assured social gathering is the weekly service in the chapel. The priest, a kind man, has become a friend. The other day, a prisoner was attacked in the chapel; a fist smashed his head from behind while hymns were being sung.

When we greet each other, I can feel his ribs. His arm has no muscle. He has lost perhaps 10 to 15 kilos since April. When I first saw him here in May, what was most shocking was how much older he looked.

“I think I’m going out of my mind,” he said then.

I said to him, “No you’re not. Look how you frighten them, how powerful you are.” Julian’s intellect, resilience and wicked sense of humour – all unknown



CONFINED: Julian Assange is isolated, medicated and spied on at Belmarsh.

to the low life who defame him – are, I believe, protecting him. He is wounded badly, but he is not going out of his mind.

We chat with his hand over his mouth so as not to be overheard. There are cameras above us. In the Ecuadorean embassy, we used to chat by writing notes to each other and shielding them from the cameras above us. Wherever Big Brother is, he is clearly frightened.

On the walls are happy-clappy slogans exhorting the prisoners to “keep on keeping on” and “be happy, be hopeful and laugh often”.

The only exercise he has is on a small bitumen patch, overlooked by high walls with more happy-clappy advice to enjoy ‘the blades of grass beneath your feet’. There is no grass.

He is still denied a laptop

and software with which to prepare his case against extradition. He still cannot call his American lawyer, or his family in Australia.

The incessant pettiness of Belmarsh sticks to you like sweat. If you lean too close to the prisoner, a guard tells you to sit back. If you take the lid off your coffee cup, a guard orders you to replace it. You are allowed to bring in £10 to spend at a small café run by volunteers. “I’d like something healthy,” said Julian, who devoured a sandwich.

Across the room, a prisoner and a woman visiting him were having a row: what might be called a ‘domestic’. A guard intervened and the prisoner told him to “fuck off”.

This was the signal for a posse of guards, mostly large, overweight men and women eager to pounce on him and hold him to the floor, then frog march him out. A sense of violent satisfaction hung in the stale air.

Now the guards shouted at the rest of us that it was time to go. With the women and children and grandmothers, I began the long journey through the maze of sealed areas and yellow lines and biometric stops to the main gate. As I left the visitor’s room, I looked back, as I always do. Julian sat alone, his fist clenched and held high. **CT**

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John Pilger's new film, The Dirty War on the NHS, has just been released. For details visit his website – www.johnpilger.com

In his book *The Backroom Boys*, Noam Chomsky warned that the lies that sustained the war on Vietnam was not taken seriously. Lies about more recent war on Afghanistan show that nothing has changed, says **Vijay Prashad**

Afghan Papers offer an eerie reminder of Vietnam

NOAM Chomsky recently celebrated his 91st birthday. As an homage to Noam, I spent the day with one of his lesser-known books – *The Backroom Boys* (1973). The book is made up of two spectacular essays, the first a close reading of the Pentagon Papers. To read this book alongside the trove of documents released by the US government as part of its own internal study on the ongoing US war on Afghanistan is telling. Both the Pentagon Papers on Vietnam and the recent Washington Post disclosures on Afghanistan show that the US government lied to its citizens about a war that could never be won. If you substitute the word “Afghanistan” for the word “Vietnam,” you could read Noam’s essays from 1973 and imagine that they were written today.

There was one quote in the Afghanistan papers that stopped me. It was almost as if I had read this before in the *Pentagon Papers*. In 2015, an

unnamed National Security Council official said, “It was impossible to create good metrics. We tried using troop numbers trained, violence levels, control of territory and none of it painted an accurate picture”. With regard to Vietnam, the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) constantly inflated “body counts” – the number of dead Vietnamese – as a metric of impending victory. This is clear in both the *Pentagon Papers* and in the papers at the Johnson Library (Austin, Texas).

One soldier who worked in MACV would often go along with the generals to observe the battlefield. His words, collected by Toshio Whelchel, are worth reading: “once we flew over an area after a B-52 raid and the devastation was incredible. There were all these plastic bags out there with our guys supposedly counting bodies of enemy killed. But they were merely picking up body frag-

ments – anything to put in the bag – and counting each one as a single kill”. These numbers pleased Washington; they were what was sold to the public as a metric to gauge how well the war was going.

Noam’s essay on the *Pentagon Papers* begins with the words of a US air force pilot who explains the “finer selling points” of napalm. A certain generation knows exactly what “napalm” is, but younger readers might not be aware of it. Napalm is one of the most hideous weapons ever made – petroleum based, with gel that makes the fuel stick to the human skin. It was used with great gusto against the Korean and Vietnamese people.

The pilot who drops napalm on the civilians says, “We sure are pleased with those backroom boys at Dow [Chemical]. The original product wasn’t so hot – if the gooks were quick enough they could scrape it off. So the boys started adding polystyrene – now it sticks like shit to a blanket. It’ll even burn



NO MORE WAR: Vietnam War protestors march at the Pentagon in Washington, DC on October 21, 1967

under water now”.

These sentences require patience. The airman is talking about the Vietnamese. He uses the term “gooks,” which seems to have had its origins in the US invasion of the Philippines in 1898, and then was used to refer to Haitians and Nicaraguans, Costa Ricans and Arabs – anyone that the US military and air force seemed to be killing. The term was used to describe the “natives,” the people whose bodies were worth only what work they could do for the “masters.”

This is the vocabulary that does not go away. It reappears in Afghanistan.

Chillingly, the airman says that he would like the weapon

to be more lethal, the chances of civilians being able to save themselves nullified.

In the back rooms, the scientists make the weapons and the analysts debate the war. What was so stunning about the *Pentagon Papers* was that the entire establishment knew that the United States would not be able to defeat the Vietnamese people, and that even with the use of such barbaric weapons as napalm and Agent Orange, the Vietnamese would not lose their morale.

In 1967, eight years before the US quit Vietnam, the director of Systems Analysis at the

Pentagon wrote, “I think we’re up against an enemy who just may have found a dangerously clever strategy for licking the United States. Unless we recognise and counter it now, that strategy may become all too popular in the future”. He referred to wars of national liberation. They – not guerilla tactics – had to be vanquished. National liberation was out of the question. That was the basic premise of why the US government lied to its public. It was fighting a war that it could not win because its adversary – the Vietnamese people – believed in their fight and would not stop until they had triumphed.

Afghanistan does not have an army of national liberation anywhere near the calibre of the Viet Minh. It has the Taliban, whose brutality was born out of the crucible of the war of the warlords from the 1990s. From the ground upward, however, the Taliban – however brutal it has been – appears at least as a force against an alien invader whose asymmetrical warfare does nothing to lift the confidence of the population. The Taliban do not promise land reform or social liberation, but they live and die alongside the rest of the civilian population. That is what makes them more popular than the drones and the Special Forces, and even the Afghan National Army. The “dangerously clever strategy” of the Taliban is that they are rooted amongst their brethren. No bombing raid can break that link.

Ever since the United States government set up the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) in 2008, I have read all its reports and engaged many of its staff members. It was clear to them – often very decent people – that this war against Afghanistan was an abomination. It was clear to those of us who covered this war that the United States was going to devastate further this poor country, and then leave because it could not attain ends that it had so poorly defined.

Nothing in the recently released SIGAR documents surprised me, or many of my colleagues. We had heard these things from Afghan officials and from Western intelligence and military officials over the years; such comments have littered the reports that we have filed on the US war in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, these documents are welcome, since they – like the WikiLeaks revelations – shine a light on the mendacity of the US governments regarding these wars against Afghanistan and then Iraq.

Colonel Bob Crowley, who was a senior counterinsurgency adviser to the US military commanders in 2013-14, told the SIGAR researchers, “Every data point was altered to present the best picture possible. Surveys, for instance, were totally unreliable but reinforced that everything we were doing was right and we became a self-licking ice cream cone.”

“Truth,” Crowley said, “was

The US government continues to refuse to allow any development in the investigation of war crimes in Afghanistan

rarely welcome” at the US military headquarters in Kabul; it was rarely welcomed in Washington, DC, either. The US government was lying to justify its war in Afghanistan. Data is not to be trusted; the words of officials are not to be taken seriously.

As early as 2003, a CIA analyst told me that there were no territorial gains being made in Afghanistan; after bombing runs, and after troops went in to “capture and hold” the land, they found themselves retreating to their bases, leaving the devastation, and watching as the Taliban came back to take power. No gains were made in the 18 years since the war began.

The reporting on these documents has nothing from the Afghan side. The outrage is merely this: US citizens have been lied to for a war that was a waste from the very start. The *New York Times* – using estimates from the Brown University *Cost of War Project* – ran a full page of graphics to dispel the metrics, and to talk about the waste of this war. These are all undeniable facts.

But what about the Afghans,

whose lives have been destroyed further, whose aspirations are reduced to ashes?

The US press coverage says that the administrations of Bush, Obama, and Trump lied to the US public; but this is not all. What about the war crimes committed against the people of Afghanistan, and what about the fact that this entire operation – without any clear war aim – is a disastrous crime against the Afghan people?

The US government continues to put pressure on the International Criminal Court, refusing to allow any development in the investigation of war crimes in Afghanistan. At the very least, and on behalf of the millions of Afghans whose lives have been eroded, someone needs to stand in the dock, someone needs to take responsibility. They did not for the illegal war in Vietnam and Cambodia; they will not for this war, and therefore – because they have impunity – there will be another war.

Chomsky’s book from 1973 was a warning. He wrote judiciously that the US war on Vietnam and the lies used to justify the war were not a “mad aberration.” That warning was not taken seriously. It is not being taken seriously now. **CT**

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Vijay Prashad’s most recent book is *No Free Left: The Futures of Indian Communism* (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2015). This article was produced by *Globetrotter*, a project of the *Independent Media Institute*.



TRUMP AS HITLER: Protest banner outside London's US embassy the day after his election win in 2016.

2019: The Year of Manufactured Hysteria

Politics in 2019 has been crazy, but it's about to get worse, writes **CJ Hopkins**

41

WELL, it looks like we've somehow managed to survive another year of diabolical Putin-Nazi attacks on democracy. It was touch-and-go there for a while, especially coming down the home stretch, what with Jeremy Corbyn's desperate attempt to overthrow the UK government, construct a British version of Auschwitz, and start rounding up and mass-murdering the Jews.

That was certainly pretty scary ... but then, the whole year was pretty scary.

The horror began promptly in early January, when Rachel Maddow revealed that Putin was projecting words out of Trump's mouth in real-time,

ie, literally using Trump's head like a puppet, or one of those Mission Impossible masks. And that was just the tip of the iceberg, as, despite the best efforts of Integrity Initiative, Bellingcat, and other such establishment psy-ops, Internet-censoring sites like NewsGuard, and an army of mass hysteria generators, Putin's legion of Russian 'influencers' was continuing to maliciously influence Americans, who were probably also still under attack by brain-eating Russian-Cubano crickets!

While Resistance members were still wrapping their heads in anti-cricket aluminium foil, Putin (ie, Russian Hitler) ordered Trump (ie, Russian-

asset Hitler) to launch a coup in Venezuela (ie, Russian Hitler's South American ally), probably to distract us from 'Smirkboy Hitler' and his acne-faced gang of MAGA cap-wearing Catholic high-school Hitler Youth, who were trying to invade and Hitlerise the capital. Or maybe the coup was meant to distract us from the un-American activities of Bernie Sanders, who had also been deemed a Russian asset, or a devious 'Kremlin-Trump operation', or was working with Tulsi Gabbard to build an army of blood-drinking Hindu nationalists, genocidal Assadists, and American fascists to help the Iranians (and the Russians, of course, and presumably also Jeremy Corbyn) frontally

assault the State of Israel and drive the Jews into the sea.

As if all that wasn't horrifying enough (and ridiculous and confusing enough), by early Spring there was mounting evidence that Putin had somehow gotten to Mueller, possibly with one of those FSB pee-tapes, and was sabotaging the 'Russiagate' coup the Intelligence Community, the Democratic Party, the corporate media, and the rest of the Resistance had been methodically preparing since 2016. Liberals' anuses began puckering and unpuckering as it gradually became clear that the 'Mueller Report' was not going to prove that Donald Trump had colluded with Putin and Julian Assange to steal the presidency from Hillary Clinton and transform the United States of America into a genocidal Putin-Nazi Reich.

Meanwhile, the antisemitism pandemic that had mysteriously erupted in 2016 (ie, right around the time Trump won the nomination) was raging unchecked throughout the West. Jews in Great Britain were on the brink of panic because approximately 0.08 percent of Labour Party members were anti-Semitic, as opposed to the rest of the British public, who have never shown any signs of antisemitism (or any other kind of racism or bigotry), and are practically a nation of Shabbos goys. Clearly, Corbyn had turned the party into his personal neo-Nazi death cult and was planning to carry out a second Holocaust just as soon as he renationalised the British

railways!

And it wasn't just the United Kingdom. According to corporate media virologists, idiopathic antisemitism was breaking out everywhere. In France, the 'Yellow Vests' were also antisemites. In the USA, Jews were facing 'a perfect storm of antisemitism', some of it stemming from the neo-fascist fringe (which has been a part of the American landscape forever, but which the corporate media has elevated into an international Nazi movement), but much of it whipped up by Ilhan Omar, who had apparently entered into a 'Red-Brown' pact with Richard Spencer, or Gavin McInnes, or some other formerly insignificant idiot.

Things got very confusing for a while, as Republicans united with Democrats to denounce Ilhan Omar as an antisemite (and possibly a full-fledged Islamic terrorist) and to condemn the existence of 'hate', or whatever. The corporate media, Facebook, and Twitter were suddenly swarming with hordes of angry antisemites accusing other antisemites of antisemitism. Meghan McCain couldn't take it anymore, and she broke down on the Joy Behar Show and begged to be converted to Judaism, or Zionism, right there on the air. This unseemly display of anti-antisemitism was savagely skewered by Eli Valley, an 'antisemitic' Jewish cartoonist, according to McCain and other

morons.

Then it happened ... perhaps the loudest popcorn fart in political history. The Mueller Report was finally delivered. And just like that, Russiagate was over. After three long years of manufactured mass hysteria, corporate media propaganda, books, T-shirts, marches, etc., Robert Mueller had come up with squat. Zip. Zero. Nichts. Nada. No collusion. No pee-tape. No secret servers. No Russian contacts. Nothing. Zilch.

Cognitivedissonancegripped the nation. There was beaucoup wailing and gnashing of teeth. Resistance members doubled their anti-depressant dosages and went into mourning. Shell-shocked liberals did their best to pretend they hadn't been duped, again, by authoritative sources like The Washington Post, The New York Times, The Guardian, CNN, MSNBC, et al., which had disseminated completely fabricated stories about secret meetings which never took place, power grid hackings that never happened, Russian servers that never existed, imaginary Russian propaganda peddlers, and the list goes on, and on, and on ... and hadn't otherwise behaved like a bunch of mindless, shrieking neo-McCarthyites.

Except that Russiagate wasn't over. It immediately morphed into 'Obstructiongate.' As the corporate media spooks explained, Mueller's investigation of Trump was never about collusion with Russia. No, it was always about Trump obstructing the investigation

of the collusion with Russia that the investigation was not about, and that everyone knew had never happened. In other words, Mueller's investigation was launched in order to investigate the obstruction of his investigation.

Or whatever. It didn't really matter, because, by this time, Assange had been arrested for treason, or for jumping bail, or for smearing poo all over the walls of the Ecuadorean embassy, and the *New York Times* was reporting that a veritable 'constellation' of social media accounts 'linked to Russia and far-right groups' was disseminating extremist 'disinformation', and Putin had unleashed the Russian spywhale, and 'Jews were not safe in Germany again', because the Putin-Nazis had formed an alliance with the Iranian Nazis and the Syrian Nazis, who were backing the Palestinian Nazis that Antifa was fighting on behalf of Israel, and Jews were not safe in the UK either, because of Jeremy Corbyn, who Donald Trump (who, let's all remember, is literally Hitler) was conspiring with a group of 'unnamed Jewish leaders' to prevent from becoming prime minister, and Iran was conspiring with Hezbollah and al Qaeda to amass an arsenal of WMDs to launch at Israel and Saudi Arabia, and other peaceful Middle Eastern democracies, and Trump was finally going to go full-Hitler and declare martial law on the Fourth of July, and he was operating literal 'concentra-

If you thought the ruling classes and the corporate media's crushing of Jeremy Corbyn was depressing ... well, prepare for 2020

tion camps' where immigrants were being forced to drink out of toilets, which looked almost exactly the same as the 'detention facilities' Obama had operated, except for ... well, you know, the 'fascism.' So who had time to worry about the corporate media colluding with an attempted Intelligence Community coup?

Then, in August, right on cue, some racist whack job murdered a bunch of people, and so now, as if the mass hysteria hadn't already been jacked up to the max, America had 'a white nationalist terrorist problem', or was in the throes of a 'white nationalist terrorism crisis.' Trump was now officially our 'Nihilist-in-Chief', and 'a white supremacist who inspires terrorism' and was basically no different than Anwar al-Awlaki. It was time to take some extraordinary measures along the lines of the Patriot Act, except focused on potential white supremacist terrorists, or anyone the Editorial Board of The New York Times might deem a 'threat.'

This sudden outbreak of 'Trump-inspired terrorism' and the manufactured 'fascism' hys-

teria that followed got the Resistance through end of the Summer and into the Autumn, which was always when the main event was scheduled to begin. See, these last three years have basically been a warm-up for what is about to happen ... the impeachment, sure, but that's only one part of it.

If you thought the global capitalist ruling classes and the corporate media's methodical crushing of Jeremy Corbyn was depressing to watch ... well, prepare yourself for 2020. The Year of Manufactured Mass Hysteria was not just the Intelligence Community and the corporate media getting their kicks by whipping the public up into an endless series of baseless panics over imaginary Russians and Nazis. It was the final phase of cementing the official 'Putin-Nazi' narrative in people's minds.

For the sake of anyone new to my columns, here's how the Putin-Nazi narrative works ...

The Putin-Nazi narrative has two basic parts, or messages, which are constantly repeated: (1) 'Russia is attacking our democracy!'; and (2) 'fascism is spreading like wildfire!', both of which parts are essentially fictions. This official Putin-Nazi narrative was introduced in the Summer of 2016, and replaced the official 'War on Terrorism' narrative, which had run for fifteen years, and which was just as fictional. It has been methodically reinforced and repeated by the neoliberal establishment, the corporate media (and, more recently, the alternative

media, and even by extremely intelligent anarchist anthropologists like David Graeber) for the last three years on a daily basis. At this point it has become our ‘reality’, just as the War on Terror became our ‘reality’ ... as the Cold War had previously been our ‘reality.’

When I say that this narrative has become our ‘reality’, I mean that it is now virtually impossible to refute it in any mainstream forum without being dismissed as a ‘conspiracy theorist’, or an ‘antisemite’, or a ‘Russian asset.’ It has become axiomatic and is taken for granted that we are experiencing an explosion of antisemitism, and fascism, and that Russia is out to get us (so axiomatic that someone like Graeber falls into the trap of defending Corbyn by relying on, and thus reifying, the very ‘fascism’ hysteria that was used to destroy him).

Never mind that the entire planet continues to be ruled by global capitalism, transnational corporations, and supra-governmental bodies, and that most of it is occupied by the US military, NATO, and other GloboCap allies, and assorted corporate military contractors. Never mind that Russia isn’t ‘attacking’ anyone, and that the ‘Nazis’ haven’t taken over anything, and that no one is rounding up and murdering the Jews, or the Mexicans, or anyone else for that matter ... because when have facts had anything to do with maintaining an official narrative?

The answer, in case you

Watch as the Labour ‘antisemitism crisis’ evaporates into thin air, as the War on Terror did in 2016, once it no longer served a useful purpose

were wondering, is ‘never.’ We are, all of us, living in a fiction. A fiction authored by those in power to serve the interests of those in power. That’s what an official narrative is. It makes no difference whether we believe it or not. It functions as ‘reality’ regardless. If you doubt that ... well, just ask Jeremy Corbyn. Or watch as the Labour ‘antisemitism crisis’ evaporates into thin air, as the War on Terror did in 2016, once it no longer served a useful purpose.

As for 2020, I’m afraid the manufactured mass hysteria is only going to get worse. The global capitalist ruling classes are determined to snuff out this populist rebellion, and to make sure it never happens again, or at the very least not on this scale. Anyone who gets in the way is going to be branded an ‘antisemite’, or a ‘fascist’, or a ‘Russian asset.’ Politicians who do not toe the line are going to have their political careers and personal reputations destroyed. (Did you notice how it took less than two days after the crushing of Jeremy Corbyn for the smearing of Sanders as an antisemite or ‘soft on antisemitism’ to begin?)

Mainstream journalists who dare to question the official Putin-Nazi narrative, even in the most respectful way, are going to come under increasing pressure to tone it down or suffer the consequences. Putin-Nazi paranoia will metastasise. Dissident websites will be deplatformed and demonitised. The Internet will be increasingly monitored for any and all forms of non-conformity. Dissent will be increasingly stigmatized. ‘Reality’ will be increasingly policed. It’s all going to get extremely unpleasant, and that’s assuming that civil war doesn’t break out.

And as for me, I’m just a political satirist with a barely respectable cult-sized following, so they’ll probably let me get away with continuing to cover the whole ugly show (as long as no one starts to take me seriously). I’ll try to find the humour in it, but honestly, just between you and me, what’s coming may not be all that funny. **CT**

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CJ Hopkins is an award-winning American playwright, novelist and political satirist based in Berlin. His plays are published by Bloomsbury Publishing and Broadway Play Publishing, Inc. His dystopian novel, *Zone 23*, is published by Snoggsworthy, Swaine & Cormorant. Volume I of his *Consent Factory Essays* is published by Consent Factory Publishing, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Amalgamated Content, Inc. He can be reached at cjhopkins.com or consentfactory.org.



The permanent election season in the US makes voters think that we have a lot of sway over the course the country takes. We don't, but there are ways in which we can make a difference to the country's direction, writes **Lee Camp**

The Left is finally winning the war of ideas

GOOD ideas are like viruses. They grow and spread despite our best efforts to stop them. And yes, our bulbous, awkward species does indeed work very hard to catch and kill good ideas.

At the time I write this column, the first Democratic primaries are approaching with

the zest and excitement of an unavoidable bowel movement. Even if you read this a year or two or 10 from now, primaries will still be advancing toward you. As sure as the universe expands, the primaries approach. The moment we finish one election season, another is on the horizon.

This serves two purposes.

First, it continuously makes voters think that we matter, that we have a lot of sway over the course this country takes. We don't. (Well, not as much as we think we do.) And the second purpose is to fill the mainstream media airwaves with vacuous political play-by-play for two straight years. For example, by covering the three-

point shift in Pete Buttigieg's likability amongst Iowans (which matters as much as a three-point shift in the average Iowan's concern about getting trichinosis from undercooked anchovies), the corporate media cogs can avoid talking about the exploitation of American workers or the massive debt crushing most people or the environmental collapse gripping the planet or the highly advanced, highly illegal surveillance state in which we live.

Our electoral politics is a beautiful smokescreen for the ruling elite.

But no matter what happens in these overtly rigged Democratic National Committee primaries (See: media manipulation, voter suppression, corporate spending, super delegates, unverifiable voting machines, etc, etc, etc), those of us who care about the world and care about our fellow human beings are winning the war of ideas. Simply take a look at the ideas that are dominating the Democratic presidential race, even though the corporate media has tried to ignore these solutions, attack them, dispute them, and then ignore them all over again.

1. Medicare for All

This is the idea that if you're five years old and you break your arm, no matter how little you get paid at your child labor job, you shouldn't have to fix your broken arm yourself with a papier-mâché cast made from soiled Kleenex and bird poop.

Marijuana has become so widely accepted that Joe Biden recently became a laughingstock when he called weed a 'gateway drug'

Medicare for All was initially put forward by the Green Party and left-wing activists, and now it's a mainstream discussion. The idea perseveres despite interminable attacks from the moneyed and the well-heeled as they sit neck-deep in mountains of top-shelf health care. (I hear many of them get young blood transfusions just for kicks on the weekend.) The rich continue to espouse one of the worst systems in the developed world, as if it's somehow justifiable that two-thirds of Americans who declare bankruptcy each year do so partially because of health care costs.

2. The Green New Deal

This is an economic proposal that would give a majority of Americans a job and switch to renewable energy, among other things. Basically it would solve both our fossil fuel death spiral and unemployment problems in one fell swoop. It was put forward initially by the Green Party and left-wing activists, but then it quickly rose to the level of mainstream discussion, resulting in a bill by Congress. This is an impressive feat even though there are criticisms of the Democratic rewriting of the Green New Deal (such as its fail-

ure to address the military-industrial complex, which happens to be the largest polluter in the known world, but maybe we'll find a lost tribe in the Amazon that runs a few hundred thousand warships on diesel and then our Pentagon will drop down to the second biggest polluter).

3) Legalising marijuana

If I have to explain what this is to you, then you clearly haven't turned on a television in the past 50 years nor caught a glimpse of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (the show, the movie, the action figure, the comic book, the video game, the candy or the song). The legalisation of cannabis in all its nifty forms has rapidly spread across the country – which is not just crucial to people who have gained tremendous medical benefits from cannabis but also crucial for anybody who needs to get viciously baked in order to watch the impeachment hearings (which is the only legitimate way to watch the impeachment hearings).

Marijuana has become so widely accepted that Joe Biden recently became a laughingstock when he called weed a 'gateway drug'. Yes grandpa, the evil weed is a gateway drug, and rock music is the devil's work, and dancing with a girl before marriage can cause one's phallus to fall off. ... Not to mention, who is Joe Biden to tell us not to get a little loopy at the end of a long day? How many prescription meds must it take

that guy to simply put on his pants each morning?

4. \$15 minimum wage

I don't have to tell you why this matters. The federal minimum wage is \$7.25 an hour. You know what you can buy with \$7 these days? A Ding-Dong out of the vending machine. So maybe, after a worker has laboured for 39 straight hours, he can tether all the Ding-Dong packages together into a rudimentary raft that will allow him to float downriver to somewhere that treats him better. At \$7.25 an hour, no one can possibly get by. I did the math: You'd have to work for 3,700 years just to afford a ticket to the Mötley Crüe reunion tour. (And they're not even good. Imagine if you wanted tickets to see someone good.)

5. Distrust of mainstream corporate media

Even if you're one of these certifiable nutbags who still turns on CNN or Fox News every day all day, you still understand that you're not getting the full truth. You might think you're getting a piece of it, but not all of it. ...

Also, you should be euthanised. (Okay, maybe not euthanised, but anyone who leaves cable news on in the background just to feel warm and cozy should at the very least be left on a faraway island to live out their days. If you're one of them, please stop it. Corporate media crap is not the audio version of your childhood blanket. It's pathetic PROPAGANDA. ... Sorry to yell.)

6. Distrust of US-backed coups and war games

Most Americans are opposed to endless war now. We're opposed to harming and killing so many millions in the name of propping up our bloated, belligerent empire that eats entire nations and then vomits up new KFC franchise locations. Obviously the growing disgust among most of the country has not managed to stop the bombs from falling, but it's a start.

I'm sure you don't have the time to read the entire list of ideas that were once considered far left and are now mainstream vibrant discussions – abolishing ICE, holding

police accountable, distrusting the intelligence community AKA the surveillance state, questioning capitalism, ending factory farming, confronting the extreme climate crisis, etc. etc. Sure, our elections are rigged in favour of the two corporate Wall Street-funded parties. And yes, our media is owned and operated by the largest, most aggressive corporations in the world leaving little to no room on the air for the anti-war activists offering free hugs and senseless acts of kindness. But that's why it's all the more impressive that in so many areas, we are winning the seemingly endless battle for the mindscape of our country. **CT**

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*Lee Camp is an American stand-up comedian, writer, actor and activist. This column is based on a monologue Lee Camp wrote and performed on his TV show Redacted Tonight. His new book *Bullet Points and Punch Lines*, with a foreword by Chris Hedges, is available at www.LeeCampBook.com*

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