

# CounterPunch



THE NEW NUCLEAR WEAPONS BY JOHN LAFORGE

JOHN REED AND THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION BY P. SAINATH

THE PRESIDENT AND THE PORN STAR BY RUTH FOWLER

MEXICO'S BIG ELECTIONS BY KENT PATERSON

THE FBI AT WORK BY PAUL KRASSNER





# CounterPunch

www.counterpunch.org

CounterPunch Magazine, Volume 25, (ISSN 1086-2323) is a journal of progressive politics, investigative reporting, civil liberties, art, and culture published by The Institute for the Advancement of Journalistic Clarity, Petrolia, California, 95558. Visit [counterpunch.org](http://counterpunch.org) to read dozens of new articles daily, purchase subscriptions, order books and access 18 years of archives.

Periodicals postage pending at Eureka, California.

POSTMASTER send address changes to: CounterPunch

P.O. Box 228  
Petrolia, CA 95558

ISSN 1086-2323 (print)  
ISSN 2328-4331 (digital)  
[www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org)  
All rights reserved.

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

ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR &  
DESIGN PRODUCTION  
Becky Grant

ECOMMERCE SPECIALIST &  
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT  
Deva Wheeler

SUBSCRIPTION & ORDER FULFILLMENT  
Nichole Stephens

DESIGN CONSULTATION  
Tiffany Wardle

## Contact Information

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

## EDITORIAL:

[counterpunch@counterpunch.org](mailto:counterpunch@counterpunch.org)  
BUSINESS: [becky@counterpunch.org](mailto:becky@counterpunch.org)  
SUBSCRIPTIONS AND MERCHANDISE:  
[deva@counterpunch.org](mailto:deva@counterpunch.org)

## Submissions

CounterPunch accepts a small number of submissions from accomplished authors and newer writers. Please send your pitch to [counterpunch@counterpunch.org](mailto:counterpunch@counterpunch.org). Due to the large volume of submissions we receive we are able to respond to only those that interest us.

## Advertising

Advertising space is available in CounterPunch Magazine. Media kit available upon request. All advertisements are subject to the publisher's approval of copy, text, display, and illustration. CounterPunch reserves the right to reject or cancel any advertisement at any time.

[email becky@counterpunch.org](mailto:email becky@counterpunch.org)

## Address Change

Please notify us immediately of email and/or mailing address changes for uninterrupted delivery of your magazine.

BY MAIL:  
CounterPunch Business Office  
PO Box 228, Petrolia, CA 95558

BY PHONE:  
1 (707) 629-3683

BY EMAIL (preferred):  
[nichole@counterpunch.org](mailto:nichole@counterpunch.org)

## Donations

CounterPunch's survival is dependent upon income from subscriptions, donations and book and merchandise sales. We are a non-profit, tax exempt organization under The Institute for the Advancement of Journalistic Clarity, DBA CounterPunch. Donations are welcome year round. Donate by mail, telephone or online: [www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org). If you would like to include IAJC in your will or make a bequest, please contact Becky Grant in the business office.

## Subscriptions

A one year subscription consists of 6 bi-monthly issues.  
1- year print/digital edition \$45

1- year digital edition (PDF) \$25

1- year institutions/supporters \$100

1- year print/digital for student/low income \$40

1-year digital for student/low income \$20

All subscription orders must be prepaid—we do not invoice for orders. Renew by telephone, mail, or on our website. For mailed orders please include name, address and email address with payment, or call 1 (800) 840-3683 or 1 (707) 629-3683.

Add \$25.00 per year for subscriptions mailed to Canada and \$45 per year for all other countries outside the US.

Please do not send checks or money orders in currency other than U.S. dollars. We DO accept debit cards and credit cards from banks outside the US that have the Visa, Mastercard or other major card insignias.

MAKE CHECKS OR  
MONEY ORDERS PAYABLE TO:  
CounterPunch  
Business Office  
PO Box 228  
Petrolia, CA 95558

## Letters to the Editor

Send letters to the editors by mail to:

CounterPunch  
PO Box 228  
Petrolia, CA 95558

or preferably by email to:

[counterpunch@counterpunch.org](mailto:counterpunch@counterpunch.org)

## Cover Image

"Field of Nukes." by Nick Roney

## Subscriber Password: nukes

Use this password to access the subscriber only archive at <https://store.counterpunch.org/back-issues-subscriber-access/>



In Memory of  
Alexander Cockburn  
1941–2012

---

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

VOLUME 25 NUMBER 2 • 2018

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ..... 5

## BORDERZONE NOTES

### 1968 + 50: The Year of Youth BY LAURA CARLSEN ..... 10

## EUROZONE NOTES

### The Working Poor BY DANIEL RAVENTÓS AND JULIE WARK ..... 12

## ARTICLES

### New Nuclear Weapons BY JOHN LAForge ..... 14

### John Reed and the Russian Revolution BY P. SAINATH ..... 21

### Mexico's Big and Contentious Elections BY KENT PATERSON ..... 26

### The FBI At Work BY PAUL KRASSNER ..... 30

## COLUMNS

### Roaming Charges ..... 6

Badge of Impunity  
by Jeffrey St. Clair

How America's police get away  
with murder.

### Empire Burlesque ..... 7

MSNBC's Progressive  
Bot-ulism

By Chris Floyd

Liberals' undying obsession  
with Putin.

### Bottomlines ..... 8

Express Train to  
the 19th Century  
By Pete Dolack

Back to trickle-down economics.

### Between the Lines ..... 9

The President and the  
Porn Star

By Ruth Fowler

Sex as transaction.

## CULTURE & REVIEWS

Appalachia Say You Will  
by Lee Ballinger ..... 32

Soderbergh's Truth  
by Ed Leer ..... 34

# CounterPunch Subscription Information

You're holding an official copy of CounterPunch Magazine which contains exclusive articles and special features you will not find on the CounterPunch website or anywhere else on the internet.

Current subscribers can find their expiration date on the address label on the back of the magazine. Please renew your subscription several weeks prior to the expiration date to avoid missing an issue.

The password for the subscriber only access area on the CounterPunch website will be sent monthly with the digital magazine. This is subscribers can access all the back issues since the magazine's inception.

#### CHOOSE YOUR SUBSCRIPTION TYPE:

If you are renewing your subscription, this will be accounted for when the order is processed.

**PRINT + DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTIONS** include the bi-monthly magazine by mail (6 issues per year), containing exclusive articles and special features you can't find on our website. Each edition of the magazine is (36) pages. Subscriptions begin within 3 weeks of subscribing, and start with the current issue being advertised at the time the order is placed unless specified otherwise. Plus you'll get everything that comes with a digital subscription.

**DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTIONS** are virtually the same as our print subscriptions. The main difference is that instead of receiving a print version in the mail you will receive the bi-monthly magazine delivered via email with a link to a PDF plus access to the online subscriber only archive.

**GIFT SUBSCRIPTIONS:** Please include the gift recipient's mailing address for print subscriptions and email address for email edition subscriptions. A gift note will be sent with the first issue.

**SUPPORTER SUBSCRIPTIONS** include a donation to CounterPunch and are available in print, email or for both versions.

**Renew by phone, mail or online: P.O. Box 228 Petrolia, CA 95558**  
**1(707) 629-3683 [www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org)**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Country \_\_\_\_\_ Outside US? See additional postage fee below.

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Bill my credit card \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration date \_\_\_\_\_

☐ **Sign me up for free website updates.** (Please include your email address above.)

Mail check, money order, or credit card info to: CounterPunch P.O. Box 228 Petrolia, CA 95558. All renewals outside the U.S. please add shipping: add \$25.00 per year for postage for Canada and Mexico; all other countries outside the US add \$45.00 per year. No checks from banks outside the US. The information you submit is confidential and is never shared or sold.

**Please call for all gift subscription orders.**

#### CHECK APPLICABLE

☐ RENEWAL ☐ GIFT  
☐ NEW SUBSCRIBER

1 Year Print/Digital	\$50	
1 Year Digital	\$25	
1 Year, Gift Print/Digital	\$45	
1 Year, Either Supporter Sub	\$100	

Extra Donation

Total Enclosed

**STUDENTS, SENIORS, & LOW INCOME:** Take off \$5 for any type of subscription. This designation is self determined.

---

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

---

## Yearsley's Prize

I was delighted to learn from yesterday's NY Times that David Yearsley, one of my favorite CounterPunch writers, received a Guggenheim award.

This is as well an implicit tribute to Counterpunch, which publishes so many fine writers from a wide range of cultural fields.

*Best regards,  
June Zaccone*

## Tired of War

Syrians are beyond tired of war. And we are tired of dictators, interventionists, opportunists, and lackeys, spanning across all borders and political affiliations. Every time I hear about another one of these attacks, I want to scream: "You want to help? END THE WAR. DON'T PROLONG IT." The U.S. has never had a real "Syria policy" that elevated concern for Syrian human rights, development, and progress. And Congress? Their concern in the past was to sanction Syria and isolate the country (in part, because that special lobby told them to). So now they're horrified? Now they care about my relatives and friends over there, who have suffered for far too long? Nope.

*Farrah Hassen*

## Police Action

So the administration considers military strikes on Syria a mere "police action." Remember Truman's "police action" in Korea where 4 million people perished? Following Truman's pronouncement, the U.S. Congress quadrupled the DOD budget in 1952—paving the way for the creation of the most destruc-

tive military force in history.

*Bob Alvarez*

## Drones Over Syria

If the President was really psychopathic and really wanted to maneuver everyone in the establishment & general public into gracefully submitting to his batshit insanity, he would've sent drones to Mueller's offices. Since he's as "sane" as Hillary Clinton and maybe even John Ellis "Jeb!" Bush, he's only gonna send drones into Syria...

*Matthew Hardwick*

## Sanders and the South

My sense is Sanders underestimated his likely success, probably hoping to do a little better than Kucinich did, in a symbolic message campaign about inequality, never thinking that he could be competitive in the race. Apparently he worked half time in the Senate in months prior to primaries instead of campaigning full time. By the time of most of the southern primaries on super Tuesday, there were too many states to try to cover. And after the severe defeat in South Carolina, where he'd put in lots of effort complete with events backed by Danny Glover, his campaign probably didn't think they could get much traction in the other southern states going up against the Democratic Party machine there and Clinton's longtime familiarity with the establishment and voters there versus his utterly unknown status to many in the south. And probably as the NY Times noted, he didn't help himself by his disdain to speak of his civil rights activism in the 60s.

*Bernardo Issel*

## The Evicted

There was a forum on home evictions in Kansas City back in December, organized by the public library and the local PBS station. It was attended by over 600 people. Tara Raghuvver, who is a Harvard grad and studied with Matthew Desmond, presented her research on eviction rates in Kansas City. She found that the eviction rate was around 98% for court cases that went to the final judgment phase.

*Chuck Munson*

## When Writing Fails

Just writing about this stuff is no longer enough. America needs a new grass roots movement, independent of the Democrats, to take to the streets as it did 50+ years ago, except this time with a real political agenda and the determination, the stamina to last it out.

*Vaska Tumir*

## Facebook Farce

The spectacle of a bunch of Baby Boomer politicians whose skills re:Internet/Social Media are limited, at best, clinging to their Blackberries and Twitter no matter how many 20-year-olds they hire to educate them and who have a fatal aversion to effectively regulating anything, cluelessly interrogating Zuckerberg pretty much sums up why the Boomer politicians need to exit stage right and support the younger generations as they try and clean up the mess.

*Michael Donnelly*

## Black Bodies, White Minds

Many white people seem to feel easily threatened &

are often fearful of the mere existence of black people. As if they are only used to being around other white people and don't really personally know many black people. They then project their fear and bias onto non-white bodies... sometimes getting them killed.

*Priya Reddy*

## Starbucks & Cops

As a Starbucks Barista, I can say that our safety training almost always has us relying on calling the police if we experience or suspect danger. The company needs to take more sensible approaches and train its employees in a way that mitigates police involvement, as it usually escalates situations and leads more likely to violence. This company is culpable in part.

*David Chaykowski*

## Thanks for Your Service

A bunch of us were standing on a corner in Santa Cruz, CA, some years ago, demonstrating against a war, I forget which one. A car stopped and Dennis Kucinich got out. He went up to each of us and shook our hands. I'll never forget that.

*Will Yaryan*

**Send Letters to the Editor  
to PO Box 228, Petrolia, CA  
95558 or, preferably, by email  
to [counterpunch@  
counterpunch.org](mailto:counterpunch@counterpunch.org)**



## ROAMING CHARGES

# Badge of Impunity

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

**W**hat does it take to awaken a somnambulant media these days? Getting shot in the back 8 times by trigger-happy cops while standing in your grandmother's backyard? That was the fate of young Stephon Clark on the night of March 18 in the Meadowview neighborhood of Sacramento, whose ghastly murder by police briefly diverted the attention of the national press from its Trump fixation. But after a couple of days, MSDNC and the New York Times, were, like the White House, content to let Clark's killing recede from the headlines and become just another "local issue."

Why did the cops fire 20 shots at Stephon Clark? The official story was that Clark had been seen breaking car windows in his neighborhood, a destitute area of Sacramento that is under police occupation. According to police, Clark had been tracked by a helicopter for this alleged act of vandalism. The helicopter police warned the cops on the ground that Clark was holding a tool bar. When police confronted Clark, he was standing near his grandmother's house and then ran into the backyard. The cops followed, guns drawn, body cameras rolling. One officer shouts, "Show me your hands! Gun!" Three seconds pass before the cop yells: "Show me your hands! Gun! Gun! Gun!" Then Clark is shot multiple times in the back. He falls to the ground and is shot once more. The encounter, from the time the helicopter spotted Clark to the fatal shooting, lasted less than two minutes.

The police let Clark bleed out for five minutes before placing his dying body in handcuffs. "He had something in hands, one of the cops said. 'Looked like a gun from our perspective.' But Clark was unarmed. No gun, no tool bar. His

hand held only a white i-Phone. When the reality of what taken place began to sink in, one of the cops says, "Hey, mute," and the audio is silenced. The police story changed over the ensuing days: Clark was carrying a gun, he was carrying a tool bar, he was breaking into houses, he was using a concrete block or an aluminum gutter railing. None of this stood up to the simple facts. A 22-year-old unarmed black man had been shot seven times in the back on suspicion of breaking a few windows. The mayor of Sacramento, Darrell Steinberg, said he was "in no position to second guess" the officers. And, just days after Clark was killed, two police unions donated a total of \$13,000 to the woman investigating the shooting, city DA Anne Marie Schubert. "It's not an exception to the rule—it is the rule. Their relationships with each other are incestuous," said Cat Brooks, executive director of the Oakland-based Justice Teams Network. "Prosecutors are beholden to law enforcement unions."

The media can't be bothered to spend too much time on killings that have become routine, unless there's grisly video footage. In the 24-hour period around Clark's death, at least five other men were killed by cops: Michael Holliman in Lone Rock, Arkansas, Reuben Ruffin, Jr. in Daviess County, Kentucky, Manuel Borrego in El Monte, California, Jermaine Massey in Greenville, South Carolina and Osbaldo Jimenez in Escondido, California. Only Clark's murder merited mention on CNN's chiron. So many killings, so little airtime.

Two weeks after the Sacramento shooting, the Supreme Court handed down an appalling decision that will only encourage more police killings. The

case involved the shooting of an Arizona woman in 2010 by police who had come to her house for a "welfare inspection." When police arrived, Amy Hughes came out of her house holding a kitchen knife at her side. Hughes made no threatening moves but failed to respond to Officer Andrew Kisela's demands to drop the blade. He then shot her four times without a warning. Fortunately, Hughes survived and sued the Arizona cop for use of excessive force. The Court ruled that Kisela, and by extension all other police, was entitled to "qualified immunity" from lawsuits because the shooting did not "violate clearly established statutory or constitutional rights of which a reasonable person would have known."

Good luck holding cops accountable for even the most egregious actions after this ruling. In fact, it's now more likely that American citizens will be held responsible for people cops shoot than the cops themselves. This sounds crazy and it should, but it's also true. Consider the case of Lakeith Smith, who was 15-years-old when he took part in a burglary in Millbrook, Alabama that went horribly wrong when police interrupted the break-in and shot and killed his accomplice, A'Donte Washington. The officer who shot Washington was swiftly cleared of any wrongdoing, but Smith was charged and convicted, under Alabama's cruel Accomplice Liability Act, of murdering his friend, who had actually been killed by the cop. Tried as an adult, Smith was sentenced to 65 years hard time.

Cops wear a badge of impunity. More than 1,500 Americans are killed by police each year. That's almost 10 percent of all homicides in the country. Yet few of these killings are questioned and almost none are prosecuted. Most homicide victims are killed by someone they knew: a friend, a business partner, a lover, a spouse, a parent, a child. In today's America, when people are killed by someone they don't know that killer is more and more likely to be a person who had sworn to protect and serve them. **CP**



## EMPIRE BURLESQUE

# Pajama Game: MSNBC's Progressive Bot-ulism

BY CHRIS FLOYD

**V**OICEOVER: Tonight, MSNBC presents a special edition of “In Deep with Maddie Haynes,” revealing a shocking secret behind the seemingly benign “March For Our Lives.” Here’s Maddie.

HAYNES: Thanks, Jim. Yes, on March 25th we were all stirred by the remarkable scenes of hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren marching through the streets of America—indeed, the world—demanding action against mass shootings and gun violence. Since that time, this network has been in the forefront of those seeking to amplify the message of the march.

But MSNBC is also dedicated to the pursuit of truth, no matter where it might lead, and no matter whose ox is gored. And we all know there is only one prism for truth in American politics today: Russia. Every issue must be examined largely—or even solely—on the basis of how Vladimir Putin is using it to pursue his ruthless agenda of weakening and subverting our great—because we are good—democracy.

For example, we have shown, time and time again, how the Moscow Machiavelli used Bernie Sanders as a dupe to cripple the campaign of the most qualified person ever to run for president. We have shown, in staggering, bludgeoning detail, how Putin has used social media to sow division among us, hypnotizing millions of decent Americans into becoming racist, neo-fascist Trump followers, while beguiling millions of others into supporting radical, contentious causes such as Black Lives Matter, BDS and the Dakota Pipeline protests.

Sadly, we must now report that the March for Our Lives is no exception.

After extensive consultations with our experts—ex-CIA chiefs, former NSA officials, retired military brass heading private security companies, Bush-Cheney alumni rehabilitated by their criticism of Trump and Russian bot hunters led by insatiable warmongers from the Project for a New American Century—we have confirmed that Vladimir Putin was directly involved in fomenting the chaos that filled America’s streets on that fateful day of March 25th. We go now to our top investigative journalist, Whittaker Cambres. Whit, how did you unravel this sinister scheme?

CAMBRES: Maddie, it began when we were doing our usual deep-dive monitoring of the Putin propaganda machine by watching RT in our pajamas at home. We saw that the Kremlin sock-puppet network was not saying anything derogatory about the march, but giving large amounts of airtime and web space to the students and their stirring speeches. They even mentioned that their top operative, Donald Trump, had cowardly flown to his Florida bolthole to escape the protests.

HAYNES: I’ll bet that set off alarm bells!

CAMBRES: You bet, Maddie. As one of our go-to guys, John Brennan, has said, Russians are genetically programmed to be deceitful. Whatever the Russians do, there’s a double-triple-quadruple-sided game going on behind it. If they don’t attack something, that means they support it and it must be bad. Unless, of course, it means they actually don’t support it, but want us to think they do, so that we’ll end up attacking what they don’t actually support and supporting what we should be attacking.

HAYNES: Tricky devils. Genetics will tell, I guess.

CAMBRES: Absolutely. Anyway, I called Brennan himself, and he called Bill Kristol who called Sam Power who called Henry Kissinger, and the consensus of the intelligence community is clear: Russian bots are reaching into our high schools—even our elementary schools, Maddie!—to radicalize our youth. Of course, these kids don’t like getting shot—but organizing? Protesting? Where will that lead? At some point, they might not just question the authority of a garish vulgarian like Trump, but the authority of our whole bipartisan system!

Right now, they’re just focused on sporadic outbreaks of gun violence aimed at people like them. But what if they ever start connecting this to the larger violence that their bipartisan government is aiming at young people—and others—around the world? What if they tie this bipartisan system of violence, death, ruin, corruption and deceit abroad to the corrosion and decay of their own country, their own communities, to the curdling of opportunity and security in their own lives?

HAYNES: My god, Whit, that could spell the end of our progressive neoliberal path of common-sense, incremental compromise with the War Machine, Wall Street, the Security State and corporate kleptocrac! But what can we do?

CAMBRES: There’s still hope, Maddie. Reliable sources tell me that Robert Mueller is preparing indictments against nine Russian bot accounts—identified through unknown methods by Bill Kristol’s group—which have allegedly been pushing divisive stories about school shootings via ads on Facebook, WebCrawler and other sites popular with today’s youth.

HAYNES: Well, if anyone can save us, Mueller can! Thanks for the report, Whit. And hey—I like those pajamas! Ha ha ha!

CAMBRES: Ha ha ha ha! **CP**



## BOTTOM LINES

# Express Train to the 19th Century

BY PETE DOLACK

**M**odern conservatism wants to take us back to the 19th century, with a stop in the Reagan era on the way. Ah, the 19th century—the good old days when there were no pesky government regulations, no unions, and private mercenary corporate militias kept the rabble in line. So before we can set the clocks back that far, we get one more try at “trickle down” economics, courtesy of the Trump administration’s rammed-through tax plan.

Corporate leaders will magically create new jobs! Uh-huh. We’ve heard this siren song before, and it’s going to work even less well this time around. Except we should change the tense of the preceding sentence, because the only expected immediate result of gigantic tax cuts is already happening—fattening the wallets of corporate executives and Wall Street speculators. That is not to forget the future cuts to Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, food stamps and other social services, certainly high on the list of intended outcomes. Already the Trump régime has proposed \$193 billion in cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Those of you old enough to have been around for the Reagan administration’s tax cuts for the wealthy: Did the wealth trickle down to you? Still waiting, aren’t you? And thanks to rulings by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission giving the green light to stock buybacks, this drought will be even drier. Already, stock manipulation, and not job creation or wage increases, is where the corporate tax savings are going.

A buyback is when a corporation buys its own stock from its shareholders at a premium to the current price.

Speculators love buybacks because it means extra profits for them. Corporate executives love them because, with fewer shares outstanding following a buyback program, their company’s “earnings per share” figure will rise for the same net income, making them look good in the eyes of Wall Street. Other shareholders love buybacks because the profits will now be shared among fewer shareholders.

In just the first nine weeks of 2018, U.S. corporations announced a total of \$214 billion in stock buybacks—a total greater than that of any prior full quarterly period. To cite just a handful of examples, Cisco Systems will spend \$25 billion buying its own stock; PepsiCo will spend \$15 billion doing so, and will increase its quarterly dividend, thus shoveling still more money into speculator wallets; and Wells Fargo will spend \$21 billion. Yes, the same Wells Fargo known for its infamous business plan of opening fake accounts in the name of its bank customers. (No accident there, by the way. A member of my family who once worked as teller told me she and all other tellers were under constant pressure to get all customers to open a minimum of five accounts each.)

And those smatterings of job announcements? Mostly smoke and mirrors. Take Wal-Mart. First, the retail chain announced that it would raise its minimum starting wage, and increase its maternity and family-leave benefits, taking care to tie these improvements to the Trump tax cuts. Mere hours later, Wal-Mart announced it would close 63 of its Sam’s Club stores. Good-bye jobs! (In January alone, it announced at least 1,500 layoffs.) Before the announcement

of the store closings, Wal-Mart claimed its wage increases and benefit provisions would cost it \$700 million. But the company will save \$2.2 billion a year from the tax cuts.

The biggest beneficiaries of Wal-Mart’s tax cuts are none other than the Walton family, the heirs to the Wal-Mart fortune and who own about half of the company’s stock. The company hasn’t yet announced a fresh buyback plan for 2018, but had already committed itself in October 2017 to spending \$20 billion on stock buybacks. Please don’t shed any tears for the Walton family—the company has steadily increased its dividend payouts over the years and is now paying 52 cents a share four times a year. That means the Walton family receives billions of dollars a year just from their dividends, without lifting a finger. Good work if you can get it.

Perhaps an unusually egregious example, but hardly unique. A report issued by Morgan Stanley last month reported that 13 percent of the value of the corporate tax cuts will go toward pay raises, bonuses and employee benefits, with nearly half going to stock buybacks. Given Morgan Stanley’s Wall Street perspective, it is likely the former is overstated and the latter understated.

Money spent on buybacks had already tripled from 2009 to 2016. The 500 biggest U.S. corporations spent \$1 trillion on buybacks and dividends in 2016 and that’s an even more phenomenal total than it initially appears—that \$1 trillion was about \$115 billion more than their combined net income.

What’s in it for you? You’ll get to share in the glory of robust profits for the boss, basking in the bright light of the new neon sign your company is installing on its headquarters building and warming yourself in the knowledge that you’ve done your part in making Wall Street richer. Your landlord will accept that as payment for this month’s rent. Won’t he?

**CP**





BETWEEN THE LINES

# The President and the Porn Star

BY RUTH FOWLER

**T**he news POTUS has allegedly had an affair with adult actress, Stormy Daniels, is so predictable that I personally struggled to find it newsworthy. It seems like something we've always known about Donald Trump—the 'grab you by a pussy' human phenomenon 'leading' our country—that the ensuing media frenzy seems hyperbolic and insincere—and focused entirely around Stormy's career in the adult industry. It is not that Trump had an affair—clearly America is, at this point, pretty OK with the fact Trump fucks anything that will or will not have him and isn't particularly tied to the marital bed. It is that Trump had sex with a pornstar, someone who has sex in public for money, someone who has no shame in selling the sex she has for money, and openly and honestly does so with her face, dripping in cum, plastered all over a DVD cover.

For the past three months, I've been working in and around the porn industry, documenting pornstars, directors and crew with a stills camera for a journalistic project. The news about Stormy and Trump has been circulating that industry for months: not really a secret, so much, as something that everyone knew about and wasn't entirely sure anyone else would be interested in. When it seems America does not really care about the President molesting a woman, those of us who have been around the sex industry and understand the stigma, can't really understand why anyone would care the President molested a woman who is a pornstar—ie, someone who, in most of America's eyes, has forfeited her right to be considered a human being and a woman on the

same scale as non-sex workers. (Most) sex when you are a pornstar, is not about love, affairs, romance and cheating. Sex is work, therefore, a form of currency, a domestic and pedestrian event that usually takes place with around four people watching disinterestedly from a ridiculously proximate distance, a boom hovering three feet away from your face, a camera jammed close to your dick, someone's iPhone timer ticking away the requisite 24 minutes until the 'pop-shot'—the climactic moment a guy cums all over a female performer. The stigma surrounding porn is what makes it sell and gives the industry its dirty, wonderfully seedy sheen. The sense of the taboo—so entirely absent from a chilly porn set in someone's empty mansion in the Valley crewed by people who have seen other people's sex a million times too often to find anything noteworthy about the event, instructions being barked out by a Director who just wants to get the hell out of there—doggy, reverse cowgirl, blow job, soft-core—is necessary for the industry to keep going. The stigma is what porn thrives on—making you think, that the things they do, should be getting you off. Frankly, after several years as a stripper, and now three months following porn stars, I'm often surprised that I haven't had sex as often as I feel like I have. Sex—mine, yours, the couple getting paid hundreds of dollars to do it across the room from me—has saturated my ironically sexless life, and navigating the constraints of the 'real' world, where sex takes on an entirely different place and value, riven with Judeo-Christian rules, moral and ethical pitfalls, is a confusing and bizarre

occurrence.

Adult, operating in a guerrilla fashion in and throughout Los Angeles—descending upon empty mansions with less than 24 hours warning, sweeping in with janky, cobbled together equipment and cheap LED's—consistently morphs to stay one step ahead of a moralizing and judgmental establishment that is intent on either shutting it down outright, or fabricating paternalistic and utterly unworkable regulations which claim to focus on participants' 'health'. Whether it's through regulating condom use, STD testing or the internet, controlling other people who fuck for a living and telling them that they are inhuman, seems to be one way that America can feel OK with simultaneously jerking off to them.

Ironically, we might note, Trump has never voiced any kind of moralizing diktat over sex, marriage or ethics. He's always made himself known as the asshole who will grab potential sexual partners by the pussy and doesn't see consent as an obstacle to consummation. Porn is all about consent. It's all about prioritizing female talent above the male, who is seen as the prop. Porn is all about producing content in a way which is acceptable and pleasurable to the talent performing. It is about commodifying what the rest of the world struggles with, morally and ethically, on a daily basis.

What is most surprising about the Stormy Daniels scandal is that we even describe their sex as "an affair". It was a transaction, pure and simple, devoid of the emotional and intellectual struggles which delineate anything to do with the heart. Like the porn stars America despises, Trump gets the distinction between sex and love, and yet unlike these porn stars who are stigmatized, loathed and despised—he is applauded for it. **CP**

---

# BORDERZONE NOTES

---

## 1968 + 50 The Year of Youth

BY LAURA CARLSEN

**Y**outh activism exploded in 1968 and transformed societies throughout the world. Fifty years later, it's happening again.

The March for Our Lives stunned the political establishment and unleashed the vitriol of the right. That's a good sign. The huge number—between 800,000 and 1,000,000 in Washington DC alone—were part of it, but even more impressive was the conviction and the eloquence of the students.

Demands to tighten access to guns, especially weapons designed to murder large numbers of human beings, have always followed mass shootings. They have failed. This time is different. Before, it had been mostly the parents who spoke up. Now it's the kids. The crime at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High tapped into the deep grief and fear that many adolescents feel, and the sense of betrayal of growing up in a society that fails to value their lives and safety.

A few months ago, before the Parkland massacre on February 14, no one could predict that a rally for “common-sense gun laws” could bring out so many people, so passionately committed. The march, the voices of the kids and the outpouring of support revealed a much broader grievance than the lack of gun regulation. Children and teens in the world's most developed country feel unsafe. They feel unsafe in their schools, in their neighborhoods and in the streets. They're pointing a finger and saying the system promotes, supports and condones the violence

they're forced to confront. And they've risen up to say that that's not a future they can live with.

With the media actually paying attention this time, most people have heard the moving words of the Parkland students and other students who have survived attacks, lost friends to gun violence or live in fear. Millions of people experienced the resounding silence in Emma Gonzalez's speech that carried them into a classroom where terror reigned for six minutes.

From day one, the teens at the forefront of this movement put the blame where it belongs—on big money in politics and back-pocket politicians. For them, it's not just about regulations. It's a question of basic values—for life or for the industry of death. The demand to get NRA money out of politics goes to the heart of our rapidly eroding democratic system, and the students know that. In public forums, they pin politicians down to choose between them or the campaign donations. A now viral video of a town hall meeting shows Marco Rubio sweating bullets as he justifies NRA donations. He ends up saying that voters “bought into my agenda” (and so did the NRA, to the tune of \$3.3 million). After 17 students were murdered in his own state, his response enraged the students and people across the nation.

The gun lobby has consistently managed to marginalize gun regulation as a public safety issue, but it's fundamental. Sensible regulation can keep assault rifles and other high-power

weapons out of the hands of assassins. They can downsize an industry of arms manufacturing and sales that makes millions by assuring that anyone who wants a gun gets one, and that thousands of people, mostly men, want guns.

The impact would also cross borders. Gun smuggling has become a major part of the arms industry's business model, as Mexican drug cartels take advantage of the easy access. U.S. gun makers and sellers and the government that supports them don't only have the blood of Parkland students on their hands; they also have the blood of thousands of youth in Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey. For years, Mexican victims' organizations have been pleading with the U.S. Congress to tighten laws that would reduce the flow of arms to their country.

For now, the youth movement is focused on legislation, while flexing its considerable electoral muscle. The signs and slogans—“get rid of public servants who only care about the gun lobby”, “Vote them out” and “Our ballots will stop bullets”—promise a newly energized youth vote that has the potential to make major changes. The regulations are important, but at root, it's the violence of everyday life that catalyzed the movement.

That's why there's a growing confluence between the youth's March for Our Lives, Black Lives Matter organizing against police brutality, the drug policy reform and anti-incarceration movements, and women speaking out against sexual assault and harassment. They all feel the brunt of violence that has been exacerbated by a refusal of authorities to control it or even recognize it. As high school student Edna Chavez who lost her brother Ricardo to gun violence said, “I learned to dodge bullets before I learned to read”.

Violence characterizes this moment in history. Capitalism and patriarchy act with greater violence to assert control over dwindling resources and challenges to power. Grassroots movements resisting and defending have increased. It's

not just in the United States, it's in countries all over the world, locked in permanent wars for resources, and because war is good business. Violence that seems random or individual becomes systemic when the system neither prevents nor controls it, and in many cases generates it.

Trump's response to arm teachers follows the script for how to turn insecurity into a way to feed the same system that created that insecurity. It's the classic macho response to meet violence with violence that makes defense companies rich and reinforces patriarchal dictums of control through force. In response, finally, young people and millions of others are calling for real security, the kind that is built on a solid culture of non-violence rather than walls or guns.

Today's youth move-ment conjures memories of 1968, amid the fifty-year commemorations of the civil rights movement, the SDS days of resistance, May in France, the massacre of Tlatelolco in Mexico, and youth movements across the globe. Rebellion was the zeitgeist of '68. In dozens of countries with different histories and political contexts, young people organized and broke through the barriers of repression and depression, of hopelessness and resignation. In broad strokes, their movements challenged the dictums of a capitalist society that presented itself as the only future. They danced in the streets, organized in communities, threw rocks and rocked the powers-that-be. They called for freedom and experimented with what that meant.

Today's movement calls for safety. The right to live and continue to breathe. That's a powerful indicator of how violent our societies have become. In some ways, it's a historic reaction to what happened in 1968. The flipside to the rebellion that year was repression. As young people stood up to say 'no more', they found themselves looking down the barrel of a gun. The extreme response of governments to student uprisings and fights for freedom,

whether it was the student, civil rights or anti-war movement, created a long-term chilling effect that tamped down the rebellion but left the example. As Martin Luther King's 9-year old granddaughter Yolanda told the March, "My grandfather had a dream that his four little children would not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character... I have a dream that enough is enough. That this should be a gun-free world."

Although we may not have seen it coming now and in this way, it's logical that young people are speaking out against violence in daily life. Violence is

threat that hangs over the head of the people the system wants expelled, imprisoned, silenced or dead. Homeland and national security programs target them and strip away rights that could protect them from delinquents and state violence. These policies are the opposite of security.

Young people have responded by saying no to the threat. In the US they marched for their lives, in Mexico City they marched to protest the disappearances and assassinations of the young in the context of the war on drugs. There's a sense that we've come to a breaking point.

---

## **In a capitalist and patriarchal society, systematic violence is a powerful tool of social control.**

---

the sinister thread that weaves through our lives and that we've been told to call normal. Although the government and the media represent it as the random outcome of unbalanced individuals or the necessary response to threats, students are speaking out to say that laws, economic forces and rulers incite the violence and gain from it. Industries that encourage the use of assault weapons for sport and place them in the hands of men bred on a culture of macho violence and governments whose response to gun violence is more arms form part of this dangerous loop.

The problem goes even deeper. In a capitalist and patriarchal society, systematic violence is a powerful tool of social control. Attempts to isolate and personalize attacks by white men, can't hide the racism, misogyny and hatred of the other behind the attacks. Amid the hand-wringing and "thoughts and prayers", the message is clear—we can do this to you.

The relative lack of punishment for these crimes, most obviously in the case of police brutality, enforces the message. Murder is the ever-present

The youth know this isn't a one-day battle. They're ready for the long haul. They celebrate diversity and have a greater respect for women than their predecessors and that's a great strength. This new generation of young activists challenges prior social consensus on race and gender. Jamelle Bouie writing in Slate Magazine calls it "the next consensus": "Millennials, now the most diverse generation of adults in American history, are at the vanguard of a shift toward greater color-consciousness in American politics". Surveys show this generation acknowledges and rejects racism and supports immigrants at a much higher rate than previous generations. Although there has been less explicit talk about gender equality, the strong and articulate voices of girls and young women reflect a sea change from the sixties male-dominated student movements.

If in 1968, the system that young people lived under had become stifling, today it has become deadly. Like 1968, 2018 will be remembered as the year that millions of young people, all over, stood up and said no to the violence. **CP**

**F**or all the mealy-mouthed assurances that employment is “on the rise”, what’s really on the rise in Europe is poverty. But Europe is by no means homogenous. For some, life is sweet in a Europe which, according to Capgemini data and geographically speaking, concentrates 806 of 2,473 of the world’s billionaires. The less advantaged peoples are not homogenous either. Employment rates show a north-south divide at both country and regional levels, and they are much lower for women than men, with the widest gender gaps appearing for women in age ranges associated with caring for children, dependent family members or grandchildren. Poverty is obviously self-perpetuating when the least-educated people, many of them immigrants and refugees, enduringly show the lowest employment rates. And the most disadvantaged groups now include growing numbers of young people who must accept part-time and fixed-term “rubbish” contracts.

In three EU member states—Bulgaria (41.3%), Romania (37.3%), and Greece (35.7%)—more than a third of the population was at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2015. And poverty is showing a relatively new facet in Europe which is niggling at some consciences and bothering conventional analysts who need to explain why, despite the purported partial economic recovery, there are more people working full-time but more people are living in poverty. The numbers of working poor, officially defined as workers who earn less than 60% of the average wage in their respective states, are rising fast. In Greece, Croatia, Hungary, Portugal, Cyprus, the UK and Italy wages (adjusted for inflation) have been falling since 2009. The problem of poverty is not only due to the fact that 17,978 million men and women in the EU-28 were unemployed in December 2017 but the closely-related reality: the deplorable quality of jobs and working conditions for those who are employed.

Of course, it’s not just a European matter because Europe is partly re-

sponsible for the present global situation causing “Europe’s problem” of immigrants and refugees. In former colonies and poor countries, vulnerable employment affects three out of four workers, almost 1.4 billion people, more than 300 million of whom have a per capita household income or consumption of less than US\$1.90 per day, and young people (some 156 million) are disproportionately affected. The figure for Sub-Saharan Africa is almost 70%. Yet people who flee to the EU for their livelihoods—and their very lives—are contemptuously labeled “economic refugees”, insinuating that “they are greedy and coming to take your job”.

In Europe, in-work poverty has appeared as one of the products of four decades of out-of-control capitalism and, in particular, the economic policies imposed since the onset of the crisis ten years ago. As researchers from the Hans-Böckler-Foundation’s Institute of Economic and Social Research (WSI) found in a study of eighteen EU countries from 2004 to 2014, austerity enthusiasts in all these countries have a clear objective: to make the unemployed work for low wages. Germany, Europe’s most powerful economy, is no exception. The figure for poor workers doubled from 1.9 million (4.8%) in 2004 to 4.1 million (9.6%) in 2014. If the increase is greater in absolute numbers, it is because the total number of workers rose from 39.3 to 42.6 million. Yes, they’re creating jobs. EU President Jean-Claude Juncker bragged in his 2017 State of the Union

---

## EUROZONE NOTES

---

**DAMNED IF YOU DO, DAMNED IF YOU DON’T**

# The Working Poor

BY DANIEL RAVENTÓS AND JULIE WARK

Address, “Almost 8 million jobs have been created during this mandate so far. With 235 million people at work, more people are in employment in the European Union than ever before”. But he did beg a couple of key questions. What kind of jobs? Who is doing what and for what?

The OECD tells another story in its report, “Understanding the Socio-Economic Divide in Europe” (January 26, 2017), pointing out that if the average income of the richest 10% was seven times higher than that of the poorest 10% in the 1980s, it is 9½ times higher today. The 10% wealthiest households have amassed 50% of total wealth and the 40% least wealthy just over 3%. And a quick comparison of working conditions before and after the crisis shows, once again, that the differences between EU member states are considerable. Spain—bailout poster child with one of the Eurozone’s highest growth rates—stands out as being among the worst countries in this regard. Temporary workers account for more than 25% of the workforce, and 90% of contracts signed in 2015 were temporary. Some people have had more than 130 contracts in two and a half years. One in five people are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, a number that rises to more than one in three for children. In beautiful Seville, so loved by tourists, more than 40% of children live in poverty.

The social effects are long-term and devastating. Eurofound’s 2016 European



Quality of Life Survey shows that the working poor are much more likely to have mental health problems than the working population in general. Inadequate, overcrowded, dark, damp, cold housing in dangerous neighborhoods with no recreational or green zones spawns serious vulnerability in terms of health, education, crime, pollution, vandalism, physical safety, more social exclusion and more poverty. The EU Horizon 2020 project NEGOTIATE pays special attention to young people, showing links between unemployment, cannabis use and mental illness. The associated falling birth rates portend a “perfect demographic storm”.

The plight of the working poor in the West calls into question old assumptions about the “traditional functions”—self-esteem, reinforced social relations, and living in dignity—of wage labor. We’re not referring to work in general as this would include both instrumental and autotelic activities (with an end or purpose in themselves) as well as voluntary and reproductive (domestic and care) work. In the case of wage labor, the “traditional functions” start looking delusional. Work is more like Huey Lewis’ blue-collar rock depiction back in 2005: “Busboy, bartender, ladies of the night / Grease monkey, ex-junky, winner of the fight / Walkin’ on the streets it’s really all the same / Sellin’ souls”. Hardly anyone gives a damn about people having to suffer the indignity of “sellin’ souls”.

Remunerated work is usually instrumental (unlike autotelic activity), with some kind of end in sight, like accommodation, food, clothing, leisure activity and so on. What counts is the instrumentality of attaining something else and, at the most basic level, staying alive. Marx sums it up. When “labor is external to the worker [...] it is forced labor. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it. [...] External labor, labor in which man alienates himself, is a labor of self-sacrifice, of mortification.” And long before Marx, Aristotle described wage-labor as “part-time slavery”.

Surveys asking workers about the sense of their employment quickly demolish trite notions of “traditional functions”. It’s no secret that many people consider that their work makes no sense. For example, *The Wall Street Journal* (July 19, 2016) reported that job satisfaction in the US had “hit a 10-year high”, but with only 46.9% of workers expressing satisfaction with their jobs. So does wage labor really dignify a person? Indeed, many jobs attack dignity, freedom and justice, the three basic principles of human rights. Recognition of this goes way back to Roman law which makes a clear distinction between two kinds of job contract, the *locatio conductio operis* and the *locatio conductio operarum*. With the former, an individual contracted another (a silversmith or a tanner, let’s say) to do the job specified in the contract. The latter meant that one person provided unspecified services to another for a certain period of time. The first contract respects the worker’s dignity because a free person offers another free person a clearly designated kind of service, but the second type subverts dignity because making one person dependent on another’s whims is an assault on freedom. Or, as the oligarchic republican Cicero put it in *De Officiis*, “the very wage they receive is a pledge of their slavery”.

One thing is part-time wage slavery as understood by republican thinkers in ancient Greece and Rome, and another is the tightly interconnected global phenomenon of present-day slavery, with 40.3 million people affected, 10 million of them children, and 24.9 million in forced labor. But there are similarities. Many westerners think of slavery as an atrocious practice occurring in poor, underdeveloped countries. But much of today’s slavery—as Cicero understood it—is alive and well in the West too when women are forced into prostitution, septuagenarians can’t retire because they can’t survive on a Social Security check, and it can also typify domestic work, factories, and sweatshops. Vulnerable people are forced,

with threatened or real abuse, into dehumanizing conditions of servitude, as a commodity that is all but owned by an “employer”, with physical constraints on freedom of movement, and (mainly in cases of immigrant girls and women) being trafficked, especially in the sex trade. Young people are terribly susceptible to exploitation in conditions of semi-servitude. Ignacio Doreste from the European Trade Union Congress, points out that, on “youth salaries” of as little as four euros per hour, young people need at least two full-time jobs just in order to survive. But they’re not free to make life choices. Without radical change, the vicious circle can only get more vicious.

One measure which could constitute radical change is universal basic income (UBI) but, like many another good idea, it is being sequestered by billionaires like Richard Branson, Elon Musk, and Mark Zuckerberg. They see it as a “safety net” (whose?), a way of confronting increased automation in industry. Many right-wing UBI supporters see it as a way of doing away with or minimizing welfare and public services. They’re not far from Friedrich Hayek’s dictum that a minimal income is a “necessary part of the Great Society in which the individual no longer has specific claims on the members of the particular small group into which he was born”. It becomes a kind of charity which, ignoring causes, poverty and suffering, takes them for granted as collateral damage of an unchallengeable economic system, an ill to be arbitrarily ameliorated but not abolished.

But, given the huge numbers of unemployed, working, and slaving people living in conditions of the starkest material existence, this universal, unconditional measure might also lay the foundations for change toward a much more just, free, environmentally responsible society. Naomi Klein, speaking in favor of a UBI, observes: “when people don’t have options, they’re going to make bad choices.” Unemployment and poor employment are not just a matter

of work but one with grave social, political, economic, and environmental ramifications. Giving people the means to make good choices might even allow things to get revolutionary. **CP**

---

## The New Nuclear Weapons \$1.74 Trillion for H-bomb Profiteers and “Fake” Cleanups

BY JOHN LAForge

“We like to cook. We don’t like to do the dishes.”

Trivializing nuclear weapons the way he makes light of sexual assault, white supremacy, beating up critics, deporting millions, shooting someone in the street, bombing civilians and torturing suspects, Donald Trump blithely “tweeted” about the US arsenal in December 2016: “The US must greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capability until such time as the world comes to its senses regarding nukes.”

Mr. Trump’s handlers were trying to steal thunder that day, Dec. 23rd, from the UN General Assembly where most of the world actually was coming to its senses regarding nuclear weapons, voting overwhelmingly in favor of a resolution to begin negotiating a treaty banning them. The remarkable Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons or Ban Treaty was finally adopted by the UNGA on July 7, 2017, and will take effect when it’s ratified by 50 states. Then, on Oct. 6, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons was declared the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize winner for its successful effort to see the UN adopt the Ban Treaty. Of course, the US government was having none of it.

Both the Obama and Trump administrations publicly opposed and obstructed efforts to enact the ban, and last October the Congressional Budget Office reported on the colossal price of their all-out pro-nuclear stampede in the opposite direction. The CBO’s report (Approaches for Managing the Costs of US Nuclear Forces, 2017 to 2046) projects that the military-industrial complex’s plan to rebuild the entire US nuclear arsenal from top to bottom, including new warhead production facilities, would cost \$1.2 trillion between 2017 and 2046.

This staggering sum involves contested plans to produce: new nuclear-armed long-range bombers, land-based missiles, missile-firing submarines, and their propulsion reactors (\$772 billion); new nuclear cruise missiles; the first guided or “smart” gravity H-bomb, and jet fighters to carry them (\$25 billion); a rebuilt complex of laboratories and production facilities, in Tennessee, New Mexico and Missouri (\$261 billion); and replacement command and control systems that enable the ongoing threat to use the weapons (\$184 billion). Allocating the

\$1.2 trillion by department, the GAO estimates that \$890 billion will go to the Pentagon and \$352 billion to the Department of Energy (DOE) and its bomb-building wing known as the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA).

While the CBO’s cost estimate is flabbergasting enough, the agency “lowballed” its estimate by at least \$541 billion according to Robert Alvarez, a former DOE senior policy advisor. Writing in the Washington Spectator, Alvarez notes that by excluding the costs of environmental restoration and waste management in the 70-year-old nuclear weapons complex, the CBO “hides” and downplays more than half-a-trillion dollars. The \$541 billion “comes from the same congressional spending account” as the \$1.2 trillion weapons complex upgrade, Alvarez notes, raising the actual inflation-adjusted total estimate to \$1.74 trillion. Clean-up costs were perhaps left out to reduce the hair-raising sticker shock usually prompted by trillions in new federal spending.

Ignoring or belittling the toxic and radioactive legacy of decades of US nuclear weapons production is a longtime practice among weapons proponents. One Livermore National Lab design engineer told me 30 years ago over the phone, “We like to cook; we don’t like to do the dishes.” Three typical examples of this condescension toward contaminated production sites—Oak Ridge Tenn., and Los Alamos, New Mexico, and Kansas City, Missouri—are looked at below.

The \$1.7 trillion weapons complex rebuild was originally proposed in 2016 by President Obama, who reportedly agreed to it as a quid pro quo for the Senate’s Ratification of the New Start Treaty with Russia. The weapons industry bonanza appears to be a zero sum tribute to inflation, since it won’t increase the size of the nuclear arsenal. Another couple of trillion will have to be diverted, however, if, as reported by NBC News last Oct. 11, President Trump’s summertime demand for a “tenfold increase” the nuclear arsenal’s size is enacted. It’s only a partial relief that no one takes Trump’s asinine misnomer seriously in this instance, and that Secretary of State Rex Tillerson left the July meeting calling the game show president “a fucking moron.”

### “We don’t have money anymore” but for war

While debating the Republican’s \$1.5 trillion tax cut bill, Utah Senator Orrin Hatch, Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, spoke about the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) which needed its \$15 billion appropriations renewed after expiring last Oct. 1. CHIP subsidizes health exams, doctor visits, prescriptions and other medical care for children in 9 million low-income families. Mr. Hatch actually said on the record: “[T]he reason CHIP is having trouble is because we don’t have money anymore.” Mr. Hatch had just given away CHIP’s budget 100 over in a single tax cut gifting industrialists and the super-rich. With austerity budget cuts like the Republicans’ Oct. 2017 budget proposal to gouge \$1 trillion from Medicaid and nearly \$500 billion from Medicare,

---

## Accurate H-bombs are not needed for deterrence. The “improvement” means the Air Force intends to use the B61s before the US is attacked in a nuclear first-strike.

---

and over half of federal discretionary funds lavished on the Pentagon, Mr. Hatch must have meant the country doesn't have money anymore except for weapons and war. The CHIP was eventually funded after a temporary government shutdown, but the White House's Feb. 12 proposed budget would cut \$17 billion from the anti-poverty Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program known as SNAP, slash the Department of Education budget by 10 percent, and phase out federal funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

The Trump Administration's official Nuclear Posture Review, issued Feb. 2nd, regurgitates the \$1.7 trillion weapons complex rebuild plan without evidence of a need for cost-cutting. A closer consideration of the 30-year-long, trillion-dollar giveaway for military contractors mocks Republican calls for belt-tightening in discretionary spending and shows Obama-era arms control talk as nothing but permanent bomb building.

### **The B61-12 guided nuclear gravity bomb (~\$13 billion)**

The Air Force is pursuing the first ever “smart” gravity H-bomb known as the B61-12. With variable explosive force of up to 350 kilotons, model 12 of the B61 will reportedly have 60% better accuracy than present-day models known as B61-3, -4, -7, -10, and -11. Critics point out that accurate H-bombs are not needed for deterrence. The “improvement” means the Air Force intends to use the B61s before the US is attacked—in a Pearl Harbor-like sneak attack known as a nuclear first-strike.

The offensive and destabilizing capability of the planned B61-12 may have led retired US Airforce Gen. Eugene Habiger, a former commander of Strategic Command overseeing all US nuclear weapons, to tell the San Antonio Express News last July 22 that, “the [B61] bombs no longer have any military usefulness.”

Still, the Air Force wants to build a few hundred new B61s to replace about 180 currently deployed in the face of broad public and official opposition at six NATO bases—in Germany, Italy, Turkey, Belgium and The Netherlands—and to pad the US stockpile. German public opinion on the B61s, shared across Europe generally, according to a 2016 survey by the Forsa Institute, found that 85% of those polled support permanent withdrawing the US bombs, and 88% oppose US plans to replace Germany's 20 remaining B61s.

William Arkin, a national security consultant for NBC News Investigates, reports that “Soviet nuclear weapons have been

removed from Eastern Europe,” and since “nuclear weapons [were] be removed from [South Korea], certainly they don't need to be physically present in Europe.” Arkin also points to NATO trend-setters who already rejected “nuclear sharing” and ousted their US B61s: Greece in 2001, and Britain in 2008.

The *Los Angeles Times* has reported that “since the end of the Cold War, most military leaders believe that our short-range ‘tactical’ nuclear weapons [B61s] based in Europe have virtually no utility.” In April 2010, when he was Vice Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. James Cartwright was asked by the Council on Foreign Relations, “Is there a military mission performed by [B61] that cannot be performed by either US strategic forces or US conventional forces?” The general answered simply, “No.”

But popular opinion and military expertise aside, the NNSA forged ahead in 2015 and estimated the B61 replacement cost at \$8.1 billion over 12 years. By January 2018 the projection had increased to between \$12 and \$13 billion, 35% over-run. Already five years behind schedule, but with plans to produce 480 of the new bombs, the B61-12s could each cost as much twice their weight in gold.

Boeing has won a choice \$1.8 billion contract to develop just the new “tail kit” for the B61, making it “smart” and, according to Jay Coghlan, the executive director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico in Santa Fe, Lockheed Martin Corp. (the general contractor) is making a brand new H-bomb. Hans Kristensen with the Federation of American Scientists agrees, saying that the B61-12 “is a new weapon because a guided nuclear bomb does not exist in the United States.” As a novel weapon, producing the B61-12 will violate both the US-ratified Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and President Obama's pledge not to develop new nuclear weapons. Even the current deployment of US H-bombs to five NATO countries who are all NPT signatories is an open violation of the treaty's Articles I and II which explicitly prohibit any such transfer.

But legal technicalities aside, and considering just the big business end of the B61, William Hartung, a Fellow at the Center for International Policy, notes that Lockheed Martin “gets two bites at the apple,” because the company also designs and builds the F-35A fighter-bomber “which will be fitted to carry the B61-12.” Other general contractors getting in on the action by building their jets to carry the new bomb will be McDonnell Douglas (the F-15E), General Dynamics (the F-16), Northrop Grumman (the B-2A, and the B-21), Boeing (the B-52H), and—although the German government hasn't

yet decided to allow it—Panavia Aircraft, builder of Germany's new Tornado jet.

Sandia National Laboratory in New Mexico is the lead designer of the new B61. Both Sandia and the Kansas City bomb plant in Missouri are operated by Honeywell which stands to take a big chunk of the B61-12's \$13 billion to the bank. Los Alamos National Lab was in on early designs, so its private operators—Bechtel, BWXT Government Group, URS Corp., and the U. of California—have also been in on the take.

### **“Interoperable warhead” (\$50 billion)**

This boondoggle of laboratory inventiveness is a warhead that in theory would be used interchangeably on submarine missiles, land-based rockets, and even air-launched weapons. Its enormous budget was slashed and then postponed temporarily by Congress, but the program is not dead. Coghlan, with Nuclear Watch New Mexico, notes that the three planned

---

**The missile makers see the retirement of the big rockets as a threat to their stockholders and consequently promote dangers and “needs” where none exist.**

---

versions of the so-called interoperable warhead, “are arguably huge make-work projects for the nuclear weapons labs ... which ironically the Navy doesn't even want,” citing a declassified Sept. 27, 2012, Navy memo that says “we do not support commencing with the effort at this time.”

### **The B-21 Raider or “China bomber” (\$127 billion)**

A new long-range, nuclear-armed “stealth” bomber known as the “B-21” or “Raider” has also been dubbed the “China bomber” because some in the military claim it's being designed to attack China. In October 2015, the Air Force awarded Northrop Grumman Corp. a “secret” contract to begin its engineering and construction development, now underway at Palmdale, California. Last March, the Air Force identified some of the other major suppliers getting in on the gravy train: Pratt & Whitney (engines), Rockwell Collins, Spirit Aerosystems, Janicki Industries, BAE Systems, GKN Aerospace, and Orbital ATK.

Air Force vice chief of staff Gen. Stephen Wilson, speaking to the House Armed Services Committee last March, said the

B-21 had finished “preliminary design review” and that the first bomber may be operational by the mid-2020s. Arthur Villasanta, reporting on Gen. Wilson's testimony for chinatopix.com, noted that the Air Force wants 100 of the “very long-range” B-21s at an estimated total cost of \$80 billion or up to \$564 million per plane. The remaining \$136-to-\$150 million in Gen. Wilson's estimate may be a matter of padding, but given the weapon industry's routinized cost over-runs and delays, the general's \$80 billion price-tag and timeline projections are as reliable as TV commercials.

Unlike the other Air Force heavy bombers—the B-1B “Lancer” built by Rockwell Corp., and the B-2 “Spirit” made by Northrop-Grumman Corp.—the B-21 is reportedly being built to carry all the nuclear weapons now used on the B-52s. These include: “12 Advanced Cruise Missiles, 20 Air-Launched Cruise Missiles, and eight bombs,” according to airforce-technology.com. The website didn't specify that the “bombs” are the B61 nuclear gravity bombs which are also scheduled for upgrade and replacement in the trillion-dollar tax give-away.

Without even attempting to present to Congress some “need” to replace today's bombers, the Air Force says it wants to operate the new B-21s along with its B-1s (until 2038), and its B-2s (until 2058), according to Kris Osborn writing for thenationalinterest.com, belying the idea that new bombers are a needed. The GBO report combined the nuclear weapons “mission” costs of operating all three heavy bombers and sees \$127 billion overall, not the \$80B lofted by the Air Force.

The B-21 is reportedly being built to attack extremely far-off targets, beyond even what today's B-52s can reach—further, that is, than the 16,000 miles round-trip bombing run that one B-52H flew (a world-record for a combat mission), flying from Guam to bomb Iraq in 1996, according to Ron Dick and Dan Patterson in Aviation Century. The B-52 “H” is the eighth of Boeing's endlessly profitable series of B-52s.

However, the need for bomber “modernization” has been refuted by the Air Force itself, which coldly boasts of its current fleet's killing power. Maj. Kent Mickelson, operations director for the USAF 394th combat training squadron, refuted the pretext in an April 2016 interview, saying that today's B-2 “is still able to do its job just as well as it did in the '80s. ... [N]obody should come away with the thought that the B-2 isn't ready to deal with the threats that are out there today. It is really an awesome bombing platform.” Mickelson should know, Osborn reported since he helped plan and execute the US bombardment of Libya in 2011.

### **The Columbia Class ballistic missile submarine (\$313 billion)**

The Navy submarines that fire long-range nuclear weapons are called Tridents or Ohio Class subs. Shipbuilders and admirals want to retire and replace their 14 Tridents (designed and built by General Dynamics Electric Boat Div.) with 12 new so-called Columbia Class ballistic missile subs. Beyond





*The B-21 stealth bomber.*

General Dynamics, the industrial base that takes tax money for building such subs, two football fields long and costing 7 to 8 billion apiece, includes hundreds of supplier firms, labs and research facilities across the country.

The CBO report says that over the 2017-2046 period, the total Navy and Energy Department costs to maintain and modernize today's Trident subs, their ballistic missiles and their warheads—while building their replacements—are projected to be \$313 billion. Of the total, \$79 billion would be for operating and sustaining the current systems. The remaining \$234 billion would be for the next generation of systems, including operation and sustainment of those systems once they are fielded. The Navy also wants all new missiles for the Columbia Class, for a few tens of billions of dollars more.

The Congressional Research Service has been mildly critical of the Navy's history of gross cost over-runs. In a December 2017 report, the CRS said, "Some of the Navy's ship designs in recent years ... have proven to be substantially more expensive to build than the Navy originally estimated," citing a Congressional Budget Office study that found "the Navy in recent years has underestimated the cost of [prototype ships] by a weighted average of 27%." Just the average cost over-run for the \$313 billion Columbia submarine program would cover CHIPS \$15 billion annual budget—if only Mr. Hatch had any money anymore.

Not surprisingly, General Dynamic Corp.'s price hikes for the new submarine are already underway. The CBO's \$90 billion (2017) cost estimate for the program's first 10 years, covering

the first two new subs and initial plans for a third—lead ships are always pricey—is \$8 billion over the Navy's 2015 estimate.

### **The Long Range Stand-Off (LRSO) missile (\$30 billion)**

The Long Range Stand-Off missile is supposed to replace the nuclear-armed Air Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM). The Air Force already has about 528 operational ALCMs at Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota, so the "new cruise missile" has been called unnecessary by everyone from peace activists to retired Pentagon chiefs. Cancelling the project would reportedly save \$30 billion, or two CHIP allotments for which we "don't have money anymore."

The military and its contractors can be counted on to exaggerate the need, value, and capability of the new weapons, and the interchangeable players in industry and the Pentagon always say the same thing about "national security." So the LRSO is being touted by the Pentagon, Lockheed, and Congress as crucial for "countering Russian aggression," pointing to Moscow's annexation of Crimea. These pretexts must be verbalized with a wink since H-bombs can't counter Russian or Chinese actions on their own borders without incinerating the contested areas.

The LRSO missile has been condemned by former Sec. of Defense William Perry as the most "uniquely destabilizing" new weapon in the government's rebuilding extravaganza. Its most well-known unnerving aspect is that it can carry either a nuclear or a non-nuclear warhead. Mr. Perry and

former Assistant Sec. of Defense Andy Weber argued in the Washington Post, “We should no longer run the risk that a conventionally armed cruise missile might be mistaken for one with a nuclear warhead, thus starting a nuclear war by mistake.”

Marylia Kelly, coordinator of Tri-valley CARES, a watchdog group that hounds the Livermore National Lab in California, reports that the pro-war Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein has said, “The LRSO ... by the Pentagon’s own admission would have a role ‘beyond deterrence.’ Congress shouldn’t fund dangerous new nuclear weapons designed to fight unwinnable nuclear wars.”

In spite of the pointed criticism, the Air Force wants to start fielding the LRSO by 2030, and last August, the Pentagon awarded separate \$900-million contracts, one each to Lockheed Martin Corp. and to Raytheon Corp., for a 5-year development competition for the LRSO.

The Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center will reportedly select a single winning contractor to build the new missile in 2022. This industrial competition among profiteers is managed so cynically that even the loser banks hundreds of millions. The bard must have been thinking of the masters of war when he sang, “there’s no success like failure.”

While these billion-dollar deals sound like huge jackpots for the big corporations, the Ritz-Carlton context is important, if hard to fathom. Imagine this: the Pentagon paid \$46 billion to Lockheed Martin alone in just the past fiscal year. As CEO Marillyn Hewson likes to say, “The hell with conflict resolution.”

It’s not that the cushy, high-paying, high-status jobs must be protected for decades without producing usable products, but, rather, as Gen. Robin Rand, commander of Air Force Global Strike Command [its real name], told the House Armed Services Committee’s Strategic Forces Subcommittee last May, “The LRSO [is] an absolutely essential element of the nuclear triad.”

Gen. Rand may have been pushing back against powerful skeptics like former Sec. Perry, who, in two scathing Washington Post op-eds, reported that, “The US does not need to arm its bombers with a new generation of nuclear-armed cruise missiles” [the LRSO], and demanded, “Mr. President, kill the new cruise missile.”

## **A “Ground Based Strategic Deterrent” long-range missile (\$149 billion)**

Although the Air Force’s long-range, land-based ballistic missiles (ICBMs) are the most dangerous, accident-prone, and scandal-ridden of the Pentagon’s three nuclear weapons systems (sea-based, bomber-based, and land-based) it is still moving ahead with a proposed replacement. If Congress approves what’s been dubbed the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD), the Pentagon would buy 640 missiles (up from today’s 450), and would refurbish existing launch silos, missile support equipment, and command-and-control

systems—for a cost of about \$149 billion over 30 years.

Last August, Northrop Grumman Corp. and Boeing Corp. were awarded contracts (\$349.2 million and \$328.6 million, respectively) to competitively churn out GBSD missile technology and program studies. Again, the Air Force will pick a winning contractor while the missile biz “competition” sees no success like failure.

Currently spread across parts of Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska, Montana and North Dakota, today’s Minuteman III missiles have been authoritatively ridiculed as “the greatest source” of the danger of an accidental nuclear war. Retired Secretary of Defense and respected nuclear weapons expert William Perry, in op-eds in the New York Times in 2016 and the Washington Post (in 2017, with Gen. James Cartwright, a former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), has said, “the United States can safely phase out its land-based ICBM force,” saving money and eliminating “the most dangerous weapons in the world” which “could even trigger an accidental nuclear war.” Reporting on Mr. Perry’s Dec. 3, 2015 speech, Defense News reported “[Perry] said ICBMs are simply too easy to launch on bad information and would be the most likely source of an accidental nuclear war. He referred to the ICBM as ‘destabilizing’ in that it invites an attack from another power.”

Even nuclear weapons advocates like current Pentagon chief Gen. James “Mad Dog” Mattis have questioned the retention of ICBMs, telling the Senate Armed Services Committee in January 2015 that, “You should ask: ‘Is it time to reduce the triad ... removing the land-based missiles?’” More recently, Brent Talbot of the Air Force Academy faculty, writing fondly about other H-bombs in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, slammed plans to replace land-based giants, declaring that “Intercontinental ballistic missiles ... should be phased out of the nuclear arsenal.”

Both Sec. Perry and the GAO report that early cancellation of the GBSD and elimination of today’s ICBMs would save \$149 billion. This is because the planned “interoperable warhead” would then be far less complex (built only for submarines), and because retiring today’s land-based missiles between 2018 and 2021 would nix current plans to replace expensive rocket fuses on the Minuteman IIIs.

Heavy corporate pressure will be used in Congress to retain the Cold War dinosaurs, because, as the Federation of American Scientists reports, the Minuteman III has been profitably updated for decades (and because they produce jobs, votes and campaign contributions in the states they occupy). “Modernization programs have resulted in new versions of the [Minuteman] missile, expanded targeting options, significantly improved accuracy and survivability. Today’s Minuteman is the product of almost 35 years of continuous enhancement.” Just between 2001 and 2008, the Air Force lavished \$1.8 billion on Boeing, Morton-Thiokol, Aerojet-General, and United Technologies for their installation of new solid rocket fuel in all three stages of all 450 missiles.

Of course, the missile makers see the retirement of the big rockets as a threat to their stockholders and consequently promote dangers and “needs” where none exist. The GAO notes with apparent concern that abandoning the land-based weapons—with their incomprehensible 335-to-475-kiloton warheads—shrinks the government’s ability to wage a “large-scale nuclear exchange.”

### **Nuclear warhead production: 1) Los Alamos, New Mexico; 2) Oak Ridge, Tennessee; 3) Kansas City, Missouri (\$261 billion)**

The government’s national nuclear weapons laboratories, Sandia, Los Alamos, and Livermore are now allowed to be run by private companies in a perpetual self-fulfilling conflict of interest. These companies both advocate and feed from the federal nuclear weapons tax trough. Sandia National Laboratories is managed and operated by a wholly owned subsidiary of Honeywell International, and Honeywell runs the new Kansas City Plant. The Los Alamos National Lab, in New Mexico, the Lawrence Livermore Lab in California, and the Y-12 bomb plant in Tennessee are now all managed and operated by Bechtel. These will be the big winners in what the GAO report estimates will be a \$261 billion rebuild of these weapons labs.

#### **Los Alamos National Lab (\$7.5 billion)**

Plutonium “pits” and uranium “secondaries” are the guts of hydrogen bombs. The pits have long been turned out at the Los Alamos National Lab in New Mexico. Upgrading pit production there could cost between \$1.9 and \$7.5 billion, according to the NNSA, and lab is pushing hard to get the assignment.

I asked Don Hancock of Southwest Research and Information Center, why the DOE and Trump’s new Nuclear Posture Review latched onto a goal of producing “at least” 80 new plutonium pits every year. Hancock answered in an email, “You’re asking the wrong question. The real question is ‘Why any new pits at all?’”

Hancock has revealed that the Pantex Plant near Amarillo, Texas now stores roughly 2,740 so-called “reserve” nuclear warheads, also referred to as “hedge” or “spare” units that can be put to use at any time. A total of 15,000 plutonium warheads are maintained at Pantex and are good for 50 years, according to a report in the Guardian. The United States, with almost 1,900 deployed nuclear weapons ready to launch, and at least 10 times more usable “spares” than most nuclear-armed states have in their entire arsenals, has no reason to produce new weapons whatsoever.

Hutchison, of the watchdog group OREPA in Tennessee, spoke to the subject in an Dec. 26 email: “We have argued that Congress should commission a ‘lifetime study’ of the Y-12 ‘secondaries,’ preferably by the think tank JASON that discovered, when it completed a plutonium pit ‘lifetime study,’ that pits were useful for twice as long as NNSA said, a finding that

shut down [pit replacement plans] at Los Alamos for the time being.”

Likewise, Dr. James Doyle, a veteran of 17 years as a political analyst at the Los Alamos Lab, told The Guardian, “I’ve never seen the justification articulated for the 50-to-80 pits per year by 2030.”

Even more absurdly, a Nov. 2017 report from the NNSA sets the Los Alamos Lab in New Mexico against the Savannah River Site in South Carolina in competition to be the site of the unneeded new plutonium “pit” production. Savannah River is currently building a factory to make commercial reactor fuel using excess military plutonium. The project is 28% complete, delayed, and so over-budget that the NNSA is strangely toying with the idea of transforming its purpose midstream and building a plutonium pit factory instead. The NNSA claims the switch would cost no more than \$5.4 billion. According to the Aiken Standard, a move from fuel fabrication to “pit” production would be scheduled for 2024-2031. The move would transfer 800 jobs from Los Alamos, where the pits were last produced.

#### **Y-12 Bomb Plant, Oak Ridge, Tenn. (\$19 billion)**

Part of the bomb-building infrastructure upgrade involves the production of highly-enriched uranium “secondaries,” the thermonuclear cores of nuclear weapons, which are fashioned at the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. A massive new complex, the Uranium Processing Facility (UPF), is under construction there to produce the uranium cores for a new generation of “at least” 80 bombs a year. However, a major revamping of the plans was forced on the project when the \$600 million cost projection soared to more than \$19 billion, 31 times the original guess.

The latest UPF mock-up has been cut to an estimated \$6.5 billion. Ralph Hutchison reported last April that even this slimmed-down version, which he notes cuts corners on environmental and worker safety, is still set to cost over 10 times the original estimate.

Bechtel Corp., which manages and operates the Y-12 complex, is the majority partner of Consolidated Nuclear Security, the group building the UPF. The \$60 billion firm’s reach and profiteering is nearly unmatched in the nuclear weapons racket. Its \$32 billion in revenue for 2016 came in part from managing and operating the Los Alamos National (H-bomb) Lab in New Mexico, the Lawrence Livermore H-bomb Lab in Calif., and the Pantex Plant, in Amarillo, Texas—the nation’s final assembly point for nuclear weapons.

If successful, OREPA’s federal lawsuit filed against the prospect of a dangerous new UPF may yet foil the industry’s hopes for a needless new warhead assembly-line. OREPA’s Hutchison argues, “With no legitimate need for the UPF, the project should be cancelled and funding redirected to a facility to dismantle retired nuclear weapons and to cleaning up high-risk facilities like Y12 that pose, in the words of the



*“Ground Based Strategic Deterrent” missile test, Vandenberg Air Force Base. Photo courtesy Lompoc Record.*

DOE’s Inspector General, an ‘ever-increasing risk to workers and the public.’”

While the owners, management and workers at Y-12 drool and tool-up for the potential financial diamond mine of new weapons programs, environmentalists watching the 70-year-old facility had to bring a federal lawsuit to challenge the government’s shabby assessment of plans to produce new highly enriched uranium, the thermonuclear cores, for nuclear weapons.

According to Hutchison, the July 2017 lawsuit—brought by OREPA, Nuclear Watch New Mexico and the Natural Resources Defense Council—challenges the NNSA over, among other things, its un-analyzed plan “to use two deteriorating buildings that violate current environmental and earthquake standards” without bringing the old wrecks up to code.

### **Kansas City Plant (\$750 million)**

A poster child for the flippancy minimization of clean-up hazards at nuclear weapons production sites is Kansas City, Missouri, where the DOE has already finished part of the enormous H-bomb infrastructure upgrade, having replaced

the giant Honeywell-operated Kansas City Plant that made non-nuclear parts for every warhead in the arsenal from 1949 to 2014. A newly minted \$750 million bomb factory, collegiately named “National Security Campus,” took over for the heavily contaminated KCP in 2014.

Local community activists have had to organize to confront the government’s scandalous mistreatment of injured former KCP workers and to challenge the DOE’s flimsy plans for environmental remediation at the abandoned site known as Bannister Federal Complex. PeaceWorks Kansas City reports that, “The mission of the Coalition Against Contamination is to support workers and their families whose health was impaired” by beryllium and other toxins that were heavily used at the factory. Coalition member Ann Suellentrop, KC says the group also warns locals about the US Labor Department’s unlawful denials (exposed by a DOL whistleblower) of worker compensation claims and also about the “potential threat from toxins released during the demolition and cleanup” of Bannister.

Last October, CenterPoint Properties, which coincidentally took home hundreds of millions building the new



bomb building “campus,” won the contract to clean-up the old Bannister site. CenterPoint says it can be done for \$200 million, one-quarter of the \$800 million estimate made previously by the DOE. The Coalition Against Contamination has condemned the shabby proposal and is demanding that the site be restored to a residential rather than industrial clean-up standard in order to protect surrounding communities.

Current plans call for reclamation only to industrial standards, and, consequently, are recklessly dangerous, says Suellentrop. “The coalition advocates for use of tenting to cover the 300-acre toxic brownfield during clean-up to prevent dispersal of the dusts,” she says. Tenting would also work to prevent beryllium and other heavy metals from further contaminating groundwater and local streams during demolition. CenterPoint’s cost-cutting may save millions, but the potential dispersal of beryllium puts next door neighbors at great risk. Beryllium is so toxic that its manipulation always requires industrial-strength dust control equipment and procedures; inhaled or ingested contaminated dusts can cause the chronic, life-threatening disease berylliosis.

### How the weapons complex keeps humming

Some nuclear war experts like Sec. Perry have pointed out that H-bombs are superfluous in view of what he called “the reality of today’s US conventional military dominance.” Non-nuclear “conventional” weapons dominance is now a fact established by the non-nuclear US military bombardment, occupation and take-over of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Former Reagan presidential advisor and founder of the anti-Soviet ‘Committee on the Present Danger’ Paul Nitze made the point perfectly in 1999, soon after retiring. “In view of the fact that we can achieve our objectives with conventional weapons, there is no purpose to be gained through the use of our nuclear arsenal.” Nitze’s *New York Times* op-ed “A Threat Mostly to Ourselves,” included what should have been the epitaph for the nuclear arsenal: “I see no compelling reason why we should not unilaterally get rid of our nuclear weapons. To maintain them ... adds nothing to our security. I can think of no circumstances under which it would be wise for the United States to use nuclear weapons, even in retaliation for their prior use against us.”

With most of the world in agreement with the experts and moving to boldly stigmatize and shun nuclear weapons, how do Congress, the Pentagon and the White House gettaxpayers to pony up the trillions?

Part of the answer is decades of dreadful, seemingly plausible, and well-publicized, if fake, threats used to scare the public into nuclear madness. The “missile gap,” the “bomber gap,” the “threat of a Soviet invasion of Europe” and the bizarre “window of vulnerability,” were all useful fictions that kept contracts flowing to the arms industry. Today’s manufactured threats—from Iraq’s “WMD,” to Iran’s “destabilizing” medical isotope and reactor fuel production facilities, to North Korea’s

“suicidal” wish to attack the United States, to Russia’s annexation of Crimea, and China’s island-building—are just as ludicrous, but generally succeed in winning limited support for the pollution-intensive weapons complex.

Another part of the answer is explained by researcher William Hartung in his writing about the corrupt influence on Congress exerted by the gargantuan arms industry which profits from building the bombs. In *Sleepwalking to Armageddon* (edited by Helen Caldicott, The New Press, 2017), Hartung notes that the giant weapons contractors contributed \$50 million in campaign contributions to Congressional candidates in just the three election cycles since 2009. Simultaneously, and dwarfing that enormous sum, the weapons sector keeps almost two lobbyists on Capitol Hill for every member of Congress and it spent \$680 million on lobbying just in the last five years.

Likewise, Greg Mello, of the watchdog Los Alamos Study Group in Albuquerque, told the Guardian that the reason new H-bomb production is ever being considered is “private greed” plain and simple. “Ever since they [the national laboratories] were privatized in 2006, for-profit corporations now run all the government’s nuclear weapons labs,” Mello notes. So the military-industrial-weapons complex taints whole Congressional districts with self-serving campaign contributions and a few thousand bomb-building jobs; and it enshrines a vast persistent structural base of managerial, academic, scientific, labor, and political support for useless and unlawful nuclear weapons development. In his farewell address, President Eisenhower warned us to guard against this situation to no avail.

Former Defense Secretary Perry’s outspoken criticism of the bank-busting cost of a nuclear complex rebuild managed to move a group of just 10 US senators to write to President Obama urging him to “scale back plans to construct unneeded new nuclear weapons.” It seems the other 90 were busy raising campaign funds from the bomb builders. **CP**

**JOHN LAFORGE** is Co-director of Nukewatch, a peace and environmental justice group in Wisconsin, and is co-editor with Arianne Peterson of “Nuclear Heartland, Revised: A Guide to the 450 Land-Based Missiles of the United States.”

---

## The Writer Who Shook the World John Reed and the Russian Revolution

BY P. SAINATH

‘If Mark Twain or John Reed were alive today and looking for work, would they find it at your newspaper or channel? Could Twain have a column? Would you carry Reed’s despatches?’

That was a question I put to several American editors and journalists in 2000. I was touring the USA as an Eisenhower

Fellow and meeting, often interviewing, many media personalities there. My focus was on mavericks, anti-establishment, progressive and radical journalists, including Studs Terkel, Gore Vidal, Alexander Cockburn and Adam Hochschild. However, I did meet some very mainstream ones, including Walter Cronkite, well past 80, but quite alive and articulate. Also, Joe Lelyveld of *The New York Times*. I usually asked these questions at the end of those very different meetings.

Cockburn spilt his coffee laughing out loud at the idea of a Twain or Reed finding a place on staff in the contemporary corporate media. Terkel, though unwell, stood up and enacted a scene he'd been through in the McCarthy period, when he'd been blacklisted and was an untouchable in the media. 'I gotta act this out. Watch me,' he said. 'I'm a great ham.' Vidal (another 'blacklister' of the time) joked he probably wouldn't find a job with them himself—in 2000. Cronkite said he thought Twain might get a column or show but would lose it very quickly—mainly because 'Samuel Langhorne Clemens' contempt for the bosses of our time would surface quickly and hilariously'. Clemens was Twain's real name. Of Reed, Cronkite said, pausing a few seconds, that after six decades 'in our profession, I'd think you'd have to give that perspective a place'.

Lelyveld pondered a moment and said upfront, 'Twain probably would not find a column here...or in most mainstream publications...we do have a Bob Herbert, but...' It seemed to me he felt Twain's scathing irreverence would not easily find a place in any major paper. My question on Reed either did not register, or he did not find the author of *Ten Days That Shook the World* worthy of consideration at all. Since it was one posed as I was stepping out of his office, we couldn't pursue it.

This was late September 2000, less than a year away from 9/11. Not long after which *The New York Times*, which would have dismissed the credentials of John Reed, enthusiastically published Judith Miller's many Words of Mass Deception on mythical Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq. Miller would later be 'embedded' with a U.S. military unit in that country. She would be forced to resign from *The Times* in 2005, but her job as an embedded hack was done.

John Reed was embedded in the reality of the Russian Revolution—and before that the peasant uprising in Mexico. He was not cocooned with military or mercenary protection. In the chaos of the revolutionary uprising of 1917, he came close to being shot or otherwise killed by people on different sides of the battle. But, though exuberant, he did not mythologise or romanticise himself. And never lost his sense of humour. His account of the first hotel he went to in Moscow after November 7, 'we entered an office lit by two candles'. Reed and his companions were welcomed in this hotel office. 'Yes, we have some very comfortable rooms,' they were told, 'but all the windows are shot out. If the gospodin does not mind a little fresh air'. It is important to remember that the gospodin, the Russian word for 'mister', would have to suffer below freezing temperatures in

his room. Reed was not going to live the high-life as a reporter. He would stay in a room that opened out to the Moscow air, and would eat whatever he could find,

"We dined at a vegetarian restaurant with the enticing name, 'I eat nobody', and Tolstoy's picture prominent on the walls, and then sallied out into the streets."

John Reed was a reporter and journalist. Not a stenographer to the powerful. Nor embedded with the oppressors of those he was covering. That, of course, did not go down too well with Big Media even in his time.

For Charles Russell, who reviewed the book for *The New York Times* (April 27, 1919), Reed's message boiled down:

To revolt for the sake of revolting, to fight for the joy of fighting, to slay valiantly, to ride furiously, to shout vehemently are activities glorious. This we can easily perceive from Mr. Reed's book, as from the others. But as to why we should revolt, fight, slay, ride, and shout we are left darkling.

So it was nice to see the *New York Times* acknowledge him in its Red Century Series this year. That includes a thoughtful and reflective piece by London-based journalist-author Jack Schenker. There is also a piece in that series on the '10 days still shaking the world' by—no kidding—Condoleezza Rice (October 17, 2017). It was Rice, as then U.S. Secretary of State and a great supporter of the WMD fabrications, who in 2002 wrote a major piece in—you guessed it—*The New York Times*, on 'Why We Know Iraq Is Lying'. Before she joined the administration of George W. Bush, Rice was a Soviet specialist at Stanford University. Despite the title ripping off on his own, Reed gets just a few words in her Red Century piece. But they're interesting words,

*Ten Days That Shook the World* captures the excitement of that moment. The author, John Reed, was an American who made no secret of his Bolshevik sympathies. He nevertheless provided a riveting and vivid—if not impartial—account of the most pivotal phase of the revolution, as viewed from the ground.

From his vantage point, Reed could only tell a part of the story, however.

No single report or book can ever tell more than a part of the story of something so large as the Russian Revolution of 1917. Yet, as AJP Taylor (probably the most popular British historian of the 20th century) wrote in his preface (Penguin 1977) to *Ten Days That Shook the World*,

Reed's book is not only the best account of the Bolshevik Revolution, it comes near to being the best account of any revolution.

Reed the journalist himself made no claim to being impartial.

In the struggle, my sympathies were not neutral. But in telling the story of those great days I have tried to see events with the eye of a conscientious reporter, interested in setting down the truth.

The authenticity of his writing on the revolution gained from its being a first-hand, eyewitness account. Seen from the streets and barricades, drawn from the meeting halls and fiery debates. Acute powers of observation, aligned always with a sensitivity towards ordinary people. Not 'experts.' Quite unlike the eager-to-embed hacks who would decades later go all the way to Afghanistan and Iraq and work from briefings of the U.S. military units that had them on a leash—only to produce stories that could have been written just as easily in Washington D.C. Some of them probably were. Reed always sought to escape censorship from governments. Very unlike the steno-serfs of our time who would each day meekly submit their copy to their military for approval. (It sort of gave the word 'copy' a new meaning).

Reed's writing skills lent excitement and urgency to his account. Painting vivid pictures in words, he captured a moment, many moments, in time.

Describing Petrograd 'on the eve',

Up in the Nevsky in the sour twilight, crowds were battling for the latest papers, and knots of people were trying to make out the multitudes of appeals and the proclamations posted in every flat place. ...An armoured automobile went slowly up and down, siren screaming. On every corner, in every open space, thick groups were clustered; arguing soldiers and students. Night came swiftly down, the wide-spaced streetlights flickered on, the tides of people flowed endlessly...It is always like that in Petrograd just before trouble.

Inside the Smolny, where the revolution set up its offices,

... the long, gloomy halls and bleak rooms seemed deserted. No one moved in all the enormous pile. A deep, uneasy sound came to my ears, and looking around, I noticed that everywhere on the floor, along the walls, men were sleeping. Rough, dirty men, workers and soldiers, spattered and caked with mud, sprawled alone, or in heaps, in the careless attitudes of death. Some wore ragged bandages marked with blood. Guns and cartridge belts were scattered about...

"In the upstairs buffet so thick they lay that one could hardly walk. The air was foul. Through the clouded windows, a pale light streamed. A battered samovar, cold, stood on the counter, and many glasses holding dregs of tea...

Reed came from a privileged background. He was—like Walter Lippmann—a Harvard graduate. He was—unlike Lippmann—never a war propagandist for his government. Reed, when covering Pancho Villa's revolt, wrote of Mexicans

without that racial disdain that so much of US journalism still reeks of. In *Ten Days That Shook the World* and elsewhere, he wrote of Russians, Americans, Europeans and others without a trace of prejudice. He was dealing with human beings.

Lippman knew Reed. And had once even praised his coverage of the Colorado Coalfield War as 'undoubtedly the finest reporting that's ever been done'. In the years that followed, Reed stayed on the Left. Lippmann became a pillar of the establishment, churning out reams of U.S. war propaganda. He would even peddle his own, to push his government towards internment fellow citizens in prison camps on US soil during World War II. Well over two-thirds of the 120,000 Japanese Americans who were thrown into these camps were U.S. citizens, born in that country. Orphans were not spared, nor even Japanese children adopted by white American parents. None of those interned was charged with a crime. They were incarcerated anyway.

In a dreadful piece, 'The Fifth Column On The Coast'

---

## Reed's writing skills lent excitement and urgency to his account.

---

(February 12, 1942), Lippmann targeted Japanese Americans. He warned of the 'imminent danger of a combined attack from within and from without'. He did concede that 'there has been no important act of sabotage on the Pacific coast'. For him, that only proved 'that the blow is well organised and that it is held back until it can be struck with maximum effect'. Veteran journalist Richard Reeves believes Lippmann's piece pushed President Roosevelt into giving California authorities the go-ahead for the prison camps. Reeves is author of the heat-rendering book *Infamy: The Shocking Story of the Japanese-American Internment in World War II*.

Years later, Lippman was to look back on the propaganda of the war: 'It seemed impossible to wage the war energetically except by inciting the people to paroxysms of hatred and to utopian dreams'. He did not, though, mention the tragic event. Lippmann is celebrated as the father of modern journalistic objectivity. Harvard's key journalism institution, the Nieman Foundation, is housed in a building named after him. Of fellow-Harvardian Reed, Lippmann once wrote, 'By temperament, he is not a professional writer or reporter. He is a person who enjoys himself' (*The New Republic*, December 26, 1914). In today's Big Media jargon, Reed would be labelled an 'activist', not a journalist.

There was also this difference between Reed and so many of the 'star journalists' of today. He did not return from exotic

locales with 'war stories' of which he was himself the focus. No 'Christiane Amanpour in Baghdad' nor 'Anderson Cooper on Syria's border'—where the war in those countries is less important than the mere presence of these television icons on their soil, however briefly. CNN's own promos leave you in no doubt as to who makes the story—and it's not the natives, not even the friendly ones. *Ten Days that Shook the World* was not promoted as 'John Reed from Red Square.' There was a revolution in Russia. He covered it. He was not invisible in his

the spectacle. Reed probably hoped the pageant would also work as a benefit performance for and by the strikers.

In Colorado, he covered the miners' strike of 1913-14 which the Rockefellers and other mining interests of the day moved to crush with great barbarism. Reed arrived there a few days after the infamous Ludlow massacre which saw the Colorado National Guard attack a settlement of over a thousand workers. The workers fought back.

Estimates of the number of deaths vary but are all sadden-



John Reed in Moscow, 1920.

reporting, but was clear that he wasn't the story. And he was consistent: the principles he stood for in Mexico and in Russia were also those he practiced at home. Within the United States he covered—and participated in—the struggles of workers, miners, and other poor people.

As the historian Howard Zinn put it of Reed,

He rushed into the centre of wars and revolutions, strikes and demonstrations, with the eye of a movie camera, before there was one, and the memory of a tape recorder, before that existed. He made history come alive for the readers of popular magazines and impoverished radical monthlies.

Reed was moved by the silk weavers and workers strike in Paterson, New Jersey. And was arrested in 1913 while trying to speak for the strikers. (The first of many times he would be arrested in his lifetime). Deeply moved by the brutal crack-down on the workers, he went on to stage a pageant recreating scenes from those battles—in New York's old Madison Square Garden. As many as 1,200 strikers were reported to have participated in the pageant. Many thousands more came to watch

ing. In all, perhaps, over two dozen people died at Ludlow, several in firing—the Guard used machine guns—and also 11 children and 2 women who suffocated to death in the miners' camp, owing to fires the Guard had set to burn the tents. More lives were lost in the days that followed, in Guard action and in rioting. Still more were slain in the other battles of the 'Colorado Coalfield War.' Overall, from differing estimates, it would seem the total ran to over a hundred deaths in the 'war.'

In Reed's powerful prose,

In three hours every striker for 50 miles in either direction knows that the militia and mine guards had burned women and children to death. Monday night they started, with all the guns they could lay their hands on, for the scene of the action at Ludlow. All night long the roads were filled with ragged mobs of armed men pouring towards the Black Hills. And not only strikers went. In Aguilar, Walsenburg and Trinidad, clerks, cab drivers, chauffeurs, school teachers, and even bankers seized their guns and started for the front. It was as if the fire started at Ludlow had set the whole country aflame.



Contrast that with *The New York Times*' calling for the use of force in the Colorado War,

"With the deadliest weapons of civilization in the hands of savage-mined men, there can be no telling to what lengths the war in Colorado will go unless it is quelled by force ... The President should turn his attention from Mexico long enough to take stern measures in Colorado."

John Reed didn't just speak 'truth to power'—he spoke the truth about power. Relentlessly, passionately, powerfully.

Reed was fiercely independent, truthful, but did not pretend to be neutral—a distinction completely lost with the onset of corporate-driven journalism.

Reed set out in his early days viewing himself as a poet—but his poetry was not distinguished. It was certainly not his strong point. However, some of his prose borders on and melds with the poetic. And that comes out best in his first book *Insurgent Mexico*. A spellbinding account of the uprising in Mexico of the poor and the destitute led by Pancho Villa, one of the great figures of the Mexican revolution. But that's another book, another story. It still seems worthwhile to repeat the lines about Reed by Alfredo Varela in the preface to the Argentinian edition of *Insurgent Mexico*,

In the end he is a mural painter. The great fresco is his speciality, the panoramic picture which reveals history in a thousand details.

By the time John Reed reached Russia, he had seen and developed his own understanding of class war. If *Insurgent Mexico* was near poetry, *Ten Days That Shook the World* is pulsating prose. It also takes the reporting of the marginalised to yet another, incredible level. Reed works in documents, declarations, debates a great deal more than in his earlier writings, yet the excitement never flags. And he sets the record straight on many things including 'the loot of the Winter Palace'.

Reed saw ordinary people becoming 'self-appointed sentinels' to protect the treasures of the Palace. And where the poor themselves were ransacking anything,

The paintings, statues, tapestries and rugs of the great state apartments were unharmed... The most highly-prized loot was clothing which the working people needed. In a room where furniture was stored, we came upon two soldiers ripping the elaborate Spanish leather upholstery from chairs. They explained it was to make boots with...

Indeed, some precious stuff was also stolen. He cites the Bolsheviks then and later repeatedly appealing for the return of the 'inalienable property of the Russian people', of the 'valuable objects of art that were stolen'. The new Soviet government created 'a special commission comprised of artists and archaeologists to recover the stolen objects'. Even more appeals were made.

About half the loot was recovered, some of it in the baggage of foreigners leaving Russia.

Reed was to return to the United States where, of course, he was indicted for sedition. The trials of Reed and his editor Max Eastman ended with hung juries. Reed had already returned to Russia where he died of typhus in 1920.

His wife Louis Bryant wrote to his editor Max Eastman while Reed's illness raged. She wanted him to take plenty of rest before he returned to the United States where she feared he would be imprisoned.

Early in his sickness I asked him to promise me that he would rest before going home, since it only meant going to prison. I felt prison would be too much for him. I remember he looked at me in a strange way and said, 'My dear Little Honey, I would do anything I could for you but don't ask me to be a coward'

*Ten Days That Shook the World* did more than give its fans a good read. It raised questions, it carved out a kind of journalism that would allow the marginalised in society to be heard in their own voice. It inspired readers rebels, revolutionaries. As Howard Zinn would write of him,

John Reed could not be forgiven by the Establishment for refusing to separate art and insurgency, for being not only rebellious in his prose but imaginative in his activism. Protest joined to imagination was dangerous, courage combined with wit was no joke. Grim rebels can be jailed, but the highest treason, for which there is no adequate punishment, is to make rebellion attractive.

This article is adapted from Sainath's introduction to LeftWord's new edition of *Ten Days That Shook the World*. **CP**

## References:

Charles E. Russell, 'Bolshevism, in Theory and Practice, As Friend and Opponent See It', *The New York Times*, April 27, 1919.

Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (Harper & Row, 1980).

John Reed, *Insurgent Mexico* (D. Appelton and Co., 1914).

Louise Bryant, *Six Red Months in Russia* (George H. Doran, 1918).

*Shaking the World: John Reed's Revolutionary Journalism*, ed. J. Newsinger (Bookmarks, 1999).

**P. SAINATH** is the founder and editor of the People's Archive of Rural India. He has been a rural reporter for decades and is the author of *Everybody Loves a Good Drought*.

---

# The Old and the New Mexico's Big and Contentious 2018 Elections

BY KENT PATERSON

"Never forget October 2." Recalling the 1968 government conducted massacre in Mexico City, every year the words commemorate the somber day in Mexican history when hundreds of students and others were gunned down while demanding democracy and social reforms. Now, as the 50th anniversary of the bloody repression approaches, Mexicans are again at a crossroads in charting a political future in which demands of the '68 movement are realized.

On July 1, the country will elect a new president, congress and officials in 30 of the nation's 32 states. More than 3,400 posts are up for grabs, according to the official National Electoral Institute (INE), the agency overseeing the federal contest and assisting with state ones.

The winners of July's contests will help stay or alter Mexico's course at a moment when the neo-liberal economic model implanted in the country during the 1980s has widened inequality, corruption and delinquency rage all about, and the Trump administration, in its zeal to project a Neo-Monroe Doctrine in Latin America, is pressuring its southern neighbor on different fronts.

Contextually, the 2018 elections occur when prospects for political and social reforms that once electrified the nation are long dissipated, political parties and politicians are held in disrepute, and viable alternatives for change seem distant or impossible to many.

Dr. Lorenzo Meyer, prominent Mexican historian and columnist, argues that Mexico has fallen short in transitioning from the one-party state of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) that dominated the country's political life from 1929 to 2000, despite multiple political reforms, the appearance of greater press freedom and alternating periods of governance between the PRI and other political parties at the federal, state and municipal levels.

"Today's system is neither authoritarian or democratic. It is in a state of flux..." Meyer was quoted in Reforma newspaper. "We have had less dirty and more dirty elections, more fraudulent and less fraudulent elections, but we have never arrived to the point of a true election with 21st century standards."

Fernando Rivera, veteran political analyst and a co-founder of presidential candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's National Movement for the Regeneration of Mexico (Morena) party in Aguascalientes, said the 2006 election which Lopez Obrador officially lost by less than a one percent margin was "considered a fraud," triggering post-electoral protests. Fraud was also in the air the second time the candidate lost in 2012 but was "more difficult to document," Rivera said.

A Pew Research Center survey released last year found only 17 percent of Mexicans trusted the national government and, ominously, 42 percent gave a positive opinion of hypothetical military rule.

Benefitting from the gross failure of the civilian law enforcement and justice system to curb delinquency and tackle corruption, authoritarian solutions to the Mexican crisis hover as a backdrop, evidenced by the recent congressional passage of a new internal security law, approved over the objections of national and international human rights organizations, which institutionalizes the role of the Mexican military in the so-called drug war.

## Bloody Election Year Red Flags

Although the INE assures that 2018 will witness a fair and peaceful election process, red flags are fluttering high in the political winds, especially over regions dominated by organized crime groups increasingly intertwined with political parties and possessing the "dark" money capable of influencing the vote.

Fanning fears were the murders from late November to the first week of March of at least 27 current or former government officeholders and aspirants, primary candidates and political party members in various states, according to Mexican press accounts. In Guerrero state alone, the daily El Sur documented 12 political aspirants who were murdered between April 2017 and February 2018.

Quoted in El Sur, Beatriz Mojica, senatorial candidate for the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), concluded that the murders constituted an "emergency situation" necessitating safe election guarantees from the president and the governor.

Early in the year, Proceso magazine's Arturo Garcia Rodriguez prophetically assessed the killings as a "grave precedent of what will continue happening during the electoral process."

Interviewed shortly before the March 2 assassination of recent mayoral hopeful Homero Bravo in Zihuatanejo, Guerrero, Leticia Rodriguez, leading Morena activist in the Pacific Coast town, mulled the wave of slayings, including the February murders of two women politicians in Guerrero, Antonia Jaimes of the PRD and Dulce Nayeli Rebaja of the PRI. In a territory where "narco-politics" reigns, mystery pervades and impunity prevails, such killings always leave doubts, Rodriguez observed.

"I don't mean to victimize the victims, but there is always a suspicion of why this person, why their candidacies were terminated," she said.

The harassment of Claudia Sheinbaum, Mexico City mayoral candidate for Morena, reinforced suspicions of organized political sabotage. On multiple occasions during December and January, shadowy groups disrupted Sheinbaum's events, injuring La Jornada reporter Angel Bolanos in one instance. Many analysts consider the Mexico City mayor's seat the



*Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, Mexico City, 2012. Photo courtesy Eneas De Troya (Wikimedia).*

second or third most powerful political post in the nation, and Sheinbaum is in strong standing to win the job.

Apart from attacks on politicians, violence against civil society activists and journalists clouds the election year picture. According to the Cerezo Committee human rights organization, 48 activists and journalists nationwide were murdered during 2017—by far the worst year for such violence in a review done by the group for the period beginning in 2007.

Slaughtered along with family members in Guerrero last October, small farm leader Ranferi Hernandez represented the intersection between politics and social movement activism. After a political exile in France in the late 1990s, Hernandez returned to Mexico and was elected as a legislator for the then center-left PRD party.

More recently, Hernandez was backing Lopez Obrador in the presidential race and reportedly considering another legislative run. His assassination removed a historic and influential actor from the state's political scene.

2018 started off on a bad note, too. On January 13, political journalist Carlos Dominguez was stabbed to death in front of family members at an intersection in the northern border city of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas.

“Until the Mexican government decides to change the pattern of impunity in the country, criminals will continue to get away with killing journalists,” said Alexandra Ellerbeck, North American program coordinator for the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists.

In the southern state of Oaxaca, meanwhile, reporter Agustin Silva vanished in January, while the following month three members of Committee for Indigenous Rights (CODEDI) were gunned down in an ambush. On February

5, independent Acapulco journalist and YouTuber Pamela Montenegro was shot to death.

Jan Jarab, Mexico representative for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, urged authorities to investigate a lead pointing to the complicity of government officials in Montenegro's murder.

“Besides, we can't forget that this aggression against a journalist focused on political criticism happened in the middle of an electoral process,” Jarab said in a communique. “Authorities must clarify crimes against journalists, who by diverse media exercise freedom of expression and contribute to an informed and critical society...”

In assessing the upcoming elections, the persistence of deep-seated illegalities like conditioning the delivery of social services for votes and/or outright vote-buying, as were widely reported in four controversial 2017 state elections, must be considered.

“If the circle of illegal money-vote buying-social programs-vote cooptation continues, an authentic (democratic) transition will continue as a (paper) project and the continuity of a degrading reality will persist as our only horizon,” Meyer warned in his weekly column.

## **The Old and The New in 2018**

Three big political coalitions will vie for the presidency and congress. The governing PRI has again joined hands with the Mexican Green Party and New Alliance Party in a bid to retain power, naming former budget and taxation secretary Jose Meade as the presidential pick.

Cognizant of the PRI's tarnished political status, the PRI chose Meade, who is not a party member and has served in

both PRI and National Action Party (PAN) administrations, in an effort to paint his candidacy as a “citizen” run. A 49-year-old Yale graduate, Meade hails from the second wave of Mexican technocrats schooled in the Washington Consensus of free trade and U.S.-style elections.

Morena party leader Lopez Obrador is making his third run for the nation’s top job, in an alliance with the small Labor and Social Encounter (PES) parties grandiloquently dubbed “Together We Will Make History.”

A third coalition, uniting the conservative PAN with the shrinking PRD and centrist Citizen Movement party, is fielding 39-year-old former PAN leader Ricardo Anaya as its man.

Perhaps deftly, Anaya has lashed out at the Pena Nieto administration over a scandal fed by government leaks alleging Anaya’s involvement in money laundering connected to a real estate deal.

Crying foul, Anaya demands both an independent prosecutor and a truth commission with foreign participation to impartially investigate the allegations.

Traditional notions of left, right and center are muddled as the election process moves forward. Befitting the non-ideological drift of Mexican politics in favor of pragmatic or opportunistic group and personal interests, the national party coalitions aren’t necessarily duplicated in the state and municipal races, where one party or another is peeling off on its own or combining with parties from the rival coalition, usually over local candidate nominations.

Permitted to run outside party confines for the first time in a presidential race, three “independents,” all former members of the PRI, PAN or PRD, were still poised in March to gain INE approval for a spot on the ballot. In order to achieve ballot status, each contender had to present almost 900,000 verified signatures of registered voters from at least 17 states.

The three finalists include one time Priista Jaime “El Bronco” Gonzalez, governor-with-leave from the northern border state of Nuevo Leon; Margarita Zavala, former PAN lawmaker and wife of ex-president Felipe Calderon; and Armando Rios Piter, ex-PRD member and senator from Guerrero.

Not making the cut were Edgar Ulises Portillo, a Mexico City academic who targeted the same Millennial vote as Rios Piter; Maria “Marichuy” Martinez, an indigenous healer from Jalisco who serves as the spokesperson for the Zapatista-supported Indigenous Government Council (CIG) and journalist Pedro Ferriz.

In February, as the primaries wrapped up, Marichuy was injured in a vehicular accident in the state of Baja California Sur that left one of her collaborators dead.

For Marichuy and the CIG, however, their plunge into electoral politics wasn’t really about getting elected to office. Instead, the indigenous movement viewed the 2018 elections as an opportunity to spread its message, consolidate the movement across the nation and build bridges to the left with

other progressive forces. As March rolled around, the CIG and National Indigenous Congress were analyzing their next steps in the electoral process.

Marichuy’s supporters charged that technical and geographic problems impeded the required electronic uploading of signatures to the INE. For his part, Ferriz asserted widespread commercial trafficking of voter rolls tainted the independent primary.

Scores of independents also gathered signatures for a whack at congressional seats, with seven of them finally approved by the INE for Senate races and 39 others for the Lower House contests.

The federal institute disqualified many aspirants for allegedly submitting false or irregular signatures or not filing campaign expenditure reports. Accordingly, the INE declared that legal sanctions against some unsuccessful contenders could be forthcoming.

Other newer elements in the 2018 political scene include reforms that require half of many party candidacies be assigned to women, as well as allowing the consecutive reelection of certain offices such as mayor. The Morena Senate candidacy of Nestora Salgado is another notable development in this year’s race.

After living in the U.S. for many years, Salgado returned to her native Mexico, becoming a commander in Guerrero’s grassroots community police. Arrested in 2013, Salgado was subsequently freed after an international freedom campaign accused the government of trumping up charges designed to suppress an effective popular movement.

For Leticia Rodriguez, though, “The progress of women in politics has been little.” Rodriguez traced the history of women in Mexican politics, noting that even though women were active participants in the 1910 Mexican Revolution female suffrage was not granted until 1953. A second advance occurred in the 1970s, when Mexico City feminist activists raised public consciousness about gender inequality and violence against women, Rodriguez added.

“This was an important movement, and positions opened up for women. But all these issues remain pending,” the former Zihuatanejo city council member said. For instance, abortion is still largely viewed as a moral issue rather than a matter of women’s control over their bodies, Rodriguez affirmed. Liberalized in Mexico City, abortion is nevertheless subject to restrictions across the rest of the nation.

For the third election cycle now, Mexicans who live abroad and are registered to vote will be allowed to cast ballots via mail. As in previous contests, the United States has been the scene of election year visits by the major presidential contenders to migrant communities.

Whether 2018 will attract significantly better migrant participation than in earlier elections is questionable. With a March 31 registration deadline looming, the INE reported in late February that only 467,566 of the more than 11 million

estimated Mexican nationals residing outside the country were registered to vote. Of that number, 57,106 people had already expressed their intentions to vote.

In 2006, the first year Mexicans living abroad were permitted to vote in a presidential election, 34,000 voters mailed in in their ballots mail, according to the old Federal Election Institute. In 2012, the number rose to slightly more than 41,000, later reports indicated. Though few migrants have voted in past elections, expatriates remain a potential swing vote. In both 2006 and 2012, the PRI came in way last among Mexicans abroad.

In 2018 the huge and wild card-like youth vote looms “fundamental,” according to Rivera. In his home state of Aguascalientes approximately 43 percent of the registered voter roll consists of young people aged 18 to 34, the local edition of *La Jornada* reported. The youngest strand of the roll will be allowed to for the first time, Rivera noted, though it’s not clear who they will mainly support for or even if they will actually vote in large numbers.

Interfaced with the generational question is the increasing influence of social media networks and the decline of commercial television once closely controlled by the government, “especially among the youth, who might not even watch it. They’re not interested in news on Televisa,” Rivera said. “There is an incredulousness among many people” of anything emanating from government quarters or corporate media, he added.

## **All Eyes on Lopez Obrador**

Historically identified with the left nationalist tendency in Mexican politics, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) leads the presidential polls with anywhere from about a quarter to more than a third of respondents.

Yet the Lopez Obrador of 2018 has struck a far different tone than in previous races, pivoting to the center and enlisting the support of thousands of defecting members of a host of political parties. A who’s who of the nation’s elite and even one-time enemies like former leading PAN politicians such as Gabriela Cuevas and German Martinez now form part of Team AMLO. Proceso documented more than 34 individuals connected to Mexican economic, political and media elites who hold important campaign positions or are slated to serve in Lopez Obrador’s cabinet if he wins the presidency.

The 64-year-old former Mexico City mayor’s alliance with the PES, a grouping with conservative positions on sexuality, sparked protests by some supporters like iconic writer Elena

Poniatowska. Despite the emergence of a “made-over” AMLO in 2018, the presidential contender maintains a reform agenda that tilts left and irks powerful enemies at home and abroad.

In a nomination acceptance speech, Lopez Obrador rattled off 51 concrete actions he will promote as president, including raising workers’ wages, transforming the 50 Mexican consulates in the U.S. into defense centers for migrants, and dismantling the CISEN national intelligence agency implicated in political spying.

He promises to reclaim at least part of Mexico’s oil sovereignty from foreign interests; reinvest in a countryside that’s been turned upside down by official neglect, corporate globalization and narco conquest; guarantee popular access to costly secondary and higher education; overturn an unpopular No Child Left Behind like law; end privatizations; and hike paltry senior pensions.

Without raising taxes, AMLO pledges to finance such reforms by slashing governmental corruption and subjecting high officials who are accustomed to living like royalty to “republican austerity.”

“We are going after the roots of the regime of injustice, corruption and privilege that exists in the country,” Lopez Obrador vowed to thousands of supporters at a

---

## **One FBI memo tried to smear Tom Hayden with the worst possible label of they could invoke: “FBI informer.”**

---

February rally in Guadalajara closing the primaries.

Sizing up the elections, journalist and author Jenaro Villamil pinpointed factors auguring an AMLO victory, among them the fracturing of the three major political parties, the collapse of the PRD and the rise of Morena as the country’s left-leaning force, President Pena Nieto’s rock-bottom rankings, and a crafty divide-and-conquer strategy pursued by Lopez Obrador.

In Rivera’s view, AMLO has another big plus in the ground game: he alone among the presidential contenders has visited every municipality in Mexico, spending the last 12 years on the road and meeting with locals in even the most remote, forgotten parts of the country.

## **Who is the Real Big Bad Wolf?**

Given Lopez Obrador’s resurgence, the strident attacks against him as a dangerous radical and irresponsible populist are not surprising. For Washington and its right-wing allies in Latin America, the presidential frontrunner looms as a thorn in their side, maybe even a big, sticky one.

A politician who frequently invokes historic nationalist presidents like Benito Juarez and Lazaro Cardenas, President Lopez Obrador could prove a serious obstacle in the intensifying campaign of the Trump administration and the Latin American right to isolate oil-rich Venezuela and finish off the

Bolivarian Revolution.

To Washington's displeasure, AMLO holds a firm stance against the Trump administration's border wall.

"If Trump insists (on the border wall) we will go to the United Nations to present our complaint. We will do what (Mexican president) Peña Nieto has not done," Lopez Obrador said while on the primary campaign trail.

As for NAFTA, the former Mexico City mayor has declared that a new trade deal should be postponed until after the July 1 elections. His position is generally shared by prominent Morena senators and a network of nearly 100 unions, small farmer organizations and civil society organizations like Greenpeace Mexico and the Digital Rights Network which advocate a withdrawal from NAFTA if popular interests aren't prioritized.

Embellishing a script from 2006 and 2012, Lopez Obrador's opponents are trying, without success so far, to paint the front-runner as a Venezuelan and Russian stooge.

Breathing life into a sagging story, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson declared at a February 2 press conference in Mexico City that Russian "fingerprints" were on elections worldwide and that Mexico should "pay attention." Nonetheless, the senior U.S. official offered no concrete evidence of Russian intervention in the Mexican elections.

Tillerson's comment came during a Latin American tour aimed at solidifying the anti-Venezuela bloc.

"We respect all the governments of the world and ask that they respect our principles of non-intervention and self-determination of the peoples," Lopez Obrador said in response to Tillerson's remarks.

Tillerson's Russia warning was delivered on the 170th anniversary of the U.S.-Mexico Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, a militarily strong-armed agreement which ceded much of the modern-day U.S. West to Washington and a historical date that's well remembered south of the border.

"Since when has the U.S. not interfered, though in different degree depending on the circumstances, in our internal life?" questioned Lorenzo Meyer." Nowadays, it's the same wolf that cries, 'the other wolf is coming.'"

## A Thorny Election Day and Beyond

Far from a given, Lopez Obrador's victory and reform agenda could prove difficult to implement if the new president is faced with a divided Congress, mused Fernando Rivera. A former citizen member of the old Federal Electoral Institute, River contemplated another post-electoral scenario like the one confronted by center-left opposition candidate Cuauhtemoc Cardenas after he won the 1997 Mexico City mayoral race.

After the reformer's win, crime and violence initially shot up as organized crime and corrupt authorities attempted to undermine the new government, Rivera recalled. If anything, nationwide insecurity is even more problematic.

"Whoever wins, I don't know if they will resolve this because (organized crime groups) are increasingly pulverized and violent," he cautioned.

Concurring with federal election officials, Rivera predicted an avalanche of post-election legal challenges in the courts. "There are going to be many complaints, irregularities and incidents," he said. "It's hoped (election judges) will act with impartiality."

Will Mexicans overcome cynicism, fear, confusion, bribes and violence on July 1? Will a massive voter turnout overwhelm attempts at electoral manipulation? For his part, based on estimates by the political parties, Rivera projected more than two-thirds of registered voters will go the polls. Rodriguez, too, rejected the notion that abstentionism might rule the day. "People want to go out and change the circumstances of the country," she insisted. **CP**

**KENT PATERSON** is a journalist living in New Mexico.

---

## Poison Pens The FBI At Work

BY PAUL KRASSNER

Howard Rasmussen was not his real name. Actually, he was an FBI agent working in the New York office. That was 50 years before the contrast pendulum of the current FBI. One day in October 1968, Rasmussen was reading an article in *Life* magazine. Then he sat down at his typewriter, trying creatively to choose every word so carefully that it would reek of credibility, as he composed a letter to the editor of *Life* on plain stationery.

Rasmussen complained, "Your recent issue which devoted three pages to the aggrandizement of underground editor Paul Krassner was too, too much...you must be aware that *The Realist* is nothing more than blatant obscenity...To classify Krassner as some sort of 'social rebel' is far too cute. He's a nut, a raving, unconfined nut...count me out, gentlemen." Rasmussen signed his letter "Brooklyn College, School of General Studies."

Before he could be permitted to mail the letter to *Life*, he was required to send a copy to FBI headquarters in Washington, along with this memo:

The 10/4/68 issue of *Life* magazine contained a three page feature on Paul Krassner, editor of *The Realist* and self-styled "hippie." Krassner is carried on the RI [Round-up Index] of the NYO [New York Office].

Bureau authority is requested to send the following letter to the editors of *Life* on an anonymous basis. It is noted that the *Life* article was favorable to Krassner.

Rasmussen was merely doing his job, writing that poison-pen letter, but is that how taxpayers' money was supposed to



be spent? I had broken no law. The return memo—approved by J. Edgar Hoover’s top two aides—was addressed to agents at the New York office:

“Authority is granted to send a letter, signed with a fictitious name, to the editors of Life magazine. Furnish the Bureau the results of your action.

NOTE: Krassner is the Editor of *The Realist* and is one of the moving forces behind the Youth International Party, commonly known as the Yippies. Krassner is a spokesman for the New Left. Life magazine recently ran an article favorable to him.

New York’s proposed letter takes issue with the publishing of this article and points out that the *The Realist* is obscene and that Krassner is a nut. This letter could, if printed by Life, call attention to the unsavory character of Krassner.

There were Rasmussens all over the place. One memo tried to smear Tom Hayden with the worst possible label they could invoke—“FBI informer.” The FBI distributed a caricature depicting Black Panther leader Huey Newton “as a homosexual,” and ran a fake “Pick the Fag” contest, referring to Dave McReynolds as “Chief White Fag of the lily-white War Resisters League” and “the usual Queer Cats-like Sweet Dave Dellinger and Fruity Rennie Davis.”

The FBI always took pains to instruct agents to “Insure mailing material utilized and paper on which leaflet is prepared cannot be traced to the Bureau.” In that context, “Bureau authority was received for New York to prepare and mail anonymously a letter regarding [an individual’s] sexual liaison with his step-daughter (Age 13) to educational authorities in New Jersey” where he was a teacher.

In 1969, the FBI’s previous attempt at mere character assassination of me escalated to a slightly more literal approach. This wasn’t included in my own Co-Intel-Pro (Counter-Intelligence Program) files but, rather, discovered elsewhere by Sam Leff. At the Chicago convention, Leff had erased the line between anthropologist and activist. Later, as a Yippie archivist, he investigated a separate FBI project calculated to cause rifts between the black and Jewish communities.

The FBI produced a WANTED poster featuring a large swastika. In the four square spaces of the swastika were photos of Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, Mark Rudd of SDS, and myself. Underneath the swastika was this message:

LAMPSHADES! LAMPSHADES! LAMPSHADES!

New York radio station WBAI recently featured programs under the tutelage of black revolutionary Julius

Lester of the Guardian and Leslie R. Campbell, sometime teacher at JHS 271, from which it appeared that the only solution to Negro problems in America would be the elimination of the Jews. May we suggest the following order of elimination? (After all, we’ve been this way before.)

- All Jews connected with the Establishment.
- All Jews connected with Jews connected with the Establishment.
- \* All Jews connected with those immediately above.
- All Jews except those in the Movement.
- All Jews in the Movement except those who dye their skins black.
- All Jews (Look out, Jerry, Abbie, Mark and Paul!)

Once again, this flyer was approved by the FBI director’s top aides:

“Authority is granted to prepare and distribute on an anonymous basis to selected individuals and organizations in the New Left the leaflet submitted...Assure that all necessary precautions are taken to protect the Bureau as the source of these leaflets that suggest facetiously the elimination of these leaders.”

Of course, if some overly militant black obtained that flyer and eliminated one of those “New Left leaders who are Jewish,” the FBI’s bureaucratic butt would be covered: “We said it was a facetious suggestion, didn’t we?”

But truly, in 1982, Julius Lester converted to Judaism. Now, go, Mueller! **CP**

**PAUL KRASSNER** is editor of *The Realist*.

---

## One memo tried to smear Tom Hayden with the worst possible label they could invoke “FBI informer.”

---



**AGAINST CHARITY**  
Daniel Raventós & Julie Wark

"This compelling, deeply thoughtful book is both an eloquent manifesto for the radical politics of kindness and a brilliant unmasking of our current 'benevolent' system—the tech billionaires and Hollywood celebrities who disguise greed as charity and privilege as generosity."  
—Mike Davis, author of *Revolution and Its Enemies*

**AVAILABLE AT**  
[store.counterpunch.org](http://store.counterpunch.org)  
or (707) 629-3683

**\$16.95**  
**PLUS SHIPPING**

ISBN-13: 978-1849353045  
e-book ISBN: 978-1-849353052

---

# CULTURE & REVIEWS

---

## Appalachia Say You Will

BY LEE BALLINGER

**"The Appalachian mountain people today are no better than barbarians. They have relapsed into illiteracy and witchcraft. They are the American counterparts of the latter-day white barbarians of the Old World."—A Study of History by Arnold Toynbee, who never set foot in Appalachia**

Toynbee's much-lauded book, published right after World War II, found an echo during the 1950s in the Chicago Tribune. In a series of editorials, the paper attacked Appalachian newcomers for turning the city into "a lawless free-for-all with their primitive jungle tactics ... with the lowest standard of living and moral code of all... No other group is so completely devoid of self-pride and responsibility... even worse than Negroes."

This is hardly just some ancient history, fading away in the digital age. Today we are confronted with the likes of Hillbilly Elegy by J.D. Vance, a best-seller since its publication in the summer of 2016. Vance dismisses Appalachians as lazy and drug-addled, concluding that their problems "were not created by governments or corporations or anyone else. We created them."

Really? Let's look at some facts.

Between 1900 and 2005, some 104,500 coal miners were killed on the job in America, according to Jeff Biggers in United States of Appalachia.

Scientists at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health have identified the largest cluster of advanced black lung disease ever reported,

centered in Appalachia. "We've gone from having nearly eradicated it in the mid-1990s to the highest concentration of cases that anyone has ever seen," says Scott Laney of NIOSH.

"In 1979," Elizabeth Catte writes in *What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia*, "Harvard paid just \$2.82 in annual property taxes on 11,182 acres of land in Martin County, Kentucky." While Harvard freeloards off of a corner of Appalachia in order to add to its \$36 billion endowment, forty percent of Martin County residents live in poverty. Adding insult to injury, water bills there come with warnings that the local water could increase the risk of cancer.

West Virginia loses \$220 million a year from its state budget due to corporate tax cuts facilitated a decade ago by a Democratic majority in the state legislature.

In 1995, Purdue Pharma won federal approval for the highly addictive pain medication OxyContin, which ended up generating \$35 billion in sales for the company. According to Sam Pizzagati in Inequality.org, "The FDA examiner who ran the approval process would later come to work for Purdue....A congressional committee has just found that 'two of the nation's biggest drug distributors shipped 12.3 million doses of powerful opioids to a single pharmacy in a tiny West Virginia town over an eight-year period.'"

"Purdue Pharma pleaded guilty to a felony count of 'misbranding' OxyContin," author Sam Quinones writes. "To avoid federal prison sentences for its executives, the company paid a fine of \$634.5 million."

We did not create our problems—corporations and government and the synergy between them did that. J.D. Vance blames us, the victims. He isn't alone, of course. National Review executive editor Reihan Salam, whom

Vance describes as a "dear friend," has employed Vance as a contributor to his magazine, a publication which praised Hillbilly Elegy for proving that white Appalachians have "followed the black underclass and Native Americans into family disintegration, addiction, and other pathologies."

Vance says PayPal billionaire Peter Thiel, who helped Vance transition from poverty to the one percent by hiring him at Thiel's Mithril venture capital fund, is "super-thoughtful and incredibly nice." Thiel says that giving women the vote undermines democracy. That's thoughtful. Nice. Thiel donated \$1.25 million to Donald Trump's presidential campaign. How thoughtful and nice was that? Upon his election, Trump immediately appointed billionaire Wilbur Ross as secretary of commerce. Ross was the owner of a coal mine in Sago, West Virginia where twelve Appalachian miners died in an explosion in 2006. Whose fault was that?

Meanwhile, J.D. Vance is about to get an even higher profile, having just sold Hillbilly Elegy's film rights to Oscar-winning director Ron Howard.

It might seem strange, looking through the distorted modern lens that has been so carefully crafted for us, but Appalachian whites were once portrayed in heroic terms. Unfortunately, it was for their role in dispossessing Native Americans of their land. "In every skirmish with Shawnee, in every frontier battle, the pioneers made visceral claims to territory," writes Steven Stoll in *Ramp Hollow: The Ordeal of Appalachia*. "Their unsanctioned seizure of a contested frontier justified the expansion of American authority."

This westward push was accompanied by the depiction of settlers as brave pioneers—Daniel Boone and many others. "The admiration of mountaineers marked a particular geopolitical

moment,” Stoll notes. “By 1860, that moment had ended...Their story no longer coincided with the one about a nation destined to embrace a continent... Mountain whites lost their lands under the same assumptions, if not the same tactics, deployed against Indians. They shared one other thing in common: their displacements made them poor.”

Land became a commodity and distant owners (George Washington once owned 30,000 acres in Appalachia) sent out their agents to enforce their titles and buy up more. They were determined to rip out the timber, dig up the coal, and send the profits back east. In the process, a definitive end was put to the practice of mountaineers treating the land as a commons, a community resource. This was justified by force-feeding the concept of private property into the body politic. Human displacement was regarded as a small price to pay for “progress.”

This was the birth of Appalachia, a region but also a process, a process that continues today. As Steven Stoll notes: “The southern mountains are half a billion years old, but Appalachia did not exist before the industrial invasion of those uplands during the nineteenth century.”

Today Appalachia has 25 million people spread across 737,000 square miles. The popular conception is that the region is dominated by people of Scots-Irish descent. Elizabeth Catte responds that “More than 80 percent of Appalachia’s population identifies as white, but for the past thirty years, African Americans and Hispanics have fueled more than half of Appalachia’s population growth....There are more people in Appalachia who identify as African-American than as Scots-Irish.”

This should come as no surprise. Appalachia is well-known for coal, but most people don’t realize that black miners dug a lot of it. At the time of the epic 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain in which coal miners battled police and the army, thirty percent of the miners in McDowell County were black. Between

1900 and 1930, the African-American population in Appalachia increased from 40,000 to 108,000.

At one point, 46 percent of coal miners in northern Alabama were black, 15 percent in Kentucky. This was especially true in iconic Harlan County, where towns such as Benham and Lynch attracted thousands of African-American miners.

Eastern Kentucky was shaped in part by the history of slavery. There were several lynchings there in the early twentieth century. Pikeville had once been the site of a thriving slave market.

Yet when authors Thomas Wagner and Phillip Obermiller interviewed several black Harlan County miners, they found that “In coal towns, blacks and whites neighbored often and easily within their own communities. Social interaction was frequent, food and favors were exchanged on an almost daily basis, and emergency assistance was just a neighbor or two away.” This happened despite the fact that mine owners, recognizing the problems racial unity could cause them, had their security forces break up interracial social interactions.

Singer Bill Withers, a native of Slab Fork, West Virginia and the son of a coal miner, remembers that “You had to go to the back door if you wanted a milkshake or something from one of the restaurants in town. But the kids left to their own devices, we played together.”

On the other hand, according to retired Harlan County miner Joe William Trotter, “Working class solidarity was a highly precarious affair...White workers and employers coalesced to a substantial, even fundamental, degree around notions of black inferiority.”

Poor whites also became a despised race. Racialization has often gone along with ejection and enclosure, offering an intellectual tool for taking resources away from people said to be incapable of progress or change. This is what we find in the southern mountains.—Steven Stoll

In the wake of Donald Trump’s election as president, both Ted Koppel and the Huffington Post declared that McDowell County, West Virginia was unambiguously Trump Country, with the clear implication that this was an accurate regional symbol.

In the 2016 election, only 27 percent of McDowell County voted for Trump and voter turnout there was at a record low. In 2008, Barack Obama won the county by 8 percent. In the 2016 Democratic primary, Bernie Sanders, with his program of free education and free medical care, won handily there, as he did in every county in West Virginia and across much of Appalachia. In McDowell County, there was strong local support for the recent statewide teachers’ strike, which pitted the state’s educators against governor Jim Justice, a billionaire coal mine owner.

When you stop and think about it, McDowell County may actually be the opposite of Donald Trump.

In 1996 Charlotte Pritt rode an anti-corporate platform to the West Virginia gubernatorial nomination, defeating current U.S. Senator Joe Manchin. Instead of endorsing Pritt, the Democratic Party supported the Republican candidate and Pritt lost in a close general election. In 2016 Pritt garnered 42,068 votes under the banner of the tiny, underfunded Mountain/Green Party. In McDowell County, she came in third out of five candidates for governor.

Lissa Lucas, running for the office of West Virginia State Delegate under the slogan of “Holler From The Hollers,” recently drove one hundred miles to a public hearing at the state capitol to read off a list of the fossil fuel donors who had funded many of the politicians present. She was promptly expelled from the chamber. The response to this was a wave of support, notably over \$50,000 donated to Lucas’s campaign (in 2016, all three candidates combined raised only \$17,498).

West Virginia and the rest of Appalachia fueled the American

Industrial Revolution, giving the nation mountains of coal and tens of billions of board feet of lumber. But that is the old. Between 1950 and 1970, the number of coal miners in the U.S. fell from 513,860 to 128,375. There are now only about 36,000 miners. Alpha Natural Resources, the nation's second-largest coal company, filed for bankruptcy in 2015, shedding 6,500 jobs and closing eighty mines in the process. Not one of the thirteen most productive mines in the United States today is located in Appalachia.

If that is the old, then what is the new?

Steven Stoll proposes a "Commons Communities Act," a sweeping legislative change informed by both the elimination of most coal mining jobs and the planetary destruction caused by fossil fuels. The Act proposes the creation of a vast series of "commons communities," locally owned and administered. The communities would be paid for by an income tax on the one per cent and a tax on any corporation which "closes its operations and moves elsewhere, leaving behind toxic waste and poverty." There will be no homelessness, no corporation may purchase property in the community, and incentives will be provided for doctors and teachers to live there.

But the details are less important than Stoll's philosophy of change. "If our sense of the possible doesn't contain an element of the unlikely," he writes, "then it's only a compromise with what is. There can be no improvement without a viable political identity. This would require the white working class of the southern mountains to stop identifying their interests with those of the rich and powerful.... Instead of telling a story about themselves that separates them from African Americans, American Indians, and all those who have been dispossessed, they could tell a story about their common predicament."

For this to happen, it will also be necessary for everyone else to stop "identifying their interests" with the vicious stereotypes of poor whites that remain so easily accepted in America.

To get a glimpse of what such a society might look and feel like, check out the

new video from country music superstar Carrie Underwood, who grew up on a farm in Checotah, Oklahoma and who has performed in Appalachia throughout her career. Close to half of the large cast in "The Champion" video are people of color, including Muslims. Special guest is hardcore rapper Ludacris. The civil rights movement is featured prominently, with a nod to the Me Too movement and to workers, farmers, marching bands and athletes fast and slow. It ends with a stunning mosaic that includes all of it.

"The Champion" video might seem corny to some, but for context compare it to a presentation Hillbilly Elegy author J.D. Vance made at the University of West Virginia on February 21. According to a local blogger, "Vance's talk reinforced familiar negative stereotypes about Appalachia at nearly every turn—we're deliberately ignorant, too lazy to work, and too dependent on government assistance to want to do anything to take ownership over our lives—and blamed 'environmental' and 'cultural' factors for the region's problems."

On a Dick Tracy wristwatch, J.D. Vance and Donald Trump may be what time it is in America today. But on the town square clocks across Appalachia and the rest of the country, a new version of standard time is straining to establish itself. That momentum will continue to build only to the degree that we recognize our "common predicament." We need to hurry up and talk to each other about it. Time is running out. **CP**

**LEE BALLINGER** is co-editor of *Rock & Rap Confidential*. Free email subscriptions are available by writing [rockrap@aol.com](mailto:rockrap@aol.com).

---

## Unsane: Soderbergh's Truth

BY ED LEER

In an interview around the time of *Kafka*, Steven Soderbergh stated that his filmmaking hero was Howard Hawks

because, "he made a lot of great films. A lot of different films, which I would like to do." In the same interview, Soderbergh points out that both *Kafka* and his debut, *Sex, Lies and Videotape* deal with the search for truth, one on a personal level, the other societal. It's fascinating that so early on, Soderbergh knew the type of filmmaker he wanted to be as well as the central theme that would preoccupy his entire body of work. His latest film, *Unsane* is his first full-blown horror piece and his first shot entirely on an iPhone. That said, it still finds the director investigating the thorny nature of truth. It is not a great film, Hawksian or otherwise, but it is different and we should be grateful to have an elder-statesman of cinema whose willing and able to take the risks that Soderbergh takes.

The premise of *Unsane* is a particularly pulpy one. A young woman named Sawyer Valentini has just moved to a new city with a new job. From the first scene we see she's tough if not a bit prickly by the way she talks to customers on the phone or how she rebuffs the advances of her new boss. Following a mental breakdown during a one-nightstand, Sawyer seeks out a support group for stalkers, making it clear to the viewer why she moved. She mentions suicide to the therapist and before knowing what's happening, she's placed under psychiatric evaluation. Things go from inconvenient to terrifying when Sawyer starts seeing her stalker as an orderly at the facility.

As is the problem with most films about supposedly sane people being held in mental institutions, the first half of *Unsane* is frustrating not only because of the staff's refusal to listen but also Sawyer's poor ways of conveying her sanity. Her initial bouts of anger only get her into more trouble. That being said, the character of Sawyer is perhaps one of horror film's most interesting and dynamic of heroines. Where most modern genre films define their female protagonists by a specific tragedy in the beginning to gain the audience's sympathy, *Unsane* holds off on Sawyer's

stalker past, instead focusing on how she deals with work, family and dating. Once she's stuck in the hospital, Sawyer is shown to be calculating and even ruthlessly manipulative.

The other strong suit the film has going for it is the villain. No. Not Sawyer's stalker. I'm referring to the hospital itself. The question of Sawyer's sanity is never fully answered. What is answered fairly quickly is how unscrupulous Highland Creek Behavioral Center can be. Sawyer learns from a fellow patient Nate (Jay Pharoah) that the whole operation is one big insurance scam and after seven days, the money runs out and Sawyer will be released. This of course becomes a challenge when David Strine, her stalker, appears to be working as a night shift orderly.

The question is whether we can trust what Nate, a mental patient, tells Sawyer. Or should we trust Sawyer when she starts seeing her stalker, having previously mistaken other people for David? If Nate is to be believed, then it's easy to see how an unethical place like Highland wouldn't screen their employees too carefully. If Nate is making up the whole thing, perhaps Sawyer is just as delusional. Sawyer's mother attempts to come to the rescue only to run into legal red tape with a Nurse Ratchett-esque Hospital Administrator, painted-on smile and all. While it seems Sawyer's mother will add an objective view of the events, Soderbergh hints that perhaps family ties make her perspective unreliable.

Each of these strains of truth gets stuck in a big knot and, as is common

for Soderbergh, he spends the final third untying the strains for us to see the bigger picture. This seems to be the closest thing to truth Soderbergh's films have to offer. He holds back certain information, while letting slip just enough to make you think one way before revealing the lies and unknowns that led the viewer down one avenue of perspec-



Still from *Unsane* (2018).

tive. It's no coincidence that Soderbergh named his recent HBO series (and interactive app) *Mosaic*.

Soderbergh has always been an advocate of digital technology, being one of the first serious directors to shoot features entirely on the medium. His work was exciting because he was one of the most light-on-his feet commercial filmmakers, sometimes even acting as his own director of photography. The use of the iPhone is certainly crucial to the story of *Unsane*. It never gives the viewer a dominant, "traditional" image they can trust. The whole film looks like it could have been shot undercover without the characters' knowledge.

The downside to this is that it feels too light and inconsequential, like Soderbergh's feet have left the cinematic ground. *Unsane* should be cat-

egorized as more a retirement project than a finished film. The compositions are sloppy and not at all close to what Sean Baker showed us was possible with an iPhone in his stunning *Tangerine*. Considering, Soderbergh is currently shooting another film using the iPhone, this may have been more a project he undertook to get test out the technology

just as *Logan Lucky* was used to test out his distribution model.

Considering that Soderbergh's indie contemporaries from the 1990s such as Tarantino and the Andersons (Wes and Paul Thomas) have all receded into large-scale period pieces shot on film, it is rather refreshing to see a director with the same clout choose to experiment and play around with a consumer camera, making a micro-budget genre film.

Howard Hawkes was able to make so many films of all different genres because he was protected within the Studio System. While Soderbergh has worked with studios on larger films, he successfully, and daringly carved out a diverse body of work while existing in the wilds of independent distribution. More important, as Hawkes would say, the films of Soderbergh are never boring. **CP**

**ED LEER** is a writer and filmmaker-based in LA. He studied English at the University of Iowa and Screenwriting at Chapman University. He is a frequent contributor to the *CounterPunch* Culture section.



# CounterPunch

ISSN 1086-2323 (print)

ISSN 2328-4331 (digital)

[www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org)

1 (800) 840-3683

\$7.50 per issue

P.O. Box 228

Petrolia, CA 95558

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



*Just In Time for Summer*

## TIE DYE SHIRTS

*tied and dyed by hand  
just for CounterPunch*

*No Two Alike!*

[store.counterpunch.org](http://store.counterpunch.org)

*while supplies last!*