

**THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN CAVES** | NATE ROBERT  
**ANTI-TERRORISM IS DESTROYING DEMOCRACY** | VASHTI KENWAY  
**OUR POVERTY MYTH** | JILL RICHARDSON

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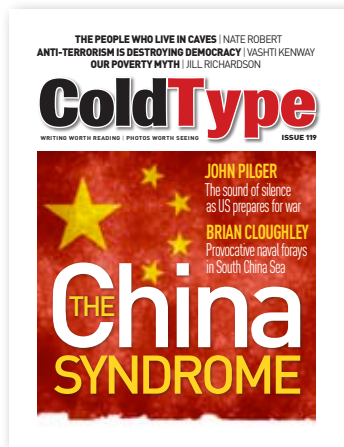
WRITING WORTH READING | PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

ISSUE 119

**JOHN PILGER**  
The sound of silence  
as US prepares for war

**BRIAN CLOUGHLEY**  
Provocative naval forays  
in South China Sea

**THE China**  
**SYNDROME**



### Cover art

Nicholas Raymond (via Flickr.com)

– See Pages 3-7

# ColdType

Issue 119 / June 2016

- 
- |     |  |                         |
|-----|--|-------------------------|
| 3.  | <b>SOUND OF SILENCE AS THE US PREPARES FOR WAR</b> | JOHN PILGER             |
| 6.  | <b>SURGING TOWARDS ANOTHER WAR</b>                 | BRIAN CLOUGHLEY         |
| 8.  | <b>'ANTI-TERRORISM' IS DESTROYING DEMOCRACY</b>    | VASHTI KENWAY           |
| 12. | <b>REFORM OR REVOLUTION?</b>                       | CHRIS HEDGES            |
| 17. | <b>THE PENTAGON'S WAR ON ACCOUNTABILITY</b>        | WILLIAM D. HARTUNG      |
| 22. | <b>SONG, SOUL &amp; SALVATION</b>                  | JOHN COHEN, TONY SUTTON |
| 28. | <b>AMERICA'S COSMIC TAX GAP</b>                    | SAM PIZZIGATI           |
| 30. | <b>THE POVERTY MYTH</b>                            | JILL RICHARDSON         |
| 32. | <b>JOURNALISTS UNITED AGAINST ELECTORAL REFORM</b> | RICK SALUTIN            |



*The people who still live in caves  
– Pages 40-43*

- |     |   |  |
|-----|---|--|
| 35. | <b>MIDNIGHT SURFERS</b>                           | DELL FRANKLIN                                  |
| 38. | <b>THE PLACE WHERE PEOPLE STILL LIVE IN CAVES</b> | NATE ROBERT                                    |
| 42. | <b>THE EUROPEAN UNION: A HOUSE DIVIDED</b>        | CONN M. HALLINAN                               |
| 46. | <b>RELIGIOUS ZEALOTS TAKING OVER ISRAELI ARMY</b> | JONATHAN COOK                                  |
| 48. | <b>HITLERGATE?</b>                                | DAVID EDWARDS                                  |
| 53. | <b>NEW POLITICAL EARTHQUAKE IN BRAZIL</b>         | GLENN GREENWALD, ANDREW FISHMAN, DAVID MIRANDA |

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# Sound of silence as the US prepares for war

**John Pilger** points to the need for a genuinely anti-imperialist analysis of Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump, and yes — Bernie Sanders.

**R**eturning to the United States in an election year, I am struck by the silence. I have covered four presidential campaigns, starting with 1968; I was with Robert Kennedy when he was shot and I saw his assassin, preparing to kill him. It was a baptism in the American way, along with the salivating violence of the Chicago police at the Democratic Party's rigged convention. The great counterrevolution had begun.

Martin Luther King, the first to be assassinated that year, had dared link the suffering of African-Americans and the people of Vietnam. When Janis Joplin sang, Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose, she spoke perhaps unconsciously for millions of America's victims in faraway places.

"We lost 58,000 young soldiers in Vietnam, and they died defending your freedom. Now don't you forget it." So said a National Parks Service guide, as I filmed last week at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington. He was addressing a school party of young teenagers in bright orange T-shirts. As if by rote, he inverted the truth about Vietnam into an unchallenged lie.

The millions of Vietnamese who died and were maimed and poisoned and dispossessed by the American invasion have no historical place in young minds, not to mention the estimated 60,000 veterans who took their own lives. A friend of mine, a marine

who became a paraplegic in Vietnam, was often asked, "Which side did you fight on?"

A few years ago, I attended a popular exhibition called The Price of Freedom, at the venerable Smithsonian Institution in Washington. The lines of ordinary people, mostly children, shuffling through a Santa's grotto of revisionism, were dispensed a variety of lies: the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki saved "a million lives." Iraq was "liberated [by] air strikes of unprecedented precision". The theme was unerringly heroic: only Americans pay the price of freedom.

## Washington's boot

The 2016 election campaign is remarkable not only for the rise of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders but also for the resilience of an enduring silence about a murderous self-bestowed divinity. A third of the members of the United Nations have felt Washington's boot, overturning governments, subverting democracy, imposing blockades and boycotts. Most of the presidents responsible have been liberal – Truman, Kennedy, Johnson, Carter, Clinton, Obama.

The breathtaking record of perfidy is so mutated in the public mind, wrote the late Harold Pinter, that it "never happened ... Nothing ever happened. Even while it was happening it wasn't happening. It didn't matter. It was of no interest. It didn't mat-

**Carried upwards by easterly spring winds, fallout in the form of isotopes of caesium, iodine and xenon had blown across much of Europe**

**In 2009, Obama promised to help “rid the world of nuclear weapons,” and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Yet no American president has built more nuclear warheads than Obama**

ter.” Pinter expressed a mock admiration for what he called “a quite clinical manipulation of power worldwide while masquerading as a force for universal good. It’s a brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis.”

Take Obama. As he prepares to leave office, the fawning has begun all over again. He is “cool.” One of the more violent presidents, Obama gave full reign to the Pentagon war-making apparatus of his discredited predecessor. He prosecuted more whistleblowers – truth-tellers – than any president. He pronounced Chelsea Manning guilty before she was tried. Today, Obama runs an unprecedented worldwide campaign of terrorism and murder by drone.

In 2009, Obama promised to help “rid the world of nuclear weapons,” and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Yet no American president has built more nuclear warheads than Obama. He is “modernising” America’s doomsday arsenal, including a new “mini” nuclear weapon, whose size and “smart” technology, says a leading general, ensure its use is “no longer unthinkable.”

James Bradley, the best-selling author of *Flags of Our Fathers* and son of one of the US marines who raised the flag on Iwo Jima, said, “[One] great myth we’re seeing play out is that of Obama as some kind of peaceful guy who’s trying to get rid of nuclear weapons. He’s the biggest nuclear warrior there is. He’s committed us to a ruinous course of spending a trillion dollars on more nuclear weapons. Somehow, people live in this fantasy that because he gives vague news conferences and speeches and feel-good photo-ops that somehow that’s attached to actual policy. It isn’t.”

On Obama’s watch, a second cold war is under way. The Russian president is a pantomime villain; the Chinese are not yet back to their sinister pig-tailed caricature – when all Chinese were banned from the United States – but the media warriors are working on it.

Neither Hillary Clinton nor Bernie Sanders has mentioned any of this. There is no risk and no danger for the United States and all

of us. For them, the greatest military build-up on the borders of Russia since World War Two has not happened. On May 11, Romania went “live” with a Nato “missile defence” base that aims its first-strike American missiles at the heart of Russia, the world’s second nuclear power.

In Asia, the Pentagon is sending ships, planes and special forces to the Philippines to threaten China. The US already encircles China with hundreds of military bases that curve in an arc up from Australia, to Asia and across to Afghanistan. Obama calls this a “pivot.”

As a direct consequence, China reportedly has changed its nuclear weapons policy from no-first-use to high alert and has put to sea submarines with nuclear weapons. The escalator is quickening.

## **Rocks and reef**

It was Hillary Clinton who, as Secretary of State in 2010, elevated the competing territorial claims for rocks and reef in the South China Sea to an international issue. CNN and BBC hysteria followed: China was building airstrips on the disputed islands. In its mammoth war game in 2015, Operation Talisman Sabre, the US practiced “choking” the Straits of Malacca through which pass most of China’s oil and trade. This was not news.

Clinton declared that America had a “national interest” in these Asian waters. The Philippines and Vietnam were encouraged and bribed to pursue their claims and old enmities against China. In America, people are being primed to see any Chinese defensive position as offensive, and so the ground is laid for rapid escalation. A similar strategy of provocation and propaganda is applied to Russia.

Clinton, the “women’s candidate,” leaves a trail of bloody coups: in Honduras, in Libya (plus the murder of the Libyan president) and Ukraine. The latter is now a CIA theme park swarming with Nazis and the frontline of a beckoning war with Russia. It was through

Ukraine – literally, borderland – that Hitler’s Nazis invaded the Soviet Union, which lost 27-million people. This epic catastrophe remains a presence in Russia. Clinton’s presidential campaign has received money from all but one of the world’s ten biggest arms companies. No other candidate comes close.

Sanders, the hope of many young Americans, is not very different from Clinton in his proprietorial view of the world beyond the United States. He backed Bill Clinton’s illegal bombing of Serbia. He supports Obama’s terrorism by drone, the provocation of Russia and the return of special forces (death squads) to Iraq. He has nothing to say on the drumbeat of threats to China and the accelerating risk of nuclear war. He agrees that Edward Snowden should stand trial and he calls Hugo Chavez – like him, a social democrat – “a dead communist dictator.” He promises to support Clinton if she is nominated.

The election of Trump or Clinton is the old illusion of choice that is no choice: two sides of the same coin. In scapegoating minorities and promising to “make America great again,” Trump is a far right-wing domestic populist; yet the danger of Clinton may be more lethal for the world.

“Only Donald Trump has said anything meaningful and critical of US foreign policy,” wrote Stephen Cohen, emeritus professor of Russian History at Princeton and NYU, one of the few Russia experts in the United States to speak out about the risk of war.

In a radio broadcast, Cohen referred to critical questions Trump alone had raised. Among them: why is the United States “everywhere on the globe?” What is NATO’s true mission? Why does the US always pursue regime change in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Ukraine? Why does Washington treat Russia and Vladimir Putin as an enemy?

The hysteria in the liberal media over Trump serves an illusion of “free and open debate” and “democracy at work.” His views on immigrants and Muslims are grotesque, yet the deporter-in-chief of vulnerable people from America is not Trump, but Obama,

whose betrayal of people of colour is his legacy: such as the warehousing of a mostly black prison population, now more numerous than Stalin’s gulag.

This presidential campaign may not be about populism but American liberalism, an ideology that sees itself as modern and, therefore, superior and the one true way. Those on its right wing bear a likeness to 19th century Christian imperialists, with a God-given duty to convert or co-opt or conquer.

In Britain, this is Blairism. The Christian war criminal Tony Blair got away with his secret preparation for the invasion of Iraq largely because the liberal political class and media fell for his “cool Britannia.” In the Guardian, the applause was deafening; he was called “mystical.” A distraction known as identity politics, imported from the United States, rested easily in his care.

History was declared over, class was abolished and gender promoted as feminism; lots of women became New Labour MPs. They voted on the first day of Parliament to cut the benefits of single parents, mostly women, as instructed. A majority voted for an invasion that produced 700,000 Iraqi widows.

The equivalent in the US are the politically correct warmongers on the New York Times, Washington Post, and network TV who dominate political debate. I watched a furious debate on CNN about Trump’s infidelities. It was clear, they said, a man like that could not be trusted in the White House. No issues were raised. Nothing on the 80 per cent of Americans whose income has collapsed to 1970s levels. Nothing on the drift to war. The received wisdom seems to be “hold your nose” and vote for Clinton: anyone but Trump. That way, you stop the monster and preserve a system gagging for another war. **CT**

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*John Pilger’s film Cambodia Year Zero, which has been credited with alerting the world to the terrors of the Pol Pot regime, was recently named one of ITV’s television’s 60 greatest programs.*

**The election of Trump or Clinton is the old illusion of choice that is no choice: two sides of the same coin**

# Surging towards another war

**Brian Cloughley** wonders why the United States is so determined to provoke China with its naval forays into the South China Sea

**The United States has no territorial rights in the South China Sea which is 7,000 miles from its west coast. There is nothing in international law that justifies its unilateral military challenge to China's presence**

On 10 May 2016 the United States navigated closer to war. Not content with having created chaos from Afghanistan to Libya and menacing Russia along its borders, the administration in Washington ordered a guided missile destroyer, USS William P. Lawrence, to carry out manoeuvres within 12 nautical miles of Fiery Cross Reef in the South China Sea.

The Lawrence is but one vessel of the nuclear-armed US fleet deployed in the region. As the US Navy Times proudly reported on 4 March, "The US Navy has dispatched a small armada to the South China Sea. The carrier John C Stennis, two destroyers, two cruisers and the 7th Fleet flagship have sailed into the disputed waters in recent days . . . The carrier strike group is the latest show of force in the tense region, with the US asserting that China is militarising the region to guard its excessive territorial claims."

Fiery Cross Reef lies in the Spratly Island chain in which settlements have been established by Brunei (1), China (7), Malaysia (5), the Philippines (9), Taiwan (1) and Vietnam (21). The US reasoning for its latest show of force was delivered by the Pentagon whose spokesman said the US was taking military action to "challenge excessive maritime claims" by China which established a base at Fiery Cross more than 25 years ago.

At a meeting of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the UN Educa-

tional, Scientific and Cultural Organisation in Paris in March, 1987, it was agreed that weather stations be constructed around the world to assist in a global oceanic survey. China built one at Fiery Cross Reef in 1988, but it was only in more recent years that the United States resolved, in its military "pivot" to confront China in Asia, that the PRC should not be allowed to build anything in the South China Sea.

The United States has no territorial rights in the South China Sea which is 7,000 miles from its west coast. There is nothing in international law that justifies its unilateral military challenge to China's presence.

The Pentagon declared on 10 May that China's "excessive maritime claims are inconsistent with international law as reflected in the Law of the Sea Convention, in that they purport to restrict the navigation rights that the United States and all states are entitled to exercise."

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) has been ratified by 167 countries. It lays down "rights, duties, and jurisdictions of maritime states, defines the limits of a country's territorial sea, establishes rules for transit through international straits, and defines exclusive economic zones (EEZs) in a way compatible with freedom of navigation and overflight," and is altogether an admirable international covenant. But as with so many international agreements, including the Kyoto climate change Protocol, institution

of the International Criminal Court, the Convention to eliminate Discrimination against Women, and the Protocol to the Convention Against Torture, the United States refuses to ratify the Law of the Sea Convention – while ordering every other country to abide by it.

As far as international law is concerned, Washington refuses to accede to a covenant that lays down directions for maritime transit, which makes nonsense of the Pentagon's attempted justification for actions that it claims are based on the provisions of UNCLOS. It would be amusing if it were not so arrogantly insolent and potentially inflammable.

On 29 March the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dunford, proclaimed that, "In the South China Sea, Chinese activity is destabilising and could pose a threat to commercial trade routes," which is a fatuous assertion. China's defence presence on its little rock outcrops is minimal – and intended to deter foreign military action rather than threaten civilian ships. Why on earth would it want to menace commercial shipping? China's lifeline is trade, and the majority of its raw materials and manufactured goods are transported by sea, in and out of the country. It would be insane for the Beijing government to consider severing its own trade links.

If China wanted to engage in aggressive military confrontation, similar to that of the US nuclear-armed armadas (the word used by the US Navy Times), it would have no need to use a few rocks around its shores. It would do so from Hainan, the base of its Southern Fleet. It could close off the China Sea to commercial shipping like turning off a tap – but that would be commercial suicide.

So why is the Pentagon being so confrontational? Why does it send guided-missile destroyers and electronic warfare aircraft to areas that have nothing to do with the United States? Why is it flaunting its military might to menace a country that does not threaten the security of the United States? Does Washington believe the waters around South China should be called the West American Sea?

Pentagon strategy is based on Washing-

ton's "Pivot to Asia" doctrine which is based on military encirclement of China, exactly as has been done by US-promoted expansion of NATO to menace Russia in Europe. As noted by the Voice of America, "Washington has been moving more troops and military assets into the region. . . . Admiral Harry Harris, commander of the US Pacific Fleet, said the Navy has already brought its newest and most capable military equipment to the area, like the P-8 surveillance airplane, the Littoral Combat Ship, the Virginia-class submarine, and new amphibious ships such as the USS America. . . . These increased capabilities in Southeast Asia are complemented by extensive US military bases and deployments in Guam, Japan and South Korea." (There are some 800 US military bases, 350,000 uniformed personnel, in countries around the globe.)

There is one problem for America, and that is how China will react to Washington's increasingly confrontational behaviour. Because China, like Russia, is not going to take much more provocation before reacting militarily, which seems to be exactly what Washington wants to happen. The US is surging towards yet another war – but this time it will be very much more serious for the world. The next US war will not result in expansion of terrorist networks and creation of countless millions of desperate refugees. It will begin with a comparatively minor clash caused by coat-tailing confrontation and provocation on the part of US ships and aircraft. The probability is that misjudgments by the bombastic generals and admirals of the Pentagon will cause the situation to get out of hand to the extent that there will be nuclear war. It is obvious that no rational person would wish to surge his country close to that appalling fate. But are they rational people? **CT**

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**There is one problem for America, and that is how China will react to Washington's increasingly confrontational behaviour. Because China, like Russia, is not going to take much more provocation before reacting militarily, which seems to be exactly what Washington wants to happen**

# 'Anti-terrorism' is destroying democracy

**Vashti Kenway** tells how Australia has taken its first steps along the road to becoming a police state

**Even the Victoria Supreme Court judge responsible for sentencing the men, admitted that the conspiracy was not that much further along than just sitting and thinking about it**

In 1956, science fiction author Philip K. Dick wrote the short story "Minority Report." In it, a shadowy government agency known as "pre-crime" arrests people in anticipation of crimes they suspect individuals will commit in the future. What appears as a dystopian fictional nightmare in 1956 has become a reality in Australia 60 years later.

One of the major legal transformations associated with the introduction of the various anti-terror acts in the 15 years since 9/11 has been the normalisation of the idea that you can be charged with a crime that you have yet to commit.

The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) has the right to seek warrants that allow the detention of someone suspected, or someone related to someone suspected of considering a terror offence. This person may be detained in custody with no right to confidential legal counsel and no right to see the evidence brought against them.

Furthermore, the Terrorism Act 2002 makes it a crime to "provide or receive training, to possess a 'thing,' or to collect or make a document, if (in each case) that conduct was connected with preparation for, the engagement of a person in, or assistance in a terrorist act".

In 2010, these laws resulted in the conviction of three men for "preparing to prepare" an attack on the Holsworthy Army Base. One

of the men visited the barracks and another had a phone conversation with a sheikh, seeking religious counsel about the moral virtues of possibly committing an act.

It would be unthinkable, if not constitutionally impossible, in nations such as the US and Canada to restrict freedom of speech in the manner achieved by Australia's 2005 sedition laws.

The sheikh eventually answered in the negative and advised the men against any action. Even Justice King, the Victoria Supreme Court judge responsible for sentencing the men, admitted that "the conspiracy was not that much further along than just sitting and thinking about it." She nevertheless sentenced them to 18 years' jail. For thought crime.

What's more shocking is that, legally, these "preparatory" offences are committed if the person either "knows or is reckless as to the fact that they relate to a terrorist act." Being "reckless" can mean a whole range of things. It can mean that you say or write something that may inadvertently encourage someone else to engage in terrorist activity.

For instance, Division 102 of the Criminal Code imposes a maximum penalty of life imprisonment "where a person provides or collects funds and is reckless as to whether those funds will be used to facilitate or engage in a terrorist act." This means that someone who donates money to a charity that turns out to



have some putative involvement in terrorism could be imprisoned for life.

The definition of terrorism is suitably broad for a ruling class looking to criminalise a wide range of anti-government activity. Section 101.1 of the Criminal Code defines terrorism as “conduct engaged in or threats made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause.” The conduct or threat must be designed to coerce a government or population by intimidation. It must involve “harm” – broadly defined.

Added to this is “urging violence.” For example, it is an offence punishable by seven years’ imprisonment to “urge the overthrow of the constitution or government by force or violence, or to urge interference in parliamentary elections.”

#### **Disturbing definitions**

Such definitions are disturbing. Again, “interfering in parliamentary elections” could involve encouraging voters to cast donkey votes or rip up ballot papers. Left wing newspapers regularly run pieces on the necessity of overthrowing many and various governments. The fact that such laws have been penned indicates how far we have come. Under such legislation the United States Declaration of Independence, with its claim that “it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish [the Government], and to institute new one,” could be deemed a terrorist document.

A law introduced in 2014 that prohibits the advocacy of terrorism extends this issue of incitement into even more alarming territory. An organisation can be listed as terrorist if it “directly praises the doing of a terrorist act in circumstances where there is a substantial risk that such praise might have the effect of leading a person ... to engage in a terrorist act.”

If these laws had been enacted in the past they would have meant that the author of an article supporting the actions of Nelson Mandela in his struggle against apartheid in South Africa would become liable if someone

might have read that article and acted upon it in a manner deemed terrorist by the state.

Today, the organisation of any author who is accused of “praising terror” can be listed. Being a member, or even associated with, a member of a listed terrorist organisation can incur up to 10 years in prison.

The mutability of what constitutes a “terrorist organisation” was revealed in the trial of 13 Muslim men in Melbourne in 2005-09. These young men were arrested after more than a year of intense surveillance of conversations between them and a radical Islamic preacher, Abdul Nacer Benbrika.

An extraordinary 27,000 hours of police surveillance revealed nothing more criminal than discussions about the morality or immorality of revenge actions against Australians for the government’s crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq. No specific or concrete terror actions were planned, and they were never charged with planning a terrorist attack.

Nevertheless, the state charged them with membership of an unspecified, unlisted, unnamed terrorist organisation. The attorney-general declared it so – and a few more men who had had some association with Benbrika were charged with “supporting or providing funds” to a terrorist organisation.

Greg Barns, one of the defence lawyers in the Barwon 13 trial, pointed out the absurdity of the situation: “An organisation can be a terrorist organisation even if it has no terrorist act in mind.” Such realities call to mind Alice in Wonderland, “When I use a word”, Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.”

The Barwon 13 trial also brought to light a number of other disturbing aspects of the anti-terror legislation. One of the most shocking revealed the prejudice against giving terror suspects bail.

This meant that from 2005 until 2008, when the judge handed down a decision, the defendants were held in the maximum security Barwon prison. Here, some as young as 19-years-old were kept shackled in isolation

**27,000 hours of police surveillance revealed nothing more criminal than discussions about the morality or immorality of revenge actions against Australians for the government’s crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq**

**State representatives claim that nipping terrorist actions before they happen is more important than civil liberties. But such claims are bogus when most of the terrorist atrocities they claim to be thwarting were never even in the planning stages**

for up to 18 hours a day. During their trial, they were strip-searched every day and transported back and forth on the hour-long journey with their arms shackled to their waist and their ankles tied together.

Four of the 13 were found not guilty of any charges, but were held in Guantanamo Bay-like conditions for, one can only suspect, being Muslim and associating with other Muslims. Four of the 13 were convicted on such spurious grounds that Michael Pearce from Liberty Victoria told reporters that they were victims of one of the “most sustained assaults on civil liberties in 50 years. . . Their treatment is an affront to the most basic principle of the rule of law,” he said.

The current targets of the anti-terror laws are Muslim. Nineteen of the 20 proscribed organisations are Muslim, and of the 46 people charged under the laws, all, with the exception of a couple, identify as Muslim. Not one of these people has been charged with actually committing a terrorist offence. All are offences of association, of planning or planning to plan.

State representatives claim that nipping terrorist actions before they happen is more important than civil liberties. But such claims are bogus when most of the terrorist atrocities they claim to be thwarting were never even in the planning stages.

One young man, Faheem Lodhi, was sentenced to 20 years in prison although, according to a lawyer at his trial, he “had not yet reached the stage where the identity of the bomber, the precise area to be bombed or the manner in which the bombing would take place had been worked out.”

As civil liberties lawyer Rob Stary told Katherine Wilson in an interview for Overland, “They talk the talk, and it’s dangerous talk. But I can say whatever I like about who the real Iraq or Palestinian war criminals are, and how they should be brought to justice, and I won’t be imprisoned for it. Not unless I convert to Islam”.

When Muslim kids mouth off, they can be locked up for decades. If anything is likely

to prompt feelings of hatred, anger and frustration that lead to the desire to commit terrorist acts, it is this kind of systematic legal persecution.

Islamophobia is the ideological mechanism through which the state has managed to get through such draconian legislation. Concerted public media campaigns vilifying Muslims – representing them as medieval barbarians intent on bringing down Western civilisation – has had its effect. Opposition to the anti-terror laws is minimal – the conflation of Islam with terror has been achieved.

### **Fifteen years in the making**

Before 9/11, politically motivated violence was dealt with under criminal law. This all changed after 2001. In March 2002, federal attorney-general Darryl Williams introduced the first package of anti-terrorism legislation to parliament. He said the laws were “exceptional,” but that “so too is the evil at which they are directed.”

Australians were told to be alert to shadowy internal threats and to report any “suspicious” activities they might witness. From 11 September 2001 to the fall of the Howard government, the federal parliament enacted 48 anti-terror laws. In other words, on average a new anti-terror statute was passed every seven or so weeks under the Liberal government. The Labor Party supported the overwhelming bulk of these laws.

When Labor came to power, the pace of lawmaking slowed, but the fundamental approach remained the same: use the terror threat to usher through increasingly draconian laws. Indeed, the Rudd government actively opposed independent reviews into the passing of its own anti-terror legislation.

Abbott came to office with an open and aggressive agenda. He was unabashed in 2014, “Regrettably, for some time to come, Australians will have to endure more security than we are used to and more inconvenience than we would like . . . the delicate balance between freedom and security may have to shift.”

Under Abbott and Turnbull, the existing anti-terror legislation has been strengthened and expanded, most dramatically with the introduction of astonishingly extensive data retention laws.

All of this frantic legislative activity has been accompanied by regularly staged anti-terror raids. The Australian state has far exceeded the UK, the USA and Canada in the number of laws enacted. University of New South Wales professor George Williams argues, “It would be unthinkable, if not constitutionally impossible, in nations such as the US and Canada to restrict freedom of speech in the manner achieved by Australia’s 2005 sedition laws.” US author Ken Roach describes Australia as engaging in “hyper-legislation.”

### Normalisation

While initially introduced as “emergency legislation” to deal with imminent terror threats, anti-terror legislation has not only stuck, but has crept into other legislative areas. Laws recognised as exceptional, even by their proponents, are now used against groups and individuals who have nothing to do with the “war on terror.”

Biker gangs and their members (bikies) are subject to laws virtually identical to anti-terror legislation. The Rann Labour government in South Australia began the trend, drawing dramatic comparisons between bikies and terrorists. In 2008, Rann said, “Organised crime groups are terrorists within our communities,” and described bikies as “an evil within our nation.” The laws passed almost without a whimper of opposition.

In Queensland, biker gangs have been “declared” in the same way that so-called terrorist organisations have – which means anyone associated with a gang can be arrested and charged. If you are a member of a gang you cannot be seen with one or more “criminal associates.”

Bikies are also subject to something very similar to control orders – one of the most controversial aspects of the anti-terror legislation. They can be placed under house arrest,

and have their movement and their oral and electronic communications limited. These restrictions can be decided in a secret court hearing, and the person will discover if they are subject to an order only after their arrest. All states have introduced similar laws.

The depth and breadth of the anti-terror legislation provided the perfect precursor to the use of equally (if not more draconian) laws against construction workers in the Howard government’s Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC).

Turnbull is now preparing to fight an election over the reintroduction of the body. The ABCC’s coercive powers mirror ASIO’s. It has the right to hold secret interviews and jail those who don’t co-operate. Habeas corpus is out the window. Construction workers will again have no right to silence and no right to be represented by the lawyer of their choice. The terror bogey was simply the thin end of the wedge.

It is clear over the 15 years of the “war on terror” that many legal rights have disappeared. Basic legal assumptions such as innocent until proven guilty, the right to silence, the right to a fair trial, and the right to legal counsel no longer exist in expanding areas of the legal system. What’s more, the state’s powers to watch, listen, detain and punish have grown dramatically, and there is no indication that the government wants to pull back. The US whistleblower Edward Snowden said of similar actions in the USA, “These programmes were never about terrorism: they’re about economic spying, social control, and diplomatic manipulation. They’re about power.”

Australia’s behemoth security state is now more powerful than even Philip K. Dick’s paranoid imagination could have dreamed. **CT**

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**Vashti Kenway** is a member of the National Executive of Socialist Alternative, an Australian socialist organisation. She was a founder of Student for Palestine in Melbourne. This article was first published at Red Flag, the newspaper of Socialist Alternative, at [www.redflag.org.au](http://www.redflag.org.au)

**Construction workers will again have no right to silence and no right to be represented by the lawyer of their choice. The terror bogey was simply the thin end of the wedge**

# Reform or revolution?

**Chris Hedges** on the stirring words and continuing legacy of murdered revolutionary socialist Rosa Luxemburg

**Soldiers dragged Luxemburg to a waiting car ... as the car sped away, Lt. Kurt Vogel fired his pistol into her head. The soldiers tossed Rosa Luxemburg's corpse into the Landwehr Canal**

*This is the text of Chris Hedges' talk on revolutionary socialist Rosa Luxemburg at the Left Forum in New York City*

**O**n the night of January 15, 1919, a group of the Freikorps – hastily formed militias made up mostly of right-wing veterans of World War I – escorted Rosa Luxemburg, a petite, 50-year-old with a slight limp, to the Eden Hotel in Berlin, the headquarters of the Guards Cavalry Rifle Division.

“Are you Frau Rosa Luxemburg?” Capt. Waldemar Pabst asked when she arrived at his office upstairs.

“You decide for yourself,” she answered.

“According to the photograph, you must be,” he said.

“If you say so,” she said softly.

Pabst told her she would be taken to Moabit Prison. On the way out of the hotel, a waiting crowd, which had shouted insults such as “whore” as she was brought in under arrest, whistled and spat. A soldier, Otto Runge, allegedly paid 50-marks to be the first to hit her. Shouting, “She’s not getting out alive,” he slammed the butt of his rifle into the back of her head. Luxemburg collapsed. Blood poured from her nose and mouth. Runge struck a second time. Someone said, “That’s enough.” Soldiers dragged Luxemburg to a waiting car. One of her shoes was left behind. A

soldier hit her again. As the car sped away, Lt. Kurt Vogel fired his pistol into her head. The soldiers tossed Luxemburg’s corpse into the Landwehr Canal.

Karl Leibknecht, who had coaxed a reluctant Luxemburg into an uprising she knew was almost certainly doomed, had been executed a few moments before. The Spartacus Revolt was crushed. It was the birth of German fascism.

The killers, like the police who murder unarmed people of color in the streets of American cities, were tried in court – in this case, a military court – that issued tepid reprimands. The state had no intention of punishing the assassins. They had done what the state required.

The ruling Social Democratic Party of Germany created the Freikorps, which became the antecedent to the Nazi Party. It ordered the militias and the military to crush resistance when it felt threatened from the left. Luxemburg’s murder illustrated the ultimate loyalties of liberal elites in a capitalist society: When threatened from the left, when the face of socialism showed itself in the streets, elites would – and will – make alliances with the most retrograde elements of society, including fascists, to crush the aspirations of the working class.

Liberalism, which Luxemburg called by its more appropriate name – “opportun-



**ALWAYS REMEMBERED:** The memorial to Rosa Luxemburg at the site where she was thrown into the Landwehr Canal, Berlin.

Photo: Manfred Brückels

**Wage slavery and employment are not determined by law but by the imperatives of the market. The market forces workers to fall to their knees before the dictates of global profit**

ism” – is an integral component of capitalism. When the citizens grow restive, it will soften and decry capitalism’s excesses. But capitalism, Luxemburg argued, is an enemy that can never be appeased. Liberal reforms are used to stymie resistance, and then, later, when things grow quiet, are revoked on the inevitable road to capitalist slavery. The last century of labour struggles in the United States provides a case study for proof of Luxemburg’s observation.

#### **Property right**

The political, cultural and judicial system in a capitalist state is centred around the protection of property rights. And, as Adam Smith pointed out, when civil government “is instituted for the security of property, [it] is in reality instituted for the defence of the rich against the poor, or of those who have some property against

those who have none at all.” The capitalist system is gamed from the start. And this makes Luxemburg extremely relevant, because corporate capital, now freed from all constraints, reconfigures our global economy, including that of the United States, into a ruthless form of neo-feudalism.

Wage slavery and employment are not determined by law but by the imperatives of the market. The market forces workers to fall to their knees before the dictates of global profit. This imperative can never be corrected by legal or legislative reform.

Democracy, in this late stage of capitalism, has been replaced with a system of legalised bribery. All branches of government, including the courts, along with the systems of entertainment and news, are wholly-owned subsidiaries of the corporate state. Electoral politics are elaborate puppet shows. Wall Street and the milita-

## REMEMBERING ROSA

**The nation, in the name of national security, demands the eradication of civil liberties. It defines dissent as treason. It creates a centralised system of power that ultimately – as has happened in the United States – serves the dictates of empire rather than democracy**

rists, whether Trump or Clinton, win.

“Capitalist accumulation requires for its movement to be surrounded by non-capitalist areas,” Luxemburg wrote. And capitalism “can continue only so long as it is provided with such a milieu.”

Capitalism searches the globe to exploit cheap, unorganised labour and pillages natural resources. It buys off or overthrows local elites. It blocks the ability of the developing world to become self-sufficient.

Meanwhile, workers in the industrialised world, stripped of well-paying jobs, benefits and legal protections, are pushed into debt peonage, forced to borrow to survive, which further enriches global speculators.

An economy built on credit, Luxemburg foresaw, transforms a regular series of small economic crises into an irregular series of large economic crises – hence two major financial dislocations to the US economy in the early part of the 21st-century – the dot-com collapse of 2000 and the global meltdown of 2008. And we are barrelling towards another. The end result, at home and abroad, is serfdom.

Luxemburg, in another understanding important to those caught in the pressures of a single election cycle, viewed electoral campaigns, like union organising, as a process of educating the public about the nature of capitalism. These activities, divorced from “revolutionary consciousness” – from the ultimate goal of overthrowing capitalism – were, she said, “a labour of Sisyphus.”

We who seek to build radical third-party movements must recognise that it is not about taking power now. It is about taking power, at best, a decade from now. Revolutions, Luxemburg reminded us, take time.

In an understanding that eludes many Bernie Sanders supporters, Luxemburg also grasped that socialism and imperialism were incompatible. She would have excoriated Sanders’ ostrich-like refusal to confront American imperialism. Imperialism, she understood, not only empowers

a war machine and enriches arms merchants and global capitalists. It is accompanied by a poisonous ideology – what social critic Dwight Macdonald called the “psychosis of permanent war” – that makes socialism impossible.

The nation, in the name of national security, demands the eradication of civil liberties. It defines dissent as treason. It creates a centralised system of power that ultimately – as has happened in the United States – serves the dictates of empire rather than democracy. Democracy becomes farce, or in our case, a tawdry reality show that coughs up two of the most unpopular presidential candidates in American history. Society devolves into what Karl Marx called “parliamentary cretinism,” or what political theorist Sheldon Wolin called “inverted totalitarianism.” Democracy is a facade.

### **Profits up, labour costs down**

Capitalism is ruled by two iron dictums – maximise profit and reduce labour costs. And as capitalism advances and consolidates power in a world where resources are becoming scarce and mechanisation is becoming more sophisticated, the human and environmental cost of profit mounts.

“The exploitation of the working class as an economic process cannot be abolished or softened through legislation in the framework of bourgeois society,” Luxemburg wrote. Social reform, she said, “does not constitute an invasion into capitalist exploitation, but a regulating, an ordering of this exploitation in the interest of capitalist society itself.”

Capitalism is an enemy of democracy. It denies workers the right to control means of production or to determine how the profits from their labour will be spent. American workers – both left and right – do not support trade agreements. They do not support the federal bailouts of big banks and financial firms. They do not embrace astronomical salaries for CEOs or wage

stagnation. But workers do not count. And the more that working men and women struggle to be heard, the harsher and more violent the forms of control employed by the corporate state will become.

Luxemburg also understood something that eluded Vladimir Lenin. Nationalism – which Luxemburg called “empty petty-bourgeois phraseology and humbug” – is a disease. It disconnects the working class in one country from another – one of the primary objectives of the capitalist class.

As parties on the left and the right – in our case, the corporate Democrats and corporate Republicans – vie to be more patriotic and hawkish, they deify the military and the organs of internal security. They revoke basic civil liberties in the name of national security and law and order. This process grooms a segment of the population, as we see in Trump rallies, for fascism.

Nationalism, warned Luxemburg, is always a tool used to betray the working class. It is, she wrote, “an instrument of counterrevolutionary class policy.” It unleashes powerful forms of indoctrination.

As the contagion of nationalism erupted at the outbreak of the First World War, liberal European parties, including the German Social Democrats, swiftly surrendered to right-wing nationalists in the name of the fatherland, despite many preceding years of anti-war rhetoric.

Luxemburg saw this betrayal as evidence of the fundamental moral and political bankruptcy of the liberal establishment in a capitalist society.

By the time the war was over, 11-million soldiers on all sides, most of them working-class men, were dead. Capitalists, who had grown rich from the slaughter, had nothing to fear now from the working class. They had fed them to the mouths of machine guns.

Luxemburg distrusted disciplined, revolutionary elites – Lenin’s vanguard. She denounced terror as a revolutionary tool. She warned that revolutionary movements that were not democratic swiftly became despotic. She understood

the peculiar dynamics of revolution. She wrote that in a time of revolutionary ferment, “It is extremely difficult for any directing organ of the proletarian movement to foresee and calculate which occasions and factors can lead to explosions and which cannot.” Those who were rigidly tied to an ideology or those who believed they could shape events through force, were crippled by a “rigid, mechanical, bureaucratic conception.”



Rosa  
Luxemburg

### Revolutions and mass struggle

Revolutions, for Luxemburg, were as much the product of mass struggle as its instigator. She knew that revolution was a “living” entity. “It was formed not from above,” but from the “consciousness of the masses.” And this consciousness took years to build. A revolutionary had to respond to the unpredictable moods and sentiments that define any revolt, to the unanticipated responses of a population in revolt.

Lenin, to achieve power during the 1917 revolution, was forced to follow her

**Nationalism, warned Luxemburg, is always a tool used to betray the working class. It is, she wrote, “an instrument of counterrevolutionary class policy.”**

## REMEMBERING ROSA

**Luxemburg warns us that in a crisis, the liberal elites become our enemy. She cautions against terror and gratuitous violence. She urges us to maintain open, democratic structures to ensure that power rests with the people**

advice, abandoning many of his most doctrinaire ideas to respond to the life force of Russian revolution itself. “Lenin,” Robert Looker wrote, “was a Luxemburgist in spite of himself.”

### **A reasons to rise**

A population finally rises up against a decayed system, not because of revolutionary consciousness, but because, as Luxemburg pointed out, it has no other choice. It is the obtuseness of the old regime, not the work of revolutionaries, that triggers revolt. And, as she pointed out, all revolutions are in some sense failures, events that begin, rather than culminate, a process of social transformation.

“There was no predetermined plan, no organised action, because the appeals of the parties could scarcely keep in pace with the spontaneous rising of the masses,” she wrote of the 1905 uprising in Russia. “The leaders had scarcely time to formulate the watchwords of the on-rushing crowd.”

“Revolutions,” she continued, “cannot be made at command. Nor is this at all the task of the party. Our duty is only at all times to speak out plainly without fear or trembling; that is, to hold clearly before the masses their tasks in the given historical moment, and to proclaim the political program of action and the slogans which result from the situation. The concern with whether and when the revolutionary mass movement takes up with them must be left confidently to history itself. Even though socialism may at first appear as a voice crying in the wilderness, it yet provides for itself a moral and political position the fruits of which it later, when the hour of historical fulfillment strikes, garners with compound interest.”

I have covered uprisings and revolutions around the globe – the insurgencies in Central America in the 1980s, two

Palestinian uprisings, the revolutions in 1989 in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Romania, the street demonstrations that brought down Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia. Luxemburg’s understanding of the autonomous nature of revolt is correct. A central committee, like Lenin’s Bolsheviks, because it is ruthless, secretive and highly disciplined, is capable of carrying out a counter-revolution to take control of and crush the democratic aspirations of the workers. But such organisations are not the primary engine of revolution. The messiness of democracy, with all its paralysis and reverses, keeps revolution alive and vibrant. It protects the population from the abuse of centralised power.

“Without general elections, without freedom of the press, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, without the free battle of opinions, life in every public institution withers away, becomes a caricature of itself, and bureaucracy rises as the only deciding factor,” Luxemburg said.

The consequences of not carrying out a revolution against corporatism are catastrophic. This makes Luxemburg vital. She warns us that in a crisis, the liberal elites become our enemy. She cautions against terror and gratuitous violence. She urges us to maintain open, democratic structures to ensure that power rests with the people. She keeps us focused on the ultimate savagery of capitalism. She understands the danger of imperialism. And she reminds us that those of us committed to socialism, to building a better world, especially for the oppressed, must hold fast to this moral imperative. If we compromise, she knew, we extinguish hope. **CT**

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*Chris Hedges’ latest book, Wages of Rebellion: The Moral Imperative of revolt, is published by Nation Books (\$11 at Amazon). This essay was originally published at [www.truthout.org](http://www.truthout.org)*



# The Pentagon's war on accountability

**William D. Hartung** reveals how slush funds, smoke and mirrors, and funny money equal weapons systems galore

**N**ow you see it, now you don't. Think of it as the US Department of Defense's version of the street con game, three-card monte, or the Pentagon shuffle. In any case, the Pentagon's budget is as close to a work of art as you're likely to find in the US government – if, that is, by work of art, you mean scam.

The United States is on track to spend more than \$600-billion on the military this year – more than was spent at the height of President Ronald Reagan's Cold War military buildup, and more than the military budgets of at least the next seven nations in the world combined. And keep in mind that that's just a partial total. As an analysis by the Straus Military Reform Project has shown, if we count related activities such as homeland security, veterans' affairs, nuclear warhead production at the Department of Energy, military aid to other countries, and interest on the military-related national debt, that figure reaches a cool \$1-trillion.

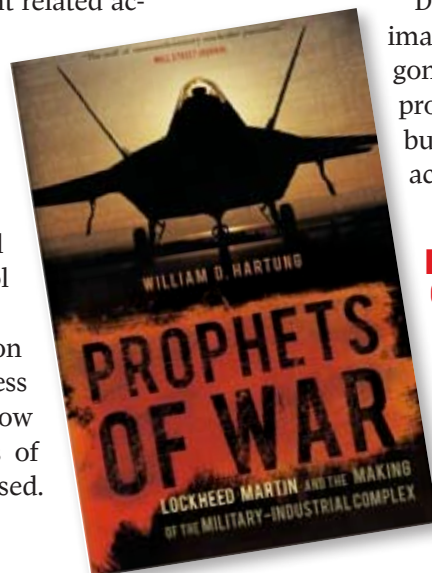
The more that's spent on "defence," however, the less the Pentagon wants us to know about how those mountains of money are actually being used.

As the only major federal agency that can't pass an audit, the Department of Defense (DoD) is the poster child for irresponsible budgeting.

It's not just that its books don't add up, however. The DoD is taking active measures to disguise how it is spending the hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars it receives every year – from using the separate "war budget" as a slush fund to pay for pet projects that have nothing to do with fighting wars to keeping the cost of its new nuclear bomber a secret. Add in dozens of other secret projects hidden in the department's budget and the Pentagon's poorly documented military aid programmes, and it's clear that the DoD believes it has something to hide.

Don't for a moment imagine that the Pentagon's growing list of secret programmes and evasive budgetary maneuvers is accidental or simply a

**The Dept of Defense is taking active measures to disguise how it is spending the hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars it receives every year – from using the separate "war budget" as a slush fund to pay for pet projects that have nothing to do with fighting wars to keeping the cost of its new nuclear bomber a secret**



## PROPHETS OF WAR

Lockheed Martin and the Making of the Military-Industrial Complex

William D. Hartung

\$13.97 (Amazon.com)

**There was far more interest in promoting the idea that the Marine Corps could pass an audit than in seeing it actually do so, even if inconvenient facts had to be swept under the rug**

matter of sloppy bookkeeping. Much of it is remarkably purposeful. By keeping us in the dark about how it spends our money, the Pentagon has made it virtually impossible for anyone to hold it accountable for just about anything. An entrenched bureaucracy is determined not to provide information that might be used to bring its sprawling budget – and so the institution itself – under control. That’s why budgetary deception has become such a standard operating procedure at the Department of Defense.

The audit problem is a case in point. The Pentagon, along with all other major federal agencies, was first required to make its books auditable in the Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990. More than 25 years later, there is no evidence to suggest that the Pentagon will ever be able to pass an audit. In fact, the one limited instance in which success seemed to be within reach – an audit of a portion of the books of a single service, the Marine Corps – turned out, upon closer inspection, to be a case study in bureaucratic resistance.

In April 2014, when it appeared that the Corps had come back with a clean audit, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel was so elated that he held a special ceremony in the Hall of Heroes at the Pentagon. “It might seem a bit unusual to be in the Hall of Heroes to honor a bookkeeping accomplishment,” he acknowledged, “but damn, this is an accomplishment.”

In March, 2015, however, that “accomplishment” vanished into thin air. The Pentagon’s Office of Inspector General (OIG), which had overseen the work of Grant Thornton, the private firm that conducted the audit, denied that it had been successful (allegedly in response to “new information”). In fact, in late 2013, as Reuters reported, auditors at the OIG had argued for months against green-lighting Grant Thornton’s work, believing that it was full of obvious holes. They were, however, overruled by the deputy inspector

general for auditing, who had what Reuters described as a “longstanding professional relationship” with the Grant Thornton executive supervising the audit.

The Pentagon and the firm deny that there was any conflict of interest, but the bottom line is clear enough: there was far more interest in promoting the idea that the Marine Corps could pass an audit than in seeing it actually do so, even if inconvenient facts had to be swept under the rug. This sort of behavior is hardly surprising once you consider all the benefits from an undisturbed status quo that accrue to Pentagon bureaucrats and cash-hungry contractors.

Without a reliable paper trail, there is no systematic way to track waste, fraud, and abuse in Pentagon contracting, or even to figure out how many contractors the Pentagon employs, though a conservative estimate puts the number at well over 600,000. The result is easy money with minimal accountability.

### **How to arm the planet**

In recent years, keeping tabs on how the Pentagon spends its money has grown even more difficult thanks to the “war budget” – known in Pentagonese as the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) account – which has become a nearly bottomless pit for items that have nothing to do with fighting wars. The use of the OCO as a slush fund began in earnest in the early years of the Bush administration’s war in Iraq and has continued ever since. It’s hard to put a precise number on how much money has been slipped into that budget or taken out of it to pay for pet projects of every sort in the last decade-plus, but the total is certainly more than \$100-billion.

The Pentagon’s routine use of the war budget as a way to fund whatever it wants has set an example for a Congress that’s seldom seen a military project it wasn’t eager to pay for. Only recently, for instance, the House Armed Services Committee



**MOST EXPENSIVE EVER: US Navy orders for Lockheed Martin's F-35 are declining, but the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee is calling for more to be built.**

Photo: Lockheed Martin

chair, Texas Republican Congressman Mac Thornberry, proposed taking \$18-billion from the war budget to cover items like an extra 11 F-35 combat aircraft and 14 F-18 fighter-bombers that the Pentagon hadn't even asked for.

This was great news for Lockheed Martin, which needs a shot in the arm for its troubled F-35 programme, already slated to be the most expensive weapons system in history, and for Boeing, which has been lobbying aggressively to keep its F-18 production line open in the face of declining orders from the Navy. But it's bad news for the troops because, as the Project on Government Oversight has demonstrated, the money used to pay for the unneeded planes will come at the expense of training and maintenance funds.

This is, by the way, the height of hypocrisy at a time when the House Armed Ser-

vices Committee is routinely sending out hysterical missives about the country's supposed lack of military readiness. The money to adequately train military personnel and keep their equipment running is, in fact, there. Members of Congress like Thornberry would just have to stop raiding the operations budget to pay for big ticket weapons systems, while turning a blind eye on wasteful spending in other parts of the Pentagon budget.

Thornberry's gambit may not carry the day, since both President Obama and Senate Armed Services Committee chair John McCain oppose it. But as long as a separate war budget exists, the temptation to stuff it with unnecessary programmes will persist as well.

Of course, that war budget is just part of the problem. The Pentagon has so many budding programs tucked away in so many

**The Pentagon has so many budding programs tucked away in so many different lines of its budget that even its officials have a hard time keeping track of what's actually going on**

**The Secrecy Project at the Federation of American Scientists recently put the size of the intelligence portion of the national security state's "black budget" – its secret spending on everything from spying to developing high-tech weaponry – at more than \$70-billion**

different lines of its budget that even its officials have a hard time keeping track of what's actually going on. As for the rest of us, we're essentially in the dark.

Consider, for instance, the proliferation of military aid programs. The Security Assistance Monitor, a non-profit that tracks such programmes, has identified more than two dozen of them worth about \$10 billion annually. Combine them with similar programs tucked away in the State Department's budget, and the US is contributing to the arming and training of security forces in 180 countries. (To put that mind-boggling total in perspective, there are at most 196 countries on the planet.) Who could possibly keep track of such programmes, no less what effect they may be having on the countries and militaries involved, or on the complex politics of, and conflicts in, various regions?

Best suggestion: don't even think about it (which is exactly what the Pentagon and the military-industrial complex want you to do). And no need for Congress to do so either. After all, as Lora Lumpe and Jeremy Ravinsky of the Open Society Foundations, noted earlier this year, the Pentagon is the only government agency providing foreign assistance that does not have to submit to Congress an annual budget justification for what it does. As a result, they write, "The public does not know how much the DoD is spending in a given country and why."

### **Slush funds galore**

If smokescreens and evasive manoeuvres aren't enough to hide the Pentagon's actual priorities from the taxpaying public, there's always secrecy. The Secrecy Project at the Federation of American Scientists recently put the size of the intelligence portion of the national security state's "black budget" – its secret spending on everything from spying to developing high-tech weaponry – at more than \$70-billion. That figure includes a wide variety of activities carried out through the CIA,

the NSA, and other members of the intelligence community, but \$16.8-billion of it was requested directly by the Department of Defense. And that \$70-billion is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to secret spending programmes, since billions more in secret financing for the development and acquisition of new weapons systems has been squirrelled away elsewhere.

The largest recent project to have its total costs shrouded in secrecy is the B-21, the Air Force's new nuclear bomber. Air Force officials claim that they need to keep the cost secret lest potential enemies "connect the dots" and learn too much about the plane's key characteristics. In a letter to Senator McCain, an advocate of making the cost of the plane public, Ronald Walden of the Air Force's Rapid Capabilities Office claimed that there was "a strong correlation between the cost of an air vehicle and its total weight." This, he suggested, might make it "decisively easier" for potential opponents to guess its range and payload.

If such assessments sound ludicrous, it's because they are. As the histories of other major Pentagon acquisition programmes have shown, the price of a system tells you just that – its price – and nothing more. Otherwise, with its classic cost overruns, the F-35 would have a range beyond compare, possibly to Mars and back. Of course, the real rationale for keeping the full cost estimate for the B-21 secret is to avoid bad publicity. Budget analyst Todd Harrison, of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, suggests that it's an attempt to avoid "sticker shock" for a programme that he estimates could cost more than \$100-billion to develop and purchase.

The bomber, in turn, is just part of a planned \$1-trillion splurge over the next three decades on a new generation of bombers, ballistic missile submarines, and ground-based nuclear missiles, part of an updating of the vast US nuclear arsenal. And keep this in mind: that trillion dollars is simply an initial estimate before the

usual Pentagon cost overruns even begin to come into play. Financially, the nuclear plan is going to hit taxpayer wallets particularly hard in the mid-2020s when a number of wildly expensive non-nuclear systems like the F-35 combat aircraft will also be hitting peak production.

Under the circumstances, it doesn't take a genius to know that there's only one way to avoid the budgetary equivalent of a 30-car pile up: increase the Pentagon's already ample finances yet again. Principal Deputy Undersecretary of Defense Brian McKeon was referring to the costs of building new nuclear delivery vehicles when he said that the administration was "wondering how the heck we're going to pay for it, and probably thanking our lucky stars we won't be here to answer the question." Of course, the rest of us will be stuck holding the bag when all those programmes cloaked in secrecy suddenly come out of hiding and the bills come fully due.

At this point, you may not be shocked to learn that, in response to McKeon's uncomfortable question, the Pentagon has come up with yet another budgetary gimmick. It's known as the "National Sea-Based Deterrence Fund," or as Taxpayers for Common Sense more accurately labels it, "the Navy's submarine slush fund." The idea – a longstanding darling of the submarine lobby (and yes, Virginia, there is a submarine lobby in Washington) – is to set up a separate slush fund outside the Navy's normal shipbuilding budget. That's where the money for the new ballistic missile submarine program, currently slated to cost \$139-billion for 12 subs, would go.

Establishing such a new slush fund would, in turn, finesse any direct budgetary competition between the submarine program and the new surface ships the Navy also wants, and so avoid a political battle that might end up substantially reducing the number of vessels the Navy is hoping to buy over the next 30 years. Naturally, the money for the submarine fund

will have to come from somewhere, either one of the other military services or that operations and maintenance budget so regularly raided to help pay for expensive weapons programs.

Not to be outmanoeuvred, Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James has now asked Congress to set up a "strategic deterrence fund" to pay for its two newest nuclear delivery vehicles, the planned bomber and a long-range nuclear-armed ballistic missile. In theory, this would take pressure off other major Air Force projects like the F-35, but as with the submarine fund, it only adds up if a future president and a future Congress can be persuaded to jack up the Pentagon budget to make room for these and other weapons systems.

In the end, however the specifics work out, any "fund" for such weaponry will be just another case of smoke and mirrors, a way of kicking the nuclear funding crisis down the road in hopes of fatter budgets to come. Why make choices now when the Pentagon and the military services can bet on blackmailing a future Trump or Clinton administration and a future Congress into ponying up the extra billions of dollars needed to make their latest ill-conceived plans add up?

If your head is spinning after this brief tour of the Pentagon's budget labyrinth, it should be. That's just what the Pentagon wants its painfully complicated budget practices to do: leave Congress, any administration, and the public too confused and exhausted to actually hold it accountable for how our tax dollars are being spent. So far, they're getting away with it. **CT**

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**William D. Hartung** is the director of the Arms and Security Project at the Center for International Policy and a senior adviser to the Security Assistance Monitor. He is the author of, among other books, *Prophets of War: Lockheed Martin and the Making of the Military-Industrial Complex*. This essay was first published at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com)

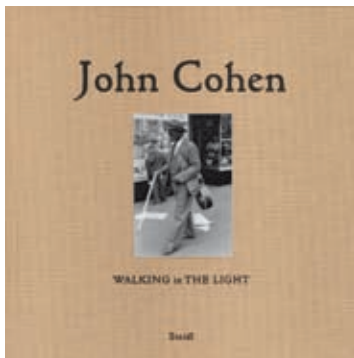
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Images from John Cohen: *Walking in the Light*.

Reverend Gary Davis: "I'm here in your midst as a black man, like a fly in buttermilk."

# SONG, SOUL & SALVATION



## WALKING IN THE LIGHT

By John Cohen

Published by Steidl / [www.steidl.de](http://www.steidl.de)

Price: \$38.25 (Amazon)

From 1954 to 1964, John Cohen photographed life inside black churches in East New York, on the streets of New Haven, and at the home of Reverend Gary Davis, the blind blues and gospel singer. He visited dark and dingy boxing gyms, met sweating coal shovellers, and made a pilgrimage to John's Island, South Carolina, where he watched the children dancing.

Cohen's odyssey – chronicled in the recently published photobook, *Walking in the Light* – begins in Harlem, where his stark images highlight the contrast between the innocent playfulness of the young and the stress felt by their parents, who struggle to survive in a harsh and unequal society. The potentially lethal energy of the streets is dissipated in hard labour, sporting conflict, and a relentless quest for salvation, eagerly sought in the area's many churches. It's hardly surprising that the book's highlights are not the photographs infused with drama and simmering violence, but those that glow with spiritual fulfillment – as worshippers at a small church in Harlem find release from a life of political and social-uncertainty in impassioned displays of trance and dance. Sweet soul music . . .



Images from John Cohen: *Walking in the Light*.



**Worshippers find release and transformation at a church in Harlem, New York.**

“In gospel churches where I photographed,” writes Cohen in the book’s introduction, “the music making revealed inner sounds that can be seen on the face of the singer: soulful expressions . . . the intensity of a prayer, where raw feeling is laid bare – the quality of light illuminates the face of a child. I attempted to photograph the energy generated in that room. I felt that the church members had found release and transformation within the music, in reaction to the painful constrictions of New York City life.”

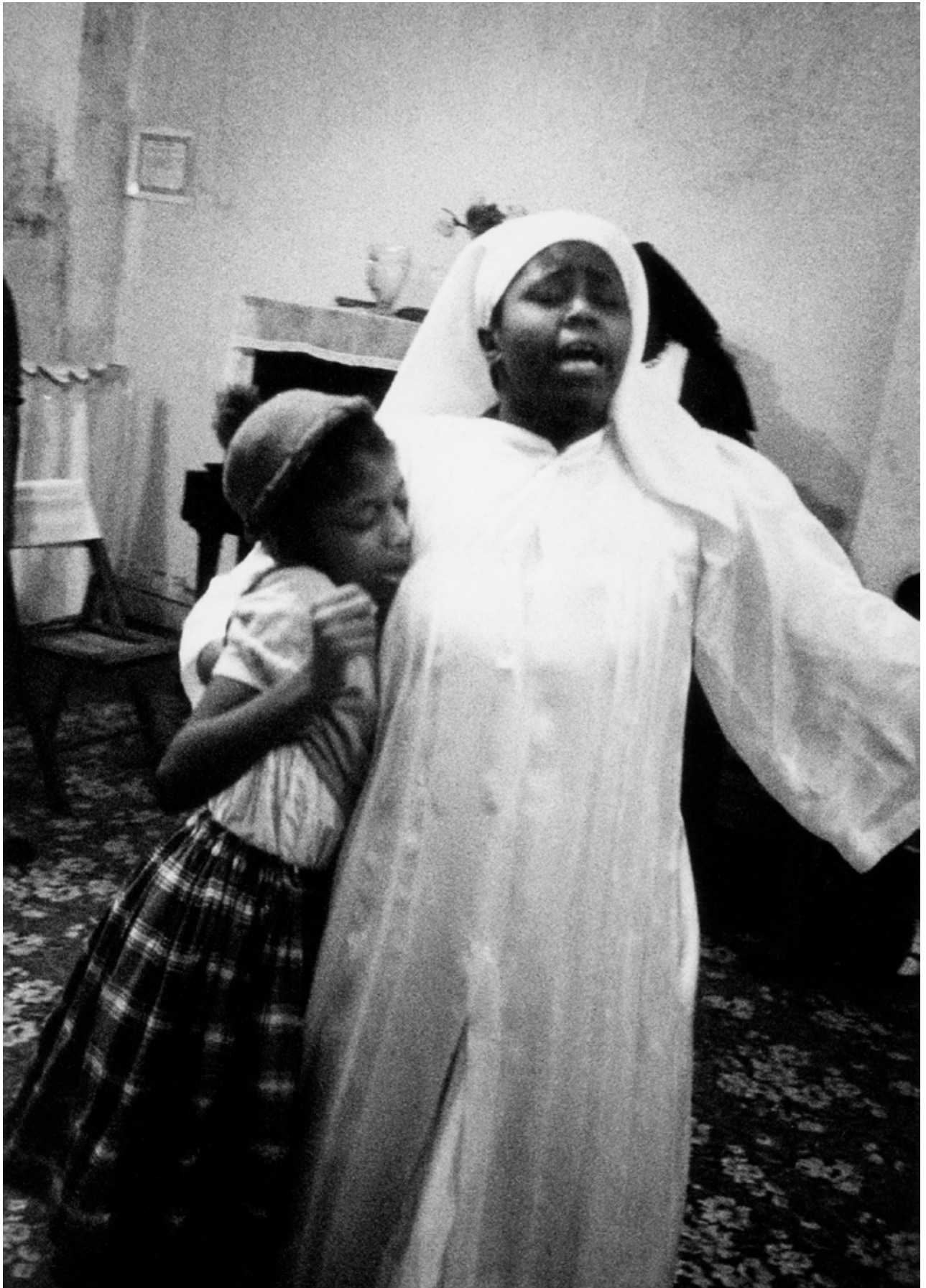
During his journey, Cohen was also thrilled by the sound of Blind Reverend Gary Davis, who later “became a popular performer in the folk music revival, singing gospel, blues and ragtime to white audiences at clubs and concerts. “Davis tells Cohen, ‘I’m here in your midst as a black man, like a fly in buttermilk. It ain’t how a thing looks, though, it’s what it is.’ ”

The final episode of the book transports read-



*Images from John Cohen: Walking in the Light.*





Images from John Cohen: *Walking in the Light*.





At home and at play at Johns Island, South Carolina.

ers to Johns Island, near Charleston, South Carolina, where Cohen had heard Janie Hunter sing at a 1964 festival, and wanted to know more about the African-based dances her children and grandchildren were doing in her rural community. “On the island, eight-year old kids performed African games, followed immediately by 1920s Charleston dance steps, Kung Fu moves and modern Motown choreography. Within moments they shifted gears from one era to another.”

Walking in the Light’s grainy photographs portray a society taking its first steps to civil rights emancipation. Sixty years on, though, some descendants will summarise the hopes and dreams that their forebears nurtured with the question, “What went wrong?”

For an answer, they probably need look no further than the stark words of Reverend Gary Davis, “It is what it is.” – **Tony Sutton**



Images from John Cohen: *Walking in the Light*.

**The photographer:** John Cohen is a musician, documentary filmmaker and photographer. His archive has recently been acquired by the US Library of Congress

# America's cosmic tax gap

The federal government can now spot a bug in space – so why can't it spot rich tax cheats here on the ground? asks **Sam Pizzigati**

**With fewer watchdogs on the job, almost a fifth of individual tax due on capital gains and "partnership" income is going uncollected**

**T**he folks working for the federal government can do some incredible things. Over at NASA, for instance, they're now putting the finishing touches on the new James Webb Space Telescope – an instrument the Washington Post says will be powerful enough "to capture the heat signature of a bumblebee on the moon."

Amazing. We can now spot a bug in space. So why can't we spot people who cheat on their taxes right here in the US of A?

A great many people, the IRS says in a new report, are stiffing Uncle Sam. Our federal "tax gap" – the disconnect between what taxpayers owe and what they eventually pay – is now averaging \$406-billion a year.

That eye-opening figure comes from the 17 percent of taxpayers who misreport their income and underpay their taxes.

The other side of the coin is that 83 percent of Americans are paying their taxes, in full and on time. If you make a typical American income, you almost definitely fall within this 83 percent.

Actually, you don't have much choice. All wage and salary income – the overwhelming bulk of the income average Americans receive – gets automatically reported to the IRS and faces automatic withholding from your pay cheque.

Under this system, notes the new study,

only one percent of overall paycheck income goes under- or unreported.

But some Americans – the nation's most affluent – don't make their money from wages and salaries. They get the bulk of their income instead from business profits, rents, and the money they make buying and selling assets.

Most of this income doesn't get automatically reported, so few of these dollars ever face any withholding at all.

That wouldn't matter all that much if the IRS had plenty of agents out in the field doing in-depth audits. But the IRS has been losing staff. The tax agency had 50,400 full-time-equivalent enforcement staff available in 2010. The 2016 figure: only 38,800.

With fewer watchdogs on the job, almost a fifth of individual tax due on capital gains and "partnership" income is going uncollected. An even higher share of rents, royalties, and "proprietor" income – nearly two-thirds – is escaping taxes.

How much of this tax cheating involves big-time business people and how much involves mom-and-pop business operators? The IRS doesn't say. The agency doesn't break down the new tax evasion data by taxpayer income class.

But eight years ago, economists Andrew Johns and Joel Slemrod went through ear-

lier IRS raw data and did just that.

Americans who make between \$500,000 and \$1-million a year, these two researchers found, misreport their income at triple the rate of taxpayers making between \$30,000 and \$50,000, and well over double the rate of taxpayers making \$50,000 to \$100,000.

One key point to keep in mind here: We're not talking about loopholes in the tax code when we talk about the "tax gap." Loopholes let the deep-pocket set legally sidestep what otherwise would be a significantly higher tax bill. The IRS tax gap numbers only apply to outright illegal tax cheating.

The rich engaging in this cheating do get nabbed sometimes. This May, for example, a federal judge found that Texas ty-

coon Sam Wyly engaged in "deceptive and fraudulent actions" to avoid taxes on over \$1-billion of his assets.

But the Sam Wylys remain outliers. Most high-income tax cheats don't get caught. And that won't change until Congress starts subjecting the incomes of the awesomely affluent to the same reporting and withholding standards that apply to the incomes of average Americans. **CT**

**We're not talking about loopholes in the tax code when we talk about the "tax gap." The IRS tax gap numbers only apply to outright illegal tax cheating**

*Sam Pizzigati, an Institute for Policy Studies associate fellow, co-edits Inequality.org, where an earlier version of this piece appeared. His latest book is The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970. This article was distributed by [www.otherwords.org](http://www.otherwords.org)*

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# The poverty myth

The illusion that people are to blame for their own poverty goes back centuries in our culture, writes **Jill Richardson**

**Those who got rich, the Puritans thought, must have been chosen by God for heaven; those who were poor were damned**

If you're poor, many Americans think, it's your own fault. It's a sign of your own moral failing.

I don't personally believe that, but the idea has roots in our culture going back centuries.

In *The Wealth of Nations*, the foundational work of modern capitalism, Adam Smith extolled the virtues of working hard and being thrifty with money. That wasn't just the way to get rich, he reasoned – it was morally righteous.

Sociologist Max Weber took the idea further in describing what he called the Protestant work ethic.

To Puritans who believed that one was either predestined for heaven or for hell, Weber wrote, working hard and accumulating wealth was a sign of God's blessing. Those who got rich, the Puritans thought, must have been chosen by God for heaven; those who were poor were damned.

Even major American philanthropists have subscribed to this idea.

## **Rockefeller the righteous**

John D. Rockefeller, a religious Baptist, thought his extraordinary wealth was evidence from God of his righteousness. Fortunately, he took this as a sign that he should use his money for good. He gave it to universities and medical research centers, and his descendants used it for great

art museums, national parks, and more.

But Rockefeller also believed that the poor were often deserving of their fate. If they'd just worked harder, or budgeted their money wisely, then they wouldn't be poor.

Plenty of Americans agree. Sadly, that's often not the case.

The first factor determining one's wealth as an adult is an accident of birth. If you're born to wealthy parents, you'll go to better schools and get better health care. Your odds of success as an adult are higher.

If, on other hand, you're born to poor parents who must work multiple jobs instead of staying home to care for you – or who can't afford healthy food, medical care, or a house in a good school district – your chances of earning your way into the middle class as an adult plummet.

In fact, if your parents' income is in the bottom 20 percent, there's a 40 percent chance you'll be stuck in that low-income bracket for your entire life. Thanks to racism, that figure rises to 50 percent for black people born into poverty.

Indeed, racial disparities crop up even at the bottom of the ladder.

Due to historic racism and discrimination, data from the Economic Policy Institute shows, low-income white families tend to be wealthier than black families making the same income. Furthermore,



**THE INVISIBLE MAN:** He's lying asleep on the street corner in the heart of Toronto's financial district. People step over him, someone has left a sandwich, but most ignore him. Poverty and homelessness are easy to ignore. Photo: Tony Sutton

whites are more likely to have friends and family who can help them out of a financial bind.

Finally, thanks to decades of discriminatory housing and lending practices, black families are more likely to live in poorer neighbourhoods. That impacts the quality of the schools they attend, among many other things.

So why can't a hardworking family get ahead? For one thing, it's expensive to be poor. Try finding an affordable place to live. You need to have enough cash on hand to pay a deposit. Many apartments require you to prove your income is 2.5 times the cost of the rent.

Public assistance programs only help the most destitute, and often don't pro-

vide enough even then.

For the disabled, the situation is worse. In theory, Social Security provides for those with disabilities. In reality, getting approved for disability payments is costly (in both medical and legal fees) and difficult. Once you get approved, disability payments are low, condemning you to poverty for life.

In short, there are many reasons why poor Americans are poor. It doesn't help that our society thinks it's their own fault.

**CT**

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**Jill Richardson** is the author of *Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It*. This article originally appeared at [www.OtherWords.org](http://www.OtherWords.org)

**In theory, Social Security provides for those with disabilities. In reality, getting approved for disability payments is costly (in both medical and legal fees) and difficult**

# Journalists united against election reform

It's hard to understand the widespread passion for such an undemocratic political relic rooted in the 18th- and 19th-centuries, writes **Rick Salutin**

**The Tories' only chance at power in Canada lies in our current, rigged (thanks, Donald Trump, the word applies perfectly well here) system**

feel like writing a letter to the editor about surly, negative reactions of Canadian journalists to the prospect of electoral reform. There are exceptions, though only Andrew Coyne of the National Post, comes to mind.

Many journalists seem pre-emptively nostalgic for a foul, undemocratic system that has only longevity in its favour, like the death penalty in the US. Pardon, the death penalty may have more to be said for it.

I'm perplexed over why they become passionate and fastidious about a political relic, rooted in 18th- and 19th-century political worst practices, that has lingered longer than it ever should've and now only survives here in Canada and in the UK.

Note that the Liberal campaign promise last fall was that this would be the last Canadian election held under the first-past-the-post system. It was a simple negative, and I think voters were aware of it to the extent they're aware of platforms in elections. The implication was that any alternative – proportional representation, mixed member proportional or ranked ballot – would be better than what we have. Didn't matter which. Out, out damned spot.

The hostility to reform among parties is understandable. The Tories' only chance at power lies in our current, rigged (thanks, Donald Trump, the word applies perfectly well here) system. If they needed a genuine

majority, they'd have to go back to being the kind of inclusive, somewhat progressive, party they once were. The New Democratic Party (NDP) wants only a proportional system and seems ready to stick with the status horribilis if it can't get that. Me, I'm good with any change.

But wherefore those journalists? Rosemary Barton, host of CBC's daily politics show, is irate about the non-voting status of the Greens and Bloc Quebecois on the committee set up to study reform. She finds it hypocritical. She's outraged by it – not by Canada never having held a genuinely democratic vote.

Canadian Press veteran Jennifer Ditchburn, on Rosie's show, says she could “rant on forever” – not about democratic sacrilege through the centuries, but procedural government ineptitude, and especially the timeline! The timeline, O the timeline!

Chantal Hebert, in the Toronto Star, has written on this three times already this month. She says the process has been “largely discredited,” and hasn't been “minimally respectful of Parliament.” I guess I'd say Parliament will deserve more respect once it's been truly democratized. She also says this isn't high on Canadians' list of concerns, which may be true. But if so that's because people think we already live in a democracy – with all those Parliamentary ‘majorities’ – and maybe the press



could spare a little ink to correct that false impression.

Jeffrey Simpson, in the *Globe and Mail*, who has consistently opposed basic reform, says “the electoral system, like the constitution . . . belongs to the people, not the political parties.” I think he means there must be a referendum.

But we’ve already been handed two constitutions: one in 1867, which Sir John A. Macdonald decreed people be given no chance to vote on, and a similar procedure in 1982. Our electoral system isn’t even in either constitution – it’s a hand-me-down from Britain.

Instead of getting mired in a referendum process (what alternatives are on it? What percentage is required to win?), how about leap-frogging to a place where minority governments can never again pretend to be majorities?

What’s behind these sour responses to a sunnier democratic future? Have journalists learned to cover elections as they now are and don’t want to retool? That’d be mean-spirited to suggest though if the shoe fits, etc.

Or, perhaps, they see themselves as surrogates for the benighted, politically deprived masses who they stand in for, holding the elites to account since ordinary people can’t, due to the current political math? That’s convoluted, but sounds more like it.

Or are journalists embarrassed at having ignored this rotting system for so long? We all should be but they’re the watchdogs who’ve blithely treated a democratic atrocity as if it’s a virtue or at least something normal, like the weather. Anyone would rather not have such dereliction pointed out.

So they opt to continue covering peccadilloes and light abrasions rather than the limb that got lopped off and was never replaced or even sutured. It’s as if some huge story – say, an airliner going down once a week on the same day for years – never got reported, while all the energy went into the occasional fender bender. **CT**

*Rick Salutin is an author and activist based in Toronto. This article was originally published in the *Toronto Star**

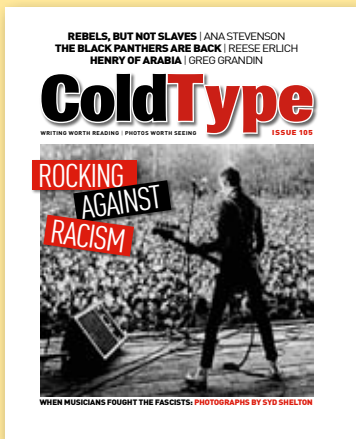
**Instead of getting mired in a referendum process, how about leap-frogging to a place where minority governments can never again pretend to be majorities?**

**BY THE NUMBERS** [www.inequality.org](http://www.inequality.org)

CEOs at America’s largest corporations averaged **\$12.4 million** in total pay last year. The average American worker would have to labor **335 years** to match that CEO take-home.

Source: AFL-CIO, PayWatch, May 17, 2016 [inequality.org](http://inequality.org)

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# Midnight surfers

**Dell Franklin** picks up a couple of late-night revellers who proceed to beat each other up on the back seat of his cab. But it's not what it seems

**H**ey Dude!" That's how they address me as they stand in animated conversation with fellow drinkers in front of Bull's Tavern, one of the last semi-rowdy establishments remaining in San Luis Obispo. When I pull up, they repeatedly execute their farewells – shaking hands with a brief grab of two fingers, followed by bumping fists, hugging, and thumping chests, playful as young puppies.

I don't want to keep honking and interrupting, but it's the midnight hour, near last call, just when I'm about finished tolerating asinine conversation and want to cut and run.

So I honk the horn, keeping my paw on it. They glance over, suddenly remembering that, yes, they did call a cab, and the two of them lower their hands in a gesture indicating I should remain patient while I read their lips, "Chill, dude, we're comin' bro'."

I am impatient, and restless, and dying to get home to Cayucos at some point in the wee hours for my triple shot of chilled Skyy vodka, but I do my best to understand these young knuckleheads. However, if I do not honk my horn again, they might forget they called a cab, and become so caught up in the celebration of their departure that they might just return to the bar for one more,

"Just one more, dude, come on back for us in half an hour."

It's happened before, many times.

But they are finally breaking up; just one more round of grabbing two fingers, bumping fists, hugging, and thumping chests, before they fall into the back seat.

Both wear beanies, hoodies and torn jeans, with sun-bleached brows. One is short and stocky, the other tall and lanky.

"Hey, dude, thanks for waitin'." Says the tall one.

"Yeh, bro', yer way cool," adds his pal

"Hey, you an old surfer?"

"Nah. Just a body surfer down south, before I moved up here 100 years ago. Hermosa/Manhattan Beach."

"Yeh, it's way cool down there. The Wedge is way gnarly. Hey, we're goin' to Los Osos, but we ain't got enough money. It's about 30, right? We got money at our pad, though, bro', no shit. We wouldn't stiff you, not a righteous dude like you, bro'."

"Well, you guys know you're supposed to have the money up front when we go out of town, right?"

"We totally understand, bro', but we got carried away and spent most of our bread in the bar, man. Hey, didn't you useta tend bar at Happy Jack's in Morro Bay?"

**When I pull up, they repeatedly execute their farewells – shaking hands with a brief grab of two fingers, followed by bumping fists, hugging, and thumping chests, playful as young puppies**



**They smack each other again, then start wrestling and flailing, heads bouncing off doors, feet thumping my seat, squawking, hooting, panting, grunting, cursing vilely, and calling each other names**

“Right.” I’m heading toward Los Osos, 12 miles away. What the hell. These guys are not on the con. We’re brothers, after all, even if they’re young enough to be my kids.

“You’re the dude hit that low-rider in the head with a bottle of Galliano, ain’t you?”

“That’s me.”

“Right on!”

“Far out! Everybody knows about you, bro’, yer a legend. Fuckin’ Happy Jack’s. What a wild scene. Gnarly fuckin’ bar, but you ruled! I remember you.”

When they finish schmoozing me, they inform me that, after partying all night, they need to get home because the short dude has to be at work at eight, while the lanky dude has a class at Cal Poly at the same time. They begin arguing over nonsense, half serious, and I am nearly out of town when they start pummeling each other. There seems to be no provocation for this activity. They’re not slapping or play punching, but pounding each other with hard punches, creating a ruckus.

“Hey!” I bellow, for this has never happened in my cab before. “Cut it out, back there! You’re gonna tear my goddam cab apart.”

“We’re not hurting each other,” claims the taller one, during a brief pause.

“We never hurt each other,” adds the smaller guy.

“I don’t care if you hurt each other,” I continue, glimpsing the two boneheads in the mirror. “It’s my cab I’m concerned about.”

“We promise not to hurt your cab, bro’.” says the tall one. “If we hurt your cab, we’ll pay for it.”

“Yeh, we got yah covered, brah.”

To emphasise their intent, they smack each other again, then start wrestling and flailing, heads bouncing off doors, feet thumping my seat, squawking, hooting, panting, grunting, cursing vilely, and calling each other names. All I can do is drive on, powerless to deal with the situation. In time, they come up for air, caps pushed to the side, grinning, winded, jubilant, showing no

signs of pain or injury. We are approaching the last light out of town to Los Osos when the smaller guy dials up his cellphone and, through gasps, contacts a woman and proceeds to sweet-talk her. Soon he is imploring, and then painfully begging.

Then, “Hey, good brah, turn around, my bitch wantsa fuck. Hurry, dude ’fore she changes her mind.”

“That skank?” inquires his friend. “She treats you like shit.”

“Hey, dude, that’s my bitch yer talkin’ about.” He hauls off and punches his friend in the bicep.

His friend hauls off and hits him back in HIS bicep. “You deserve to be treated like shit by a skank,” he tells him.

The little guy addresses me, “Good dude, turn around and go back to San Luis, okay?”

“Christ, it’s gonna end up costing you a fortune. The meter’s already at 12-bucks.”

“It’s okay, brah. She’s gonna fuck me. I’d rather do that than hang out with home-boy.”

His pal gives him a less intensive punch. “Go on, bro’, take him to his skanky, skuzzy skag.”

“It’s gonna cost.”

“We got it covered.”

I turn around and head back to town. By the time we arrive at the girl’s house the meter is up to \$20. Out in front of the house, the rangy dude wants some cab cash from his about-to-get-laid bro’, who takes out his wallet and discovers he has nary a dollar. They argue. I wait. Finally, the broke dude tells his bro’ he has money stashed under his CDs in his bedroom. They get things straightened and make a quick swipe of fingers, bump fists, thump each other on the chests, and, for good measure, whack each other in the biceps as the girl looks on from the porch. Then the bonehead staggers up to her as his partner slips into the shotgun seat.

“I hope she’s worth it,” I tell him.

“Oh, you know how it is – drunk and horny. It is what it is.”

“Amen.”

“Thanks for bein’ cool, brother-man. I’ll tip you big when we get back to my pad.”

We begin talking during the ride to Los Osos, a 15-minute jaunt down a two-lane highway. Without the influence of his rascally pal, he proves to be, despite his drunkenness, intelligent and articulate. He is 29, just a few credits away from a degree in communications at Cal Poly, and works part time as a waiter. He lives at home in a cottage, and his best friend, currently shackled up with his on-and-off squeeze, lives there, too. The dude tells me that, although he is going to get his degree at some point, he is in no hurry to acquire a full-time occupation, because his priorities remain surfing and a laid-back lifestyle, and not a plunge into the “stressful ownership society, which involves too much bullshit to take care of, bro.”

“That’s pretty much where I’m at as a man more than twice your age,” I tell him. “You’ve got to be a certain kind of person to live the way I do, to tend bar for years, and have too much fun to settle down.”

“You settled down now, brah?”

“Only because I’m too old to raise the kind of hell and beat up my body the way I used to.”

“Got a squeeze?”

“Got a good one – with few demands of the grown-up world you’re talking about.”

“Right on, brah. Yer my idol.”

“I sure as hell hope not.”

He laughs. We rap knuckles in brotherly agreement, forming a bond of male camaraderie as we approach Los Osos, a formless, off-the-beaten-track, bedroom community that is known for its lack of personality and night life. By the time we reach his residence, in the older part of town, the meter is over \$46. He asks me to wait while he goes into the backyard bungalow to rummage for cash, while I ponder the long drive back to San Luis, and then the longer ride of 22 miles from the taxi lot to Cayucos before I can sip my beloved vodka.

He returns and sits in the shotgun seat, hands me enough crumpled cash for the fare and \$10 tip. He stares straight ahead. “I got a main squeeze, too, bro’, and she’s pushing me to settle down, you know, get my degree, get the right job, get married, have kids before she’s too old. But, man, I’m fighting it. It ain’t me right now, but I don’t wanna lose her, she’s a good chick, been real understanding, you know. What do you think I should do?”

I open up my wallet and withdraw a strip of paper upon which, years ago, I had printed out a quote by the great writer Somerset Maugham, from his book, *The Moon and Sixpence*. I skip the beginning of the quote, because my new disciple might not be sober enough to digest it, but read the end aloud: “There is no object more deserving of pity than the married bachelor.”

He nods slowly, still staring straight ahead. “Yeh, man, I get it – big time. Don’t know if I’m cut out for the long haul.”

“But the long haul as a lifetime bachelor isn’t without periods of misery, my friend. You have to know what kind of person you are, what’s in your heart, what you can deal with. You might surprise yourself that you can take on the grown-up world just fine, especially after most of your pals succumb to that ownership bullshit – the wife, house, kids, they all own you. Nothing owns me. I got a full time dog, two cats, and a part time woman. But I’m an exception. You have to find out if you are.”

He turns and grins at me, offers his hand. We soul shake. “Thanks, bro’. Glad we could talk like this.” He gets out, walks around the cab, and stops at my window. “Wish you were still tending bar at Happy Jack’s. I could drop in and we could have some righteous talks. Good night, bro’.”

As he starts toward his bungalow, I call out, “Don’t forget your eight o’clock class tomorrow!”

He turns around. “Awh, gonna shine it off, bro’.” He flashes a wolfish grin. “Surf’s up.”

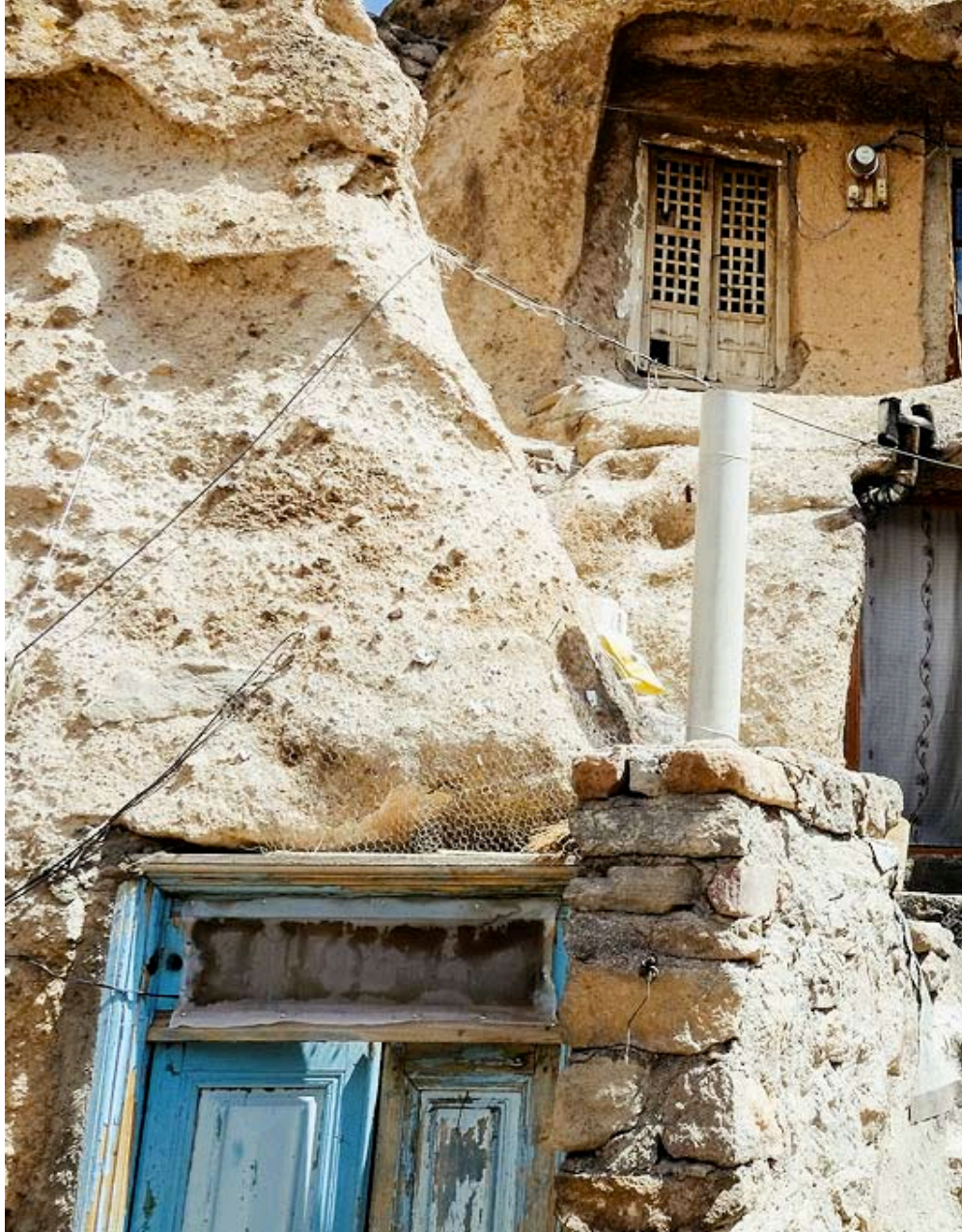
**The dude tells me that, although he is going to get his degree at some point, he is in no hurry to acquire a full-time occupation, because his priorities remain surfing and a laid-back lifestyle**

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**Dell Franklin**  
*is a long-time journalist and founder of the Rogue Voice literary magazine. He blogs at [www.dellfranklin.com](http://www.dellfranklin.com)*

**CT**

IN THE PICTURE

# The place where people still live in caves



**Nate Robert** visits Kandovan, in Iran, where the locals are mixing the old with the new, and upsetting UNESCO in the process

**K**andovan, located in a fairly remote and dusty north-western corner of Iran, appears more movie set than real-life, the type of unearthly village that Hollywood would trade its left caryopsis to be allowed to film a blockbuster scene at.

Visually unparalleled, culturally unique, its residents live inside the world's last remaining cave village. The 175 Kandovan families can trace their roots back seven centuries, to the days of Genghis Khan's invading Mongolian empire. Their multi-level abodes are carved directly into the deep volcanic rock close to Mount Sahand, a towering volcano stretching almost 4,000 meters into the sky. Having erupted regularly for 12-million years, Mount Sahand is now dor-

mant, but the lava digging continues.

A spectacular spot to build a cave home, Kandovan is surrounded by snow-capped mountains, with at least 17 summits in the Sahand range taller than three-kilometers. On the green slopes opposite the cave-dwellings, painterly terraced farms add colour to the earthy tones. Smoke rises gently from the BBQ restaurants and wood-fired kettles below, a clear river runs by, the air is crisp, and everything seems surreal and, well, Flintstoney.

Kandovan is already a tourist attraction. On the day I visited, a local pointed at the labyrinth of caves and excitedly told me, "There are some Americans here! You should talk to them!" Fortunately, although I heard a few distant calls of "does anyone have the

## IN THE PICTURE

**Left:** Often it's difficult to say where one cave house ends and another begins.

**Below:** A nice spot for a cup of tea.

**Below, left:** Picture perfect – Kandovan's cave dwellings are framed by the snow-capped mountains of north-west Iran.



Wi-Fi password?”, I didn’t get to meet them. The only tourists I saw were hundreds of Iranian school kids, reminding me of my youth back in Australia, where, lacking centuries-old-lava-carved-cave-villages, our annual school excursion was to a working animal slaughter-house. But I digress.

Maybe I got lucky, as I’ve read that Kandovan is a popular tourist attraction. However, during the several hours spent walking the quieter upper-levels and slippery sheep-trails high above the settlement, I didn’t see another soul, other than the occasional cave-dwelling local.

Being somewhat similar to the better-known cave dwellings in Cappadocia in Turkey, comparisons between the two settlements are inevitable. The key difference is

## IN THE PICTURE



**Old meets new: The stone and brick additions to the Kandovan homes have upset UNESCO.**

**Despite Kandovan being well visited by Iranian day-trippers, this is still a genuine working village**

that Cappadocia has gone full-tourist, regular cave-life having been abandoned long ago, traded for a fistful of tourist dollars and a nice McMansion in the neighbouring village. I'm not disparaging Cappadocia – I visited not so long ago, and it's one of the most striking places I have ever seen.

But Kandovan, Iran, is different – it's real, and alive. And, despite Kandovan being well visited by Iranian day-trippers, this is still a genuine working village.

With such genuine historical continuity, you would assume that a UNESCO World Heritage listing is in place. But, no. UNESCO has issues with Kandovan. There's angst about the contemporary stone and brick additions, as they're not part of the original fabric of the cave village. UNESCO sees these structures as a problem that needs resolving, before Kandovan can be being admitted to the World Heritage register. On the other side of this UNESCO story, are the residents, who've carved-out not only their own domi-

**Kandovan's cave houses.**







A young girl stands at the entrance to one of the tourist-focussed shops in Kandovan.



ciles, but also make a living from the tourists who do make it here, with locals earning a Rial or two via restaurants and locally hand-made tchotchkes.

Indeed, the addition of these stone and brick structures and the several tourist-targeted galleries have enhanced the authenticity and experience of Kandovan, giving the place its naturalness and normalcy. Ram-shackle, and somewhat raw, the organic evolution of Kandovan is now ironically contemporary. The layering of old and new is effortlessly pure. And a sanitised, by-the-book, UNESCO-friendly version of Kandovan would certainly not have the same feeling, or appearance.

Indeed, there is perhaps no tourism venture more authentic than the millennia-old racket of locals making a sly buck from gawking out-of-towners. Crass, but true. Even in a low-tourist area like North-west Iran, the tradition of profiting from visitors dates back to

times older than Kandovan itself.

Tourism and unfettered capitalism go hand-in-hand. With the remote corners of the world being more accessible than ever before, Kandovanians are going to make money – that much is certain.

However, only those locals with foresight will be aware of the true price that will eventually be paid. Whether that price is worth it, or not, is another question.

As it stands right now, Kandovan is incredible. The recent structural additions and the ventures of locals servicing tourists give the village a touch of ordinariness – a nice contrast and addition to surroundings that are anything but ordinary.

For us mere tourists, Kandovan is a day-tripping dream. **CT**

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**Nate Robert** specializes in travel photography. Since July 2012, he has been traveling the world full time, through 54 countries. His website is [www.yomadic.com](http://www.yomadic.com)

# The European Union: A house divided

Conn M Hallinan on the financial struggle that is tearing a continent apart

The awkwardly named “Brexit” has stirred up a witches’ brew of xenophobia, racism and nationalism, but it has also served to sharpen a long-standing debate among the European left

*“Larger now than the Roman Empire of two thousand years ago, more opaque than the Byzantine, the European Union continues to baffle observers and participants alike.” – Perry Anderson, British historian*

The European Union is one of the premier trade organisations on the planet, with a collective GDP that matches the world’s largest economies. But it is far more than a trade group; it is also a banker, a judicial system, a watchdog, a military alliance, and, increasingly, an enforcer of economic rules among its 28 members.

On the one hand, it functions like a super state, on the other, a collection of squabbling competitors, with deep divisions between north and south. On June 23, the two-decade-old organisation will be put to the test when Great Britain – its second largest economy – votes whether to stay in the EU or bail out.

The awkwardly named “Brexit” has stirred up a witches’ brew of xenophobia, racism and nationalism, but it has also served to sharpen a long-standing debate among the European left over the nature of the organisation, and whether it serves to unite a continent shattered by two world wars, or functions as little more than a vehicle to spread a particular species of capitalism that has impoverished more people

than it has lifted up.

The EU was originally sold as an effective way to compete with US and Japanese commercial power (and later China) by integrating the economies of Western Europe into a common market. The 1957 Treaty of Rome established the European Economic Community (EEC), but that organisation was plagued by currency instability.

Currency manipulation is a standard economic strategy, one the US Treasury follows to this day. The idea is to boost exports by deflating one’s currency, thus making one’s products cheaper. In an organisation such as the EEC, however, where currencies were traded back and forth, that strategy caused chaos, particularly after the Americans decoupled the dollar from gold in 1971. The US immediately began aggressively devaluing its currency and undercutting Germany.

To make a long history brief, Germany and France began pushing for a common currency, though for different reasons.

For Germany, fluctuating currency rates cut into that country’s export engine. For France, a common currency would give Paris some say over the EEC’s economic policies through the creation of a European Central Bank, policies that at the time were largely determined by Germany’s powerful economy.

Although Britain opted out of adopting the Euro, London rapidly became the finan-



**German Chancellor Angela Merkel: "Can't live beyond your mean."**

Caricature: DonkeyHotey, via Flickr.com

cial centre of the continent. In the end, 19 countries would adopt the Euro, creating the Eurozone. Eight others, including Denmark, Sweden and Poland kept their own currencies.

The common currency – established by the 1991 Maastricht Treaty and launched in 1999 – effectively put the German Bundesbank in charge. Bonn agreed to the common currency, but only on the condition that everyone kept their budget deficits to three percent of national income and held their government debt level at 60 percent of GDP. Those figures matched Germany's economy, but very few of the other states in the EU.

The Maastricht Treaty also transformed the EEC into the EU in 1993.

Deflating one's currency as a tactic to increase exports and stimulate growth during a downturn was no longer an option, and the debt ratio was set so low that few economies could keep to its strictures. When the

bottom fell out during the 2008 economic meltdown, EU states found out just what they had signed on for: draconian austerity measures, the widespread privatisation of state owned enterprises – from water and electrical systems, to airports and harbors – and emigration. Millions of mainly-young Portuguese, Irish, Greeks and Spaniards fled abroad.

The European Central Bank – with its cohorts, the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission, the so-called Troika – straitjacketed economies throughout the continent, turning Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland into basket cases, forcing them to borrow money to keep their banks afloat, while instituting austerity regimes that led to massive unemployment, huge service cutbacks, and rising poverty rates.

The Troika had a neat trick: it shifted the debts incurred by private speculators on to the public, while the Germans spun up a fairy tale to explain the counter-example: the frugal frau.

"The Swabian housewife," lectured German Chancellor Angela Merkel, "would have told us her worldly wisdom: In the long run you cannot live beyond your means."

Except that the debts were not due to the Greeks, Irish, Spaniards, and Portuguese "living beyond their means." They were just picking up the tab run up by the speculators. The vast majority of "bailouts" that followed the crash went directly into the vaults of French, British, German, and Austrian banks. On the day the Greek "bailout" was announced, French bank shares rose 24 percent.

In many ways, the EU resembles a military alliance on the march. Jan Zielonka, a professor of European politics at Oxford, calls the EU a "postmodern empire," filling the vacuum created by the fall of the Soviet Union, using "checkbooks rather than swords as leverage." During the Clinton ad-

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ministration, the EU – along with NATO – pushed eastward, creating what Zbigniew Brzezinski called “the Eurasian bridgehead for American power and the potential springboard for the democratic system’s expansion into Eurasia.”

But the EU has very little to do with “democracy,” as the recent Greek crisis demonstrated. In a confrontation between the then newly-elected Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis and German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schauble, the latter refused to negotiate over the austerity program that had cratered Greece’s economy. “I’m not discussing the program,” said Schauble, “This was accepted by the previous [Greek] government and we can’t possibly let an election change anything.”

In short, the Troika – an unelected body – makes all economic decisions and is unwilling to consider any other approach but that of the mythical Swabian housewife. It isn’t democracy moving east, but the Bundesbank, and a species of capitalism that is unmoved by unemployment, poverty and widespread misery

So is the Brexit a challenge to the growing might of capital and an implicit critique of the EU’s dearth of democracy? Nothing’s that simple.

First, the loudest critics of the EU are people one needs a very long spoon to sup with: Marine Le Pen’s racist National Front, Britain’s xenophobic United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), Hungary’s thuggish Jobbik, Greece’s openly Nazi Golden Dawn, and Italy’s odious Northern League. Hatred of immigrants and Islamophobia are the glue that binds these parties, which are active and growing throughout the EU.

Indeed, some on the British left have suggested voting against a Brexit precisely because the most vocal opposition to the EU comes from the most reactionary elements in the UK. The British Conservative Party is deeply split on the issue, with its most right-wing and anti-immigrant members favouring getting out.

The left is also filled with crosscurrents. While some argue for getting out because they see the EU as an undemocratic vehicle for the expansion of international capital, others are critical, but advocate staying in. British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn – hardly a friend to international capital – opposes the Brexit.

While Corbyn is deeply critical of the EU’s lack of “democratic accountability,” and its push to “privatise public services,” he argues that there is a “strong socialist case” for staying in. Corbyn says the EU plays a positive role on climate change, and that exiting the EU would initiate a race to the bottom on issues such as equal pay, work hours, vacations and maternity leave. The Scottish National Party, which is to the left of the Labour Party, also opposes a Brexit, and threatens to call for another independence referendum if it passes.

Left parties in Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland are critical of the EU, but most do not advocate withdrawing. What they are demanding is a say over their economic decisions, and relief from the rigid rules that favor economies like Germany, and bar many others from ever becoming debt free.

It is ironic that Germany – the country that refuses to even consider retiring some of the overwhelming debts that enchain countries like Greece – owes its current wealth to the 1951 London Conference that cut post-war Germany’s debt in half, lowered interest rates, and stretched out debt payments. The result was the “Wirtschaftswunder” [economic miracle] and the creation of an industrial juggernaut. Greece’s Syriza Party has long called for such a conference to deal with the EU countries mired in debt.

There is no secret why Germany, France and the European banks oppose debt reduction, or “haircuts”: Between the three of them they hold almost \$84 billion of Greece’s debt

The polls show the British electorate

could go either way on a Brexit. What happens if they do leave is hardly clear, because it would be a first. The predictions range from doom and gloom to sunny days, and everything in between, although it is doubtful the EU would severely punish Europe's second largest economy.

One model the left needs to look at in this battle is Portugal, where three left parties, who have long fought with each other, found common ground around reversing the austerity policies that have racked the country's economy for four years. Portugal just recently received a barely favorable bond rating that gives the coalition government some breathing room. The economy is growing and unemployment down, but at 129 percent of GDP, Portugal's debt burden is still the third highest in Europe.

Alone, Portugal is no match for power of the Troika, but Lisbon has allies in Spain, Greece, Ireland and increasingly, Italy. Support for the EU in Italy has gone from 73 percent in 2010 to 40 percent today. "Europe has taken the wrong road," says Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi. "Austerity

alone is not enough."

Given the absence of a strong, continent-wide left, however, reversing the current economic rules of the EU may be a country-by-country battle.

It is already under way, and for all of the economic power of the EU, the organisation is vulnerable to charges that Brussels has sidelined democracy.

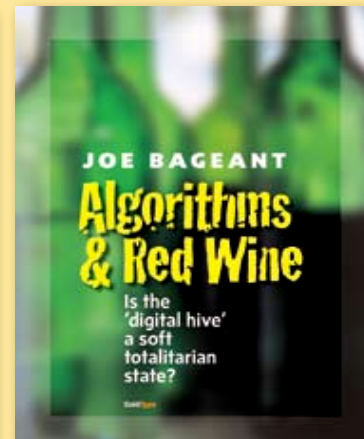
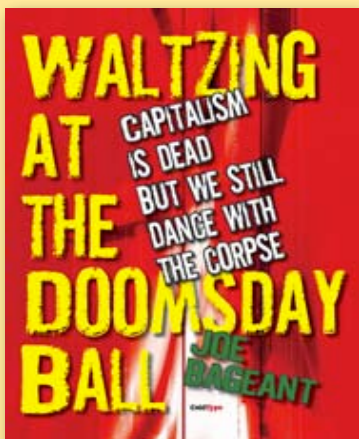
If Brussels – read Germany – can be persuaded or forced to agree to debt reductions, to loosen the spending restrictions and start pump priming, Europe can do something about its horrendous unemployment rate and underperforming economies. If not, whether the British leave or not may be irrelevant: a house divided cannot stand for long,

**CT**

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# Religious zealots ready to take over Israeli army

Jonathan Cook analyses the new lurch to the right in the Israel government

Israeli commentators have pointed out that, with Lieberman's inclusion, the government will be the most extreme in Israel's history

In a surprise move in mid-May, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu forced out his long-serving defence minister, Moshe Yaalon. As he stepped down, Yaalon warned, "Extremist and dangerous elements have taken over Israel."

He was referring partly to his expected successor – Avigdor Lieberman, leader of the far-right Yisrael Beiteinu party, whose trademark outbursts have included demands to bomb Egypt and behead disloyal Palestinian citizens.

But Yaalon was also condemning extremism closer to home, in Netanyahu's Likud party. Yaalon is to take a break from politics. With fitting irony, his slot is to be filled on Likud's backbenches by Yehuda Glick, a settler whose struggle to destroy Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque and replace it with a Jewish temple has the potential to set the Middle East on fire.

Israeli commentators have pointed out that, with Lieberman's inclusion, the government will be the most extreme in Israel's history – again.

French prime minister Manuel Valls, who began a visit to the region near the end of May, was expected to face an impregnable wall of government hostility as he tried to drum up interest in a French peace plan.

Less noticed, however, has been the gradual and parallel takeover of Israel's security institutions by those espousing the ideol-



**FORCED OUT: Moshe Yaalon, the long-serving Israeli defence minister.** Photo: Wikipedia

ogy of the settlers – known in Israel as the national-religious camp.

None of this is accidental. For two decades, the settlers have been targeting Israel's key institutions. Under Netanyahu's seven-year watch as prime minister, the process has accelerated.

Naftali Bennett, leader of the settler party Jewish Home and education minister, recently boasted that the national-religious camp, though only a tenth of the population, held "leadership positions in all realms in Israel."

One such success for Bennett is Roni Alsheikh, who was appointed police chief late last year. He was a long-time resident of Kiryat Arba, one of the most violent settlements in the occupied territories.

The force's most recent campaign, "Believing in the police," is designed to recruit

more religious hardliners. Behind the programme are settler-politicians who have called Palestinians “sub-human,” and expressed sympathy for those who burnt to death a Palestinian family, including a baby, last summer.

The other security agencies are being transformed, too. Religious nationalists now hold many of the top posts in the Shin Bet intelligence service and the Mossad, Israel’s spy agency.

In the army, too, the settlers are today heavily over-represented in the officers corps and combat units. For more than a decade, their rabbis have dominated the army’s education corps, invoking God’s will on the battlefield.

But, despite these rising tideswaters, Israel’s traditional secular elite – mostly of European extraction – have desperately clung to the top rungs of the army command. Netanyahu bitterly resents their continuing control. They stood in his way at two momentous occasions: as he tried to overturn the Oslo accords in the late 1990s, and to bomb Iran five years ago.

In a bid to curb their influence, Netanyahu tried to promote the religious Yair Naveh to military chief last year, but was blocked by the top brass.

Lieberman’s arrival as defence minister, however, may mark a turning point.

In some ways, less is at stake than Yaalon’s hyperbolic warning suggests. For decades, the secular generals have been in charge of an occupation that has crushed the rights of Palestinians and caged them into ever-smaller holding pens. These generals have been just as cruel as the religious officers replacing them.

Nonetheless, the reverberations of this quiet revolution should not be ignored.

The old elites have lived off the fat of the land in the kibbutz, Israel’s spacious farming communities built on the ruins of hundreds of Palestinian villages ethnically cleansed in 1948. After the 1967 war, the kibbutz-generals happily exported the same model of

industrial-scale theft of Palestinian land to the occupied territories.

But their security obsessions were ultimately rooted in Israel, where they fear having to account for the crimes of 1948 from which they profited. Their abiding nightmare is a right of return to Israel of the land’s original owners – Palestinian refugees today numbering in the millions.

The religious camp’s priorities are different. The lands they defend most passionately are not in Israel but in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. That is where many live and where the holy places that sanctify their territorial greed are located.

The spread of this zealotry into the army has deeply discomfited its more liberal elements. In recent years, small numbers of whistleblowers have emerged, from military intelligence unit 8200 through to a group called Breaking the Silence.

The recent video of an execution of a badly wounded Palestinian by army medic Elor Azaria – and the outpouring of public support in Israel for him – has only intensified these tensions. Last month the army’s deputy head, Yair Golan, compared Israel to Nazi Germany in the 1930s. Lieberman, meanwhile, is Azaria’s most vocal supporter.

The goal of the religious nationalists is undisguised: to remove the last restraints on the occupation, and build a glorious, divinely ordained Greater Israel over an obliterated Palestinian society.

That means no hope of a peaceful resolution of Israel’s conflict with the Palestinians – unless it is preceded by a tumultuous civil war between Israel’s secular and religious Jews.

**CT**

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**Last month the army’s deputy head, Yair Golan, compared Israel to Nazi Germany in the 1930s**

# Hitlergate?

In the second part of his series on propaganda and the media, **David Edwards** of Media Lens, looks at Britain's recent anti-semitism 'crisis'

The original intelligence said nothing about whether Iraq possessed the chemical or biological weapons to use in WMD. Tony Blair's government had turned a purely hypothetical danger into an immediate and deadly threat

The recent furore surrounding the supposed British Labour Party's anti-Semitism crisis is a classic propaganda blitz of the kind I described in Part 1 of this series, published last month in ColdType, issue 118.

## Dramatic new evidence

As with so many propaganda blitzes, intense media coverage was triggered by what was claimed to be "dramatic new evidence," namely, the discovery of a graphic posted by Naz Shah two years ago, before she became a Labour MP. The graphic shows a map of the United States with Israel superimposed in the middle, suggesting that a solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict would be to relocate Israel to the US.

Shah's post was highlighted by right-wing political blogger Paul Staines, who writes as Guido Fawkes: "Naz Shah . . . shared a highly inflammatory graphic arguing in favour of the chilling 'transportation' policy two years ago, adding the words 'problem solved.'"

Jonathan Freedland, comment editor at the Guardian, argued that leftists view Israel as "a special case, uniquely deserving of hatred," and that this hatred "lay behind" Shah's call "for the 'transportation' [of Israel to America] – a word with a chilling resonance for Jews."

In the Observer, Andrew Rawnsley claimed that Shah believed "that Israelis should be



**IT STARTED HERE: British MP Naz Shah put this graphic on her web site two years ago, before she became an MP**

put on 'transportation' to America, with all the chilling echoes that has for Jews."

Guardian assistant editor Michael White reported that Shah had been suspended from the Labour party, "while the context of her antisemitic comments . . . are thoroughly investigated." Clearly then, the jury was in –



the comments were “anti-Semitic.”

By contrast, however, Israel-based, former Guardian journalist Jonathan Cook, who was given a Martha Gellhorn special award for his work on the Middle East, argued that the map “was clearly intended to be humorous rather than anti-Semitic. I would make a further point. It is also obvious that the true target of the post is the US, not Jews or even Israel – making the anti-Semitism claim even more ridiculous.”

Norman Finkelstein, Jewish author of *The Holocaust Industry*, and the son of Holocaust survivors, commented that he had originally posted the graphic on his website in 2014: “An email correspondent must have sent it. It was, and still is, funny. Were it not for the current political context, nobody would have noticed Shah’s reposting of it, either. Otherwise, you’d have to be humourless. These sorts of jokes are commonplace in the US. So, we have this joke: Why doesn’t Israel become the 51st state? Answer: Because then, it would only have two senators. As crazy as the discourse on Israel is in America, at least we still have a sense of humour. It’s inconceivable that any politician in the US would be crucified for posting such a map.”

Finkelstein also responded powerfully to the idea that Shah’s posting of the image was an endorsement of a “chilling ‘transportation’ policy”: “Frankly, I find that obscene. It’s doubtful these Holocaust-mongers have a clue what the deportations were, or of the horrors that attended them. I remember my late mother describing her deportation. She was in the Warsaw Ghetto. The survivors of the Ghetto Uprising, about 30,000 Jews, were deported to Majdanek concentration camp. They were herded into railroad cars. My mother was sitting in the railroad car next to a woman who had her child. And the woman – I know it will shock you – the woman suffocated her infant child to death in front of my mother. She suffocated her child, rather than take her to where they were going. That’s what it meant to be deported. To compare that to someone posting a light-hearted, in-

nocuous cartoon making a little joke about how Israel is in thrall to the US, or vice versa . . . it’s sick. What are they doing? Don’t they have any respect for the dead? All these desiccated Labour apparatchiks, dragging the Nazi holocaust through the mud for the sake of their petty jostling for power and position. Have they no shame?”

**Emotional tone and intensity  
– demonising dissent**

Former London mayor Ken Livingstone, described by the Independent as a “long-time ally” of Jeremy Corbyn but not an MP, defended Shah from the accusation of anti-Semitism. He said: “When Hitler won his election in 1932, his policy then was that Jews should be moved to Israel. He was supporting Zionism before he went mad and ended up killing six million Jews.”

This was met with the kind of cross-spectrum moral outrage so characteristic of a propaganda blitz. Again, everyone knew – or did they? – that Livingstone’s comments were outrageous, monstrous, rabidly anti-Semitic.

Labour Party John Mann MP confronted Livingstone, calling him “a disgusting racist,” “a fucking disgrace,” and “a Nazi apologist.” His tirade was broadcast widely, with Mann thoughtfully checking to ensure the camera was catching the action. His denunciation was more “dramatic new evidence” of a scandal, ideal ammunition for a propaganda blitz.

Few TV viewers will have been aware that Mann is one of party leader Jeremy Corbyn’s strongest critics. Last July, after Corbyn had become front-runner in the leadership election race, Mann called for the party to suspend the contest, “over fears of an ‘infiltration’ by hard-left activists.” Mann told the Guardian, “It is pretty clear that what is happening amounts to infiltration of the Labour party.”

Mann’s concern at the time was not anti-Semitism but “the Militant Tendency-types coming back in.”

The website *TheyWorkForYou* records that Mann “generally voted for use of UK military forces in operations overseas,” “con-

**Labour Party John Mann MP confronted Livingstone, calling him “a disgusting racist,” “a fucking disgrace,” and “a Nazi apologist”**

## MEDIA BIAS PART TWO

**It is hardly in doubt that Livingstone intended to suggest that Hitler had become more insane when he committed genocide. This is not the same as arguing that he had previously been sane**

sistently voted for the [2003] Iraq war,” and “consistently voted against an investigation into the Iraq war.” He voted for war on Libya in 2011, and again for war on Iraq in 2014. If any journalist highlighted the ironic location of the moral high ground from which Mann was preaching at Livingstone, we missed it.

The Jewish Chronicle certainly agreed on Livingstone: “Labour now seems to be a party that attracts antisemites like flies to a cesspit. Barely a week goes by without the identification of a racist party member or allegations of racist behaviour by those involved in the party.”

Under the title, Labour’s Sickness, a Times editorial column, presumably written by Blairite neocon Oliver Kamm, denounced the “grotesque analogies” offered by Livingstone, a “trivial ignoramus.” The editorial concluded: “The tropes of antisemitism are . . . a stain on British public life. A great political party is harbouring a sickness and has a moral obligation to purge itself.” (Labour’s Sickness, The Times, April 28, 2016)

Under the headline, Labour’s Anti-Semites Put the Party in Peril, the Daily Mail commented, “Mr Corbyn gave not the faintest sign of understanding how monstrously and deliberately offensive it was of his long-term ally Ken Livingstone to make the absurd claim that Hitler was a Zionist.”

Richard Littlejohn wrote in the Mail under the title, The Fascists at the Poisoned Heart of Labour, “Naz [Shah] by name, Nazi by nature, was revealed to have backed the transportation of Jews in Israel to the United States. Red Ken rallied to her defence by claiming, absurdly, that Hitler was a Zionist.”

A Guardian editorial commented that the Labour Party “finds itself charged with being contaminated by anti-Semitism. And with singular crassness, instead of clearing the air on Thursday, Mr Livingstone encouraged the accusation.”

Jonathan Freedland wrote, in the same paper, of Livingstone’s comments, “His version of history was garbled and insulting, suggesting that the Hitler who had already

written Mein Kampf had not yet gone ‘mad, and was ‘supporting Zionism’ - as if there is any moral comparison between wishing to inflict mass expulsion on a minority and the desire to build a thriving society where that minority might live.”

In fact, it is hardly in doubt that Livingstone intended to suggest that Hitler had become more insane when he committed genocide. This is not the same as arguing that he had previously been sane. Livingstone later said of Hitler, “He was a monster from start to finish, but it’s simply the historical fact. His policy was originally to send all of Germany’s Jews to Israel [sic] and there were private meetings between the Zionist movement and Hitler’s government which were kept confidential, they only became apparent after the war, when they were having a dialogue to do this.”

The late historian Howard Zinn supported the assertion of a Nazi descent into more extreme madness, and the claim that the Nazis initially planned to expel the Jews, “Not only did waging war against Hitler fail to save the Jews, it may be that the war itself brought on the Final Solution of genocide. This is not to remove the responsibility from Hitler and the Nazis, but there is much evidence that Germany’s anti-Semitic actions, cruel as they were, would not have turned to mass murder were it not for the psychic distortions of war, acting on already distorted minds. Hitler’s early aim was forced emigration, not extermination, but the frenzy of it created an atmosphere in which the policy turned to genocide. This is the view of Princeton historian Arno Mayer, in his book *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken*, and it is supported by the chronology – that not until Germany was at war was the Final Solution adopted.

“[Raul] Hilberg, in his classic work on the Holocaust, says, ‘From 1938 to 1940, Hitler made extraordinary and unusual attempts to bring about a vast emigration scheme . . . The Jews were not killed before the emigration policy was literally exhausted.’ The Nazis found that the Western powers were

not anxious to cooperate in emigration and that no one wanted the Jews.”

Yad Vashem, Israel’s official memorial to victims of the Holocaust, also discusses The Transfer Agreement.

Jonathan Cook wrote, “Livingstone’s mistake was both to express himself slackly in the heat of the moment, and to refer to a history that was supposed to have been disappeared down the memory hole. But what he is saying is, in essence, true.”

Finkelstein commented, “The Nazis considered many ‘resettlement’ schemes – the Jews wouldn’t have physically survived most of them in the long run – before they embarked on an outright exterminatory process. Livingstone is more or less accurate about this – or, as accurate as might be expected from a politician speaking off the cuff.”

**Manufacturing consensus**

As so often, the propaganda coup de grace was supplied by a Guardian leftist, this time Owen Jones, who tweeted, “John McDonnell [the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer] was right to swiftly force Naz Shah’s resignation - but now the party has to suspend her.” A day later, Jones issued a further decree, “Ken Livingstone has to be suspended from the Labour Party. Preferably before I pass out from punching myself in the face.”

Ali Abunimah, co-founder of Electronic Intifada, commented, “Didn’t always agree with Ken Livingstone, but he’s been an anti-racist fighter & took on Thatcher before @OwenJones84 was born. Sad to watch.”

Abunimah added, “To watch @OwenJones84 throw Ken Livingstone under the bus to appease a bunch of hard-right racists is a truly pitiful sight.”

Jones’s tragicomic McCarthyist stance in all but ordering the suspension of Shah and Livingstone for supposed anti-Semitism strongly reminds us of the way the Guardian’s George Monbiot supported a nugatory smear of progressives promoted by his notoriously non-credible interlocutor, Oliver Kamm. Monbiot wrote that Noam

Chomsky, Edward Herman, John Pilger and my organisation Media Lens were part of a “malign intellectual subculture,” that sought “to excuse savagery by denying the facts” of genocide in Bosnia and Rwanda. Monbiot even wrote an article titled, Media Cleanse. As recently as March 25, he tweeted, “Still waiting for Hume, Herman, Pilger, Media Lens etc to acknowl[edge] their terrible mistakes on Srebrenica.”

George Eaton, fiercely anti-Corbyn political editor of the hard-right ‘centre-left’ New Statesman, tried to coin the term “Hitlergate” to describe the scandal that had engulfed Livingstone (the Nexis media database finds no other mentions of the term). Eaton cited an anonymous MP arguing, “It firmly pins responsibility for next week’s [local election] results on the hard-left antics.” This at least gave a good idea of the motivation behind the propaganda blitz.

Norman Finkelstein was again far beyond the corporate mainstream in asking some obvious questions, “The question you have to ask yourself is, why? Why has this issue been resurrected with a vengeance, so soon after its previous outing was disposed of as a farce? . . . The only plausible answer is, it’s political. It has nothing whatsoever to do with the factual situation; instead, a few suspect cases of anti-Semitism – some real, some contrived – are being exploited for an ulterior political motive. As one senior Labour MP said the other day, “it’s transparently a smear campaign.”

He added, “You can see this overlap between the Labour Right and pro-Israel groups personified in individuals like Jonathan Freedland, a Blairite hack who also regularly plays the anti-Semitism card. He’s combined these two hobbies to attack Corbyn.”

Israeli historian Ilan Pappé noted how the young electorate supporting Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders in the US have a “desire for cleaner, more moral politics that dare to challenge the neoliberal set up of economy and politics in the West.” The result being that, “Members of the political elites and es-

**A few suspect cases of anti-Semitism – some real, some contrived – are being exploited for an ulterior political motive**

## MEDIA BIAS PART TWO

**Vested interests are well aware that public opinion can be manipulated by emotionally potent declarations of certainty, on the one hand, and by nurturing doubt on the other**

tablishment, in very senior positions, voice clear, unashamed support for Palestine.

“This is the background for the current vicious attack on the Labour Party and Corbyn. Whatever the Zionists in Britain point to, as an expression of anti-Semitism, which, in the main, are legitimate criticism of Israel, have been said before in the last 50 years. The pro-Zionist lobby in Britain, under direct guidance from Israel, picks them up because the clear anti-Zionist stance of BDS has reached the upper echelons. They are genuinely terrified by this development. Well done the BDS movement!”

Jonathan Cook summed it up, “Corbyn and his supporters want to revive Labour as a party of social justice. . . This is nothing more than a class war to pave the way for a return of the Blairites to lead Labour.”

Chomsky has discussed the long-standing efforts to associate anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism for political ends. In 1973, leading Israeli diplomat Abba Eban said that “one of the chief tasks of any dialogue with the gentile world is to prove that the distinction between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism is not a distinction at all.” Critics of Israel were to be branded “anti-Semites,” while Jewish critics such as Chomsky were guilty of “self-hatred.”

Asa Winstanley, investigative journalist at the Electronic Intifada, puts the supposed crisis of anti-Semitism in context, “A 2015 survey by Pew found that seven percent of the UK public held ‘unfavourable’ views of Jews. By contrast, about a fifth held negative views of Muslims and almost two-fifths viewed Roma people unfavorably.

“There’s no evidence to suggest that such views are any more prevalent in the Labour Party – and the tiny number of anti-Semitism complaints suggests they may well be less so in a movement many of whose activists have been in the frontline of anti-racist struggles.”

### **Conclusion - ‘emotionally potent oversimplifications’**

The fact that completely false, or highly

questionable, claims are repeatedly being affirmed by an instant, outraged consensus across the media spectrum is powerful evidence for the existence of a propaganda system undermining democracy.

Journalists may plead ignorance, but, as Chomsky has documented, elites have openly advocated the “manufacture of consent” in exactly this way for decades. In 1932, highly influential US foreign policy adviser Reinhold Niebuhr wrote of the need for “emotionally potent oversimplifications” and “necessary illusion” to overcome the threat to elite control posed by “the stupidity of the average man.”

Vested interests are well aware that public opinion can be manipulated by emotionally potent declarations of certainty, on the one hand, and by nurturing doubt on the other. Indeed, the flipside of the propaganda coin promoting false certainty was described by Phil Lesley, author of a handbook on corporate public relations, “People generally do not favour action on a non-alarming situation when arguments seem to be balanced on both sides and there is a clear doubt. The weight of impressions on the public must be balanced, so people will have doubts and lack motivation to take action. Accordingly, means are needed to get balancing information into the stream from sources that the public will find credible. . . . Nurturing public doubts by demonstrating that this is not a clear-cut situation in support of the opponents usually is all that is necessary.” (Lesley, *Coping with Opposition Groups’ Public Relations Review* 18, 1992, p.331)

The logic is crude but effective. When elites want to prevent action, for example in response to climate change, they work hard to encourage public doubts. When they want to attack Iraq, Libya or Syria, or Julian Assange, or Jeremy Corbyn – when it is vital that the situation be presented as clear cut – balancing information must be ridiculed, damned and dismissed. These are the tasks of a propaganda blitz. **CT**

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# New political earthquake in Brazil

Is it time for media outlets to call the overthrow of president Dilma Rousseff a coup? ask **Glenn Greenwald, Andrew Fishman and David Miranda**

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**B**razil awoke on May 23 to stunning news of secret, genuinely shocking conversations, involving a key minister in Brazil’s newly installed government, which shine a bright light on the motives and participants driving the impeachment of the country’s democratically elected president, Dilma Rousseff.

The transcripts were published by the country’s largest newspaper, Folha de São Paulo, and reveal secret conversations that took place in March, just weeks before the impeachment vote took place in the lower House.

They show explicit plotting between Brazil’s new planning minister (then-Senator) Romero Jucá and former oil executive Sergio Machado – both of whom are formal targets of the Car Wash corruption investigation into allegations of corruption at the state-controlled oil company Petrobras, where it is alleged that executives accepted bribes in return for awarding contracts to construction firms at inflated prices – as they agree that removing Dilma is the only means for ending the corruption investigation. The conversations also include discussions of the important role played in Dilma’s removal by the most powerful national institutions, including – most im-



**HAPPIER DAYS: Ex-President Lula da Silva and his successor, President Dilma Rousseff.**

Photo: Umsebenzi, South Africa

portantly – Brazil’s military leaders.

The transcripts are filled with profoundly incriminating statements about the real goals of impeachment, and who was behind it. The crux of this plot is what Jucá calls “a national pact,” involving all of Brazil’s most powerful institutions, to leave Michel Temer in place as President (notwithstanding his multiple corruption scandals) and to kill the corruption investigation once Dilma is removed.

In the words of Folha, Jucá made clear that impeachment will “end the pressure from the media and other sectors to continue the Car Wash investigation.” It is unclear who is responsible for recording and leaking the 75-minute conversation, but Folha reports that the files are currently in

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the hands of the prosecutor general. The next days will likely see new revelations that will shed additional light on the implications and meaning of these transcripts.

The transcripts contain two extraordinary revelations that should lead all media outlets to seriously consider whether they should call what took place in Brazil a “coup,” a term Dilma and her supporters have used for months.

When discussing the plot to remove Dilma as a means of ending the Car Wash investigation, Jucá said the Brazilian military is supporting the plot: “I am talking to the generals, the military commanders. They are fine with this, they said they will guarantee it.”

He also said the military is “monitoring the Landless Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST)),” the social movement of rural workers who support PT’s efforts of land reform and inequality reduction and have led the protests against impeachment.

The second blockbuster revelation – perhaps even more significant – is Jucá’s statement that he spoke with, and secured the involvement of, numerous justices on Brazil’s Supreme Court, the institution that impeachment defenders have repeatedly pointed to as vesting the process with legitimacy and to deny that Dilma’s removal is a coup.

Jucá claimed, “there are only a small number” of court justices to which he had not obtained access (the only justice he said he ultimately could not get to is Teori Zavascki, who was appointed by Dilma, and who – notably – Jucá viewed as uncorruptable in obtaining his help to kill the investigation. A central irony of impeachment is that Dilma has protected the Car Wash investigation from interference by those who want to impeach her). The transcripts also show him saying that “the press wants to take her [Dilma] out,” so “this shit will never stop” – meaning the corruption investigations – until she’s gone.

The transcripts provide proof for virtually every suspicion and accusation that impeachment opponents have long expressed about those plotting to remove Dilma from office. For months, supporters of Brazil’s democracy have made two arguments about the attempt to remove the country’s democratically elected president:

1. The core purpose of Dilma’s impeachment is not to stop corruption or punish lawbreaking, but rather the exact opposite: to protect the actual thieves by empowering them with Dilma’s exit, thus enabling them to kill the Car Wash investigation; and

2. The impeachment advocates (led by the country’s oligarchical media) have zero interest in clean government, but only in seizing power that they could never obtain democratically, in order to impose a right-wing, oligarch-serving agenda that the Brazilian population would never accept.

The first two weeks of Temer’s newly installed government provided abundant evidence for both of these claims. He appointed multiple ministers directly implicated in corruption scandals. A key ally in the lower house who will lead his government’s coalition there – André Moura – is one of the most corrupt politicians in the country, the target of multiple, active criminal probes, not only for corruption but also attempted homicide.

Temer himself is deeply enmeshed in corruption (he faces an eight-year ban on running for office), and is rushing to implement a series of radical right-wing changes that Brazilians would never democratically allow, including measures, as the Guardian newspaper detailed, “to soften the definition of slavery, roll back the demarcation of indigenous land, trim housebuilding programs and sell off state assets in airports, utilities and the post office.”

But, unlike the events of the previous two weeks, these transcripts are not merely clues or signs. They are proof: proof that

the prime forces behind the removal of the president understood that taking her out was the only way to save themselves and shield their own extreme corruption from accountability; proof that Brazil's military, its dominant media outlets, and its Supreme Court were colluding in secret to ensure the removal of the democratically elected president; proof that the perpetrators of impeachment viewed Dilma's continued presence in Brasilia as the guarantor that the Car Wash investigations would continue; proof that this had nothing to do with preserving Brazilian democracy and everything to do with destroying it.

For his part, Jucá admits that these transcripts are authentic but insists it was all just a misunderstanding with his comments taken out of context, calling it "banal."

"That conversation is not about a pact for Car Wash. It's about the economy, to extricate Brazil from the crisis," he claimed in an interview with political blogger Fernando Rodrigues. That explanation is entirely implausible, given what he actually said, as well as the explicitly conspiratorial nature of the conversations, in which Jucá insists on a series of one-on-one encounters, rather than meeting in a group, all to avoid provoking suspicions. Political leaders are already calling for his resignation from the government.

Ever since Temer's installation as president, Brazil has seen intense, and growing, protests against him. Brazilian media outlets – which have been desperately trying to glorify him – have suspiciously refrained from publishing polling data for many weeks, but the last polls show him with only two percent support and 60 percent wanting him impeached.

The only recent published polling data showed that 66 percent of Brazilians believe legislators voted for impeachment only out of self-interest – a belief these transcripts validate – while only 23 percent believe they did so for the good of the country. After the leak was reported in São

Paulo, police were forced to barricade the street where Temer's house is located because thousands of protesters were heading there; they eventually used fire hoses and tear gas.

An announcement to close the Ministry of Culture led to artists and others occupying offices around the country in protest, which forced Temer to reverse the decision.

Until now, The Intercept, like most international media outlets, has refrained from using the word "coup," even as it (along with most outlets) has been deeply critical of Dilma's removal as anti-democratic. These transcripts compel a re-examination of that editorial decision, particularly if no evidence emerges calling into question either the most reasonable meaning of Jucá's statements or his level of knowledge. This newly revealed plotting is exactly what a coup looks, sounds and smells like: securing the cooperation of the military and most powerful institutions to remove a democratically elected leader for self-interested, corrupt and lawless motives, in order to then impose an oligarch-serving agenda that the population despises.

If Dilma's impeachment remains inevitable, as many believe, these transcripts will make it much more difficult to leave Temer in place. Recent polling data shows that 62 percent of Brazilians want new elections to select their president. That option – the democratic one – is the one Brazil's elites fear most, because they are petrified (with good reason) that Lula or another candidate they dislike (Marina Silva) will win. But that's the point: if what is being avoided and smashed in Brazil is democracy, then it's time to start using the proper language to describe this. These transcripts make it increasingly difficult for media outlets to avoid doing so. **CT**

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