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**A 35-YEAR MARCH AGAINST AUSTERITY** | Granville Williams  
**IGNORING 40,000 DEAD VENEZUELANAS** | Cromwell & Edwards  
**RICH MINING COMPANIES. POOR MINERS** | VJ Prashad

ISSUE 184

# ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

MID-MAY 2019

## That's All, Folks!

We've got 15 years to save the planet from climate change,  
but all the UK media care about is a royal baby

W **STEPHEN GILBERT** (Page 18)

**GEORGE  
MONBIOT:**  
Stop eating  
fish and save  
sea life  
(Page 22)



**TOM  
ENGELHARDT:**  
Suicide  
watch on  
Planet Earth  
(Page 24)

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# ColdType

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Issue 184

Mid-May 2019

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**Granville Williams** tells how Mike Carter followed in his father's footsteps in a 330-mile trek to commemorate 1981's anti-Margaret Thatcher People's March for Jobs from Liverpool to London

# A father, his son and their 35-year march against austerity

4

**I**T'S the subtitle, *One Man's Walk in Search of His Father and a Lost England*, that captures the essence of Mike Carter's moving and informative book *All Together Now?* His father, Pete Carter, died of lung cancer in 2011, aged 73, and a core theme of the book is the fractured relationship of the pair after his father separated from Mike's mother Norma in 1977. She had been a big influence on Pete's political development – even teaching him to read after he left school illiterate – and the separation hurt her deeply. She died ten years later. Their children, Sue and Mike, witnessed this and Mike, in particular, vented his anger on his father. In their last encounter,

a fortnight before Pete Carter died on the narrowboat he lived on, there had been an angry exchange. Mike “reeled off grievance after grievance, the anger and hurt he had caused to me, my mum and [sister] Sue”.

Pete replied: “I sacrificed everything for the struggle ... You don't understand”.

“The fucking struggle”, Mike responded, “it's all we ever heard. Look around you. It's all fucked. Your life's work. Was it worth it?”

**T**he 1981 People's March For Jobs was organised by Pete Carter and two other trade union officials, Jack Dromey and Colin Barnett. The march – 330



miles across the spine of England, from Liverpool to Widnes, Salford, Macclesfield, Birmingham, Northampton, Luton, on to London – took four weeks.

The main group of 250 marchers left Liverpool on May 2, aiming to draw attention to rocketing unemployment and the need for alternative eco-



**Abandoned terraced houses are covered with metal shutters in Salford, UK, awaiting demolition for property development. Many other former council homes have been bought by buy-to-let investors.**

conomic policies to those imposed by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government. Feeder marches from Yorkshire and South Wales joined in, and at the end of the month 150,000 unemployed workers and trade

unionists converged in central London

As Mike Carter travels the route of the march, the presence of his father is triggered by people he meets who were on the original march or by visits to

places such as the People's History Museum in Manchester.

I found the sections where he grapples with his recollections of his father painful to read, for I knew Pete Carter when I was in Birmingham in the 1970s and

got on well with him. He was in the Communist Party and, with two other CP members, Mike Shilvock and Phil Beyer, and several other militant shop stewards, led a movement against “the Lump”, a casual labour system in the early 1970s. (“The Lump” referred to the way building contractors would hire labourers by the day or week. They would be regarded as self-employed and get paid a lump sum of money for that work, hence “working on the lump”. The individual worker would be responsible for paying income tax and National Insurance, not the employer. It was a dangerous working practice which meant many workers were trading off decent working conditions and health and safety on sites for higher pay.)

Carter was a brilliant organiser, skilful in devising stunts to keep their struggles in the news. Gerry Kelly, then a young building worker and a member of the International Socialists, said, “Carter was the greatest working class orator I have ever seen. He could hold mass meetings of hundreds of people spellbound with his speeches, which were often peppered with quotations from Shelley and other poets.”

In early 1972 I was contacted by David Hart, a World in Action producer with the ITV company Granada, who wanted to make a programme on “the Lump”. Pete Carter and the UCATT regional secretary Ken Barlow cooperated and the outcome, *The Lump*, shown on March 27, 1972, was later declared to be a classic WIA programme.



**ALL TOGETHER NOW?  
One Man's Walk in Search of  
His Father and a Lost England**

**Mike Carter**

Guardian/Faber Publishing

**£14.99**

Under Carter's inspired leadership, C. Bryant and Co, the largest construction firm in the Midlands, was forced in February 1972 to concede a 50 percent basic wage increase in a deal that *Construction News* called “a watershed in the construction industry”. It was the precursor to the national building workers' strike in June 1972.

**A**s Mike Carter retraces the march's route, which took place just before the 2016 EU referendum, he integrates the two themes to shape a book that is rich in incisive political comment on the condition of England, while reminding us what Britain was like under

the embryonic Thatcherism.

The accumulation of detail and analysis of the state of England as his journey progresses is powerful and harrowing. The book is a searing critique of the 40 years of neoliberalism that ruined the lives of many ordinary people in the country, documenting the ways in which the established structures that had long sustained communities were torn down. Carter shows how, in health, jobs, housing, transport, public spaces, welfare and sport, the working class has been battered over the intervening years.

For example, in Salford, he tells how buy-to-let investors, “up from the south for the day”, pay cash to snap up entire streets for their portfolios and block any opportunity for local people to buy houses. In 1981, the year of The People's March, the rent for a council property was less than seven percent of the average income. In 2015, for a private tenancy, that figure stood at 52 percent of average income, and in London 72 percent.

We're reminded, too, of David Cameron's comments to a group of local journalists in Liverpool in 2011. He told them the relatives of the 96 victims of the April 15, 1989, Hillsborough football stadium disaster, who continued to seek justice, were “like a blind man, in a dark room, looking for a black cat that isn't there”.

On September 12, 2012 Cameron had to stand up in Parliament and say he was “profoundly sorry” for the failures that caused the tragedy, and for

subsequent attempts to shift the blame onto Liverpool supporters, after the publication of the damning Hillsborough Independent Panel report on the events.

**O**n May 29, 1981 The People's March for Jobs arrived in London, where a delegation went to 10 Downing Street to hand their petition to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who refused to meet them.

The march itself, Carter writes, "walked triumphantly

into Trafalgar Square and a hundred thousand people had greeted them with a spirit of hope – a sense that the tidal wave they'd seen heading for shore could be stopped".

That tidal wave wasn't stopped and more were to follow, with the brutal consequences Carter describes. However, people are finally waking up to the fact that the set of economic and political ideas – neoliberalism – that have held politicians in thrall for decades are now threadbare. We now need fundamental political and

economic change to roll back the damage done. *All Together Now* provides eloquent ammunition for those of us who want to realise that change. **CT**

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**Granville Williams** is coordinator of Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (North) and editor of *MediaNorth*. He has edited the new edition of *Shafted: The Media, the Miners' Strike and the Aftermath* which was published to mark the 35th anniversary of the British coal miners' strike.

## The quest for social justice

**Tony Sutton** highlights five more books that chart recent significant social and political events in the UK

**I**n his book *Long Road From Jarrow*, broadcaster Stuart Maconie marked the 80th anniversary of the 1936 depression-era march for jobs from the north-eastern town of Jarrow to London, by retracing the marchers' 300-mile journey, during which he "found a different land suffering from similar problems – political turbulence, austerity, food banks".

Polly Toynbee's *Hard Work: Life In Low-Pay Britain*, and James Bloodworth's *Hired: Six Months Under-*



*cover in Low-Wage Britain*, tackle one of the biggest problems of post-industrial society: how to survive on the minimum wage. In her 2003 work, Toynbee lived in one of the worst council estates in Britain, taking whatever jobs she was offered. What she discovered made a shocking, tale of life at the bottom in Tony Blair's Britain.

In *Hired*, Bloodworth follows a similar path 15 years later, working in insecure jobs paying poverty-level

wages: – stacking shelves in a giant Amazon warehouse, driving Uber taxis, being a careworker looking after the sick and the elderly, and selling insurance from a telesales centre.

To find out how the UK got into such dire straights, it's essential to get back to the root of the country's social fragmentation.

Two books stand out – Andy Beckett's *Promised You A Miracle: UK 80-82* maps the early years of "brittle optimism and upheaval" that marked the early years of Thatcher's reign before the rot and disillusionment set in, while Alwyn A. Turner's *Rejoice! Rejoice! Britain in the 1980s* charts Thatcher's rise and fall – an unruly and fractured decade of "social discord from high politics through to low culture". **CT**

Mike Pompeo, Donald Trump's Secretary of State is waiting for the second coming of Christ to guarantee him his place in Heaven, writes **Philip Giraldi**

# He lies. He cheats. He steals. But he's a good Christian!

**U**S Secretary of State Mike Pompeo recently told an audience at Texas A&M University that when he was head of the Central Intelligence Agency he was responsible for “lying, cheating and stealing” to benefit the United States. “Like we had entire training courses. It reminds you of the glory of the American experiment”.

Pompeo made the comment with a grin, noting that when he was a cadet at West Point he subscribed to the Academy honour code, which stated that, “You will not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do”. The largely student audience clearly appreciated the irony and laughed and applauded, though it is not clear what they made of the “glory of the American experiment”. The normally humourless Pompeo was suggesting ironically that yesterday's Pompeo would be required to turn today's Pompeo in to the appropriate authorities for lying and also conniving at high crimes and misdemeanours

while at the CIA.

Certainly, some might find Pompeo's admission a bit lame though perhaps understandable as he arrived at CIA without any experience in intelligence. Someone should have whispered in his ear, “That is what spy agencies do Mike”. And if he found the moral ambiguities vexing, he should have turned down the job.

Equally lame has been the international media coverage of the comments (it was not reported in any major national news outlet in the US), which reflected both shock and vindication at finding a top-level official who would admit that Washington does all that sort of nasty stuff.

Pompeo is not alone in his doing what would have hitherto been unthinkable as many senior figures in the Trump Administration who have sworn an oath to uphold the Constitution now find themselves conniving at starting various wars without the constitutionally-required declaration of war from Congress. Pompeo has personally

assured both the Venezuelans and Iranians that “all options are on the table”, while also arming the Ukrainians and warning the Russians to get out of Caracas or else face the consequences. And it is a good thing that he has now learned how to lie as he does so when he keeps insisting that the Iranians are the leading state sponsors of terrorism and that the Saudis are fighting a just war in Yemen.

Then there is the ethical dimension. The United States government is already involved in economic acts of war through use of its sanctions worldwide. It is currently dedicated to starving the Iranian and Venezuelan people to force them to change their governments. This month, a global boycott of Iranian oil sales to be enforced unilaterally by Washington kicked in with the objective, per Pompeo, of reducing “Iran's oil exports to zero” to deny its government its “principal source of revenue”. The problem with the Pompeo objective is that attacking a foreign government normally ral-



lies the people around their leadership. Also, denying a country income ultimately hurts ordinary people much more than it does those who make the decisions. One recalls the famous Madeleine Albright line about killing 500,000 Iraqi children through malnutrition and disease brought about by sanctions as “being worth it”.

**P**ompeo believes himself to be a good Christian. Indeed, a very good Christian in that he believes that the second coming of Jesus Christ is imminent and by virtue of his good deeds he will be saved and “raptured” directly to heaven. He, like Vice President Mike Pence, is referred to as a Dispensationalist, and he also believes that those who are not “born again” and accept Jesus will be doomed to hell. Most Dispensationalists think the second coming will be preceded by a world war centred in the Middle East referred to as Armageddon, which will pit good against evil. How that shapes Pompeo’s thinking vis-à-vis encouraging a major armed conflict with Iran is certainly something war-weary Americans should be considering.

One of the really interesting things about fanatics like Pompeo and his *dos amigos* Vice President Mike Pence and National Security Advisor John Bolton is how they are unable to figure out what comes next after the “lying, cheating, stealing” and shooting are over. After American air and naval power destroy Iran, what next?



**MIKE POMPEO: Fanatic in the US State Department.**

If Iraq and Afghanistan are anything to go by, “next” will be kind of figured out as one goes along. And as for an end game, fuggedaboutit.

Now let us suppose that with the crushing of the Mullahs all the requirements for Armageddon will be met and Jesus Christ makes his second appearance, what happens after that when the world as we know it ends? Presumably the rapture itself is painless, but when Pompeo and Pence arrive at heaven what will they do all day? Play cards? There will be no television one presumes and no Muslims or Latinos to kick around as they will all be in hell. Drinking and smoking are probably not allowed and acquiring a girlfriend will likely be discouraged. One suspects that engaging in philosophical symposia to pass one’s time is not particularly favoured by either gentleman.

Perhaps Pompeo and Pence look forward to something like the Mormon model, where they and their extended families

going back genetically to the Pleistocene period will have their own planets where they can sit around and hobnob all day long. God, who, according to the Mormons, also has his own planet called Kolob, might just pop by for a visit every once in a while.

The point of all this is that we Americans are in the hands of a group of people who are adept at self-deception and who are also quite capable of doing some very dangerous things in light of their religious and personal views. It is one thing to have a strong foreign policy defending actual American interests but it is quite another to have a propensity to go to war to satisfy a personal predilection about how one goes about enabling a biblical prophecy. Equally, having a moral compass that is flexible depending who is on the receiving end is like having no real morals at all.

We have reached a point here in the United States where bad decisions and behaviour best described as evil are masked by a certain kind of expressed piety and visions of national greatness. It is time to get rid of the Pompeos and Pences to end the charade and restore genuine morality unencumbered by the book of Revelations together with a national dignity that is not linked to threats or projection of military power. **CT**

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*Philip Girdaldi is Executive Director of the Council for the National Interest. This article was first published at [www.unz.com](http://www.unz.com)*



One of the objectionable panels in the high school mural depicts a dead Native American.

**Amna Khalid & Jeffrey Aaron Snyder** argue against the ‘white-washing of history’ by activist groups who strive to censor or ban offensive images

# Activists battle over ‘racist’ high school mural

**F**OR nearly a century, a massive mural by painter Victor Arnautoff titled *The Life of Washington* has lined the hallways of San Francisco’s George Washington High School.

It may not be there much longer.

The mural “glorifies slavery, genocide, colonisation, manifest destiny, white supremacy [and] oppression”. So said Washington High School’s Reflection and Action Group, an ad-hoc committee formed late last year and made up of Native Americans from the community, stu-

dents, school employees, local artists and historians.

It identified two panels as especially offensive. One (*see Page 12*) shows Washington pointing westward next to the body of a dead Native American. The other (*pictured above*) depicts slaves working in the



fields of Mount Vernon.

Because the work “traumatises students and community members”, the group concluded that “the impact of this mural is greater than its intent ever was”. They are campaigning for its removal.

The idea that impact matters more than intention has informed debates about everything from micro-aggressions to cultural appropriation.

But when it comes to art, should impact matter more than intention?

As historians committed to preserving our cultural heritage – and as citizens invested in the power of art to engage the public – we see the growing chorus of voices favouring impact over intention as a dangerous

trend, one that makes art more vulnerable to rejection, censorship or even destruction.

For most members of the Washington High School’s Reflection and Action Group, the only message *The Life of Washington* sends is one of crushing, dehumanising oppression.

**W**hat happens, though, when we examine the mural in the context of the life and times of the artist?

Painter Victor Arnautoff was born in 1896 in a small village in present-day Ukraine. He emigrated to San Francisco in 1925, where he joined a leftist art collective. During the Great Depression he was a supporter of workers’ strikes and formally

joined the Communist Party in 1937. He was even hauled before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1956 for drawing a “Communist Conspiracy” cartoon that caricatured then-Vice President Nixon.

In “The Life of Washington,” Arnautoff decided to place Native Americans, African Americans and working-class revolutionaries front and centre in the four largest panels, relegating Washington to the margins.

The slaves toiling in the Mount Vernon fields highlight a central paradox of America’s history: The nation was founded by men who championed liberty, freedom and equality, and yet owned slaves.

Then there’s the striking



In his mural, Arnautoff strove to emphasise everyday Americans of all races.

image of the fallen Native American. The mural's detractors say that it dismisses the humanity of indigenous peoples.

But why must it necessarily be read as dehumanising to Native Americans? Could it not instead be seen as throwing into sharp relief the inhumanity of the founding fathers?

According to Arnautoff's biographer, Robert W Cherny, the image challenged the fallacy that "westward expansion had been into largely vacant territory waiting for white pioneers to develop its full potential".

That the mural appears in a school is particularly important in this regard. For decades, the country's educational institutions perpetuated national myths about American exceptionalism and American history as one long glorious march of forward progress.

Up until the 1960s, the standard US history curriculum ignored the country's dark and terrifying history of racial violence, including enslavement and the slaughter of indigenous peoples. So drawing attention

to the horrors inflicted on Native Americans and African Americans would have been a radical statement in 1930s America.

**M**any of those in favour of scrapping the murals seem to believe that merely depicting past atrocities justifies them. In fact, the Action and Reflection Group concluded that the mural contravened the San Francisco Unified School District's commitment to "social justice".

Quite to the contrary. In our view, the *Life of Washington* provides an invaluable opportunity for students to engage in a serious and sustained way with social justice issues.

There's a strong case to be made that Arnautoff is exposing – rather than celebrating – slavery and genocide. Moreover, those arguing for the mural's removal are overlooking the fact that African Americans are not only portrayed as picking cotton and that Native Americans are not only depicted as victims of genocide. Rather

Arnautoff is insisting that African Americans and indigenous peoples were key historical actors in the making of the United States.

The controversy over this mural is sadly not an isolated exception. Over the past several years, there have been dozens of cases where plays, poems, books, prints, paintings, sculptures, installations and other creative works have been shut down, cancelled, removed or otherwise censored based on snap judgments, social media swarms, ideologically motivated reasoning and obtuse interpretations of the art in question.

In all of these cases, there has been little to no regard for the aspirations, aims and ambitions of the artists themselves. Their intentions have been treated along a spectrum that runs from indifference to contempt.

To be clear, we are not saying that an artist's intent is all that matters. How people interpret and respond to a work of art is inseparable from its rai-

son d'être. But disregarding the intentions of artists would place every significant creative work with a whiff of controversy in jeopardy because of its “problematic” or “offensive” content. In a world where intentionality and context are irrelevant, satire and irony would not only be incomprehensible but forbidden.

Artist Kara Walker’s searing paper cuts depicting the horrific violence of slavery in the United States? Nothing more than a celebration of the white domination of black bodies. The pungent, explosive litany of racial slurs in Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing*? Just a vicious rehearsal of profoundly damaging ethnic stereotypes. Keegan-Michael Key’s brilliant sketch character Luther who serves as Obama’s “anger translator”? Simply a racist caricature of the “angry black man”.

**C**alls to censor “offensive” art by committees, petitions or the Twitterverse are especially dangerous. For every case of “righteous” censorship that removes works of art that are allegedly racist, sexist, homophobic and so on, there will be scores more censored on the grounds that they are anti-American or offensive to Christians.

As the American Library



**A 1941 self-portrait of painter Victor Arnautoff.**

Association reports, the most frequently challenged and banned books are those that contain “diverse content” and include characters of colour or address themes of sexuality, racism, religion, disability and mental illness.

Four out of the top 11 most challenged or banned books in 2018 were objected to on the basis of their LGBT content. *Two Boys Kissing* – a 2013 novel centred around the lives of seven gay teenagers – has made the American Library Association list for several years running, even though *The Guardian* described it as a “complex”, “intricate” novel “so extremely powerful [it] leaves you thinking long, long after you have finished reading it.”

Thinking long and hard, alas, is in short supply for members of the “we are not interested in the artist’s intentions” when the art offends us brigade. Ripping art from its context degrades our critical faculties and imprisons us in the present. It smacks of a literal-minded authoritarianism that assumes and indeed insists that a creative work can and must only be read in one way.

When people refuse to see the contradictions, tensions and ambiguities of art, it becomes disposable. Arnautoff’s detractors bring to mind Oscar Wilde’s warning that any time a spectator of art tries to “exercise authority over it and the artist”, he “becomes the avowed enemy of Art and of himself”.

It took Arnautoff almost a year to complete the mural, painstaking labour that could be erased with a single coat of paint. Not only would this outcome whitewash history, it would also deal a severe blow to our own capacity for creativity and critical thought. **CT**

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**Amna Khalid** is associate professor of history at Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota. **Jeffrey Aaron Snyder** is associate professor of educational Studies, at Carleton. This article was first published at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)

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**David Niddrie** assesses the outcome of South Africa's sixth general election, and president Cyril Ramaphosa's emerging from beneath the long shadow of his disgraced predecessor Jacob Zuma

# ANC still on top in South Africa - despite Zuma

**S**OUTH Africa's May 8 general election was never in serious doubt – the ruling ANC retained a 7 percent parliamentary majority and control of eight of the country's nine provinces – although one with a paper-thin majority.

Yet it campaigned with an intensity unseen since the first, 1994, democratic election, despite having probably its smallest campaign budget ever – thanks to the damage wrought by Jacob Zuma's nine years in the presidency.

No ostentatious cavalcades of luxury German cars this year, navigated by grateful nouveau riche through the townships and suburbs to encourage votes for presidential candidate Cyril Ramaphosa; nor the now traditional, and equally grotesque, free concert of most of South Africa's rappers, in the vain hope of enticing urban youth to vote, and to vote for the ANC.

Most of the cavalcade drivers and concert attendees have abandoned the ANC. It is now

forced to rely for support from the urban working class and the rural poor – many of the latter among the quarter of South Africa's 52-million people who rely on ANC-established social grants and pensions to survive – pensions and disability grants currently pegged at R1,700 a month (about US\$125); child support grants at R400 (US\$30).

South Africa's general elections are for both the national parliament and for provincial legislatures, on separate ballots.

**T**he comparatively low voter turnout – 65 percent, down 7 percent from the previous general election – indicates, despite the intensity of the ANC campaign, many ANC loyalists in the urban working class will not consider switching allegiance but have yet to forgive the ANC for catastrophic Zuma years.

But enough relented to give Ramaphosa what he needed –

at least in the election, and possibly where it actually matters, within the ranks of the ANC itself.

This year's 57 percent ANC majority is down from the previous general election (2014). But it is a clear 2 percent up from the ANC's worst electoral performance, in 2016 local elections, when it lost control of both the economic and political capitals, Johannesburg and Pretoria, as outraged working class ANC supporters stayed away in their hundreds of thousands.

In 2014, the populist veneer masking Zuma's increasing kleptocratic administration still help sway. By 2016 the extent of Zuma-facilitated looting of the state was becoming clear, thanks to a handful of courageous journalists, the ANC's communist allies and a group of aging ANC veterans – not to mention declining job numbers and the partial collapse of several state-owned utilities: Eskom, the state-owned the national power generator (leading to regular planned blackouts), and



Cyril Ramaphosa greets a packed stadium of supporters ahead of South Africa's sixth general election

commuter rail utility Prasa, used mainly by black workers. All of this directly attributable to Zuma.

This year there seemed a real prospect that the ANC would lose control of Gauteng, South Africa's economic heartland province, home to a quarter of the national population and generating more than half South Africa's GDP.

This was a consequence both of the continued alienation of the black working class in the massive dormitory townships dotted around Johannesburg and Pretoria – all traditionally ANC strongholds – and of a contradiction at the heart of the ANC. As a free market-friendly, centrist party committed to

improving the circumstances of the black majority, it interprets its mandate as facilitating the migration of as many as possible poor and working class South Africans into the middle classes. Once ensconced there, many class migrants duly defect to parties more directly representing their new class interests.

**A**s the economic heartland, Gauteng has a disproportionately large middle class and has, for all 25 years of South Africa's democracy, consistently elected the ANC with a lower majorities than the other seven provinces the ANC controls.

Gauteng has never been easy for the ANC. But the Zuma presidency – his nine years in office cost the country the equivalent of almost a full annual national budget, and lopped at least R480-billion (US\$33-billion) off annual GDP after 2016 – made Gauteng 2019 possibly the toughest election challenge the ANC has ever faced. Ultimately it scraped in with a one-seat majority in the 73-seat provincial legislature.

The victory gives Ramaphosa some respite from unrelenting manoeuvring to remove him from the ANC presidency he won in 2017 against Zuma's ex-wife Noksazana Dlamini-Zuma. Her candidacy was driven by intense pre-election vote

rigging and -buying by Zuma's allies. They narrowly lost the party presidency, but managed to pack almost half the top decision-making structure, the national executive committee, with Zuma acolytes, and secure the powerful secretary general position for notoriously corrupt former Free State provincial premier Ace Magashule.

Both Zuma and Magashule remain committed to ensuring Ramaphosa does not see out his first full, five-year term in office, much less a second term.

Magashule's motivations appear to be primarily venal. As Free State premier, and before that as ANC chair in the province, he enriched himself and a range of political and business associates by taking control of provincial procurement structures, while ruthlessly manipulating ANC political structures in the province to ensure he was able to retain control in perpetuity.

Escalating his activities to the national stage has obvious appeal, although the bigger stage comes with a far more critical audience. The Free State is small – accounting for 4 percent of South Africa's population and 3.5 percent of its budget – and Magashule was able to limit any serious inquiry into his endeavours there by a fairly placid provincial media. Since his elevation to the national stage, he has demonstrated real discomfort at the glare of the national media spotlight – and particularly of the mainly Johannesburg-based investigative journalist corps, which has



**MUTUAL LOATHING:** Cyril Ramaphosa with ANC secretary general Ace Magashule.

begun to scratch enthusiastically through his record in the Free State. One book focused on his apparent perfidy, “Gangster state: Unravelling Ace Magashule’s web of capture”, has been published since he became ANC general secretary, and several more are being written.

This is embarrassing, but has not weakened his resolve to force Ramaphosa out of the party and country presidencies – vividly demonstrated by his significant but unauthorised changes to the ANC electoral lists submitted to the electoral commission. This guarantees Zuma supporters a strong presence in the post-election parliament, and denies Ramaphosa, whose party power-base is highly contested, a power-base in the ANC parliamentary caucus.

**Z**uma's motives for wanting Ramaphosa out or, at the very

least, hamstrung are more compelling. Having an obedient satrap in the presidency would enable him to resume his looting of the South African state, this time at one remove – he has, after all, five wives and more than 20 children to keep, all now accustomed to a lifestyle impossible to maintain even on a relatively comfortable presidential pension. But he has a more pressing motive: he is already facing prosecution for corruption related to South Africa's re-equipping of its military in the late 1990s, when he was deputy president to Thabo Mbeki. As president, with access to state funds for his lawyers, he engaged in a protracted Stalingrad defence, endlessly stringing out legal processes to avoid ever having charges formally laid. He also packed the national prosecutions' office with loyalists to ensure no charges were brought – or any additional offences were investigated. But he has run out of





**Jacob Zuma in court last year to face corruption charges in relation to the re-equipping of South Africa's military in the late 1990s.**

string on the charges from the 1990s kickbacks and appeared in court last year to face corruption charges. He is due back in court later this month.

But more serious potential charges arise from his more recent presidential savaging and looting of the South African state and decimation of the economy. Among Ramaphosa's first acts as ANC president were to instruct Zuma to appoint a commission of inquiry into "state capture" – South African shorthand for taking control of part of the government system to facilitate looting – and then to secure Zuma's recall by the ANC as South African president.

And when Ramaphosa was sworn in to replace Zuma for the 16-month balance of his second presidential term, almost his first appointment was of a new head of national prosecutions' office, a South African whose CV included several years as legal adviser to the Internation-

al Criminal Court.

These moves provide a pointer to how Ramaphosa plans to head off the challenge from Zuma, Magashule and their many allies in the ANC leadership and in parliament. He will work from his only certain base: in the executive.

**C**onstitutionally, Ramaphosa's presidential authority over the executive is only minimally constrained by party-political factors: the president alone is legally responsible for appointing his Cabinet and for a range of civil service appointments – as, for example, with the head of the prosecuting authority, but also including appointment of all state departments' heads, although on these he must consult Cabinet Ministers (who, helpfully, he appoints).

He can also appoint commissions of inquiry – a right he has used to good effect: one has already inquired into and found

two Zuma appointments in the national prosecutors' office "not fit and proper" to hold office. Another Ramaphosa-appointed commission, into the state-run Public Investment Corporation – its R2-trillion (US\$150-trillion) in assets, a mouth-watering target for Zuma-era "state capture" – has generated a powerful arsenal for use against Zuma allies inside and outside the ANC, and against Zuma himself. So too has the "state capture" commission.

The fact that Ramaphosa is necessarily based in the executive for his campaign against Zuma and Magashule has forced him to adopt due process as a political tactic. This is not a bad thing in a country exhausted by a daily diet, over the past four years, of new revelations of looting and degradation of the state.

But it does demonstrate the downside to the classical Greek truism that the wheels of justice grind exceedingly slow.

Within the ANC, both Zuma and Magashule hoped – and, evidence suggests, worked – for a poor ANC result, intending to use that to force Ramaphosa out of the ANC presidency. At least four new parties among the 48 contesting the election have links to Zuma or Magashule – most of them no-hopers, although one Zuma-aligned party has appears to have secured enough votes for two seats in parliament. **CT**

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**David Niddrie** is a Johannesburg-based analyst and former journalist.

We've got 15 years to save the planet from climate change, but all the UK media seems to care about is a royal baby, writes **W Stephen Gilbert**

# Above us the waves

**T**HE salient point about Cassandra the mythological princess, and Dr Stockmann in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, and Chief Brody in Peter Benchley's *Jaws* is not that they predicted calamity or that they were proved right after several individuals (thousands in Cassandra's case) had unnecessarily died. It was that they were ignored and even reviled. So it is with the most significant issue of the age, indeed the most significant event in the history of the world: climate change.

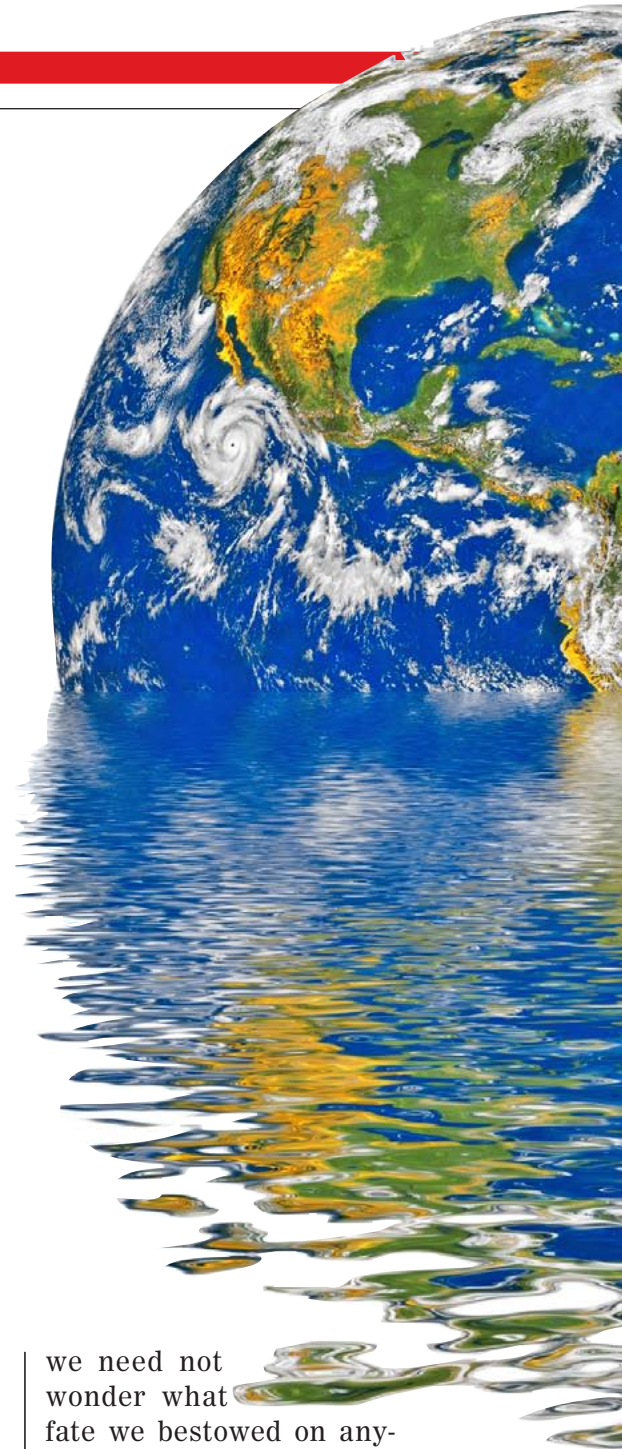
Predictably enough, the coverage of the on-going worldwide action by the groups acting under the umbrella Extinction Rebellion and the school strikes inspired by the Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg has concentrated on their conduct rather than their aims. Sitting down, skipping school, sleeping over and supergluing are of more interest to the mainstream media than the survival of the planet. Politicians and media

commentators prate about irresponsibility, civil disobedience, disruption and cost, unmindful that these are but a drop in the rising ocean.

Peter Harper, the pioneering prophet of alternative technologies, was telling our local Labour party the other week that the expert consensus now is that we have, at best, 15 years before the whole of eastern England including London, along with Toronto, New York, Florida and the eastern seaboard of the United States, and the low countries and much else of western Europe, disappears under permanent flood water. The window of opportunity for pre-emptive action that will limit, let alone prevent, this outcome is fast closing. Some time in the next decade, the tipping point will come, the damage will be irreparable, irrevocable, irreversible.

My partner and I have no issue. We fear for the children and even more the grandchildren of our friends, but for ourselves

we need not wonder what fate we bestowed on anyone we have brought into a doomed world. We have always assumed that our deaths would precede Armageddon. And long ago, we moved to England's west country. But if we were ever tempted to feel smug about our relative age and our choice of base, we can no longer comfort ourselves. While the end of



Art: Joseelias / 123rf.com



**FIGHTING BACK:** Demonstrators at the Declare Climate Emergency Now rally at Parliament Square in London on May 1.

the world appeared to be a far-off fantasy, we could enjoy its fictional representations in the scenarios of disaster literature and movies. But gradually, alongside the possibility of nuclear catastrophe returning to consideration, especially in the hands of death-cult groups, the spread of uncontrollable bacteria or global epidemic became credible.

And now climate change has overtaken all other threats, not

as something far off and largely imaginary but as terrifyingly imminent. My partner and I, hitherto immune to the danger because of human life expectancy, may well still be around in 15 years, by which time the vulnerability of old age will be rather more apparent to us.

**T**he prospect of huge numbers of English refugees fleeing west – by then perhaps as many as 30-million of them – fills one with dread. Look how unsympathetically the European nations have handled the comparatively small numbers of refugees seeking help over the last few years. So the breakdown of order is a given. What proportion of desperate people, many exhibiting the Londoner’s characteristic sense of entitlement, would be content to wait patiently for the provisions that the authorities have made for

them? Indeed, in the nightmare scenario that Theresa May is still the prime minister in 2035, scant provision will have been made because parliament will have been wholly engaged in dispute about the precise depth to which the floodwater is predicted to rise, with the grande dame determined to push through her policy based on a flooding projection merely to the depth of a couple of centimeters.

Politicians, particularly in Britain, like to sit back and congratulate themselves on the pitiful restrictions they have enacted and the puny long-term goals they have set, promising to reduce vehicular emissions just a tad when what they face is the impossibility of travel by any means save boat and raft. We are all fetishising small, targeted causes and ignoring the scale of the overarching disaster. What is the good of saving the tiger or the honey bee,



### ROYAL EMERGENCY: What will the Queen and her brood do when Buckingham Palace and their other royal homes are submerged?

the rain forest or the coral reef when, in a foreseeable future, flora and fauna will be globally decimated, surviving only in random pockets until they too are hunted to extinction for food? As half of England disappears under water, how many creatures, save those that can fly distances, will perish as we struggle to save ourselves?

It's not as if these warnings are new. In her seminal book *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson identified the extensive use of pesticides as having a profoundly deleterious effect on the environment. That was in 1962, 57 years ago. Who listened?

The UN's recent report on climate change anticipates a million extinctions of plants and animals unless action is taken, and taken now. Who can doubt that the extinction of the human race will follow, and sooner rather than later? We are the authors of our own fate. In his recent BBC programme on the subject, *Climate Change – The Facts*, David Attenborough limned “our greatest threat in

thousands of years”. Among the experts consulted, the chief executive of the Committee on Climate Change, Chris Stark, drily noted: “The costs of action are dwarfed by the costs of inaction”. Stark enough for you?

**F**or the mainstream media, the UN report was a big story but played second to the obviously much more significant news of a royal birth. One wonders whether the Sussexes have pondered where they will flee to once the London palaces are flooded. Of the 25 current royal residences, only four may be expected to be untouched by the imminent inundation: Highgrove, Gatcombe, Llwyn-ywermud in Carmarthenshire and possibly Barnwell Manor in Northants. The rest, even those in Scotland, are vulnerable because of successive royals favouring eastern counties. Perhaps the Duke of Cambridge could be persuaded to speak up louder about what we face. As monarch, he may be presiding

over an unimaginable crisis.

Labour has urged the government to declare a climate emergency, a gesture that will be no more than that if not followed up. As Jeremy Corbyn put it, in proposing a number of large but unspecified measures, “it's a chance that won't be available to succeeding generations”. But we have to ensure that the ‘could’ in his hope that “we could set off a wave of action from parliaments and governments around the world” is in practice a ‘will’.

The world is swinging hard to the right and governments of the hard right are not exercised by the global emergency; indeed, they doubt its very existence. Trump calls it a hoax. Brazil now has a president whose policy is to clear the Amazon basin for short-term profit, with no thought for the global implications. Why has not the International Court of Justice already sought preemptive measures to prevent his carrying through this policy? Why is Trump being permitted to reactive the American fossil fuel companies, purely to obtain the workers' votes in 2020?

Despite Trump, New York City is enacting a \$20-billion programme to combat the local effects of climate change, addressing such issues as coastal protection and drainage capacity. The coastline around Lower Manhattan is being raised 20 feet above the current sea level. Millions of additional trees have been planted across the city to help to control rising

summer temperatures. All new builds have to meet stringent green requirements.

New protections have been created to prevent the flooding of the subway system. “Managed retreat” plans have been enacted as a result of Hurricane Sandy more than six years ago. Congestion pricing will be introduced in the next two years and vehicle emissions are intended to be halved by 2025. Will that be sufficient? And how much is London investing in something similar?

Late last year, London mayor Sadiq Khan and civic leaders in other cities also declared “a climate emergency”. Khan’s plan is to make his city carbon neutral by 2050, but he does not explain how you achieve such a target in a metropolis that has by then been under water for 15 years. The London Assembly wisely passed a motion to bring forward Khan’s target by 20 years. But

is it realistic?

What seems clear is that politicians generally, ever mindful of this week’s measure of popularity, have no will to do more than nibble at the edges. They may have calculated that they’ll be dead by 2050 and so they won’t care.

But if they are out by as many years as the scientists now fear, some at least of them will live to see their names reviled and perhaps find themselves hunted down by starving and vengeful refugees, many of those refugees being people who thought they were immune to tomorrow’s disaster. Then the politicians might learn too late something about irresponsibility, disruption and cost.

**FOOTNOTE:** Peter Harper points out that the timeframe sketched by him and mentioned in the article refers to the opportunity to put measures in place to prevent the

seas rising by more than three feet by century’s end, rather than the time shortly after which a large landmass will be inundated.

He says: “In my view, the best avenue for the Labour Party would be a major infrastructural renewal programme that would bring millions of new jobs. They could forge rational alliances with appropriate businesses and redirect the universities to provide the necessary research and training. They should reorganise the tax system to be revenue-neutral but make carbon visible in prices”.

**CT**

**W** Stephen Gilbert has been a writer, journalist and TV producer since 1971, when his first play was screened on BBC1. His books include first biographies of Dennis Potter and Jeremy Corbyn. He mostly passes his twilight years indexing other writers’ books.

**MEDIA WATCH: World’s end or royal baby? How the UK press treated the news**



The birth of a royal baby called Archie – perhaps it was that name choice that has denied him the title Prince – is deemed more significant than the extinction of life on earth. As usual, the mainstream media, presented with the choice between a cataclysmic and a piffing story, makes the wrong decision.

Unhindered by regulation, driven by greed, the fishing industry is the greatest threat to our oceans. We must take action, writes **George Monbiot**

# Stop eating fish. It's the only way to save life in our seas

22

**I**T is the most important news humanity has ever received: the general collapse of life on Earth. The vast international assessment of the state of nature, as revealed on May 6, tells us that the living planet is in a death spiral. Yet it's hardly surprising that it appeared on few front pages of British newspapers. Of all the varieties of media bias, the deepest is the bias against relevance. The more important the issue, the less it is discussed.

There's a reason for this. Were we to become fully aware of our predicament, we would demand systemic change. Systemic change is highly threatening to those who own the media. So they distract us with such baubles as a royal baby and a vicious dispute between neighbours about a patio. I am often told we get the media we deserve. We do not. We get the media its billionaire owners demand. This means that the first duty of a journalist is to cover neglected issues. So I want to direct you to the 70 percent of the planet that was sidelined even

in the sparse coverage of the new report: the seas.

Here, life is collapsing even faster than on land. The main cause, the UN biodiversity report makes clear, is not plastic. It is not pollution, not climate breakdown, not even the acidification of the ocean. It is fishing. Because commercial fishing is the most important factor, this is the one we talk about least.

The BBC's recent *Blue Planet Live* series, carefully avoiding any collision with powerful interests, epitomised this reticence. There was not a word about the fossil fuel or plastics industries – and only a fleeting reference to the fishing industry, which is protected by a combination of brute power and bucolic fantasy.

**W**hen you hear the word fisherman, what picture comes to mind? Someone who looks like Captain Birdseye: white beard, twinkly eyes, sitting on a little red boat chugging merrily across a sparkling sea? If so, your image of the industry

might need updating. An investigation by Greenpeace last year revealed that 29 percent of the UK's fishing quota is owned by five families, all of whom feature on the *Sunday Times Rich List*. A single Dutch multinational, operating a vast fishing ship, holds a further 24 percent of the English quota. The smallest boats – less than 10 metres long – comprise 79 percent of the fleet, but are entitled to catch just 2 percent of the fish.

The same applies worldwide: huge ships from rich nations mop up the fish surrounding poor nations, depriving hundreds of millions of their major source of protein, while wiping out sharks, tuna, turtles, albatrosses, dolphins and much of the rest of the life of the seas. Coastal fish farming has even greater impacts, as fish and prawns are often fed on entire marine ecosystems: indiscriminate trawlers dredge up everything and mash it into fishmeal.

The high seas – in other words,

the oceans beyond the 200-mile national limits – are a lawless realm. Here fishing ships put out lines of hooks up to 75 miles long, which sweep the sea clean of predators and any other animals that encounter them. But even inshore fisheries are disastrously managed, through a combination of lax rules and a catastrophic failure to enforce them.

For a few years, the populations of cod and mackerel around the UK started to recover. We were told we could start eating them again with a clear conscience. Both are now plummeting. Young cod are being illegally discarded (tipped overboard) on an industrial scale, with the result that the legal catch in UK seas is probably being exceeded by roughly one-third. Mackerel in these waters, thanks to the scarcely regulated greed of the fishery, lost its eco label a few weeks ago.

The government claims that 36 percent of England's waters are "safeguarded as marine protected areas" (MPAs). But this protection amounts to nothing but lines on the map. Commercial fishing is excluded from less than 0.1 percent of these fake reserves. A recent paper in the Science journal found that the trawling intensity in European protected areas is higher than in unprotected places. These MPAs are a total farce: their only purpose is to con the public into believing that something is being done.

You might have hoped, in view of the European Union's failures, that Brexit would provide an opportunity to do things better. It does, but it is not being taken.

On the contrary, while the EU will introduce a legal commitment to prevent any fish species from being exploited beyond its replacement rate next year, the UK's fisheries bill contains no such safeguard. There are no plans to turn our "protected areas" into, er, protected areas. The looting of our seas is likely, if anything, to intensify.

What makes all this so frustrating is that regulating the fishing industry is both cheap and easy. If commercial fishing were excluded from large areas of the sea, the total catch would be likely, paradoxically, to rise,



**Fishing boat comes home with its catch at Whitby, Nth Yorkshire.**

due to what biologists call the spillover effect. Fish and shellfish breed and grow to large sizes in the reserves, then spill over into surrounding waters. Where seas have been protected in other parts of the world, catches have grown dramatically. As a paper in the journal PLOS Biology shows, even if fishing was banned across the entire high seas – as it should be – the world's fish catch would rise, as the growing populations would migrate into national waters.

Nor are the rules difficult to

enforce. As the World Wide Fund for Nature has shown, fitting every boat over 10 metres that fishes in UK waters with remote monitoring equipment would cost just £5-million. Cameras and sensors would record what the boats catch and where, making illegal fishing impossible. But fitting this equipment is voluntary. In other words, it is mandatory to comply with the law to prevent discards, over-quota fishing and fishing in no-take zones, but it is voluntary to fit the equipment that shows whether or not you are complying with the law. Unsurprisingly, fewer than 1 percent of vessels have agreed to carry the equipment. Given the vast profits to be made by cutting corners, is it any wonder that this industry keeps driving fish populations – and the living systems they support – into collapse?

There are almost no fish or shellfish we can safely eat. Recent scandals suggest that even the Marine Stewardship Council label, which is supposed to reassure us about the fish we buy, is no guarantee of sound practice. For example, the council certified tuna fisheries in which endangered sharks had been caught and finned; and, in UK waters, it has approved scallop dredging that rips the seabed to shreds.

Until fishing is properly regulated and contained, we should withdraw our consent. Save your plastic bags by all means, but if you really want to make a difference, stop eating fish. **CT**

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**George Monbiot's web site is [www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com) – This article was first published in the Guardian.**

As the Notre Dame flames began to rise, the arsonists appeared, writes **Tom Engelhardt**

# Suicide watch on Planet Earth

**A**S Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris burned on April 15, as the flames leapt from its roof of ancient timbers, many of us watched in grim horror. Hour after hour, on screen after screen, channel after channel, you could see that 850-year-old cathedral, a visiting spot for 13-million people annually, being gutted, its roof timbers flaring into the evening sky, its steeple collapsing in a ball of fire.

It was dramatic and deeply disturbing – and, of course, unwilling to be left out of any headline-making event, President Trump promptly tweeted his advice to the French authorities: “Perhaps flying water tankers could be used to put it out. Must act quickly!” No matter that water from such planes would probably have taken the cathedral’s towers down and endangered lives as well – “the equivalent”, according to a French fire chief, “of dropping three tons of concrete at 250 kilometers per hour [on]

the ancient monument.”

Still, who could doubt that watching such a monument to the human endeavour being transformed into a shell of its former self was a reminder that everything human is mortal; that, whether in a single lifetime or 850 years, even the most ancient of our artifacts, like those in Iraq and Syria recently, will sooner or later be scourged by the equivalent of (or even quite literally by) fire and sword; that nothing truly lasts, even the most seemingly permanent of things like, until now, Notre Dame?

**T**hat cathedral in flames, unlike so much else in our moment (including you-know-who in his every waking moment), deserved the front-and-centre media attention it got. Historically speaking, it was a burning event of the first order. Still, it’s strange that the most unnerving, deeply terrifying burning underway today, not of that ancient place of worship



that lived with humanity for so many tumultuous centuries but of the planet itself, remains largely in the background.

When the cathedral in which Napoleon briefly crowned himself emperor seemed likely to collapse, it was certifiably an event of headline importance. When, however, the cathedral





(if you care to think of it that way) in which humanity has been nurtured all these tens of thousands of years, on which we spread, developed, and became what we are today – I mean, of course, the planet itself – is in danger of an unprecedented sort from fires we continue to set, that’s hardly news at all.

It’s largely relegated to the back pages of our attention, lost any day of the week to headlines about a disturbed, suicidal young woman obsessed with the Columbine school massacre or an attorney general obsessed with protecting the president.

And let’s not kid ourselves,

this planet of ours is beginning to burn – and not just last week or month either. It’s been smoldering for decades now. Last summer, for instance, amid global heat records (Ouargla, Algeria, 124 degrees Fahrenheit; Hong Kong, over 91 degrees Fahrenheit for 16 straight days; Nawabsha, Pakistan,

122 degrees Fahrenheit; Oslo, Norway, over 86 degrees Fahrenheit for 16 consecutive days; Los Angeles, 108 degrees Fahrenheit), wildfires raged inside the Arctic Circle. This March, in case you hadn't noticed – and why would you, since it's had so little attention? – the temperature in Alaska was, on average, 20 degrees (yes, that is not a misprint) above normal and typical ice roads between villages and towns across parts of that state were melting and collapsing with deaths ensuing.

Meanwhile, in the Antarctic, ice is melting at a rate startling to scientists. If the process accelerates, global sea levels could rise far faster than expected, beginning to drown coastal cities like Miami, New York, and Shanghai more quickly than previously imagined. Meanwhile, globally, the wildfire season is lengthening. Fearsome fires are on the rise, as are droughts, and that's just to begin to paint a picture of a heating planet and its ever more extreme weather systems and storms, of (if you care to think of it that way) a Whole Earth version of Notre Dame.

**A**s was true with Notre Dame, when it comes to the planet, there were fire alarms before an actual blaze was fully noted. Take, for example, the advisory panel of scientists reporting to President Lyndon Johnson on the phenomenon of global warming back in 1965. They would, in fact, predict

with remarkable accuracy how our world was going to change for the worse by this 21st-century moment. (And Johnson, in turn, would bring the subject up officially for perhaps the first time in a Special Message to Congress on February 5, 1965, 54 years before Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal proposal.) As that panel wrote at the time, "Through his worldwide industrial civilisation, Man is unwittingly conducting a vast geophysical experiment. Within a few generations he is burning the fossil fuels that slowly accumulated in the earth over the past 500 million years..."

### **The last four years have been the hottest on record and, despite alternative energy sources, carbon dioxide emissions are still rising**

In other words, the alarm was first sounded more than half a century ago.

When it comes to climate change, however, as the smoke began to appear and, in our own moment, the first flames began to leap – after all, the last four years have been the hottest on record and, despite the growth of ever less expensive alternative energy sources, carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere are still rising, not falling – no firemen arrived (just children). There were essentially no adults to put out the blaze. Yes, there was the Paris climate accord but it was largely an agreement in

principle without enforcement power of any genuine sort.

In fact, across significant parts of the planet, those who appeared weren't firefighters at all, but fire feeders who will likely prove to be the ultimate arsonists of human history.

In a way, it's been an extraordinary performance. Leaders who vied for, or actually gained, power not only refused to recognise the existence of climate change but were quite literally eager to aid and abet the phenomenon.

This is true, for instance, of the new president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, who came to power prepared to turn the already

endangered carbon sink of the Amazon rain forest into a playground for corporate and agricultural destroyers.

It is similarly true in Europe, where right-wing populist movements have begun to successfully oppose gestures toward dealing with climate change, gaining both attention and votes in the process.

In Poland, for instance, just such a party led by President Andrzej Duda has come to power and the promotion of coal production has become the order of the day. And none of that compared to developments in the richest, most powerful country of all, the one that historically has put more greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere than any other.

On taking office, Donald Trump appointed more

climate-change deniers to his cabinet than might have previously seemed possible and swore fealty to “American energy dominance,” while working to kneecap the development of alternative energy systems. He and his men tried to open new areas to oil and gas drilling, while in every way imaginable striving to remove what limits there had been on Big Energy, so that it could release its carbon emissions into the atmosphere unimpeded.

And as the planetary cathedral began to burn, the president set the mood for the moment (at least for his vaunted “base”) by tweeting such things as, “It’s really cold outside, they are calling it a major freeze, weeks ahead of normal. Man, we could use a big fat dose of global warming!” or, on alternative energy, “You would be doing wind, windmills, and if it doesn’t if it doesn’t blow you can forget about television for that night ... Darling, I want to watch television. I’m sorry, the wind isn’t blowing.”

**A**mong those who will someday be considered the greatest criminals in history, don’t forget the Big Energy CEOs who, knowing the truth about climate change from their own hired scientists, did everything they could to increase global doubts by funding climate-denying groups, while continuing to be among the most profitable companies around. They even hedged their bets by, among other things, investing

in alternative energy and using it to more effectively drill for oil and natural gas.

Meanwhile, of course, the planet that had proven such a comfortable home for humanity was visibly going down. No, climate change won’t actually destroy the Earth itself, just the conditions under which humanity (and so many other species) thrived on it.

Sooner or later, if the global temperature is indeed allowed to rise a catastrophic seven degrees Fahrenheit or four degrees Celsius, as an environmental impact statement from the Trump administration suggested it would by 2100, parts of the planet could become uninhabitable, hundreds of millions of human beings could be set in desperate motion, and the weather could intensify in ways that might be nearly unbearable for human habitation. Just read David Wallace-Wells’s book *The Uninhabitable Earth*, if you doubt me.

This isn’t even contestable information anymore and yet it’s perfectly possible that Donald Trump could be elected to a second term in 2020. It’s perfectly possible that more right-wing populist movements could sweep into power in Europe. It’s perfectly possible that Vladimir Putin’s version of great powerdom – a sagging Russian petrostate – could continue on its present globally warming path well into the future.

Understand this: Trump, Bolsonaro, Duda, Putin, and the others are just part of human history. Sooner or later, they

will be gone. Climate change, however, is not part of human history (whatever it may do to civilisation as we know it). Its effects could, in human terms, last for almost unimaginable periods of time. It operates on a different time scale entirely, which means that, unlike the tragedies and nightmares of human history, it is not just a passing matter.

Of course, the planet will survive, as will some life forms (as would be true even if humanity were to succumb to that other possible path to an apocalypse, a nuclear holocaust resulting in “nuclear winter”).

But that should be considered small consolation indeed.

Consider global warming a story for the ages, one that should put Notre Dame’s near-destruction after almost nine centuries in grim perspective. And yet the planetary version of burning, which should be humanity’s crisis of all crises, has been met with a general lack of media attention, reflecting a lack of just about every other kind of attention in our world (except by those outraged children who know that they are going to inherit a degraded world and are increasingly making their displeasure about it felt).

To take just one example of that lack of obvious attention, the response of the mega-wealthy to the burning of Notre Dame was an almost instantaneous burst of giving.

The euro equivalent of nearly a billion dollars was raised more or less overnight from

the wealthiest of French families and other .01 percenters. Remind me of the equivalent for climate change as the planet's spire threatens to come down?

As for arsonists like Donald Trump and the matter of collusion, there's not even a question mark on the subject. In the United States, such collusion with the destroyers of human life on Planet Earth is written all over their actions.

It's beyond evident in the appointment of former oil and gas lobbyists and fellow travellers to positions of power. Will there, however, be the

equivalent of a Mueller investigation? Will the president be howling "witch hunt" again? Not a chance. When it comes to Donald Trump and climate change, there will be neither a Mueller Report, nor the need for a classic Barr defence.

And yet collusion – hell, yeah! The evidence is beyond overwhelming.

We are, of course, talking about nothing short of the ultimate crime, but on any given day of our lives, you'd hardly notice that it was underway. Even for an old man like me, it's a terrifying thing to watch

humanity make a decision, however inchoate, to essentially commit suicide. In effect, there is now a suicide watch on Planet Earth. Let's hope the kids can make a difference. **CT**

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**Tom Engelhardt** is a co-founder of the American Empire Project and the author of a history of the Cold War, *The End of Victory Culture*. He runs *TomDispatch.com* and is a fellow of the Type Media Center. His latest book is *A Nation Unmade by War*. This essay first appeared at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com)



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**GUIDED WHALE:** The latest exotic weapon from those dastardly Russkies.

Could we be finding ourselves at the butt end of jokes because in 2016 our society went bat-shit, pants-on-head, insane?, asks **Caitlin Johnstone**

## Whales, crickets, and other fearsome Doomsday weapons from Russia

29

**H** EADLINES were blaring the word “Russian” again the other day because mass media narrative managers found yet another reason for westerners to feel terrified of the icy potato patch that we’d barely ever thought about before 2016.

Yes, I’d like to talk about the Kremlin’s latest horrifying horrific addition to its fearsome doomsday artillery, and recap a few of the other incredibly frightening and terrifying tactics that those strange Cyrillic-scribbling demons of the East are employing to undermine truth, justice, and the American way. Just to make sure we’re all

good and scared like we’re supposed to be.

Gather the kids, clutch your pearls and sign off on hundreds of billions of dollars of extra military spending, my patriotic brethren! Here are five super scary ways the Red Menace is trying to destroy you and everything you hold dear:

### 1. Whales

Headlines and TV news segments from virtually all mainstream outlets were falling all over themselves at the end of April to report the fact that some Norwegians found a tame beluga whale with a harness on

it, and “experts” attest that the animal may have been part of a covert espionage program for the Russian navy.

While there is no indication that this spying cetacean has been trained in the arts of sonar election meddling or shooting novichok from its blowhole, the *Guardian* helpfully informs us that the harness was labelled “Equipment of St. Petersburg”, and was equipped to hold “a camera or weapon”.

“Marine experts in Norway believe they have stumbled upon a white whale that was trained by the Russian navy as part of a programme to use underwater mammals as a spe-

cial ops force,” the *Guardian* reports.

The Norwegian tabloid *Verdens Gang*, which picked up on the discovery well before the breathless English headlines began gracing us with their presence, is a teensy bit less Ian Flemingesque in its reporting on the matter: the harness is equipped for a GoPro camera. The words “Equipment of St. Petersburg” are written in English.

Why is the Russian military writing “Equipment of St. Petersburg” in English on the garments of its aquatic special ops forces, you may ask? If there were indeed a secret beluga espionage squad assembled by Russian intelligence services, would they not perhaps avoid writing the home address of the whales on their harnesses altogether, and maybe, you know, not let them run free in the wild?

To that I would say, stop asking so many questions. That’s just what Putin wants.

## 2. Crickets

A report seeded throughout the mainstream media by anonymous intelligence officials last September claimed that US government workers in Cuba had suffered concussion-like brain damage after hearing strange noises in homes and hotels with the most likely culprit being “sophisticated microwaves or another type of electromagnetic weapon” from Russia. A recording of one such highly sophisticated attack was ana-

lysed by scientists and turned out to be the mating call of the male indies short-tailed cricket. Neurologists and other brain specialists have challenged the claim that any US government workers suffered any neurological damage of any kind, saying test results on the alleged victims were misinterpreted.

The actual story, when stripped of hyperventilating Russia panic, is that some government workers once heard some horny crickets in Cuba.

## 3. Puppies

Ye gads, is nothing sacred? Is there any weapon these monsters won’t use to transform the west into a giant, globe-spanning Mordor?

That’s right, in 2017 puppies became one of the many, many things we’ve been instructed to fear in the hands of our vodka-swilling enemy to the east, with mass media outlets reporting that a Facebook group for animal lovers was one of the sinister, diabolical tactics employed by St. Petersburg’s notorious Internet Research Agency. As the *Moon of Alabama* blog explained, the only evidence we’ve seen so far actually indicates that the Internet Research Agency’s operations in America served no purpose other than to attract eyeballs for money. As journalist Aaron Maté wrote of the highly publicised Russian Facebook meddling, “Far from being a sophisticated propaganda campaign, it was small, amateurish, and mostly unre-

lated to the 2016 election”.

The late Robert Parry, one of the earliest and most outspoken critics of the Russiagate narrative, covered this one for *Consortium News* in an article he authored a few months before his untimely death: “As Mike Isaac and Scott Shane of the *New York Times* reported in Tuesday’s editions, “The Russians who posed as Americans on Facebook last year tried on quite an array of disguises. ... There was even a Facebook group for animal lovers with memes of adorable puppies that spread across the site with the help of paid ads”.

Now, there are a lot of controversial issues in America, but I don’t think any of us would put puppies near the top of the list. Isaac and Shane reported that there were also supposedly Russia-linked groups advocating gay rights, gun rights and black civil rights, although precisely how these divergent groups were “linked” to Russia or the Kremlin was never fully explained. (Facebook declined to offer details.)

At this point, a professional journalist might begin to pose some very hard questions to the sources, who presumably include many partisan Democrats and their political allies hyping the evil-Russia narrative. It would be time for some lectures to the sources about the consequences for taking reporters on a wild ride in conspiracy land.

Yet, instead of starting to question the overall premise of this “scandal,” journalists at the

*New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, CNN, etc. keep making excuses for the nuttiness. The explanation for the puppy ads was that the nefarious Russians might be probing to discover Americans who might later be susceptible to propaganda.

“The goal of the dog lovers’ page was more obscure”, Isaac and Shane acknowledged. “But some analysts suggested a possible motive: to build a large following before gradually introducing political content. Without viewing the entire feed from the page, now closed by Facebook, it is impossible to say whether the Russian operators tried such tactics.”

#### 4. Pokémon

Yes, Pokémon.

This Russia hysteria has been a long, wild ride, and sometimes it’s honestly felt like they’re just experimenting on us. Like they’ve been testing the limits of how ridiculous they can make this thing and still get mainstream Americans to swallow it. Like the establishment propagandists are all sitting around in a room smoking blunts and making bets with each other all,

“I’m telling you, we can sell a Pokémon Go Kremlin conspiracy.”

“Do it!”

“No way. There’s no way they’ll go for it.”

“Yeah well you said that about the puppy dogs!”

And then they release their latest experiment in social

manipulation and place bets on how many disgruntled Hillary voters they can get retweeting it saying “God dammit, I knew that jigglypuff looked suspicious!”

The October 2017 CNN report which sparked off a full day of shrieking “OMG THEY’RE EVEN USING PIKACHU TO ATTACK OUR DEMOCRACY” headlines was titled, “Exclusive: Even Pokémon Go used by extensive Russian-linked meddling effort”, and it reported that Russia had extended its “tentacles” into the popular video game for the purpose of election meddling.

Apparently the Internet Research Agency attempted to hold a contest using the game to highlight police brutality against unarmed Black men, which of course is something that only an evil autocracy would ever do.

Not until the 15th paragraph of the article did we see the information which undercut all the frantic arm flailing about Russians destroying democracy and warping our children’s fragile little minds: “CNN has not found any evidence that any Pokémon Go users attempted to enter the contest, or whether any of the Amazon Gift Cards that were promised were ever awarded – or, indeed, whether the people who designed the contest ever had any intention of awarding the prizes.”

Mmm hmm.

#### 5. Laughter

Late last year the BBC pub-

lished an article titled, “How Putin’s Russia turned humour into a weapon” about yet another addition to the Kremlin’s horrifying deadly hybrid warfare arsenal: comedy.

The article’s author, ironically titled “Senior Journalist (Disinformation)” by the BBC, argues that Russia has suddenly discovered laughter as a way to “deliberately lower the level of discussion”.

“Russia’s move towards using humour to influence its campaigns is a relatively recent phenomenon”, the article explained, without speculating as to why Russians might have suddenly begun laughing at their western accusers.

Is it perhaps possible that Russian media have begun mocking the west a lot more because westerners have made themselves much easier to make fun of?

Could it perhaps be the fact that western mass media have been doing absolutely insane things like constantly selling us the idea that the Kremlin could be lurking behind anything in our world, even really innocuous-looking things like puppy dogs, Pokémon and whales?

Could we perhaps be finding ourselves at the butt end of jokes now because in 2016 our society went bat0shit, pants-on-head, screaming-at-passing-motor-vehicles insane?

Nahhh. Couldn’t be. It’s the Russians who’ve gone mad. **CT**

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**Caitlin Johnstone** is an Australian blogger. Follow her at [www.caitlinjohnstone.com](http://www.caitlinjohnstone.com)

Once again, the corporate media is doing its required job of keeping the public in a state of ignorance, or acquiescence, regarding the crimes of the West, say **David Cromwell & David Edwards**

# How the media ignored 40,000 dead Venezuelans

**A** REPORT on April 25 by a respected think tank has estimated that US sanctions imposed on Venezuela in August 2017 have caused around 40,000 deaths. This atrocity has been almost entirely blanked by the British mainstream media, including BBC News. Additional sanctions imposed in January 2019 are likely to lead to tens of thousands more deaths.

The report was co-authored by Mark Weisbrot and Jeffrey Sachs for the US-based Center for Economic and Policy Research. CEPR was founded in 1999 “to promote democratic debate on the most important economic and social issues that affect people’s lives”. Its advisory board includes Nobel Laureate economists Robert Solow and Joseph Stiglitz.

Weisbrot is co-director of CEPR and his expertise encompasses economic growth, trade, international financial institutions, development and Latin America. Sachs is a world-renowned economist and senior

UN advisor with considerable knowledge of policies related to sustainable development and combatting poverty. Their credentials are impressive and the title of their report – *US Sanctions on Venezuela Are Responsible for Tens of Thousands of Deaths* – is damning.

**T**he Trump administration imposed sanctions on Venezuela in August 2017. These prohibited the Venezuelan government from borrowing in US markets, thus preventing the country from restructuring its foreign debt.

As the report made clear: “It is important to emphasise that nearly all of the foreign exchange that is needed to import medicine, food, medical equipment, spare parts and equipment needed for electricity generation, water systems, or transportation, is received by the Venezuelan economy through the government’s revenue from the export of oil. Thus, any sanctions that reduce

export earnings, and therefore government revenue, thereby reduce the imports of these essential and, in many cases, life-saving goods”.

The authors added: “The sanctions reduced the public’s caloric intake, increased disease and mortality (for both adults and infants), and displaced millions of Venezuelans who fled the country as a result of the worsening economic depression and hyperinflation. They exacerbated Venezuela’s economic crisis and made it nearly impossible to stabilise the economy, contributing further to excess deaths. All of these impacts disproportionately harmed the poorest and most vulnerable Venezuelans”.

In January 2019, additional US sanctions cut Venezuela off from its largest oil market – the United States. Washington also intervened to pressure other countries, including India, not to buy Venezuelan oil that had been previously imported by the US. The consequences have been catastrophic. Amongst the



report's findings were:

- More than 40,000 deaths from 2017–18.

- Sanctions have reduced the availability of food and medicine, and increased disease and mortality

- The August 2017 sanctions contributed to a sharp decline in oil production, causing great harm to the civilian population.

- If US sanctions implemented in January 2019 continue, they will almost certainly result in tens of thousands more avoidable deaths;

- This finding is based on an estimated 80,000 people with HIV who have not had anti-retroviral treatment since 2017, 16,000 people who need dialysis, 16,000 people with cancer, and four million with diabetes and hypertension (many of whom cannot obtain insulin or cardiovascular medicine).

- Since the January 2019 sanctions, oil production has fallen by 431,000 barrels per day or 36.4 per cent. This will greatly accelerate the humanitarian crisis. But the projected 67 per cent decline in oil production for the year, if the sanctions continue, would cause vastly more loss of human life.

Weisbrot spelled out the enormity of punitive US policy towards Venezuela: “The sanctions are depriving Venezuelans of lifesaving medicines, medical equipment, food, and other essential imports. This is illegal under US and international law, and treaties that the US has signed. Congress should

move to stop it”.

Just as the corporate media blamed Saddam Hussein for the devastating impact of US-UK sanctions on Iraq which led to the deaths of over one million Iraqis between 1990 and 2003, “our free press” are united in blaming Nicolás Maduro, the Venezuelan president, for the country’s economic and humanitarian crisis.

The new CEPR report refutes that propaganda framework. Sachs emphasised: “Venezuela’s economic crisis is routinely blamed all on Venezuela. But it is much more than that. American sanctions are deliberately aiming to wreck Venezuela’s

### With a single exception, US and UK mainstream newspapers have simply turned a blind eye to the damning report

economy and thereby lead to regime change. It’s a fruitless, heartless, illegal, and failed policy, causing grave harm to the Venezuelan people”.

**T**he report highlights that: “the pain and suffering being inflicted upon the civilian population may not be collateral damage but actually part of the strategy to topple the government”.

Indeed, Weisbrot and Sachs make the devastating point that sanctions: “would fit the definition of collective punishment of the civilian population as described in both the Geneva

and Hague international conventions, to which the US is a signatory”.

In a sane political and media world, this would be headline news.

So, what has been the media response to such a damning report by two authoritative experts? In fact, with a single exception, US and UK mainstream newspapers have simply turned a blind eye.

This lack of coverage is especially ironic in the case of the *Guardian*. As journalist John McEvoy, a regular contributor to the Canary website, pointed out: “In an editorial [in 2008] the @guardian praised CEPR

as ‘a professional thorn in the side of orthodoxy’ & claimed ‘in a world of Goliaths, CEPR makes a rather effective David’. Yet it has said nothing of CEPR’s recent study holding US sanctions

responsible for 40,000 deaths in Venezuela”.

We challenged BBC News via Twitter to cover the important new CEPR report implicating US policy in the deaths of over 40,000 Venezuelans: “What are the odds that @BBCNews will push this as their lead story, with major coverage on #BBC-NewsTen from one of their big-name reporters? #Venezuela”

There has been no BBC coverage, as far as we can see.

Online, we found a brief mention in an article by the mainstream press agency, Agence France-Presse: it was buried in the final three paragraphs of a 25-paragraph piece. Excep-

tions to the 'norm' of shameful, power-friendly silence were found in media outlets that we are supposed to ignore or disparage in the West: RT, Sputnik International, TeleSur English, Venezuela Analysis, among others.

Imagine if Russian policy had been responsible for a similar number of deaths in another country, with tens of thousands more lives at risk in the months to come. The headlines and in-depth coverage here would be incessant. The Russian ambassador in London would be given a stern dressing-down by the UK Foreign Secretary. There would be calls at Westminster from all parties to condemn Putin in the strongest possible terms. There would be global demands for the UN to intervene.

**T**he ideological discipline required to ignore such a major crime under Western policy is

## Imagine if Russian policy had been responsible for a similar number of deaths in another country

remarkable, but entirely standard in the corporate media system; as Noam Chomsky has long observed.

The independent journalist Caitlin Johnstone summed up: "To be clear, this unforgivable atrocity rests predominantly on the shoulders of the Trump administration. [...] Imagine if Trump deployed a barrage of Tomahawk missiles onto the most impoverished parts of a densely populated city in Venezuela, then hearing anyone say 'Well Maduro actually exploded those people, because he wouldn't do what we told him to do'. [...] Sanctions are a slower and more gruelling weapon of war than bombs and missiles, but they're vastly superior when it comes to the matter of

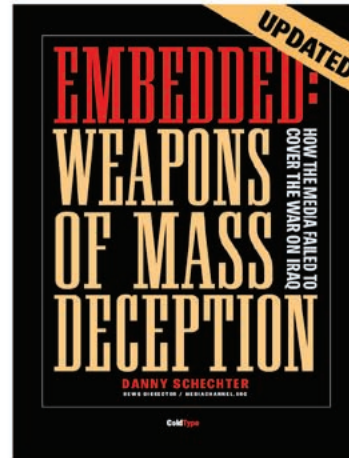
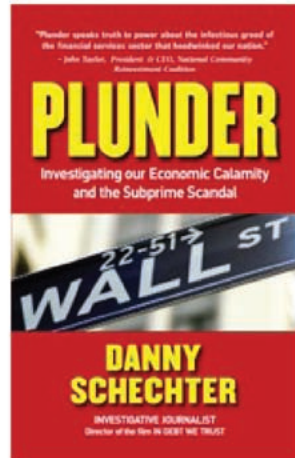
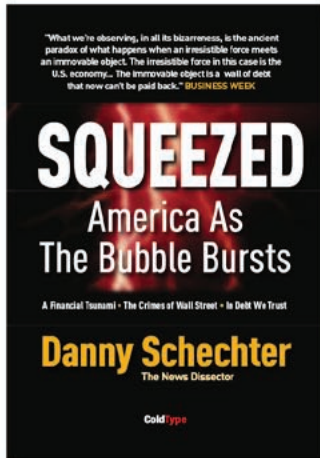
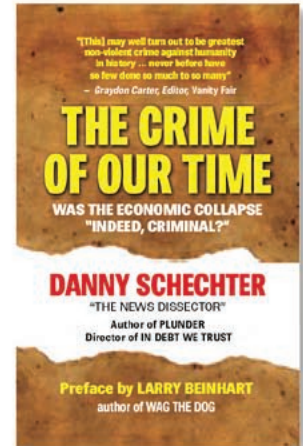
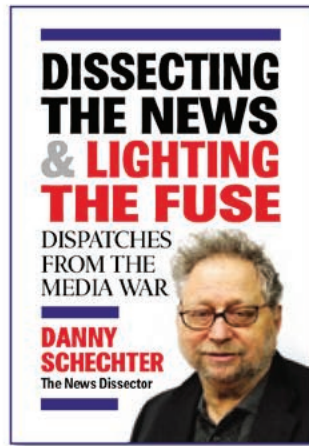
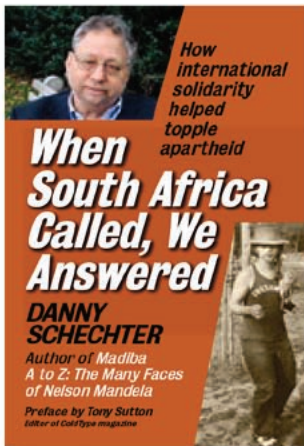
keeping the public asleep through depraved acts of mass slaughter".

As ever, the corporate media is doing its required job of keeping the public in a state of ignorance, or acquiescence, regarding the crimes of the West. "When truth is replaced by silence", the Soviet dissident Yevgeny Yevtushenko once said, "the silence is a lie". As John Pilger noted in 2004, following the invasion and occupation of Iraq: "He might have been referring to the silence over the devastating effects of the embargo. It is a silence that casts journalists as accessories, just as their silence contributed to an illegal and unprovoked invasion of a defenceless country". **CT**

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**David Cromwell and David Edwards** are co-editors of *Medialens*, the UK press watchdog. This article was first published at their website [www.medialens.org](http://www.medialens.org)

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# REMEMBERING DANNY SCHECHTER 1942 - 2015



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Danny Schechter, the NewsDissector, was acclaimed as one of the most politically astute journalists in recent memory. As a tribute to him and an appreciation of his work with ColdType, we are giving away free downloads of these seven books, all published in association with ColdType.net. Download them at:

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Ellen Maud Bennett's death shows how doctors endanger some patients' lives by obsessing on weight loss, writes **Patty Thille**

# How doctors' anti-fat bias is killing people

**W**HEN Ellen Maud Bennett died a year ago, her obituary published in the local newspaper, the Victoria (BC) *Times-Colonist*, gained national media attention in Canada, although she wasn't a celebrity.

Bennett's obituary revealed that she died from cancer days after finally being diagnosed – after years of seeking help. Her diagnosis came so late, beyond the point where treatments were possible, because the 64-year-old woman was repeatedly told her health problems were caused by her weight – or more specifically, by the amount of fat on her body.

She died because of bad assumptions that caused poor quality care. And she used her own obituary to share her dying wish: “Ellen's dying wish was that women of size make her death matter by advocating strongly for their health and not accepting that fat is the only relevant health issue.”

How to know if this might be

happening to you? When do you need to advocate for yourself? I studied the phenomenon of anti-fat stigma in Canadian primary care clinics for my PhD. Knowing how it happens might help.

Bodily fatness is a stigmatised body characteristic in Canada and other wealthy countries. Within any given culture, some characteristics or histories are assumed to reflect a character flaw. The characteristic is treated as a sign of inferiority. The result is loss of social status and widespread societal discrimination.

**W**ith bodily fatness, the assumed character flaws are laziness, ignorance or weak willpower.

In a comprehensive review published 10 years ago, there was strong evidence of fatness-related discrimination in employment, while other sectors were less researched. Studies carried out since that time confirm the pattern – including

within health care.

Poor quality clinical care due to anti-fat stigma occurs when doctors or nurses assume the stereotype holds true.

One common way this happens: a clinician simply tells you to “lose weight”, as Bennett heard many times when seeking help. That's like telling patients to “lose blood sugar”. Telling people to produce an outcome is not good quality clinical care.

This is especially awful when weight is not related to the topic at hand – an ear infection, for example. Sometimes, clinicians do this as “opportunistic counselling”. It's done assuming the benefits outweigh harms – except we know that doing this for weight reduces trust in health-care providers. And reduced trust can lead to avoidance, for obvious reasons – needs aren't met.

Unfortunately, some clinicians give very simplistic weight loss advice, such as “eat more salads”, without any assessment of what the patient already knows, does, has



**Science tells us that body weight is not just about lifestyle, and yet health-care providers often assume that people with obesity are lazy and that fatness is the only relevant health issue.**

tried or can afford and fit into their lives.

Simplistic advice is patronising at best; it assumes patients are ignorant, as per the stereotype. This approach vastly underestimates the knowledge of a patient, gained in part through repeated past attempts to change body composition. One Canadian study found that half of those classified as overweight, and 71 percent of those categorised as obese, had tried to reduce their body weight in the last year.

Simplistic messages – “lose weight” or “exercise more” – assume thinness is easy and simply involves some lifestyle tweaks. When such advice is given without assessment of health concerns – for instance, headaches – anti-fat biases can endanger lives.

Clinicians should, at minimum, recommend actions that have a chance at producing an

outcome. Lifestyle changes only produce modest effects for most, yet many clinicians assume much bigger impacts.

Obesity Canada, an organisation that uses evidence-based action to prevent and manage obesity, reminds health-care providers that the typical body weight reduction from sustained lifestyle changes is five percent of body weight. Dramatic life changes, such as those of participants on the TV show *The Biggest Loser*, can slow the body’s resting metabolic rate, triggering weight regain.

**S**cience also tells us that factors beyond lifestyle are influencing population shifts around body weight and fatness.

But these scientific findings are still not routinely integrated into health-care professionals’ understandings of weight. As a result, many still empha-

size poor willpower as the core problem. You shouldn’t have to advocate for yourself to get adequate health care. You should be able to trust your health-care professionals.

There are many people working to ensure access to good quality health care. But tackling discrimination is complex.

You can help. When clinicians make one of these common mistakes or in some other way block you being diagnosed or treated, you are on good grounds to challenge them. Say something like: “What would you do if someone with a thin body had this problem”? Then encourage them to treat you in the same way.

After receiving poor quality care, register a complaint with the provider’s professional licensing body. They may not investigate your individual complaint but do track trends. Patient advocates are also available in some hospitals to help you get the care you need.

News stories come and go. But the issues Ellen Maud Bennett raised in her obituary should not disappear from our consciousness so quickly. You deserve good care, just as she did. **CT**

*This article is written in memory of Ellen Maud Bennett, with the permission of her sister.*

**Patty Thille** is assistant professor in physical therapy at Canada’s University of Manitoba. This article was first published at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)

Over five years, the small German charity Sea-Watch has saved 37,000 lives. But xenophobia and repression threaten its survival, writes **Susan H Smith**

# Aboard one of Europe's last migrant rescue ships

**A**T the height of the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015, there were 14 migrant rescue ships operated by international humanitarian organisations in the Central Mediterranean Sea. Today, following the ascendance of right-wing governments and draconian measures enacted by the European Union, only the Sea-Watch 3 and its small air reconnaissance plane still patrol the waters.

Owned and operated by Sea-Watch, a small German charity based in Berlin, the 180ft ship has a crew of 22 volunteers, including navigators, physicians, mechanics and cultural mediators. Since 2014, nearly 500 volunteers have worked with Sea-Watch to save more than 37,000 lives amidst the worst refugee crisis since World War II – a crisis that has forcibly displaced 68.5-million people worldwide.

In March, the EU downscaled its own rescue assets, known as Operation Sophia. This effectively turned over governmen-

tal search and rescue, or SAR, responsibilities in the Central Mediterranean to the Libyan Coast Guard, which is paid to return shipwrecked migrants to Libya – a direct violation of the Geneva Refugee Convention, as it puts refugees and asylum seekers in an unsafe country. At the same time, all EU nations bordering the Mediterranean have adopted the policy of preventing rescue ships from landing and disembarking migrants.

**W**hile Sea-Watch 3 is currently the last non-governmental rescue ship in the Central Mediterranean Sea, there are still some operating in the Eastern Mediterranean, near Greece. Once docked, they face a protracted bureaucratic ordeal. Following port-of-entry registration and inspection, they are often detained on arbitrary charges such as a missing document. Meanwhile, the international crew members – who are primarily European

in origin – face harassment and fines. Government hostility is particularly harsh in countries bordering the Mediterranean, despite there being a number of open-port and sanctuary cities such as Palermo, Naples and Barcelona.

Aside from stalling and preventing rescue ships from docking, the EU also works with local authorities and militias in North and Sub-Saharan Africa to prevent migrants from making the dangerous trip to Europe.

Sea-Watch 3 has already experienced multiple stand-offs with European nations this year. For example, in January, Italy, France, Malta and Spain refused to offer the crew and its 47 guests safe harbour for almost two weeks. Finally, Italy allowed them to land and disembark in Catania – only to detain the ship another three weeks on minor charges, preventing it from responding to urgent calls for SAR. In fact, while the Sea-Watch 3 was being detained, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR,



**LONELY GUARD:** The Sea-Watch 3 is the only rescue ship currently operating in the Central Mediterranean.

reported that 170 migrants perished in two shipwrecks off the coast of Libya and Morocco.

According to Jelka Kretschmar, a Sea-Watch activist from Berlin, the rising tides of right-wing politics and xenophobia in Europe are to blame. “Negative public media campaigns and defamation have had a massive impact on our ability to operate. Tragically, every single day that the ship is blocked from rescuing, people perish at sea”.

Aside from stalling and preventing rescue ships from docking, the EU also works with local authorities and militias in North and Sub-Saharan Africa to prevent migrants from ever making the dangerous trip to Europe. In the case of Libya, a country invaded by NATO with-

out UN Security Council backing in 2011, rival governments battle for national control and are quick to abandon refugee rights and safety in favour of bribes of foreign currency and weapons. This makes Libya the perfect breeding ground for smuggling, human trafficking and a wide variety of other human rights violations. Once returned to the failed state, migrants are most often detained in camps, raped, tortured, trafficked or sold into slavery.

**A**s a result of EU efforts to seal the northern Mediterranean border, migrants are forced to choose different, unknown, and increasingly perilous paths towards the elusive goal

of safety and security.

Kretschmar expressed her frustration with the United Nations and the five permanent members of the Security Council for putting economic gain over human lives, and for failing to address the root causes of – as well as their complicity in – the global migration crisis.

“A first step for the European Union is to stop investing in militias,” she said. “They should take responsibility and request the United Nations to send the blue helmets [UN peacekeepers] into Libya.” Seeing neocolonialism as a root cause mass migration to Europe, she noted, “You cannot exploit and destroy the resources and infrastructure of the southern hemisphere, repress its people and expect no reaction”.

Meanwhile, former Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki – who was elected after the Jan. 14 revolution in 2011 – puts the onus of the humanitarian catastrophe on the breakdown of sovereignty. At a recent event at Fordham University, he stated that, “Unlike Tunisia, which is a safe country with a centralised government, Libya has a power vacuum in which foreign powers are able to pay off rival governments and militias to stop migration and exploit oil and other resources. We need to increase the accountability of the international community”.

Marzouki named racism as a motivating factor in not only Europe’s xenophobia, but also Libya’s abuse and subjugation of black migrants. “The way Libyans are treating poor refugees is shameful”, he said. “We accept their deaths and this humanitarian disaster because they are African, from countries like Nigeria and Mali. It is a crime against humanity”. He went on to say that the EU – particularly Italy and France – share responsibility for engendering chaos and factionalism in Libya to control the border. He then asked, “Where is the international community to remedy this culture and structure of violence, and guarantee non-repetition”?

As a result of EU efforts to seal the northern Mediterranean border, migrants are forced to choose different, unknown, and increasingly perilous paths towards the elusive goal of safety and security.

According to Kretzschmar,



**SAVED FROM DEATH: Sea-Watch rescues migrants ignored by the EU-funded Libyan Coast Guard.**

“There are no actual numbers of deaths in the desert or at sea, since a huge effort is invested to silence those who are watching and reporting”.

**M**oonbird, Sea-Watch’s aerial reconnaissance asset, struggles to observe human rights violations in the Central Mediterranean, but is often grounded by governmental officials. “They seek to silence rescue missions, which often witness and report violations of international law and human rights by national and private vessels”, Kretzschmar said.

At the same time, she argued, these countries bordering the Mediterranean fail to conduct SAR in conformity with Article 98 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea – an international treaty adopted and signed in 1982.

As the journey across the Mediterranean becomes more-

fraught with danger, much of the human flow from Africa and Asia has diverted to South and Central America, where many countries don’t require visas.

According to Dr. Camilo Perez-Bustillo of the Hope Border Institute, one-third of those seeking asylum in the United States began their journey overseas. “Migrant flows at the US-Mexico border, and specifically in the El Paso sector, are increasingly diverse and have recently included large numbers of migrants of African and Asian origin. This is reflected in an increasing number of African migrants seeking asylum here and being detained”.

So long as the United Nations and EU lack the political will to address their complicity in the root causes of mass displacement, civil society must carry the burden of solving the escalating humanitarian crisis.

Given this phenomenon, it is



not surprising that the number of refugees reaching Europe's shores is decreasing. According to Kretschmar, attempts at migration across the Central Mediterranean are only one-tenth of what they were three years ago, but that hasn't led to a drop in the death toll. According to the UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration, one in five people attempting to cross the Mediterranean will die, whereas three years ago it was one in 18. She emphasised that the actual death toll is much higher, as the official numbers account only for identified deaths, such as bodies washed up on shore.

**M**aking matters worse, of course, is the fact that SAR ships are finding it nearly impossible to stay operative. Doctors Without Borders, SOS Mediterranee and Migrant Off-shore Aid Station are among the humanitarian organisations that have been forced to shut down their vessels, particularly since populist parties in Italy took power in March 2018. From funding the expensive missions to confronting state-led smear campaigns to deal-

ing with negative societal pressure to responding to increasing governmental constraints and the criminalisation of staff – the challenges are simply too numerous. Even commercial boats and private fisherman are becoming increasingly afraid of responding due to all the complicating factors.

While Sea-Watch has managed to stay operative despite these challenges – thanks in large part to German and international donor support –

### The Dutch government issued a new policy citing concerns for the onboard safety of rescued individuals

new hurdles keep popping up. The latest obstacle comes from the Netherlands – the country where Sea-Watch 3 is registered and was undergoing planned maintenance and inspections in March.

Just before leaving to return to SAR operations in the Mediterranean, the Dutch government issued a new policy citing concerns for the onboard safety of rescued individuals. It has effectively thwarted Sea-Watch 3's movement. According to Kretschmar it is "the absurd-

ity, perversion and institutionalised discrimination of a policy that would rather leave people to drown than rescue them".

Now, as it approaches five years of operation, Sea-Watch continues its fight to be fully operational. So long as the United Nations and EU lack the political will to address their complicity in the root causes of mass displacement, civil society must carry the burden of solving the escalating humanitarian crisis.

Sea-Watch remains vehement in its call for #SafePassage and has no intention to give up its fight to ensure no one dies at Europe's deadly southern border. **CT**

*Susan H Smith is director of operations at the Fellowship of Reconciliation, community liaison for the Muslim Peace Fellowship, and a member of the intentional multi-faith Community of Living Traditions at Stony Point Center, NY. She is involved in migrant justice and anti-Islamophobia work at local, national and international levels. This article was first produced by the Fellowship of Reconciliation at [www.wagingnonviolence.org](http://www.wagingnonviolence.org)*

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JOE BAGEANT**  
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Spain's election showed that campaigning on a social democratic ticket when you're running for office and then ruling with careful centrism once you get into power are over, writes **Conn Hallinan**

# Some hard lessons for the Left from Spain

**T**HERE were several lessons to take from last month's Spanish elections, some special to Spain, others that resonate continent wide. Since the 28-member European Union is preparing to vote on the make-up of the European Parliament at the end of this month, those lessons are relevant.

On the surface the outcome seemed pretty straightforward: Spain's Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) picked up lots of seats – but not enough to form a government – the country's traditional center-right Popular Party (PP) took a pounding, the ultra-right edged into parliament and the centre did well. But Spain's politics are as complex as the country's geography, and certainly not as simple as the *New York Times's* analysis that the outcome was a “strong pro-European Union vote” that will allow Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez “to tackle Spain's neglected economic challenges”.

For starters, the majority did not vote for the EU, but, to the

contrary, against the devastation the huge trading bloc has inflicted on Spain through a decade of austerity measures.

The Spanish Socialists ran on a platform of jobs creation, implementing a US-inspired “Green New Deal”, a 22 percent jump in the minimum wage and greater funding for education and science, all issues that run counter to the tight-fisted policies of the EU.

Indeed, if the European Union had been on the ballot it might have gone badly for Brussels, not exactly a Spexit, but hardly a ringing endorsement. Part of the Socialist victory reflected the profound ineptness of the opposition on the right.

**F**or more than 40 years, the Popular Party has been an umbrella for the Spanish right, ranging from conservative businessmen and small farmers to unreconstructed supporters of the fascist dictator, Francisco Franco. But when the left-wing Podemos Party

won 20 percent of the vote in 2015, it unleashed centrifugal forces that smashed up the old two-party system that had dominated the country since the death of Franco in 1975.

Besides opening the political landscape to multiple parties, including the centre right Ciudadanos, or “Citizens” Party, it put immeasurable strains on the Socialist and Popular parties.

In the case of the latter, the PP's extreme right jumped ship and formed “Vox”, whose policies are little different than Franco's: opposition to abortion, equal rights for women, gay rights, immigration, and regional autonomy.

The party won almost 11 percent of the vote in a recent election in Andalusia, Spain's most populous province. It is currently part of the province's ruling coalition, which includes the PP and Citizens, but underperformed in last month's vote.

The PP's turn to the right as a strategy to peel off Vox votes was a disaster. Women, in particular, felt threatened by some

of the party's anti-abortion talk, and the PP's candidates hand-picked by party leader Pablo Casado were underwhelming.

The Socialists also had their divisions. In 2016 the PSOE's rightwing engineered the ouster of Sanchez after he considered forming a government with Podemos and several small regional parties. The rightwing of the Socialists then allowed the PP to form a minority government, a move that did not sit well with the Party's rank and file.

Sanchez barnstormed the country, rallying the Socialist's left wing and taking back the Party's leadership seven months later.

In this last election the PSOE stayed united, a major reason why Sanchez is in a position to form a government.

Was the election a victory for the centre? There is not a lot of evidence for that. While Citizens did well – it bypassed Unidos-Podemos to become the third largest party in the parliament with 57 seats – most of its votes came from former PP members alienated by the Popular Party's sharp turn to the right and the profound corruption that has enmeshed many of its leaders.

The PP, Citizens and Vox all pounded away at the Catalan independence movement and immigration, two issues that did not resonate very strongly with the electorate. A poll by Spain's Centre for Sociological Research showed that voters were most concerned with unemployment (61.8 percent),

**Faced with the demands of capital, on one hand, and the misery of yet more austerity, many socialist parties – with the exception of Britain's and Portugal's – have gone along with the strictures of the EU**

corruption (33.3 percent) and the state of the political parties (29.1 percent). Only 8.9 percent felt immigration was a major issue, and Catalan independence was a concern for only 11 percent. In short, when the right was railing at the Catalans and immigrants, most of the voters tuned out.

The leftist UP also took a beating, dropping from 71 to 42 seats, but that was partly due to a falling out between the two major Podemos leaders, Pablo Iglesias and Inigo Errejón, and disagreements on how closely the leftist alliance should align itself with the Socialists. In contrast, the leftwing Catalan parties did well.

**T**he Socialists now face two major problems.

First, there is the PSOE's programme that, if instituted, would certainly ease the austerity policies of the EU and the PP that have inflicted such pain on the bulk of Spaniards. While

unemployment has come down from its height during the years following the 2008 financial crash, many of those jobs are low paying, benefit-free, temporary gigs.

A Green New Deal would confront climate change and create new jobs. Repairing the social safety net that the PP and the EU have shredded would not only make people's lives easier, it would stimulate the economy.

But the EU is pressing for almost \$28-billion in government spending cuts, that, if agreed to, would make much of the Socialists' programme still-born. Faced with the demands of capital, on one hand, and the misery of yet more austerity, many socialist parties – with the exception of Britain's and Portugal's – have gone along with the strictures of the EU.

When they do, they pay the price: centre-left parties all over Europe have been decimated for buying into the debt reduction strategy of the EU. Socialist parties tend to run from the left and govern from the centre, but if Sanchez does that, the party's support will evaporate.

Secondly, there is the Catalan problem. While Sanchez has pledged to open a dialogue with the Catalans, he has steadfastly refused to consider their demand for a referendum on independence.

The Socialist leader argues that he is constrained by the Spanish constitution that explicitly forbids provinces from seceding. But the constitution was drawn up only a few years after Franco's death and

is deeply flawed on a number of different levels, including giving rural regions greater representation than urban areas.

The refusal of Sanchez to consider a referendum makes “dialogue” an empty phrase. It is not even clear if the majority of Catalans would vote for independence, although the policies of Madrid – in particular the brutal crushing of a referendum effort this past October, and the arrest and imprisonment of Catalan leaders – certainly seems to have increased separatist sentiment. In the recent election Catalan independence parties won a majority in the Provence.

Sanchez may try to construct a coalition without the Catalan parties, which would be a major mistake. Many of the Catalan parties are more simpatico to the PSOE on economic and social matters than some of

**It is not clear if the majority of Catalans would vote for independence, although the brutal crushing of a referendum effort last October, and the arrest and imprisonment of Catalan leaders – seems to have increased separatist sentiment**

the other regional parties the Socialists will try to recruit to form a government. And, as the recent election showed, people want some answers to their economic problems.

The Socialists will certainly be attacked by the right if they allow a referendum, but the PP labelled them “terrorists” in

this last election and the majority of voters didn’t buy it. The referendum could require a super majority – maybe 60 per cent – to pass, because it would be folly to take the province out of Spain on the basis of a narrow win.

But the Catalan question cannot be dispersed with tear gas, billy clubs or prisons, and constitutions are not immutable documents. For European parties on the centre-left, Spain’s elections had a message: the old days of campaigning on left social democracy when you’re running for office and ruling with careful centrism once you get into power are over. People want answers.

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*Conn Hallinan can be read at [www.dispatchesfromtheedge.blog.wordpress.com](http://www.dispatchesfromtheedge.blog.wordpress.com) and at [www.middleempseries.wordpress.com](http://www.middleempseries.wordpress.com)*



**READ THE BEST OF JOE BAGEANT**

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

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

– **Tony Sutton, Editor**



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

[www.issuu.com/frontline.south](http://www.issuu.com/frontline.south)

Vijay Prashad tells how a Canadian gold mining company's actions led to accusations that it was stealing resources in Papua New Guinea

# Rich multinational mining companies, poor miners

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**F**EW people outside Papua New Guinea know about Porgera. Those who do know about it know that it is one of the centres of international gold mining, with a major company with an innocuous name – Porgera Joint Venture (PJV) – sucking out the enormous deposits of gold from its mountainous landscape.

The Porgera mine is one of the world's top 10 producers of gold, which makes it remarkably rich – although the people who live near the mine have not shared in the spoils. The proven gold reserves of the Porgera mine are worth over \$10-billion in today's gold prices, and it is just one of Papua New Guinea's hundreds of mines.

The population of Papua New Guinea is just eight-million, which – given such wealth – would suggest that its people lived enriched lives. But this is not the case.

Behind the name PJV sits the Canadian mining company Barrick Gold and the Chinese mining company Zijin Mining. Both

are making enormous profits from this mine – and others. Barrick Gold, as a new briefing – *Ten Canadian Mining Companies: Financial Details and Violations* – by the Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, shows, is worth billions of dollars and has mining operations across the world. It has been the primary owner of the mine from 2006 to 2015. Zijin Mining is one of China's largest gold producers, which has gradually left the Chinese shores to enter joint partnerships abroad.

**L**ast November, lawyers – on behalf of the Justice Foundation for Porgera (landowners of the Special Mining Lease Area) – filed a suit worth \$13-billion against the Government of Papua New Guinea. The contracts signed between the company and the government prevents any third party from suing the company for anything (this is called a “privity of contract” in legal terms). The Justice Foundation for Porgera could not

directly sue Barrick Gold. This is why the lawyers – based in Australia – have filed their claim in accord with the rules of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law. It has taken the lawyers and the plaintiffs seven years to prepare this important suit. This suit has brought some attention to the situation in Papua New Guinea.

The main human rights group in Porgera – the Akali Tange Association (ATA) – is not part of this lawsuit. They are pushing Barrick Gold to establish a grievance mechanism that responds to the claims of the people. The locals have complained about a range of human rights violations since 1989, just as the mine was being prepared to start production, but no one listened. In 2004, the ATA – then newly formed – focused some attention on the mine and got various international groups to pay attention to the gross violations of their land and their bodies.

In 2005, ATA released its first



Looking out across the lower half of the Porgera processing plant, and down into the Porgera valley.

major report – *The Shooting Fields of Porgera Joint Venture* – which documented the killing of 14 people as well as torture and arbitrary arrests of people by PJV security guards. At that time, the mine was owned by the Canadian company Placer Dome. It caught the attention of Mining Watch Canada, a group formed in 1999 to monitor the activities of Canadian mining companies around the world. Placer Dome did not deny the shootings, but little came of the outcry, largely because Placer Dome sold the mine to Barrick Gold the following year.

**Placer Dome did not deny the shootings, but little came of the outcry, largely because the company sold the mine to Barrick Gold the following year**

However, Barrick, one of Canada's largest mining firms, did not provide respite to the population. Conversations with the activists of ATA and the voluminous files they have

archived show that the violence and the impoverishment continued. Shootings at miners and at activists started almost as soon as Barrick took over. The government of Papua New Guinea conducted an investigation in 2006, in which it heard from witnesses, but no report was issued.

McDiyan Robert Yapari, who is one of the leaders of the ATA, worked for a janitorial company that had a contract with the Porgera Gold Mine. He became active in the ATA after his brother – Jerry Yapari – was murdered by mine

guards, who threw rocks on him and crushed him to death. Jerry's death a decade ago was "terrible", McDiyan told me. It inspires his work now to fight for justice in Porgera. The ATA, McDiyan says, currently has 940 human rights allegations against the company, all filed with the company's grievance mechanism. These allegations run from extrajudicial killings to gang rapes to chemical poisoning.

Their calls, McDiyan says, "have fallen on deaf ears." "We have tried to reach for assistance to air our grievances for everyone to know what a Canadian mining company does to the indigenous communities here in Porgera," McDiyan said.

After *The Shooting Fields of Porgera Joint Venture*, the ATA produced two more reports: *Porgera Gross Human Rights Violations* (2017) and *Cost of Gold* (2018). Reading these texts is painful. The first text provided the basis for the US-based NGO BSR (Business for Social Responsibility) to develop its own report, *In Search of Justice*. The Akali Tange Association is working closely with BSR to push Barrick to accept its 10 – very basic – recommendations. Barrick responded with a media brush-off typical of multinationals, and cancelled a November 2018 meeting with the ATA.

McDiyan says that Barrick has made no effort to dialogue with the ATA.

The second text – *Cost of Gold* – carries the correspond-

## Security guards linked to the mine and police burned down 150 homes near the mine, attacked the community and raped at least eight women

ence between ATA and various government authorities. It is a one-sided correspondence. ATA writes into the void, asking for help but not getting much in the way of serious consideration. The descriptions of the violence are vivid and sincere. Women write of rape as an object to destroy their society, to humiliate the women and create social discord inside families. Routine violence is the order of things. On March 25, 2017, security guards linked to the mine and police burned down 150 homes near the mine, attacked the community and raped at least eight women.

McDiyan reported on this case of forced eviction. He was arrested under the cybercrimes law of Papua New Guinea and detained for over 30 hours. Released from bail, McDiyan – with community support – fought his case and won. It is one of the few victories in Porgera.

**T**he fight for compensation is an old one. The people – through ATA's recommendations – seek compensation not merely to heal their wounds but as a mechanism to assert their dig-

nity. They have taken the toll of the mines and produced powerful demands, which press for a different kind of mining operation. They want to ensure that the miners and their families become partners in the production of the gold. They want to enforce environmental rules to prevent the dumping of harsh chemicals into the rivers. They want a hospital in the area to be tasked with dealing with mercury poisoning and the broad impact of the toxic soil produced by the mining techniques of Barrick Gold.

Their demands are clear and reasonable. Neither Barrick/Zijin nor the government of Papua New Guinea has taken them seriously.

On May 12, the Special Mining Lease for the Porgera mine will need to be renewed in Papua New Guinea. Both the lawyers who filed the arbitration case against the government and the ATA, which pursues the reform of the grievance mechanism, are aware of this deadline. No one believes that the government of Papua New Guinea is going to drop Barrick. That is unlikely.

In a position paper last month, ATA suggests that Barrick is "ignorant and negligent." It is both, surely, but also very rich. And its removal of gold has left the Porgerans very poor, and very angry. **CT**

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**Vijay Prashad** is an Indian historian, editor and journalist. This article was produced by *Globetrotter*, a project of the *Independent Media Institute*.



# Insights



Photo: US Air Force

**ANNIHILATION MACHINE:** The Mark 7 nuclear bomb on display in the Cold War Gallery at the National Museum of the US Air Force at Dayton, Ohio.

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## Why aren't we hearing about nuclear war threat?

By **Linda McQuaig**

**M** as curious as the next person about the Mueller report, Donald Trump's tax returns and Canada's ex-Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould's inner thoughts, but is there really no room amidst all the media chatter for the news that the chances of nuclear war are

“higher than they've been in generations”?

That was the frightening assessment the United Nations Security Council received from UN disarmament chief Izumi Nakamitsu, and it made barely a ripple in the media.

For that matter, Trump's

decision in February to withdraw from a key nuclear treaty, signed amid great hope 32 years ago by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, was deemed worthy of about 24 hours of news coverage.

Even as climate change is finally penetrating the mainstream news cycle, the media has all but lost interest in nuclear war.

Commentators rarely find time to remind us that all-out war between the US and Russia, the two most heavily armed nuclear combatants, would be 100,000 times more destructive than Hiroshima. Billions

of people would die in raging fires and from radioactive fallout, with the rest of humanity freezing or starving to death in the ensuing nuclear winter.

Unlike the climate change battle, where a worldwide movement is managing to push the issue onto the political agenda, the fight to rid the world of nuclear weapons has become widely regarded as hopeless, a genie that can't be re-bottled.

This sense of hopelessness – promoted by the arms industry – is misplaced.

**W**hile it's true that there's no way to un-invent nuclear weapons, the most dangerous threat they pose could be eliminated. Indeed, such a goal is within reach.

That's the conclusion of a number of experts, including former military analyst Daniel Ellsberg. Best known for leaking the Pentagon papers in the 1970s, Ellsberg also worked as a nuclear war planner for the Kennedy administration.

In his recent book, *The Doomsday Machine*, Ellsberg argues that probably the greatest nuclear threat today is accidental nuclear war – that is, a false electronic alarm triggering a pre-emptive strike by either the US or Russia. Over the years, there've been a number of chillingly close calls. This mind-bending concept – the end of human civilisation due to a computer

error – is made possible by the continuing presence in the two countries of hundreds of land-based missiles kept on hair-trigger alert, ready to launch on warning.

If warning data indicate a nuclear attack may be underway, a process kicks in with incomprehensibly-tight timelines. The US Strategic Command's top officer would have time to provide only a 30-second briefing to the president, who would then have 12 minutes (or less) to weigh the options, according to Bruce Blair, a nuclear security expert at Princeton University.

These timelines render impossible a meaningful decision by even the most astute, high-functioning human being, let alone Donald Trump.

While disarmament experts agree the ultimate goal is eliminating all nuclear weapons, Ellsberg and others insist that a more immediate goal of removing this exceptionally dangerous, hair-trigger situation could be accomplished, bilaterally or even unilaterally – while still maintaining nuclear deterrence against an enemy first strike.

Indeed, along with a number of high-ranking ex-generals, both George W. Bush and Barack Obama argued during their presidential bids for dramatically reducing hair-trigger status in the US nuclear arsenal, although both men failed to follow through in office.

Trump is now heading in the opposite direction, embarking

on a massive modernisation of US nuclear weapons, urged on by his ultrahawkish national security adviser John Bolton, a longtime proponent of nuclear buildup.

**Y**et there is stunningly little pushback as the Trump administration proposes to increase the vastly over-bloated US military budget from \$720-billion last year to \$750-billion this year. The Democrats are largely acquiescent, agreeing to \$736-billion.

All this leaves Americans – and the rest of the world – less safe.

As the popular science writer Carl Sagan once noted: “The nuclear arms race is like two sworn enemies standing waist deep in gasoline, one with three matches, the other with five”.

Taking away all the matches is the ultimate goal. Meanwhile, it would be gratifying to see a vigorous popular movement aimed at preventing a lit match from accidentally dropping into the gasoline. **CT**

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*Linda McQuaig is a journalist and author. Her book *Shooting the Hippo: Death by Deficit and Other Canadian Myths* was among the books selected by the *Literary Review of Canada* as the “25 most influential Canadian books of the past 25 years.” This column originally appeared in the *Toronto Star*.*

# Trump's crusaders march to war on Iran

By Eric Margolis

**T**HE world is still reeling in horror from the deadly Sri Lanka bombings that may have been the work of Islamic State madmen. Poor Sri Lanka has suffered so much after three decades of civil war and communal strife. We weep for this beautiful and once gentle nation.

But behind the horror in Sri Lanka, a huge crisis was building up of which the world has so far taken insufficient notice: renewed tensions in the oil-producing Gulf. This is the latest attempt by the United States to crush Iran's independent-minded government and return it to American tutelage.

The Trump administration has demanded that the principal importers of 1.2-billion barrels of Iranian oil halt purchases almost immediately. This imperial diktat includes China, South Korea, Turkey, India and Japan. The comprehensive embargo is very close to an all-out act of war. In 1941, America's cut-off of oil to Japan provoked the attack on Pearl Harbor.

The oil embargo not only violates international law, it sets the US on a collision course with some of its most important allies and vassal states.

Brazen threats against Iran by Trump's two main enforcers, National Security advisor John Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, have reinforced America's unfortunate image as an imperial power that threatens war against disobedient satraps and independent-minded nations.

**I**ran, a proud, ancient nation of 80 million, has become, with Turkey, the most effective opposition to America's imperial domination of the Mideast and a key supporter of Palestinian rights and statehood. This has put Iran on a collision course with Israel and its influential American supporters, notably the Evangelical hard right which somehow believes that Jesus will only return to earth after Israel expands its border and mankind is destroyed.

Meanwhile, the Trump Administration, which has now become indistinguishable from Israel's hard-line far right ruling coalition, has declared virtual war against Iran.

To benefit Israel, the White House cancelled a \$20-billion order from Iran for Boeing aircraft, embargoed trade with

Iran, reneged on the internationally backed nuclear deal with Tehran, cut off all aid to Palestinians, and keeps sustaining the savage Saudi/Emirati war against Yemen that has caused mass starvation and epidemics.

Trump has just unilaterally approved Israel's illegal seizure of Syria's Golan Heights, an act worthy of the 1916 Sykes-Picot treaty dividing up the Ottoman Mideast between Britain and France. US threats against Venezuela and Cuba grow louder.

Washington plans to use its naval forces massed around Iran to interdict Tehran's oil exports. Two US aircraft carriers are now on station within striking range of Iran. I went to sea on one, the Abraham Lincoln.

China faces dire trade punishments for dealing with Iran. Welcome back to 19th-century gunboat diplomacy. Even Washington's European allies may be scourged for buying Iranian oil.

Iran, which has faced similar threats in the past, is digging in and threatens to close the strategic Strait of Hormuz if its oil exports are interdicted. Twenty percent of the world's oil passes through the Strait. At its narrowest point, this strategic passage is only 21 miles (34 km) wide.

Iran could seriously interfere with oil tankers in the Strait, using armed speedboats, mines and land-based, Chinese-made missiles. Equally important, insurance rates for tankers would skyrocket. Add all this together, and Trump & Co's war-like actions will cause the price

of gasoline to surge, just as America's busy summer driving season is getting underway.

America's satraps Saudi Arabia (which just cut off the heads of 37 of its subjects) and sidekick the Emirates have promised to make up oil shortfalls, but neighbour Iran's special forces may have very different ideas. Look for missiles and commando attacks on Saudi oil installations.

Adding to this dangerous mess, Beijing may slow down or even abort its trade talks with Washington, which are of vital importance to the US economy. US markets have already factored in a deal being made.

Trump's irrational quest to crush Iran could very well turn the rest of the world against Washington. But Trump & Co.

don't seem to care. Someone must tell Trump's out of control administration to stop trying to overthrow governments it does not like around the globe and promoting itself as the Second Coming of Christ.

"Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad." Verily. **CT**

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reports, have begun "expressing concern about the growing income disparity in the United States".

What has boat dealers so concerned? The middle-class families they've counted on for decades are feeling too squeezed to buy their boats – or even continue boating.

"Boating has now priced out the middle-class buyer", one retailer opined to a *Soundings Trade Only* survey. "Only the near rich/very rich can boat".

Mark Jeffreys, a high school finance teacher who hosts a popular bass fishing webcast, worries that his pastime is getting too pricey – and wonders when bass anglers just aren't going to pay "\$9 for a crankbait".

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## Now we're preparing for gentrification of the sea

By **Sam Pizzigati**

**W**E typically think of urban neighbourhoods when we think of gentrification – places where modest-income families thrived for generations suddenly becoming no-go zones for all but the affluent.

The waters around us have always seemed a place of escape from all this displace-

ment, a more democratic space where the rich can stake no claim. The wealthy, after all, can't displace someone fishing on a lake or sailing off the coast. Or can they? People who work and play around our waters are starting to worry.

Local boat dealers and fishing aficionados alike, a leading marine industry trade journal

**N**ot everyone around water is worrying. The companies that build boats, Jeffreys notes, seem to "have been able to do very well". They're making fewer boats but clearing "a tremendous amount" on the boats they do make.

In effect, the marine industry is experiencing the same market dynamics that sooner or later distort every sector of an economy that's growing wildly more unequal. The more wealth tilts toward the top, research shows, the more companies tilt their businesses to serving that top.

In relatively equal societies, Columbia University's Moshe Adler points out, companies

have “little to gain from selling only to the rich”. But that all changes when wealth begins to concentrate. Businesses can suddenly charge more for their wares – and not worry if the less affluent can’t afford the freight.

The rich, to be sure, don’t yet totally rule the waves. But they appear to be busily fortifying those stretches of the seas where they park their vessels, as *Forbes* has just detailed in a look at the latest in superyacht security. Deep pockets have realised that people of modest means may not take well to people of ample means – “cocktails in hand” – floating “massive amounts of wealth” into their harbours.

**I**n 2019’s first quarter alone, the International Maritime Bureau reports, unwelcome guests boarded some 27 vessels and shot up seven.

Anxious yacht owners, in response, are outfitting their boats with high-tech military-style hardware.

One new “non-lethal anti-piracy device” emits pain-inducing sound beams. Should that sound fail to dissuade, the yachting crowd can turn on a “cloak system” from Global Ocean Security Technologies. The “GOST cloak” can fill the area surrounding any yacht with an “impenetrable cloud of smoke” that “reduces visibility to less than one foot”.

The resulting confusion, the theory goes, will give nearby

authorities the time they need to come to a besieged yacht’s rescue.

But who will rescue the boating middle class? Maybe we need an “anti-cloak”, a device that can blow away all the obfuscations the rich pump into our national political discourse, the mystifications that blind us to the snarly impact of grand concentrations of private wealth

on land and sea.

Or maybe we just need to roll up our sleeves and organise for a more equal future. **CT**

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**Sam Pizzigati** co-edits *Inequality.org* for the *Institute for Policy Studies*. His latest book is *The Case for a Maximum Wage*. This article first appeared at [www.otherwords.org](http://www.otherwords.org)

## Fascism is lying in the shadows of democracy

By Emanuele Corso

**F**ASCISM REFERS to an authoritarian right-wing system of government and social organisation that has always lurked in the shadows of democracy like a circling shark. Fascism is notably contemptuous of the democratic process. While some practitioners include racial superiority and personal supremacy, all fascists require unquestioning obedience to a supreme “leader”.

There have been many times in history when fascism overtook democracies and we may be witnessing one of those moments right now. It is easy to call names at people whose behaviour we don’t like and that makes it necessary to be quite careful when doing so. But as

the old saw puts it: “If the shoe fits ...” One purpose of calling names is, of course, to dehumanise the targeted groups of non-believers and to create a common vocabulary with which to describe a taxonomy of common experience. On the other hand, there are also times when labels are exact, to the point, and necessary.

So then what exactly is “fascism”? Well, it cannot be whatever we want it to be as a label for people and movements we disagree with. I submit here Robert O. Paxton’s description of the intrinsic nature of fascism which seems to fit not only the historical manifestations of Fascism but those which are current:

“Fascism may be defined as

a form of political behaviour marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood ... and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion”.

Historically the most powerful incubating conditions necessary for fascism to emerge have been economic. When a majority of people in a society feel threatened by economic failure those fears are easily exploited by demagogues fingering immigrants, overbearing government bureaucrats, or foreign powers, a cleverly played “blame game” that exploits anxiety, insecurity, fear, ignorance, and makes irrational attributions of evil to necessary “others”, others being the most useful essential element in the equation.

As a tactic, cynically playing groups within a society against one another almost always succeeds. Joseph Goebbels wrote during the Nazi takeover of Germany, “It will always remain one of democracy’s best jokes that it provided its deadly enemies with the means by which it was destroyed”.

It is not difficult, as Hitler and his associates demonstrated, to play any class of people against any other, to vilify scapegoats, especially in difficult economic times. This scenario has been played

many times throughout history. And, even as you read this, fascism is rearing its ugly head in several places in the world including the United States.

As Chris Hedges put it, “Thomas Paine wrote that despotic government is a fungus that grows out of a corrupt civil society. This is what happened to these older democracies. It is what happened to us”.

Robert Paxton also wrote that, in fascism “... a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues ... without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.”

I would add to this an inhumanity wrapped in callow religious piety. For example, one of the leader of the Republican assault on the Affordable Care Act in the US House of Representatives in recent years is a self-professed pious practicing Catholic who has been praised by his bishop. We have to ask them, was the “fishes and the loaves” lesson not taught in that diocese? Given that the majority of those in this country who are perpetrating these wars against humanity are self-professed Christians one can’t help but marvel at their inhumanity and the apparent ineffectiveness of their reli-

gious beliefs.

When I read comments made by elected officials that poor people are somehow lacking in effort and motivation it brings to mind reading *A Tale Of Two Cities* in high school – the poor people at the barricades, the infamous, “Let them eat cake”. It could have been *A Tale Of Two Worlds* – rich and poor, the advantaged and the disadvantaged, the powerful and the weak, the selfish and the giving, the employed and the unemployed.

Those are the contradictions fascism tirelessly works to exploit. Fascism, today cloaked within the shadows of high finance and so-called conservative politics, is ready and waiting in the wings to overtake and drown our wounded democracy in it’s own contradictions.

The dichotomies describe social patterns repeated over the course of history which have led inexorably to political upheaval and violence. History does, of course, repeat itself perhaps endlessly because human nature is what seems not to change. The Karmic wheel keeps on turning. **CT**

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# Venezuela: US talking points translation guide

By Caitlin Johnstone

**T**HINGS keep heating up in Venezuela, with possible “military options” now being discussed at the Pentagon. You know what that means. That’s right, it means we can expect to see even more lies and manipulations from the political/media class as the narrative managers try to manufacture support for unconscionable acts.

This can create a very confusing environment for everyone, where up means down and black means white and “humanitarian intervention” means “murdering thousands and thousands of innocent human beings”. Here’s a handy translation key to help you understand what the establishment mouthpieces are really saying:

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**“I stand with the people of Venezuela”** – *I stand with some people in Venezuela, specifically the ones who support US government interests.*

**“Interim President”** – *Some guy most Venezuelans had never heard of until January.*

**“Brutal dictator”** – *Elected leader who opposes US dictates.*

**“Usurper”** – *The guy calling the shots and leading the country.*

**“Opposition-led, military-backed challenge”** – *Coup.*

**“The people of Venezuela are starving”** – *Oil! Oil! Oil!*

**“All options are on the table”** – *One option is on the table.*

**“Popular uprising”** – *Unpopular uprising.*

**“Grassroots activists”** – *Let’s pretend the CIA’s not a thing.*

**“Freedom and democracy”** – *US control of Venezuela’s petroleum resources.*

**“Humanitarian aid”** – *Pretext for further escalations.*

**“Failed socialist policies”** – *Inability to overcome US economic warfare.*

**“Foreign interference”** – *An ally of Venezuela supporting its ally.*

**“We support the National Assembly”** – *Foreign interference.*

**“The Venezuelan Constitution”** – *Our convenient interpretation of the Venezuelan Constitution.*

**“We can’t just sit around and do nothing”** – *I have learned nothing since the Iraq War.*

**“54 countries recognise Guaido as president”**

– *141 countries don’t recognize Guaido as president.*

**“Troika of tyranny”** – *John Bolton’s second-favourite masturbatory fantasy.*

**“The Monroe Doctrine”** – *I think all the countries on this side of the planet are my personal property.*

**“Operación Libertad”** – *Operación Libertad para el Petróleo de Venezuela.*

**“Talk to Venezuelans”** – *Talk to the wealthier, English-speaking Venezuelans with abundant free time and internet access who support a coup.*

**“You love Maduro”** – *I don’t have an argument for your opposition to US interventionism.*

**“You’re just a socialist who loves socialism”** – *I don’t have an argument.*

**“Go live in Venezuela if you love socialism so much”** – *I don’t have an argument.*

**“Maduro is killing his own people”** – *Yeah I’m just making shit up now.*

**“Maduro refuses to let in aid”** – *I just believe whatever the TV says.*

**“This US regime change intervention will be different”** – *I have replaced my brain with shaving cream. CT*

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**Caitlin Johnstone** is an Australian blogger. Follow her at [www.caitlinjohnstone.com](http://www.caitlinjohnstone.com)

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