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ISSUE 180

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MID-MARCH 2019

*Antisemitism,
the Israel 
lobby, and the
manipulation
of media and
politics*

Jonathan Cook, Chris Hedges, Caitlin
Johnstone, CJ Hopkins, Robert Inlakesh

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Issue 180

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Threats by a Jewish group to split from Britain's Labour Party is not evidence of antisemitism, but of the party's long indulgence of anti-Palestinian racism, writes **Jonathan Cook**

Labour Party finally erupts into civil war over Israel

4

AN announcement by the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM) that it is considering splitting from the British Labour Party could not have come at a worse moment for Jeremy Corbyn. The Labour leader is already besieged by claims that he is presiding over a party that has become “institutionally antisemitic”.

The threats by the JLM should be seen as part of concerted efforts to oust Corbyn from the leadership. They follow on the heels of a decision by a handful of Labour MPs last month to set up a new faction called the Independent Group. They, too, cited antisemitism as a major reason for leaving.

On the defensive, Corbyn was prompted to write to the JLM expressing his and the shadow cabinet's “very strong desire for you to remain a part of our movement”. More than 100 Labour MPs, including members of the front bench, similarly pleaded with the JLM not to disaffiliate. They apologised for “toxic racism” in the party and for “letting our Jewish supporters and members down”.

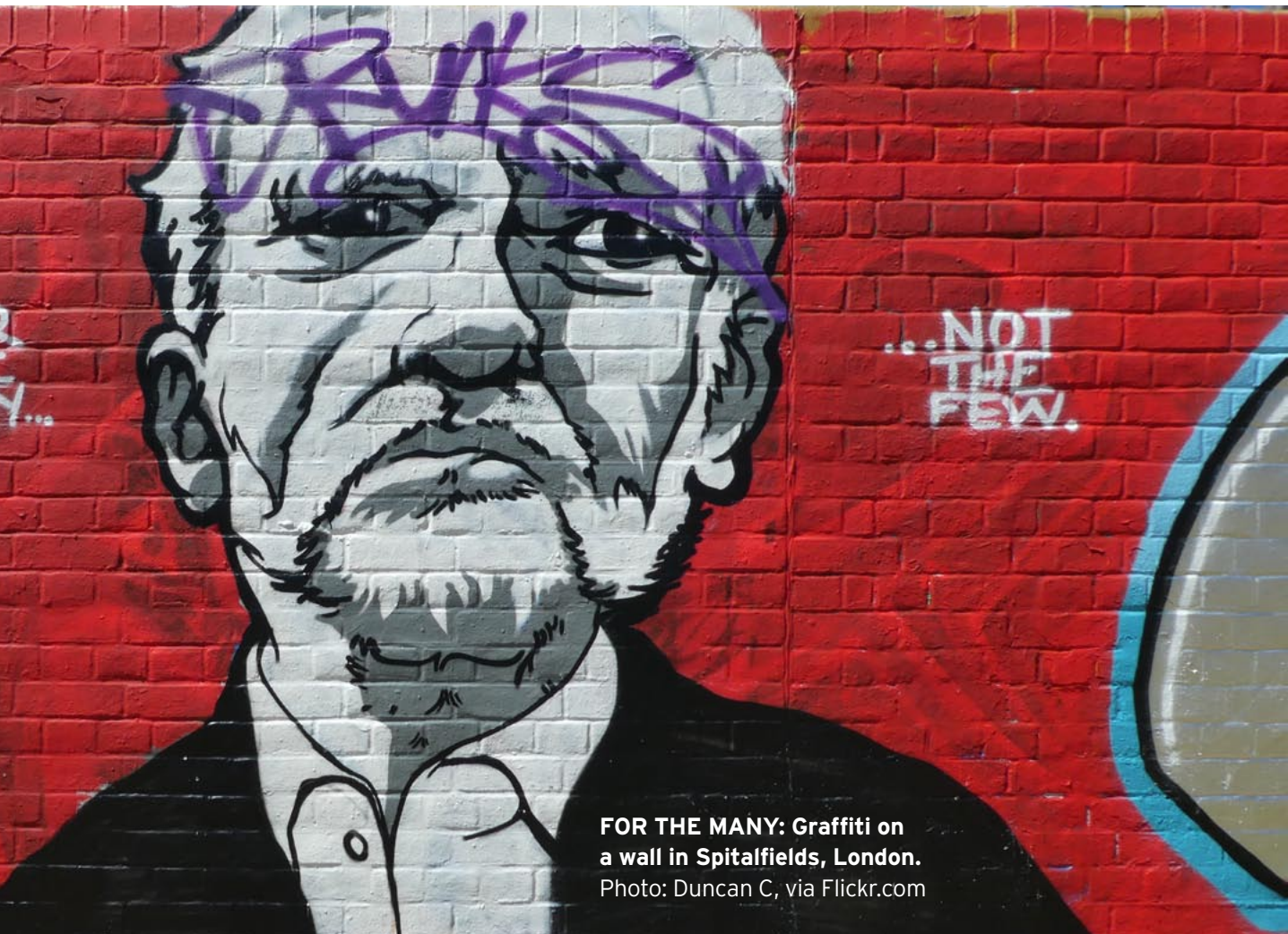
Their letter noted that the JLM is “the legitimate and long-standing representative of Jews in the Labour party” and added that the MPs recognised the importance of “calling out those who seek to make solidarity with our Jewish comrades a test of foreign policy”.



That appeared to be a swipe at Corbyn himself, who is the first leader of a British political party to prioritise Palestinian rights over the UK's ties to an Israeli state that has been oppressing Palestinians for decades.

Earlier this month, the Labour leader renewed his call for Britain to halt arms sales to Israel following a UN report that said the Israeli army's shooting of Palestinian protesters in Gaza's Great March of Return could amount to war crimes.

Despite the media atten-



FOR THE MANY: Graffiti on a wall in Spitalfields, London.
Photo: Duncan C, via Flickr.com

tion, all the evidence suggests that Labour does not have a problem of “institutional antisemitism”, or even a problem of antisemitism above the marginal racism towards Jews found in the wider British population. Figures show only 0.08 percent of Labour members have been disciplined for antisemitism.

Also largely ignored by the British media, and Corbyn’s opponents, is the fact that a growing number of Jews are

publicly coming out in support for him and discounting the claims of an “endemic” antisemitism problem.

Some 200 prominent Jews signed a letter to the Guardian newspaper calling Corbyn “a crucial ally in the fight against bigotry and reaction. His lifetime record of campaigning for equality and human rights, including consistent support for initiatives against antisemitism, is formidable.”

At the same time, a new organisation, Jewish Voice for Labour, has been established

to underscore that there are progressive Jews who welcome Corbyn’s leadership.

In the current hysterical climate, however, no one seems interested in the evidence or these dissenting voices. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that Corbyn and his supporters are on the back foot as they face losing from Labour an affiliate group of 2,000 members who represent a section of the UK’s Jewish community.

But paradoxically, the loss of the JLM may be inevitable if Labour is serious about becom-

ing a party that opposes racism in all its forms, because the JLM has proved it is incapable of meeting that simple standard.

While the Labour Party has been dragged into an increasingly fractious debate about whether anti-Zionism – opposition to Israel as a Jewish state – equates to antisemitism, everyone has been distracted from the elephant in the room.

In fact, it is political Zionism, at least in the hardline form adopted by groups such as the JLM, that is racism – towards Palestinians.

Zionism, we should recall, required the ethnic cleansing of 750,000 Palestinians to engineer a “Jewish state” on the ruins of Palestinians’ homeland. It fuelled Israel’s hunger for an enlarged territory that led to it occupying the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, and further dispossessing the Palestinians through illegal settlement building.

Zionism has made it impossible for any Israeli government to offer meaningful concessions to Palestinians on statehood to create the conditions necessary for peace. It has justified policies that view “mixing between the races” – between Jews and Palestinians – as dangerous “miscegenation” and “assimilation”.

Furthermore, Zionism has kept Israel’s Palestinian citizens a segregated minority, hemmed up in their own ghettoised communities, denied

rights to almost all land in Israel, and corralled into their own separate and massively inferior school system.

All of these policies were instituted by Israel’s Labor Party, the sister organisation of the JLM in Britain. The JLM not only refuses to oppose these policies, but effectively shields Israel from criticism about them from within Britain’s Labour Party.

The JLM has remained mute on the structural violence of Israel’s occupying army, and the systematic racism – encoded in

Israel’s most ardent supporters, and Corbyn’s enemies, in Labour will play dirty to protect Israel and their own role from scrutiny

Israel’s laws – towards the fifth of its population who are Palestinian citizens.

Meanwhile, the JLM’s mother body, the World Zionist Organization, has a division that – to this day – finances the establishment and expansion of settlements in the West Bank, in violation of international law.

Added to this, an Al Jazeera undercover documentary broadcast in 2017 showed that the JLM was covertly working with an Israeli government official, Shai Masot, to damage Corbyn because of his pro-Palestinian positions.

Israel, remember, has for the last decade equated to the

ultra-nationalist government of Benjamin Netanyahu. His coalition allies seek not a two-state solution, but the takeover of most of the occupied territories and ultimately their annexation, again in violation of international law.

Ella Rose was appointed director of the JLM in 2016, straight from a post at the Israeli embassy.

Times – and politics – move on. The JLM is a relic of a period when it was possible to claim to be anti-racist while turning a blind eye to the oppression of the Palestinian people. Social media and Palestinians armed with camera phones – not just Corbyn – have made that evasion no longer possible.

Labour giving pride of place to groups such as the JLM or Labour Friends of Israel – to which 80 of its MPs proudly belong – is, in the current circumstances, as obscene as it would have been 40 years ago for British parties to host their own Friends of South Africa groups.

The Labour Party bureaucracy is being dragged, kicking and screaming, into the modern world by its members, who have felt liberated by Corbyn’s leadership and his history of supporting all kinds of anti-racism struggles, including the Palestinian one.

While Britain has major and pressing issues to tackle, from dealing with its exit from Europe to imminent climate collapse, Labour’s energies have

been sidetracked into a civil war about Israel, of all things.

The old guard want to be allowed to support Israel, even as it heads towards full-blown fascism, while much of the membership want to dissociate from what looks increasingly like another apartheid state – and one whose leaders are seeking to stoke conflict across a volatile region.

Israel's most ardent supporters, and Corbyn's enemies, in Labour will play dirty to protect Israel and their own role from scrutiny, as they have been doing all along.

The JLM led moves last year intended to divide the party by insisting that Labour redefine antisemitism to include criticism of Israel.

Rumblings of dissatisfaction from the JLM will be cited as further evidence of the membership's antisemitism, because that is the most powerful weapon they have to silence criticism of Israel and deflect attention away from their role in shielding Israel from proper scrutiny within Labour.

Politics is about choices and values. Labour has for many decades sided exclusively with Israel and ignored the rights of Palestinians.

In 1944 – four years before Israel's creation – Labour's annual conference recommended that the natives of Palestine, a large majority population, be ethnically cleansed to advance the goals of European Zionists colonising their land. The reso-

lution declared: "Let the Arabs be encouraged to move out, as the Jews move in."

That is exactly what Israel did by expelling 750,000 Palestinians, more than 80 percent of the Palestinian population, in events we now call the Nakba (Catastrophe).

For decades after Israel's creation, Labour Party members happily travelled to Israel to toil in agricultural communes, such as the kibbutz, that were built on stolen Palestinian land and which, to this day, refuse to allow any of the country's 1.7 million Palestinian citizens to live in them.

In a speech in 1972, after Israel seized yet more Palestinian lands, including East Jerusalem, Labour leader Harold Wilson urged Israel to hold on to these conquered territories: "Israel's reaction is natural and proper in refusing to accept the Palestinians as a nation."

This is the dark, dishonourable underbelly of Labour racism, and the party's decades-long support for colonialism in the Middle East.

Labour created a hierarchy of racisms, in which concern about hatred towards Jews enjoyed star billing while racism towards some other groups, most especially Palestinians, barely registered.

Under Corbyn and a much-expanded membership, these prejudices are being challenged in public for the first time – and that is justifiably making the party an "unsafe" space for groups such as the JLM and Labour Friends of Israel, which

hang on to outdated, hardline Zionist positions.

The JLM's claim to speak for all Jews in Labour has been challenged by anti-racist Jews like those of the Jewish Voice for Labour. Their efforts to defend Corbyn and Labour's record have been widely ignored by the media or, encouraged by JLM, dismissed as "downplaying" antisemitism.

The JLM's discomfort may be unfortunate, but it cannot be avoided. It is the price to be paid for the continuing battle by progressives to advance universal rights and defeat racism. This battle has been waged since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was published in 1948 – paradoxically, the year Israel was established by violating the core principles of that declaration.

Israel's racism towards Palestinians has been indulged by Labour for too long. Now history is catching up with Israel, and with groups such as the JLM.

Labour MPs have a choice. They can stand on the wrong side of history, battling the tide like some modern King Canute, or they can recognise that it is time to fully enter the modern era – and that means embracing a programme of anti-racism that encompasses everyone, including Jews and Palestinians. **CT**

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The harder it becomes for Israel to sell its apartheid state, the more pronounced its already massive interference will become, writes **Chris Hedges**

Israel's stranglehold on American politics

8

THE Israel lobby's buying off of nearly every senior politician in the United States, facilitated by our system of legalised bribery, is not an antisemitic trope. It is a fact.

The lobby's campaign of vicious character assassination, smearing and blacklisting against those who defend Palestinian rights – including the Jewish historian Norman Finkelstein and university students, many of them Jewish, in organisations such as Students for Justice in Palestine – is not an antisemitic trope. It is a fact.

Twenty-four state governments' passage of Israel lobby-backed legislation requiring their workers and contractors,

under threat of dismissal, to sign a pro-Israel oath and promise not to support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement is not an antisemitic trope. It is a fact.

The shameless decision in 2014 by all 100 US senators, including Bernie Sanders, to pass a Soviet-style plebiscite proposed by the Israel lobby to affirm Israel's "right to defend itself" during the 51 days it bombed and shelled homes, water treatment plants, power stations, hospitals and UN schools in Gaza, killing 2,251 Palestinians, including 551 children, is not an antisemitic trope. It is a fact.

The US refusal, including in the United Nations and other



Marchers help a young victim of Israeli gunfire during the Gaza Great March of Return protest on March 31, 2018.

Photo: Mohammed Zaanou, ActiveStills

international bodies, to criticise Israel's apartheid state and routine violation of international law is not an antisemitic trope. It is a fact.

The well-funded campaigns



by the Israel lobby, which works closely with Israel's Ministry of Strategic Affairs, to discredit any American politician or academic who even slightly deviates from Israeli policy is

not an antisemitic trope. It is a fact. (One infamous example of a US politician kowtowing was the unconstitutional invitation by then-House Speaker John Boehner to Israeli Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to address Congress in 2015 to denounce President Barack Obama's Iranian nuclear agreement.)

The massive interference in

our internal affairs by Israel and the Israel lobby, far exceeding that of any other country, including Russia or China, is not an antisemitic trope. It is a fact.

Israel's lackeys in the political class, along with bankrupt courtiers in the US press, including former American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) employee Wolf Blitzer, are making a serious mistake, however, in refusing to acknowledge Israel's outsized, transparent and often illegal meddling in the American political system and Israel's brutal oppression of Palestinians. It is too obvious and too egregious to hide.

The longer the ruling elites ignore this reality and censor and attack those such as Rep. Ilhan Omar who have the temerity to name this interference and the human rights abuses perpetrated by Israel, the more it gives credence to the racists, bigots, conspiracy theorists and white hate groups, many rooted in the Christian right, who are the real antisemites. Israel and its lobby, rather than protecting Israel and Jews, are steadily nullifying their moral and ultimately political force.

Criticism of Israel and the ideology of Zionism is not antisemitic. Criticism of Israel's influence and control over US foreign policy, and of Israeli efforts to silence those who champion Palestinian rights, is not antisemitic.

Criticism of Israel's oppression of the Palestinians or its dangerous campaign to orchestrate a war with Iran is not antise-

mitic. The more Israel and the Israel lobby abuse the charge of antisemitism, a charge the Israel lobby has levelled against British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, among many others, the more they lose their effectiveness against the dangerous antisemites whose ranks are growing within the far right and across the Muslim world.

Israel and its lobby do not care if its political allies, including those in the Christian right and the Trump White House, possess warped and racist attitudes about Jews. The Christian right and many of those in the White House, while embracing Zion-

It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends upon his not understanding it" - Upton Sinclair

ism, are also antisemitic. President Donald Trump has called neo-Nazis "very fine people", and once tweeted an illustration of Hillary Clinton against a background of hundred-dollar bills and with the Star of David superimposed near her face. The sole criterion of Israel and the Israel lobby in determining who to support and who to demonise is identifying who backs the far-right agenda of the apartheid state of Israel and who does not. Genuine antisemitism is irrelevant.

For Israel, the world is divided along the fault line of Palestinian rights. Stand up for the Palestinians and you are an antisemite. Cheer their marginalisation,

oppression and murder and you are a friend of the Jews.

Have Jewish leaders forgotten their own history? Antisemitism is wrong and dangerous not only because it is bad for the Jews, but because the dark forces of ethnic and religious hatred, used by Israel and the lobby against critics, are bad for everyone, including the Jews and the Palestinians. You open this Pandora's box of evils at your peril.

The interference by Israel in the American political system is amply documented, including in the Al-Jazeera four-part series *The Lobby*, which Israel and its supporters managed to block from being broadcast. In the film, a pirated copy of which can be watched on the website *Electronic*

Intifada, the leaders of the Israel lobby are repeatedly captured on a reporter's hidden camera explaining how they, backed by the intelligence services within Israel, attack and silence American critics and use huge cash donations to control the American electoral process and political system.

The Israel lobby, lacking any plausible deniability, has remained stunningly silent about the film. The corporate press, in the face of pressure by the lobby, has ignored the documentary.

The series exposes the various machinations of the Israel lobby.

"We made sure that there were people [agents of the lobby] in

every single congressional district”, MJ Rosenberg, a former editor of the AIPAC policy journal *Near East Report* and now a critic of AIPAC, said in the film in an on-the-record interview with Al-Jazeera. “You call [politicians] and say, ‘I’m calling from AIPAC in Washington’. I did these calls. ‘We hear you’re good friends with Congressman So and So’. ‘Oh my God, yes, we’ve been friends with so and so’. ‘Well, what does he think about Israel?’ ‘I never talked to him about Israel’. ‘Well, can I come down and talk to you? And help you figure out a way to talk to him about Israel?’ ‘No, just tell me. What should I say? I’ll just tell him.’”

Craig Holman, who campaigns for lobbying reform with Public Citizen, is another participant in the film who denounced the Israel lobby’s fundraising practices.

“Right now our current [federal] contribution limit from any person to a candidate is \$2,700”, Holman says. “That’s a lot of money. It can certainly buy ... some gratitude with a lawmaker. But if you really want to add punch to that type of buying of favours, what you do is you get 50 or 100 people together at an event like this, all chipping in \$2,700 and then you bundle it all together and hand the total amount to the lawmaker. At that point, we’re talking anywhere around a quarter-million dollars. So suddenly you’ve got a group of people with the same demand they want from the lawmaker, handing over a quarter of a million dollars. That buys a

lawmaker”.

One of the fundraising events captured in the film was for Anthony Brown, a Democrat who successfully ran for Congress in Maryland in 2016.

“You strategically pick the ones who are in close races and [whom you] want to build relationships with”, David Ochs, the founder of HaLev and an activist for Israel, says in the documentary. “We want the Jewish community to go face to face in this small environment – 50, 30, 40 people, and say, ‘This is what’s important to us.’”

“They’re actually buying these officeholders”, Public Citizen’s Holman says in the documentary. Speaking from the lobby’s point of view, he says “we’re chipping in all this money so we can hand over \$100,000 or \$200,000 to the officeholder so we can buy them.”

“What [the] group is doing to avoid that [federal] disclosure requirement is it isn’t taking money and putting it in its own account and then handing it over to the officeholder”, Holman says of the Israel lobby. “It’s just collecting credit card information and turning that over directly to the candidate. Therefore, it’s not violating the earmarking law and they’re not reporting this. All we can see on the campaign finance reports are the individuals who contributed. But there are no records on those campaign finance reports that they weren’t together in a bundling group who are all at this event. All we’d know is Person A gave \$2,700; Person B gave \$2,700. And we’d have no

idea they’re working in tandem with each other”.

The Israel lobby also flies hundreds of members of Congress, often with their families, to Israel every year for lavish junkets at expensive resorts. These Congress members run up individual bills that frequently exceed \$20,000. The Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007 attempted to restrict lobbyists from offering paid trips lasting more than one day to members of Congress. But AIPAC, which has never been forced to register as a foreign agent, used its clout to insert a clause in the act to exclude so-called educational trips organised by charities that do not hire lobbyists. AIPAC is affiliated with such a charity, called the American Israel Education Foundation.

“It doesn’t have an office”, Holman says about the foundation. “It doesn’t have any employees. It’s just a tax form they [Israel lobby agents] file. Gives some dinners, gives some wonderful resorts to stay at, entertainment, all of which is packed up into one of these trips. It’s a very, very effective tool at influence peddling”.

The investment by Israel and its backers is worth it. The United States Congress in 2018 authorised a \$38-billion defense aid package for Israel over the next decade and has spent over \$5.6-trillion during the last 18 years fighting futile wars that Israel and its lobby pushed for in the Middle East.

“If you wander off the reservation and become critical of Israel, you not only will not get money, AIPAC will go to great lengths to find someone who will run against you”, John Mearsheimer, professor of political science at the University of Chicago and co-author of *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy*, says in the documentary. “And they support that person very generously. The end result is you’re likely to lose your seat in Congress”.

The film focuses in part on former Rep. Jim Moran, who was in the US House of Representatives from 1991 to 2015 and who was an open critic of the Israel lobby.

“They have questionnaires”, Moran says about AIPAC in the film. “Anyone running for Congress is [presented with a demand from AIPAC] to fill out a questionnaire. And they evaluate the depth of your commitment to Israel on the basis of that questionnaire. And then you have an interview with local people. If you get AIPAC support, then more often than not you’re going to win”.

“You are told that ‘Israel continues to be under siege from hundreds of millions of its neighbours who are Muslims and they hate Israel and Jewish people’,” Moran says. “You’re told, ‘They have only survived because of the United States, because of American politicians like you who support us’”.

“You realise it’s not just the money”, he goes on. “A number

of concerned activists will send out postcards, make phone calls, they’ll organise. That’s the democratic process. They understand the democratic process”.

“They threaten”, MJ Rosenberg says of the Israel lobby leaders’ response to elected officials who become critical of Israel. “They immediately threaten. Even if [politicians] know AIPAC can’t defeat them, AIPAC can make their lives more difficult. They can make sure that their next town meeting or something, some members of the Jewish congregation jump up and say, ‘But you’re anti-Israel!’ ”

Moran was targeted by the

Rabin did not invite the leaders of the Israel lobby to his inauguration and referred to the leaders of the Israel lobby as “scumbags”

Israel lobby because he raised questions about the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force Act, which authorized the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Moran told a Jewish constituent at a town hall meeting in his district that “if the Jewish community was opposed to the war, I think that would make a difference” in whether the United States would invade Iraq. He was immediately accused by the Israel lobby of being an antisemite and fostering the belief that there was a Jewish conspiracy to push America into war.

“There was a conservative rabbi in my district who was assigned to me, I assume, by AIPAC”, Moran says. “He

warned me that if I voiced my views about the Israeli lobby that my career would be over, and implied that it would be done through the [Washington] *Post*. Sure enough, the *Washington Post* editorialised brutally. Everyone ganged up.”

The film shows a screen shot of a 2003 headline in *The Washington Post*: “Sorry, Mr. Moran, You’re Not Fit For Public Office”. In following years there were a number of other negative commentaries.

In the film, Eric Gallagher, then with *The Israel Project*, tells the undercover reporter that AIPAC has a close relationship with the *Washington Post* editorial board.

Moran says, “The principal editorial board of the *Post* itself has been a very effective instrument because they have been

able to maintain their credibility. It’s a great paper in every other way. Because they have such credibility, they’re extremely effective”.

“Both of my daughters married Jewish men”, Moran says. “My grandchildren are Jewish. Anybody who considers me an antisemite is ignorant”.

AIPAC, while it presents itself as an impartial supporter of Israel, has long been an arm of the Israeli right. It vehemently opposed the Oslo Accord and the peace process with the Palestinians engineered by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. It poured money and resources into the

1992 Israeli election campaign to back Rabin's political opponents in the Likud party. Rabin did not invite the leaders of the Israel lobby to his inauguration and, according to an aide in his office, referred to the leaders of the Israel lobby as "scumbags". He repeatedly denounced the lobby as an impediment to Israel's security and democracy.

The Israeli newspaper *Haar-etz* characterised Rabin's remarks to American Jewish leaders during a visit to the United States as "brutal". "You have hurt Israel," the newspaper quoted Rabin as saying. "I will not allow you to conduct my dealings with the [US] administration".

Washington Jewish Week reported that Rabin told the AIPAC leadership, "You failed at everything. You waged lost battles. ... You caused damage to Israel. ... You're too negative. ... You create too much antagonism".

The Israel lobby, after Rabin's assassination in 1995 by a right-wing Jewish fanatic and the 1996 electoral victory by Likud under the leadership of Netanyahu, returned to the good graces of the Israeli government. The lobby, as Israel has lurched further and further to the right and adopted ever more overtly racist policies toward the Palestinians under Netanyahu, has become more intrusive in American political life. Israel's apartheid state, racism and murderous assaults on unarmed Palestinians increasingly alienate many of its traditional supporters, including

young American Jews. Israel, unable to justify its human rights abuses and atrocities, has opted for harsher forms of control including censoring, spying on and attacking its critics. It has pressured the US State Department to redefine antisemitism under a three-point test known as the Three Ds: the making of statements that "demonise" Israel; statements that apply "double standards" for Israel; statements that "delegitimise" the state of Israel. This definition is being pushed by the Israel lobby in state legislatures and on college campuses.

It spreads the hate talk of Islamophobia, including by sponsoring the showing of the racist film "Unmasked Judeophobia" on college campuses on Holocaust Remembrance Day. The film argues that Muslims embrace a Nazi-like antisemitism and are seeking to carry out another holocaust against Jews. Nearly all American Muslims targeted by law enforcement since 9/11 were singled out for their outspokenness about Palestinian rights. Most of those arrested had no connection to al-Qaida, Hatem Bazian, lecturer in the department of Near Eastern studies at UC Berkeley, says in the film – "no relationship whatsoever to what is called transnational terrorism."

There are fractures in the Democratic Party, evidenced when House Speaker Nancy

Pelosi faced a revolt by younger, more progressive members of the House over her proposal to pass an antisemitism resolution pushed by the Israel lobby and designed to shame Rep. Omar. A reworded resolution, one that did not please the lobby, was passed, condemning anti-Muslim bias and white supremacy and citing "African-Americans, Native Americans, and other people of colour, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, immigrants and others" victimised by bigotry.

Israel's dominance of the Democratic Party is eroding. It is losing legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Israel's tactics, for this reason, will become more vicious and underhanded. Its interference in the democratic process will be characterised less by an attempt to persuade and more by the use of money to ensure fealty to its policies, censorship, the enforcement of legally binding oaths in favour of Israel to blunt the BDS movement, and the kind of racist hate talk it unleashed against Rep. Omar. The lobby, as Rabin understood, was never a true friend of Israel. **CT**

Chris Hedges spent nearly two decades as a foreign correspondent in Central America, the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. He was part of a New York Times team of reporters awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 2002. He also received the Amnesty International Global Award for Human Rights Journalism in 2002. This essay was first published at www.truthdig.com

Anyone who attempts to control the dominant narrative about who you are and what you stand for is trying to control you and your voice. They must be resisted, writes **Caitlin Johnstone**

How (and how not) to beat a smear campaign

ANYONE who opposes western interventionism or thinks the poor are human beings is a Russian antisemite. If you disagree, it's because you are a Russian antisemite, too.

Narrative is a funny thing. You can do everything right, cross all your 'T's and dot all your 'I's and colour within all the official lines, but if you offend the powerful they can still rearrange the dominant narrative underneath you to kill your public influence.

In Venezuela right now, some guy named Juan is being elevated to the leadership of the nation simply by the governments of other nations referring to him as "President Guaido", and denying the legitimacy of the actual guy who is running the Venezuelan government. The funny thing about that is if enough people believe it, it can theoretically work; the only thing keeping leaders in place is the agreed-upon narrative that they're the leaders. If you can replace that narrative with

a different one, as powerful people are currently attempting to do, in theory it is possible to effect a coup by pure narrative. You couldn't ask for a more perfect illustration of the power of narrative control.

Smear campaigns work in the same way. Anyone challenging authorised narratives and the status quo of oligarchic hegemony can have their reputations destroyed by the lackeys of the plutocratic class which exerts massive influence over the political/media class, thereby neutralising their ability to influence the public.

If the public distrusts someone, they aren't going to believe the narratives that person is putting forward, even if those narratives are as sane as protecting the poor, opposing senseless warmongering, or defending Palestinian rights.

In today's political climate where smearing someone as a socialist or communist is increasingly ignored, the most

effective smear campaigns are currently those that paint the target as a servant of the Kremlin or a hater of Jews.

British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn's populist leftism and support for Palestinian rights has got him targeted by an amazingly virulent smear campaign which journalist Jonathan Cook describes as "a perfect, self-rationalising system of incrimination – denying the victim a voice, even in their own defence." A narrative has been promulgated with extreme aggression by the UK media that a horrifying epidemic of antisemitism has somehow overtaken the Labour Party under Corbyn's leadership, and that Corbyn himself is (despite a lifetime of opposition to all forms of racism and bigotry) a closet antisemite as well.

Corbyn has responded to this fact-free smear campaign with capitulation after capitulation, most recently with the suspension of MP Chris Williamson on baseless accusations of antisemitism and a





JEREMY CORBYN: Targeted by an amazingly virulent smear campaign.

Twitter post of a video warning about antisemitic conspiracy theories. There is nothing inherently wrong with warning people about antisemitic conspiracy theories (which are toxic for a whole host of reasons), but the video Corbyn chose to share explicitly cited criticism of Zionism as an example of one such conspiracy theory. Zionism is the racist ideology supporting the continued existence of a Jewish ethnostate (much like the white ethnostate sought by American white nationalists like Richard Spencer), and it is the driving force behind the oppression and persecution of the Palestinian people today.

Validating this conflation of anti-Zionism with hatred of Jews is a capitulation to the demands of those who have been advancing this smear campaign, and it is the wrong way to fight it. It will never work, because the goal has never been to fight antisemitism, the goal has been to destroy Corbyn. It wouldn't matter if Corbyn did everything everyone demanded of him and then posted a video of himself being whipped while screaming, "Lord have mercy on this wicked Nazi Jew-hater!" on his knees – no amount of capitulation will end this campaign to eliminate him. The target is not antisemitism, the target is Corbyn. And the goal is not to tell the truth but to advance a narrative.

We are seeing the same type of smear campaign advanced

against Congresswoman Ilhan Omar in response to her support for Palestinian rights, criticism of the US Israel lobby, and opposition to US regime change interventionism in nations like Venezuela. Currently she is again being smeared as an antisemite for making the demonstrably true claim that influential Americans push for allegiance to Israel, even while the GOP is taking a much smaller amount of flack for putting up a poster which literally depicts her as having ties to the 9/11 attacks. The fact that this brazen Islamophobia is receiving far less establishment media attention than fact-free accusations of antisemitism tells you that this smear campaign has nothing to do with fact and everything to do with narrative.

Yet still we see Omar attempting to appease these unappeasable smearmongers by publicly apologising for perfectly truthful and accurate statements. The campaign to kill her influence will continue for as long as she continues to disrupt the official narratives of the US-centralised empire, so no amount of apologising or sensitivity to concern trolling about antisemitism will ever stop the smears.

Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard has also been subject to the same narrative control subversion for her opposition to US interventionism in Syria,

Venezuela and Iran, her criticisms of disastrous US interventionism in the past in Iraq and Libya, and her calls to end the new cold war against Russia. American mass media has been flipping the fuck out ever since she announced her candidacy for the presidency and working overtime to smear her as a friend of the Kremlin and of Syria's President Bashar al-Assad. During a recent guest appearance on *The View*, the Hawaii Representative was told by the ditzy daughter of late bloodthirsty psychopath John McCain that, "When I hear the name Tulsi Gabbard, I

Still we see Omar attempting to appease these unappeasable smearmongers by apologising for truthful and accurate statements

think of Assad apologist".

Gabbard's response? Contributing to the war machine's propaganda narratives about Syria: "There is no disputing the fact that Bashar al-Assad in Syria is a brutal dictator", Gabbard said. "There is no disputing the fact that he has used chemical weapons and other weapons against his people".

Again, Gabbard is not being targeted by establishment mouthpieces such as John McCain's hellspawn because there is an actual concern that she holds some weird kind of loyalty to a random Middle Eastern leader on the other side of the world. Yet Gabbard capitulated to narratives she knows damn well

are highly questionable in a vain attempt to appease her smearers. This is not how you beat these creeps. The way to beat them is to attack the smear directly.

I've been the target of smear campaigns myself, and I've had blunders and successes in dealing with them. The fact that I'm still here speaking to a large readership without my influence having been killed off means I've picked up a clue or two about dealing with attempts to manipulate the public narrative about me, so I'm just going to share what I've learned here in case it's useful to anybody.

Anyone who attempts to control the dominant narrative about who you are and what you stand for is trying to control you and your voice. It is a direct attack on your ability to influence your world, and if it succeeds you will necessarily be rendered impotent. It is therefore necessary to fight a smear campaign about you as directly and aggressively as any other attempt to rob you of your faculties or capabilities. This means not ignoring your smearers, nor capitulating to their demands, but engaging their smears loudly and publicly in a way that fully exposes what they are attempting to do to you.

If you are being lied about by someone attempting to influence public opinion about you, debunk that lie and loudly draw attention to it. If your position is being misrepresented by some-

one attempting to influence public opinion about you, correct that misrepresentation and call attention to how manipulative and dishonest your smearer is being. Explain their real motives for coming after you and dismiss their false stated reasons for the bogus justifications that they are.

They are trying to control the narrative about you, so the idea is to take back that control of your narrative. You don't need to convince everyone that you're right, you just need to prevent their malicious narrative about you from becoming the one everyone accepts as true because that's what everyone else is saying.

Most people believe things not because of facts and evidence, but because other people in their life believe those things. If you can create enough doubt in the malicious narratives being circulated about you and enough trust in your own, you can punch through that dynamic of unanimous consensus and keep your influence from being killed.

When you see it for what it actually is, a smear campaign is actually really gross to look at. People have a natural revulsion to manipulation and deception once they've seen it, especially when it's done in the

service of the powerful against the interests of the disempowered. All you need to do, then, is forcefully draw attention to what they're doing to the point where their engagement in the smear campaign makes them look worse than they're trying to make you look. This will kill their ability to manipulate public perception of you.

It sucks to have to do this. It feels really gross to keep having to wade into the muck and fight your smearers on their level, but the alternative is letting them control the narrative about you, which is the same as handing them control over your voice and, to an extent, your life. Because you can be 100 percent certain that they will not cease working to kill public trust in you and your words if you just ignore them or be nice to them hoping that they will stop.

Remember, they are not actually concerned about you being a Nazi/antisemite/Putin-lover/Assadist; they don't actually care about fighting antisemitism in the way you or any healthy adult does. They have one simple goal, and that is to kill off your influence over the herd. Keep putting out your own mes-

sage as well; don't let fighting smears become the majority of your output, but don't give them a single inch of control over the public narrative about you, either. If you see someone smearing Corbyn, Omar, Gabbard, or any other target of establishment campaigns such as Julian Assange, the best way to help them continue to disrupt the narrative matrix is to (a) refute the smear, then (b) aggressively expose the smearer for what they are and what they're about.

Whoever controls the narrative controls the world, and whoever controls the narrative about a particular thing controls that thing. If that particular thing is something or someone you care about, don't let them control the narrative about it.

Never treat an argument made in bad faith like it's an argument made in good faith. Expose their lies and force a conversation about the despicable tactic that they are employing. **CT**

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Caitlin Johnstone is an Australian-based blogger. She has a podcast and a new book *Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Preppers*. Follow her at www.caitlinjohnstone.com

**READ THE BEST OF
JOE BAGEANT**

www.coldtype.net/joe.html

Scour the Internet for any criticism of the capitalist ruling classes, the corporate media, neoliberalism, or any other antisemitic tropes! writes **CJ Hopkins**

A pandemic of antisemitism

GET the kids into the house! Lock your doors! Board up the windows! Break out the gas masks and hazmat suits! According to the corporate media, we are now officially deep in the throes of a deadly antisemitism pandemic! And just as the threat of mind-controlling Russian influencers was finally waning! It seems the fabric of Western democracy just can't catch a break these days.

The origins of this pernicious, panic-inducing pestilence remain shrouded in mystery, but epidemiologists now believe that it began in the spring of 2015, shortly after the resignation of Ed Milliband as UK Labour Party leader, and went global in the summer of 2016, right around the time of the Brexit referendum and the nomination of Donald Trump. (Although the circumstantial evidence is overwhelming, to date, there exists no conclusive proof that Russian bio-weapons designers cooked up the virus in a hotel in Salisbury and sprayed it onto anyone's doorknob.)

Virologists are working around the clock to map the genome of this scurrilous scourge, about which very little is known, other than that it has a sudden onset, and attacks the language centre of the brain, causing the sufferer to express opinions about "Zionism", "globalism", "the Israel lobby", "banks", and other code words for "Jews".

Patients appear to be unaware that they are spouting these antisemitic code words until they are told they are by the corporate media, or their colleagues, or some random account on Twitter, at which point their symptoms alter dramatically, and they suffer a series of petit mal seizures, causing them to repeatedly apologise for unintentionally advocating the extermination of the entire Jewish people and the establishment of a worldwide Nazi Reich.

At the moment, Britain is taking the brunt of it. Despite the best efforts of the ruling class-

es and the media to contain its spread, several new cases of antisemitism have been reported throughout the Kingdom, or at least among the Labour Party, which, at this point, has been so thoroughly infected that it resembles a neo-Nazi death cult.

Jeremy Corbyn, who contracted the virus more or less the moment he assumed the leadership, is now exhibiting symptoms of late-stage disease. Reliable sources close to the party, reached for comment at a brunch in Qatar with Tony Blair and a bunch of Saudis, report that Corbyn is running around Momentum HQ in full Nazi regalia, alternately heiling Hitler and looking for journalists to apologise to.

Another Labour MP, Chris Williamson, had to be summarily quarantined after publicly apologising for not apologising for inciting a gathering of Labour members to stop apologising for refusing to apologise for being disgusting antisemites ... or something basically along those lines.



Riot police stand guard close to the Eiffel Tower in Paris during Gilets Jaunes protests calling for lower fuel taxes, reintroduction of the solidarity tax on wealth, a minimum wage increase, and Emmanuel Macron's resignation as President of France.

Photo: Norbu Gyachung / Wikimedia.com

Guardian columnist Owen Jones is fiercely denying denying that the party is a hive of Nazis, and that he ever denied that denying the fact that there is zero actual evidence of that fact is essential to preserving what is left of the party, once it has been cured of antisemitism, or disbanded and reconstituted from scratch.

Emergency measures are now in effect. A full-scale Labour Party lockdown is imminent. Anyone not already infected is being advised to flee the party, denounce anyone who hasn't done so as "a Hitler-loving Corbyn-sympathiser," and prophylactically apologise for any critical statements they might have made about Israel, or "elites", or "global capitalism", or "bankers", or anything else that anyone can construe as antisemitism (preferably in

the pages of the *Guardian*).

Nor has the Continent been spared! What at first appeared to be a series of spontaneous protests against Emmanuel Macron, economic austerity, and global capitalism by the so-called "Yellow Vests" in France has now been officially diagnosed as a nationwide antisemitism outbreak. In a heroic attempt to contain the outbreak, Macron has dispatched his security forces to shoot the eyes out of unarmed women, pepper spray paraplegics in wheelchairs, and just generally beat bloody hell out of everyone.

Strangely, none of these tactics have worked, so France has decided to join the USA, the UK, Germany, and the rest of the empire in defining anti-Zi-

onism as form of antisemitism, such that anyone implying that Israel is in any way inherently racist, or a quasi-fascist Apartheid state, or making jokes about "elites" or "bankers", can be detained and prosecuted for committing a "hate-crime".

Meanwhile, in the United States (where Donald Trump, "US patient zero", had already single-handedly infected the vast majority of the American populace, and transformed the nation into an unrecognisable, genocidal Nazi Reich), the antisemitism virus has now spread to Congress, where Representative Ilhan Omar (reputed to be a hardcore member of the infamous "Axis of Antisemitism") has apparently totally lost her mind and started talking about the Israel lobby, and the billions of dollars the US government provides to

Israel on an annual basis, and other Israel-related subjects one simply does not talk about (unless one writes for the *New York Times* and isn't a hijab-wearing Muslim, in which case it's completely fine to characterise support for Israel as being "bought and paid for by the Israel lobby").

Now, this is where things get really confusing. Trump (who, let's remember, is Literally Hitler, or was until he green-lit the attempted US coup in Venezuela) and the Republicans have now united with the Democrats to denounce Ilhan Omar as a filthy antisemite, and possibly a full-fledged Islamic terrorist (or to condemn the existence of "hate", or something).

The corporate media, Facebook, and Twitter have been overtaken by hordes of angry antisemites accusing other antisemites of antisemitism. Congress is on the verge of convening a House Un-Israeli Activities Committee to investigate anyone who might have ever trafficked in "antisemitic tropes".

Meghan McCain was so horrified by the hateful, antisemitic things that Ilhan Omar never said that she broke down blubbering on national television and begged Joy Behar to call in a Rabbi to convert her to Judaism on the spot ... which some viewers found a bit unseemly.

OK, I know, you're probably questioning the fact that this antisemitism pandemic just sprang up out of the ether one day, more or less in perfect sync with the Russian plot to destroy

democracy that Vladimir Putin set in motion the moment the Global War on Terror seemed to be running out of steam. If you are, you need to close this essay, pull up either MSNBC or the *Guardian* website on your phone, and inoculate yourself against such thoughts.

That conspiratorial type of thinking is one of the early warning signs that you have been infected with antisemitism! Unless you act now to protect yourself, before you know it, you'll be raving about "the ruling classes", "globalist elites", "austerity". "neoliberalism", "the Israel lobby", or even "Palestinians".

So just put all that stuff out of your mind! This sudden antisemitism outbreak has nothing to do with the War on Populism that the global capitalist ruling classes have been waging for the last two years.

It's not like the establishment would stoop so low as to use antisemitism (and even the holocaust!) as a cynical propaganda ploy to delegitimise their myriad opponents and critics.

No, it's much more believable that an idiopathic, worldwide antisemitism pandemic erupted, for no apparent reason, precisely as the capitalist ruling classes were beginning to suspect that they had a widespread "populist" insurgency on their hands.

Plus, even if our democratic leaders, and the professional journalists in the corporate media, were, in fact, a bunch of

soulless, conniving, sociopathic scumbags, what purpose would it possibly serve for them to whip the public up into a series of fits of mass hysteria over antisemitism, or "populism". or imaginary Russian hackers (or imminent lone-wolf terrorist attacks, possibly with home-made nuclear devices)? That wouldn't make any sense, now would it?

People would be so consumed with fear and hatred that they could hardly think. They might not even notice how they were being cynically manipulated, and were contributing to actual antisemitism by rendering the term devoid of any meaning.

No, the sudden antisemitism pandemic theory makes a lot more sense.

So get out those vintage plague doctor masks, lock your critical thinking up in your anti-antisemitism safe room, and pull up Schindler's List on Netflix ... oh, and don't forget to scour the Internet for any criticism of the capitalist ruling classes, or the corporate media, or neoliberalism, or any other antisemitic tropes! **CT**

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CJ Hopkins is an award-winning American playwright, novelist and political satirist based in Berlin. His plays are published by Bloomsbury Publishing (UK) and Broadway Play Publishing (USA). His debut novel, *ZONE 23*, is published by Snogsworthly, Swaine & Cormorant Paperbacks. He can be reached at cjhopkins.com or consentfactory.org.

The commission found serious human rights violations that may constitute crimes against humanity and called on Israel to “Lift the blockade on Gaza with immediate effect, writes **Robert Inlakesh**

UN report slams Israel's Gaza massacres

THE United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council has released a powerful report, on the Gaza “Great Return March” demonstrations, stating that they have grounds to believe Israel committed International War Crimes against demonstrators during “large-scale civilian protests”.

The 22-page document has been condemned by the Israeli government, as there is talk of the country being brought to the International Court of Justice and tried for war crimes and violations of International Law against demonstrations that “were civilian in nature”.

The commission conducted 325 interviews and meetings with victims, witnesses, government officials and members of civil society, from all sides, and gathered more than 8,000 documents, including affidavits, medical reports, open source reports, social media content, written submissions and expert legal opinions, video and drone footage, and photographs”.

Here are the most important points concluded in the report:

- The commission found in the killings of 189 demonstrators between 30 March and 31 December 2018, 183 were killed with live ammunition, including 35 children, three health workers and two members of the Press. Only 29 of those killed were members of Palestinian armed groups.

- Only four Israeli snipers were lightly injured; none were killed by demonstrators.

- 23,313 Palestinian demonstrators were injured during the 2018 demonstrations, 6106 with live ammunition, “contributing to the highest toll of injuries recorded in the Occupied Palestinian Territory since 2005”.

- On the killing of child demonstrators, the commission found “reasonable grounds to believe that Israeli snipers shot them intentionally, knowing that they were children”.

- On the killing of health workers, “the commission found reasonable grounds to believe that Israeli snipers

intentionally shot health workers, despite seeing that they were clearly marked as such”.

- On the killings of journalists, “the commission found reasonable grounds to believe that Israeli snipers shot journalists intentionally, despite seeing that they were clearly marked as such”.

- The commission found that both male and female protesters were shot in the groin. The female victims told the commission they are now “unlikely to be able to have children”.

- The policy of the Israeli Minister of Defense, was to deny passage to any person injured during demonstrations, causing unnecessary deaths and life changing injuries.

- According to the commission, except in two possible cases, “the use of live ammunition by Israeli security forces against demonstrators was unlawful”.

- Israel used a “disproportionate use of force”.

- The “demonstrators were shot in violation of their right

to life or of the principle of distinction under international humanitarian law”.

- The commission found “reasonable grounds to believe that the excessive use of force by Israeli security forces violated the rights” of thousands of demonstrators who were peaceful.

- The commission found “reasonable grounds” to believe that Israel violated *The Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

- “Violations of international law, such as those committed by Israeli security forces and set out in this report, give rise to State responsibility...”.

The commission found serious human rights violations that may constitute crimes against humanity and called on Israel to “Lift the blockade on Gaza with immediate effect.

The often repeated Israeli claims of the protests being inspired and organised by “ Hamas terrorists”, were also addressed in the report, which stated that the demonstrations were inspired by the internet posts of 34-year-old Palestinian poet and journalist, Ahmed Abu Artema, with the demonstrations being organised by “A higher national committee and 12 subcommittees”.

The report went on to say, that “while the members of the committee held diverse political views, they stated that their unifying element was the principle that the march was to be “fully peaceful from beginning to end” and demonstrators would be unarmed”.

Activities such as the use of incendiary kites, cutting barbed wire or tire burning were organised by “self-declared” units. The report further states “the commission found no evidence to suggest that they were directed or coordinated by armed groups”.

The commission interviewed what it called an international journalist who said, “I have covered wars in Syria, Yemen, Libya. I have never seen anything like this. The slow methodical shooting. It was just shocking...”

The commission also noted that Israel refused to assist with the UN investigation and did not “cooperate or provide information”.

The following is a sample of the cases investigated by the commission.

March 30 demonstrations

Injury of 17 Mohammed Ajouri (17 years old)

“Israeli forces shot Mohammad, a student-athlete, in the back of his right leg as he gave onions to demonstrators to relieve tear-gas symptoms, approximately 300m from the fence. His leg had to be amputated”.

The murder of Abdel Fatah Nabi (18 years old)

“Israeli forces killed Abed, from Beit Lahia, when they shot him in the back of the head as he ran, carrying a tyre, away from and about 400m from the separation fence”.

The murder of Bader Sabagh (19 years old)

“Bader, from Jabaliya, was killed by Israeli forces when they shot him in the head as he stood smoking a cigarette 300m from the separation fence”.

Injury and murder of schoolgirl (13 years old) and Marwan Qudieh (45 years old)

“Israeli forces injured a schoolgirl with bullet fragmentation. As she lay on the ground, four men attempted to evacuate her. The forces shot three of them, killing Marwan Qudieh (45) from Khuzaa village and injuring a potato seller and another man in the legs. One of the rescuers had to have a leg amputated”.

Injury of Alaa Dali (21 years old)

“Alaa, a member of the Palestinian cycling team, was shot by Israeli forces in the leg as he stood holding his bicycle, wearing his cycling kit, watching the demonstrations, approximately 300m from the separation fence. His right leg had to be amputated, ending his cycling career”.

May 14 demonstration, seven children killed

“On 14 May, Israeli security forces shot and killed seven children: a girl, Wisal Khalil (14), and six boys: Izzedine al-Samak (13); Said al-Kheir (15); Ahmad al-Sha’ar (15); Talal Matar (15); Saadi Abu Salah (16); and Ibrahim al-Zarqa (17)”.

The murder of Mohammad Najjar (33 years old)

“Israeli forces shot Mohammad,

a naval police officer, in the chest, killing him, as he sat on a hill with a friend, around 500m from the separation fence”.

The murder of Yasser Abu Naja (11 years old)

“On 29 June, Israeli forces killed Yasser from Khan Younis with a shot to the head as he was hiding with two friends behind a bin, approximately 200m from the separation fence. The children had been chanting national slogans at Israeli forces”.

The murder of Nasser Mosabeh (11 years old)

“Nasser was from Khan Younis. On 28 September, Israeli forces shot him in the back of the head as he stood 250 m from the separation fence. He died the same day”.

The murder of Razan Al-Najar (20 years old)

“On 1 June, an Israeli sniper bullet hit Razan, of the Palestinian Medical Relief Society and who at the time was wearing a white paramedic vest and



Yasser Murtaja was shot by an Israeli sniper, despite wearing a high visibility PRESS flak jacket and helmet.

standing with other volunteer paramedics approximately 110m from the separation fence, in the chest at the Khuzaa site, east of Khan Younis. She died in hospital”.

The murder of Yasser Murtaja (30 years old)

“On 6 April, Yasser, a journalist from Gaza City, was shot in the lower abdomen by Israeli forces at the Khan Younis site while he was filming the demonstrations

for a documentary. He was wearing a blue helmet and a dark blue bulletproof vest clearly marked “Press”. He died the following day”.

Amputation of Abed Nofal (11 years old)

“On 17 April, Abed, a schoolboy from the Bureij refugee camp, was shot by Israeli forces while he was playing football near the separation fence. His leg had to be amputated”.

The extended version of the report is set to be released on March 18, 2019. The commission recommended that UN members consider imposing individual sanctions, such as travel bans or an asset freezes on those responsible.

Robert Inlakesh is a journalist, political analyst and human rights activist who specializes in delivering insight into the geopolitical scene of the Middle East, specialising in the political and humanitarian situation in Palestine. This report was first published at www.mintpressnews.com

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It was considered one of the finest places to live in the old



Railway Station, Village of Janov, October 1996

24

David McMillan

Prvpiat

Inside the city that was left to die

In 1994, I began photographing in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, an area created in the aftermath of the accident at the nuclear power plant. Within its millions of acres, there are fields left to lie fallow and cities and villages where the vestiges of the defunct Soviet Empire and the everyday remnants of the lives of the former citizenry



Soviet Union. Then the nuclear reactor melted down . . .



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Sinking Boat on the Prypiat River, Chernobyl, October 1998



School, Village of Shipelicki, April 1995



remain. I've photographed almost exclusively within the city of Prypiat. Once home to 50,000 people, it was built to house the workers from the nuclear power plant, and several apartments were still under construction at the time of the accident. The city was considered one of the finest places to live in the former Soviet Union, with many schools, kindergartens, playgrounds, hospitals, and cultural facilities, but it will never be lived in again. Within this area, virtually untouched by civilisation since the 1986 accident, there have been dramatic changes that have become the subject of my photographs, particularly the proliferation of nature and



Portrait of Lenin, Kindergarten, October 1997



Lobby, Children's Hospital, October 2012

the deterioration of the built environment. This is a tragic place, but one which continues to offer mystery and surprise.

- **David McMillan**,
Introduction to *Growth and Decay: Prypiat and the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone*



GROWTH AND DECAY:
Prypiat and the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone

David McMillan

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Riverside Cafe, Prypiat, October 2016

If Julian Assange can stand up to Big Brother, so can you: so can all of us, writes **John Pilger**

The prisoner who says 'No' to Big Brother

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WHenever I visit Julian Assange, we meet in a room he knows too well. There is a bare table and pictures of Ecuador on the walls. There is a bookcase where the books never change. The curtains are always drawn and there is no natural light. The air is still and fetid.

This is Room 101.

Before I enter Room 101, I must surrender my passport and phone. My pockets and possessions are examined. The food I bring is inspected.

The man who guards Room 101 sits in what looks like an old-fashioned telephone box. He watches a screen, watching Julian. There are others unseen, agents of the state, watching and listening.

Cameras are everywhere in Room 101. To avoid them, Julian manoeuvres us both into a corner, side by side, flat up against

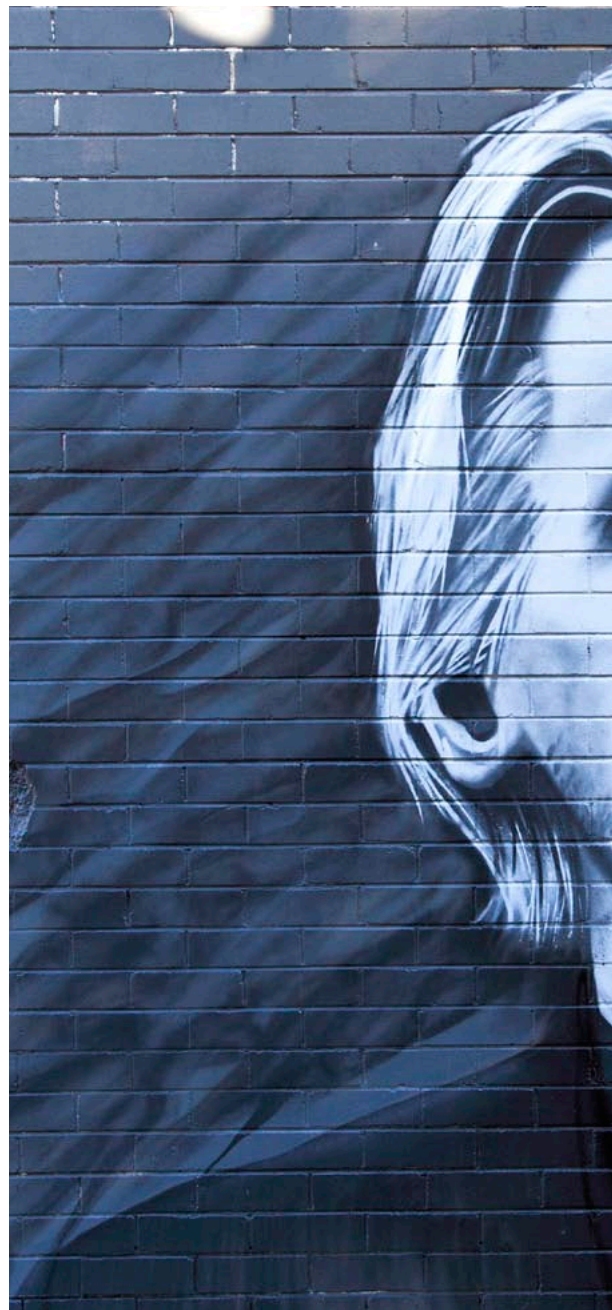
the wall. This is how we catch up: whispering and writing to each other on a notepad, which he shields from the cameras. Sometimes we laugh.

I have my designated time slot. When that expires, the door in Room 101 bursts open and the guard says, "Time is up!" On New Year's Eve, I was allowed an extra 30 minutes and the man in the phone box wished me a happy new year, but not Julian.

Of course, Room 101 is the room in George Orwell's prophetic novel, *1984*, where the thought police watched and tormented their prisoners, and worse, until people surrendered their humanity and principles and obeyed Big Brother.

Julian Assange will never obey Big Brother. His resilience and courage are astonishing, even though his physical health struggles to keep up.

Julian is a distinguished



Australian, who has changed the way many people think about duplicitous governments. For this, he is a political refugee subjected to what the United Nations calls "arbitrary detention".

The UN says he has the right of free passage to freedom, but



LOCAL HERO: Graffiti on a wall in Sydney, Australia.

Photo: Threthny, via Flickr.com

this is denied. He has the right to medical treatment without fear of arrest, but this is denied. He has the right to compensation, but this is denied.

As founder and editor of WikiLeaks, his crime has been to make sense of dark times. WikiLeaks has an impeccable

record of accuracy and authenticity which no newspaper, no TV channel, no radio station, no BBC, no *New York Times*, no *Washington Post*, no *Guardian* can equal. Indeed, it shames them.

That explains why he is being punished.

For example:

Last month, the International Court of Justice ruled that the British Government had no legal powers over the Chagos Islanders, who in the 1960s and 70s, were expelled in secret from their homeland on Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean and sent

into exile and poverty. Countless children died, many of them, from sadness. It was an epic crime few knew about.

For almost 50 years, the British have denied the islanders' the right to return to their homeland, which they had given to the Americans for a major military base.

In 2009, the British Foreign Office concocted a "marine reserve" around the Chagos archipelago.

This touching concern for the environment was exposed as a fraud when WikiLeaks published a secret cable from the British Government reassuring the Americans that "the former inhabitants would find it difficult, if not possible, to pursue their claim for resettlement on the islands if the entire Chagos Archipelago were a marine reserve."

The truth of the conspiracy clearly influenced the momentous decision of the International Court of Justice.

WikiLeaks has also revealed how the United States spies on its allies; how the CIA can watch you through your iPhone; how Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton took vast sums of money from Wall Street for secret speeches that reassured the bankers that if she was elected, she would be their friend.

In 2016, WikiLeaks revealed



a direct connection between Clinton and organised jihadism in the Middle East: terrorists, in other words. One email disclosed that when Clinton was US Secretary of State, she knew that Saudi Arabia and Qatar were funding Islamic State, yet she accepted huge donations for her foundation from both governments.

She then approved the world's biggest ever arms sale to her Saudi benefactors: arms that are currently being used against the stricken people of Yemen.

That explains why he is being punished.

WikiLeaks has also published more than 800,000 secret files from Russia, including the

Kremlin, telling us more about the machinations of power in that country than the specious hysterics of the Russiagate pantomime in Washington.

This is real journalism – journalism of a kind now considered exotic: the antithesis of Vichy journalism, which speaks for the enemy of the people and takes its sobriquet from the Vichy government that occupied France on behalf of the Nazis.

Vichy journalism is censorship by omission, such as the untold scandal of the collusion between Australian governments and the United States to deny Julian Assange his rights as an Australian citizen and to silence him.

In 2010, Prime Minister Julia Gillard went as far as ordering the Australian Federal Police to investigate and hopefully prosecute Assange and WikiLeaks – until she was informed by the AFP that no crime had been committed.

Last month, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published a lavish supplement promoting a celebration of "Me Too" at the Sydney Opera House on March 10. Among the leading participants is the recently retired Minister of Foreign Affairs, Julie Bishop.

Bishop has been on show in the local media lately, lauded as a loss to politics: an "icon", some-

one called her, to be admired.

The elevation to celebrity feminism of one so politically primitive as Bishop tells us how much

so-called identity politics have subverted an essential, objective truth: that what matters, above all, is not your gender but the class you serve.

Before she entered politics, Julie Bishop was a lawyer who served the notorious asbestos miner James Hardie which fought claims by men and their families dying horribly with asbestosis.

Lawyer Peter Gordon recalls Bishop “rhetorically asking the court why workers should be entitled to jump court queues just because they were dying.”

Bishop says she “acted on instructions ... professionally and ethically”.

Perhaps she was merely “acting on instructions” when she flew to London and Washington last year with her ministerial chief of staff, who had indicated that the Australian Foreign Minister would raise Julian’s case and hopefully begin the diplomatic process of bringing him home.

Julian’s father had written a moving letter to the then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, asking the government to intervene diplomatically to free his son. He told Turnbull that he was worried Julian might not leave the embassy alive.

Julie Bishop had every opportunity in the UK and the US to

The persecution of Julian Assange is the conquest of us all: of our independence, our self respect, our intellect, our compassion, our politics, our culture

present a diplomatic solution that would bring Julian home. But this required the courage of one proud to represent a sovereign, independent state, not a vassal.

Instead, she made no attempt to contradict the British Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, when he said outrageously that Julian “faced serious charges”. What charges? There were no charges.

Australia’s Foreign Minister abandoned her duty to speak up for an Australian citizen, prosecuted with nothing, charged with nothing, guilty of nothing.

Will those feminists who fawn over this false icon at the Opera House be reminded of her role in colluding with foreign forces to punish an Australian journalist, one whose work has revealed that rapacious militarism has smashed the lives of millions of ordinary women in many countries: in Iraq alone, the US-led invasion of that country, in which Australia participated, left 700,000 widows.

So what can be done? An Australian government that was prepared to act in response to a public campaign to rescue the refugee football player, Hakeem al-Araibi, from torture and

persecution in Bahrain, is capable of bringing home Julian Assange.

The refusal by the Department of Foreign

Affairs in Canberra to honour the United Nations’ declaration that Julian is the victim of “arbitrary detention”, and has a fundamental right to his freedom, is a shameful breach of the letter and spirit of international law.

Why has the Australian government made no serious attempt to free Assange? Why did Julie Bishop bow to the wishes of two foreign powers? Why is this democracy traduced by its servile relationships, and integrated with lawless foreign power?

The persecution of Julian Assange is the conquest of us all: of our independence, our self respect, our intellect, our compassion, our politics, our culture.

So stop scrolling. Organise. Occupy. Insist. Persist. Make a noise. Take direct action. Be brave and stay brave. Defy the thought police.

War is not peace, freedom is not slavery, ignorance is not strength. If Julian can stand up to Big Brother, so can you: so can all of us. **CT**

John Pilger gave this speech at a rally organised by the Socialist Equality Party for Julian Assange in Sydney on March 3. Read more of John Pilger’s award-winning work at his website, www.johnpilger.com



A shrine to the Monkey King in a shaman's house at Vinh Chau.

Linh Dinh takes a trip to the shaman's surgery, where people pay tribute to the Monkey King and the shaman sits on a bed of sharp nails

Monkey business

AFTER three weeks in Saigon for Tet, I'm back in Ea Kly. It's 5:33am as I begin this, and I'll type until 6:45, to begin my work day at the plastic recycling plant.

As usual, I sit at Mrs. Ha's cafe. I'm her first customer. Unlike Saigon, it's chilly here. Appearing suddenly from the shadow between my thighs, her

white poodle demands attention. I pet him. She brings me my coffee and tea. Two long distance buses pause in the dark.

After Tet, most Vietnamese businesses reopen with a ceremonial food offering to the God of Prosperity [Ông Than Tài] and God of the Soil [Ông Đja], two Chinese deities, and the date has to be carefully chosen, to ensure success for the coming

year. My brother in law is very superstitious. To reverse some business setbacks, he had a back tattoo etched with a sadistically long needle for half an hour by a renown monk in Thailand, and magical charms given to him by a Teochew shaman in Vinh Chau, 125 miles south of Saigon.

This shaman only sees people by special recommendations and charges no fees, though grate-



The shaman is about to land hard on chair of nails.

ful supplicants will bring gifts. He can channel the Monkey King, it is said, but isn't that a fictional character? Yes, but the Monkey King is based on Chinese mythology, so those who worship him insist there is such a god, as real as any, and there are perhaps a thousand temples dedicated to the Monkey King across the Chinese universe, with most of them in Fuzhou. Communists couldn't stand this. Trying to eradicate traditional religions and cults, they destroyed countless temples, including those worshipping the Monkey King, but in China and Vietnam, all these folk beliefs have made a huge come back.

You must honour your ancestors. Predating Darwin by mil-

lennia, the Chinese have many legends tracing their roots to monkeys.

There are tales of monkeys turning into a man or woman to have sex with humans, or become a Buddha. Magical monkeys abound, but the most badass is the Monkey King, for he can shape shift, walk on water or through the earth, stop rivers, grab the moon, transfer his pain onto your body, give you nightmares, divide himself to confuse enemies and grow another head if he's decapitated.

Very few people go to Vinh Chau, but I made my first visit in 1998. My travelling compan-

ion was Lloyd Luntz, a 6ft 9in, red-headed New York Jew, who simply freaked out the backwoods locals. Kids ran up to pull the hair on his arms.

Being on the coast, Vinh Chau was the starting point for thousands of boat people, so many natives escaped. Prospering in the USA, Canada and Australia, they've sent lots of money back, transforming their hometown.

The shaman's house is 50 yards from a road. I half expected to find some scowling, intimidating dude, but only found a half dozen middle aged men, sitting cross legged on a wooden bed, drinking tea. The sun there is fierce, so people tend to be darker, but one bare-

cheded, white bearded guy was particularly dark. That's the shaman.

His concrete house was modest and rather ugly, his wife and kids were cheaply dressed and there was a shallow bamboo basket where six puny fish and three flayed frogs were being dried, probably to make rousong. At a nearby patch, rows of purple onions waited to be uprooted. In the distance, a spired Cambodian grave magnificently rose.

We entered a small-yet-elaborate shrine to the Monkey King, with murals on the walls illustrating episodes from Journey to the West.

Being seeing us, the shaman had to take care of a man who was made to sit on a chair of nails, as the still bare-chested holy man shouted abuses at him, with "fuck your mother" a constant refrain. Enduring the ordeal, the distressed beneficiary was actually the police chief of Bac Lieu Province. In Vietnam, an official of that rank can expect to rake in lots of illicit loots, and make plenty of enemies, so somebody must have put a curse on him, hence this exorcism. "Fuck your mother!"

Performing his rituals, it's standard for the shaman to pierce his cheeks with two long rods, without drawing blood.

He knelt, prayed, waved a fan, spoke in Vietnamese and Teochew, wrote magical charms in red ink with a brush and answered questions about our futures, along this line, "Your break won't come this year, but you must be patient. Don't lose heart". If I can learn to puncture

my cheeks painlessly, maybe I can become a shaman also, but just for thinking that, I will likely be disfigured, if not killed, this year, so should it happen, you can trace it to this blasphemous sentence. "Fuck your mother!" Forgive me, Monkey King.

Each in our party of six left with magical charms, and the shaman also granted our plastic recycling plant strips of paper imbued with supernatural power, to be posted at strategic locations. Most importantly, we got our lucky reopening date.

9:34am. After the last paragraph, we've unloaded two truckloads of plastic garbage, and the work day is going reasonably smoothly. By reopening a bit later than expected, we lost a handful of workers, for they simply couldn't hang around without an income. Also, Mr. Cuc is hospitalised, thanks to decades of heavy drinking.

Though he's our oldest worker at 58, he seriously hauled ass. Mrs Vinh is also not likely to return, for she continues to suffer beatings by her husband. The laws can't prosecute since she won't report these abuses. A few times, her male relatives have come over to rough up her husband in retaliation, but they can't keep doing that unless Mrs. Vinh wants them to. Black and blue, she stands by her man. In the US, too, I know women like this.

As I type, a small girl, nicknamed Rabbit, plays behind me, with plastic toys scavenged from

the garbage. Both her parents work for us. Every so often, we get a kid inside our plant, and I try to humour them with cookies or candies. With heavy bags being moved about and bottles of insecticides among our recyclables, this environment is not exactly child friendly, but Rabbit is reasonably well behaved and rarely throws a tantrum. Next to broken dolls, a "HAPPY" rooster, brightly coloured combs and a matchbox sized shopping cart, she fusses with a tiny oven. "Make me some food," I tell her. "I'm hungry!"

Rabbit looks up, "What will you have, Uncle Linh?"

"Broken rice with pork chops."

"Lots of vegetables?"

"Lots!"

She's wearing a red muscle T-shirt with a tiara-crowned blonde mermaid holding a sea-horse, and, "Friends love wheres YOU find them." Even if the English was good, no one here could decipher it anyway. It's just cool to be adorned with the language of that most magical place, America, where everything, as projected, is beyond real, and the further you are from it, the more fantastic it becomes.

On the way back to Ea Kly, we passed a town, Kin Duc, that seemed oddly desolate, with many restaurants empty or out of business.

"They must have suffered a bad season," my brother in law concluded.

"What do they grow here?" I asked.

"Sichuan pepper [tiêu] and cashews [điu]."



Rabbit playing with found plastic toys while her mom works in the plastic recycling plant.

Since “tiêu điều” in Vietnamese is also “desolation,” I joked, “That’s what they get for growing desolation. They should switch to growing apricots [mai] and making fermented fish [mam].”

Mai mam, you see, sounds a bit like “may man,” or “lucky”. Vietnamese think like that. Since mai alone also means lucky, most Vietnamese overspend during Tet to buy at least one apricot tree in blossom, to ensure good luck for the rest of the year. It’s an absurd belief, but that’s culture for you.

The Vietnamese susceptibility to magic is more than counterbalanced by a clear headed practicality and com-

mon sense, for otherwise, they wouldn’t be able to survive or even thrive. Take my brother-in-law. Though prone to mumbo jumbo, the 43-year-old has risen from nothing to become a millionaire, with his main business the making of plastic crates that are exported to Thailand. Two years ago, he travelled to India to explore the possibilities of exporting organic Vietnamese fruits and vegetables.

There is much that is irrational or fantastical in every society, with some beliefs imposed from above, sometimes abruptly, even violently. The worst beliefs aren’t just costly, but suicidal, but you can’t see what’s killing you if you’re mesmerised.

Marx is a false god, conclude most Vietnamese, so now you can drive hundreds of miles here without encountering his bearded face once, but everywhere, temples and churches are being built, and statues of Guanyin, Jesus and the Virgin Mary front millions of homes. Vietnamese breathe easier because the state no longer micro manages their lives or, worse, try to control their every thought. Surely, that’s the worst evil. **CT**

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

J Andrew Deman tells how an X-Men writer's vision led to the creation of binge-worthy, character-driven TV from Buffy to Game of Thrones

The comic that inspired modern television

A QUIET revolution has occurred within all of our homes, one that has fundamentally altered the way we watch television.

Given the North American love of television, it is not hyperbole to say this revolution has had a notable effect on our lives, our culture and our identities. It is strange to consider that we might owe a great deal of these cultural changes to the work of a single X-Men comics writer.

This writer played a significant role in developing the long-form storytelling techniques that have since found their way into everything from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to *Game of Thrones* to *Stranger Things*.

In the 1960s, *X-Men* comics were a failure for Marvel, despite boasting the creative pairing of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. After 63 issues, the series was effectively cancelled and left in limbo for five years. Then in 1975, a 24-year-old editorial assistant named Chris

Claremont took over as the new writer of *X-men*.

Claremont expected the job to last six issues, but he instead wound up writing the series for 16 consecutive years.

In that time, *X-Men* went from a B-list title to the best-selling comic book in the world, and Claremont holds the Guinness World Record for the best-selling single issue comic of all-time: *X-Men* (vol 2) #1.

All of this is established comics history. What does it have to do with television?

By the late 1990s, television had begun a transition. According to culturalist Jimmie Reeves and his colleagues, TV started “programming forms that inspire devoted rather than casual engagement.”

Before this, TV was dependent on broadcast scheduling and had to be designed to be accessible to casual viewers. This was simply because there was no way to guarantee audiences would be in front of their televi-

sion the next week at the same time to see the next episode.

With the rise of VHS or DVD boxed sets, personal video recorders and later, streaming services, television was set free to use long-form continuity-based storytelling. Those stories featured more complex character dynamics within more continuous, open-ended plots and structures.

As a result of this transition, the way most of the globe consumed television changed within a very short period of time. This shift led us from self-contained, non-continuous stories to the very concept of being “binge-worthy”.

This same type of transition is exactly what Claremont contributed to comics, decades prior.

When Claremont started on *X-Men* in 1975, comics were also written for a casual audience. Stan Lee is famously quoted as saying: “Every comic book is someone’s first.” Casual engagement needed to be woven into the books. That was the sta-



Chris Claremont took X-Men from B-list title to the best-selling comic book in the world.

tus quo and creators were not allowed to drift too far from it.

But Claremont was not interested in telling the same stories over and over, and because he wrote *X-Men* for 16 years, he covered a lot of stories. This necessitated a new approach to writing, one that allowed for change: new characters and new directions. In light of this, Claremont's *X-Men* were constantly changing and growing in a way that did not conform to Stan Lee's mandate.

Claremont's growth of writing style was rooted in an interest in character over plot. Comics historian Sean Howe noted: "All Claremont cared about were the emotional relationships of his characters." As a result, *X-Men* became, as Howe

put it, "the soapiest soap saga ever put forth by the House of Ideas, filled with agonised romances, self-confidence crises, lectures on morality, psychic scars, and worrying."

If these elements sound familiar, they should. Most of our current television programs use the same components to build their devoted followings.

The most direct successor of Claremont's work is Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. According to cultural critic Geoff Klock, Claremont's influence "looms too large for many to see. A lot of folks don't know that Joss Whedon would

not have created *Buffy* or *Angel* were it not for Claremont's *X-men*."

Similarly, comics historian Jason Powell believes Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is "an avowed Kitty Pryde [a character Claremont created for X-men] analogue, and an entire season of *Buffy* riffed on Claremont's *Dark Phoenix Saga*."

The same can be said for an entire season of Whedon's *Angel*, which used Claremont's Illyana Rasputin character as the basis for a long arc about *Angel's* son, Connor. Whedon is quite open about how Claremont inspired him, and *Buffy* is

frequently cited as a touchstone moment in the development of long-form storytelling in television.

Beyond this direct influence, Claremont's techniques are visible among the best-loved television series within this current golden age: nested story structures, drawn-out mysteries, character melodrama and dysfunctional collectives that have to put aside their differences to defeat a common foe.

The only thing missing is the yellow tights. Perceived as a whole, Claremont's work constructed a sort of long-form storytelling toolbox, one that our TV creators have been dipping into ever since.

Additionally, Claremont's

use of women in his stories was, according to Powell, "ahead of its time 30 years ago, and modern comics are still catching up."

His cultivation of strong female characters such as Storm, Carol Danvers, Rogue, Colleen Wing, Misty Knight, Phoenix and Psylocke set a new standard for action heroines in popular culture as a whole, one that manifests readily in some of the great, badass heroines populating our screens today.

When Claremont was finally pushed out of *X-Men* comics, he was the No. 1 comics writer in the world.

He wasn't pushed out because he was failing at his job, but

because he refused to comply with an editorial mandate that requested a return to status quo, to casual engagement all over again.

His greatest accomplishment — developing ways by which a character-based story could unfold slowly over time — was, ironically, what cost him his job. But if our current television landscape is any indication, our culture has profited greatly from the choices Claremont made, and from the ingenuity that followed those choices. **CT**

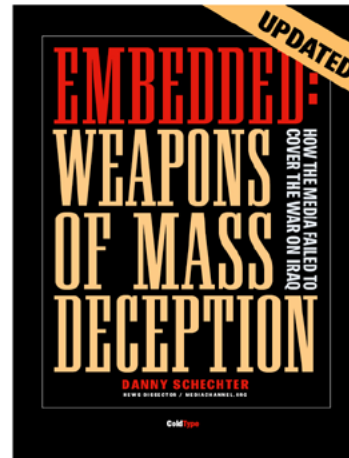
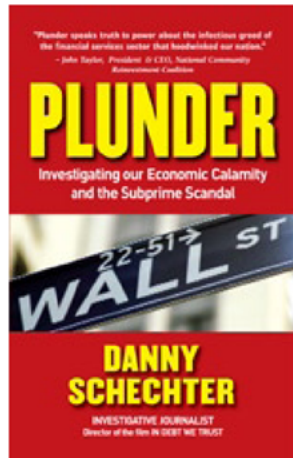
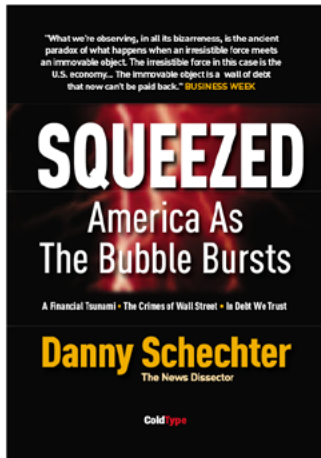
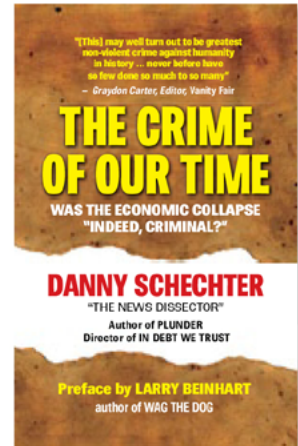
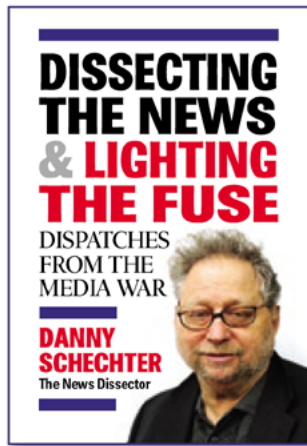
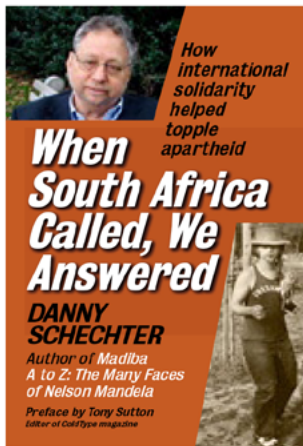
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REMEMBERING Danny SCHECHTER 1942 - 2015



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Nuclear powers need to disarm before we get caught up in the after-effects of a 'limited' nuclear war, writes **Conn Hallinan**

Dodging nukes in South Asia

THE recent military clash between India and Pakistan underscores the need for the major nuclear powers – the US, Russia, China, Britain and France – finally to move toward fulfilling their obligations under the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The Treaty's purpose was not simply to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, but to serve as a temporary measure until Article VI could take effect: the "cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a Treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control".

The 191 countries that signed the NPT – it is the most widely subscribed nuclear treaty on the planet – did so with the understanding that the major powers would de-nuclearise. But in the 50 years since the Treaty was negotiated, the nuclear powers have yet to seriously address eliminating weapons of mass destruction.

While over the years the Americans and the Russians have reduced the number of warheads in their arsenals, they – along with China – are currently in the midst of a major modernisation of their weapon systems. Instead of a world without nuclear weapons, it is a world of nuclear apartheid, with the great powers making no move to downsize their conventional forces. For non-nuclear armed countries, this is the worst of all worlds.

The folly of this approach was all too clear in the recent India and Pakistan dust-up. While both sides appear to be keeping the crisis under control, for the first time in a very long time, two nuclear powers that border one another exchanged air and artillery attacks.

While so far things have not got out of hand, both countries recently introduced military policies that make the possibility of a serious escalation very real.

On the New Delhi side is a doctrine called "Cold Start" that permits the Indian military to penetrate up to 30 kilometers into Pakistan if it locates, or is in pursuit of, "terrorists".

On the Islamabad side is a policy that gives front-line Pakistani commanders the authority to use tactical nuclear weapons.

The possibility of a nuclear exchange is enhanced by the disparity between India and Pakistan's military forces. One does not have to be Karl von Clausewitz to predict the likely outcome of a conventional war between a country of 200-million people and a country of 1.3-billion people.

Pakistan reserves the right to use nuclear weapons first. India has a "no first use" policy, but with so many caveats that it is essentially meaningless. In brief, it wouldn't take much to ignite a nuclear war between them.

If that happens, its effects will not be just regional. According to a study by the

University of Colorado, Rutgers University and UCLA, if Pakistan and India exchanged 100 Hiroshima sized nuclear warheads (15 kilotons), they would not only kill or injure 45-million people, but also generate enough smoke to plunge the world into a 25-year long nuclear winter.

Both countries have between 130 and 150 warheads apiece.

Temperatures would drop to Ice Age levels and worldwide rainfall would decline by six percent, triggering major droughts.

The Asian Monsoon could be reduced by between 20 and 80 percent, causing widespread regional starvation.

Between the cold and the drought, global grain production could fall by 20 percent in the first half decade, and by 10 to 15 percent over the following half decade.

Besides cold and drought, the ozone loss would be between 20 and 50 percent, which would not only further damage crops, but harm sea life, in particular plankton. The reduction of the ozone layer would also increase the rate of skin cancers.

The study estimates that “two-billion people who are



BATTLE LINES: The dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir could become a nuclear nightmare.

now only marginally fed might die from starvation and disease in the aftermath of a nuclear conflict between Pakistan and India.”

In short, there is no such thing as a “local” nuclear war.

Article VI is the heart of the NPT, because it not only requires abolishing nuclear weapons but also addresses the fears that non-nuclear armed nations have about the major powers’ conventional forces. A number of countries – China in particular – were stunned by the conventional firepower unleashed by the US in its 2003

invasion of Iraq. The ease with which US forces dispatched the Iraqi army was a sobering lesson for many countries.

In part, it is the conventional power of countries like the US that fuels the drive by smaller nations to acquire nuclear weapons.

Libya is a case in point. That country voluntarily gave up its nuclear weapons program in 2003. Less than seven years later Muammar Gaddafi was overthrown by the US and NATO. At the

time, the North Koreans essentially said, “we told you so”.

The NPT has done a generally good job of halting proliferation. While Israel, Pakistan, India and North Korea obtained nuclear weapons – the first three never signed the Treaty and North Korea withdrew in 2003 – South Africa abandoned its programme and other nuclear capable nations like Japan, Brazil, Argentina, Iran, South Korea and Saudi Arabia have not joined the nuclear club – yet.

But it is hard to make a case for non-proliferation when the major nuclear powers insist on keeping their nuclear arsenals.

And one can hardly blame smaller countries for considering nuclear weapons as a counterbalance to the conventional forces of more powerful nations like the US and China. If there is anything that might make Iran abandon its pledge not to build nuclear weapons, it is all the talk in Israel, the US and Saudi Arabia about regime change in Teheran.

There are specific regional problems, the solutions to which would reduce the dangers of a nuclear clash. The US has taken some steps in that direction on the Korean Peninsula by downsizing its yearly war games with South Korea and Japan. Declaring an end to the almost 70-year old Korean war and withdrawing some US troops from South Korea would also reduce tensions.

Halting the eastward expansion of NATO and ending military exercises on the Russian border would reduce the chances of a nuclear war in Europe.

In South Asia, the international community must become involved in a solution to the Kashmir problem. Kashmir has already led to three wars between India and Pakistan, and the 1999 Kargil incident came distressingly close to going nuclear.

The international community must become involved in a solution to the Kashmir problem. Kashmir has already led to three wars between India and Pakistan

This latest crisis started over a February 14 suicide bombing in Indian occupied Kashmir that killed more than 40 Indian paramilitaries. While a horrendous act, the current government of India's brutal crackdown in Kashmir has stirred enormous anger among the locals.

Kashmir is now one of the most militarised regions in the world, and India dominates it through a combination of force and extra-judicial colonial laws – the Public Safety Act and the Special Powers Act – that allows it to jail people without charge and bestows immunity on the actions of the Indian army, the paramilitaries and the police.

Since 1989, the conflict has claimed more than 70,000 lives and seen tens of thousands of others “disappeared”, injured or imprisoned.

India blames the suicide attack on Pakistan, which has a past track record of so doing. But that might not be the case here. Even though a Pakistani-based terrorist organisation, Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) claims credit, both sides need to investigate

the incident. It is not unlikely that the attack was homegrown – the bomber was Kashmiri – although possibly aided by JeM.

It is also true that Pakistan does not have total control over the myriad of militant groups that operate within its borders. The Pakistani Army, for instance, is at war with its homegrown Taliban.

The Kashmir question is a complex one, but solutions are out there. The United Nations originally pledged to sponsor a plebiscite in Kashmir to let the local people decide if they want to be part of India, Pakistan, or independent. Such a plebiscite should go forward. What cannot continue is the ongoing military occupation of 10 million people, most of whom don't want India there.

Kashmir is no longer a regional matter. Nuclear weapons threaten not only Pakistanis and Indians, but, indeed, the whole world. The major nuclear powers must begin to move toward fulfilling Article VI of the NPT, or sooner or later our luck will run out. **CT**

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

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Insights



New statistical shell game for justifying billionaires

By Sam Pizzigati

A MERICA'S billionaires have suddenly realised they just may be facing an existential crisis. A good chunk of the American people, they now understand, would rather billionaires not exist. Every billionaire, as a key aide of Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has famously quipped on his popular Twitter feed, represents “a policy failure”. The nation needs, posits a recent *New York Times* op-ed, to “abolish billionaires”.

Our more pugnacious billionaires – and their devoted admirers – have greeted this new abolitionist thrust with predictable scorn. *National Review* columnist Kevin Williamson has tagged the

case against billionaires as “irredeemably stupid”. Any attempt to tax billionaires out of existence, suggests three-comma investment banker Ken Moelis, would surely “crush the economy”.

More sober defenders of the billionaires in our midst take care to acknowledge the widening – and troubling – gap between the fabulously wealthy and everyone else, but then urge us, all the same, to “think twice before seeking to flatten every tycoon”.

“It may seem counterintuitive”, adds *Washington Post* editorial page editor Fred Hiatt, “but billionaires can be good for democracy, and a bulwark against tyranny”.

Bill Gates, the holder of the

world’s second-largest fortune, agrees: “The idea that there shouldn’t be billionaires – I’m afraid if you really implemented something like that, that the amount you would gain would be much less than the amount you would lose”.

Gates doesn’t offer any evidence for that claim. Neither do Hiatt or any of the more frothing foes of moves to level down the billionaire class. In fact, the only response to the billionaire abolitionist movement that bothers to offer up any statistical evidence on behalf of billionaires has come from a small group of daring conservative analysts. These analysts are using the world’s most egalitarian nations – the Nordics that conservatives typically love to hate – to argue that life with billionaires can be incredibly sweet.

Will Wilkinson, a self-described “recovering Washingtonian” who used to labour at the Cato Institute, has penned the cleverest exposition of this billionaires-make-fine-neighbours thesis. Wilkinson points out that the Scandinavian nations that progressives regularly swoon over – egalitarian pace-setters like Sweden and Norway – actually have more billionaires per capita than the billionaire-packed United States.

“So what’s the prob-

lem?” asks Wilkinson. “If there are billionaires in all the places where people flourish best, why think getting rid of them will make things go better?”

The American Enterprise Institute’s James Pethokoukis points to the United Nations Human Development Index, a widely used metric for measuring social well-being. Six countries, he notes, outrank the United States on this well-being index and have more billionaires per capita. These half-dozen nations include the three most populous Nordics: Norway, Sweden, and Denmark.

Wilkinson and Pethokoukis have not fudged any of these figures. The Scandinavian countries do have more billionaires per capita than the United States. And the Scandinavian countries do rate highly on all the standard measures of social well-being, as the British epidemiologists Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett have compellingly documented, most recently in their new book, *The Inner Level: How More Equal Societies Reduce Stress, Restore Sanity and Improve Everyone’s Well-Being*.

Does all this mean, as conservative analysts delightedly advise, that Americans have no reason to worry about our own billionaires, no reason to flatten their fortunes? Not really. Counting the number of billionaires in a nation can give us a vivid anecdotal sense of how concentrated a nation’s wealth has become. But to see

how deep that concentration goes, we need to look at more than the number of billionaires a nation may host. We need to look at how many billions a nation’s billionaires hold.

Taking this step flips the Nordic billionaire picture. Yes, the Nordics may have more billionaires per capita than the United States. But those Nordic billionaires have far fewer billions.

Consider Norway, for instance, the world’s highest-ranking nation on the UN Human Development Index.

The latest global billionaire census, released earlier this week in China, counts 10 dollar-billionaires in Norway, down one from last year’s Hurun Global Rich List. Not one of these 10 Norwegian billionaires ranks among the world’s 100 richest billionaires, an elite club that requires at least a \$13-billion fortune to enter.

Forbes magazine won’t release its 2019 annual global billionaires tally until later this month. Last year’s *Forbes* list gave the largest Norwegian private fortune to retailer Odd Reitan, at \$6.6-billion. Norway’s billionaires last year, the *Forbes* figures indicate, held a combined fortune of \$39.1-billion.

By contrast, 16 US billionaires individually held more wealth than all of Norway’s billionaires combined. American billionaires, in other words,

stomp a much larger financial footprint than their Norwegian counterparts.

In Scandinavia overall, economist Gabriel Zucman and his colleagues calculate, the wealthiest 0.01 percent of households hold under 5 percent of their nations’ wealth. The comparable figure in the United States: just about 8 percent.

But figures like these, researchers at the Swiss bank Credit Suisse point out, overstate the level of Scandinavian inequality as average Scandinavians experience it – because Scandinavians live in nations that work for working people.

In the United States, average families are constantly feeling pressured to set aside limited paycheck dollars for college tuition or unexpected medical expenses or a home downpayment. In Scandinavia, average families face no such pressure to slash daily living expenses and save. Why the difference?

In Scandinavia, Credit Suisse explains, “strong social security programs, good public pensions, free higher education or generous student loans, unemployment and health insurance can greatly reduce the need for personal financial assets”.

And public housing programs in Scandinavia take the pressure off saving for a down payment. That leaves “the middle and lower classes”, adds Credit Suisse, with “no pressing need for personal saving”. They

can use more of their incomes instead to enrich the lives they and their loved ones lead.

The result? Less stress, better health, and longer lives than people enjoy in the United States, where billionaires and the rest of the awesomely affluent have the wealth and power to rig the economy at the expense of average working families.

Scandinavia's billionaires, to be sure, have some power, too. In Norway a half-dozen years ago, a coalition government they supported ended the Norwegian inheritance tax. That move would assure billionaire status for the young Norwegian woman who now ranks as the world's youngest billionaire, the 22-year-old heiress Alexandra Andresen.

A century ago, Norway and

the other Nordic nations rated as deeply unequal – and unpleasant – nations for most of their populations. But mass social movements across Scandinavia changed all that and forged societies that have flourished for almost all within them since the years of the Great Depression.

In today's deeply unequal world, Scandinavian activists readily recognize, egalitarians can't take for granted what earlier generations achieved. They need to work at protecting the equality those generations fought so diligently to forge. Billionaires, even lowly ones, make that work harder. **CT**

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you've followed the story in Britain's mass media. In fact, the more you've read, the more confused you're likely now to be.

There are some things I do know, however.

The first is that the Russian state had as little to gain from attacking this pair in broad daylight on a Salisbury street with a signature Soviet-developed weapon, 'novichok,' as I said at the time.

It was exactly 100 days before the World Cup, just days before President Putin's re-election. If – and it's a big if – the Russian state wanted to kill the Skripals, many things would've been different.

Firstly, they would've been dead. Yulia would've been dead in Russia where she lived. And Sergei would've been dispatched at a less sensitive time by rather more reliable, less identifiable means, and by rather less comical killers.

The killers would not have flown directly from and back to Moscow. They would not have entrusted their egress to the Sunday service of Wiltshire public transport. They would not have smiled up at every CCTV camera they could find.

They would not have stayed at a downscale small hotel in East London, they would not have smoked drugs there, and they would not have noisily entertained a prostitute in their room. They would not have left traces of their nerve agent in their hotel room. They would not have spent a mere hour scoping Salis-

Britain puts new roof on Skripal house of horrors

By **George Galloway**

IN 12 months of shifting sands, one thing remains as its original foundations: the British state narrative on Salisbury stands as a castle in the air.

One year from the dastardly fate of Sergei and Yulia Skripal, no one is a step forward on what happened to them, how, why, or

of course where they are.

One year ago, a nerve agent was allegedly sprayed onto their front doorknob. One year later, their house needs a new roof as a result. And why the roof? And why only the roof?

I don't know what happened to the stricken pair but then, neither do you, however much

bury the day before the alleged poisoning of the Skripals. Nor would they have returned by public transport to London for their sex and drug party, only to retrace their steps by public transport the next day.

If they were going to kill a man and his daughter, they would not have trusted nerve agent on a doorknob when there was no conceivable way of knowing who's hand would touch it. Yulia? Sergei? The milkman? Any Tom, Dick or Harry in the street (or any of their children)?

If they were going to smear nerve agent on a doorknob, they would've done it in the dark – not at noon the next day, when anyone or any camera could watch them doing so, yet no one did. Quite apart from the salient fact that by noon the victims had already left the house never to return to it.

If the Skripals were merely victims in this case, why were both of their phones switched off in the hours between leaving their home and their afternoon repast. How did they manage to happily feed ducks in the park with bread between drinks and lunch, and share that bread with a local child – but neither child nor ducks suffered any ill effects?

If they left home early that morning, why were no signs of illness observed until after the pub and the restaurant at least five hours later? If the roof of the Skripals' house has to be replaced, why not the roof of

the restaurant? If Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey was affected, why wasn't the first responder? How come the first responder turned out to be a most senior British Army nurse?

Why did the police wait months before publishing the likenesses of the two chief suspects?

If the Skripals were merely victims, why have they been hidden, why haven't they told us what happened?

Why was there a second bottle of perfume? How did it get into the hands of Dawn Sturgess? Why would the assassins need two bottles of perfume? Why and where did they discard the second, unopened, bottle?

Believe me, I could adumbrate 500 questions more but you'd be dropped down at your door if I did – from fatigue!

Suffice to say, there are way more questions than answers in the Skripal story. But not for the British government.

Their answers were swift and have had serious consequences for Russia, for Britain, and for the world. That they have made no effort to persuade a highly skeptical British public, relying on crude methods of information warfare instead, is a further reason why I and many others simply don't believe them.

Neither will history, if I'm any judge.

Journalism – history's first draft – is easy to purloin when most journalists haven't the time, inclination or resources to question the state – especially inclination. History books though, grind exceedingly fine. **CT**

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

'In a mirror darkly' - The mirror that is Trump

By Emanuele Corso

WIKIPEDIA offers that, "...the first mirrors used by humans were most likely pools of dark, still water, or water collected in a vessel of some sort". Mirrors fascinate as much as they serve

useful purposes, to see oneself "as others see us". A historian of mirrors cites Socrates who thought, "the mirror can aid moral meditation between man and himself". The reflected image, in one way or another, both

fascinates and serves utilitarian purposes. Whether an ancient human looking into a deep dark pool of still water recognizing himself or a modern man making sure he has shaved the last errant hair from his face, “There I am!” and now, here I go into the world, ready for the day, ready for what’s to come.

Another mirror is a nation’s reflection in its leaders. Societies have had their “finest hours” under the leadership of men such as Winston Churchill and John F Kennedy. On the other hand, it often takes extraordinary courage to look into a dark mirror to learn what has become of one’s society or what has been there all along but we have avoided looking at it. We all age, of course, and in that outward reflected image we can see what we have become. Looking into the mirror that represents current events and the conduct of our societies presents another range of similar possibilities. For example, a crowd chanting full-throat, “Lock her up!” is one of those mirrors. View historical newsreels of Hitler and Mussolini working their crowds with similar tactics – identify an enemy, vilify them, follow the leader into a future where they will be dealt with, you can see the pattern. All of those events and consequences are mirrors of their societies. And so now we have come full circle in the land of the brave and the home of the free to a mirror held up by the current president. Take a look. Do you like what you see? Is

that you? Are those your neighbours? Your fellow Americans?

“For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully even as also I was fully known”. Corinthians 13:12

On November 4th, 1944, when I was six, my mother and I took the short city bus ride from Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, to Springfield where we stood below the railroad station’s great stone arch. There was an enormous crowd packed elbow to elbow stretching back for several blocks. On that day, Franklin D Roosevelt who had confronted the 1929-1939 Great Depression and created the New Deal, was greeted by working people who, like my parents, had suffered through the Great Depression. At the rampart of the overpass the great man appeared, by then afflicted by polio, and was greeted with the most tumultuous expression of respect and affection I have experienced. There was no resentment, no anger, only respect and gratitude for the better future he had nurtured. This was the America that defined my basic understanding of our social contract, my social reality. This was the America I grew up in. This was the country I eventually joined the military to serve. It was a very different country, certainly not equal for all, certainly not without fault

but very different from what we have become today. This memory is the mirror I look into when attempting to understand the complexity of these times. And what do we see?

Are we ready to go face to face with what our nation is becoming? Is that really us reflected or merely some minority of loud demonstrative fellow Americans riled up to some kind of fever pitch by an unscrupulous political cheer leader? And if immigrants are today’s targets who will be tomorrows? You perhaps? Your neighbours and people of colour in the supermarket? My grandparents on both sides were immigrants and the stories they told reflected the rejection and ridicule they faced not unlike what we are witnessing now. Today, however, the Cheerleader-In-Chief is the President of the United States and his audience are the descendants of the same earlier immigrants. Surely this cannot not truly be what we have become, what we are as a people, as a nation. What is at stake is basic respect for your fellow Americans, our immigrant forebears, our fellow human beings, and ourselves. And, if for no other reason than that, we must live with each other or fail as a nation. **CT**

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Kamala Harris: My pick for the Democratic ticket.

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It's time for black women to rule the United States

By Dell Franklin

NOBODY has had it tougher than black women in the United States, and nobody is tougher.

In 1969, I was 25 years old, and in New Orleans, hired off the street as ship's storekeeper on the Delta Queen riverboat – the last stern-wheeler to ply the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers as a passenger carrying vessel – the only white face, other than the officers and two engineers. Porters, deck hands, bartenders, waiters, the kitchen crew and maids were all black, and

were the backbone of the majestic queen of the river.

The maids all seemed to be in their forties and, whenever I ran into one of them, they always smiled, and said, “Hi, mistah sto’keepah, how y’all doing today?” I always answered, “Just fine, ma’am. How are you?”

As time went on, they found humour in my bearded sloppy appearance, giggling in a fond, motherly way, nodding and always making eye contact. I found them sensuous

and earthy and felt a natural nurturing from them, a comfort that put me at ease. They looked at me as if I was somebody of value, and that allowed me to actually like myself at a discontented time in my life.

There were five of them, all from Memphis, and when we docked in Memphis for a layover their grown-up sons and daughters picked them up and toted their suitcases. The ship's chef, also from Memphis, told me that most of the maids on the Queen had grown up in Mississippi sharecropping cotton and had later moved to Memphis to do domestic work while raising their children.

At night the crew's dining room became the place to listen to music and chat. The maids always sat at together and endured the wisecracks from cocky porters – once, a lady named Dolores slapped one in the face so hard that the sound reverberated throughout the cramped dining room. These churchgoing ladies, who sent most of their paychecks home but dressed up to go to lunch when we hit New Orleans, were not to mess with.

A waiter called Davis, a former Pullman porter who'd played baseball in the negro leagues and was still spry as a 25-year-old in his fifties, took me under his wing as a sort of mentor, smartened me up, and took me to a blues club in Memphis where he promised to show me the “real blues”, something of which I knew nothing,

being atypical whitey raised on generic rock 'n' roll in Los Angeles.

Three of the maids and three of the waiters came along and we brought in our own bottles and sat at a long table in the dimly-lit, packed blues club and listened to the grating shiver of guitars, the groaning of a harmonica, the constant beat of drums, the deep rasp of a singer, and the melding of down home blues from the Delta. It was the saddest music I'd ever heard, yet I'd never seen people so happy partying to it.

Dolores forced me onto the floor to dance with the black folk, who made me feel lame and awkward as they moved about so easily to the music.

"Don't y'all be shy now, mistah sto'keepah, jes' follow mah lead, chile".

Dolores got me moving and into the swing of things, making me forgetting my self-consciousness. She did it without saying a word, merely nodding and smiling and encouraging me.

At one point, I asked her, "Dolores, I've never seen people have so much fun dancing to such sad music; it's all about heartbreak and betrayal and suffering and misery". She lifted her face, looked me in the eye, and said, "Baby, us black folks jes' got to celebrate our bad times or they kill us".

That statement could be an anthem for most of the black women in the United States.

Now, in the year 2019, they have emerged as the bedrock of the Democratic Party, the single last hope for this country. Those bad times also made them 10 times tougher than the old pasty-faced, saggy-jowled white Republicans who are presently disgracing themselves and the country in the present Trump government.

Out of this ongoing morass came the likes of Oprah, Kamala Harris, Michelle Obama, Stacey Abrams, and Maxine Waters. Only a fool would want to tangle with any of them on an intellectual or common sense level. These spirited women are the spawn of a world where black mothers were often saddled with men humiliated by a system that offered them little compared to the white man and beat them down further when they were rejected for the colour of their skin, and educated in crappy schools that offered them little but crappy jobs, crappy wages – or no jobs at all.

In most cases, the women held everything together.

They raised their children in blighted projects and gave them the only thing that enabled them to survive: food, clothing, love, warmth, encouragement – and hope.

They were treated as chattels destined to drudge work for the lowest of wages. In movies, they were doting nannies or servile maids humoured by

wealthy white people. They were seen as background objects, always in support, and surely never groomed for greatness, unless they were entertainers or athletes.

No more. Now there is burgeoning pride among these gals, led by the likes of powerful black women who have been through it all. As a consequence, they are tougher than anybody in this country, know how to talk to people eloquently on a human level, and shimmer with pride at who they are and what they've accomplished. Behind them, in a massive show of genuine black pride, are all the black women in this country who have come so far and have these dynamic leaders to look up to and follow.

That's why I say, Put Kamala Harris on the Democratic ticket for the next election, She'll carry whomever else is on it. It's time black women stood together behind a black female leader and explained in passionate terms just exactly what they've endured, and why they have earned the right to lead this country against legislation that has filled the coffers of rich white men and their club of blood-sucking lobbyists. **CT**

Dell Franklin is a long-time journalist and founder of the now-defunct Rogue Voice literary magazine. He blogs at www.dellfranklin.com

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