
**WAR? NOT OUR FAULT, BLAME POLYGAMY | NEIL CLARK
BLURRING FACTS, DISTORTING REALITY | TONY SUTTON
SUPERPETS, SUPERBUGS AND US | MATT SMITH**

ISSUE 165

ColdType

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AUGUST 2018



**GLIMPSES OF
LINH DINH SAYS GOODBYE TO PHILADELPHIA
A LOST CITY**

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RAY McGOVERN

Ahed and her mother are free – for now

As Ahed Tamimi and her mother are released from an Israeli prison, we look back on a meeting with the Tamimi family last year in their West Bank village, and reflect on the spirit that drives their resistance



DEFIANT TEEN: Ahed Tamimi was jailed for eight months for slapping an Israeli soldier. Photo: Wikimedia

WHEN they left prison on Sunday, July 29, Ahed Tamimi and her mother Nariman received a hard-earned heroes' welcome from Palestinians and others who opposed Israel's occupation and colonisation of Palestinian lands seized in 1948 and enlarged by the Israeli army in 1967.

Ahed was 16 last December when an Israeli soldier shot her cousin in the face. The next day armed Israeli soldiers menacingly showed up at her house in the West Bank village of Nabi Saleh. Ahed slapped one of them and was arrested.

Although some Israeli politicians said she should be put away for life and others demanded a sentence of at least ten years, the Israeli occupiers sentenced her to eight months for the slap seen around the world. She spent her 17th birthday in prison.

Her mother Nariman filmed the incident and was thrown in jail, too, this time for incitement. (It was not the activist Nariman's first time in an Israeli prison.)

The Israeli authorities are so worried about the symbol for resistance that Ahed has become internationally that, the day before her release, they arrested two Italian artists who had painted a large portrait of her on the separation wall near Bethlehem.

Most Americans – except for the relatively few who have spent more than a few days in Israeli-occupied territories – find it hard to understand why Palestinians like Nariman and Ahed “persist.” Most people in the US are blissfully unaware of the history of Palestine and of the continuing injustices inflicted on its people today. The explanation for this lies largely in the way the US media reports the story, almost entirely from the Israelis' point of view.

For those malnourished on Establishment media, here's a bit of history, without which it is impossible to understand the anger and the courage-against-all-odds shown by those who continue to use what they have – even their open

RAY McGOVERN



Ray McGovern with Ahed Tamimi and unnamed villager after teens in Nabi Saleh fought off Israeli soldiers.

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palms – to make clear that they will never acquiesce in Israeli occupation.

The Israeli attack starting the Six-Day War in early June 1967 fits snugly into the Nuremberg category of “war of aggression” as defined by the post-WWII Nuremberg Tribunal. “Pre-emptive” attacks, when there is nothing to pre-empt, are now – post-Iraq war – labelled more euphemistically as “wars of choice”, but that too fits the Nuremberg definition.

To begin to appreciate the injustices inflicted on millions of Palestinians, whose land Israel coveted for itself, one must unlearn the legend that in attacking its neighbours in 1967 Israel was acting in self-defence. None other than then-Prime Minister Menachem Begin (1977 – 83) undermined that piece of propaganda in a speech to the US National Defense University on August 8, 1982. (Apparently, even accomplished dissimulators get cocky on occasion and let the truth slip out.) Here are Begin’s words: “In June, 1967, we

had a choice. The Egyptian Army concentrations in the Sinai approaches do not prove that [President Gamal Abdel] Nasser was really about to attack us. We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him. ... The government decided unanimously: We will take the initiative and attack the enemy, drive him back, and thus assure the security of Israel and the future of the nation”.

And now, a half-century after its successful six-day war of aggression, Israel has, with US backing, been unlawfully colonising the occupied territories, oppressing the Palestinians still living there, and thumbing its nose at UN Security Council Resolution 242, approved unanimously on November 22, 1967, calling on Israel to withdraw from the lands it seized in June of that year.

That was then. This is now ...



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Bassem Tamimi and Ray McGovern in Nabi Saleh last year.

In February and March 2017, I was part of a small Veterans For Peace delegation in Palestine. One of our last visits was to the village of Nabi Saleh, where Ahed's father Bassem Tamimi, his wife Nariman, and Ahed's three siblings live when they are not in prison. Ahed's older brother is in prison now.

After two weeks of experiencing what life is like for Palestinians under Israeli occupation in the West Bank, I had a chance to ask Bassem about his family's non-violent resistance to Israeli occupation and colonisation.

"Your sons have been beaten and badly wounded and one is still in prison; your wife is in and out of prison: your brother-in-law was killed by a sniper bullet; you yourself have been tortured in prison; your house is on the list for demolition – why do you persist; why encourage such actions?" I asked.

"We have no alternative," Bassem replied matter-of-factly. "It is our land and our life. I will not tell my children or my people to acquiesce in the Israeli occupation – ever."

The following day we Veterans For Peace members took part in a protest march to the Separation Wall. Later, beneath the tear-gas and sheltered from the ensuing rifle fire, we watched the teens of Nabi Saleh dodge Israeli soldiers chasing them through the village for two hours. When the Israeli soldiers, so heavily burdened with weaponry that they could hardly run, finally went back behind their Wall, the young folk emerged shouting, "We won." It was a privilege to be there to welcome them back to the Tamimi house and some relative peace and quiet.

Chris Smiley, our delegation videographer, created an excellent 38-minute documentary as part of a series on our experience in Nabi Saleh

RAY McGOVERN

called: *One Day, One Village, One Family*.
The Palestinian Spirit is Universal

Ahed “Didn’t Get It From the Moon”. This is the expression my Irish grandmother would use to make it clear that tribute and praise should go to the seed-sowers as well as the protagonists themselves. Other traditions use some variant of: “The apple does not fall far from the tree.” Suffice it to say that, from what I was able to witness of the attitude and behaviour of Ahed and her three brothers, they are clearly determined to honour the rich legacy of courage and Palestinian patriotism they inherit from Bassem and Nariman – and not only from them.

One might say that Ahed and her siblings are honour graduates of the Bassem/Nariman Folk School, just as Rosa Parks was a graduate of the Highlander Folk School. The common curriculum has to do with courageous persistence in the pursuit of justice. Moreover, our delegation was to discover that Rosa Parks is a revered figure in the Israeli Knesset – well, at least in the modest conference room allocated to Arab members.

Hanging prominently on the main wall were pictures of Rosa Parks and of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. And now I can hear Ahed Tamimi’s voice echoing that of Rosa Parks, who explained in 1992: “I did not want to be mistreated ... It was just time... there was opportunity for me to take a stand to express the way I felt about being treated in that manner. I had not planned to get arrested. ... But when I had to face that decision, I didn’t hesitate to do so because I felt that we had endured that too long. The more we gave in, the more we complied with that kind of treatment,



GOOD COMPANY: A photo of Rosa Parks hangs in a meeting room of Arab members of the Knesset

the more oppressive it became.”

Nonetheless, they persisted.

Welcome home, Ahed and Nariman.

CT

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READ THE BEST OF EDWARD S. HERMAN
www.coldtype.net/herman.html

The invisible hand of dark money

Dark money is undermining our democracies, and it's never darker than when channelled through lobby groups masquerading as think tanks

A **MERE** two millennia after Roman politicians paid mobs to riot on their behalf, we are beginning to understand the role of dark money in politics, and its perennial threat to democracy. Dark money is cash whose source is not made public, that is spent to change political outcomes.

The Facebook/Cambridge Analytica scandal unearthed by Carole Cadwalladr and the mysterious funds channelled through Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party to the Leave campaign in England and Scotland have helped to bring the concept to public attention. But these examples hint at a much wider problem. Dark money can be seen as the underlying corruption from which our immediate crises emerge: the collapse of public trust in politics, the rise of a demagogic anti-politics, assaults on the living world, public health and civic society. Democracy is meaningless without transparency.

The techniques now being used to throw elections and referendums were developed by the tobacco industry, and refined by biotechnology, fossil fuel and junk food companies. Some of us have spent years exposing the fake grassroots campaigns they established, the false identities and bogus scientific controversies they created, and the way in which public broadcasters and other media outlets have been played by them. Our warnings went unheeded, while the ultra-rich learned how to buy the political system.

The problem is exemplified, in my view, by the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA). In the

UK government's latest reshuffle, two ministers with close links to the institute, Dominic Raab and Matthew Hancock, have been promoted to the front bench, responsible for issues that obsess the IEA: Brexit and the NHS. Dominic Raab credits the IEA with supporting him "in waging the war of ideas". Matthew Hancock, in his former role as Cabinet Office minister, notoriously ruled that charities receiving public funds should not be allowed to lobby the government. His department credited the IEA with the research that prompted the policy. This rule, in effect, granted a monopoly on lobbying to groups like the IEA, which receive their money only from private sources. Hancock has received a total of £32,000 in political donations from the IEA's chairman, Neil Record.

The IEA has lobbied consistently for a hard Brexit. A report it published last month as an alternative to Theresa May's *White Paper* calls for Brexit to be used to tear down the rules protecting agency workers, to deregulate finance, annul the rules on hazardous chemicals and weaken food labelling laws. Darren Grimes, who was recently fined by the Electoral Commission for spending offences during the Leave campaign, now works as the IEA's digital manager.

So what is this organisation, and on whose behalf does it speak? If only we knew. It is rated by the accountability group Transparify as "highly opaque". In my view, all that distinguishes

organisations like the IEA from acknowledged public relations companies like Burson Mars-teller is that we don't know who it is working for. The only hard information we have is that, for many years, it has been funded by British American Tobacco (BAT), Japan Tobacco International, Imperial Tobacco and Philip Morris International. When this funding was exposed, the IEA claimed that its campaigns against tobacco regulation were unrelated to the money it had received.

Recently, it has been repeatedly dissing the NHS, that it wants to privatise; campaigning against controls on junk food; attacking trade unions; and defending zero hour contracts, unpaid internships and tax havens. Its staff appear on the BBC, promoting these positions, several times a week. But never do interviewers ask the basic democratic questions: who funds you, and do they have a financial interest in these topics?

The BBC's editorial guidelines seem clear on this issue: "We should make checks to establish the credentials of our contributors and to avoid being 'hoaxed'". In my view, the entire IEA is a hoax. As Adam Curtis has revealed (ironically on the BBC's website), when the institute was created in 1955, one of its founders, Major Oliver Smedley, wrote to the other, Antony Fisher, urging that it was "imperative that we should give no indication in our literature that we are working to educate the Public along certain lines which might be interpreted as having a political bias. ... That is why the first draft [of the Institute's aims] is written in rather cagey terms".

The two men were clear about its purpose: to become a public relations agency that would change society along the lines advocated by the founder of neoliberalism, Friedrich Hayek. It should not, Hayek urged them, do any actual thinking, but become a "second-hand dealer in ideas". The IEA became the template for other neoliberal institutes. It was financed initially from the fortune Anthony Fisher made by importing broiler chicken farming into the UK. Curtis credits him with founding 150 such lobby groups around the world.

While dark money has been used to influence elections, the role of groups like the IEA is to reach much deeper into political life. As its current director, Mark Littlewood, explains, "We want to totally re-frame the debate about the proper role of the state and civil society in our country ... Our true mission is to change the climate of opinion".

Astonishingly, the IEA is registered as an educational charity, with the official purpose of helping "the general public/mankind". As a result it is exempt from the kind of taxes about which it complains so bitterly. Charity Commission rules state that "an organisation will not be charitable if its purposes are political". How much more political can you get? In what sense is ripping down public protections and attacking the rights of workers charitable? Surely no organisation should be registered as a charity unless any funds it receives above a certain threshold (say £1000) are declared?

Last month, the Charity Commission announced that, after thinking about it for just 60 years, it has decided to examine the role of the IEA, to see whether it has broken its rules. I don't hold out much hope. In response to a complaint by Andrew Purkis, a former member of the Charity Commission's board, the commission's regulatory compliance department claimed that the IEA provides a "relatively uncontroversial perspective accepted by informed opinion". If the commission sees hard Brexit, privatising the NHS and defending tax havens as uncontroversial, it makes you wonder what circles he moves in.

I see such organisations as insidious and corrupting. I see them as the means by which money comes to dominate public life, without having to declare its hand. I see them as representing everything that has gone wrong with our politics.

CT

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George Monbiot's latest book, How Did We Get Into This Mess?, is published by Verso. This article was first published in the Guardian. Monbiot's web site is www.monbiot.com



10

SIT ON IT BAR: Where the lovely Rose told me about her life and her dream – to visit Hawaii.

Glimpses of a lost city

Time to pack my bags and get out of this imploding nation

CÉLINE halfjoked, “If you stay anywhere long enough, everyone and everything will stink up, just for your special benefit.” Without this pungency, however, there is no real understanding of anything, and Céline knew this as well as anyone. With tremendous physical and mental courage, the man endured. He survived being wounded in WWI, a year in Africa, a month in America, being a slum doctor for decades, WWII and the consequences of being an antisemite, everything but his first marriage.

I first encountered Céline as a 22-year-old, living in a crappy shell-of-a-house in grim Grays

Ferry, and paying all of \$25 a month for rent. Filled with illusions and vanity, I had no idea Philadelphia would be my life, would define me, but it’s perfect, this fate, for everyone must stay somewhere long enough for everything to become richly three dimensional, with a complex and nuanced history.

Thirty of my 54 years have been spent in Philly and, walking or crawling, I’ve measured this city with my body, for I don’t drive. As a housepainter, house cleaner and window washer for over a decade, I worked in dozens of neighbourhoods, and I’ve roamed around many more, so just about every Philly tree or trash can address-

LINH DINH



DIRTY FRANK'S: Skinny Dave is dead of an overdose, and Sheila is in hospital after being hit by a car.

es me by name – Behind this bush at 34th and Walnut, I once slept. At 11th and South, I was nearly mugged by a guy wielding a hammer. The last three months, then, have been one drawn-out goodbye, filled with last glimpses of places and faces.

Goodbye, then, to Point Breeze, with the lovely Rose in the bar Sit On It. Months after I'd written about the 54-year-old, she told me more about herself. She was born of a Dominican mother and African father, of which country she's not quite sure, for she never really knew him. Rose's mom was a bartender. "When I was 14, my mom came home at around three in the morning, woke me up and force me to iron her dress. Being sleepy, I burnt it, you know, and this pissed her off so much, she made me take my clothes off and get in the shower, then she burned me all over with the red-hot iron! I ran downstairs and hid in the utility closet, but I couldn't deal with the pain, you

know, so I knocked on a neighbour's door. I can still remember the man's face as he called out to his wife, 'Martha, there's a naked woman at our door'. When his wife came out, she said, 'That's not a woman, Robert. That's a child!'"

Rose never lived with her mom again. She worked her tail off, married early, had two kids, but was so depressed she ballooned to 275 pounds, all on a 4-foot-10 frame. Now free from her abusive husband and amazingly down to 130 pounds, Rose's as cheerful and sweet as can be.

"You know what I'd like to do someday? Take a cruise!"

"Which country would you like to go to, Rose?"

"Oh, I don't know, maybe Hawaii?"

Goodbye to Dirty Frank's, which I've also written about, including in a poem that mentions Skinny Dave and Sheila Modglin. The first is dead of an overdose, and Sheila is still in hospital, after being hit by a car four days after the Eagles' Super Bowl victory, as the entire city



12 DELAWARE AVENUE: More beggars than ever, and nearly all of them white.

was partying away. Though merely a bartender, Sheila started a non-profit, Sunshine Arts, that provided all sorts of classes, and an occasional field trip, for the kids in her Upper Darby neighbourhood. Buzzed, I'd shout out, "You're a saint, Sheila! A saint!" Everyone agreed. Now, Sheila's a bedridden, speechless angel.

When I was in Frank's in the '80's and '90's, I would see Uncle Moe, a silent, stooping man, nursing his Yuengling in the corner. Twenty years later, I would find out that Uncle Moe was actually a pill pusher. He'd start out his day with a lox and bagel at 4th Street Deli, drop into Friendly Lounge for his morning beer, then drift across town until he ended up at Dirty Frank's, two miles away, his leisurely lifestyle supported by drug dealing.

On Delaware Avenue, there are more beggars than ever, and nearly all of them white, dirty and wasting away. Seeing these likely junkies, my friend Felix would bitterly joke, "They're sure enjoying their white privilege".

Goodbye to 9th and Market, where the electronic news ticker dismally announces, "In the opioid epidemic, breastfeeding emerges as a possible crime".

Goodbye, too, to Suburban Station. With its tacky shops, seedy eateries, confusing passageways and underlit, tucked away corners, it's a magnet for the homeless, drifters, assorted weirdos and busking musicians. In 2013, I wrote a poem about a competent-though-diffident guitarist who strummed outside the Dollar Store. Once, Tony had made OK money as a pizza deliveryman in Cape May, then came the drugs and rehab, so now he was reduced to living in a house with a bunch of pigs, including one who consistently splattered and smeared the toilet seat.

In 2015, I ran into another Tony. A serious 23-year-old, Anthony Coleman had a large sign around his neck, "When you first look at me, do you see... / A black man? / OR / A human being?"

LINH DINH



ANTHONY COLEMAN: He aims to become a revolutionary thinker and global leader of love and peace.

Next to him was another sign, “Will you stand for LOVE and TRUTH? / Join the Movement!” Armed with a high school education and almost no work experience, Anthony was not just interested in becoming a life coach, but a revolutionary thinker and global leader of love and peace, “In ten years, I see... the Human Race Movement established. I have a team go across the country, to be featured in schools. They go into different businesses and talk to different people. I even see them go overseas”.

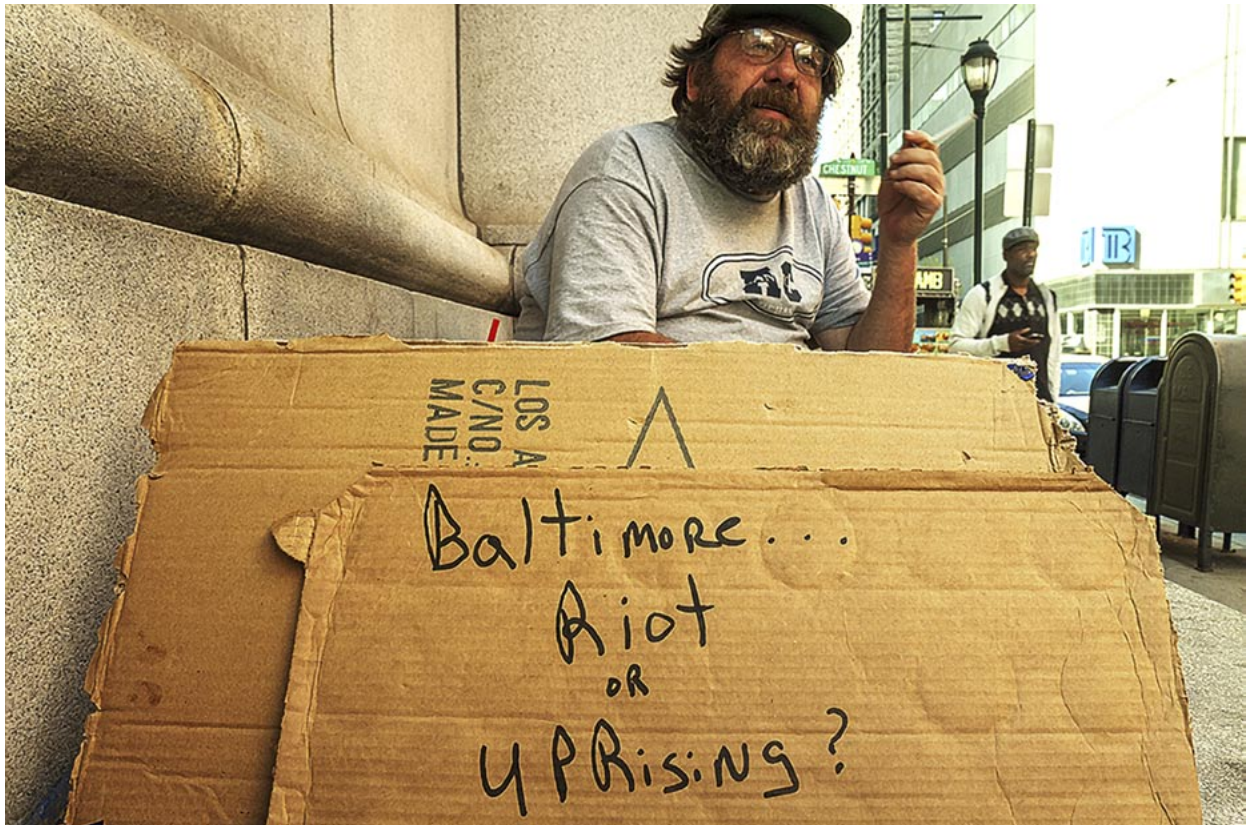
Goodbye to 12th and Chesnut, where in 2015 I met a homeless man with an IQ of 165. John’s SAT score was 1560, just 40 short of the maximum. When I confessed that mine was only 1110, John laughed, “I hear McDonald’s is hiring”.

After earning his PhD in applied mathematics from UPenn at 20 years old, John worked for 18 years in a bunch of countries for the Defense Intelligence Agency and US Army, then he was

diagnosed with schizophrenia.

With his monthly pension of \$2,700, John should have been OK, except that he’s contributing \$2,000 to his mom’s nursing home cost, “At first we had her in a cheaper nursing home, but we visited her on Tuesday, and she’s wearing a sunflower dress with a mustard stain, and when we visited her on Saturday, she’s wearing the same sunflower dress with the mustard stain, plus ketchup and chili stains. When you have Alzheimer’s, you really need one-on-one care at meal time, and she wasn’t getting that. If no one is paying attention to you, you may not eat at all. It is a sacrifice, but I don’t see it as a sacrifice. I’m happy to take care of mother”.

To not panic constantly over nothing, John had to take seven psychotropic drugs daily, “I’m usually not this social. I have a hard time talking to people”, because they’re just too insufferably stupid, basically. “When you have an IQ of 165, regular people are like special need kids. They’re retarded. Once you go below a hundred,



14 JOHN'S SAT score was 1560. When I confessed that mine was only 1110, John laughed, "I hear McDonald's is hiring".

you're talking about a chimpanzee, dude, or a severely retarded human being. If I meet someone with an IQ of 120, which is considered pretty smart, it's like I'm talking to a bonobo. Bonobos are almost human".

Seeing two freaks on the ground, a young, attractive and bright-faced woman smiled at us, so I blurted, "She smiled at us, did you see? I don't fuckin' care how smart she is. She has a great spirit. She smiled at us, for no reason!"

"But how can you have a conversation with her afterwards?"

"You can ask her, I don't know, how she feels?"

"I don't care what she feels! I don't care if she feels".

In case you don't already know, Philadelphia is filled with geniuses. Just yesterday, I met one more, 65-ish Jim, in the Friendly Lounge, "I'm a genius. I'm a combination of Albert Einstein,

HG Well and Thomas Edison. I'm trying to give you an education here. I'm an astronomer. The nearest galaxy is the Andromedy Galaxy. It's two-million light years away from us. In other word, it would take us two-million light years back in time. There's a billion galaxies out there, so we're not going to argue the fact that the universe is vast. I know it, everyone is gleaning on my knowledge. I'm very humble. The universe is vast, and the earth is small, but, ah, we can't get there.

"I live in Upper Darby, since you asked. I don't want to know where you live. I'd rather live in Maine, yeah, or Canada, anywhere but here, or Iceland! I'd like to go where people leave you alone. I don't like to be bothered. I don't like people.

"This is Washington Avenue. What would George Washington think if he saw this city right now, this disgusting street, with all these ugly things? Except for the Friendly Bar. Except, fuck yeah, for the Friendly Bar!"



NICKELS BAR, where Bill the carpenter said, "You guys are artists. You are so rich".

There's nothing more common than a man who grossly overestimates his own intelligence, and since everything beyond his grasp is invisible to him, he may even fancy that he's the sum of all knowledge, more or less, minus a few trivia not worth noticing.

In 1896, Chekhov wrote, "Look at life. There is the insolence and idleness of the strong, the ignorance and brutishness of the weak, horrible poverty everywhere, overcrowding, degeneration, drunkenness, hypocrisy, lying. Yet in all the houses and on the streets there is peace and quiet. We see the people who go to the market, eat by day, sleep by night, who babble nonsense, marry, grow old, good naturedly drag their dead to the cemetery, but we do not see or hear who suffer. What is terrible in life goes on somewhere behind the scenes. Everything is peace and quiet and only mute statistics protest".

Soon enough, though, there would be more

than mute statistics protesting, and Russia would never be the same. A cataclysm awaits this country also, but in the meantime, the good-hearted camaraderie and banter still reign in the Philly dives I love so much.

In Nickels, a woman in her mid-40's shouted to a man across the bar, "You're so good looking, you should thank your mother!" She then turned to the rest of us, "You're good looking, too, and so are you, you and you!"

Bill the carpenter then said to Felix and me, "You guys are artists. You are so rich". He's right. Philly has enriched me immeasurably. One can't live on stories alone, however, and that's why I must pack my bags.

It's getting late. Goodnight, then, to this purposely imploding nation. **CT**

Linh Dinh's latest books are "Postcards from the End of America" (non-fiction) and "A Mere Rica" (poetry). He maintains a photo blog at www.linhdinphotos.blogspot.ca

Enough to make a sailor blush

Jeremy Corbyn's response to MP's x-rated slur shows that
Dame Margaret Hodge "is no gentleman"

16

DO not believe in personal abuse of any sort. Treat people with respect, treat people as you wish to be treated yourself, listen to their views, agree or disagree but have that debate. There's going to be no rudeness from me ... I want a kinder politics, a more caring society. Don't let them reduce you to believing in less. So I say to all activists, whether Labour or not, cut out the personal abuse, cut out the cyber bullying, and especially the misogynistic abuse online, and let's get on with bringing real values back into politics". Those were the words of Jeremy Corbyn in his first conference speech as leader on September 29, 2015. He was heartily cheered.

Britain's Parliamentary Labour Party has many members who, in all seriousness, would rather lose the next election under another leader – some would say any other leader – than win it led by Corbyn. That their own survival and that of their allies as MPs might well depend on winning that election is clearly not part of the calculation, so determined are they to stop Corbyn. This faction in the party seemed to have gone quiet last summer, when it momentarily would have been hard not to be dismissed as churlish to criticise the leader for delivering a much better result in the general election than any of them had imagined possible.

Of all Corbyn's stances they have shown themselves ready to thwart, the one about abuse, respect and a kinder politics has been the one most trampled. The rhetorical practices of individu-

als in politics, in public as well as in private, are on a downward slide. Seemliness and decorum have gone the way of courtesy and consideration. While some complain more and more vociferously that they are subjected to abuse and vilification, others step up the invective and the venom. In practice, many combine these stances, putting themselves forward as indomitable martyrs. We live in strange times.

In the Palace of Westminster late on Tuesday, July 17, Margaret Hodge confronted her leader. Whether it was a chance encounter or a planned ambush goes unrecorded. What she said is not disputed. There were witnesses. "You're a fucking anti-Semite and a racist".

It's perfectly impossible to imagine a comparable verbal attack by an MP on a party leader – of any party at any time in parliamentary history – taking place. Bill Cash assaulting John Major in such terms? Woodrow Wyatt saying things like that to Harold Wilson's face? Antony Nutting bearding Eden on any terms at all? Absolutely unthinkable. It also cannot be imagined that personal abuse to the face of any other party leader would not be received with the most virulent condemnation from all sections of the party in question. There would be questions as to whether the MP was drunk. It would certainly be universally accepted that the MP would lose the whip and probably be expelled from the party and banned from the Palace of Westminster.



*Labour MP
Margaret
Hodge, to
Labour Party
leader Jeremy
Corbyn:
“You’re a
fucking
anti-Semite
and a racist”*



Yet MPs duly condemned Corbyn’s office for describing Hodge’s words as “unacceptable” and saying that “action will be taken”. If Hodge’s words are acceptable, how come much of the media reproduced them substituting “f*****” for “fucking”? That implicitly announces that the word is not acceptable to readers, viewers and listeners, an awkward circle for Corbyn-hating editors to square. What about the accusations against Corbyn? If it’s acceptable to accuse someone of being an anti-Semite, is it okay to call someone a swindler or a paedophile? If Hodge’s words are acceptable, then where is the threshold? Can anyone say anything to anybody? Who can complain at being described as a fascist in the House or being called a cunt on social media?

Once upon a time, politicians were witty and resourceful and, if they wanted to insult some-

one they did it in a way that made everybody else and, with luck, the victim laugh. Churchill was good at this. The redoubtable Bessie Bradock, stout of heart and form, encountered the PM in the Palace of Westminster. “Winston, you are drunk”, she chided. “Bessie, you are ugly,” Churchill shot back. “But in the morning I shall be sober and you will still be ugly”. Churchill wouldn’t have heard of body-shaming. No, it’s not politically correct, but nor is a baseless slur decorated with an expletive.

Like Falstaff, Churchill was not only witty in himself but the cause of that wit in others. Margot, Lady Asquith said of him, “He would kill his own mother so that he could use her skin to make a drum to beat his own praises”. I bet he enjoyed that.

In the House, there are many sins that you are not permitted to pin on a fellow member, including being drunk and being a liar. Disraeli nimbly stepped over this when anatomising Gladstone: “the right honourable member is a sophisticated rhetorician inebriated by the exuberance of his own verbosity”. The House knew just what he meant but Mr Speaker was outfoxed. We like our politicians to show that they can tap-dance rather than merely stamp their feet.

Margaret Hodge has been the MP for Barkingside since 1994. She accepted a damehood in the dissolution honours of 2015, just 17 days before Corbyn became party leader. Nine months later, she was one of two MPs to request from the Labour Party chair that a vote of no confidence in the leader be moved.

She and Corbyn have history. It was on her watch as leader of Islington Council that allegations of child abuse in the council’s children’s homes emerged. Hodge was obliged to reach a financial settlement with a whistle-blower whom she had attempted to discredit. Corbyn, an Islington MP throughout this period, has been accused of “silence” on the issue, especially by one of his most consistent detractors, John Mann. Perhaps he was implicitly supporting Hodge. Had he condemned her, it would have carried weight.

One of the ways in which women have sought to challenge the predominance of men in many fields has been to talk like men. Is this all to the good? It used to be said that a gentleman was never unknowingly rude, a nice perception that confirmed the notion that there are rules of behaviour to be broken deliberately or not at all. I have no doubt that Dame Margaret intended to



FRONT PAGE ATTACK: How Britain’s Jewish Chronicle ran the story of Hodge’s attack on Corbyn – minus the explosive.

defame her leader. If she hoped to provoke him, she mistook her man. John Prescott perhaps would have socked her in the jaw. John Woodcock might have told her to go fuck herself. Corbyn said, “I’m sorry you feel that”. Cool, classy, effortlessly rising above it.

Whatever else you make of this unprecedented vignette, you can certainly draw the conclusion that Margaret Hodge is no gentleman. **CT**

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

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TONY SUTTON

Blurring facts, distorting reality

A new book by Greg Shupak exposes the fake news at the heart of mainstream media coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict

20

WE'VE been swamped by dire warnings about fake news and its threat to democracy over the past couple of years, the phenomenon being variously attributed to alternative web sites, Twitter feeds, and Facebook postings made by dastardly agents employed by Vladimir Putin. The mainstream media, half-destroyed by years of its own internet and business ineptitude, is delighted to build and sustain this blustering cold war narrative, gleefully – with the backing of Western governments and digital billionaires – relishing its mantle as Guardian of Journalistic Truth.

The alternative media, however, is proving to be mightily resilient, facing down the accusations that it is facilitating internet anarchy. Web sites such as the UK's Medialens – www.medialens.org – and New York-based FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) – www.fair.org – have long exposed the failings and hypocrisies of the biggest and most powerful mainstream voices, Britain's *Times*, *Guardian Telegraph* and BBC, and the USA's *New York*

Times, *Wall Street Journal* and *Washington Post*. Their message is: If you want to see fake news, just look at the lies, deceits and – especially – the distortions churned out by these Publishing Pillars of the Establishment.

Want an example of mainstream failure? Let's start at the pinnacle of the journalistic firmament with the *New York Times*, proclaimed as the world's greatest newspaper, its front page flaunting the slogan, *All The News That's Fit To Print*. On the contrary: *All The News That's Fit To Distort* is the message from Greg Shupak's enlightening new book, *The Wrong Story: Palestine, Israel & The Media*. Shupak, lecturer in media studies at the University of Guelph-Humber in Toronto and a frequent contributor to FAIR, takes a hard, critical look at media coverage of the decades-long Israel-Palestine conflict, using the *NYT* literally as a text-book example of how media bias is structured and maintained.

The book draws on the *Times*'s summer 2014 editorials published during Israel's Operation Protective Edge invasion of Gaza. The focus on the *Times* is warranted, writes Shupak, because it is “the most influential print media source in the United States, if not the entire English-speaking world”. His aim, he adds, is to show readers that the story of Palestine-Israel “is *not* one of two sides who have wronged each oth-

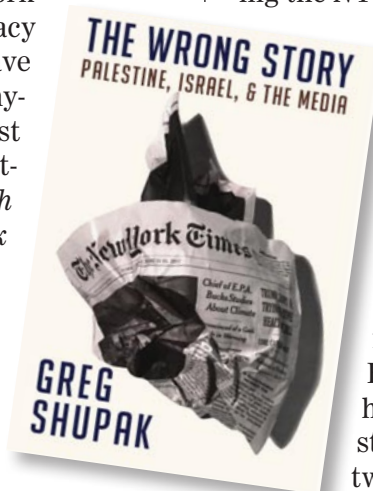
THE WRONG STORY Palestine, Israel, & The Media

Greg Shupak

Published by OR Books

www.orbooks.com

\$17





SUFFER THE CHILDREN: Palestinian father cradles his child as they head for cover during Israel's Operation Protective Edge in Gaza during 2014.

Photo: Basel Yazouri, Wikimedia

er to comparable extents, or of a question that can be solved by isolating an extremist fringe and empowering moderates, or of an Israeli state defending itself that perhaps sometimes goes too far”.

Instead, he stresses, the conflict might best be regarded as one that Nahla Abdo, Professor of Sociology at Ottawa's Carleton University, describes in her essay, *Women, War and Peace: Reflections From the Intifada*, as “two asymmetrical entities; one is coloniser and occupier and the other is colonised and occupied; one is a regional military superpower and the other is a largely demilitarised entity; one is independent with almost unlimited financial aid from the West ... and the other is heavily dependent for its breathing, drinking and feeding, on the air, water, and land that Israel [controls]. ... In this relationship of occupier and occupied, this asymmetrical relation between those who order and practice the destruction, and those who receive its wrath, one cannot equate between the victim and the victimiser, let alone, blame the victim for the violence.”

Shupak presents *The Wrong Story* in three parts, focusing on the distorting narratives that he finds the most pervasive in the coverage of the crisis:

1. Claims that both Palestine and Israel are both victims of, and equally at fault for, the ongoing violence;
2. The view that the conflict is one between “extremists and moderates”; and
3. Media outlets' framing of the Palestine-Israel dispute in terms of Israel's supposed “right to defend itself” against Palestinian violence.

Examining the *Times* editorials from the early days of Protective Edge, Shupak shows how the paper's distortion of timelines enabled it to lay most of the blame on Hamas, while avoiding the fact that it was Israel that initiated the violence that led to the invasion.

“The story of Protective Edge is told in a way that speciously implies that Israel is at fault for going too far at times, but that Palestinians are at fault for starting the fighting and that, therefore,

both sides are in the wrong”, writes Shupak.

The *Times*’s editorials, he says, “presented Operation Protective Edge as a war in which both Israelis and Palestinians were harmed to comparable degrees.” Not true, “Media coverage suggesting that Israelis and Palestinians have wronged each other to similar extents ignores that it is only one side that made millions of people refugees and that is responsible for them continuing to have that status.”

Shupak also points out that suggesting equality in both belligerence and response encouraged readers to see the fight as one between similarly-sized forces, when the reality was that one side was armed with F-16 bombers, tanks and one of the strongest armies in the world, while the other was a rag-tag force with an arsenal essentially comprising short-range rockets and slingshots.

While his criticism is mainly of the *New York Times*’s coverage, the author also slams the reporting in other newspapers, including London’s “liberal” *Guardian* and *Independent*, where he finds columnists falling over themselves to find a nonexistent balance to what was a blatantly one-sided conflict.

This narrative, Shupak points out, obscures the larger context of the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict, which is that of occupier and occupied: “That only one side in Palestine-Israel ethnically cleansed the other demonstrates the folly of presenting Palestine-Israel as a story of two sides who have inflicted similar degrees of harm on each other and who are equally responsible for decades of violence ... It is not both sides in Palestine-Israel who are keeping millions of refugees from returning to their homes”.

Shupak also illustrates other ways in which the distribution of blame is a fabrication, pointing out that, “During that half century occupation, only one side has subjected the other to dispossession, discrimination, and mass violence. Israel’s illegal separation wall cuts Palestinians off from their own land, which they can access only by passing through gates that Israel controls and that require permits issued by the military that are hard to secure”.

The second part of *The Wrong Story* examines the idea that the violence is between extremists and moderates on both sides, a stance that allows the media great latitude in portraying Hamas as a “violent”, “extremist”, “hateful”, and “terroristic”, organisation. “Israel is not described this way”, says Shupak, “although it has ethnically-cleansed, colonised, occupied, and erected a system of institutional discrimination against the Palestinians. In this regard, the discourse about ‘extremists and moderates’ in Palestine-Israel is a continuation of that of other colonial and imperial situations: When the oppressed use force it is ‘hateful violence and when the oppressor uses vastly more destructive force it is not”.

Shupak highlights a further problem the mainstream media often avoids in its often over-simplistic framing of the violence: “Palestinians, like any occupied or colonised people, have the right to armed resistance under international law.” Israel, the oppressor, has no such legal standing.

The book notes the *Times*’s tacit approval of Israel’s unrestrained state violence in a discussion of another editorial from July 2014, that blasted Hamas after Israel had killed many Palestinians and destroyed much infrastructure in aerial bombardment on built-up areas of Gaza. Shupak writes, “By suggesting that Hamas is to blame for the deaths of their own people, the paper contributes to the narrative that Hamas is an atavistic group committed to violence for its own sake who must therefore be dealt with violently”.

Finally, Shupak examines various dubious media narratives explaining how Israel has the right to defend itself against Palestinian attacks. However, he points out, they mislead readers, “by ignoring the permanent violence of Israel’s colonisation of Palestine and the aggressive pursuit of ethnic supremacy that this colonisation entails.” He illustrates this by showing how, in one editorial, “the *Times* describes Hamas’s ‘heavily armed militia’ as a barrier to resolving the Palestine-Israel question, but makes no similar comment about Israel’s vastly more powerful military arsenal, which includes nuclear weapons,” adding, “The legitimacy of the coloniser’s violence is unquestioned,

TONY SUTTON

whereas the violence of the colonised is presented as illegitimate”.

In *The Wrong Story*, Shupak unravels a web of sophisticated distortions and half truths that perfectly fit the criteria of manufactured – ie fake – news. Yes, Hamas does undertake acts of violence against Israel, but that violence is miniscule when compared to the scale of oppression that Israel employs against the people of Gaza – a combination of vast, sophisticated and carelessly-applied firepower, oppressive and illegal border “security”, and barefaced theft of Palestinian land, along with the expulsion of its inhabitants.

Concluding this important work, Shupak points to high degree of sophisticated capital-media collusion in the perpetuation of this Middle Eastern tragedy: “When coverage of Palestine-Israel is viewed in the context of commercial media, it is no surprise that narratives about the issue that are favourable to Israel are as prevalent as they are. The outlets covering Palestine-Israel are embedded in a system of global imperialist capitalism built around US hegemony, of which Israel is an important characteristic. The overall functioning of the international capitalist system of which the commercial media are a part is guaranteed by the US military, and American sponsorship of Israeli settler-colonial capitalism is a key part of US planners’ strategy for dominance of the Middle East. The millionaire and billionaire owners of media outlets and of the advertisers that fund them are unambiguously part of the ruling class”.

We only have to look back a few weeks to confirm that collusion. The recent Great March of Return demonstrations in Gaza, marking the 70th anniversary of the expulsion of Palestinians from their homes during the creation of the



KILLED: Yaser Murtaja was shot by an Israeli sniper during the Great March of Return on April 6, despite wearing a PRESS flak jacket and helmet.

state of Israel, were marked by the deliberate slaughter of doctors, nurses and children by Israeli snipers. Instead of howling with outrage and condemnation, the media seemed more concerned by the potential crop damage caused by flaming kites flitting over the border in the opposite direction.

If, as Shupak points out, we can’t rely on the mainstream media to tell the truth, “the task of bringing about the necessary shifts in consciousness therefore falls to independent news outlets and publishers as well as the activists working within and

beyond them on campuses, in workplaces, in religious communities, and on the streets.”

This journalistic “call to arms” is timely. Fake news should not be seen as a new threat emanating solely from obscure web sites funded by our “enemies”; the mainstream media has long been guilty of blurring facts and distorting reality. Its messages, built around lies and half-truths, have created an Orwellian world of derangement in which Vladimir Putin is considered a dangerous warmonger while it is the US president who threatens to blow up half the world; countries such as Libya and Iraq are destroyed by brazen lies and Western bombs; British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn is branded a racist and antisemite, despite decades of evidence to the contrary; and Israeli snipers can kill Palestinians with no fear of sanction.

The Wrong Story is an important book; it and others like it, penetrate the haze of political bombast and corporate bullshit, and help us understand that mainstream media distortion – not shady Facebook or Twitter feeds – is the most deliberate and destructive agent of fake news. We must all be on guard. **CT**

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Eight myths that keep America afloat

The adult fairy tales that keep our corrupt rulers in power

A **AMERICAN** society should have collapsed by now. You know that, right? No society should function with this level of inequality (with the possible exception of one of those prison planets in a *Star Wars* movie). Sixty-three percent of Americans can't afford a \$500 emergency. Yet Amazon head Jeff Bezos is now worth a record \$141-billion. He could literally end world hunger for multiple years and still have more money left over than he could ever spend on himself.

Worldwide, one in 10 people only make \$2 a

day. Do you know how long it would take one of those people to make the same amount as Jeff Bezos has? 193 million years. (If they only buy single-ply toilet paper.) Put simply, you cannot comprehend the level of inequality in our current world or even just our nation.

So ... shouldn't there be riots in the streets every day? Shouldn't it all be collapsing? Look outside. The streets aren't on fire. No one is running naked and screaming (usually). Does it look like everyone's going to work at gunpoint? No. We're all choosing to continue on like this.

Why?

Well, it comes down to the myths we've been sold. Myths that are ingrained in our social programming from birth, deeply entrenched, like an impacted wisdom tooth. These myths are accepted and basically never questioned.

I'm going to cover eight of them. There are more than eight. There are probably hundreds. But I'm going to cover eight because (a) no one reads a column titled "Hundreds of Myths of American Society," (b) these are the most important ones and (c) we all have other shit to do.

Myth No. 8 – We have a democracy.

If you think we still have a democracy or a democratic republic, ask yourself this: When was the last time Congress did something that the people of America supported that did not align with corporate interests? You probably can't do it. It's like trying to think of something that rhymes with "orange." You feel like an answer exists but then slowly realise it doesn't. Even the Carter Center and former president Jimmy Carter believe that America has been transformed into an oligarchy: A small, corrupt elite control the country with almost no input from the people. The rulers need the myth that we're a democracy to give us the illusion of control.

Myth No. 7 – We have an accountable and legitimate voting system.

Gerrymandering, voter purging, data mining, broken exit polling, push polling, super-delegates, electoral votes, black-box machines, voter ID suppression, provisional ballots, super PACs, dark money, third parties banished from the debates and two corporate parties that stand for the same goddamn pile of fetid crap!

What part of this sounds like a legitimate election system?

No, we have what a large Harvard study called the worst election system in the Western world. Have you ever seen where a parent has a toddler in a car seat, and the toddler has a tiny, brightly coloured toy steering wheel so he can feel like he's driving the car? That's what our election system is – a toy steering wheel. Not connected to anything. We all sit here like infants, excitedly

shouting, "I'm steeeeeering!"

And I know it's counterintuitive, but that's why you have to vote. We have to vote in such numbers that we beat out what's stolen through our ridiculous rigged system.

Myth No. 6 – We have an independent media that keeps the rulers accountable.

Our media outlets are funded by weapons contractors, big pharma, big banks, big oil and big, fat hard-on pills. (Sorry to go hard on hard-on pills, but we can't get anything resembling hard news because it's funded by dicks.) The corporate media's jobs are to rally for war, cheer for Wall Street and froth at the mouth for consumerism. It's their mission to actually fortify belief in the myths I'm telling you about right now. Anybody who steps outside that paradigm is treated like they're standing on a playground wearing nothing but a trench coat.

Myth No. 5 – We have an independent judiciary.

The criminal justice system has become a weapon wielded by the corporate state. This is how bankers can foreclose on millions of homes illegally and see no jail time, but activists often serve jail time for non-violent civil disobedience. Chris Hedges recently noted, "The most basic constitutional rights ... have been erased for many. ... Our judicial system, as Ralph Nader has pointed out, has legalised secret law, secret courts, secret evidence, secret budgets and secret prisons in the name of national security."

If you're not part of the monied class, you're pressured into releasing what few rights you have left. According to the *New York Times*, "97 percent of federal cases and 94 percent of state cases end in plea bargains, with defendants pleading guilty in exchange for a lesser sentence."

That's the name of the game. Pressure people of colour and poor people to just take the plea deal because they don't have a million dollars to spend on a lawyer. (At least not one who doesn't advertise on beer coasters.)

Myth No. 4 – The police are here to protect you. They're your friends.

That's funny. I don't recall my friend pressur-

ing me into sex to get out of a speeding ticket. (Which is essentially still legal in 32 states.)

The police in our country are primarily designed to do two things: protect the property of the rich and perpetrate the completely immoral war on drugs which by definition is a war on our own people.

We lock up more people than any other country on earth. Meaning the land of the free is the largest prison state in the world. So all these droopy-faced politicians and rabid-talking heads telling you how awful China is on human rights or Iran or North Korea none of them match the numbers of people locked up right here under Lady Liberty's skirt.

Myth No. 3 – Buying will make you happy.

This myth is put forward mainly by the floods of advertising we take in but also by our social engineering. Most of us feel a tenacious emptiness, an alienation deep down behind our surface emotions (for a while I thought it was gas). That uneasiness is because most of us are flushing away our lives at jobs we hate before going home to seclusion boxes called houses or apartments. We then flip on the TV to watch reality shows about people who have it worse than we do (which we all find hilarious).

If we're lucky, we'll make enough money during the week to afford enough beer on the weekend to help it all make sense. (I find it takes at least four beers for everything to add up.) But that doesn't truly bring us fulfilment. So what now? Well, the ads say buying will do it. Try to smother the depression and desperation under a blanket of flat-screen TVs, purses and Jet Skis. Now does your life have meaning? No? Well, maybe you have to drive that Jet Ski a little faster! Crank it up until your bathing suit flies off and you'll feel alive!

The dark truth is that we have to believe the myth that consuming is the answer or else we won't keep running around the wheel. And if we

aren't running around the wheel, then we start thinking, start asking questions. Those questions are not good for the ruling elite, who enjoy a society based on the daily exploitation of 99 percent of us.

Myth No. 2 – If you work hard, things will get better.

According to Deloitte's Shift Index survey: "80% of people are dissatisfied with their jobs", and "[t]he average person spends 90,000 hours at work over their lifetime." That's about one-seventh of your life and most of it is during your most productive years.

Ask yourself what we're working for. To make money? For what? Almost none of us are doing jobs for survival anymore. Once upon a time, jobs boiled down to:

I plant the food

I eat the food

If I don't plant food, I die.

But nowadays, if you work at a café will someone die if they don't get their super-caf-mocha-frap-almond-piss-latte? I kinda doubt they'll keel over from a blueberry scone deficiency.

If you work at Macy's, will customers perish if they don't get those boxer briefs with the sweat-absorbent-ass fabric? I doubt it.

And if they do die from that, then their problems were far greater than you could've known. So that means we're all working to make other people rich because we have a society in which we have to work. Technological advancements can do most everything that truly must get done.

So if we wanted to, we could get rid of most work and have tens of thousands of more hours to enjoy our lives. But we're not doing that at all. And no one's allowed to ask these questions not on your mainstream airwaves at least. Even a half-step like universal basic income is barely discussed because it doesn't compute with our cultural programming.

Scientists say it's quite possible artificial intelligence will take away all human jobs in 120 years. I think they know that will happen be-

*Try to smother
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meaning?*

LEE CAMP

cause bots will take the jobs and then realise that 80 percent of them don't need to be done! The bots will take over and then say, "Stop it. ... Stop spending a seventh of your life folding shirts at Banana Republic."

One day, we will build monuments to the bot that told us to enjoy our lives and leave the shirts wrinkly.

And this leads me to the largest myth of our American society.

Myth No. 1 – You are free.

I'm not talking about the millions locked up in our prisons. I'm talking about you and me. If you think you're free, try running around with your nipples out, ladies. Guys, take a dump on the street and see how free you are.

I understand there are certain restrictions on freedom we actually desire to have in our society maybe you're not crazy about everyone leaving a Stanley Steamer in the middle of your walk to work. But a lot of our lack of freedom is not something you would vote for if given the chance.

Try building a fire in a parking lot to keep warm in the winter.

Try sleeping in your car for more than a few hours without being harassed by police.

Try maintaining your privacy for a week without a single email, web search or location data set collected by the NSA and the telecoms.

Try signing up for the military because you need college money and then one day just walking off the base, going, "Yeah, I was bored. Thought I would just not do this anymore."

Try explaining to Kentucky Fried Chicken that while you don't have the green pieces of pa-

per they want in exchange for the mashed potatoes, you do have some pictures you've drawn on a napkin to give them instead.

Try running for president as a third-party candidate. (Jill Stein was shackled and chained to a chair by police during one of the debates.)

Try using the restroom at Starbucks without buying something ... while black.

We are less free than a dog on a leash. We live in one of the hardest-working, most unequal societies on the planet with more billionaires than ever. Meanwhile, Americans supply 94 percent of the paid blood used worldwide. And it's almost exclusively coming from very poor people. This abusive vampire system is literally sucking the blood from the poor. Does that sound like a free decision they made? Or does that sound like something people do after immense economic force crushes down around them? (One could argue that sperm donation takes a little less convincing.)

Point is, in order to enforce this illogical, immoral system, the corrupt rulers most of the time don't need guns and tear gas to keep the exploitation mechanisms humming along. All they need are some good, solid bullshit myths for us all to buy into, hook, line and sinker. Some fairy tales for adults.

It's time to wake up.

CT

Lee Camp is an American stand-up comedian, writer, actor and activist. Camp is the host of the weekly comedy news TV show "Redacted Tonight With Lee Camp" on RT America. He is a former comedy writer for the Onion and the Huffington Post and has been a touring comic for 20 years. This article first appeared at www.truthdig.org

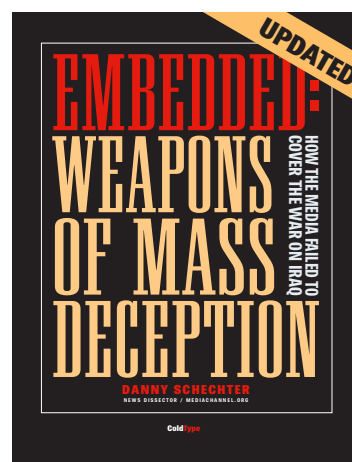
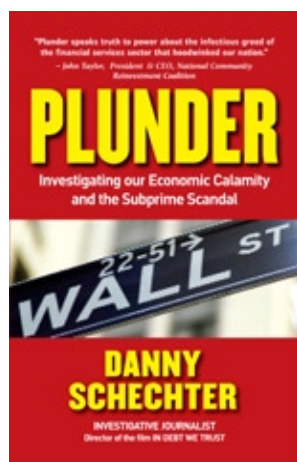
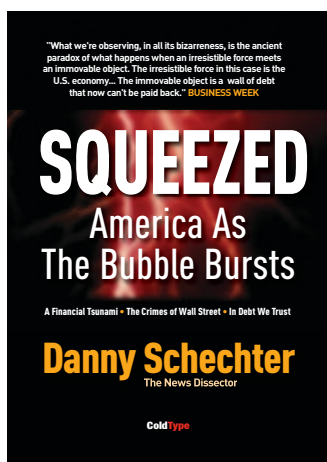
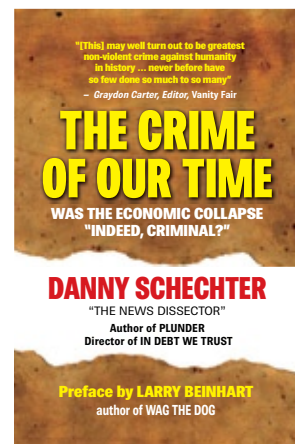
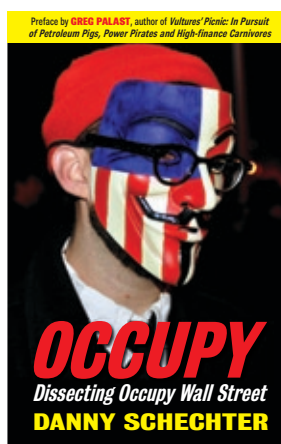
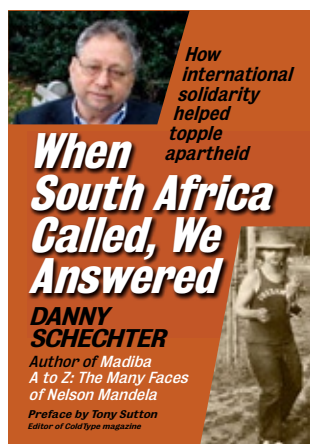
*Most of the time
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NEIL CLARK



PLAYTIME: Two girls – one pretending to hold a hand grenade, the other pretending to hold a gun – from Jos, a mainly-Christian area of Nigeria that is terrorised frequently by Boko Haram. Photo: Wikimedia

War? Not our fault, blame it on polygamy!

29

It's a cop-out to write about conflict zones without mentioning the West's role in fuelling the fires and the commercial interests that profit from them

ACCORDING to the *Economist* magazine, polygamy is a key factor in civil wars and conflict. How convenient to blame it all on “the natives” and their “backward” customs, obscuring the role of the US and its allies in destabilising regions.

In the 1930 Marx Brothers comedy *Animal Crackers*, Groucho Marx proposes to two women at the same time. One protests: “But that’s bigamy!” Groucho replies: “Yes and that’s big-a-me, too. It’s big of all of us. Let’s be big for a change. I’m sick of these conventional marriages!”

We know the *Economist* isn’t a great fan of Karl Marx, and it’s doubtful it would approve of Groucho much either – or at least the idea of him taking two wives. You see, it would probably lead to armed conflict.

Forget the illegal invasion of Iraq, which led to a million deaths and turned the Middle East into a cauldron. Forget, too, the mass casualties of two World Wars. It’s polygamy that we should be focusing on to explain violence in the world. Run for your wives? More like run for your lives.

It’s fair to say that the *Economist*, the weekly Bible of Western neoliberal capitalism, is very

keen that we get the Polygamy = Wars thesis.

“Polygamy is still common in Africa, the Islamic world and parts of Asia. It makes civil war more likely”, we were told on Twitter.

This follows an article entitled “Why Polygamy breeds civil war”, published on March 19, 2018, a piece by *Economist* Foreign Editor Robert Guest entitled, “Big Love and Big War”, on January 12, 2018, which cited a 2009 study by Satoshi Kanazawa of the LSE, and another piece entitled “The link between polygamy and war”, published in the 2017 Christmas edition.

“Wherever it is widely practised, polygamy (specifically polygyny, the taking of multiple wives) destabilises society, largely because it is a form of inequality which creates an urgent distress in the hearts, and loins, of young men”, the last piece states.

The neoliberal *Economist*, which has championed all the Thatcherite reforms of the past 40 years, concerned with inequality? Why, you could have knocked me down with a feather!

The article also says polygamy “is one of the reasons why the Arab Spring erupted, why the jihadists of Boko Haram and Islamic State were able to conquer swathes of Nigeria, Iraq and Syria, and why the polygamous parts of Indonesia and Haiti are so turbulent”. It adds: “Polygamous societies are bloodier, more likely to invade their neighbours and more prone to collapse than others”.

The *Economist* doesn’t blame polygamy for the recent heatwave, but that’s probably coming up in next week’s edition.

By way of evidence, the magazine states that: “The taking of multiple wives is a feature of life in all of the 20 most unstable countries on the Fragile States Index compiled by the Fund for Peace, an NGO”.

But if we look at that Index we see that a large number of the “top 20” have been affected directly or indirectly by Western de-stabilisation campaigns, or even – in case of Yemen (placed at number 4), Iraq (10), Syria (6), Afghanistan (9) –

by Western alliance invasion/bombing.

This is the “link” that the *Economist* won’t mention because it has largely been in favour of these “interventions”. Who can ever forget the way the magazine whitewashed the Iraq invasion with its “Sincere Deceivers” cover featuring the warmongers Bush and Blair?

South Sudan and Sudan feature heavily in the *Economist*’s arguments – but again, the US role in sponsoring oil-rich South Sudan’s secession and creating instability in the region is not mentioned.

As for the “conquering” by Boko Haram and Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS) of “vast swathes” of Nigeria, Iraq and Syria, who do we blame for that? Here’s Dan Glazebrook, writing

about global famines: “The situation in Nigeria is also a result of war, in this case the Boko Haram insurgency – an insurgency which owes its massive spread in recent years directly to the Nato destruction of Libya, which opened up the country’s weapons dumps to Boko Haram and its partners.”

A destruction of Libya which the *Economist* described as “a modest win for liberal internationalism.” The Iraq War – also backed by the *Economist*, led directly to the rise of IS, while Syria

whose polygamy rates are “N/A” in the index, became a “fragile state” only because of the regime change operations of the West and its regional allies.

The more we analyse the global situation a very clear pattern emerges. The US and its allies have targeted a succession of independently-minded, resource-rich countries in strategically important parts of the world and, where they haven’t been able to directly invade, they’ve fomented civil wars to further their own economic and geopolitical interests. A classic example was the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Unilateral secessions were encouraged from the republic, in contravention of Article 5 of the Yugoslav constitution.

Separatist politicians and armed militias

The Economist, which championed the Thatcherite reforms of the past 40 years, concerned with inequality? You could have knocked me down with a feather!

were backed, even if they were once classified as terrorist groups, like the Kosovo Liberation Army. Attempts by local actors to sort things out peacefully were sabotaged, for example when US Ambassador Warren Zimmerman persuaded Bosnian separatist Alija Izetbegovic to renege on his signing of the EU-sponsored 1992 Lisbon Accord.

Then when things got out of hand, Nato powers could use the violence on the ground as an excuse for “intervention” – with the aim of bringing the Balkans under full economic and military control. In November 2012, the *New York Times* ran an article on how the “Americans who helped free Kosovo” were returning there as “entrepreneurs” to bid for privatised assets.

“So many former American officials have returned to Kosovo for business – in coal and telecommunications, or for lobbying and other lucrative government contracts – that it’s hard to keep them from colliding,” the paper reported. The pattern has been repeated across the world. In 2006, a cable from US Ambassador to Syria William Roebuck discussed “potential vulnerabilities” of the Bashar Assad government and the “possible means to exploit them.”

One of the “possible means” was to seek to divide the Shiite and Sunni communities in Syria. The US and its regional allies have flooded Syria with weapons and foreign jihadists in pursuance of their objectives. But, hey, let’s blame N/A polygamy figures for Syria’s current “fragile state” shall we?

It’s a very similar story in Afghanistan. The late US diplomat and former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski was the architect of the US policy of backing Islamist fighters to try to “bleed” the Soviet Union, which supported the secular, left-wing government in Kabul. As I have commented previously, Zbig’s policy had far-reaching global consequences: “The Taliban and Al-Qaeda grew out of the Mujahedeen and then many years later, the US led an invasion of Afghanistan to try and get rid of the Taliban.”

In 1998 Brzezinski was asked, “Do you regret having supported Islamic fundamentalism, which has given arms and advice to future terrorists?” He replied, “What was more important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some agitated Muslims or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War?”

Today, we’re expected to put full blame on those “agitated Muslims” and forget who got them so worked up and so well-armed. We’re meant to see conflicts and civil wars in close-up and not in long shot. Where Boko Haram and IS get their weaponry and funding is not a question we’re supposed to ask. Instead, let’s focus on cultural factors, okay? Let’s talk about marriage customs and not the numbers on the side of spent missile cases.

None of this, it must be said, denies agency to local actors, or excuses them from war crimes and atrocities committed once hostilities begin. Nor is it a defence of polygamy. It’s up to each country to decide its own laws regarding marriage.

But it’s an intellectual cop-out to write about the world’s conflict zones and not mention the role that the West has played in fuelling the fires and the commercial interests that lie behind the wars and which profit greatly from them. “Wars, conflicts – it’s all business,” sighs the anti-hero Monsieur Verdoux at the end of Chaplin’s classic 1947 film. It’s no great surprise that the organ espousing the ideology of elite Western business interests prefers to blame something else. **CT**

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Neil Clark is a journalist, writer, broadcaster and blogger. He has written for newspapers and magazines in the UK and other countries, His Twitter feed is @NeilClark66 - He invites readers to contribute to his legal fund to pay for court action against Oliver Kamm of the Times, who he has sued for libel and harassment at https://fundrazr.com/41B1C1?ref=ab_2ohKqI8xk9n2ohKqI8xk9n

The US and its allies flooded Syria with weapons and foreign jihadists. But, let’s blame polygamy figures for Syria’s current “fragile state” shall we?

Mass dementia in the Western Establishment

Why all the hysteria about the Trump-Putin meeting in Helsinki?
At least, progress was made in defusing any chance of a nuclear war

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WHERE to begin to analyse the madness of mainstream media in reaction to the Trump-Putin meeting in Helsinki? By focusing on the individual, psychology has neglected the problem of mass insanity, which has now overwhelmed the United States establishment, its mass media and most of its copycat European subsidiaries. The individuals may be sane, but as a herd they are ready to leap off the cliff.

For the past two years, a particular power group has sought to explain away its loss of power – or rather, its loss of the presidency, as it still holds a predominance of institutional power – by creation of a myth. Mainstream media is known for its herd behaviour, and in this case the editors, commentators, journalists have talked themselves into a story that initially they themselves could hardly take seriously.

Donald Trump was elected by Russia?

On the face of it, this is preposterous. Okay, the United States can manage to rig elections in Honduras, or Serbia, or even Ukraine, but the United States is a bit too big and complex to leave the choice of the presidency to a barrage of electronic messages totally unread by most voters. If this were so, Russia wouldn't need to try to "undermine our democracy". It would mean that our democracy was already undermined, in tatters, dead. A standing corpse ready to be knocked over by a tweet.

Even if, as is alleged without evidence, an army of Russian bots (even bigger than the notorious

Israeli army of bots) was besieging social media with its nefarious slanders against poor innocent Hillary Clinton, this could determine an election only in a vacuum, with no other influences in the field. But there was a lot of other stuff going on in the 2016 election, some for Trump and some for Hillary; and Hillary herself scored a crucial own goal by denigrating millions of Americans as "deplorables" because they didn't fit into her identity politics constituencies.

The Russians could do nothing to build support for Trump, and there is not a hint of evidence that they tried. They might have done something to harm Hillary, because there was so much there: the private server emails, the Clinton foundation, the murder of Muammar Gaddafi, the call for a no-fly zone in Syria ... they didn't have to invent it. It was there. So was the hanky panky at the Democratic National Committee, on which the Clintonite accusations focus, perhaps to cause everyone to forget much worse things.

When you come to think of it, the DNC scandal focused on Debbie Wasserman Schultz, not on Hillary herself. Screaming about "Russian hacking the DNC" has been a distraction from much more serious accusations against Hillary Clinton. Bernie Sanders supporters didn't need those "revelations" to make them stop loving Hillary or even to discover that the DNC was working against Bernie. It was always perfectly obvious.



HANDSHAKE THAT CAUSED A STORM: President Trump greets Russian President Vladimir Putin during their July meeting in Helsinki.

White House photo by Shealah Craighead

So at worst, “the Russians” are accused of revealing some relatively minor facts concerning the Hillary Clinton campaign. Big deal.

But that is enough, after two years of fakery, to send the establishment into a frenzy of accusations of “treason” when Trump does what he said he would do while campaigning, try to normalise relations with Russia.

This screaming comes not only from the US mainstream, but also from that European elite which has been housebroken for 70 years as obedient poodles, dachshunds or corgis in the American menagerie, via intense vetting by US trans-Atlantic “cooperation” associations. They have based their careers on the illusion of sharing the world empire by following US whims in the Middle East and transforming the mission of their armed forces from defence into foreign intervention units of Nato under US command. Having

not thought seriously about the implications of this for more than half a century, they panic at the suggestion of being left to themselves.

The Western elite is now suffering from self-inflicted dementia.

Donald Trump is not particularly articulate, navigating through the language with a small repetitive vocabulary, but what he said at his Helsinki press conference was honest and even brave. As the hounds bay for his blood, he quite correctly refused to endorse the “findings” of US intelligence agencies, 14 years after the same agencies “found” that Iraq was bursting with weapons of mass destruction. How in the world could anyone expect anything else?

But for the mainstream media, “the story” at the Helsinki summit, even the only story,

was Trump's reaction to the, er, trumped up charges of Russian interference in our democracy. Were you or were you not elected thanks to Russian hackers? All they wanted was a yes or no answer. Which could not possibly be yes. So they could write their reports in advance.

Anyone who has frequented mainstream journalists, especially those who cover the "big stories" on international affairs, is aware of their obligatory conformism, with few exceptions. To get the job, one must have important "sources", meaning government spokesmen who are willing to tell you what "the story" is, often without being identified. Once they know what "the story" is, competition sets in: competition as to how to tell it. That leads to an escalation of rhetoric, variations on the theme: "The President has betrayed our great country to the Russian enemy. Treason!"

If Trump actually makes a "deal", there may be losers – neither the US nor Russia, but third parties. When two great powers reach agreement, it is often at somebody else's expense

caterwauling we've been hearing from senators and talking heads on CNN.

Those people seem to have no idea of what diplomacy is about. They cannot conceive of agreements that would be beneficial to both sides. No, it's got to be a zero sum game, winner take all. If they win, we lose, and vice versa.

They also have no idea of the harm to both sides if they do not agree. They have no project, no strategy. Just hate Trump.

He seems totally isolated, and every morning I look at the news to see if he has been assassinated yet.

It is unimaginable for our Manichean moralists that Putin might also be under fire at home for failing to chide the American president for US violations of human rights in Guantanamo, murderous drone strikes against defenceless citizens throughout the Middle East, the destruction of Libya in violation of the UN mandate, interference in the elections of countless countries by government-financed "non-governmental organisations" (the National Endowment of Democracy), worldwide electronic spying, invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, not to mention the world's greatest prison population and regular massacres of schoolchildren. But the diplomatic Russians know how to be polite.

Still, if Trump actually makes a "deal", there may be losers – neither the US nor Russia, but third parties. When two great powers reach agreement, it is often at somebody else's expense. The West Europeans are afraid it will be them, but such fears are groundless. All Putin wants is normal relations with the West, which is not much to ask.

Rather, candidate number one for paying the price are the Palestinians, or even Iran, in marginal ways. At the press conference, asked about possible areas of cooperation between the two nuclear powers, Trump suggested that the two could agree on helping Israel:

"We both spoke with Bibi Netanyahu. They

This demented chorus on "Russian hacking" prevented mainstream media from even doing their job. Not even mentioning, much less analysing, any of the real issues at the summit. To find analysis, one must go on line, away from the official fake news to independent reporting. For example, "the Moon of Alabama" – www.moonofalabama.org/2018/07/helsinki-talks-how-trump-tries-to-rebalance-the-global-triangle.html – offers an intelligent interpretation of the Trump strategy, which sounds infinitely more plausible than "the story". In short, Trump is trying to woo Russia away from China, in a reverse version of Kissinger's strategy 40 years ago to woo China away from Russia, thus avoiding a continental alliance against the United States. This may not work because the United States has proven so untrustworthy that the cautious Russians are highly unlikely to abandon their alliance with China for shadows. But it makes perfect sense as an explanation of Trump's policy, unlike the

DIANA JOHNSTONE

would like to do certain things with respect to Syria, having to do with the safety of Israel. In that respect, we absolutely would like to work in order to help Israel. Israel will be working with us. So both countries would work jointly.”

In political terms, Trump knows where political power lies, and is counting on the influence of the pro-Israel lobby, which recognises the defeat in Syria and the rising influence of Russia, to save him from the liberal imperialists – a daring bet, but he does not have much choice.

On another subject, Trump said that “our militaries” get along with the Russians “better than our politicians”. This is another daring bet, on military realism that could somehow neutralise military industrial congressional complex lobbying for more and more weapons.

In short, the only chance to end the nuclear

war threat may depend on support for Trump from Israel and the Pentagon!

The hysterical neoliberal globalists seem to have ruled out any other possibility – and perhaps this one, too.

“Constructive dialogue between the United States and Russia forwards the opportunity to open new pathways toward peace and stability in our world”, Trump declared “I would rather take a political risk in pursuit of peace than to risk peace in pursuit of politics”.

That is more than his political enemies can claim. **CT**

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Nato, the unexamined alliance

It's time to consign the organisation to the history books, just as happened to the Warsaw Pact

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THE outcome of the July 11-12 Nato meeting in Brussels got lost amid the media's obsession with President Donald Trump's bombast, but the "Summit Declaration" makes for sober reading. The media reported that the 28-page document "upgraded military readiness", and was "harshly critical of Russia," but there was not much detail beyond that.

But details matter, because that is where the devil hides.

One such detail is Nato's "Readiness Initiative" that will beef up naval, air and ground forces in "the eastern portion of the Alliance." Nato is moving to base troops in Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic and Poland. Since Georgia and Ukraine have been invited to join the Alliance, some of those forces could end up deployed on Moscow's western and southern borders.

That should give us pause.

A recent European Leadership's Network's (ELN) study titled "Envisioning a Russia-Nato Conflict", concludes, "The current Russia-Nato deterrence relationship is unstable and dangerously so". The ELN is an independent think tank of military, diplomatic and political leaders that fosters "collaborative" solutions to defence and security issues.

High on the study's list of dangers is "inadvertent conflict", which ELN concludes "may be the most likely scenario for a breakout" of hostilities.

"The close proximity of Russian and Nato forces" is a major concern, argues the study, "but also the fact that Russia and Nato have been adapting their military postures towards early reaction, thus making rapid escalation more likely to happen".

With armed forces nose-to-nose, "a passage from crisis to conflict might be sparked by the actions of regional commanders or military commanders at local levels or come as a consequence of an unexpected incident or accident". According to the European Leadership Council, there have been more than 60 such incidents in the last year.

The Nato document is, indeed, hard on Russia, which it blasts for the "illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea", its "provocative military activities, including near Nato borders", and its "significant investments in the modernization of its strategic [nuclear] forces".

Unpacking all that requires a little history, not the media's strong suit.

The story goes back more than three decades to the fall of the Berlin Wall and eventual re-unification of Germany. At the time, the Soviet Union had some 380,000 troops in what was then the German Democratic Republic. Those forces were there as part of the treaty ending World War II, and the Soviets were concerned that removing them could end up threatening the USSR's bor-



UN PATROL: Norwegian UN troops on their way up Sniper Alley in Sarajevo, November 1995.

Photo: Wikimedia

ders. The Russians have been invaded – at terrible cost – three times in a little more than a century. So West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, US Secretary of State James Baker, and Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev cut a deal. The Soviets agreed to withdraw troops from Eastern Europe as long as Nato did not fill the vacuum, or recruit members of the Soviet-dominated Warsaw Pact. Baker promised Gorbachev that Nato would not move “one inch east”.

The agreement was never written down, but it was followed in practice. Nato stayed west of the Oder and Neisse rivers, and Soviet troops returned to Russia. The Warsaw Pact was dissolved in 1991.

But President Bill Clinton blew that all up in 1999 when the US and Nato intervened in the civil war between Serbs and Albanians over the Serbian province of Kosovo. Behind the new American doctrine of “responsibility to protect”,

Nato opened a massive 11-week bombing campaign against Serbia.

From Moscow’s point of view the war was unnecessary. The Serbs were willing to withdraw their troops and restore Kosovo’s autonomous status. But Nato demanded a large occupation force that would be immune from Serbian law, something the nationalist-minded Serbs would never agree to. It was virtually the same provocative language the Austrian-Hungarian Empire had presented to the Serbs in 1914, language that set off World War I.

In the end, Nato lopped off part of Serbia to create Kosovo and re-drew the post World War II map of Europe, exactly what the Alliance charges that Russia has done with its seizure of the Crimea.

But Nato did not stop there. In 1999, the Al-

liance recruited former Warsaw Pact members Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic, adding Bulgaria and Romania four years later. By the end of 2004, Moscow was confronted with Nato in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia to the north, Poland to the west, and Bulgaria and Turkey to the south. Since then, the Alliance has added Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania, Croatia, and Montenegro. It has invited Georgia, Ukraine, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to apply as well.

When the Nato document chastises Russia for “provocative” military activities near the Nato border, it is referring to manoeuvres within its own border or one of its few allies, Belarus.

As author and foreign policy analyst Anatol Lieven points out, “Even a child” can look at a 1988 map of Europe and see “which side has advanced in which direction”.

Nato also accuses Russia of “continuing a military buildup in Crimea”, without a hint that those actions might be in response to what the Alliance document calls its “substantial increase in Nato’s presence and maritime activity in the Black Sea”. Russia’s largest naval port on the Black Sea is Sevastopol in the Crimea.

One does not expect even-handedness in such a document, but there are disconnects in this one that are worrisome. Yes, the Russians are modernising their nuclear forces, but the Obama administration was first out of that gate in 2009 with its \$1.5-trillion programme to upgrade the US’s nuclear weapons systems. Both programmes are a bad idea.

Some of the document’s language about Russia is aimed at loosening purse strings at home. Nato members agreed to cough up more money, but that decision preceded Trump’s Brussels tantrum on spending.

There is some wishful thinking on Afghanistan – “Our Resolute Support Mission is achieving success” – when in fact things have seldom been worse. There are vague references to the Middle East and North Africa, nothing specific, but a reminder that Nato is no longer confining its mission to what it was supposedly set up to

do: Keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the Germans down.

The Americans are still in – one should take Trump’s threat of withdrawal with a boulder size piece of salt – there is no serious evidence the Russians ever planned to come in, and the Germans have been up since they joined Nato in 1955. Indeed, it was the addition of Germany that sparked the formation of the Warsaw Pact.

While Moscow is depicted as an aggressive adversary, Nato surrounds Russia on three sides, has deployed anti-missile systems in Poland, Romania, Spain, Turkey, and the Black Sea, and has a 12 to 1 advantage in military spending. With opposing forces now toe-to-toe, it would not take much to set off a chain reaction that could end in a nuclear exchange.

Yet, instead of inviting a dialogue, the document boasts that the Alliance has “suspended all practical civilian and military cooperation between Nato and Russia”.

The solution seems obvious.

First, a return to the 1998 military deployment. While it is unlikely that former members of the Warsaw Pact would drop their Nato membership, a withdrawal of non-national troops from Nato members that border Russia would cool things off.

Second, the removal of anti-missile systems that should never have been deployed in the first place. In turn, Russia could remove the middle range Iskander missiles Nato is complaining about and agree to talks aimed at reducing nuclear stockpiles.

But long range, it is finally time to re-think alliances. Nato was a child of the Cold War, when the West believed that the Soviets were a threat. But Russia today is not the Soviet Union, and there is no way Moscow would be stupid enough to attack a superior military force. It is time Nato went the way of the Warsaw Pact and recognise that the old ways of thinking are not only outdated, but also dangerous. **CT**

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

ONE MAGAZINE'S 10-YEAR QUEST FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Before I wound up in Toronto and ColdType, I designed **Frontline** magazine, South Africa's top liberal-left magazine, for 10 years during the 1980s as it battled for justice and equality during the final years of Apartheid. Now, we're digitising Frontline, as a case study of prophecy and history. The first digital issues are now on line; more will follow each month.

– **Tony Sutton, Editor**



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Favouring extremism over democracy

By propping up Turkey's Afrin operation, the British government has once again supported Islamist-backed military conquest over more liberal forces

HOW does a British government respond when an allied state invades another territory with the backing of jihadists, overthrows a democratic experiment and consolidates an occupation? Judging by what Turkey is doing in the Afrin district of northern Syria, the answer is: by supporting it.

Britain, far from helping to defeat terrorism in Syria, is once again aiding it.

Turkey's military intervention in Afrin was launched on 20 January and largely concluded on 18 March, when President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced that his forces were in control of Afrin city. In that two-month period, over 200,000 people fled, and human rights groups accused Turkish forces of shelling civilians, killing scores, and indiscriminately shooting at refugees attempting to cross into Turkey.

Turkey's wrath was launched against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), the dominant element in the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) fighting the Islamic State (IS) in northern Syria - but which Erdogan calls a "terror army" linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militant group in Turkey.

Ankara has wanted to stop the US plan to stay in Syria and form a 30,000-strong force with the SDF to protect Syrian terri-

tory held by its mainly Kurdish allies. Turkey's war aim appears to be to create a sphere of influence in northern Syria free from the Kurds.

Britain has backed the intervention in Afrin, saying it recognises "Turkey's legitimate interest in the security of its borders" - an apology for Turkish actions that prompted a senior Turkish official to say that Ankara "appreciates" the UK stance. While London did go through the motions of calling for "de-escalation", it rejected a call for a ceasefire.

Throughout the military operation in Afrin, the UK was in "close communication" with Turkey and said it "cannot categorically state" that British weapons were not used. Last year, the UK already signalled it would do nothing to prevent a Turkish attack on Afrin.

Britain has also helped Turkey out diplomatically by its ambassador to Ankara, Sir Dominic Chilcot, who has said the UK has "a lot of respect and consideration" for Turkey's views on the YPG, and referred to the "potential threat posed by the YPG" and said it had "very close links" to the PKK.

British support for Turkey is especially noteworthy in light of UK military support to the force it is fighting, the SDF. Although the UK is not known to have supplied arms to the YPG, unlike the US, the UK has carried out airstrikes

Britain has backed the intervention, saying it recognises "Turkey's legitimate interest in the security of its borders"

MARK CURTIS

to support the SDF that are “likely to have assisted the YPG”, a British parliamentary committee concluded.

Moreover, in March, a British Special Air Service (SAS) soldier embedded with US forces was killed fighting with local Kurdish troops to stabilise the northern city of Manbij. SAS sources revealed that those who planted the bomb could belong to the Free Syrian Army (FSA), the same affiliation of militias, including jihadists, being backed by Turkey to take over Afrin.

Journalist Patrick Cockburn reported that Turkey also recruited and trained ex-IS fighters to drive the YPG out of Afrin: Of the 10,000 FSA forces who crossed into Syria on 20 January with 6,000 Turkish troops, “most” were ex-IS and many were “open about their allegiance to al-Qaeda and its offshoots”.

It can be presumed that Britain knows all about Turkish collaboration with jihadists. Turkey’s foreign minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, has, for example, said that Turkey cooperates best with the US and UK in terms of intelligence-sharing on foreign fighters who want to use Turkish territories when entering or exiting Syria.

As Britain arms Turkey, there is a real risk that such military equipment can end up in the hands of jihadists. Yet the British government defines Turkey as a priority market for promoting arms sales that have been worth more than £200-million (\$265-million) since 2016, including aircraft, helicopters, drones, grenades, small arms and ammunition.

In January 2017, British Prime Minister Theresa May visited Ankara and signed a £100-million deal to sell British warplanes to Turkey. Earlier this year, Turkish fighter jets of unknown origin reportedly bombed the main hospital in Afrin as part of the Turkish offensive, killing 16 people.

Two months after the conquest of Afrin was completed, May welcomed Erdogan to London, where he also met the Queen. In a government statement, May said Ankara was an ally in the

There is a real risk that such equipment can end up in the hands of jihadists. Yet the British government defines Turkey as a priority market for arms sales

fight against terrorism, failed to mention Afrin at all, and only mentioned Kurds in the context of “Kurdish terrorism”.

In a phone call with Erdogan in June, May said the UK would “continue working in partnership” with Turkey in Syria, showing that London is intensely relaxed about its ally’s collaboration with the jihadists it is meant to oppose.

Once again, it can be seen that the UK’s principal aim in this part of the Middle East is not to fight

terrorism, but to maintain its alliance with Turkey, sell arms and counter the Assad regime in Syria. This strategy has led it to undermine its main ally in the region fighting IS - the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed wing, the YPG, which the Foreign Office recognises “make an important contribution to counter-[IS] efforts”.

Although the UK proscribes the PKK in Turkey as a terrorist organisation, it does not so regard the YPG in Syria; the minister of state for the Middle East, Alistair Burt, has said they are “separate organisations”.

The PYD declared a self-governed territory that it refers to as Rojava, or the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria. Rojava showed a significant commitment to promoting multi-ethnic governance and women’s rights, having held elections in September last year. This experiment was demolished by Turkey’s takeover of Afrin, with Turkish forces taking over homes and seizing farms, while 134,000 Afrin residents remain displaced and face restrictions in returning.

To students of British history, Britain’s favouring of Islamist-backed military conquest over more liberal, democratic forces comes as no surprise - rather, it is a leitmotif of British foreign policy in the Middle East. **CT**

Mark Curtis is a historian and analyst of UK foreign policy and international development and the author of six books, the latest being an updated edition of Secret Affairs: Britain’s Collusion with Radical Islam.



LADIES FIRST: Part of Canada's contingent to the UN Mission in Mali.

Photo: Canadian Forces Combat Camera

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Here comes the Mali media manipulation

We must be careful what we believe when the flow of news is shaped by the armed forces

FOR the military, shaping media coverage of deployments is what roasting a marshmallow is to a summer camper's S'mores; there isn't one without the other. Even before beginning a small "peace-keeping" mission to the African state of Mali, the Canadian forces have an elaborate media strategy. At the end of June, Chief of the Defence Staff Jonathan Vance took journalists with him on a visit to Mali. They toured the facilities in Gao where an advance team was preparing for

Canada's UN deployment to the African nation. An *Ottawa Citizen* headline described Vance's trip as part of an effort at "selling the public on the Mali mission."

The tour for journalists was followed by a "technical briefing" on the deployment for media in Ottawa. "No photography, video or audio recording for broadcast purposes" was allowed at last week's press event, according to the advisory. Reporters were to attribute information to "a senior government" official. But, the rules were

YVES ENGLER

different at a concurrent departure ceremony in Trenton. “Canadian Armed Forces personnel deploying to Mali are permitted to give interviews and have their faces shown in imagery,” noted the military’s release.

None of these decisions are haphazard. With the largest PR machine in the country, the military has hundreds of public affairs officers to work on its media strategy. “The Canadian Forces (CF) studies the news media, writes about them in its refereed journals – the *Canadian Army Journal* and the *Canadian Military Journal* – learns from them, develops policies for them and trains for them in a systematic way,” explains Bob Bergen, a professor at the University of Calgary’s Centre for Military and Strategic Studies. “Canadian journalists simply do not access the Canadian Forces in the scholarly fashion that the military studies them. There are no peer-reviewed journals to which they contribute reflections on their success or failure as an industry to cover the 1991 Persian Gulf War or the 1999 Kosovo Air War.”

While the tactics have varied, based on technologies, balance of power and type of conflict, the government has pursued extensive information control during international deployments, which are invariably presented as humanitarian even when motivated by geostrategic and corporate interests. There was formal censorship during the First World War, Second World War and the Korean War. In recent air wars the military largely shut the media out while in Afghanistan they kept reporters close.

Air wars lend themselves to censorship since journalists cannot accompany pilots during their missions or easily see what’s happening from afar. “As a result,” Bergen writes, “crews can only be interviewed before or after their missions, and journalists’ reports can be supplemented by cockpit footage of bombings”.

During the bombing of the former Yugoslavia

in 1999 the CF blocked journalists from filming or accessing Canadian pilots flying out of Aviano, Italy. They also refused to provide footage of their operations. While they tightly controlled information on the ground, the CF sought to project an air of openness in the aftermath of the Somalia scandal. For 79 days in a row a top general gave a press conference in Ottawa detailing developments in Yugoslavia. But, the generals often misled the public. Asked “whether the Canadians had been targeted, whether they were fired upon and whether they fired in return” during a March 24 sortie in which a Yugoslavian MiG-29 was downed, Ray Henault denied any involvement. The deputy chief of Defence Staff said: “They were not involved in that operation.” But, Canadians actually led the mission and a Canadian barely evaded a Serbian surface-to-air

missile. While a Dutch aircraft downed the Yugoslavian MiG-29, a Canadian pilot missed his bombing target, which ought to have raised questions about civilian casualties.

One reason the military cited for restricting information during the bombing campaign was that it could compromise the security of the armed forces and their families. Henault said the media couldn’t interview pilots bombing Serbia because “we don’t want any risk of family harassment or something of that nature, which, again, is part of that domestic risk we face.”

During the bombing of Libya in 2011 and Iraq-Syria in 2014-16 reporters who travelled to where Canadian jets flew from were also blocked from interviewing the pilots. Once again, the reason given for restricting media access was protecting pilots and their families.

Since the first Gulf War, the military has repeatedly invoked this rationale to restrict information during air wars. But, as Bergen reveals in *Balkan Rats and Balkan Bats: The art of managing Canada’s News Media During the Kosovo Air War*, it was based on a rumour that antiwar protesters put body bags on the lawn of a Canadian pilot during the 1991 Gulf War. It likely never



YVES ENGLER

happened and, revealingly, the military didn't invoke fear of domestic retribution to curtail interviews during the more contentious ground war in Afghanistan.

During that war the CF took a completely different tack. The CF embedding (or in-bedding) programme took reporters into the military's orbit by allowing them to accompany soldiers on patrol and stay on base. When they arrived, senior officers were often on hand to meet them, while top officers also built a rapport with reporters during meals and other informal settings. Throughout their stay on base, public affairs officers (PAOs) were in constant contact, helping reporters with their work. After a six-month tour in Afghanistan PAO Major Jay Janzen wrote: "By pushing information to the media, the Battalion was also able to exercise some influence over what journalists decided to cover. When an opportunity to cover a mission or event was proactively presented to a reporter, it almost always received coverage."

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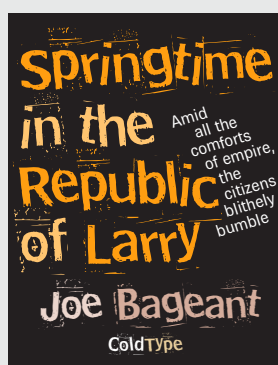
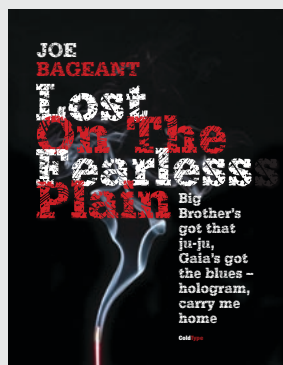
In addition to covering stories put forward by the military, "embeds" tended to frame the conflict from the perspective of the troops they accompanied. By eating and sleeping with Canadian soldiers, reporters often developed a

psychological attachment, writes Sherry Wasilow, in *Hidden Ties that Bind: The Psychological Bonds of Embedding Have Changed the Very Nature of War Reporting*.

Embedded journalists' sympathy towards Canadian soldiers was reinforced by the Afghans they interviewed. Afghans critical of Canadian policy were unlikely to express themselves openly with soldiers nearby. Scott Taylor asked, "what would you say if the Romanian military occupied your town and a Romanian tank and journalist showed up at your door? You love the government they have installed and want these guys to stay! Of course the locals are smiling when a reporter shows up with an armoured vehicle and an armed patrol."

The military goes to great lengths to shape coverage of its affairs and one should expect stories about Canada's mission in Mali to be influenced by the armed forces. So, take heed: Consume what they give you carefully, as you would a melted chocolate and marshmallow-coated graham wafer. **CT**

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BEST FRIEND? Buster the bulldog takes a break from distributing superbugs.

Superpets, superbugs and our future

Matt Smith wonders what part the family dog might be playing in the superbug threat to civilisation

W**E'RE** all well aware of the growing threat of superbugs. There are plenty of warnings about how we encourage these antibiotic-resistant bacteria by either overusing antibiotics or not finishing a pre-

scribed course of treatment. But while this has hopefully made people more cautious about misusing these drugs, few probably give it a second thought when it comes to their pets. As it turns out, this is going to have to quickly change.

It is well known that farm ani-

mals are an issue. Many of the antibiotics we give them are also used in humans, so superbugs on farms threaten us all. There are also problems with antibiotics getting into the water table because of farm run-off. The World Health Organisation issued recommendations last year, warning the food industry to stop routinely giving antibiotics to farm animals.

Yet while the same is true with pets, it has been mostly overlooked by both the research community and general public. You might think we should be more worried about agriculture, since the sector treats many times more animals and uses far more antibiotics by weight than pets.

But because pets are in such close proximity to many more humans, they're actually more likely to transfer resistant bacteria – mainly through saliva or skin contact. Pets risk becoming reservoirs of resistant microbes that spill over into their owners with disastrous effects.

I'm part of a team that has been researching this issue in Scotland through in-depth interviews with groups of pet owners and vets. We found pet owners generally had good knowledge about superbugs, but their understanding of

Insights

antimicrobial resistance was limited. When it came to antibiotics, we found that owners wanted to do whatever was necessary to help their animal in the short term.

This often overruled concerns about antimicrobial resistance, which owners saw as abstract and mainly a problem for the future – similar to how people often view actions that cause climate change. Interestingly, our interviewees were happy to hold off on antibiotics for themselves to see if their infection sorted itself out. But when it came to their pets, much like children, people wanted antibiotics straight away.

46 **A**ny large-scale public awareness campaign for pet owners will therefore have to try to be relevant to their present situation. One possibility might be to let them know that without responsibly using antibiotics now, there may be no working treatment for pets later. But let's not kid ourselves here – it is well documented that getting people to make preventative behaviour changes is extremely challenging in public health.

Another issue was contact between owners and animals. As we all know, many pet owners let their animals lick their faces, sleep in their beds or eat food from their hands or plates. Many consider pets to be part of the family, of course, and these affectionate moments are one of the reasons we have pets in the first place.

Most owners in our research didn't know that resistant bacteria could be spread between pet and owner and vice versa. It should be stressed that unless the pet or owner has been colonised by resistant bacteria, there are no risks. But as there are no simple tests at present, owners cannot know whether they are safe. In a part of our work still to be published, we asked owners whether they would be prepared to change this kind of behaviour as antimicrobial resistance becomes more critical, and many said they wouldn't. Convincing people not to do these things clearly won't be easy.

We also asked vets why they thought antibiotics are overused in pets. Unlike doctors operating in publicly funded healthcare, vets feel market pressures: dissatisfied pet owners can always go elsewhere for antibiotics. Vets told us that pet owners tended to want something tangible in exchange for the fees they were paying, and often saw antibiotics as a "magic fix-all".

Yet the pet owners had a very different perspective: they tended to think the pressure to use antibiotics was coming from vets. They said it was the vet who was the expert and that they tended to go along with their decisions.

So what is happening here? There was little agreement about who should be taking responsibility for the antibiotics. It looked like there was a breakdown in communication between owners and vets. Our

conclusion was that both sides should be trained to be sensitive to these interactions, and provided with the skills and knowledge to make more informed decisions.

With vets, this could be through professional development or externally enforced guidelines and standards. This won't be easy, however, as most veterinary practices are private businesses. Unlike doctors' surgeries, vets lack an overarching body to which they all subscribe.

For vets and pet owners alike, the next logical step will be to survey people in much larger numbers. This would confirm that our findings are reflected by the country at large.

What next? The central challenge with antimicrobial resistance in pets lies in trying to make it a priority in a world where there are already so many large issues for us to comprehend. Antimicrobial resistance is already having an impact on many aspects of our daily lives, and the search for new antibiotics is an expensive and drawn-out process.

The answer is a "one-health" response which acknowledges that healthcare, agriculture, pets and other issues are all contributing to this crisis. To have any chance of having an impact, they all need to be tackled under the same policy package.

This can seem impossibly complex, even within the UK – let alone globally. We are at least

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seeing some excellent research initiatives that take this big-picture approach, along with action plans on the policy front such as this one by the EU. The question is whether we will have done enough before the problem becomes uncontrollable. For the majority of us, the way forward

lies in making small changes around antibiotics to our daily lives – pet owners, for one, need to start acting more responsibly. **CT**

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Matt Smith is a researcher at Glasgow Caledonian University. This article was first published at www.theconversation.com

Ensuring a better deal for the lowest paid

Denis Beckett finds much to agree with in Sam Pizzigati's new book, but he has issues with a few of the writer's ideas

LOVE and hate saying, “I was wrong”. The upsides are multiple. It's showing you that your mental arteries are not yet irredeemably hardened. It's showing that your mind remains open: You've grown, bigger.

The downside: Why were you wrong in the first place, damn? It's not your business being wrong, let alone being wrong and shouting the odds, which seem to go together rather too often for comfort.

Around my parts – southern Africa – where poverty is massive and so is inequality, choices have to be made. Loud voices have lately erupted into open season on the rich: Milk the bastards and that'll be fairer. Well, so it might, if that means a flat growth curve and a politely modest Gini coefficient. But I'm pretty sure it won't mean happier people. It will mean less

money for everyone – and that can't be right.

Yes, I am 100 percent in favour of a squarer society, but for me that means, or has meant – things are confused now – getting the rich guys forging forward, making the economy, making industries, making

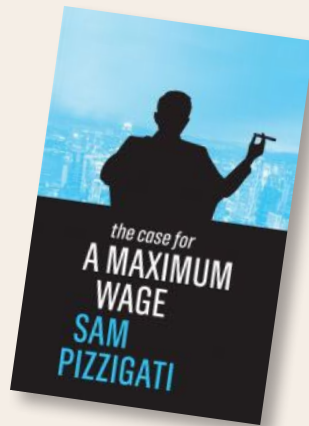
employment, making wealth. If you keep them doing that, we can talk every brand of distribution debate, every kind of incentive to get the poor moving up fastest. But if you can't do that; if the rich are leaving the country, their cash spirited away via a few mouse clicks, it is foolish to think you benefit anyone by chasing them away. You're leaving less for everyone. Everyone. The tramp snaffling sandwich crusts from street corner bins gets older, staler, lesser, crusts. What matters is where the bottom is – *not* how high the top is.

Well, I'd still say that logic is fundamentally right, but I'm saying it softer, now. After reading Sam Pizzigati's short book, *The Case for a Maximum Wage*, I'm beginning to toy with the phrase, “I might have been half wrong”.

One delicious thing Sam does is cite Danish economist Jan Pen visualising income as a parade, with marchers the size of their income. First come the very poor, tinier than any adult human has ever been. Then the working poor, small of stature, then average-earners at average height. Then the marchers grow to seven feet. Then they lose human scale, soaring to 50 feet, 100 feet; finally there's a marcher a mile high, way out of any human interaction.

Next, Sam enumerates the pathologies of highly unequal societies – more immorality, more obesity, more murders, and poorer people smoke more

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THE CASE FOR A MAXIMUM WAGE

Sam Pizzigati

Published by PolityPress

www.politybooks.com

\$45 hardback \$12.30 paperback

– inequality’s imbalances stress them out.

Then, here’s a punchy point: the US and UK *were* low-wage countries until World War II. Low-wage is finally bad news for everybody – fewer customers, less demand, more debt, little incentive to lift productivity. So, during the war, high incomes were heavily taxed, and those taxes stayed high *after* the war ended, creating an enormous new middle-class.

But – ordinary people weren’t always aware how *everyone* was winning from high tax on high income; take, for example, the fact that it reduced the incentive for the rich to exploit workers or short-change consumers. However, rich people saw one very personal way in which *they* were losing out : the taxman’s mighty slice, So they rounded up lawyers and lobbyists and “pulled off the perfect class-war crime”. From 90 percent levels in 1948, America’s top tax rates fell to 28 percent in 1988. Europe’s dropped similarly. Which, reckons Sam, is why now “the ability and willingness to exploit workers is what makes executives attractive and valuable”. He cites a guy who recently eliminated 17,000 Canadian Pacific jobs so successfully, for a fee of \$89-million, that he’s now getting \$230-million to do the same south of the border.

Best, Sam transcends the dreary Egalitarian reprimand, “Tsk, wicked, you earn too much”. His solution: Don’t tax a sum, tax a ratio – so that if I earn

x times more than you, the taxman gets the excess. That way, if I want to boost my wealth I must ensure that yours is boosted first. Incentivising rich people to want poor people to be richer: there’s no bigger win than that.

Why then do I churlishly admit only to “half wrong”? Well, take Sam on China: Between 1978 and 2015 the bottom 50 percent became 400 percent richer. That’s bad, he says, for the one percent’s wealth rose massively and unequally, by 1900 percent. Egalitarians suffer from mental cut-off here. It’s because the initiators grew 19-fold that the multitude grew four-fold (while some penurious portions of the planet grew nought-fold, notice). And Sam’s invoking of low-wage evils and tiny march-

ers insinuates that without equality there’s misery. No, it’s all about whether the bottom rises faster via regulation or via the top bringing new wealth into existence, in the way that industrialist- or geek-billionaires do whether they intend it or not. (Unlike the currency-manipulator brand of billionaire).

The jury remains out here; there’s much to be worked through. (Without that savage paring, might Canadian Pacific have died altogether?) But Sam broadens the evidence and widens the mind. And I’m grateful for that, although I do think Sam, like me, might also get to think, “I was wrong”, in some of his thinking. **CT**

Denis Beckett is an author and columnist for the Johannesburg Star newspaper.

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Tracking the history of ‘travelling while black’

‘Travelling while black’ guidebooks may be out of print, but their messages still resonate, writes **Cotten Seiler**

In the summer of 2017, the NAACP issued a travel advisory for the state of Missouri. Modelled after the international advisories issued by the US State Department, the NAACP statement cautioned travellers of colour about the “looming danger” of discrimination, harassment and violence at the hands of Missouri

law enforcement, businesses and citizens.

The civil rights organisation’s action had been partly prompted by the state legislature’s passage of what the NAACP called a “Jim Crow bill”, which increased the burden of proof on those bringing lawsuits alleging racial or other forms of discrimination.

But they were also startled

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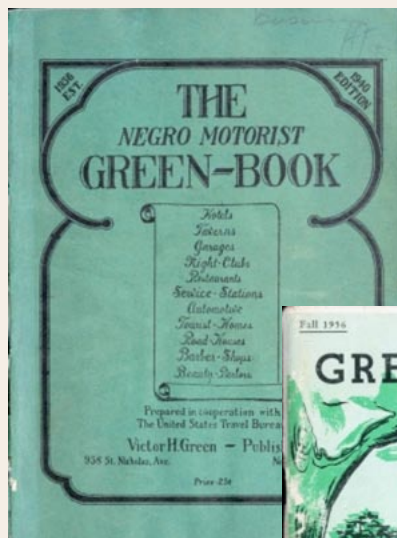
by a 2017 report from the Missouri attorney general's office showing that black drivers were stopped by police at a rate 85 percent higher than their white counterparts. The report also found that they were more likely to be searched and arrested.

When I first read about this news, I thought of the motoring guidebooks published for African-American travellers from the 1930s to the 1960s – a story I explore in my book *Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America*.

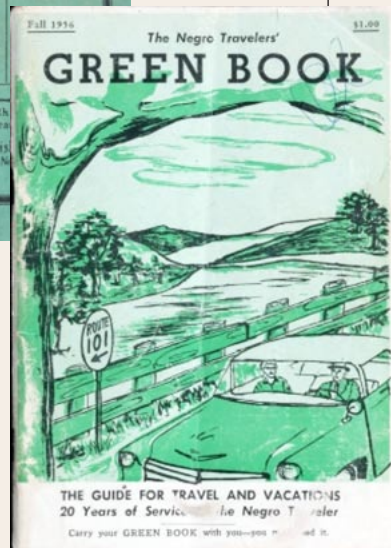
Although they ceased publication 50 years ago, the guidebooks are worth reflecting on in light of the fact that for drivers of colour in the United States, the road remains anything but open.

In American popular culture, movies (1983's *National Lampoon's Vacation*), literature (*On the Road*), music (the 1946 hit *Route 66*) and advertising, have long celebrated the open road. It's a symbol of freedom, a rite of passage, an economic conduit – all made possible by the car and the Interstate highway system. Yet this freedom – like other freedoms – has never been equally distributed.

While white drivers spoke, wrote and sang about the sense of excitement and escape they felt on automobile journeys through



THE GREEN BOOK: Helping black American motorists avoid trouble.



unfamiliar territories, African-Americans were far more likely to dread such a journey.

Especially in the South, whites' responses to black drivers could range from contemptuous to deadly. For example, one African-American writer recalled in 1983 how, decades earlier, a South Carolina policeman had fined and threatened to jail her cousin for no reason other than the fact that she had been driving an expensive car. In 1948, a mob in Lyons, Georgia, attacked an African-American motorist named Robert Mallard and murdered him in front of his wife and child. That same year, a North Carolina gas station owner shot Otis Newsom after he had asked for service on his car.

Such incidents weren't confined to the South. Most of the thousands of "sundown towns" – municipalities that barred people of colour after dark – were north of the Mason-Dixon Line.

Of course, not all white people, police and business owners behaved cruelly toward travellers of colour. But a black individual or family travelling the country by car would have had no way of knowing which towns and businesses were amenable to black patrons and visitors, and which posed a grave threat. The only certainties for African-Americans on the road were anxiety and vulnerability.

"Would a Negro like to pursue a little happiness at a theatre, a beach, pool, hotel, restaurant, on a train, plane, or ship, a golf course, summer or winter resort?" the NAACP magazine *The Crisis* asked in 1947. "Would he like to stop overnight in a tourist camp while he motors about his native land 'Seeing America First'? Well, just let him try!"

Despite the dangers, try they did. And they had help in the form of guidebooks that told them how to evade and thwart Jim Crow.

The Negro Motorist's Green Book, first published in 1936 by a New York letter carrier and travel agent named Victor Green, and *Travelguide: Vacation and Recreation Without Humiliation*, first published in 1947 by jazz band leader Billy Butler, advised

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black travellers where they could eat, sleep, fill the gas tank, fix a flat tire and secure a myriad of other roadside services without fear of discrimination. The guidebooks, which covered every state in the union, drew upon knowledge hard-won by pioneering black salesmen, athletes, clergy and entertainers, for whom long-distance travel by car was a professional necessity.

“It is,” a *Green Book* subscriber wrote to Victor Green in 1938, “a book badly needed among our Race since the advance of the motor age.”

Acknowledging the era’s racial tensions and dangers of travel, the 1956 edition reminded drivers to “behave in a way to show we’ve been nicely bred and [were] taught good manners.”

50 It pointed to certain states that would be more amenable to black travellers: “Visitors to New Mexico will find little if any racial friction there. The majority of the scores of motels across the State accepts guests on the basis of ‘cash rather than colour.’”

Yet even as they sought to ease the black traveller’s passage through an America in which racial discrimination was the norm, the guidebooks, whose covers often featured well-heeled travellers of colour with upscale

automobiles and accessories, also asserted African-Americans’ claims to full citizenship.

The guidebooks’ images and text conveyed an attitude of indignation and resistance to the racist conditions that made them necessary.

In 1955, “Travelguide” declared, “The time is rapidly approaching when *TRAVELGUIDE* will cease to be a ‘specialised’ publication, but as long as racial prejudice exists, we will continue to cope with the news of a changing situation, working toward the day when all established directories will serve **EVERYONE**”.

Travelguide and the *Green Book* did indeed shut down in the 1960s, when the civil rights movement sparked a profound transformation in racial law and custom across the country. Today, copies can be found in research archives at Howard University, the New York Public Library and the Library of Congress. The guidebooks have been the focus of a growing body of print and digital scholarship. The University of South Carolina, for example, has built an interactive map that allows visitors to search for all of the businesses listed

in the 1956 edition of the *Green Book*.

In popular culture, a play, a children’s book and a forthcoming Hollywood film starring Mahershala Ali all centre on these travel guides. While the story of these books recall an era of prejudice many regard as bygone, there remains much work to be done. The NAACP’s decision to issue a travel advisory calls attention to the dangers that continue to be associated with “driving while black.” The highly publicised recent deaths of Sandra Bland, Philando Castile and Tory Sanford are the starkest examples of what can happen to black drivers at the hands of police. Studies have shown that across the nation, police are still much more likely to stop and search drivers of colour.

If guidebooks for drivers of colour are unlikely to make a return, it is because the internet now fulfils their role, not because the “great day” of racial equality the *Green Book* heralded 70 years ago has arrived. **CT**

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Cotten Seiler is Associate Professor of American Studies at Dickinson College. This article was first published at www.theconversation.com

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Former UK ambassador slams Syrian ‘rescuers’

Ex-ambassador says UK government lied in its statement praising the White Helmets. **Vanessa Beeley** reports

PETER Ford, the UK’s ambassador to Syria from 2003 to 2006, responded to a UK Government statement by Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt and International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt on the “exceptional” Israeli evacuation of the UK/US Coalition intelligence construct, the White Helmets:

“Following a joint diplomatic effort by the UK and international partners, a group of White Helmets volunteers from southern Syria and their families have been able to leave Syria for safety. They are now being assisted by the UNHCR in Jordan pending international resettlement.

“The White Helmets have saved over 115,000 lives during the Syrian conflict, at great risk to their own. Many White Helmets volunteers have also been killed while doing their work – trying to rescue civilians trapped in bombarded buildings or providing first aid to injured civilians. White Helmets have been the target of attacks and, due to their high profile, we judged that the volunteers required immediate protection. We therefore took steps with the aim of affording that protection to as many of the volunteers and their families as possible.

Ford responded: “The government statement contains two bare-faced lies. The White Helmets most definitely have not assisted all sides in the conflict. From the beginning they have only ever operated in rebel-held areas. Government-controlled areas have the real Syrian Civil Defence and Syrian Red Crescent. This is quite a big whopper on the government’s part. It goes without saying that the media will not pick up on it.

“Secondly the White Helmets are not volunteers. They are doing jobs for which they are paid by Western governments. They have a press department 150 strong, bigger than that for the whole of the UK ambulance service. Their claims of saving over 115,000 lives have never been verified. The collocation of their offices with jihadi operation centres has been well documented.

“Apparently the government are lying because they are nervous of being accused of importing into this country scores of dangerous migrants who have many times been reported to be associating with extremists (social media is rife with self-propagated videos of their misdeeds such as participation in beheadings and waving ISIS and Al Qaida flags), and wish to whitewash them.

“The White Helmets’ dramatic exfiltration leaves many questions unanswered:

“1. Why was it deemed necessary to evacuate this particular group in the south when other groups of White Helmets simply got on the buses to Northern Syria when military operations concluded in Aleppo, Eastern Ghouta and elsewhere, and when similar exodus by bus has been arranged for rebels in Deraa?

“2. Why should White Helmets be considered to be more at risk than combatants, many of whom have either ‘reconciled’ or been bussed out? In the demonology of the government side the White Helmets are not seen as worse than other jihadis.

“3. Might the British government have been afraid of this particular group being caught and interrogated, revealing perhaps the truth about alleged chemical weapon incidents?

“4. Will they be foisted on to areas of the UK struggling to absorb migrants, or will they go to places like Esher and Carshalton?

“5. Will local councils be informed about the backgrounds of these fugitives? Will they be given extra resources to absorb them and cope with resulting security needs, bearing in mind that Raed Saleh, leader of the White Helmets, was refused a visa to the US in 2016?” **CT**

Vanessa Beeley has spent most of her time since 2011 in the Middle East as a independent researcher, writer, photographer, and peace activist. She blogs at www.thewallwillfall.org

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