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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Jeffrey St. Clair

MANAGING EDITOR
Joshua Frank

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Lee Ballinger, Melissa Beattie, Darwin Bond-Graham, Chloe Cockburn, Windy Cooler, Chris Floyd, Kevin Alexander Gray, Steve Horn, Lee Hall, Conn Hallinan, Barbara Rose Johnson, Binoy Kampmark, JoAnn Wypijewski, David Macaray, Chase Madar, Kim Nicolini, Brenda Norrell, Vijay Prashad, Louis Proyect, Martha Rosenberg, Christine Sheeler, Jan Tucker, Mike Whitney

SOCIAL MEDIA EDITOR
Nathaniel St. Clair

BUSINESS MANAGER &
DESIGN PRODUCTION
Becky Grant

SUBSCRIPTIONS & ORDER FULFILLMENT
Deva Wheeler

DESIGN CONSULTATION
Tiffany Wardle

Contact Information

CounterPunch Business Office
PO Box 228, Petrolia, CA 95558
Toll Free 1 (800) 840-3683
1 (707) 629-3683

EDITORIAL:

counterpunch@counterpunch.org

BUSINESS: becky@counterpunch.org

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND MERCHANDISE:
counterpunchdeva@gmail.com

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BY PHONE:
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In Memory of
Alexander Cockburn
1941–2012

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Scout's Honor

I write to thank you for publishing Jeffrey St. Clair's outstanding piece, *Scout's Honor* today, as it reached deep into my heart. I am 25 years older than you, but proved I am no pacifist when, as a skinny, scrawny, allergic 9-year-old, stopped my school's only bully with a punch to the belly, followed by one to the nose (also fat and the methodist minister's son; is there a pattern here about bodymind?)

Unlike you, I suffered no negative consequences, only cheers, and my dad hid the news from my mom, so that my perfect pedestal-reputation would be preserved (done in the neighboring state of Illinois).

I Love the reference to the psychopath terrorist George Armstrong Custer and to the Boy Scout fascist history of "Lord" Badman Powell.

And thanks for the link to Bobby's speech, a man I didn't like who changed my life 2 months later with his murder in a hotel where I had sex years before. 1968 was one of the most momentous years of my life, personally and politically, and your piece helped me remember almost all of consequence the year my own true audacity of hope ended.

Recalling all the 1968 stuff helped me chase the rage I awakened with this morning after discovering yesterday that the "centrist" corrupt pols in my fair valley cut a couple acres of Doug Firs and obliterated a trail officially dedicated to a friend who helped save the Columbia Gorge.

This rape in service to elite youth tennis and something

called "pickle ball" their extreme centrism reminding me of jim hightower: "there ain't nothin' in the middle of the road but a yellow stripe and dead armadillos".

The rage-chase included some giggles as well, so thanks much for beginning my trip down memory lane.

David Hupp

Give Peace a Chance?

I know you're in the pacifist camp with respect to the U. S. Empire. I find it extremely sad that the Senate can only garner only 8 NO votes on a \$700 Billion Senate War (Defense???) Bill. What has happened to the Democratic Party that they are all on board for war? Why are Ms. Warren, Ms. Harris, Mr. Schumer, Mr. Brown, Mr. Franken, etc., all voting for war? While I would not like any of my loved ones drafted into the Armed Forces, permanent war is the direct result of President Reagan's 'All Volunteer' Armed Forces. The U. S. Armed Forces are now a totally mercenary force and can be used any way the government pleases without any resistance in the ranks. With the U. S. political system having totally failed to even consider peace as an option, perhaps the only way left to get peace is prayer and a miracle.

Jerry D. Lammer

From Hillary to Irma

Enjoy your articles especially the Hilly Book review—Yeah everyone's fault but hers. Now these political prostitutes are selling the Monica Lewinsky/impeachment story to the History Channel. They have no

shame as they push Chelsea for Congress; for the Senate; for the Presidency.

Away from all that—perhaps you'll give a listen to: the electronic group Zero Cult that has an excellent EP—"Arabesque/ Before Sunrise".

Just been through Hurricane Irma in Miami. It was a laugh listening to the Governor Scott demanding that people evacuate & there is no gas. The highways are full of folks jamming the Interstate driving SUV's with the air-conditioning on maximum carrying their living rooms with the family packed in tight—on a journey to nowhere. Most of the folks here simply can't afford to evacuate as it is really expensive even if you have family to stay with.

And then you aren't allowed back into your neighborhoods until FEMA says it is safe for you to return. The Governor has no shelters well stocked with food rations, water & cots in place perhaps they could be located in some of the empty "hurricane proof" State office buildings. The Governor has the adamant climate change denier Senator Rubio standing next to him nodding in agreement. They have no post recovery plan: Gas is still in short supply; food stores still have empty shelves; Mr. Governor flies around in his helicopter promising a better tomorrow. Photo ops abound for his coming senatorial campaign—he told everyone "evacuate now." He's a Billionaire from the Insurance Industry. The police parade a dozen looters in front of the electronic media & work 12 hour shifts with a curfew of 8pm-6am. Miami was fortunate damage wasn't cata-

strophic as trees toppled & the electric shut off. Downtown—the exclusive Brickell flooded—and the National Guard quickly responded.

Joe D'Ambrosio

The Hillary Saga

Thanks you for your insights about Hillary. What she was as a young visionary disappeared over time. Of course she remained intelligent, "well-prepared", a hard worker, etc. But she lost whatever soul she had, and didn't seem to miss it.

I wanted to like her, and tried hard, but for all the reasons you have enumerated, she failed the sniff test, and I had to admit that she was not a good candidate for president.

Worst of all, she sucked all the air out the room, leaving Bernie to suffocate. There was virtually no coverage for his message, because we as Democrats were out to crown Hillary. We lost the opportunity to really listen to America by silencing Bernie, and Hillary did that. She needs to admit it, but never will, because it's not about her, it's about ALL of us. Not good enough for a Clinton.

Don't believe what she says, follow what she's actually done. That's what you are doing in your journalism.

Janet Bischoff

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ROAMING CHARGES

The Fires This Time

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

As Hurricane Irma was charging across the Caribbean, 3,500 miles to the Northwest the Columbia River Gorge, one of the continent's natural marvels, had exploded into flames. The Gorge, a National Scenic Area largely under the management of the U.S. Forest Service, is a 4,000-foot deep chasm in the Cascade Mountains through which the Columbia River forges toward the Pacific. The western half of the Gorge is temperate rain-forest, dominated by 300-year-old Douglas-fir and western hemlock trees.

The fire started on September 2. It was a suffocatingly hot day in a record run of hot, dry days. Northwest Oregon hadn't seen measurable rain since the first of June. The forest floor was crisp, arid and flammable. A group of teens had ventured into Eagle Creek Canyon seeking refuge under its tall trees, emerald pools and waterfalls. Goofing around, one of them shouted, "Hey, watch this." Then he lit a pack of fire-crackers and tossed it down to the canyon floor, where it detonated like a bomblet. Within hours, the Eagle Creek Fire had raced across 3,000 acres of old-growth forest, stranding more than 100 terrified hikers on the Pacific Crest and Eagle Creek Trails. By the next day, the river town of Cascade Locks was under evacuation orders.

Three days later, I awoke to a sickly-sweet smell in Oregon City, 70 miles west of the Gorge fires. Outside, a gray scrim of ash coated the porch and my ancient Subaru. Our house was enshrouded in a pall of smoke so thick I could barely detect the vague outlines of the house across the street. The night before the winds had shifted and the fire had surged 14-miles to the West in a few hours. I-84, the main east-west

Interstate in Oregon, was closed and would remain so for three weeks. The ash and debris, still warm to the touch, continued to fall for the next five days, until the winds shifted and the fires raged to the east menacing the town of Hood River. In four weeks, the Gorge fires had burned nearly 50,000 acres.

As Multnomah Falls, Oneonta Gorge, Angel's Rest and dozens of other natural jewels went up in flames, popular rage against the fire-starter intensified. There were vengeful calls for the kid to be arrested, tried as an adult, fined millions of dollars and hauled off to prison for decades. The anger toward the tyro pyro is understandable, but misplaced. The Gorge was primed to burn. If it hadn't been firecrackers, it would have been a cigarette butt, a campfire, a spark from a truck engine, a lightning strike.

Forests, even rainforests, are born in fire. Ecologically, fire is a regenerative force. Mature Douglas-fir trees have thick, furrowed bark that makes them resistant to most fires, which historically have tended to burn in a patchwork, mosaic-like pattern, that tends to clear out the understory and reduce the fuel load but leave the big trees unscathed. The Gorge had burned before, but never like this. These fires are different. They consume whole stands of trees. They burn hotter, longer and spread faster.

The wildfire season in Oregon has expanded by 75 days since 1980. In the 1970s, the average Oregon wildfire burned for about a week before petering out. Now, forest fires here in the Northwest rage for an average of 56 days, until they are extinguished by the fall rains and snows, which come later and later each year. The number of

acres burned in Oregon each year has more than doubled since 1980. What has changed in those 37 years? The climate.

If you're looking for a culprit to blame, blame the Blob, the vast patch of warm surface water in the Pacific Ocean that has been expanding off the Northwest Coast for the past six years. The warm air currents percolating up from the Blob, which now seems less like a freakish phenomenon and more like a twisted new reality, has derailed the jet-stream. The low pressure systems that have brought rain, fog and cool temperatures to the region for millennia have been diverted, replaced by a stubborn high pressure system that tends to stick over the Northwest from June through October.

This was Oregon's hottest and driest summer in history. The fifth such record in the last seven years. You get the picture.

But the politicians don't. They see fire as an opportunity for plunder. Sonny Perdue and his wrecking crew at the Agriculture Department, which through a bureaucratic quirk controls the Forest Service, are portraying old-growth trees as standing weapons of mass destruction. Taking the Vietnam approach to the National Forests, which Perdue calls the "woodbasket of the world," Perdue intends to save the forest by clearcutting it, without any restraint from troubling environmental laws. "We're not going to roll over at every 'boo' from the environmentalists," he vowed in Montana in July. How convenient for the timber industry.

Denial prevails, coast-to-coast. In Houston, the Feds are aerial spraying the wreckage of Harvey with pesticides, preparing for reconstructing in the floodplains and marshes. In Oregon, the plans are already being scripted to log the scorched forests for their own good, which is the ecological equivalent of pouring acid on a burn patient. If they succeed, the Columbia Gorge will become a sylvan necropolis to greed and climate change. **CP**



EMPIRE BURLESQUE

Against the Zeitgeist: Dylan's Alembic

BY CHRIS FLOYD

As the title of this column suggests, I'm an admirer of Bob Dylan's work, from the world-shaking epics to the off-the-wall obscurities. But I admit that even I quailed this March when I heard he was about to release yet another collection of classic crooner covers—in a three-record set, no less!

I'd enjoyed his first couple of forays into this area, especially the moody "Shadows of the Night," where he sang with more genuine emotion than he'd shown in years on record. But the thought of 30 more of these seemed a bit much.

I'm not one of those fans who require Dylan to redefine the zeitgeist or hale souls out of men's bodies every time he strums a chord, but still, I would've preferred some new songs— or his long-threatened album of Charley Patton covers—to more mining of the Sinatra seam.

Naturally, I bought the record the day it came out.

And to my surprise, I found I couldn't stop listening to it. I understood the criticisms of "Triplicate": too much of a muchness, too creaky of a croakiness, too remote of a remoteness from the contemporary world, etc. But the more I listened, the more I sensed something else going on.

Not just a lightsome stroll through "the Great American Songbook." Not just an exercise in nostalgia, or a contrarian's nose-thumbing at his audience's expectations. Instead, what I heard was the careful construction of an alternative—even radical—worldview: a modern moral code masked (and anonymous) in archaic forms, a sharp counterpart and challenge to the pre-

vailing zeitgeist.

The album concerns itself entirely with demotic themes, the stuff of life for ordinary people: lost love, unrequited love, unfulfilled yearnings, the looming shadows of mortality, with occasional bursts of joy and gentle swagger ("the best is yet to come"). The vocal delivery in most of the songs surpasses "Shadows"—and rivals anything in Dylan's canon—for emotional depth, emotional reality.

But with the whole "American Songbook" to draw from, the selection of cuts on "Triplicate" shows an obvious crafting of a particular vision. Dylan himself described the triple album as a story, beginning with a jaunty fellow lightly repining over a lost girlfriend (regretting the "new blue pajamas" he'd bought for the affair) and ending with a love-broken man wondering why he'd even been born.

At some point it occurred to me that the stories of the album, delivered by a male narrator, were describing—and enacting—nothing less than an alternative view of masculinity: a conception of manhood expressing itself in openness, tenderness and above all, vulnerability.

Throughout the album, there is a courageous embrace of emotion and the possibility—and acceptance—of deep emotional pain. Indeed, in many of the songs, there is a sense of surrender: to fate, to time, to mortality, to the fragility of love, to the ending and rending of things.

Here, across a full three albums, there are none of the withering put-downs that Dylan is famous for: no hoodoo women, no backstabbers, no soul-stealers, no Miss Lonely getting her

righteous comeuppance from Napoleon in rags. There's just a series of ordinary men life hoping to be worthy of the woman they love or long for, or else ruminating—not raging, not ranting—about a wonderful, beguiling woman they've lost.

There's no place in these songs for the triumph of the will, for braggadocio, for imposing one's desires through bluster and violence. In a world where war is the prevailing metaphor and mode of being, where manhood is measured by the throw-weight of missiles and chest-thumping displays of dominance, here comes an old man quietly asserting the primacy—and nobility—of the loving heart, of brokenness and gentleness, of fierce, enduring passions bounded by a respect for the beloved, whatever the outcome of the encounter.

In some ways, it reminded me of a phrase I once used—in my brief stint as a Russian literature teacher—to describe the not-dissimilar *Weltanschauung* found in the poetry of Boris Pasternak: "a power without the power of resistance"—which in Pasternak's case, as with Tolstoy before him, nonetheless came to stand as a stark rebuke to the powers of their day.

"Triplicate" is not on that level, of course, but it's striking that Dylan crafted this alternative *Weltanschauung* from old songs largely written by immigrants or the children of immigrants: survivors of repression, violence, bigotry and persecution. This was not the lineage of the Indian-killers and slavers, the aristocrats and robber barons who gave us the bellowing hoo-rah of "American Exceptionalism," now swelling in a spectacular excrescence in Washington.

I think this is what Dylan meant when he said he wasn't covering the songs but uncovering them. He's brought back those depths in a kind of cultural alchemy, distilling a new sensibility through an old alembic. It's not likely to change the corrupted currents of this world, but it's an alternative worth attending to. **CP**



EXIT STRATEGIES

Liberals Ruin Everything

BY YVETTE CARNELL

September marks the one year anniversary of my prediction that Colin Kaepernick's protests would not spark the emergence of a broader protest movement. "Real transformative politics necessarily muffles voices like Kaepernick's because his influence is proportional to both his celebrity and ability to amass capital for billionaire NFL owners," I wrote in 2016. A year later, Kaepernick's blown-out Afro has become more than just a symbol against police brutality, but also a condemnation of the American political project.

Looking back, I can point to four elements that served to strengthen and extend Kaepernick's anthem protests; 1.) The quarterback is no longer enriching billionaires. In fact, every NFL team to date has refused to add him to their roster. This perceived indignity has enraged and enlivened Kaepernick supporters (and given rise to a booming T-shirt and novelty industry). 2.) The election of Donald Trump galvanized liberals in a way that certainly wouldn't have been possible if Hillary Clinton had glided into the White House on a wave of identity politics. 3.) Reports and studies indicate that things are consistently getting worse for Blacks. Even though most Americans, Blacks included, remain optimistic about the potential to build wealth in the U.S., recent studies have been unequivocal. According to a report from the U.S. Census, Blacks are the only group making less than they did in 2000. Another report estimated that Black wealth, what little there is that exists, will drop to drop to zero by 2053. 4.) Charlottesville happened.

Charlottesville was an electric moment that put President Trump squarely on the side of racists who had,

up and until that point, been sort of casual and traditional in their racism, as in Yes, the Klan dropped fliers. Whatever. They're a relic, right? That perceived relic was out in full militancy during the march on Charlottesville, which was a clarifying moment for some comfortable middle Americans (African-Americans have always known that the KKK is a terrorist organization and should be regarded as such). And in St. Louis, amid protests after the murder of a Black man at the hands of a police officer, police were heard in the streets chanting, "Whose streets! Our streets!" This was the context for the groundswell of support we saw growing around Kaepernick's anthem protests.

Add to this perfect storm Kaepernick himself, who also benefited from his own variety of identity politics. Like Barack Obama, Kaepernick is mixed. Whereas Obama was raised by one white parent, Kaepernick was raised by two adopted white parents. This is like kryptonite against allegations of anti-whiteness (even though right wingers have tried and failed to make those accusations against Obama in the past).

The problem with most celebrity protests is that they are short lived. Celebrities are businesses with brands. Rarely are they willing to pitch a tent for the long haul required to pull back the layerings of a white supremacist government. But Kaepernick did. He remained consistent in both his message and mode of protest. And be it because of boycotting Blacks, or fed up conservative whites, football ratings are down. Something is happenings. And at the moment I began to get a tiny bit excited, that this might actually be a moment that we can transform into something more meaningful, I remembered that

liberals ruin everything. Let me explain.

In reaction to catching heat for calling President Trump a "bum" on Twitter, LeBron James defended himself by weirdly claiming that he's trying to bring America together. "It's not about dividing. We as American people need to come together even stronger," said James. Except, that's not what Kaepernick's protest was about. Now rewind back to the start of the protest where Kaepernick declared, "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color" adding, "There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder." Kaepernick also slammed both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, calling them both "proven liars".

After Trump inserted himself into this controversy by slamming NFL protesters who refused to stand during the anthem as "sons of bitches", some liberal elites pounced on the opportunity to co-opt the narrative, and use LeBron's comments to make the kneel about Trump, as opposed to police brutality and a broken political system. "The kneel will now become a symbol of Trump," tweeted Mother Jones' David Corn. It was retweeted 2,500 times at last count and had garnered 9,056 likes. "NFL Protests Donald Trump" read another headline from CBS Sports.

Although the Kaepernick protests lasted longer than I anticipated, I stand by my prediction that deputizing millionaires as stand-ins for an actual movement would fall far short of the transformative change required to alter the trajectory of this country. There is, of course, a chance to build upon what Kaepernick is sacrificing to bring attention to police brutality. I support his effort, as should you. Don't hold your breath though, because liberals once again stand poised to shrink Kaepernick's full throated condemnation of racist policing. Liberals do, if given a chance, ruin everything. **CP**



GRASPING AT STRAWS

Syria: How Does This End?

BY MIKE WHITNEY

The outcome of the Syrian War is no longer in doubt. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad will stay in power in Damascus and most of the country will remain under the central government's control. But there are still thorny issues that need to be resolved, particularly the question of who will occupy the territory previously controlled by ISIS.

As ISIS continues to lose ground east of the Euphrates River, the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and the US-backed Kurdish militia (the SDF) are in a race to grab as much land as possible. That greatly increases the probability of a clash that could quickly escalate into a confrontation between Russia and the US. This is the nightmare scenario that both sides want to avoid, an unforeseen miscue that triggers World War 3.

The good news is that there appears to be open lines of communication between the Russians and the US military. Even so, both parties have conflicting strategic objectives which means that it will be difficult for them to find common ground. Washington has bases in east Syria and wants their proxy-army to occupy as much of the territory as possible, but Assad has already stated that he will never accept a shrunken country.

"Whether it's the Syrian Democratic Forces, or ISIS or any illegitimate foreign force in the country ... we will fight against them until our land is freed completely from any aggressor," said one of Assad's top aids, Bouthaina Shaaban.

But while Assad is more than willing to fight the SDF, Russian President Vladimir Putin might have other things in mind. In fact, it's very hard to imagine Putin risking a broader conflict with the US merely to recapture every square inch of Syrian sovereign territory. More

likely, Putin will permit the US to keep their bases in the northeast as long as the SAA is allowed to retake all the land directly east of Deir Ezzor creating an open corridor to the Iraqi border. This is crucial for Assad. Not only is the area rich with oil that will help finance the rebuilding of the country, but also it clears an overland route connecting Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad and Tehran, an Arab Superhighway.

In exchange, the US would still maintain a toehold in northeastern Syria providing cover for a de facto Kurdish State. The Pentagon has tried to downplay this arrangement by allowing locals to choose their own leaders, but it's doubtful that anyone is taken in by the ruse.

Behind the smokescreen of local autonomy, lies an emergent Kurdistan containing numerous US military bases where Sunni militants will continue to be armed and trained so they can be sent back into Syria to destabilize the regime. Recent setbacks have not dampened Washington's hope of eventually removing Assad.

It was widely believed that fighting would break out between the Syrian Army and the SDF following the capture of Deir Ezzor. But the SAA, accompanied by combat units from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and Hezbollah, swiftly overtook Deir Ezzor lifting the three year-long siege and quickly crossing the Euphrates. And while their progress has been slower than expected, loyalist forces seem to have an edge on the SDF whose units have been plodding southward at a snail's-pace.

What's clear, is that the SAA has made important territorial gains that will be impossible to reverse. In a matter of weeks they should be able cut a path to

the Iraqi border while securing most of the province's lucrative oil fields. For the most part, ISIS will have been defeated or forced to retreat creating an opportunity for final negotiations between the US-backed militias and Damascus.

In a perfect world, the US would claim "Victory", withdraw its troops and end its involvement in Syria. But no one expects that to happen. Washington wants to maintain a permanent presence in Syria to intensify its grip on critical resources and pipeline corridors. In as much as US objectives coincide with the aspirations of the SDF for a Kurdish homeland, the two parties will remain allies. But the path forward will not be easy or trouble-free. All of Syria's neighbors are adamantly opposed to a Kurdish state which they see as a threat to existing borders and a carve-up of the region. If the Kurds pursue this plan they will become a pariah state, permanently isolated and insecure. It would be better for the Kurds to hammer out a compromise with Damascus on partial autonomy then become a regional outcast that has to accept permanent US occupation as a condition of its statehood.

In any event, the War in Syria will not end with the defeat of ISIS. The Kurdish issue will have to be resolved and Washington will have to stop its provocations. Naturally, a political settlement would be preferable to another bloody and protracted war, but that would require leaders who genuinely want peace. And that may not be the case. **CP**

BORDERZONE NOTES

The Real Heroes of Mexico City

BY LAURA CARLSEN

IN HONOR OF THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN THE EARTHQUAKES OF SEPT. 19, 2017 AND SEPT. 19, 1985, MEXICO CITY—AND THOSE WHO SAVED LIVES.

The sirens shriek in all directions at once. There's dust and smoke and the ominous smell of gas in the air. Health workers in white coats run to attend to the wounded. Getting down the rickety stairs, swaying wildly from side to side, and out into the street seems like the first miracle. In the streets, we hug and cry and take stock as the tremors continue. We're not sure if it's the earth still shaking or the shaking inside us.

Every once in a while, a signal comes through the cell phone and we get a little news or a chance to make a call to family members. Then the lines go dead again and we're left to wonder what the rest of city looks like. Mothers despair, not knowing if their children are ok.

In Colonia Juarez, our building withstood the quake. We can't see fallen buildings, but we know there are some from the particles in the air. Glass and pieces of facades obstruct the streets, now abandoned by the daily traffic that tangles travel and left to emergency vehicles. The doctors carefully lift a woman who lies on the asphalt onto a stretcher, careful not to move her spine. Some say she jumped in panic when the earthquake started. Others say she fell in the street when pieces of concrete began to break off.

There was no warning. For all the so-

phisticated earthquake sensor systems, this one slipped in under the radar and exploded into our awareness, hitting at the same time as the useless alarm. The epicenter was close, a mere 100 kilometers or so away from this capital city of 21 million people.

Earthquakes don't get names like hurricanes, so what will posterity call this one? The "September 19th earthquake" is already taken. This week's quake happened on the exact same day as the devastating earthquake 32 years ago that left 5-10,000 dead or missing. The irony was lost on no one.

I arrived in Mexico, a student with a rudimentary grasp of the Spanish language, in 1986. I encountered a city in ruins. Walking the streets, entire blocks held nothing but the remains of buildings and the ghosts of the people who once lived and worked there. An epically corrupt government had pocketed international aid money and reconstruction took place at a glacial pace, if at all. I began collecting the stories of survivors—the terror of being trapped, the loved ones who died, the outrage of business owners who came in to rescue their safes and materials leaving human beings trapped in what was left of their investment.

1985 left an imprint of terror for a generation of Mexico City residents. When the earth shakes, they feel it in every bone of their bodies. Even a mild quake sends at least someone to the hospital with a nervous breakdown

from reliving the trauma. And this quake was not a mild one. They say the epicenter was the state of Puebla on the Morelos border-- relatively close to Mexico City--so the 7.1 tremor struck nearly full-force.

From the first second, the response is social. People pour into the streets, first for safety then for consolation. They compare experiences, search for loved ones, watch the drama unfold around them. They move in large herds on foot, as other forms of transportation have disappeared from the urban landscape. It's like the post-apocalyptic scenes in movies, except these aren't marauders, but simply citizens forced back to basics—two feet, one heart, no smart phone.

It took no time at all for the emergence of the deep collective. Radiating out from the inner circle of family and friends (are they well? Do they need anything?) it began to encompass complete strangers who shared nothing but dwelling together in a disaster zone. Youth took the lead, with thousands grabbing a pick and hard hat and heading to the scenes of wreckage. Young people who assumed responsibility for the community and took on the task. A popular tweet quotes the stereotype, 'Millennials are all apathetic and lazy and all they do is sit around watching videos.' Below it shows a photo of a human chain of young people passing supplies to rescue workers, with the rhetorical question: "Now what do you have to say about us?" (translated).

College students and workers, men and women with incredible endurance and commitment, are pulling multi-hour shifts of heavy physical labor moving rock, bricks and twisted steel rod. They've come not just as rescuers, but as grassroots organizers. In hives, they land on a site and immediately create complex systems to sort donations, coordinate searches, and secure dangerous areas. At Latin America's largest—and best—university, brigades come and go, holding impromptu workshops so the experienced groups

can train the new groups. They pass on knowledge in a quick-learning process that their professors would marvel at, knowledge of things they never studied and were not on the curriculum. Knowledge of how to save your city.

The volunteers stop by the tool store and buy their own shovels and picks and bright-colored hard hats. Budding sociologists and Spanish Lit majors become de-construction workers overnight. The atmosphere is serious, sad but somehow ebullient. Support arrives minute by minute, until videos go out announcing a surplus of sandwiches. At donation centers set up in public squares and parks and wreckage sites,

banks charge Mexicans more for services than anywhere else in the world), and Telmex (owner: Carlos Slim, one of the richest men in the world) offering free cell phone data. But corporate largesse is not what sustains this citizens' movement. It's the spontaneous eruption of people helping people, showing a tribal unity that the egotism of consumer society has worked for decades to replace. Neighbors who complained about barking dogs just yesterday lean on each other like long-lost siblings today. Couples open their homes to strangers just because they recognize the need.

The powers-that-be do not like what

It's the organized people, like ants that march out of the cracks with an instinctive master plan, who are transforming this city and at the same time, its political culture for years to come.

On Avenida Cuauhtemoc, a group of people gather to watch the drama. The building teetered and fell backward. Now it's a giant plate of concrete that once was a roof, atop an enormous pile of rubble. The rescue workers walk up the floor-roof like a giant slide and use ropes and picks to try to burrow down into the ruins for survivors. Hundreds of impromptu rescue workers with dime-store hardhats watch below, many with their fists raised in the air. In

A natural disaster arises from nature, but it's not a disaster until it affects one species: the one with naming power.

the volunteers receive whatever the public brings, but they most appreciate batteries and bandages. Three boys, obviously from poor families, leave a dolly stacked with cases of bottled water. A car drives by and passes the policeman directing traffic a box of cookies. Neighbors drop off clothing and canned goods. Two young women have started a shelter for the pets of the affected. They hand out flyers offering pet food, kennel services, and veterinary care. All free of charge.

The rules of capitalist society have been thrown out the broken window. Anyone who tries to make money off the tragedy—and there are a few—is called out. One WhatsApp message notes that Walmart and Costco are raking in the money of people buying goods to donate without even offering discounts, while the mom-and-pop corner stores that survive on a shoestring have emptied their shelves to donate to the rescue efforts. "Think about who you want to buy from in the future" the writer admonishes.

The commercial media herald the banks' decision not to charge commissions (Citigroup and other foreign

they see. What is this business of an entire society, across class and race and gender lines, rising up to help itself? A massive civic response not controlled or channeled by the elite? And in the nation's capital! They shake their heads in wordless consensus: This bodes ill for the future of authoritarian rule in Mexico, and right when the elections are coming up. What if the people see, as they are, that they don't need to rely on the government? What if flexing their civic muscles in earthquake relief inspires them to do so at other times and for other issues, like freedom and justice?

At wreckage sites, the state security forces allow only the mainstream media reporters to enter, from the Televisa and TV Azteca duopoly. The media conglomerates are working overtime to weave a narrative that makes the police and soldiers and politicians the heroes of the rescue efforts and ignores the civil society role. No one believes it because what they're seeing is the opposite. At site after site, the security forces stand by as the citizen volunteers lead efforts, or worse, they attempt to take control and obstruct urgent tasks.

the language of earthquake reconnaissance, a raised fist is not a symbol of struggle and resistance—it's a sign to maintain absolute silence. Few speak and if they do, they're hushed. The hush of a crowd in one of the world's noisiest cities is eerie, but it serves a purpose. Everyone is listening, hoping for a tiny voice or movement to show someone is alive inside. Then the rescue workers will know where to dig down and claim another victory from the jaws of disaster. Teenagers with raised fists silence even the cars passing by in the street.

Unfortunately, that doesn't happen this time. As we leave, they're saying that demolition will begin soon. Once the heavy equipment dives in, hope of life emerging dissolves. The chunks of concrete shift and settle and if there were survivors they would be crushed. Each day that goes by reduces the chances of finding people alive. Some social media reports protest that the armed forces deployed by the president argue for moving in with the backhoes and excavators, giving up on the thin thread of hope that anyone can still be pulled out of the wreckage alive. But it's that thin thread that motivates every

brigadista to continue to work through the night and into the next day, even under rain and hail. Local press reports that 56 persons have been rescued from fallen buildings.

More than 233 have died from this earthquake in the areas that felt the brunt of the impact. There are 115 dead in Mexico City alone and another 200 are still missing, indicating the death toll will continue to climb in the coming days. If it's at all like 1985, some will never be found. In addition to the buildings destroyed, another 200 to 500 suffered major structural damage. Some families have lost everything. Hundreds will remain homeless or living in cramped quarters with friends and relatives for weeks or months.

Thousands of people are coming to the aid of strangers with no thought of whether the victims "deserve" it or not, without distinguishing or discriminating, without speeches or fanfare. It's an entire city in solidarity with itself, sidelining a government desperate to regain legitimacy and brushing off official security forces. Maybe those raised fists are a symbol of resistance after all.

A natural disaster arises from nature, but it's not a disaster until it affects one species—the one with naming power. We humans call them disasters because when the earth moves or the winds whip up, it destroys what we have built and threatens our lives. For the earth, these are merely its internal adaptations to millennial processes. In the long view, we'd be irrelevant were it not for our tremendous destructive capacity.

It's that knowledge of our irrelevance and vulnerability that terrifies when the tremors begin. The sense of self caves in ways we can't explain. But when the individual fades and the deep collective arises to save, protect, and shelter, you can't help but think that maybe in our best moments there's something transcendent about the human race after all.

Ironically, for Mexico City—amid the rubble, the pain, the uncertainty—this is that moment. **CP**

EUROZONE NOTES

The City of Peace is Not Afraid

BY DANIEL RAVENTÓS AND JULIE WARK

The operation was planned as a large-scale massacre with Gaudí's tourist-crammed temple La Sagrada Família among the targets but unforeseen obstacles obliged the plotters to change their objectives. In any case, on August 17 one of the most recent attacks for which the Islamic State (IS) has claimed responsibility occurred on Les Rambles in Barcelona, a city known for its enormous demonstrations for peace. However, the attack wasn't just about Barcelona. However tangibly and psychologically it affected the city itself, it was also more abstract: an attempt to instill fear on a global scale by striking against one of the world's top tourist brand-names (84 million tourists forecast for 2017) and, still more, issuing yet another challenge to an insanely voracious, militarized West.

The death toll is fifteen and 130 people were injured, some gravely. According to the official version, the twelve people directly responsible for this attack and a related one in the seaside town of Cambrils are dead or have been detained. If these attacks were headline news, not so was that in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso where, three days earlier, eighteen people died when gunmen attacked a Turkish restaurant, or in Mirza Olang, Afghanistan on 5 August with at least 36 deaths. So far this year, IS has claimed responsibility for 25 attacks with more than 400 dead and some 6,900 injured. Most have occurred not in Europe but in Istanbul, Baghdad, Kabul, Sehwan, Al-Bab, Dhaka,

Mastung, Marawi, Jakarta, Tehran, and elsewhere. On August 17 it was our turn, "our" in the sense that we are both residents of Barcelona, although all the attacks, wherever IS strikes, are "ours" too because they assail our humanity.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the catastrophic result of the renewed prominence of the Middle East as a zone of geopolitical friction is millions of victims: dead, wounded, homeless, hungry, displaced, and refugees rejected by countries that call themselves democracies. Arab and Muslim societies have seen from close quarters the atrocious failure of the West's promises of decolonization and modernization. With a lot of help from a feckless, his-master's-voice media, this descent of politics into what is often pure barbarism has encouraged simplistic clash-of-civilizations world views laying the foundations for the dreadful utopia of the Islamic State and its promise to transform victims into executioners. With the death throes of its caliphate in Raqqa and Mosul, and harried by alliances that reproduce the causes that led to its first appearance in an open conflict for hegemony in the Middle East, the mobile IS moves on to other places including Europe, using terrorism's promise of afterlife greatness to garner support in alienated communities of Muslim immigrants.

The IS attacks hold up a mirror showing the fault lines in western democracies. In Barcelona where, even as the city's residents were reeling and tears were being shed among and for

Conflict packaged as mourning has been sown in the midst of genuine mourning but the population, if not the media, is able to distinguish between the two.

the victims, the ugly side of politics appeared with Madrid's swift exploitation of the "independence question", expressed as imperious calls for its brand of "unity". On October 1, Catalonia will vote on the question "Do you want Catalonia to be an independent country in the form of a republic?" in an illegal referendum (illegal because banned by the right-wing Partido Popular (PP) government). This democratic/antidemocratic abyss has yawned even wider in the wake of the attacks. On 6-7 September the Catalan parliament voted for a "crisis of State", as the right-wing press puts it or, to use more factual terms, to pass its Referendum Law and, if the "Yes" vote wins, to proclaim the Catalan Republic—a resounding act of institutional disobedience backed at the grassroots level on September 11, Catalonia's national day, by a million people who marched for "Yes" in what was Europe's biggest demonstration for the sixth consecutive year (in a country of seven million people). The state is responding in ham-fisted Gilbert-and-Sullivan style: the Constitutional Court suspended the referendum law; all security (including Catalan) forces must prevent the vote on October 1; the Guardia Civil searched a printing press looking for ballot papers as the public taunted them outside; pro-referendum websites and media will be prosecuted; the attorney general is opening criminal charges against the entire Catalan government and the members of parliament who enabled the referendum vote; and, once again, Spain could have hundreds if not thousands of political prisoners.

For authoritarian governments, terrorist attacks are tailor-made for instilling fear. And, in its efforts to prevent the referendum, the PP is doing its

shock-and-awe best to impose "security" over democracy, to widen the gulf between Spanish, Catalan, immigrant and autochthonous communities, and to demonstrate The State's monopoly on the use of force. But the project is being thwarted by a good part of the Catalan population. On August 26 half a million people demonstrated to proclaim "I am not afraid". Recognizing the power of the message, the City Hall stepped out of the limelight and, in deference to civil society, regional and central government officials, including the king of Spain, then had to follow suit and accept a secondary role in the march. Prime Minister Rajoy was surrounded by ordinary people in a demonstration headed by ordinary people. So was King Felipe who, with a grimace, he was unable (or cared not) to disguise, walked beside him as both were met by whistles of rejection.

For the mainstream Spanish media, this proved that Catalans are ill-mannered and fixated on independence. The pro-independence flag, the *estelada* was too visible in the march: "A Shameful Separatist Show", for The Spain Report. Meanwhile, El País pronounced that, for Catalan politicians, "the secessionist chimera is the only item on the political agenda" and, reliably scurrilous, El Mundo editorialized that the "mosques are out of control" and the Catalan authorities "must reconsider their immigrant welcoming policy".

But there is more to all this than meets the eye of some beholders. Many banners suggested that, rather than bad manners or knee-jerk nationalism, Catalonia's citizens were rejecting a state and a monarchy with a thriving arms business well-oiled by close ties of friendship between the Bourbon and

al-Saud monarchies. The rallying cry "Barcelona, city of peace" is not just about peace per se, however desired it is, but also the fact that Spain occupies an inglorious seventh place among the world's top ten arms exporters, with the terrorist paymaster Saudi Arabia among its main clients: €447.6 million in weapons to Riyadh during the first quarter of 2016.

So what about unity? The unity Rajoy found was proof that he had failed to drive a wedge between Madrid and Barcelona when the mayors of the two cities, Ada Colau and Manuela Carmena embraced and reaffirmed their commitment to work together for their shared values. Unity was expressed in the manifesto of the march, read by a Catalan actress Rosa Maria Sardà and a veiled representative of the Ibn Battuta Foundation, Míriam Hatibie. In Ripoll, hometown of some of the terrorists, unity came with the words of Haifa Oukabir, sister of two members of the terrorist cell, when she rejected terrorism and spoke of "shared pain". Unity and a sense of community were conveyed when the parents of a three-year-old boy killed in the attack embraced a weeping imam.

Disunity was there too, of course. Small but vocal, far-right, neo-Nazi groups and Islamophobes have seized the day to express their hatred for immigrants. But they have been driven back by residents and passers-by shouting, "Fascists, get out of our neighborhoods!" Rajoy's unity is one he sees being inflicted by the armed forces. More seriously, what has now been revealed is an almost non-existent co-operation between Spanish and Catalan police and security forces. After the Madrid attack in 2004, it was clear that Spain was on the jihadists' map.

Nevertheless, the Spanish Ministry of the Interior blocked the Catalan Police (Mossos d'Esquadra—"Squad Lads") from conventional international networks of anti-terrorist information like Interpol, Europol, and also the Spanish Center for Intelligence against Terrorism and Organized Crime (CITCO). More shockingly, in the 2014 "Operation Caronte" case, the Mossos reported to the National Court and the Attorney General's office "serious interference by National Police agents" aiming to undermine their work by "alerting the Jihadist terrorists that they were being investigated by the Catalan police".

Finally, lurking yet again in the security issues is the literally divisive matter of independence. As *The Guardian* noted, when Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy and his Home Secretary Juan Ignacio Zoido decided after a too-long silence to let Barcelona deal with the emergency, they inadvertently gave the Catalan government the chance to demonstrate that Catalonia "is ready for independence". In the aftermath of the tragedy, the evident political result is that most of Catalonia's population, including more than 140 Muslim organizations, and members of Sikh and other immigrant communities, have democratically expressed their rejection of the IS attacks and violence in general. The Catalan institutions have shown efficiency, discretion and dignity, and have listened to their mass base. The real unity is in a firm rejection of fear throughout a defiant Catalan society which is preparing for October 1 as ultra-right sectors in Madrid are demanding that the terrorist alert should be raised to Level 5, which means the army occupying the streets and a belligerent pruning of the Catalan Government's powers.

Conflict packaged as mourning has been sown in the midst of genuine mourning but the population, if not the media, is able to distinguish between the two. Barcelona's municipal government has been led since 2015 by the left-wing Barcelona en Comú with a mayor, Ada Colau, who started out in politics as a housing activist, and the Catalan government is a nationalist coalition of center-left and right-wing parties. Whatever their differences, they are united in standing up to Mariano Rajoy, especially in matters of security and immigration. In 2015 the PP received 253 million euros in EU funding to take 17,337 refugees over a two-year period but, to date, has accepted only 1,700. Transparency about these funds is virtually non-existent. But once again, Barcelona's citizens, supported by the City Hall, came to the fore with a huge march last February calling for open borders. Immigrants and refugees are well and truly present in the tetchy background to the "unity" the Rajoy government is demanding. But there can never be "unity" between such conflicting sets of values, so Madrid will turn to whatever kind of fear-mongering it can muster to convey its message: Catalonia will not leave Spain. Meanwhile, another message, "We Are Not Afraid", is not mere bravado and, as city councilor Gala Pin said in a recent Facebook post referring to the open, democratic spirit of Les Rambles, "there is still a lot of Les Rambles to walk". **CP**

Racism as Policy Sessions' Jaded Justice

BY STANLEY COHEN

Although Jefferson Beauregard Sessions III long ago traded in his white bed sheet for one that's red, white and blue, his eyes still sparkle at the sight of a good old-fashioned torch lit parade marching across Main Street..., especially down South.

Indeed, rumor has it, the most powerful cop in the US raced more than once to take "selfies" as he posed against the large TV screen in his office with his smiling cultural offspring, perched just behind him, making monkey sounds during their recent virtual family get-together in Charlottesville.

Once rejected for a federal judgeship on the grounds of a well-documented record as a racist, who better to take over the mantle of leadership at DOJ, for Donald Trump, than a proud supremacist who's seen his life's work as maintaining racial, ethnic and religious purity in the United States.

Of all the seats of discretionary and arbitrary power in a president's circle of friends, the one with the most unbridled and destructive reach is the head of the Department of Justice.

Be assured, Beauregard has used every day of his own personal Fantasy Island at DOJ to give meaning to "arbitrary" and "capricious" in his effort to wage an all-out attack on any semblance of civil rights and justice in this country.

To date, in many ways, he's proven to be one of a kind as he strives to re-set the clock to days that stretch back well before the death of Jim Crow.

For those of us experienced in the hallways of federal criminal justice, it's a short walk from courtroom door to the expense of government discretion in selecting the nature and extent of charges which prosecutors can seek against an accused.

Under the Trump-owned DOJ, it's been all downhill as prosecutors have once again been unleashed to target non-violent drug offenses... including marijuana possession and distribution charges.

Make no mistake about it, there's nothing at all new about DOJ's reignited "war" on drugs. Years ago, the Clinton Administration began it as so much a simple, but popular, electoral tease. Not to be bested by an earlier "progressive", Obama sent more people of color to federal prison for getting high or helping others to do so, than any other president.

When it came to drugs, it took years of re-education for Obama to finally evolve from "tough" on crime to real on life. As a result, during his second term, sweeping new policies at DOJ prohibited federal prosecutors from pursuing charges that would trigger mandatory minimum prison sentences for certain categories of drug offenders even when convictions for far more serious charges could otherwise be had.

Unlike decades of mindless charging doctrine, those now

caught even with large amounts of drugs were to be charged with less serious offenses that didn't unleash mandatory minimum sentences if, among other things, the crime was not one of violence and the accused did not have a long criminal history.

Not long into his tenure, Sessions directed federal prosecutors to undo these changes and to, once again, seek the most severe penalties possible; including mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent drug offenses as he aims to repack prisons with persons of color.

In addition, the Attorney General recently sought Congressional leave to target and prosecute medical marijuana providers otherwise protected under various state laws.

Not to worry. There will be plenty available cellblocks to absorb expected increases in our federal prison population, in the years to come, as Sessions has sought to re-institute use

suspects in their head with weapons, unnecessary use of stun guns on handcuffed people, race-based pedestrian and automobile stops, false arrests based on race, heritage and "disrespectful" speech to improper internal investigation of allegations of police misconduct.

Under Sessions, DOJ will move to undo consent agreements, reached with rogue police departments, to remove external limits on police abuse and corruption in an effort to ensure they do not "adversely impact" the Trump administration's priorities of combating violent crime and "promoting police safety and morale." The Attorney General will also refuse to enter into any additional consent decrees in the future.

Indeed in what was to prove to be a dire precursor of events to come not long after a meeting with the National Fraternal Order of Police, on March 31 Sessions issued a memo noti-

Sessions will end a Justice Department partnership with independent scientists to improve forensic standards that, in the past, had contributed to thousands of wrongfully obtained convictions across the country.

of private prisons which were in the process of being phased out as little more than inhumane corporate profit-making ventures.

Rife with systemic corruption and widespread abuse that often targeted vulnerable prisoners for physical and sexual assault, on occasion, inmates were found dead in these private facilities... typically under "mysterious" circumstances.

In other ways, DOJ is aiming to increase prison population through announcing it will crack down on leaks coming from within the Trump administration... and said it would consider going after reporters who receive and publish leaked material.

The Attorney General also announced DOJ is reviewing guidelines related to subpoenas of journalists which raises the distinct specter of civil and criminal contempt citations and prison for those who take seriously not just their First Amendment protection but professional obligations pursuant to the journalist-source privilege.

In the past, such dares would often go untested as numerous police departments found themselves bound by consent decrees, sought by DOJ and approved by federal courts, to reign in what had been widespread long-term police abuses throughout the Country.

Among others, police departments in Baltimore, Miami, Newark, Cleveland, Ferguson, Seattle and Chicago found themselves subject to federal court oversight for a wide variety of unconstitutional police tactics ranging from excessive, often deadly, force against mostly youth of color, hitting

fying Justice Department officials, including those in the Civil Rights Division, that "It is not the responsibility of the federal government to manage non-federal law enforcement agencies."

Just recently, the Sessions memo of intent became official DOJ practice as it refused to involve itself in the explosive matter of Freddie Gray whose inexplicable killing, several years ago, at the hands of police ultimately led to federal oversight of the Baltimore Police Department.

Indeed, no event sums up better, or worse, the decision by this administration to walk, even run, away from its obligation to ensure local police forces comply with their constitutional obligations than the police murder of Freddie Gray.

Gray, a twenty-five year old African American resident of Baltimore, elected to run past police officers when encountering them on a street. Having been "chased" by them on bicycles, according to a court document, Gray came to a stop, voluntarily, without the need of police to use any force. Although a knife was recovered from him during a search... without probable cause... as it turned out, the knife was entirely legal.

Nevertheless, Gray was arrested for possession of a "switch-blade." Offering no resistance, he was pinned to the ground and placed in a "tactical hold" with his hands cuffed behind his back. Before the arrival of a transport van, Gray's request to use an inhaler was ignored. Likewise, police refused to obtain medical attention for Gray, an asthmatic, who was ob-

viously going through significant distress... repeatedly asking for medical assistance as he screamed out for help.

Dragged from the street, Gray was loaded, head first and on his stomach, into the police van. In violation of Baltimore police department regulations, he was not restrained by a seatbelt. Later, he was placed in leg irons after becoming “irate.” Apparently, at some point, while in transit, Gray suffered a neck injury. Upon arrival at a police station, he couldn’t talk and wasn’t breathing. Subsequently, he was pronounced dead.

Following an autopsy which concluded Gray’s death was

exercising their free speech and filming rights involving police.

Ultimately, six police officers were charged with depraved homicide, and other offenses, in the killing of Gray. After trials in which three of the officers were found not guilty, state prosecutors dismissed all charges against the remaining police.

In keeping with the clear message and intent of the Sessions memo, the Department of Justice recently announced it will not pursue federal civil rights charges of any sort against the officers.



Jeff Sessions arrives at Trump’s inauguration. Photo: DoD.

caused by a “high-energy” injury to his neck and spine that likely occurred as he was thrown about in the moving van without a seatbelt, the medical examiner ruled Gray’s death a homicide.

Gray’s murder, which became a symbol of the black community’s mistrust of police, and triggered days of protests and riots in Baltimore, led to an Obama-era Justice Department review of the police force which found a widespread pattern of abuse and misconduct by the Baltimore Police Department.

Like so many other instances which ultimately led to consent decrees and federal oversight of various police departments, DOJ concluded, in Baltimore, police routinely stopped, searched and arrested residents without reasonable suspicion or probable cause, disproportionately targeted black residents, and frequently resorted to unnecessary physical force during these interactions, and others, with persons, ex-

While some might wonder how costly or dangerous the prospect of unshackled policing might become under Sessions, local police forces will not want for either a lack of money or weapons to meet their task. The Attorney General recently rolled back a series of extant curbs on civil-asset forfeitures, thereby, strengthening the federal government’s power to seize cash and property from citizens without first bringing criminal charges against them.

As one observer noted, “civil-asset forfeiture is tantamount to policing for profit, generating millions of dollars annually that [federal and local police] agencies get to keep” and use as they wish.

Apparently, Sessions unilateral reinstatement of civil forfeitures goes on even though, very recently, the House unanimously voted on 3 amendments to a spending bill which would, once again, curtail the program... effectively eliminat-

ing the Sessions expansion. Pending action by the Senate, DOJ thefts will continue.

Meanwhile, all that extra cash will come in handy to subsidize the dramatic increases in arrests of immigrants, by ICE, following Trump's inauguration.

Thus, on the basis of new immigration priorities, in the early days of this administration, agents arrested 38% more undocumented immigrants than they seized during the same period last year, increasing the number from approximately 30,000 to 41,300. At roughly the same time, there was a 150% increase in the number of undocumented aliens detained by ICE for "non-criminal arrests" growing from 4,200 in 2016 to 10,800 in 2017.

On the other hand, to give credit where credit is due, in terms of deportations during essentially the same period of time, the administration did reduce their number by all of 1.2 percent removing "only" 54,741 aliens from the United States.

Because increased policing can necessarily mean increased "risk" for local police forces, in particular, the president has removed restrictions previously imposed upon militarization of local police across the country.

Under new policies, the Trump administration is lifting limits on transfer, from the federal government to local police, of surplus military equipment including grenade launchers, bayonets, large-caliber weapons and armored personnel carriers... some the size and power of tanks.

In other ways, Sessions has moved quickly to ensure that notions of justice and civil rights lose traction in Trump's full-time race to play to his supremacist base.

Thus, Sessions will end a Justice Department partnership with independent scientists to improve forensic standards that, in the past, had contributed to thousands of wrongfully obtained convictions across the country.

He will also end an expanded review of countless other cases in which FBI techniques and testimony had come under belated challenge while numerous other prisoners await an honest day in court.

In but six months of tenure, Sessions has managed to undo, or walk away from, the legacy of a wide range of civil rights priorities within the DOJ. In addition to police reform and on-going school desegregation, among other efforts no longer a priority, DOJ has begun to roll back decades of progress on civil rights and voting rights, equal protection for the disabled and more recent successes around issues of LGBTQ rights.

Indeed, not long after taking office, the administration withdrew in-place protections for transgender students in public schools that let them use bathrooms and facilities corresponding with their gender identity. Recently DOJ argued to the Supreme Court that a Christian baker could refuse a cake for a gay couple... ignoring long settled protections under the Interstate Commerce Clause; the very vehicle used to break the back of much of Jim Crows "private" discrimination practices years ago.

At the same time, the Trump administration prepares to redirect resources of the DOJ's civil rights division toward investigating and suing universities with affirmative action admission policies.

DOJ has also moved to obstruct enforcement of federal voting rights laws and recently sided with Ohio's voter purge program. Under this program, Ohio can continue to remove "infrequent voters" who fail to cast a ballot over a six-year period yet otherwise remain citizens of the same state at the same address.

Last month, DOJ refused to defend DACA as an unconstitutional reach of the Executive Order power of the president... at the very time, it supports the Muslim ban Trump moved to implement through an identical EO practice.

Not sufficiently pleased with a presidential pardon for Ex-Sheriff Joe Arpaio, convicted for contempt in willful and multiple failures to obey a federal court order demanding he cease lawless practices of racial profiling, harassment, and detention, in a palpably clear political act, several days ago, Sessions moved to support Arpaio's motion to vacate his underlying conviction... obtained by Session's own office.

These are but a few of many issues within criminal justice and civil rights spheres where this administration has sent a loud, clear, and unprecedented message that justice is tough, prisons are good, and civil rights are for those who can afford to pay to play.

Elsewhere, this administration has moved, with reckless abandon, to undo generations of priorities and protections which range from those that extend to our environment, our public schools, women and family rights, Native American rights, subsidized food and housing programs, and regulations intended to end unfettered corporate and banking greed.

While not nearly as exhaustive as the catalog of abuse and abandon in the halls of the DOJ, they still provide a powerful glimpse of an administration that has chosen to walk, indeed, flee from, or target, the most vulnerable among us.

Nowhere, however, has the attack on constitutional and civil rights and safeguards been more glaring, or immediate, than it has been under the Department of Justice headed, now, by one once found by the US Senate to be too racist to serve in the federal judiciary, but apparently, now, just xenophobic enough to become the top cop in this country. **CP**

STANLEY COHEN is lawyer and activist in New York City.

The Hidden War A Significant Moral Outrage in Yemen

BY EDWARD HUNT

The ongoing support of the United States for the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen is continuing to have devastating consequences for people of Yemen. By continuing to provide the Saudi-led coalition with political and military support in its war against the Houthis, the U.S. is prolonging a conflict that has created one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world.

Already, the war in Yemen has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people. Last January, a top U.N. official said that 10,000 civilians have died. Two months later, UNICEF estimated that the wartime decline in the country's health services had caused an additional 10,000 children to die from preventable diseases, such as diarrhea and pneumonia.

More recently, the situation has worsened. Millions of Yemenis are finding it difficult to get access to food and are facing a famine. In addition, one of the largest cholera outbreaks in the past 50 years has begun spreading across the country, infecting more than half a million people and killing nearly 2,000 people.

Making matters worse, the U.S.-backed Saudi-led coalition is continuing to kill civilians in airstrikes. Over the past two years, the Saudi-led coalition has struck farms, schools, bridges, hospitals, power stations, industrial factories, key seaports, and even a funeral. The strike on the funeral "sort of pales next to anything else that had been done before," a senior official in the Obama administration commented at the time. One recent airstrike on an apartment building in Sanaa wiped out an entire family, leaving only one young girl alive. "Despite concussion and skull fractures, doctors think Buthaina will pull through," Reuters reported.

Through it all, the architects of U.S. policy have known that the quickest way to end the crisis is to end the fighting. Certainly, "the surest way to relieve the hardships and the hunger is to stop the fighting, end the war," Secretary of State John Kerry acknowledged over a year ago.

Regardless, U.S. officials have continued to help the Saudi-led coalition maintain its military operations against the Houthis. Not only have they continued to provide the Saudi government with weapons that they know could make them complicit in war crimes, but they have also done everything in their power to ensure that the Saudi-led coalition keeps military pressure on the Houthis. "We have provided significant support to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, and continue to do so, both in terms of weapons we sell and the generous military and intelligence support package we give," former State Department official Tom Malinowski confirmed

before a congressional subcommittee in June.

In this way, the leaders of the United States are fueling the devastating conflict in Yemen. Rather than ending their support for the Saudi-led coalition and ending the war, they are prolonging the fighting, thereby producing, even more, misery and suffering in Yemen.

With their support, "the Saudis have used US-provided weapons in ways that have caused excessive and avoidable harm to civilians, and exacerbated a terrible humanitarian crisis," just as former State Department official Tom Malinowski has acknowledged.

U.S. Motives

As U.S. officials have exacerbated the terrible humanitarian crisis in Yemen, one basic question that arises is why are they doing this. What are U.S. officials hoping to achieve by continuing to support the Saudi-led intervention?

Since the Saudi-led intervention began in March 2015, U.S. officials have cited a number of reasons. Some say they need to stop Iranian influence in Yemen. "We would like for the Iranians to end their flow of weapons to the Houthis, in particular, their flow of sophisticated missiles to the Houthis," Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told a congressional committee in June. "We need for them to stop supplying that."

At the same time, not everyone in Washington agrees that Iran has been playing a decisive role in the country. For example, U.S. intelligence officials have often found that Iranian influence in Yemen has been overstated. "American intelligence officials believe that the Houthis receive significantly less support from Iran than the Saudis and other Persian Gulf nations have charged," the New York Times reported last year.

Today, many doubts remain about the extent of Iranian influence. As Jeremy Sharp at the Congressional Research Service reported earlier this year, "many Western observers generally agree that Iranian aid to the Houthis does not match the scale of its commitments to proxies in other parts of the Middle East."

Given these doubts, U.S. officials have cited additional factors to defend their actions. For example, they often point to the presence of al-Qaeda in Yemen. Arguing that the al-Qaeda branch in Yemen is the most dangerous affiliate of al-Qaeda in the world, they say that they need the Saudi-led coalition to succeed with its efforts to return the ousted Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi to power.

"President Hadi has been and remains a strong, reliable partner in the fight against al-Qaeda," former U.S. Ambassador to Yemen Gerald Feierstein told the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in March. "Maintaining that relationship is a necessity."

But once again, there are problems with their argument. For starters, Hadi had once appointed a financier of al-Qaeda to a high-level position in the Yemeni government. In addi-

tion, Saudi Arabia remains the source of much of the support and financing for al-Qaeda. Saudi society continues “to export extremism, fund radical ideology for terrorist groups, and supply a stream of jihadists around the world,” former 9/11 commissioner Tim Roemer told a congressional subcommittee last year. Indeed, the evidence indicates that Saudi Arabia is much more of a problem than the Houthis when it comes to the issue of al-Qaeda.

So What Are the Real Motives of U.S. Officials?

First, U.S. officials want to ensure that they can keep the Bab al Mandab Strait along the western coast of Yemen

open for trade and navigation. “Spillover from the conflict poses a threat to vital international shipping lanes through the Red Sea,” he warned.

Finally, U.S. officials have been determined to keep a friendly government in power in Yemen. As long as they can maintain good relations with the country’s leaders, they believe they can more effectively achieve their regional objectives.

The basic goal of the Saudi-led coalition, according to former U.S. Ambassador to Yemen Gerald Feierstein, is to get “a friendly government” installed in Yemen.

Over the previous decades, U.S. officials had achieved their political objectives by working with Yemen’s longtime ruler



Saudi airstrike on the Yemeni capital of Sanaa. Photo: Almigdad Mojalli/VOA.

Ali Abdullah Saleh. Although Saleh’s power was directly challenged during the Arab Spring, U.S. officials and their Saudi allies exercised and maintained their influence by directing a transition plan that removed Saleh from power and replaced him with Hadi, his longtime associate.

Earlier this year, officials in the Trump administration confirmed that they shared the same concerns. A primary focus in Yemen is “ensuring freedom of navigation and commerce through the southern Red Sea and the Bab al Mandeb (BAM) Strait,” the Commander of U.S. Central Command, General Joseph Votel, told the Senate Committee on Armed Services. Lieutenant General Vincent Stewart, the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, agreed, telling the same congressional committee that it was important to keep the re-

gion’s shipping lanes open. “Spillover from the conflict poses a threat to vital international shipping lanes through the Red Sea,” he warned.

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maintain their influence over Yemen. As a result, the people of Yemen must continue to suffer and die so the United States can continue to control one of the major transit areas through the Middle East.

Prospects for Peace

Given the determination of U.S. officials to achieve their regional goals, there are not many reasons to believe that the conflict in Yemen will end anytime soon. With the Houthis in control of the northern part of the country and the U.S. government continuing to support the Saudi-led intervention, it appears that the fighting in the country will only continue.

There were certainly some hopes for peace last year, but they were quickly dashed when Hadi, the ousted Yemeni president who the U.S. and Saudi governments are trying to return to power, rejected a U.N.-proposed peace plan. The rejected plan, which was disclosed to a number of news organizations, would have gradually transferred power to a new Yemeni leader, provided the Houthis with a role in the new Yemeni government, and eventually led to elections.

Not long after Hadi rejected the plan, former State Department official Dafna Rand told the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations that it was still possible to reach some kind of negotiated settlement and end the war. “The Houthis are looking for guarantees of political inclusion in the formal government process,” Rand said. “These issues would be worked out whether or not the coalition retakes a few more cities.”

Despite these possibilities, officials in the Trump administration have been unwilling to give up the military effort to restore Hadi to power. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who has acknowledged that millions of people in Yemen are suffering “because of the impact of the fighting,” announced last May that the Trump administration would continue working with the Saudi government to fight the Houthis. The Houthis have to know “they will never prevail militarily,” Tillerson said. “But they’re only going to feel that when they feel the resistance militarily, so it’s important we keep the pressure on them.”

Shortly after Tillerson made his announcement, additional officials in the Trump administration then confirmed that they expected the fighting to continue for the rest of the year. “Fighting in Yemen will almost certainly persist in 2017,” Director of National Intelligence Daniel Coats told the Senate Committee on Armed Services.

Making matters worse, officials in the Trump administration have signaled that they are willing to risk the lives of more civilians to achieve their goals. For instance, they have been working closely with the Saudi-led coalition to take control of the port of Hodeidah, a major hub for humanitarian aid and assistance. “We believe we can gain control of the port under some other third authority’s control,” Tillerson has said.

Officials in Washington know that if the Saudi-led coalition takes control of the port, it could use it to inflict even greater

harm on the people of Yemen. As former State Department official Dafna Rand noted earlier this year, there is a possibility that the Saudi-led coalition will take advantage of the port to “use a strategy of punishing the North,” the Houthi-controlled part of the country.

Furthermore, the Trump administration has decided to provide the Saudi government with precision-guided munitions, which the Saudi-led coalition has repeatedly used to strike civilian targets. Although Congress could have easily blocked the move, it decided not to prevent the Trump administration from sending more of the specialized weapons to the Saudi government.

These weapons “make us complicit in the strikes that are creating the humanitarian crisis,” former State Department official Tom Malinowski told a congressional subcommittee on the same day that the Senate decided not to block the deal.

In all, the leaders of the United States are adopting policies that are making the humanitarian crisis worse. Rather than using their political power to pressure Hadi and the Saudi-led coalition into reconsidering the U.N.-proposed peace plan from late last year, officials in Washington have decided to press forward with an ongoing military effort that is continuing to devastate the country.

Ultimately, “it’s important that pressure be kept on the rebels in Yemen,” Secretary of State Tillerson has insisted. **CP**

EDWARD HUNT writes about war and empire. He has a PhD in American Studies from the College of William & Mary.

Cold War Illusions Losing Friends

BY PATRICK LAWRENCE

Just before the November 2016 elections, I was invited to share lunch at a place called Packer’s Corner, a tiny hamlet in southeastern Vermont. I was instantly intrigued. If “faded glory” fairly describes the place now, Packer’s Corner et ses environs retain a certain standing in the long, intricate story of the 1960’s. It is where Raymond Mungo and other associated with Liberation News Service retreated, thereupon letting the press rust, in 1968. It is today as it was then—a warren of dirt roads far from all madding crowds. Buried in the foothills of the Green Mountains, its remote geography still enhances a strong whiff of romance. “If you lived here you’d be / home now in Heaven,” Verandah Porche, one of the original communards, later on, wrote of the place.

Porche, gracefully gone silver and still writing poetry of elegant, earthy simplicity, was among the two dozen who gathered for lunch. We sat at refectory tables arranged in a horseshoe, and the floor was opened to the obvious topic, the election being hard upon us. When it was my turn to speak,

I suggested we had reached a moment of historical importance. Money and Citizens United had reduced representative institutions to inoperable ruins. We faced two candidates too objectionable to support. These incontrovertible realities imposed a new responsibility upon us. It was a duty to resist flinching from our moment and accept the necessity—here I spoke with special care—the necessity of extra-parliamentary action.

Some time into a silence the consistency of granite I realized I had mistaken my company. I had belched in chapel. “And what do you mean by ‘extra-parliamentary,’” someone finally asked with Dominican consternation.

“The shortest and best answer is the street and all the term implies,” I replied. “Where else to turn in the circumstances? This is what I meant by a burden of responsibility.”

More silence, the think-tank of knives and forks.

There was a handsomely craggy man who spoke very finely of his time with Harry Bridges in the San Francisco chapter of the Longshoremen’s Association. Another man spoke a little vaguely but well enough of more willful, more courageous passages in American politics. But the tide overtook their voices, as it had mine. So far as I could make out, we were awash in a Clintonian sea. By and large, this was a gathering of Hillary voters, and, as Hillary voters are wont to do, they brooked no deviation.

It is possible to treat a pariah politely, I learned in the course of the afternoon.

I do not recall this incident to single out the residents of Packer’s Corner. They were paying attention people. Their consciences were on the table. I had been agreeably welcomed. I liked their company. I mean to say what happened one rainy October day in a hamlet of semi-hallowed history reflects the very sudden, stark severity of our predicament. Events have been such that nothing can any longer be taken to be “as usual,” and certainly not politics. To bring the point to a single word, we face a choice none of us can (or can no longer) evade. Few of us can have anticipated this. One would need an appetite for angst, bitter recognitions, risk, sacrifice, and certain kinds of hardship to welcome this choice. One is sure to lose friends as this choice is made. But there is no denying that, after a long time hovering above us, it has landed with an audible thud.

This is the choice between illusion and reality. To say this another way we must choose, and rather quickly now, between myth and history. I have distinguished before, in my most recent book and elsewhere, between a mythical idea of America and one rooted inhumanly made, humanly determined history. In the case, I presented this was the nation’s choice. It would determine America’s path into the 21st century. (And so it is doing.) I have since come to see that this choice lies, first of all, with each of us—an individual choice. We are now well into the process of making this choice. If we are agents of history, what is it we propose to do? This is now our question. It cannot be what we have done to date—

this much is plain. That afternoon in Packer’s Corner was simply one moment among many leading to the satori of this conclusion.

Illusion takes a peculiarly outsized place in American political culture. More than anywhere else, in my experience, illusion lies like a layer of smog atop our ordinary, perfectly evident political realities. For a few of us this superstratum of constructed appearances is a topic unto itself. For most, illusion serves as a salve as we continue to live as we are accustomed, quiescently accepting the ever more unacceptable—rampant poverty, permanent war, the dilapidated wreck we pretend constitutes a working democratic process. Our cotton-wool public discourse is a symptom of this dysfunction even as it is key to sustaining it.

I thought about American illusion during my drive home from Packer’s Corner. I began with my own. What was I thinking when I accepted that invitation to lunch? That the survivors and descendants of those “famous long ago” were holding to the old watchtowers? It must have been something like that. For all the shortcomings of the 1960’s—Has anyone finished counting?—I credit that time with getting some things done. It put a notion of transcendence—of an alternative to the whole of the established order—before an entire nation (and well beyond). It turned upside-down the logic of “what is possible” to read “what is necessary, what is urgent,” so transforming the task into making the necessary and urgent possible. Even among the all the failures, these features of the 1960’s are easily recalled. But I had allowed myself to forget the political wages exacted during the intervening half-century. All is changed, changed utterly, and there is not much beauty born of it.

That is one kind of illusion, prevalent but treatable. Another kind, yet more prevalent, seems to have no known cure. This illusion has to do with power. The reply to the 1960’s from all the decades since has been that the possible is all that is necessary and urgent and can be accomplished with no fundamental critique of power, the institutions invested with it, and those who direct these institutions. There is no such critique in the main streams of American politics. Instead, there is an assumption of institutional efficacy (in the face of all evidence) and eternal life. Of all the illusions embedded in American political culture, this, surely, is the grandest. It is also the oldest, as I will shortly explain.

It was a remarkable thing, looking back, to watch as my generation—“the 1960’s generation,” though I am not sure about this term—embraced the grand illusion. It began as a cohort more critical of the materialist tradition than most, if not all, before it. It then made itself the most voraciously acquisitive generation to come of age in the 20th century. Things became the drug of choice. All the while it maintained its claim to the righteousness attaching to its original ideals. This is a too-swift pencil sketch, I confess. It is to say only that this hollowed-out righteousness comes down to us in monumentally perverse form. In the 1990’s Bill Clinton named its adher-

ents “New Democrats.” We now call it simply “Clintonism,” Hillary its high priestess, Barack Obama its most effective apostle to date.

The consequences of this self-betrayal, as I count it, do much to define our condition. A critical separation now lies between one’s living and one’s understanding. There is rarely any thought of altering one’s path and the path of one’s energies as a necessity or responsibility on the basis of events or the beliefs one has acquired. American life is bracketed, impervious to whatever may occur in public space. This condition leaves most of us impersonators of ourselves as we propose to be. “Most people are other people,” Wilde wrote a century ago. “Their thoughts are someone else’s, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.” It is exactly the point.

It follows naturally that politics is bracketed, too. Whether we are talking about no compromise or limitless compromise such that outcomes are rendered meaningless, politics now is strictly a matter of material gain and loss. Stripped of reference to any ideal, it is purely instrumental. Sequestered from any form of aspiration, politics is effectively depoliticized. At the bottom, it is a mere spectacle.

“The tangle of delusion, belief, hope, disappointment, and realism should not be underestimated,” Joann Wypijewski, a journalist (and former CounterPunch columnist) wrote just after Donald Trump’s inauguration. “The dissonance between people’s personal behavior and their political choices ought not to be underestimated, either.” Wypijewski (who was present that day in Packer’s Corner) was describing America’s dispossessed. But are any others immune from this condition? Clintonians and “moderate” Republicans—Is there a difference?—are clear-eyed and on the case? “Progressives” of one or another stripe are privileged to stand apart and above? It does not hold up. It is another illusion. There are not “two Americas,” as often asserted. There is one, with many different manifestations.

Illusion and its consequences, just as Wypijewski listed them, make a long thread in American political culture. Our moment is distinguished as one of a few when this thread surfaces prominently in the weave and addressing it cannot be avoided. Failing to do so, or denying the need, constitutes a choice. Acquiescence is assent this time around.

Various historians have noted the fundamental shift in shared American perspectives after the War of Independence, the settlement with Britain and the ratification of the Constitution in 1787. The nation born of revolutionary violence quickly came to abhor revolution. There were many reasons for this, some very practical, but beneath them all lay the thought that the new nation was a near-perfect republic just as it was. If it was, after all, a product of providential benevolence, it followed that there would be no further need of revolution or any kind of dramatic change, violent or other-

wise. Yes, human fallibility and the dangers of decay and corruption would arise from time to time. But the antidote in all cases would consist of greater or lesser adjustments, nothing more. God ever watched over his creation.

I have just described several things. You can find the core of the American mythology in the above outline. It is a pencil sketch of orthodox American ideology. It suffices as a thumbnail definition of American exceptionalism. And it is the working assumption in American politics today. So it describes the source of many illusions, to put the point another way—not least the grand illusion mentioned earlier. Healthcare, the Pentagon budget, the ever more intrusive corporation, the marketization of everything, abuse of the environment, crumbling schools and roads: We can manage all this while observing the boundaries of the possible. We must make more adjustments, but these need not include a direct challenge to power and the order it upholds—the order that produced the problems, this is to say. That is neither possible nor necessary.

Every major social movement since the Gilded Age—the Progressives, organized labor, the New Left, feminism, the environmentalists—has succumbed to the temptation of American ideology. Our “Resistance” (with a capital “R,” no less) does not even pretend to oppose it at the outset. Progressives, “Resisters,” and many liberals rarely accept that they have anything in common with true-believing exceptionalists and other “chosen people” fundamentalists. But they do: at the bottom, almost everything, save for matters of style.

The immediate ancestor of our Clintonian Democrats and progressives today is that odious creature known as the Cold War liberal. I have always nursed the deepest contempt for these people, I allow, but I have never been given a reason I should not. The stain they have left on postwar American politics has been almost singularly destructive.

It is not merely that those of this mid-century persuasion propagated an impossibly simplistic, even cartoonish rendering of the Soviet Union, the Cold War’s origins, and the post-1945 equation. They did make Russophobia “respectable,” of course. But the Cold War liberal’s core project, plain enough in all the basic texts, was a radical restoration of exceptionalist ideology. It was to declare American liberalism excused from that critique of power one must consider essential to any vibrant politics. The focus was the radical residue—domestically, at home—of the 1930’s and 1940’s. This was still powerful after the war. While the Cold War liberal’s anti-communism was as real as it could get, the Russians were in this one respect a mere foil. It is worth considering this in the context of the grand illusion so many of us nurse today. Was the Cold War liberal not its godfather?

America had previously proven itself immune from all those undesirable forms of history at work elsewhere, the texts of Cold War liberals uniformly noted. But, reading straight

out of the 17th and 18th-century credenda, they followed this thought with assertions that the danger of decay was again at the nation's door. "Today, democracy is paying the price for its systematic cultivation of the peaceful and rational virtues," Arthur Schlesinger declared in *The Vital Center*. The only response had to be a vigorous reiteration of belief (as opposed to thought, one surmises)—"the fundamental faith of contemporary liberalism." This had to be, moreover, "a fighting faith."

One finds the foreshadows of many things now too familiar to us in militantly written calls to arms such as *The Vital Center* and Louis Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America*. George W. Bush's "with us or against us," his post-2001 article of faith, is hardly even a variant of Schlesinger's "we or they" division of the planet and anyone to his left in the domestic context. Post-Cold War triumphalism, never so well expressed as in Francis Fukuyama's foolish "end of history" thesis, is the Cold War liberal's look-alike child. Our neoconservatives and neoliberals are his first and second cousins.

Hartz, for his part, was fully aware of the danger of "liberal absolutism," as he termed it. This was the problem de Tocqueville warned of in the second volume of *Democracy in America*, and Hartz seems to have read his de Tocqueville. What the French writer called soft despotism some of us call "illiberal liberalism," for the intolerance at American liberalism's core is now rampantly obvious, of course. But Hartz had it very wrong when he tied "American policy abroad and the fate of freedom at home ... in an intricate knot." This is another immense, persistent illusion. The projection of American power more or less limitlessly can no longer be counted a defense of freedom or anything else, if it ever could have been, so much as it is a devastation. Empire abroad, democracy at home: It is one or the other, for at the horizon they were always mutually canceling. Can the mistake be any plainer than it is today? To put the point simply, we have reached the horizon. What has the Pentagon become in our time, a defender or a destroyer?

* * *

I began raising a question concerning a choice we face. This choice turns on many things, of course, but it is defined to a considerable extent by our views of Russia. What was once the "red scare," in prewar and postwar versions, is now the Russians-did-it thesis, to be applied in whatever circumstance may be convenient. In this the choice we face is a carbon copy of that Americans confronted during the Cold War. This is not so odd: As I argued in a previous *CounterPunch* essay ("Ukraine: The Crisis in Context," Volume 21, No. 5, 2014) America's animus toward Russia has roots that run back to the 1840s. It was de Tocqueville, indeed, and then Sainte-Beuve, who first identified it. At this point, it is rather easy to activate.

There are various specific similarities between our time and the Cold War decades. I count these among our many

Cold War scars—very few of them, if any, have healed. We live amid an extraordinary resurgence of ideology—"compulsive Americanism," as Hartz called it—and it runs through all the familiar political stripes, far from least the Democrats. The open disgrace our media have made of themselves is at least as shameful as their Cold War record. If the Cold War made a salad of Wilsonian mission and McCarthyism, we have tossed one of "liberal interventionism" and Russophobic hysteria. People lost in this mode ought to take a lesson: The better historians will not be kind to the "herd current"—Hartz's term again—abroad among us. As during the Cold War, too few are the dissenters who, at some future date, will be able to claim immunity.

We can trace the current rupture in U.S.–Russian relations to a noted speech Vladimir Putin delivered at a security conference in Munich 10 years ago. In it, the Russian president rejected the demeaning, highly damaging, subservient role Boris Yeltsin, Putin's pliant, inebriated predecessor, had accepted for the new Russian Federation. If there is to be a partnership between Moscow and Washington, Putin asserted, it is to be on an equal footing. The global hegemony the U.S. seeks in the post-Cold War era is fated to remain a dangerous source of disorder so long as Washington persists in this pursuit. These remarks tipped the scales within the American policy cliques. The coup in Ukraine and the war in Syria—the two crises that currently define U.S.–Russian relations—followed. The lesson here is simple: The animus toward Russia now abroad among Americans is strategic in origin, however few of our Russophobes understand this. Precisely as it was during the Cold War, public opinion is again manipulated in the service of American primacy.

Lost in the blur of our Cold War II, as vigorously encouraged by our media, are three realities. Washington cultivated the February 2014 coup in Ukraine, and it has sought another by supporting jihadists in Syria. These are questions of on-the-record facts, beyond debate. As a commentary on 21st century realities, Putin's Munich speech is far superior even today than anything Washington has had to say for the past 17 years. This is a matter of judgment, but, having referred to the text on numerous occasions in the course of writing columns, I have no trouble claiming it as mine.

The above three points will prompt many objections. These will all underscore this essay's argument: Illusion blinds too many of us. Too many of us bear the Cold War's scars. Too many of us, lost in mythology, lay claim to a status as history's exceptions without even knowing we are doing so. Too many of us are making the wrong choice. **CP**

PATRICK LAWRENCE is a longtime columnist, essayist, critic, and lecturer.

A Different “Night of the Grizzlies” After 50 Years, Another Slaughter of Yellowstone Grizzlies Looms

BY LOUISA WILLCOX AND DAVID MATTSON

Last August witnessed a spate of articles on the “Night of the Grizzlies,” involving the tragic killing by grizzlies of two people in separate incidents on one night 50 years ago in Glacier National Park.

While the press amply covered the story of subsequent improvements in managing human behavior around bears, especially in keeping garbage and human food away from bruins in Glacier and Yellowstone, they missed deeper lessons of the tragedy. Most important is the very real possibility of a grizzly bear slaughter comparable to what occurred in the Glacier (or Northern Continental Divide) and Yellowstone Ecosystems during the late 1960s and 70s in the wake of the “Night of the Grizzlies.” But this time, the killing and its consequences could be even worse.

The trigger for change this time is not tragic human fatalities, but the June decision by the federal government to strip endangered species protections for Yellowstone grizzlies (“delisting”) and return management authority outside the national parks after a 40-year hiatus to the states of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.

Delisting of the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) grizzlies is slated for next year. That would leave listed under the ESA three tiny, isolated populations—less than 100 grizzlies total—in northwest Montana, northern Idaho and northern Washington. These populations are nearly extinct and, scientists maintain, are not recoverable without being reconnected to larger populations—something that delisting of NCDE and Yellowstone grizzlies will preclude by facilitating the killing of bears that attempt to travel between ecosystems.

It is the States, not the Park Service, we need to watch, as state wildlife managers intend to reduce the size of the Yellowstone population, now roughly 700 animals, by as many as 200 bears, through trophy hunting and increasingly lethal management. Such killing would reverse the hard-fought progress made toward recovery over the past 40 years.

Glacier’s “Night of the Grizzlies:” What Happened and Some Background

On August 12, 1967, a 19-year-old Glacier Park employee, Julie Helgeson, was attacked and killed by a grizzly at a back-country campsite near Granite Park Chalet. Her companion, Roy Ducat, was severely mauled. That same night, within hours of the first attack, Michele Koons, also 19 years old, was dragged from her sleeping bag and killed by a grizzly while

camping at Trout Lake, about 20 miles away; other campers in her party escaped by climbing trees.

At issue was the widespread availability of garbage and other human foods to bears. At the time, the Park Service, whose mission is to provide for the “use and enjoyment of the American people” as well as the preservation of natural resources, emphasized visitors’ enjoyment at the expense of Park protection. This was the era of Project 66, which included a major publicity program to boost Park visitation—a program that succeeded far beyond Park Service expectations.

It was no surprise that at Granite Park Chalet the Park Service, overwhelmed with trash from a record number of visitors in 1967, allowed delighted campers to view bears as they pawed through a pile of garbage that had been pushed into a gully behind the Chalet. There, at Trout Lake and elsewhere in the Park, black and grizzly bears, conditioned to eating human foods, were getting increasingly aggressive, raiding campsites and harassing hikers.

The same was happening in Yellowstone, where pioneer grizzly bear researchers Drs. Frank and John Craighead worried about the impacts of eating garbage on the health of the grizzly population.

The Craigheads predicted that bears, which were then being fed at open pit dumps in the Park, would increasingly seek sustenance in Park campgrounds, where food storage was effectively unregulated. Similarly, in communities outside the Park, human foods were easy pickings for bears. The Craigheads were concerned that widespread food-conditioning of bears would increase the likelihood they would be killed by managers or fearful residents outside the Park. Tragically, they would be proven right.

As park visitation mounted in the 1960s, so did bear-human conflicts. As former Park ranger Jerry Mernin persuasively describes in his memoir, *Yellowstone Ranger*, Park personnel were overwhelmed by bears (black and grizzly) ripping into tents, raiding coolers, and chasing and injuring campers. No amount of marksman’s skill or dedication to the purpose of the Parks—Jerry, in fact, epitomized both qualities—could make up for the lack of institutional leadership to deal with skyrocketing park visitation, mounting trash and human-bear conflicts.

Everything changed after disaster struck in Glacier.

The Grizzly Slaughter of the 60s and 70s

As some called for the Park Service to eliminate grizzlies to make Parks safe for tourists, others including the Craigheads, urged redoubling conservation efforts. Five years before the passage of the Endangered Species Act, the Craigheads wrote in a report released days after the Glacier tragedy: “[the grizzly] is an endangered species...and must receive sufficient protection to ensure its survival.”

The Craigheads mattered because they were both top scientists and media stars. Their invention of the radio-collar enabled them to share, for the first time, the intimate and

fascinating details of bears' lives on TV with people in living rooms across the country. The Craigheads were also the first to widely publicize the grizzly's plight. In less than 100 years, European settlers had wiped out about 97% of the grizzlies that had roamed the West at the time of Lewis and Clark. It was especially important, they said, to protect grizzlies in their last two strongholds in the lower-48 states, Glacier and Yellowstone.

The Craigheads' 1967 report was highly critical of the Park Service's management of grizzly bears and the lack of coordination among state and federal agencies. They recommended a slow and gradual elimination of garbage dumps, as well as the designation of a buffer zone surrounding the parks free from trophy hunting to protect bears as they were weaned off garbage.

In a widely publicized move, the Park Service swiftly punished the Craigheads for their trouble, terminating their research in Yellowstone as abruptly as they closed the dumps. As the Craigheads had predicted, these "cold turkey" closures drove hungry bears into campgrounds and communities outside the national parks in search of food.

In a willful lack of foresight, Park Service managers essentially pulled the rug out from under grizzlies in Glacier and Yellowstone by abruptly closing dumps and bear-proofing campsites. At the time, Park managers did not envision any alternative to addressing the ensuing mayhem other than killing bears, so management was centered on firepower. Black and grizzly bears died in droves.

Grizzlies, one of the slowest reproducing mammals in North America, could not produce enough cubs to keep pace with the killing. As populations took a nosedive toward extinction, in 1975 the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) listed the grizzly in the lower-48 states as threatened under the recently passed Endangered Species Act (ESA).

How the ESA and Park Service Saved Grizzlies

ESA protections brought about sweeping management changes, inside and outside the national parks. The widespread state-sponsored grizzly bear hunts outside Yellowstone Park were banned. So was killing grizzlies, except in cases of self-defense. Decisions about grizzlies and their habitat had to be made on the grounds of the best available science. And, poaching could be punished by large fines.

Even though the Park Service already had full authority to

manage how visitors behaved, after grizzlies were listed, with the haunting memories of the "Night of the Grizzlies"—the agency took that authority seriously.

Management reforms centered on preventing bears from becoming conditioned to food and garbage. Park Service and US Forest Service managers, which together oversee the lion's share of grizzly bear habitat, implemented food storage orders and instituted stiff fines for violations. Park managers also closed to camping certain areas intensively used by bears. And, they also required people to camp in designated sites to reduce conflicts.

Today, you cannot visit Glacier, Yellowstone or Grand Teton Parks without being inundated with information about keeping food out of the reach of bruins and keeping a respectful distance from them.

(The Forest Service does a reasonably good job, despite recent devastating budget cuts in its wildlife programs). It is a testimony to the effectiveness of Park Service efforts that today very few grizzlies are now killed inside Glacier, Yellowstone or Grand Teton Parks—even with record-breaking Park visitation in recent years.

Besides authority under the ESA, the Park Service benefits



Grizzly bear in Yellowstone ecosystem. Photo: National Park Service.

from a clear mandate under its Organic Act (the law creating the Park Service) to preserve its natural resources, as well as by a command and control institutional culture. When given a directive to change management direction, the Park Service has the capacity to embrace the new course with gusto. And as the darling of the nation's public lands agencies, the Park Service also often has more money at its disposal than other agencies, such as the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management.

Speeding the shift in the Park Service's management philosophy was a significant report released in 1963 by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) that called for an increased effort to preserve natural conditions in Parks. Dubbed the "Leopold Report" for the chairman of the NAS committee, Starker Leopold (Aldo Leopold's eldest son), the report recommended that "the biotic associations within each park be maintained, or where necessary recreated, as nearly as possible in the condition that prevailed when the area was first visited by the white man."

The Leopold Report also emphasized a need for scientific research and ecological management expertise in the

National Parks, saying: “Americans have shown a great capacity for degrading and fragmenting native biotas. So far we have not exercised much imagination or ingenuity in rebuilding damaged biotas.”

The progress made by the Park Service in managing Glacier and Yellowstone grizzlies over the last 40 years speaks to the agency’s capacity to change in the face of new information and directives. Eventually, managers in Yellowstone and Grand Teton Park went one step further than Glacier, by allowing grizzlies to re-colonize roadside habitat without fear of being harassed by managers.

This policy change made roadsides safer for grizzlies, especially females who are more afraid of the threat that males pose to their cubs (infanticide by male grizzlies is not uncommon) than they are of loud, enthusiastic, but mostly benign (and unarmed) Park visitors. This created opportunities for some roadside grizzlies, such as Jackson’s matron Grizzly 399, to emerge as celebrities. As with Yellowstone’s wolves, passionate viewers spend hours by Park roads collecting and sharing stories about what sometimes appear to be soap opera-style dramas involving the lives of bears and wolves.

Another Rug Gets Pulled From Under Yellowstone Grizzlies

One saving grace for the Yellowstone grizzly bear population during and after the era of Park dump closures was the availability of abundant whitebark pine seeds. These seeds are rich in fat and produced by trees living in the ecosystem’s most remote high country, away from lots of people. After dump closures, these seeds became important drivers of female reproductive success as well as the survival of all bears.

But, in the last decade, whitebark pine forests have collapsed due to an unprecedented climate-driven outbreak of mountain pine beetles. A highly lethal non-native fungus, white pine blister rust, exacerbated this catastrophe.

The loss of whitebark pine is on top of the functional elimination of Yellowstone cutthroat trout from tributaries around Yellowstone Lake. At one time, cutthroat trout provided grizzlies with a rich food during spring spawning—a time when not many other bear foods were yet available. The culprits of their demise were climate change and an introduced non-native fish, Lake trout, which spawns in waters deep enough to render them immune to bear predation.

The upshot was that by roughly 2009, two of the four major natural foods that had driven the health of the Yellowstone grizzly population was functionally wiped out. Yet another nutritional rug had been pulled out from under Yellowstone’s grizzlies. And the situation is likely to get worse as climate change wreaks havoc on the alpine habitat needed by another key bear food, army cutworm moths.

In the absence of whitebark pine, grizzlies are foraging more on meat—in the form of livestock and hunter-killed elk remains. The problem is that well-armed hunters tend to react aggressively to bears that approach as they dress their game

or use artificial elk bugles to draw in elk to shoot. Grizzlies are learning that the sound of gunshots are dinner bells that signal the potential of a rich meal of elk or moose meat.

Meanwhile, ranchers in areas with lots of livestock conflicts, notably Wyoming’s upper Green River area, successfully lobby their political allies to get state managers to dispatch grizzlies rather than change problematic husbandry practices, as many other ranchers in Greater Yellowstone have done. (Coexistence practices have greatly improved in recent years among many ranchers in the ecosystem, but not in the upper Green.)

Since about 2002, big game hunter and livestock-related conflicts have mounted to such an extent that the modest growth of the population stalled. For the last three years, killing rates have spiked so high that the population has almost certainly declined. Today’s pattern of killing is a far cry from 20 years ago when the number one cause of grizzly bear deaths was related to garbage.

Bear deaths will almost certainly increase with the removal of ESA protections, as ranchers and hunters increasingly take matters into their own hands. Further, state managers aim to reduce bear numbers, possibly by several hundred bears, presumably to reduce conflicts.

State Management: Domination by White, Male Hunters, Ranchers, Developers

Outside National Parks, the States have jurisdiction over wildlife. While the Park Service embraces an ethos of respect and reverence for wildlife, state managers orient more towards domination, killing and control. Making matters worse, State decision-making about wildlife management in the Northern Rockies is notoriously despotic in nature.

State managers are also famously jealous of their power and prerogatives. For over 30 years—beginning just a decade after grizzlies were listed—Wyoming, Idaho and Montana have been obsessed with wresting control over their management back from the federal government.

To State managers, wildlife exists to be hunted or trapped. The primary mission of state game agencies is thus to provide “surplus” game to feed these lethal pursuits. People with other perspectives, including valuing wildlife for intrinsic reasons alone, are ignored or even insulted. This problematic dynamic is amplified by the fact that, at least in western states, almost all funding is obtained from hunter license fees and federal taxes levied on sales of arms and ammunition.

Parenthetically, other states, notably Arkansas, Florida, Minnesota and Missouri, have broadened their mission to include greater emphasis on nongame wildlife and biodiversity writ large. But western states, especially in the northern Rockies, remain fixated on huntable large herbivores such as elk.

Special hostility is reserved for large carnivores because of scientifically unjustified views that bears, wolves and lions compete for big game that would otherwise support the sale

of hunting licenses. Thus, one of the top aims of state managers is to reinstate a trophy grizzly hunt to reduce this presumed competition. Idaho, Montana and Wyoming all have plans to initiate sport hunting, possibly by next spring.

Even though the economies of the communities surrounding Yellowstone and Glacier Parks no longer depend on ranching, logging, or other extractive industries, but rather on recreation and tourism, wildlife watchers and non-hunters hold virtually no sway over management decisions. Only hunters, ranchers, and corporate development interests, comprised mostly of white males residing within the bounds of the three states, will have influence over the management of grizzly bears—despite the fact that this species has a national constituency.

Given the priorities and orientations of the States, resources also are guaranteed to be a problem for grizzly conservation. State legislatures are unlikely to spend money to resolve conflicts with bears nonlethally when bullets will suffice. Even if States want to fund coexistence work, that work is notoriously expensive, and they will likely not have the kind of funds that have been available to the Park Service and FWS due to their national support base.

The bottom line is that hunters, ranchers, and development interests maintain a death grip on state wildlife commissions, legislatures and county governments much as they did a hundred years ago—despite growing demands from women, wildlife watchers, and minorities such as Indian Tribes for a seat at the post-delisting table. Even the Park Service has been blocked from participating in the states' decision-making for establishing hunting seasons.

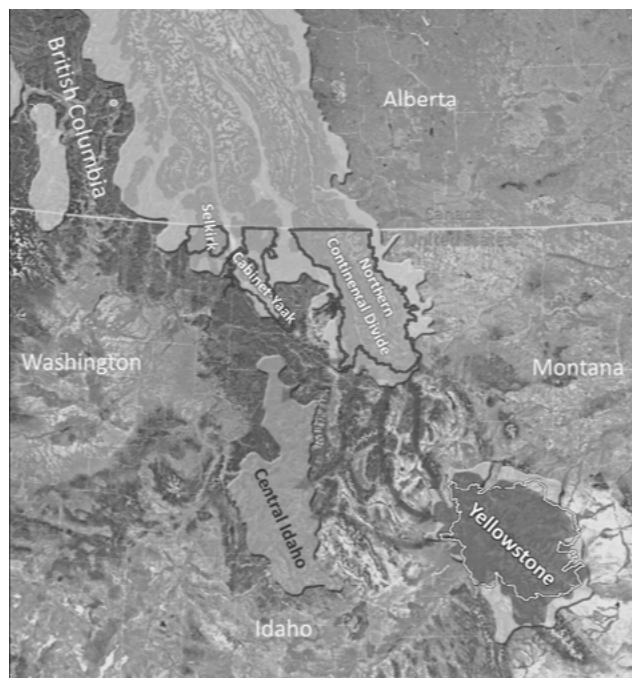
Limits to State Authority

Management of grizzlies by the States is further complicated by limits to their authority. States have jurisdiction only to the animals themselves, not habitat. Outside the Parks, most grizzly bear habitat is owned by the US Forest Service, where it is managed for “multiple uses”—which, outside designated Wilderness Areas, translates into logging, mining, ranching and industrial-scale recreation (i.e., motorized vehicle use, ski resorts). Even if the States want to limit development to advance conservation, they lack the authority. Making matters worse, state managers are reluctant to influence what happens on private lands, where conflicts often concentrate.

Just as the Park Service displayed a willful refusal to see the foreseeable consequences of their management actions in the 1960s, so too have state managers resisted acknowledging what might happen to grizzlies under their trigger-happy regime in response to an unraveling environment. They even went so far as to prevent the Fish and Wildlife Service from setting a “trigger” in the delisting rule that would automatically reinstate ESA protections if funding is not available to implement post-delisting commitments, or if the population drops below specified numbers.

The point is that the States lack the kind of legal or other

curbing mechanisms that helped the Park Service pivot in its approach to grizzly bear management when changed circumstances demanded it. Without the ESA, state wildlife managers are not likely to restrain themselves in their treatment of grizzlies, especially when their base of hunters, ranchers and developers wants them to kill more bears. With friends in the White House and Administration such as the Department of Interior's Ryan Zinke, the States can rest assured that FWS will not step in to reinstate ESA protections even if they are needed.



And among the first bears to be killed will likely be favorite roadside bears as well as the younger risk-taking bears dispersing between ecosystems. Continued isolation of Yellowstone's ecological island, which experts maintain is a major threat to the genetic health of Yellowstone's grizzlies, is thus virtually guaranteed.

Whither the Clan of 399 and other Celebrity Grizzlies?

Roadside bears that live outside of National Parks are at greatest risk, notably the famous clan of matron grizzly 399 of Jackson Hole, Wyoming. These benign, well-behaved bears have found an ecological niche near roads and people, and visitors and residents alike have responded with delight. With the help of Park Rangers and a volunteer “Bear Brigade” that patrols bear “jams,” visitors are behaving, for the most part, with respect and deference.

But Wyoming Game and Fish grizzly bear manager Dan Thompson has stated repeatedly that roadside bears will not fare well under the authority of the State. “We do not support these habituated bears,” he has stated on numerous occasions, particularly when WGF officials killed grizzly number 587, one of 399's offspring.

Not surprisingly, state managers have staunchly refused to limit or prohibit hunting in areas where these celebrity bears live, as advocated by the Jackson Chamber of Commerce. Human-habituated bears will be particularly easy to kill, and some hunters have made it clear they are gunning for them.

A Different “Night of the Grizzlies?”

The Park Service learned its lesson -- admittedly the hard way -- after 1967. Even without the ESA’s mandate, we can expect the agency to continue its emphasis on peaceful co-existence. Its ability may be handicapped by massive funding cuts proposed by the Trump administration, but it will never allow bears again to rely on garbage, kill bears indiscriminately, or permit the kind of public safety problems that triggered the “Night of the Grizzlies.”

The problem now will be the States, which are taking over management at a time when the rug again has been pulled out from under feet of grizzlies. State managers appear to have learned little since the grizzly was listed, and are obsessed with their power more than ever. They are still dominated by white, male hunters, ranchers and developers. Their primary management tool is the gun. Even if they wanted to prioritize conservation, they lack the needed authority and resources.

State policies that allow trophy hunting and facilitate killing will likely create the same kind of conditions that brought the grizzly to the brink of extinction in the 1970s. But this time, when it happens, resistance to change may well delay action until the consequences are even more catastrophic. **CP**

LOUISA WILLCOX is a longtime grizzly bear activist and founder of Grizzly Times. She lives in Montana.

DAVID MATTSON worked for the grizzly study team for 2 decades. He retired from the US Geological Survey two years ago.

Impunity UK

How UK Police Get Away With Murder

BY DAN GLAZEBROOK

“The moment they entered they were shouting at him to get down. He wasn’t being threatening or aggressive, he was saying: ‘What have I done?’ He was scared, but they just kept shouting at him. They wouldn’t tell him what he was supposed to have done, then you could hear them Taser-ing him, again and again, then CS gas [spray], on and on.”

Luke Purser’s account of the police attack on Darren Cumberbatch checks out; several others in the building—a bail hostel in Nuneaton in the East Midlands—on the 10th July have reported the same thing. Shaun Duffy told reporters that he “heard everything from start to finish; the police

were on the go from the moment they entered. Shouting at him right away. They would use Taser and gas repetitively and without warning, there were no warnings. He kept asking: ‘What have I done?’” Vikash Shohan added “You could hear the Taser noise near constantly; Darren was screaming.”

Darren was dumped in A and E later that night by the police. He would die from his injuries ten days later. “I know what happened to Darren”, told a campaigner at a demonstration called by the family, “I’ve seen the photos with my own eyes. He was battered by the police. He has bruises all over his body, burn marks all over his body.”

“Both his jaws were broken”, his father, Keith Cumberbatch, told me. “His ankle was broken, he had severe bruising to the lower part of his body. His liver was shut down, kidneys shut down, and lungs at 40% when they dropped him off at A and E. But the police never contacted us. We found out from the nurse, three days later. When I first heard about it, it smacked of police brutality.”

Darren was the second of three young, healthy, black man to die “following contact” with UK police in just over a week. Shane Bryant had died the previous weekend after being restrained by police in Leicestershire; and 20 year old Rashan Charles died after having his head smashed against a fridge unit by police four days later in East London. The previous month, Edson da Costa also died following restraint and close-range CS-spraying by the police. His mother died from grief two weeks later.

Four deaths at the hands of the police in a month sounds like a lot. But in fact, it is slightly below average; according to the monitoring group Inquest, no fewer than 1433 people died in police custody or following police contact over a 22-year period from 1990: over 65 per year. Not all of these were suspicious, of course. But many were. And yet not a single police officer has ever been successfully convicted over any of them: of 509 suspicious deaths in custody analysed by the Institute of Race Relations, 13 verdicts of unlawful killing were returned by inquest juries, but only 5 prosecutions were mounted, and no convictions obtained.

I have been writing about deaths at the hands of the police for fifteen years. But as I attended the march for justice for Darren, I felt a different kind of anger. Of course, I was angry at what the police had done, the more so the more the truth emerged of what had taken place. But I also felt a deep anger at what I knew was to come: at how Darren’s family were going to be led down the garden path, for years on end, down legal channels and through state institutions that are designed to prevent, rather than to provide, justice. My work on similar cases in the past has led me to the conclusion that every one of the institutions involved in a death in custody case plays a role of protecting and colluding with the police. Some, such as the (misnamed) Independent Police Complaints Commission, have an additional role of pacifying public anger, and thus have to balance their ‘cover-up’ role with sup-

plying enough information and contrition to prevent unrest. It is a delicate balancing act. But ultimately, the aim is simply to combine impunity with the appearance of accountability.

After every high profile death, police and their backers banally reassure us that 'lessons have been learned'. Yet, as the IRR have pointed out, despite "the proliferation of guidelines, lessons are not being learnt: people die in similar ways year on year". The only lesson truly being learnt by police, it seems, is how to successfully evade justice; how to get away with it.

This article is about how they do so.

Step 1: Destruction of Evidence

Normally when someone dies in suspicious circumstances, those involved will be arrested and interviewed as suspects, and the place of death will be cordoned off as a possible crime scene, to prevent any tampering with the evidence. Yet, when someone dies at the hands of the police, none of this takes place. The incident is investigated by the IPCC (about whom more later), whose operational procedures, right from the get-go, show the bias involved. The police are interviewed as witnesses, rather than suspects, and the place of death is not treated as a crime scene. This makes the process of removing evidence much easier for the officers involved.

In the case of Christopher Alder, for example, who died in a police station in Hull in 1998, blood spots were removed from the police van which brought Christopher to the station, CS gas canisters suspected of being used on him were destroyed, and the clothes of the officers involved were dry-cleaned. In the case of Darren Cumberbatch, officers bought themselves extra time by failing to report the event to the IPCC until ten days after they had hospitalised him.

2. Lying

There can be no doubt that lying is absolutely standard institutional practice when it comes to dealing with deaths in custody. This lying typically takes two forms: slandering the victim, and covering up police culpability. The first type is now well documented. Following the 1989 Hillsborough disaster—when police mismanagement of a football match led to 96 fans being crushed to death—officers were instructed by their Chief Superintendent to blame 'drunken, ticketless fans' for the disaster: a narrative which was then eagerly parroted by much of the media. A similar strategy had been used by the same police force (South Yorkshire) against striking miners at Orgreave in 1984. After brutally attacking the miners, the police systematically falsified statements against them, framing them as instigators of violence, in order to fit them up with long prison sentences. When the innocent electrician Jean Charles de Menezes was shot in the head eight times by the police, claiming they thought he was a suicide bomber, police briefed the media that he was wearing a heavy bomber jacket, had jumped over the ticket barrier and was running from police. All three claims were later shown to

be total fabrications, as were claims initially made following the police shooting of Mark Duggan in 2011. Even government ministers are not immune to police slander, as former Development Secretary Andrew Mitchell discovered when police falsely accused him of calling them 'plebs'.

Of course, some police tell the truth: but they tend to be overruled. In the case of Habib 'Paps' Ullah, killed in 2008 following a vicious and unprovoked assault by a gang of four officers, most of the officers involved actually gave fairly honest accounts of what had taken place. However, these initial statements were not those handed to the IPCC; instead, senior officers and members of the Police Federation instructed the officers to rewrite their statements, to remove references to Habib's compliance, the level of force used by the police, Habib's going limp and breathing strangely, the warnings about Habib's condition shouted at police by members of the public, and even the presence of certain witnesses. It was these doctored statements which were then handed to the IPCC.

The practice of allowing police to confer following a death in custody—to get their 'story straight'—is one factor in the institutionalisation of a culture of police lying.

In the case of Kingsley Burrell, who died in hospital following at least two serious beatings by police, including one during which he was handcuffed to a hospital bed, three officers denied they had left him with a blanket wrapped round his head, despite the evidence of several hospital staff.

Ian Tomlinson died during protests against the G20 summit in London in 2009. Police initially told the press he had died of a heart attack and that officers' attempts to save his life had been impeded by protesters. Footage later showed that he had been in fact been struck with a baton and thrown to the ground by PC Simon Harwood whilst walking with his hands in his pockets. No officer had gone to his aid, despite ample opportunity to do so, and pathologists concluded he had died from massive internal bleeding caused by the assault.

This is only a small sample of the lies we know about. Yet even when found out, the police have plenty more tricks up their sleeves.

3. Collusion With Investigators and the IPCC

Before the creation of the IPCC in 2004, investigations into deaths in custody were typically undertaken by neighbouring forces. It doesn't take a genius to work out the interest such forces have in exonerating those who might one day investigate them.

Thus it was that the West Yorkshire police investigation into Christopher Alder's death at the hands of the neighbouring Humberside force allowed the afore-mentioned destruction of evidence to take place, whilst never investigating what happened to Christopher in the police van. This van ride was crucial, given that Christopher appears to have lost his belt,

lost a tooth, sustained additional injuries and lost consciousness during this journey. Christopher's family suspect he was given a beating in the van. But this possibility has never been investigated.

Yet even today, many deaths 'following police contact' continue to be investigated by the police themselves, rather than by the IPCC. This was initially the case after Ian Tomlinson's death, when the IPCC denied there was anything suspicious about his death until a week later when the footage of his assault by police emerged. That allowed the City of London police to lead the initial investigation, with the chief investigator noting in his log the need to "ensure that attention of media is managed in a positive and appropriate way [and to] safeguard the position of the force and partner agencies in relation to level of information released". As Jules Carey has commented, "It is bizarre that an investigation into a violent death can have as a priority the ambition to safeguard the reputation of those around the suspect at the expense of the truth. As a result of this misguided strategy the investigator withheld critical information from the coroner, IPCC, FLO, pathologist and, most importantly, the family."

Yet, even an investigation by the supposedly impartial IPCC is no guarantee of any rigour. Sean Rigg died in 2008 after police used what an inquest jury deemed to be "unsuitable and unnecessary force" on him, before leaving him face down, unattended and unconscious for over half an hour whilst he was dying. Yet the IPCC's initial investigation exonerated the police of any wrongdoing, and it was not until the inquest two years later that the truth was revealed. As the Rigg family's solicitor Daniel Machover, commented, "the IPCC failed to properly examine the most basic evidence in its possession in Sean Rigg's case, including police incident records, photographs of the restraint and CCTV footage, which meant that officers were never asked key questions until the inquest."

Forced to review their initial investigation, the IPCC eventually admitted to their "interviewers at times appearing hesitant to put to the officers fundamental questions about how they exercised their duty of care", as well as being too ready to accept without challenge police accounts that were "improbable" and "implausible".

The IPCC's craven deference to the police is also evident in their outright refusal to investigate anyone but the most lowly officers. In the case of Habib Ullah, for example, their investigations focused on only the five officers involved on the ground, but did not touch the senior officers and Police Federation staff who had ordered the doctoring of the those officers' statements. This was despite the fact that the investigation had a specific remit to investigate the cover-up.

None of this should be surprising, however, given the composition of the IPCC: eight out of its ten senior investigators are themselves former police officers. Some independence. In 2012, the IPCC was even threatened with contempt of court proceedings by a coroner following its refusal to hand over

key evidence during the Mark Duggan case. The IPCC is clearly unable to act as the independent watchdog it proclaims to be; indeed, in 2013 a parliamentary inquiry concluded that the IPCC "has neither the powers nor the resources that it needs to get to the truth when the integrity of the police is in doubt." Nor does it have, we should add, the will.

4. Legal Muscle

At inquests, every member of the police gets a top lawyer, funded by the state, as does the force itself, and any other institution involved. Families of the victim, meanwhile, are lucky to get legal aid for one lawyer. At Christopher Alder's inquest, there were six lawyers representing the police, and 2 representing the ambulance trust and health authority, facing one representing the family. And in the Sean Rigg case, the family had to raise £21,000 themselves to get any legal representation at all at the inquest. These state-funded lawyers will take every opportunity to challenge evidence and muddy the waters.

5. Pro-police Pathologists

One way of muddying the waters is by the use of specialists with a track record of 'sympathy' for the police in judicial proceedings. At the trial of PC Simon Harwood, there was consensus amongst all three forensic pathologists, backed up by two postmortems, that the cause of Ian Tomlinson's death was internal bleeding caused by injuries sustained in the assault by the officer. That was until trauma specialist Alastair Wilson was introduced to the court, with his hypothesis that the bleeding could have started before the assault took place. According to the Guardian newspaper, his testimony was crucial in securing Harwood's acquittal.

Wilson had already raised eyebrows in 2002 when he argued that murdered schoolboy Damliola Taylor was probably not stabbed but had simply "fallen on a broken bottle". Given the depth (6cm) and shape of the wound, the suggestion was widely ridiculed, with prosecutor Mark Dennis pointing out that Damilola would have had to "take off and fly through the air like Peter Pan" for the doctor's theory to be right. Had it been accepted, however, it would have been a great relief for the police, who were already in the firing line over their botched investigation. Wilson was later awarded an OBE.

However, he was not the police's first choice of pathologist in the Tomlinson case. That dubious honour went to Freddy Patel, whose autopsy claimed that Tomlinson had died of heart failure, failing to mention the internal bleeding which every other expert had deemed responsible for his death. In a previous case, Patel had claimed that a prostitute with serious head injuries and a bite mark died of natural causes, ensuring the police would not have to bother with an investigation. Her killer went on to commit two further murders. Patel has now, at last, been struck off by the General Medical Council after giving questionable verdicts in four cases.

Dr Kenneth Shorrock is another pathologist who has shown himself to be amenable to adapting his reports to suit the needs of the authorities. As the London Evening Standard recalled, “Dr Shorrock came into the public eye in the wake of the de Menezes case after inserting inaccurate details about the shooting at Stockwell Tube station, South London, in July 2005 into his report. He said the 27-year-old Brazilian had vaulted over the ticket barriers while being chased by police before he was shot.

The information appeared to have come from police sources but was later proved to be incorrect, leading to accusations of a cover-up by officers. In fact, Mr de Menezes walked through the barrier and down the escalator.” Five years previously, Dr Shorrock had “changed his report into the death of a pensioner during an operation, which led to her surgeon being wrongly charged with manslaughter.” He had done this “in response to a call from the coroner’s office asking him to ‘reconsider’ his view.” The General Medical Council later ruled that he had been “unprofessional, inconsistent, unreasonable and inappropriate”. As David Halpin commented, “Of the greatest importance is the fact that he was called from Sheffield to examine the remains of Jean Charles de Menezes” despite the fact that “Sheffield is 150 miles from London which has at least 8 forensic pathologists available” and despite the fact that “a charge of serious professional misconduct was hanging over him”. His reputation as a man willing to provide an ‘appropriate narrative’ clearly overrode all other concerns.

6. The CPS

But if all else fails, the Crown Prosecution Service can always be relied on to protect officers who kill. Usually this is as straightforward as refusing to bring prosecutions—even after inquests have returned verdicts of unlawful killing, or the IPCC have recommended prosecutions. As already mentioned, at least 13 deaths in custody were ruled to have been caused by unlawful killing between 1990 and 2002, yet only 5 of these resulted in prosecutions. The officers who delivered a vicious beating to Kingsley Burrell whilst he was handcuffed face down on a hospital bed, before leaving him to die, were never put on trial over his death. No one involved in the police murder of Jean Charles De Menezes ever faced criminal charges. None of the five officers who left Sean Rigg to die after using excessive force faced charges over his death. And following the death of Habib Ullah, although the IPCC concluded that criminal prosecutions should be brought against the officers for misconduct, assault, intention to pervert the course of justice and perjury, the CPS refused to bring a single prosecution. Indeed, a 1999 government report into deaths in custody by Judge Gerald Butler explicitly criticised the CPS’s reluctance to prosecute officers over such deaths. Yet the practice continues.

In the case of Christopher Alder, however, after four years of campaigning by the family, and a unlawful killing

verdict at inquest, the CPS were finally compelled to bring charges against the officers involved. But they conducted the prosecution so poorly that the case collapsed. Conflicting medical reports were submitted, and the case law they used would have found the officers’ innocent, meaning the judge was forced to throw it out. Christopher’s sister Janet believes this was deliberate: “I always felt, from the beginning, that this case was set to fail”, she told me in 2011, “I don’t think it’s incompetence, because they’ve been prosecuting cases for hundreds of years. I think the CPS from the beginning had absolutely no intention whatsoever of prosecuting these officers. They’d proved that for four years. When we got the evidence as a family, they then decided to conflict it, knowing what the outcome would be. They always say that a jury will not convict, but that’s not true. It’s the way they put the evidence together.”

Again, this should not be surprising, as the CPS is nothing more than the merger of the Director of Public Prosecutions department with all the police’s own prosecution departments (which functioned autonomously until 1986). In other words, just like the IPCC, the CPS is effectively a arms-length branch of the police. Their partisanship, towards both police and government, has been revealed time and again, with refusals, for example, to prosecute Lord Janner on child abuse charges despite copious evidence, and their initial refusal to prosecute PC Harwood over Ian Tomlinson’s death. Amazingly, they actually used the conflict between Freddy Patel’s ‘heart attack’ verdict and the findings of two subsequent postmortems as an excuse not to bring the charge, demonstrating the way in which each rung of impunity reinforces the others. In the same vein, the CPS justified their decision not to charge officers who were proven to have lied at Sean Rigg’s inquest by reference to previous collusion by the IPCC, arguing that the IPCC’s failure to challenge the officers’ account meant that “a jury would be likely to accept that this confirmed in the custody sergeant’s mind that his memory was correct”. Thus the supposed incompetence by one branch of the state underpins continued impunity by another.

So despite enquiry after enquiry, nothing changes—and the reason is simple: the IPCC and the CPS exist to sustain, rather than to challenge, impunity. A filmmaker Ken Fero put it, “There is the law of murder and manslaughter and these need to be implemented for police officers. It’s as simple as that. The only change there needs to be is in the determination of the CPS to actually prosecute and the determination of the IPCC to investigate.” Until that time comes, the question remains: who will police the police? **CP**

DAN GLAZEBROOK is a political writer based in the UK.

CULTURE & REVIEWS

Music & Mayhem

BY LEE BALLINGER

“He who controls the past controls the future,” wrote George Orwell in 1984. Daniel Wolff doesn’t want to control the past, but he does want to paint an accurate picture of it. He does it well in his new book, *Grown-Up Anger: The Connected Mysteries of Bob Dylan, Woody Guthrie, and the Calumet Massacre of 191* (HarperCollins).

Wolff’s story revolves around the Keweenaw Peninsula—the northernmost part of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula—which once had some of the richest copper deposits on earth. Seven thousand years ago, Native Americans were able to mine it well enough to make tools. The advent of modern technology made the mines more productive, but the work was far from easy.

The early twentieth-century work day at the Calumet & Hecla mines on the Keweenaw Peninsula “began by riding a thousand feet down into ill-lit, poorly ventilated mining shafts. There, the workers spent ten hours manning ‘widow makers,’ 170-pound drills that they held overhead, gouging out rock in search of copper...While the company’s stockholders received 400 percent returns on their investment and the general manager of the mine got a yearly salary of \$125,000, workers were paid under a dollar a day.”

As Christmas approached in 1913, the workers had been on strike at C&H in Calumet, Michigan for almost five months. The ladies auxiliary of the union organized a Christmas party

at Italian Hall for the miners’ kids. They sang songs and opened presents. According to famed labor organizer Mother Bloor, who was present, just as a young girl sat down to play the piano, “a man pushed open the door and shouted: ‘Fire!’”

The crowd rushed downstairs for the building’s one exit. Adults and children fell and piled up on top of each other until, after only a few minutes, seventy-four of them were dead, sixty-three of them children. “I saw the marks of children’s nails in the plaster,” Bloor said, “where they had desperately scratched to get free, as they suffocated.”

“If someone deliberately shouted ‘Fire!’ and set off the panic--and all the inquiries seem to agree that’s what happened—that person was liable for the death of sixty-three children and eleven adults. The majority of witnesses testified that the man who shouted was wearing a [pro-management] Citizens Alliance pin.”

Management worked for the real owners of the Calumet mines--New England movers and shakers who operated under the innocuous moniker of Boston Associates. The roots of the wealth of many of them traced directly back to slavery. The Associates opposed the Civil War and were “known as Cotton Whigs, their textile mills depended on what one commentator called an alliance ‘between the lords of the lash and the lords of the loom.’”

They may have been the lords of both. Between 1880 and 1910, there were a little over 1,000 deaths just in the copper mines of the Michigan Upper Peninsula. This compares to 3,705 lynching deaths nationwide in the same period. As Daniel Wolff writes: “It was like a war—an unseen, below-ground war.”

That stairwell of crushed humanity at Italian Hall eventually became a

song, roughly following the evolution described by James Baldwin in *Just Above My Head*: “Music can get to be a song but it starts with a cry. That’s all. It might be the cry of a newborn baby, or the sound of a hog being slaughtered, or a man when they put a knife to his balls.”

Or the cry of children gasping for breath as they tried to escape a people’s palace turned coffin. Woody Guthrie eventually heard the story from Mother Bloor. He wrote a song about it, “1913 Massacre,” and recorded it in 1945.

Bob Dylan discovered “1913 Massacre” sometime around 1960. He may have found it on a Woody Guthrie 78, a *Rambling Jack Elliot* British LP, or just heard it in the Minneapolis coffeehouses where he performed. Once Dylan left the Twin Cities for New York he played the song publicly just once more, at a Carnegie Hall concert in 1961. He never recorded it but his first album did contain an homage to Woody Guthrie, “Song to Woody.” The melody was taken from “1913 Massacre.”

At age thirteen, Daniel Wolff first encountered Bob Dylan on the radio, the electric sound of “Like A Rolling Stone.” That led Wolff back to Dylan’s early acoustic work, neatly reversing Dylan’s sonic path. Somewhere on that journey, he found “1913 Massacre” on an album by Woody Guthrie’s son Arlo.

Wolff says that what first attracted him to Bob Dylan was his anger, which finds its echo (and perhaps one of its sources) in Guthrie’s song, which concludes:

*The parents they cried and the
miners they moaned*

*See what your greed for money
has done*

Guthrie and Dylan took sides even though they didn’t come from the same

economic background as the miners of the Keweenaw Peninsula.

I wasn't in the path that John Steinbeck called the Okies...My dad, to start with, was worth about thirty-five, forty thousand. He had everything hunky-dory.

—Woody Guthrie

Charlie Guthrie, Woody's father, owned thirty farms with hired help and two residences in the new state of Oklahoma, which joined the Union in 1907. Charlie Guthrie became wealthy in part because he hustled Indians out of their land.

Bob Dylan's father was a partner in an electrical appliance store in Hibbing, Minnesota. Bob's first girlfriend said about him: "He was from the right side of the tracks, and I was from the wrong side."

But Guthrie and Dylan both came from places largely defined, just like the Keweenaw Peninsula, by what was on the ground. Guthrie's youth in Oklahoma paralleled that state's oil boom while Dylan's Hibbing was smack dab in the middle of the Mesabi Iron Range. There was local work to be had for young men but those two had other plans. Guthrie left early on for Los Angeles, Dylan for Greenwich Village.

Guthrie and Dylan both grew up where there was a past and a present of intense unrest—small farmers in Oklahoma, miners in Hibbing. In 1916 there was a mass walkout from the Mesabi Range iron mines and it wasn't long before Hibbing "was being patrolled by sharpshooters in armored cars."

The unrest led to protest. Oklahoma had one of the country's highest percentage of socialist voters. In 1912, the year Woody Guthrie was born, Socialist Party presidential candidate Eugene Debs got 897,000 votes nationwide, six percent of the total cast.

Dylan's Hibbing was the birthplace of the Finnish Socialist Federation, which had 225 locals and 11,000 members, including quite a few among the miners

of Upper Michigan. Bob Dylan described northern Minnesota as "an extremely volatile, politically active area—with the Farmer Labor Party, Social Democrats, socialists, communists."

All this history, fueled by anger, is reflected directly and indirectly in the music of Guthrie and Dylan. But the music's roots go even deeper.

In 1907, the new state of Oklahoma "was duplicating the Old South's system of sharecropping." It was based on stolen land and its southeastern quadrant was known, tellingly, as "Little Dixie." The elections that year in Oklahoma featured a populist combination of racism and an attack on big business, a framework that still plagues us (see Trump, Donald). In 1907, it led to a Democratic sweep of every statewide office and also brought the likes of Charlie Guthrie, running for District Court clerk, to power.

By 1937 Woody Guthrie was co-host of a radio show in Los Angeles. Evidently influenced by his Oklahoma upbringing, one day he sang a song on the air called "Run, Nigger, Run." Guthrie received a letter of protest from a black listener and he quickly made an apology.

The apology appears to have been sincere. Living in New York City three years later, Guthrie wrote a song called "Hangknot, Slipknot," dedicating it to "the many Negro mothers, fathers, and sons alike, that was lynched and hanged under the bridge...seven miles south of Okemah, Oklahoma, and to the day when such will be no more." Okemah was Woody's hometown.

"Hangknot, Slipknot" is one of Guthrie's best if not best-known songs. It's a coiled snake of restrained anger that begins by describing the technique for making a hangman's noose, declares the slave to be his brother, and ends by describing the entire legislative/judicial system as a slipknot.

Bob Dylan went further a generation later with "Only A Pawn In Their Game," a song he wrote in quick response to the assassination of civil rights leader

Medgar Evers in Mississippi in June 1963.

"It's a protest against the shooting, but it also questions the standard protest song, cutting through the black and white conventions of Greenwich Village and the folk world to emerge not far from the old Popular Front idea that racism is a product of the larger economic system."

Dylan sang the song at a rally in Greenwood, Mississippi, where violence against the civil rights movement was at a peak. He sang it again for 300,000 people at the March on Washington. The importance of "Only A Pawn In Their Game" can still be seen in the way that poor whites today are almost universally regarded as hopelessly ignorant if not downright fascist, not to mention being blamed for the election of Donald Trump. Dylan's song insists that we see "The poor white remains/On the caboose of the train." If we embrace that truth, we may see ways we can all escape being mere pieces on their chessboard.

There have been many attempts in our history to do just that.

"There was that moment [during the strike in Calumet] when the workers were chanting, 'We are the bosses,' but by the Christmas party, that was long gone," Wolff writes. "And the Western Federation of Miners never thought of the strike in those terms. It wasn't trying to change the basic system; it had conceded that the earth--what was dug from the earth--was already bought and owned. It just wanted the workers to get more of a share, to be partners in the business."

That strategy worked for a section of the working class as long as they had a social contract with the employers--economic survival in exchange for support for the bosses' strategic initiatives (when I was a steelworker, the company gave us paid time off to watch a film, *Where's Joe?*, that was made by the union and preached the message that our real enemy was foreign steel). In any event, real wages went up from

the end of World War II until the mid-1970s.

This may have been what Woody Guthrie meant to prophesy when he said: “The only New Deal that will ever amount to a damn thing will come from trade unions.” But today real wages have been dropping for forty years and union membership in the private sector

workers is in a race against time as the automation of McJobs draws closer every day.

With a new social contract impossible in a world going rapidly in a laborless direction, we are again confronted with the challenge and the opportunity to “change the basic system.” We are taught to look at previous efforts to do

percent increase over 2014.

This may just be kneejerk frustration but it may run deeper. According to a 2016 report from Business Insider: “Mainstream media painted Trump’s election victory as a ‘white working class revolt.’ The real story is that voters who fled the Democrats in the Rust Belt were twice as likely either to vote for a



Woody Guthrie at McSorley's Ale House, East Village, NYC, in 1943. Photo: Eric Schaal.

today is less than 7 percent of the workforce. Michigan, a traditional bellwether of blue-collar strength, passed a right-to-work law in 2012, the 24th state to do so.

The social contract that kept millions of families afloat has been unilaterally torn up and discarded. For instance, there is now a large group of port truckers in Los Angeles who, according to a *USA Today* investigative report, work under conditions of indentured servitude, taking home as little as 67 cents a week. Meanwhile, the righteous Fight For Fifteen campaign of fast food

that, such as the strong socialist voting upsurge in Woody Guthrie’s youth, as failures. It would be more instructive to see them not as ancient aberrations, but as steps on a winding road that is wending its way back to us.

Consider that recent polls show up to 40 percent of all Americans prefer socialism to capitalism and that a majority of millennials feel that way. Peter Sokolowsk of Merriam-Webster points out that “Socialism has been near the top of our online dictionary lookup list for several years.” In 2015, socialism took the top spot on that list, with a 169

third party or to stay at home, rather than to embrace Trump. Compared with 2012, three times as many voters in the Rust Belt who made under \$100,000 a year voted for third parties. Similarly, compared with 2012, some 500,000 more voters chose to sit out this presidential election. If there was a Rust Belt revolt this year, it was the voters’ flight from both parties. The story of a ‘white working-class revolt’ in the Rust Belt just doesn’t hold up. In the Rust Belt, Democrats lost 1.35 million voters. Trump picked up less than half, at 590,000. The rest stayed home or voted

for someone other than the major party candidates.”

What if this pox-on-both-your-houses Rust Belt revolt coalesced under a banner inscribed with Woody Guthrie’s vision of a society where people would “own everything in common. Common means all of us.” The national despair which marks the Trump presidency could turn into hope.

The need for a movement based on solutions and not just protest is becoming a matter of life and death. Daniel Wolff might be describing Flint or the war in Afghanistan when he writes: “Guthrie’s song is the story of how the American system kills its own. It describes a deliberate act: dozens of children are smothered to death because a small group of people owns the wealth of the earth—and they’d rather kill than share.”

As for the music, will another Woody Guthrie or Bob Dylan emerge from the social turmoil of our times? I posed that question to Daniel Wolff. He replied: “A next Dylan? Nope. Same way he wasn’t the next Guthrie. Or Guthrie the next Joe Hill. Times and needs and music change.”

So will it be some sixteen-year-old rapper? Some middle-aged troubadour cast adrift from middle-class moorings and putting his or her anger into song? Are there ten thousand people under the radar already fulfilling that role?

Who knows? But we do know that to navigate the future, we need to understand the past. Daniel Wolff has illuminated an important chunk of it to guide us on our journey. **CP**

LEE BALLINGER is editor of Rock & Rap Confidential.

Tim O’Brien and Me

How Literature Works and Why It’s Irreplaceable

BY THOMAS S. HARRINGTON

Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* is a heavily autobiographical account of a small college student from Minnesota who is drafted to fight in Vietnam in 1968. A bright young guy, he has already concluded the war is wrong and thus flirts quite seriously with going to Canada. But in the end, he does not and goes off to Vietnam where he becomes part of the senseless American killing machine.

Why couldn’t he say no to something he knew quite profoundly was wrong? The reason as the text makes clear, and as O’Brien has said in subsequent interviews, was that he was afraid to go against the expectations of the people he loved and respected, afraid to “let them down”, afraid to be called a “coward”.

And as I read, I knew that had I been born just 14 years earlier (or perhaps even less), which is to say when Tim O’Brien was born, that young faithless junior officer heading off to Vietnam could very well have been me.

Looking in the mirror, I knew that the 21-year-old self would have never had the courage to stand up to my WWI veteran father and uncle, the memory of my WWI veteran grandfather, the whole church-going, authority-respecting culture that surrounded me, and go off to Canada.

And as I realized this I looked at my beautiful young seven-year-old son and realized that someday he might very well be in the same place someday unless I could provide him with a comfortable basis for saying “no”, not only to immoral imperial wars but to all the other importunements of our crass consumer culture.

So, I crossed that Rubicon that according to the good bourgeois values of nice suburbs like the one we lived in, one is never supposed to cross. I began talking to my son and his beautiful sisters not like inert babies only interested in edifying fairy tales but like the observant and sentient humans they were.

I said quite clearly things like “No, I don’t support the troops and never will for anything other than to defend us from an attack on another country” and “No, the US is not necessarily the greatest country in the world and even if it were, it would not have the right to invade and destroy countries to prove it.”

And this “There is nothing particularly unprecedented about what happened on September 1st. When a country goes around the world bombing others with impunity does it expect to never get touched by blow-back? And besides, if you are counting bodies, the 3000 people killed that day are a drop in the bucket compared to what people around the world have suffered at our hands in the last 7 decades”.

I will never know if my words have had any effect. No parent ever does. But in the dark of the night, as I sit and wonder about who they are and what they will become, I at least know that I tried to give them something to hold on to before a state and a society that seems to have become fatally resigned to its role as the world’s and perhaps history’s unparalleled merchant of death and destruction. Thank you, Tim O’Brien. **CP**

THOMAS S. HARRINGTON is a professor of Iberian Studies at Trinity College.

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