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Mid-November 2020

Jonathan Cook

WHY BIDEN WILL FAIL

David Edwards

Death of a 'controversial' journalist

Joe Allen

Two tribes go to war

Alan Macleod

The end of online privacy



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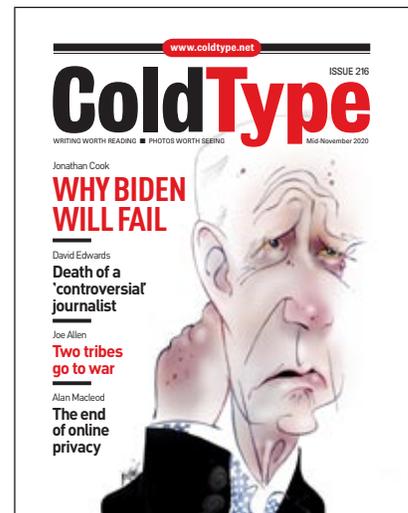
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ColdType

7 Lewis Street, Georgetown,
Ontario, Canada L7G 1E3

Contact ColdType:

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at editor@coldtype.net

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Art: 123rf.com

Alan Macleod

The end of online privacy

The European Union is rushing through new legislation to get rid of end to end digital encryption. This would mean the end of privacy for users of popular messaging apps like WhatsApp and Signal.

A European Council draft resolution on encryption quietly published in early November lays out the EU's Orwellian position in detail. "The European Union fully supports the development, implementation and use of strong encryption". it states, "Encryption is a necessary means of protecting fundamental rights

and the digital security of governments, industry and society". Yet in the very next sentence it insists that, "At the same time, the European Union needs to ensure the ability of competent authorities" to "exercise their lawful powers, both online and offline". These "competent authorities" (a phrase occurring throughout the document) refer to law enforcement agencies and judicial authorities.

"Protecting the privacy and security of communications through encryption and at the same time upholding the possibility for competent authorities in

the area of security and criminal justice to lawfully access relevant data for legitimate, clearly defined purposes infighting serious and/or organised crimes and terrorism, including in the digital world, are extremely important", it concludes.

Thus, the EU's position is that its citizens should be able to hide their data from criminals, but not from the government or its various spying agencies.

The official justification for these new laws, Austrian public service broadcaster Österreichischer Rundfunk reports, is the Vienna terrorist attack of

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November 2, which left five people dead and 23 injured. However, it notes, the EU has long dreamed of pushing through legislation which lets it surveil its population.

In June, for instance, European Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson gave a speech outlining what must be done to win the fight against child trafficking and abuse. “We must also deal with encryption. Military grade encryption that’s easy to use but impossible to break makes paedophiles invisible and hides evidence of their crimes from police”, she insisted. “It’s our obligation to protect children. We must do what is necessary”, she added.

Civil rights group the Electronic Freedom Foundation is not impressed by the various arguments put forward by the EU in order to justify the end of end to end encryption, calling it a “drastically invasive step”. We are in the first stages of a long anti-encryption march by the upper echelons of the EU, headed directly toward Europeans’ digital front-doors. It’s the same direction as the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States have been moving for some time. If Europe wants to keep its status as a jurisdiction that treasures privacy, it will need to fight for it”, they wrote last month.

WhatsApp, a subsidiary of Facebook, has more than 2-billion users around the world and is particularly popular with Euro-

peans. In terms of user penetration, the top five countries for WhatsApp are all in Europe, with over 85 percent of Dutch smartphone owners using the service. Commonly thought to be the most secure messaging app,

Signal is also extremely popular. While it does not reveal how many users it has, its app has been downloaded more than 10-million times by Android users alone. Launched in 2014, Signal is an open source app specifically created with journalists, NGO workers, and other professions who share sensitive data in mind. And while Facebook and WhatsApp have a history of cooperating with governments around the world, Signal has so far resisted attempts to co-opt or neutralise its software, notably rejecting the Australian government’s demands to install a spying “backdoor” for it.

Österreichischer Rundfunk alleges that the campaign against encryption is being led by France and President Emmanuel Macron in particular. “The ground for this has been prepared since 2015 in a whole series of campaigns”, emanating from Paris, it writes. Macron will discuss “further steps against terrorism” with Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz.

While the EU represents just 27 nations and around 450-million people, decisions the body makes have a profound effect on the rest of the world. Indeed, the European Council document makes this clear, claiming that, “the EU will leverage its tools and regulatory

powers to help shape global rules and standards”. Thus, regulations enforced on tech companies will likely become the standard in many other parts of the world, if not globally.

On November 2, a lone gunman wearing a fake explosive belt opened fire in the historic center of Vienna, killing four others before police shot him dead. Authorities stated that the perpetrator, 20-year-old Kujtim Fejzullai, was an ISIS sympathiser. This is not the first time that terrorist incidents have been used to justify increasing surveillance laws. Just six weeks after the September 11 attacks, the US government rushed through the PATRIOT Act, a piece of legislation that drastically increased the state’s ability to spy on its own citizens, even allowing for indefinite detention of non-US citizens. The act has been continually condemned by rights groups such as the ACLU and Amnesty International. Likewise, the 7/7 bombings in London led to unprecedented levels of government surveillance in the United Kingdom.

While the latest European laws would increase the level of government pressure on tech companies, the reality is that it is already difficult to ascertain where one ends and the other begins. Facebook, already partners with the Atlantic Council, a NATO cutout organisation funded by governments and defense contractors, to help curate its users’ news feeds. A senior Twit-

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ter executive was found last year to be an undercover British Army officer specialising in online psychological operations. Meanwhile, Zoom appointed former Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano to its board of directors. Other communications giants like Microsoft are also huge defence contractors themselves.

While it is likely impossible to ever end terrorism or child trafficking, it is certainly possible to end user privacy online. This

latest law would likely do little of the former and a great deal of the latter. **CT**

*Alan Macleod is a staff writer for MintPress News. After completing his PhD in 2017 he published two books: *Bad News From Venezuela: Twenty Years of Fake News and Misreporting and Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent*. This article was first published at www.mintpressnews.com.*

just for those looking to cut their ties to rents and mortgages, but also for community planners and employers.

As organisation scholars, we believe understanding the shifting definition of home in the work-life balance equation is important. Most research on work-life balance focuses on finding ways to fit work into our homes and lives. That includes by either changing the way work is done or by providing programmes such as daycare, eldercare or telecommuting that help workers better fit their work into their homes.

But these adaptations aren't available for many workers. Construction work can't take place on a Zoom call and flexible schedules don't work well when you're a bus driver. And many companies, for many reasons, are unwilling to invest in the programmes that make work more flexible.

Our research, based on interviews of working people who live in vans, finds that some workers are redefining their homes rather than relying on employers to redefine their work. They're enabled by the social media movement #vanlife that provides tips on refitting vehicles with beds, baths and kitchens, on friendly (and unfriendly) places to park overnight and a thriving community of #vanlife commodities. The people known as vanlifters reject traditional notions of home ownership and take their residence on the road.

This may sound like mobile home vacationers, but the vanlife



Photo: Hilary Bird/Unsplash

ON THE ROAD: Flexible living and freedom from mortgages.

Scott B. Rankin & Angus J. Duff

The workers who live in their vans

A growing number of people are redefining what “home” looks like. For many of them, it looks like a van.

The trend to #vanlife is fuelled by the declining affordability of homes, rental shortages in urban centres and resort communities, and by a shift in our definition

of “community” from physical neighbourhood to online social networks.

Judging from our research, there are very different understandings of this choice of residence depending on which side of the steering wheel you're on. But understanding the experiences of van dwellers is important not

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phenomenon is not about vacationing. Rather, it's a choice that people with jobs are making, especially in high-cost markets like Vancouver, San Francisco and Seattle.

From the point of view of communities and homeowners, van dwellers occupy a category of homelessness. In the winter of 2019, the resort town of Canmore, in the Canadian province of Alberta, grappled with the growing number of vans parking in community centres and shopping mall parking lots. Local residents complained of noise, mess and the use of recreation centre facilities by the van dwellers.

There have been similar stories in Vancouver, Victoria and Squamish, BC.

Local news narratives tend to paint van dwellers as a transient group squatting on public space. These are valid concerns for communities, but the communities that complain about non-standard living arrangements often depend on the low-wage workers who tend to populate them and provide them with the goods and services they need.

We set out to understand the van dweller lifestyle from their perspective and found several common themes. First, van dwellers categorically reject the homeless label. Many respondents made clear they'd simply made a different choice than most when it comes to how they live.

They see van dwelling as a source of freedom from mort-

gages, rent, utilities and the possessions that come with traditional dwelling places.

One respondent, a club disc jockey, told us that as a renter, he needed to work more than two weeks every month just to pay his rent. In a van, he says, he has extra time and money to live a lifestyle he otherwise could not afford.

A construction worker lived in a van so that he could take half the year off for recreational travel, something that owning or renting would make unaffordable for him.

In addition to financial freedom, van dwellers told us it gave them more career freedom, opening up opportunities they couldn't otherwise have taken.

A warehouse worker from California relocated to Washington to take advantage of higher wages. An on-call schoolteacher in Vancouver could take different assignments without suffering two-hour commutes. Instead, he moved his home/van in the evening when traffic was light.

Finally, van dwellers extolled the harmony between work demands and their lives. They consistently told us they could enjoy their lifestyle regardless of work locations and schedules that would be challenging for many. Like the schoolteacher, a bus driver who works out of three depots scattered across British Columbia's lower mainland talked of how her living arrangements eliminated the stress by ridding her of the morning commute.

Van dwellers did report some negatives. Some found the chore of finding parking places where they weren't targets for ticketing or community frustration to be an ongoing challenge. Others felt their workplaces might stigmatise their choice, requiring them to hide their lifestyle in fear of harming their or their employer's reputation.

On the whole, though, van dwellers rejected typical notions of home. Just as vanlifters have reimaged the definition of home, perhaps it's time for society and employers to reimagine where workers live. For employers, van living may provide access to workers, particularly in high-cost housing markets or tight employment markets.

Providing basic services such as showers or parking spots with power sources, ensuring employees are not discriminated against based on how they've chosen to live or simply acknowledging that someone's choice of residence is no threat to anyone's livelihood may create better outcomes for van dwellers, their employers and the communities where they work. **CT**

Scott B. Rankin is Assistant Professor, Human Resources, Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, BC. Angus J Duff is Associate Professor, Human Resources, Thompson Rivers University. This article was first published at www.theconversation.com

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Sam Pizzigati

Election triumph for democracy! Hold on ...

In real horse races – races that actual horses run – the winners go on to run other races. Racehorses do races. They have no other responsibility.

In our political horse races, winners do have another responsibility. We expect them to go on and govern, to make and execute policy decisions. Horse races don't give us democracy. We have democracy when those we the people elect make choices that reflect what we need and feel.

Our pundits, unfortunately, regularly overlook that distinction, as they did once again on Election Day 2020. They beheld the spectacle of a national voter turnout up by tens of millions and hailed the resiliency of our democracy, as imperfect as that democracy may be.

Meanwhile, just before Election Day, two researchers released compelling new evidence that by the metric of governing – the only reason we hold political horse races – the United States no longer operates as a serious democracy. We have become something else altogether. In our current political system, their data analysis shows, the rich, not the people, almost always win.

The two analysts behind this new research, the Seattle-based Shawn McGuire and Charles

Delahunt, have built upon the pioneering political science of UCLA's Martin Gilens and Northwestern's Benjamin Page, scholars who've been probing how democracy does – and does not – play out in the policy choices America makes.

The big question the Gilens and Page work raises: At what point does a democracy cease to be democratic? A difficult question. In the social sciences, after



Photo: Pexels.com

all, neat lines seldom separate one phenomenon from another. But if we start from “the premise that democracy means a government that responds to the wishes of the average citizen”, as Page explained after he and Gilens published their landmark research in 2014, we can find it “quite feasible to investigate this question objectively”.

To do that investigating, to find out how much influence average citizens have on what their government does, Gilens and Page made a deep dive into a da-

tabase of federal policy decisions that Gilens had spent ten years compiling. In all, the two political scientists analysed the outcomes from 1,779 policy disputes and battles. And their conclusion?

“Average citizens have no detectable influence at all”, sums up Page, “upon federal policy”.

Who does have influence?

“If you look at affluent people”, says Page, “they get what they want almost all the time”.

Enter Shawn McGuire and Charles Delahunt, and at this point things get a little wonky. Gilens and Page put their data on federal decisions through the standard scholarly tools of multiple regression analysis. McGuire and Delahunt have gone back to that same database with analytical tools from the emerging new worlds of artificial intelligence and machine learning.

Their new working paper, just published by the Institute for New Economic Thinking in New York, gives a rigorously technical analysis of what these tools reveal, and the Institute's research director, Thomas Ferguson, has helpfully fashioned an introduction to – and a historical context for – the McGuire-Delahunt analysis that lay readers will find easily accessible.

Ferguson, himself a pioneer in social science research on political decision making, points out that “the idea that public opinion powers at least the broad direction of public policy in formally democratic countries like the United States has been an article of faith in both political

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science and public economics for generations.”

Gilens and Page upset that apple cart. McGuire and Delahunt confirm that upsetting and, notes Ferguson, open the way to “exciting extensions”.

Gilens and Page, for instance, locate real influence over public policy within the ranks of the most affluent 10 percent, but suggest that opinions in this top tenth most probably reflect attitudes within the ranks of the top 1 or 2 percent.

McGuire and Delahunt go further. Their research moves our focus from what our richest have on their minds to what they’re doing with what they have in their wallets. They see “the transfer of large amounts of money to policy makers from the wealthiest sources focused intensely on particular policies” as the “lodestar variable” for understanding how our policy makers make policy.

Opinions among America’s influencers, concurs Ferguson, amount to “noisy” byproducts from the mobilisation of big money, what we get from big money’s “comet-like trail of social networks, subsidised op eds, subservient think tanks, and journalists seeking applause and better positions”. Our democracy has become, in Ferguson’s phrase, an “affluent authoritarianism”.

“McGuire and Delahunt’s reassessment of the [Gilens] data makes it much easier to see how far from reality ideas that average voters drive politics really are”, Ferguson goes on to note. “To make progress on under-

standing the mainsprings of actually existing democratic systems like the United States, the fixation on public opinion has to change”.

And who has the power to make that change, to shift our nation’s political dialogue off win-some narratives about America as democracy’s eternal fountain-head? On this key question, our most serious researchers – on the presence and absence of democracy in contemporary American life – seem to agree. Only mass mobilisations can beat back mobilisations of big money.

“I’d like people to see”, says Ben Page, “that things can change – because, in fact, things did change in the United States, in two big waves of political action, the first during the Populist and Progressive period that started in the late 19th-century, the second in the New Deal era”.

Elections do matter, adds Thomas Ferguson, but making real change like taxing the rich and passing Medicare for all requires “a real mass movement not de-

pendent on the good will of the super rich”.

McGuire and Delahunt most certainly agree. They find it “strange to observe the fight for ‘democracy’ currently playing out on screens across the country”, the two said, “while the underlying disease – money-driven policy outcomes – leading to present-day symptoms goes mostly unspoken”.

“The current election is of critical importance”, they continue, “but a society that pins its hopes for democracy on quadrennial extravaganzas heavily funded by wealthy interests will be disappointed, as these players will perpetually win the game.” **CT**

Sam Pizzigati co-edits *Inequality.org*. His latest books include *The Case for a Maximum Wage* and *The Rich Don’t Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970*. Follow him at [@Too_Much_Online](#).

Paul Armentano

Marijuana was clear election winner

On many issues, our country is deeply divided. But when it comes to loosening the longstanding prohibition on cannabis, most Americans agree.

On Election Day, voters in states across the country approved a series of ballot proposals legalising the use and distribution of marijuana for either medical or adult-use purposes.

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Their voices were unmistakable and emphatic. Majorities of Americans decided in favour of every marijuana-related proposition placed before them – a clean sweep – and they did so by record margins.

Voters approved the legalisation of medical cannabis in two states, Mississippi and South Dakota.

In Mississippi, voters chose between two duelling initiatives. Ultimately, they favoured a measure placed on the ballot by patient advocates and rejected a more restrictive alternative measure placed on the ballot by state lawmakers. In one of many lopsided results on Election Day, 74 percent of voters chose the more liberal of the two measures.

Voters legalised the possession of marijuana by adults in Arizona, Montana, New Jersey, and South Dakota.

The measures in Arizona, Montana, and South Dakota permit adults to possess and cultivate marijuana for personal use and establish a regulated retail market.

In New Jersey, voters decided on a public ballot question. That means Garden State lawmakers must now amend state law to comport it with the voters' decision.

Voters' actions on Election Day were an unequivocal rebuke to the longstanding policy of federal marijuana prohibition. They are an indication that marijuana legalisation is far from a fringe is-

sue, but one that is now embraced by mainstream America.

In New Jersey, 67 percent of voters chose legalisation. In Arizona, legalisation passed by a 20 percent margin, just four years after voters had rejected a similar ballot question. Fifty-seven percent of Montanans backed legalisation, as did 54 percent of South Dakotans.

Voters did so despite opposition from many of their public officials. Republican South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem appeared in television ads opposing both state initiative measures. Montana US Attorney Kurt Alme issued a white paper opining that legalisation would have “serious ramifications” for “public safety and health.”

These attacks, however, failed to gain traction.

As in 2016, when voters in deep red states like Arkansas and North Dakota joined voters in deep blue states like California and Massachusetts to reform their cannabis laws, these 2020 results once again affirm that marijuana legalisation is a uniquely popular issue with voters of all political persuasions.

Indeed, majorities of Democrats, independents, and Republicans consistently endorse legalization in national polls.

The results also continue a multi-decade long trend of marijuana legalisation advocates achieving success at the ballot box. Since 1996, voters have decided affirmatively on 35 separate ballot measures legalising

cannabis (22 legalising medical marijuana and 13 legalising adult use).

Despite this public consensus, elected officials have far too often remained unresponsive to the legalisation issue. This dereliction of representation has forced advocacy groups to directly place marijuana-related ballot questions before the voters.

The success of these initiatives proves definitively that marijuana legalisation is not exclusively a blue state issue, but an issue that is supported by a majority of all Americans – regardless of party politics. Once these latest laws are implemented, one out of every three Americans will reside in a jurisdiction where the use of marijuana by adults is legal under state law.

For more than two decades, the public has spoken loudly and clearly. They favour ending the failed policy of marijuana prohibition and replacing it with a policy of legalisation, regulation, taxation, and public education.

Elected officials – at both the state and federal level – ought to be listening. Perhaps even more importantly, they ought to be acting. **CT**

*Paul Armentano is the Deputy Director of NORML – the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws. He's the author of *The Citizen's Guide to State-By-State Marijuana Laws* (Whitman Press, 2015). Distributed by OtherWords.org.*

Insights

Caitlin Johnstone

There are no war heroes. Only victims

Some thoughts on the recent American elections. And on the people who did their best to make sure that the elections were “the fairest in the world”.

“The media do not decide who’s president!” Uhh, yeah they kinda do. They spent two years sabotaging progressive primary candidates and spent this year manufacturing consent for Biden. They manipulate the thoughts people think about power, and they can install whomever they wish.

Republicans spent years calling a fake Russia narrative that posed no risk of removing Trump a “coup”. Now Democrats are calling a glorified temper tantrum a “coup”. The government that stages the most coups around the world has no idea what they are. They’re not scaring you about a Trump “coup” because there is any possibility of that ever happening, they’re doing it because it’s their last chance to use Trump to psychologically abuse you for clicks.

Biden is a hollowed out husk of a man whose insides have been entirely filled with corporate logos. Anyone who is already defending

Biden and saying you’re being too hard on him will be completely useless for the next four to eight years.

You can get rid of Trump, but people who say the mass media are crooks and liars will keep getting traction and attention with that message. Because it is true, and people know it is true.

Liberal pundits have loved to promote the narrative that Trump is uniquely cozy with dictators because it lets them both (a) attack him for being insufficiently hawkish toward nations like Russia and North Korea and (b) pretend their favourite presidents haven’t been extremely cozy with dictators.

Liberal media writers assured us that if Trump was elected in 2016 there’d be millions of deportations, Muslims in concentration camps and alt-right militias driving minorities out of the country. Instead we got another shitty Reagan Republican, total amnesia for Bush and Obama’s crimes, and a bunch of psychologically traumatised liberals who just lived through the Holocaust in their minds.

It is impossible to say Trump is uniquely evil among presidents without rehabilitating George W. Bush. It can’t be done, because

nothing Trump did is as bad as an invasion that killed more than a million people, destabilised the Middle East and ushered in an unprecedented era of military expansionism which displaced tens of millions of people.

That’s always been the most destructive element of Trump hysteria: not that it’s unfair to Trump, but that it necessarily erases the crimes of his predecessors and of future presidents. It blurs out the criminal nature of the US empire as an institution by making it about one guy.

I want a system where corporations are fined for any litter they produce that winds up on the street or in the ocean. We need to reverse the burden and make it in their financial interest to create packaging and recycling systems that are closed loops.

You could have collectors whose job it is to find trash and tally up the fines. A buck a cup or whatever. It wouldn’t even have to be the government doing it; it could easily be done by the private sector because there is a fiscal motivation for finding trash.

In the old days whole empires were built around religions and their theocratic institutions, which used their doctrines to shape society in service of the powerful. Nowadays the same thing happens, but the religion is called “capitalism”.

One party wants to roll back most of the environmental measures. The other party that wants to

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implement vastly insufficient environmental measures which accomplish nothing other than allow liberals feel like they're doing something for a few years. These two parties are not meaningfully different from each other on environmental issues.

The plutocrat-owned western political/media class has built up a collective doctrine that you cannot simply end overseas wars and bring the troops home, and that anyone who says you can is a lunatic. That's all it is though: fact-free religious doctrine, espoused on blind faith. When it

comes to large-scale governing and international matters, the mainstream perspective is only mainstream because extremely wealthy people poured vast fortunes into making it mainstream. There's no collective wisdom or truth in it, it's just what power wants us to believe about what's going on.

As long as the powerful are propagandising the people, the people aren't truly operating with free will. Anyone who's escaped a relationship with a manipulative abuser understands that you're not really operating with much

free agency while you're being psychologically dominated.

Leftists: I want socialism, an end to imperialism, and revolutionary change.

Liberals: I want capitalism, endless war, and the status quo. Also I have pink hair.

Rightists: These are the same to me.

There are no war heroes, only war victims. **CT**

Caitlin Johnstone is an Australian blogger. Her website is www.caitlinjohnstone.com

Thomas S. Harrington

If rationality ever returns ...

Historians will marvel at the suicide of Euro-American culture set in motion by a virus that killed 3 of 1000 people, the vast majority of whom were over 75 and with already compromised health.

They will wonder and marvel at how the culture of consumerism suddenly sapped most in this cultural space of the basic desire to live as freely as possible in the face of the nemesis that has always stalked each and every inhabitant of the earth: death.

They will wonder and marvel at how the inhabitants of this world, who as recently as seven decades before had responded to infinitely greater threats to

their existence with hope and optimism, and subsequently, with the construction of perhaps the freest and most comfortable culture that humanity had ever seen, suddenly decided to close up shop and terminate that project before this puny scare.

They will examine the superstitions that made them do it, superstitions as absurd as the wearing of garlic garlands in medieval times – but presented dishonestly and hubristically in the name of science, and wonder at the astonishing inversion of basic social aspirations and thought processes.

They will, I suspect, ultimately conclude that by garrisoning ourselves in cubicles of material

opulence, or the often unsuccessful pursuit thereof, we fatally unhinged ourselves from the contemplation of, and engagement with, the only things that life has ever been about: love, friendship, survival and the pursuit of joy within the often difficult trials of this existence, and that we simply gave up, exhausted and devoid of imagination and vital ambition. **CT**

*Thomas S. Harrington is professor of Hispanic Studies at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. His most recent book is *A Citizen's Democracy in Authoritarian Times: An American View on the Catalan Drive for Independence* (University of Valencia Press).*

Jonathan Cook

Time for *real* change in US politics

Joe Biden will fail to bring back 'normal' politics. What's needed now is a populism of the left

Analysts are still grappling with the fallout from the US election. Trumpism proved a far more enduring and alluring phenomenon than most media pundits expected. Defying predictions, Trump improved his share of the overall vote compared to his 2016 win, and he surprised even his own team by increasing his share of minority voters and women.

But most significantly, he almost held his own against Democratic challenger Joe Biden at a time when the US economy – the incumbent’s “trump” card – was in dire straits after eight months of a pandemic. Had it not been for Covid-19, Trump – not Biden – would most likely be preparing for the next four years in the White House.

Of course, much of Trump’s appeal was that he is not Biden. The Democratic party decided to run pretty much the worst candidate imaginable: an old-school machine politician, one emphatically beholden to the corporate donor class and unsuited to the new, more populist political climate. His cam-

paingning – on the rare occasions he appeared – suggested significant cognitive decline. Biden often looked more suited to a luxury retirement home than heading the most powerful nation on earth.

But then again, if Trump could lead the world’s only superpower for four years, how hard can it really be? He showed that those tinfoil-hatted conspiracy theorists might be right after all: maybe the president is largely a figurehead, while a permanent bureaucracy runs much of the show from behind the curtain. Were Ronald Reagan and George W Bush not enough to persuade us that any halfwit who can string together a few cliches from a teleprompter will suffice?

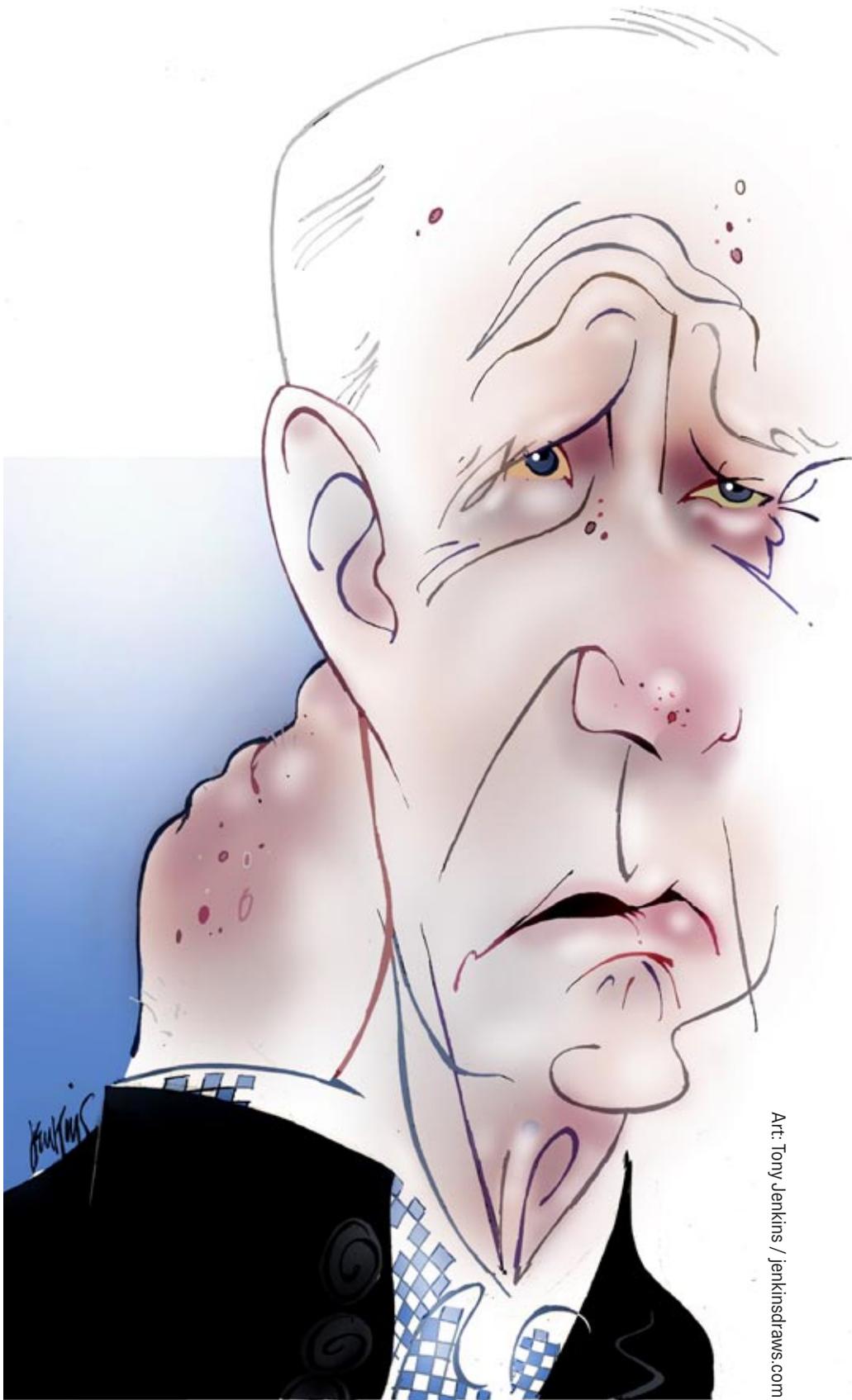
The narrowly averted Trump second term has at least prompted liberal pundits to draw one significant lesson that is being endlessly repeated: Biden must avoid returning to the old “normal”, the one that existed before Trump, because that version of “normal” was exactly what delivered Trump in the first place. These commentators fear that, if Biden doesn’t play

his cards wisely, we will end up in 2024 with a Trump 2.0, or even a rerun from Trump himself, re-energized after four years of tweet-sniping from the sidelines. They are right to be worried.

But their analysis does not properly explain the political drama that is unfolding, or where it heads next. There is a two-fold problem with the “no return to normal” argument.

The first is that the liberal media and political class making this argument are doing so in entirely bad-faith. For four years they have turned US politics and its coverage into a simple-minded, ratings-grabbing horror show. A vile, narcissist businessman, in collusion with an evil Russian mastermind, usurped the title of most powerful person on the planet that should have been bestowed on Hillary Clinton. As Krystal Ball has rightly mocked, even now the media are whipping up fears that the “Orange Mussolini” may stage some kind of cack-handed coup to block the handover to Biden.

These stories have been narrated to us by much of the corporate media over and over again – and



Art: Tony Jenkins / jenkinsdraws.com

Biden often looked more suited to a luxury retirement home than heading the most powerful nation on earth

precisely so that we do not think too hard about why Trump beat Clinton in 2016. The reality, far too troubling for most liberals to admit, is that Trump proved popular because a lot of the problems he identified were true, even if he raised them in bad faith himself and had no intention of doing anything meaningful to fix them.

Trump was right about the need for the US to stop interfering in the affairs of the rest of the world under the pretence of humanitarian concern and a supposed desire to spread democracy at the end of the barrel of a gun. In practice, however, lumbered with that permanent bureaucracy, delegating his authority to the usual war hawks such as John Bolton, and eager to please the Christian evangelical and Israel lobbies, Trump did little to stop such destructive meddling. But at least he was correct rhetorically.

Equally, Trump looked all too right in berating the establishment media for promoting “fake news”, especially as coverage of his presidency was dominated by an evidence-free narrative claim-

ing he had colluded with Russia to steal the election. Those now bleating about how dangerous his current assertions of election fraud are should remember they were the ones who smashed that particular glass house with their own volley of stones back in 2016.

Yes, Trump has been equally culpable with his Twitter barrages of fake news. And yes, he cultivated rather than spurned support from one of those major corporate outlets: the reliably rightwing Fox News. But what matters most is that swaths of the American public – unable to decide who to believe, or maybe not caring – preferred to side with a self-styled maverick, Washington outsider, the supposed “underdog”, against a class of self-satisfied, overpaid media professionals transparently prostituting themselves to the billionaire owners of the corporate media.

Once voters had decided the system was rigged – and it is rigged towards the maintenance of elite power – anyone decrying the system, whether honestly or duplicitously, was going to prove popular.

Trump’s appeal was further bolstered by styling himself a self-made man, as his campaign riffed on the long-standing myths of the American Dream. The US public was encouraged to see Trump as a rich man prepared to gamble part of his own fortune on a run for the presidency so he could bring his business acumen to USA Ltd. That contrasted starkly with Democratic party leaders like Clinton and Biden who gave every appearance of having abjectly sold their principles – and their souls

Even if Biden wanted to overhaul the existing, corporate-bonded US political system he would be incapable of doing so

– to the highest-bidding corporate “donors”.

And again, that perception – at least in relation to Clinton and Biden – wasn’t entirely wrong.

How can Biden not end up trying to resurrect the Obama years that he was so very much part of during his two terms as vice-president and that led directly to Trump? That was why corporate donors backed his campaign. They desire the kind of neoliberal “normal” that leaves them free to continue making lots more money and ensures the wealth gap grows.

It is why they and the media worked so hard to pave Biden’s path to the presidency, even doing their best to bury political stories embarrassing to the Biden campaign. Maintaining that “normal” is the very reason the modern Democratic party exists.

Even if Biden wanted to radically overhaul the existing, corporate-bonded US political system – and he doesn’t – he would be incapable of doing so. He operates within institutional, structural constraints – donors, Congress, the media, the supreme court – all there to ensure his room for manoeuvre is tightly delimited.

Had his main rival for the Democratic nomination, Bernie Sanders, been allowed to run instead

and won the presidency, it would have been much the same. The important difference is that the existence of a President Sanders would have risked exposing the fact that the “world’s most powerful leader” is not really so powerful.

Sanders would have lost his battles trying to defy these structural constraints, but in the process he would have made those constraints far more visible. They would have been all too obvious had someone like Sanders been constantly hitting his head against them. That was precisely why the corporate class and the technocratic leadership of the Democratic party worked so strenuously to make sure Sanders got nowhere near the presidential race.

Biden will do his best to achieve what his donors want: a return to the neoliberal “normal” under Obama. He will offer a sprinkling of initiatives to ensure progressive liberals can put to rest their resistance posturing with a clear conscience. There will be some “woke” identity politics to prevent any focus on class politics and the struggle for real economic justice, as well as some weak, corporation-friendly Green New Deal projects, if Biden can sneak past them past a Republican-controlled Senate.

And if he can’t manage even that ... well that’s the beauty of a system tailor-made to follow the path of least financial resistance, to uphold the corporate status quo, the “normal”.

But there is a second, bigger problem. A fly in the ointment. Whatever Biden and the Democratic party do to resurrect the neoliberal consensus, the old “normal”, it isn’t coming back. The smug, technocratic class that

has dominated western politics for decades on behalf of the corporate elite is under serious threat. Biden looks more like a hiccup, a last burp provoked by the unexpected pandemic.

The neoliberal “normal” isn’t coming back because the economic circumstances that generated it – the post-war boom of seemingly endless growth – have disappeared.

A quarter of a century ago, the Cassandras of their day – those dismissed as peddlers of false conspiracy theories – warned of “peak oil”. That was the idea that the fuel on which the global economy ran either had peaked or soon would do. As the oil ran out, or became more expensive to extract, economic growth would slow, wages would fall, and inequality between rich and poor would increase.

This was likely to have dramatic political consequences too: resource wars abroad (inevitably camouflaged as “humanitarian intervention”); more polarised domestic politics; greater popular dissatisfaction; the return of charismatic, even fascist, leaders; and a resort to violence to solve political problems.

The arguments about peak oil continue. Judged by some standards, the production peak arrived in the 1970s. Others say, with the aid of fracking and other harmful technologies, the turning-point is due about now. But the kind of world predicted by peak oil theory looks to have been unfolding since at least the 1980s. The crisis in neoliberal economics was underscored by the 2008 global economic crash, whose shockwaves are still with us.

On top of all this, there are

The populism of the left espouses cooperation and solidarity within nations and between them

looming ecological and climate catastrophes intimately tied to the fossil-fuel economy on which the global corporations have grown fat. This Gordian knot of globe-spanning self-harm urgently needs unpicking.

Biden has neither the temperament nor the political manoeuvre room to take on these mammoth challenges and solve them. Inequality is going to increase during his term. The technocrats are again going to be exposed once again as impotent – or complicit – as plutocracy entrenches. The ecological crisis is not going to be dealt with beyond largely empty promises and posturing.

There will be lots of talk in the media about the need to give Biden more time to show what he can do and demands that we keep quiet for fear of ushering back Trumpism. This will be designed to lose us yet more valuable months and years to address urgent problems that threaten the future of our species.

The ability of the technocratic class to manage growth – wealth accumulation for the rich, tempered by a little “trickle down” to stop the masses rising up – is coming to an end. Growth is over and the technocrat’s toolbox is empty.

We are now in the age of politi-

cal populism – a natural response to burgeoning inequality.

On one side is the populism of the Trumppers. They are the small-minded nationalists who want to blame everyone but the real villains – the corporate elite – for the west’s declining fortunes. As ever, they will search out the easiest targets: foreigners and “immigrants”. In the US, the Republican party has been as good as taken over by the Tea party. The US right is not going to repudiate Trump for his defeat, they are going to totemise him because they understand his style of politics is the future.

There are now Trumps everywhere: Boris Johnson in the UK (and waiting in the wings, Nigel Farage); Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil; the Le Pen dynasty in France; Viktor Orban in Hungary. They are seeding the return of xenophobic, corporate fascism.

The corporate media would have us believe that this is the only kind of populism that exists. But there is a rival populism, that of the left, and one that espouses cooperation and solidarity within nations and between them.

Jeremy Corbyn in the UK and Sanders in the US are the first shoots of a global reawakening of class-conscious politics based on solidarity with the poor and oppressed; of renewed pressure for a social contract, in contrast to the worship of survival-of-the-fittest economics; of a reclaiming of the commons, communal resources that belong to us all, not just the strongmen who seized them for their own benefit; and, most importantly, of an understanding, lost sight of in our industrialised,

consumption-obsessed societies, that we must find a sustainable accommodation with the rest of the living world.

This kind of leftwing populism has a long pedigree that dates back nearly 150 years. It flourished in the inter-war years in Europe; it defined the political battle-lines in Iran immediately after the Second World War; and it has been a continual feature of Latin American politics.

As ever, the populism of the nationalists and bigots has the upper hand. And that is no accident.

Today's globalised wealth elite prefer neoliberal, technocratic politics that keep borders open for trade; that treat the labouring poor as human chattel, to be moved around on a global chess board as a way to force wages down; and that ensure the elite can stash its ill-gotten gains away on island sanctuaries far from the tax man.

But when technocratic politics

The corporate elite will always settle for the populism of a Trump or a Farage over the populism of the left

is on its death bed, as it is now, the corporate elite will always settle for the populism of a Trump or a Farage over the populism of the left. They will do so even if rightwing populism risks constraining their financial empires, because leftwing populism does much worse: it upends the warped logic on which the corporate elite's entire hoarded wealth depends, threatening to wipe it out.

If the corporate elite can no longer find a way to foist a neoliberal technocrat like Biden

on the public, they will choose the populism of a Trump over the populism of a Sanders every time. And as they own the media, they can craft the stories we hear: about who we are, what is possible and where we are heading. If we allow it, our imaginations will be twisted and deformed in the image of the deranged totem they choose.

We can reclaim politics – a politics that cares about the future, about our species, about our planet – but to do so we must first reclaim our minds. **CT**

Jonathan Cook won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His books include "Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East" (Pluto Press) and "Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair" (Zed Books). His website is www.jonathan-cook.net.



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Protesters take to the streets of Seattle, WA, to march in response to the death of George Floyd, who was killed while being arrested by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Will more violence erupt when Joe Biden is installed as US President?

Joe Allen

Two tribes go to war

The Red and Blue factions condense and peel apart as we enter the final phase of an American mitosis

The American mind is splitting in two, tearing each of us apart in the process. Every new cell sees the other as a diabolical inversion of itself, like an evil twin. The polarised halves – both seething with mutually hostile factions, now united against a common enemy – have been gradually driven apart by a longstanding war of ideas. By all appearances,

that division is almost complete.

On a subtle plane, this schism is ideological – left vs right, progress vs tradition, globalist vs nationalist – but down on the ground, this “big sort” is also playing out geographically. For decades, the Proglodytes have flocked to the coastal cities, while the Deplorables hunkered down in the heartland. At a glance, our 2020 electoral map resembles two allied blue nations on the east

and west coasts, with a rogue red nation cutting a diagonal swath up the middle. These increasingly homogenous zones edge us closer to some sort of disjointed secession.

As the USA fractures, our psyches are being split along similar lines. Just as inland swing states are neatly divided within themselves, individual minds are being cut in half, severing one side of the whole Self from the other. As

two distinct thought-worlds attain concrecence in the digital ether – currently defined along lines of political legitimacy, police brutality, and public health – each individual is forced to choose which half of his or her psyche will be allowed to grow.

As a result, more and more people are locked into their own tribe's reality tunnel, completely incapable of thinking for themselves. Fewer are able to ponder a topic from one side of the spectrum to the other, whether it's human evolution, national history, or global warming. Wherever you stand in America, you're liable to find yourself in a confederacy of conformists.

The potential for Civil War II – presaged by mobs of masked Antifa tearing up the townsquare and Thunder Dome-style Trump caravans flexing down the highway – emerges from America's soul-splitting culture war. Over the course of our history, various ideological armies have rallied around banners of religion, class, language, and bloodline, and more recently, around icons of gender identity and sexual predilection.

That cultural chaos is now being captured, computerised, and channelled into two massive silos. The resulting friction has generated amazing profits and new concentrations of power.

The hottest battles tend to be matters of life-and-death – abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, and foreign warfare. The tension centres on the sanctity of life versus our natural capacity to snuff it out. Over time, stark black-and-white polarisation has come to

Wherever you stand in America, you're liable to find yourself in a confederacy of conformists

define these arguments. Either you defend the fetus and the geriatric, and dutifully destroy the enemy; or you protect the oppressed at home and abroad – by any means necessary – while wasting no sentimentality on a soulless bundle of cells.

No doubt, the complexities of life present moral possibilities beyond these absurd absolutes, but that requires a mind broad enough to contain paradox. It's possible to believe every living creature is sacred, but still understand that sometimes a brutal choice is for the best. This ancient conundrum was first encountered in the primeval hunts and blood feuds – indeed, with the first bites of fruit plucked from a tree.

During the Axial Age, the Buddha urged non-harm and compassion for all sentient beings, from the gods down to the worms. At the crux of Western history, Jesus counselled his disciples to be like their heavenly father, whose heart lingers on each bird in the air and every lily in the field. But God knows no creature can survive without defending itself, and none can eat without taking another's life. The Chinese sage Lao Tzu embraced this as the natural order:

Heaven and Earth are impartial;

They see the ten thousand things as straw dogs.

The wise are impartial;

They see the people as straw dogs.

Or as William Blake wrote in his Proverbs of Hell, “The cut worm forgives the plow”.

It's possible to honour the life of an elderly relative or an unborn child – or even a sworn enemy – and still be willing to end it. That's the tragic juncture where freedom meets responsibility, where you make a hard decision and hope the heavens will grant forgiveness.

Such nuanced thought is being dissolved in the American mitosis, with the “right to life” on one side, for example, and the “right to choose” on the other – as if these ideas were mutually exclusive.

As our nation divides into competing cellular structures, the demand for absolute loyalty and ideological conformity becomes increasingly intense. No one is allowed to break ranks – not if they want to belong. And because our fiercest debates are framed as matters of life-or-death, the use of force becomes ever more justified.

Out of fear of a killer virus, blue state Americans are ready to use the state's power to strap muzzles on the other half against their will. If push comes to shove, all walking biohazards will be locked in their homes indefinitely. Of course, that powerlust cuts both ways. After months of watching black-clad mobs destroy city centres across the country, red state Americans have become far more amenable to using federal troops – and even lethal force – to bring peace to

streets they've never visited.

While the mass media intentionally stoke these animosities, tech oligarchs cultivate digital echo chambers that amplify the outrage. This pressure cooker has been threatening to blow for decades, but the 2020 election may well be the breaking point. We now have two presidents representing two separate nations, and neither is willing to concede. Their constituents have no faith in the opposition's legitimacy, and have no inclination to question their own.

Perhaps the most tragic loss in this gathering storm is the sovereign individual, grounded in conscience and guided by reason. That ideal is an increasingly unaffordable luxury. As the red and blue tribes close ranks, the independent thinker becomes an open target on the battlefield – a traitor to his own and an enemy to the other.

Like nervous farm animals, most of us sense treacherous winds on the horizon. The absence of mass shootings in 2020 feels like an eerie calm before the storm. In a nation

We now have two presidents representing two separate nations, and neither is willing to concede

with nearly twice as many guns as human beings – where each side is encouraged to see the other as an existential threat – you have to wonder how long the potential for mass murder can be contained.

We've already seen bloodshed celebrated in Kenosha, WI and Portland, OR. The patriot Kyle Rittenhouse may be on his way to prison, and Antifa hero Michael Reinoehl was gunned down by the cops, but both shooters' deeds were caught on video and now serve as role models to their own. That momentum only grows with the accumulation of heroic footage.

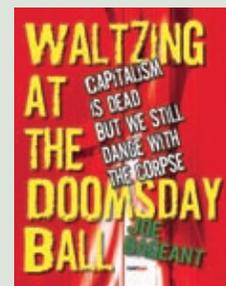
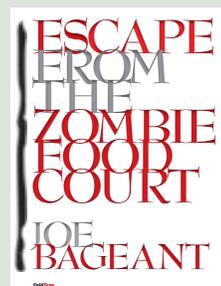
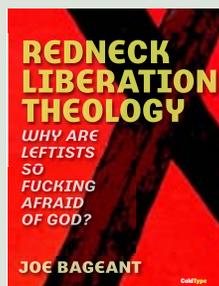
How long before someone finally snaps and unloads a few high-capacity magazines on a crowd? Or sets off an IED in an enemy

temple? What are the chances that America's accelerating feud will stop there? If things get out of control, or even just appear to be, what arguments could be made to restrain the State's absolute power?

If Trump's unlikely efforts to challenge the election results do succeed in court, I expect there to be blood in the streets by sundown. If Biden assumes power in January, then violent confrontation will probably be postponed, but only for a time.

Perhaps wars of fictive kin against kin are inevitable in the long run. From Rome's rise and fall to Europe's civil wars to modernity's global conflagrations, descent into communal violence is the historical norm. Peace is the anomaly. Still, one hopes we can preserve a view of each other's humanity beyond the battle lines. After all, every living creature is sacred – even if a brutal choice is for the best. **CT**

Joe Allen writes about race, robots, and religion. These days, he's based out of a survivalist bunker on wheels. His website is www.JOEBOT.xyz.



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C.J. Hopkins

The war is over. Globocap won

*Live in fear of an imaginary plague. Censor all dissent. Ban all protests.
Do not attempt to adjust your telescreen. Get down on your knees ...*

OK, so, that was not cool. For one terrifying moment there, it actually looked like GloboCap was going to let Russian-Asset Hitler win. Hour after hour on election night, states on the map kept turning red, or pink, or some distinctly non-blue color. Wisconsin ... Michigan ... Georgia ... Florida. It could not be happening, and yet it was. What other explanation was there? The Russians were stealing the election again!

But, of course, GloboCap was just playing with us. They're a bunch of practical jokers, those GloboCap guys. Naturally, they couldn't resist the chance to wind us up just one more time.

Seriously, though, while I enjoy a good prank, I still have a number of liberal friends, many of whom were on the verge of suffering major heart attacks as they breathlessly waited for the corporate media to confirm that they had successfully voted a literal dictator out of power. (A few of them suffer from IBS or other gastrointestinal disorders, so, in light of the current toilet paper shortage caused by the Return of the Apoc-

alyptic Plague, toying with them like that was especially cruel.)

But, whatever. That's water under the bridge. The good news is, the nightmare is over! Literal Hitler and his underground army of Russia-loving white supremacists have been vanquished! Decency has been restored! Globalisation has risen from the dead!

And, of course, the most important thing is, racism in America is over ... again!

Yes, that's right, folks, no more racism ... kiss all those Confederate monuments goodbye! The Democrats are back in the White House! According to sources, the domestic staff are already down in the West Wing basement looking for that MLK bust that Trump ordered removed and desecrated the moment he was sworn into office. College kids are building pyres of racist and potentially racist books, and paintings, and films, and other degenerate artworks. Jussie Smollet can finally come out of hiding.

OK, granted, they're not going to desegregate liberal cities or anything crazy like that, or

stop "policing" black neighbourhoods like an occupying army, or stop funding schools with property taxes, but Kamala Harris is black, mostly, and Granpa Joe will tell us more stories about "Corn Pop", the razor-wielding public-pool gangster, and other dangerous black people he hasn't yet incarcerated, so that should calm down all those BLM folks.

In the meantime, the official celebrations have begun. Assorted mass-murdering GloboCap luminaries, government leaders, and the corporate media are pumping out hopey-changey propaganda like it was 2008 all over again. Pundits are breaking down and sobbing on television. Liberal mobs are ritualistically stomping Cheetos to the death in the street. Slaphappy hordes of Covidian Cultists are amassing outdoors, masks around their necks, sharing champagne bottles and French-kissing each other, protected from the virus by the Anti-Trump Force Field that saved the BLM protesters last Summer. It's like V-Day, the fall of the Berlin wall, and the bin Laden assassination all rolled into one!



All of which is understandable, given the horrors of the last four years, the concentration camps, the wars of aggression, the censorship, the CIA murder squads, the show trials, and all that other dictator stuff. On top of which, there was all that white supremacy, and that antisemitism, and that horrible wall that transformed America into an “apartheid state” where people were imprisoned in an open-air ghetto and gratuitously abused and murdered. (Whoops, I think I screwed up my

citations ... maybe I should double-check.)

But let’s not dwell on all those horrors right now. There will be plenty of time for all that later, when Donald Trump is hauled into court and tried for his crimes against humanity, like all our previous war-criminal presidents.

No, this is a time for looking ahead to the Brave New Global-Capitalist Normal, in which everyone will sit at home in their masks surfing the Internet on their toasters with MSNBC playing in the

background ... well, OK, not absolutely everyone. The affluent will still need to fly around in their private jets and helicopters, and take vacations on their yachts, and, you know, all the usual affluent stuff. But the rest of us won’t have to go anywhere or meet with anyone in person, because our lives will be one never-ending Zoom meeting carefully monitored by official fact-checkers to ensure we’re not being “misinformed” or exposed to “dangerous conspiracy theories” which could potentially lead to

the agonised deaths (or the mild-to-moderate flu-like illnesses) of hundreds of millions of innocent people.

But let's not count our chickens just yet. As much as you're probably looking forward to life in the Brave New GloboCap Normal, or the Great Reset, or whatever they end up calling the new pathologised totalitarianism, it isn't a fait accompli quite yet ... not until Russian-Asset Hitler has been thoroughly humiliated and removed from office, and anyone who voted for him, or didn't believe he was literally Hitler, or a Russian asset, or who otherwise refused to take part in the mindless, corporate-media-generated Anti-Trump Hate-Fest, has been demonised as a "racist", a "traitor", an "antisemite", a "conspira-

I'm pretty certain the plan is still to goad Trump into overreacting and trying to resist his removal from office

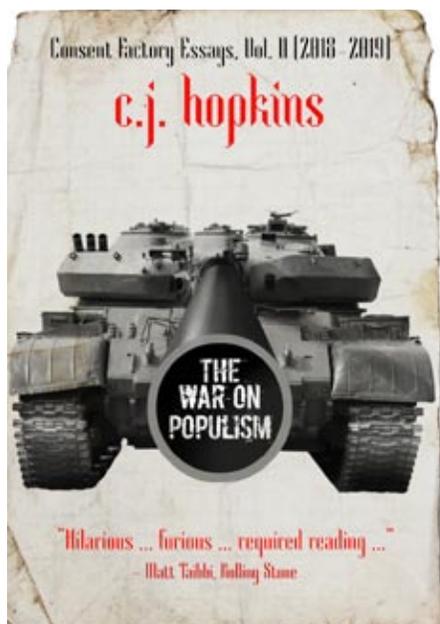
cy theorist", or some other type of "far-right extremist". That's probably going to take another couple of months.

I'm pretty certain the plan is still to goad Trump into overreacting and trying to resist his removal from office. And I do not mean just in the courts. No, after all

the money, time, and effort that GloboCap has invested over the last four years, they are going to be extremely disappointed if he just slinks away without going full-Hitler and starting a Second Civil War.

As I've been saying, over and over, since he won the election, GloboCap needs to make an example of Trump to put down the widespread populist rebellion against global capitalism and its ideology that started back in 2016. And no, it doesn't make any difference whether Donald Trump is actually a populist, or whether people realise that it is global capitalism and not "Cultural Marxism" that they are rebelling against.

According to the script, this is the part where Trump refuses to respect "democracy" and has to be



The War on Populism

Consent Factory Essays Vol. 2 (2018-2019)

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forcibly dragged out of office by the Secret Service or elements of the military, ideally “live” on international television. It may not end up playing out that way (Trump is probably not as dumb as I think), but that’s the Act III scenario for GloboCap: the “attempted Trump coup”, then the “perp walk”. They need the public and future generations to perceive him as an “illegitimate president”, a “usurper”, an “intruder”, an “imposter”, an “invader” ... which, he is. (Being rich and famous does not make you a member of the GloboCap Power Club.)

The corporate media are already hard at work manufacturing this version of reality, not only in the content of their “reporting”, but also with the unbridled contempt they are showing for a sitting president. The networks actually cut him off in the middle of his post-election address. The Twitter Corporation is censoring his tweets. What could possibly be more humiliating ... and indicative of who is really in charge?

Meanwhile, the GloboCap propaganda has reached some new post-Orwellian level. After four long years of “RUSSIA HACKED THE ELECTION!” ... now, suddenly, “THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS ELECTION FRAUD IN THE USA!”

As Biden and the corporate media keep telling us, we are looking at a “very dark winter”

That’s right, once again, millions of liberals, like that scene in 1984 where the Party switches official enemies right in the middle of the Hate-Week speech, have been ordered to radically reverse their “reality”, and hysterically deny the existence of the very thing they have been hysterically alleging for four solid years ... and they are actually doing it!

At the same time, the Trumplings have been reduced to repeating, over and over, and over, that “THE MEDIA DOES NOT SELECT THE PRESIDENT”, and “BIDEN IS NOT THE PRESIDENT ELECT”, and other versions of “THIS CAN’T BE HAPPENING”.

I hate to rub salt into anyone’s wounds (particularly those whose faces are currently being stomped on by GloboCap’s enormous boot), but, yes, this is actually happening. Second Civil War or no Second Civil War, this is the end for Donald Trump. As Biden and the corporate media keep telling us,

we are looking at a “very dark winter”, on the other side of which a new reality awaits us ... a new, pathologised, totalitarian reality.

Call it the “New Normal,” or whatever you want. Pretend “democracy has triumphed” if you want. Wear your mask. Mask your children. Terrorise them with pictures of “death trucks”, tales of “Russian hackers” and “white supremacist terrorists.” Live in fear of an imaginary plague (or perhaps a non-imaginary plague if that “very dark winter” comes to pass). Censor all dissent. Ban all protests. Do not attempt to adjust your telescreen. Click on the link to join the Zoom meeting. Have your password and your identity papers ready. Watch your pronouns. Get down on your knees. It’s GloboCap Fucking Über Alles! **CT**

C.J. 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 Snoggworthy, Swaine & Cormorant. Volumes I and II of his Consent Factory Essays are published by Consent Factory Publishing, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Amalgamated Content, Inc. He can be reached at www.cjhopkins.com or at www.consentfactory.org.

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Highway20, outside Worland, Wyoming.



Cross Village, Emmet County, Michigan



Grand Rapids, Michigan.

John Rothwell

Signs of the times

Wild, insulting, humorous, and inventive, US election displays show the strained face of a deeply divided nation



US 2, just west of Bagley, Minnesota.

*Sign, sign, everywhere a sign
 Blockin' out the scenery, breakin' my mind
 Do this, don't do that, can't you read the
 sign?"*

– Five Man Electrical Band

Election year 2020 has been the year of the political sign. Everywhere I've travelled during the pre-election build-up there has been a profusion of signs demanding I vote for Donald or Joe. From the crowded inner city to the tiniest hamlet in rural America, screeching signs demand support for a favoured candidate. They are planted into the ground, posted on fences, stuck on walls, flown from flagpoles. Printed, hand-painted, insulting, religious, profane. Vote this, don't vote that, can't you read! Mercifully, it's all over. We hope. **CT**



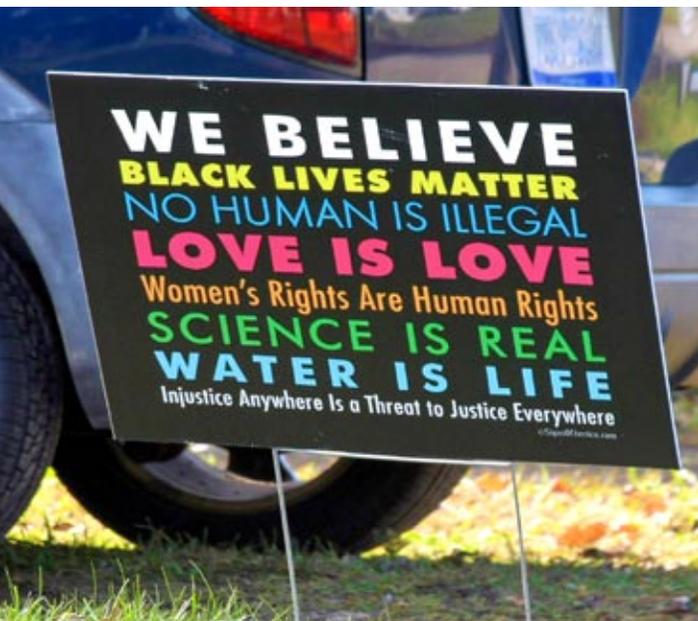
Highway 21, west of Ionia, Michigan



They are planted in the ground, posted on fences, stuck on walls, flown from flagpoles. Printed, hand-painted, insulting, religious, profane

John Rothwell is a freelance photojournalist based in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He blogs at www.johnrothwellblog.com

Grand Rapids, Michigan.



NEIGHBOUR v NEIGHBOUR: Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Satya Vatti

US bomb test victims still seek justice

Before the US dropped atomic bombs on Japan, it conducted tests that caused serious health issues to New Mexico residents, who remain uncompensated

On July 16, 1945, the first-ever nuclear bomb was tested in New Mexico, in the Southwestern United States. The detonation was code-named “Trinity”. It was the day that would seal the fate of many Americans living in the surrounding areas for generations to come.

Seventy miles from what became known as ground zero – the Trinity test site – Genoveva’s family lived on a ranch just outside the village of Capitan in New Mexico. Genoveva was born the year after the blast. Now 74, she recalls how her family remembers the day that would change their lives forever.

Genoveva’s sisters had come to visit their father and pregnant mother at the ranch. At 5:30 a.m., as dawn broke, the sky suddenly went pitch dark. Having no other point of reference, they mistook the abnormally loud roaring and rumbling in the sky for thunder. The entire house began to shake. Fear-stricken, the family huddled together in a corner.

When the sky cleared, her father stepped outside the house and found himself being

showered with a white powder. The powder was everywhere and covered everything around them. Nothing escaped it, not the cows the family had raised, or the vegetables in the garden, or the rainwater they stored in the absence of running water. Like other families who went through this experience, Genoveva’s family also dusted off the powder and consumed their vegetables and the stored water.

The blast produced so much energy that it incinerated everything it touched and formed a fireball that rose more than 12 kilometers into the atmosphere. The fireball created ash that snowed over the communities surrounding the blast site. The people did not know it then, but this ash that covered thousands of square miles was the radioactive fallout from the explosion.

Dread gripped the communities in Tularosa Basin who either witnessed or experienced the phenomenon they could not make sense of. Meanwhile, the immediate reaction of the staff of the Manhattan

Project, which created the bomb, was of “surprise, joy, and relief”.

Paul Pino, Genoveva’s cousin, who was born nine years after the Trinity blast, says that his family, which lived 33 miles from the blast site, was one of many who were unaware of what had transpired on that day. In the days and months leading up to the blast, US government officials did not notify anyone who lived in the region about the imminent nuclear bomb test. Nobody in the Tularosa Basin was evacuated to safety.

In the aftermath of the nuclear test, officials began to cement a false narrative into the consciousness of the nation; saying the region was remote and uninhabited. Tens of thousands of people, in fact, lived in the Tularosa Basin in 1945. For a long time, the people of the basin believed that the blast was an ammunition explosion. “We were lied to by the government,” said Pino.

It takes 24,000 years for half of the radioactive plutonium used in the Trinity bomb to decay. The people of the region have inhaled and ingested radioactive particles for 75 years because of environ-

mental contamination. Those in power refuse to accept responsibility and take any corrective action. To this day, there have been no cleanup efforts.

Radiation exposure has caused high rates of aggressive cancers, thyroid disease, infant mortality, and other health abnormalities in generations of families in the Tularosa Basin region. The scale of the health impact cannot be determined accurately as long-term epidemiological studies have only been undertaken recently. The findings of the latest research studies by the National Cancer Institute were published in September 2020 in the journal *Health Physics*.

“There were 10 of us; now only one is surviving,” Genoveva says, speaking of herself. She has lost everyone in her family to cancer.

In a country without universal health care, debt from medical expenses has brought economic ruin to the communities near the Trinity site. “All the pain and suffering we have had to endure, and not a speck of help from the government”, Pino says. “Meanwhile, it has spent trillions on thousands of nuclear weapons”.

Genoveva’s story is not an exceptional one. It is the story of tens of thousands of families in the United States.

Debt from medical expenses has brought economic ruin to the communities near the Trinity site

More than 1,000 nuclear bomb tests were conducted in the US between 1945 and 1992. A total of 100 above-ground tests were conducted at the Nevada test site from 1951 to 1962. The winds carried radioactive fallout for thousands of kilometers. Hundreds of millions of people living in the US have been exposed to varying levels of radiation over the years, unknown to them.

New Mexico was downwind of the Nevada test site, and the people living there continued to be exposed to radioactivity for decades after the initial exposure during the Trinity nuclear test.

People from the impacted communities founded the Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium in 2005 to fight for justice for the survivors and their descendants. Tina Cordova, one of the group’s co-founders, was shocked to find

that a few of the impacted states neighbouring New Mexico were receiving financial compensation under the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act since 1990. The communities in New Mexico, however, were left out of the act.

When asked why, Cordova says, “It is the billion-dollar question. I think we are being left out because we are mainly Mexican Hispanics, Natives, and Latinos. We are minorities and we are poor”.

Cordova is the fourth generation in her family to have cancer. She has joined with others like her to educate and organise the affected communities, to fight to establish the truth. “In their [the government’s] rush to bomb Japan, we were sacrificed in the process. We were enlisted in the service of our country, unknowing, unwilling, and remain uncompensated”, she says. **CT**

Satya Vatti is a journalist with *BreakThrough News*, an independent media platform in the United States highlighting the untold stories of the resistance of poor and working-class communities. She is also a writer for *Liberation News*. She lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where she is a community organiser and a recent nursing school graduate. This article was produced by *Globetrotter*, a project of the *Independent Media Institute*.

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David Edwards

Death of a 'controversial' journalist

He was a great writer whose truths exposed the establishment. That's why the corporate media used the weasel word "controversial", which is best translated as "offensive to power", to describe him

Robert Fisk, the *Independent's* Middle East correspondent, died on October 30, aged 74. In reviewing his life and career, the newspaper for which he worked for more than two decades wrote of their star reporter:

"Much of what Fisk wrote was controversial..."

As John Pilger noted, in describing Fisk's journalism as "controversial", the *Independent* was using a "weasel word".

The *Washington Post* published a piece titled: "Robert Fisk, daring but controversial British war correspondent and author, dies at 74".

Al Jazeera's piece was subtitled: "The *Independent* newspaper confirms its acclaimed and controversial journalist died following a short illness".

A piece in *Le Monde Diplomatique* was titled: "La mort de Robert Fisk, grand reporter au Moyen-Orient et personnage controversé" (Christophe Ayad, *Le Monde Diplomatique Online*, November 4 2020)

The trend is clear. When the *Times* subjected Fisk to one of its

full-on hit pieces in April 2018, it wrote: "Fisk is no stranger to controversy".

So why do mainstream commentators feel obliged to red-flag Fisk's journalism with "controversial" in this way, and why is it a "weasel word"?

Consider that the likes of the BBC's Andrew Marr, the *Guardian's* Martin Chulov and the *Times's* David Aaronovitch, and numerous others, will never be described as "controversial", despite their highly controversial, in fact outrageous, warmongering bias.

Marr is not labelled "controversial" for supporting a ground invasion of Serbia in 1999: "I want to put the Macbeth option: which is that we're so steeped in blood we should go further. If we really believe Milosevic is this bad, dangerous and destabilising figure we must ratchet this up much further. We should now be saying that we intend to put in ground troops". (Marr, 'Do we give war a chance?', the *Observer*, April 18 1999)

Was that "controversial"? How about this? Was it "controversial" for the *Guardian* to write this of

the country that has relentlessly waged war and supported tyranny around the world since 1945: "Joe Biden looks to have done enough to win the White House... He will have to reassert America's role as the global problem-solver".

Was it "controversial" for the supposedly impartial global news agency, Associated Press, to write this of the United States: "For decades, the US has been an advocate for democracy abroad, using diplomatic pressure and even direct military intervention in the name of spreading the principles of a pluralistic system with a free and fair vote for political leaders"?

An awesome level of gullibility is required to believe that the direct military "interventions" (wars) in oil-rich Iraq and Libya were about spreading pluralistic principles. Whether or not Iraqis have had "a free and fair vote" since 2003 is a matter of complete indifference to Western politics and journalism.

It turns out that the term "controversial" is only applied in corporate media to political writers and leaders deemed "controversial" by



ROBERT FISK: One of the great crusading journalists of the past century.

elite interests. This was unwittingly made clear by the big brains at the BBC who noted that Fisk “drew controversy for his sharp criticism of the US and Israel, and of Western foreign policy”. If Fisk had drawn “controversy” from China, Iran or North Korea, the “weasel word” would not have appeared in the Beeb’s analysis.

A second piece in the *Independent* also allowed us to read between the letters that make up “controversial”: “Often writing and speaking of his pity for the people he saw being killed at the same time as becoming a forthright critic of the US and Israel. His writing could be

controversial – such as his later reporting on Syria...”

Fisk is not alone, of course. The BBC controversially echoed numerous other media in describing Hugo Chavez as “Venezuela’s... controversial president”.

If Chavez was “controversial”, which national leader is not? Should they all be described as “controversial”? By the way, Biden very controversially described Chavez’ successor Nicolas Maduro as a “tyrant”, adding:

“I was among the first Democratic foreign policy voices to recognise Juan Guaidó as Venezuela’s legitimate leader and to call for

Maduro to resign”.

As we have discussed, these were deeply embarrassing propaganda claims in pursuit of regime change. Even the BBC was eventually forced to give up the pretence that Guaidó was “interim leader”, reverting to the title ‘opposition leader’.

Although Obama bombed seven Muslim countries from 2009 to 2017, all but destroying Libya, the BBC would, of course, never refer to “America’s controversial president, Barack Obama”, or even to “America’s controversial president, George W. Bush”. Specific Bush policies might be described

as “controversial”, but the term would never be applied as a broad brush description of who he is.

In corporate media newspeak, “controversial” can actually be translated as “offensive to power”. The term is intended as a scare word to warn readers that the labelled person is “dodgy”, “suspect”: “Handle with care!” The journalist is also signalling to his or her editors and other colleagues: “I’m not one of ‘them!’”

The same effect can be achieved by praising establishment figures. Peter Osborne did not cover himself “in glory by tweeting: “Tony Blair has emerged as probably the most authoritative and persuasive voice during the Covid crisis.”

As we noted: “If it was some other leader of some other country who had waged an illegal war of aggression killing one million people, Osborne might not have sent this”.

Journalists and leaders who serve power, including “Teflon Tony”, somehow retain fundamental “respectability”, are welcomed by elite media and the powers that be. (For completists interested in this subliminal misuse of language, the same use is made of the term “narcissist”: Julian Assange, Russell Brand, George Galloway, Glenn Greenwald, Seumas Milne, John Pilger, Edward Snowden, Hugo Chavez, and – alas! – us at *Media Lens*, have all been repeatedly accused of “narcissism”.

Recently, Andrew Rawnsley wrote of the almost comically humble and selfless Jeremy Corbyn: “Many things have been said about his character over the years, but one thing has not been said enough: he is a narcissist”.

An unwitting, backhanded

Given the appalling racism faced by the Palestinian people, the reference to Fisk “going native” was grotesque

compliment from the *Observer*’s great warmonger. (See our book *Propaganda Blitz* for more discussion on “narcissism”, Pluto Press, 2018, pp.54-55)

In 2004, at a time when all of US-UK journalism was celebrating the “transfer of sovereignty” from the forces still occupying Iraq and stealing its oil, Fisk was a rare voice mocking the charade: “Alice in Wonderland could not have improved on this. The looking-glass reflects all the way from Baghdad to Washington... Those of us who put quotation marks around ‘liberation’ in 2003 should now put quotation marks around ‘sovereignty.’” (Fisk, “The handover: Restoration of Iraqi sovereignty – or Alice in Wonderland?” *The Independent*, June 29, 2004)

In 2014, after Tony Blair made one of his frequent attempts to exonerate himself in relation to Iraq while calling for more violence to bomb Syria better, the *Guardian* editors performed painful contortions in declaring Blair’s analysis “thoughtful” if “wrong-headed”. Fisk’s response to Blair was different: “How do they get away with these lies?”

Fisk was also a virtual lone mainstream voice contesting the

US-UK’s audacious, well-funded attempts to re-run their Iraq “weapons of mass destruction” scam in Syria: “Washington’s excuse for its new Middle East adventure – that it must arm Assad’s enemies because the Damascus regime has used sarin gas against them – convinces no-one in the Middle East. Final proof of the use of gas by either side in Syria remains almost as nebulous as President George W. Bush’s claim that Saddam’s Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction”.

For this, as the obituaries make unsubtly clear, Fisk was never forgiven.

An obituary in the *Times* commented on Fisk: “While he was an outstandingly poetic writer, he developed an emotional obsession with the plight of the Palestinian people and a visceral dislike of the Israeli government and its allies, especially America. In the jargon of news reporting he ‘went native’, unable to provide a dispassionate account of events and their context.” (“Robert Fisk: Obituaries – Trenchant yet lyrical foreign correspondent who interviewed Osama bin Laden three times and was often accused of ‘going native’,” the *Times*, Nov 3, 2020)

Given the appalling racism and ethnic cleansing faced by the Palestinian people, the reference to Fisk “going native” was a grotesque observation.

The *Times* noted, of course, that Fisk “remained no stranger to controversy”. It asked us to believe that “critics poured cold water on Fisk’s writing”, although “awards committees did not”. In translation: Fisk was subjected to exactly the kind of ugly propaganda

smears from “critics” contained in the *Times*’ obituary.

The comments are no great surprise, given the honesty with which Fisk described his departure from the *Times* to join the *Independent* in 1989: “The end came for me when I flew to Dubai in 1988 after the USS Vincennes [a US Navy guided missile cruiser] had shot down an Iranian passenger airliner over the Gulf. Within 24 hours, I had spoken to the British air traffic controllers at Dubai, discovered that US ships had routinely been threatening British Airways airliners, and that the crew of the Vincennes appeared to have panicked. The foreign desk told me the report was up for the page-one splash. I warned them that American ‘leaks’ that the Iran Air pilot was trying to suicide-crash his aircraft on to the Vincennes were rubbish. They agreed.

“Next day, my report appeared with all criticism of the Americans deleted, with all my sources ignored. The *Times* even carried an editorial suggesting the pilot was indeed a suicider. A subsequent US official report and accounts by US naval officers subsequently proved my dispatch correct. Except that *Times* readers were not allowed to see it”.

Fisk said that he believed Murdoch did not personally intervene. However: “He didn’t need to. He had turned the *Times* into a tame, pro-Tory, pro-Israeli paper shorn of all editorial independence”.

Echoing virtually every other obituary, the *Guardian* commented that Fisk “tended to absolve the Assad regime of some of the worst crimes credited to it”, which had “provoked a backlash, even among

Who knows where this unsubtle red-flagging of Fisk’s journalism as “controversial” would have ended?

his anti-imperialist acolytes”.

It is ironic that the *Guardian* should highlight Fisk’s supposed tendency to “absolve” Syria of ‘the worst crimes credited to it’. Whistleblowing revelations relating to OPCW and the alleged chemical weapons attack in Douma, Syria, while almost completely ignored by the mainstream media, have overwhelmingly vindicated Fisk and made a nonsense of official claims.

The *Guardian* naturally deployed the “weasel word” in noting “all the controversy generated by his later commentary on the evils of western, and specifically US, involvement in the Middle East”. This was followed by a distorted version of “balance”: “Some of Fisk’s most ardent admirers have suggested that to describe his journalism as controversial is a vulgar slight”.

Some people might think so, but only “ardent admirers”, “acolytes” – themselves controversial narcissists.

Who knows where this unsubtle red-flagging of Fisk’s journalism as “controversial” would have ended? The intent behind ‘mainstream’ propaganda, particularly on Fisk’s Syria reporting, has increasingly been to suggest that Fisk was morally tainted; that he

got it badly, shamefully wrong. Flitting like barely-glimpsed bats at the back of the readers mind are supposed to be terms like “Assad apologist”, “genocide denial”. Not Holocaust denial exactly, but a shameful mutation of the same moral blindness.

Patrick Cockburn, another rare, excellent mainstream journalist, dispensed with the herdthink, copycat smears, and captured the truth of a journalist who was “a meticulous and highly-informed reporter, one who responded sceptically – and rigorously investigated – the partisan claims of all parties, be they gunmen, army officers or government officials”.

Cockburn added: “He took nothing for granted and was often openly contemptuous of those who did. He did not invent the old journalist saying ‘never believe anything until it is officially denied’ but he was inclined to agree with its sceptical message. He was suspicious of journalists who cultivated diplomats and ‘official sources’ that could not be named and whose veracity we are invited to take on trust”.

This explains exactly why Fisk was and is viewed as “controversial”; a word that did not appear in Cockburn’s summing up.

A storm had been made to brew around Fisk’s reputation in recent years. But it had not yet reached the Category 5 propaganda hurricane that engulfed Jeremy Corbyn who, like Fisk, “drew controversy for his sharp criticism of the US and Israel, and of Western foreign policy”.

Corbyn was not just accused of antisemitism and Holocaust de-

nial; he was accused of being a de facto Nazi who “wants to reopen Auschwitz”. These claims were baseless and insane, but not “controversial”.

By contrast, we discovered what is deemed “controversial” on Twitter on November 3. That day, we tried three times to tweet a link to a *Red Pepper* article by Lynne Segal as she “looks back on her experience of 40 years as a party member in [Corbyn’s] constituency”. We tweeted a screenshot of this important passage from Segal’s excellent piece: “Right now, along with the many other Jewish activists I know in Islington North, I am simply devastated that this process has climaxed in the suspension of our cherished MP, and former leader. It’s so hard to accept that I must repeat again what every Jewish member I know in Islington North has frequently confirmed and it is we who actually know and regularly meet with Jeremy Corbyn – unlike most of critics. What we can confirm is that as Jews in North Islington we have always felt more than safe, more than welcome, unfailingly supported, in everything we do in the borough, and the Party. As it happens, we often feel this all the more strongly as Jews, knowing that – unlike Corbyn – so many who choose to speak in our name completely disrespect our commitment to antisemitism and racism of all kinds in struggles for a better world, including the vital struggle for Palestinian rights”.

We also tweeted a screenshot of this passage: “So, let me provide a few pertinent facts. Over the years, Corbyn has had mutu-

This exposes the claims against Corbyn, not just as a sham, but as a monstrous reversal of the truth

ally supportive relations with the practising Jewish community in Islington, attending Shabbat dinners with the orthodox Chabad Rabbi, Mendy Korer, and attending numerous other official Jewish events in North London. Against some local resistance, Corbyn promoted the installation of a plaque on a demolished synagogue site in 2015 to celebrate Jewish life in the borough. Unlike most of his critics in Westminster, Corbyn unfailingly turned up to vote for motions addressing antisemitism in Parliament, just as he worked tirelessly against racism on every front”.

This is extremely powerful, credible evidence exposing the claims against Corbyn, not just as a sham, but as a monstrous reversal of the truth.

We know what our readers like and we know how they will likely react to our tweets, so we were surprised that the two tweeted screenshots did not immediately pick up a few likes and retweets. In fact, after four hours, they had not been liked or retweeted by anyone. We tried tweeting the screenshots again, and again they received no likes or retweets. We checked with friends and it became clear that while these tweets were visible to us, they had been secretly ren-

dered invisible to everyone else by Twitter without us knowing. Unlike the smears unleashed on Corbyn for five years, our words had been banished because they were deemed “controversial” by a giant, profit-maximising tech corporation. And we are not alone; we discovered that independent journalist Glenn Greenwald had earlier tweeted: “I posted this tweet 3 times and all 3 times it just won’t appear in my time-line, allowing nobody to see it. Genuinely confused. Is anyone else experiencing this problem?”

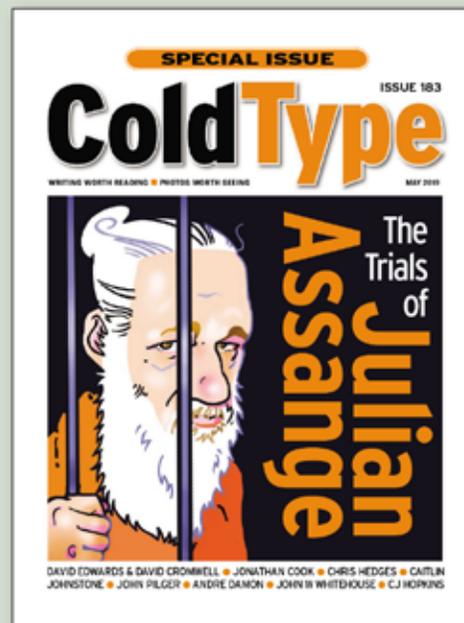
No surprise, Greenwald is also “controversial”, having, like Fisk, Corbyn and us, attracted “controversy” “for his sharp criticism of the US and Israel, and of Western foreign policy”.

On Twitter, in response to corporate media censoring Donald Trump, science writer Marcus Chown commented: “This is what we DESPERATELY need in the UK. We need our media to interrupt speeches by Johnson and others and point out to viewers their lies. Retweet if you would like to seee [sic] this happen”.

If giant, profit-maximising, advertiser-dependent corporate media decide it is their job and right to censor political leaders like Trump and Johnson, they will have no qualms at all about censoring you, us, and everyone else. Is that what we want? What on earth qualifies Big Business as an arbiter of Truth? **CT**

David Edwards is co-editor of Medialens, the UK media watchdog. This article first appeared at www.medialens.org

THE TRIALS OF JULIAN ASSANGE



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Youth on wall, Jarrow, Tyneside.

Chris Killip [1946-2020]

Visual historian of the English working class

Photographer's stark images highlighted the impact of de-industrialisation on suffering communities in the North of England



Torso, Pelaw, Gateshead, Tyneside.



Father and son, West End, Newcastle.



At an Angelic Upstarts concert, Sunderland, Wearside.

Chris Killip, the legendary British documentary photographer who was best known for his stark images of working class people whose lives were severely hit by the rapid de-industrialisation of the North East of England in the late 1970s and early 1980s, has died at his home in the United States, aged 74.

Killip's photographs from the period were first published by Secker & Warburg in the book *In Flagrate* in 1988 and republished as *In Flagrate Two* in an expanded, large format, edition in 2016 by the German publisher Steidl.



Bever, Skinningrove, North Yorkshire.



Royal wedding, North Shields, Tyneside.

“In recording their lives”, he said of the people featured in his seminal work, “I’m valuing their lives. These people will not appear in history books because ordinary people don’t. History is done to them. It is not acknowledged that they make history”.

Killip moved to the US in 1991, to lecture at Harvard, where he was later appointed professor emeritus in the department of visual and environmental studies, a post he held until his retirement in 2017. – *TS*

IN FLAGRANTE TWO
CHRIS KILLIP



Cover of *In Flagrante Two*.

IN FLAGRANTE TWO

Chris Killip

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Justin Podur

Police culture is rooted in the colonial past

The model for policing isn't going to be changed even as Donald Trump is set to be replaced by "shoot them in the leg" Joe Biden

The Minneapolis City Council's attempt to defund police may have fizzled out for the moment, but the problem of police violence across the United States is unresolved – and much of it stems from the institution's colonial, counterinsurgency roots.

Here are seven counterinsurgency features of policing and the inequities in the criminal justice system.

1. Counterinsurgency tactics are everywhere

In the Canadian province of Ontario, when the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) changed its public transportation fare collection method from tokens to the Presto card, users had a strange experience. Sure, the fare booth was predictably replaced by an inhuman and unforgiving terminal that malfunctions all the time (despite the steep price the province had paid for it). But instead of having less human interaction, TTC passengers found they had more – with fare inspectors who corral passengers into small spaces at stations to test everyone's cards. In

counterinsurgency terms, this is called a cordon-and-search operation.

Another counterinsurgency concept, that of "hearts and minds," can be seen in a public information campaign to shame fare evasion through posters blanketing subway walls and the sides of buses. Riders were infuriated – not just by the campaign itself but also by abuses and racial discrimination by the fare inspectors. Unsurprisingly, spoofs of the TTC's messaging followed, as they did in New York City in resistance to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's fare evasion messaging.

There is nothing special about Toronto, New York City, or other transit systems that increasingly use these warlike techniques to police customers; what's happening with the TTC and MTA is a relatively mild example of what happens when counterinsurgency methods are the first resort for any urban problem that arises.

2. Police don't live in the communities they police

Colonial forces are imposed from outside; this prevents too much natural solidarity between the

occupier and the occupied. In the United States, the majority of police don't live in the communities they serve. One Newark officer from the Fraternal Order of Police put it succinctly, "The community hates the police. And you want to put us right in the middle of that with our families?"

The polling is consistent with the idea that one group of people is policing another. A July 2020 Gallup survey showed that 70 percent of black Americans support reducing police budgets, while only 41 percent of white Americans do. Out-and-out defunding is more commonly supported by black Americans (according to FiveThirtyEight's average of two polls, 45 percent of black Americans polled support defunding, with 28 percent opposed) and opposed by white Americans (with 61 percent of white Americans opposed to defunding and only 23 percent in support of defunding). The difference in public opinion reflects one group benefiting from police security and another suffering from police violence and surveillance.

As Richard Rothstein showed in his book *The Color of Law*, the



LAPD cops drive back protesters during a demonstration in West Hollywood.

racial segregation of US cities was brought about by methodical legal means, racially explicit zoning, and the destruction of integrated neighbourhoods. This segregation, too, has consequences for the police-counterinsurgency alignment.

In author James Ron's book *Frontiers and Ghettos: State Violence in Serbia and Israel*, he compared the methods of state violence used in a "ghetto," where a hostile population is meant to be contained by powerful state control but where law and morality still limit its enforcement due to the nature of oppressor and oppressed living side-by-side; and on a "frontier", where even more

devastating warfare is unleashed since state power is more tenuous on targeted populations who don't live among their oppressors, but the bounds of law and morality are weaker.

In the United States, this theory also has applied throughout its history: domestic ghettos are policed, and frontiers are the sites of total war both at home and abroad. But the more police think of cities as the "frontier", the more violence they will commit against the policed.

3. Police get specialised counterinsurgency training

Police officers are encouraged to

take weekend courses in a field called "killology", developed by retired Army Lt. Colonel Dave Grossman. There, they learn to see themselves as "front-line troops" in a war, presumably on the civilians they are policing.

Seth Stoughton, a critic of killology courses, says they steep police in the worldview that "the officer is the hero, the warrior, the noble figure who steps into dark situations where others fear to tread and brings order to a chaotic world, and who does so by imposing their will on the civilians they deal with." Another critic, Craig Atkinson, calls the courses "fear

porn". One such training, *The Bulletproof Warrior*, was taken by Philando Castile's killer.

4. In a counterinsurgency, everyone's a criminal

According to defenders of law enforcement, the thinking is: If you don't want to be policed, don't commit crimes, right? But the law creates the criminal.

And the number of laws for police to identify those criminals is growing suspiciously. American University professor Emilio Viano notes, quoting the conservative think tank the American Heritage Foundation, that "the 'number of criminal offences in the United States Code increased from 3,000 in the early 1980s to 4,000 by 2000 to over 4,450 by 2008. From 2000 to 2007 Congress added 56.5 new crimes every year". The staggering number of laws is incongruous to American society's actual concerns, as is evidenced by attorney Harvey Silverglate's book arguing that the average American commits "three felonies a day."

In this system, the full weight of the law is available to bring down upon anyone at any time. And once it is brought down on you, you have no meaningful right to a trial.

5. There's No Right to a Trial in a Counterinsurgency

In TV cop shows, the police are constrained by clever lawyers and fair-minded judges in the courtroom – but in reality, cases almost never go to trial. As Professor Viano writes: "In fiscal year 2010, the prevalent mode of conviction in US District Courts of all crimes was by plea of guilty (96.8 percent of all cases). The percentage ranges from a relative low of 68.2 percent

In cases relating to the drug war, the goal of police and prosecutors is also to get the accused to turn on one another

for murder to a high of 100 percent for cases of burglary, breaking and entering. With the exception of sex abuse (87.5 percent), arson (86.7 percent), civil rights (83.6 percent) and murder (68.2 percent), for all other crimes the rate of convictions by plea of guilty is well over 90 percent. In the... [2012] US Supreme Court decision, *Missouri v. Frye*, Justice Kennedy, writing the majority opinion, pointed out the statistics that 97 percent of federal convictions and 94 percent of state convictions are the result of guilty pleas".

The fact that 90 percent of cases don't go to trial is the outcome of two Supreme Court rulings described by Michelle Alexander in a 2012 op-ed in the *New York Times*: "The Supreme Court ruled in 1978 that threatening someone with life imprisonment for a minor crime in an effort to induce him to forfeit a jury trial did not violate his Sixth Amendment right to trial. Thirteen years later, in *Harmelin v. Michigan*, the court ruled that life imprisonment for a first-time drug offence did not violate the Eighth Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishment".

Regardless of the innocence of the offender or the senseless overzealousness of law writing and enforcement, it is standard operating procedure that the accused do

not get their day in court. Instead, prosecutors threaten the accused with shocking sentences, and have them plead guilty to something less to get them into the life-ruining prison system.

Alexander noted that the criminal justice system is unequipped for any other way: "If everyone charged with crimes suddenly exercised his constitutional rights, there would not be enough judges, lawyers or prison cells to deal with the ensuing tsunami of litigation". The author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* also argued in the *New York Times* op-ed that "crash[ing] the system just by exercising our rights" could comprise a strategy to combatting the inequities and flaws in the criminal justice system. Blogger Arthur Silber agreed that this strategy could work if done en masse, noting, "[n]othing short of mass non-cooperation has a chance in hell".

But the price of seeking one's right to trial is prohibitive. Julian Assange is being publicly tortured right now mainly for doing journalism, but partly also for insisting on his rights to a trial. And Aaron Swartz was hounded to death, driven to suicide by a prosecutor applying the standard operating procedure by threatening Swartz with a 35-year sentence for trying to make scientific publications available to those outside of university paywalls.

In cases relating to the drug war, the goal of police and prosecutors is also to get the accused to turn on one another: in exchange for more lenient punishments, suspects are made to become informants against others – another key element of counterinsurgency

and its slow destruction of solidarity in the criminalised, targeted society.

6. Us policing was developed in concert with the US Empire.

Consider one of the founding fathers of American policing, August Vollmer. A US Marine who invaded the Philippines in the Spanish-American War in 1898, he set out to “reform” Berkeley’s police when he became its first chief in 1909. He used the scientific techniques of counterinsurgency developed by the US empire in the Philippines (a system described in Alfred McCoy’s book *Policing America’s Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State*). Vollmer brought in centralized police records, patrol cars, and lie detectors. Vollmer established a criminal justice program at the University of California, Berkeley in 1916 and wrote books including scientific racist theories of “racial degeneration” and crime. He joined the American Eugenics Society and wondered how to prevent “defectives from producing their kind”.

Smedley Butler provides another example. The military man famously wrote that he had been “a gangster for capitalism”, including that he “helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in”. He had done so by,

In counterinsurgency campaigns, state armies and police work with paramilitaries

among other things, establishing Haiti’s first police force when the Marines occupied that country in 1915, as Jeremy Kuzmarov describes in his book *Modernizing Repression: Police Training and Nation-Building in the American Century*. When Butler became police chief in Philadelphia in 1924, he too upgraded police technology and militarised its tactics, including military checkpoints and Marine-style uniforms. The mayor fired him after two years, sending him back to the Marines.

7. Counterinsurgencies use auxiliaries.

In counterinsurgency campaigns, state armies and police work with paramilitaries, who do dirty work with plausible deniability.

As Alan Macleod reported on September 28, there were more than 100 vehicle ramming attacks against protesters since the George Floyd protests started in May, many of which “seem to

have the tacit approval of local law enforcement”, given the lack of consequences.

Portland activist Mac Smiff told the *Brief Podcast*, “We call it a shift change. They’re all the same people... there’s the cops, there’s the sheriffs, there’s the marshals, there’s the DHS [Department of Homeland Security], there’s the Proud Boys, there’s the Patriot Prayer, it just goes on and on. They just take turns”.

It is called impunity: the criminal activities of paramilitaries or proxy forces go unpunished, while the full power of the state is brought down upon the intended victims of counterinsurgency.

The default counterinsurgency mode is a consequence of being ruled by an elite that sees the whole population as the enemy. The model for policing isn’t going to be changed even as Trump is replaced by “shoot them in the leg” Biden. The occupied always challenge the legitimacy of their occupiers: the debate about abolition is not going anywhere. **CT**

Justin Podur is a Toronto-based writing fellow at Globetrotter, a project of the Independent Media Institute. You can find him on his website at www.podur.org and on Twitter @justinpodur. He teaches at York University in the Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change.

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Trevor Grundy

When Malcolm X met the Ku Klux Klan

Book tells how the Klan supported Nation of Islam proposal for ‘complete separation of races’

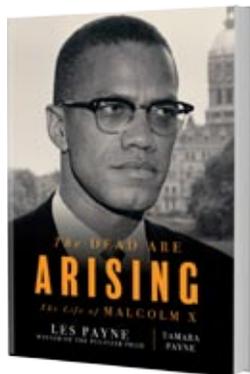
The Black Lives Matter movement demands that white people lift the veils that have long hidden their racial arrogance towards people of different skin tones and cultures.

South African apartheid was condemned by the United Nations as a crime against humanity.

Now the field widens. How blacks fought white racism – or who thought they could change it from within rather than from without – is a subject of unending interest.

A new book by the deceased American reporter Les Payne and his daughter Tamara about the life of Malcolm X (born 1925, assassinated in America in 1965) gives a glimpse of how Elijah Muhammad’s Nation of Islam, whose members included not only Malcolm X but also boxer Muhammad Ali, made contact with the Ku Klux Klan with a view to setting up separate parts of America along racial lines.

Elijah Muhammad would not have embraced the word apartheid. But what other word is there for what he advocated? But his separation views were compatible with those of some white suprema-



THE DEAD ARE ARISING: The Life of Malcolm X

Les Payne

Viking Press

www. www.hurstpublishers.com

£30

cists in America, South Africa and Rhodesia.

This new book – *The Dead Are Arising – The Life of Malcolm X*, is the latest in a long list of books about a petty criminal called Malcolm Little who found the religion that turned his life around.

Payne tells how, in 1961, Elijah Mohammed ordered Malcolm X to open exploratory talks with leaders of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in Atlanta. How the talks went still remain unclear. Some students of that time in America believe Elijah

Muhammad’s motivation was money and that he wanted farmland in Terrell County, Georgia.

The author of the new book describes how Klansmen arrived at the home of a Nation of Islam minister, Jeremiah Shabazz, in the black Atlanta neighbourhood in a ten-car motorcade.

Malcolm X is quoted as saying the meeting had been authorised by Elijah Muhammad. A Klansman identified as WS Fellows sought to break the ice by attacking Jewish people, and said blacks were not unhappy in the Southern States of the USA but that they were being stirred up by Jews to hate white people.

At that meeting, Malcolm X made his case for “complete separation of the races as opposed to segregation or integration”.

Fellows responded, saying – “Whatever you want. Call it what you like. As long as you stay over there and you’re glad to be black ... good”.

Some say the meeting was infiltrated by the FBI and reported to Washington. That shouldn’t be surprise: Jesus only had 12 disciples and one of them was Special Branch!

CT

Book Excerpt

When socialism came to the Standard

From 'Call Me Comrade', by Trevor Grundy

The extraordinary meeting between the Nation of Islam and the Ku Klux Klan, described in Les Pyne's *The Dead Are Arising – The Life of Malcolm X*, (see previous page) reminded me how one prominent African leader in the 1960s – President Julius Nyerere – reacted when he was asked to give support to the creation of a blacks-only part of America.

In my not-yet-published book, *Call Me Comrade* – excerpted here – I recall the time when Nyerere met a bunch of radical black Americans at a meeting at the office of the Standard newspaper in Dar es Salaam.

Nyerere had gone there to talk to indigenous and expatriate journalists about the need for a new socialist paper following his nationalisation of the press in December 1969.

The new managing editor was Frene Ginwala, a South African ANC supporter who recruited several top flight British and South African reporters, one of whom was Richard Gott of the UK newspaper, the *Guardian*.

The meeting took place a few weeks after the Tanzanian government adopted the Mwongozo Guidelines which were designed to enhance the role of lower grade workers in Tanzania.

The Standard went to bed early, with the cash-strapped advertising department hoping to sell a few hundred more copies to audiences coming out of local cinemas around midnight.

One day, we were told by Frene Ginwala that the paper would be even earlier than normal because President Nyerere was going to come to the office, sit in the newsroom, explain what sort of socialist newspaper he wanted to see emerge after all the changes and then take questions from all members



Photo Adarsh Nayyar

Frene Ginwala, managing editor of The Standard newspaper with President Julius Nyerere when the Tanzanian leader was questioned by visiting Afro Americans on his attitude towards the forced creation of a separate state for blacks in the USA.

of the staff, even the messengers who were to be seen in future as important (maybe more so) than the middle class Tanzanians who occupied prominent positions in this African socialist society.

A notice confirming the changes had already appeared on an already overcrowded newsroom notice board. Many of the memos reminded reporters that those fighting white rule in Africa were freedom fighters or guerrillas and not terrorists, that Viet Cong should be deleted from Reuters copy and replaced with the South Vietnamese Liberation Front, and that Mao's regime was not in a 'new' China but in a China re-vitalised by revolutionary commitment and socialist thought.

Richard Gott roared with laughter when he told us that both the British High Commission and the American Embassy were upset with him for re-writing news stories written by journalists working for Reuters, the AP, the UPI and Agence France Press.

He spent a great deal of time with people who appeared as his close friends – Chinese officials. He let it be known to all who cared to listen that he detested the Soviet Union and its post-Krushchev leadership which was returning Russia to the dark days under Stalin.

That night at 9 pm, Nyerere, his aide Joan Wicken, and several officials from State House and the Ministry of Information appeared, accompanied by a dozen plain clothes security men who spent their time looking at us, never once at the great man at the top table who ruled our lives.

I sat waiting for Frene to introduce the honoured guests, hungry, but too nervous about eating my tuna and tomato sandwiches or drinking coffee from my thermos flasks.

Nyerere sat next to his managing editor. Gott was at the back of the room, in a colourful *katenge* shirt, stroking his red beard, surrounded by young black reporters. Frene, who was referred to by local reporters, *sotto voce*, as the memsahib, looked stunning in a new silk sari. He spoke so calmly that the angry faces of Frene's new militant recruits from the now expatriate cleansed University of Dar es Salaam became at once attentive and obedient.

He began with a warning, "It is stupid to rely on money as the major instrument of development when we know only too well that our country is poor. It is equally stupid, indeed even more stupid, for us to imagine that we shall rid ourselves of our poverty through financial assistance rather than our own financial resources. Firstly, we shall not get the money. There is no country in the world which is prepared to give us gifts or loans, or establish industries, to the extent that we would be able to achieve all our development targets. And even if all the prosperous nations were willing to help the needy countries, the assistance would still not suffice".

Three Afro-Americans came in late, apologised and sat down.

Nyerere said that independence did not mean a new flag at the top of a pole in an African football stadium. It did not mean the replacement of white faces by black faces.

Joan Wicken handed him a piece of paper and he started to read. "As early as 1897, James Connolly, the Irish socialist leader told fellow nationalists that if they were to remove the English army from their country and hoist their green flag over Dublin Castle it would not mean they had won the fight".

He added, "This is what Connolly said, and I suggest you all write it down and use it when you write your stories. He looked down and continued reading Connolly's words, "England would still rule you. She would rule you through her capitalists, through her

landlords, through her financiers through the whole army of commercial individualist institutions she has planted in this country and watered with the tears of our mothers and the blood of our martyrs".

Nyerere said, "Comrades. A power-hungry elite is emerging in this country and a privileged class is growing as powerful and as ruthless as the colonials we long ago expelled from our motherland. Don't ever be fooled by racists. They draw a red herring across the field and mislead the hounds. Guard the sacred flame we lit so long ago at the top of Mount Kilimanjaro and let that flame never die on top of that mountain or deep inside your hearts".

Silence reigned.

"Independence means self-reliance. Independence cannot be real if a nation depends upon gifts and loans from another for its development. How can we depend upon foreign governments and companies for the major part of our development without giving to those governments and countries a great part of our freedom to act as we please? The truth is we cannot".

I whispered to a colleague, "But the World Bank has just been here. Will it let Tanzania do as it pleases?"

He thought a while and nudged me. I expected something considered and profound. "Let's do a swap. Your cheese and tomato for my sausage roll with HP sauce?"

After a short break, one of the foreign journalists asked the president if he and other expatriates would be called on to fight for Tanzania if she was invaded by its many white enemies. Nyerere shook his head and said, "No". Several hands were raised, one belonging to an American, who said that he was a friend and supporter of Robert Franklin Williams, who was a close associate of Stokely Carmichael and Walter Rodney.

He said that he and Williams had spent time in Vietnam and that his movement had a good knowledge of the guerrilla tactics the Viet Cong were using against the American imperialist. He was sure Nyerere would agree that Viet Cong guerrilla tactics would succeed in Africa just as they were succeeding in Vietnam.

His big question was, "Would Tanzania support blacks with guns taking over parts of the United States of America and forming a state which would be non-aligned and linked to the revolutionary

forces of the Third World and progressive governments around the globe, especially the Soviet Union, Cuba and China?”

Then he turned his gaze on me, and said, “And I wish that honky with the big nose would stop staring at me. Is he supposed to be here?”

Nyerere stood up, smiled in my direction, and replied: “I have spent my whole life fighting apartheid in South Africa, Rhodesia and the Portuguese colonies, and racial hatred in my own country. Do you really believe I will condone the apartheid you suggest in America?”

A moment’s silence and then the clapping began. At the back of the room, the paper’s most senior messenger raised his hand, and asked the last question of the night: Was the *Standard* now a socialist paper? Nyerere replied that the aim was to turn it into a socialist paper, but that would take time.

The messenger wondered if under socialism all

things were equal. Nyerere smiled and said that was the aim – all things should be equal. The messenger then asked that if all things were supposed to be equal why were some stories in the paper with big headlines while others had only small headlines?

Nyerere smiled, looked at Frene, who shook her head. The he stood up and walked away, pausing only when he came to the messenger. He patted him on the shoulder and said something in Swahili which prompted the messenger to click his heels and give Nyerere a British army salute.

The black American turned to one of the men with him and growled “The guy’s a sell-out”. They left the building and never returned. **CT**

Trevor Grundy is the author of Memoir of a Fascist Childhood, published by William Heinemann, London in 1998. His website is www.trevorgrundy.news

Hurwitt’s Eye

Mark Hurwitt



Andrew Fischer

I wish ...

... I'd been there to greet Sonny Liston after his victorious flight home to Philadelphia

There aren't many things I'd do differently if I could do them again, but there are a few: First, I'd force myself to learn to play a musical instrument. Then, in college I'd major in something other than journalism. And I'd definitely keep dating Barbara while still living in California.

I'd also greet Sonny Liston at Philadelphia airport after he won the heavyweight boxing championship of the world in 1962. I was only a teenager at the time, but if my current brain could somehow get back into that long-gone little body. ...

There are at least a dozen books about Liston, and I've read many, the best of which was Nick Tosches' *The Devil and Sonny Liston*. Most of the books focus on the circumstances of his suspicious death in 1970, but the accounts of his life have always held more interest for me.

My first memory of him is his 1963 appearance on the Ed Sullivan show, skipping rope to the instrumental *Night Train* as if working out for his future title defence against a 21-year-old 7-1 underdog named Cassius Clay.

Looking back, I wonder why I didn't see Liston as a scary man. Nicknamed "The Big Bear", he was big, black, powerful, soft-spoken, and menacing, with fists that measured 15 inches around. I'd never seen anyone like him, on TV or in person. I didn't find his verbal interaction with Sullivan threatening and he seemed to be a nice man, despite his dangerous appearance. Years later I would learn about the difficult and unhappy life he had led.

Born in Arkansas in or around 1930, Charles L. Liston suffered beatings from his abusive, sharecropper father, who is said to have hitched Sonny to a plough when the family mule wasn't up to the task. Functionally illiterate and not especially bright, he was taunted by fellow-students, quit school and moved to St. Louis, Missouri. Soon falling in with a gang of hoodlums, he committed robberies and other crimes, was caught and sentenced to five years in prison around the age of 20. Liston didn't seem to mind, however, and the facility's athletic director introduced him to boxing, for which he had a natural

aptitude. In just two years he was released from prison and, after a short amateur career, signed a professional contract with the help of some "unsavoury" backers.

Boxing has always had "mob" connections, due to the nature of the sport. Betting on the bouts has been around from the beginning. Promoters can set up matches (and mismatches) pretty much as they see fit. Unlike every other major sport, there is no scoreboard, judges score each round in secret, not revealing their "cards" until a fight ends by rounds or knockout. Thus there is opportunity to adjust the result if necessary. Scoring in boxing is subjective, based on factors such as ring generalship, aggression, the number of punches landed as well as their quality and power.

In early 1953, Liston became the Golden Gloves world heavyweight champion. In September of that year he knocked out his opponent to win his first pro fight.

By the mid-1950s, Liston was advancing impressively in his boxing career, while being regularly harassed by the St. Louis police. When he objected verbally, it resulted in bad press. When he did so physi-

cally, it resulted in six months in prison and more bad press. There were also racial slurs: Liston was called a gorilla because of his long arms (an amazing 84-inch boxing reach, especially long for a 6ft 1-inch man), and a “jungle beast”. Between the newspaper hyperbole and Liston’s history with the law, he became persona non grata with the local populace. The feeling was mutual and in 1957 Liston had had enough of St. Louis and moved to Philadelphia.

By 1960 he had beaten all the top heavyweight contenders who would face him, and with a record of 34 wins (25 knockouts) and one loss he became the number one heavyweight contender. Two 1959 bouts with Cleveland “Big Cat” Williams illustrate just how complete a fighter Liston had become. Williams had a record of 43 wins (34 KOs) and two losses at the time of their first meeting, with 34 wins coming via knockout. Liston, however, proved to be the superior fighter during their five total rounds of boxing. In addition to his left jab, still considered by many boxing experts as the most powerful of all time, his defence, ring movement, mechanics and ability to take a punch were all evident. Liston knocked out Williams in both of their fights, in the third and second round, respectively.

In 1962, promoters had little choice but to give him a title shot against Floyd Patterson, to take place in Chicago. The champion was a converted light-heavyweight, but he was a skilled boxer, clean-cut, well-mannered, nice guy and the “people’s choice.” Liston was considered the opposite: a lumbering



NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR PHILLY: Sonny Liston, world heavyweight champion.

slugger with a criminal history, crooked associates, and almost inarticulate – not a good role model.

The criticism and negativity didn’t stop, all the way to the championship bout. President Kennedy didn’t want Patterson to fight Liston, the NAACP was afraid that the civil rights movement would be stalled if Liston won and, although Liston was odds-on favourite, most sports reporters chose Patterson to win the fight, as did many former champions, including Jack Dempsey, who said Liston shouldn’t even have got the title shot.

With a 25-pound weight advantage and a much longer reach, the powerful Liston easily knocked out Patterson in the first round. He was the new heavyweight champ of the world! Films after the fight show a truly happy Sonny Liston

– ecstatic, revelling in what he must have considered his first real achievement of any kind.

He was on top of the world and looked forward to returning to Philadelphia, expecting crowds of fans to greet him at the airport. However, there was no crowd. Not a single fan. There were a few reporters and public relations people, though. Sportswriter Jack McKinney noted, “I watched Sonny. His eyes swept the whole scene. ... You could feel the deflation, see the look of hurt in his eyes. ... He had been deliberately snubbed. Philadelphia wanted nothing to do with him”.

Larry Merchant, a writer for the *Daily News*, wrote derisively: “So it is true – in a fair fight between good and evil, evil must win. . . . A celebration for Philadelphia’s first heavyweight champ is now in order. Emily Post probably would recommend a ticker-tape parade. For confetti we can use shredded warrants of arrest”.

“Evil must win...” If I could go back, I’d tell Sonny Liston that Merchant was an ass. I’d be standing there with a sign, *Philly Loves Champ Sonny!* I’d make my way to the man, congratulate him and say I was representing 100 people that day, although I doubt he’d believe me. I imagine he’d pat me on the head, smile and say, “Thanks, kid,” and turn away. At that moment I would think, “Maybe his sad life might retain some happiness a while longer now.” **CT**

Andrew Fischer’s collection of short stories, *Purgastories*, is available at amazon.com. He also designs board games, which can be downloaded at no charge from www.boardgamegeek.com.

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