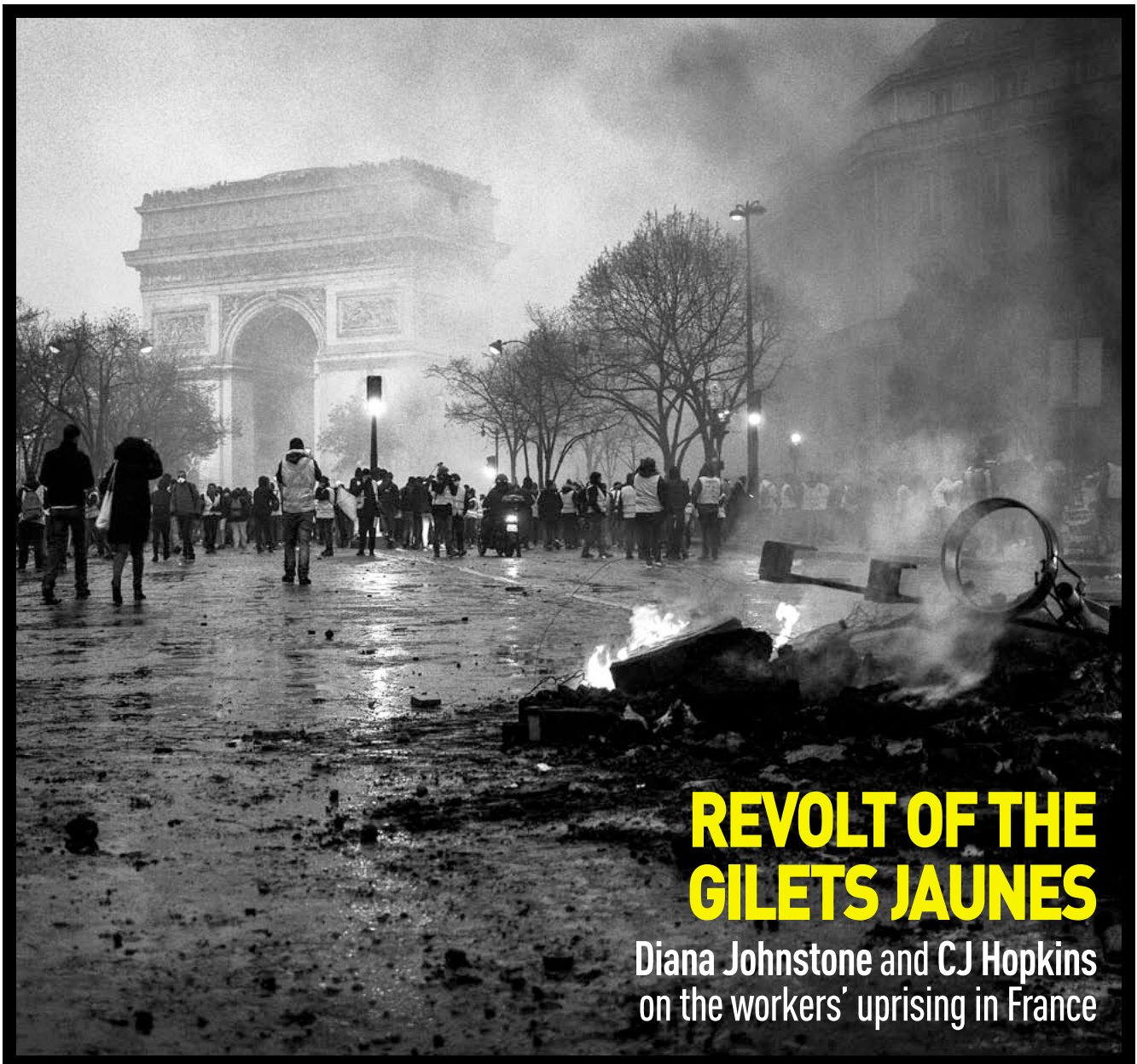

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NO CRITICISM ALLOWED | JONATHAN COOK

ColdType

ISSUE 174

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MID-DECEMBER 2018



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on the workers' uprising in France

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DIANA JOHNSTONE

A bright yellow sign of distress

The Gilets Jaunes lead a new fight for social justice on the streets of France

4

EVERY automobile in France is supposed to be equipped with a yellow vest. This is so that, in case of accident or breakdown on a highway, the driver can put it on to ensure visibility and avoid getting run over.

So the idea of wearing your yellow vest to demonstrate against unpopular government measures caught on quickly. The costume was at hand and didn't have to be provided by Soros for some more or less manufactured "colour revolution". The symbolism was fitting: in case of socio-economic emergency, show that you don't want to be run over.

As everybody knows, what set off the French protest movement was yet another rise in gasoline taxes. But it was immediately clear that much more was involved. The gasoline tax was the last straw in a long series of measures favouring the rich at the expense of the majority of the population. That is why the movement achieved almost instant popularity and support.

The Gilets Jaunes (Yellow Vests) held their first demonstrations on Saturday, November 17 on the Champs-Élysées in Paris. It was totally unlike the

usual trade union demonstrations, well organised to march down the boulevard between the Place de la République and the Place de la Bastille, or the other way around, carrying banners and listening to speeches from leaders at the end. The Gilets Jaunes just came, with no organisation, no leaders to tell them where to go or to harangue the crowd. They were just there, in the yellow vests, angry and ready to explain their anger to any sympathetic listener.





Protesters try to escape clouds of teargas during one of the Paris demonstrations.

Briefly, the message was this: we can't make ends meet. The cost of living keeps going up, and our incomes keep going down. We just can't take it any more. The government must stop, think and change course.

But the reaction of the government was to send police to spray torrents of tear gas on the crowd, apparently to keep the people at a distance from the nearby presidential residence, the Elysee Palace. President Macron was somewhere else, ap-

parently considering himself above and beyond it all.

But those who were listening could learn a lot about the state of France today. Especially in the small towns and rural areas, where many protesters came from. Things are much worse than officials and media in Paris have let on.

There were young women who were working seven days a week and despaired of having enough money to feed and clothe their children.

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People were angry but ready to explain very clearly the economic issues.

Colette, age 83, doesn't own a car, but explained to whoever would listen that the steep rise of gasoline prices would also hurt people who don't drive, by affecting prices of food and other necessities. She had done the calculations and figured it would cost a retired person 80 euros per month.

"Macron didn't run on the promise to freeze pensions," recalled a Yellow Vest, but that is what he has done, along with increasing solidarity taxes on pensioners.

A significant and recurring complaint concerned the matter of health care. France has long had the best public health programme in the world, but this is being steadily undermined to meet the primary need of capital: profit. In the past few years, there has been a growing government campaign to encourage, and finally to oblige people to subscribe to a "mutuelle", that is, a private health insurance plan, ostensibly to fill the gaps not covered by France's universal health coverage. These "gaps" can be the 15 percent that is not covered for ordinary illnesses (grave illnesses are covered 100 percent), or for medicines taken off the "covered" list, or for dental work, among other things. The "gaps" to fill keep expanding, along with the cost of subscribing to the mutuelle. In reality, this programme, sold to the public as modernising improvement, is a gradual move toward privatisation of health care. It is a sneaky method of opening the whole field of public health to international financial capital investment. This gambit has not fooled ordinary people and is high on the list of complaints by the Gilets Jaunes.

The degradation of care in the public hospitals is another complaint. There are fewer and fewer hospitals in rural areas, and one must "wait long enough to die" emergency rooms. Those who can afford it are turning to private hospitals. But most can't. Nurses are overworked and underpaid. When one hears what nurses have to endure, one is reminded that this is indeed a noble profession.

In all this, I was reminded of a young woman

we met at a public picnic in southwestern France last summer. She cares for elderly people who live at home alone in rural areas, driving from one to another, to feed them, bathe them, offer a moment of cheerful company and understanding. She loves her vocation, loves helping old people, although it barely allows her to make a living. She will be among those who will have to pay more to get from one patient to the next.

People pay taxes willingly when they are getting something for it. But not when the things they are used to are being taken away. The tax evaders are the super-rich and the big corporations with their batteries of lawyers and safe havens, or intruders like Amazon and Google, but ordinary French people have been relatively disciplined in paying taxes in return for excellent public services: optimum health care, first class public transport, rapid and efficient postal service, free university education. But all that is under assault from the reign of financial capital called "neo-liberalism" here. In rural areas, more and more post offices, schools and hospitals are shut down, unprofitable train service is discontinued as "free competition" is introduced following European Union directives – measures which oblige people to drive their cars more than ever. Especially when huge shopping centres drain small towns of their traditional shops.

And the tax announced by the government – an additional 6.6 cents per litre for diesel and an additional 2.9 cents per litre of gasoline – are only the first steps in a series of planned increases over the next years. The measures are supposed to incite people to drive less or even better, to scrap their old vehicles and buy nice new electric cars.

More and more "governance" is an exercise in social engineering by technocrats who know what is best. This particular exercise goes directly opposite to an earlier government measure of social engineering which used economic incitements to get people to buy cars running on diesel. Now the government has changed its mind. Over half of personal vehicles still run on diesel, although the percentage has been dropping. Now their owners are told to go buy an electric car instead. But people living on the edge simply can't afford the switch.

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Photo: NightFlightVenus / via Flickr.com

UP IN SMOKE: A car burns, stones litter the street, a pall of smoke is about to engulf the Arc de Triomphe.

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Besides, the energy policy is incoherent. In theory, the “green” economy includes shutting down France’s many nuclear power plants. Without them, where would the electricity come from to run the electric cars? And nuclear power is “clean”, no CO₂. So what is going on? People wonder.

The most promising alternative sources of energy in France are the strong tides along northern coasts. But last July, the Tidal Energies project on the Normandy coast was suddenly dropped because it wasn’t profitable – not enough customers. This is symptomatic of what is wrong with the current government. Major new industrial projects are almost never profitable at first, which is why they need government support and subsidies to get going, with a view to the future. Such projects were supported under de Gaulle, raising France to the status of major industrial power, and providing unprecedented prosperity for the population as a whole. But the Macron government is not investing in the future nor doing anything to

preserve industries that remain. The key French energy corporation Alstom was sold to General Electric under his watch.

Indeed, it is perfectly hypocritical to call the French gas tax an “ecotax” since the returns from a genuine ecotax would be invested to develop clean energies – such as tidal power plants. Rather, the benefits are earmarked to balance the budget, that is, to serve the government debt. The Macronian gas tax is just another austerity measure – along with cutting back public services and “selling the family jewels”, that is, selling potential money-makers like Alstom, port facilities and the Paris airports.

Initial government responses showed that they weren’t listening. They dipped into their pool of clichés to denigrate something they didn’t want to bother to understand. President Macron’s first reaction was to guilt-trip the protesters by invoking the globalists’ most powerful argument for imposing unpopular measures: global warming. Whatever small complaints people may have, he

indicated, that is nothing compared to the future of the planet.

This did not impress people who, yes, have heard all about climate change and care as much as anyone for the environment, but who are obliged to retort: “I’m more worried about the end of the month than about the end of the world”.

After the second Yellow Vest Saturday, November 25, which saw more demonstrators and more tear gas, the minister in charge of the budget, Gérard Darmanin, declared that what had demonstrated on the Champs-Élysée was “la peste brune”, the brown plague, meaning fascists. (For those who enjoy excoriating the French as racist, it should be noted that Darmanin is of Algerian working class origins). This remark caused an uproar of indignation that revealed just how great is public sympathy for the movement – over 70 percent approval by latest polls, even after uncontrolled vandalism. Macron’s Minister of the Interior, Christophe Castaner, was obliged to declare that government communication had been badly managed. Of course, that is the familiar technocratic excuse: we are always right, but it is all a matter of our “communication”, not of the facts on the ground.

Maybe I have missed something, but of the many interviews I have listened to, I have not heard one word that would fall into the categories of “far right”, much less “fascism” – or even that indicated any particular preference in regard to political parties. These people are wholly concerned with concrete practical issues. Not a whiff of ideology – remarkable in Paris!

Some people ignorant of French history and eager to exhibit their leftist purism have suggested that the Yellow Vests are dangerously nationalistic because they occasionally wave French flags and sing *La Marseillaise*. That simply means that they are French. Historically, the French left is patriotic, especially when it is revolting against the aristocrats and the rich or during the Nazi Occupation. (The exception was the student uprising of May 1968, which was not a revolt of the poor but a revolt in a time of prosperity in favour of greater personal freedom: “it is forbidden to forbid”. The

May ’68 generation has turned out to be the most anti-French generation in history, for reasons that can’t be dealt with here. To some extent, the Yellow Vests mark a return of the people after half a century of scorn from the liberal intelligentsia.)

It is just a way of saying, We are the people, we do the work, and you must listen to our grievances. To be a bad thing, “nationalism” must be aggressive toward other nations. This movement is not attacking anybody, it is strictly staying home.

The Yellow Vests have made clear to the whole world that Emmanuel Macron was an artificial product sold to the electorate by an extraordinary media campaign.

Macron was the rabbit magically pulled out of a top hat, sponsored by what must be called the French oligarchy. After catching the eye of established kingmaker Jacques Attali, the young Macron was given a stint at the Rothschild bank where he could quickly gain a small fortune, ensuring his class loyalty to his sponsors. Media saturation and the scare campaign against “fascist” Marine LePen (who moreover flubbed her major debate) put Macron in office. He had met his wife when she was teaching his theatre class, and now he gets to play President.

The mission assigned to him by his sponsors was clear. He must carry through more vigorously the “reforms” (austerity measures) already undertaken by previous governments, which had often dawdled at hastening the decline of the social State. And beyond that, Macron was supposed to “save Europe”. Saving Europe means saving the European Union from the quagmire in which it finds itself.

This is why cutting expenses and balancing the budget is his obsession. Because that’s what he was chosen to do by the oligarchy that sponsored his candidacy. He was chosen by the financial oligarchy above all to save the European Union from threatening disintegration caused by the euro. The treaties establishing the EU and above all the common currency, the euro, have created an imbalance between member states that is unsustainable. The irony is that previous French governments, starting with Mitterrand, are largely responsible for this state of affairs. In a desperate and technically ill-examined effort to



Photo: NightFlightToVenus / via Flickr.com

AFTERMATH: A burned out motor scooter on the Place de la Revolution after the Paris riots of December 1.

keep newly unified Germany from becoming the dominant power in Europe, the French insisted on binding Germany to France by a common currency. Reluctantly, the Germans agreed to the euro – but only on German terms. The result is that Germany has become the unwilling creditor of equally unwilling EU member states, Italy, Spain, Portugal and of course, ruined Greece. The financial gap between Germany and its southern neighbours keeps expanding, which causes ill will on all sides.

Germany doesn't want to share economic power with states it considers irresponsible spendthrifts. So Macron's mission is to show Germany that France, despite its flagging economy, is "responsible", by squeezing the population in order to pay interest on the debt. Macron's idea is that the politicians in Berlin and the bankers in Frankfurt will be so impressed that they will turn around and say, well done Emmanuel, we are ready to throw our wealth into a common pot for the benefit of all 27 member states. And that

is why Macron will stop at nothing to balance the budget, to make the Germans love him.

So far, the Macron magic is not working on the Germans, and it's driving his own people into the streets. Or are they his own people? Does Macron really care about his run of the mill compatriots who just work for a living? The consensus is that he does not. Macron is losing the support both of the people in the streets and the oligarchs who sponsored him. He is not getting the job done.

Macron's rabbit-out-of-the hat political ascension leaves him with little legitimacy, once the glow of glossy magazine covers wears off. With help from his friends, Macron invented his own party, La République en Marche, which doesn't mean much of anything but suggested action. He peopled his party with individuals from "civil society", often medium entrepreneurs with no political experience, plus a few defectors from either the Socialist or the Republican Parties, to occupy the most important government posts.

The only well-known recruit from "civil society"

DIANA JOHNSTONE

was the popular environmental activist, Nicolas Hulot, who was given the post of Minister of Environment, but who abruptly resigned in a radio announcement last August, citing frustration.

Macron's strongest supporter from the political class was Gérard Collomb, Socialist Mayor of Lyons, who was given the top cabinet post of Minister of Interior, in charge of the national police. But shortly after Hulot left, Collomb said he was leaving too, to go back to Lyons. Macron entreated him to stay on, but on October 3, Collomb went ahead and resigned, with a stunning statement referring to "immense problems" facing his successor. In the "difficult neighbourhoods" in the suburbs of major cities, he said, the situation is "very much degraded: it's the law of the jungle that rules, drug dealers and radical Islamists have taken the place of the Republic". Such suburbs need to be "reconquered".

After such a job description, Macron was at a loss to recruit a new Interior Minister. He groped around and came up with a crony he had chosen to head his party, ex-Socialist Christophe Castaner. With a degree in criminology, Castaner's main experience qualifying him to head the national police is his close connection, back in his youth in the 1970s, with a Marseilles Mafioso, apparently due to his penchant for playing poker and drinking whiskey in illegal dens.

Saturday, November 17, demonstrators were peaceful, but resented the heavy tear-gas attacks. Saturday November 25, things got a big rougher, and on Saturday December 1, all hell broke loose. With no leaders and no service d'ordre (militants assigned to protect the demonstrators from attacks, provocations and infiltration), it was inevitable that casseurs (smashers) got into the act and started smashing things, looting shops and setting fires to trash cans, cars and even buildings. Not only in Paris, but all over France: from Marseilles to Brest, from Toulouse to Strasbourg. In the remote town of Puy en Velay, known for its chapel perched on a rock and its traditional lace-making, the Prefecture (national government authority) was set on fire. Tourist arrivals are cancelled and fancy restaurants are empty and

department stores fear for their Christmas windows. The economic damages are enormous.

And yet, support for the Yellow Vests remains high, probably because people are able to distinguish between those grieved citizens and the vandals who love to wreak destruction for its own sake. The protests continued: there were suddenly fresh riots in the troubled suburbs that Collomb warned about as he retreated to Lyons. This was a new front for the national police, whose representatives let it be known that all this was getting to be much too much for them to cope with. Announcing a state of emergency is not likely to solve anything.

Macron is a bubble that has burst. The legitimacy of his authority is very much in question. Yet he was elected in 2017 for a five year term, and his party holds a large majority in parliament that makes his removal almost impossible.

So what next? Despite having been sidelined by Macron's electoral victory in 2017, politicians of all hews are trying to recuperate the movement – but discreetly, because the Gilets Jaunes have made clear their distrust of all politicians. This is not a movement that seeks to take power. It simply seeks redress of its grievances. The government should have listened in the first place, accepted discussions and compromise. This gets more difficult as time goes on, but nothing is impossible.

For some two or three hundred years, people one could call "left" hoped that popular movements would lead to changes for the better. Today, many leftists seem terrified of popular movements for change, convinced "populism" must lead to "fascism". This attitude is one of many factors indicating that the changes ahead will not be led by the left as it exists today. Those who fear change will not be there to help make it happen. But change is inevitable and it need not be for the worse. **CT**

Diana Johnstone is the author of Fools' Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO, and Western Delusions. Her new book is Queen of Chaos: the Misadventures of Hillary Clinton. The memoirs of Diana Johnstone's father Paul H. Johnstone, From MAD to Madness, was published by Clarity Press, with her commentary. She can be reached at diana.johnstone@wanadoo.fr.



TO THE STREETS: Gilets Jaunes demonstrators gather around the embers of a burned out car. TV screenshot

CJ HOPKINS

The indiscreet charm of the Gilets Jaunes

11

It began as a suburban tax revolt and then morphed into a bona fide working class uprising

So it appears the privatisation of France isn't going quite as smoothly as planned. As I assume you are aware, for over a month now, the Gilets Jaunes (or “yellow vests”), a multiplicitous, leaderless, extremely pissed off, confederation of working class persons, have been conducting a series of lively protests in cities and towns throughout the country to express their displeasure with Emmanuel Macron and his efforts to transform their society into an American-style neo-feu-

dal dystopia. Highways have been blocked, toll booths commandeered, luxury automobiles set on fire, and shopping on Paris's Champs-Élysées disrupted. What began as a suburban tax revolt has morphed into a bona fide working class uprising.

It took a while for “the Golden Boy of Europe” to fully appreciate what was happening. In the tradition of his predecessor, Louis XVI, Macron initially responded to the Gilets Jaunes by inviting a delegation of *Le Monde* reporters to laud

his renovation of the Elysée Palace, making the occasional condescending comment, and otherwise completely ignoring them. That was back in late November. On December 8, he locked down central Paris, mobilised a literal army of riot cops, “preventatively arrested” hundreds of citizens, including suspected “extremist students”, and sent in the armoured military vehicles.

The English-language corporate media, after doing their best not to cover these protests (and, instead, to keep the American and British publics focused on imaginary Russians), have been forced to now begin the delicate process of delegitimising the *Gilets Jaunes* without infuriating the entire population of France and inciting the British and American proletariats to go out and start setting cars on fire. They got off to a bit of an awkward start.

For example, (probably due to a cock-up at headquarters) the *Guardian*’s honchos allowed its Paris bureau chief Angelique Chrisafis to do some actual propaganda-free reporting (and some interviews with actual protesters) before they caught themselves and replaced her with Kim Willsher, who resumed the paper’s usual neoliberal establishment-friendly narrative, which, in this case, entailed dividing the protesters into “real” *Gilets Jaunes* and “fake” *Gilet Jaunes*, and referring to the latter fictional group as “thuggish, extremist political agitators”.

No one believes the Russians are behind this, not even the hacks who are paid to pretend they do

By Sunday, December 9, the corporate media were insinuating that diabolical Russian Facebook bots had brainwashed the French into running amok, because who else could possibly be responsible? Certainly not the French people themselves! The French, as every American knows, are by nature a cowardly, cheese-eating people, who have never overthrown their rightful rulers, or publicly beheaded the aristocracy. No, the French were just sitting there, smoking like chimneys, and otherwise enjoying their debt-enslavement and the privatisation of their

social democracy, until they unsuspectingly logged onto Facebook and ... BLAMMO, the Russian hackers got them!

Bloomberg is reporting that French authorities have opened a probe into Russian interference (in the middle of which report, for no apparent reason, a gigantic photo of Le Pen is featured, presumably just to give it that “Nazi” flavour). According to “analysis seen by the *Times*,” Russia-linked social media accounts have been “amplifying” the “chaos” and “violence” by tweeting photos of *Gilets Jaunes*, whom the French police have savagely beaten or gratuitously shot with “less-than-lethal projectiles.”

“Are nationalists infiltrating the yellow vests?” the BBC *Newsnight* producers are wondering. According to Buzzfeed’s Ryan Broderick, “a beast born almost entirely from Facebook” is slouching toward ... well, I’m not quite sure, the UK or even, God help us, America! And then there’s Max Boot, who is convinced he is being personally persecuted by Russian agents like Katie Hopkins, James Woods, Glenn Greenwald, and other high-ranking members of a worldwide conspiracy Boot refers to as the “Illiberal International” (but which regular readers of my column will recognize as the “Putin-Nazis”).

And, see, this is the problem the corporate media (and other staunch defenders of global neoliberalism) are facing with these *Gilets Jaunes* protests. They can’t get away with simply claiming that what is happening is not a working class uprising, so they have been forced to resort to these blatant absurdities. They know they need to delegitimise the *Gilets Jaunes* as soon as possible – the movement is already starting to spread – but the “Putin-Nazi” narrative they’ve been using on Trump, Corbyn, and other “populists” is just not working.

No one believes the Russians are behind this, not even the hacks who are paid to pretend they do. And the “fascism” hysteria is also bombing. Attempts to portray the *Gilets Jaunes* as Le Pen-sponsored fascists blew up in their faces. Obviously, the far-Right are part of these protests, as they would be in any broad working class upris-

ing, but there are far too many socialists and anarchists (and just regular pissed-off working class people) involved for the media to paint them all as “Nazis”.

Which is not to say that the corporate media and prominent public intellectuals like Bernard-Henri Lévy will not continue to hammer away at the “fascism” hysteria, and demand that the “good” and “real” Gilets Jaunes suspend their protests against Macron until they have completely purged their movement of “fascists”, and “extremists”, and other dangerous elements, and have splintered it into a number of smaller, antagonistic ideological factions that can be more easily neutralised by the French authorities ... because that’s what establishment intellectuals do.

We can expect to hear this line of reasoning, not just from establishment intellectuals like Lévy, but also from members of the Identity Politics Left, who are determined to prevent the working classes from rising up against global neoliberalism until they have cleansed their ranks of every last vestige of racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, transphobia, and so on. These leftist gatekeepers have been struggling a bit to come up with a response to the Gilets Jaunes ... a response that doesn’t make them sound like hypocrites. See, as leftists, they kind of need to express their support for a bona fide working class uprising. At the same time, they need to delegitimise it, because their primary adversaries are fascism, racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, and assorted other isms and phobias, not the neoliberal ruling classes.

Nothing scares the Identity Politics Left quite like an actual working class uprising. Witnessing the furious unwashed masses operating out there on their own, with no decent human restraint whatsoever, Identity Politics Leftists feel a sudden overwhelming urge to analyse, categorise, organise, sanitise, and otherwise correct and control them. They can’t accept the fact that the actual, living, breathing working classes are messy, multiplicitous, inconsistent, and irreducible to any one ideology. Some of

them are racists. Some are fascists. Others are communists, socialists, and anarchists. Many have no idea what they are, and don’t particularly care for any of these labels. This is what the actual working classes are ... a big, contradictory collection of people who, despite all their differences, share one thing in common, that they are being screwed over by the ruling classes. I don’t know about you, but I consider myself one of them.

These leftist gatekeepers have been struggling a bit to come up with a response to the Gilets Jaunes ...

Where we go from here is anyone’s guess. According to the *Guardian*, as I am sitting here writing this, the whole of Europe is holding its breath in anticipation of the Gilets Jaunes’ response to Macron’s most recent attempt to appease them, this time with an extra hundred Euros a month, some minor tax concessions, and a Christmas bonus.

Something tells me it’s not going to work, but even if it does, and the Gilets Jaunes uprising ends, this messy, Western “populist” insurgency against global neoliberalism has clearly entered a new phase. Count on the global capitalist ruling classes to intensify their ongoing War on Dissent and their demonisation of anyone opposing them (or contradicting their official narrative) as an “extremist,” a “fascist,” a “Russian agent,” and so on. I’m certainly looking forward to that, personally.

Oh ... yeah, and I almost forgot, if you were wondering what you could get me for Christmas, I did some checking, and there appears to be a wide selection of yellow safety vests online for just a couple of euros. **CT**

CJ Hopkins is an award-winning American playwright, novelist and political satirist based in Berlin. His plays are published by Bloomsbury Publishing (UK) and Broadway Play Publishing (USA). His debut novel, ZONE 23, is published by Snoggsworthy, Swaine & Cormorant. He can be reached at cjhopkins.com or consentfactory.org.

GEORGE MONBIOT

You want it darker?

The remarkable story of how the hard-right Koch brothers funded a Trotskyite splinter group.

DARK money is among the greatest current threats to democracy. It means money spent below the public radar, that seeks to change political outcomes. It enables very rich people and corporations to influence politics without showing their hands.

Among the world's biggest political spenders are Charles and David Koch, co-owners of Koch Industries, a vast private conglomerate of oil pipelines and refineries, chemicals, timber and paper companies, commodity trading firms and cattle ranches. If their two fortunes were rolled into one, Charles David Koch, with \$120-billion, would be the richest man on Earth.

In a rare public statement – an essay published in 1978 – Charles Koch explained his objective. “Our movement must destroy the prevalent statist paradigm.” As Jane Mayer records in her book *Dark Money*, the Kochs’ ideology – lower taxes and looser regulations – and their business interests “dovetailed so seamlessly it was difficult to distinguish one from the other”.

Over the years, she notes, “the company developed a stunning record of corporate malfeasance”. Koch Industries paid massive fines for oil spills, illegal benzene emissions and ammonia pollution. In 1999, a jury found that it had knowingly using a corroded pipeline to carry butane, which caused an explosion in which two people died. *Company Town*, a film released last year, tells the story of local people’s long fight against pollution from a huge paper mill owned by the Koch brothers.

The Koch’s chief political lieutenant, Richard

Fink, developed what he called a three-stage model of social change. Universities would produce “the intellectual raw materials”. Think tanks would transform them into “a more practical or usable form”. Then “citizen activist” groups would “press for the implementation of policy change”.

To these ends, the Kochs set up bodies in all three categories themselves, such as the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, the Cato Institute and the “citizens’ group” Americans for Prosperity. But for the most part they funded existing organisations that met their criteria. They have poured hundreds of millions of dollars into a network of academic departments, thinktanks, journals and movements. And they appear to have been remarkably successful.

As researchers at Harvard and Columbia universities have found, Americans for Prosperity alone now rivals the Republican party in terms of size, staffing and organisational capacity. It has pulled “the Republican party to the far-right on economic, tax, and regulatory issues.” It was crucial to the success of the Tea Party Movement, the ousting of Democrats from Congress, and the staffing of Trump’s transition team. The Koch network has helped secure massive tax cuts, the smashing of trade unions and the dismantling of environmental legislation.

But their hands, for the most part, remain invisible. A Republican consultant who has worked for Charles and David Koch told Jane Mayer that



“to call them under the radar is an understatement. They are underground”.

Until now, there has been no evidence that Charles and David Koch have directly funded organisations based in the UK. But a few weeks ago, a reader pointed me to one line he found in a form submitted to the US government by the Charles Koch Foundation, which showed money transferred to a company that appears to be the US funding arm of a UK organisation. Once I had grasped its significance, I set up a collaboration with the investigative group DeSmog UK. We could scarcely believe what we were seeing.

The organisation the Charles Koch Foundation has chosen to fund is at first sight astounding: a US organisation established by an obscure magazine run by former members of a tiny Trotskyite splinter group. Some of its core contributors still describe themselves as Marxists or Bolsheviks. But the harder you look at it, the more sense

the Koch donations appear to make.

The name of the magazine is *Spiked* – www.spiked-online.com – which emerged from a group with a comical history of left factionalism. In 1974, the International Socialists split after a dispute over arithmetic in Volume 3 of Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital*. One of the new factions formed the Revolutionary Communist Group. In 1976, it split again, and one of the splinters became the Revolutionary Communist Tendency. It was led by a sociologist at the University of Kent called Frank Furedi. In 1981 it changed its name to the Revolutionary Communist Party.

In 1988, the party launched a magazine called *Living Marxism* (later *LM*). By then, it had abandoned many of its former convictions. Among the few discernible traces of its revolutionary past was an enthusiasm for former communists in the Balkans, such as Slobodan Milošević. In 2000, it closed after losing a libel case: it falsely claimed that ITN had fabricated evidence of Serb atrocities against Bosnian Muslims. But as

soon as the magazine folded, a network of new groups, with the same cast of characters – Frank Furedi, Claire Fox, Mick Hume, Brendan O’Neill, James Heartfield, Michael Fitzpatrick, James Woudhuysen – sprang up to replace it. Among these organisations were the Institute of Ideas, the Academy of Ideas, the Manifesto Club and a new magazine, *Spiked*. It had the same editor as LM (Mick Hume) and most of the same contributors.

We found three payments over the past two years from the Charles Koch Foundation. They amount to \$170,000, earmarked for “general operating support”.

The payments were made to Spiked US Inc. On *Spiked*’s “Donate” page is a button that says “In the US? Donate here”. It takes you to the PayPal link for “Spiked US, Inc”. Spiked US, in other words, appears to be its American funding arm. Beyond a postal address is Hoboken, New Jersey, it is hard to see what presence it has in the US. It appears to have been established in 2016, the year in which the Koch donations began.

When I asked *Spiked* what the money was for and whether there had been any other payments, its managing editor, Viv Regan, told me that the Charles Koch Foundation has now given Spiked US a total of \$300,000, “to produce public debates in the US about free speech, as part of its charitable activities.” She claims the foundation supports projects “on both the left and the right”. The Koch Foundation has funded “a free-speech oriented programme of public debates on campus titled the Unsafe Space Tour” and four live events, the first of which is titled ‘Should we be free to hate?’. She told me “We’re very proud of our work on free speech and tolerance, and we are proud to be part of the programme.”

But I have been unable to find any public acknowledgement of this funding. Neither on the



LIVING MARXISM: Closed after losing a libel case. A new magazine Spiked shared the same editor and most of its contributors

videos of the debates, in the posters advertising them or in reports of the events in *Spiked* magazine is there any mention of the Charles Koch Foundation. From what I could see of the title slides in the videos, they acknowledged an organisation called the Institute for Humane Studies, but not the Foundation. *Spiked* has yet to reply to my questions on this matter.

The Koch brothers are famously careful with their money. According to Jane Mayer, they exert “unusually tight personal control over their philanthropic endeavours”. David Koch told a sympathetic journalist, “If we’re going to give a lot of money, we’ll make

darn sure they spend it in a way that goes along with our intent. And if they make a wrong turn and start doing things we don’t agree with, we withdraw funding.” So what might have attracted them to this obscure organisation?

Spiked magazine, now edited by Brendan O’Neill, appears to hate left-wing politics. It inveighs against the welfare state, against regulation, the Occupy movement, anti-capitalists, Jeremy Corbyn, George Soros, #MeToo, “black privilege” and Black Lives Matter. It does so in the name of the “ordinary people”, whom, it claims, are oppressed by the “anti-Trump and anti-Brexit cultural elites”, “feministic elites”, “green elites” and “cosmopolitan politicians”.

It repeatedly defends figures on the hard right or far right: Katie Hopkins, Nigel Farage, Alex Jones, the Democratic Football Lads’ Alliance, Tommy Robinson, Toby Young, Arron Banks, Brett Kavanaugh, Viktor Orban. They are portrayed as victims of “McCarthyites” trying to suppress free speech. It demands the hardest of possible Brexits, insisting that “No Deal is nothing to fear”, as it would allow the UK to scrap EU regulations.

But what it appears to hate most is environmentalism. It rails against “climate scaremongering”, and has called for fracking and coal production to

GEORGE MONBIOT

be ramped up. It blames the Grenfell Tower disaster on “the moral fervour of the climate change campaign”. It mocks the idea that air pollution is dangerous and has proposed abolishing the planning system. “We need to conquer nature, not bow to it”, it contends. “Let’s make the ‘human footprint’ even bigger”.

Spiked’s writers rage against exposures of dark money. It calls the *Observer’s* Carole Cadwalladr, who has won a string of prizes for exposing the opaque spending surrounding the Brexit vote, “the closest thing the mainstream British media has to an out-and-out conspiracy theorist”. It carries numerous articles by writers from the obscurely-funded Institute of Economic Affairs and from the Cato Institute, that was founded by Charles Koch. Its editor, Brendan O’Neill, also writes for *Reason* magazine, owned by the Reason Foundation, which has received \$1-million from the Charles Koch Foundation over the past two years.

Bizarrely, *Spiked* still uses Leon Trotsky to justify its positions. It claims to have built its philosophy on his objective of “increasing the power of man over nature and ... the abolition of the power of man over man”. This means, it says, that “we should fight for greater human dominion over the natural world”, and that regulatory power should not be used to prevent anyone from exercising their agency. The result appears to turn Trotsky’s objective on its head: without constraint, those with the greatest agency can exercise uninhibited power over others.

Its enthusiasm for Trotsky is highly selective. As one of *Spiked’s* writers noted in 2002, his central message was that “the retreat behind national boundaries is a recipe for reaction”. Yet the magazine’s defence of both Brexit and Viktor Orban, Hungary’s right-wing prime minister, is founded on the notion of national sovereignty. *Spiked* seems to have remembered everything

Leon Trotsky wrote that could be recruited to the cause of corporate capital and the hard right, and forgotten all his, shall we say, less enthusiastic musings about those forces.

Above all, its positions are justified with the claim to support free speech. But the freedom all seems to tend in one direction: freedom to lambast vulnerable people. The Unsafe Space tour that the Charles Koch Foundation financed was heavily slanted towards this line. Yet, when I exercised my freedom of speech in sending my questions to *Spiked*, I was denounced on the front page of the magazine as a “McCarthyite”. This is its favourite insult, which it uses prolifically to dismiss legitimate inquiries and critiques. The usual term for asking awkward questions about powerful interests is journalism. Open information and transparency are crucial to free speech: the more we know, the freer we become. *Spiked* has also called for schools, universities and governments to be “cleansed” of “the malign influence” of green NGOs, which it denounces as “the environmentalist enemy within.” Some friends of free speech, these.

The Kochs are mentioned in several *Spiked* articles, but no corresponding interests are declared. An article in 2016, when *Spiked* received \$170,000 from the Charles Koch Foundation, attacked the Standing Rock protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline, in which the Koch brothers have a major interest.

Is this the extent of the Koch brothers’ funding of groups based in the UK? Who knows? I have not yet had a response from the Charles Koch Foundation. But I see these payments as part of a wider pattern of undisclosed funding. Democracy without transparency is not democracy. **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

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CHELLIS GLENDINNING

In the company of a rebel

From the moment of consciousness, just about every move
John Ross made was defined by politics and poetry

In her upcoming book about the star-lit individuals she has known as a chronicler of the social and artistic movements of our time, Chellis Glendinning writes about an author, poet and activist who stood ardently by his beliefs, often to his physical peril, was a winner of the American Book Award, and wrote one of the great books about the glorious and bedevilled metropolis of Mexico City.

I came here just to be bombed! Bush already has a bomb with my name written on it. – John Ross (a claim to his NGO host while being ousted as a Human Shield, Daura oil refinery, Iraq, 2003)

JOHN Ross was bigger in spirit than a human body could contain. He was a “Red Diaper Baby”, a Beat poet whose stronghold had been the cafés and cantinas of The Village, an uncountable-cups-a-day espresso freak, and a non-stop news-breaking, award-winning periodista informing the world about Mexican politics.

Tom Hayden once told me that John was his favourite journalist – most likely for his razor-sharp reportage combined with witty double-entendres and down-home phrases like “a rat’s ass”. The man had almost no teeth left after being beaten up for some political stand he had taken – and when I say “stand” I mean literally placing his bipedal body in the way of injustice. He was half-blind, having lost one eye after being hammered for another political stand; he had a bad

back and walked with a limp for having been clobbered for another couple of political stands. He was loud and sure of himself. He was a man of irony, outrage, and courage.

I say ‘was’ because John was beaten up once and for all by liver cancer in 2011. All medical intervention that could be done had been done, and he asked to leave his rooms at the Isabel Hotel in Mexico City’s Federal District and be shepherd to the Michoacán village where he had raised a family and lived on-and-off for 50 years. It wasn’t that we hadn’t had sufficient notice of the possibility of his death, yet when I received the news, I sat in my chair for some time, as stunned as a baby bird slammed into a glass window. I was overcome with the feeling that I could not imagine – nor accept – a world without John Ross.

John was born on 11 March 1938 and raised in an apartment in New York City. His parents were Hollywood show-biz Commies, and before the age of 16 he had sold a joint to Dizzie Gillespie, babysat for Billie Holiday’s dog, and gotten loaded at his mother’s dinner parties with veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. From the moment of consciousness, just about every move he made

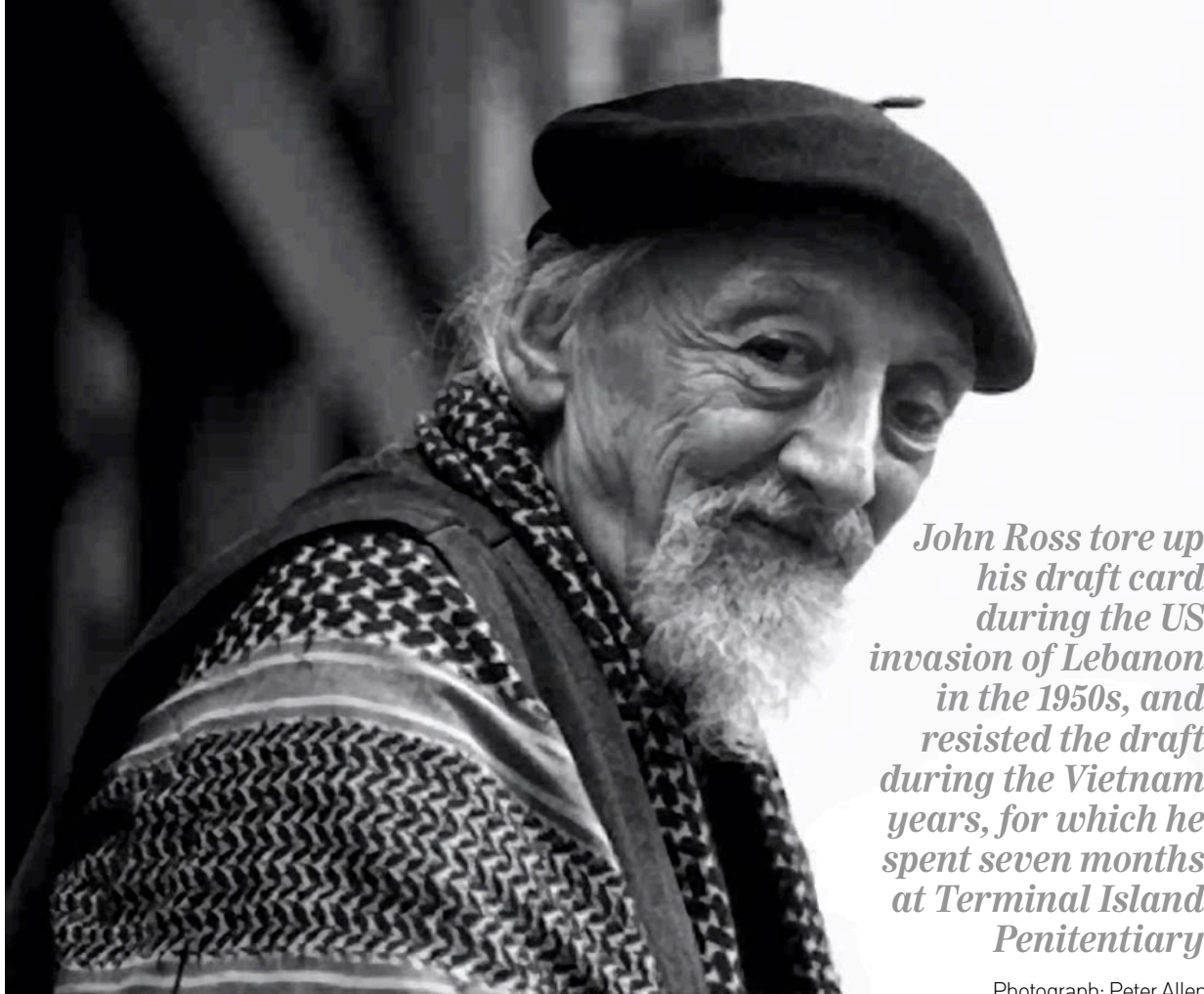
IN THE COMPANY OF REBELS

by Chellis Glendinning

New Village Press

Publication date, April 30 2019

CHELLIS GLENDINNING



John Ross tore up his draft card during the US invasion of Lebanon in the 1950s, and resisted the draft during the Vietnam years, for which he spent seven months at Terminal Island Penitentiary

Photograph: Peter Allen

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was defined by politics and poetry.

He first went to Mexico in 1961, where he and his lover Norma Melbourne landed in a village in Michoacán and built a casita. He also hung out in the Mission District in San Francisco, which was the heart of the Latin community. He had torn up his draft card during the US invasion of Lebanon in the 1950s, and resisted the draft during the Vietnam years, for which he spent seven months at Terminal Island Penitentiary. There he wrote his first tome, a pamphlet answering a crucial question for those incarcerated. It was called *What to Do in Jail*.

The truth is that John didn't really find his vocation until 1984 when he was 56 years old. He became a Spanglish-speaking news correspondent with a focus on Mexico, and Pacific News Serv-

ice sent him south to report. The job was a perfect fit. He trailed the Shining Path through Peru's jungles. He reported on resistance to Pinochet's dictatorship. He shadowed Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas' run for president of Mexico. He also met up with composer/author Paul Bowles in Morocco and the Basque separatist Euskadi Ta Askatasuna in Franco's Spain. When the 1985 earthquake devastated Mexico City, PNS sent him to report on los damnificados. He checked into the Isabel Hotel – and did not check out until 2010 when he left for Michoacán to die.

His second book won the American Book Award in 1995, *Rebellion from the Roots*, a chronicle of the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas on 1 January 1994, the first day of the North American Free Trade Agreement. He became a regular at Zap-

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artista events, braving the long and muddy trek to their jungle hide-away, and at all events involving Mexican politics. *The War against Oblivion*, *The Annexation of Mexico*, *¡Zapatistas!* and a novel based on voting corruption during Cárdenas' presidential bid, *Tonatiuh's People*, followed. He also penned ten poetry chapbooks.

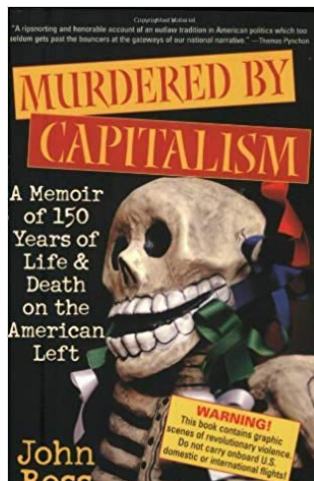
When I saw that John was coming to Brodsky's Bookstore in Taos, New Mexico, to give a reading of Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos' children's book, *La historia de los Colores*, I jumped into my old Jeep and made tracks northward. The book had been commissioned in 1999 by the National Endowment for the Arts, to be published by Lee and Bobby Byrd's Cinco Puntos Press of El Paso, Texas. But when some of the anxious politicians of the Clinton administration got wind of the fact that US taxpayer monies were bringing a "subversive" document into print, they nixed the project. After some tense weeks, the Lannan Foundation of Santa Fe came to the rescue, offering up the now-revoked \$7,500; the book came out in glorious colours, and John was trotting about the US promoting it.

Somehow, in the commotion after the reading, I ended up in the same caravan as John and his lady-love of the moment, headed for a late-night dinner at some dowager's adobe, and it was here that our friendship began. It was nurtured across the distance – Chimayó, New Mexico to Mexico City – by none other than . . . the internet. Yes, John Ross was the guilty party who got this Luddite clacking away on a computer keyboard – and, for his wild notions, sleight-of-hand use of language, and utter dedication to friendship, it was worth every byte.

Our first poetry reading together took place at my house in Chimayó and went on into the night, lubricated by a bottle of red wine – I the audience to his poems, he to mine. Our second was in El Paso. We were scheduled, along with publisher Bobby Byrd, to read at La Fe Cultural Center. The

afternoon of the event John was all excited about an archeo-art exhibit made of Mexican indocumentados' used water bottles, dirty, ripped cachuchas, broken plastic shrines of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, photos of loved ones, and wayward underpants found in the Arizona desert.

The source of John's devotion to the border was obvious; mine sprung from my labours as something of an underground railroad for incoming, deported, and departing immigrants in northern New Mexico. We set out to find the show. Of course, neither of us knew north from south in El Paso. We ended up driving around and around, only to find the building housing the exhibit locked shut – and an even worse tragedy: no espresso machine in sight. We stopped to down some chili-smothered hot dogs, which appeared to be the only semi-life-like foodstuff available, and after a gruelling search for something/anything to eat, it seemed up to me to make up the Official Cuisine of El Paso. Sitting in plastic chairs on the sidewalk, John regaled me with gritty tales of the down-and-out denizens of his 'hood in Mexico City and the 1997 massacre of peasants in Acteal – the government's cruel retribution for the existence of the Zapatistas.



Cover of John Ross's memoir, *Murdered By Capitalism*.

With the arrival of the millennium, John went on to resist the incursion of Israeli settlers into Palestinian olive groves (where they bludgeoned him with clubs) and act as a Human Shield in Iraq to prevent the US from attacking; upon their arrival Donald Rumsfeld threatened that if any of the Shields survived they would be prosecuted for war crimes for impeding US bombs. In the early 2000s John also wrote a creative memoir entitled *Murdered by Capitalism* in which, while imbibing Gallo wine and smoking PCP-laced pot in a Humboldt County cemetery, he meets the ghost of anarchist Edward B. Schnaubelt (1901-1979) and together they compare notes on the burial of the Old Left of Schnaubelt's era and the

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New Left of John's.

Upon returning to the Israel, he wrote what was to be his last book, *El Monstruo*, a monstrous tribute to Mexico City.

Through the years John identified himself as a “rebel reporter”, an “investigative poet”, a “left-wing Mr. Rogers”, a “professional blurb writer”, and, toward the end, a “corpse-in-training”. During his last round of chemotherapy, he attended the traditional Day of the Dead celebration in San Francisco's Mission District dressed as a cancer-ridden liver. His last wishes echoed those of socialist Joe Hill – that his ashes be scattered in a diversity of locations. In John's case, in the ash trays at the Hotel Isabel and along the #14 bus route through the Mission, mixed with marijuana and rolled in a joint to be smoked at his funeral.

In early 2010 John, half-blind and barely able to walk, braved the rail-runner from Albuquerque to Santa Fe to visit me while on a book tour. The mission was to swig espresso, buy a really cool, Pueblo-crafted cane to bolster his failing leg, and (needless to say) talk politics. I was on the verge

of moving to Bolivia, and at a little café by the tracks he reached into the suitcases of memory to regale me with his encounters with Evo Morales before the man became El Presidente of that country – the major theme being the clash between John's aspiration to discuss anti-imperialist strategies and Morales' obsession with ogling passing women.

Although neither John nor I said a word, when he mounted the aluminium steps for the return journey, we knew it would be the last time we would be together. Hyper-focusing every cell of my body, from eyeballs to toe nails, I clung to the vision of this valiant warrior as he hobbled to grab the overhead bar and plop his wiry body into a seat.

CT

*Chellis Glendinning is an essayist, poet, psychotherapist, yoga practitioner, and the author of nine books – the latest being *Objetos* (La Paz, Bolivia: Editorial 3600, 2018). She lives in Chuquisaca, Bolivia. This article was first published at www.wildculture.com*



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NATE ROBERT

Photo: Nate Robert



22 **DECAYING:** Abandoned since 1979, the Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired Sham's Palace is rapidly disintegrating.

Inside a princess's abandoned palace

Magnificent home has been neglected since Shah was deposed at time of Iranian revolution

RECENTLY, an architect from California joined one of my Iran tours. We had met touring Chernobyl and Ukraine, where we discovered our shared architectural tastes. For his Iran tour, he had created an interactive treasure map of the country's architectural highlights and, as I clicked through it, a grainy photo grabbed my attention. Located not far from Tehran, and designed by the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, Shams Palace looked

like a dream, a surreal amalgamation of everything I live for – curvaceous, abandoned, and concrete.

In the mid-1960's, William Wesley Peters – son-in-law of Frank Lloyd Wright, chief architect of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation – responded to a unique architectural calling. Shams Pahlavi, the older sister of the last Shah of Iran (self-anointed King-of-Kings Mohammad Reza Pahlavi), needed a palace. The end result was simply magnificent.



INTEGRATED: The palace featured outdoor plants in a courtyard that was integrated with the living area.

However, in the little-known Iranian city of Karaj (population two-million, zero tourists), Frank Lloyd Wright's figurative fingerprints have been fading since the palace was abandoned shortly before the February 12, 1979 revolution in which the Shah was overthrown. Sham's Palace may be experiencing its final days ...

Also known as the Pearl Palace, the elaborate edifice expresses a genuine understanding and appreciation of Persian culture and tradition.

For centuries in Iran, there's been an unbreakable relationship between gardens and buildings, in which bedrooms and family rooms open directly onto internal courtyards with manicured gardens, ponds, and open-spaces.

Inspired by this traditional design, Peters decided to create a large, circular, internal garden space, into a courtyard surrounded with dwelling rooms. Filled with exotic plants and ponds, the garden is consolidated with the rooms by an elegant, translucent, domed roof.

Providing grandeur, protection from the

elements, and allowing sunlight to penetrate throughout the palace, the intricate dome creates a graceful ambiance.

Surrounded by an artificial lake, Shams Palace gently leans against an artificial hill. Plants wind their way along curving roads, their contours fluidly leading to the main entrance. Once inside, through a relentless harmony of circles and spirals, the interior reveals itself as an extension of the outdoors.

Decades after Shams Palace was abandoned, the remaining plants survive, but the larger of the two domes has succumbed to the elements – the cathedral-like array of acrylic glass windows has been destroyed, leaving only the metal flower-like frame to cover the once lush cascaded internal garden.

After the disappearance of the main dome, the building is quickly deteriorating, with massive erosion of the concrete. However, some of the



Courtyard, Shams Palace.

24 **FRAMED:** The acrylic glass window have been destroyed, leaving only the metal frame of the main dome.

more protected rooms are almost untouched, incredibly, much of the original furniture remains – 1960’s Finnish Ball Chairs by Eero Aarnio seem to be exactly as they were left by the poolside.

How did the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation come to design the building? Like everything in Iran, the back-story of Shams Palace is fascinating and complex. In the early part of the 20th-century, Persia was not as united as Iran is today. Sheikh Khaz’al, a tribal leader, controlled the South West of the country which, although a declared part of Persia, remained stubbornly beyond central control.

However, the region contained an enormous quantity of oil that had been discovered by British prospectors, and a contract had been signed with the central Persian authority, giving the British exclusive rights to explore, extract, and profit from the oil resources in much of Iran. Due to the local control of Sheikh Khaz’al, the Brit-

ish government decided that a special arrangement would be prudent. So they provided the Sheikh with weapons, gifted him shares in the newly formed Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (later renamed British Petroleum – BP), and knighted him. In return, the Sheikh would use his clout to ensure that the British could take all the oil it wished, uninhibited.

Although the Sheikh was collecting taxes, he paid only a very small amount to the Iranian central government. Becoming ever more wealthy and powerful, he became a serious rival to Reza Shah Pahlavi – King of Iran, and the father of Princess Shams.

Later, thanks to the British withdrawing support for the Sheikh and instead supporting the father of Princess Shams, King Reza Shah finally conquered the lands of Sheikh Khaz’al. Placed under house arrest, the Sheikh’s assets were transferred to the Imperial Iranian government, and he remained virtually imprisoned under the watchful eye of the Shah for



FIT FOR A PRINCESS: One of the bedrooms inside the abandoned palace of the Shah's royal sister.

more than a decade.

In 1936, the all-powerful Reza Shah ordered the assassination of his rival – and Sheikh Khaz'al finally met his death.

Sheikh Khaz'al had a son named Nezam Amery. At the time of his father's assassination, Nezam was only ten, but he grew up privileged, and enrolled at Kent State University in Ohio, where he studied the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. A successful student, Nezam was given an architectural apprenticeship with Taliesin Associated Architects – a division of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.

Returning to Tehran, Amery became the Middle East representative of Taliesin. His firm shared joint interests with Taliesin, working on architectural and city planning projects in Iran and Iraq. Upon being awarded the commission for Shams Palace, Nezam Amery invited Taliesin to participate.

In 2003, Shams Palace was registered by Iran's National Heritage Foundation. However, despite being recognised as an important historical monument deserving restoration, the condition of the palace has further declined.

Restoration would now be incredibly expensive – and there is certainly no financial incentive. Iran currently has much more to worry about than the restoration of the Pearl Palace – after all, this is just one of an astounding 9,000 registered historic sites located all over the nation.

Some years ago Shams Palace was open for tours but it's now off-limits. Gated and guarded, hidden away from the public eye, this truly visionary interpretation of mid-century-modern Iran slowly returns to dust. **CT**

***Nate Robert** has travelled the world full time since 2012, through 54 countries running "un-tours" to destinations including Iran, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro and Ukraine. His web site is www.yomadic.com.*

W STEPHEN GILBERT

Ode to 2018

In the manner of Alexander Pope

It fogs the mind that Century Twenty-One
Already has a sixth of its span run.
Those born in the first months of the millennium
Can vote – all we can do is to pinchpenny 'em.
The hope is slim they ever can afford
To own a home. It seems a poor reward
For working internships and zero-hours,
No job security as came with ours.
I'm thankful for the age when I was young –
The Swinging Sixties, long gone, fully swung.
We won in '64: three hearty cheers.
We followed thirteen wasted Tory years.
Then '97 had a sense of mission.
We'd weathered eighteen years of opposition.
Now we've been out again since Twenty-Ten.
We must avoid as long a wait again.
To regain power we all must pull together,
Not be distracted by a load of blether
About who best embodies our great cause
And risk defeat snatched out of vict'ry's jaws.

What we most want's an imminent election
Wherein we can express our deep objection
To Tory government and all its works,
To May's crass leadership and to the berks
Who came to and then went from her front bench,
Most of them leaving us with quite a stench
Of various wrong-doing, like bad cheese,
What under John Major was known as sleaze.
Rudd's back and others may eye up the Lords
But some have simply ... Fallon on their swords.
Now, if we earnestly wish to unseat
Them, we must all sing from the same hymn sheet.
The Labour Party, we know, is broad church,
Which means in practice it's most apt to lurch
From Social Democrat to full-blown Trot
And back again. And it does this a lot,
Instead of turning fire against the Tories,
Which is a lot less fun than civil war is.

Corbyn will put his foot down, or he might.
Called to his very face "anti-Semite",
He didn't rise, he turned the other cheek.
That's dignified – or is it merely weak?
He wields a stick and Westminster's abuzz,
Damned if he doesn't, and damned if he does.

Momentum members know what they've expected –
That dissidents will all be deselected.
There was a call, more like one of Rees-Mogg's
But made to Corbyn: "Come, call off your dogs!"
Thereby the dissidents were given succour
By that man whose name – Chukka – rhymes with ...
mucker.

Momentum's founder-leader is Jon Lansmann
Who hardly could be deemed a Ku Klux Klansman
But on the Jewish question he's been critical
Of Corbyn – some might call him jesuitical.
Not quite a fitting term that, in the circs.
Is going your own way among the perks
Of leadership? Corbyn thinks it hypocrisy
To discount members' views: that's not democracy.
He chose remaining in the referendum
Against his own instincts. He did suspend 'em.
It's no secret. There's nothing there to probe.
His long-held view is clearly Europhobe.
Now he respects the verdict of the ballot
As democratic – which is hard to palate
By those who claim the leave voters were lied to
And given one more chance they will decide to
Reverse their votes: a forecast full of holes
Because it's based upon opinion polls,
Whose record recently – it's undeniable –
Has been the opposite of what's reliable.
Last year's result was one none had forecasted.
Back to the drawing board, boys – what a bastard!

The Tories still held power, if only croakily.
They seem to hold on better when it's locally.
Swindon's among our party's prime projections.
Some of us canvassed there in the elections,
Hoping to put the council to the sword.
Our sole success was in the very ward
Where we had leafleted – so that was good,
But now we want both Commons seats ... touch wood.
Well, as we speak the government may fall
Or maybe not, but it's May's closest call.
She has invested all her hope in Brexit,
But what will happen when her party wrecks it?
"Deal or no deal" was asked by Panorama
And then there's the six tests set by Keir Starmer.
She couldn't meet those, we knew all along.
Her leadership's not stable, it's not strong.

W STEPHEN GILBERT

For party sentiment she has no feel –
Sceptic MPs are her Achilles heel.
Theresa's fate has generated screeds
Of commentary, but clearly what she needs
Is to get rid of those whose best advice is
“To get on with the job” itself suffices
As governmental policy, when sadly
Most voters think the job is done so badly.
Backbenchers too – she won the Tory vote
But not so comfortably that she could gloat.
She's a dead woman walking, quoth Osbourne.
She's dogged, some say, but say it with scorn.

For Labour it should be an open goal
And it would be if Corbyn could control
His dissident backbenchers who promote
Blairism and the so-called People's Vote.
Diehard remainers loudly feel betrayed
But so do leavers who say they're afraid
That Twenty-Sixteen's Referendum win
Will disappear as if it's never bin.
The options leave some voters quite aghast,
They start to yearn for leaders of the past
Of whom rose-coloured spectacles see skills un-
Paralleled – for instance, Harold Wilson,
Whose truest line, perhaps his only true one –
Remember, he's the only leader who won
Four national elections, so it's prime:
“A week in politics is a long time”.
And now we know as May's EU fog clears
How very long is two-and-a-half years.

This month has only added to the mess –
The “meaningful vote” has turned meaning-less.
Uncertainty is everybody's bugbear
Though it suits Boris, lurking like a smug bear
And ready to trap something with his paw
So he can eat and give a mighty roar
And challenge for the Tory leadership
Before the dwindling chance slips from his grip.
Is what drives him ambition or mere malice?
Does he know leadership's a poisoned chalice?
Cassandras warn of an impending slump.
It could be worse. We could have Donald Trump,
Whose favourite term for coverage – fake news –
Despite ourselves is one we're apt to use
When in so many words we too condemn
What we see as the biased MSM.
“What's that?” you cry. “Where's the encyclopedia?”
MSM is merely the mainstream media.
So press barons like Rothermere and co
Make sure their titles let their readers know
They're utterly opposed to Labour policies.
The Barclay Brothers, say, whose major solace is

To live tax-free on Monaco and Sark,
Using their titles like an oligarch
To undermine Labour's voter appeal
So they may make their millions and conceal
Them off-shore where they can cover their tracks
Avoiding that thing that they most hate: tax.
Their papers frankly loathe the Labour movement.
The Guardian is hardly an improvement.
Its commentators rubbish Corbyn's stances
And pour their tired old scorn upon his chances
Of winning. These are just hypotheses
Meant to be self-fulfilling prophecies.
Does this reverse their falling circulation?
Hardly. They daily ask for a donation.
And then of course there is the BBC,
An institution we love, you and me,
But lack of bias, enshrined in its charter,
Is widely seen as being a nonstarter.
In any trial of bias, the discoverment
Would show the BBC close to the government.
And Kuenssberg, the Beeb's Westminster-based editor
Is widely viewed as something of a predator.
No Labour MP gets as soft a run
As Rory Stewart does on World at One.
We note the MSM's consensual view
Is simply that Labour's not got a clue.
However often we state our position,
The only view of us that gains transmission
Is we're confused or we're afraid to strike.
They've no notion what politics is like.
Well, it's analogous to verse, to rhyming,
The secret's in the rhythm, in the timing.
A government no-confidence division
Requires some Tories to reach the decision
That their leader has sold them all a pup
That won't survive, that now the game is up.

Whatever happens – deal, no deal, remain –
We shall recover, we will dowse the pain.
When battle's over, banners are refurled,
We'll have to start to deal with the real world.
And though the prospects may look deeply cryptic,
We can't assume they'll be apocalyptic.
We'll still be trading “sur le continong”,
We still will sing a Eurovision song.
The EU countries still will be our neighbours,
Whether our government is May's or Labour's.
We think of EU officers as brusque,
But here's the sweet vale from Donald Tusk
Whose wish was ours and also Mrs May's:
“We will remain friends till the end of days”.

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*W Stephen Gilbert is the author of **Jeremy Corbyn –
Accidental Hero [Eyewear 2015; 2nd edition 2016]***

A land where no criticism is allowed

CNN's firing of Marc Lamont Hill and outrage at Airbnb and the Quakers reveals a complete intolerance of criticism

FOR 30 years, the United Nations has held an annual International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November. The event rarely merited even a passing nod in the mainstream media. Until early this month.

Marc Lamont Hill, a prominent US academic and political commentator for CNN, found himself deluged by a tsunami of outrage over a speech he had made at the UN headquarters in New York. He called for an end to Oslo's discredited model of interminable and futile negotiations over Palestinian statehood – a strategy that is already officially two decades past its sell-by date.

In its place, he proposed developing a new model of regional peace based on a single state offering equal rights to Israelis and Palestinians. Under a barrage of criticism that his speech had been antisemitic, CNN summarily fired him.

His dismissal echoes recent, largely confected furores greeting attempts by organisations to take a more practical and ethical stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both Airbnb, an accommodation bookings website, and the UK branch of the Quakers, a society of Christian religious movements, have faced howls of indignation in response to their modest initiatives.

Last month, Airbnb announced that it would remove from its site all properties listed in illegal Jewish settlements on Palestinian territory in the West Bank. Shortly afterwards, the Quakers declared that they would refuse to invest in companies that profit from Israel's theft of Palestinian

resources in the occupied territories.

Both moves fully accord with international law, which views the transfer of an occupying powers' population into occupied territory – the establishment of settlements – as a war crime. Again, like Hill, the two organisations were battered by adverse reactions, including accusations of malevolence and anti-semitism – especially from prominent and supposedly liberal and representative Jewish leadership groups in the US and UK.

What all three cases illustrate is how the definition of anti-semitism is being rapidly expanded to encompass even extremely limited forms of criticism of Israel and support for Palestinian rights. This redefinition is occurring at a time when Israel is led by the most intransigent and ultra-nationalist government in its history.

These two trends are not unrelated. The cases in question also reveal the growing weaponisation of an emotive identity politics that has been turned on its head – depoliticised to side with the strong against the weak.

Of the three “controversies”, Hill's speech offered the biggest break with western orthodoxy on how to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – or at least an orthodoxy established by the Oslo agreements in the mid-1990s. Those accords intimated that, should the Palestinians wait patiently, Israel might one day concede them a state on less than a quarter of their homeland.

Some 25 years later, the Palestinians are still waiting, and most of their proposed state has in the meantime been devoured by Israel's

*Marc Lamont Hill:
called for “a free
Palestine from the
river to the sea”*



settlement-colonies.

In his speech, Hill put the Zionist movement’s dispossession of the Palestinians in its proper historical perspective – one increasingly recognised by academics and experts – as a settler-colonial project. He also correctly noted that the chance for a two-state solution, were it even feasible, has been usurped by Israel’s determination to create a single state over all of historic Palestine – one that privileges Jews. In Greater Israel, Palestinians are doomed to be treated as lesser human beings.

History, Hill observed, suggests there is only one possible ethical resolution of such situations: decolonisation. That recognises the existing reality of a single state, but insists on equal rights for Israelis and Palestinians.

Rather than challenge Hill on the unassailable logic of his argument, critics resorted to inflammatory soundbites. He was accused of using antisemitic language – employed by Hamas – in referring to international action to secure “a free Palestine from the river to the sea”.

In a double leap of faulty logic, Israel and its apologists claimed that Hamas uses the term to declare its genocidal intent to exterminate Jews, and that Hill had echoed those sentiments. Dani Dayan,

Israel’s consul-general in New York, termed Hill “a racist, a bigot, an anti-semite”, and compared his remarks to a “swastika painted in red”.

Ben Shapiro, an analyst on Fox News, echoed him, claiming Hill had called for “killing all the Jews” in the region. Seth Mandel, the executive editor of the Washington Examiner, similarly argued that Hill had urged a “Jewish genocide”.

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL), a prominent and supposedly liberal Jewish organisation that claims to support equal treatment for all US citizens, denounced Hill too, arguing: “Those calling for ‘from the river to the sea’ are calling for an end to the State of Israel.”

In fact, the expression “from the river to the sea” – referring to the area between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea – has a long pedigree in both Israeli and Palestinian discourse. It is simply a popular way of referring to a region once named historic Palestine.

Far from being a Hamas slogan, it is used by anyone who rejects the partition of Palestine and favours a single state. That includes all the various parties in the current Israeli government.

In fact, the founding charter of the Likud party of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressly envisions a Greater Israel that denies Palestinians any hope of statehood. It uses exactly the

same language: “Between the Sea and the Jordan there will only be Israeli sovereignty.”

Even after the charter was amended in 1999, in the wake of the Oslo accords, it continued to call for a Greater Israel, declaring that “the Jordan river will be the permanent eastern border of the State of Israel.”

The difference between the position of Hamas and the Israeli government, on the one hand, and Hill’s on the other, is that Hill proposes a single state that would treat all its inhabitants as equals, not provide the framework for domination by one religious or ethnic group over another.

In short, unlike Netanyahu and Israeli officials, Hill rejects a model of permanent occupation and apartheid. That, it seems, is a sackable offence in the view of CNN and the ADL.

By contrast, CNN has long employed former US senator Rick Santorum, even though he has argued that the area between the river and the sea is “all Israeli land” and uses language suggesting he supports a Palestinian genocide.

The preposterousness of the attacks on Hill should be evident the moment we consider that many of the recent leading actors in the peace process – from former Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak to former US secretary of state John Kerry – have warned that Israel is on the brink of slipping into apartheid rule over Palestinians. They make this prediction precisely because a succession of Israeli governments have adamantly refused to withdraw from the occupied territories.

Given that under Donald Trump, the US has abandoned any vision of Palestinian statehood – viable or otherwise – Hill simply pointed out that the emperor lacks clothes. He presented a truth no one in a position to change the appalling status quo appears ready to consider.

Hill was also accused of anti-semitism for supporting methods to pressure Israel into ending its intransigence, which has kept Palestinians under occupation for more than half a century.

Hill highlighted the right of an occupied people to resist their oppressor, a right that every single western capital has ignored and now invariably characterises as terrorism, even when Palestinian attacks are against armed Israeli soldiers enforcing a belligerent occupation.

But Hill himself advocated for a different, Gandhian-style resistance, of non-violence and solidarity with Palestinians in the form of the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement – precisely the kind of international protest that helped to decolonise apartheid South Africa.

In recent years, and under pressure from the Israeli government, apologists for Israel’s occupation and western states have transformed BDS into a bogeyman. Its merits are no longer debated. It is not presented either as a tactic to end the occupation, or even as a tool to pressure Israel into liberalising an ideology that demands ethnic supremacy for the Jewish majority over the fifth of Israel’s citizenry who are Palestinian.

Instead it is said to be proof of anti-semitism and increasingly, by implication, of genocidal intent. The fact that the BDS movement is taking hold on western campuses and has been taken up by a significant number of young, anti-Zionist Jews is simply ignored. Instead, the growing trend is to outlaw BDS and treat it as if it is a precursor to terrorism.

So Hill’s speech was a direct assault on the silent borders of public debate vigorously policed by Israel’s apologists and western states to prevent meaningful discussions of how to end Israel’s occupation and re-assert the right of Palestinians to dignity and self-determination.

Why it is so important for Israel’s apologists to silence someone like Hill is because he alludes to the elephant in the room. His argument strongly hints at the fact that Zionism, Israel’s state ideology, is incompatible with equal rights for Palestinians in their historic homeland. He implies that the occupation is not an aberration that needs fixing but integral to the Zionist movement’s vision of “Judaising” Palestine, of its erasure of Palestinian presence in line with other colonial-settler projects.

Evidence that shielding Israel’s aggressive territorial ambitions from closer inspection is the true goal of Hill’s critics – rather than concern at a supposed rise in “leftwing anti-semitism” – is confirmed by the similar furores surrounding the very modest actions taken by the UK Quakers and Airbnb.

JONATHAN COOK

Late last month the Quakers announced that they would no longer invest in any company that profits from the occupation. The move is part of their “ethical investments” policy, similar to their refusal to invest in the arms and fossil fuel industries.

The Quakers represent a small group of Christian movements that have historically led the way in identifying the moral outrages of each era.

They were prominent in their opposition to slavery in the US and to apartheid in South Africa, and won a Nobel peace prize for their work in saving Jews and Christians from the Nazis during the Second World War. That included organising the Kindertransport that brought 10,000 predominantly Jewish children to the UK. So it is hardly surprising that they should be taking a lead – one other British Churches have been too fearful to contemplate – in penalising those companies that profit from the subjugation and oppression of Palestinians in the occupied territories.

In fact, rather than criticise the UK Quakers for the boycott of these companies, one might fairly wonder why it has taken them so long to act. After all, Israel’s military occupation has been around – and its bastard progeny, the settlements, growing – for more than five decades. Its terrible abuses are well documented.

But even the fact that the Quakers have been repeatedly proved to be on the right side of history has not shaken the confidence of Jewish organisations in the UK in denouncing the group. Most prominent was the Board of Deputies, which grandly claims for itself the status of the representative body for Britain’s Jewish community.

Its relentless attacks on Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, accusing him of anti-semitism, have been treated as authoritative by the British media for that very reason. But the Board revealed its true colours by denouncing the Quakers, suggesting that their stance was motivated not by ethics but by anti-semitism. Ignoring the Quakers’ long history of taking a moral stand, newly elected president Marie van der Zyl argued that Israel was being “singled out”, and that the Quaker leadership had an “obsessive and tunnel-visioned approach”.

Paradoxically, she accused the Quakers of refusing to “tackle prejudice and promote peace in

the region”. Instead Quaker leaders had “chosen to import a divisive conflict into our country”.

In fact, it is the Board and other Jewish leadership organisations that have imported that very divisiveness into Britain and the US by expressly tying their Jewish identities to Israel’s ugly colonial-settler actions. The Quakers are pointing out that in a conflict in which one side, Israel, is overwhelmingly stronger, there can be no resolution unless the stronger side faces effective pressure.

The Board, on the other hand, wants to intimidate and silence the Quakers precisely so Israel can continue to be free to oppress the Palestinians and steal their land through settlement expansion. It is not the Quakers who are antisemitic. It is Jewish leadership organisations like the Board of Deputies that are indifferent – or even cheerleaders – to decades of Israeli brutality towards the Palestinians.

Similarly, Airbnb was bombarded with criticism when it promised the even more limited step of removing some 200 properties on its website located in West Bank settlements that violate international law. Indeed, some of them are built in violation of Israeli law too, even if Israel makes precisely no effort to enforce such laws against the settlers.

Until recently it was widely accepted that the settlements were an insuperable obstacle to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a two-state solution. Further, the settlements, it was understood, necessitated ever greater violence against the native Palestinian population to guarantee their protection and expansion.

That, after all, is precisely why international law forbids the transfer of an occupying power’s population into the occupied territory.

Airbnb was clearly aiding these illegal settlers by creating a stronger profit-motive for Jews to live on stolen Palestinian land. That economic motive was the tangential basis for a legal suit filed in the US last week by settler families claiming “religious discrimination”.

In reality, the firm’s decision to pull out of the West Bank was the very minimum that could be expected of them. And yet, even so, they managed

to exclude Jewish settlements in occupied East Jerusalem from their listing ban, although they constitute the bulk of the Jewish settler population exploiting Airbnb.

Despite Airbnb's move being feeble and long overdue, it was again cast as antisemitic by leading Jewish organisations in the US, not least the ADL. The ADL claims to "secure justice and fair treatment to all citizens alike", one of the reasons why it took an active role in fighting for civil rights for American blacks in the Jim Crow era. But like so many Jewish leadership organisations, its actions prove that, when it comes to Israel, it is in truth driven by a tribal, ethnic agenda rather than a universal, human rights-based one.

Rather than welcoming Airbnb's action, it once again exploited and degraded the meaning of anti-semitism as way to ringfence Israel from pressure to end its ongoing abuse of Palestinians and the theft of their resources. It accused the company of "double standards" for not applying the same policy in "Northern Cyprus, Tibet, the Western Saharan region, and other territories where people have been displaced". As Forward commentator Peter Beinart pointed out, this argument was disingenuous at best: "Was the ADL guilty of a 'double standard' when its officials marched for civil rights for African Americans but not for American Indians, whose civil rights were not guaranteed by federal law until 1968?"

What these three cases highlight is that, just as Israel's ill-intent towards the Palestinians has become ever more overt and transparent, the officially sanctioned space to criticise Israel and support the Palestinian cause is being intentionally and aggressively restricted.

In an era of phone cameras, 24-hour rolling news and social media, Israel stands exposed like never before to intimate and daily scrutiny. Its long-standing dependence on colonial support, its creation based on the sin of ethnic cleansing, the institutional racism faced by its minority of Palestinian citizens, the brazen brutality and structural violence of its 51-year occupation are more widely understood than was possible even a decade ago.

That has happened at the same time as other major historic injustices – against women, people of colour, indigenous peoples and the LGBT community – have emerged into the spotlight with the adoption of a new kind of popular identity politics. Israel should clearly be on the wrong side of this story, and yet western governments and Jewish leadership organisations are vigorously helping it deny what should be self-evident, and thereby turning reality on its head.

A few years ago, only the most rabid supporters of Israel openly argued that anti-Zionism equated with anti-semitism. Now anti-Zionism and solidarity movements like BDS are uncritically characterised in mainstream discourse not only as antisemitic but also implicitly as a form of terrorism against Jews.

The right of Palestinians to dignity and to liberation from Israel's oppressive rule are again being made subservient to Israel's right to pursue unchallenged its settler-colonial agenda – to displace and replace the native Palestinian population.

Not only this, but any solidarity with downtrodden Palestinians is characterised as anti-semitism simply because Jewish leaders in the US and UK claim a trump card: their superior right to identify with Israel's settler-colonial project and to be protected from any criticism for their stance.

In this deeply perverse form of identity politics, the rights of the nuclear-armed state of Israel and its supporters abroad are weaponised to damage the rights of a weak, dispersed, colonised and marginalised community of Palestinians.

For decades, Israel's supporters have conceded that Israel should be subjected to what they termed "legitimate criticism". But the reactions to Hill, the Quakers and Airbnb reveal that in practice there is no criticism of Israel that will be treated as legitimate and that when it comes to the suffering of Palestinians, the only acceptable stance is one of resignation and silence. **CT**

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Jonathan Cook won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His books include *Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East* (Pluto Press) and *Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair* (Zed Books).



TRIBUTE: Bob Marley is commemorated on a wall in Hoxton, London.

Photo: Luke McKernan, via Flickr.com

Why UNESCO was right about reggae

Jamaican music has continued to "speak truth to power" – from challenging domestic abuse to protesting against apartheid in South Africa

WHEN UNESCO announced that "the reggae music of Jamaica" had been added to its list of cultural products considered worthy of recognition, it was a reflection on the fact that reggae, which grew from its roots in the backstreets and dance halls of Jamaica, is more than just popular music, but an important social and political phenomenon.

Jamaica's application to the committee mentioned a number of artists from Bob Marley and Peter Tosh to Chronixx and the Zinc Fence Band. Some observers may be wondering whether such musicians are a good enough reason to include reggae on this prestigious list. What those readers don't fully understand is that reggae is far more significant than its musicians. Not only is social commentary "an integral part of the mu-

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sic”, the application argued, but reggae has also made a significant “contribution to international discourse concerning issues of injustice, resistance, love, and humanity”.

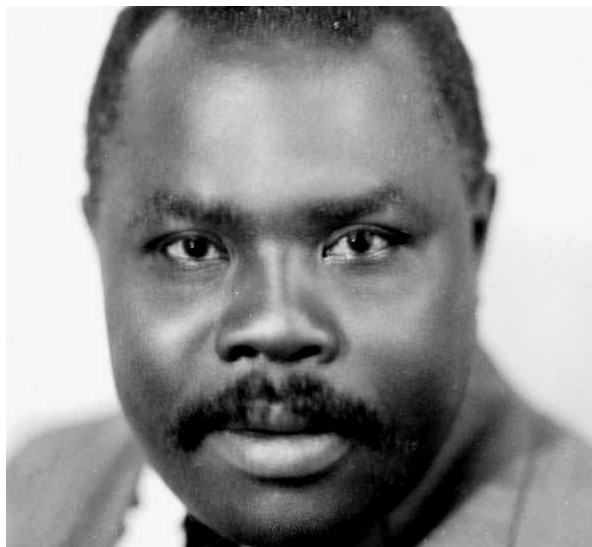
Reggae has “provided a voice for maligned groups, the unemployed and at risk groups and provided a vehicle for social commentary and expression where no other outlet existed or was afforded”. It has also “provided a means of praising and communicating with God”. Not only are these big claims, but they are all true.

Culturally, politically, religiously and musically, reggae has done much heavy lifting. Born in the back streets of Kingston in the 1950s, it is proudly Jamaican. Raised in difficult circumstances, it has matured into a friendly and generous music that travels well and warmly embraces the other cultures and music it meets. Hybridisation is part of reggae’s genetic makeup. Its DNA can be traced back to West Africa and out into the world of popular music. It came into being through mento (a form of Jamaican folk music), ska and rock steady, absorbing influences from the Caribbean (especially calypso), rhythm and blues, rock, and jazz.

However, not only has reggae embraced other musical styles and ideas, but in so doing, it has influenced them and given birth to new sub-genres. Particularly significant in this respect has been the innovative recording techniques developed by Jamaican producers such as King Tubby, Lee “Scratch” Perry, and Bunny Lee. What became known as “dub reggae” has inspired generations of artists and producers around the world and is still an important influence in popular music.

As well as its musical contribution, reggae hasn’t forgotten its roots. Not only does it comment on current political events and social problems, but it also provides a multi-layered introduction to the history, religion and culture of what music historian Paul Gilroy called “the Black Atlantic”. While some reggae cannot, of course, be considered religious or political – “lovers rock” for example, focuses on romantic relationships – much of it is.

A key moment in Jamaican political history (as well as the story of reggae) happened on April 22 1978 at the One Love Concert hosted by Bob Marley at The National Stadium in Kingston.



RASTAFARIAN PROPHET: Marcus Garvey.

Marley famously called bitter political rivals Michael Manley and Edward Seaga to the stage and persuaded them to join hands. Few other people could have done this. Although the concert did not bring an end to the turmoil in Jamaica, it did showcase the significance of reggae as a political and cultural force.

It is of particular significance that reggae is inextricably related to the religion of Rastafari, which emerged as a direct response to oppression within Jamaican colonial society. Often articulating the ideas of Jamaican political activist Marcus Garvey, who is understood by Rastafarians to be a prophet, Rasta musicians such as Marley and Burning Spear developed roots reggae as a vehicle for their religio-political messages.

Even if some musicians are not committed Rastafarians, they typically identify with the movement’s ideas and culture. In particular, many wear dreadlocks, consider smoking “the herb” (cannabis) to be a sacrament, and reference the religio-political dualism of Zion and Babylon (the social systems of the righteous and the unrighteous). There is a hope often articulated within reggae of a better world following Armageddon and the fall of Babylon. “Babylon your throne gone down”, declared Marley in his

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REGGAE HERO: Peter Tosh.

1973 song, *Rasta Man Chant*. These biblical ideas are also creatively applied to a range of political issues, from local injustices to climate change and the nuclear arms race.

Sometimes reggae itself is understood to be a form of direct action, in that musicians are understood to “chant down Babylon”. As Ziggy Marley put it: “Babylon [is] a devil system ... who cause so much problems on the face of the Earth ... And by ‘chanting down’ I mean by putting positive messages out there. That is the way we’ll fight a negative with a positive”.

Examples of this include Yabby You’s *Chant Down Babylon Kingdom* and of course, Marley’s own *Chant Down Babylon*. This type of thinking is rooted in Jamaican history. Following violent confrontations with the police during the 1940s and 1950s, Rasta elders – particularly Mortimer Planno – appealed to Jamaican academics to study Rastafari in order to increase popular understanding and tolerance. And in 1960, three scholars (MG. Smith, Roy Augier and Rex Nettelford) published their *Report on the Rastafarian Movement* in Kingston, Jamaica.

For Rastas, the destruction of Babylon came to be interpreted less in terms of a violent overthrow of oppressive social structures and more in terms of a conversion to new ways of thinking, central to which was the strategic primacy assumed by the arts. Reggae emerged as part of this process.

From the outset, therefore, it was understood by many to be far more than simply “pop music”. It was “rebel music”, a powerful political tool for the peaceful resistance of oppression.

The potency of reggae as an educational and inspirational force became conspicuous shortly after its arrival in Britain. In 1976 it was central to the founding of the Rock Against Racism campaign and by the late 1970s, reggae, dub, ska, and the terminology of Rastafari were informing punk culture as part of an emerging “dread culture of resistance”.

For example, in 1979, the same year that witnessed the Southall race riots, during which a teacher, Blair Peach, was killed, the British punk band The Ruts released their dub reggae influenced single *Jah War*, on which they sang, “the air was thick with the smell of oppression”.

The Ruts subsequently achieved chart success with *Babylon’s Burning*. While some may have been bemused by the reference, for their fans – for whom punk and reggae were first cousins at the very least – the message was obvious: Babylon was the principally white political establishment, which oppressed ethnic minorities and the unemployed poor of the inner cities, and which would eventually be dismantled.

At the same time, Jamaicans who had moved to Britain in their childhood, such as Linton Kwesi Johnson, used a creative blend of poetry and reggae to comment on the injustices they faced: “Inglan is a bitch, dere’s no escapin it.” One of Johnson’s poems commented specifically on the murder of Peach, *Reggae Fi Peach*. Since then, reggae music has continued to “speak truth to power” – from challenging domestic abuse to protesting against apartheid in South Africa.

For these political, religious and cultural reasons – as much as for the music itself – UNESCO was right to finally give reggae the recognition it deserves. **CT**

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Photos from *Dr. Blankman's New York*, by Tod Papageorge, published by Steidl www.steidl.de

New York moments

'Free with a Leica in the streets of my newly-adopted home'

TOD Papegeorge's "new" work, *Dr. Blankman's New York* documents the critical moment in the photographer's early career, when he first shot pictures in colour in New York during the late 1960s.

Papageorge – 25 years old and newly arrived in New York City – was encouraged by Gerry Winogrand and Joel Meyerowitz, fellow street photographers, to seek paying magazine work by developing a body of work in colour. It was a failed experiment: he mainly produced still-life pictures with little commercial appeal, spotlighting canned hams in shop windows and political posters.

But colour offered him an opportunity to work in a new medium at a time of great social, political

and cultural change. "I'd like to think that, in *Dr. Blankman's New York*, you'll find a persuasive account of what it meant for me to be free with a Leica in the streets of my newly adopted home of Manhattan," writes Papageorge, "a record drawn with Kodachrome film and its rich, saturated colours."

Fifty years later, these photos provide an affable flashback to the beginning of Papageorge's career as one of the leading artist-chroniclers of an America that struggled to negotiate a path through the twin agonies of Vietnam and the assassination of a president, then endured several decades of carefree, if uncertain, self-indulgence before diving headlong into a post-9/11 swamp of fear, anger and flailing retribution. **CT**

TOD PAPAGEORGE

Photos from Dr Blankman's New York, by Todd Papageorge, published by Steidl www.steidl.de



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\$30 (Amazon.com)

Spanish vote is a lesson for the Left

The path to success will require re-thinking the strategy of the past 30 years

38

In what seems a replay of recent German and Italian elections, an openly authoritarian and racist party made major electoral gains in Spain's most populous province, Andalusia, helping to dethrone the Socialist Party that had dominated the southern region for 36 years. Vox (Voice) – a party that stands for “Spain First,” restrictions on women's rights, ending abortion, stopping immigration and dismantling the country's regional governments – won almost 11 percent of the vote. The party is in negotiations to be part of a ruling rightwing coalition, while left parties are calling for an “anti-fascist front”. It's as if the old Spanish dictator Francisco Franco had arisen from his tomb in the “Valley of the Fallen” and was again marching on Madrid.

Actually, the results were not so much “stunning” – the British *Independent's* headline on the election – as a case of chickens coming home to roost, and a sobering lesson for centre-left and left forces in Europe.

The December 2 vote saw the centre-left Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) lose 14 seats in the regional parliament and the leftist alliance, Adelante Andalucía, drop three. The conservative Popular Party (PP) also lost seven seats, but, allied with Vox and the rightwing Ciudadanos (Citizens) Party, the right now has enough seats to take power. It was the worst showing in PSOE's history, and, while it is still the largest party in Andalucía, it will have to go into opposition.

On one level, the Andalusian elections do look like Germany, where the neo-fascist Alternative for Germany (AfG) took 94 seats in the Bundestag, and

Italy, where the rightwing, xenophobic Northern League is sharing power with the centre-right Five Star Movement.

There are certainly parallels to both countries, but there are also major differences that are uniquely Spanish. What is similar is the anger at the conventional centre-right and centre-left parties that have enforced a decade of misery on their populations. Centre-left parties like the Democratic Party in Italy and the Social Democratic Party in Germany bought into the failed strategy of neo-liberalism that called for austerity, regressive taxes, privatization of public resources and painful cutbacks in social services as a strategy for getting out of debt. Not only was it hard for most people to see a difference between the centre-left and the centre-right, many times the parties governed jointly, as they did in Germany. Andalucía's Socialists were in an alliance with Ciudadanos.

However, the rise of parties like Vox and the AfG has less to do with a surge from the right than as a collapse of the centre-right and centre-left. The Spanish Socialists did badly, but so did the rightwing Popular Party. In Germany, both the centre-right and the centre-left took a beating.

In the aftermath of the Andalusian debacle, Susana Diaz, leader of the PSOE in Andalucía, called for a “firewall” against the right. But Diaz helped blow a hole in that “firewall” in the first place with politics that alienated much of the Socialist's long-time constituency. In 2016 Diaz led a rightist coup in the PSOE that dethroned General Secretary Pedro Sanchez because he was trying to cobble together

a coalition with the Leftist Podemos Party, the Basques, and Catalan separatists.

After ousting Sanchez, Diaz allowed Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy to form a government and pass an austerity budget. Making common cause with the PP was apparently too much for the SPOE's rank and file, and they returned Sanchez to his old post seven months later. The Socialist rank and file also seems to have sat on their hands in the Andalucian election. Only 58.6 percent of the electorate turned out and there were a considerable number of abstentions and blank ballots in traditionally Socialist strongholds.

The leftist AA took a hit as well, but that was in part due to some infighting in Podemos, and the Party did not mobilise significant forces on the ground. And because Podemos kept its distance from the crisis in Catalonia, it ceded the issue of separatism to the right, particularly Ciudadanos, which wrapped itself in the Spanish flag.

Podemos actually has a principled position on Catalan independence: it opposes it, but thinks the matter should be up to the Catalans. It also supports greater cultural and economic autonomy for Spain's richest province. But when Rajoy unleashed the police on the October 2017 independence referendum, beating voters and arresting Catalan leaders, Podemos merely condemned the violence. The Socialists supported Rajoy, although they, too, expressed discomfort with the actions of the police.

Ciudadanos, on the other hand, enthusiastically supported the violent response, even provoking it. According to Thomas Harrington, a professor of Iberian Studies at Trinity College in Hartford, CN and an expert on Catalonia, Ciudadano members' systematically removed yellow ribbons that Catalans had put up to protest the imprisonment of Catalan leaders.

The PSOE had a generally progressive economic program, but it appears many Spaniards don't believe them. The Leftist AA had a much better programme, but was hobbled by internal problems and downplayed the Catalan issue. That left a clear field for Ciudadanos, which hammered away at the Catalan separatists. Ciudadanos ended up getting 18.3 percent of the vote, more than double what it got in the last election. The PSOE and PP are still the two largest parties in the province.

As for Vox, it is surely disturbing that such an antediluvian party could get 10.5 percent of the vote, but it would be a mistake to think that Franco is back. In fact, he never went away. When the dictator died in 1975 the Spaniards buried the horrors of the 1936-39 civil war and the ensuing repression, rather than trying to come to terms with them: some 200,000 political dissidents executed, 500,000 exiled, and 400,000 sent to concentration camps.

Vox tapped into that section of the population that opposes the "Historical Memory Law" condemning the Franco regime, and still gathers at Valley of the Fallen or in town squares to chant fascist slogans and give the stiff-arm salute. But the party is small, around 7,000, and part of the reason it did well was because of extensive media coverage. Most the Party's votes came from PP strongholds in wealthy neighbourhoods.

Following the election, thousands of people poured into the streets of Seville, Granada and Malaga to chant "fascists out."

Certainly the European right is scary, particularly in Spain, Italy, Germany, Greece, Austria and France. It has absconded with some of the left's programmes, like ending austerity, a guaranteed wage, and resisting the coercive power of the European Union. Once elected, of course, it will jettison those issues, just as the Nazis and fascists did in pre-war Germany and Italy. And removing them will not be easy, since their only commitment to democracy is as a tool to chisel their way into power.

The centre-left and the left are still formidable forces in Europe, and their programmes do address the crisis of unemployment, growing economic disparity, and weakening social safety nets. But the path to success will require re-thinking the strategy of the past 30 years and fighting for programs like those the British Labour Party adopted under Jeremy Corbyn: rolling back the privatisation of public resources, a graduated tax scale based on wealth, investments in education, health, housing and infrastructure, raising the minimum wage, encouraging unions, and seriously tackling the existential issue of climate change. **CT**

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

BARRY LANDO

George HW Bush's disastrous legacy

'Smart, pragmatic leader' made the biggest foreign policy blunder by an American president (until his son came along)

THE media has been filled with tributes to the late President George HW Bush. He is portrayed as a smart, pragmatic leader, who chose wise counsellors like James Baker – very different from his willful son, George W Bush, who led the US into a disastrous attack on Iraq in 2003, the most fateful foreign policy blunder ever made by an American leader.

The fact, however, is that it was the blundering of George HW Bush and Baker in 1990 that set the stage for George W's calamitous move 13 years later.

It was Papa Bush, after all, who sent American troops half way around the world to launch the First Gulf War – an error of tragic proportions; responsible in its own way for much of the horror that afflicts the Greater Middle East (and America) to this day.

Ironically, it happened just as the US seemed about to become king of the global roost – the greatest military power the planet had ever known. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was no power around to challenge US hegemony. It was left to America to blight its own future.

What is also extraordinary about the First Gulf War is that – like the outbreak of World War I – it was all so unnecessary, the result of feckless leadership, in-

ept diplomacy and shocking miscalculations by both leaders – Saddam Hussein and George HW Bush.

Saddam's ignorance can be understood: a brutal dictator, surrounded for the most part by sycophants, the Iraqi president knew little of the outside world. George HW Bush, on the other hand, had been Ambassador to China where I had dinner with him and was impressed by his keen desire to know more about that country and its leader. Then he became head of the CIA, and afterwards, as president, had an impressive stable of experienced advisors and could also draw upon the US's vast intelligence capacities.

The problem, however, in the summer of 1990 was that Bush and his top aides were obsessed by the disintegrating Soviet empire. They were largely oblivious to the political storm that was brewing in the Gulf between Saddam Hussein and the leaders of Kuwait.

Saddam had just "won" an incredibly bloody nine-year war with Iran, only to find himself in a mounting feud with his immensely wealthy Gulf neighbour, Kuwait.

Saddam's charges against the Kuwaitis were not at all unreasonable. For starters, they were beggaring Iraq's ravaged economy by manipulating the price of





The horror of Bush's war on Iraq

Ken Jarecke's photo of a dead Iraqi soldier was regarded by many editors as too disturbing to print. But it later became one of the most famous images of the first Gulf War. Jarecke, said, "If I don't photograph this, people like my mom will think war is what they see on TV".

oil. They were also demanding that the bankrupt Iraq pay back huge loans Kuwait had made to help finance Baghdad's war against Iran.

As Saddam saw it, by attacking revolutionary Iran, he had been defending Kuwait's interests as well. But now that Iran was defeated, and Iraq was bled white, the Kuwaitis wanted their money back.

The Kuwaitis dismissed Saddam's claims and continued to demand their loans be repaid. Riled by what he saw as their arrogant, aggressive stance, Saddam became increasingly belligerent.

At the same time, however, as he was mobilising his troops, the Iraqi dictator was attempting to figure out how the US would react if he actually proceeded to invade Kuwait. He never got a clear signal. The blame for that is usually laid at the feet of April Glaspie, America's ambassador at the time. Saddam called her to the Foreign Ministry, railed about the Kuwaitis, and made vague references to his aggressive plans. She replied with the standard line, that the US had no interest in border disputes between Iraq and Kuwait. Washington hoped that everything could be settled peacefully.

But by not flashing a red light, Ambassador

Glaspie was simply relaying the very confused and self-contradictory policies of the George HW Bush administration itself.

That's also something of an irony, since, as we've said, Papa Bush is lauded by many to this day for his supposedly incisive, cool-headed skills, particularly when contrasted with his impetuous, hair-trigger son, George W.

But in the summer of 1990, the elder Bush and his advisors had no clearly defined views on how the US would react to an invasion of Kuwait. Indeed, officials much more senior than Glaspie made it clear that the US had no military commitment to defend Iraq's oil-rich neighbour.

Those officials included George HW himself. He'd been muddling along for years trying to deal with Saddam, at first seeing him as America's ally in the war against Iran and a market for American goods; at other times as a corrupt, untrustworthy and incredibly brutal megalomaniac. In the summer of 1990, he was still unsure how to handle the Iraqi dictator.

Thus, on July 27, 1990, as Saddam's threats against Kuwait became ever more strident, Presi-

dent Bush wrote a letter to the Iraqi president -- a letter so bland and conciliatory, that Paul Wolfowitz, attempted -- unsuccessfully -- to have it cancelled.

The upshot, as Congressman Lee Hamilton, former chairman of the House International Relations Committee told me: “We did not draw a firm line in the sand. It’s not difficult. What is clear to me is at the highest levels of the US government we did not convey strongly and clearly to Saddam Hussein that we would react militarily if he went across that border”.

But, that’s only the half of it.

Incredibly, even as some American officials were adamant that the US had no commitments to Kuwait, other senior Americans were reassuring top Kuwaitis that the US was totally in their corner, and urged them not to buckle to the Iraqi leader’s demands.

One of those was General Norman Schwarzkopf, then American commander for the Gulf region, who personally told Kuwaiti officials that the US had their back. The director of the CIA was also encouraging Kuwaiti them to keep the economic strangle hold on Saddam.

When it finally came, Saddam’s August 2, 1990 invasion of Kuwait caught George HW Bush and his team flat-footed. The American president scrambled for some kind of response. Though he condemned the invasion, Bush told a reporter, “We’re not discussing intervention”.

But, once he had finally made the decision to send in the troops, he spurned serious negotiations. According to a later investigation by the US Congress, a diplomatic solution satisfactory to the interests of the united States may well have been possible in the period following the invasion – had the White House been interested in diplomacy. It wasn’t.

No longer deterred by the now crumbling Soviet Union, the US president felt free to deploy America’s massive military might half way across the globe.

He would rid the world, he grandly declared, of a tyrant “worse than Hitler”. This, mind you, was the same leader that the US had backed with

battlefield intelligence and weapons in the war against Iran.

At the beginning, in an eerie fashion, Papa Bush’s fierce determination to destroy Saddam Hussein in 1990 matched George W’s obsession with Saddam 13 years later.

And just as George Bush’s decision to invade Iraq in 2003, would turn out to be an unmitigated disaster for the United States, so was his father’s decision in August 1990 to dispatch more than 150,000 troops to Saudi Arabia.

It was that act, more than anything else, that provoked Osama Bin Laden to declare al-Qaeda’s war on America – the “distant enemy”. It led directly to al-Qaeda’s attacks on US targets in the Gulf, in Africa, and then in New York on 9/11.

The reason the Saudi rulers finally reluctantly agreed to accept those “infidel” foreign troops was their fear – encouraged by the Bush administration – that Saddam’s troops in Kuwait were poised to invade Saudi Arabia.

To convince the Saudis of that threat, then Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney flew to Riyadh. He took with him satellite photographs that supposedly showed Iraqi armoured forces massed in offensive positions, ready to strike the Saudis.

But were they? Or did the administration of George HW Bush (and Dick Cheney) use the same kind of trumped up scare tactics in 1990 to justify deploying US troops to Saudi Arabia, as George W. Bush (and Vice President Dick Cheney) employed to justify the invasion of Iraq in 2003?

Or was Saddam Hussein really planning to attack Saudi Arabia? As soon as that charge was raised, Saddam and his top officials insisted to anyone who would listen that he had no intention of going beyond Kuwait. Indeed, he made it clear, as soon as he understood that Bush was serious, that he was planning to withdraw from Kuwait as well, as soon as he could find a face-saving exit. His statements, however, were ignored by the White House and most of the mainstream US media.

What serious evidence did the US have that Saddam was planning to invade Saudi Arabia? It’s not at all clear they had any. After the invasion, a number of news organisations obtained commercial satellite photographs of Iraqi forces in Kuwait

and had them examined by skilled photo analysts, veterans of the US intelligence community. They found no signs of the supposed massive Iraqi troop build-up anywhere near the Saudi border; nor for that matter anywhere in Kuwait.

Indeed, on August 9, 1990, Defense Department spokesman Peter Williams admitted that the Iraqi forces in Kuwait “seem to be in a defensive posture.” And at the end of the first week after the invasion, US military analysts were surprised to see that Saddam had already begun moving his elite Republican Guard units north, back to Iraq. “They were headed out of Kuwait”, one American expert said.

After the Gulf War, two expert military authorities concluded that, apart from the case of one defector who claimed to have a sketch of a battle plan, “there is no other evidence that Baghdad ever intended to do anything other than hold what it had already captured”.

Neither the CIA nor the Defense Intelligence Agency thought it probable that Iraq would actually invade Saudi Arabia. As Colin Powell himself later conceded, if Iraq had wanted to invade Saudi Arabia, it had a long border with that country; there was no need to go through Kuwait.

A top American commander admitted to *Newsday* that the Pentagon had seriously exaggerated the number of Iraq troops. “There was a great disinformation campaign surrounding this war”, he admitted.

The deceit and woeful blunders didn’t end there. With Saddam’s forces trounced in Kuwait, on February 15, 1991, George HW Bush called for the Iraqis to rise up and overthrow Saddam. His appeal was broadcast by radio, and also spelled out in millions of leaflets dropped over the country by American helicopters. But, when the Shiites and Kurds responded, and it looked as if their revolt would be successful, Bush not only turned his back on the rebels, but, by allowing Saddam’s ‘defeated’ forces to continue to fly their helicopter gunships, while forbidding US forces in Iraq to aid the rebels in any way, the US actually helped the Iraqi dictator crush the uprising, with horrific results.

Eventually, because of dramatic TV coverage of the Kurd’s plight, Bush was obliged to establish a no-fly zone in the north to protect the Kurds. Since there were no TV cameras in the South, he did nothing to prevent the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Shiites.

As the killing was still going on, the American president would also deny – falsely – that he had ever called for the revolt. The reason usually given for his spurning the rebels was fear that, if the Shiites took power, it would dangerously increase Iran’s influence. Bush wanted Saddam out. But he wanted him replaced by a military backed regime amenable to American interests.

There were later leaks by the administration that the Saudis and Turks also warned Bush not to back the uprising because of their fears of Iran. Later, however, many Saudis and Turks have denied that version.

Meanwhile, Saddam Hussein remained in power.

Thus, it was that in 2003, George W. Bush, encouraged by Vice President Cheney and other neo-con advisors, used the 9/11 attack by al-Qaeda, which was based in Afghanistan, as an excuse to invade Iraq and complete the Bush family’s unfinished business of ridding the world of Saddam Hussein – a mission that the younger Bush felt his father didn’t have the guts to carry out.

He showed the old man.

And today, more than a quarter of a century after the first Gulf War, from Syria to Iraq to Afghanistan to Yemen, after a horrific waste of millions of lives and trillions of dollars, America remains mired in its never ending, budget-draining, globe-spanning War Against Terror. **CT**

Barry Lando spent 25 years as an award-winning investigative producer with 60 Minutes. He is the author of Web of Deceit: The History of Western Complicity in Iraq, from Churchill to Kennedy to George W. Bush. and The Watchman’s File, a novel about America and Israel’s most closely-guarded secret (It’s not the bomb). He is currently completing a sequel, Unknown Unknowns, about a TV correspondent’s determination to investigate his own erroneous report about war crimes in Iraq.

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**



Read the digital editions of Frontline, exactly as they were published, free of charge, at

www.issuu.com/frontline.south

ColdType Insights

- SARAH KASTNER
- PIERS ROBINSON
- PETCOFF & KATCH
- SANDY TOLAN

Different treatment for Ahd and Malala

Sarah Kastner looks at the West's response to two young girls fighting for their countries' rights and freedoms

A**FTER** Israeli forces shot her 15-year-old cousin in the head with a rubber bullet last December, Ahd Tamimi, a Palestinian girl from Nabi Saleh in the West Bank, stood up to the occupying Israeli forces and was arrested and charged for slapping a soldier. The story of the activist went viral.

But what Ahd was fighting for was largely buried beneath sensationalised media representations of her. Her story is unlikely to circulate in the same elevated spaces granted to Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani girl who survived a brutal attack on her school by the Taliban, although both Ahd and Malala are fighting for simi-

lar rights and freedoms. Both are young women facing down brutal military repression at the hands of fully-armed men, yet their stories could not have been received more differently.

The reasons for our complicated responses to Malala and Ahd's stories are as multi-layered as the political realities that shape their lives. They encapsulate a range of ideas about gender and the girl-child, nationalism and education, and about forms of activism that are palatable

and therefore deemed legitimate and those which are not.

Both Malala and Ahd refuse to be victims. Malala has dedicated her life to advocating for girls' education. Her story sends powerful and inspiring messages to girls around the world – girls like Ahd, who dream of being a lawyer. Ahd turned the Israeli female prison unit where she was held into a school, where she and other incarcerated Palestinian women read and studied legal texts.

But Malala's platform also has the contours of a story that can buttress imperialist worldviews and justify militarised interventions in Asia. The use of rhetoric about saving women and children in the Middle East by Western politicians is one of the ways that liberalism appeals to Western emotions to garner support for the US-led "War on Terror," as the scholar Maya Mikdashi writes.

Ahd is too empowered, too unmanageable and altogether too adulterated by her community's struggle to appeal widely to liberal sympathies in the West. She is also too blonde, according to UK Professor Yosefa Loshitzky, who characterises Ahd as someone who completely disrupts the gendered

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Malala Yousafzai (above) and Ahd Tamini



Photos: Wikimedia

and racial logics of the Israeli occupation.

The point isn't that Malala doesn't deserve the platform she's been given, but that while we celebrate Malala's advocacy for girls' education, we must ask why that platform is not extended to children like Ahd. Anything less is a disservice to them both.

Malala's status as a worthy cause has a critical relationship to Ahd's status as an exception to that cause. The differences between the reception of Malala and Ahd in the global cultural marketplace illustrate this point in fairly stark terms: Malala's activism won her the Nobel Prize, and took her to Oxford, while Ahd's activism landed her in an Israeli prison.

46 Prof. Shanila Khoja-Mooji writes that Ahd's struggle, and the way it has been sidelined in the West by feminist and human rights groups, "exposes the West's selective humanitarianism".

Malala's story emerged amid the politics of hope that characterised President Barack Obama's campaign. She won the Nobel Prize in 2014. In 2016, the year Trump was elected, Ahd was denied a visa to the United States to be part of the speaking tour, "No Child Behind Bars/Living Resistance".

Whether the Obama administration would have had the political courage to grant Ahd a visa is impossible to know. Obama's gestures of support for Palestinians were largely superficial, while his financial support for the Israeli military was

unwavering.

By comparing Ahd and Malala, we come closer to understanding the limits and even the failure of liberal visions of social progress in the 21st-century. Ahd is a classic case of how American liberalism's blind spots breed discontent around the world.

Malala's advocacy circulates in a neoliberal economy in which much of the value of her story has become something that communicates the power of the individual to overcome extreme hardship and to effect social change against an enemy long reviled by the West. In this transaction, the politics that underwrite her suffering are managed by focusing on her personal story of survival.

In her story is redemption for the West, whose role in the violence that harmed her (and thousands of girls like her) is mitigated by their efforts to uplift her. In Malala's story of fighting for the right to education, as a girl, the Western media and political machinery finds a story that chimes powerfully with arguments used to bolster the US-led military invasion of Afghanistan.

In this sense, Malala's message has been co-opted by the neoliberal idea that everyone can gain access to the same opportunities, so long as they follow the proper procedures. In her case, by fighting an enemy recognisable to us, Malala gains access to recognition, including

entry to the oldest university in the country that colonised what is now Pakistan.

By contrast, Ahd cannot perform her suffering in ways that appeal to the paternalistic liberal imagination. Ahd's story cannot be yoked to the Janus-faced work of neoliberalism, global development and military intervention.

Ahd's enemy – the Israeli army that maintains and deepens the illegal military occupation of her country – can rarely be recognised in dominant Western discussions without accusations of anti-Jewish sentiments.

Stories like Ahd's that insist on collective forms of liberation over individual liberation, draw our attention to diffuse and entrenched systems of oppression that cannot be remedied through individual acts of uplift.

"There is no justice under occupation and this court is illegal", Ahd told her prosecutors, as she smiled and the international media captured the scene for the world to see.

Ahd's smile in those photos unsettles liberal conceptions of suffering that separate the rights of the individual from their social, political and economic making. Wringing our hands and watching from the West, we are implicated in the sham of liberal justice. **CT**

Sarah Kastner is SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow at York University, Toronto. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

Conspiracy theory? Another look at 9/11

Book offers a challenge for mainstream academics and journalists to ask substantial questions, says **Piers Robinson**

ALTHOUGH not a topic for polite conversation, nor a widely recognised “acceptable” issue for mainstream academics and journalists, the issue of 9/11 and the multiple questions that persist with respect to this transformative event continue to bubble under the surface. 9/11 ushered in the global “war on terror”, shaping the geo-political agenda of Western governments for almost two decades now and having a deleterious impact on civil liberties across Western liberal democratic states. Torture has been used as part of official policy and there is bulk data collection and surveillance of entire populations.

In recent years, further information has come into the public domain, via the UK Chilcot report regarding the formative stages of the post 9/11 “war on terror”: Within days of 9/11 having occurred a British embassy cable reported that “the ‘regime-change hawks’ in Washington are arguing that a coalition put together for one purpose (against international terrorism) could be used to clear up other problems in the region”; Chilcot also published a Bush-Blair communication from the aftermath of 9/11 which discussed phase

9/11 UNMASKED

David Ray Griffin & Elizabeth Woodworth

Olive Branch, \$20

two of the “war on terror” and indicated debate over when to “hit” countries unconnected with Al Qaeda, such as Iraq, Syria and Iran.

Broadly speaking, Chilcot corroborated former Supreme Allied Commander Wesley Clark’s claim that he was informed, immediately after 9/11, that seven countries, including Syria, were to be “taken out” in five years.

It is against this backdrop that *9/11 Unmasked* by David Ray Griffin and Elizabeth Woodworth now emerges. The book is the culmination of seven years work by the 9/11 Consensus Panel which includes 23 experts from fields including physics, chemistry, structural engineering, aeronautical engineering, piloting, airplane crash investigation, medicine, journalism, psychology, and religion. The panel has examined and reviewed a wide variety of evidence which brings into question the official narrative regarding 9/11 and em-

ployed a standard “best-evidence consensus model” commonly used in science and medicine in which each “consensus point” was only accepted after three rounds of review and a vote of at least 85 percent.

The results, detailed and fully referenced, are presented in this book and cover remarkably wide and disparate areas in which the official narrative, as sanctioned by the official *9/11 Commission Report*, are questioned. These areas include questions regarding the collapse of the Twin Towers and the third building, WTC7, which collapsed much later in the day, the attack on the Pentagon, the hijacked flights, US military exercises on and before 9/11, the activities of key military and political leaders, the relationship between the alleged hijackers and Osama bin Laden and evidence concerning insider trading.

The question now, both for the academy and for journalists, is whether this accumulation of substantial questions can be ignored any longer, especially given the evidence we now have that the so-called “war on terror” was exploited, right from the start, in order to engage in a series of regime-change wars. We already have had the notable establishment figures Senator Bob Grahame and CIA’s Bob Baer publicly raising questions regarding, for example, alleged Saudi involvement in 9/11 while a recent book by Duffy and Nowosielski also raises questions with regard to the actions of the CIA in relation to 9/11.

In addition, there is an abundance of activity that has emerged from professional-based organisations: the Lawyers' Committee for 9/11 Inquiry has recently filed a Grand Jury petition with the US Attorney in Manhattan, the Bobby McIlvaine Act is being promoted to congress persons by Architects and Engineers for 9/11 Truth, and the University of Alaska Fairbanks study on the WTC7 collapse is due to report shortly.

The diligent and painstaking work by Griffin and Woodworth and the 9/11 Consensus Panel lays down a serious challenge for mainstream academics and journalists to start to ask sub-

stantial questions about 9/11 and to examine the event in a way that enables there to be a full, accurate and truthful rendering of the events in question. If they are true to the ideals of their respective professions, journalists and academics will address these difficult questions, search for the facts, and speak truth to power. Failure to do so will, in the final analysis, render much of these professions defunct and irrelevant. **CT**

Professor Piers Robinson
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Cuomo and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio took a pause from their bitter and destructive rivalry to come together in defense of the Amazon deal as a victory for New York in its economic cage match against the other 49 states.

For these two supposedly liberal Democrats, handing over taxpayer money to Jeff Bezos — the actual richest person in history — whose company's horrible treatment of warehouse workers and creepy collaboration with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on facial recognition software is making it the new villain of 21st century capitalism — is simply part of progressive governance.

"Nothing in the Amazon transaction is new," Cuomo wrote in an unusual "op-ed" on the governor's website. "[T]ax incentives ... are long-standing programs supported by both Democrats and Republicans in both the city and the state."

According to Cuomo, only extremists on the right and left could find any fault with funnelling government revenue to a billionaire. "The socialists argue that we gave a \$1 billion grant to one of the richest men in the country," he wrote, "and that we should have given that money to the poor and the needy."

Um ... yes. That's precisely what socialists propose.

While Cuomo stayed on brand as liberalism's menacing bouncer determined to keep out any left-wing riffraff, de Blasio

48 NYC shells of billions to the Amazon beast

Aaron Petcoff and Danny Katch look at the numbers behind the deal to locate Amazon's new headquarters

WHEN New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo publicly offered to change his first name to "Amazon," it sounded like a weird gag mocking the clumsy desperation of a mainstream politician seeking corporate goodwill.

But no, in the final days of the nationwide municipal groveling contest that Amazon inaugurated last year over which city would be graced with its second headquarters (HQ2), Cuomo actually told reporters he'd be fine with the name "Amazon Cuomo"

if it meant landing those jobs.

As we all now know, the company ended up making the entirely predictable decision to select two locations, Queens and Northern Virginia, adjacent to the business and political capitals of the US

The fact that Amazon's decision was based on the unique advantages offered by New York City and Washington, DC, makes even more outrageous the ransom of public giveaways it was able to demand — including \$3 billion from New York alone in the form of tax breaks and other incentives.

Insights

played his typical role of the arrogant NGO administrator who has no idea that he sounds like a complete fool.

Speaking about Amazon agreeing to hold job fairs and resume-building workshops in the nearby Queensbridge housing projects, the mayor gushed, “One of the biggest companies on earth next to the biggest public housing development in the United States — the synergy is going to be extraordinary.” But the memorandum of understanding published by Amazon makes no mention of any local hiring mandate.

De Blasio also didn’t mention that among the collateral damage from this synergy are 1,500 affordable housing units that were to be built on the site given to Amazon — or the nearly 300 percent increase in searches for neighbourhood real estate reported by StreetEasy.

Across the country, state governments spend up to \$90-billion a year competing with each other to retain or attract businesses. As Derek Thompson notes in *The Atlantic*, that’s more than the federal government spends on housing, education or infrastructure.

New York spends over \$8 billion annually on these business incentive packages, a major part of Cuomo’s economic policy since he took office in 2011. But while Cuomo’s New York spends the second-highest percentage of its economy on business incentives, a recent study concluded that these incentives “might tip the location of six percent of the firms given incentives; the other 94 percent is economic activity that would have

occurred anyway.”

For example, tax breaks for the TV and film industry give away an incredible \$42,000 for every job created — often for shows that would probably never leave New York. As Joseph Spector of the *Democrat & Chronicle* asked, “does Saturday Night Live really need our money to stay in New York?”

But while Andrew Cuomo may be a particularly gullible mark for corporate con artists, the Amazon headquarters sweepstakes shows that he has major rivals in cities and states across the country.

Over 200 city and state governments across North America jumped into the bidding war over the course of 14 months. Montgomery County, Maryland, offered Amazon an astounding \$8.5 billion in tax breaks. Atlanta offered billions, plus separate train cars for company employees. (No word on how the city’s Martin Luther King Center felt about the proposal for segregated seating on public transit.)

Many cities and regions offered Amazon even more incentives than New York and Virginia, but it turns out that the company may have cared less about tax breaks than they did about gathering the information that each region provided as part of its proposals about local infrastructure plans, demographics, zoning codes and more — priceless data for a company trying to take over vast swaths of the US economy.

“I think they had this in mind

from day one,” said urban theorist Richard Florida to CBS News.

“This was about crowdsourcing data...This was never about an individual HQ2.”

One thing should be immediately made clear: nothing is yet set in stone. The only details that have been revealed are from Amazon’s own memorandum of understanding, which should not be confused with a binding contract.

Already, several modestly sized protests have taken place and more are being planned, along with a number of community forums. Coworker.org and the Democratic Socialists of America’s working group of tech workers have released a pledge asking that New York area tech workers boycott working for Amazon.

Newly elected left-wing Democrats like congressional Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, state Sen. Julia Salazar and state Rep. Catalina Cruz have strongly opposed the deal, as have a number of other local officials who previously expressed support for New York City’s Amazon bid — a reflection of the degree of popular anger against such a blatant corporate giveaway.

While no unified set of demands have yet emerged, a number of clear themes have emerged from the protests and press conferences coming from the various communities and movements affected by this decision.

First, there should be no public givebacks to Amazon, period. In fact, Amazon already makes enormous profit from public resources and should make direct payments

into funds for affordable housing, transit, health care and education. We should also demand that Amazon end all marketing and business with ICE, and the legal protections for Amazon's workforce must be enforced.

It's also important to fight for an end to the shady back-room deal-making by Cuomo and de Blasio, and fight for any new negotiations to take place in public view, with public input, and with the public's democratic approval. This is especially important given the likelihood that some of the politicians, unions and community groups currently opposing the deal are primarily looking to negotiate a few concessions for their constituents and members before eventually coming on board.

50 **T**he fight against Amazon's expansion into New York City has the potential to be a powerful force that draws together various social justice movements, including housing and transit activism; immigrant rights; the growing movement of tech workers; and a slowly reinvigorating labor movement.

Already, it's revealed how stunningly out of touch Democrats like Cuomo and de Blasio are with the class anger that shapes all of politics in 2018.

Only a few years ago, de Blasio won an upset mayoral victory with a campaign theme that New York was a "tale of two cities." Today he can't seem to understand why working-class New Yorkers who everyday have to descend into the hell of the city's crumbling

subway system are pissed that their tax dollars are being used to build Jeff Bezos a helipad.

Meanwhile, the typical Queens household earns under \$60,000 in income, while the typical Queens rent requires a household income of \$88,000 — and that's before Amazon comes in. Over 60 percent of households in the Queensbridge Houses rely on food stamps.

So yes, Andrew Cuomo, socialists think we should take that money you're trying to give to Amazon and give it to the New

Yorkers for whom that money would actually make a world of difference — \$3 billion comes out to over \$1,000 for every adult and child living under the state's miserably low poverty line.

We need to build a movement that forces every politician in New York to explain why they want to use desperately needed funds to instead aid and abet Jeff Bezos's plan to take over the world. **CT**

This article first appeared in the Socialist Worker at www.socialistworker.com

The Thought Police on Israel/Palestine

City is wrong to change mind on screening provocative documentary on birth of Israel, writes **Sandy Tolan**

ON December 12, in keeping with its image as a progressive leader in social policy, the City of West Hollywood, Calif., was scheduled to host a film screening and panel discussion on the painful birth of Israel and the Palestinian refugee crisis. Instead, the city is playing censor, "postponing" the event until further notice.

The screening of the new documentary, *1948: Creation and Catastrophe*, and panel, which I was invited to join, are part of West Hollywood's Human Rights Speaker Series, co-sponsored by PBS SoCal. But after spurious allegations of anti-Semitism

by local rabbi Denise Eger, the city pulled the plug. City Council member Lindsey Horvath said she didn't want West Hollywood to become a "refuge for hate".

The real issue here, as it is increasingly in public forums and media across America, is who gets to tell the story. West Hollywood is taking the word of a constituent with a keenly vested interest — Rabbi Eger, of West Hollywood's Congregation Kol Ami is a staunch supporter of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and its efforts to lobby Congress and silence critics of Israel, often by accusing them of antisemitism.

Insights

Rabbi Eger appears to have cut and pasted accusations against one of the film's producers, Dr. Ahlam Muhtaseb, communications professor at Cal State-San Bernardino, from Canary Mission, a shadowy blacklist that targets critics of Israel. As the *Forward* reported in August, the anonymously funded Canary Mission "is now being used as an intelligence source on thousands of students and academics by Israeli officials with immense power over people's lives."

West Hollywood City Council appears to be playing directly into an AIPAC-driven political agenda that conflates legitimate criticism of Israel with antisemitism. In many cases, calling someone an antisemite is an effective means to shut down open discussion. It is a direct threat to free speech, which is why it's long past time to stand up to this anti-democratic agenda.

The disingenuous claim that *1948* is antisemitic or promotes hatred is part of a broader effort to narrow the boundaries of "acceptable" discussion regarding Israel and Palestine. Recently, the commentator Marc Lamont Hill was fired by CNN for delivering a speech at the UN in which he suggested that the Holy Land would eventually become a single state from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean. Hill's words were certainly provocative, but decades of Israeli settler colonisation of the West Bank have undermined a "two-state solution," and a single, democratic state of Israelis and Palestinians is hardly an idea to be muzzled

by the thought police.

Even more troubling are the broad efforts to slap the antisemitic label on nonviolent, constitutionally protected calls to boycott Israeli institutions. The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement has prompted dozens of state laws and bills in Congress to impose civil and even criminal sanctions against groups that boycott Israeli products or institutions.

Some say the fears provoked by the recent wave of antisemitism, including the murder of 11 Jews in Pittsburgh, is reason enough to curtail criticism of Israel. As someone who has spent years working in Israel, and many hours interviewing Holocaust survivors for an oral history project of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, I have long known those fears to be legitimate. But exploiting that fear can be cynical. It is not legitimate to label critics as antisemites when they advocate a boycott of, say, Caterpillar, whose Israeli military D-9 bulldozers have helped to reduce almost 48,000 Palestinian homes and other buildings to rubble since 1967.

As for *1948*, it is not clear whether those involved in West Hollywood's "indefinite delay," as one organiser calls it, have even have seen the film. I have. It is fair and even-handed in its telling of a wrenching, difficult history that features the perspectives of Israelis who saw the 1948 war as their War of Inde-

pendence, and Palestinians who experienced it as their *nakba*, or catastrophe. The film includes stories of expulsions of Palestinians, which have been well-documented by Israeli historians. (I did much the same in my 2006 book, *The Lemon Tree*.) What the *1948* film does not do is simply repeat the triumphal narrative conveyed in Leon Uris's *Exodus*, which a generation of Americans grew up reading. Uris's account describes the birth of Israel in exclusively heroic terms, with the plight of "the Arabs" (i.e., Palestinians) conspicuously missing.

For those exposed to this blinkered history, a deeper, more inclusive narrative can be challenging to accept. Yet isn't the role of a democracy to promote difficult debate, and to help us face our collective history? The Dec. 12 forum was an opportunity for West Hollywood, which takes pride in its "impact on the national progressive public policy agenda," to do just that. Instead, the city has placed itself, unwittingly or not, on one side of the debate, and chosen to stifle free speech and open discussion. **CT**

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