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DIRTY TRICKS AND THE UK GENERAL ELECTION

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Cover Photo: Tony Jenkins / Jenkinsdraws.com
Paddy French examines an extraordinary battle between the British Broadcasting Corporation and the Labour Party over a controversial programme about antisemitism, which Labour says was a deliberate attempt to sabotage its electoral prospects . . .

Political storm rages over BBC’s ‘rogue’ journalism

The BBC has always been something of a political football in the UK – the left considers it too right wing, the right believes it’s full of left-wingers. But on July 10 the corporation crossed a line when its flagship current affairs series Panorama broadcast a programme entitled Is Labour Anti-Semitic? Veteran reporter John Ware – a man who openly despises Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn – was allowed to produce a programme Labour branded an “authored polemic” that was “an overtly one-sided intervention in political controversy . . .” The BBC hit back saying it stood by its journalism – “we completely reject any accusation of bias and dishonesty.” The evidence, though, strongly favours the Labour Party: this was a piece of rogue journalism that presented just one side of the argument, ignored basic facts and bent the truth to breaking point.

Part of the BBC’s defence of the programme was that “it explored a topic of undoubted public interest, broadcasting powerful and disturbing testimonies from party members who’d suffered anti-semitic abuse.” The programme begins with an unnamed young woman who tells viewers “I’ve been the victim of a lot of antisemitism within the Labour Party” and “I wouldn’t say to a friend go to a Labour Party meeting if you are Jewish. I couldn’t do that to someone I cared about.

After she speaks, award-winning reporter John Ware says “Labour says anti-racism is at its very core. Why then is there a constant stream of complaints by party members?”

The programme then presents the testimony of a further nine witnesses saying that antisemitism is a serious problem in the Labour Party. Since they are not identified by the programme – apparently to protect them from threats and harassment – viewers are inevitably led to believe they’re just ordinary members of the Labour Party. In fact, of the “anonymous ten,” most are high-profile Labour Jewish members – and all of them are opposed to Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership.

Take Ella Rose, the
young woman who opens the Panorama programme as an anguished victim of antisemitism.

Eighteen months earlier she was playing – without being aware of it – an equally high profile role in the sensational Al Jazeera documentary *The Lobby* about Israel’s clandestine attempts to shape British politics. At the time she was Director of the Jewish Labour Movement, having moved into the job from her previous post as a public affairs officer at the Israeli Embassy. She was filmed discussing the case of the black Labour activist Jackie Walker who was under investigation for antisemitism. Rose was caught on camera saying she could “take” Walker using martial arts techniques developed by the Israeli military. The Jewish Labour Movement denied that it was close to the Israeli Embassy.

Another of the “anonymous ten” is Phil Rosenberg, Director of Public Affairs at the Board of Deputies of British Jews which is also opposed to Corbyn. I asked Rosenberg why *Panorama* thought it necessary to anonymise him: after all his job, it would seem, is to represent the Board in public. He didn’t reply.

But there’s a more serious problem than just the identity and the affiliations of the ten. They all come from the right wing of Labour’s Jewish membership which supports Israel and opposes Corbyn. Eight of them are, or have been, officials of the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM) which insists that antisemitism is a serious problem in Labour and that the leadership isn’t doing enough to deal with it.

In November 2018 it asked the UK’s Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to investigate the party’s “institutional antisemitism.” In April 2019 it passed a motion of no confidence in Jeremy Corbyn over his alleged failure to deal with the issue. JLM chairman Mike Katz has made it clear the group will not be campaigning in this month’s General Election for any Labour election candidate who supports Corbyn.

There is an alternative narrative coming from pro-Corbyn Jewish organisations which says that, while there is antisemitism in Labour, it’s not a widespread problem. And it would have been a simple matter to obtain the testimonies of ten Jewish members who have never experienced antisemitism in the party.

Moreover, anecdotal evidence suggests many of the complaints are made about Jewish members by other Jewish members – and that a large number of them relate
to criticism of Israel’s policies towards the Palestinians. But this side of the issue is unrepresented in the Panorama programme.

And then there’s the scale of the problem. Ware asserts that before Corbyn complaints about antisemitism “were rare” but after he became leader there was a “constant stream of complaints.” He states that many British Jews “once saw the Labour Party as their natural political home. No longer”. As well as the “anonymous ten” who give personal experiences, a former Labour Party insider says “the problem was massive…” Ware adds that by the spring of this year “there were still several hundred antisemitism cases waiting to be resolved”. He says the Labour Party “won’t give us precise figures…”

In fact, Ware did have access to figures which throw genuine light on the scale of the problem – statistics he chose to ignore. In February, Labour Party general secretary Jennie Formby released figures for a ten-month period from April 2018 to January 2019. There were 673 complaints of antisemitism against party members, of which 394 – more than half – were found not to involve a breach of party rules and were dismissed. Leaving aside 30 cases which were not completed, there were 249 cases where sanctions were imposed or where members resigned before their cases were determined. Given that the Labour Party has 500,000 members, these 249 cases amount to 0.05 percent – a tiny fraction. The problem is, then, statistically small.

Not only does Panorama fail to give viewers the only reliable statistics on the scale of the problem, John Ware then goes on to talk about “Mr Corbyn’s failure to drive out antisemitism”, as if this was an accepted fact. As proof of this, he seizes on the fact that “only around” 15 people have been expelled from the party for antisemitism in a three year period. But Ware should have known this proves nothing – and to understand why he only had to look at the BBC’s record when it comes to complaints. In its annual report for 2018-2019 the Corporation records more than 218,000 “editorial and general complaints” of which 58 were found to be in breach of BBC editorial guidelines – a fraction of one percent. In the antisemitism statistics for April 2018-January 2019, the number of people expelled from Labour is close to 2 percent.

This pattern is common in all regulatory regimes: the number of complaints upheld is usually a small percentage of the total. And Ware could have also looked at the issue of Labour’s antisemitism in another way. In the ten months to January 2019, the party took action against 249 individual members out of a total number of 763 complaints. In other words, in more than a third of all cases Labour took some form of disciplinary action – an extraordinary figure in any regulatory regime. The evidence, then, suggests that the party is bending over backwards to address the concerns of Jewish members.
one case, he examined the experience of a Labour Party disputes official called Ben Westerman when he went to Liverpool to investigate problems in the city. There had been friction between supporters of the Riverside MP, Louise Ellman, and critics over the issue of Labour policy on the Israel-Palestinian question. Westerman is Jewish and among the people he interviewed was Helen Marks, a pensioner.

Of this interview, John Ware says: “While interviewing one member he was confronted with the very antisemitism he’d been investigating.”

Westerman says: “We finished the interview, the person got up to leave the room and then turned back to me and said where are you from? And I said what do you mean, where am I from? And she said I asked you where are you from? And I said I’m not prepared to discuss this. They said are you from Israel? What can you say to that? You’re assumed to be in cahoots with the Israeli government, it’s this obsession with that that just spills over all the time into antisemitism.”

Aside from the fact that it’s difficult to see how asking someone if they come from Israel can be, of itself, antisemitic, this account is disputed. Helen Marks says it never happened. She says that, during the interview, she was accompanied by a friend who asked Westerman what branch of the party he was in. A transcript of the interview confirms this – and the fact that Westerman’s response was “I don’t think that’s relevant.”

Neither Helen Marks nor her friend were contacted by Panorama to give their side of the story. Nor did the programme reveal the fact that they are both Jewish. When Helen Marks complained to the BBC, a Corporation executive said he was satisfied Westerman’s “account is his genuine memory of what he heard and we confirmed that it was as he reported it at the time.” Just what is meant by the words “we confirmed that it was as he reported it at the time” is not explained.

Having posed the question – is Labour antisemitic? – the BBC was duty-bound to give both sides of the argument. In fact, apart from an interview with Labour shadow communities secretary Andrew Gwynne and statements from the party, Panorama devotes the majority of the programme to voices claiming the problem was serious and critical of Labour’s handling of the problem. Of 22 people interviewed for the broadcast, 21 fell into this bracket.

The BBC sets itself high standards. In June 2019, just a few weeks before the Panorama broadcast, it published a new set of Editorial Guidelines. Chairman Sir David Clementi was emphatic: “... nothing is more important than the BBC’s reputation for independence, impartiality and editorial integrity ...” Director General Tony Hall was even more forthright: “It’s just a few short years since the terms ‘fake news’ entered our lexicon. It’s now a weapon of choice used worldwide. In a world of misinformation, our values have never been more important. That’s why accuracy, impartiality and fairness are given such prominence in these Guidelines.”

After the Panorama programme, the BBC recorded 1,593 complaints alleging “bias against the Labour Party.” The BBC’s initial response – it stood by its journalism and rejected “any accusations of bias or dishonesty” – was enough to dissuade most of these from proceeding any further. However, at least 49 appealed the decision. These were rejected by the Corporation’s Executive Complaints Unit. The Unit also dismissed a detailed complaint from the Labour Party itself.

Until recently, that would have been the end of the matter. For nearly a century the BBC has been judge and jury in its own case. In April 2017, however, this self-regulation came to an end and the statutory broadcasting regulator Ofcom took over the role. Ofcom is one of the UK’s most powerful watchdogs and its complaints system is rigorous. Ofcom has already received 25 appeals about the BBC’s rejection of their com-
The Panorama programme – still available on iPlayer – has done significant harm to Labour’s reputation on antisemitism

Labour has not revealed the contents of its complaint but the general outlines are clear. The party says it was perfectly acceptable for Panorama to examine the issue of antisemitism among its membership – it’s a clear matter of public interest. However, John Ware’s “authored polemic” was so one-sided that it broke one of Ofcom’s cardinal rules. This is clause 5.12 of the watchdog’s broadcasting code: “In dealing with matters of major political and industrial controversy and major matters relating to current public policy an appropriately wide range of significant views must be included and given due weight in each programme … Views and facts must not be misrepresented.”

Moreover, the party is also likely to argue that the BBC, in first approving and then defending the Panorama programme, was partisan at a time when an election was likely to take place within a matter of months. And, given the slowness of the BBC’s complaints system (even after four months the process is still not complete) combined with the length of time Ofcom requires, the chances of Labour obtaining a correction before any election in 2019 were always remote. And this is what has happened. Panorama’s programme is still available on iPlayer and significant harm has been done to Labour’s reputation on the antisemitism issue.

Although any Ofcom ruling will not come until next year, the stakes are still high. If Ofcom finds against the BBC – it can also impose a fine of up to £250,000 – it will be a huge blow for the Corporation’s reputation for impartiality. The jobs of chairman Clementi and Director General Tony Hall could be on the line. For Ofcom to make such a sensational ruling against the UK’s state broadcaster may also have serious political repercussions for the watchdog itself, especially if the Conservatives, who are the main beneficiary of Panorama’s rogue journalism, are returned to power. But if Ofcom decides that the BBC has not broken its code, then it could face a challenge in the courts …

Paddy French is a retired television current affairs producer. He is editor of the investigative website Press Gang – www.pressganguk.wordpress.com.
Nicholas Jones looks into the work of the tabloid media’s elite right-wing writers who are helping to make newspaper coverage of this election the vilest he’s witnessed in almost 60 years as a reporter.

**Attack journalists churn out lies in support of Boris Johnson**

**READY** to “die in a ditch” with Boris Johnson the closer it gets to polling day are his blood brothers, a taxi rank of highly-paid wordsmiths able to twist and turn the daily news agenda as they strive to deliver a Conservative victory and get Brexit over the line.

Johnson has always been their hero, the Brexiteer-in-chief for much of the media class, a journalist admired for his wizardry in delivering an endless stream of anti-European Union exclusives about the mad machinations of the Brussels bureaucracy – the fake news of his day.

In his hour of need, columnists and feature writers employed by hard line Brexit-supporting newspapers – Daily Mail, Daily Express, The Sun and Daily Telegraph – are only too happy to follow in his footsteps, able within a matter of hours to pull together an election storyline into a hard-hitting column or feature.

Attack journalism is the forte of this elite commentariat: yet more character assassination of Jeremy Corbyn; a chance to ridicule Nigel Farage; trash Jo Swinson; or perhaps an alarmist set of
thinking it through, the piece is taking shape by mid-afternoon and the backbench team are on the phone, wanting to be updated, to be sure that the column is on track.

“As the deadline approaches, it can be intense, the pressure to go further and further to justify the headline; there seems no escape.

“It’s like riding on the back of a shark, fearful any moment of falling off and getting eaten alive.”

Some of the columnists are so in demand for the flexibility of their writing that they are not tied to one newspaper. Several rotate their by-lines in the pages of competing titles, and deliver instant articles across the political waterfront:

Leo McKinstry has few equals in the range of his output: “Threats may loom but Boris is still ahead of the game” (Daily Express, 4.11.2019); “Corbyn and his cronies who’d turn the UK into Venezuela” (Daily Mail, 30.10.2019); “Blood Brothers: Labour leader’s career dominated by links to terrorism” (The Sun, 23.5.2017)

Ross Clark’s is another go-to by-line: “We finally have a compromise that can suit everyone” (Daily Express, 4.10.2019); “If Corbyn gets into No 10...we’re all in the chicken soup” (The Sun, 6.9.2019); “People are wak-
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Express, The Sun and Daily Telegraph could hardly complain as they were jubilant in congratulating themselves on securing the Leave majority through the strength of their campaigning journalism.

I suggested in the inquest after Theresa May’s drubbing in the 2017 general election that she had been duped into thinking that voters were bound to agree after she had been crowned a popular hero by the Brexit press. She had become cocooned in the deadly embrace of the anti-Corbyn hate of Conservative-supporting titles.

So in-your-face is the press commentariat of the right-wing press – and so heavily outnumbered are media voices from the left – that they command a far higher proportion of broadcast interviews and invitations to newspaper reviews on television and radio.

All too often, the multiple roles – and political affiliations – of the commentariat’s elite get conveniently ignored by broadcasters. When, at the start of the election campaign, Dominic Sandbrook was interviewed on the World At One (4.11.2019) about the consequences of the “heyday of public spending in the 1970s”, he was introduced by the presenter Sarah Montague as “the historian, Dominic Sandbrook” – no mention was made of his stock-in-trade as the Daily Mail’s star anti-Corbyn columnist.

As long as press headlines continue to be treated as news – and the front pages are reproduced in extended television press reviews – the tabloids will retain, despite rapidly falling circulations, at least a fair degree of their previous clout.

Perhaps, as others are now suggesting, the BBC, ITV and Sky could make a start by including a health warning in press reviews by reminding viewers – and listeners – of a paper’s political affiliation.

A headline or quote could be prefaced by the lines that this is from a paper that advised readers to vote Leave or Remain in the 2016 referendum.

If there was clear signposting, the Daily Mail, Daily Express, The Sun and Daily Telegraph could hardly complain as they were jubilant in congratulating themselves on securing the Leave majority through the strength of their campaigning journalism.

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We will see on 12 December whether Boris Johnson’s blood brothers in the Brexit commentariat are making the same fatal mistake as in 2017 – or whether tabloid editors will have the satisfaction of celebrating a triumph to equal that of their Referendum Day victory.

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Media coverage of 2017 was the vilest of any general election of my 60 years as a reporter. 2019 might be even worse.

Nicholas Jones was a BBC industrial and political correspondent for 30 years until retiring in 2002. His books include, The Lost Tribe: Whatever Happened to Fleet Street’s Industrial Correspondents?
Britain’s Chief Rabbi is helping stoke antisemitism

Jonathan Cook explains why Ephraim Mirvis’s meddling in the election of Britain’s next leader has made the UK Jewish community much less safe

Britain’s Chief Rabbi

Chief rabbi Ephraim Mirvis has not only misrepresented the known facts about Labour and its supposed antisemitism crisis. He has not only interfered in an overtly, politically partisan manner in the December 12 election campaign by suggesting that Jeremy Corbyn – against all evidence – is an antisemite.

By speaking out as the voice of British Jews – a false claim he has allowed the UK media to promote – his unprecedented meddling in the election of Britain’s next leader has actually made the wider Jewish community in the UK much less safe. Mirvis is contributing to the very antisemitism he says he wants to eradicate.

Mirvis’ intervention in the election campaign makes sense only if he believes in one of two highly improbable scenarios.

The first requires several demonstrably untrue things to be true. It needs for Corbyn to be a proven antisemite – and not just of the variety that occasionally or accidentally lets slip an antisemitic trope or is susceptible to the unthinking prejudice most of us occasionally display, including (as we shall see) Rabbi Mirvis.

No, for Mirvis to have interfered in the election campaign he would need to believe that Corbyn intends actively as prime minister to inflame a wider antisemitism in British society or implement policies designed to harm the Jewish community. And in addition, the chief rabbi would have to believe that Corbyn presides over a Labour party that will willingly indulge race-hate speeches or stand by impas-sively as Corbyn carries out racist policies.

If Mirvis really believes any of that, I have a bridge to sell him. Corbyn has spent his entire political career as an anti-racism campaigner, and his anti-racism activism as a backbencher was especially prominent inside a party that itself has traditionally taken the political lead in tackling racism.

The second possibility is that Mirvis doesn’t really believe that Corbyn is a Goebbels in the making. But if that is so, then his decision to intercede in the election campaign to influence British voters must be based on an equally fanciful notion: that there is no significant threat posed by antisemitism on the right or the rapidly emerging far right.

Because if antisemitism is not an issue on the right – the same nationalistic right that has persecuted Jews throughout modern history, culminating in the Nazi atrocities – then Mirvis may feel he can risk playing politics in the name of the Jewish community without serious consequence.

If there is no perceptible populist tide of white nationalism sweeping Europe and the globe, one that hates immigrants and minorities, then making a fuss about Corbyn might seem to make sense for a prominent...
vis’ flagrant intervention in the election campaign actually bolsters a key part of the antisemitic discourse of the far right that is rapidly making inroads into the Conservative party.

White nationalists are all over social media warning of supposed Jewish global conspiracies, of supposed Jewish control of the media, of supposed Jewish subversion of “white rights”. It was precisely this kind of thinking that drove European politics a century ago. It was arch-antisemite Arthur Balfour who signed off the Balfour Declaration of 1917 that sought to end Britain’s “Jewish problem” by encouraging European Jews to move far away, to a part of the Middle East known as Palestine.

That is, of course, why today’s white supremacists love Israel, why they see it as a model, why they call themselves “white Zionists”. In creating a tribal democracy, and one heavily fortified, land hungry, belligerent and nuclear-armed, Israel has done for Jews exactly what white nationalists hope to do again for their white compatriots. The white supremacists’ love of Israel is intimately bound up with their hatred and fear of Jews.

Mirvis has given succour to white nationalist discourse both because he has spoken out against Corbyn without offering evidence for his claims and because those entirely unsubstantiated claims have been echoed across the media.
There is good reason why the billionaire-owned print media and the Establishment-dominated BBC are happy to exploit the antisemitism smears — and it has nothing to do with concern for the safety of Jews. The corporate media don’t want a Labour leader in power who is going to roll back the corporate free-for-all unleashed by Margaret Thatcher 40 years ago that nearly bankrupted the rest of us in 2008.

But that is not what those flirting with or embracing white nationalism will take away from the relentless media chorus over evidence-free antisemitism claims.

Mirvis’s intervention in the democratic process will drive them more quickly and more deeply into the arms of the far-right. It will persuade them once again that “the Jews” are a “problem”. They will conclude that — though the Jews are now helping the right by destroying Corbyn — once the left has been dealt with, those same Jews will then subvert their white state. Like Balfour before them, they will start thinking of how to rid Britain and Europe of these supposed interlopers.

This is why Mirvis was irresponsible in the extreme for meddling. Because the standard of proof required before making such an intervention — proof either that Corbyn is an outright Jew hater, or that white nationalism is no threat to the UK — is not even close to being met.

In fact much worse, all the evidence shows the exact reverse. That was neatly summed up in a survey this month published by the Economist, a weekly magazine that is no friend to Corbyn or the Labour party.

It showed that those identifying as “very left-wing” — the section of the public that supports Corbyn — were among the least likely to express antisemitic attitudes. Those identifying as “very right-wing”, on the other hand — those likely to support Boris “piccaninny” Johnson — were three-and-a-half times more likely to express hostile attitudes towards Jews. Other surveys show even worse racism among Conservatives towards more obviously non-white minorities, such as Muslims and black people. That, after all, is the very reason Boris “letterbox-looking Muslim women” Johnson now heads the Tory party.
The Economist findings reveal something else of relevance in assessing Mirvis’s meddling. Not only is the real left (as distinguished from the phoney, centrist left represented by Labour’s Blairites) much less antisemitic than the right, it is also much more critical of Israel than any other section of the British public.

That is easily explained. The real left has always been anti-imperialist. Israel is a particularly problematic part of Britain’s colonial legacy.

Elsewhere, the peoples who gained independence from Britain found themselves inside ruined, impoverished states, often with borders imposed out of naked imperial interest that left them divided and feuding. Internal struggles over the crumbs Britain and other imperial powers left behind was the norm.

But in a very real sense, Britain – or at least the west – never really left Israel. In line with the Balfour Declaration, Britain helped to establish the institutions of a “Jewish home” on the Palestinians’ homeland. British troops may have departed in 1948, but waves of European Jewish immigrants were either encouraged or compelled to come to the newly created state of Israel by racist immigration quotas designed to prevent them fleeing elsewhere, most especially to the United States.

The west helped engineer both the ethnic cleansing of Palestine and Israel’s creation to solve Europe’s “Jewish problem”. It provided the components necessary for Israel to build a nuclear bomb that won it a place at the international top table and ensured the Palestinians were made Israel’s serfs in perpetuity. Ever since, the west has provided Israel with diplomatic cover, military aid and special trading status, even as Israel has worked relentlessly to disappear the Palestinian people from their homeland.

Even now, our most prized rights, such as free speech, are being eroded and subverted to protect Israel from criticism. In the US, the only infringements on the American public’s First Amendment rights have been legislated to silence those seeking to pressure Israel over its crimes against the Palestinians with a boycott – similar to the campaign against apartheid South Africa. In the UK, the Conservative manifesto similarly promises to bar local councils from upholding international law and boycotting products from Israel’s illegal settlements.

The real left focuses on this continuing colonial crime against the Palestinians not because it is antisemitic (a claim the Economist survey amply refutes), but because the left treats Israel as emblematic of British and western bad faith and hypocrisy. Israel is the imperial west’s Achilles’ heel, the proof that war crimes, massacres and ethnic cleansing are not only not punished but actively rewarded if these crimes accord with western imperial interests.

But ardent friends of Israel such as Mirvis are blind to these arguments. For them, one western antisemitic crime – the Holocaust – entirely obscures another western antisemitic crime: seeking to rid Europe of Jews by forcing them into the Middle East, serving as pawns on an imperial chessboard that paid no regard to the Palestinians whose homeland was being sacrificed.

In his state of historical and political myopia, Mirvis cannot begin to understand that there might be political activists who, in defending the Palestinian people, are also defending Jews. That they, unlike him, understand that Israel was created not out of western benevolence towards Jews, but out of western malevolence towards “lesser peoples”. The real left in Britain speaks out against Israel not because it hates Jews but because it holds dear a commitment to justice and a compassion for all.

Mirvis, on the other hand, is the Zionist equivalent of a little Englander. He prefers particularist, short-term interests over universalist, long-term ones.

It was he, remember, who threw his full support behind...
Israel in 2014 as it indiscriminately bombed Gaza, killing some 550 children – a bombing campaign that came after years of an Israeli blockade on the Palestinian population there. That siege has led the United Nations to warn that the enclave will be uninhabitable by next year.

It was Mirvis, along with his predecessor Jonathan Sacks, who in 2017 endorsed the fanatical Jewish settlers – Israel’s equivalent of white supremacists – on their annual march through the occupied Old City of Jerusalem. This is the march where the majority of the participants are recorded every year waving masses of Israeli flags at Palestinians and chanting “Death to the Arabs”. One Israeli newspaper columnist has described the Jerusalem Day march as a “religious carnival of hatred”.

It was Mirvis and Sacks that encouraged British Jews to join them on this tub-thumping trip to Israel, which they suggested would provide an opportunity to spend time “dancing with our brave soldiers”. Those soldiers – Israeli, not British – occupy West Bank cities like Hebron where they have locked down life for some 200,000 Palestinians so that a handful of crazed religious Jewish bigots can live undisturbed in their midst.

What is so appalling is that Mirvis is blind to the very obvious parallels between the fearful Palestinians who hastily have to board up their shops as a Jewish mob parades through their neighbourhood and today’s white supremacists and neo-Nazis in the west who seek to march provocatively through ethnic minority communities, including Jewish neighbourhoods, in places like Charlottesville.

Mirvis has no lessons to teach Corbyn or the Labour party about racism. In fact, it is his own, small-minded prejudice that blinds him to the anti-racist politics of the left. His ugly message is now being loudly amplified by a corporate media keen to use any weapon it can, antisemitism included, to keep Corbyn and the left out of power – and preserve a status quo that benefits the few at the expense of the many.

Jonathan Cook

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

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CJ Hopkins warns of the Nazis that don’t come goose-stepping up the street waving big neo-Nazi flags. He warns that they’re the kind we don’t recognise even when we’re looking right at them.

Reclaiming your inner fascist

OK, we need to talk about fascism. Not just any kind of fascism. A particularly insidious kind of fascism. No, not the fascism of the early 20th-century. Not Mussolini’s National Fascist Party. Not Hitler’s NSDAP. Not Francoist fascism or any other kind of organised fascist movement or party. Not even the dreaded Tiki-torch Nazis.

It’s the other kind of fascism we need to talk about. The kind that doesn’t come goose-stepping up the street waving big neo-Nazi flags. The kind we don’t recognise looking right at it.

It’s like that joke about the fish and the water ... we don’t recognise it because we’re swimming in it. We’re surrounded by it. We are inseparable from it. From the moment we are born, we breathe it in.

We are taught it by our parents, who were taught it by their parents. We are taught it again by our teachers in school. It is reinforced on a daily basis at work, in conversations with friends, in our families and our romantic relationships. We imbibe it in books, movies, TV shows, advertisements, pop songs, the nightly news, in our cars, at the mall, the stadium, the opera ... everywhere, because it is literally everywhere.

It doesn’t look like fascism to us. Fascism only looks like fascism when you’re standing outside of it, or looking back at it. When you are in it, fascism just looks like “normality”, like “reality”, like “just the way it is.”

We (ie, Americans, Brits, Europeans, and other citizens of the global capitalist empire) get up in the morning, go to work, shop, pay the interest on our debts, and otherwise obey the laws and conform to the mores of a system of power that has murdered countless millions of people in pursuit of global-hegemonic dominance. It has perpetrated numerous wars of aggression. Its military occupies most of the planet. Its Intelligence agencies (ie, secret police) operate a worldwide surveillance apparatus that can identify, target, and eliminate anyone, anywhere, often by remote control. Its propaganda network never sleeps, nor is there any real way to escape its constant emotional and ideological conditioning.

The fact that the global capitalist empire does not call itself an empire, and instead calls itself “democracy”, doesn’t make it any less of an empire. The fact that it uses terms like “regime change” instead of “invasion” or “annexation” makes very little difference to its victims. Terms like “security”, “stability”, “intervention”, “regime change”, and so on are not meant for its victims. They are meant for us ... to anaesthetise us.

The empire is “regime-changing” Bolivia currently. It has “regime-changed” most of Latin America at one time or
tries, and orchestrating and sponsoring coups, or otherwise overthrowing their governments, and murdering, torturing, and oppressing people. Sending in terrorists, death squads, and such. We have organisations that train guys to do that, ie, to round people up, take them out to the jungle, or the woods, or wherever, rape the women, and then summarily shoot everyone in the head. We pay for this kind of thing with our taxes, and our investments in the global corporations that our militaries and intelligence agencies serve. We know this is happening. We can google this stuff. We know “where the trains are going”, as it were.

And yet, we do not see ourselves as monsters.

The Nazis didn’t see themselves as monsters. They saw themselves as heroes, as saviours, or just as regular Germans leading regular lives. When they looked at the propaganda posters which surrounded them (as the Internet surrounds us today), they didn’t see sadistic mass-murderers and totalitarian psychopathic freaks. They saw normal people, admirable people, who were making the world a better place.

They saw themselves. They saw “the good guys.”

Now, let’s be clear about this “regime-change” business. We’re talking about invading other people’s coun-

another since the World War II. It “regime-changed” Iraq, Libya, Yugoslavia, Indonesia ... the list goes on. It very much wants to “regime-change” Iran, which it “regime-changed” back in the 1950s, before the Iranians “regime-changed” it back. It would love to “regime-change” Russia and China, but their ICBMs make that somewhat impractical.

Basically, the empire has been “regime-changing” everyone it can since the end of the Cold War. It has run into a little bump in Syria, and in Venezuela, but not to worry, it will get back there and finish up eventually.

Now, let’s be clear about this “regime-change” business. We’re talking about invading other people’s coun-

NAZI GERMANY: Another self-proclaimed nation of good guys.
to inhabit). It is Power’s way of letting us know what it wants us to believe, how it wants us to behave, who our official enemies are. Its purpose isn’t to mislead or deceive us. It is an edict, a command, an ideological model … to which we are all expected to conform. Conform to this ideological model, and one is rewarded, or at least not punished. Deviate from it, and suffer the consequences.

It is a question of obedience, not one of truth.

This is why it doesn’t matter that there is no actual “Attack on America”, and that the Russians didn’t “hack”, “subvert”, “meddle in”. or otherwise significantly “influence” the 2016 presidential election or otherwise put Donald Trump in office. John Brennan and the CIA say they did, and the corporate media say they did, so all Good Americans have to pretend to believe it.

Likewise, it also doesn’t matter if an organisation like the OPCW collaborated with the empire’s regime-change specialists who staged a “chemical weapons attack” on helpless women and children in Douma (because, no matter what the empire did or didn’t do, Assad is a Russian-backed, baby-gassing devil), or if the Guardian just makes up stuff about Julian Assange out of whole cloth and prints it as news.

This is also why, when the Guardian runs an enormous colour propaganda photo of a beneficent-looking Hillary Clinton and her soon-to-be-Democratic senator daughter posing as our last line of defence against the Invasion of the Putin-Nazis, and as the future of Western democracy, and whatever, on the cover of its cultural Review, this isn’t perceived as propaganda.

Never mind that this woman (ie, Hillary) is directly responsible for the deaths and misery of God-knows how many innocent people in the course of her lucrative service to the empire.

Never mind that this is the exact same person that sadistically cackled on national television when the empire’s associates anally knife-raped and murdered Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, and then transformed a developed African country into a hellish human-slavery market.

For fascists (and authoritarian personalities generally), facts are completely beside the point. The point is to robotically conform to the ideology (or hysterical ravings) of whatever leader or system of power happens to be in charge of things.

Authoritarian personality types are skilled at determining exactly who that is (ie, who is really in charge of things) and obsequiously currying favour with them. For some, this is an innate talent; others have this talent conditioned into them (or beaten into them) over the course of years. Either way, the result is the same.

Put a random bunch of people together in a group and give them a problem to solve, or a complex project or objective to accomplish. Don’t give them any organisational guidance, just put them in a room and watch what happens.

The first thing that happens is … a “leader” emerges. Someone (or a few people) decides that someone needs to be in charge of this project, and they feel pretty strongly that it should be them. If more than one such “leader” emerges, or if the need for a leader itself is challenged, a struggle for power will immediately ensue. The aspiring “leaders” will compete for the support of the “followers” in the group. Sides will be taken. Eventually, a “leader” will be chosen. Occasionally, this will happen openly, but, more often than not, it will happen unconsciously. Someone in the group will want to dominate
... and the rest of the group will want them to dominate. They will experience discomfort until a “leader” is established, and they will feel an enormous sense of relief once one is, and they can surrender their autonomy.

I assume you’re familiar with the Milgram experiment, but, if not, you should probably read up on that, and maybe read Adorno’s The Authoritarian Personality. It’s a bit outdated, and over-focused on the Nazis (it was originally published in 1950), but I think you’ll get the general idea.

Once you’ve done that, turn on your television, or your radio, or scan the news on the Internet, or walk down any big city street and compare the content on the digital billboards, movie posters, and advertisements to historical fascist propaganda ... that is, if your boss will let you leave the workplace long enough to do that, which he probably will if you ask him in that special way you have learned over time that he likes and generally tends to respond to.

Sorry, I didn't mean to get inside your mind. That's kind of a fascistic thing to do.

Look, the point is, we all have an “Inner Fascist”, with whom we are either acquainted or not. I'm a playwright and a novelist, which means I've got a big, fat, Sieg-heiling Inner Fascist goose-stepping around inside my head. I invent whole worlds, which I dictatorially control. I put people in them and make them say things. It doesn't get much more fascistic than that. The way I see it, my art is how I sublimate my Inner Fascist, so that he doesn't run around invading Poland, exterminating the Jews, or “regime-changing” Bolivia.

I'm not a psychiatrist, or a fascism expert, but I figure this is probably the most we can do ... recognise, acknowledge, and find some way to sublimate our Inner Fascists, because, I guarantee you, they’re not going away. (If you don't believe me, go watch that Planet Earth episode featuring the fascist chimpanzees.)

Seriously, I recommend you do this. Get acquainted with your Inner Fascist, in an appropriate set and setting, of course. Give him something safe to dominate and then let him go totally totalitarian. You’ll be doing yourself and the rest of us a favour.

Ironically, it is those who are not acquainted with their Inner Fascists (or who deny they have one) who are usually the first to make a big public show of loudly denouncing “fascism,” brandishing their “anti-fascist” bonafides, accusing other people of being “fascists”, and otherwise desperately projecting their Inner Fascists onto those they hate, and want to silence, if not exterminate.

This is one of the hallmarks of repressed Inner Fascism ... this compulsion to control what other people think, this desire for complete ideological conformity, this tendency, not to argue with, but rather, to attempt to destroy anyone who disagrees with or questions one’s beliefs.

We all know people who behave this way. If you don’t, odds are, one of them is you.

So, please, if you haven’t done so already, get acquainted with your “Inner Fascist”, and find him something harmless to do, before he … well, you know, starts singing hymns to former FBI directors, or worshipping the CIA, or Obama, or Trump, or Hillary Clinton, or supports the empire’s next invasion, or coup, or just makes a desperate, sanctimonious ass of you both on the Internet.

I'm not kidding. Reclaim your “Inner Fascist”. It might sound crazy, but you will thank me some day.

CJ Hopkins is an award-winning American playwright, novelist and political satirist based in Berlin. His plays are published by Bloomsbury Publishing (UK) and Broadway Play Publishing (USA). His debut novel, ZONE 23, is published by Snoggsworthy, Swaine & Cormorant Paperbacks. He can be reached at www.cjhopkins.com or at www.consentfactory.org.
At last! Landmark new legislation now before the US Congress links corporate taxes to the CEO-worker pay divide, writes Sam Pizzigati

Putting the brakes on Corporate America

WHY has the United States become so much more unequal over the last four decades? Any number of factors have been driving our increased inequality. But no single factor may have been more significant than the behaviour of the modern American corporation.

Corporations are contributing to inequality on two fronts. On the one hand, they’re systematically depressing incomes for average Americans, via everything from outsourcing to pension cuts. On the other, they’re just as systematically stuffing the pockets of America’s executive class.

These two vile sets of behaviours are relentlessly reinforcing each other. Outrageously huge rewards give corporate executives an incentive to behave outrageously, to squeeze their workers at every opportunity.

So how can we fight these corporate pay outrages? We change the incentive structure. We start giving Corporate America reason to narrow income divides, not stretch them ever wider. New legislation just introduced in Congress does just that.

The legislation – the Tax Excessive CEO Pay Act – raises the corporate tax rate on companies that pay their top executives over 50 times more than what they pay their most typical workers. The wider the pay-gap multiple over 50 times, the higher the tax rate.

Not that long ago, no one could have possibly dreamed that this sort of tax penalty would be so necessary. In mid-20th-century America, CEOs at major US firms seldom made much more than 30 or 40 times average worker pay. Today, by contrast, the nation’s top CEOs average nearly 300 times more. In 2018, a new Institute for Policy Studies report details, 50 top execs grabbed over 1,000 times more.

The proposed Tax Excessive CEO Pay Act carries some heavyweight sponsors. In the Senate, Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont) introduced the legislation November 13, the same day that veteran lawmaker Barbara Lee (D-California) and outspoken first-termer Rashida Tlaib (D-Michigan) introduced the bill in the House. And, on the Senate side, Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Massachusetts) is co-sponsoring the legislation.

Over two dozen national labor, religious, and policy organisations have already endorsed the new Tax Excessive CEO Pay Act. They range from the AFL-CIO and the National Council of Churches to the Coalition on Human Needs and Public Citizen.

“The more corporations channel into executives’ pockets, the less they have for wages and other investments”, the groups note in a joint statement of support. “By putting a tax penalty on corporations with extreme pay gaps, the bill would give corporations an incentive to narrow their divides by lift-
increasing up the bottom and bringing down the top of their pay scale.”

“If America’s corporate boards can’t understand the absurdity of paying their CEO friends – in one year – more than their workers will earn in a lifetime”, adds Senator Sanders, “then the Tax Excessive CEO Pay Act will help them figure it out.”

Rep. Lee has been a long-time champion of measures that link executive and worker pay. Her Income Equity Act sought to prevent corporations from deducting off their taxes executive pay that runs over 25 times worker pay. The Tax Excessive CEO Pay Act builds upon that approach on a grander scale – and also plugs loopholes in similar pay-ratio tax bills that have come before legislatures at the state and federal level.

The new bill, for instance, applies to both publicly traded and privately held corporations. Under the legislation, giant privately held corporations would – for the first time ever – have to reveal the ratio between their CEO and median worker pay.

The Tax Excessive CEO Pay Act also recognises that the most highly compensated executive within a corporation at times might not be the CEO. In firms like Google and Twitter, CEOs have sometimes taken only nominal annual compensation because they gain far more from increases in the value of the millions of shares they hold.

At these companies, other top execs are collecting CEO-size windfalls.

One example: At Alphabet, the enterprise that subsumes Google, CEO and co-founder Larry Page holds company stock worth over $22-billion. He takes home $1 a year. In 2018, Alphabet’s highest-paid exec collected $47.5-million, 192 times median pay. Under the Tax Excessive CEO Pay Act, the corporate tax would be tied to that $47.5-million compensation.

The legislation’s corporate tax penalty would add a 0.5 percentage-point increase to the corporate income tax rate for companies with CEO-median worker pay ratios between 50 and 100 times. A firm with a ratio between 100 and 200 times would face a 1 percentage-point increase, with the rate jumping by 5 percentage points for companies with CEO-worker gaps over 500 times.

For corporations with billions in annual earnings, these percentage-point increases would have real bite. Walmart’s tax liability would have soared by $794-million if the Tax Excessive CEO Pay Act had been law last year.

Would tax hikes in the hundreds of millions be enough to convince corporate boards to narrow their vast pay divides? In some cases, probably not. Greed runs deep in Corporate America. But we have other tools we can contemplate, other consequences we can place on enterprises with unconscionable divides.

Some of these consequences have already surfaced in state-level legislative proposals. We can tie the awarding of lucrative government contracts to pay ratios. We can do the same with government subsidies. We can create all sorts of incentives for corporations to do the right thing.

The Tax Excessive CEO Pay Act starts us down that road. What a good start its passage would be.

Sam Pizzigati co-edits Inequality.org. His recent books include The Case for a Maximum Wage and The Rich Don’t Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970. Follow him at @Too_Much_Online.
THE Situation Room, October 2039: the president and vice president, senior generals and admirals, key cabinet members, and other top national security officers huddle around computer screens as aides speak to key officials across the country. Some screens are focused on Hurricane Monica, continuing its catastrophic path through the Carolinas and Virginia; others are following Hurricane Nicholas, now pummeling Florida and Georgia, while Hurricane Ophelia lurks behind it in the eastern Caribbean.

On another bank of screens, officials are watching horrifying scenes from Los Angeles and San Diego, where millions of people are under mandatory evacuation orders with essentially nowhere to go because of a maelstrom of raging wildfires. Other large blazes are burning out of control in Northern California and Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington State. The National Guard has been called out across much of the West, while hundreds of thousands of active-duty troops are being deployed in the disaster zones to assist in relief operations and firefighting.

With governors and lawmakers from the affected states begging for help, the president has instructed the senior military leadership to provide still more soldiers and sailors for yet more disaster relief. Unfortunately, the generals and admirals are having a hard time complying, since most of their key bases on the East and West Coasts are also under assault from storms, floods, and wildfires. Many have already been evacuated. Naval Station Norfolk, the nation’s largest naval base, for example, took a devastating hit from Monica and lies under several feet of water, rendering it inoperable. Camp Pendleton in California, a major Marine Corps facility, is once again in flames, its personnel either being evacuated or fully engaged in firefighting. Other key bases have been similarly disabled, their personnel scattered to relocation sites in the interior of the country.

Foreign threats, while not ignored in this time of domestic crisis, have lost the overriding concern they enjoyed throughout the 2020s when China and Russia were still
considered major foes. By the mid-2030s, however, both of those countries were similarly preoccupied with multiple climate-related perils of their own – recurring wildfires and crop failures in Russia, severe water scarcity, staggering heat waves, and perpetually flooded coastal cities in China – and so were far less inclined to spend vast sums on sophisticated weapons systems or to engage in provocative adventures abroad. Like the United States, these countries are committing their military forces ever more frequently to disaster relief at home.

As for America’s allies in Europe: well, the days of trans-Atlantic cooperation have long since disappeared as extreme climate effects have become the main concern of most European states. To the extent that they still possess military forces, these, too, are now almost entirely devoted to flood relief, firefighting, and keeping out the masses of climate refugees fleeing perpetual heat and famine in Asia and Africa.

And so, in the Situation Room, the overriding question for US security officials in 2039 boils down to this: How can we best defend the nation against the mounting threat of climate catastrophe?

Read through the formal Pentagon literature on the threats to American security today and you won’t even see the words “climate change” mentioned. This is largely because
of the nation’s commander-in-chief who once claimed that global warming was a “hoax” and that we’re better off burning ever more coal and oil than protecting the nation against severe storm events or an onslaught of wildfires. Climate change has also become a hotly partisan issue in Washington and military officers are instinctively disinclined to become embroiled in partisan political fights. In addition, senior officers have come to view Russia and China as vital threats to US security – far more dangerous than, say, the zealots of ISIS or al-Qaeda – and so are focused on beefing up America’s already overpowering defense capabilities yet more.

“Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in US national security,” the Department of Defense (DoD) affirmed in its National Defense Strategy of February 2018. “Without sustained and predictable investment to restore readiness and modernize our military to make it fit for our time, we will rapidly lose our military advantage.”

Everything in the 2018 National Defense Strategy and the DoD budget documents that have been submitted to Congress since its release proceed from this premise. To better compete with China and Russia, we are told, it’s essential to spend yet more trillions of dollars over the coming decade to replace America’s supposedly aging weapons inventory -- including its nuclear arsenal -- with a whole new suite of ships, planes, tanks, and missiles (many incorporating advanced technologies like artificial intelligence and hypersonic warheads).

For some senior officers, especially those responsible for training and equipping America’s armed forces for combat on future battlefields, weapons modernization is now the military’s overriding priority. But for a surprising number of their compatriots, other considerations have begun to intrude into long-term strategic calculations. For those whose job it is to house all those forces and sustain them in combat, climate change has become an inescapable and growing concern. This is especially true for the commanders of facilities that would play a critical role in any future confrontation with China or Russia.

Many of the bases that would prove essential in a war with China, for example, are located on islands or in coastal areas highly exposed to sea-level rise and increasingly powerful typhoons. Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia, a major logistical and submarine base in the Indian Ocean, for example, is situated on a low-lying atoll that suffers periodic storm flooding and is likely to be submerged entirely well before the end of the century. The Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site, focused on preparing American defences against the future use of nuclear missiles by either North Korea or China, is located on Kwajalein Atoll in the midst of the Pacific Ocean and is also destined to disappear. Similarly, the country’s major naval base in Asia, at Yokosuka, Japan, and its major air facility, at Kadena on the Japanese island of Okinawa, are located along the coast and are periodically assaulted by severe typhoons.

No less at risk are radar facilities and bases in Alaska intended for defense against Russian Arctic air and naval attacks. Many of the early-warning radars overseen by the North American Aerospace Defense Command, or NORAD, a joint US-Canadian operation, are located on the Alaskan and Canadian shores of the Arctic Ocean and so are being threatened by sea-level rise, coastal erosion, and the thawing of the permafrost on which many of them rest.

Equally vulnerable are state-side bases considered essential to the defense of this country, as well as its ability to sustain military operations abroad. Just how severe this risk has become was made painfully clear in late 2018 and early 2019, when two of the country’s most important domestic installations, Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida and Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska, were largely immobilized by extreme storm events – Hurricane Michael in one case and a prolonged rainfall in the other.

Tyndall, located on a narrow strip of land projecting into the
Gulf of Mexico, housed a large fraction of America’s F-22 “Raptor” stealth fighter jets along with the 601st Air and Space Operations Center (601st AOC), the main command and control unit for aerial defense of the continental United States. In anticipation of Michael’s assault, the Air Force was able to relocate key elements of the 601st AOC and most of those F-22s to other facilities out of the hurricane’s path, but some Raptors could not be moved and were damaged by the storm. According to the Air Force, 484 buildings on the base were also destroyed or damaged beyond repair and the cost of repairing the rest of the facilities was estimated at $648 million. It is, in fact, unclear if Tyndall will ever again serve as a major F-22 base or house all the key military organizations it once contained.

Offutt Air Force Base plays a similarly critical role in America’s defense operations, housing the headquarters of the Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM), which is responsible for oversight of all US nuclear strike forces, including its intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). Also located at Offutt is the 55th Wing, the nation’s premier assemblage of reconnaissance and electronic-warfare aircraft. In March 2019, after a severe low-pressure system (often called a “bomb cyclone”) formed over the western plains, the upper Missouri River basin was inundated with torrential rains for several days, swelling the river and causing widespread flooding. Much of Offutt, including its vital runways, was submerged under several feet of water and some 130 buildings were damaged or destroyed. USSTRATCOM continued to operate, but many key personnel were unable to gain access to the base, causing staffing problems. As with Tyndall, immediate repairs are expected to run into the hundreds of millions of dollars and full restoration of the base’s facilities many millions more.

Wildfires in California have also imperilled key bases. In May 2014, for example, Camp Pendleton was scorched by the Tomahawk Fire, one of several conflagrations to strike the San Diego area at the time. More than 6,000 acres were burned by the blaze and children at two on-base schools had to be evacuated. At one point, a major munitions depot was threatened by flames, but firefighters managed to keep them far enough away to prevent a catastrophic explosion.

An even more dangerous fire swept through Vandenberg Air Force Base, 50 miles north of Santa Barbara, in September 2016. Vandenberg is used to launch satellite-bearing missiles into space and houses some of the Ground-Based Midcourse Defense missile interceptors that are meant to shoot down any North Korean (or possibly Chinese) ICBMs fired at this country. The 2016 blaze, called the Canyon Fire, burned more than 12,000 acres and forced the Air Force to cancel the launch of an Atlas V rocket carrying an earth-imaging satellite. Had winds not shifted at the last moment, the fire might have engulfed several of Vandenberg’s major launch sites.

Such perils have not (yet) been addressed in Pentagon documents like the National Defense Strategy and senior officers are normally reluctant to discuss them with members of the public. Nonetheless, it’s not hard to find evidence of deep anxiety among those who face the already evident ravages of climate change on a regular basis. In 2014 and 2017, analysts from the US Government Accountability Office visited numerous US bases at home and abroad to assess their exposure to extreme climate effects and came back with startling reports about their encounters.

“At 7 out of 15 locations we visited or contacted,” the survey team reported in 2014, “officials stated that they had observed rising sea levels and associated storm surge and associated potential impacts, or mission vulnerabilities.” Likewise, “at 9 out of 15 locations we
visited or contacted, officials stated that they had observed changes in precipitation patterns and associated potential impacts,” such as severe flooding or wildfires.

Look through the congressional testimony of top Pentagon officials and you’ll find that similar indications of unease abound. “The Air Force recognizes that our installations and infrastructure are vulnerable to a wide variety of threats, including those from weather, climate, and natural events,” said John Henderson, assistant secretary of the Air Force for installations, environment and energy, at a recent hearing on installation resiliency. “Changing climate and severe weather effects have the potential to catastrophically damage or degrade the Air Force’s war-fighting readiness.”

At a time when US bases are experiencing the ever more severe effects of climate change, the armed forces are coming under mounting pressure to assist domestic authorities in coping with increasingly damaging storms, floods, and fires from those same climate forces. A prelude to what can be expected in the future was provided by the events of August and September 2017, when the military was called upon to provide disaster relief in the wake of three particularly powerful hurricanes – Harvey, Irma, and Maria – at the very moment California and the state of Washington were being ravaged by powerful wildfires.

This unprecedented chain of disasters began on August 26th, when Harvey -- then a Category 4 hurricane – made landfall near Houston, Texas, and lingered there for five agonizing days, sucking up water from the Gulf of Mexico and dumping it on that area in what proved to be the heaviest continuous rainfall in American history. With much of Houston engulfed in flood waters, the DoD mobilized 12,000 National Guard and 16,000 active-duty Army troops to assist in relief operations.

Such cleanup operations were still under way there when Irma -- a Category 5 storm and one of the most powerful hurricanes ever detected in the Atlantic Ocean – struck the eastern Caribbean, Puerto Rico, and southern Florida. Guard units sent by Florida’s governor to assist in Texas were hastily recalled and the Pentagon mobilized an additional 4,500 active-duty troops for emergency operations. To bolster these forces, the Navy deployed one of its aircraft carriers, the USS Abraham Lincoln, along with a slew of support vessels.

With some Guard contingents still involved in Texas and cleanup operations just getting under way in Florida, another Category 5 storm, Maria, emerged in the Atlantic and began its fateful course toward Puerto Rico, making landfall on that island on September 20th. It severed most of that island’s electrical power lines, bringing normal life to a halt. With food and potable water in short supply, the DoD commenced yet another mobilization of more than 12,000 active-duty and Guard units. Some of them would still be there a year later, seeking to restore power and repair roads in remote, harshly affected areas.

If finding enough troops and supply systems to assist in these relief operations was a tough task–akin to mobilizing for a major war – the Pentagon faced a no less severe challenge in addressing the threats to its own forces and facilities from those very storms.

When Hurricane Irma approached Florida and the Keys, it became evident that many of the Pentagon’s crucial southern installations were likely to suffer severe damage. Notable among them was Naval Air Station (NAS) Key West, a major hub for US operations in the Caribbean region. Fearing the worst, its commander ordered a mandatory evacuation for all but a handful of critical personnel. Commanders at other bases in the storm’s path also ordered evacuations, including at NAS Jacksonville in Florida and Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay in Georgia. Aircraft at these installations were flown to secure locations further inland while Kings Bay’s missile-carrying submarines were sent to sea where they could better ride out the storm. At least a dozen other installations were
forced to relocate at least some personnel, planes, and ships.

While the extremity of each of these individual climate disasters can’t be attributed with absolute certainty to climate change, that they occurred at such strength over such a short time period is almost impossible to explain without reference to it. As scientists have indicated, the extremely warm waters of the Atlantic and Caribbean contributed to the fury of the three hurricanes and extreme dryness in California and the American West has resulted in severe recurring wildfires. All of these are predictable consequences of a warming planet.

That means, of course, that we can expect recurring replays of summer 2017, with multiple disasters (of ever-increasing magnitude) occurring more or less simultaneously. These, in turn, will produce ever more demands on the military for relief services, even as it is being forced to cope with the impact of such severe climate events on its own facilities. Indeed, the National Research Council (NRC), in a report commissioned by the US Intelligence Community, has warned of just such a future. Speaking of what it termed “clusters of extreme events,” it noted that warming temperatures are likely to generate not just more destructive storms, but also a greater concentration of such events at the same time.

“Given the available scientific knowledge of the climate system,” the report notes, “it is prudent for security analysts to expect climate surprises in the coming decade, including... conjunctions of events occurring simultaneously or in sequence, and for them to become progressively more serious and frequent thereafter, and most likely at an accelerating rate.”

Combine the ravages of Harvey, Irma, Maria, Katrina, and Sandy with the wildfires recently blasting across California and you get some sense of what our true “national security” landscape might look like. While the Pentagon, the National Guard, and local authorities should be able to cope with any combination of two or three such events, as they did in 2017 (although, according to critics, the damage to Puerto Rico has never been fully repaired), there will come a time when the climate assault is so severe and multifaceted that US leaders will be unable to address all the major disasters simultaneously and will have to pick and choose where to deploy their precious assets.

At that moment, the notion of focusing all our attention on managing military rivalries with China and Russia (or other potential adversaries) will appear dangerously distracting. Count on this: US forces sent to foreign bases and conflicts (as with the never-ending wars of this century in the Greater Middle East and Africa) will undoubtedly be redeployed homeward to help overcome domestic dangers. This may seem improbable today, with China and Russia building up their arsenals to counter American forces, but scientific analyses like those conducted by the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the NRC, suggest that those two countries are then no less likely to be facing multiple catastrophes of their own and will be in no position to engage in conflicts with the United States.

And so there will come a time when a presidential visit to the Situation Room involves not a nuclear crisis or the next major terrorist attack, but rather a conjunction of severe climate events, threatening the very heartbeat of the nation.

Michael T. Klare, a TomDispatch regular, is the five-college professor emeritus of peace and world security studies at Hampshire College and a senior visiting fellow at the Arms Control Association. He is the author of 15 books, including the just-published, All Hell Breaking Loose: The Pentagon’s Perspective on Climate Change (Metropolitan Books), on which this article is based. This article was first published at www.tomdispatch.com.
Awaiting the *right* moment

Jonathan Higbee has an unlimited supply of patience. The evidence is apparent in scanning the 10 years’ of unique photographs in his brilliant book, *Coincidences: New York City By Chance*, a collection of street photographs of New Yorkers caught in curious situations,

Send for a fireman, there’s a guy with smoke rising from their hair; here’s a giant walking down the street; the face of a woman on a book cover is remarkably transposed onto the woman reading it; a dancer performs on a stage of trash; graffiti unfurls from a backpack ...

At first sight, many of the photographs in *Coincidences* appear staged, but they’re not: they’re the product of hours – occasionally days – patiently awaiting the *right* moment. The result of the effort is a volume that takes street photography to stunning new heights. – TS

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**COINCIDENCES**

Jonathan Higbee
Anthology Editions
www.anthologyeditions.com
US$35 / Canada$45
“The moments have to unfold on their own. Staging, directing, or choreographing these scenes would take away the magic . . . meanwhile, several times a week, especially on Instagram, I still have people yelling in all caps, “THIS IS STAGED. THIS IS ALL BULLSHIT!””

– Jonathan Higbee
When Netanyahu says Iran is lying about its nuclear programme, much of the world – including the US – rolls their eyes, writes Conn Hallinan

Nuclear lies and broken promises

When Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan told an economic meeting in the city of Sivas on September 4 that Turkey was considering building nuclear weapons, he was responding to a broken promise.

When Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused the government of Iran of lying about its nuclear programme, he was concealing one of the greatest subterfuges in the history of nuclear weapons.

And the vast majority of Americans haven’t a clue about either.

Early in the morning of September 22, 1979, a US satellite recorded a double flash near the Prince Edward islands in the South Atlantic. The satellite, a Vela 5B, carries a device called a ‘bhangmeter’ whose purpose is to detect nuclear explosions. Sent into orbit following the signing of the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963, its job was to monitor any violations of the agreement. The treaty banned nuclear explosions in the atmosphere, underwater and in space.

Nuclear explosions have a unique footprint. When the weapon detonates, it sends out an initial pulse of light, but as the fireball expands, it cools down for a few milliseconds, then spikes again.

“Nothing in nature produces such a double-humped light flash”, says Victor Gilinsky, who was a member of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission and a former Rand Corporation physicist. He adds, “The spacing of the hump gives an indication of the amount of energy, or yield, released by the explosion”.

There was little question who had conducted the test. The Prince Edward islands were owned by South Africa, and US intelligence knew the apartheid government was conducting research into nuclear weapons, but had yet to produce one. But Israel had nukes and both countries had close military ties. In short, it was almost certainly an Israeli weapon, though Israel denied it.

In the weeks that followed, clear evidence of a nuclear test emerged from hydrophones near Ascension Island and a jump in radioactive iodine-131 in Australian sheep. Only nuclear explosions produce iodine-131.

But the test came at a bad time for US President Jimmy Carter, who was gearing up his re-election campaign, a cornerstone of which was a peace agreement between Israel and Egypt. If the Israelis were seen to have violated the Partial Test Ban, as well as the 1977 Glenn Amendment to the Arms Export Control Act, the US would have been required to cut off all arms sales to Israel and apply heavy sanctions. Carter was nervous about what
such a finding would have on the election, since a major part of Carter’s platform was arms control and non-proliferation.

So he threw together a panel of experts whose job was not to examine the incident but to cover it up. The Ruina Panel cooked up a tortured explanation involving mini-meteors that the media accepted and, as a result, so did the American public.

But nuclear physicists knew the panel was blowing smoke and that the evidence was unarguable. The device was set off on a barge between Prince Edward Island and Marion Island (the former should not be confused with Canada’s Prince Edward Island) with a yield of from three to four-kilotons. A secret CIA panel concurred but put the yield at 1.5 to two-kilotons. For comparison, the Hiroshima bomb was 15-kilotons.

It was also clear why the Israelis took the risk. Israel had a number of Hiroshima-style fission bombs but was working on producing a thermonuclear weapon – a hydrogen bomb. Fission bombs are easy to use, but are tricky and needed testing. That the Vela picked it up was pure chance, since the satellite had been retired. But its bhang-meters were still working.

From Carter on, every US president has covered up the Israeli violation of the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty, as well as the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). So when Netanyahu says Iran is lying about its nuclear programme, much of the rest of the world, including the US nuclear establishment, rolls their eyes.

As for Turkish President Erdogan, he is perfectly correct that the nuclear powers have broken the promise they made back in 1968 when the signed the NPT. Article VI of that agreement calls for an end to the nuclear arms race and the abolition of nuclear weapons. Indeed, in many ways Article VI is the heart of the NPT. Non-nuclear armed countries signed the agreement, only to find themselves locked into a system of ‘nuclear apartheid’, where they agreed not to acquire such weapons of mass destruction, while China, Russia, Great Britain, France and the US get to keep theirs.

The ‘Big Five’ not only kept their weapons, they are all in the process of upgrading and expanding them. The US is also shedding other agreements, such as the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Agreement. Washington is also getting ready to abandon
the START treaty that limits the US and Russia to a set number of warheads and long-range strategic launchers.

What is amazing is that only four other countries have abandoned the NPT: Israel, North Korea, Pakistan and India (only the latter three have been sanctioned by the US). But that situation cannot hold forever, especially since part of Article VI calls for general disarmament, a pledge that has been honoured in the breach. The US currently has the largest defence budget in its history and spends about 47 percent of what the entire rest of the world spends on their militaries.

While the US doesn’t seem able to win wars with that huge military – Afghanistan and Iraq were disasters – it can inflict a stunning amount of damage that few countries are willing to absorb. Even when Washington doesn’t resort to its military, its sanctions can decimate a country’s economy and impoverish its citizens. North Korea and Iran are cases in point.

If the US was willing to cover up the 1979 Israeli test, while sanctioning other countries that acquire nuclear weapons, why would anyone think that this is anything more than hypocrisy on the subject of proliferation? And if the NPT is simply a device to ensure that other countries cannot defend themselves from other nations’ conventional and/or nuclear forces, why would anyone sign on or stay in the Treaty?

Turkish President Erdogan may be bluffing. He loves bombast and effectively uses it to keep his foes off balance. The threat may be a strategy for getting the US to back off on its support for Israel and Greece in their joint efforts to develop energy sources in the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

But Turkey also has security concerns. In his speech, Erdogan pointed out “There is Israel just beside us. Do they have [nuclear weapons]? They do.” He went on to say that if Turkey did not respond to Israeli ‘bullying’ in the region, “We will face the prospect of losing our strategic superiority in the region.”

Iran may be lying – although though there is no evidence that Teheran is making a serious run at producing a nuclear weapon – but if they are, they in good company with the Americans and the Israelis.

Soon or later, someone is going to set off one of those nukes. The likeliest candidates are India and Pakistan, although use by the US and China in the South China Sea is not out of the question. Neither is a dust-up between NATO and Russia in the Baltic.

It is easy to blame the current resident of the White House for world tensions, except that the major nuclear powers have been ignoring their commitments on nuclear weapons and disarmament for over 50 years.

The path back to sanity is thorny but not impossible:

One: re-join the Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty, thus making Russia’s medium range missiles unnecessary, and reduce tensions between the US and China by withdrawing ABM systems from Japan and South Korea.

Two: reinstate the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Agreement and find a way to bring China, India and Pakistan into it. That will require a general reduction of US military forces in Asia, coupled with an agreement with China to back off on its claims over most of the South China Sea. Tensions between India and Pakistan would be greatly reduced by simply fulfilling the UN pledge to hold a referendum in Kashmir. The latter would almost certainly vote for independence.

Three: continue adherence to the START Treaty but halt the modernisation of the Big Five’s nuclear weapons arsenals and begin to implement Article VI of the NPT in regard to both nuclear and conventional forces.

Pie in the sky? Perhaps, but it beats a mushroom cloud. CT

Conn Hallinan can be read at dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com and middleempireseries.wordpress.com
The US case against the WikiLeaks founder is an assault on press freedom and the public’s right to know. The publication’s editorial board argues that since the Swedish investigation has once again been dropped, the time is now to oppose US extradition for the WikiLeaks founder.

“Sweden’s decision to drop an investigation into a rape allegation against Julian Assange has both illuminated the situation of the WikiLeaks founder and made it more pressing,” the editorial board writes.

The Guardian has published an editorial titled “The Guardian view on extraditing Julian Assange: don’t do it”, subtitled “The US case against the WikiLeaks founder is an assault on press freedom and the public’s right to know”. The publication’s editorial board argues that since the Swedish investigation has once again been dropped, the time is now to oppose US extradition for the WikiLeaks founder.

CHANGING COURSE: The Guardian is now saying Julian Assange should not be extradicted to the USA. However, over the past years, it has been publishing all manner of smears against the jailed whistleblower.

Claiming you oppose an imperialist agenda while helping to advance its smear campaigns is a nonsensical and contradictory position, writes Caitlin Johnstone.

How the Guardian advances propaganda for evil agenda
months ago, when Assange’s ridiculous bail sentence ended and he was still kept in prison explicitly and exclusively because of the US extradition request. Not six months ago, when the US government slammed Assange with 17 charges under the Espionage Act for publishing the Chelsea Manning leaks.

Not seven months ago, when Assange was forcibly pried from the Ecuadorian embassy and slapped with the US extradition request.

Not any time between his April arrest and his taking political asylum seven years ago, which the Ecuadorian government explicitly granted him because it believed there was a credible threat of US extradition.

Not nine years ago when WikiLeaks was warning that the US government was scheming to extradite Assange and prosecute him under the Espionage Act.

Nope, no, any of those times would have been far too early for the Guardian to begin opposing US extradition for Assange with any degree of lucidity. They had to wait until Assange was already locked up in Belmarsh Prison and limping into extradition hearings supervised by looming US government officials.

They had to wait until years and years of virulent mass media smear campaigns had killed off public support for Assange so he could be extradited with little or no grassroots backlash. And they had to wait until they themselves had finished participating in those smear campaigns.

This is after all the same Guardian which published the transparently ridiculous and completely invalidated report that Trump lackey Paul Manafort had met secretly with Assange at the embassy, not once but multiple times.

Not one shred of evidence has ever been produced to substantiate this claim despite the embassy being one of the most heavily surveilled buildings on the planet at the time, and the Robert Mueller investigation, whose expansive scope would obviously have included such meetings, reported absolutely nothing to corroborate it. It was a bogus story which all accused parties have forcefully denied.

This is the same Guardian which ran an article last year titled “The only barrier to Julian Assange leaving Ecuador’s embassy is pride”, arguing that Assange looked ridiculous for remaining in the embassy because “The WikiLeaks founder is unlikely to face prosecution in the US”. The article was authored by James Ball, who deleted a tweet not long ago complaining about the existence of UN special rapporteurs after one of them concluded that Assange is a victim of psychological torture. Ball’s article begins, “According to Debrett’s, the arbiters of etiquette since 1769: ‘Visitors, like fish, stink in three days.’ Given this, it’s difficult to imagine what Ecuador’s London embassy smells like, more than five-and-a-half years after Julian Assange moved himself into the confines of the small flat in Knightsbridge, just across the road from Harrods.”

This is the same Guardian which published an article titled “Definition of paranoia: supporters of Julian Assange”, arguing that Assange defenders are crazy conspiracy theorists for believing the US would try to extradite Assange because “Britain has a notoriously lax extradition treaty with the United States”, because “why would they bother to imprison him when he is making such a good job of discrediting himself?”, and “because there is no extradition request.”

This is the same Guardian which published a ludicrous report about Assange potentially receiving documents as part of a Nigel Farage/Donald Trump/Russia conspiracy. The Guardian published a report about Assange potentially receiving documents as part of a Nigel Farage/Donald Trump/Russia conspiracy’

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Before they launch missiles, they launch narratives. Before they drop bombs, they drop ideas. Before they invade, they propagandise. Before the killing, there is manipulation. Narrative control is the front line of all imperialist agendas, and it is therefore the front line of all anti-imperialist efforts.

When you forcefully oppose these agendas, that matters, because you're keeping the public from being propagandized into consenting to them. When you forcefully facilitate those agendas, that matters, because you're actively paving the way for them.

Claiming you oppose an imperialist agenda while helping to advance its propaganda and smear campaigns in any way is a nonsensical and contradictory position. You cannot facilitate imperialism and simultaneously claim to oppose it.

They work so hard to manufacture our consent because they need that consent. If they operate without the consent of the governed, the public will quickly lose trust in their institutions, and at that point it’s not long before revolution begins to simmer. So don’t give them your consent. And for God’s sake don’t do anything that helps manufacture it in others.

Words matter. Work with them responsibly.

Caitlin Johnstone is an Australian blogger. Her website is www.caitlinjohnstone.com
A student campaign to stop a 9ft (2.7 m) bronze statue of Mohandas ‘Mahatma’ Gandhi being erected outside Manchester Cathedral on November 25, to coincide with the 150th anniversary of his birth, has been described by one well-known Indian human rights activist, Zareer Masani, as “the latest political blackmail by today’s Stalinist censors.”

In the age of character assassination and public ‘execution’ – thanks to Twitter and other social media platforms – it was a brave thing to say.

“Gandhi, like his opponent Winston Churchill”, Masani wrote in The Thunderer column of the Times on October 29, “was a product of his time, imbued with the then near-universal racial prejudices. During his youth in South Africa he supported the British against the Boers and believed his Indian community more deserving of equality than black Africans. However, like Churchill’s, Gandhi’s views evolved during a long career.”

Not so the views of the campaigning Manchester University students, which seem to be somewhat rigid.

Launching the campaign in an open letter, the university’s Decolonise Network demanded that Manchester City Council reverse its decision to place the statue – a gift from the charitable organisation Shrimad Rajchandra Mission Dharampur – in front of the Anglican cathedral, whose Dean, Rogers Govender, is a South African by birth.

The protest is led by Sara Khan, the Students’ Union liberation and access officer who was one of a group who painted over a mural of the Rudyard Kipling poem If, arguing that the writer was a racist who “de-humanised people of colour.”

Today, the man who led the successful campaign against British rule and inspired civil rights movements across the world is causing sparks to fly once again, just as he did in the 1930s and 1940s. Between then and now, Gandhi has been variously described as an anti-colonial protesters, a religious thinker, a radical who used non-violence to fight for causes close to his heart, a clever politician, and a whimsical Hindu patriarch.

Added to this list now, especially in Britain, is the tag ‘racist’ – although his revolt against imperialism was an inspiration to men including Martin Luther King Junior and Nelson Mandela. The Manchester students’ letter said Gandhi called Africans “savages” and “half-heathen natives” who were “dirty”, “lived like animals” and should be kept away from Asians as well as Europeans.

This British version of the Gandhi Must Fall campaign is not new. It began in West Africa, where Gandhi’s statue was removed from the University of Ghana in December 2018. The following month, a woman in India used a toy gun to squirt red paint on a statue of the...
freedom fighter, whom she held responsible for the partition of India.

Writing in the *Washington Post* on October 2, the newspaper’s India Bureau Chief Joanna Slater said: “Even as admiration for Gandhi remains widespread, aspects of his life and philosophy are increasingly a source of controversy. Scholars have highlighted the racist language he used as a young man living in South Africa as well as his defence of India’s caste system.”

Students say the people of Manchester, whose 2.55-million strong population is diverse, with 24.7 percent Muslim and 1.1 percent Hindu, would benefit more if a statue of Steve Biko, the South African Black Consciousness leader who was murdered by South African Police in Pretoria on 12 September 1977, was raised in their city instead of one to ‘racist’ Gandhi.

South African academics Ashwin Desai and Goolam H. Vahed spent seven years exploring the complex story of a man who lived in their country and campaigned vigorously and courageously for the rights of Indians living there. Their book, *The South African Gandhi: Stretcher-Bearer of Empire*, was published in 2015 and caused a big stir when the authors revealed that Gandhi never missed an opportunity to show his loyalty to Empire. He served as a stretcher-bearer in the Boer War when the British occupied South Africa, demanded guns in the aftermath of the Bhambatha Rebellion, and toured the villages of India during the First World War as recruiter for the Imperial Army.

The authors suggest that Gandhi’s political strategies were concerned with Indian affairs only and that he believed state power in South Africa should remain in white hands.

Unpalatable facts about his attitudes to black Africans abound.
In 1893, Gandhi wrote to the Natal Parliament saying that “a general belief seems to prevail in the colony that the Indians are little better, if at all, than savages or the natives of Africa”. Then, in 1904, he wrote to a health officer in Johannesburg that the council “must withdraw Kaffirs” from an unsanitary slum called the Coolie Location, where a large number of Africans lived alongside Indians. He was quoted as saying: “About the mixing of the Kaffirs with the Indians, I must confess I feel most strongly”. The same year he wrote that, unlike the African, the Indian had no “war-dances, nor does he drink Kaffir beer”.

When Durban was hit by a plague in 1905, Gandhi wrote that the problem would persist as long as Indians and Africans were being “herded together indiscriminately at the hospital.”

An attempt to balance claims that Gandhi was anti-black in South Africa came from his grandson Rajmohan Gandhi, who has written that, when the 24-year-old Gandhi arrived in South Africa, he was inexperienced and ignorant about the plight of that country’s blacks, leading him to voice racially prejudiced views. But, insists Rajmohan, Gandhi’s ideas evolved over time and he should, therefore, be judged not for his early attitudes and the mistakes he made, but for what he became, the changes he achieved and the millions he inspired.

For the moment, the Manchester students’ anger about Gandhi seems to have been placed on the back-burner with the failure of their campaign. Will it stay there? We must wait and see.

As for what lies behind this modern desire to attack Gandhi, the respected author and academic Mary Elizabeth King asked that very question in a recent wide-ranging article titled How South Africa forced Gandhi to reckon with racism and imperialism.

She also answered it: “Social scientists maintain that the present political environment in the Americas, Europe, South Asia and elsewhere has increased the disparagement (or worse) of the ‘other’ along the lines of nationalism, religion, race, creed, gender and caste. Another possibility might be the current popularity of ‘purity tests’, which have been leading aggrieved groups to demand and expect what is, in essence, infallibility on the part of those perceived to be leaders or exemplars of a cause. Their perspective leaves no room for deviance, much less error – perceived or real.”

As Oscar Wilde once observed, a halo doesn’t have to fall far to become a noose.

Trevor Grundy is an English journalist, author and researcher who lived and worked in several Commonwealth countries between 1966 and 1996. He is a member of the Commonwealth Journalists Association (CJA).

READ THE BEST OF
EDWARD S. HERMAN
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Shameful attack on Britain’s travellers and gypsies

By George Monbiot

This is how it begins: with a theatrical attack on a vulnerable minority. It’s a Conservative tradition, during election campaigns, to vilify Romani Gypsies and Travellers: it tends to play well on the doorsteps of Middle England. But what the Home Secretary, Priti Patel, proposed last month is something else. It amounts to legislative cleaning.

The consultation document she released on the last day of Parliament aims to “test the appetite to go further” than any previous laws. It suggests that the police should be able immediately to confiscate the vehicles of “anyone whom they suspect to be trespassing on land with the purpose of residing on it”. Until successive Conservative governments began working on it, trespass was a civil and trivial matter. Now it is treated as a crime so serious that on mere suspicion you can lose your home.

When I say “you”, obviously I don’t mean you, unless you are a Romani Gypsy, a traditional Traveller or a New Traveller. If you’re on holiday in your caravan, it does not affect you. It applies only if you have “intent to reside” in your vehicle “for any period”. In other words, it is specifically aimed at travelling peoples. It is clearly and deliberately discriminatory.

It’s true that some people have sometimes behaved appallingly, damaging places, leaving litter and abusing residents. But there are already plenty of laws to prosecute these crimes. The government’s proposal, criminalising the use of any place without planning permission for Romani and Travellers to stop, would exterminate the travelling life.

The consultation acknowledges that there is nowhere else for these communities to go, other than the council house waiting list, which means abandoning the key elements of their culture. During the Conservative purge in the late 1980s and early 1990s, two thirds of traditional, informal stopping sites for travellers, some of which had been in use for thousands of years, were sealed off. Then, in 1994, the Criminal Justice Act repealed the duty of local authorities to provide official sites.
Over the past few weeks in Grimsby, Lincolnshire, local people have been debating the merits of the council’s proposal for an official transit site for travelling people. According to one of the councillors, there have been threats to stone, bottle and petrol bomb anyone who uses it, if planning permission is granted. For centuries Romani and Travellers have been hounded from parish to parish, suffering prejudice and bigotry as extreme as any group faces. Now the government is stoking it.

Patel’s proposed laws belong to the most dangerous of all political categories: performative oppression. She is beating up a marginalised group in full public view, to show that she sides with the majority. I don’t know whether she really intends to introduce these laws, or whether this is empty electioneering. In either case, she is playing with fire. Already this month, three caravans in Somerset have been torched by suspected arsonists. Travelling peoples have been attacked like this for centuries, and sometimes murdered. In 2003, a 15-year-old Traveller child, Johnny Delaney, was kicked to death by a gang of teenagers. One of them is reported to have explained to a passer-by, “he was only a fucking Gypsy.”

I asked a traditional Traveller how Patel’s legislation would affect her. Briony (not her real name) told me she has ploughed her life savings into her motorhome, which she parks out of people’s way, beside roads within easy reach of her children’s school. She has good relations with local people, many of whom know her and see her as part of the community. But none of this will help.

If this proposal becomes law, “the police will have the power to kick my door in, take my home, arrest me and take the children into care. We won’t get them back because we won’t have a home. Because of my work, I can’t afford a criminal record. When I walk out of the police station, I will have no home, no assets, no children and no career.” It would also leave her without state protection. “Sometimes we’ve had to call the police when we’re on the receiving end of hate crimes. This legislation would mean we had to go under the radar.” Understandably, she is terrified.

She has nowhere else to go. “There’s one transit site half an hour away, but you can stay there only for 28 days a year. So my only option is roadside. Roadside is our cultural heritage.” Stopping by the road has already been made extremely stressful and precarious by existing laws. Patel’s proposal would stamp it out altogether. It would end a migratory tradition that’s as old as humanity.

As Briony points out, this is collective punishment. “The majority of us are minding our own business. We’re providing our own housing, not relying on the government. But everything I do that’s positive is lost in people’s minds. Most people I meet have no idea I’m a Traveller. We’re invisible until we do something wrong. Then people notice we’re Travellers.”

A week before Priti Patel launched her consultation, the Weiner Holocaust Library in London opened its exhibition on the Porajmos: the genocide of Roma and Sinti people carried out by the Nazis. It shows how ancient prejudices were mobilised to destroy entire peoples. I’m not saying that this is how the situation will unfold in this country, but the exhibition shows us the worst that can happen when the state sanctions the demonisation of an outgroup. First they came for the Travellers …

George Monbiot is a columnist with the Guardian. His website is www.monbiot.com.
It’s time for a ban on billionaires

By Negin Owliaei

“I’ve paid more than $10 billion in taxes. I’ve paid more than anyone in taxes,” Bill Gates said to journalist Andrew Ross Sorkin. “But when you say I should pay $100-billion, OK, then I’m starting to do a little math about what I have left over.”

Supposedly Gates was talking about a wealth tax that US election 2020 candidates have supported. But no plan yet proposed would seize $100-billion from the philanthro-capitalist anytime soon. Even if it did, he’d still be one of the richest men in the world, with $7-billion left over.

Gates isn’t the only billionaire who’s worried. JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon also has concerns about the rising resentment towards his fellow elites.

“I think you should vilify Nazis,” Dimon told Lesley Stahl, “but you shouldn’t vilify people who worked hard to accomplish things.”

Billionaire investor Leon Cooperman, who’s become a fixture on CNBC, recently teared up while complaining about the “vilification of billionaires.”

Why do the feelings of the 600 Americans that constitute our billionaire class suck up so much media attention?

For one thing, billionaires literally own the news. Buying up media companies is a new rite of passage for the ultra wealthy, like the purchase of the Washington Post by Amazon head Jeff Bezos, or Time by tech CEO Marc Benioff.

They’ll say they’re all about editorial independence, but the truth is billionaire ownership can affect news output. When billionaire Joe Ricketts found out the staff of DNAinfo, a network of city-based news sites he owned, was unionising, he promptly shut down the entire venture out of spite.

There are more subtle ways in which the rich buy media access. The Gates Foundation, for example, has poured millions in donations into the media over the last several years to raise awareness around the foundation’s philanthropic goals – including its controversial funding of charter schools.

Not all billionaire power is publicly broadcast, however. In their book Billionaires and Stealth Politics, researchers Benjamin Page, Jason Seawright, and Matthew J. Lacombe document how economic elites have banded together to lobby for extremely conservative policies, like cutting estate taxes, opposing regulations on the environment and Wall Street, and gutting social programmes.

Because these moves are highly unpopular, they’ve done this work in the background.

That means there’s a network of billionaires aligned with the Koch brothers, who’ve poured hundreds of millions of dollars into anti-labor policies. And Rupert Murdoch, the media mogul who changed the media landscape with Fox News. And casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, who’s spending his billions shaping US foreign policy.

Their enormous wealth offers them an outlandishly oversized role in our democracy. It’s poisoning both our politics and our media.

So how about a ban on billionaires? Let’s tax away their wealth, but let’s get them off our
Doug Ford’s destructive cuts will hit health care

By Linda McQuaig

It warms the soul to recall the day last June when Ontario premier Doug Ford was heartily booed by the enormous crowd in Toronto’s Nathan Phillips Square celebrating the NBA-title-winning Raptors – a crowd so big that it even dwarfed the one at Donald Trump’s inauguration.

Humiliated by this stunning rebuke, the premier retreated from some of his more unpopular cutbacks.

But it would be a mistake to assume that Ford’s destructive austerity agenda has been derailed. On the contrary, it moves forward like a freight train, coming at us slowly but relentlessly, much of it under cover of darkness.

Among the premier’s sweeping cutbacks – aimed at reducing the deficit without tapping the corporate elite for more tax revenues – are a dizzying array of cuts to Canada’s public health-care system, the crown jewel of our social programmes.

These cuts, totalling about $360-million, will affect everything from mental health care to cancer screening, according to Natalie Mehra, head of the Ontario Health Coalition.

Their impact will likely be profound, since Ontario’s health-care spending is already well below the Canadian average, even though Ontario is one of the richest provinces.

Indeed, Ontario’s health-care spending is only $3,903 per person – the lowest of the 10 provinces – and $487 per person lower than the Canadian average, according to Ontario’s Financial Accountability Office.

Even more damaging may be the Ford government’s embrace of further privatisation, evident in recent legislation creating a health superagency with vast new privatisation powers.

Let’s quickly clarify that there are no savings to be had from such privatisation. Quite the contrary.

While government spending on the public portion of health care – doctors and hospitals – has held steady at about 4 percent of GDP for the past 40 years, the costs of the private parts of the system – drugs, physiotherapy, dentistry, home care, etc – have risen dramatically.

But Ford seems less concerned about controlling health costs than about pleasing business interests, which have long pushed to open our health-care system to more privatisation, so they can get in on the spectacular profits reaped in private health care south of the border.

The premier’s support for privatised health care adds
The Wall made Pink Floyd – then it destroyed them

By Mark E. Perry

Forty years ago, on Nov. 30, 1979, the English progressive rock band Pink Floyd released its 11th studio album, The Wall. The Wall, featuring 26 tracks, two records and an opera-esque story line, the concept album would go on to become the number two bestselling double album in history. But it would also mark the last time Pink Floyd’s core members – Roger Waters, David Gilmour, Nick Mason and Richard Wright – would record an album together.

Years of touring and financial stress had taken their toll. The egomania of one member, Waters, during the new impetus to the well-funded, pro-privatisation campaign already well underway.

The public face of this campaign has been British Columbia medical entrepreneur Dr Brian Day, who has spearheaded a 10-year legal battle to strike down Canadian medicare laws restricting private surgical clinics from collecting money through the public system while also charging patients hefty additional fees.

Behind the scenes, Day has had ample financial support from private interests who recognise that his victory would open the floodgates to private medicine in Canada.

“If he wins, you can kiss goodbye to medicare as we know it,” says Colleen Fuller, a health policy researcher affiliated with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Astonishingly, much of this anti-medicare campaign appears to have been waged with tax deductible dollars.

A massive $5-million war chest to support Day’s legal challenge has been amassed by the Canadian Constitution Foundation (CCF), a right-wing, Calgary-based organisation – with charitable status.

The CCF acknowledges that its donors include some very high-net-worth individuals, including Anthony Fell, former chairman of RBC Capital Markets.

Indeed, the suggested donation range on the CCF’s website goes all the way up to $250,000. And there’s a link to a form allowing donors to transfer securities from their brokerage accounts. Not your usual lemonade-stand charity.

The CCF is also registered as a US charity with the IRS, suggesting it receives money from wealthy US donors keen to help strike down Canadian laws that restrict their investment opportunities here.

Meanwhile, a pro-medicare group called Canadian Doctors for Medicare is denied charitable status in Canada, on the grounds that it’s an advocacy group. So, while you can get a tax deduction for a donation to fight medicare, you can’t get one for a donation to save medicare. Ironic, since most Canadians revere medicare.

Far from the boos that greeted him at Nathan Phillips Square, Ford has now moved to the backrooms where he’s quietly helping financial interests, domestic and foreign, get a chunk of our crown jewel.

Linda McQuaig is a journalist and author of The Sport & Prey of Capitalists, which explores the different energy policies of Alberta and Norway. This column originally appeared in the Toronto Star.
The unchecked egos of band members can often be difficult to rein in, and often lead to acrimony – to the point where the band breakup has almost become a cliche.

Tensions between the four members of the Beatles – John Lennon and Paul McCartney, in particular – famously led to the band’s breakup in 1970. Conflict between guitarist Johnny Marr and vocalist Morrissey triggered Marr’s decision to leave the Smiths. And let’s not forget the Eagles, which broke up on such bad terms that drummer and vocalist Don Henley said the band would reunite “when hell freezes over.”

By the time Pink Floyd started recording The Wall in January 1979, tensions had been simmering for years. The Dark Side of the Moon, released in 1973, had catapulted Pink Floyd to superstardom. But the band members struggled over how to build off the success of Dark Side and make another hit album.

They had already fought among themselves when recording their follow-up albums, 1975’s Wish You Were Here and 1977’s Animals.

Roger Waters, the band’s bassist and co-lead singer, took charge for Wish You Were Here. He decided which tracks would appear and essentially dictated the album’s conceptual themes, which included alienation, a critique of the music industry and a tribute to former bandmate Syd Barrett, who had left the band in 1968 due to mental health struggles.

In the process, Waters ended up cutting the songs Raving and Drooling and Gotta Be Crazy against guitarist and co-vocalist David Gilmour’s wishes.

“Dave was always clear that he wanted to do the other two songs”, Waters recalled. “He never quite copped what I was talking about. But Rick did and Nicky did, and he was outvoted so we went on.”

Perhaps feeling suffocated by Waters, Richard Wright and David Gilmour took a stab at solo albums in 1978, with Wright releasing Wet Dream and Gilmour debuting the self-titled David Gilmour.

Reflecting on his first solo album, Gilmour said, it “was important to me in terms of self respect. At first I didn’t think my name was big enough to carry it. Being in a group for so long can be a bit claustrophobic, and I needed to step out from behind Floyd’s shadow.”

The Wall would be the band’s next project – and, again, Waters asserted control. Waters was partly inspired by an infamous incident that took place during the In the Flesh tour, which promoted the album Animals. Annoyed by the sound of firecrackers – and feeling as if the crowd wasn’t listening to their music or lyrics – Waters spat on the audience. He later mused about building a wall between him and his fans. The seed for The Wall was planted.

In July 1978, he presented a 90-minute demo to the rest of the band, proposing two concepts for the next album: Bricks in the Wall and The Pros and Cons of Hitch Hiking.

The band members agreed to make an album focused on the first of the two. It would be about the struggles and isolation of rock stardom, and its central character would be named Pink Floyd.
The name of the character belied the fact that this would largely be a one-man show. As musicologist Allan F. Moore observed, “Waters’ growing megalomania, much in evidence on The Wall, became harder to handle.”

The fact that the album’s central story was semi-autobiographical, based on Waters and former band member Syd Barrett, probably didn’t help matters.

The motif of walls symbolised the defence mechanisms Waters had built up against those who might hurt him – parents, teachers, wives and lovers. Some lyrics deal with the death of his father, others with infidelity.

If David Gilmour had ideas for ways to contribute to Waters’ vision, they were barely incorporated. Waters did include fragments from demos associated with Gilmour’s solo projects. But in the end, Gilmour only received three co-writing credits – for Run Like Hell, Young Lust and Comfortably Numb. Drummer Nick Mason and keyboardist Richard Wright didn’t receive any at all.

Young Lust is one of only three songs that David Gilmour received credits for.

On the track Mother, Waters even brought in Toto drummer and session percussionist Jeff Porcaro to replace Mason. On Mason’s limited drumming abilities, Roger Waters recalled:

“It’s got 5/4 bars in it. Nick, to his great credit, has no pretence about that, it was clear that he could not play it. He said ‘I can’t play that.’ Or maybe somebody said to him, ‘Nick, maybe you should get somebody else to play this because you’re struggling.’”

Today, The Wall is considered by many to be one of the best albums in rock history. But it marked the last time the four members of the band would record an album together.

Keyboardist Richard Wright left, only to return later as a salaried sideman during Pink Floyd’s tours in 1980 and 1981. Pink Floyd – minus Wright – went on to record its 1983 album, The Final Cut. Waters eventually quit Pink Floyd in 1985 and sued members Gilmour and Mason in an attempt to stop them from using the band name, arguing that Pink Floyd was “a spent force creatively.”

Waters lost, and Gilmour and Mason went on to record three more albums under the name Pink Floyd: 1987’s A Momentary Lapse of Reason, 1994’s The Division Bell and 2014’s The Endless River.

None would match the critical or commercial success of The Wall.

The making of The Wall reflects a common experience faced by many other rock bands – how creative tension and competing visions can deteriorate relations between band members.

Luckily, Pink Floyd was able to keep it all together to record one final masterpiece.

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