

THE WAR AT SCHOOL | RORY FANNING
BOLIVIA: THE TELENOVELA | HEATHER MENCKEN
MONEY FOR NOTHING | DAVID TUFFLEY

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING | PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

ISSUE 116



**THE PRIME MINISTER, HIS FATHER
AND THE TAX HAVEN**



Cover photo:
Ron Fassbender
(Pages 10-15)

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War, football and reality

Fred Reed discusses the nature of US military excursions, and explains why they always end in defeat

War may be thought of in two ways. First, as a football game between armies, in which the function of the citizenry is to cheer for the home team. In football, success is measured in points scored, yardage gained, brilliance of play, and time of possession. In war, as football, it is battles won, enemies killed, territory conquered. The crucial goal is to defeat the other side's armed forces. Doing so constitutes victory.

To one who sees war in this way, as militaries invariably do, America will always come out ahead on points because we fight only countries hopelessly inferior in military terms. In Vietnam, Laos, Iraq, and Afghanistan the US killed vastly more people than it suffered dead, won almost all battles by overwhelming material superiority, and easily captured any territory it chose.

By this reasoning, it can be argued that America won in Vietnam. When the GIs pulled out, the South was a functioning country by the standards of the Third World. The Viet Cong were still blowing up bridges, but Saigon was repairing them. The VC had no chance of conquering the country unaided. America had won.

One may also view war otherwise, as an element in a struggle in which one country seeks to make another country do something it wants. Victory consists in accomplishing this. In Vietnam, America

– or, important distinction, the US government – wanted to prevent South Vietnam from falling to the Communists. The North wanted the US to go away, so that it could conquer the South. The US went, and the North conquered. It got what it wanted. The North won, QED.

From the footballer's point of view, the United States won in Iraq. It killed huge numbers of people while losing few, destroyed cities, and never lost a battle. But it got none of the things it wanted: a puppet government, permanent large military bases, and the oil. A dead loss. If anybody won, it was Israel and Iran. In Afghanistan, America, as usual, devastated the country and killed with impunity, thus winning the football game – but accomplished nothing.

To those who see war as football, the principal target is the enemy's military. To those who see war as a means of making the other side do something, the aim is to destroy the enemy's will to fight. This includes the will of the enemy's population.

In Vietnam, the North knew it had no chance of decisively defeating American forces. It might, however, drag the war on and on, and on, and on, steadily inflicting casualties, until the enemy's will to fight collapsed. In the North, this was a deliberate strategy. To win in the sense of making the US do what it wanted, it didn't have to win militarily. It just had to keep from los-

In war, as football, it is battles won, enemies killed, territory conquered. The crucial goal is to defeat the other side's armed forces. Doing so constitutes victory

WAR GAMES

The public was so sick of the Vietnam war than any attempt to restart it was going to have congressmen hanging from lamp posts

ing – and inflict casualties, and casualties, and casualties. It suffered many more dead than it inflicted, but it had the will to keep fighting. And inflict casualties. And casualties.

There were about 60 kids in my graduating class at King George High School, Virginia, in 1964. Doug Grey died with a 12.7 round through the head. Studley Franklin, paraplegic. Ricky Reed, face full of shrapnel and severe eye damage. Chip Thompson, neck wounds. At least two others became severe alcoholics. Many others went. Everyone knew all of these kids.

The military, with its football mindset, expects the public to rally round the flag and support the wars. As the antiwar rallies grew and became huge, and kids fled to Canada and sought deferments and hid in the navy, the military felt betrayed. To this day, many veterans remain bitter at what they see as treason, cowardice, and lack of patriotism. They were fighting and dying, seeing friends bleeding to death, and choking on their own blood, burned alive in flaming Amtracs – and college kids were smoking dope and getting laid and chanting, “Hell no, we won’t got.” The vets were, and are, embittered. They won, they believe, but the hippies and lefties stabbed them in the back.

And this was what the North Vietnamese counted on. They couldn’t bomb American cities, as America was bombing theirs, but they could keep the body bags flowing. Two hundred dead a week was a modest figure, with others mutilated, and they came back to towns and cities in bags or wheelchairs. Many of them told friends, “Don’t go. It’s godawful. It’s pointless. Don’t go.” It added up. It was a Cold Warrior’s war, and a high-school kid’s fight.

America’s will to fight crumbled, exactly as the North hoped. They – you can read this in their documents from the war – knew what they were doing.

I was on campus for some years of this, both before and after going to Asia as a

Marine. The boys didn’t want to fight in a remote war that meant nothing to them. Their girlfriends were against it. In Vietnam itself morale flagged. Fraggings came. Mutinies and things perilously close occurred.

Tet came. Seeing war as football, many insist, correctly, that Tet was a military disaster for the North. Vietnamese losses were huge, and the Americans, taken by surprise, retook everything they had lost with comparative ease.

But, in the all-important terms of the will to fight, it was an American disaster. Soldiers don’t understand this. It convinced much of the American public – whether rightly or wrongly doesn’t matter at all – the US was not winning and couldn’t win.

America declared victory and left – the first part of what the North wanted. In 1975 when Ban Me Thuot fell and the NVA rolled South, the more war-like in America wanted to send the air force in to save the South, and said that the US had weakened its allies by not supplying them with fuel and so on. Some said that the Democrats in Congress were treasonous and should be tried. As you like. But the public was so sick of that war than any attempt to restart it was going to have congressmen hanging from lamp posts.

The strategy of the North, which might be regarded as a form of psywar, had worked.

Can America be defeated this way again? Unlikely. The all-voluntary military means that body bags will contain only elements of society that the ruling classes don’t care about. Wars now chiefly involve bombing enemies who have no way of fighting back. Reliance on drones means no casualties at all, and the use of robots in ground combat, long a pipe dream, is nearing reality. The media are under control. America still loses its wars in the sense of not getting what it wants, but the public doesn’t care, and you cannot sap a drone’s will. That is the lesson of Vietnam. **CT**

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ALL LIFE IS HERE: La Paz, the 'new' capital of Bolivia.

Bolivia: The telenovela

Heather Mencken tells of an embattled president, his mistress, their son, the vice president, and a referendum

Bolivia is not what you think. It is what you can't possibly think and some more – a beautiful and dusty, colourful and sort-of thriving, feral and friendly, politically engaged and enraging landlocked country down the centre of the Andes mountains that is the poorest nation in South America and second poorest in Latin America, after Haiti. I have followed the recent climactic months in President Evo Morales' tenure, including a Chavez-style referendum and a tabloid scandal neatly erupting a few days before. Here's my chronicle of wild Bolivian political culture.

October 12, 2015

President Evo Morales is getting ready for the coming vote, scheduled for February 2016. He is pitching a national referendum to vote on whether to amend the constitution

so he can run for a fourth term. (The constitution mandates that one can run for only two terms.) Cracking a confident smile, he indicates that his personal aim is to achieve a personal best: to raise the percentage in favour of re-election to 70 per cent. In past elections he has received as much as 60 per cent.

OK, folks, get comfy on that sofa . . . now the show begins.

Vice President Álvaro García Linera, known as "el Vice," accuses the United States of funding the campaign against a fourth re-election

November 25, 2015

El Vice claims that if Evo is not re-elected in 2019, any new government will "take away the babies, the sun will not rise, and the moon will disappear."

Evo Morales is pitching a national referendum to vote on whether to amend the constitution so he can run for a fourth term

DOWN SOUTH

Eleven people die: One from the crack of a military nightstick, another of an aneurism, and nine when a bus crashes while circumnavigating the barricade via an inadequate road

That sounds ominous.

January 30, 2016

Claiming a state of economic emergency resulting from unfair taxation, the Transporte Pesado Sindicalizado launches a blockade of all highways leading to the nation's cities. During a similar dispute in 2013, the economy was strangled for two months – with both mega-businesses and small street peddlers losing income and mercados, stores, and restaurants left bare.

People here know how to do blockades; they're normal fare in these parts. My friend Marco and I get ready by buying up heaps of rice, nuts and oatmeal.

February 3

A game between the government and the trucking industry begins, with each side holding out – while the population is left without transport. Lacking ways to get home, some sleep in the streets, others carry their wares on their backs for miles. Eleven people die: One from the crack of a military nightstick, another of an aneurism, and nine when a bus crashes while circumnavigating the barricade via an inadequate road. Protests erupt. Everybody hunkers down.

We cook up vegetables and fruit to freeze.

Reporter Carlos Valverde drops a journalistic bomb: In 2005-2007, President Evo Morales had an affair with Gabriela Zapata, a model, 30 years his junior. They had a son, but he died, and the two broke up. In 2013, at age 24, she – who claims a degree in law from an unknown and unidentified university – was made a high-level executive of China CAMC Engineering Company that sealed the deals for contracts with Chinese businesses to the tune of \$57-m. According to Valverde, Zapata is engaged in cocaine trafficking made possible by government collaboration. Evo is implicated.

What weird twist now unfoldeth?

February 4

Minister of the Presidency, Juan Ramón

Quintana proclaims that the president has not had contact with Zapata since 2007.

OK.

February 5

In a heart-to-heart with the nation, Evo reveals that yes, he had a baby with her, but tragically the child died.

Aaaaah . . . OK.

El Vice accuses the right wing of taking advantage of a poor fallen child.

February 6

Whatsupp circulates a photo of Morales hugging Zapata at Carnaval de Oruro, dated 2015. The image goes viral.

Huh?

February 9

Evo explains that at that particular Carnaval, he saw a “face he recognized but couldn't place, and she came closer and it was Gabriela.”

The plot thickens.

I talk to taxi drivers, street vendors, shopkeepers. Moral indignation is precisely what I hear from them.

February 14

The annual 10-day, full-tilt boogy, chichadrunken, party-time Carnaval commences! . . . It always makes for a major economic boon to the country as thousands travel to Oruro where the most spectacular procession of South America occurs, plus it's at heart a spiritual celebration with roots in pre-Colombian times. Blockading truckers announce that they will re-open the highways for the duration.

My forehead bunches up in the shape of a question mark. I open the freezer door and stare at an excess of apple sauce.

February 17

What ostensibly begins as a peaceful march to the El Alto city hall to bring attention to the poor state of schools ends with the burning of the building. Documents proving



SLOW DOWN: Transportistas blockade Bolivia's roads.

corruption in the previous administration, dominated by Evo's party Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), are destroyed. Functionaries of said government arise out of the more innocent ranks to attack the building – kicking down doors, breaking windows, entering, throwing gasoline on furniture, sacking computers, and setting the place on fire. Six die – four trapped in a bathroom succumbing to carbon monoxide asphyxiation, one stabbed, one bleeding to death from a bludgeoning to the skull. The fire department located a block away, does not respond. It takes the police department three hours to arrive.

WHAAAAAATT?!!!!

MAS's Vice Minister of the Internal Regime Marcelo Elío announces that what ap-

pears as a tragedy was actually invented and carried through by the current progressive-but-not-MAS mayor to make MAS look bad before the referendum.

February 19

Because citizens video the event, four perpetrators are thrown in jail for inciting the blaze – a union director, who in the past has worked with El Alto's ex-mayor of the MAS party, a former MAS city council candidate, and two young people. Twenty more are suspected of conspiracy or participation.

February 21

Bolivia essentially shuts down – no cars, no airplanes, no alcohol, no public gatherings –

Documents proving corruption in the previous administration, dominated by Evo's party Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), are destroyed by fire

DOWN SOUTH

What about that soldier who made his fame with a hip-hop video about being in the Bolivian military?

as the population is called to vote on whether or not to change the constitution.

We walk down the empty boulevards. We eat empanadas sold at street-corner kiosks. A calm overtakes the city, but inside everyone waits . . .

Finally we learn the first-count results. “No” has won.

El Vice assures the populace that, whatever the outcome, he and Evo will honour the results.

February 22

El Vice says that “the results could be modified.”

What does that mean?

Evo rancorously blames social networks like Facebook, Twitter, and Whatsapp for lying and destroying his popularity.

What the fuck?

He calls for government control of the internet. La Fuerza Aérea Boliviano responds, prohibiting all in the military from using social networks. What about that soldier who made his fame with a hip-hop video about being in the Bolivian military?

February 23

El Vice accuses crowds standing in front of voting stations, bodyguards, and the right wing of blocking the MAS-supporting, campesino majority from voting.

Venezuela President Nicolás Maduro chimes in. The right has “waged a dirty war to destroy him . . .” he says. “They invented scandals. . . There’s a threat against progressive projects because the right never respects the rules of the game.”

February 24

The Tribunal Supremo Electoral reports that, with 99.72 per cent of the votes in, “NO” is the official winner.

With indignation, Evo demands that Zapata present the child within six days.

February 26

La Fuerza Especial de la Lucha Contra el

Crimen detains Zapata. The charge is illegal enrichment, taking advantage of government connections, and drug trafficking. It is revealed that, in a rush in 2015, she told Jimmy Morales to deposit a cheque for \$30,000 into her personal account. He is a chauffeur in . . . the Ministry of the Presidency.

Hell with “Location, location, location!” The cogent theme now is . . . “Plot, Plot, Plot!”

Minister Quintana calls Carlos Valverde a “drug dealer disguised as a journalist.”

Ouch.

The truckers’ union threatens to renew the nationwide blockade.

February 27

Cameras rolling, microphones on, Zapata’s aunt Pilar Guzman, who is now an ex-director at CAMC, proclaims that the Morales-Zapata child is not dead.

A veritable page-turner!

February 29

Evo asserts that Zapata lied to him in 2007. She said the baby had died.

Oh-oh. The populace is on tenterhooks.

El Vice presents a diagram showing links between Zapata and two right-wing parties – through the political preferences of her brother. Radio commentators remind us that El Vice’s brother is mentally ill.

I have a brother who’s an activist for Donald Trump.

With indignation, Evo demands that Zapata present the child within six days.

Get it together, Gaby! Everyone wants to see if the child wears \$4,000 suits like his dad.

February 29

Minister Quintana accuses the United States of trying to destabilize Bolivia economically by destroying its investment relations with China and Russia.

Despite my studied awareness that the age-old tactic of creating enemies strikes terror in the hearts of the citizenry – and builds

solidarity, I'm nervous. I need to lie low.

Quintana goes on. In her role as executive at CAMC, Zapata has entered the Ministry of the Presidency more than 40 times, stationing herself in the office that normally belongs to a first lady. Her working connection there, he asserts, is not Evo, it is a couple of sub-officials, who are now in jail.

If she was shilly-shallying about Evo's official workplace, didn't he see her?

March 2

In a press conference Minister of the Government Carlos Romero discloses that not only have death threats to Evo emerged on social networks, but a drone has been seen hovering over his house.

Minister of Defense Reymi Ferreira proclaims that the president is a modern-day Mahatma Gandhi/Joseph Stalin. Did someone hand him a script or did he make that up all by himself?

He also points a condemning finger at the US, the right wing, social networks, and the nation's newspapers and television stations. They have orchestrated a conspiracy against Morales.

Late that night, a "rare mobilization by police" on the block where Carlos Valverde lives catalyzes a late-night street blockade made of hundreds of neighbours, friends, and followers of the journalist. Thwarted by the crowd, the police leave. . .

Carlos is feeling a tad nervous, too.

March 3

On a TV news program the hostess asks Minister Romero about the hyped-up police presence in Valverde's neighbourhood. Romero: "Please . . . I don't understand the nature of that question . . . I'm working . . . I won't be pressed into this kind of idle trivia." He storms off the set.

Minister Quintana accuses the media of lying and announces that in the coming days several of them will be "disappeared."

Yikes!

The press reveals that Quintana was a

career officer in the Bolivian army during . . . President Hugo Banzer's right-wing dictatorship.

YIKES!

March 4

News agencies report on the couture "choices" in the Obrajes prison of queen of chic/corporate executive Zapata, saying that she "left behind her high-heeled sandals, to which she was accustomed, to don simple bathroom slippers."

Well, they are more comfortable.

March 5

Evo calls a CNN reporter working in Bolivia "a drug dealer on the lam from justice in the US."

Strange . . . We haven't heard a peep about the truck drivers. What about El Alto? There are droughts and hailstorms threatening food production, cocaine factories, paid-off judges within the justice department . . .

Political analysts report that the brouhaha is diverting the state from dealing with the emergency issues it faces:

1. the reduction of national exports by 35 per cent;
2. an increasing national debt, including \$7.5-billion owed to China;
3. the reform of a justice system fraught with fraud, favouritism, and discrimination;
4. citizen safety in an increasingly violent environ;
5. farm-to-factory narcotics production and trafficking; and
6. climate change that threatens Bolivia's food security.

They say the Morales-Garcia obsession with maintaining personal power as a root cause.

March 8

With members of the Bolivian military at his side, Evo warns that he is considering a proposal to "purge" the officials and civil servants who voted "NO" in the referendum.

This series is not over. Stay tuned. **CT**

Zapata has entered the Ministry of the Presidency more than 40 times, stationing herself in the office that normally belongs to a first lady

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Heather Mencken
is a Canadian photojournalist and writer currently traveling through Latin America. Her book, One if by Sea, Two if by Land, Three if by Internet, is soon to be published. This article originally appeared at
www.wildculture.com

The prime minister, his father and the tax haven

Daniel Margrain looks on as David Cameron keeps changing his story about the cash he inherited from his father. Photos by **Ron Fassbender**

By Tuesday afternoon, Number 10 had sent out yet another clarification – this time a clarification of their previous clarification

Prime Minister David Cameron's speech to Britain's House of Commons on April 11 was clearly intended to clear up once and for all his family's involvement in the Panama Papers scandal. Cameron had been pulled into the affair a week earlier, on April 4, when details of the offshore financial dealings of Ian Cameron, his late father, were featured in the first batch of "Panama Papers" documents leaked from the Mossack Fonseca law firm.

This is a major problem for Cameron because he has previously condemned tax reduction schemes, such as the one in which his father was accused of being involved. In 2012 he said, "Tax avoidance is morally wrong." Again, when the latest scandal first came into the open, he condemned people who tried to hide their money from the UK tax authorities. However, when the tax affairs of his own family were brought into the media spotlight, he changed his tune, this time claiming that such affairs were "a private matter."

The following day, he clarified his statement, saying, "In terms of my own finan-

cial affairs, I own no shares. I have a salary as prime minister, and I have some savings, which I get some interest from, and I have a house in which we used to live, which we now let out while we are living in Downing Street, and that's all I have."

Hoping to impress the British public with this expression of personal frugality, he added, "I have had no shares, no offshore trusts, no offshore funds, nothing like that. So I think that's a very clear description."

Not clear enough, it seems. That same afternoon, Number 10 Downing Street had sent out yet another clarification – this time a clarification of Cameron's previous clarification. This third clarification said, "To be clear, the prime minister, his wife and their children do not benefit from any offshore funds. The prime minister owns no shares." It then added, "It's time for people to either put up or shut up in relation to questioning Cameron's tax affairs."

However, it's clear the people won't shut up. Cameron will discover that his attempts to draw a metaphorical line in the sand in relation to this scandal won't be heeded in the way that he and his advisers would like. They have totally underestimated the pub-



GREEDY PIGS: London demonstrators show their contempt for David Cameron and his Conservative Party during a protest against his entanglement in the Panama papers scandal, which exposed massive international offshore tax avoidance.

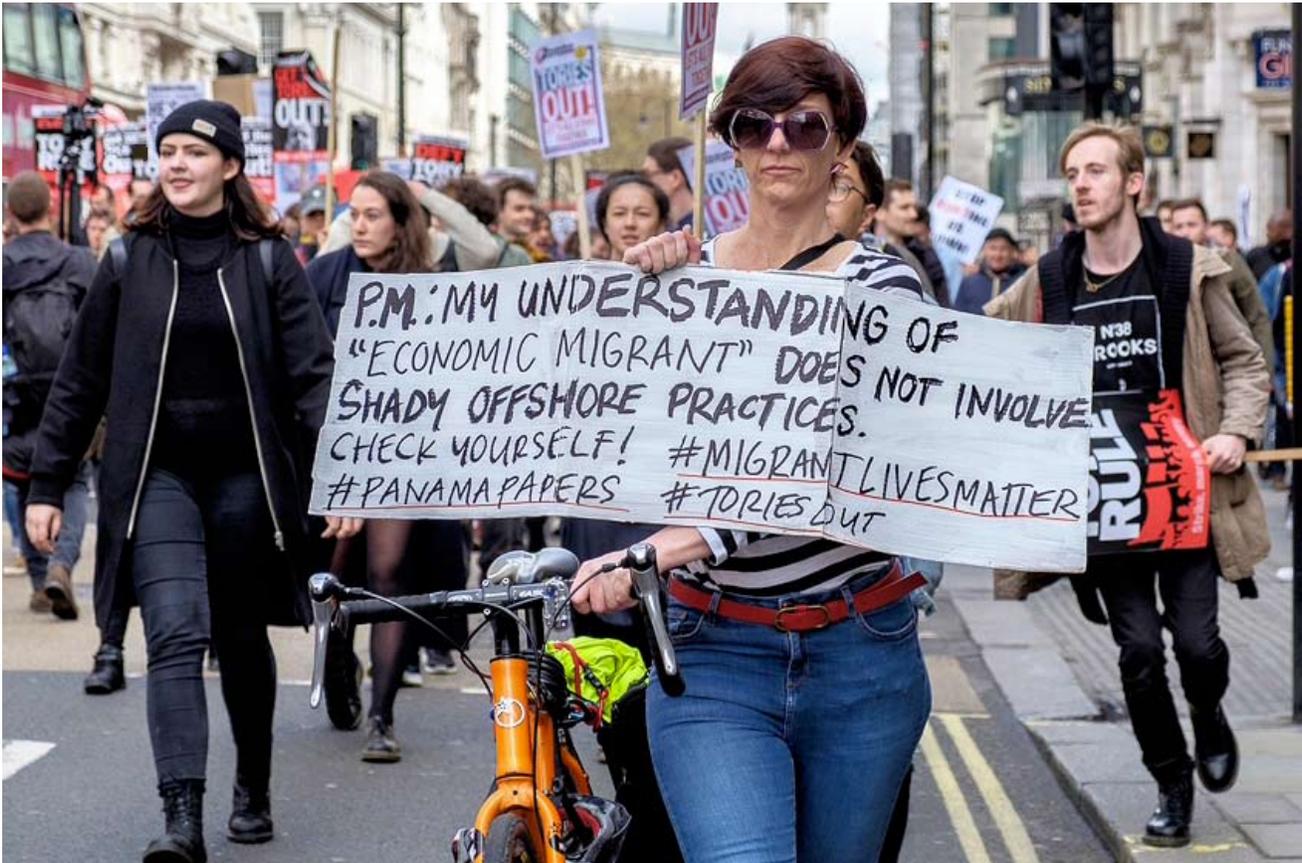


lic mood and the extent to which people recognize that a week of shenanigans represents merely the end of the beginning and not the beginning of the end. The public is only now warming up for the fun and games as Cameron tries to put his role in the scandal to bed.

So, it came as no surprise that, just as his troubles seemed to be over, there was a fourth clarification, on Wednesday, April 6, which claimed that, “There are no offshore funds or trusts which the prime minister, Mrs Cameron or their children *will* benefit from *in future*” (my emphasis). Crucially, Cameron’s lawyers and advisers had thus changed the tense.

Then, the next afternoon, there was a fifth clarification, when Cameron maintained that he had nothing to hide, as he revealed that both he and his wife had sold

Just when it seemed to be over, there was a fourth clarification – and then, a fifth



SIGN OF THE TIMES: A protestor points out that her idea of an 'economic migrant' does not include David Cameron.

Cameron said that his father had left him £300,000, but he couldn't reveal the source of every bit of the money because his Dad was no longer around to answer any questions

interests worth more than £30,000 in his father's offshore Blairmore investment fund, which "uses bearer shares to protect the privacy of investors." As with cash, whoever holds bearer shares owns them, but they are much more portable in that they can be moved around without leaving any paper trail. Consequently, due to the criminal implications associated with them, they have been banned in the UK – ironically, and embarrassingly for him – by none other than Cameron.

The prime minister insisted he didn't personally benefit from any funds from his father's tax efficient holdings, other than the £30,000 described. But, as the political satirist Mark Steel so brilliantly observed, this presupposes that a young David Cameron would have paid for his elite privately funded education at Eton, using money he had earned himself after having saved up while

undertaking a paper round.

When interviewed by ITV's Robert Peston, Cameron said his father had left him £300,000, but he couldn't reveal the source of every bit of the money because his dad was no longer around to answer any questions. Peston asked Cameron how he could have been certain that some of the £300,000 didn't come from offshore sources. The PM said he and his advisors couldn't be certain. So, unless Cameron spent the £300,000 on sweets and comics, then he is almost certainly currently bene-fitting from offshore funds.

It's hard to believe that Cameron would have been unaware of his father's financial dealings in Blairmore, given that he was himself involved in the Blairmore fund for 14 years (1996-2010). And the notion that he was somehow oblivious to the fact that Blairmore boasted that it was able to avoid



GO NOW: Rapper performs outside the Grand Connaught Rooms, where the Conservative Party was holding a conference.



TAGGED: A single word sums up how much a large part of the British public feels about the future of their prime minister.

UK tax, or that the British government MPs' Code of Conduct compels MPs to declare a financial interest to fellow MPs before participating in House of Commons business, is hard to take seriously.

As far as the political and media establishment are concerned, the revelation that Cameron was implicated in the Panama Papers scandal boils down to a question of PR/media mismanagement, as opposed to recognizing that his actions are immoral and, if the law is applied equally, possibly illegal enough to warrant a court appearance.

The rich members of British society are not above the laws that apply to the rest of us. Failing to participate in UK society, while presuming to tell the rest of us how it should be run, is incompatible with the idea of democracy. Democracy has become a by-word for a self-serving system

The rich members of British society are not above the laws that apply to the rest of us. Failing to participate in UK society, while presuming to tell the rest of us how it should be run, is incompatible with the idea of democracy



POETIC PROTEST: Placard draws attention to a previous scandal involving Prime Minister David Cameron.

The government places a greater emphasis on tackling benefit fraud which represents a relatively tiny proportion of revenue loss compared to the resources that go into tackling tax evasion and avoidance by the super-rich

in which MPs – 78 per cent of whom are millionaires, compared to just 0.7 per cent of the British population – effectively represent themselves and the interests of the wealthy. This probably explains why the government places a greater emphasis on tackling benefit fraud, which represents a relatively tiny proportion of revenue loss compared to the resources that go into tackling tax evasion and avoidance of the one per cent of the super-rich.

These kinds of cozy relationships and practices are contributing to an astounding rate of inequality in which 62 people currently own the same wealth as 3.6-billion people – 50 per cent of the world’s total population. In Britain, tax evasion and avoidance costs the UK treasury a massive £95-billion a year, enough to fund the entire NHS in England.

However, the biggest irony in this week

of strange shenanigans, was the fact that a demonstration held in Downing Street just a few days after the prime minister’s role in the Panama scandal had been exposed, was barely reported by the BBC. However, another demonstration held outside the Icelandic parliament against that country’s prime minister, who was named in the Panama scandal (and later resigned), received widespread coverage from the British national broadcaster.

You just couldn’t make this up! **CT**

Daniel Margrain, who lives in London, has a master’s degree in globalization, culture and the city. More of his political articles may be found at his blog at www.danielmargrain.com

Ron Fassbender is a London photographer. His Flickr feed is www.flickr.com/theweeklybull



HEADS UP: And this little piggy went to Panama ...

The war at school

Ex-Army Ranger **Rory Fanning** tells how he found a new mission in life – persuading kids not to sign up for the US military

I've been in search of creative ways to frighten myself, apparently to relive the moments in the military I said I never wanted to go through again

Early each New Year's Day I head for Lake Michigan with a handful of friends. We look for a quiet stretch of what, only six months earlier, was warm Chicago beach. Then we trudge through knee-deep snow in bathing suits and boots, fighting wind gusts and hangovers. Sooner or later, we arrive where the snowpack meets the shore and boot through a thick crust of lake ice, yelling and swearing as we dive into near-freezing water.

It took me a while to begin to understand why I do this every year, or for that matter why for the last decade since I left the military I've continued to inflict other types of pain on myself with such unnerving regularity. Most days, for instance, I lift weights at the gym to the point of crip-

pling exhaustion. On summer nights, I sometimes swim out alone as far as I can through mats of hairy algae into the black water of Lake Michigan in search of what I can only describe as a feeling of falling.

A few years ago, I walked across the United States with 50 pounds on my back for the Pat Tillman Foundation in an obsessive attempt to rid myself of "my" war. On the weekends, I clean my house similarly obsessively. And it's true, sometimes I drink too much.

In part, it seems, I've been in search of creative ways to frighten myself, apparently to relive the moments in the military I said I never wanted to go through again – or so a psychiatrist told me anyway. According to that doctor (and often I think I'd be the last to know), I'm desperately trying to recreate adrenalinizing moments like the one when, as an Army Ranger, I jumped out of an airplane at night into an area I had never before seen, not sure if I was going to be shot at as I hit the ground. Or I'm trying to recreate the energy I felt leaping from a Blackhawk helicopter, night vision goggles on, and storming my way

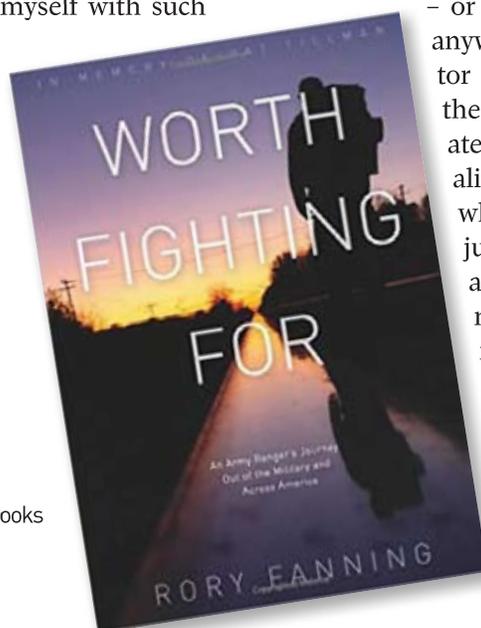
WORTH FIGHTING FOR

An Army Ranger's Journey Out of the Military and Across America

By **Rory Fanning**

Published by Haymarket Books

\$14.44 (Amazon.com)





CANON FODDER: Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) cadets from Western Michigan University.

Photo: Staff Sgt. Russell Lee Klika, US Army

I began speaking to high school students heavily propagandized by the US military on the charms, delights, and positives of war, American-style, about my own experiences and that, in turn, has been changing my life

into some nameless Afghan family's home, where I would proceed to throw a sandbag over someone's head and lead him off to an American-controlled, Guantánamo-like prison in his own country.

This doctor says it's common enough for my unconscious to want to relive the feeling of learning that my friend had just been blown up by a roadside bomb while on patrol at two in the morning, a time most normal people are sleeping. Somehow, at the oddest hours, my mind considers it perfectly appropriate to replay the times when rockets landed near my tent at night in a remote valley in Afghanistan. Or when I was arrested by the military after going AWOL as one of the first Army Rangers to try to say no to participation in George W. Bush's Global War on Terror.

I'm aware now, as I wasn't some years back, that my post-war urge for limits-

testing is not atypical of the home-front experiences of many who went to war in Afghanistan or Iraq in these years, and, for some of them, judging by the soaring suicide rates among Global War on Terror vets, the urge has proven so much more extreme than mine. But more than a decade after leaving the army as a conscientious objector, I can at least finally own up to and testify to the eeriness of what we all brought home from America's 21st-century wars, even those of us who weren't physically maimed or torn up by them.

And here's the good news at a purely personal level: The older I get the less I'm inclined towards such acts of masochism, of self-inflicted pain. Part of the change undoubtedly involves age – I hesitate to use the word “maturity” yet – but there's another reason, too. I found a far better place to begin to put all that stored up, jumpy

ANOTHER BATTLE

Schools in the poorest neighbourhoods in the city were being shut down at a record pace, and yet, somehow, his school district always had the money to supplement the Pentagon's funding of the JROTC (Junior Reserve Officer Training) program

energy. I began speaking to high school students heavily propagandized by the US military on the charms, delights, and positives of war, American-style, about my own experiences and that, in turn, has been changing my life. I'd like to tell you about it.

Filling in the blanks

The first time I went to speak to high school students about my life with the Rangers in Afghanistan, I was surprised to realize that the same nervous energy I felt before jumping into Lake Michigan or lacing up my gym shoes for a bone-shaking workout was coursing through my body. But here was the strangest thing: When I had said my piece (or perhaps I really mean "my peace") with as much honesty as I could muster, I felt the very sense of calmness and resolution that I'd been striving for with my other rituals and could never quite hang onto come over me – and it stayed with me for days.

That first time, I was one of the few white people in a deteriorating Chicago public high school on the far south side of the city. A teacher is escorting me down multiple broad, shabby hallways to the classroom where I am to speak. We pass a room decorated with eight American flags, four posted on each side of its door. "The recruiting office," the teacher says, gesturing toward it, and then asks, "Do they have recruiting offices in the suburban schools you talk to?"

"I'm not sure. I haven't spoken to any on this topic yet," I reply. "They certainly didn't have an obvious one at the public high school I went to, but I do know that there are 10,000 recruiters across the country working with a \$700-million a year advertising budget. And I think you're more likely to see the recruiters in schools where kids have less options after graduation."

At that moment, we arrive at the appointed classroom, and I'm greeted warmly by the social studies teacher who invited

me. Photos of Ida B. Wells, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and other revolutionary black leaders hang neatly on a wall. He first heard about my desire to talk to students about my wartime experiences through Veterans for Peace, an organization I belong to. "There is no counter-narrative to what the kids are being taught by the instructors in Junior ROTC, as far as I can tell," he says, obviously bothered, as we wait for the students to arrive. "It would be great if you could provide more of a complete picture to these kids." He then went on to describe his frustration he felt with a Chicago school system in which schools in the poorest neighbourhoods in the city were being shut down at a record pace, and yet, somehow, his school district always had the money to supplement the Pentagon's funding of the JROTC (Junior Reserve Officer Training) program.

The kids are just beginning to filter in, laughing and acting like the teenagers they are. I'm not encouraged.

"Okay, everyone, settle down, we have a guest speaker today," the teacher says. He oozes confidence of a sort I only wish I possess. The volume in the room dies down to something approaching a hush. They clearly respect him. I only hope a little of that will spill over in my direction.

I hesitate a moment and then start, and here's a little report from memory on at least part of what I said and what happened:

"Thanks," I begin, "for having me in today. My name is Rory Fanning, and I'm here to tell you why I joined the military. I'll also talk about what I saw while I was in that military, and why I left before my contract was up." The silence in the classroom stretches out, which encourages me, and I plunge on.

"I signed up for the Army Rangers to have my student loans paid for and to do my part to prevent another terrorist attack like 9/11 . . . My training was sometimes difficult and usually boring . . . A lot of food

and sleep deprivation. Mostly, I think my chain of command was training me in how to say yes to their orders. The military and critical thinking don't mix too well . . ."

As I talk on about the almost indescribable poverty and desperation I witnessed in Afghanistan, a country that has known nothing but occupation and civil war for decades and that, before I arrived, I knew less than nothing about, I can feel my nervousness abating. "The buildings in Kabul," I tell them, "have gaping holes in them, and broken-down Russian tanks and jets litter the countryside."

I can hardly restrain my amazement. The kids are still with me. I'm now explaining how the US military handed out thousands of dollars to anyone willing to identify alleged members of the Taliban and how we would raid houses based on this information. "I later came to find out that this intelligence, if you could call it that, was rooted in a kind of desperation." I explain why an Afghan in abject poverty, looking for ways to support his family, might be ready to finger almost anyone in return for access to the deep wells of cash the US military could call on. In a world where factories are few, and office jobs scarce indeed, people will do anything to survive. They have to.

I point out the almost unbearable alien quality of Afghan life to American military officials. Few spoke a local language. No one I ever ran into knew anything about the culture of the people we were trying to bribe. Too often we broke down doors and snatched Afghans from their homes not because of their ties with either the Taliban or al-Qaeda, but because a neighbour had a grudge against them.

"Most of the people we targeted had no connection to the Taliban at all. Some even pledged allegiance to the US occupation, but that didn't matter." They still ended up with hoods over their heads and in some godforsaken prison.

By now, I can tell that the kids are truly

paying attention, so I let it all out. "The Taliban had surrendered a few months before I arrived in Afghanistan in late 2002, but that wasn't good enough for our politicians back home and the generals giving the orders. Our job was to draw people back into the fight."

Two or three students let out genuine soft gasps as I describe how my company of Rangers occupied a village school and our commander cancelled classes there indefinitely because it made an excellent staging point for the troops – and there wasn't much a village headmaster in rural Afghanistan could say to dissuade history's most technologically advanced and powerful military from doing just what it wanted to. "I remember," I tell them, "watching two fighting-age men walk by the school we were occupying. One of them didn't show an acceptable level of deference to my first sergeant, so we grabbed them. We threw the overly confident guy in one room and his friend in another, and the guy who didn't smile at us properly heard a gunshot and thought, just as he was meant to, that we had just killed his friend for not telling us what we wanted to hear and that he might be next."

"That's like torture," one kid half-whispers.

I then talk about why I'm more proud of leaving the military than of anything I did while in it. "I signed up to prevent another 9/11, but my two tours in Afghanistan made me realize that I was making the world less safe. We know now that a majority of the million or so people who have been killed since 9/11 have been innocent civilians, people with no stake in the game and no reason to fight until, often enough, the US military baited them into it by killing or injuring a family member who more often than not was an innocent bystander."

"Did you know," I continue, quoting a statistic cited from University of Chicago political scientist Robert Pape, "that 'from

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ANOTHER BATTLE

The students know next to nothing, for instance, about our recent history in Iraq and Afghanistan, or our permanent state of war in the Greater Middle East and increasingly in Africa

1980 to 2003, there were 343 suicide attacks around the world, and at most 10 per cent were anti-American inspired. Since 2004, there have been more than 2,000, over 91 per cent against US and allied forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries. I didn't want to be part of this, so I left."

Full disclosure

Chicago-area high school students aren't used to hearing such talk. The public school system here has the largest number of Junior ROTC students – nearly 10,000 of them, 45 per cent African American and 50 per cent Latino – of any school district in the country. And maybe so many of these kids are attentive exactly because the last thing JROTC instructors are likely to be discussing is the realities of war, including, for instance, the staggering number of homeless Iraq and Afghanistan veterans unable to assimilate back into society after their experience overseas.

When I urge the students to join me in a conversation about war and their lives, I hear stories about older siblings deluged by telemarketer-style calls from recruiters. "It's so annoying," one says. "My brother doesn't even know how the recruiter got his information."

"Recruiters have contact information for every junior and senior in this school," I say. "And that's the law. The No Child Left Behind Act, signed soon after 9/11, insists that your school hand over your information to the Department of Defense if it wants to receive federal funds."

Soon enough, it becomes clear that these students have very little context for their encounters with the US military and its promises of an uplifting future. They know next to nothing, for instance, about our recent history in Iraq and Afghanistan, or our permanent state of war in the Greater Middle East and increasingly in Africa. When I ask why so many of them signed up for the JROTC program, they talk about "leadership" opportunities and "struc-

ture" for their lives. They are focused, as I was, on having college paid for or "seeing the world." Some say they are in JROTC because they didn't want to take gym class. One offers this honest assessment: "I don't know, I just am. I haven't given it much thought."

As I grill them, so they grill me. "What does your family think about your leaving the military?" one asks.

"Well," I respond, "we don't talk about it too much. I come from a very pro-military family, and they prefer not to think of what we are doing overseas as wrong. I think this is why it took me so long to speak honestly in public about my time in the military."

"Did other factors weigh on your decision to talk openly about your military experience, or was it just fear of your family's response?" an astute student asks.

And I answer as honestly as I can: "Even though, as far as I know, I did something no one in the Rangers had yet done in the post-9/11 era – the psychological and physical vetting process for admission to the Ranger Regiment makes the likelihood of a Ranger questioning the mission and leaving the unit early unlikely – I was intimidated. I shouldn't have been, but my chain of command had me leaving the military looking over my shoulder. They made it seem as if they could drag me off to jail or send me back into the military to be a bullet stopper in the big army at any time if I ever talked about my service in the Rangers. I did after all, like all Rangers, have a secret security clearance." Heads shake. "The military and paranoia go hand in hand. So I kept quiet," I tell the kids. "I also started reading books like Anand Gopal's *No Good Men Among the Living*, a reporter's brilliant story of our invasion of Afghanistan as told from the perspective of actual Afghans. And I began meeting veterans who had experiences similar to mine and were speaking out. This helped boost my confidence."

“Is the military like Call of Duty?” one of the students asks, referring to a popular single-shooter video game.

“I’ve never played,” I respond. “Does it include kids who scream when their mothers and fathers are killed? Do a lot of civilians die?”

“Not really,” he says uncomfortably.

“Well, then it’s not realistic. Besides, you can turn off a video game. You can’t turn off war.”

A quiet settles over the room that even a lame joke of mine can’t break. Finally, after a silence, one of the kids suddenly says, “I’ve never heard anything like this before.”

What I feel is the other side of that response. That first experience of talking to America’s future cannon fodder confirms my assumption that, not surprisingly, the recruiters in our schools aren’t telling the young anything that might make them think twice about the glories of military life.

I leave that school with an incredible sense of calm, something I haven’t felt since my time began in Afghanistan. I tell myself I want to speak to classrooms at least once a week. I realize that it took me 10 years, even while writing a book on the subject, to build up the courage to talk openly about my years in the military. If only I had begun engaging these kids earlier instead of punishing myself for the experience George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, and their cohorts put me through. Suddenly, some of my resident paranoia seems to melt away, and the residual guilt I still felt for leaving the Rangers early and in protest – the chain of command left me believing that there was nothing more cowardly than “deserting” your Ranger buddies – seems to evaporate, too.

My thought now is full disclosure going forward. If a teenager is going to sign up to kill and die for a cause or even the promise of a better life, then the least he or she should know is the good, the bad,

and the ugly about the job. I had no illusions that plenty of kids – maybe most of them, maybe all of them – wouldn’t sign up anyway, regardless of what I said. But I swear to myself: No moralism, no regrets, no judgments. That’s my credo now: Just the facts as I see them.

A new mission

I’m on an operation and that feels strangely familiar. Think of it as a different way to be a Ranger in a world that will never, it seems, be truly postwar. But, as with all things in one’s mind, easier said than done. The world, it turns out, is in no rush to welcome me on my new mission.

I start making calls. I create a website to advertise my talk. I send out word to teacher friends that I’m available to speak in their schools. I’m prepared for my schedule to fill up within weeks, but a month passes, and no one calls. The phone just doesn’t ring. I grow increasingly frustrated. Fortunately, a friend tells me about a grant sponsored by the Chicago Teachers Union and designed to expose kids to real-world educational experiences they may not hear about in school. I apply, promising to speak to 12 of the 46 schools in Chicago with JROTC programs during the 2015/2016 school year. The grant comes through in September, and better yet, it promises that each student I talk to will also get a free copy of my book, *Worth Fighting For*.

I don’t for a second doubt that this will ensure my presence in front of classrooms of kids. I have nine long months to arrange meetings with only 12 schools. I decide that I’ll even throw in some extra schools as a bonus. I create a Facebook page so that teachers and principals can learn about my talk and book me directly. Notices of both my website and that page are placed in teacher newsletters and I highlight the Chicago Teachers Union endorsement in them. I’m thinking: Slam dunk! I even advertise on message boards, spend money

That first experience of talking to America’s future cannon fodder confirms my assumption that, not surprisingly, the recruiters in our schools aren’t telling the young anything that might make them think twice about the glories of military life

ANOTHER BATTLE

In 2015, the US government spent \$598-billion on the military, more than half of its total discretionary budget, and nearly 10 times what it spent on education

on targeted ads on Facebook, and again reach out to all my teacher friends.

It's now April, seven months into the school year, and only two teachers have taken me up on the offer to speak. "He was comfortable and engaging with the students and in the students' reflections the following day he was someone that the students clearly enjoyed talking with. I will definitely ask him to come back to speak to my classes every year," wrote Dave Stieber, one of those teachers.

It's finally starting to dawn on me, however. In our world, life is scary, and I'm not the only one heading for Lake Michigan on cold winter mornings or gloomy nights. Teachers out there in the public schools are anxious, too. It's dark days for them. They are under attack and busy fighting back against school privatization, closures, and political assaults on their pensions. The popular JROTC program is a cash cow for their schools, and they are discouraged from further rocking a boat already in choppy waters.

"You'll bring too much tension to our school," one teacher tells me with regret. "Most of my kids need the military if they plan on going to college," I hear from another who says he can't invite me to his school anyway. But most of my requests simply go out into the void unanswered. Or promises to invite me go unfulfilled. Who, after all, wants to make waves or extracurricular trouble when teachers are already under fierce attack from Mayor Rahm Emanuel and his unelected school board?

Lifeline for permanent war

I understand and yet, in a world without a draft, JROTC's school-to-military pipeline is a lifeline for Washington's permanent war across the Greater Middle East and parts of Africa. Its unending conflicts are only possible because kids like those I've talked to in the few classrooms I've visited continue to volunteer. The politicians and the school boards, time and again, claim

their school systems are broke. No money for books, teacher's salaries and pensions, healthy lunches, etc. . . .

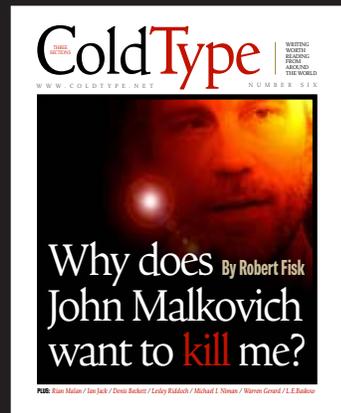
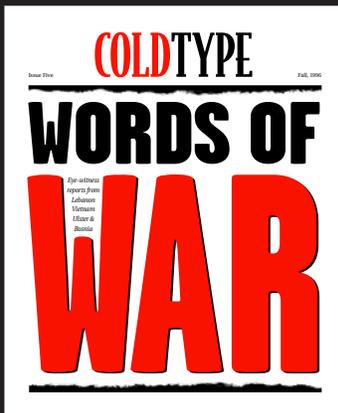
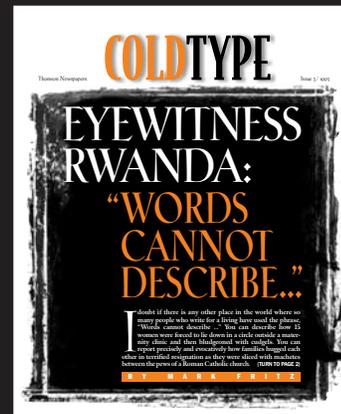
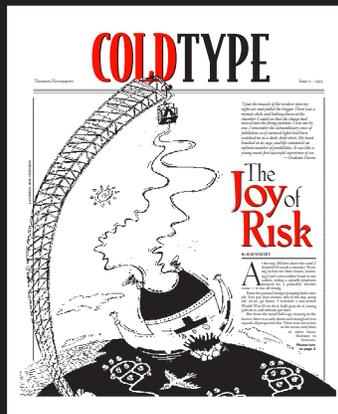
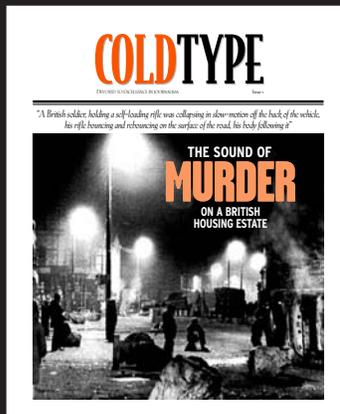
And yet, in 2015, the US government spent \$598-billion on the military, more than half of its total discretionary budget, and nearly 10 times what it spent on education. In 2015, we also learned that the Pentagon continues to pour what, it is estimated, will in the end be \$1.4-trillion into a fleet of fighter planes that may never work as advertised. Imagine the school system we would have in this country if teachers were compensated as well as weapons contractors. Confronting the attacks on education in the US should also mean, in part, trying to interrupt that school-to-military pipeline in places like Chicago. It's hard to fight endless trillion-dollar wars if kids aren't enlisting.

Just the other day I spoke at a college in Peoria, three hours south of Chicago. "My brother hasn't left the house since returning home from Iraq," one of the students told me with tears in her eyes. "What you said helped me understand his situation better. I might have more to say to him now."

It was the sort of comment that reminded me that there is an audience for what I have to say. I just need to figure out how to get past the gatekeepers. Believe me, I'll continue to write about, pester, and advertise my willingness to talk to soon-to-be-military-age kids in Chicago. I'm not giving up, because speaking honestly about my experiences is now my therapy. At the end of the day, I need those students as much as I think they need me. **CT**

Rory Fanning is the author of *Worth Fighting For: An Army Ranger's Journey Out of the Military and Across America* and co-author of the forthcoming book *Long Shot: The Struggles and Triumphs of an NBA Freedom Fighter*. You can reach out to him on Twitter at @rtfanning. This excerpt was first published at www.tomdispatch.com

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Cuba, baseball, my dad and Obama

The Cuban and American people would rather watch baseball together than be enemies, writes **Dell Franklin**

Dad remembered Fidel Castro as a polite kid wanting to be a ballplayer, who working out with his team

I was four when we lived in Havana, and, though I recall nothing concrete, my mind conjures swirling images of bright colours, energetic activity, non-stop fast-talking voices, and rousing music. My dad, Murray Franklin, was playing professional baseball in Cuba in 1946/47 during the winter after a season in Tampico, Mexico, where he had jumped from the big leagues – he played for Detroit Tigers in 1941/42 – for better money.

On my wall is a small black-and-white framed photo of him with his Cuban teammates, the only American among black- and lighter-skinned men of Spanish ancestry, against the backdrop of a rickety stadium.

A man of high passion and strong opinion, Dad learned Spanish while playing in Mexico, and loved Cuba. Raised in the Great Depression and having served in the Second World War, he was convinced the secret to life was to make the best of every situation, ignore hardship and differences in culture, and concentrate on the joy of relating to people and their customs.

Dad remembered Fidel Castro as a polite kid, who wanted to be a ballplayer. Castro, who worked out with his team, he said, had a “decent glove as an infielder for a tall gangly kid, but couldn’t hit a bull in the ass with a base fiddle as a hitter.”

Dad also talked of the fans: “It was love-hate. They were rabid, much more so than

American fans, even New York, Detroit and Philly fans, who were real wolves. Cuban fans bet on games, bet on innings, bet on at-bats. The cities and towns practically closed down when there was a game. People came to the park or listened on radio. They were rough on you if you didn’t produce, and if you were an American with a big name and came down and laid an egg, they would literally run you out of town. I was fortunate to play well down there until the malaria I got from the South Pacific during the war recurred.”

My mother said: “No matter how poor they were, the Cuban people were good-natured and happy about what they had. There was a spirit and a soul about them; they were not afraid to reach out and embrace you. At night, Murray and I would go out after the games, very late, because it was so exciting, and we had not seen each other for almost two years while he was away during the war. We would go to the cantinas and clubs, and there was always music. The people loved to dance, we loved to dance, and the parks were always full of people playing games or playing music. There was so much life and excitement in Havana; it was a city of festivity that never shut down.”

Dad talked of his teammates, players such as Minnie Minoso and Sandy Consuegra. The black ones, including Minoso, were not allowed to play ball in America, no mat-



My dad's team in Cuba; he's in the back row, second from the right.

line was broken by Jackie Robinson. After that big day, Minoso, then in his thirties, finally established an illustrious career in the big leagues.

Dad said: "The Cubans played with a different emotion, what you would call flair. You could call them showboats. They were from a different culture. What I learned about them was that if you learned their language and were friendly they would do anything for you; they were very loyal. No matter how poor they were, they would take you into their homes, and they'd serve you their last plate of rice and black beans, because you were a guest. They thought about you first, a trait I find very rare and good in people, and one that I tried to copy, because it serves everybody better to share what they have. You are always learning in life, and my experience in Cuba taught me humility, even though I was a pretty humble guy to begin with and always appreciated what I had."

Cuban baseball players risk their lives to come to America to play the great game, possibly to live in freedom, make real money, and compete against the best, to show us just how great they really are.

They play with a different rhythm and instinct, pleasantly devoid of over-coaching and over-training, like the kids – Cobb and Ruth and the Gas House Gang – who grew up in the sandlots and dirt parks a century ago. It's so unlike the controlling and insane supervision and overexposure of American Little League and the structured and robotic techniques taught to American players. Cuban ball players are colourful, ours are not.

Imagine the culture shock of Cuban ball players coming to America and facing the vastness of our country, the huge shiny cars marauding our massive highways, the sudden big money, the freedom, the incredible hi-tech toys and the splendor of even our minor league systems, much less the luxury of the big leagues. Imagine their reaction to the tight-lipped grimness of the baseball tradition in America.

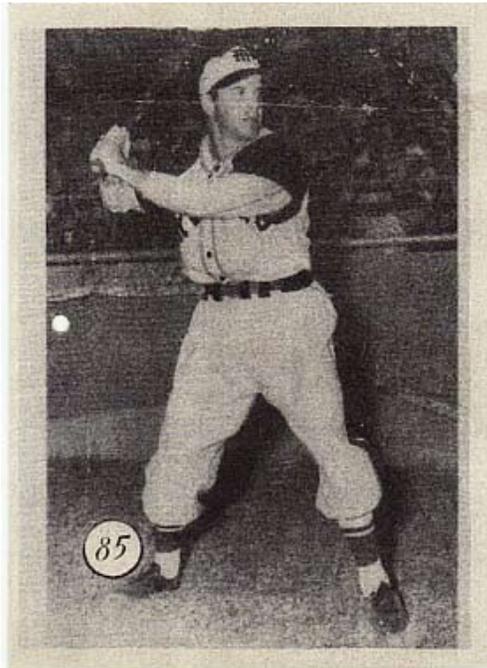
And then imagine our pampered players, raised in a culture of overabundance and entitlement, the best food and equipment and stadiums, going to Cuba and playing ball for a pittance, in seedy surroundings, for the love of the game.

Baseball, the USA's great game, is also

Imagine our pampered players, raised in a culture of overabundance and entitlement, the best food and equipment and stadiums, going to Cuba and playing for a pittance, in seedy surroundings, for the love of the game

SPORTING LIVES

Obama is trying to explain to the mindless knuckleheads in this country is that what he is trying to do is about people – their people, and our people



BIG HITTER: Murray Franklin, the writer's father, in Cuba during the early 1950s.

Cuba's great game, and now our president Barack Obama, is trying to renew relations with Cuba by using baseball as a bridge to build a new relationship.

Meanwhile, politicians on the right, squawk sanctimoniously about how Cuba is a communist country that punishes its people and denies human rights. At the same time, these same hypocrites wish to deny women in our country the right to make their own decisions on abortion, seek to deny black people the right to vote, and try to destroy the first healthcare provider in our country set up primarily for the poor. They hang on to a cold war mentality that has long ago dissolved, and a vicious occupational foreign policy that has failed miserably and infuriated most of the world.

We negotiate trade and exchange tourism with Vietnam and China, supposed enemies, and seem to have no problem with their regimes, or their propaganda against America. These countries also seem to have no problem with our history of exploiting Latin and South American governments for

decades, assassinating their leaders and replacing them with ruthless despots who do what we tell them in exchange for military support while they toss crumbs to their impoverished people and jail or murder them if they rebel. And for what?

What Obama is trying to explain to the mindless knuckleheads in this country is that what he is trying to do is about people – their people, and our people. It is about allowing their people to taste a little of what we have, while we taste a little of what they have. In that process, we can learn a little about each other without trying to turn their country into South Florida. It is about no longer demanding that THEY change before WE concede even to talk to them, because of their human rights record, or about us imposing our political philosophy and ideology on them, or boycotting their goods and placing embargos and strangling their economy and rendering their people poorer than they already are.

Cuba is a proud country with as many social ills as we have, but what it is really about is not politics, but people: Cubans and Americans would, if they were encouraged to socialize, have a few beers, forget about politics and history, and watch a baseball game together.

My father played professional baseball in the Pacific Coast league from 1949 until 1953. Afterwards he started his own business, was very successful, and although like everybody else he complained about taxes, he never veered from his compassion for the underdog and went out of his way to put people in the minorities in business, believing that just because he as a man was extraordinary – as both a gifted athlete and a man of intelligence and an uncommon social grace – others were less fortunate and needed a break in life.

At his funeral, in 1978, there was not enough room for people of all colors and denominations to sit, people who somewhere along the line he had helped because they needed it.

CT

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Execution exposes Israel's military culture

Cold-blooded execution shows Israel's contempt for human rights, says **Jonathan Cook**

It might have been the moment that jolted Israelis to their senses. Instead the video of an Israeli soldier shooting a young Palestinian man dead as he lay wounded and barely able to move has only intensified the tribal war dance of the Israeli public.

Last month, as the soldier was brought before a military court for investigation, hundreds of supporters protested outside. He enjoys vocal support, too, from half a dozen cabinet ministers, former army generals, rabbis and – according to opinion polls – a significant majority of the Israeli Jewish public.

It is worth reflecting on this generous act of solidarity.

It is hard to dispute the main facts. On March 24, two Palestinians – Abdel Fattah Al Sharif and Ramzi Qasrawi, both aged 21 – were shot during an attack on soldiers manning a checkpoint in the occupied city of Hebron in the West Bank.

Ten minutes later, the 19-year-old soldier at the centre of the investigation arrived. Qasrawi was dead and Al Sharif was lying in the road wounded. Other soldiers milled around, close by.

At that point, the soldier – who cannot be named because of a gag order – approached Al Sharif, aimed his gun at the young man's head and pulled the trigger.

All of this was captured on video, as was a trail of blood that leaked from Al Sharif's

head seconds later.

This was not a killing in the fog of war; it was a cold-blooded execution. As Amnesty International noted, such an act constitutes a war crime.

And yet, for most Israelis the soldier is the victim of this story. Some 57 per cent oppose an investigation, let alone prosecuting or jailing him, while 66 per cent describe his behaviour in positive terms, and only 20 per cent think criticism is warranted. Only a tiny five per cent believe the killing should be judged as murder.

Should this video and the aftermath serve just one purpose, it is to open a window on the rotten state of the Israeli body politic.

The incontestable evidence of Al Sharif's execution is challenging Israeli Jews to maintain the deception, among themselves and to outsiders, that the institutions of their tribal, ethnic state have any abiding commitment to universal values and human rights.

Claims of morality

For decades Israel has trumpeted its army as uniquely moral. The claim was always risible. But, in an era of phone cameras, hiding the systematic crimes of a belligerent occupying power has proved ever harder.

The past six months has seen a wave of

The incontestable evidence of Al Sharif's execution is challenging Israeli Jews to maintain the deception that the institutions of their tribal, ethnic state have any abiding commitment to universal values and human rights

TRIGGER HAPPY

When the soldier took his shot, his comrades registered not the least surprise that their prisoner had just been executed. This looked suspiciously like an event that had played out many times before

desperate attacks by Palestinians – mostly improvised, using knives and cars – to end the occupation. On-hundred-and-ninety Palestinians have been killed in this period. A number of the incidents have been captured on film. In a shocking proportion, Palestinians – including children – have been shot dead, even when they posed no threat to Israeli soldiers or civilians. In military parlance, this is called “confirming the kill.”

The latest video is distinctive not only because the evidence is so indisputable, but also because it exposes Israel’s wider military culture.

When the soldier took his shot, his comrades registered not the least surprise that their prisoner had just been executed. This looked suspiciously like an event that had played out many times before: standard operating procedure.

Back in December, Sweden’s foreign minister, Margot Wallstrom, spoke out against the Israeli army’s trigger-happy attitude. She was lacerated by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and barred from entering Israel.

A recent letter from 10 US senators – written before the Hebron killing – was made public, echoing Wallstrom’s concerns. Netanyahu was again indignant, saying his soldiers were not murderers.

Wallstrom was concerned that, by refusing to investigate or condemn obvious examples of summary executions, Israeli officials were sending a message to their soldiers and the wider Israeli public that they condoned such acts.

It is, therefore, hardly surprising that most Israelis feel this soldier is being singled out. His crime was not executing a Palestinian – that happens all the time – but being caught on film doing so. That was nothing more than bad luck.

The Israeli public did not reach this conclusion by accident. They have been schooled in a tribal idea of justice from a young age. Palestinians are not viewed as

fully human or deserving of rights.

That attitude has only intensified of late. Politicians from across the ideological spectrum have urged soldiers, police and armed settlers to kill any Palestinian who raises a hand against a Jew. The incitement has grown intense, and no one – from Netanyahu down – has spoken against it.

In fact, quite the reverse. The few Israeli organizations trying to protect Palestinian rights have come under concerted assault.

Breaking the Silence, a group helping Israeli soldiers turn whistle-blowers, was recently accused by the defence minister of treason. Israel is busy bullying and silencing the messengers, whether foreign diplomats or its own soldiers.

Netanyahu has left no doubt where his sympathies lie. His office issued a press release highlighting that he had called the father of the soldier to commiserate with him. Rabbis, too, are contributing to the mood music of this war dance. As supporters feted the Hebron soldier as a hero, one of the country’s two highest religious authorities, Yitzhak Yosef, the Sephardic chief rabbi, ruled that Israel’s non-Jews – some two-million Palestinian citizens – should either agree to become servants to Jews or face expulsion to Saudi Arabia.

Two weeks earlier, he told soldiers they were under a religious obligation to kill anyone who attacked them.

Terminating life

Note something else revealing about the Hebron soldier. He was serving in the medical corps. Although his job was to save lives, he believed his greater duty – in the case of Palestinians – was to terminate life.

He is no aberration. The other Israeli medics at the scene – including those affiliated with, and supposedly obligated by, the code of the Red Cross – can be seen ignoring Al-Sharif, despite his life-threatening wounds, and clustering instead around a lightly injured Israeli soldier. Palestinian

and Jewish life are patently not equal to these medics.

Many recent videos tell a similar story. In November, an Israeli ambulance drove past 13-year-old Ahmed Manasra as he lay bleeding from a serious head wound after his involvement in a stabbing attack in occupied East Jerusalem.

Then there are Israel's legal authorities. Israeli media reported earlier this month that the justice ministry had failed even to open an investigation into a policeman suspected of executing a Palestinian man following an attack last month near Tel Aviv, even though the moment was caught on camera. In the case of the Hebron soldier, the military court is already refashioning the soldier as the victim. In imposing a gag order preventing his identification, they have suggested to ordinary Israelis he is equivalent to a rape victim.

The prosecutors showed the pressure was getting to them – as it doubtless will later to the military judge – when they downgraded their accusations from murder to manslaughter. The army officer who presided over the hearing has already ef-

fectively freed the soldier, restricting him to his unit's base.

The Israeli public understands that this soldier is being investigated for appearance's sake, only because the evidence is there for all the world to see. He may not be a victim, but he is a scapegoat. He acted not just on his own initiative but in accordance with values shared by his unit, by the army command, by most Israeli politicians, by many senior rabbis, and by a significant majority of the Israeli public.

We should judge him harshly, but it is time to extend that censure beyond the lone soldier. Those who over many decades sent him and hundreds of thousands of others to enforce an illegal, belligerent occupation and taught them to view Palestinians as lesser beings are just as guilty. **CT**

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Jonathan Cook won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His latest books are "Israel and the Clash of Civilizations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East" (Pluto Press) and "Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair" (Zed Books). His website is www.jonathan-cook.net

In imposing a gag order preventing the soldier's identification, they have suggested to ordinary Israelis he is equivalent to a rape victim

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GRIM SIGHT: The communist-era apartment blocks of the Stolipinovo ghetto in Bulgaria.



In the ghetto . . .

Nate Robert ventures into the 'worst vacation spot on the planet' and finds fierce dogs, an angry man, and joyful dancing in the street

Here's poverty, disease and pollution: Welcome to Stolipinovo

Stolipinovo, a ghetto near the centre of Plovdiv, in Bulgaria, one of Europe's oldest and most historical cities, can safely be described as Third World: Poverty stricken, rampant with disease, heavily polluted, with an

estimated 50,000 predominantly Roma (gypsy) people densely packed into concrete communist-era apartment blocks, or surrounding shacks and shanties, many of whom survive without running water.

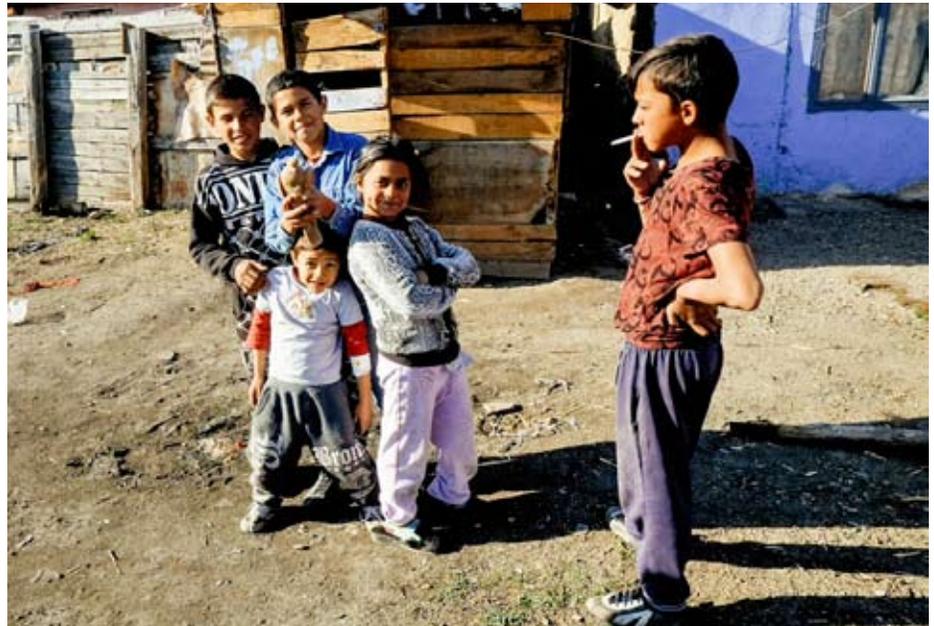
Much of the district is covered in a pu-



ABOVE:
These kids set up a makeshift bar on the street in front of their apartment building in Stolipinovo

ABOVE, RIGHT:
Gypsy chickens rule the mean streets.

RIGHT: Boy smokes a cigarette, as his pals look on.



trid sea of trash, while broken sewerage and water pipes leave large pools of fetid water along the main boulevards. Not so long ago, a hepatitis epidemic ran through the area. Unemployment and crime are rampant, and many children don't attend school.

Recently listed as the worst place on the planet to take a short vacation, it's been described as a parallel world that defies belief. So I decided to take a look for myself.

Along with a Nepalese photojournalist, and two local girls roped into providing translation duties, I walked to Stolipinovo from the city centre of Plovdiva, just a couple of kilometres away. Chatting along the

way, I discovered that neither of our translators had ever walked around "the ghetto," but both seemed nervously curious: Until now, they'd only seen tales from Stolipinovo in the local media – dominated by reports of drugs, murder, crime, and poverty. Now they would see for themselves just what the ghetto down the street was really like.

The girls didn't hang around for long, however. The area is full of garbage, and a revolting stench fills the air. And within a few minutes, we were warned by a grim-looking group of men, that Stolipinovo was perhaps not the best neighbourhood in which to be taking photos.

We were warned by a grim-looking group of men, that Stolipinovo was perhaps not the best neighbourhood in which to be taking photos.



BARKING MAD: A vicious dog fight scared away our two translators.

We stood nervously as two large dogs circled, biting, growling, and crashing through piles of debris,

Then, on cue, a vicious dog fight broke out on a main boulevard. We stood nervously as two large dogs circled, biting, growling, and crashing through piles of debris, before the bloodied beasts were brought under control by an elderly lady brandishing a large wooden pole.

I looked at the girls, and half-jokingly said, “Shit just got real.” Wide-eyed, they declared, “Nate, we are ready to leave now.” We walked them out to safety, and I went back to take a few more photos.

Unfortunately, the girls missed what happened next. A heavy-set man shouted aggressively at me from four levels up in

an apartment building. He motioned that I should wait, slammed his window, which then hurtled down, crashing to the ground in front of me. In the shadow of several apartment blocks, surrounded by dirt and mud, standing next to around 20 live sheep, I decided to wait.

Moments later, he came running from the front door, yelling. Then he grabbed my camera. We tussled for a while. I wouldn’t let go. We couldn’t understand each other. But the small crowd that gathered didn’t seem too concerned at the actions of this now-frothing man. Anyway, I hung on to my camera, he calmed down, and I got



EATING OUT: A lady standing behind me really wanted me to take a photo of this small market stand.

away unscathed.

Trust me, his behaviour was an exception, however. Apart from the camera-incident-jerk, the people here in Stolipinovo are among the most friendly I have met on my travels, and I didn't feel in danger at any time.

Many people said hello, had a chat, and shook my hand, a local café refused payment for my coffee, despite my insistence, and a few kids provided a small tour of the backstreets. Even the few people who were suspicious of our motives were friendly when they asked us to explain what we were doing in their neighbourhood.

However, we were greeted mainly by the smiles and laughter of happy people. The locals were actually dancing in the streets to the sounds of multiple sound systems blasting music around the 'hood. Invitations into homes and yards were being extended, and food and drinks were constantly being offered.

Now, that *never* happens when I stroll through a wealthy neighbourhood. **CT**

.....
Nate Robert specializes in travel photography. Since July 2012, he has been traveling the world full time, through 54 countries. His website is www.yomadic.com

The locals were actually dancing in the streets to the sounds of multiple sound systems blasting music around the 'hood

Can an undemocratic European Union survive?

Eamonn McCann wonders if the EU is going to collapse, whether or not Britain is still a member after its June referendum

Velkouleskou suggested that the Tsipras administration might climb down and swallow the bitter medicine “if they get pressured enough”

British Prime Minister David Cameron says that if the referendum on British membership in the European Union returns a majority for leaving, it would take two years to negotiate the terms of a new relationship. Others argue that the process could take 10 years.

If the 10-year estimate is right, the assumption that there will be an EU to leave may turn out to be ill-founded. The union is facing a series of challenges coming together in grim coordination.

Earlier this month, WikiLeaks published the minutes of a meeting on March 19, at which two leading officials of the International Monetary Fund discussed how to deal with the Greek debt crisis. It has been popularly assumed that this crisis had come to an end last July when the Syriza government capitulated to the EU, and accepted an austerity package more severe than measures rejected by a substantial majority of the Greek people in a referendum just a week previously.

The government of Alexis Tsipras was humiliated, the result of the referendum tossed away like a used tissue, and the Greek people told to tighten their belts another notch.

Who could ask for anything more? The IMF, as it happens.

The officials involved in the March meeting were Poul Thomsen, head of the IMF's European section, and the fund's “mission

chief for Greece,” Delia Velkouleskou. The meeting concerned the possibility of the Greek difficulty escalating into another full-blown crisis. Fresh austerity measures were needed, the two officials agreed – specifically, raising taxes, cutting pensions and reducing working conditions.

Thomsen complained that the Greeks “are not even getting close . . . to accepting our views.” Velkouleskou suggested that the Tsipras administration might climb down and swallow the bitter medicine “if they get pressured enough.”

As to whether the Greek people would placidly yield to pressure in the form of yet another forced reduction in their living standards, we may find out soon enough.

The Greek crisis reflects a broad rumbling beneath the surface. The notion of every country for itself is becoming the new common sense, in direct contradiction of the intended basis of the EU.

Crude nationalism is on the rise. In Greece, the anti-EU, anti-migrant, anti-Semitic Golden Dawn is taking easy advantage. Campaigning under a flag with a symbol resembling a swastika, the neo-fascist group recorded 500,000 votes in last September's general election, seven per cent of the poll, returning 18 MPs. Five years ago, it was stuck on less than one per cent, with no representation in parliament.

More than 500,000 migrants arrived in

Greece last year. In the first three months of this year, another 150,000 made landfall. The EU plan to deport those who haven't established or claimed asylum, and to replace them on a one-for-one basis with "genuine" refugees, has begun to be implemented.

The numbers affected so far have been small. No violent resistance has been reported. But it's hard to see this continuing. Huge numbers fleeing violence, poverty and oppression are massed at the borders of the EU, fenced out with nowhere to go. They will keep coming, unceasing and uncontrollable. They cannot be expected to huddle in camps dependent on frugal charity without complaint. We may all hope for a resolution without tear gas and worse. But only a cock-eyed optimist could be confident that this is how it will be.

The difficulty in handling debt problems and the needs of migrants is compounded by the thoroughly undemocratic nature of the EU. In the Guardian earlier this month, former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis recalled his attempts last year to find common cause with EU colleagues.

After he made a plea for an easing of the terms of the bailout, explaining that this was the devout wish of the Greek people as

expressed in the recent election, German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble made a reply that should send shivers up the spine of every democrat: "Elections cannot be allowed to change the economic program of a member state."

Another finance minister consoled him: "Yanis, you must understand that no country can be sovereign today, especially not a small and bankrupt one like your own."

Varoufakis commented in his Guardian article: "The true meaning is that sovereignty is passé unless you are the United States or China or maybe Putin's Russia. Moreover, the Eurogroup, where most of Europe's important economic decisions are taken, is a body which doesn't even exist in European law, keeps no minutes of its procedures and insists its deliberations are confidential – that is, not to be shared with the citizens of Europe."

There is no democratic redress for any of the problems afflicting the EU. Discontent will either be bottled up or will erupt on to the streets. The EU may not survive. **CT**

Eamonn McCann is a writer and social activist based in Derry, Northern Ireland. This article was first published in the Irish Times.

"Elections cannot be allowed to change the economic program of a member state"

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Money for nothing

What should governments do when machines take our jobs?
Give everyone free money for doing nothing, suggests **David Tuffley**

But what about those people whose jobs are lost to automation? What if new jobs aren't created to replace them?

It was Groucho Marx who said, "While money can't buy happiness, it certainly lets you choose your own form of misery." Quite true, but what if there's no money coming in from work because your job's been taken over by a machine?

Low wage earners appear to be most at risk from automation. In February 2016, the Council of Economic Advisers (an agency within the Executive Office of the US President) issued an alarming report predicting that an 80 per cent or greater chance exists for people on basic incomes of US\$20 per hour or less to be made redundant by smart machines in the foreseeable future.

After them come the mid-range workers. Clearly, we need strategies to address any job losses arising through increases in automation.

Theoretically, just about any job that can be described as a process could be done by a computer-controlled machine. In practice though, many employers will decide that keeping a human in a job is preferable to automating it. These are jobs that involve some degree of empathy. Imagine telling a robot doctor what ails you in response to "please state the nature of your medical emergency."

But what about those people whose jobs are lost to automation? What if new jobs aren't created to replace them? What are

they to do if they can't earn a living anymore? This time it's Karl Marx, not Groucho, who comes to mind with the idea of giving people a universal basic income (UBI). This is raised as a possible remedy to any misery caused by rising unemployment from job automation.

Put simply, a UBI is a pump-priming minimum income that is unconditionally granted to all on an individual basis, without any means test or work requirement. It eliminates the poverty traps that the poor fall into when welfare payments have many conditions and are administered by large and inflexible bureaucracies.

Raising hackles

The suggestion of free money is sure to raise many peoples' hackles. But, this seemingly outrageous idea is being taken seriously enough to be tested by a growing number of governments around the world, including those of Finland, the Netherlands and Canada.

Meanwhile, Switzerland will hold a referendum in June on whether to include a flat monthly payment of 2,500 Swiss Francs to all adults, and a reduced flat payment of 625 Swiss Francs to children.

Some commentators, such as former US labour secretary Robert Reich, consider a form of guaranteed national income to be "almost inevitable."



Jiuguang Wang

And the US libertarian think-tank, the Cato Institute, last May published an analysis on the pros and cons of a guaranteed national income.

In the Netherlands, the provincial capital of Utrecht is planning a trial that it calls See What Works. This model is showing other governments how to go about their own trials. Four types of UBI will be tested over two years.

The first type gives people a basic income of around €850 per month, requiring nothing in return, no reciprocal obligation. People are allowed to earn as much additional income as they desire.

The second gives people the UBI, but requires them to do volunteer community work to qualify for the full €850. Non-volunteering recipients receive a reduced amount.

The third type offers additional money for volunteering, while the fourth gives people the €850, but does not allow them to do any work. A control group rounds out the trial.

What about welfare?

Under existing welfare arrangements, some people are already being paid even if they don't work.

Non-means-tested income would encourage people to work to supplement their

basic income, an arrangement that would suit the rising class of freelance and casual workers in today's information economies.

A basic income is described by some advocates in Silicon Valley as venture capital for poor people. They see it as enabling a pool of creative talent that has good ideas but not the means to pursue their projects and create the dynamic new industries that will be key to future prosperity.

Where will the money come from?

Advocates suggest that much of the funding currently going into welfare, state pensions, tax credits and various poverty alleviation schemes could be redeployed to fund a UBI to achieve better results.

More savings can be made by reducing the size of the government bureaucracies that administer them. Big government becomes smaller government.

The shortfall would need to be funded from tax revenue, and therein lies the rub. Raising taxes is never popular, particularly with those already saddled with heavy tax burdens.

But one thing is for sure: automation will continue to change the nature of employment, forcing economic restructuring whether we like it or not. There is pain ahead, and no avoiding it.

As counter intuitive as it might seem to those of us with a traditional work ethic (myself included), a UBI is worth exploring as a simple solution to a complex problem.

We must not underestimate the value of untapped human capital – people with the desire and capacity to be engaged and creative. If they do not need to take a menial job to cover their living expenses, they will have time to do more interesting things that are of benefit to society. **CT**

.....
David Tuffley is a senior lecturer in applied ethics and socio-technical studies, at Griffith University, in Queensland, Australia. This article originally appeared at www.theconversation.com

If people do not need to take a menial job to cover their living expenses, they will have time to do more interesting things that are of benefit to society

The wages of sin

Massive societal change, such as that in post-industrial USA, brings dysfunction, misery, suffering – and revolution, writes **Chris Hedges**

Plastic surgeons who provide the illusion of eternal youth, religious leaders who promise a return to a simplified Biblical morality, political demagogues who hold out the promise of a renewed greatness, and charlatans offering techniques for self-advancement and success, all peddle magical thinking

When Plato wrote *The Republic*, his lament for a lost Athenian democracy, he did not believe democracy could be recovered.

The classical world, unlike our own, did not see time as linear, but cyclical. It inevitably brought decay and eventually death. This was true for both individuals and societies. In *The Republic*, Plato proposed that those who attempted in the future to create the ideal state carry out a series of draconian measures, including banning drama and music, which diverted the citizen from performing civic duties and instilled corruption, and removing children from their parents to provide a proper indoctrination. Plato wanted to slow the process of dissolution. He wanted to stymie change. But that decay and death would come was certain, even in Plato's ideal state.

History has proved the ancient Greeks correct: All cultures decay and die. Dying cultures, even when they cannot fully articulate their reality, begin to deeply fear change. Change, they find, brings with it increasing dysfunction, misery and suffering. This fear of change soon becomes irrational. It compounds decay and accelerates morbidity.

To see modern-day victims of this process, we need only look to white American workers who once had good manufacturing jobs and benefited from the structures

of white supremacy.

Those who promise to miraculously roll back time rise up in decaying cultures to hypnotize a bewildered and confused population. Plastic surgeons who provide the illusion of eternal youth, religious leaders who promise a return to a simplified Biblical morality, political demagogues who hold out the promise of a renewed greatness, and charlatans offering techniques for self-advancement and success, all peddle magical thinking. A desperate population, fearing change, clamours for greater and greater illusion. The forces that ensure collective death – including corporate capitalism, the fossil fuel industry and the animal agriculture industry – are blotted out of consciousness.

Jobs are gone. Schools are closed. Neighbourhoods and cities are in ruin. Despair and poverty dominate lives. Civil liberties are abolished. War is endless. The society self-medicates. Democracy is a fiction. Austerity decisions by government, such as the latest slashing of the US federal food stamp program, a move that could remove a million people from the rolls, bring more jolts. Shocks like these, as Alvin Toffler wrote, eventually trigger emotional overload; they are “the shattering stress and disorientation that we induce in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time.” And, finally, reality is too much to



The New Jersey city of Elizabeth was devastated by the 1982 closure of its Singer plant, which had been built in 1873, and at one time had 10,000 workers. The city was built around the sprawling plant

DEATH OF A CITY: The massive 1.4-million-sq ft Singer sewing machine factory once employed 10,000 people in Elizabeth, NJ. Now the city is a hollowed-out shell. Photo: Mario Burger

bear and is banished.

Climate change and the looming financial crisis will transform these emotional short circuits into what anthropologists call “crisis cults.” Crisis cults serve up illusions of recovered grandeur and empowerment during times of collapse, anxiety and disempowerment. A mythologized past will magically return. The old social hierarchies and rules will again apply. Prescribed rituals and behaviors, including acts of violence to cleanse the society of evil, will vanquish malevolent forces. These crisis cults – they have arisen in most societies that faced destruction, from Easter Island to Native Americans at the time of the 1890 Ghost Dance – create hermetically sealed tribes. We are already far down this road.

White collar remnants

I spent a recent weekend in the Second Presbyterian Church in Elizabeth, New Jersey, helping to clear out piles of old books, church records, plastic flowers, worn choir robes and other detritus that were dusty

remnants of the white working-class congregation that filled these pews a few decades ago.

Elizabeth was devastated by the 1982 closure of its Singer plant, which had been built in 1873, and at one time had 10,000 workers. The 1,000 or so African-Americans at the plant worked mostly in a foundry that made cast-iron parts for the sewing machines. The work was poorly paid and dangerous. White workers, many of them German, Italian, Irish, Jewish, Polish or Lithuanian immigrants, dominated the safer and better-paid factory floor. The city was built around the sprawling plant. Generations of residents organized their lives and their families on the basis of Singer jobs or income that the facility indirectly produced. And then, after a long decline, the factory was gone.

In 1982, the year Singer closed its flagship factory in Elizabeth, there were 2,696 plant shutdowns across the United States, resulting in 1.3-million job losses. Singer workers in Elizabeth under the age of 55 lost all retire-

Most of these former manufacturing hubs have seen whites flee. Hispanics and blacks, living in terrible poverty, now populate decaying neighbourhoods there. Sixty per cent of Elizabeth's population today is made up of Latinos, many from Central America

ment benefits, even if they had worked for the company for decades. Small businesses in the city that depended on the plant went bankrupt.

In post-industrial cities across America it is now clear, after the passage of years, that the good jobs and stability once provided by factories such as the Singer plant have been lost forever. The pent-up anger and frustration among the white working class have given birth to dark pathologies of hate. The hate is directed against those of different skin colour or ethnicity, who somehow seem to have heralded the changes that destroyed families and communities.

This sentiment, on display at Donald Trump rallies, will outlive his election campaign, even should the candidate be, as I expect, deposed by the party elites. It presages violence against all who appear to have been empowered at the expense of the white working class – African-Americans, Muslims, undocumented workers, homosexuals, feminists, artists and intellectuals – and will feed the rise of a Christianized fascism.

“Generations from the same family worked for Singer,” the Rev. Michael Granzen, the senior minister at the Elizabeth church, said of the white workers who lost their jobs. “They suffered, when the plant was closed, not only economic loss, but also a loss of identity. They were stripped of their daily work routines. They lost social bonds. They no longer had generational goals. They lost hope in the future. They could no longer count on a steady income, health coverage and a secure retirement. Marriages and neighbourhoods were torn apart. There was an increase in domestic violence, drug use, alcoholism and crime.

“Many white blue-collar workers blamed and scapegoated the newer black and Latino workers for the plant closure,” he said. “White racism is largely about this loss of self-worth. It is about the fear of nihilism. It creates a false grandiosity to compensate for a deep insecurity. We see this dynamic

being played out in post-industrial cities across the country.”

Most of these former manufacturing hubs have seen whites flee. Hispanics and blacks, living in terrible poverty, now populate decaying neighbourhoods there. Sixty per cent of Elizabeth's population today is made up of Latinos, many from Central America.

Colony of the poor

Elizabeth, like many other cities, has become an internal colony of the poor. It helps provide the bodies that feed the system of mass incarceration. And it, along with other suffering urban centres, has been turned into a toxic dumping ground. “The environmental hazards multiplied in the years after Singer closed,” Granzen said. “As with other cities experiencing industrial decline in New Jersey – such as Camden, Newark, Trenton and Patterson – white-controlled political structures in the state turned to dumping hazardous and toxic wastes in cities like Elizabeth, which already had their own toxic legacies. The ethos of racial profiling that undermined the worth of non-white bodies was reflected in this environmental racism. The lives of non-whites were seen as of lesser value.”

The insidious forms of institutional racism that define America explode as societal death approaches. They express themselves in displays of racial violence. White vigilante groups, desperate to prevent further change, engage in the same use of indiscriminant lethal force practised by police against unarmed people of colour. The continued failure by government to reintegrate the working class back into the economy, to give people hope, dooms us all.

Plato begins *The Republic* by having Socrates go to the port at Piraeus, the most decadent spot in ancient Athens. It was filled with taverns and brothels. It was home to thieves, prostitutes, soldiers and armed gangs. Egyptian, Median, Germanic, Phoenician and Carthaginian sailors and

other foreigners – Athenians lumped them together as barbarians – congregated along the seafront. The port was also where the Athenian war fleet, made up of black trireme ships with bronze-sheathed rams on the prow, was stationed in rows of military boat houses. These warships helped turn Athens from a democratic city-state into an empire in the fifth-century BC. And, as Plato and his pupil Aristotle understood, the building of empire, any empire, extinguishes democracy.

The Greek polis, or city-state, soon to be swallowed up by the Macedonian empire, was the nucleus that – like early New England town halls in the United States – made it possible for an individual to be a political being, to have agency and a voice. Empire requires a centralized, authoritarian government that has no use for the demos. Greek democracy, always a patriarchy, was with the rise of empire extinguished. Corruption and a lust for power defined the new ruling elites. The citizen, as in our system of “inverted totalitarianism,” became irrelevant. As the Athenian general Thucydides noted, the tyranny that Athens imposed on the outer reaches of empire, it eventually imposed on itself. Athens, like the United States centuries later, was hollowed out from the inside by the corrosive force of empire. The brutal tools of control used initially in distant parts of the empire – in our case militarized police, drones, suspension of civil liberties, wholesale surveillance and mass incarceration – migrated back to the homeland. This is how most empires die. They commit suicide.

The loss of civic virtue, Plato wrote, left a population hypnotized by the illusions flickering on the wall of a cave. Such distorted images of reality – our electronic hallucinations are beyond Plato’s imagination – fuel irrational beliefs and desires. They foster a visionless existence. Our images are skillfully manipulated by the elites to keep the population entertained and passive. Those who seek to question the illusions are, Socrates warned,

usually attacked and killed by the mob, which does not want its comforting myths punctured. When reality is too painful to bear, a population does not seek freedom or truth; it becomes an accomplice to its own enslavement. Epicureanism, the reduction of life to the pursuit of fleeting individual pleasure, seduces the public. Cynicism rules. Distrust is everywhere. The community breaks down, and, as Plato writes, “all goes wrong when, starved for lack of anything good in their own lives, men turn to public affairs hoping to snatch from thence the happiness they hunger for. They set about fighting for power, and their internecine conflict ruins them and their country.” This collapse creates a dream world “where men live fighting one another about elaborate shadows and quarreling for power, is if that were a great prize. ...”

At the end, death arrives as a relief.

We are no more immune to the forces of decay and death than were ancient Athens, ancient Egypt, ancient Rome, the Mayans, the Aztecs, Easter Island, Europe’s feudal society of lords and serfs, and the monarchical empires in early 20th-century Europe. Human nature has not changed. We will react as those before us reacted when they faced collapse. We will be increasingly consumed by illusion. We will seek to stop time, to prevent change, to embrace magical thinking in a desperate effort to return to an idealized past. This time, collapse will be planetwide. There will be no new lands to conquer, no new peoples to subjugate, no new natural resources to plunder and exploit. Climate change will teach us a brutal lesson about hubris.

The wages of sin, as Paul writes in his Letter to the Romans, is death – first moral and intellectual death and then physical death. The first, we already are experiencing. It would be reassuring to believe we could, as a species, avoid the second. But if human history is any guide, we are in for it. And the worse it gets, the more we seek to thwart change through magical thinking, the more our eventual extinction as a species is assured.

CT

Collapse will be planetwide. There will be no new lands to conquer, no new peoples to subjugate, no new natural resources to plunder and exploit. Climate change will teach us a brutal lesson about hubris

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Chris Hedges’
latest book, Wages of Rebellion, has just been released by Amazon Books. This essay was originally published at www.truthout.org

Man of the North

Granville Williams remembers Barry Hines, an author who brought passion and humanity to his novels about the struggles of the working-class

The emphasis of most news reports and obituaries after the death of Barry Hines was on Kes, the 1969 film adaptation of second novel, A Kestrel for a Knave

It was a foolish thought, really. My wife, Sue, and I heard the news that the writer Barry Hines had died as we were travelling home on the M62 motorway from Manchester. We were concerned that his passing would not be widely noted, because Barry, aged 76, had suffered from Alzheimer’s disease since 2007, and had been cruelly robbed of his creative voice before his death on March 18.

Hines, who is best known for his second novel, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, which was

later filmed as *Kes*, was born on June 30, 1939, in the South Yorkshire mining village of Hoyland Common, near Barnsley. When the mine shaft of Rockingham Colliery, where his father and grandfather worked, was sunk in 1875 and the pit houses built, they were surrounded by rolling fields and woodlands. The contrast between the natural rural beauty and pit village life feature strongly in his writing.

Hines went to Ecclesfield Grammar School, Sheffield, where he was an outstanding footballer, but he left without any qualifications to train as an apprentice mining surveyor. Admonished by a miner “for not using his brain,” he returned to college to study physical education (PE) at Loughborough Training College, where he wrote his football novel, *The Blinder* (published in 1966). He taught for two years in a London comprehensive school before returning north to teach in Yorkshire. Sport and the school experience are themes running through much of his work.



YORKSHIRE LIFE: Barry Hines’s first novel, *The Blinder*, was about football; his second, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, became the much-acclaimed movie *Kes*.

Photo: Tony Sutton

The response to Hines’s death, across print and broadcast media, has been truly remarkable. The emphasis of most news reports and obituaries was on *Kes*, the 1969 film adaptation of his second novel, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, published in 1968, whose title, from medieval laws governing the ownership of birds of prey – peregrines



ON THE BEACH: Barry Hines died after suffering from Alzheimer's disease for nine years. Photo: Mark Hodgkinson, Pomona Press

were for princes, while only kestrels were available to the lower orders – highlights the core of Barry Hines's work: working-class life and class inequality.

You get an insight into the themes and issues that captured the author's attention in the titles of his book collection, now lodged in his archive at the University of Sheffield, which includes 23 books on mining, many on aspects of the epic, year-long miners' struggle of 1984-85.

There is another book in the archive that gives a clue to how Barry Hines was launched as a writer. It is a 1980 anthology of poems, prose and songs, *The Northern Drift* by Alfred Bradley, a producer for BBC North in Leeds, who discovered and nurtured many northern writers between 1959 and 1980, several of whom achieved great success.

Bradley's *Northern Drift* program fostered regional talent, including writers Alan

Plater and Stan Barstow, along with the humour of Henry Livings and the touching, softly satirical songs and sketches of Alex Glasgow. Many writers have paid tribute to the part Bradley played in launching their careers. Alan Plater, who worked closely with him on *The Northern Drift*, observed, "The record speaks for itself. The Leeds studio's output of plays, short stories and anthology program such as the *Northern Drift* introduced the work of hundreds of new writers in recent years. Many of these have moved on to other market places, writing novels, stage and television plays, or films."

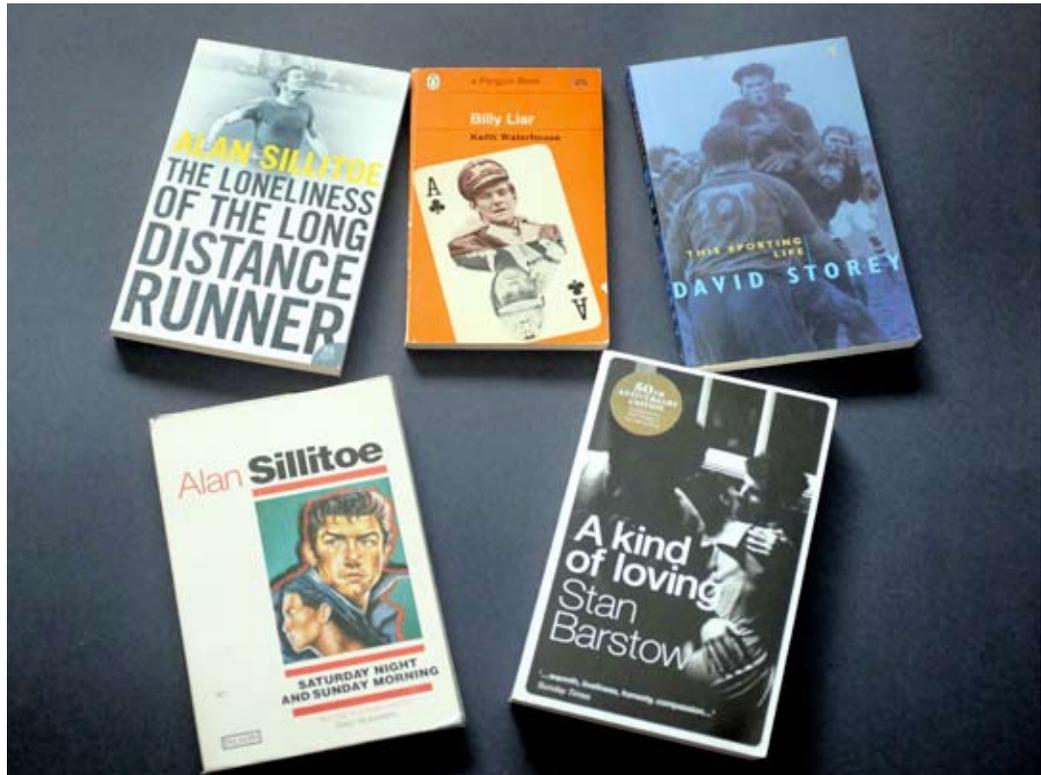
Barry Hines wrote a few pieces for Bradley, notably the fable-like *Billy's Last Stand* (1965), a radio play about an ageing labourer, Billy, whose life had been spent shovelling coal. When Billy is tempted into a business partnership with a ruthless entrepreneur, it ends in tears and bloodshed. *Billy's Last Stand* so impressed Bradley that he recommended that the BBC's Northern Region give him a bursary. With this reward, Hines took a trip to the island of Elba, where he wrote *A Kestrel for a Knave*.

When Bradley sent Hines to the BBC TV Centre in London, to see Tony Garnett, the BBC producer then making his name, along with Ken Loach, for gritty documentary-style dramas for the BBC's Wednesday Play, Garnett asked him to write a film. Hines refused, saying he had a novel to write. Eighteen months later, a typescript from Hines's agent, Sheila Lemon, landed on Garnett's desk. It was *A Kestrel for a Knave* and, after reading it in a day, Garnett decided it must be a film. The result was *Kes*, one of the most acclaimed British films of the late-20th-century.

Another important factor in Hines's success was the dramatic cultural shift in the mid-1950s away from what film director Lindsay Anderson, then active with Free Cinema, described as "a metropolitan, southern English culture."

When Tony Garnett asked him to write a film, Hines refused, saying he had a novel to write. Eighteen months later, a typescript landed on Garnett's desk. It was *A Kestrel for a Knave* and, after reading it in a day, Garnett decided it must be a film. The result was *Kes*, one of the most acclaimed British films of the late-20th-century

I remember the queues outside the cinemas in Leeds city centre as people crowded in to see their lives, their language, their experiences, their towns and cities reflected back at them on the big screen



BLAZING THE TRAIL: The late 1950s saw a surge in 'angry' young novelists, who based their writing on their own working class roots in the North of England. Photo: Tony Sutton

That shift was seen first in novels, such as Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958), and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1959); Keith Waterhouse's *Billy Liar* (1959); David Storey's *This Sporting Life* (1960) and Stan Barstow's *A Kind of Loving* (1960), all of which became top-rated films. I remember the queues outside the cinemas in Leeds city centre as people crowded in to see their lives, their language, their experiences, their towns and cities reflected back at them on the big screen.

The book, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, and its movie adaptation, *Kes*, were brilliant late flowerings of the northern creative moment of the 1960s, and they remain amazingly resilient. The writer and broadcaster Ian Clayton, a friend of Hines for more than 30 years, observes, "I have never read such a visual book. Barry, as a writer, operates using the three classic ways in which a film works. There are wide shots, his panoramas

with kestrels flying through the sky, buildings in the distance, and acres of farmland spread out above coal seams. Then you get the mid-shots, which are the streets where people are living, the working men's clubs, the shop where Billy pinches his comics and chocolates of a morning. Then you get close-ups on faces. You can see the fear in people's eyes. You can see the anger and ruthlessness in some people's faces, and you can see the gentleness. He's operating on these three very unusual filmic levels in the book, and I don't know a writer who had done that before."

The focus of *A Kestrel for a Knave*, the coal mining belt on the cusp of South and West Yorkshire, is Hoyland Common, the place where he was born. But his work didn't present a romanticized view of life in that mining community. "He's not frightened to portray the warts and all of working class life, and the novel manages to tiptoe

the line of showing the everyday brutality and negligence that's in these towns without pointing fingers," says Ian Clayton.

What is most striking about both the novel and the film, *Kes*, is that, although the main character, Billy Casper, is neglected by his mother, often thrashed by his older brother, and caned by his school headmaster, it's a realistic portrayal of the daily cruelties a young boy would have experienced at the time in tough mining towns. Billy suffers, but is not a victim, and the time he spends with his kestrel speaks to the human spirit of independence and defiance. And both the film and novel are laced with great comic scenes: Life is observed with a wry eye.

Barry Hines had an office at the top of the Arts Tower at Sheffield University, where he was a Yorkshire arts fellow in creative writing, between 1972 and 1974. His essay, *This Artistic Life*, in the anthology of the same title (Pomona Press, 2009) ponders



TOASTING FRIENDSHIP: Barry Hines, left, his wife, Eleanor Mulvey, and Ian Clayton, a close friend for more than 30 years.

the view from the office in the Arts Tower: "When people come up to my room, they look out of the window and say, 'It's not very inspiring is it?' . . . As it happens, the view from my window is very inspiring. 'What,' they say? 'Those horrible blocks of flats, all those mucky factories and all that smoke pouring out? Those ramshackle houses down there, that faceless council estate?' 'Well, yes,' I say. 'Most people live and work in places like that. And I can't think of anything more important to write about. Can you?'"

Of course, that view from the Arts Tower has now changed: The tower blocks are still there but the "steel city" of Sheffield is no more, and the industries beyond in South and West Yorkshire – engineering, textiles, coal mining, steel making – have largely disappeared.

Barry Hines's life and work remind us of a time when the daily struggles of people in the north of England were viewed with compassion, humanity and importance. We now live in different, more fractured, times, but there is some continuity. In 1992 the BBC established the Alfred Bradley Bursary award of £5,000 for writers new to radio, and the 1994 recipient was Lee Hall, a young writer from the north east, who went on to write the screenplay for the film, *Billy Elliot*, and the wonderful play, *The Pitmen Painters*, about the Ashington miners and their art class.

Barry Hines's death will draw people back to the substantial body of work he did beyond *A Kestrel for a Knave*, the 20 novels, plays, screenplays and television plays he created between 1966 and 1999, all of which are a powerful testament to the way art can give working people a sense of representation and pride. **CT**

Granville Williams is the editor of Pit Props: Music, International Solidarity and the 1984-85 Miners' Strike. Available from www.cpbf.org.uk

Billy, the hero of *Kes*, suffers, but is not a victim, and the time he spends with his kestrel speaks to the human spirit of independence and defiance



Yankee Doodle tailings pond, Butte area superfund site, Butte, Montana, 1986

Landscapes of failed desire

David T. Hanson's photographs highlight the dangers of unrestrained greed and environmental destruction, writes **Tony Sutton**

The author chronicles some of the major despoilation wreaked on the United States in the last century

For generations, industrial corporations have left chaos in the wake of their pursuit of wealth, plundering the countryside and shattering suburban communities. Profits extracted, they flee, leaving their mess to be cleaned up by often-reluctant government agencies.

In his new book, *Wilderness to Wasteland*, David T. Hanson turns the clock back to the 1980s in a photographic monograph that

chronicles some of the major despoilation wreaked on the United States over the past century.

The four sections of his book feature different types of devastation:

1. Atomic City, 1986: The largely-abandoned Atomic City, Idaho, was the site of the world's first electricity-generating nuclear power plant, when, in 1951, it generated enough power to illuminate a string of four



Fackrell's Texaco store and bar, Atomic City, Idaho, 1986

200-watt light bulbs. It was also the site of the world's first reactor meltdown before being decommissioned in 1964. Hanson's images show the remnants of a former boomtown, reduced to dilapidated shacks, shuttered stores and barely-habitable mobile homes stranded in the middle of a barren nowhere.

2. The Richest Hill on Earth, 1985-87: The vast copper, gold, silver, and zinc mines of Butte, Montana, were identified on a nearby road sign as "the greatest mining camp on earth, built on the richest hill in the world." That was then. Now, writes Hanson, "Reclamation in Butte will cost at least \$1-billion, but will not address the town's most serious environmental problems - including an extensive bedrock aquifer system that is permanently contaminated. Environmental



Fort Worth-Dallas Club, next to the Pantex nuclear weapons plant, Carson County, Texas.



Mt. Con Mine, Centreville, Butte, Montana, 1985.

Were it possible to fully reclaim the Butte site to its original condition, it would cost far more than all the mining revenues the “richest hill on earth” generated during its 140 years of production.

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3. Wilderness to Wasteland, 1985-86: Ranging from the seemingly mundane to the obviously calamitous, we see roads cutting through the wilds, housing development encroaching into the desert, and the scars that oil fields have left on previously-virgin soil. From this, the images progress to aerial shots of vast sores on the landscape: long-abandoned mines and steel plants, waste ponds, and discarded military sites.

4. Twilight in the Wilderness, 1982: Beautiful scenes taken at night, of power-producing plants in California, New England and Montana, are futuristic and apocalyptic vi-

sions of man’s desire for energy and light.

The ravaged scenes in *Wilderness to Wasteland*, described by the author as “landscapes of failed desire,” have a savage beauty, while sounding important warnings, which we’ll ignore at our peril.

I’m left wondering what future generations will make of the massive destruction being inflicted on areas such as the Alberta tarsands in Canada. And how much of this, and other, man-made destruction will be forsaken by retreating energy corporations and cash-strapped governments as the world progresses from its reliance on fossil fuels to the adoption of new, cleaner, and less intrusive, energy sources? **CT**

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Tony Sutton is editor of *ColdType*.



Sunset on the California coast (Union Oil Company of California, Richmond, California), 1983.



The cover of David T. Hanson's book.

WILDERNESS TO WASTELAND

By **David T. Hanson**

Foreword by *Joyce Carol Oates*

Afterword by *Miles Orvell*

Published by Taverner Press

Price: \$38.71 (Amazon)

THE AUTHOR

David T. Hanson's previous publications include *Waste Land: Meditations on a Ravaged Landscape*, and *Colstrip, Montana*.

He has received numerous awards for his photography, including a Guggenheim Fellowship

Perfect fool

Trevor Grundy on a Romanian writer who fell foul of his mentor

The unnamed hero ended up seeing the man who helped shape his early life turn into a Jew-hater as Romania was swept along with the fast-rising tide of fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany

The Romanian-Jewish author Mihail Sebastian (1907-45) isn't a household name, so Penguin should be applauded for bringing this extraordinary book before an Anglophone audience for the first time. For *Two Thousand Years* is the story of an intellectually isolated Romanian Jewish student in the late 1920s and early 1930s. His deepest wish is to attach himself to the non-Jewish backbone of his homeland, even if that means irrevocably offending his ethnic and religious counterparts.

The unnamed hero ended up seeing the man who helped shape his early life – in real life he was Nae Ionescu, who appears in the book as Professor Ghita Blidaru of Bucharest University – turn into a Jew-hater extraordinaire as Romania was swept along with the fast-rising tide of fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany.

Ionescu was one of the most important intellectual architects of the Romanian Iron Guard which committed crimes that even shocked members of Himmler's SS. Of the 728,115 Jews who lived in Romania in 1930, up to 270,000 were killed during the World War II. Most Romanian Jews today live in Israel, where the condition of so many Palestinians might tempt Penguin to publish this book in another language – Arabic.

Mihail Sebastian – the pseudonym of Iosif Mendel Hechter – is little known outside

Western literary/academic/historical circles. But during his lifetime, he was prominent in Romania as a journalist, author, playwright and poet. Sebastian studied law at Bucharest University, before studying in Paris, where he was influenced by André Gide and Marcel Proust. Ever alert to the rising tide of state-sponsored violence against liberals, communists and Jews in Germany, he wrote mainly about cultural matters for prestigious Romanian magazines and societies.

In *For Two Thousand Years*, we first meet the unnamed protagonist in Bucharest in 1923, at a time when the country's post-war constitution granted minority rights to the Jewish community. As a law student at Bucharest University, our mild-mannered and always anxious-to-please Parsifal (Perfect Fool) believes he and other Jews could survive the turbulent times if they lived, not as isolated individuals in their own narrow world bent under the heavy weight of the Talmud and Torah, but as fully committed citizens of a liberal-minded Romania.

However, on December 10 that year, a group of student activists, led by Corneliu Codreanu, promulgated an anti-Semitic nationalist program that challenged the mainstream parties, which they accused of selling out to the Jews and the forces of international finance. Codreanu led Romania's inter-war fascist mainstream movement, the Iron

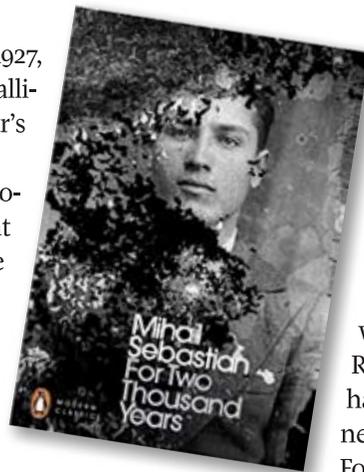
Guard, from its foundation in 1927, and later advocated a military alliance between Romania and Hitler's Germany.

In the novel, Ghita Blidaru (Ionescu) tells his adoring student (Sebastian) to drop law, declare war on intelligence, think as a Romanian and search for a grassroots commitment to life. "Do something that connects you to the soil, a craft based on certitudes," he tells his protégé. Responding to this advice, the novel's protagonist distances himself from his Jewish contemporaries.

To Jews who refuse to commit to Romanian nationalism, he sends out bitter, sometimes deadly, words. To a young Zionist trying to persuade him to pursue a place in Palestine he says, "Jewish fellow feeling – I hate it. I'm always on the brink of shouting out a coarse word, just to show that even though I'm in the midst of 10 people who believe me their 'brother in suffering,' I am in fact absolutely, definitely alone. Listen Marcel Winder, if you pat me on the shoulder one more time, I'll punch you out. My business if I'm hurt, your business if your skull gets cracked. I've nothing to share with you. You don't need anything from me. You go your way and I'll go mine."

He wants neither Marxism nor Zionism: just a normal life as a Romanian who happens to have been born in a Jewish stable. "I have," he writes "an immense longing for simplicity and unawareness. If I could re-discover something strong, simple feelings from somewhere centuries back – hunger, thirst, cold; if I could overcome two thousand years of Talmudisms and melancholy, and recover – supposing one of my race has ever had it – the clear joy of life. . . ."

This unnamed loner drops law and qualifies as an architect. He becomes wealthy and is proud that he appears to have been accepted by Romanian Christians (Eastern Ortho-



FOR TWO THOUSAND YEARS

by Mihail Sebastian
Penguin Books
£9.99

dox mainly). Why not? He is, after all, equal to the next man in the eyes of the law.

But laws, like the minds of men and the boundaries of nations, can easily change. With the book written, what next for the Romanian nationalist, Mihail Sebastian? He asked Ionescu to write the preface to *For Two Thousand Years*. At that time, Ionescu was a nationalist but certainly not an anti-Semite. But by the time the book appeared in print in 1934, Ionescu had fallen under the influence of Hitler and

was a strong supporter of the Iron Cross. Ionescu's essay seethed with anti-Jewish rhetoric. Sebastian's erstwhile hero and mentor mocked the author's "assimilationist illusion," and predicted that the "sick" author of *For Two Thousand Years* was destined to suffer for his race.

Sebastian was in a no-win situation. Ionescu mocked him in print, while co-religionists damned him as a self-loathing Jew. Why he allowed Ionescu to write what he wrote remains a mystery. Toby Lichtig wrote in his review of this book in the *Financial Times*, "This edition is crying out for an introductory essay and screaming for some footnotes."

The author survived the war, but only just. He was run over by a truck in Bucharest in May, 1945, on his way to deliver a lecture at Bucharest University.

For Two Thousand Years is Sebastian's literary monument. It's worth reading because of the light it throws on the growth of anti-Semitism in one Eastern European country between the two world wars, a study of how minorities can live and flourish, or decline and die, when faced with hostile hosts. It deserves a wide audience in so many parts of the world, particularly the Middle East, during these explosive times.

Ionescu's essay seethed with anti-Jewish rhetoric. Sebastian's erstwhile hero and mentor predicted that the author of *For Two Thousand Years* was destined to suffer for his race

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Trevor Grundy
is the author of
Memoir of a Fascist
Childhood (William
Heinemann,
London 1998).

Last chance president

David Edwards on the British corporate media's hostile treatment of Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn

Sanders talks about the causes of vast and shameful inequality in the world's wealthiest country. He talks about corporate media bias rooted in advertiser funding

The comedian Billy Connolly once observed that politicians aren't like the rest of us. They don't look like us, don't sound like us, and they rarely talk about issues that matter deeply to mere voters.

Senator Bernie Sanders, candidate for the Democrat's US presidential nomination, on the other hand, does look and talk like ordinary people. He is the kind of smart, straight-talking, Jewish New Yorker celebrated by TV shows such as *Seinfeld* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*.

If the liberal commentariat is to be believed, leftist enthusiasm for Bernie is sharply curbed by the very fact that he's Jewish. In the *Guardian*, Rafael Behr, who is also Jewish, wrote at the beginning of the month: "There have been enough reports in recent weeks of Labour councillors and candidates peddling antisemitic mumbo-jumbo – Jews as puppet-masters behind 9/11, ISIS and global capitalism – to suggest the party has an infestation on its hands."

An infestation, no less! The link to Labour officials "peddling anti-semitic mumbo-jumbo" took the reader to a piece by Behr's own comment editor at the *Guardian*, Jonathan Freedland, also Jewish, who wrote last month: "Thanks to Corbyn, the Labour party is expanding, attracting many leftists who would previ-

ously have rejected it or been rejected by it. Among those are people with hostile views of Jews."

In reality, leftists embrace Sanders for the same reason they resist Behr and Freedland. Sanders talks honestly about corporate (not Jewish "puppet-masters") control of society; Behr and Freedland do not. Sanders talks about the causes of vast and shameful inequality in the world's wealthiest country. He talks about corporate media bias rooted in advertiser funding. He talks about "whether or not we think it's proper for the United States to go around overthrowing governments." Behr and Freedland, and a long list of *Guardian* corporate apologists, do not talk honestly about these issues.

Every movement has its haters, of course, but when serious left commentators critique these liberal journalists, it has nothing to do with ethnicity, race, creed or religion.

Sanders' recent discussion with Cenk Uygur of *The Young Turks* (TYT) show was an astonishing departure from standard, six-second soundbite politics. Imagine a high-profile UK politician talking like this about the media: "First of all, we're talking about the corporate media, right? . . . We need to break through the fog of the corporate media, which does everything that they can to keep us entertained with-

out addressing the real issues. I'm on the corporate media every single day and you don't know how hard it is just to try to demand that we begin to talk about the real issues. They really do not want to. They talk about everything under the sun, but not the real issues."

Sanders is not arguing that the corporate media is merely biased, or unbalanced, in reporting issues; he is arguing that it never talks about real issues. He offers a jaw-dropping example: "Here's the story. I have been mayor for eight years, congressman for 16, a US senator for nine years. Do you know how many times people in the media have said: 'Bernie, what are you going to do to end poverty in America? This is an outrage! We have 47-million people in poverty, what are you going to do about it, Bernie?' The answer is zero. Not once."

The remarkable result, as Sanders notes: "Concepts of income and wealth inequality, concepts of justice, learning what goes on around the rest of the world [are] never talked about in the corporate media."

So what is going on? Why won't corporate media discuss real issues. Sanders explains: "I had to write a letter to the presidents of all of the networks to tell them that on their Sunday shows they never talk about climate change. Almost never talk about it. Why? Well, does it have to do with the fact that they get a lot of coal company and oil company money advertising? I think it does. They don't talk about it."

He adds: "I want a vigorous effort to address climate change. I mean, I am very worried. I talk to these scientists. This planet is in serious danger. You can't cuddle up to the fossil fuel industry; you've got to take them on."

It seems incredible, but Sanders is correct on climate coverage. The not-for-profit Media Matters for America reported that, despite ever-worsening warnings of the dangers and a long list of broken temperature and other records, media coverage actually declined in 2015: "In 2015, ABC, CBS, NBC

Cartoon: Donkeyhotey www.flickr.com/photos/donkeyhotey/11239604203



and Fox collectively aired approximately 146 minutes of climate change coverage on their evening and Sunday news shows, which was eight minutes less than the networks aired in 2014. This five per cent drop in coverage occurred even though 2015 was a year full of significant actions to address climate change, including the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) finalizing the Clean Power Plan, the first-ever federal limits on carbon pollution from power plants,

Bernie Sanders:
"I had to write a letter to the presidents of all of the networks to tell them that on their Sunday shows they never talk about climate change"

MEDIA ISSUES

Big business does not want the public to be alarmed about climate change because people will demand action that will cut into corporate profit

President Obama rejecting the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline, citing the need to fight climate change, Pope Francis releasing the first-ever papal encyclical on climate change, and leaders from 195 countries agreeing to a landmark accord to lower greenhouse gas emissions at the United Nations climate summit in Paris.”

In mid-March, corporate media described how climate scientists were now warning of nothing less than a climate emergency. The Guardian reported: “February smashed a century of global temperature records by a ‘stunning’ margin, according to data released by NASA. The unprecedented leap led scientists, usually wary of highlighting a single month’s temperature, to label the new record a ‘shocker’ and warn of a ‘climate emergency.’”

When famously dispassionate climate scientists use this kind of language, it’s time to start paying attention. Assuming you care about the life-expectancy of your children and grandchildren, and indeed of yourself.

According to the Nexis media search engine, the term “climate emergency” was mentioned about a dozen times between March 14 and March 21. The term has not been used since. A March 22, Guardian piece mentioned merely that scientists had been “alarmed” by the recent record heat.

The fact is that big business does not want the public to be alarmed about climate change because people will demand action that will cut into corporate profits. Sanders again: “So the media is an arm of the ruling class of this country, and they want to talk about everything in the world except the most important issues. Because if you talk about real issues, and people get educated on the real issues, you know what happens next? They actually may want to bring about change.”

He added: “They are scared to death. They get scared to death of the idea that young people are actually getting involved

in the political process and want real change – that working class people are saying, ‘You know what, we need to end establishment politics and economics, and move in a different direction. That is their nightmare.’”

TYT host, Cenk Uygur wryly responded: “Senator Sanders, are you charging that these multi-billion-dollar corporations that run the media might be part of the establishment?!” Sanders, joking, shot back: “That’s a hard one, Cenk. Why do you ask me such hard, difficult questions?! That is the establishment!”

Sanders was also accused by Breitbart.com’s Jerusalem bureau chief Aaron Klein of issuing “anti-Israel statements” that “go beyond even Hamas terrorist propaganda.” As Uygur tweeted: “If you’re not viciously right-wing, media will swiftboat [smear] you as anti-Israel even if you’re Jewish, lived in Israel and have family in Israel.”



Jeremy Corbyn:
“Spiral of irrelevance.”

Fear of change

Elite fear and loathing of profit-sapping progressive change helps explain why corporate commentators reject the idea that Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the opposition Labour Party in the British parliament, and Sanders should even have a place in the discussion. Last June, establishment fixture David Aaronovitch of The Times asked: “What positive debate . . . is served by having Corbyn on the ballot?”

And in July, a Guardian editorial claimed that Corbyn was leading a vicious “spiral

into irrelevance after defeat” in the general election. Corbyn was eventually elected by 500,000 votes, a record for any UK party political leader. The Guardian wasn’t just out of touch; it was shoving an elite, rugby hand-off in the face of the electorate.

Guardian columnist Zoe Williams was amazed that she was even discussing Corbyn: “How did this man . . . get on the ballot in the first place?”

In a piece titled, *The Media are Trying to Destroy Jeremy Corbyn*, shadow chancellor John McDonnell talked about the press coverage he and Corbyn received during the leadership campaign: “None of them, except the Morning Star, supported us. Even the liberal left Guardian opposed us and undermined us at every opportunity.”

McDonnell added: “It can sound like we’re paranoid, but the reality is that the treatment Jeremy has had across the media has been appalling. It’s the worst any politician has been treated. The problem with the BBC and other broadcasters is that because of the cutbacks that have gone on with journalists, they are taking their stories from newspapers rather than investigating and reporting for themselves, and therefore the bias of the press infects the broadcast media, too . . . It’s an object lesson about the establishment using its power in the media to try and destroy an individual and what he stands for.”

As Sanders says: “The corporate media is right in the middle of this. In all of my speeches what I tell people is, ‘Don’t accept the status quo and the options.’”

If the corporate media won’t discuss real issues, what will they discuss? Hadley Freeman gives an idea in the Guardian, in an article titled, *Leather Jackets, Flat Caps and Tracksuits: How to Dress if You’re a Left-wing Politician*: “Now, personally, some of us think that Corbyn could consider updating his ideas as much as his wardrobe . . . He must spend veritable hours cultivating that look, unless there’s a store on

Holloway Road that I’ve missed called 1970s Polytechnic Lecturer 4 U. Honestly, where can you even buy tracksuits like the ones he sports?

“Bernie Sanders is the American version, of course, with his skew-whiff hair and lumpy jackets.”

Freeman – who describes herself in the article as a “New York Jew” like Sanders – would claim to her last breath that she’s just writing light-hearted comedy. But she’s also lampooning the correct establishment targets while labelling Hillary Clinton one of the “left-wing female politicians” – a favoured and ludicrous media deception, as Naomi Klein made clear recently: “While Clinton is great at warring with Republicans, taking on powerful corporations goes against her entire worldview, against everything she’s built, and everything she stands for. The real issue, in other words, isn’t Clinton’s corporate cash, it’s her deeply pro-corporate ideology: one that makes taking money from lobbyists and accepting exorbitant speech fees from banks seem so natural . . .”

Perhaps Freeman thinks we’re motivated to write about her because she’s Jewish (last year, she claimed leftist politician George Galloway had crossed “the line from anti-Israel to anti-semitic”). Or perhaps because she’s a woman. But we’re not driven by anti-semitism, sexism, or hatred of any kind.

Like most leftists, I support Sanders’ comments and reject the liberal commentariat for reasons to do with concern for the welfare of all citizens, not just the rich, and above all out of fear for the survival of our species and planet. Business as usual – with corporate power subordinating everything to profit – is now the greatest threat humanity has ever faced. As Klein says, and she is not overstating: “If the next president wastes any more time . . . the climate clock will run out, plain and simple.”

CT

The problem with the BBC and other broadcasters is that because of the cutbacks that have gone on with journalists, they are taking their stories from newspapers rather than investigating and reporting for themselves, and therefore the bias of the press infects the broadcast media, too

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