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February 2021

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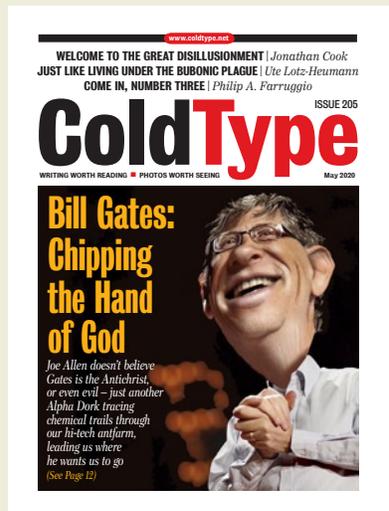
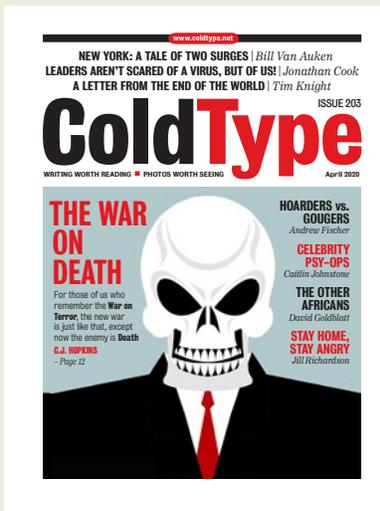
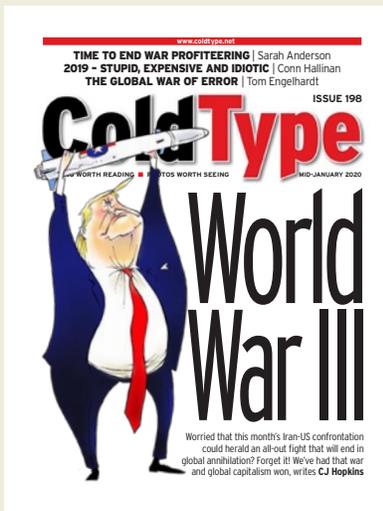
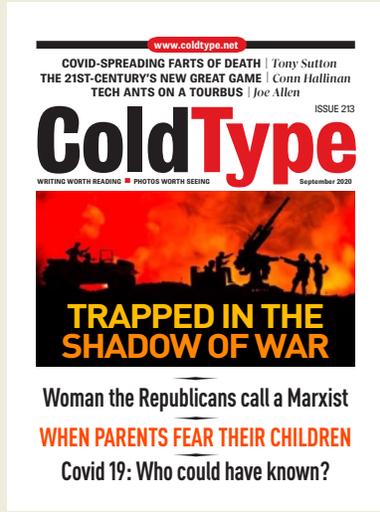
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Amargosa Valley, Nevada / Photo: Dino Kužnik

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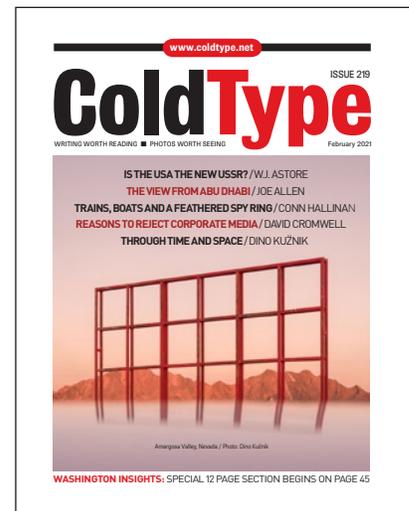
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Conn Hallinan

Trains, boats and a feathered spy ring

Our contributor makes his annual awards to individuals, companies and governments that make reading the news a daily adventure

● **The Golden Lemon Award** goes to Lockheed Martin for its F-35 fifth generation stealth fighter, at \$1.5-trillion the most expensive weapons system in history. The plane currently has 883 “design flaws”, including nine “category 1” flaws. The latter “may cause death, severe injury, or severe occupational illness” to pilots and “major damage” to weapons systems and combat readiness (which sounds like those TV ads for drugs that may or may not treat your disease, but could also kill your first born and turn you into a ferret).

But the company got right to work on those flaws, not by fixing them, mind you, but by reclassifying them as less serious. As for the rest of the problems, Lockheed Martin says it will fix them if it gets paid more. The company cur

rently receives \$2-billion a year to keep some 400 F-35s flying, a cost of \$50-million a plane. It costs \$28,455 an hour to fly an F-35.

US aircraft are following industrialist Norman Augustine’s prediction that war plane costs increase by a factor of 10 every decade. He predicted that by 2054 the Pentagon will be able to buy just one fighter plane

● **The Silver Lemon** goes to the US Navy for mothballing four of its Littoral Combat ships after less than two decades in service. All 10 Littoral ships apparently have a “fundamentally flawed” propulsion system. The ships cost over \$600-million apiece.

There are plans to build six more.

The navy plans to build 82 ships overall in the next six years at a cost of \$147-billion, including – at \$940-million apiece – 20 frigates to replace the Littoral Combat ships.

● **The Bronze Lemon** to the US Army for spending \$24-billion to replace its aging, 27-ton Bradley Fighting

Vehicle with – ah, nothing? Not that it didn’t spend all that money. First there was the M2, but its armour was too thin. Then it built the Future Combat System, but it was too big and also had inadequate armour. Then they built the Ground Combat Vehicle, which was a monster and weighed three times more than the Bradleys. Solution? Keep the old Bradleys.

● **The ET Award** to the new US Space Force for the design of its uniforms: jungle foliage. As George Takei (Helmsmen Hikaru Sulu from *Star Trek*) commented, “Unclear why there is a need for camouflage in space”.

● **The Golden Covid-19 Award** to Solange Vierira, Brazil’s Superintendence of Private Insurance in President Jair Bolsonaro’s rightwing government. According to former Health Ministry official and epidemiologist Julio Croda, when told that older people were more likely to die from the virus, Vierira told him that “it’s good that deaths are concentrated among the old. That will improve our economic performance as it will reduce our pen-



KILLING MACHINE?
The F-35 stealth fighter

Photo: Wikimedia



OVER SHE GOES: The USS Billings, one of the USA Navy's ill-fated Littoral Combat ships, launches sideways into the Menominee River in Marinette, Wisconsin. The ships have "fundamentally flawed" propulsion systems.

sion deficit". The virus has killed more than 184,000 Brazilians as of December.

● **The Silver Covid** goes to US Commerce Secretary Wilber Ross, who told Fox News that the virus has a silver lining: "I think it will help accelerate the return of jobs to North America". Unemployment in the US passed 20-million this past summer. The virus also has killed more than 335,000 Americans.

● **The Bronze Covid** goes to the Italian medical supply company, Intersurgical, which threatened to sue a 3-D printer startup for producing the company's ventilator valve during last spring's Covid emergency in northern Italy. Intersurgical, which charges \$11,000 for each valve, had been unable to meet the needs of hospitals overrun

with desperately sick patients. So Alessandro Ramaioli and Christian Francassi of Isinnova, a 3-D printer company, reverse engineered the part because Intersurgical refused to release the design specifications. The 3-D supplied valves cost \$1 apiece. Now Intersurgical is threatening to sue the two Isinnova men for patent violation. The virus has killed more than 97,000 Italians as of December.

● **The Revolving Door Award** goes to former Marine Corps General, Joseph Dunford, who oversaw the testing of Lockheed Martin's troubled F-35 fighter. According to the tests, the plane "could not dem-



Photo: US Military

STAYING PUT: Replacements are three times as heavy, so the military sticks with the Bradley Fighting Machine.

onstrate that the ... F-35B is operationally effective or suitable for use in any kind of limited combat operation”, and if the plane encountered enemies it should “avoid threat engagement” (translation: run for your life). The test also found that pilots under 165 pounds had a 25 percent chance of death, and an almost certainty of serious neck injuries, if they ejected from the plane.

But Dunford said he had “full confidence” in the F-35 (generals don’t fly them). A little over four months after Dunford retired as head of the Joints Chiefs of Staff, he was appointed to the Lockheed Martin Board of Directors.

He has lots of company. After retiring, Admiral William Crowe joined General Dynamics, Gen. John Shalikashvili joined Boeing, Gen. Richard Myers joined Northrop Grumman, and current Defense Secretary nominee, retired Gen. Lloyd Austin, is on the board of Raytheon, one of the prime contractors for the new Space Force.

● **The Culture Sensitivity Award** to the Trump Administration for appointing Darren Beattie to the Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad that oversees the conservation of Holocaust sites in Europe. Beattie has appeared on a panel with Peter Brimelow from VDare, a anti-immigrant site that the Southern Poverty Law Center calls a “hate website”. The Trump White House also put out a statement on Holocaust Remembrance Day that never



BAD CHOICE: Israel’s PM Benjamin Netanyahu made an embarrassing appointment.



SPY MASTER: Narendra Modi’s Indian government found a highly-sophisticated aerial spy ring

mention the word “Jewish”.

Co-winner is Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for appointing former general Efi Eitam to head the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum. Eitam, a West Bank settler, refers to Palestinians as a “cancer” and advocates expelling them from the Occupied Territories. “We cannot be with all these Arabs”, he says, arguing that the army could “expel the population there overnight”. He also calls for ousting all Palestinians from the parliament.

Honourable mention goes to the White House for unleashing Border Patrol Agents, Arizona state troopers and State Department of Public Safety officers on O’odham tribal members who were protesting the border wall that divides up their

lands. Tribe members were tear gassed and struck with rubber bullets, and a number of children were arrested. The day was October 12, Indigenous People’s Day.

● **The Blind Justice Award** goes to the Greek government for charging a 25-year-old Afghan man with killing his 16-old-child, who drowned when a refugee-filled boat overturned. Adriana Tidona of Amnesty International said the charge was “just one more way to discourage” asylum seekers and could violate the Geneva Conventions on the protection of refugees.

Runner up in this category is Egypt’s National Election Authority, which was angered by the low turnout of voters in the first round of the Senate elections last August. Voting in Egypt is a requirement. But Egypt is in the middle of the pandemic and an economic crisis. Many of the polling places were also located away from residential areas, making it difficult for voters to get to them.

Only a little over 14 percent of Egypt’s 64-million voters made it to the polls. The Commission’s response? Charge 54-million people with violating the election law, which carries a fine of 500 Egyptian pounds (about \$31).

● **The Mati Hari Award** to the right wing Indian government of Narendra Modi for breaking up a highly sophisticated Pakistani spy ring.

The agent – a pigeon, painted pink and wearing a ring with a number on it – was turned over to the police, who are continuing their investigation. The official story is that locals saw the pigeon fly over the border and seized it, but suspicion is that it was an inside job: a stool pigeon.

Good News

There are also people and organizations that do their best to make the world a better place to live in. Here are a few:

- Hallel Rabin, an 19-year old Israeli conscientious objector who has served three jail sentences for refusing to serve in the Occupied Territories. “People in power institute a policy of occupation and oppression of an entire nation”, she said; “I will not take part in a system that is based on inequality and fear”.
- Melati and Isabel Wijsen, 19

The agent – a pigeon, painted pink and wearing a ring with a number on it – was turned over to the police

and 17 respectively, who lobbied successfully to ban all throwaway plastics in Indonesia. After China, Indonesia is the second largest source of marine pollution. The sisters have also taken on climate change. “Us kids may be only 26 percent of the world’s population, but we are 100 percent of the future”, said Isabel.

- The people of Ireland, who raised over \$3-million to buy water, food

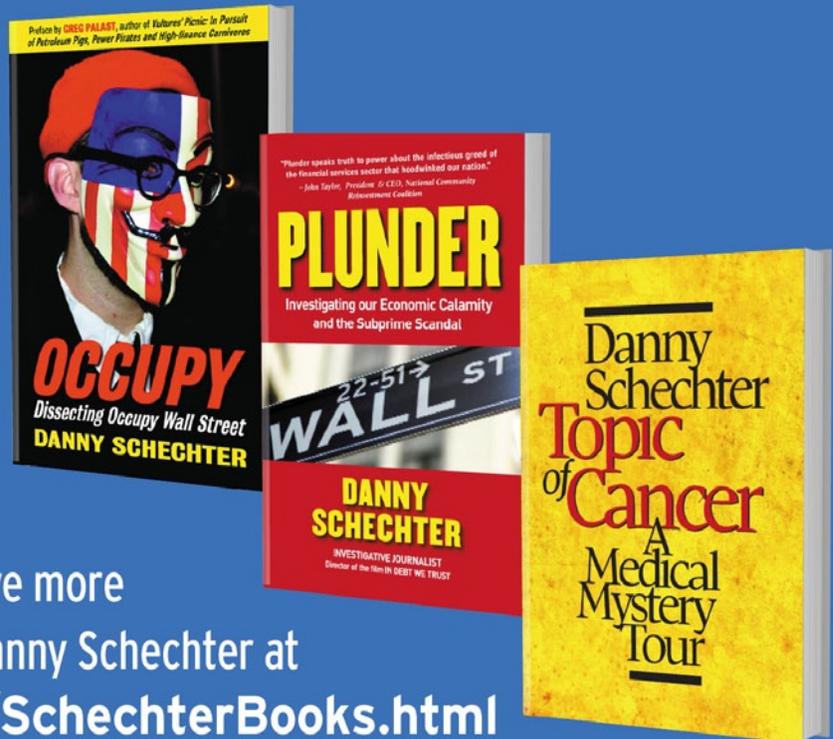
and medical supplies for the Hopi Reservation and the Navajo Nation. Both tribes have been hard hit by Covid-19. The money was payback. In 1847 the Choctaw Nation sent \$170 to Irish families caught up in the 1845-49 potato famine that killed more than a million people, and forced more than a million others to emigrate. The Choctaw were the first tribe to be forcibly relocated to Oklahoma in 1831, the so-called “Trail of Tears”, in which thousands died of disease and starvation. When tribal members heard about the famine they raised money and sent it to the Quakers to be distributed.

CT

Conn Hallinan can be read at www.dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com and at www.middleempireseries.wordpress.com.

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Joe Allen

The view from Abu Dhabi

From my front door in America to a job site in the UAE – with TV screens all along the way – the outside world looks pretty bleak from the window of a Covidian cattle car

They say travel opens your eyes to the world, but the New Normal doesn't offer many opportunities to nose around. Your path is pretty well marked out for you, from one door to the next. Any deviation from that path is considered a violation of public health. One false move, and you could be held responsible for countless people dying of Covid. During a global panic, nose-pickers are the new mass murderers.

Just to get out the door in the first place, I had to send in a mail-in nasal swab test. I probably took six Covid tests before it was over – one swab every five days for three weeks. Each time, a weary nurse from Asia, India, or Africa – peering out over two masks and through a clear plastic face shield, searching my face for any sign of humanity – would ram a massive Q-tip down my throat until I gagged, or up my nose until they'd scraped a layer of cells off my pre-frontal cortex.

Most were gentle at first, but each time I went in, they'd drill down a little deeper. You got the feeling they'd conspired to test our

limits, if only out of boredom.

The day after I got home, Chinese authorities announced that anal swabs are far more effective than oral or nasal testing. I've never been more relieved to be back in the good ol' USA, land of the free and home of the brave.

America! Fuck yeah

I arrived in Abu Dhabi right after the US military moved a nuclear submarine through the Strait of Hormuz, just off-shore of the UAE. It was another attempt to intimidate the Iranians on the opposite shore.

Just over a month before, one of Iran's top nuclear scientists had been gunned down in the streets of Tehran. According to Iranian officials, the assassination was pulled off by an autonomous pickup truck armed with an AI-guided gun turret.

Just after America's ominous nuke-sub display, a Tehran court sentenced an Iranian-American businessman to 10 years in prison. He was accused of spying for 'Merica.

A few days later, the US arrested an Iranian professor teaching at

Boston University for "acting as an unregistered agent of the Iranian government."

From our crew's perspective, just across the strait from Iran, the news media seemed full of bad omens. Our show was one of many Western productions blowing through town. Any one of us could be a target for the next attention-hungry terrorist.

The longer our company was imprisoned in that hypersanitised Covidian cattle car – quarantined in a beachside resort with nothing but CNN International, Russia Today, the BBC world service, and rumour-infested Interwebs to keep us apprised of the plot unfolding outside – the more my American co-workers indulged dark, and ultimately delusional fantasies that we would become collateral damage in some toxic foreign entanglement.

After decades of hard flexes, colour revolutions, full-on invasions, and relentless drone strikes from the West, these Middle Eastern cats show no fear of Armageddon. It wouldn't matter to them if the End Times turned out to be spiritual or utterly mundane – they



GLITTERING PARADISE IN A DESERT WASTE: "The skyline is amazing at first, but then you remember that glass is made from sand. In a sense, these oil-fired skyscrapers are actually organic, like cozy log cabins in a Catskills forest".

refuse to bend the knee to other Highest Earthly Powers.

If the world ignited in a mass conflagration, that would only fulfill their Abrahamic prophecies. If global warming turned the planet into a desert, the oil-thirsty Arabs would barely notice. Until then, they'll keep drilling deeper and building higher.

The first thing a Westerner notices about Abu Dhabi, even in the midst of a mass lockdown, is how much wealth is on display. The

city boasts a Ferrari theme park, ornate mosques, and shimmering ultra-mod skyscrapers. Most conspicuous is the disc-shaped Oreo cookie tower.

From my hotel balcony, I watched dusky migrant workers sweep up tourists' trash. They were decked out in rubber gloves, gauze-like PPE cosmonaut suits, and double-ply medical masks. Just beyond, yachts packed full of maskless Arabs cruised the beach's edge. The dancing passen-

gers celebrated life and health and freedom as sitar-infused techno throbbed across the water.

Oddly enough, the first images I ever saw of Abu Dhabi came from an advertisement that aired right after Election Day. I was in rural Tennessee at the time, watching TV in a family living room, waiting for the wild-ass Sidewinder to get home.

His wife and I sat on the couch, anxious about the fate of the nation. She kept CNN on the tube, wishing

they'd just call the election and be done with it. The channel's vapid talking heads were already seeding catch phrases like "baseless claims" and "without evidence", preemptively casting doubt on Trump's dubious doubt-casters. As the mail-in ballots poured in by the truckload, flipping state after state from red to blue, an eerie advertisement interrupted the drama.

A trailer for Michael Bay's *6 Underground* rattled the enormous flatscreen TV. Sports cars raced through the streets of Abu Dhabi, engines roaring. Drone footage showcased a pristine skyline crowned by a futuristic space mosque.

The grinding soundtrack left the impression of a chthonic force rising up from the desert sands.

I sat on the edge of an old recliner-couch in that Southern living room, already unnerved by the social chaos tearing across our once great nation. I contemplated the pothole-pocked roads just beyond the front yard while images of Arab splendour passed before my eyes. An uneasy feeling came over me.

As America crumbles under the weight of its grudges, I thought to myself, the world's authoritarian states are poised to surpass us. Our cities have never looked so tidy as Abu Dhabistan does today, at least on camera – and it's possible they never will.

Related by trade

People naturally associate "race" with skin colour. But much of what we recognise as racial difference, or the sense of being related by race, can be triggered by behavioural cues. Deep in our mammalian

As America crumbles under the weight of its grudges, I thought to myself, the world's authoritarian states will soon surpass us

brains, there's a feeling that people who behave like us – those who possess the same skill-sets, who are playing for our team – these are our people.

Recently, I had the privilege of working with an international team that included a gruff Pakistani, a young buck from the Philippines, and an American born and raised in Guam. We climbed steel truss and ate our meals together. We hoisted heavy objects into place. We trusted our lives to each other's hands. When the action died down, we exchanged a few life stories.

It isn't as if our national allegiances overlap, or our religious lives are deeply intertwined. Nothing like that. And yet, I can't emphasise enough how much more I relate to the brown Ewoks in the arid hinterlands than I do the Rainbow White storm troopers who defend our neoliberal Empire.

My sense of kinship toward a Pakistani Muslim who knows how to tie solid knots, who understands the mechanics of counterweights and friction resistance, far surpasses my genetic relationship to fey Caucasoids whose advanced education leads them to claim insults are "violence" or obvious sex differences are arbitrary "social constructs". Believe it or

not, working class Pakistanis still have a grip – the Prophet's flawless reputation notwithstanding.

I have far more respect for a roughneck Filipino with the guts to climb high steel than I do some ambitious Cracker Jack eager to climb the multi-culti social ladder. Like me and my kind, these men chase daily wages across various borders under the rule of aloof oligarchs. Despite the obvious cultural barriers, we speak the same language.

Bloodline is important, but shared language is far more important – even symbolic or memetic language. Ultimately, shared spirit is most important of all.

Demonic drone swarms

For the first time in my life, I got to see a drone swarm with my own two eyes. I bet drones will be soon deployed in pretty much every production, from pop concerts to evangelical revivals. They'll be as commonplace as lighting rigs or video walls.

As these creatures lifted off the ground in tandem, their coordinated movements resembled an awkward school of fish. Each had four tiny propellers for fins and an LED globe for a head. They performed intricate aerial manoeuvres, forming a multicoloured tornado, playing "follow the leader" in cascading streams, and creating two-dimensional geometric planes that rotated in mid-air. Occasionally one would lose signal and wander off, or crash into its neighbour.

More jarring than the visual display was the sound they made. The collective scream of their propellers humming all at once, especially as they approached,

sounded like blood-hungry mosquitos emerging from the bowels of hell. Their shriek reminded me of the evil string music at the opening of the 1973 film *The Exorcist*, just before the hapless archaeologist uncovers a Sumerian amulet that starts all the trouble.

That god-awful sound, coupled with the nascent intelligence of these machines – merging to form an even greater collective intelligence – raised the hair on the back of my neck. What would it be like to have a swarm of malevolent, quasi-intelligent slaughterbots chase you down and pick you apart like airborne piranhas?

How many Muslims have already known that feeling just before they met their Maker?

How many 'Mericans will before it's all said and done?

Lady Gaga mangles the “Star Spangled Banner”

Historically speaking, it's pretty weird that a mob of Internet-addicted conspiracy theorists attempted an ... ahem ... “insurrection” with random bike racks, pepper spray, and inverted flagpoles. Swept up by a roaring meme storm, that Quixotic mob believed they were confronting an elite cabal of sexually deviant satanists as they battled a wonky windmill up on Capitol Hill. To the outside world, it was obvious they'd lost their minds out in the wastelands of Cyberia.

Even crazier, though, is the Democrats' decision to have Lady Gaga sing the National Anthem at Joe Biden's “unifying” inauguration. To hyper-vigilant eyes, the singer appeared to be dressed like one of the genocidal oligarchs in *The Hunger Games*. Watching Gaga approach

It was hilarious to see Lady Gaga belt out the “Star Spangled Banner” at the invitation of Creepy Uncle Joe Biden

the mic, flashing her crooked grin – as Slick Willy, George W, Saint Obama, Stiff Pence, Sleepy Joe, and soon-to-be-president Kamala smiled behind their fashion masks – you have to wonder if Biden's production team was just trolling the Q-Anon crowd.

Lady Gaga is the closest thing we have to a mainstream satanic sex symbol. She's the poster girl for the postmod, glam-obsessed, gender-bending cultural mutations that have altered the face of Christendom since at least the turn of the 20th-century – since the dawn of the Age of the Child.

As the 21st-century descended into a goofball dystopia, the versatile singer made a brilliant career out of subverting the sacred iconography of the host culture she now symbolizes.

The occult elements in Lady Gaga's work are hardly subtle. Whether he likes it or not, one of her more obvious influences is the Thelemic rockstar, Marilyn Manson. But that's just the tip of an iceberg melting in hell.

About a decade ago, Gaga underwent the “Abramović Method”. This masochistic initiatory rite found the singer wandering naked in the woods under the tutelage of the infamous neo-pagan Spirit Cooker, Marina Abramović.

As if to confirm the gaslit megalomania of our new age, Gaga had this to say about her esoteric mentor:

“[Abramović] is such an incredible piece of art in herself. And she is limitless. She is limitless in every way that I can even, in my limit ravin' [sic]... raidin' brain... that I do not possess the limitless brain that she does. I look at her and she is so free...

“It's when you are around someone like Marina, as myself – a self-proclaimed pop performance artist – wanna go home and slit my wrists, and I am nothing, I have achieved no sense of art, she is so boundless”.

Given the fact that Lady Gaga's catchy pop art is openly derived from anti-orthodox occultism, it was pretty hilarious to see her belt out a vaguely dissonant version of the “Star Spangled Banner” at the invitation of Creepy Uncle Joe Biden, our second Catholic president. Hopefully he got another chance to sniff her hair.

Just imagine: a hotly contested presidential inauguration sanctified by a Luciferian turbo-slut for an audience of masked elites under protection of 25,000 armed troops behind the barbed-wire fences of the Washington DC “Green Zone.” If you didn't know better, you might suspect the Highest Earthly Powers were trying their damndest to give an already paranoid Middle America a hard case of the heebie-jeebies. **CT**

Joe Allen writes about race, robots, and religion. Presently, he lives in the western shadow of the Rocky Mountains. Read his weekly newsletter at www.JOEBOT.xyz.

C.J. Hopkins

That's all, folks!

The global-capitalist system can, virtually any time it wants, suspend the Simulation of Democracy and crack down on us with despotic force

As they used to say at the end of all those wacky Looney Tunes cartoons, that's all folks! The show is over. Literal Russian-Asset Hitler, the Latest Greatest Threat to Western Democracy, the Monster of Mar-a-Lago, Trumpzilla, Trumpenstein, the Ayatollah of Orange Shinola, has finally been humiliated and given the bum-rush out of Washington by the heroic forces of the GloboCap "Resistance", with a little help from the US military. The whole thing went exactly to script.

Well ... OK, not quite exactly to script. Despite four years of dire warnings by the corporate media, the Intelligence Community, Hollywood celebrities, the Democratic Party, faux anti-fascists, fake-Left pundits, and pretty much every utterly deluded, Trump-obsessed liberal with an Internet connection, there was no Hitlerian "Reichstag Fire", no Boogaloo, no Civil War II, no coup, no white-supremacist uprising. Nothing. The man simply got on a chopper and was flown away to his Florida resort.

I know, you're probably think-

ing ... "Wow, how embarrassing for the GloboCap 'Resistance', being exposed as a bunch of utterly shameless, neo-Goebbelsian propagandists, and liars, and hysterical idiots, and such!" And, in any other version of reality, you'd have a point ... but not in this one.

No, in this reality, "Democracy Has Prevailed!" Yes, it was touch and go there for a while, as there was no guarantee that the Intelligence Community, the military-industrial complex, Western governments, the corporate media, supranational corporations, Internet oligarchs, and virtually every other component of the global-capitalist empire could keep one former game show host with no real political power whatsoever from taking over the entire world.

Still, Trump's failure to go full-Hitler, or even half-Hitler, was somewhat awkward. I mean, you can't whip millions of people into a four-year frenzy of fear and hatred of a clearly powerless ass-clown president, and portray him as a Russian Intelligence asset, and the Son of Hitler, and all the rest of it,

and then just drop the act cold and laugh in their faces. That would leave them feeling like total morons who had just spent the last four years of their lives being lied to and emotionally manipulated, or like members of a cult, or something.

Fortunately, for GloboCap, this was not a major problem. All they had to do was produce a cheap simulation of "Trump going full-Hitler". It didn't even have to be convincing. They just needed a semi-dramatic event to plug into the official narrative, something they could call "an attempted coup," "an insurrection", "an attack," and so on, and which millions of credulous liberals could hysterically shriek about on the Internet.

The "Storming of the Capitol" did the trick. They held a dress rehearsal in Berlin last August, and then gave the real performance in the Capitol Building (this time it was for all the money, so they went ahead and got a couple people killed). It wasn't very hard to pull off. All they actually had to do, in both Berlin and DC, was allow a small fringe group of angry protesters to gain access to the



THE RAMBO EFFECT: Flags fly as Trump supporters demonstrate outside Washington's Capitol building on January 6.

building, film it, and then pump out the “attempted coup” narrative. It made no difference whatsoever that the “domestic terrorists” (in both Berlin and Washington) were a completely unorganised, unarmed mob that posed absolutely zero threat of “staging a coup” and “overthrowing the government”. It also made not the slightest difference that Trump didn’t actually “incite” the mob (yes, I put myself through the agony of reading every word of his speech, which was the usual word salad from start to finish). We’re talking propaganda here, not reality.

The so-called “Violent Storming of the Capitol” set the stage for the main event, which was the show of force we have all just witnessed. Someone (I’m not entirely clear who) ordered in the troops, tens of thousands of them, locked down Washington, erected fences,

set up road blocks and military check points, and otherwise occupied the government district. It looked like any other US-military post-“regime-change” occupation, because that’s what it was, which was precisely the point. As I have been repeating for ... well, for over four years now, it was always going to end this way, with GloboCap making an example of Trump and reminding everyone who is really in charge.

Look, let’s be clear about these last four years, because there are all kinds of crazy theories going around (not to mention the official GloboCap narrative), but what actually happened is pretty simple. Here’s the whole story, as concise as I can make it.

Back in 2016, the American people, sick to the gills of global

capitalism and its increasingly oppressive woke ideology, elected an unauthorised, narcissistic ass-clown to the highest office in the land. They did this for a variety of reasons, but mostly it was just a big “fuck you” to the establishment. It was an act of rebellion against a government which they know is owned by unaccountable, supranational corporations and oligarchs who openly detest them. It was an act of rebellion against a system of government they know they have no influence over, and are not going to have any influence over. It was an act of rebellion against global capitalism, the unopposed, global-hegemonic system which has dominated the world for the last 30 years ... whether they realised what they were rebelling against or not.

This act of rebellion happened on the heels of Brexit (another such

act of rebellion) and in the context of the rise of assorted “populist” movements all throughout the world. When Trump actually won in 2016, the global capitalist ruling classes realised they had a serious problem ... a “populist” rebellion in the heart of the empire. So they suspended the Global War on Terror and launched the War on Populism.

The ultimate objective of the War on Populism was to neutralise this “populist” rebellion and remind the public who is actually running things. Think of the Trump era as a prison riot. In any maximum security prison, the prisoners know they can’t escape, but they can definitely raise a little hell now and then, which they tend to do when they get really tired of being abused and neglected by the prison guards. Most prison riots run out of steam on their own, but if they go on too long or get too ugly, the penal authorities typically respond by shooting a few prisoners (usually the ringleaders), and reminding the inmates that they are in a prison, and that the owners of the prison have guns, whereas they have shivs made out of spoons and toothbrushes.

This, basically, is what we’ve just experienced. The global capitalist ruling classes have just reminded us who is really in charge, who the US military answers to, and how quickly they can strip away the facade of democracy and the rule of law. They have reminded us of this for the last ten months, by putting us under house arrest, beating and arresting us for not following orders, for not wearing masks, for taking walks without permission,

You will do what you are told. You will not ask questions. You will believe what they tell you to believe

for having the audacity to protest their decrees, for challenging their official propaganda, about the virus, the election results, etc. They are reminding us currently by censoring dissent, and deplatforming anyone they deem a threat to their official narratives and ideology.

In other words, GloboCap is teaching us a lesson. I don’t know how much clearer they could make it. They just installed a new puppet president, who can’t even simulate mental acuity, in a locked-down, military-guarded ceremony which no one was allowed to attend, except for a few members of the ruling classes. They got some epigone of Albert Speer to convert the Mall (where the public normally gathers) into a “field of flags” symbolising “unity.” They even did the Nazi “Lichtdom” thing. To hammer the point home, they got Lady Gaga to dress up as a Hunger Games character with a “Mockingjay” brooch and sing the National Anthem. They broadcast this spectacle to the entire world.

And the lesson isn’t quite over yet ... it won’t be over for a while. The “War on Populism” will simply morph into the “New Normal War on Domestic Terror,” which will become one more theatre in the “Global War on Terror,” which has been on hiatus, and which will

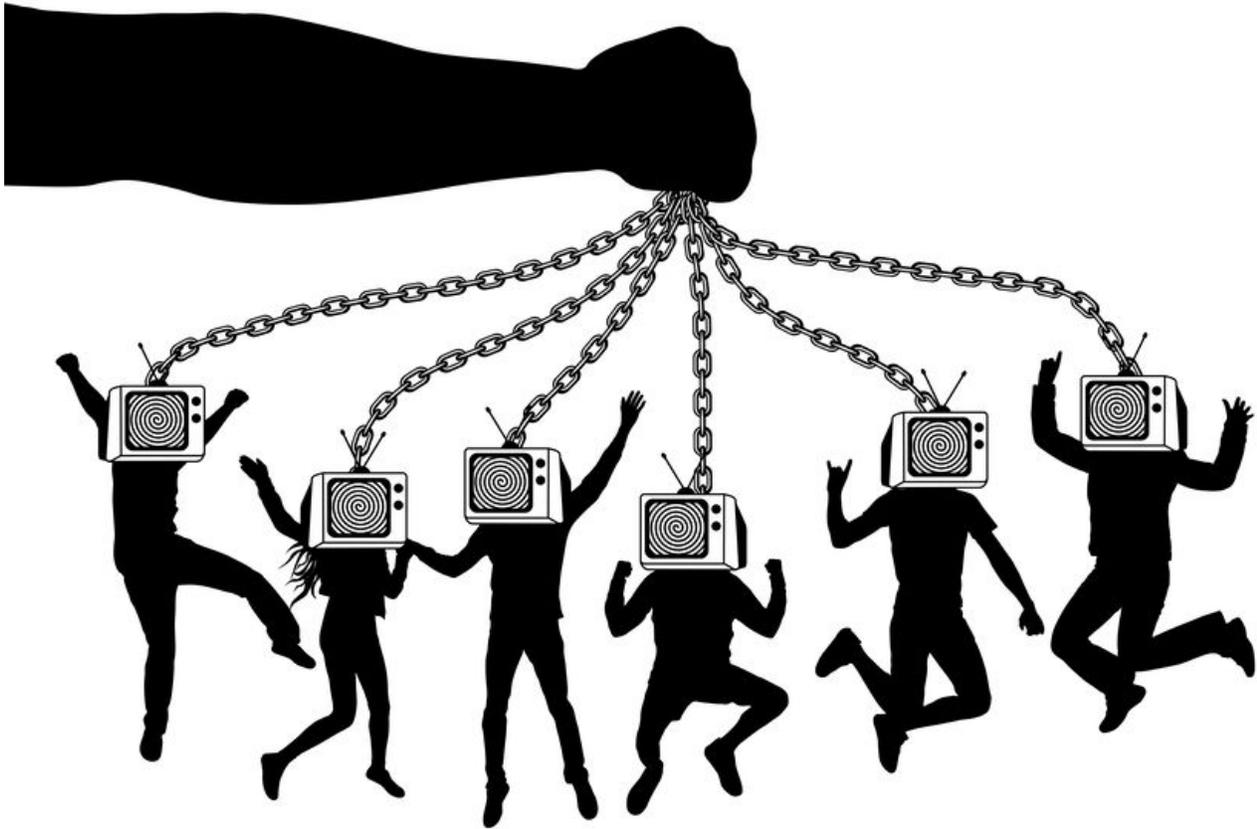
now resume. As I have pointed out repeatedly over the past four years, we appear to be headed toward a dystopian future in which there will essentially be two classes of people: (a) “normals” (i.e., those who conform to global-capitalist ideology and decrees); and (b) the “extremists” (i.e., those who don’t).

It will make no difference whatsoever what type of “extremists” these “extremists” are ... religious-fundamentalist extremists, Islamic extremists, Christian extremists, right-wing extremists, left-wing extremists, white-supremacist or Black-nationalist extremists, virus deniers, anti-vaxxers, conspiracy theorists, anti-maskers, recalcitrant transphobians, anti-transhumanists, pronoun resisters, defiant oppositionalists, or whatever ... the names don’t really matter. The point is, conform or be labelled an “extremist,” a “domestic terrorist,” or some other type of “antisocial person” or “social deviant,” or “potential threat to public health”.

I don’t claim to know every detail, but one thing seems abundantly clear. We are not going back to the way things were. GloboCap has been explaining this to us, over and over, for almost a year. They couldn’t have made it any more explicit. When they warned us to get ready because a “New Normal” was coming, they meant it.

And now...well...here it is. **CT**

C.J. Hopkins is an award-winning American playwright, novelist and political satirist based in Berlin. Volumes I and II of his *Consent Factory Essays* are published by *Consent Factory Publishing*. He can be reached at cjhopkins.com or consentfactory.org.



Granville Williams & Julian Petley

The Right tightens its grip on UK media

Murdoch's new TV channel prepares to join fight against 'liberal' BBC

Rupert Murdoch is ensconced in the UK. He is a US citizen, but was one of the first to get his Covid vaccine jab in mid-December at a doctor's surgery near his South Oxfordshire home in England where he is isolating with his wife, Jerry Hall Murdoch.

After the furore following the

mayhem at the Capitol in Washington on January 6, his mind is now focused elsewhere. Fox News faced a stark choice in the light of President Donald Trump's defeat and the January 6 storming of the Capitol that was hugely blamed on his – and the network's – constant lies about election fraud costing him the election.

As the network became more

and more enmeshed with Trump over the past four years, several veteran network journalists departed, while current and former employees became increasingly critical of its coverage. After Fox laid off members of its 'Brain Room' research department last autumn, Fox staffers told the *Daily Beast* website that the network was acting "more like an extension

of this administration, instead of a news network” and compared it to “state TV”.

The news division got into more trouble for reporting the election accurately, first in Arizona and then calling the 2020 election for now-President Joe Biden. Fox executives blame this for the hostile reaction from viewers and a ratings dip, most dramatically as viewers shift to Newsmax and One America News Network, two right-wing competitors for Fox viewers.

Rupert Murdoch, as executive chair of Fox Corporation, was directly involved in the January 11 decision to reduce news content and go for more right-wing opinion programming to win back viewers.

What has all this got to do with UK broadcasting? Surely the kind of fevered right-wing programming which fosters hatred and division, and is watched by millions of Americans, can't happen in the UK. Just as we don't have the overwhelmingly conservative talk radio stations producing more of the same in the US.

Well maybe not yet, but decisions recently taken by UK broadcasting regulators may have unintended consequences. Rupert Murdoch, when he had a 40 percent stake in Sky Television, thought the output of Sky News was “BBC-lite” because it was required under UK broadcasting regulation to report news impartially. Now he is pushing for change with a new, as-yet-unnamed, TV channel, which will also compete with another contender, GB News.

However, there is one important difference between US and

Three billionaire families control an estimated 68 percent of UK national newspaper circulation

UK media. The UK already has a highly concentrated right-wing press. Three billionaire families – the Murdochs, Rothermeres and Barclays – control an estimated 68 percent of national newspaper circulation. Add to that the holdings of *Evening Standard* owner Evgeny Lebedev, recently made a peer by the Tories, and just under 75 percent of all national newspapers are controlled by Conservative-supporting billionaires.

These papers practice attack, partisan, journalism – the equivalent in print in the UK to what Fox News does in the US. One of the best examples of this is the way they greeted the announcement of two news channels being planned for the UK. One is being driven by Murdoch, seeking to exploit the resources of the four national newspapers and three national commercial radio stations he already owns, although details of his new venture are thin on the ground. We now have a clearer idea about the other, GB News. It acquired a broadcast licence from Ofcom in January 2020 and is owned by the company All Perspectives.

The company is jointly owned by Andrew Cole and Mark Schneider, respectively current and former directors of Liberty Global, which owns Virgin Media. The

company's largest shareholder is the US billionaire and Liberty Global owner John Malone.

In January, it also announced funding from the Dubai-based Legatum Institute. This was described by the *Financial Times* in 2017 as “one of Britain's loudest intellectual advocates for a ‘hard’ Brexit”. Founded by the Conservative peer Philippa Stroud (a former special adviser to Iain Duncan Smith when he was Secretary of State for Work and Pensions), it enjoys very close relationships with prominent right-wing Conservatives such as Michael Gove and Steve Baker. It is notoriously loathe to disclose the sources of its funding, but, according to DeSmog UK, it received a grant of \$77,000 from the Charles Koch Charitable Foundation, which, like other Koch family foundations, is heavily involved in climate change denial.

The other major funder announced in January was Sir Paul Marshall, co-founder and director of asset management firm Marshall Wace, one of the biggest hedge funds in Europe and estimated in 2018 to be worth £520-million. There is a Legatum connection here too, in that in 2015 he bankrolled their 12-month research programme entitled *A Vision for Capitalism*. According to Tim Shipman's book, *All Out War*, Marshall played the key role in persuading the then justice minister, Michael Gove, to betray David Cameron and lead the official campaign to leave the EU, to which he donated £100,000.

Marshall is also co-founder and chair of the ARK Schools academy trust, through which he came to know Gove when he was education minister, and who appointed him

to the Department of Education board. He has funded the political website Unherd, which, according to its mission statement, aims “to push back against the herd mentality with new and bold thinking, and to provide a platform for otherwise unheard ideas, people and places”. Judging by many of the articles that it carries, these are precisely the kind of allegedly “unheard” views with which GB News intends to regale Britons.

Andrew Cole, who sits on the board of Liberty Global, informed his LinkedIn followers that the BBC was “possibly the most biased propaganda machine in the world” and asked them to watch out for “the launch of a completely new TV news channel for the UK – one that will be distinctly different from the out-of-touch incumbents”. GB News has also hired former Sky News executive John McAndrew and appointed Angelos Frangopoulos as chief executive. Frangopolous was the former head of Sky News Australia where he replicated the Fox News formula of rolling news reporting during the day followed by distinctly right-wing punditry in the evening.

The announcements about the new channels were greeted with hoots of glee by the BBC’s many enemies in the national press. For example, the *Daily Mail* announced on August 29, that “the race is on to bring a US-style news service to Britain”, and quoted an “insider” to the effect that it “will be less Left-wing and less woke than the BBC ... Just by taking a centrist line it will seem more to the Right because the others are so much to the Left”.

The following day’s *Mail on Sunday* quoted a “source close

The mainstream US broadcast media appear “left-wing” only when viewed from a hard-right perspective

to GB News” as stating that “the channel will be a truly impartial source of news, unlike the woke, wet BBC. It will deliver the facts, not opinion dressed as news”.

It is entirely unsurprising that papers that support the extreme right of the Conservative Party, and someone like Cole, who considers the *Guardian* “a disgusting, extremist rag” and *Bloomberg* “very suspect” and “almost unreadable”, take this view of the BBC.

But this is exactly the same ideological conjuring trick played in the US by Fox News, whose claim to be “fair and balanced” depends entirely on the canard that it is providing the “balance” to the “left-wing” news provided by NBC, ABC and CBS. But the simple truth of the matter is that the mainstream broadcast media in the US appear “left-wing” only when viewed from a hard-right conservative perspective.

The arrival of the new channels raises two vitally important questions: First, will the national media regulator Ofcom relax its regulations on due impartiality (as it has clearly done in the case of talkRA-DIO) in order to allow the new arrivals to broadcast opinion-driven news of the kind never yet seen in the UK? In this respect, it needs to be remembered that when in

1987 the US Federal Communications Commission suspended the “Fairness Doctrine” this led not to greater freedom of speech and more diversity but to an intensification of the “shock jock” phenomenon on the radio, and, with the consequent arrival of Fox News, a decided shift of the television news agenda to the right.

Second, what will be the impact of the new channels’ news agenda on that of the Public Service Broadcasters (PSBs), and especially the BBC? Consider the following scenario: GB News is sufficiently popular with certain sections of the TV audience to make it commercially successful. As viewing figures grow, either the PSBs decide that there’s profit in populism, and follow suit, or they carry on as before. In the latter case, the terrestrial broadcasters, particularly the BBC, may soon find their news coverage being compared unfavourably with that of GB News, attracting yet more criticism for being overly ‘liberal’ – not only by right-wing newspapers and politicians but now by a right-wing television channel as well.

As a defensive move, the PSBs start to shadow the agenda of GB News – and thus, ineluctably, broadcasting in the UK may then falls prey to the same process of Foxification that Murdoch so successfully initiated in the States and Australia. **CT**

Granville Williams is editor of the British media organisation MediaNorth – find it online at www.medianorth.org.uk. Julian Petley is Professor of Film and Television at Brunel University.



Navajo Magenta Generating Station, Page, Arizona



Algodones, New Mexico

Dino Kužnik

Through time and space

New York photographer seeks solitude in a rapidly-changing world

Dino Kužnik is a New York-based photographer, originally from Slovenia, Europe. He uses photography as a medium to immortalise aesthetically unique scenes, which emphasise composition and colour. One of the driving factors behind his personal work is solitude, a state of mind which, he believes, is only attainable after total immersion within the environment in which he is working.

With seven years experienced as a photo journalist, retoucher, and graphic designer, he focuses on expanding his personal body of work and commercial projects ranging from artistic portraits, automotive, landscape, fashion, and documentary photography.

“I love to return to spaces I have already photographed. To see how they change through time. A new crack in the road, a dried bush in the distance... Like us, the landscape also ages.”



Gunslinger's Stop ,
Holbrook, Arizona



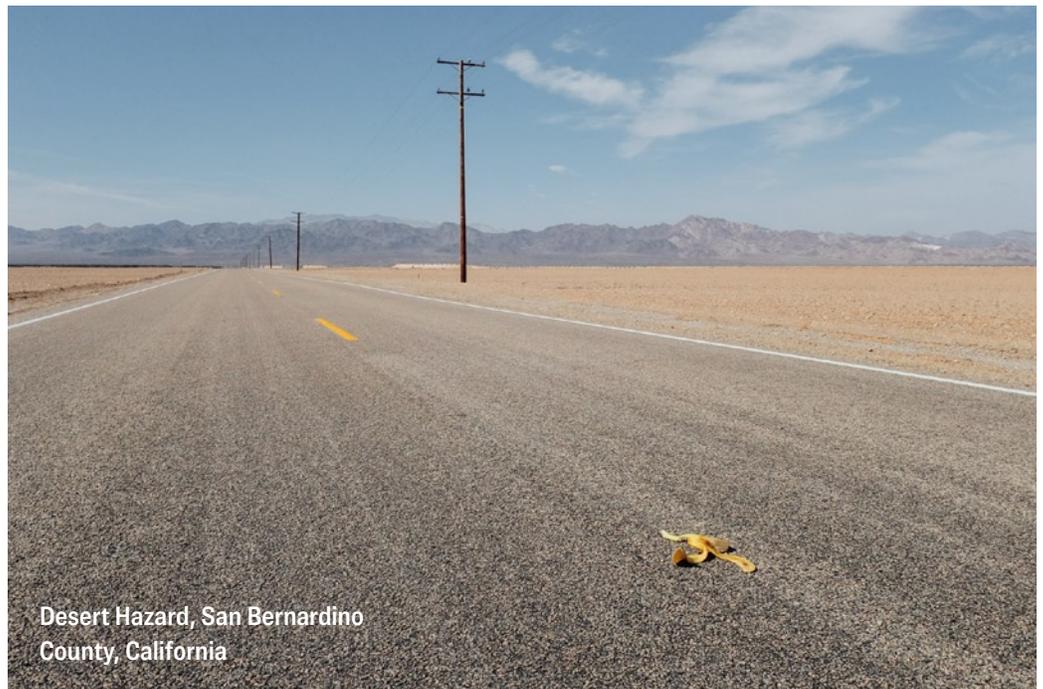
Monumental Burro, Oljato,
Monument Valley, Arizona

Kužnik's work is featured as the latest part of a new collaborative series from UK publisher Setanta Books and London's Open Doors Gallery that showcases the work of a broad range of emerging or previously unpublished photographic artists.

The self-titled work is the fourth in a series of short-run publications which will feature a new artist bi-monthly.

It is published by Setanta Books in a limited edition of 350 copies, priced at £20 to £50.

CT



Desert Hazard, San Bernardino
County, California

● Details from Setanta Books at www.setantabooks.com and at www.opendoors.gallery



Reflections in the Desolate, Amargosa Valley, Nevada

Sam Pizzigati

Workers take the risks, CEOs grab the rewards

Walgreens employees got just 18 cents an hour in hazard pay while their CEO made \$17-million

Walgreens has no buzz. Almost every week millions of Americans walk into a local outlet of this drab drugstore giant and give the enterprise all around us not a second thought. Maybe we should.

Walgreens illustrates – personifies – the long-term economic trends that the Trump years so cavalierly doubled down upon. The core reality at the heart of these trends: Top corporate executives are busily pocketing immense paychecks at the direct expense of their workers.

At Walgreens, workers start an \$10 an hour. No chain store empire employing essential workers pays less. Could Walgreens afford to pay more? Just no way, the company's flacks would like us to believe. Walgreens was cost-cutting, the excuses go, even before the pandemic hit, announcing plans in 2019 to shut down 200 of its 9,000 local US outlets.

The squeeze on Walgreens workers has only deepened over the course of the pandemic. No re-

tail giant in the United States, report Brookings analysts Molly Kinder and Laura Stateler, has given its workers less of a Covid hazard-pay bump than Walgreens – just 18 cents an hour.

But the pathetically paltry Walgreens hazard pay boost looks even worse when we turn our attention to the Walgreens eminences who have faced no pandemic-time hazard. These most fortunate Walgreeners – the power suits who run the company – have continued to rake in fabulously generous rewards.

Walgreens CEO Stefano Pessina, the company disclosed last month, took home \$17-million in the company's fiscal 2020. Altogether, the five top Walgreens execs averaged \$11-million for the year, a 9 percent hike over the previous year's annual average.

Pessina became the top dog at Walgreens after his previous employer, a Swiss-based pharmacy retailer, merged into Walgreens in 2015. Since then, his pay has soared, from \$7.1-million in 2015

to \$14.7-million in 2017 and then to \$19.2-million in 2019.

In fiscal 2020, meanwhile, the typical Walgreens employee pulled down a mere \$33,396. Pessina's take-home outpaced that meager reward by 524 times. In effect, Pessina made more in a single weekday morning than his company's median-pay workers made for an entire year of labor.

Brookings' analysts Kinder and Stateler have found similar levels of top-dog greed at other US retail giants, most notably at Amazon and Walmart. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos and the heirs to the Walmart fortune, the two researchers note, "have grown \$116-billion richer during the pandemic – 35 times the total hazard pay given to more than 2.5-million Amazon and Walmart workers".

Amazon and Walmart, Kinder and Stateler added last month, "could have quadrupled the extra Covid-19 compensation they gave to their workers" and still earned more profit than they registered in the previous year.

Not every major corporate player has treated the pandemic as just

another easy greed-grab opportunity. Workers at Costco – who start at \$15 an hour, \$5 an hour more than workers at Walgreens – have had an extra \$2 an hour added to their hazard base rate.

Costco's top executive team, interestingly, last year collected less than half the pay that went to their counterparts at Walgreens. Costco's most typical workers took home \$47,312 for the year. The ratio between that median worker pay and Costco CEO W. Craig Jelinek's compensation? That ratio sat at 169 to one, less than one-third the pay gap between Walgreen's chief exec and his company's most typical workers.

The question these numbers raise for the American people: Which corporations should we as a society be rewarding, those companies whose execs enrich themselves at worker expense or those that do a much better job at valuing the contributions all their employees are making?

San Francisco opted to levy a tax penalty on corporations with top execs making over 100 times typical worker pay

In moments of past national crisis – like World War II – lawmakers took action to prevent corporate profiteering. They put in place stiff excess profits taxes. We could act in that same spirit today. We could, for instance, raise the tax rate on companies that pay their top execs unconscionably more than their workers.

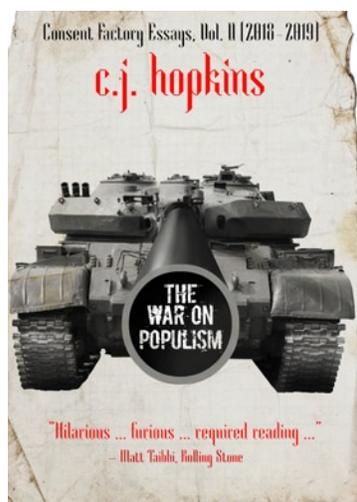
We could also start linking government contracts to corporate pay scales: no tax dollars to any corporations that pay their top execs over a certain multiple of what

their workers take home.

Efforts to link taxes and contracts to corporate pay ratios have already begun. Voters in San Francisco this past November opted to levy a tax penalty on corporations with top execs making over 100 times typical San Francisco worker pay. In Oregon, the city of Portland had earlier taken a similar step. At the national level, progressive lawmakers have introduced comparable legislation.

Donald Trump may now be gone from his power perch. But the corporate execs who did so well throughout his tenure remain in place. We need to change the rules that flatter their fortunes. **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*.



The War on Populism

Consent Factory Essays Vol. 2 (2018-2019)

C.J. Hopkins

In this second volume of his Consent Factory essays, C. J. Hopkins continues his irreverent coverage of the mainstream media and political establishment's reaction to the presidency of Donald Trump and the so-called "new populism" that put him in office.

"Hilarious ... furious ... required reading ..". (Matt Taibbi, Rolling Stone), the essays in this collection cover the insanity of 2018 and 2019. Russiagate, mass "fascism" hysteria, the new McCarthyism, the war on dissent, the Hitlerisation of Jeremy Corbyn, the demonisation of the working classes, identity politics, and all the rest of the establishment's "war on populism".

Published by Consent Factory Publishing **Price \$10.99**

Available from Amazon, Waterstones, Barnes & Noble and most other booksellers

Linh Dinh

Cairo, Alexandra, and a third-class train ride

Booze is hard to find and once-magnificent buildings are falling apart, but you can rent a home for less than a buck a month, so it's not all bad

Flying into Egypt, I was given a one-month visa, which I got right at the airport for a small fee. One is allowed to overstay for two weeks, however, so I'll likely take advantage of this. I'm getting more comfortable in Cairo, and why not?

In any unknown neighbourhood, you must figure out where you can drink coffee, eat affordably and buy the basics, and if you're partial to green bottles with cheery labels, where you can get buzzed for just a slurry song.

A conservative Muslim country, Egypt is not exactly a barhopper's paradise, but there are some hoppy joints and, being right downtown, I have options.

Since my hotel receptionist is an Armenian, he has no qualms about boozing, "But I don't really socialise. Prices have gone up. I go home and stay home". He lives near the Giza Metro Station.

"Let's go to Stella!" My treat, of course, except I haven't been able to find it. It has no sign.

Although alcohol consumption is allowed, it must be discreet, so no loud music or butt-flossed bartenders, such as they have in even

frostbitten Michigan. Nothing like Hooters, in short. (Hey, there's an untapped market here. Go for it!) Most of Egypt is bone dry.

Prowling around looking for the elusive Stella, I have been approached by unctuous strangers who began their pitch with, "my friend". In any country, this is never a good sign.

When I replied to a dark, scrunchy faced man in English, he blurted, "Ah, you're an American! My wife is from the Windy City". Yeah, right. "What do you do?"

"I'm a writer". I wanted to see where this was leading.

"Fantastic! I'm an artist".

"Really?"

"Yes. My studio is right there", He pointed. "Let me show you".

Following this fellow, I was led into a small souvenir shop jammed with miniature pyramids, sphinx, cats, nefertitties, pharaonic icons luridly painted on supposedly papyrus and body oils with exotic or concupiscent names, such as you'd find in American ghettos. There's none tagged "Barack Obama", however.

"Would you like a cup of coffee?"

"No, thanks".

Uncapping Cleopatra's Secret, he held it to my nose. "Nice?"

I shrugged.

"It's for at night", he grinned.

For most contemporaries, Cleopatra doesn't conjure up Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* or Dryden's *All For Love*, but a naked Elizabeth Taylor submerged up to her cleavage in a sumptuous marble bathtub, or getting a voluptuous back rub. That queen, too, is history, for "Golden lads and girls all must, as chimney-sweepers, come to dust," wrote some antisemitic white dude. Don't read him!

This Cairo man was an exceedingly minor hustler. In Skopje, North Macedonia, I ran into a very short man who was wandering around wearing a USA cap. In perfect, accent-free and colloquial English, he explained that he had just been robbed by five gypsies in Ohrid. Though they had taken his IDs, three credit cards, \$40, new iPhone and passport, he still had a wallet, first red flag, which he pulled out to show me a photo of an exceedingly gorgeous blonde in a US Army uniform (second red flag). As if to explain why he



"Horreya is a tall ceilinged, spacious room with long-stemmed, three-bladed ceiling fans and large, multi-panelled windows, so you can clearly hear car horns and motorcycle vrooms above the low roar of conversations. There's no music, thankfully".

was so tiny, he said he had been a jockey in Louisville for three years, where he saw nine other jockeys die in violent wrecks, (third red flag). As if to snuff out suspicions he wasn't really a Yank, he said he could name all "44 US presidents, with even their middle names", and he actually rattled them off, in order, as we were walking along the Vardar. I'm not going to nitpick and say there were actually 45 American prezies, but the final red flag was when he said his father owned 50 industrial supply stores, one in every state, and that's just ridiculous, amigo. Still, it was a very impressive performance, so when he asked for \$10

halfway through, to get the cheapest hotel room until his wife sent him cash the next morning, I readily coughed up. Plus, there was an outside chance he was genuine, for he hadn't mentioned the 50 stores in 50 states. Hell, it would be disgraceful to deny a fellow American in trouble ten lousy bucks.

Searching for Stella, I serendipitously discovered Horreya, so that's where I am now, having my first beer in more than three weeks, a personal record. Stella is Egypt's only beer brand. First brewed in 1897, it's a respectable lager, just a notch below Beer Lao.

The only other choice is Heineken, so no, thanks.

Horreya is a tall ceilinged, spacious room with long-stemmed, three-bladed ceiling fans and large, multi-panelled windows, so you can clearly hear car horns and motorcycle vrooms above the low roar of conversation. There's no music, thankfully. The hummus-colored walls are decorated with shaped mirrors and a sign from nearly a century ago, *Votre Boisson PRÉFÉRÉ/ VIMTO*. The light is naked neon, such as you find at bus stations.

There's a tin ashtray at each table. After spitting on the floor, a nattily dressed young man rubbed

out the sputum with his shoe. The waiter patrols the floor with bottles ready to be dispensed, and adroitly opened with a quick flick of his wrist. Most patrons are men. Just now, though, some matronly broad just ambled past me. Ten feet away sits a fierce eyed, sharp chinned and tightly smiling beauty, with her cigarette, beer and bearded, prematurely balding boyfriend.

Behind a square column are two joined tables of possible Americans, judging not just by their faces, but also by body language. Pudgy and pasty, they may be professors at the American University here, but who knows? Perhaps they're Cornhusker offensive linemen from the mid-80's, here on a quirky reunion.

"Hey dudes, let's go to Cairo!"

"Man, that's just a pissy little village! My sister lives right on the corner of Mecca and Alexandria, near the Baptist Church. There ain't nothing in Cairo but the Medina Coffee Shop..."

"I don't mean Cairo, Nebraska, dumbshit! I mean Cairo, Egypt!" So here they are.

An Egyptian Mau lurks, frowns, eyes you with hope and resentment then bounces away. In Muslim countries, stray dogs don't wander indoors, but cats do. In Cairo, I spot them often inside metro stations, sometimes nibbling from small plates. At Istanbul's Hagia Sophia, I encountered meowing pussies, licking themselves most indecorously.

Horreya means liberty, by the way, and that's apt, for it is an oasis of license in a culture that generally shuns alcohol. The Koran (2:219), "They ask you about intoxicants and gambling. Say, 'There is gross sin in them, and

In 2580 BC, a labourer at the Giza pyramids was allotted four to five litres of beer daily

some benefits for people, but their sinfulness outweighs their benefit." True enough, so get shitfaced responsibly, and don't gamble.

For 1,375 years, Egypt has been Muslim, but not entirely, for there are significant Christian communities here, with beautiful, well-maintained churches, 500 in Cairo alone, some of them huge.

For thousands of years before the Muslim conquest, Egyptians downed more beer than Bavarians, Brits, Koreans or whomever else you could think of. In fact, they were one of the first brewers. The oldest large-scale brewery anywhere was in Nekhen, Egypt. In 3600BC, it cranked out the equivalence of 650 bottles a day. In 2580 BC, a labourer at the Giza pyramids was allotted four to five litres of beer daily. (When I was housepainting in Philly, our boss, Joe, only gave us one bottle of Samuel Adams at quitting time!)

Egyptian men, women and children all drank beer, for it was deemed nutritious. Beer was also used in medicine. During their annual Festival of Drunkenness, Egyptians whooped it up all night, complete with orgies, it's claimed. Trashed, they sloshed through the marshes, so to speak, without clothes.

Now, alcohol is no longer avail-

able in most of Egypt, and with its few bars, Cairo is much drier than, say, Beirut or Istanbul. It's also more conservatively dressed. To chance upon flowing female hair is a luxury and, one soon starts to feel, an obscene privilege.

As an outsider, I have no right to suggest Egypt should be anything but itself, but there's an internal squabble here, with public intellectuals assassinated, and even tourists massacred. There's an element that wants all foreign influences purged.

Denounced as an apostate, the popular author and magazine columnist Farag Foda was murdered in 1992 by militant Islamists. In 1994, the only Arab Nobel in literature, Naguib Mahfouz, was stabbed in the neck, also by a Muslim fanatic. In custody, the would-be-assassin lamented his failure to shout, "Allahu akbar," during the attack, thus sparing the 82-year-old novelist's life.

In 1997, 62 tourists were killed at Luxor. Fifty-eight were foreign, with Switzerland losing 36 people. In 2014, a suicide bomber walked onto a bus about to enter Israel. Killing himself, he also murdered three South Korean tourists and the Egyptian driver. In 2015, a Russian plane blew up shortly after taking off from Sharm El Sheikh, killing all 224 aboard. With ISIS immediately claiming responsibility, one may wonder if it's really Uncle Sam butchering Russians? In 2018, a tour bus in Giza hit a roadside bomb, killing three Vietnamese visitors and an Egyptian guide.

No Egyptian city has ever been more cosmopolitan than Alexan-



"After two visits to Alexandria, I can confirm that it is a real dump. Its main train station is in disrepair, and just about every building downtown is rotting".

dria. In fact, it was the greatest city on earth, though a Greek one, mostly. Writing in the 1st-century BC, Diodorus Siculus noted, "The city in general has grown so much in later times that many reckon it to be the first city of the civilised world, and it is certainly far ahead of all the rest in elegance and extent and riches and luxury".

From Ptolemy, Cleopatra, Euclid and Plotinus of ancient times, to the modern poet Constantine Cavafy, nearly all the greatest Alexandrians were Greek, and in 1940, there were still 250,000 Greeks in that city.

After gaining power in 1956,

Alexandria copy Nasser expelled nearly all Greeks, Turks, Jews, Armenians and Italians. With all those non-Egyptians gone, the most visible alien population remaining are sub-Saharan Africans.

Lawrence Durrell arrived in Alexandria in 1942, and his three years there yielded his magnum opus, *The Alexandria Quartet*. Right on the first page, Durrell sums up Alexandria most memorably, "Five races, five languages, a dozen creeds: five fleets turning through their greasy reflections behind the harbour bar. But there are more than five sexes and only demotic Greek seems to distinguish among them."

Yet even then, Alexandria was decayed. Durrell, "What is resumed in the word Alexandria? In a flash my mind's eye shows me a thousand dust-tormented streets. Flies and beggars own it today – and those who enjoy an intermediate existence between either". Let's pause here. Alexandria, he's saying, is for those who enjoy an intermediate existence between flies and beggars!

With a few upticks, it has been a long decline from the Pharos Lighthouse, Library of Alexandria and the Mouseion, a process that accelerated after the Arab conquest of 642. Though initially merciful and tolerant, General Amr unleashed

his wrath on Alexandria after its inhabitants got Constantine to send 300 warships to retake this gem.

In any case, Arabs have never valued Alexandria as highly as the Greeks, Romans, English or French. In *The Rise and Fall of Alexandria*, E. M. Forster explains, “The Arabs were anything but barbarians; their own great city of Cairo is a sufficient answer to that charge. But their civilisation was Oriental and of the land; it was out of touch with the Mediterranean civilisation that has evolved Alexandria”.

After two visits to Alexandria, I can confirm that it is a real dump. Its main train station is in disrepair, and just about every building downtown is rotting, with some collapsing years ago, and just left. Crude wooden shacks or concrete cabins are slapped on top of once gorgeous grand edifices. Just two blocks from the ocean, thus still prime real estate, I’d think, a street is already puddled, pebbled and garbage flecked dirt.

In chi-chi Sidi Gaber, there are more fast food joints, chic eateries and English on signs, but if anything, it’s even uglier than downtown, for it has no character or charm. Even its mosques are hideous. Advertisements for its condos inevitably feature the palest faces in Egypt, for such whitebread can’t be found on the streets here, or even in Cairo bars. There’s a beauty salon for men.

As I’ve already said, much of Cairo is also falling apart, but it’s infused with tax money, and also cash from tourists. As with London, Paris, Rome or Tokyo, etc., foreigners tend to flock to the capi-

Thanks to rent control, many Egyptians pay less than a buck a month for rent

tal. The Giza Pyramids and Sphinx are also nearby. Alexandria has no equivalent pull.

You’d think a seaside city not far from Cairo would attract tons of domestic tourists on weekends, but ocean swimming and sunbathing aren’t big here. To maintain their modesty, women don’t shed but put on extra clothing before entering the water. To prevent their shape from showing through their soaked abaya, they wear pants underneath.

In his magisterial *Cairo: The City Victorious*, Max Rodenbeck clues us in, “One summer morning in 1961, many an ex-pasha was to spill his Turkish coffee on reading the headlines in Al-Ahram. To finance the march to socialism, the government had just made it practically illegal to own assets worth more than £10,000. Anything in excess of this amount, whether it be a Garden City villa or a stake in the Cairo Electric Tramways Company, was to be seized. Four thousand of Egypt’s richest families were ruined”.

Even worse than the number of victims of this state robbery is the precedence it set. To accumulate wealth in Egypt became a foolish gamble. With enterprise snuffed out, only corruption remained, and it was best to transfer your

cash overseas.

Rodenbeck also points out that in 1996, Egyptian-born Americans were the most highly educated among immigrants, with an astounding 60 percent having college degrees.

With its bias, and often diatribes, against overachievers, socialism has always tamped down or chased out the best, a process I saw in my native Vietnam.

Had a Martian landed in either Cairo or Alexandria, and like me, spent a month walking around everywhere, he would conclude that a good percentage of urban Egyptians had lived in pretty decent houses, with some dwelling in magnificent ones. In recent decades, they must have fallen on very hard times, however, because most of these homes now look like shit.

The Martian is only partially correct, for there’s a key, hidden reason for this appalling deterioration. Thanks to rent control, another popular socialist policy, many Egyptians pay less than a buck a month for rent, you read that right, with some coughing up just 23 cents, less than for a cup of tea here. Though rent control was abolished in 1996, about 1.5-million Egyptians still enjoy “old rent” contracts.

Seen through Marxist lens, landlords are just bloodsuckers, you see, and so are all industrialists and successful businessmen. At least in Egypt, they haven’t looted mom-and-pops to grab payback, as they’ve often done in you-know-where.

As brainy Egyptians flee to the West, common labourers flood east to the Gulf States. There, they can



Since the train was so packed, ticket inspection was impossible, so all who got off by the second stop rode for free. There was also the option of riding outside the train”.

make a few bucks while soaking up Wahhabism, to be brought home to further restore Egypt to the 7th-century. Egyptian television and movies, a shadow of themselves, have also been tailored to accommodate Gulf States aesthetics and ethics, for that’s where the money is.

On my first trip to Alexandria, I got back to Cairo on the wrong train, for foreigners aren’t supposed to ride third-class. After it clanked and chugged into the station, I pressed onboard like everybody else. As a mass of meat and bones, we rapped that door.

It proved unnecessary, since

there were no seats to be had, and everyone got on. Since the train was so packed, ticket inspection was impossible, so all who got off by the second stop rode for free. There was also the option of riding outside the train.

Every square foot was taken by passengers standing or sitting, and on the luggage racks, several people lounged or slept. Despite this density, hawkers selling drinks or snacks still managed to muscle their way through. All windows were grimy, with many cracked, and it appeared no surface had been cleaned for months, if ever, but so what. With all doors

open, the views were generously splendid.

Just before Damanhour, the train thinned out enough for me to find a seat, and everything was lovely, but then the conductor kicked me off. Though I couldn’t understand anything he said, he was polite and smiling. It was clear he was quite amused to find such an idiot on his watch. **CT**

Linh Dinh's latest book is Postcards from the End of America. He maintains a regularly updated photo blog at www.linhdinhphotos.blogspot.com

Leslie McMurtry & Adam Fowler

Penny dreadfuls: The first crime podcasts

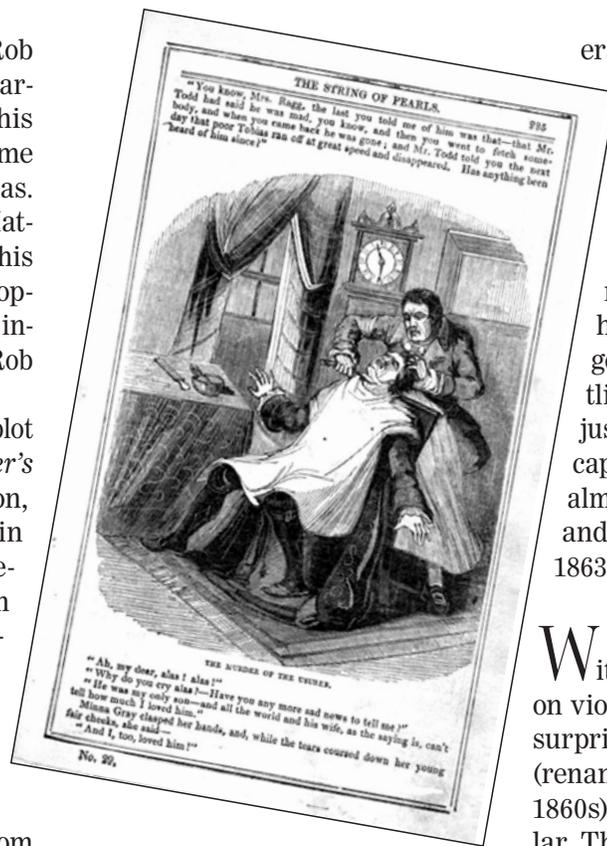
Murder periodicals delighted eager consumers in the 19th-century. Now they're making a comeback in a thoroughly modern format

A young man named Rob hears a voice in his earbuds. It belongs to his favourite true-crime podcast host, Matthias. Like all good podcast hosts, Matthias takes pride in addressing his audience as individuals, developing a rapport and a trustworthy intimacy. So when Matthias tells Rob to murder women, Rob obeys.

This isn't a true story but the plot of the 2017 audio drama *Monster's Game*. But like all good fiction, this horror story has a basis in reality: our contemporary, sometimes ghoulish fascination with true-crime podcasts. The 19th-century had a similar macabre popular fascination, the penny dreadful.

In the 19th-century, people enjoyed a tale of murder and woe as much as we do now. From their complicated relationship with journalism to their love of sensationalism, the two forms have a lot in common.

Penny dreadfuls arose in Britain the 1830s due to a growing number of readers and improved printing technology. The penny post and railway distribution also played a



DEADLY: Illustration of Sweeney Todd murdering a victim in *A String of Pearls*.

part. While literacy levels are hard to establish, by the 1870s, most of the working class could read well enough to read a newspaper.

This explosion of crime lit-

erature gave a bewildered populace the erroneous impression that violent crime (especially murder) was increasing, as historian Christopher A. Casey notes. This led to many believing that cities had never been more dangerous to live in and had startling implications for criminal justice in Britain. For instance, capital punishment, which had almost disappeared in the 1840s and 1850s, was reinstated in 1863.

With so much printed material on violent crime, it's perhaps not surprising that the penny bloods (renamed Penny dreadfuls in the 1860s) were so incredibly popular. The name change is thought to have happened because of the shift from tales of highwaymen and Gothic adventure to true crime, especially murder. And if there weren't enough real crimes, the writers invented them, as with, most famously *The String of Pearls*, which was the first story to introduce Sweeney Todd, the de-

Art: Wikimedia

mon barber of Fleet Street.

Serialised, short, printed on flimsy paper, cheap and luridly illustrated, penny dreadfuls were issued to a large eager audience each week. There were 100 publishers of penny-fiction and magazines between 1830 and 1850, and by the 1880s there were 15 periodicals competing simultaneously.

Casey links the newspaper era that parallels the rise of the penny dreadful with the gestation of the 19th-century idea of “new journalism”. Coined by cultural critic, the term refers to a wide range of changes in British newspaper and magazine content, which sought to make print culture more accessible to working class and female readers. This included a shift away from political news coverage to wider reporting on crime, which focused on the journalist putting themselves in the story and often shaping it.

While this idea of “new journalism” arose in the 19th-century, it has links with our current era. Observing the wide range of subjects for podcasts, the journalism academic Mia Lindgren has discerned how investigative journalism podcasts (a genre identified with true crime) quickly became very popular. This swift rise is similar to that of penny bloods.

The true crime genre predates podcasts, but its recent renaissance is, in part, due to award-winning productions such as *Serial*. In 2019, 22 of the top 100 podcasts on iTunes were true crime. Like penny dreadfuls, these podcasts are about real murder and mayhem and nat-



GHOSTLY: The 1867 serial *Spring-heel'd Jack: The Terror of London* was based on urban legends about ghosts and a series of crimes around the city.

urally blur the line between news and entertainment.

Like penny dreadfuls, true crime podcasts tend to be serialised, short, of variable quality and drop weekly or bi-weekly. They may not have the lurid illustrations associated with penny dreadfuls, but the supplementary visual assets on their websites are arguably just as visually arresting – and necessary to the format. Readers of penny dreadfuls wanted to see an illustration of what the murderers and victims looked like; modern podcast listeners also enjoy having their aurally stimulated storytelling supplemented with colourful podcast logos, images and videos of the podcast hosts, and pictorial evidence of crimes.

Penny dreadfuls were developed to cater to a specific youth audience. They generated a moral panic and were blamed for inspiring real acts of violence as juveniles exposed to such “trash” were thought to be morally corrupted. For example, in 1895, Robert and Nattie Coombes, aged 13 and 12, admitted to stabbing their mother to death. The police discovered a collection of penny dreadfuls in the house, which the coroner argued had led the boys to commit the heinous act.

True crime podcasts haven't been accused of corrupting the young and contributing to juvenile delinquency (yet) but the consequences for real people involved in real investigations have been felt. One example comes from *Serial*. As the podcast's investigations threw doubt onto whether Adnan Syed was responsible for the murder of his high school girlfriend, a crime for which he had been jailed, avid listeners began searching and stalking Jay, the person Adnan says is responsible for the murder.

Podcasts seem to be, at worst, tolerated as escapist entertainment, and at best, able to influence the criminal justice system – in a more socially progressive way than crime reporting did in the 19th-century. The charity the Innocence Project has seen increased donations as a result of podcasts and listeners appear in court to support defendants. Judges even cite podcasts as reasons for changing their decisions on defendants' motions for post-conviction relief.

The economic historian John

Springhall noted that “often-reprinted serials about low-life crime and mystery ... would have held a vicarious appeal for young metropolitan readers seeking a romantic escape from uneventful daily lives”.

True crime podcasts have also been a welcome escape from the monotony of life in lockdown during the pandemic. Investigative

podcasts like the *Washington Post's Canary*, a seven-part series about women who refused to stay silent about sexual assault, and *CounterClock*, which investigates two unsolved murders, have made it on to lists of the best podcasts for 2020.

Both podcasts and penny bloods satisfy a lurid fascination in all that is dark and violent. A fascination

that is sure to push the true crime genre to even greater heights in years to come. **CT**

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THE TRIALS OF JULIAN ASSANGE

ColdType Issue 215 / September 2020

Extra

The last stand of Julian Assange
By Jonathan Cook

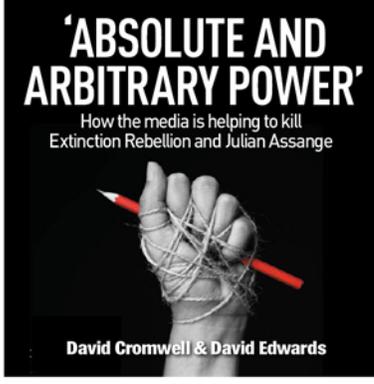


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ColdType Issue 215 / September 2020

Extra

'ABSOLUTE AND ARBITRARY POWER'
How the media is helping to kill
Extinction Rebellion and Julian Assange



David Cromwell & David Edwards

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Extra

JOHN PILGER
Julian Assange must be freed, not betrayed

ON February 22, people marched from Australia House in London to Parliament Square, the centre of British democracy. They carried pictures of the Australian publisher and journalist Julian Assange who, on February 24, faced a court that will decide whether or not he is to be extradited to the United States and a living death.

I know Australia House well. As an Australian myself, I used to go there in my early days in London to read the newspapers from home. Owned by King George V over a century ago, its vastness of marble and stone, chandeliers and solemn portraits, imported from Australia when Australian soldiers were dying in the slaughter of the First World War, have ensured its landmark as an imperial pile of monumental servility.



As one of the oldest "diplomatic missions" in the United Kingdom, this relic of empire provides a plausible structure for a London politician: a "rustic" rewarded or a troublemaker exiled. Known as High Commissioner, the equivalent of an ambassador, the current beneficiary is George Brandis, who as Attorney General tried to water down Australia's Race Discrimination Act and approved raids on whistleblowers who had revealed the truth about Australia's illegal spying on East Timor during negotiations for the carve-up of that impoverished country's oil and gas. This led to the prosecution of whistleblowers Bernard Collaery and "Witness X" on bogus charges. Like Julian Assange, they are to be silenced in a Kafkaesque trial and put away.

Australia House was the ideal starting point for the Assange march. "Tombstoned," wrote Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, in 1898, "that country are pieces on a chess-board upon which is being played out a great game for the domination of the world."

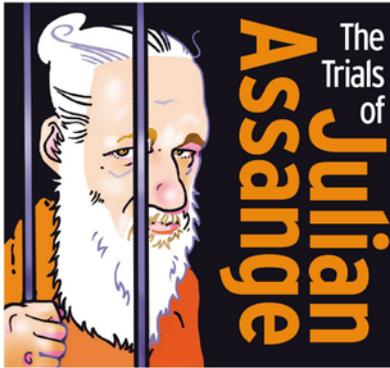
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SPECIAL ISSUE

ColdType ISSUE 183

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING MAY 2019

The Trials of Julian Assange



DAVID EDWARDS & DAVID CROMWELL • JONATHAN COOK • CHRIS HEDGES • CAITLIN JOHNSTONE • JOHN PILGER • ANDRE DAMON • JOHN W WHITEHOUSE • C.J. HOPKINS

Download these ColdType Specials at
www.coldtype.net/Assange.html

David Cromwell

Reasons to reject the corporate media

Let's start with coverage of Israeli apartheid, Joe Biden, Keir Starmer, Julian Assange, and the threat of mass extinction

Back in 2017, before WikiLeaks co-founder Julian Assange was silenced by Twitter, he used the platform to highlight an immutable truth: “The overwhelming majority of information is classified to protect political security not national security”.

Power hates being exposed. It hates having its inner machinations, its selfish priorities and ugly operations opened up to public scrutiny.

The omission of inconvenient facts, and the silencing of inadmissible viewpoints, are core features of the so-called “mainstream” news media. Thus, it should be obvious by now why we always put “mainstream” in quotation marks. Because, as increasing numbers of the public surely now recognise, the major news media are not impartial, or fair, or balanced. Nor do they truly represent and reflect the concerns and priorities of the vast majority of the population. Instead, the major newspapers and broadcasters represent, defend and project the interests of powerful state and corporate elites. The state-corporate media will not, and

cannot, undertake consistent and reliable public scrutiny of these elites. That would make no sense since the mass media is the propaganda operation of state-corporate power.

Since David Edwards and I began *Media Lens* 20 years ago in 2001, we have amassed over 5,000 pages of media alerts detailing numerous examples of dangerous, power-friendly omissions, distortions and imbalances in UK state-corporate media. Rather than go for easy and obvious targets like the *Sun*, *Express* and *Mail*, we have focused on those media outlets the public is supposed to regard as the most fair, balanced, probing and challenging of governments and Big Business. “Thus far and no further”, as Noam Chomsky has described the most open or most liberal end of the narrow spectrum of establishment media.

BBC News deserves particular scrutiny, not least because it regularly declares itself “the world’s most trusted international news broadcaster”. That is not much of an accolade given that public trust in the media is crumbling; particularly in a country which has some

of the worst “news” media anywhere on the planet. The UK has an overwhelmingly right-wing and establishment press dominated by rich owners, and edited by compliant editors with the required ideologically-aligned views. As for the *Guardian*, which has always been a “liberal” gatekeeper on behalf of power, investigative journalists Matt Kennard and Mark Curtis reported in 2019 that the paper has been: “successfully targeted by security agencies to neutralise its adversarial reporting of the ‘security state’, according to newly released documents and evidence from former and current Guardian journalists”.

Moreover, other than a recent belated and mealy-mouthed defence, for many years the *Guardian* essentially abandoned and abused Julian Assange, along with the rest of the “mainstream” media, after exploiting him and WikiLeaks.

Couple all that with the fact that BBC News regularly follows the skewed, power-serving agenda set by UK press coverage, and it is no surprise that overall British public trust in the media is so low. As we



MEN IN BLUE SUITS: President Joe Biden, ex-President Donald Trump, and UK Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer.

noted last year, the extensive annual Eurobarometer survey across 33 countries revealed that the UK public's trust in the press is rock bottom. Indeed, 2020 was the ninth year out of the past ten that the UK had come last.

BBC silence over Israel as an apartheid state

One of the most egregious recent omissions by BBC News was last month's groundbreaking report by leading Israeli human rights group B'Tselem naming Israel as "an apartheid state", and "a regime of Jewish supremacy". "In the entire area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, the Israeli regime implements laws, practices and state violence designed to cement the supremacy

of one group – Jews – over another – Palestinians".

Apartheid in the Palestinian Territories has long been recognised. For example, in 2004, a prominent South African professor of international law, John Dugard, then UN special rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian territories, wrote that there is "an apartheid regime" in the territories "worse than the one that existed in South Africa".

Noam Chomsky concurred: "In the Occupied Territories, what Israel is doing is much worse than apartheid. To call it apartheid is a gift to Israel, at least if by 'apartheid' you mean South African-style apartheid.

"What is happening in the Occupied Territories is much worse.

There is a crucial difference. The South African Nationalists needed the black population. That was their workforce...

"The Israeli relationship to the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories is totally different. They just do not want them. They want them out, or at least in prison".

All this was damning enough. But the publication of the new B'Tselem report was the first time that Israeli human rights and legal experts had publicly stated that apartheid exists not just in the Occupied Territories, but throughout the whole region that Israel claims for itself.

As the Israel-based British journalist Jonathan Cook observed: "By calling Israel an apartheid state and a "regime of Jewish su-

premacny”, B’Tselem has given the lie to the Israel lobby’s claim – bolstered by a new definition promoted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance – that it is antisemitic to suggest Israel is a “racist endeavour”.

“B’Tselem, a veteran Israeli Jewish organisation with deep expertise in human rights and international law, has now explicitly declared that Israel is a racist state. Israel’s apologists will now face the much harder task of showing that B’Tselem is antisemitic, along with the Palestinian solidarity activists who cite its work”.

As far as we are aware, there was no mention of the report on any of the flagship BBC News at 6 or 10 television programmes. Nor was there anything to be found on the BBC News website. Presumably, the BBC deemed it unworthy of the public’s attention. We challenged BBC foreign editor Andrew Roy, BBC world affairs editor John Simpson, BBC chief international correspondent Lyse Doucet and BBC digital news editor Stuart Millar for a response. Not one of them replied. It is perhaps significant that Millar moved to the BBC from the *Guardian* where, as deputy editor of *Guardian US*, he had scoffed at Julian Assange: “I like to think that #Assange chose the Ecuadorean embassy because it’s so convenient for Harrods.”

This is the archetypal sneering “mainstream” journalist’s view of anyone who seriously exposes the truth and challenges power.

As for B’Tselem’s landmark report detailing the reality of the Israeli state as an apartheid regime, it is possible that there were sporadic brief mentions in some outlying parts of the BBC. Long-

UK government ministers robotically repeat the mantra of “following the science”, with one u-turn after another

time readers will recall that the BBC infamously buried revelations by Scott Ritter, a former chief UN weapons inspector, that Iraq had been fundamentally disarmed of any weapons of mass destruction, at 3am on the BBC World Service.

In response to the B’Tselem report, John Pilger pointed out via Twitter: “Israel is top of the league for vaccinating its own people [against coronavirus]. The accolades say Israel is the ‘example’. False. Israel is denying the vaccine to Palestinians whose land and lives it controls. WHO has pleaded with Israel: to no avail. Apartheid in action”.

Glossing over brutal imperialism

Here in the UK, the Tory government’s criminally incompetent response to the coronavirus pandemic has led to an appalling death toll – now the highest death rate of any country in the world – while ministers robotically repeat the mantra of “following the science”, with one u-turn after another. Meanwhile, many people are suffering tremendous hardship, losing their jobs or struggling to earn a living, or even unable to feed their children adequately.

As Phil Miller, a staff writer for the excellent investigative journalism website *Declassified*

UK, noted: “The UK now has over 100,000 Covid deaths. That’s a result of government failure on a grand scale. The lack of calls for Johnson and ministers to resign is extraordinary”.

It is extraordinary. But, tragically, it is a natural consequence of how the state-corporate media represents and defends elite power, of which it is a key component. Any real dissent is smeared, swept to the margins or simply blanked. With the power of corporate media manifest in the demolition of Jeremy Corbyn’s prospects of becoming prime minister in 2019, it is entirely predictable that there is now no substantive political opposition to a destructive, elite-serving Tory government.

Sir Keir Starmer, Labour’s lame Blairite successor, is a stalwart establishment figure who, at best, would only ever paper over a few cracks in the edifice of neoliberal economics. This is the corporate- and finance-driven system that is crushing the vast majority of the world’s population, destroying the natural environment and species at an alarming rate, and driving us all towards the precipice of climate breakdown. As we have noted before, and as we will see again below, no world leader anywhere is doing anything remotely sufficient to address this disaster.

Starmer has actually called for the Labour party to emulate new US President Joe Biden’s “broad coalition” to “see progressive values triumph over the forces of division and despair”. The stone-cold reality that Biden represents huge financial interests and corporate power, and has an appalling record in supporting US imperialism and wars, appears to have escaped

Stارmer's attention. But then, Starmer is also seemingly oblivious to the UK's own imperial past and blood-soaked complicity in war crimes. How else could a Labour leader write: "We are at our best when the world knows we have the courage of our convictions and a clear moral purpose".

Wiping away the blood of countless US/UK atrocities across the globe, he continued: "For the United States of America and for Britain, this is the time to return to the world stage. This is the time for us to lead".

To gloss over Britain's brutal past and present – to ignore the grievous crimes committed against Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, to name a few – is an insult to the UK's many victims. For a supposed 'progressive' to do so is surely absurd. It can only result from being blind to the propaganda system so cogently explained by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent* (Vintage, 1988). In this system, we are immersed in a brainwashing environment of mass media in which even the more 'reputable' news outlets such as Associated Press regurgitate doctrinal statements such as: "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. These tactics have generated both allies and enemies, and this year's presidential vote perhaps more than any other is testing the strength of the values it promotes around the world".

A safe pair of hands like Sir Keir would never recognise, far

Starmer is locked into an elite-friendly mindset apparent whenever he proclaims his credentials

less, criticise such assertions for the dangerous, ideological and ahistorical nonsense that they are. Instead, Starmer is locked into an elite-friendly mindset apparent whenever he proclaims his establishment credentials, as here via Twitter: "This is also an important moment for the world. It is a chance to reassert America's place as a force for good on the world stage. A nation that will work with Britain and other allies to defeat this pandemic and fight climate change".

The reply from *Media Lens* reader Ryan Moon was apt: "When, specifically, has the US (& UK) been a 'force for good in the world?' Supporting Suharto & Pinochet maybe? In Yemen & Libya? In the Chagos Islands? Nicaragua might have a few choice words about that description, too. Grow a spine".

Biologist and science writer Richard Dawkins, like so many other prominent members of the liberal commentariat, once again revealed his deep ignorance of history and world affairs: "With few exceptions like Putin & Farage, the entire world welcomes President Biden and Vice-President Harris. After four years of lies, venal hypocrisy and vicious hostility to decency and humane values, America has taken a major step towards

making America great again".

Historian Mark Curtis, co-founder of *Declassified UK*, responded: "The thing is, @Richard-Dawkins, while you're right to welcome the demise of the contemptible Trump, as I do, the 'lies, venal hypocrisy and vicious hostility to decency and humane values' are just routine features of every US presidency, especially in foreign policy".

Meanwhile, it was no surprise to see a senior *Guardian* journalist unleashing purple prose in praise of Biden. David Smith, the *Guardian*'s Washington DC bureau chief, declared that "with empathy and humility, Biden sets out to make America sane again". The ideological rhetoric continued to gush out across *Guardian* column inches: "After the mental and moral exhaustion of the past four years, Biden made America sane again in 15 minutes. It was an exorcism of sorts, from American carnage to American renewal".

Readers with long memories will recall similar *Guardian* effusions of liberal ordure when Barack Obama was elected in 2008 to "rebrand America" and serve as the eloquent "cool" figurehead of US corporate and imperial might. That is the *Guardian* worldview in a nutshell.

The harsh truth is that the corporate media, including BBC News and the *Guardian*, has a stranglehold on any prospect for changing society. The transfer of US power from Trump to Biden provided the briefest permissible glimpse of mild scepticism being broadcast from corporate newsrooms. This was most notable with Trump vociferously contesting the US presidential elections results, claiming election fraud on

a grand scale. The repeated buzz phrase from journalists reporting Trump's claims was "without offering evidence". Thus, BBC news presenter Mishal Husain told the nation's television audience on 8 November last year: "President Trump has been out on the golf course and made further claims of election fraud without offering evidence".

The point was emphasised in a news piece by BBC North America correspondent Nick Bryant: "the president took to the golf course this morning continuing to make unsubstantiated claims that the election was rigged".

This narrative was repeated across the "mainstream" media.

But those important caveats – "without further evidence" and "unsubstantiated claims" – are routinely missing when propaganda declarations are, or were, made by the US/UK about Iraq's mythical 'WMD'; or when the public is told that the West's 'security' and military forces need to counter the "threat" from Russia, China, Iran, North Korea or whoever the latest "enemy" happens to be; or that "we" need to keep Saudi Arabia as an "ally"; that Israel only ever "retaliates" in the face of Palestinian "provocation", that the US is a neutral "peace broker" in the Middle East; or that the US/UK defend freedom and human rights around the world. On and on flow the propaganda assertions, without serious challenge from a compliant media. Suddenly, when it really matters, the media's supposed enthusiasm for "fact checking" dries up.

Assange and *Guardian* hypocrisy

We have seen the ugly truth in the brutal, inhumane treatment

Film director Ken Loach nailed the role of the *Guardian* in persecuting and undermining Julian Assange

of Julian Assange, arguably the most important Western dissident, journalist and publisher in recent years, by western "democracies", the major news media, and a cruel system of court "justice" operating in London. During a recent online conversation, acclaimed film director Ken Loach nailed the despicable role of the *Guardian*, in particular, in persecuting and undermining Assange: "It's one of those cases that clarifies the role of the media [...] there's a collusion of silence. There doesn't need to be an active conspiracy; they all understand the steps of the dance. "We're going to keep quiet about this". The *Guardian* did publish some [WikiLeaks] material, but then turned on Julian. And typical with the liberal press, there's a degree of hypocrisy. They want to have a foot in both camps. They want to be both seen as part of the responsible establishment; they also want to speak truth to power. But they're compromised on both fronts. And their attacks on Julian Assange were critical in undermining his presence as a journalist, and being seen as a journalist. And the scurrilous attacks on him, for year after year; [and their] failure to really campaign against the torture for ten years".

He added: "There could not be a clearer case of shoot the messen-

ger, and let the scoundrel go free. I mean, here you have people – Bush, Blair, propagandists like Alastair Campbell – wheeled out on the BBC, like Newsnight. They have season tickets to the current affairs programmes that tell us what to think. They are responsible for – what – up to a million deaths, four, five, million people made homeless, destruction of Iraq; the most atrocious war crimes, in an illegal war – an illegal war, so every activity is illegal on account of that, war crimes – they should be indicted. The man who told us about those crimes is condemned to rot, at the very least, and is in danger of never seeing the light of day again, or of being executed, and we know some politicians in the States have called for precisely that. There could not be a more outrageous, a more egregious example of the messenger being crucified and the scoundrels, the villains, the criminals getting away with this".

As musician Brian Eno said during the discussion: "Julian is a threat [to power] because he exposes an illusion that we are generally being told to support. And that illusion is that we live in a democracy. So, the fundamental concept of democracy is that people make decisions about their future, and about the state they live in. And the fundamental assumption of democracy is that people have the information on which to make those decisions. So, clearly, for democracy to work we have to have good information, otherwise we'll make bad decisions".

The most compelling evidence that there is no functioning democracy in capitalist societies is all around us: global environmental collapse and climate breakdown.

A new scientific report last month warns that the planet is facing a “ghastly future of mass extinction, declining health and climate-disruption upheavals” that threaten human survival. The study, published in *Frontiers in Conservation Science* by a group of 17 experts, observes that: “The scale of the threats to the biosphere and all its lifeforms – including humanity – is in fact so great that it is difficult to grasp for even well-informed experts”.

Somewhat couched in academic language, the urgency and starkness of the warning are nevertheless clear: “The gravity of the situation requires fundamental changes to global capitalism, education, and equality, which include inter alia the abolition of perpetual economic growth, properly pricing externalities, a rapid exit from fossil-fuel use, strict regulation of markets and property acquisition, reigning in corporate lobbying, and the empowerment of women”.

Meanwhile, the climate crisis has been worsening, with 2020 declared by scientists as the joint hottest year ever recorded, despite the pandemic lockdowns. There were record Arctic wildfires and Atlantic tropical storms.

The European Commission’s Matthias Petschke said: “The extraordinary climate events of 2020 [...] show us that we have no time to lose. We must come together as a global community, to ensure a just transition to a net zero future. It will be difficult, but the cost of inaction is too great...”

In the wake of the US presidential election last November, the BBC’s John Simpson had tweeted: “According to the *New York Times*,

2020 was declared by scientists as the joint hottest year ever recorded, despite the pandemic lockdowns

exit polls showed that 84 percent of people who voted for Trump thought that global warming wasn’t an important issue”.

But, of course, if political leaders everywhere believed that climate breakdown is an important issue – the overriding issue facing humanity – they would be tackling it with the urgency that it requires now.

As climate campaigner Greta Thunberg pointed out: “In 2010 our leaders signed ‘ambitious goals to protect wildlife and ecosystems’. By 2021 they’d failed on every single one. Each day they choose not to act. Instead they sign more ‘ambitious’ non-binding future goals while passing policy locking in destructive business as usual”.

This was her acerbic summary of political discussions at the One Planet Summit in Paris on 11 January:

“LIVE from #OnePlanetSummit in Paris:

“Bla bla nature

“Bla bla important

“Bla bla ambitious

“Bla bla green investments

“Bla bla great opportunity

“Bla bla green growth

“Bla bla net zero

“Bla bla step up our game

“Bla bla hope

“Bla bla bla...”

“locking in decades of further destruction”

We have arrived at this terminal stage of capitalism because we are being held in a death-grip by a system of economics and exploitation that is coated with a veneer of “democracy”, “freedom”, “progress” and other convenient ideological myths. The corporate media has sold the public those myths, perpetuating and deepening the various interlocking crises that threaten to wipe out homo sapiens, along with countless other species.

We can still escape the worst if we face up to reality. As Gail Bradbrook and Jem Bendell, co-founder of Extinction Rebellion and founder of Deep Adaptation respectively, explain: Our power comes from acting without escape from our pain”.

They continue: “Paying attention fully to what is around us and in front of us, even though it hurts, is to be fully alive. [...] Once we accept that anxiety and grief will be constant companions in this struggle, we can stay fully present to what is happening and respond accordingly. It means we do not grasp desperately at the latest idea of what might fix the climate and ecological emergency. Instead, we can help each other stay fully present to the difficult mess, so that we can try to reduce harm, save what we can and plant some seeds for what might come next”.

A good start would be to reject the corporate media. **CT**

David Cromwell is co-editor of medialens, the UK media watchdog. This essay first appeared at its website, www.medialens.org.

V.J. Prashad

Time for a world free of nuclear weapons

122 states sign latest international treaty ban, but belligerent US leads boycott by countries with nuclear arsenals

On January 22, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) became international law for the 122 states who signed the agreement in July 2017. The TPNW, as with most treaties, is summed up in one sentence (article 1a): “Each State Party undertakes never under any circumstances to... Develop, test, produce, manufacture, otherwise acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.” There is no complexity here. This is a treaty to ban nuclear weapons.

Wilfred Burchett was the first non-Japanese journalist to visit Hiroshima. His first dispatch for London’s *Daily Express* (September 5, 1945) was entitled “The Atomic Plague”. “In Hiroshima, 30 days after the first atomic bomb destroyed the city and shook the world”. Burchett wrote, “people are still dying, mysteriously and horribly... Hiroshima does not look like a bombed city. It looks as if a monster steamroller had passed over it and squashed it out of existence. I write these facts as dispassionately as I can in the hope that

they will act as a warning to the world... The damage is far greater than photographs can show... It gives you an empty feeling in the stomach to see such man-made devastation”.

In 1952, Sakamoto Hatsumi – a primary school student who had experienced the terror of the bombing – wrote a short poem: “When the atomic bomb drops/day turns into night/people turn into ghosts”. It is simple and elegant, a plea from the darkness to abolish nuclear weapons. This is what the *hibakusha*, the survivors of the atomic nightmare of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, have been demanding since 1945. Their pleas have been heard around the world, but not in the capitals that have developed these hideous weapons.

Nine of the 193 member states of the United Nations possess nuclear weapons. Two of them – the US and Russia – have more than 90 percent of all the 13,410 warheads. Four countries – the US, Russia, the UK and France – have at least 1,800 warheads on high alert, which means that they can

be fired at very short notice.

To compare the warheads currently deployed with the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima is enough to make the heart stop: the yield from the “Little Boy” used on Hiroshima is estimated at 15 kilotons, whereas the yield from one W88 warhead that is deployed on a Trident II submarine is estimated at 475 kilotons. It is not just the number of nuclear weapons that are available; the current nuclear weapons, many of them deployed on submarines and ships, are far more lethal.

None of the nine nuclear weapons states have joined the TPNW; they boycotted the negotiations and the vote in the United Nations General Assembly. In October 2020, the US government circulated a letter asking those governments who signed the treaty to withdraw from it. The US ambassador to the United Nations in 2017 – Nikki Haley – said that the TPNW threatens the security of the United States; she condescended to the 122 governments that joined the TPNW, saying, “do they really understand the threats that we have?” Iran, incidentally,

voted with 121 other countries for the TPNW.

Over the course of the past few years, the US administration has undermined the three core treaties for disarmament: “the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, and the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty, which has now metamorphosed into the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START)”, as Prabir Purkayastha wrote in January 2020. Appetite for serious nuclear disarmament has simply not been evident. In fact, the Congressional Budget Office in the US estimates that the government will spend \$1.2-trillion between 2017 and 2046 to modernise the US nuclear arsenal. The other eight nuclear weapons states will follow suit but far behind, since in these matters the United States drives this terrifying agenda.

While 122 countries voted to ban nuclear weapons, the United States pursued a project to threaten China with a nuclear attack. In August 2019, the US withdrew from the INF treaty, tested two intermediate-range missiles, and then posted an order for a variety of cruise and ballistic missiles. When the US government sought bases for these missiles around China, its Asian allies balked. They do not want to inflame the already tense situation between the United States and China.

Former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in 2020 that the US “Department of Defense has ramped up its efforts” against China. These threats grew more and more explicit later that year. Biden’s nominee to be the new US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that

While 122 countries voted to ban nuclear weapons, the US pursued a project to threaten China with a nuclear attack

Donald Trump’s administration was right to be tough on China.

The presence of these missiles on US naval vessels and the development of hypersonic cruise missiles as well as open threats against China simply make it impossible for Beijing to dismantle its nuclear arsenal. To do so would be tantamount to surrender before a US attack. China’s government, meanwhile, has said that it welcomes the establishment of nuclear-free zones, including the Southeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) Treaty.

At a press briefing in July 2020, Fu Cong, China’s director-general of the Department of Arms Control and Disarmament in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that his country would be willing to enter into disarmament negotiations if the US arsenal (at 5,800 nuclear missiles) drops down to the Chinese level (300 nuclear missiles). “The US knows full well the huge gap between the Chinese and American nuclear arsenals, both in terms of quantity and sophistication”, said Fu Cong. “For the US, hyping up the China factor is nothing but a ploy to divert world attention, and to create a pretext, under which they could walk away

from the New START, as they have done on so many other arms control treaties. The real purpose is to get rid of all possible restrictions and have a free hand in seeking overwhelming military superiority over any adversary, real or imagined”.

Public opinion, even in many NATO states, favours a total ban on nuclear weapons. After the treaty went into force on January 22, Beatrice Fihn of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) addressed nuclear weapons states, “Your weapons are now banned. Permanently. You are on the wrong side of international law, the wrong side of history, and the wrong side of humanity”. In 2017, ICAN won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Nuclear disarmament has a long history. In 1961, the US and the USSR signed the McCloy-Zorin Accords or the Agreed Principles for General and Complete Disarmament, which called for “general and complete disarmament” but also that war should “no longer [be] an instrument for settling international problems”. Gone is that spirit. It needs to be revived. **CT**

Vijay Prashad is an Indian historian, editor and journalist. He is a writing fellow and chief correspondent at Globetrotter, which produced this article. He is the chief editor of LeftWord Books and the director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research. He has written more than 20 books, including The Darker Nations and The Poorer Nations. His latest book is Washington Bullets, with an introduction by Evo Morales Ayma.

Trevor Hoyle

Graham in Greenland

An appreciation of the master craftsman who made cheap thrills and the sleazy underbelly of crime into an art form

As a young man of 19, Graham Greene took a revolver onto Berkhamsted Common in Hertfordshire and played Russian roulette. You won't be surprised to learn he survived. The reason he gave later was "to escape boredom". Very likely it was this same impulse that led him to restlessly scour the world in search of excitement and danger, and which provided material for more than 30 novels and travel books.

Greene was born in 1904. He was educated at Berkhamsted School, where his father was headmaster (which must have made relations with fellow pupils awkward at best, at worst bloody impossible) and Balliol College, Oxford. Soon after leaving he converted to Catholicism, in order to marry his girlfriend Vivien. No question he was smitten; just before they were married in 1927 he wrote to her: "I have no ambition but to win you, and little idea of Paradise but to have you with me".

Although becoming a Catholic might have been a ploy to get the girl, questions of faith, guilt and



Graham Greene: Writer who turned cheap thrills into high art.

redemption, and the dilemmas and contradictions these posed for one's own personal morality came to play a central role in his writing.

Greene himself, when asked, stated that his theme was *perfect evil walking the world where perfect good can never walk again*. Which in a nutshell is an apt summary of *Brighton Rock*, published in 1938. This is the best of his thrillers, set amongst the razor-slashing racetrack gangs of pre-war Brighton.

Teenage gangster Pinkie Brown

is like a cornered rat: jumpy, unpredictable, vicious and extremely dangerous. He's also a devout believer in hellfire and eternal damnation who corrupts everything he touches; everything except Rose, the innocent young waitress whose purity of love for him is like an insult to Pinkie, and ultimately the cause of his downfall.

The novel is stamped through like a stick of Brighton rock with what makes Greene such a distinctive and powerful writer, in particular its sleazy underworld atmosphere of brooding menace.

Richard Attenborough gave an outstanding early performance – both creepy and authentic – as Pinkie in the 1947 film version, which was scripted by Greene and directed by John Boulting. Easily in the top echelon of *noir* British gangster films ever made.

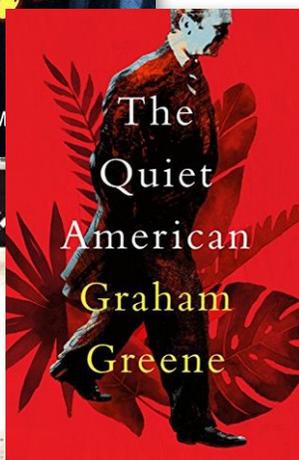
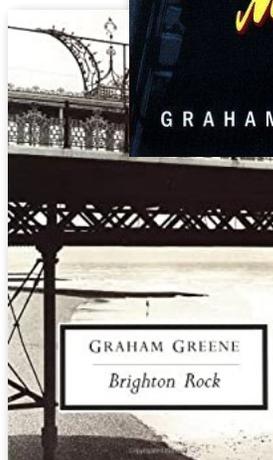
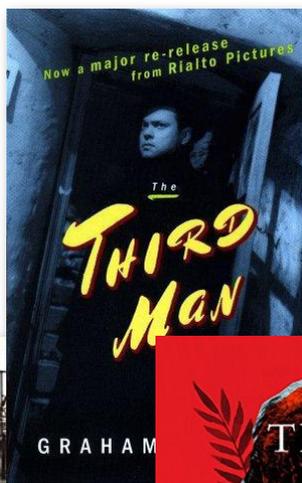
T*he Ministry of Fear*, 1943, is another of what Greene defensively called his "entertainments". He liked the thriller form (not mysteries or whodunnits) both to read and to write, and had a real flair for it. But was afraid it might

cheapen his literary reputation and tarnish his prospects of being regarded as a “serious” novelist. It was only later in his career that he dropped the label “An Entertainment” from the title page when it became obvious to everyone, including the critics, that his thrillers and murder stories were among his best work. For my money, they *are* his best work.

The setting of *Ministry* is the blitz and the blackout in the middle of the second world war. We follow Arthur Rowe, one of life’s bystanders, as he is drawn slowly yet inexorably into a murky half-world where sinister foreign

organisations pursue their mysterious, murderous ends. The story, while realistically told, has the texture of a waking nightmare. If Kafka ever got around to writing thrillers, this is the one he would have produced, and wouldn’t have been ashamed of either. The monstrous Mrs Bellairs, who conducts seances, is a chilling creation.

A Gun for Sale is one of Greene’s earlier efforts –1936 – that Hollywood bought for its great title and then changed to *A Gun for Hire*. It’s a nail-biting revenge thriller about a hired killer, Raven, an embittered outcast of society in whose dark soul a young woman kindles alien sparks of decency, honour, even tenderness. Alan Ladd became star material in the leading role and from then on he and diminutive Veronica Lake, she of the peek-a-boo blonde curtain, were



Top author and highly-skilled screenwriter, Graham Greene was “a great stylist engaging important themes”.

a hot romantic coupling.

The term “Greenland” was coined by critics to describe both the physical and metaphorical terrain of his books, more especially the novels with literary themes set in exotic parts of the globe. But his view of human nature, as in the thrillers, is no different, still bitter and sardonic, as of someone turning over a stone and poking at the life squirming beneath with fascinated disgust.

Several of these “superior” fictions depend on the heat and squalor of tropical locations for the added value of existential significance.

In *The Quiet American*, published in 1955, it’s Vietnam long before the US invaded and laid waste to the country. The novel relates how Pyle (the naive young Ameri-

can of the title) with righteous zeal and the very best of intentions, blunders in and causes the deaths of innocent people. Americans, quiet or otherwise, seem to make a habit of blundering in and decimating the native population for their own good.

On top of his creative gifts, Greene had an ace-reporter’s sixth sense of scenting out where in the world the next political epicentre would erupt. And he always got there first.

The End of the Affair, 1951, is possibly his most personal novel. Told in the first person by a middle-aged writer, Bendrix, it’s a brutally honest account of his affair with a married woman in London during the war. Once again, religious faith – or rather the loss of it – plays a major role, as does the terrible price of jealous revenge.

Greene was that rare thing, a great stylist engaging important themes who was critically lauded and at the same time extremely popular, selling shedloads of books. He had as many cakes as he wanted, did Graham, and scoffed the lot. As if this wasn’t enough, he was also a highly skilled screenwriter, producing original screenplays such as *The Third Man*, made into that amazing 1950 film by Carol Reed, starring Orson Welles. **CT**

Trevor Hoyle is a writer and novelist based in Lancashire, England. His most recent novel is the environmental thriller *The Last Gasp*, published by Jo Fletcher Books (Quercus). He is currently preparing and making notes for a novel, *The Rock ‘n’ Roll Diaries: 56-58*. His website is www.trevorhoyle.com.

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Washington Insights

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START OF A REVOLUTION OR CAVALCADE OF CRANKS?: The 'invasion' of the US Capitol in Washington, January 6, 2021.

Paul Edwards

Coup, coup, kachoo ...

Contrary to the bleatings of rabid Never Trumpers, Democrat drum majors, and neurasthenic pundits, the Butthead Circus of camo wanks, Halloweening morons, and feeble-minded Q Anon dead-enders, the bumbling vandalism and imbecile thuggery at the Capitol on January 6 had no resemblance whatever to an actual coup.

See *Websters*, Coup d'Etat: "A sudden, decisive action in politics

effecting a change of government illegally or by force".

The precise definition, likely unfamiliar to most Americans, is not a subject of confusion to our government. Coups, it can be said, are us. Our government runs them all the time. They are, with unilateral and undeclared war, its favourite 'diplomatic' endeavour. It was late to adopt the tactic but strove to perfect subversion and destruction of regimes beyond what was thought

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possible.

In our early days, invasions and occupations were all America required in its own hemisphere, long before we had deemed it necessary to manage the entire world for our Capitalists' profit. Inspired by British and French examples, it was clear to the US that killing inferior races was fine where profit justified it. As the world then was up for rape and domination, we joined the fest in Central America, the Caribbean and Pacific Islands, while finally completing the casual extermination of our own native peoples.

After WWI, invasion of nations to steal resources fell somewhat out of favour in the world, which was awkward. If war and murder were out, then Capitalism – a euphemism for our government – had to find an alternative. It gambled that the next best thing to conquest was corruption, which proved to be cost effective besides, always a critical factor to us. You just pull the Marines out of Nicaragua, Haiti, Cuba, and the Philippines, and install a dirty elite to hand you the country for a tiny cut of the gross. It was much cheaper than murdering thousands of people.

This new kind of soft coup worked well in most places, most of the time. You had to have a slush budget to control press and education but that was peanuts compared to garrisoning combat outfits. Where the programme hit the skids was in countries

where, against all odds, a small dedicated cadre of courageous idealists somehow defied propaganda and moral pollution and resolved to die rather than whore themselves to the Gringo and his lackeys.

In Nicaragua, Sandino's guerrillas fought their pimp United Fruit Co. government and US troops to a standstill. When we couldn't kill or capture him, we paid to get him betrayed and murdered by the brute, Somoza, of whom Roosevelt famously said, "I know he's a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch".

After WWII, hopes for world peace through self-determination of nations ended the era when America could openly rape and loot weak states with no repercussions, even when hidden behind our hired slut elites. They began being seriously menaced by their own people which interfered annoyingly with corporate cash flow.

Britain had ripped Iran's oil off for decades when a proud old aristocrat pol nationalised it and ran the coward Shah out with the dithering Brits, who came whining to the flexing CIA. Ike said go, and in a bollixed farce – the first by those hugely overrated, ham-handed bunglers – it doled out wheelbarrows of cash, brought Mossadegh down, and set the preening, brutal Shah up as chief whore for the new majority owners, American Oil.

With ever fiercer demands for national autonomy and an end to US Capitalist piracy, it was felt that we had to put teeth in

the programme. The way to get "plausible deniability" was to train native murderers as "security forces". This was clear when we nearly botched a coup against popular Guatemalan Socialist, Jacobo Arbenz, for lack of a killer unit. Threats of invasion and bribes won the army and he was ousted for our chosen dictator. United Fruit won, and America lost face forever in Guatemala.

By the '60s it was clear that you didn't always need a new, dirty government, you could just destabilise some states to create chaos. In independent Congo, we bought the assassination of people's hero, Patrice Lumumba, left power up for grabs, and hired the sick winner of the bloodbath that followed as our guy.

It got yet tougher to subvert countries in the '70s but our tactics were improving. When Socialist Salvador Allende won election in Chile and began running it for the people, Kissinger's CIA buckled down. We cut off essential exports, jammed the banking system, bribed union leaders, jawboned crooked generals, and armed traitors inside. In the end the coup went off well and our "partners" killed him. We made our deal with General Augusto Pinochet, America's fave dictator with the Shah for a time, as vicious a psychopath as Heinrich Himmler ever aspired to be.

That brings us to 50 years ago and rather than belabour the point by listing dozens more of our coups, some bloodier, clum-

sier, stupider than others, the prosecution rests. What happened at the Capitol was a tantrum of the rabble not remotely resembling an effort to take over the country, QED. Americans are self-absorbed, and much given to exaggeration. And very fearful...

Well, we have much to be fearful about. But it isn't a Trumpian coup. And it isn't Russia or China. Or Iran... Or Communists, or Socialists, or Antifa, or Proud Boys, or BLM, or Q Anon...

What should fill you with terror, shake your soul, give you night sweats and hurt your heart, is the appalling truth that we are all trapped in a system that cares nothing for its people or the world they inhabit, and that that people, facing looming man made and natural catastrophe, hasn't the courage and wisdom to save itself. **CT**

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widespread violence.

Karma would be the US becoming a failed state where people are again sold as slaves.

Karma would be nuclear bombs dropped on US cities.

Karma would be Americans starved to death by crushing sanctions.

Karma would be America's forests soaked with Agent Orange.

Karma would be mass executions of Americans in sports stadiums.

Karma would be massacres of entire towns: men, women and children.

Karma would be foreign soldiers raping and killing civilians with impunity.

Karma would be foreign-backed extremists mutilating Americans to death and publicly displaying their corpses.

Karma for US interventionism would be for America to collapse and burn in chaos and torture.

That would be "karma". That would be the chickens coming home to roost.

I am not saying it would be a good thing if this happened. It most definitely would not.

I am saying the US must cease brutalising the world.

We now know for a fact that monopolistic Silicon Valley mega-corporations can be pressured by the plutocrat-controlled political/media class to silence political factions online. Good thing there's no way this can possibly go wrong.

When you realize that corpora-

Caitlin Johnstone

What 'democracy' is under attack?

To stop the exacerbation of Trumpism the talking heads are recommending internet censorship, regulations on media, new domestic terror laws, literally anything they can possibly think of except changing the conditions which gave rise to Trumpism.

The most imminent threat to US democracy is not Russia, nor fascist insurrectionists, but the fact that US democracy is entirely fictional.

Saying US democracy is being threatened is like saying Grinch- es are a critically endangered species.

The previous president inter-

vened in the primary to appoint his right-hand man as his chosen successor. That successor will be installed in a five-day, star-studded celebration surrounded by a sea of barbed wire and heavily armed soldiers. What "democracy" is under attack, exactly?

No, the Capitol riot was not "karma" for America's international coups and regime change interventions.

Karma would be the US actually reaping what it sows.

Karma would be the US government toppled and replaced with a foreign puppet regime, and millions of Americans killed.

Karma would be tens of millions of Americans displaced by

tions are America's real government, the whole "it isn't censorship if it's a private company doing it" argument is seen for the joke that it is. It's also completely specious, because the government is directly involved in the censorship.

Soon social media will just be an app that sends everything you say to the FBI and gives you regular notifications that the government is your friend, and then everyone will finally be happy.

Back before he was silenced Assange tweeted "The overwhelming majority of information is classified to protect political security, not national security."

I think of this quote often.

The mass media have earned every bit of the contempt the public has for them. Every little bit of it.

Rightists suck at conspiracy analysis because their worldview requires an elite cabal planning and orchestrating all evil dynamics, whereas leftists understand that many (though not all) of those dynamics will unfold on their own in a system where human behaviour is driven by profit-seeking. In situations where you are ideologically prohibited from blaming the obvious culprit capitalism, you'll come up with all kinds of other wacky explanations.

The best most reliable way to

accurately predict what will happen in a given situation is to ignore whatever laws, trends and dynamics everyone else is pointing at and just assume the most powerful people will find a way to get whatever it is they want somehow. Doesn't mean elites always win, and it certainly doesn't mean we should stop fighting. It's just the most reliable way to accurately guess what will happen in a given situation, if you're into that sort of thing.

Sectarian feuds in the online left always boil down to "the whole system is rigged against the people" lefties versus "we can work with the oligarchic empire to advance our interests" lefties.

The US empire has two faces: the plastic smiling one based in Hollywood, and the blood-spattered one based in DC, Arlington and

Langley. If you live in wealthy western nations you're presented with the former. If you live in the Middle East or the Global South you get the latter.

One of the weirdest things in my life these days is watching people enthusiastically arguing that they should receive less assistance from their government. Never until I began commenting on US politics was this ever a part of my life. The brainwashing there is out of this world.

If a political party always succeeds at advancing sick agendas and always fails at advancing healthy agendas, it's because it only exists to advance sick agendas. **CT**

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

Norman Solomon

Don't let Biden make us dupes

At inauguration time, journalist I. F. Stone wrote, incoming presidents "make us the dupes of our hopes." That insight is worth pondering as Joe Biden ascends to the presidency. After four years of the real-life Trump nightmare, hope is overdue – but it's hazardous.

Stone astutely warned against taking heart from the lofty words that President Richard Nixon had just deployed in his inaugural address on January 20, 1969. With the Vietnam War raging, Stone pointed out: "It's easier to make war when you talk peace".

That's true of military war.

Washington Insights

And class war.

In 2021, class war is the elephant – and the donkey – in the national living room. Rhetoric aside, present-day Republican politicians are shameless warriors for wealthy privilege and undemocratic power that afflicts the non-rich. Democratic Party leaders aren't nearly as bad, but that's an extremely low bar; relatively few are truly champions of the working class, while most routinely run interference for corporate America, Wall Street and the military-industrial complex.

Rarely illuminated with clarity by corporate media, class war rages 24/7/365 in the real world. Every day and night, countless people are suffering and dying. Needlessly. From lack of social equity. From the absence of economic justice. From the greed and elite prerogatives cemented into the structures of politics and a wide range of institutions. From oligarchy that has gotten so extreme that three people in the United States (Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates and Warren Buffett) now possess more wealth than the entire bottom half of the population.

Yes, there are some encouraging signs about where the Biden presidency is headed. The intertwined economic crisis and horrific pandemic – combined with growing grassroots progressive pressure on the Democratic Party – have already caused Biden to move leftward on a range of crucial matters. The climate emergency and festering racial injustice also require responses.

We can expect important steps via presidential executive orders before the end of this month.

At the same time, if past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour, we should not expect Biden to be a deserter from the class war that he has helped to wage, from the top down, throughout his political career – including via NAFTA, welfare “reform”, the bankruptcy bill and financial-sector deregulation.



NO DESERTER: Joe Biden.

How far Biden can be pushed in better directions will depend on how well progressives and others who want humanistic change can organise. In effect, most of mass media will encourage us merely to hope – plaintively and passively – holding onto the sort of optimism that has long been silly putty in the hands of presidents and their strategists.

Hope is a human need, and recent Democratic presidents have been whizzes at catering to it. Bill Clinton marketed himself as “the man from Hope” (the

name of his first hometown). Barack Obama authored the bestseller *The Audacity of Hope* that appeared two years before he won the White House. But projecting our hopes onto carefully scripted Rorschach oratory, on Inauguration Day or any day, is usually a surrender to images over realities.

The standard Democratic Party storyline is now telling us that greatness will be in reach for the Biden administration if only Republican obstacles can be overcome. Yet what has led to so much upheaval in recent years is mostly grounded in class war. And the positive aspects of Biden's initiatives should not delude progressives into assuming that Biden is some kind of a class-war ally. For the most part, he has been the opposite.

“Progressives are not going to get anything from the new administration unless they are willing to publicly pressure the new administration”, David Sirota and Andrew Perez wrote days ago. “That means progressive lawmakers are going to have to be willing to fight and it means progressive advocacy groups in Washington are going to have to be willing to prioritise results rather than White House access”.

The kind of access that progressives need most of all is access to our own capacities to realistically organise and gain power. It's a constant need – hidden in plain sight, all too often camouflaged by easier hopes.

More than being a time of

Photo: Gage Skidmore

hope – or fatalism – the inauguration of President Joe Biden should be a time of sceptical realism and determination.

The best way to not become disillusioned is to not have illusions in the first place. And the best way to win economic and social justice is to keep organising and keep pushing. What can happen during the Biden presidency is up for grabs. **CT**

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should call itself, now that the “Redskins” has finally been rejected as impolitic and inappropriate. An innocuous name like the Washington Monuments came to mind. But if we wanted to be more honest, how about the Washington Lobbyists? The Washington Bullies? Or the Washington Awesome Splendour of Timeless Exceptionalism (WASTE)?

The idea for the latter name came from a recent statement the Trump administration released in support of a “Garden of American Heroes.” Here’s a sample of the rhetoric:

The garden’s purpose is “to reflect the awesome splendour of our country’s timeless exceptionalism.”

The garden of heroes “is America’s answer to [a] reckless attempt to erase our heroes, values and entire way of life. On its grounds, the devastation and discord of the moment will be overcome with abiding love of country and lasting patriotism. This is the American way.”

A garden of heroes is a perfect antidote to “a dangerous anti-American extremism that seeks to dismantle our country’s history, institutions and very identity.”

So, what Trump was saying is that America’s main enemy is “a dangerous anti-American extremism” that’s seeking to destroy our very identity. Meanwhile, anti-Trump forces are similarly arguing that Trump and his minions represent a dangerous anti-American extremism

W. J. Astore

Is the USA the new USSR?

Back in the days of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, most Americans took pride in not being like the USSR, or our image of the USSR. We, the USA, were not a militaristic empire. We, the USA, didn’t have state propaganda. We, the USA, took in Soviet dissidents who spoke out against state abuses of power and for personal freedoms. We, the USA, didn’t have old sclerotic leaders who were simply figureheads for elites. We, the USA, didn’t have military forces in the streets to maintain order. And so forth.

I was thinking about this today because Trump didn’t pardon Edward Snowden, whose only sanctuary is Russia. I was thinking about this today because some of the more interesting shows with critical coverage of the USA are

on RT, a Russia-owned network. (I’m thinking here of shows hosted by Jesse Ventura and Chris Hedges. Their outspoken criticism and honesty is rarely heard on America’s mainstream media networks.)

I was thinking today of a mainstream media that’s celebrating the inauguration of an aging man, Joe Biden, who’s visibly in decline and who is a tool for the establishment.

I was thinking today of the nation’s capital that resembles an armed and fortified camp for a “peaceful” transference of power.

These are uncomfortable thoughts, I know.

Similarly, my wife and I were joking this morning about what the Washington football team

that's out to destroy our way of life. Not much room for compromise and unity here, is there?

The Soviet Union collapsed in part due to internal tensions and disorder, massive military spending, and lost wars. A sclerotic leadership was incapable of changing course, and by the time the empire attempted to change

course with Gorbachev, it was too late for restructuring and openness.

Is it already too late for the USA? Or does today's pomp and ceremony promise a new beginning? **CT**

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face paint. "This year", someone said, "due to travel restrictions, the US had to organise the coup at home".

This reduction of the US to a banana republic is ongoing. A day after the DC "coup", an Iraqi judge issued an arrest warrant on Trump for "premeditated murder", for the drone strike on an Iranian general and an Iraqi militia leader in Baghdad last year.

How about some empathy? It's always easier to see the problems of people you know than your own. "If the US could see what the US is doing in the US, the US would invade the US to liberate the US from the tyranny of the US"/ (Available on blankets and mugs.)

● **A reality crisis?** None of this may do the moment justice. Internet maven Jesse Hirsh calls it "the televised clash of realities". He says the images are "right out of LARP", live-action role-playing. That makes more sense of the costumes and avatar quality: people blinking as they emerge from the cave of the internet and try to mesh reality outside with reality online. That's one of many meanings of a reality crisis. It was also enough to throw the people who run Twitter and Facebook into a panic for their, er, roles enabling it.

● **Was the coup planned?** They surely discussed it, the Trumps, supporters, militias and sympathisers among police and agencies like ICE. But maybe they were surprised by how easy it was getting in. Or treated it as a rehearsal.

What's clear is that Trump has

Rick Salutin

Recollections of protests past

There was lots of, "This hasn't happened since 1814, when Britain invaded and burned the White House". C'mon. In 1967 a protest crowd invaded the Pentagon grounds, trampled the lawn and joined a Tibetan chant led by poet Allen Ginsberg, in order to "levitate" the building.

OK, different spirit. But the storming of the Capitol was, for shock and symbolic value, a homegrown version of 9/11. Except it was US terrorists directed by their president, defecating on their own national symbols.

● **The irrelevance of experts.** "Historians struggled to find a precedent" – as they usually do. "There isn't one", said a "presidential scholar" at Columbia University. Back during the Vietnam protests, I watched journalists on a chaotic Columbia campus beg the top scholar of US

political paranoia, Richard Hofstadter, for parallels from the past. He said nothing came to mind.

"It's almost beyond belief", said a Yale prof after the January 6 affair. The problem is there's lots of precedent for events like this in the US. But none for them being led and directed by the president. So it's confusing.

● **Instant schadenfreude.**

There was no dilemma for those from places that have seen US-sponsored coups. For them it was déjà vu many times over. "It's like the cartoon version of a South American coup", said someone watching, "except our golpistas wear military uniforms and know what they're doing. These guys are pathetic, they're the mirror image of Trump".

She's talking about the clown costumes or "Q Shaman", a devotee of QAnon's conspiracy theories, with his horns, pelts and

never said a word in favour of democracy. He has no commitment to it. This may answer a question which has been debated but not resolved, because the definitions are many and fluid and don't seem to fit his lack of ideology or organisation: is he a fascist?

The answer? In his own mind he is, and that's where he lives. All he really knows about the realm of action is being surly and breaking anything within reach.

● President-elect intervenes. Joe Biden always comes onstage like a man looking for the bathroom. There was a lawyer series I liked, *The Practice*. When they had a hopeless case they'd turn to

Eugene, played by Steve Harris, and say, "It's time for the USA defence". He'd babble clichés at the judge, then solemnly conclude, "Because this is the United States of America". It had no content but it always worked. Biden replicates it: "America ... honour, decency ... That's who we are. That's who we've always been". It's pretty close to Make America Great Again. He's better than Trump but his is also the way that leads back to Trump. **CT**

Rick Salutin writes about current affairs and politics. This article was first published in the Toronto Star.

standards – over the course of his presidency and on Jan. 6 helped cause a simmering pot to boil over.

Second, there were the so-called "patriots" who took to the streets because the jailer of their choice didn't get chosen to knock heads for another four years. Those "Stop the Steal" protesters may have deluded themselves (or been deluded) into believing they were standing for freedom when they stormed the Capitol. However, there are limits to what can be done in the so-called name of liberty, and this level of violence – no matter who wields it or what brand of politics or zealotry motivate them – crossed the line.

Third, you've got the tech giants, who meted out their own version of social justice by way of digital tyranny and corporate censorship. Yet there can be no freedom of speech if social media giants can muzzle whomever they want, whenever they want, on whatever pretext they want in the absence of any real due process, review or appeal. At a minimum, we need more robust protections in place to protect digital expression and a formalised process for challenging digital censorship.

Fourth, you've got the police, who normally exceed the constitutional limits restraining them from brutality, surveillance and other excesses. Only this time, despite intelligence indicating that some of the rioters were planning for mayhem, police were outnumbered and ill prepared to deal with the incursion.

John Whitehead & Nisha Whitehead

The US is a nation imploding

This is what we have been reduced to: A violent mob. A nation on the brink of martial law. A populace under house arrest. A technocorporate state wielding its power to immobilise huge swaths of the country. And a Constitution in tatters.

We are imploding on multiple fronts, all at once.

This is what happens when ego, greed and power are allowed to take precedence over liberty, equality and justice.

Just to be clear, however: this is not a revolution.

This is a ticking time bomb.

There is absolutely no excuse for the violence that took place at the Capitol on January 6, 2021.

Yet no matter which way you look at it, the fallout from this attempted coup could make this worrisome state of affairs even worse.

First, you've got the president, who has been accused of inciting a riot and now faces a second impeachment and a scandal that could permanently mar his legacy. At a minimum, Trump's actions and words – unstatesmanlike and reckless, by any

Washington Insights

Investigations underway suggest that some police may even have colluded with the rioters. All that was missing on Jan. 6 was a declaration of martial law.

Which brings us to the fifth point, martial law. Given that the nation has been dancing around the fringes of martial law with each national crisis, it won't take much more to push the country over the edge to a declaration and military lockdown. The rumblings of armed protests at all 50 state capitals and in Washington, DC, will only serve to heighten tensions, double down on the government's military response, and light a match to a powder keg state of affairs.

So where do we go from here?

That all of these events are coming to a head around Martin Luther King Jr. Day is telling. More than 50 years after King was assassinated, America has become a ticking time bomb of racial unrest and injustice, police militarisation, surveillance, government corruption and ineptitude, the blowback from a battlefield mindset and endless wars abroad, and a growing economic inequality between the haves and have nots.

Making matters worse, modern America has compounded the evils of racism, materialism and militarism with ignorance, intolerance and fear. Callousness, cruelty, meanness, immorality, ignorance, hatred, intolerance and injustice have become hallmarks of our modern age, magnified by an echo chamber of nasty tweets and government-sanctioned brutality.

This casual cruelty is made possible by a growing polarisation within the populace that emphasizes what divides us – race, religion, economic status, sexuality, ancestry, politics, etc. – rather than what unites us: we are all human.

This is what writer Anna Quindlen refers to as “the politics of exclusion, what might be thought of as the cult of otherness... It divides the country as surely as the Mason-Dixon line once did. And it makes for mean-spirited and punitive politics and social policy”.

This is more than meanness, however. This is the psychopathic mindset adopted by the architects of the Deep State, and it applies equally whether you're talking about Democrats or Republicans.

As an academic study into pathocracy concluded, “[T]yranny does not flourish because perpetrators are helpless and ignorant of their actions. It flourishes because they actively identify with those who promote vicious acts as virtuous”.

“We the people” have paved the way for this tyranny to prevail. None of us who remain silent and impassive in the face of evil, racism, extreme materialism, meanness, intolerance, cruelty, injustice and ignorance get a free pass.

Those among us who follow figureheads without question, who turn a blind eye to injustice and turn their backs on need, who march in lockstep with tyrants and bigots, who allow poli-

tics to trump principle, who give in to meanness and greed, and who fail to be outraged by the many wrongs being perpetrated in our midst, it is these individuals who must shoulder the blame when the darkness wins.

Freedom demands responsibility. Freedom demands that we stop thinking as Democrats and Republicans and start thinking like human beings, or at the very least, Americans.

Martin Luther King Jr. dared to dream of a world in which all Americans “would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”. He didn't live to see that dream become a reality. It's still not a reality. We haven't dared to dream that dream in such a long time. But imagine...

Imagine what this country would be like if Americans put aside their differences and dared to stand up – united – for freedom...

Imagine what this country would be like if Americans put aside their differences and dared to speak out – with one voice – against injustice...

Imagine what this country would be like if Americans put aside their differences and dared to push back – with the full force of our collective numbers – against the evils of government despotism. Tyranny wouldn't stand a chance. **CT**

John W. Whitehead is a constitutional lawyer and founder and president of The Rutherford Institute.

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