

TONY BLAIR & THE SEARCH FOR JUSTICE | FELICITY ARBUTHNOT
DESPERATE PLIGHT OF THE PETRO-STATES | MICHAEL T. KLARE
KIDS' REVOLT AND THE FALL OF APARTHEID | DAVID NIDDRIE

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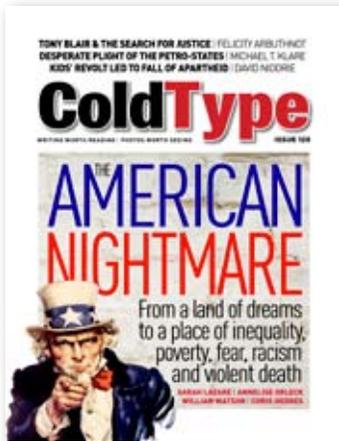
ISSUE 120

THE AMERICAN NIGHTMARE

From a land of dreams
to a place of inequality,
poverty, fear, racism
and violent death

SARAH LAZARE | ANNEISE ORLECK
WILLIAM WATSON | CHRIS HEDGES





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Editor: Tony Sutton – editor@coldtype.net

Tony Blair and the search for justice

Felicity Arbuthnot on the increasingly frantic attempts by the former British prime minister to deflect criticism of his war on Iraq

Former British prime minister Tony Blair seems intent on deflecting the savaging he is expected to receive in the publication next month of the years-delayed Chilcot Inquiry into the illegal invasion of Iraq. On one of his rare visits to the country, he has been sharing his dubious wisdom on the UK referendum on the European Union, attacking Jeremy Corbyn, the present leader of the Labour Party, who opposed Blair's foreign interventions, and wading into discussions on the economy, Africa, faith and God, while also cheerleading for Western military invasions of Syria and Iraq.

Blair had been prime minister for just 23 months when he signalled his desire for bloody interventionism. Speaking at the Chicago Economic Club, on April 22, 1999, he declared, "Many of our problems have been caused by two dangerous and ruthless men – Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic . . . Instead of enjoying its oil wealth, Iraq has been reduced to poverty, with political life stultified."

The Balkans, of course, were already being pulverised. "On its 50th birthday, NATO must prevail," he thundered. Perhaps he was facing his and the US's worst nightmare: that with the Berlin Wall gone, the Cold War ended, and European and Russian citizens rejoicing, NATO no longer had a *raison d'être*. As for his claim of Iraq

poverty, we should remember that, before the paralysing US- and UK-driven UN embargo imposed in 1990, Iraq had poured cash for 30 years into infrastructure, free health services, free education, clean water, reliable electricity and telecommunications, all of which were destroyed by a 34-nation onslaught, from January 17 to February 28, 1991.

Iraq was left unable to import, rebuild or repair. The country rose from the ashes, by near unique ingenuity, but its infrastructure was impossible to fix without imported parts. However, Blair ignored the embargo's silent infanticide, genocide and ecocide, and the billion-dollar rip-off of the UN's shameful oil-for-food deal.

It's worth noting that the UN sanctions committee was headed by Blair's envoy Carne Ross, who later formed the organisation, Independent Diplomat, which currently claims to be working with the "moderate" – that is head-chopping, organ-eating, pyromaniac – Syrian opposition that is trying to overthrow that country's President Bashar al-Assad.

Blair's Chicago speech demonstrated how long he had been determined to back the US in the illegal overthrow of the leader of a sovereign nation, his address coming just 11 months after the US had passed the Iraq Liberation Act, on May 10, 1998, which determined that, "It should be the policy of the United States to seek to remove the

Blair's 1999 Chicago speech demonstrates how long he had been determined to back the US in the illegal overthrow of the leader of a sovereign nation

AWAITING CHILCOT

On election night, with all the candidates gathered after the result – Blair won, of course – Keys gave a withering, blistering, speech that left Blair and his wife Cherie standing white-faced with lips clenched

Saddam Hussein regime from power in Iraq, and to replace it with a democratic government.”

Perhaps, with Chilcot’s findings looming, Blair’s duplicities might come home to roost, which helps explain his frenzied diversionary tactics. If that is his intention, however, his plan is not working. Michael Burleigh writes, in an eviscerating Daily Mail commentary, headlined, Why I Despise Conman Blair’s Grubby Attempt To Spin Away Chilcot Truths, “Chilcot will be a defining moment in our recent history . . . It will show how the art of lying has become central to the British way of government – with ‘facts’ proving malleable and the civil service degraded into partisanship.”

Having dragged “the perma-tanned multi-millionaire-become-pantomime-villain” through the media mud, Burleigh concludes, “The lessons to be learned from Iraq must include how a preachy conman debased our entire system of government.”

Also in the Mail, Quentin Letts writes “Enter Saint Tony, as tanned as the top of an egg flan . . . and looking every one of his 63 years,” referring to an event at which Blair spoke, and from which Letts and other journalists were barred. “By the way,” he adds, “yesterday’s event was co-organised by Mr Blair’s Faith Foundation, which seeks to promote ‘stable societies.’ And if they won’t make themselves stable, we’ll jolly well have to drop bombs and parachutists on them, and invade them with tanks and battalions of Western troops and basically kill them. All. That’ll calm them down, just you see.”

Blair was also, said Letts, “shrivelled by scandals and pointlessness.”

Chris Nineham, writing in the Guardian, reminded us that, “The parody of Blair as US poodle diminishes his role in history. He chafed at Bill Clinton’s hesitancy to bomb Serbia in 1999, and secretly reassured the Bush administration that it



WAITING FOR CHILCOT: Will justice finally catch up with ex-British PM Tony Blair?

would not be alone in the illegal pursuit of regime change in Iraq, in April 2002. It should be an encouragement to progressives that Blair’s combination of aggression overseas, pro-market policies at home and deception in general has made him a pariah.”

Nineham’s reference to the commitment to Bush related to Colin Powell’s memo to George W. Bush, briefing him ahead of Blair’s visit to Crawford, Texas, from April 5-7, 2002. A paragraph in that memo confirms that, “On Iraq, Blair will be with us should military operations be necessary. He is convinced on two points: that the threat is real; and success against Saddam will yield more regional success.”

The threat was, of course, a fantasy, followed by a pack of lies, which has resulted in a years-long regional bloodbath.

Blair’s misery doesn’t end here. On June 6, BBC showed a TV drama. Reg, the story of Reg Keys and his wife Sally, whose soldier son, Lance Corporal Tom Keys, aged

20, was killed in Iraq, along with five colleagues.

In 2005, Reg Keys, a paramedic, ran against Tony Blair in the general election with the aim of drawing attention to Blair's Iraq duplicities. On election night, with all the candidates gathered after the result – Blair won, of course – Keys gave a withering, blistering, speech that left Blair and his wife Cherie standing white-faced with lips clenched. When the candidates parted, Blair refused to shake Keys's hand. Truth clearly hurts.

Reg's wife, Sally, never recovered from the loss of her son, Tom, and died in 2011, aged 57. Anna Maxwell Martin, who played the part of Sally Keys, said, "I think this absolutely hammers home the personal nature for some people, and I hope it really highlights Tony Blair to be the gruesome crook that he is."

Actor Tim Roth, who played the part of Reg Keys, said he hoped the drama would force Blair to apologise, adding, "I've always felt Blair should be hauled off in handcuffs and put in Wormwood Scrubs prison. I think he's profited from the death of Reg's son and the Iraq war. I have nothing but contempt for him."

Meanwhile, the Iraq Families Action Group intends to use the findings of the Chilcot Inquiry to sue Blair, his former ministers and generals, seeking unlimited damages on behalf of the 179 British soldiers killed in the Iraq war.

And now Alex Salmond, the former leader of the Scottish National Party, seems set to revive a group of politicians formed to take legal action against Blair in 2004. Salmond said he believed the "best route would be to use the International Criminal Court, because the prosecutor is able to initiate action on his or her own behalf on presentation of a body of evidence, which Chilcot would provide."

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, in an interview on BBC's Newsnight said, "We went into a war that was catastrophic, that

was illegal, that cost us a lot of money, that lost a lot of lives, and the consequences are still played out with migrant deaths in the Mediterranean, and refugees all over the region." Asked if he would like to see Blair put on trial, he replied, "I want to see all those that committed war crimes tried for it, and those that made the decisions that went with it."

Total denial is the response from the former prime minister. Speaking on the BBC's Andrew Marr Show, Blair said that if the inquiry finds he committed to the invasion before he told parliament and the public, he will probably refuse to accept the verdict. Surely he can't have forgotten that military commitment mentioned in General Colin Powell's 2002 memo to George W. Bush?

Ironically, the Centre for Religion and Geopolitics, founded by Tony Blair, has just published its latest report on extremism, which says, "Our data shows that, over the past three months, the same countries repeatedly suffered high levels of extremism." With no hint of irony, its writers name Iraq and Afghanistan, which Blair's Britain played a key role in attacking and destabilising, followed by Syria, Yemen and Pakistan, where the US and UK have meddled, murdered and disrupted.

In Libya, the report also notes, "ISIS has continued to gain strength." That, of course, is the same Libya whose leader Muammar Gaddafi was kissed by Blair (a Judas kiss if ever there was one), as he welcomed him back in to the "community of nations." That was before Libya was destroyed by that same "community."

We can only hope that Chilcot throws the book at Blair and all the others involved in Iraq's tragedy. However, whatever the findings, they can never be sufficient to atone for the misery Blair and his cronies have created. **CT**

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Felicity Arbuthnot is a London-based political activist and author.

Asked if he would like to see Blair put on trial, labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn replied, "I want to see all those that committed war crimes tried for it, and those that made the decisions that went with it"

Schoolkids' revolt that led to the fall of apartheid

David Niddrie looks back 40 years to the protest that kicked off the revolution that ended apartheid in South Africa

South African middle-class hegemony has always had a taste for non-violent victims and martyrs – and if, as in Mandela's case, we had to airbrush out his role in initiating the armed struggle against apartheid . . . well, where's the airbrush?

South Africa has reached a point where its leader, President Zuma appears to have sold off the right to make senior government appointments to an expatriate Indian family enterprise, where the head of the country's near-monopoly public broadcaster knows more about Cabinet reshuffle plans than the ruling party's inner circle, and where key members of parliament and civil servants sell their support to the highest bidder.

The political pollution is so dense that it is difficult to look back 40 years to June 16, 1976, and accurately recall the seismic shock created by high school protests over plans to impose the Afrikaans language as a compulsory medium of instruction – both as the first mass black protests in a generation, and for the brutality of the police response that left more than 170 schoolchildren dead in one day. That's three times more than police killed in the infamous 1960 Sharpeville massacre.

Golden age of resistance?

Many South Africans remember the '76 generation as participants in a golden age of the anti-apartheid struggle, who, like the First World War dead in Robert Binyon's *The Fallen*, "shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old . . . Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn."

This image of noble, innocent rebels, is part of today's prevalent, but heavily revised, version of South African history, in which a beaming Nelson Mandela single-handedly delivers democracy to all, thus ending the (implicitly unnecessary) bloodshed, oppression and furious counter-violence that marked apartheid's last decade.

In this version of history, the '76 generation has no blood on its hands, and the uprising ended within about a year of its starting (with more than 600 dead and Afrikaans dropped as a high-school medium of instruction). South African middle-class hegemony has always had a taste for non-violent victims and martyrs – and if, as in Mandela's case, we had to airbrush out his role in initiating the armed struggle against apartheid . . . well, where's the airbrush?

In this version, too, most white South Africans didn't approve of apartheid, although they were critical of violent efforts to overthrow it, and were greatly relieved when common sense prevailed, and, in 1990, FW de Klerk released Mandela and other political prisoners, unbanned the African National Congress (ANC) and other formations in the democratic movement.

That's the story, but reality is different. For most white South Africans, the upris-



ON THE RUN: Whip flailing, an Apartheid-era South African policeman chases fleeing demonstrators. Photo: Juhan Kuus

ing – particularly as it spread throughout the country – graphically proved the legitimacy of the fear and hatred that lurked beneath the peaceful veneer of South African life – and the necessity for the steady militarisation of South African society.

In reality, the uprising marked the beginning of the end of white rule and the start of an 18-year continuum of conflict (all the way to 1994, rather than 1990, as revisionist history now tells us). From 1976, thousands of young South Africans, frustrated by their inability to fight against the NATO-supplied FN rifles and US-made tear gas favoured by the paramilitary police, left the country to join the ANC and re-establish the organisation as the unquestioned champion of the struggle to end apartheid.

June 16 marked an explosive end to the silent years that followed the 1960 banning of the ANC and imprisonment of those members of the leadership still inside the country. Mandela’s law partner and interim ANC president Oliver Tambo had earlier been sent into exile to establish the “mission-in-exile,” the foundation-stone of the organisation that returned home in triumph in 1990.

While thousands of young men and women fled the country to fight under the ANC’s black-green-and-gold banner, South Africa’s black opposition continued to simmer, encouraged by the ’76 generation’s demonstration that resistance was possible; by the presence of black governments in neighbouring Mozambique and nearby Angola; and, in 1980, by the armed

From 1976, thousands of young South Africans left the country to join the ANC and re-establish the organisation as the unquestioned champion of the struggle to end apartheid

On the first evening in our house, our 16-year-old guest explained to my wife and I, over coffee, how to remove the metal base of a lightbulb, pour battery acid into the bulb and replace the base to make a perfect acid bomb

defeat of minority rule that transformed Rhodesia into Zimbabwe.

By 1984, with the ANC able to wage a series of sometimes spectacular political propaganda actions – notably the destruction of part of the state-run oil-from-coal Sasol complex with the plume of smoke visible 80-km north in Johannesburg – resistance had evolved from protest over specific grievances into a generalised, if often ill-equipped, but explicitly political, challenge to all aspects of governing authority mounted by tens of thousands of young black South Africans. They had graduated from rebellion to revolution.

The price was often high. One of my abiding personal images of the times is a row of half-a-dozen corpses along an ill-lit roadside as my wife and I drove past Johannesburg's Alexandra township – and there were thousands upon thousands of similar pictures.

A second is of the cherubic face of a painfully-polite and charming young guest in the lounge of our white, middle-class Johannesburg home. The guest, a 16-year-old boy whose name I have forgotten, desperately wanted to study to be an engineer and was anxious that his prospects would be hampered by his absence from school for the two previous years, an absence necessitated by an ongoing police hunt for him. He was on his way from his New Brighton home to covertly cross the border and join the ANC. On the first evening in our house, he explained to us, over coffee, how to remove the metal base of a lightbulb, pour battery acid into the bulb and replace the base to make a perfect acid bomb. It could then be lobbed into one of the armoured personnel carriers the police and military used to patrol the townships, to acid-burn the occupants' faces to minimise resistance when the lobber's comrades petrol-bombed the vehicle. A polite young man who dreamed of an engineering future, but who had been moulded by two years

of unremitting conflict into a young man whose only skill was in building equipment intended to kill or maim.

By then, much of the urban schooling system for black pupils operated only sporadically, and local government in black townships existed only in theory. The contest both for control of black townships and to render national administration increasingly impotent had become steadily more merciless and bloody.

This continued until 1990 – and in parts of the country until 1994 – and the first democratic elections.

Now, 22 years later, despite the myths, South Africa is not the rainbow nation bound together by the reconciliation and forgiveness that is so central to the narrative provided by revisionist history. It was created by a revolution; and revolutions are inherently violent, brutal and damaging. Its aftermath has been both good and bad.

Fees frozen

Twenty-two years on, we have a political democracy: the university students who last year forced Jacob Zuma's government to freeze university fees at 2014 levels with their #feesmustfall campaign were not slaughtered in their hundreds.

The material dividends of political democracy are indisputable: hundreds of thousands of affordable houses, access by millions to water and electricity, the quadrupling of the number of black students at universities, and the ongoing entry of millions of black South Africans into the country's middle classes.

But the Gini coefficient, measuring the gap between richest and poorest, has surged, as successive ANC administrations: first Mandela's, then Thabo Mbeki's, and currently Zuma's, have attempted to impose the logic of the free market on a society in which most black people, systematically deprived over 300 years of the means to compete on anything approach-



University of Cape Town students in last year's #feesmustfall campaign. Massacre-free protests in South Africa are among the benefits of democracy.

ing an equal basis, remain marginalised, both economically and socially.

And for the township scholars, whose parents and grandparents reignited the struggle against apartheid on June 16 four decades ago, the struggle continues. For the voices that dominate South African radio and television (and much of the lower strata of business that isn't still white-dominated) are not township voices, but are instead inflected with accents that reflect a privileged suburban education. For those township parents who can afford it, battle to get their children into suburban, non-township schools for an education that adds sometimes six hours of bus-rides daily to the schoolgoing, but will hugely multiply their chances of tertiary education and decent employment. School-leaving pass rates demonstrate why they do it – township schools still lag decisively

behind suburban schools.

Notionally, the post-1994 government budget allocations to schools are based on pupil numbers, and the number of teachers per pupils is evenly spread. But in the formerly exclusively-white suburbs, parents are allowed to top-up school budgets to hire more teachers, and to equip and resource their schools in ways unimaginable in township and rural schools. In schooling terms, township scholars remain second-class citizens.

It is difficult to imagine that this is the future that the 16-year-old boy who sat in our lounge so many years ago, felt was worth shelving his dream of becoming an engineer for.

CT

David Niddrie is a Johannesburg-based former journalist, now working as a media consultant

In the formerly exclusively-white suburbs, parents are allowed to top-up school budgets to hire more teachers, and to equip and resource their schools in ways unimaginable in township and rural schools



YEAR OF THE HIPPO: Alf Kumalo's stunning photograph of dead bodies in front of a police 'hippo,' was intended to appear in Drum magazine soon after the start of the 1976 Soweto riots. But a banning order delayed publication by several months.

In the front row of a revolution

Tony Sutton, editor of South Africa's Drum magazine during the 1976 schoolkids' rebellion, tells how Drum's coverage earned it a 25-year ban

Our initial coverage of one of the most momentous events in South Africa's history was limited to just four pages

Glancing through the pages of Drum magazine 40 years after the events of June 16, 1976, I'm surprised by how little space we devoted to the riots in the issue that followed the initial violence. Then I remember that the magazine had just switched from fortnightly to monthly publishing, and we were trapped by brutal print deadlines – six weeks from delivery of pages to the printer to printed magazines – that were geared for timeless features rather than fast-breaking news. So that month's coverage of one of the most momentous events in South Africa's history was limited to just four hasty pages, with a front page teaser – “THE RIOTS: Why They

Happened” – pasted across the top-right corner of a cover image of an unnamed local beauty.

Inside that July '76 issue are reports by co-editor Stan Motjuwadi and chief reporter Joe Thloloe, accompanied by photographs by Mike Mzileni, who was soon to be detained without charge as part of a state crackdown on journalists. Another unbylined piece, also written by Motjuwadi, affirms that, “For 25 years Drum has been saying that if South Africa were to have a revolution of social conscience and recognise the brotherhood of Man under the fatherhood of God, there could be no violence and no threat from foreign powers. For our

variety of races and colours is perhaps our greatest asset.”

That issue was ignored by the government, which had hammered much of the black media in the days after the riots. So we – and our lawyers – were extra careful how we handled the following issue.

Our vigilance was in vain. The state reaction stunned us all: the August 1976, issue of Drum was considered so inflammatory that the government didn’t just follow its usual practice of simply banning the issue from sale, but they decreed that possession of it was a criminal offence – an action usually reserved for the most extreme political journals (that ban remained in place for almost 25 years, until Mandela’s release in February, 1990).

Yes, Drum’s rhetoric was angry, but it was reasoned, carefully-articulated, anger, not a wild scream for revenge or bloody insurrection. Motjuwadi had written, “Every adult South African, black and white should hang their heads in shame. The whole blood-curdling affair of Hector Peterson, only 13, riddled with bullets, stinks to high heaven. Every white South African finger drips with the blood of Hector for ramming Afrikaans down his throat.”

That paragraph was cited by the censors as one of a plethora of nit-picking reasons for the banning, as was a photograph of a dead body, shattered rib-caged exposed, which was declared “offensive to public morals.” So it was confirmed: under apartheid, mowing down schoolkids was okay, but publishing photographs of their corpses was a sin!

Ironically, the banning order made no mention of another quote in the magazine, from a speech by the Afrikaner Chief Justice Rumpff at a graduation of white students 56 days before the first shot had been fired in Soweto on June 16, “. . . social equality will have to be accepted and mechanisms for self-expression will have to be created. If there are whites who don’t like this, they had better go and find what they want else-

Read more, see more photographs

This article is an edited excerpt from an essay in the catalogue for a photographic exhibition, Drum 1976-1980: An Exhibition From the Pages of Drum Magazine, held at Rhodes University in 2006 to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Soweto riots of 1976.

A pdf of the booklet may be downloaded from:
<http://coldtype.net/Assets.06/Essays.06/0606.DrumBook.pdf>

great future for all of us provided whites are willing to educate, qualify and recognise the non-whites . . . so that they may walk side by side into the dawn that has broken over Africa, a dawn which in South Africa will not turn again to darkness.”

The vicious state reaction had an immediate, chilling, impact. Freelance photographer Alf Kumalo had handed me a stunning, but politically-provocative, photograph that no other publication had dared print as the townships blazed during the fragile days after June 16. I had already placed this image – showing the bodies of two dead Africans lying in front of a ‘hippo,’ an armoured combat vehicle extensively used by the security forces in black townships – as a double-page spread in the early pages of the September issue.

After the banning, I killed the feature, but held on to the photo for several months, before splashing it across two pages to open Drum’s January, 1977, photographic round-up of the year, under the heading, Year of The Hippo (see Page 10). Then we held our breath, hoping it would slide past the government’s unpredictably censorious gaze. Fortunately, it did . . .

The state’s reaction to the next, August, issue amazed us all: It was judged to be so inflammatory that the government didn’t just follow its usual practice and ban the issue from sale, but made possession of it a criminal offence

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Tony Sutton is editor of ColdType. He was editor of the South African magazine Drum from 1976 to 1981.

CT

'I just wanted to be free'

Dave Zirin recalls the radical reverberations of Muhammad Ali

What Muhammad Ali did – in a culture that worships sports and violence, as well as a culture that idolises black athletes while criminalising black skin – was redefine what it meant to be tough and collectivise the very idea of courage

The reverberations. Not the rumbles, the reverberations. The death of Muhammad Ali will undoubtedly move people's minds to his epic boxing matches against Joe Frazier and George Foreman, and there will be retrospectives about his epic "rumbles" against racism and war. But it's the reverberations that we have to understand in order to see Muhammad Ali as what he remains: the most important athlete ever to live. It's the reverberations that are our best defence against real-time efforts to pull out his political teeth and turn him into a harmless icon suitable for mass consumption.

When Dr. Martin Luther King came out against the war in Vietnam in 1967, he was criticised by the mainstream press and his own advisers, who told him to not focus on "foreign" policy. But Dr. King forged ahead and to justify his new stand, said publicly, "Like Muhammad Ali puts it, we are all – black and brown and poor – victims of the same system of oppression."

When Nelson Mandela was imprisoned on Robben Island, he said that Muhammad Ali gave him hope that the walls would some day come tumbling down.

When John Carlos and Tommie Smith raised their fists on the medal stand at the Olympic Games in Mexico City, one of their demands was to "Restore Muhammad Ali's title." They called Ali "the warrior-saint of the black athlete's revolt."

When Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) volunteers in Lowndes County, Alabama, launched an independent political party in 1965, their new group was the first to use the symbol of a black panther. Beneath the jungle cat's black silhouette was a slogan straight from the champ, "WE Are the Greatest."

And when Billie Jean King was aiming to win equal rights for women in sports, Muhammad Ali would say to her, "Billie Jean King! YOU ARE THE QUEEN!" She said that this made her feel brave in her own skin.

The question is why? Why was he able to create this kind of radical ripple throughout the culture and across the world?

What Muhammad Ali did – in a culture that worships sports and violence, as well as a culture that idolises black athletes while criminalising black skin – was redefine what it meant to be tough and collectivise the very idea of courage. Through his words on the streets and deeds in the ring, bravery was not only standing up to Sonny Liston, it was also speaking truth to power, no matter the cost. He was a boxer whose very presence taught a simple and dangerous lesson 50 years ago: "Real men" fight for peace and "real women" raise their voices and join the fray. Or, as Bryant Gumbel said years ago, "Muhammad Ali refused to be afraid. And being that way, he gave other

people courage.”

My favorite Ali line is not him saying, “I hospitalised a rock. I beat up a brick. I’m so bad I make medicine sick” or anything of the sort. It was when he was suspended from boxing for refusing to be drafted into the Vietnam War. He was attending a rally for fair housing in Louisville, when he said, “Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go 10,000 miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam while so-called negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights? No, I’m not going 10,000 miles from home to help murder and burn another poor nation simply to continue the domination of white slave masters of the darker people the world over. This is the day when such evils must come to an end. I have been warned that to take such a stand would cost me millions of dollars. But I have said it once and I will say it again: The real enemy of my people is here. I will not disgrace my religion, my people or myself by becoming a tool to enslave those who are fighting for their own justice, freedom and equality. . . . If I thought the war was going to bring freedom and equality to 22-million of my people they wouldn’t have to draft me, I’d join tomorrow. I have nothing to lose by standing up for my beliefs. So I’ll go to jail, so what? We’ve been in jail for 400 years.”

Damn. This was not only an assertion of black power, but a statement of international solidarity, of oppressed people coming together in an act of collective resistance. It was a statement that connected wars abroad with attacks on the black, brown and poor at home, and it was said from the most hyper-exalted platform our society offered at the time: the platform of being the Champ.

These views did not only earn him the hatred of the mainstream press and the right wing of this country, but also made him a target of liberals in the media as well as the mainstream civil rights movement, who did not like Ali for his membership in the Nation of Islam and opposition to what was Lyndon

Johnson’s war.

But for an emerging movement that was demanding an end to racism by any means necessary, and a very young, emerging anti-war struggle, he was a transformative figure. In the mid-1960s, the anti-war and anti-racist movements were on parallel tracks. Then you had the heavyweight champ. Or, as poet Sonia Sanchez put it with aching beauty, “It’s hard now to relay the emotion of that time. This was still a time when hardly any well-known people were resisting the draft. It was a war that was disproportionately killing young black brothers, and here was this beautiful, funny poetical young man standing up and saying no! Imagine it for a moment! The heavyweight champion, a magical man, taking his fight out of the ring and into the arena of politics and standing firm. The message was sent.” We are still attempting to hear the full message that Muhammad Ali was attempting to relay: a message about the need to fight for peace.

Full articles can and should be written about his complexities – his fallout with Malcolm X, his depoliticisation in the 1970s, the ways that warmongers attempted to use him like a prop as he suffered in failing health. But the most important part of his legacy is that time in the 1960s when he refused to be afraid. As he said years later, “Some people thought I was a hero. Some people said that what I did was wrong. But everything I did was according to my conscience. I wasn’t trying to be a leader. I just wanted to be free.” Not the fight, the reverberations. They are still being felt by a new generation of people. They ensure that the Champ’s name will outlive us all.

Bill Russell said it best in 1967. “I’m not worried about Muhammad Ali. I’m worried about the rest of us.” That is now more true than ever. **CT**

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Dave Zirin is the author of Brazil’s Dance With the Devil. This article was first published in the Nation magazine at www.thenation.com

Ali’s views did not only earn him the hatred of the mainstream press and the right wing of this country, but also made him a target of liberals in the media as well as the mainstream civil rights movement

The women who are taking on Wal-Mart

Annelise Orleck meets a group of brave women determined to bring decent conditions to staff of the world's largest employer

The labour conditions and free market ideology that today's low-wage workers are reacting against bear many resemblances to those faced by labour activists a century ago

Pico Rivera is a dusty working-class Latino suburb of Los Angeles. After the school district, Wal-Mart is the city's largest employer and the source of 10 percent of its tax revenue. More than 500 families in the town depend on income from the store.

The town is also the epicenter of activism by Wal-Mart workers in the United States. Walmart associates have been fighting for four years to pressure the world's largest private employer to grant its workers decent conditions, a living wage and regular hours.

Last fall, I flew to Los Angeles to interview Pico Wal-Mart workers for a book I'm writing about the 21st-century struggle by workers worldwide for a living wage. The Pico workers helped to galvanise that movement by organising, in 2012, the first strike against a US Wal-Mart. Since that time, the world has seen expansive organising by garment workers, farm workers, fast food and retail workers, from Cape Town to Canada, Bangladesh to Brazil and Cambodia to California.

The labour conditions and free market ideology that today's low-wage workers are reacting against bear many resemblances to those faced by labour activists a century ago. And the workers involved have played on those historical resonances.

Bangladeshi garment workers invoke the memory of Jewish and Italian immigrant women workers killed in the Triangle Shirt-



waist Factory fire of 1911. Activist fast food workers carry "I am a Man," and "I am a Woman" signs, echoing the Memphis garbage workers strike of 1968. The Pico Wal-Mart workers carried photographs of the Woolworth strikers of 1937 when they sat in at an Los Angeles Walmart in 2014. At the same time, this is a 21st-century movement, so activists make use of cellphones, and Facebook and Snapchat, to organise and publicise their actions.

For me, as a labour historian, this contemporary movement with historic echoes is fascinating and powerful. That is what drew me to interview activists in the movement. As I got to know the Pico workers, I quickly learned that the personal cost of their activism has been high. Most have been fired or laid off. Local families have been donating food and clothing to those who now have no income.

Still, the activists are committed to making change. Many were in Bentonville, Arkansas at this year's shareholders' meeting to present a petition to Wal-Mart executives demanding their reinstatement.

Simply put, what Wal-Mart does matters. It



By some estimates, Wal-Mart's imports from China alone have cost 400,000 Americans their jobs between 2001 and 2013

LEADING THE FIGHT: Denise Barlage and Venanzi Luna.

Photo: Liz Cook-

is the world's largest company and the largest private employer on earth. It employs 1.4 million people in the US and 800,000 in 27 other countries on five continents. The only larger employers are public – the US Department of Defense and the Chinese army.

As a result of its staggering size, Wal-Mart has tremendous influence on wages, labour standards, environmental standards and the national trade deficit as well as global trade policy. Labour activists, global trade analysts and economists talk of “the Wal-Mart effect.” By some estimates, Wal-Mart's imports from China alone have cost 400,000 Americans their jobs between 2001 and 2013. The sheer volume of its purchases enables the company's buyers to successfully press suppliers to lower their wages, labour costs and safety standards in order to lower their prices. This has had wide ripple effects, driving down manufacturing wages both in the US and abroad.

The second largest private employer in the world is McDonald's, whose workers have also been leaders in the global fight for a living wage. Earlier in May, 10,000 workers from across the US staged a civil disobedience camp-out at the McDonald's annual shareholders' meeting in Oak Brook, Illinois. They are currently voting on whether to unionise.

Wal-Mart hasn't yet agreed to talk to me for my book. However, their corporate website states, “Our associates are the heart of our business – all 2.2 million of them. For tens of thousands of people every year, a new job at one of our stores, clubs, distribution centres or corporate offices opens the door to a better life.”

Corporate spokespeople insist that salaries, benefits and opportunities for advancement open to Wal-Mart associates are competitive with other major corporations.

Former Pico Wal-Mart associate Jennie Mills has been living in her car for two years. She parks across from the Wal-Mart where she used to work, sleeping in the little hatchback with her husband and their cat. I met her at the nearby Denny's, where employees let the couple wash every morning in the restaurant bathroom.

“Even when I was working,” Mills told me, “I couldn't afford to pay for my apartment. When my son got hurt and couldn't work any more, I was evicted. There were three homeless workers at my Wal-Mart.”

Her son also worked for the Pico Wal-Mart, doing lifting and stocking shelves. When he was injured on the job, he was told by his

When Green reached her last trimester of pregnancy, she asked her manager for lighter work. Her manager's response – Take an unpaid leave or "do your job" – was not what she had hoped

manager to continue working. Injured again, this time more seriously, he could no longer do his job. He was, she says, unceremoniously laid off. Since that time, she has been a militant Organization United for Respect (OUR) Wal-Mart activist.

Though Wal-Mart workers have been organising across the US and around the world – Chile and China have been particularly militant – Pico's Wal-Mart associates helped start it all. In fall 2012, Denise Barlage and co-workers Venanzi Luna and Evelin Cruz led the first strike against a Wal-Mart in the United States. Unionised Wal-Mart workers from Italy, Uruguay, Chile and South Africa flew in to support them, walking them back into the store when the strike ended so that managers could not harass or fire them for striking.

That same year, pregnant Wal-Mart workers from California to Maryland also began challenging the stores' labour policies, Girshriela Green of the Crenshaw store in South Central Los Angeles told me.

When Green reached her last trimester of pregnancy, she asked her manager for lighter work. This was the first job she had been able to find since coming off welfare, she told me, and she really liked it. Still, she did not want to risk losing her baby. Her manager's response – Take an unpaid leave or "do your job" – was not what she had hoped.

Injured while lifting stock, Green saw no choice but to continue working. She couldn't afford to lose her paycheque. Repeatedly asked to stock bulky, heavy items, she says she ended up with dangerous bone spurs in her throat and had to take leave. She was sitting on her living room couch in a neck brace when the call came telling her she'd been fired. That's when she decided to join OUR Wal-Mart.

Green reached out to other pregnant Wal-Mart workers. They formed a group called Respect the Bump. With the help of the National Women's Law Center, Respect filed a complaint against Wal-Mart with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. They charged violation of the 1978 Pregnancy Discrimination Act.

Before the complaint could be fully litigated, Wal-Mart announced a change in policy. It would now make accommodations for pregnant workers. But the changes in policy were not enough to stop injuries on the job – even after the Supreme Court's 2016 UPS decision ordering that company to accommodate pregnant workers. Respect is continuing to fight and to sue.

To protest Wal-Mart's retaliations against activists, workers from 30 cities walked off their jobs in Spring 2013, joining a Ride For Respect to Wal-Mart corporate headquarters in Bentonville, Arkansas. Green told me that the "Respect Riders" were met by security and dogs. "We just wanted to talk to our employers. And they threatened to have us arrested."

It was in November of 2014 that Barlage, Luna, Tyfani Faulkner and 25 others staged a sit-down strike, the first retail sit-down since Woolworth workers struck in 1937. "We shut down the store for almost two hours," Luna told me. "Corporate was freaking out."

She and other workers put tape over their mouths bearing the word STRIKE. The tape was meant to illustrate Wal-Mart's attempts to silence workers, Barlage and Luna told me. The strikers held up pictures of the Woolworth sit-down strikers. They felt they were making history. Meanwhile, in Pico-Rivera, hundreds of protesters sang the old labour anthem "We Shall Not Be Moved." Then, parodying Wal-Mart's slogan "Pay Less, Live Better," they sat down in traffic holding hand-lettered signs that read: "Stand Up, Live Better. Sit Down, Live Better."

At first, the pressure seemed to yield results. In Spring, 2015, Wal-Mart announced that it would be raising wages for 500,000 of its lowest-paid workers to \$9 an hour by April 2015 and \$10 an hour by 2016. There was a quick shareholder backlash and dire predictions about how these wages would affect corporate profits.

Then, in April 2015, corporate headquarters suddenly closed five stores in four states, lay-

ing off 2,200 workers without warning. Pico Rivera was among the stores closed. Venanzi Luna told me she came to work that day and found the doors locked. No one saw it coming, she said. Full-time workers and some part-time employees received 60 days' severance. Many did not qualify. Wal-Mart claimed that most workers who wanted transfers to other stores were given that opportunity. Luna says that is not true and that none of the transferred workers were members of OUR Wal-Mart.

Management claimed the stores were shut down to repair plumbing problems. OUR Wal-Mart and allies in the United Food and Commercial Workers said it was punishment for the militancy of the Pico workers.

The company has a history of shutting down stores to punish strikers. In 2013 and 2014, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruled that Wal-Mart was illegally intimidating and sanctioning workers in retaliation for their organising.

In November, 2015, in time for Black Friday, the Pico Rivera store was reopened. None of the OUR Walmart activists was rehired, Luna and Barlage told me. Venanzi Luna is still out of work. "I was suicidal for a while," she said, despondent at the thought that her activism had left her neighbours without income. "People came over to me and said 'If it wasn't for you, we would still have our jobs.'" Recently, when Luna tried to shop where she used to work, she says that she was recognised, stopped and escorted out by security.

Still, Luna, Barlage, Cruz, Green, Mills and Tyfani Falkner are in the struggle for the long haul. The Pico Rivera workers and allies from across the US have continued to rally and speak out. Over Thanksgiving 2015, Falkner, Barlage and other current and former Wal-Mart associates staged a Fast for \$15 hunger strike in front of the Manhattan apartment of Wal-Mart heiress Alice Walton. They had a banner that read "Alice Walton: Wal-Mart Workers are Hungry."

Evelin Cruz told me that she and the other Pico workers will never tone down their pro-

tests. "We were the loudest in the fight for fair wages and enough hours. We were the first to go on strike. We were the first to do a sit-down. We will be the last to shut our mouths."

In December, 2015, OUR Walmart began lobbying Congress to investigate the corporation's labour practices. In January, after filing repeated unfair labour practice complaints with the National Labor Relations Board, Wal-Mart workers won two major victories. First, a National Labor Relations Board judge ruled that Wal-Mart had violated federal law by firing activist workers and had to rehire them. One of these was Evelin Cruz. Getting her job back won't stop her speaking out, Cruz says.

Then, on May 3, 2016, the NLRB cited Wal-Mart for firing and disciplining activist workers in 10 states. Wal-Mart store managers were also required to read aloud to employees the federal government's ban on retaliating against workers for organising.

Though she has not yet been rehired, Denise Barlage says that she has found her calling – labour organising. "This is what I'm going to do for the rest of my life," she told me. "For my children. For the next generation. So they will not be treated this way. Everybody deserves a decent living. Everybody deserves respect. I enjoy organising, speaking out. And I'm going to keep on doing it."

On May 30, she flew to Bentonville for the Wal-Mart shareholders' meeting to speak out on behalf of the workers she says Wal-Mart has illegally fired for organising. It is the fourth year in a row that she has done so.

Fast food workers are also pushing McDonald's to pay a living wage and give its workers regular hours. Bangladeshi garment workers marched this May for higher wages and staged a global day of action against the global clothing retailer H & M, to demand it make its Bangladeshi factories safe from fire and building collapse. Migrant berry pickers are protesting child labor in the fields owned by the "world's berry company," Driscoll's.

"We started a revolution that has spread around the world," Venanzi Luna told me proudly. She may be right. **CT**

In November, 2015, in time for Black Friday, the Pico Rivera store was reopened. None of the OUR Walmart activists was rehired

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Teenagers beat school cops' arms build-up

Sarah Lazare tells how Los Angeles high school students forced school police to remove grenade launchers and M-16s from their arsenal

They have forced the police department for the second-largest public school district in the United States to remove grenade launchers, M-16 rifles, a mine-resistant ambush protected (MRAP) vehicle and other military-grade weaponry from its arsenal

A coalition of Los Angeles high school students and grassroots organisers has accomplished the unthinkable: After almost two years of sit-ins and protests, they have forced the police department for the second-largest public school district in the United States to remove grenade launchers, M-16 rifles, a mine-resistant ambush protected (MRAP) vehicle and other military-grade weaponry from its arsenal.

But the coalition did not stop there. Members took over a Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) board meeting in February to call for proof that the arms had been returned to the Department of Defense – a demand they eventually won in the form of an itemised invoice for every weapon sent back to the DoD.

The coalition also successfully pressed board members of the school district to apologise for greenlighting the policing of students with weapons of war.

“I now understand that, especially in the context of the many conflicts between law enforcement and communities of colour across the nation, our participation in this programme may have created perceptions about the role of our district and our school police that my silence exacerbated,” Steve Zimmer, the president of the board of education, wrote in a May 19 letter to the groups Fight for the Soul of the Cities and Labor



Community Strategy Center, which played a key role in the campaign. “Please accept my apology for any and all of my actions that contributed to feelings of betrayal and injury and interrupted our important collaborative efforts for equity and justice in all aspects of public education.”

The coalition eventually persuaded the Los Angeles School Police Department to issue its own apology. “The LASPD recognises the sensitive historical aspect of associating ‘military-like’ equipment and military presence within a civilian setting,” wrote Chief Steven Zipperman in a letter dated May 18. “We recognise that this sensitive historical component may not have been considered when originally procuring these type of logistics within a civilian or K-12 public school setting.”

The resounding victories were won in a district where the vast majority of students are black and latino. In the era of Ferguson, they have seen images of young people who look like them being shot and killed by police. Amid mounting nationwide

outrage over police use of weapons of war to patrol civilian neighbourhoods, the win marks an unprecedented stride toward the demilitarisation of public schools.

“I know that this will transcend my school district and state,” Bryan Cantero, a senior at Augustus F. Hawkins High School, told me. “I feel like I was part of something that is bigger than me. I prevented something terrible from happening to someone’s brother, sister, friend or daughter. We prevented a tragedy. We prevented a war. When the police got those weapons it was a call to war. Am I viewed as a student or prey? What do they think I am? At the end of the day, something had to be done, and we took charge.”

The Strategy Center describes itself as a movement-building think tank “rooted in working-class communities of color.” According to director Eric Mann, the organisation first discovered that the Los Angeles Police Department possessed an arsenal of military-grade weapons two years ago. At the time, Mann and his colleagues had just returned from a solidarity delegation to Ferguson in 2014, where they saw the deployment of tanks and assault rifles against civilian protesters. Mann said the delegation “understood this was part of the war against black people.”

The revelation that Los Angeles school cops were in possession of military arms immediately provoked a civil rights uproar. Yet, in September 2014, the school district and police department refused to return all of the weapons, agreeing to hand back grenade launchers, but insisting they needed armoured vehicles and rifles. “While we recognise, this armoured vehicle is ‘military-grade,’ it is nevertheless a life-saving piece of equipment that the district would not otherwise have,” the school district stated.

The subsequent campaign “took a lot of work and time,” Ashley Franklin, lead organiser for the Strategy Center, said. “We

organised on each of the blocks we work in, organised in different high school campuses, going in and doing classroom presentations at the school about how this is rooted in institutional racism. We had phone call campaigns, turned in 3,000 petitions and made over 300 calls to school board members. It was a long campaign, and those were just the easy tactics.”

Taking Action clubs at multiple high schools in the district played a critical role. “Young people decided to put their bodies on the line, following after Malcolm X and Fannie Lou Hamer,” Franklin said. “They did multiple sit-ins at the school board and disrupted meetings, declaring that this should not be business as usual.”

At the early February school board meeting takeover, students and activists refused to leave until their demands were heard, leading to a charged scene described in the Los Angeles Times. “Asst. Supt Earl Perkins hurried forward and motioned to camera operators, with a hand slashing across his throat, to cut the live video feed, while meeting chairman and board member George McKenna tried to establish order,” wrote journalists Sonali Kohli and Howard Blume. When administrators eventually left the meeting, students and activists remained, declaring the gathering a ‘people’s school board.’”

Monique Jones, a junior at Augustus F. Hawkins High School, was one of the young people who took action. “I believe the campaign was important because every day somebody of colour, black or latino, is being shot by police officers,” she told me. “Why would you bring those types of weapons into school campuses? It’s not a war zone. You’re not going to war with your own citizens and people who are in kindergarten through 12th grade.”

Some board members appear chastened by the exchanges they have had with students such as Jones. In an apology letter dated April 22, LAUSD school board member Monica Garcia declared, “The

The school district and police department had refused to return all of the weapons, agreeing to hand back grenade launchers, but insisting they needed armoured vehicles and rifles

Since 9/11, \$34-billion in federal government grants has gone toward the purchasing of military-grade weaponry for police departments. As in Los Angeles, many of these weapons have found their way into school police departments

need for safety is a collective responsibility that must balance our lessons learned from history, our present challenges and our vision for the future. . . . Together, with community partners, LAUSD has come a long way. And to use the words of the great Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., ‘we have a long way to go.’”

Despite the Los Angeles victory, police departments nationwide remain heavily militarised. This is largely because of the federal programme that allows police agencies to acquire weapons of war. The current iteration of the initiative dates back to 1990 and was escalated by the 1997 National Defense Authorization Act, which established that the Department of Defense may transfer “excess” military equipment to state and local law enforcement agencies. According to the Defense Logistics Agency, the 1033 programme has transferred at least \$5.4-billion worth of property since its inception.

In 2014, the year Black Lives Matter protests gripped the country, \$980-million worth of property (based on initial acquisition cost) was transferred to law enforcement agencies, the agency concludes, noting that more than 8,000 law enforcement agencies count themselves among the programme’s enrollees.

However, the actual amount of public dollars that have been funnelled into this program is far higher. A report from the Center for Investigative Reporting in 2011 found that since 9/11, \$34-billion in federal government grants has gone toward the purchasing of military-grade weaponry for police departments. As in Los Angeles, many of these weapons have found their way into school police departments. The police department for San Diego’s public schools revealed in 2014 that it had also purchased its own MRAP, a piece of equipment that has become a fixture of the US military’s occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan.

The 1033 programme is just one facet of the militarisation of police departments

nationwide, which also includes SWAT deployments for drug searchers and collaborations between police agencies, arms manufacturers and foreign militaries. An ACLU report released in 2014 found that the “use of hyper-aggressive tools and tactics results in tragedy for civilians and police officers, escalates the risk of needless violence, destroys property, and undermines individual liberties.” Poor people and communities of colour disproportionately see their neighbourhoods turned into war zones by police, the investigation determines.

Last year, President Obama issued an executive order placing some limits on the transfer of certain kinds of military weapons, referencing the demands of civil rights leaders and Ferguson protesters. However, he declined to eradicate the programme or immediately recall all of the heavy arms that have been distributed to police departments across the country.

High school senior Cantero believes Obama’s order does not go nearly far enough. “The 1033 federal programme still exists in the nation, and I think the following step is to abolish the programme in its entirety,” he said. “No school should have military-grade weapons. We want police military weapons destroyed.

“When you are a teen you feel you have no control over anything,” he continued. “But what is amazing to me is that there were so many teenagers all over the city who felt the same way we did, and stood up together. Power in numbers is an amazing thing. This is a national problem at the end of the day, because this is what the youth is going through. We’re not going to stop.”

CT

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Addicted to executions

William David Watkin highlights the increasingly bizarre, and unsuccessful, attempts by US authorities to kill prisoners humanely

It began in Utah back in 1977. On January 17 of that year, Gary Gilmore became the first man to be executed in the US for more than a decade, ending a national moratorium on the death penalty. Gilmore, guilty of murdering two men during a 24-hour spree, insisted on being executed and chose to die by firing squad.

It is possible that if this mentally disturbed, indeed suicidal man, had not elected to be shot that day, the history of the death penalty would have been completely different and the lethal injection never invented.

As it was, Gilmore's intransigence over the issue of his destruction meant that the death penalty was acceptable once more and states were faced with a series of tough choices. Should they kill or not? If so, what's the best way of going about it? And how were the states that eventually reinstated capital punishment going to answer to legal challenges based on the Eighth Amendment that outlawed any form of punishment that was "cruel or unusual?"

Enter Jay Chapman, a young forensic pathologist with no medical expertise in the field of pharmacology, who was tasked by an Oklahoma legislator to develop a more humane method of execution than the firing squad, hanging or the electric chair. It was a chance event that may have been precipitated by a simple remark made by



If Gary Gilmore had not elected to be shot, the history of the death penalty would have been completely different

Chapman that animals are put to death more humanely than humans. Such a bald comparison between man and beast inspired strong feelings in the Oklahoma legislature and Chapman was asked to right this wrong by developing a safe, effective and humane drug protocol for the now resurgent killing states to use.

Chapman's solution was devastatingly simple: "We simply took the standard set for anaesthesia in surgical procedures, then all we did was take the amounts of drugs to lethal levels recommended by a toxicologist."

This standard set consisted of three drugs: Sodium Thiopental to bring about unconsciousness, Pancuronium Bromide which paralyses the body, and Potassium Chloride to stop the heart. It was the potassium which did the actual killing, the other two drugs were applied rather to ameliorate its searing effects so that the patient could die violently of a heart attack, yet peacefully and without pain. Since its inception, around 1,000 people have been killed this



The execution chamber in San Quentin prison in California

“People talk about the drug not being tested. What does that mean? Should we be lining people up against the wall and testing them with different legal drugs?”

way in the US according to Amnesty International. Lethal injection is by far the most favoured mode of execution there – and is a system that has been exported around the world.

Yet the protocol has no real basis in standard medical methodology. It was never tested then – and never has been since. But then again, as Chapman says: “People talk about the drug not being tested. What does that mean? Should we be lining people up against the wall and testing them with different legal drugs?”

Ludicrous as this suggestion may sound, that appears to be what penitentiaries across the country have been doing, due to a complex set of global circumstances that means the favoured three-drug model is no longer possible simply because the European pharma companies that used to supply these drugs have since refused to do so.

In 2009, Hospira – the company that supplied that crucial first drug Thiopental (crucial because it allowed the killing states to prove that the lethal injection was humane) – suddenly found that it could no longer source its active ingredients in America. After an exhaustive search it found a company near Milan in Italy which agreed to provide the missing component. But once the Ital-

ian government caught wind of what the drug was being used for, it refused to allow its export. This was to provide a pattern that was initially ad hoc but eventually became a semi-official embargo. First Britain, then Germany suspended the rights of companies to export drugs to America for use in lethal injections.

Oklahoma is called the Sooner State and has a reputation of being first to the party. In the case of the lethal injection, this reputation is deserved, for when they found out they could no longer source Thiopental they switched to another drug, Pentobarbital, supplied by a company based in Illinois called Lundbeck. Pentobarbital is a pretty good switch for Thiopental – but perhaps officials at Oklahoma state pen should have paid attention to the name of the company. Lundbeck is a Danish company and, when the liberal Danes discovered what their Pentobarbital was actually being used for – not for treating seizures as it was designed to do but for masking them – they ceased to ship the drug stateside.

By then it was 2011, which proved to be a bad year for the lethal injection. The halting of supplies by Lundbeck was followed by a Europe-wide decision of nearly every big pharmaceutical company to refuse to provide any drugs to America for lethal injections, an embargo encouraged and backed by the European Union itself.

The embargo slowly took effect. By 2013 the amounts of lethal stock in the drug cupboards of Texas, Ohio and Oklahoma had dwindled to such a degree that death by lethal injection was, for all intents and purposes, foreclosed. By 2015 the number of executions in the 31 states still using this form of extreme punishment was down to just 28, compared to 98 in 1999.

Although this dramatic reduction has been a massive global success for abolitionism, it is not a definitive victory by any means – the death penalty is being defeated not because it is immoral, unconstitutional or because it contravenes the Eighth

Amendment. Rather, it is abolition by a technicality – you can use the drugs but only if you can find them. And, in any case, abolition by technicality has not proved sufficient to put an end to state-sponsored killing.

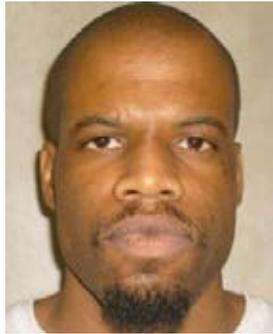
Faced with the possibility of not being able to kill their criminals, in 2014 many death penalty states started to simply try other drugs to see how they kill. For although the lethal injection always came with a veneer of medical legitimacy, it was never a truly medical procedure. There was no medical evidence that the original drug combination was safe and painless – quite the contrary – so what was to stop states trying other drugs? Nothing, it transpires, nothing legally and nothing medically. So that's what they started to do.

The terrible botched death of Clayton Lockett

On April 29, 2014 the state of Oklahoma executed a man called Clayton Lockett for his terrible crimes. They didn't have the right drugs to kill Lockett and they didn't have the right medical staff on hand either, but that didn't dissuade them. Unfortunately, things went very wrong indeed.

It was decided to try a new batch of drugs that was doing the rounds now that the key drugs were no longer being shipped from Europe. Instead of Pentobarbital, they chose Midazolam, not a very good killing drug to say the least as it is a sedative primarily used on children and the aged because its effects are so mild.

But it was not just ineffective drugs that led to the terrible botching of Lockett's death – Oklahoma has since been criticised for a lack of technical know-how in the killing room that day. It began when the executioners tried to insert a needle into the arm of Clayton Lockett, usually a routine procedure.



Clayton Lockett took more than an hour to die.

Photo: EPA: Oklahoma Department of Corrections.

The executioners repeatedly tried and repeatedly failed. Eventually they found a vein in Lockett's groin, at which point the warden asked for a "modesty sheet." The provision of the sheet preserved Lockett's modesty, perhaps, but it also meant that the staff couldn't see what they were doing – and, after 16 minutes, the blinds were drawn which meant that those legally permitted to observe the procedure were no longer able to

observe the procedure.

Behind the curtain it would appear that the botching went on. It had taken nearly an hour to find a vein and during this interminable search it was observed that the IV had infiltrated tissue. This meant the treatment could fail and would probably produce undue suffering. Finally, outside the chamber, corrections director Robert Patton and general council Steve Mullins, argued and then agreed to stay the execution. Unfortunately, in the meantime, what the executioners had been unable to achieve through intention, they had brought about by ineptitude. Lockett, after more than an hour – according to a timeline released by the Oklahoma Department of Corrections – had died of a heart attack. A lethal injection procedure is supposed to take about 15 minutes.

Even at this stage it was argued that Lockett could have, and should have, been revived, so that he could be nursed to health and killed "properly" at a later date. In the end this did not happen, which was yet another breach of standard procedure.

By the end of the whole appalling Grand Guignol staged in Oklahoma that day, it was unclear if the untested drugs were the cause of Lockett's suffering or not, but, as reports came in from other botchings using similar drug combinations, such as the extended asphyxiations of Joseph R Wood III

It was not just ineffective drugs that led to the terrible botching of Lockett's death. It began when the executioners tried to insert a needle into the arm of Clayton Lockett, usually a routine procedure

In one recent case, a consignment of drugs was paid for in cash with no receipts, making it impossible to trace the provenance or quality of the drugs in question. Even the staff charged with carrying out the execution were paid in cash

in July 2014, and Dennis McGuire in January 2015, it became clear that these new protocols had transformed the rapid efficiency of the lethal injection into an extended mode of torture.

The “Oklahoma report” was released in May of this year criticising, in no uncertain terms, the officials whose professional duty it had been to carry out executions in recent years.

Here are some of the indictments levelled against Oklahoma’s legalised killing machine after a string of botched executions, including that of Lockett. Their pharmacist ordered the wrong drugs. Even then a top official in the governor’s office insisted the execution go ahead, with the wrong drug. The attitude of those in charge of the executions was described as “careless, cavalier and in some circumstances dismissive of established procedures that were intended to guard against the very mistakes that occurred.” More than once the state used the incorrect drug to kill a prisoner, and – in a strange legal twist – when the state administered the incorrect drugs, this meant that prisoners were not legally allowed to challenge the procedure before their deaths.

Mullins was singled out by the report as “flippant and reckless”, allowing executions to go ahead even though he knew the incorrect drugs had been obtained. He has since quit his post. The list of errors goes on and on; the report is more than 100 pages long.

Some of the methods that states have used to get around the recent drugs embargo are worthy of a HBO mini-series. Some have been sourcing non-regulated versions of key drugs in India and importing them, illegally, into the US. How do we know? Because the FDA caught them. Other states have made extensive use of poorly regulated compound drug companies to synthesise the embargoed drugs. The FDA is cracking down on this practice.

The awful, tragic irony is that these state authorities charged with taking the lives

of criminals are attempting suspect acts in order to continue doing so. In one recent case, a consignment of drugs was paid for in cash with no receipts, making it impossible to trace the provenance or quality of the drugs in question. To compound this obsession with secrecy, even the staff charged with carrying out the execution were paid in cash.

Around the same time as the news came out of the Oklahoma hearing, Pfizer announced that it would no longer supply its products to any agency involved in capital punishment. This effectively means that the embargo is now complete and abolition has effectively been achieved on a technicality. But this is neither safe nor satisfactory. The only satisfactory end to this barbaric practise will be when the US Supreme Court acts. But the court, when last given the chance in 2015 – largely as a result of the Lockett killing – to ban capital punishment refused to do so . . . but only by a margin of five to four.

The embargo on drugs inevitably feeds into this process. The public may not give a damn about the difference between Pentobarbital and Midazolam, but people are starting to sit up and take notice when they see news reports about botched executions. So it seems likely that the practice of experimenting with new drug combinations will have a limited shelf life, as the public reactions to increased botching will be too negative. Even though most people in the US still favour the death penalty, those who are in control of its fate – the judges – are themselves subject to more localised pressures of opinion and, of course, must uphold the Eighth Amendment. Deaths by botching are clearly in breach of that.

So much so that, following Lockett’s execution, President, Barack Obama, called for a federal review of America’s death penalty procedures: Americans should “ask ourselves some difficult and profound questions around these issues,” he said.

Which raises the question, what happens next? Already several states have started to

look for alternatives. Many still have the right to execute by other means on their statute books. Some states have spoken of using the firing squad, others nitrogen gas. And then there is, of course, Hollywood's favourite, "Old Sparky" (the electric chair).

Most states are painfully aware of the effect these more graphically violent and symbolically loaded methods may have on a wavering public opinion. At the moment, many continue to play a dangerous game to keep on killing criminals.

Yet it is not only the 31 states who have capital punishment on their books that face tricky decisions. The whole issue of capital punishment teeters on a knife edge. If you find the latest tactics of places such as Oklahoma questionable, is not the current abolitionist strategy problematic as well? It is undoubtedly the case that the drug embargo has led to greater suffering on the

part of those who have still been executed by lethal injection. If you are an abolitionist, are you comfortable with suspension on a technicality, when this pushes states to use crueler means to kill?

Either way, it is probably the end of the road for the lethal injection. Its brief life has been a rip-roaring yarn of vision, carpet-bagging and malpractice that says so much about attitudes to death, revenge, science and the law – as well as our dependence on drugs. As you read this, I am preparing my pitch for HBO. "It's like Breaking Bad," I'll say, "with chemists and everything. Only Jessie is a prison warden and the drugs they deal don't make you get high, they kill you. Where's it set? Oklahoma, where else?" **CT**

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William David Watkin is professor of contemporary philosophy and literature at Brunel University, London. This article was first published at www.theconversation.com

Most states are painfully aware of the effect these more graphically violent and symbolically loaded methods may have on a wavering public opinion

BY THE NUMBERS www.inequality.org



Inequality.org

In Hong Kong last week, this Hermes Birkin sold for just over \$300,000, an auction record. Handbags, says Winsy Tsang of Christie's, certainly now rate as a "meaningful asset class."

Lock up the men, evict the women and children

Chris Hedges tells of deprivation, exploitation and misery in the heartland of the richest nation on earth

Desmond's book portrays a judicial system that has broken down, a dysfunctional social service system and the licence in neoliberal America to carry out unchecked greed, no matter the cost

Matthew Desmond's book, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, like Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed*, is a heartbreaking snapshot of the rapacious exploitation and misery we inflict on society's most vulnerable, especially children. It is a picture of a world where industries have been created to fleece the poor, and destroy neighborhoods and, ultimately, lives. It portrays a judicial system that has broken down, a dysfunctional social service system and the licence in neoliberal America to carry out unchecked greed, no matter the cost.

"Her face had that look," Desmond wrote. "The movers and the deputies knew it well. It was the look of someone realising that her family would be homeless in a matter of hours. It was something like denial giving way to the surrealism of the scene: the speed and the violence of it all; sheriffs leaning against your wall, hands resting on holsters; all these strangers, these sweating men, piling your things outside, drinking water from your sink poured into your cups, using your bathroom. It was the look of being undone by a wave of questions. What do I need for tonight, for this week? Who should I call? Where is the medication? Where will we go? It was the face of a mother who climbs out of the cellar to find the tornado has levelled the house."

Being poor in America is one long emer-



gency. You teeter on the edge of bankruptcy, homelessness and hunger. You endure cataclysmic levels of stress, harassment and anxiety and long bouts of depression. Rent strips you of half your income – one in four families spend 70 percent of their income on rent – until you and your children are evicted, often into homeless shelters or abandoned buildings, when you fall behind on payments. A financial crisis – a medical emergency, a reduction in hours at work or the loss of a job, funeral expenses or car repairs – can lead inexorably to an eviction. Creditors, payday lenders and collection agencies hound you. You are often forced to declare bankruptcy. You cope with endemic violence, gangs, drugs and a judicial system that permits brutal police abuse and ships you to jail, or slaps you with huge fines, for minor offences. You live for weeks or months with no heat, water or electricity because you cannot pay the utility bills, especially since fuel and utility rates have risen by more than 50 percent since 2000. Single mothers and their children usually endure

this hell alone, because the men in these communities are locked up. Millions of families are tossed onto the street every year.

The United States has five percent of the world's population and 25 percent of its prison population. More than 60 percent of the 2.2-million incarcerated are people of colour. If these poor people were not locked in cages for decades, if they were not given probationary status once they were freed, if they had stable communities, there would be massive unrest in the streets. Mass incarceration, along with debt peonage, evictions, police violence and a judicial system that holds up property rights, rather than justice, as the highest good, and that denies nearly all of the poor a trial, forcing them to accept plea bargains, is one of the many tools of corporate oppression.

The working poor, now half of the country, have fallen to levels of misery unseen since the Great Depression. One in eight renting families in the United States was unable to meet rent payments in 2013, Desmond writes.

Lamar, a double amputee profiled in Desmond's book (whose name, like all he wrote about, is a pseudonym), lived on \$2.19 a day once he paid his \$550 in rent. He was a single father and recovering addict responsible for two teenage boys. He desperately attempted to stay in his home by doing odd jobs for his landlord, propping himself with his hands across the floor, but even this did not save him and his sons from eviction.

"These days, there are sheriff's squads whose full-time job is to carry out eviction and foreclosure orders," Desmond wrote. "There are moving companies specialising in evictions, their crews working all day, every weekday. There are hundreds of data-mining companies that sell landlords tenant screening reports listing past evictions and court filings. These days housing courts swell, forcing commissioners to settle cases

in hallways or makeshift offices crammed with old desks and broken file cabinets – and most tenants don't even show up. Low-income families have grown used to the rumble of moving trucks, the early-morning knocks at the door, the belongings lining the curb."

We get the New Deal. A few decades later we get neoliberalism. Up and down we go on the capitalist seesaw. It is a long and honoured tactic of the capitalist class – concessions in times of unrest and then reversals – one amply illustrated by the labour history of the United States, and illuminated by revolutionary theorists such as Rosa Luxemburg.

Everyone suffers. But poor people of colour, trapped in the internal colonies Desmond wrote about, suffer more.

"Between 2007 and 2010, the average white family experienced an 11 percent reduction in wealth, but the average black family lost 31 percent of its wealth," Desmond noted. "The average hispanic family lost 44 percent."

Mass incarceration and evictions destroy the cohesion of poor communities. The oppressed are never permitted to congregate long enough in one place to organise. It is, I believe, one of the reasons families that visit incarcerated loved ones in prison are treated so brutally by prison guards. While they wait for hours – sometimes in the rain – outside the prison gate, they often have no access to a bathroom. Once in the visitor's area, they and their children are shouted at, searched and traumatised to the point of tears, as if they were prisoners. The idea is to make it so unpleasant they do not come back. And many do not. Once the oppressed gather together often enough to realise that their story is shared by millions of others, there will be hell to pay. In the 1930s, community groups blocked sheriffs from carrying out evictions, moved belongings from the street back into the house or organised rent strikes. But this takes solidarity.

The working poor, now half of the country, have fallen to levels of misery unseen since the Great Depression

There is a lot of money to be made off the poor. They are defenceless. And the law is on the side of the predators

“The public peace – the sidewalks and street peace – of cities is not kept primarily by the police, necessary as the police are,” wrote Jane Jacobs in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. “It is kept primarily by an intricate, almost unconscious, network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves, and enforced by the people themselves.”

Desmond, who follows the plight of eight families in impoverished neighbourhoods in Milwaukee, registered the citywide devastation of constant evictions.

“A single eviction could destabilise multiple city blocks, not only the block from which a family was evicted but also the block to which it begrudgingly relocated,” he wrote. “In this way, displacement contributed directly to what Jacobs called ‘perpetual slums,’ churning environments with high rates of turnover and even higher rates of resentment and disinvestment.”

“The key link in a perpetual slum is that too many people move out of it too fast – and in the meantime dream of getting out,” Jacobs observed.

There is a lot of money to be made off the poor. They are defenceless. And the law is on the side of the predators. As Desmond noted in his book, in “many housing courts around the country 90 percent of landlords are represented by attorneys, and 90 percent of tenants are not.” Slumlords, who usually own numerous properties, use the courts and sheriffs as their enforcers. “Most tenants taken to eviction court were sued twice – once for the property and a second time for the debt – and so had two

court dates,” Desmond wrote. And as long as the debt goes unpaid, the slumlord can slap on a 12 percent interest rate.

“For the chronically and desperately poor whose credit was already wrecked, a docketed judgment was just another shove deeper into the pit,” Desmond wrote. “But for the tenant who went on to land a decent job or marry and then take another tentative step forward, applying for student loans or purchasing a first home – for that tenant, it was a real barrier on the already difficult road to self-reliance and security.”

Corporations such as Rent Recovery Service are hired by landlords to hound evicted tenants for their debts. These corporations monitor tenants’ financial lives for years without their knowledge. They never close an unpaid file, waiting patiently for someone to become financially solvent to strike. Those few who begin to recover financially are forced to pay ancient debts, swelled by high interest rates, and pushed swiftly back into economic distress.

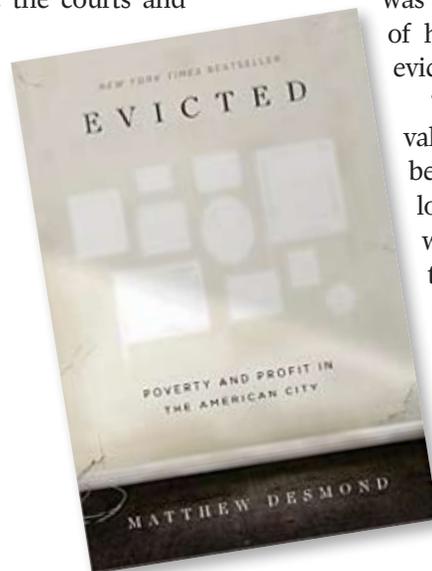
Desmond profiled Tobin Charney, who made close to half a million dollars a year running College Mobile Home Park, with its dilapidated 131 trailers and leaking raw sewage. Charney seized the trailers of those he evicted as “abandoned property” and rented or sold them to someone else. Lorraine Jenkins, one of his tenants Desmond followed, was paying Charney 77 percent of her income until she was evicted.

“She knew the ghetto’s value and how money could be made from a property that looked worthless to people who didn’t know any better,” Desmond wrote of a slumlord named Sherrena Tarver, who made about \$10,000 a month from her dozens of rental properties. She earned more in a month than most of

EVICTED: POVERTY AND PROFIT IN THE AMERICAN CITY

Matthew Desmond

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her tenants earned in a year. And like many slumlords, “her worst properties yielded her biggest returns.”

A life of dead ends led many in Desmond’s book to make decisions that, on the outside, could be seen as irresponsible or foolish: withholding rent payments, or as Lorraine Jenkins did, blowing her monthly allocation of food stamps on a dinner of lobster tails, shrimp, crab, lemon meringue pie and Pepsi. But the present is unbearable, and the future, they know, is grim. So they block the future out and seek, for a moment, to make the present endurable. It is why so many of the poor turn to drugs or alcohol. Jenkins, as Desmond wrote, was not “poor because she threw money away.” She “threw money away because she was poor.”

“People like Lorraine [Jenkins] lived with so many compounded limitations that it was difficult to imagine the amount of good behaviour or self-control that would allow them to lift themselves out of poverty,” Desmond wrote. “The distance between grinding poverty and even stable poverty could be so vast that those on the bottom had little hope of climbing out even if they pinched every penny. So they choose not to. Instead, they tried to survive in colour, to season the suffering with pleasure. They would get a little high or have a drink or do a bit of gambling or acquire a television. They might buy lobster on food stamps.”

The powerlessness of poverty evokes a protective emotional callousness that diminishes or blunts the capacity for empathy and feelings of self-worth. Arleen Belle, who battles depression and lives on welfare, struggles to raise a teenage boy, Jori, and his five-year-old brother, Jafaris, who has severe asthma. The book opens with Jori and his cousin throwing snowballs at cars on Milwaukee’s South Side. An angry driver stops his vehicle, chases the boys to their apartment and kicks down the front door. The family is evicted because of the incident and moves to a homeless shelter.

They had lived in the apartment for eight months. Jori was forced to change schools five times in the seventh and eighth grades because of repeated moves. Later in the book, after Jori kicks a teacher in the shin, the police show up at the door and the family, which had just moved into the apartment after a lengthy and exhausting search, is given a week to leave. The string of evictions and length of the waiting list – 3,500 names – means Belle and her boys will never receive housing assistance. Three-quarters of families that qualify for housing assistance nationally never get it.

Several of those in the book, including Scott, a gay nurse who loses his licence after he becomes addicted to opiates, were sexually abused. Most of those Desmond interviewed grew up in violent households or suffered domestic abuse from partners. Nearly all of the fathers were in prison or had disappeared.

Poverty robs children of their childhood. Jori, at 14, attempted to be his mother’s protector. “If Arleen needed to smile, Jori would steal for her,” Desmond wrote. “If she was disrespected, he would fight for her. Some kids born into poverty set their sights on doing whatever it takes to get out. Jori wasn’t going anywhere, sensing he was put on this Earth to look after Arleen and Jafaris. He was, all 14 years of him, the man of the house.” He tells his mother he wants to become a carpenter so he can build her a house.

Belle’s family ends up living with Crystal Mayberry, who was 18 and had an IQ of about 70, and who had been “born prematurely on a spring day in 1990 shortly after her pregnant mother was stabbed 11 times in the back during a robbery.” The stabbing induced labour. Crystal, the daughter of parents addicted to crack, grew up in 25 foster homes. When she aged out of the system, she became homeless.

Belle and Mayberry engaged, Desmond wrote, in “a popular strategy poor people used to pay the bills and feed their children. Especially in the inner city, strangers

The present is unbearable, and the future, they know, is grim. So they block the future out and seek, for a moment, to make the present endurable. It is why so many of the poor turn to drugs or alcohol

COVER STORY 4

There are numerous corporations and individuals that make money off this human sacrifice inside and outside prison walls. They have a vested interest in keeping the system intact

brushed up against one another constantly – on the street, at job centres, in the welfare building – and found ways to ask for and offer help. Before she met Arleen, Crystal stayed a month with a woman she had met on a bus.”

But the relationship soured, in part because of tensions between Jori and Mayberry. Jori threatened Mayberry and called her a “bitch” when she attempted to put his little brother outside the house with no shoes or coat. “You don’t know what it’s like,” Belle shouted at Mayberry as the relationship unraveled. “You don’t know what I been through. You don’t know what it’s like to have your father molest you and your mother not care about it!”

“Oh, yes I do,” Mayberry, answered. “Yes, I do! I know exactly what that’s like ’cause my stepfather molested me when I was just a little girl, and that’s why they sent me to foster care.”

The world is too much for Jori, as it is for his mother and little brother, as it is for most of the poor who are hemmed in by the unforgiving walls of poverty. After their eviction, Jori leaves his black and white cat, Little, with a neighbour. When he comes back to collect Little, one of his few sources of joy, Jori finds “a car had ground him into the pavement.” He fights back tears. He takes a foam mannequin’s head, turns it face up and begins to repeatedly hit the face with his fist until his mother screams at him to stop. By the end of the book, Belle loses her two children to Child Protective Services.

Desmond captures the stress and shame that makes it difficult to have empathy and that creates disconnected and alienated individuals. He wrote: “Arleen’s children did not always have a home. They did not always have food. Arleen was not always able to offer them stability; stability cost too much. She was not always able to protect them from dangerous streets; those streets were her streets. Arleen sacrificed for her

boys, fed them as best she could, clothed them with what she had. But when they wanted more than she could give them, she had ways, some subtle, others not, of telling them they didn’t deserve it. When Jori wanted something most teenagers want, new shoes or a hair product, she would tell him he was selfish, or just bad. When Jafaris cried, Arleen sometimes yelled, ‘Damn, you hardheaded. Dry yo’ face up!’ or ‘Stop it, Jafaris before I beat yo’ ass! I’m tired of your bitch ass.’ Sometimes, when he was hungry, Arleen would say, ‘Don’t be getting in the kitchen because I know you not hungry,’ or would tell him to stay out of the barren cupboards because he was getting too fat.

“You could only say ‘I’m sorry, I can’t’ so many times before you began to feel worthless, edging closer to a breaking point. So you protected yourself, in a reflexive way, by finding ways to say ‘No, I won’t.’ I cannot help you. So, I will find you unworthy of help.”

There are generations being sacrificed to emotional and cognitive dysfunction because of poverty. They lack a basic education. They are rendered numb by trauma. They are crushed as human beings. The rage Jori exhibited when his cat was killed grows and blossoms into a terrifying violence. I see it among my students in the prison. As adults, those raised like Jori explode with an inchoate fury at the slightest provocation, often something banal or trivial. If a gun is available – and in America, guns are almost always available – they shoot. If they are caught, they spend decades locked in a cage, where there are no more opportunities for education, vocational training, counseling or redemption than in their blighted slums. There are numerous corporations and individuals that make money off this human sacrifice inside and outside prison walls. They have a vested interest in keeping the system intact. These moneyed interests use their power and their lobbyists to prevent rational and humane reform. Desmond captures the true face of corporate America. It is ugly and cruel. **CT**

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

A very Brazilian coup

Conn M. Hallinan details the unravelling of the case for the impeachment of Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff

On one level, the impeachment of Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff seems like vintage *commedia dell'arte*: the Lower House speaker who brought the charges, Eduardo Cunha, had to step down because he has \$16-million stashed in secret Swiss and US bank accounts. The man who replaced Cunha, Waldir Maranhao, is implicated in corruption around the huge state-owned oil company, Petrobras. The former vice-president and now president, Michel Temer, has been convicted of election fraud, and has also been caught up in the Petrobras investigation. And the president of the Senate, Renan Calheiros, has also been implicated in the oil company scandal and is dodging tax evasion charges. In fact, over half the legislature is currently under investigation for corruption of some kind.

But there is nothing comedic about what the fall of Rousseff and her Workers Party will mean for the 35-million Brazilians who have been lifted out of poverty over the past decade, and for the 40-million newly minted members of the middle class one-fifth of Brazil's 200 million people.

While it was the current downturn in the world's seventh largest economy that helped light the impeachment fuse, the crisis is rooted in the nature of Brazil's elites, its deeply flawed political institutions, and the not-so-dead hand of its 1964-1985 mili-

tary dictatorship.

Given that the charges against Rousseff do not involve personal corruption, or even constitute a crime – if juggling books before an election was illegal, virtually every politician on the planet would end up in the dock – it is hard to see the impeachment as anything other than a political coup. Even the conservative Economist, long a critic of Rousseff, writes, “in the absence of proof of criminality, impeachment is unwarranted” and, “looks like a pretext for ousting an unpopular president.”

That suspicion is reinforced by the actions of the new President. Temer represents the centre-right Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) that until recently was in alliance with Rousseff's Workers Party. As soon as Rousseff was impeached by the Senate and suspended from office for 180 days, Temer made a sharp turn to the right on the economy, appointing a cabinet of ministers straight out of Brazil's dark years of dictatorship: all white, all male, and with the key portfolios in the hands of Brazil's historic elites. This is in a country where just short of 51 percent of Brazilians describe themselves as black or mixed.

Seven of those ministers have been implicated in the Petrobras scandal.

The President announced a programme to “reform” labor laws and pensions, code words for anti-union legislation and pen-

As soon as Rousseff was impeached by the Senate and suspended from office for 180 days, Temer made a sharp turn to the right on the economy, appointing a cabinet of ministers straight out of Brazil's dark years of dictatorship

DILMA'S DILEMMA

Brazil has long been a country with sharp divisions between wealth and poverty, and its elites have a history of using violence and intimidation

sion cuts. His new Finance Minister, Henrique Meirelles, a former central bank head who once headed BankBoston in the US, announced that, while programs for the poor “which don’t cost the budget that much” would be maintained – such as the highly popular and successful Bolsa Familia that raised tens of millions out of poverty through small cash grants – other Workers Party initiatives would go under the knife.

The new government is already pushing legislation that would roll back laws protecting the environment and indigenous people, and has appointed ministers with terrible track records in both areas.

One of the largest soybean farmers in Brazil, Blairo Maggi, was appointed agriculture minister. Maggi has overseen the destruction of vast areas of the Amazon to make way for soybean crops. Temer’s initial appointment for science minister was an evangelical Protestant minister who doesn’t believe in evolution. Temer also folded the culture ministry into the ministry of education, sparking sit-ins and demonstrations by artists, filmmakers and musicians.

Brazil has long been a country with sharp divisions between wealth and poverty, and its elites have a history of using violence and intimidation. Brazil’s north-east is dominated by oligarchs who backed the 1964 military coup and manipulated the post-dictatorship constitution.

Political power is heavily weighted toward rural areas dominated by powerful agricultural interests. The three poorest regions of the country, accounting for only two-fifths of the population, control three quarters of the seats in the Senate. As historian Perry Anderson puts it, the political system was designed “to neutralise the possibility that democracy might lead to the formation of any popular will that could threaten the enormities of Brazilian inequality.”

Brazil’s legislature is splintered into 35 different parties, many of them without a political philosophy. The legislature is elect-

ed on the basis of proportional representation, but with an added twist: an “open list” system in which voters can choose any candidate, many of them standing on the same ticket. The key to winning elections in Brazil, then, is name recognition, and the key to that is lots and lots of money. Most of that money comes from Brazil’s elites and the oligarchs in the country’s north-east.

Because of the plethora of parties, forming a government is tricky. What normally happens is that one of the larger parties ropes in several smaller parties by giving them ministries. Not only does this encourage corruption – each party knows it needs to raise lots of money for elections – but results in political incoherence.

When the Workers Party was elected in 2002 it was unwilling to dilute its programmes by bringing ideological opponents into a cabinet, yet the Workers Party needed partners. The solution was cash payouts to legislators, a scheme titled “mensalao” (“monthly payoffs”) that was uncovered in 2005. Once the payoffs were revealed, the Workers Party had little choice but to fall back on the old system of handing out ministries in exchange for votes. That is how Temer and the PMBD entered the scene.

With the reputation of Silva and the Workers Party dented by the payoff scheme, the right saw an opportunity to rid themselves of the left, but Silva’s popularity and the success of programmes aimed at alleviating poverty made the Workers Party pretty much unassailable at the ballot box. Silva won another landslide election in 2006, and Rousseff was elected twice in 2010 and 2014. In short, the elites could not win elections.

But they could still pull off a very Brazilian coup. First, they hammered at the fact that some Workers Party leaders had been involved in corruption and others implicated in the Petrobras bribery scheme. Rousseff headed up Petrobras before being elected president. While she has never been linked to any of the corruption, it did happen on her watch.

Petrobras is rated the fourth largest company in the world, and it is building tankers, off shore platforms and refineries. That expansion has opened opportunities for graft, and the level of bribery involved could exceed \$3-billion. Nine construction companies are implicated in the scandal, as well as more than 50 politicians, legislators and state governors, including the PMDB and the Workers Party.

Rousseff's biggest mistake was to run on an anti-austerity platform in 2014 and then reverse course after she was elected, putting the brakes on spending. The economy was already troubled and austerity made it worse. The 2005 bribery scheme lost the Workers Party some of the middle class, and the 2014 austerity alienated some of the party's working class support. But it was most likely Rousseff's decision to green light the Petrobras corruption investigation that spurred her enemies to strike before the probe pulls down scores of political leaders and wealthy construction owners. One of Temer's ministers was recently caught on tape plotting how to use the impeachment to derail the investigation.

Certainly the campaign aimed at Rousseff was well orchestrated. Brazil's media – dominated by a few elite families – led the charge. According to Reporters Without Borders, the role of the media was “partisan,” its anti-Rousseff agenda “barely veiled.” Judge Sergio Moro, who is a key figure in the Petrobras investigation, illegally leaked wiretap intercepts that put Silva and Rousseff in a bad light.

Given the makeup of the Brazilian Senate, it is likely Rousseff will be convicted and removed as President. It also appears that Temer will try to roll back many of the programmes that successfully narrowed the gap between rich and poor.

Brazil's economy is in trouble, shrinking 3.7 percent last year. Commodity prices are down worldwide, in large part because of the downturn of China's economy. Iron ore dropped from \$155 to \$55 a ton, soya went

from \$18 to \$8 a bushel, and oil from \$140 to less than \$40 a barrel.

Brazilian debt is rising, but it is still half that of Italy, and unemployment is low, at least by European standards. A return to the austerity policies that destroyed economies all across the southern cone during the 1980s and '90s would be a disaster. The worst thing one can do in a recession is curb spending, which stalls out economies and puts countries into a debt spiral.

The austerity policies of the European Union have kept all but a few European economies virtually dead in the water, and those that have shown some growth, such as Spain, still post unacceptable unemployment rates. Spain currently has an overall national jobless rate of 21 percent, rising to almost 50 percent among youth. Brazil's jobless rate is 10.9 percent.

For now, the Workers Party is on the ropes but hardly down and out. It has 500,000 members, and the new government will find it is very difficult to take things away from people now that they have got used to having them. Thirty-five million people are unlikely to return to their previous poverty without a fight.

One of Temer's first acts was putting up 100,000 billboards all over the country with the slogan: “Don't speak of crisis; work!”, which sounds a lot like “Shut up.” Brazilians are not noted for being quiet, particularly if the government instituting painful cuts is unelected.

The pressure for new elections is sure to grow, although the current government will do anything it can to avoid them. Sooner or later there will be a reckoning. **CT**

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Rousseff's biggest mistake was to run on an anti-austerity platform in 2014 and then reversing course after she was elected, putting the brakes on spending. The economy was already troubled and austerity made it worse

IN THE PICTURE



Above: Chips with everything, and the peas are free! Facing Page: Your chips taste better than mine . . .

Eating out . . .

Tony Sutton enjoys a day at the seaside, beaches, food and all

Ah, the seaside – where else would an Englishman (or woman) want to spend a hot summer's day? Welcome to Skegness, Lincolnshire, the English East Coast's oldest and most famous, holiday resort. It's renowned for its endless sandy beaches, glistening (if usually cold) sea, renowned Jolly Fisherman logo, and – best of all – an unlimited selection of fish 'n' chip shops, many of them packed into the town's High Street. The narrow street, known to locals and visitors alike as Chip Alley, has more fish 'n' shops than you'll encounter in such a short walk just about anywhere in the country – perhaps in the world! So next time you're in England, go to Skeggy and taste a little culinary history. Don't forget to ask for peas – they're free . . . **CT**



DOG HOUSE

WESTERN UNION WU

WATCHES BATTERIES & STRA

HOME OF THE FOOTLONG

PHC ACCESSORY
MOL KIDS TO
ACCESSORY

CLIPS • BO
CARVES •
RINGS • L
NAIL VAR
and Lots

Argos

IN THE PICTURE



Above:
Elvis is in
the house
– but no photos
allowed
unless you’re
a customer.

Right:
Waiting for
lunch –
I’ll have
a hot dog,
please.





Above:
Lunch in the
mid-afternoon
sunshine. Their
four-legged pal sits
beneath the table,
awaiting a share.



Left:
Two helpings
of chips is
better than one.



Centre left:
Don't want fish?
Try scampi
instead.

The desperate plight of petro-states

With a busted business model, oil economies head for the unknown, writes **Michael Klare**

Russia, under Vladimir Putin, used its prodigious oil wealth to rebuild and refurbish its military, which had largely disintegrated following the collapse of the Soviet Union

Pity the poor petro-states. Once so wealthy from oil sales that they could finance wars, mega-projects, and domestic social peace simultaneously, some of them are now beset by internal strife or are on the brink of collapse as oil prices remain at ruinously low levels. Unlike other countries, which largely finance their governments through taxation, petro-states rely on their oil and natural gas revenues. Russia, for example, obtains about 50 percent of government income that way; Nigeria, 60 percent; and Saudi Arabia, a whopping 90 percent. When oil was selling at \$100 per barrel or above, as was the case until 2014, these countries could finance lavish government projects and social welfare operations, ensuring widespread popular support. Now, with oil below \$50 and likely to persist at that level, they find themselves curbing public spending and fending off rising domestic discontent or even

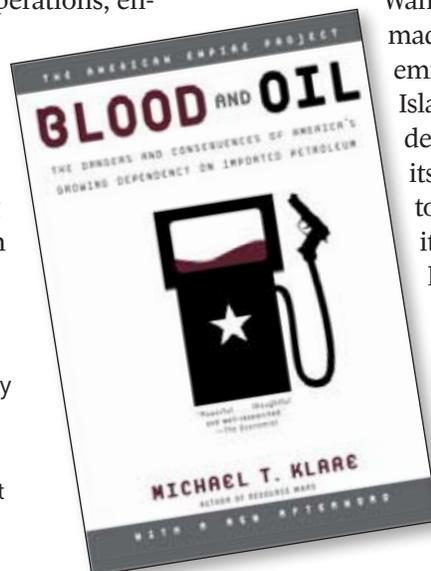
BLOOD AND OIL

The Dangers and Consequences of America's Growing Dependency on Imported Petroleum

Michael T. Klare

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incipient revolt.

At the peak of their glory, the petro-states played an outsized role in world affairs. The members of OPEC, the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, earned an estimated \$821-billion from oil exports in 2013 alone. Flush with cash, they were able to exert influence over other countries through a wide variety of aid and patronage operations. Venezuela, for example, sought to counter US influence in Latin America via its Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), a cooperative network of mostly leftist governments. Saudi Arabia spread its influence throughout the Islamic world in part by financing the efforts of its ultra-conservative

Wahhabi clergy to establish madrassas (religious academies) throughout the Islamic world. Russia, under Vladimir Putin, used its prodigious oil wealth to rebuild and refurbish its military, which had largely disintegrated following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Lesser members of the petro-state club such as Angola, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan became accus-



THE PRICE OF OIL: Pollution at Lago Agrio, Ecuador.

Photo: Wikipedia

tomed to regular fawning visits from the presidents and prime ministers of major oil-importing countries.

That was then, and this is now. While these countries still matter, what worries these presidents and prime ministers now is the growing likelihood of civil violence or even state collapse. Take, for example, Venezuela, long an ardent foe of US policy in Latin America, but today the potential site of a future bloody civil war between supporters and opponents of the current government. Similar kinds of internal strife and civil disorder are likely in oil-producing states such as Algeria and Nigeria, where the potential for the further growth of terrorist violence amid chaos is always high.

Some petro-states such as Venezuela and Iraq already appear to be edging up to the brink of collapse. Others such as Russia and Saudi Arabia will be forced to reorient their economies if they hope to avoid such

future outcomes. Whatever their degree of risk, all are already experiencing economic hardship, leaving their leaders under growing pressure to alter course in the bleakest of circumstances – or face the consequences.

A busted business model

Petro-states are different from other countries because the fates of their governing institutions are so deeply woven into the boom-and-bust cycles of the international petroleum economy. The challenges they face are compounded by the unnaturally close ties between their political leaderships and senior officials of their state-owned or state-controlled oil and natural gas industries. Historically, their rulers have placed close allies or even family members in key industry positions, ensuring continuing government control and in many cases personal enrichment as well. In Russia, for

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ENERGY WOES

A growing number of analysts are convinced that world oil demand will in the not-so-distant future reach a peak and begin a long-term decline, ensuring that large reserves of petroleum will be left in the ground

example, the management of Gazprom, the state-controlled natural gas company, and Rosneft, the state-owned oil company, is almost indistinguishable from the senior leadership in the Kremlin, with both groups answering to President Putin. A similar pattern holds for Venezuela, where the government keeps the state-owned company, *Petróleos de Venezuela, SA (PdVSA)*, on a tight leash, and in Saudi Arabia, where the royal family oversees the operations of the state-owned Saudi Aramco.

In 2016, one thing is finally clear, however: the business model for these corporatised states is busted. The most basic assumption behind their operation – that global oil demand will continue to outpace world petroleum supplies and ensure high prices into the foreseeable future – no longer holds. Instead, in what for any petro-state is a nightmarish, upside-down version of that model, supply, not demand, is forging ahead, leaving the market flooded with fossil fuels.

Most analysts, including those at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), now believe that increases in energy efficiency, the spread of affordable alternative energy sources (especially wind and solar), slowing worldwide economic growth, and concern over climate change will continue to put a damper on fossil fuel demand in the years ahead. Meanwhile, the oil industry – now equipped with fracking technology and other advanced extractive techniques – will continue to boost supplies. It's a formula for keeping prices low. In fact, a growing number of analysts is convinced that world oil demand will in the not-so-distant future reach a peak and begin a long-term decline, ensuring that large reserves of petroleum will be left in the ground. For the petro-states, all of this means persistent pain, unless they can find a new business model that is somehow predicated on a permanent low-oil-price environment.

These states vary in both their willingness and ability to respond to this new re-

ality effectively. Some are too deeply committed to their existing business model (and its associated leadership system) to consider significant changes; others, increasingly aware of the need to do something, find almost insuperable structural roadblocks in the way; while a third group, recognising the desperate need for change, is attempting a total economic overhaul of its oil economies. In recent weeks, examples of all three types – Venezuela for the first, Nigeria the second, and Saudi Arabia the third – have surfaced in the news.

Venezuela: a nation on the brink

Venezuela claims the world's largest proven reserves of petroleum, an estimated 298-billion barrels of oil. In past decades, the exploitation of this vast fossil fuel patrimony has ensured incredible wealth for foreign companies and Venezuelan elites alike. After assuming the presidency in 1999, however, Hugo Chávez sought to channel the bulk of this wealth to Venezuela's poor and working classes by forcing foreign firms to partner with the state-owned oil firm PdVSA, and redirecting that company's profits to government spending programmes. Billions of dollars were funneled into state-directed "missions" to the poor, lifting millions of Venezuelans out of poverty. In 2002, when the company's long-serving managers rebelled against these moves, Chávez simply replaced them with his own party loyalists and the diversion of funds continued.

In the wake of the ousting of that original management team, the country's oil production began to decline. With prices running at or above \$100 per barrel, this initially seemed to make little difference as money continued to pour into government coffers and those missions to the poor kept right on going. What Chavez didn't do, however, was create the national equivalent of a rainy-day fund. Little of the oil money was channelled into a sovereign wealth fund for more problematic moments, nor was any

invested in other kinds of industries that might in time have generated streams of non-fossil-fuel income for the government.

As a result, when prices began to drop in the fall of 2014, Chavez's presidential successor, Nicolás Maduro, faced a triple calamity: diminished revenues for social services, scant savings to draw upon, and no alternative sources of income. Not surprisingly, as a new impoverishment spread, many former Chavistas lost faith in the regime and, in last December's parliamentary elections, voted for emboldened opposition candidates.

Today, Venezuela is a nation living under an officially declared "state of emergency," politically riven, experiencing food riots and other violence, and possibly on the brink of collapse. According to the IMF, the economy contracted by 5.7 percent in 2015 and is expected to diminish by another 8 percent this year – more, that is, than any other country on the planet. Inflation is out of control, unemployment and crime are soaring, and what little money Venezuela had in its rainy-day account has largely been spent. Only China has been willing to lend it money to pay off its debts. If Beijing chooses to hold back when the next payments come due this fall, the country could face default. Opposition leaders in the National Assembly seek to oust Maduro and move ahead with various reforms, but the government is using its control of the courts to block such efforts, and the nation remains in a state of paralysis.

Nigeria: Continuing disorder

Nigeria possesses the largest oil and natural gas reserves in sub-Saharan Africa. The exploitation of those reserves has long proved immensely profitable for foreign companies such as Royal Dutch Shell and Chevron and also for well-connected Nigerian elites. Very little of this wealth, however, has trickled down to those living in the Niger Delta region in the south of the country where most of the oil and gas is

produced. Opposition to the central government in Abuja, the capital, to which the oil income flows, has long been strong in the Delta, leading to periodic outbursts of violence. Successive federal administrations have promised a more equitable allocation of oil revenues, but a promise this has remained.

From 2006 to 2009, Nigeria was wracked by an insurgency spearheaded by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, a militant group seeking to redirect oil revenues to the country's impoverished southern states. In 2009, when President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua offered the militants an amnesty and monthly cash payments, the insurgency died down. His successor, Goodluck Jonathan, a southerner, promised to respect the amnesty and channel more funds to the region.

For a while, high oil prices enabled Jonathan to make good on some of his promises, even as entrenched elites in Abuja continued to pocket a substantial percentage of the country's petroleum income. When prices began to plummet, however, he was confronted with mounting challenges. Pervasive corruption turned people against the government, feeding recruits into Boko Haram, the terror movement then growing in the country's northern reaches; money intended for soldiers in the Nigerian army disappeared into the pockets of military elites, subverting efforts to fight the insurgents. In national elections a year ago, Muhammadu Buhari, a former general who vowed to crack down on corruption, rescue the economy, and defeat Boko Haram, took the presidency from Jonathan.

Since assuming office, Buhari has demonstrated a grasp of Nigeria's structural weaknesses, especially its overwhelming dependency on oil monies, along with a determination to overcome them. As promised, he has launched a serious crackdown on the sort of corruption that is a commonplace feature of petro-states, firing officials accused of blatant thievery. At the same

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ENERGY WOES

In 2016, the Saudi budget has, for the first time in recent memory, moved into deficit, and the monarchy has had to cut back on both its usual subsidies to and social programmes for its people

time, he has stepped up military pressure on Boko Haram, for the first time putting a crimp in that group's brutal activities. Crucially, he has announced plans to diversify the economy, placing more emphasis on agriculture and non-fossil-fuel-related industries, which might, if pursued seriously, help diminish Nigeria's increasingly disastrous reliance on oil.

In the cold light of day, however, the country still needs those oil revenues for the lion's share of its income, which means that in the current low-price environment it has ever less money to fight Boko Haram, pay for social services, or pursue alternative investment schemes. In addition, Buhari has been accused of disproportionately targeting southerners in his fight against corruption, sparking not just fresh discontent in the Delta region but the rise of a new militant group – the Niger Delta Avengers – that poses a threat to oil production. On May 4, the Avengers attacked an offshore oil platform operated by Chevron and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, forcing the companies to shut down production of about 90,000 barrels per day. Add that to other insurgent attacks on the country's oil infrastructure and the Nigerian government is expected to lose \$1-billion in May alone. If repairs are not completed on time, it may lose an equal amount in June. It remains a nation on edge, in danger of devastating impoverishment, and with few genuine alternatives available.

Saudi Arabia: Seeking a new vision

With the world's second largest reserves of oil, Saudi Arabia is also the planet's leading producer, pumping out a staggering 10.2-million barrels daily. Originally, those massive energy reserves were owned by a consortium of American companies operating under the umbrella of the Arabian-American Oil Company (Aramco). In the 1970s, however, Aramco was nationalised and is now owned by the Saudi state – which is to say, the Saudi monarchy. To-

day, it is the world's most valuable company, worth by some estimates as much as \$10-trillion (10 times more than Apple), and so a source of almost unimaginable wealth for the Saudi royal family.

For decades, the country's leadership pursued a consistent political-economic business plan: sell as much oil as possible and use the proceeds to enrich the numerous princes and princesses of the realm; provide lavish social benefits to the rest of the population, thereby averting popular unrest of the "Arab Spring" variety; finance the ultra-conservative Wahhabi clergy so as to ensure its loyalty to the regime; finance like-minded states in the region; and put aside money for those rainy-day periods of low oil prices.

Saudi leaders have recently come to recognise that this plan is no longer sustainable. In 2016, the Saudi budget has, for the first time in recent memory, moved into deficit, and the monarchy has had to cut back on both its usual subsidies to and social programs for its people. Unlike the Venezuelans or the Nigerians, the Saudi royals socked away enough money in the country's sovereign wealth fund to cover deficit spending for at least a couple of years. It is now, however, burning through those funds at a prodigious rate, in part to finance a brutal and futile war in Yemen. At some point, it will have to sharply curtail government spending. Given the youthfulness of the Saudi population – 70 percent of its citizens are under 30 – and its long dependence on government handouts, such moves could, in the view of many analysts, lead to widespread civil unrest.

Historically, Saudi leaders have been slow to initiate change. But recently, the royal family has defied expectations, taking radical steps to prepare the country for a transition to what's being termed a post-petroleum economy. On April 25th, the powerful Deputy Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, unveiled "Saudi Vision 2030," a somewhat hazy blueprint for the kingdom's economic diver-

sification and modernisation. Prince Mohammed also indicated that the country will soon begin to offer public shares in Saudi Aramco, with the intention of raising massive funds to invest in and create non-oil-related Saudi industries and revenue streams. On May 7, the monarchy also abruptly dismissed its long-serving oil minister, Ali al-Naimi, and replaced him with the head of Saudi Aramco, Khalid al-Falih, a figure deemed more subservient to Prince Mohammed. Falih's job title was also changed to minister of energy, industry, and mineral resources, which was (so the experts speculated) a signal from the monarchy of its determination to move beyond exclusive reliance on oil as a source of income.

This is all so unprecedented that there is no way of predicting whether the Saudi royals are actually capable of bringing anything like Saudi Vision 2030 to fruition, no less moving away in a serious fashion from its reliance on oil. Many obstacles remain, including the possibility that jealous royals will push Prince Mohammed (and his vision) aside when his father, King Salman, now 80, passes from the scene. (There are regular rumours that some members of the royal family resent the meteoric rise of the 31-year-old prince.) Nevertheless, his dramatic statements about the need to diversify the kingdom's economy do show that even Saudi Arabia – the petro-state par excellence – now recognises that some kind of new identity is now a necessity.

The stakes for us all

You may not live in a petro-state, but that doesn't mean you don't have a stake in the evolution of this unique political life form. From at least the "oil shock" of 1973, when the Arab OPEC members announced an "oil boycott" against the US for its involvement in the Yom Kippur War, such countries have played an outsized role on the world stage, distorting international relations, and – in the Greater Middle East – involving themselves (and their financial resources) in one conflict after another

from the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988 to the wars in Yemen and Syria today.

Their fervent support for and financing of favoured causes – whether it be Wahhabism and associated jihadist groups (Saudi Arabia), anti-Westernism (Russia), or the survival of the Assad regime in Syria (Iran) – has provoked widespread disorder and misery. It will hardly be a tragedy if a lack of funds forces such states to pull back from efforts of this sort. But given the centrality of fossil fuels to our world for the last century or more, the chaos that could ensue in the oil heartlands of the planet from low oil prices and high supply is likely to create unpredictable new nightmares of its own.

And the greatest nightmares of all lurk not in any of this, but in the inability of these states and those they supply to liberate themselves from reliance on fossil fuels fast enough. Looking into the future, the demise of petro-states as we've known them could have a profound impact on the struggle to avert catastrophic climate change. Although these states are not primarily responsible for the actual combustion of fossil fuels – that's something we in the oil-importing countries must take responsibility for – their pivotal role in fueling the global petroleum economy has made them largely resistant to international efforts to curb emissions of carbon dioxide. As they try to repair their busted business model or collapse under the weight of its failures, we can only hope that the path they follow will entail significantly less dependence on oil exports as well as a determination to speed up the conclusion of the fossil fuel era and so diminish its legacy of climate disaster.

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*Michael T. Klare is a professor of peace and world security studies at Hampshire College and the author, most recently, of *The Race for What's Left*. A documentary movie version of his book *Blood and Oil* is available from the Media Education Foundation. This essay first appeared at www.tomdispatch.com*

Looking into the future, the demise of petro-states as we've known them could have a profound impact on the struggle to avert catastrophic climate change

THAT'S LIFE

In his latest book, **Dougie Wallace** captures the end of an era with his stark images of Mumbai's 'tanked-up bumble bees'

Road work

Street photography has two extreme philosophies: The first insists that the picture taker should *never* intrude on the scene being photographed. Henri Cartier-Bresson described it as a quest for the decisive moment in which, "A photograph is neither taken or seized by force. It offers itself up. It is the photo that takes you; one must not take photos."

Contrast that with the Dougie Wallace method, an energetic take-no-prisoners approach, which he describes in the text accompanying *Road Wallah*, his latest extraordinary, documentary collection, as "ambush" photography.

Road Wallah's 96 pages feature 65 loud, brash and garish photographs of the iconic black-and-yellow Padmini taxis in the Indian city of Mumbai – "tanked-up, drunken bumble bees," fume-spluttering taxis struggling through the streets, "a congested myriad of bikes, buses, cows, cars and carts."

Wallace documented these elaborate ly-



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THAT'S LIFE

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“Tanked-up, drunken bumble bees,” fume-spluttering taxis struggling through the streets of the Indian city of Mumbai

adorned cabs over four years, during which he made 17 trips to the city, photographing what he describes as, “four-wheeled objects of amazement, decorated and personalised by their drivers in ways that showed both pride and a deep relationship; not surprising, given that many drivers would spend up to 24 hours a day in their cabs, often sleeping in them.” Wallace writes, “I’ve heard them described as ‘hypnotic Bollywood disco bars on wheels,’ though at times even this understated the reality. . . . They could also resemble a clown’s comedy car, as a never-ending stream of people would get in or out; enormous numbers of people squeezed into the smallest of spaces.”

Wallace explains his extreme photo-taking process, “Each time I would spend a few intense days, loitering with intent at busy junctions or at traffic lights ready to ambush Mumbai’s popular taxi culture. I sought to catch people seconds before self-consciousness kicked in. In this crucial moment of brief intimacy, the drivers and passengers often appear to look directly at the camera, their gaze intense.”

He adds, “In Mumbai the vibrancy and mayhem around the cabs, the drivers and the variety of their passengers caught my attention. I turned to them, shooting through the windscreen and experimenting with the light.”

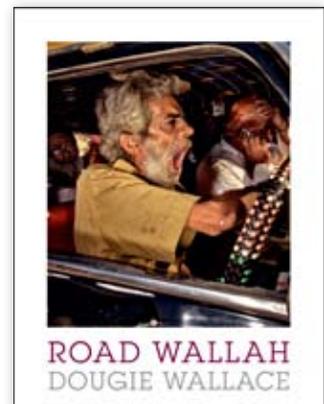


The photography is certainly intrusive, but it provides a glimpse of a vibrant life that has been confined to the history books, for the Padminis – a few years ago there were 60,000 in Mumbai – are no more. They were banned in 2015 by legislation aimed at reducing air pollution. “The taxis had been an integral part of the city’s landscape for decades, and a source of livelihood for many of those who flocked to Mumbai from the countryside in search of a better life. Now, thousands of previous owners can’t afford to replace their vehicles and with the state government favouring ‘fleet’ taxi companies, the owner-driver is on the way out, along with a workforce that had a semblance of stability and community. Mumbai’s streets will become a little less chaotic, a little less noisy and a little less distinctive,” writes Wallace.

Such is life. We gain a little, but in the process of change, we lose an integral and colourful part of the human experience, once available in the flesh, but now confined to picture books.

Tony Sutton

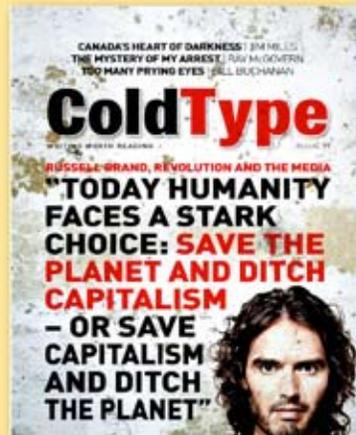
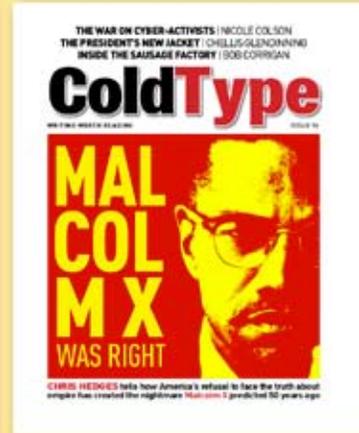
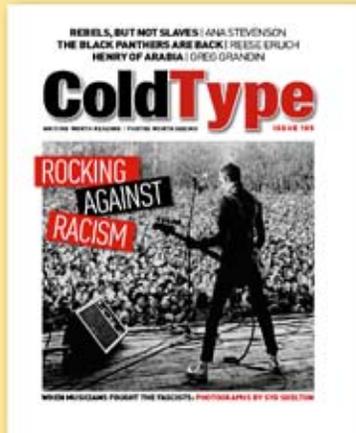
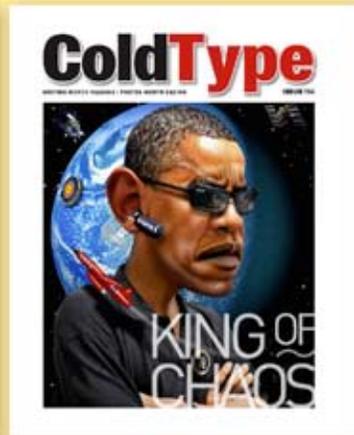
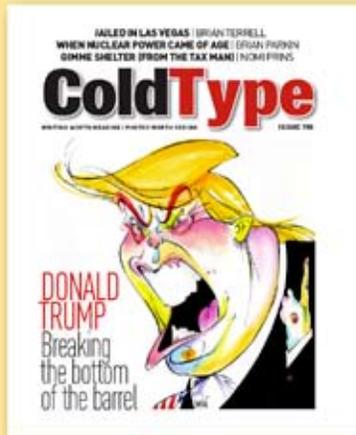
Note: References by Wallace to Bombay in quotes taken from the book have been changed to Mumbai for clarity and consistency.



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Why we must say 'No' to more trade deals

Rick Salutin has a message for Canada's Justin Trudeau as he contemplates signing new trade deals in Europe and the Pacific

A Three Amigos summit – Canada, US, Mexico – celebrating the abominable NAFTA trade deal of 1994, is coming at the end of this month. I'd like to suggest Canada's PM Justin Trudeau and his trade minister Chrystia Freeland take time to think about striking a different note, like backing off future deals such as the Pacific and European ones now pending.

The Liberals came into office saying they'd carefully examine those deals before signing on, which is ritualistic crap – as ex-Quebec premier Jean Charest wrote recently. You say you'll look seriously, then you just sign – as another new Liberal government did with NAFTA.

But that pattern might be changeable. Nobel Prize economist Joseph Stiglitz, one of the "smart guys" Freeland reveres (too much, perhaps), says he advised her against the deals, so that's a bit of cover. But mostly ordinary people everywhere have rounded on them. US and German support for the Europe deal has dropped from the mid-50s to the teens in just two years. And it's usually the far right – such as Trump – which has occupied the new terrain. It will go by default to them unless someone else steps up.

So what has changed? What's behind this shift?

The pro-dealers keep citing numbers to prove what bargains we're getting. I wouldn't

say numbers lie, but they don't tell the truth. Numbers don't do anything, they're numbers! What has pre-empted numberism is common sense, such as when Bernie Sanders says you didn't need to be a genius in 1990 to visit Mexico and realise that people willing to work for a few dollars a day would get jobs from farther north if trade deals (which were, by the way, rarely about trade and mostly about freedom to move production) went through. Now, that common sense logic has been ratified by experience. It's exactly what's happened.

Elementary logic also suggests that deals (they're rarely called 'free trade' deals any more, just 'trade') written in secret, with only corporate figures present alongside governments – versus workers, women's or native organisations, environmentalists: basically everybody else – will reflect guess-whose interests? That doesn't take genius, either.

The credibility dip has been steep. The chief argument that 'liberal' pro-dealer Paul Krugman, another Nobelist, has left for those deals is that they raised wage levels in poor countries. I think there's some truth to that, but why does it fall solely on Western workers' families to pay the price for such progress through their own desperate decline, while the rich soar to levels never known before? This is an exact recipe for the rise of xenophobia and rage, as you needn't look far to see.

Elementary logic also suggests that deals written in secret, with only corporate figures present alongside governments will reflect guess-whose interests?

DEFYING LOGIC

The only excuse for sticking with Canada's disgraceful sale to Saudis of democracy-busting military equipment is to provide some work around London, Ontario, where so many decent factory jobs vapourised during the NAFTA years

Lastly, the glamour is gone from the globalisation mantra. I recently attended a performance of Bach's Cello Suites in Toronto. Cellist Misha Maisky introduced himself as a citizen of the world, "I play an Italian cello with French and German bows, Austrian and German strings, my six children were born in four countries, my second wife is half Sri Lankan, half Italian, I drive a Japanese car, wear a Swiss watch, an Indian necklace and I feel at home everywhere."

It was weirdly tone-deaf for a virtuoso. Didn't he know where he was? And who doesn't drive a Japanese car? Outside the concert, a latino busker played "La Vie en rose" on an alto clarinet. He didn't congratulate himself for being a world citizen. He just is, like so many others. Deal celebrants may not have noticed how dated their shtick has grown.

And now for some breaking news. General Electric has just said it will build a new plant in Welland, Ontario, in response to hefty

bribes, whoops and subsidies from governments here. They'll happily screw their US workers, just the way many Canadians were screwed by previous moves to Mexico, then China, then Vietnam . . . it's your basic race to the bottom.

The benefit in Welland? 150 measly jobs. But they're jobs. The only excuse for sticking with Canada's disgraceful sale to Saudis of democracy-busting military equipment is to provide some work around London, Ontario, where so many decent factory jobs vapourised during the NAFTA years.

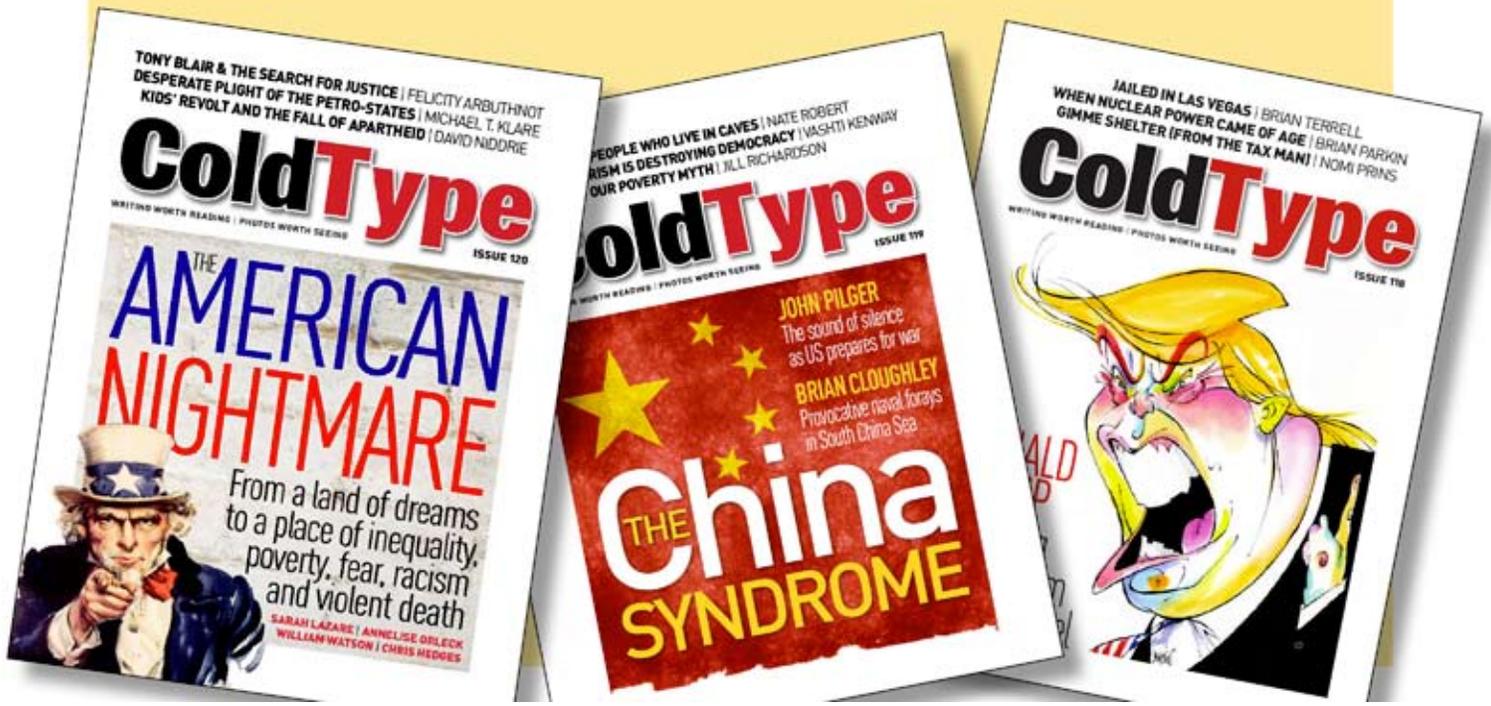
What's the alternative - no trade? Hardly. These people sometimes talk as if no one ever thought about trading before NAFTA. But slathering on more of these particular (not even really about) trade deals will only make things worse.

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

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A bottle of water

Dell Franklin picks up a late night customer. Trouble is the man is so drunk that he can't remember where he lives

It's almost two in the morning when I pull up to Bull's Tavern, the last classic dive in town, haunted mostly by rowdy townies and college kids. Somebody has called for a ride to Arroyo Grande, which is 15 miles south of San Luis Obispo. A gaggle of young folks lurch around out front, but, when I honk the horn, none of them indicates they need a cab, which means I must enter Bull's cold sober.

The doorman, an ex-CalPoly bruiser who probably played linebacker on the football team a few years back and decided to stay in town, is drunk. The few remaining patrons in the bar, like those outside, weave around and gibber in loud, incoherent voices. A few mopes are being flushed outside by the bruiser and one person has passed out at the bar. He looks homeless. The bartender, also fairly drunk, and near as burly as the doorman, is trying to revive him, lift his head off the bar, get him off his stool and standing.

"Anybody call a cab?" I holler.

The bartender signals me over and points at the slumped-over drunk, who isn't responding.

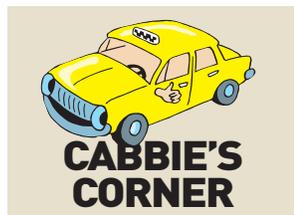
"No way!" I exclaim. "I don't take passed out drunks in my cab. They always puke."

"This dude never pukes," assures the bartender. "He's a pro. He's not as bad as he looks. He's a great guy."

"He's blind, comatose, can't open his eyes or hold his head up."

"You gotta take him to Arroyo Grande," the bartender insists. "He's cool. He lives on James Way."

"I don't know where that is. I don't have a tracking device. I'm unfamiliar with AG."



The bartender and the doorman lift the drunk off his stool to a standing position. His head lolls to his shoulder, his eyes half-closed and blank, yet he has this asinine grin on his face. The doorman and bartender, against my pleas,

begin steering him past me, out onto the sidewalk.

"Dammit, I don't want him in my cab!" I shout.

The stragglers still on the sidewalk make way as the two men steer the drunk to my cab, and I watch helplessly as they open the back door, spill him into the seat and sit him upright, as a ventriloquist would a dummy, his head instantly lolling to his shoulder.

The bartender hands me two twenties. "The dispatcher said it's about \$35. You got

A few mopes are being flushed outside by the bruiser and one person has passed out at the bar. He looks homeless

The drunk snorts a geyser from his nose and blubbers like a spouting whale. He bolts upright, flapping his arms; eyes now open but still sightless

a good tip there. I'll buy you a few rounds sometime. Bring your old lady, old timer. Thanks a lot, we really appreciate it." He offers his hand, and I have to shake it, and then he and the doorman hustle back into the bar and slam the door shut and lock it.

As a bartender, I always tried to make sure a patron was somewhat coherent and awake before pawning him off to a cab driver. Now I have no alternative but to head for the freeway, half a mile away.

I don't go a block, and he's snoring and there's no sight of him in the rearview mirror. He is half on the floor, gurgling, muttering, and he's thrashing around, thumping his body parts against my seat.

"Settle down back there!" I holler. "Hey, you damn wino, don't pass out on me . . . I don't know where the hell you live!"

No response.

I don't know which freeway off-ramp to take to find his street. I don't know how to find the street. I don't know the home address. It's a cold, moonless dark, and I do not know what to do with the drunk in his faded hooded sweatshirt, dingy, torn-at-the-knees jeans, and ratty sneakers. I continue yelling at him, but still there is no response. I keep the windows open so cold air flows in to keep him from becoming too nauseous and puking. His snoring is loud enough to rattle the interior and I turn up the radio full blast in hope of reviving the drunk.

I decide to take the busiest off-ramp in Arroyo Grande. I pull over on the side of the ramp just before it exits onto the main boulevard crossing over the freeway. I get out and open the back door. There is very little traffic. The drunk has settled on his side on the seat and is sleeping peacefully, snoring away, his hands forming a cushion under his face. I shake him. I yell as loud as I can an inch

from his ear. No response. I don't want to start handling the guy, but I'm growing desperate. And I don't want to dump a guy I can identify with at the police station. In fact, I don't even know where the police station is. But I also don't want to be driving around in the wee hours like a lost fool trying to find his street, and I don't want to drop his body off at the wrong address in the chilly 34-degree night.

Finally, veteran bartender that I am, I do what I've done for years to drunks passed out at the bar: I take out my plastic bottle of water and pour and splash the entire contents on his face, making sure to squeeze some into his nose and ears.

The drunk snorts a geyser from his nose and blubbers like a spouting whale. He bolts upright, flapping his arms; eyes now open but still sightless.

"WHERE THE FUCK DO YOU LIVE?!!!" I scream at him.

No response. He snorts water out of his nose and rubs his eyes. He starts listing to the side, and I push him upright.

"Come on, man, talk to me! I can't get you home unless you talk to me!"

He lists to the side and I again prop him up. A patrol car pulls up behind me, lights flashing. I approach the cop as he gets out of his car.

"I've got a small problem," I tell him.

"What's the problem?" asks the cop, a young guy, very official.

I lead him to the open door of the cab. "This is a nice fella who chose to take a cab instead of being a menace on the road. He took a little siesta and I had to pour a bottle of cold water on him to revive him, and I'm still trying to get him to respond. He says he lives on James Street, but I don't know where that is."

"James Way," the cop corrects. He shines his flashlight into the drunk's eyes. "Where do you live, sir?" he asks, loudly.

Nary a flicker of a response.

“May I see your ID, sir!” The officer shouts directly into his ear.

The drunk stirs. He manages to extract his wallet, fumbles retrieves it, pulls some cards out onto his lap, secures a driver’s license and holds it up for the officer, who takes it, peers at it with his flashlight, and appears confused.

“Sir, this license gives your address in San Luis Obispo. You’re a long way from home. You’re in Arroyo Grande.”

Out of his mouth come the drunk’s first words: “Can’t go there no more. Ex owns it. Kicked me out. Hates me. Wants me dead.”

“Sir, we need to know where you live NOW!”

“Royo Grande.”

“Where in Arroyo Grande?”

He begins listing and smacking his lips at the water that has saturated his face, neck and sweatshirt. The patient officer gently props him up and repeats the question over and over, louder and louder, flashing the light directly into his eyes—like shock treatment. Finally, at about the tenth request, he blurts out a number on James Way. Then he peers around, evidently apprised of the situation he’s found himself in: a cop, a cabby, drunk, on the side of the road, water-logged. Something not right here? You bet.

“I’m thirsty,” he mutters.

“I just poured my water on your head,” I explain.

Oh,” he murmurs.

The cop slowly gives me instructions to the drunk’s house. I thank him with great appreciation. He is an Eagle Scout type. I get back in my cab, find James Way and head north. I had stopped the meter on the off-ramp. As I drive on, the neighbourhood becomes more affluent, then exclusive. The drunk, meanwhile, remains upright.

“Sorry,” he mumbles, a little more alert.

“No sweat. Sorry I poured water on you.”

“It’s okay. I needed it.”

“This is a really nice neighbourhood you live in.”

“Yeah,” he mutters, disinterested. “I built some of it. Own some of it.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Own lotta stuff. Buildings. Bars. Cars. Houses. Toys. Stuff.”

“Me, I own nothing of any value. Never have. The more stuff I own, the more stressed and depressed I get. Guess that’s why I’m a cabby. I’m fairly happy, compared to most.”

He blows his nose into a bar napkin. “Thanks for pourin’ that water on me. I appreciate it. How much I owe yah for the ride?”

“It’s paid for.” I point to the meter. “Looks like \$35 or so. The bartender where you were passed out gave me \$40.”

“What bartender?”

“I don’t know his name.”

“What bar?”

I tell him.

“Hell, I own that, too. Own a couple of bars.” He points to a house, leaning forward. “That’s it. I live there.”

I pull into one of those circular driveways. There’s a Mercedes convertible in it. He has a wad and pulls out a bill, a 50, holds it near my ear. He is grinning. “Fifty bucks for a bottle of water. Best deal I ever made. Really ’preciate you pourin’ it on me.”

I watch him climb out of the cab and lurch up the driveway and up to his door. He searches himself for a key, finds it, takes a couple stabs with it, manages to open the door and pitches into the house, the door still open behind him. I get out and close it for him. **CT**

Dell Franklin is a long-time journalist and founder of the Rogue Voice literary magazine. He blogs at www.dellfranklin.com

There’s a Mercedes convertible in it. He has a wad and pulls out a bill, a 50, holds it near my ear. He is grinning

Israel wants peace process, but only one doomed to fail

Jonathan Cook explains how Benjamin Netanyahu's ideas for a two-state deal between Israel and Palestine are not what they seem

With astounding chutzpah, Israeli official Dore Gold compared the summit to the "height of colonialism" a century ago, when Britain and France carved up the Middle East between them

In a familiar muddying of the waters, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu spent the first week of this month talking up peace while fiercely criticising the summit in France – the only diplomatic initiative on the horizon.

As foreign ministers from 29 nations arrived for a one-day meeting in Paris, Netanyahu dusted off the tired argument that any sign of diplomatic support for Palestinians would encourage from them "extreme demands."

France hopes the meeting will serve as a prelude to launching a peace process later in the year. French president Francois Hollande said he hoped to achieve a "peace [that] will be solid, sustainable and under international supervision."

With astounding chutzpah, Israeli official Dore Gold compared the summit to the "height of colonialism" a century ago, when Britain and France carved up the Middle East between them. He conveniently overlooked the fact that it was the same British colonialism that promised a Jewish "homeland" in place of the native Palestinian population.

Earlier, Netanyahu and his new defence minister, the far-right Avigdor Lieberman, had publicly committed themselves to an "unceasing search for a path to peace".

In a two-minute interview on CNN, Israeli spokesman David Keyes managed to



TIRED ARGUMENT: Benjamin Netanyahu is keen on any peace process, so long as it's not the current one launched in Paris.

mention the formula "two states for two peoples" no less than five times.

Rather than the French initiative, Netanyahu averred, Israelis and Palestinians should be left to engage in the kind of face-to-face talks "without pre-conditions" that have repeatedly failed. That is because Israel, as the much stronger party, has been able to void them by imposing its own conditions. Netanyahu, it seems, is keen on any peace process, just so long as it's not the current one launched in Paris.

Part of the reason for bringing Lieberman

into the government was to provide more diplomatic wriggle room. With Lieberman cementing Netanyahu's credentials with the far-right, he is now free to spout vague platitudes about peace, knowing that his coalition partners are unlikely to take him at his word and bolt the government.

European fears

But while the domestic front has been secured, rumbles of dissent reverberate abroad. Europe is increasingly fearful that an emboldened Israeli government may soon annex all or major parts of the West Bank, stymying any hope of creating even a severely truncated Palestinian state.

The Paris conference is a sign of the mounting desperation in Europe to restrain Israel. While France is not about to engineer a breakthrough, Netanyahu is nonetheless worried.

It is the first time Israel has faced being dragged into talks not presided over by its Washington patron. That risks setting a dangerous precedent.

Although US secretary of state John Kerry attended, he was decidedly cool towards the summit. Yet Netanyahu worries that this time Washington may not be able – or willing – to watch his back.

If the conference leads to talks later in the year, that will be when Barack Obama is preparing to bow out as president. Netanyahu is afraid of surprises. Israeli officials have been in near-panic that Obama may seek payback for the years of humiliation he endured from Netanyahu.

One way might be for Washington to agree to French oversight of the talks, following a tight timetable and establishing diplomatic “teams” to solve final-status issues.

Even if negotiations fail, as seems inevitable, parameters for future talks might be established.

Netanyahu also knows that the wider atmosphere is likely to leave him singled out as the intransigent party.

A report by the Quartet, due soon, is expected to criticise Israel for its past failure to take steps towards peace. And a report last month by a joint team of US and Israeli defence experts suggested Israel's “security concerns” about Palestinian statehood are not as intractable as claimed.

Netanyahu wants instead to deflect attention to a “regional peace summit.” The key has been Egypt's support for a revival of direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, based on the Arab Peace Plan of 2002. It promised Israel normal relations with the Arab world in return for ending the occupation.

Israel's sudden interest in the plan is odd, given that it has not been discussed in cabinet since the Saudis unveiled it 14 years ago.

In truth, Netanyahu backs the idea because he knows reaching a region-wide agreement would be impossible with the Middle East in turmoil.

Israeli officials have already insisted that parts of the 2002 plan need “updating.” Israel, for example, wants sovereignty over the Golan, Syrian territory it seized in 1967, and which currently promises newfound oil riches.

At the summit, the Saudi foreign minister said Israeli efforts to water down the plan would be opposed. Egyptian officials have hurried to distance themselves from the Netanyahu proposal and throw their weight behind the Paris process.

Still, Israel will try to ride out the French initiative until Obama's successor is installed next year. Then, Netanyahu hopes, he can forget about the threat of two states once and for all.

CT

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

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