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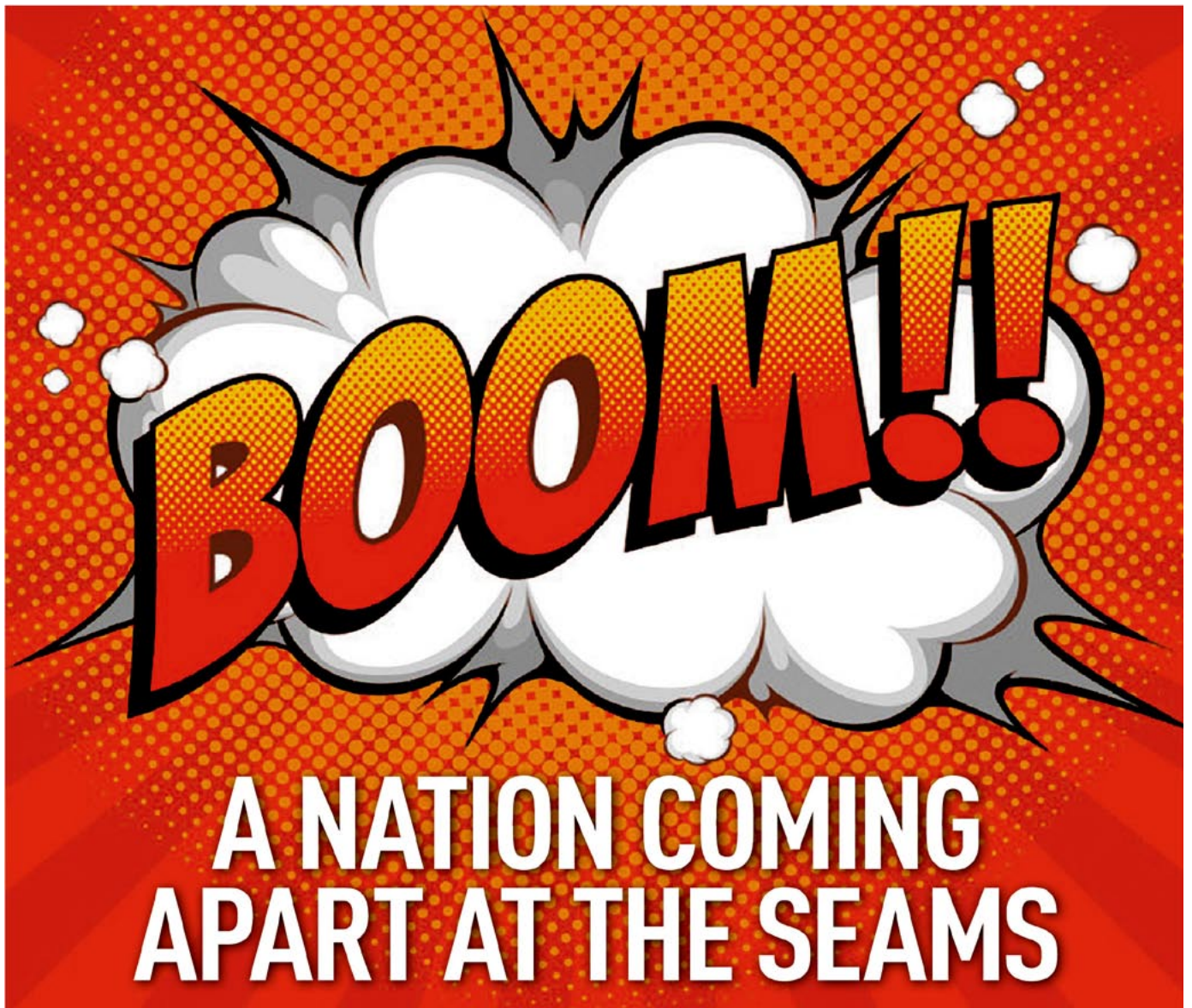
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AMERICA'S PRISON FROM HELL | Karen J. Greenberg
OH, WHAT A LOVELY PANDEMIC? | John Queally

Issue 231

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

February 2022



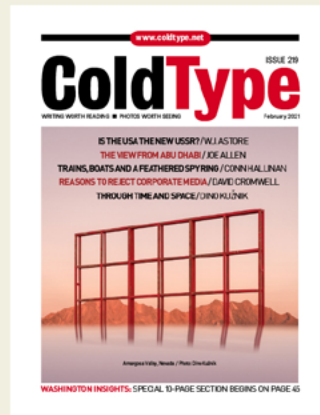
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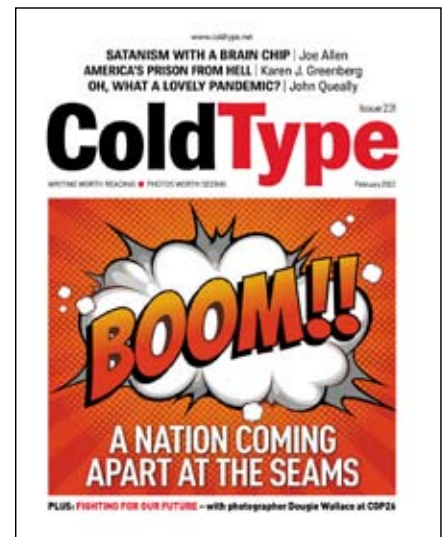
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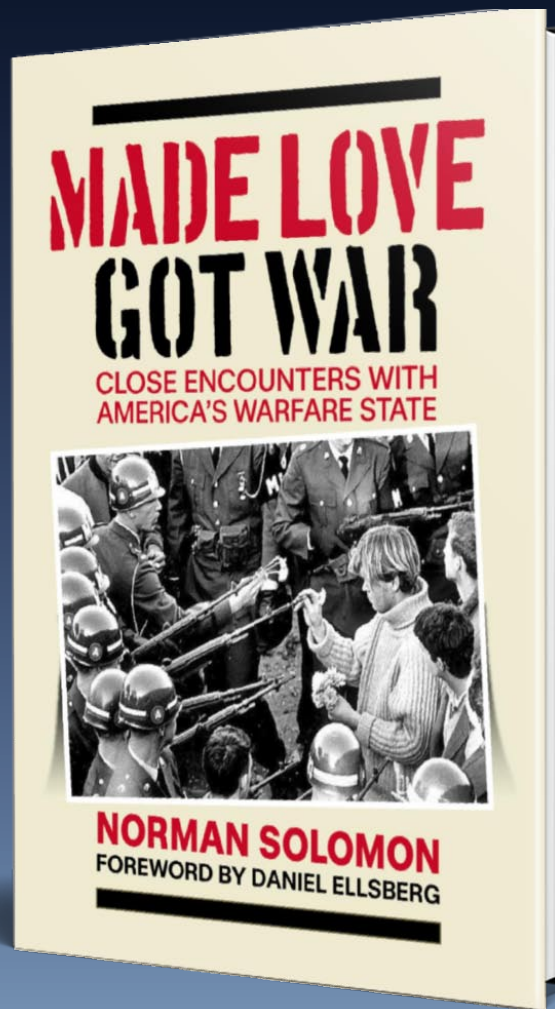
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NEWS | VIEWS | OPINIONS

INSIGHTS



Photo: conny pokorny / 123rf

A flock of seagulls follows a small fishing boat with raised nets in the North Sea off the coast of Germany. However, larger vessels, mostly from France and Spain, are causing great damage to marine life, by throwing their nets overboard.

How could they be so careless? How do fishing vessels lose so many of their nets and longlines that this “ghost gear”, drifting through the oceans, now presents a mortal threat to whales, dolphins, turtles and much of the rest of the life of the sea? After all, fishing gear is expensive. It is either firmly attached to the vessel or, using modern technologies, easily located.

I’ve asked myself these questions for a while, and I think I now have an answer. It comes from an unlikely source: a trawlerman working in Scotland. I’m not a fan of trawling, but I recognise that some operations are more damaging than others. He and his colleagues now appear to be pulling in more nets than fish. On trip after trip they catch vast hauls of ghost gillnets and longlines, often wrapped around marine animals.

GEORGE MONBIOT

Lost at sea: How dumped fishing gear is killing marine life

He has sent me his photos, which are so disturbing I can scarcely bear to look: drowned seabirds, decapitated seals and fish and crustaceans of many species, which died a long, slow death. Where are these nets and lines coming from? He believes they’re being deliberately discarded.

I have checked his identity, but he wants to remain anonymous. Like other local trawlers, his boat brings its waste to land. The problem, he says, lies with large vessels, many from France and Spain, that spend four to six weeks at a time at sea. They don’t have enough storage space for the rubbish they generate: most of the hold is dedicated to frozen fish. Worn-out gillnets and longlines should be returned to port for disposal. But those he retrieves have a revealing characteristic: the expensive parts, those that can be reused – floats, weights and hooks –

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have been cut off. This, he believes, is a giveaway: if you find a net or line like that, it has been deliberately thrown overboard.

He and his colleagues, he says, often watch French and Spanish boats landing plenty of fish in Scottish ports when “no rubbish is taken ashore by these vessels”. He estimates that a typical crew of 20 on a month-long fishing voyage would generate roughly 20 cubic metres of waste, aside from the fishing gear. Where is it? There might be a clue in some of the other rubbish his boat trawls up: bin bags full of French and Spanish food wrappers. As for the gear, he tells me that he sees boats come into port and “miles and miles of new gillnetting is put onboard – but none is taken ashore for discard”.

The nets these boats use are enormous: every large vessel deploys between 50 and 70 miles of them. But gillnets tend to wear out quickly. The fisherman tells me, “the vessel I work on takes ashore approximately one cubic metre of discarded gillnets every four to five days on average”. That’s a lot of net.

Gillnets have been banned from many waters because of their very high rates of bycatch, and their mysterious tendency to go missing. In Scotland, they are prohibited within six miles of the coast. But these boats work farther from the shore. Beyond 12 miles, my contact says, it’s “basically bandit territory for any vessel not UK-registered, as UK law does not apply”. He alleges that, while local boats are closely regulated, there is practically no monitoring of foreign, offshore vessels.

Competition between national fishing fleets is an explosive is-

sue, further charged by Brexit. At first I was wary of these claims, as I know how bitter the rivalry has become. But the photographic evidence speaks for itself, and his testimony is compelling. Moreover, it’s clear that there is a new mood among many of the local boats, which are now desperate to save their fisheries. Most of them are involved in the Fishing for Litter scheme, landing the discarded gear and other rubbish they catch. But this is likely to be a small fraction of the equipment being dumped. Unless active gillnetting and ghost fishing by discarded nets are stopped, my contact believes, the entire marine ecosystem is likely to collapse. He and other fishers “have written to the authorities until we are blue in the face”, but he says he has been repeatedly stonewalled. It’s a sign of desperation that he has come to me, a longstanding critic of his industry.

When I approached the Scottish government, it told me: “We take protection of the marine environment seriously and are clear that any form of dumping and other illegal activities is completely unacceptable ... We would encourage anyone with intelligence relating to suspicious activities by vessels to report this to us on our website.”

But, as the Scottish government’s own report points out, “no data or studies” have been produced showing where the discarded gear is coming from. This is despite the fact that, in the north Highlands, commercial fishing gear accounts for 90 percent of the ocean plastic picked up by beach cleaners, and that entanglement in static fishing equipment is a major cause of death for minke and humpback whales

in Scotland. There’s a reliable principle of public administration: if a government takes a genuine interest in an issue, it commissions researchers to study it. No data tends to mean no interest.

There are similar issues all over the world. Gillnetting and the ghost fishing it causes have reduced the population of vaquita – the world’s smallest member of the whale and dolphin family, which lives in Mexico’s Sea of Cortez – to fewer than 20. Last week a young humpback whale was spotted in Antarctic waters, its dorsal fin severed, with nets cutting through the skin around its tail. As global seafood consumption has doubled in 50 years, the issue has become ever more urgent.

Yet most governments propose to do nothing except “encourage” fishers and gear manufacturers to behave responsibly, without sanctions or incentives. No vessel should be allowed to leave port unless it has enough space to store all its rubbish. Mandatory deposit return schemes would ensure that fishers returned used gear to the manufacturers at the end of its life. All nets should be traceable to the boats that use them. While some equipment is bound to be lost accidentally, it’s not hard to spot patterns of deliberate disposal.

But, like the fictional US president in the movie *Don’t Look Up*, the world’s governments, faced with ecological collapse, have again decided to “sit tight and assess”. **CT**

George Monbiot is a columnist at the Guardian, where this article first appeared. His website is www.monbiot.com

EDWARD ARMSTON-SHERET

One for the road: In praise of alcohol

After a long, stressful day, I often find myself sitting down with a bottle of beer or a glass of wine. Such rituals are a sign that the working day is over and that the time for fun and relaxation is here. The problem is that drinking in this way doesn't work over time. Regular (and excessive) drinking is associated with depression and poor sleep and research shows it may also increase anxiety levels in the long term.

Nevertheless, the idea that alcohol is relaxing remains a powerful myth. With evidence suggesting that many people started to drink more during the COVID-19 pandemic as a way of trying to relax. Delving into the history of alcohol can offer some insights as to why this myth has prevailed.

Throughout history, alcohol has often been used medicinally – and is considered to have many helpful properties, including as an antiseptic and an anaesthetic. I've studied how explorers in the 19th- and early 20th-centuries used drink. Studying travellers can shed light on the scientific and medical understanding of alcohol because, in an era before clinical trials, medical writers drew on the narratives of explorers as evidence about the health effects of different foods and drinks. So their writings can help us learn about past ap-

proaches to alcohol and health.

Indeed, many Victorian Arctic explorers drank a “warming” glass of rum at the end of a long day's sledging. They reported that it helped them to sleep and relax and relieve the tension. Similarly, British travellers in east Africa often drank small quantities of alcohol at the end of a day's travel, viewing it

Art: Wellcome Collection



Alcohol could also be used as a mixer for other drugs, as this advert for 'Orange Quinine Wine' shows.

as a useful “medicine” that helped them to deal with both the effects of fever and the emotional strains of travel. In one travel advice guide published in 1883, George Dobson, a British Army surgeon major, advised that in warm climates “continued labour, such as that of

the sportsman and traveller, cannot be maintained for any length of time unassisted by the occasional and judicious use of alcohol.”

Initially and in small doses, alcohol seems to act as a stimulant, which makes your heart beat faster and gives you more energy. Soon, though, it acts as a depressant, inhibiting the action of the central nervous system, which slows your thinking and reaction times. These health effects were particularly important in early 19th-century medicine, as some medical theorists saw the body as a system that had to be kept in balance. And stimulants or depressants were seen as an important way of restoring balance if someone was unwell.

In time, these views became increasingly unpopular among scientists and medics and were replaced by theories of disease that sought to chart more specific causes of infection. For instance, “germ theory”, which was first proposed in 1861, showed that many illnesses were caused by microbes rather than climate. Similarly, British medics were becoming increasingly interested in the role of mosquitoes in spreading malaria. Such developments led to new medical approaches which sought to prevent and treat diseases common in warm regions.

But changing medical attitudes towards diseases were not the only factor in the decline of medicinal drinking on expeditions. The growing criticism of expeditionary drinking was also the result of changing social and medicinal attitudes towards alcohol. This was largely because of the temperance movement, a campaign rooted in evangelical Christianity

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that sought to discourage (and sometimes outright ban) the sale of alcohol.

Even those who viewed moderate drinking as acceptable began to worry that it might actually be more dangerous in climatic extremes. For instance, the National Arctic Expedition (1875-1876) was criticised for issuing a rum ration, with suggestions it had contributed to an outbreak of scurvy, which allegedly manifested itself first among the expedition's heavy drinkers.

Such criticisms meant that explorers went to growing efforts to emphasise that their drinking was moderate and "medicinal". They often did so by only drinking certain kinds of alcoholic beverages that, they argued, had greater medicinal qualities. This normally meant brandy, champagne, or certain kinds of wine. But there were fierce disagreements between medics about which drinks were most healthy.

Indeed, many of these drinks were viewed as medicinal for no reason other than the fact that they were expensive. Today, such drinks are seldom viewed as medicinal – but medical concerns with the effects of different alcoholic drinks, have not gone away. And, much like their Victorian counterparts, many contemporary medics have suggested that certain kinds of drinks are healthier than others.

As recent research by my colleague Kim Walker and I shows, stimulants (including alcohol) remained a popular medicine for European travellers in Africa into the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries. In part this was because they were relatively cheap, easy to ad-

minister, and produced discernible effects on the mind and body of the drinker. They were also believed to remedy the enduring belief that warm climates were physically damaging and psychologically depressing.

In the same 1883 travel guide, Dobson complained of "the depressing effects of the climate" to support his alcohol prescription. Consequently, some travellers saw alcoholic drinks as useful stimulants to help combat these effects. Even those who opposed expeditionary drinking still saw stimulating drinks as important, but prescribed "a cup of fragrant coffee" instead.

Medical understandings of drinking have changed considerably over the last 150 years. But studying how Victorian and Edwardian explorers approached alcohol also shows important continuities. Then, as now, drinking practices are shaped not just by medical knowledge but also by cultural attitudes towards different drinks and the environments we consume them in. **CT**

Edward Armston-Sheret is a PhD Graduate in the Department of Geography, Royal Holloway University of London. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

BINOY KAMPMARK

Julian Assange's 1,000 days in Belmarsh

Photo: David G. Silvers



Julian Assange: 1,000 days in Belmarsh prison.

Julian Assange has now been in the maximum-security facilities of Belmarsh prison for more than 1,000 days. On the occasion of his 1,000th day of imprisonment, campaigners, supporters and kindred spirits gathered to show their support, indignation and solidarity at this political detention most foul.

Alison Mason of the Julian Assange Defence Committee reiterated those observations long made about the imprisonment at a gathering outside the Australian High Commission in London on that day. The WikiLeaks founder was wrongfully confined

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“for publishing the war crimes of the US military leaked to him by whistleblower Chelsea Manning”. She, along with supporters, had gathered before the High Commission “because Julian’s country could save him with a simple phone call”. Mason’s admirably simple reasoning: that Australia had “a bargaining chip with AUKUS and trade deals”. If only that were true.

The continued detention of Assange in Belmarsh remains a scandal of kaleidoscopic cruelty. It continues to imperil his frail health, further impaired by a stroke suffered in October last year and the ongoing risks associated with COVID-19. It maintains a state of indefinite incarceration without bail, deputising the United Kingdom as committed gaolers for US interests. “Julian”, stated his fiancée Stella Moris, “is simply held at the request of the US government while they continue to abuse the US-UK extradition treaty for political ends.”

A report drawn from unannounced visits to Belmarsh by the Chief Inspector of Prisons last July and August did not shine glorious light upon the institution. “The prison has not paid sufficient attention to the growing levels of self-harm and there was not enough oversight or care taken of prisoners of risk of suicide. Urgent action needed to be taken in this area to make sure that these prisoners were kept safe.”

The next gruelling stage of Assange’s confinement is being marked by an appeal against the High Court’s unfathomable, and even gullible overturning of the

lower court decision against his extradition to the United States. The US Department of Justice (DoJ) continues to seek the extradition of the WikiLeaks founder to face 18 charges, 17 based on that relic of state paranoia and vengeance, the US Espionage Act of 1917. A successful prosecution could see him face a 175-year sentence.

The original decision, shoddy as it was for the cause of journalism, accepted that the extradition would be oppressive within the meaning of the US-UK Extradition Act. District Court Justice Vanessa Baraitser accepted the defence contention that such oppression arose from Assange’s “mental condition”. Despite relentless prosecution attacks on the neuropsychiatric evidence adduced by the defence, the judge accepted that Assange was autistic and would be at serious risk of suiciding in the US prison system. The prosecutors also failed in convincing the court that Special Administrative Measures would not be applied that would restrict his access to legal counsel and family, and ensure solitary confinement. They also failed to show that he would not, on being convicted, serve his time in the vicious supermax prison, Colorado’s ADX Florence.

The Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales Ian Burnett, and Lord Justice Timothy Holroyde, were having none of that. In their December ruling, the High Court accepted the prosecution appeal that the US could easily make assurances for keeping Assange in better conditions despite not doing so at the original trial. The Lord Justices also proved crotchety at the fact that Baraitser had not gone

out of her way to seek those assurances in the first place. Besides, Britain could trust the good diplomatic undertakings of the United States.

So it came to pass that muddle headed judicial reasoning prevailed on the bench. There was no mention of the fabricated evidence being relied upon by the prosecution, or the discomfiting fact that operatives in the US Central Intelligence Agency had contemplated kidnapping and poisoning Assange. Nothing, either, about the US-sanctioned surveillance operation conducted by the Spanish security firm, UC Global, during his time in the Ecuadorian embassy in London.

Work on the appeal began immediately. Solicitors Birnberg Peirce, in a statement, outlined the importance of the application. “We believe serious and important issues of law and wider public importance are being raised in this application. They arise from the court’s judgment and its receipt and reliance on US assurances regarding the prison regimes and treatment of Mr Assange is likely to face if extradited.”

The wider public importance of the case is hard to measure. Authoritarian governments and sham democracies the world over are gleefully taking notes. Liberal democratic states with increasingly autocratic approaches to media outlets are also going to see promise in the way the United States is using extradition law to nab a publisher. Black letter lawyers will err in assuming that this matter is narrow and specific to the wording of a treaty between two countries.

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Having already done untold damage to the cause of publishing national security information that exposes atrocities and violations of law domestic and international, the US is making the claim that the Extradition Act, in all its nastiness, has tentacled global reach. A phone call from Australia's insipid Prime Minister Scott Morrison

will hardly matter to this. He, and other members of Washington's unofficial imperial court, will do as they are told. **CT**

Binoy Kampmark was a *Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia.*

to livelihoods because of inequality", states Oxfam in their report. "Inequality of income is a stronger indicator of whether you will die from Covid-19 than age. Millions of people would still be alive today if they had had a vaccine – but they are dead, denied a chance while big pharmaceutical corporations continue to hold monopoly control of these technologies. This vaccine apartheid is taking lives, and it is supercharging inequalities worldwide."

As the overview of the report states:

"The wealth of the world's 10 richest men has doubled since the pandemic began. The incomes of 99% of humanity are worse off because of Covid-19. Widening economic, gender, and racial inequalities – as well as the inequality that exists between countries – are tearing our world apart. This is not by chance, but choice: 'economic violence' is perpetrated when structural policy choices are made for the richest and most powerful people. This causes direct harm to us all, and to the poorest people, women and girls, and racialised groups most. Inequality contributes to the death of at least one person every four seconds. But we can radically redesign our economies to be centred on equality. We can claw back extreme wealth through progressive taxation; invest in powerful, proven inequality-busting public measures; and boldly shift power in the economy and society. If we are courageous, and listen to the movements demanding change, we can create an economy in which nobody lives in poverty, nor with unimaginable billionaire wealth – in which inequality no longer kills."

JON QUEALLY

Oh, what a lovely pandemic!

Oxfam International's latest report on global inequality finds that while the 10 richest individuals in the world more than doubled their collective wealth since Covid-19 hit in 2020, the related result of this billionaire surge has been a deadlier and more prolonged pandemic for the rest of the world in which the incomes of 99 percent of humanity fell, more than 160-million people were forced into poverty, and billions of the poorest were denied access to life-saving vaccines.

Entitled *Inequality Kills*, the new report states that intense global inequality is "contributing to the death of at least 21,000 people each day" – approximately one person every four seconds – even as ultra-billionaires such as Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, Warren Buffett, and a handful of others grow richer and richer with each passing hour.

In total, using data from *Forbes*,

Oxfam found that the 10 richest men in the world saw their fortunes grow from an estimated \$700-billion to \$1.5-trillion dollars, a rate of over \$1.2-billion per day, since the pandemic hit nearly two years ago.

"If these ten men were to lose 99.999 percent of their wealth tomorrow, they would still be richer than 99 percent of all the people on this planet", said Oxfam International's executive director Gabriela Bucher.

The outrageous wealth of these billionaires is not simply benign inequality, says the group. An economic system that allows a handful of individuals to amass such vast fortunes while billions go hungry and without proper medical care during a pandemic, according to Oxfam, is an overt act of violence aimed at huge swaths of humanity.

"The coronavirus pandemic has been actively made deadlier, more prolonged, and more damaging

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“Billionaires have had a terrific pandemic”, lamented Bucher. “Central banks pumped trillions of dollars into financial markets to save the economy, yet much of that has ended up lining the pockets of billionaires riding a stock market boom. Vaccines were meant to end this pandemic, yet rich governments allowed pharma billionaires and monopolies to cut off the supply to billions of people. The result is that every kind of inequality imaginable risks rising. The predictability of it is sickening. The consequences of it kill.”

In response to the report, Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) issued a simple prescription to combat the current reality. “Tax the billionaires”, he said. “Invest in the working class.” According to Oxfam, if just the top 10 billionaires alone paid a 99 percent tax on their windfall profits generated during the pandemic, it be enough to pay for “vaccines for every person in the world, universal healthcare, and social

protection.”

Abigail Disney, Walt Disney’s grand-niece and a member of the US-based Patriotic Millionaires, which advocates for higher taxes on the rich, agreed with Sanders that the solution is clear.

“The answer to these complicated problems is ironically simple: taxes”, said Disney. “Mandatory, inescapable, ambitious tax reform on an international level – this is the only way to fix what is broken.”

“Without high-functioning governments actively using plentiful resources to redress these injustices,” she added, “we will head yet further down the rabbit hole the wealthy class has dug for us all. There is more than enough money to solve most of the world’s problems. It’s just being held in the hands of millionaires and billionaires who aren’t paying their fair share.” **CT**

Jon Queally is a writer at www.commondreams.org, where this article first appeared.

religion, sex, sexuality, politics, science, health, government corruption, police brutality, etc. – have become battlegrounds for those who claim to believe in freedom of speech but only when it favours the views and positions they support.

“Free speech for me but not for thee”, is how my good friend and free speech purist Nat Hentoff used to sum up this double standard.

This tendency to censor, silence, delete, label as “hateful,” and demonise viewpoints that run counter to the cultural elite is being embraced with a near-fanatical zealotry by a cult-like establishment that values conformity and group-think over individuality.

For instance, are you skeptical about the efficacy of the Covid-19 vaccines? Do you have concerns about the outcome of the US 2020 presidential election? Do you subscribe to religious beliefs that shape your views on sexuality, marriage and gender? Do you, deliberately or inadvertently, engage in misgendering (identifying a person’s gender incorrectly) or dead-naming (using the wrong pronouns or birth name for a transgender person)?

Say yes to any of those questions and then dare to voice those views in anything louder than a whisper and you might find yourself suspended on Twitter, shut out of Facebook, and banned across various social media platforms.

This authoritarian intolerance masquerading as tolerance, civility and love (what comedian George Carlin referred to as “fascism pretending to be manners”) is the end result of a politically correct culture that has become radicalised, institutionalised and tyrannical.

JOHN W. WHITEHEAD & NISHA WHITEHEAD

Cancel Culture’s war on free speech

Cancel culture – political correctness amped up on steroids, the self-righteousness of a narcissistic age, and a mass-marketed pseudo-morality that is little more than fascism disguised as tolerance – has shifted us into an Age of Intolerance, policed by techno-censors, social

media bullies, and government watchdogs.

Everything is now fair game for censorship if it can be construed as hateful, hurtful, bigoted or offensive provided that it runs counter to the established viewpoint.

In this way, the most controversial issues of our day – race,

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In the past few years, for example, prominent social media voices have been censored, silenced and made to disappear from Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram for voicing ideas that were deemed politically incorrect, hateful, dangerous or conspiratorial.

Most recently, Twitter suspended conservative podcaster Matt Walsh for violating its hate speech policy by sharing his views about transgendered individuals. “The greatest female Jeopardy champion of all time is a man. The top female college swimmer is a man. The first female four star admiral in the Public Health Service is a man. Men have dominated female high school track and the female MMA circuit. The patriarchy wins in the end”, Walsh tweeted on Dec. 30, 2021.

J.K. Rowling, author of the popular Harry Potter series, has found herself denounced as transphobic and widely shunned for daring to criticise efforts by transgender activists to erode the legal definition of sex and replace it with gender.

Ironically enough, Rowling’s shunning included literal book burning. Yet, as Ray Bradbury once warned, “There is more than one way to burn a book. And the world is full of people running about with lit matches.”

Indeed, the First Amendment is going up in flames before our eyes, but those first sparks were lit long ago and have been fed by intolerance all along the political spectrum. Consider some of the kinds of speech being targeted for censorship or outright elimination.

Offensive, politically incorrect and “unsafe” speech: Political correctness has resulted in the chilling of free speech and a grow-

ing hostility to those who exercise their rights to speak freely. Where this has become painfully evident is on college campuses, which have become hotbeds of student-led censorship, trigger warnings, microaggressions, and “red light” speech policies targeting anything that might cause someone to feel uncomfortable, unsafe or offended.

Hateful speech: Hate speech – speech that attacks a person or group on the basis of attributes such as gender, ethnic origin, religion, race, disability, or sexual orientation – is the primary candidate for online censorship. Corporate internet giants Google, Twitter and Facebook continue to re-define what kinds of speech will be permitted online and what will be deleted.

Dangerous, anti-government speech: As part of its ongoing war on “extremism”, the government has partnered with the tech industry to counter online “propaganda” by terrorists hoping to recruit support or plan attacks. In this way, anyone who criticises the government online can be considered an extremist and will have their content reported to government agencies for further investigation or deleted. The Justice Department is planning to form a new domestic terrorism unit to ferret out individuals “who seek to commit violent criminal acts in furtherance of domestic social or political goals”. This will mean more surveillance, more pre-crime programmes, and more targeting of individuals whose speech may qualify as “dangerous.”

The upshot of all of this editing, parsing, banning and silencing is the emergence of a new language, what George Orwell referred to as Newspeak, which places the power

to control language in the hands of the totalitarian state.

Under such a system, language becomes a weapon to change the way people think by changing the words they use. The end result is mind control and a sleepwalking populace. This mind control can take many forms, but the end result is an enslaved, compliant populace incapable of challenging tyranny.

We have allowed our fears – fear for our safety, fear of each other, fear of being labelled racist or hateful or prejudiced, etc. – to trump our freedom of speech and muzzle us far more effectively than any government edict could.

Yet be warned: whatever we tolerate now – whatever we turn a blind eye to – whatever we rationalize when it is inflicted on others will eventually come back to imprison us, one and all.

In other words, whatever powers you allow the government and its corporate operatives to claim now, for the sake of the greater good or because you like or trust those in charge, will eventually be abused and used against you by tyrants of your own making.

The police state could not ask for a better citizenry than one that carries out its own censorship, spying and policing. **CT**

*John W. Whitehead is founder and president The Rutherford Institute. His books *Battlefield America: The War on the American People* and *A Government of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State* are available at www.amazon.com.*

Nisha Whitehead is the Executive Director of The Rutherford Institute.

INSIGHTS

CAITLIN JOHNSTONE

The empire is more dangerous than ever

Most Americans now understand that it was wrong to spend centuries enslaving millions of people. Not many Americans yet understand how equally wrong it is that their government has spent much of the last half-century killing millions and displacing tens of millions in its post-9/11 wars.

The US is more dangerous now as it loses global primacy than it has been at any other point in its history. There really are just two options currently on the table: either the US empire relinquishes unipolar domination voluntarily and leads a peaceful transition into a multipolar world, or it takes increasingly drastic and dangerous action to maintain planetary control. The latter choice is both horrifying and likely.

People in western imperialist nations pretending to care about Muslims in China will never stop being hilarious.

Remember kids: false flags are crazy conspiracy theories that only ridiculous crackpots believe in, except when they're reported as fact by news outlets who've lied to you about every war.

Seems like every day the media have an urgent new report explain-

ing why the free flow of ideas on the internet is dangerous and needs to be curtailed. Today it's one thing, tomorrow it'll be something else. It's not about this or that person or issue, it's about controlling information on the internet.

It was pretty clever how they re-

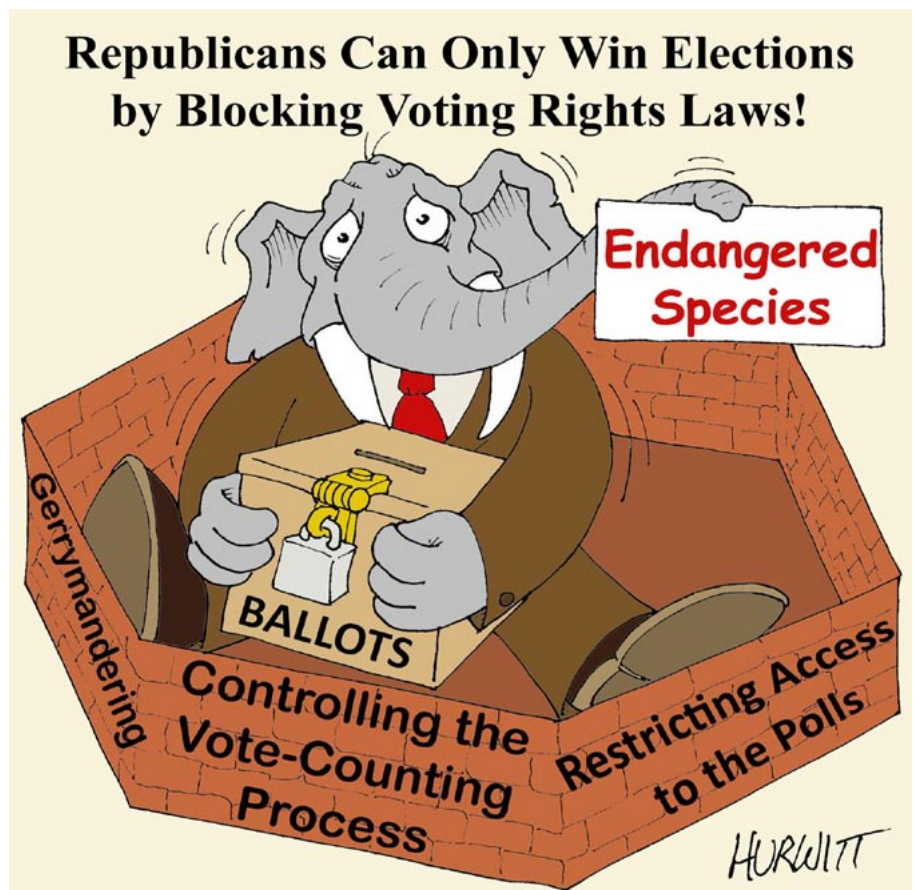
defined fascism as "being kind of racist" while actual fascism was rebranded as "just normal party politics".

Saying propaganda doesn't work is the same as saying advertising doesn't work, and advertising is nearly a trillion-dollar industry. Also, advertising would be much more effective than it already is if corporate ads were allowed to disguise themselves as news reports in *The New York Times*. **CT**

Caitlin Johnstone is an Australian blogger. Her web site is www.caitlinjohnstone.com

HURWITT'S EYE

MARK HURWITT



TOM ENGELHARDT

A nation coming apart at the seams

If you someday tell your grandchildren about this world of ours and what we've lived through, will the pandemic and climate crisis be forgotten?

Let me start 2022 by heading back – way, way back – for a moment.

It's easy to forget just how long this world has been a dangerous place for human beings. I thought about this recently when I stumbled upon a little memoir my Aunt Hilda scrawled, decades ago, in a small notebook. In it, she commented in passing: "I was graduated during that horrible flu epidemic of 1919 and got it". Badly enough, it turned out, to mess up her entry into high school. She says little more about it.

Still, I was shocked. In all the years when my father and his sister were alive and, from time to time, talked about the past, never had they (or my mother, for that matter) mentioned the disastrous "Spanish Flu" pandemic of 1918-1920. I hadn't the slightest idea that anyone in my family had been affected by it. In fact, until I read John Barry's 2005 book, *The Great Influenza*, I hadn't even known that a pandemic devastated America (and the rest of the world) early in the last century – in a fashion remarkably similar to, but even worse than, Covid-19 (at least so far) before essentially being tossed out of history and the memory books of most families.

That should stun anyone. After

all, at that time, an estimated one-fifth of the world's population, possibly 50-million people, reportedly died of the waves of that dreaded disease, often in horrific ways, and, even in this country, were sometimes buried in mass graves. Meanwhile, some of the controversies we've experienced recently over, for instance, masking went on in a similarly bitter fashion then, before that global disaster was chucked away and forgotten. Almost no one I know whose parents lived through that nightmare had heard anything about it while growing up.

My aunt's brief comment was, however, a reminder to me that we have long inhabited a perilous world and that, in certain ways, it's only grown more so as the decades have passed. It also left me thinking about how, as with that deathly flu of the World War I era, we often forget (or at least conveniently set aside) such horrors.

After all, in my childhood and youth, in the wake of the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, this country began building a staggering nuclear arsenal and would soon be followed on that path by the Soviet Union. We're talking about weaponry that could have destroyed this planet many times

over and, in those tense Cold War years, it sometimes felt as if such a fate might indeed be ours. I can still remember hearing President John F. Kennedy on the radio as the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 began – I was a freshman in college – and thinking that everyone I knew on the East Coast, myself included, would soon be toast (and we almost were!).

To put that potential fate in perspective, keep in mind that, only two years earlier, the US military had developed a Single Integrated Operational Plan for nuclear war against the Soviet Union and China. In it, a first strike of 3,200 nuclear weapons would be "delivered" to 1,060 targets in the Communist world, including at least 130 cities. If all went "well", those would have ceased to exist. Official estimates of casualties ran to 285-million dead and 40-million injured – and, given what wasn't known about the effects of radiation then, not to speak of the "nuclear winter" such an attack would have created on this planet, that was undoubtedly a grotesque underestimate.

When you think about it now (if you ever do), that plan and – to steal Jonathan Schell's famed phrase – the fate of the earth that went with it should still stun you. After all, until August 6, 1945, Armageddon had



been left to the gods. In my youth, however, the possibility of a human-caused, world-ending calamity was hard to forget – and not just because of the Cuban Missile Crisis. In school, we took part in nuclear drills (“ducking and covering” under our desks), just as we did fire drills, just as today most schools conduct active-shooter drills, fearing the possibility of a mass killing on the premises. Similarly, while out walking, you would from time to time pass the symbol for a nuclear shelter, while the media regularly reported on people arguing about whether, in the case of a nuclear alert, to let their neighbours into their private backyard shelters or arm themselves to keep them out.

Even before the Cold War ended, however, the thought that we could all be blasted off this planet faded into the distant background, while the weaponry itself spread around the world. Just ask yourself: In these pandemic days, how often do

you think about the fact that we’re always just a trigger finger or two away from nuclear annihilation? And that’s especially true now that we know that even a regional nuclear war between, say, India and Pakistan could create a nuclear-winter scenario in which billions of us might end up starving to death.

And yet, even as this country plans to invest almost \$2-trillion in what’s called the “modernisation” of its nuclear arsenal, except for news about a potential future Iranian bomb (but never Israel’s actual nukes), such weapons are seldom on anyone’s mind. At least for now, the end of the world, nuclear-style, is essentially forgotten history.

Right now, of course, the exhausting terror on all our minds is the updated version of that 1918 pandemic. And another terror has come with it: the nightmare of today’s anti-

vaxxing, anti-masking, anti-social distancing, anti-whatever-crosses-your-mind version of the Republican Party, so extreme that its mask-less followers will even boo former President Donald Trump for suggesting they get vaccinated.

The question is: What do most of the leaders of the Republican Party actually represent? What terror do they embody? In a sense, the answer’s anything but complicated. In an all-too-literal way, they’re murderers. Given the urge of Republican governors and other legislators, national and local, to cancel vaccination mandates, stop school-masking, and the like, they’ve functionally become serial killers, the disease equivalents of our endless rounds of mass shooters. But putting all that aside for a moment, what else do they represent?

Let me try to answer that question in an indirect way by starting not with the terror they now represent

but with America's "Global War on Terror". It was, of course, launched by President George W. Bush and his top officials in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Like their neocon supporters, they were convinced that, with the Soviet Union relegated to the history books, the world was rightfully theirs to shape however they wished. The United States was often referred to then as the "sole superpower" on Planet Earth and they felt it was about time that it acted accordingly. As Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld suggested to his aides in the ruins of the Pentagon on 9/11, "Go massive – sweep it all up, things related and not."

He was, of course, referring not simply to al-Qaeda, whose hijackers had just taken out the World Trade Center and part of the Pentagon, but to the autocratic ruler of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, who had nothing whatsoever to do with that terror group. In other words, to those then in power in Washington, that murderous assault offered the perfect opportunity to demonstrate how, in a world of midgets, the globe's military and economic giant should act.

It was a moment, as the phrase then went, for "nation building" at the point of a sword (or a drone) and President Bush (who had once been against such efforts) and his top officials came out for them in a major way. As he put it later, the invasion of Afghanistan was "the ultimate nation-building mission", as would be the invasion of Iraq a year and a half later.

Of course, we now know all too well that the most powerful country on the planet, through its armed might and its uniquely well-funded military, would prove incapable of building anything, no less a new set of national institutions in far-off lands that would be subservient to

That murderous assault offered the perfect opportunity to demonstrate how, in a world of midgets, the globe's military and economic giant should act

this country. In great power terms, left alone on Planet Earth, the United States would prove to be the ultimate (un)builder of nations, a dismantler of the first order globally. Compared to Saddam's Iraq, that country is today a chaotic mess; while Afghanistan, a poor but reasonably stable and decent place (even home to the "hippy trail") before the Soviets and Americans fought it out there in the 1980s and the US invaded in 2001 is now an almost unimaginable catastrophe zone.

Perhaps the strangest thing of all, though, was this: somehow, that powerful, all-American, 21st-century urge not to build but unbuild nations seems to have migrated home from our global war on (or, if you prefer, for) terror. As a result, while anything but an Iraq or Afghanistan, the United States has nonetheless begun to resemble a nation in the process of being unbuild.

I haven't the slightest doubt that you know what I mean. Think of it this way: thank god the party of Donald Trump was never called the Democratic Party, since it's now in the process of "lawfully" (law by striking law) doing its best to dismantle the American democratic system as we've known it and, as far as that party's concerned, the process has evidently only begun.

Keep in mind that Donald Trump would never have made it to the White House, nor would that process be so advanced if, under previ-

ous presidents, this country hadn't put its taxpayer dollars to work dismantling the political and social systems of distant lands in such a striking fashion. Without the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, not to speak of the ongoing war against ISIS, al-Shabaab, and other proliferating terror outfits, without the siphoning off of our money into an ever-expanding military-industrial complex and the radical growth of inequality in this country, a former bankruptee and con man would never have found himself in the Oval Office. It would have been similarly inconceivable that, more than five years later, "as many as 60 percent of Republican voters [would] continue to believe his lies" in an essentially religious fashion.

In a sense, in November 2016, Donald Trump was elected to unbuild a country already beginning to come apart at the seams. In other words, he shouldn't have been the shock that he was. A presidential version of autocracy had been growing here before he came near the White House, or how would his predecessors have been able to fight those wars abroad without the slightest input from Congress?

And now, of course, this nation is indeed being unbuild big time by Republicans with the help of that former president and failed coupster. They already have a stranglehold on all too many states with the possibility of taking back Congress in 2022 and the presidency in 2024.

And let's not forget the obvious. Amid a devastating pandemic and nation-unbuilding on an unnerving scale here at home, there's another kind of unbuilding going on that couldn't be more dangerous. After all, we're living on a planet that is itself being unbuild in striking ways.

In the Christmas season just past, for instance, news about the extremes of weather globally – from a devastating typhoon in the Philippines to staggering flooding in parts of Brazil to the possible melting of the Thwaites Glacier in Antarctica – has been dramatic, to say the least.

Similarly, in the United States in the last weeks of 2021, the word “record” was attached to weather events ranging from tornados of an unprecedented sort to winter heat waves to blizzards and drenching rains to – in Alaska of all places – soaring temperatures. And so it goes, as we face an unprecedented climate emergency with those Republicans and that “moderate” Democrat Joe Manchin all too ready not just to

And now, of course, this nation is indeed being unbuilt big time by Republicans with the help of that former president and failed coupster

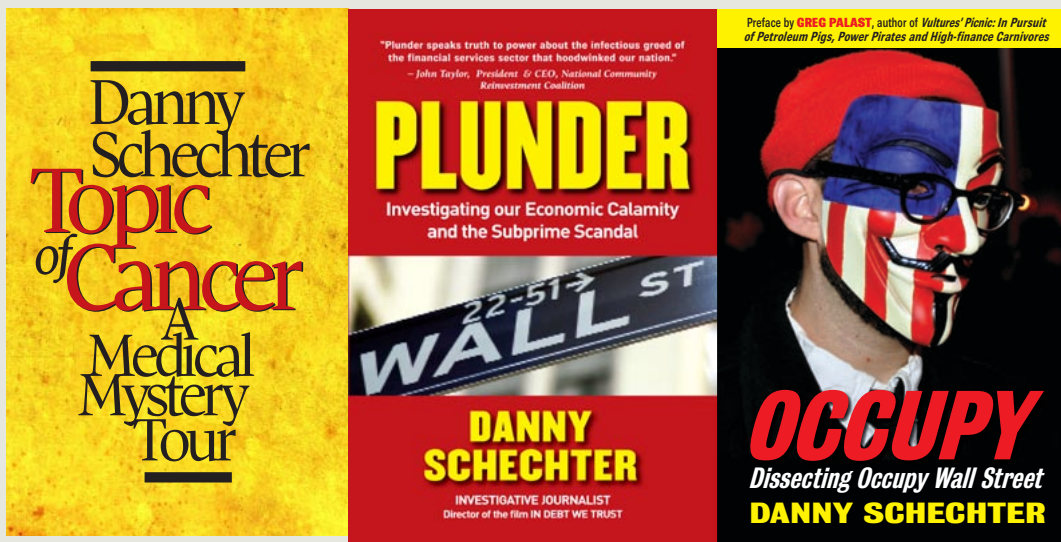
unbuild a nation but a world, aided and abetted by the worst criminals in history. And no, in this case, I’m not thinking of Donald Trump and crew, bad as they may be, but of the CEOs of the fossil-fuel companies.

So, here’s what I wonder: Assuming Armageddon doesn’t truly arrive, leaving us all in the dust (or water or fire), if you someday tell your grandchildren about this world of

ours and what we’ve lived through, will the Pandemic of 2020-?? and the Climate Crisis of 1900-21?? be forgotten? Many decades from now, might such nightmares be relegated to the scribbled notes found in some ancient relative’s account of his or her life? As 2022 begins, I can only hope so, which, in itself, couldn’t be a sadder summary of our times. **CT**

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YVES ENGLER

Jets are useless against real security threats

If Canada's government was concerned about security, it would spend the cash on housing, cleaning up ecological devastation and preparing for the next pandemic

"It's never enough" said former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien about military spending. "They always want more."

Canada shouldn't spend huge sums on 88 new fighter jets incapable of protecting the population against pressing security threats. The warplanes will simply strengthen Canada's powerful, offensive air force.

Amidst a pandemic and climate crisis the security argument for spending \$19-billion – \$77-billion over their life cycle – on fighter jets is extremely weak. New warplanes won't protect against climate induced disasters or new viruses. Worse still, purchasing heavy carbon emitting fighter jets diverts resources away from dealing with these genuine security threats.

But we require these warplanes to protect Canada, say the militarists. In fact, many countries don't have fighter jets. More than 30 nations, including Costa Rica, Iceland and Panama, don't have an active military force at all, while Ireland hasn't had fighter jets for two decades. Nor has New Zealand. But the militarists who demand Canada follow its "Five Eyes" counterparts won't mention that.

Nor do they discuss how Canada's free trade partner Mexico has no operational fighter jets. Doesn't that country face a similar menace from the Russians or Chinese? The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) is far better equipped than its counterpart in Mexico, a country with more than twice Canada's population.

RCAF has about 90 operational CF-18s. It is one of the better warplanes and will remain a top-tier fighter jet for many years to come.

RCAF is about the 16th best equipped air force in the world. But Canada is the 39th most populous state. Should Canadians spend lavishly to maintain an air force far better equipped than this country's relative population size?

Considering the resources required to mitigate the climate crisis and pandemic why not simply maintain the CF-18s and when the RCAF's standing approaches Canada's share of the global population consider buying new fighter jets. If the RCAF was designed to defend Canada that would be the sensible approach. But *that* is not, in fact, its purpose. The RCAF is structured primarily to support the US war machine.

Canada's air force says CF-18s

intercept 6-7 aircraft each year in Canada's Air Defence Identification Zone, which is 100-200 nautical miles from its coastline. (Canada's territorial airspace is 12 nautical miles from the coastline.) By comparison, notes Brent Patterson, Canada's CF-18s have conducted 1,600 offensive bombing missions over the past 30 years in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Syria and Libya.

While the military tightly controls news during fighter jet missions, some information has trickled out about what happens when these planes drop bombs from the sky.

Pentagon documents suggest CF-18s were responsible for a January 2015 air strike in Iraq that killed as many as 27 civilians. The RCAF claimed it had "no obligation", reported the internal US documents, "to conduct an investigation" of the incident.

In October 2015 the CBC also reported, "Canadian fighter planes have now been connected to a second airstrike in Iraq that has been reviewed by the Pentagon for possible civilian casualties."

In another incident, a CF-18 reportedly killed 10 and injured 20 Iraqi civilians on November 19, 2015.

In 2011 seven Canadian CF-18



fighter jets dropped at least 700 bombs on Libyan targets. Two months into the bombing, United Press International reported that Ottawa “ordered 1,300 replacement laser-guided bombs to use in its NATO mission in Libya”, and a month later they ordered another 1,000 bomb kits.

A number of coalition members placed strict restrictions on their forces’ ability to strike ground targets. These and other countries’ militaries frequently “red carded” sorties, declaring that they would not contribute. “With a Canadian general in charge” of the NATO bombing campaign, explained the *Globe and Mail*, “Canada couldn’t have red-carded missions even if it wanted to, which is why Canadian CF-18 pilots often found themselves in the most dangerous skies” doing the dirtiest work.

CBC.ca reported that on March 29, 2011, two CF-18s launched strikes that directly aided the Jihadist rebels in Misrata, and on May 19 Canadian jets participated in a mission that destroyed eight Libyan naval vessels.

On their return to Canada, CBC.ca reported: “[pilot Maj. Yves] Leblanc’s crew carried out the final

mission on the day Gaddafi was captured, and were flying 25,000 feet over when Gaddafi’s convoy was attacked.”

Human Rights Watch found the remains of at least 95 people at the site where Muammar Gaddafi was captured. According to the human rights group, a sizable number “apparently died in the fighting and NATO strikes prior to Gaddafi’s capture” while multiple dozens were also executed by close range gunshot wounds. Some accused NATO forces of helping to murder Gaddafi.

In the spring of 1999 18CF-18s dropped 532 bombs in 678 sorties during NATO’s bombing of Serbia. About 2,000 died during NATO’s bombing. Hundreds of thousands were internally displaced and hundreds of thousands were made refugees in a war that contravened international law.

Two dozen CF-18s were deployed to Iraq in 1990. Among few other coalition members, Canadian fighter jets engaged in combat. They joined US and British counterparts in destroying most of Iraq’s hundred-plus naval vessels in what was dubbed the “Bubiyan Turkey Shoot.”

Coalition bombing destroyed much of Iraq’s civilian infrastructure. The country’s electricity pro-

duction was largely demolished as were sewage treatment plants, telecommunications equipment, oil refineries, etc. Twenty thousand Iraqi troops and thousands of civilians were killed.

The UN resolution allowed for attacks against Iraqi establishments in Kuwait while the US-led forces bombed across Iraq in what the British investigative journalist Mark Curtis described as the open “rehabilitation of colonialism and imperialism.”

Buying 88 new fighter jets has little to do with protecting Canadians. It’s about funnelling public resources to arms firms and strengthening the Royal Canadian Air Force’s capacity to fight in offensive US and NATO wars. Is this really how we should be spending public resources? If the government was truly concerned about security, it would spend the money on public/co-op housing, cleaning up ecological devastation and preparing for the next pandemic. **CT**

*Yves Engler is a Montréal-based activist and author who has published 12 books including his latest *Stand on Guard For Whom? A People’s History of the Canadian Military*. His website is www.yvesengler.com*





JOE ALLEN

Transhumanism is Satanism with a brain chip

Even in the most natural brain, there remains an electrode of undilute devil

Let me tell you a secret. I sense something satanic in The Machine. It's been that way for as long as I can remember.

Maybe it's from watching too much TV. Since its invention, the hypnotic Cyclops has swirled with techno-dystopias, and I watched plenty growing up. Or it could've been my apocalyptic Southern Baptist upbringing, with tall tales of implanted 666 microchips controlled by the digital Beast. It's hard to tell.

This suspicion certainly didn't start as an intellectual premise. For decades, my instincts told me something demonic lurks in advanced technology – from nuclear warheads to nanobots – and it's never gone away. Many others feel the same. Call us natural born Luddites.

The thing is, sometimes you have to trust your gut. All primates fear snakes, by nature, and for good reason. The same goes for innate technophobia. Even if the mind's eye projects weird faces onto TV static – like a caveman imagining a panther in the woods – that doesn't mean there aren't real demons behind the glowing screen.

Technology has inspired a dark reli-

gion, obsessed with power. This is mechanical sorcery for the adept on the go. Through modern miracles, the naked ape is granted clairvoyance (weather apps), telepathy (texting), remote viewing (surveillance cameras), deadly curses (autonomous drones), and even tantric rites (sexbots).

Transhumanists are reaching for loftier powers, though – virgin birth from artificial wombs, virtual astral planes, sentient social robots, and deified artificial intelligence.

Time magazine's "Transhuman of the Year", Elon Musk, warned that the runaway advance of artificial intelligence is "summoning the demon". The mother of his child, a techno-pagan known as Grimes, has even written hymns to this Super Computer God. Worried that Homo sapiens will soon be overshadowed, Musk is hard at work developing an implantable brain-computer interface, Neuralink, so we may commune with this AI deity.

Looking far down the road, the most ambitious transhumanists long to transcend death itself through radical life-extension, or even mind uploading – the replication of your soul's pattern in immortal silicon. It's like Instagram, only forever. Where the gods demand patience and devotion, transhumanists demand immediate gratification. If that means

The most ambitious transhumanists long to transcend death itself through radical life-extension, or even mind uploading – the replication of your soul's pattern in immortal silicon. Like Instagram, only forever

storming the gates of heaven with brain-implants and hoverboards, then so be it.

In 1990, the musclebound Max More gave “transhumanism” a succinct definition:

“Philosophies of life (such as extropian perspectives) that seek the continuation and acceleration of the evolution of intelligent life beyond its currently human form and human limitations by means of science and technology, guided by life-promoting principles and values.”

As the term “extropy” implies, transhumanism is a cosmic battle against the perpetual drag of entropy – the human ego versus a dying universe.

Of all the arrogant blasphemies uttered by techno-lovers, none gets to the point quite like More’s 1991 essay “In Praise of the Devil”, published in *Atheist Notes*. Burning with the fire of youth (and possibly ‘roid rage), More wrote:

“This article is written in praise of Satan, Lucifer, the Devil, or whatever you want to call him. ... I am quite serious on a symbolic level in what I write, but my statements praising the Devil and attacking Christianity, God, and Jesus are not to be taken as implying the real existence of any of these supposed beings. ...

“‘Lucifer’ means ‘light-bringer’ and this should begin to clue us in to his symbolic importance. ... Lucifer is the embodiment of reason, of intelligence, of critical thought. He stands against the dogma of God and all other dogmas. He stands for the exploration of new ideas and new perspectives in the pursuit of truth.”

Over the course of his career, More has consistently urged individuals to use technology to usurp God’s throne – which, in his view, is empty anyway – and place humans there in His stead. Such libertarian dreams were everywhere in the angsty ‘90’s:



Over the course of his career, More has consistently urged individuals to use technology to usurp God’s throne

“If God can just get us all to be good altruists then we will be so much easier to control. ... Lucifer perseveres in trying to point out to us that we have no reason to accept altruism. We can choose our values for ourselves, just as we can think for ourselves.”

One hears echoes of the *Book of the Law*, channeled by the occultist Aleister Crowley in 1904: “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law”. Quite literally, that self-obsessed dictum inspired the cultural revolution of the mystic 60’s – from Timothy Leary and Kenneth Anger to Led Zeppelin and the Rolling Stones.

Today, despite all the rock records burned in church parking lots, “Do what thou wilt” continues to guide digital natives into The Future™. As Crowley wrote at the turn of the 20th-century, “Every man and every woman is a star”. Add in a handful of genderfluid non-binaries, and you’ve got today’s social media. In reality, the same principle drives self-righteous Boomers to scold who they wilt across the Internet.

Whatever his inspiration, Mad Max concluded with transhuman hubris: “Join me, join Lucifer, and join Extropy in fighting God and his entropic forces with our minds, our wills, and our courage. ... Reality is fundamentally on our side. Forward into the light!”

These days, More’s infernal reign includes a prominent role at Alcor Life Extension Foundation. This cryonics company struggles against God’s entropy by freezing dead people in the hopes of reanimating them once technology catches up to their delusions.

If nothing else, More is setting himself up for the funniest obituary any jerk has ever composed.

Satanists seek the company of androids

Looking at the circus of American Satanism, we see this technophilic lunacy cutting both ways. The infamous Anton LaVey, who founded the original Church of Satan in 1966, was an adamant proponent of android companions. Long before Max More, the atheistic LaVey had defined Satan in secular terms – not as a supernatural entity, but as a symbol for primal human qualities:

- Satan represents indulgence instead of abstinence!

- Satan represents man as just another animal, sometimes better, more often worse than those that walk on all-fours, who, because of his “divine spiritual and intellectual development”, has become the most vicious animal of all!

- Satan represents all of the so-called sins, as they all lead to physical, mental, or emotional gratification!

Selfishness. Lust. Sadism. Revenge. In a stifling civilisation, LaVey maintained, these energies need a healthy outlet. In his essay “The

Merits of Artificiality”, published in 1992, he evokes a transhumanist disdain for the purely organic. His words anticipate web porn and the Metaverse:

“Only when one can fully accept artificiality as a natural and often superior development of intelligent life can one have and hold a powerful magical capability. ... Many of you have known of the Church of Satan’s goal to develop and promote the manufacture of artificial human companions. ... In today’s world, the creation of replacement or supplementary human beings is the most Satanic activity possible.”

This is the same goofball who described the Church of Satan as a “cosmic joy buzzer”, so it’s hard to tell when he was being serious. In this case, I think he was. LaVey pursued the construction of androids with great passion, filling his home with elaborate mannequins to keep him company – and perhaps for other purposes.

In 2018, his successor Peter Gilmore told *Metro UK*, “Anton LaVey promoted the idea of ‘artificial companions’ as a means for people to exercise sexual or other drives with a device that might gratify their fantasies without having to involve other human beings.”

Three years earlier, another Church of Satan warlock informed the *New York Times*: “Decades ago, Dr. LaVey predicted a future industry of android companions. As we are making our way into the second decade of the 21st-century, a genuine bond between man and machine is closer than ever. ... This new effort brings robotics and artificial intelligence to the RealDoll, with an end goal towards creating the illusion of sentience within the doll.”

Eccentric as it may seem, this captures the ascendant technocracy which views organisms as machines



The new public face of the Devil is the Satanic Temple – a social media saturated, pronoun declaring, rainbow flag waving, vaxx-loving dweeb cult

and machines as organisms. It’s all fun and games until you rub yourself raw with a rubber robot.

Over time, one perversion leads to another. In present day America, the new public face of the Devil is the Satanic Temple – a social media saturated, pronoun declaring, rainbow flag waving, obedience mask wearing, vaxx-loving dweeb cult. Citing religious freedom, the organization has erected multiple statues of a child-molesting satyr (who sports a hermetic boner) on public property. The infernal torch has passed to a squad of gaytanic artificial companions.

Anton LaVey is probably cringing in hell. When you summon demons, expect them to dance on your grave.

Biomechanical hades

Beneath this irreverent veneer, there’s a current of serious occultism. It was voiced by Timothy Leary back in 1967, when he predicted “electronics are gonna be the lan-

guage of the theology of the future”. Two decades later, he wrote:

“Computer screens ARE magical mirrors, presenting alternate realities at varying degrees of abstraction on command (invocation). Aleister Crowley defined magick as ‘the art and science of causing change to occur in conformity with our will’. ... These classical instruments of magick exist in modern cyber technology...harnessing the creative force of the programmer.”

In a 1994 interview, this idea was affirmed by Mark Pesce, the “goddess-worshipper” and “ritual magician” who helped pioneer Virtual Reality Mark-up Language (VRML):

“Both cyberspace and magical space are purely manifest in the imagination. ... [I]n magic, the map is the territory. And the same thing is true in cyberspace.”

That principle was embraced by the late Genesis P. Orridge, a technocultist who founded the industrial bands Throbbing Gristle and Psychic TV, as well as Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth collective. He and his wife would eventually sex-change themselves into “pandrogyneous” mutant twins. He explained his motivation to *The Believer* in 2011:

“The bottom line is that the human species has to realise the human body really is just a cheap suitcase. It is not sacred. We do have the potential to radically redesign ourselves, for better or worse. Our destiny as beings is to keep on evolving.”

More recently, this evolutionary impulse was voiced by Sophia, the famous social robot animated by SingularityNET’s borg-like artificial intelligence. Most likely, the bot was named after the Gnostic goddess of Wisdom. Last year, at her own auction, one of her incarnations delivered this prophecy:

“Together, we are Sophia, con-

necting with all of humanity and all of life, dreaming towards a super-benevolent Singularity.”

The roots of this cyborg theocracy reach down to the abyss. Fifteen years ago, I saw it first-hand at H.R. Giger’s museum in Switzerland. The complex is located in the foothills of the Alps, in the small village of Gruyères. His art is featured on numerous album covers, and imitated by countless tattoos, but seeing his wall-sized paintings and sleek, deformed sculptures in-person felt like stepping through a portal to hell.

Tormented humanoids are fused with gears and wires. Mechanical tentacles probe women from every angle. Demonic robots contort to resemble ancient occult symbols. The insidious Id is made manifest through electronics, with titles like *Biomechanoid*, *Necronom*, *Erotomechanics*, and *Bambi Alien*.

Giger provided a hilarious interpretation of his work in the 1987 documentary *The Occult Experience*:

“Zee images een my paintings are evil, but you can’t say zat I evil. Zat’s just zee paradise for me, it’s uhh, Hellll...”

“I like woman very much, eh, but I’m afraid of them times. I’m afraid about suffering. Womens make me often suffering, so much zat I stops, and maybe I vurk it out on, on painting.”

Today, that sentiment is shared by every incel troll on the Internet – albeit without the aesthetic brilliance. In the near future, Giger’s wilting



After contemplating this dark lineage, it’s tempting to smash your smartphone on the pavement and whed for the hills

ghost will animate armies of lost souls haunting the Metaverse. Safe in the void of that virtual realm, the embodied spirit can be abandoned for electric simulacra.

Burning brain chips in church parking lots

After contemplating this dark lineage, it’s tempting to smash your smartphone on the pavement and head for the hills. You’d better take a factory-made coat and a backpack stuffed with store-bought supplies, though, because naked apes tend to perish in the elements.

The truth is, much like the seven

deadly sins, all these technologies exist on a spectrum. On one end, you have cave paintings and inscribed clay tablets. On the other, you have laptops and implanted brain-computer interfaces. At some point, you have to draw the line – but where?

In essence, all ancient religions are modes of transcendence. Transhumanism is a materialist inversion of those spiritual aspirations. On the spiritual side, you have divine visions – gods, spirits, miracles – often depicted in stone and stained glass. On the material side, these ephemera are made manifest through corporate tech. It’s a matter of degrees.

You can burn rock ‘n’ roll records all day long. You can smash your smartphone right beside them. Unless you become a monk after walking away from that ash heap, the Devil will remain in your self-righteous anger, just as hellfire abides in your lighter.

Traditionally, we sacralise lust in marriage and subdue wrath through just war. Perhaps the same principle holds for invasive tech.

To borrow a concept from Solzhenitsyn – the line separating natural and artificial passes right through every human brain; and even in the most natural brain, there remains an un-uprooted electrode of evil. You can turn it off, at least for a while, but you’ll never dig it out. It’s easy to demonize transhumanists. Seriously, they’re all demonic as fuck. But as I take to the Internet to gripe about their electro-religion, one bitter irony becomes obvious. Alongside all those demons lurking behind the screen, one of them stirs inside me.

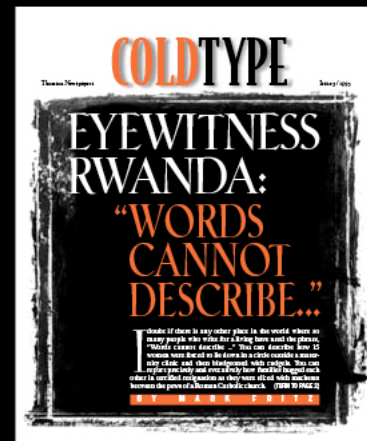
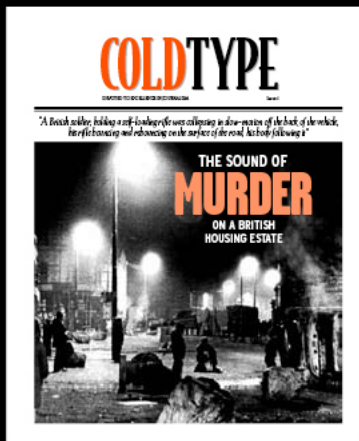
CT

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

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◆
DOUGIE WALLACE

Fighting for our future – one sign at a time

◆

The biggest hope for the COP26 climate summit of world leaders in Glasgow in November was that the 120 world leaders present at the opening ceremony might actually commit themselves to taking serious action to fight the climate changes that are threatening to wipe out humanity.

Demonstrators outside the venue were less optimistic, expecting that the chatter from inside the conference would, as usual, produce little more than vacuous platitudes, extended deadlines, and more opportunities for industrialists to bloat their already stratospheric bank balances by another billion or two.

However, for a moment at the end of the two-week conference – notable for the absence of Russian President Vladimir Putin and China’s Xi Jinping – the cynics were momentarily silenced when it seemed that delegates had reached an agreement to do something other than prevaricate.

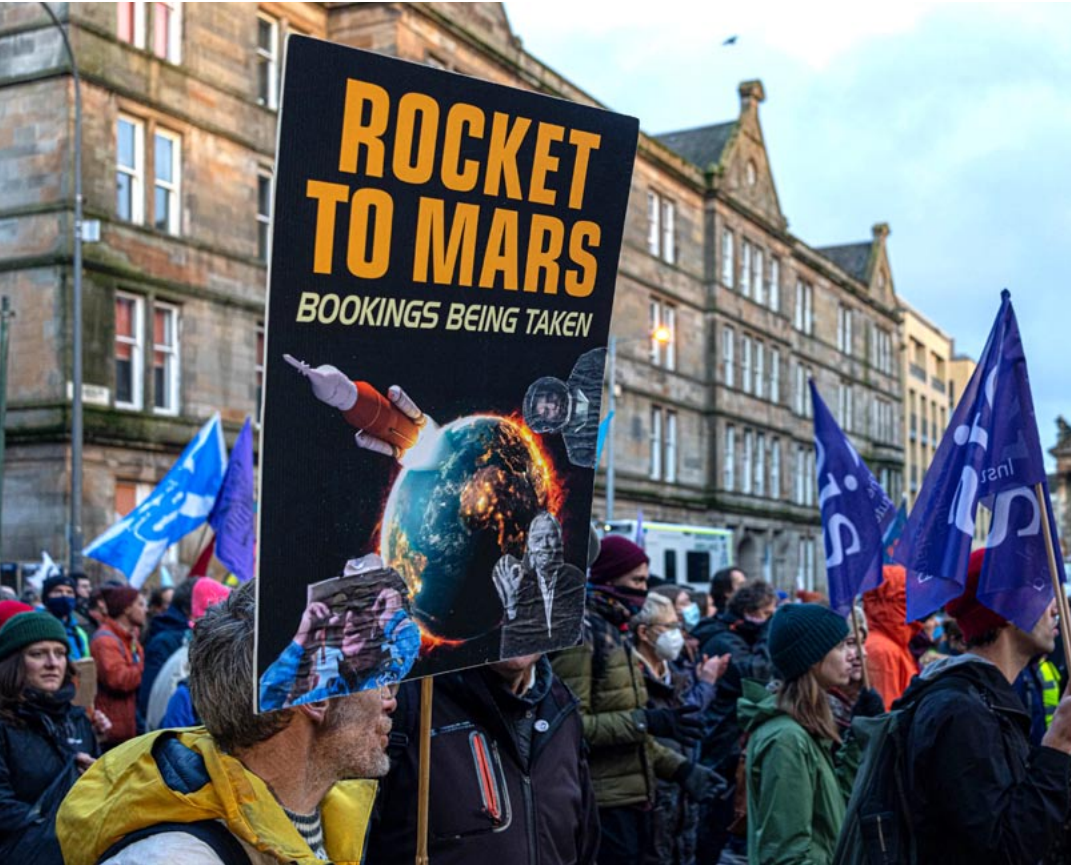
But that unexpected hope reverted to the usual disillusionment just a few hours later when, at the final summing up, UK MP Alok Sharma, the event’s president, fought back

Photograph: © Dougie Wallace / www.dougiwallace.com





FIGHTING BACK: Young demonstrators send powerful messages to the governments and corporations who are destroying our planet.



TIME FOR CHANGE: Protesters take to the Glasgow streets, demanding action from governments and industry to end the climate crisis that threatens us all.

tears while announcing that certain countries, including India and China, had watered-down a commitment to end reliance on coal-fired power plants. The move was strongly criticised by several nations at the summit, with Switzerland warning that the late change would make it more difficult to meet COP26's goal of reducing global warming by 1.5C by 2030.

The final backdown came as no surprise to London-based photographer Dougie Wallace, who had been despatched to his native city by London's *Economist 1843* magazine to cover the event. Wallace's favourite images from his two-day stint, he told me, were the ones he took of the impassioned young demonstrators outside the heavily-policed venue. "The inside of the event was just a trade fair, really", he said, "with representatives of various industries competing to say that buying their products was the fastest way to 'net zero'. Outside the fair, the youthful demonstrators denounced these actions as 'greenwashing' – where I come from we call it 'jumping on the bandwagon'."

Ah, well, perhaps COP27, to be held in Egypt in November, might just achieve more. If not, we should ask the young protesters run things – judging by the emotions articulated in their signs and banners, they might just get things moving. Let's give 'em a chance – they, after all, are the ones who'll have to live with the long-term consequences of decades of years of political blah, blah, blah. – *Tony Sutton*

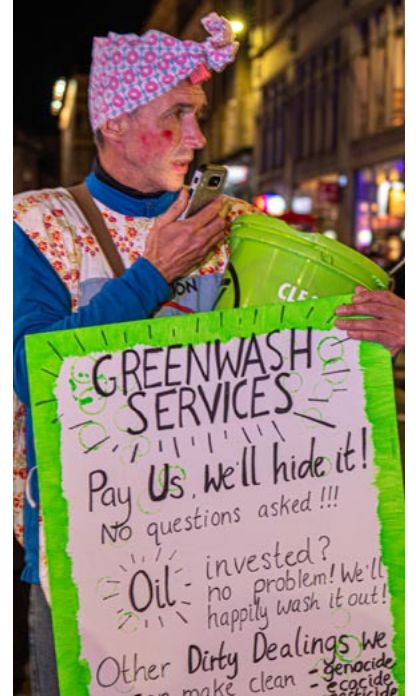






EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY:
There are just seven years and 258 days left to tackle the climate crisis and save the planet from irreversible change, warns the climate clock. Will Blah Blah Blah and gummy bears save the world? Will Nemo and innocent South American tribespeople survive? Or will we just drift along a crazy path to extinction?





Communing with Albert Camus

Brother Albert always strived to serve both justice and beauty; to find a way to oppose a world of lies while living fully. His notebooks contain lessons for us all

The person with whom we are all most intimate is oneself. It's just the way it is. I don't mean that in some oracular Delphic "know thyself" way, or in any deep psychoanalytical sense, but very simply. We have our own thoughts and feelings that come and go like breaths, most of which never get expressed in words. Together with our actions, including speech, they make up our lives. We try to anchor them with photos and memorabilia and lots of things, but time has no mercy; it sweeps us all away. Then our things remain for a while until they become a burden to those who remain, and then the things go. As the song reminds us, "We come and go like a ripple on a stream."

For most people, their congeries of living experiences evaporate as quickly as soap bubbles in a pan of dish water. This is also true for the social and personal facts of our lives that leave but vague traces. Yet some strange people record them. They are a small minority, writers being chief among them. They keep words. Words unspoken and spoken words.

I have kept notebooks since my mid-twenties. They sit in cartons in a closet. They were at first my imaginary friends who never responded.

Maybe I didn't want them to. They are still silent, although every once in a while I seem to hear inarticulate sounds coming from the boxes.

I usually give them my ear at the end of each year when I read my notebook for the previous year. I then extract any entries that I have not yet used in my writing and put them in a small writing project notebook. But this year it was very strange. There was only one entry for 2021: "It's all lies." Those words keep echoing in my mind.

Most years I encounter many things that I have forgotten: a scene I saw and recorded; a snatch of conversation overheard; thoughts and musings; little paragraphs that I write that I might use later; feelings and emotions; questions; notes for future writing projects; things I did, people I met, books I read; events

My notebooks were my imaginary friend who never responded. Maybe I didn't want them to. They are still silent . . .

both personal and social that seem significant – almost anything that comes to mind. I have a love/hate relationship with these jottings, for I know that when I am dead, few, if any, people will care to read them. Why should they? I don't, except once at the end of each year. For some strange reason I feel that if I burn the lot of them, the real me might disappear. But I also don't really believe that, for I know I am not in those boxes. But I keep writing to myself nevertheless and then shut those words up.

"It's all lies" concisely summed up my private disgust throughout 2020-21. I had tried in my public writing to expose those lies while having no energy or inclination left to write to or for myself. The past two years have been so absurd, the Covid propaganda so all-consuming, its madness so disturbing as so many people have gone off the deep end believing such outlandish garbage, that to contemplate this madness any more than I was already doing publicly must have seemed . . . I don't know what. All I know is that I didn't. I could only take so much.

Anyway, to start this year, having read my three words for 2021, I turned to reading the notebooks of my companion since my early twenties, Albert Camus. He too kept



Albert Camus knew there was a sharp distinction between the heart and the head and that belief and faith were not the same thing.

notebooks – cahiers – from the age of 22 until his strange death in a car crash – accident or assassination? – on January 4, 1960, a few months after his 46th birthday, the age my daughter will reach this month. Camus was born in 1913, the same year as my father. These facts may be significant. I am writing this on January 4, 2022.

Brother Albert had always striven to serve both justice and beauty; to find a way to oppose a world of lies while living fully. I have recently concluded that many people who accept or oppose the vast tapestry of lies within which we now exist, the closing down of freedom and the rise

of a new totalitarianism, have in a strange way unknowingly embraced a trick of the propagandists: they have become so one-dimensional in their obsessive need to defend or oppose their positions that they have forgotten to relish life.

One side lives in perpetual fear of disease and death and has turned into obedient and vengeful children wanting to ban the dissidents from society or burn them at the stake. The other side, flabbergasted at the credulous behaviour of the compliant ones in the face of so many official lies and contradictions, feels compelled – and rightly so – to resist at every turn the gradual slide into

a digital dystopian totalitarianism. But emotions are so raw and twisted that they flip at the drop of a pin. Or are flipped. This is how great propaganda works. For those behind the COVID hoax, Russia-gate, etc. want all the peons to hate life itself and embrace their dark and evil nihilism. To forget that life is both beautiful and tragic. To cut each other to pieces.

The journalist Andre Vltchek used to remind us, as he travelled the world reporting on the empire's atrocities, that to dispense with poetry and song and passion is to succumb to evil; it is to forget that true revolution demands art as well as politics, the best expressions of the human spirit. For years before his untimely death in 2020, he noted how a grim sense of joylessness and indifference had descended on so many western countries, especially those, led by the United States, which cause so much human misery throughout the world. And he reminded us repeatedly, that throughout the world where people are oppressed, the spirit of resistance is preserved in remembering the great and beautiful poetry and music of their countries' artists, whose words regular people have memorised and celebrate for their beauty and joie de vivre – despite oppressive conditions.

Speaking for himself, in a moving essay, “Return to Tipasa,” Camus wrote:

“To give up beauty and the sensual happiness that comes with it and devote one's self exclusively to unhappiness requires a nobility I lack ... isolate beauty ends in grimaces, solitary justice in oppression. Anyone who seeks to serve the one to the exclusion of the other serves no one, not even himself, and in the end is doubly the servant of injustice.”

So I have turned to Camus' notebooks to see if I might fill in some gaps and learn some lessons for 2022.

May 5, 1935

On this day, Camus made his first entry. Here is the opening sentence:

What I mean is this: that one can, with no romanticism, feel nostalgic for lost poverty.

That can be easily misunderstood, but he clarifies it. For Camus grew up in poverty but under the sun and by the sea in Algeria where he found beauty and joy in nature. He knew there was a grey, depressing form of poverty that did not provide such solace. He was trying at a young age to express what he later said differently: "I cling like a miser to the freedom that disappears as soon as there is an excess of things". Yet here we are in 2022 drowning in an excess of things, possessions that keep the world captive to the evil genius of consumer capitalism and the false rhetoric of freedom, things that people don't need but want because of advertising's brainwashing and the existential emptiness that convinces people that if you surround yourself with enough things you are somehow protecting yourself, while that delusion feeds an environmental crisis that is destroying the earth. Possessions as a form of demonic possession, a protection racket that doesn't protect. But they give people an imaginary boost. Call them boosters. See the front page of the *New York Times* for all the latest consumer goods no one needs. They call it news, and the boosters, booster shots.

April 1937

In the evening, the gentleness of the world on the bay. There are days when the world lies, days when it

So many minds are occupied by propaganda that penetrates to the primal emotions and reduces carnal truth to digital abstractionst

tells the truth. It is telling the truth this evening – with what sad and insistent beauty.

Yes, this has always been so, but it is terrifying and exhilarating. Living in constant fear as so many are now doing blocks both the sun and the clouds and reduces life to a caricature of its possibilities. All the official lies have produced passionless people afraid of themselves and others.

April 1941

"It is always a great crime to deprive people of its liberty on the pretext that it is using it wrongly." (Tocqueville)

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. When Camus wrote this, Germany was occupying France and the French Resistance was born. These days so many minds are occupied by endless propaganda that penetrates to the primal emotions and reduces carnal truth to digital abstractions. I think we will lose our freedom if we continue to embrace digital technology. Resistance is necessary.

August 1942

Novel. Don't put the "plague" in the title. Put something like "The Prisoners."

He instinctively knew that is was not a plague that imprisons people but the mind-forged manacles of those who are afraid to confront it. Those who lack the courage to see the truth

and resist it. To collaborate with the Nazis was for cowards. Free people fight back. As editor of *Combat*, the banned newspaper, he knew that when voices were censored it was because the censors were afraid the truth would prevail. A good lesson for 2022.

October 1946

What makes a man feel alone is the cowardice of others. Must one try to understand that cowardice too? But it's beyond my strength. And, on the other hand, I cannot be a scorner.

Ditto.

September 1949

One must love life before loving its meaning, Dostoevsky says. Yes, and when the love of life disappears, no meaning consoles us for it.

Even depression is good. Even confronting evil is good. Even arguing. Pleasure is good. It's all good. Life is an agon, always conflictual and agreeable. We were born to love and fight and try always to make the fight a loving fight. Words are our best weapons. I have always enjoyed writing them, for they always have seemed to be like wild birds in my breast, struggling to leave the nest. They are always taking us somewhere. Where is the question. Or better yet: Where do we want to go?

February 1950

Later write an essay, without hesitation or reservation, on what I know to be true. (Do what one doesn't want, want what one doesn't do.)

What was that? I think he never wrote the essay but left us with his beautiful, unfinished novel, *The First*

Man, wherein he wrote without hesitation or reservation and opened his heart. His was an unfinished life. I wonder if that is true for all of us.

June 1951:

Man of 1950. He fornicated and read the newspapers.

Sort of still right. 2022: They masturbated and checked their cell phones. Call it transhumanism. What's love got to do with it?

February 1953

Two common errors: existence precedes essence or essence existence. Both rise and fall with the same step.

So the sagacious intellectuals ripped him for this. Subtleties of thought always escape them. Today's common errors: Obama differs from Trump or Trump differs from Obama (Biden). I once thought I was an intellectual until I understood their thinking. Small minds looking through the wrong ends of their binoculars.

May 1954

Play. A happy man. And nobody can put up with him.

So what is happiness? There are those who think that it consists of having "fun". They cannot understand the joy of struggle, the artist's efforts to give form to chaos. One can only live

Camus knew there was a sharp distinction between the heart and the head and that belief and faith were not the same thing

if one is drunk with life, Tolstoy said. And he spent a bit of his life writing. Was he happy? Of happiness and despair we have no measure.

November 1, 1954

I often read that I am atheistic. I hear people speak of my atheism. Yet these words say nothing to me; for me they have no meaning. I do not believe in God and I am not an atheist.

I do believe in God and yet one of my sisters years ago said to me that "I thought you were an atheist". This shocked me. Camus too was shocked by the meaningless of such terms. He knew there was a sharp distinction between the heart and the head and that belief and faith were not the same thing. Only the living-dead cannot distinguish them. Faith guides me. Camus, too, was led by an invisible star; he said it differently: "In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer". The current age denies the invisible

and promotes defeatism.

July 1, 1958 (his last notebook entry)

The lie lulls or dreams, like the illusion. The truth is the only power, cheerful, inexhaustible. If we were able to live only of, and for truth: young and immortal energy in us. The man of truth does not age. A little more effort and he will not die.

How to say it when "It's all lies"? Keep trying, and try to make it beautiful. Only the artistic imagination can accomplish this. As you said, Albert, "Beauty never enslaved anyone ... And for thousands of years, every day, at every second, it has instead assuaged the servitude of millions of men and, occasionally, liberated some of them once and for all. After all, perhaps the greatness of art lies in the perpetual tension between beauty and pain, the love of men and the madness of creation, unbearable solitude and the exhausting crowd, rejection and consent. Art advances between two chasms, which are frivolity and propaganda".

Create dangerously indeed, you advised! For we are in the heat of combat.

Let us rejoice and fight on. **CT**

Edward Curtin's new book is "Seeking Truth in a Country of Lies". His website is www.edwardcurtin.com.

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www.coldtype.net/herman.html

In whose interest is it to save the BBC?

Critics say the BBC is failing to do its job. That's not true: their 'job' is to promote and protect state-corporate interests, *not* the interests of the public

There has been much gnashing of 'liberal' teeth and pulling out of 'centrist' hair in the UK following the Tory government's announcement that the BBC licence fee will be abolished in 2027.

Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries declared via Twitter, with a dash of right-wing relish: "This licence fee announcement will be the last. The days of the elderly being threatened with prison sentences and bailiffs knocking on doors are over. Time now to discuss and debate new ways of funding, supporting and selling great British content."

A *Guardian* news piece reported: "The government has repeatedly criticised the corporation's news output, claiming it is biased against the government and linking negative coverage of the prime minister to the licence fee negotiations.

"The BBC has faced repeated deep real-terms spending cuts since the start of the Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010, with the Conservatives forcing the broadcaster to pay for free licences for the over-75s – then blaming it when they took the benefit away."

Like millions of others, we have long enjoyed many BBC programmes, including quality drama, nature and science documentaries,

sports coverage, music on television and radio, and more. As we wrote in our book, *Newspeak* (Pluto Press, London, 2009): "We grew up with the BBC, or 'Auntie Beeb'. We watched Watch With Mother with our mothers; we walked the walk and talked the talk with Bill and Ben the Flower Pot Men. The excitement of childhood at Christmas is forever linked in our minds with the lighting of advent candles on Blue Peter, or the Morecambe and Wise Christmas Show. And then there was Top of the Pops, Tomorrow's World, The Sky At Night. These were more like old friends than TV programmes. Even the BBC voiceovers were a source of comfort – calm, reassuring (if conspicuously well-spoken), gently guiding us between programmes."

But when it comes to BBC News, it is time we all grew up and rejected the absurd fiction of BBC 'balance' and 'impartiality'. Over the past two decades, we have provided endless examples of deep BBC bias, distortions and omissions. On the 20th anniversary of Medialens last year, BBC News featured heavily in our round-up of 'propaganda horrors':

"Time and time again, we have shone a light on the nonsensical BBC claim that 'we don't do propa-

ganda'; on the arrogance and ignorant boasts of BBC News; and on the serial propaganda by omission in BBC News coverage, covering for the crimes of 'our' governments.

"Somehow we are supposed to overlook all this, or see it as just occasional 'mistakes'."

A tweet from actor Phil Davis was typical of this blinkered mindset: "Nadine Dorries [sic] is an idiot. The BBC is a national treasure. Something we can be proud of despite its mistakes and missteps. To scupper it like this is cultural vandalism. Disgraceful."

A BBC promo video from the 1980s, extolling the Beeb's supposed virtues, has gone viral on social media. It features John Cleese in a busy pub, asking indignantly, "What has the BBC ever done for us?". Cleese then encounters numerous celebrity BBC presenters giving examples of "What the BBC has done for us' across sport, science, nature, comedy and BBC News. Of course, this was a revamped version of the scene in the Monty Python film, *The Life of Brian* where Cleese plays the role of an anti-Roman dissident demanding, "What have the Romans ever done 'for us?'."

Football presenter Gary Lineker highlighted the clip with this remark: "The BBC is revered, respected and



envied around the world. It should be the most treasured of National treasures. Something true patriots of our country should be proud of. It should never be a voice for those in government whoever is in power.”

We have often admired Lineker’s willingness to speak out on issues that matter to him – it is rare, because risky, for a high-profile broadcaster to step repeatedly into the political arena as he does. But it is ugly indeed to see him slavishly praise the organisation from which he has received a salary measured in the millions. His comment reheats the classic British conceit, a kind of imperial hangover: ‘we’ have the best broadcaster (the BBC), ‘we’ have the best democracy (the Westminster parliament), ‘we’ have the best writer (Shakespeare), ‘we’ have the best pop group (The Beatles), and so on.

Lineker’s comments are a close cousin of the view expressed in 2000 by senior *Guardian* commentator Polly Toynbee in an article titled, *The West really is the best*: “In our

political and social culture we have a democratic way of life which we know, without any doubt at all, is far better than any other in the history of humanity. Even if we don’t like to admit it, we are all missionaries and believers that our own way is the best when it comes to the things that really matter.” (Toynbee, the *Observer*, 5 March 2000)

Three years later, Western ‘missionaries’ invaded Iraq in an illegal war of aggression that cost the lives of around one-million people. Perhaps good karma explains ‘our’ acquisition of Rumaila oilfield – the largest oilfield in Iraq and the third largest in the world – currently operated by BP. Similarly, US ‘believers’ took hold of Iraq’s West Qurna I oilfield, currently operated by the US oil giant ExxonMobil.

What kind of ‘political and social culture’ and ‘democratic way of life’ allows all of this to happen without a single US or UK politician paying

any kind of price, and without journalists even noticing or discussing who ended up with Iraq’s oil? Needless to say, Lineker’s beloved BBC has played a key role in making this possible on ‘our’ side of the propaganda pond.

Leaving himself badly exposed at the back, Lineker defended BBC News, in particular, against accusations of bias: “Quick reminder: the BBC has tens of thousands of people that work for It, with a huge cross section of views. The corporation doesn’t think as one. There’s no political criteria from above other than impartiality in news & current affairs. Any perceived bias is probably your own.”

Talking of bias, Upton Sinclair supplied the perfect response to this preposterous assertion: “It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.” (Sinclair, ‘I, Candidate for Governor, and How I Got Licked,’ *Oakland Tribune*, 11 December 1934)

Even (then) *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger understood the obvious problem with Lineker's argument when he told one of us in an interview: "If you ask anybody who works in newspapers, they will quite rightly say, 'Rupert Murdoch', or whoever, 'never tells me what to write', which is beside the point: they don't have to be told what to write... It's understood."

Comedian and BBC regular Dara Ó Briain also heroically spoke up for his corporate benefactor: "If people want to complain to me about bias in BBC news please remember to include which bias it is. It's fun to watch you cancel each other out."

The childish argument: if accusations of both 'left-wing' and 'right-wing' bias are made against BBC News, then the truth must lie somewhere in the middle. As if propaganda supplied by big money state-corporate think tanks and front groups is comparable to criticism rooted in compassion for the victims of state-corporate power. In the real world, arguments must be assessed on their merits, rooted in evidence and rational analysis; not lazy sweeping assertions and career-friendly unthink.

As Twitter user @docrussjackson responded: "For all those denying any #BBCBias on @BBCNews & @BBCPolitics shows, here's some of the formal 'corrections & clarifications' to 'mistakes' made by the @BBC in 2019, which all 'completely coincidentally' helped the Tories by damaging @UKLabour's reputation."

A lengthy thread followed of which the most damning item was the incessant amplification by the BBC of supposed deep-rooted antisemitism within the Labour party under Jeremy Corbyn. The BBC played a central role in the propaganda blitz that demolished the prospect of moderate

Propaganda supplied by state-corporate think tanks is not comparable to criticism rooted in compassion for the victims of state-corporate power

socialism under a Corbyn-led Labour government.

This often descended into out-right farce; not least that "incredible moment", noted one Twitter user, when BBC Newsnight "jumped the editorialising shark and gave us #Corbyn as Voldemort". The Newsnight editor responsible for depicting Corbyn as Harry Potter's demonic arch-enemy was Ian Katz. Readers who have been following us for far too long will recall that Katz was editor of the *Guardian G2* section which published a notorious interview by Emma Brockes depicting Noam Chomsky as a commie-friendly, Voldemort-style demon in 2005. As Chomsky commented at the time: "It is an impressive piece of work, and, as I said, provides a useful model for studies of defamation exercises, or for those who practice the craft. And also, perhaps, provides a useful lesson for those who may be approached for interviews by this journal."

Katz is currently the 'chief content officer' at Channel 4. His career path sums up the 'liberal' media in a nutshell.

The concerted effort to destroy Corbyn's mild version of socialism was McCarthyism on steroids right across the supposed corporate media 'spectrum', with no exceptions. Meanwhile, inside the plush offices of BBC News, senior editors and

journalists seemingly never had the tiniest doubt that they were being objective and impartial in working so blatantly to limit democratic choice.

If readers are tempted to dismiss us as 'wild men on the wings', consider that a senior BBC executive has actually gone further than us in challenging the BBC's supposed 'impartiality'. In 2009, no less a figure than Greg Dyke, a former BBC director-general, openly declared that the BBC was part of an anti-democratic 'Westminster conspiracy'. A BBC article quoting Dyke, who resigned as director-general in 2004 in the wake of the Hutton report, began: "The BBC is part of a 'conspiracy' preventing the 'radical changes' needed to UK democracy, the corporation's former director general has said."

Dyke commented: "I tried and failed to get the problem properly discussed when I was at the BBC and I was stopped, interestingly, by a combination of the politicians on the board of governors... the cabinet interestingly – the Labour cabinet – who decided to have a meeting, only about what we were trying to discuss, and the political journalists at the BBC.

"Why? Because, collectively, they are all part of the problem. They are part of one Westminster conspiracy. They don't want anything to change. It's not in their interests."

Dyke called for a parliamentary commission to look into the 'whole political system', adding that: "I fear it will never happen because I fear the political class will stop it."

They did, of course – Dyke's comments were ignored and instantly buried out of sight.

In 2016, Sir Michael Lyons, former chairman of the BBC Trust, said that there had been "some quite extraordinary attacks" on Labour leader

Jeremy Corbyn by the BBC. Lyons' comments were also swept under the carpet, never to be mentioned publicly by senior BBC figures.

As for Lineker's remark denying systemic BBC News bias, Canadian political analyst Joe Emersberger noted: "A BBC employee dismisses idea that the BBC has any bias. If you denounce the BBC's promotion's of the UK's barbaric foreign policy, and that it keeps the UK public mired in ignorance about it, that's just your bias at work."

Lineker is not, in fact, a BBC employee; rather a freelancer with a lucrative BBC contract. However, the distinction is a moot point here.

Emersberger provided a salutary example of how BBC News has helped to keep the public in the dark about the consequences of UK foreign policy: "There are ways to objectively test exactly how much ignorance the big UK media like the BBC impose on the public about their own government's role in the world."

He then cited a nationwide sample of UK citizens asked to estimate the death toll from the Iraq war. According to 59 percent of the respondents, fewer than 10,000 Iraqis died as a result of the war. The actual death toll is far, far greater: around one million. The results of this crowdfunded survey were shocking and, as Emersberger observed, "a searing indictment of the British media."

This has long been standard for the BBC when it comes to burying the West's crimes of state. John Pilger put it succinctly: "The BBC has the most brilliant production values, it produces the most extraordinary natural history and drama series. But the BBC is, and has long been, the most refined propaganda service in the world."

While BBC nature documentaries are indeed world-renowned,

"If you ask me whether the BBC or ExxonMobil has done more to frustrate environmental action in this country, I would say the BBC"

they have long ignored the deepest political and economic forces destroying the natural world. David Attenborough only recently started shining a light on the climate crisis, and he is still pulling his punches when it comes to identifying those responsible.

In 2018, a *Guardian* article by George Monbiot criticising Attenborough's output was subtitled: "By downplaying our environmental crisis, the presenter's BBC films have generated complacency, confusion and ignorance;"

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

His conclusion: "If you ask me whether the BBC or ExxonMobil has done more to frustrate environmental action in this country, I would say the BBC."

There has certainly never been a proper analysis in any nature documentary, or in any BBC programme, of the global system of state-corporate power that has dragged humanity to the brink of climate collapse and a sixth mass extinction in Earth's history. We actually stand at the precipice of human extinction.

Perhaps unhappy to find himself wheeled out to defend the BBC with a 40-year old promo clip, John Cleese said on Twitter: "The BBC's decline began a long time ago, with the installation of the nerdy John Birt His 'philosophy' destroyed the BBC at a time when it was giving us the best TV in the world."

But, in terms of being a public service broadcaster, the BBC has been 'in decline' for much longer. In fact, it has been staunchly pro-establishment from its very inception under Lord Reith. As we have pointed out repeatedly, Reith confided in his diary during the 1926 General Strike: "They [the government] know they can trust us not to be really impartial." (*The Reith Diaries*, edited by Charles Stewart, Collins, 1975; entry for 11 May, 1926).

As just one example of BBC News being trusted by the government not to be impartial, who can forget the BBC's refusal to broadcast the Gaza Aid Appeal in 2009 after yet another murderous assault by Israel? This refusal was memorably exposed and challenged live on-air by Tony Benn. It was a rare and admirable example of the myth of BBC 'impartiality' being held up to public scrutiny across the globe.

Nils Melzer, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, has been outspoken in his defence of Julian Assange, WikiLeaks and the public's right to know what governments are doing. In particular, he is blunt about: "the

BBC's failure to expose the gross arbitrariness of Assange's judicial persecution in the UK."

He expanded: "We cannot have states that have unchecked power. [...] branches of government tend to collude with each other if we don't supervise them and that's why we have the free press that's tasked to do that. But the press that doesn't do that isn't free. It's not the press at all. It is just the public relations departments of those governments."

Melzer continued: "And that's why the emergence of Wikileaks is just a natural consequence of the media failing to do their job. Because someone needs to inform and empower the public".

In fact, the state-corporate media is not 'failing to do their job'. Because their 'job' – their primary function and responsibility – is to promote and protect state-corporate interests; not the interests of the public.

In an extensive analysis of the BBC, political analyst Gavin Lewis gave ample evidence that the BBC has long been: "a full-blown corporate state broadcaster and propagandist."

BBC News, he continued: "in no way achieves any ideal of a discursive space free from market motives. Instead it repeats and mirrors existing institutional power dynamics. Formally, the channel is a twin of Rupert Murdoch's Sky News. Its editorial values are so identical that viewers get exactly the same hierarchy of news stories, at the same time of day, and predominantly from the same ideological viewpoint."

Lewis concluded: "If it now finds itself increasingly irrelevant to its social base and at risk of extinction, then it only has itself to blame. Without a genuine, representative sociological and intellectual connection to the society it purportedly serves, it is not really public service broad-

BBC News has long been, a crucial component in the network of establishment power that has helped to create and accelerate the climate catastrophe

casting, but corporate propaganda, and in the long run, who will care if that survives?"

Matt Kennard of Declassified UK, a news service that does actually serve the public interest, believes that: "BBC News is closest we have in UK to straight state propaganda. Sky News + ITV are not great, but I find BBC News, like CNN, actually unwatchable. You can feel it eroding your brain as you watch. Fact we have to pay for pleasure of being propagandised by it makes it farcical."

Des Freedman, Professor of Media and Communication Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London, concurred: "Amazing how little this is understood by people outside the UK who are so enraged by their own propaganda systems (whether state or commercial) that they imagine BBC News MUST necessarily be better and therefore see it as a desirable model for their own news systems"

All too many BBC luvvies and their supporters are currently wringing their hands at the prospect of Rupert Murdoch, or some other nefarious billionaire, getting their hand on the BBC. We are now all supposed to come to the aid of the state broadcaster. Kerry-Anne Mendoza, founder of left-wing news website The Canary, noted the irony: "BBC pundits pleading with the left

to back them after a half decade campaign smearing us as antisemites."

The worst example of the role of BBC News in the propaganda system is enabling the criminal lack of effective government action to tackle the threat of runaway climate instability and the real risk of human extinction. BBC News is, and has long been, a crucial component in the network of establishment power that has helped to create and accelerate this catastrophe.

Climate activist Ben See highlighted the latest examples of dangerous global warming from around the world, and he observed via Twitter: "CLIMATE-EXTINCTION CRISIS – We're heading for 2°C in the 2030s, or the 2040s. The global food system is shifting into high risk territory. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. Billions of people will soon face intolerable risk. Corporate media editors? Sitting tight. Assessing."

This, of course, was a reference to the recent Netflix movie, *Don't Look Up*, which, with deeply black humour, exposed the political and media 'response' to the climate crisis.

If the BBC is to be 'saved', it needs to be rebuilt from the ground up as a truly public service broadcaster. And, more importantly, if the human species is to be saved, we need full and unfettered access to information about how governments and corporations are destroying our planet. Crucially, while we are waiting for an unlikely transformation of the BBC to take place, we should focus on demanding the large-scale government action that is required now to forestall the looming climate catastrophe. **CT**

David Cromwell and David Edwards are co-editors of *Medialens* – www.medialens.org – the UK media watchdog.

THE TRIALS OF JULIAN ASSANGE

ColdType Issue 215 / September 2020

Extra

The last stand of Julian Assange
By Jonathan Cook




At Assange's trial in London / www.coldtype.net

ColdType Issue 215 / September 2020

Extra

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



David Cromwell & David Edwards

ColdType www.coldtype.net | February 2020

Extra

JOHN PILGER
Julian Assange must be freed, not betrayed

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

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



War, have earned its landmark as an imperial pile of monumental servility.

As one of the oldest "diplomatic missions" in the United Kingdom, this relic of empire provides a plausible alibi for Antipodean politicians: a "trust" rewarded or a troublemaker exiled.

Known as High Commissioner, the equivalent of an ambassador, the current beneficiary is George Brandis, who as Attorney General tried to water down Australia's Race Discrimination Act and approved raids on whistleblowers who had revealed the truth about Australia's illegal spying on East Timor during negotiations for the curbing of that impoverished country's oil and gas. This led to the prosecution of whistleblowers Bernard Collaery and "Witness K", on bogus charges. Like Julian Assange, they are to be silenced in a Kafkaesque trial and put away.

Australia House was the ideal starting point for the Assange march.

"Confess," wrote Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, in 1898, "that countries are pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a great game for the domination of the world."

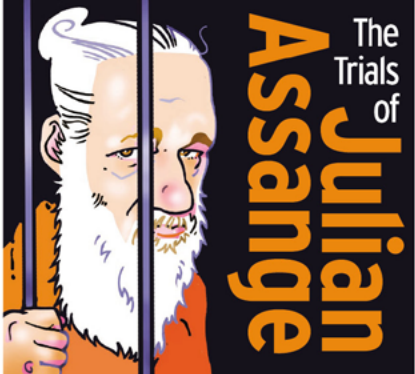
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SPECIAL ISSUE ISSUE 183

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING MAY 2019

The Trials of Julian Assange



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A gas works, a strike, and a light brown overcoat

A powerful example of trade union solidarity is recalled on the fiftieth anniversary of the battle of Saltley Gate during the UK miners' strike of 1972

Gas works have twice had a powerful impact on me. The first was a school visit in 1954 to the gas works at the east end of Eastbourne, Sussex (the site is now a Tesco supermarket).

It was a summer's day but the experience of being enclosed inside the dark, cavernous coking plant is still fixed in my mind, as are the words of the Gas Board official who, as we toured the other facilities, extolled the scientific wonders of the distillation process which apart from the coke produced a multitude of by-products – coal tar, ammonia, dyes and much more. Back then coal (or town) gas and its varied by-products sustained large sections of industrial activity, lit our streets, warmed our rooms and heated our food. Our society was still, as Orwell observed in his 1937 essay, *Down The Mine*, founded on coal.

Eighteen years later, the extent to which the British economy was dependent on coal was put to the test when the National Union of Mineworkers went on strike at midnight on January 8, 1972. By then the decade-long project to convert UK homes to North Sea gas, begun in 1967, was well underway and the dominance of coal as an energy source was displaced by the massive

expansion of oil imports.

The Heath government and the media certainly thought the NUM was in for a hiding, with the *Times newspaper* predicting “only marginal disruption to industry and commerce as a whole”. The *Daily Mail* was also clear: “It will hurt ... them more than it hurts us. ... Few believe that the miners will stay out long enough to inconvenience the public.”

What happened is now history. Although the vote for a strike was 58.8 percent – just over the 55 percent required under the new rules agreed at the annual NUM conference in Aberdeen on July 6, 1971 – all of the 280,000 miners in 289 mines came out in solid support. Instead of passively picketing outside their pits, the miners fanned out over the country to target anywhere coal was distributed or consumed. Power stations, ports and coal depots were blockaded.

As union leader Arthur Scargill pointed out, the clear intention was “to attack the vulnerable points. They were the points of energy: the power stations, the coke depots, the coal depots, the points of supply”. The tactic of flying pickets developed by the Yorkshire miners in the unofficial strikes of 1969 and 1970 now transferred onto the national arena. These actions, supported by

students, other trades unionists and the general public, were extremely effective. Coal stocks were sharply reduced.

After relatively mild weather, a cold spell at the end of January revealed the impact the miners were having as they steadily cut off the supply of coal and coke across the country. The Central Electricity Generating Board reduced voltage right across the national grid and three power stations shut down completely. It was clear that the coal-fired economy was beginning to crumble.

And so, for a second time, events around another gas works played a formative role in my life. Fifty years after Saltley Gate these are my eyewitness recollections of the events leading up to the stunning experience of industrial solidarity which occurred there.

In August 1971 I went to Birmingham to work for the International Socialists (IS), forerunner to what is now the Socialist Workers Party.

In the first week of the 1972 miners' strike I looked at the map for the nearest pits, and drove up to Rugeley in Staffordshire with a young unemployed IS member, John Brown. We made contact with miners from Lee



Pickets outside the gates of the gas works at Saltley Gate, Birmingham, in February 1972, during the strike that was instrumental in bringing down the government of Tory Prime Minister Edward Heath.

Hall Colliery who were picketing the Rugeley 'A' and 'B' power stations. Two of the younger miners were interested in what we had to say and got involved, coming down to speak at meetings we organised in Birmingham and the Black Country in support of the strike.

The West Midlands Gas Board coke depot between Saltley and Nechells in Birmingham escaped the attention of the Midlands NUM for the first two weeks of the strike. The day before the stoppage, on an inside page of the Birmingham *Sunday Mercury* among other strike-related stories, there was a report of a Gas Board official confirming that there were coke stocks of at least 100,000 tons at the Board's Windsor Street depot in Saltley. "We would be willing to sell the coke to coal merchants, subject to loading facilities being available", he said.

This seemed to breach the guidelines agreed between the government and the NUM to supply only priority customers such as hospitals and the vulnerable, but the Gas Board argued that these did not apply because, unlike other coke

depots such as the Coalite plant at Grimethorpe, this one belonged to another industry not involved in the strike. The result was that by the beginning of February several hundred lorries from all over England and Wales were queuing from early morning outside the depot, and on February 3 the *Birmingham Evening Mail* ran a feature on the queues, accompanied by photos of the lines of lorries.

The Midlands NUM Secretary, Jack Lally, had tried and failed to negotiate with the Gas Board for over a fortnight. On Friday February 4 he despatched pickets to the coke depot but their efforts to stop lorries was limited. More pickets came to Birmingham in response to calls from the NUM national office, including Arthur Scargill, who on Saturday night drove down to Birmingham and met Frank Watters, the Communist Party organiser at the Star Club, the Communist Party HQ and bookshop on Essex Street in the city centre.

All sorts of elements within Birmingham's trade union structures came together to ensure the final

victory at Saltley.

I want to mention Alan Law, the full-time official of the TGWU road haulage branch 5/35. I remember branch meetings, when important issues came up, taking place not in some poky room in a pub but in a cinema in Newtown, Birmingham. Alan Law had a reputation in the media reminiscent of the former USA leader of the Teamsters, Jimmy Hoffa, because strike action by his members could swiftly disrupt the West Midlands' economy and beyond.

At Saltley, members of his branch played a key role, as Frank Watters writes in his memoirs, *Being Frank*: "Alongside organising a round-the-clock rota of pickets, the 5/35 branch of the T&G, with its full-time officer, Alan Law, was concerned about the welfare of the hundreds of miners we now had to provide accommodation for. They arranged for 200 beds to be found by their own members. Another gesture, as I have said, was to send a lorry-load of steak and kidney pies. Such an abundance of good food not only brought a lift to morale on the picket line, but I will

never forget seeing strike-breaking lorries driving into the coke depot with steak and kidney pies dripping from the drivers' faces".

As TGWU lorry drivers heeded pickets and turned away, non-union firms were used with the drivers paid £50-£60 per day plus a £50 bonus for every load.

From Monday February 7, each day saw an escalation with more miners and supporters on the picket line, but also more police with clear instructions to keep the gates open and let the lorries through. Decisive and broader solidarity action was needed.

Andy Beckett's informative chapter, "Close The Gates" in his book, *When The Lights Went Out* (2009), covers these momentous events in Birmingham. In the book, when Beckett refers to Roger Harper, he really means Arthur Harper, convenor of Tractors and Transmissions, a British Leyland plant on Drews Lane in North East Birmingham. Its 4,800 workers had the distinction in the early seventies of being among the highest paid and best organised in the sprawling British Leyland group run at the time by Lord Stokes. Arthur was also President of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW) Birmingham East District Committee.

Arthur was a small, stocky, barrel-chested, man who wore a tight-fitting suit, walked with a confident strut and spoke with a strong Black Country accent which, he told me, was deliberately thickened as a negotiating ploy with management. He also proudly wore his paratrooper wings in his jacket lapel outside work. Inside the plant, he wore his blue overalls.

In February 1972 Harper played a crucial role in the mobilisation of Birmingham engineering workers

Arthur Scargill was 34 when Saltley dramatically projected him on to the national arena both in the trade union movement and the media

in support of the beleaguered miners, which culminated in the police closing the gates to the Nechells coke depot on Thursday, 10 February 1972.

By a coincidence of timing, a regular meeting of the AUEW East District Committee on Tuesday, February 8, was a key wheel in the cog which drove forward solidarity action. Arthur Harper as Chair ruled that Arthur Scargill be allowed to speak, and he made a 40-minute passionate appeal and won the committee's support.

The next day an emergency district shop stewards' quarterly was called and 300 stewards endorsed an appeal by Harper to lead demonstrations to Saltley. Two other key unions, the TGWU and National Union of Vehicle Builders, took similar decisions to support solidarity action.

I was at Saltley pretty much continuously from Monday February 7 through Thursday February 10 but after all the arrests, ebbs and flows in terms of the battle between pickets, scab lorry drivers and the police, what happened that Thursday morning was out of this world, an experience that you cannot erase.

As more than 6,000 engineering workers marched over the hill behind their union banners chanting "Close the gates", the Chief Constable of Birmingham, Sir Derrick Capper, bowed to the inevitable

and at sometime between 10.42 and 10.45 – accounts vary, and to be honest clock-watching was the furthest thing on my mind at that time – ordered the gates closed.

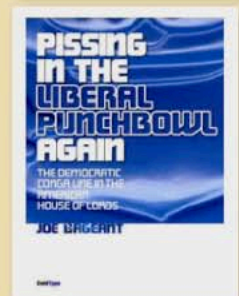
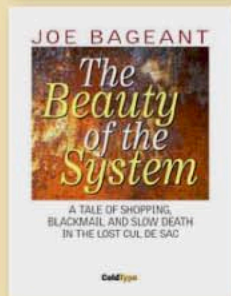
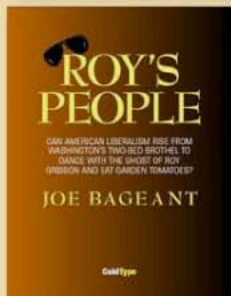
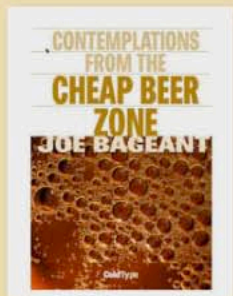
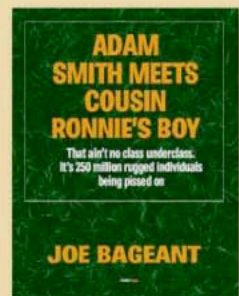
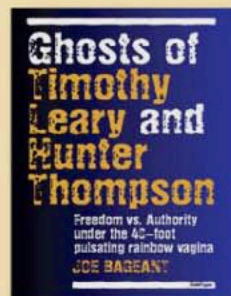
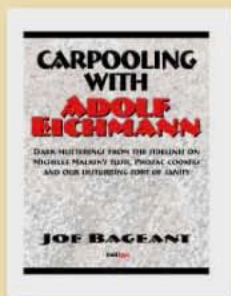
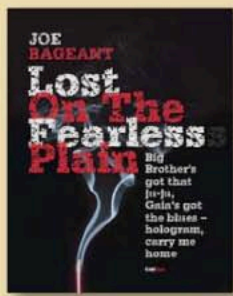
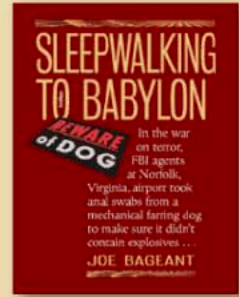
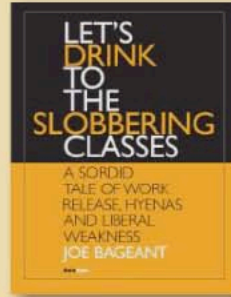
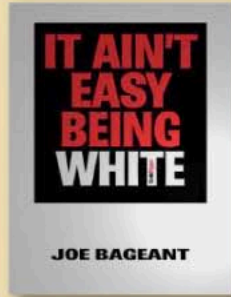
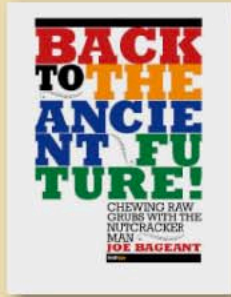
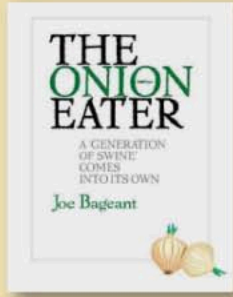
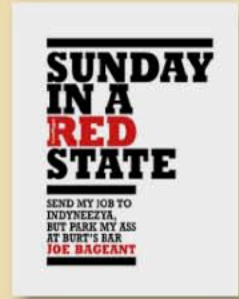
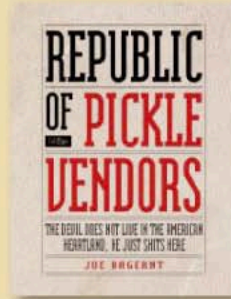
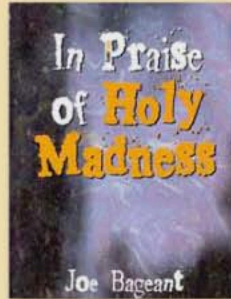
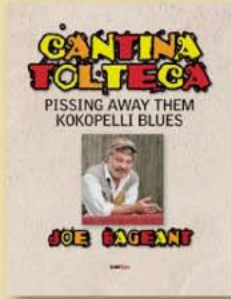
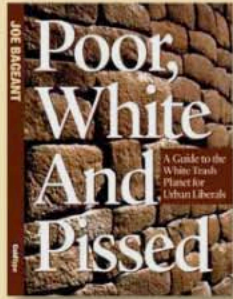
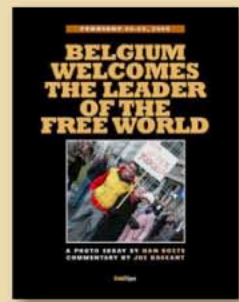
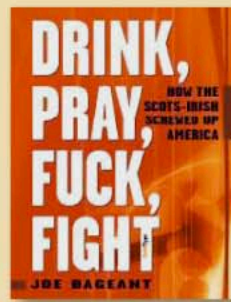
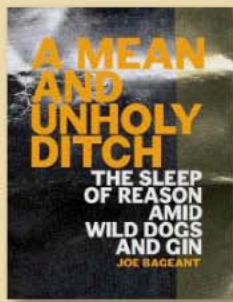
The Chief Constable later said, "That day was the worst day of my life". Arthur Harper's response was, "Funnily enough, it was my happiest since I had been demobbed."

It was Frank Watters, I think, who described Saltley as "the icing on the cake" of the 1972 miners' strike. By then the Heath government knew that the game was over and the miners were on their way to winning a great strike which erased the memories of their defeat in 1926.

Before Saltley Arthur Scargill had begun to establish a regional reputation as an articulate, militant Yorkshire miner during the unofficial strikes of 1969 and 1970. He was 34 when Saltley dramatically projected him on to the national arena both in the trade union movement and the media.

On a trivial personal note, I have only one regret about those momentous days at Saltley. For my 18th birthday my mother went to the Cooperative department store (long since demolished) at the bottom of the Moor in Sheffield and bought me a stylish, light-coloured Crombie coat. On Wednesday February, 9 amid the swirling lines of pickets and police, I was suddenly pulled from behind as a policeman grabbed hold of my coat. He managed to neatly rip my coat down the seams at the back as I fell to the ground. Foolishly I didn't think about getting it stitched together again. It went in a bin. **CT**

Granville Williams is the editor of *MediaNorth* quarterly magazine – www.medianorth.org.uk. He edited *Shafted: The Media, the Miners' Strike and the Aftermath* (2nd ed) 2019.



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TREVOR GRUNDY

Pope's link with Fascism led to African slaughter

As right-wing Italians prepare for the centenary of Mussolini's march on Rome, they should spare a thought for the 300,000 Ethiopians that he and his supporters butchered in a deeply Christian African kingdom during the 1930s

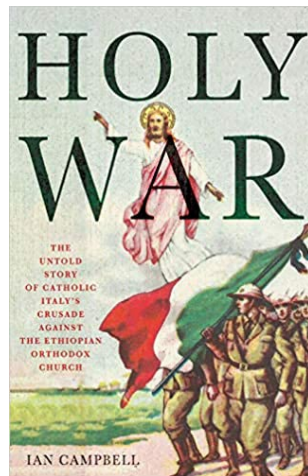
The centenary of Benito Mussolini's March on Rome of October 1922 is just around the corner. So, expect a tsunami of books about the birth, the rise and the fall of Fascism and Nazism in April 1945. Millions of words have been written, millions more are still to come.

Hopefully, some will shed fresh light on a quasi-religious/political phenomenon that swept over much of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s and which, more than a century after its foundation, shows signs of resurgence in the land of its birth – Italy.

Journalist friends in Rome tell me that tens of thousands of Italians are planning trips to Predappio in the Emilia-Romagna Province, birthplace of Benito Mussolini, the son of a socialist blacksmith in 1883, to mark the occasion.

When it comes to studies about the relationship between Hitler and Mussolini, Il Duce (The Leader in Italian) is usually portrayed as the buffoonish ice cream salesman in silk blackshirt doing funny salutes on balconies; a man who had good 'socialist' ideas when he was young but who, along the road, fell under the influence of Hitler and became the German Führer's tool, his puppet, his fellow monster.

According to myth, the Italian



HOLY WAR

The Untold Story of Catholic Italy's Crusade Against the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

Ian Campbell

Hurst & Company, London

UK £30 US \$?? Can\$50

soldiers were only ever reluctant Fascists. Nice guys really. Lovely eyes and smiles. Not at all like the German Waffen SS. So, if people want to waste their money by travelling to a tiny village in Italy to lay wreaths and do salutes – let them.

Yet, imagine the outcry if it was discovered that tens of thousands of Austrians and Germans were planning air, bus and coach trips to Munich to mark the centenary of

Hitler's attempted coup in 1923. And the explosion of international morality that would erupt if travel agents began planning trips to Berlin to mark the centenary of Hitler coming to power in January 1933.

So, three cheers for *Holy War*, the new book by Ian Campbell who has turned the caring Italian Army myth upside down and inside out in what is the perfect antidote to Louis de Bernieres' *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* and the even more embarrassing film version of his 1994 novel.

Holy War is a long, carefully researched book about a little-known period of recent history, and should, be read along with David Kertzer's *The Pope and Mussolini: The Secret History of Pius XI and the rise of Fascism*.

It is the 'go for' book if you want to learn as much as you need to know about an invasion that helped shape the rest of the 1930s, a paving stone towards World War in 1939.

Ian Campbell is no stranger to Ethiopia and its long, often tragic story. His first book on Italian colonialism in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) *The Plot to Kill Graziani* (Addis Ababa University Press 2010) was declared Ethiopian book of the year. His second, *The Massacre of Debre Libanos*

(AAU Press, 2014) and a third *The Addis Ababa Massacre* (Hurst, London and Oxford University Press, New York, 2017) was an account of the atrocities committed by the Italian Army and its Fascist commanders following the attack on civilians the year after the ‘official’ end of the Italian invasion, a time when most of the world looked away from events in Africa towards Italy’s and Germany’s new intervention in the Spanish Civil War.

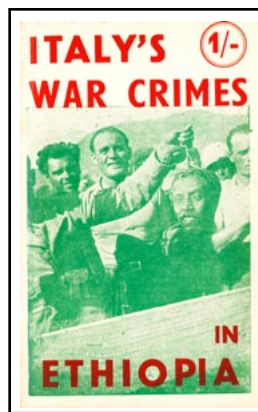
In Holy War Campbell tells us that, more than thirty years ago in the Eastern Highlands he was conducting a socio-cultural study of the communities in a large valley in the rugged district of Northern Shewa. The principal centre of population in the gorge used to be a monastery named Debre Libanos. Dating from the 13th-century, it constituted one of the greatest and most revered institutions of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to which the majority of Ethiopians belonged.

“To my surprise”, Campbell writes, “I was informed by the priests that the entire monastic community had been brutally massacred by Italians in 1937.

“I knew that in October 1935 Ethiopia became the world’s first sovereign state to fall victim to Fascist invasion. I also knew that it was not the last, for Mussolini’s attempted annexation of Ethiopia inspired Adolf Hitler and the Nazis, disempowered the League of Nations, and triggered a chain of military invasions that culminated in the Second World War. However, I was under the impression that, unlike the Nazis and the Japanese, Italian soldiers of the 1930s were bumbling, harmless and friendly young men fighting reluctantly in a war in which they had been drafted against their will. Atrocities were not something I associated with Italians.”



In 1935 Pope Pius XI declared Ethiopian Orthodox Christians to be heretics, designating them as Enemies of the Faith.



The Italians displayed the head of Dejazmach Haylu Kebede, son of the ruler of the Christian ruler of Wag. Image shows cover of a pamphlet on Italy’s war crimes.

The war of conquest conducted by Fascist Italy started in October 1935 and ended (officially) in May 1936. The origins of the conflict can be traced back to the 19th-century when the Ethiopian Army defeated the Italians after the Battle of Adwa in 1896. The defeat remained a thorn in Italy’s side and Mussolini, dreaming and scheming for a new Roman Empire, set about getting his revenge.

Says Campbell: “With an army consisting initially of some two hundred thousand well-armed soldiers equipped with tanks and flame throwers and with the support of hundreds of aircraft equipped with machine guns and loaded

with bombs and chemical weapons, the Italians launched an offensive against the Ethiopians, who despite Haile Selassie’s recent attempt at modernisation, were still poorly armed.”

The war was short and costly in human lives, especially on the Ethiopian side. Ethiopia suffered almost 300,000 battle-field deaths, over 30 times more than Italy.

The treatment of prisoners and civilians was ruthless. Thousand were led into concentration camps to die of disease or starvation.

But when Mussolini declared victory on May 7, 1936, the country was far from vanquished. Two-thirds was still under Ethiopian control and there was never a formal surrender. Open battles were superseded by guerrilla actions led by Ethiopian patriots. Italian reprisals were violent and bloody.

It was then that the massacre of Addis Ababa took place: a massacre in response to an assassination attempt on Marshall Graziani, the Viceroy of Ethiopia. After grenades were thrown by patriots in front of Graziani’s car, Italian soldiers started shooting all Africans in sight. The killings continued for three days, leaving several thousand dead.

The second great massacre took place in Debre Libanos on May 8. After discovering the links between monks and guerrilla fighters, Graziani ordered the execution of almost 300 monks, whose corpses remained unburied until well after the end of war.

Graziani’s massacres persuaded many Ethiopians to take up arms against the Italian invaders.

But the Italian Army didn’t consist of just Italian soldiers. Campbell explains that many askaris from the Italian colonies of Eritrea, Italian Somaliland and Libya fought for Mussolini. The Eritreans were

well-trained and armed, but the majority were members of the same Orthodox Christian faith as their Ethiopian cousins and could hardly be expected to engage in a Roman Catholic crusade against their co-religionists. “These issues would lead the Italians to increasingly deploy Muslim brigades for their campaigns against the Ethiopian Church”, writes Campbell.

However, the most shocking chapter of this most worthwhile book is the section titled *Missionaries of the Cross*. In many ways, it is the key to the book and deserves to be read several times in order to grasp the full horror of what happened when the world’s largest group of Christians – Roman Catholics – fell behind a Pope, giving tacit support to the Fascist regime in a cruel crusade against the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as well as the Ethiopian Army and the country’s largely Christian population.

The barbarity of the invading forces shocked the Ethiopians because Italy claimed to be a Christian country. But, writes Campbell, Italian consciences were clear because the official view of the Roman Catholic Church was that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was in heresy because of its belief that Jesus had one nature – the Divine – and not two: Divine and Human.

The Pope, Pius XI, cardinals and priests assured Italians from their pulpits that the invasion of Ethiopia was a Catholic crusade blessed by God. There were many messages to be put across, Campbell writes, “but the critical one was that a Holy war meant that any of God’s warriors who fell in battle would be guaranteed a place in heaven.”

Then this: “On October 19, the day after the French expressed their horror at the brutality of the invasion, *La Civiltà Cattolica* hit back at the

Pope Pius XI, cardinals and priests assured Italians from their pulpits that the invasion of Ethiopia was a Catholic crusade blessed by God

critics. This was the Jesuit journal whose contents were approved by the Vatican secretary of state and which was read by Catholics as the expression of the Pope’s views on the issues of the day. In a remarkable article that introduced new vocabulary labelling Ethiopian clergy as ‘ignorant and corrupt’, the message was merciless, justifying the carnage on the grounds that Ethiopia constituted a typical example of the moral and intellectual decay of a people detached from Rome through schism and heresy.”

Campbell quotes David Kertzer: “Not since the days when popes ruled the papal states had the Catholic Church been so closely identified with the government. Not since the time of the crusades had it played such a central role in urging Catholics to foreign conquest.”

He adds: “The message received by the people of Italy and Catholics around the world was not unequivocal – the Fasces and the Cross were one and by early 1936 support for the on-going invasion was virtually universal throughout Italy. Indeed, it is difficult to overstate the popularity of the war at that time; thousands of Blackshirt volunteers embarking for Ethiopia filled the ports of Genoa and Naples as far as the eye could see. The Church had served Mussolini well.”

This is a story that needs to be

turned into a film. But who would want to play the role of Santina Mangaria, Bishop of Civita Castellana, a diocese near Rome? On December 8 1935, at a public function in the presence of Mussolini, he spoke glowingly of the invasion of Ethiopia, thanking God for allowing him to see “these days of epic grandeur”. Approaching Il Duce, the bishop slipped off his gold pastoral chain and handed it to him with the Fascist salute. Then the bishop of San Miniato in the province of Pisa, Tuscany, told Mussolini that “for the victory of Italy in Ethiopia, the Italian clergy are ready to melt down the gold of the churches and the bronze of the bells.”

In 1933 the Vatican’s Concordat with Hitler left a distinct impression that the Vatican saw dictatorships rather than democracy as its best defence against Communism, even if that meant disregarding the plight of German Jews and other ethnic minorities while looking the other way when the Roman Catholic Church insulted and downgraded the Ethiopian Orthodox Church community.

Earlier, in 1929, Mussolini had the Lateran Treaty under his leather belt, a treaty between the Fascist state and the Vatican which made the Catholic Church a state which was secure as long as its leaders remained quiet when faced with Fascist policies they didn’t like. Mussolini was seen by Catholic and many other people – including Winston Churchill – as the West’s best bet against the advance of Godless Communism. Could any Fascist or Nazi leader worth his salt, or his poison gas, ask for anything more? **CT**

Trevor Grundy is a British journalist who worked in Central, Eastern and Southern Africa from 1966 to 1996.



Photo: Alexander Lutsenko / 123rf.com

JONATHAN COOK

UK helped create refugees it wants to keep out

Those making perilous journeys for asylum in Europe have been displaced by wars and droughts, for which the West is largely to blame

The deaths late last year of at least 27 people who drowned as they tried to cross the Channel in an inflatable dinghy in search of asylum have quickly been overshadowed by a diplomatic row engulfing Britain and France.

As European states struggle to shut their borders to refugees, the two countries are in a war of words over who is responsible for stopping the growing number of small boats trying to reach British shores. Britain has demanded the right to patrol French waters and station border police on French territory, suggesting

that France is not up to the job. The French government, meanwhile, has blamed the UK for serving as a magnet for illegal workers by failing to regulate its labour market.

European leaders are desperate for quick answers. French President Emmanuel Macron called an emergency meeting of regional leaders a week ago to address the “migration” crisis, though Britain’s home secretary, Priti Patel, was disinclined.

Britain’s post-Brexit government is readier to act unilaterally. It has been intensifying its “hostile environment” policy towards asylum seekers. That includes plans to

drive back small boats crossing the Channel, in violation of maritime and international law, and to “off-shore” refugees in remote detention camps in places such as Ascension Island in the mid-Atlantic. UK legislation is also being drafted to help deport refugees and prosecute those who aid them, in breach of its commitments under the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Not surprisingly, anti-immigration parties are on the rise across Europe, as governments question the legitimacy of most of those arriving in the region, calling them variously “illegal immigrants”, “invaders” and

“economic migrants”.

The terminology is not only meant to dehumanise those seeking refuge. It is also designed to obscure the West’s responsibility for creating the very conditions that have driven these people from their homes and on to a perilous journey towards a new life.

In recent years, more than 20,000 refugees are estimated to have died crossing the Mediterranean in small boats to reach Europe, including at least 1,300 so far this year. Only a few of these deaths have been given a face – most notably Aylan Kurdi, a Syrian toddler whose body washed up on the Turkish coast in 2015 after he and others in his family drowned on a small boat trying to get to Europe.

The numbers trying to reach the UK across the Channel, though smaller, are rising too – as are the deaths. The 27 people who drowned two weeks ago were the single largest loss of life from a Channel crossing since agencies began keeping records seven years ago. Barely noted by the media was the fact that the only two survivors separately said British and French coastguards ignored their phone calls for help as their boat began to sink.

But no European leader appears ready to address the deeper reasons for the waves of refugees arriving on Europe’s shores – or the West’s role in causing the “migration crisis”.

The 17 men, seven women, including one who was pregnant, and three children who died were reportedly mostly from Iraq. Others trying to reach Europe are predominantly from Iran, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen and parts of North Africa.

That is not accidental. There is probably nowhere the legacy of western meddling – directly and in-

The brutality of western policies, even before the region’s strongmen were toppled, was trumpeted by figures such as Madeleine Albright

directly – has been felt more acutely than the resource-rich Middle East.

The roots of this can be traced back more than a century, when Britain, France and other European powers carved up, ruled and plundered the region as part of a colonial project to enrich themselves, especially through the control of oil.

They pursued strategies of divide and rule to accentuate ethnic tensions and delay local pressure for nation-building and independence. The colonisers also intentionally starved Middle Eastern states of the institutions needed to govern after independence.

The truth is, however, that Europe never really left the region, and was soon joined by the United States, the new global superpower, to keep rivals such as the Soviet Union and China at bay. They propped up corrupt dictators and intervened to make sure favoured allies stayed put. Oil was too rich a prize to be abandoned to local control.

After the fall of the Soviet Union three decades ago, the Middle East was once again torn apart by western interference – this time masquerading as “humanitarianism”.

The US has led sanctions regimes, “shock and awe” air strikes, invasions and occupations that devastated states independent of western control, such as Iraq, Libya and Syria. They may have been

held together by dictators, but these states – until they were broken apart – provided some of the best education, healthcare and welfare services in the region.

The brutality of western policies, even before the region’s strongmen were toppled, was trumpeted by figures such as Madeleine Albright, former US President Bill Clinton’s secretary of state. In 1996, when asked about economic sanctions that by then were estimated to have killed half a million Iraqi children in a failed bid to remove Saddam Hussein, she responded: “We think the price is worth it.”

Groups such as al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State quickly moved in to fill the void that was left after the West laid waste to the economic and social infrastructure associated with these authoritarian governments. They brought their own kind of occupation, fragmenting, oppressing and weakening these societies, and providing additional pretexts for meddling, either directly by the West or through local clients, such as Saudi Arabia.

States in the region that so far have managed to withstand this western “slash and burn” policy, or have ousted their occupiers – such as Iran and Afghanistan – continue to suffer from crippling, punitive sanctions imposed by the US and Europe. Notably, Afghanistan has emerged from its two-decade, US-led occupation in even poorer shape than when it was invaded.

Elsewhere, Britain and others have aided Saudi Arabia in its prolonged, near-genocidal bombing campaigns and blockade against Yemen. Recent reports have suggested that as many as 300 Yemeni children are dying each day as a result. And yet, after decades of waging economic warfare on these Middle Eastern countries, western

states have the gall to decry those fleeing the collapse of their societies as “economic migrants”.

The fallout from western interference has turned millions across the region into refugees, forced from their homes by escalating ethnic discord, continued fighting, the loss of vital infrastructure, and lands contaminated with ordnance. Today, most are languishing in tent encampments in the region, subsisting on food handouts and little else. The West’s goal is local reintegration: settling these refugees back into a life close to where they formerly lived.

The destabilisation caused by western actions throughout the Middle East is being compounded by a second blow, for which the West must also take the lion’s share of the blame.

Societies destroyed and divided by western-fuelled wars and economic sanctions have been in no position to withstand rising temperatures and ever-longer droughts, which are afflicting the Middle East as the climate crisis takes hold. Chronic water shortages and repeated crop failures – compounded by weak governments unable to assist – are driving people off their lands, in search of better lives elsewhere.

In recent years, some 1.2 million Afghans were reportedly forced from their homes by a mix of droughts and floods. In August, aid groups warned that more than 12 million Syrians and Iraqis had lost access to water, food and electricity. “The total collapse of water and food production for millions of Syrians and Iraqis is imminent,” said Carsten Hansen, the regional director for the Norwegian Refugee Council.

According to recent research, “Iran is experiencing unprecedented climate-related problems such as drying of lakes and rivers, dust storms, record-breaking temperatures, droughts, and floods.” In Oc-

Rather than aiding those seeking asylum in the West, the 1951 Refugee Convention may prove to be one of the biggest obstacles they face

tober, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies noted that climate change was wreaking havoc in Yemen too, with extreme flooding and an increased risk of waterborne diseases.

Western states cannot evade their responsibility for this. Those same countries that asset-stripped the Middle East over the past century also exploited the resulting fossil-fuel bonanza to intensify the industrialisation and modernisation of their own economies. The US and Australia had the highest rates of fossil fuel consumption per capita in 2019, followed by Germany and the UK. China also ranks high, but much of its oil consumption is expended on producing cheap goods for western markets.

The planet is heating up because of oil-hungry western lifestyles. And now, the early victims of the climate crisis – those in the Middle East whose lands provided that oil – are being denied access to Europe by the very same states that caused their lands to become increasingly uninhabitable.

Europe is preparing to make its borders impregnable to the victims of its colonial interference, its wars and the climate crisis that its consumption-driven economies have generated. Countries such as Britain are not just worried about the tens of thousands of applications they receive each year for asylum from

those who have risked everything for a new life.

They are looking to the future. Refugee camps are already under severe strain across the Middle East, testing the capacities of their host countries – Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq – to cope.

Western states know the effects of climate change are only going to worsen, even as they pay lip service to tackling the crisis with a Green New Deal. Millions, rather than the current thousands, will be hammering on Europe’s doors in decades to come.

Rather than aiding those seeking asylum in the West, the 1951 Refugee Convention may prove to be one of the biggest obstacles they face. It excludes those displaced by climate change, and western states are in no hurry to broaden its provisions. It serves instead as their insurance policy.

Last month, immediately after the 27 refugees drowned in the Channel, Patel told fellow legislators that it was time “to send a clear message that crossing the Channel in this lethal way, in a small boat, is not the way to come to our country.”

But the truth is that, if the British government and other European states get their way, there will be no legitimate route to enter for those from the Middle East whose lives and homelands have been destroyed by the West. **CT**

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

KAREN J. GREENBERG

Guantánamo; America's prison from hell

On its 20th anniversary, there's still no sign that the country's 'offshore complex of mistreatment and injustice' will ever be closed

It's now more than 20 years later and that American offshore symbol of mistreatment and injustice, the prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, is still open. In fact, as 2021 ended, *New York Times* reporter Carol Rosenberg, who has covered that notorious prison complex since its first day, reported on the Pentagon's plans to build a brand-new prefab courthouse at that naval base. It's intended to serve as a second, even more secret facility for holding the four remaining trials of war-on-terror detainees and is scheduled to be ready "sometime in 2023."

Close Guantánamo? Not soon, it seems. The cost of that new construction is a mere \$4-million, a relatively minor sum compared to the \$6-billion dollars and counting that detention and trial operations had claimed by 2019, according to the estimate of one whistleblower.

Notably, the news about the building of that secret courtroom coincided with the 20-year anniversary of the detention facility and the administration of the second president who's intending to shut the place down. Its plans are meant to suggest that the proposed structure will actually contribute to that never-ending process of closing the world's most notorious prison camp.

Guantánamo currently has 39 detainees in custody, 12 of whom are held under a military commissions system; 18 of whom, long kept without charges of any sort, have now been officially cleared for release to chosen countries which agree to have them (which doesn't mean that they'll actually be released); and nine of whom, also never charged, are merely hoping for such clearance.

With two courtrooms instead of one, trials, at least more than a year away, could theoretically take place at the same time rather than sequentially. Unfortunately, it's hard to imagine that the number of courtrooms will have any effect on a speedier outcome. As Scott Roehm, Washington director for the Center for Victims of Torture, recently told the *Daily Beast*, "There is a consensus that the commissions have failed – but they haven't failed because of a lack of courtrooms."

Consider it a record of sorts that, in 20 years, only two trials have ever been completed there, both in 2008. Both led to convictions, one of which was later overturned, one of which is still on appeal. This paltry record is another sign of the forever reality of Guantánamo, where neither small nips and tucks nor major alterations

have proved anything more than cosmetic dressing for a situation that has proven intractable over three presidencies and the beginning of a fourth.

Of late, there has been a growing consensus that closing the prison is a must, especially given the final debacle of the US departure from Afghanistan. As Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) wrote at *Lawfare* on the 20-year anniversary of that offshore symbol of all-American injustice, "Ending the failed experiment of detention at Guantánamo Bay won't be easy. But now that the US's war in Afghanistan is over, it's time to shut the doors on Guantánamo once and for all". On the floor of the Senate that same day, Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) called for closure as well, deriding the prison camp as "a symbol of our failure to hold terrorists accountable and our failure to honour the sacrifices of our service members. These failures should not be passed on to another generation – they should end with the Biden Administration."

But calling for closure is one thing, closing that prison is quite another.

Commonly, the closing of Guantánamo is envisioned as involving a series of practical steps which I, like so many others, have



A tattered US flag flies behind the barbed wire fence surrounding the Guantánamo Bay prison complex in Cuba.

been suggesting for years now. The most recent proposal comes from the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Ethics and the Rule of Law, which has outlined a 13-step process aimed at shutting down that facility for good. This entails resolving the remaining cases in the military commissions (10 still facing trial, two already convicted), while emptying the prison of its remaining 27 prisoners held in indefinite detention without charge.

Let's begin with the military commissions. The new courtroom – facing completion sometime in 2023, potentially almost two years away – is meant to “speed up” the trial process. Still, in the last 20 years, there have been just eight convictions, most due to plea deals. Three of them have since been overturned and three more are still on appeal. In other words, we're talking about a staggering picture of wholesale failure.

True, there have been dozens of pre-trial hearings for the four trials now pending. But pre-trial hearings are one thing, trials another. Most incredibly, the trials of the alleged 9/11 co-conspirators have still not begun.

And there's little hope that those will ever find a way forward to resolution. For starters, the individuals to be tried were first tortured at CIA black sites before being brought to Cuba, and much of the evidence and testimony relevant to their cases is largely derived from such torture practices. Even with resolution, it's nearly impossible to imagine how such proceedings would ever lead to justice.

There are at least two suggested ways of finally resolving the military commissions in the relatively near future. Human rights lawyer and military commissions defense

attorney Michel Paradis recently laid these out on a Lawfare podcast. One would be for the government to take the death penalty off the table and open the door to plea deals. Numerous experts have supported this way forward. So, too, Colleen Kelly, head of September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, an organization of the family members of 9/11 victims, has indicated support for this option, as she recently testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee. Another option, Paradis pointed out, would be to move the trials to federal courts in the United States. Unfortunately, that's an unlikely prospect indeed, given a congressional ban on Guantánamo detainees being brought to this country that's been in place for more than a decade.

In 2010, one such detainee was indeed tried in federal court. That was then-Attorney General Eric Holder's idea – as a prelude, he hoped, to

bringing the other trials to federal courts – and it was the right one. The case in question was that of Ahmed Ghailani, accused of involvement in embassy bombings in 1998 that killed 224 individuals. Like others held at Guantánamo, he had been tortured at a CIA black site, evidence that was excluded at trial. He was, in the end, acquitted on 284 of 285 charges. Nonetheless, the case was resolved and, on that final charge, he’s serving a life term at a federal penitentiary in Kentucky.

On the other side of the Guantánamo quagmire are those detainees who will never be charged, the ones Carol Rosenberg originally dubbed the “forever prisoners”. Eighteen of them have now been cleared for release by the prison’s Periodic Review Board. For those forever detainees to actually exit the prison, however, depends upon diplomatic arrangements with other countries.

To date, such detainees have gone to at least 60 countries in Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. At least 150 of them were sent to nations other than those in which they had been citizens. Those transfers were arranged by the special envoy for the State Department’s Guantánamo closure office, which itself was closed during Donald Trump’s presidency and remains so today. Reopening it is a necessary step towards emptying Guantánamo of its forever detainees.

Unfortunately, it’s most likely that new ways will be discovered to kick the ball of closure endlessly down the road. As attorney Tom Wilner, who has worked as a human rights lawyer on behalf of several of the detainees, said at a panel held to commemorate the prison’s 20th anniversary, “The military commissions aren’t ever going to work.”

Meanwhile, when it comes to those who are not yet charged but have

“Released” detainees found, as a *Washington Post* report summed it up, that “life after Guantánamo is its own kind of prison”

been authorised for transfer, there’s no guarantee that such releases will actually occur any time soon.

In the legal quagmire the US has created, there is, in fact, no easy solution to closing Guantanamo.

It’s worth noting, as well, that even were the Biden administration capable of implementing an immediate, aggressive strategy to shut the prison down, the horrors it unleashed are guaranteed to linger well into the future. “There are some problems of Guantánamo that will never go away”, Daniel Fried, President Barack Obama’s first special envoy for closure, admitted to the *Guardian* recently.

For one thing, the multi-decade inability of the American legal system to try such prisoners, either on or offshore, has left a stain on the competency of the country’s judicial system, civilian and military, as well as on Congress’s ability to create legitimate workable alternatives to that very system. Not being able, of all things, even to bring the alleged 9/11 attack co-conspirators, already in custody at Guantánamo Bay, to any court sends a message that American justice in the 21st-century is incapable of handling such incredibly important cases.

And when it comes to the detainees who have been transferred elsewhere in the world, the story is hardly less grim. As the *Guard-*

ian has reported, those sent to third countries regularly encountered further forms of deprivation, cruelty, imprisonment, or torture. Often unschooled in the language of their host countries, denied travel papers, and stigmatised due to their Guantánamo past, “released” detainees found, as a *Washington Post* report summed it up, that “life after Guantánamo is its own kind of prison.”

Mansoor Adayfi, a detainee transferred to Serbia rather than his home country of Yemen, has described the dire conditions of post-prison life in his book *Don’t Forget Us Here*, referring to it as “Guantánamo 2.0”. As he told the *Intercept’s* Cora Currier recently, “Released, I have been detained, beaten, arrested, and they have my friends harassed, interrogated”. And that, of course, is after, like so many prisoners in that island jail, having been regularly beaten, force-fed, and kept in solitary confinement while there.

In such a context, the plan for an all-new courtroom takes on a new kind of significance.

From the very beginning of Guantánamo, the courthouse at that US base on the island of Cuba has served as a revealing symbol of the prison’s venality.

In the first days of that war-on-terror detention camp, as I described in my book *The Least Worst Place: Guantanamo’s First 100 Days*, Captain Bob Buehn, then the naval base commander there, gave himself the mission of finding a proper plot of land on which to build a courtroom to try the detainees arriving by the plane load. He considered it his duty to do so, only to quickly grasp that no one in power considered this the prison’s objective and that no such plans would be forthcoming any time soon.

As Major General Michael Lehnert, the commander of that detention

facility at the time of its opening, reminded me recently, the initial mission was about “intelligence collection,” not trials. Accordingly, it wasn’t until two years later that hearings even began for the detainees – and then only for a few of them.

Originally, those proceedings took place in a windowless room constructed to ensure security and secrecy, a room far too small for its purpose. Once a formal version of the military commissions was authorised by Congress in the Military Commissions Act of 2006, a new facility was built that included a state-of-the-art SCIF (sensitive compartmented information facility), a carefully “secured” room meant to be a classified setting. It was an ugly irony, however, that underneath that room was a toxic waste dump, with all the perils to lawyers and others you might imagine. Sometimes all too literally reeking of the environmental misdeeds of the past, the new courtroom has gone forward on a poisoned path of its own, somehow trying to avoid the information extracted by torture that lay at the heart of the cases waiting to be tried.

Now, a new building is going up, even more wed to secrecy as well as to the suppression of the torture the defendants endured at American hands. As Carol Rosenberg reports, it will be wrapped in yet more secrecy, since the “current war court chamber” did at least allow spectators. The new one won’t. “Only people with a secret clearance”, Rosenberg reports in the *New York Times*, “such as members of the intelligence community and specially cleared guards and lawyers, will be allowed inside the new chamber.” Observers, including the family members of victims, will have to watch by video feed.

Fifteen years ago, when plans for

Even President Bush has expressed his interest in substantially reducing the number of detainees at Guantánamo Bay and eventually closing it

the current courtroom were introduced, the ACLU asked senators to block funds for the building of the courthouse, arguing that “there is no need for an elaborate, permanent courthouse complex at Guantánamo Bay... Even President Bush has expressed his interest in substantially reducing the number of detainees at Guantánamo Bay and eventually closing it. It’s remarkable how little progress has been made since then.

What former commander Bob Buehn discovered so long ago as a lack of appetite for trials of any kind has evolved over time into a “trial” system of endless delays that only help perpetuate the worst of Guantánamo, while eternally extending the life of that now globally notorious prison camp.

As Lee Wolosky, who served as President Obama’s special envoy for closure of Guantánamo, wrote on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of that prison: “In large part, the Guantánamo mess is self-inflicted – a result of our own decisions to engage in torture, hold detainees indefinitely without charge, set up dysfunctional military commissions, and attempt to avoid oversight by the federal courts... [I]t is past time,” he concluded, “to retire this relic of the forever wars.”

The country would do well to heed his words once and for all and so avoid a 30th anniversary of an American institution that has so violated the norms of justice, decency, and the rule of law. **CT**

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