

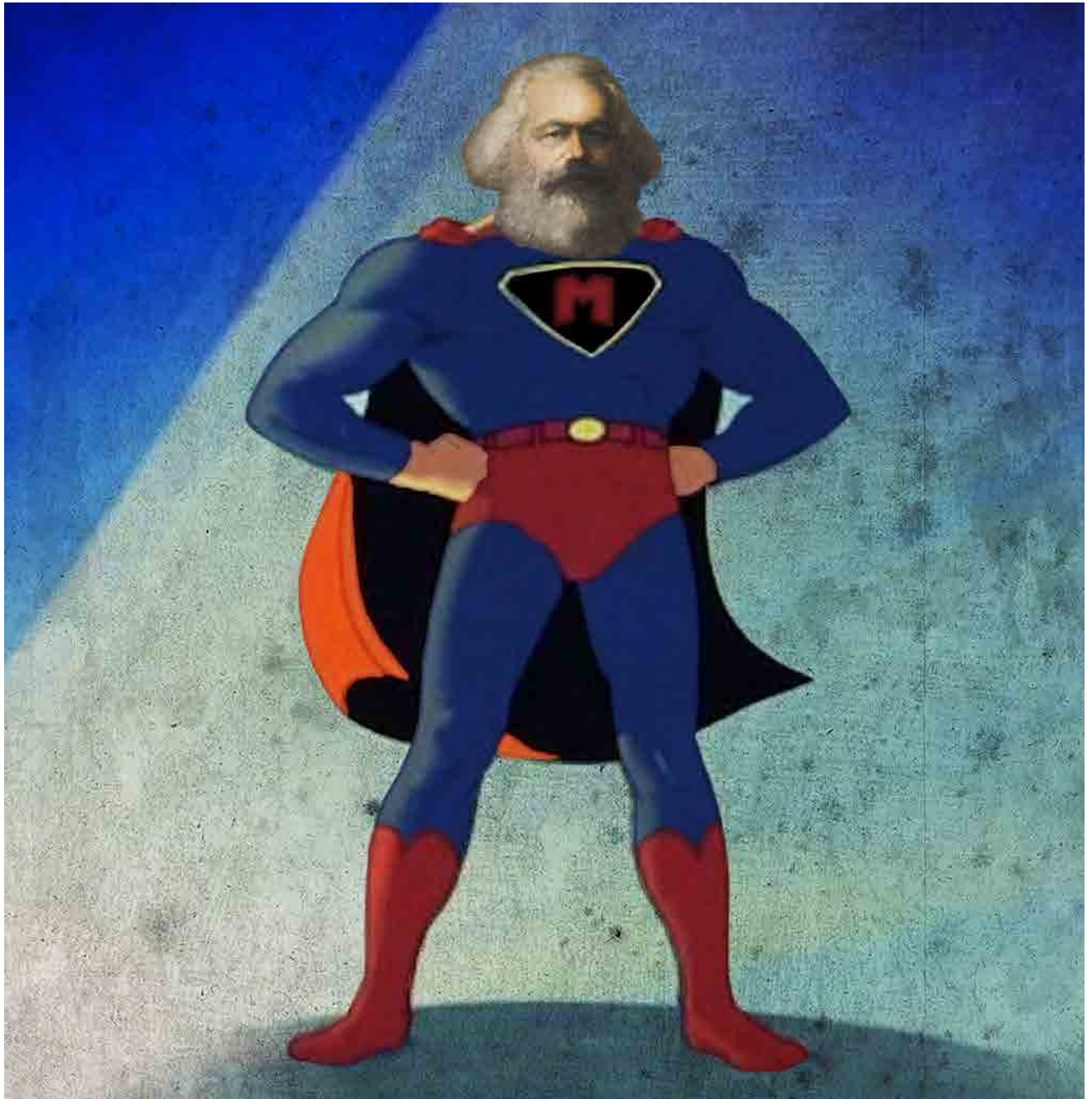
CounterPunch

THE MEANING OF MANDELA BY KEVIN ALEXANDER GRAY

THE RETURN OF KARL MARX BY LOUIS PROYECT

FUKUSHIMA'S NUCLEAR SHADOW BY PETER LEE

THE STUPIDITY OF US POLICY IN UKRAINE BY CHRIS FLOYD



CounterPunch

www.counterpunch.org
CounterPunch Magazine, Volume 21, (ISSN 1086-2323) is a monthly journal of progressive politics, investigative reporting, civil liberties, art, and culture published by The Institute for the Advancement of Journalistic Clarity, 631 Chambers Road, Petrolia, California, 95558. Visit counterpunch.org to read dozens of new articles daily, purchase subscriptions, order books, plus 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)
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COVER IMAGE:

Marx to the Rescue by Nick Roney

In Memory of
Alexander Cockburn
1941–2012



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Lay Off Dylan

Well, Chris Floyd didn't have much to say about Dylan's ad, but, like he said, there isn't much to say about it. Thing is, I'm thinking about trying to sell my '91 Eldorado and buy me a Chrysler. Not because I particularly want a Chrysler -- never wanted one before -- but for all the reasons Dylan talked about in the ad. I liked the ad.

*Henry Goodman
Anguilla, Mississippi*

The End of Fraternities

Thank God for Christopher Schon's article [on fraternities at Dartmouth]. I graduated in 1984. I can't even begin to detail what life was like as a female student. Among other things, we women were called cows and pigs. I have never felt so ugly and demoralized in my life. Although I hated it, I thought it was normal. My experience as a victim of a sexual assault was straight out of "how not to handle a sexual assault". I'm so glad Dartmouth is finally going to be held accountable for what has gone on there. I would *never* allow my children to attend.

Julie Howard

Boneyard Empire

Dear Editor:
Jeffery St. Clair (CP 21:2) draws from Camus for insight into American tolerance for assassinations-by-drones. European death penalties were a form of state-sanctioned killing designed to extract vengeance that led, said Camus in 1956, to "an infect[ion] of corpses

accumulated for the last twenty years." But now, as then, there is more at work than a simple killing-begets-killing logic. The United States today self-identifies as a terrorized people licensed to avenge its hurts using the means of its enemies: stealth and trauma. However, the horror it embraces--like Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now*--only appears as alien when, in reality, it is a reappropriation of loathing for the awfulness of its own collective Self, a self-destructive impulse in foreign disguise. The silence of the drones going out today is really the death-rattle that an empire headed for its own boneyard doesn't want to hear.

*Jerry Lembcke
Worcester, MA
Author of PTSD: Diagnosis
and Identity in Post-Empire
America*

Where's the Stash?

Dear Friends:
I have subscribed to CounterPunch for several years. I recommend it to my friends, on my blogsite, on Facebook. As the cover art of *The New Yorker*, I particularly enjoy CounterPunch's awesome, quirky cover art. Browsing the CounterPunch archive gets me the meat but no fluff, the opposite of reading *Playboy*! Where, oh where, is your stash of digital covers on the website?

*Thanks so much.
Best wishes,
CJ Hinke
Bangkok*

Dear CJ,
Good news! We're working on printing posters of our covers right now and should have those available on our website by later this spring.

*Best Regards,
CP Business Office*

Global Warming Hoax

I wish Alexander Cockburn would send in a message from beyond the grave every once and a while to set St. Clair and Frank straight on their fantasies about climate change. Alex was right on this issue, as in so many others. These doomsday scenarios are nothing more than quack science in pursuit of a Malthusian agenda. The models are bad, the predictions are little more than sooth-saying, and the evidence is contradictory at best. Besides, the climate is actually cooling. CounterPunch needs to get back to its roots and challenge the received wisdom about this global hoax.

*Ronald S. Forsythe
Winnemucca, Nevada*

A Refuge

Dear Jeffrey,
I must say that you're the only site on the whole goddamn internet that has reasonable analysis of the Ukraine mess. Unbelievable how brainwashed the rest of the media is, even the so-called progressives. I'm getting old, don't have children, I don't care if the whole effing world blows up - judging by the nonsense the media have been spouting, we probably deserve it.

*Keep up the good work,
Elizabeth*

Bad, Bad Putin

Jeffrey St. Clair's article, "Down the River with Vladimir Putin," really makes Putin look bad, and Russian men in particular. We used to manage apartment buildings with many Russian immigrant families. The older men really are as described in this article, but as with Putin, being MACHO in Russia is huge. The elder Russian men were as described, but not the younger ones with families, and we dealt with many. In this case, so far I think Putin is the intelligent one in the mess. He's doing the best of anyone to try to negate this crisis and turn it into a positive. I believe the US is flirting with all-out war on the path they are on. And, I thought Bush was bad, and I am afraid anyone either party runs, will be the same disaster. Hillary, is certainly not in my hopes for our future President. But then, none of the other potential nominees, are either. Where do we go from here?

*JB Collicott
Nebraska*

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ROAMING CHARGES

Mean Streets

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

The phone call came early in the morning on the last day of February. The voice sounded raw, emotionally spent. “Hello, Jeffrey? Jeffrey, this is Charlene. Charlene Rogers.” My mind drew a blank. “Robert’s sister.” It still took another few seconds for the names to click. Robert Rogers. My old pal from Indianapolis. I hadn’t seen him in 25 years. I hadn’t seen Charlene in more than 30 years.

“It’s terrible, Jeffrey. Robert’s dead. They found him on the street in East St. Louis. They say he’d been laying there for a few days. They say Robert may have starved to death.”

Robert Rogers and I met in 1973 in Chillicothe, Ohio at a baseball academy run by former Cincinnati Reds slugger Ted Kluszewski. Robert was the only black teen in a cohort of about 50 promising young baseball players from across the Midwest. He was there on a scholarship provided by the Indianapolis Indians, the Reds’ AAA affiliate.

Robert and I were both from Indianapolis. I grew up in the bone-white suburbs on the southside, while Robert and his four sisters lived with their grandmother on the inner eastside. Robert was known to his friends as Zipp, for his speed. But he was more than fast. His long strides were sleek and elegant.

After spending two weeks together in Ohio, Robert and I grew much closer. We played against each other in high-school and with each other in summer leagues. We stayed at each others homes, went to concerts together, got high together, shot hoops in the alley behind his apartment until we were chased off by cops in the early morning hours.

Robert had a capacious and wide-ranging mind. He turned me on to

James Baldwin, Funkadelic, and the great trumpeter Freddie Hubbard, an Indianapolis native. He introduced me to the fierce work of the black poet Etheridge Knight, who had also grown up in Naptown, not far from the Rogers’s place. Though never a believer, Robert also played a funky organ twice a week at the AME church.

Zipp Rogers was the best baseball player I ever took the field with or against. I was a mediocre infielder, slow of foot and inept at the plate. Zipp could have made it to the big leagues. He almost did. Then his life fell apart.

In the spring of 1977, Robert received a full-scholarship offer to play baseball at Georgia Tech. That night we celebrated by driving up to Colfax, Indiana and eating a heaping mound of Robert’s favorite food, deep-fried catfish. We drove home in a brutal thunderstorm. It must have been an omen.

We didn’t see each other much that summer. I was in Scotland, hiking across the highlands following the footsteps of John Keats, while Robert spent his days mowing the lawns at the vast Crown Hill Cemetery and playing baseball for an American Legion team at night.

In early August, a few weeks before he was supposed to leave for Atlanta, Robert was pulled over by a patrol car as he was walking home from a party. The cops searched him, found a couple of joints in his pocket and hauled him to jail.

That same night a liquor store had been held up at gunpoint by three black teenagers wearing ski masks a few blocks from Robert’s home. The next morning Robert was put in a line-up, where he was identified by the clerk as looking “like” one of the robbers. He was interrogated for the next few hours,

always denying any involvement in the heist. He didn’t have money for a lawyer and didn’t ask for one. Two days later he was charged with armed robbery.

For the next four months, Robert, who had no prior criminal record, sat in jail, unable to come up with bail. In those fateful 160 days, his scholarship to Georgia Tech was withdrawn, his grandmother died, his sisters moved out of the old apartment and his best friend (me) had gone off to Washington, DC to college.

Eventually, the charges were dropped after the same trio were nabbed in the act of robbing another store. Robert was released without so much as an apology. He had no money and no place to stay. He was a brilliant young black man with an arrest on his record, now homeless and with no prospects for work. Thus began Robert’s freefall into Hell.

Robert bounced around for the next decade, doing menial labor, dealing drugs, still playing organ in churches when they’d let him. He’d call collect from Chicago or Kansas City, once every six months or so. Then in 1990 he was busted for selling crack and went to prison in Joliet for 10 years. We corresponded a few times, then he stopped answering my letters and I lost track of him.

Charlene filled in some of the blanks. She said Robert had contracted HIV after being anally raped in prison and emerged from his term physically ruined and psychologically shattered. The remainder of his once-luminous life was spent in and out of jails and halfway houses and scrambling out a meager existence on the mean streets of the American heartland, as his body steadily eroded until his heart finally gave out in that alley in East St. Louis.

Robert Rogers was one of the most talented people I’ve ever known. But in the course of one awful night, his future was cut down and discarded by a system that has been fine-tuned for a sole purpose: to service the insatiable greed of the American super-elites. **CP**



DIAMONDS AND RUST

Criminality and Custom

BY JOANN WYPIJEWSKI

There is a scene in *12 Years a Slave* upon which the camera rightly, excruciatingly lingers. Solomon Northrup is not quite hanged, though by any meaning of the word he is lynched. The plantation overseer has saved the owner's property, a service that does not, however, require any kindness to the man. The hired hands who aimed to kill Northrup are driven off the land, threatened with murder themselves, but he is left trussed and in the noose, spared from extinguishment by stamina alone, propping himself up on tiptoe for hours, a whole day, while the business of the plantation proceeds: while his fellow enslaved go out to work in the morning and return at toil's end, while the mistress steps onto the balcony for a breath, while others come and go, and candles are lit for the evening.

Torture at the center of a wide field of quotidian activity, undisturbed, is more than a metaphor. It is a symbol so searing as to be almost tangible, like a coin of the realm, stamped and passed on generation to generation, from slave time to Guantanamo and the dark contents of CIA files. In the movie, most of the people going through their paces are terrorized, some are indifferent, a few directly complicit. About midway through this scene an enslaved woman hurries to Northrop and gives him a drink of water. We know she risks death or worse for this, so she represents rebellion.

It is enough to say that Hollywood was built on slavery because "the movies" are the effulgence of the modern world. There's more to it than that, though, because Hollywood owes its modernism – its panoramas and stills, its original cued scores, night shots, panning shots, visual tricks, dramatic swells, even big budgets, high

ticket prices and points in lieu of cash; such artistry and invention and blockbusterism as we recognize today – directly to the slaver's sentiment.

Exactly 100 years ago D.W. Griffith began filming *The Clansman*. The movie that pioneered such heady territory, ultimately rechristened *The Birth of a Nation*, premiered on February 8, 1915, meaning its centenary will coincide with the movie industry's season of self-congratulation next year. That scene of Northrup's misery evokes as well what was going on in Hollywood over the 100 years that it took to produce a single epic film whose sole subject is the experience of the person suffering at the center.

We now wait for an American film that ventures beyond the body in pain to tell a rebel's tale, or to trace the ugliness from root to unexceptional branch – say, the slaver origins of insurance and, thus, generations of Aetna adjusters in Connecticut. Lucky for us, we still have books.

It was a failed book, *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres*, published in 1817, that inspired a novella unheralded in 1855, *Benito Cerino*, that inspired a new work, *The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom and Deception in the New World*, which presents slavery as the thread-wire binding histories of liberty and subjugation; linking the known world to the unheeded past.

Amasa Delano, author of that first book, began his career as a Revolutionary soldier, a republican seafaring optimist keen to study the world but drawn by opportunity to the business of slaughtering seals. He died penniless and broken, with 700 unsold copies of his memoir. Herman Melville, author of the second, took

Delano's account of his unwitting and ultimately barbaric encounter with a shipboard slave revolt in 1805 as the subject for a chilling tale of the deceptions of freedom and slavery. He died largely ignored, his greatest works a commercial failure. Now comes Greg Grandin, centering his book on the rebel Africans' experience, acknowledging in the process Delano's tragedy, and complementing Melville's genius with a history of adamantine brilliance.

Materially, the *Empire of Necessity* here is colonial South America in the late 1700s, early 1800s. Spain's embrace of "free trade" led to "a slavers' fever" that would hit the US South after 1812:

Enslaved peoples were at one and the same time investments, credit, property, commodities, and capital, making them an odd mix of abstract and concrete value. Slaves were also objects of nostalgia, mementos of a fixed but fading aristocratic world even as they served as the coin of a new commercialized one. Slaves literally made money: working in Lima's mint, they trampled quicksilver into ore with their bare feet, pressing toxic mercury into their bloodstream to amalgamate the silver used for coins.

Grandin follows Babo, Mori and the other rebels from Africa to the Pacific and their seizure of *The Tryal* in a way that nothing is left untouched by their presence – neither landscape nor law nor something as insignificant as a kid glove. The wealth that made the glove a trifling purchase, that filled ships' cargos with Africans or cowhides also made liberty from colonial power possible, and more slave rebellion inevitable. It shaped the choices even of those who wanted no part in slaving, lashing their labor to economies of speculation, debt finance, manic extraction.

The Tryal rebels' story ends with Mori's head on a pike, another victim of the central crime, prefiguring Northrup and so many others on up to the hooded figure at Abu Ghraib, indicting ordinary custom that accommodates, or requires, such cruelty, and begging for an alternative. **CP**



EMPIRE BURLESQUE

The Stupidity of U.S Policy in Ukraine

BY CHRIS FLOYD

The stupidity of the American ruling class is surpassed only by the monstrous contempt it feels for those they rule at home and those they seek to dominate abroad. The Ukraine crisis offers another bravura display of this enduring attribute, perhaps best exemplified in the sage observation offered by one of our most revered statesmen, the senior senator from Arizona, John McCain.

Popping up in Kiev before the Crimean vote on secession, McCain delivered this rigorous insight into the manifold political, historical and cultural complexities at play in the regional crisis: “Russia is a gas station masquerading as a country.” Thus an entire nation, with more than a thousand years of rich and tragic history – and a culture whose artistic achievements might even surpass those of that great wellspring of world civilization, Arizona – is dismissed as so much trash.

This is stupid even for the eternally stupid McCain. But it is no less stupid than the deathless pronouncement served up – or *dredged* up from some swampy cellarage of the mind – by the even more august personage of the Secretary of State, John Forbes Kerry. Denouncing Russian machinations in Crimea, Kerry declared, “You just don’t in the 21st century behave in 19th century fashion by invading another country on a completely trumped-up pretext.” The hypocrisy of this ejaculation from a man who – in the 21st century – personally voted to invade another country on a completely trumped-up pretext (an action that killed approximately one million human beings) is almost sublime in its purity. This is stupidity with a vengeance, stupidity on stilts, stupidity on steroids. But is also a stupidity shared

across the commanding heights of America’s elite – and thus a stupidity armed with the most destructive military force in history.

The new “Cold War” our leaders are ostensibly bemoaning is very much of their own creation. But while the third-rate poltroons who constitute the leadership of the West obviously wanted to destabilize Ukraine and pull it out of Russia’s orbit for their own aggrandizement, their slack-jawed shock at Moscow’s reaction shows they were stupidly oblivious to the larger consequences of their latest smash-and-grab. But then, such obliviousness is absolutely *de rigueur* for membership in the ruling class.

If the poltroons were really concerned about the sovereignty of Ukraine, the integrity of its constitution and respect for international law, then perhaps they should not have overtly and covertly connived in a movement to overthrow the constitutionally-elected government of Ukraine and replace it with an unelected regime which includes openly neo-fascist factions. There were other ways to encourage genuine betterment in Ukraine without abetting extremism and political chaos – if what you wanted was genuine betterment in Ukraine. But of course the Poltroonery didn’t care a fig about the Ukrainians, whom they have led up the primrose path of EU dalliance only to offer them nothing but the slow strangulation of Greek-style “austerity” – and the risk of war. The dire fates of Libya and especially Iraq – riven by horrific sectarian violence sprung directly from the “humanitarian interventions” of the West – should speak frightening volumes to Ukraine.

In any case, Ukraine would not be under threat if the West-backed coup had not occurred. It is inconceivable that Vladimir Putin would have acted unilaterally to seize Crimea without the crisis precipitated by the unconstitutional ouster of Ukraine’s president. Putin is also a third-rate poltroon, of course, one whose methods of statecraft are so brutal and blunt you could be forgiven for thinking that he was educated at the School of the Americas instead of the KGB. But he had nothing to gain by an unprovoked land grab in Ukraine, which is actually a cash cow for the ever-faltering Russian economy.

However, once the country was plunged into chaos by the coup, Putin moved swiftly to turn the situation to his advantage. If the Ukrainian constitution was no longer operative (which is what the Western-approved regime change clearly demonstrates), and if the anarchy introduced by the crisis was breaking the country apart, why not grab what you can, any way you can, as far as you can? In this, Putin is merely aping the behavior of his colleagues in the G8; the morality of the gangster guides them all.

The poltroons’ stupidity has also handed Putin a great gift. By backing a markedly anti-Russian uprising – with a prominent role for neo-fascist extremists linked to collaborators with the Nazis who killed more than 20 million Soviet people within living memory – they gave Putin the perfect recipe for whipping up the fear, nationalism and xenophobia any dictator needs to obscure the pervasive rot and illegitimacy of his rule.

The Russian opposition, already reeling from fresh crackdowns, will be further marginalized by the upsurge of patriotism after the Crimean *anschluss*. The Western meddling in Ukraine has armed Putin, not cowed him.

Only one thing is certain in the strife to come: there will be hell to pay – but the Poltroonery will make damn sure that *other* people pay it. **CP**



GRASPING AT STRAWS

Sinking Homes

BY MIKE WHITNEY

If you buy a home in 2014, you're probably going to lose money. The 18-month surge in prices is over and the market is gradually losing steam. The problem is that the fundamentals are still too weak. Unemployment is high, wages are flat, and credit is too tight. The combination of these three deflationary forces is putting pressure on sales that will eventually lead to price erosion. That makes 2014 a particularly bad time to buy a home. *Caveat emptor.*

Typically, housing leads the economy out of recession. More housing starts mean more jobs, more household formation, and more personal consumption of big-ticket items like appliances, drapes, landscaping etc. All of these increase economic activity, which further drives growth. Economists call this a "virtuous circle." That hasn't happened this time, mainly because congress has reduced the flow of fiscal stimulus to the economy. This policy has crimped GDP, kept unemployment needlessly high, and left the recovery stillborn. The problem isn't stagnation. The problem is ideology. That probably won't change in 2014, so prices are going to fall.

For the last five years, the Fed has been the only game in town. Former Fed chair Ben Bernanke kept interest rates at zero, while loading up on more than \$1.3 trillion in mortgage-backed bonds. This made it cheaper to buy a home that helped to boost demand. At the same time, the Fed expanded its balance sheet by more than \$4 trillion through its QE program. That gigantic burst of liquidity touched off a spending splurge that pushed housing prices up 13.4 percent year-over-year. Naturally, the media saw the uptick in prices as proof that the recovery was real. Now they're not so sure given the sharp downturn in sales.

According to the S&P/Case-Shiller

index of 20 large U.S. cities, home prices slipped 0.1% from November, the second straight month-over-month drop. While the change may seem insignificant, it indicates that the direction of the market is reversing. Price-gains are narrowing because sales are dropping like a stone. Existing home sales have dropped 6 months in a row, reflecting dwindling investor interest and weak organic demand. The share of first-time homebuyers is presently the lowest on record. Purchase applications are at an 18-year low. The homeownership rate has slipped to levels not seen since 1995, and institutional investors have started to reduce their home buying due to higher prices, higher interest rates and shrinking availability of distressed inventory. All of these are signs that the housing market is in deep trouble.

Keep in mind, sales drifted lower for a full year after peaking in July 2005 before prices started to tumble in July 2006. The same dynamic is at work in 2014. The pundits think that a stronger economy will keep prices rising by 3 to 4 percent per year, but how likely is that? No one thinks the economy is getting better. The median household income has dropped by 6 percent since March 2009 and is probably still falling today. At the same time, the unemployment rate has only improved because more and more people have dropped out of the labor force altogether and fallen off the BLS's radar. In fact, the labor participation rate just slumped to a 35 year low, a level not seen since 1978. Meanwhile, 95 percent of all income gains between 2009 and 2012 went to the wealthiest one percent of the U.S. population. So where's the silver lining in all of this? Where is the wage growth, low unemployment and manageable personal debt loads that would precipi-

tate a strong rebound in housing sales?

Nowhere, which is why this could be the worst spring for housing on record. Things are already getting bad in the West, where the hotter markets have turned ice cold. Take Phoenix, for example, where the moneybag investors have suddenly vamoosed, pushing prices down 5 percent while listings are up an eye-watering 50 percent. Ballooning inventory means that prices are going to be hammered into the ground like a tentpeg. You can bet on it. The same goes for Los Vegas where prices are still in the stratosphere, up 22 percent in the last year, but where personal incomes are falling and unemployment is higher than nearly every metropolitan area in the country. Once the speculators pack it in, the Vegas housing market is going to collapse like a trailer park in a hurricane. Prices can't possibly stay elevated when 35 percent of demand vanishes overnight.

People who read this column regularly, know that we never believed the "recovery" fairytale. Housing is in the tank, because the economy is in the tank. And the economy is in the tank, because Obama and Co. have implemented a stealth austerity program aimed at 'strangling the beast' and dismantling all the progressive gains of the last century. Even so, I never anticipated the effect that yield-crazed speculators would have on the market. There have been months where these investors represented upwards of 50 percent of all sales. Who saw that coming? Certainly not me.

That said, it looks like the Fed's bag of tricks may be nearly empty. QE is winding down, investors are reducing their purchases, and organic demand is weaker than ever. There's only so much that can be done when the underlying economy is as bad as it is. **CP**



DAYDREAM NATION

Farewell Transmission

BY KRISTIN KOLB

It was a warm morning, and I rolled off the single, sheetless mattress onto the floor, still sweaty and bleary from the night before. I tried to shove my ass back onto the bed, and my nose into the fragrant armpit of my boyfriend, but the relentless pitch of a ukulele required me to get up and take a piss.

I stumbled upon the recording space, the bathroom, of Jason Molina, who eventually became Songs:Ohia, and, later, Magnolia Electric Company. I sat there on the steps in my t-shirt and underwear, with my ear to the door.

We called him “Sparky,” because we enjoyed poking fun at those of us who were truly gifted. Sparky would silence a room as soon as he sat down to play, night after keg-addled night. He was small and squirmy – certainly no pale, lean rock star, although definitely an asshole.

We bonded because we were both working-class kids on “The Plantation” – the Oberlin College campus, defined thus because we knew only one other first-generation college student. We challenged each other over this skimpy hubris, typically matching shots of cheap whiskey.

His merit: a “townie,” born and raised in blue-collar Lorain County, Ohio, grew up in a doublewide. We arm-wrestled over country singers, chanted to Metallica, and mutually disrespected the value of an elite, liberal-arts college education from a smarter-than-thou, poor kid’s perspective, while shamelessly indulging in it.

It’s hard to describe a place so far removed from the practical world, and watching so many students pretend to be poor, until they move on, with the diploma, to the parent-paid flat in Dumbo, NYC. Now, just tune into *Girls* to wretch over that bosom of luxurious aimlessness we both lampooned.

I retreated home to Missouri and worked as a library clerk, but Sparky was too talented – he could swagger in the music world and write searing, lonesome songs. He sang of the decaying industrial landscape that haunts the shores of Lake Erie where I met him, blue factory flames burning and isolating night shifts.

But wildness was always creeping in – wolves howling at the full moon, serpentine women, ghosts and devils conjuring, and a long highway leading south to a more simple, civilized place, West Virginia and the scent of magnolia blossoms.

Sparky died a year ago this March 17, on a frozen street in Bloomington, Indiana, after battling depression and alcoholism. He was found with only one phone number in his cell: that of his grandma. His organs gave out at age 39.

I got word via text, and drove to Lake Washington to sit at my usual spot under an eagle’s nest, wondering if the smug, stubborn independence of Sparky’s career undermined him. He was self-made. But we all need help most of the time.

For artists, who often are minimally, gainfully employed to allow the space to create, there really is little help. In fact, just five percent of musicians are insured, mostly orchestra lackeys.

Sparky had accumulated large debts, owed to the medical-industrial complex. “It has been a long hospital year,” he wrote in 2012, “getting to deal with a lot of things that even the music didn’t want to.”

But he’s hardly the only one. Others avoided.

Alex Chilton, the singer for Big Star, died four years ago of a heart attack at 59. He was flushed and breathless, but

refused to see a doctor due to costs.

That same year, 56-year-old Gary Shider, the guitarist for Funkadelic, died of brain cancer. He couldn’t afford his health insurance premiums, so he ignored a strange cough and pain in his legs.

In 2003, alt-country singer Alejandro Escovedo vomited blood before a gig in Tempe, Arizona, played the show, and then sped to ER. Hepatitis emerged after years of hard living, and he turned to his friends for the financial help of his life. Artists like John Cale, Lucinda Williams, Steve Earle, Jon Langford and CounterPuncher Sally Timms rallied to create an Escovedo tribute album, *Por Vida*, and play benefit shows. It not only got him treatment, but the community raised his spirits to fight. He’s now Hep-C-free.

Perhaps, with Obamacare, the era of killing off artists – those who can heal our souls with beauty, not just service our organs, is over. But it’s too early to tell. In November, the administration introduced a mental health “parity” rule requiring insurance companies to cover mood disorders and addiction just like broken legs and flu shots, but the devil’s hiding in the details.

Josh Homme, the singer for the Queens of the Stone Age, watched two band members sicken, and one of them die, meanwhile helping them pay their bills. In typical fuck-you stance, he explained America to the *Guardian*: “If you want to live, you better be rich.”

Well, those of us who have counted the casualties don’t typically run for office or pose for TED Talks. We know. You don’t. We grieve amongst ourselves. You preach talking-stat-points and common-sense solutions, parity, and faith in a failed system, hemorrhaging, *por vida*.

“I can feel his ghost breathing down my back,” Sparky sang in his trenchant song, “Farewell Transmission.” “The real truth about it is no one gets it right. The real truth about it is we’re all supposed to try.” **CP**

The Meaning of Mandela

Collective Power

BY KEVIN ALEXANDER GRAY

“The discovery of America, and that of a passage to the East Indies by the Cape of Good Hope, are the two greatest and most important events recorded in the history of mankind. Their consequences already have been very great; but, in the short period of between two and three centuries which has elapsed since these discoveries were made, it is impossible that the whole extent of their consequences can have been seen. What benefits, or what misfortunes to mankind may hereafter result from those great events, no human wisdom can foresee. By uniting, in some measure, the most distant parts of the world, by enabling them to relieve one another’s wants, to increase one another’s enjoyments, and to encourage one another’s industry, their general tendency would seem to be beneficial. To the natives however...”
– Adam Smith, “An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations” (1776)

Reflecting on his life in 2000, Nelson Mandela said, “I just wanted to be remembered as part of a team, and I would like my contribution to be assessed as somebody who carried out decisions taken by that collective... an organized and disciplined struggle by our organization and the international community.”

For me, those are the most important words he left behind.

In early fall of 2013, while in New York, I spotted a Foundation for a Better Life ‘Pass It On!’ message boards with Mandela’s picture on it. It read: “What can one person do?” Inspiration. Pass It On!”

The message stuck me as wrong. It should have read: ‘What many people did.’ ‘Amandla!’ - ‘Ngawethu!’ means ‘Power!’ – ‘To the People!’ It was the call and response of a collective fighting to end apartheid for one and all.

Mandela was the consensus symbol of a movement. It might have been different if he hadn’t been in prison. Still, he wasn’t fighting alone, arrested alone, a lone captive, nor was he ‘president for life’ as seems to be the case with Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe. He didn’t want the office and ruling just to be about him. He proved it by only serving as South Africa’s president from 1994 to 1999.

The ‘great man’ or singular individual rising above his or her circumstance is a familiar trope to diminish the power of a collective of people working together for a singular goal. It reduces the people to supporting cast in Mandela’s “long walk to freedom.” It also reduces Mandela to a fantastical figure, erasing the man with both strengths and weaknesses, who was a hero but who did what other flesh and blood humans have done and are capable of doing again.

Mandela said in his autobiography: “I led a thoroughly immoral life...” Maybe he was talking about his three marriages. First to law partner Oliver Tambo’s cousin Evelyn Mase, who rarely gets mentioned though she bore him four children – one of who died young, then Winnie who shared the world stage with him and Graça Machel, widow of former Mozambican President Samora Machel, who was most likely killed by the same sinister forces that imprisoned Mandela and his compatriots? It could be something else. Like whether or not he fathered two other daughters by two other women while married to Mase? Even so, his admission speaks to those who want or ought to fight back but think they have to be without stain to stand up.

President Barack Obama remarked: “... they don’t make folk like Mandela any more.” I disagree.

The striking Marikana miners back in 2012 are ‘folk like Mandela.’ So are Chelsea Manning, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Leonard Peltier, Albert Woodfox, Marie Mason, Sister Megan Rice, Michael Walli and Greg Boertje-Obed. So are those in exile like Edward Snowden and Assata Shakur. And the captives at the Guantánamo Bay gulag and places we don’t yet know about. They’re among the hundreds of thousands of inmates in jails and prisons due to the war on drugs, serving unjust sentences or doing time for crimes they didn’t commit. And those “undocumented” human beings held in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities. They’re among those guilty of petty or heinous crimes.

Mandela knew the struggle against unjust power didn’t begin, wasn’t all about, and didn’t end with him. And that blacks didn’t compliantly accept white power without a fight until he came along or until the 1980s when the international anti-apartheid movement was at its peak.

The fight for “Tina Sizwe” – “the black nation”, is old as the 12th century tales of Prester John – one of the earliest Europeans to set foot in Africa. Portugal’s Bartolomeu Dias’ “discovery” of the Cape of Good Hope in 1488 and Vasco da Gama’s contact with the Xhosa people 10 years later sped up misery. From the start the Khoikhoi (Bushmen and Hottentots) fought the Dutch who settled on the Cape via the Dutch East India Company in 1652. French Huguenots and German immigrant later joined them. The amalgam was the original Afrikaners. British rule followed the Napoleonic wars in the 1800s. In response about 12,000 Dutch-speaking Afrikaners – Voortrekkers spurred “liberal” British rule by migrating eastward and northeastward into the southern Africa interior to set up an independent homeland. The Afrikaners’ (also called Boers) ‘Great Trek’ (1835-46) into the future Natal, Orange Free State and Transvaal regions meant invasion, bloodshed, land seizure and coerced or slave labor. A decade later trekkers set up two independent republics: the South African Republic (1852), also known as the Transvaal Republic, and the Orange Free State (1854) prohibiting slavery, but codifying racial separatism in their constitutions. The

British defeated the Zulu and the Pedi in 1879 and consolidated their power over Natal, Transvaal, and the once-independent Zulu kingdom. A year and a half later in December 1880, the Boers declared war on the United Kingdom and won self-rule in the Transvaal under British oversight. Eight years later the 2nd Boer War (1899) erupted. The Brits wanted the Zulu to stay out of the “white man’s war” but they and the Swazis wanted to reclaim land taken by the Boers. As the war went on about 20,000-armed Africans fought with the British. The British won the war with a ‘scorched earth’ policy of destroying crops, burning homes, and poisoning wells. Around 75,000 died including 20,000 black Africans who perished on the battlefield and in “concentration camps” due to starvation, disease and exposure. The Boers signed a peace treaty in 1902. The most resistant Boers, called “*bittereinders*”, many who later built the white supremacist Nationalist Party, chose exile over allegiance to Britain. Three years later in 1910, the Boer republics became the Union of South Africa, a Commonwealth “dominion” of the U.K. like Canada.

The ANC, founded as the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) on January 8, 1912. More radical elements outside the SANNC fought the Afrikaaner’s secret, klan-like Hitler admiring Broederbond (brotherhood) and waged organized and unorganized political and criminal acts against whites. From its beginning to when its name changed to the ANC in 1923, the group opposed “separate development” laws that prevented blacks from buying land and changes to “limited franchise,” not universal suffrage. At first, they focused on holding the status quo in the Cape Province, where qualification was based on education and wealth and “coloured” and blacks could vote. The new government ended that and much more.

Britain ended its legal authority over South Africa in 1931 and the rise of the Nationalist Party was in full play. During WWII, many Afrikaaners were sympathetic to Nazi Germany. In 1943, apartheid was first used to describe the goals of the party and the system of government it was setting up. Literally translated, it means “apart-ness” and is pronounced

“apart-hate.” Some say it was patterned after the Jim Crow system in the US.

The 1948 election saw the Nationalist Party together with the Afrikaner Party winning the general elections. The two parties merged in 1951 into the National Party. Non-whites were forcibly removed for living in the “wrong” areas and restricted to smaller and smaller areas to live in. Non-whites

had to carry pass books to enter the ‘white’ parts of the country and vice-versa. Nationalists also stripped the right of coloureds to vote in the main South African Parliament replaced with a separate, segregated, and largely powerless assembly. The ANC Youth League had been formed in the 1940s by Mandela, Tambo, Sisulu, Ashley Peter Mda and



ROBBEN ISLAND PRISON, SOUTH AFRICA.

Anton Lembede. By 1949 the Youth League controlled the ANC. The younger men began decades of civil disobedience, strikes and armed action.

The government met the protest with more laws and more force. It was Florence Matomela, a school teacher with five kids who kicked off protest at the beginning of 1950 leading a demonstration in Port Elizabeth of protesters burning their passes. Matomela, an organizer with the ANC Women’s League and the Federation of South African Women was one of the first women volunteer in the Defiance Campaign. A general strike resulted in 18 blacks being killed and other protesters, including Mandela, jailed and beaten for their opposition to the government. By the end of the year the UN passed a resolution calling apartheid ‘racial segregation’ based on “doctrines of racial discrimination.”

Two years later Chief Albert Luthuli, a teacher and politician, who joined the ANC in 1944, became president-general of the organization. The 1st years of Luthuli’s term saw an ongoing dispute between “Africanists” and “Charterists.” The Charterists proposed:

“The Land Shall be Shared Among Those Who Work It!”:

Restrictions of land ownership on a racial basis shall be ended, and all the land re-divided amongst those who work it ...

The state shall help the peasants with implements, seed, tractors and dams ...
Freedom of movement (abolition of pass laws) shall be guaranteed to all who work on the land;
All shall have the right to occupy land wherever they choose.

The Africanists' position was "one settler one bullet." The Charterists saw the ANC as a "disciplined force of the left" against white supremacy but its alternative was not black supremacy.

"The ideological creed of the ANC is, and always has been, the creed of African Nationalism. It is not the concept of African Nationalism expressed in the cry, 'Drive the White man into the sea.' The African Nationalism for which the ANC stands is the concept of freedom and fulfillment for the African people in their own land." ~ Nelson Mandela, Rivonia Trial, Pretoria Supreme Court, April 20, 1964.

Verwoerd became Union prime minister (1958) as Luthuli led the ANC. Verwoerd's aim was clear: "... We want to keep South Africa white – keeping it white can only mean one thing, namely white domination, not leadership, not guidance, but control, supremacy." For starters, in 1959 he pushed through the Bantu Self- Government Act classifying blacks into eight ethnic groups and restricting them to 'homelands'.

Events took another critical turn 10 days before the ANC was to kick off a nationwide campaign against the pass laws. On March 21, 1960, Sharpeville township police fired into a crowd of 5,000 to 10,000 PAC-led protestors that had converged on their headquarters, killing 69 people and wounding 180. Many were shot in the back as they ran away. The country declared a state of emergency, detained 2000 ANC leaders including Mandela, arrested 20,000 and sent thousands to prison or work camps after secret trials.

The Sharpeville massacre led to the banning of the PAC and ANC and activation of the ANC's military wing, MK-Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation) led by Mandela, and Leballo's Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA), originally called Poqo, as the military wing of the PAC. Poqo's slogan – "drive the whites into the sea."

Luthuli was allowed to travel to Norway to receive a Nobel Peace Prize on December 11, 1961. He was the 1st person outside of Europe or the US to get the award. Six days later, Mandela, now a fugitive on various charges including inciting strikes and leaving the country, launched MK with two acts of sabotage in Capetown and Johannesburg. Some say he launched MK without Luthuli's sanction but evidence proves otherwise. MK's manifesto announced "planned attacks against government installations and "a break from the past."

"The government policy of force, repression and violence will no longer be met with non-violent resistance ... The choice is not ours; it has been made by the Nationalist government which has rejected ... every ... peaceable demand ...

with force and yet more force!"

The following year Luthuli and Martin Luther King, Jr. issued a joint statement calling for an international sanctions campaign. Meanwhile, fugitive Mandela traveled to Ethiopia, Morocco, Algeria and Britain meeting with Haile Selassie, Julius Nyerere and other African leaders. When he returned from military training in Addis Ababa he's met in Bechuanaland (now Botswana) by a British-born, white, gay, MK member Cecil Williams. They worked together until 1962 when Mandela was arrested posing as Williams' chauffeur, David Motsamayi. The two drove to Johannesburg to see Luthuli immediately upon his return.

Even though he denied it, Mandela was a member of the SACP, serving in the Central Committee at the time of his arrest. Mandela had close relationships with Lionel "Rusty" Bernstein, son of European-Jewish émigrés, Harold Wolpe, a Lithuanian-Jew and Arthur Goldreich, a South African-Israeli. All were communist party members. In 1961, Wolpe and Arthur Goldreich purchased Lilliesleaf Farm in Rivonia as headquarters and safe house for the underground Communist Party and the ANC. Goldreich and his family pretended to be the owners of a farm on the outskirts of Johannesburg. When Mandela needed a safe house, he stayed there under his assumed name pretending to be a worker. Bernstein, Goldreich and Wolpe also helped locate sabotage sites for MK, and helped draft a disciplinary code for guerillas entitled "*Umkhonto we Sizwe: We are at War!*"

"We are fighting for a South Africa in which there will be peace and harmony and equal rights for all people.

"We are not racialists, as the white oppressors are. The African National Congress has a message of freedom for all who live in our country."

On 11 July 1963, security police raided Lilliesleaf Farm and captured 19 members of the underground, charging them with sabotage. The raid led to the Rivonia Trial that made Mandela a worldwide name. He was already in prison having been arrested the previous year.

Many others didn't get off with prison or exile. There were over 50 recorded deaths of people in detention under security laws from 1963 to 1982. The majority of reported deaths were either "suicide by hanging" or "jumping out a window." Many know Steve Bantu Biko, leader of the Black Consciousness Movement who was killed by the Pretoria police on September 12, 1977. Fewer know Dr. Neil Aggett, a young white trade union organizer who "committed suicide by hanging himself" with a pajama cord in his cell at Johannesburg's John Vorster Square police headquarters in 1982. Aggett's 1981 arrest under the Internal Security Act and his death while in custody sparked outrage among white citizens in S.A. and was a factor in the formation of the Detainees' Parents Support Committee (DPSC) that, with the support of international church groups, took on S.A. security forces abuses and murders of political detainees from 1963-83.

Biko's more than a character played by Denzel Washington in the 1987 movie *Cry Freedom* or a Peter Gabriel song. Biko's stature lies in his ideological link to Njabulo Ndebele, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael and other voices of diasporic African, Pan Africanism and the black consciousness movement which connects blacks to their past, present and future. The ideological connections Biko and others spoke of in the 70s weren't new. In the US they reached throughout the 20th century through Hubert Henry Harrison, Marcus Garvey, Harry Haywood and W.E.B. Dubois and Jack O'Dell. All made "the connection between local and global dimensions of antiracism" with Dubois calling out "white supremacy and imperialism as causes for turmoil in the world." O'Dell weaved the connection from King and the civil rights movement through Jesse Jackson's 1984 and '88 presidential campaigns. On the American side of the ocean, blacks organized around the legacy and consequences of being kidnapped from their land, reduced to chattel, having their labor exploited by whites with no political power or franchise to fight back. On the African side of the ocean, Robert Sobukwe and the nationalist PAC organized around stolen land, being reduced to chattel in their own land, exploited by whites, having no political power but having the numbers to fight back.

Mandela's law partner Tambo became ANC president after Luthuli, living under a 5-year travel ban, was struck by a train near his home in Groutville in 1967. Tambo spent 30 years in exile (1960-90) yet was head of the ANC in its most militant period. In the late 60s, students in Soweto, South Africa's largest black township, put their bodies on the line refusing to submit to Afrikaans – the language of the white Afrikaansers – being imposed on them as the dominant language and punished for speaking Xhosa, their native language. Student protest over "Bantu Education policy" led to the Soweto Uprising of '76. School-aged exiles spread across the globe, organizing in countries that took them in and preparing for the day they would go home. Less than a decade later, from 1984-86, high school students pulled off a two-year boycott of school and year-end exams throughout South Africa.

It was Tambo and his chief of staff Slovo who approved the 1983 Church Street bombing in Pretoria, the largest paramilitary attack by the ANC. The bombing killed 19, including two ANC members, Freddie Shangwe and Ezekial Maseko, and wounded 217 others. The target was South African Air Force headquarters. From 1985-1995, approximately 20,000-30,000 people died in the tumult. The uprising in the black townships resulted in the deaths of between 2,000 and 3,000 people – including the hundreds who were "necklaced", or burnt to death with a flaming tire around their necks, by pro-ANC township youths.

Meanwhile, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the 35 unions it represented began withholding their labor. "Changes at the workplace can improve the life of the worker from 8:00 until 5:00; beyond that point ...

The person still has to carry a pass (regulating movement in the country) and lives in a community that is chosen for him by the government. ... If you cannot live with your family, according to law, then that becomes an economic as well as a political issue..."

My son and nephew, now in their 30s, called me after Mandela's death. They grew up with posters of Winnie with her fist in the air, her husband, Biko and Machel on their walls. The anti-apartheid movement was their indoctrination to the worldwide freedom struggle. My son Brian reminded me of his friendship with Nkosinathi Mncube, a black South African from Johannesburg, now living in D.C. who came to the US in 2004 to study dance. When they met, "Nathi" was surprised by Brian's awareness of his homeland. Later on as we were driving and talking my son rolled up his sleeve to show me the tattoo on his arm. It was the name his friend gave him, "Sipho", which means, "gift" in Xhosa.

At first I was indifferent to obits praising Mandela for "reconciliation", "forgiving" or "freeing his jailers" but then Brian, who now works at a community college, told me of his female colleague, a white South African émigré. She was tearful after hearing Mandela was gone. She credits Mandela for "allowing the world to see white South Africans different."

Yet with all the talk of forgiveness, Winnie Mandela is scorned by many as a torturer, murderer, thief, adulteress, bitter ex-wife and delegitimized widow.

Despite it all, Winnie's still seen as "the mother of a nation." Jesse Jackson said in her defense: "When it was real dark she was the light that carried people across the river." In 1969, she was held in solitary confinement for 13 months on terrorism charges. In '73 she did another six months in jail. During the '76 Soweto Uprising she told the young people to "fight to the bitter end." She was locked up for five months as the mastermind of the insurrection, banned from speaking publicly and banished to the rural town of Brandfort for seven years. In 1986, a time when suspected traitors were being burned alive in the townships, she declared that blacks would be "freed with our matchboxes."

In 1986, I participated in pickets of the University of South Carolina's Educational Foundation to pressure the university to disclose and withdraw their holdings with companies doing business with South Africa. Every Friday we faced a young white, fundamentalist Christian, supporter of the apartheid government who stood amongst us with a tire around her neck.

Mandela once said he was "fortunate to have been in prison" so he "didn't have to spill blood." Yet he supported it, saying: "Our mandate was to wage acts of violence against the state ... Our intention was to begin with what was least violent to individuals but most damaging to the state." Tambo did just that. Others, like Winnie, went further, just like their oppressors.

One of the images on TV after Mandela's death was the

NBC evening news leading with Reagan in 1990 stating Mandela should be included in talks about the future of South Africa. Jimmy Carter imposed economic sanctions on the apartheid government. Reagan removed them and called the Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986 “immoral” and “utterly repugnant.” Prior to 1990 the Reagan administration violated a U.N. arms embargo against the regime, vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution that would’ve imposed economic sanctions and endorsed a billion-dollar IMF loan to the racist government. His administration considered Mandela a “terrorist” and put the ANC on the terrorism watch list. Reagan insisted that the 16 percent minority white population in power were “strategically essential to the free world,” although the 84 percent majority of black South Africa’s citizens (to include Coloureds and Asians) were be violently kept un-free. His British ally PM Margaret Thatcher followed suit calling Mandela a “terrorist” while simultaneously selling arms and military equipment to the apartheid regime.

Conservative hardliners like South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond, Phil Gramm of Texas and Jesse Helms of North Carolina, and others, to include future Vice President Dick Cheney, then a Republican congressman from Wyoming, supported Reagan. Helms filibustered the sanctions bill. Cheney said he made the right decision in 86: “I don’t have any problems at all with the vote I cast 20 years ago.”

It was Ron Dellums who introduced an anti-apartheid bill in 1972. Maxine Waters, Bill Gray, Parren Mitchell, Mervyn Dymally, Walter Fauntroy and other Congressional Black Caucus members fought the early legislative battle. It was Caroline Hunter, a Polaroid Corporation chemist, who in 1970 stumbled upon evidence that her employer was providing the camera system to the South African government to produce photos for the infamous pass books. She and Ken Williams formed the Polaroid Workers Revolutionary Movement to campaign for a boycott. By 1977, Polaroid withdrew from South Africa.

The US activists’ history includes familiar names like TransAfrica and its then-leader Randall Robinson who in the 80s organized “civil disobedience that led to jailings for over a year.” Groups targeted local and national banks to force them to stop selling the South African gold “kruggerrand” coins. Legal advocacy groups raised money and provided assistance defending individuals and group inside the racist regime.

From Massachusetts to New Mexico, by 1985, 12 states and the District of Columbia, over 25 cities, counties and the Virgin Islands had enacted divestment legislation, withdrawing more than \$5 billion from US corporations that had investments in South Africa.

That same year, the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility kicked off a campaign against twelve US corporations, whom they called the “Dirty Dozen” that were key investors in apartheid. They included: Burroughs, Chevron, Citicorp, Control Data, Flour, Ford, General Electric, General

Motors, IBM, Mobil, Newmont Mining and Texaco. Others companies targeted were Coke, Standard Oil, Shell, TWA, Honeywell, Exxon, ITT, RCA, Chase, Firestone, International Harvester, Union Carbide, 3M, American Express, Dow, Pillsbury, Continental Bank, Morgan, First National Bank and others.

The boycott-sanctions-divestment movement forced over 70 colleges and universities to partially or fully divest \$411 million from companies that did business with South Africa.

On Sept. 29, 1986 the House voted 313-83 to override Reagan’s veto of the economic sanctions Act. The Senate followed suit, voting 78-21 to override. For the first time in the 20th century, lawmakers overturned a presidential veto of a foreign policy issue. In the Senate, 31 Republicans broke with Reagan.

All the major daily paper in my hometown of Columbia could offer the world after Mandela’s death was a 1998 picture of a 95-year-old Thurmond holding up Mandela’s arm as though he’d just won a prizefight. The photo was snapped during Mandela’s visit to Washington to receive the Congressional Gold Medal.

Maybe someone thought the photo of Thurmond was funny or ironic. Maybe the person who posted the picture was at best, ignorant of history or, at worst trying to revise history by giving the photographic impression that Thurmond supported Mandela and anti-apartheid. It would have been more accurate to post a picture or write something about Senator Ernest F. Hollings’ efforts. Hollings co-sponsored the failed 1985 anti-apartheid bill but succeeded in having an anti-apartheid plank added to the Democrats’ platform in ‘84 and ‘88.

Opponents of black self-determination didn’t give up until then South African President F.W. de Klerk’s government and the ANC agreed to maintain the economic status quo – or as singer Miriam Makeba put it: “We got the flag, but they got to keep the money.”

Another reason could be that de Klerk’s government had nuclear weapons that Israel helped them build as leverage. Neither the white regime nor Western powers wanted a black-led nation to possess nuclear weapons. And the racist leaders made it clear that they would maintain a “buffer” from other Frontline States. Many felt that if pushed they’d use the weapons on their own people. Who knows what individuals in and out of the government got for dismantling their nuclear weapons? Nonetheless, shortly after Mandela’s release from prison and the unbanning of the ANC, the PAC and the South African Communist Party, de Klerk’s government began destroying the country’s military facilities, ballistics missiles and stripping down their nuclear weapons.

Some suggest that the ANC’s real failure was not taking over through a bloody revolution even with nuclear weapons in the mix. Or how could a “racist, violent, and brutal oppression white apartheid regime be trusted with nuclear weapons, yet a black and democratically elected regime not?” Some

believe the country would be stronger today if it had kept its nukes. Others argue it was “honorable” that white and black negotiators “believed in a vision of an Africa free of nuclear weapons.”

Nonetheless, the politics of dealing with people who wish you dead is a tricky thing. The goal was “to break apartheid rule through negotiation, rather than a bloody civil war.” Moreover, the 80s anti-apartheid movement remains the last successful globally human right battle since the anti-Vietnam War and Civil Rights efforts ended.

After Mandela’s death Bill Clinton tweeted: “I will never forget my friend Madiba.” Someone tweeted back: “Then why didn’t you take him off the terrorist watch list?” Mandela wasn’t removed from the list until 2008 when then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice asked George Bush to do so.

The Clinton Administration endorsed S.A.’s multi-party, proportional representation voting system and sent observers to monitor the election that put Mandela in office. Ironically, it’s the same electoral theory advocated by Lani Guinier which prompted Clinton to dump her from consideration for the Justice Department’s Office of Civil Rights.

And Clinton’s concern over Mandela’s friendship with his “brother” Fidel Castro is as fake as Cuba’s anti-apartheid history is real. As far back as ’61, Che Guevara called apartheid an “inhuman and fascist policy.” Mandela replied saying that the Cuban “defeat of the racist [South African] army” at Cuito Cuanavale in 1988 “made it possible for him to be [president].”

Mandela critics, including his ex-wife Winnie, often blame him for what the people didn’t get after the change in government. They say he “betrayed the revolution.” That he appeased Western powers and was overly loyal to those who stood with him in the past turning, a blind eye to their corruption - both during and after he left office.

Doubtless, the hope that the economic enfranchisement of poor landless blacks written into the Freedom Charter hasn’t become real. Radical social change and wealth redistribution has been replaced by racial diversity window dressing with black faces helping to run the old colonial turned corporatist-neo-liberal structure.

The existing wealth disparities and the fact that whites and a relatively new small black elite have all the money remains at the core of the nation’s problem. Today, whites make up about 9 percent of South Africa’s 51.8 million population, down from 16 percent in the 80s. Blacks are about 80 percent of the population. Yet whites earn six times more than blacks. Poverty in South Africa has increased over the last decade with the unemployment rate among blacks as high as 45 percent. 26.3% of blacks live below the food poverty line. 10.7% of the population lives on less than \$1.25 per day and 36.4% live below the \$2.50 per day poverty line.

Economic conditions, government corruption, land reform and a longing for some type of black African nationalism to

solve those problems is why Zuma was booed at Mandela’s national memorial. Yet Zimbabwe’s one-man rule is no model to follow.

The most powerful part of Mandela’s homegoing was Zuma leading mourners at Qunu singing “Tina Sizwe.” The heartfelt call and response was a far different reaction for him than at the public memorial. Zuma’s race solidarity bamboozery over Mandela’s coffin was an attempt to quiet charges of corruption and the failures of the ANC. Still, the song is bigger than Zuma. The voices posed the question: what comes next?

“We the Nation” (translation)

*We the nation, we the black nation,
we mourn, we mourn for our land
Stolen from us, stolen from us by the white man.
They must leave our land alone
They must leave our land alone*

*We, the children of Africa,
Are crying for Africa
That was taken by the white people.
They must leave our land alone
They must leave our land alone*

Early on Mandela said he was “attracted by the idea of a classless society ... The land, then the main means of production, belonged to the tribe. There was no rich or poor and there was no exploitation ... I should tie myself to no particular system of society other than that of socialism.” As time passed he offered “I must leave myself free to borrow the best from West and from the East.” Another Nobel Peace Prize winner, Martin Luther King offered: “... the kingdom of brotherhood is found neither in the thesis of communism nor the antithesis of capitalism but in a higher synthesis ... a higher synthesis that combines the truths of both.”

Whether or not South Africa becomes a ‘Black,’ or ‘Rainbow’ or a truly egalitarian socialist nation, or if neo-liberal, neo-colonialism continues to trump economic restitution and redistribution is still up in the air. The “unfinished business” of restorative justice for stolen lives, land and labor and the evolution or revolution that pushes back against the inhumanity of power goes on in South Africa, the United States and scores of countries around the world.

That fight takes a collective of people. **CP**

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A Hero for Our Time?

The Return of Karl Marx

BY LOUIS PROYECT

Seemingly three or four years late in the game, *Rolling Stone* weighed in on the relevance of Karl Marx. In an article titled “Marx Was Right: Five Surprising Ways Karl Marx Predicted 2014,” Sean McElwee told his readers that the Great Recession of 2008 confirmed Marx’s analysis of the capitalist system as “chaotic” and “crisis-prone.”

Just to make sure that nobody would accuse him of being a Commie, McElwee also points out that Marx was wrong about many things, especially failing to offer a proposal about what should replace capitalism. This lack left his writing “open to misinterpretation by madmen like Stalin in the 20th century.” Now it should be said that Marx never intended to write about the workings of socialism, not that this would have made any difference to Stalin. The horrors of the USSR have much less to do with Marx’s failure to write what he called “recipes for the cook-shops of the future” (Afterword to the 1873 edition of V. 1 of *Capital*) than the sheer backwardness of Czarist Russia, exacerbated by a bloody civil war.

I could not help but notice the renewal of interest in Karl Marx’s ideas just after the 2008 financial crisis began. While the *Communist Manifesto* is the second-best selling book in history, there was a pronounced spike in sales around that time, no doubt aided by Marx’s words that read like a prophecy: “The modern labourer, on the contrary, instead of rising with the process of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth.” McElwee paraphrases Marx: “Decades of deepening inequality reduced incomes, which led more and more Americans to take on debt. When there were no sub-prime borrows left to scheme, the whole façade fell apart, just as Marx knew it would.”

It is interesting to note that Sean McElwee does not allow his past associations with John Stossel, the Hudson Institute and *Reason Magazine* to prejudice him against Karl Marx, a sure sign that history is moving in the right direction. There was a time when McElwee found rightwing ideas more useful. After graduating from King’s College in New York, a school with the dubious distinction of having Dinesh D’Souza named president in 2010, McElwee’s writings tilted rightward as evidenced by his *Reason* article arguing that plastic garbage floating around in the oceans was not that worrisome.

After 2008 there were deep worries in the financial punditocracy. You might remember that scene in *China Syndrome* when the first shudders took place in the nuclear reactor. Was this going to be the “Big One”? That is how Nouriel Roubini must have felt on August 11, 2011 when he told a *Wall Street*

Journal interviewer:

Karl Marx had it right. At some point, Capitalism can self-destroy itself because you cannot keep on shifting income from labor to Capital without having an excess capacity and a lack of aggregate demand. That’s what has happened. We thought that markets worked. They’re not working. The individual can be rational. The firm, to survive and thrive, can push labor costs more and more down, but labor costs are someone else’s income and consumption. That’s why it’s a self-destructive process.

Even more shockingly, George Magnus, an economist with the UBS investment bank, advised *Bloomberg News* readers to “Give Karl Marx a Chance to Save the World Economy” just 18 days after Roubini’s interview appeared. (Magnus quoted Marx’s *Capital*: “The ultimate reason for all real crises always remains the poverty and restricted consumption of the masses.” But his solutions had more to do with Keynes than Marx, such as this one: “Governments and central banks could engage in direct spending on or indirect financing of national investment or infrastructure programs.” If Karl Marx confronted a crisis as deep as the one we faced in 2008, his advice would have been to nationalize the banks not use them as tools for fiscal pump-priming.

However, Umair Haque probably spoke for most of these commentators – including Sean McElwee, I imagine – when after posing the question “Was Marx Right” in the *Harvard Business Review*, he came down squarely on the side of capitalism. After giving Marx his due (“Marx’s critiques seem, today, more resonant than we might have guessed”, Haque sides with McElwee on the “recipe” question: “Now, here’s what I’m not suggesting: that Marx’s prescriptions (you know the score: overthrow, communalize, high-five, live happily ever after) for what to do about the maladies above were desirable, good, or just. History, I’d argue, suggests they were anything but.”

It is, of course, only natural that Marx’s books get taken off the bookshelves and dusted off during a period of profound economic crisis. For that matter, a political crisis will also have the same effect. In 1967 I took the unprecedented steps of reading the *Communist Manifesto* after two years of facing the draft and working in Harlem as a welfare investigator. A combination of napalm bombing of peasant villages and urban rebellions against racism and poverty convinced me that a revolution was necessary and who better to consult on that matter than Karl Marx?

I made the decision at that time to join the movement founded by Leon Trotsky since his connections to Karl Marx seemed to have more of a pedigree than those of Joseph Stalin or Mao Zedong. I failed to realize at the time that notions of pedigrees were exactly what prevented Marxism from full development.

In April 1939, just a year before his assassination, Leon Trotsky wrote “Marxism in Our Time,” as an introduction to a new edition of Karl Marx’s V. 1 of *Capital*. It is of extraordinary value as a statement of the ABC’s of Marxism, as well as unwitting evidence of its unresolved contradictions.

Trotsky does not shy away from the key challenge to Marxism that I first heard in a social studies class in 1958 when the American economy was reaching new heights – what his article refers to as “the theory of increasing misery”. Our teacher said something that most of us heard in public school growing up in the U.S. It goes something like this: Karl Marx was right about workers being oppressed and exploited in 1850 but he never would have dreamed about how wealthy they would become a hundred years later. Probably the first person to articulate this seemingly irrefutable point of view was Werner Sombart, the German ex-Marxist and author of *Why there is no Socialism in America*.

Writing in 1939, when misery was widespread throughout the capitalist world, Trotsky would seem to have had the upper hand but interestingly enough he sought to vindicate Marx’s analysis not on the basis of what existed during the depths of the Great Depression but at the height of its economic vitality: the roaring 20s. Trotsky observed that while industrial production increased by 50 per cent between 1920 and 1930, wages only rose only by 30 per cent. The workers were getting screwed in the best of times.

Like the nuclear reactor that withstood a meltdown in China Syndrome, the American economy supposedly is in recovery. Of course there are those unfortunates who cannot seem to find a job, especially in the Black community, but the stock market is at an all-time high and the housing market – according to the experts – is doing quite well. GM is showing a handsome profit even if it faces criminal charges for failing to inform owners of their cars that a faulty ignition might lead to fatal accidents.

More to the point, the *New York Times* of March 12, 2014 reported on economist Thomas Piketty’s new book *Capital* in the Twenty-First Century that would be of little assurance to anybody except the wealthy. Piketty deploys a mountain of data to prove that economic inequality will not only persist into the future but that the system itself is the primary generator, not “vampire squids” as Matt Taibbi put it. It is the very nature of the system that leads to a concentration of wealth at the top and misery at the bottom. Timesman Eduardo Porter, not a critic of capitalism after the fashion of Nouriel Roubini, puts it bluntly:

The deep concern about the distribution of income and wealth that inspired 19th-century thinkers like David Ricardo and Karl Marx was attributed to a misunderstanding of the dynamics of growth leavened with the natural pessimism that would come from living in a time of enormous wealth and deep squalor, an era that gave us *Les Misérables* and *Oliver Twist*.

Today, of course, it’s far from obvious that the 19th-century pessimists were entirely wrong.

Glancing back across history from the present-day United States, it looks as if Kuznets’s curve swerved way off target. Wages have been depressed for years. Profits account for the largest share of national income since the 1930s. The richest 10 percent of Americans take a larger slice of the economic pie than they did in 1913, at the peak of the Gilded Age.

Recently, a trend within Marxism has emerged that argues against the importance of “immiseration” altogether. To somehow link revolution with a declining standard of living is tantamount to what they call “Catastrophism”, a word in the title of a collection of essays edited by West Coast radio host Sasha Lilley: *Catastrophism: The Apocalyptic Politics of Collapse and Rebirth*.

Lilley’s chapter (“Great Chaos Under Heaven: Catastrophism and the Left”) in the collection can be read in Google books, something I highly recommend it even if I disagree with every word. Lilley is a stimulating thinker who can at least be given credit for being forthright. While she correctly discredits the notion that the capitalist system will collapse as a result of its own contradictions (Marx instead believed that cyclical crisis was endemic to the system), she goes too far in saying that crisis itself was inimical to class consciousness and political struggle and that an expanding capitalist economy was far more propitious for the left:

“With the exception of the 1930s, periods of intense working class combativeness in the United States have tended to coincide with periods of economic expansion, not contraction and crisis. The two big strike waves of the early twentieth century, from 1898 to 1904 and 1916 to 1920, took place during years of growth. These were periods in which radical workers forced employers to raise wages – by 35 percent between 1890 and 1920 – and, through struggle, successfully shortened the workweek by nine hours. These strikes were fueled by relative prosperity, and industrial action fell off when the economy moved downward.”

Workers struck throughout the early 1960s for that matter. This was a time when the UAW, the Teamsters, and the railway unions went out on strike for substantial wage increases all the time. During the brief time I was a public school teacher in the late 60s, Albert Shanker was one of the most “militant” trade unionists in the U.S. if going out on strike is some kind of litmus test. This was the guy after all who resulted in civilization being destroyed after he got his hands on a nuclear weapon, as the Doctor told Woody Allen in *Sleeper* after he awoke. That’s pretty militant but I do not think that’s the sort of thing Lilley had in mind.

But the kinds of strikes that capture Marxist’s attention are not the Samuel Gompers inspired affairs for higher wages. Instead we study what happened in Flint, Michigan in 1936 and 1937 when workers occupied factories and battled the cops and National Guard. This was a strike that began to

educate workers about FDR back-stabbing the CIO. Like it and so many other major class battles of the 1930s, it eventually came to naught because the Communist or Social Democratic leadership (Victor and Walter Reuther in the case of the UAW) was determined to back FDR. If the trade union movement had broken with the Democrats and launched a labor party, American politics would look a lot different today.

In the final analysis, it is politics that is key for Marxism in our time. Accepting Piketty's findings at face value (something made easier by the "new normal" of unemployment, stagnating wages, environmental despoliation, and decaying infrastructure), the emphasis should be on strengthening the left and challenging the rich on every single issue that divides us. Nobody can predict when and if the class struggle will reach such an advanced level that workers will become revolutionary, but the best way to move forward in that direction is by exploiting every injury and insult to those who own nothing but their labor power.

Although Marx was the first to understand the laws of motion in capitalism, it was really up to Lenin to think through what strategies were most effective. Ironically, it was lessons he learned from the German Social Democracy that helped him to formulate policies for a Czarist state that on the surface had little in common with a parliamentary democracy like Germany's.

In "What is to be Done?," Lenin appealed to his Russian co-thinkers to learn from the Germans:

"Why is there not a single political event in Germany that does not add to the authority and prestige of the Social-Democracy? Because Social-Democracy is always found to be in advance of all the others in furnishing the most revolutionary appraisal of every given event and in championing every protest against tyranny ... It intervenes in every sphere and in every question of social and political life; in the matter of Wilhelm's refusal to endorse a bourgeois progressive as city mayor (our Economists have not managed to educate the Germans to the understanding that such an act is, in fact, a compromise with liberalism!); in the matter of the law against 'obscene' publications and pictures; in the matter of governmental influence on the election of professors, etc., etc."

You have to wonder how our dogmatic Marxists of today can have so little appreciation for how the Russian social democracy operated. Could you imagine any of the 57 varieties of "Leninist" sects ever taking up the cause of a "bourgeois progressive" being denied the right to take office? Just recently, the Senate rejected Obama's appointment of Debo Adegbile to a top civil rights post because he had participated in an appeal filed on behalf of Mumia Abu-Jamal. A powerful left party in the U.S. would have raised hell about this, even if the Democrats did not lift a finger.

In terms of the laws against "obscene" publications and pictures, and governmental interference in the election of

professors, Lenin is amazingly prophetic when you think of Piss Christ and Ward Churchill. In many ways, capitalism is not just about whether the boss is enjoying a higher return on profits than a worker's rise in wages since Marxism is not reducible to economic determinism. Capitalism constitutes an assault on our lives during every working moment of the day and the duty of a revolutionist is to find ways to get people to come out of their apolitical shell and take part in civil society in order to fight for greater freedoms now and total liberation after the final conflict.

But in order to become effective, Marxism has to learn how to avoid the "pedigree" trap alluded to above since size matters. Nothing prevents growth more than hairsplitting after all. To be taken seriously by working people, socialists have to get out of their isolation chambers and use ideas and language drawn from their nation's own experience. This means first and foremost casting off the iconography of the Russian Revolution and especially terms like "communism" that would be totally misunderstood by the ordinary person even if they excite Slavoj Žižek.

In early 2010 the Gallup Poll discovered that 36 percent of Americans view socialism positively. Can you imagine if Gallup had used the word communism instead? That word might have registered more positively in the NYU sociology department but we are far more interested in what appeals to the average American.

As is most likely the case, Kshama Sawant was elected to City Council in Seattle by representing herself as a socialist rather than a communist and downplaying the dogmatic beliefs of her Trotskyist organization. Instead of making speeches about the need for a Leninist party, it was the need for a \$15 minimum wage that won her volunteers and votes.

As a sign of how intoxicated the left can become when it loses track of what century it is in, the Socialist Workers Party of the USA – a group Leon Trotsky hailed as most faithful to his party-building conceptions – dismissed Sawant's campaign as "reformist":

"Constrained to the narrow boundaries that typify capitalist election contests for local offices, her literature avoided important political issues that affect all workers, such as high unemployment and a woman's right to choose abortion. It made no mention of key international issues, Syria, the place of the Cuban Revolution, the common interests of working people worldwide against the bosses or the global crisis of capitalism that is driving their attacks against us."

Considering that her bid was for City Council, it made eminent good sense for her not to make speeches about Syria and the Cuban Revolution (whatever that means in 2014, when the country seems poised to adopt the Chinese model).

Not long after the cops expelled the last Occupy protester out of the last public park, I had hopes that the movement could have come together and run candidates under the name of the Occupy Party. Unfortunately, the autonomist and anar-

christ prejudices of the key activists made this impossible. For the ordinary person, taking a leave of absence from their job in order to camp out in the bitter cold was never a realistic possibility to begin with.

Making every possible tie to the Occupy movement, the Sawant campaign became a small token of what may be possible if the American left puts aside its petty differences and began to come together in a common organization to defend the rights of working people for a livable wage, as well as their freedom to go to a museum and see works like *Piss Christ* or photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe.

We have no crystal ball that would indicate when such an organization has reached the critical mass that is necessary to lead to the explosive reaction that can transform society and usher in a new civilization based on freedom and justice. Yet we must do everything in our power to remove all obstacles in our way, especially those put there in the name of Marxism. **CP**

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Fallout Over the USS Reagan

Fukushima's Nuclear Shadow

BY PETER LEE

During Operation Tomodachi - the deployment of a flotilla of US Navy ships to assist in the cleanup of Fukushima - the crew of the USS Reagan was irradiated by a radioactive release from the crippled Fukushima nuclear power station.

Please see the supplement of this issue which begins on page 29 of this PDF for the corrected version of this article.

"I had a digital watch," said quartermaster Jaime Plym, "and it suddenly stopped working. Somebody made a crack that radiation would do that. There were five or six of us on deck and everyone looked at their watches - and all the digital watches had stopped. There was one that was real expensive, and it wasn't working either.

"We were laughing at first. But then that petered out and we just sort of looked at each other because it wasn't funny anymore."

It is acknowledged that the crew of the Reagan, as well as other personnel and vessels in the US Sixth Fleet, were irradiated by a radioactive release from the crippled Fukushima nuclear power station.

However, the Department of Defense doesn't believe that sailors in the task force face significant health risks, and has declined to institute medical surveillance for personnel listed

in the "Operation Tomodachi Registry", a data base that includes inferred radiation doses for the 75,000 US military personnel involved in the operation.

Not so fast.

Atomic explosions have a blinding flash of clarity, followed by a grim plume of death, disease, and uncertainty.

With an atomic accident, like the Fukushima meltdown, all you get is the plume. And plenty of uncertainty.

Prediction of fallout from the successful airburst detonation of a nuclear weapon is reasonably close to an exact science. However, a rough estimate of how much radioactive material is generated by a nuclear accident is a fraught exercise in atomic forensics; even after the accident site becomes safe enough to access, it is difficult and dangerous to pick through the mess and calculate what material, and how much of it, made it up into the plume. In the case of Chernobyl, nobody has an idea of what flew out the shattered top of the reactor; estimates range from 10% to 100% of the total radioactive load.

In the case of Fukushima, without knowing what went up in the plume, the Japanese government has to rely on extrapolation from the ground-based instruments and air-borne sample collection it was able to deploy during the critical accident period, and from data provided by the U.S. and other governments. It is notoriously difficult to calculate actual release amounts using only field detection data; extrapolated data from the U.S. system of gummed film detectors and sensors operated during the era of atmospheric testing could usually account for only about half of what scientists knew was in the atmosphere.

Working off the same Fukushima data, different organizations' estimates of total release of radioactive material vary by over 30%.

Fukushima was not as big a disaster as Chernobyl. Maybe the total radioactive material released was 1/10th of Chernobyl. But that is plenty to create concern for the Ronald Reagan.

That is because the Reagan was allegedly caught in a washout - a more accurate term is perhaps a snow-out - that precipitated fallout from the upper atmosphere onto the ship.

Despite the efforts by the Reagan to avoid contamination - largely by designating a 50 mile by 25 mile triangle with its apex at Fukushima and trying to stay out of it - the Ronald Reagan occasionally had to enter the triangle as it positioned itself nearshore to launch and recover helicopters involved in the rescue effort.

To complicate matters, the plume apparently declined to conform to this rather simple geometry. And then came a snow shower...which brought with it, according to one sailor who went on deck to throw snowballs, a hot, metallic taste.

So the sailors of the Ronald Reagan are unlikely to derive much consolation from a report in *Science* sunnily titled *Much of Fukushima's Fallout was Gone with the Wind*:

The World Health Organization this morning released a relatively reassuring report suggesting few health impacts from the 2011 disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan. But the accident is likely to cause small, but significant, increases in cancers in populations in a few hotspots exposed to higher radioactive doses.

These conclusions regarding the worst nuclear accident since Chernobyl in 1986 could be less comforting than they sound: In fact, Japan dodged a bullet thanks to the weather. The pattern of prevailing winds during the accident meant that most of the radioactive materials released from the plant were blown out to sea. The results therefore say little about the health risks of any future nuclear accidents.

“Had the winds been less favourable, the consequences could have been more serious than Chernobyl,” says Keith Baverstock, a radiobiologist at the University of Eastern Finland in Kuopio.

Precipitated fallout from nuclear accidents is quite well understood, thanks in considerable part to the rich Russian experience in awful events exemplified by Chernobyl.

The lead fallout scientist for Chernobyl, Y. Izrael, wrote:

Radioactive Fallout After Nuclear Explosions and Accidents (Elsevier, Amsterdam, 2002). He addresses the efficacy of precipitation in removing fallout from the atmosphere with considerable authority. That’s because the Soviet government seeded rain clouds headed toward Chernobyl so they would dump precipitation prematurely and avoid a washout over the area most at risk. Perhaps out of modesty, Yizrael neglects to mention an even bolder initiative: the Soviet government allegedly seeded rainclouds over Belarus in order to create a washout, i.e. stop the Chernobyl plume from reaching Moscow, turning over half of Belarus into the most heavily contaminated area of Europe outside of the immediate environs of Chernobyl. Particles that otherwise might have eventually dispersed into a uniform and relatively dilute global radioactive haze were washed to the deck of the Reagan. And because the Reagan was close to Fukushima, the plume probably still contained the “near fallout”, the heavy material, possibly including “hot particles,” that can’t make it very far from the point of origin before it falls to the surface.

Instead of a uniform distribution of radiation easily measured by an array of air-sniffing sensors, a surface contaminated by hot particles in a washout might show fluctuations of up to thirty times radiation in one area than another.

This condition was independently documented in the sudden creation of one of most heavily irradiated locations in the United States: Albany, New

York. On April 26, 1953 (thirty three years to the day before the Chernobyl explosion, for connoisseurs of irony), an apocalyptic rainstorm swept through New York’s Capital Region just as the plume from a shot in Nevada, codenamed Simon, 2300 miles away and one day before, was passing overhead.

A local network of scientists took readings after the Albany incident and documented the high degree of local variability in radioactivity from the washout: Ted Rich...found a general level of 1 millirad per hour near the ground between Union College and Knolls. There were locally higher levels where rain water had run off from large areas before settling into the ground. Your editor [Jack Stehn, who assembled the reports] had the doubtful distinction of having the hottest spot on that first survey night under the gutter spout beside his front porch: 13 millirads per hour. [pg. 46]

In documentation for the Tomodachi Registry, the U.S. Navy does not directly address the variability issue and relies on extrapolation from the fixed and portable radiation sensors on board and computer models to calculate an inferred dose. In the Navy’s Radiation Dose Assessment for Fleet-Based Individuals, used to assign doses to be recorded for individuals in the Tomodachi Registry, there is no mention of precipitation and the possibility of hot particles and hot spots for the Ronald Reagan.

With this context, the Navy statement that “worst-case radiation exposure for a crew member on USS Ronald Reagan is less than 25 percent of the annual radiation exposure to a member of the U.S. public from natural sources of background radiation, such as the sun, rocks and soil” and bluff assertions on the Internet that sailors on the Reagan will “be fine as long as they don’t lick the windows” should perhaps be taken with a grain of iodized salt.

Not only is fallout variable in its distribution; it is notoriously difficult to dislodge.

The USS Ronald Reagan was probably only the second U.S. aircraft carrier to experience radioactive contamination in the Pacific. The first, the USS Independence, was irradiated by design in 1949, as part of the notorious Bikini Atoll nuke tests. The Baker shot, underwater and therefore extremely dirty, coated the test flotilla with contamination that could not be removed after months of scrubbing, acid bathg, and other treatment.

The purpose of the Bikini test was to determine whether a naval vessel that had been contaminated during a nuclear exchange could be satisfactorily decontaminated and returned to service. The answer was No, not even after months of strenuous decontamination. Finally, the USS Independence, together with its cargo of radiation (which made the scraping the ship economically unfeasible), was secretly and ignominiously scuttled in the eastern Pacific Ocean, probably a few dozen miles west of San Francisco.

One might expect that the Ronald Reagan will benefit from advances in decontamination science in the intervening decades and not suffer the same fate. The Ronald Reagan responded to the detection of the descending plume as an unconventional weapons threat. A crewmember recorded an announcement in which the captain, with the studied insouciance demanded of these occasions, ordering a “Cargo William” a.k.a. CW or Chemical Weapons response. The below decks area was sealed off and suitable protective clothing and masks issued to the crew.

However, sailors from the Ronald Reagan will feel an unwelcome twinge of nostalgia when viewing archival photos of seamen using pushbrooms trying to clean the deck of the Prinz Eugen, one of the test vessels in the 1949 Baker shot.

Apparently, fallout descended on the Reagan so unexpectedly that there was not time to deploy the first line of defense – sprinklers on the deck before the fallout hit – and by that time the water around the ship was also contaminated, so hosing off the deck would have simply exacerbated the contamination problem. So sailors, soap, and pushbrooms were deployed.

Obviously, the U.S. Navy has been anticipating and preparing for this kind of threat for decades – though anonymous reports imply that a full military complement of anxiety, overcompensation, obtuseness, and coverup (including allegations that some personnel were pressured into falsely certifying they had received iodide tablets) – may have also been deployed when the Reagan’s radiation sensors began to sound.

However, when dealing with radioactive particulates at the micron and submicron level, sometimes experience, ingenuity, and effort aren’t enough. As Roger Witherspoon reported in his groundbreaking report at Japan Focus on the experience of the Ronald Reagan:

Enis had been ordered to bring down the American flag, which had been flying atop the mast for two weeks, and bring it to the Captain’s quarters.

“I brought it down,” he said, “and folded it respectfully and tucked it under my right arm, next to my body. I carried it inside, put it away, and thought nothing of it.”

After dinner, he was walking past a sensor “and the alarms all went off,” he recalled. “And they began yelling at me not to touch anything or anyone and to go straight to the decontamination area.”

“They had told us that there was no radiation,” said Enis. “When they started putting up the stations along the ship to check for radiation they didn’t say why they were there. They checked my boots and nothing happened. Then they checked my hands and the machine goes crazy.

“The guy doing the checking freaked out and said to ‘Step away from him!’ Next thing I know, I got plastic bags on my arms and they are telling everyone to get away from me. I

almost had an anxiety attack because they were treating me like I had the plague. They weren’t touching me. They were yelling commands to where I had to walk and what I had to do. I had to scrub my hands and my right side with this gritty paint remover and it took off a couple of layers of skin.”

Enis was not told, then or later, exactly what his radiation reading was. They did say his was the highest level recorded among personnel on the ship.

In addition, the water supply was tainted, presumably by intake of contaminated sea water to feed the desalinization lines.

Clearly, decontamination was not quick or easy. According to sailors who served on the Ronald Reagan, it was barred from ports in Japan and South Korea because of the radioactivity issue and sailed the Pacific, Flying Dutchman fashion, until the ship had been cleaned up. In calculating theoretical radiation doses for the Reagan, the U.S. Navy’s worst case



USS Ronald Reagan. Photo: US Navy.

assumption was sixty days of exposure. According to Paul Garner, a lawyer representing some of the sailors claiming radiation-related illness, the Navy spent a year and a half after Tomodachi overhauling the Reagan, quietly decontaminating it, and shipping the waste to the U.S. nuclear facility at Hanford, Washington.

Questions concerning the actual magnitude of radioactive contamination are, unfortunately, further complicated by a well-founded suspicion that governments tend to use the most optimistic estimates at best and at worst flat out lie when it comes to reporting radiation exposure.

Russia is a notorious offender in this regard. In her book, *Chernobyl: Crime Without Punishment* (Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, N.J. 2011), Alla Yaroshinskaya, a journalist turned activist turned USSR deputy elected on a truth on Chernobyl platform in the perestroika era, uses internal Soviet documents to demonstrate the Soviet government’s massive coverup, and the vast disconnect between public pronouncements and private information in the weeks, months, and years after the explosion.

Seeking to protect the government and party from accusations of gross negligence and the enormous political and financial costs of thoroughgoing remediation, the Soviet government downplayed the magnitude of the radiation release. This led to negative short-term outcomes such as the decision to conduct the 1986 May Day parade in Kiev through a radioactive haze immediately after Chernobyl, and horrible decisions like arbitrarily jacking up the acceptable lifetime dose of radiation to 35 Rem (as opposed to 7 Rem) so the government would not be faced with the existential issue of having to resettle tens of millions of Soviet citizens out of contaminated zones.

The United States is also not immune from accusations that it has suppressed information on the true magnitude of radiation releases from the government test program in Nevada, and especially from the 1953 Albany washout described above.

The yield of the Simon shot significantly exceeded the predictions of the bomb's makers. This not only delivered a nasty radioactive surprise to personnel in the forward observation trenches; it meant that the initial fireball exceeded expectations and irradiated and sucked up into the plume an unknown amount of dirt and rock.

So, in some ways, Simon was a nuclear accident, like Windscale, Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, and Fukushima

As noted above, the Albany area was unique in that a well-trained cadre of academics and engineers was on site to conduct some "citizen science".

The Albany area is home to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, a premier engineering school that had on its faculty a Los Alamos veteran, Herbert Clark, who ran a nuclear chemistry lab equipped with a Geiger counter. General Electric also has its major electric motor engineering and manufacturing facility up the road, in Schenectady, and operated a nuclear research facility, the Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory nearby for the AEC. Through a local association, scientists from these and other facilities informally mobilized to collect readings on radioactivity.

Albany is also home to Bill Heller, a local journalist who developed a taste for the Simon fallout story.

In his book *A Good Day Has No Rain* (Whitsun Publishing Co., Albany 2003), Heller described the disparity between the announced fallout estimates and what was detected by the local scientists.

At the time, the AEC announced that the cumulative exposure in the Capitol Region as a result of Simon was 100 millirads, "as dangerous as a chest X-Ray" according to the *Albany Knickerbocker News*.

This was clearly at odds with the observation of local scientists, who had detected 5 millirad per hour hot spots i.e. cumulative exposure would have exceeded 100 millirads in a single day, not the 13 week window used to calculate cumulative exposure.

Even more significantly, it transpired that this modest an-

nounced dose was also radically at odds with AEC internal opinion, which estimated an integrated (i.e. cumulative) dose of 2 Rad in the Albany Region as a result of Simon. This conclusion was classified and only revealed in 1980. Heller points out that the local measurements and conditions imply even higher levels. The AEC had based its internal calculations on an aerial survey over Albany, in air that had been scoured by the rainstorm, and five days after the test, when the shorter-lived isotopes had already decayed.

Beyond the problem of the government flubbing – or fudging – radiation measurements is the intensely controversial issue of what that radiation can and will do.

The effort to link radiation exposure to cancer has been largely lost in U.S. courts because of the prolonged latency period of cancer, and the invocation of genetics, environment, and statistical uncertainty to prevent the determination of legal causality.

The nuclear establishment, in other words, is willing to say that radiation may cause cancer. On the other hand, it is quite unwilling to state that radiation caused your cancer.

Unable to make headway in the US courts, affected groups like "downwinders" – residents of Nevada and Utah who received radiation exposure as a result of nuclear testing – and employees who worked in the government-run nuclear establishment turned to legislative relief with the help of their state delegations. For a carefully defined cohort, when a certain duration exposure to man-made nuclear radiation can be documented, and a disease from a list of about two dozen relatively rare cancers is present, the legislation allows the presumption of causality to be made and offers defined cash settlements from a special fund.

Governments that operate nuclear weapons and research facilities and support civilian nuclear power generation have an obvious vested interest in minimizing the potential consequences of the environmental release of radioactive material. The U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, for instance, saw nuclear weapons and nuclear power as national priorities, and unambiguously pushed back against scientific research that demonstrated the hazards of radiation – particularly low level radiation releases unavoidable in the conduct of day-to-day nuclear business – and threatened the political and social space of the nuclear industry.

This including turning on one of their own.

John Gofman was one of the founding fathers of American nuclear science. While associate director and chief of the bio-medical division at Lawrence Berkeley Laboratories, the premier U.S. atomic weapons research facility, he also documented the dangers of low level radiation and expressed his findings in the hypothesis "Linear No Threshold" or LNT, i.e. that even the smallest radiation dose was hazardous.

Gofman recounted a phone call from a colleague in 1970:

Someone from the AEC came to my house last weekend," he said. "He lives near me. And he said,

'We need you to help destroy Gofman and Tamplin [Gofman's collaborator]'. And I told him you'd sent me a copy of your paper, and I didn't necessarily agree with every number you'd put in, but I didn't have any major difficulties with it either. It looked like sound science. And – you won't believe this – but do you know what he said to me? He said, 'I don't care whether Gofman and Tamplin are right or not, scientifically. It's necessary to destroy them...

The U.S. government exiled Gofman to nuclear purdah (actually he went back to teach at Berkeley after his research funding at Livermore was pulled, and subsequently became a leading spokesman against nuclear power), but kept his LNT... with a twist. The government enshrined the linear element of the hypothesis, decreeing that the ability of small doses to do damage was directly proportional to their magnitude. Small doses = small problem.

However, there is one government that has swung the pendulum in the opposite direction on the issue of acknowledging and remediating radiogenic illness.

That government is Ukraine, which has turned the Chernobyl disaster into a symbol of its break with the Soviet pattern of disinformation, dishonesty, and malign neglect. Ukraine recognizes a broad range of maladies beyond cancer as radiation sicknesses, and set up an elaborate bureaucratic effort to classify and compensate sufferers accordingly.

Ukraine's radiation policy is widely viewed with hostility both by Russia and the international atomic establishment, including the United States and the IAEA.

It is not too much of an exaggeration to characterize the view of the international nuclear establishment that Ukraine has fostered a colony of atomic moochers spinning ordinary ailments into radiation-sickness gold for personal, bureaucratic, and scientific profit, and corrupting nuclear medicine in the process.

Critics continue to ascribe the irrefutable health problems of Chernobyl victims with the contemporaneous social and economic calamity of de-Sovietization and, if statistical correlations between well-being and radiation exposure emerge, to allege "radiophobia" i.e. hypochondrial anxiety caused by unfounded fear of radiation exposure, as the cause. The more generous concession is to treat radiophobia as a disease in itself, as a form of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD.

A series of U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Committee (the successor to the AEC) powerpoint briefings on Fukushima that came to light through the Freedom of Information Act make for interesting reading. A presentation on "Fukushima Health Effects" mis-states the total release of radioactive materials from Chernobyl (the USNRC number comes to 400 Megacuries; the generally accepted number is north of 1000) and spends a great deal of slide space minimizing the potential health impact of radiation, concluding with a warning about the Chernobyl precedent of "psycho-social

impacts" which has implanted feelings of victimhood, and caused many "to have and continue to make unhealthy lifestyle choices resulting in higher rates of disease."

In its own mind, the USNRC may have neatly closed the circle on the disturbing morbidity data by ascribing higher disease rates to Chernobylites' decision to live their lives as bummed-out drunken mopes.

Chernobyl activists are infuriated by Western and IAEA positions, which they ascribe to cynical collusion by the nuclear establishment in the regurgitation of inaccurate, misleading, and manufactured Russian data in order to paint a false, minimalized picture of the health crisis around Chernobyl.

Indeed if attention is shifted from the West, with its armies of irradiated laboratory animals, to the doctors and academics of the affected countries, who interact with the human victims through their clinics and try to make sense of it, a more complex picture, and one closer to the Chernobyl activists' position, emerges.

Adriana Petryna, an anthropologist now at the University of Pennsylvania, fluent in Ukrainian, conducted extensive fieldwork in Ukraine studying the human experience of radiation exposure and the government's response to the Chernobyl problem. She published a groundbreaking book, *Exposed Lives* (Princeton University Press, 2013) on the human, social, and political fallout of the Chernobyl catastrophe. In it she cautiously navigates between the "psychoneural" (disease) and "psychosocial" ("radiophobia") advocates.

Writing in the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, Petryna reflected upon the unending parade of sufferers she observed passing through the Ukrainian radiological bureaucracy:

[I]t is critical to recognize that these claimants showed up in the country's medical centers because of unanswered health problems. The reality of their everyday health burdens should not be excluded from analyses of the disaster's effects, including analysis of how they survived.

Scientists in the ex-Soviet bloc have pushed ahead, often against resistance in their own countries as well as abroad, to document the statistical significance of the health problems of hundreds of thousands of Chernobyl responders, the so-called "liquidators", who not only knocked down the original fire and built the notorious sarcophagus that encases the derelict unit, but also performed prolonged tasks in the exclusion zone like removing contaminated topsoil for burial. In 2011, 40% of the liquidators (about a quarter million people) were disabled with a host of cardiovascular, endocrinological, gastrointestinal, and neural diseases. This number that perhaps can be explained away by psychosomatic despair; but liquidators also showed an increase in the incidence rate of a statistically more concrete malady, solid carcinomas, to 15-20% over the

Russian male population as a whole.

Significantly, in seeking to explain these widespread negative health outcomes, researchers have also given a major knock to the simplistic “linear no threshold” hypothesis, which is employed to assert that Chernobyl survivors do not face significant health hazards from the long-term low level exposure they have experienced since the disaster. Based on Russian research – including decades of data from another miserable Soviet nuclear ghetto, the contaminated environs and residents surrounding the Mayak military plutonium factory at Chelyabinsk – it appears that certain low levels of radiation do more harm than one would expect according to the linear hypothesis. It is hypothesized that small doses damage the cell and its function but, unlike larger doses, do not trigger the cell’s repair mechanism to mitigate the damage. This finding has been supported by Western researchers, who have found that prolonged low-level exposure produces a higher level of cancer than the same dose in one quick shot (the *Bulletin of Atomic Sciences* devoted an issue to this debate in 2012).

This state of affairs has opened the door for dissident scientists to assert that radiation hazard is not simply a matter of totting up the aggregate damage to cell DNA until the repair mechanism is overcome and cancer erupts; instead, that radiation damage affects cells, organs, and human systems in complex and synergistic ways.

Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and North America all have main stream but dissident scientists, such as Elena Burlakova in Russia, Angelina Caena in Ukraine, and Vassili Nesterenko in Belarus, who are making the case that the chronic buzz of Chernobyl radiation layered over the natural background radiation is contributing to a host of illnesses, not just cancer from misbehaving cells, but endocrinological, heart and neurological damage. They believe there is, in fact, a synergy between low-level radiation, an individual’s genetic endowment, environmental factors (like chemical insults from alcohol, tobacco, drugs, pollution and, yes, the omnipresent stress of feeling that one is contaminated), which also means that different subjects respond to similar doses in different ways i.e. “stochastically” (randomly) instead of “deterministically”.

Further research on radiogenic illness might be able to explain or debunk disturbing anecdotal parallels typified by three cases:

First case:

A Czech journalist, Petr Toman, interviewed Leonid Budkovski, a Chernobyl liquidator in 2011:

I can’t walk, let alone move. When my wife puts me in bed, I lie. When my grandson puts me in a wheelchair, I sit. We have to hire our neighbor to come over and lift me up; otherwise I couldn’t even move. My right arm is practically numb - I can’t hold anything in it.

To top things off, I am beginning to lose sensation in the left one as well. I am able to grab things only when I see them, or else I don’t know whether I am holding something in my hand or not. It’s like they said – I’m gradually burning out... The doctors are lost. When they treat my legs, my heart fails me. When they treat my heart, my legs give up on me for a change. There are no pills that would actually work. Chernobyl burned me out, like a piece of wood.

Second case:

In 2001, Lisa Davis reported in the *San Francisco Weekly* on the toxic residue of the U.S. Navy’s Radiological Defense Laboratory at Hunter’s Point on the San Francisco Bay just south of downtown San Francisco. One of the lab’s responsibilities was to dispose of radioactive waste, both from its own operations and from Lawrence Berkeley Labs and other facilities. The waste, mostly carcasses of experimental animals sacrificed as part of radiation experiments, were packed into 55-gallon drums to be hauled by barge for disposal at sea. Over 47,000 barrels were disposed of in the Farallon Islands dump a few dozen miles outside the Golden Gate, possibly including 9000 barrels of “special” i.e. plutonium or uranium-laced waste

Once the barrels were dumped, they might float. Fortunately, the Navy had a solution. A gunner’s mate, John Gessleman, was on hand. He rode the tugboat towing the barge out to the Farallons once or twice a week with a rifle to shoot holes into the barrels that wouldn’t sink.

Twenty years later, Gessleman got sick. As Davis records:

Now, Gessleman lives in Pennsylvania; his speech is slurred, and his wife, Ann, often has to translate what he’s saying on the phone. In 1980, Gessleman was diagnosed with a form of multiple sclerosis, which has left him in a wheelchair, with limited use of his left arm and sight in only one eye. John Gessleman believes his time in the Navy, working near radioactive waste, contributed to his present condition. He remembers, for example, sleeping on the starboard side of his ship – the side next to the barge’s loading gate -- but as with most claims by atomic veterans, the government disagreed, and refused to pay him for a service-related disability.

Currently over 70 servicemen and women on the USS Ronald Reagan are trying to sue Tokyo Electric Power Corporation, the operators of TEPCO, for negligence relating to their alleged exposure and illness from radioactive contamination from the Fukushima plume. A local TV station reported on one of the plaintiffs, Steve Simmons:

He served his country, but has his country turned its back on him? A Maryland sailor says he’s now wheelchair-bound, and he blames it on radiation he was

exposed to while representing his country at what's been called the world's worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl...

Steve started feeling tired, not himself. Then, he blacked out while driving to work, and drove his truck up on a curb. Steve said his list of ailments was puzzling, "You're starting to run fevers, your lymph nodes start swelling, you're having night sweats, you're getting spastic and you're losing sensation in your legs, and you can't feel your legs when you're getting 2nd degree burns on them, and how do you explain those things?"

Doctors could not. Steve's leg muscles eventually just gave up, and he's now confined to a wheelchair to get around.

Steve explains, "As far as the big picture we still don't have a diagnosis of what this is, still struggling to even get a doctor to acknowledge that radiation had anything to do with it."

That diagnosis is critical. Without the Navy acknowledging Steve wouldn't be in this situation if it wasn't for his time in Operation Tomodachi, his retirement and pension are at stake, plus he doesn't qualify for aid in the same way he would if he lost his legs in an IED explosion.

The Department of Defense says radiation levels were safe, and were the equivalent to less than a month's exposure to the same natural radiation you pick up from being near rocks, soil and the sun.

Steve doesn't buy that, "How do you take a ship and place it into a nuclear plume for five plus hours, how do you suck up nuclear contaminated waste into the water filtration system and think for one minute that there's no health risk to anybody on board?"

Dr. Robert Peter Gale is one of the world's leading experts on radiation's effects, WUSA9 asked him if he thinks Steve's condition is related, he said no, "I feel badly about it, but it's extraordinarily unlikely that it has anything to do with radiation exposure. There's no toxic agent that we can measure as precise as radiation. It's very unlikely that the Department of Defense would not have precise data on this."

With all due respect to Dr. Gale—who, in addition to consulting on nuclear accidents around the world, is an evangelist for the insignificance of man-made irradiation, and an advocate for nuclear power to lick the global warming problem, it is difficult to believe that the Department of Defense has precise data on what happened in every nook and cranny and to every person on the Ronald Reagan as it experienced a washout of near-zone fallout.

Or that the growing body of research on the complex and variable effects of low-level radiation emerging from the radioactive petri dish of Chernobyl is unsound and irrelevant.

As these doubts grow, perceptions by people like John Gessleman and Steve Simmons concerning the causes of their personal catastrophes are not going to get beaten back by invocations of precise measurement, statistical improbability, traditional scientific authority, and mockery of radiophobia.

From the point of view of government and private-sector managers of the nuclear portfolio, scientists pushing beyond the simple, mechanistic LNT/cancer version are opening a Pandora's box of junk science, popular panic, and endless litigation. That might be the reason why the Department of Defense made the decision not to pursue medical surveillance for personnel on the Tomodachi Registry after three years, well before the suspected health problems of low level radiation might arise.

The sailors of the Sixth Fleet task force will, of course, face an uphill battle. Service personnel cannot sue the U.S. military – the principle was affirmed in the landmark case of a serviceman who was denied compensation for a botched surgery even after a towel reading "Property of U.S. Army" was fished out of his abdomen – and sailors on the Reagan claiming radiogenic illnesses are seeking redress through courts in Japan by suing TEPCO for its alleged negligence in failing to notify the task force of the radiation release from Fukushima.

As for being able to prove radiogenic sickness for the purpose of securing treatment for service-related disability through the VA system after discharge, the sailors will be in a race against time, the slow progress of scientific research in a new and complex field and, one expects, a certain lack of enthusiasm by the U.S. nuclear and defense establishment.

John Gofman recalled what his colleague told him about the AEC's attempts to suppress his low-level radiation studies:

[B]y the time those people get the cancer and the leukemia, you'll be retired and I'll be retired, so what the hell difference does it make right now? We need our nuclear power program, and unless we destroy Gofman and Tamplin, the nuclear power program is in real hazard from what they say.' And I told him no. I refused. I just want you to know if you ever mention this, I'll deny it. I'll deny that I ever told you this, and I'll deny that he said it to me."

The third anniversary of the Japanese earthquake and tsunami was March 11. The twenty-seventh anniversary of Chernobyl is April 26. John Gessleman passed away in 2007, about forty years after he served at the San Francisco radiation lab. CP

PETER LEE edits China Matters.

CULTURE & REVIEWS

Southern Discomfort The Apotheosis of Matthew McConaughey

By Kim Nicolini

In 1993, I went to Richard Linklater's *Dazed and Confused* expecting a shallow comedy. Set in a Texas high school in 1976, the movie started out funny enough with plenty of stoner humor and 70s rock to entertain. What I wasn't expecting was how the film turned into a scathing critique of Southern youth and a dark commentary on the violence of teen culture.

Teenagers are portrayed like rabid pack animals in vicious displays of sexually tinged rituals. Senior boys beat freshman's asses with wooden paddles in sadistic repressed sexuality, while senior girls demean freshmen by squirting them with ketchup and demanding they writhe like frying bacon. Both scenarios reference *Deliverance* ("squeal like a pig") where Southern sexual repression is played out in a rural homosexual rape scene. *Dazed and Confused* is the film where Matthew McConaughey first appeared on the big screen as the iconic David Wooderson, a predatory man-boy who hangs out with the high school kids and preys on young girls.

With his tight orange jeans, cigarettes stuffed in his t-shirt sleeve, and a beefed up Chevy, Wooderson and his iconic "Alright, alright, alright" is a picture of masculinity gone wrong. A man who never stops being a boy and thinks getting laid by high school girls will keep him perpetually virile, he is a living cliché. His catch line is: "That's

what I like about those high school girls, man. I get older, but they stay the same age." On the surface this line is funny, but at its heart it exposes a sick sense of masculinity and sexuality. Wooderson is an empty vessel, no different than the car that he drives.

Dazed and Confused's combination of comedy, tragedy and horror are what make it a specifically Southern film. As found in the writing of William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor, the American South has always bred a unique culture that is both comic and tragic, Romantic and grotesque, rich with clichés that would be hilarious if they weren't so real.

After *Dazed and Confused*, McConaughey disappeared into the mediocre muck of romantic comedies. He used his good looks (voted "Most Handsome" at Longview Texas High School) to play the shallow roles that I expected to find in *Dazed and Confused*. Then, McConaughey resurfaced in 2011 from the place he started in 1993, with *Bernie* a darkly humorous parable of the American South directed by Richard Linklater. The film blends fiction and fact and real actors with native Texans. It set the stage for McConaughey to blend his own personal sense of the South with the fictional roles he plays, and in turn become the face of Southern regional cinema.

Set in Carthage, Texas, *Bernie* is Southern culture at its best or worst, depending on how you look at it. A mix of reality and parody, Christianity and perversion, big hair and hunting rifles, the movie uses the murder trial of Bernie (Jack Black) to unveil hypocrisies, homophobia and twisted sexuality "Behind the Pine Curtain" as one of the characters refers to East Texas and the Confederate States of America (CSA). McConaughey plays the town District

Attorney Danny Buck, replete with oversized lenses, wide collared suits, and a whole shitload of homophobia.

In the past few years, McConaughey's roles have taken on complexities of Southern sexuality and masculinity and their inextricable relationship to Christian culture and dogma. He has worked with visionary directors including Richard Linklater (*Bernie*, 2011), William Friedkin (*Killer Joe*, 2011), Lee Daniels (*The Paperboy*, 2012), Jeff Nichols (*Mud*, 2012), and Steven Soderbergh (*Magic Mike*, 2012). He also played the homophobic AIDS afflicted Texan Ron Woodruff in *Dallas Buyers Club*. Finally, he just completed his tour de force performance as detective Rust Cohle in HBO's *True Detective* set in rural Louisiana.

McConaughey's roles play on the Southern tradition in film and literature to deconstruct codes of masculinity. In cultural texts, the South is a hotbed of fucked-up sexuality. Christianity is coupled with homocentric culture in which men hang with men while women are kept in the bedroom and kitchen. Southern culture creates violence out of sex, builds closets inside of closets, cultivates a landscape where homophobia meets perversion and pedophilia, and morphs archaic codes of chivalry into racist vigilantism.

In *Bernie*, McConaughey's character shows how in the CSA (or at least Eastern Texas) anyone perceived as "different" can be persecuted for being homosexual, the evidence being that Bernie wears sandals (gasp). In *Killer Joe*, McConaughey again takes up the side of the law, playing a homicide detective who moonlights as a contract killer and has a taste for virgins. According to Southern Gothic lore, there's nothing those pious and masculine Southern men like more than virgin flesh. For these whackos, somehow fucking a virgin is a stamp of white masculine righteousness rather than criminal perversion.

In *The Paper Boy*, rural Florida is seething with sexual perver-

sion, racism, and misaligned desires. McConaughey's character Ward Jansen has inherited so much white guilt that he can only get his jollies by being beaten and fucked by black men. We find the naked McConaughey face down and hog-tied on a plastic sheet (continuing with the piggy thread). McConaughey bares his ass to show the stripped Southern white male trapped in his corrupted sense of sexuality.

There is no shortage of McConaughey's bare ass in *Magic Mike* which dissects the contradictions in Southern male archetypes. Pimped as a film about male nude strippers, *Magic Mike* really is a sad tale of men who literally perform their gender for a living in Tampa. It combines labor and sex, showing the inherent prostitution of gender roles and work. At the center of the ring is McConaughey's character Dallas, who would be funny if he wasn't so damn tawdry and tragic, believing in a myth that is as empty as his nightclub after the lights go out.

Many of McConaughey's roles are so riotously funny that they are uncomfortable. The very things that make them humorous make them tragic. He delivers sincere portraits of tragically fucked up men burdened with the weight of the clichés and archetypes they embody. They are comic tragedies.

McConaughey's *Mud* plays like a modern day Tom Sawyer. Another man-boy who conflates romantic dreaming with deflated reality, *Mud* is more fable than man. The movie is about boys coming of age in a landscape where archetypes of masculinity are built from straw. They are boats without engines, guns without bullets. A snake pit boys fall into while they chase their masculine ideals.

In *Dallas Buyers Club*, McConaughey's raw viscerally real performance as Ron Woodruff is the epitome of Southern virility (a bull-riding, womanizing homophobe) who contracts AIDS and subsequently is confronted with the homophobia of which he is part and parcel.

Finally, in HBO's *True Detective* McConaughey's Rust Cohle is a prophet of Southern debauchery and corruption. Cohle and his partner Marty Hart (fellow Texan Woody Harrelson) investigate the ritual murder of a prostitute found wearing a crown of antlers and tied to a tree in a burning cane field. Like a Southern Gothic version of a Hieronymus Bosch painting, *True Detective* and McConaughey's Cohle expose a Southern "psychosphere" of secrets and perversion where masculinity and Christianity literally breed epidemic murder.

Some may critique these roles as crude stereotypes, but stereotypes are derived from reality. McConaughey's roles fit into a cultural tradition that depicts the decadence and debauchery of the South through baroque exaggeration, myth, and dark humor. Sure, not everyone living in the CSA is a pervert, racist homophobe. McConaughey shows the complexity of being a white man in the South by playing his roles to the edge of absurdity then turning them into images of tragic sincerity, not unlike the music of Lynyrd Skynyrd which plays during the violent drunken brawl in *Dazed and Confused*.

When McConaughey won his Oscar and thanked God and family for his success, he got a lot of shit from the liberal media. But nothing in the roles McConaughey has played over the last three years propagates a Christian agenda. In fact, they turn the Christian agenda on its head. Discriminating against him for his religious choices is the same as discriminating against anyone else for their choices. Discrimination is discrimination.

The consistency of his roles has made his body a landscape of Southern culture and an embodiment of the Southern literary canon. As far as I'm concerned, that is "Alright, alright, alright." **CP**

KIM NICOLINI is an artist, poet and cultural critic living in Tucson, Arizona.

Inside MSNBC

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

Barack Obama wasn't the only beneficiary of the calamitous Republican rule under George W. Bush in the 2000s. Something of an industry punchline since its formation in 1996, MSNBC suddenly gained a comprehensible voice during the era, while pinning its hopes upon the inspiring Senator from Illinois.

Obama's presidential victory in 2008 spelled success for the network, which saw a sizable ratings increase, and began positioning itself as a viable alternative to the right-wing propaganda machine of Fox News. However, after a close examination of the station's programming, and an analysis of their celebrity talking heads, troubling questions about the state of the American media arise.

In *Medium Blue: the Politics of MSNBC*, media analyst Michael Arria provides the first book-length investigation into the remaking of MSNBC as a cable network designed to advance the neoliberal ideology of the new Democratic Party.

Arria depicts a network devoted to defending the Democratic Party's policies at all costs. His in-depth analysis provides new details on the firing of Phil Donahue, the termination of Keith Olberman and Cenk Uygur, the personal and professional interconnections between MSNBC producers and commentators to the DNC and the Obama White House. He shows how MSNBC has shilled for the Obama administration's wars, defended its illegal spying, tarred whistleblowers Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning, backed Obama's wars and failed to hold our broken political system accountable.

Medium Blue serves as lucid guide to help you navigate through the nightly propaganda of America's most popular liberal network. **CP**

CounterPunch

ISSN 1086-2323 (print)

ISSN 2328-4331 (digital)

www.counterpunch.org

1 (800) 840-3683

\$5.00 per issue

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CounterPunch

Editor's Note: Unfortunately, Peter Lee's groundbreaking exploration of the exposure of sailors onboard the USS Ronald Reagan to radiation from the meltdown of reactors at Fukushima was somewhat mangled by our design software, which dropped several of the indented quotations. This is a vitally important essay that deserves a wide readership in a clear format. We are sending Lee's story out once more as a stand-alone edition, with block quotes and citations for the quotations. I apologize for the inconvenience.

— Jeffrey St. Clair

Fukushima's Nuclear Shadow Fallout Over the USS Reagan

BY PETER LEE

During Operation Tomodachi — the deployment of a flotilla of US naval vessels off Japan to assist in disaster relief after the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami — a group of sailors on the aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan took a turn on deck.

“I had a digital watch,” said quartermaster Jaime Plym, “and it suddenly stopped working. Somebody made a crack that radiation would do that. There were five or six of us on deck and everyone looked at their watches — and all the digital watches had stopped. There was one that was real expensive, and it wasn't working either.

“We were laughing at first. But then that petered out and we just sort of looked at each other because it wasn't funny anymore.”

<http://japanfocus.org/-Roger-Witherspoon/3919#sthash.yYoKIOMw.dpuf>

It is acknowledged that the crew of the Reagan, as well as other personnel and vessels in the US Sixth Fleet, were irradiated by a radioactive release from the crippled Fukushima nuclear power station.

However, the Department of Defense doesn't believe that sailors in the task force face significant health risks, and has declined to institute medical surveillance for personnel listed in the “Operation Tomodachi Registry”, a data base that includes inferred radiation doses for the 75,000 US military personnel involved in the operation.

Not so fast.

Atomic explosions have a blinding flash of clarity, followed by a grim plume of death, disease, and uncertainty.

With an atomic accident, like the Fukushima meltdown, all you get is the plume. And plenty of uncertainty.

Prediction of fallout from the successful airburst detonation of a nuclear weapon is reasonably close to an exact science. However, a rough estimate of how much radioactive material is generated by a nuclear accident is a fraught exercise in atomic forensics; even after the accident site becomes safe enough to access, it is difficult and dangerous to pick through the mess and calculate what material, and how much of it, made it up into the plume. In the case of Chernobyl, nobody has an idea of what flew out the shattered top of the reactor; estimates range from 10% to 100% of the total radioactive load.

In the case of Fukushima, without knowing what went up in the plume, the Japanese government has to rely on extrapolation from the ground-based instruments and air-borne sample collection it was able to deploy during the critical accident period, and from data provided by the US and other governments. It is notoriously difficult to calculate actual release amounts using only field detection data; extrapolated data from the US system of gummed film detectors and sensors operated during the era of atmospheric testing could usually account for only about half of what scientists knew was in the atmosphere.

Working off the same Fukushima data, different organizations' estimates of total release of radioactive material vary by over 30%.

Fukushima was not as big a disaster as Chernobyl. Maybe the total radioactive material released was 1/10th of Chernobyl. But that is plenty to create concern for the Ronald Reagan.

That is because the Reagan was allegedly caught in a washout — a more accurate term is perhaps a snow-out — that precipitated fallout from the upper atmosphere onto the ship.

Despite the efforts by the Reagan to avoid contamination — largely by designating a 50 mile by 25 mile triangle with its apex at Fukushima and trying to stay out of it — the Ronald Reagan occasionally had to enter the triangle as it positioned itself nearshore to launch and recover helicopters involved in the rescue effort.

To complicate matters, the plume apparently declined to conform to this rather simple geometry. And then came a snow shower... which brought with it, according to one sailor who went on deck to throw snowballs, a hot, metallic taste.

So the sailors of the Ronald Reagan are unlikely to derive much consolation from a report in Science sunnily titled *Much of Fukushima's Fallout was Gone with the Wind*:

The World Health Organization this morning released a relatively reassuring report suggesting few health impacts from the 2011 disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan. But the accident is likely to cause small, but significant, increases in cancers in populations in a few hotspots exposed to higher radioactive doses.

These conclusions regarding the worst nuclear accident since Chernobyl in 1986 could be less comforting than they sound: In fact, Japan dodged a bullet thanks to the weather. The pattern of prevailing winds during the accident meant that most of the radioactive materials released from the plant were blown out to sea. The results therefore say little about the health risks of any future nuclear accidents.

“Had the winds been less favourable, the consequences could have been more serious than Chernobyl,” says Keith Baverstock, a radiobiologist at the University of Eastern Finland in Kuopio.

<http://www.nature.com/news/much-of-fukushima-s-fallout-was-gone-with-the-wind-1.12528>

Precipitated fallout from nuclear accidents is quite well understood, thanks in considerable part to the rich Russian experience in awful events exemplified by Chernobyl.

The lead fallout scientist for Chernobyl, Y. Izrael, wrote *Radioactive Fallout After Nuclear Explosions and Accidents* (Elsevier, Amsterdam, 2002). He addresses the efficacy of precipitation in removing fallout from the atmosphere with considerable authority. That's because the Soviet government seeded rain clouds headed toward Chernobyl so they would dump precipitation prematurely and avoid a washout over the area most at risk. Perhaps out of modesty, Yizrael neglects to mention an even bolder initiative: the Soviet government allegedly seeded rainclouds over Belarus in order to create a washout, i.e. stop the Chernobyl plume from reaching Moscow, turning over half of Belarus into the most heavily contaminated area of Europe outside of the immediate environs of Chernobyl.

Particles that otherwise might have eventually dispersed into a uniform and relatively dilute global radioactive haze were washed to the deck of the Reagan. And because the Reagan was close to Fukushima, the plume probably still contained the “near fallout”, the heavy material, possibly including “hot particles,” that can't make it very far from the point of origin before it falls to the surface.

Instead of a uniform distribution of radiation easily measured by an array of air-sniffing sensors, a surface contaminated by hot particles in a washout might show fluctuations of up to thirty times radiation in one area than another.

This condition was independently documented in the sudden creation of one of most heavily irradiated locations in the United States: Albany, New York. On April 26, 1953 (thirty three years to the day before the Chernobyl explosion, for connoisseurs of irony), an apocalyptic rainstorm swept through

New York's Capital Region just as the plume from a shot in Nevada, codenamed Simon, 2300 miles away and one day before, was passing overhead.

A local network of scientists took readings after the Albany incident and documented the high degree of local variability in radioactivity from the washout:

Ted Rich...found a general level of 1 millirad per hour near the ground between Union College and Knolls. There were locally higher levels where rain water had run off from large areas before settling into the ground. Your editor [Jack Stehn, who assembled the reports] had the doubtful distinction of having the hottest spot on that first survey night under the gutter spout beside his front porch: 13 millirads per hour. [pg. 46]

In documentation for the Tomodachi Registry, the US Navy does not directly address the variability issue and relies on extrapolation from the fixed and portable radiation sensors on board and computer models to calculate an inferred dose. In the Navy's Radiation Dose Assessment for Fleet-Based Individuals, used to assign doses to be recorded for individuals in the Tomodachi Registry, there is no mention of precipitation and the possibility of hot particles and hot spots for the Ronald Reagan.

With this context, the Navy statement that “worst-case radiation exposure for a crew member on USS Ronald Reagan is less than 25 percent of the annual radiation exposure to a member of the U.S. public from natural sources of background radiation, such as the sun, rocks and soil” and bluff assertions on the Internet that sailors on the Reagan will “be fine as long as they don't lick the windows” should perhaps be taken with a grain of iodized salt.

Not only is fallout variable in its distribution; it is notoriously difficult to dislodge.

The USS Ronald Reagan was probably only the second US aircraft carrier to experience radioactive contamination in the Pacific. The first, the USS Independence, was irradiated by design in 1949, as part of the notorious Bikini Atoll tests. The Baker shot, underwater and therefore extremely dirty, coated the test flotilla with contamination that could not be removed after months of scrubbing, acid bathgs, and other treatment.

The purpose of the Bikini test was to determine whether a naval vessel that had been contaminated during a nuclear exchange could be satisfactorily decontaminated and returned to service. The answer was No, not even after months of strenuous decontamination. Finally, the USS Independence, together with its cargo of radiation (which made the scrapping the ship economically unfeasible), was secretly and ignominiously scuttled in the eastern Pacific Ocean, probably a few dozen miles west of San Francisco.

One might expect that the Ronald Reagan will benefit from advances in decontamination science in the intervening decades and not suffer the same fate. The Ronald Reagan responded to the detection of the descending plume as an unconventional weapons threat. A crewmember recorded an announcement in which the captain, with the studied insouciance demanded of these occasions, ordering a “Cargo William” a.k.a.

CW or Chemical Weapons response. The below decks area was sealed off and suitable protective clothing and masks issued to the crew.

However, sailors from the Ronald Reagan will feel an unwelcome twinge of nostalgia when viewing archival photos of seamen using pushbrooms trying to clean the deck of the Prinz Eugen, one of the test vessels in the 1949 Baker shot.

Apparently, fallout descended on the Reagan so unexpectedly that there was not time to deploy the first line of defense — sprinklers on the deck before the fallout hit — and by that time the water around the ship was also contaminated, so hosing off the deck would have simply exacerbated the contamination problem. So sailors, soap, and pushbrooms were deployed.

Obviously, the US Navy has been anticipating and preparing for this kind of threat for decades — though anonymous reports imply that a full military complement of anxiety, overcompensation, obtuseness, and coverup (including allegations that some personnel were pressured into falsely certifying they had received iodide tablets) — may have also been deployed when the Reagan's radiation sensors began to sound.

However, when dealing with radioactive particulates at the micron and submicron level, sometimes experience, ingenuity, and effort aren't enough. As Roger Witherspoon reported in his groundbreaking report at Japan Focus on the experience of the Ronald Reagan:

Enis had been ordered to bring down the American flag, which had been flying atop the mast for two weeks, and bring it to the Captain's quarters.

"I brought it down," he said, "and folded it respectfully and tucked it under my right arm, next to my body. I carried it inside, put it away, and thought nothing of it."

After dinner, he was walking past a sensor "and the alarms all went off," he recalled. "And they began yelling at me not to touch anything or anyone and to go straight to the decontamination area."

...

"They had told us that there was no radiation," said Enis. "When they started putting up the stations along the ship to check for radiation they didn't say why they were there. They checked my boots and nothing happened. Then they checked my hands and the machine goes crazy.

"The guy doing the checking freaked out and said to 'Step away from him!' Next thing I know, I got plastic bags on my arms and they are telling everyone to get away from me. I almost had an anxiety attack because they were treating me like I had the plague. They weren't touching me. They were yelling commands to where I had to walk and what I had to do. I had to scrub my hands and my right side with this gritty paint remover and it took off a couple of layers of skin."

Enis was not told, then or later, exactly what his radiation reading was. They did say his was the highest level recorded among personnel on the ship.

See more at: <http://japanfocus.org/-Roger-Witherspoon/3919#sthash.Y4G7tIP6.dpuf>

In addition, the water supply was tainted, presumably by intake of contaminated sea water to feed the desalinization lines.

Clearly, decontamination was not quick or easy. According to sailors who served on the Ronald Reagan, it was barred from ports in Japan and South Korea because of the radioactivity issue and sailed the Pacific, Flying Dutchman fashion, until the ship had been cleaned up. In calculating theoretical radiation doses for the Reagan, the US Navy's worst case assumption was sixty days of exposure. According to Paul Garner, a lawyer representing some of the sailors claiming radiation-related illness, the Navy spent a year and a half after Tomodachi overhauling the Reagan, quietly decontaminating it, and shipping the waste to the US nuclear facility at Hanford, Washington.

Questions concerning the actual magnitude of radioactive contamination are, unfortunately, further complicated by a well-founded suspicion that governments tend to use the most optimistic estimates at best and at worst flat out lie when it comes to reporting radiation exposure.

Russia is a notorious offender in this regard. In her book, *Chernobyl: Crime Without Punishment* (Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, N.J. 2011), Alla Yaroshinskaya, a journalist turned activist turned USSR deputy elected on a truth on Chernobyl platform in the perestroika era, uses internal Soviet documents to demonstrate the Soviet government's massive coverup, and the vast disconnect between public pronouncements and private information in the weeks, months, and years after the explosion.

Seeking to protect the government and party from accusations of gross negligence and the enormous political and financial costs of thoroughgoing remediation, the Soviet government downplayed the magnitude of the radiation release. This led to negative short-term outcomes such as the decision to conduct the 1986 May Day parade in Kiev through a radioactive haze immediately after Chernobyl, and horrible decisions like arbitrarily jacking up the acceptable lifetime dose of radiation to 35 Rem (as opposed to 7 Rem) so the government would not be faced with the existential issue of having to resettle tens of millions of Soviet citizens out of contaminated zones.

The United States is also not immune from accusations that it has suppressed information on the true magnitude of radiation releases from the government test program in Nevada, and especially from the 1953 Albany washout described above.

The yield of the Simon shot significantly exceeded the predictions of the bomb's makers. This not only delivered a nasty radioactive surprise to personnel in the forward observation trenches; it meant that the initial fireball exceeded expectations and irradiated and sucked up into the plume an unknown amount of dirt and rock.

So, in some ways, Simon was a nuclear accident, like Windscale, Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, and Fukushima

As noted above, the Albany area was unique in that a well-trained cadre of academics and engineers was on site to conduct some “citizen science”.

The Albany area is home to Rennselaer Polytechnic Institute, a premier engineering school that had on its faculty a Los Alamos veteran, Herbert Clark, who ran a nuclear chemistry lab equipped with a Geiger counter. General Electric also has its major electric motor engineering and manufacturing facility up the road, in Schenectady, and operated a nuclear research facility, the Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory nearby for the AEC. Through a local association, scientists from these and other facilities informally mobilized to collect readings on radioactivity.

Albany is also home to Bill Heller, a local journalist who developed a taste for the Simon fallout story.

In his book *A Good Day Has No Rain* (Whitsun Publishing Co., Albany 2003), Heller described the disparity between the announced fallout estimates and what was detected by the local scientists.

At the time, the AEC announced that the cumulative exposure in the Capitol Region as a result of Simon was 100 millirads, “as dangerous as a chest X-Ray” according to the Albany Knickerbocker News.

This was clearly at odds with the observation of local scientists, who had detected 5 millirad per hour hot spots i.e. cumulative exposure would have exceeded 100 millirads in a single day, not the 13 week window used to calculate cumulative exposure.

Even more significantly, it transpired that this modest announced dose was also radically at odds with AEC internal opinion, which estimated an integrated (i.e. cumulative) dose of 2 Rad in the Albany Region as a result of Simon. This conclusion was classified and only revealed in 1980. Heller points out that the local measurements and conditions imply even higher levels. The AEC had based its internal calculations on an aerial survey over Albany, in air that had been scoured by the rainstorm, and five days after the test, when the shorter-lived isotopes had already decayed.

Beyond the problem of the government flubbing — or fudging — radiation measurements is the intensely controversial issue of what that radiation can and will do.

The effort to link radiation exposure to cancer has been largely lost in U.S. courts because of the prolonged latency period of cancer, and the invocation of genetics, environment, and statistical uncertainty to prevent the determination of legal causality.

The nuclear establishment, in other words, is willing to say that radiation may cause cancer. On the other hand, it is quite unwilling to state that radiation caused your cancer.

Unable to make headway in the US courts, affected groups like “downwinders” — residents of Nevada and Utah who received radiation exposure as a result of nuclear testing — and employees who worked in the government-run nuclear establishment turned to legislative relief with the help of their state delegations. For a carefully defined cohort, when a certain duration exposure to man-made nuclear radiation can be documented, and a disease from a list of about two dozen relatively

rare cancers is present, the legislation allows the presumption of causality to be made and offers defined cash settlements from a special fund.

Governments that operate nuclear weapons and research facilities and support civilian nuclear power generation have an obvious vested interest in minimizing the potential consequences of the environmental release of radioactive material. The US Atomic Energy Commission, for instance, saw nuclear weapons and nuclear power as national priorities, and unambiguously pushed back against scientific research that demonstrated the hazards of radiation — particularly low level radiation releases unavoidable in the conduct of day-to-day nuclear business — and threatened the political and social space of the nuclear industry.

This including turning on one of their own.

John Gofman was one of the founding fathers of American nuclear science. While associate director and chief of the bio-medical division at Lawrence Berkeley Laboratories, the premier US atomic weapons research facility, he also documented the dangers of low level radiation and expressed his findings in the hypothesis “Linear No Threshold” or LNT, i.e. that even the smallest radiation dose was hazardous.

Gofman recounted a phone call from a colleague in 1970:

“Someone from the AEC came to my house last weekend,” he said. “He lives near me. And he said, ‘We need you to help destroy Gofman and Tamplin [Gofman’s collaborator].’ And I told him you’d sent me a copy of your paper, and I didn’t necessarily agree with every number you’d put in, but I didn’t have any major difficulties with it either. It looked like sound science. And — you won’t believe this — but do you know what he said to me? He said, ‘I don’t care whether Gofman and Tamplin are right or not, scientifically. It’s necessary to destroy them...’”

The US government exiled Gofman to nuclear purdah (actually he went back to teach at Berkeley after his research funding at Livermore was pulled, and subsequently became a leading spokesman against nuclear power), but kept his LNT... with a twist. The government enshrined the linear element of the hypothesis, decreeing that the ability of small doses to do damage was directly proportional to their magnitude. Small doses = small problem.

However, there is one government that has swung the pendulum in the opposite direction on the issue of acknowledging and remediating radiogenic illness.

That government is Ukraine, which has turned the Chernobyl disaster into a symbol of its break with the Soviet pattern of disinformation, dishonesty, and malign neglect. Ukraine recognizes a broad range of maladies beyond cancer as radiation sicknesses, and set up an elaborate bureaucratic effort to classify and compensate sufferers accordingly.

Ukraine’s radiation policy is widely viewed with hostility both by Russia and the international atomic establishment, including the United States and the IAEA.

It is not too much of an exaggeration to characterize the view of the international nuclear establishment that Ukraine has fostered a colony of atomic moochers spinning ordinary ailments into radiation-sickness gold for personal, bureaucratic, and scientific profit, and corrupting nuclear medicine in the process.

Critics continue to ascribe the irrefutable health problems of Chernobyl victims with the contemporaneous social and economic calamity of de-Sovietization and, if statistical correlations between well-being and radiation exposure emerge, to allege “radiophobia” i.e. hypochondrial anxiety caused by unfounded fear of radiation exposure, as the cause. The more generous concession is to treat radiophobia as a disease in itself, as a form of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD.

A series of US Nuclear Regulatory Committee (the successor to the AEC) powerpoint briefings on Fukushima that came to light through the Freedom of Information Act make for interesting reading. A presentation on “Fukushima Health Effects” mis-states the total release of radioactive materials from Chernobyl (the USNRC number comes to 400 Megacuries; the generally accepted number is north of 1000) and spends a great deal of slide space minimizing the potential health impact of radiation, concluding with a warning about the Chernobyl precedent of “psycho-social impacts” which has implanted feelings of victimhood, and caused many “to have and continue to make unhealthy lifestyle choices resulting in higher rates of disease.”

In its own mind, the USNRC may have neatly closed the circle on the disturbing morbidity data by ascribing higher disease rates to Chernobylites’ decision to live their lives as bummed-out drunken mopes.

Chernobyl activists are infuriated by Western and IAEA positions, which they ascribe to cynical collusion by the nuclear establishment in the regurgitation of inaccurate, misleading, and manufactured Russian data in order to paint a false, minimized picture of the health crisis around Chernobyl.

Indeed if attention is shifted from the West, with its armies of irradiated laboratory animals, to the doctors and academics of the affected countries, who interact with the human victims through their clinics and try to make sense of it, a more complex picture, and one closer to the Chernobyl activists’ position, emerges.

Adriana Petryna, an anthropologist now at the University of Pennsylvania, fluent in Ukrainian, conducted extensive fieldwork in Ukraine studying the human experience of radiation exposure and the government’s response to the Chernobyl problem. She published a groundbreaking book, *Exposed Lives* (Princeton University Press, 2013) on the human, social, and political fallout of the Chernobyl catastrophe. In it she cautiously navigates between the “psychoneural” (disease) and “psychosocial” (“radiophobia”) advocates.

Writing in the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, Petryna reflected upon the unending parade of sufferers she observed passing through the Ukrainian radiological bureaucracy:

[I]t is critical to recognize that these claimants showed up in the country’s medical centers because of unanswered health problems. The reality of their everyday health burdens should not be excluded from analyses of the disaster’s effects, including analysis of how they survived.

Scientists in the ex-Soviet bloc have pushed ahead, often against resistance in their own countries as well as abroad, to document the statistical significance of the health problems of hundreds of thousands of Chernobyl responders, the so-called

“liquidators”, who not only knocked down the original fire and built the notorious sarcophagus that encases the derelict unit, but also performed prolonged tasks in the exclusion zone like removing contaminated topsoil for burial. In 2011, 40% of the liquidators (about a quarter million people) were disabled with a host of cardiovascular, endocrinological, gastrointestinal, and neural diseases. This number that perhaps can be explained away by psychosomatic despair; but liquidators also showed an increase in the incidence rate of a statistically more concrete malady, solid carcinomas, to 15-20% over the Russian male population as a whole.

Significantly, in seeking to explain these widespread negative health outcomes, researchers have also given a major knock to the simplistic “linear no threshold” hypothesis, which is employed to assert that Chernobyl survivors do not face significant health hazards from the long-term low level exposure they have experienced since the disaster. Based on Russian research — including decades of data from another miserable Soviet nuclear ghetto, the contaminated environs and residents surrounding the Mayak military plutonium factory at Chelyabinsk — it appears that certain low levels of radiation do more harm than one would expect according to the linear hypothesis. It is hypothesized that small doses damage the cell and its function but, unlike larger doses, do not trigger the cell’s repair mechanism to mitigate the damage. This finding has been supported by Western researchers, who have found that prolonged low-level exposure produces a higher level of cancer than the same dose in one quick shot (the *Bulletin of Atomic Sciences* devoted an issue to this debate in 2012).

This state of affairs has opened the door for dissident scientists to assert that radiation hazard is not simply a matter of totting up the aggregate damage to cell DNA until the repair mechanism is overcome and cancer erupts; instead, that radiation damage affects cells, organs, and human systems in complex and synergistic ways.

Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and North America all have main stream but dissident scientists, such as Elena Burlakova in Russia, Angelina Caena in Ukraine, and Vassili Nesterenko in Belarus, who are making the case that the chronic buzz of Chernobyl radiation layered over the natural background radiation is contributing to a host of illnesses, not just cancer from misbehaving cells, but endocrinological, heart and neurological damage. They believe there is, in fact, a synergy between low-level radiation, an individual’s genetic endowment, environmental factors (like chemical insults from alcohol, tobacco, drugs, pollution and, yes, the omnipresent stress of feeling that one is contaminated), which also means that different subjects respond to similar doses in different ways i.e. “stochastically” (randomly) instead of “deterministically”.

Further research on radiogenic illness might be able to explain or debunk disturbing anecdotal parallels typified by three cases.

First case

A Czech journalist, Petr Toman, interviewed Leonid Budkovski, a Chernobyl liquidator in 2011:

I can’t walk, let alone move. When my wife puts

me in bed, I lie. When my grandson puts me in a wheelchair, I sit. We have to hire our neighbor to come over and lift me up; otherwise I couldn't even move. My right arm is practically numb - I can't hold anything in it. To top things off, I am beginning to lose sensation in the left one as well. I am able to grab things only when I see them, or else I don't know whether I am holding something in my hand or not. It's like they said — I'm gradually burning out... The doctors are lost. When they treat my legs, my heart fails me. When they treat my heart, my legs give up on me for a change. There are no pills that would actually work. Chernobyl burned me out, like a piece of wood.

<http://www.petrroman.eu/interview/en/17>

Second case

In 2001, Lisa Davis reported in the SF Weekly on the toxic residue of the US Navy's Radiological Defense Laboratory at Hunter's Point on the San Francisco Bay just south of downtown San Francisco. One of the lab's responsibilities was to dispose of radioactive waste, both from its own operations and from Lawrence Berkeley Labs and other facilities. The waste, mostly carcasses of experimental animals sacrificed as part of radiation experiments, were packed into 55-gallon drums to be hauled by barge for disposal at sea. Over 47,000 barrels were disposed of in the Farallon Islands dump a few dozen miles outside the Golden Gate, possibly including 9000 barrels of "special" i.e. plutonium or uranium-laced waste

Once the barrels were dumped, they might float. Fortunately, the Navy had a solution. A gunner's mate, John Gessleman, was on hand. He rode the tugboat towing the barge out to the Farallons once or twice a week with a rifle to shoot holes into the barrels that wouldn't sink.

Twenty years later, Gessleman got sick. As Davis records:

Now, Gessleman lives in Pennsylvania; his speech is slurred, and his wife, Ann, often has to translate what he's saying on the phone. In 1980, Gessleman was diagnosed with a form of multiple sclerosis, which has left him in a wheelchair, with limited use of his left arm and sight in only one eye. John Gessleman believes his time in the Navy, working near radioactive waste, contributed to his present condition. He remembers, for example, sleeping on the starboard side of his ship — the side next to the barge's loading gate — but as with most claims by atomic veterans, the government disagreed, and refused to pay him for a service-related disability.

<http://www.sfweekly.com/2001-05-09/news/fallout/full/>

Third case

Currently over 70 servicemen and women on the USS Ronald Reagan are trying to sue Tokyo Electric Power Corporation, the operators of TEPCO, for negligence relating to their alleged exposure and illness from radioactive contamination from the Fukushima plume. A local TV station reported

on one of the plaintiffs, Steve Simmons:

He served his country, but has his country turned its back on him? A Maryland sailor says he's now wheelchair-bound, and he blames it on radiation he was exposed to while representing his country at what's been called the world's worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl...

Steve started feeling tired, not himself. Then, he blacked out while driving to work, and drove his truck up on a curb. Steve said his list of ailments was puzzling, "You're starting to run fevers, your lymph nodes start swelling, you're having night sweats, you're getting spastic and you're losing sensation in your legs, and you can't feel your legs when you're getting 2nd degree burns on them, and how do you explain those things?"

Doctors could not. Steve's leg muscles eventually just gave up, and he's now confined to a wheelchair to get around.

Steve explains, "As far as the big picture we still don't have a diagnosis of what this is, still struggling to even get a doctor to acknowledge that radiation had anything to do with it."

That diagnosis is critical. Without the Navy acknowledging Steve wouldn't be in this situation if it wasn't for his time in Operation Tomodachi, his retirement and pension are at stake, plus he doesn't qualify for aid in the same way he would if he lost his legs in an IED explosion.

The Department of Defense says radiation levels were safe, and were the equivalent to less than a month's exposure to the same natural radiation you pick up from being near rocks, soil and the sun.

Steve doesn't buy that, "How do you take a ship and place it into a nuclear plume for five plus hours, how do you suck up nuclear contaminated waste into the water filtration system and think for one minute that there's no health risk to anybody on board?"

Dr. Robert Peter Gale is one of the world's leading experts on radiation's effects, WUSA9 asked him if he thinks Steve's condition is related, he said no, "I feel badly about it, but it's extraordinarily unlikely that it has anything to do with radiation exposure. There's no toxic agent that we can measure as precise as radiation. It's very unlikely that the Department of Defense would not have precise data on this."

<http://www.wusa9.com/story/news/nation/military/2014/01/13/4465023/>

With all due respect to Dr. Gale — who, in addition to consulting on nuclear accidents around the world, is an evangelist for the insignificance of man-made irradiation, and an advocate for nuclear power to lick the global warming problem — it is difficult to believe that the Department of Defense has precise data on what happened in every nook and cranny and to every person on the Ronald Reagan as it experienced a

washout of near-zone fallout.

Or that the growing body of research on the complex and variable effects of low-level radiation emerging from the radioactive petri dish of Chernobyl is unsound and irrelevant.

As these doubts grow, perceptions by people like John Gessleman and Steve Simmons concerning the causes of their personal catastrophes are not going to get beaten back by invocations of precise measurement, statistical improbability, traditional scientific authority, and mockery of radiophobia.

From the point of view of government and private-sector managers of the nuclear portfolio, scientists pushing beyond the simple, mechanistic LNT/cancer version are opening a Pandora's box of junk science, popular panic, and endless litigation. That might be the reason why the Department of Defense made the decision not to pursue medical surveillance for personnel on the Tomodachi Registry after three years, well before the suspected health problems of low level radiation might arise.

The sailors of the Sixth Fleet task force will, of course, face an uphill battle. Service personnel cannot sue the US military — the principle was affirmed in the landmark case of a serviceman who was denied compensation for a botched surgery even after a towel reading “Property of US Army” was fished out of his abdomen — and sailors on the Reagan claiming radiogenic illnesses are seeking redress through courts in Japan by suing TEPCO for its alleged negligence in failing to notify the task force of the radiation release from Fukushima.

As for being able to prove radiogenic sickness for the purpose of securing treatment for service-related disability through the VA system after discharge, the sailors will be in a race against time, the slow progress of scientific research in a new and complex field and, one expects, a certain lack of enthusiasm by the US nuclear and defense establishment.

John Gofman recalled what his colleague told him about the AEC's attempts to suppress his low-level radiation studies:

[B]y the time those people get the cancer and the leukemia, you'll be retired and I'll be retired, so what the hell difference does it make *right now*? We need our nuclear power program, and unless we destroy Gofman and Tamplin, the nuclear power program is in real hazard from what they say. And I told him no. I refused. I just want you to know if you ever mention this, I'll deny it. I'll deny that I ever told you this, and I'll deny that he said it to me.”

The third anniversary of the Japanese earthquake and tsunami was March 11. The twenty-seventh anniversary of Chernobyl is April 26. John Gessleman passed away in 2007, about forty years after he served at the San Francisco radiation lab.

PETER LEE edits *China Matters*.

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1941–2012



CounterPunch

ISSN 1086-2323 (print)
ISSN 2328-4331 (digital)
www.counterpunch.org
1 (800) 840-3683
\$5.00 per issue
P.O. Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558

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