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FINGERPRINTS
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Jonathan Cook – Page 14



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Aisdaire Hickson

END THE KILLING: Part of a counter-protest, for and against Israel, in London, May 25, 2024

► CRAIG MURRAY

Time to face the facts: *We are the bad guys*

In my book *Murder in Samarkand* I describe how as a British ambassador, when I discovered the full extent of our complicity in torture in the War on Terror, I thought it must be a rogue operation and all I had to do was make minis-

ters and senior officials aware and they would stop it.

When I was reprimanded and officially told that receipt of intelligence from torture in the “War on Terror” was approved from the prime minister and foreign secre-

tary down, and it became clear to me that there was a deliberate promoting of false intelligence narratives through torture, which exaggerated the Al Qaida threat to justify military policy in Afghanistan and Central Asia, my worldview was severely shaken.

Somehow I mentally compartmentalised this as an aberration, due to overreaction to 9/11 and the unique narcissism and viciousness of then Prime Minister Tony Blair.

I did not lose faith in Western democracy or the notion that the Western powers, on the whole, were

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a positive force when contrasted with other powers.

It is a hard thing to lose the entire belief system in which you were brought up — probably particularly hard if like me, you had a very happy life right from childhood and were highly successful within the terms of the governmental system.

I have however now finally shed the last of my illusions and I am obliged to acknowledge that the system of which I am a part — call it “the West,” “liberal democracy,” “capitalism,” “neo-liberalism,” “neo-conservatism,” “imperialism,” “the New World Order” — call it what you will in fact, it is a force for evil.

Gaza has been an important catalyst. I am not lacking in empathy, but my knowledge of the horrid butchery by the Western powers in Iraq, Afghanistan or Libya was an intellectual knowledge, not a lived experience.

Technology has brought us the Gaza genocide — which has so far killed fewer people than any of those earlier NATO-member perpetrated massacres — in gut wrenching detail.

I have just been looking at 75kg bags of mixed human meat handed over to relatives in lieu of an identifiable corpse, and am in shock.

That is not the worst we have seen in Gaza.

Mosul & Fallujah

If only the people of Mosul and Fallujah had had modern mobile phone technology, what horrors we would know.

Incidentally, I tried to find you some images of the massive US destruction of Mosul and Fallujah in 2002-2004 and Google won't give me any. It will, however, offer thou-



Elon Musk: \$100-billion man-child?

sands of images from fighting there with ISIL in 2017. Which rather underlines my point about the extraordinary lack of imagery of the Second Iraq War.

Of the current genocide in Gaza, again I found myself naively thinking at some point this will stop. That Western politicians would not in fact countenance the total destruction of Gaza.

That there would be a limit to the number of Palestinian civilian deaths they could accept, the number of UN facilities, schools and hospitals destroyed, the number of little children torn into shreds.

I thought that at some stage human decency must outweigh Zionist lobby cash.

But I was wrong.

The Ukrainian Attack on Kursk

The Ukrainian attack into Kursk also has a profound emotional resonance. The Battle of Kursk was arguably the most important blow struck against Nazi Germany, the largest tank battle in the history of the world by a wide margin.

The Ukrainian government has destroyed all the monuments to the Red Army which achieved this, and denigrates the Ukrainians who fought against fascism.

By contrast, it honours the very substantial Ukrainian components of the Nazi forces, including but not limited to, the Galician Division and their leaders.

Kursk is therefore a place of great symbolism for Ukraine to attack now into Russia, including with German artillery and armour.

German politicians seem to have an atavistic urge to attack Russia, and support the genocide of Palestinians to an astonishing degree.

Germany has effectively ended all freedom of speech on Palestine, banning conferences of distinguished speakers and making pro-Palestinian speech illegal. Germany has intervened on Israel's side in the genocide case before the ICJ, and intervened at the ICC to object to an arrest warrant against Netanyahu.

I do not know how many civilian dead would assuage German lust for the expiatory blood of Palestinians — 500,000? 1-million? 2-million?

Or perhaps 6-million?

The West are not the good guys. Our so-called “democratic systems” give us no ability to vote for anybody who may get into power who does not support the genocide and imperialist foreign policy.

It is not an accident and it is not genius that makes a man-child like Elon Musk worth \$100-billion. The power structures of society are deliberately designed by those with wealth to promote massive concentration of wealth in favour of those who already have it, exploiting and disempowering the rest of society.

The rise of the multi-billionaires

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is not a fluke. It is a plan, and the misallocation of more than adequate resources is the cause of poverty. The attempt to shift blame onto the desperate constituents of waves of immigration forced into life by Western destruction of foreign countries, is also systematic.

There is no longer any free space for dissent in the media to oppose any of this.

We are the Bad Guys. We resist our own governing systems, or we are complicit.

In the United Kingdom it falls to

the Celtic nations to try to break up the state which is a subordinate but important imperialist engine. The paths of resistance are various, depending where you are.

But find one and take one. **CT**

Craig Murray is an author, broadcaster and human rights activist. He was British ambassador to Uzbekistan from August 2002 to October 2004 and rector of the University of Dundee from 2007 to 2010. This article was first published at CraigMurray.org.uk.

mize that the scammers are, in fact, on the up-and-up; 5) the pay-off, in which the victim gets to experience some small early “wins”; and 6) the “hurrah”—a sudden manufactured crisis or change of events that creates a sense of urgency.

In this particular con game, every candidate dangled before us as some form of political savior—including Donald Trump and Kamala Harris—is part of a long-running, elaborate scam intended to persuade us that, despite all appearances to the contrary, we live in a constitutional republic.

In this way, the voters are the dupes, the candidates are the shells, and as usual, it's the Deep State rigging the outcome.

► JOHN & NISHA WHITEHEAD

Theocracy has become America's national religion

“You shall have no other gods before me.”—The Ten Commandments

“Christians, get out and vote, just this time. You won't have to do it anymore. Four more years, you know what, it will be fixed, it will be fine, you won't have to vote anymore.”—Donald Trump

Politics has become America's national religion.

While those on the Left have feared a religious coup by evangelical Christians on the Right, the danger has come from an altogether different direction: our constitutional republic has given way to a theocracy structured around the worship of a political savior.

For all intents and purposes, politics has become America's God.

Pay close attention to the political conventions for presidential candidates, and it becomes immediately evident that Americans have allowed themselves to be brainwashed into worshipping a political idol manufactured by the Deep State.

In a carefully choreographed scheme to strip the American citizenry of our power and our rights, “we the people” have become victims of the Deep State's confidence game.

Every confidence game has six essential stages: 1) the foundation to lay the groundwork for the illusion; 2) the approach whereby the victim is contacted; 3) the build-up to make the victim feel like they've got a vested interest in the outcome; 4) the corroboration (aided by third-party conspirators) to legiti-

Terrorist attacks, pandemics, economic uncertainty, national security threats, civil unrest: these are all manipulated crises that add to the sense of urgency and help us feel invested in the outcome of the various elections, but it doesn't change much in the long term.

No matter who wins this election, we'll all still be prisoners of the Deep State.

Indeed, the history of the United States is a testament to the old adage that liberty decreases as government (and government bureaucracy) grows. To put it another way, as government expands, liberty contracts.

When it comes to the power players that call the shots, there is no end to their voracious appetite for more: more money, more power, more control. Thus, since 9/11, the government's answer to every problem has been more government and less freedom.

Yet despite what some may

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think, the Constitution is no magical incantation against government wrongdoing. Indeed, it's only as effective as those who abide by it.

However, without courts willing to uphold the Constitution's provisions when government officials disregard it and a citizenry knowledgeable enough to be outraged when those provisions are undermined, the Constitution provides little to no protection against SWAT team raids, domestic surveillance, police shootings of unarmed citizens, indefinite detentions, and the like.

Unfortunately, the courts and the police have meshed in their thinking to such an extent that anything goes when it's done in the name of national security, crime fighting and terrorism.

Consequently, America no longer operates under a system of justice characterized by due process, an assumption of innocence, probable cause and clear prohibitions on government overreach and police abuse. Instead, our courts of justice have been transformed into courts of order, advocating for the government's interests, rather than championing the rights of the citizenry, as enshrined in the Constitution.

The rule of law, the US Constitution, once the map by which we navigated sometimes hostile government terrain, has been unceremoniously booted out of the runaway car that is the US government by the Deep State.

What we are dealing with is a rogue government whose policies are dictated more by greed than need. Making matters worse, "we the people" have become so gullible, so easily distracted, and so out-of-touch that we have ignored the warning signs all around us in

favor of political expediency in the form of electoral saviors.

Yet it's not just Americans who have given themselves over to political gods, however.

Evangelical Christians, seduced by electoral promises of power and religious domination, have become yet another tool in the politician's toolbox.

For instance, repeatedly conned into believing that Republican candidates from George W. Bush to Donald Trump will save the church, evangelical Christians have turned the ballot box into a referendum on morality. Yet in doing so, they have shown themselves to be as willing to support totalitarian tactics as those on the Left.

This was exactly what theologian Francis Schaeffer warned against: "We must not confuse the Kingdom of God with our country. To say it another way, 'We should not wrap Christianity in our national flag.'"

Equating religion and politics,

and allowing the ends to justify the means, only empowers tyrants and lays the groundwork for totalitarianism.

This way lies madness and the certain loss of our freedoms.

If you must vote, vote, but don't make the mistake of consecrating the ballot box.

As I make clear in my book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People* and in its fictional counterpart *The Erik Blair Diaries*, it doesn't matter what religion a particular candidate claims to subscribe to: all politicians answer to their own higher power, which is the Deep State. **CT**

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► GLOBAL NEWS SERVICES

South Korea plans new military exercise with US

South Korea and the US have announced yet another joint military drill. The drill will be explicitly aimed at countering the alleged nuclear threat from North Korea, and will involve the civilian administration of South Korea as well, spokespersons from both the US and South Korean mili-

taries said in a joint press conference on August 12.

South Korea's joint chiefs of staff declared that the drill, which will be part of the annual Ulchi Freedom Shield (UFS) exercises, will be the "first-ever government drill that simulates North Korea's [alleged] nuclear attack," the Korea Times

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reported.

The US spokesperson Ryan Don-ald did not specify the number of US troops to participate in the exer-cises. However, he confirmed that the “exercise will reflect realis-tic threats [coming allegedly from North Korea] across all domains.”

Nodutdol, a Korean diaspora and anti-imperialist organization based in the United States, has staged a response against escalating mili-tary drills by launching their new campaign, “US out of Korea”

Alleged threats from North Korea have been used by the US military to carry out various drills in the re-gion. The proposed drills would be the second of such exercises in less than three months. Between June 26 and 29, South Korea, Japan, and the US forces held a joint military exercise called “Freedom Edge,” which North Korea denounced as an attempt to create an Asian NATO. **CT**

➤ SONALI KOLHATKAR

What does arming Israel cost US citizens?

What will it take to end Israel’s genocide in Gaza? That’s the ques-tion confounding peo-ple of conscience all over the world since last October. After Israeli citi-zens, tax-paying residents of the United States have the most lever-age over the perpetrators of geno-cide given that the US is Israel’s biggest weapons supplier. What if our taxes were spent on the things we need rather than on the deadly weapons Israel is thirsting for?

For months, a majority of the US public has disapproved of Israel’s relentless mass killings. College students organized dramatic en-

campments to demand divestment from Israel. Protesters confronted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during his recent visit.

Yet, President Joe Biden has done little beyond paying lip service to address the public rage over Israel’s murderous assault. Now, his proxy, Vice President Kamala Harris, fac-es a similar calculus in running for the presidency: pull back US weap-ons from fueling genocide, as Unit-ed Nations experts have urged, or risk losing voters in a critical election.

Unfortunately for Palestinians and their allies, Harris appears to be taking a similar approach to

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Biden's: using strong terms to uplift Palestinian suffering, while affirming "her longstanding and unwavering commitment to the security of the State of Israel and the people of Israel."

When Biden was the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, he resolutely refused to budge on funding Israel, even if it meant he might lose the election. Harris may truly believe Palestinian suffering needs to end, but between now and November, she faces a critical choice: to pledge allegiance to Israel or to adhere to basic standards of morality that value human life.

But, given the stranglehold that Israel and its powerful lobby have on the US political system, Harris and her party may feel they risk more by alienating Israel than curbing its genocide.

And, given that Harris's main election opponent will be no better (or possibly worse) than Biden on Gaza, is there any significant leverage left to end Palestinian suffering?

Can the roughly 700,000 "uncommitted" Democratic voters who have threatened to withhold their ballots over Gaza be loud and strong enough to sway Harris to do the right thing? Perhaps. But she might call their bluff, weighing the aforementioned political risks and touting the dangers of a Donald Trump presidency on the domestic front.

The sad truth is that while Democrats and Republicans have had distinct domestic platforms, they have tended to be relatively united on foreign policy for decades. Democrats have often backed the same wars as their Republican opponents in the Middle East and antiwar organizers have struggled to stop

wars even where US soldiers were directly involved in killing civilians, let alone proxy wars such as Israel's Gaza genocide.

In 2007, then-Senator Barack Obama distinguished himself in the 2008 election as an "antiwar candidate" with respect to US involvement in Iraq. But he remained a pro-war candidate over the war in Afghanistan begun in 2001.

Still, Obama's talking points on Iraq offer a tantalizing way forward on Gaza in 2024. In combating his opponent Senator John McCain, Obama said, "For a fraction of what we're spending each year in Iraq, we could be giving our teachers more pay and more support, rebuilding our crumbling schools, and offering a tax credit to put a college degree within reach for anyone who wants one."

McCain's response was to call Obama "irresponsible," saying his ideas would jeopardize the U.S.'s national security. It didn't work. In 2008 Americans were tired of the two major wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and if they couldn't put an end to both, they would pick the candidate promising to end at least one and chose Obama. It wasn't until 2021 that the US war in Afghanistan finally ended when Biden pulled all troops out.

There is a direct line between the issue Americans care most about in this election and the Palestinian right to exist: the US economy. One of the most compelling arguments that could move the average American voter—who might be struggling far too much in their day-to-day life to care about Palestinians being massacred on the other side of the planet—is to remind ourselves of

the cost of backing Israel's devastating pogroms.

Americans spend billions each year to arm Israel. Since its founding, Israel has received more than \$300 billion in aid from US taxpayers.

The US spent more tax dollars on Israel in the past year—\$12.5 billion—than it did to fund a critically important federal agency such as the Environmental Protection Agency, whose \$9.2 billion budget for fiscal 2024 was cut by nearly \$1 billion from the year before.

Last year alone, taxpayers spent more on arming Israeli genocide than the annual funding shortfall for Pell Grants.

The federal government spent many times more money on Israel than the budget cuts facing the Department of Education.

Every year, Republicans use budgetary concerns to extract domestic spending cuts from the federal government on social programs that help Americans. Democrats could counter those demands by cutting Israel funding to pay for the things we are told we can't afford.

Palestinian suffering cannot be allowed to continue. If making cold, hard calculations comparing the cost of carrying out their annihilation versus the cost of funding American needs will help to move the needle away from Israel's genocide, then so be it.

Think tanks such as the National Priorities Project have, for years, made direct links between war spending and domestic social programs, saying "Funding for Militarism Compromises Our Welfare."

Senator Bernie Sanders has often questioned the size of military budgets compared to social spend-

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ing, saying in April 2024 that \$95 billion in supplemental military spending was “a lot of money—especially at a time when many Americans are unable to afford their rent or pay their mortgages, pay their bills, afford healthcare, [and] are struggling with student debt or many other needs.”

US politicians have been able to undercut such logic by touting vague notions of “national security” in response. But that excuse won’t work with respect to Israel. Let Israel worry about its “national security” while Americans focus on funding our needs.

Not only could antiwar and pro-Palestinian activists center the financial costs of gifting weapons to Israel as an election issue, but Harris could use it as political cover for

doing the morally right thing.

Such an approach could have more resonance in an election year than hoping enough American voters will care about the fate of Palestinians to withhold votes from a liberal Democrat—especially when faced with the prospect of a fascist authoritarian. **CT**

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for the nation’s public schools has “barely increased” over the past decade, rising just an average 1 percent a year after inflation. Over the same time span, “state spending on tax breaks and subsidies for private schools has skyrocketed by 408 percent.”

The overall impact? America’s average public school teachers, points out Senator Bernie Sanders, the committee chair, are making almost \$100 less weekly, after taking inflation into account, than they did 28 years ago.

Public school funding “has become so absurd,” says Sanders, that just four hedge fund managers on Wall Street “made more money last year” than all the kindergarten teachers in America.

➤ SAM PIZZIGATI

Is the rich-friendly tax tide finally turning?

The United States essentially invented public education. Back in the 1780s, notes the Center on Education Policy, federal legislation “granted federal lands to new states and set aside a portion of those lands to be used to fund public schools.” By the 18th-century’s close, most Americans had embraced the notion of “using public funds to support public schooling for the common good.”

In the mid-20th-century, amid growing levels of economic equality, that public financial support for public schools would expand might-

ily. The results would be impressive. By 1970, graduation rates from American high schools – institutions, notes historian Claudia Goldin, themselves “rooted in egalitarianism” – had quadrupled over 1920 levels.

But that era of growing equality and expanding public education would start fading in the 1970s. Over recent years, a new US Senate report makes clear, that fade has only intensified.

In fact, details this Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee report, state funding

What’s going on here? Public school teachers haven’t run into a stretch of horribly bad luck. They’ve run into a gang of billionaires who’ve been underwriting a massive drive to decouple the “public” from “education.” The policy movers and shakers these deep pockets are bankrolling – outfits like the DeVos Family Foundation and the Koch Foundation – are funding legislative and lobbying campaigns that are earmarking ever more public tax dollars to private schools.

The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee’s new report, *By the Wealthy, for the Wealthy: The Coordinated Attacks on Public Education in the United States*, chillingly exposes this carefully plotted anti-public education offensive.

“Across the nation,” the report reads, “conservative billionaires are funding a coordinated effort to dismantle public education to pay

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for private school vouchers that largely benefit wealthy families and enable corporations to avoid paying their fair share of taxes.”

An “unprecedented number of states,” the report adds, have since 2020 “expanded their private school vouchers, many providing universal access to these policies for the first time.” In the process, these states have drained “hundreds of millions of dollars” from their state budgets and public school systems.

No state has been doing more than Arizona to put public tax dollars into private schools that can pick the public they allow to enroll. Two years ago, Arizona enacted America’s first “universal-eligibility” private school voucher program. Some 60 percent of the families claiming an Arizona voucher credit, an Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy study finds, have incomes over \$200,000.

In other states, voucher dollars tilt even more severely toward the top. Households with over \$200,000 in annual income make up 87 percent of families getting tax dollars for private-school tuition in Virginia and 99 percent in Louisiana.

Voucher advocates, a study last year from the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Education Law Center observed, like to claim that states can save money educating students via vouchers for private school tuition. But that claim “ignores numerous realities.” Among them: Vouchers “concentrate higher-need, more-costly-to-educate students in already-underfunded public schools.”

Public schools, adds the Senate’s By the Wealthy, for the Wealthy report, “must serve and educate all students.” Private schools – “even those that receive public funding through private school vouchers” – can deny admission to those children who might complicate whatever they see as their mission. Private schools accepting taxpayer-funded vouchers, for instance, don’t have to provide the same rights and



TAXING: Under Gov Tim Walz, Minnesota became the first state to add a capital gains tax surcharge on high earners.

services that public schools must by law provide to students with disabilities.

Has the political momentum behind privatising public education now become too strong to stop? Maybe not. The past few weeks have seen a new dynamic enter onto the political scene. The governor of the state that’s been most boldly advancing public education has just ascended onto the national political stage.

That governor, Minnesota’s Tim Walz, has signed into state law a host of measures that public school educators are enthusiastically applauding. In Minnesota, notes Na-

tional Education Association president Becky Pringle, Walz has been a powerful advocate for making sure “our students have the resources they need to succeed.”

The Walz administration, Pringle makes clear, has done everything from increasing “education spending by billions of dollars” to putting in place “paid family and medical leave for all families.” And he’s successfully promoted “legislation providing free school meals to every Minnesota student, ensuring no child will have to learn on an empty stomach.”

The funding for programmes like these has come from taxes – but taxes with a difference. Under Walz, as the conservative-leaning Tax Foundation complains, Minnesota has been raising tax levies on the state’s most affluent. Walz has signed into law an array of tax increases “focused on businesses and high earners.”

All states with income taxes except Minnesota, the Tax Foundation points out, either tax the long-term capital gains income of high earners at a lower or same rate as paycheck income. Under Walz, Minnesota became the first state to add a surtax onto an existing capital gains tax that high earners pay. Walz also gave the green light to legislation that trims the tax benefits Minnesota’s wealthiest can claim from standard and itemized tax deductions.

Walz has, to be sure, cut some taxes as well. But those cuts are benefiting only moderate- and low-income Minnesotans. Many parents will be saving through a new child care tax credit. Minnesotan seniors will benefit from a new tax

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exemption for most Social Security income.

On the corporate side of the tax ledger, legislation that Walz has signed into law is helping Minnesota tax more of the international business income that the state's biggest companies are collecting.

Might the spirit of Minnesota's new tax-the-rich action start spreading? Some of America's wealthiest are doing their best to avoid that

possibility. They're helping underwrite an ambitious Tax Foundation high school and college curriculum project on taxes.

This effort, relates journalist Katya Schwenk, has a most challenging goal: convincing students from average-income families that the last thing they should "want to do is make sure the rich and powerful pay their fair share" at tax time.

In much of today's America, that convincing figures to be a tough sell. In Florida, for instance, average teachers pay an overall effective

tax rate of 9.5 percent. The effective rate that Florida's richest 1 percent – a cohort that averages \$3.3 million in annual income – enjoy: a mere 2.7 percent . **CT**

Sam Pizzigati, an Institute for Policy Studies associate fellow, co-edits Inequality.org. His latest books include The Case for a Maximum Wage and The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970.

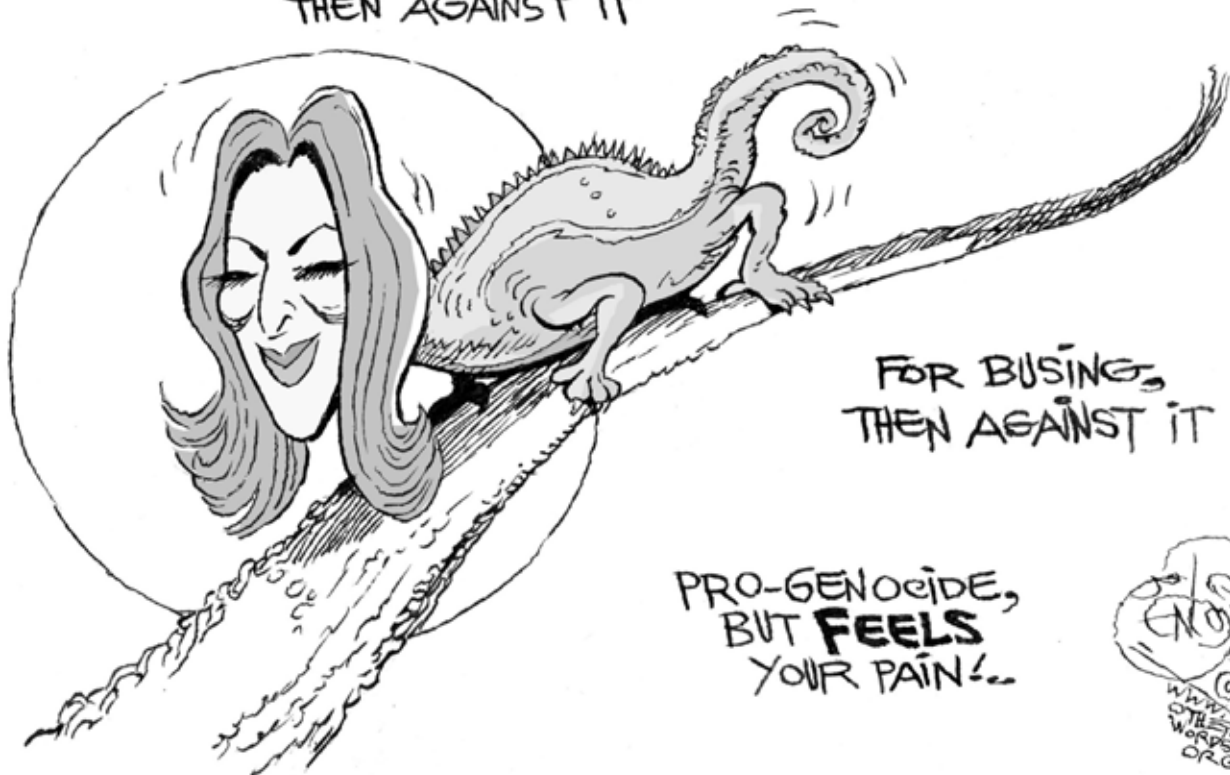
BENDIB'S WORLD

KHALIL BENDIB

KAMELEON HARRIS:

PRO-MEDICARE FOR ALL,
THEN AGAINST IT

AGAINST FRACKING,
THEN FOR IT



► JONATHAN COOK

Starmers fingerprints are all over UK race riots

Islamophobia is so bipartisan, so normalised, in Britain that BBC reporters refer to anti-Muslim pogromists as 'pro-British protesters'

Imagine this scene, if you can. For several days, violent mobs have massed in the centre of British cities and clashed with police in an attempt to reach synagogues to attack them.

Draped in England flags and Union Jacks, and armed with cricket bats and metal rods, the trouble-makers have dismantled garden walls to throw bricks.

Gangs have swept through residential areas where Jews are known to live, smashing windows and trying to break down doors. The rioters attacked and torched a hotel identified as housing Jewish asylum seekers, an act that could have burned alive the occupants.

For days, the media and politicians have chiefly referred to these events as far-right "thuggery" and spoken of the need to restore law and order.

In the midst of all this, a young Jewish MP is invited onto a major morning TV show to talk about the unfolding events. When she argues that these attacks need to be clearly identified as racist and antisemitic, one of the show's presenters barks and ridicules her.

Close by, two white men, a former cabinet minister and an executive at one of the UK's largest newspapers, are seen openly laughing at her.

Oh, and if this isn't all getting

too fanciful, the TV presenter who mocks the young MP is the husband of the Home Secretary responsible for policing these events.

The scenario is so hideously outrageous no one can conceive of it. But it is exactly what took place on August 5 – except that the mob wasn't targeting Jews, but Muslims; the young MP was not Jewish but

but in a London TV studio.

Islamophobia is so bipartisan in today's Britain that BBC reporters on at least two occasions referred to the mobs chanting anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant slogans as "pro-British protesters."

The chief focus of nightly news has not been the anti-Muslim racism driving the mob, or the resemblance of the riots to pogroms. Instead, it has highlighted the physical threats faced by the police, the rise of the far-right, the violence and disorder, and the need for a firm response from the police and courts.

The trigger for the riots was disinformation: that three small girls stabbed to death in Southport on 29 July had been killed by a Muslim asylum seeker. In fact, the suspected killer was born in Cardiff to Rwandan parents and is not Muslim.

But politicians and the media have contributed their own forms of disinformation.

Media coverage has mostly assisted – and echoed – the rioters' racist agenda by conflating the violent targeting of long-settled Muslim communities with general concerns about "illegal" immigration. The reporting has turned "immigrant" and "Muslim" into synonyms just as



Zarah Sultana, the country's most high-profile Muslim MP; and her demand was not that the violence be identified as antisemitic but as Islamophobic.

It all sounds a lot more plausible now, I'm guessing. Welcome to a Britain that wears its Islamophobia proudly, and not just on the streets of Bolton, Bristol or Birmingham,



Muslim MP Zarah Sultana, left, was 'barracked and jeered' by Ed Balls, husband of the Home Secretary Yvette Cooper, his co-presenter Kate Garraway and guest pundits Ben Bradshaw and Andrew Pierce on ITV's Good Morning Britain, for arguing that the riots needed to be identified as Islamophobic



Above: Sultana responds to Balls. Right: Former Labour MP Ben Bradshaw and the *Daily Mail*'s Andrew Pierce took part in the programme, which received more than 8,000 complaints to Ofcom, the UK government's communications regulator

readily as it earlier turned “terrorist” and “Muslim” into synonyms.

And for much the same reason.

In doing so, politicians and the media have once again played into the hands of the far-right mob they are seemingly denouncing.

Or seen another way, the mob is playing into the hands of the media and politicians who claim they want calm to prevail while continuing to stir up tensions.

Muslim youth who turned out to defend their homes, as police struggled to cope with the onslaught, were labelled “counter-protesters.” It was as if this was simply a clash between two groups with conflicting grievances, with the police – and the British state – caught in the middle.

Again, can we imagine rioting, hate-filled pogromists trying to burn alive Jews being described as

“protesters,” let alone “pro-British?”

None of this has come out of nowhere. The current anti-Muslim mood has been stoked by both sides of the political aisle for years.

The British establishment has every incentive to continue channeling public anger over economic issues – such as shortages of jobs and housing, crumbling services and the rocketing cost of living – onto scapegoats, such as immigrants,

asylum seekers and Muslims.

Were it not doing so, it might be much easier for the public to identify who are the true culprits – an establishment that has been pushing endless austerity policies while siphoning off the common wealth.

The case against the right is easily made.

Sayeeda Warsi, a Conservative peer and former cabinet minister, has been warning for more than a decade that her party is filled with Muslim-hating bigots, among both the wider membership and senior officials.

She declared back in 2019: “It does feel like I’m in an abusive relationship at the moment... It’s not healthy for me to be there any more with the Conservative party.”

A recent poll found that more than half of Tory party members believe Islam is a threat to what was termed a “British way of life” - far above the wider public.

Such racism stretches from the top to the bottom of the party.

Boris Johnson, whose novel Seventy-Two Virgins compared veiled Muslim women to letterboxes, won endorsement in his prime ministerial run from far-right figures such as Tommy Robinson, who has been fomenting the current wave of riots from a Cyprus hideaway.

Warsi was especially critical of Michael Gove, one of the key actors in successive Conservative governments. She observed: “I think Michael’s view is there is no such thing as a non-problematic Muslim.”

That may explain why the party has repeatedly refused to address proven and rampant Islamophobia within its ranks. For example, officials quietly reinstated 15 councillors suspended over extreme Islamophobic comments once the furore had died down.

Even when the leadership was eventually cornered into agreeing to an independent inquiry into an-

ti-Muslim bigotry in the party, it was quickly watered down, becoming a “general inquiry into prejudice of all kinds.”

In February, shortly after Lee Anderson stepped down as the Conservative party’s deputy chairman, he declared that “Islamists” had “got control of” Sadiq Khan, London’s mayor. The mayor, Anderson added,



Shortly after stepping down as the Conservative Party's deputy chairman, Lee Ashworth declared that London mayor Sadiq Khan had “given our capital city away to his mates”

had “given our capital city away to his mates.”

Anderson was suspended from the Tory parliamentary party when he refused to apologise. But even then, Tory leaders, including the then-prime minister, Rishi Sunak, and his deputy, Oliver Dowden, refused to label Anderson’s comments as racist or Islamophobic.

Dowden suggested only that Anderson had used the “wrong words.”

Sunak ignored Anderson’s inflammatory, hate-filled rhetoric al-

together, redirecting public ire instead towards marches against Israel’s slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza – or what he described as a supposed “explosion in prejudice and antisemitism.”

Anderson soon defected to the even more aggressively anti-immigrant Reform party of Nigel Farage.

Suella Braverman, a former home secretary, similarly proclaimed: “The truth is that the Islamists, the extremists and the antisemites are in charge now.”

Rightwing media, from GB News to the *Daily Mail*, have regularly echoed such sentiments, comparing immigrants – invariably implied to be Muslims – as a “swarm” flooding Britain’s borders, taking away jobs and housing.

Even the body charged with identifying and protecting ethnic minorities made an all-too-obvious exception in the case of institutional Islamophobia.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission had been only too keen to investigate the Labour Party over what turned out to be largely evidence-free claims of antisemitism against its members.

But the same body has steadfastly refused to carry out a similar investigation into well-documented Islamophobia in the Tory Party, despite receiving a dossier from the Muslim Council of Britain containing allegations of bigotry from 300 figures in the party.

Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer is now leading a high-profile crackdown on the violence of the far-right by setting up a “standing army” of anti-riot police squads and pressing for speedy and tough sentencing.

His supporters trumpeted his success in his first major test as prime minister last week, when expected riots on August 7 failed to

materialise.

But since becoming Labour leader four years ago, Starmer has played a direct role in fuelling the anti-Muslim climate, too, a climate that encouraged the far-right out onto the streets.

In his campaign for No 10, he made a conscious decision to compete with the Tories on the same political terrain, from “illegal immigration” to patriotism and law and order.

That political terrain was shaped by a New Labour foreign policy 20 years ago that has had far-reaching domestic repercussions, stigmatising British Muslims as un-British, disloyal and prone to terrorism.

In lockstep with the United States, the Labour government of Tony Blair waged a brutal, illegal war on Iraq in 2003 that left more than 1 million Iraqis dead and many millions more homeless. Still more were dragged off to black sites to be tortured.

Along with a violent and prolonged occupation of Afghanistan by the US and UK, the Iraq invasion triggered regional chaos and spawned new and nihilistic forms of Islamist militancy, particularly in the form of the Islamic State group.

Blair’s brutalising crusade in the Middle East – often framed by him as a “clash of civilisations” – was bound to alienate many British Muslims and radicalise a tiny number of them into a similar nihilism.

In response, Labour introduced a so-called Prevent strategy that cynically focused on the threat from Muslims and conflated an entirely explicable disenchantment with British foreign policy with a supposedly inexplicable and inherently violent tendency within Islam.

Starmer modelled his own leadership on Blair’s and recruited many of the same advisors.

As a result, he was soon obsessively aping the Conservatives in a bid to win back the so-called Red Wall vote. The loss of urban areas of northern England in the 2019 general election to the Tories was in large part down to Labour’s muddled position on Brexit, for which Starmer was chiefly responsible.

Starmer tacked firmly rightwards on immigration, chasing after the Conservative Party as it veered even further to the right in



For decades Jeremy Corbyn had been celebrated by the Labour left – and reviled by the Labour right – for his support for anti-colonial struggles such as that of Palestine

its attempt to head off an electoral insurgency from Farage’s Reform Party.

As opposition leader, Starmer echoed the Tories in fixating on “stopping the small boats” and “smashing the smuggling gangs”. The subtext was that the migrants and asylum seekers fleeing the very troubles the UK had inflamed in the Middle East were a threat to Britain’s “way of life”.

It was a reinvention of the “clash of civilisations” discourse Blair had

championed.

Days before polling in last month’s general election, Starmer went one further, promoting dog-whistle racism of the kind more usually associated with the Tories.

The Labour leader singled out Britain’s Bangladeshi community as one where he would act more decisively in carrying out deportations. “At the moment, people coming from countries like Bangladesh are not being removed,” he told an audience of *Sun* readers.

But there was another, even more cynical reason Starmer made racial and sectarian politics central to his campaign. He was desperate not only to win over the Tory vote but to crush the Labour left and its political agenda.

For decades, Jeremy Corbyn, his predecessor, had been celebrated by the Labour left – and reviled by the Labour right – for his anti-racist politics and his support for anti-colonial struggles such as that of the Palestinians.

For his troubles, Corbyn was roundly smeared by the British political and media establishment in every way possible. But it was the charge of antisemitism – and its conflation with anything more than the mildest criticism of Israel – that proved the most damaging.

The same Equality Commission that resolutely refused to investigate the Tories over Islamophobia hurried to bolster the smears of Corbyn’s Labour Party as institutionally antisemitic, even though the body struggled to produce any evidence.

With the chameleon-like Starmer, it is difficult to divine any certain political convictions. But it is clear he was not going to risk facing the same fate. The party’s leftwingers, including Corbyn, were hurriedly purged, as was anything that

smacked of a left agenda.

Starmer became a rabid cheerleader for Nato and its wars, and a champion of Israel – even after 7 October, when it cut off food and water to the 2.3 million people of Gaza in what the world’s highest court would soon be calling a “plausible” genocide.

By then, Starmer’s war on the left and its politics was well-advanced.

The nature of that factional attack was already clear in April 2020, shortly after Starmer had taken over Labour’s reins, when an embarrassing internal party report was leaked.

Among many other things, it showed how, during Corbyn’s leadership, the Labour right had sought to damage him and his supporters using antisemitism smears as the weapon of choice.

Still finding his feet as leader, and trying to head off an internal revolt over the revelations, Starmer appointed Martin Forde KC to carry out an independent review of the leak.

After long delays, largely caused by obstructions from party officials, Forde published his findings in the summer of 2022. He identified what he called a “hierarchy of racism”, in which the Labour right had sought to weaponise antisemitism against the left – including against its Black and Asian members.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Labour members from ethnic minorities tend to share more political ground with Corbyn and the Labour left, especially in their strong opposition to racism and the decades-long colonial oppression of the Palestinians.

That was seen by the Labour right and Starmer as a threat – and one they were determined to snuff out.

An Al Jazeera documentary broadcast in September 2022, drawing on more documents than Forde

had managed to secure, discovered rampant Islamophobia from Starmer’s officials and the Labour right.

One of the victims of Starmer’s purges of the left described to the programme-makers Labour’s recent years as a “criminal conspiracy against its members.”

Al Jazeera’s investigation found that Muslim party members, including local councillors, had been firmly in the Labour right’s crosshairs.

Party officials were revealed to



A campaign to humiliate and undermine Diane Abbott, the first black woman MP and a Corbyn ally, dragged on for weeks until being resolved begrudgingly in her favour

have colluded in concealing law-breaking, covert surveillance and data collection on Muslim members, as a prelude to suspending the entire London constituency of Newham, apparently because there were concerns about it being dominated by the local Asian community.

Ethnic minority staff in the Labour head office who raised complaints about these discriminatory actions were dismissed from their jobs.

Labour continued its visible purg-

es right up to the July general election, cynically excluding and removing leftwing, Black and Muslim candidates at the last minute, so there would be no time to challenge the decision.

The highest-profile victim was Faiza Shaheen, an economist who had already been chosen as the parliamentary candidate for Chingford and Woodford Green until she was ditched very publicly and uncereemoniously. Questioned about the decision, Starmer said he wanted only the “highest quality candidates.”

A similar campaign to humiliate and undermine Diane Abbott, the first black woman MP and a Corbyn ally, dragged on for weeks before being resolved begrudgingly in her favour.

The barely veiled insinuation yet again was that Muslim and Black candidates could not be trusted, that they were suspect.

Notably too, it later emerged that Starmer’s officials had sent a threatening legal letter to Forde after he had spoken to Al Jazeera about racism within the party. Forde concluded it was a barely veiled attempt to “silence” him.

Shortly after winning an overwhelming parliamentary majority on one of Labour’s lowest-ever vote-shares, Starmer effectively suspended a handful of leftwing MPs from the parliamentary party - as he earlier had done to Corbyn. Their offence was voting to end child poverty.

Most visible was Zarah Sultana, the young Muslim MP who had been barracked and jeered on Good Morning Britain for arguing that the riots needed to be identified as Islamophobic.

Though it has been widely understood that Starmer was determined to crush the Labour left, the inevitable consequences of that policy – es-

pecially in relation to large sections of Britain's Muslim population – have been far less examined.

One of the ways Starmer distanced himself from Corbyn and the left was to echo Israel and the British right in redefining anti-Zionism as antisemitism.

That is, he has smeared those who take the same view as the judges of the World Court that Israel is an apartheid state and one that has assigned Palestinians inferior rights based on their ethnicity.

He has also vilified those who believe Israel's slaughter in Gaza is the logical endpoint for a racist apartheid state unwilling to make peace with the Palestinians.

Two groups in particular have felt the full force of this conflation of opposition to Israel's crimes against the Palestinians – namely, anti-Zionism – and antisemitism.

One is Labour's leftwing Jews. The party has assiduously tried to conceal their existence from public view because they all too obviously disrupt its antisemitism narrative. Proportionally, the largest group expelled and suspended from Labour have been Jews critical of Israel.

But conversely, and even more dangerously, Starmer's conflation has served to visibly tar Muslims in general as antisemitic, given that they are the most vocal and united community in opposing Israel's "plausible" genocide in Gaza.

Starmer's denunciations of anti-Zionists as Jew haters have – whether intentionally or not – readily bolstered a poisonous caricature the Tories have been promoting of Islam as a religion inherently hateful and violent.

Israel's genocidal war on Gaza over the past 10 months – and the horrified reactions of millions of Britons to the slaughter – has brought the problem

with Starmer's approach into especially sharp relief.

The Labour leader may have eschewed the incendiary rhetoric of Braverman, who denounced as "hate marches" the mass, peaceful protests against the slaughter. But he has subtly echoed her sentiments.

In rejecting the left's anti-racism and anti-colonialism, he has had to prioritise the interests of a genocidal foreign state, Israel, over the concerns of Israel's critics.



Starmer's words have breathed life into the allegations of 'two-tier' policing, in which the police are so afraid to take on the Muslim community that the far-right needs to do their job for them

And to make his stance appear less ignoble, he has tended, like the Tories, to gloss over the diverse racial composition of those opposing the slaughter.

The goal has been to try to discredit the marches by obscuring the fact that they have multiracial support, that they have been peaceful, that many Jews have taken a prominent part and that their message is against genocide and apartheid and in favour of a ceasefire.

Instead, Starmer's approach has

insinuated that domestic Muslim extremists are shaping the nature of the protests through chants and behaviour that are likely to make Jews fearful.

The Labour leader has claimed to "see hate marching side by side with calls for peace, people who hate Jews hiding behind people who support the just cause of a Palestinian state".

It is a lawyerly, coded version of the racist right's "Londonistan" – the supposed takeover of the UK's capital by Muslims – and the smears, now even from government advisors, that the weekly marches in solidarity with Gaza's suffering are turning British cities into "no-go zones" for Jews.

Starmer's words – whether by design or not – have breathed life into the racist right's preposterous allegation of "two-tier policing", in which the police are supposedly so afraid to take on the Muslim community that the far-right needs to do their job for them.

The reality of that two-tier policing was only too visible last month when a video showed a police officer stamping on the head of a tasered and inert Muslim man after a fracas at Manchester airport. The man's brother was shown being assaulted while his hands were behind his head, and their grandmother reports having been tasered too.

As with the Tories, Starmer's unstinting support for Israel since 7 October – and his framing of protests against the slaughter as threatening to Jewish communities – has created an undeclared, implicit loyalty test. One that assumes most British Jews are patriots while casting suspicion on British Muslims that they need to prove they are not extremists or potential terrorists.

Both the main parties appear to

believe it is fine for British Jews to cheerlead their co-religionists in Israel as the Israeli army bombs and starves Palestinian children in Gaza – and even that there is nothing wrong with some of them heading to the Middle East to take a direct part in the killing.

But the two parties also insinuate that it may be disloyal for Muslims to march in solidarity with their co-religionists in Gaza, even as they are being butchered by Israel, or vociferously oppose decades of belligerent Israeli occupation and siege that the world's highest court has ruled are illegal.

In other words, Starmer has tacitly endorsed a logic that views the waving of a Palestinian flag at a demonstration as more dangerous and alien to British values than joining a foreign army to commit mass murder – or, let us note, than sending weapons to that army for it to slaughter civilians.

There are indications that Starmer's alienation of large parts of the Muslim community – intimating that its views on Gaza equate to "extremism" – may have been intentional and designed to impress voters on the right.

A "senior Labour source" told reporters that the party welcomed the resignation of dozens of councillors from Labour over Starmer's comments in support of Israel starving Gaza's population. It was, the source said, the party "shaking off the fleas."

A related narrative was advanced by Starmer loyalists ousted in last month's general election by leftwing independents, including Corbyn,



Jonathan Ashworth, who lost his seat at July's general election, accused supporters of his Muslim rival of failing to abide by democratic norms, through what he termed as 'vitriol' 'bullying,' and 'intimidation'

running on a platform to stop the slaughter in Gaza.

Jonathan Ashworth, who lost his Leicester South seat to Shokat Adam at July's general election, accused supporters of his Muslim rival of failing to abide by democratic norms – through what Ashworth has termed "vitriol", "bullying", and "intimidation."

Palestinian flags have been all too visible at what politicians and the media have been calling "counter-demonstrations" – anti-fascists reclaiming the streets from the far-right, as they did on August 7.

The Labour right, which like

Starmer is keen to see the left disappear from British politics, had insisted that anti-racists stay at home to let the police deal with the racist rioters.

But it is precisely because the anti-racist left has been forced onto the back foot through a bipartisan campaign of smears – painting it as extreme, antisemitic, un-British, traitorous – that the racist right has felt emboldened to show who is in charge. Starmer is now determined to put the genie he helped release back into the bottle through sheer brute force, using the police and courts.

There is every reason to fear, given Starmer's campaign of smears against the left and authoritarian purges within his party, that his new government is more than capable of deploying the same heavy hand against the so-called "counter-demonstrators", however peaceful.

The Labour leader believes he reached power by smearing and crushing the anti-racist left, by driving it into the shadows.

Now, as prime minister, he may yet decide it is time to roll out the same programme across the nation.

CT

Jonathan Cook is an award-winning British journalist, who was based in Nazareth, Israel, for 20 years before returning to the UK in 2021. The author of three books on the Israel-Palestine conflict, Cook won the Martha Gelhorn Special Prize for Journalism in 2011. He previously worked for Britain's Guardian and Observer newspapers. His website is www.jonathan-cook.net

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► CHRIS HEDGES

Thou shalt not commit genocide

Opposing genocide is a moral – not a political – choice

There is only one way to end the ongoing genocide in Gaza. It is not through bilateral negotiations. Israel has amply demonstrated, including with the assassination of the lead Hamas negotiator, Ismail Haniyeh, that it has no interest in a permanent ceasefire. The only way for Israel's genocide of the Palestinians to be halted is for the US to end all weapons shipments to Israel. And the only way this will take place is if enough Americans

make clear they have no intention of supporting any presidential ticket or any political party that fuels this genocide.

The arguments against a boycott of the two ruling parties are familiar: It will ensure the election of Donald Trump. Kamala Harris has rhetorically shown more compassion than Joe Biden. There are not enough of us to have an impact. We can work within the Democratic Party. The Israel lobby, especially the American Israel Public Af-

fairs Committee (AIPAC), which owns most members of Congress, is too powerful. Negotiations will eventually achieve a cessation of the slaughter.

In short, we are impotent and must surrender our agency to sustain a project of mass killing. We must accept as normal governance the shipment of hundreds of millions of dollars in military aid to an apartheid state, the use of vetoes at the UN Security Council to protect Israel and the active obstruction of

international efforts to end mass murder. We have no choice.

Genocide, the internationally recognised crime of crimes, is not a policy issue. It cannot be equated with trade deals, infrastructure bills, charter schools or immigration. It is a moral issue. It is about the eradication of a people. Any surrender to genocide condemns us as a nation and as a species. It plunges the global society one step closer to barbarity. It eviscerates the rule of law and mocks every fundamental value we claim to honour. It is in a category by itself. And to not, with every fibre of our being, combat genocide is to be complicit in what Hannah Arendt defines as “radical evil,” the evil where human beings, as human beings, are rendered superfluous.

The plethora of Holocaust studies should have made this indelible point. But Holocaust studies were hijacked by Zionists. They insist that the Holocaust is unique, that it is somehow set apart from human nature and human history. Jews are deified as eternal victims of anti-Semitism. Nazis are endowed with a special kind of inhumanity. Israel, as the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington concludes, is the solution. The Holocaust was one of several genocides carried out in the 19th- and 20th-centuries. But historical context is ignored and with it our understanding of the dynamics of mass extermination.

The fundamental lesson of the Holocaust, which writers such as Primo Levi stress, is that we can all become willing executioners. It takes very little. We can all become complicit, if only through indifference and apathy, in evil.

“Monsters exist,” Levi, who survived Auschwitz, writes, “but they are too few in number to be tru-

Are these the kinds of allies we want to empower? Is this behaviour we want to embrace? What message does this send to the rest of the world?

ly dangerous. More dangerous are the common men, the functionaries ready to believe and to act without asking questions.”

To confront evil – even if there is no chance of success – keeps alive our humanity and dignity. It allows us, as Vaclav Havel writes in *The Power of the Powerless*, to live in truth, a truth the powerful do not want spoken and seek to suppress. It provides a guiding light to those who come after us. It tells the victims they are not alone. It is “humanity’s revolt against an enforced position” and an “attempt to regain control over one’s sense of responsibility.”

What does it say about us if we accept a world where we arm and fund a nation that kills and wounds hundreds of innocents a day?

What does it say about us if we support an orchestrated famine and the poisoning of the water supply where the polio virus has been detected, meaning tens of thousands will get sick and many will die?

What does it say about us if we permit for 10 months the bombing of refugee camps, hospitals, villages and cities to wipe out families and force survivors to camp out in the open or find shelter in crude tents?

What does it say about us when we accept the murder of 16,456 children, although this is surely an undercount?

What does it say about us when we watch Israel escalate attacks on United Nations facilities, schools – including the Al-Tabaen school in

Gaza City, where over 100 Palestinians were killed while performing the Fajr, or dawn prayers – and other emergency shelters?

What does it say about us when we permit Israel to use Palestinians as human shields by forcing handcuffed civilians, including children and the elderly, to enter potentially booby-trapped tunnels and buildings in advance of Israeli troops, at times dressed in Israeli military uniforms?

What does it say about us when we support politicians and soldiers who defend the rape and torture of prisoners?

Are these the kinds of allies we want to empower? Is this behaviour we want to embrace? What message does this send to the rest of the world?

If we do not hold fast to moral imperatives, we are doomed. Evil will triumph. It means there is no right and wrong. It means anything, including mass murder, is permissible. Protestors outside the Democratic National Convention at the United Center in Chicago demand an end to the genocide and US aid to Israel, but inside we are fed a sickening conformity. Hope lies in the streets.

A moral stance always has a cost. If there is no cost, it is not moral. It is merely conventional belief.

“But what of the price of peace?” the radical Catholic priest Daniel Berrigan, who was sent to federal prison for burning draft records during the war in Vietnam, asks in his book *No Bars to Manhood*:

“I think of the good, decent, peace-loving people I have known by the thousands, and I wonder. How many of them are so afflicted with the wasting disease of normalcy that, even as they declare for the peace, their hands reach out with

an instinctive spasm in the direction of their comforts, their home, their security, their income, their future, their plans – that five-year plan of studies, that ten-year plan of professional status, that twenty-year plan of family growth and unity, that fifty-year plan of decent life and honourable natural demise. ‘Of course, let us have the peace,’ we cry, ‘but at the same time let us have normalcy, let us lose nothing, let our lives stand intact, let us know neither prison nor ill repute nor disruption of ties.’ And because we must encompass this and protect that, and because at all costs – at all costs – our hopes must march on schedule, and because it is unheard of that in the name of peace a sword should fall, disjoining that fine and cunning web that our lives have woven, because it is unheard of that good men should suffer injustice or families be sundered or good repute be lost – because of this we cry peace and cry peace, and there is no peace. There is no peace because there are no peace-makers. There are no makers of peace because the making of peace is at least as costly as the making of war – at least as exigent, at least as disruptive, at least as liable to bring disgrace and prison and death in its wake.”

The question is not whether resistance is practical. It is whether resistance is right. We are enjoined to love our neighbour, not our tribe. We must have faith that the good draws to it the good, even if the empirical evidence around us is bleak. The good is always embodied in action. It must be seen. It does not matter if the wider society is censorious. We are called to defy – through acts of civil disobedience and noncompliance – the laws of the state, when these laws, as they often do, conflict with moral law. We

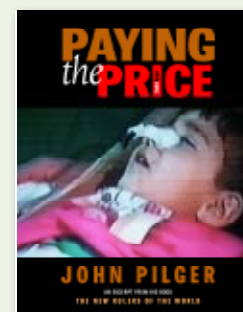
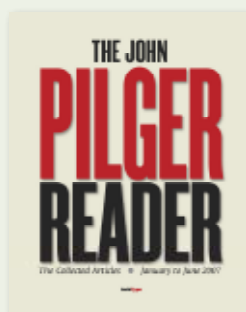
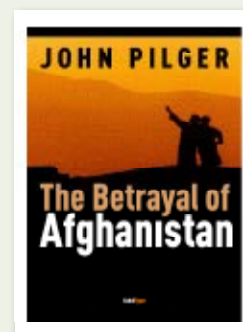
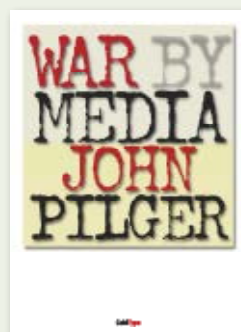
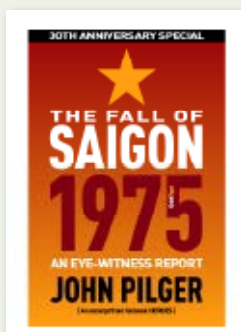
**A moral stance
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must stand, no matter the cost, with the crucified of the earth. If we fail to take this stand, whether against the abuses of militarised police, the inhumanity of our vast prison system or

the genocide in Gaza, we become the crucifiers. **CT**

Chris Hedges is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who was a foreign correspondent for 15 years with the New York Times, where he served as Middle East bureau chief and Balkan bureau chief. He previously worked overseas for the Dallas Morning News, the Christian Science Monitor and NPR. He is host of the Chris Hedges Report – www.chrishedges.substack.com

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➤ VIJAY PRASHAD

Every place in Gaza – including schools – is a target

Since October 2023, the US has approved 100 sales, amounting to over \$1-billion in weapons to Israel

It is almost as if the Israeli army is trying to gather as many Palestinians as possible in one place and then kill them all. Ahmed Abed and his family fled the Dalal al-Maghribi school in early August after an Israeli airstrike displaced them. That airstrike killed 15 Palestinians who had taken refuge there after Israel had bombed their homes in the Ash Shujaiyeh neighbourhood of Gaza City.

The family arrived at the al-Taba'een school, a private school with an attached mosque, that sheltered 2,500 people. Since the Israelis began their most recent bombardment of Gaza in October 2023, Palestinians have taken refuge in private schools and in schools run by the United Nations (UN). The UN reports that in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli attacks have damaged 190 of their facilities, most of them schools. There are few sanctuaries left in Gaza.

These schools – whether private or UN – are the only places that were seen as relatively safe.

At 4:30 a.m. on August 10, Israe-

li jet fighters flew over Gaza City and dropped US-made GBU-39 250-pound bombs on the al-Taba'een school and mosque. During that time, a large number of the inhabitants had lined up at the mosque to go for the Fajr or dawn prayer.

The bombs hit the people near the mosque, killing at least 100 Palestinians. It is a grotesque massacre that took place just when the United States decided to rearm Israel with these kinds of weapons.

Sarah Leah Whitson, former Middle East and North Africa division director for Human Rights Watch, wrote that the arms sales to Israel by the United States on the day of this bombardment demonstrated a “Pavlovian conditioning for a feral army.”

The United States, despite occasional statements about withholding weapons, has consistently armed Israel during this genocidal war. Since 1948, the United States has provided \$130-billion worth of weapons to Israel. Between 2018 and 2022, 79 percent of all weapons sold to Israel came from the United States (the next was Germany,



which supplied 20 percent of Israel's arms imports). The US arms sales have come in deliberately small bunches of under \$250million per sale so that they do not require the scrutiny of the US Congress, and therefore public debate.

From October 2023 through March, the US approved 100 of these small sales, which amount to over \$1-billion in weapons sales, including the GBU-39. It is important to know that the bomb, created in the United States, was likely loaded onto an Israeli fighter jet by a US technician seconded to the Israeli bases.

Mahmoud Basal, the spokesperson for Gaza's civil defence unit, said that the medics who got to the scene at the al-Taba'een school, many of them already veterans of this kind of violence, were confounded by



ANOTHER MASSACRE: At 4:30 a.m. on August 10, Israeli jet fighters flew over Gaza City and dropped US-made GBU-39 250-pound bombs on the al-Taba'een school and mosque

what they found. "The school area is strewn with dead bodies and body parts," he said. "It is very difficult for paramedics to identify a whole dead body. There's an arm here, a leg there. Bodies are ripped to pieces. Medical teams stand helpless before this horrific scene."

At least 40,000 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli bombings since last October, and 2-million Palestinians have been displaced from their homes.

In the lead-up to the attack on al-Taba'een school, the Israeli forces have been escalating their bombings of schools in Gaza that serve as shelters.

In July, the Israeli military struck 17 schools in Gaza, killing at least

163 Palestinians. In the week before August 10, Israel hit the Khadija and Ahmad al-Kurd schools in Deir al-Balah killing 30 Palestinians (July 27), the Dalal Moghrabi school in Ash Shujaiyeh killing 15 Palestinians (August 1), the Hama and Huda schools in Sheikh Radwan killing sixteen Palestinians (August 3), the Hassan Salame and Nasser schools in al-Nassr killing 25 Palestinians (August 4), and the al-Zahraa and Abdul Fattah Hamouda schools killing 17 Palestinians (August 8).

This sequence of attacks on schools came before the August 10 bombing, which shows that there is a pattern of targeting civilians who are seeking shelter in schools. The massacre at al-Taba'een is the 21st attack by Israel against a school that has been serving as a shelter since

July 4. Ahmed Abed lost his brother-in-law Abdullah al-Arair in the massacre at al-Taba'een. "There is nowhere else to go," he said. "Every place in Gaza is a target."

Israel accepted that it had bombed these schools but denied that it had killed civilians. In fact, Israel no longer names these places such as al-Taba'een and Dalal Moghrabi as schools; it calls them "military facilities."

The Israeli military said that it had killed at least 20 "terror operatives" since it is reported to have claimed to have hit an "active" Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad command room embedded within a mosque." The Israeli authorities released the names of at least 19 people who they claimed were senior operatives of Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

The EuroMed Human Rights

Monitor, an independent organisation based in Switzerland, studied the claims made by Israel's military and found them to be wanting. The Monitor's staff went to the school, did a survey of the survivors, and reviewed the Israeli-controlled civil registry for the names. The team's "preliminary investigation found that the Israeli army used names of Palestinians killed in Israeli raids – some of whom were killed in earlier raids – in its list."

The three people killed earlier, but whose names appeared in the Israeli lists, include Ahmed Ihab al-Jaabari (killed on December 5, 2023), Youssef al-Wadiyya (killed on August 8, 2024), and Montaser Daher (killed on August 9, 2024). The Israeli list also had three elderly civilians who have no connection to any militant group, including Abdul Aziz Misbah al-Kafarna (a school principal) and Yusef Kahlout (an Arabic language teacher and deputy mayor of Beit Hanoun). The list also includes six civilians, "some of whom were even Hamas opponents."

It is remarkable that even in their own statements the Israeli officials seem unsure about their claims. Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari of the

Having made these evacuation orders, Israel then bombs the protected shelters, including hospitals and schools, with the argument that these are military targets

Israeli military said that "various intelligence indications" show that there was a "high probability" that Ashraf Juda, a commander of the Islamic Jihad's Central Camps Brigade, was in al-Taba'een school. But the Israelis could not confirm it. So, the Israelis killed 100 civilians even though they were not certain if their target was in the facility at that time.

The Israeli army has set up a pattern for its genocidal campaign. It first bombs civilian neighbourhoods, sending terrified people into shelters such as schools and hospitals. Then, it announces blanket evacuation orders from an entire area, forcing people in these shelters to live in fear since many of them do not have the wherewithal to leave them for other places (indeed, "There is nowhere else to go," said Ahmed Abed).

Having made these evacuation

orders, Israel then bombs the protected shelters, including hospitals and schools, with the argument that these are military targets. This formula was enacted in Gaza City and in other parts of Gaza.

Now, Israel has announced forced evacuation orders for people in Khan Younis, a city in central Gaza. Alongside these orders, Israeli forces have begun aerial and artillery attacks at the eastern edge of Khan Younis. We will now see these kinds of attacks on schools and hospitals that are shelters for desperate people in the center of Gaza, with every building seen by the Israelis as a legitimate target.

CT

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ISRAEL'S USE
OF AI-DRIVEN
WARFARE

AUTOMATING GENOCIDE

VISUALIZING **PALESTINE** SOURCES bit.ly/vp-Algenocide FEB 2024 

► RAMZY BAROUD

Why torture is failing in Israel's war on Gaza

Raping prisoners, leaking videos of the gruesome acts, and carrying out the same horrific deed again and again, are part of the Israeli strategy – restoring fear

On October 25, Israeli politician Moshe Feiglin told Arutz Sheva-Israel National News that “Muslims are not afraid of us anymore.”

It might sound odd that Feiglin saw the element of fear as critical to Israel's well-being if not its very survival. However, the fear element is directly linked to Israel's behaviour and fundamental to its political discourse.

Historically, Israel has carried out massacres with a specific political strategy in mind: to instill the desired fear to drive Palestinians off their land. Deir Yassin, Tantara and the over 70 documented massacres during the Palestinian Nakba, or Catastrophe, are cases in point.

Israel has also utilised torture, rape and other forms of sexual assault to achieve similar ends in the past, to exact information or to break down the will of prisoners.

UN-affiliated experts said in a report published on August 5 that “these practices are intended to punish Palestinians for resisting occupation and seek to destroy them individually and collectively.”

Israel's ongoing war in Gaza has manifested all these horrific strategies in ways unprecedented in the past, both in terms of widespread application and frequency.

In a report, *Welcome to Hell*, published on August 5, the Israeli rights group, B'tselem, said that Israel's detention “facilities, in which every inmate is deliberately subjected to harsh, relentless pain and suffering operate as de-facto torture camps”.

A few days later, the Palestinian rights group, Addameer, published its own report, “documented cases of torture, sexual violence, and degrading treatment,” along with the “systematic abuses and human rights violations committed against detainees from Gaza.”

If incidents of rape, sexual as-

saults and other forms of torture are marked on a map, they would cover a large geographical area, in Gaza, in the West Bank, and Israel itself – mostly notably in the notorious Sde Teiman Camp.

Considering the size and locations of the Israeli army, well-documented evidence of rape and torture demonstrates that such tactics are not linked to a specific branch of the military. This means that the Israeli army uses torture as a centralised strategy.

Such a strategy has been associated with the likes of Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel's national security minister. His aggressive statements, for example, that Palestinian prisoners should be “shot in the head instead of being given more food,” are perfectly aligned with his equally violent actions: the starvation policy of prisoners, the normalisation of torture and the defense of rape.

But Ben-Gvir did not institute these tortuous policies. They have predated him by decades and were used against generations of Palestinian prisoners, who are granted few rights compared to those enshrined by international law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention.

But why does Israel torture Palestinians on such a large scale?

Israeli wars against Palestinians



HELL In ISRAEL: A new report from the Israelpeace organisation B'Tselem highlights torture in the country's detention facilities.

are predicated on two elements: a material and a psychological one. The former has manifested itself in the ongoing genocide, the killing and wounding of tens of thousands and the near destruction of Gaza.

The psychological factor, however, is intended to break the will of the Palestinian people.

Law for Palestine, a legal advocacy group published a database of over 500 instances of Israeli leaders, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, inciting genocide in Gaza.

Most of these references seem to be centred on dehumanising the Palestinians. For example, the October 11 statement by Israeli President Yitzhak Herzog, that “there are no innocent civilians in Gaza,” was part of the collective death sentence that made the extermination of Palestinians morally justifiable in the eyes of Israelis.

Netanyahu’s own ominous biblical reference, where he called on Israeli soldiers to seek revenge from Palestinians, stating “Remember what Amalek has done to you,” was also a blank check for mass murder.

While choosing not to see Palestinians as humans, as innocent, as worthy of life and security, Israel has granted its army carte blanche to do as it saw fit to those, in the words of Israeli Defense Minister, Yoav Gallant, “human animals.”

The mass killing, starvation and widespread rape and torture of Palestinians are a natural outcome of these shocking dialectics. But the overall purpose of Israel is not simply to exact revenge, though the latter has been quite important to Israel’s desire for national recovery.

By trying to break the will of the Palestinians through torture, humiliation and rape, Israel wants to restore a different kind of deter-



A screenshot from a video shown on Israel's Channel 12 appears to show sexual assault of a Palestinian prisoner at Sde Teiman prison



'HUMAN ANIMALS': Yoav Gallant, Israel's Defense Minister

rence, which it lost on October 7.

Failing to restore military or strategic deterrence, Tel Aviv is invested in psychological deterrence, as in restoring the element of fear that was breached on October 7.

Raping prisoners, leaking videos of the gruesome acts, and carrying out the same horrific deed, again and again, are all part of the Israeli strategy – that of restoring fear.

But Israel will fail, simply because Palestinians have already succeeded in demolishing Israel’s 76-year matrix of physical domination and

mental torture.

The Israeli war on Gaza is be the most destructive and bloody of all Israeli wars. Yet, Palestinian resilience continues to grow stronger, because Palestinians are not passive, but active participants in the shaping of their own future.

If popular resistance is indeed the process of the restoration of the self, Palestinians in Gaza are proving that, despite their unspeakable pain and agony, they are emerging as a whole, ready to clinch their freedom, no matter the cost. **CT**

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► JOE ALLEN

Manhattan and the Machine

I love new York, grubby humans and all

Last month, I travelled to Manhattan for a speaking event and I couldn't stop talking. That's typical of the city for me. People grumble about how unfriendly New Yorkers are, and that's true at times. But in general, NYC is one of the most gregarious cultures I've ever encountered. It's a town powered by gasoline, electricity, hormones, overclocked neurons, and a variety of chemical stimulants. More than two decades of fellowship have taught me that most New Yorkers love to talk and be talked at – even those too wired to actually listen.

I gave a speech about the allure of technology and its false promise of spiritual fulfilment. All my words – for the past four years, really – can be summed up as “Robots are bad, mkay.” If you don't know that ol' story, you ain't from around here.

This engagement was hosted by the New York Young Republicans Club. Maybe there was a time when you'd expect to meet country club types – polo shirts and khakis, aristocratic accents and sockless sebgos. That wasn't the NYYRC that I encountered.

The crowd, packed into the stylish clubhouse in midtown Manhattan, offered a broad spectrum of personalities. Probably a third of

those gathered were either black, east Asian, south Asian, or middle eastern – and they weren't there because of some diversity quota.

Many joined because they're pro-America and pro-business. Others are deeply religious and wary of the techno-secular swarm. Some are simply tired of liberal decay.

The next night, at a grimy little bar in Chinatown, I talked to all sorts of people who are bored with the Left's stale virtue-signalling and PC pabulum.

It was a self-selected crowd for the most part, but alongside the sharp whiteys and cynical fashionistas, there was a black filmmaker who is as repulsed by soulless AI-generated art as I am, and a rightwing Asian woman who's too aggressive to ever play the victim. One fellow traveller had a flip-phone (my man!). The only lib I met, an Indian immigrant from Oklahoma, was open-minded enough to be bearable.

No one agreed about anything much, so it was a refreshing intellectual romp. Unlike the generic rainbow blobs dotting every city from Miami to Nashville, out to San Francisco and Portland – where white people get together to praise each other's taste for diversity – this little cross-section of



New York was truly diverse and actually interesting.

In the old days, I'd travel to NYC to meet unorthodox people. Most of the time, they were outside-the-box liberals. Back then, lefties weren't so boring, at least not to me.

They would be amused at my caveman ways, and I would tolerate their citified cultural mutations. The first time I visited was just after 9/11. The WTC craters were still



smouldering and tourists gathered around to snap pictures. (I refused to approach the site – that’s bad juju.)

Soon after, America waged a War on Terror abroad and a war on freedom at home. It was the first mass roll-out of unmanned drones, airport nude scanners, and a brain-like global surveillance grid.

In 2005, I returned to rig the stage for Billy Graham’s Last Crusade

in Flushing Meadows Park. A million and a half people showed up for the televangelist’s final techno-religious ceremony. The zealous crowd merged into a single polyglot chimerica, sweating under that rusty old flying saucer left over from the 1964 World’s Fair. Graham’s sermon, blasted out through speaker arrays and amplified by delay towers, was a plastic-wrapped slice of apple pie.

On election night in 2008, I was

invited to a house party in Harlem. The minute they announced Obama had won the presidency, our prim and proper Afro American hostess abruptly shouted at the television, “This is the BLACK HOUSE now, muthafuckas!” Hearing the commotion outside, my Cuban friend and I went for a walk, just to take in the celebratory vibe.

My buddy’s TV-amped enthusiasm was soon dampened by the hos-

tile blacks who shouted at us from their stoops. More than one yelled, “This is our shit, now! This is OUR shit!!” Glancing around with a wary eye, it was obvious this wasn’t my shit.

The election night experience drove home the fact that, far beyond all the pretty words about racial unity, electro-tribalism is one of the Left’s most potent weapons. Those guns may be holstered for now, but they’re fully loaded and ready to pop off at any moment. I would return to Harlem the next day, and many times over the years. I never had any problems, but then again, I was no longer so naive.

In a subsequent trip, I got to meet the comedian Greg Giraldo just before he died of an overdose. A young Jamaican woman introduced us backstage at a Manhattan comedy club. Throughout his entire set, the woman shouted at Giraldo at the top of her lungs – as if she was in a movie theatre and he was on the silver screen. In retrospect, that was funnier than his jokes.

Over the years, I also visited Catholic cathedrals, the old monastery up at the Cloisters, a Chabad-Lubavitch synagogue in Brooklyn, the bustling Hindu temple in Queens, and a small temple to Kali a few neighbourhoods over, where I was welcomed to join a stranger’s wedding. The lovely couple embraced under the dark goddess’s bloody grin.

In 2016, I rigged the set for UFC 205 at Madison Square Garden. Before the fights, I strolled up to Trump Tower, where the rabble had amassed to vent their phase-one TDS. It seemed goofy to me at the time, but in reality, America had come apart at the seams. I suppose the fabric had already been torn eight years earlier, even if most of

This gleaming electric ant farm – built on a foundation of lofty dreams – has been thoroughly digitised. Pretty much every city has

us couldn’t admit it.

That night, the young Conor McGregor wrecked Eddie Alvarez in the octagon, becoming the UFC’s first champ in two separate weight classes. “Backstage I’m startin’ fights w’ everybody,” McGregor confessed in the post-match interview, his Celtic eyes gleaming on the big video screens.

“I’ve ridiculed everyone on the roster. And I just wanna say from the bottom a’ me heart. I’d like to take the chance to apologize... TO ABSOLUTELY NOBODY!!”

The crowd went nuts. That’s what crowds do.

I’ve been in and out of NYC many times since. I’ve had a few adventures, seen a few sights, met a few folks. As I wandered around NYC last last month, one thing that stuck out is how much it all looks the same. Yeah, Manhattan has new Lego-block towers here and there, and many more have gone up in the outer boroughs. The classic skyscrapers look smaller to my eyes, too, like when you go back to your old elementary school and the lockers appear to be miniatures. A lot of the independent businesses have been replaced by megacorps, especially after the pandemic.

But it all feels about the same to my stranger’s sensibilities. The pedestrians are just as forward-focused. The women still wear the latest over-priced fashion accessories. The youth packs are still looking

for trouble. The rats are still crawling around bags of trash piled on the street. And I swear, I think some of the same construction scaffolding is still up from my first visit in 2001. Does anything ever get finished in this town?

The one change that really sticks out, though, is mass digitisation. The once static billboards in Times Square are now animated video walls. The subway tokens are long gone, replaced by digital kiosks that ping with each passing microchip, tracking your every movement. Instead of looking at books or newspapers, or, God forbid, at each other, people everywhere are staring down at their smartphones. Not all of them. But too many.

Flowing over these multi-ethnic masses are streams of data swimming with algorithms, extracting information and telling people what to think, who to meet, and where to go. The city’s soul hasn’t dried up. Not entirely. But this gleaming electric ant farm – built by human hands on a foundation of lofty dreams – has been thoroughly digitised. Pretty much every city has.

No one can escape human nature, no matter how urbane he or she becomes. And as one year rolls over to the next, it’s obvious that human nature can’t escape the Future™. This transformation is repulsive to my eyes, even if the people are still beautiful.

City folks have always looked like ants from the sky and acted like apes on the ground – which is great! – but now they’re guided by invisible bots. Oh well. At least we have something new to talk about. **CT**

*Joe Allen, a long-time ColdType contributor, writes the Singularity Weekly Substack blog at <https://joebot.substack.com>. His latest book is *Dark Aeon: Transhumanism and the War Against Humanity*.*



► JOSHUA FRANK

First California. Then the nation

Why Governor Gavin Newsom's war on rooftop solar
is a bad omen for the country

California Governor Gavin Newsom appears to be taking climate change seriously, at least when he's in front of a microphone and flashing cameras. His talk then is direct and tough. He repeatedly points out that the planet is in danger and appears ready to act. He's been called a "climate-change crusader" and a leader of America's clean energy revolution.

"[California is] meeting the moment head-on as the hots get hotter, the dries get drier, the wets get wetter, simultaneous droughts and rain bombs," Newsom typically asserted in April 2024 during an event at Central Valley Farm, which is powered

by solar panels and batteries. "We have to address these issues with a ferocity that is required of us."

These are exactly the types of remarks many of us wish we had heard from so many other elected officials addressing the climate disaster this planet's becoming, the culprits behind it, and how we might begin to fix it. True, Big Oil long covered up internal research about how devastating climate change would be while lying through its teeth as its officials and lobbyists worked fiercely against any kind of global-warming-directed fossil-fuel legislation. It's also correct that the issue must be addressed immediately and forcefully. Yet, whatever Governor

Newsom might say, he's also played a role in launching a war on rooftop solar power and so kneecapping California just when it was making remarkable strides in that very area of development.

Consider California's residential solar program (its "net-metering"), which the governor has all but dismantled. Believe it or not, in December 2022, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) voted 5-0 to slash incentives for residents to place more solar power on their homes. Part of the boilerplate justification offered by the CPUC, Newsom, and the state's utility companies was that payments to individuals whose houses produce such power

were simply too high and badly impacted poor communities that had to deal with those rate increases. They've called this alleged problem a "cost-shift" from the wealthy to the poor. It matters not at all that the CPUC, which oversees consumer electric rates, has continually approved rate increases over the years. Solar was now to blame.

It's true that property owners do place those solar power panels on their roofs. What is not true is that solar only benefits the well-to-do. A 2022 study by Lawrence Berkeley Labs showed that 60 percent of all solar users in California then were actually low- to middle-income residents. In addition, claiming that residential solar power is significantly responsible for driving the state's electricity rates up just isn't true either. Those rates have largely risen because of the eternal desire of California's utility companies to turn a profit.

Here's an example of how those rates work and why they've gone up. Pacific Gas & Electric Company (PG&E), whose downed power lines have been responsible for an estimated 30 major wildfires in California over the past six overheating years, was forced to pay \$13.9-billion in settlement money for the damage done. The company has also been found guilty of 84 felony counts of involuntary manslaughter for deaths in the devastating 2018 Camp Fire in Butte County. In response to those horrific blazes and the damages they inflicted, the company claims it must now spend more than \$5.9-billion to bury its aging infrastructure to avoid future wildfires in our tinder-box of a world. Watchdog groups suggest that it's those investments that are raising electric bills across the state, not newly installed solar power.

In short, large utilities make their

A recent analysis estimating that by 2050 rooftop solar panels would save California ratepayers \$120 billion

money by repairing and expanding the energy grid. Residential solar directly threatens that revenue stream because it doesn't rely on an ever-expanding network of power stations and transmission lines. The electricity that residential solar power produces typically remains at the community level or, better yet, in the home itself, especially if coupled with local battery storage. Not surprisingly then, by 2018, 20 transmission lines had been cancelled in California, mainly because so many homes were already producing solar power on their own rooftops, saving \$2.6-billion in total consumer energy costs.

A recent Colorado-based Vibrant Clean Energy analysis confirmed the savings rooftop solar provides to ratepayers. Their report estimated that, by 2050, rooftop panels would save California ratepayers \$120-billion. That would also save energy companies from spending far more money on the grid (but, of course, that's the only way they turn a profit).

"What our model finds is that when you account for the costs associated with distribution grid infrastructure, distributed energy resources can produce a pathway that is lower cost for all ratepayers and emits fewer greenhouse gas emissions," said Dr. Christopher Clack of Vibrant Clean Energy. "Our study shows this is true even as California looks to electrify other energy sectors like transportation."

However, such lower costs also

mean less profits for utility companies, so they have found an ingenious workaround. They could appease climate concerns while making a bundle of money by building large solar farms in the desert. In the process, nothing about how they generated revenue would change, energy costs would continue to rise, and little would stand in their way, not even a vulnerable forest of Joshua trees.

"Why Razing Joshua Trees for Solar Farms Isn't Always Crazy," a troubling *Los Angeles Times* headline read. Sammy Roth, an intrepid environmental reporter who has written insightfully and cogently on the way humanity is altering the climate, was nonetheless all in on uprooting thousands of Joshua trees in California's Kern County to make space for that giant solar farm.

The "Aratina Solar Project," a sprawling 2,300-acre installation in the heart of the Mojave Desert, would transfer electricity to wealthy coastal areas, powering more than 180,000 homes.

As Roth reported, "There are places to build solar projects besides pristine ecosystems. But there's no get-out-of-climate-change-free card... Hence the need to accept killing some Joshua trees in the name of saving more Joshua trees. I feel kind of terrible saying that."

He should feel terrible. Roth believes that tearing up Joshua trees, already in great jeopardy due to our warming climate, is the price that must be paid to save ourselves from ourselves. But is sacrificing wild spaces — and, in this case, also threatening the habitat of the desert tortoise — truly worth it? Is this really the best solution we can come up with in our overheating world? There do appear to be better options, but they would also upend the status quo and put far less money in the pockets of utility shareholders.

Here's how Californians could

think outside the box or, in this case, on top of it. A single Walmart roof averages 180,000 square feet. In California, there are 309 Walmarts. That's 55,620,000 square feet or 1,276 acres of rooftop. Home Depots? There are 247 of them in California and each of their roofs averages 104,000 square feet, totalling 25,668,000 square feet, or around 589 acres. Throw in 318 Target stores, averaging 125,000 square feet, and you have over 39,750,000 square feet or another 912 acres. Add all of those up and you have 2,777 acres of rooftops that could be turned into mini-solar farms.

In other words, just three big box stores in California cities ripe for solar power would provide more acreage than the 2,300-acre Joshua-tree-destroying solar installation in Kern County. And that doesn't even include all the Costcos (129), Lowes (111), Amazon warehouses (100+), Ikeas (8), strip malls, schools, municipal buildings, parking lots, and so much more that would provide far better options.

You get the picture. The potential for solar in our built environment is indeed enormous. Throw in the more than 5.6-million single-family homes in California with no solar panels, and there's just so much rooftop real estate that could generate electricity without wrecking entire ecosystems already facing a frighteningly hot future.

In 2014, it was estimated that solar power from California homes produced 2.2 gigawatts of energy. Ten years later, that potential is so much greater. As of summer 2024, the state has 1.9-million residential rooftop solar installations capable of churning out 16.7 gigawatts of power. It's estimated that 1 gigawatt can conservatively power 750,000 homes. This means that the solar generation

If residential solar has succeeded exceptionally well and has so much possibility, why are we intent on destroying desert ecology with massive solar farms?

now installed on California's roofs could theoretically, if stored, power 12,525,000 homes in a state with only 7.5-million of them. Already, in 2022, it's believed that the state wasted nearly 2.3-million megawatt-hours worth of solar-produced electricity.

And mind you, this isn't just back-of-the-napkin math. A 2021 geospatial analysis of rooftop solar conducted by researchers at Ireland's University of Cork and published in *Nature* confirmed what many experts have long believed: that the US has enough usable rooftop space to supply the entire country's energy demands and, with proper community-based storage, would be all we would need to fulfil our energy production demands — and then some! If properly deployed, the US could produce 4.2 petawatt-hours per year of rooftop solar electricity, more than the country consumes today. (A petawatt-hour is a unit of energy equal to one trillion kilowatt-hours.) The report also noted that there are enough rooftops worldwide to potentially fully feed the world's energy appetite.

If residential solar has succeeded exceptionally well and has so much possibility, why are we intent on destroying desert ecology with massive, industrial-scale solar farms? The answer in Gavin Newsom's California has much more to do with politics and corporate avarice than with mitigating climate change.

Despite what Governor Newsom and the California Public Utilities Commission have claimed, electric

rates have increased not because of solar power's massive success but because of old-school capitalist greed.

"Rooftop solar has value in avoiding costs that utilities would have to pay to deliver that same kilowatt-hour of energy, such as investments in transmission lines and other grid infrastructure," reports the solar-advocacy group, Solar Rights Alliance. "Rooftop solar also reduces the public health costs of fossil-fuel power plants and the costs to ratepayers of utility-caused wildfires and power shut-offs. Rooftop solar also provides quantifiable benefits through local economic development and jobs. It preserves land that would otherwise be used for large-scale solar development. When paired with batteries, rooftop solar helps build community resilience."

Nonetheless, blaming rooftop solar for California's increased electricity rates has been a painfully effective argument. So, here's a question to consider: Why does it seem like Newsom is working on behalf of the utilities to limit small-scale rooftop solar? Could it be related to the \$10-million Pacific Gas & Electric donated to his campaigns since he first ran for office in San Francisco in the late 1990s? Or could it be because key members of his cabinet are tight with PG&E executives? (Dana Williamson, his current chief of staff, was a former director of public affairs at PG&E.)

Then, consider the potential conflict of interest when the law firm O'Melveny & Myers, which previously worked for PG&E, was tasked by Newsom with drafting wildfire legislation to save the company from bankruptcy. PG&E would, in fact, end up hammering out a deal with CPUC to pass on the costs of the bailout, a staggering \$11-billion, to ratepayers over a 30-year period.

It all worked out well for the company. In 2023, PG&E, which serves 16 million people, raked in \$2.2-billion in profits, nearly a 25 percent jump from 2022.

“The coziness between Gavin Newsom and [PG&E] is unlike anything we’ve seen in California politics... Their motive is profit, which is driven by Wall Street,” says Bernadette Del Chiaro, executive director of California Solar & Storage Association, who has over a decade of experience monitoring the industry. “[The utility companies] have to keep posting record profits, quarter after quarter. It’s a perversity that nobody is really thinking about.”

It’s pretty simple really. Growth means more money for California’s utilities, so they’ve gone all in on expansive and destructive solar farms. Ultimately, this means higher bills for consumers to cover the costs of a grid they are forced to rely on as home solar systems become increasingly expensive.

Newsom’s war on rooftop solar has had another detrimental impact: it’s threatened the state’s clean energy goals. And the governor hasn’t said a word about that. The California Energy Commission estimates that, to meet its climate benchmarks, the state must add 20,000 megawatts of rooftop solar electricity by 2030. At this pace, they’ll be lucky to install 10,000 megawatts. With such

A rapid decline in new solar installations also means massive job losses, possibly 22 percent of the state's solar gigs, or up to 17,000 workers

a precipitous decline in home solar installations, the 20,000 megawatts goal will never be reached by that year, even when you include all large-scale solar developments now in the works.

The Coalition for Community Solar Access estimates that 81 percent of solar companies in the state fear they’ll have to close up shop. Bad news for the solar industry also means bad news not just for California, the nation’s leader in solar energy production, but for the climate more generally.

A rapid decline in new solar installations also means massive job losses, possibly 22 percent of the state’s solar gigs, or up to 17,000 workers. In addition to such bleak projections, disincentivising rooftop solar will also hurt the Californians most impacted by warming temperatures and in need of relief — those who can’t afford to live along the state’s more temperate coast.

“Rooftop solar is not just the wealthy homeowners anymore,” State Senator Josh Becker, a San Mateo Democrat, recently told Cal-

Matters. “Central Valley people are suffering from extreme heat. The industry has been making great strides in low-income communities. This [utilities commission decision] makes it harder.”

The slow death of new residential solar installations is likely to mean that most of California’s electricity will continue to be made by burning natural gas and sending more fossil fuel emissions into the atmosphere. All of this may also be a sign that rooftop solar across the country is in peril. Utility companies and those hoping to gut residential solar programs in Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Nevada, and North Carolina are already humming Newsom’s “cost-shift” tune.

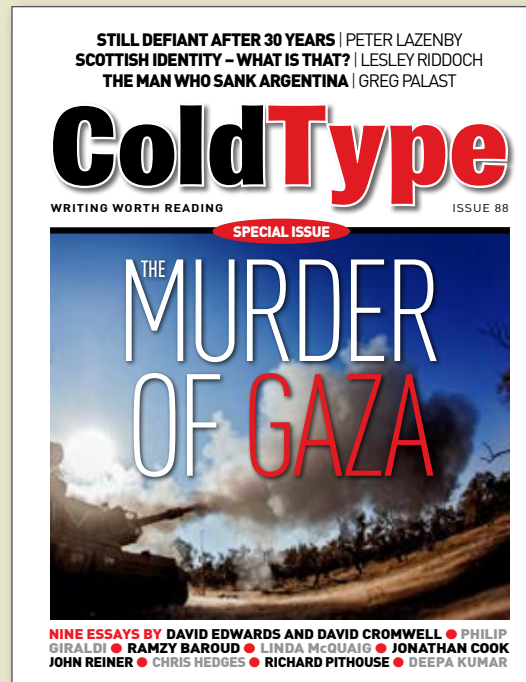
“They [the big utilities] know it’s a pivotal time,” Bernadette Del Chiaro tells me, with a sense of urgency and deep concern for what lies ahead. “They are fighting really hard, and they are fighting hardest in California because where California goes, there goes the nation.” **CT**

Joshua Frank is an award-winning California-based journalist and co-editor of CounterPunch. He is the author of the new book “Atomic Days: The Untold Story of the Most Toxic Place in America” (Haymarket Books). This article first appeared at www.tomdispatch.com

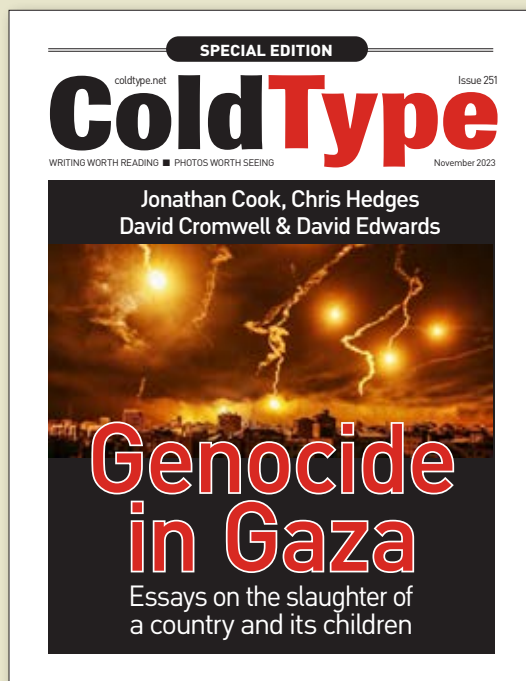
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Britain's broken water system: death, denial and diarrhoea

Thatcher's privatisation of water supply and corporate created conditions that give us a reminder of the bad old days when Londoners died in their thousands

In the spring of 2024, residents of the south Devon harbour town of Brixham kept falling ill. Their symptoms – including “awful stomach complaints, bad diarrhoea and severe headaches” – went on for weeks. A retired GP who ventured to the pub after finally recovering from the illness recalled that, when someone asked those present to “raise their hand if they hadn’t had the bug,” not a single hand went up.

Given the controversies about raw sewage discharges that were swirling at the time, the drinking water seemed an obvious suspect. Many local residents contacted their water provider, but by late April, South West Water was still insisting the water was safe to drink, and that all tests for contaminating bacteria had returned negative.

Then suddenly, the company issued an urgent “boil it” note to thousands of households in Brixham and nearby villages and towns in the Torbay region. A tiny parasite that causes the intestinal disease cryptosporidiosis had been discovered in the water supply.

The contamination was eventually pinpointed to a defective valve under a stretch of farmland which had allowed cow faeces to enter three holding tanks of drinking water – downstream from the main water

works, and from where the water’s quality was routinely tested.

According to South West Water, the outbreak ultimately affected 17,000 households. While the official record shows 77 confirmed cases of “crypto,” as it is commonly known, the UK Health Security Agency only began surveying residents in the second week of July – long after the outbreak began.

The contamination of an entire region’s water supply, with thousands of households forced to rely on bottled water or boiling their tap water for months, is shocking. But as experts in the history of waterborne disease outbreaks and public health, what concerns us most is how quickly the story has moved on – as if nothing could be done and it was “just another infection.”

Given the UK was once known for its revolutionary sanitation projects, we want to understand what systemic issues – from inadequate infrastructure to corporate cover-ups to lax legislation – lie at the heart of this inability to keep the water clean and people free from waterborne infection. Or put another way: why can’t Britain get its shit together?

The residents of Torbay have a particular right to ask this ques-

tion. In the summer of 1995, the same Devon holiday region (known as the “English riviera”) experienced the UK’s first major outbreak of waterborne disease – also cryptosporidiosis – since the water industry was privatised by Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government in 1989. More than 250,000 residents were sent a “boil it” notice. By the end of the summer, there had officially been 575 cases and 25 hospitalisations.

A year later, the environment secretary John Gummer took South West Water to court under section 70 of the 1991 Water Industry Act. This was the first time a British water company had been taken to court for providing water unfit for human consumption – but the case was thrown out after evidence provided by the Drinking Water Inspectorate was ruled inadmissible.

The ruling fuelled public fears that water companies, like other newly privatised state enterprises, could not be held properly accountable for their mismanagement. These concerns have grown over the subsequent three decades, as South West Water – and England and Wales’s other nine private water and sewage companies – have regularly been accused of prioritising healthy shareholder dividends over the public’s health.



POO ALERT: Green Party protesters campaign against sewage disposal into the sea at Brighton, on England's south coast

Many of the world's modern systems of public health surveillance have their origins in innovations Britain introduced in the mid-19th-century, including continuous water supply, sewage filtration and routine governmental investigation of disease outbreaks.

And yet Britain has never managed to eradicate systemic failures when it comes to providing safe, clean and accessible drinking water to its citizens. To understand why not, we need to start by revisiting Britain's major cholera and typhoid outbreaks of the 19th- and early 20th-century which at their peaks killed hundreds of people every day.

"The colossal power of life and death wielded by a water company supplying half a million customers is something for which, till recently, there has been no precedent in the history of the world. Such a power

ought most sedulously to be guarded against abuse."

These prophetic words were written by the British government's first ever chief medical officer, John Simon, in 1867. He was responding to one of the country's worst water-related scandals: the 1866 cholera epidemic that killed 5,596 people in the East End of London.

A legal mechanism should have prevented this appalling loss of life. According to the 1852 Metropolis Water Act – introduced in response to previous cholera epidemics in the 1830s and 40s that had also killed thousands – London's eight private water companies had been compelled to move their river water intakes away from the polluted city centre (where the river was still tidal), and to perform water filtration before it reached consumers. Yet the act was powerless to prevent the

return of cholera in June 1866, this time because of the failings – and denials – of the East London Water Company.

Within weeks, the epidemic was killing hundreds of Londoners every day. Holborn's medical officer of health, Septimus Gibbon, reported the deaths of two children on the same day at the home of a cigar maker in Cannon Street, observing:

"The house where these children resided is in clean and fair sanitary condition, but there is an old and partly disused sewer running close at the back of it, in the rear of Great James Street, which the sanitary authority is unable to destroy, because three houses in Green Street claim a right to drain into it."

At the height of this cholera outbreak, the East London Water Company denied all accusations from government epidemiologists that it

was responsible for the deaths. In August 1866, the company's chief engineer, Charles Greaves, wrote a letter to *The Times* declaring that, for several years, "not a drop of unfiltered water has been supplied by the company for any purpose." But his statement was quickly contradicted by two local residents, who told the *East-End News* they had discovered eels in their water pipes.

In the end, pioneering epidemiologists discovered that the East London Water Company – wrestling with both a blocked water filter and unusually high demand in early June 1866 – had opened the sluice at its uncovered Old Ford reservoir, drawing in unfiltered water and unleashing diarrhoeal horrors on the residents of east London.

Yet, despite being in clear violation of the 1852 act, the company argued other factors were to blame for the cholera outbreak – even including the suspect morals of East End residents. In his evidence to a parliamentary select committee, engineer Nathaniel Beardmore pointed to the dangers of an overcrowded East End "populated by dock labourers, sailors, mechanics in the new factories, and great numbers of laundresses."

Ultimately, while the East London Water Company received lots of bad press, it was given no official sanctions. A pattern of denial and obfuscation had been established that water companies have regularly employed ever since, when accused of being responsible for life-threatening water infections.

In the wake of the 1866 cholera outbreak, Simon, the pioneering chief medical officer, argued that the way to eradi-

"Both the taste and smell were something dreadful ... it was the most horrid water I ever tasted and the smell was also equally bad"

cate deadly health outbreaks was a combination of more surveillance of water companies and more preventive public health measures based on epidemiological investigations. This would mean carefully monitoring sickness data from around the country, and sending in epidemiological experts at the first sign of crisis – not waiting until after an outbreak had exploded.

But despite Simon's urgings, it would take another shocking water-related scandal for the British government to get serious about the dangers of untreated sewage.

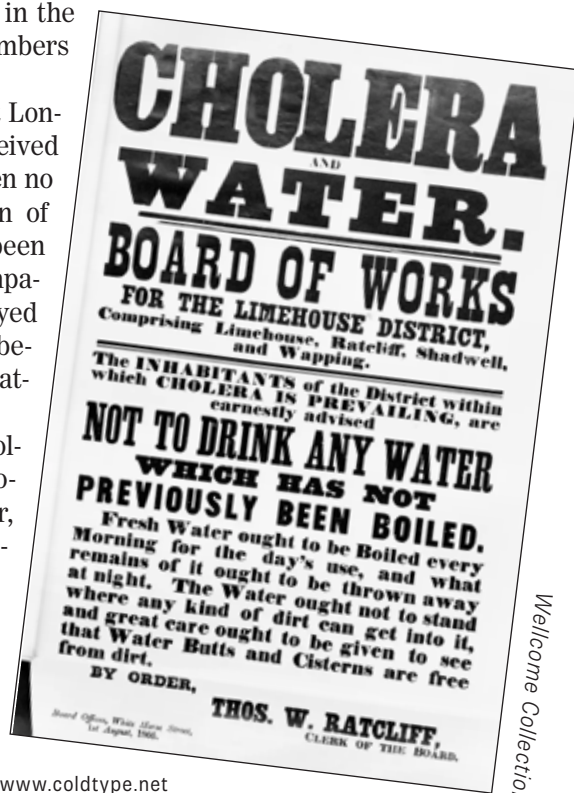
One late-summer evening in September 1878, the *Princess Alice*, a paddle steamer with more than 800 people on board, was struck by the coal ship *Bywell Castle* in the middle of the River Thames. The *Alice* was virtually sliced in two, and sank within minutes in sight of North Woolwich pier.

Two hours earlier, 75,000 gallons of raw sewage from the outflows of Joseph Bazalgette's much-heralded underground sewerage system – constructed to rid London of its "great stink" and only just completed – had been discharged into the same stretch of river, forming a noxious cloud of air and hideously contaminated water. A survivor of the disaster would later recall:

"Both the taste and smell were something dreadful ... Having been down to the bottom and having rose again with my mouth full of it, I could give a very good picture of it – it was the most horrid water I ever tasted and the smell was also equally bad."

This was Britain's worst inland waterway tragedy, claiming around 650 lives. A report in *The Times* described dead bodies "continually being washed ashore along the whole course of the river from Limehouse to Erith ... It will be some days before this rendering up of the dead will be at an end."

While the victims died by drowning or asphyxiation due to being trapped inside the sinking boat, the descriptions of the state of the river water and air caused outrage among the public. In response, the government rushed in a new law that all sewage must be treated before being discharged into rivers. Extensive new treatment facilities were commissioned, beginning in east London, and a Royal Commission on Sewage Disposal was established in 1898 – the first to set official standards for the treatment of wastewater.



Wellcome Collection

'Boil it' instruction for residents of east London's Limehouse during the cholera epidemic of 1866

But while these efforts meant the threat of cholera was largely eradicated from British drinking water, its deadly waterborne cousin, typhoid fever, continued to wreak havoc. So prolific were these outbreaks – including the worst episode of typhoid in modern British history, when nearly 2,000 people were infected and more than 140 died in Maidstone, Kent, in 1897 – that by the turn of the century, more than 150 British towns and cities had taken responsibility for providing and regulating water into their own hands.

This new vision of municipal responsibility was encapsulated by the pioneering mayor of Birmingham, Joseph Chamberlain, who spearheaded a massive public ownership programme for provision of gas, schools, libraries and city parks. In 1876, he established the Birmingham Corporation Water Department after buying the private Birmingham Waterworks Company for £1,350,000 (over £195-million at today's prices).

Progressives argued that removing private industry from the provision of water and other key services would ensure the standards of health and hygiene that modern towns and cities required – and that this was more important than company profits. Or as Chamberlain put it:

“We have not the slightest intention of making profit ... We shall get our profit indirectly in the comfort of the town and in the health of its inhabitants.”

Maidstone's deadly typhoid outbreak would see the town go down in history as the world's first municipality to attempt widespread water sterilisation, when its reservoir and mains water supply were disinfected with a solution of chloride of lime in 1897 (it proved “a difficult procedure that required several attempts”). In time, this initiative

Progressives argued that removing private industry from the provision of water would ensure the standards of health and hygiene that modern towns and cities required

would lead to global water chlorination programmes that are estimated to have saved millions of lives by preventing the spread of dangerous bacteria including Salmonella Typhi, the cause of typhoid fever.

Shortly afterwards, in 1902, London joined the march of municipalisation, when the Metropolitan Water Act created the largest public water system in Britain with the purchase of the city's private companies. The East London Water Company alone was purchased for nearly £4 million – over £600 million today.

The rationale was threefold: cost savings from delivery at scale, an ethos of civic responsibility, and the belief that publicly owned water could be more closely monitored, preventing waterborne outbreaks in the future.

By the mid-20th-century, a public-private hybrid was the norm for water provision in Britain – and the scale of the resulting public investments in waterworks was staggering. However, the argument that these would lead to long-term savings was disputed – with a 1920 parliamentary committee on the impact of the Metropolitan Water Act concluding:

Not only has there never been any savings in total cost, [but] the actual expenditures of the [new London-wide water] board have been in excess of the total of the eight undertakings whose properties were

taken over. The cost of the water supplies ... has risen.

Municipal water projects may not have saved money, but did they save lives? A 2016 study found that municipalisation of Britain's water supply from the late-19th-century resulted in a reduction of typhoid fever by 19 percent. The city of Oxford experienced an initial decline in typhoid mortality from the 1880s due to improved sand filtration and municipal piped water, followed by a sharp decline when chlorination of the water was introduced in 1930.

And yet, in the second half of the 20th-century, sewage treatment in Britain consistently failed to meet the standards demanded by laws imposed decades earlier, according to a report by the government regulator Ofwat:

“The desire to dispose of sewage as cheaply as possible led to a lack of investment in sewage treatment by many councils, and the number of river pollution incidents increased through the 1960s. This, in turn, increased the treatment requirement of river water abstractions. By the end of the 1960s, 60 percent of all sewage treatment works were estimated to be failing to meet the standards established at the end of the 19th century.”

By the early 1970s, England and Wales still possessed a motley crew of public and private systems for dealing with sewage and water. In all, there were 160 different water companies (some public, some private), 130 sewerage authorities, and 29 river authorities. Where operational risks were usually shouldered by the private sector, the public sector typically carried all the (enormous) financial risks associated with the building of water treatment infrastructure.

In 1973, Edward Heath's Conservative government sought to end this confusing array of localised water and sewerage provision. Its latest

version of the Water Act established ten new regional water authorities – based not on the political might of cities but the dominant regional river systems in England and Wales. It was an ambitious but largely sensible attempt to secure the long-term health of Britain's water supply. In early February 1973, Geoffrey Rippon, secretary of state for the environment, told his House of Commons colleagues:

"This is a radical reconstruction. I suggest it is none the worse for that. It takes its place alongside the reorganisation of local government and of the health services in this government's overhaul of the administration of the country, to keep pace with the problems with which we shall have to deal through the remaining decades of this century and into the next."

Rippon was seeking approval for a programme of carefully coordinated public and private investment – but his plea fell on deaf ears among Conservative MPs and their colleagues across the aisle. Instead, a more radical strategy was introduced by Heath's successor as Tory leader, Margaret Thatcher.

Rather than investing any more public money in Britain's water infrastructure, Thatcher sought to put Britain's entire system of water provision back in the hands of the private sector. A decade after she came to power in 1979, and despite a public outcry and many referendums, she finally achieved this through the Water Act of 1989. This turned the regional water authorities in England and Wales into limited companies, and offered lucrative regional monopolies to the highest bidders. (In Scotland, the plans to privatise were met with particularly strong opposition, and its public schemes remain to this day.)

In one infamous speech in the House of Commons, Thatcher's argument rested on a simplistic eco-

Rather than investing more public money in water infrastructure, Thatcher sought to put Britain's water provision back in the hands of the private sector

logic case for long-needed investment: "It will be the people who want those improvements in water who will have to pay."

This was a reversion back to the Victorian origins of Britain's approach to water provision. But the prime minister had orchestrated her case well. Restrictions imposed by her government on public borrowing since the early 1980s had made it impossible for the regional water authorities to borrow money for investments for over a decade.

At the same time, the 1980s saw a steadily growing concern for the environment among the British public and rising demand for improvement of its waterways. The UK's embarrassing failure to meet European obligations which it had co-designed made privatisation seem like a sensible last resort, even though such a policy had no precedence in any other developed country.

Yet it remained one of the most unpopular policy decisions of the Thatcher government. In 1994, the *Daily Mail* – usually an ardent supporter of the Conservative party – condemned it under the headline "The Great Water Robbery," declaring:

"When it was privatised in 1989, the water industry was hailed as the jewel in the crown of the Thatcherite privatisation programme ... In reality, the water industry has become the biggest rip-off in Britain.

Water bills, both to households and industry, have soared. And the directors and shareholders of Britain's top-ten water companies have been able to use their position as monopoly suppliers to pull off the greatest act of licensed robbery in our history."

Globally, the full-scale water privatisation of England and Wales remains an exception, other than for a few World Bank-led initiatives in developing economies. Most European countries have opted for a coexistence of private and public bodies.

In England and Wales, selling off water providers as regional monopolies led to unsustainable price hikes, with company after company prioritising shareholders over customers from the get-go. Whereas publicised investment strategies implied that sewerage systems had, on average, a reliable lifetime of 280 years, in reality many are crumbling away – with even conservative evaluations limiting their lifetime to about 110 years, such that some urgent upgrades are now urgently needed.

In the summer of 1995, when Torbay experienced the UK's first major outbreak of a waterborne parasite since Thatcher's privatisation programme, investigations by Public Health England traced the outbreak to the Littlehempston water treatment facility near Totnes – but there was no conclusive evidence on how the cryptosporidium parasite had entered the water.

South West Water offered £15 to each affected household, but claims of reputational and economic damage from the outbreak were growing by the hour. Legal action against the company followed but the case was thrown out. After installing a new filtration system, South West Water stated it had "absolutely minimised" any future risk of a stomach bug emerging from the faulty facility. Yet as litigation had been un-

successful, there was no pathway to test this pledge and hold the company to account for any future failures.

The familiar cop-out of downplaying the seriousness of any faults – whether in monitoring and regulating water quality, or a lack of investment in infrastructure – was voiced again in March 1997 by Conservative MP James Clappison, who noted during a debate on cryptosporidium that “most incidents are relatively minor happenings.”

Earlier that same month, Thames Valley Water had issued another dreaded “boil it” notice, this time to 300,000 customers in Hertfordshire and North London. Emboldened by the failed legal case in south Devon, the company robustly refused compensation claims and offered a single paltry payout of £10 to affected customers.

In Scotland, meanwhile, water had been retained in public ownership. Writing in *The Scotsman* in March 1997, columnist Lesley Riddoch remarked that in England and Wales, there was obviously “still no legal requirement for companies to com-

In the 12 months following Blair's election, all ten of England and Wales's water and sewerage companies were found guilty of environmental offences

pensate poisoned consumers.”

Following Tony Blair's landslide victory in May 1997, the new Labour government promised tighter oversight of the water industry – including an increased threat of prosecution for companies that transgressed. But for Adrian Sanders, then Torbay's LibDem MP, this didn't go far enough, as he told the local *Herald Express* newspaper in May 1998:

“I am concerned there still isn't anything to allow independent watchdogs access into water treatments for tests. There isn't a clearcut way for residents to seek compensation if they are the victims of the bug.”

In the 12 months following Blair's election, all ten of England and Wales's water and sewerage companies were found guilty of envi-

ronmental offences. Thames Water and Anglian Water were prosecuted eight times in 1999, and by 2001, Severn Trent led the “serial offenders” table with 494 pollution incidents since the new government came to power. But the associated fines were usually negligible. Wessex Water, a subsidiary of US energy company Enron, was fined only £5,000 (plus costs) for discharging 1-million gallons of raw sewage into Weymouth marina in Dorset one August bank holiday.

More recently, government-induced fines have increased. Since 2015, the UK Environment Agency has prosecuted 59 water and sewerage companies for more than £150-million. Yet outbreaks of waterborne illnesses from dodgy, stinking, and contaminated water sources remain all-too-common. In May 2024, Conservative MP Anthony Mangnall condemned South West Water's response to the outbreak of cryptosporidium in his south Devon constituency:

“I think this is contemptible and just generally incompetent – it's put a lot of people's health at risk. That, to me, is one of the most serious indictments because they were made aware of this by a large number of people, including myself ... So to not actually respond in a manner that would safeguard public health, I think, is deeply problematic.”

In the era of Covid-19, we mostly hear about epidemiology as the science of predictive modelling. But at its core, epidemiology is a detective science of outbreak investigation. This means carrying out proper diagnoses to verify the pattern of an outbreak, clarify the presence of a common infective agent, elucidate conditions that might accelerate the epidemic, then form a hypothesis about its cause.

Yet outbreak investigations seem too often to be a thing of the past. “The nearest I heard of any sur-

Photo: White House

Wikimedia Commons



The collision between the Princess Alice and the Bywell Castle on the River Thames killed 650 passengers. *Illustrated London News*, September 14 1878.

veys,” one Brixham resident noted earlier this year, “was post-Pilates coffee conversations: have you had the bug?”

As the earlier, failed legal challenge against South West Water in 1996 recalls, to develop a successful prosecution, a case needs good detective work involving up-to-date water monitoring as well as epidemiologists on the ground, counting cases.

In Keir Starmer’s first prime minister’s questions on July 24, the very first question posed – by Calum Miller, LibDem MP for Bicester and Woodstock – challenged the new prime minister to accept that “Britain’s water system is broken.”

The new government – in echoes of the Blair ministry almost 30 years earlier – had already promised in the king’s speech to strengthen the powers of the water regulator Ofwat, increase compensation levels for “boil it” notices, and make it easier for customers to hold water company bosses to account in special hearings. These measures point in the right direction, but they won’t go far enough to restore trust in British water after so many decades of failure.

Almost 150 years on from the original “march of municipalisation” led by Birmingham’s Mayor Chamberlain and other towns and cities, the corporate status of British water providers is back under scrutiny. While the new Labour government officially has no plans to re-nationalise Britain’s water, we’re squarely

In Starmer's first prime minister's questions on July 24, the first question posed challenged the new prime minister to accept that “Britain's water system is broken”

back in conversations about whether Britain’s best bet with water safety is a more draconian regulation of privatised companies, or a return to nationalisation.

With Thames Water in distress and steep price hikes ahead, this is a difficult political and economic gamble for the government and the water regulator. But even if the government ends up having to take some companies into “special measures”, this won’t address the overpowering issue of a leaking, ailing and stinking water and sewerage infrastructure that is unfit for purpose.

If the future of water companies continues to be private, public or somewhere in between (which seems most likely), a key question is how to maintain public and political will for infrastructure investments on the massive scale that is required – amid the “black hole” in public finances identified by the chancellor Rachel Reeves.

But ensuring safe and clean water also requires faster epidemiolog-

ical investigation and new monitoring systems. When things go wrong (and the next crypto outbreak will not be far away), affected customers require a proper outbreak investigation – not tokenistic compensation and lukewarm promises from their water provider.

Epidemiological analysis should commence as soon as a failure is noticed – not like at Brixham earlier this year, where a proper survey only began nine weeks after the “boil it” notices were sent out. Investigations carried out too late risk becoming complicit in any attempt to cover up the scale of a water crisis.

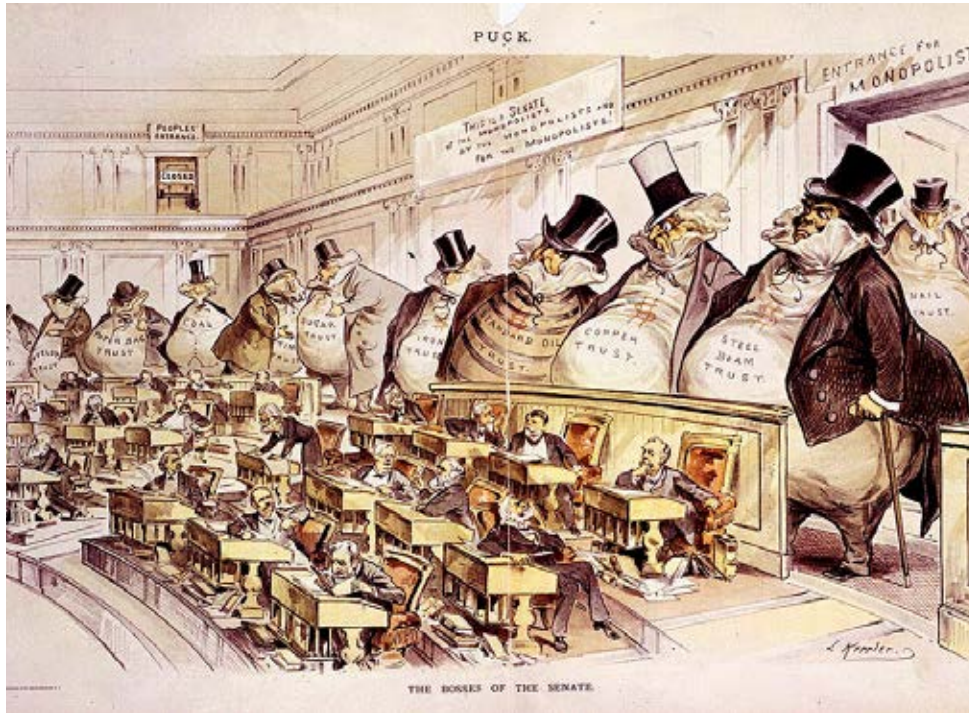
A better future depends on proper outbreak investigation in concert with appropriate legislation, which offers the chance to provide true accountability.

If evidence collected in timely fashion by an independent agency stands up in court, legal routes to compensation become a viable option for customers. This in turn should provide a considerable motivation for water providers – private or otherwise – to finally start cleaning up their shit. **CT**

Lukas Engelmann is chancellor's fellow in sociology and history of biomedicine, at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. Jacob Steere-Williams is associate professor at the College at Charleston, West Virginia. This essay first appeared at www.theconversation.com

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► EDWARD J. CURTIN

The ardent pipe dreams of American voters

Election time: the acceptance of propaganda and embrace of illusions

“To hell with the truth! As the history of the world proves, the truth has no bearing on anything. It’s irrelevant and immaterial, as the lawyers say. The lie of a pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober.” – Eugene O’Neill, The Iceman Cometh

Voters in the USA live in fantasy and probably always will. No matter how obvious it is that the US is an oligarchy, not a democracy, the ardent pipe dreams

of a new face in the White House go to their heads every four years. It can only be explained by a combination of intellectual ignorance, the acceptance of propaganda, and the embrace of illusions.

An analogy is apropos. In the small town and vicinity where I live, there are about 10 pot shops where pipe dreams are dispensed. As The Platters sang long ago, “*when your heart’s on fire, you must realise smoke gets in your eyes.*” But few realise it.

Smoke? What smoke?

Quadrennially, this love affair

with the presidential candidates burns hot and heavy despite their records, as if they were heart throbs of stage and screen, straight from Broadway or Hollywood deeply concerned for the public’s welfare.

Americans love actors, and the presidential candidates are of course actors, following the directions of the fat cats who produce their shows. As the grand opening of election day approaches, the supine public is aroused to a fanatical frenzy of excitement from its years’-long sleep by a mass media that spews out drivel to deceive. It could

be said that what the media propagandists digest, the public eats.

Smoke and mirrors never fail as the electorate's favourite billionaire-backed candidates – at this point in 2024 Trump and Kamala Harris (but don't count on it) – spew lie after lie and the mass media faithfully promote the show as if it were an actual contest between good and evil, a grand movie. The acting is terrible, but the audience is so inflamed they can't tell.

"There are unconscious actors among them and involuntary actors; the genuine are always rare, especially genuine actors," Friedrich Nietzsche told us long ago, alluding to far more than this crude political masquerade – to life itself – urging us to take a deep look at the games we play and love in our politicians because they confirm our illusions.

In the 2020 election between Joseph Biden and Donald Trump, more than 158-million ballots were cast, a record number that was two-thirds of estimated eligible voters. That was about seven percentage points higher than in 2016 when Trump and Hillary Clinton faced off. Each election was supposed to be the most important in "your lifetime."

And as everyone knows, the country has gotten more prosperous, healthier and happier, and the world more peaceful, in those eight years of Republican and Democratic rule.

One can expect more of the same smoke this year as the excitement, titillation, and political lies build to a November 4 crescendo. Illusions die hard, or to be more accurate – they do not die.

The Spectacle rolls on.

Although it might sound uppity, unless people read books that explain how the political and economic system is constructed and how it op-

Once the military draft was ended in January 1973, the public lost interest in who was being killed in America's wars

erates, they have no hope of understanding why the presidential elections are musical chairs played to the tune of *Yankee Doodle Dandy*. Podcasts and talks can be instructive when true, but they don't stick like words on a page in a book that you have noted and can refer back to. But the vast majority of people will not read such books because many can't read or are too lazy or distracted to take the time to switch off digital media and the mainstream corporate press.

It is only through slow meditative reading and study of the great analytic books about social structure, propaganda, history, capitalism, and political economy that a person can truly grasp the nature of the power elite's domination of the US government, the mass media, and the White House. A soupçon of differences between contestants for the presidency – superficial make-up – is enough to have those caught in the spectacle get worked up into a hot lather of excitement for candidates chosen by the billionaires. It is an aspect of the mania for celebrity culture.

One cannot simply imbibe the daily mass media, listen to talking heads, or read books recommended and promoted by the *New York Times* or some prize committee such as the Booker or Pulitzer prizes. It is no secret that the reading public has been shrinking for years as literacy has waned dramatically. This is not an accident as the internet, cell phones, and the

online life have been pushed by the authorities at every level, including throughout the school system. (I am not arguing that the voters saw through the electoral charade in the past because the level of cultural literacy was higher.)

Today, a walk into any local library throughout the country will confirm the sad state of what even those who read books are reading. The new fiction shelves are filled with books with candy-coloured sensationalised covers that evoke bodice-ripping books of old now updated to sound more serious by telling stories of orphans on European trains during WW II, mysterious murders, separated twins, equally evil Nazis and Russians on the prowl, childhood trauma, unfaithful men, etc. All seemingly *New York Times* bestsellers, together with the "non-fiction" books within which you would search a long time on the shelves to find a radical critique of the American political system and its propaganda arms.

This issue of voting and literacy is connected to another key matter. The American public as a whole does not much care to follow foreign policy and military issues. That is an understatement. Once the military draft was ended in January 1973, the public lost interest in who was being killed in America's wars.

Let foreigners be damned was the unspoken assumption. It was a stroke of genius by the military-industrial-political complex, for politics has always been about what's in it for us, and when the military is voluntary and Americans are dying in smaller numbers, people are indifferent to the killing.

When it comes to politics, the public's focus is primarily on domestic issues, the economy, health care, taxes, etc., despite the fact that the

entire economy is dependent on war and preparations for war and the US has been at war continually for decades. The US spends nearly \$900-billion dollars annually on “defence” spending; this is more than China, Russia, India, Saudi Arabia, the UK, Germany, France, South Korea, and Japan combined.

As everyone knows:

The US is **defending** itself in Syria where its troops illegally occupy the oilfields in the northeast.

It is **defending** itself helping Israel slaughter Palestinians and supporting an expanded Middle Eastern war.

It is **defending** itself by attacking Russia via Ukraine and leading the world to nuclear war.

It is **defending** itself by provoking China in the South China Sea.

It is **defending** itself all over the world with special forces and military bases everywhere because everyone is out to get us.

It is **defending** itself always far, far away from its own shores.

Everyone knows that’s how it goes.

But facetiousness aside, the voting public either doesn’t know or doesn’t care that the USA is a war-

**Without waging wars,
the US economy would
collapse. It is based on
fantasy and fake money
with a national debt over
\$35-trillion that
will never be repaid**

fare state; it’s as simple as that. Without waging wars, the US economy, as presently constituted, would collapse. It is an economy based on fantasy and fake money with a national debt over 35 trillion dollars that will never be repaid. That’s another illusion. But I am speaking of pipe dreams, am I not? And whether they choose to be aware of it or not, the vast majority of Americans support this killing machine by their indifference and ignorance of its ramifications throughout the society and more importantly, its effects in death and destruction on the rest of the world. But that’s how it goes as their focus is on the masked faces that face each other on the stage of the masquerade ball every four years.

This charade is comical but accepted by so many, and as the Halloween season in a presidential election year in the USA approaches, it becomes most clear. It’s always a trick until four years elapses and the next poisoned candy treat is offered.

Get to the polls. Your life depends on it!

But there is a big price to be paid – a lesson always too late for the learning – for going to the masquerade ball. Yet when smoke gets in your eyes . . . ah, such an exciting time it is!

“Do you not know there comes a midnight hour when everyone has to throw off his mask?” warned Søren Kierkegaard.

“Do you believe that life will always let itself be mocked?”

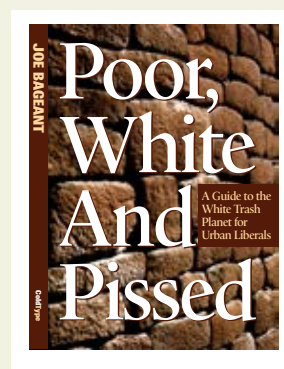
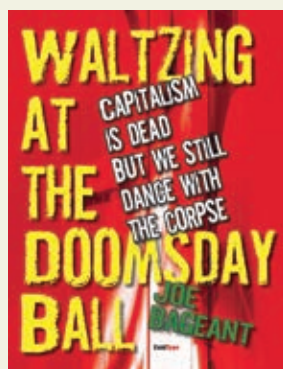
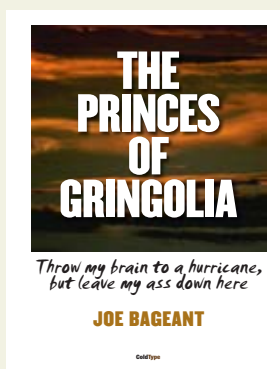
Do you think you can slip away a little before midnight in order to avoid this?

Or are you not terrified by it?” **CT**

Edward Curtin is an independent writer whose work has appeared widely over many years. His website is edwardcurtin.com and his latest book is ‘Seeking Truth in a Country of Lies.’

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► ANITA LAM

Trump and the art of the courtroom sketch

What started as an image drawn under a courtroom's tightly regulated conditions has since taken on a life of its own

For the first time in its history, *The New Yorker* featured a courtroom sketch on its cover. The image, which appeared on its April 17, 2023, issue, gives viewers a glimpse of a historic court proceeding that could not be captured by cameras: the arraignment hearing of Donald Trump two weeks earlier.

Because Trump is the first former US president to be criminally indicted, there is immense public interest in this case. However, when Trump pleaded not guilty to 34 felony counts of falsifying business records, his reactions and expressions could be visually recorded only by three approved courtroom artists.

In a way, it was a throwback to an era when only artists could provide the public with visual records of court proceedings. Yet with more and more jurisdictions allowing cameras into courtrooms, courtroom artists now find themselves working in a dying field.

Having studied both courtroom sketches and tabloid crime photography, I sometimes wonder what might be lost if courtroom art were to become extinct.

Despite their dwindling numbers, courtroom artists are still able to pursue their craft because many judges continue to forbid photography in their courtrooms.

Yet a national standard for banning cameras in US courtrooms is less than 100 years old.

When news photography flourished after World War I, courtroom photographs became a staple of tabloids such as the *New York Daily News*. These newspapers regularly sent their reporters to cover high-profile trials, taking advantage of the uneven patchwork of judicial positions on whether cameras should be allowed in courtrooms.

The trial of Bruno Richard Hauptmann spurred a wave of regulations against cameras in courtrooms.

In 1935, Hauptmann was tried for kidnapping and murdering the child of Charles Lindbergh. To cover the so-called “Trial of the Century,” an estimated 700 reporters and more than 130 cameramen rushed to

Flemington, New Jersey, leading to reports of photographers climbing on the counsel’s table, shoving their flashbulbs in witnesses’ faces and jockeying with one another to take pictures of Hauptmann.

After investigating the sensational publicity surrounding the Hauptmann trial, the American Bar Association went on to ban courtroom photography in Canon 35 of its 1937 Canons of Judicial Ethics. Following the American Bar Association’s lead, Congress enacted Rule 53 of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure in 1944, which prohibited photography in federal courtrooms during judicial proceedings.

This statutory ban remains in place today in American federal criminal courts and in the US Supreme Court.

The bulky cameras of the past, along with their cables, microphones and wires, required judges, witnesses, lawyers and jurors to navigate around them. Today’s cameras, however – whether in their compact, portable form or as remotely controlled, permanently mounted features in courtrooms – operate as less physically disruptive recorders of court proceedings.

Although cameras can give the general public direct access to what happens during a trial, they can also threaten what the American



Mary Chaney's sketch of Rodney King on the witness stand during his 1994 trial. Library of Congress

Bar Association has termed the “fitting dignity and decorum” of court proceedings. When cameras are permitted, as they were in the O.J. Simpson trial, judges and lawyers sometimes worry that the proceedings will turn into a circuslike spectacle.

Because the history of courtroom sketches cannot be separated from the history of prohibiting photography in the courtroom, cameras and human artists are often positioned as competitors in the production of courtroom images.

Working with a print or television news agency, freelance courtroom artists need to draw quickly to meet news deadlines. Notably, courtroom artist Mary Chaney was able to depict, through more than 260 sketches, the criminal and civil trials of the four Los Angeles police officers charged with beating Rodney King.

When courtroom illustrators, such as David Rose, assert that “the camera sees everything, but captures nothing,” they are arguing that the camera’s mechanical eye is a poor substitute for – as Chicago courtroom artist Andy Austin puts it – “the human eye, the human hand, dealing with a human subject for viewing by humans.”

While the camera can immediately generate highly detailed images of a trial, it cannot capture the emotional resonance of a courtroom moment. By funnelling the emotional highs and lows of a trial through their body, courtroom artists can bring to their work irreplaceable sensory and dramatic insights.

Part of the drama stems from a courtroom artist’s ability to compress hours of court action into a single drawing. Artists can also manipulate the composition and per-



Courtroom sketch of Donald Trump as it appeared on the cover of *The New Yorker*

spective of their drawings to create “artistic pull.” Even though judges, lawyers, witnesses and the defendant may be physically spread out in the actual courtroom, the artist can bring them into close proximity with one another and the viewer.

It is in this way that courtroom sketches can make viewers feel the emotional pull of the trial’s main characters. This is what happened in Jane Rosenberg’s viral courtroom sketch of Trump.

Compared with the drawings by Christine Cornell and Elizabeth Williams, Rosenberg’s image is the only one that depicts Trump looking glum, with arms crossed as he eyes Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg. Because Bragg is not visible in the image, it appears as though Trump is fully facing the viewer with an expression that has been simultaneously described as despondent, disdainful and “pissed off.”

To allow viewers to focus even further on Trump’s facial expression and body language, the *New Yorker* cover crops Rosenberg’s il-

lustration, so it becomes a portrait of a former president in criminal court. Made up of energetic pastel-chalk lines that are suggestive but ultimately unfinished, the rough sketch aesthetically aligns with the moral “sketchiness” that has long dogged Trump.

When Reuters tweeted Rosenberg’s courtroom sketch of Trump, it jump-started the image’s afterlife. Even though the practice of courtroom illustration has been described as a dying art form, courtroom sketches, like other cultural artifacts, are not only preserved in special collections and exhibits; they can also evolve through successive framings and interpretations.

Rosenberg herself is no stranger to creating viral courtroom sketches. When covering Deflategate – the deflated ball controversy involving NFL star Tom Brady – she drew a portrait of the then-New England Patriots quarterback that elicited comparisons to Quasimodo, Lurch and Thriller-era Michael Jackson.

Courtroom sketches can also be creatively transformed into online memes. Rosenberg’s Trump sketch has been photo-edited to evoke Edvard Munch’s “The Scream,” to include a bucket of KFC fried chicken and to appear as if he’d been caught by the Scooby Doo gang.

Trump’s fans and foes may not have gotten their mugshot. But they have a viral courtroom sketch, and what started as an image drawn under a courtroom’s tightly regulated conditions has since taken on a life of its own. **CT**

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