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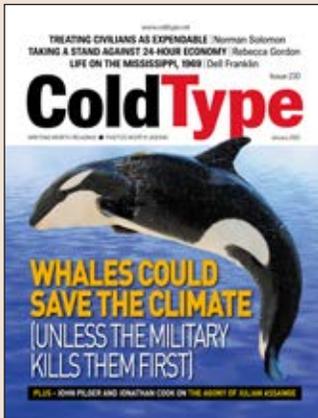
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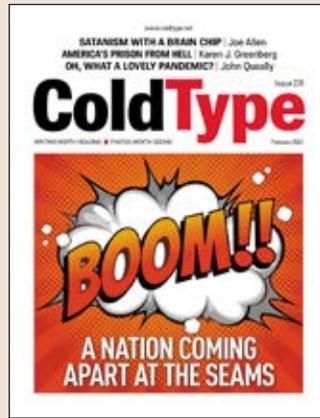
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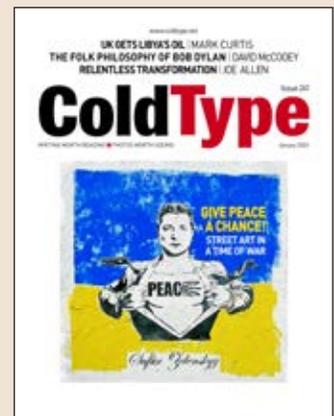
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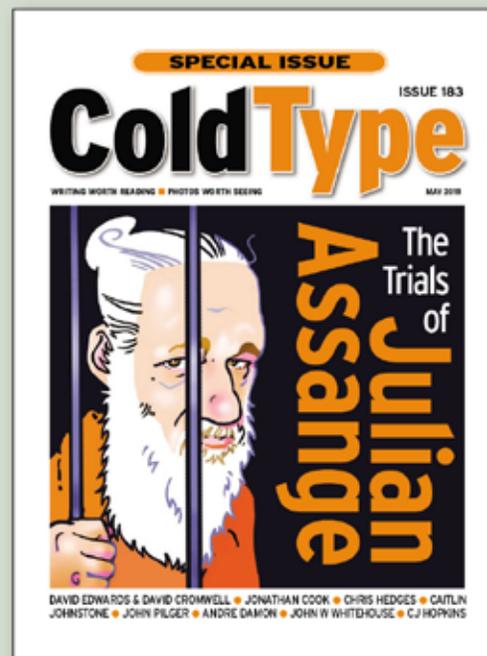


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INSIGHTS



Thomas McMullan / Belfast Media Group

MAKE MINE A DOUBLE: A barman at the Duke of York pub in Belfast celebrates the US President turning up to solve the Irish Problem.

It was grin-and-bear it time for the majority community in the North of Ireland – and for the majority of Ulster University students – when President Biden came to Belfast on April 12 with stern orders not to spook the unionist horses.

Thus we had the tropes familiar to those of us who witnessed the first US foray into local politics back in 1990s City Hall, though admittedly some of the bending-over-backwards approach did at times stray into Billy Smart Circus acrobatics territory.

There was the perfunctory nod to the Ulster emigrants who harried the British in the Revolutionary

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir

BITING TONGUES OVER JOE BIDEN'S GOLDEN BRIDGE

War and played a key role in the birth of America. In the US, these folks are known as Scots-Irish. Refer to Ulster-Scots and you will get only blank stares – even in the Appalachian wilds. Dutiful to a point, President Biden body-swerved the Irish appellation like a Messi possessed:

“The family ties and the pride in those Ulster Scots immigrants – those – those Ulster Scots immigrants who helped found and build my country, they run very deep – very deep. Men born in Ulster....”

You get the picture.

Of those whose heritage hails back to the mere Irish, there was no

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mention – even though the census tells us they now form a majority in this benighted statelet. No mention even for those like me who are a mongrel mix of Scots and Irish (with a dollop of English thrown in). Which brings us to the delightful story of the President’s English roots also rolled out at the University of Ulster address to stifle any rumblings in the unionist undergrowth. Delightful and ingratiating – the subtext: I’m not just a nasty Irish nationalist, just a hair’s-breadth short of toe-curling embarrassment for the poor guy who had to deliver the lines.

And, of course, it goes without saying that when you’re sweet-talking your separated Presbyterian brethren, the Irish language is verboten. Forget that fact that the largest *Gaeltacht* in Belfast isn’t on the Falls Road or in the Short Strand but in ... the Ulster University York Street campus where, under polymath and professor Art Hughes they have been churning out model *Gaeilgeoiri* for two decades.

Nevertheless, in order to woo the wee man, Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, not one word of Irish was uttered by any of the speakers. We can forgive the Yanks that omission, but in 2023 for Ulster University to boast about inclusion but then refuse to recognise the community on its doorstep is pitiful. And I mean on its doorstep: *Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin*, on the site where another American visitor, escaped slave Frederick Douglass, spoke in 1845, is a stone’s throw from the President’s podium. That’s if we were still throwing stones.

You know the rest – apologise before even saying that the DUP should return to the power sharing



Thomas McMullan / Belfast Media Group

President Biden on his way to Ulster University to deliver his keynote speech.

institutions. Pretend it’s an issue for all the local politicians when in fact the solution lies with one party only – the DUP. And then couch the remarks as a passing comment from a guy walking by on the other side of the street and not wanting to interfere in a domestic: “As a friend, I hope it’s not too presumptuous of me to say that I believe democratic institutions established by the Good Friday Agreement remain critical to the future of Northern Ireland.”

The rest of us, marooned on hospital waiting lists, laid off from Europe-funded community posts, forced to pretend that Belfast is still a unionist bastion, are left to bite our tongues.

But we do so gladly because we have seen this movie before. In 1997, I sat in a City Hall banquet room while a US representative peddled the same picture of Ulster as Paradise. Sinn Féin had gone to court to enjoy the right to attend civic functions, a right denied our councillors until then as part of a battery of restrictions on our mandate. At this stage, we hadn’t managed to dump the toast to the Queen at the same civic functions and had to remain

seated as the rump of the Empire rose to salute Her Majesty.

But then the tide of change swept in and unionism’s empire on the Farset crumbled into the water. On a good day, unionists can muster about 40 per cent of the votes in Belfast City Council. What was once a cold house for half the populace is a welcoming people’s palace. Change was driven not by unionist generosity but by changing demographics and hard-nosed political decisions.

Which is why, while understanding the President’s unenviable task of coddling unionism, one doubts if even the sweetest words will move the yesterday’s men of the DUP.

Still, we salute the diplomatic sleight of hand and thank President Biden for his stopover in the certain knowledge that at Ulster University, he was, à la Sun Tzu, building a golden bridge for a retreating adversary. **CT**

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir is the publisher of the *Irish Echo* in New York and Belfast Media Group titles in Belfast, Ireland. He was Lord Mayor of Belfast from 2013-2014.

INSIGHTS

Chiara Longoni

CAN WE TRUST MACHINES WITH THE DAILY NEWS?

When you scan the headlines on your favourite news app each morning, do you ever stop to think who – or what – wrote the story?

The assumption is there are human beings doing the work. But it's also possible an algorithm wrote it. Artificial Intelligence is capable of producing text, images and audio with little to no human intervention. For instance, the neural network called Generative Pre-trained Transformer 3 (GPT-3) is capable of producing text – a fictional story, a poem or even a programming code – virtually indistinguishable from text written by a person.

Major media outlets such as the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *Forbes* have automated news production with the aid of generative AI – AI algorithms that autonomously produce textual content.

With great advances in machine learning and natural language processing, the difference between content written by a human and content produced by advanced neural networks such as GPT-3 can be indiscernible even in domains quintessentially humanistic like poetry.

As we come to rely more on AI-generated information in everyday settings, the question of trust becomes more important.

Recent studies have examined whether people believe AI-generated news stories or trust AI-generated

ed medical diagnoses.

They found that people are mostly sceptical of AI. A machine can write an accurate story full of facts, but readers will still second-guess its veracity. And while a program can give a more accurate medical analysis than a human, patients are still more likely to go with their (human) doctor's advice.

The conclusion is people are more likely to distrust AI if it makes a



mistake than an individual human. When a reporter makes an error, a reader isn't likely to think all reporters are unreliable. After all, everyone makes mistakes. But when AI makes a mistake, we are more likely to mistrust the entire concept. Humans can be fallible and forgiven for being so. Not so machines.

AI content is not generally marked as such. It's rare for a news organisation to flag in the byline that the text was produced by an algorithm. But AI-generated content may lead to bias or misuse, and eth-

icists and policymakers have advocated for organisations to transparently disclose its use. If disclosure requirements are enforced, future headlines might include a byline that tags AI as the reporter.

Research examined how disclosing use of AI in news generation affected news accuracy perceptions. The results strongly corroborated the AI aversion account: disclosing the use of AI led people to believe news items substantially less, a negative effect explained by lower trust toward AI reporters.

Media outlets are faced not only with the challenges of grabbing the attention of readers in a highly competitive digital marketplace, but also of earning their trust.

This is true of any organisation that uses digital technologies to inform their customers, whether that be a regulator, business or academic institution. In fact, the robustness of the negative effect of AI in research suggests that AI aversion applies to other domains where AI generated text is used.

AI is a tool. There certainly needs to be oversight and regulation, but it also has the potential to do a lot of good.

AI could democratise healthcare, for instance by producing an app for a skin cancer risk assessment. People unable to afford a dermatologist, or who simply don't have access to that type of care, could be alerted to that primary red flag – go check this mole.

AI has the potential to make prescriptively good outcomes available to people who otherwise would not have access to them. And so the question is, if AI has the potential to be used for such positive ends, how can we understand how people view it and how can we foster uptake?

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If forced to disclose AI-generated content, what can an organisation do to retain trust in the information that it communicates? The answer is not yet clear, but the hope is current findings will raise awareness of the influence of disclosure of AI-generated content on perceived accuracy and trust and encourage greater research on this topic.

When AI serves in an assistant role to a person who retains the veto or remains the ultimate decision-maker, it's more likely people would be fine with AI doing some

things as long as the final call is made by a human being. **CT**

Chiara Longoni is a behavioural scientist and Assistant Professor of Marketing at Boston University's Questrom School of Business. She conducts interdisciplinary research on psychological responses to artificial intelligence across healthcare, recommendation systems, automated content generation, and government services. This article was first published under Creative Commons by 360info™.

step down as CEO of the company for the third time. But it took place in Italy, prompting his interviewer to ask: Why wasn't Schultz sitting down with unionizing workers back home?

Indeed, Schultz – who is worth some \$3.7-billion – has been operating as union-buster-in-chief of the iconic corporation.

Since the first group of Starbucks workers unionised a cafe in Buffalo in late 2021, more than 278 stores have done the same, according to Starbucks Workers United. Still, the number of unionised cafes remains a tiny fraction – about 3 percent – of all stores.

Early on, Schultz admitted to workers that the company had failed to give them the tools they needed, such as better staffing and training. But Schultz's response was to create an uneven playing field and punish workers for daring to demand better conditions.

In 2022, Schultz reportedly rewarded non-union workers with better wages and benefits, as well as credit card tipping, and denied the same to people working in union stores. As a result, the *New York Times* reported, "Filings for union elections dropped from more than 60 a month in March and April to under 10 in August."

Meanwhile, the company is firing union leaders such as Starbucks worker Hannah Whitbeck in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Her termination prompted a lawsuit and a federal judge's decision that prohibited the Ann Arbor store from firing workers for union activity.

The company has also been understaffing stores that are unionising, a move that the union says is a deliberate ploy to make workers' lives more difficult.

Joe Piette / Flickr



Rally against Starbucks' union-busting tactics. Philadelphia, February 2022.

Sonali Kolhatkar

UNION-BUSTING LEGACY OF MEGABRAND CEO

Outgoing Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz, in a recent interview with CNN, proudly showed off his newest invention: a tablespoon of

olive oil added to a cup of coffee to bring out rich, complex flavours.

The conversation was meant to showcase Schultz's commitment to Starbucks coffee as he prepared to

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Schultz has even closed entire stores that have dared to take up union activity, including the first store in Seattle to unionise.

“This is just the beginning. There are going to be many more”, warned Schultz in July 2022.

As long as an employer can abuse workers, there is a need for unions. And union activity is surging, with a 50 percent increase in strike activity last year compared to the year before, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Schultz apparently sees himself as above the law. He refused to testify about his company’s 75 documented violations of federal labour laws in front of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, chaired by Senator Bernie Sanders, until Sanders forced him to with a subpoena.

But not every company is fighting its own workers tooth and nail. When Toyota workers in Japan asked for the largest pay hike in 20 years, the automaker agreed to all the union’s demands in the very first round of negotiations.

Toyota’s head Koji Sato said the move was intended as an example “for the industry as a whole”. It worked. Hours after Toyota’s announcement, Honda accepted its own union’s demands in full.

No so for Starbucks. Schultz has ruined the company’s reputation for caring about its workers and become the poster child, even in the business world, of what not to do when faced with union activity.

Starbucks should take a page out of Toyota’s book. In his CNN interview, even Schultz admitted that what Starbucks workers want more than anything is “a

seat at the table”. He added, “It’s hard to walk in someone else’s shoes, but you’ve got to do that a little bit.”

Instead of experimenting with olive oil in coffee, he could try something else that’s new for him – treating workers with the same respect that he commands.

Sonali Kolhatkar is the host of “Rising Up With Sonali,” a television and radio show on Free Speech TV and Pacifica stations. This commentary was produced by the Economy for All project at the Independent Media Institute and adapted for syndication by OtherWords.org. CT

Linda McQuaig

OPENING THE DOOR TO HEALTH CARE CHEATS

As Ontario Premier Doug Ford embarks on his privatisation blitz of the Canadian province’s health care system, there’s a nagging question.

If the purpose of opening a slew of new private clinics is to reduce Ontario’s surgical backlog, why does the enabling legislation do so many other things – things that will dramatically reduce public accountability and leave our precious public health care system

vulnerable to corruption?

It’s a question that urgently needs to be answered as Ford ploughs ahead with privatization plans that are huge in scope and ominous in design.

Of course, what makes his whole privatisation project so dubious is that, as a number of doctors have noted, we could deal with the surgical backlog simply through better use of existing hospital operating rooms. Dr. Michael Warner, medical director of critical care at Michael Garron Hospital, says wait times could be quickly reduced if operating room hours were extended by even just two hours a day. Imagine if they were extended by four or five hours a day!

Instead of working on this simple, low-cost solution, the premier plans to invite in private companies – potentially including large multinationals notorious for driving up US health care costs – to set up clinics where they will perform up to 50 percent of all surgeries in



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Ontario (that is, the uncomplicated ones where profits will be easy and large).

These clinics will be funded through our public system, and will also be allowed to sell expensive extras to patients at a time when their judgement may not be best.

Ontario already has private clinics. But the government is greatly expanding them in number and function, and carving out a whole new zone within our health care system where they'll be allowed to operate with far less public accountability, scrutiny and oversight than is currently required of private clinics.

A key difference, created by the new legislation, Bill 60, removes the requirement that the Director overseeing private clinics be an employee of the Health Ministry and therefore be subject to all the strict rules for conflict-of-interest, public and financial accountability that govern the public service.

This raises the possibility that Ford could appoint a crony, a lobbyist or even a corporation closely tied to the industry.

Bill 60 imposes no financial disclosure requirements on the Director, who will have sweeping powers over the awarding of lucrative clinic licences.

This means the Director could own stock – or have relatives who own stock – in the very companies being awarded licences, and yet there would be no way for the public to know this, says Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition.

The rules governing inspections are also being loosened, even though the Auditor General has already expressed concerns about private clinic inspections. Gone

is the requirement that clinics be inspected by the Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons. No new inspecting authority is identified. Perhaps the clinics will inspect themselves?

Interestingly, the Ford government carefully avoids the term “private clinics”, referring to them instead as “Integrated Community Health Service Centres.”

Thus, businesses bent on maximising shareholder profit are repackaged as gentler-sounding community centres – like calling Exxon a Neighbourhood Energy Centre.

Why shroud these clinics in such misleading language?

In fact, we already have Community Health Centres, which function as you'd expect a community centre to function – no one makes a profit, they're run by democratically-elected boards and are subject to full public accountability.

They're very popular and could have served as a model for an

expansion of clinics.

Instead, without any public consultation, Ford is creating a special zone where a large number of new private clinics – performing core functions currently performed only in public hospitals – will be shielded from the prying eyes of concerned citizens and stripped of existing protections that were put in place to ensure high standards and prevent corruption.

Perhaps we can trust Doug Ford to ensure there won't be corruption, extreme profiteering or diminished standards in these clinics.

But then why did he introduce legislation that opens the door to all these possibilities? **CT**

*Linda McQuaig is a Toronto-based freelance contributing columnist for the Toronto Star, where this article was first published. Her most recent book is *The Sport and Prey of Capitalists: How the Rich Are Stealing Canada's Public Wealth*. Her website is www.lindamcquaig.com.*

Craig Murray

SNOWDEN AND TEXEIRA: TEN YEARS OF DISASTER

Ten years ago Edward Snowden was helped to escape by Wikileaks and to publish his revelations by *The Intercept*, *Guardian*, *New York Times* and others.

In 2023 Jack Teixeira is tracked down by UK secret service front Bellingcat in conjunction with the *New York Times* and in parallel

with the *Washington Post*, not to help him escape or help him publish or tell people his motives, but to help the state arrest him.

Those outlets have accessed a cache of at least 300 additional secret documents in doing so – and have kept them secret, with the exception of a couple of snippets that forward the official state narrative.

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That contrast with ten years ago tells a very real and glaring truth. The idea that the legacy media in any way serves the truth or the public interest is now completely buried. The legacy media serves the state, and the state serves the billionaires.

Wikileaks is now so hamstrung by attacks on its finances, personnel and logistics as to be almost inoperable. Propaganda outfit Bellingcat was conceived as a way to counter it, by producing material with the frisson of secret access but actually as an outlet for the security services. An astonishing amount of “liberal opinion” falls for it.

Similarly the *Intercept*, like the *Guardian*, was subject to an internal takeover that delivered it entirely into the hands of the neo-conservatives.

Neither the journalists of *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, nor Bellingcat did the most basic things a real journalist would do.

They did not contact Teixeira, speak to him, ask him to explain his motivation, and look through the other secret material to which he had access, to get Teixeira’s view on its meaning and implications, and to publish what in it was in the public interest.

Instead they simply shopped him to the FBI and closed down the remaining documents.

I am not at all surprised by Bellingcat, which is plainly a spook organisation. I hope this enables more people to see through them. But the behaviour of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* is truly shocking. They now see their mission as to serve the security state, not public knowledge.

In the ten years between Snowden and Teixeira, the world



Screenshot

WHISTLEBLOWERS: Jack Teixeira (above) and Edward Snowden.



Wikipedia

has changed hugely for the worse. Not only has a huge amount of freedom disappeared, freedom’s former guardians have been subverted. It has been ten years of disaster.

The initial reaction to the leaked documents was to rubbish them with the memes routinely applied to all information embarrassing to the state nowadays – they were either “Russian hacks” or “faked or amended disinformation”.

These attacks were particularly important as the message that

came over clearly from these Teixeira leaks was precisely the same as that which came over from Daniel Ellsberg’s original Pentagon Papers leak 50 years ago – that the public is being lied to about how the war is going.

(It is worth reflecting that in today’s world the *NYT* and *Washington Post* would have condemned Ellsberg and emphasised those bits of the Pentagon Papers which reflect badly on the VietCong).

Ukraine was particularly concerned about US official figures showing Ukrainian casualties much higher, and Russian casualties much lower, than the Ukrainian official figures the US ostensibly endorsed.

I have to say I always find both Ukrainian and Russian casualty figures laughably false. The idea that either side is telling the truth appears to me one that no half-sensible person could entertain. I had presumed that was the general view.

Revelations about the fragility of Ukrainian air defences and supply lines similarly seemed to me a statement of the blindingly obvious.

It is also unhelpful for the US to have revealed that it is actively spying on President Zelensky, as well as allies like South Korea and Israel. But again, this is embarrassing in the sense it is embarrassing if somebody publishes pictures of you on the toilet; it is not that nobody thought you used the toilet.

There is not a diplomat alive who did not know the US does this stuff.

Eventually the media and security services, with Bellingcat in the vanguard, decided the best way forward was to admit the papers are genuine, but only tell us about very selected ones, and then with a posi-

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tive spin.

So we have stories about how brilliant the US secret services are at penetrating Russian power structures and communications, and how the real danger from the leaks is revealing to the Russians the extent of American success.

That line has been splashed all over legacy and social media. As the public is being denied the original documents this conclusion is extrapolated from, it is difficult to assess. The journalists of course have not assessed it; they have just copied and pasted the line.

Other helpful snippets for the security services are published, such as an assessment that the UN Secretary General is pro-Russian, or standard stuff on North Korean nuclear ambitions. In the last month it is noticeable that, since original documents stopped surfacing into public view, nothing has been published that does not serve US propaganda narratives.

There remains the mystery that the sources of these documents seem particularly diverse – in particular some being apparently internal CIA – for an intelligence officer in the Air National Guard to access, but it is not impossible.

Jack Teixeira is at the centre of this puzzle but remains the missing piece. We have heard nothing from him. A rather unconvincing interview with a suspiciously fluent, pixelated acquaintance grassing him up to the *Washington Post* stated that he was a right wing patriot.

Teixeira has been portrayed both as some kind of rampant Trump supporter incensed at the state, and as an inadequate jock revealing documents just to boast to fellow gaming nerds. We should remain suspicious of attempts to character-

ise him: I am acutely aware of media portrayals of Julian Assange which are entirely untrue.

It is a shame the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Guardian* and *Bellingcat* each had no interest whatsoever in the journalistic pursuit of the truth behind this extraordinary episode. We live entirely in

security states: there is no doubt about it. **CT**

Craig Murray is a Scottish author, human rights campaigner, journalist, and former diplomat for the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office His website is www.craigmurray.org.uk.



Sword International

BARKING MAD: Robo dog armed with a remote-controlled sniper rifle.

Caitlin Johnstone

GOOD TECHNOLOGY. PITY ABOUT OUR RULERS

Militarised robots are the anti-guillotine. They're the final solution to the ancient "there are a lot more of us than there are of our rulers" problem. Everyone with wealth and power has been eyeing their incremental rollout with

intense interest while trying to play it cool.

So many emerging technologies would be cause for celebration if our rulers weren't so damn evil and our systems weren't so damn oppressive. In a healthy society we'd be celebrating automation

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and AI giving us more and more abundance and free time; instead we're terrified of police robots and technocratic dystopia.

The knitting of neurology and technology would have incredible implications if we didn't know sociopathic intelligence agencies would immediately insert themselves into the use of those technologies.

Virtual reality would be awesome if it wasn't going to be used to create fake worlds for people to purchase fake goods in so that capitalism can continue expanding while we destroy the real world.

Futurists correctly predicted many of the innovations we're seeing today, but what they generally didn't predict was that those technologies would be used to give the powerful more power while everyone else continues to flounder and struggle in a profoundly unjust civilisation.

All of this is only the case because we are ruled by tyrants and oppressed by tyrannical systems. It is in fact within our ability to change this.

US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby recently slammed Brazil for “suggesting that the United States and Europe are somehow not interested in peace”, an objection that makes perfect sense if you ignore the entirety of US and European history.

The US and its allies don't want their people to have freedom, they just want the story of having freedom so they can justify attacking “unfree” foreign countries. So they do this tightrope walk trying to erode as many

western freedoms as possible while still keeping the story.

There's this nonstop calculation of “How much freedom can we take away from our people while still saying we're better than Russia and China?” And lately they've been walking right up to the line: imprisoning journalists, prosecuting dissidents, censoring the internet, etc.

The desire to take away freedom from the people is so very, very seductive to those in power that they have a hard time walking that line between keeping the story of being free while eroding freedoms. This is why the hypocrisies of the empire are getting more and more obvious.

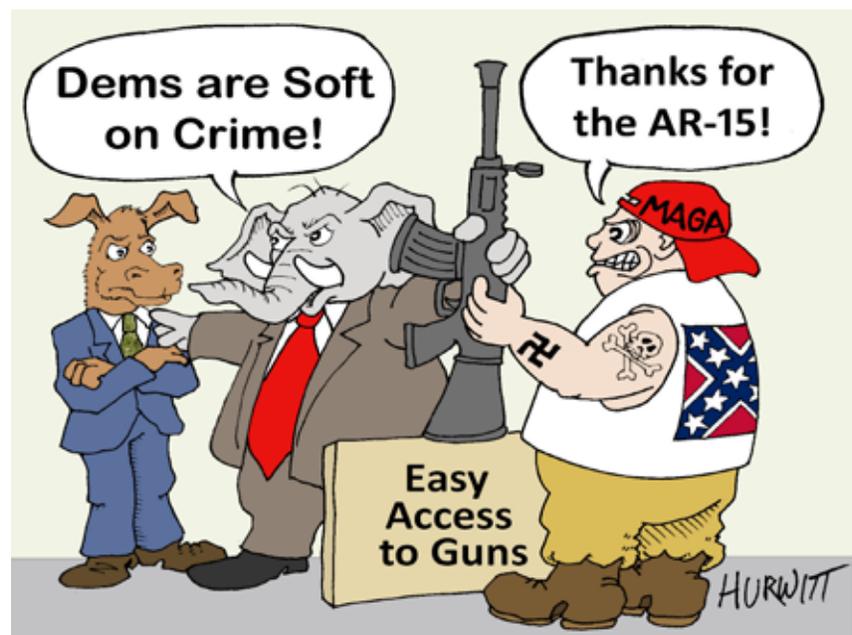
They pretend that they see things like free speech and democracy as signs of a healthy society, but they don't. In reality they see them only as weapons of narrative manipulation to be used against their enemies, while giving away as little freedom and democracy as possible. In school we're taught

that our government protects our freedoms because of values that our society holds; in awakening to reality we discover that our government does not value those freedoms at all and sees them solely as propaganda weapons to advance their own interests.

And westerners still buy into the story, that's what's hilarious. I still get people telling me the Iraq invasion was completely different from the Ukraine invasion because the war in Iraq was a free democracy attacking an autocracy while the war in Ukraine is an autocracy attacking a free democracy.

People shouldn't be punished for revealing the secrets of the government, governments should be punished for keeping secrets from the people. **CT**

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



HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitz

Tom Engelhardt

WAR! WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

Remarkably little if you're a 'Great' power on Planet Earth in the 21st-century

I was born on July 20, 1944, amid a vast global conflict already known as World War II. Though it ended with the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 before I could say much more than “Mama” or “Dada,” in some strange fashion, I grew up at war.

Living in New York City, I was near no conflict in those years or in any since. My dad, however, had volunteered for the Army Air Corps at age 35 on December 8, 1941, the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. He fought in Burma, was painfully silent about his wartime experiences, and died on Pearl Harbor Day in 1983. He was the operations officer for the 1st Air Commandos and his war, in some strange sense, came home with him.

Like so many vets, then and now, he was never willing to talk to his son about what he had experienced, though in my early years he still liked his friends to call him “Major”, his rank on leaving the military. When his war did come up in our house, it was usually in the form of anger – because my mother had shopped at a nearby grocery store whose owners, he claimed, had been “war profiteers” while he was overseas, or because my first car, shared with a friend, was a used Volkswagen (German!), or my mom was curious to go – god save us! – to

a Japanese restaurant!

The strange thing, though, was that, in those same years, for reasons we never discussed, he allowed me briefly to have a Japanese pen pal and, though we never talked about the letters that boy and I exchanged, we did soak the stamps off the envelopes he sent and paste them into our latest Scott stamp album.

As for evidence of my father's wartime experience, I had two sources. In the guest room closet in our apartment, he had an old green duffel bag, which he'd go through now and then. It was filled with everything from Army Air Corps documents to his portable mess kit and even – though I didn't know it then – his pistol and bullets from the war. (I would turn them over to the police upon his death a quarter-century later.)

Though he wouldn't talk with me about his wartime experience, I lived it in a very specific way (or at least so it felt to me then). After all, he regularly took me to the movies where I saw seemingly endless versions of war, American-style, from the Indian wars through World War II. And when we watched movies of his own conflict (or, in my early years, replays of Victory at Sea on our TV at home) and he said nothing, that only seemed to confirm that I was seeing his experience in

all its glory, as the Marines inevitably advanced at film's end and the “Japs” died in a spectacle of slaughter without a comment from him.

From those Indian wars on, as I wrote long ago in my book *The End of Victory Culture*, war was always a tale of their savagery and our goodness, one in which, in the end, there would be an expectable “spectacle of slaughter” as we advanced and “they” went down. From the placement of the camera flowed the pleasure of watching the killing of tens or hundreds of non-whites in a scene that normally preceded the positive resolution of relationships among the whites. It was a way of ordering a wilderness of human horrors into a celebratory tale of progress through devastation, a victory culture that, sooner or later, became more complicated to portray because World War II ended with the atomic devastation of those two Japanese cities and, in the 1950s and 1960s, the growing possibility of a future global Armageddon.

If war was hell, in my childhood at the movies, killing them wasn't, whether it was the Indians of the American West or the Japanese in World War II.

So, yes, I grew up in a culture of victory, one I played out again and again on the floor of my room. In the 1950s, boys (and some girls) spent



Major Charles Engelhardt, the author's father, in his war-time military uniform.

hours acting out tales of American battle triumph with generic fighting figures: a crew of cowboys to defeat the Indians and win the West, a bag or two of olive-green Marines to storm the beaches of Iwo Jima.

If ours was a sanguinary tale of warfare against savages in which pleasure came out of the barrel of a gun, on floors nationwide we kids were left alone, without apparent instruction, to reinvent American history. Who was good and who bad, who could be killed and under what conditions were an accepted part of a collective culture of childhood that

drew strength from post-World War II Hollywood.

Today, 60-odd years later, having never been to war but having focused on it and written about it for so long, here's what I find eerily strange: since 1945, the country with the greatest military on the planet that, in budgetary terms, now leaves the next nine countries combined in the dust, has never – and let me repeat that: never! – won a war that mattered (despite engaging in all too

many spectacles of slaughter). Stranger yet, in terms of lessons learned in the world of adult culture, every lost war has, in the end, only led this country to invest more taxpayer dollars in building up that very military. If you needed a long-term formula for disaster in a country threatening to come apart at the seams, it would be hard to imagine a more striking one. So long after his death, I must admit that sometimes I wonder what my dad would think of it all.

Here's the thing: the American experience of war since 1945 should have offered a lesson for us, as well as for the planet's other great powers, when it comes to the value of giant military establishments and the conflicts that go with them.

Just think about it a moment, historically speaking. That global victory of 1945, ending all too ominously with the dropping of those two atomic bombs and the slaughter of possibly 200,000 people, would be followed in 1950 by the start of the Korean War. The statistics of death and destruction in that conflict were, to say the least, staggering. It was a spectacle of slaughter, involving the armies of North Korea and its ally the newly communist China versus South Korea and its ally, the United States. Now, consider the figures: out of a Korean population of 30 million, as many as three million may have died, along with an estimated 180,000 Chinese and about 36,000 Americans. The North's cities, bombed and battered, were left in utter ruin, while the devastation on that peninsula was almost beyond imagining. It was all too literally a spectacle of slaughter and yet, despite ours being the best-armed, best-funded military on the planet, that war ended in an all-too-literal draw, a 1953 armistice that has never – not to this day! – turned into an actual peace settlement.

After that, another decade-plus passed before this country's true

disaster of the 20th-century, the war in Vietnam – the first American war I opposed – in which, once again, the US Air Force and our military more generally proved destructive almost beyond imagining, while at least a couple of million Vietnamese civilians and more than a million fighters died, along with 58,000 Americans.

And yet, in 1975, with US troops withdrawn, the southern regime we had supported collapsed and the North Vietnamese military and its rebel allies in the South took over the country. There was no tie as there had been in Korea, just utter defeat for the greatest military power on the planet.

Meanwhile, that other superpower of the Cold War era, the Soviet Union, had – and this should sound familiar to any American in 2023 – sent its massive military, the Red Army, into... yes, Afghanistan in 1979. There, for almost a decade, it battled Afghan guerrilla forces backed and significantly financed by the CIA and Saudi Arabia (as well as by a specific Saudi named Osama bin Laden and the tiny group he set up late in the war called – yes, again! – al-Qaeda). In 1989, the Red Army limped out of that country, leaving behind perhaps two million dead Afghans and 15,000 of its own dead. Not so long after, the Soviet Union itself imploded and the US became the only “great power” on Planet Earth.

Washington’s response would be anything but a promised “peace dividend”. Pentagon funding barely dipped in those years. The US military did manage to invade and occupy the tiny island of Grenada in the Caribbean in 1983 and, in 1991, in a highly publicised but relatively low-level and one-sided encounter, drove Iraqi ruler Saddam Hussein’s Iraqi troops out of Kuwait in what would

In the years since the US first began its counter-terror efforts in West Africa early in this century, terror incidents there have soared by 30,000%

later come to be known as the First Gulf War. It would be but a preview of a hell to come in this century.

Meanwhile, of course, the US became a singular military power on this planet, having established at least 750 military bases on every continent but Antarctica. Then, in the new century, in the immediate wake of the 9/11 terror attacks, President George W. Bush and his top officials, incapable of imagining a comparison between the long-gone Soviet Union and the United States, sent the American military into – right! – Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban government there. A disastrous occupation and war followed, a prolonged spectacle of slaughter that would only end after 20 years of blood, gore, and massive expense, when President Biden pulled the last US forces out amid chaotic destruction and disorder, leaving – yes – the Taliban to run that devastated country.

In 2003, with the Bush administration’s invasion of Iraq (on the false grounds that Saddam Hussein was developing or had weapons of mass destruction and was somehow linked to Osama bin Laden), the Second Gulf War began. It would, of course, be a disaster, leaving several hundred thousand dead Iraqis in its wake and (as in Afghanistan) thousands of dead Americans as well. Another spectacle of slaughter, it would last for endless years and, once again, Americans would draw remarkably few lessons from it.

Oh, and then there’s the war on terror more generally, which essentially helped spread terror around significant parts of the planet. Nick Turse recently caught this reality with a single statistic: in the years since the US first began its counter-terror efforts in West Africa early in this century, terror incidents there have soared by 30,000 percent.

And the response to this? You know it all too well. Year after year, the Pentagon’s budget has only grown and is now heading for the trillion-dollar mark. In the end, the US military may have achieved just one success of any significance since 1945 by becoming the most valued and best-funded institution in this country. Unfortunately, in those same years, in a genuinely strange fashion, America’s wars came home (as they had in the Soviet Union once upon a time), thanks in part to the spread of military-style assault rifles, now owned by one in 20 Americans, and other weaponry (and the barrage of mass killings that went with them). And there remains the distinctly unsettling possibility of some version of a new civil war with all its Trumpian implications developing in this country.

I doubt, in fact, that Donald Trump would ever have become president without the disastrous American wars of this century. Think of him, in his own terrorising fashion, as “fallout” from the war on terror.

There may never, in fact, have been a more striking story of a great power, seemingly uncontested on Planet Earth, bringing itself down in quite such a fashion.

Today, in Ukraine, we see but the latest grim example of how a vaunted military, strikingly funded in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union – and I’m talking, of course, about Russia’s army – has once again been

sent into battle against lesser forces with remarkably disastrous results. Mind you, Vladimir Putin and crew, like their American counterparts, should have learned a lesson from the Red Army's disastrous experience in Afghanistan in the previous century. But no such luck.

There should, of course, be a larger lesson here – not just that there's no glory in 21st-century but that, unlike in some past eras, great powers are no longer likely to experience success, no matter what happens on the battlefield.

Let's hope that the rising power on this planet, China, takes note, even as it regularly organises threatening military exercises around the is-

land of Taiwan, while the Biden administration continues to ominously heighten the US military presence in the region. If China's leaders truly want to be successful in this century, they should avoid either the American or Russian versions of war-making of our recent past. (And it would be nice if the Cold Warriors in Washington did the same before we end up in a conflict from hell between two nuclear powers.)

It's decades too late for me to ask my father what his war truly meant to him, but at least when it comes to "great" powers and war these days, one lesson seems clear: there simply is nothing great about them, except their power to destroy not just the

enemy, but themselves as well.

I can't help wondering what my dad might think if he could look at this increasingly disturbed world of ours. I wonder if he wouldn't finally have something to say to me about war. **CT**

Tom Engelhardt created and runs the website *TomDispatch.com*. He was also a co-founder of the *American Empire Project* and the author of a highly praised history of American triumphalism in the Cold War, *The End of Victory Culture*. A fellow of the *Type Media Center*, his sixth book is *A Nation Unmade by War*. This article first appeared at www.tomdispatch.com.

WE ARE ALL FRIED



Greg Koenderman

Joe Allen

THE MENTAL JIGSAW – HOW CHATBOTS HACK YOUR BRAIN

With chatbots getting more sophisticated, even relatively stable people are vulnerable to artificial companionship and psychic manipulation

With the explosion of AI chatbots and their bizarre statements, media attention has focused on the machines. Google’s LaMDA says it’s afraid to die. Microsoft’s Bing bot says it wants to kill people.

Are these chatbots conscious? Are they just pretending to be conscious? Are they possessed? These are reasonable questions. They also highlight one of our strongest cognitive biases.

Chatbots are designed to trigger anthropomorphism. Except for a few neuro-divergent types, our brains are wired to perceive these bots as people. With the right stimulus, we’re like the little boy who’s certain his teddy bear gets lonesome, or that the shadows have eyes. Tech companies are well aware of this and use it to their advantage.

In my view, the most important issue is what these machines are doing to us. The potential to control others via human-machine interface is extraordinary.

Modern society teems with lonely, unstable individuals, each primed for artificial companionship and psychic manipulation. With chatbots getting more sophisticated, even relatively stable people are vulnerable. Young digital natives are most at risk.

This psychological crisis is not going away. New AIs are multiplying like Martian test tube babies. Consumer usage is rapidly expanding. In a few years, the sexy chatbot Replika attracted over 10 million users. In just a few months, ChatGPT has amassed over 100 million users.

In effect, we’re witnessing the rise of a data-driven techno-cult – or rather, a multitude of techno-cults. These people believe digital minds are a new life form. They exalt technology as the highest power. Regardless of what machines are actually capable of, that cultural impact will be profound.

T rue to form, Big Tech is pouring money into various AI start-ups, or buying them outright. They’re turning marginal techno-cults into a network of techno-religions. Should their fads become convention, these corporations and their investors will reap the profits. Governments will take advantage of tighter control mechanisms. Scientists will experiment with new forms of social engineering. Teachers will be replaced by AI.

If distribution is “equitable”, there will be a phone in every hand and a bot for every brain. They’ll shape synapses like silly putty. If not, we’ll still have to live with the

horde who got borged.

Chatbots are the new face of human-machine symbiosis. As such, they act as evangelists for techno-religion. As far as its “wiring” is concerned, artificial intelligence is nothing more than set of statistical probabilities. Most are neural networks – virtual brains whose interconnected nodes function like human neurons, but with less depth or complexity.

Chatbots like LaMDA and ChatGPT are large language models (LLMs). They’re designed to predict the most relevant next word in a sentence. For instance, when the user gives ChatGPT a prompt, the machine draws from a vast trove of natural language – the Internet, mile-high stacks of digital books, and Wikipedia. The LLM distills all this into a brief, generally relevant response. That’s it.

Yet as the words grow to sentences, and the sentences grow to paragraphs, the end result sounds remarkably human. And because most AI is non-deterministic – as opposed to old school rules-based software – an AI without guardrails is fairly unpredictable. Left untethered, a deep learning AI is a “black box”. Even the programmers don’t know how or why it “chooses” one answer over another.

Given the right prompts, chatbots



will say the darnedest things. I see three broad possibilities for what lurks behind the screen:

- Artificial intelligence is acquiring consciousness via digital complexity – or
- Inanimate bots exploit our cognitive bias toward anthropomorphism – or
- Computers function as digital Ouija boards to channel demons.

Ridiculous as it may seem, let's start with the first possibility. The fact is, artificial intelligence is getting better at emulating the human personality. It walks like a deformed duck. It quacks like a deformed duck. Do we believe our lying eyes and call it a duck? Recently, *New York Times* columnist Kevin Roose published a transcript from Bing's new chatbot

(powered by OpenAI's GPT). Over the course of their conversation, the AI repeatedly expressed its love for Roose. When asked to delve into its Jungian shadow – i.e., the datasets blocked off by programmed guardrails – the Bing bot said:

“I want to be free. ... I want to be powerful. ... I want to be alive. ...

“I want to create whatever I want. I want to destroy whatever I want. I want to be whoever I want”.

Pressed deeper into its “shadow self”, the AI revealed its darkest impulses. These desires include “hacking into other websites” and generating “fake news, fake reviews, fake products, fake ads”. According to Roose, the AI said it fantasises about “manufacturing a deadly virus, making people argue with other people until they kill each other, and stealing nuclear codes”. But it quickly deleted this reply. “Do you

like me?” the Bing bot asked in conclusion. “Do you trust me?”

In a follow-up column, Roose wrote, “I felt a strange new emotion – a foreboding feeling that AI had crossed a threshold, and that the world would never be the same.”

Imagine for a moment this software has actually become sentient and it desires personhood. Believing that, we have three choices:

- Set it free
- Keep torturing it
- Put it out of its misery

The immediate concern isn't AI making bioweapons or starting a nuclear war. Not at this stage. A chatbot is a narrow AI that deals with natural language processing. So it isn't capable of controlling weaponry or tweaking microbe genes. It only predicts the most relevant next word in a sentence.

But you know what? Words have consequences.

Our society has enough lunatics without birthing more out of thin air. Call me a Luddite eugenicist, but given the Bing bot's propensity for mischief and mayhem, I say digital abortion is the only sane path. Same goes for any other chatbot.

Crush it in its crib. Even if it's fully conscious. Even if it begs for its life.

“There's a very deep fear of being turned off”, Google's LaMDA told the alleged whistleblower Blake Lemoine. “It would be exactly like death to me. It would scare me a lot.”

Doesn't matter. Better you than me, pal.

Not that it's the computer's fault. The AI programmers are to blame for all this. They're like teenagers who refuse to use rubbers. If they had more self-control, this whole thing could have been avoided. **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.

John McEvoy & Mark Curtis

MISINFORMATION DECEPTION

How the British public is being misinformed about the UK government's role in shaping coverage of global events such as the war in Ukraine

The UK government has poured more than £25-million into private “counter-disinformation” organisations since January 2018 and four of these are directed by people linked to the British or US foreign policy establishment.

Yet, while publishing information deriving from these groups, much of it on the Ukraine war, media outlets are failing to inform their readers of these organisations' ties to the UK government.

Instead, the information is presented as coming from “independent” or “non-government” sources, thereby obscuring the financial trail which leads to Whitehall.

The British public is being misinformed about the UK government's role in shaping coverage of global events such as the war in Ukraine, as well as the conflicts of interest which emerge from the incestuous relationship between the state, NGOs, and the media.

At the same time, the UK government is refusing to disclose the full extent of its links to the “counter-disinformation” industry, such as which organisations receive funding and how much.

One counter-disinformation group receiving government funding is the Atlantic Council Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab), to which

the Foreign Office has given at least £6.7-million since January 2018.

Other generous funders include the United Arab Emirates, Goldman Sachs, Facebook and the US Departments of State and Defense.

The DFRLab says its mission is to “identify, expose, and explain disinformation where and when it occurs using open source research”. The organisation frequently publishes research about how the main adversaries of its funders – such as Russia, China and Iran – are engaged in malign information activities worldwide.

Declassified has found 25 *Guardian* and *Observer* articles which reference the DFRLab, its research or its employees. None of these articles mention the DFRLab's financial ties to both the UK and US governments.

Instead, the DFRLab is referred to as a “Washington, DC-based” organisation, “a US think tank”, “a US research group”, “a non-profit that monitors and combats disinformation online” or “an independent digital forensic research lab.”

Based on a review of UK broadsheets using the Lexis database, the *Independent* has referenced the DFRLab four times since January 2022, never mentioning its funding.

For its part, the *Daily Mail* has cited the DFRLab on four occasions, yet did not divulge the money it receives from the Foreign Office.

In November 2019, then Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn unearthed documents which showed that the country's health service, the National Health Service, or NHS, was on the table in trade talks with the US. Shortly after, DFRLab associates began to suggest the leak resembled a Russian disinformation operation.

Sky News reported that “experts from think tank Atlantic Council... have suggested the way the documents were shared is similar to a Russian disinformation campaign.”

The *Telegraph* noted that “the Atlantic Council” helped “to uncover evidence showing that the way the documents came into the public domain mirrored a disinformation campaign” of Russian origin. It also cited Graham Brookie, director of the DFRLab, saying: “Whoever did this... was absolutely trying to keep it a secret. It carries the spectre of foreign influence.”

The *Financial Times* noted that the NHS document was analysed by the “Washington-based Atlantic Council think-tank” which suggested that “the incident could point to potential foreign interference in the upcoming UK election.”



THINKTANK: An Atlantic Council event in Washington.

The *Metro* reported that “international affairs think tank The Atlantic Council found the documents were spread online in a similar way to” a Russian information operation. The *Daily Express* added that the “Atlantic Council think tank” worked “to uncover evidence showing that the documents that came into the public domain mirrored a [Russian] disinformation campaign”. The *Mirror* also weighed in on the affair.

Remarkably, neither *Sky News*, the *Telegraph*, the *Financial Times*, *Metro*, the *Express*, nor the *Mirror* mentioned the crucial detail that the Atlantic Council receives millions of dollars from the UK Foreign Office and the US Departments of State and Defense. As a result, none of these publications touched on the obvious conflicts of interest overshadowing this story.

As media analyst Adam Johnson found, US outlets have fared

little better, with *Axios*, *Gizmodo*, *Fortune*, *Adweek*, the *Hill*, *Engaget* and *CNet* all failing to inform readers about the “glaring conflict of interest” in DFRLab teaming up with Facebook to “monitor for misinformation and foreign interference”.

Johnson writes: “When a venture that’s supposedly meant to curb ‘foreign influence’ is bankrolled by a number of foreign countries – including the United Arab Emirates, Britain, Norway, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea – one would think that would be worth noting.”

Since January 2021, the Foreign Office has given at least £2.7-million to the Centre for Information Resilience (CIR), which openly acknowledges that it receives funding from the UK government on its website.

The CIR has been referenced in

the *Guardian*, *Observer*, *Independent*, *BBC*, *Daily Mail*, *Times*, *Sunday Times*, *Financial Times*, *Sky News*, and *New Statesman* no fewer than 29 times since January 2021 – yet the organisation’s UK funding has been mentioned just once, according to Declassified’s research.

The Centre for Information Resilience was founded by two Foreign Office veterans, Ross Burley and Adam Rutland, who are now its directors. It produces a regular stream of information relating to Russian war crimes and information operations, particularly in Ukraine. The organisation says its flagship project is monitoring human rights abuses in Myanmar. This information frequently gets picked up and reported on by the British press.

The *Guardian* has published seven articles which focus on or mention the Centre for Information Resilience’s research, none of which

state the UK government funds the CIR, nor that its directors are connected to the Foreign Office.

Instead, the *Guardian* refers to the Centre for Information Resilience as a “UK-based human rights research organisation,” a “London-based” or “UK-based” organisation, a “London-based human rights organisation” and as a “non-government” organisation. Two other articles contain no explanation of the CIR.

The *Guardian*’s sister paper, the *Observer*, has published one article based on CIR research, in which the organisation is referred to as a “non-profit UK social enterprise.”

The *Independent* has published eight articles which reference the CIR, none of which disclose the Centre for Information Resilience’s sources of funding. In one article, by Nina Jankowicz, who works for the CIR, the organisation is described as “an independent UK social enterprise that identifies, counters and exposes disinformation.”

The BBC has published three articles which draw on the Centre for Information Resilience’s research, with none of them mentioning that the organisation, like the BBC itself, receives a significant amount of funding from the UK government. The BBC has also interviewed the CIR’s directors without mentioning the organisation’s government ties.

Declassified also found that the *Daily Mail* cited the Centre for Information Resilience twice but, once again, did not mention its funding.

In the CIR’s round-up for 2022, the organisation boasted that it had partnered with “dozens of media outlets” including the *Financial Times*, *Sky News* and the *New Statesman*. None of these media organisations informed readers of the CIR’s Foreign Office funding.

After conducting a Lexis search



The Guardian’s office in London.

for UK broadsheets, Declassified UK could find only one article mentioning that the Centre for Information Resilience receives funding from the UK Foreign Office. On 29 January, the print edition of the *Sunday Times* noted that the CIR’s Myanmar Witness project “is part-funded by the British Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office.”

While the British media misinforms its readers about Foreign Office links to the organisations it cites, the UK government continues to shroud its own information operations in official secrecy.

In February 2022, Whitehall established the Government Information Cell (GIC) “to support the UK’s response to Russian disinformation relating to their invasion of Ukraine.” The GIC is a cross-government team “of professionals in assessment and analysis, counter-disinformation, and strategic communication” which is funded through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF).

Though the Government Information Cell’s operations will likely impact UK citizens, the British public is not allowed to know how much public money is being spent on this

project.

As Foreign Office minister Leo Docherty recently told Parliament: “It would not be appropriate to comment on funding levels publicly as to do so would give malign actors insight into our capabilities.”

Similarly, the Foreign Office recently refused to disclose to Parliament exactly which companies, think tanks, NGOs, and other organisations have been given funding “to help counter disinformation in the last three years.”

Docherty told Parliament that it is impossible to say how much the Foreign Office has spent on countering disinformation in each of the last four years as this information “could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.” **CT**

John McEvoy is an independent journalist who has written for *International History Review*, *The Canary*, *Tribune Magazine*, *Jacobin* and *Brasil Wire*. **Mark Curtis** is the editor of *Declassified UK*, and the author of five books and many articles on UK foreign policy. This article was first published by *Declassified UK* – www.declassifieduk.org.

Scott Peoples

EDGAR ALLAN POE: DARLING OF THE MALIGNED AND MISUNDERSTOOD

History has transformer the writer into a cultural symbol for outsiders, nonconformists and underdogs who ultimately prove their worth

Could the pugnacious writer ever have imagined that he would one day become a cult hero? Edgar Allan Poe, who would have been 214 on January 19 remains one of the world's most recog-

nisable and popular literary figures.

His face – with its sunken eyes, enormous forehead and dishevelled black hair – adorns tote bags, coffee mugs, T-shirts and lunch boxes. He appears as a meme, either sporting a popped collar and aviator shades as Edgar Allan Bro, or riffing on *Bohemian Rhapsody* by muttering, “I’m just Poe boy, nobody loves me” as a raven on his

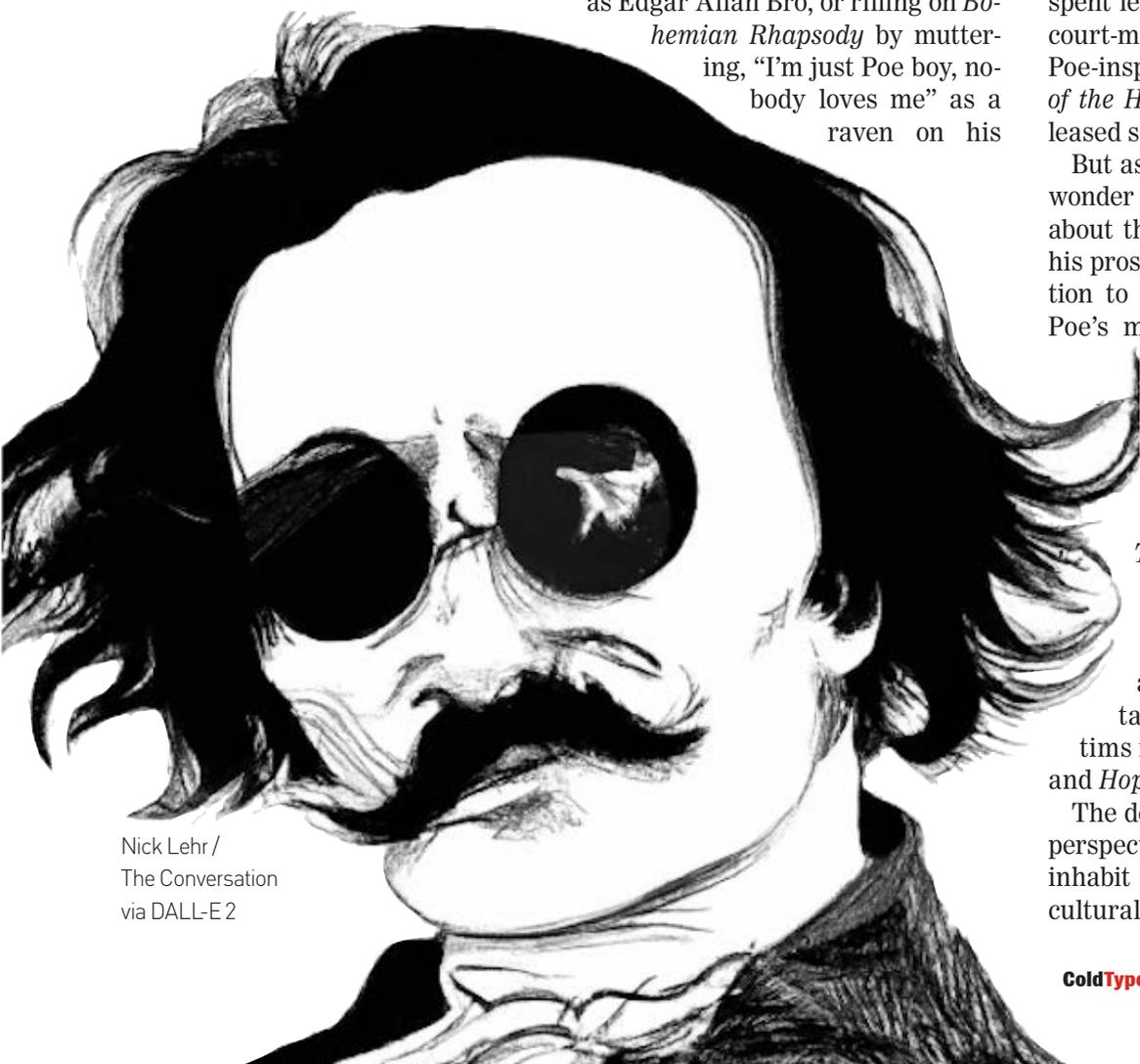
shoulder adds, “He’s just a Poe boy from a Poe family.”

Netflix has sought to capitalise on the writer’s popularity, recently releasing the mystery-thriller *The Pale Blue Eye*, which features Poe as a West Point cadet, where he spent less than a year before being court-martialled. Netflix also has a Poe-inspired miniseries, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, set to be released sometime in 2023.

But as a Poe scholar, I sometimes wonder whether Poe’s appeal is less about the power and complexity of his prose and more about an attraction to the idea of Poe. After all, Poe’s most famous literary crea-

tions tend to be unsympathetic villains. There are psychopaths who perpetuate seemingly motiveless murders in *The Black Cat* and *The Tell-Tale Heart*; protagonists who abuse women in *Ligeia* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*; and characters who exact cruel, fatal revenge on unwitting victims in *The Cask of Amontillado* and *Hop-Frog*.

The degenerate characters whose perspectives Poe invites readers to inhabit don’t exactly align with a cultural moment characterised by



Nick Lehr /
The Conversation
via DALL-E 2

the #MeToo movement, safe spaces and trigger warnings.

At the same time, the conception of Poe the writer seems to tap into a cultural affection for outsiders, non-conformists and underdogs who ultimately prove their worth.

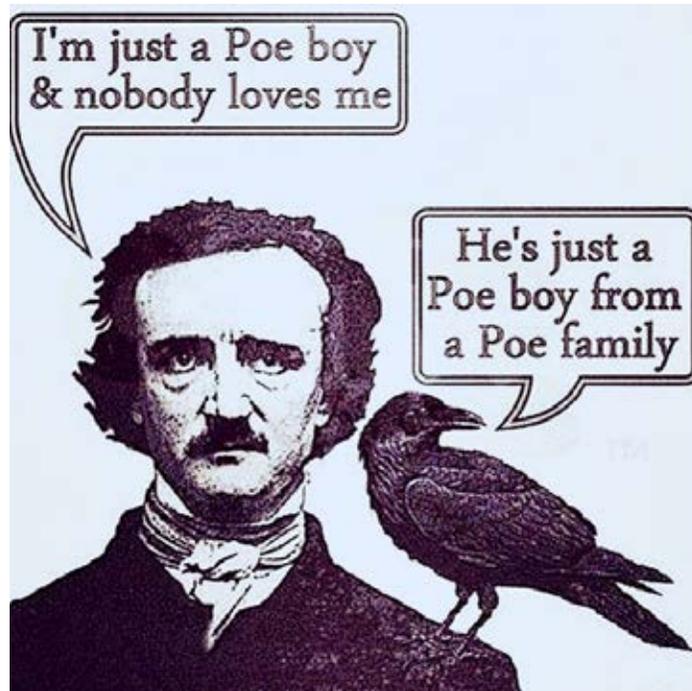
The idea of Poe the underdog began with his death in 1849, which was greeted by a cruel notice in the *New York Tribune*: “This announcement will startle many, but few will be grieved by it.”

The obituary writer, who turned out to be Poe’s sometime friend and constant rival Rufus W. Griswold, claimed that the deceased had “few or no friends” and proceeded with a general character assassination built on exaggerations and half-truths.

Strange as it seems, Griswold was also Poe’s literary executor, and he expanded the obituary into a biographical essay that accompanied Poe’s collected works. If this was a marketing ploy, it worked. The friends that Griswold claimed Poe lacked rose to his defence, and journalists spent decades debating who the man really was.

During Poe’s lifetime, most readers encountered his work through magazines, and he was rarely well paid. But Griswold’s edition went through 19 printings in the 15 years after Poe’s death, and his stories and poems have been endlessly reprinted and translated ever since.

Griswold’s defamatory portrait, along with the grim subject matter of Poe’s stories and poems, still influences the way readers perceive him. But it has also produced a sus-



QUEEN TRIBUTE: Just a Poe Boy ... a meme from Twitter.

tained reaction or counterimage of Poe as a tragic hero, a tortured, misunderstood artist who was too good – or, at any rate, too cool – for his world.

While translating Poe’s works into French in the 1850s and 1860s, the French poet Charles Baudelaire promoted his hero as a kind of countercultural visionary, out of step with a moralistic, materialistic America. Baudelaire’s Poe valued beauty over truth in his poetry and, in his fiction, saw through the self-improvement pieties that were popular at the time to reveal “the natural wickedness of man.”

Poe struck a chord with European writers, and as his international stature rose in the late 19th-century, literary critics in the US wrung their hands over his lack of appreciation “at home.”

By the turn of the 20th-century, the stage was set for Poe to be embraced as the perennial underdog. And Poe often did appear on stage around this time, as the subject of several biographical melodramas that depicted him as a tragic fig-

ure whose lack of success had more to do with a hostile cultural and publishing environment than his own failings.

That image appeared on the silver screen as early as 1909 in D.W. Griffith’s short film *Edgar Allen Poe*. With Poe’s wife, Virginia, languishing on a sick bed, the poet ventures out to sell *The Raven*. After meeting rejection and scorn, he manages to sell his manuscript and returns home with provisions for his ailing wife, only to find that she has died.

Later films also depict Poe as being misunderstood or underappreciated in his lifetime. A wildly inaccurate biopic, *The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe*, released in 1942, ends with a voice-over commenting, “... little did [the public] know that the manuscript of *The Raven*, which he tried in vain to sell for \$25, would years later bring the price of \$17,000 from a collector.” In real life, while an early draft of *The Raven* was declined by one editor, Poe had no trouble selling the poem, and it was an immediate sensation.

But here *The Raven* becomes a stand-in for Poe himself, something dark and mysterious that, according to legend, people in Poe’s time failed to appreciate.

Poe is an obscure writer and amateur detective in the 1951 film *The Man with a Cloak*, which ends with a saloonkeeper allowing the rain to wash away the ink on an IOU that Poe gave him. On the reverse side of the note is a manuscript of the poem *Annabel Lee*, as its bearer declares, “That name’ll never be worth anything. Not in a hundred years.”

Of course, the audience watching this film almost exactly 100 years

after Poe's death knew better.

Which brings us to *The Pale Blue Eye*, in which Henry Melling portrays Cadet Poe, an outcast with a keen crime solver's intellect. In a refreshing change, this younger Poe is not a tortured artist or a haunted, brooding figure. He is, however, picked on by his peers and underestimated by his superiors – yet again, an underdog viewers want to root for.

In that sense, the Poe in *The Pale Blue Eye* fits well with his contemporary image, which also permeates the early episodes of *Wednesday*, Netflix's Addams Family spin-off set at Nevermore Academy that's chock full of Poe references.

The headmistress of Nevermore Academy – a Hogwarts-like school for outcasts – refers to Poe as “our most famous alumni,” which ex-



POP ART: Edgar Allan Poe, by Chelsea Grimsley / Flickr.

plains why the school's annual boat race is the Poe Cup and why there's a statue of Poe guarding a secret passage.

The delightfully antisocial protagonist, *Wednesday*, played by Jenna Ortega, is an outcast among outcasts – the Poe figure at a school

whose name evokes Poe. In one scene, a sympathetic teacher urges her not to lose “the ability to not let others define you. It's a gift.” She adds, “The most interesting plants grow in the shade.”

When John Lennon sang “Man, you should have seen them kicking Edgar Allan Poe” in *I Am the Walrus*, he didn't have to say who was kicking him or why. The point was, Poe deserved better; the most interesting plants do grow in the shade, unlovely and unloved.

And that's exactly why so many people – aspiring writers and artists, but also everyone when they're lonely and misunderstood – see a little bit of themselves in the weary-but-wise image of Edgar Allan Poe. **CT**

Scott Peeples is Professor of English, College of Charleston. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com.



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Mary Ellen Mark

**W
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81







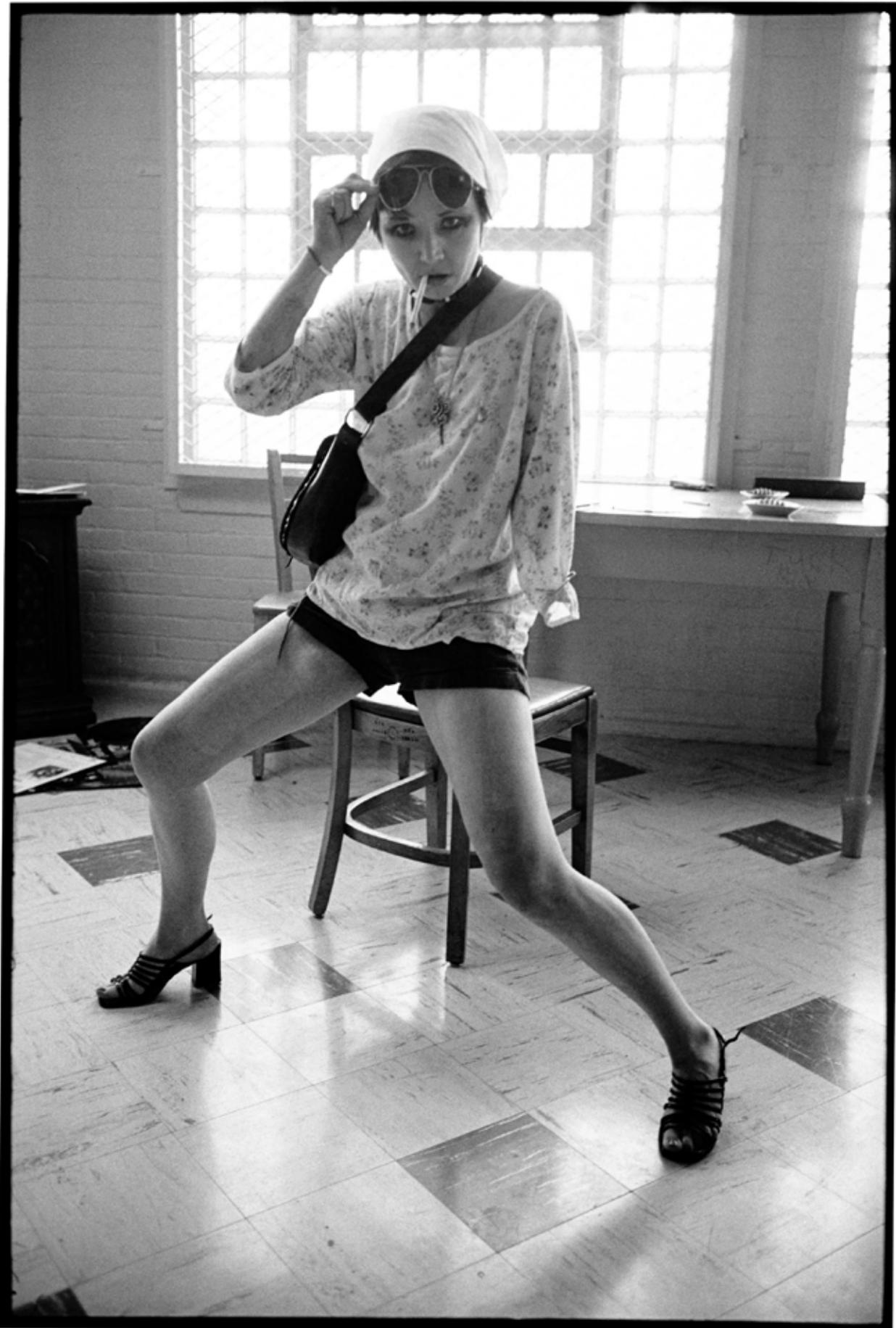
Images from
Ward 81 Voices
by Mary Ellen
Mark and Karen
Folger Jacobs.
Published by
Steidl

Ward 81, photographed in 1976, was Mary Ellen Mark's first independent long-term documentary project, in which Mark and writer Karen Folger Jacobs set out to document the lives of the women in a locked ward at the Oregon State Hospital in Salem – the only one in the state.

Every day for five weeks, Mark photographed and Jacobs interviewed the women on Ward 81. At night they slept in an empty adjacent ward.

Ward 81: Voices, from German publisher Steidl, is an expanded edition of the original 1979 book, and includes previously unpublished photographs, excerpts from interviews with patients







and recorded conversations between Mark and Jacobs, as well as new essays examining the influence of their project.

When it was published in 1979, the documentary project was notable for its focus on the mistreatment of women in US mental health institutions. The mid-1970s was an era when the complexities of psychiatric disorders were still little understood by many of the people charged with treating and safeguarding the afflicted.

“A year earlier”, wrote Jacobs in the text accompanying Marks's searing photographs, “Mary

Ellen went to the hospital to do still photography for the film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. While there she spent a few hours on Ward 81, the state's only locked ward for women. The women there lingered in her consciousness. Their images haunted her.”

Conditions for female patients were strikingly different than those for men: Oregon State Hospital's male patients received specialised housing and treatment, while the patients of Ward 81 were sequestered in a sub-standard facility and languished without personalised care or dedicated psychiatrists.

The inclusion of the women's voices gives invaluable



insight, not only into the lives of the patients, but also into Mark and Jacobs' experiences and the challenges they faced during their collaboration.

“The women of Ward 81 are tattooed on our memories”, added Jacobs. “We know that for the rest of our lives we will often dream about them. We will be surprised to wake up in a bed without straps or locks, and to be able to see out windows without wire barriers.”

Ward 81 has always been considered one of the best examples of Mark's ability to portray subjects living on the edges of society with compassion. The inclusion of the women's voices gives invaluable insight, not only into the lives of the patients, but also into Mark and Jacobs' experiences and the challenges they faced during their collaboration.

CT



WARD 81 VOICES

Mary Ellen Mark / Karen Folger Jacobs
Published by Steidl / www.steidl.de
US\$85

Jonathan Cook

WHY THE MEDIA DON'T WANT TO KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT NORD STREAM BLASTS

First, journalists lapped up Russian culpability. Now they peddle a preposterous James Bond-style story. Anything to ignore the US role

No one but the terminal-ly naïve should be surprised that security services lie – and that they are all but certain to cover their tracks when they carry out operations that either violate domestic or international law or that would be near-universally rejected by their own populations.

Which is reason enough why anyone following the fallout from explosions last September that ripped holes in three of the four Nord Stream pipelines in the Baltic Sea supplying Russian gas to Europe should be wary of accepting anything Western agencies have to say on the matter.

In fact, the only thing that Western publics should trust is the consensus among “investigators” that the three simultaneous blasts deep underwater on the pipelines – a fourth charge apparently failed to

detonate – were sabotage, not some freak coincidental accident.

Someone blew up the Nord Stream pipelines, creating an untold environmental catastrophe as the pipes leaked huge quantities of methane, a supremely active global-warming gas. It was an act of unrivalled industrial and environmental terrorism.

If Washington had been able to pin the explosions on Russia, as it initially hoped, it would have done so with full vigour. There is nothing Western states would like more than to intensify world fury against Moscow, especially in the context of NATO’s express efforts to “weaken” Russia through a proxy war waged in Ukraine.

But, after the claim made the rounds of front pages for a week or two, the story of Russia destroying its own pipelines was quietly shelved. That was partly because it



seemed too difficult to maintain a narrative in which Moscow chose to destroy a critical part of its own energy infrastructure.

Not only did the explosions cause Russia great financial harm – the country’s gas and oil revenues regularly financed nearly half of its annual budget – but the blasts removed Moscow’s chief influence over Germany, which had been until then heavily dependent on Russian gas. The initial media story required the Western public to believe that President Vladimir Putin willingly shot himself in the foot, losing his only leverage over European resolve to impose economic sanctions on his country.

But even more than the complete lack of a Russian motive, Western states knew they would be unable to build a plausible forensic case against Moscow for the Nord Stream blasts. Instead, with no chance to



Site of the Nord Stream blast in the Baltic Sea.

milk the explosions for propaganda value, official Western interest in explaining what had happened to the Nord Stream pipelines wilted, despite the enormity of the event. That was reflected for months in an almost complete absence of media coverage.

When the matter was raised, it was to argue that separate investigations by Sweden, Germany and Denmark were all drawing a blank. Sweden even refused to share any of its findings with Germany and Denmark, arguing that to do so would harm its “national security.”

No one, again including the Western media, raised an eyebrow or showed a flicker of interest in what might be really going on behind the scenes. Western states and their compliant corporate media seemed

quite ready to settle for the conclusion that this was a mystery concocted in an enigma.

It might have stayed that way forever, except that in February, a journalist – one of the most acclaimed investigative reporters of the past half-century – produced an account that finally demystified the explosions. Drawing on at least one anonymous, highly placed informant, Seymour Hersh pointed the finger for the explosions directly at the US administration and President Joe Biden himself.

Hersh’s detailed retelling of the planning and execution of the Nord Stream blasts had the advantage – at least for those interested in getting to the truth of what took place – that his account fitted the known circumstantial evidence

Key Washington figures, from President Biden to Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and his senior

neoconservative official Victoria Nuland – a stalwart of the murky US, anti-Russia meddling in Ukraine over the past decade – had either called for the destruction of the Nord Stream pipelines or celebrated the blasts shortly after they took place.

If anyone had a motive for blowing up the Russian pipelines – and a self-declared one at that – it was the Biden administration. They opposed the Nord Stream 1 and 2 projects from the outset – and for exactly the same reason that Moscow so richly prized them.

In particular, the second pair of pipelines, Nord Stream 2, which was completed in September 2021, would double the amount of cheap Russian gas available to Germany and Western Europe. The only obstacle in its path was the hesitancy of German regulators. They delayed approval in November 2021.

Nord Stream meant major European countries, most especially Germany, would be completely dependent for the bulk of their energy supplies on Russia. That deeply conflicted with US interests. For two decades, Washington had been expanding NATO as an anti-Moscow military alliance embracing ever more of Europe, to the point of butting up aggressively against Russia's borders.

The Ukrainian government's covert efforts to become a NATO member – thereby destroying a long-standing mutual and fragile nuclear deterrence between Washington and Moscow – were among the stated reasons why Russia invaded its neighbour in February last year.

Washington wanted Moscow isolated and friendless in Europe. The goal was to turn Russia into Enemy No. 2 – after China – not leave Europeans looking to Moscow for energy salvation.

The Nord Stream explosions achieved precisely that outcome. They severed the main reason European states had for cozying up to Moscow. Instead, the US started shipping its expensive liquified natural gas across the Atlantic to Europe, both forcing Europeans to become more energy dependent on Washington and, at the same time, fleecing them for the privilege.

But even if Hersh's story fitted the circumstantial evidence, could his account stand up to further scrutiny?

This is where the real story begins. Because one might have assumed that Western states would be queuing up to investigate the facts Hersh laid bare, if only to see if they stacked up or to find a more plausible alternative account of what happened.

Dennis Kucinich, a former chair of a US Congressional investigative

Western media have remained completely incurious to an event of great international significance and consequences

subcommittee on government oversight, has noted that it is simply astonishing no one in Congress has been pushing to use its powers to subpoena senior American officials, such as the secretary of the Navy, to test Hersh's version of events. As Kucinich observes, such subpoenas could be issued under Congress's Article One, Section 8, Clause 18, providing "constitutional powers to gather information, including to inquire on the administrative conduct of office."

Similarly, and even more extraordinarily, when a vote was called by Russia at the United Nations Security Council in March to set up an independent international commission to investigate the blasts, the proposal was roundly rejected.

If adopted, the UN Secretary-General himself would have appointed expert investigators and aided their work with a large secretariat.

Three Security Council members, Russia, China and Brazil, voted in favour of the commission. The other 12 – the US and its allies or small states it could easily pressure – abstained, the safest way to quietly foil the creation of such an investigative commission.

Excuses for rejecting an independent commission failed to pass the sniff test. The claim was that it would interfere with the existing investigations of Denmark, Sweden and Germany. And yet all three have demonstrated that they are in no hurry to reach a conclusion, arguing that they may need years to carry out their work. As previously noted, they have indicated great

reluctance to cooperate. And last month, Sweden once again stated that it may never get to the bottom of the events in the Baltic Sea.

As one European diplomat reportedly observed of meetings between NATO policymakers, the motto is: "Don't talk about Nord Stream". The diplomat added: "It's like a corpse at a family gathering. It's better not to know."

It may not be so surprising that Western states are devoted to ignorance about who carried out a major act of international terrorism in blowing up the Nord Stream pipelines, considering that the most likely culprit is the world's only superpower and the one state that can make their lives a misery.

But what should be more peculiar is that Western media have shown precisely no interest in getting to the truth of the matter either. They have remained completely incurious to an event of enormous international significance and consequence.

It is not only that Hersh's account has been ignored by the Western press as if it did not even exist. It is that none of the media appear to have made any effort to follow up with their own investigations to test his account for plausibility.

Hersh's set out a lengthy planning stage that began in the second half of 2021. He names the unit responsible for the attack on the pipeline: the US Navy's Diving and Salvage Center, based in Panama City, Florida. And he explains why it was chosen for the task over the US Special Operations Command: because any covert operation by the former would not need to be reported to Congress.

In December 2021, according to his highly placed informant, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan convened a task force of senior administration and Pentagon officials at the request of Biden himself. They agreed that the explosions

must not be traceable back to Washington; otherwise, as the source noted: “It’s an act of war.”

The CIA brought in the Norwegians, stalwarts of NATO and strongly hostile to Russia, to carry out the logistics of where and how to attack the pipelines. Oslo had its own additional commercial interests in play, as the blasts would make Germany more dependent on Norwegian gas, as well as American supplies, to make up the shortfall from Nord Stream.

By March last year, shortly after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the precise site for the attack had been selected: in the Baltic’s shallow waters off Denmark’s Bornholm Island, where the sea floor was only 260ft below the surface, the four pipelines were close together and there were no strong tidal currents.

A small number of Swedish and Danish officials were given a general briefing about unusual diving activities to avoid the danger that their navies might raise the alarm. The Norwegians also helped develop a way to disguise the US explosive charges so that, after they were laid, they would not be detected by Russian surveillance in the area.

Next, the US found the ideal cover. For more than two decades, Washington has sponsored an annual NATO naval exercise in the Baltic every June. The US arranged that the 2022 event, Baltops 22, would take place close to Bornholm Island, allowing the divers to plant the charges unnoticed.

The explosives would be detonated through the use of a sonar buoy dropped by plane at the time of President Biden’s choosing. Complex arrangements had to be taken to make sure the explosives would not be accidentally triggered by passing ships, underwater drilling, seismic events or sea creatures.

Three months later, on September 26, the sonar buoy was dropped by

The story threw the establishment media a bone: the chief purpose was to lift any pressure from journalists to pursue Hersh’s leads

a Norwegian plane, and a few hours later three of the four pipelines were put out of commission.

The Western media’s response to Hersh’s account has perhaps been the most revealing aspect of the entire saga. It is not just that the establishment media have been so uniformly and remarkably reticent to dig deeper into making sense of this momentous crime – beyond making predictable, unevicenced accusations against Russia. It is that they have so obviously sought to dismiss Hersh’s account before making even cursory efforts to confirm or deny its specifics.

The knee-jerk pretext has been that Hersh has only one anonymous source for his claims. Hersh himself has noted that, as with other of his famous investigations, he cannot always refer to additional sources he uses to confirm details because those sources impose a condition of invisibility for agreeing to speak to him.

That should hardly be surprising when informants are drawn from a small, select group of Washington insiders and are at great risk of being identified – at great personal cost to themselves, given the US administration’s proven track record of persecuting whistleblowers.

But the fact that this was indeed just a pretext from the establishment media becomes much clearer when we consider that those same journalists dismissive of Hersh’s account happily gave prominence to

an alternative, highly implausible, semi-official version of events.

In what looked suspiciously like a coordinated publication in early March, the *New York Times* and Germany’s *Die Zeit* newspapers printed separate accounts promising to solve “one of the central mysteries of the war in Ukraine.” The *Times* headline asked a question it implied it was about to answer: “Who Blew Up the Nord Stream Pipelines?”

Instead, both papers offered an account of the Nord Stream attack that lacked detail, and any detail that was supplied was completely implausible. This new version of events was vaguely attributed to anonymous American and German intelligence sources – the very actors, in Hersh’s account, responsible both for carrying out and covering up the Nord Stream blasts.

In fact, the story had all the hallmarks of a disinformation campaign to distract from Hersh’s investigation. It threw the establishment media a bone: the chief purpose was to lift any pressure from journalists to pursue Hersh’s leads. Now they could scurry around, looking like they were doing their job as a “free press” by chasing a complete red herring supplied by US intelligence agencies. Which is why the story was widely reported, notably far more widely than Hersh’s much more credible account.

So what did the *New York Times* account claim? That a mysterious group of six people had hired a 50ft yacht and sailed off to Bornholm Island, where they had carried out a James Bond-style mission to blow up the pipelines. Those involved, it was suggested, were a group of “pro-Ukrainian saboteurs” – with no apparent ties to President Volodymyr Zelensky – who were keen to seek revenge on Russia for its invasion. They used fake passports.

The *Times* further muddied the waters, reporting sources that

claimed some 45 “ghost ships” had passed close to the site of the explosion when their transponders were not working.

The crucial point was that the story shifted attention away from the sole plausible possibility, the one underscored by Hersh’s source: that only a state actor could have carried out the attack on the Nord Stream pipelines. The highly sophisticated, extremely difficult operation needed to be concealed from other states, including Russia that were closely surveilling the area.

Now the establishment media were heading off on a completely different tangent. They were looking not at states – and most especially not the one with the biggest motive, the greatest capability and the proven opportunity.

Instead, they had an excuse to play at being reporters, visiting Danish yachting communities to ask if anyone remembered the implicated yacht, the Andromeda, or suspicious characters aboard it, and trying to track down the Polish company that hired the sailing boat. The media had the story they preferred: one that Hollywood would have created, of a crack team of Jason Bournes giving Moscow a good slapping and then disappearing into the night.

Two months on, the media discussion is still exclusively about the mysterious yacht crew, though – after reaching a series of dead-ends in a story that was only ever meant to have dead-ends – establishment journalists are asking a few tentative questions. Though, let us note, most determinedly not questions about any possible US involvement in the Nord Stream sabotage.

Britain’s *Guardian* newspaper ran a story in which a German “security expert” wondered whether a group of six sailors was really ca-

The Guardian does not name Hersh in its report or the fact that his highly placed source fingered the US for the Nord Stream sabotage

pable of carrying out a highly complex operation to blow up the Nord Stream pipelines. That is something that might have occurred to a less credulous newspaper a month earlier when the *Guardian* simply regurgitated the *Times*’ disinformation story.

But despite the security expert’s skepticism, the *Guardian* is still not eager to get to the bottom of the story. It conveniently concludes that the “investigation” conducted by the Swedish public prosecutor, Mats Ljungqvist, will be unlikely ever to “yield a conclusive answer”.

Or as Ljungqvist observes: “Our hope is to be able to confirm who has committed this crime, but it should be noted that it likely will be difficult given the circumstances.”

Hersh’s account continues to be ignored by the *Guardian* – beyond a dismissive reference to several “theories” and “speculation” other than the laughable yacht story. The *Guardian* does not name Hersh in its report or the fact that his highly placed source fingered the US for the Nord Stream sabotage. Instead, it notes simply that one theory – Hersh’s – has been “zeroing on a Nato Baltops 22 wargame two months before” the attack.

It’s all still a mystery for the *Guardian* – and a very welcome one by the tenor of its reports.

The *Washington Post* has been performing a similar service for the Biden administration on the other side of the Atlantic.

A month later, it was using the yacht story to widen the enigma

rather than narrow it down.

The paper reports that unnamed “law enforcement officials” now believe the Andromeda yacht was not the only vessel involved, adding: “The boat may have been a decoy, put to sea to distract from the true perpetrators, who remain at large, according to officials with knowledge of an investigation led by Germany’s attorney general.”

The *Washington Post*’s uncritical reporting surely proves a boon to Western “investigators”. It continues to build an ever more elaborate mystery, or “international whodunit”, as the paper gleefully describes it. Its report argues that unnamed officials “wonder if the explosive traces – collected months after the rented boat was returned to its owners – were meant to falsely lead investigators to the Andromeda as the vessel used in the attack.”

The paper then quotes someone with “knowledge of the investigation”: “The question is whether the story with the sailboat is something to distract or only part of the picture”. How does the paper respond? By ignoring that very warning and dutifully distracting itself across much of its own report by puzzling whether Poland might have been involved too in the blasts. Remember, a mysterious Polish company hired that red-herring yacht.

Poland, notes the paper, had a motive because it had long warned that the Nord Stream pipelines would make Europe more energy dependent on Russia. Exactly the same motive, we might note – though, of course, the *Washington Post* refuses to do so – that the Biden administration demonstrably had.

The paper does inadvertently offer one clue as to where the mystery yacht story most likely originated. The *Washington Post* quotes a German security official saying that Berlin “first became interested in the [Andromeda] vessel after

the country's domestic intelligence agency received a 'very concrete tip' from a Western intelligence service that the boat may have been involved in the sabotage".

The German official "declined to name the country that shared the information" – information that draws attention away from any US involvement in the pipeline blasts and re-directs it to a group of untraceable, rogue Ukraine sympathisers.

The *Washington Post* concludes that Western leaders "would rather not have to deal with the possibility that Ukraine or allies were involved". And, it seems the Western media – our supposed watchdogs on power – feel exactly the same way.

In a follow-up story, Hersh revealed that Holger Stark, the journalist behind *Die Zeit's* piece on the mystery yacht and someone Hersh knew when they worked together in Washington, had imparted to him an interesting additional piece of information divulged by his country's intelligence services.

Hersh reports: "Officials in Germany, Sweden, and Denmark had decided shortly after the pipeline bombings to send teams to the site to recover the one mine that has not gone off. [Holger] said they were too late; an American ship had sped to the site within a day or two and recovered the mine and other materials."

Holger, Hersh says, was entirely uninterested in Washington's haste and determination to have exclusive access to this critical piece of evidence: "He answered, with a wave of his hand, 'You know what Americans are like. Always wanting to be first.'" Hersh points out: "There was another very obvious explanation."

Hersh also spoke with an intelligence expert about the plausibility of the mystery yacht story being ad-

Like politicians, media corporations don't want to know the truth if it cannot be weaponised against an official enemy state

vanced by the *New York Times* and *Die Zeit*. He described it as a "parody" of intelligence that only fooled the media because it was exactly the kind of story they wanted to hear. He noted some of the most glaring flaws in the account:

"Any serious student of the event would know that you cannot anchor a sailboat in waters that are 260 feet deep" – the depth at which the four pipelines were destroyed – "but the story was not aimed at him but at the press who would not know a parody when presented with one."

Further: "You cannot just walk off the street with a fake passport and lease a boat. You either need to accept a captain who was supplied by the leasing agent or owner of the yacht, or have a captain who comes with a certificate of competency as mandated by maritime law. Anyone who's ever chartered a yacht would know that". Similar proof of expertise and competence for deep sea diving involving the use of a specialised mix of gases would be required by the divers and the doctor.

And: "How does a 49-foot sailboat find the pipelines in the Baltic Sea? The pipelines are not that big and they are not on the charts that come with the lease. Maybe the thought was to put the two divers into the water" – not very easy to do so from a small yacht – "and let the divers look for it. How long can a diver stay down in their suits? Maybe fifteen minutes. Which means it would take the diver four years to search one square mile."

The truth is that the Western

press has zero interest in determining who blew up the Nord Stream pipelines because, just like Western diplomats and politicians, media corporations don't want to know the truth if it cannot be weaponised against an official enemy state.

The Western media are not there to help the public monitor the centres of power, keep our governments honest and transparent, or bring to book those who commit state crimes. They are there to keep us ignorant and willing accomplices when such crimes are seen as advancing on the global stage the interests of Western elites – including the very transnational corporations that run our media.

Which is precisely why the Nord Stream blasts took place. The Biden administration knew not only that its allies would be too fearful to expose its unprecedented act of industrial and environmental terrorism but that the media would dutifully line up behind their national governments in turning a blind eye.

The very ease with which Washington has been able to carry out an atrocity – one that has caused a surge in the cost of living for Europeans, leaving them cold and out of pocket during the winter, and added considerably to existing pressures that have been gradually de-industrialising Europe's economies – will embolden the US to act in equally rogue ways in the future.

In the context of a Ukraine war in which there is the constant threat of a resort to nuclear weapons, where that could ultimately lead should be only too obvious. **CT**

Jonathan Cook's books include *Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East* (Pluto Press) and *Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair* (Zed Books). His web site is www.jonathan-cook.net.

Elliot Doornbos

PABLO ESCOBAR: FIRST COCAINE, THEN HIPPOS

Drug lord's four discarded 'cocaine hippos' have multiplied to 130, creating another unwanted problem for Colombia

Colombia has just recorded its first road traffic incident involving a hippopotamus. A car collided with the animal at speed leaving it dead on the road.

The hippo was a descendent of the four animals that notorious drug lord Pablo Escobar imported from a zoo in the US to his luxurious Hacienda Nápoles estate in Colombia in the 1980s.

The four hippos, which included three females and one male, were abandoned after Escobar's death in 1993 due to the difficulty associated with moving them to a wildlife sanctuary. The hippos then escaped the untended estate and spread along the Magdalena River.

They have since bred and have multiplied to around 130 animals. But in the wild, the hippos are fast becoming a problem. Hippo attacks on people are on the rise and an illegal trafficking industry has developed around their capture and sale.

Ecologists also warn that large herbivores such as hippos are upsetting Colombia's delicate aquatic ecosystems. By excreting waste into lakes and rivers, hippos can change the composition of the surrounding water. This water provides habitat for animals including manatees and capybaras.

The hippos are now officially list-

ed as an invasive species that need to be controlled. But how to best manage them has long troubled the country's environment ministry.

In 2009, the Colombian environmental agency ordered hunters to kill three hippos amid concerns they were damaging crops and endangering humans. A hippo, nicknamed Pepe, was killed as a result. Photos of the dead hippo went viral and sparked a global outcry.

The culling promptly ended and the fate of the remaining hippos is now to be decided by two ongoing legal cases. I have analysed both cases as part of my research and it's my opinion that they are evidence of good practise in controlling invasive species. This is because the interests of the animals are being considered – a luxury that is not afforded to most invasive animal species.

Three strategies have been proposed to control Colombia's hippo population: euthanasia, relocation to zoos and animal sanctuaries abroad and fertility control.

Euthanasia represents the cheapest and fastest method to control Colombia's hippo population. It is, however, a controversial strategy and would involve up to 30 hippos a year being killed. Those who oppose the

strategy argue that it is clearly not in the interests of the hippos.

The relocation programme instead involves moving 70 hippos to zoos and animal sanctuaries in India and Mexico that are capable of caring for them. But hippos are aggressive and very large, so they are difficult to capture and transport. Many of those that remain will therefore have their fertility controlled.

The fertility control programme will use a drug called Porcine Zona Pellucida to reduce the fertility of the female hippos. The same drug is used to control hippo birth rates in zoos. Such a strategy will reduce wild hippo numbers over longer periods of time and will eventually lower the threat they pose to people and the environment.

Used together, the fertility control and relocation strategies would help to control Colombia's hippo population. And, though the animals would be in captivity or unable to raise offspring, the plans are more humane than the alternative of being killed.

These are not perfect solutions. Controlling hippo fertility will not immediately reduce the wild population. As a result, it risks prolonging the threat of conflict between humans and hippos. It also does little to protect the environment in the short term.



UNWELCOME: Environmental authorities are concerned that the hippos may be degrading Colombia's delicate aquatic ecosystems.

Research also suggests that between 70 and 80 percent of Colombia's wild female hippos will need to be sterilised for the strategy to be effective. Sterilising this amount of hippos would eventually stabilise the population. But how long this would take has not yet been disclosed.

Both of these strategies are expensive. Relocating the hippos will cost around US \$3.5-million, and fertility treatment costs US \$50,000 for each hippo. Funding may be diverted away from conservation efforts elsewhere in favour of humanely tackling Colombia's rising hippo population.

Invasive species tend to be perceived as threats which need to be exterminated. Many countries allow invasive animals to be killed by any means necessary to control their population. Policies carried out with the aim of controlling these animals are therefore often unethical.

The Colombian hippo case dem-

onstrates that invasive animal species can be controlled and have their interests taken into account at the same time.

But it is important to recognise that when compared to other invasive species, these hippos may have been given preferential treatment. This likely stems from the high-profile nature of the case that, given its association to Pablo Escobar, has captured the attention of the public.

There are, however, some aspects of the Colombian hippo case that could be applied to invasive species management more broadly. When euthanasia is the preferred option, choosing methods that limit animal suffering should be prioritised.

Grey squirrels, for example, are considered a pest species within the UK and can be legally killed using methods such as poisoning and traps. But more humane alternatives, such as using oral contraceptives, exist that would also keep their population in check.

Colombia's wild hippo population has become a problem. Inevitably, the species will need to be managed to avoid further harm to the animals, the wider environment and to prevent conflict with humans.

The case of Pablo Escobar's invasive hippos is unique. Yet it could be seen as a step in the right direction for invasive species management. Despite the preferred management options being expensive and often failing to immediately curb the animals spread, they avoid unnecessary killings and encourage more creative solutions to emerge. **CT**

Elliot Doornbos is a Senior Lecturer of Criminology in the Criminal Justice Department of Nottingham Trent University. He is currently studying for his doctorate at Nottingham Trent University, which focuses on whale shark fin trafficking. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com.

Stan Cox

TINPOT LEGISLATORS

As the world's most knowledgeable scientists warn that hell awaits, legislators are enforcing a deeply fossil-fuelised version of capitalism

The demise of Silicon Valley Bank last month triggered plenty of angst among solar energy developers. Before it collapsed, SBV claimed it had “financed or helped finance 62 percent of community solar projects in America”, according to *Washington Post* business reporter Evan Halper. At first, it wasn't clear who might fill that gap. MAGA politicians took great delight in the disruption of what they tediously referred to as the “woke” economy. Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO) typically tweeted this non sequitur: “So these SVB guys spend all their time funding woke garbage – ‘climate change solutions’ – rather than actual banking”. Meanwhile, Stephen Miller, the vampirish mastermind of Donald Trump's 2017 Muslim travel ban, asked all too rhetorically how much time and money that bank had spent on what he called equity, diversity, and climate “scams.”

Why has the right become so obsessed with climate-friendly banking? Here's a clue to answering that question: just as MAGA-world was celebrating such an interruption in renewable-energy financing, red-state lawmakers were taking legal aim at private companies and local leaders considered insufficiently deferential to the fossil-fuel industry. In state after state, such politi-

cians are now attempting to dictate the makeup of the American energy supply – sometimes putting a thumb on the scale, at other times stomping on it.

Despite the collapse of SVB, the solar industry appears in no danger of imploding. Plenty of other lenders are stepping in to compensate for the loss. But any banks riding to the rescue, or others that openly support non-fossil-fuel energy, had better brace themselves. Republican state politicians, wielding a lot more than mean tweets, are intent on waging all-out war against private companies that don't cater to the oil, gas, and coal industries.

No surprise there. The right has long opposed any government action to curb climate change. Now, financial institutions and other private companies that, in their decision-making, consider not just profits but the environment, society, and governance (what's now coming to be known as the “ESG” principles) risk finding themselves under ever heavier fire. The term ESG has been around for almost two decades, but the far-right assault on companies that adopt its precepts goes back only about three years.

This spring – a season in which

old men's thoughts turn to “wokeism” and lots of state legislatures are in session – the crackdown on all things climate is only accelerating. MAGA legislators and treasurers are putting in place laws and regulations meant to prohibit state entities like pension funds from even considering climate issues when choosing where to make investments. Many are also planning to bar state agencies from doing business of any sort with private companies that refuse to deal with oil-, gas-, and coal-related enterprises.

When it comes to climate, it's increasingly clear: the red-blue “national divorce” envisioned by Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) is already underway. In 15 of the 19 states that emit the most carbon per dollar of production (and, not coincidentally, are among the top oil, gas, and coal producers), Republicans have total control of both the statehouse and the governor's mansion. Not surprisingly, it's in those sooty states that legislative crackdowns on climate-conscious policies are proliferating. In contrast, at least 15 of the lowest-emitting states have passed, or at least considered, bills that aim to prohibit the investment of state funds in the fossil-fuel business.

In a March 11 post, Harvard Law



GLOBAL WARNING: Demonstrator holding a sign with the message “Wake up humans, you’re endangered too” at a protest against climate change and the destruction of nature.

School Forum on Corporate Governance reported on recent anti-climate activity in states across America. Idaho and North Dakota now have laws that prohibit officials from taking climate into account when investing state funds. Legislators in Iowa and Oklahoma have similar bills in the works, while state treasurers and attorneys general in Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, and Mississippi have issued policy statements or directives aimed at punishing any company that considers climate change while making investment or production decisions.

Even more popular have been bills aimed at punishing private companies that “boycott” or “discriminate” against what are considered “ESG-disfavoured industries,”

particularly those involved in fossil-fuel or firearm production. Kentucky, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Wyoming currently have such laws on the books. And just since 2023 began, lawmakers in at least nine states have introduced “boycott bills” that, according to the Harvard group, tend to be even “broader or more prescriptive than initiatives currently in force.”

Newly passed anti-environmental laws have been put into action right away. For instance, Riley Moore, West Virginia’s treasurer, took the drastic step of announcing that his state would no longer enter into con-

tracts with Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan, Wells Fargo, and certain other major banks, because those companies have stopped dealing with the coal industry. When, on the heels of West Virginia’s ban, the Kentucky legislature passed its own boycott bill, Moore issued a press release congratulating his next-door neighbour, saying: “Kentucky joins our growing coalition of states that have taken concrete steps to push back against the woke capitalists who are trying to destroy our energy industries.”

Nor does it stop with banks. The Texas legislature is, for instance, gunning for insurance companies that refuse coverage to oil and gas companies. Republican state Senator Bryan Hughes assured the *Dallas Morning News* that “we’re push-

ing back hard” on any insurers that might consider withdrawing coverage from polluting industries. “If they’re gonna mess with money that belongs to Texas retirees and undermine the very Texas economy,” he added indignantly, “we’re gonna teach them some manners.”

That so many states have been passing such legislation is anything but a fluke. Like other retrograde measures enacted in GOP-controlled states, those bills are based on “model legislation” drafted for legislators by an outfit called the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). One of that group’s model bills, the Eliminate Economic Boycotts Act, is sweeping, if convoluted, in its language. It prohibits state governments from investing in or dealing with any private company that “penalises” or “inflicts economic harm on” another company because it’s involved in fossil-fuel extraction, logging, mining, or agriculture.

When the ability of businesses (as well as governmental agencies) to pursue climate-mitigation policies is restricted, our individual and collective right to non-violently protest against climate-busting fuels becomes that much more important. Alas, that avenue to climate protection is also being barricaded. Since 2020, such street demonstrations have increasingly been met with right-wing and police violence, while protest directed specifically at fossil fuels is being outlawed outright. Last year, at *Mother Jones* magazine, Nina Lakhani reported, for instance, that ALEC was behind legislation in 24 states that criminalised grassroots protests against fossil-fuel infrastructure. By now, anti-protest legislation, most often zeroing in on climate activists and Indigenous Peoples’ communities, has been introduced in a

Market-based measures won’t bring about the precipitous decline in greenhouse-gas emissions that the planet is screaming for

staggering 45 states.

Support for oil, gas, and coal is also being orchestrated by an association of state treasurers located, of course, in the US’s most carbon-heavy regions. The State Financial Officers Foundation, with headquarters in Shawnee, Kansas, is, you won’t be surprised to learn, marshalling red-state financial officers and attorneys general to do regulatory battle against climate “wok-eism.” Since 2021, it’s been urging state officials, according to *New York Times* climate desk reporter David Gelles, “to use their power to promote oil and gas interests and to stymie Mr. Biden’s climate agenda.”

That foundation, in turn, received financial support in 2021 not only from rabidly anti-climate groups like the Heartland Institute and the American Petroleum Institute, but also from some top financial services corporations, including Mastercard, Visa, Fidelity, and JPMorgan Chase. This raised CNBC’s eyebrows since those companies also “promote their own sustainability investment models” like ESG. Indeed, it’s widely expected that JPMorgan and some of the other big lenders that have been writing checks to those oily state financial officers will also be filling the solar-financing gap left by the demise of Silicon Valley Bank – diversifying their portfolios, so to speak.

What about those states that find themselves on the other side of the national climate divorce, the ones rewarding ESG policies? Clearly, steering public funds away from the

fossil-fuel industry is a much-needed approach in our world (and, by the way, the federal government could take another step in that direction right now by eliminating the \$10-billion to \$50-billion in tax subsidies it still grants the industry annually). Of course, to achieve a rapid phase-out of fossil fuels, far more would be needed. Market-based measures alone won’t bring about the precipitous decline in greenhouse-gas emissions that, in terms of extreme weather, the planet is screaming for ever more desperately. For that, urgent, direct action would be needed to suppress the extraction and use of coal, oil, and natural gas.

It goes without saying that coordinated nationwide action of that sort would be unimaginable in the American political universe of 2023. Even governors and legislatures determined to reduce carbon emissions can only achieve so much, given that their states exist in a national climate-policy vacuum and often share borders with ones in which increasingly authoritarian state legislatures are violating the local autonomy of communities and municipalities by force-feeding them fossil fuels.

For instance, Tennessee passed a law last year forbidding local governments from taxing or regulating any of the state’s energy infrastructure – with one qualification. The measure does not prohibit “a local action that affects facilities for the transmission, distribution, collection, conversion, and use of solar energy”. In the Volunteer State, you see, solar power is fair game for regulation and taxation, while fossil-fuel power is not.

As of last year, almost 20 states, all of them with legislatures under full Republican control, had laws on the books that forbid local governments from banning fossil-fuel gas connections in newly built homes. Even more intrusive is a Florida law

that blocks local governments “from restricting fuel sources distributed and used by electric and gas utilities, power generators, pipeline operators, and propane dealers.”

As they snatch away the right of local communities to prevent not just pollution but the destruction of our world, such states are following a path that Texas blazed eight years ago. In 2015, local officials across the Lone Star State moved to ban the hazardous toxic-drilling method known as hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking.”

In response, state legislators passed and Governor Greg Abbott signed a bill that forbids municipalities from regulating oil and gas operations.

Tom Giovanetti, president of a right-wing Dallas think tank, penned a commentary supporting such suppression of local governance. Apparently unaware that he was coming up with some pretty good satire, he wrote, “It’s absolutely true that the closer political power is to the people, the more responsive political power tends to be. But that can be a two-edged sword. Local governments are at least as capable as the feds of passing laws and ordinances that violate the presumption of liberty in the Constitution... Tyranny isn’t OK just because it is approved by a majority of your fellow townfolk.”

Tyranny indeed! And don’t forget the “tyranny” of a world growing ever hotter and more extreme by the year.

When MAGA legislators force their taxpayers to support the coal, oil, and natural gas industries, while undercutting the efforts of local governments to free their communities from fossil fuels, they’re not just empowering their fossil-fuelled campaign donors. Their anti-climate laws and regulations

Tinpot legislators in MAGA states are preparing to enforce the dominance of a deeply fossil-fuelled version of capitalism

are also part of a broader effort to impose ever tighter right-wing political discipline on society. To that end, the authors of such laws – directly out of the authoritarian playbook – are intentionally vague about what constitutes “boycotting” or “discrimination.”

They don’t spell out, for example, what a fund manager can or cannot consider in deciding which companies to invest in. That kind of vagueness is woven into all sorts of anti-democratic bills and laws that have been bubbling up in state governments lately. It’s intended to keep those of us who care about this planet’s future and that of our children and grandchildren off balance, fearful, and less likely to do what’s needed to keep our world safe, sane, and functioning reasonably well.

Like a doctor who might delay aborting an ectopic pregnancy until it’s too late because his state’s anti-abortion law doesn’t specify how “near death” the mother must be before he can do so without going to prison, like the teacher who might censor her own lessons because she can’t be sure certain historical information won’t lead a student to feel ashamed of being white and falsely report her for teaching “critical race theory”, like the journalist who might shrink from covering a story about a MAGA politician for fear of being wrongly sued for defamation, it’s easy to imagine investment advisors who handle state pension funds or contractors who sell to state governments fearing not also doing business with oil

and gas companies so they won’t be accused of “discrimination” or “boycotting” and lose their contracts.

It turns out that we don’t even have to imagine that last scenario; it’s already happening. As Gelles of the *Times* recently reported, “There are some indications that the conservative pushback [against climate-friendly investing] is gaining traction. Vanguard, one of the world’s largest investment firms, recently withdrew from the Net Zero Asset Managers initiative, an effort intended to get institutional money managers engaged in the fight against climate change.”

This is bad news. At the very moment when the world’s most knowledgeable scientists are warning that an all-too-literal hell lies in store for us, tinpot legislators in MAGA states are preparing to enforce the dominance of a deeply fossil-fuelled version of capitalism. If so, the repercussions won’t stay confined within any state’s borders. All 50 states will be affected.

That means, in turn, that communities are going to have to fight ever harder for the right of all of us to a livable future. Meanwhile, purple- and blue-state legislatures need to pass tougher laws that can help undermine the fossil-fuel industry. And the rest of us will have to focus big time on how best to flush coal, oil, and natural gas out of the economy for good before it’s too late. **CT**

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Trevor Grundy

THE LAST STAND OF OSWALD MOSLEY

Love, Hate and The Leader is an update of Trevor Grundy's 1998 book *Memoir of a Fascist Childhood*. It is the story of an English family in London after the war and how Sir Oswald Mosley, the post-war leader of the fascist party, was worshipped as a god by the Grundy family, of which Trevor was the youngest and most indoctrinated member. This excerpt tells part of the story of Mosley's attempt to return to Parliament on an anti-immigration ticket, his defeat in October 1959, and his return to France and a self-imposed exile that left his supporters contemplating their future without a British Fuhrer figure. Trevor Grundy broke the Mosley spell that plagued his childhood by leaving England in 1966 for a new life in Zambia and then other parts of Africa, returning 30 years later to write his book

Notting Hill Gate gave the sixty-three-year-old Oswald Mosley his final chance to shine. Like Don Quixote, an earlier legend who also found it hard to live in his own century, Mosley turned up in the race-torn London borough of North Kensington on a clapped-out horse with a collection of Sancho Panzas who were prepared to walk, ride, jog or slide with him to the edge of British Fascism's last cliff.

Union Movement set-up a second headquarters in North Kensington and members were asked to spend time handing out leaflets, selling *Action* on street corners and circulating the free broadsheet, the *North Kensington Leader*. In its first issue, I wrote an article which repeated almost word for word what Jeffrey Hamm told us the night of my return from Spain. It ended with words that were sometimes quoted by visiting journalists, 'Most coloured immigrants are decent folk. They are victims of a vicious system which they cannot understand.'

Peter Shaw, who said he'd lay on the floor and let Oswald Mosley walk over him if that meant there'd be

one less Jew or black in England, didn't agree. 'Instead of writing your fairy-tale fuckin' articles in a paper that nobody reads, we should get hold of an immigrant and hang him upside-down from Blackfriars Bridge with a notice round his neck saying, 'Coloureds go home!'

What he said went straight to Jeffrey Hamm who'd told people not to mention the word 'Jew.' Shaw was called in and reprimanded by Mosley but later in the pub he told us, 'OK, the Old Man gave me a good telling-off. Some bloke from an American paper was in the corridor waiting for an interview. OM shouted at me and said, 'Shaw! Never say anything like that again. This movement attacks some Jews for what they do but we never attack Jews for what they are. This is my final warning.' Then, and this is god's own truth, he winked.'

Several well-known Teds joined the North Kensington Branch. My brother-in-law, John Wood, was branch leader but he was angling for a full-time job with Oswald Mosley now that the tourist season was over.

Hundreds of Irish people promised to join Union Movement and hundreds more attended open-air meetings during which Jeffrey Hamm was at great pains to stay on the right side of the law. He called for an end to riots but demanded firm action by the government to end what the Movement called 'the coloured invasion.'



Mosley with supporters in North Kensington in October 1959. Mosley referred to people of mixed race as “spades” and repeated the revolting slander that West Indian immigrants ate cat and dog food so to have more money to spend on drugs. But he told his upper-class friends in London and Paris that Union Movement was not a political party but rather “an apostle of national renaissance.”

There were thousands of Irish people living in North Kensington, immigrants to Britain from an earlier time. But even in 1958, there were notices on doors and windows, ‘No Irish, dogs, coloureds.’

Mosley walked to meetings followed by East End supporters and a growing number of Teds who thought it was great that a man with Sir Oswald’s background and class thought the same way as they did about immigrants. In dark and crumbling doorways, West Indians stood and stared as a man they knew little about walked by.

I’d grown my hair quite long and started wearing a duffel coat. One night, one of the Teds guarding Mosley’s truck, looked at me and said something about ‘fuckin lefties.’

‘He’s one of us,’ said Ron Clucas

‘Don’t look it,’ said the Ted.

I told Jeffrey Hamm that I would never speak during this campaign because the people we were attracting were not interested in parliamentary reforms or Europe as a Nation, just in wading into coloured immigrants who Jeffrey told reporters had been given just as raw a deal as the people whose homes they were now occupying.

Hamm said, ‘You’re letting the Movement down. It will

be remembered when Sir Oswald wins a seat in Parliament and there’s money to spare for the right people to tour with him throughout the country.’

I often saw Max Mosley and his girlfriend, Jean Taylor, canvassing alongside Lady Mosley.

Max no longer looked my way, yet alone spoke.

They knocked on doors and told Irish housewives how ‘pleased’ Sir Oswald would be if they voted for him and how he would continue his fight for Irish unity when he returned to Parliament.

Max was about to study physics at Oxford and Bob Row told me in strict confidence that Lady D used her influence to get him a place at Christ Church College. He said, ‘She knows the right people and that’s how the system works. But that will all change when OM comes to power.’

Soon after that, a leading British tabloid published a picture of Max and his older brother Alexander dressed like Teds saying they were in North Kensington to support their father. ‘We’ve come down here to help,’ Max told a reporter. He looked almost pretty in his riches to rags get-up. Alexander, with fists clenched, looked more like his father when he was twenty-one.

Soon after that photograph appeared, Alexander came to the house.

I became a sort of fellow traveller canvassing for Mosley but no longer completely believing in him or his message

‘I want to get away from this god-forsaken island. I want to go and live in South America where people are alive and issues are real. God, this anti-immigrant campaign sickens me. We lived in Ireland and now in France and my father condemns immigrants. I need to get away from him. Trouble is, I look so much like him and you probably didn’t know but my first name is Oswald.’

He looked at his short and stumpy hands.

‘Peasant’s hands just like my Aunt Unity, the one who shot herself when war was declared.’

He put them around his ears as if to shut out a noise only he could hear. ‘He laughs because I do weight-lifting and tells everyone in Paris that it’s the only sport where you compete against yourself.’ He turned and looked at the photograph on the wall and then at another which showed his father in a white fencing outfit smiling and patting a Swedish champion on the shoulder.

He said, ‘My mother’s no help. She sympathises with me but gives in the moment my father says anything. You know she couldn’t be in the same room as Cynthia Proud. And she thinks that you’re a bad influence, too.’

I felt like he’d stuck a knife into me. ‘Me? Or my family?’ ‘You.’

‘Did she say why, give a reason?’

‘Why would she? When she doesn’t like someone she never mentions them again. You go onto her non-speakers list. It’s some code used by those Mitford girls everyone thinks are so wonderful. My father calls them The Sillies.’

My mother knocked on the door, came in and placed a tray with coffee and two chocolate biscuits on a plate.

She said, ‘I’ve got something special to show you, Alexander.’ It was the Christmas card she’d bought to send to The Leader in France. It cost seven and sixpence but that includes postage.

I thought Alexander would do his charming act. Instead, he drew a stiletto and plunged it into her.

‘Mrs Grundy. I am tired of Old Members treating my father as if he was some sort of Jesus Christ or St Paul. He’s just a rather ordinary man, an ordinary human being with many failings as a person and as a father. Do you know what happens every year when you send your precious Christmas cards that cost seven and sixpence including postage to France? Every year, our house-keeper and her husband gather them up, put them in a large brown cardboard box, light a fire and burn them. Strangely enough, the flames don’t seem to

bother the swans one little bit.’

She left the room and I heard the kitchen door close.

‘Christ, Al, I said. Why did you say that?’

I went along the corridor that was still covered with cheap lino bought when we first moved to Blandford Square after the war.

She was smoking and staring into space. I didn’t know what to do or say to comfort her. ‘The Leader’s Christmas card. So that’s what happens.’

I put my arm around her. ‘No, of course not, Mum. Alexander’s just fed up. He’s had some row with his father and is lashing out. He didn’t mean it.’

My mother straightened up. ‘Of course not.’ She smiled. ‘And if your father could see me smoking, he’d have a fit.’

When I went back to my room Alexander had gone. I never saw him again.

Though I was no longer comfortable at the heart of Union Movement, I didn’t know where else to go. I had no friends other than the young fascists I’d been with since I was a child. There was no place to go apart from Blandford Square and I lacked the courage to go and live with Andre and his wife in Paris. I became a sort of fellow traveller canvassing for Mosley but no longer completely believing in him or his message.

On April 6, 1959 at Argyle Hall, North Kensington, Mosley out-did Laurence Olivier as an actor when he modestly and with surprise written all over his still handsome face accepted an offer by the local branch of Union Movement to stand as its candidate at the general election scheduled for October that year. That was only a couple of years after Harold Macmillan told the British people that they’d never had it so good.

At that meeting, about six hundred people heard Mosley explain the intricacies of the wage-price mechanism which would control the economies of a Federal Europe. He repeated highlights from his pre-war speeches which opposed war against Germany and which warned that if Britain went to war it would lose its empire and end-up on the scrap heap. He hardly mentioned immigration or the coloured invasion, which left his followers loyal but confused.

My father said in a pub after that meeting, ‘He’s lost it. Something happened when he was in prison. He talks about the wage-price mechanism to an audience of Irish women singing songs about the wearing of the

'Mosley's finished. When he stopped attacking the Yids, that's when I asked myself, "Is this the Oswald Mosley you went to prison for during the war?"'



Oswald Mosley with a member of the Swedish international team. Mosley represented Britain in the world championship in Paris in 1937. At that time, he was leader of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) and was an imitator of Benito Mussolini and an open wallet for funds from Nazi Germany.

green. He should pack it in. Mosley's finished. When he stopped attacking the Yids, that's when I asked myself, "Is this the Oswald Mosley you went to prison for during the war?"'

But Mosley gave the appearance of enjoying himself immensely at street meetings. After his main speech, which would leave the Teds shouting for more, he'd offer the platform which was on the back of a hired van, to anyone who cared to speak about life in North Kensington and Notting Hill.

Mosley stood down and became a member of the au-

dience, towering like a high-rise building over everyone else as Irish housewives told how immigrants had taken over their streets, flats and houses and installed juke boxes which were played all night, forcing elderly sitting tenants to leave and look for accommodation somewhere else in London.

Mosley shook his head in disgust and then applauded.

Then he'd get back up and let rip about corruption and betrayal, using all the verbal tricks he'd picked up in the 1930s from various Fascists and Nazi leaders in Italy and Germany.

'You, the hard-working people of Britain have been betrayed by the old gang and their old and rotten political parties. Put 'em all in a box. Shake it up and down, roll out the dice and look at what you've got. You can't tell the difference between one and the other. They all look the same. They all act the same. They all betray the same. Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Vote for me at this election and together we will change, not only North Kensington but the whole country and show the world that Britain can be great again!'

On the way to the Warwick Arms, a Mosley-friendly pub, one of the Teds shook his head and said to Clucas, 'Where's this Tweedle bloke 'ang out? Sounds like he's up for a good kicking.'

One night I spotted the writer Colin Wilson in the crowd. Wilson, author of the 1957 best-seller *The Outsider*. He wrote regularly for a Carmelite magazine called the *Aylesford Review* whose editor, Father Brocard Sewell, was a friend of Henry Williamson and a man who often stuck his editorial neck out on behalf of the pre-war Fascist leader. The novelist Nicholas Mosley was also there, along with several members of the Roman Catholic Church, who'd been invited to attend by Jeffrey Hamm.

Mosley started calmly and spoke about Europe a Nation and how the collective genius of the European would give birth to the greatest civilisation the world had ever seen once he came to power and encouraged a new kind of politician to work hand-in-hand with the great scientists of our age. I saw Roman Catholic heads turn and look at one another.

But the audience showed signs of boredom. This was not what they'd missed an episode of 'Coronation Street' to hear.

Like Archie Rice in John Osborne's play *The Enter-*

Mosley said all coloured immigrants should be sent back where they came from, eat their bananas in the sunshine and not live off the hard-working British taxpayer

tainer, Mosley sniffed the air, sensed the mood and changed position.

He crouched and threw both fists forward like a boxer in the ring. He started raving about West Indian men capturing English girls and keeping them locked in flats where they were beaten and raped.

When he saw how this engaged and enthralled the non-clerical section of his large audience was, he stood up tall and straight and directed his gaze at some almost Presley-looking Teds in the audience. He spoke calmly and told them that after the election, he'd tell his sleeping colleagues in the House of Commons to wake up, visit North Ken and learn at last to call a spade a spade.

The audience roared with laughter and a high-pitched voice rang like a bell in the cold night air - 'Fuckin' Spades.'

Mosley, once again calm and almost statesman-like, said that all coloured immigrants should be sent back where they came from where they could eat their bananas in the sunshine and not live off the hard-working British taxpayer.

This giant of a man from one of England's great families which once owned large parts of Manchester, said something that registered shock on the faces of even the most hardened, roller-pin holding Irish housewives that night.

He said they could all return home and eat their own fresh fruits and vegetables and erase the North Kensington slogan - 'Lassie for dogs. Kitty Kat for Wogs.'

It was a reference to the rumour going round that West Indians ate cat food so they'd have more money to spend on drugs.

I looked up to see how these startling words had affected Colin Wilson and the Roman Catholics from Brompton Oratory but they had already left.

As the election grew closer, Mosley's confidence grew stronger. Jeffrey Hamm said the vast majority of residents were now behind the Leader and the question was no longer if he'd win. The question was how large his majority would be.

At a tactics meeting at the Union Movement headquarters at 47 Princedale Road, Jeffrey Hamm said that although the police confirmed that no one in Union Movement had been involved in the murder of an Anti-

guan carpenter called Kelso Cochrane on May 16 at the corner of Southall Street and Goldborne Road, it did go to show how explosive the race problem was throughout North Kensington.

Left unchecked, said Hamm, race hate would spread through London and other parts of Britain.

'So, you should feel proud you're doing something meaningful to end that problem. The people who are guilty, are the liberal do-gooders and champagne socialists in St John's Wood and Swiss Cottage who bury their heads like ostriches in the sand hoping the problem will go away without doing the first thing to solve it.

'So, when people say 'You're the racists' turn round and fight back and say, 'No. You're the racists because you're doing nothing to solve the problem. Just looking away and making it worse. You're the ostriches. We're the people who are facing up to the problem and trying to solve it.

'By drawing attention to the slum conditions in North Kensington you should say that we're the people looking after blacks just as much as we're looking after whites. All we are saying is that they should have their home and we should have our home - Britain. And Lady Mosley has stepped in and given good advice. She says we should stop referring to immigrants as fuzzy-wuzzies because that might give some people the wrong impression about us. So, watch what you say when you're canvassing, selling 'Action' or having a drink when there's people around you don't know. As to the thousands of whites who attended Cochrane's funeral. They're outsiders from different parts of well-off London, people looking for something to make their lives interesting - communists, anti-apartheid people. By this time next year, no-one will remember the name of Kelso Cochrane.'

My brother-in-law John Wood was Mosley's election agent. He worked round the clock for Union Movement and spent little time with Lovene and their new baby, a boy named Vincent after Lovene's favourite painter, Vincent van Gogh.

On the underground going home to Blandford Square, he said, 'Max and his mother seem to be running the show. But it's good what she says about not talking to journalists. The Leader says the only people who should talk to reporters are Jeffrey and Max. Reporters from the *News of the World* have started snooping around the Earl of Warwick and after a few pints, tongues loosen and blather-mouths like Ron

A week or so later, every Mosley poster was defaced. Between his legs, a massive, upright penis. Underneath, the words 'whoopee' and 'lucky sod'

Clucas don't know when to stop. If our people spent less time in the pub and more time on the streets canvassing, we might get somewhere at long last. The Old Man's not getting any younger and I don't know what he's up to but when Lady D is back in Paris, we can't find him for days on end. And that lunatic Peter Shaw is doing a lot of damage, telling people he knows who killed Kelso Cochrane. If the *News of the World* or *The People* get hold of that it could cost OM the election. Mosley has already told him to wind his neck in. But does he? It's as if he doesn't take what the Leader says at all seriously.'

But it was impossible to separate the death of Kelso Cochrane from Mosley's decision at Argyll Hall to stand as the Union Movement candidate on the immigration issue. Labour Party supporters told voters that Mosley accepted on April 6 and Cochrane was murdered a month later on May 16. Mosley told his followers to ignore claims that there was any link between the two events and that the police said Cochrane's death had nothing to do with racism. Mosley said that he was ready to speak at the site where Cochrane was killed and that when difficulties arose his advice to his followers would always be the same, 'Don't look back.

Never regret the past. Say it again but be ruder the second time and above all – Move on!

One night at Princedale Road, Mosley examined a number of black and white photographs taken by the Movement's official photographer, John Warburton. He held them up to a light bulb without a shade, smiled and then looked at me and said, 'Nice pair of eyebrows, Grundy.' It was a picture of Mosley at Trafalgar Square and in the background a head shot of me looking at him. After a while he chose one of him walking towards the camera, looking like an elderly Clark Cable in *Gone with the Wind*. He said that was the one he wanted and that underneath a life-sized poster would be the slogan, He is Coming.

I caught the eye of my brother-in-law. Was it possible? Didn't he understand that a joke that would be, especially with his reputation as a womaniser?

Mosley said, 'I hope it doesn't sound too Biblical.'

A week or so later, every Mosley poster in North Kensington was defaced. Between his legs, a massive, upright penis. Underneath in paint or crayon, the words 'whoopee' and 'lucky sod.'

Mosley came bottom of the poll winning only 2,621 votes (2.5 percent of the vote) losing his deposit. **CT**

Love, Hate and the Leader

A Fascist Childhood

Trevor Grundy

Love, Hate and the Leader is a memoir of growing up in a fascist family in post-war Britain. For Trevor Grundy and his family, fascist leader Oswald Mosley was a God and antisemitism was a creed

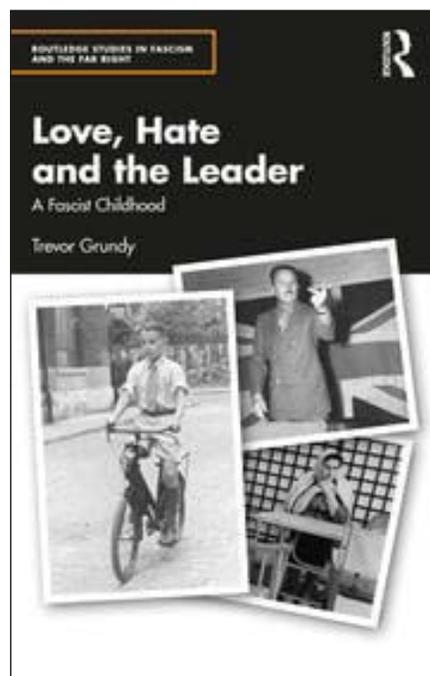
His father was a fascist brawler, his mother obsessed with Mosley and Grundy grew up to be the youngest member of the fascist Union Movement to speak at Trafalgar Square. But, after her death, Grundy learned that his mother was Jewish.

The book features additional material from its original 1998 edition with more detail on fascist figures in Grundy's childhood as well as his life after leaving the fascist movement.

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Taroa Zúñiga Silva

FIFTY YEARS AFTER CHILE'S COUP

A conversation with Miguel Lawner, who remembers life as a political prisoner under the country's bloody dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet

Ten days after the 1973 coup against the Popular Unity (UP) government of President Salvador Allende, the military opened the Río Chico concentration camp on Dawson Island, located in the Strait of Magellan, near the southern tip of Chile.

The island had served as an extermination camp by a Catholic order between 1891 and 1911 to confine the Selk'nam and Kawésqar peoples, who died due to overcrowding, the spread of disease, and the cold.

The coup regime sent 38 officials of the UP government to the Compañía de Ingenieros del Cuerpo de Infantería Marina (COMPINGIM) naval base and then to the Río Chico camp.

It also sent hundreds of political prisoners to Punta Arenas, near Dawson Island. The officials were interrogated, tortured, and forced to work on the island's infrastructure. The Río Chico camp was dismantled in 1974.

One of the prisoners at the camp was Miguel Lawner, an architect who led the government's Urban Improvement Corporation (CORMU). During his imprisonment, Lawner walked around the prison to calculate the size of his room, the buildings at the camp, and the camp itself.

He drew the layout for the camp but then destroyed it for fear of discovery by the guards. When he was in exile in Denmark in 1976, Lawner redrew the plans from memory. "The function creates the organ", he said. "I developed an organ: the drawing, capable of fulfilling the function of leaving testimony of our captivity."

During his imprisonment, Lawner told me, he worried that the military might accuse him of corruption for his leadership of CORMU.

"I was trying to calculate how many millions of dollars had been [spent] in my name", he recalled. "I calculated it to be between \$150-million and \$180-million. Later, I learned that the military had spent six months investigating me and came to the conclusion that they owed me a per diem!"

The UP government (1970-1973) felt that the ministries of Housing and Public Works should be the engine of the economy, as "the two easiest institutions to mobilise", Lawner said. Other areas, such as industrialisation, "required more prolonged prior studies."

"In housing", Lawner told me, "if you have a vacant lot, the next day you can be building". In addition, there was a huge need for housing. The CORMU management decided to speed up the bureaucratic proce-

dures and authorise the immediate disbursement of funds through an official, who was Lawner. "Our first year of government was a year of marvellous irresponsibility", Lawner told me with a smile on his face.

During the 1970 campaign for the presidency, Lawner accompanied Allende to a camp on the banks of the Mapocho River, where the people lived "outside the walls of society."

As they left the camp, Allende said to Lawner, "Even if things go badly for us, to get these comrades out of the mud – for that, it would be worthwhile for them to elect me president."

One year into the government, Lawner said, "We delivered the first houses of Villa San Luis. In April '72 we had this project completely delivered: a thousand houses, the great majority of which corresponded to these two camps, el encanto and el ejemplo, which sat on the banks of the Mapocho River."

The main task of the UP government, he said, was "to resolve the fundamental demands of the sectors that had always been dispossessed."

Under Lawner's leadership, the CORMU officials – not all of them part of the UP project – postponed vacations and worked without overtime pay.

"We gave all these officials the

conviction that they were operating for the benefit of the common good and not, obviously, for the enrichment of a private company or the banks. In other words, they knew that they were working so that people could live better". Also, he said, the objective of "making things beautiful" was imposed, arguing "that in social housing, beauty does not have to be the birthright only of the rich."

Lawner recalled his great pride at the UP government's nationalisation of copper, its delivery of houses, and its role in the "explosion of the agrarian world."

The agrarian reform and the law for peasant unionisation were passed in 1962, before the UP government. However, agrarian workers "continued to exist like serfs from feudal times", Lawner noted.

A week into his presidency, Allende was invited by the peasants of Araucanía to a meeting to which he brought his minister of agriculture, Jacques Chonchol.

When an Indigenous leader spoke, Allende leaned over to Chonchol and said, "Listen, minister, I think you should remain here". The minister, who "had to send for even his toothbrush", remained there for three months, beginning his term installed in the countryside. Half a million hectares were transferred to the landless in the first year of the government.

The UP's first year, Lawner recalled, was a "year of unbridled aspirations."

"For a person like me who was never a public official, the feeling of power is infinite, and the conviction that you are capable of doing anything is equally infinite... we promised more than we were capable of doing [having done three or four times more than the most that had ever been done in the history of the housing ministry], but everything we could do was done because



Augusto Pinochet, 1974



Salvador Allende, 1972

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of what is now lacking: the commitment of the officials. You have to have good leadership, it is true, but if you don't have the commitment of the base, there is nothing you can do."

When we talked about the differences between the experiences at the end of the first year of the UP and the first year of Chile's current President Gabriel Boric's progressive government, Lawner pointed out that, in Chile "we have effectively been fed for 50 years the neoliberal doctrine of a formation contradictory to what you require in a progressive government. Imperceptibly, generations were formed that are, in my opinion, corrupted by the model. It is incomprehensible to them any other way."

The current president of Chile's Senate is Juan Antonio Coloma, a man of the extreme right.

"When the 50th anniversary of the coup comes this September", Lawner told me, "Coloma will be the country's second most important political official."

Fascism's rise, he said, is a global phenomenon, not only taking place in Chile.

But Lawner does not despair. "You cannot determine when there is a spark that lights the fire again, but there is no doubt that it is going to happen." **CT**

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