

CounterPunch

JULIAN ASSANGE: STILL WANTED, STILL WRITING BY BINOY KAMPMARK

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SCAPEGOATING BY BEN DEBNEY

FRONTLINE: EAST JERUSALEM BY JENNIFER LOEWENSTEIN

THE GREAT LAKES NUCLEAR WASTE DUMP BY JOYCE NELSON

ROBIN WILLIAMS AND ME BY PAUL KRASSNER



CounterPunch

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Cover Image: Bernie and the Jets by Nick Roney

In Memory of
Alexander Cockburn
1941-2012



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Can Putin end the Syrian war?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bill Evans, the Congo and the CIA

I became friends with an ex-CIA officer who for years tailored his assignments in Europe to coincide with the jazz pianist Bill Evans performances there. He was a stone cold Bill Evans fan. The agent, whose first name was Jeff, and I became friends not because of our mutual love of Evans but because he had been stationed in Congo when Lumumba was kidnapped and killed and I new that Frank Carlucci was part of the operation. Sitting on the bench in front of my book shop he actually looked shocked that I knew about Carlucci. “How did you know that,” he said. I said, “Because I read *Covert Action Information Bulletin* (*Covert Action Quarterly*).

In fact, the publisher, Lou Wolff lives right around the corner. He was in the store a couple of days ago.” To Jeff’s credit he was part of that ex-CIA group trying to force the Agency to release more documentation. While embroiled in this he was struck by a car and badly injured, but survived. The great Bill Evans.

Carlo Parcelli

Wrong!

I object to St. Clair comparing The Donald to Nero. The Emperor Carracalla is a much better choice! Ever heard of the Baths of Carracalla? The largest bath house ever built in Rome, in which ruins they give opera performances of Madame Butterfly. Besides Carracalla even looks like The Donald.

As a grotesque circus barker, Trump is amusing in a perverse way, but less grating than the other Republican luminaries, like Carson, Fiorini and Rubio, all indicative of the state the empire is in, much like decadent Rome. I am waiting for someone to make his horse a senator, as if we do not have enough equine’s behinds in that august body.

Gui Rochat

Putin Love?

Hello Joshua,
Thanks for your recent article opposing all foreign intervention in Syria. It was a welcome relief from the last few months of Counterpunch articles on Syria, demonizing the vast grassroots and jihadi opposition and upholding the

“valiant “ As’ad regime. You admitted to As’ad’s destructive bombing of Syrian cities and also acknowledged the popular nature of the revolt against him. Of course, European imperialism, the US invasion of Iraq and the Israelis have made Syria and Iraq almost unimaginably violent since the mid-20th century and that is the critical history and subtext underlining the current crises. Iran and Saudi involvement have certainly made things far worse than they would have been otherwise. The western Left is making a tragic mistake in backing As’ad’s regime and Russian intervention and you have made an important gesture toward accepting that reality.

*Richard Wood
Retired Chair, Sociology
Dept., DeAnza College;
(and former contributor to
CounterPunch)*

Attention: We Need Your Help!

Dear CounterPunchers,

CounterPunch is living up to its founding hopes of restoring the honor of radical muckraking. Our goal, as Alexander Cockburn used to say, is to be as radical as reality. In the age of remote-control journalism, we hear regularly that the kind of smart analysis and quality writing you find on CounterPunch is a life raft in fraught times. The editors, Jeffrey and Joshua, have been working non-stop all year to keep the stories coming to you on our website 365 days a year. Most news sites are cut-and-paste operations, offering a predictable mix of columns culled from the mainstream. Not us. Everyday CounterPunch offers dozens of original articles from some of the best writers on the left. We give you truly original voices.

We’re not grant farmers, and we don’t have a battery of foundations backing us, nor a platoon of big donors spoon feeding us. We rely solely on our subscriptions and generous donations from our readers. Your support is deeply appreciated. Unlike many other outfits, we don’t hit you up for money every month ... or even every three months. When we ask, it is because we really need your support. For over 20 years, we have proved our worth. We’ve built CounterPunch into an intelligent, vital and radical presence around the world. Now, after the tireless efforts of Andrew Nofsinger, with Jeffrey and Joshua, the new CounterPunch website was introduced this summer and a newer, tech-savvy generation of readers can access CounterPunch wherever they go on mobile friendly versions of the website. The CounterPunch podcast allows CounterPunchers to supplement their reading with poignant interviews by Eric Draitser, even when their hands are dirty in the garden. But we can only move forward with your financial support. There’s no safety net for us. CounterPunch is run by a dedicated skeleton crew. We’re a lean operation with no waste to prune. Every dollar you can manage is crucial to our survival. So, please, help as much as you can.

Sincerely,

Your CounterPunch Crew: Jeffrey St. Clair, Becky Grant, Joshua Frank, Deva Wheeler, Nat St. Clair



ROAMING CHARGES

Bernie and the Jets

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

As Clintons are wont to do, Hillary laid a political trap and Bernie Sanders, in his Schlemiel-like way, stumbled right into it. In the wake of Jeremy Corbyn's smashing victory as the new leader of Britain's Labour Party, Hillary's super-PAC tarred Sanders as a Corbyn-lite renegade who has cozied up to untouchable figures like Hugo Chavez.

About a decade ago, Sanders was part of a delegation that negotiated a sensible deal to bring low-cost heating oil from Venezuela to poor families in the northeastern United States. But instead of defending his honorable role in this *ex parte* negotiation, Sanders wilted. In a fundraising email to his legions of Sandernistas, Bernie fumed at being "linked to a dead Communist dictator."

Of course, Chavez represented everything that Bernie Sanders claims to be but isn't. Namely, an independent socialist, whose immense popularity in his own country led to his Bolivarian Party winning 18 straight contested elections since 1996, not to mention surviving several coup attempts backed by the CIA and the editorial board of the *New York Times*, plots that elicited not a squeak of dissent from Bernie the Red.

One might be tempted to cut the Vermont senator some slack on the matter. After all, Sanders seems to have given foreign policy in the post-9/11 era about as much attention as he has police violence in urban American. As the American military skids into Syria, one looks to Sanders for new ideas, for a holistic political philosophy that links neoliberal economics to racism and imperial adventurism. Yet we see nothing of the kind. How does Sanders feel about the latest war we've backed our way into in the Middle East? Who can really say? No one is sure if Sanders himself really knows, and this not merely because

Bernie so often seems to be speaking in tongues, absent the spiritual uplift a Pentecostal sermon provides.

Sanders' core political ideas seem scrawled on parchment, as stale and faded as those of the American politician he most resembles, Hubert H. Humphrey. The country's most acerbic political journalist, Robert Sherrill, has called Humphrey the Drugstore Liberal. The Minnesota Democrat was an economic populist, perhaps even to the Left of Sanders, who remained insensate to the horrors of the American war machine. Like Sanders, Humphrey directed almost all of his economic rhetoric at the middle class — what nearly everyone else in the world calls the bourgeoisie—a curious target demographic for an avowed socialist.

As the nation sank deeper into the blood of Vietnam, Humphrey's sole consolation was to dole out economic palliatives while talking up the number of high-paying jobs generated by the arms manufacturers. Like Humphrey, Sanders is a military Keynesian who seems to believe that the never-ending War on Terror is one sure-fire route toward full-employment. In other words, he's a Cold War Liberal lost in a post-Cold War world.

Still, Bernie clings to his death-dealing supersonic relics, most fervently to the F-35 Lightning II fighter jet. Sanders and his Vermont colleague Patrick Leahy waged a fierce bureaucratic fight to bring the jet to the Burlington Air Base as the premier weapon of the the 158th Fighter Wing of the Vermont Air National Guard. At \$191 million per aircraft, the F-35 represents a technological wish-fulfillment for the defense lobby. Larded with the latest high-tech thanatic gizmos, the porcine Stealth fighter will prowl cloud-free skies (too

dainty to fly in rain) on quest to confront an enemy that no longer exists, and perhaps never did. The only people terrorized by Bernie's fleet of F-35s are the poor residents of South Burlington whose homes are perpetually quaking from the caterwauling squeal of the jet's after-burning turbofan engine.

Award Bernie bonus points for consistency here. He is equally supportive of gun manufacturers, rejecting even the most timid restrictions on gun sales (the Brady Bill) and voting to shield weapons-makers from liability suits brought by victims of mass shootings. A few hours after the rampage at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon, Bernie hypocritically tweeted out a note of condolence for the victims which was notable only for the extreme banality of its sentiment.

Two days later, when U.S. airstrikes targeted a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, killing 22 medical workers and patients, Sanders's twitter-wire went tellingly mute. But what could Sanders say about this war crime in real time, an attack that infused a new meaning to the phrase 'surgical strike'? The miserable 14-year-long war on Afghanistan is the battle Sanders said had to be waged, a war without regrets.

Alexander Cockburn used to say that one of the pre-conditions for being a "serious presidential contender" was the ability to confess publicly, often live on "Meet the Press," that you were willing to launch nuclear weapons against (pick a country, any one will do....), even at the risk of incinerating life on Earth. Of course, these days, you also have to pledge support for Obama's killer drone program, as Bernie Sanders has faithfully done. Sanders told George Stephanopoulos in August that if he becomes the next joystick bombardier in the Oval Office, he won't pull the plug on the drones but he will try to kill fewer innocent people. Rarely has the moral hollowness of American liberalism been expressed more clearly. Thank you, Comrade Bernie. **CP**



MIDDLE EAST NOTES

Frontline: East Jerusalem

BY JENNIFER LOEWENSTEIN

At the United Nations, many people expected Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to drop a ‘bombshell’; a message that would shake up the status quo in Palestinian-Israeli relations. Restrained by the usual parties, Abbas’ message was no different than his usual, mealy-mouthed utterances that ‘we’re really not so thrilled about what’s happening’; that mock defiance and say nothing. It is no surprise that his popularity continues to drop at a time when furious outcries are breaking out of another decade of degradation.

Is it a wonder that U.S.-Israeli actions over the past 22 years have significantly worsened? That a United Nations report concludes that the continued deterioration of conditions on the ground for approximately 4.5 million people in the Gaza Strip will render it “uninhabitable” by 2020 (UN UNCTAD Report, Sept 1st, 2015)? And that the ongoing denial of basic human rights in the West Bank has made the atmosphere there more heated and tempestuous than it has been since the military crackdowns of the second Intifada? Surely Abbas recognizes that his “security arrangements” with Israel transformed his own fighting forces into Israel’s proxy police. If he isn’t there yet, he is miles behind his own people and fading from sight.

Give it up, Mahmoud. Give back the Occupation’s lock-up keys and wash your hands of their stench. Throw away the shreds of paper you’ve been hauling around like fool’s gold since you assumed power. Israel isn’t honoring any covenant but its own. The covenant that details how to grab your people’s land and lives, incrementally and outright, using every stone under the desert sun as an excuse. Where are the improvements in the conditions in which your compatriots live? Where is

their security when occupation tanks roll over your land to crush you in ‘self defense’? What have the deaths of thousands meant if they fail to prevent the process of annexation and national, cultural annihilation? Allow resistance to bloom or you’ll be complicit in the fate of the Red Man of the Middle East.

Why has Justice burned up for the Dawabshe family? Where were the handcuffs before Huthaifa Abu Suleiman was gunned down with live fire west of Tulkarem for protesting Jewish settlers’ attacks in illegally annexed Jerusalem - the epicenter of the coming revolt? Why are Israeli forces always at the ready to attack hundreds of Palestinian civilians in their own East Jerusalem neighborhoods? Why should these same civilians not protest the murders of Fadi Alouon and Muhannad al-Halabi? Why did the Israeli police patrol 19-year-old Aloun was running to for protection execute him at the demands of settler fanatics chasing him through the streets of East Jerusalem? Why was 13-year-old Abed Obeidallah shot in the chest during a clash between protesters and Israeli security forces near Bethlehem?

Should villagers in the surrounding neighborhoods of Silwan, al-Eisawiya, at-Tour, As-Souwana, al-Jouz valley, Shu’eifat, Beit Hanina, Abu Dis, and al-Aizariya stay quiet when Israeli forces use live ammunition, rubber coated metal bullets, sound bombs and tear gas canisters to punish collectively anyone protesting the violation and possible partition of a sacred religious site; against people who object to seeing their friends, neighbors or family members kicked and beaten for exercising their legal right to resist?

When the Palestinian Red Crescent Society reports 171 Palestinians

wounded by live bullets, rubber coated metal bullets and bullet shrapnel do military strategists and lay people expect this will quell the spirits of an increasingly restive and angry population? Will imprisoning and beating children who throw stones at heavily armed, battle trained soldiers cause them or their neighbors to reconsider rejecting their oppression?

For nearly 30 years news reports have remained the same with different variables. Israeli military forces still deliberately target Palestinian ambulances, as they did on Oct. 4th, 2015 in front of a university in Abu Dis, and again in the village of al-Issawiya? Why did they beat the ambulance crew near Taweel Mountain outside el-Bireh and arrest a wounded child who’d been inside the ambulance after dragging him face down by his feet, throwing him on the ground and beating him? Why did the police attack the ambulance after putting the wounded boy in it, and then prevent it from leaving to take the boy to hospital? Why was the ambulance driver forced to turn off the ambulance and hand over his key? (PCHR Press Release; 5 Oct. 2015) There are no answers, only clear signs that the army of occupation is closing in on al-Aqsa.

In one of the most chilling scenes, captured on videotape, 15 year old Hasan Khaled Manasra is shown wounded and bleeding in a street near the Pisgat Ze’ev settlement. He had been beaten and rammed by a car, ostensibly for attempting to stab two settlers though the police could provide no evidence linking him to such a crime. Hasan is seen lying on his back, both of his legs broken and bent upward from his knees. Blood pools around his head. Each time he tries to lift himself up police officers kick him back down,

while Israelis surrounding him are heard hurling insults: “Die, you son of the biggest whore!” “Die you fucker, die you son of a whore, die you son of a bitch!” “Shoot him in the head, shoot him in the head!” “Shoot him in the head, do him a favor!” Ahmad bled to death in front of them. (IMEMC video) Netanyahu meanwhile approved mandatory prison sentences for stone throwers, including minors, and has punished no one for the spate of executions against Palestinian suspects or bystanders, a policy Israeli journalist Gideon Levy described as “a spree of extrajudicial killings...sweeping over the land.” (Haaretz; 11 Oct.) Levy quotes Israeli journalist and television host, Dan Margalit, justifying these actions by saying, “It’s highly advisable to shoot all terrorists... the more terrorists that are struck down, the fewer of them there’ll be.” Death to the Arabs. The chant is a daily reality. Between October 1st and the 14th, twenty-nine Palestinians have been shot dead in the violence that has engulfed an increasingly arbitrary and brutal occupation. (PCHR; 10/14)

Why were bypass roads closed down and armed soldiers deployed at checkpoints, and why did they proceed to humiliate the Palestinians forced to use those checkpoints? Why have home demolitions begun again with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu instructing “Justice” Minister, Ayelet Shaked to speed up the process by which homes can be destroyed? (Haaretz) The international community, including Israel, knows that collective punishment, excessive use of force, detaining or imprisoning children indefinitely often without charge, targeting civilians, the civilian infrastructure, humanitarian aid convoys with food and medical supplies, and firing at ambulances are grave violations of international laws. Netanyahu and his gang of thugs don’t care. They are preparing for “all out war”. Judging by the response, neither do the so-called Great Powers. “Terrorism” is still the word of choice

used to describe even non-violent resistance to occupation, while in Israel people are complaining that the tactics used by occupation soldiers against Palestinian protesters are not harsh enough. “No one anywhere will have immunity,” Netanyahu said recently.

No U.S. president, including Obama, has demanded that Israel refrain from its predictable patterns of violence, its accelerated building of settlements on occupied Palestinian land, the theft of natural resources, its indifference to refugees, and its tightening grip on the Old City of Jerusalem. US Calls for “restraint” are hollow protests. In practice, they are affirmations of long-established, acceptable behavior by US allies with the possible caveat that they occur as far away from independent media lenses as possible. The attack over the weekend on *Al Mayadeen* journalist Hanaa Abdel Hamid Mahamid, 30, who sustained moderate burns on the left side of her face, neck, and ear after being injured by an Israeli fired stun grenade demonstrates the effort to silence unwanted reporting. (Al-Mezan, Press Release; 10/7) Spin in a fable or two for ‘reasonable doubt’ and anyone can be exonerated, including (among others) the most notorious apologists, advocates, and executors of mass killing. If the past three wars against the Gaza Strip haven’t demonstrated this, nothing will.

Importantly, over the last 5 years alone, Gaza has been transformed from a desert slum into a wilderness of concrete ruins, dried up farmlands, minimally-functioning, half-destroyed cities and refugee camps with increasingly intermittent water and electricity. The last pools of resilience are shrinking. Poverty, a sense of powerlessness, food insecurity, and desperation define a population consigned to global solitary confinement. Their isolation, compounded by an eight-year long official blockade of the Strip, contributes to the nightmares of hundreds of thousands of children who, with their families, are fighting post traumatic stress dis-

orders, dire medical shortages and inadequate facilities, persistent fear, deep emotional scars and the loss, among far too many, of the will to live. (GCMHP video; Mondoweiss) “If we cannot kill you in death, we will kill you in life,” wrote an activist describing this occupation’s goals. (Journal of Palestine Studies; “Return to Rafah”; 2004.) As Gaza withers, attention is focused increasingly on completing the de facto annexation of the West Bank; the ‘Gaza-fication’ of the remaining Palestinian ‘island’ communities. Slowly, often subversively, the people of these indigenous communities are disappearing. Israel can tolerate only a small remnant of Palestine’s past; tourist attractions like the Navajo or the Sioux.

Fully aware of the tumult raging across the region, Obama has presented Israel with a glittering new gift bag of weapons. These Israel will use for practice on its captive population and as yet another insurance policy against Iran and any other potential adversary. Israel is the nuclear-favored protege of the paramount power in world politics. Washington is its role model; its power has paved the way for global terror and cataclysmic violence. Fragmented, crushed and divided states have given way to power vacuums and sectarian bloodshed, filled in places by villainous and extremist gangs, often armed with the weapons we left behind, and spreading far across the region like ISIS in Yemen. These are the twisted outgrowths of a century of colonial hegemony and imperial hubris.

Watching Israel’s self-serving aggression from afar is like living in a straight-jacket of frustration. Standing on the streets where these events are taking place forces you onto the edges of life where a chaos of bullets, dust and grit engulfs you and steals away your children. ‘So foul a sky clears not without a storm.’* Reality is a gaping, bloody wound threatening the beating heart of your world. East Jerusalem is the epicenter of a new revolt. Al-Aqsa will be its rallying cry. **CP**



EMPIRE BURLESQUE

Meurtriers sans Frontières

BY CHRIS FLOYD

When I heard of the deadly U.S. strike on the Médecins Sans Frontières facility in Kunduz on October 3, I thought of this fragment of ancient history, written by a lowly scribe years ago:

“One of the first moves in this magnificent feat of arms was the destruction and capture of medical centers. Twenty doctors—and their patients, including women and children—were killed in an airstrike on one major clinic, the UN Information Service reports, while the city’s main hospital was seized in the early hours of the ground assault. Why? Because these places of healing could be used as ‘propaganda centers,’ the Pentagon’s ‘information warfare’ specialists told the NY Times. Unlike the first attack on Fallujah last spring, there was to be no unseemly footage of gutted children bleeding to death on hospital beds.”

The attack on the MSF facility might well be an unintended consequence of the “fog of war,” as the Americans claim. (Although just before the strike, Pentagon massagers were opining to their media mouthpieces how awful the Russians were for bombing Syria without the super-duper-ultra-advanced “precision” technology and high-tech intelligence that the USA uses. So why did they strike the Kunduz hospital, having been carefully and continually informed of its location beforehand? And why did they keep bombing even after they’d been told of the supposed error?

But whatever happened in Kunduz, America’s Terror Warriors certainly have form, as the Brits say, when it comes to deliberately targeting medical centers. The passage above was from a column I wrote in 2004 about one of the most brazen war crimes of the

21st century: America’s decimation of Fallujah in Iraq.

The city was marked for destruction after four mercenaries were killed there in the early days of the occupation. The incident was depicted as an act of pure evil by the brutal natives; left unreported in almost every story was the fact that the occupying forces had slaughtered more than a dozen civilians before the reprisal against the mercenaries. An initial punishment assault against the city failed, partly due to the bad PR generated by footage of the horrific civilian casualties, and US forces backed off for a few months. But just after the 2004 election, the Pentagon gave their warrior chief, George Bush, a human sacrifice to celebrate his victory, and launched their second attack on the city. As I noted at the time:

“So while Americans saw stories of rugged ‘Marlboro Men’ winning the day against Satan, they were spared shots of engineers cutting off water and electricity to the city—a flagrant war crime under the Geneva Conventions, as CounterPunch notes, but standard practice throughout the occupation. Nor did pictures of attack helicopters gunning down civilians trying to escape across the Euphrates River—including a family of five—make the TV news, despite the eyewitness account of an AP journalist. Nor were tender American sensibilities subjected to the sight of phosphorous shells bathing enemy fighters—and nearby civilians – with unquenchable chemical fire, literally melting their skin, as the Washington Post reports. Nor did they see the fetus being blown out of the body of Artica Salim when her home was bombed during the ‘softening-up attacks’ that raged relentlessly – and unnoticed – in the closing days of George W. Bush’s

presidential campaign, the Scotland Sunday Herald reports.”

I don’t know if the carnage in Kunduz was “collateral” or, as in Fallujah, carefully planned. But in many ways, it doesn’t matter. Since the days when Jimmy Carter joined his Saudi allies in creating the worldwide network of violent jihadis, through the expansion of extremist jihad by Ronald Reagan (who called the extremists “the moral equivalent of our Founding Fathers”) and the systematic campaign to destroy secular governments throughout the Muslim world and empower violent sectarians (Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, etc.) to fill the vacuum, the bipartisan military imperialists in charge of the American state bear the responsibility for an untold—and ever-growing—number of atrocities, committed on every side.

Without the invasion of Iraq, no ISIS. Without America’s arming of a global jihad movement to overthrow the secular government in Afghanistan, no al Qaeda. Without 70 years of American protection of the pushers of the most violent, extremist, retrograde off-shoot of Islam, the corrupt Saudi tyrants—coupled with 70 years of America’s relentless destruction and undermining of every single non-sectarian political movement in the Middle East in favor of tyrants, satraps and puppets—no worldwide “radicalization” of repressed and threatened Muslims.

But don’t get me wrong: I don’t want to be seen as part of the “Blame America First” crowd on this. I don’t hold with such a reductive stance, especially in the face of the vast complexities and nuances of geopolitics. No, when it comes to fixing the primary guilt for the dark thunderclouds of fear, war, madness, extremism, instability, tyranny and chaos that loom over our time, I don’t “blame America first.” I blame America first, second, third, fourth, fifth and last. And I damn the bipartisan leaders who have made this so. **CP**



GRASPING AT STRAWS

The Peace Plan You've Never Heard Of

BY MIKE WHITNEY

Russian President Vladimir Putin has made every effort to de-escalate tensions in Syria and to find a reasonable way to end the hostilities. What he opposes now, and what he has rejected from the very beginning, is removing Syrian President Bashar al Assad through force-of-arms. On this point, Putin remains inflexible. As he stated in a recent interview with Charlie Rose, "At no time in the past or in the future will Russia take part in actions aimed at overthrowing a legitimate government." As far as Putin is concerned, regime change is a non-starter.

The Obama administration, on the other hand, has made it quite clear that it wants to remove Assad by any means possible. In a speech he delivered to the United Nations General Assembly on September 28, Obama underlined this point saying:

"When a dictator slaughters tens of thousands of his own people, that is not just a matter of one nation's internal affairs—it breeds human suffering on an order of magnitude that affects us all ... The United States is prepared to work with any nation, including Russia and Iran, to resolve the conflict. But we must recognize that there cannot be, after so much bloodshed, so much carnage, a return to the pre-war status quo."

Obama's comments were followed shortly after by other members of the political establishment who signaled their support for the president's position by reiterating the all-too-familiar refrain, "Assad must go." What's shocking about Obama's statement is that it's nearly identical to statements made by George W. Bush prior to the invasion of Iraq. The "evil dictator" meme factored heavily into Bush's rationale

for launching Operation Enduring Freedom, the lethal foray that killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians and displaced millions of others. Now Obama is invoking the same language to plunge yet another Muslim country into chaos and ruin. Why?

Clearly, the policy has nothing to do with fighting terrorism, spreading democracy or ending state repression. Regime change is a way of achieving U.S. geopolitical objectives; securing resources in the oil-rich Middle East, establishing forward-operating bases across the region, and reinforcing US global hegemony. These are the real goals that are driving the policy. The blather about humanitarian concerns is merely public relations pabulum.

Putin has a good grasp of what the U.S. is up-to in Syria. In a recent interview he said, "President Obama frequently mentions the threat of ISIS. Well, who on earth armed them? And who created the political climate that facilitated the current situation? Who delivered arms to the area? Do you really not know who is fighting in Syria? They're mercenaries mostly. They are paid money. Mercenaries work for whatever side pays more. We even know how much they are paid. We know they fight for awhile and then see that someone else pays a little more, so they go there..."

"The U.S. says 'We must support the civilized, democratic opposition in Syria.' So they support them, arm them, and then they join ISIS. Is it impossible for the U.S. to think one step ahead? We do not support this kind of policy at all. We think it's wrong."

The point is that Putin knows what Washington is doing and is determined to put an end to it. He's not going to let

Assad be removed from power, and he is going to exterminate as many militants as possible. But that's just part of his plan. Putin's also promoting a framework agreement for ending the hostilities and re-establishing security. The plan is called the Geneva communiqué of 2012, although many in the west have never heard of it before. Geneva is the peace plan the United States will eventually agree to when they have exhausted all other options. Unfortunately, that could take some time since Washington is bound to be upset about not getting its way. And that, of course, is going to be a problem, because when Washington is angry, bad things happen. In fact, the administration will probably edge closer and closer to a nuclear conflagration before it backs off and agrees to negotiations. What's important is that Putin hold his ground and refuse to budge. He mustn't give in to U.S. threats or coercion. Regime change must be defeated before peace can prevail.

The basic provisions in Geneva are fairly straightforward. It allows for the "establishment of a transitional governing body" that must be acceptable to both the government and opposition. It requires the "participation of all groups ... of society in a meaningful national dialogue process." And it calls for "free and fair multi-party elections for the new institutions and offices that have been established."

This doesn't resolve the central issue of whether Assad goes or stays, but it does put the matter in the hands of the people who should decide such things, the Syrian voters. Internationally monitored elections will make sure that the will of the people is fairly reflected in the counting of ballots.

If the Obama administration is sincere about "democracy promotion" it should stop arming and training jihadis, abandon the plan for regime change, and throw its support behind the Geneva initiative. This is the only way there's going to be peace in Syria.

CP

The Political Economy of Scapegoating

The Oldest Trick in the Book

By Ben Debney

Scapegoating is as old a tactic as political power itself, and a vital tool in the perpetuation of political, economic and social privilege. James Madison, the Father of the U.S. Constitution, expressed a great truism about state power when he described its fundamental role as being to defend 'the minority of the opulent from the majority.' What Madison neglected to mention was that the defense of the minority of the opulent against the majority tended to entrench and exacerbate social and economic inequality. This in turn precipitated social chaos as inequality and disorder exacerbated social and class conflict, threatening the stability of the system as a whole.

Faced with this situation, the minority of the opulent required some mechanism or other to neutralize social conflict and ensure stability without having to address its root causes in the defense of their economic and social privileges from economic democracy and social justice. They needed to be able to establish and maintain a state of peace without justice, long understood to be synonymous with tyranny. Whether the tyranny concerned was that of an individual autocrat, or a class of them, the same problem remained; what the minority of the opulent needed in effect was an ideological safety valve to take the pressure away of actually existing social conflicts and tensions and divert them onto a scapegoat, onto one or another ideological punching bag for the shortcomings of a society devoted to maintaining the minority of the opulent in the lifestyle to which they had become accustomed.

Its Machiavellian tenor notwithstanding, a characteristic that has threatened here and there to give it away, the great strength of the ideological safety valve throughout the centuries has been its adaptability; while the form taken by the safety valve any particular period of history has been unique to that incarnation, the essential dynamics have always remained the same. Arthur Miller demonstrated as much when he caught it in the spotlight with *The Crucible*, drawing an adroit parallel between the Salem Witch Trials and the McCarthyist Red Scare politics of the 1950s. Unfortunately the ideological safety valve slipped the noose, being allowed to run amok throughout the Cold War before reappearing once again as the defining feature of the official US reaction to the 9-11 attacks.

Perhaps part of the explanation for the longevity of the ideological safety valve lies in the fact that it is only in the last few decades that it has come to be recognized for what it what is, in this instance by sociologists concerned with the recurring phenomenon of what we today call moral panics.

This being the case, it becomes far easier to track the history of the scapegoating mechanism backwards. As it turns out, perhaps unsurprisingly, this ideological safety valve is one with an ancient vintage, each new incarnation of the ideological safety valve tending to innovate on the previous incarnation, Moreover, each new incarnation of the exact same ideological safety valve invoked in defense of the minority of the opulent seems often to contain elements of older ones so as to resonate with a ready-primed, if not especially self-aware, audience, and bury its message of fear deep in the back passageways of the collective unconscious.

We find the roots of the scare-mongering dynamics associated with moral panics, the ideological safety valve and the defense of the minority of the opulent from the majority in what historian Norman Cohn described as an 'ancient fantasy.' The essence of the fantasy, what we might describe these days as a propaganda trope or cultural motif, was, as Cohn wrote, that 'there existed, somewhere in the midst of the great society, another society, small and clandestine, which not only threatened the existence of the great society but was also addicted to practices which were felt to be wholly abominable, in the literal sense of anti-human' (Europe's Inner Demons, ix).

The fantasy changed, became more complex, down through the centuries. It played an important part in some major persecutions; and the way in which it did also varied. Sometimes it was used merely to legitimate persecutions that would have occurred anyway; sometimes it served to widen persecutions that would otherwise have remained far more limited. In the case of the great [European] witchhunt it generated a massive persecution, which would have been inconceivable without it. In pursuing its history one is led far beyond the confines of the history of ideas and deep into the sociology and social psychology of persecution (ibid).

It is in fact this concern with the horrific and oft-bloody consequences of historical events like the European Witch Hunts that has been the driving force for research into the technical aspects of moral panics—in particular, 'deviance production' in sociology and 'moral disengagement' in social psychology. Sociological research into the 'production of deviance' has been based on the fact that deviance is a product of the power to impose a particular interpretation of the meaning of 'deviance' on popular discourse at any given moment, as opposed to any particular characteristic, activity or behavior associated with anyone thus labeled. Along the same lines, research in social psychology into moral disengagement has focused on the various psychological devices by which we disable the mechanisms of self-condemnation in order to reconstruct actions that might otherwise be interpreted as immoral, harmful, dangerous, irresponsible or even criminal to maintain a positive self-image (or put more simply, the bullshit stories we tell ourselves to neutralize our consciences by tricking them into thinking we're good people

when we're not). This approach recognizes that we rarely reject the idea of morality out of hand, merely apply it selectively.

Sociological approaches to studies of moral panics help us to understand various manifestations of moral panic for the ideological safety valves they are by looking at the ways various social issues are overblown and turned into pretexts for repression. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson for example describe what they call a 'signification spiral' that results in the production of a deviant as scapegoat for social ills created in the service of the minority of the opulent: a) The intensification of a particular issue; b) The identification of a subversive minority; c) 'Convergence' or the linking by labeling of the specific issue to other problems; d) The notion of 'thresholds' which, once crossed, can lead to further escalation of the problem's 'menace' to society; e) The element of explaining and prophesying, which often involves making analogous references to the United States—the paradigm example; f) The call for firm steps (*Resistances through Ritual*, 1976).

Complementing and enhancing this sociological approach, research into moral disengagement has made a vital contribution to our understanding of the ideological safety valve to the extent that it reveals how the production of deviance functions in practice to facilitate persecution of ideological scapegoats. Typically, we 'disengage' from the targets of blame-shifting, political persecution and ideologically-driven scapegoating through such strategies as playing the victim, blaming the victim, and invoking the "with us or against us" fallacy so as to conflate being doubted, contradicted, questioned, challenged or criticized with attacks on our person. In many ways, this latter mechanism is the cornerstone of moral disengagement and one of its most powerful mechanisms, particularly insofar as the logic of 'if you think for yourself the deviant practitioners of evil win' provides an initial pretext for all the others.

One way or the other then, the function of moral disengagement mechanisms is largely to (1) reconstruct immoral conduct, (2) displace or diffuse responsibility, (3) misrepresent injurious consequences as beneficial to the victim, and (4) dehumanize the victim. Additional strategies include euphemistic labeling ('collateral damage'); advantageous comparison ('I hit Saddam with the plastic spade in the sandpit because he hit me first'); displacement of responsibility ('just following orders'); diffusion of responsibility ('everyone does it'); and disregard or distortion of consequences ('they love it'). Defenders of the minority of the opulent can use any or all of these psychological mechanisms to establish a rationale for targeting under cover of moral panic those whom they feel threatened, having demonized them as deviants from whom society needs rescuing in one manner or another.

We need not look too hard to find historical examples of Cohn's 'ancient fantasy' as ideological safety value in practice. The aforementioned experience of the European Witch

Hunts was so protracted in its wanton and brutal dispensing of state terror and mass murder that it now serves as an archetype or cultural trope for any scare campaign perpetrated in the process in particular of defending the indefensible; when someone is ganged up on by cowards on the basis of lies and falsehoods they are 'witch hunted.' Two main historical factors serve otherwise to demonstrate the continuing historical significance of the Witch Hunts:

1) Their instrumental role in rescuing the social and economic tendencies in Europe responsible for sowing the seeds of modern capitalism from peasant movements pursuing alternative models of economic democracy built around the commons, as feminist historian Silvia Federici has documented in her seminal work *Caliban and the Witch* (Autonomedia, NY);

2) Their instrumental role in invoking what I call 'the wages of patriarchy,' after David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness* (Verso) which discusses the role token privileges given to the white working class in capitalist societies plays in fuelling intra-class ethnic divisions and entrenching the hierarchical social order dominated by the minority of the opulent.

As a protracted scare campaign waged as part of the massive waves of social warfare that occurred throughout Western Europe during the medieval era (eg the English Peasant Revolt of 1381, the French Jacquerie, the Flemish peasant revolts, the Peasant War in Germany), the gendered nature of the persecutions under the European Witch Hunts paid male peasants a 'gender wage' insofar as it spared them burning at the stake—the classic tactic of state terror designed to demonstrate to all and sundry what happened to those who opposed the minority of the opulent. The Witch Hunters operated their persecutions through the secular courts of Europe rather than the church-controlled ecclesiastical ones, a most telling fact about the class nature of the European Witch Hunts when we remember that no such thing as democratic franchise existed during the Middle Ages.

As a means of class warfare, the witch persecutions functioned as a 'divide and conquer' strategy in the classic sense of the term. In fact the 'wages of patriarchy' worked and continue to work exactly the same way as the 'wages of whiteness,' a fact that ought to be the cause of sober reflection in English-speaking countries outside of Western Europe founded on colonialism and genocide and that continue to be characterized by marked inequality and social chaos.

Thankfully, the roots of the witch-panic fuelling the European Witch Hunts are quite well understood. The hateful stereotype of the old hag on a broomstick, a specifically female folk demon whose purported role as Bride of Satan was to aid the execution of the latter's diabolical plot against God, a goal she would achieve by carrying out maleficarum, or evil works, did not simply fall out of the sky, no more so than the dynamics and processes associated with moral panics as such. On the contrary, the roots of the witch

stereotype originate back at least as far as the Roman Empire before Constantine, when the Pagan authorities persecuted the Christian minority on the basis of myths that Christians themselves adopted later for exactly the same purpose when the aforementioned adopted Christianity as the state religion.

‘The stereotype of the witch, as it existed in many parts of Europe in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,’ wrote our historian benefactor Norman Cohn, ‘is made up of elements of diverse origin ... some of these derived from a specific fantasy which can be traced back to Antiquity.’ (ibid, ix.) Illustrating the application of the ‘ancient fantasy’ to the witch panic, Cohn quotes a pagan description of early Christians in the following terms:

I am told that, moved by some foolish urge, they consecrate and worship the head of a donkey, that most abject of all animals ... Others say that they reverence the genitals of the presiding priest himself, and adore them as if they were their father’s . . . As for the initiation of new members, the details are as disgusting as they are well known. A child, covered in dough as to deceive the unwary, is set before a would-be novice. The novice stabs the child to death with invisible blows; indeed he himself, deceived by the coating dough, thinks his stabs harmless. Then—it’s horrible!—they hungrily drink the child’s blood, and complete with one another as they divide his limbs. (ibid, 1).

In this example, we find the foundational tropes of Cohn’s ancient fantasy as it appeared in Roman times: the diabolical feast and the incestuous orgy. Similar tropes appear even earlier in fables concerning the Bacchanalia. Ironically enough, they appear again later in texts written by orthodox Christians integrated into the Roman state.

One such text comes from Psellos, a ‘leading Byzantine statesman’ from Constantinople and author of a Greek dialogue entitled *On the Operation of the Demons*. In demonising dissident religious groups such as the Paulicians, who had split from the official church with a view to recovering what they felt was the spiritual vitality of early Christianity through more non-hierarchical approaches, Psellos turns the tables on his persecutors by applying the ancient fantasy to a religious context as a pretext for attacking religious dissent. Psellos’s target in this case was the Bogomiles, another minority Gnostic sect who shared heretic status along with the now-minority pagans who were likewise guilty of thinking differently. The basic elements of Cohn’s ancient fantasy are unmistakable:

In the evening, when the candles are lit, at the time when we celebrate the redemptive Passion of Our Lord, they bring together, in a house appointed for the purpose, young girls whom they have initiated into their rites. Then they extinguish the candles, so that the light shall not be witness to their abominable

deeds, and throw themselves lasciviously on the girls; each one on whomever first falls into his hands, no matter whether she be his sister, his daughter or his mother. For they think they are doing something that greatly pleases the demons by transgressing God’s laws, which forbid marriage between blood relatives. When this rite has been completed, each goes home; and after waiting nine months, until the time has come for the unnatural children of such unnatural seed to be born, they come together again at the same place. Then on the third day after the birth, they tear the miserable babies from their mothers’ arms. They cut their tender flesh all over with sharp knives and catch the stream of blood in basins. They throw the babies, still breathing and gasping, onto the fire, to be burned to ashes. After which, they mix the ashes with the blood in the basins and so make an abominable drink, with which they secretly pollute their food and drink, like those who mix poison with hippocras or other sweet drinks. Finally they partake of these foodstuffs; and not they alone but others also, who know nothing of their hidden proceedings (ibid, 19).

These two examples of scare mongering demonstrate the adaptability of the ancient fantasy as ideological safety valve, as does their adaptation to the changing needs of persecutors and persecuted. Changing fortunes precipitate a reversal of roles, persecuted becoming the persecutors in a way that bears parallels with more modern conflicts (particularly around the Middle East). The same was demonstrated again as proponents of primitive mercantilism amongst the opulent minority found themselves at loggerheads with proponents of primitive communalism amongst the dispossessed classes of the peasantry, many of whom expressed their desire for social justice in religious dissent (‘heresy’), or outright apostasy.

As a pretext for repression and ideological persecution, the utility of the Bride of Satan stereotype built on the power of previous incarnations of Cohn’s ‘ancient fantasy’ to drive a wedge between the class enemy by using women’s sexuality as a weapon against them. *The Malleus Maleficarum* (Witches’ Hammer), the medieval witch hunter’s handbook penned by the acutely unhinged Inquisitor Heinrich Kramer, demonises female sexuality as the root cause of such evils as miscarriages, the wiping out of harvests and the affliction of men and women ‘with terrible ailments, both inner and outer’ (1A). Kramer’s deeply misogynistic invective accuses women of being prone to sexual temptation by Satan and accordingly becoming his willing accomplice due to weaknesses of character purportedly inherent to their gender. Predictably enough, these are described in terms that suggest the same lack of self-restraint as those precipitating the bloody feast and licentious orgy of earlier times—a more carnal disposition and diminished capacity for religious faith. In such notions, the threat presented to the Catholic patriarchy by

female sexuality is unmistakable.

The Bride of Satan or witch stereotype also cast the minority of the opulent as victims of those who dared resist the oppressiveness of medieval hierarchies, or voice a desire for social justice, especially through religious dissent. For the female half of the target population, the scapegoating dynamics of the European Witch Hunts had the effect of blaming peasant women for existing as sexual beings on the one hand, and on the other for resisting moves by the minority of the opulent to maintain and extend their power—particularly through the enclosure movement in England—at the expense of the atypical levels of freedom the peasantry of Western Europe enjoyed in the latter stages of the Middle Ages. For the male half of the target population, the Witch Hunts gave them with additional motivation to accept the wages of patriarchy, abandon their social responsibilities to their female brethren (let alone their spouses and family), and victim-blame. Modern ignorance of the vision of economic democracy spurring medieval peasant movements indicates the degree of success of the application of the ideological safety valve in the archetypal form, as does the general level of sexism and misogyny in what passes for civilization.

Of additional relevance is the fact that the targeting of women during the European Witch Hunts and the demonization of female sexuality had another function, that of incorporating the enemy class of landed peasantry into a new work regimen known as the wage system, and 2) sourcing and exploiting means of startup capital from which to kick-start the cycle of capitalist production. In actual fact these two goals were opposite sides of the same process, known to modern political economists as 'primitive accumulation' (see Michael Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism*). As it was developed by the nascent capitalist classes of the period between the end of the Late Middle Ages and the beginning of the Modern Era, the process of primitive accumulation took three main forms:

Colonisation of the feudal commons via enclosures, an act that first forced the landed peasantry out of the economic self-sufficiency they had been habituated to throughout the feudal era as the cornerstone of subsistence production, first into agrarian wage labour and then into the cities to become industrial wage slaves;

Military acquisition of colonial possessions for exploitation of land and human resources (see Jason W. Moore, *The Crisis of Feudalism*);

Colonisation of women's bodies as a means of breeding factory fodder for exploitation in industry via the wage system and war fodder for the military acquisition of colonial possessions; the extirpation from women in general of the habit of freedom and their subjugation for the purpose of being rendered brood mares for capital and the state.

In this context the adaptation of the ancient fantasy and the ideological safety valve as a weapon of social and class warfare

in a time far closer to our own follows a set pattern, though naturally by this stage the stereotype of the witch had long faded into the realm of fairy tale. The fact is well established by Edward Herman (*The Real Terror Network*) and Noam Chomsky (*Deterring Democracy*, numerous others) amongst others that 'War on Terror' mythology did not begin spontaneously with the 9-11 attacks as the pretense of their reaction suggested, but rather in the 1980s as a product of the tail end of the Cold War. In this instance, Reagan was fond of linking conflict in the region to the purported machinations of the Evil Empire:

There is no doubt that far more than simply arming the PLO, the Soviets had made Lebanon the center of Soviet activity in the Middle East ... Based on documents they had captured, it was clear that a terror network sponsored by the Soviets and involving Hungary, Bulgaria, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Pakistan, India, the People's Republic of China, East Germany and Austria were all involved in assisting the PLO (Mattia Tolado, *The Origins of the U.S. War on Terror*, 82).

If you resist the settler colonialism of those who colonize, persecute and then play the victim on the basis of having been persecuted historically themselves following exactly the same manner as the Christians of two millennia ago, the communist terrorists win. The 'ancient fantasy' as ideological safety value cum scare mongering and moral panic, with all that involved in terms of the production of deviance and moral disengagement, was and remains as strong as ever.

As the quote from Reagan reveals, the Terror Scare, the global moral panic over terrorism that characterized the US response to the 9-11 attacks, was built on Reaganite 'War on Terror' mythology in the same way that the Cold War was built on the 'Domino' Theory of encroaching communism—the peril of an exterior threat a classic example of Cohn's 'ancient fantasy,' and thus of the ideological safety valve. Its re-appearance here, as with other examples throughout history, merely serves to demonstrate its continuing value as a means of spreading state terror, shutting down rational thought, driving the population thus panicked into the arms of tyrants and reconstructing state power such that those responsible for deploying the ideological safety valve, in presenting themselves as The Salvation of All That is Good from the Evil Others from Outside, thus become cures of the problems for which their defense of the minority of the opulent is ultimately the cause.

A social order based on privilege and justice, and whose very existence depends on lies and dishonesty, can hardly appeal to reason or the better angles of human nature when looking to get itself out of hot water. The defenders of the minority of the opulent must look instead to the 'ancient fantasy' and the ideological safety valve for a pretext for blame shifting

and repression. To date it has been extremely effective at rescuing the minority of the opulent from basic accountability and ownership for the consequences of their actions as a succession of ruling classes, a fact that would appear to account for its popularity across two millennia. The fact that their victims are forgetful does not help matters much, though we can easily redress the situation by refusing to further neglect our own history. **CP**

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Assange in the Embassy Still a Wanted Man, Still Publishing

By Binoy Kampmark

The “Ned Kelly of the digital age,” as he was called by Bryce Lowry, is still there, lodged in the cramped confines of London’s Ecuadorean embassy, with little room to exercise, suffering from a series of ailments associated with lack of exposure to sunlight, and living under the constant risk of being whisked away to the prosecutor’s quarters of another country. The latest saga involved a possible interview by Swedish prosecutors over what has become an entangled process of constipated legal, some might say extra-legal, proceedings. At the last minute, however, Marianne Ny changed her mind. The status quo would be retained.

He is “wanted”—that much can be said. The extent of what he is wanted for is something Julian Assange’s detractors disagree about. Pop over to Sweden; be questioned. Then charged (to reiterate, there are no current charges) for sexual assault on two women, only to be bundled via extradition proceedings to the United States to serve a harsh term for making use of material that he, himself, never directly stole.

A flawed, inconsistent prosecution process, prolonged by a prosecutor seemingly addicted to using the European Arrest Warrant for an improper purpose (that is, preliminary investigation), remain key stand-ins in the Assange drama. On August 20, effectively three-quarters of the prosecutor’s case expired by virtue of the statute of limitations. Changes in UK immigration law have also meant that the European Arrest Warrant system no longer applies—though the Foreign Ministry was good enough to confirm that these changes were not retrospective. This has not rendered the prosecution’s case a damp squib. In documents released by Edward Snowden, it is clear that Assange remains on a “Manhunt target list”.

Human rights lawyer Gareth Peirce, who has represented Assange, summed up the situation in a note to Australia’s former foreign minister, Kevin Rudd when he described Assange’s case as one involving two swords of Damocles: “potential extradition to two different jurisdictions in turn for two different alleged crimes, neither of which are crimes in his own country, and that his personal safety has become a risk in circumstances that are highly politically charged.”

The intoxicating context of personal dilemma is one thing—it often risks corrupting arguments of principle made with sobriety. Sides are taken and pot shots made at Assange the personality (“damaged” according to Luke Harding and David Leigh of *The Guardian*) and his hyper-charged ego. In playing the man of history, it is easy to ignore the pressing nature of his central philosophy. That philosophy continues to remain an enduring WikiLeaks gift, that of information transparency to inform citizens about government and corporate processes otherwise obscured from public view and debate. Assange puts pay to the notion that historical forces must always be vast and impersonal. Information restores, if not revolutionizes, the relationship between subjects and governing powers.

The broader transparency project advanced by Julian Assange remains a remarkable information revolution premised on an informed citizenry. The grim contrast is with an uninformed, anaesthetised public captivated by convention. Where those margins lie in the spectrum of publication remain to be seen: it is one thing to have the information to pick and choose from, but constructive ignorance is as much a feature of human engagement as is deliberate disengagement. When confronted with the evidence, some simply choose not to see. And when they do, their vision is often slanted, the perspective out of kilter.

As executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy Norman Solomon has rightly pointed out in a range of publications, including *CounterPunch*, the categories on Assange continue to be muddled, something that remains almost an institutionalized pathology. He remains an editor and publisher, a purveyor of scientific journalism, while the statist arm of Assange’s critics insist he is a disgorging, reckless whistleblower.

What has been seen since Assange took up residence in the Ecuadorean embassy, is a veritable transformation across a range of information regimes. Political parties around the world are now invoking the language of transparency. Podemos in Spain openly demands a platform that opens centres of traditional, fustian power, inspired by the Assange situation. Elements of the Syriza movement in Greece have also shown elements of the same. The dowdy and the conservative practitioners seem to have been caught off guard.

In the last few years, it is also evident that the WikiLeaks project has been re-energized. This resurgence has been driven by several remarkable releases, touching on the private entertainment complex (the Sony leaks), the release of the

Saudi cables, and the activism surrounding the largely clandestine contents of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement. It is fitting that the Assange detention be remembered in this light, not merely for the outrageous circumstances of his captivity, but the productivity that has ensued from it. Detained, Assange remains, like Michel de Montaigne in his cerebral tower of contemplation, more industrious than ever.

The Sony Cables

At what point does the realm of private information become a subject of genuine public interest? State Department officials shaping foreign policy presumably demand more serious attention than the media entertainment complex. Therein lies one of the more controversial measures issuing from the WikiLeaks release of 173,132 emails and 30,287 documents specific to Sony's U.S. subsidiary Sony Pictures Entertainment (SPE). The added spice in this particular dish involved an alleged North Korean connection, with the Washington establishment making the boisterous claim that the material was the subject of a Pyongyang directed hack, a claim that is still vigorously disputed.

Again, as happened in Cablegate, Assange has been confronted with the erroneous argument that the means by which such material is acquired should disentitle the broader public from consulting its contents. Publish, in other words, with due propriety, managed by officialdom. The content in such material is only relevant in so far as it is confidential and kept away from prying eyes.

These releases opened up another frontier in the realm of information. The corporate dream factory has its own extensive influences, be they political or social. As Assange would observe, "The archive shows the inner workings of an influential multinational corporation." For the publisher, "It is newsworthy and at the center of a geopolitical conflict. It belongs in the public domain. WikiLeaks will ensure it stays there." According to Assange's critics, the Sony documents and emails constituted merely a trove of inter-office gossip that did more to harm privacy than public benefit.

Sony took to the bastions to howl about what it regarded as violated corporate privacy. The company's blustery stance is worth noting, resorting to the specious suggestion that a global corporation with a large payroll is as vulnerable as that of the private citizen. Of course, the element of corporate power, in such responses, is always discounted by suggesting that mere entertainment is their sole preserve.

In the words of a Sony spokesperson to the Los Angeles Times (Apr 16), "The attackers used the dissemination of stolen information to try to harm SPE and its employees, and now WikiLeaks regrettably is assisting them in that effort." Accordingly, the company "vehemently disagree with WikiLeaks' assertion that this material belongs in the public domain and will continue to fight for the safety, security and privacy our company and its more than 6,000 employees."

Sony's lawyers, led by David Boies, got busy disparaging WikiLeaks, playing the North Korean card of ill-repute. "Despite its purported commitment to free speech, WikiLeaks' conduct rewards a totalitarian regime seeking to silence dissident speech, and imposes incentives on entities such as SPE who depend on trade secrets, confidential information and protection of intellectual property to exercise their First Amendment rights every day." A touching stance, one making Sony Pictures Entertainment the self-appointed guardians of good secrecy over bad, and WikiLeaks the Lucifer of the information world.

Journalists have certainly been trawling the material to see if there is anything of value. There is certainly much in terms of bird feed. Email correspondence between actress Natalie Portman and Sony Motion Pictures Group Chairwoman Amy Pascal is cited as showing the modest efforts of chat activism over last summer's conflict between Hamas and Israel (*The Algemeiner*, Apr 20). But Pascal had better things to do than dabble in Portman's moral universe.

Privacy needs to be proportionate to the context of power that is wielded. Those, be they government officials with power of life and death over individuals, or entities with deep pockets and networks of influence, should be more transparent. Not so Sony, which sees its operations as necessarily clandestine in an aggressive world of trade secrets and policing.

The wisdom of the technocrats and bureaucrats is the reverse: the more complex society becomes, the more ill-informed the public must be for them to succeed. Platonic high castes come in to fill the void, offering paternal guidance. Accept the secrecy directive—we know best.

It should come as little wonder, then, that Sony Pictures' CEO Michael Lynton warms a seat on the board of trustees at the RAND corporation. The military research entity was ever so helpful in advising Sony on managing North Korea's reaction to the film, *The Interview*. Regular invitations from RAND and hosting by Sony of RAND personnel, feature in the correspondence released by Wikileaks.

The degree of power should determine how visible its holder is. That, at least, is the principle. Sony may not be as important as Assange makes the company out to be, but it would be a mistake to assume that the conglomerate wields no measure of influence in the corridors of political and economic power. Film and propaganda are intrinsic enterprises of the political mission. Corporations have the front seats at the negotiating tables of Congress and the trade missions.

The role celluloid plays in shaping politics is undeniable. Actors, as celluloid's primary representatives, have exerted an insufferable pull on the political process, with Ronald Reagan merely being its symptom. The White House does not merely leave its door open to Hollywood, it is often overtaken by it.

Specific to the Sony trove, British Prime Minister David Cameron, to take but one dismal example, fretted about the

possible impact of the TV show *Outlander* on the independence referendum in Scotland. Daft, yes, but still worthy to note in email traffic.

Given Sony Pictures's role behind the production of *Outlander*, executive vice president Keith E. Weaver found himself discussing the series in the agenda for a meeting with Cameron. (*Outlander* itself is based upon the novels by the same name by Diana Gabaldon, whose first book was published 23 years ago.) "From a Sony Pictures Entertainment perspective," goes an email by Weaver cited in the *Herald Scotland* (Apr 20), "your meeting with Prime Minister Cameron on Monday will likely focus on our overall investment in the UK – with special emphasis on the importance of OUTLANDER (i.e. particularly vis-à-vis the political issues in the UK as Scotland contemplates detachment this Fall)." Not earth-shattering, and more cultural than geopolitical, but nonetheless significant as evidence of Hollywood's agency of influence. After all, Cameron doesn't mind traversing low-brow culture if a ballot is at stake.

Some material from the trove is more direct and pungent. The company, unsurprisingly, has been a keen purveyor of anti-piracy measures. A document by a Sony employee notes the activities of the Anti-Piracy Group in the company, covering content security, technology, business intelligence, enforcement, PR and education, public policy and commercial policy.

He goes on to outline the strategies taken by the company regarding its business interests, using the language of universal relevance. What diminishes Sony's profits, in other words, diminishes everybody else's. "Our PR approach with international markets is based locally rather than globally. Our goal is to help grass roots organizations tackle piracy in their own territories. We offer support, help and guidance to ensure that the issue of privacy is not about the impact of American business alone, but about the impact on everyone's businesses."

The stance is well noted in Sony's interest regarding contributions to the re-election of New York's governor Andrew Cuomo. The sticking point there was the limit on corporation donations of \$5,000. In an email from Weaver to Pascal, "Thanks to Governor Cuomo, we have a great production incentive environment in NY and a strong piracy advocate that's actually done more than talk about our problems." To that end, efforts were being made to raise the contributions to "50K overall. This means I need to ask individual senior execs for support, which is not my favourite thing to do."

Sony often gives the impression of a wounded giant, with thousands of employees who have been supposedly assailed by the dark forces of hacking. When queried, its standard response is that one cannot question a company about material that has been pilfered. But the other side of the argument – that WikiLeaks has merely unearthed a gossip train rather than a useful information trove – is similarly mistaken.

Secrecy is not an inviolable charter for the powerful.

The Saudi Cables: Media Neutralization

The transparency project involves breaking the seal of secrecy, the cordons of information control that characterize the functioning of government. Assange's critics have tended to argue that he has a fascination with, for instance, the U.S. power complex. This is more a case of governing subject matter: the U.S. imperial complex demands examination and demystification, given the global reach of its military bases (over 1,400 in 120 countries), and its growing network of interlocking, and controlling trade deals. As Assange explained on *Russia Today* (Sep 9), "It uses these mechanism in its embassies, of its military bases, of its presence in organizations like the UN and IMF, in order secure advantageous deals and structures for the largest American companies."

That said, Assange's interest in the U.S. security complex is not exclusive. Indeed, the scope of the WikiLeaks project is much broader. In June, the organization focused some light on a previously dark area of diplomatic discussion: the views and workings of the Royal Saudi government. In many ways, it was fitting that WikiLeaks should reveal such material, given the valued role Cablegate played in helping to ignite the Arab Spring.

As Assange explained in a press statement on June 19 of this year, "The Saudi Cables lift the lid on an increasingly erratic and secretive dictatorship that has not only celebrated its 100th beheading this year but which has also become a menace to its neighbours and itself." Over the course of the summer, WikiLeaks released what in total amounts to more than 500,000 cables.

How were the documents obtained to begin with? A suggestion was made that they came from a cyber attack on the Saudi Foreign Ministry initiated by the Yemen Cyber Army. (Yemen has a genuine, blood-stained gripe here, being the subject of Saudi military attack and blockade.) "As a matter of policy," claimed WikiLeaks spokesperson Kristinn Hrafnsson to the Associated Press, "we're not going to discuss the source of the material."

The cables provide ample material on a range of media management tactics at work. The Saudis show themselves sinisterly adept at controlling the image of the Kingdom in broader press channels. Saudi interests are protected by their heavy influence on public representations about the Kingdom's policies. Who, noted WikiLeaks, noticed that this summer the Kingdom openly celebrated the beheading of its 100th prisoner this year? "Even international media was relatively mute about this milestone compared to what it might have been if it had concerned a different country. How does a story like this go unnoticed?" (WikiLeaks, Jun 19). The reasons lie in a range of approaches dealing with the monitoring and co-opting of outlets in Arab media.

The cables also show the extent that various Saudi min-

istries will go in cultivating other sources of influence. Techniques of “neutralization” and “containment” are employed, limiting the range and scope of coverage and encouraging outlets to either cover events in certain ways or refrain from them altogether. “Containment” involves a more direct approach, one of conciliatoriness towards Riyadh and hostility to perceived anti-Saudi interests.

An example of the neutralization policy is evident in a cable taking note of the Saudi Kingdom’s concerns about attitudes in Morocco, where the paper in question, *Today’s News*, notes how “a number of the Emirates of the Arabian Gulf do not look favourably on the experience of [that country’s] openness to the Arab Spring”.

Another cable notes various items of payment to a variety of publications in Indonesia, with amounts ranging from \$U.S. 3,000 to \$10,000. There is talk about renewing the involvement of the Ministry of Culture and Information via massive subscriptions to newspapers such as *Kompas* and the *Jakarta Post*.

The technique of purchasing subscriptions effectively makes the publication in question an annex of the Kingdom, with Riyadh becoming a de facto investor expecting appropriate returns by way of favourable coverage. As *WikiLeaks* notes, one document outlines subscriptions requiring renewal by January 1, 2010, covering publications in Damascus, Abu Dhabi, Beirut, Amman, Kuwait and Nouakchott. “The Kingdom effectively buys reverse ‘shares’ in the media outlets, where cash ‘dividends’ flow the opposite way, from the shareholder to the media outlet. In return Saudi Arabia gets political ‘dividends’ – an obliging press.”

When an obliging press cannot be obtained, other, more forward techniques are adopted. A Royal Decree of January 20, 2010 inspired the Saudi foreign minister to remove the Iranian Arabic service, *Al-Alam*, from *Arabsat*, the main Riyadh communications satellite operator. On failing to do so, efforts were made to limit the reach of the signal.

In the broader policy realm, there are documents covering Sunni suspicions of Shiite ambitions – the long held, intemperate rivalry between Riyadh and Teheran gets coverage, notably on the issue of Iran’s nuclear ambitions. Mistrust is bountiful. A 2012 note from the Saudi Arabian embassy in Teheran speaks of “flirting American messages” carried to Iran via an anonymous Turkish mediator (*AP*, Jun 19).

Lurking in the documents is the overwhelming sense of state-based anxiety. Behind every totalitarian fantasy is a revolutionary waiting to undermine it. Anything that might challenge the Kingdom’s near totalitarian primacy, not to mention its much inflated reputation, is to be handled in an assortment of ways. The regime-churning events of the Arab Spring receive a predictably appropriate degree of concern in the documents, with a loss of authoritarian control, however briefly, in such states as Egypt. Public opinion, for instance, is treated as something that should be driven by a regime, rather

than formed by the public. The moment it became clear the motor of protest was gathering steam in Tunisia and Egypt, strategies of funding were hatched to combat such revolutionary tendencies.

For those trawling through the archives, notes abound about regional power plays and a state terrified about prospects of reform from below. A Kingdom notorious for its secrecy is revealed in its range of operations, clandestine, extensive and expansive. More careful sifting through it is bound to reveal a range of intricate, complex alliances with Islamic and Western states, many distinctly at odds with the official record.

The TPP: Power to the Public

The three years since Assange has been in ambassadorial quarters oversaw one of the most significant disclosures of information on the issue of global trade. In that sense, *WikiLeaks* has energized a renewed effort to critique massive, enveloping trade agreements where secrecy has trumped informed discourse.

On November 13 2013, *WikiLeaks* released the draft text of the entire Intellectual Property Rights Chapter of the TPP, otherwise known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement. As noted in the preamble, “This chapter published by *WikiLeaks* is perhaps the most controversial chapter of the TPP due to its wide-ranging effects on medicines, publishers, internet services, civil liberties and biological patents.” This remains a remarkable coup in the information wars, even if, in relative terms, we are talking about the tip of the iceberg, with 26 chapters remaining undisclosed.

Assange insists that the TPP is designed to smooth the way for what will amount to a range of restrictive agreements to control the global financial sphere at the expense of the BRICS states. According to *WikiLeaks*, the TPP is the “ice-breaker agreement” for what will be a “T-treaty triad” comprising the TPP-TISA-TTIP that would replicate a similar body of rules to apply to 53 states, 1.6 billion people and two-thirds of the global economy.

Very little is free in this supposedly free trade agreement. Bill Moyer, Executive Director of the Backbone Campaign, had firm words on the subject: “Only a bought a sold government would sign a treaty that sacrifices our capacity as communities and country pass laws for workers benefit, and the protection of our communities and our natural resources.”

As an incentive, Assange initiated a novel form of protest, with crowd source funding of \$100,000 for anyone who has the means of securing the contents of the entire document. “The TPP bounty also heralds the launch of *WikiLeaks* new competition system, which allows the public to pledge prizes towards each of the world’s most wanted leaks. For example, members of the public can now pledge on the missing chapters of the TPP”

A similar crowd source project is in progress to unearth

the contents of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, with a set target of 100,000 euros. High profile activism has featured in these initial pledges, with contributions from former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, UK fashion designer and environmental campaigner Vivienne Westwood, Glenn Greenwald of *The Intercept*, film maker and journalist John Pilger, Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg, and Belarusian philosopher of the internet, Evgeny Morozov.

There are other sites of protest that have arisen in response to the TPP, demonstrating how WikiLeaks has inspired a revitalising of grassroots protests. Power, in other words, is being redistributed through such platforms as PopularResistance.Org, utilising material generating through the publishing site. The substance of such discussions has been almost exclusively focused on two things: the lack of accountability for the content of the secret document; and the principle behind not discussing such a vital document in the public domain.

On the release of the chapters, various public action groups undertook to comb through the material and provide summary points for readers and members, among them the Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch. A range of information samples are detailed, based predominantly on the text chapters made available by Wikileaks. These include material specific to the defunct Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA), a measure that failed in Congress largely for its emphasis on compelling internet service providers to censor (that is, police) sites deemed in copyright violation.

Where to now?

Assange remains lodged at one of history's stranger impasses. The Metropolitan police are none too happy keeping vigil over the celebrity publisher. The site govwaste.co.uk lists the costs in live time—as at this writing, the amount is 12,173,575 million pounds and rising. The cumulative total, following accounts from the Metropolitan Police, can be broken down into direct costs—those incurred in the course of normal duties; and opportunity costs, a smaller portion resulting from overtime for being stationed at the Ecuadorean embassy.

The site also lists what the equivalent amount might have funded: 60,868 vaccinations for children; 47,740 hospital beds for one night; the salaries for 558 teachers for a full year. As for food, the figure comes to over 10 million meals for the needy. Despite repeated statements on the need to keep an eye on budgets in these times of austerity, it is clear that the UK authorities have more than enough cash to go around keeping an eye on Assange. Call it geopolitical insurance, if you will.

Former Scotland Yard royalty protection chief Dai Davies never had much time for the bluing account associated with the Assange case. Having visions of Assange on the run, his statement made in February 2013 went to lifting the police cordon, and shining the green light of temptation. Would

Assange take a punt and make a dash for it? “The time has come for the Met to review its strategy on Assange, and withdraw the officers currently guarding the Ecuadorean embassy. If he went on the run, he could be hunted down like any common fugitive” (*Daily Mail*, Feb 16, 2013).

Assange has, at this point, no shown intention of doing that. His political experiment in Australia with the WikiLeaks Party lapsed, suggesting that others should become torchbearers. Various global mutations of similar ideas have taken place, placing the transparency idea at the forefront. While these may not be done in the same buccaneering spirit, there should be little doubt where the inspiration is coming from. Gradually, a redistribution of power is taking place through the wily ways of the information spectrum, conveyed via daring the means of “cyber bushranging”. After three years in detention and battling illness, Assange remains more constructively active than ever—in a realm that deals with very different spaces and walls. **CP**

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Radioactive Folly at Lake Huron

The Great Lakes Nuclear Waste Dump

By Joyce Nelson

Opponents of the proposed nuclear waste dump on the Canadian shores of Lake Huron have been hoping that intervention by the International Joint Commission (IJC) could somehow stop the project from going forward, now that a Canadian federal Joint Review Panel (JRP) has approved the environmental assessment of the project.

There's reason to believe, however, that publicized calls by U.S. politicians for IJC intervention may be little more than political spin – not surprising, given the current electioneering on both sides of the U.S.-Canada border. It wouldn't be the first time that a politician used an issue to boost his or her own standings in the polls.

The Plan

The proposal by provincial Crown corporation Ontario Power Generation (OPG) is for at least 7 million cubic feet of low-and medium-level nuclear wastes from Ontario nuclear power plants to be buried in chambers drilled into limestone

2,231 feet below the surface and under the Bruce nuclear site at Kincardine, Ontario—a site that is less than a mile from Lake Huron. The waste to be entombed in this Deep Geologic Repository (DGR) will come from the Bruce, Pickering and Darlington nuclear sites in Ontario - currently home to 18 Candu reactors.

The 8 nuclear reactors at the Bruce site are leased from OPG by a private company called Bruce Power, whose major shareholder/partners include TransCanada Corp.—better known for its tarsands pipeline projects like Keystone XL. TransCanada earns more than one-third of its profits from power-generation. Bruce Power pays OPG for storage of nuclear wastes.

After a 7-10 year construction phase of the proposed DGR, the operations phase would last about 40 years, followed by a decommissioning period of five or six years. According to CBC News (May 7), the decommissioning phase “would include the installation of a ‘concrete monolith’ at the base of the [storage] shafts, then sealing the shafts and removing the surface buildings.” During the next stage, called the abandonment phase, the “OPG assumes that some kind of institutional control over the abandoned repository would last for up to 300 years.”

On May 6, the federally appointed JRP approved the environmental assessment of the proposed DGR, stating that the limestone of the site is “extremely stable,” and that “the sooner the waste is isolated from the surface environment the better.”

The JRP report even says that overall, the risk posed by an underground nuclear waste disposal site is much less of a threat to the Great Lakes than numerous other factors, including invasive species, climate change and other forms of pollution: “...the relative position of the proposed project within the spectrum of risks to the Great Lakes is a minor one, albeit one that demands strict attention and regulation.”

The JRP announcement was met with howls of outrage on both sides of the U.S.-Canada border.

Ramping Up Opposition

In mid-May, one hundred public interest groups from both countries wrote an Open Letter to Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne and the Ontario Legislature, asking that the Ontario government, “as the sole shareholder of the proponent, Ontario Power Generation,” direct OPG to “withdraw its proposal.”

Dozens of U.S. lawmakers also stepped up their rallying against the plan, including Michigan Senators Debbie Stabenow (D) and Gary Peters (D), as well as Michigan Representatives Candice Miller (R) and Dan Kildee (D). More than 2 dozen Congress members – from Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, Ohio, New York, and Minnesota – teamed up to introduce bipartisan Congressional resolutions opposing the DGR in the U.S. House (H. Res. 194) and Senate (S. Res. 134). Many urged the State Department and U.S.

Secretary of State John Kerry to get involved.

On May 22, Illinois Senator Mark Kirk (R) wrote a letter to U.S. President Barack Obama—with copies to John Kerry, Gina McCarthy (Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency), Gordon Walker (Canadian Chair of the International Joint Commission) and Lana Pollack (U.S. Chair of the International Joint Commission)—calling the proposed DGR a “serious threat.”

Sen. Kirk asked President Obama “to use your authority to request an IJC [International Joint Commission] study into this matter, to utilize Federal resources to properly assess the risks this proposal poses to the United States, and to request that the Canadian Government postpone its final decision until both parties of the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 properly consider the matter.”

Sudden Delay

The JRP was appointed in January 2012 by then-federal Minister of the Environment Peter Kent and Michael Binder, president of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC).

Current federal Environment Minister Leona Aglukkaq was scheduled to announce a decision about the DGR by early September, but suddenly on June 3, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA) launched a 90-day “public comment period” until September 1—extending the deadline for a federal Cabinet decision until after the October federal election in Canada.

Sen. Kirk’s letter may well have prompted U.S. authorities to contact their Canadian counterparts—leading to the hasty June 3 deadline extension until after the Canadian election.

Opponents of the DGR considered this delay a sign that the Harper government underestimated just how contentious this DGR project has become. Beverly Fernandez, a co-founder of an Ontario-based group called Stop the Great Lakes Nuclear Dump, told *The Globe & Mail* (June 7) that “since the federal panel endorsed this plan and sent it to the federal minister’s desk for a decision, more and more Canadians are expressing deep concern and strong opposition.”

As of late July, at least 164 communities (representing more than 22 million people) on both sides of the international border have passed resolutions opposing the DGR plan. Some 80,000 people have also signed a petition to stop the project.

It’s doubtful, however, that the IJC will become engaged in this issue, despite its role to prevent and resolve disputes regarding boundary waters matters. And that’s why some of the Bevacqua then added, “...the IJC does not review proposals for site-specific projects unless asked to do so by both governments.”

I then contacted Sen. Kirk’s Washington office on July 27, telling his press operations staff what the IJC had told me and asking (by email): “Is Senator Kirk aware of this

restriction? If so, what purposes would the language in the Appropriations Bill serve? If he was not aware of this restriction, what is his reaction to it?"

By July 31 I had not heard back from Sen. Kirk's office. The senator is reportedly engaged in a challenging re-election campaign.

"Absurd" Plan

Former nuclear scientist Dr. Frank Greening has called the DGR plan "idiotic" and "dangerous." In 2014 JRP hearings, Dr. Greening challenged OPG's radioactivity figures for the wastes, finding them to sometimes be "1,000 times lower" than the actual radioactivity level that can be expected.

Dr. Greening recently told me that many individuals and groups made "excellent" JRP presentations against the DGR, "but by and large our concerns were just ignored," he said. "It's like talking to a brick wall and they call it 'public hearings.'"

Dr. Gordon Edwards, founder of the Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility, has called the DGR plan "absurd," and on June 7 he wrote that nuclear waste dumps "ought to be sited far away from major water bodies—because water is the biggest single threat to the safe long-term storage of nuclear waste. Water floods underground mines, corrodes containers, promotes chemical reactions, generates gas pressure, and carries radioactive poisons back into the environment and into the food chain. Of all the places to dump nuclear wastes, the Great Lakes drainage basin would seem to be one of the very worst."

OPG argues that the 450 million-year-old limestone rock is very stable and would prevent any wastes from leaking for tens of thousands of years. The JRP report endorsed that view.

However, in a June 16 speech in Port Huron, Michigan, nuclear waste expert Kevin Kamps (with Beyond Nuclear) explained: "They note that [limestone] formation is very stable and very little water flows through there. But even if they're right, you have to get the nuclear waste down to this site. They're going to pierce this geology," said Kamps (as reported by voicenews.com). "Now you've created the pathways for water to go down, for water to flood up," he said. "They plan to stop active pumping after 100 years, so this facility will flood and keep flooding until it gets up to the surface and onto the land and overflows into Lake Huron."

Dr. Greening told me, "They have no justification for this DGR, except that they have a willing host" in Kincardine, Ontario (where the Bruce site is located).

It was the Kincardine city council that approached OPG about a possible long-term nuclear waste facility back in 2001, thereby saving the authorities from having to search for another site.

The scandalous local politics involved in the proposed DGR – including millions of dollars doled out to host com-

munities, "secret and illegal" meetings between nuclear proponents and council members, etc.—are explored in my current article for *The Watershed Sentinel* (Autumn 2015). They were also briefly summarized in the May 2015 Open Letter to Premier Kathleen Wynne.

Dr. Greening told me that the JRP's approval of the DGR's environmental assessment shows that "the nuclear juggernaut has its way every time."

"Nuclear Juggernaut"

There is tremendous pressure from the entire nuclear industry to get a DGR approved. Industry analysts maintain that no more nuclear reactors will be built in North America until the waste-disposal problem is solved. Industry pressure for expansion has continued even after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster and after the recent failure of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in Carlsbad, New Mexico.

The WIPP was built to contain 6.2 million cubic feet of nuclear waste in caverns carved out of a 250-million-year-old salt bed, located 2,150 feet below the surface. The facility opened in 1999. Dr. Greening told me that the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) "assured the public that the WIPP would not leak in the first 10,000 years of operation." Unfortunately, "just 15 years after its opening, the facility had two accidents in one week"—first an underground vehicle fire, and then a serious radiation leak.

On February 14, 2014, a drum of nuclear waste in a storage chamber ruptured, exposing at least 22 workers on the surface to radiation. The WIPP has been closed ever since.

A year-long investigation by the National Nuclear Security Administration's Accident Investigation Board found a series of blunders, missteps and shortcuts that led to the accident, including the fact that a contractor used an organic wheat-based kitty litter (instead of a plastic variety) to stabilize and pack the nuclear waste in the drum.

Over a period of some 72 days, the rotting wheat created enough heat to cause a chemical reaction inside the drum, which led to the rupture. According to *The New Mexican* (April 23, 2015), the released radiation "breached not only the fortified room that held the waste, but WIPP itself, which was designed to never leak." Radiation from the rupture was detected up to a half mile away from the underground facility.

U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) safety expert Ted Wyka, who led the investigation, told the press on April 23, 2015, that because hundreds of waste drums mistakenly contain the organic kitty litter material, there is no way to rule out future ruptures.

As Beverly Fernandez of Stop the Great Lakes Nuclear Dump puts it, "There are only three deep geological repositories on our entire planet that have actually held nuclear waste, and all three of these have failed." The other two, located in Germany, started leaking irradiated water into the surrounding environment after only a few decades.

Solution?

Dr. Gordon Edwards argues that burying and abandoning the nuclear waste is “simply a corporate strategy for terminating liability.” In a piece for DissidentVoice.org (May 8), Dr. Edwards wrote that “corporate bodies cannot tolerate the concept of a never-ending liability, one that may require repeated expenditures far into the future, so they want to devise a protocol by which they can abandon these wastes.”

Instead, he advocates “a policy of Rolling Stewardship” whereby the nuclear waste would be constantly monitored above-ground indefinitely. “We know how to package this waste very well so that it does not contaminate the environment,” he wrote. “The necessary authority, information, and resources can be ceremonially transmitted to the next generation by means of a formal inauguration ceremony every 20 years or so...until one day there may be a method for genuinely neutralizing these wastes or otherwise rendering them harmless.”

Rather than pin their hopes on an intervention by the IJC, opponents of the proposed DGR would be better off giving support and encouragement to the Saugeen Ojibway Nation (SON), on whose territory the DGR would be sited. OPG has stated that it will not go ahead with the project over the objections of the SON. On May 8, Saugeen First Nation Chief Vernon Roote told the press, “Of course we are opposed to it. In our community that I represent...there are no members that are agreeable to the burial at this site at this time.” **CP**

Joyce Nelson is an award-winning Canadian freelance writer/researcher working on her sixth book.

In Music is the Conscience of the World

The Rhythm Changes But the Struggle Remains

By Lee Ballinger

“History keeps repeating itself and we have to change our perspective on how we look at things if we want things to change. Somehow we look at what’s happened in the past as being unrelated to what’s happening now and it’s not.”—Kamasi Washington

In 1931, fifty-seven years before the release of N.W.A.’s “Fuck Tha Police,” Louis Armstrong and his Orchestra were touring the South, playing to enthusiastic but segregated audiences. In October, he did a show at the Peabody Hotel in

Memphis, his all-black band playing for a white crowd, including several Memphis cops.

In his book *Louis Armstrong: Master of Modernism*, Thomas Brothers describes the scene: “Armstrong announces he would like to dedicate the next song to the Memphis Police Department. Turning to the band, he sets the tempo and they are off with their arrangement of ‘I’ll Be Glad When You’re Dead You Rascal You.’”

“The relationship of Armstrong’s band to the Memphis police was already loaded with tension,” Brothers continues. “The night before the Peabody Hotel gig they had all been thrown in jail. Their crime: Armstrong was discovered sitting next to his white manager’s white wife on the chartered bus, the two of them talking over business. ‘Why didn’t you shoot him in the leg?’ one officer demanded from his colleague.”

Such problems continued, and not just in the South. In the 1940s and 1950s, Central Avenue in Los Angeles was a place to hear and hang out with many of the brightest lights in jazz. The clubs and hotels attracted a diverse crowd and, as night follows day, the attention of the police. “They closed up Central Avenue downtown because of the mixture of the races,” bandleader Horace Tapscott told author Brian Cross in a 1993 interview.

But the police couldn’t kill off Central Avenue’s flow of music. “Generation to generation, black jazz musicians kept studying with other black jazz musicians who had been a part of the Central Avenue scene,” says Carvell Holloway, jazz trumpeter and head of music education at Davis Middle School in Compton. “Musicians took that legacy and kept passing it down. I know that’s what I’m a result of.”

One of the most important figures in that process was Reggie Andrews, who taught music for decades at Locke High School in South Central Los Angeles. Twenty years ago, Andrews began driving a group of teenagers from various schools to practice as part of the Locke-based L.A. Multi-School Jazz Band, a longtime incubator of South Central talent.

That group of teenagers stuck together, morphed into a band called the West Coast Get Down, and in 2011 went into a studio for a month and worked on several different albums. The first to be released, tenor saxophonist Kamasi Washington’s three CD *The Epic*, came out in May. Washington says “I want my music to change the world” and he showed how serious he is about that on July 25 at one of the weekly Grand Performances concerts in downtown LA, this one entitled 65-92: The Rhythm Changes But the Struggle Remains. It was a celebration of what many call riots but which on this evening were pointedly described as the Watts Rebellion and the LA Uprising (“It was more than a riot” was an ongoing refrain). The format was a combination of jazz and hip-hop, with a version of the West Coast Get Down playing the jazz and a number of guest rappers supplying the hip-hop. “I want to destroy some of the barriers in our music,”

Washington said, “and in a grander scheme I want to destroy some of the barriers in our mind.”

The evening began as actor Roger Guenveur Smith (*Do the Right Thing, American Gangster*) burst onto the stage to portray Rodney King. Twenty-three years later, King’s brief, awkward monologue still makes people uncomfortable. We instinctively want to respond to that plea but we also know that Rodney King was a traumatized police victim who was unwittingly used to spread confusion. “People, I just want to say, you know, can we all get along? Can we get along? Can we stop making it, making it horrible for the older people and the kids? ... It’s just not right. It’s not right. It’s not, it’s not going to change anything. We’ll, we’ll get our justice ... Please, we can get along here. We all can get along. I mean, we’re all stuck here for a while. Let’s try to work it out. Let’s try to beat it. Let’s try to work it out.”

When Smith finished, the crowd was engaged but the energy was mixed, at odds with itself. The music which followed swept that away. It was the jazz of 1965, intense and beautiful, mixed with the hip-hop of 1992, which more than held its own. The lines blurred by Smith’s portrayal of Rodney King began to come into sharper focus.

- Charles Mingus’ “Fables of Faubus” segued into Snoop Dogg’s “Serial Killer”
- Eric Dolphy’s “Out to Lunch” (with Kamasi’s music teacher father, Ricky Washington, as Dolphy) with the Alkoholiks
- Eddie Harris’s “Freedom Jazz Dance” with Ice Cube’s “Today Was a Good Day”
- Gerald Wilson’s “Viva Tirado” with Pharcyde’s “Passin’ Me By”
- Ornette Coleman’s “Broken Shadows” with Freestyle Fellowship’s “Park Bench People”

The choice of the Latin-styled “Viva Tirado” reflects the fact that, unlike the Watts Rebellion which was almost entirely black, 53% of the arrests in 1992 were of Latinos. It’s no coincidence that the LA band El Chicano had a Top 30 hit with a cover of “Viva Tirado” in 1970, the same year in which the huge Chicano Moratorium anti-war march took place in Los Angeles. During the march, journalist Ruben Salazar was killed by the police.

Throughout the show West Coast Get Down vocalist Patrice Quinn would periodically step to the mic, but not to sing. “My name is Time, T-I-M-E, and I have something to teach,” she began. “Ella Fitzgerald, sitting in a Houston jail cell for throwing dice with the band in her dressing room... The police straight jacked their money but you know what it was really about that should interest you in 2015? It was her,

Illinois Jacquet, Dizzy Gillespie, they got in trouble for integrating their audience that night.”

Music certainly hasn’t lost its power to bring people together. The audience on July 25, the largest at a Grand Performances concert this year, was all colors, all ages, and economically diverse because admission was free.

Patrice Quinn put what happened in the streets in 1965 and 1992 into deeper context, giving history lessons on slavery, Reconstruction, the civil rights movement, Iran/Contra, and more. She brought it all forcefully into the present by pointing to the crimes of homelessness and police brutality in 2015, including the murderous conditions on Skid Row, a stone’s throw from where she stood on stage.

The musical synergy between jazz and hip-hop that night is just the tip of a very large iceberg. As Brian Cross notes, “There is something in terms of the scale of the imagination that has happened for this generation of people.” The scale of that imagination takes in music of many styles and many eras, sees no barriers between them and no reason not to mix them together.

The roots of this revolution began with the rise of hip-hop, when artists used new techniques and emerging technology to sample the music they wanted to use without any regard to how old or new it was or what genre it came from.

Widespread sampling was only a temporary defeat for the Legal Industrial Complex which claims to own everything. The lawyers eventually regained control of the music, which brought the DJ into greater prominence, since his or her use of music evaporates into the night, outside the reach of the copyright police. LA conductor/composer Geoff Gallegos credits “The openness of the DJ, the modern day music historian. He listens to the most records, his instrument is the turntable.” The DJs and other artists influence the audience. In turn, the audience supports their alchemy.

“My students don’t really see the difference between the Beatles, Slipknot, and Kendrick Lamar,” says Carvell Holloway. “They’re just ‘Oh, I like that.’ They know so much about all the stuff and they’re only twelve years old. When I was their age, I only listened to one radio station.”

“Technology,” adds composer/string player Miguel Atwood-Ferguson, “brings us closer together and gives us more access to a lot of things, including music. It’s pretty natural that things start to blend.”

It happens naturally, but not without a lot of help. In Los Angeles, visionary crews such as Art Don’t Sleep and Mochilla have been master blenders in making connections and staging events which feature great diversity.

Perhaps most surprising is the way the palette of classical sounds has found a home in new neighborhoods over the past decade.

An early example was the hip-hop/classical orchestra daKAH, helmed by Geoff Gallegos, which, beginning in Los Angeles in the late 1990s, crammed as many as seventy musi-

cians on a stage.

In 2009 Miguel Atwood-Ferguson was the conductor at a now-legendary concert, *Suite For Ma Dukes*, where an orchestra played the arrangements he had created for the music of the late Detroit hip-hop pioneer J Dilla. Karma went in both directions that night--Dilla was the son of an opera singer and a jazz bassist and his first instrument was the cello.

Kamasi Washington's West Coast Get Down core band has two drummers, two bassists, two keyboard players, percussion, vocalists and horns. That's a lot of people making music, musicians who've honed their chops on jazz, hip-hop, rock, R&B, and heavy metal tours. When Brian Cross heard the initial results they'd gotten in the studio, he was blown away. "But Kamasi wasn't done," he told me. "He had this great three story house but he wanted it to be eight stories high." So the band was joined on the album by a 32-piece string orchestra and a 20-voice chorus, which made the jazz even fuller while at times evoking the majesty of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy."

The CD release show at LA's Regent Theater on May 4, where 1200 people paid forty bucks each to get in on a Monday night, took things further. DJs filled in between sets and took star turns in the band. The spirit of the evening could be seen in the way the musicians were dressed. Some of the string players were in traditional classical garb, but others looked like they'd just gotten off their nine to five—a cellist wore a baseball cap and the conductor wore a hoodie. Other attire ranged from 60s Black Power to 80s MTV to the non-style styles of today. It was all part of the palpable joy of performing together, echoing Walt Whitman's declaration that "I am large, I contain multitudes."

Expanding their musical framework even further, several members of the West Coast Get Down either played, produced tracks, or arranged strings and horns on rapper Kendrick Lamar's 2015 hip-hop/jazz/soul masterpiece, *To Pimp A Butterfly*.

Although Los Angeles is one focal point for mixture, the phenomenon is nationwide. For example, Black Violin, a violin/viola duo out of Florida, tours with a drummer and a DJ and plays a blend of classical and hip-hop. Violist Will Baptiste says "We're two big black guys playing the violin. We're breaking stereotypes every time we step on stage."

It's not just classical elements finding new homes, but the classical world itself is becoming a destination for other sounds.

daKAH conductor Gallegos has been commissioned to write the score for a new work for the LA Opera, set to debut in 2016. It takes place in a traffic jam. Another version of the opera is already taking shape in his mind. "I can't wait to give it to the DJs," he says, "so they can chop it up into something else."

That type of blend is already being chopped up around the world. In Poland, 28-year-old composer/conductor Radzimir

Debski (aka JIMEK) has been ending symphonic concerts with an encore that's an orchestral history of hip-hop, a medley of thirty rap tracks featuring the likes of Kendrick Lamar, Missy Elliot, and the Beastie Boys. Recently JIMEK released his own debut as a rapper on video. "I recorded myself playing separate instruments like keys, drums, percussion, guitar, bass, and even violin to sound like a sampled band and then cut the shit out of it, like a good beatmaker would."

"Classical musicians live in the same world as everyone else, hear the same music, like it, want it to be part of their musical lives," says Greg Sandow, who teaches at Julliard and is a consultant specializing in the future of classical music. "This is especially true of younger classical musicians. Like so many younger people they may not make much distinction between 'high' and 'low' art. They take it all as it comes."

Sandow cites a few of what he says could be countless examples:

- Christopher O'Riley, concert pianist with a Sony record contract, also plays Radiohead transcriptions and created versions of Arcade Fire songs for cello and piano.

- Mason Bates--composer who's also a dance DJ and puts a lot of EDM into his symphonic pieces. Now a composer in residence at the Kennedy Center in DC.

- Young orchestra musicians in a summer program a few years ago were scheduled to present a concert finale. Michael Jackson died the day of the show, so they whipped up a "Billie Jean" arrangement and played it.

- Opera singer Renee Fleming has recorded jazz and did an album of indie rock covers.

The distinction between high and low art has often been used as a weapon to minimize voices seeking to be heard through the medium of unruly post-war sounds. At one point, the governor of Georgia directed that every newborn in the state be given a classical CD in order to protect them from heavy metal and hip-hop. While on the surface this may reflect the division of society into haves and have-nots, all the music is a gift to the world. More and more, musicians and their audiences are finding each other, as barriers which once seemed permanent begin to crumble.

While the form of the music is mutating in new directions, the long-standing role of music as the conscience of the world is clearly still in the mix.

Kamasi Washington's *The Epic* shows that the July 25 concert didn't emerge out of thin air. One of the highlights of the album is a version of Terence Blanchard's "Malcolm's Theme," which swirls around a recasting of Ossie Davis's

funeral eulogy for Malcolm X. Singer Patrice Quinn's mom used to babysit the children of Malcolm X, who was assassinated only a few months before the Watts Rebellion.

To *Pimp A Butterfly*'s conclusion is an extended dialogue between Kendrick Lamar and Tupac in which Tupac says: "The ground is the symbol for the poor people, the poor people is gonna open up this whole world and swallow up the rich people."

For many musicians, their music, their lives, and the world they live in keeps returning to an unchanging fact of life—the violence of the police. Louis Armstrong. Central Avenue. Miles Davis beaten up by cops outside a New York nightclub where he was performing. The Watts Rebellion sparked by the beating of an innocent motorist. The murder of Ruben Salazar. J Dilla, whose home was invaded and trashed by cops, which caused him to write his own scathing song entitled, perhaps inevitably, "Fuck Tha Police." The LA uprising of 1992, set off by the LAPD's brutalizing of Rodney King. The epic 65/92 concert in the city of Los Angeles, where police shootings are rising by fifty per cent a year.

A tipping point came back in 1988 in the small corner of LA known as Compton. At the beginning of that year, Compton was an afterthought in Southern California and unknown elsewhere. But that was about to change. Five young men in Compton had come together to work on some music. "We were in the middle of gangs, police brutality, Reaganomics, and there was nowhere to escape," Ice Cube told Rolling Stone. Ernest Hemingway once advised artists to "Write hard and clear about what hurts." That's precisely what Ice Cube's group, N.W.A., did.

By the end of 1988, Compton had become a worldwide symbol of poverty in the post-industrial age. The catalyst was N.W.A.'s debut album, *Straight Outta Compton*, and its anthem "Fuck Tha Police." The record took sides and it was well thought out. This was confirmed for me in 1993 when I went to Locke High School, where much of the music that is setting the pace today had its genesis, to hear Ice Cube speak to the student body. He began by saying that the principal had limited attendance at the assembly to those students with good grades. "I'm not with that," Ice Cube said. "I'm here for everyone who's skipping school today." He knew that most Locke students, in school or out, faced the prospect of a lifetime of police and poverty. Ice Cube disdainfully held up a copy of Black Enterprise magazine, the cover of which praised the black church as a money-making business. He told the students they should ask their pastors why they weren't serving the community instead.

N.W.A. was one of a teenaged Kamasi Washington's first musical influences and its spirit hovered over his July 25 concert as did the solo albums of N.W.A. members Dr. Dre (*The Chronic*) and Ice Cube (*The Predator*). These CDs came out not long after the L.A. rebellion of 1992 and took the side of the people and opposed the police with a fiery intelligence.

Classical consultant Greg Sandow, then on staff at the Los Angeles *Herald-Examiner*, was the first of many writers to champion *Straight Outta Compton*.

The high profile of N.W.A. and Compton hasn't faded. In fact, it's more pervasive than ever. In the summer of 2015, Dr. Dre, a key figure in Kendrick Lamar's musical direction, put out a new solo album, simply entitled *Compton*, which arrived on the album sales charts at number two. It was followed a week later by the re-release of N.W.A.'s debut *Straight Outta Compton*, back in the top five twenty-seven years after it first burst upon the world. The film about N.W.A., *Straight Outta Compton*, was released in August and may be the first Hollywood movie ever made in which there are no good cops, no made-up extenuating circumstances for the boys in blue, nothing but justified hatred for continuous brutality. In its first week, *Straight Outta Compton* set a box office record for a music biopic. Meanwhile, in 2015 Kendrick Lamar became the most popular hip-hop artist in the world. If you had to sum up his music in one word, it would be "Compton," his hometown.

The reason N.W.A. and Compton remain such evocative markers is because the music and the history collectively speak so clearly to the escalating wave of police violence around the world. "Fuck Tha Police" was a scream of protest in 1988 but it has become a prophecy fulfilled. Public opinion, trending strongly multi-racial, is turning rapidly in the direction of N.W.A.'s defiant shout.

What's next? It's impossible to predict other than to say that the walls that have come down will not go back up. This is not just a mix of genres or styles or songs or sounds or notes or even musicians. Underneath it all is the relentless downward pressure all of us outside the one per cent feel in our lives. We have to try to stand and when we do we reach for any hand that's outstretched toward us.

This process has a soundtrack. For instance, Kendrick Lamar, expanding his range of sound once again, recorded a duet with pop superstar Taylor Swift entitled "Bad Blood." The YouTube video for the track has several hundred million views. Since these are mostly Taylor Swift fans, it means that there are now potentially over half a billion new connections to Kendrick's scathing indictments of the police and poverty and to his powerful calls for unity, both of which define *To Pimp A Butterfly*, to say nothing of the musical innovations which amplify it all.

Nothing is guaranteed, of course, but more and more it feels like anything is possible. **CP**

"The universe is a vast, vast place. There's room for everything."—Kamasi Washington

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CULTURE & REVIEWS

Roasting with Robin Williams

By Paul Krassner

The first time I met Robin Williams was in 1976 at the first annual Comedy Competition in San Francisco. He was sweating profusely, his hairy chest and arms showing, and he wore a brown cowboy hat. I was one of the judges. Although I voted for Williams, he came in second. I forget the winner's name, but I recall that the lights went off in during his act, so he took advantage of the accident, and in the darkness he whispered loudly, "Okay, now, when the lights go back on, everybody shout out, 'Surprise! Surprise!'" The audience laughed and applauded his ad lib.

Robin's disappointment was palpable, but his stardom was inevitable. Our paths continued to cross backstage at benefits where we both performed. He was also a reader of *The Realist*. In 1988, the word got around that I was going to undergo surgery, and he sent me a generous unsolicited check to help.

In 1998, Anita Hoffman, Abbie's widow, dying from cancer, decided to take her life on December 27, so as not to spoil Christmas for family and friends who were visiting and bringing all kinds of food. Her appetite was ravenous, and her humor was dark. After devouring a pastrami sandwich, she remarked, "I better brush my teeth, I don't want to get gum pockets."

She was staying at a house in San Francisco owned by actress Wynona Rider, whose godfather was Timothy Leary. He had been Anita's role model during the final months of his life. "You couldn't choose how and when and with whom you were born," he said, "but you can take charge of your own death." And that's exactly what she was

now doing.

Robin Williams learned about Anita's situation from his co-star in *Good Will Hunting*, Matt Damon, who had been told about it by his girlfriend, Wynona. Robin had never met Anita, but he called and offered to pay a visit, in keeping with his benign case of Patch Adams Syndrome. If Patch could travel to Trinidad to entertain murderers who would be hanged three days later, why shouldn't it be appropriate for Robin to make Anita laugh on Christmas day? She hesitated—"I've never really been a fan of his work," she thought—but then invited him to visit...

And so it came to pass in 2014 that Robin Williams would also commit suicide. In the midst of mass mourning him, Rush Limbaugh explained that "Leftists are never happy." And the anti-choice *Lifenews* claimed that Robin killed himself out of guilt over an abortion his girlfriend had in the 1970s.

The last time I saw him was in 1987 on a Saturday evening at the Hollywood Press Club, where we were both participants at a roast for Harlan Ellison, the prolific author of fantasy, science-fiction and speculative-fiction, his work including 1,700 short stories. He also had a reputation for angry ranting with literary style. My wife Nancy said, "He has a black belt in Mouth."

The roast was supposedly a fundraiser for his defense in a frivolous libel lawsuit. Although the auditorium was filled at \$25 a head, the plaintiff, Michael Fleischer, was suing Ellison for a million dollars. In a 1980 issue of *Comics Journal*, in a review of Fleischer's comic-book-novel, Ellison called him "crazy" like H.P. Lovecraft and other renowned writers. Ironically, Harlan had intended it to be a compliment.

Screenwriter David Gerrold remarked, "The fact that Ellison is a self-made man relieves God of a great re-

sponsibility. I've been Harlan's friend for six years. Of course, I've known him for eighteen years."

The moderator of the roast, film critic Digby Diehl, read a telegram from Isaac Asimov, which concluded, "Kick him in the balls—signed, Frank Sinatra." Onstage, Asimov's fellow science-fiction writer Robert Silverberg announced that "Harlan Ellison is so short that he goes up on his girlfriend." Robin and I were sitting next to each other, and we simultaneously crossed that joke off our imaginary lists.

There were short-jokes galore. Have a few free samples: "Short? I carry a life-sized portrait of Harlan in my wallet." "Harlan's parents were normal, but the milkman was a syphilitic dwarf." And the producer of *Twilight Zone*, Phil de Guere, complained, "It took Harlan nine months before he figured out how to shoot himself in the foot at *Twilight Zone* and get canned. But of all the people I have worked with, Harlan is by far the shortest. Harlan doesn't have a short fuse. He is a short fuse."

My own joke was, "This isn't a roast. It's more like a microwave." Robin said, "Harlan is a tall Paul Williams, a white Paul Simon." I pointed out that "Harlan is on the right side of a lot of important fights. He's fought against racism and sexism. That's why this whole panel is white males."

A roast by definition overflows with irreverence, insults, and raunchiness. Examples: "If it's true that you are what you eat, Harlan would be a vagina." Stan Lee of comic-book infamy said, "Harlan is a very difficult person to arouse. Ask any of his former wives." And Robin contributed a metaphorical dick joke: "If you're hung like a field mouse, don't stand in the wind."

I stated that "Harlan is an egomaniac partially because at the moment of sexual climax, he calls out his own name." Robin shouted: "Was it good for me?" I responded, "Harlan has a typewriter with only two letters—M and E. And on it he has somehow managed to write 42 books as well as 300 of Steve

Allen's songs, plus a few of Lyndon LaRouche's speeches."

Robert "Psycho" Block remembered when "Harlan was interested in re-writing other people's work. He took me into a nearby drugstore and showed me how he had erased all the M's off all the Murine bottles." I observed that "Harlan has always refused to get involved with the drug world—as a user. However, he is a dealer. In fact, he was the connection for Kathy Evelyn Smith."

A severe groan emanated from the audience, and I realized that I was treating a roaster as a roastee. Robin Williams and Robert DeNiro had been with Smith and John Belushi on the night of Belushi's death. "Oh, that's a good one," Robin said with Sarcasm 101. "Listen," I replied, "if she didn't plea-bargain, you wouldn't be here tonight."

Moderator Digby Diehl proceeded to rub salt in Robin's wound that I had unintentionally caused: "Robin Williams has been called the king of improv, and he has proven it tonight by interrupting everybody, stepping on their lines, doing schtick. He's been about as annoying as he can be."

"I loved that review, though," said Robin, referring to Diehl's negative critique of *Club Paradise*.

Diehl: "I was hoping you hadn't seen it, Robin. It's said of you in Hollywood that you don't read your scripts. Anyway, ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to bring you Robin Williams, fresh from *Club Paradise*, his biggest failure yet."

Williams: "Thank you, Gary Franklin [the movie reviewer Diehl replaced]. What can you say about a man who's a TV critic? A man who looks at a good film and letters it like a report card. Is that art? I think not. And I'd like to thank Harlan's lawyer for proving, God, is there a reason for law? I think not. And I'd like to thank Mr. Krassner for all the Kathy Smith references. That's some funny stuff."

Robin confessed, "I really don't know Harlan for shit," then described his house. "It's like Notre Dame done by Sears. There's Harlan, naked, playing in

his toys with a beautiful shiksa goddess jumping up and down saying, 'I like him. He's smart.'" Robin morphed into a little boy in the bathroom. "I'm reading Bradbury, dad." (Roaster Ray Bradbury chortled. Robin suppressed a fake sob.) "It's just taken me so far down to be here. I wish I could cry but I don't care." (The audience applauded.)

"Well," said Diehl, "it's been basically a really hostile, ugly night, with a lot of lame jokes and sentimental drivel. But we still have the ritual forgiveness to look forward to." He introduced Harlan Ellison, "a man with the milk of human kindness dripping from his fangs."

"I had a friend once, Harlan reacted, "but the wheels fell off. Zip friends. Dust is my friend. And what of these fuckers here? Robin Williams can't even get a pair of pants that fits him."

"There's a reason for that, Harlan."

"Yeah, sure. It was for you they made up the phrase, 'Is it in yet?' You wanna talk about that, Williams? I've got four words for you: *Club Paradise* and *The Survivors*."

"Yeah, on a double bill with *Man With a Dog* [Ellison wrote the screenplay]." Harlan continued to baste the roasters. As for me, he said, "I want to thank my old chum Krassner for being here tonight. I want to commend him on his restraint in the remarks he made. Or perhaps it was only caution on his part because I promised if he fucked around with me, I'd let on that he caught his herpes from Nancy Reagan."

Digby Diehl concluded, "Harlan's only fear is that he'll get in a car accident and have to re-live this event. And in the true tradition of roasting, that tradition being to talk dirty and mention a big name, thank you all for coming. And join us next week when our guest roaster will be Mother Teresa."

I blurted out, "I fucked her."

The audience screamed, hooted, stomped. Robin jumped out of his chair and ran around in a circle. Then he said, "Gandhi is going, 'Who is this man? He may not get through the gates of heaven for that line.'"

Harlan said, "Thank God Krassner got off one good one."

"I guess I just fell into the insult mode," I explained

"Basically," said Robert Silverberg, "the roast is a really ugly, repugnant, immature and childish art form. I hate it. And I will only do one if Harlan is the target."

And on our way home, Nancy summed up the irony: "A compliment was originally perceived as an insult, and consequently we've had an evening of insults which were really compliments." **CP**

PAUL KRASSNER is the editor of *The Realist*.

The Politics of the Nobel Prize

By Noah Viernes

This year the Nobel Prize in Literature went to the Belarusian writer, Svetlana Alexievich, whose ability to characterize the voices of others stands against governments who have forgotten how to read. Her writing comprises an empathic body of work based on interviews with war veterans, those affected by nuclear disaster, and the human toll of the Soviet dissolution. The Nobel committee's recognition of Alexievich's mastery of language floodlights, if only briefly, the victims of modernity's forgotten accidents and inaugurates a significant conversation about the politics of literature. This politics deals less with the resolution of the always-controversial Nobel prize, nor the corrupt Belarusian leaders that appear in her 2005 collection of non-fiction, entitled *Voices From Chernobyl: the Oral History of Disaster*. The politics of Alexievich's writing resides in hearing beyond the loudness of man-made accidents, from nuclear catastrophe to state failure and authoritarian repression that filter through our lives with increasing frequency.

As an Assistant Professor at a small liberal arts university in Japan, I am often reorganizing the selection of readings to address the question of how power works within the comparative dimensions of our politics curriculum. While conventional yet outdated approaches to the question are built from rational scientific residues of institutions and calculating elites, my own fieldwork in zones of political division have suggested that the experience of power eludes the frames of our dying discipline. Two years ago, I first assigned Alexievich's *Voices From Chernobyl* to observe how students would respond to the relationship between ideology, discourse, and the ways nuclear disaster impacts fragile livelihoods. An international student from Brunei took note of the ways events challenge the categories of subjecthood: she observed how a re-settler described Chernobyl as "a prison" where exposure to the radioactivity converted them into "strangers" and "aliens." She is referring to Alexievich's description of one man's experience of loss in the Belarus town of Pripjat. "We didn't just lose our town, we lost our whole lives." The politics of one man's monologue, left for decades without a language to speak, is the challenge to recognize those who have been silenced—either by the force of ideology or the impulse to move past catastrophic events. Alexievich's bottom-up approach to the disaster pits these stories against the dominant desire, according to Paul Virilio, that Chernobyl be remembered as an accident to be studied on the technological path of a more perfect nuclear grid.

It is not obvious that the humanities and social sciences serve a highly significant role in thinking through the risks and consequences of technological malfunction in our time. While fiction and creative non-fiction writers grapple with political events, government ministries, Japan being case and point, seek to drive students toward the hard sciences an entre-

preneurial gaze that bolsters national development models while burying the affective lessons of the past in the forward march of capital. Alexievich writes of other lives in other places, and perhaps this hope falls within the ideal of an otherwise outdated literary prize. We are living in times where the weapons of the word are all-to-often feared by states with waning influence. Meanwhile, loyal battalions and paramilitary volunteers of impromptu assassins know only that freedom of the word is antithetical to the idea that institutions are sacred. Moscow journalist Anna Politkovskaya was shot dead in an elevator for her coverage of the "secret war" in Chechnya in October of 2006, while Thai poet Mai Neung Kor Khuntee was gunned down for his vocal opposition to a militarized Thai state. Allegations that he was part of a "militant" wing of the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship, is not unlike Chinese claims that the Uyghur writer, Rabiya Qadir, is a terrorist. Singaporean filmmaker Tan Pin Pin was also labeled a terrorist by national censors after a review of her 2013 film, *To Singapore, with love*. Of course, shifting perspectives from one terrorist to another does not require a nation without fundamental rights, but simply the free expression granted to powerful people in so-called democracies. Underscoring the point, Jeff Kingston observed how Ishiba Shigeru, secretary general of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party, referred to protestors against a national "secrecy bill" as "terrorists."

Any discussion about democracy in our times must return to question of movement, resonance, and recognition. When I taught Alexievich's *Voices from Chernobyl* in the fall of 2013, Japan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Fumio Kishida had just travelled to Chernobyl on a fact-finding mission. But no collection of facts will make Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party any more people-centered than their desire to envision the threat to the national future as a threat from the outside.

With limited channels through which to communicate with states, we must seek out those with first-hand experience with power and the everyday procedures of so-called policy.

Not long after winning the Nobel Prize in Literature, Gabriel Garcia Marquez completed a work of creative non-fiction based on interviews with the Chilean dissident Miguel Littín entitled *Clandestine in Chile*. Here, too, we read of a young filmmaker violently struck by what he hears, in the sounds of Violeta Parra's "Gracias a la Vida," floating through the air of Pinochetera Santiago. Garcia Marquez writes the recollection. "It was almost too much to bear. I thought of Violeta, of how often she had gone hungry and homeless in Paris, of her unflinching dignity. The system had always rejected her, ignored her songs, and mocked her rebelliousness." In *Voices From Chernobyl*, Alexievich writes of Sergei Gurin, a Belarusian filmmaker, who can only see a patriotic nation at war with an invasive nuclear threat. "No matter what catastrophes befall us, we will triumph!" Slowly he abandons the social realism of war images and channels the dehumanization of death. "People who've been through that kind of humiliation together, or who've seen what people can be like, at the bottom, run from one another." Thus exchanging a common inhumanity for a symbiotic recognition that nature is fragile, Gurin concludes, "at war, you become a real writer."

The most political writers, especially for any bottom-up approaches to the question of how power works, are those who address the voices of others and the idea that listening is at least twice as important as speaking. Alexievich's Nobel prize is a small victory, reclaiming the administration of justice from those who live the word in their refusal to read. **CP**

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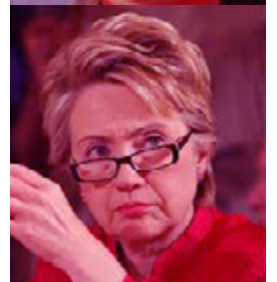
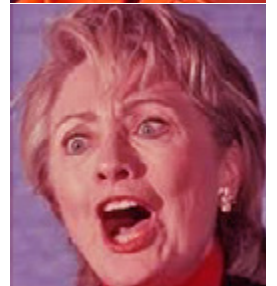
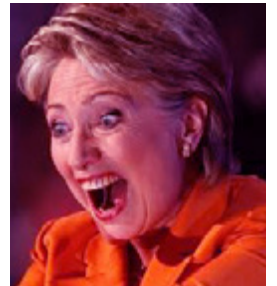
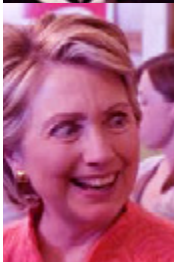
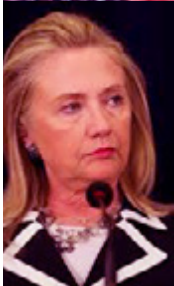
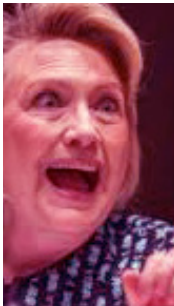
Queen of Chaos

THE MISADVENTURES OF HILLARY CLINTON

BY DIANA JOHNSTONE

"Diana Johnstone captures the imperial worldview of Hillary Clinton in memorable detail. Hillary the Hawk, as U.S. Senator and Secretary of State, never saw a weapons system she did not support, nor a U.S. war practice she did not endorse."

– Ralph Nader



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