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Photo: Nate Robert

**One call from this
phone could have
ended the world.**

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Why US loves to call foreign leaders insane

Invasions and bombings are easier for people to accept when America brand its enemies as 'crazies' and 'mad men,' writes **Ryan McMaken**

This narrative helps to reinforce the credulous American public's naive acceptance of the idea that the US government is an untrammelled force for good in the international sphere, and that any opposition to the US must be based on irrational, evil motives

When the US government decides it doesn't like a foreign regime, it's become something of a tradition for US politicians – with the help of a compliant media – to portray those leaders as irrational, unhinged, or even downright insane.

This was true of Saddam Hussein, and it was true of Slobodan Milosevic. In both cases, a foreign head of state was condemned as irrational in order to help justify US invasions and bombings of nations that were no threat to the United States.

The US narrative usually goes something like this – as described by Ronnie Lipschutz:

“Why would so-called rogues – and these are the only countries that, according to Washington, threaten US forces, allies, or interests – choose to [threaten the US]? No rational reason can be given, and so irrational ones are offered instead. They hate us, but for no reason since we have no designs on them. They desire vengeance, but for no reason since we have never offended them. They wish to injure us, for no reason, since they have only been injured through their interference with our pursuit of order.”

This narrative helps to reinforce the credulous American public's naive acceptance of the idea that the US government is an untrammelled force for good in the inter-

national sphere, and that any opposition to the US must be based on irrational, evil motives. If any other head of state is angry with the United States, it's simply because he absurdly desires world conquest, or to massacre innocents. Or he may even be insane.

Why we must claim they're crazy

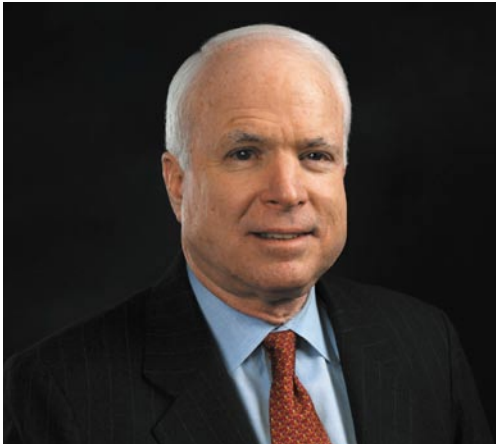
But there's an even more important motivation behind portraying “rogue” nations as being run by crazy people. It allows advocates for war to claim that deterrence via America's huge nuclear and conventional arsenals will not work – and thus these leaders present a grave threat to the American public. Lipschutz notes, “if insanity or irrationality are to blame for wars, deterrence cannot work to prevent them.”

A rational head of state, of course, would understand that any existential threat to the US could mean total nuclear annihilation for the offender. On the other hand, if the head of state is just insane, then all bets are off.

It is not surprising, then, that this narrative is being trotted out yet again in the case of North Korea.

Nuclear deterrence may have worked against Joseph Stalin – who apparently was a super-reasonable and level-headed guy – but Kim Jong-un is just crazy.

Naturally, ultra-hawk John McCain has been at the forefront of this rhetorical effort, calling Kim Jong-un a “crazy fat kid.”



FIGHTING TALK: John McCain (above) called Kim Jong-un (right) a “crazy fat kid.”

Photos: Wikipedia

it's not uncommon to encounter pro-war commentators who insist – without proffering any evidence – that Kim is simply impervious to nuclear deterrence, and thus must be killed (along with millions of other North Koreans) in a pre-emptive nuclear holocaust

Later, McCain's daughter got in on the act, calling Kim a “total absolute maniac.”

These attempts at portraying Kim as immune to deterrence are so common, in fact, that Isaac Fish from Foreign Policy magazine has declared “there is widespread belief in the US that North Korea is so hard to deal with because Kim is insane.” Fish, on the other hand, concludes Kim has understandable motives just like most everyone else.

Certainly, in social media, it's not uncommon to encounter pro-war commentators who insist – without proffering any evidence – that Kim is simply impervious to nuclear deterrence, and thus must be killed (along with millions of other North Koreans) in a pre-emptive nuclear holocaust.

Kim is sane – and predictable

Those who have actually bothered to study Kim and his regime, however, often take a rather more moderate position.

Charles Peña begins with the obvious question and provides the obvious answer: “But isn't Kim Jong-un an unpredictable – even crazy– leader who can't be deterred? The same was said of Stalin and Mao in their time, yet both those leaders were deterred. Moreover, Kim Jong-un would have to be suicidal to launch a nuclear weapon against the United States since the United

States has the ability to retaliate with utter devastation.”

David C. Kang also concludes, “Kim Jong-un may be many things, but he is not suicidal. Deterrence will continue to work.”

Contrary to the idea that Kim and the North Koreans are crazed loose cannons, the North Koreans behave exactly as any other regime bent on maintaining its regime. Far from seeking to die in a blaze of glory, Kim wants to go on living as a dictator indefinitely.

As Peña notes, Kim wants “to secure his own survival and that of his regime, much like his father and his father's father before him. That would certainly explain the executions and assassinations of those who might usurp him, which include family members.”

The regime wants to survive – and not be a victim of “regime change” which is exactly why, as Kang writes, “North Korea isn't unpredictable; rather, it is the most predictable country on earth.”

Even US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson – perhaps the most reasonable person on Trump's foreign policy team – admits, “He may be ruthless. He may be a murderer. He may be someone who in many respects we would say by our standards is irrational. But he is not insane.”

But why would the regime want nu-

Face Of The Enemy

In order to justify a first-strike nuclear war or a pre-emptive war against the North Koreans, the John McCains of the world must convince the world that Kim is simply insane And is not subject to deterrence

clear weapons if not to use them? Kim wants nukes as protection against “regime change” imposed by the US, since, as Pena notes, “Having nuclear weapons would seem to be an effective deterrent against regime change. After all, other dictatorial leaders who gave up their weapons programs – such as Iraq’s Saddam Hussein and Libya’s Muammar el-Qaddafi – paid a high price for those decisions.”

Castro figured it out

Jacob Hornberger has explained how Fidel Castro was one of the first to figure out the need for nuclear weapons as protection against American-sponsored regime change: “[Cuba’s success in the Cuban Missile Crisis] showed that if an independent, recalcitrant Third World regime wants to protect itself from a US national-security-state regime-change operation, the best thing it can do is secure nuclear weapons.”

Thus, North Korea’s behaviour in this regard has been utterly predictable, rational, and what we would expect from a head of state in his position.

Kim understands nuclear deterrence perfectly well. He knows that it is the only thing that works against the US’s plans for yet another regime change operation. However, in order to justify a first-strike nuclear war or a pre-emptive war against the North Koreans, the John McCains of the world must convince the world that Kim is simply insane and is not subject to deterrence.

This “he’s crazy!” strategy is then mixed with endless ominous news reports about what new missile Kim’s regime is testing this week, and just how many nuclear warheads he may or may not have. Indeed, the evidence is rather spotty in this regard. For the sake of argument, however, let’s assume that the regime has nuclear warheads, and it has the ability to deliver them to the North American mainland.

Okay, well, then it’s a good thing nuclear deterrence works. After all, we know for sure that the Chinese regime has many nukes,

and the ability to deliver them. In fact, the Chinese have had nuclear capability for decades, and will continue to have it.

While Russia and the US both have more than 7,000 warheads and enough nuclear firepower to destroy the planet many times over, the French have 300 warheads, and China has 260 warheads.

Moreover, it was just in August that China rolled out new ICBMs, including the DF-31AG, which puts most of the North American mainland within reach – and undoubtedly with far greater precision and reliability than anything the North Koreans have. And yet, all we heard about in the news was about North Korea’s low-rent, often-failing missile system.

So, the Chinese can almost certainly deliver multiple nuclear warheads to North America. So why aren’t we talking about a pre-emptive strike on Beijing? Why not strike now before the Chinese strike us? Is it just because the Chinese leadership – a faceless entity headed by people whom virtually no American can name – is so eminently sane? The Chinese heads of state are almost certainly sane, but unlike the North Koreans – and like the Americans – they seek expansion. This can be seen in the continued shows of strength by the Chinese state in the South China Sea and elsewhere. So why not talk about a war to stop this quest for global dominance?

In all likelihood, few talk about pre-emptive war on China precisely because it is known that a war against China would be an unmitigated global disaster. North Korea is small enough that the US military establishment can still flatter itself with the idea that it can pull off yet another regime change without having to face a real nuclear arsenal such as that held by China. Sure, Seoul might be totally destroyed, but that is a price the Pentagon is willing to pay.

Indeed, the vast nuclear capability of the Chinese, not to mention Pakistan’s growing ICBM capability, illustrates the absurdity of

the claim that any country that has nuclear weapons is about to use them on the US, and thus requires a pre-emptive war.

Yes, North Korea is currently involved in efforts to expand its ICBM capability. But we're only hearing about it because China, Russia, and others already have the capability. They don't have to fire test missiles into the ocean. They can already nuke North America, and everyone who's paying attention knows it. We've already been down this road with the Russians, the Chinese, the Indians, the Pakistanis, and others.

What to do

So what is a reasonable response to nuclear proliferation? President Dwight Eisenhower can offer some useful insights here.

The Soviet Union conducted its first successful nuclear tests in 1949. By the early 1950s, the Soviets were testing air-dropped bombs – which made sense for a country with a sizable air force. By 1956, the Soviets were testing medium-range ballistic missiles.

What did Eisenhower do? Did he threaten a pre-emptive war with the Soviets? Did he massively increase military spending?

No. In fact, during the early '50s, Eisenhower cut military spending, and by the end of Eisenhower's term, military spending had still not matched the levels built up by Harry Truman during the Korean war. This all occurred while the Soviets expanded their nuclear capability.

Naturally, if Eisenhower were president today, he'd be denounced by neoconservatives as a Russian tool and a traitor for both his military budget-cutting and his reliance on nuclear deterrence. Fortunately for Eisenhower, however, Lindsay Graham and John McCain were not yet in the Senate.

The larger point, of course, is that Eisenhower understood that nuclear deterrence works, and that, while it is an unfortunate option in a nuclear-armed world where much is beyond the control of the US military – it is the most reasonable and low-risk option. Unfortunately, the current US regime is practic-

ing what looks like the opposite approach.

With his constant "tough talk" about invading or attacking North Korea, Trump and his aides are courting the type of situation that leads to actual nuclear war. After all, for very bad things to happen, North Korea has to only believe that the country is about to be invaded and the regime annihilated. Constant threats of invasion are just the sort of things that lead to misunderstandings, human error, miscalculation, and disastrous wars.

Moreover, it's unclear that Trump is taking seriously the possibility that China could act to defend the North Korean regime from destruction. As John Mearsheimer recently noted, the Chinese regime views North Korea as an essential buffer state against Western encirclement. The Chinese regime is unlikely to sit around and do nothing while the US adds North Korea to its list of Asian client states.

On the other hand, why talk about any of this when it all can be dismissed with a wave of the hand, and one need only declare "they're crazy!" In that case, the possibility of World War III with China and others need not even be weighed. If Kim is "crazy" then prudence dictates we must "do something" before his suicidal insanity takes over and he nukes San Francisco.

The "he's crazy!" claim thus acts as a magical talisman of warhawks who can denounce all caution and strategic concern that speaks against "taking out" the bad guy who will bomb us any second.

It's easy to see why John McCain is so fond of the tactic. **CT**

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Ryan McMaken (@ryanmcmaken) is the editor of *Mises Wire* at www.mises.org where this article first appeared, and *The Austrian*. He has degrees in economics and political science from the University of Colorado, and was the economist for the Colorado Division of Housing from 2009 to 2014. He is the author of *Commie Cowboys: The Bourgeoisie and the Nation-State in the Western Genre*.

During the early '50s, Eisenhower cut military spending, and by the end of Eisenhower's term, military spending had still not matched the levels built up by Harry Truman during the Korean war

The killing of history

John Pilger finds problems with the latest TV history of the Vietnam War produced by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick

One of the most hyped “events” of American television, The Vietnam War, has started on the PBS network. The directors are Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. Acclaimed for his documentaries on the Civil War, the Great Depression and the history of jazz, Burns says of his Vietnam films, “They will inspire our country to begin to talk and think about the Vietnam war in an entirely new way.”

In a society often bereft of historical memory and in thrall to the propaganda of its “exceptionalism,” Burns’ “entirely new” Vietnam war is presented as “epic, historic work.” Its lavish advertising campaign promotes its biggest backer, Bank of America, which in 1971 was burned down by students in Santa Barbara, California, as a symbol of the hated war in Vietnam.

Burns says he is grateful to “the entire Bank of America family” which “has long supported our country’s veterans.” Bank of America was a corporate prop to an invasion that killed perhaps as many as four-million Vietnamese and ravaged and poisoned a once bountiful land. More than 58,000 American soldiers were killed, and around the same number are estimated to have taken their own lives.

I watched the first episode in New York. It leaves you in no doubt of its intentions right from the start. The narrator says the war “was begun in good faith by de-



cent people out of fateful misunderstandings, American overconfidence and Cold War misunderstandings.”

The dishonesty of this statement is not surprising. The cynical fabrication of “false flags” that led to the invasion of Vietnam is a matter of record – the Gulf of Tonkin “incident” in 1964, which Burns promotes as true, was just one. The lies litter a multitude of official documents, notably the Pentagon Papers, which



Two US soldiers await the helicopter that will evacuate the body of a comrade after the battle at Long Khanh." Photo: L. Paul Epley, 1966

the great whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg released in 1971.

There was no good faith. The faith was rotten and cancerous. For me – as it must be for many Americans – it is difficult to watch the film's jumble of "red peril" maps, unexplained interviewees, ineptly cut archive and maudlin American battlefield sequences.

In the series' press release in Britain – the BBC will show it – there is no mention of Vietnamese dead, only Americans. "We are all searching for some meaning in this terrible tragedy," Novick is quoted as saying. How very post-modern.

All this will be familiar to those who have observed how the American media and popular culture behe-

Truth & Lies

The “meaning” of the Vietnam war is no different from the meaning of the genocidal campaign against the Native Americans, the colonial massacres in the Philippines, the atomic bombings of Japan, the levelling of every city in North Korea

moth has revised and served up the great crime of the second half of the 20th-century: from The Green Berets and The Deer Hunter to Rambo and, in so doing, has legitimised subsequent wars of aggression. The revisionism never stops and the blood never dries. The invader is pitied and purged of guilt, while “searching for some meaning in this terrible tragedy.” Cue Bob Dylan: “Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son?”

I thought about the “decency” and “good faith” when recalling my own first experiences as a young reporter in Vietnam: watching hypnotically as the skin fell off Napalmed peasant children like old parchment, and the ladders of bombs that left trees petrified and festooned with human flesh. General William Westmoreland, the American commander, referred to people as “termites.”

In the early 1970s, I went to Quang Ngai province, where in the village of My Lai, between 347 and 500 men, women and infants were murdered by American troops (Burns prefers “killings”). At the time, this was presented as an aberration: an “American tragedy” (Newsweek). In this one province, it was estimated that 50,000 people had been slaughtered during the era of American “free fire zones.” Mass homicide. This was not news.

To the north, in Quang Tri province, more bombs were dropped than in all of Germany during the Second World War. Since 1975, unexploded ordnance has caused more than 40,000 deaths in mostly “South Vietnam,” the country America claimed to “save” and, with France, conceived as a singularly imperial ruse.

Another genocidal campaign

The “meaning” of the Vietnam war is no different from the meaning of the genocidal campaign against the Native Americans, the colonial massacres in the Philippines, the atomic bombings of Japan, the levelling of every city in North Korea. The aim was described by Colonel Edward Lansdale, the

famous CIA man on whom Graham Greene based his central character in *The Quiet American*.

Quoting Robert Taber’s *The War of the Flea*, Lansdale said, “There is only one means of defeating an insurgent people who will not surrender, and that is extermination. There is only one way to control a territory that harbours resistance, and that is to turn it into a desert.”

Nothing has changed. When Donald Trump addressed the United Nations on 19 September – a body established to spare humanity the “scourge of war” – he declared he was “ready, willing and able” to “totally destroy” North Korea and its 25-million people. His audience gasped, but Trump’s language was not unusual.

His rival for the presidency, Hillary Clinton, had boasted she was prepared to “totally obliterate” Iran, a nation of more than 80-million people. This is the American Way; only the euphemisms are missing now.

Returning to the US, I am struck by the silence and the absence of an opposition – on the streets, in journalism and the arts, as if dissent once tolerated in the “mainstream” has regressed to a dissidence: a metaphoric underground.

There is plenty of sound and fury at Trump the odious one, the “fascist,” but almost none at Trump the symptom and caricature of an enduring system of conquest and extremism.

Where are the ghosts of the great anti-war demonstrations that took over Washington in the 1970s? Where is the equivalent of the Freeze Movement that filled the streets of Manhattan in the 1980s, demanding that President Reagan withdraw battlefield nuclear weapons from Europe?

The sheer energy and moral persistence of these great movements largely succeeded; by 1987 Reagan had negotiated with Mikhail Gorbachev an Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) that effectively ended the Cold War.

Today, according to secret Nato documents obtained by the German newspaper, *Suddeutsche Zeitung*, this vital treaty is likely to be abandoned as “nuclear targeting planning is increased.” The German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel has warned against “repeating the worst mistakes of the Cold War . . . All the good treaties on disarmament and arms control from Gorbachev and Reagan are in acute peril. Europe is threatened again with becoming a military training ground for nuclear weapons. We must raise our voice against this.”

But not in America. The thousands who turned out for Senator Bernie Sanders’ “revolution” in last year’s presidential campaign are collectively mute on these dangers. That most of America’s violence across the world has been perpetrated not by Republicans, or mutants like Trump, but by liberal Democrats, remains a taboo.

Seven wars for Obama

Barack Obama provided the apotheosis, with seven simultaneous wars, a presidential record, including the destruction of Libya as a modern state. Obama’s overthrow of Ukraine’s elected government has had the desired effect: the massing of American-led Nato forces on Russia’s western borderland through which the Nazis invaded in 1941.

Obama’s “pivot to Asia” in 2011 signalled the transfer of the majority of America’s naval and air forces to Asia and the Pacific for no purpose other than to confront and provoke China. The Nobel Peace Laureate’s worldwide campaign of assassinations is arguably the most extensive campaign of terrorism since 9/11.

What is known in the US as “the left” has effectively allied with the darkest recesses of institutional power, notably the Pentagon and the CIA, to see off a peace deal between Trump and Vladimir Putin and to reinstate Russia as an enemy, on the basis of no evidence of its alleged interference in the 2016 presidential election.

The true scandal is the insidious assumption of power by sinister war-making vested interests for which no American voted. The rapid ascendancy of the Pentagon and the surveillance agencies under Obama represented an historic shift of power in Washington. Daniel Ellsberg rightly called it a coup. The three generals running Trump are its witness.

All of this fails to penetrate those “liberal brains pickled in the formaldehyde of identity politics”, as Luciana Bohne noted memorably. Commodified and market-tested, “diversity” is the new liberal brand, not the class people serve regardless of their gender and skin colour: not the responsibility of all to stop a barbaric war to end all wars.

“How did it fucking come to this?” asks Michael Moore in his Broadway show, *Terms of My Surrender*, a vaudeville for the disaffected set against a backdrop of Trump as Big Brother.

I admired Moore’s film, *Roger & Me*, about the economic and social devastation of his hometown of Flint, Michigan, and *Sicko*, his investigation into the corruption of healthcare in America.

The night I saw his show, his happy-clappy audience cheered his reassurance that “we are the majority!” and calls to “impeach Trump, a liar and a fascist!” His message seemed to be that had you held your nose and voted for Hillary Clinton, life would be predictable again.

He may be right. Instead of merely abusing the world, as Trump does, the Great Obliterator might have attacked Iran and lobbed missiles at Putin, whom she likened to Hitler: a particular profanity given the 27-million Russians who died in Hitler’s invasion.

“Listen up,” said Moore, “putting aside what our governments do, Americans are really loved by the world!”

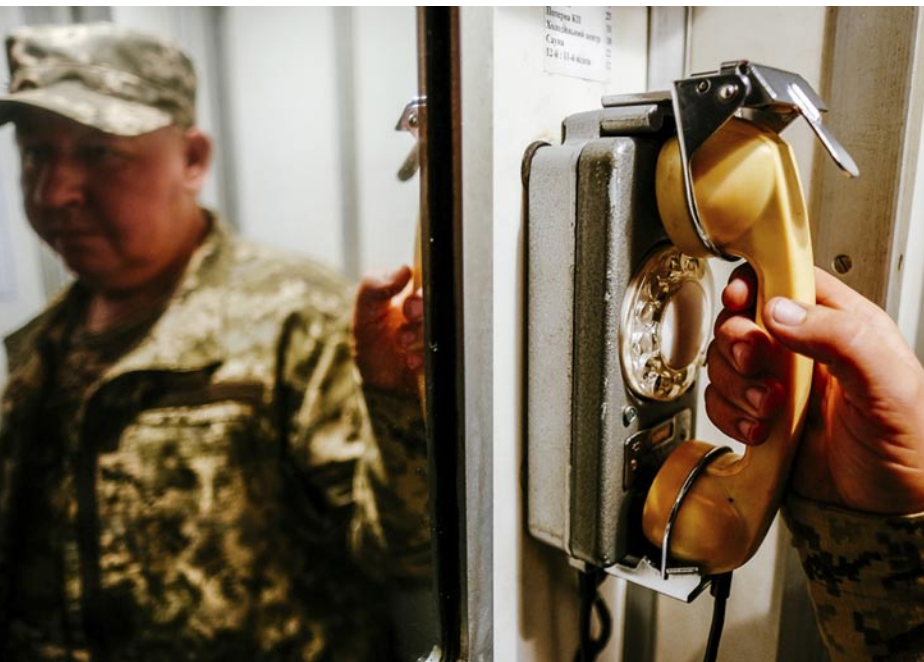
There was a silence.

CT

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John Pilger’s latest film is *The Coming War On China*. his website is www.johnpilger.com

What is known in the US as “the left” has effectively allied with the darkest recesses of institutional power, notably the Pentagon and the CIA, to see off a peace deal between Trump and Vladimir Putin and to reinstate Russia as an enemy

In The Picture



HOTLINE TO HELL: One phone call, and the it's end of the world as we know it.

Where the world ends

Nate Robert ventures inside a Soviet-era underground nuclear missile base

Twelve levels underground, I'm deep inside a Soviet-era strategic nuclear missile base, hanging out with a Ukrainian soldier. In a previous existence, he would have lived here for 45 days at a time, inside a control centre, awaiting orders from the Soviet Union's top-brass. Those orders would be instructions to launch one of 10 intercontinental ballistic missiles, with charming names such as Satan and Iron Maiden, aimed at US cities and military targets, theoretically giving the Soviets a first-strike advantage, while reducing the USA to a rag-tag collection of post-apocalyptic roaming-murder-gangs.

This is Strategic Missile Base Pervo Maysk, located in the middle of nowhere, a long way from the cities of Kiev and Odessa, surround-



ed by sunflower fields, in the quiet Ukrainian countryside.

Above ground, Pervo Maysk shows only a hint of what lies beneath. There are a few lightweight fences, some of them previously electrified, rusty barbed-wire and a small collection of buildings.

Beneath the surface, however, is something much more formidable: a cold-war-era Soviet Union nuclear missile base where, just a few years ago, an array of locked-and-loaded nuclear missiles was poised, ready for blast off. The earthquake-proof command centre also controlled other nuclear missiles, dotted around the vicinity.

These days, the facility has been decommissioned, but its contents are almost perfectly preserved – including the launch but-



ABOVE: The SS-18 Satan nuclear missile holds up to ten nuclear warheads, each 50 times more powerful than the bomb that killed 70,000 people in Hiroshima, Japan.

LEFT: A steady diet of 1980's Russians-as-bad-guys action movies, has resulted in my reading anything written with the Cyrillic alphabet with cautious suspicion. In this case, my fears may be justified.

In The Picture



ABOVE: Doors, tunnels, lifts. This section is suspended and separated from the surrounding Earth, it's designed to withstand a direct nuclear hit and carry on like it aint no thing.

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Nate Robert
specialises in travel photography. Since July 2012, he has been travelling the world full time, through 54 countries. His website is www.yomadic.com

ton, located in a tiny submarine-like room a very long way beneath the surface. I pressed it, and the control panel lit up, to simulate (I hope) the launch of 10 ICBM's. There were many buzzing sounds, and we joked about aiming the warheads at Mar-a-Lago.

What can I say? Nuclear weapons are an enigma. From the heartland of America to the Siberian plains in Russia, millions of people work many hours each week in jobs they mostly don't like, paying taxes that fund an arms-race that will one day likely destroy the human-race. And every nation with nuclear weapons repeats the same mantra: these weapons will only be used in self-defence; it's all about keeping the peace. Thousands of these weapons sit ready to fly on their one-way missions of destruction – all in the interest of maintaining peace, of course.

We're powerless to stop the madness. Maybe, we never stood a chance. Was it complacency and apathy that got us to this

point? Or is it our voluntary support for a decades-old conga-line of democratically elected leader-demons, spending with impunity the fruits of our labour on upgrading, maintaining, and enhancing these weapons of unfathomably powerful destruction?

Global thermo-nuclear war, as we all know, is a lose-lose proposition. There are no "acceptable losses" or "first-strike advantages." It doesn't matter where you live: there's no escaping the consequences. These weapons are real; there are already too many, and the power of just one would cause a single-event death-toll higher than anything the world has ever seen.

Meanwhile, North Korea races to build nukes while the US threatens to kill everyone in sight. As our leaders posture and threaten and continue this preposterous arms race, we stand in the background, gazing into the abyss, powerless to prevent the stupidity. **CT**



ABOVE: Several kilometres of underground tunnels lead to the missile silo and control centre. **LEFT:** Iron Maiden on display at the strategic missile force base, Pervo Maysk in the Ukraine.

The silencing of dissent

Chris Hedges tells how the corporate state is battling to control the war of ideas

No dominant class can long retain control when the credibility of the ideas that justify its existence evaporates. It is forced, at that point, to resort to crude forms of coercion, intimidation and censorship

The ruling elites, who grasp that the reigning ideology of global corporate capitalism and imperial expansion no longer has moral or intellectual credibility, have mounted a campaign to shut down the platforms given to their critics. The attacks within this campaign include blacklisting, censorship and slandering dissidents as foreign agents for Russia and purveyors of “fake news.”

No dominant class can long retain control when the credibility of the ideas that justify its existence evaporates. It is forced, at that point, to resort to crude forms of coercion, intimidation and censorship. This ideological collapse in the United States has transformed those of us who attack the corporate state into a potent threat, not because we reach large numbers of people, and certainly not because we spread Russian propaganda, but because the elites no longer have a plausible counter-argument.

The elites face an unpleasant choice. They could impose harsh controls to protect the status quo or veer leftward toward socialism to ameliorate the mounting economic and political injustices endured by most of the population. But a move leftward, essentially reinstating and expanding the New Deal programs they have destroyed, would impede corporate power and corporate profits. So instead the elites, including the Democratic Party leadership, have decided to quash pub-

lic debate. The tactic they are using is as old as the nation-state – smearing critics as traitors who are in the service of a hostile foreign power. Tens of thousands of people of conscience were blacklisted in this way during the Red Scares of the 1920s and 1950s. The current hyperbolic and relentless focus on Russia, embraced with gusto by “liberal” media outlets such as the New York Times and MSNBC, has unleashed what some have called a virulent “New McCarthyism.”

The corporate elites do not fear Russia. There is no publicly disclosed evidence that Russia swung the election to Donald Trump. Nor does Russia appear to be intent on a military confrontation with the United States. I am certain Russia tries to meddle in US affairs to its advantage, as we do and did in Russia – including our clandestine bank-rolling of Boris Yeltsin, whose successful 1996 campaign for re-election as president is estimated to have cost up to \$2.5-billion, much of that money coming indirectly from the American government. In today’s media environment, Russia is the foil. The corporate state is unnerved by the media outlets that give a voice to critics of corporate capitalism, the security and surveillance state and imperialism, including the network RT America.

My show on RT America, “On Contact,” like my columns at Truthdig, amplifies the voices of these dissidents – Tariq Ali, Kshama Sawant, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Medea Ben-



WRITING ON THE WALL: Free speech is being dismantled by stealth. Photo: Newtown Grafitti (Flickr.com)

Social programmes were slashed and funds for infrastructure, from roads and bridges to public libraries and schools, were cut. Protections for workers were gutted. Wages declined or stagnated. The military budget, along with the organs of internal security, became ever more bloated

jamin, Ajamu Baraka, Noam Chomsky, Dr. Margaret Flowers, Rania Khalek, Amira Hass, Miko Peled, Abby Martin, Glen Ford, Max Blumenthal, Pam Africa, Linh Dinh, Ben Norton, Eugene Puryear, Allan Nairn, Jill Stein, Kevin Zeese and others. These dissidents, if we had a functioning public broadcasting system or a commercial press free of corporate control, would be included in the mainstream discourse. They are not bought and paid for. They have integrity, courage and often brilliance. They are honest. For these reasons, in the eyes of the corporate state, they are very dangerous.

Where it began

The first and deadliest salvo in the war on dissent came in 1971 when Lewis Powell, a corporate attorney and later a Supreme Court justice, wrote and circulated a memo among business leaders called “Attack on American Free Enterprise System.” It became the blueprint for the corporate coup d’état. Corporations, as Powell recommended in the document, poured hundreds of millions of dollars into the assault, financing pro-business political candidates,

mounting campaigns against the liberal wing of the Democratic Party and the press and creating institutions such as the Business Roundtable, The Heritage Foundation, the Manhattan Institute, the Cato Institute, Citizens for a Sound Economy, the Federalist Society and Accuracy in Academia. The memo argued that corporations had to fund sustained campaigns to marginalise or silence those who in “the college campus, the pulpit, the media, and the intellectual and literary journals” were hostile to corporate interests.

Powell attacked Ralph Nader by name. Lobbyists flooded Washington and state capitals. Regulatory controls were abolished. Massive tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy were implemented, culminating in a de facto tax boycott. Trade barriers were lifted and the country’s manufacturing base was destroyed. Social programmes were slashed and funds for infrastructure, from roads and bridges to public libraries and schools, were cut. Protections for workers were gutted. Wages declined or stagnated. The military budget, along with the organs of internal security, became ever more bloated. A de facto

After 2008 it became clear that the “free market” is a scam, a zombie ideology by which workers and communities are ravaged by predatory capitalists and assets are funnelled upward into the hands of the global 1 percent

blacklist, especially in universities and the press, was used to discredit intellectuals, radicals and activists who decried the idea of the nation prostrating itself before the dictates of the marketplace and condemned the crimes of imperialism, some of the best known being Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky, Sheldon Wolin, Ward Churchill, Nader, Angela Davis and Edward Said. These critics were permitted to exist only on the margins of society, often outside of institutions, and many had trouble making a living.

The financial meltdown of 2008 not only devastated the global economy, it exposed the lies propagated by those advocating globalisation. Among these lies: that salaries of workers would rise, democracy would spread across the globe, the tech industry would replace manufacturing as a source of worker income, the middle class would flourish, and global communities would prosper. After 2008 it became clear that the “free market” is a scam, a zombie ideology by which workers and communities are ravaged by predatory capitalists and assets are funnelled upward into the hands of the global 1 percent. The endless wars, fought largely to enrich the arms industry and swell the power of the military, are futile and counterproductive to national interests. Deindustrialisation and austerity programs have impoverished the working class and fatally damaged the economy.

The establishment politicians in the two leading parties, each in service to corporate power and responsible for the assault on civil liberties and impoverishment of the country, are no longer able to use identity politics and the culture wars to whip up support. This led in the last presidential campaign to an insurgency by Bernie Sanders, which the Democratic Party crushed, and the election of Donald Trump.

Barack Obama rode a wave of bipartisan resentment into office in 2008, then spent eight years betraying the public. Obama’s assault on civil liberties, including his use of the Espionage Act to prosecute whistle-

blowers, was worse than those carried out by George W. Bush. He accelerated the war on public education by privatising schools, expanded the wars in the Middle East, including the use of militarised drone attacks, provided little meaningful environmental reform, ignored the plight of the working class, deported more undocumented people than any other president, imposed a corporate-sponsored health care program that was the brainchild of the right-wing Heritage Foundation, and prohibited the Justice Department from prosecuting the bankers and financial firms that carried out derivatives scams and inflated the housing and real estate market, a condition that led to the 2008 financial meltdown. He epitomised, like Bill Clinton, the bankruptcy of the Democratic Party. Clinton, outdoing Obama’s later actions, gave us the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the dismantling of the welfare system, the deregulation of the financial services industry and the huge expansion of mass incarceration. Clinton also oversaw deregulation of the Federal Communications Commission, a change that allowed a handful of corporations to buy up the airwaves.

Crisis state

The corporate state was in crisis at the end of the Obama presidency. It was widely hated. It became vulnerable to attacks by the critics it had pushed to the fringes. Most vulnerable was the Democratic Party establishment, which claims to defend the rights of working men and women and protect civil liberties. This is why the Democratic Party is so zealous in its efforts to discredit its critics as stooges for Moscow and to charge that Russian interference caused its election defeat.

In January, there was a report on Russia by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. The report devoted seven of its 25 pages to RT America and its influence on the presidential election. It claimed “Russian media made increasingly favourable comments about President-elect Trump as the 2016 US general and primary election cam-

paigns progressed while consistently offering negative coverage of Secretary [Hillary] Clinton.” This might seem true if you did not watch my RT broadcasts, which relentlessly attacked Trump as well as Clinton; or watch Ed Schultz, who now has a programme on RT after having been the host of an MSNBC commentary programme. The report also attempted to present RT America as having a vast media footprint and influence it does not possess.

“In an effort to highlight the alleged ‘lack of democracy’ in the United States, RT broadcast, hosted, and advertised third party candidate debates and ran reporting supportive of the political agenda of these candidates,” the report read, correctly summing up themes on my show. “The RT hosts asserted that the US two-party system does not represent the views of at least one-third of the population and is a ‘sham.’”

It went on: “RT’s reports often characterize the United States as a ‘surveillance state’ and allege widespread infringements of civil liberties, police brutality, and drone use.

“RT has also focused on criticism of the US economic system, US currency policy, alleged Wall Street greed, and the US national debt. Some of RT’s hosts have compared the United States to Imperial Rome and have predicted that government corruption and “corporate greed” will lead to US financial collapse.”

Is the corporate state so obtuse it thinks the American public has not, on its own, reached these conclusions about the condition of the nation? Is this what it defines as “fake news”? But most important, isn’t this the truth that the courtiers in the mainstream press and public broadcasting, dependent on their funding from sources such as the Koch brothers, refuse to present? And isn’t it, in the end, the truth that frightens them the most? Abby Martin and Ben Norton ripped apart the mendacity of the report and the complicity of the corporate media in my “On Contact” show titled “Real purpose of intel report on Russian hacking with Abby Martin & Ben Norton.”

Blacklisting the left

The blacklist published by the shadowy and anonymous site PropOrNot in November 2016 soon followed. The blacklist was composed of 199 sites PropOrNot alleged, with no evidence, “reliably echo Russian propaganda.” More than half of those sites were far-right, conspiracy-driven ones. But about 20 of the sites were major left-wing outlets including AlterNet, Black Agenda Report, Democracy Now!, Naked Capitalism, Truthdig, Truthout, CounterPunch and the World Socialist Web Site. The blacklist and the spurious accusations that these sites disseminated “fake news” on behalf of Russia were given prominent play in the Washington Post in a story headlined, “Russian propaganda effort helped spread ‘fake news’ during the election, experts say.” The reporter, Craig Timberg, wrote that the goal of the Russian propaganda effort, according to “independent researchers who have tracked the operation,” was “punishing Democrat Hillary Clinton, helping Republican Donald Trump and undermining faith in American democracy.” Last December, Truthdig columnist Bill Boyarsky wrote a good piece about PropOrNot, which to this day remains essentially a secret organisation.

The owner of the Washington Post, Jeff Bezos, also the founder and CEO of Amazon, has a \$600-million contract with the CIA. Google, likewise, is deeply embedded within the security and surveillance state and aligned with the ruling elites. Amazon recently purged over 1,000 negative reviews of Hillary Clinton’s new book, *What Happened*. The effect was that the book’s Amazon rating jumped from 2.5 stars to five stars. Do corporations such as Google and Amazon carry out such censorship on behalf of the US government? Or is this censorship their independent contribution to protect the corporate state?

In the name of combating Russia-inspired “fake news,” Google, Facebook, Twitter, the New York Times, the Washington Post, Buzz-

The owner of the Washington Post, Jeff Bezos, also the founder and CEO of Amazon, has a \$600-million contract with the CIA. Google, likewise, is deeply embedded within the security and surveillance state and aligned with the ruling elites

The latest salvo came in the middle of September. It is the most ominous. The Department of Justice called on RT America and its “associates” – which may mean people like me – to register under the Foreign Agent Registration Act

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

Feed News, Agence France-Presse and CNN in April imposed algorithms or filters, overseen by “evaluators,” that hunt for key words such as “US military,” “inequality” and “socialism,” along with personal names such as Julian Assange and Laura Poitras, the filmmaker. Ben Gomes, Google’s vice president for search engineering, says Google has amassed some 10,000 “evaluators” to determine the “quality” and veracity of websites. Internet users doing searches on Google, since the algorithms were put in place, are diverted from sites such as Truthdig and directed to mainstream publications such as the New York Times. The news organisations and corporations that are imposing this censorship have strong links to the Democratic Party. They are cheerleaders for American imperial projects and global capitalism. Because they are struggling in the new media environment for profitability, they have an economic incentive to be part of the witch hunt.

The World Socialist Web Site reported in July that its aggregate volume, or “impressions” – links displayed by Google in response to search requests – fell dramatically over a short period after the new algorithms were imposed. It also wrote that a number of sites “declared to be ‘fake news’ by the Washington Post’s discredited [PropOrNot] blacklist . . . had their global ranking fall. The average decline of the global reach of all of these sites is 25 percent. . . .”

Another article, *Google Rigs Searches To Block Access To World Socialist Web Site*, by the same website that month said: “During the month of May, Google searches including the word ‘war’ produced 61,795 WSWS impressions. In July, WSWS impressions fell by approximately 90 percent, to 6,613.

“Searches for the term ‘Korean war’ produced 20,392 impressions in May. In July, searches using the same words produced zero WSWS impressions. Searches for ‘North Korea war’ produced 4,626 impressions in May. In July, the result of the same search produced zero WSWS impressions. ‘India Pakistan war’ produced 4,394 impressions in

May. In July, the result, again, was zero. And ‘Nuclear war 201’ produced 2,319 impressions in May, and zero in July.

“To cite some other searches: ‘WikiLeaks’ fell from 6,576 impressions to zero, ‘Julian Assange’ fell from 3,701 impressions to zero, and ‘Laura Poitras’ fell from 4,499 impressions to zero. A search for ‘Michael Hastings’ – the reporter who died in 2013 under suspicious circumstances – produced 33,464 impressions in May, but only 5,227 impressions in July.

“In addition to geopolitics, the WSWS regularly covers a broad range of social issues, many of which have seen precipitous drops in search results. Searches for ‘food stamps,’ ‘Ford layoffs,’ ‘Amazon warehouse,’ and ‘secretary of education’ all went down from more than 5,000 impressions in May to zero impressions in July.

The accusation that left-wing sites collude with Russia has made them theoretically subject, along with those who write for them, to the Espionage Act and the Foreign Agent Registration Act, which requires Americans who work on behalf of a foreign party to register as foreign agents.

The latest salvo came in the middle of September. It is the most ominous. The Department of Justice called on RT America and its “associates” – which may mean people like me – to register under the Foreign Agent Registration Act. No doubt, the corporate state knows that most of us will not register as foreign agents, meaning we will be banished from the airwaves. This, I expect, is the intent. The government will not stop with RT. The FBI has been handed the authority to determine who is a “legitimate” journalist and who is not. It will use this authority to decimate the left.

This is a war of ideas. The corporate state cannot compete honestly in this contest. It will do what all despotic regimes do – govern through wholesale surveillance, lies, blacklists, false accusations of treason, heavy-handed censorship and, eventually, violence. **CT**

Saturated in propaganda

Even the rich think the system has failed, writes **Graham Vanbergen**

Noam Chomsky once said, “All over the place, from the popular culture to the propaganda system, there is constant pressure to make people feel that they are helpless, that the only role they can have is to ratify decisions and to consume.”

Chomsky, like so many others, is of course, right. Today, more than ever our world view is totally distorted by the saturation of information masquerading as news, in reality just propaganda. And rarely does anyone even partially question the status quo other than to acknowledge its existence. Strange then that around 80 percent of the population of Britain and most of Europe and the USA mistrust their political representatives. Why they buy into their vision of the future is still a mystery – logic would tell you the masses should have done something about this by now, if nothing else, to protect the sanctity of democracy.

Mass media propagandists are the main drivers to what we believe is going on in our world. Everything from historical accounts such as “our part” in the major wars of the 20th-century, to what we are to think about major events unfolding in front of us such as climate change. We are lied to on both sides of the debate, which is deliberately confusing.

People always have an opinion though, but there’s always a “but.” Everyone, without exception, knows there’s something wrong. The truth is, the truth is absent, or at least become so vague even the definition of the word truth

is a tool of propaganda” “truth – a fact or belief that is accepted as true.” The salient word being “accepted.”

Our system of defining and communicating the truth lies in what can now only be described as the fog of war – an information war. The functionality of the system has been centralised in recent years and fallen almost exclusively into the hands of a few billionaires whose incentives to keep the crumbling ‘establishment’ narrative intact because the status quo ensures you live in an ideologically ridden world, that deprives the vast majority of what could be achieved, whilst they live like royalty irrespective of the consequences.

A prime example is the recent growth of news regarding extreme left- and right-wing political activists. All over the West we are now witnessing civil society involved in battles not just in the streets of our capitals but on social media and the web. Increasingly, billionaires are funding groups, activists and think tanks. Their purpose is to confuse and divide the majority – an age old political guideline to divide and rule. This is officially defined as, “the policy of maintaining control over one’s subordinates or opponents by encouraging dissent between them, thereby preventing them from uniting in opposition.” You know that this is happening right now don’t you?

A substantial part of the propaganda model is, of course, corporate censorship. The system is such that reporters and especially edi-

Increasingly, billionaires are funding groups, activists and think tanks. Their purpose is to confuse and divide the majority – an age old political guideline to divide and rule



TRUTH OR LIES? In the UK, studies suggest that immigration has a small impact on average wages.

Less than a quarter of the public actually believe the establishment press and yet everyone has their political perspectives formed by a propaganda machine managed by media giants

tors have little choice but to share or acquire values that agree with corporate elites in order to further their careers.

“Migrants take ALL new jobs in Britain,” “Migrants trying to kill Brit truckers,” and “True Toll of mass migration on Britain: are the headlines of right-wing newspapers in Britain. You can see the divide and rule strategy at play – and we got Brexit.

So emotionally invested in these strategies, the general public never stopped to question these dubious statements and fight for what are the real facts. The dangerous rhetoric that Washington and

its media mouthpieces spews out on a daily basis about Russia is replicated in Britain. Supported by no facts or evidence whatsoever, these gross distortions play into the geopolitical card-game that the USA is playing 8,000 miles away from the shores of another nuclear power so well equipped it could wipe out humanity. In Britain, we allow our politicians to espouse the same nonsense with no means whatsoever of defending its own population whilst being located on the doorstep of a nation that could make this small island dust in just a few short seconds.

In another example, you would have thought that armed with the reasonable evidence that Britain’s EU referendum might have been rigged by American billionaires, a public uproar would have occurred with a political inquiry called for from on high. But no. The Observer, the newspaper that did have the courage to publish a damning 7,000 word article on the subject is being sued. And nowhere in the media has anyone had the fortitude to question what emerged and what is now known. We, the people have been fully indoctrinated into their narrative and been conned, in this case by omission.

Less than a quarter of the public actually believe the establishment press and yet everyone has their political perspectives formed by

a propaganda machine managed by media giants. They have all the weapons; printed and broadcast media, the internet, social media – they own it all.

True editorial independence simply doesn’t exist in mainstream media. Interference from newspaper owners and political parties along with the pressures of corporate advertising revenues drives content, the truth does not. Allegations of government officials pressuring and even threatening editors and journalists is rife in the industry. Indeed, Britain’s secret service MI5, is constantly accused of manipulating the press, whilst the political use of supposedly neutral sources (such as Google, HSBC and George Soros funding fact checker – see Full-Fact.org) results in a systemic bias that exists to completely distort the truth.

These platforms now force everyone into “informational bubbles,” commonly known as a self imposed “echo chamber” as if somehow its all our fault. This insidious, pervasive and ubiquitous bubble concentrates a narrative managed by the new commanders of the information war, favouring a pre-ordained establishment conclusion. Just five people own 80 percent of the newspapers we read every day in Britain, they also own TV stations, press agencies, book companies, cinemas and the like – so everything we read or see in Britain is almost entirely influenced by these individuals, none of whom reside in Britain.

Today, new political parties or new ideas have to break through establishment defensive barriers never seen before – that of the media platforms which now control and censor the narrative. Posting an article about Google’s 2.7-billion euro fine means the media charitably reporting that, “Google had abused its dominant position by systematically favouring its own shopping comparison service” – which was indeed universally the language used by the media. In reality, this is a global enterprise that rigged the system using criminal intent, who knowingly and fraudulently broke the law, illegally earned billions, ripped off millions of people, tried to kill the compe-

tion and then stashed their gains in off-shore tax havens. It's straight from the banking play-book: no-one went to prison, shareholders pay the price. The fine was small change for a company worth over half a trillion dollars that exploited the world's largest economy.

In Britain, the politicians are the main problem, though. It should be natural for MPs to support representative democracy above everything – they are, after all, supposed to embody it and serve the people they represent. It has become clear, though, it is not in their personal interests to do so. So they don't. The consequence, is that the media is allowed to be biased in their favour. This is evidenced by the fact that the British press is regarded as the most “right-wing” and “biased” in Europe, according to research by YouGov.

Britain is now an oligarchy. They rule by the distribution of propaganda, providing an illusion of freedom. But what is this freedom? George Monbiot writes: “When think tanks and the billionaire press call for freedom, they are careful not to specify whose freedoms they mean. Freedom for some, they suggest, means freedom for all. When corporations free themselves from trade unions, they curtail the freedoms of their workers. When the very rich free themselves from tax, other people suffer through failing public services. When financiers are free to design exotic financial instruments, the rest of us pay for the crises they cause. Ripping down such public protections means freedom for billionaires and corporations from the constraints of democracy. This is what Brexit – and Trump – are all about. The freedom we were promised is the freedom of the very rich to exploit us.”

Is there a solution to a political system that is owned by an oligarchy? Probably the only viable route visible is that public trust in the four pillars of society has crashed to all time lows – so low, in fact, there is little left to trust. If anything, this means that this egregious propaganda apparatus is no longer working as intended – hence the hysterical rhetoric and constant fear mongering.

This fearmongering has now reached the

farcical. Michael Fallon, the UK's defence Secretary is now peddling propaganda about North Korea's ability to nuke Britain. The Evening Standard reported, “UK Is Under Threat From Pyongyang Missiles, Says Defence Secretary Michael Fallon.” Of course, not only have we heard this irresponsible rhetoric before (think Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, et al), the facts simply do not bear out what this government mouthpiece is spewing out. The evidence is that – theoretically, a North Korean nuclear weapon (no evidence exists that they actually have a viable nuke), might be able to hit North America. But why would North Korea launch a nuclear attack against Britain when it is known to have limited military firepower, with South Korean and North American targets on its doorstep to defend against. Why is the British government supporting Donald Trump's careless and erratic geopolitical ambitions, which the UN has now warned is likely to lead the world into a global conflict?

Let's not kid ourselves. Much of the west as we know it is a guided (or managed) democracy, which by definition is either a de facto autocracy or an oligarchy. This system has failed.

Capitalism is forever at war; propaganda is its forward battleground. The violence it propagates is abstract. Austerity, a construct of ideology and not economics, is a device to convince the majority into agreeing to taking low pay, to increased poverty and denying good education and healthcare services for the good of the country. When the masses see through its thin veil the violence becomes more real. The enemies arrive at our shores. Threats of terrorists, rogue nations, nuclear attack and WMD are the sure signs that oligarchic neoliberal capitalism, the historical root causes of war, has reached its crest, the wave about to come crashing down.

If the propaganda machine starts to tell us we are under threat from an evil foreign force, when they start creating the motivation for us to go and kill and die for them, history tells us what is coming next is not good. **GT**

Austerity, a construct of ideology and not economics, is a device to convince the majority into agreeing to taking low pay, to increased poverty and denying good education and healthcare services for the good of the country

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Graham Vanbergen is the founder and contributing editor of TruePublica.org.uk - where this article was first published. He is also a columnist for the European Financial Review and the World Financial Review.

History as re-run

It seems we in the West are condemned to listen to the repeated lies of capitalism, its political servants, and compliant media monopolies, writes **Jason Hirthler**

Fourteen nations from the west had attacked Russia in 1918-1920 in an attempt to foreclose communism, but they failed. The effort was revived with the Nazis as the military vanguard

European essayist George Santayana famously wrote, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” This is repeated, as it just has been, ad nauseum as various persons (like yours truly) attempt to claim the mantle of wisdom. But the past is being deliberately repeated by those that do remember. By those that engineered the history we forget. Here are several ways in which history is repeating itself—on purpose—led by the capitalist deep state, their political servants, and the media monopolies that front its agenda to the general population.

People on social media rage about the double-standard applied to both the left anti-fascist protestors, the antifa anarchists, and the white supremacist marchers. Numberless voices rant about how the police protected the free speech of the white supremacists, but cracked down on anti-fascists. Now the government is moving to label antifa groups as domestic terrorists while doing nothing to apply the same tag to violent fascist racists. Some fairly argue that antifa are not the same as the majority of anti-fascist protesters. The former are violent, the latter peaceful. But the violence of antifa will be used to brand the entire progressive left as domestic terrorists. The right will largely be left alone.

But this is nothing new. Capitalists and fascists have always had a symbiotic relationship. Before World War II, historians blame

insufficiently strident capitalist politicians like UK Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain for “appeasing” the Nazis, as though they miscalculated the threat of fascism. What is forgotten is that they appeased the Nazis on purpose. Western capitalists rebuilt the German military and funded the rise of National Socialism after World War I. After all, the real threat to capitalism is communism, not fascism. As author Michael Parenti writes, “fascism is nothing more than a final solution to the class struggle, the totalistic submergence and exploitation of democratic forces for the benefit and profit of higher financial circles.”

The capitalist West hoped that the Nazis would attack Russia and destroy the burgeoning communist revolution there. Fourteen nations from the west had attacked Russia in 1918-1920 in an attempt to foreclose communism, but they failed. The effort was revived with the Nazis as the military vanguard. Only when the Nazis attacked western capitalist interests, did the west intervene against Germany. After the war, many fascists who had served in military, intelligence, and civilian capacities were left in place. Operation Gladio was designed to leave NATO forces behind in liberated countries to ensure those countries, such as Italy, Spain, and Greece, did not “go communist” but subjected themselves to semi-fascist proto-democratic forms of social organisation. Gladio generated a “strategy of tension” with campaigns of false flag terror-

ism designed to discredit the communists and drive the population into the arms of proto-fascist democratic forces.

We were weaned on fake news

For more than a year we've been told we now live in an era of fake news. The claim has been trotted out again and again, in places high and low. It is largely used by neoliberals to defame Donald Trump. But fake news is what you grew up on. Woodrow Wilson's Creel Commission brainwashed a somewhat pacifist population into drooling contempt for the "Hun." Adolf Hitler and his NSDAP brethren spoke in glowing terms of the ability of western media concerns to condition the American mind. The CIA has long infiltrated western media. A journalist wrote a book about the compromise of European journalists. MI5 has been long said to be running journalists.

American media rooms generally need not be "infiltrated," not that this hasn't been relentlessly done (then buried). Yet the effect of decades of fake news promoting American exceptionalism and excessively demonising all non-capitalists has produced several generations of robotic groupthinkers that have internalised the values of power. Rarely must such journalists even be instructed what to say; they already know: how to balance a story, how to under-report, how to deprioritise, how to frame, how to produce dead ends, how to terminate a train of thought, and how to remove responsibility from active agents using the passive tense. The techniques are myriad.

Modern newsrooms are full of such obsequious zombies. Former FCC Commissioner and Iowa law professor Nicholas Johnson noted four types of journalists. First, the young maverick who pens a thrillingly muckraking piece only to have it shelved by his or her prudent editor. Second, the cautiously optimistic journalist who runs the idea for a new exposé past his editor before thinking better of trying to write it. Third, the rather more skeptical journalist who kills the sensational investigation himself and doesn't bother airing

it with his superiors. Fourth, the perfectly assimilated journo to whom the truth-to-power story never even occurs. You might add a fifth kind, when the journalist becomes the editor himself and inaugurates the process all over again with some fledgling hire.

The story of what Parenti calls the "free-market holocaust" is never written about in the mainstream press. Only a few courageous souls, toiling alone and in obscurity, publish the truth. Given recent stirrings, we should reflect on the two-million North Koreans, or 20 percent of its population, killed by the west during the Korean War. The three-million in Vietnam. The million-plus in Iraq. The legions in Afghanistan. The half-million in Syria. The tens of thousands in Libya. The half-million Iraqi children killed by Western sanctions. Add that to the millions of displaced and exiled refugees internal and external to their countries. Add to that thousands of drone kills. Then there is the current slaughter in Yemen conducted by Saudi Arabia, our Islamofascist ally, using weapons we sold them, intelligence we give them, and military strategies we devise for them. We mustn't forget the Indonesian slaughter of East Timorese we greenlit and supported. Throw in Ronald Reagan's hysterical blood work in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. Thousands more in Chile, Haiti, Brazil, Zaire, Panama, Honduras, Colombia, Laos, Cambodia, and many more unlucky locations. Some have estimated the US is, directly and indirectly, responsible for 20-million deaths since the end of World War II. Add to that the millions lost annually to lack of social services that communist nations provided but that are stripped away under neoliberal capitalist regimes. One will encounter the western propagandists' dubious tabulation of the tens of millions in one-hundred-foot advertisements on the sides of buildings walking through Times Square, but never catch the slightest glimpse of US war crimes adorning any of that pricey ad space.

Few ever hear of these considerations. But take a roll call of major propaganda campaigns foisted on the American populace by its own

We should reflect on the two-million North Koreans, or 20 percent of its population, killed by the west during the Korean War. The three-million in Vietnam. The million-plus in Iraq. The legions in Afghanistan. The half-million in Syria. The tens of thousands in Libya. The half-million Iraqi children killed by Western sanctions

Now, thanks to the neoliberal ideology that insists everything be privatised including public utilities, we are subject to the ideological whimsy of Google and Facebook and YouTube as they tweak their manic algorithms to suppress anti-capitalist thought, otherwise known as free speech

media: we were treated to the Red Scare before and during World War One, the McCarthyite drama after the Second World War, the post-Vietnam revivification of the Soviet phantoms by Ronald Reagan, a man deeply imprinted by the McCarthy era. And that's just a short-list. Now the Democrats have reanimated the corpse of the Russian scare thanks to NATO's steady absorption of the former nations of the Warsaw Pact, Barack Obama's relentless demonisation of Moscow, and the Clinton clans' cynical use of Russian hacking to deflect attention from their own corruption.

Now, thanks to the neoliberal ideology that insists everything be privatised including public utilities, we are subject to the ideological whimsy of Google and Facebook and YouTube as they tweak their manic algorithms to suppress anti-capitalist thought, otherwise known as free speech. They do this in the name of democracy and maintain their democratic base by promoting diversity on the surface, while they quietly use H-1B migrants to exclude competent American minority workers, sacrificing native diversity for profits.

Reforms are holding actions

"I'm a free-market guy," wrote Barack Obama in his pre-presidential book, *The Audacity of Hope*. Indeed he was. Obama liked to talk about how social change was always "incremental" and that we must be patient. Doubtless he was talking to the downtrodden peasants of capitalism, not the wealthy privileged sector of neoliberals who are doing fabulously under the present system. Or not. Rather than use his bully pulpit to press – no, to fight – for single payer insurance, he revised right-wing Romneycare and proffered it as his own personal Great Society contribution. To be clear, the largely unaffordable Affordable Care Act (ACA) above all produced a guaranteed revenue stream of taxpayer monies for the corporate profiteers that are literally the insurance problem itself. But the ACA was a futile dodge of the question of universal care; it will eventually unravel as the inexorable demands of

shareholder capitalism overwhelm it.

But men like Obama never look back. They get in lockstep with the forward march of corporate profits for the pampered few. But the general proposition sprinkled through our newspapers is that we are all of us on a march of progress, and that uplifting social events like the civil rights movement and feminism and such are markers on the path to an expanded human consciousness. All smart propaganda contains a germ of truth, and these indeed were heroic efforts that achieved considerable breakthroughs. But what is presented as clearing the ground for democracy is anything but, and never has been.

Capitalist investment prefers structural adjustment programs (SAPs) by the IMF that lend money to strapped economies on condition that they reduce social spending, which incidentally reduces revenues and slows the economy, at which point these bewildered, or perhaps comprador, governments are encouraged to sell off national patrimonies such as resources and utilities and industry to elite capital interests abroad. None of this increases domestic industrialisation or self-sufficiency on any level. It creates nations of debt serfs completely dependent on the beneficence of western lending regimes, who can posture as liberal magnanimous cosmopolitans in front of capitalist media. Once said country is properly looted, the cameras click off, the globalists lose interest in the country, abandon it to unsustainable debt service, and move on to the next victim. This is not unlike the process by which lenders securitised toxic mortgages in exotic financial instruments and quickly sold them off to pension funds and other unwitting investment groups. Like passing a time bomb around the room.

What does modern research tell us? Thomas Piketty spent 700 pages telling us that capitalism increases inequality by design. He then proposes a few tepid transaction taxes on capital so he doesn't get blackballed from academia. Reforms like these are simply holding actions by ruling class elites in order to stem growing discontent. Although one of the

greatest eras in American history, the New Deal reforms of FDR were intended to save capitalism, as FDR himself admitted. They stemmed the tide of labour militancy. Immediately following their implementation, elite capital began a war to roll back these social advances.

In the so-called developing world, slums boom and become a permanent feature of the urbanscape, genuine “poverty traps” rather than short-lived purgatories on the path of progress. Because of the lie that economic socialism didn’t work in the Soviet Union, we happily ignore the performance of socialist development models when they exceed the neoliberal “Washington consensus,” which is designed to fail for the majority. Naturally, in an imperial state, those who have success rallying people to this truth are ostracized or, if necessary, liquidated. And so Martin Luther King, Jr. is slain just as he draws the connection between racism, poverty, and war. Likewise Malcolm X, Eugene Debs, and so on down the line of those who stepped out of line.

It’s always been class war

The reality is, class war continues around the globe. The frightful sight of the working classes lifting their heads is a perpetual menace to the ruling class, and must be fought and put down by the henchmen of private capital, as it was in Paris after 1871, Vietnam in the ’sixties and the al-Fateh Libyan Revolution in 1969, Nicaragua after 1979, and numerous other locales distant and near. Looking back shows that the present moment is but the echo of a forgotten past.

The destabilisation, coming partition, and alienation of Syria is class war writ large. The socialist and secular Assad government is being brutally dismembered by western globalism, a ruling class construct aimed at the delegitimising of independent states, which elites understand are the last barricade behind which powerless populations defend themselves. Once sovereignty is diluted, a transnational superstructure of investor rights agreements will assume the character of a kind of global Hammurabi’s Code. Rights, resources,

and wealth will accrue to the one percent investor class, a sampling of crumbs from the banquet table will fall to the globalised professional classes, which will gratefully support the elite cabal, and the remaining global majority, some seven-billion people, will subsist in conditions of rapid decline. The Human Development Index will fall precipitously and the income gap between rich and poor will be supplanted by a mortality gap that will contrast the long, comfortable lives of the rich with the truncated lives of desperation endured by the “unpeople” of the world, to use a Noam Chomsky phrase. This end varies only slightly, as one moves from continent to continent.

What we are witnessing in Venezuela is also a class war. A phalanx of highly motivated, pro-violence, anti-democracy elitists, acting as a fifth column backed by Washington, are squared off against the country’s majority, a generally Chavista populace energised to reify the gains made under the Chavez government (and who hold four of five branches of government). But the minority opposition has the trump card of Western violence to call upon, if all else fails. Is it a coincidence that Syria and Venezuela and Libya were secular socialist independent states, two of which were actively organising their continents to be self-sustaining without the debilitating conditionalities of IMF and World Bank loans? Without handing one’s economic power over to Washington? Without adopting the petrodollar? Without inviting CentCom into your region like a Trojan Horse? It’s not a coincidence. It’s a strategy.

If we see relentless propaganda in our own era on the planet, why would we think the popular historical record from the 20th-century any more reliable than it is now? Like Santayana, Karl Marx thought history repeated itself, although first as tragedy and then as farce. How true. There’s little more absurd than a populace of imperial subjects happily rehearsing the discredited platitudes of its monopoly media, thinking they are freedom’s flagbearers and an irresistible force for good in the world. Too often ignorance is bliss for Americans – and affliction for everyone else. **CT**

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Coke is sucking the water out of Mexico

People in Chiapas are forced to buy water as multinational company drains local wells, writes **Martha Pskowski**



ABOVE: In Zinacantán, a Tzotzil indigenous community outside San Cristobal, Coca-Cola is widely sold during the festival for the town's patron saint, San Jerónimo.

The water is disappearing in San Felipe Ecatepec, an Indigenous town three miles outside of San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, in southern Mexico.

“In the past four years, our wells have started drying up,” says Juan Urbano, who just finished a three-year term as the president of the Communal Territory of San Felipe Ecatepec. “People sometimes walk two hours a day to get water. Others have to buy their water.”

Where is all the water going?

In between San Felipe and San Cristobal lies a Coca-Cola bottling plant, operated by

the Mexican company FEMSA. The plant consumed over 1.08 million litres of water per day in 2016.

Urbano, 57, explains that the urban growth of San Cristobal has gradually eaten up agricultural lands in San Felipe. He is part of a shrinking number of people in the community that still grow corn, beans and squash on plots of land passed down for generations, and drink pozol, a drink made from fermented corn dough.

“Many people don’t drink pozol anymore,” Urbano laments. “They’ve replaced it with Coca-Cola.”

San Felipe Ecatepec is one of thousands of towns across Mexico where corporate water consumption has taken precedence over local need. Advocates are scrambling to rein in a chain of public health consequences.

Government is failing on constitutional right

Chiapas has the highest renewable water resources per capita in all of Mexico. Yet, the tap water here is rarely safe to drink. And in rural Chiapas, more than one in three people do not have running water. Urbano describes how families in San Felipe frequently get sick from drinking contaminated well water. “We have been asking the government to install a deep well in the community for 12 years,” says Urbano. “We’ve gone to the municipal, state and federal governments, but they’ve done nothing.”



SIGN OF THE TIMES: Storefront in San Cristobal selling 20-litre jugs of filtered water.

(Photo: Martha Pskowski)

Article 115 of the Mexican Constitution requires all municipal governments to provide potable water, suitable for drinking and bathing, along with drainage, sewage and wastewater treatment systems. Despite the government's responsibility, most Mexicans do not have safe drinking water in their homes. Each Mexican household buys on average 1,500 litres of bottled water a year.

Antonino García, an agronomist and researcher at Chapingo University's San Cristobal campus, says that the water problem in San Cristobal has historic roots. "The city has been growing significantly since the 1970s," he says in an interview at his office, which has a view of Huitepec mountain, where Coca-Cola extracts its water. "But in San Cristobal, there was no urban planning. And that's been aggravated by public policies that don't pay attention to the indigenous people of the state."

Looking at San Cristobal's geography, its haphazard organisation becomes obvious. As the valley floor has filled with homes, new neighbourhoods slowly have climbed up the surrounding hillsides. García explains that groundwater is no longer enough to feed the city, and that Huitepec is the watershed's most important subterranean supply.

Salmonella is now an endemic problem in San Cristobal. A study at the research university ECOSUR found that water in the local wetlands has high levels of bacterial pathogens, including coliforms, which make it unsafe for consumption.

García says the water shortages and contamination are becoming worse with climate change. The rainy season, which lasts from May to October, is not as consistent as in the past. San Felipe isn't the only community where wells are running dry. Urbano says other communities near the Coca-Cola

Salmonella is now an endemic problem in San Cristobal

Nothing To Drink

For Coca-Cola, there is no shortage of water. It uses 56.9-billion litres of water a year in its operations across Latin America

plant, such as Los Alcanfores, are also suffering water shortages. Community leaders in the town of Teopisca, 20 miles east of San Cristobal, reached out to García when their wells dried up this year.

On the night of September 7, an 8.2 magnitude earthquake hit off the coast of Chiapas. More than 90 people were killed in Chiapas, Oaxaca and Tabasco. While San Cristobal was not one of the hardest-hit cities, three people died in informal neighbourhoods in the north of the city. The impacts of the earthquake on water infrastructure are still being assessed.

García says numerous pipes broke, interrupting water access. “Surely the earthquake damaged underground caves in the aquifer, which could impact aquifer recharge in the future,” says García. “But a study to assess that type of damage would be very costly, and we just don’t have the information right now.”

Coca-Cola in the Highlands of Chiapas

While local communities struggle to secure water, for Coca-Cola, there is no shortage of water. The bottling plant opened in 1994, the year the Zapatista uprising put Chiapas in the global spotlight. While the Zapatistas organised in the mountains surrounding San Cristobal, FEMSA began pumping water from Huitepec mountain. The National Water Commission (Conagua) renewed the permit in 2005, and FEMSA now operates two wells. For Coca-Cola, there is no shortage of water . . . it uses 56.9-billion litres of water a year in its operations across Latin America.

In Mexico, lax government regulation, fuelled by the revolving door between government and industry, helped FEMSA become Coca-Cola’s most important bottler worldwide. Vicente Fox was president of Coca-Cola FEMSA Mexico before being elected Mexican president in 2000.

FEMSA reports that it uses 56-billion litres of water a year in its operations across Latin America. In Mexico, the company

holds 40 water permits.

Civil society organisations published the Report on Violations of Human Right to Drinking Water and Sanitation in Mexico, this year, which called out Coca-Cola, PepsiCo and Danone for profiting off Mexico’s water resources without paying fairly. The report states that the fees the companies pay “are completely ridiculous compared to the profits that these companies make off the water.” They report that FEMSA pays 2,600 pesos (\$146) for each of its water permits in Mexico.

FEMSA funds reforestation and rain water catchment projects, which the company says “replenish” the same amount of water that is used in Coca-Cola production. A FEMSA representative in Mexico City says the reforestation program in Chiapas has planted more than 129,000 trees. However, water catchment and reforestation in other parts of the state have not brought back the well water in San Felipe Ecatepec.

García sees a direct link between the deep wells of the bottling plant, and the nearby water shortages. “Imagine each well is a straw going down into the earth. If the Coca-Cola straw is much longer than the straws the communities have, their wells will eventually run out,” he says. Juan Urbano says the deepest wells in San Felipe are around 25 metres. FEMSA’s wells are 130 metres deep. Urbano adds that FEMSA representatives have never reached out to his community to address the water problem.

A FEMSA representative said the San Cristobal bottling plant produces between five and seven percent of the Coke products consumed in Mexico. The company declined to specify how much it pays for the water extracted in San Cristobal.

The Chiapas branch of Conagua confirmed that the company has permits for two wells to extract a total of 499,918 cubic metres of water per year, or 499.9-million litres. In 2016, the company extracted 78.8 percent of the permitted total.

The water situation in Chiapas has at-



HOME OF FIZZY DRINKS: The Coca-Cola-FEMSA bottling plant on the outskirts of San Cristobal produces five to seven percent of Coca-Cola products sold in Mexico. (Photo: Martha Pskowski)

tracted international attention. Léo Heller, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation, visited Chiapas this year. In a press conference on May 12, he said he had collected sufficient evidence to prove that Mexico is violating the human right to water and sanitation.

The civil society Report on Violations of Human Right to Drinking Water and Sanitation in Mexico includes dozens of case studies to prove how corporate water use is prioritised over the human right to water. The report also shows how the poorest Mexicans have the least access to water and sanitation services.

Advocates call for more water, less Coke

Beyond Coca-Cola’s insatiable thirst for Mexican groundwater, advocates have called out

the company’s role in the country’s health crisis. During decades working in Chiapas as a doctor, Marcos Arana found that water access issues were at the heart of public health problems in the state’s Indigenous communities. “If communities had access to clean water, many health issues in Chiapas would improve,” he told me..

“In many cases, children with malnutrition have access to food. But due to dirty water, they develop gastrointestinal problems and cannot eat properly or absorb nutrients,” he says, echoing what Juan Urbano described in San Felipe Ecatepec. He also saw that soda was replacing traditional beverages such as pozol, and in some communities, soda was even cheaper than water.

Meanwhile, public health organizations, such as El Poder del Consumidor (Consumer Power), based in Mexico City, have argued

In a press conference on May 12, Léo Heller, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation said he collected sufficient evidence to prove that Mexico is violating the human right to water and sanitation

Nothing To Drink

The long-term impacts of Mexico's soda tax remain to be seen, but a study predicted that during the next decades, the reduction in soda consumption will prevent between 86,000 and 189,000 cases of diabetes

that soda consumption was contributing to Mexico's soaring diabetes and obesity rates. According to the 2012 National Health and Nutrition survey, diabetes is the leading cause of death in Mexico and affects 13-million people. Another study found that one in six diabetes cases could be directly linked to soda consumption.

In response, advocates like El Poder del Consumidor and Arana campaigned for a soda tax in Mexico. They succeeded against the odds, and it went into effect in January 2014. While the tax is lower than advocates had recommended, it equals 10 percent the cost of the beverage, or roughly one peso per litre.

After the tax was enacted, soda sales fell by 5.5 percent in 2014 and 9.7 percent in 2015. Following Mexico's lead, US cities, such as Philadelphia and San Francisco, have passed similar measures.

However, soda companies aren't backing away. Fiorella Espinosa, a nutritionist at Poder del Consumidor, says companies have introduced new marketing campaigns to cope with the tax and sway public opinion. Plus, soda companies are more aggressively marketing bottled water, and bottled water sales have gone up. "The tax alone won't solve the problem," Espinosa says. "The long-term strategy is to increase access to safe drinking water and drinking fountains."

The federal government reports that funds from the tax have been used to install 11,000 water fountains in schools. Advocates are pushing for the remaining funds to be used for health programs for low-income communities that the price increase hits hardest.

Espinosa points out that in some cases, companies are not passing the tax along to the consumer. A study published in 2016 found that in rural Mexico, soda prices only went up 0.73 pesos per litre, instead of the full 1-peso required by law. This finding suggests that in places like rural Chiapas,

soda companies could be subsidising the cost of the tax to keep prices low.

The long-term impacts of the tax remain to be seen, but a study predicted that during the next decades, the reduction in soda consumption will prevent between 86,000 and 189,000 cases of diabetes.

While public health arguments have kept Coca-Cola on the defensive in Mexico's Congress, the company's unlimited refills of Chiapas groundwater are also facing local opposition.

Local outrage at Coca-Cola

In April, local non-profits and neighbourhood organizations held a protest outside the Coca-Cola bottling plant in San Cristobal de las Casas. The 1,500 protestors denounced Coca-Cola's water consumption and health impacts.

Arana says that ongoing citizen pressure is working. Coca-Cola previously had billboards in indigenous communities around San Cristobal, such as San Juan Chamula, showing men and women in traditional dress with Coca-Cola bottles. They have now taken down the billboards. "They're changing their strategy," says Arana. "They're worried about all the criticisms."

In San Felipe Ecatepec, Juan Urbano doubts the current Mexican government will help the community with its water problems. Instead, community leaders are taking part in the National Indigenous Congress (CNI), affiliated with the Zapatistas, to highlight Indigenous concerns during next year's presidential elections. **CT**

Martha Pskowski is an independent journalist based in Mexico. Since 2014, she has reported from Central America and Mexico on immigration, environmental justice and gender in Latin America for outlets including Vice News, Al Jazeera English and Mongabay. She is a former Fulbright fellow.

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This feature first appeared at www.truth-out.org



A crowd marches to support the election of Salvador Allende as president in Santiago, Chile. Photo: James N. Wallace, US Library of Congress

How to read Trump

You can burn books, but not the ideas that spawn them, writes **Ariel Dorfman**

The organisers of August's white supremacist gathering in Charlottesville knew just what they were doing when they decided to carry torches on their nocturnal march to protest the dethroning of a statue of Robert E. Lee. That brandishing of fire in the night was meant to evoke memories of terror, of past parades of hate and aggression by the Ku Klux Klan in the United States and Adolf Hitler's Freikorps in Germany.

The organisers wanted to issue a warning to those watching: that past violence, perpetrated in defense of the "blood and soil" of the white race, would once again be harnessed and deployed in Donald Trump's America. Indeed, the very next day, that fatal August 12, those nationalist fanatics unleashed an orgy of brutality that led to the deaths of three people and the injuring of many more.

Millions around America and the world were horrified and revolted by that parade of torches. In my case, however, they also brought to mind deeply personal memories of other fires that had burned darkly so many decades before, far from the United States or Nazi Europe. As I watched footage of that rally, I couldn't help remembering the bonfires that lit up my own country, Chile, in the aftermath of General Augusto Pinochet's September 11 coup in 1973 – that "first 9/11," which, with the active support of Washington and the CIA, had overthrown the popularly elected government of Salvador Allende.

The Chilean people had voted Allende in as their president three years earlier, launching an exceptional democratic experiment in peaceful social change. It would be an unprecedented attempt to build socialism

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Burning Books

Our book was meant to respond to a very practical need: the mass media stories Chileans had been consuming, that mentally colonised the way they lived and dreamed of their everyday circumstances, didn't faintly match the extraordinary new situation in their country

through the ballot box, based on the promise that a revolution need not kill or silence its enemies in order to succeed. It was thrilling to be alive during the thousand days that Allende governed. In that brief period, a mobilised nation wrested control of its natural resources and telecommunication systems from multinational (primarily US) corporations; large estates were redistributed to the peasants who had long farmed them in near servitude; and workers became the owners of the factories they laboured in, while bank employees managed their nationalised institutions previously in the hands of rich conglomerates.

As an entire country shook off the chains of yesteryear, intellectuals and artists were also challenged. We faced the task of finding the words for, the look of, a new reality. In that spirit, Belgian sociologist Armand Mattelart and I wrote a booklet that we called *Para Leer al Pato Donald* (How to Read Donald Duck). It was meant to respond to a very practical need: the mass media stories Chileans had been consuming, that mentally colonised the way they lived and dreamed of their everyday circumstances, didn't faintly match the extraordinary new situation in their country. Largely imported from the United States and available via outlets of every sort (comics, magazines, television, radio), they needed to be critiqued and the models and values they espoused, all the hidden messages of greed, domination, and prejudice they contained, exposed.

If there was a single company that embodied the overarching influence of the US – not just in Chile but in so many other lands then known as the Third World – it was the Walt Disney Corporation. Today, in addition to the many amusement parks that bear its name, the Disney brand conjures up a panoply of Pixar princesses, avatars of cars and planes, and tales of teenage angst and Caribbean piracy. But in Chile, in the early 1970s, Disney's influence was epitomised by a flood of inexpensive comic books available at every newsstand. So Armand and I decided to focus on

them and in particular on the character who then seemed to us the most symbolic and popular of the denizens of the Disney universe. What better way to expose the nature of American cultural imperialism than to unmask the most innocent and wholesome of Walt Disney's characters, to show what authoritarian tenets a duck's smiling face could smuggle into Third World hearts and minds?

We would soon discover what an attack on Disney would be met with – and it wasn't smiles.

Roast author, not Duck

Para Leer al Pato Donald, published in Chile in 1971, quickly became a runaway best-seller. Less than two years later, however, it suffered the fate of the revolution and of the people who had sustained that revolution.

The military coup of 1973 led to savage repression against those who had dared to dream of an alternative existence: executions, torture, imprisonment, persecution, exile, and, yes, book burnings, too. Hundreds of thousands of volumes went up in flames.

Among them was our book. A few days after the neo-fascist takeover of Chile's long-standing democracy, I was in hiding in a clandestine house when I happened to see a live TV transmission of a group of soldiers throwing books onto a pyre – and there was *Para Leer al Pato Donald*. I wasn't entirely surprised by this inquisitorial blaze. The book had touched a nerve among Chilean right-wingers. Even in pre-coup times, I had barely avoided being run over by an irate motorist who shouted, "Viva el Pato Donald!" I was saved by a comrade from being beaten up by an anti-Semitic mob and the modest bungalow where my wife and I lived with our young son Rodrigo had been the object of protests. The children of neighbours had held up placards denouncing my assault on their innocence, while their parents shattered our living-room windows with some well-placed rocks.

Seeing your own book being burned on television was, however, another matter. I

had mistakenly assumed – an assumption I still find hard to dislodge, even in Donald Trump’s America – that after the infamous Nazi bonfires of May 1933 in which tons of volumes deemed subversive and “un-German” had been consigned to the flames, such acts would be considered too reprehensible to be done in public. Instead, four decades after those Nazi pyres, the Chilean military was broadcasting its fury and bigotry in the most flagrant way imaginable. And of course it brought home to me in an alarming fashion a simple fact of that moment: given the public fate of my book, the perpetrators would have no compunctions about acting with the same virulence against its author. The experience undoubtedly helped persuade me, a month later, to reluctantly accept orders from the underground Chilean resistance to leave the country to assist in the campaign against General Pinochet from abroad.

From exile, I would then witness how our country became a laboratory for the shock-therapy treatments of the Chicago boys, a group of economists mentored by Milton Friedman who were eager to apply the economic strategies of a brutal *laissez-faire* capitalism that would conquer England and the United States, too, in the Thatcher and Reagan eras. They still, of course, reign supreme among conservatives everywhere, especially the plutocrats around Donald Trump. Indeed, many of the policies instituted and attitudes displayed in post-coup Chile would prove models for the Trump era: extreme nationalism, an absolute reverence for law and order, the savage deregulation of business and industry, callousness regarding worker safety, the opening of state lands to unfettered resource extraction and exploitation, the proliferation of charter schools, and the militarisation of society. To all this must be added one more crucial trait: a raging anti-intellectualism and hatred of “elites” that, in the case of Chile in 1973, led to the burning of books like ours.

I carried into exile that image of our book in flames. We had intended to roast Disney

and the Duck. Instead, like Chile itself, the book was consumed in a conflagration that seemed to know no end. That the military conspirators and their oligarchic civilian masters had been financed and aided by the American government and the CIA, that President Richard Nixon and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger had worked to destabilise and bring down the whole Allende experiment, only added a bitter scent of defeat to the suppression of our book (and so of our critique of their country and its ideology). We had been so sure that our words – and the marching workers who had stimulated them – were stronger than the empire and its acolytes. Now, the empire had struck back and we were the ones being roasted.

And yet, though so many copies of *Para Leer al Pato Donald* were obliterated – the entire third edition of the book was thrown into Valparaíso Bay by Chilean navy sailors – as with the Nazis, as with the Inquisition, books are hard things to truly destroy. Ours was, in fact, being translated and published abroad at the very moment it was being burned in Chile. As a result, Armand and I nursed the hope that even if *How to Read Donald Duck* could no longer circulate in the country that had given it birth, the version translated by art critic David Kunzle might, at least, penetrate the country that had birthed Walt Disney.

It soon became apparent, however, that Disney, too, was more powerful than we had anticipated. No publisher in the US was willing to risk bringing our book out because we had reproduced – obviously without authorization – a series of images from Disney’s comics to prove our points and Walt’s company was (and still is) notorious for defending its copyright material and characters with an armada of lawyers and threats.

Indeed, thanks to the Disney Corporation, when 4,000 copies of *How to Read Donald Duck*, printed in London, were imported into the United States in July 1975, the whole shipment was impounded by the Treasury Department. The US Customs Service’s Import

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Burning Books

It intrigues me that our ideas, forged in the heat and hope of the Chilean revolution, have finally arrived here just as some Americans are picking up torches like the ones that once consumed our book, while millions of others are asking themselves about the conditions that put Donald Trump in the Oval Office where he could fan the flames of hatred

Compliance Branch labelled the book an act of “piratical copying” and proceeded to “detain,” “seize,” and “hold [it] in custody” under the provisions of the Copyright Act (Title 17 USC. 106). The parties involved in the dispute were then invited to submit briefs regarding a final determination of the book’s fate.

The Center for Constitutional Rights took up our defence and, incredibly enough, under the leadership of Peter Weiss, beat the serried ranks of Disney barristers. On June 9, 1976, Eleanor Suske, head of the Imports Compliance Board, wrote that “the books do not constitute piratical copies of any Walt Disney copyright recorded with Customs.” As philosopher John Shelton Lawrence pointed out in his account of the incident in Fair Use and Free Inquiry, there was, however, a catch to this “victory,” a “serious snag in the final determination of the Customs Department.” Alluding to an arcane law from the late nineteenth century as justification, it allowed only 1,500 copies of the book into the country. The rest of the shipment was prohibited, blocking many American readers from becoming acquainted with the text and turning the few copies that made it to these shores into collector’s items.

Duck, It’s another Donald!

More than four decades have since passed and only now, eerily enough in this Trumpian moment, is the text of How To Read Donald Duck finally being published in the land of Disney. It is part of a catalogue accompanying an exhibition at the MAK Center for Art and Architecture in Los Angeles.

I would hardly deny that, so many years later, I find satisfaction in the continuing life of a book once consigned to the flames, no less that its “birth” in this country is taking place not so far from Disneyland or, for that matter, from the grave at Forest Lawn Cemetery where the cremated remains of Walt himself lie. (No, he was not frozen cryogenically, as urban legend has it.) No less important to me, our scorched book has snuck into the United States at the very moment when

its citizens, animated by the sort of nativism and xenophobia I remember from my own Chile when General Pinochet reigned, have elected to the presidency another Donald – albeit one more akin to Uncle Scrooge McDuck than his once well-known nephew – based on his vow to “build the wall” and “make America great again.” We are clearly in a moment when a yearning to regress to the supposedly uncomplicated, spotless, and innocent America of those Disney cartoons, the sort of America that Walt once imagined as eternal, fills Trump and so many of his followers with an inchoate nostalgia.

It intrigues me that our ideas, forged in the heat and hope of the Chilean revolution, have finally arrived here just as some Americans are picking up torches like the ones that once consumed our book, while millions of others are asking themselves about the conditions that put Donald Trump in the Oval Office where he could fan the flames of hatred. I wonder whether there’s anything those who are now my fellow citizens could learn from our ancient assessment of this country’s deep ideology. Can we today read a second Donald into How to Read Donald Duck?

Certainly, many of the values we impaled in that book – greed, ultra-competitiveness, the subjection of darker races, a deep-seated suspicion and derision of foreigners (Mexicans, Arabs, Asians), all enwreathed in a credo of unattainable happiness – animate many of Trump’s enthusiasts (and not merely them). But such targets are now the obvious ones. Perhaps more crucial today is the cardinal, still largely unexamined, all-American sin at the heart of those Disney comics: a belief in an essential American innocence, in the utter exceptionality, the ethical singularity and manifest destiny of the United States.

Back then, this meant (as it still largely does today) the inability of the country Walt was exporting in such a pristine state to recognise its own history. Bring to an end the erasure of, and recurring amnesia about, its past transgressions and violence (the enslavement of blacks, the extermination of na-

tives, the massacres of striking workers, the persecution and deportation of aliens and rebels, all those imperial and military adventures, invasions, and annexations in foreign lands, and a never-ending complicity with dictatorships and autocracy globally), and the immaculate Disney worldview crumbles, opening space for quite another country to make an appearance.

Though we chose Walt Disney and his cartoons as our foil, this deep-seated belief in American innocence was hardly his property alone. Consider, for instance, the recent decision by the generally admirable Ken Burns, that quintessential chronicler of the depths and surfaces of Americana, to launch his new documentary on the Vietnam War, a disastrous and near-genocidal intervention in a faraway land, by insisting that it “was begun in good faith by decent people” and was a “failure,” not a “defeat.”

Take that as just one small indication of how difficult it will be to get rid of the deeply ingrained idea that the United States, despite its flaws, is an unquestionable force for good in the world. Only an America that continues to bathe in this mythology of innocence, of a God-given exceptionalism and virtue destined to rule the Earth, could have produced a Trump victory. Only a recognition of how malevolent and blinding that innocence is could begin to open the way to a fuller understanding of the causes of Trump’s ascendancy and his almost mesmerising hold upon those now referred to as “his base.” My small hope: that our book, once reduced to ashes thanks to an anything-but-innocent CIA-backed coup, might in some small way participate in the renewal of America as its better angels search the mirror of history for the reasons that led to the current debacle.

There is, however, an aspect of *How to Read Donald Duck* that might offer a contribution of another sort to the quest upon which so many patriots in the United States are now embarked. What stirs me as I reread that document of ours today is its tone – the

insolence, outrage, and humour that flow through every page. It’s a book that makes fun of itself even as it mocks Donald, his nephews, and his pals. It pushes the envelope of language and, behind its language, I can still hear the chants of a pueblo on the march. It brings back to me the imaginative enormity that every true demand for radical change insists upon. It catches a missing feeling of our age: the belief that alternative worlds are possible, that they are within reach if we’re courageous enough, and smart enough, and daring enough to take control of our own lives. Para Leer Al Pato Donald was and still is a celebration of such imaginative joy that was its own best reward and that could never be turned into ashes in Santiago or drowned in the bay of Valparaíso or anywhere else.

It is that joy in liberation, that alegría, that spirit of resistance that I would love to share with Americans via the book Pinochet’s soldiers could not liquidate or Disney’s lawyers ban from this country. Now, it finally finds its way into the very land that invented both Donald Duck and Donald Trump. At a terrible moment, I hope it’s a modest reminder that we really don’t have to leave this world as it was when we were born. If I could, I might retitle it though. What about: *How to Read Donald Trump?* **CT**

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*Ariel Dorfman, an emeritus professor of literature at Duke University, is the author of the play *Death and the Maiden*, the upcoming novel *Darwin’s Ghosts*, and a new book of essays, *Homeland Security Ate My Speech: Messages From the End of the World*. He lives with his wife in Durham, North Carolina, and in their native Chile. This article was originally published at www.tomdispatch.com*

[Note: *How to Read Donald Duck* has now been published in the United States for the first time in *How to Read El Pato Pascual: Disney’s Latin America and Latin America’s Disney*, the catalogue accompanying an exhibition at the MAK Center for Art and Architecture in Los Angeles mentioned in this piece.]

Only an America that continues to bathe in this mythology of innocence, of a God-given exceptionalism and virtue destined to rule the Earth, could have produced a Trump victory

In The Picture

Photos © Rob Ball from Coney Island / Dewi Lewis Publishing



ON THE BEACH: Sunshine, sand, sea and freedom from the clamouring hell of the big city.

A meal for the belly and the senses

Rob Ball captures the charm and excitement of Coney Island

Carefree summer days in an exhilarating wonderland filled with garish lights, gaudy signs, and brassy music; the enticing aroma of normally-forbidden fast foods; rollercoasters, ferris wheels, dodg'em cars; vast, sandy beaches, swept by bracing winds; people cavorting, uninhibited, through the cool, foaming sea?

No wonder the seaside is still a huge magnet for

holidaymakers and day-trippers, whose pilgrimages preserve a tradition that began in Europe and North America during the late 19th-century.

Indeed, many of my fondest childhood memories stem from day trips with my parents and brothers to the English east coast resort of Skegness, a short bus ride from my family home. Those reminiscences reverberate clearly half a century later when, with my





10-year-old Canadian grandson, I revisit those old haunts and rekindle the experiences that thrilled me as a youngster.

Still, no matter how socially important and personally memorable, those English resorts pale in size and significance when compared to Brooklyn's Coney Island, the world's largest amusement area, a summer playground for millions of visitors from

New York City. Developed in the years between 1880 and World War II, Coney Island consisted of three huge amusement parks – Luna Park, Dreamland, and Steeplechase Park – and, as a result of their rivalry, became a focus for technological innovation during the early days of the last century.

In his new book, **Coney Island**, British photographer Rob Ball finds a resort that may have seen its best

In The Picture

Photos © Rob Ball from Coney Island / Dewi Lewis Publishing



STILL STANDING: The architecture is dated, the decor outlandish, but it's all part of the unrestrained vibrance of Coney Island,

days, but it still remains a huge cultural significance for New Yorkers. Ball articulates this historical context through the use of the unpredictable tintype photographic process, once favoured in Coney Island, where photos appear as a monochrome mirror-image of the original. The very long exposures used in this process eliminate the passing crowds of people, providing a ghostly, almost apocalyptic, peek into the future should Donald Trump decide to punish North Korea for its nuclear impudence. These photographs are balanced by colour work documenting the area's current diversity and popularity.

For Ball, senior lecturer at England's Canterbury Christ Church University, this book





FAMILY FUN: Stripping down to basics, the seaside is a land of frolicking fun for children - and grown-ups.



In The Picture

Photos © Rob Ball from Coney Island / Dewi Lewis Publishing



STARK MAJESTY: Monochrome tintype photographs project a hidden, almost post-apocalyptic, side of Coney Island.

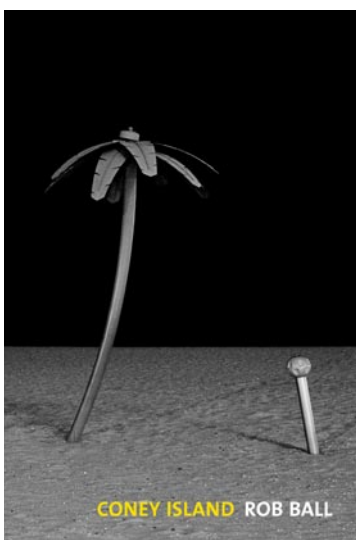
CONEY ISLAND

ROB BALL

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is part of a long-term photographic project on the history of coastal resorts and their cyclical rise and fall in popularity, and is a welcome sequel to his previous work, **Dreamlands**, that looked at another ageing, but still popular, amusement park at Margate in England.

Mark Rawlinson's accompanying essay sums up the delights that continue to fuel the seaside magic: "Shish kebabs and clams, cold beer and franks, hot pizza and Italian sausage. Coney Island and its amusement parks and beaches, a thick all-you-can-eat-meal for the belly and the senses, as it always was. Few airs or graces, the epitome of a guilty pleasure." Substitute some of the food, and you have a perfect definition of the seaside experience – in the United States, Britain, and all points between. For what is life about but the attainment of pleasure, guilty or otherwise?

– Tony Sutton

In The Picture



Urge, purge, splurge

Capitalism can't save the planet – it can only destroy it, writes **George Monbiot**

You can estimate the money you might make from building an airport: this is likely to be linear and fairly predictable. But you cannot reasonably estimate the environmental cost the airport might incur

There was “a flaw” in the theory: this is the famous admission by Alan Greenspan, the former chair of the Federal Reserve, to a congressional inquiry into the 2008 financial crisis. His belief that the self-interest of the lending institutions would lead automatically to the correction of financial markets had proved wrong. Now, in the midst of the environmental crisis, we await a similar admission. We may be waiting some time

For, as in Greenspan's theory of the financial system, there cannot be a problem. The market is meant to be self-correcting: that's what the theory says. As Milton Friedman, one of the architects of neoliberal ideology, put it: “Ecological values can find their natural space in the market, like any other consumer demand.” As long as environmental goods are correctly priced, neither planning nor regulation is required. Any attempt by governments or citizens to change the likely course of events is unwarranted and misguided.

But there's a flaw. Hurricanes do not respond to market signals. The plastic fibres in our oceans, food and drinking water do not respond to market signals. Nor does the collapse of insect populations, or coral reefs, or the extirpation of orangutans from Borneo.

The unregulated market is as powerless in the face of these forces as the people in

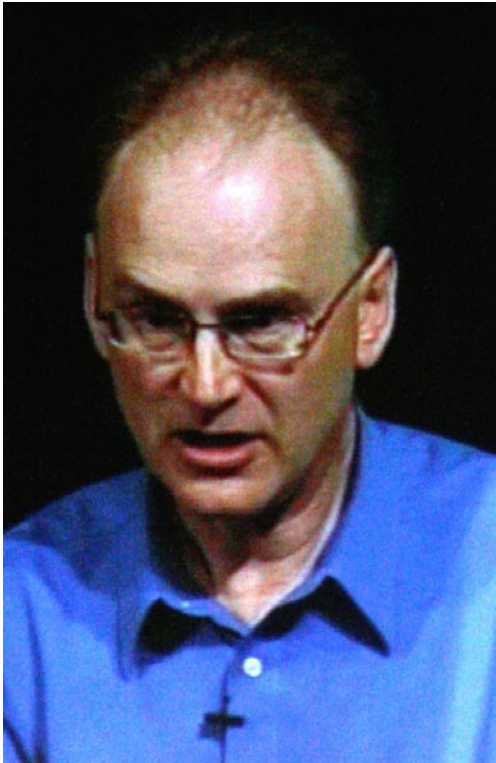
Florida who resolved to fight Hurricane Irma by shooting it. It is the wrong tool, the wrong approach, the wrong system.

There are two inherent problems with the pricing of the living world and its destruction. The first is that it depends on attaching a financial value to items – such as human life, species and ecosystems – that cannot be redeemed for money. The second is that it seeks to quantify events and processes that cannot be reliably predicted.

Environmental collapse does not progress by neat increments. You can estimate the money you might make from building an airport: this is likely to be linear and fairly predictable. But you cannot reasonably estimate the environmental cost the airport might incur. Climate breakdown will behave like a tectonic plate in an earthquake zone: periods of comparative stasis followed by sudden jolts. Any attempt to compare economic benefit with economic cost in such cases is an exercise in false precision.

Even to discuss such flaws is a kind of blasphemy, because the theory allows no role for political thought or for action. The system is supposed to operate not through deliberate human agency, but through the automatic writing of the invisible hand. Our choice is confined to deciding which goods and services to buy.

But even this is illusory. A system that de-



Alan Greenspan (left) and a slice of toast created by The selfie toaster: get yours at www.burntimpresions.com.

depends on growth can survive only if we progressively lose our ability to make reasoned decisions. After our needs, then strong desires, then faint desires have been met, we must keep buying goods and services we neither need nor want, induced by marketing to abandon our discriminating faculties, and to succumb instead to impulse.

You can now buy a selfie toaster, that burns an image of your own face on to your bread – the Turin Shroud of toast. You can buy beer for dogs and wine for cats; a toilet roll holder that sends a message to your phone when the paper is running out; a \$30 branded brick; a hairbrush that informs you whether or not you are brushing your hair correctly. Panasonic intends to produce a mobile fridge that, in response to a voice command, will deliver beers to your chair.

Urge, splurge, purge: we are sucked into a cycle of compulsion followed by consumption, followed by the periodic detoxing of ourselves or our homes, like Romans making themselves sick after eating, so that we

can cram more in.

Continued economic growth depends on continued disposal: unless we rapidly junk the goods we buy, it fails. The growth economy and the throwaway society cannot be separated. Environmental destruction is not a byproduct of this system: it is a necessary element.

The environmental crisis is an inevitable result not just of neoliberalism – the most extreme variety of capitalism – but of capitalism itself. Even the social democratic (Keynesian) kind depends on perpetual growth on a finite planet: a formula for eventual collapse. But the peculiar contribution of neoliberalism is to deny that action is necessary: to insist that the system, like Greenspan's financial markets, is inherently self-regulating. The myth of the self-regulating market accelerates the destruction of the self-regulating Earth.

What cannot be admitted must be denied. Ten years ago this week, Matt Ridley – as chair of Northern Rock – helped to

We are sucked into a cycle of compulsion followed by consumption, followed by the periodic detoxing of ourselves or our homes, like Romans making themselves sick after eating, so that we can cram more in

Flawed System

The sigh of relief from insurers and financiers when Hurricane Irma, whose intensity is likely to have been enhanced by global heating, changed course at the last minute could be heard around the world

cause the first run on a British bank since 1878. This triggered the financial crisis in the UK. Now, in his new incarnation as a Times columnist, he continues to demonstrate his unerring ability to assess risk, by insisting that we needn't worry about hurricanes: as long as there's enough money to keep bailing us out, we'll be fine.

Ridley, who helped destroy the hopes of millions, is one of the faces of the New Optimism that claims life is becoming inexorably better. This vision relies on downplaying or dismissing the predictions of environmental scientists. We cannot buy our way out of a process that could, through a combination of heat stress, aridity, sea level rise and crop failure, render large parts of the inhabited world hostile to human life; and which, through sudden jolts, could translate environmental crisis into financial crisis.

In April Bloomberg News, drawing on a report by the US federal mortgage corporation Freddie Mac, investigated the possibility that climate breakdown could cause a collapse in real estate prices in Florida. It looked only at the impact of sea-level rise – hurricanes were not considered. It warned that a bursting of the coastal property bubble “could spread through banks, insurers and other industries. And, unlike the recession, there's no hope of a bounce back in property values.” The sigh of relief from in-

surers and financiers when Hurricane Irma, whose intensity is likely to have been enhanced by global heating, changed course at the last minute could be heard around the world.

This year, for the first time, three of the five global risks with the greatest potential impact listed by the World Economic Forum were environmental; a fourth (water crises) has a strong environmental component. If an economic crisis is caused by the environmental crisis, it will be the second crash in which Ridley will have played a part.

They bailed out the banks. But as the storms keep rolling in, you'll have to bail out your own flooded home. There is no environmental rescue plan: to admit the need for one would be to admit that the economic system is based on a series of delusions. The environmental crisis demands a new ethics, politics and economics. A few of us are groping towards it, but it cannot be left to the scattered efforts of independent thinkers – this should be humanity's central project. At least the first step is clear: to recognise that the current system is flawed. **CT**

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George Monbiot's latest book, *Out Of The Wreckage: a New Politics for an Age of Crisis*, is published by Verso. His website is www.monbiot.com

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BOOK EXCERPT

Deep Strike

Russian hacking, rogue CIA agents, and a new American president . . .
The first two chapters of the new novel by **Barry Lando**

FORWARD

Like most works of fiction, this is one that began with a “what if.” What if, I wondered after the last presidential race, what if a small handful of CIA agents who investigated Russian hacking, were outraged by the blatant interference in America’s democratic process?

What if those agents were infuriated by the unwillingness of congressional leaders to react to their findings, and further inflamed by the refusal of the new president to acknowledge that the hacking had even taken place?

What if they were scandalised by the fact that America’s intelligence agencies and colossal military force would now be under the command of that same new feckless leader?

What if, pushed to the breaking point by the death of a colleague, three of those agents go rogue to take on the President and all his vast powers, and attempt to drive him from office?

To write this fiction, I made use of voluminous news reports about the US and Russia, accounts of America’s vast intelligence apparatus that the president controls. I received valuable input from a plastic surgeon, from an expert on Moscow, from hackers and cyber professionals.

But the characters in this novel – their backgrounds, their thoughts and words and interactions – are all invented. The crimes and corruption my agents uncover, the climactic ending to their struggle, are all spun from my own imagination.

It’s all fiction. It never happened.

But could it?

Chapter One

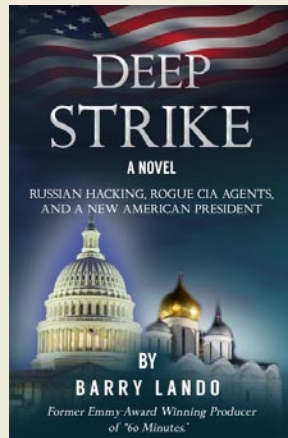
THE FOUNTAINHEAD REGIONAL PARK

Brian Hunt was fired up, an explosion of energy, as he tore up the Bear Claw Run, the most gruelling mountain bike course in Northern Virginia. The young CIA agent powered through it every Saturday morning. He had no way of knowing this morning would be his last. Pumping and slithering around the switchbacks and boulders, he pounded away with sinewy legs and core muscles of iron. The image of a pouncing tiger leapt across the front of his crimson crash helmet.

He leaned back in his seat and let out a primal scream of rage, venting the fury and frustration he’d been accumulating over the past few months. Who wouldn’t be outraged? After half a year of investigation, the team led by the CIA had nailed it. They’d uncovered chapter and verse on Russian hacking of the US elections. They’d briefed the Oval Office, the top people in the administration, the heads of the intelligence community, the leaders in congress. And, as the story leaked – as it was bound to – they’d generated headlines across the country, and around the world.

And what had happened? Nothing. Their findings were ignored by congressional leaders, played down by the wimp in the White House, derided during the campaign by the Republican candidate, Walter Stokes, who – incredibly – was now the new president. It was scandalous. Who knew what Stokes owed to the Russians? Who knew what deals had been made by those around him?

Yet no one was willing to act – not congress of course, controlled by the Republicans; not even the members of



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his own CIA team – yellow-bellied chickenshits. It was nauseating. Instead of reacting to the outrage, they'd crawled into their offices to lick their wounds. And he'd been a fool, dedicating his life, sacrificing his family – Joanne and the kids – supposedly for the national good. Such crap. He'd make it up to them.

The muscles in his thighs and gut were burning, his heart pounded in his chest, another switchback, and suddenly he was at the summit, looking out over the Occogugna Reservoir far below. But no time to savour the view. A sharp right and the course dropped away. He was picking up speed, skidding and swerving, the wind whistling by his body. He let loose another wild howl that echoed off the mountain side. Faster and faster now – the wild temptation to let everything out balanced against the need to brake and buck around the boulders and switchbacks he knew lay just ahead.

He skidded through a corrugated patch of mud and leaves, then shifted his weight to handle the most treacherous switchback of the run. He could manage it easily, knowing it was there. He slithered around a sharp turn to the left, a rattled along a narrow rock ledge. There was a clearing in the woods on one side, on the other an ancient wooden barrier – the only thing that stood between him and the cliff that dropped precipitously to the ravine far below.

Suddenly, a masked figure dressed in khaki and wielding a rifle, rose from the clearing on the left and lunged towards him. “What the fuck!” screamed Brian, instinctively swerving around his assailant? He felt a huge blow on the back of his head and heard his helmet crack as he went sprawling in the deep grass of the clearing. He was on his back, trying to gather his senses, when another masked face loomed into his vision. All he could see were the emerald green eyes. He felt a cloth cover his nose and just managed to recognize the faint ether-like smell before he passed out.

When he regained consciousness there was a pounding in his head, a blindfold covering his eyes. “Where am I?” he groaned. He tried to move, but couldn't. His arms and legs were bound. He could hear the gurgle of water filling some kind of basin, and two or three murmuring voices. One of them seemed to be a woman's. The emerald green eyes?

“Okay, let's go,” he heard her say.

“What the fuck is going on?” he rasped, fighting the pain in his skull.

“We want to know what you are up to.” She seemed

to be standing over him. “What you and your friends are planning.”

“Up to – about what? Who the hell are you?”

She spoke with a southern drawl, but her voice had a metallic edge to it – military.

“We know you're trying to organise something.”

“Organise – to do what?”

“Overthrow the president.”

“Stokes? You're crazy!” he yelled.

“We heard you plotting.”

“Heard me what?” What seemed like a nightmare was actually happening.

“Trying to get your agency friends to commit treason.”

“That's bullshit. We were arguing over drinks. I was upset, angry. But no one's doing anything. Nothing! Who the hell are you, anyway?” he repeated

“Okay – let's do it,” she said.

Whatever he was tied to was picked up, carried towards the sound of flowing water.

“You've seen waterboarding,” she said. “So I don't have to tell you what to expect.”

Of course, he'd seen waterboarding – at the Bagram prison in Afghanistan. He'd never done it himself, but he'd watched on several occasions when he was stationed there. It was a technique used by other groups, very rarely by the CIA itself. He knew some Special Forces guys who underwent water boarding as part of their training. They lasted an average of 14 seconds before they panicked. To a man, they testified to its horrors.

He was in the air now, above a basin of water or bathtub he supposed. His body was tilted, his feet a few inches higher than his head. Terror filled his being. “This is crazy!” he screamed.

One part of him, knew they wouldn't want to completely fill his lungs with water – to asphyxiate him. He knew their purpose was to trigger an instinctive reflex in the body – a terror of drowning, of death. So that he would plea for the torture to end, would tell his captors anything they wanted. But there was nothing to tell them. His heart pounded wildly.

A rag stinking of grease was placed over his face. His mouth was forced open, and water poured in and over the rag into his nose. It would keep the water clinging to his face, filling his throat, mouth, and sinuses. His inclined head kept his throat open; made it easier to pour water into his nostrils.

“No! Don't!” his scream was smothered by the putrid rag. It would act as a one-way valve, opening to let more

BOOK EXCERPT

air out then closing again to prevent inhalation. He gasped then gasped again as water poured through the cloth.

He knew that trained CIA officers tried to outlast the torment by exhaling slowly through the upturned nose. That would keep water out, but only for a few seconds. He felt the water surging through his sinuses and larynx, and fought desperately for breath. He could feel his lungs collapsing. There was no breath left in his body. No way to get the water out. He was drowning. No one could hear his screams. He could feel himself defecating.

Then suddenly they lifted him up and removed the cloth over his face. He fought for air and vomited. Water spewed from his throat and sinuses. He couldn't stop retching and gasping.

"Horrible, isn't it," said the woman. "You know you can't fight it. So why keep trying? Why not talk?"

"About what?" Brian wheezed. He was shivering uncontrollably. Still filled with panic.

"Don't play stupid. You've nothing to gain. What are you up to – you and your friends in the agency?"

"What friends?" Brian rasped.

"The ones who worked with you on the hacking investigation?"

"We're doing nothing! Nothing!" He was still trembling, on the point of tears. "You have to stop. I've got nothing to tell you."

"But you will," she said. "Everyone does."

Again, the filthy rag was placed over his face, his mouth forced open, the water cascaded into his throat and nostrils; again the frantic gasping for breath – the panic and terror.

He lost track of how many times they repeated the hellish procedure. He was hallucinating now, delirious, in and out of consciousness. Between each session, he could feel her hand on his throat, checking the pulse, ensuring he had enough oxygen in his blood to remain conscious.

"The prick's not going to talk," he heard her say when they removed the rags again.

"End it." She ordered. If he could talk, he would have blessed her.

The board was lowered into the water until he was completely covered. This time there was no rag on his face. This time the water flooded into his lungs. For the last time, the terrifying reflex of drowning kicked in. He alone heard his scream.

They pulled him up again after five minutes. The woman leaned forward and again put her thumb on his neck. No pulse. She took off her mask. She was wearing khaki

dungarees and black boots. The left side of her face was very attractive – high cheek bones, up tipped nose, lustrous green eyes.

It was the right side that was straight out of horror film: from her eyes to her chin the skin was fiery red latticed with white scars and scales almost like the skin of a snake, her scabrous right ear looked as if it had been torn off and partly replaced.

Her name was Captain Jeanne Swanson. She'd served three tours of duty in Special Forces in Afghanistan, one in Iraq, as an intelligence officer. She'd been severely injured and burned in an attack on a firebase near Kabul. The medics at first thought she'd never recover. After two years and 18 different surgical procedures she returned to active duty.

She'd been seconded to a new highly secret elite unit that was set up the very day that Walter Stokes was inaugurated. Its expenses would be covered by a hidden line item in the Department of transportation budget. It would continue to grow in numbers and budget over the following months. It was known as the Executive Liaison Office by those who had no real idea what its purpose was – and as the S Team by those who were part of it, or had the clearance to be briefed. The S, of course, stood for Stokes.

A former Delta Force Colonel was put in charge, but it was ultimately under the direct command of the president of the United States.

Chapter Two ARLINGTON

Brian Hunt's funeral was held four days later – on a damp grey morning at the First Presbyterian Church in Arlington, Virginia. It was a red brick neoclassical building, with a graceful white steeple and stood at the top of a grassy hill.

Most of the three hundred or so people filling the high-pitched nave didn't know Brian had worked at the CIA. They thought he'd been a statistician with the Department of Transportation. In fact, among his colleagues at the agency, he was considered one of the sharpest analysts of cyber intelligence. He'd spent most of the past year in a special unit investigating possible Russian hacking of the American elections. The subject was incredibly sensitive, the work highly classified.

Brian's body was found a day after he disappeared while biking in the Fountainhead River Park. He had been killed in what appeared to be a freak accident. The coroner ruled

BOOK EXCERPT

the cause of death was drowning. Now the body lay in a closed, polished oak casket beside the pulpit. There was a slight sandalwood smell from the four tall candles flanking the casket; a single red rose lay on top. Joanne, his wife, had asked that there be no flowers; she also requested the choir sing one of Brian's favourite songs, *Candle in the Wind*, before the minister began the service. Joanne sat in the first pew, her arms around each of her twin six-year-old sons.

The man who ran the Russian hacking investigation, Steve Penn, sat two rows behind Joanne, wearing a dark single-breasted suit. He was 53, with broad shoulders, greying sideburns and a deep furrow between his hazel eyes. Some women judged him handsome; most didn't. His nose was too prominent; chin too pointed. His right eye often drooped when he was tired or bored. Today he was neither. His mind was seething. Steve and Brian had been very close – almost like family. They'd first met when Brian and Joanne moved to Virginia from Boise, Idaho, six years ago and Brian went to work for the agency. Impressed by his analytic abilities, Steve picked Brian to be a key member of the CIA team investigating Russian hacking. Three other members of the team were at the church today.

On Steve's left sat a stunning woman, Sarah Levin, with high cheekbones, olive skin, almond eyes, and full lips. A combination dreamed up by God, Steve thought – the daughter of a Vietnamese refugee who married a Jewish dermatologist. Who would have pegged Sarah as a child musical prodigy who became a CIA expert in artificial intelligence and machine learning?

Given her first cello at four years-old, by nine she was performing with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. At 16, to promote her career, she outraged classical music purists but delighted millions of fans by posing for a *Victoria's Secret* catalogue with her cello, wearing only a black lace bra and a thong. At 16, she also started dating an 18-year-old from Stanford who turned her on to the elegance of hacking. Later, the number of heartbroken male staff at the agency was legion when Sarah decided she was gay, and took as her partner a leading LGBT rights activist.

This morning in the church her eyes were brimming. "It's horrible, just horrible," she whispered.

Morning guys," a tall black man wearing a dark suit slid into the pew beside Sarah, kissed her on the cheek, then reached over to shake Steve's hand. Another very unlikely agent. Six foot three, Charlie Doyle once dreamed of playing basketball for the NBA, but wound up joining the CIA instead. He first worked overseas, running informants in Africa and Malaysia, then spent two years being trained in

internet technology and coding. His combination of street skills and computer smarts was invaluable to Steve's team. He had also been very close to Brian.

The funeral service lasted 45 minutes and was moving without being maudlin. The pastor spoke about the many friends Brian and Joanne had made since they moved to the community, Brian's dedicated service to the church and the community. There were a few other speakers, friends of the family, the captain of the Lincoln High baseball team that Brian coached – when he was not travelling. Of course, no one spoke from the CIA – since, officially, Brian, worked at the Department of Transportation. It was Bob Peterson, the president of the local mountain biking club, who spoke last about Brian's passion for the sport and his love of the wilderness. "How tragic," he said, "that such passion could lead to his death."

As they filed out of the church Steve greeted several people he knew, and shook hands many he didn't. His attention wandered to an attractive brunette in the back row. At least she seemed alluring when their eyes met briefly – hers were a luminous emerald green. But when she turned to exit, he noticed the terrible red scar disfiguring the other side of her face. Probably ex-military, he thought. He'd seen so many burn victims like that in Iraq and Afghanistan.

After the service, on the way to the cemetery, Steve caught up with Bob Peterson. Steve was an inveterate biker himself. Fifteen years older than Brian, he frequently joined the younger agent on his regular weekend outings. Increasingly though he would pass on the tougher runs.

"Very nice words about Brian and his biking," said Steve. He introduced Peterson to Sarah and Charlie who were walking with him. "They were also great friends of Brian," he said.

"Hell of a downer," said Peterson. This was not his usual scene. He wore dirty gray khakis and a faded blue polyester jacket obviously borrowed from someone two sizes smaller. His long sandy hair was tied in a ponytail.

"Don't know how many times I rode the Bear Claw with Brian," he said. "It's a grind, but not that tough. Not a killer."

"That's what I can't figure out," said Steve.

Sarah moved closer, "So what could have happened?" she asked.

"I spoke to a buddy with the park police," said Peterson. "He said it looks like he skidded on that rough washboard just after the crest and went over the side. Forty feet to the bottom. The railing there's old and rotted. Like most of the

BOOK EXCERPT

so-called guardrails on that trail.” Peterson pushed back his ponytail. “ We’ve been complaining about it for years to the park board. Forget it. No money, they say. It’s a pile of crap. They’ve sure got enough for that fancy banquet they throw every year.”

“It still doesn’t make sense,” said Steve, “Brian was such a damn good rider.”

“Yeah,” said Peterson. “He just laid out fifteen hundred bucks for a brand new Trek. I was envious as hell. Hard to believe he skidded off there. Everyone knows about that turn. Like the back of our hand.”

“So how explain it?” insisted Sarah.

“I don’t,” Peterson shrugged his shoulders. “Fate, I guess.”

“And the coroner ruled that he drowned?” said Steve.

Peterson shook his head. “Tumbled down the hill, landed on the rocks, head lying in the river. Bloody incompetents. Took them more than a day to find him – even with their hound dogs.”

Sarah shivered, “Awful, just awful.”

At the graveside, standing next to Sarah and Charlie. Steve stared over the heads of the mourners into the grey willows as the coffin was lowered into the ground. Then he looked across the grave to where Joanna was sobbing quietly, with her arms around the two boys. How many times Brian had talked to Steve about his family – his guilt about not spending more time with them, his fear that President Stokes and his crazed politics could endanger their very future.

“It’s all so terribly ironic,” Steve whispered to Charlie. “A freak biking accident ends Brian’s life at precisely the time his professional career is also headed down the tubes.”

“Yeah, thinking the same thing myself,” said Charlie.

“”You actually believe it might have been suicide?” said Sarah.

“No way,” Steve shook his head vigorously. “Brian wasn’t the kind of guy to end his own life. He had a great family, friends.”

“Yeah,” said Charlie, “but professionally he was dead meat.”

“Maybe,” said Steve. “But Brian wasn’t a quitter. He was determined to fight.” He stopped and turned to the other two agents. “Hell, if you want to look at it that way, my career is also washed up. Brian was the top analyst on the hacking report,” said Steve, “But I was the lead author. That puts the bulls-eye right on me. Both Brian and I helped brief the joint congressional committee prior to the elections. I still can’t believe we actually exchanged high-fives

after that briefing.”

“We all thought it would be a bombshell,” said Charlie. “I still can’t get over the Republicans refusing to act. Hell, even the White House wussed out.”

“But not Brian,” said Steve.

He remembered how they’d last come together a couple of days before Brian’s death. It was early evening in O’Shaughnessy’s Pub on King Street in Falls Church. Brian was already there. The young agent raised his Guinness before relaying the latest news.

“Guess what – Stokes not only claims our investigation was bullshit, he’s also threatening to veto any plans to punish the Russians. What a crock!”

Though seething within, Steve kept his resentment bridled. Passion and outrage were not his thing. He was more of a cynic. “Of, course, there’s another way of looking at all this,” he said. “From year one at the agency we’ve been doing exactly what we’re now accusing Russia and Kozlov of doing.”

“What do you mean?” said Sarah.

“I mean meddling in the most sensitive affairs of other countries. We did it in Italy, in Guatemala in Iran, in Chile. We did it all over. Admit it!”

“I was up to some pretty wild stuff in the Congo and Venezuela,” said Charlie.

“No! This is different,” said Brian. “When we did it to other countries we were fighting communism or radical Islam or whatever. But this is our own country, God damn-it. It’s in our face. We’re supposed to be the most powerful nation in the world and we’re sitting here like a bunch of assholes. We handed Kozlov a victory he could never have won by force!”

Steve’s mind returned to the present as he was handed a shovel by the gravesite. “Brian was right,” thought Steve, tossing a clod of earth onto the casket. “Now he’s gone, and Stokes and his slimy crew are there, in the White House, all triumphant. We’ve been played for fools.”

Afterwards, they went to the nearby home of the dead agent’s brother in the Aurora Highlands. Brian’s brother had obviously done well. It was a large two-story Cape Cod-style house with a lush lawn and meticulously trimmed hedges. A Mercedes and BMW were parked in the open garage. More than a hundred people were already there, filling the large living room, spilling over into the library, hallways, and kitchen. There were several pictures of Brian – with Joanne on their honeymoon in Hawaii, coaching the Lincoln high school baseball team, skiing in Aspen with the family; in biking gear next to Steve, each one

BOOK EXCERPT

astride his mountain bike.

Joanne was seated on a sofa, wearing a black dress, drinking coffee and surrounded by friends. Steve bent to take her hand. "I'm going to miss him," he said. "He was like a brother to me." He was startled when Joanne looked at him blankly, then turned her back to speak to the woman beside her. What's all that about? he thought. Brian's two sons, each with a black ribbon pinned to his white shirt, passed cookies and cakes. Steve accepted a brownie and patted each on the head.

Many of the mourners were in couples. As often happened in such situations, Steve felt very much alone. No wife. No children – at least none alive. No parents – they'd taken off when he was only six. And woman friends – not much in that department, either. The few affairs he'd begun had ended quickly. The woman usually accused him of being self-centred, selfish, closed-off. Hard for him to deny the charge.

He poured himself a scotch and moved into the den where Charlie and Sarah were standing with Sal Russell, another member of their small team. Sal was the exact opposite of Charlie – just about the most unprepossessing agent that Steve had ever worked with – squat, pudgy, almost bald, with an almost obscene cackle for a laugh. He'd been a hacker since he was 12-years-old, and was never hesitant to let everyone within hearing know he was "the absolute best in the business."

Gesticulating with a bottle of beer, Sal was skewering the latest presidential executive decrees. "That asshole has just declared the US will continue using black sites in other countries to interrogate suspected terrorists. And, last but not least, Gitmo will remain open and ready for business.

"He's fucking berserk," Sal continued. "After the flack they got last time round, no country will ever let us use their prisons to torture again."

"So why does Stokes do it?" asked Sarah.

"For show. It's all for show," said Charlie. "For the crazies in Wisconsin and Michigan."

"Dead wrong," said Sal. "Stokes really believes in the stuff he's doing. He's nuts."

Steve's mind, however, was elsewhere, still probing the details of Brian's death. He poured himself another scotch. "It's all too pat," he muttered. "Too fucking pat," he said louder. The others turned to stare.

"What's too fucking pat?" asked Sal.

"Just too god-damned much coincidence," said Steve.

"Coincidence?" asked Sarah.

"Look," said Steve. "Brian bitches about Stokes killing our hacking report. He keeps insisting we have to do something about it. Gets louder and louder. Practically calls for an insurrection in the agency – then conveniently dies in a biking accident. And it takes the searchers more than a day to find the body." He took another sip of his drink. "Death by drowning? No way."

Sal looked at the others, eyebrows skeptically raised. Steve was notorious for his dogged investigations. But he also had the reputation of inventing conspiracies. They knew how close he was to Brian – like an older brother, he was always saying.

"Steve, this is the real world – stuff happens," said Sarah, placing a hand on his arm.

"But when it happens like this," said Steve "you can't just shrug and walk away. I'm not imagining it – there's something there."

"So what are you going to do?" asked Sal, still with that mocking gaze.

Steve looked at him squarely. "I'm going to find out what happened."

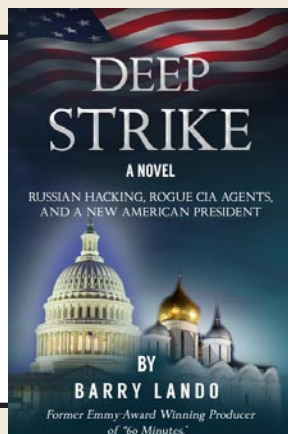
"I thought we knew," said Charlie.

"No bloody way," said Steve.

CT

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Why do businesses fail to detect worker slavery?

We can track the sources of our food, so why not our workers? ask **Andrew Crane & Genevieve LeBaron**

I can tell you the farm where the steak on your plate came from. Probably even the name of the cow. But we have no idea where the workers came from that work in our kitchens.

That was the very frank admission from a senior executive of a major British hotel chain we spoke to as part of our research into modern slavery. Companies can increasingly trace where their products come from – but not the workers who produce them.

According to the UK's National Crime Agency, there could be tens of thousands of victims of modern slavery and human trafficking in the UK. The crime is far more prevalent than law enforcement previously thought.

And businesses have little hope of detecting modern slavery practices unless they adopt a new approach that focuses specifically on their labour supply chains.

Twenty years ago, most high street retailers didn't have a clue where the things they sold came from. But a revolution in responsible business practices has now led to companies spending vast sums of money trac-

ing the source of their products.

As part of the ever expanding remit of responsible sourcing, everything is examined – from working conditions to waste, and corruption to carbon emissions.

Increased attention to modern slavery has pushed extreme forms of worker exploitation up the corporate agenda, most notably (in the UK) with the introduction of the 2015 Modern Slavery Act. While companies were understandably nervous of additional regulation, many assumed that they were already well prepared, given the investments they had made in responsible sourcing practices.

Our research suggests they were wrong.

The problem is that current approaches to responsible sourcing tend to focus on tracing the product supply chain. But the key issue in tackling modern slavery is in understanding the labour supply chain. These are often unregulated networks through which forced or trafficked workers may be recruited, transported, and supplied to business by third party agents.

A labour supply chain consists of

a sequence of relationships a worker might go through to end up in work. The chain might be short, consisting simply of a producer and a worker. Or, particularly where international movement is involved, there may be multiple layers of intermediaries, agents, brokers, traffickers and gangmasters.

The problem for people like the executive of the hotel chain we spoke to (who knew his steaks), is that some of the workers in those kitchens may well have been supplied by unscrupulous agents. Agents who, unbeknown to the hotel, are subjecting the workers to highly exploitative labour practices.

These can include withholding their passports, forcing them to work for little or no pay, threatening them or their families, or tricking them into racking up huge debts through deductions for accommodation, food, transport and other “services”. Some will even have paid to get the job in the first place.

The challenge in dealing with these types of practices is that companies cannot easily trace where workers have come from or the types of exploitation they have been exposed to. But some have taken positive steps. Apple, for example, has banned the payment of recruitment fees by workers in their supplier factories.

In the UK, responsible labour providers have set up programmes to improve standards and better identify modern slavery practices. Such initiatives are helpful, but the stark

Header Header

reality for companies struggling to cope with the threat of modern slavery is that, for the most part, the labour chains remain invisible.

Our research, based on interviews with experts in business, NGOs, trade unions, law firms, and the police, shows that informality, and layers of subcontracting, thwart even the most well-intentioned companies.

In agriculture, suppliers often have little idea of who is working for them. One of our sources explained:

You call someone, you say I want 20 people, and that person maybe has five people at their disposal. So he phones somebody else and says, have you got some people and they go, yeah I have got three but I can get you another eight, so he phones his mate. It is very, very informal.

These different agents will rarely if ever be formally documented as official suppliers and so the audit trail will typically overlook them. As one social auditor, employed to check on worker conditions for high street companies, explained to us: “You can’t check all those agents who are responsible for all the people who’ve been on the farm. So there could always be another group of people who aren’t written down and this happens commonly.”

Leading UK companies are starting to wake up to the fact that their existing systems for detecting worker abuse simply are not fit for purpose

for uncovering modern slavery. But, as new initiatives emerge, the critical factor determining their success will be whether they meaningfully address the labour supply chains that feed their business.

It is these chains that make slavery-like practices seemingly invisible even when the workers subjected to them are right in front of us in the

farms, factories and construction sites that surround communities. **CT**

Andrew Crane is professor of business and society at the University of Bath, Genevieve LeBaron is a senior lecturer in politics, University of Sheffield.

This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

Sometimes the poor make it big. Usually not

Life would be better if we didn’t rig the game against those whose only mistake was to be born poor, writes **Jill Richardson**

We all want to live in a country where all it takes is hard work and some talent for anyone to succeed. We tell ourselves that we do. We even see examples of people who “came from nothing” and ended up rich and famous.

And it’s true that it sometimes happens. Sometimes a child born into poverty grows up to become the president of the United States, a multi-billionaire, or an Olympic gold medalist.

Most of the time, however, they don’t. And it’s not because they’re bad, lazy, stupid, or immoral. Often

it’s because of our system itself.

Take our school system for a start. By funding schools with property taxes, we guarantee that the children from the richest neighbourhoods go to the wealthiest schools.

If we lived in neighbourhoods that were economically mixed with families of all incomes, this wouldn’t be a big deal. But we don’t. Instead we have areas of very wealthy people whose children attend wonderful schools, and areas of concentrated poverty where children attend failing schools.

And the kids in the good schools? Their parents can afford tutoring,

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extracurricular activities, summer camp, and SAT prep classes. It's the kids whose parents can't provide those extra learning opportunities who go to the worst schools.

Meanwhile, careers are sorted into those that require a college degree and those that don't. Once upon a time, one could support a family on the wage of a manufacturing job. But America lost those jobs, and replaced them with poorly paid service jobs that often have no benefits.

For those without college degrees, getting ahead is difficult. But college is expensive. Even without the tuition costs, one has to keep a roof over their head and eat while attending school. Community colleges and online programs add flexibility for students who work full time while attending school, but it can still be difficult.

I don't advocate a return to the days when men worked and women stayed home. But at least back then, families had an adult whose full time duties were to take care of the home and the children.

When women went to work, the expectations of the workplace didn't change. Men with stay-at-home wives never needed maternity leave or flex time or places to pump breast milk or time off to pick up a sick kid from day care.

But in families where both partners work, or in single parent families, how on earth are parents supposed to hold down a full time job and simultaneously be full-time homemakers?

Sociologist Arlie Hochschild examined this in her classic book *The Second Shift*, finding that the housework often still falls disproportion-

ately to working women, often leaving them frazzled and exhausted. Sometimes the kids lose out, when neither parent has time to spend with them.

Wealthier families now pay for the work that women used to do for free: childcare, laundry, cooking, cleaning, and so on.

But whom do they pay? Less wealthy women, usually. And those women, after spending a day caring for someone else's kids or doing someone else's laundry, still have to figure out how to get their own housework done once they go home.

The end result is that most peo-

ple who start out poor stay poor. And those who start out rich usually stay rich. (Recent studies show that Canada now has three times better social mobility than the US, suggesting the American dream moved north.)

Ours is a great system, if you're rich. But we'd be a better country if we didn't rig the game against those whose only mistake was to be born to poor parents. **CT**

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*Jill Richardson is the author of **Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It**. This article first appeared at www.otherwords.org*

Docs choose capitalism over better public health

Yves Engler looks at the storm raging over a proposed closure of a tax loophole used by Canada's middle classes

Doctors' aggressive opposition to a more equitable tax code reflects a capitalist ethos that's often been at odds with public health.

The Canadian Medical Association, Coalition of Ontario Doctors, Ontario Association of Radiologists, Canadian Association of Radiologists and Ontario Medical Association all joined the newly formed Coalition for Small Business Tax Fairness. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Canadian Taxpayers Federation and Canadian Federation of Independent Business are also part of this large coalition established to scuttle a government initiative to lessen

tax advantages for wealthy small business owners and remove loopholes that incentivise incorporation for high paid professionals (two thirds of doctors have a corporation to reduce their taxes).

The government's proposal would restrict business owners' ability to lower their tax rate by sprinkling income to family members – who do no work for the firm – in lower tax brackets. The changes would also limit certain companies' investments in stocks and real estate and the ability to convert a corporation's regular income into capital gains, which are taxed at a lower rate. The government says

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the proposed changes would have almost no impact on anyone making under \$150,000 a year, but doctors often make \$300,000, \$500,000 or more and the higher the income the greater the savings under the current rules. According to a summary of the 2014-15 fiscal year, 500 Ontario doctors received more than \$1-million from the provincial government with the top-biller claiming \$6.6-million.

Currently, highly paid doctors and other professionals often pay lower taxes rates than nurses. That injustice and the Ontario Medical Association president's claim the proposed tax changes would harm patient care prompted the Canadian Nurses Association to endorse the government's tax plan. The CNA noted, "should the proposed changes pass, provincial and territorial governments should see an increase in revenues which can be invested in strengthening our publicly-funded health services, which in themselves employ thousands of salaried, highly-skilled professionals who pay their fair share of personal income taxes."

While nurses defend public health care, doctors have long promoted a capitalist model of medicine that maximises their wealth and power. In 1962 doctors in Saskatchewan, the birthplace of Canada's universal health care system, went on strike for 23 days to block Medicare and

other health reforms that weakened their power over medicine. After working to stymie the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation's proposed health reforms for two years, in July 1962, doctors withdrew their services and launched a massive public relations campaign when the government introduced its long promised health improvements.

As part of the research for *The Year We Became Us: A Novel About the Saskatchewan Doctors Strike*, Gary Engler examined the Moose Jaw Times Herald's coverage of the work stoppage. The rhetoric was over the top. One editorial was headlined *Legal Profession Next to be Socialized*, and another *The Day That Freedom Died In Saskatchewan*. That story claimed, "the people of Saskatchewan are now awakening and find that their province has been slowly, and in recent months much more rapidly transformed from a free democracy into a totalitarian state, ruled by men drunk with power."

The Saskatchewan doctors' fight against Medicare was assisted financially by the American Medical Association, which has long been a major obstacle to public health insurance in the US. According to Stan Rands in *Privilege and Policy: A History of Community clinics in Saskatchewan*, "by 1920 the American Medical Association, fearing that public financing would lead to public con-

trol of medical practice, had opposed health insurance regulation by any state or federal government. The AMA saw health insurance as a threat to its independence and, like the CMA, proposed that health insurance be carried through private companies."

Fortunately, the CCF (NDP predecessor) government remained steadfast and the doctors lost their battle against universal health insurance, which was extended to the rest of the nation a few years later. But the Saskatchewan doctors won a number of concessions, notably fee-for-service billing. Unlike in Britain, where most doctors are salaried employees of the National Health Service, Canadian doctors are overwhelmingly paid per visit/x-ray/operation. Remunerated based upon the number of clients they see, doctors have a financial self-interest in treating rather than preventing ill health.

Careful consideration of the efficacy of every test or treatment, which should underpin all medical evaluations, is too often overlooked when financial benefits are to be had. In fact, one reason drugs are overprescribed is that doctors are generally paid the same whether they stay with a patient for two or 20 minutes. While a prescription can be written in seconds, it takes time to fully understand an individual's health history and to offer them ways to avoid illness.

Doctors draw their income and prestige largely from curative medicine, but advances in life expectancy and overall health have largely been shaped by improved public health measures such as sanitation, pollution controls, workplace safety regu-

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lations, infection control standards, etc. Further improvements will most likely come through broader sociological dynamics such as reductions in inequality and poverty, or improvements in education, healthier food systems, exercise-oriented urban planning, etc.

In *Betrayal of Trust: The Collapse of Global Public Health*, Laurie Garrett estimates that “86 percent of increased life expectancy was due to decreases in infectious diseases. The same can be said for the United States, where less than four percent of the total improvement in life expectancy since the 1700s can be credited to 20-century advances in medical care.” While Garrett may be overstating her case, public health measures that seek to prevent illness

are what works.

By aligning with corporate lobbyists opposed to a more equitable tax code, doctor associations have provided an opening to those who believe a mistake was made at the dawn of Medicare. Like almost everyone whose income comes from public funds, doctors should be paid a salary. This would better align their interests with Medicare, public pensions and many other social programs that have improved overall health as well as working class Canadians who overwhelmingly support a fair tax system to pay for improved government services. **CT**

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Yves Engler is a Montreal-based activist and author. His web site is www.yvesengler.com

haviours, I do not want to be among the defenders of their order: I prefer to be an agent of sedition.

To be accused of being an agent of sedition is a privilege when the accuser is someone obsessed with using the law to confront democracy, when he seeks refuge in an article of the constitution, number 155, brought in an envelope to the authors of the constitution by Franco’s military, when they say to us, whatever we decide to do, their documents will always carry more weight than our hands. It could very well be that we’ve waited too long to confront them. Be that as it may, the taboo of burying our differences can no longer hold up. It is the people that decide such things, not an old and decrepit law that we neither respect nor recognise as our own.

I’ll go even further. To be a seditious person today is, for them, to take an unforgivable position. Those who accuse us of sedition in this way or that are really only trying to maintain the privileges of a corrupt regime that is, for the first time, being seriously challenged. I’ll never be able to close ranks with people that say things like, “He who breaks it, pays for it” as they cynically cover up the fact that their party is the most corrupt political party in Europe, among whose ranks are hundreds of people who have never been held to account for the things they’ve done. They break the hard drives where the evidence of their crimes are hidden without the least fear of consequence, while they violate the constitutional separation of powers and use state institutions not only to serve the needs of the prime minister and his cabinet, but

In Catalonia: I’m proud to be an agent of sedition

Vicent Partal explains why it’s important to resist the Spanish government over its handling of the October referendum on Catalan independence

Now they’re calling us seditious. They accuse us, all of us, tens or even hundreds of thousands of people that have protested in support of Catalan institutions, of being agents of sedition. This is what Spain’s assistant state prosecutor, Miguel Ángel Carballo Cuervo, has said in a document destined to inhabit the precincts of judicial infamy. He, of course, will never understand it, but his accusation, is for me at least, an honour.

Why? Because I believe it is an honour to be accused of sedition by an authoritarian state that violates its own laws to cancel democratic rights. It is honourable to be accused of sedition by those that arrest politicians, threaten media outlets, spy on personal correspondence, close down websites, invade government offices, enter into print shops without warrants, and threaten high school principals. In these circumstances and before these be-

even worse, the proprietary needs and desires of the their party.

But let me say, above all, that being an agent of sedition today is, in my view, a moral necessity. I am an agent of sedition because I am taking a position, because I cannot believe in the idea of a middle ground that requires me to equate ballots with armed police; politicians elected by popular vote with attorneys general and martial-law courts; and a peaceful people with the coercion of a state shorn of its legitimacy.

And still one more thing. I am an agent of sedition, and quite proud of it, because I learned when I was young something that I have believed in ever since: that when one is confronted by the possibilities of both liberty and tyranny there is never, ever, any need for deliberation.

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Vicent Partal is founder and director of the influential Vilaweb on-line newspaper in Spain. Translated by Thomas Harrington.

Labor Secretary Alexander Acosta announced the new honour in a ceremony at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum in California. Reagan, Acosta noted, served as the president of the Screen Actors Guild, the movie-industry union, in the 1940s. He made no mention of the union that Reagan destroyed, the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization.

In 1981, only months after Reagan entered the White House, PATCO members struck for a shorter workweek and higher wages. Reagan fired 11,000 strikers, a norm-shattering move that gave America's employers, in effect, a green light to permanently replace strikers.

Today, three dozen years later, the American labour movement has still not recovered. Back in the 1950s, one of every three American workers carried union cards. By 1989, the year Reagan left the White House, only one in six American workers belonged to a trade union.

What impact has this fading union presence had? Wages in the United States have, after adjusting for inflation, not increased since the early 1970s. And inequality has soared. Back in the 1950s, America's richest 10 percent took in less than a third of the nation's income. In 2015, the Economic Policy Institute points out, that top 10 percent captured nearly half America's income, 47.8 percent.

Ronald Reagan did not, of course, single-handedly generate this inequality. Attacks on the right to organise unions in America's workplaces began before he took office and continued long after he left.

In fact, those attacks are still going strong today – and these days,

A hall of fame turns shameful

The US Department of Labor has chosen to honour the White House union-buster who turbo-charged American income and wealth inequality, says **Sam Pizzigati**

Just in time for Labor Day 2017, the US Department of Labor has enshrined the latest member of the Labor Hall of Fame the Department created back in 1988.

And who gets this honour, a tribute that has gone to real heroes such as Cesar Chavez, the legendary farmworker organiser, and Tony Mazzocchi, the moving force behind federal worker safety protections?

Ronald Reagan.

No joke. An honour created to salute “those Americans whose distinctive contributions in the field of labour have elevated working conditions, wages, and over-all quality of life of America's working families” has gone to a president of the United States who “became the



Official portrait of Ronald Reagan, 1981.

most powerful union buster in the world” and “stacked the National Labor Relations Board with officials who vehemently opposed unions.”

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in the Trump era, they're even coming from right inside the Department of Labor.

The latest sorry example: The Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the Labor Department agency that Hall of Fame honoree Tony Mazzocchi fought so hard to create, has erased off the OSHA website home page a running list of all Americans killed on the job.

That list included the date, name, and cause of death of each workplace fatality and served as a public shaming of sorts for the employers involved. Killing the spot-

light on this list, notes the National Employment Law Project's Debbie Berkowitz, amounts to "a conscious decision to bury the fact that workers are getting killed on the job."

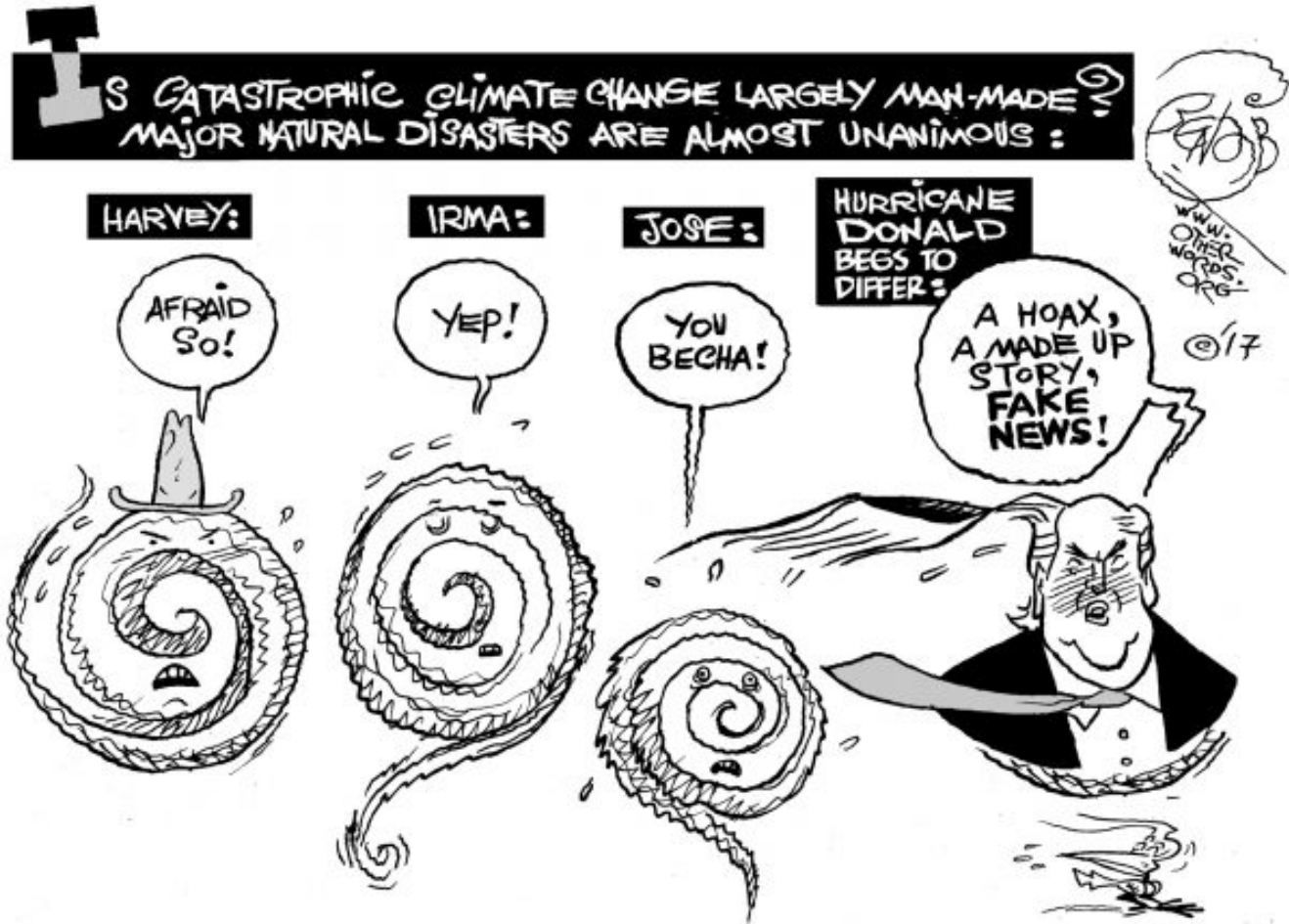
Ronald Reagan did his best, as president, to do the same thing. To head OSHA, Reagan appointed a Florida construction company executive. That's executive's claim to worker safety fame? He had earlier, as his CV crowed, "organised the lobbying effort which killed the adoption of the Occupational Safety and Health Act by the State of Florida."

Now Ronald Reagan sits in the Labor Department Hall of Fame. That could only happen in the deeply unequal America that Ronald Reagan did so much to help create. **CT**

Sam Pizzigati, an Institute for Policy Studies associate fellow, co-edits Inequality.org. His latest book – The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970 – traces how average Americans ended the nation's original Gilded Age. Follow him at @Too_Much_Online.

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