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ColdType

ISSUE 172

WRITING WORTH READING

MID-NOVEMBER 2018



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CONN HALLINAN

Unwrapping Armageddon

A warning of the dangers created by the erosion of nuclear arms control

THE decision by the Trump administration to withdraw from the Intermediate Nuclear Force Agreement (INF) appears to be part of a broader strategy aimed at unwinding over 50 years of agreements to control and limit nuclear weapons, returning to an era characterized by the unbridled development weapons of mass destruction.

Terminating the INF treaty – which bans land-based cruise and ballistic missiles with a range of between 300 and 3400 miles – is not, in and of itself, a fatal blow to the network of treaties and agreements dating back to the 1963 treaty that ended atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons. But coupled with other actions – George W. Bush’s decision to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) in 2002 and the Obama administration’s program to upgrade the nuclear weapons infrastructure – the tapestry of agreements that has, at least in part, limited these terrifying creations, is looking increasingly frayed.

“Leaving the INF,” says Sergey Rogov of the Institute of US and Canadian Studies, “could bring the whole structure of arms control crashing down.”

Lynn Rusten, the former senior director for arms control in the National Security Agency Council warns, “This is opening the door to an all-out arms race.”

Washington’s rationale for exiting the INF Treaty is that the Russians deployed the 9M729 cruise missile that the US claims violates the agreement, although Moscow denies it and the

evidence has not been made public. Russia countercharges that the US ABM system – Aegis Ashore – deployed in Romania and planned for Poland could be used to launch similar medium range missiles.

If this were a disagreement over weapon capability, inspections would settle the matter. But the White House – in particular National Security Advisor John Bolton – is less concerned with inspections than extracting the US from agreements that in any way restrain the use of American power, be it military or economic. Thus, Trump dumped the Iran nuclear agreement, not because Iran is building nuclear weapons or violating the agreement, but because the administration wants to use economic sanctions to pursue regime change in Teheran.

In some ways, the INF agreement is low hanging fruit. The 1987 treaty banned only land-based medium range missiles, not those launched by sea or air – where the Americans hold a strong edge – and it only covered the US and Russia. Other nuclear-armed countries, particularly China, India, North Korea, Israel and Pakistan have deployed a number of medium range nuclear-armed missiles. One of the arguments Bolton makes for exiting the INF is that it would allow the US to counter China’s medium range missiles.

But if the concern was controlling intermediate range missiles, the obvious path would be to

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expand the treaty to other nations and include air and sea launched weapons. Not that that would be easy. China has lots of intermediate range missiles, because most its potential antagonists, like Japan or US bases in Asia, are within the range of such missiles. The same goes for Pakistan, India, and Israel.

Intermediate range weapons – sometimes called “theatre” missiles – do not threaten the US mainland the way that similar US missiles threaten China and Russia. Beijing and Moscow

can be destroyed by long-range intercontinental missiles, but also by theatre missiles launched from ships or aircraft.

One of the reasons that Europeans are so opposed to withdrawing from the INF is that, in the advent of nuclear war, medium-range missiles on their soil will make them a target.

But supposed violations of the treaty is not why Bolton and the people around him oppose the agreement. Bolton called for withdrawing from the INF Treaty three years before the Obama

administration charged the Russians with cheating. Indeed, Bolton has opposed every effort to constrain nuclear weapons and has already announced that the Trump administration will not extend the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) when it expires in 2021. START caps the number of US and Russian deployed nuclear weapons at 1550, no small number.

The Bush administration's withdrawal from the 1972 ABM treaty in 2002 was the first major blow to the treaty framework. Anti-ballistic missiles are inherently destabilising, because the easiest way to defeat such systems is to overwhelm them by expanding the number of launchers and warheads. Bolton – a longtime foe of the ABM agreement – recently bragged that dumping the treaty had no effect on arms control.

But the treaty's demise has shelved START talks, and it was the ABM's deployment in Eastern Europe – along with NATO's expansion up to the Russian borders – that led to Moscow deploying the cruise missile now in dispute.

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While Bolton and Trump are more aggressive about terminating agreements, it was the Obama administration's decision to spend \$1.6 trillion to upgrade and modernize US nuclear weapons that now endangers one of the central pillars of the nuclear treaty framework, the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

That agreement ended the testing of nuclear weapons, slowing the development of new weapons, particularly miniaturization and warheads with minimal yields. The former would allow more warheads on each missile, the latter could increase the possibility of using nuclear weapons without setting off a full-scale nuclear exchange.

Nukes are tricky to design, so you don't want to deploy one without testing it. The Americans have bypassed some of the obstacles created by the CTBT by using computers like the National Ignition Facility. The B-61 Mod 11 warhead, soon-to-be-deployed in Europe, was originally a city killer, but labs at Livermore, CA and Los Alamos and Sandia, NM turned it into a bunker buster, capable of taking out command and control centres buried deep in the ground.

Nevertheless, the military and the nuclear establishment – ranging from companies such as Lockheed Martin and Honeywell International to university research centres – have long felt hindered by the CTBT. Add the Trump administration's hostility to anything that constrains US power and the CTBT may be next on the list.

Restarting nuclear testing will end any controls on weapons of mass destruction. And since Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) requires nuclear-armed powers to eventually disarm their weapons of mass destruction, that agreement may go as well. In a very short time countries like South Korea, Japan and Saudi Arabia will join the nuclear club, with South Africa and Brazil in the wings. The latter two countries researched producing nuclear weapons in the 1980s, and South Africa actually tested one.

The demise of the INF agreement will edge the world closer to nuclear war. Since medium range missiles shorten the warning time for a nuclear attack from 30 minutes to 10 minutes or less, countries will keep their weapons on a hair trigger. "Use them or lose them" is the philosophy that impels the tactics of nuclear war.

In the past year, Russia and NATO held very large military exercises on one another's borders. Russian, US and Chinese fighter planes routinely play games of chicken. What happens when one of those "games" goes wrong? The US and the Soviet Union came within minutes of an accidental war on at least two occasions, and, with so many actors and so many weapons, it will be only a matter of time before some country interprets a radar image incorrectly and goes to DEFCON 1 – imminent nuclear war.

The INF Treaty came about because of strong opposition and huge demonstrations in Europe and the United States. That kind of pressure, coupled with a pledge by countries not to deploy such weapons, will be required again, lest the entire tapestry of agreements that kept the horror of nuclear war at bay vanish. **CT**

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*Conn Hallinan can be read at
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TED RALL

Terror starts at the top

It's right to be shocked by mass murder, but our leaders should also do a bit of heart-searching as they denounce violence

THERE are no eye sockets big enough for the eye-rolling I want to do when I hear American politicians express shock at political violence like the latest domestic terror trifecta: a racist white man murdered two blacks at a Kentucky grocery store, a white right-winger stands accused of mailing more than a dozen pipe bombs to Democratic politicians and celebrities, and a white antisemite allegedly gunned down 11 people at a Pittsburgh synagogue.

There's plenty of blame to go around.

The assault weapons ban expired in 2004 and Congress failed to renew it; eight-million AR-15 semiautomatic rifles and related models are now in American homes. Mass shootings aren't occurring more frequently but when they do, body counts are higher.

In 1975 the Supreme Court ruled that a state could no longer forcibly commit the mentally ill to institutions unless they were dangerous. It was a good decision; I remember with horror my Ohio neighbour who had his wife dragged away so he could move in with his girlfriend. Unfortunately it set the stage for the Reagan Administration's systemic deinstitutionalisation policy. During the first half of the 1980s mental hospitals were closed and patients were dumped on the streets. The homeless population exploded. Under the old regime, obviously deranged people like James Holmes (the carrot-haired mass shooter at the movie theater in Aurora, Colorado), Adam Lanza (Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut), and Ce-

sar Sayoc (the homeless man arrested for recent mail bombs) would probably have been locked up before they could hurt anyone.

This time, the post-mayhem political classes blame Donald Trump. He's bigoted and loudly legitimises far-right extremism. Did his noxious rhetoric inspire these three right-wing bigots? I think it's more complicated: Trump can convince a reasonable person to turn racist. But it's a bigger jump to turn a racist into a killer. That has more to do with insanity.

Tone, morale, what's acceptable vs what's unacceptable: social norms come from the top and trickle down to us peasants. Trump's rhetoric is toxic. But the message that violence is effective and acceptable didn't begin with Trump. And it's hardly unique to his presidency.

To paraphrase the old Palmolive commercial: Violence? You're soaking in it! And no one is guiltier of our culture of violence than the countless politicians who say stuff like this:

"Threats or acts of political violence have no place in the United States of America." – Trump, 10/24/18. Untrue. Five days earlier, Trump praised ("he's my kind of – he's my guy") a psychotic Montana congressman who assaulted a reporter, breaking his glasses.

"There's no room for violence [in politics]." – Barack Obama, 6/3/16. Yet every week as president Obama worked down a "kill list" of victims targeted for drone assassination because they opposed the dictatorial governments of corrupt US allies. And he bragged about the political assass-

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sination of Osama bin Laden rather than putting him on trial, as the law requires.

Textbooks teach us, without irony or criticism, about Manifest Destiny – the assumption that Americans have been entitled from Day One to whatever land they wanted to steal and to kill anyone who tried to stop them. Historians write approvingly of the Monroe Doctrine, the insane-if-you-think-about-it claim that every country in the Western hemisphere enjoys only as much sovereignty as we feel like granting them. Implicit throughout America’s foreign adventurism is that the US invading and occupying and raiding other nations is normal and free of consequence, whereas the rare occasions when other nations attack the US (War of 1812, Pearl Harbor, 9/11) are outrageous and intolerable and call for ferocious retribution.

After childhood the job of brainwashing otherwise sane adults into the systemic normalisation of state violence falls to our political leaders and their mouthpieces in the media. Even the best politicians do it. It’s a system. When you live in a system, you soak in it.

“In this country we battle with words and ideas, not fists and bombs,” Bernie Sanders tweeted in response to the mail bombs. What a lie. The Obama Administration’s Department of Homeland Security used policemen’s fists and flash grenades and pepper bombs to rout dozens of Occupy Wall Street movement encampments in 2011.

The mayor of Philadelphia ordered that police drop a bomb on a row house in a quiet neighbourhood in 1985. The botched effort to execute arrest warrants on an anarcho-primitivist group called MOVE killed 11 people and burned down three city blocks, destroying 65 buildings. Police shot at those trying to escape. Naturally, no city official was ever charged with wrongdoing.

Cops kill a thousand Americans every year.

Every president deploys violence on a vast scale. They’re cavalier about it. They revel in their crimes because they think bragging about committing mass murder makes them look “tough”.

How on earth can they act surprised when ordinary citizens follow their example?

After watching Islamist rebels torture deposed Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi and sodomise

him with a bayonet, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton chuckled gleefully about America’s role in his gruesome death (a US drone blew up the dictator’s convoy): “We came, we saw, he died.”

How macho.

At the 2010 White House Correspondents Dinner Obama joked about his policy of assassinating brown-skinned Middle Easterners willy-nilly: “The Jonas Brothers are here; they’re out there somewhere. Sasha and Malia are huge fans. But boys, don’t get any ideas. I have two words for you: Predator drones. You will never see it coming. You think I’m joking”.

Imagine the president of France or Germany or Canada or Russia saying something that insensitive, tasteless and crass. You can’t. They wouldn’t.

“It’s already hard enough to convince Muslims that the US isn’t indifferent to civilian casualties without having the president joke about it”, commented Adam Serwer of the *American Prospect*. Assuming Muslims are dumb enough to be convinced.

When political leaders in other countries discuss their decisions to commit violence, there’s often a “more in sorrow than in anger” tone to their statements. Don’t want to, can’t help it, regrettable – just don’t have a choice.

American presidents are different. They swagger like John Wayne. The crazies who shoot up schools and synagogues sound a lot like them.

“Screw your optics, I’m going in”, accused Pittsburgh temple shooter Robert Bowers posted to social media hours before the incident.

“Hey mom. Gotta go”, Dylan Thomas said on video the day before he and Eric Harris killed 20 people at Columbine High School.

“Well, Mr. Big Brother IRS man, let’s try something different; take my pound of flesh and sleep well”, wrote Andrew Stack before he flew his plane into an IRS office in Austin in 2010.

There is, of course, a difference between killer elites and killer proles. The elites kill more people.

CT

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DAVID CROMWELL

How to be a reliable mainstream journalist

If you want to get ahead, you need to follow the basic rules and conform to the requirements of wealth and power

THERE are certain rules you need to follow as a journalist if you are going to demonstrate to your editors, and the media owners who employ you, that you can be trusted.

For example, if you write about US-Iran relations, you need to ensure that your history book starts in 1979. That was the year Iranian students started a 444-day occupation of the US embassy in Tehran. This was the event that “led to four decades of mutual hostility”, according to BBC News. On no account should you dwell on the CIA-led coup in 1953 that overthrew the democratically-elected Iranian leader, Mohammad Mossadegh. Even better if you just omit any mention of this.

You should definitely not quote Noam Chomsky who said in 2013 that: “the crucial fact about Iran, which we should begin with, is that for the past 60 years, not a day has passed in which the US has not been torturing Iranians.”

As Chomsky notes, the US (with UK support) installed the Shah, a brutal dictator, described by Amnesty International as one of the worst, most extreme torturers in the world, year after year. That ordinary Iranians might harbour some kind of grievance towards Uncle Sam as a result should not be prominent in “responsible” journalism. Nor should you note, as Chomsky does, that: “When he [the Shah] was overthrown in 1979, the US almost immediately turned to supporting Saddam Hussein in an assault against Iran, which killed hundreds of thousands of Iranians, used extensive use of chemical weapons. Of course, at the

same time, Saddam attacked his Kurdish population with horrible chemical weapons attacks. The US supported all of that”.

As a “good” journalist, you should refrain from referring to the US as the world’s most dangerous rogue state, or by making any Chomskyan comparison between the US and the Mafia: “We’re back to the Mafia principle. In 1979, Iranians carried out an illegitimate act: They overthrew a tyrant that the United States had imposed and supported, and moved on an independent path, not following US orders. That conflicts with the Mafia doctrine, by which the world is pretty much ruled. Credibility must be maintained. The god-father cannot permit independence and successful defiances, in the case of Cuba. So, Iran has to be punished for that”.

As a reliable journalist, there is also no need to dwell on the shoot-



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ing down of Iran Air flight 655 over the Persian Gulf by the US warship Vincennes on July 3, 1988. All 290 people on board the plane were killed, including 66 children. President Ronald Reagan excused the mass killing as “a proper defensive action”. Vice-President George HW Bush said: “I will never apologise for the United States – I don’t care what the facts are. ... I’m not an apologise-for America kind of guy”.

The US has never forgiven Iran for its endless “defiance” in trying to shirk off Washington’s impositions. Harsh and punitive sanctions on Iran, that had been removed under the 2015 nuclear deal, have now been restored by President Donald Trump. Trump has also decided to pull out of the INF, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces

Treaty, with Russia. This is the landmark nuclear arms pact signed in 1987 by President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

But “balanced” journalism need not focus on the enhanced threat of nuclear war, or the diplomatic options that the US has ignored or trampled upon. Instead, journalism is to be shaped by the narrative framework that it is the US that is behaving responsibly, and that Iran is the gravest threat to world peace. Thus, BBC News reports that US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has: “warned that the US will exert ‘relentless’ pressure on Iran unless it changes its ‘revolutionary course’.”

BBC News adds: “Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani earlier struck

a defiant tone, saying the country will “continue selling oil”.

“We will proudly break the sanctions,’ he told economic officials”.

Good reporters know that Official Enemies resisting US imperialism must always be described as “defiant”. But the term is rarely, if ever, applied to the imperial power implementing oppressive measures.

BBC News dutifully reported Pompeo’s comments: “The Iranian regime has a choice: it can either do a 180-degree turn from its outlaw course of action and act like a normal country, or it can see its economy crumble”.

A good reporter knows not to critically appraise, far less ridicule, the idea that the US is an exemplar of “a normal country”, rather than being an outlaw state that outrageously threatens to make another country’s economy “crumble” for refusing to obey US orders.

Don’t talk about the Israel lobby

Another rule of corporate journalism is to downplay the influence of the Israel lobby in British politics; or just pretend it doesn’t exist. More-over, you can boost your credentials by reporting from within the skewed, pro-Israel narrative that Jeremy Corbyn, a lifelong campaigner against racism, has succumbed to antisemitism. Even better if you can somehow link him to a horrific event, such as the recent murder of 11 worshippers at a Pittsburgh synagogue by a far-right white supremacist. That’s what Christina Patterson, a newspaper columnist, did on Sky News. She said: “I have to say in our own country, the Labour party has had a very heavy shadow of antisemitism hanging over it for much of this year ... I know that Jeremy Corbyn and his colleagues have tried to say that it’s not a problem”.

This was a blatant smear.

If you work for BBC News, it is especially important that stories have an appropriate headline and narrative framework: namely, one that promotes Israel’s perspective and also obscures the agency involved when Palestinians have been killed by Israelis. Thus, a story about three young Palestinians, aged 13 and 14, killed in an Israeli



air attack should be titled: “Gaza youths ‘killed planting bomb”

And definitely not: “Israel kills three Palestinian children”

Otherwise, you – or more likely your superiors – are likely to receive a phone call from the Israeli embassy in London. As a senior BBC News producer once told Professor Greg Philo of the Glasgow Media Group: “We wait in fear for the telephone call from the Israelis”.

This helps keep journalists in line.

It is also important not to watch, far less report, one recent film the Israel lobby doesn’t want the public to see. Titled, *The Lobby – USA*, it is a four-part undercover investigation by Al Jazeera into Israel’s covert influence in the United States. The film was completed in October 2017. However, it was not shown after Qatar, the gas-rich Gulf emirate that funds Al Jazeera, “came under intense Israel lobby pressure not to air the film”. The Electronic Intifada website has obtained a copy of the film and has now published the episodes.

In Britain, an Al Jazeera undercover sting operation on key members of the Israel lobby last year revealed a £1-million plot by the Israeli government to undermine Corbyn. It’s best to look the other way, however, if you are an aspiring journalist in the “mainstream”. In particular, if you work for BBC News or the *Guardian*, you certainly do not wish to draw attention to a recent report by the Media Reform Coalition (MRC) about inaccuracies and distortions in media coverage of antisemitism and the Labour Party. The BBC and the *Guardian* were among the worst offenders.

Over a month after the damning report was published, *Guardian* editor Katharine Viner has still said nothing in public about it (as far as we are aware), despite being prompted by us, and many others, more than once. Perhaps unsurprisingly, not a single person at the *Guardian* has so much as mentioned it; including those columnists, notably Owen Jones and George Monbiot, the public is encouraged to regard as fearless radicals. Justin Schlosberg, the lead author of the report, has now published an open letter to the *Guardian* readers’ editor on behalf of the MRC. He wrote: “Both before and since publishing our research,

which raised serious concerns about the *Guardian*’s coverage of antisemitism within the Labour Party, we have made strident efforts to engage in constructive dialogue with both editorial and public affairs staff. Unfortunately, these efforts do not appear to have born any fruit to date. There has also been no reporting or commenting on our research, despite the significant public debate and controversy that it sparked. We nevertheless continue to hope and expect that a reflexive and considered response to the evidence will be forthcoming”.

Respected media academics – including Robert McChesney, Greg Philo, James Curran, David Miller and many others – are clear that the MRC report on coverage of antisemitism and Labour is serious and requires addressing: “It is imperative that news institutions – especially the BBC and those newspapers who pride themselves on fair and accurate reporting – answer to these findings. It is not enough to simply dismiss the research on the basis of presumed bias without engaging constructively with the research, including the notably cautious approach adopted by the researchers”.

The statement continued: “Silence or blanket dismissal will only speak volumes about the widely sensed malaise in our free press and public service media. A functioning democracy depends on a functioning fourth estate”.

The academics’ statement went unheeded by the “mainstream” media; thus highlighting the dearth of a functioning fourth estate, and the grievous lack of a functioning democracy.

Attack Julian Assange

As a “mainstream” journalist, you also need to ensure that you treat WikiLeaks co-founder Julian Assange with the requisite amount of contempt and ridicule. Thus, “impartial” BBC News featured a story on its website titled, “Julian Assange given feline ultimatum by Ecuador”. Assange, the BBC said, had: “been given a set of house rules at the Ecuadorean embassy in London that include cleaning his bathroom and

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taking better care of his cat.”

The original version of the article even included a fake quote, “Save water, don’t shower”, from a parody Julian Assange Twitter account; possibly a symptom of an over-eager BBC reporter trying to make Assange look as ridiculous as possible.

In similar vein, the *Times* ran a piece titled, “Clean up after your cat or else, Ecuadorian embassy tells Julian Assange”, followed later by another article with the flippant headline, “Ecuadorian Embassy tires of Julian Assange’s kickabouts and skateboarding”. The *Express* went with “Feline fine? Assange’s cat needs Embassy assistance”. The *Guardian*, which benefited from an earlier collaboration with WikiLeaks and Assange, published a flippant piece titled, “How to get rid of an unwanted housemate”, which chuckled: “The Ecuadorians are fed up with their long-time lodger, Julian Assange. But many of us have had a nightmare flatmate. Here’s how to get them to leave”.

By contrast, Italian journalist Stefania Maurizi, doing actual journalism, wrote: “While the media focused on Julian Assange’s cat rather than his continuing arbitrary detention, evidence shows that Britain worked hard to force his extradition to Sweden where Assange feared he could then be turned over to the US”.

Maurizi pointed out that Sweden dropped its investigation in May 2017, after Swedish prosecutors had questioned Assange in London, as he had always asked. She added: “Although the Swedish probe was ultimately terminated, Assange remains confined. No matter that the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention established that the WikiLeaks founder has been arbitrarily detained since 2010, and that he should be freed and compensated. The UK, which encourages other states to respect international law, doesn’t care about the decision by this UN body whose opinions are respected by the European Court of Human Rights. After trying to appeal the UN decision and losing the appeal, Britain is simply ignoring it. There is no end in sight to Assange’s arbitrary detention”.

Real journalists would be hugely concerned by the implications of someone publishing de-

tails of war crimes and corruption being targeted by a state and threatened with extradition and long-term imprisonment. But, as the Canadian writer Joe Emersberger says, the “Assange case shows support for free speech depends on who’s talking”.

Australian independent journalist Caitlin Johnstone notes that what “empire loyalists” in the corporate media “are really saying when they bash Julian Assange” is that they can be trusted to protect establishment interests. Of course, it is all the easier to attack Assange knowing that he has essentially been silenced in the Ecuadorean embassy. He is also at serious risk of deteriorating health if he is unable to leave the embassy soon without the risk of being extradited to the US.

At the time of writing, he still apparently has no access to the internet. His mother, Christine Assange, has just issued an urgent and impassioned plea to raise awareness of his plight: “This is not a drill. This is an emergency. The life of my son ... is in immediate and critical danger.”

She adds that: “A new, impossible, inhumane set of rules and protocols was implemented at the embassy to torture him to such a point that he will break and be forced to leave”.

She warns that if her son leaves the embassy, he will be extradited to the US, given a “show trial”, face detention “in Guantanamo Bay, 45 years in a maximum-security prison, or even the death penalty”.

Meanwhile, as Johnstone adds, the message sent out by would-be careerists smearing and laughing at Assange is: “Hey! Look at me! You can count on me to advance whatever narratives get passed down from on high! I’ll cheer on all the wars! I’ll play up the misdeeds of our great nation’s rivals and ignore the misdeeds of our allies! [...] I will be a reliable mouthpiece of the ruling class regardless of who is elected in our fake elections to our fake official government. [...] I understand what you want me to do without your explicitly telling me to do it. [...] Look, I’m even joining in the dog pile against a political prisoner who can’t defend himself”/

Soft-pedal Fascism

Another rule to abide by as a corporate journalist is to worship the global economy, excusing or even acclaiming the rise of extreme right-wing politicians because that leads to possible gains for big business. As Alan MacLeod, of the Glasgow University Media Group, observed in a recent piece for Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR), the financial press cheered the election of a fascist president in Brazil: “Jair Bolsonaro was an army officer during Brazil’s fascist military dictatorship (1964–85), which he defends, maintaining that its only error was not killing enough people”.

He is set to apply “shock therapy” to Brazil, initiating “a fire sale of state assets and an opening up of the country’s vast natural resources for foreign exploitation”, including the Amazon. Moreover, he has threatened to unleash a wave of violence on the working class, minorities and the left. Bolsonaro stood against the centre-left Workers’ Party candidate Fernando Haddad. International markets, and therefore the financial press, clearly wanted Bolsonaro to win, observes MacLeod. Socialism is never popular with business and financial elites, after all.

MacLeod notes that Bolsonaro was elected with just 55.5 per cent of the vote after former leftist President Lula da Silva, by far the most popular candidate, had been jailed and barred from running on highly questionable charges. After being elected, Bolsonaro brazenly appointed the prosecutor who jailed Lula as Justice Minister in the new Brazilian government.

The *Financial Times* reported that the markets were “cheering” Bolsonaro’s lead in the presidential race. The FT also noted surging stocks in weapons companies and a boost to the general economic as Bolsonaro’s performance “heartened investors”.

MacLeod concluded: “When it comes to opportunities for profits, all else is forgotten. After all, fascism is big business”. Of course, a ‘real’ journalist would never say something like that.

An opinion piece on the business-orient-

ed Bloomberg website proclaimed: “Brazil’s Bolsonaro Completes a US Sweep of South America”, adding: “Other than Venezuela – and only for as long as Maduro holds on – the continent is now US-friendly”.

The piece was written by James Stavridis, a retired US Navy admiral and former military commander of NATO.

As journalist Ben Norton summed up via Twitter: “I repeat for the umpteenth time: capitalism and imperialism infinitely prefer fascism over socialism. Capitalist imperialism wholeheartedly embraces fascists, while murdering socialists. This ex-commander of US Southern Command is bragging about this”.

“Responsible” journalism means providing a regular, amplified outlet for imperial-friendly “analysis”. As Jonathan Cook pointed out recently, Bolsonaro is “a monster engineered by our media”. In other words, in much the same way that the corporate media facilitated the rise of Donald Trump to become US president.

Bury UK responsibility for Yemen’s nightmare

There are always exceptions to the rules. Patrick Cockburn, a long-time foreign correspondent with the *Independent*, is an example of a journalist who questions established “truths”. For almost two years, the corporate media have cited a UN figure of 10,000 Yemenis who have been killed in the US-and UK-backed Saudi war. Recently, Cockburn pointed out that this figure grossly downplays the real, catastrophic death toll which is likely in the range 70,000-80,000.

Cockburn interviewed Andrea Carboni, a researcher with the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED). This is an independent group formerly associated with the University of Sussex. Carboni is focusing attention on the real casualty level in Yemen. He estimates the number killed between January 2016 and October 2018 to be 56,000 civilians and combatants. When he completes his research, Carboni told Cockburn that he expects to find a total of between 70,000 and 80,000 victims who have died since the start of the Saudi-led

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assault in the Yemen civil war in March 2015.

Cockburn adds: “The number is increasing by more than 2,000 per month as fighting intensifies around the Red Sea port of Hodeidah. It does not include those dying of malnutrition, or diseases such as cholera”.

In fact, figures from UNICEF and Save the Children show that between January 2016 and November 2017, at least 113,000 Yemeni children died from preventable causes; mostly disease and malnutrition.

In an interview with Ben Norton on the Real News Network, Cockburn points out that, despite the horrendous scale of this suffering, it is being given minimal news coverage: “It’s horrific. And you know, it’s not – a point, actually, that the UN was making recently, I don’t think got picked up very much, was, you know, that famines are pretty uncommon. You know, there was a famine in Somalia some years ago. There was another smaller one in South Sudan. But a famine like this, as big as this, this is very uncommon. I mean, it’s entirely man made. And one could say it’s been taking place in view of the whole world. But actually it isn’t, because the news of it isn’t being reported”.

Cockburn also highlights a study by Professor Martha Mundy, titled *Strategies of the Coalition in the Yemen War: Aerial Bombardment and Food War*, concluding that the Saudi-led bombing campaign, which is supported by the US and the UK, deliberately targeted food production and storage facilities. As a well-established veteran reporter of impressive credentials, Cockburn can report such uncomfortable truths without suffering career oblivion. But woe betide any young journalist trying to make their way in the ‘mainstream’ who tries to do likewise. Instead, they should follow the example of Patrick Wintour, the *Guardian*’s diplomatic editor, who performs contortions to provide a fictitious “balance” in a recent piece on Yemen. Wintour refers to mere “claims” that the UK “is siding too much with the Saudis”. The Orwellian language continues with the description of Saudi Arabia as a “defence partner” of Britain.

The sub-heading under the main title of Wintour’s article gives prominence to the perspective of the UK Defence Secretary: “Jeremy Hunt says

cessation of hostilities could ‘alleviate suffering’ of Yemeni people”.

As the historian and foreign policy analyst Mark Curtis observed via Twitter: “This sub-heading is a microcosm of what a joke the *Guardian* is. After over 3 yrs of UK govt’s total backing of mass murder in Yemen, the paper has the temerity to equate UK policy with easing humanitarian suffering. The state could not ask for more”.

Aspiring journalists should take note of the state-corporate requirement to bury the bloody reality of “defence” and the huge profits that must be protected.

Curtis also recently highlighted an admission by the Ministry of Defence that has seemingly gone under the radar of the corporate media: “Oh, so Saudi pilots *are* being trained at RAF Valley in Wales (Anglesey). <https://bit.ly/2qiNkrN>”.

It would also not do for those hoping for a career in journalism to examine the daily contortions and sleight-of-hand pronouncements emanating daily from government departments. Thank goodness, then, for Curtis who regularly highlights the distasteful deceits that are churned out by the UK state.

We tweeted BBC News about the buried truth that the UK is training Saudi pilots, even as Saudi Arabia commits war crimes in Yemen: “Hello @BBCNews. Perhaps you could devote a decent amount of coverage to this? Or would you rather keep the public in the dark about the extent of UK government complicity in #Yemen’s nightmare?”

As ever, the BBC did not respond.

In short, being a reliable “mainstream” journalist entails a number of basic rules including: propagating the myth that ‘we’ are the good guys; conforming to the requirements of wealth and power; keeping one’s head down and never challenging authority in any deep or sustained way; and refraining from any public discussion about these rules. **CT**

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David Cromwell is co-editor of Medialens, the UK media watchdog – www.medialens.org – where this essay was first published.



West Side Restaurant, Manhattan

Dining out

Once there were more than 1,500 diners in New York City. Now fewer than 500 remain. Riley Arthur has photographed them all. Tony Sutton reports

FELL in love with the classic American diner during my first trip to New York City in the mid-1980s. There seemed to be one on every corner, offering wonderful all-day breakfasts, never-ending cups of coffee, cheerful service, and plenty of uninterrupted time to read the daily papers.

During that visit, I decided to try to find Manhattan's best corned beef hash, calling in at as many diners as I could manage until my tastebuds – and waistline – rebelled after a few days of glorious gluttony. The best I found before I waddled away from my quest was just off 42nd Street, close to Grand Central Station. However, it and more than 1,000 others has disappeared under the overwhelming double-whammy of inner-city gentrification and massive rent increases. Long-established, family-

run, eating houses have been replaced by cookie-cutter corporate abominations that deliver generic meals and overpriced coffee-flavoured sludge to hordes of tourists, who seem distrustful of anything that isn't a rehash of the dreck they gorge on in the food court of the shopping mall back home.

Documentary photographer Riley Arthur noticed the sudden disappearance of several local diners when she lived in Queens. Understanding their importance to the city's cultural history, she decided to photograph every diner left in the city. Three years later, her project is finished, with almost 450 diners in her portfolio, all of which are featured at her website and Instagram account.



Nick's Blue Diner, the Bronx



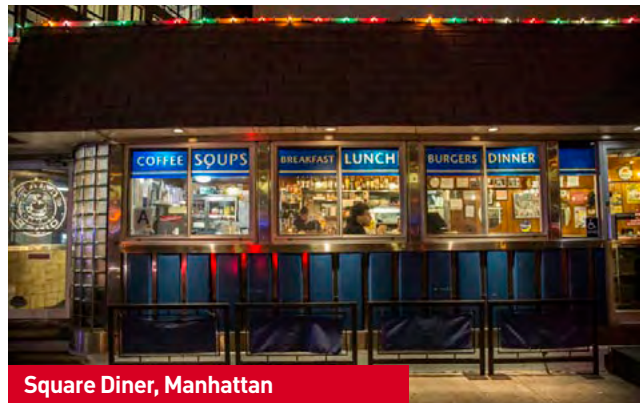
Fort Hamilton Diner, Brooklyn



Cup & Saucer Diner, Manhattan

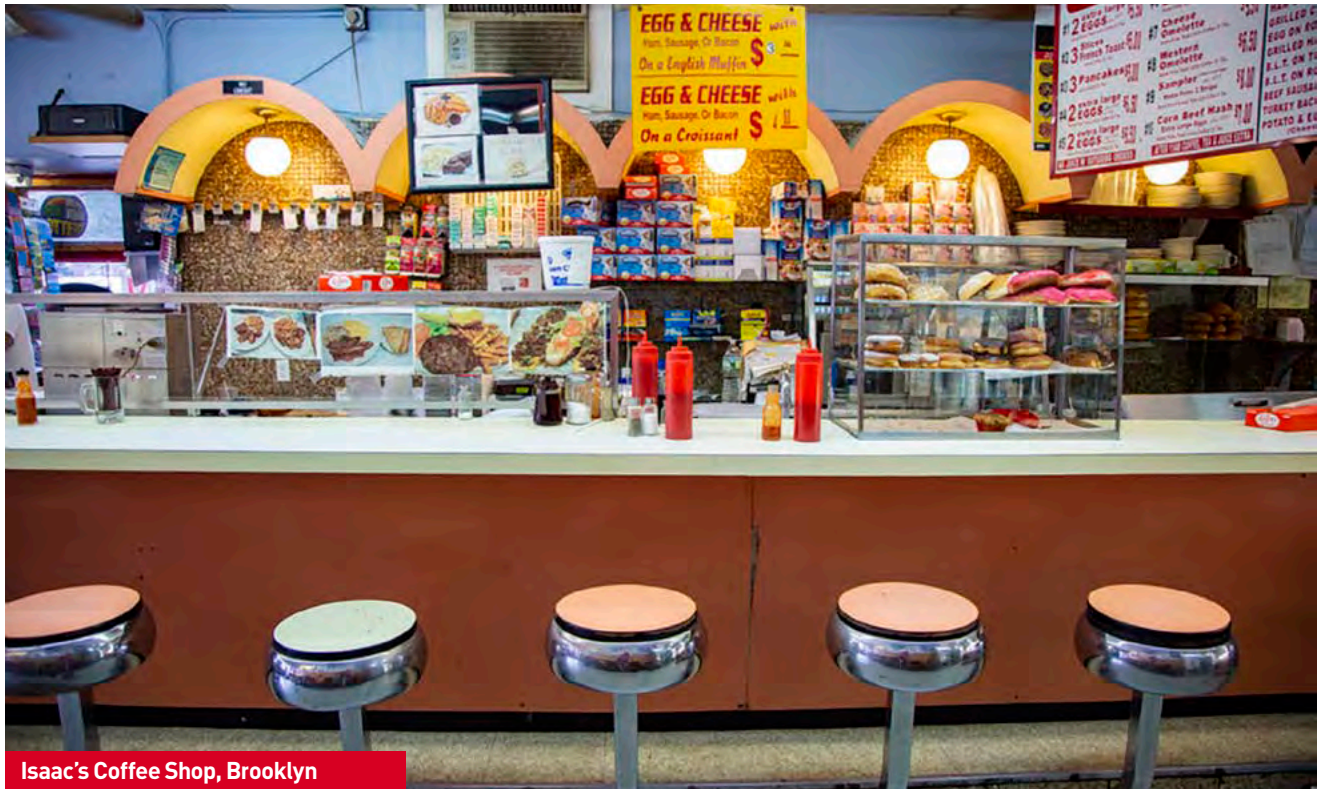


Flagship Diner, Brooklyn



Square Diner, Manhattan

RILEY ARTHUR



Isaac's Coffee Shop, Brooklyn

18 Ms Arthur spoke to *ColdType* about her work:

ColdType: *Diners are fast becoming squeezed out of NYC as gentrification and corporate food chains wipe out what remains of traditional working class communities. What persuaded you to photograph the remaining restaurants?*

Riley Arthur: When I first struck out to document NYC diners, I was aware of the gentrification of New York and the loss of diners within that system. However, in the first few months of the project, I only photographed the most historic and photogenic diners – pre-fabricated standalone diners juxtaposed against skyscrapers are a joy to photograph. Then I realised I was the only person documenting this decline, so widened the scope with the goal to document them all.

ColdType: *How long has your project taken? How many diners are there and how many do you shoot in a day?*

Riley Arthur: I'm nearing three years into the project and have now photographed every diner currently open and several that are no longer in busi-

ness. I didn't have any specific number of diners I plan to shoot in a single day, but I've shot as many as 14 in a couple of boroughs in a day. In all, I've shot more than 440 diners, but I'm reluctant to give a definitive number because what defines a diner is hotly contested among aficionados.

ColdType: *Quite a lot of your photographs are taken inside the diners. Do you eat in all of them or do you walk in, take a couple of sly photos and then leave?*

Riley Arthur: I always photograph the interiors and exteriors of each diner. I try to patronise each of them, because I want to support these small businesses. I eat at about 90 percent I visit. I always order the matzo ball soup. It's a hard job, but at least there are free coffee refills.

ColdType: *Where did you get a list of the diners? Or do you just pound the streets looking for them?*

Riley Arthur: There isn't a list of diners; that's what I'm creating! There is an outdated and incomplete list in *Diners of New York*, by Michael Engle, but many have closed since he published the book more



Cafe Royale, the Bronx



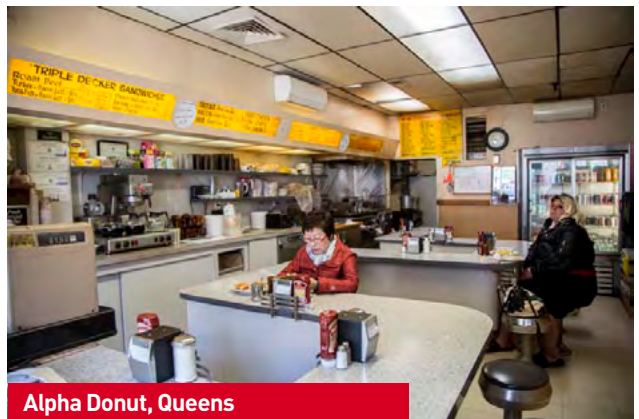
Sarge's Deli and Diner, Manhattan



Viand Cafe, Manhattan



Gemini Diner, Manhattan

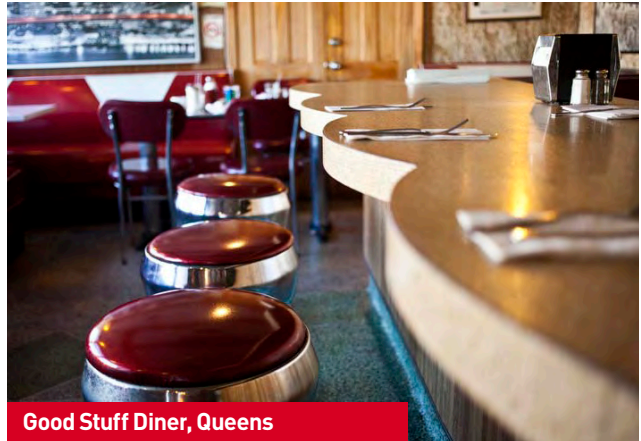


Alpha Donut, Queens

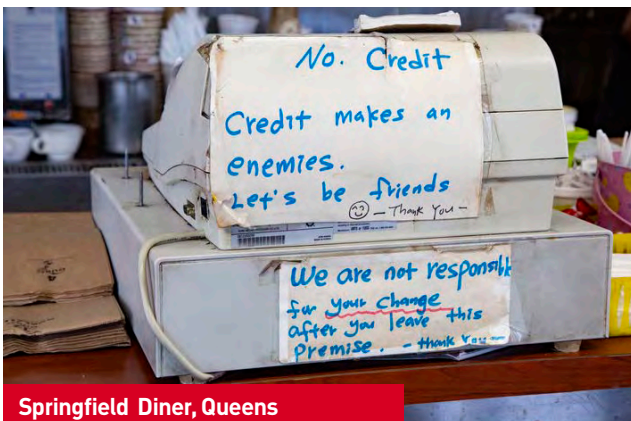
RILEY ARTHUR



EJ's Luncheonette, Manhattan



Good Stuff Diner, Queens



Springfield Diner, Queens



Dakota Diner, Staten Island

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than 10 years ago. So I research as best I can, and use Google Maps and Yelp to help get me there. I use public transportation, and walk each of the neighbourhoods, and have stumbled upon dozens of diners this way.

ColdType: *Tell me about your other projects, which seem to span the globe. I read that you had moved to Florida a couple of years ago. Are you based there now or did you move back to NYC?*

Riley Arthur: I moved to New York this summer to spend more time focusing on the project, but have since moved to Detroit. I move around a lot. My work focuses on ethnographic documentary photography focusing on underrepresented communities, and gentrification. I've done work in Slovenia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, the Azores ... I try not to limit myself geographically if there is a project that interests

me. I've got a long-term photo project documenting the psychogeography of the Post-Soviet Baltics, and another documenting Colorado ghost towns. I've started a new project on Detroit storefront churches. Additionally, the diners project is on-going and publishing a book is a project in itself.

ColdType: *I see you're from American Samoa and got a degree in visual journalism degree in Lancashire, England. Tell me about your travels?*

Riley Arthur: I grew up in American Samoa, so was raised with a global perspective. I've travelled to more than 35 countries, lived in four countries, and have lived in seven US states. Travel is deeply engrained in who I am – I've had a passport since I was six months old. It also very much informs my work as a photographer. **CT**

See more of Riley Arthur's photographs of New York City diners at www.rileyarthur.com and at www.instagram.com/dinersofnyc

SUSAN ABULHAWA

Deported from my homeland

The true vulgarity is that several million Europeans and other foreigners live in Palestine now while the indigenous population lives either in exile or under the cruel boots of Israeli occupation

After being deported from Israel for the second time in three years, Susan Abulhawa posted the following statement to the Kalimat Palestinian Literature Festival that she was unable to attend after once again being refused entry into the country in which she was born

WOULD like to express my deep gratitude to the Kalimat Palestinian Literature Festival, Mahmoud Muna in particular, and to the Kenyon Institute of the British Council for inviting me and undertaking the expense for me to participate in this year's literature festival in Palestine.

As you all know by now, Israeli authorities have denied me entry into my country and I am therefore unable to attend the festival. It pains me greatly not to be with my friends and fellow writers to explore and celebrate our literary traditions with readers and with each other in our homeland. It pains me that we can meet anywhere in the world except in Palestine, the place to which we belong, from whence our stories emerge and where all our turns eventually lead. We cannot meet on soil that has been fertilised for millennia by the bodies of our ancestors and watered by the tears and blood of Palestine's sons and daughters who daily fight for her.

Since my deportation, I read that Israeli authorities indicated that I was required to "coordinate" my travel with



DENIED ENTRY: Author Susan Abulhawa. Below: The cover of her book, *Mornings In Jenin*.



them in advance. This is a lie. In fact, I was told upon arrival at the airport that I had been required to apply for a visa to my US passport, and that this application would not be accepted until 2020, at least five years after the first time they denied me entry. They said it was my responsibility to know this, even though I was never given any indication of being banned. Then they said my first deportation in 2015 was because I refused to give them the reason for my visit. This, too, is

SUSAN ABULHAWA

a lie. Here are the facts:

In 2015, I travelled to Palestine to build playgrounds in several villages and to hold opening ceremonies at playgrounds we had already built in the months previous. Another member of our organisation was travelling with me. She happened to be Jewish and they allowed her in. Several Israeli interrogators asked me the same questions in different ways over the course of approximately 7.5 hours. I answered them all, as Palestinians must if we are to stand a chance of going home, even as visitors. But I was not sufficiently deferential, nor was I capable of that in the moment. But I was certainly composed and – the requirement for all violated people – “civil.” Finally, I was accused of not cooperating because I did not know how many cousins I have and what are all their names and the names of their spouses. It was only after being told that I was denied entry that I raised my voice and refused to leave quietly. I did yell, and I stand by everything I yelled. According to *Haaretz*, Israel said I “behaved angrily, crudely and vulgarly” in 2015 at the Allenby Bridge.

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What I said in 2015 to my interrogators, and which was also reported in *Haaretz* at the time, is that they should be the ones to leave, not me; that I am a daughter of this land and nothing will change that; that my own direct history is steeped in the land and there’s no way they can extricate it; that as much as they invoke Zionist mythological fairy tales, they can never claim such personal familial lineage, much as they wish they could.

I suppose that must sound vulgar to Zionist ears. To be confronted with authenticity of Palestinian indigeneity despite exile, and face their apocryphal, ever-shifting colonial narratives.

My lack of deference in 2015 and choice not to quietly accept the arbitrary decision of an illegitimate gatekeeper to my country apparently got appended to my name and, upon my arrival this time on November 1, signalled for my immediate deportation.

The true vulgarity is that several million Europeans and other foreigners live in Palestine now while the indigenous population lives either in

exile or under the cruel boots of Israeli occupation; the true vulgarity is in the rows of snipers surrounding Gaza, taking careful aim and shooting human beings with no real way to defend themselves, who dare to protest their collective imprisonment and imposed misery; the true vulgarity is in seeing our youth bleed on the ground, waste in Israeli jails, starve for an education, travel, learning, or some opportunity to fully be in the world; the true vulgarity is the way they have taken and continue to take everything from us, how they have carved out our hearts, stolen our everything, occupied our history, and tamp our voices and our art.

In total, Israel detained me for approximately 36 hours. We were not allowed any electronics, pens or pencils in the jail cells, but I found a way to take both – because we Palestinians are resourceful, smart, and we find our way to freedom and dignity by any means we can. I have photos and video from inside that terrible detention center, which I took with a second phone hidden on my body, and I left for them a few messages on the walls by the dirty bed I had to lay on. I suppose they will find it vulgar to read: “Free Palestine,” “Israel is an Apartheid State,” or “Susan Abulhawa was here and smuggled this pencil into her prison cell”.

But the most memorable part of this ordeal were the books. I had two books in my carry-on when I arrived at the jail and I was allowed to keep them. I alternated reading from each, sleeping, thinking.

The first book was a highly researched text by historian Nur Masalha, *Palestine: A Four Thousand Year History*. I was scheduled to interview Nur on stage about his epic audit of Palestinian millennia-old history, told not from the politically motivated narratives, but from archaeological and other forensic narratives. It is a people’s history, spanning the untidy and multilayered identities of Palestine’s indigenous populations from the Bronze Age until today. In an Israeli detention cell, with five other women – all of them Eastern European, and each of them in her own private pain, the chapters of Nur Masalha’s book took me through Palestine’s pluralistic, multicultural and multi-religious past, distorted and essentialised

SUSAN ABULHAWA

by modern inventions of an ancient past.

The bitter irony of our condition was not lost on me. I, a daughter of the land, of a family rooted at least 900 years in the land, and who spent much of her childhood in Jerusalem, was being deported from her homeland by the sons and daughters of recent arrivals, who came to Palestine mere decades ago with European-born ethos of racial Darwinism, invoking biblical fairy tales and divinely ordained entitlement.

It occurred to me, too, that all Palestinians – regardless of our conditions, ideologies, or the places of our imprisonment or exile – are forever bound together in a common history that begins with us and travels to the ancient past to one place on earth, like the many leaves and branches of a tree that lead to one trunk. And we are also bound together by the collective pain of watching people from all over the world colonise not only the physical space of our existence, but the spiritual, familial, and cultural arenas of our existence. I think we also find power in this unending, unhealed wound. We write our stories from it. Sing our songs and dabke there, too. We make art from these aches. We pick up rifles and pens, cameras and paint brushes in this space, throw stones, fly kites and flash victory and power fists there.

The other book I read was Colson Whitehead's acclaimed, spellbinding novel, *The Underground Railroad*. It is the story of Cora, a girl born into slavery to Mabel, the first escaped slave from the Randal Plantation. In this fictional account, Cora escapes the plantation with her friend Caesar, their determined slave catcher, Ridgeway, on their trail in the Underground Railroad – a real-life metaphor made into an actual railroad in the novel. The generational trauma of inconceivable bondage is all the more devastating in this novel because it is told matter-of-factly from the vantage of the enslaved. Another people's collective unhealed wound laid bare, an excruciatingly pow-

erful common past, a place of their power too, a source of their stories and their songs.

I am back in my house now, with my daughter and our beloved dogs and cats, but my heart doesn't ever leave Palestine. So, I am there, and we will continue to meet each other in the landscapes of our literature, art, cuisine and all the riches of our shared culture.

After writing this statement, I learned that the press conference is being held at Dar el Tifl. I lived the best years of my childhood there, despite my separation from family and the sometimes difficult conditions we faced living under Israeli occupation. Dar el Tifl is the legacy of one of the most admirable women I have ever known – Sitt Hind el Husseini. She saved me in more ways than I suppose she knew, or that I understood at the time. She saved a lot of us girls. She gathered us from all the broken bits of Palestine. She gave us food and shelter, educated and believed in us, and in turn made us believe we were worthy. There is no more appropriate place than Dar el Tift to read this statement.

I want to leave you with one more thought I had in that jail cell, and it is this: Israel is spiritually, emotionally, and culturally small despite the large guns they point at us – or perhaps precisely because of them. It is to their own detriment that they cannot accept our presence in our homeland, because our humanity remains intact and our art is beautiful and life-affirming, and we aren't going anywhere but home. **CT**

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*Susan Abulhawa is the author of the international bestselling novel, *Mornings in Jenin* (Bloomsbury, 2010) – www.morningsinjenin.com – and founder of *Playgrounds for Palestine* – www.playgroundsforpalestine.org*

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GEORGE MONBIOT

In a world of their own

By downplaying and misrepresenting our environmental crisis, David Attenborough and the BBC have generated complacency, confusion and ignorance

KNOWINGLY creating a false impression of the world: this is a serious matter. It is more serious still when the BBC does it, and yet worse when the presenter is “the most trusted man in Britain”. But, as his latest interview with the *Observer* reveals, Sir David Attenborough sticks to his line that fully representing environmental issues is a “turn-off”.

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His new series, *Dynasties*, will mention the pressures affecting wildlife, but Attenborough makes it clear that it will play them down. To do otherwise, he suggests, would be “proselytising” and “alarmist”. His series will be “a great relief from the political landscape which otherwise dominates our thoughts.” In light of the astonishing rate of collapse of the animal populations he features, alongside most of the rest of the world’s living systems, and when broadcasting as a whole has disgracefully failed to represent such truths, I don’t think such escapism is appropriate or justifiable.

It is not proselytising or alarmist to tell us the raw truth about what is happening to the world, however much it might discomfit us. Nor do I believe that revealing the marvels of nature automatically translates into environmental action, as the executive producer of *Dynasties* claims. I’ve come to believe it can have the opposite effect.

For many years, wildlife film-making has presented a pristine living world. It has created an impression of security and abundance, even in places afflicted by cascading ecological collapse.

The cameras reassure us that there are vast tracts of wilderness in which wildlife continues to thrive. They cultivate complacency, not action.

You cannot do such a thing passively. Wildlife filmmakers I know tell me that the effort to portray what looks like an untouched ecosystem becomes harder every year. They have to choose their camera angles ever more carefully to exclude the evidence of destruction, travel further to find the Edens they depict. They know, and many feel deeply uncomfortable about it, that they are telling a false story, creating a fairytale world which persuades us that all is well, in the midst of an existential crisis. While many people, thanks in large part to David Attenborough, are now quite well informed about wildlife, we remain astonishingly ignorant about what is happening to it.

What makes Attenborough’s comments particularly odd is that they come just a year after the final episode of his *Blue Planet II* series triggered a massive effort to reduce plastic pollution. Though the programme made a complete dog’s breakfast of the issue, the response demonstrated a vast public appetite for information about the environmental crisis, and an urgent desire to act on it.

Since 1985, when I started work in the department that has made most of his programmes, I’ve pressed the BBC to reveal environmental realities, often with dismal results. In 1995, I spent several months with a producer, developing a novel

GEORGE MONBIOT

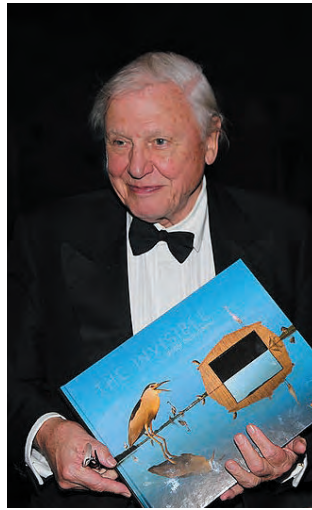
and imaginative proposal for an environmental series. The producer returned from his meeting with the channel controller in a state of shock. “He just looked at the title and asked ‘Is this environment?’. I said yes. He said, ‘I’ve spent two years trying to get environment off this fucking channel. Why the fuck are you bringing me environment?’” I later discovered that this response was typical. The controllers weren’t indifferent. They were actively hostile. If you ask me whether the BBC or ExxonMobil has done more to frustrate environmental action in this country, I would say the BBC.

We all knew that only one person had the power to break this dam. For decades, David Attenborough, a former channel controller widely seen as the living embodiment of the BBC, has been able to make any programme he wants. So where, we kept asking, was he? At last, in 2000, he presented an environmental series: *The State of the Planet*.

It was an interesting and watchable series, but it left us with nowhere to go and nothing to do. Only in the last few seconds of the final episode was there a hint that structural forces might be at play: “real success can only come if there’s a change in our societies, in our economics and in our politics.” But what change? What economics? What politics? He had given us no clues.

To make matters worse, it was sandwiched between further programmes of his about the wonders of nature, that created a strong impression of robust planetary health. He might have been describing two different worlds. Six years later, he made another environmental series, *The Truth about Climate Change*. And this, in my view, was a total disaster.

It told us nothing about the driving forces behind climate breakdown. The only mention of fossil fuel companies was as part of the solution: “the people who extract fossil fuels like oil and gas have now come up with a way to put carbon diox-



WRONG MESSAGE: Sir David Attenborough. Wikimedia

ide back under ground.” Apart from the general “we”, the only distinct force identified as responsible was the “1.3 billion Chinese”. That a large proportion of Chinese emissions are caused by manufacturing the goods we buy was not mentioned. The series immediately triggered a new form of climate denial: I was bombarded with people telling me there was no point in taking action in Britain, because the Chinese were killing the planet.

If Attenborough’s environmentalism has a coherent theme, it is shifting the blame away from powerful forces and onto either society in general or the poor and weak. Sometimes it becomes pretty dark. In 2013, he

told the *Telegraph*, “What are all these famines in Ethiopia? What are they about? They’re about too many people for too little land ... We say, get the United Nations to send them bags of flour. That’s barmy”.

There had not been a famine in Ethiopia for 28 years, and the last one was caused not by an absolute food shortage, but by civil war and government policies. His suggestion that food relief is counter-productive suggests he has read nothing on the subject since Thomas Malthus’s essay in 1798. But, cruel and ignorant as these comments were, they were more or less cost-free. By contrast, you do not remain a national treasure by upsetting powerful vested interests: look at the flak the wildlife and environmental presenter Chris Packham attracts.

I have always been entranced by David Attenborough’s wildlife programmes, but astonished by his consistent failure to mount a coherent, truthful and effective defence of the living world he loves. His revelation of the wonders of nature has been a great public service. But withholding the knowledge we need to defend it is, I believe, a grave disservice. **CT**

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

KIT KNIGHTLY

Amistice Day and the lies of war

The mental scars passed down by our great-grandfathers
are still raw to the touch. To truly honour their memory, we must never
let new liars get away with telling old lies

“This book is to be neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. It will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped (its) shells, were destroyed by the war.” – Erich Maria Remarque, All Quiet on the Western Front

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THERE was a generation, of every nationality imaginable, who were victims of one of the greatest crimes in history. Today they are all gone. The last veteran of World War I died nearly ten years ago. The last of the “heroes, fit for homes” passing, one hopes, to a kinder world.

But still, we’re here. And we remember. Why?

Jung theorised that people are joined beyond the physical boundaries of reality. Each person has a mind and thoughts and ideas and dreams as an individual. ...there are also collective archetypes. The group mind. Water, Shadow, the Tree of Life. Shared ideas, known by instinct, understood by everyone.

Logic would suggest a group mind is as liable to break as an individual. A shared consciousness can be traumatised as much as a private one. We can see that in our own recent history. America’s national consciousness was broken by the JFK assassination, then further fractured by Vietnam. Japan has never recovered from Hiroshima or Nagasaki. Russians carry the starvation and suffering of the siege of Leningrad in their very bones.

You can see World War I through this lens: A

global trauma, species wide. We all felt it, we all feel it still. An old wound that refuses to heal.

I studied First World War history at secondary school, and then in more detail at college. I have seen the Great War documentary series and countless others like it. I have read soldiers diaries and letters home. I have digested *Regeneration*, *Paths of Glory*, *King and Country* and *Oh, What a Lovely War!*, all of which I highly recommend.

But, for me, none of them compare to my first experience of WWI – the British TV series *Blackadder Goes Forth*. I’ll admit, that seems flippant and silly. But, as a child who barely understood the idea of death or the concept of war, it was an object lesson in loss. As pure and sharp as a psalm or a sonnet or a fable.

They were Blackadder, and Baldrick, and George. They made me laugh ... and then they were gone. There is something strong in the simple horror of four frightened men, going over the top to what they know is almost certain death. There’s power in showing us characters we’ve shared laughs with getting cut down for no reason at all. In its own subtle way, *Blackadder* is a distillation of the impact that the “Great War” had on the world. Impacts felt to this day, by all of us.

When George says “Sir ... I’m scared sir.” ... we feel his fear, and the fear of the million of young men like him. The junior officers, the younger sons of wealth. A hundred-thousand fools of a hundred-thousand families who weren’t wise, or lucky, enough to join the clergy. Young men who truly believe the lies that all Empires tell their



IN THE TRENCHES: British troops await orders that will send them into enemy fire. Photo: Wikimedia.org

soldiers: WE are in the right. WE use our power for the good of all. WE must have control, because only we can be trusted with it. Our cause is just. God is on our side. Freedom, family and love are the preserves of our side alone.

When Baldrick asks “Why can’t we just stop sir? Why can’t we all just say ‘no more killing let’s all go home!’? Why would it be stupid just to pack it all in, sir? Why sir, why?”, he’s expressing confusion and anger beyond his ability to understand: a stupid man, but decent and honest, abused by the authority he trusted and losing faith in all the systems of society he never questioned before. A miniaturised social revolution, mirroring the collapse of the Russian monarchy and the rise of Communism.

When Captain Darling laments the loss of his future, his job and his fiancée and his cricket club, we feel a pull. A black hole in our collective souls where a million happy lives might have been.

Who knows what we lost? What undiscovered artists were blinded by gas? What brilliant scientists were picked off by snipers? Or record-breaking athletes blown apart by landmines? How many great unwritten novels shivered out of existence thanks to typhoid or dysentery? We’ll never know.

The tragedy doesn’t have to be huge to be felt. On a smaller scale, there were smiles and kisses and dreams extinguished. Sons were never born. Daughters never held. Fiancées never married. Christmases and birthdays and summers ruined. Forever. Millions upon millions upon millions.

And we know it. We all know it, in our gut.

Blackadder was written by, and for, a generation that wasn’t born when World War I ended – whose parents weren’t born when World War I ended. It was released to mark the 70th anniversary of Armistice Day.

In a profoundly dishonest society, the shared grief of World War I is one of the few things we all know the truth of. One of the few things we are all

honest about. Because it's important. Because it's a wound too deep to ignore, a betrayal too lasting to be forgiven.

The Great War was sold to the British public as a just war. Men were sent over to France and Belgium to curb "German aggression and Imperial ambitions". Every generation since has known that to be an absurd lie.

In the 200 years preceding 1914, British armies had painted a quarter of the world red with blood. We were an empire, the greatest in human history. A "democratic" empire where less than 20 percent of the population could vote. The sun never set on Britain, and yet millions lived in darkness.

It wasn't just an Empire of bullets and banks, either, but also of marriages. Empress Victoria had spread her (half-German) children, and their watery blood, all across the royal houses of Europe. The German Kaiser was a cousin of our King who was a cousin of the Russian Tsar. They were all the same, from the beards on their faces to the blood on their hands. Mirror images of each other. Dueling empires, throwing men into the furnace to fuel their conquests.

Britain was not fighting for values, merely playing the grand chessboard into a horrific stalemate. Every schoolchild has been taught that for decades.

We know that British generals were as callous as they were incompetent as they were out of touch. That when General Melchett looks at the wrong side of a map or Field Marshall Haig sweeps toy soldiers into a dustpan, that we're only just to the satire side of reality.

Field Marshall Haig, after all, was borderline mad. He was nicknamed "the Butcher of the Somme" by his own men. Even Winston Churchill – that gin-soaked purveyor of slaughter – thought Haig was too cavalier with the lives of the men in his charge. Butcher Haig was a monster. We've been taught that all our lives.

Trench warfare was a hell on Earth. Conditions beyond human imagining punctuated by events of such brutality as to tip-toe the line between tragedy and farce. Events like the Battle of Loos, where 8000 British soldiers died in four hours, cut down by machine guns. The Germans didn't lose a single man.

It was all such a bloody waste. Everyone knows that, has always known that. Nobody ever questioned it. Until now.

In 2014, to mark the centenary of the start of the war, then-Education Secretary Michael Gove criticised schools for showing *Blackadder* as part of WWI education. Writing in the *Daily Mail*, Gove lamented the "left-wing myths" propagated by *Blackadder* and *Oh, What a Lovely War!*, claiming they denigrated "British heroes" who fought valiantly in a "just war".

Gove praised the "rehabilitation" of Field-Marshal Douglas Haig and objected to the portrayal of Britain's war efforts as a "misbegotten shambles – a series of catastrophic mistakes perpetrated by an out-of-touch elite".

Later that year, then-Prime Minister David Cameron attempted to take the censor's black pen to the history books in the most inappropriate way imaginable – in a letter to the Unknown Soldier. He hit all the same talking points as Gove did, more cloying, less didactic, equally dishonest. Praising the sacrifice of lives for a "just cause" and warning of the "darkness" of the world that might have existed if we had lost. He later repeated those sentiments in an equally abhorrent setting – a speech at a military cemetery in Mons.

In September 2013, priest and academic Nigel Biggar wrote an article in *Standpoint* magazine criticising modern historian for refusing to attribute blame for WWI where it belongs – namely, the Germans.

In February 2014, the BBC aired *The Necessary War*, a documentary in which historian Max Hastings strongly disagrees with what he calls the "*Blackadder* view of history" – the idea World War I was all a waste of time, fought for no reason.

In an article of August 2013, Professor Gary Sheffield used the exact same phrase: It is time to ditch the *Blackadder* view of history ... Britain was right to fight Imperial Germany in 1914.

There was a general, establishment-backed, push to revisit the First World War, to reinvent it in the public imagination as something more akin to the way most people think of World War II: a

KIT KNIGHTLY

battle against evil, a victory for the light, won at great cost.

What's reassuring, to anyone of sense, is just how badly these efforts failed. Gove was ridiculed in the comments and called out in the media. An open letter, signed by dozens of public figures, castigated Cameron for his tasteless attempts to rewrite history. Even the *Guardian* contributed.

What's troubling, to all of the same people of sense, is the motivation behind the push in the first place. Why would the British government, and wider state as a whole, want people to change their attitude to World War I? Why now?

Is it simply that authoritarian governments require the state to be seen as above reproach? Is it a manifestation of a compulsive need to exert control over narrative, which goes hand in hand with attaining power? Or is there a more pragmatic reason behind it?

It's important to remember the truth of the Great War. Not the muddy, bloody, rotting, mangled truth of no-mans-land. The more distant, ephemeral truth. The part of the war we don't think about when we're wearing our poppies or laying our wreaths – it didn't need to happen.

People could have stopped it, but didn't. When I say "people could have stopped it", I don't mean Field Marshall Haig or Kaiser Wilhelm or Winston Churchill or Emperor Franz-Josef. I mean people like you and me. Ordinary people could have stopped the war.

The elites may have wanted the war, they may have started the war, they may have profited from the war ... but ordinary people supported the war. Ordinary people gave white feathers to young men, bullied the pacifists and the conscientious objectors. Ordinary people encouraged their sons and husbands and brothers to enlist. Because they were told to, and never thought to question it. Because they bought into the pro-war propaganda without ever examining it. Because it never occurred to them that they were being lied to. They weren't stupid or primitive. They possessed the same faculties we do. They just existed in a system that denied them both the agency to control their world, and the information to understand it. They believed in their system because they were told there was no alternative.

The world is very different now. In the last 104 years we have made strides previously unimagined. Television and flight and space and the internet. The world was turned from black-and-white to colour. We live in a "now" where bowler hats are extinct, penny-farthings are hilarious and telephones can be kept in our back pockets ... but the most important change is the free availability of information.

Ordinary people in the early 20th-century didn't have access to the same resources of knowledge or communication that most British people do today. That awareness, that inter-connectedness, is the reason we're not at war with Syria right now. Possibly the reason the world isn't a collection of glowing ashes.

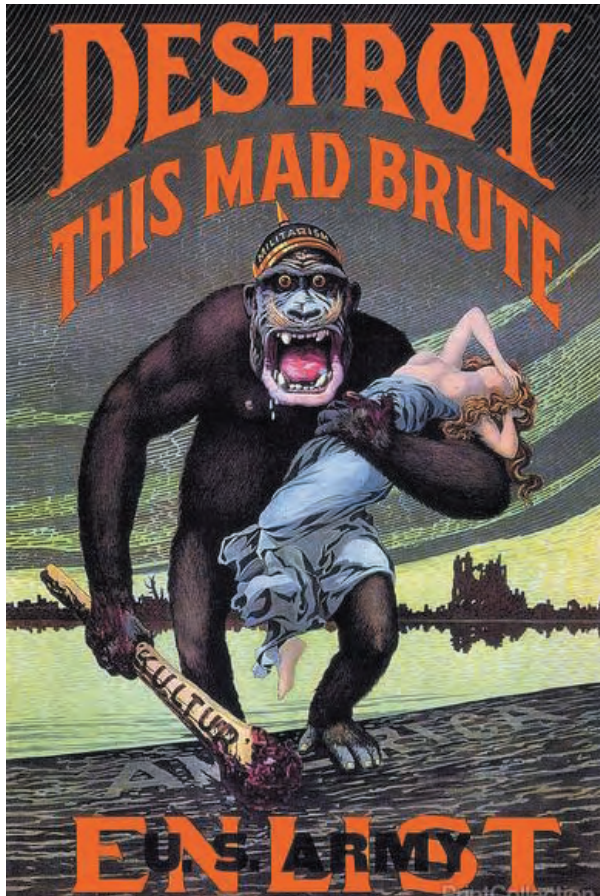
Public intelligence and informed citizens are a vital limit on the ability of the powerful to pursue their agenda. That is part of the reason powerful interests want to re-invent World War I, they want to – as Orwell said – destroy us by removing our understanding of our own history.

The lasting legacy of World War I is a decreased trust in authority. A race memory of a lie that killed 15-million people while enriching a few hundred. A deep trauma that proves, beyond doubt, that we are children of a father who does not love us. A wound, unaddressed and unhealed in the century since.

The world is very different now. But it's also just the same. Our increasingly authoritarian system of government needs a biddable underclass, people who can be bullied and manipulated into acting against their own interests. Lemmings happy to be herded off cliffs, with broad smiles on their faces.

That's what pro-World War I propaganda is about ... not a war in the past, but a war in the future. The NEXT war. The one they want to be able to sell us, in the same way, when the time comes.

That struggle is behind countless issues to this day. Lowering standards of education. Increased poverty. Debt. Starvation. Racism. Censorship. These are not accidental by-products of greed or corruption or incompetence, but deliberate policy choices. Required ingredients for the type of social



SAME AGAIN: Left – WW1 propaganda poster, c. 1916. Above – Cover of the National Review, August 2016

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structure that has existed for 90 percent of human civilisation – a system of peasants and kings.

They want a people who pay their meat tax, work their zero hours contracts, and don't trust the unions. People who hate the people they're told to hate and don't mind being spied on. People who believe everything they read in the papers and do what they're told. Just like in the good old days. They want people to forget the past mistakes wrought by a complacent, ill-informed populace. They want us to forget the crimes of their past, so they can condemn us to repeat them.

Remember that, next time you share an anti-Assad meme on Facebook, or nod along in horror at the "crimes" of China or "human rights abuses" in Venezuela. Look at the images at the top of this page, and ask yourself if we're moving in the right direction. We need to be vigilant, to remember who we are, and how we got here. Because it could all happen again. But only if we let it.

Progress, far from consisting in change, de-

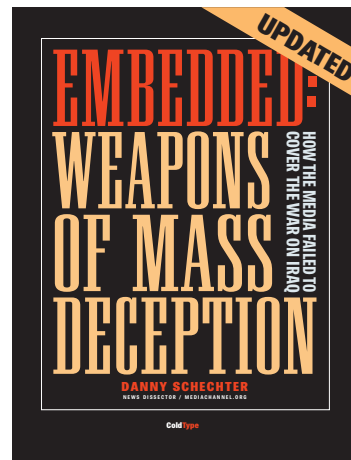
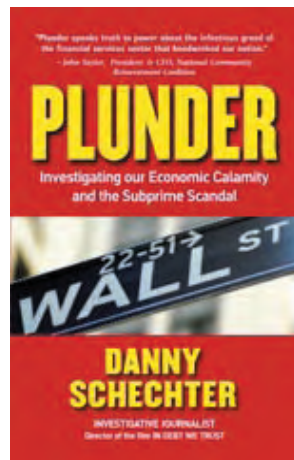
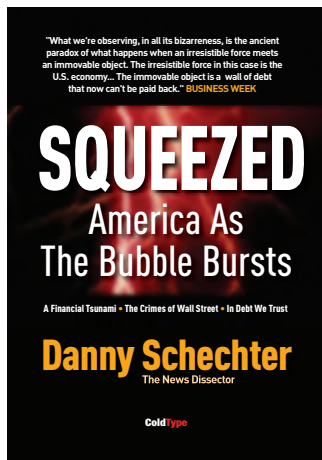
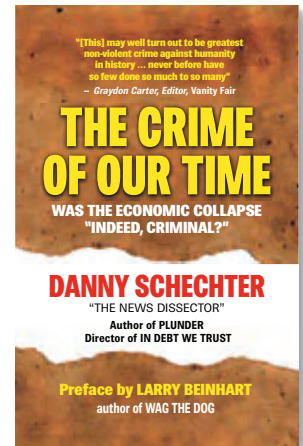
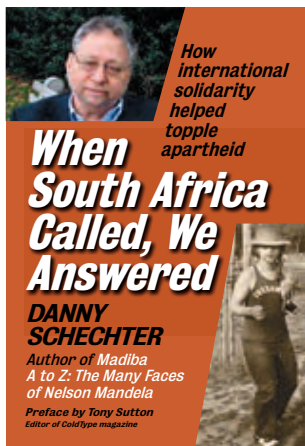
pends on retentiveness. When change is absolute there remains no being to improve and no direction is set for possible improvement: and when experience is not retained, as among savages, infancy is perpetual.

Today, the world is as close to 1914 as at any other point in the last 100 years. An old power is crumbling, its time is over, and a dying empire lashes out. Feverishly grasping at fraying threads of power. An old lion, roaring the last of his energy into an angry denial of his own mortality.

There is a fizz of war in the air, a barely controlled chaos on the verge of cutting loose and destroying us all. A very real possibility of a war that could traumatise the world forever, or leave no one behind to remember. If we can examine our own past, look at our traumas honestly, perhaps we can stop history repeating itself. **CT**

*Kit Knightly is co-editor of Off-Guardian
– www.offguardian.org*

REMEMBERING **Danny SCHECHTER** 1942 - 2015



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

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A monster engineered by our media

The election of Jair Bolsonaro as Brazil's president shows how the liberal media fails to fulfill its self-proclaimed role of guardians of moral order

WITH Jair Bolsonaro's victory in Brazil's presidential election at the end of October, the doom-mongers among western elites are out in force once again. His success, like Donald Trump's, has confirmed a long-held prejudice: that the people cannot be trusted; that, when empowered, they behave like a mob driven by primitive urges; that the unwashed masses now threaten to bring down the carefully constructed walls of civilisation.

The guardians of the status quo refused to learn the lesson of Trump's election, and so it will be with Bolsonaro. Rather than engaging the intellectual faculties they claim as their exclusive preserve, western "analysts" and "experts" are again averting their gaze from anything that might help them understand what has driven our supposed democracies into the dark places inhabited by the new demagogues. Instead, as ever, the blame is being laid squarely at the door of social media.

Social media and fake news are apparently the reasons Bolsonaro won at the ballot box. Without the gatekeepers in place to limit access to the "free press" – itself the plaything of billionaires and global corporations, with brands and a bottom line to protect – the rabble has supposedly been freed to give expression to their innate bigotry.

Here is Simon Jenkins, a veteran British gatekeeper – a former editor of the *Times* of London who now writes a column in the *Guardian* – pontificating on Bolsonaro: "The lesson for champions

of open democracy is glaring. Its values cannot be taken for granted. When debate is no longer through regulated media, courts and institutions, politics will default to the mob. Social media – once hailed as an agent of global concord – has become the purveyor of falsity, anger and hatred. Its algorithms polarise opinion. Its pseudo-information drives argument to the extremes".

This is now the default consensus of the corporate media, whether in its rightwing incarnations or of the variety posing on the liberal-left end of the spectrum like the *Guardian*. The people are stupid, and we need to be protected from their base instincts. Social media, it is claimed, has unleashed humanity's id.

There is a kind of truth in Jenkins' argument, even if it is not the one he intended. Social media did indeed liberate ordinary people. For the first time in modern history, they were not simply the recipients of official, sanctioned information. They were not only spoken down to by their betters, they could answer back – and not always as deferentially as the media class expected.

Clinging to their old privileges, Jenkins and his ilk are rightly unnerved. They have much to lose. But that also means they are far from dispassionate observers of the current political scene. They are deeply invested in the status quo, in the existing power structures that have kept them well-paid courtiers of the corporations that dominate the planet.



WESTERN CREATION: Brazil's new rightwing president, Jair Bolosonaro.

Photo: Beto Oliveira

Bolsonaro, like Trump, is not a disruption of the current neoliberal order; he is an intensification or escalation of its worst impulses. He is its logical conclusion.

The plutocrats who run our societies need figureheads, behind whom they can conceal their unaccountable power. Until now they preferred the slickest salespeople, ones who could sell wars as humanitarian intervention rather than profit-driven exercises in death and destruction; the unsustainable plunder of natural resources as economic growth; the massive accumulation of wealth, stashed in offshore tax havens, as the fair outcome of a free market; the bailouts funded by ordinary taxpayers to stem economic crises they had engineered as necessary austerity; and so on.

A smooth-tongued Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton were the favoured salespeople, especially in an age when the elites had persuaded us of a self-serving argument: that ghetto-like identities based on colour or gender mattered far more than class. It was divide-and-rule dressed up as empowerment. The polarisation now bewailed by Jenkins was in truth stoked and rationalised by the very corporate media he so faithfully serves.

Despite their professed concern, the pluto-

crats and their media spokespeople much prefer a far-right populist like Trump or Bolsonaro to a populist leader of the genuine left. They prefer the social divisions fuelled by neo-fascists like Bolsonaro, divisions that protect their wealth and privilege, over the unifying message of a socialist who wants to curtail class privilege, the real basis of the elite's power.

The true left – whether in Brazil, Venezuela, Britain or the US – does not control the police or military, the financial sector, the oil industries, the arms manufacturers, or the corporate media. It was these very industries and institutions that smoothed the path to power for Bolsonaro in Brazil, Viktor Orban in Hungary, and Trump in the US.

A smooth-tongued Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton were the favoured salespeople

Former socialist leaders like Brazil's Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva or Hugo Chavez in Venezuela were bound to fail not so much because of their flaws as individuals but because powerful interests rejected their right to rule. These socialists never had control over the key levers of power,

the key resources. Their efforts were sabotaged – from within and without – from the moment of their election.

Local elites in Latin America are tied umbilically to US elites, who in turn are determined to make sure any socialist experiment in their backyard fails – as a way to prevent a much-feared domino effect, one that might seed socialism closer to home.

The media, the financial elites, the armed forces were never servants of the socialist governments that have been struggling to reform Latin America. The corporate world has no interest either in building proper housing in place of slums or in dragging the masses out of the kind of poverty that fuels the drug gangs that Bolsonaro claims he will crush through more violence.

Bolsonaro will not face any of the institutional obstacles Lula da Silva or Chavez needed to overcome. No one in power will stand in his way as he institutes his “reforms”. No one will stop him creaming off Brazil’s wealth for his corporate friends. As in Pinochet’s Chile, Bolsonaro can rest assured that his kind of neo-fascism will live in easy harmony with neoliberalism.

If you want to understand the depth of the self-deception of Jenkins and other media gatekeepers, contrast Bolsonaro’s political ascent to that of Jeremy Corbyn, the modest social democratic leader of Britain’s Labour party. Those like Jenkins who lament the role of social media – they mean you, the public – in promoting leaders like Bolsonaro are also the media chorus who have been wounding Corbyn day after day, blow by blow, for three years – since he accidentally slipped past safeguards intended by party bureaucrats to keep someone like him from power.

Our pretend democracies were created . . . to eliminate a threat like Corbyn much earlier

The supposedly liberal *Guardian* has been leading that assault. Like the rightwing media, it has shown its absolute determination to stop Corbyn at all costs, using any pretext.

Within days of Corbyn’s election to the Labour leadership, the *Times* newspaper – the voice of the

British establishment – published an article quoting a general, whom it refused to name, warning that the British army’s commanders had agreed they would sabotage a Corbyn government. The general strongly hinted that there would be a military coup first.

We are not supposed to reach the point where such threats – tearing away the façade of western democracy – ever need to be implemented. Our pretend democracies were created with immune systems whose defences are marshalled to eliminate a threat like Corbyn much earlier.

Once he moved closer to power, however, the rightwing corporate media was forced to deploy the standard tropes used against a left leader: that he was incompetent, unpatriotic, even treasonous.

But just as the human body has different immune cells to increase its chances of success, the corporate media has faux-liberal-left agents like the *Guardian* to complement the right’s defences. The *Guardian* sought to wound Corbyn through identity politics, the modern left’s Achilles’ heel. An endless stream of confected crises about anti-semitism were intended to erode the hard-earned credit Corbyn had accumulated over decades for his anti-racism work.

Why is Corbyn so dangerous? Because he supports the right of workers to a dignified life, because he refuses to accept the might of the corporations, because he implies that a different way of organising our societies is possible. It is a modest, even timid programme he articulates, but even so it is far too radical either for the plutocratic class that rules over us or for the corporate media that serves as its propaganda arm.

The truth ignored by Jenkins and these corporate stenographers is that if you keep sabotaging the programmes of a Chavez, a Lula da Silva, a Corbyn or a Bernie Sanders, then you get a Bolsonaro, a Trump, an Orban.

It is not that the masses are a menace to democracy. It is rather that a growing proportion of voters understand that a global corporate elite has rigged the system to accrue for itself ever greater riches. It is not social media that is polarising our

JONATHAN COOK

societies. It is rather that the determination of the elites to pillage the planet until it has no more assets to strip has fuelled resentment and destroyed hope. It is not fake news that is unleashing the baser instincts of the lower orders. Rather, it is the frustration of those who feel that change is impossible, that no one in power is listening or cares.

Social media has empowered ordinary people. It has shown them that they cannot trust their leaders, that power trumps justice, that the elite's enrichment requires their poverty. They have concluded that, if the rich can engage in slash-and-burn politics against the planet, our only refuge, they can engage in slash-and-burn politics against the global elite.

Are they choosing wisely in electing a Trump or Bolsonaro? No. But the liberal guardians of the status quo are in no position to judge them. For decades, all parts of the corporate media have helped to undermine a genuine left that could have offered real solutions, that could have taken

on and beaten the right, that could have offered a moral compass to a confused, desperate and disillusioned public.

Jenkins wants to lecture the masses about their depraved choices while he and his paper steer them away from any politician who cares about their welfare, who fights for a fairer society, who prioritises mending what is broken.

The western elites will decry Bolsonaro in the forlorn and cynical hope of shoring up their credentials as guardians of the existing, supposedly moral order. But they engineered him. Bolsonaro is their monster. **CT**

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

"I think their work is heroic and I would place a copy of their just published book, Propaganda Blitz, in every journalism school that services the corporate system, as they all do" – John Pilger

PROPAGANDA BLITZ

HOW THE CORPORATE MEDIA DISTORT REALITY

By David Edwards and David Cromwell

Do you trust the liberal media? ... The reality is that all corporate media is systematically filtered by the powerful interests that own, manage and fund it.

Propaganda Blitz shows that the corporate media does not just 'spin' the news – it fundamentally distorts everything it touches, hiding the real issues from public view, and often completely reversing the truth.

Propaganda Blitz explains the real meaning of 'objective' journalism, exposes the fake news about 'fake news' and outlines a model for anti-business media activism.

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The 1993 funeral of a prominent AIDS activist became a march through the streets.

Photo: Thomas McGovern

Change and turmoil on New York streets

How the *Village Voice's* photographers captured lasting images of society
in the throes of radical social change

WHEN the *Village Voice*, the USA's first alternative weekly, closed in late August, social justice movements lost one of their biggest cheerleaders. Founded in 1955, the *Voice* aggressively covered civil rights, race relations, police brutality, gentrification, homelessness and reproductive rights. While a gay rights march may have received a short mention in the *New York Times*, that same demonstration would get front page treatment in the *Voice*.

The *Voice* played a particularly important role in publishing social documentary photography. Just as the photographs of Lewis Hine and Jacob Riis communicated the horrors of child labor and tenement overcrowding in the early 20th century, *Voice* photojournalists such as Donna Binder, Ricky Flores, Lisa Kahane, T.L. Litt, Thomas McGovern, Brian Palmer, Joseph Rodriguez, and Linda Rosier conveyed the fears, rage and struggles of the city's marginalised communities.

These photographers captured the despair



After the Howard Beach killing, activists disrupt the MTA subway service by marching on the tracks. Photo: Ricky Flores

and anger of the HIV/AIDS epidemic; the anguish of black and Latino New Yorkers whose friends and family members had died at the hands of white mobs or the police; and battles over access to affordable housing. Their work is included in “Whose Streets? Our Streets!,” a travelling exhibition that we co-curated with Meg Handler and Michael Kamber, featuring photojournalists who covered struggles for social justice on the streets of New York City from 1980 to 2000.

We spoke with Handler, a former photo editor for the *Voice*, and three photographers whose work regularly appeared in the publication to discuss the significance of the *Voice*’s approach to photography.

Founded in 1955, the *Village Voice* quickly became a popular outlet for progressive photojournalists. To Handler, a former photo editor of the tabloid in the early 1990s, there were three key points of attraction: “One, there was never any ambiguity about the politics of the paper. It was, from its infancy, what longtime *Voice* photo

editor and photographer Fred W. McDarrah famously called a ‘commie, hippie, pinko rag’. Two, the paper hired a fair amount of freelancers and so there was the opportunity to work with a diverse group of people to cover subjects that they were personally committed to. And three, it was a ‘photographer’s paper’, meaning images would retain their integrity, they wouldn’t be cropped, their subjects wouldn’t be misrepresented.”

Photographer Tom McGovern worked at the *Voice* from 1988 to 1995, and credited the publication with giving him the freedom to make the photographs he wanted to make in order to educate others about the AIDS epidemic. McGovern, whose photographs of the AIDS crisis would eventually be published in his 1999 book, *Bearing Witness (To AIDS)*, was motivated by a simple impulse: to “challenge the negative stereotypes about who has AIDS and what is this disease”.

“It was not traditional journalism,” he said. “I



A car is set aflame in the aftermath of the 1992 police killing of Jose 'Kiko' Garcia.

Photo: Ricky Flores

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never saw myself as being completely objective. I was certainly a supporter of the cause”.

In his photographs, McGovern highlighted the work of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, or ACT UP New York, which used direct action and street theatre to call attention to the ineffective government response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Social documentary photographers are committed to showcasing perspectives of marginalised groups. Dorothea Lange famously told the story of the Great Depression through the faces of destitute farming families, not wealthy bankers. Sometimes, those best suited to tell the stories of marginalised groups came from those groups themselves. The *Village Voice*, more than mainstream news outlets, valued publishing work by photographers from diverse backgrounds.

Ricky Flores, whose photographs document race relations and police brutality, was raised in the South Bronx. According to Flores, his own background and community ties were essential

to the pictures he made for the *Voice* and other progressive outlets.

Other photographers aren't "going to see it the way I see it", Flores said. "They're not a South Bronx Puerto Rican who actually is living under the very weight of the oppression that was being focused on our community”.

Flores is also respected for his coverage of race relations and police brutality. He photographed the civil rights marches led by the Rev. Al Sharpton in the late 1980s and early 1990s after white youths killed a young African-American man in Howard Beach. He also covered unrest in Washington Heights in July 1992 after the police killing of Jose "Kiko" Garcia in a drug sweep.

Flores said that, through his work, he hoped to show "why people are demonstrating," by documenting "the injustices that were taking place." To this day, "there's a lot of mistrust" of the police in minority communities, Flores continued. "They feel that cops can get away with murdering citizens with impunity”.

With its focus on local issues and its tradi-



Jewish and black residents of Crown Heights scuffle after a boy died after being hit struck by a rabbi's car. Photo: Linda Rosier

tion of muckraking journalism, the *Voice* gave social justice movements more coverage – and more sympathetic coverage – than mainstream papers.

As a student activist at New York University in the 1980s, Victoria Wolcott recalled how, after a protest, “you would go and get the *Village Voice* the next day. We wanted to know what the *Village Voice* was reporting, because they were progressive and they had really great photographs”.

Wolcott, now a professor of history at the University of Buffalo, explained how “there would be a photograph of somebody getting beat up [by the police] with blood [gushing] from their head, so that was another way that photographs help to legitimise ... your experience.”

Voice photographer Linda Rosier told us that in those years, before the rise of smart phones, social media and so-called citizen journalism, she had a “mandate” to photograph, “since we were the ones out there seeing it and being the eyes of the city.” Today, McGovern adds, “Newspapers and magazines don’t have the power they used to

have. It’s not like you’re waiting for *The Village Voice* to come out on Wednesday or the *New York Times* the next morning to be able to see these pictures; now it’s on social media.”

The problem now is not a dearth of images, but rather a lack of context. Part of a photograph’s power can come from the way experienced journalists and editors position it in the text, or use it to complement a reported article. The tactics and spirit of the *Voice* might live on in the amateur photographers covering modern social movements such as Black Lives Matter and the Keystone XL Pipeline. But something will be lost with the folding of a periodical that featured images by the neighbourhood, about the neighbourhood and for the neighbourhood. **CT**

Tamar Carroll is Associate Professor of History at Rochester Institute of Technology.

Joshua Meltzer is Assistant Professor of Photojournalism and Visual Storytelling at Rochester Institute of Technology. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

The science that gave birth to Frankenstein

Mary Shelley's book might read like a fantasy to modern eyes, but to its author and original readers there was nothing fantastic about it

ON January 17 1803, a young man named George Forster was hanged for murder at Newgate prison in London. After his execution, as often happened, his body was carried ceremoniously across the city to the Royal College of Surgeons, where it would be publicly dissected. What actually happened was rather more shocking than simple dissection though. Forster was going to be electrified.

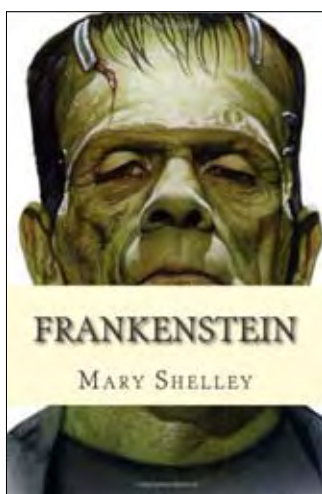
The experiments were to be carried out by the Italian natural philosopher Giovanni Aldini, the nephew of Luigi Galvani, who discovered “animal electricity” in 1780, and for whom the field of galvanism is named. With Forster on the slab before him, Aldini and his assistants started to experiment. The *Times* newspaper reported: “On the first application of the process to the face, the jaw of the deceased criminal began to quiver, the adjoining muscles were horribly contorted, and one eye was actually opened. In the subsequent part of the process, the right hand was raised and clenched, and the legs and thighs were set in motion”.

It looked to some spectators “as if the wretched man was on the eve of being restored to life.”

By the time Aldini was experimenting on Forster the idea that there was some peculiarly intimate relationship between electricity and the processes of life was

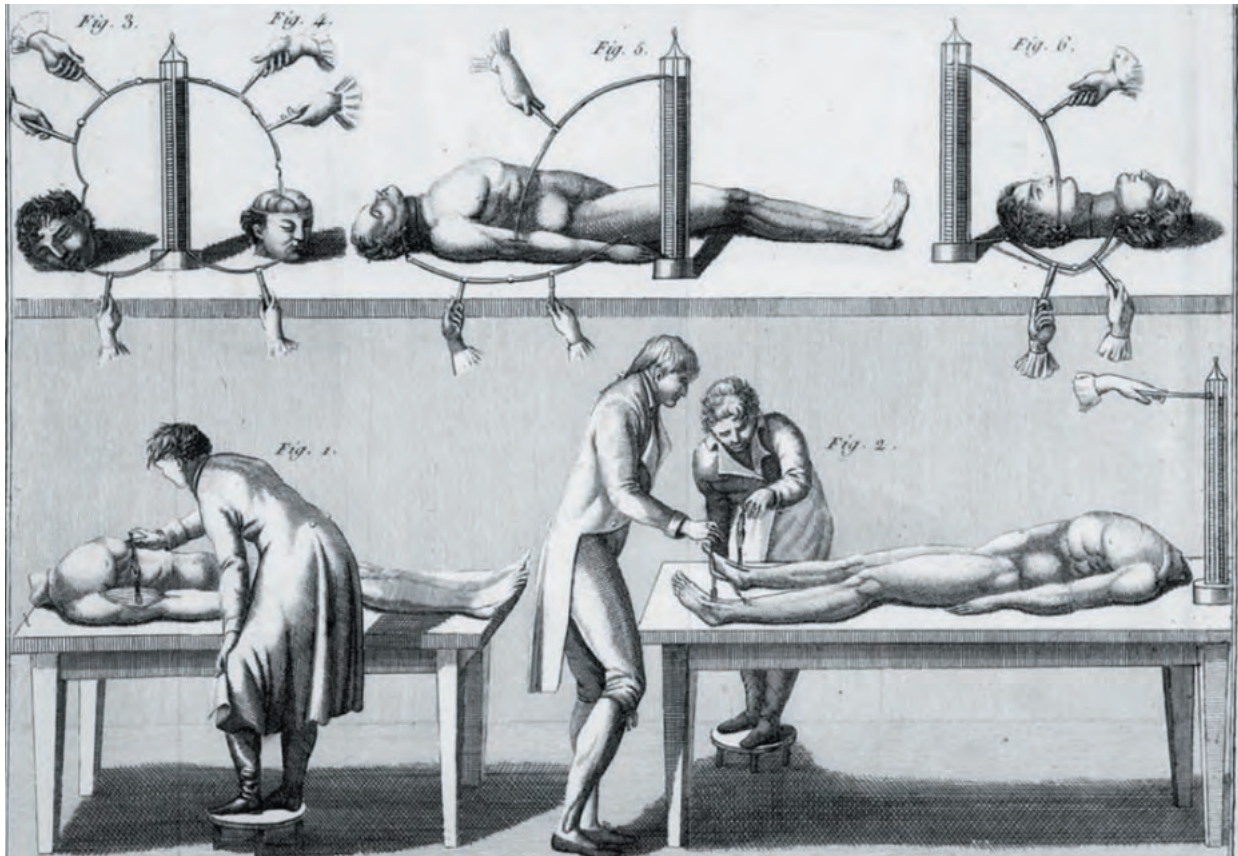
at least a century old. Isaac Newton speculated along such lines in the early 1700s. In 1730, the English astronomer and dyer Stephen Gray demonstrated the principle of electrical conductivity. Gray suspended an orphan boy on silk cords in mid air, and placed a positively charged tube near the boy's feet, creating a negative charge in them. Due to his electrical isolation, this created a positive charge in the child's other extremities, causing a nearby dish of gold leaf to be attracted to his fingers.

In France in 1746 Jean Antoine Nollet entertained the court at Versailles by causing a company of 180 royal guardsmen to jump simultaneously when the charge from a Leyden jar (an electrical storage device) passed through their bodies.



The cover of Mary Shelley's book, *Frankenstein*.

It was to defend his uncle's theories against the attacks of opponents such as Alessandro Volta that Aldini carried out his experiments on Forster. Volta claimed that “animal” electricity was produced by the contact of metals rather than being a property of living tissue, but there were several other natural philosophers who took up Galvani's ideas with enthusiasm. Alexander von Humboldt experimented with batteries made entirely from animal tissue. Johannes Ritter even carried out electrical experiments on



ASSEMBLY LINES: Giovanni Aldini's experiments with a human corpse.

Art: Wellcome Collection

himself to explore how electricity affected the sensations.

The idea that electricity really was the stuff of life and that it might be used to bring back the dead was certainly a familiar one in the kinds of circles in which the young Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley – the author of *Frankenstein* – moved. The English poet, and family friend, Samuel Taylor Coleridge was fascinated by the connections between electricity and life. Writing to his friend the chemist Humphry Davy after hearing that he was giving lectures at the Royal Institution in London, he told him how his “motive muscles tingled and contracted at the news, as if you had bared them and were zincifying the life-mocking fibres”. Percy Bysshe Shelley himself – who would become Wollstonecraft’s husband in 1816 – was another enthusiast for galvanic experimentation.

Aldini’s experiments with the dead attracted considerable attention. Some commentators poked fun at the idea that electricity could restore

life, laughing at the thought that Aldini could “make dead people cut droll capers”. Others took the idea very seriously. Lecturer Charles Wilkinson, who assisted Aldini in his experiments, argued that galvanism was “an energising principle, which forms the line of distinction between matter and spirit, constituting in the great chain of the creation, the intervening link between corporeal substance and the essence of vitality”.

In 1814 the English surgeon John Abernethy made much the same sort of claim in the annual Hunterian lecture at the Royal College of Surgeons. His lecture sparked a violent debate with fellow surgeon William Lawrence. Abernethy claimed that electricity was (or was like) the vital force while Lawrence denied that there was any need to invoke a vital force at all to explain the processes of life. Both Mary and Percy Shelley certainly knew about this debate – Lawrence

IWAN MORUS

was their doctor.

By the time *Frankenstein* was published in 1818, its readers would have been familiar with the notion that life could be created or restored with electricity. Just a few months after the book appeared, the Scottish chemist Andrew Ure carried out his own electrical experiments on the body of Matthew Clydesdale, who had been executed for murder. When the dead man was electrified, Ure wrote, “every muscle in his countenance was simultaneously thrown into fearful action; rage, horror, despair, anguish, and ghastly smiles, united their hideous expression in the murderer’s face”.

Ure reported that the experiments were so gruesome that “several of the spectators were forced to leave the apartment, and one gentleman fainted”. It is tempting to speculate about the degree to which Ure had Mary Shelley’s recent novel in mind as he carried out his experiments. His own account of them was certainly quite deliberately written to highlight their more lurid elements.

Frankenstein might look like fantasy to modern eyes, but to its author and original readers there was nothing fantastic about it. Just as everyone knows about artificial intelligence now,

so Shelley’s readers knew about the possibilities of electrical life. And just as artificial intelligence (AI) invokes a range of responses and arguments now, so did the prospect of electrical life – and Shelley’s novel – then.

The science behind *Frankenstein* reminds us that current debates have a long history – and that in many ways the terms of our debates now are determined by it. It was during the 19th-century that people started thinking about the future as a different country, made out of science and technology. Novels such as *Frankenstein*, in which authors made their future out of the ingredients of their present, were an important element in that new way of thinking about tomorrow.

Thinking about the science that made Frankenstein seem so real in 1818 might help us consider more carefully the ways we think now about the possibilities – and the dangers – of our present futures. **CT**

Iwan Morus is Professor of History at Aberystwyth University in Wales. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

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BARRY LANDO

Pittsburgh and USA's antisemitic past

Americans and Canadians and Brits have done their best to bury and try to forget shameful events in the not-so-distant past

READING the horrified reactions to the bloody attack on the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh on October 27, one has the impression that the assault was carried out by a crazed individual operating from the most deranged fringe of America's alt-right: a product of the brutal politics of Donald Trump and social media run amok. The fact is that, though America would dearly love to forget it, antisemitism has long been deeply embedded in the US.

In the Spring of 1942, the sociologist David Riesman described American anti-Semitism as "slightly below the boiling point." Indeed, the despicable image of an American president slamming shut his country's Southern border to desperate refugees fleeing the violence of their homeland is nothing new.

The same tragic tale played out in the United States early in 1939, when Franklin Roosevelt was President: US authorities refused to let a ship, the St. Louis, loaded with more than 900 passengers, most of them Jews attempting to escape from Germany, refused to let them dock in the US

Already forbidden from landing in Cuba, the ship's German captain Gustav Schroder, circled off the coast of Florida, hoping for permission to enter the United States. But Secretary of State Cordell Hull advised President Franklin Roosevelt not to accept the Jews. Still determined to save his passengers, Captain Schröder considered running aground along the US coast to



LOOKING FOR A NEW HOME: Refugees aboard the St. Louis as they arrive in Belgium, 1939.

Photo: The Canadian Encyclopedia

allow the refugees to escape. But, again, acting on Cordell Hull's instructions, US Coast Guard vessels shadowed the ship and prevented such a move.

Also refused entry by Canada and Great Britain, Captain Schroder finally returned to Europe, but only after several European countries agreed to accept a portion of the refugees. But Hitler still caught up with many of them: more than 250 of the St Louis passengers ultimately died in the Holocaust.

That was just one episode of America's shameful role during World War II. "The Nazis were

the murderers, but we were the all too passive accomplices”, was the verdict of American historian, David Wyman, who produced an extremely disturbing book, *The Abandonment of the Jews* (Pantheon) in 1984. Wyman’s findings have not been disputed.

For instance, little Switzerland – charged with closing its borders to the Jews during WWII – accepted as many Jewish refugees during the war – 21,000 – as did the vastly larger United States. That pitifully small number represented only 10 percent of the number who could have been legally admitted under US immigration quotas at the time.

Tens of thousands of Jews were turned away or dissuaded from applying for visas by US officials intent on keeping the inflow to a trickle.

It is clear that by the summer of 1942, Washington had confirmed accounts of Hitler’s plan to exterminate the Jews. But, according to Mr. Wyman: “The American State Department and the British Foreign Office had no intention of rescuing large numbers of European Jews. On the contrary, they continually feared that Germany or other Axis nations might release tens of thousands of Jews into Allied hands. Any such exodus would have placed intense pressure on Britain to open Palestine and on the United States to take in more Jewish refugees – a situation the two great powers did not want to face. Consequently, their policies aimed at obstructing rescue possibilities and dampening public pressures for government action”.

Incredibly, according to Mr. Wyman, Anthony Eden even opposed a joint plea from the Allies to Germany to release the Jews because of his fear that Germany might actually agree.

Strong popular pressure could have made a difference. Why wasn’t it there? Anti-Semitism and anti-immigration attitudes were widespread in American society and entrenched in Congress. In the late 1930s, as Jews were scrambling to escape from Europe, a Roper poll showed that 70 to 85 percent of the American people opposed raising quotas to help Jewish refugees enter the United States.

Even more shocking, another set of polls taken in the years between 1938 and 1945 revealed that

as much as 35 to 40 percent of the US population was prepared to approve an anti-Jewish campaign in America. Only 30 percent would have opposed it, and the rest would have remained indifferent.

There was also the failure of the mass media – including newspapers like the *New York Times* – to publicise Holocaust news, even though the wire services and other sources made most of the information available early on.

Added to that were the near silence of the Christian churches and most of their leaders and the indifference of American political and intellectual nabobs. One of the greatest American journalists of the day, Walter Lippmann, for instance, wrote not a single column about the Holocaust or the death camps.

As for President Franklin Roosevelt, according to Mr. Wyman, he did nothing about the mass murder for 14 months after first learning about it. And then he “moved only because he was confronted with political pressures he could not avoid and because his administration stood on the brink of a nasty scandal over its rescue policies”.

Even most of America’s Jewish leaders at the time were remiss, caught in internal bickering, concerned about provoking antisemitism, more worried about establishing the state of Israel than saving Jews from the Holocaust.

It’s ironic how insistent we were after the war that the Germans recognise their shameful history – teach it in their schools, and so on. The French also have similarly felt obliged to confront their shameful willingness to collaborate in the Holocaust. As have the Swiss. Americans and Canadians and Brits, meanwhile, have done their best to bury and try to forget. **CT**

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Barry M. Lando is a former 60 Minute producer and the author of *Web of Deceit: the History of Foreign Intervention in Iraq from Churchill to Kennedy to George W. Bush*, and two novels, *The Watchman’s File*, and *Deep Strike*, a tale of Russian Hackers, rogue CIA agents and an American president.

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- NOAM CHOMSKY
- SAM PIZZIGATI
- WHITNEY WEBB
- NEIL CLARK



BE WARNED: "If you have your jackboot on somebody's neck, you have to find a way to justify it," Noam Chomsky told news agency. Photo: Wikimedia

'Judeo-Nazi tendencies' are rising in Israel

West Bank occupation is threat to country's security, says **Noam Chomsky** as he repeats warnings of Yeshafahu Leibowitz

P**ROMINENT** Jewish intellectual Noam Chomsky has raised concerns over what he believes is the rise of "Judeo-Nazi tendencies" in Israel. Speaking to i24NEWS, the renowned political dissident, linguist and scholar, repeated warnings given by Yeshayahu Leibowitz, an Israeli public intellectual, biochemist and polymath, concerning the dehumanising effect of Israel's brutal

occupation of Palestine on the victims and the oppressors.

Chomsky commented on remarks by Leibowitz who was nominated for the Israel Prize saying that "Leibowitz warned that if the occupation continues, Israeli Jews are going to turn into what he called, Judeo-Nazis". Chomsky recognised the description was a "strong term" and that most people wouldn't be able to get away with de-

scribing Israel in this manner, but explained that Leibowitz's status meant that he was able to speak about Israel without incurring fury.

Leibowitz who died in 1994 in Jerusalem, cautioned that the state of Israel and Zionism had become more sacred than Jewish humanist values and controversially went on to describe Israeli conduct in occupied Palestinian territories as "Judeo-Nazi" in nature.

Outraged by Israel's killing of 60 villagers of Qibya in 1953, most of them women and children, by the notorious Israeli commando Unit 101, known for its brutality and retribution campaigns, Leibowitz has been quoted as saying: "We have to ask ourselves where this youth of ours emerged from; young people who had no mental inhibitions about committing this atrocity? What inner motivation for such acts could have been at work here? This youth is not a mob but the product of Zionist, humanist social education".

Echoing Leibowitz, Chomsky said: "If you have your jackboot on somebody's neck, you have to find a way to justify it."

Repeating Leibowitz's warning he added that "blaming the victim was a direct reflection of

the continued occupation, the humiliation of people, the degradation, and the terrorist attacks by the Israeli government”.

The former MIT linguist said that being critical of the occupation in Israel today means being labelled a traitor, a phenomenon which has caused the left to virtually disappear from the political spectrum. He pointed to opposition to the situation in the Gaza Strip, which he likened to a concentration camp, as an example of the delegitimisation of the left.

“Take Gaza. If you are going to place two-million people in a concentration camp, which is in effect what it is, and put them under a vicious siege, you have to ask yourself; am I justified in doing this? People who try to oppose it are traitors, Arab lovers and so on. You have seen this phenomenon in European history, I don’t have to give you

examples”, said Chomsky.

Speaking about a common myth in Israeli society that a military presence in the West Bank is necessary for security, Chomsky dismissed that idea saying that the opposite is true; that “a military occupation” of the West Bank only endangers Israel’s security. “Ask any Israeli strategic analysts. They all understand that occupation of the West Bank is a threat to Israeli security”.

Chomsky went on to present a number of incidents where Arab leaders have offered Israel peace in return for withdrawal from the West Bank, all rejected by Israel. Israel, he told, i24NEWS is deliberately choosing expansion over security. **CT**

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This article was originally published by the Middle East Monitor at www.middleeastmonitor.com

wealthier than when they began it. A number of these dynastic families, the new report adds, are indeed doing that spending. They’re using “their considerable wealth and power to rig the rules of the economy to protect and expand their wealth and power”.

But many Americans of modest means – including many who consider themselves advocates for progressive social change – don’t seem especially alarmed. Yes, their casual indifference about grand fortune suggests, we certainly do have billionaires out there engaged in political nastiness. But we also have billionaires defending democratic values against their nasty billionaire brethren.

In other words, this perspective holds, our billionaires more or less cancel each other out. The dark side has the billionaire gambling magnate Sheldon Adelson. The forces of goodness and light have the billionaire environmentalist Tom Steyer. They have the Koch brothers. We have George Soros and Warren Buffett – and thank our lucky stars for that. Without them, where would we be?

That about sums up the mindset now on display in Michigan, where a feisty grassroots group is pushing a statewide initiative that would put in place a non-partisan redistricting commission and end the notorious Republican gerrymandering of the state’s legislative districts.

Late in October, campaign finance filings revealed that this grassroots citizen’s movement had accepted millions in cam-

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Mouthy moguls: our latest vanishing species

The wealth and power of the mega-rich is being used to rig the rules of the economy, writes **Sam Pizzigati**

CAN American democracy survive the grand – and growing – personal fortunes of America’s billionaires? A just-released Institute for Policy Studies report, *Billionaire Bonanza 2018*, offers ample cause for worry. The families of America’s top billionaires, the

study shows, are becoming multi-generational dynasties. The 15 wealthiest of these dynasties hold fortunes worth a combined \$618-billion.

These dynasties have the wherewithal to spend hundreds of millions of dollars a year on politics and still end the year

Insights

paign support from two “dark money” groups that don’t have to reveal their deep-pocket donors. The Texas energy hedge fund billionaires John and Laura Arnold, press reports revealed, had launched one of these groups.

That revelation didn’t faze Katie Fahey, the grassroots leader of the nonpartisan redistricting initiative. Fahey told reporters she had no qualms about accepting any billionaire cash.

“At the end of the day”, she explained, “when you’re up against other dark money, we don’t want to lose because we can’t fund a campaign”.

How should progressives interpret this Michigan episode – and others like it? Should social justice activists stop worrying so much about growing billionaire fortunes – and start working more diligently to line up more billionaire support for progressive causes? Three political scientists from Northwestern University have just joined this debate. They bring data.

This trio of researchers – Benjamin Page, Jason Seawright, and Matthew Lacombe – has just completed a systematic study of America’s 100 richest billionaires. Their core question: Do we have “a sort of Madisonian pluralism among billionaires,” a wide variety of political viewpoints, or does the “billionaire class” as a whole consistently put its thumb on the scale in any particular direction?

And what did the researchers find? Those billionaires with

public-spirited and even progressive orientations, they note, turn out to be “not at all typical.” Most of America’s richest billionaires “more closely resemble Charles Koch.”

Like Koch, America’s billionaires as a group turn out to be “extremely conservative on economic issues”, “obsessed with cutting taxes, especially estate taxes,” and “opposed to government regulation of the environment or big banks”. They also show little enthusiasm for “government programs to help with jobs, incomes, healthcare, or retirement pensions” and favour shrinking government “by cutting or privatizing guaranteed Social Security benefits”.

Most billionaires, in other words, oppose policies that most average Americans support. So why do so many Americans believe that our billionaires are cancelling themselves out in the rough and tumble of American politics? The Northwestern political scientists have a straightforward, simple answer.

“Billionaires who favour unpopular, ultraconservative economic policies, and work actively to advance them,” the researchers note, “stay almost entirely silent about those issues in public”.

Northwestern’s Page, Seawright, and Lacombe document that silence in their soon-to-be-released new book, *Billionaires and Stealth Politics*. They’ve combed through the public record and searched for what America’s richest 100 billionaires have said, over a ten-year period, on issues ranging

from taxes and Social Security to immigration.

These billionaires, this research shows, overwhelmingly said nothing. On issues around Social Security, for instance, 97 percent of our wealthiest billionaires “have said nothing at all” about America’s most important social programme, no public comments whatsoever on benefit levels, privatisation, or any other hot-button Social Security policy concern.

Yet in that same period most of these same silent billionaires have, far from the media spotlight, “made substantial financial contributions” to conservative candidates and officials “who favour the very unpopular step of cutting rather than expanding Social Security benefits”.

These billionaires, the Northwestern researchers posit, are “deliberately” practicing what amounts to a “stealth politics”. They are exercising their public-policy nastiness behind the scenes, leaving the political stage to those few – but more talkative – billionaires who tilt more progressive.

All this, the Northwestern political scientists agree, should deeply trouble us. Politics by stealth, they believe, will always be “harmful to democracy”.

To avoid that harm, we need more than a few more open-minded billionaires. We need America to become billionaire-free. **CT**

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Sam Pizzigati co-edits *Inequality.org*. His latest book, *The Case for a Maximum Wage*, has just been published.



DEFENDERS!: Left to right: Joseph Frager, Alan Dershowitz, and John Bolton at the 2018 Zionist Organization of America awards. Photo: ZOA

John Bolton wins award for ‘defending’ Israel

48 Whitney Webb shows how special interest group honours the man it helped become US National Security Adviser

THE Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) recently awarded US National Security Adviser John Bolton the “Defender of Israel Award” during its annual awards dinner, in New York on November 11.

Other awardees included US Ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell as well as Fox News television host Mark Levin. Both Grenell and Levin are close to Bolton, with the former having served as Bolton’s spokesman and the latter having worked closely with Bolton at the Department of Justice in the Reagan administration.

Though Bolton has received several awards from the Israel lobby in the past, due to his

fervent promotion of Zionism and Israeli government policy, this more recent award is notable, as the ZOA is largely responsible for Bolton’s appointment as National Security Adviser within the Trump administration.

Indeed, beginning in August 2017, the ZOA – under the leadership of its president, Morton Klein – led the campaign to remove former National Security Adviser HR McMaster from his post after railing against McMaster’s “anti-Israel” positions, most notably his support for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), better known as the Iran nuclear deal.

However, McMaster had also earned the ire of American

Zionists for allegedly referring to Israel as an “occupying power” and acknowledging the existence of Palestine – as Zionists at ZOA and like-minded organisations support a revisionist history of the creation of the Israeli state that asserts that Palestine did not exist as a state before Israel’s establishment in 1948.

Leaked emails earlier this year revealed that ZOA’s campaign to remove McMaster won the support of Trump’s top political donor, Zionist billionaire Sheldon Adelson. It was later revealed that Adelson had been instrumental in placing Bolton in the position McMaster vacated, as Bolton had long been a confidant of the politically influential casino magnate and Adelson had previously lobbied Trump – then president-elect – to include Bolton in his cabinet.

Since his appointment in April, Bolton has promoted and helped bring to fruition policies long supported by Adelson and the ZOA – which Adelson helps fund – as well as related groups. Under Bolton’s influence, President Trump unilaterally withdrew the US from the JCPOA and imposed harsh sanctions against Iran, which disproportionately affect Iranian civilians. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo recently stated that Iranian leaders would need to fall in line if “they want their people to eat”, underscoring the fact that the Iranian people are by and large the target of the US sanc-

tions targeting Iran.

In addition, Bolton has also used his role as National Security Adviser to advocate for other troubling policies in the Middle East to the benefit of Israel, such as the continuation and expansion of the US occupation of around 30 percent of Syrian territory.

Bolton announced in July that the US would maintain its military presence in Syria until the “Iranian menace was wiped off the map”. Bolton’s announcement became administration policy just two months later in September. However, just days before Bolton took over for McMaster, Trump had announced that he wanted to remove U.S. troops from Syria “very quickly”.

Ultimately, Bolton’s recent award from the Adelson-backed

ZOA for “defending Israel” is the result of events that ZOA itself helped make possible. Now that Bolton – who they helped install into power – has helped bring about the very policies they had hoped he would manifest, ZOA has granted him a “prestigious” award.

Perhaps it is only fitting that he receive such thanks for the service to Zionism he was installed to provide. Indeed, it is a cause and ideology that Bolton has repeatedly supported – often at the expense of US government interests and even US national security. **CT**

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Whitney Webb is a staff writer for MintPress News and a contributor to Ben Swann’s Truth in Media. This article was first published at www.mintpressnews.com

come along in the US of A, we are treated to the same spectacle. Ordinarily intelligent people making fools of themselves in the belief that the elections are “tremendously important”. When will they ever learn that the best thing to do on a US election night is to go to bed early with a nice hot water bottle and a good book.

Let’s take presidential contests first.

In 1992, Bill Clinton was hailed as “the president for the people” after 12 years of Republicans in the White House. Bill deregulated the financial sector and Wall Street enjoyed a bonanza. In 2000, George W. Bush was billed as “the president who wouldn’t meddle”, after Clinton had bombed Yugoslavia, Iraq and Sudan. Bush then invaded Afghanistan and Iraq. His successor Barack Obama was going to stop the wars – and was even awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He bombed Libya and helped set fire to Syria. The “reset” in relations with Russia ended with Russia being sanctioned. The closure of Guantanamo Bay never happened. See the pattern? Then in 2016 Donald Trump was going to be “the president who drained the swamp”. But he’s appointed swamp dwellers to his inner circle. He was also going to stop bombing countries and rebuild relations with Russia. Well, he’s carried on bombing and US-Russian relations are at an all-time low. The president who was going to tell the neo-

Maintaining the great illusion of democracy

If US elections could change anything they wouldn’t be held, argues **Neil Clark**

THIS month’s US midterm elections received saturated media coverage. Why? The reality is that elections in the US don’t change much, if anything, because America has a regime and is not a genuine democracy.

The US midterms – and you’d have to have been locked in a wardrobe to have avoided

hearing about them – reminded me of a great song by the 1980s indie-rock band the Smiths. No, not *This Charming Man*, in reference to Donald Trump, but *What Difference Does it Make?* Remember that one? It should be played on a loop every time America goes to vote.

Because every couple of years, whenever “big” elections

Insights

cons where to go in no uncertain terms has told them “Join my team, partners – let’s do Iran!”

I was one of those who, very naively, believed two years ago that Trump would be preferable to Hillary Clinton, due to her record of warmongering. The sad truth is that it made no difference. On the campaign trail Trump repeatedly referred to his opponent as “Crooked Hillary” and promised that if he won, Clinton would be investigated by a special prosecutor. However, on getting elected he said, “I don’t want to hurt them (the Clintons). They’re good people”. He’s made fresh calls since then, but can anyone see Clinton ever being prosecuted?

It’s hard to escape the conclusion that it was all a charade, like everything else connected with American politics. The rich people who attack each other in public for the benefit of the voters all know each other and their families are all friends. They attend the same weddings.

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English writer GK Chesterton got it right when he said: “When the Founding Fathers talked about democracy they did indeed mean, doubtless, the government of the people, by the people, for the people. But they meant the government of the people they knew, by the people they knew, for the people they knew.”

The midterms again saw people invest enormous emotional energy on trying to “stop Trump” – as if he was an aber-



WARMONGER: Hillary Clinton



TYPICAL: Donald Trump

ration – instead of being just a typical US president (albeit with different hair colouring), increasing profits for Wall Street and threatening other countries who don’t pay Danegeld to the Empire. Yes, we do need to stop Trump, but we can only do that if we understand that The Donald is not the root cause of the problem. The utterly corrupt American political system is.

The Democrats, the other, slightly more “liberal” half of

the “Permanent War Party”, are an integral part of that system. They were hailed as “saviours of democracy” for capturing the House. But on the issues that really matter there’ll be no major change.

Because if things could be changed in a significant way via elections in the US then they simply would not be held. Elections serve a valuable function in that they give the public the illusion of democracy. They’re a safety valve which stop people marching on Capitol Hill with torches and pitchforks, crying “Enough is Enough!” They keep people compliant.

Political power lies not with the voters, but with the powerful lobby groups who “buy” elected representatives, who then act in their interests, and not the people’s. It’s not those we see at election time who really call the shots, but those we don’t. Those hidden behind the curtain. Those who write the cheques.

That’s why whoever wins we’ll never get any meaningful gun control, no matter how many mass shootings take place. It’s why neither the Democrats nor the Republicans will introduce an American National Health Service. Why the power of Wall Street and finance capital won’t be curbed. And why in foreign policy, presidents and Congress will always do the bidding of the military-industrial complex and Israel. It is absolutely revealing that the US’ only real “breach” with Israel in recent decades

Insights

came in December 2016, when the Obama administration did not veto an anti-settlements UN resolution. Obama had just literally days left in the White House.

Identity politics enhances the “democratic” charade. We’re all meant to be terribly excited by the fact that a record number of women have been elected to the House. Of course sexual equality is a good thing, but the crucial question is: Will these new women in Congress mean the US following different policies? Don’t forget two of the worst and most pro-war US Secretaries of State in recent years have been women, namely Madeline Albright and Hillary Clinton.

The colour of legislators and their sexual orientation is another great diversion. What did America’s first black president do for Afro-Americans?

What did Obama do for Africa – save bomb Libya, the country

with the highest Human Development Index in the whole of the continent, back to the Stone Age.

When I see claims that “#First indicates change is coming”, I am automatically reminded of that classic line from the Italian historical novel *Il Gattopardo* (*The Leopard*): “*Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga come è, bisogna che tutto cambi,*” meaning “if we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change”.

Some are trying hard to convince us that the Democrats have “moved to the left”. Don’t believe it. Licensed radicals are needed to keep genuine radicals onboard. Those behind the curtain know that. But they’ll never let the licensed radicals succeed.

By playing the Tweedledum/Tweedledee “Republicans are better than Democrats/Democrats are better than Republi-

cans” game we are helping to maintain the status quo. Only when we break out of the existing Establishment-constructed paradigm and acknowledge that the US has a de facto one-party system, will there be any prospect of moving forward towards real democracy. To make that happen we need to keep singing the Smiths, every first Tuesday in every second November. So, what difference does it make? It makes none. **CT**

Neil Clark is a journalist, writer, broadcaster and blogger. He has written for newspapers and magazines in the UK and other countries and blogs at www.neilclark66.blogspot.com – where he invites readers to contribute to his legal fund to pay for court action against Oliver Kamm of The Times, who he has sued for libel and harassment. Full details at www.goo.gl/vaxyL

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