

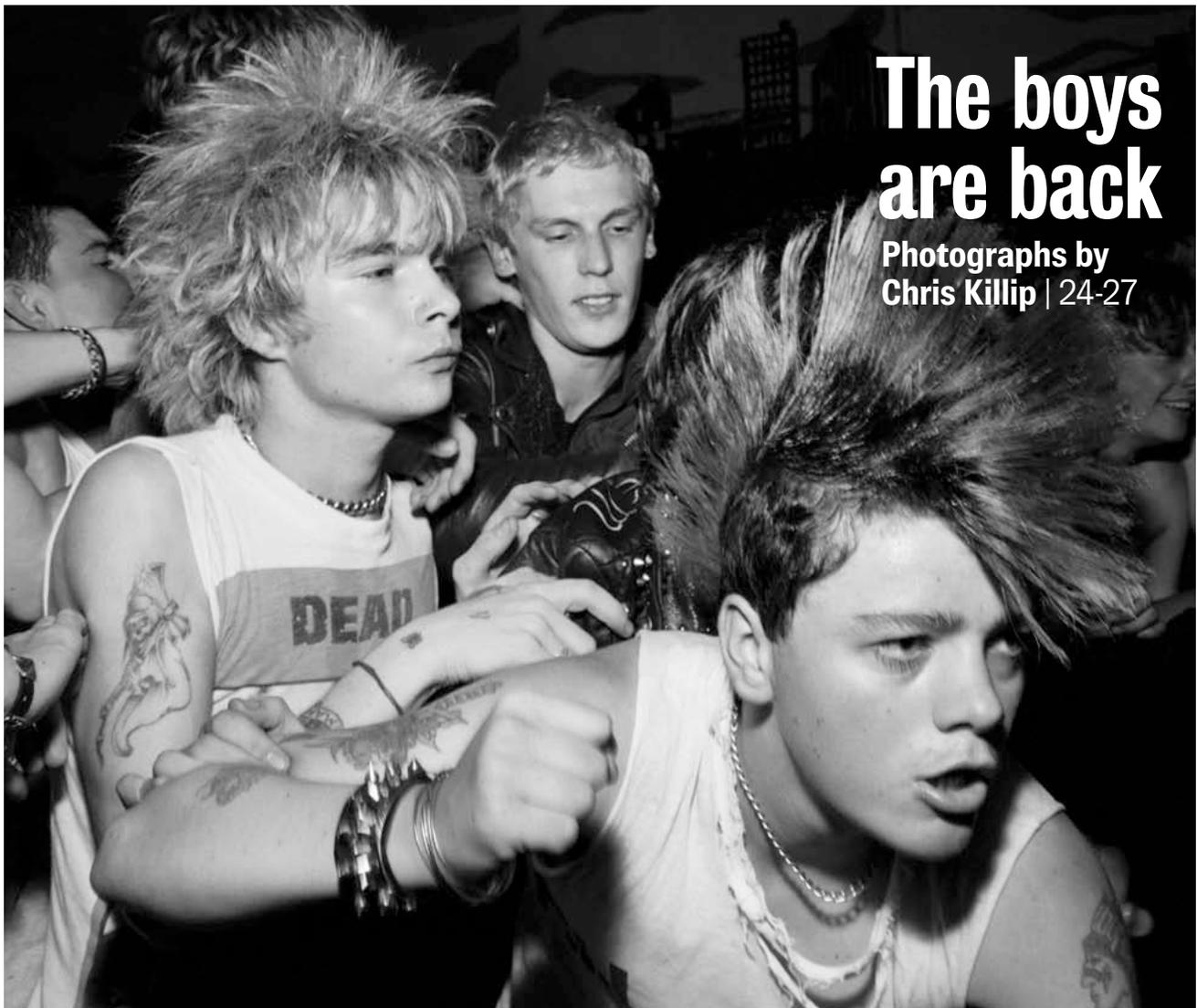
**NOTES FROM THE CHINESE BORDER** | Linh Dinh  
**WHAT BILLIONAIRES LOVE ABOUT HARD WORK** | Sam Pizzigati  
**THE ROAD TO GEORGE ORWELL** | Trevor Hoyle

ISSUE 201

# ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

March 2020



**The boys  
are back**

Photographs by  
Chris Killip | 24-27

**PLUS** – Yemen's deadly ghost ship | America's fling with romance comics

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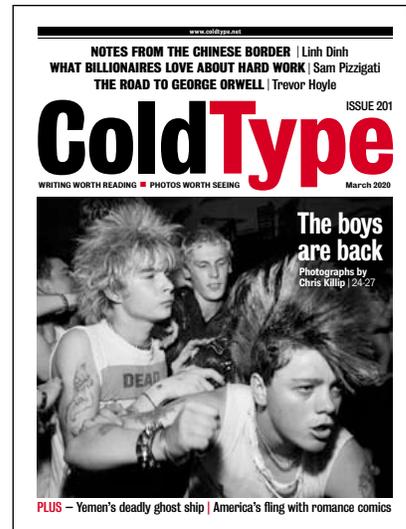
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### Cover image:

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published by Steidl

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# Pardon Me?

When the moment comes, Trump will jump ship in the nick of time, money in hand, leaving the rest of us to go down on the USS Constitution (with no get-out-of-jail-free card in sight)

**H**ERE'S the truth of it: I'd like a presidential pardon. Really, I would. And I think I deserve it more than Michael Milken or Rod Blagojevich or – because it's obviously heading our way – Roger Stone (not to speak of Michael Flynn and Paul Manafort). Unlike the rest of them, I genuinely deserve a pardon because I don't even remember being tried or know what I did. Yet somehow, here I am sentenced to what, if things don't get better – given my age and his luck – could prove to be life not in prison but in Trumpland (once known as the United States of America).

Or here's another possibility that came to mind as I was thinking over my predicament: maybe I can still use that old "get out of jail free card" I saved from my childhood Monopoly set. You know, the one at the bottom of which was written: "This card may be kept until needed or sold". Well, I need it now. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to work anymore, maybe because it was produced before financialisation stopped being a kid's board game and became one for presidents, presidential candi-

dates, and those recently pardoned by you-know-who.

If only this were simply a game I found myself trapped in – Trumpopoly. Unfortunately, it's no board game, though I must admit that, more than three years later, I'm officially bored with the man who has surely gotten more attention, more words spoken and written about him, than anyone in history. Even if you included Nebuchadnezzar, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Zedong, I doubt he would have any serious competition.

Honestly, who could even contest that statement, given that nothing he does, no matter how trivial, isn't dealt with as "news" and covered as if the world were ending? When you think about it, it's little short of remarkable. And I'm not even talking about Donald Trump's non-stop coverage on his own news service, also known as Fox News. No, what I had in mind was the Fake News Media itself, regularly identified by the president as his major enemy. ("Our primary opponent is the Fake News Media. They are now beyond Fake, they are Corrupt.")

He's not wrong, if by corrup-

tion you mean the over-coverage of him. The truth is that, whether you're talking about the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, CNN, or MSNBC, none of them can get enough of him. Ever. They cover his rallies; they cover his tweets; they cover his impromptu news conferences in the north driveway of the White House, often as if nothing else on Earth were going on.

"Cover" might not even be the right word for it, unless you're thinking about a thick, smothering, orange blanket thrown over our American world.

**I**n this Trumpian prison of ours, you really have little choice. Whether you like it or not, whether you want to or not, you're a witness to the vagaries of one Donald J Trump, morning, noon, and night, day in, day out. I mean, you know what film the president thinks should have won the best-picture Oscar this year, right? *Gone With the Wind*, which, after he brought it up, promptly shot to number one on topics trending on Twitter. You have a sense of how many years he expects to remain in the White



House (up to 26, as he told one of his rally crowds recently, or assumedly until Barron is ready to take over); you know that he's a "germophobe" (small tip: don't cough or sneeze in his presence and the next time you meet him, don't try to shake his hand); you're probably aware that his properties in India (as well as his pronunciation of Indian names) leave something to be desired, but that the Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas is buzzing along (especially when he visits while on the campaign trail).

And here are some other things you might have caught as well: that you and I have spent quite a little fortune (up to \$650 a night per agent) putting up the Secret Service people protecting him at Trump properties; that, thanks to a tweeted photo of him on a windy day, he has quite a tan line (or that, as he tweeted back, "More Fake News. This was photoshopped, obviously, but the wind was strong and the hair looks good? Anything to demean!"); or that he hates being told, especially by American intelligence officials, no less "Shifty Schiff", that Vladimir Putin would like to lend his reelection a hand, but loves it that the Russian prexy may have a yen to promote Bernie Sanders in this election season; that his greatest skill (à la The Apprentice and The Celebrity Apprentice) may be firing people he considers personally disloyal to him (even if it's called purging when you're the president and they're government officials or bureaucrats), hence his

three years in office represent the greatest turnover in Washington officialdom in presidential memory; or perhaps the way he tweets charges and claims of every sort (that, for instance, Mitt Romney is a “Democratic spy”); or all the people he actually knows but claims he doesn’t; or his urge to slam every imaginable, or even unimaginable, figure ranging from the forewoman of the Roger Stone jury (“She somehow weaseled her way onto the jury and if that’s not a tainted jury then there is no such thing as a tainted jury”) to the 598 “people, places, and things” the *New York Times* counted him insulting by May 2019, including John McCain (23 times, “last in his class”) and his daughter Meghan (four times, “obnoxious”); oh, and let’s not forget his threats to unleash nuclear weapons on North Korea (“They will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen.”) and Afghanistan (“And if we wanted to do a certain method of war, we would win that very quickly. But many, many – really, tens of millions of people would be killed...”). And that, of course, is barely a hint of the world we now inhabit, thanks not just to Donald J Trump, but to the very Fake News Media that he denounces so incessantly.

**W**e’re here in Trump’s version of a prison in part because he and the Fake News Media he hates so much are in eternal collusion as well as eternal collision! Much as they theoretically dislike each other, both the non-Fox mainstream media and the president seem to desperately need each other. After all, in a social media-dominated world, the traditional media has

## **Donald Trump is no founding father but you could perhaps think of him as something like a founding feather**

had its troubles. Papers have been losing revenue, folding, drying up, dying. Staffs have been plunging and local news suffering. (In my own hometown rag, the *New York Times*, undoubtedly because many copy editors were dumped, small errors now abound in the paper paper, which I still read, in a way that once would have been unimaginable.) On TV, of course, you have cable news networks that need to talk about something quite literally 24/7.

So what a godsend it must be to be able to assign reporter after reporter and commentator after commentator to the doings of a single man, his words, acts, impulses, tweets, concerns, bizarre comments, strange thoughts, odd acts. Who could doubt that he has, in these years, become the definition of “the news” in a way that once would have been inconceivable but couldn’t be more convenient for a pressed and harried media?

And, however much he may endlessly denounce them, he desperately needs them, too. Otherwise, what would he do for attention? They’re, in effect, his servants and he, in some strange way, theirs. No matter what they officially think of each other, this is the definition of collusion – one that has, in the last three years, also helped redefine

the nature of our American world. No matter what they say about each other, in his own fashion, he’s always ready to pardon them and they, in their own fashion, him.

And here I am – don’t think I’m not feeling guilty about it – covering him, too, today. It seems I can’t help myself. After all, I’m in the same prison world as everyone else in this country, including reporters.

**B**y the way, give you-know-who credit where it’s due. He may be 73 years old, but he’s grasped the tweetable moment in a way that’s been beyond impressive from that fateful day in June 2015 when he rode a Trump Tower escalator into the presidential race, praising his future “great, great wall” (to be paid for by Mexico), and denouncing the “Mexican rapists” who had to go. In attention-getting terms, he had anything but a 73-year-old’s sense of how this world actually works and, let’s be honest, that was impressive.

At some basic level, the results of what he grasped are no less so. After all – god save us – he might even find himself in the White House for a second term (if the coronavirus or Bernie Sanders don’t take him down first).

Donald Trump is obviously no founding father but, despite his weight, you could perhaps think of him as something like a founding feather, a phenomenon carried by the latest political winds into the grim future of us all. And what a future it’s likely to be if this president, a genuine arsonist when it comes to heating the planet to the boiling point, gets reelected. (He could singlehandedly give William

Blake's classic poem, *Tyger, Tyger, burning bright, in the forests of the night*, new meaning.)

I, on the other hand, find myself trapped in his world but, in a sense, from elsewhere. Sometimes I wonder if I'm really living in the world I seem to inhabit or if I'm not already, in Australian terms, in some kind of midsummer night's dream or rather nightmare?

I'm just a couple of years older than The Donald and yet if he represents the most modern of 73-year-old realities, then I'm from a past age. I can't even tweet, having never learned that modern form of conspiracy haiku. Has anyone, no matter how much younger than him, grasped as fully or creatively as he did the all-too-modern sense of how to demand and command attention on a 24/7 basis? There has been nothing like him or his version of a presidency in our history.

**N**ow, to be honest with you, I'm sick of both Donald Trump and the fake news media. No, I mean

## **I'm just a couple of years older than Trump and yet if he represents the most modern of 73-year-old realities, then I'm from a past age**

it. Sometimes, I dream of bringing back my long-dead parents and showing them our Trumpian world in which, for instance, Americans fight a range of endlessly unsuccessful wars across a remarkable swath of the planet. Meanwhile, the Pentagon is indulged in its urge to recreate a militarised version of the Cold War, including a new multi-trillion dollar nuclear arms race; a world in which, however – and this would have been beyond comprehension to them – “infrastructure week” in Washington, the very idea of putting significant sums of money into rebuilding the crumbling basics in this country, has become little short of a joke.

Oh, and of course, I'd have to tell them that, since their deaths, we – some of us at least – have accepted that the planet itself, thanks to the burning of fossil fuels, is now overheating in a radical way.

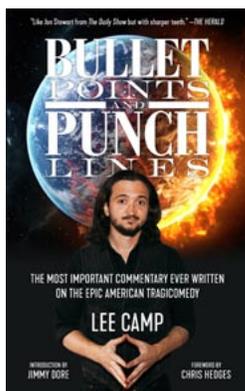
There is, however, one thing I've never doubted about The Donald: that, as he did with his five flaming, bankrupt casinos in Atlantic City in the early 1990s, when the moment comes, he'll jump ship in the nick of time, money in hand, leaving the rest of us to go down on the USS Constitution (with no get-out-of-jail-free card in sight).

Pardon me? Don't count on it. Pardon you. I wouldn't hold my breath. But pardon him? You bet! Consider it a done deal. **CT**

*Tom Engelhardt is a co-founder of the American Empire Project and the author of a history of the Cold War, *The End of Victory Culture*. He runs *TomDispatch.com* and is a fellow of the *Type Media Center*. His sixth and latest book is *A Nation Unmade by War*. This article first appeared at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com).*

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– Kelly Carlin (George Carlin's daughter)



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# Assange ‘trial’ is a Kafkaesque nightmare

If whistleblower is extradited to the United States as the mysterious magistrate Vanessa Baraitser seems primed to allow, he will face a rigged trial, after which he will disappear

**T**HE first week of the Julian Assange extradition trial has concluded, to be resumed on May 18. If you haven’t been following the proceedings closely, let me sum up what you missed:

The prosecution is working to extradite Assange to the US under a US-UK extradition treaty, whose contents the prosecution now says we should ignore because they explicitly forbid political extraditions. The prosecution says it doesn’t matter anyway because Assange is not a political actor. Yet in 2010 the US government that’s trying to extradite him labelled him a political actor in those exact words.

Assange’s trial is taking place in a maximum security prison for dangerous violent offenders because that’s where he’s being jailed for no stated reason and, despite having no history of violence, which means he’s kept separate from the courtroom in a sound-resistant safety enclosure where he can’t hear or participate in his own trial. The magistrate judging the case says he can’t be allowed out of the enclosure since he’s considered dangerous, because he’s

been arbitrarily placed in a prison for dangerous violent offenders. The magistrate keeps telling Assange to stop speaking up during his trial and to speak through his lawyers, yet he’s being actively prevented from communicating with his lawyers.

Make sense?

No?

Not even a tiny bit?

Oh. Okay. Let me explain.

It’s common in British courtrooms to have a ‘dock’, a place where defendants sit separately from court proceedings. Not all UK courtrooms have docks, and not all docks are the ‘secure’ glass cabinet type which Assange is kept in; they can also be open wooden enclosures.

Because Assange is being kept in a maximum security prison normally reserved the most dangerous violent offenders and terrorism convicts, his trial is taking place in a cage that is very much the ‘secure’ type (so much so that he’s been complaining that he can’t hear the proceedings in his own trial through the bulletproof glass) The magistrate has ruled that this nonviolent offender shall be kept in his sound-resistant enclosure

throughout the duration of his trial, bizarrely asserting that Assange poses a danger to the public.

Former UK ambassador and longtime Assange supporter Craig Murray was at court all four days of the trial, and he described the situation as follows (Edward Fitzgerald is Assange’s defense attorney, Vanessa Baraitser is the magistrate): “On return, Edward Fitzgerald made a formal application for Julian to be allowed to sit beside his lawyers in the court. Julian was ‘a gentle, intellectual man’ and not a terrorist. Baraitser replied that releasing Assange from the dock into the body of the court would mean he was released from custody. To achieve that would require an application for bail.

“Again, the prosecution counsel James Lewis intervened on the side of the defence to try to make Julian’s treatment less extreme. He was not, he suggested diffidently, quite sure that it was correct that it required bail for Julian to be in the body of the court, or that being in the body of the court accompanied by security officers meant that a prisoner was no longer in custody. Prisoners, even



ASSANGE WATCH: An anti-extradition vigil at London's Trafalgar Square during the first week of whistleblower's 'trial'.

the most dangerous of terrorists, gave evidence from the witness box in the body of the court nest to the lawyers and magistrate. In the High Court prisoners frequently sat with their lawyers in extradition hearings, in extreme cases of violent criminals handcuffed to a security officer. Baraitser replied that Assange might pose a danger to the public. It was a question of health and safety. Ah yes, yes I'm sure everyone at the courtroom is very concerned that the emaciated computer nerd might at any moment tart throwing them all across the room. Sure thing, Vanessa.

To recap, Assange has been placed in a prison for dangerous offenders for no reason, and he's designated too dangerous to participate in his own trial because he's in a prison for dangerous offenders. Both the defence and the prosecution agree that this is absurd, yet the supposedly impartial judge ruled against them both.

Does that make sense to you?  
No?

Good. That means you're sane.

In the same report Murray also says Assange was forbidden from passing notes to his lawyers, yet when he tried to speak up during his trial to get someone's attention Baraitser told him he may only speak through his lawyers. Even when they let him, *Shadowproof's* Kevin Gosztola also reports that the defence has complained that they can't even see when he wishes to communicate something with them, because his dock is behind them in the courtroom.

*Bridges for Media Freedom* reports the following: "Assange then stood up in the dock and said, 'The problem is I'm not able to get representation'. Baraitser then told him to 'keep quiet and speak through his lawyers'. He replied, 'That's the problem, I can't.'"

Assange also complained that even when he is both able and permitted to speak to his lawyers during the trial, he's unable to do so

in private, saying, "I cannot communicate with my lawyers or ask them for clarifications without the other side seeing", and "The other side has about 100 times more contact with their lawyers per day."

So Assange may only speak through his lawyers, but also he's been presented with many obstacles to speaking with his lawyers. Perfectly normal stuff in a perfectly normal trial being treated in a perfectly normal way by a perfectly normal empire.

It's pretty clear by the way Baraitser is even more biased against Assange than the actual prosecutors that she made up her mind how she's going to rule long before the trial even began. This is made all the more shady by the fact that there are apparently no photographs of this public official anywhere online, and indeed no documentation of her existence outside of the court.

"Ms Baraitser is not fond of photography – she appears to be the only public figure in Western

Europe with no photo on the internet”, wrote Murray after noting her anger at someone photographing the courtroom. “Indeed the average proprietor of a rural car wash has left more evidence of their existence and life history on the internet than Vanessa Baraitser. Which is no crime on her part, but I suspect the expunging is not achieved without considerable effort. Somebody suggested to me she might be a hologram, but I think not. Holograms have more empathy.”

This by itself is weird. How is someone with no public face ruling on an extradition trial of such immense significance? How is a public official allowed to make a decision which will affect every member of the public in one way or another, yet the public is not allowed to know anything about her or what she even looks like? That, in my opinion, is weird and creepy.

Then there’s the prosecution. They’re trying to argue that the US-UK extradition treaty which forbids extradition for political offences is void and inapplicable because of another law called the Extradition Act, which is written differently, although the extradition treaty formed the basis for Assange’s extradition request in the first place.

“We’re in a pretty strange Alice in Wonderland world where the treaty that controls and gives rise to the request, supposedly has nothing to do with the legality of it, it’s very strange”, Fitzgerald said at one point, adding: “it is generally accepted worldwide that people should not be extradited for a non-violent offense of a political nature.”

The prosecution also argued that even if the exemptions in the extradition treaty did apply, it

## ‘Somebody suggested to me that Vanessa Baraitser might be a hologram, but I think not. Holograms have more empathy’

wouldn’t matter because Assange is not accused of anything that could be called a political offence. They said the defence must “equate what Mr Assange is alleged to have done against whether or not the only purpose was to change the government in America or induce America to change its policy, both of which we say it’s not.”

The defence correctly countered that not only was WikiLeaks trying to affect US government behaviour, but that they actually succeeded in doing so. Not only that, but the US government has itself accused Assange of being a political actor who is trying to change America’s behaviour.

“He’s not a journalist. He’s not a whistleblower. He is a political actor. He has a political agenda”, State Department spokesman PJ Crowley said of Assange in 2010 after WikiLeaks began exposing US war crimes. “He is trying to undermine the international system that enables us to cooperate and collaborate with other governments and to work in multilateral settings and on a bilateral basis to help solve regional and international issues.”

In other words, Assange is a political actor who is deliber-

ately trying to interfere with the US government agenda of world domination.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the word *Kafkaesque* as “of, relating to, or suggestive of Franz Kafka or his writings, especially: having a nightmarishly complex, bizarre, or illogical quality.”

“Kafka’s work is characterised by nightmarish settings in which characters are crushed by nonsensical, blind authority,” says Merriam-Webster. “Thus, the word *Kafkaesque* is often applied to bizarre and impersonal administrative situations where the individual feels powerless to understand or control what is happening.”

That’s the most perfect definition of this ridiculous bootlicking bureaucratic nightmare maze that you could possibly come up with.

We can expect more of this when the trial resumes in May, and, to be clear, this is the more just and equitable half of the fight. If Assange is successfully extradited to the United States as the mysterious Vanessa Baraitser seems primed to allow, he will face a rigged trial after he and his legal team were spied on by US intelligence agencies when preparing his defence. He and his legal team will be silenced from commentary on the trial, and he’ll disappear into a black hole of ‘Special Administrative Measures’ where he won’t be heard from again. The time to speak up for Assange and the future of press freedoms is now. Not when he’s extradited. Not after his fake trial and draconian sentencing. Now. **CT**

*Caitlin Johnstone is an Australian blogger. Her website is [www.caitlinjohnstone.com](http://www.caitlinjohnstone.com)*



The FSO Safer is moored five nautical miles off the coast of Ras Isa on Yemen's west coast.

■ CHRIS BARANIUK

# Yemen's deadly ghost ship

An abandoned oil tanker with over a million barrels of oil on board is an environmental catastrophe waiting to happen

**F**IVE miles off the coast of Yemen lies a floating bomb. An oil storage vessel called the FSO Safer has been sitting more or less unattended in the Red Sea for half a decade.

A victim of Yemen's current civil war, the Safer has fallen in to a dire state of disrepair, with rust spreading around her hull and on-board equipment. She is packed with more than a million barrels of crude oil, which over time is thought to have steadily released flammable gases mean-

ing the Safer could explode if she doesn't simply begin leaking huge volumes of oil into the sea.

That would cause a huge environmental catastrophe – one that would affect the lives of millions of people in the region. How did this ship end up in such a sorry state?

The FSO Safer was built in 1976 in Japan and for roughly 10 years sailed the world's oceans as an oil tanker. In 1987, she was converted into a stationary storage facility for the Safer oil company and brought to an offshore posi-

tion near the Yemeni coast. With a total capacity of three million barrels of oil, the Safer became a useful but not particularly special bit of infrastructure.

When war broke out in Yemen in March 2015, few people gave the vessel much thought. It and many other assets owned by the same firm were quickly seized by Houthi rebels. But unlike land-based installations and pipelines, the Safer now finds itself in an especially precarious predicament. Sitting in the sea, it is corroding

away rapidly as we speak.

The conflict in Yemen has proved to be both long and complicated, with no end in sight. The internationally-recognised government in the country, which is currently supported by Saudi Arabia, has no access to the Safer because the vessel remains under Houthi control. Analysts say the Houthis are using the Safer as leverage.

“They consider it as a hostage and they want to keep it because they can threaten the coalition forces in the Red Sea,” says Yemeni economic researcher Abdulwahed Al-Obaly.

Al-Obaly is an employee of the Safer company. He says that the FSO Safer was due to be replaced by a land-based storage facility years ago but the project was never completed. By 2015, millions of dollars a year were being spent on maintenance costs racked up by the vessel, says Al-Obaly. He explains how the explosive gases that build up in the Safer’s storage tanks over time would periodically have to be vacuumed off. Since civil war broke out, little or no maintenance has been carried out.

“Any kind of ship that sits in the sea or moves around in the sea has to be regularly maintained,” says Laleh Khalili, professor of international politics at Queen Mary University London.

In the absence of constant sanding and painting of the hull, the Safer has essentially been left to rot. And while Prof Khalili notes that tankers caught in the midst of past conflicts in the region have been known to leak oil before, the volume of crude on the Safer puts it into a league of its own.

## Should that oil flow out of the rusting hull and into the Red Sea, it could form a spill roughly four times as large as the Exxon Valdez spill in 1989

“That makes it a lot more of a concern,” she says.

The Houthi strategy of using the Safer as a bargaining chip is potentially disastrous. If gases on board were to ignite, experts fear they could cause a gigantic explosion deadly to any individuals or shipping in the vicinity at the time. Plus, the Red Sea is a particularly salty body of water, meaning that the Safer’s hull is corroding faster than it would elsewhere in the world.

But it gets worse. The 1.15m barrels of oil on board is Marib Light, a type of crude that mixes more easily with water, explains Dr David Soud at IR Consilium, a maritime security consultancy that has been tracking the FSO Safer situation.

Should that oil begin to flow out of the rusting hull and into the Red Sea, it could form a spill roughly four times as large as the Exxon Valdez spill in 1989 – and with crude that mixes down into the water column.

“It will not be the kind of spill that will settle on the bottom or simply on the top,” Dr Soud says.

That means the Safer presents a significant threat to nearby coral reefs, marine life and also desalination plants in the region that provide drinking water to nearby countries including Saudi Arabia.

There were fears that a spill had begun last December but these proved to be unfounded, according to satellite imagery analysed by Samir Madani, co-founder at TankerTrackers.com. There is still no sign of a major leak unfolding, he adds.

“Honestly though, she’s a ticking time bomb. The UN needs to tend to that situation ASAP,” he says.

The United Nations has been involved in efforts to neutralise the situation and attempted to organise an expedition to board and assess the vessel last year. However, such an inspection has still not taken place. The Safer was raised in a recent meeting of the Security Council but no public action has yet followed.

Al-Obaly is among those who have criticised the UN’s response to the situation. The UN did not respond to a request for comment from openDemocracy.

Experts are not only worried that natural decay will spell doom for the vessel. It is also possible that she could be openly attacked by an aggressor seeking to target nearby facilities or tip the balance of power in the area. It would be something of a nuclear option, perhaps, but conflict in the region is notoriously unpredictable.

The FSO Safer may not be viewed as a top priority in Yemen, never mind the Middle East as a whole, which faces a multitude of challenges. However, those sounding the alarm from afar think that the risk posed by the Safer is so great that it cannot be ignored any longer. They also argue that, should access to the vessel be

granted, it would not be overly difficult to extract oil from her and virtually eliminate the threat of catastrophe.

“Frankly, it’s painful. It is frustrating as hell to watch [...] a preventable crisis that could lead to greater conflict not be addressed when it is eminently doable,” says Dr Ian Ralby at IR Consilium.

And there are some who, despite the personal risks involved, are chomping at the bit to tackle the problem. John Curley is a salvage specialist who once worked for the United Nations Development Programme. He was involved in the salvage and removal of ships from Iraqi ports during the Iraq war. If the Houthis were to grant access to the Safer, he says the operation to deal with the ship would be fairly straightforward.

“Basically, once the green light is given we’d move onto location. We’d assess the condition on deck and find out the condition of the oil and the amounts,” he says.

If the ship were seaworthy, it could be towed to port where oil on board could be pumped away, he adds. Alternatively, if the Safer could not be towed, the oil could be

## If the ship were seaworthy, it could be towed to port where the oil on board could be pumped away

removed at sea and relocated.

Removing the oil would involve drilling through the hull on either side of the vessel, below the waterline, and using divers or remotely operated vehicles to attach underwater “umbilical cords”. These would suck out the beleaguered cargo to fill barges waiting nearby.

“That way you will empty the full capacity of each tank [in the vessel] in the safest way possible,” says Curley.

If this or some other remedial operation is not carried out, there’s no doubt that a catastrophe will eventually occur, says Dr Ralby. “It’s not a question of ‘if’, it’s merely

a question of ‘when,’” he says.

The sticking point may ultimately be the Houthis – will they or won’t they grant access, and under what terms? It has been reported that they have demanded \$8-million in return for the Safer’s oil in the past. That sounds like a lot of money but given the severity of the threat facing marine life and human populations in the region, some argue it is a levy worth paying.

“If the catastrophe happens, even billions of dollars will not be enough to sort out the problem,” says Al-Obaly.

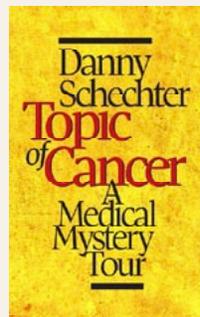
While various parties fret or argue over what to do with the Safer, there she sits in the Red Sea with many thousands of tons of oil on board. A giant problem begging to be fixed – waiting, rusting, creaking. **CT**

*Chris Baraniuk is a freelance science and technology journalist based in the United Kingdom. His work has been published by the BBC, New Scientist, Scientific American, and The Atlantic. This article first appeared at [www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net)*

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■ MICHAEL C WEISENBURG

# America's post-war fling with romance comics

The real pleasure of reading these books came from the mildly scandalous behaviour of their characters and the untoward plots that the narratives were ostensibly warning against

**L**AST year, comic book enthusiast Gary Watson donated his massive personal collection to the Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at the University of South Carolina.

As the reference and instruction librarian, I'm tasked with getting to know the collection so I can exhibit parts of it and use the materials for teaching. One of the great pleasures of assessing and cataloguing Watson's collection has been learning about how comic books have changed over time. Sifting through Watson's vast collection of 140,000-plus comics, I'm able to see the genre's entire trajectory.

Before World War II, superheroes were all the rage. Reflecting anxieties over the Great Depression, the rise of fascism and the march to war, readers yearned for mythical figures who would defend the disenfranchised and uphold liberal democratic ideals.

All images from the Gary Lee Watson Comic Book Collection, Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina Libraries, Author provided



The first issue of *Young Romance*, which launched the romance genre in 1947.

Once the war ended, the content of comic books started to change. Superheroes gradually fell out of fashion and a proliferation of genres emerged. Some, such as westerns, offered readers a nostalgic fantasy of a pre-industrial America. Others, like true crime and horror, hooked readers with their lurid tales, while science fiction comics appealed to the wonders

of technological advancement and trepidation about where it might lead us.

But there was also a brief period when the medium was dominated by the romance genre.

Grounded in artistic and narrative realism, romance comics were remarkably different from their superhero and sci-fi peers. While the post-war popularity of romance comics only lasted a few years, these love stories ended up actually having a strong influence on other genres.

**T**hough today they are most famous for creating *Captain America*, the creative duo of Joe Simon and Jack Kirby launched the romance comic book genre in 1947 with the publication of a series called *Young Romance*.

Teen comedy series like *Archie* had been around for a few years and occasionally had romantic story lines and subplots. Romance pulps and true confession magazines had been around for decades.

But a comic dedicated to telling romantic stories hadn't been



Left: Issue #1 of *Teen-Age Romances* (St. John, 1949).

Below: Superhero, super-romance. Below, left: *But He's the Boy I Love* was one of the few romance comic to feature black characters.



done before. With the phrase “Designed for the More Adult Readers of Comics” printed on the cover, Simon and Kirby signalled a deliberate shift in expectations of what a comic could be.

While most scholars have argued that romance comics tend to reinforce conservative values – making marriage the ultimate goal for women and placing family and middle-class stability on a pedestal – the real pleasure of reading these books came from the mildly scandalous behaviour of their characters and the untoward plots that the narratives were ostensibly warning against. With titles like “I Was a Pick-Up!,” “The Farmer’s Wife” and “The Plight of the Suspicious Bridegroom,” *Young Romance* and its sister titles quickly sold out of their original print runs and began outselling other comics genres.



Other publishers noticed the popularity of the genre and followed suit with their own romance titles, most of which closely followed Simon and Kirby’s style and structure. By 1950, about one in five of

all comic books were romance comics, with almost 150 romance titles being sold by over 20 publishers.

The rage for all things romance was so sudden that publishers eager to take advantage of the new market altered titles and even content in order to save on second-class postage permits. Second-class or periodical postage is a reduced rate that publishers can use to save on the cost of mailing to recipients. Rather than apply for new permits every time they tested a new title, comics publishers would simply alter a failing title while retaining the issue numbering in order to keep using the preexisting permit. To comics historians, this is a telltale

sign that the industry is undergoing a sudden change.

One striking example of this is when comics publisher Fawcett ended its failing superhero comic *Captain Midnight* in 1948 with issue #67 and launched its new title, *Sweethearts*, in issue #68. In this case, the death of a superhero comic became the birth of a romance comic.

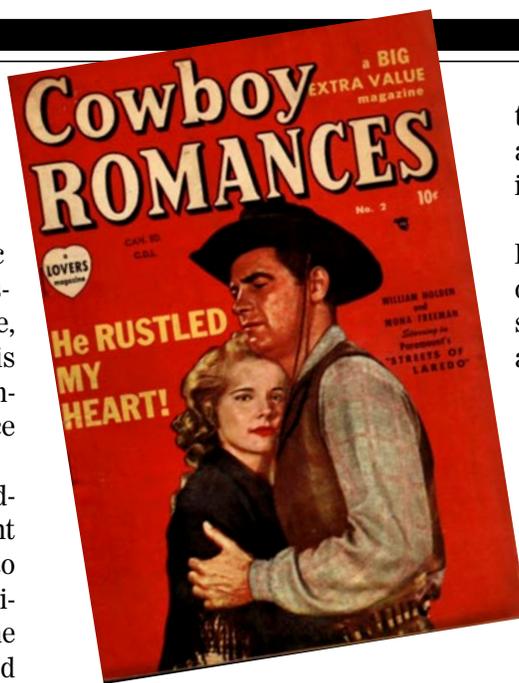
With so many new titles flooding newsstands and department stores, the bubble was bound to burst. In what comic book historian Michelle Nolan has dubbed “the love glut,” 1950 and 1951 witnessed a rapid boom and bust of the romance genre. Many romance titles were cancelled by the mid-1950s, even as stalwarts of the genre, such as *Young Romance*, remained in print into the mid-1970s.

There was the brief popularity of the sub-genre of gothic romance comics in the 1970s – series with names like *The Sinister House of Secret Love* and *The Dark Mansion of Forbidden Love*. But romance comics would never approach their brief, postwar peak.

Among collectors, issues of romance comics are less sought after than those of other genres. For this reason, they tend to go under the radar.

Romance comics, however, featured work by pioneering artists like Lily Renée and Matt Baker, both of whom worked on first issue of *Teen-Age Romances* in 1949.

Baker is the first-known black artist to work in the comic book industry and Renée was one of comics’ first female artists. Prior to working on *Teen-Age Romances*, they both drew “good girl art”



All the good girls love a cowboy. The cover of *Cowboy Romances*.

– a set of artistic tropes borrowed from pinups and pulp magazines – for several titles. Their work in both genres exemplifies how earlier pulp magazine themes of desire and seduction could readily be applied to newer genres.

After the “love glut,” sub-genre mash-ups nonetheless emerged. For example, cowboy romances were briefly popular. Later, in response to the civil rights movement, Marvel published the 1970 story *But He’s the Boy I Love*, which was the first story in a romance comic to feature African-American characters since Fawcett’s three-issue run of *Negro Romance* in 1950.

Even after romance comics largely fell out of fashion, the genre’s visual tropes and narrative themes became more prevalent during what’s known as the “Silver Age,” a superhero revival that lasted from 1956 to 1970. Titles such as *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* often borrowed heavily from romance for

their plots to generate intrigue and tension in the hopes of driving up sales.

Issue 89, in which Lois marries Bruce Wayne, is a prime example of such marketing techniques. Issues such as these were often situated as “what if” narratives that offered readers speculative story lines, such as “What if Lois Lane married Bruce Wayne?” Though they’re generally thought of as separate from the superhero canon, these love stories show that comic book writers had internalized the main narrative techniques of romance comics even if the genre itself was in decline.

But other comics didn’t merely use romantic themes for the occasional gimmick issue. Instead, they made the love lives of their characters a central plot point and a fundamental aspect of their characters’ identities. Comics such as the *Fantastic Four* and the *X-Men* rely heavily on the heated emotions and jealousies found in group dynamics and love triangles.

Take Wolverine. Presumably tough and stoic, he’s so enamoured of Jean Grey – and so envious of her love interest, Scott Summers – that you could argue that unrequited love is one of his primary motivations throughout the series.

Thanks to romance comics, even stoic superheroes got bitten by the love bug. **CT**

*Michael C. Weisenburg is Reference & Instruction Librarian at Irvin Department of Rare Books & Special Collections, University of South Carolina. This article was first published at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)*

## ONE MAGAZINE'S 10-YEAR QUEST FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Before I wound up in Toronto and ColdType, I designed **Frontline** magazine, South Africa's top liberal-left magazine, for 10 years during the 1980s as it battled for justice and equality during the final years of Apartheid. Now, we're digitising Frontline, as a case study of prophecy and history. The first digital issues are now on line; more will follow each month.

– *Tony Sutton, Editor*



Read the digital editions of Frontline, exactly as they were published, free of charge, at

[www.issuu.com/frontline.south](http://www.issuu.com/frontline.south)

# Notes from the Chinese border

A few men were fishing and I glimpsed two women walking their dogs. Most of the time, though, there was no life. Thanks to the coronavirus, much of China is locked inside

**F**OR two weeks, I've been hugging a border. I type this in Si Ma Cai in Vietnam, just four miles from China, though the trek there is not level, and there's nothing on the other side but wooded mountains.

Just last week, though, I was in Lao Cai, where each day I could stroll along the Red or Nanxi River and see what the Chinese were doing on their streets and balconies, or inside their windows. Along the bank of the Red River, a few men were fishing against a green backdrop of towering wild grass and bamboos. I fleetingly glimpsed two women walking their dogs.

Most of the time, though, there was no life. Most stores were closed. Unoccupied hotel rooms had their curtains always drawn. At mid-morning, a four-lane avenue leading to a grand gate and steep steps, a magnificent vista, had but one motorbike moving.

**N**ormally bustling, Hekou and the Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture have become unnaturally void and silent, even as their multi-coloured lights still dazzle at

night. Thanks to the coronavirus, much of China is locked inside. Though seeing a Chinese in public is not quite like spotting Elvis or Big Foot, it is rare.

I came to Lao Cai from Dien Bien Phu, on a minibus that took ten hours, with stops to pick up passengers and to eat lunch. There was a friendly Chinese who communicated with me via a translation app. About 40, he alternated between looking eager and subdued.

Learning that I was Vietnamese, he asked, "Will you help me to find a wife?"

"Sure, when we get to Lao Cai". I laughed.

"A beauty pageant winner?"

"Yes, of course. There are many."

"A Vietnamese wife is too expensive", he cranked up the humour. "Three hundred thousand dong [\$13] for just half an hour!"

Since a conversation of this nature could only go so far, we didn't say much more. A few hours later, the Chinese turned his attention to an Argentinian man, sitting right in front of me.

His opening, "I'm from China.

I go back to China tomorrow. I'm only playing in Vietnam. Where are you from?"

When the Argentinian said something nice about China, the Chinese surprisingly retorted, "Dictatorship!"

**M**ost people onboard were headed for trendy Sapa. In 1995, I saw its famous 1935 church still in ruins. It had been shelled by the Chinese during their 1979 invasion. A local told me people had fled in terror to the hills. In 2020, I opened the minivan window to better scan all the new, brightly-lit hotels, restaurants, cafes and bars.

Lao Cai was completely destroyed during this barely remembered border war, and was abandoned for a dozen years. Both sides laid down thousands of mines.

This remote region has long been fought over, however, for it's a lucrative trade route between Yunnan and Vietnam. Opium shipped downriver while sea salt flowed upstream. Fattening on taxes, the Black Flag bandits were based in Lao Cai. Tai and Hmong Lords staked out territories.



Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture, 2020

Trying desperately to retain their identity, there are ethnic groups here almost no one has heard of, such as the Kháng (down to 14,000 people), the La Chí (13,000), the Phù Lá (11,000) or the Pa Dí (just 2,000). Much larger groups, though, are also losing this battle, and yours, too, of course. Cultural castration is a worldwide pandemic. We're all being unmanned.

As the British rushed to reach Yunnan via Burma, the French got there first through Lao Cai, in 1886. In 1906, they linked it with Hanoi by a railroad that cost 12,000 Vietnamese and Chinese lives, plus 80 European ones.

When the Englishman Archi-

bald Little came to Lao Cai in 1911, this was what he saw:

*LAO-KAI presents the same contrast to Ho-k'ou, that the Model Settlement does to the Shanghai city; on crossing the railway bridge that now unites the two towns, one passes abruptly from filth and disorder into wide macadamised streets lined with shade trees; clean white bungalows, one and two-storied, a small bund with pontoon wharf—a miniature Point de Galle with the same tropical air and vegetation, but also a close, steamy atmosphere due to its situation in a narrow valley distant 265 miles from the sea. There are few or no Chinese in Lao-kai (it costs them about six shillings a head to enter French territory) and, in the siesta hour, in which we*

*landed, there were apparently no inhabitants. The military are stationed on the right bank and have to cross the rushing river by ferry to come into Lao-kai; the piers of a high bridge, solid circular pillars of brick and stone, were erected some years ago, but the idea of completing the bridge seems to have been abandoned. The chief buildings are the offices of the administration, a spacious Custom-house with godowns attached, the offices of the "Messageries Fluviales," the Post Office and the Hotel Fleury, where we put up, also a roomy military "cercle," pleasantly situated on a bluff overlooking the river, and a bandstand in the central "Square." Towards evening, after an enjoyable dejeuner at the hotel, we sat on the verandah listening to a military*

band, we having happily arrived on band-day, and felt that in crossing the Nam-ti we had re-entered civilisation; but we pitied the folk whose duties relegate them to this depressing spot, with little to occupy them, no sports, no society, nowhere to go; hemmed in as they are by pathless jungle.

A century later, Hekou has surpassed Lao Cai in tall buildings, array of shops and modernity, for China is no longer mired in “filth and disorder”. Things can reverse fast.

Just before we entered Lao Cai, the Chinese showed me his phone, “Can we stay together at the hotel?”

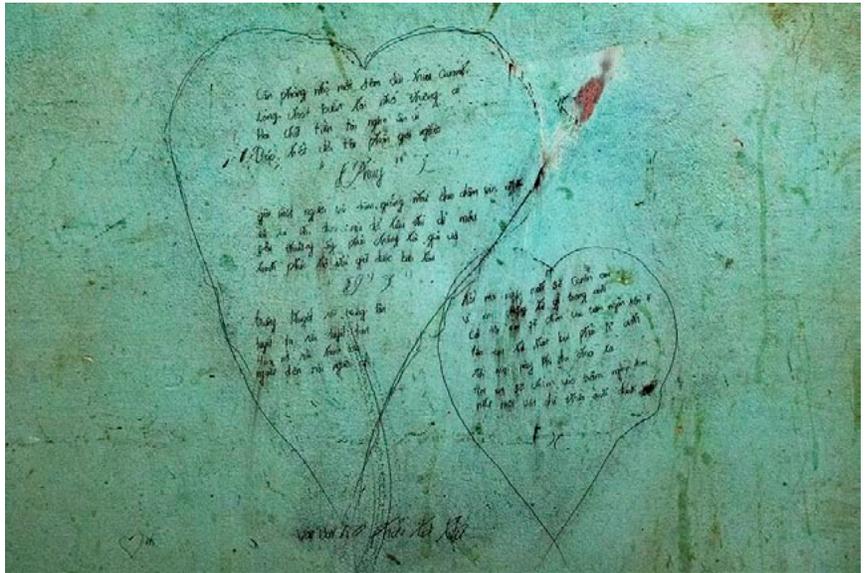
I didn’t exactly welcome the idea, but thought that perhaps the man was low on cash, and since it was only for one night, maybe I could deal with it. The best solution was to find a place cheap enough so we could each have our own room.

“We’ll find something in Lao Cai”, I answered.

Just like at Dien Bien Phu and Sapa, there was nothing in Lao Cai I could recognise. We got out in the darkness and cold. With excitement and relief, the Chinese pointed to a guest house right over the minibus company’s office, but after one look at its barely lit stairs, I shook my head, then led him down the street.

Sure enough, there were guest house signs nearby. Walking into the first one, I found out that it only cost \$7.30 a night, so fine, we were set, but after the Chinese pulled out his passport, the owner said no.

“But he’s been in Vietnam for a



LOST PRINCESS: On the bedroom wall were two pencil-drawn hearts, enclosing heartbroken poems.

**My bed didn’t smell funky or sour, and though voices, music or footsteps did occasionally penetrate my thin walls**

whole month, brother,” I protested. “He’s only in Lao Cai to go back to China, tomorrow.”

“No, no Chinese, my kids are afraid.”

Chuckling incredulously, I could say nothing more to persuade him. Since I wasn’t about to abandon my Chinese friend, I asked the owner hypothetically, “So can I stay here? I’m Vietnamese.”

Grimly shaking his head, the man couldn’t wait to get rid of us diseased monsters. Again, we marched into the darkness and cold. “Don’t worry,” I said, “we’ll find something”. and we did, just

two doors away.

At Quyen Linh Guest House, a room without a private toilet cost \$4.29, so that’s that, for that’s all they had, and it was cheap enough that neither one of us had to hear the other snore, fart or dreamingly babble through the night.

For that price, I didn’t expect much, but my bed didn’t smell funky or sour, and though voices, music or footsteps did occasionally penetrate my thin walls and seemingly nonexistent door, I slept fine.

On a dingy wall, there were even two pencil drawn hearts, enclosing heartbroken poems. The first one began, *A small room during a long, desolate night / Suddenly my heart saddens and longs for him / The word wealth sounds so romantic / Squashes my life with its poor girl’s fate.* Since age deepens poverty, the poor girl is probably even more destitute, or maybe she’s a princess, intertwined with some toad.

The next morning, I walked sev-



**GRIM, BUT FASHIONABLE:** One ponytailed girl had 'Love and Courage' on the back of her hoodie.

eral miles to scope out the new Lao Cai, and before noon, had moved into a better situated and cheerier hotel, though still cheap. I'd stay there for ten days. I wanted to be as close to the border as possible.

Before leaving Quyên Linh, I did chat with its owner to learn that he was a native, and hadn't just lived through the Chinese invasion, but fought against it, as a militiaman.

"How much training did you get?"

"Almost none."

"So how did you know what to do?!"

"You know, brother, us Vietnamese hear so many war stories growing up, we became accustomed to it as children."

**A**lthough the Lao Cai region is the second poorest in Vietnam, the city itself has done extremely well in the last two decades, as a key gateway to trade with China, and with a daily influx of Chinese tourists. With the eruption of the

coronavirus and the closing of the border on January 29, all this commerce suddenly stopped, so I found myself in a stunned and prostrated city, though not nearly as comatose as what's across two thin rivers.

Many Lao Cai businesses clearly target Chinese. Sichuan dry hot pots are widely available, and at Dang Chau Quan, the menu lists prices only in yuans.

Sign at a burger joint, "CORONAVIRUS / STORE TEMPORARILY CLOSED." At a health and beauty store, "TO FIGHT AGAINST THE CORONAVIRUS / WE ASK THAT YOU ALLOW US TO WEAR MEDICAL MASKS / WHEN CONDUCTING BUSINESS." At a Chinese restaurant, "BECAUSE OF THE VIRUS / THE RESTAURANT WILL BE CLOSED TEMPORARILY /

WE WILL ANNOUNCE LATER WHEN IT WILL REOPEN."

I entered the café at the upscale Muong Thanh Hotel, to find it completely empty, and there was nothing in the pastry case.

"There are no pastries", I said to the cashier. "Will there be some later?"

"There won't be any all day"; she answered.

Normally, the short bridge between Lao Cai and Hekou is streaming with trucks, private cars, tourists and porters, pushing or pulling ridiculously large loads on primitive wheels. What I saw though, was a nearly always empty crossing. Once, there was a forlorn tourist walking home, and another time, a father and his small daughter entering uncertainty, if not fear, after their too brief vacation.

I saw two vans disgorge Chinese tourists, all looking grim and wearing medical masks. Hardly talking, they wearily walked towards the grand exit gate. Pulling stylish luggage, they were all cheerfully dressed, however, in that casual and adolescent fashion derived from Gap, Old Navy and American Apparel. One ponytailed girl had "LOVE AND COURAGE" on the back of her hoodie.

**S**urveying the border, I ran into a soldier one afternoon, but he wasn't in uniform.

"Why are you taking so many pictures, uncle?"

"Ah, just curious! It looks so dead over there."

Astride his motorbike, he still eyed me suspiciously, "You shouldn't take so many photos at the border of a friendly country."

He actually said that. Putting my camera away, I opined, "If they run over here, we'll have a serious problem."

"But they can't. We have our patrols."

“But the border is so long. If this virus gets worse, many of them will decide to flee over here!”

“We’ll catch them.”

I have my doubts, for smuggling has always been a huge problem along this border. There are many sections where you can just wade or even walk across.

In Lao Cai, I sometimes hired a motorbike taxi guy. Born in 1962, he had had three wives. The first, he left. The second died while pregnant when a car hit their motorbike. The third left him almost a year ago, with their three-year-old daughter. Missing the child terribly, he showed me many photos of her exuberant self, and once almost teared up. His dark face quivered.

“I’m the nicest guy”, he professed, then later admitted he had been in several jails, where he managed to beat up the meanest “bearheads” from just about every province in the Red River Delta.

“Why were you in jail?”

“Ah, it’s nothing. Just making a living.”

The second wife is most relevant to this piece. Running a smuggling operation, she hired many porters, and got pregnant by one of them. Seeing her belly bulge, the married lover ran away, only to return four years later. Jumping into her bed again, he also had a juicy proposal. Instead of goods, why not smuggle gullible women, for a lot more cash? Many Chinese men were desperate for a wife.

She agreed, and got rather loaded, until a tricked bride escaped back to Vietnam, which landed our smuggler in prison for seven elongated years. Out, broke and



**SPECTACULAR LANDSCAPE:** But it has been deformed by man.

chastened, she somehow found a new man, so there’s a second chance, after all – until that mass of steel smashed into her.

On the minibus from Lao Cai to Si Ma Cai, a woman told me, “Many women from this area got tricked into going to China. Some, we haven’t heard from in twenty years, so we don’t even know if they’re dead or alive.”

Some, she’s still in touch with, “They’re married, with children. We talk through Zalo or Snapchat. They tell me everyone stays inside now, with only one person leaving the house to buy grocery when absolutely necessary.”

An emblematic event from this novel crisis is the massive banquet held by Wuhan on January 18th, for they did this knowing full well 62 Wuhanese had already been infected. Catering to 40,000 families, the organisers wanted to break the world record for most dishes served. In retrospect, this diseased feast was a celebratory funeral for

those who would soon die.

Two months into this crisis, the death toll has breached 2,000, with many more to come, almost certainly. This outbreak has triggered some of the darkest speculations, moreover, and even wishes.

Many believe it has been bio-engineered, and released into China by the United States. This contention is seemingly supported by the fact that at the time of writing only Orientals, nearly all of them Chinese, have been killed, but if China’s industrial paralysis continues, the American economy will also collapse, so why would Washington trigger this? Already, the disruption to the global supply chain is causing major turmoil.

Others agree that it is bio-engineered, yet released by China itself, accidentally. If this is true, why did China invent a bio-weapon that’s aimed at its own people primarily?

Some are cheered by the prospect this coronavirus will kill millions, if not billions, of Orientals.

The wish to see an entire group disappear can't be that uncommon. This elation will be snuffed out when non-Orientals start to die from the coronavirus.

A universal culling yields another schadenfreude. If life is a competition of all against all, a battle royale, then the last man standing wins. Vain, each loser enjoys seeing others fall, for each death witnessed seemingly adds to his longevity. Laughing, he is not dead.

It is dark now. There are voices outside my window. Earlier, I could hear cheerful bells from the water buffaloes, feeding across the road. In Si Ma Cai, these lumber-

## It is dark now. There are voices outside my window. Earlier, I could hear cheerful bells from the water buffaloes, feeding across the road

ing beasts shit even on sidewalks, so you just get used to it.

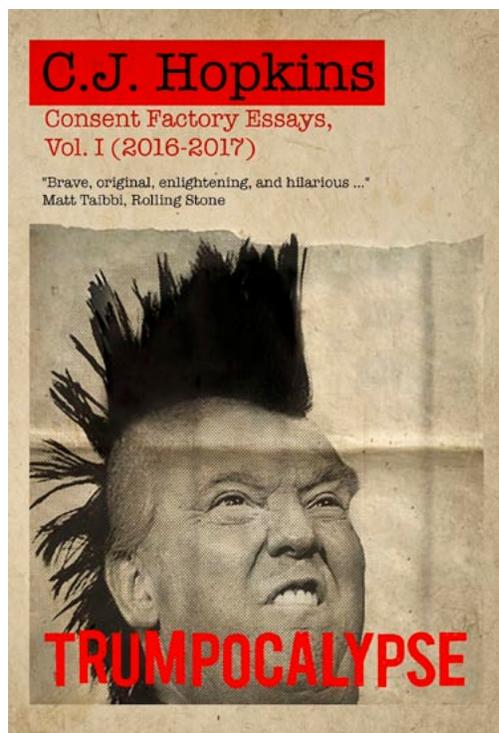
Here, the mountainous landscape is indeed spectacular, but it has been much deformed by man. That's always the first sign of civilisation, then come priests, slaves, temples, a few thoughtful paintings, lots of garbage, fake

everything then, finally, some global gargle to allow this exhausted planet to finally heal.

Soon, perhaps all this will die away, then I can finally go to China, to see what's left of China, or maybe there won't be any me left, to go to any China. At least I've seen China, so to speak, at least much more of it than 14-million congenitally blind Chinese!

Tall grass will grow from our already cracked sidewalks. Roaming free, the water buffaloes will tinkle our bells. **CT**

*Linh Dinh's latest book is Postcards from the End of America. He maintains a photo blog at [www.linhdinhphotos.blogspot.com](http://www.linhdinhphotos.blogspot.com)*



## Trumpocalypse

Consent Factory Essays  
Vol. 1 (2016-2017)

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In this first collection of his Consent Factory essays, C.J. Hopkins irreverently covers the improbable rise of Donald Trump, the political dynamics that led to his presidency, and the media-generated mass hysteria that swept America during his first term in office. "Brave, original, enlightening, and hilarious" (Matt Taibbi, *Rolling Stone*), the essays in this volume capture the insanity of 2016 and 2017. Trump's candidacy, the election, the Resistance, "Putin-Nazis," neo-McCarthyism, fake news, bots, Charlottesville ... the whole mad circus unleashed by America's "insane clown president."

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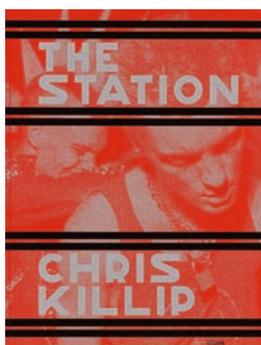
Photograph from The Station, by Chris Killip, published by Steidl / [www.steidl.de](http://www.steidl.de)



Photograph from The Station, by Chris Killip, published by Steidl / www.steidl.de

## The boys are back

When **Chris Killip** was photographing the music scene in England's Newcastle upon Tyne during the early 1980s he was told about The Station, a punk venue in Gateshead, just across the River Tyne. During his visits to the club, he found a remarkably energetic anarcho-punk scene, where members of local bands who weren't playing were in the audience dancing



**THE STATION**  
Chris Killip

Published by Steidl  
www.steidl.de

**US\$70**  
**Can\$99**

**L**ATE in 2016 the son of British photographer Chris Killip discovered a box of contact sheets of the photos his father had made at *The Station*, an anarcho-punk music venue that thrived from 1981 to 1985 in Gateshead, across the river from Newcastle upon Tyne.

These images of raw youth caught in the heat of celebration which had been forgotten for 30 years have found new life in Killip's new photobook, *The Station*, from German publisher Steidl.

The UK miners' strike had ended a month before Killip's first visit and there was much youth unemployment in the area. "Most of the punks at *The*

*Station* didn't have a job, and this place, run as an inclusive collective, was so important to them and their self-worth", he says.

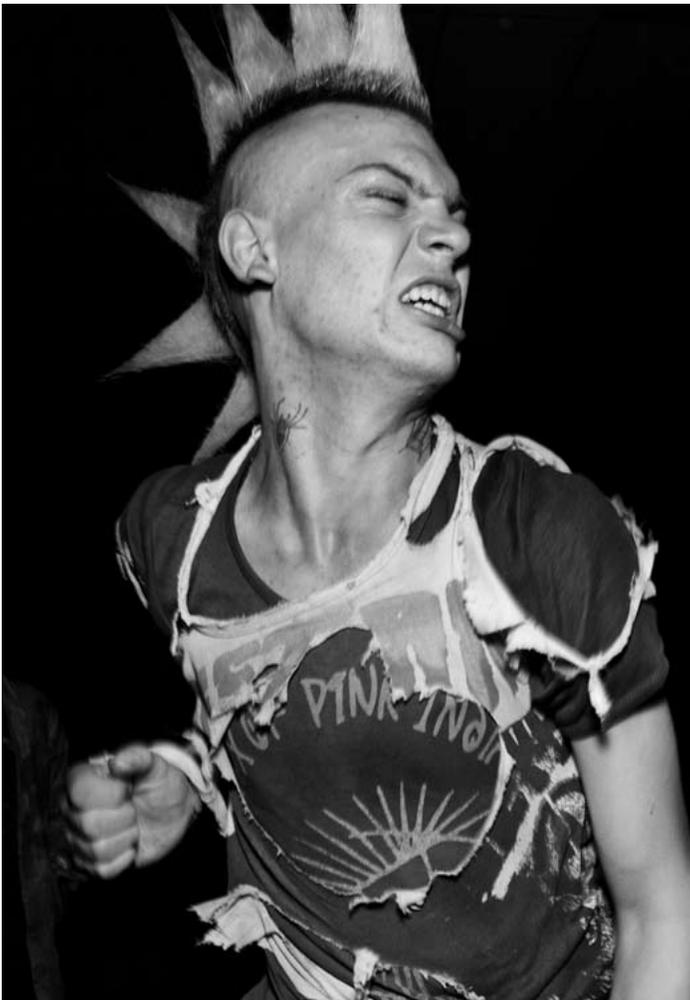
"When I first went to *The Station* in April 1985", says Killip, "I was amazed by the energy and feel of the place. Every Saturday that I could, I photographed there. Nobody ever asked me where I was from or even who I was: a 39-year-old with cropped white hair, always wearing a suit, with pockets stitched inside the jacket to hold my slides.

"With a 4x5 camera around my neck and a flash and battery around my waist, I must have looked like something out of a 1950s B movie."

**CT**



**“Nobody ever asked me where I was from or even who I was: a 39-year-old with cropped white hair, always wearing a suit, with pockets stitched inside the jacket to hold my slides”**



Photographs from The Station, by Chris Killip, published by Steidl / [www.steidl.de](http://www.steidl.de)

# What billionaires love about hard work

The facts about the deep-pocketed super rich suggest that they spend more time talking about work than actually doing it

**B**ILLIONAIRE White House hopeful Michael Bloomberg must have known the question was coming. At the February 19 Democratic presidential debate in Las Vegas, the question did come – from NBC’s Chuck Todd. Should billionaires, Todd wanted to know, exist?

“Have you earned too much – has it been an obscene amount of – should you have earned that much money?” Todd followed up.

“Yes”, Bloomberg replied. “I worked very hard for it.”

“Hard work” has been the go-to justification for grand private fortune ever since the days of America’s original Gilded Age. In America, the old saw goes, anybody can get rich. You just need to put your shoulder to the wheel, your nose to the grindstone.

Is that true? Social scientists have tested out this “hard work” case for grand fortune. Success in the business world, they’ve found, most typically comes to those with access to financial capital, via “family money, an inheritance, or a pedigree and connections”. Many researchers, economist Andrew Oswald has noted, “have replicated

the finding that entrepreneurship is more about cash than dash.”

None of this research, naturally, has stopped the awesomely affluent from claiming that they deserve their prodigious wealth because they – like Michael Bloomberg – have “worked very hard.”

Back in the 1990s, the decade Bloomberg first crashed into the national consciousness, no man of means made the “hard work” claim more unabashedly than John K Castle, a New York banker who had built up a tidy personal fortune worth about \$100-million.

“None of this happens without working 60 hours a week”, Castle proudly noted to a *Wall Street Journal* reporter. “But I work 60 hours a week because I want to, not because I’ve got a time clock.”

Castle probably shouldn’t have made that time-clock reference. The enterprising *Journal* reporter promptly put Castle himself on the clock, figuratively speaking, and followed the New York banker around for a day in the middle of a winter work week.

That day opened, in Florida, with Castle showing off his \$11-million Palm Beach estate.

Later, the *Journal* watched Castle wile away the afternoon hours jumping hurdles “astride one of his show horses at his nearby 10-acre farm”. The day ended on the water, with Castle nibbling cheese and crackers aboard his yacht.

This busy day, the *Journal* reported, hardly qualified as out of character for Castle. During the winter months, he spent a few days at his Florida estate every week. And Castle, the *Journal* added, also found time to organise a private expedition to the North Pole, climb his way up and down mountains in Africa and the Himalayas, and send his yacht on a two-year voyage around the world.

As an ever diligent and hard-working executive, Castle didn’t have the time to personally skipper his yacht the entire way. Instead, he would fly overseas to meet up with the yacht at exotic ports of call, then captain the vessel for a week or so of sailing until duty called him back to New York. Castle logged almost 150,000 air miles in the process. All time well spent. Chief executives, Castle told the *Journal*, “need some time to step back and get the broader

perspective.”

How many wealthy people labor at schedules as gruelling as John K. Castle’s? A sizeable number, apparently. One 1998 Management Resource Group study of Americans who make at least \$1-million a year, the *Washington Post* reported, found that over 20 percent of these deep pockets were taking at least two months of annual vacation.

About a decade later, amid the early stages of Wall Street’s financial meltdown, Bears Stearns chief exec James Cayne became the emblem of sorts for CEO sloth. In the same 2007 month his firm began tottering, Cayne spent ten “working” days either playing bridge or golf.

Cayne had plenty of deep-pocket company on the links. In 2016, the *Harvard Business Review* reported on research that unearthed “several CEOs who recorded more than 100 rounds of golf in a single fiscal year – roughly one round every three days!”

Now some exceedingly rich people undoubtedly do “work hard” and put in long hours. How many? Hard to say. CEOs and hedge fund kingpins, after all, punch no time clocks. And if they did, would they punch out before joining a potential investor for dinner? Would they log as work time the hours they spend on golf links mixing putts and patter with potential takeover targets? Would they count as office hours the morning commutes



**HARD WORKER:** “I work 60 hours a week because I want to”, New York banker John K Castle told a *Wall Street Journal* reporter, who then followed him to check his working life.

they spend chatting on cell phones in chauffeured limousines?

Profound questions. We seem destined to never know exactly how many hours rich people like Michael Bloomberg spend working. But even if we could calculate such a figure, and if that figure were 60 or 80 or 100 hours a week, would these rich then deserve many millions of dollars a year for their labours? That case would be hard to make.

Average Americans who take second jobs to make ends meet routinely work 60 to 80 hours a week without receiving anything remotely close to the robust rewards top execs in the business world regularly pocket. If moonlighting Americans don’t deserve king-sized rewards for the long

hours they put in, then why should “hard-working” executives deserve regal rewards for theirs?

Our society obviously places no particular premium value on sheer hard work alone. Nor should it.

“It is not enough to tell me that you worked hard to get your gold”, as Henry David Thoreau once observed. “So does the devil work hard.”

Working hard, *Open Democracy* economics editor Laurie Macfarlane noted recently, will indeed “generally help you earn more money”, but “not all wealth has been attained through hard work.”

“In practice”, adds Macfarlane, “the distribution of wealth has little to do with contribution, and everything to do with politics and power.”

“No one makes a billion dollars”, as Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez put it in January at New York’s famed Riverside Church. “You take a billion dollars”. Michael Bloomberg, a \$62-billion-dollar man, has taken plenty. **CT**

**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*. Parts of this reflection have been adopted from his 2004 book, *Greed and Good: Understanding and Overcoming the Inequality that Limits Our Lives*. Follow him at @Too\_Much\_Online

# Labour's next leader has already betrayed the left

In declaring their support for Zionism, the three contenders for Jeremy Corbyn's crown are offering only the cynical politics of old

**I**n recent years the British Labour party has grown rapidly to become one of the largest political movements in Europe, numbering more than half a million members, many of them young people who had previously turned their backs on national politics.

The reason was simple: a new leader, Jeremy Corbyn, had shown that it was possible to rise to the top of a major party without being forced to sacrifice one's principles along the way and become just another machine politician.

But as Corbyn prepares to step down after a devastating election defeat, statements by the three contenders for his crown – Lisa Nandy, Rebecca Long-Bailey and Keir Starmer – suggest that his efforts to reinvent Labour as a mass, grassroots movement are quickly unravelling.

A politics of cynicism – dressed only loosely in progressive garb – has returned to replace Corbyn's popular democratic socialism. Leadership candidates are once again carefully cultivating their image and opinions – along with their hairstyles, clothes and accents – to satisfy the orthodoxies

they fear will be rigidly enforced by a billionaire-owned media and party bureaucrats.

Labour's lengthy voting procedure for a new leader began last month with the winner to be announced in early April. But whoever takes over the party reins, the most likely outcome will be a revival of deep disillusionment with British politics on the left.

**T**he low-point of the candidates' campaigning, and their betrayal of the movement that propelled Corbyn on to the national stage, came at a "hustings" jointly organised by the Jewish Labour Movement and Labour Friends of Israel. These two party organisations are cheerleaders for Israel, even as it prepares to annex much of the West Bank, supported by the Trump administration, in an attempt to crush any hope of a Palestinian state ever being established.

Asked if they were Zionists, two of the candidates – Nandy, the climate change secretary, and Long-Bailey, the shadow business secretary, who is widely touted as representing "continuity Cor-

bynism" – declared they indeed were. The third candidate – Keir Starmer, the shadow Brexit secretary, and the man favoured by the party machine – stated only slightly less emphatically that he supported Zionism.

Nandy's response was particularly baffling. She is the current chair of Labour Friends of Palestine, while the other two are supporters of the group. It is exceedingly difficult to find a Palestinian Zionist. And yet the Palestinian cause is now officially represented in the Labour parliamentary party by someone who has declared herself a Zionist.

This is no small matter. For good reason, Zionism is rarely defined beyond the vaguest sentiment about creating a safe haven for Jews following the Nazi genocide committed in Europe. Zionism's political implications are little understood or analysed, even by many who subscribe to it. By the standards of modern politics, it is an extremist ideology.

For decades western states have preferred to promote an inclusive, civic nationalism that embraces people for where they



**ZIONIST TO THE CORE:** Labour leadership contenders, Lisa Nandy (left), Keir Starmer and Rebecca Long-Bailey.

live, not who they are. Zionism, by contrast, is diametrically opposed to the civic nationalism that is the basis of modern liberal democracies.

Rather, it is an ethnic nationalism that confers rights on people based on their blood ties or tribal identity. Such nationalisms were at the root of a divisive European racial politics in the first half of the last century that led to two cataclysmic world wars and the Holocaust.

In the Middle East, Zionism has fuelled a racial politics that was once familiar across Europe. It has rationalised the mass dispossession of the Palestinians of their homeland through ethnic cleansing and illegal settlement-building. It has also conferred superior rights on Jews, turning Palestinians into

an ethnic underclass – segregated from Jews – both inside Israel and in the occupied territories.

Progressive post-war politics of the kind one might assume the Labour party should uphold has sought to rid the West of the menace of ethnic nationalism. It is true that race politics is reviving at the moment in the US and parts of Europe, under figures such as Donald Trump, Boris Johnson and Hungary’s Viktor Orban. But ethnic nationalism is – and always has been – the preserve of right-wing, authoritarian politicians.

It should be an abhorrence to the left, which subscribes to universal rights, opposes racism and promotes principles of equality. But Labour politicians have long

made an exception of Israel and Zionism.

Originally, that blind spot was fuelled by a mix of Holocaust guilt and a starry-eyed excitement over Israel’s brief experiments with socialist-inspired – though exclusively Jewish – collectivist agricultural communities like the kibbutz, built on stolen Palestinian land.

Then, as Labour fully abandoned socialism, culminating in its reinvention as New Labour under Tony Blair in the 1990s, the party began to champion Israel for additional, even more cynical reasons. Labour leaders dressed up colonial ideas – of projecting western power into the oil-rich Middle East – in modern attire, as a supposed Judeo-Christian “clash of civilisations” against Islam in

which Israel was on “our” side.

Corbyn never accepted the exception made for Israel. Consistent with his universalist principles, he long championed the Palestinian cause as an enduring colonial injustice, instituted by the British government more than a century ago with the Balfour Declaration.

It is worth recalling, after years of being pilloried by a hostile media, the wider reasons why Corbyn was unexpectedly and twice elected by an overwhelming majority of Labour members – and why that provoked such a backlash. Decades on the backbenches – choosing to represent the concerns of ordinary people – had made it clear Corbyn would not pander to establishment interests.

His track record on offering the right answers to the great questions of the day spoke for itself, from decrying South African apartheid in the early 1980s to opposing Britain’s leading role in the 2003 war of aggression against Iraq.

He refused to bow to neoliberal orthodoxies, including the “too big to fail” rationalisations for the bank bailouts of 2008, that nearly bankrupted the global economy. He had long campaigned a more equitable society, and one accountable to working people rather than inherited wealth and a self-serving corporate elite.

He was genuinely anti-racist, but not in the usual lip-service way. He cared about all oppressed people whatever their skin colour and wherever they lived on the planet, not just those that might vote for him or his party in a UK election. For that reason he was also fiercely against the legacy of western colonialism and its end-

## **The Zionist movement designed Israel to be a racist state – one that privileged Jewish immigrants over the native population**

less resource wars against the global south. He had long been a prominent figure in the Stop the War movement.

But equally, though it did not fit the narrative that was being crafted against him and so was ignored, he had been a committed supporter of Jewish causes and his Jewish constituents throughout his career on the backbenches.

In declaring their support for Zionism – or worse, saying they were Zionists – Long-Bailey, Nandy and Starmer betrayed the left.

They did so at a time when the foundations of the explicit racism of the resurgent right needs confronting and challenging, not accommodating. After all, the white supremacists who are the key to this resurgence are also among the biggest supporters of Israel and Zionism.

Everyone understands why the three candidates signed up enthusiastically as Zionists at the Jewish Labour Movement and Labour Friends of Israel’s hustings. They have watched Corbyn slowly destroyed by a four-year campaign of smears promoted by these two groups – and echoed by the corporate media – claiming the party has become “institutionally

antisemitic” on his watch.

Each candidate has faced demands that they distance themselves from Corbyn. That culminated in January in an ultimatum from the Board of Deputies of British Jews that they sign “10 pledges” or face the same onslaught Corbyn was subjected to.

The 10 commitments are designed to ensure that successful moves made in the Labour Party by the board and the Jewish Labour Movement to redefine anti-semitism will become irreversible. That is because the pledges also make these two Israel advocacy groups judge and jury in Labour’s antisemitism cases.

They have already foisted on the party a retrograde and ahistorical definition of antisemitism – formulated by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance – that is specifically designed to ring-fence Zionism from any debate about what it means as an ideology.

It shifts the focus of anti-semitism from a hatred of Jews to strong criticism of Israel. Seven of the IHRA’s 11 examples of anti-semitism refer to Israel, including this one: “Claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour”.

And yet the Zionist movement designed Israel to be a racist state – one that privileged Jewish immigrants to Palestine over the native Palestinian population. And if that wasn’t clear from its founding as an ethnic nationalist “Jewish state” on the Palestinians’ homeland, it was made explicit two years ago when those founding principles were set out in a Basic Law.

That law defines Israel as the “nation-state of the Jewish people”

– that is, all Jews around the world, rather than the people who live in its territory, including a fifth of the population who are Palestinian by heritage.

The three leadership candidates all hurried to back the Board of Deputies’ pledges. But these 10 commitments do more than just make serious criticism of Israel off-limits. They create a self-rationalising system that stretches the idea of antisemitism well beyond what should be its breaking point.

Under these new terms, anyone can be automatically denounced as an antisemite if they try to challenge the changed definition of antisemitism to include criticism of Israel, or if they acknowledge that a pro-Israel lobby exists. In fact, this was exactly why Chris Williamson, an MP close to Corbyn, was expelled from the party last year.

How McCarthyite this has become was again illustrated this week when a candidate for Labour’s National Executive Committee (NEC) elections, Graham Durham, was suspended for antisemitism over comments in which he accused Long-Bailey of “cuddling up to the Jewish Labour Movement and the chief rabbi, a well-known Tory.”

Durham’s “antisemitic” comment was barely more than a statement of fact. It included an additional reference to the efforts of Britain’s chief rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis, a public supporter of Boris Johnson, to damage Corbyn’s chances in the run-up to December’s general election by accusing the Labour leader of being an antisemite.

## **The goal is to have a Labour leader once again entirely beholden to the current western economic and imperialist order**

The decision by Long-Bailey and the other two candidates to back the Board’s pledges has effectively turned the pro-Israel lobby into an executioner-in-waiting. It empowers these groups to destroy any of one of them who becomes leader and tries to promote a Corbyn-style progressive platform.

Neither the Board nor the JLM could have imposed these demands on Labour in a vacuum. It would not have been possible without the support both of a corporate media that wishes Labour cowed and of the Labour bureaucracy, which wants the status quo-embracing, Blairite wing of the party back in charge, even if that means alienating a large section of the new membership.

For all three – the Israel lobby, the media and the party machine – the goal is to have a Labour leader once again entirely beholden to the current western economic and imperialist order. A candidate who will once again commit to business as usual and ensure voters are offered a choice limited to two parties of capital.

And the simplest and most double-dealing way to achieve that end is by holding the antisemitism sword over their heads. Corbyn could not be tamed so he had to be destroyed. His successors have

already demonstrated how ready they are to be brought to heel as the price for being allowed near power.

At another hustings, this time staged by the BBC, all three candidates agreed that their top priority, were they to become party leader, would be to tackle Labour’s supposed “antisemitism crisis”. That’s right – the top priority. Not changing the public discourse on austerity, or exposing the Tory government’s incompetence and its catastrophic version of a hard Brexit, or raising consciousness about an impending climate catastrophe.

Or tackling the rising tide of racism in British society, most obviously targeting Muslims, that is being fomented by the right.

No, the priority for all three is enforcing a so-called “zero tolerance” policy on antisemitism. In practice, that would mean a presumption of guilt and a fast-track expulsion of members accused of antisemitism – as recently redefined to include anything but softball criticism of Israel.

It hardly bears repeating – so hard-set is the media narrative of an “institutionally antisemitic” Labour party – that there is a complete absence of evidence, beyond the anecdotal, to support the so-called “crisis”.

Much less than 0.1 percent of members have been found guilty of antisemitism even given the new, much-expanded definition designed to entrap anti-racists who criticise Israel or question the good faith of the pro-Israel lobby. That is far less than the prevalence of old-school antisemitism – the

kind that targets Jews for being Jews – found in the wider British population or in the Conservative Party, where all types of racism are publicly indulged.

So confident is Boris Johnson's government that it won't suffer Corbyn's fate, either from the media or from pro-Israel lobby groups, that this week it stood by an adviser who was revealed to have approved of eugenics and argued that black people have lower IQs. Notably, Andrew Sabisky was not sacked by the party after his views were outed. He stepped down to avoid becoming a "distraction".

Nor were there headlines that his employment by Johnson's chief adviser, Dominic Cummings, proved the Conservative Party was "institutionally racist". In fact, Sabisky's worldview has become increasingly mainstream in the Tory party as it lurches rightwards.

**C**onversely, though rarely mentioned by the media, several prominent incidents of antisemitism in Labour that caused problems for Corbyn relate to Jews and Jewish party members who are staunch critics of Israel or define themselves as anti-Zionists.

There has been little attention paid to the prejudice faced by these Jews, who have set up a group inside the party called Jewish Voice for Labour to counter the disinformation. It has been maligned and ignored in almost equal measure.

These Jewish party members who support Corbyn are regularly dismissed as the "wrong kind of Jews" – paradoxically, an example of real antisemitism that those peddling the antisemitism smears

## **This incontrovertible evidence of efforts to subvert the party from within has been ignored by Labour Party bureaucrats too**

against Labour have depended on to maintain the credibility of their claims.

Also unreported by the British media is the documented role of the party's pro-Israel partisans in the Jewish Labour Movement and Labour Friends of Israel in seeking to foment a revolt against Corbyn – filmed by an undercover reporter for Al-Jazeera – over his strong support for the Palestinian cause.

This incontrovertible evidence of efforts to subvert the party from within has been ignored by Labour Party bureaucrats too.

The assumption of some who bought into the antisemitism "crisis" was that once the Labour party was rid of Corbyn the smears would fizzle out. They would become unnecessary. But that was to misunderstand what was at stake and what role the accusations served.

The antisemitism allegations were never really about antisemitism, except presumably in the minds of some members of the Jewish community whose perceptions of events were inevitably skewed by the media coverage and the hostility from Jewish leadership organisations that have made Israel their chief cause.

Antisemitism was a tool – one

for preventing Corbyn from reaching power and threatening the interests of the ruling elite. His opponents – in the media, inside his own party and among pro-Israel groups – chose antisemitism as the battlefield because it is much easier to defeat a principled opponent in a dirty war than in a fair fight.

Antisemitism served a purpose and continues to do so. In Corbyn's case, it tarnished him and his general policies by turning reality on its head and making him out to be a racist posing as an anti-racist.

Now the same allegations can be used as a stick to tame his successor. Antisemitism can be wielded as threat to make sure none contemplates following his path into a principled, grassroots politics that champions the weak over the powerful, the poor over the fabulously wealthy.

**T**he antisemitism allegations surfaced again in a leadership TV debate staged by Channel 4 on February 17.

Perhaps aware of how craven they risk appearing by backing Israel and Zionism so enthusiastically, and of how many party members may conclude that the Palestinians are being thrown under the proverbial bus, all three stated that there was no contradiction between opposing antisemitism and standing up for Palestinian rights.

In theory that is true. But it is no longer true in the case of Long-Bailey, Nandy and Starmer. They have accepted the ugly, false premises of the pro-Israel lobby, which require one to make just such a choice.

The lobby requires that, like the

candidates, one must declare one's support for Zionism, and Israel as a Jewish state, or be denounced as an antisemite. This is the flipside of the mischievous conflation of anti-Zionism – opposition to a political ideology – with antisemitism – hatred of Jews.

That conflation is based on the quite obviously false assertion that Israel represents all Jews, that it speaks for all Jews and that its actions – including its war crimes against the Palestinians – are the responsibility of all Jews. The pro-Israel lobby's intentional conflation is not only deeply problematic, it is deeply antisemitic.

One cannot stand up for a Palestinian right to self-determination while also embracing a political ideology, Zionism, that over more than 70 years, and as shared by every shade of Israeli government, has worked tirelessly to deny the

## The next leader of the Labour Party is already a prisoner to the 'institutional antisemitism' narrative

Palestinians that right.

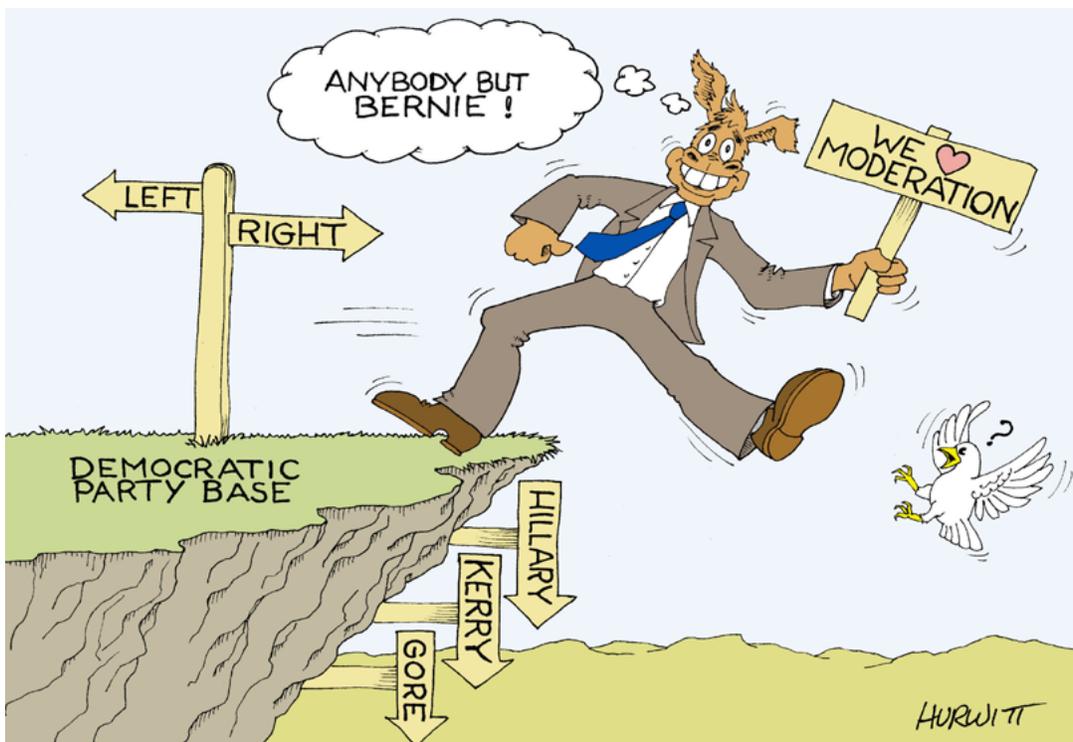
The fact that so many people in the West – Jews and non-Jews alike – have for so long evaded making that choice does not alter the fact that a choice has to be made. The lobby has made its choice. And now it has forced the Labour Party's leadership candidates – as it tried to force Corbyn himself – into making the same choice.

The next leader of the Labour

Party is already a prisoner to the "institutional antisemitism" narrative. That means their hands are chained not only to support for Israel, but to the reactionary politics in which Israel as a Jewish state makes sense – a worldview that embraces its style of ethnic, chauvinist, militaristic, segregationist politics.

A world, in fact, not so unlike the one we are being driven towards by the right-wing parties of Europe and the US. **CT**

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## Hurwitt's Eye

Mark Hurwitt

# Witnessing the misery of migrant hell

When workers come to Saudi Arabia, they have to travel by the dangerous waters and through war-torn Yemen; when they get deported, they are flown home by aircraft

**A**T Obock, Djibouti, 2,000 migrants gather each day along the waters of the Gulf of Aden looking for boats to get them to Yemen. Over the past two years, more migrants from Africa have used the “Eastern Route” rather than go across the Mediterranean Sea; according to the UN’s migration agency, the International Organization for Migration, this Eastern Route is now the “busiest maritime migration path on earth”. Roughly 11,500 people got on boats at places like Obock and Bosasso, Somalia, to go into Yemen, and then overland to Saudi Arabia, where they hope to get employment.

## Ethiopia

Outside the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia is typically thought of as a country of distress due to the 1983-85 famine that wracked the country. But over the past few years, according to World Bank numbers, Ethiopia has been one of the fastest-growing countries in the world (after Myanmar and China). On July 18, 2019, Abebe Aemro Selassie, the director of the International Monetary

Fund’s African Department, gave a presentation at the Ethiopian Economics Association. In his presentation, Selassie said that the key reasons why Ethiopia has seen such high growth have been improvements in the productivity of labour and increased investment in capital stock (factories, infrastructure). To make these gains, Ethiopia had to borrow, which has now put it in a position of debt vulnerability.

If you just look at the numbers, Ethiopia is doing great. But, not for people in the rural districts, where agrarian distress remains a fact of life. Of those who use the Eastern Route to migrate, over 90 percent come from Ethiopia, and most of them from the rural districts of Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray. The World Food Program and the Ethiopian government’s data shows us that these districts face terrible food insecurity and that there is a high level of food energy deficiency per adult in rural Ethiopia, with Amhara and Tigray leading the way. There has been barely any exit from the long-term crisis of agriculture in Ethiopia, whose lands are now increasingly threatened by corporations from India and

Saudi Arabia and by shifts in the climate.

Neoliberal policies have enabled Ethiopia to grow quickly, but this growth has not been pro-people, certainly not the people of the rural districts of Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray, from where the main migration has been taking place.

## Djibouti

Djibouti, at the tip of the Horn of Africa, within sight of Yemen, is one of the smallest countries in the world. But it is located at a strategic vantage, at the entrance of the Red Sea. That is the reason why it has been home to a very large United States military base at Camp Lemonnier. But the US base is no longer the only one; there are substantial bases for the militaries of China, France, Italy, and Japan.

For years, there was concern about the rise of piracy in the water off the Horn of Africa, with pirates from Somalia being seen as a major threat to global shipping. But, over the past decade, piracy here has decreased in these waters as it has decreased worldwide. It is clear that none of these bases are



**DRIFTING TO FREEDOM:** Refugees at sea aboard a rubber raft.

in Djibouti to deter piracy, which is their stated goal. They are there because of the geopolitical tensions around the Gulf region.

India and Saudi Arabia are building their own bases in Djibouti, with the Saudis even looking at Obock for land. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), which is prosecuting the war in Yemen with Saudi Arabia, already has military bases in Eritrea, Somaliland, and Somalia.

Despite the presence of these forces in such a small country, there is no effective way to prevent the migration of thousands of Ethiopians through Djibouti to Yemen. Neither the ports nor the waters are barriers to this human exodus.

## Yemen

The Saudi-UAE war on Yemen has been going on for five years. On February 23 the parties to the conflict met in Jordan to agree on a prisoner exchange; this fulfills

some of the commitments made in the Stockholm Agreement of 2018. A medical air bridge has allowed a handful of critically ill patients to be taken out of Yemen's capital of Sana'a, while the port of Hudaydah is largely left free for necessary humanitarian goods to enter the country. Almost all of Yemen's people rely on these humanitarian goods for basic survival.

Despite this relatively good news, violence has escalated in certain key districts of Yemen over the past two months. Since January, 35,000 Yemenis have been displaced from their homes, an indicator of the dangerous situation in the country.

It is into this cauldron that the Ethiopian migrants come. Crossing the Red Sea is not easy, since the boats are insufficient and overcrowded; migrants who make it to Yemen report that they have seen people leap off the boats to certain death because of the terrible situation that they face. In March 2017, a UAE-Saudi helicopter fired at

a boat carrying Somali migrants – killing at least 42 people; there are additional reports of this kind of activity along the Yemeni shoreline.

In Yemen, the migrants are held in detention camps, where they are abused by human traffickers and by other gangsters. Migrants in these camps, including in Aden, face extortion – if they cannot pay the guards, they are beaten, raped, and held indefinitely. When the spotlight is shone on any one of these camps, it closes and another opens elsewhere.

## Saudi Arabia

If the migrants somehow make it to Saudi Arabia, the terror continues. Smugglers take the migrants into Saudi Arabia's Jizan Province; often the migrants are made to carry qat (a stimulant grown in Eastern Africa) across the border. They are often shot at by Saudi border guards and – if caught – are either ransomed or held in places such as

Jizan Central Prison (which might as well be a detention camp).

Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia have a strangely symbiotic relationship. Saudi Arabia relies upon at least 400,000 Ethiopian workers, who come to do a variety of jobs in the kingdom. But, every few years, Saudi Arabia deports these workers. In 2013, the Saudi government removed 100,000 Ethiopian workers; they were deemed to be “illegal”, arrested, and removed in chartered flights. Then, slowly, Ethiopian workers returned, now with lower wages and almost no rights. In March 2017, Saudi Arabia deported 260,000 Ethiopians. These deportations are a disciplinary mechanism, a way to keep the Ethiopian migrants on their toes.

Ethiopia conducted agreements with Saudi Arabia (2017) and the UAE (2018) to ensure protections for their citizens, but there is little evidence that this is helping. Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE have been putting billions of dollars into

## No plans are afoot inside Ethiopia to be able to generate employment to hold the population in place

the National Bank of Ethiopia and into its government, part of the foreign direct investment (FDI) that has heated up the Ethiopian economy. Given this money, it is impossible to imagine the government of Ethiopia standing up for its citizens in the Gulf.

The boats from Obock, Djibouti, will continue to ply their trade; Ethiopians will continue to travel the Eastern Route into Saudi Arabia. No plans are afoot inside Ethiopia to be able to generate employment to hold the population in place, and there are certainly no

plans in Saudi Arabia to improve the conditions of its workers.

There is a demonstration of values here: when workers come to Saudi Arabia, they have to travel by the dangerous waters and through war-torn Yemen; when they get deported, they are flown home by aircraft. **CT**

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# Insights

Photo: Trevor Hoyle



WRITER'S RETREAT: Barnhill, on the island of Jura, where Orwell finished work on his best-known book, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

■ TREVOR HOYLE

## The Road to George Orwell

**L**AST year I decided to combine two items on my personal wish-list and tick them off together.

The first was hiring a motor home and setting off with my wife on a road trip, somewhere within the British Isles.

The second, and far more important, was an ambition I've nursed for more than 40 years. Back in the '70s I cycled through Hertfordshire where my literary hero, George Orwell, while living with his wife Eileen at The Stores, a tiny cottage-cum village shop in Wallington, had written *Homage to Catalonia*. Since then I've wanted to visit the remote island of Jura in the Hebrides, off the west coast of Scotland, where

he finished (just before it finished him) his best-known novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Although an established author and journalist, with books such as *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *The Road to Wigan Pier* to his name, it wasn't until 1945 that Orwell had his first commercial success with *Animal Farm*. For the one and only time in his impoverished career he'd made a bit of money, which meant he could take a break from the treadmill of book reviews, weekly columns and deadlines, and devote himself to the novel he was desperate to write: working title *The Last Man in Europe*.

For this work, he needed

peace, quiet and solitude, and a publisher friend suggested Barnhill, an isolated dwelling at the north end of Jura. In those days getting there was a 24-hour marathon slog from London via train and steamer; but for Orwell, who described Barnhill as 'ungettable-at' (no phone, no electricity, with oil lamps and log fires) it was the perfect hideaway.

There was also a sense of urgency to the quest. Orwell was suffering from TB and knew he was living on precious borrowed time even if he had the slightest hope of completing his novel.

Before leaving home on my personal quest I drew up a timetable, made the ferry bookings online, and reserved four nights at the Port Mor campsite on the island of Islay. (The locals pronounce it Isle-a, I discovered.)

Driving the double-berth motor home was easier than I imagined, provided I kept in mind its extra-wide turning circle. The elevated position and

panoramic windscreen provided great views. The van was fitted out with everything we required, and as this was October we were grateful for the electric fan heater during the long cold nights (even more so on Islay when gales were blowing off the Atlantic all the way from Newfoundland). We stayed two nights just outside Inveraray on the banks of Loch Fyne, then drove south down the long spit of land known as the Kintyre. We didn't get as far as the Mull of Kintyre (cue the Paul McCartney refrain) but headed for the ferry port of Kennacraig.

On the two-hour ferry-ride over a placid sea, something remarkable happened. Standing on deck, watching the misty outline of the islands growing gradually sharper, we got into conversation with a woman taking photographs with a professional's camera. She looked to be in her 50s and it turned out Sarah was an American travel writer. She and her companion, a retired airline stewardess, had been coming to Britain on walking tours for the past 22 years. Obviously dedicated, hardened walkers, not casual rambles like us; they'd never been to the Hebrides before, Sarah told us, adding that this year they'd rented a remote house called Barnhill on the island of Jura.

Coincidences are always weird, but to have a chance encounter with someone actually staying there, living in Orwell's house, was strange, unsettling, and wonderful. We introduced ourselves and explained the reasons for our pilgrimage. Sarah



Photo: Trevor Hoyle

**FOUR MILES TO GO:** Signpost on the final leg to Barnhill.

invited us to stop by the house. (As a writer herself she knew all about the Orwell connection, of course.) Though if the weather, Sarah reminded us, was anything less than torrential and freezing, they would be out during daylight hours, trekking over the hills and exploring the rocky coastline which overlooks the giant whirlpool of Corryvreckan.

It was here, as all us devout Orwellians know, that the writer nearly drowned, along with his eight-year-old adopted son Richard, when their skiff overturned and they were marooned on a sliver of rock – fatefully to be rescued by a passing fisherman. Nearly no Orwell. No Richard Blair. And no *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

We spent our first three days at Port Mor, the pre-booked campsite overlooking Loch Indaal. Each morning we hoped the constant wind and driving rain might ease so we could set out on our trip to Jura, but the weather was foul. Then, with just one day remaining, the skies cleared and gave us our chance. From Port Askaig on Islay, the ferry to Jura

takes 10 minutes. The island has fewer than 200 human inhabitants who are vastly outnumbered by 6,000 deer. Jura is a hunter's paradise – teeming with pheasant and grouse, which seem hell-bent on a kamikaze mission as they run alongside the van, perilously close to the wheels.

After 25 miles the only road on the island peters out to little more than a rutted waterlogged track. There's a warning sign: *No Motor Vehicles*. It's not kidding. This is passable only by LandRover or SUV. Now's the time to don the weatherproofs and pull on the walking boots for the final four-mile slog. Apart from a short stinging shower or two, the day is perfect, the sky is clear, the views spectacular. Jura has a gaunt, sweeping beauty of russet-browns and purples: bracken and gorse covering mile upon mile of gentle contours, with glimpses in-between the slopes of white-flecked ocean whipped by the Atlantic westerlies. It's a vista that's savage and primitive in its remoteness and bleakness, yet also uplifts and inspires.

An hour into our expedition we pass a LandRover by the side of the track. The vehicle must belong to Sarah and her companion, so I scribble a note and leave it under the windscreen wiper. Secretly I'm hoping the two intrepid American hikers will see the message and return to Barnhill in time to make us a cup of tea and show us round the house, which I've read somewhere has changed hardly at all since Orwell lived there in the 40s ...

Not to be, unfortunately. This year's stock of amazing coincidences and good fortune has been used up. But no matter.

It's enough that our exertions are finally rewarded when below us in a cleft of hills, facing the sea, we spy the long solid structure of Barnhill. White-painted walls gleaming in the sunlight and roof of grey slate. Having met, however briefly, the couple renting it, I tell myself that taking a snoop around and snapping some photos isn't too much of an intrusion.

In my mind's eye I picture Orwell living on the property, his tall, almost emaciated stick-like figure bent over in the vegetable patch (it was just after the war

when food was scarce) and preparing meals in the farmhouse kitchen.

I even know which bedroom he worked in – upstairs left as you face the house. Propped up on pillows, portable typewriter on his knees, here he battled against time and ill-health to complete his masterpiece, a roll-up of strong dark tobacco between his lips, which can't have helped the TB much.

Our visit was soon over – less than an hour, with the light failing – but for me it was enough: Mission accomplished. I'd made the pilgrimage, walked the same track my literary hero had trod, peeked inside the house where one of the most famous and

influential books of the 20th-century had first seen the light of day.

**Author's postscript:** *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was completed at Barnhill in December 1948 and published in June 1949. Orwell died in hospital on 21 January of the following year. On his deathbed he married Sonia Brownell, an editorial assistant on *Horizon* magazine, who became the second Mrs Blair and inherited his estate. **CT**

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■ JOE ALLEN

## Genesis on acid: The cartoons of Creationism

ONCE again, Creationist Ken Ham is hogging the spotlight. A recent PBS documentary *We Believe in Dinosaurs* was crafted to make Young Earth Creationists look silly. The producers didn't have to put forth much effort. Their unflattering portrait basically sketched itself: Bible-thumping barkers defend the reality of plastic half-angel giants who live side-by-side with a latex T. Rex.

Regardless of your belief system, the film's subject is fas-

cinating. In the tradition of Jack Chick's brilliant pocket-sized comics, self-promoting evangelist Ken Ham has built a massive replica of Noah's Ark in rural Kentucky. His masterpiece, completed in 2016, doubles as a biting parody of religious faith. "It's bigger than imagination", as his slogan goes. By the end of the documentary, I had to wonder if the attention-hungry Ham is actually trying to inoculate the public against the Bible.

Skeptics have long asked, sarcastically, if Adam and Eve

rode dinosaurs in Eden. After all, geologists have been poking around in the earth for centuries. The resulting fossil record is undeniable. Therefore the fundamentalist's logical answer, following a literal reading of Genesis, is "yes".

Of course dinosaurs walked the Earth! Some were even sacrificed by the Lord's faithful servants. Obviously they were killed off in the Great Flood. If you don't believe it, you can drive to Kentucky and see the evidence yourself. And if you get off on denouncing all Christians as gullible, head down to the Ark's hull. You'll find a pile of cheap ammo ten cubits high.

Ken Ham's stated purpose is to harmonise the facts of science with the Bible's authority. What he does is transmute a sacred

mythos into a literal cartoon. According to Ham, a sound reading of scripture yields a six-day Creation, 6,000 years of human tragedy, and six-billion ticket sales to a biblical theme park. Before the holy roller could say, “Let there be rollercoasters”, news cameras from all over the world had descended on his parallel universe.

The resulting footage confirms every atheist’s haughty suspicions. People of faith don’t oppose abortion because it’s callous – they simply lack scientific literacy. Religious homeschooling isn’t a reaction to the lunacy of public education – it’s just another way to retreat from the facts.

The documentary concludes with a dubious statistic, presumably meant to characterise one half the nation for the other: “40 percent of Americans hold the Creationist belief that God created humans in their present form within the past 10,000 years.”

Just connect the dots, man. Any resistance to progressive hubris is conservative, and conservatives are Christian, and Christianity is for idiots.

Years ago, I had the pleasure of visiting the adjoining Creation Museum myself. The Ark’s construction was still under way at the time. You could see its gopher barks just beyond the parking lot. My companion that day is one of the most brilliant men I know, a militant right-wing Catholic, who was kind enough to pay the exorbitant admission fee.

While I thought the museum’s displays were just Genesis as pop surrealism, he appreciated the



**WHEN DINOSAURS RULED:** The exterior of the Answers in Genesis Creation Museum in Kentucky

creators’ bold effort to go against the secular grain. I was stunned, but as always, I listened. Over the years, my friend’s world-wise counsel has reliably checked my naivete. He’s no fool.

The fossil collection and big rubber dinosaurs are standard fare, even with the museum’s far-fetched interpretations. The more visceral exhibits include naked Adam and Eve in erotic Eden, followed by Noah’s bloody animal sacrifice. A detailed Ark diorama shows a rectangular boat tossed on violent waves. Tiny sinners are stranded on rocks with hands outstretched, begging for mercy.

The museum’s spiritual themes are obvious enough – temptation, mass extinction, redemption – but the presentation is so kitschy, even kids must think the curators lack self-awareness.

I did find one installation worthy of serious consideration, though. There’s a nightmarish

exhibit with a sign overhead that reads “A World Without Christ”, or something to that effect. It’s a universe of sorry atoms banging around the void. A wall-sized collage is plastered with images of the Twin Towers burning, riots in the streets, news clippings from the Columbine shooting. A large photo of a nuclear explosion. Another of a man tying off to stab a needle in his arm. Young boys watching porn. State-enforced eugenics.

This is where I meet my Catholic friend eye to eye. Without a transcendent vision to bind society together, cultural chaos and nihilism gradually fill the vacuum. These crazy Creationists may be full of beans when it comes to paleontology, but their fear of a satanic planet is spot on. Ironically, I suspect their over-the-top reaction is a symptom, not a cure.

You have to wonder, will religion in the West die off like the

dinosaurs? Whatever the actual number of American Creationists may be, it's diminishing. More pertinent are recent statistics showing the rapid decrease in religious affiliation. Over the last decade, religious 'nones' have leapt from 17 percent to a full 26 percent of the US population.

As churches fail to attract Millennials, about 35 percent are sleeping in on Sundays. As in Europe, the hard core of American atheists is also growing. These non-believers, most of whom are male, tend to become aggro Bernie Bros or buy their meaning with filthy lucre. A demystified cosmos especially appeals to teenagers, 13 percent of whom identify as atheist – twice that of the total US population.

This spiritual warfare inevitably spills out into the streets. One striking segment of “We Believe in Dinosaurs” shows atheist protesters facing off with Creationist counter-protesters at the Ark Encounter’s opening. Cameras caught the Creationist organiser Eric Hovind lying to cops about asking counter-protesters to attend. We then see aggressive atheists line up to poke fingers at Hovind’s nose and spit tired talking points. As the past half-decade has shown, screaming blowhards are the new face of American discourse.

Somewhere between these ideological armies are those who can marvel at the elaborate material world revealed by science, yet hold fast to spiritual realities. But we all know ‘both/and’ makes for boring television. Ken Ham’s

‘either/or’ excites our bloodlust.

Immediately after the sensational premier, PBS segued into BBC News Hour. The opening story was shot inside China’s internment camps, where over a million Muslim Uyghurs are currently receiving re-education. The ethnic minority’s archaic, unscientific beliefs are being replaced by ideas more amenable to the Communist Party’s materialist worldview. According to Uyghur exiles, Chinese authorities offer two alternatives: enlightenment or death.

This is a grim juxtaposition to the socially isolated Creationists

and their culturally dominant opponents. As faith wanes among the young, radical socialism and the vitalist alt-right provide tangible substitutes. It’s a reminder that, as with other nations, American religion could go the way of the dinosaurs – first due to sickness, then ultimately finished off by a fast approaching asteroid. **CT**

*Joe Allen writes about race, robots, and religion. His work has appeared in The Federalist, Taki's Magazine, Disinformation, and Salvo Magazine.*

■ ALAN MacLEOD

## Cop-hating vandals or pro-democracy activists?

THE New York Police Department (NYPD) can generally rely on corporate media as allies on controversial police issues. A case in point was the New York subway protests last month, in which the activist group Decolonize This Place organised hundreds of people to occupy New York City subway stations to demand free transit for all and an end to racialised over-policing on the subway system. There was one injury reported.

The prospect of an event overtly critical of police tactics had Fox News (1/31/20) scandalised. “Antifa Plans

Massive Anti-Cop Action in NY Subways”, its headline read. Quoting the Police Benevolent Association, it claimed that the ‘anti-police movement’ is aiming for the “destruction of public order.” Like Fox, Britain’s *Daily Mail* (2/1/20) appeared particularly appalled that demonstrators were covering their faces: “Masked Anti-Cop Protesters Storm Grand Central During Rush Hour and Vandalise Subway Stations Across New York,” ran its headline.

Local news like ABC7 New York (2/5/20) claimed that the masked ‘vandals’ were part of a ‘criminal effort’ that had

‘trashed’ the subway. Examples of subway destruction offered amounted to squirting glue into card readers and locking a door open, allowing commuters to ride for free. Reporter Derick Waller also told viewers that protesters painted vulgar messages, the camera panning to a wall reading ‘No NYPD’ to illustrate. ABC ended with an appeal to arrest protesters: “Anyone with information is urged to call the NYPD’s Crime Stoppers Hotline.”

This was hardly Shay’s Rebellion. Yet the *New York Daily News* (2/4/20) was still outraged: “Trashing The Subway, Is a Crime, Not Political Speech,” it argued, as it called for state retribution.

But it was perhaps the *New York Post* – noted for repeating NYPD talking points – that was the most dead set against the action. ‘Cop-hating vandals’ and ‘radical agitators’ “stormed Grand Central Terminal during rush hour” – ‘wreaking havoc’ and holding ‘hateful signs’ like ‘No Fare No Cops’, it told readers (1/31/20, 2/5/20). The cop-haters, according to one source (2/1/20), were carrying out a “twisted agenda” of “violence against police.”

Throughout its reporting, the only sources were anonymous police officials, leading the stories to sound very much like they were written by the NYPD themselves.

This love of police is not extended to Hong Kong officers, however. In comparison to New York City,

where the extent of the damage was limited to what small amounts of paint and glue could do, in October, Hong Kong demonstrators shut down the entire subway system (that carries five-million daily) by bombing trains and stations. While reporting on the bombing, the *New York Post* (10/12/19) insisted that they were not anti-cop vandals, but peaceful ‘pro-democracy protesters’ defending the autonomy of the city state against Beijing. An earlier subway clash was described (*New York Post*, 8/12/19) as police launching a ‘violent crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators.’

Another *Post* editorial (11/13/20) made it absolutely clear who they thought was responsible: “Hong Kong’s Crisis Is Entirely Beijing’s Fault” was its headline, as the editorial board condemned the “relentless drive to remove all [the pro-democracy protesters’] liberties.”

Corporate media that appeared so alarmed with New Yorkers wearing masks glorified their counterparts in Hong Kong doing the same thing. The first sentence of CNBC’s report (10/4/19) on the government’s mask ban and the subsequent subway shutdown included the remarkable phrase, “pro-democracy protesters torched businesses and metro stations,” a combination of terms – ‘pro-democracy’ and ‘torched’ – not likely to be seen had US leftists done the same thing. While emphasising that in response to the mask ban, protesters “hurled petrol bombs at police,” the report maintained that they were part of a ‘pro-democracy movement.’

Reuters (10/5/19) and

the BBC(10/4/19) also described thousands of masked activists shutting down the entire subway network, by bombing stations and setting fire to trains, as part of a ‘pro-democracy’ protest. The *Washington Post*’s editorial (10/5/19) on the subject presented the masked activists as champions of the ‘rule of law’, protesting against ‘police brutality’ and ‘excessive use of force’, and trying to ‘preserve their free market and political liberties.’ China is solely at fault, it concluded.

The message from the media is clear: Their protesters are good, regardless of what they do; ours are vandals, thugs or criminals. Their cops are bad; ours are unimpeachable heroes under fire for just doing their jobs. Journalists who work closely with police, credulously repeating their statements and printing copaganda, pushing a dubious ‘war on cops’ narrative echoed by Trump himself, can effortlessly turn into anarcho-communists challenging authority, depending on the nation being reported on. **CT**

**Alan MacLeod** is a member of the Glasgow University Media Group. He is author of *Bad News From Venezuela: 20 Years of Fake News and Misreporting*. His latest book, *Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent*, was published by Routledge in May 2019. Follow him on Twitter: @AlanRMacLeod. This article was first published by *Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting* at [www.fair.org](http://www.fair.org)

■ YVES ENGLER

## Arms firms swarm Canada's decision-makers

**M**ORE politically dependent than almost all other industries, arms manufacturers play for keeps in Ottawa, Canada's capital city. They target ads and events sponsorships at decision makers while hiring insiders and military stars to lobby on their behalf.

Activist and academic Tamara Lorincz recently posted a photo of an F35 ad in a bus shelter in front of Parliament Hill. US weapons giant Lockheed Martin is pushing hard to win a \$19-billion contract to supply the Canadian air force with a fleet of new fighter jets.

To gain a share of the public funds on offer arms companies target ads at political and military leaders, promoting their products in washrooms and bus shelters where Department of National Defence (DND) and Canadian Forces (CF) officials congregate. Rideau Institute founder Steven Staples pointed out that “you can't walk around in Ottawa without tripping over some arms dealer on Spark Street.”

Arms sellers also sponsor talks and exhibits attended by Ottawa insiders. They promote their brand at the Canadian War Museum, Gatineau-Ottawa airshow,

Ottawa Chamber of Commerce, Conference of Defense Associations, etc.

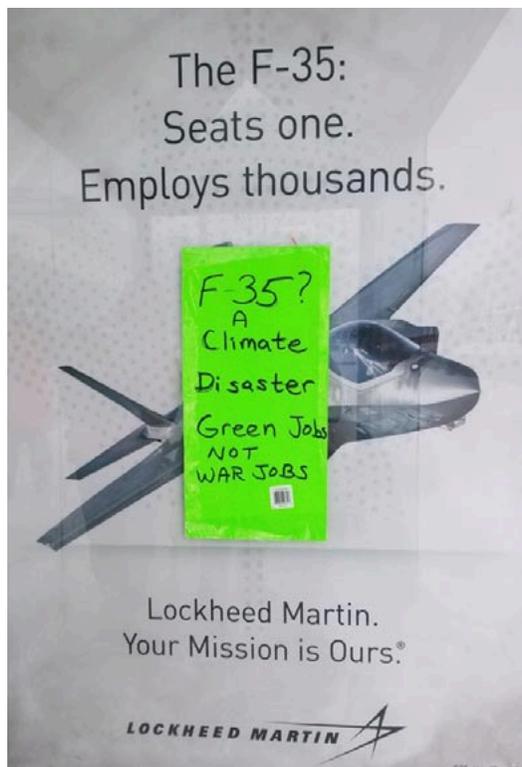
Beyond promoting their wares in the nation's capital, companies advertise aggressively in publications read by Ottawa insiders such as *iPolitics*, *Ottawa Business Journal* and *Hill Times*. “Today's Morning Brief is brought to you by Canada's Combat Ship Team”, noted a regular *iPolitics* ad. “Lockheed Martin Canada is leading a team of BAE Systems, CAE, L3 Technolo-

gies, MDA and Ultra Electronics to deliver the Royal Canadian Navy's future fleet of surface combatants”. Their ads also foot much of the bill for journals read by military officials such as the *Canadian Defence Review*, *Canadian Naval Review* and *Esprit de Corps*.

Arms companies' constantly lobby MPs and DND officials. In a “12-Month Lobbying Activity Search” of the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada Lockheed Martin, CAE, Bombardier, General Dynamics, Raytheon, BAE, Boeing and Airbus Defence were listed dozens of times. Lockheed Martin's name alone appeared 40 times in a recent search.

To facilitate access to government officials, international arms makers maintain offices in Ottawa. Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, BAE, General Dynamics, L-3 Communications, Airbus, United Technologies, Raytheon, etc. all have offices in Canada's capital and most of them are a few blocks from Parliament.

A sales pitch carries more weight when it comes from a friend, CF “star” or experienced veteran. As a result, arms companies contract former CF and DND leaders to lobby on their behalf. Long-time Project Ploughshares campaigner Kenneth Epps explains: “There are many cases of government officials who, very early after retiring, become lobbyists or advocates of certain types of equipment or representatives



**NO TO WAR JOBS:** Lockheed poster in a bus shelter in front of Ottawa's Parliament Hill.

Photo: Tamara Lorincz

of particular companies. They come from government and know the ins and outs of how government decisions are made, who in government to contact and what arguments might be useful to advocate for certain types of equipment.”

In October 2017, Lockheed Martin contracted retired Air Force commander Andre Deschamps to lobby for military contracts while Irving Shipbuilding hired former vice-admiral James King to push for Arctic and offshore patrol ship contracts. In 1983 three leading DND bureaucrats set up CFN Consultants.

A late 1980s CFN brochure highlighted its “in-depth knowledge of Canadian government and military requirements, military specifications, contracting procedures and associated budgetary considerations”. Headquartered two blocks from Parliament, CFN Consultants remains dominated by retired military leaders.

But contracting former CF/DND as lobbyists is a half measure. Some arms firms offer executive positions to retired CF leaders. In 2013 former deputy commander at NORAD and commander of NATO forces in Libya, Charles Bouchard was appointed “country lead for Lockheed Martin Canada” in a bid to convince Ottawa to purchase its F-35 jets. Four years later L3 Technologies appointed Major General Richard Foster to oversee its Canadian business. The press release announcing its hiring of the former commander of the RCAF and deputy commander of the Joint Oper-

ations Command highlighted “his extensive military experience and work with foreign governments”. In 2012 former Navy commodore Kelly Williams became General Dynamics Canada’s senior director of strategy and government relations while three weeks after Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie retired as Chief of Transformation for the CF, CGI Group appointed him to lead an Ottawa-based business unit seeking to “serve the Canadian Forces around the globe.”

It’s not only CF leaders who use their public sector careers as a springboard to lucrative arms industry positions. Weapons makers often hire top bureaucrats who were formerly responsible for arms procurement. Two weeks after stepping down as a deputy minister of defence in 2017 – after years of procurement work – John Turner was appointed vice president of operations at arms contractor PAL Aerospace. In 2011 CGI Group hired 12-year DND veteran Ken Taylor as vice-president of cyber security in Canada.

A CGI Group press release noted: “In his new role, Ken will work closely with both government and commercial clients as part of the newly formed Canadian Defence, Public Safety and Intelligence business unit under the leadership of Lieutenant-General (retired) Andrew Leslie”. (Leslie was later Justin Trudeau’s Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.)

The CF-leader-to-arms-executive pipeline is important to

the upper echelon of the military. In 2008 columnist Don Martin pointed out that “dozens of retired officers pocket salaries they could never have dreamed of as soldiers.”

The prospect of a lucrative post-retirement industry position increases the likelihood that CF leaders identify the military’s interests with arms makers. The “rent-a-general” pipeline strengthens interest in expensive new weaponry and opposition to arms control measures. Since many Canadian weapons companies are branch plants of US firms, lucrative post-retirement positions also increase CF leaders’ support of the US military-industrial complex.

To weaken militarism, it is imperative to reduce the financial benefits sloshing around the system. Senior CF and DND officials should be restricted from lobbying for at least five years after leaving the public service and other measures ought to be adopted to weaken the link between the military hierarchy and arms firms.

In the meantime, activists in Ottawa should follow Lorincz’s lead and “correct” arms industry ads. She posted a sign on top of the Lockheed Martin ad outside Parliament noting, “F35 Climate Disaster: Green Jobs Not War Jobs!” **CT**

*Yves Engler is a Canadian political activist and author. His latest book is House of Mirrors: Justin Trudeau’s Foreign Policy, published by Black Rose Books. This article first appeared at [www.yvesengler.com](http://www.yvesengler.com).*

■ PHILIP KRASKE

## Is the next election too important for the people?

Have the people of America prepped for their vote?  
 Have they read up the issues and know what's  
 afloat?  
 Have they read Chris Hedges and know fascists  
 loom,  
 Awaiting deep crisis to lower the boom?  
 Do they know how Washington pushes  
 towards war?  
 Or are they all pork prices and patriot lore?

Does outright murder alter their voting plans,  
 A murder abroad global law strictly bans?  
 Do Iowans vote from their fear of ghost terror,  
 And think that killing a foreigner's no error?  
 Or does Bernie's great hair weigh strong on  
 their scale,  
 Against Bloomberg's ads well-designed to close sale?

Maybe they'll shock us in debate Q and A,  
 And ask about something that's not curds  
 and whey:  
 "You say Putin's a creep for Crimea-grabbing,  
 And instead should do what? Sit there  
 gripe-gabbing?  
 He did what he had to, as anyone would:  
 It was that or Nato in his neighbourhood."

But I doubt the voters have much global vision,  
 I doubt they have any but local ambition,  
 In Iowa or anywhere else for that matter,  
 Just cliché'd opinions from Fox and Friends

chatter.  
 Oh, everyone yearns for the Goddess of Change,  
 Just not too much or fast, now isn't that strange?

Hence Honest Joe Biden is leading the pack,  
 A sign that everyone would like Barack back,  
 Him and Michelle and those ballyhoo days,  
 When you watched stocks climbing from  
 your backyard chaise,  
 Global warming but simmered, life would go on,  
 Banks had learned lessons, no one thought of Iran.

It brings to mind people who voted for Trump,  
 MAGA nostalgia for what's left of the rump,  
 But little or no thought for what ahead lies:  
 The in-your-face splat of financial cream pies,  
 The worse falling behind of folks who work hard,  
 More soldiers and spooks splitting up rising lard.

It's a pity other countries can't vote on our prez,  
 Unfazed, unchecked by what the MSM says,  
 For when you consider the woods not the trees,  
 The true path of peace can be seen with fair ease,  
 Nobody would vote with nostalgia in mind,  
 Or choose on the basis of the price of pork rind. **CT**

*Philip Kraske is an American author who lives in Madrid, Spain. His latest novel is 11/19 and the Terrorist Who Loved Bonsai Trees (Encompass Editions). His website is [www.philipkraske.com](http://www.philipkraske.com).*

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