

INDIANS AND COWBOYS | CHIP WARD
SANDBAGGING FOR FUN AND PROFIT | SAM PIZZIGATI
LABOUR AIMS FOR VICTORY | W. STEPHEN GILBERT

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING | PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

ISSUE 125



Zach Nasmith

SIX NIGHTS OF RAGE

How many more black men must die at the hands of US police?



Cover photo:

Six nights of protest followed the shooting of Keith Lamont Scott by police in Charlotte, North Carolina. Photo by Zach Nesmith [See Pages 16 to 25]

ColdType

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'Jez, we can!' Labour aims for victory

W. Stephen Gilbert sees a triumphant Jeremy Corbyn ignite Britain's Labour Party Conference, but warns of a long bitter fight ahead



UNDISPUTED LEADER: Jeremy Corbyn makes his triumphant speech to a packed hall at the Labour party's Conference in Liverpool. Photo: TV screen grab

Nobody worked harder at the British Labour Party conference, held at the end of last month in Liverpool, than John McDonnell. You could count yourself unlucky if he didn't breeze in at the session you were attending, however arcanelly fringe it might be. He never gave a speech, or even a few words, that you'd heard before and, though looking increasingly exhausted, he was winningly upbeat, ending with a cry of either "Solidarity!" or

"Socialism!" every time.

McDonnell's keynote speech in the main hall put pounds of flesh on the bones of the party's economic policy, indicating that he's been working flat out during the tumultuous year that he has been shadow chancellor. He'd better pace himself. Labour needs him.

The conference also established triumphantly that the Corbyn loyalists who stepped up to fill the suddenly empty

AT THE CONFERENCE



LANDSLIDE VICTORY: Jeremy Corbyn shakes hands with challenger Owen Smith before the result of the labour Party leadership contest was announced. Corbyn took 61.8 percent of the votes. (TV screenshot)

The chasm between Jeremy Corbyn's gracious acknowledgment of Sadiq Khan and the latter's suppressing-a-fart face that the television reaction shot revealed was telling

seats in the shadow cabinet after the year's mass Blairite exodus were nothing like the fourth eleven that the media and other belittlers claimed.

The theme of the week was "There is far more that unites us than divides us." If you Google that line, the name popping up most often is that of Hillary Clinton, but of course it originated long before; Pope John Paul II also used it but it can hardly be his to claim. Jeremy Corbyn tended to mangle it a bit (he needs a more fastidious speechwriter), but inevitably it was the newly-confirmed leader for whom it had the most resonance.

Corbyn's own speech was confident, determined, comprehensive and encouraging. It was also notably generous and

conciliatory. The chasm between his gracious acknowledgment of Sadiq Khan and the latter's suppressing-a-fart face that the television reaction shot revealed was telling. Elsewhere, the leadership's enemies – some of them, anyway – were making constructive noises. In declaring, following the previous weekend's leadership result after the bitter fight between Corbyn and Owen Smith, that "we're absolutely settled on who leads our party," the Ilford North MP and leading irreconcilable Wes Streeting will have astonished those who believed him. In fact, the war continues in subterranean form. After all, the intention of denying Corbyn the prospect of leading Labour into the next election has been thwarted for now, but his enemies hope there is time to change that. The war will be in the trenches and on the surface if Corbyn is still in post in a year, and nuclear should he enter Downing Street. The magnificently shrewd Jon Trickett warned us that this summer has been "a small skirmish, just sharpening the pencils."

Though the anti-Socialists have shown themselves time and again devoid of tactics, their strategy still works. They have damaged and can and will damage Corbyn by daily undermining and distracting. That this is self-harming does not enter their heads.

Ham-fisted tactics

The tactics are astoundingly ham-fisted. After the leadership numbers were released, Neil Coyle, MP for Bermondsey and Old Southwark and one of the Corbyn nominees who's been turned, tweeted: "Seems 20% of Labour members haven't voted. If we can't enthuse 1/5th of our own members we may have bigger problem engaging wider electorate." Somebody please inform him that an unknown number of members – certainly running into six figures – was prevented from voting by arbitrary decision of the NEC. Does he not read the papers?

AT THE CONFERENCE

Shortly before Corbyn's speech to the conference, a group of Progress supporters stood up and walked out, hoping their empty seats would be picked up by the TV to show that Corbyn could not fill the hall. Tragically for their delightful plan, the Liverpool ACC had provided what every venue where Corbyn speaks needs: an overspill hall (which, incidentally, was also "ram-packed," as we say now). The abandoned seats were quickly filled with lucky "entryists" from the overspill. As is his habit, Corbyn followed his address with an immediate appearance in the overspill hall – imagine the rapturous reception – where the audience got the benefit of a variation on his stump speech and hence more material than anyone else. His enemies accuse Corbyn of failing to "reach out" to voters beyond his "comfort zone," but there's nothing lost by keeping the enthusiasts fired up. One of Labour's growing strengths is the depth of its activism. These are the people who till the soil in which wider popularity will grow.

Radio argy-bargy

On the commercial radio stand in the exhibition hall, I went on LBC for an argy-bargy with Richard Angell (I'm glad you missed it; I was terrible). As gay men are apt to do, we established within a minute of meeting that we are both gay. But Angell – can that be a pseudonym? – is the paid "executive director" of Progress, not merely a ginger group, but an incorporated company set up to spread the philosophy that we are no longer allowed to call Blairism. Once we were on air, the gloves were off. I chanted the mantra that I brought with me to use at every opportunity: that

anyone purporting to speak to the media for the Labour Party who declared that the party could not or would not be elected at the next election or that the present leadership was unelectable ought to be disciplined. Angell wasn't having that. Members must say it because it's what people tell us on the doorsteps.

This is wilfully disingenuous. If anyone does actually say it on the doorstep, it's a mere parroting of what they've heard on the media – a chicken-and-egg effect. And Progress doesn't peddle anything else it hears on the doorstep – "You want to bring back hanging;" "I'd send all the Pakis home;" "those poofs should all be in jail" – at least not as far as I am aware.

When Jeremy Thorpe's leadership of the Liberals was in trouble in 1976, his old friend Michael Foot observed: "They pretend to be against you for your morals, but really hate you for your politics." We need to remember that Progress and others pretend to be against Corbyn for his supposed incompetence, but they really hate him because they want New Labour to remain what Thatcher hailed it as: her greatest achievement.

As I left the ACC for the last time, I spotted Tom Watson striding towards his taxi. A tiny, pony-tailed Liverpudlian was scampering beside him, shouting "Two-nil." I suddenly realised she meant that Corbyn had twice been elected leader. As the taxi pulled away, she ran alongside, punching the air and chanting "Jez we can, Jez we can." It was a heartening and extraordinarily pertinent image to take home. **CT**

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W. Stephen Gilbert is the author of *Jeremy Corbyn – Accidental Hero*.

As I left the ACC for the last time, I spotted Tom Watson striding towards his taxi. A tiny, pony-tailed Liverpudlian was scampering beside him, shouting "Two-nil"

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Indians and cowboys

Chip Ward tells the 2016 version of an old story

The Dakota Access Pipeline will snake through the headwaters of the Missouri River, a life-giving source of fresh water for millions of people who live downstream

Cowboys and Indians are at it again. Americans who don't live in the West may think that the historic clash of Native Americans and pioneering settlers is long past because the Indians were, after all, defeated and now drive cars, watch television, and shop at Walmart. Not so. That classic American narrative is back big time, only the Indians are now the good guys and the cowboys – well, their right-wing representatives, anyway – are on the warpath, trying to grab 640 million acres of public lands that they can plunder as if it were yesteryear. Meanwhile, in the Dakotas, America's Manifest Destiny, that historic push across the Great Plains to the Pacific (murdering and pillaging along the way), seems to be making a return trip to Sioux country in a form that could have planetary consequences.

Energy Transfer Partners is building the Dakota Access Pipeline, a \$3.7-billion oil slick of a project. It's slated to go from the Bakken gas and oil fracking fields in northern North Dakota across 1,100 miles of the rest of the Dakotas and Iowa to a pipeline hub in Illinois. From there, the oil will head for refineries on the Gulf Coast and ultimately, as the emissions from fossil fuels, into the atmosphere to help create future summers so hot no one will forget them. Keep in mind that, according to global warming's terrible new math,

there's enough carbon in those Bakken fields to roast the planet – if, that is, the Sioux and tribes allied with them don't stop the pipeline.

This time, in other words, if the cavalry does ride to the rescue, the heroes on horseback will be speaking Lakota.

Last stand at Standing Rock

If built as planned, the Dakota Access Pipeline will snake through the headwaters of the Missouri River, a life-giving source of fresh water for millions of people who live downstream, including Native Americans. It's supposed to pass under that river just a few miles from the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation that straddles North and South Dakota. Protestors point out that, eventually, the pipeline is likely to leak into that vital watershed and the contamination could prove catastrophic. The Army Corps of Engineers, which green-lighted the project's design, and Energy Transfer Partners have continued to insist that there is no such risk – even though, suspiciously enough, they decided to change the pipeline's route to avoid the water supply of North Dakota's capital, Bismark. As ever, tribal leaders point out, they were ignored rather than consulted in the planning stages, even though the project was to pass directly through their lands.

When the Keystone XL Pipeline, slated



WE SAY NO! Mounted protesters demand an end to the planned Dakota Access Pipeline project.

Photo: LaDonna Bravebull Allard / <http://www.ienearth.org>

to bring especially carbon-heavy tar sands from Alberta, Canada, to the US Gulf Coast, was killed thanks to years of fierce environmental protests, the stakes were raised for the Dakota Access Pipeline. Keystone was a disaster for the energy industry. In its wake, opponents claim, the new project was fast-tracked without the usual environmental reviews so that construction could be completed before a Keystone-style opposition formed. Fast as they were, it turns out that they weren't fast enough.

Keep in mind that such a project wasn't exactly a first for the native people of the region. In the wake of their defeat and confinement to reservations in the 19th-century, they lived through a profound

transformation of their landscape. Settlers let cattle loose on meadows cleared of wolves, cougars, and bears. The rude stamp of progress followed: fences, roads, dams, mines, sawmills, railroads, power lines, towns, condos, resorts, and in the 21st-century, vistas increasingly pockmarked with fracking's drill rigs and service roads.

In the Dakota prairies, hundreds of species of grass and flowers were replaced by monocultures of soy and corn, while millions of cattle were substituted for herds of free-roaming bison. As recently as the 1950s and 1960s, the neighboring Sioux and Cheyenne lost 200,000 more acres of valuable reservation farmland to dams built without their permission. Entire vil-

The Keystone pipeline plan was a disaster for the energy industry. In its wake, opponents claim, the new project was fast-tracked without the usual environmental reviews so that construction could be completed before opposition formed

WILD WEST

The cowboys have been engaged in a not-so-old-fashioned range war over who can best manage 640 million acres of public lands now owned collectively by the American people

lages had to relocate. The Dakota Access Pipeline is just the latest of these assaults and yet, in every way, it's potentially more disastrous. As Lakota Chairman David Archambault puts it, "To poison water is to poison the substance of life."

Slaughter, internment, and neglect were bad enough, say tribal leaders, but threatening the people's life-giving water was the last straw. As a result, thousands of Native Americans from 280 tribes across the country and even around the world are now camping out at the construction site where the Dakota Access Pipeline nears the tip of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. Almost two million signatures have been gathered on a petition opposing the pipeline; dozens of environmental groups have signed on to the resistance; and tribes nationwide have expressed their solidarity.

On September 3, the private security guards hired by Energy Transfer Partners used pepper spray and dogs on those trying to block the pipeline. This eruption of violence halted work until US District Judge James Boasberg could rule on the tribe's request for an injunction to block construction while its case was heard in court. On September 9, while conceding that "the United States' relationship with Indians has been contentious and tragic," he denied that request. Then, in a move described even by the Sioux as stunning, the Obama administration suddenly stepped between the protesters and the pipeline construction crews. The Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of the Interior, and even the Army Corps of Engineers called for a halt to the process until the permitting procedure could be reviewed.

Although putting an oil pipeline under a major river should have triggered an environmental review, the Corps chose not to do one. Now, it will take a second look. The administration also committed itself to finding better ways to include Native

Americans in future land-use decisions.

Where this goes next is anyone's guess. The construction halt could, of course, be lifted if the protesters were to disperse under a false sense of victory. The Sioux now plan to litigate vigorously against the pipeline. One prediction, however, is easy enough. The unity and purpose experienced by the people in that encampment will resonate powerfully for years to come. A movement has been born along the banks of the Missouri River.

Native Americans have played the crucial role in this campaign to "keep it in the ground," just as they were leaders in the successful struggle to block the Keystone XL Pipeline, the proposed Northern Gateway Pipeline that would have carried dirty crude across Canada to the Pacific, and the building of a massive coal export port on Canada's Pacific coast. As Native American leader Winona LaDuke puts it, "For people with nothing else but land and a river, I would not bet against them."

This town ain't big enough for the both of us

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, the cowboys have been engaged in a not-so-old-fashioned range war over who can best manage 640 million acres of public lands now owned collectively by the American people. Backed by the Koch brothers and their American Legislative Exchange Council, or ALEC, legislators across the American West, where most of the public lands are located, are calling on the federal government to cede control and management of them to counties and states. This would include some of our most beloved national parks.

In Utah where I live, the Republican-dominated legislature has put forward the Public Lands Initiative (PLI). It's the latest round in a 30-year feud pitting conservationists and businesses tied to tourism and recreation against ranchers and miners. At stake: whether to give the last publicly controlled wild places in the state formal

wilderness status and federal protection or (though this isn't often directly said) let private interests exploit the hell out of them. Every few years the Utah legislature's "cowboy caucus" has pushed just such a "wilderness bill" filled with poison pills and potentially devastating loopholes that the local conservation community can't abide.

Billed this time as a potential grand bargain to settle who controls public lands and how they can be used, the PLI has proven no different. It was, in fact, generated by local fears that President Obama might use his wide-ranging powers under the Antiquities Act to create a new national monument in the state as he left the Oval Office. This was exactly what Bill Clinton did in 1996, establishing the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument on 1.9 million acres of land in southern Utah's spectacular canyon country, already the home of five national parks.

That 1906 act, passed while Teddy Roosevelt was in the White House, gives the president wide-ranging authority to create national monuments from public lands in order to protect significant natural, cultural, or scientific features. Since activities such as drilling for oil and gas, mining, timber cutting, and grazing are barred or tightly restricted on such protected lands, Western politicians tend to regard them as a tool wielded by conservationists to suppress economic development.

Grave robbing for fun and profit

Sure enough, the nightmare of the cowboys is being realised. A coalition of five tribes, all either presently in Utah or claiming ancestral lands there, is now pushing a bold proposal for just such a national monument – a park co-managed by the five tribes and the National Park Service (which in itself would be a significant first for the Native American community). It would include 1.9 million acres of the ancestral grounds of the Navajo, Hopi, Zuni,

Ute Mountain, and Ute Indian tribes and would be known as the Bears Ears after the area's most famous landmark, twin buttes that are said to resemble a bear's ears.

Interior Secretary Sally Jewel recently toured the proposed monument and was amazed by what she saw, including spectacular cliff-house ruins, as well as paintings and rock carvings depicting clan signs, shamanic visions, and ghostly herds of bighorn sheep and elk. Bears Ears would possess more than 100,000 archaeological sites, including many of the oldest and most spectacular ruins in the United States. Members of the coalition of tribes regard them and the ground littered with their ancestors' artifacts and bones as sacred.

A grassroots group, Utah Dine Bikeyah, did extensive groundwork collecting data and interviews to create cultural maps of the region. The extraordinary archaeological and historical record they built effectively made their case that the ancestors of the coalition tribes have relied on that landscape for hunting, gathering, and ceremonial activities for centuries. The Utah conservation community, which had mapped out its own plans for such a monument, stepped aside for the tribal proposal.

Protecting the Bears Ears is considered an urgent matter. A mere handful of rangers currently patrol thousands of square miles of rugged canyons where the looting of archaeological sites for fun and profit is a rural tradition. In remote outposts like Blanding, Utah, Indian grave robbing was considered an acceptable family pastime until agents from the FBI infiltrated the black market for artifacts and busted a prominent local family. Ute leader Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk expresses a motivating concern of the tribal leaders. "Without swift action," she says, "we fear that the archaeological and cultural riches of the Bears Ears will suffer shameful, disgraceful dissolution and obliteration."

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WILD WEST

Federal agents eventually arrested all of the principal players in both the earlier Nevada standoff and the Malheur fiasco, except for one killed at a roadblock when he charged armed rangers and reached for his gun

Her fear is well founded. In recent years, for instance, rural county commissioners have led illegal all-terrain-vehicle rallies on a route through Recapture Canyon that Bureau of Land Management (BLM) rangers shut to motorised traffic because it crosses several key archaeological sites. State and county politicians were not content to challenge the BLM's closure of that canyon in court. Instead, they openly promoted such rides to defy the feds. The last of these protests in 2014 did, in fact, significantly damage unprotected archeological sites. The indigenous community saw it as a shocking show of disrespect, like driving directly over cemetery graves. The well-armed vigilantes who rode through Recapture Canyon were led by Ryan Bundy, son of Cliven Bundy and the famous hothead of the Bundy clan.

You may remember the colourful Bundy boys. After all, they became the stars of the “cowboy rebellion” against federal regulation on public lands. In 2014, BLM rangers were dispatched to Nevada to remove Cliven Bundy's cows from lands on which they had been grazing illegally for 20 years. The feds claimed that he owed the taxpayers a million bucks in unpaid grazing fees. He, on the other hand, insisted that such public lands belonged to the ranchers whose grandparents first grazed them. The rangers sent to enforce the law were met by hundreds of armed cowboys, many of whom took up sniper positions around them. Faced with such overwhelming firepower and the prospect of bloodshed, they withdrew and a range war was on.

The gang that couldn't shoot straight

That retreat in Nevada undoubtedly emboldened the Bundy clan and their militia allies to seize Oregon's Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in January 2016. Well-armed, they occupied the visitor centre at that bird refuge, leaning on every cowboy cliché in the book. They dressed the part with chaps, boots, buckles, and Stetson hats, carried American flags, and regularly

posed with their horses for news photographers.

In the end, despite the Marlboro Man look and the Clint Eastwood demeanour, the Bundyites came across as the gang that couldn't shoot straight. The “constitutional revolution” they wanted to spark by seizing Malheur fizzled amid a festival of cognitive dissonance and irony: men carrying assault rifles and threatening to use them proclaimed themselves “peaceful protesters” and, while declaring it off limits, attempted to “return” land to the American people – land that they already owned. Federal agents eventually arrested all of the principal players in both the earlier Nevada standoff and the Malheur fiasco, except for one killed at a roadblock when he charged armed rangers and reached for his gun. Trials began on September 7 and are slated to last for months.

Given the open hostility of state and local politicians to the protection of sacred sites, as well as their willingness to break the law and offer tacit support for vigilantes like the Bundys, tribal leaders decided to take their concerns about protecting their ancestral grounds to the top. A delegation traveled to Washington and met with President Obama, while a media campaign was begun to persuade others to endorse the plan.

A broader coalition of tribes and the conservation community rallied to the idea, especially because it was the first time that Native American tribes had proposed such a monument. The vision of a park to honour sacred indigenous lands, shaped and directed by Native Americans themselves, caught the public imagination. The New York Times and Washington Post have both written editorials urging the president to create such a park and Utah polls show a solid majority of citizens in favor of it.

The genocidal policies that accompanied settlement across North America

crested in Sioux country at the close of the nineteenth century. The survivors of the vanquished indigenous nations there were interned on reservations. Their children were taken from them and sent to boarding schools where their hair was cut, and their language and ceremonies banished. This was – and was meant to be – a form of cultural genocide. In the Bears Ears and Sioux country today, however, the culture of Native Americans endures. The descendants of those warriors who died defending their homeland and of those children taken from their families and their native cultures have proven remarkably resilient. They are once again defending their world and, as it happens, ours too, because even if you don't share the Missouri River watershed, you live on a planet that is being rapidly transformed by the sort of toxic cargo that will fill a future Dakota Access Pipeline.

In the Hollywood Westerns of my youth, Indians were often one-dimensional villains who committed atrocities on good white folks trying to bring civilisation to the frontier. As with so many notions I inherited in my youth, reality has turned out to be another story.

Certainly, before the onslaught of colonialism, the way indigenous people across the planet viewed what we now call our environment has come to seem like sanity itself. The land, as the Sioux and other tribal peoples saw it, was a living being saturated with spirits that humans should both acknowledge and respect.

The Indians whom the cowboys and bluecoats fought didn't share European concepts of cash, property, profit, progress, and, most importantly, technology. Once upon a time, we had the guns and they had the bows and arrows, so we rolled over them. But here's the wondrous thing: a story that seemed to have ended long ago turns out to be anything but over. Times have changed, and in the process the previous cast of characters has, it seems, swapped roles.

An economy hooked on carbon is threatening life on Earth. The waters of seas and oceans are warming fast; the weather is becoming unpredictable and harsh. Perhaps it's time to finally listen to and learn from people who lived here sustainably for thousands of years. Respecting Sioux sovereignty and protecting the sacred sites of tribes in their own co-managed national monument could write the next chapter in our American story, the one in which the Indians finally get to be heroes and heroines fighting to protect our way of life as well as their own. **CT**

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*Chip Ward co-founded HEAL Utah and wrote *Canaries on the Rim and Hope's Horizon*. Returning from hiking trips in the Bears Ears, he long kept his knowledge of the ruins he visited to himself, fearing the vulnerability of ancient cliff houses and granaries to looters. He is hopeful that they will now get the protection they deserve. This essay was first published at www.tomdispatch.com*

In the Hollywood Westerns of my youth, Indians were often one-dimensional villains who committed atrocities on good white folks trying to bring civilisation to the frontier

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Stuck on the road to carmageddon

Car use takes a huge toll on our health and on the planet. We need to kick our addiction to driving, writes **George Monbiot**

The vast expanse of road space, the massive investment in metal and fossil fuel, has delivered the freedom to sit fuming in a toxic cloud as your life ticks by

It was a mistake – a monumental, world-class mistake. Cars for everyone was one of the most stupid promises politicians ever made. Cars are meant to meet a simple need: quick and efficient mobility. Observe an urban artery during the school run, or a trunk road on a bank holiday weekend, and ask yourself whether the current system meets that need. The vast expanse of road space, the massive investment in metal and fossil fuel, has delivered the freedom to sit fuming in a toxic cloud as your life ticks by.

The primary aim has become snarled up with other, implicit objectives: the sense of autonomy, the desire for self-expression through the configuration of metal and plastic you drive, and the demand for profit by car manufacturers and fossil fuel producers whose lobbying keeps us on the road rather than moving along it.

Step back from this mess and ask yourself this. If you controlled the billions that are spent every year – privately and publicly – on the transport system, and your aim was to smooth the passage of those who use it, is this what you would do? Only if your imagination had been surgically excised.

Even in a small, economically mature, densely populated nation like the UK, where change is easy, we're still driving in the wrong direction. The government boasts that car use is rising again, after

being knocked back by the recession. It is spending £9-billion of our scarce money on roads every year, 70 percent of which is on new capacity. Thanks to the cuts, bus services supported by local authorities reduced their mileage by 10 percent last year.

Over half the car journeys people make in this country are less than five miles: this is what policy failure looks like. Why don't people cycle instead? Perhaps because, though the number of motorists killed or seriously injured has fallen sharply, the number of cyclists killed or hurt on the roads has climbed since 2003. This now accounts for 14 percent of all casualties, though cycling amounts to only 1 percent of the distance we travel.

The simplest, cheapest and healthiest solution to congestion is blocked by the failure to provide safe transit. Last year the transport department crowed that it could cut £23-million from its budget as a result of an "underspend on the Cycle Cities Ambition budget." Instead of handing this money back to the Treasury, it should have discovered why it wasn't spent, and ensured that it doesn't happen again.

The undercapacity of the roads arises from the overcapacity of the vehicles that use them. Average occupancy of cars in the UK is 1.6; and it seems to me that the bigger the car, the fewer people it tends to contain. With a few exceptions (such as Mayor Sadiq

Khan's plans for London), almost nothing is done to change or challenge this.

When a major feeder road was resurfaced in my home city, I heard people complaining that it took them an hour-and-a-half to travel two miles to work. They could have walked in half the time, or cycled in one-tenth. The council had a perfect opportunity to intervene, with notices beside the road urging people to switch to two wheels or two feet. But it sat and watched, as trapped in its mindset as people were in their cars.

Disaster on the horizon

Our problems are dwarfed by what is happening elsewhere. Global car production has almost doubled in 10 years. The number of cars on the planet is expected to rise from 1.2 billion to two billion by 2035. Carmageddon beckons: a disaster for the climate, public health and our quality of life. Yet it is still treated as an indicator of economic success.

We are told that this is about choice. But surely there should be a hierarchy of choice: the choice of whether or not to suffer a premature death should take precedence over our choice of transport mode.

Our brains are filled with metal particles, our children's lungs and mental development are stunted, and an epidemic of heart and lung disease is catalysed – all to grant people the choice of stewing in a traffic jam rather than getting there by other means.

In a recent YouGov poll in Britain, 76 percent of respondents opted for clean air zones in their cities, enforced by taxes and charges. Sorry, wrong kind of choice.

So here's a novel idea: how about a 21st-century transport system for the 21st-century? Helsinki is making public transport as convenient and flexible as private transport. For example, by aggregating people's requests via a smartphone app, minibus services can collect people from their homes and deliver them close to their destinations while minimising their routes.

Hamburg is building a network of cycling and walking paths so safe, pleasant and convenient that no one with the ability to do otherwise would want to take a car.

Let's set a date by which no new car is manufactured unless it's electric. Let's set up household charging points, allowing people to plug in without having to take their car off the road. Let's introduce a scrappage payment, not to replace old cars with new ones but to replace old cars with no car at all. It would take the form of public transport tokens.

How about facilitating "walking buses" to school, with parents taking turns to lead a crocodile of children? How about local drop-off points, so that parcel companies don't clog our streets and we never miss deliveries? How about providing bikes for hire at stations, and – yes, I believe in miracles – synchronising bus and train timetables?

Let's reopen old rail lines closed in the mistaken belief that train travel was on the way out (it has grown 74 percent since 1995) and build new lines to bridge the gaps. Let's bring train services under public control and use the money now spent on road-building to make tickets affordable for everyone.

Let's implement the brilliant plan proposed by economist Dr Alan Storkey for an intercity bus network faster and more convenient than car travel, using dedicated lanes on the motorways and interchanges at the motorway junctions. Let's build new settlements around public transport hubs – light rail, tram and electric bus systems – rather than around the car.

What is difficult about any of this? What technological barriers stand in the way? None. Transport is among the simplest of our problems to solve. Yet our governments are stuck in a 20th-century gridlock, still committed to their great mistake. **CT**

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George Monbiot's new book, How Did We Get into This Mess?, is published by Verso. His web site is www.monbiot.com

Our brains are filled with metal particles, our children's lungs and mental development are stunted, and an epidemic of heart and lung disease is catalysed – all to grant people the choice of stewing in a traffic jam

What did we get for the \$5-trillion spent on war?

Just think what you could buy with the cash spent on largely pointless US wars over the past 16 years, writes **Juan Cole**



ENDLESS WAR, ENDLESS COST: US troops in Afghanistan.

Photo: Wikipedia

"The US has appropriated, spent, or taken on obligations to spend more than \$3.6-trillion on recent wars

A Boston US political scientist estimates that as of 2016, the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars have cost the American taxpayers \$5-trillion. That number isn't as important when we consider the human cost – Some 7,000 US troops dead, 52,000 wounded in action; hundreds of thousands of Iraqis dead who wouldn't otherwise be, four million displaced and made homeless, etc.

Just to put that \$5-trillion in perspec-

tive. Let's say you chose five individuals. Each of the five will spend \$10-million a day. That's the cost of German model Heidi Klum's Los Angeles mansion. They'd be buying the equivalent of five of those each day.

They'll do that every day of their lives. All five of them. And then each of them will be succeeded by one of their children, who will spend \$10-million dollars a day, and one of their grandchildren, and one of their great-grandchildren, until 270 years have passed and it is the year 2286.

Neta Crawford, a professor of Political Science at Brown University, who published the study for Brown University's Watson Institute, writes: "As of August 2016, the US has already appropriated, spent, or taken on obligations to spend more than \$3.6-trillion in current dollars on the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria and on Homeland Security (2001 through fiscal year 2016). To this total should be added the approximately \$65-billion in dedicated war spending the Department of Defense and State Department have requested for the next fiscal year, 2017, along with an additional nearly \$32 billion requested for the Department of Homeland Security in 2017, and estimated spending on veterans in future years. When those are included, the total US budgetary cost of the wars reaches \$4.79-trillion."

The US has spent \$1.7-trillion for combat and reconstruction. I have a sinking feeling that first they spent half of it on destroying things and then they spent the other half on rebuilding them.

Through 2053, the US government owes the Iraq and Afghanistan veterans \$1 -trillion in medical and disability payments along with the money to administer all that.

Crawford adds, "Interest costs for overseas contingency operations spending alone are projected to add more than \$1-trillion dollars to the national debt by 2023. By 2053, interest costs will be at least \$7.9-trillion unless the US changes the way it pays for the wars."

Of 2.7 million military personnel who served in those two theatres of war, two million have now left the military and have entered the Veterans Administration system. Some 52,000 of them were wound-

ed in action and many need care.

Because the Bush administration borrowed money to pay for the wars, we've paid half-a-trillion dollars in interest alone.

At least al-Qaeda had been based in Afghanistan. Iraq had nothing to do with September 11. It was Bush's invasion that brought al-Qaeda there, which later morphed into ISIL. We were lied into that war, and it has weakened our economy. If anyone can tell me what benefit that war brought the average American, I'd like to hear it.

The Iraq War was a government-led Ponzi scheme and, as usual, the little people are the ones who took a bath. **CT**

Juan Cole is Richard P. Mitchell Collegiate Professor of History at the University of Michigan. His blog, Informed Comments, appears at www.juancole.com

The US has spent \$1.7-trillion for combat and reconstruction. I have a sinking feeling that first they spent half of it on destroying things and then they spent the other half on rebuilding them

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MEAN STREETS / 1



Ready for Action 1: On the streets of Charlotte.

WILL THE COPS STOP

Zach Nesmith photographs the protests after Keith Lamont

MEAN STREETS / 1



Ready for Action 2: On the streets of Charlotte.

KILLING BLACK MEN?

Scott is shot to death in Charlotte, NC. Words by **Tony Sutton**

MEAN STREETS / 1



Invading army?: In a cloud of tear gas, the riot cops move in.

Surely, there are times when even the most ardent supporters of America's no-guns-barred police forces pause for a moment, then scratch their heads and ask: "What the fuck is wrong with these trigger-happy fools?"

How many innocent black men must die before fundamental changes are made in the policing of the nation's cities, where cops are increasingly seen as an occupying army, a malignant force that dominates and creates fear rather than serve and protect.

The latest victim of their relentless urban war (more will surely follow before this issue is published), was father-of-seven



Back at you: Protester returns a tear gas gcanister.



Protester dances on the top of a vandalised police car.

MEAN STREETS / 1



Blood in the streets: A protester was killed during the riots.

Keith Lamont Scott, shot by Charlotte police in a parking lot on September 20, his death filmed by his wife, as she screamed: “Keith, get out the car. Keith, Keith! Don’t you do it. Don’t you do it. Keith! Keith! Keith! Don’t you do it! Did you shoot him? Did you shoot him? Did you shoot him? He better not be fucking dead!” He was . . .

Writing on the Socialist Worker web site, Brian Bean pointed out that: “Regardless of what the video shows, some facts are obvious. Another black man has been killed by police in another case of racially profiled mistaken identity. He wasn’t committing a crime, there was no risk or danger present in the situation, and there wasn’t even



Am I next? The fear of every young black male in America.



Making his voice heard: Dreadlocked youth shares his feelings.

MEAN STREETS / 1



Ready: National Guard prepares for action.



Invading force: Robo cops face a barrage of cellphones.

a call to police. Scott is the 790th victim of police murder this year and the sixth person killed in Charlotte.”

The police story was that Scott had left his car with a gun and threatened officers who approached him, They said they'd found a gun at the scene, but witnesses refuted that claim, saying Scott was unarmed. It was also suggested that a gun, supposedly found at the scene, but which was not evident in footage later shown on CNN, was planted after the killing.

The aftermath of the shooting followed scenes seen earlier in Ferguson, Missouri, and Baltimore, after other much-publicised deaths of black men: Charlotte erupted in





Fighting for justice:
On the streets of Charlotte.

MEAN STREETS / 1



Standing guard: Cops use their bikes as shields.

six nights of protest, as hundreds of people marched through the uptown area to be met, first, by cops on cycles, then by robo-cops, tear gas and flash-bang grenades.

“When it was the bicycle police everything was fine,” Eddie Thomas, an attorney and Charlotte public defender, told the Guardian newspaper. “I have no idea why they came out with riot gear. Within five minutes everything had escalated.”

Now the riots have ended and a wary calm has settled on the streets of Charlotte. But, as the anger reverberates, the same questions remain unanswered: When will America wake up and end the racial inequality in its midst?, and – more important – When will the cops stop killing black men?

CT



Defiant gesture.



Hear this: Protester lends her voice to the anger on the streets of Charlotte after the killing of Keith Lamont Scott.

When the victim becomes a suspect

Needless escalations like the one I witnessed in Toronto explain how black men end up being shot and killed by police, writes **Desmond Cole**

Cops say they care about good community relations, but their treatment of this man, and of me for looking out for him, proves that many officers value intimidation over dialogue

Police carding is alive and well – I just witnessed it. On my way to a Blue Jays baseball game, I saw a young black man standing on the sidewalk in Chinatown, surrounded by Toronto police, his hands held in the air. The man was backed up against a storefront window, wide-eyed and trembling. The fear in this man’s face gripped me and I approached the scene to make sure he was all right.

Toronto police tell us that carding – the arbitrary stopping and documenting of civilians in Toronto – is over, but I witnessed it yet again with my eyes, and through the lens of my cellphone camera. Cops say they care about good community relations, but their treatment of this man, and of me for looking out for him, proves that many officers value intimidation over dialogue. They continue detaining, searching, and documenting innocent people, especially black people, and putting our lives at risk to satisfy their own prejudices.

I couldn’t determine this young man’s name, but we’ll call him Omar. When I arrived at the scene, police were clearly running Omar’s name through their databases to determine his identity. As he stood flabbergasted, Omar kept asking police, “Why are you making this about me? I’m the one who called you!”

Police were repeatedly questioning Omar about his middle name, and about

his precise address, as if he may have been trying to mislead them. An officer on the scene would later tell me that Omar himself had called 911 to say he’d been stabbed (I heard Omar tell police about being robbed, not stabbed – he produced some cash from a pocket to indicate what he’d lost). But at that moment, Omar was being treated as a suspect, humiliated on a public street after he’d called for help.

An officer was busying himself by searching through Omar’s bag. I watched, stunned, as the officer then began patting down Omar’s pockets and crotch, and reached his hands into Omar’s pockets, right there on the sidewalk.

The police should never search us, or put their hands on us, unless there is a very clear reason for them to do so. I called out to Omar, telling him he had the right to refuse a search if he was not under arrest. The police immediately turned their attention toward me. One of them repeatedly called me “ignorant,” and told me to go to a library and read about the law. The officer who had been searching Omar, who identified himself as “Peters,” approached me and attempted to grab my camera, which I was using to film him, out of my trembling hand.

I have written before that people who oppose carding should approach its victims and make sure they’re okay, as I did. I



The cops eventually put Omar in the back of one of several vehicles on the scene – there were at least 10 officers present by this time

Omar has his bag searched by a Toronto police officer. The man had called 911 for assistance after being robbed.

Photo: Desmond Cole

know why this makes people scared. They don't want to be harassed, or have their property seized by police. They don't want to be arrested. But our collective inaction leaves people like Omar at the police's mercy.

The cops eventually put Omar in the back of one of several vehicles on the scene – there were at least 10 officers present by this time. Peters, who was clearly upset about my filming and intervention, encouraged me to ask Omar where the cops were taking him. I approached Omar and asked if he was okay. "I'm good," he replied, and added after being urged by Peters, "They're taking me home."

In the aftermath, another officer approached me to explain that his colleagues were only there to help a man who'd called in an emergency. When I repeatedly asked him why they were searching and detain-

ing a person who'd called for help, he said, "through the investigation, we couldn't figure out who he was." Who he was? Should we accept that police can't help a person who calls them without doing a background check first?

This same officer told me his colleagues wanted to ensure Omar was "mentally healthy," and added that police often receive calls from a nearby location of the Canadian Mental Health Association. I don't buy this explanation. You don't assess someone's mental well-being by conducting a body search. If police actually thought Omar was in mental distress, they should have known that searching and interrogating him would only escalate the situation.

Police spokesperson Victor Kwong responded Wednesday to a request for comment on this incident. Regarding the run-

MEAN STREETS / 2

Many of our police don't know how to do their jobs without turning the people they serve into enemies. They don't know how to help a black man who calls them without questioning his innocence and humanity

ning of Omar's name, Kwong said, "there was a discrepancy with the name he gave and his true identity." Kwong says Omar was searched and subjected to questioning because, "stabbing calls are dynamic and we cannot take what is said at face value." He also claimed Omar was initially "uncooperative" with police.

Kwong also said police were authorised to search Omar's bag and pat him down to "get his true identity and confirm there were no weapons at a weapons call." He also said my advice to Omar, that he did not need to allow officers to search him, "is the wrong advice. Officers have the right when it's a weapons call."

So was this really carding? Weren't police talking to Omar because they were responding to a call for help? The police want us to believe that it's normal to treat someone who reports violence against them as a potential suspect, normal to search the body and belongings of alleged victim for weapons, to confirm the alleged victim's name in their databases. If this is how police normally treat people who report crimes, it's no wonder they have such poor relations across the city.

Needless escalations like the one I witnessed explain how black men like Andrew Loku and Jermaine Carby end up being shot and killed by police. Just a week before this incident, the Special Investigations Unit decided not to charge Toronto officers in two separate incidents, each of

which involved a person in mental distress being shot three times. We are too busy watching the carnage caused by American police officers to mind our own. And even when we see these incidents on our own streets, most of us give the police the benefit of the doubt and keep walking.

In a year where gun homicides have spiked, police blame a new provincial regulation on carding for their inability to prevent and solve gun crimes. Yet Toronto's police board has yet to formally adopt the provincial carding regulation, meaning that police have not yet received any formal direction to alter the practice.

I wish I could say that is why people like Omar continue to be harassed for no reason. The truth is that many of our police don't know how to do their jobs without turning the people they serve into enemies. They don't know how to help a black man who calls them without questioning his innocence and humanity.

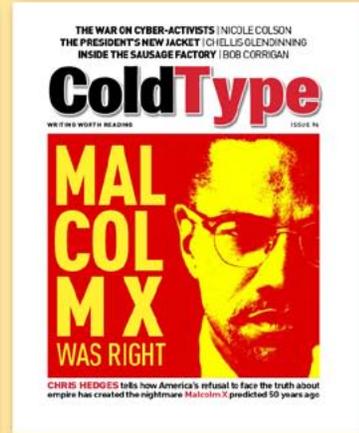
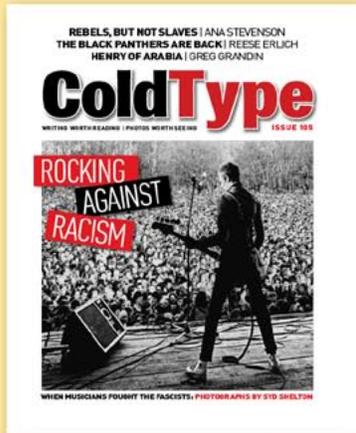
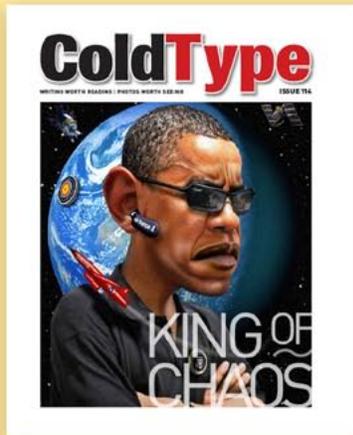
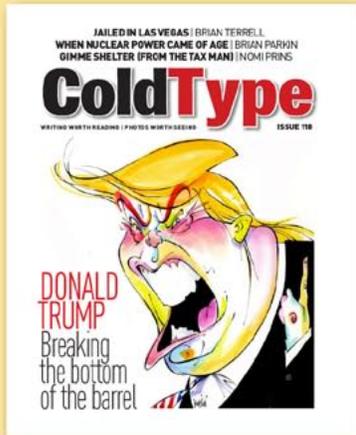
The police board has until January 1 to incorporate the carding regulation. The test of the board's proposal is whether or not it will prevent situations like the one I witnessed with Omar. Carding is alive and well, and only concrete reforms that address our police's prejudices and poor judgment can end it for good. **CT**

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Desmond Cole is a Toronto-based journalist. This commentary first appeared in the Toronto Star at www.thestar.com

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Britain's complicity in Saudi Arabia terror

David Edwards finds little honest reporting about Britain's involvement in the war on Yemen in the UK media

Oxfam reported that in excess of 21 million people in Yemen, out of a total population of around 27 million, are in need of humanitarian aid, more than in any other country

The mainstream Western media is, almost by definition, the last place to consult for honest reporting of Western crimes. Consider the appalling case of Yemen which is consumed by war and an ongoing humanitarian catastrophe.

Since March 2015, a "coalition" of Sunni Arab states led by Saudi Arabia, and supported by the US, Britain and France, has been dropping bombs on neighbouring Yemen. The scale of the bombing is indicated in a recent article by Felicity Arbuthnot – in one year, 330,000 homes, 648 mosques, 630 schools and institutes, and 250 health facilities were destroyed or damaged. The stated aim of Saudi Arabia's devastating assault on Yemen is to reinstate the Yemeni president, Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, and to hold back Houthi rebels who are allied with the former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh. The Saudis assert that the Houthis, who control Yemen's capital, Sanaa, are "proxies" for Iran: always a convenient propaganda claim to elicit Western backing and justify intervention.

Philip Hammond, who was UK defence secretary when the Saudi bombing began in 2015, promised: "We'll support the Saudis in every practical way short of engaging in combat."

The British government has been true to its word; in this respect at least. Campaign Against Arms Trade says that UK sales to

Saudi Arabia since the start of the attacks on Yemen include £2.2-billion of aircraft, helicopters and drones, £1.1-billion of missiles, bombs and grenades, and nearly half-a-million pounds of armoured vehicles and tanks. Last month, it was revealed that Britain is now the second biggest dealer of arms in the world. Is there any clearer sign of the corrupt nature of UK foreign policy?

Perhaps there is. Oxfam reported that in excess of 21 million people in Yemen, out of a total population of around 27 million, are in need of humanitarian aid, more than in any other country. More than 6,000 people have been killed, more than three million displaced and more than 14 million are suffering hunger and malnutrition.

Amnesty International reports that British-made cluster bombs have been used in deadly attacks on civilians. Children are among those who have been killed and maimed. The human rights organisation says that the UK should stop all arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Amnesty has also called for Saudi Arabia to be dropped from the United Nations Human Rights Council because of 'gross and systematic violations of human rights', both at home and abroad.

"They call it natural death. But it's not"

In a two-part piece for BBC Newsnight last year, Gabriel Gatehouse commendably reported from Yemen on the plight of civil-



"We'll support the Saudis in every practical way," said Philip Hammond, when he was UK defence secretary. Photo: Wikipedia

ians there, including the Saudi targeting of civilian infrastructure. The BBC journalist also alluded to "the British dimension" in which the Saudi "coalition's efforts are supported by Britain and the United States," with British-supplied weaponry being used by the Saudis. Although a welcome deviation from the norm, his criticism of UK foreign policy was muted and not subsequently maintained by BBC News, as far as we could see (with limited recent exceptions as I will discuss later).

Peter Osborne is a rare example of a Western journalist reporting from Yemen, also pointing unequivocally to British complicity in the country's nightmare. Together with his colleague Nawal Al-Maghafi, Osborne notes in a recent article that: "We discovered indisputable evidence that the coalition, backed by the UK as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, is targeting Yemeni civilians in blatant breach of the rules of war."

At the same time, Saudi Arabia has imposed a brutal blockade on Yemen, pre-

venting vital commodities from getting into the country. One doctor at the Republic teaching hospital in Sanaa told Osborne: "We are unable to get medical supplies. Anaesthetics. Medicines for kidneys. There are babies dying in incubators because we can't get supplies to treat them."

The doctor estimated that 25 people were dying every day at the Republic Hospital because of the blockade. He continued: "They call it natural death. But it's not. If we had the medicines they wouldn't be dead."

"I consider them killed as if they were killed by an air strike, because if we had the medicines they would still be alive."

This is shocking enough. But Osborne adds that there is: "powerful evidence that the Saudi-led coalition has deliberately targeted hospitals across the country. Four MSF [Médecins Sans Frontières] hospitals had been hit by Saudi air strikes prior to the organisation's withdrawal from the country, even though MSF were careful to give the Saudi authorities their GPS positions."

Osborne, who resigned as political commentator from the Telegraph last year, places Western complicity in Yemen's nightmare at the front and centre of his reporting. He points out that Britain has continued to sell arms to Saudi Arabia and its partners, despite copious evidence of breaches of international humanitarian law presented by human rights organisations.

This is an echo of Britain's shameful role in arming Indonesia while it crushed tiny independence-seeking East Timor, killing around 200,000 people – about one-third of its population. Noam Chomsky described it as a "slaughter" of "near-genocidal" levels. He noted that: "By 1998, Britain had become the leading supplier of arms to Indonesia . . . over the strong protests of Amnesty International, Indonesian dissidents, and Timorese victims. Arms sales are reported to make up at least a fifth of Britain's exports to Indonesia (estimated at one billion pounds), led by British Aerospace." (Noam Chomsky, 'Rogue States', Pluto Books.)

"We are unable to get medical supplies. Anaesthetics. Medicines for kidneys. There are babies dying in incubators because we can't get supplies to treat them"

STATE BRUTALITY

Foreign office minister, Tobias Ellwood, addressed the Commons after being requested to do so by the Speaker, John Bercow, because of previously misleading statements on Yemen given by ministers to parliament

In the present case of Yemen, the British Foreign Office has repeatedly denied that Saudi Arabia had broken humanitarian law, asserting until a couple of months ago that the FO's own assessment had cleared the Saudis of any wrong-doing. As Osborne notes, however, on July 21 this year, the last day of parliament before the long summer recess: "The British government was forced to admit that it had repeatedly misled parliament over the war in Yemen."

It turns out that no such assessment had taken place; a grudging and potentially damaging admission that ministers had clearly hoped to slip out quietly without proper scrutiny. Osborne describes it as "a dark moment of official embarrassment." You have to dig deep in the BBC News website to find scant mention of this shameful episode.

Moreover, Britain has supported the UN Security Council resolution backing a Saudi blockade, and the UK has also provided the Saudis with intelligence and logistical support.

"Perhaps most crucially of all, Britain and the United States have provided Saudi Arabia with diplomatic cover. Last year, Britain and the United States helped to block a Dutch initiative at the UN Human Rights Council for an independent investigation into violations of international humanitarian law."

In a powerful accompanying filmed report on the destruction of Yemen's capital Sanaa, Osborne concludes: "This city of old Sanaa is as extraordinary, as priceless, as unique as any of the masterpieces of Western civilisation – like Florence or Venice. Just imagine the outcry if bombs were falling on Florence or Venice. But because this is old Sanaa, in forgotten Yemen, nobody cares a damn."

And least of all Britain's new Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, who callously waved away copious evidence of Saudi breaches of international humanitarian law. The Guardian's diplomatic editor Patrick Win-

tour writes of Johnson's assertion that the Saudis are not "in clear breach" of humanitarian law: "His judgment is based largely on a Saudi-led inquiry into eight controversial incidents, including the bombing of hospitals."

To his credit, Wintour notes that Johnson was "defending the credibility of a Saudi-led inquiry exonerating Saudi targeting." Comment seems superfluous. He then adds Johnson's own unwittingly self-damning statement: "They [the Saudis] have the best insight into their own procedures and will be able to conduct the most thorough and conclusive investigations. It will also allow the coalition forces to work out what went wrong and apply the lessons learned in the best possible way. This is the standard we set ourselves and our allies."

Indeed, this is the same standard that the world saw with horror last year when the US investigated, and largely exonerated itself, over its dreadful bombing of an MSF hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan.

Boris Johnson is sweeping aside compelling evidence of serious breaches of international law in a cynical move to maintain lucrative UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia, and to protect close strategic ties with a brutal kingdom of state beheaders and torturers. All this belies his carefully-crafted media image as an amiably bumbling and largely harmless PG Wodehouse-like character. In reality, he is a dangerous, extreme right-wing politician with too much power. Sadly, even the often admirable Peter Osborne's judgement went awry on his return from Yemen when he appealed to Johnson to "act boldly to reset Riyadh [i.e. Saudi Arabia] relations:" "Boris Johnson has the potential to be one of the great British foreign secretaries of the modern era."

Sadly, this line by Osborne does not appear to be satire.

Meanwhile, on September 5, the foreign office minister, Tobias Ellwood, addressed the Commons after being requested to do so by the Speaker, John Bercow, because

of previously misleading statements on Yemen given by ministers to parliament. Wintour claims in his Guardian report that Ellwood “apologised” for these “inaccurate answers.” But the quoted wording is far from a proper apology. Indeed, the foreign minister obfuscated further in support of Saudi Arabia. Ellwood said, “it was not for the UK government to conclude whether individual bombing incidents by the Saudis represented breaches of international humanitarian law (IHL), but instead to ‘take an overall view of the approach and attitude by Saudi Arabia to international humanitarian law.’”

In effect, the UK would continue to rely on Saudi Arabia’s assessments on whether the latter had breached international humanitarian law. Worse, while Yemenis continued to die under US/UK-supported bombing, Ellwood went on to support the Saudis: “Defending the Saudi response to criticisms of its campaign, Ellwood said: ‘It was new territory for Saudi Arabia and a conservative nation was not used to such exposure.’”

This was sophistry of the worst order. “New territory” entails a murderous bombing campaign and a crippling blockade. And describing Saudi Arabia – a brutal and repressive regime which ranks among the world’s worst offenders of human rights – as merely “a conservative nation,” speaks volumes about the mental and ethical contortions required to defend British foreign policy.

But there is even more to say about the UK’s shameful complicity in Yemen’s destruction. And, from what we have seen so far, it has had zero coverage in the ‘mainstream’ media.

Media silence over UK role in ‘targeted killing’

Last month, the online investigative journal the Intercept published an in-depth piece on revelations about spying based on top-secret documents provided to them by Edward Snowden, the US National Security

Agency whistle-blower. Titled “Inside Menwith Hill. The NSA’s British Base at the Heart of US Targeted Killing,” the article was written by Ryan Gallagher, a UK-based journalist specialising in government surveillance, technology and civil liberties.

The RAF Menwith Hill base lies a few miles from Harrogate in North Yorkshire and is the largest electronic monitoring station in the world. As Gallagher notes: “It is a vital part of the NSA’s sprawling global surveillance network.” Consequently, its activities are shrouded in secrecy, despite the best efforts of human rights groups and a few British politicians demanding greater transparency. These efforts have been continually rebuffed by the UK government “citing a longstanding policy not to discuss matters related to national security.”

Now, however, the NSA files released by Snowden: “reveal for the first time how the NSA has used the British base to aid ‘a significant number of capture-kill operations’ across the Middle East and North Africa, fueled by powerful eavesdropping technology that can harvest data from more than 300 million emails and phone calls a day.”

Over the past decade, advanced surveillance programmes at Menwith Hill have located “suspected terrorists accessing the internet in remote parts of the world” and “provided support for conventional British and American military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

But, adds Gallagher, “they have also aided covert missions in countries where the US has not declared war,” including Yemen. These disclosures “raise new questions about the extent of British complicity in US drone strikes and other so-called targeted killing missions, which may in some cases have violated international laws or constituted war crimes.”

Kat Craig, legal director of London-based human rights group Reprieve, told Gallagher that Snowden’s revelations are: “yet another example of the unacceptable level of secrecy that surrounds UK involvement

Edward Snowden’s revelations are yet another example of the unacceptable level of secrecy that surrounds UK involvement in the US targeted killing programme

STATE BRUTALITY

These new, deeply damaging revelations by Snowden appear to have been completely blanked by the mainstream media. Searches of the Lexis-Nexis newspaper database yield zero hits on Snowden's Menwith revelations, and there appears to have been nothing published on the BBC News website

in the US 'targeted killing' programme. It is now imperative that the prime minister comes clean about UK involvement in targeted killing."

Gallagher describes a number of surveillance programmes, including one called GHOSTWOLF used to monitor "terrorist" activity in internet cafes in the Middle East. This information is being used to "capture or eliminate key nodes in terrorist networks."

As Gallagher observes: "GHOSTWOLF ties Menwith Hill to lethal operations in Yemen, providing the first documentary evidence that directly implicates the UK in covert actions in the country.

"Menwith Hill's previously undisclosed role aiding the so-called targeted killing of terror suspects highlights the extent of the British government's apparent complicity in controversial US attacks and raises questions about the legality of the secret operations carried out from the base."

The British government has consistently asserted that operations at Menwith "have always been, and continue to be" carried out with its "knowledge and consent." In the context of the commission of war crimes, this is a damning admission.

Gallagher expands: "For several years, British human rights campaigners and lawmakers have been pressuring the government to provide information about whether it has had any role aiding US targeted killing operations, yet they have been met with silence. In particular, there has been an attempt to establish whether the UK has aided US drone bombings outside of declared war zones – in countries including Yemen, Pakistan, and Somalia – which have resulted in the deaths of hundreds of civilians and are in some cases considered by United Nations officials to possibly constitute war crimes and violations of international law."

These new, deeply damaging revelations by Snowden appear to have been completely blanked by the mainstream media.

Searches of the Lexis-Nexis newspaper database yield zero hits on Snowden's Menwith revelations, and there appears to have been nothing published on the BBC News website. Indeed, this dearth of coverage by UK media, including BBC News, had been anticipated by US investigative reporter Glenn Greenwald, who previously worked with Snowden.

Not unusually, one has to go to media such as RT or PressTV to find any coverage; another reason why these outlets are so often bitterly denigrated as 'propaganda' operations by corporate journalists who haven't done their job of holding Western power to account.

The post-Brexit, \$2 trillion Saudi carrot

On September 7, BBC Newsnight revealed how a draft report by MPs on the influential committee on arms export control was being watered down to remove the call for a suspension of arms sales to Saudi Arabia. A statement in the draft report had said: "The weight of evidence of violations of international humanitarian law by the Saudi-led coalition is now so great, that it is very difficult to continue to support Saudi Arabia."

But a number of "pro-defence" MPs had then tabled more than 130 amendments, including a move to remove the call to suspend arms sales to Saudi Arabia. The Guardian noted cautiously that this attempt: "underlines the sensitivity of the issue of UK-Saudi relations at Westminster, the importance of the Gulf to the UK defence industry and the concern that Britain, for a variety of security reasons, is too ready to take Saudi assurances about how it is conducting a difficult civil war in Yemen."

The following evening (September 8), Tory MP Crispin Blunt refused to respond when pressed by Newsnight presenter Kirsty Wark about reportedly walking out of the committee meeting in order to stall a vote. It appears that Blunt had feared his amendments were about to be rejected, and by walking out of the meeting the quo-

rum requirement would fail and no valid vote could take place.

But the sickness of government priorities at the intersection of foreign policy and economic imperatives was really highlighted when the Saudi foreign minister declared last week that it was “in Britain’s interest” to continue supporting Saudi Arabia in its murderous assault on Yemen. Or, as the neocon Telegraph defence editor Con Coughlin put it: “to continue supporting the Saudis in the battle to prevent Yemen falling into the hands of Iranian-backed Houthi rebels.”

Adel al-Jubeir, the Saudi foreign minister, then dangled a carrot in front of British ministers’ noses. “Apart from maintaining traditional links on military and intelligence cooperation, Mr Jubeir also said post-Brexit Britain could look forward to forging new trade links with the kingdom as Saudi Arabia embarks on its ambitious plan to restructure its economy under a plan called Saudi Vision 2030. ‘We are looking at more than \$2-trillion worth of investment opportunities over the next decade, and this will take the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Britain to an entirely new level post-Brexit.’ ”

Sometimes, you have to go to the extreme right-wing press to have the crude realpolitik spelled out so clearly.

Saudi pressure is considerable and difficult to resist. In June, it was reported that even the UN succumbed when it removed Saudi Arabia from a blacklist of countries responsible for child casualties in conflicts around the globe. Saudi Arabia had been placed on the list for killing and maiming children in Yemen bombing attacks. The country, along with other Arab and Muslim countries, had reportedly threatened to withdraw funding from vital UN humanitarian programmes. One anonymous diplomat spoke of “bullying, threats, pressure,” and summed it up as “real blackmail.”

The reports on Yemen cited from the Guardian and BBC News show the permis-

sible limits of occasional – very occasional – challenges to state power. What is routinely missing, and what would be prominent in coverage of British foreign policy in honest news media, has never been better highlighted than by historian Mark Curtis. For many years, he has extensively analysed formerly secret government records detailing internal discussions about state policies and priorities. In his book, *Web of Deceit*, which lays out “Britain’s real role in the world,” Curtis concludes that the primary function of the British state: “virtually its *raison d’être* for several centuries – is to aid British companies in getting their hands on other countries’ resources.”

To pursue such state policies means initiating war, military interventions, threats, bullying, and other aggressive actions, usually in support of the United States and/or Nato. This global imperialism is dressed up in propaganda garb as “countering terrorism,” “improving world security,” working with our allies” and similar pieties propagated by the mainstream media. Curtis lays particular responsibility for such propaganda at the door of the “liberal” media, notably the Guardian and BBC News: “The liberal intelligentsia in Britain is in my view guilty of helping to weave a collective web of deceit. . . . To read many mainstream commentators’ writings on Britain’s role in the world is to enter a surreal, Kafkaesque world where the reality is often the direct opposite of what is contended and where the startling assumptions are frighteningly supportive of state power.”

This ‘surreal, Kafkaesque world’ – in which Britain shares responsibility for appalling violence, while proclaiming its supposed desire for “peace” and “security” – will continue for as long as we do not have an honest media that seriously and consistently challenges brutal state power. **CT**

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David Cromwell is co-editor of Medialens, the British media watchdog, whose website is www.medialens.org

In June, it was reported that even the UN succumbed when it removed Saudi Arabia from a blacklist of countries responsible for child casualties in conflicts around the globe. Saudi Arabia had been placed on the list for killing and maiming children in Yemen bombing attacks

A great month for impunity in US courts

Joe Emersberger tells how US corporations manage to avoid conviction in foreign courtrooms

It will be considered a major achievement if the UN can be pressured, some day, into providing reasonable compensation to the families of the cholera victims

What would happen to someone who killed 10,000 of the wealthiest people in the United States through some act of gross negligence? Or what if somebody doused the neighbourhoods of the wealthiest 0.003 percent with billions of gallons of toxic waste? Do you think that in either of these two wildly hypothetical cases the perpetrators would be able to work the US legal system to stay out of prison?

As crazy as these questions are, asking them is essential to assessing two US court rulings that were upheld on appeal in August.

On August 18th, the US Second Circuit Court of Appeals in New York upheld a lower court ruling that denied compensation to thousands of Haitian victims of the lethal negligence of UN troops. In 2010, UN troops discharged raw sewage into a river, causing a cholera outbreak that has now killed over 10,000 people. For several years, evidence of the UN's guilt has been overwhelming. A 2011 study by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said UN troops were the likely cause of the epidemic. A day after the appeals court shielded the UN, a leaked report emerged in which a UN Special Rapporteur (Philip Alston) noted that scientific evidence of UN guilt was "overwhelming." However, backed completely by the Obama administration (whose lawyers represent-

ed the UN in court), the UN was let off the hook by a very dubious technical argument that it had legal immunity. Alston's leaked report said it found the UN's argument to be "legally indefensible." The argument would surely have been disregarded (quite angrily) by US judges if the victims were among the wealthiest in the world, not the poorest people within the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

It will be considered a major achievement if the UN can be pressured, some day, into providing reasonable compensation to the families of the cholera victims. Prison terms are not even being pursued for the UN officials responsible.

And grave crimes perpetrated by UN troops in Haiti are not limited to the negligence that caused the cholera epidemic. UN troops have been stationed in Haiti since 2004 to consolidate a coup directly perpetrated by the Bush administration against Haiti's democratically elected government.

As Jake Johnson explained at the blog of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, the US government, in collaboration with the OAS bureaucracy, thoroughly corrupted Haiti's 2010 presidential election. Since 2015, the Obama administration has been pressuring Haiti, with less success than in 2010 so far, to accept fraudulent elections again. UN troops have provided



Rafael Correa's Ecuador government ended the corporate-friendly legal climate to which Chevron had grown accustomed. So Chevron returned to the US courts. Photo: Wikimedia

muscle and political cover for the US government's ongoing assault on democracy and human rights in Haiti. For that very reason, UN officials have little to fear from US courts.

Chevron shielded

On August 9, the same appeals court that allowed the UN to evade responsibility for killing 10,000 Haitians, upheld a ruling that shielded Chevron, a \$200-billion-a-year corporation, from paying US\$9-billion in compensation awarded by Ecuador's Supreme Court in 2013 to victims of pollution in Ecuador's Amazon. From 1964-1992, 16 billion gallons of waste had been dumped on the land of the poorest people in Ecuador.

The legal battle began in New York in 1993, but Chevron successfully fought to have it moved to Ecuador where it felt confident of receiving even more lenient treatment than in the United States, especially if a US jury (which Chevron has never faced in this case) were to have passed judgment on what was done in the Ecuadorean Amazon.

A few years after Chevron succeeded in getting judges from the Second Circuit Court of Appeals in New York to send the lawsuit back to Ecuador, the political situation in that country changed drastically. Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa first took office in 2007, and voters elected a constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution which was then ratified in a referendum. Ecuadorean voters, also through a referendum, ratified reform of the judiciary, so the corporate-friendly judicial climate to which Chevron had grown accustomed to came to an end.

Chevron returned to US courts, arguing not only that a provincial court ruling against it in Ecuador was won by fraud, but that Ecuador's entire judiciary was now incapable of settling the dispute. Ecuador's judiciary was disparaged to get out of a promise Chevron made to the Second Circuit Appeals Court in 2002 that it would honour the Ecuadorean jurisdiction that it had demanded.

In 2014, a US district court obligingly concluded that Ecuador "does not provide impartial tribunals or procedures compatible with due process in cases of this nature." The reasons offered for the conclusion were pitiful. The Second Circuit Appeals Court, though it upheld the district court ruling, completely sidestepped the indictment of Ecuador's entire judiciary by saying, "We do not reach any contentions as to the Ecuadorean judiciary in general." Instead, technical grounds were given to let Chevron shop around for the judiciary it wanted whenever it wanted.

A similar pattern emerges with other rulings that went to extreme lengths to enable corporate criminality abroad. High level courts simply polish up the justifications for corporate impunity provided by lower courts. For example, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in 2009 that international human rights law is not sufficiently "specific, universal, and obligatory" for corporations to ever have to worry

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JUSTICE SIDESTEPED

Cabranes was one of the judges for Second Circuit Court of Appeals who argued that a US corporation could not be sued by Peruvian miners who suffered severe lung disease because it was wrong to claim that under "customary international law" there is any such thing as the "right to life" or the "right to health"

about it under the US Alien Tort Statute. This was the basis for dismissing a case brought against Royal Dutch Shell for aiding the Nigerian government suppress protestors through torture, rape and murder. The US Supreme Court upheld the ruling on different grounds: "extraterritoriality" – thereby maintaining corporate impunity in the case but without resorting to the more unhinged arguments championed by Jose Cabranes, a judge on the Second Circuit Court of Appeals.

In August, Cabranes was also one of the judges who shielded the UN from any legal consequences for killing thousands of Haitians. In 2003, Cabranes was also one of the judges for Second Circuit Court of Appeals who argued that a US corporation could not be sued by Peruvian miners who suffered

severe lung disease because it was wrong to claim that under "customary international law" there is any such thing as the "right to life" or the "right to health."

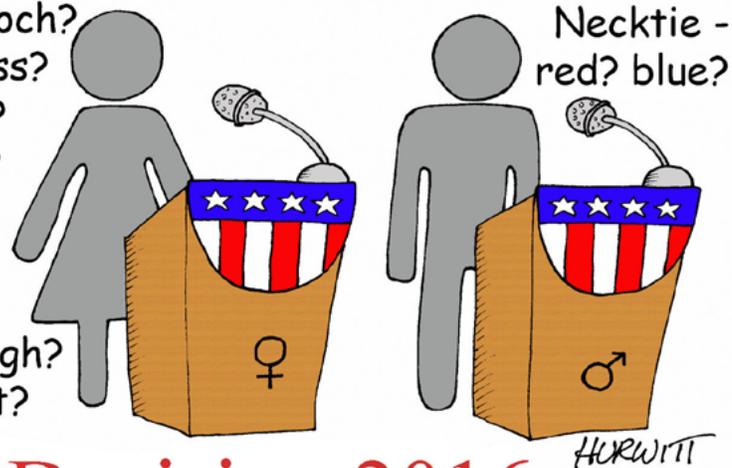
Hopefully, the United States will avoid an era of Donald Trump appointed judges, but it should be noted that some of the judges (Jose Cabranes, Lewis Kaplan) responsible for the outrageous rulings described above were appointed by Bill Clinton. An era of nasty judicial extremism would get worse under Trump, but it long predates his success as a presidential candidate. **CT**

Joe Emersberger lives in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, where he works as an engineer. He is a member of the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) union. This article originally appeared at www.telesurvtv.net

HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitt

Am I too feminine? Feminine enough?
Hair - long? short? straight? curl?
blonde? brunette? bangs? bun? flip?
Makeup - eye shadow? mascara?
lipstick color? gloss?
Earrings? Necklace?
Bracelet? Brooch?
Pantsuit? Dress?
Skirt? Blouse?
Shoulder bag?
Briefcase?
Stockings?
Hemline?
Heels - how high?
Colors - bright?
pastel? dark?



Decision 2016



Selfies

Street photographer **Vivian Maier** was a shadowy, elusive, loner – unknown until a massive stash of her negatives, hidden for 50 years, was found in a storage locker by collector John Maloof in 2007. In this edited text of her introductory essay to ***Vivian Maier: Self-Portraits***, the latest collection of the photographer's works, **Elizabeth Avedon** gives an insight into the mind of the woman she describes as a 'misfit genius'

IN THE PICTURE



1956 – Chicago area



1953 – New York



1954 – New York



1959 – Chicago area

I have often wondered about the significance of capturing your own likeness, the experience of being represented on both sides of the frame. I have to believe it is more than just vanity or narcissism. One would naively imagine a self-portrait informs us about the person. We observe the figure illustrated, and in the gaze back we believe we can determine something about their life, their work, their day. Searching for expression we discern clothes, choices, surroundings – all in an effort to resolve the mystery of self.

I am not sure if we can read the “self” in Vivian Maier’s self-portraiture or even chart the progression of her life through her images. We look at her self-portraits for revelations, but she does not really give us much. She is alone in her reflections: No hint of emotion or reaction. Never a portrait with a partner.

The strength of Maier’s character is found in the person a looking back at us. There is little compromise; and ironically for such a private, autonomous person, her self-portraits are some of her strongest



May 31, 1971 – Wilmette, Illinois

work thus far. She seemed to embody photographic wisdom beyond her knowledge – always composing, rarely emoting. She sometimes made brilliant choices, sometimes she simply experimented. Reflective surfaces and glass permeate all of her work, the world fragmented as seen through frames, doorways, and boxes, her shadows projected into others' lives, onto sidewalks, and the backs of strangers. We see her reflected in surfaces through her lens and back again onto those same planes at different angles.

No great emotion is expressed in these self-portraits, little drama, inquisitiveness rather than self-examination, composition over expressed emotion. Vivian smiled if she could, though rarely, and seemed to live two different lives: her contradictory domestic life and personal, creative life. She saw the world through a skillful eye, but never trusted anyone to bear witness or audience to her work. Deeply intuitive, it is easy to imagine in Maier a difficult person: odd, complex, living in her own head.

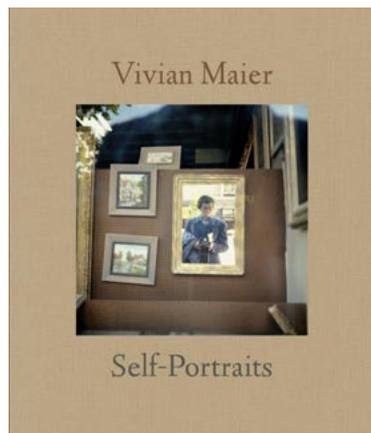
IN THE PICTURE



February 1955 – New York

So often contemporary photographic work needs something . . . It demands an audience, or requires funding. It needs someone to like it, share it, or comment to it. Images today are not content to exist on their own, they constantly seek opinion and validation, gathering numbing, repetitive rhetoric along the way. Vivian Maier's work is extraordinarily different in that it only needed to be made.

What magic. A misfit genius. **CT**



SELF-PORTRAITS

Vivian Maier
powerHouse Books
www.powerhousebooks.com
\$33.78 (Amazon.com)

How Libyan 'regime change' lies echo in Syria

The US media has largely ignored a UK report on the West's lies used to justify the Libyan 'regime change,' explains **James W. Carden**

Last month, a select committee of British parliamentarians released a report which condemned the UK government under David Cameron for its role in the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya. The report makes plain that the principal basis on which the intervention was predicated – that then-Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi was on the verge of committing a wholesale slaughter of the rebel stronghold Benghazi – was a lie propagated by Western and Gulf State media outlets.

It also shows the extent to which the crisis was driven by Libyan exiles who – perhaps quite understandably – had an axe to grind with the Gaddafi regime. In this – and in other ways, as we shall see – the Libyan crisis shares a number of similarities with the Syrian crisis. Indeed, it would be fair to view the debacle in Libya as a dress rehearsal for the war outside powers have been waging against the sovereign government of Syria for the past five years.

The UK report documents the extent to which the narrative of impending genocide was driven by the delusions of Libyan exiles: “Libyan exiles based in France were influential in raising fears about a possible massacre in Benghazi. Visiting Professor at King’s College London, Professor George Joffé, told us that ‘the decisions of President Sarkozy and his Administration

were driven by Libyan exiles getting allies within the French intellectual establishment who were anxious to push for a real change in Libya.”

Indeed, the UK Select Committee was told that “émigrés opposed to Muammar Gaddafi exploited unrest in Libya by overstating the threat to civilians and encouraging Western powers to intervene.”

The narrative crafted by Libyan exiles was swallowed hook, line and sinker by a willingly credulous Western press. Similarly dynamics were at play during the initial phase of the crisis in Syria.

Professor Tim Anderson, of the University of Sydney, notes that Syrian clerics in exile in Saudi Arabia, such as Sheikh Adnan Arour “called for a holy war against the liberal Allawi muslims” who dominated the Assad government.

The journalist Eva Bartlett, who has been on the ground in Syria, has written that the problem with many of the Western media accounts of the Syrian crisis is that “Many talking heads draw from one sole source, UK-based Syrian Rami Abdulrahman of the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR).”

Abdulrahman, who runs the oft-quoted SOHR out of his home in Coventry, England, “hasn’t,” according to Bartlett, “been to Syria for 15 years.” What is more, Abdulrahman’s operation is reliant on the

It would be fair to view the debacle in Libya as a dress rehearsal for the war outside powers have been waging against the sovereign government of Syria for the past five years

SAME AGAIN?

Security forces in both Libya and Syria came under attack by Islamist radicals from the very start: these were hardly the “peaceful” protests as portrayed by the Western media

reports of opposition figures. This, as Bartlett notes, is no impartial source.

Other exile groups, like the Syrian National Council, has received millions of dollars in funding from the declared enemies of the Assad regime such as Qatar and UAE. Meanwhile, regime change groups including the Aleppo Media Centre (AMC) and the Washington-based Syrian Expatriates Organization (SEO) have, according to Anderson, received “hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations from un-named sources.”

Professor Anderson tells us that “Like many other US-created front groups (the Syrian Campaign, the White Helmets) the SEO is committed to the overthrow of the Syrian Government. That also happens to be the aim of the US government.”

Machiavelli was perhaps righter than he knew when he wrote: “How dangerous a thing it is to believe those who have been driven out of their country . . . such is the extreme desire in them to return home, that they naturally believe many things that are false and add many others by art.”

No angels

And then there is the role Western media has played in ginning up the twin crises. The UK report on Libya – citing Amnesty International – notes that, “Western media coverage has from the outset presented a very one-sided view of the logic of events, portraying the protest movement as entirely peaceful and repeatedly suggesting that the regime’s security forces were unaccountably massacring unarmed demonstrators who presented no security challenge.”

In fact, the opposite was the case: security forces in both Libya and Syria came under attack by Islamist radicals from the very start: these were hardly the “peaceful” protests as portrayed by the Western media. As the UK report points out, “It is now clear that militant Islamist militias



Syria's President Assad: David Cameron claimed he was a “recruiting sergeant for ISIS.”

played a critical role in the rebellion from February 2011 onwards.”

What is more: “The possibility that militant extremist groups would attempt to benefit from the rebellion should not have been the preserve of hindsight. Libyan connections with transnational militant extremist groups were known before 2011, because many Libyans had participated in the Iraq insurgency and in Afghanistan with al-Qaeda.”

Likewise, the dominant myth surrounding the Syrian crisis is that “millions” of peaceful Syrians took to the streets as part of the liberalising wave which roiled the Arab world in the spring of 2011. Human Rights Watch declared that the Syrian protesters “only used violence against the security forces” as a “last resort.”

Indeed, all of the violence which soon unfolded was said to be the fault of Assad’s police state and Assad’s subsequent refusal to step down – so the story goes – is one of the main causes of the growth in strength and numbers of radical Islamist terrorists.

As recently as last summer, none other

than former Prime Minister David Cameron called Assad a “recruiting sergeant for ISIS.” And while this claim is as nonsensical as it is disingenuous, it is a line which has been dutifully echoed by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who in April told CNN that “ISIS was primarily the result of the vacuum in Syria caused by Assad first and foremost.”

From the very start, the opposition to Assad included sectarian extremists who chanted: “Christians to Beirut, Alawis to the grave.” And the first documented incidents of violence in Daraa were against, not by, the Syrian security forces.

Professor Anderson cites an Israel National News report from March 21, 2011, which said “Seven police officers and at least four demonstrators in Syria have been killed.” Anderson notes, “The armed forces came to Daraa precisely because police had been killed by snipers.”

The journalist and analyst John Rosenthal translated a January 12, 2012 report from Homs by a Dutch Jesuit, Father Frans van der Lugt, who was later murdered, likely by al-Nusra militants, in April 2014.

The Jesuit missionary observed that: “Most of the citizens of Syria do not support the opposition. . . . you also cannot say that this is a popular uprising. The majority of people are not part of the rebellion and certainly not part of the armed rebellion. What is occurring is, above all, a struggle between the army and armed Sunni groups that aim to overturn the Alawite regime and take power.

“From the start the protest movements were not purely peaceful. From the start I saw armed demonstrators marching along in the protests, who began to shoot at the police first. Very often the violence of the security forces has been a reaction to the brutal violence of the armed rebels.”

Also inconvenient to the dominant narrative is the fact that even after the large scale anti-government protests and escalation in violence, 55 percent of Syrians polled

in 2012 wanted Assad to remain in power.

With all of this in mind we would do well to treat reports from the likes of CNN’s Clarissa Ward with a healthy amount of skepticism, not least because the fact that Islamists were involved from the very start of both the Libyan and Syrian uprisings have been relentlessly excised out of the dominant, acceptable mainstream narratives like hers.

Lost alternatives

When one considers the policy alternatives which were rudely shunted aside in favour of violence, the twin catastrophes in Libya and Syria appear all the worse in retrospect. Instead of strictly adhering to the UN-mandated arms embargo in Libya, the UK Select Committee reports that: “We were told that the international community turned a blind eye to the supply of weapons to the rebels. Lord Richards [UK Defence Chief of Staff] highlighted “the degree to which the Emiratis and the Qataris . . . played a major role in the success of the ground operation.”

Likewise, the Syrian arms embargo was only selectively and fitfully enforced. From May 2011 to June 2013, the EU imposed an arms embargo on Syria but, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, by April 2013 “the EU decided to allow the supply of certain equipment to Syrian opposition forces.”

In the ensuing years the US aided and abetted the supply of weapons (laundered through Jordan) to radical opposition groups, while Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia were the principal suppliers of weapons to ISIS.

As Meredith Tax, of the think tank, Centre for Secular Space, recently pointed out in the Nation magazine, the US continues to turn a blind eye toward the actions of NATO-member Turkey which is supporting jihadi gains by attacking Kurdish forces in northern Syria. The media, as Tax correctly observes, has “failed to look hard at the Er-

Also inconvenient to the dominant narrative is the fact that even after the large scale anti-government protests and escalation in violence, 55 percent of Syrians polled in 2012 wanted Assad to remain in power

SAME AGAIN?

quote

dogan government's support of jihadis, or to ask what they have in common."

Meanwhile, diplomatic alternatives were never seriously pursued in Libya or in Syria – though it is true that the peaceful Russian alternative to Obama's "red line" policy was pursued with regard to dismantling Syria's stockpile of chemical weapons. But a peaceful path in Libya was, it seems, never taken seriously. Saif Gaddafi's attempts to broker a settlement with the Clinton State Department and with the UK through his intermediary, former Prime Minister Tony Blair, were never taken seriously by NATO principals.

As the UK report tartly notes: "Political options were available if the UK Government had adhered to the spirit of Resolution 1973, implemented its original campaign plan and influenced its coalition allies to pause military action when Benghazi was secured in March 2011. Political engagement might have delivered civilian protection, regime change and reform at lesser cost to the UK and to Libya."

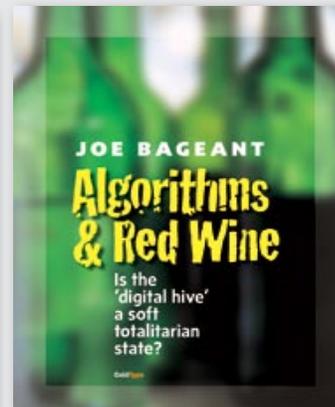
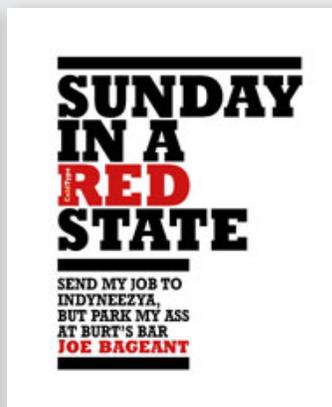
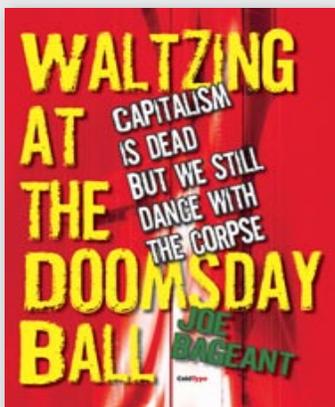
And given the behavior of both Gaddafi and Assad in the years following 9/11 the sovereignty of both countries should have – at a minimum – been respected;

after all, Gaddafi had only just begun to accede to Western prerogatives, as when he abandoned his WMD program in 2003, while Assad had cooperated with the Bush administration in its so-called Global War on Terror. It is worth noting that in doing so, he earned the enmity of the religious fanatics who run Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

As thanks for his cooperation, the US, ever at the beck and call of the Gulf State autocracies who are our actual enemies, Assad has become the target of regime change enthusiasts in the US and Europe. Their designs have wrecked large swathes of Syria, resulted in an unprecedented migrant crisis, destroyed the lives of many millions, gave rise to ISIS and strengthened the very same Islamist radicals who attacked us on 9/11 and who remain the sworn enemies of the West. **CT**

James W Carden is a contributing writer for The Nation and editor of The American Committee for East-West Accord's eastwestaccord.com. He previously served as an advisor on Russia to the Special Representative for Global Inter-governmental Affairs at the US State Department.

Read the best of Joe Bageant



www.coldtype.net/joe.html

Sandbagging for fun and profit

Wells Fargo has just been hit with the biggest banking consumer fraud fine ever. Yet the bank's bosses still get huge bonuses, writes **Sam Pizzigati**

John Stumpf, the CEO of America's most profitable megabank, sent me an email earlier this week. Imagine that. The bank Stumpf runs, Wells Fargo, has 268,000 employees. Stumpf must be a very busy man. Especially these days.

The bank has been operating in crisis mode ever since the federal Consumer Finance Protection Bureau hit the bank last month with a \$185-million fine, the largest penalty the new agency has ever assessed.

What prompted this sizeable ding? Wells Fargo employees, CFPB investigators found, have over the past five years opened more than two million accounts that customers, as one press account puts it, "did not authorise, did not know they had, did not need, and clearly did not understand."

Wells Fargo employees have created more than two million unauthorised customer accounts the last five years. That transgression has cost 5,300 of them their jobs. The Wells Fargo CEO still has his.

Some customers even ended up paying late fees on these bogus accounts.

And that's apparently why CEO Stumpf has emailed me – and millions of other Wells Fargo customers. The recent headlines about his bank, says Stumpf in his missive, do "not reflect Wells Fargo at its

best." But the bank, Stumpf goes on to pledge, is going to "get things right" and "fully reimburse any customers who were affected by these actions."

Here's what Stumpf doesn't say in his email: His bank's enormous annual earnings – and the enormous rewards these earnings have "earned" him personally – rest on a systematic "sandbagging" of the average Americans who walk into Wells Fargo branches.

Wells Fargo employees have been using "sandbagging" as a label for opening unauthorised customer accounts. But "sandbagging" also has a broader dictionary definition. If you treat somebody unfairly, if you manipulate to deceive, you're sandbagging.

Wells Fargo's top execs have been sandbagging, in this sense, since former CEO Richard Kovacevich invented "cross-selling" and turned Wells Fargo into the banking industry's top profit pacesetter.

Cross-selling – having bank employees work aggressively to sell existing customers lots of new financial products, whether they need them or not – has essentially become the Wells Fargo claim to banking fame.

Banks typically don't make all that much off opening a traditional checking or savings or credit card account, only \$41 on average, notes the New Yorker's Adam

The bank's enormous annual earnings – and the enormous rewards these earnings have "earned" him personally – rest on a systematic "sandbagging" of the average Americans who walk into Wells Fargo branches

MORE GREED



Wells Fargo Bank: making off with customers' cash.

Photo: Mike Mozart, via Flickr.com

Since the early 2000s, the average number of financial products per Wells Fargo customer has jumped more than 50 percent

Davidson. But some financial products that banks offer – like mortgages – can return a profit 25 times that modest average.

The more accounts a customer has with a bank, sales data show, the likelier a customer will be to sign up for one of these higher profit-margin offerings.

Wells Fargo rewarded employees for selling customers services they didn't ask for. Nobody in banking cross-sells as well as Wells Fargo. Since the early 2000s, the average number of financial products per Wells Fargo customer has jumped more than 50 percent.

This huge hike didn't just haphazardly happen. Wells Fargo's top execs made it happen – by establishing incentive systems and quotas that rewarded employees for getting customers to sign up for services they had no need to purchase.

Wells Fargo's top executives, meanwhile, had their own personal incentives. Carrie Tolstedt, the Wells Fargo exec in charge of the bank's retail side, had her

bonuses tied to the bank's cross-selling success. In 2015, crowed the Wells Fargo proxy statement last year, the "strong cross-sell ratios" that Tolstedt's "leadership" delivered, helped her to a \$7.3-million stock and cash bonus.

Those same strong cross-sell ratios have helped CEO Stumpf deliver, year after year, the banking industry's highest profit rates. The bank returned 12.7 percent on common equity last year, more than twice the return the Wells Fargo rival Bank of America registered.

For that achievement, Stumpf has been duly rewarded. He took home \$19.3-million in 2015, his fourth year in a row at that level. In 2011, he pocketed a mere \$17.9-million.

We have, to be sure, no evidence that Stumpf ever ordered any Wells Fargo manager or employee to set up unauthorized accounts for Wells Fargo customers. Stumpf and his fellow execs like Carrie Tolstedt had a more subtle impact. They fostered a banking culture that actively encouraged managers and employees to sandbag customers.

Those Wells Fargo managers and employees who set up unauthorized accounts – all 5,300 of them – have now been fired, says CEO Stumpf. Carrie Tolstedt has announced her retirement. She'll walk off, Fortune reports, with \$124.6-million in stock, options, and restricted Wells Fargo shares.

Stumpf remains as CEO.

"Once again," laments the New Yorker's Adam Davidson, "a big bank was caught doing something awful" and "no senior manager" – let alone CEO – "was punished in any way."

But punishment, notes the advocacy group Americans for Financial Reform, could and should be coming. Federal watchdog agency officials have the legal power to compel banks to "claw back" any executive earnings that fraudulent behaviors have generated.

Americans for Financial Reform is demanding that Wells Fargo claw back Carrie Tolstedt's \$124.6-million windfall – and also recover the bonuses Stumpf received during the bank's sandbagging heyday.

Tyrel Oates would most likely agree with the AFR demands. Two years ago, Oates – then a Wells Fargo employee in Portland, Oregon – sent Stumpf an email that urged the CEO to recognise America's "increasing focus on income inequality" and take steps to make Wells Fargo's internal distribution of income more equal.

Oates then copied his email to some 200,000 of his fellow Wells Fargo employees. Stumpf never responded. Wells Fargo institutionally responded, Oates noted in a resignation letter last year, by "limiting who we can and cannot email within the organisation."

Interestingly enough, lawmakers in Portland, the city where Oates laboured

for Wells Fargo will shortly be considering a response of their own to the inequality that executive pay excess inflicts on the nation. The city will be holding hearings on a proposal that would place a surtax on any publicly traded companies operating in the city that pay their top execs over 100 times their employee median pay.

In 2014, the year Tyrel Oates sent his email plea, Wells Fargo CEO Stumpf took home over 600 times what Oates was making. **CT**

Portland will listen to a proposal that would place a surtax on any publicly traded companies operating in the city that pay their top execs over 100 times their employee median pay

Editor's Note: As we go to press, it is reported that Wells Fargo CEO John Stumpf and banking unit executive Carrie Tolstedt will have to give back a total of \$60 million.

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Sam Pizzigati co-edits *Inequality.org*. His most recent book, *The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900–1970*.

BY THE NUMBERS

www.inequality.org

The more Wall Street banks pay their CEOs, the less they pay in taxes

JPMorgan CEO Jamie Dimon cashed in **\$23 MILLION** in fully deductible bonuses in Feb/March 2010 at the peak of the foreclosure crisis

Since then, the bank has racked up **\$28 BILLION** in fees for mortgage misconduct

Institute for Policy Studies

#BonusLoophole

Brave? Yes. Heroes? No!

Philip A. Farruggio on the propaganda that obscures the truths of war

The sad reality of phony wars of empire is that the real war criminals – our leaders – never had to get off their duffs and be placed in harm’s way

Empires have always used propaganda to control and influence the populace. So, it takes courage for a minority of truth tellers to speak up. For too long many of those of us who should know better have remained silent on who our real heroes are – or should be.

An anecdote told to me by my late neighbour Bill Klasne is quite insightful. Bill was a Chicago cop, one of those blue collar white working class guys who never bought into the racism and other phobias displayed by many of his fellow officers.

Very early one morning, Bill was driving his young son Nick to school. They passed by a bus stop and noticed a man, dressed as a labourer, perhaps in the construction industry, waiting for the bus. The man was holding a lunchbox, similar to the one that Bill’s son carried with him to school each day.

Bill looked over to young Nick and said, “You see that guy there? Now that is a hero, son. He gets up early each morning, takes the bus to work, punches out the hours to support a wife and kids. He makes far less than the guys on the baseball cards that you think are your heroes. They’re not in his class!”

Hitler’s heroes

When Adolf Hitler sent his Wehrmacht army to invade Poland under phony pre-

tenses, the Nazi spin machine painted them as heroes. They were not! Were they brave? Yes, most men put into a situation where they can get killed or maimed for life are surely brave. but that’s about the end of it. Those German grunts were placed in harm’s way for the sinister purposes of their leaders, and of course the public was propagandised to believe differently.

Such was and is the case with our own USA grunts dragged in to Bush Sr.’s War on Iraq, Bush Jr.’s War on Iraq and Obama’s continuations of the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. All those yellow ribbons and celebrations of our “brave warriors and heroes” should not be allowed hide the real truth – when will John and Joan Public finally wake up to it?

The sad reality of phony wars of empire is that the real war criminals – our leaders – never had to get off their duffs and be placed in harm’s way. It is the grunts, the young kids, most of whom were recruited for bonus money or promises of future employment, with only a few of them falling for the “fight them there, so they don’t come here” crap.

But, whatever their reasons for joining up, these kids learned to be brave and sadly (for many) learned to become numb to the killing of innocent civilians and destruction of someone else’s homeland. Then, when they return home with NO

eye or leg or arm, or suffering from post traumatic stress, how can we not feel for them?

As with the GIs who returned home from another of our empire's phony wars in Vietnam, some of us blame *them* for the debacle. Obviously, you can condemn those of our soldiers who became sadistic and torturous, or downright murderous, but even then we must ask ourselves "How would I have behaved if placed in such a terrible situation?"

Whatever the debate on such matters, in the final reckoning we should come to this conclusion: when our nation commits such reprehensible and premeditated harm on another nation that posed no threat to us, we cannot call those who did our bidding heroes. The true heroes are the ones who came back from that hell and speaking up and demanding accountability for the Bush/Cheney gang, Tony Blair, Obama, Hillary and all.

And let us never forget the "embedded water-carrying presstitutes" as Paul Craig Roberts refers to the journalists who serve this empire so well.

Fortunately, the truth is slowly coming to the surface as to the significance of our current enemy du jour, ISIS. Even some in important positions within the empire are beginning to recognise that there would not have been an ISIS if we hadn't invaded, destroyed and occupied Iraq and Afghanistan. The ISIS fanatics could never have recruited as many as they have. Period!

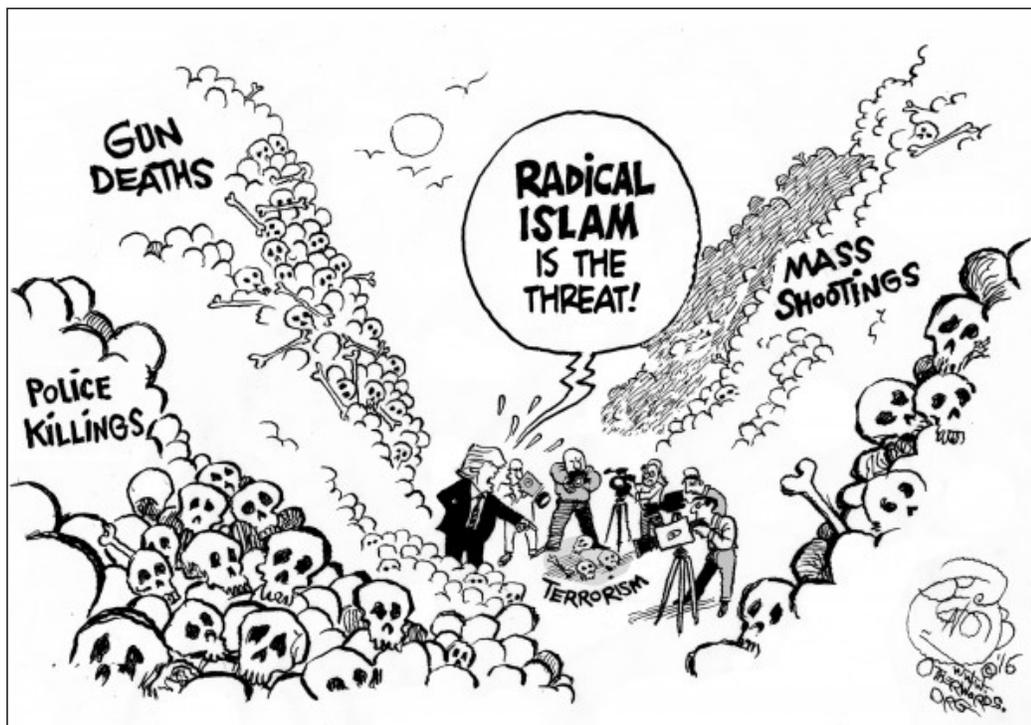
My dear neighbours, it's time to speak up and demand a drastic pull back of this Military Industrial Empire and save those yellow ribbons for a holiday. **CT**

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