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SPIRALLING INTO PERMANENT WAR | CONN M. HALLINAN

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ISSUE 129

Lies,
fake news
and the
mainstream
media
By DUNCAN SIMPSON



ColdType

Issue 129 / December 2016

-
- | | | |
|-----|---|----------------------------------|
| 3. | LIES, FAKE NEWS AND THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA | DUNCAN SIMPSON |
| 5. | BENDIB'S WORLD | KHALIL BENDIB |
| 6. | FILTERING THE ELECTION | DAVID EDWARDS |
| 11. | THE MYTH OF THE DISAPPEARING BOOK | SIMONE NATALE & ANDREA BALLATORE |
| 13. | BEER, BIBLES, A BEAUTY . . . AND BOOKS | TONY SUTTON |
| 17. | SPIRALLING INTO PERMANENT WAR | CONN M. HALLINAN |
| 21. | WE ARE ALL DEPLORABLES | CHRIS HEDGES |
| 24. | EXTENDING THE LIFE OF THE PLANET | BRIAN TERRELL |
| 28. | ON THE ROAD WITH OUR AMERICAN SELVES | MATTEA KRAMER |



Rise and fall of the Black Panthers

Pages 32-35

©2016, Stephen Shames from the book *Power to the People: The World of the Black Panthers* (Abrams). Courtesy Steven Kasher Gallery

- | | | |
|-----|---|----------------------|
| 32. | POWERFUL TIMES | STEPHEN SHAMES |
| 36. | WHY TRUMP WON | R.W. JOHNSON |
| 42. | TRUMP CLIMATE DENIAL POINTS WAY TO WAR | GEORGE MONBIOT |
| 44. | CATALONIA'S ROCKY ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE | THOMAS S. HARRINGTON |

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Lies, fake news and the mainstream media

Duncan Simpson tells how the mainstream media has become an architect of political apathy and the rise of reactionary forces across the Western world

After the earthquake of Donald Trump's election victory, attention is being drawn to the influence of "fake news" on social media amid speculation that stories such as Pope Francis endorsing the Republican candidate or opponent Hillary Clinton murdering an FBI agent might have influenced the result.

Both Google and Facebook bosses have had to make public statements on how they are tackling the phenomena and play down the influence such stories might have had on the outcome of the election. Meanwhile, Trump himself has been reining in on some of his pre-election pledges, notably the building of a wall along the Mexican border and his commitment to dismantle Obamacare.

Judging by interviews with his supporters this apparent about-face doesn't appear to be having much impact, as if the actual claims he was making were less important than the general sentiment behind them. "Well, as long as he's doing something," was one reply to a reporter who asked about this softening of Trump's resolve.

With all this going on, its perhaps not surprising that Post-Truth is Oxford Dictionaries word of the year. The company notes that, although the term has been around close to 25 years, 2016 saw a 2000 percent spike in its usage in the media they examined, notably around the time of the British

EU referendum and the build up to the US presidential election.

Mainstream media and liberal commentators have predictably decried this trend with some making reference to Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky's seminal text *Manufacturing Consent*. The citation however seems misplaced. The issue of entirely faked news stories, and politicians telling outright lies is quite distinct from the more subtle "system-supportive propaganda function" that Chomsky and Herman argued characterised Western media.

It is also convenient for mainstream media outlets to dissociate themselves from this sort of activity, framing themselves as reliable and trustworthy servants of the facts, as if politics has ever been reducible to the facts! Let us then not wring our hands in despair, lamenting how so many people could be taken in by so much bullshit. Such an attitude can very quickly lead to the sort of classist dismissal of Trump or Brexit supporters that would merely confirm their suspicions about a sneering metropolitan elite.

To take up a more radical position, it's worth bearing in mind the insight of psychoanalysis that truth always in part has the structure of fiction. In the case of Trump's aggressive claims, while they may turn out to be lies and gross exaggerations, they nevertheless captured a genuine sense of disen-

Let us not wring our hands in despair, lamenting how so many people could be taken in by so much bullshit

DISINFORMATION

The noise around “fake news” deflects criticism away from more mainstream media outlets who have had an instrumental role in degrading public confidence, not only in the claims of politicians but also in political discourse more generally

franchisement and political abandonment felt by a large proportion of US citizens. The same can be said for the now notorious claim made by the Leave campaign during the EU referendum that Brexit could mean that the £350-million a week “wasted” in EU contributions could be pumped into the NHS. The figure itself was demonstrably false, something that was proved even before the vote took place in May. But, despite this, and the overwhelmingly negative campaign fought by both sides, the Brexiteers won the day.

As with Trump’s pre-election rhetoric, it is as if the veracity of such facts were secondary to the underlying sentiment that connected directly to the real anger felt by his target audience. In the UK, such claims exploited fears about cuts to healthcare and resentment towards technocratic international governance which has enriched a minority while leaving the rest to fend for themselves with stagnating wages and decaying public services.

It is vital, however, not to see the rise of a post-truth world as a recent phenomenon driven by insurrectionary political and media forces. The noise around “fake news” deflects criticism away from mainstream media outlets who have had an instrumental role in degrading public confidence, not only in the claims of politicians but also in political discourse more generally. Today’s media is undoubtedly an architect of political apathy and the rise of reactionary forces across the Western world.

To take but three examples: The mainstream media’s coverage of the British Labour Party and Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership has been almost universally biased. This bias, however, rarely reaches such blatant form as the lies put out by the likes of Breitbart News or the fake stories concocted and spread via social media.

Chomsky and Herman’s analysis fits a lot better with the way in which the BBC, among others, constructed the narrative around Corbyn; ignoring some facts, ampli-

fying others, going to the same sources and pundits time after time while failing to provide any semblance of balance or challenging the claims of interested parties. The end goal of this was to enforce a common sense notion that Corbyn was both unelectable and incompetent, despite evidence to the contrary.

It’s a similar case with years of coverage of welfare in the UK which, in the wake of government cuts, has taken on considerable ideological significance. Tabloid stories about single mothers with numerous children living in palatial residences on vast sums of benefits are only one aspect to the attack on welfare. Just as important is the role of seemingly more positive rhetoric espousing the virtues of hard work, “working families,” striving, saving, and self reliance. Often these words come from the mouths of politicians and big business, but it is the media that amplify and normalise them through their repetition without critique.

We should recognise these terms for what they are, a subtle and insidious method of simultaneously dividing a people along crude binary lines (hard-working / lazy, strivers / scroungers, etc) and a way of conjuring the spectre of a parasitic class living off the efforts of others. It matters little whether such a notion conforms to a person’s experience, as once such a dangerous prejudice is accepted as common sense, like paranoiacs they begin to see the bloodsuckers everywhere.

The entertainment industry, with the likes of Benefits Street and Jeremy Kyle, complete the circle by holding up working class people as objects of ridicule. The cumulative effect of this has been to galvanise middle class support for attacks on welfare and Balkanise working class resistance to cuts even for the most vulnerable people.

Finally, the situation around the migrant crisis and immigration in general has been perhaps the most egregious example of media incitement in recent times. Again the tabloids have led the way for years with

near constant iterations of the trope that “they’re coming here to take your jobs.”

As rents and house prices have soared, due to under-investment in social housing and the government’s determination to turn the whole of London into a foreign investment portfolio, the media have exploited the public’s justified anger by turning it towards foreign workers. To this already toxic mix has increasingly been added a large dose of Islamophobia and outright racism ramped up in the wake of recent terrorist attacks in France and Belgium.

The backlash has been predictable. Faced with the most serious refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War, Britain has steadfastly refused to take more than a minimum of people fleeing conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, a policy that has broad popular support and provided ideological fuel for Ukip and the Conservative Right. The ground was then already prepared when the Leave campaign unveiled its notorious “Breaking Point” poster which aped anti-semitic propaganda of the 1930s. None of this however compares to the outright xenophobia and racism that has been

normalised during the Trump campaign in the US. Like politicians in the UK, he was, however, building on the work of others.

I could go further with this to ask whether stories about the private lives of the royals or celebrities are “real” stories either. Why have we had to wait for this year’s season of toxic politics before asking questions about how public discourse and news media have been so thoroughly polluted by infantilism and spin?

If it is indeed the case that the West has entered a “post-truth world” then we should remember it was the mainstream media that laid its foundations. Not only that but, like Victor Frankenstein, they may well have lost control of their creation. **CT**

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Faced with the most serious refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War, Britain has steadfastly refused to take more than a minimum of people fleeing conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa

BENDIB’S WORLD

Khalil Bendib



Filtering the election

David Edwards looks at the performance of the mainstream media during the US election and finds it only became 'fair' and 'impartial' after Trump had won

The idea that journalism should offer a neutral "spectrum" of views was unceremoniously dumped during the US presidential election

When the likes of Saddam Hussein, Muammar Gaddafi, Bashar Assad, and now Donald Trump, are declared the latest "New Hitler," we learn little except that they are enemies of the establishment. It means the "On" button has been pressed on a propaganda machine designed for maximal demonisation, leaving no room for public doubt. This inevitably drives comparisons in the direction of Hitler and the Nazis.

The rationale is well-understood by the public relations community. Phil Lesley, author of a handbook on PR and communications, explained the spectacularly successful strategy for obstructing action on environmental issues: "People generally do not favour action on a non-alarming situation when arguments seem to be balanced on both sides and there is a clear doubt . . . Nurturing public doubts by demonstrating that this is not a clear-cut situation in support of the opponents usually is all that is necessary." (Lesly, *Coping with Opposition Groups*, *Public Relations Review* 18, 1992, p.331)

Conversely, when action is required, the issue must be presented as one-sided, clear-cut, black-and-white. This doesn't mean that Saddam Hussein wasn't a tyrant, and it doesn't mean that Trump isn't a grave threat to uncivilisation; it means that establishment enemies are described as "New

Hitlers" for reasons that have little or nothing to do with any threat they might pose.

In Trump's case, the public was not being softened up for invasion, bombing and murder, although his liberal opponents have often "joked," with complete unawareness of the irony, about assaulting and assassinating him.

The Las Vegas Review-Journal declares

The idea that journalism should offer a neutral "spectrum" of views was unceremoniously dumped during the US presidential election. Hillary Clinton was endorsed by the 500 largest US newspapers and magazines; Trump by 20 of the smallest, with the most significant of these – the Las Vegas Review-Journal – reaching just 100,000 readers.

As with Jeremy Corbyn, from the moment Trump became a genuine contender, he was drenched in vitriol by virtually the entire US-UK corporate press. The smear campaign was epitomised by the baseless, Ian Fleming-like suggestion that Trump was in cahoots with the establishment's other great bête noire, Putin – a propaganda-perfect marriage of Evil and Pure Evil.

Ironically, Trump may well turn out to be the final nail in the coffin of the manifestly stalled human attempt to become civilised. As leading climate scientist Michael Mann has noted, Trump's stance on climate stabil-



There is much irony in ostensible anti-fascists insisting that a tiny website should shut up and leave Big Media to steamroll their candidate into the White House

ity may mean “game over” for it and us.

But the elite media did not oppose Trump because of his climate views – no question was raised on the issue during the presidential debates and, as Noam Chomsky observes, the issue was of no interest to journalists. On the other hand, Edward S. Herman comments, a declared lack of enthusiasm for foreign conflict, notably with Russia, “may help explain the intensity of media hostility to Trump.”

Inevitably, drawing attention to the awesome level of media bias drew accusations that my organisation Media Lens, was an unlikely “apologist” for Trump’s far-right declarations promoting racism, misogyny and climate denial. When I asked Guardian commentator Hadley Freeman why, in comparing Trump and Clinton, she mentioned Clinton’s email server scandal but not her war crimes, she interpreted this as an endorsement of Trump: “You’re right: the racist, war-endorsing misogynist multiply accused of sexual assault was the better option. Thanks for clarity.”

Telegraph columnist Helena Horton dismissed discussion of Clinton’s devastating wars as whataboutery: “Your whataboutery is detracting from the fact there is a far-right misogynist racist in the White House.”

She added: “I’m shocked idiot men who pushed a fascist into power because HRC not perfect enough haven’t shut up . . . and gosh they’re foul aren’t they?”

Comedian Robert Webb, of Peep Show fame, agreed, describing us as “pricks.”

Again, there is much irony in ostensible anti-fascists insisting that a tiny website should shut up and leave Big Media to steamroll their candidate into the White House.

Trump is only part of the problem

To be fair to our abusers, it is, of course, true that criticising Clinton risked, to a microscopically tiny degree in Medialens’s case, supplying ammunition for the Trump cause. But, in reality, Trump is only part of the problem. Chomsky comments on the Republican Party’s stance on climate change:

SELF-CENSORSHIP

The default corporate media excuse for ignoring “our” crimes is that elected politicians have been chosen to serve by the people, and it is the task of journalism to support, not subvert, democracy

“And notice it’s not Trump; it’s 100 percent of the Republican candidates taking essentially the same position. What they’re saying . . . “It’s all a joke. It’s a liberal hoax.”

Chomsky is talking about the imminent breakdown of climate stability: “It is hard to find words to capture the fact that humans are facing the most important question in their history – whether organised human life will survive in anything like the form we know – and are answering it by accelerating the race to disaster . . .

“It is no less difficult to find words to capture the utterly astonishing fact that in all of the massive coverage of the electoral extravaganza, none of this receives more than passing mention. At least I am at a loss to find appropriate words.”

As this makes very clear, the problem does not begin and end with Trump. The roots of the Clinton-Trump fiasco lie in decades of “liberal” media refusal to challenge the increasing venality, violence and suicidal climate indifference at the supposedly rational end of the political spectrum. Virtually the entire “liberal” journalistic community saw great hope in Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, while treating genuinely honest and compassionate political commentators such as Chomsky, Edward S. Herman, John Pilger, Howard Zinn, Harold Pinter, Chris Hedges, Jonathan Cook and many others as quixotic freaks who may be mentioned in passing, published once in a supermoon, but otherwise ignored.

As Slavoj Žižek observed: “The real catastrophe is the status quo.” When liberal journalism slams the door on reasoned arguments and authentic compassion, other doors swing wide for the likes of Trump.

The default corporate media excuse for ignoring “our” crimes is that elected politicians have been chosen to serve by the people, and it is the task of journalism to support, not subvert, democracy. But, of course, democracy is profoundly subverted by a lack of honest media scrutiny. Structural

media distortion is so extreme that, despite bombing seven countries, Barack Obama continues to be depicted and perceived as an almost saintly figure.

Which is why it was important to challenge the notion that Hillary Clinton was a benevolent force for democracy, justice and the climate before she attained power. And after all, as Secretary of State, she had held one of the most important positions within the US regime.

The risk of boosting Trump was thus balanced by the need to take advantage of a limited period when mass media are, or ought to be, obliged to honestly compare the words and deeds of the leading candidates. In other words, despite Trump’s awfulness, there was a strong moral case for drawing attention to Clinton’s record of reducing Libya to a ruin – a war crime known in Washington as “Hillary’s War” – of fueling a hideous war in Syria, supporting the overthrow of the Honduran government, and so on.

“Peerless leader clad in saintly white”

As author Frank Morgan noted, pretty much the entire media system depicted Clinton as “a peerless leader clad in saintly white, a super-lawyer, a caring benefactor of women and children, a warrior for social justice.”

Morgan added: “With the same arguments repeated over and over, two or three times a day, with nuance and contrary views all deleted, the act of opening the newspaper started to feel like tuning in to a Cold War propaganda station.”

It was difficult to imagine these words appearing in a national newspaper before the vote, and ironic indeed that they appeared in the Guardian. Happily for Britain’s “leading liberal-left newspaper,” the linked examples of media bias embedded in Morgan’s piece led to the New York Times rather than to equivalent or better examples on the website hosting his article.

In fact, Morgan’s piece mocking media performance is part of a trend indicating

that filters suppressing media honesty have been partially lifted now that a clear-cut, black-and-white version of reality is no longer so crucial.

Two further examples should help clarify this intriguing phenomenon.

On November 8, the BBC's New York correspondent, Nick Bryant, published a last comment on the election before voting began. On November 9, in the aftermath of the result, he published a second piece.

In his pre-vote piece, Bryant wrote blandly: "The post-industrial wastelands of the rustbelt, with their skeletal remains and carcass-like old steel mills, are hardly a new feature of the topography in states like Pennsylvania and Ohio. But to view them again was to look at the seedbeds of Trumpism – rubble-strewn but seedbeds nonetheless."

After the vote, Bryant's tone had changed: "So many people I spoke to during this campaign – especially in the old steel towns of the Rust Belt – wanted a businessman in the White House rather than a career politician. Their hatred of Washington was palpable.

"So, too, was their hatred of her. It was visceral. I vividly remember talking to a middle-aged woman in Tennessee, who oozed southern charm, who could not have been more polite. But when the subject of Hillary Clinton came up her whole demeanour changed."

Visceral hatred of Clinton, no less, with a woman's opinion offered as an example. Remarkable.

Bryant's damning summation: "Few people personify the political establishment more than Hillary Clinton. During this campaign, for millions of angry voters, she became the face of America's broken politics."

Before the vote, Bryant commented: "The rule of thumb in this election, in non-urban settings especially, was the more impoverished the landscape, the more likely its inhabitants were to support the billionaire."

After the vote: "Hillary Clinton has long

had a trust problem, which is why the email scandal loomed so large. She had an authenticity problem. She was seen as the high priestess of an east coast elite that looked down, sneeringly, on working people.

"The vast riches that the Clintons accumulated since leaving the White House did not help. The former first couple were seen not just as limousine liberals but Lear Jet liberals."

This was excoriating, unlike anything we'd seen from a BBC journalist during the election.

Before the vote, like virtually every other corporate media reporter, Bryant was casually damning of Trump: "I have tried to learn more about narcissistic personality disorder.

"Many commentators from both sides believe having a basic grasp of the condition was important in making sense of the behaviour of Donald Trump."

He also focused on the idea that Clinton's "personality is endlessly intriguing. Why, for instance, does she struggle to convey the warmth and spontaneity in public that many of us have witnessed in private?"

Bryant's post-vote piece dispensed with such pleasantries: "Hillary Clinton is not a natural campaigner. Her speeches are often flat and somewhat robotic. Her sound-bites sound like sound-bites – prefabricated and, to some ears, insincere."

No discussion of Trump's power

And consider that, as discussed, before the election numerous commentators compared Trump to Hitler, the United States to Germany in the 1930s, and so on. Despite these terrifying claims, we saw little or no discussion of just how much power a triumphant Trump would actually have. Some analysis arrived after the vote on November 15 with Anthony Zurcher's piece on the BBC's website, Can Donald Trump get what he wants?

Zurcher immediately notes that popular support, in fact, is not enough: Trump

"Hillary Clinton is not a natural campaigner. Her speeches are often flat and somewhat robotic. Her sound-bites sound like sound-bites – prefabricated and, to some ears, insincere"

SELF-CENSORSHIP

The intensity of establishment support for Clinton meant that journalistic performance was filtered by host media and self-censorship

will require the backing of “the Washington powers that populate Congress and [that] are necessary to successfully implement his agenda.”

What of Trump’s infamous US-Mexico border wall? It would cost \$20-billion, for which the Mexican government is clearly unwilling to pay, and would in some parts be downgraded to a fence. But actually: “Chances of a monumental Great Wall of Trump ever becoming a reality . . . seem slim.”

What about Trump’s shocking plan to deport 11-million undocumented workers from the US? “He’s since walked back such sweeping pronouncements . . . In the face of reluctance from Congress and financial obstacles . . . it will be tough for him to make the numbers add up.”

What about dismantling Obamacare? “Republicans likely lack the political will to fully pull the plug . . . in the end ‘reform’ looks considerably more attractive than “repeal.”

And so on. Accurate or not, serious, high-profile attention is finally being paid to the existence of checks and balances that will likely prevent a Trump tyranny. This kind of rational discussion conflicted with the establishment need to block Trump by presenting him as a Saddam- or Gaddafi-like figure, a Hitlerian threat. The fact that Trump’s stance on climate means he really is a serious threat to humanity may turn out

to be an unhappy coincidence.

Hillary Clinton was indisputably the preferred establishment candidate, backed by virtually the entire US-UK corporate press.

“Mainstream” media did not merely support Clinton, they declared propaganda war on Trump. As we have seen in this brief sample, even BBC journalists thought nothing of ridiculing Trump’s “narcissistic personality disorder” – unthinkable language from a BBC reporter describing an Obama, a Cameron, or indeed a Clinton.

The intensity of establishment support for Clinton meant that journalistic performance was filtered by host media and self-censorship. As the former Guardian editor Alan Rusbridger told me in an interview: “[T]he whole thing works by a kind of osmosis. If you ask anybody who works in newspapers, they will quite rightly say, ‘Rupert Murdoch,’ or whoever, ‘never tells me what to write,’ which is beside the point: they don’t have to be told what to write. It’s understood.”

The moment the vote was cast, pressures filtering out criticisms of Clinton and less hysterical coverage of Trump were lifted. The result is a semblance of balance that allows stunningly extreme “mainstream” media to enhance their ill-deserved reputation for “fairness” and “impartiality.” **CT**

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The myth of the disappearing book

New forms of entertainment and consumption abound. Yet the printed book endures, write **Simone Natale** and **Andrea Ballatore**

After years of sales growth, major publishers reported a fall in e-book sales for the first time this year, introducing new doubts about the potential of e-books in the publishing industry. A Penguin executive even admitted recently that the e-books hype may have driven unwise investment, with the company losing too much confidence in “the power of the word on the page.”

Yet despite the increasing realisation that digital and print can easily coexist in the market, the question of whether the e-book will “kill” the print book continues to surface. It doesn’t matter if the intention is to predict or dismiss this possibility; the potential disappearance of the book does not cease to stimulate our imagination.

Why is this idea so powerful? Why do we continue to question the encounter between e-books and print books in terms of a struggle, even if all evidence points to their peaceful coexistence?

The answers to these questions go beyond e-books and tell us much more about the mixture of excitement and fear we feel about innovation and change. In our research, we discuss how the idea of one medium “killing” another has often followed the unveiling of new technologies.

Even before the advent of digital technologies, critics have predicted the demise of existing media. After television was in-

vented, many claimed radio would die. But radio ended up surviving by finding new uses; people started listening in cars, during train rides and on factory floors.

The myth of the disappearing book isn’t new, either. As early as 1894, there was speculation that the introduction of the phonograph would spell the demise of the books: They’d be replaced by what we today call audiobooks.

This happened again and again. Movies, radio, television, hyperlinks and smartphones – all conspired to destroy printed books as a source of culture and entertainment. Some claimed the end of books would result in cultural regression and decline. Others envisioned utopian digital futures, overstating the advantages of e-books.

It is not by chance that the idea of the death of the book surfaces in moments of technological change. This narrative, in fact, perfectly conveys the mixture of hopes and fears that characterise our deepest reactions to technological change.

To understand why these reactions are so common, one has to consider that we create emotional bonds with media as they become an integral part of our life. Numerous studies have shown how people develop a close relationship with objects such as books, televisions and computers. Sometimes, we even humanise them, giving a name to our car or shouting at our laptop for not work-

As early as 1894, there was speculation that the introduction of the phonograph would spell the demise of the books: They’d be replaced by what we today call audiobooks

BOOKMARK / 1

Not surprisingly, e-readers stimulated a new appreciation for the material quality of “old” books – even for their often unpleasant smell

ing properly. As a result, the emergence of a new technology – like e-readers – doesn’t just indicate economic and social change. It also causes us to adjust our relationship with something that has become an integral part of our day-to-day life.

As a result, we find ourselves longing for what we used to know, but no longer have. And it’s why entire industries develop around retro products and older technologies. The spread of the printing press in 15th-century Europe, for example, made people seek out original manuscripts. The shift from silent to sound movie in the 1920s stimulated nostalgia for the older form. The same happened in the shift from analog to digital photography, from vinyls to CDs, and from black-and-white to colour television. Not surprisingly, e-readers stimulated a new appreciation for the material quality of “old” books – even for their often unpleasant smell.

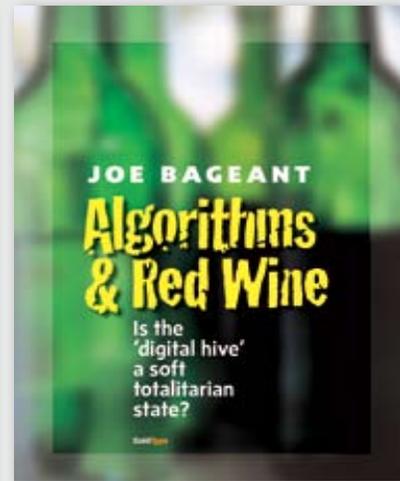
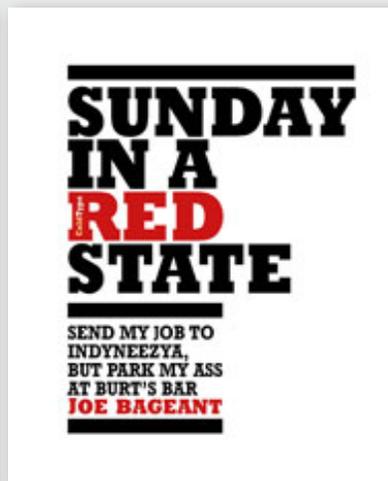
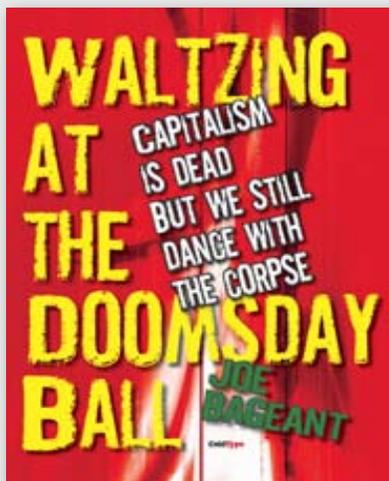
The ones who still worry for the disap-

pearance of print books may rest assured: Books have endured many technical revolutions, and are in the best position to survive this one.

Yet the myth of the disappearing medium will continue to provide an appealing narrative about both the transformative power of technology and our aversion to change. In fact, one of the strategies we employ in order to make sense of change is the use of narrative patterns that are available and familiar, such as narratives of death and ending. Easy to remember and to spread, the story of the death of media reflects our excitement for the future, as well as our fear of losing parts of our intimate world – and finally, of ourselves. **CT**

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Simone Natale is a lecturer in communication and media studies at Loughborough University. Andrea Ballatore is a lecturer at Birkbeck, University of London

Read the best of Joe Bageant



www.coldtype.net/joe.html



Now a respectable bookstore, the adjacent Jabberwock buildings once housed Daft's Tap, the most disreputable boozier in town.

Beer, bibles, a beauty . . . and books

Tony Sutton on the life and times of a small town's best book shop

It's 2005, I'm on holiday in England and I've just read a magazine article that tells me, "If you're a vacationing book lover, there's no need to struggle with a suitcase full of heavy books. Nor do you need to pay outrageous excess baggage charges at the airport. Buy as many as you want, pack them into a box, then mail it. Postage is cheap and they'll arrive hassle-free in a few weeks."

Seems like a grand idea, so I dash to the nearest used book shop, leaving a couple of hours later weighed down by bags of goodies. The next morning, before my flight home

to Canada, I stuff them into a box and go to the post office where the guy at the counter winces as he hoists the package onto the scale. Then I hear a drawn-out "phewww," followed by, "That'll be £53, Sir!"

"That's more than the damn things cost," I mutter, as I reluctantly hand over the remnants of my holiday stash, vowing never again to believe a word I read in magazines.

Since then, I've returned many times to that shop – Jabberwock Books in Horncastle, the town in which I lived 'til my mid-20s – but now my book buying is less exuberant, so

I stuff the books into a box and stagger off to the post office

BOOKMARK / 2



Jabberwock owner Robert Flanagan sits behind his desk, almost swamped by books.

Horncastle hosted the biggest horse fair in Europe during the 19th-century, and was the home of the state hangman

there's no need for those last minute, money-siphoning trips to the post office.

A small market town off the east coast of England, Horncastle has several claims to fame. It's ancient, built on the site of a 2,000-year-old Roman fort. It hosted the biggest horse fair in Europe during the 19th-century. And, in the latter part of that same period, it was the home of state hangman William Marwood, who was a cobbler when he wasn't stringing up bad guys.

Today, the place is one of the biggest antique centres in Britain and, consequently, has more used book shops than you'd expect to find in a town of fewer than 7,000 people. The best of the lot is Jabberwock which – along with the Strand in New York City, and Powells of Portland, Oregon – is high on my list of favourites. Why? Unlike most book

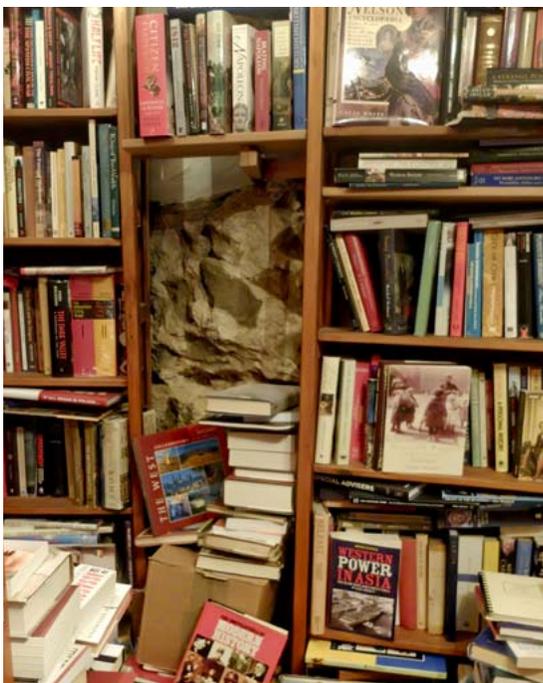
shops, its shelves are uncluttered by volumes that have gathered dust for years. Instead, the ever-changing stock is carefully curated by owner Robert Flanagan, who I find sitting behind a desk that is almost swamped by books. "My wife Pauline and I opened Jabberwock in 1987 after being schoolteachers in London, Bristol and Manchester. We intended to sell pottery but soon decided to become book dealers instead," he tells me.

Apart from its wonderful selection of books – I'm especially impressed by a section devoted to British politics – Jabberwock is notable for its labyrinth of small rooms, uneven floors, head-cracking door lintels and lighting arrangements you'd definitely not want to try at home.

And, although much smaller than the Strand or Powells, it has a few things the Americans don't. A back room contains one



A young customer peers round a bookshelf, impatient to move from the sports books to the kids' section.



Left: 2,000-year-old Roman wall provides a backdrop to the history section. Above: Light spills through the window onto a display of kids' books.

BOOKMARK / 2



Outside, looking in: Uneven floors, head-cracking door lintels and lighting arrangements you'd definitely not try at home.

of the largest remaining expanses of the Roman wall that once encircled the town. The old horse fair, established in the 13th-century, also features in its history. During the fair's heyday, the town had 40 inns, taverns, pubs and beer-houses – one for every 100 residents – and the Jabberwock building housed the most disreputable of the lot – Daft's Tap. A bar and brothel, it was described by B.J. Davey, in *Lawless and Immoral*, his history of the town, as a “beerhouse of the lowest type,” frequented by “vagrants, boatmen and ‘canal bankers.’” (There's no known link to William Marwood, but I wouldn't be surprised to find he liked to hang out with his pals at Daft's Tap after a hard day's work.)

Daft's was a private house when the last horse fair was held at the end of World War II, then it became a Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall, betting shop, used clothing store and men's hairdresser.

My most vivid recollection of the place is of the Friday night when, still a teenager, I attended a party there. That night was memorable for fast-flowing booze and a flirtatious



Table of books in the cobbled street beneath the one-eyed gaze of a CCTV camera.

former beauty queen, but mainly for her very angry husband and his very large fists . . .

These days, there's no booze, no religion, no haircuts, no beauty queen, no angry fists; just Robert Flanagan sitting behind his cramped desk in what is, in my admittedly biased opinion, the world's finest book shop. **CT**

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Tony Sutton is the editor of *ColdType*.
Jabberwock Books is at 14-16 St Lawrence St,
Horncastle – www.jabberwockbooks.co.uk

Spiralling into permanent war

A new book reinforces the belief that using military force to fight terror creates more enemies and instability, writes **Conn M. Hallinan**

“We have fallen into a self-defeating spiral of reaction and counterterror. Our policies, meant to extirpate our enemies, have strengthened and perpetuated them.” - Mark Danner

Mark Danner, an award winning journalist, professor and member of the Council on Foreign Relations, who has covered war and revolutions on three continents – begins his book, *Spiral*, with the aftermath of a 2003 ambush of US troops outside Fallujah, Iraq. The insurgents had set off a roadside bomb, killing a paratrooper and wounding several others. “The Americans promptly dismounted and with their M-16s and M-4s began pouring lead into everything they could see, including a passing truck,” he writes. “By week’s end scores of family and close friends of those killed would join the insurgents, for honour demanded they kill Americans to wipe away family shame.”

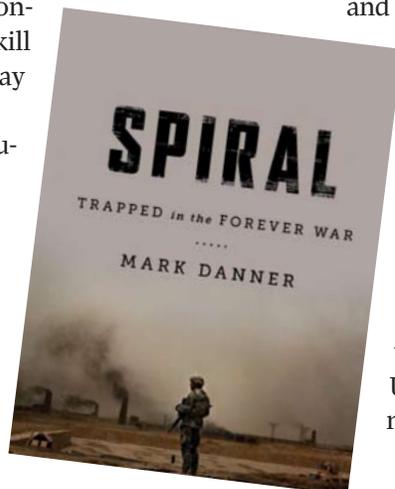
The incident encapsu-

SPIRAL: TRAPPED IN THE FOREVER WAR

Mark Danner

Simon & Schuster

\$16.52 (Amazon.com)



lates the fundamental contradiction at the heart of George W. Bush’s – and with variations, that of Barak Obama’s – “war on terror”: The means used to fight it is the most effective recruiting device that organisations like Al Qaeda, the Taliban, the Shabab, and the Islamic State have. Targeted assassinations by drones, the use of torture, extra-legal renditions, and the invasions of several Muslim countries has been an unmitigated disaster, destabilising several states, killing hundreds of thousands of people and generating millions of refugees.

Danner’s contention is hardly breaking news, nor is he the first journalist to point out that responding to the tactic of terrorism with military forces generates yet more enemies and instability. But, in *Spiral*, he argues that what was once unusual has now become standard operating procedure,

and the Obama administration bears some of the blame for this by its refusal to prosecute violations of international law.

Torture is a case in point. In the aftermath of the 2001 attack on New York and Washington, the Bush administration introduced so-called “enhanced interrogation” techniques that were, in fact, torture under both US and international law. Danner demonstrates that the White

In the aftermath of the 2001 attack on New York and Washington, the Bush administration introduced so-called “enhanced interrogation” techniques that were, in fact, torture under both US and international law

THE AMERICAN WAY

There were, of course, some restraints to torture. For instance, the Justice Department refused to approve a CIA proposal to bury people alive

House, and a small cluster of advisors around Vice-President Dick Cheney, knew they could be prosecuted under existing laws and carefully erected a “golden shield” of policy memos that would protect them from prosecution for war crimes.

In his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, Obama announced that he had “prohibited torture.” But, as Danner points out, “torture violates international and domestic law and the notion that our president has the power to prohibit it follows insidiously from the pretence that his predecessor had the power to order it. Before the war on terror official torture was illegal and an anathema; today it is a policy choice.”

And president-elect Donald Trump has already announced that he intends to bring it back.

There is no doubt that enhanced interrogation was torture. The International Committee of the Red Cross found the techniques “amounted to torture and/or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.” How anyone could conclude anything else is hard to fathom. Besides the water boarding – for which several WW II Japanese soldiers were executed for its use on allied prisoners – interrogators used sleep deprivation, extreme confinement and “walling.” Abu Zubaydah, who was water boarded 83 times, describes having a towel wrapped around his neck that his questioners used “to swing me around and smash repeatedly against the wall of the [interrogation] room.”

According to a 2004 CIA memo, “An HVD [high value detainee] may be walled one time (one impact with the wall) to make a point, or 20 to 30 times consecutively when the interrogator requires a more significant response to a question.” There were, of course, some restraints. For instance, the Justice Department refused to approve a CIA proposal to bury people alive.

And, as Danner points out, none of these grotesque methods produced any important information. The claim that torture saved “thousands of lives” is simply a lie.

There was a certain Alice in Wonderland quality about the whole thing. Zubaydah was designated a “high official” in Al Qaeda, the number three or four man in the organization. In reality he wasn’t even a member, as the Justice Department finally admitted in 2009. However, because he was considered a higher up in the group, it was assumed he must know about future attacks. If he professed that he didn’t know anything, this was proof that he did, and so he had to be tortured more. “It is a closed circle, self-sufficient, impervious to disobedient facts,” says Danner.

The logic of the Red Queen

The Obama administration has also conjured up some interpretations of language that seem straight out of Lewis Carroll. In defending his use of drone strikes in a 2014 speech at West Point, the President said he only uses them “when we face a continuing, imminent threat.” But “imminent” means “likely to occur at any moment” and is the opposite of “continuing.” A leaked Justice Department memo addresses the incongruity by arguing, “Imminent does not require the US to have clear evidence that a specific attack on US persons and interests will take place in the immediate future.”

Apparently the administration has now added, “elongated” to “imminent,” so that “a president doesn’t have to deem the country under immediate threat to attack before acting on his or her own.” As Humpty Dumpty says to Alice in *Through the Looking Glass*, “When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean.”

Danner turns the phrase “American exceptionalism” on its head. The US is not “exceptional” because of its democratic institutions and moral codes, but because it has exempted itself from international law. “Americans, believing themselves to stand proudly for the rule of law and human rights, have become for the rest of the world a symbol of something quite opposite: a society that imprisons people indefinitely



KILLER DRONE: The General Atomics MQ-1 Predator. Photo: wikiwand.com

without trial, kills thousands without due process, and leaves unpunished lawbreaking approved by its highest officials.”

The war has also undermined basic constitutional restrictions on the right of intelligence agencies and law enforcement to vacuum up emails and cell phone calls, and has created an extra-legal court system to try insurgents whose oversight and appeal process is shrouded in secrecy.

The war on terror – the Obama administration has re-titled it a war on extremism – has not been just an illegal and moral catastrophe, it is a failure by any measure. From 2002 to 2014, the number of deaths from terrorism grew 4,000 percent, the number of jihadist groups increased by 58 percent, and the membership in those organisations more than doubled.

The war has also generated a massive counter terrorism bureaucracy that has every reason to amp up the politics of fear. And yet with all the alarm this has created, a total of 24 Americans were killed by terrorism in 2014, fewer than were done in by lighting.

Terrorism, says Danner, is “la politique du pire,” the “politics of the worst” or the use of provocation to get your enemy to overreact. “If you are weak, if you have no army of your own, borrow you enemy’s. Provoke your adversary to do your political work for you,” he says. “And in launching the war on terror, eventually occupying two Muslim countries and producing Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib celebrating images of repression and torture, the United States proved

all too happy to oblige.”

Danner argues that idea you can defeat terrorism – which is really just a tactic used by the less powerful against the more powerful – with military force is an illusion. It can and does, however, make everything worse.

Even the Department of Defense knows this. In 2004, the Pentagon’s Defense Science Board found that:

- American direct intervention in the Muslim world has paradoxically elevated the stature and support for radical Islamists while diminishing support for the United States.
- Muslims do not “hate our freedoms,” they hate our policies, including one-sided support for Israel and for tyrannies in the Arab world.
- American talk of bringing democracy to Muslim countries is self-serving hypocrisy.
- The occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan has not brought democracy to those countries, but chaos and destruction.

Increasingly, the war on terrorism/extremism is a secret war fought by drones whose targets are never revealed, or by Special Operations Forces whose deployments and missions are wrapped in the silence of national security.

And as long as Obama calls for Americans “to look forward as opposed to looking backward,” the spiral will continue. As Danner argues, “It is a sad but immutable fact that the refusal to look backward leaves us trapped in a world without accountability that his [Obama’s] predecessor made. In making it possible, indeed likely, that the crimes will be repeated, the refusal to look backward traps us in the past.” **CT**

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Conn M. Hallinan is a columnist for *Foreign Policy In Focus*. He has a PhD in anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley and oversaw the journalism program at the University of California at Santa Cruz for 23 years. and lives in Berkeley, California

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We are all deplorables

Chris Hedges points out that America's true enemies are neither the working class nor the poor, but money-grabbing oligarchs and job-destroying corporations

My relatives in Maine are deplorables. I cannot write on their behalf. I can write in their defence. They live in towns and villages that have been ravaged by deindustrialisation. The bank in Mechanic Falls, where my grandparents lived, is boarded up, along with nearly every downtown store. The paper mill closed decades ago. There is a strip club in the centre of the town. The jobs, at least the good ones, are gone. Many of my relatives and their neighbours work up to 70 hours a week at three minimum-wage jobs, without benefits, to make perhaps \$35,000 a year. Or they have no jobs. They cannot afford adequate health coverage under the scam of Obamacare. Alcoholism is rampant in the region. Heroin addiction is an epidemic. Labs producing the street drug methamphetamine make up a cottage industry. Suicide is common. Domestic abuse and sexual assault destroy families. Despair and rage among the population have fuelled an inchoate racism, homophobia and Islamophobia feed the latent and ever present poison of white supremacy. They also nourish the magical thinking peddled by the con artists in the Christian right, the state lotteries that fleece the poor, and an entertainment industry that night after night shows visions of an America and a lifestyle on television screens – The Apprentice typified this – that foster unattainable dreams of wealth and celebrity.

Those who are cast aside as human refuse

often have a psychological need for illusions and scapegoats. They desperately seek the promise of divine intervention. They unplug from a reality that is too hard to bear. They see in others, especially those who are different, the obstacles to their advancement and success. We must recognise and understand the despair that leads to these reactions. To understand these reactions is not to condone them.

The suffering of the white underclass is real. Its members struggle with humiliation and a crippling loss of self-worth and dignity. The last thing they need, or deserve, is politically correct thought police telling them what to say and think and condemning them as mutations of human beings.

Those cast aside by the neoliberal order have an economic identity that both the liberal class and the right wing are unwilling to acknowledge. This economic identity is one the white underclass shares with other discarded people, including the undocumented workers and the people of colour demonised by the carnival barkers on cable news shows.

The self-righteousness of the liberal class, which revels in imagined tolerance and enlightenment while condemning the white underclass as irredeemable, widens the divide between white low-wage workers and urban elites. Liberals have no right to pass judgment on these so-called deplorables without acknowledging their pain. They must listen to their stories, which the corporate media shut

The suffering of the white underclass is real. Its members struggle with humiliation and a crippling loss of self-worth and dignity

CORPORATE ENEMIES

I finished my book with a deep dislike for megachurch pastors who, like Trump, manipulate despair to achieve power and wealth. I see the Christian right as a serious threat to an open society

out. They must offer solutions that provide the possibility of stability and self-respect.

Martin Luther King Jr. understood the downward spiral of hating those who hate you. “In a real sense all life is inter-related,” he wrote in Letter From a Birmingham Jail. “All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. ...”

We cannot battle the racism, bigotry and hate crimes that will be stoked by the Donald Trump presidency without first battling for economic justice. This is not a gap between the tolerant and the intolerant. It is a gap between most of the American population and our elites, which Trump epitomises. It is a gap that is understood only in the light of the demand for economic justice. And when we start to speak in the language of justice first, and the language of inclusiveness second, we will begin to blunt the proto-fascism being embraced by many Trump supporters.

I spent two years writing a book on the Christian right called *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America*. I spent many months with dispossessed white workers in states such as Missouri, Kansas, Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio and California. I carried into the book project all the prejudices that come with being raised in the liberal church – a disdain for a magic Jesus who answers your prayers and makes you rich, a repugnance at the rejection of rationality and science and at the literal interpretation of the Bible, a horror of the sacralisation of the American empire, and a revulsion against the racism, misogyny, homophobia, Islamophobia, anti-semitism and blind intolerance that often afflict those who retreat into a binary world of good and evil.

Those enthralled by such thinking are Christian heretics – Jesus did not come to make us rich and powerful and bless America’s empire – and potential fascists. They have fused the iconography and symbols of the American

state with the iconography and symbols of religion. They believe they can create a “Christian” America. The American flag is given the same sacred value as the Christian cross. The Pledge of Allegiance has the religious power of the Lord’s Prayer. That a sleazy developer and con artist was chosen as their vehicle – 81 percent of evangelicals voted for Trump – for achieving this goal is startling, to say the least. But this is not a reality-based movement. Most of those who profit from this culture of despair, many wrapped in the halo of the ministry, are, like Trump, slick, amoral trolls.

My view of the tens of millions of Americans who have fallen into the embrace of the Christian right’s magical thinking underwent a profound change as I conducted interviews for the book. During that time I did what good reporters do: I listened. And the stories I heard were heartbreaking. I grew to like many of these people. The communities they lived in, many of which I visited, looked like the towns where my family lived in Maine. They were terrified of the future, especially for their children. They struggled with feelings of worthlessness and abandonment. I fear the Christianised fascism in which they enshroud themselves, but I also see them as its pawns.

They hate a secular world they see as destroying them. They long for the apocalyptic visions of Tim LaHaye’s *Left Behind* series. They want the cruelty and rot of “secular humanism” to be obliterated before they and their families are lifted into heaven by the rapture (an event never mentioned in the Bible).

I finished my book with a deep dislike for megachurch pastors who, like Trump, manipulate despair to achieve power and wealth. I see the Christian right as a serious threat to an open society. But I do not hate those who desperately cling to this emotional life raft, even as they spew racist venom. Their conclusion that minorities, undocumented workers or Muslims are responsible for their impoverishment is part of the retreat into fantasy. The only way we will blunt this racism and hatred and allow them to free themselves from the grip of magical thinking is by providing jobs

that offer adequate incomes and economic stability and by restoring their communities and the primacy of the common good. We will not argue or scold them out of their beliefs. These people are emotionally incapable of coping with the world as it is. If we demonise them we demonise ourselves.

White underclass are victims, too

Arlie Russell Hochschild's book *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* in story after story makes clear that members of the white underclass are also victims and deserve our empathy. The liberal class has no hope of defeating the rise of American fascism until it unites with the dispossessed white working class. It has no hope of being an effective force in politics until it articulates a viable socialism. A socialist movement dedicated to demolishing the cruelty of the corporate state will do more to curb the racism of the white underclass than lessons by liberals in moral purity. Preaching multiculturalism and gender and identity politics will not save us from the rising sadism in American society. It will only fuel the anti-politics that has replaced politics.

Liberals have sprinkled academic, corporate, media and political institutions with men and women of different races and religions. This has done nothing to protect the majority of marginalised people who live in conditions worse than those that existed when King marched on Selma. It is boutique activism. It is about branding, not justice.

Murray Bookchin excoriated the irrelevancy of a liberal class that busied itself with "the numbing quietude of the polling booth, the deadening platitudes of petition campaigns, car[-]bumper sloganeering, the contradictory rhetoric of manipulative politicians, the spectator sports of public rallies and finally, the knee-bent humble pleas for small reforms – in short the mere shadows of the direct action, embattled commitment, insurgent conflicts, and social idealism that marked every revolutionary project in history."

Human history is defined by class struggle.

America's corporate elites successfully fused the two major political parties into a single corporate party, one that seized control of electoral politics, internal security, the judiciary, universities, the arts, finance and nearly all forms of popular communication, including Hollywood, public relations and the press. There is no way within the system to defy the demands of Wall Street, the fossil fuel industry or war profiteers. And Trump is about to remove whatever tepid restraints are left.

Oswald Spengler in *The Decline of the West* predicted that, as Western democracies calcified and died, a class of "monied thugs," people such as Trump, would replace the traditional political elites. Democracy would become a sham. Hatred would be fostered and fed to the masses to encourage them to tear themselves apart. The only route left is revolt. If this revolt is to succeed it must be expressed in the language of economic justice. A continuation of the language of multiculturalism and identity politics as our primary means of communication is self-defeating. It stokes the culture wars. It feeds the anti-politics that define the corporate state.

"The heirs of the New Left of the Sixties have created, within the academy, a cultural Left," Richard Rorty wrote. "Many members of this Left specialise in what they call the 'politics of difference' or 'of identity' or 'of recognition.' This cultural Left thinks more about stigma than about money, more about deep and hidden psychosexual motivations than about shallow and evident greed."

Our enemy is not the white working poor any more than it is African-Americans, undocumented workers, Muslims, Latinos or members of the GBLT community. The oligarchs and corporations, many proponents of political correctness, are our enemy. If we shed our self-righteousness and hubris, if we speak to the pain and suffering of the working poor, we will unmask the toxins of bigotry and racism. We will turn the rage of an abandoned working class, no matter what its members' colour, race or religious creed, against those who deserve it.

CT

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Chris Hedges has reported from more than 50 countries and has worked for *The Christian Science Monitor* and *The New York Times*, for which he was a foreign correspondent for 15 years. This essay was first published at www.truthdig.com

Extending the life of the planet

Brian Terrell visits Russia which, he discovers, is not the instigator of the threat of a 21st-century nuclear-weaponised Cold War

The military industrial complex, including the “life extension programmes for weapon systems” upon which the US intends to spend a trillion dollars over the next decades, is not a response to any real threat, but exists only to perpetuate itself

On October 9, I was in the Nevada desert with Catholic workers from around the world for an action of prayer and nonviolent resistance at what is now called the Nevada National Security Site, the test site where between 1951 and 1992, 928 documented atmospheric and underground nuclear tests occurred. Since the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the apparent end of the Cold War, The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) has maintained the site, circumventing the intent of the treaty with a stated “mission to maintain the stockpile without explosive underground nuclear testing.”

Three days earlier, as if to remind us that the test site is not a relic with exclusively historic significance, the NNSA announced that earlier in the month, two B-2 Stealth bombers from Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri had dropped two dummy B61 nuclear bombs at the site. “The primary objective of flight testing is to obtain reliability, accuracy, and performance data under operationally representative conditions,” said the NNSA press release. “Such testing is part of the qualification process of current alterations and life extension programmes for weapon systems.”

“The B61 is a critical element of the US nuclear triad and the extended deterrent,” said Brig Gen Michael Lutton, NNSA’s prin-

cipal assistant deputy administrator for military application. “The recent surveillance flight tests demonstrate NNSA’s commitment to ensure all weapon systems are safe, secure, and effective.”

General Lutton and the NNSA do not explain what threat the testing of B61 nuclear bombs is meant to deter. The military industrial complex, including the “life extension programmes for weapon systems” upon which the US intends to spend a trillion dollars over the next decades, is not a response to any real threat, but exists only to perpetuate itself. For public consumption, however, expenditures of this magnitude require justification. The not-so-subtle message that this was a “dry run” of a nuclear attack on Russia was not missed by the media that picked up the story.

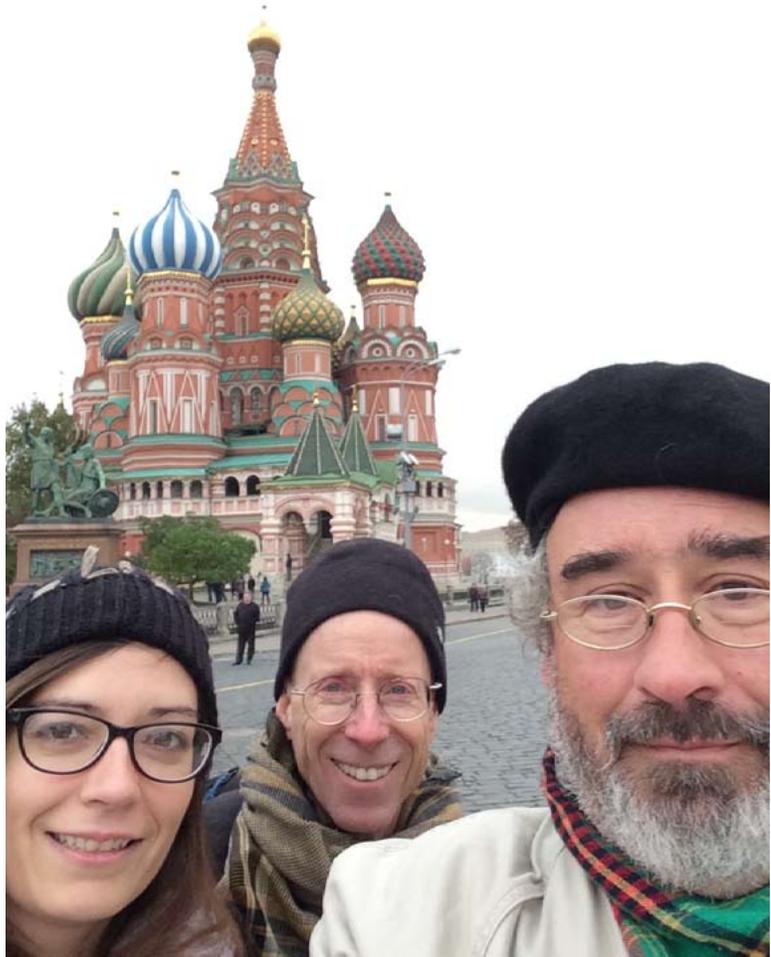
Shortly after leaving Nevada, I was in Moscow, Russia, as part of a small delegation representing Voices for Creative Nonviolence from the US and UK. Over the following 10 days in Moscow and St Petersburg, we saw nothing of the massive preparations for war that are being reported in the Western media. We saw no sign of, and no one we spoke to knew anything about, the widely reported evacuation of 40-million Russians in a civil defence drill. “Is Putin preparing for WW3?” asked one UK tabloid on October 14: “Following a breakdown in com-

munication between the USA and Russia, the Kremlin organized the huge emergency practice drill – either as a show of force or something more sinister.” This drill turned out to be an annual review that firefighters, hospital workers and police routinely conduct to evaluate their capacities to manage potential natural and man-made disasters.

Over the past years I have visited many of the world’s major cities and Moscow and St Petersburg are the least militarised of any I’ve seen. Visiting the White House in Washington, DC, for example, one cannot miss seeing uniformed Secret Service agents with automatic weapons patrolling the fence line and the silhouettes of snipers on the roof. In contrast, even at Red Square and the Kremlin, the seat of the Russian government, only a few lightly armed police officers are visible. They seemed mainly occupied with giving directions to tourists.

Travelling on the cheap, lodging in hostels, eating in cafeterias and taking public transport, is a great way to visit any region and it gave us opportunities to meet people we would not otherwise have met. We followed up on contacts made by friends who had visited Russia earlier and we found ourselves in a number of Russian homes. We did take in some of the sights, including museums, cathedrals, and a boat ride on the Neva, but we also visited a homeless shelter and offices of human rights groups and attended a Quaker meeting. We were also invited to address students in a language school in a formal setting, but most of our encounters were small and personal and we did more listening than talking.

I am not sure that the term “Citizen Diplomacy” can be accurately applied to what we did and experienced in Russia. Certainly the four of us, me from Iowa, Erica Brock from New York, David Smith-Ferri from California and Susan Clarkson from England, hoped that by meeting Russian citizens we could help foster better relations between our nations. On the other hand, as much as the term suggests that we were acting even



Erica Brock, David Smith-Ferri and Brian Terrell at Red Square.

informally to defend or explain our governments’ actions, interests and policies, we were not diplomats. We did not go to Russia with the intention of putting a human face on or in any way justifying our countries’ policies toward Russia.

There is a sense, though, that the only genuine diplomatic efforts being made between the US and NATO countries at this time are citizen initiatives like our own small delegation. What the US State Department calls “diplomacy” is actually aggression by another name and it is questionable whether the US is capable of true diplomacy while it surrounds Russia with military bases and “missile defence” systems and carries out massive military manoeuvres near its borders.

Visiting the White House in Washington, DC, for example, one cannot miss seeing uniformed Secret Service agents with automatic weapons patrolling the fence line and the silhouettes of snipers on the roof

NO NUKES

The hyped-up proposition that Russia might be conducting civil defence drills raises suspicion that Russia is preparing to launch World War III. Yet, a practice run, dropping mock nuclear bombs in Nevada, is not viewed in the West “as a show of force or something more sinister”

I am conscious of the need to be humble and not to overstate or claim any expertise. Our visit was less than two weeks’ long and we saw little of a vast country. Our hosts reminded us continually that the lifestyles and views of Russians outside their country’s largest cities might be different from theirs. Still, there is so little knowledge of what is going on in Russia today that we need to speak the little we have to offer.

While we heard a wide variety of views on many crucial issues, there seems to be a consensus among those we met about the impossibility of a war between Russia and US/NATO. The war that many of our politicians and pundits see clearly on the horizon as inevitable is not only unlikely, it is unthinkable, to the Russian people we talked with. None of them thinks that our countries’ leaders would be so crazy as to allow the tensions between them to bring us to a nuclear war.

In the United States, Presidents Bush and Obama are often credited for “fighting the war over there so we don’t have to fight it here.” In St Petersburg we visited the Piskaya Memorial Park, where hundreds of thousands of the million victims of the German’s siege of Leningrad are buried in mass graves. In World War II, more than 22-million Russians were killed, most of them civilians. Russians, more than Americans, know that the next world war will not be fought on a faraway battlefield.

Russian students laughed at the joke, “If the Russians are not trying to provoke a war,

why did they put their country in the middle of all these US military bases?” But I ruefully told them that due to our nation’s professed exceptionalism, many Americans would not see the humour in it. Rather, a double standard is considered normal. When Russia responds to military manoeuvres by the U. and its NATO allies on its borders by increasing its defence readiness inside its borders, this is perceived as a dangerous sign of aggression. This summer in Poland, for example, thousands of US troops participated in NATO military manoeuvres, “Operation Anakonda” (even spelled with a “k,” an anaconda is a snake that kills its victim by surrounding and squeezing it to death) and when Russia responded by augmenting its own troops inside Russia, this response was regarded a threat. The hyped-up proposition that Russia might be conducting civil defence drills raises suspicion that Russia is preparing to launch World War III. Yet, a practice run, dropping mock nuclear bombs in Nevada, is not viewed in the West “as a show of force or something more sinister,” but only as an indication of a “commitment to ensure all weapon systems are safe, secure, and effective.”

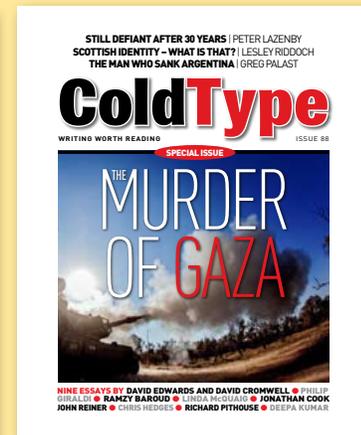
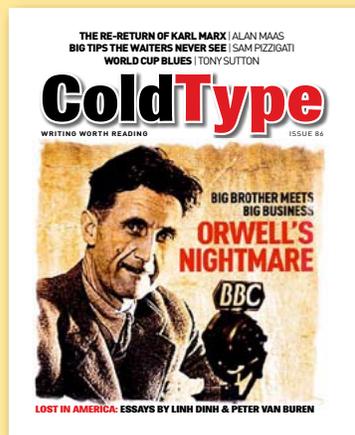
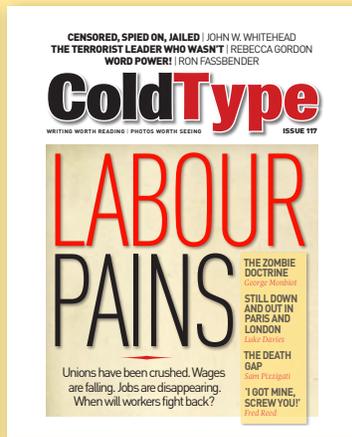
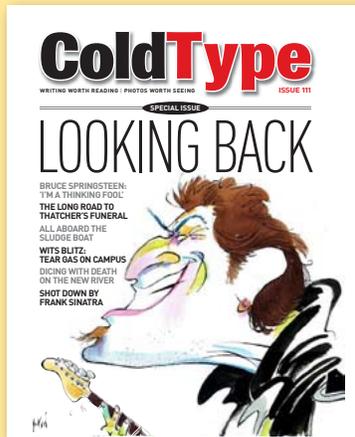
The life extension of our planet needs to be a universal goal. To speak of, let alone pour a nation’s wealth into a program of “life extension programmes for weapon systems” is nothing short of madness. **CT**

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On the road with our American selves

Or how to feel like a jerk in Mombasa, by **Mattea Kramer**

We are obviously not, for instance, going to redeploy our energies toward examining the embarrassing war that we're still waging in Afghanistan, now in its sixteenth year – something that went practically unmentioned during election season,

The fluorescent circus of Election 2016 – that spectacle of yellow comb-overs, and orange skin, and predatory pussy-grabbing, and last-minute FBI interventions, and blinking memes hewn by an underground army of self-important Internet trolls – has finally come to its unnatural end. I had looked forward to this moment, only to find us all instantly embroiled in a new crisis. And unfortunately, it's easy to foretell what, or rather who, will move into the bright lights of our collective gaze now: we're going to (continue to) focus on . . . well, ourselves.

We are obviously not, for instance, going to redeploy our energies toward examining the embarrassing war that we're still waging in Afghanistan, now in its sixteenth year – something that went practically unmentioned during election season, even as fighting heated up there. (You can be sure that Afghans have a somewhat different perspective on the newsworthiness of that war.) We are also not going to spend our time searching for the names of people like Momina Bibi, whom we've . . . oops . . . inadvertently annihilated while carrying out our nation's drone kill programme.

For his part, Donald Trump has pledged to “take out” the families of terrorists, a plan that sounds practically ordinary when compared to our actual drone assassination programme, conceived by President

George W. Bush and maintained and expanded by President Obama. And while I don't for a moment pretend that Trump's electoral victory is anything less than an emergency for our republic – especially for the most vulnerable among us, and for every American who believes in justice, equity, or basic kindness – it's also true that some things won't change at all. In fact, it's prototypically American that an overlong and inward-looking election spectacle (which will, incidentally, have “big-league” international implications) will be supplanted by still more inward-looking phenomena.

And it jogs my memory in a not very pleasant way. I can't help but recall the moment, years ago and 8,000 miles away, when I was introduced to my own American-centred self. The experience left an ugly mark on my picture of who I am – and who, perhaps, so many of us are, as Americans.

No, Not Us . . .

Eight years before I heard about a guy in Yemen whose cousins were obliterated by an American drone strike in a procession following his wedding celebration, I gleefully clicked through the travel site Kayak and pressed “confirm purchase” on one-way tickets to Kathmandu. It was 2008, shortly before Barack Obama would be elected, and my boyfriend and I, a couple of 20-somethings jonesing to see the world, were about



AFRICA PROTESTS: Demonstration against the 2008/9 Israeli attack on Gaza. Photo: Muhammad Mahdi Karim

There was a huge, angry protest nearby and we'd just gotten word that the crowd was burning an American flag. Israel, it turned out, had used a new US-made missile in its assault on Gaza

to depart on what we expected to be the adventure of our lives. Having worked temporary stints and squirrelled away some cash, we packed our belongings into my mom's damp basement and prepared ourselves for a journey meant to last half a year and cross South Asia and East Africa. What we didn't know, as we headed for New York's Kennedy Airport, our passports zippered into our money belts, was that, whatever we had left behind at my mom's, we were unwittingly carrying something far heavier with us: our American-ness.

Adventures commenced as soon as we stepped off the plane. We glimpsed ice-capped peaks that rose majestically out of the clouds as we walked the lower Everest trail. Then – consider this our introduction to the presumptions we hadn't shed – we ran into a little snafu. We hadn't brought along enough cash for our multi-week mountain trek; apparently we'd expected Capital One ATMs to appear miraculously on a Himalay-

an footpath. After we dealt with that issue through a service that worked by landline and carbon paper, we took a bumpy Jeep ride south to India and soon found ourselves walking the sloping fields of Darjeeling, the leaves of tea shrubs glinting in the afternoon light. Then we rode trains west and south, while through the frame of a moving window I looked out at fields and rice paddies where women in red or orange or turquoise saris worked the land, even as the sun set and the sky turned pink and reflected off the water where the rice grew.

Things would, however, soon get significantly less picturesque, as in some strange, twisted way, the farther we travelled, the closer to home we seemed to get.

We arrived in Mombasa, Kenya, in January 2009, on a day when thousands of the city's residents had flooded its streets to protest a recent, and particularly bloody, Israeli attack on Gaza. Hamas, firing rockets into southern Israel, had killed one Israeli

REALITY CHECK

Americans go wild with panic over lone wolf terror killings on our soil, but show scant concern when it comes to the White House-directed, CIA-run drone assassination campaigns across the world, and all the civilian casualties that are the bloody result

and injured many others. Israel retaliated in an overwhelming fashion, filling the Gazan sky with aircraft and killing hundreds of Palestinians, including five girls from a single family, ages four to 17, who were unlucky enough to live in a refugee camp adjacent to a mosque that an Israeli plane had levelled.

As I hopped off the matatu, or passenger van, into the scorching Kenyan heat, I was aware that 50,000 angry protesters had gathered not so far away, and certain facts became clear to me. For one thing, the slaughter of hundreds of civilians, including several dozen children, in what was, to me, a faraway land, was a big effing deal here. That should probably go without saying just about anywhere – except I was suddenly aware that, were I home, the opposite would have been true. Those deaths in distant Gaza (unlike nearby Israel) would barely have caused a blip in the American news. What’s more, if I had been at home and the story had somehow caught my eye, I knew that I wouldn’t have paid it much mind. Another war in a foreign country is what I would’ve thought, and that would have been that.

At that moment, though, I didn’t dwell on the point, because – let’s be serious – I was scared poopless. There was a huge, angry protest nearby and we’d just gotten word that the crowd was burning an American flag. Israel, it turned out, had used a new US-made missile in its assault on Gaza. According to the Jerusalem Post, it was a weapon designed to minimise “collateral damage” (tell that to the families of the dead). The enraged people who had taken to the streets in Mombasa were decrying my country’s role in the carnage – and I was a skinny American with a backpack who’d arrived in the wrong city on the wrong day.

We got the hell out of there as soon as we could. Early the next morning we climbed aboard a rusty old bus bound for Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. I felt a wave of relief once I’d settled into my seat. I was looking forward to a different country and a new vista.

That new vista, it turned out, materialised almost at once. Our bus was soon barreling along a rutted dirt road, the scenery whipping by the window in a distinctly less-than-picturesque fashion. In fact, it passed in such a blur that I realised we were going way too fast. We already knew that bus accidents were common here; we’d heard about a recent one in which all the passengers died.

When we hit what undoubtedly was a yawning pothole on that none-too-well kept road, the windows shook ominously and I thought: we could die. By then, my slick hands were gripping my shredded vinyl seat. I could practically feel the heat of the crash-induced flames and had no trouble picturing our charred bodies in the wreckage of the bus. And then that other thought came to me, the one I wouldn’t forget, the one, thousands of miles from home, that seemed to catch who I really was: No not us, we can’t die was what I said to myself, pressing my eyes shut. I meant, of course, my boyfriend and I; I meant, that is, we Americans.

It was then that I felt an electric zap, as the events of the previous day had just melded with the present dangers and forced me to see what I would have preferred to ignore: that there was an unsavoury likeness between my outlook and the American credo that thousands had been protesting in Mombasa. We can’t die, was my thought, as if we were somehow different – as if these Africans on the bus with us could die, but not us. Or, just as easily, those Palestinians could die – and thanks to US-supplied arms, no less – and I wouldn’t even tune in for the story. Clutching my torn bus seat, I was still afraid, but another sensation overwhelmed me. I felt like a colossal jerk.

Of course, as you know because you’re reading this, we made it safely to Dar es Salaam that night. But I was changed.

Apologising to ourselves

I’d like to say that my egocentricity about

which lives matter most is uncommon among my countrymen and women. But if you spool through the seven-plus years since I rode that bus, you'll notice how that very same mindset has meant that Americans go wild with panic over lone wolf terror killings on our soil, but show scant concern when it comes to the White House-directed, CIA-run drone assassination campaigns across the world, and all the civilian casualties that are the bloody result. The dead innocents include members of a Yemeni family who were riding in a wedding procession when four missiles bore down on them, and Momiina Bibi, that Pakistani grandmother who was tending an okra patch as her grandchildren played nearby when a missile blasted her to smithereens. And don't forget the 42 staff members, patients, and relatives at a Médecins Sans Frontières hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, killed in an attack by a US AC-130 gunship. Depending on which tally you use, since 2009 we've killed an estimated 474 civilians, or perhaps 745, outside of official war zones (and far more civilians, like those dead in that hospital, within those zones), although the horrifying truth is that the real numbers are likely much higher, but unknown and unknowable.

Meanwhile, duh, we would never fire a missile at a suspected terrorist if innocent US civilians were identified in the vicinity. We value American life far too highly for such wantonness. In 2015, when a drone struck an al-Qaeda compound in Pakistan, it was later discovered that two hostages, one of them an American, were inside. In response, President Obama delivered grave remarks: "I offer our deepest apologies to the families . . . I directed that this operation be declassified and disclosed . . . because the families deserve to know the truth."

But why so sorry that time and not with the other 474 or more deaths? Of course the difference was that innocent American blood was spilt. We don't even try to hide this dubious hierarchy; we celebrate it. In that same speech, President Obama reflect-

ed on why we Americans are so darn special. "One of the things that makes us exceptional," he declared, "is our willingness to confront squarely our imperfections and to learn from our mistakes."

If you hailed from any other country, it might have seemed like an odd, not to say tasteless, time to wax poetic about American exceptionalism. The president was, after all, confessing that we'd accidentally fired missiles at two captive aid workers. But I can appreciate the sentiment. Inadequate though the apology was – "There are hundreds, potentially thousands of others who deserve the same apology," said an investigator for Amnesty International – he was at least admitting that the United States had erred, and he was pointing out that such admissions are important. Indeed, they are. It's just . . . what about the rest of the people on the planet?

The Trump administration will probably espouse a philosophy much like President Obama's when it comes to valuing (or not) the lives of foreign innocents. And yet there's part of me that must be as unworldly as that 20-something who flew into Kathmandu, because I find myself dreaming about a new brand of American exceptionalism in our future. Not one that gives you that icky feeling when you're riding a speeding bus in another hemisphere, nor one at whose heart lies the idea that we Americans are different and special and better – which, history tells us, is actually a totally unexceptional notion among powerful nations. Instead, I imagine what would be truly exceptional: an America that values all human life in the same way.

Of course, I'm also a realist and I know that that's not the world we live in, especially now – and that it won't be for, at best, a very long time. **CT**

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Mattea Kramer is working on a memoir called *The Young Person's Guide to Aging*, which inspired this essay. It originally appeared at www.tomdispatch.com

I imagine what would be truly exceptional: an America that values all human life in the same way

IN THE PICTURE

Powerful times

Stephen Shames's photographs capture the essence of the most controversial civil rights group in US history



Bobby Seale speaks at a Free Huey rally in DeFremery Park, Oakland, 1968. To the left of Seale is Bill Brent, who later went to Cuba. Right is Wilford Holiday, known as Captain Crutch.



Admired, reviled, emulated and misunderstood, the Black Panther Party was the boldest response to institutional racism and economic inequality in American history. Formed in Oakland, California, in 1966, by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton the Black Panther party for Self-Defense, quickly grew from its original six members into a political organisation of more than 10,000 men and women in 49 chapters across the country.

The Panthers' most provocative action – an attempt to counter police brutality – saw members patrol the city's streets armed with rifles and shotguns, together with well-



Jerry "Odinka" Dunigan talks as kids eat breakfast on Chicago's South Side, in 1970.



Panther members line up at a Free Huey rally in DeFremery Park, Oakland, July 28, 1968.

All photos ©2016, Stephen Shames from the book *Power to the People: The World of the Black Panthers* (Abrams). Courtesy Steven Kasher Gallery



Bobby Seale campaigns, 1973

thumbed copies of the state's liberal gun law, which allowed residents to carry firearms in public as long as the weapons were held in full view. In response to this brazen challenge to state power, legislators introduced a bill, the Mulford Act, making it illegal to carry firearms in public. Then-governor Ronald Reagan quickly signed it into law, an action that led to high-profile clashes and the prosecution of the group's leaders.

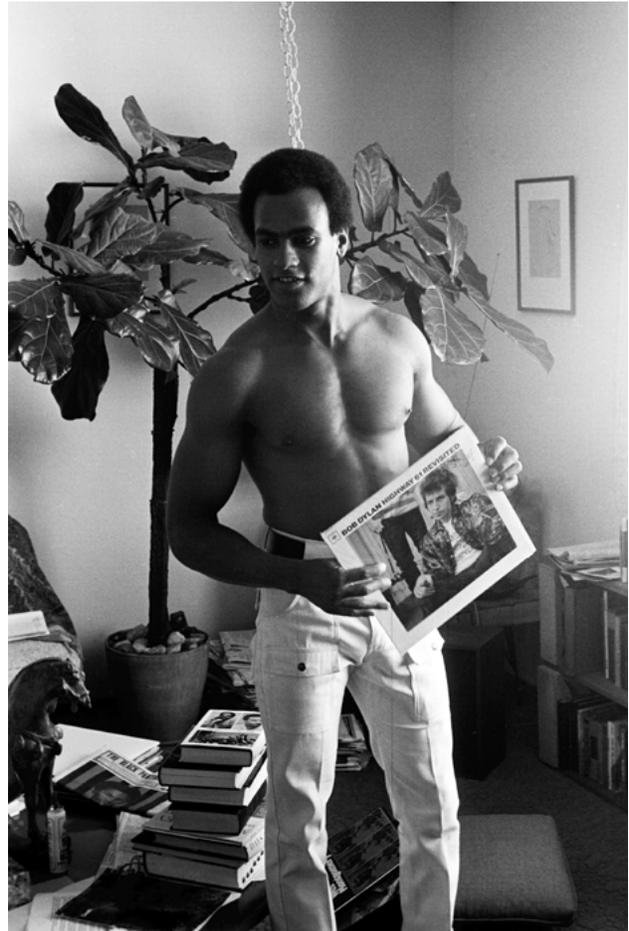
The defiant black-uniformed, gun-toting, side of the Panthers is the one that is most remembered, but there was much more to the organisation. Its members were also involved in community welfare, initiating groundbreak-

IN THE PICTURE

All photos ©2016, Stephen Shames from the book *Power to the People: The World of the Black Panthers* (Abrams). Courtesy Steven Kasher Gallery



People's Free Food Program, Palo Alto, 1972



Huey Newton listens to Bob Dylan after his release from prison.

ing free programmes for school breakfasts, medical clinics, food, clothing distribution and legal aid, along with an award winning charter school. The group also set up a programme to help prevent attacks on the elderly, especially when they went out to cash their Social Security or pension cheques.

However, the Panthers began to fall apart after five years, their ranks infiltrated by the FBI, leaders imprisoned and exiled, and key members shot. The most prominent of the killings was of Fred Hampton during a raid by Chicago police on his apartment on December 4, 1969. The cops claimed the Panthers had opened fire on them as tried to serve a search warrant for weapons. Evidence later emerged that the FBI, Cook County State's Attorney's Office and Chicago police had conspired to assassinate Hampton



The Lumpen, the Panthers' singing group, performs at the boycott of Bill's Liquors, Oakland, 1971.



Classroom at the Intercommunal Youth Institute, Oakland, c. 1971.

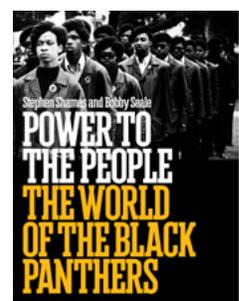
Now the controversial organisation is back in the spotlight in its 50th anniversary year, with a TV documentary, *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*, and the publication of **The Black Panthers: Power To The People**, a photographic memoir by Stephen Shames, who first met and photographed Panther chairman Bobby Seale in 1967 at an anti-Vietnam War rally. Seale, co-author of the book, was a mentor to Shames, who became the most trusted photographer for the party, remaining by Seale's side through his campaign for mayor of Oakland in 1973.

Apart from the powerful images, the book features the recollections of other surviving members – including Kathleen Cleaver, Elbert “Big Man” Howard, Billy X Jennings, Ericka Huggins, Emory Douglas and Jamal Joseph –

as well as the words of Huey P. Newton and Eldridge Cleaver.

In his introduction, Shames writes, “My photographs deal with aspirations and vision. While I am not ignoring some of the negative aspects of the Black Panthers, that is not what is most important about them. To err is human, and the errors of the Panthers pale in comparison to those of the United States government at home and abroad during this period. They also are minuscule in comparison to the virulent racism and violence born out of the enslavement of millions of Africans. This racist strain continues to haunt us as we struggle toward our multiracial future.”

Wise words that should resonate as the US grapples with life under a new president who has already threatened to deport millions of its most deprived residents. – **Tony Sutton**



POWER TO THE PEOPLE: THE WORLD OF THE BLACK PANTHERS

Stephen Shames and Bobby Seale

Harry N. Abrams

\$30.45

(Amazon.com)

Why Trump won

R. W. Johnson tells how a last-minute working class landslide caught pollsters off-guard and thwarted Hillary Clinton's White House dreams

At the heart of the problem is the stagnation of US real wages and the consequent lack of upward social mobility as higher education costs escalate out of sight

Trump's victory has surprised many. So how and why did it happen?

Three large facts need to be understood initially. First, 2016 should always have been a Republican year. If you look at the last eight two-term presidencies and then look at who won the mid-term elections in the sixth year, this correctly predicted the presidential result two years later in seven out of eight cases. In 2014 the GOP (as the Republicans are known – the Grand Old Party) heavily defeated the Democrats, winning nine Senate seats, thus giving them a clear majority in both Houses. On that basis alone any Republican should have won this year. If you add in the fact that the GOP went into this election holding the governorship in 31 of the 50 states – a powerful fact once the state administration is effectively put behind the governor's party – 2016 should have been a shoo-in for a Mitt Romney or a John McCain, and especially against such an unpopular candidate as Hillary Clinton.

Second, one should remember that when Lyndon Johnson passed the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act in 1965 he said sadly that it would mean the Democrats would lose the South for a generation. LBJ was a shrewd politico and his judgement proved entirely correct. One should bear that in mind: in 2008 and 2012 America elected a black president with an outspoken black first lady and hitherto “extremist” fig-

ures such as Al Sharpton became regular visitors to the White House, let alone a large supporting cast of other black celebrities – Oprah, Beyonce etc. In addition, Americans had to get used to a black attorney-general (Eric Holder), a black UN ambassador (Susan Rice), and the fact that Valerie Jarrett, Michelle's best friend and a very determined black woman, seemed able to out-rank and out-command anyone else in the White House – without herself holding any defined post. All of which America twice voted for – but it is hardly surprising that it should ultimately produce a reaction among white Americans. This group includes many who have had to watch black, Latino or women candidates being promoted above them at work, in access to college or to jobs. It is a group which is constantly told – correctly – that it is a shrinking group and that the future belongs to the black, Latino and Asian minorities. That may be so but this is now and this group was not prepared to face the sunset yet.

The third great factor is the death of the American Dream. This has produced a populist revolt of volcanic proportions. At the heart of the problem is the stagnation of US real wages and the consequent lack of upward social mobility as higher education costs escalate out of sight. Some data is relevant here.

Between 1948 and 1973 productivity in

the US rose by 96.7 percent and real wages by 91.3 percent, almost exactly in step. Those were the days . . . of plentiful hard hat jobs in steel and the auto industry when workers could well afford to send their children to college and see them rise into the middle class. But from 1973-2013 – the era of globalisation, when many of those jobs vanished abroad – productivity rose a further 146.4 percent but wages rose only by 17.6 percent. Trump argued that this was caused by unrestricted illegal immigration and the off-shoring of jobs, though in fact any proper analysis shows that these were only partial causes: the erosion of trade unions probably accounts for 25-30 percent of the net loss in earning power. And above all, globalisation means that the European and American working classes now have to compete with the Indians and Chinese. But it is simply easier to blame other people than abstract causes.

These trends could also be blamed on racial/gender grievances over affirmative action, providing further fuel for Trump. Undoubtedly, the admission of 11-million illegal immigrants did exert a strong downward influence on wage levels but it should be realised that such workers form only part of the now vast mass of non-unionised labour competing for jobs.

The dreadful fact of growing inequality

In any mass democracy where the poor have the vote, this would spell trouble. The trends above were disguised for some time by more women going out to work, creating two-income homes, and later by many workers taking two or three jobs. But the stress of such a downward spiral had to be felt and is more and more visible. Drive across America and you notice who mans the pumps at the gas stations. Over and over again it is white men and women in their 70s, pensioners desperately eking out a few more dollars. Such people were unlikely to be impressed by the parade of celebrities at Hillary's rallies – Beyonce, Katy Perry, Lady



Caricature by DonkeyHotey/Flickr

www.flickr.com/photos/donkeyhotey/29782768073

Gaga, Jennifer Lopez, Bruce Springsteen etc. This is all super-rich glitz and not only does it have no connection to the lives of poorer Americans, it seems to mock it. The French have a term – “la richesse insultante.” After all, what does it mean for someone on Social Security to walk past shops with watches or shoes or dresses marked in the thousands of dollars? Each price ticket says, “You’re just nothing, you’re a loser.”

There is no sign at all of any cessation in the trends towards greater inequality (and a Trump victory, bringing tax cuts for the rich, will, despite his rhetoric, only increase them). Since 2000 the wages paid to college graduate recruits have actually fallen. For men wages have risen slightly but for women they have plunged, producing an overall fall. The situation at the bottom is worse still: for the bottom 10 percent wages actually fell 5 percent between 1979 and 2013.

What does it mean for someone on Social Security to walk past shops with watches or shoes or dresses marked in the thousands of dollars? Each price ticket says, “You’re just nothing, you’re a loser”

NO SURPRISE

Like all successful populists, Trump promised to bring back yesterday – in this case, to reinstate the American Dream

Moreover, employers have slashed health benefits. Only 7 percent of high school graduates now get them and only 31 percent of college graduate recruits, down from 60 percent in 1989.

One final figure speaks volumes. On average, in 1965 an American CEO earned 20 times what a worker did. By 2013, on average, this figure was 296 times. This increasing inequality has, indeed, borne out Marx's predictions which foresaw ever greater concentrations of capital accompanied by the pauperisation of the working class as wages decline. But the result has been the opposite of what Marx predicted – an angry revolt by the white working class and lower middle class, largely to the benefit of the Right. The first pointer to this was the Occupy Wall Street movement (the famous 99 percent and 1 percent) but this revolt also powered the Bernie Sanders surge as well as Trump. It is the elemental nature of this revolt which explains why much of Trump's support was quite impervious to his peccadilloes or foolish statements. Things that might have sunk earlier candidates did not sink him. Hillary spent scores of millions of dollars on negative ads about Trump, with no apparent effect at all.

Populism of right and left

After the Romney defeat in 2012, the GOP concluded that it must increase its appeal to ethnic minorities, women and the young, otherwise they would find themselves marginalised. This was widely agreed. But what happened was the very opposite: they ended up with a candidate who was anathema to all those groups. Why? Because the people who voted in GOP primaries were “old” Republicans rather than the “new” Republicans they were hoping to attract. But Trump then did something quite remarkable. He simply ignored most of the rules of the game. He didn't prepare for the presidential debates, which Hillary easily won. He spent more on “Make America Great Again” baseball caps than he did

on opinion polls. And nowhere did he have a ground organisation comparable to Hillary's to get out the vote. Overall he spent only half as much as Hillary and depended instead on his being a crusade, a “movement.” Like all successful populists, Trump promised to bring back yesterday – in this case, to reinstate the American Dream. Nothing is so alluring as the belief that you can bring back the past – and change it: as witness, Jay Gatsby.

Similarly, the success of Bernie Sanders has shown that the Democratic nomination is wide open to someone well to the left of Hillary. Hillary beat Sanders only because she had a far better organisation, more money, her juggernaut was prepared years in advance and she had a virtual monopoly of super-delegates. If a left Democrat such as Elizabeth Warren runs next time she will not face such an opponent. Truth to tell, Bernie Sanders might well have beaten Trump. And while it would have caused a Democrat civil war given the fact of the “entitled” Hilary bandwagon, Obama probably missed a trick by discouraging Joe Biden from running. Biden has always had a good rapport with working class voters and would probably have beaten Trump by a clear margin. Hillary's best chance had been in 2008 and she would have done better to call it a day after that.

However, might-have-beens are just that. In this election much always depended on which electorate would show up to vote. In 2008 and 2012 the 11 per cent of the US population that is black cast 13 percent of the ballots and among women and the young too, turnout rose markedly to Obama's advantage. But this time, fewer of all these groups bothered to vote while more white working class voters turned out than before.

Back in 1992 Ross Perot predicted that when the NAFTA treaty was signed what you would hear was “a vast sucking sound” as American jobs disappeared over the Mexican border. This has indeed occurred and

while economists would generally say that the treaty has been beneficial to the US, the trouble is that the benefits have gone to the rich and workers have lost their jobs. The result is a large loss of faith in the free market, free trade and globalisation. Sanders and Trump both inveighed against NAFTA and other pending trade treaties and Clinton was forced to change tack and do the same. This was just one more sign that what worked for Bill Clinton 20-odd years ago would not do now.

No one listening

Listen to Debbie Dingell, the Democratic Congresswoman for Michigan's 12th district. During the campaign she repeatedly warned Hillary (whom she supported) that Michigan was not safe and that Trump could win. People thought she was nuts: Michigan, home to Detroit and the auto-industry, has been solidly Democratic for most of the last eighty years. She was "infuriated" that Hillary didn't pitch up in Michigan until the weekend before the primary vote, by which time Bernie Sanders had visited her district 10 times. The auto workers went heavily for Sanders who won the primary. From that moment on she feared that they – and Michigan – would go for Trump, as they duly did.

"The ordinary working man or woman in this country isn't asking for a lot," says Dingell. "They want to make a decent living. They want to be able to provide for their family, buy a house in a safe neighbourhood, put food on the table, go to the doctor when they need to, afford their medicines and educate their children. What many don't understand is how these things are in danger of becoming unattainable for too many Americans."

She ain't kidding. If you look at high school graduates – the peculiar America-speak for those who didn't have a higher education or enter the middle class – you find that between 2007 and 2014 their median incomes fell by 14 percent. During his

campaign Bernie Sanders would point to the example of United Technologies, a giant firm which benefits from many government contracts. In February 2016, it announced the closure of two manufacturing plants in Indiana, although both were profitable. They moved both to Mexico where wages were far lower, thus creating super profits. Recently the company gave its CEO a severance package of \$184-million, presumably wishing to reward him for his shrewdness in throwing Indiana workers out of their jobs. "You really can't make this stuff up," as Sanders put it. Indiana went for Obama in 2008 but Trump won it by 20 points this time.

Middle class liberals, picking up on Trump's obvious sexism and nativism, are prone to dismiss his supporters as so much racist trailer trash. This was the mistake Hillary made when she termed them "deplorables." This was hotly resented because Trump supporters see themselves as honest working people who are deeply grounded Americans. Many of them work every day on assembly lines next to blacks or Latinos and are well aware that upper class liberals know such people only as domestic servants. Others had black and Latino buddies when they served in the armed forces. They were angry at being called racists and were against political correctness of every kind.

The arithmetic of election day

Pollsters were repeatedly faced by a large bloc of voters who said they didn't like Clinton or Trump. Inevitably these became "Don't Knows" – yet all the indications are that they broke heavily for Trump. Hillary, meanwhile, had made women her focus from the start, clearly assuming that the 53 percent of the electorate that is feminine would want a woman president. Her rallies were mainly attended by women, her donors were 60 percent female and in mid-campaign this seemed to be working, at least among middle and upper middle class women. For the first time ever Hillary led

Many Trump supporters work every day on assembly lines next to blacks or Latinos and are well aware that upper class liberals know such people only as domestic servants

NO SURPRISE

It was only in the last week that this working class landslide to Trump really built momentum as the Don't Knows and the "plague on both your houses" voters caved in

among college graduates and even among those earning over \$100,000 a year. But the focus on women was a mistake: women are simply not a cohesive group and when push comes to shove are always far more likely to break along class and ethnic lines than to vote as a gender bloc.

This was visible as voters weighed their choices. The top issues across the board were (in order) race, guns and immigration. "Race" nowadays usually betokens dislike of affirmative action in any sphere and, often, a dislike of illegal Latino immigrants. "Guns" breaks down into concern at the amount of violence on the streets (cops and blacks shooting one another) and the slew of terrorist incidents which made people feel more insecure than at any time since 9/11. The first American response to such threats is always to want to be armed oneself.

In such a climate, it was a Democratic handicap that neither Obama nor Clinton could bring themselves to pronounce the phrase "Islamic terrorism." The conservative refrain of "How can you fight something you're not even willing to name?" registered with many. Similarly, Trump's repeated vow to "bomb the shit out of Isis" should also be seen partly as a response to terrorist incidents at home. "Immigration" denotes both a concern at the downward pressure that immigrants exercise on wage levels and a considerable irritation that the law winks at 11-million illegal immigrants although it is sternly enforced on citizens.

It should be noted that climate change was well down the list of popular concerns. Hillary and Obama gave the issue great prominence but the low salience of this issue meant that not many votes were to be gained that way. On the other hand voters in states which depend on hydrocarbons – oil, coal or fracking – tended to see an emphasis on climate change as threatening to their livelihoods. All such states went for Trump and it would be unsurprising to see

oilmen in his cabinet.

In the end, the various groups broke disappointingly for Hillary. Trump beat her 2:1 among high school graduates but in the end college graduates broke only 50-50. Only among those with graduate degrees was there a Democrat majority – as there has been steadily since 1988. Hillary beat Trump 54-42 among women, but this was counterbalanced by her losing 41-53 among men. In the end, fewer women voted for Hillary than had voted for Obama. Blacks went for Hillary by 88 to 8 – but they had gone for Obama by 93-6, so there was slippage there, too. Hillary had placed great hopes on Latino women, but in fact only 68 percent of Latinas went for Hillary compared to 76 percent for Obama.

In the end, however, this election was more about class than any election since the New Deal. The FoxNews.com polls show the gathering landslide among white men with only high school education. With two weeks to go they favoured Trump by 48-32 (+16); with one week to go by 53-32 (+21) and on election day by 61-20, a crushing 41 point margin which swung the Rust Belt states to Trump. Interestingly, white women with only high school education favoured Trump by 58-31 with a week to go but moved in Hillary's favour in the last week, ending up 53-32 on election day (though, as may be seen, this was not so much a move to Hillary as a move away from Trump). Nonetheless, the harsh reality is that their class position far outweighed their gender, so in the end they went in the same direction as their men-folk.

It was only in the last week that this working class landslide to Trump really built momentum as the Don't Knows and the "plague on both your houses" voters caved in. It was this last minute movement which caught the pollsters off-guard and which also fooled Trump and his team. They had been preparing to lose, had been working on a concession speech and had no victory speech ready.

There has been much talk of the similarities between Brexit and the Trump victory. As Peggy Noonan puts it, they have both been “an uprising of the unprotected” – and a clear sign that the old politics is fading fast. The old class politics has reversed. Hillary could win the rich but lost the workers. Labour can win London, the richest part of the UK, but has lost the workers to Ukip and the SNP. We are in uncharted territory. One fact that has to be assimilated by both Labour and the Democrats is this: When Bill and Hillary arrived in Washington in 1992 they had little money. Now, despite remaining notionally in public service throughout, they are worth \$200-million. Tony and Cherie Blair were also impecunious when they arrived in power in 1997. Today they are worth over \$75-million. Think now of the working class voters whom the Clintons or the Blairs exhorted to vote for them in the 1990s: they are probably worse off now than they were then. In effect, the Clintons and Blairs merely surfed on their grievances and inequities, making themselves rich and leaving their voters in the dust. Such contrasts have been duly noted, which is one reason that the old politics is no longer working now.

This then is how Trump won. He lost the popular vote because the three Pacific West states (California, Oregon and Washington) all voted massively against him. He lost all the big cities but won the South, the West and, above all, the Rust Belt. Whichever candidate had won, their legitimacy was sure to be contested by the losers, but the difference is that a Clinton victory would have created complete political gridlock while Trump has the Senate, the House and two-thirds of the governors on his side. Moreover, he had coat-tails, so that not a few Republican members of both Houses will know that they owe him their seats. Take Wisconsin, for example. Ron Johnson, the Tea Party Republican senator running for re-election trailed badly throughout the campaign

behind Russ Feingold, the popular liberal Democrat ex-senator – never by less than 10 per cent and often by 13-14 per cent. Yet that last minute slide to Trump carried Johnson over the line by 50-47. Johnson is just one of many Republicans who will be eager to stay onside with Trump even if he is hardly an orthodox conservative.

What Trump does is likely to be largely determined by where there are overlaps between his insurgent populism and the orthodox conservatism of Republican legislators. They will not find it hard to vote tax cuts for corporations and for the rich, to elect a new conservative judge on the Supreme Court, to increase defence spending, and kill any trade treaties currently in negotiation. Something has to be done about Obamacare but, despite the rhetoric, it’s not clear what: In a democracy it is extremely hard to roll back social entitlements, once they have been granted. After that it gets more difficult though, in all conscience, that is quite enough to be going on with.

The great question, however, is whether Trump can keep faith with white workers, build the Wall, tear up NAFTA, force corporations to repatriate jobs, apply tariffs to Chinese goods and so on. The Republicans will have little interest in any of this: already Mitch McConnell, the Senate majority leader, has signalled that his caucus doesn’t have much enthusiasm for the heavy infrastructure spending that Trump has promised.

Probably Trump’s best hope is that tax cuts plus a defence build-up will create a Keynesian boom, just as it did under Reagan. The massively wider budget deficit thus created will hardly be heeded if the result is more jobs and higher wages. Wall Street is already sniffing this prospect, sending stocks to an all-time high. What is clear is that Trump has the ball at his feet and, with a GOP majority in both Houses, has no excuse for inaction. If he fails to deliver he will merely convince his Rust Belt supporters that they have been betrayed once again.

In a democracy it is extremely hard to roll back social entitlements, once they have been granted. After that it gets more difficult though, in all conscience, that is quite enough to be going on with

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CT

Trump climate denial points the way to war

The failure to get to grips with our crises, by all mainstream political parties, is likely to lead to a war between the major powers in my lifetime, writes **George Monbiot**

The old mining and industrial areas are in crisis throughout the rich world. And we have seen nothing yet

W have the magic wand and the problem goes away. Those pesky pollution laws, carbon caps and clean-power plans: swish them away and the golden age of blue-collar employment will return. This is Donald Trump's promise, in his video message on November 21, in which the US president-elect claimed that unleashing coal and fracking would create "many millions of high-paid jobs." He will tear down everything to make it come true.

But it won't come true. Even if we ripped the world to pieces in the search for full employment, leaving no mountain unturned, we would not find it. Instead, we would merely jeopardise the prosperity – and the lives – of people everywhere. However slavishly governments grovel to corporate Ludism, they will not bring the smog economy back.

No one can deny the problem Trump claims to be addressing. The old mining and industrial areas are in crisis throughout the rich world. And we have seen nothing yet. I have just reread the study published by the Oxford Martin School in 2013 on the impacts of computerisation. What jumps out, to put it crudely, is that jobs in the rust belts and rural towns that voted for Trump are at high risk of automation, while the professions of many Hillary Clinton supporters are at low risk.

The jobs most likely to be destroyed are in mining, raw materials, manufacturing, transport and logistics, cargo handling, warehousing and retailing, construction (prefabricated buildings will be assembled by robots in factories), office support, administration and telemarketing. So what, in the areas that voted for Trump, will be left?

Farm jobs have mostly gone already. Service and care work, where hope for some appeared to lie, will be threatened by a further wave of automation, as service robots – commercial and domestic – take over.

Yes, there will be jobs in the green economy: more and better than any that could be revived in the fossil economy. But they won't be enough to fill the gaps, and many will be in the wrong places for those losing their professions.

At lower risk is work that requires negotiation, persuasion, originality and creativity. The management and business jobs that demand these skills are comparatively safe from automation; so are those of lawyers, teachers, researchers, doctors, journalists, actors and artists. The jobs that demand the highest educational attainment are the least susceptible to computerisation. The divisions tearing America apart will only widen.

Even this bleak analysis does not capture in full the underlying reasons why good, abundant jobs will not return to the places

that need them most. As Paul Mason argues in *PostCapitalism*, the impacts of information technology go way beyond simple automation: they are likely to destroy the very basis of the market economy, and the relationship between work and wages.

And, as the French writer Paul Arbair notes in the most interesting essay I have read this year – www.paularbair.wordpress.com/2016/07/05/brexit-the-populist-surge-and-the-crisis-of-complexity/ – beyond a certain level of complexity economies become harder to sustain.

There's a point at which further complexity delivers diminishing returns; society is then overwhelmed by its demands, and breaks down. He argues that the political crisis in western countries suggests we may have reached this point.

Trump has also announced that on his first day in office he will withdraw America from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). He is right to do so, but for the wrong reasons. Like TTIP and Ceta, the TPP is a fake trade treaty whose primary impact is to extend corporate property rights at the expense of both competition and democracy. But withdrawal will not, as he claims, "bring jobs and industry back to American shores". The work in Mexico and China that Trump wants to reclaim will evaporate long before it can be repatriated.

As for the high-quality, high-waged working-class jobs he promised, these are never handed down from on high. They are secured through the organisation of labour. But the unions were smashed by Ronald Reagan, and collective bargaining has been suppressed ever since by casualisation and fragmentation. So how is this going to happen? Out of the kindness of Trump's heart? Kindness, Trump, heart?

But it's not just Trump. Clinton and Bernie Sanders also made impossible promises to bring back jobs. Half the platform of each party was based on a delusion. The social, environmental and economic crises we face require a complete reappraisal of the

way we live and work. The failure by mainstream political parties to produce a new and persuasive economic narrative, which does not rely on sustaining impossible levels of growth and generating illusory jobs, provides a marvellous opening for demagogues everywhere.

Governments across the world are making promises they cannot keep. In the absence of a new vision, their failure to materialise will mean only one thing: something or someone must be found to blame. As people become angrier and more alienated, as the complexity and connectivity of global systems becomes ever harder to manage, as institutions such as the European Union collapse and as climate change renders parts of the world uninhabitable, forcing hundreds of millions of people from their homes, the net of blame will be cast ever wider.

Eventually the anger that cannot be assuaged through policy will be turned outwards, towards other nations. Faced with a choice between hard truths and easy lies, politicians and their supporters in the media will discover that foreign aggression is among the few options for political survival. I now believe that we will see war between the major powers within my lifetime. Which ones it will involve, and on what apparent cause, remains far from clear. But something that once seemed remote now looks probable.

A complete reframing of economic life is needed not just to suppress the existential risk that climate change presents (a risk marked by a 20°C anomaly reported in the Arctic Ocean while I was writing this article), but other existential threats as well – including war. Today's governments, whether they are run by Trump or Obama or May or Merkel, lack the courage and imagination even to open this conversation. It is left to others to conceive of a more plausible vision than trying to magic back the good old days. The task for all those who love this world and fear for our children is to imagine a different future rather than another past. **CT**

There's a point at which further complexity delivers diminishing returns; society is then overwhelmed by its demands, and breaks down . . . we may have reached this point

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

Catalonia's rocky road to independence

Thomas S. Harrington meets Catalan independence leader Artur Mas

Despite winning the largest number of votes the first time he contested the election for president of Catalonia, in 2003, Mas's CiU was unable to form a government

Although he no longer holds office, Artur Mas is, perhaps, the most important politician in Catalonia. As the long-time leader of the centre-right CDC (Democratic Convergence of Catalonia) – recently renamed the PDECAT (Catalan Democratic Party) – he is the most central figure of his country's increasingly forceful drive to separate from the rest of the Spain.

Following the death of Francisco Franco in 1975, Spain embarked on its Transition to Democracy, a process in which former Franco supporters and a coalition of those who had been excluded from engaging in political activity during the 36-year history of the single-party dictatorship, agreed on the parameters of a new democratic constitution. The document that emerged from those discussions in 1978 agreed the establishment of autonomous Communities, first in Spain's historically bilingual areas (Catalonia, Galicia

and the Basque Country) and, subsequently, in any other region able to show recognisable form of geographic or social cohesion.

In 1980, Jordi Pujol was elected as the first president of the Catalan government, or Generalitat. He would hold the post for 23 years, pursuing a policy of cultural and linguistic reconstruction and an opportunistic approach in his negotiations with Madrid. During his long tenure, he never pursued the idea of independence.

Upon Pujol's retirement from public life in 2003, his hand-picked successor, Artur Mas, took control of the CDC, the party Pujol had founded, and which throughout Pujol's long career had always gone to the polls in coalition with the now defunct Democratic Union of Catalonia (UDC).

Despite winning the largest number of votes in his first election in 2003, Mas's CiU was unable to form a government. The control of the Generalitat was taken by a coalition formed by the Catalan Socialist Party (PSC), the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC) and the Green Initiative for Catalonia (ICV) that, following the surprise victory of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) in the March 2004 Spanish elections, set out to renegotiate Catalonia's relationship with the Spanish state. By early 2006, the Catalan parliament and the Spanish national parliament had approved the new Catalan statute of autonomy, which was approved by a referendum of the



Catalonia (red) is in the north-eastern corner of Spain.

Wikimedia Commons



Although he stepped aside in the lection for president, Artur Mas remains the central figure in Catalonia's drive to separate from Spain.

Catalan people with a 74 percent plurality.

At this point, however, the arch-conservative Popular Party (PP) lodged objections to the new law before the country's Constitutional Tribunal and, after four years of deliberations, the Madrid court annulled many of the law's key provisions, including the matter of the Catalans' right to refer to their collective as a "nation" under the law.

The move generated large protests in Catalonia during 2010, protests that have grown in both frequency and intensity during the ensuing years. Sensing the enormous support in favour of independence, Artur Mas, president of the Generalitat since 2010, declared himself in favour of what was now being called "the process" in September 2012.

Two weeks later, he called snap elections designed to fortify his role as unquestioned leader of the movement. While those elections, in November 2012, did not give his party the mandate they had hoped for (in fact, CiU lost 12 seats in the 135-seat Cata-

lan Parliament), Mas chose instead to make common cause with the ERC, his long-time rivals on the left, which had gained many of the parliamentary seats he had just lost.

In December, 2013, a little more than a year after the elections, CiU and ERC agreed to hold a referendum on self-determination. However, the Spanish government quickly declared the proposed vote illegal. In order to avoid a collision with Madrid, Mas said the poll would be non-binding. In that vote, on November 9 2014, in which roughly 40 percent of the Catalan population participated, those in favour of the "right to decide" achieved an overwhelming victory (80 percent). The Spanish government quickly lodged criminal charges against Mas and key members of his government.

Realising that Madrid would never allow a Scottish-style vote on the matter, the CiU-ERC, independentist coalition began to pursue different means for achieving their goals. Calling itself Together for Yes (JxSi), they

The Spanish government quickly lodged criminal charges against Mas and key members of his government after a referendum on Catalanian independence

INTERVIEW

Mas stepped aside as presidential candidate in favour of Carles Puigdemont, the mayor of Girona, the smallest of Catalonia's four provincial capitals

decided the best approach was to consider the next Catalan elections (which Mas, as president, was free to call) to be “plebiscitary” in nature. A by-product of this accord was the end of CDC’s long-running electoral alliance with UDC under the label of CiU.

The coalition placed a compromise candidate, Raül Romeva at the top of the ticket and invited the Candidacy of Popular Unity (CUP) to join the coalition. This “anti-system” party refused the offer, owing to their distaste for the social and economic policies of bourgeois parties in general, and those of Artur Mas’s CDC in particular. They did suggest, however, that they would back the drive for independence in the new legislative session, but they would only do so if Mas were eliminated from the presidential equation.

In the September 27 2015, elections, JxSi took 62 of 135 seats in the Catalan parliament, 10 short of the number needed to form a majority government. As it turned out, the CUP had won 10 seats, so a series of intense, nail-biting, meetings began between JxSí and the CUP, nail-biting because the anti-system party was almost equally divided between those open to a new Mas-led government in favour of independence and those firmly opposed to its formation.

Those in the CUP opposed to his candidacy won the day when, on January 10, Mas stepped aside as presidential candidate in favour of Carles Puigdemont, the mayor of Girona, the smallest of Catalonia’s four provincial capitals, and a less well-known member of his CDC party. By stepping aside, Mas saved “the process,” but he considered himself far from done with politics. Since his resignation, he has devoted himself to re-founding the CDC, which had been rocked in the summer of 2014 by the revelation that its founder, Jordi Pujol had for years hidden the existence of his family’s secret bank accounts in Andorra.

I met Artur Mas at his office in the Palau Robert, an elegant manse built by a pioneering political figure of early 20th-century, located

at the corner of Barcelona’s two grandest thoroughfares, the Passeig de Gràcia and La Diagonal. The interview, conducted in Catalan, took place on the day the office of the Chief Prosecutor of Catalonia, a local branch of the central government, said it would not try Mas for embezzlement of public funds, for allegedly using government funds to organise the polling, the only one of a battery of charges filed against him after the November 2014, vote that carried jail time. However, the other charges, of administrative disobedience and breach of public trust, were sustained.

Tom Harrington: *This must be a good day for you in that you’ve been freed from the possibility of going to prison.*

Artur Mas: It seems to be the case.

TH: *Were you worried about this matter?*

AM: I haven’t given it a lot of thought. The trial continues. I am being charged with three possible crimes, and of the three, one – embezzlement of public funds – has been dropped. Two remain: administrative disobedience and breach of public trust, whose penalties include fines and the possibility of being banned from public office.

TH: *Yesterday was the 80th anniversary of the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. Does this event still have a direct effect on the courses of Catalan and Spanish politics?*

AM: I think that the Civil War is, fortunately, no longer a key factor in Spanish society. What we do find, however, are certain underlying Francoist tics in the culture.

TH: Social science researchers have suggested that in most societies 30 percent of the people are said to have an “authoritarian personality.” Any sense of how many such people there are in Spain?

AM: I really don’t know if it is 30 percent. What I do know is that these Francoist tics are found buried inside the sociological and political structures of a part of the Spanish right. Of course, it’s better they are found

on the inside that rather than outside! It is mostly gone, but some still remains.

TH: *Why do you consider the re-founding of your party, the CDC, to be so urgent?*

AM: It is urgent because, if our general goal is to create a new and independent country then new and updated political instruments are needed. This is the “frame,” (*he says this last word in English*) a new party for a new country. Additional reasons are the fact that that party had become worn out by the responsibility of its many years in power, and last year’s confession by President Jordi Pujol, founder of the movement and our party, an occurrence that raised very serious doubts about how that party had managed public affairs over many years. So, the first general concern, and the second, a more instrumental one, have set in motion a profound re-making of the party. This is the party that best represents the middle class and working class of this country. Without these, Catalonia will not bear up very well over time, and will not be able create a state of its own. This is why we had to bring the party up to date. There were two way of doing so. One was to restructure Convergència (CDC) and reform it from within. The other was to use Convergència as the basis for creating a new political generation. We have chosen to do the latter. A new name. New ways of functioning. And new faces . . . except for my own.

TH: *A difficult question. Speaking of President Pujol, what will be his historical legacy?*

AM: I believe it will be very important and positive. With his confession, he himself contributed to the process of dismantling that legacy, which was very good, extraordinarily good. I believe that with the passage of time, the doubts about his performance as a public servant will fade and eventually evaporate, leaving what was a very positive body of work on behalf the country and its government, to be made plain for all to see

TH: *As an outside observer, and one of fairly*

clear leftist tendencies, I have always been surprised by the vehemence of leftist attacks on the so-called nationalist “right” in Catalonia, a right that would be downright leftist in my country. How do explain this?

AM: In a country like Catalonia that self-identifies as leftist, to present the other as if they were “the right,” is politically profitable. And for this reason there is an very strong tendency to characterize what we represent as “the right,” obscuring the fact that while within our political party, or political movement, there are people from the Centre-Right. But there are also people from the ranks of the Republican left (ERC), from the Socialists ranks and the Communist ranks. In other words, our party is an amalgam, a party with a broad representation of forces. And for some, this is a convenient thing to overlook. Since we have never identified ourselves as a party of the Left, it is this easy for them to identify us as “the Right.”

TH: *Could this tendency have anything to do with the party’s past identification with social Catholicism, the sector of the society with a more positive view of the potential social role of the Church?*

AM: Possibly. Within Convergència there is a considerable number of people from the Christian world and the nationalist, or Catalanist world as well. But this is part of our history. It is hard to believe that a real party of “the Right” would have been able to win all of the elections to date in the Catalan Parliament. In a country that self-identifies as leftist, it is impossible to believe that the party that has won all of the elections since 1980 does not have at least a little bit of leftist thought within it as well. So, I think this tendency has its roots in the need to label political parties and the need for certain partisan groups to present a transversal formation that has won many elections in Catalonia as an entity stuck in an extreme corner in the political spectrum.

TH: *All this has a very long history. All the way*

“This is the party that best represents the middle class and working class of this country. Without these, Catalonia will not bear up very well over time, and will not be able create a state of its own”

INTERVIEW

“While we have had considerable difficulty getting our message across in Spain and Catalonia, our movement has never ever had greater media reverberations in the rest of Europe and the world”

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Thomas S. Harrington is a professor of Hispanic Studies at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, and the author of *Public Intellectuals and Nation Building in the Iberian Peninsula, 1900–1925: The Alchemy of Identity*, published in 2014 by Bucknell University Press

back to Prat de la Riba, who was the great organizer of the Catalanist movement at the beginning of the 20th-century.

AM: Exactly. When I am asked about my personal identification with figures of the Catalan past, I tell people I try to be a mixture, a symbiosis, between Prat de la Riba and President Macià (author note: the leader of Catalonia in the first two years of the Spanish Republic established in 1931 which was unlawfully attacked by Nazi and Fascist-backed Spanish troops in 1936 and eventually snuffed out by those same forces in 1939). Prat de la Riba was a man who did things; he generated a country of concrete results and, in this sense, left us an enormous legacy. President Macià is the idealist who had great goals for the country and articulated the great nationalist objective and personally laid himself on the line to try and achieve those things.

TH: Can you pinpoint a moment or a concrete event that made you realize the need to begin pursuing the political independence from Spain?

AM: September of 2012.

TH: On the traditional September 11th national holiday when large-scale demonstrations in favour of the idea took place?

AM: Yes, more or less at that time. Between June 2010, and September 2012, a lot of important things took place in this country. In June 2010, the Spanish Constitutional Tribunal (TC) nullified a substantial part of a new and already greatly scaled-back Catalan Statute of Autonomy. And September of 2012 is when we witnessed the first great mass demonstrations under the slogan of “Catalonia, a New European State,” and when Spanish President Rajoy said to “no” to me regarding the possibility of negotiating new revenue-sharing agreement between Catalonia and the Spanish state, an issue that had nothing to do with either the fate of the Statute or independence. It was an attempt to find at “third way” (he voices the last two words in English). And he simply said “No” to me. Looking at the decision of the TC on the Stat-

ute of Autonomy and the Spanish government’s refusal to talk about a new fiscal pact as a possible solution, I realised there was no other way out. If the Constitutional Tribunal was going to mark the upper limits of our system of self-governance and the Spanish government was going to refuse to talk about a possible third way, the only solution was to pay attention to the popular mobilisation that was taking place in the streets and try to channel it toward concrete ends.

TH: I am convinced that what the Pentagon likes to call “perception management” is arguably the single most important factor in any attempt to achieve significant political change in a culture. Assuming you are in agreement with his general premise, I wonder how you think the Catalan political class will be able to effect the changes it hopes to make when its media machine is not remotely comparable in strength to the one the Spanish state has at its disposition?

AM: Things are exactly as you’ve described them. We will never have a media apparatus comparable that of the Spanish state, and this being the case, we either do it in its absence, or we don’t do it at all. It must also be said, that while we have had considerable difficulty getting our message across in Spain and Catalonia, our movement has never ever had greater media reverberations in the rest of Europe and the world. We have been able to explain an awful lot about ourselves and about the political conflict between Catalonia and the Spanish state.

TH: Do you see a day, in the not too distant future, when the citizens of this place where we sit will be able to roam the world with a Catalan passport in their pocket?

AM: More important to me in the long run is that they roam the world as Europeans, with European passport, the symbol of a strong political and social union, in their pocket. If, in addition to showing that they are European, the passport were to indicate that they come from an historic nation called Catalonia, that would be wonderful. **CT**

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Marching on their teeth

Biscuit for breakfast – **Rachel Duffett** gives another reason why trench warfare was hell during World War I

The poor state of working-class mouths – no dental care for most of them – and the difficulties that the very basic army food presented, made the all-consuming pain of acute toothache all too common

Rewind 100 years and the Battle of the Somme would be grinding to a close. For 141 days soldiers had suffered the worst that modern warfare could deliver: bombardment, chemical weapons, failed advances and a level of casualties no one could have anticipated. In this centenary year, multiple articles have been published on the terrible conditions, the tactics, the tear gas.

But what about the teeth?

Dentistry, granted, is not a topic that often comes up when discussing World War I. But the poor state of working-class mouths – no dental care for most of them – and the difficulties that the very basic army food presented, made the all-consuming pain of acute toothache all too common. So what were the soldiers eating?

Military leaders have long noted that armies “march on their stomachs,” so the 1914 British army command was well aware of the significance of rations to its men.

Difficulties in the Crimean War, where more soldiers had been admitted to the hospital at Scutari suffering from scurvy than

from battle wounds, had prompted a series of army dietary reforms over the second half of the 19th-century. Improvements in nutritional science had also helped to shape the provisioning of the army – although the emphasis on energy values to the exclusion of other considerations resulted in a diet that, while high in calories, was often lacking in variety, difficult to consume and somewhat indigestible.

In the summer of 1914, the army provided the same level of feeding for all, but soon found this unsustainable and a series of adjustments followed, reserving the best rations for those in the front line. Those in reserve and in the training camps at home received considerably less.

The fighting man’s calorie quota was on a par with that of the modern British Army, although contemporary ration packs offer a level of variety unimagined by those serving a century earlier. In terms of national comparison, the British fared pretty well, the Americans had the most calories – and the French a widely envied daily wine ration.

If actual rations met the official description, and the cooks were of a decent standard, all went relatively well. A relatively static war meant that the delivery of rations was usually reliable – at times of advance or retreat the long supply chains could be interrupted, but most of the time the complex set of movements from base supply depots



Biscuit: Essex Regimental Museum

to the front was sustained.

Unfortunately, the cooks' efforts often fell short, although they were hindered by the army's own recipe books where, for example, the list of ingredients for "Fish Paste" contained four tins of sardines – and eight of bully (corned) beef.

If you were a British soldier serving on the front line in 1917, your rations (comprising a desired 4,193 calories per day) would be as follows:

- Meat (fresh or frozen) 1 lb, or
- Meat (preserved) 9 oz
- Bread 1 lb, or
- Biscuit 10 oz
- Bacon 4 oz
- Cheese 2 oz
- Fresh Vegetables 8 oz
- Tea 5/8 oz
- Jam 3 oz
- Sugar 3 oz

This may look like a pretty good diet, but the army sought to deliver the greatest number of calories in the easiest manner – and that often meant tinned (both meat and biscuit) rather than fresh food. A tin of Maconochie's meat and vegetable stew, especially when heated up, was the acceptable face of canned food. Cold corned beef wasn't – and biscuit was even less popular. The British working classes had grown up on a diet dominated by bread, so while a hard-baked carbohydrate substitute may have scored highly in logistical terms it was regarded by most men as an abomination.

Scores of cartoonists and writers have made jokes about biscuit's similarity to kindling, but it was no laughing matter. Many of the working and lower-middle-class soldiers had very poor teeth – the result of too much sugar and too little dentistry. The army was reluctant to pay for dentists and when the British Expeditionary Force travelled to France in 1914 not one dentist accompanied them.

It was only when General Douglas Haig developed excruciating toothache at the

height of the Battle of Aisne in October of that year that the cost of their absence was realised. No one was able to treat Haig and he was forced to await a French dental surgeon from Paris. Haig subsequently contacted the War Office to request the recruitment of army dentists for the BEF – 12 dentists arrived in November and a further eight by the end of 1914.

Jokes about the state of the nation's teeth also reached the pages of Punch. In August 1914, it published a cartoon of a disgruntled man at a recruiting office protesting to the MO who'd turned him away because of his rotten teeth: "Man, ye're making a gran' mistake. I'm no wanting to bite the Germans, I'm wanting to shoot 'em."

Defective teeth were a major cause in rejecting volunteers and so patriotic dentists stepped forward. C. J. McCarthy of Grimsby advertised in the local paper promising free treatment to the first 25 volunteers rejected because of their teeth that reported to his surgery.

Dentistry mattered: In the theatre of war, losing a set of false teeth effectively rendered the soldier useless because the conditions at the front didn't allow for a soft diet for toothless men. Canon J. O. Coop wrote home to his wife that one man had a self-inflicted wound and "to make more certain [his escape from the front line] he had thrown away his false teeth because he knew that men who lost their teeth were sent to base."

The army's efforts weren't always met with enthusiasm, but innovative Tommies knew how to make the best of what was available, often grinding the biscuits to a powder, mixing in a tin of milk and one of jam – preferably not the eternal plum and apple – and heating. Making the rations palatable was a key skill learned alongside the more distressing aspects of warfare. **CT**

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