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A STRANGE CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

Trevor Grundy thought his new girlfriend was taking him to a secret 1976 Johannesburg party in honour of jailed Anc leader Nelson Mandela. When they arrived, he discovered something was seriously wrong

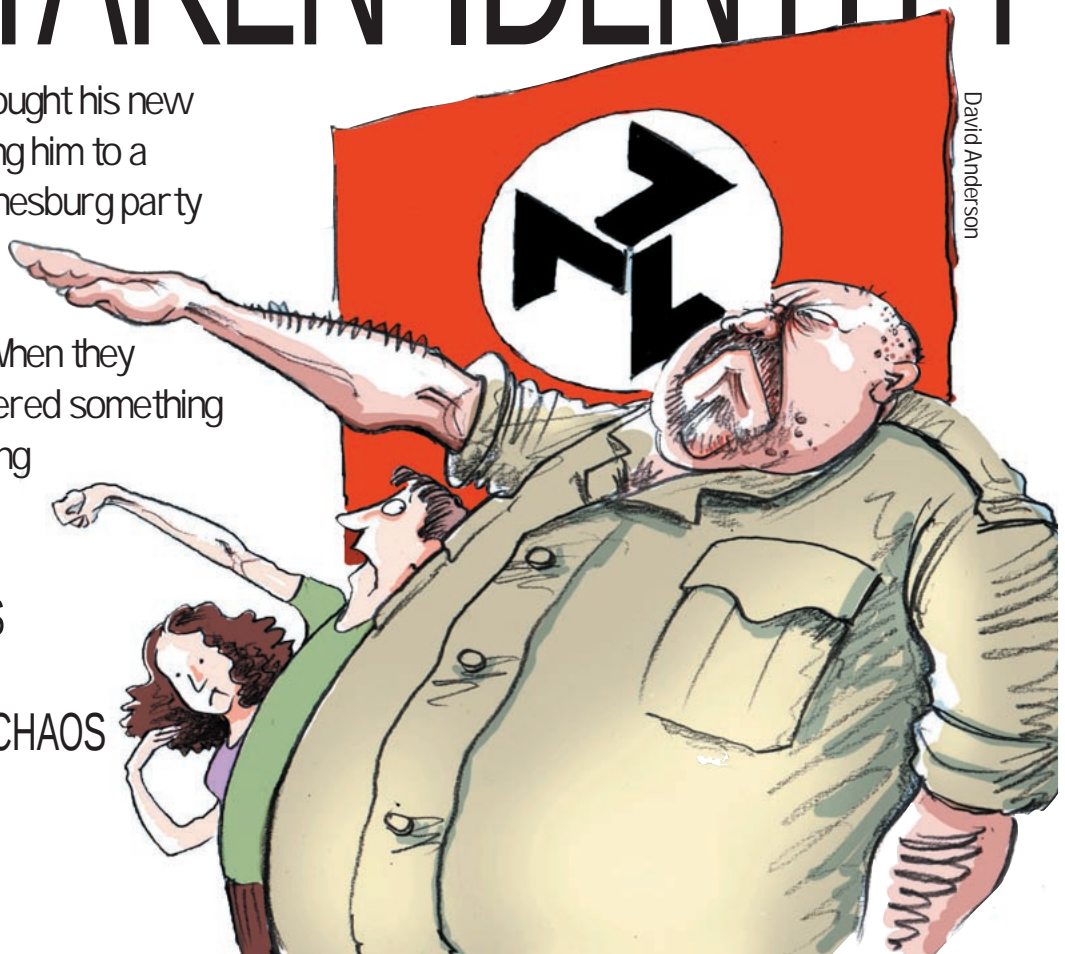
PLUS

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When ‘fake news’ was banned

The 1917 Espionage Act gave huge powers over the media to the postmaster general, former Texas congressman Albert Sidney Burleson, an America Donald Trump would have loved

Every month, it seems, brings a new act in the Trump administration’s war on the media. In January, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo exploded at National Public Radio reporter Mary Louise Kelly when he didn’t like questions she asked – and then banned a colleague of hers from the plane on which he was leaving for a trip to Europe and Asia. In February, the Trump staff booted a *Bloomberg News* reporter out of an Iowa election campaign event.

The president has repeatedly called the press an “enemy of the people” – the very phrase that, in Russian (*vrag naroda*), was applied by Joseph Stalin’s prosecutors to the millions of people they sent to the gulag or to execution chambers. In that context, Trump’s term for *BuzzFeed*, a “failing pile of garbage,” sounds comparatively benign. Last year, *Axios* revealed that some of the president’s supporters were trying to raise a fund of more than \$2-million to gather damaging information on journalists at the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other media outfits. In 2018, it took a court order to force the White House to restore

CNN reporter Jim Acosta’s press pass. And the list goes on.

Yet it remains deceptively easy to watch all the furore over the media with the feeling that it’s still intact and safely protected. After all, didn’t Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan rail against the press in their presidencies? And don’t we have the First Amendment? In my copy of Samuel Eliot Morison’s 1,150-page *Oxford History of the American People*, the word “censorship” doesn’t even appear in the index; while, in an article on “The History of Publishing,” the *Encyclopedia Britannica* reassures us that, “in the United States, no formal censorship has ever been established.”

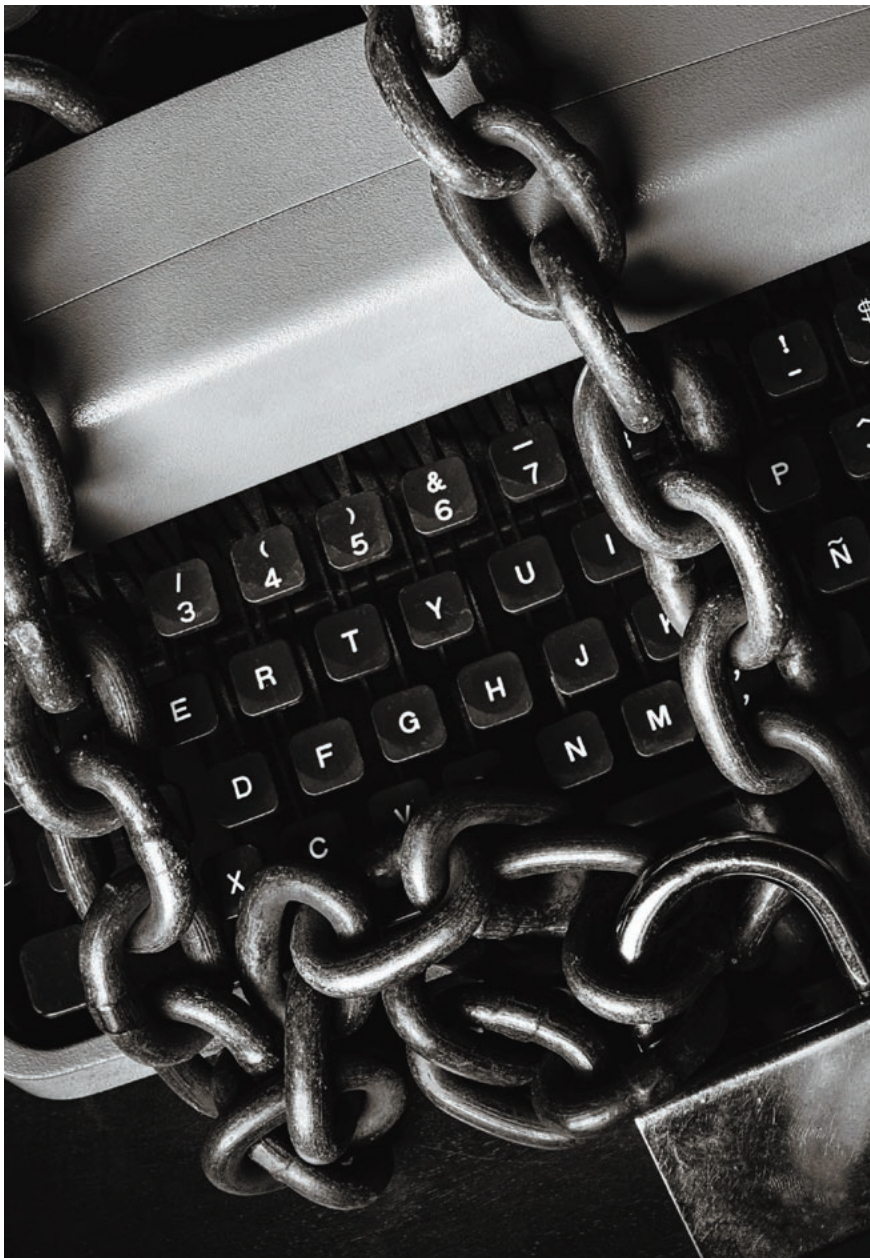
So, how bad could it get? The answer to that question, given the actual history of this country, is: much worse.

Though few remember it today, exactly 100 years ago, this country’s media was labouring under the kind of official censorship that would undoubtedly thrill both Donald Trump and Mike Pompeo. And yet the name of the man who

zestfully banned magazines and newspapers of all sorts doesn’t even appear in either Morison’s history, that *Britannica* article, or just about anywhere else either.

The story begins in the spring of 1917, when the United States entered the First World War. Despite his reputation as a liberal internationalist, the president at that moment, Woodrow Wilson, cared little for civil liberties. After calling for war, he quickly pushed Congress to pass what became known as the Espionage Act, which, in amended form, is still in effect. Nearly a century later, National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden would be charged under it and in these years he would hardly be alone.

Despite its name, the act was not really motivated by fears of wartime espionage. By 1917, there were few German spies left in the United States. Most of them had been caught two years earlier when their paymaster got off a New York City elevated train leaving behind a briefcase quickly seized by the American agent tailing him.



Rather, the new law allowed the government to define any opposition to the war as criminal. And since many of those who spoke out most strongly against entry into the conflict came from the ranks of the Socialist Party, the Industrial Workers of the World (famously known as the “Wobblies”), or the followers of the charismatic anarchist Emma Goldman, this in effect allowed the government

to criminalise much of the Left. (My new book, *Rebel Cinderella*, follows the career of Rose Pastor Stokes, a famed radical orator who was prosecuted under the Espionage Act.)

Censorship was central to that repressive era. As the *Washington Evening Star* reported in May 1917, “President Wilson today renewed

his efforts to put an enforced newspaper censorship section into the espionage bill”. The Act was then being debated in Congress. “I have every confidence”, he wrote to the chair of the House Judiciary Committee, “that the great majority of the newspapers of the country will observe a patriotic reticence about everything whose publication could be of injury, but in every country there are some persons in a position to do mischief in this field.”

Subject to punishment under the Espionage Act of 1917, among others, would be anyone who “shall willfully utter, print, write or publish any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language about the form of government of the United States, or the Constitution of the United States, or the military or naval forces of the United States.”

Who was it who would determine what was “disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive”? When it came to anything in print, the Act gave that power to the postmaster general, former Texas Congressman Albert Sidney Burleson. “He has been called the worst postmaster general in American history”, writes the historian G.J. Meyer, “but that is unfair; he introduced parcel post and airmail and improved rural service. It is fair to say, however, that he may have been the worst human being ever to serve as postmaster general.”

Burleson was the son and grandson of Confederate veterans. When he was born, his family still owned more than 20 slaves. The first Texan to serve in a cabinet, he remained a staunch segregationist. In the Railway Mail Service (where clerks sorted mail on board trains), for instance, he

considered it “intolerable” that whites and blacks not only had to work together but use the same toilets and towels. He pushed to segregate Post Office lavatories and lunchrooms.

He saw to it that screens were erected so blacks and whites working in the same space would not have to see each other. “Nearly all Negro clerks of long-standing service have been dropped”, the anguished son of a black postal worker wrote to the *New Republic*, adding, “Every Negro clerk eliminated means a white clerk appointed.” Targeted for dismissal from Burleson’s Post Office, the writer claimed, was “any Negro clerk in the South who fails to say ‘Sir’ promptly to any white person.”

One scholar described Burleson as having “a round, almost chubby face, a hook nose, gray and rather cold eyes and short side whiskers. With his conservative black suit and eccentric round-brim hat, he closely resembled an English cleric”. From President Wilson and other cabinet members, he quickly acquired the nickname “The Cardinal”. He typically wore a high wing collar and, rain or shine, carried a black umbrella. Embarrassed that he suffered from gout, he refused to use a cane.

Like most previous occupants of his office, Burleson lent a political hand to the president by artfully dispensing patronage to members of Congress. One Kansas senator, for example, got five postmaster-ships to distribute in return for voting the way Wilson wanted on a tariff law.

When the striking new powers the Espionage Act gave him went into effect, Burleson quickly refocused his energies on the sup-

Burleson instructed postmasters to immediately send him newspapers or magazines that looked in any way suspicious

pression of dissenting publications of any sort. Within a day of its passage, he instructed postmasters throughout the country to immediately send him newspapers or magazines that looked in any way suspicious.

And what exactly were postmasters to look for? Anything, Burleson told them, “calculated to... cause insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny... or otherwise to embarrass or hamper the Government in conducting the war”. What did “embarrass” mean? In a later statement, he would list a broad array of possibilities, from saying that “the government is controlled by Wall Street or munition manufacturers or any other special interests” to “attacking improperly our allies”/ Improperly?

He knew that vague threats could inspire the most fear and so, when a delegation of prominent lawyers, including the famous defense attorney Clarence Darrow, came to see him, he refused to spell out his prohibitions in any more detail. When members of Congress asked the same question, he declared that disclosing such information was “incompatible with the public interest.”

One of Burleson’s most promi-

nent targets would be the New York City monthly *The Masses*. Named after the workers that radicals were then convinced would determine the revolutionary course of history, the magazine was never actually read by them. It did, however, become one of the liveliest publications this country has ever known and something of a precursor to the *New Yorker*. It published a mix of political commentary, fiction, poetry, and reportage, while pioneering the style of cartoons captioned by a single line of dialogue for which the *New Yorker* would later become so well known.

From Sherwood Anderson and Carl Sandburg to Edna St. Vincent Millay and the young future columnist Walter Lippmann, its writers were among the best of its day. Its star reporter was John Reed, future author of *Ten Days That Shook the World*, a classic eyewitness account of the Russian Revolution. His zest for being at the centre of the action, whether in jail with striking workers in New Jersey or on the road with revolutionaries in Mexico, made him one of the finest journalists in the English-speaking world.

A “slapdash gathering of energy, youth, hope”, the critic Irving Howe later wrote, the *Masses* was “the rallying centre... for almost everything that was then alive and irreverent in American culture.” But that was no protection. On July 17, 1917, just a month after the Espionage Act passed, the Post Office notified the magazine’s editor by letter that “the August issue of the *Masses* is unavailable.” The offending items, the editors were told, were four passages of text and four cartoons, one of which showed the Liberty Bell falling apart.

Soon after, Burleson revoked the publication's second-class mailing permit. (And not to be delivered by the Post Office in 1917 meant not to be read.) A personal appeal from the editor to President Wilson proved unsuccessful. Half a dozen *Masses* staff members including Reed would be put on trial – twice – for violating the Espionage Act. Both trials resulted in hung juries, but whatever the frustration for prosecutors, the country's best magazine had been closed for good. Many more would soon follow.

When editors tried to figure out the principles that lay behind the new regime of censorship, the results were vague and bizarre. William Lamar, the solicitor of the Post Office (the department's chief legal officer), told the journalist Oswald Garrison Villard, "You know I am not working in the dark on this censorship thing. I know exactly what I am after. I am after three things and only three things – pro-Germanism, pacifism, and high-browism."

Within a week of the Espionage Act going into effect, the issues of at least a dozen socialist newspapers and magazines had been barred from the mail. Less than a year later, more than 400 different issues of American periodicals had been deemed "unmailable." The *Nation* was targeted, for instance, for criticising Wilson's ally, the conservative labor leader Samuel Gompers; the *Public*, a progressive Chicago magazine, for urging that the government raise money by taxes instead of loans; and the *Freeman's Journal and Catholic Register* for reminding its readers that Thomas Jefferson had backed independence for Ireland. (That

In Kafkaesque fashion, it often proved impossible even to learn why something had been banned

land, of course, was then under the rule of wartime ally Great Britain.) Six hundred copies of a pamphlet distributed by the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, *Why Freedom Matters*, were seized and banned for criticizing censorship itself. After two years under the Espionage Act, the second-class mailing privileges of 75 periodicals had been cancelled entirely.

From such a ban, there was no appeal, though a newspaper or magazine could file a lawsuit (none of which succeeded during Burleson's tenure). In Kafkaesque fashion, it often proved impossible even to learn why something had been banned. When the publisher of one forbidden pamphlet asked, the Post Office responded: "If the reasons are not obvious to you or anyone else having the welfare of this country at heart, it will be useless... to present them". When he inquired again, regarding some banned books, the reply took 13 months to arrive and merely granted him permission to "submit a statement" to the postal authorities for future consideration.

In those years, thanks to millions of recent immigrants, the United States had an enormous foreign-language press written

in dozens of tongues, from Serbo-Croatian to Greek, frustratingly incomprehensible to Burleson and his minions. In the fall of 1917, however, Congress solved the problem by requiring foreign-language periodicals to submit translations of any articles that had anything whatever to do with the war to the Post Office before publication.

Censorship had supposedly been imposed only because the country was at war. The Armistice of November 11, 1918 ended the fighting and on the 27th of that month, Woodrow Wilson announced that censorship would be halted as well. But with the president distracted by the Paris peace conference and then his campaign to sell his plan for a League of Nations to the American public, Burleson simply ignored his order.

Until he left office in March 1921 – more than two years after the war ended – the postmaster general continued to refuse second-class mailing privileges to publications he disliked. When a US District Court found in favour of several magazines that had challenged him, Burleson (with Wilson's approval) appealed the verdict and the Supreme Court rendered a timidly mixed decision only after the administration was out of power. Paradoxically, it was conservative Republican President Warren Harding who finally brought political censorship of the American press to a halt.

In some ways, we seem better off today. Despite Donald Trump's ferocity toward the media, we haven't – yet – seen the equivalent of Burleson barring publications from the mail. And partly because

he has attacked them directly, the president's blasts have gotten strong pushback from mainstream pillars like the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and CNN, as well as from civil society organizations of all kinds.

A century ago, even for a few brave and lonely voices, there was no equivalent. In 1917, the American Bar Association was typical in issuing a statement saying, "We condemn all attempts... to hinder and embarrass the Government of the United States in carrying on the war... We deem them to be pro-German, and in effect giving aid and comfort to the enemy". In the fall of that year, even the *Times* declared that "the country must protect itself against its enemies at home. The Government has made a good beginning."

In other ways, however, things are more dangerous today. Social media is dominated by a few com-

Does a demagogue who loves strongmen the world over and who jokes about staying in power indefinitely even need censorship?

panies wary of offending the administration, and has already been cleverly manipulated by forces ranging from Cambridge Analytica to Russian military intelligence. Outright lies, false rumours, and more can be spread by millions of bots and people can't even tell where they're coming from.

This torrent of untruth flooding in through the back door may be far more powerful than what comes through the front door of the recognised news media. And

even at that front door, in Fox News, Trump has a vast media empire to amplify his attacks on his enemies, a mouthpiece far more powerful than the largest newspaper chain of Woodrow Wilson's day. With such tools, does a demagogue who loves strongmen the world over and who jokes about staying in power indefinitely even need censorship? **CT**

Adam Hochschild teaches at the Graduate School of Journalism, University of California at Berkeley. He is the author of 10 books, including King Leopold's Ghost and Spain in Our Hearts: Americans in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939. His latest book, just published, is Rebel Cinderella: From Rags to Riches to Radical, The Epic Journey of Rose Pastor Stokes. This article first appeared at www.tomdispatch.com.



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UK politics isn't designed to protect the public

The politics of denial, first honed in the tobacco industry, has serious consequences for the UK's foundering Johnson government

The worst possible people are in charge at the worst possible time. In the UK, the US and Australia, the politics of the governing parties have been built on the dismissal and denial of risk. Just as these politics have delayed the necessary responses to climate breakdown, ecological collapse, air and water pollution, obesity and consumer debt, so they appear to have delayed the effective containment of Covid-19.

I believe it is no coincidence that these three governments have responded later than comparable nations have, and with measures that seemed woefully unmatched to the scale of the crisis.

The UK's remarkable slowness to mobilise, followed by its potentially catastrophic strategy – fiercely criticised by independent experts and now abandoned – to create herd immunity, and its continued failure to test and track effectively or to provide protective equipment for health workers, could help to cause large numbers of unnecessary deaths.

But to have responded promptly and sufficiently would have meant

jettisoning an entire structure of political thought developed in these countries over the past half century.

Politics is best understood as public relations for particular interests. The interests come first; politics is the means by which they are justified and promoted. On the left, the dominant interest groups can be very large – everyone who uses public services, for instance. On the right they tend to be much smaller. In the US, the UK and Australia, they are very small indeed: mostly multimillionaires and a very particular group of companies: those whose profits depend on the cavalier treatment of people and planet.

Over the past 20 years, I have researched the remarkably powerful but mostly hidden role of tobacco and oil companies in shaping public policy in these three nations. I've seen how the tobacco companies covertly funded an infrastructure of persuasion to deny the impacts of smoking. This infrastructure was then used, often by the same professional lobbyists, to

pour doubt on climate science and attack researchers and environmental campaigners.

I showed how these companies funded rightwing thinktanks and university professors to launch attacks on public health policy in general and create a new narrative of risk, tested on focus groups and honed in the media. They reframed responsible government as the “nanny state”, the “health police” and “elf 'n' safety zealots”. They dismissed scientific findings and predictions as “unfounded fears”, “risk aversion” and “scaremongering”. Public protections were recast as “red tape”, “interference” and “state control”. Government itself was presented as a mortal threat to our freedom.

Their purpose was to render governments less willing and able to respond to public health and environmental crises. The groups these corporations helped to fund – thinktanks and policy units, lobbyists and political action committees – were then used by other interests: private health companies hoping to break up the NHS, pesticide manufacturers seeking to strike down regulatory

controls, junk food manufacturers resisting advertising restrictions, billionaires seeking to avoid tax. Between them, these groups refined the justifying ideology for fragmenting and privatising public services, shrinking the state and crippling its ability to govern.

Now, in these three nations, this infrastructure is the government. No 10 Downing Street has been filled with people from groups strongly associated with attacks on regulation and state intervention – such as Munira Mirza, who co-founded the Manifesto Club; Chloe Westley from the TaxPayers’ Alliance; and of course Dominic Cummings, who was hired by Matthew Elliott, the founder of the TaxPayers’ Alliance, to run Vote Leave.

When Boris Johnson formed his first government, the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), which has been funded by the tobacco industry, boasted that 14 of its frontbenchers, including the home secretary, the foreign secretary and the chancellor, were “alumni of IEA initiatives”.

The foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, has published one book and launched another through the IEA, which he has thanked for helping him “in waging the war of ideas”.

The health secretary, Matt Hancock, in a previous role, sought to turn an IEA document into government policy. He has accepted significant donations from the organisation’s chairman, Neil Record. The home secretary, Priti Patel, was formerly a tobacco lobbyist. One in five new Conservative MPs have worked in lobbying or public relations for corporate interests.

Modern politics is impossible to



Boris Johnson boasted that 14 of his government frontbenchers were alumni of

understand without grasping the pollution paradox. The greater the risk to public health and wellbeing a company presents, the more money it must spend on politics – to ensure it isn’t regulated out of existence.

Political spending comes to be dominated by the dirtiest companies, ensuring that they wield the greatest influence, crowding out their cleaner rivals. While nobody has a commercial interest in the spread of coronavirus, the nature and tenor of the governments these interests have built impedes state attempts to respond quickly and appropriately.

Brexit (remember that?) could be interpreted as an effort to bridge the great split within the Conservatives, caused by the rising power of dirty money. The party became divided between an older, conserv-

ative base, with a strong aversion to novelty and change, and its polar opposite: the risk-taking radical right. Leaving the European Union permits a reconciliation of these very different interests, simultaneously threatening food standards and environmental protections, as well as price controls on medicines and other crucial regulations, while raising barriers to immigration and integration with other nations. It invokes ancient myths of empire, destiny and exceptionalism while potentially exposing us to the harshest of international trade conditions. It is likely further to weaken the state’s capacity to respond to the many crises we face.

The theory on which this form of government is founded can seem plausible and logically consistent. Then reality hits, and we find ourselves in the worst place from which to respond to crisis, with governments that have an ingrained disregard for public safety and a reflexive resort to denial.

When disasters arrive, its exponents find themselves wandering nonplussed through the wastelands, unable to reconcile what they see with what they believe. Witness Scott Morrison’s response to the Australian fires and Boris Johnson’s belated engagement with the British floods. It is what we see today, as the Trump, Johnson and Morrison governments flounder in the face of this pandemic. They are called upon to govern, but they know only that government is the enemy. CT

George Monbiot is a columnist for the Guardian, where this article first appeared. His website is www.monbiot.com

A strange case of mistaken identity

After being caught-up in a machiavellian political exercise known as detente between black-ruled Zambia and apartheid south Africa in the early 1970s, Trevor Grundy found work in 1976 as a journalist at the star newspaper in Johannesburg. In this excerpt from his new book, *call me comrade*, he tells what happened when a woman took him to a clandestine Anc gathering to celebrate nelson mandela

Photo: Adarsh Nayyar

April 20, 1976, Johannesburg's Hotel Elizabeth, the drinking den for people who worked for the *Star*, the city's biggest-selling newspaper. I was telling a group of cynical white journalists how I'd represented the London *Financial Times* and BBC's *Focus on Africa* while I was working in Zambia just a few months earlier.

"So what you doing on the Fruit and Veg desk at the *Star*?" quipped an enormous one-eyed bullyboy, who specialised in the coverage of the country's true religions – rugby and cricket. (Fruit and Veg Desk was the nickname for the paper's business and finance department.)

How could I start to explain what had happened to me in Lusaka? I told him that Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda had approved my transfer from the *Times of Zambia* to the Lusaka office of the Johannesburg-controlled Argus Africa News Service (AANS) because I had a good



TREVOR GRUNDY in the newsroom of The Standard in Dar es Salaam in February 1970.

grasp of life in Zambia, and this was the age of détente between the Black North and the White South.

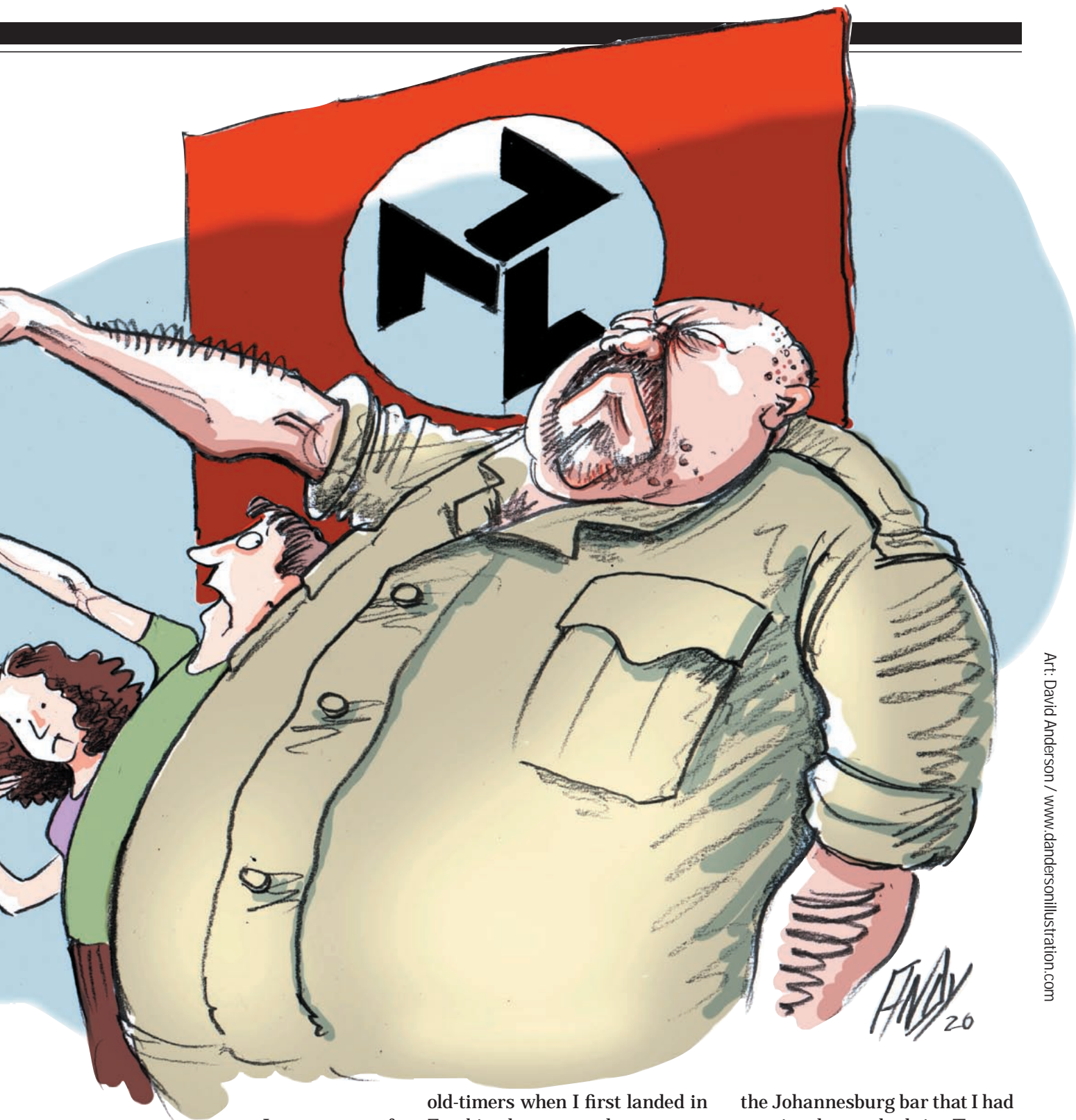
Kaunda was a big supporter of Jonas Savimbi and his Angolan freedom movement UNITA, but when it was revealed that the South African Army was fighting

alongside UNITA to stop the Marxist MPLA taking over the country, students rioted and threatened Kaunda's presidency because of his tacit support for apartheid.

After that, I was no longer any use to either side, so I was given the chop and put on a plane to Johannesburg on February 25.

Reuters correspondent Fred Bridgland had given me a copy of *Let History Judge*, a book about Stalin by the Russian writer Roy Medvedev as a parting gift as I left Lusaka. But the customs officer at Johannesburg's Jan Smuts Airport almost had a heart attack when he saw it and accused me of being a communist, so I was held in an airport prison in a room not much bigger than a cupboard for a week while my entry form was processed in Pretoria.





Art: David Anderson / www.dandersonillustration.com

In a matter of hours I'd gone from being a damned fascist sympathiser in Zambia to a communist cadre in South Africa. It reminded me of what I had been told by expatriate

old-timers when I first landed in Zambia almost exactly ten years before: "If you can't take a joke, don't live in Africa".

When I told the journalists in

the Johannesburg bar that I had previously worked in Tanzania, including two years when the country's President Julius Nyerere was the self-appointed editor-in-chief of the *Standard* with arch-communist Frene -

as managing editor, and had also worked at the Aga Khan's *Nation* newspaper in Nairobi, and then spent a year with Jim Bailey's *Drum* magazine in London, one of them – the loudest and largest – spluttered into his beer and said: "You're talking shit, man, and that's for sure", followed by a derogatory phrase I would hear so often in the days to come: "*Kaffir Boete*" (African lover).

Perhaps I was speaking too loudly, but my mention of *Drum* magazine, headquartered in Johannesburg, attracted the attention of a good-looking woman in her early thirties.

"I couldn't help hearing what you said about *Drum*. I read it every month. It's the best magazine in Africa. Sorry to listen in, but did you say that you had actually met Jim Bailey? He's a living legend. And Frene – ? You worked with her? So committed to The Cause. May I join you?"

She told me her name was Cynthia and she worked at one of the Star's rural offices.

Within a matter of days we were what people called "an item". Her divorce had just come through, although her ex-husband was still a regular visitor to her flat on the edge of the Johannesburg Hillbrow, at that time the city's answer to London's Soho, full of bookshops, cafes, restaurants, and nightclubs.

She told me that when they married it was the white ANC wedding of the year in Johannesburg.

"Nearly all the decent whites I know are in the ANC. I went to school with most of them. But it's very much hush-hush. You never write down names; everyone has a war name."

"Are you insane? If the cops stop us and tell us to open the boot, how would you explain all those Free Nelson Mandela leaflets"

"What's yours," I asked. "Cilla Black?"

"Not telling", she said. "It's a secret. Only our cell leader knows all the names and I don't know who he is."

"Or she ...", I corrected.

She rambled on.

"Paul's my ex, thought I still see him. He's a member of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC."

Then came a confused silence and an uncertain shaking of her head. "Whoops! I shouldn't have mentioned his name. I can never remember his war name. Up in Rhodesia they call it your *Chimurenga* name. I should have said Shaka, not Paul. I'm always forgetting things. It's the altitude."

One evening she came bubbling into the flat, took an envelope from the back pocket of her skin-tight jeans and waved it before me.

It was an invitation for us to attend a party on April 20 to mark Nelson Mandela's famous speech from the dock on that day in 1964.

"That's a real honour because you've only been in this country for how long? Just two months?"

I recoiled. "But I don't want to go. I don't want to get anywhere

near any of them. I never want to hear the word 'ANC' again in my life. They're a collection of goons with guns."

"But don't you see? That's why they want you. Because you're not trying to be one of them. And you don't want to be a BOSS (Bureau of State security) nark, either. You know Frene Ginwalla is the most hated non-white woman in South Africa. But she's a goddess to many of us ..."

Cynthia removed the pamphlet from the envelope as if it was a vital part of the Shroud of Turin. It showed a black and white photo of Nelson Mandela and underneath his famous words during the Rivonia treason trial at which he was sentenced to life imprisonment 12 years earlier, on April 20, 1964:

"During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die".

"We'll be together" cried Cynthia. "It'll be tremendous and you'll see the kind of people who are in the movement. No-one is supposed to know anyone else because it's some sort of secret cell-set-up but we all do, of course. A lot of our best members went to school together. And they're risking their lives for The Cause. Goons with guns! You couldn't be more wrong. April 20. Address to follow. Well, of course the address is to follow. Tactics."

On April 20 I picked up Cynthia from her flat. She asked me to drive to a café run by Portuguese exiles which the white ANC in-crowd called the Frelimo Inn. There we'd stop, have a coffee and receive a signal to either proceed or retreat. If the waiter wore a red cap we should abort and go home, but if he placed the coffee mugs in front of us and said *Aluta Continua* we should go ahead with the dangerous mission.

Cynthia was bubbling with excitement, "The man on the other end of the phone just said the address – Rand Court, Number Seven. I can't say who it was. Secrecy is everything. I hope I got the address right because Shaka's contact had such a heavy cold and was sneezing down the phone. I can't remember if he said Krugersdorp or Roodepoort. But it's by a post office next to the bottle store and it's up the stairs on the third floor. I've been there before, so I'll remember it when I see it."

I put a camera in the boot and I saw hundreds of ANC pamphlets.

"What the fuck! Are you insane? If the cops stop us and tell us to open the boot, how would you explain all those Free Nelson Mandela leaflets?"

Nonchalantly, she replied, "The cops won't bother us. We're white."

We drove away. A few kilometers later, she advised, "If this map is up-to-date you turn left at the corner, go straight on and it's the second on the left and then right at the next corner by the bridge . . . Well, I think it is."

We parked the car and climbed up three flights of cracked concrete

At the bottom
of the stairs
I bellowed at Cynthia,
sounding just like the
Leader we'd left
on the third floor

slabs to the third floor where we heard loud marching songs. Cynthia shook her head. "I suppose once a year we're allowed to have a bit of a sing-song. I hope the cops aren't listening."

I knocked on the door of a flat. It was opened by a huge man in khaki shirt. The smell of beer hit us like an ocean wave; we shook hands and walked in and were immediately handed two huge German beer jugs.

A blonde teenage girl asked us if we'd like crisps or wait for the braai (barbecue) that would be served after the Leader's speech

"It's not what I thought it would be", I said to Cynthia. "You didn't say it was a fancy dress party. And who's the Leader? You said you didn't have one, just Mandela or is it Tambo or Slovo or fucking Shaka, your ex-husband who's now in Umkonto we Sizwe."

A few minutes later a huge man, also wearing a khaki shirt, stood in front of a sign that strongly resembled the Nazi swastika.

Next to him was a blonde girl in a brown uniform with an armband that looked like three sevens stuck together. In the background a strong, firm voice, spoke out in Afrikaans. I asked the girl to translate, apologising that I couldn't speak the language because I was

a newcomer.

She gave me a sweet smile and said – "The Leader says that the British killed 27,000 of our people in their concentration camps and their gravestones cry out to heaven . . . and the man who was the best friend of the Afrikaners was Adolf Hitler who today, April 20, would be old in years but young in the hearts of the men, women and children of White South Africa. He says our new slogan must be: "The right to fight to be white in South Africa."

Shit! We weren't at a party for the ANC, but for the AWB (*Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging* – the Afrikaner Liberation Movement). I took hold of Cynthia: "You nut-case. She tells me this is bloody *Krugersdorp*. I bet you ten to one Shaka's mate said *Roodepoort*."

We fled.

At the bottom of the stairs I bellowed at her, sounding just like the Leader we'd left on the third floor.

"Jesus Christ. You people are supposed to be leading a revolution! You couldn't organise a piss up in a brewery. This isn't the April 20th gathering to mark Nelson Mandela's speech from the dock. This is the neo-Nazi's April 20th gathering to mark Hitler's birthday."

Later that evening, mellowed by top quality Malawi Gold marijuana, followed by gin chasers, Cynthia reprimanded me: "You don't have to be so uppity. Anyone can make a mistake." CT

Trevor Grundy is an English journalist who lived and worked in Central, Eastern and Southern Africa from 1966-1996.



LET'S DANCE THE WAR AWAY:
Revellers dress for the occasion
as the English town of Pickering
transforms itself back in time to
the 1940s for its annual Rail in
Wartime event.

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44 SPH

BULLDOG SPIRIT 2:
Union-jacketed British
Bulldog snuggles up
to an American
admirer.



n Tony sUTTon

The man who skewers presidential numbskullery

masterful essays take aim at the numbskullery of Trump, his hapless political opponents, and the boneheaded media warriors who founder hopelessly in the president's turbulent wake

Every political leader needs a tame biographer to weave the fine-spun words that will help create the lasting legacy of a political colossus. Donald Trump, the 45th President of the United States, is, I'm sure, seeking that person right now.

Whoever lands the job, I can say with certainty that it will *not* be C.J. Hopkins, the German-based American playwright and author who has, for the past four years, been crafting a collection of darkly satirical essays that skewer the numbskullery of Trump, his hapless political opponents, and the boneheaded warriors of the corporate media who flounder hopelessly in the president's turbulent wake.

"Back in the summer of 2016", writes Hopkins in the introduction to *Trumppocalypse*, the first volume of his *Consent Factory Essays*, "like most other halfway rational people, I regarded the candidacy of Donald Trump as some sadistic cosmic joke the gods were playing on anyone foolish enough to believe in American electoral politics. This was, after all, *Donald Trump*, the B-List celebrity billionaire buffoon



TRUMPOCALYPSE
Consent Factory Essays Vol
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C.J. Hopkins

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who went around plastering his name on everything in big, gold, shiny, ostentatious letters ... hotels, casinos, country clubs, you name it. He put his name on steaks for Christ's sake. The man even had a fake university. His 'candidacy' was clearly a promotional prank. He was probably preparing to launch a line of Trump-branded

condoms on QVC, or a *New York Times* bestseller, or something."

Then, Hopkins, along with the rest of us, watched in astonishment on November 9, 2016 as Trump, propelled by a simplistic 'Make America Great' slogan that drew the votes of millions of working class supporters - memorably described as 'deplorables' by his opponent Hillary Clinton - was proclaimed President of the United States, leader of the 'free' world.

Trump's political opponents, seeking someone other than themselves to blame for St Hillary's humiliating election rout, homed in on a secretive band of scheming internet-enabled Russian ne'er-dowells.

"Apparently", writes Hopkins, "these Russo-neo-fascists (aka the 'Putin-Nazis') had been lying in wait throughout the glorious eight-year Reign of Obama the Beneficent, and now, like a megaswarm of locusts, they poured out of their lairs en masse, took to the Internet, and unleashed a veritable blitzkrieg of silly Facebook posts, 'discord-sowing' Twitter

The big Covid-19 thought experiment

What if this isn't the greatest global pandemic that mankind has ever faced? And a few other nagging, but hypothetical, questions as we while away our days of 'self-imposed isolation'

Let's try a little thought experiment. Just for fun. To pass the time while we're indefinitely locked down inside our homes, compulsively checking the Covid-19 "active cases" and "total death" count, washing our hands every 20 minutes, and attempting not to touch our faces.

Before we do, though, I want to make it clear that I believe this Covid-19 thing is real, and is probably the deadliest threat to humanity in the history of deadly threats to humanity. According to the data I've been seeing, it's only a matter of days – or hours – until nearly everyone on earth is infected and is either dying in agony and alone or suffering mild, common cold-like symptoms, or absolutely no symptoms whatsoever.

I feel that I need to state this clearly, before we do our thought experiment, because I don't want anyone mistakenly thinking that I'm one of those probably Russian-backed Nazis who are going around saying, "it's just the flu", or who are spreading dangerous conspiracy theories about bioweapons and martial law, or who are otherwise doubting or questioning the

wisdom of locking down the entire world (and likely triggering a new Great Depression) on account of the discovery of some glorified bug.

Obviously, this is not just the flu. Thousands of people are dying from it. OK, sure, the flu kills many more than that, hundreds of thousands of people annually, but this Covid-19 virus is totally new, and not like any of the other millions of viruses that are going around all the time, and the experts are saying it will probably kill, or seriously sicken, or briefly inconvenience, millions or even billions of people if we don't lock down entire countries and terrorise everyone into submission.

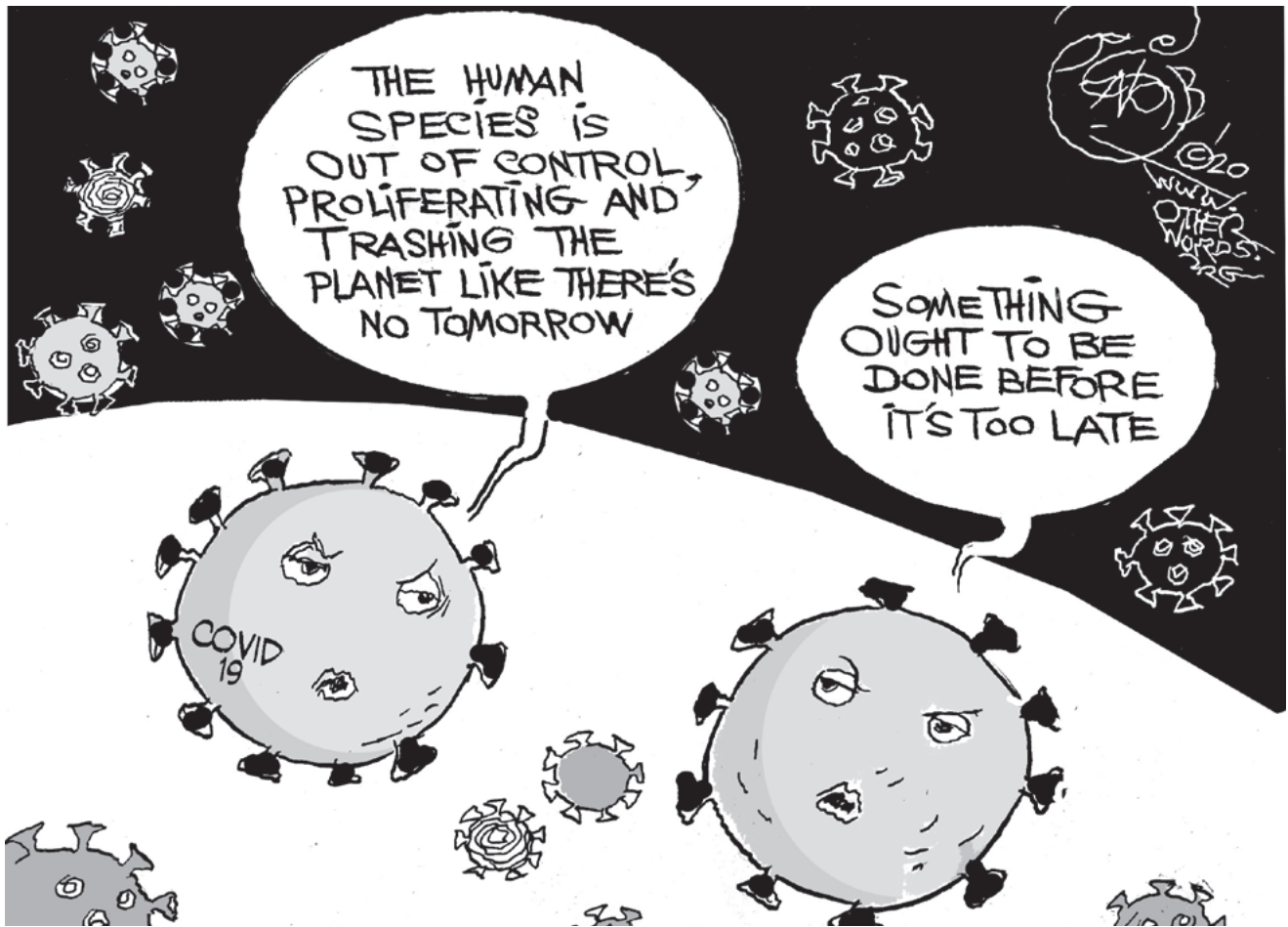
Which, don't get me wrong, I'm all for that ... this is not the time to be questioning anything the corporate media and the authorities tell us. This is a time to pull together, turn our minds off, and follow orders. OK, sure, normally, it's good to be skeptical, but we're in a goddamn global state of emergency! Idris Elba is infected for Chrissakes!

Sorry ... I'm getting a little emotional. I'm a big-time Idris Elba fan. The point is, I'm not a Covid-denialist, or a conspiracy theorist, or one of those devious Chinese or Russian dissension-sowers. I know for a fact that this pandemic is real, and warrants whatever "emergency measures" our governments, global corporations, and intelligence agencies want to impose on us.

No, I'm not an epidemiologist, but I have a close friend who knows a guy who dated a woman who dated a doctor who personally knows another doctor who works in a hospital in Italy somewhere, and she (ie, my friend, not the doctor in Italy) posted something on Facebook yesterday that was way too long to read completely but was a gut-wrenching account of how Covid-19 is killing Kuwaiti babies in their incubators!

Or maybe it was Italian babies. Like I said, it was too long to read.

Also, did you see the story about the baby that was born infected?! Or the stories about the people in their 30s and 40s who were more or less in perfect health (except for, you know, cancer or whatever)



who died from (or with) the Covid plague?! And what about all those charts and graphs?! And those pictures of people in hazmat suits?! And those Italians singing *Turandot* on their balconies?! Doesn't that just make you want to break down and cry over the sheer humanity of it all?!

No, there is absolutely no doubt whatsoever that Covid-19 is the deadliest global pandemic humankind has ever faced, and that we have no choice but to cancel everything, confine everyone inside their home, wreck the entire global economy, force working class people even further into debt, pour trillions into the investment banks, cancel elections, censor the

Internet, and otherwise implement a global police state.

But what if it wasn't? Just hypothetically. What if this wasn't the deadliest global pandemic humankind has ever faced? (I'm just posing the question as a thought experiment, so please don't report me to the WHO, or the CDC, or FEMA, or whoever.) What if this new coronavirus was just another coronavirus like all the other coronaviruses that people die from (or with) all the time? What if the fact that this one is "new" didn't really mean all that much, or possibly anything at all, because coronaviruses are always mutating, and

every year there are a lot of new variants?

Relax, OK? I know this one is different, and totally unlike anything ever encountered by virologists in the history of virology. Remember, this is just a thought experiment. These are just hypothetical questions.

Here's another hypothetical question. What if all the scary statistics we've been seeing (eg, the death rates, the explosion of "cases", etc.) weren't unquestionable scientific facts, but rather, were, like other statistics, based on things like sample groups, and dependent on a host of factors and variables, which you kind of need to know to make sense of anything?

Say, for example, you tested everyone that died of acute respiratory failure on a given day in your Italian hospital, and you discovered that, let's say, five of those patients had been infected with Covid-19. So you feed that number to the WHO, and they add it to the "total deaths" count, regardless of whether the folks who died had terminal cancer, or heart disease, or had also been infected with the common flu, or some other type of coronavirus. That would probably skew your "death" count, wouldn't it?

Or, say you wanted to test for the virus to keep track of all the "active cases" and generate an infection rate, but you can't test hundreds of millions of people, because no one has that many tests. So, you test everyone who turns up sick, or thinks they're sick and demands to be tested, or who touched someone sick who you already tested (though you're not even sure that your test is accurate) and you come up with, let's say, ten positive results. So you feed that number to the WHO, and they add it to the "active cases" count, regardless of the fact that everyone knows the real number is likely 20 times higher.

OK, so now you take your "active cases" number and your "total deaths" number and you do the math (keeping in mind that your "total deaths" include those cancer and heart failure people), and you end up grossly underestimating your "infection rate" and "active cases," and grossly overestimating your "death rate" and the number of "total deaths."

Just hypothetically, you understand. I am not suggesting this is actually happening. I certainly don't want to get censored by Fa-

OK, I'm getting
all worked up again.
I'd better take
my pills and
get back
to Facebook

cebook (or accidentally censored by some totally innocuous technical glitch) for posting "Covid misinformation", or tempt the Wikipedia "editors" to rush back to my Wikipedia page and label me a dangerous "conspiracy theorist" ... or, you know, get myself preventatively quarantined.

It probably won't come to that anyway, ie, rounding up "infected persons", "possibly infected persons", and "disruptive" and "uncooperative persons", and quarantining us in, like, "camps", or wherever.

All this state of emergency stuff, the suspension of our civil rights, the manipulation of facts and figures, the muzzling of dissent, the illegal surveillance, governments legislating by decree, the soldiers, the quarantines, and all the rest of it ... all these measures are temporary, and are being taken for our own good, and purely out of an "abundance of caution."

I mean, it's not like the global capitalist empire was right in the middle of a War on Populism (a war that it has been losing up to now) and wanted to take this opportunity to crank up some disaster capitalism, terrorise the global public into a frenzy of self-

ish and irrational panic, and just flex its muscles to remind everybody what could happen if we all keep screwing around by voting for "populists", tearing up Paris, leaving the European Union, and otherwise interfering with the forward march of global capitalism.

No, it certainly isn't like that. It is an actual plague that is probably going to kill you and your entire family if you don't do exactly what you're told. So, forget this little thought experiment, and prepare yourself for global lockdown. It probably won't be so bad ... unless they decide they need to run the part of exercise where it goes on too long, and people get squirrely, and start rebelling, and looting, and otherwise not cooperating, and the military is eventually forced to deploy those Urban Unrest Suppression Vehicles, and those Anti-Domestic-Terror Forces, and ...

OK, I'm getting all worked up again. I'd better take my pills and get back to Facebook. Oh, and ... I should probably check up on Idris! And see if Berlin has gone to "Level 3", in which case I'll need to find whatever online application I need to fill out in order to leave my house. CT

C. J. Hopkins is an award-winning American playwright, novelist and political satirist based in Berlin. His plays are published by Bloomsbury Publishing and Broadway Play Publishing, Inc. His dystopian novel, Zone 23, is published by Snoggsworthy, Swaine & Cormorant. Volume I of his Consent Factory Essays is published by Consent Factory Publishing. He can be reached at www.cjhopkins.com or www.consentfactory.org.



"Incheon, South Korea: the streets are almost deserted, and I eat and drink in empty cafes and restaurants."

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Sick days, market crashes and closed borders

Perhaps we've also reached peak freedom, not that it was all that free for much of the world

Perhaps I have really bad body odour, but here in South Korea I mostly eat and drink alone, sitting in completely empty restaurants and cafes, like right now. This casual yet elegant joint is called Ottchill. It has solidly built wooden chairs padded with homey cushions.

The two baristas are young, attractive and courteous, and they're here to serve me, and me alone, for the next hour or so.

Only the music sucks, predictably. Aggressive, urban and earnest, it corrodes your self consciousness, sociability and even heritage with a relentlessly moronic English,

mostly. You're living through a sonic hell, nearly whenever and wherever you're among others, and even alone if you're weak willed. It's a global virus. What a waste.

On a subway platform, I just bought for 80 cents a Snicker-like chocolate bar called Ghana. Something is not kosher here, so we must



"My \$24-a-night room is not Vietnam cheap, but is ridiculously low for central Seoul, thanks to the coronavirus."

alert the Anti-Defamation League, Southern Poverty Law Center and every Holocaust museum director, worldwide. There must be six-million of them, I reckon. Just because it's brown, nutty and cheap doesn't mean it should be associated with anything African! A boycott is definitely in order. All flights from unwoke South Korea must be barred immediately!

I've been in Seoul eight days. I had to come, especially since the price was coronavirus affordable. My one-way ticket cost just \$109, plus \$18 for a checked luggage. I have extra stuff because I'm homeless. Like a turtle, I must carry everything as I move. I'm a bag gentleman.

I got out on one of the last flights from Hanoi, just hours before the Vietnamese decided to quarantine

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

all passengers arriving from South Korea, thus ceasing all flights between the two countries. I had fully anticipated this scenario.

I have a closet-sized room in Myeong-dong for just \$24 a night. It has heat, wifi and its own toilet, and there are hundreds of stores and cheap restaurants nearby. A

subway station is a quick scramble away from the guest house's door. I have a tiny window with opaque glass panes, so there's no sky or skyscrapers to gaze at. I even have a fridge, but it doesn't work.

When I pointed this out to the manager, the young man said, "Most of our refrigerators are second-hand."

"So they don't work?"

"No," he shrugged. "Maybe ten years ago."

Fair enough.

What I'm in is basically a capsule apartment, of the type widely available in Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong. Even smaller than the American efficiency, none has a kitchen and most don't even have a porcelain throne. Mine, though, is elevated, so I'm on stage, so to speak, for each humbling perform-

ance. Anyway, a goshiwon apartment costs around \$300 a month here, and tenants don't just have access to a communal kitchen, but usually even unlimited cooked rice, kimchi and sometimes even noodles, so starvation is not an issue.

The poorest Koreans can't even squeeze into a goshiwon. Around Seoul Station, the misshapen homeless droop on steps or trudge down sidewalks, past greasy spoons, chain cafes, bare-boned poolhalls and grimy window displays of prosthetic limbs.

The station itself is grand and sparkling. Nearly all men, these down and outers nudge coins into the cheapest coffee machines. Battered by frigid winds, they rub their hands, sneeze and hack out viruses. With less than a thousand street dwellers, Seoul's homeless problem pales compared to most cities, however.

To be pure, you must say no to just about everything. Think convents. The first Korean quarantined herself. She was a bear.

The son of God, Hwanung, wanted to be human for a change, so he went down to Korea, where he met a tiger and a bear who also wished to become solipsistic, narcissistic, self-pitying and eternally lonely bipeds with a laughable taste in clothing and everything else.

"You can become human," Hwanung said, "if you stay in this cave for 100 days and eat only mugwort and garlic." The tiger couldn't hack it, but the bear turned into not just one gorgeous babe, but Hwanung's wife, and together they've spawned a great and enduring nation that has given to this shamefully ungrateful world Goryeo celdon, kimchis as side dishes and the Korean Zombie, etc.

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

Even after Japan had opened up to the world, Korea stayed shut in, thus it was labelled "the last of the hermit nations" by William Elliott Griffis in 1882. Now, North Korea is the world's most hermetic society, which it justifies with an ideology, *juche*, that stresses self-reliance in all spheres, from economic, political, self-defense to diplomatic.

As for South Korea, it is remarkably homogeneous compared to other advanced nations. In Seoul, there are whites, blacks, Turks and Arabs in Itaewon, and there's a smallish Chinatown in Daerim. Vietnamese and Thais are here, but they don't form distinct neighbourhoods.

An hour away in Pyeongtaek, 30,000 American soldiers are stationed, and in nearby Incheon, there is a huge, theme park-like Chinatown, plus Filipino sailors nursing beers in their own club, but in Greater Seoul, you'll rarely see a non-native away from touristic sites. There are no tribal groups in the mountains.

Just two weeks ago, I was in Si Ma Cai, Vietnam, where ethnic Vietnamese made up only 1 percent of the population, yet everyone was a native. Nothing like that exists in Korea.

Despite this demographic uniformity, South Korea is astonishingly cosmopolitan, for they're open to just about every culture, without welcoming too many aliens. Seoul has a food culture to rival the best. Well, almost. If New York is a 10, Seoul is an 8.5. Bitches who go on about not finding edible Ethiopian here haven't been to Club Zion for lunch, so just shut your trap, awright?

It is cold and dark, and I don't know where I am, or what I'm doing, so I walk. Like everyone else, I wear a mask, not because I fear imminent death, but because it would not be nice to infect anyone here with whatever I already have. I turn into an alley, because why not? Suddenly, I see five white people, dead for centuries: Pope Paul III, Queen Elizabeth I and three others I can't identify. You tell me, smart ass. It's a Five Alls pub. Momentarily finding a purpose, I enter.

It's only slightly brighter inside. At the short bar, a beefy biker is parked in front of a row of lick her bottles: Fireball, Jim Beam, Jack Daniel's, Captain Morgan, Jagermeister, Tiffin Tea Liqueur, as well as the more obscure Black Nikka from Japan and Sobieski Vodka from Poland. It's just a neighbourhood joint, where a pint of Guinness costs just 7,000 won (\$5.87). Although three cats feed right on the bar, they never knock your drinks over or stick their furry heads into your food. I can hang.

It's Five Alls' menu, though, I want to highlight. Among the rather extensive offerings, it has Canadian poutine, German currywurst, British sausage and mash, Irish lamb stew, Swedish meatballs, Italian mushroom ri-



"In Pyeongtaek, 30,000 American soldiers are stationed, and in nearby Incheon, there is a huge, theme park-like Chinatown."

sotto, Spanish calamares a feira, Indian beef keema, Okinawan taco rice, Japanese meat sauce doria and American buffalo wings. In case you these are just garbage versions, I had the \$6.71 taco rice, and it was fantastic, something I wouldn't mind as my last meal before being shot or hanged.

Any foreign population that would happily scarf poutine or currywurst must be Mother Teresa tolerant and forgiving, more open than a progressive border or maybe just insane.

Five Alls' music selection is also noteworthy, for it favours blues from 60+ years ago, ragtime, stride piano, jazz vocalists, and rhythm and blues from the '60s. I focus as Dinah Washington belts and growls, *"I'm an evil gal, don't you bother with me / I'll empty your*

pockets and fill you with misery / I've got men to the left, and men to the right / Men every day and men every night / I've got so many men, mmm, I don't know what to do."

Although both Korea and Japan have made a sustained and comprehensive effort to modernise and Westernise, South Korea may have gone even further than its neighbour. There is very little traditional architecture left, and most tellingly, more Christians than Buddhists here. Walking around, I see almost no Buddhist temples, but churches everywhere. With their thin spires, many merely occupy the top floor of a commercial building, then you have the mega churches. Large or small, almost all are hideously ugly. South Ko-

rea leads the world in cosmetic surgery, and the most popular procedure is to make one's eyes seem larger.

Unlike in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia or even Japan, you don't see South Koreans wearing anything but Western clothing, and the palette tend to be dark, most often black. Even before this coronavirus crisis, the ambience on any Seoul subway car is decidedly funereal, and even grimmer, actually, for everyone is sepulchered within his own cyberworld. Two weeks ago, I was at a weekly market in Can Cau, Vietnam, where tribal peoples wore their colourful best to go shopping, but that's barbaric, dude. A highly cultured and civilized man must always appear like a coffin bearer or occupant.

Perusing photos of Seoul from

the 1960's, I see little traffic, beat up buses, men or oxen pulling heavy carts, cattle on streets and women with babies strapped to their backs, or with baskets on their heads. Now, Koreans make good cars, excellent smart phones and the second most ships in the world annually. They erect monster skyscrapers for foreign countries, such as the PNB 118 in Kuala Lumpur.

Koreans have paid for this progress with the world's second longest workweek, one of its highest suicide rates and weeping children in cram schools, but it's all worth it, for no one has subscribed more to the forward religion.

My first exposure to Koreans was in Saigon in the early 70's, and I remember being impressed by how well-built and confident looking the ROK soldiers were. Now, I see feminised Koreans, preening or with flowers in their hair, staring at me from many Seoul ads. As Korea gains more muscles, it celebrates its sissy side, but a return to old school arrangements, virtues and taste is coming, I think.

Has the bullet train towards the future been derailed by the coronavirus? On February 24th, Anatoly Karlin boldly wrote an article titled, "Corona Will Kill Millions & Crater the World Economy", yet on March 2nd, Israel Shamir weighed in, "There is nothing to panic about, said Trump about the Corona, and he is right. Corona is a mental virus of fear, not much else. We have a sterling proof: the Diamond Princess liner had been marooned in the ideal, for virus, circumstances of single ventilation system. Many people had got the disease, but only two persons, aged over 80, had died.

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

No children became sick. Apparently it could be dangerous only for people over 60. There was no reason for panic at all."

Although they're both super smart, only one can be right, and we'll find out soon enough, perhaps by Opening Day. Batting ninth, here's my lunging whiff: if the coronavirus wasn't serious, China would not have shut down its economy for over a month, thus affecting every other economy on earth. Even if millions of people won't die, this crisis has already been very disruptive to the daily life of billions, especially if they're just trying to make a buck to survive another day.

In Si Ma Cai, Vietnam, I talked to a woman who sold banh mi sandwich for just 64 cents each, and she was seriously hurting, because Vietnamese schools had been closed for weeks, and students were her primary customers.

If it wasn't serious, Vietnam wouldn't have stopped all flights from South Korea and China. These countries aren't just Vietnam's top two sources of tourists, but foreign investments.

Another morning, another empty Seoul café. On a wall, there's a Styrofoam board with over a hun-

dred loyal customer cards, but I drink alone, thanks to the coronavirus. Nearly every shop in this underground mall is empty. Normally, it would still be packed on weekends.

Unlike China, South Korea has not shut down entire cities, so Seoul is still at work, with its subway cars somewhat filled, and many people are still eating and drinking out, but business is clearly way down. It's awkward to stroll past so many brightly lit yet empty stores, with their proprietors idling outside, looking anxious.

With 7,041 coronavirus cases and 47 deaths, South Koreans are trying to function more or less normally, but already they're being banned or restricted from entering 95 countries! Borders are suddenly shut, and if this pandemic intensifies, more nationalities will be grounded or, worse, quarantined. With harsher policies adopted by governments, citizens will become more exasperated and angry. Much ugliness will ensue.

In hip Seogyo-dong, there's a handwritten sign taped to a restaurant door, "Chinese NO entry / NO China," and as an afterthought, in smaller script, "Sorry!" Such a display is still rare, though.

Nearby, there's a two-story bar and café, Blackjack, which opened just over three weeks ago, mere days before the coronavirus crisis hit South Korea. "Bad timing, Jack," I said to the owner.

"I know," he chuckled. "I ask God, 'why?' When I first opened, people were queuing outside, to get in."

After finishing law school, Jack moved to Las Vegas, where he stayed for six years. Repatriating, Jack opened an English language academy, which did so well, he launched Blackjack. Now, both of



"I see feminised Koreans, preening or with flowers in their hair, staring at me from many Seoul ads"

his businesses are suffering.

Many firms have demanded their employees stay home as much as possible after work, so no evening English classes even, which companies normally pay for.

His waitress, Chris, was a stewardess for Eaststar. She's tall, slim and strikingly beautiful. Recently, Chris applied at Korean Air. Certain of getting this job, she told Jack she was quitting.

"She told me too soon! Now, Korean Air won't hire anyone."

Peak travel is in our rearview mirror. "God wants her to stay with you, Jack!"

"She doesn't listen to God."

Blackjack is decked out with Victorian furniture and framed prints of 18th-century Europeans, mostly aristocratic. He's certainly laid on the goopy cheese. Over the

counter, there's a sign, "You Only Live Once / Enjoy This Moment with BLACKJACK."

For a while, it was suggested the coronavirus would only kill Chinese or Orientals, but Iran's official death toll is already 107, with the real figure likely much higher, and Italy has 197 coronavirus deaths, with 49 dying in the last 24 hours. Italian schools are shut, soccer matches are played in empty stadiums, entire towns are quarantined and cities have gone quiet and empty. A growing list of countries are also banning travelers from Italy.

On March 3rd, I got an email from Alitalia, "Linh, non smettere di volare!" ["Linh, do not stop flying!"]

The desperate ad continues, "THE WORLD KEEPS TURNING,

WE MUST DO THE SAME! We are born to travel, discover, love, dream and follow our passions. Doing all this means we haven't stopped growing, or enriching ourselves with new experiences and most beautiful places, or being free."

The economic fallout from all this is already enormous, and it has just begun. Perhaps we've also reached peak freedom, not that it was all that free for much of the world.

It's evening in Seoul, but the bright lights still beckon. Strapping on my mask, I will march outside. **CT**

Linh Dinh's latest book is Postcards from the End of America. He maintains a photo blog at <https://linhdinhphotos.blogspot.com>

Coronavirus chaos

People fighting over rolls of toilet paper? Frenzied denuding of shelves of chicken, toilet paper and hand sanitiser? To say the reaction is overblown at this point is to understate the obvious

Before I tackle the “meat” of this piece, I feel like relating my first taste of chaos. I think it’ll be a good transition; call it an appetiser, if you will. Perhaps a low-calorie bloomin’ onion, if that were possible....

My family and I lived in a major east coast US metropolitan area for my first 20-odd years, solidly low-to-middle class, and in some 1960 summers my parents were able to afford a “swim club” membership. Many of the families in our neighbourhood joined the same club, which was essentially a pool with a ballfield, tennis court, lounge and dining room. There was also a refreshment stand. Here I witnessed, first hand, how boorish people could be. (I was going to write “how savage”, but I’m sure there was actual savagery back then that I was lucky enough to avoid.)

At that stand there was no line, just a mass of hungry-thirsty kids and adults, a swarm of bees around a honeycomb. Simply put, the biggest squeaky wheels (loudmouths) were first to get the delicious grease. There was no

semblance of order, no discussion, nary a thought as to who was first, who was next. Just shouts of “two cones and four lemonades” and the like. I felt angry -- with the proprietors for not insisting on a single line, with their employees for never asking whose turn it was. And also with myself, for being hesitant about joining the fray.

But disgust with my fellow beings was by far the more compelling emotion. This happened every week at the swim club. Where was the sense of fairness, of honour among these self-absorbed barbarians? Where was their sense of common decency?

Cut to 2020 and the coronavirus hysteria. I suppose seeing lines of anxious people waiting to get into Walmart brought back memories of the old swim club. Sure, some people do wait patiently to get into such stores, but what goes on inside? People fighting over rolls of toilet paper? Frenzied denuding of shelves of chicken, toilet paper and hand sanitiser? All because – as of mid-March at least – 10,000 people have contracted the “pandemic”

virus in a country of 330-million?

To say the reaction Covid-19 is somewhat overblown at this point is to understate the obvious. I get it, the spread of CV19 seems to be faster than other viruses, and deadly to people with compromised immune systems. Still, even the government’s “experts” reassuringly state that 80 percent of infected people will experience it as they would a common cold, and the death rate will likely end up at just 1 percent. So why are the media making it appear like Armageddon is around the corner? Why is government saying unlikely things like 150-million people could be infected and 1.5-million might die?

Here’s a question, dear reader – is it a pandemic if, say, a dozen people in all 200 countries on Earth get infected with a future Andromeda strain? Will billions be forced to stay home for a few months if that happens? What if, instead of Androvirus™, those 2,400 people contract gonorrhoea? (Okay, it’s a good bet that’s already true, but it isn’t my point. Not a great disease choice by me, anyway, since it takes two to tango and



CLEANED OUT: Shelves are emptied of toilet paper in a Giant supermarket at West Chester, Pennsylvania.

so far as I know isn't transmitted via touching a salt-shaker at the greasy spoon.)

Back to the point: the lack of control, of civility is far worse in 2020 than it was 60 years ago. It's been apparent everywhere for decades, but the present virus outbreak has brought it sharply into focus. A few samples from a single day, single website:

- Brawls and screaming matches break out at stores across the country as coronavirus panic buying intensifies and national emergency is declared;
- Tensions are erupting in stores around the country as fights break out between panicked shoppers stocking up amid the coronavirus emergency;
- Videos show altercations be-

tween shoppers in Georgia and New York;

- A brawl broke out inside a crowded Sam's Club in Hiram, Georgia;
- Two men came to blows after one of them, using a motorised cart, bumped into the other's cart carrying a child. They proceeded to hit each other with wine bottles until the bottles broke, then slashing one another with shards;
- Cellphone video showed men tussling on the floor, before one of them was taken away on a stretcher;
- A screaming match emerged in a Brooklyn Costco as customers waited 40 minutes in line;
- An employee begged the crowd to calm down as women shouted at him about carts being pushed into

them;

- The same Costco was forced to close its main gates later that day as the stream of customers became too heavy.

I can understand this kind of thing happening in Brooklyn... but Hiram, Georgia?

Anyway, whatever happened to basic decency, waiting your turn and such? Would the lack of toilet paper really be such a horrible predicament? Seriously, a body could use paper napkins or towels, newspaper, or even a washcloth (which interestingly could itself be washed). Hate to tell you, but toilet paper wasn't even in use until 1857, and it was so rough it could give you splinters. Ouch! It wasn't until the 1930s that modern TP was available. We truly are the

Charmin generation.

I suppose I should apologise to both Brooklyn and Hiram, since panic shopping and associated bad behaviour is taking place everywhere, regardless of income, social status, ethnicity, race, etc. We may be the Charmin generation but we're also the Me-First society. Even before the Covid-19 conundrum, shameful incidents have been occurring regularly, especially around the Xmas shopping season. Just search for the 1983 Cabbage Patch Riot videos on the web.

Of course this time the mainstream media are fanning the flames mightily with round-the-clock coverage of the pandemic. (By the way, I don't know the exact moment when "media" became a singular noun, but it's not. "Medium" is singular; "media" is plural. Maybe I'll change my tune when the next update of Marshall McLuhan's famous book is re-titled *The Media is the Massage*.) Nothing like a good panic to bump up the ratings and revenue. Twenty-four hours of coverage a day with

Shameful incidents have been occurring regularly. Just search for the 1983 Cabbage Patch Riot videos on the web

just 10,000 CV19 cases in USA as of March 19th (.003 percent of the population), many of them merely presumptive due to a lack of test kits. Keeping us all afraid.

Yet this has been declared a national emergency. Perhaps it is. Perhaps without all the lockdowns, stay-at-home edicts and hand-washing it could be a lot worse. The draconian measures that have been imposed by our governments may, in fact, turn out to be good ideas, but there are risks and potential repercussions. Businesses will shut down and close. People will lose their livelihoods. Investments are tanking big time. The Fed is pumping like mad and cutting interest rates, which will not work but will cause inflation. Fool-

ish politicians are screaming "free money for all" – also inflationary, and equally senseless.

Perhaps worst of all, governments will permanently enjoy even more control over our lives. Recall Reagan's comment please: "The most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the government and I'm here to help."

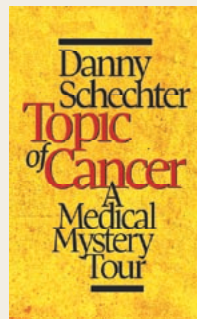
The bloodcurdling thing about all this is not that the present situation could last for many months, or that its repercussions might last for years. It's that the next time could be a lot worse. What if an Andromeda strain event does occur in the future? Will a panicked, uncivilised population empty store shelves within hours ... or die trying? CT

Andrew Fischer is an accountant and author of two books. Purgastories, a collection of short stories, is available at www.amazon.com. He enjoys his fiancée and designing board games; the latter can be downloaded at no charge from www.boardgamegeek.com.

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Insights

n LINDA McQUAIG

The public lab that could have helped fight to control coronavirus pandemic

CANADA once had a publicly owned pharmaceutical company that could have made a difference in the current coronavirus crisis – except that we sold it.

Connaught Labs was a superstar in global medicine. For seven decades, this publicly owned Canadian company performed brilliantly on the national and international stage, contributing to medical breakthroughs and developing affordable treatments and vaccines for deadly diseases.

Hated by its corporate competitors, Connaught was unique in that its focus was on human need, not profit.

It would have come in handy today.

In fact, Connaught got its start amid a diphtheria outbreak in 1913. Toronto doctor John Gerald FitzGerald was outraged that children were dying in large numbers even though there was

a diphtheria treatment available from a US manufacturer. But, at \$25 a dose, it was unaffordable to all but the rich. FitzGerald set out to change that – and he did.

After experimenting on a horse in a downtown Toronto stable, FitzGerald developed

tetanus, typhoid and meningitis.

Connaught developed an impressive research capacity, with its scientists contributing to some of the biggest medical breakthroughs of the 20th-century – including penicillin and the Salk and Sabin polio vaccines. It also

played a central role in the global eradication of smallpox.

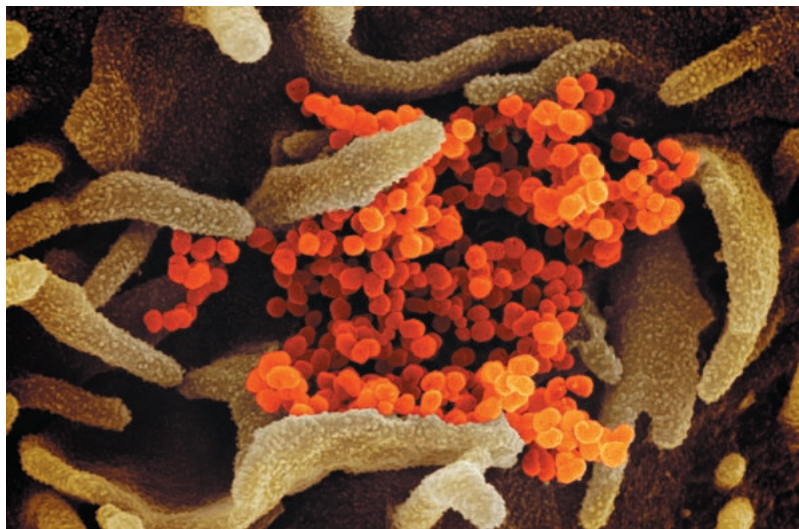
“It was a pioneer in a lot of ways”, says Colleen Fuller, a research associate of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. “It did things commercial companies wouldn’t do because they weren’t willing to take the financial risks.”

Fuller argues that if a publicly

owned Connaught were still operating today, it could be contributing to the development of the coronavirus vaccine – and ensuring a Canadian supply if there was a global shortage.

Yet, tragically it isn’t.

Succumbing to corporate pressure and a misguided belief that



This scanning electron microscope image shows SARS-CoV-2 (orange) – also known as 2019-nCoV, the virus that causes COVID-19 – isolated from a patient in the US, emerging from the surface of cells (green) cultured in the lab.

an antitoxin that proved effective in treating diphtheria, and made it available to public health outlets across the country. Then, with lab space provided by the University of Toronto, he and his team went on to produce low-cost treatments and vaccines for other common killers, including

Photo: NIAID-RML

the private sector always does things better, Brian Mulroney's Progressive Conservative government privatised Connaught Labs in the 1980s. Today, what remains of this once-dazzling Canadian public enterprise has been taken over by a giant French pharmaceutical company.

The coronavirus outbreak may finally help expose the fallacy of the notion that the private marketplace is innately superior – which has been the guiding principle in Anglo-American countries (including Canada) for the past four decades, leading to the constant denigration of government and its functions.

Fortunately, Canada's public healthcare system, established in the 1960s, has been so popular that it has survived, despite attacks of "socialised medicine" – although our political leaders have quietly whittled away funding for the system in recent decades.

If the foolishness of cutting funding for public health care wasn't already abundantly clear, the coronavirus has driven it home with a sledgehammer – as we've witnessed the extra struggles the US faces in containing the virus with its lack of public health care.

Still, our willingness to go along with the privatisation cult in recent decades has left us weaker and less protected than we could be.

Not only do we no longer have Connaught Labs, but Canada spends \$1-billion a year funding basic medical research at Cana-

dian universities, yet relies on the private marketplace to produce, control – and profit from – the resulting medical innovations.

For instance, the crucial work in developing a vaccine to treat Ebola was done by Canadian scientists at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg – and financed by Canadian taxpayer money. But sole licensing rights to the vaccine were granted to a small US company, which then sublicensed it to pharmaceutical giant Merck for \$50-million.

Although Merck is now producing the vaccine, critics have charged that the company did "next to nothing" to rush the vaccine into production during the

deadly Ebola outbreak in West Africa, according to a recent paper published in the *Journal of Law and Biosciences*.

With a surge in future global pandemics expected, it might well be time to rethink Canada's foolhardy attachment to the notion "the private sector always does things better."

Always unproven, that theory is looking increasingly far-fetched. CT

*Linda McQuaig is a journalist and author of *The Sport & Prey of Capitalists*, which explores the different energy policies of Alberta and Norway. This article first appeared in the *Toronto Star*.*

n TREVOR HOYLE

Radio Times gets with the programme

LIKE reading and reporting on the *Radio Times*. The weekly programme guide to the UK's national TV and radio service is embedded deep in the sclerotic heart of the British establishment and thus the perfect weather-vane on which way respectable, received opinion is shifting. Even though it's not owned and run by the BBC any longer, the two are snugly hand-in-glove on so many things.

Ten or twelve years ago (I can't put a date to it exactly) the then-best-selling weekly magazine in the UK (readership upwards of

four-million) ran what became an infamous article on global warming without mentioning that phrase once. The piece was actually based on a factoid in the press that within 30 years the British Isles would have a very similar climate to that of Madeira, the island just off Portugal. So the editor had a brainwave: Let's show how wonderful life will be in this idyllic golden future. The outcome was a three-page article fronted by a double-page artist's impression of a typical English garden: a vividly-coloured romantic rendering (much like the

illustrations in a children's book) of a contented middle-aged couple on a serene sunny afternoon — smiling dad lounging in a deck-chair while smug wifey trundles a wheelbarrow laden with mangoes and bananas and pineapples and other exotic fruits.

(And check out the *Radio Times*: bang up to speed with them new-fangled gender issues – capable Mum, not silly old Dad, wheeling the wheelbarrow, geditit?)

And, as I've said, nary a mention anywhere throughout the entire piece of global warming or the fireball our planet is turning into. When I read the article I didn't know whether to fall off my chair in fits of hysterical laughter or have my head explode in impotent rage. It was beyond crass or stupid; it was criminal.

I wrote to the letters editor at RT asking the simple, obvious question: if our climate was to become like Madeira's in 30 years' time, what would Madeira's climate be like 30 years hence? You won't be surprised to learn the letter wasn't even acknowledged, never mind published.

Fast forward to as recently as last August when the *Radio Times* ran an opinion piece by Bill Giles, the former BBC weatherman who spent a long career with the Met Office. Now I know this will seem incredible, and you'll rub your eyes in astonishment, but this is what he wrote:

“By 2050 the British climate will be among the best in the world.” He then goes on to extol the merits of British seaside re-



REALITY CHECK: How *Radio Times* acknowledged the problem of climate change.

sorts, saying they should be preparing for visitors from Europe and all over the world “as our climate becomes more acceptable and their own becomes unbearably hot.”

I wrote again to the *Radio Times* in my usual conciliatory manner:

“What are Mr Giles's forecasts for 2060? Iceland as being the ideal holiday destination? Or how about 2070? The Arctic Circle?”

And again they ignored me! Who'd have thought?

But reality must be slowly creeping up – at snail's-pace – on the BBC/RT crew (instructions from above perhaps? – “Let's get with the programme, guys”) because there's been a dramatic change. In the March 7, 2020 issue there was a “Viewpoint” by Francis Wilson, who used to be the young good-looking weatherman on ITV's morning show, wearing garish and “amusing” knitted pullovers. The sub-head reads: “It's time for our weather forecasters to get serious.” Wilson is highly critical of how TV companies in their “rush to get

the most attractive face overlook the fact that he or she doesn't actually know what he or she is talking about.”

Clumsily expressed it may be, but this is strong stuff; conveyed in the pages of such an ultra-conformist, cosily traditional and deeply conservative organ as the *Radio Times*, it's incendiary.

Wilson quite rightly highlights his credentials as a chartered meteorologist and a fellow of the Royal Meteorological Society, drawing the comparison with today's lot who don't know jacks-hit about weather forecasting, the climate, or anything else come to that. But Wilson isn't done with these dunces yet:

“..... we need presenters with the authority that comes with real knowledge and understanding of what is happening to the climate. We need presenters who can state that these life-threatening events [referring to storms, floods, droughts and wild fires] are caused by global warming. That such things are happening because we

casualty of war is pretty much a truism.

Erdogan initially blustered and threatened to launch an invasion of Idlib – which, in any case, was already underway – but after initially remaining silent, Rear Adm. Oleg Zhuravlev said that Russia “cannot guarantee the safety of flights for Turkish aircraft over Syria.”

The Turkish president is a hardhead, but he is not stupid. Troops, armour and artillery without air cover would be sitting ducks. So the Turks pulled back, the Syrians moved in, and now Russian military police are occupying Saraqeb. Russia has also deployed two cruise missile armed frigates off the Syrian coast.

But for Erdogan, the home front is heating up. Even before the current crisis, the Republican People’s Party (CHP) has been demanding that Erdogan brief parliament about the situation in Idlib, but the president’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) voted down the request. The right-wing, nationalist Good Party – a CHP ally – made similar demands, which have also been sidelined.

All the opposition parties have called for direct negotiations with the Assad government.

The worry is that Turkey is drifting toward a war with Syria without any input from the Parliament. On February 12, Erdogan met with AKP deputies and told them that if Turkish soldiers suffered any more casualties – at the time the death toll was 14 dead, 45 wounded – that Turkey would “hit anywhere” in Syria. To the opposition that sounded



Recep Erdogan

Mikhail Palinchak / Wikimedia

awfully like a threat to declare war.

Engin Altay, the CHP’s deputy chair, said “The president has to brief parliament, Idlib is not an internal matter for the AKP”. Altay has also challenged Erdogan’s pledge to separate Turkey from the extremist rebels, like Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, an affiliate of al-Qaeda. “Is this even possible?” he asked, “There is no way to distinguish these from each other.”

Turkey made an agreement with Russia in 2018 to allow it to set up observation posts in Idlib if it pledged not to support extremists like Tahrir al-Sham, but Ankara has facilitated the entry of such groups into Syria from the beginning of the war, giving them free passage and supplying them with massive amounts of fertiliser for bombs. In any case, the extremists eliminated any so-called “moderate” opposition groups years ago.

“Turkey said it would disassociate moderate elements from radicals”, says Ahmet Kamil Erozan of the Good Party, “but it couldn’t do that.”

The Kurdish-based progressive People’s Democratic Party (HDP) parliamentarian Necdet Ipekyuz charged, “Idlib has

become a nest for all jihadists. It has turned into a trouble spot for Turkey and the world. And who is protecting these jihadists? Who is safeguarding them?

Erdogan has jailed many of the HDP’s members of parliament and AKP appointees have replaced the Party’s city mayors. Tens of thousands of people have been imprisoned, and tens of thousands dismissed from their jobs. The media has largely been silenced through outright repression – Turkey has jailed more journalists than any country in the world – or ownership by pro-Erdogan businessmen.

But body bags are beginning to come home from a war that looks to a lot of Turks like a quagmire. The war is costly at a time of serious economic trouble for the Turkish economy. Unemployment is stubbornly high, and the lira continues to fall in value. Polls show that a majority of Turks – 57 percent – are more concerned with the economy than with terrorism. While Turks have rallied around the soldiers, before the recent incident more than half the population opposed any escalation of the war.

And Turkey seems increasingly isolated. Erdogan called an emergency session of NATO on Feb. 28, but got little more than “moral” support. NATO wants nothing to do with Syria and certainly doesn’t want a confrontation with Russia, especially because many of the alliance’s members are not comfortable with Turkey’s intervention in Syria. In any case, Turkey is not under attack. Only its soldiers,

who are occupying parts of Syria in violation of international law, are vulnerable.

The Americans also ruled out setting up a no-fly zone over Idlib.

Erdogan is not only being pressed by the opposition, but from the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) within his own ruling coalition. The MHP, or the “Gray Wolves”, have long represented Turkey’s extreme right. “The Turkish nation must walk into Damascus along with the Turkish army”, says Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the MHP.

Erdogan has no intention of marching on Syria’s capital, even if he could pull it off. The President wants Turkey to be a regional player, and occupying parts of Syria keeps Ankara on the board. But that line of reasoning is now under siege.

Turkey’s allies in the Syrian

civil war are ineffective unless led by and supported by the Turkish army. But without air cover, the Turkish army is severely limited in what it can do, and the Russians are losing patience. Moscow would like the Syria war to end and to bring some of its military home, and Erdogan is making that difficult.

Moscow can be difficult as well, as Turkey may soon find out. The two countries are closely tied on energy, and, with the sanctions blocking Iranian oil and gas, Ankara is more and more dependent on Russian energy sources. Russia just built the new TurkStream gas pipeline across the Black sea and is building a nuclear power plant for Turkey. Erdogan can only go so far in alienating Russia.

Stymied in Syria and pressured at home, Erdogan’s choices

are increasingly limited. He may try to escalate Turkish involvement in Syria, but the risks for that are high. He has unleashed the refugees on Europe, but not many are going, and Europe is brutally blocking them. He may move to call early elections before his domestic support erodes any further, but he might just lose those elections, particularly since the AKP has split into two parties. A recent poll found that 50 percent of Turks say they will not vote for Erdogan.

Or he could return to his successful policies of a decade ago of “no problems with the neighbours.” **CT**

Conn Hallinan can be read at www.dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com and www.middleempireseries.wordpress.com

n SAM PIZZIGATI & SARAH ANDERSON

Coronavirus and the Shock Doctrine

WE all have to come together. We need to help each other. We don’t have time for politics as usual.

In times of crisis like the current coronavirus pandemic, these sorts of calls for cooperation become the drumbeat of our daily lives.

Unfortunately, no drumbeat

ever gets everybody marching in sync. In deeply unequal societies like our own, a wealthy few can exploit such catastrophes to make themselves even wealthier.

Back in 2007, Naomi Klein explored this phenomenon brilliantly in her landmark book *The Shock Doctrine*. Klein showed how corporate elites worldwide have repeatedly and brutally used “the public’s

disorientation following a collective shock – wars, coups, terrorist attacks, market crashes, or natural disasters – to push through radical pro-corporate measures.”

The 2008 financial collapse would vividly illustrate the dynamics Klein described. The Wall Street giants whose reckless and criminal behaviour ushered in that crisis ended up even bigger and more powerful than before the crisis began.

Klein sees those same dynamics now resurfacing in the coronavirus crisis. “We are seeing,” she told *Democracy Now* recently, “this very

predictable process that we see in the midst of every economic crisis, which is extreme corporate opportunism.”

In response to the pandemic, she said, Trump is “dusting off” the Wall Street wish list on everything from cutting and privatizing Social Security – by undermining its payroll tax revenue stream – to enriching the fossil fuel industry with huge bailouts. So how can we prevent a “shock doctrine” repeat?

For starters, we need to provide immediate support for those the coronavirus is hitting the hardest: the sick and those who care for them, as well as the workers who lose jobs and income.

But we can’t afford to stop there. We need, in effect, a “shock doctrine” in reverse. We need to seize the openings for change the coronavirus presents – and challenge the capacity of our rich and powerful to become ever richer and more powerful at the expense of everyone else.

One example: Within our increasingly coronavirus-ravaged economy, more and more families will be facing evictions. Progressive activists and officials are now quite rightfully calling for a coronavirus moratorium on evictions.

But we have a chance to go much further. Why not use this crisis to rewrite the eviction-enabling statutes that let corporate landlords enrich themselves at the expense of vulnerable families in the first place?

The coronavirus crisis also gives us an opportunity to use

the public purse to shift our economy towards greater equity and sustainability. The core of a reverse shock doctrine ought to be a massive public investment program designed to create good jobs, with a premium on projects that better position our economy to address climate change.

But we could also use these funds to reverse some of the inequality that makes economic crises so dangerous to begin with.

Various industries are already clamouring for federal loan guarantees and other bailouts to get them past the coronavirus crisis. For immediate bailout funds, policymakers should consider attaching pro-worker strings.

We could deny, for instance, tax-dollar support to private companies that pay their CEOs over 50 or 100 times what they pay their most typical workers. Moves in that direction would give top

execs an incentive to pay workers more – and exploit them less.

Back in mid-20th-century America, a time of much greater equality than we have now, corporate top execs only averaged 30 times more pay than their workers. That more equal America proved resilient enough to overcome a fearsome polio epidemic and prosper.

That more equal America, let’s remember, also emerged out of the back-to-back crises of the Great Depression and world war against fascism. Progressives seized the opportunity those crises created and changed the face of American society. Why can’t we? **CT**

Sarah Anderson & Sam Pizzigati co-edit Inequality.org at the Institute for Policy Studies. This op-ed was adapted from Inequality.org and distributed by www.otherwords.org.

n BINOY KAMPMARK

Freedom finally arrives for Chelsea Manning

CHELSEA Manning’s release from detention on March 12 by order of Virginia District Court judge Anthony Trenga had an air of oddness to it. “The court finds Ms Manning’s appearance before the Grand Jury is no longer needed, in light of which her detention no longer serves any coercive

purpose.”

Her detention had never served any coercive purpose as such – she remained unwilling to testify before an institution she questions as dangerous, secretive and oppressive. She steadfastly refused to answer any questions relating to WikiLeaks and Julian Assange. What her

detention has done is disturb her health and constitute an act of State harassment that ranks high in the annals of abuses of power.

In March 2019, the former military analyst was summoned to appear and give testimony to the Grand Jury convened in the Eastern District of Virginia. As the *New York Times* put it at the time, “there were multiple reasons to believe that the subpoena [forcing Manning to testify] is related to the investigation of Mr Assange”.

She challenged the legitimacy of the subpoena, though lost and was held for contempt. Having already been court martialled and sentenced, Manning saw little need having to go through another round of ear bashing interrogations.

“Chelsea,” submitted her support committee in a statement, “gave voluminous testimony during her court martial. She has stood by the truth of her prior statements, and there is no legitimate purpose to having her rehash them before a hostile grand jury.”

In May that year, Manning was granted a week of freedom until the next grand jury was convened. Again, she was found to be in civil contempt and remanded “to the custody of the Attorney General until such time as she purges herself of contempt or for the life of the Grand Jury”. Her refusal to purge herself of contempt after 30 days duly incurred a fine of \$500 per day, an amount that was increased to \$1,000 after 60 days.

As Nils Melzer, UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other

cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment noted at the time, such limitations on Manning’s liberty did “not constitute a circumscribed sanction for a specific offence, but an open-ended, progressively severe measure of coercion fulfilling all the constitutive elements of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment.”

The mental degradation inflicted by the process did almost



Chelsea Manning: Free at last!

achieve its worst. On March 11, Manning attempted to take her own life.

In attempting to battle her fine, Manning argued that the Court vacate the imposed sanctions, as they exceeded “their lawful functions as coercive” and were punitive in character. Her legal team had argued that she lacked savings, had seen “an uncertain speaking career ... abruptly halted by her incarceration, and is moving her few belongings into storage, as she can no longer afford to pay her rent”.

Financial records were duly shared with the court to make the case of “compromised earning capacity”.

Judge Trenga refused to bite.

Despite accepting the premise that detaining her had ceased any utility, the fines amounting to \$256,000 were not “punitive but rather necessary to the coercive purpose of the Court’s civil contempt order.”

The brutish episode has done much to confirm Manning’s views that the Grand Jury has powers that are needless, serve no purpose other than to vex those it seeks to ensnare, and remains an odd fit in a democratic state.

As Manning herself explained in a letter to Judge Trenga in May last year, “I object to this grand jury ... as an effort to frighten journalists and publishers, who serve a crucial public good. I have had these values since I was a child, and I’ve had years of confinement to reflect on them. For much of that time, I depended on survival on my values, my decisions, and my conscience. I will not abandon them now.”

The rosy standpoint – that such body served, in Robert Gilbert Johnson’s words, as “security to the accused against oppressive prosecution and as protector of the community against public malfeasance and corruption” – can be put to bed and strangled.

The very secrecy that supposedly protects the grand jurors against corrupt eyes and venal prosecutors has been used to ensure its flourishing. Prosecutors can be assured of compliance rather than challenge being, in District Judge Edward Becker’s sharp observation, “essentially controlled by the United States Attorney [as] his prosecutorial tool”.

Photo: Mattia Luigi Nappi/Wikimedia

The current crop of critics is also growing in number. According to Natasha Lennard, writing on the subpoena directed at Manning, “Prosecutors and other authorities use grand juries to map out political affiliations while sowing paranoia and discord.”

She quotes the views of civil rights attorney and Manning’s legal representative Moira Meltzer-Cohen. “While the federal grand jury purports to be a

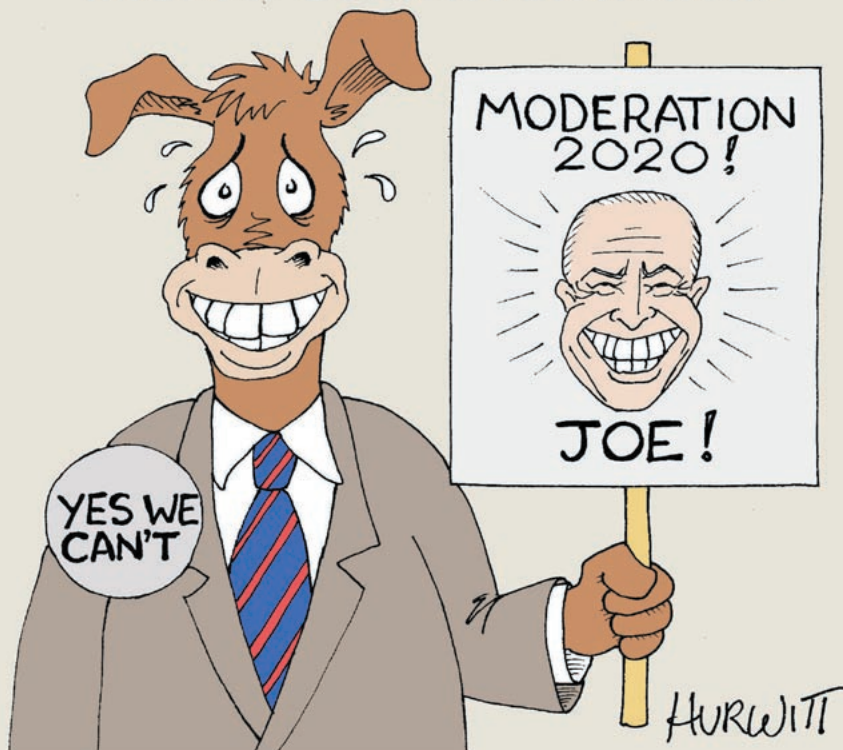
simple mechanism for investigating criminal offences, it can be – and historically has been – used by prosecutors to gather intelligence to which they are not entitled, for example about lawful and constitutionally protected political activity.” The US, being a galloping imperium, needs certain tools to rein in the dissidents and rabble rousers.

A funding campaign was commenced to ease Manning’s burden and, with \$267,002 raised,

met its goal handsomely. But the legacy of the grand jury, and the continuing prosecution of Assange and the WikiLeaks project, retain their menace and sting. **CT**

Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research and Asia-Pacific Research. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com

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- Albert Einstein**

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