

CounterPunch



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FIGHTING THE CHILD SEPARATORS BY LAURA CARLSEN

MEXICO UNDER AMLO BY KENT PATERSON



CounterPunch

www.counterpunch.org

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

Periodicals postage pending at Eureka, California.

POSTMASTER send address changes to: CounterPunch

P.O. Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558

ISSN 1086-2323 (print)
ISSN 2328-4331 (digital)
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Cover Image

"Home Invasion" by Nick Roney

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In Memory of
Alexander Cockburn
1941–2012

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

How to De-ICE

I encourage the states of Washington and Oregon to charge the federal agents and officers engaged in the outrageous separation of migrant children from their parents with false imprisonment. Yes, they would likely lose such a case, but such defiance does not go unnoticed and would make me proud of our state. Let other states soil themselves.

Rich Domingue

Invaluable

First I must say CounterPunch does a masterful job of keeping us informed on matters difficult to keep up with in most media sources.

I mention here that in “Unprecedented Cruelty,” June 20, 2018, there is no reference (or did I miss it?) to the American taking away of children from enslaved Africans in huge numbers, including, I have learned recently, and especially, after increased territory acquired in the Louisiana Purchase. Making known this action should be considered important; it let’s us know that this casual view of this cruelty to ‘the other’ is not missing from the ‘American Way.’ That is, would it be done to blond/blue-eyed children and their families? This is indeed significant in any ‘survey’ of this matter.

Again, many thanks for this invaluable news source.

Barbara Walker

Don’t Dial 911

The police who tasered an elderly lady who didn’t speak English because she was carrying scissors are jerks, but what kind of idiot calls 911 about an

old woman gathering dandelion greens? The police would be less of a problem if people would stop calling them for no good reason.

Maria Browning

All That Jazz

Aretha Franklin is now stamped as “the Queen of Soul” in the shorthand of obit ledes. But few recall that before she was reinvented as a “soul” singer by Jerry Wexler at Atlantic Records, she had released a series of neglected—and money-losing—jazz albums for Columbia. Those jazz-inflected sides for me represent some of her best work, tapping her full range of vocal and expressive talents in a way that much of her later more commercialized—and admittedly more popular—Atlantic records did not. Here’s a sample of her early jazz recordings. Rest in peace, Aretha: you were a blessed miracle.

William Kaufman

All That Soul

I remember when Aretha Franklin caught Hell for singing a soul version of the national anthem at the 1972 DNC convention in Miami. She paved the way for Jimi to do it at Woodstock. And of course Roseanne....

Mike Roselle

Dark Prince

So Trump really is considering letting Eric Prince’s Blackwater take over the Afghan War. This means more of our tax money goes to the profits of Prince’s company and the “people of this great country” forget about this ongoing war even more and it can continue and

provide money for Prince into perpetuity.

Susan Lamont

Republic Defense

So now we are back to mercenaries. Machiavelli would have something to say about that. He saw citizen-soldiers as the surest defense of republics, mercenary armies as the first steps to their ruin.

Steve Colatrella

Cooked Reports

I am sure the “seriousness” of revoking Brennan’s clearance is he will lose a cool-million (easily) a year in consulting fees at the many outsourced-privatized intelligence agencies where he’d earn top dollar cooking classified reports under government contracts. That’s the real meaning of this.

David Price

Saudis and Tar Sands

It was great to see Justin Trudeau standing up to Saudi Arabia. Not so great to note that perhaps this has at least as much to do with tar sands than with respect for human rights.

Richard Haley

We Aren’t Immune

This government is causing tragedies to unfold for what once were our hard-working middle class, as well. By causing lay-offs, shutdowns, loss of health care and lowered wages, sending “fine people” into families’ basements or homelessness. No, I’m not saying immigrants’ situations are less tragic! Just that we’re not immune to the oppression and abuse.

Veralynne

Return to Catfood?

As the Republicans prepare to use the deficits built up by their tax cuts as a rationale to gut Social Security and Medicare, we should be happy that FDR’s signature program survived Bill Clinton’s negotiations with Newt Gingrich for privatization, thwarted by the Lewinsky scandal, and Barack Obama’s bipartisan “Catfood Commission” (National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform).

Scott McLarty

Red Sunset

The Oregonian’s front page headline asked: “Are hazy summer skies a new normal?” The question led me up to Washington Park and an indeed smoky view of the city from a seat on its John Reed Memorial Bench. And there at my feet was a bronze plaque with a passage from Portland’s most famous radical journalist’s appreciation of his hometown in the *Oregon Journal* from August, 1914. It begins, “Portlanders understand and appreciate how differently beautiful is this part of the world,” and among what John Reed observed 104 years ago were the “the smoke dimmed-sunsets and pearly hazes of August.”

Michael Munk

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ROAMING CHARGES

Summer of No Return

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

The forecast for August 8th was ominous. The temperature in Portland was predicted to breach 100 degrees for the second time in a couple of weeks. In the end, the mercury stalled at 96 degrees because the sun was blotted out for most of the day by a thick pall of smoke from the Mendocino fires 500 miles to the south. Two days later the undulating jet stream carried traces of the smoke another 3000 miles east to New York City.

In just two weeks, the Mendocino Fire complex had scorched 340,000 acres, making it the largest wildfire in California history. The Mendo fire started four days after the Carr Fire ignited, which destroyed more than 1,000 homes and killed eight people near the city of Redding in northern California. The Carr Fire has seared more than 210,000 acres. In the Sierras, the 100,000 acre Ferguson Fire closed the Yosemite National Park and killed two firefighters. In southern California, the Holy Jack Fire erupted in a mushroom cloud of smoke on Hiroshima Day. California was burning from border to border.

Clarence Sibsey is a fire refugee. For the second time in two years, he was forced to evacuate his home near Clear Lake. "We've never had fires like this before," Sibsey told the *Los Angeles Times*. "Why now?" In one of his most mystical Tweets, Donald Trump tried to give Sibsey an answer. The president blamed the California fires on the state's policy of allowing some of the waters from its much-molested rivers to empty into the Pacific Ocean, instead of being totally diverted into the irrigation ditches of the Central Valley and the Klamath Basin. It may have escaped the President's keen grasp of California

geography that the two biggest fires are burning adjacent to several of the state's largest lakes: Lake Shasta, Trinity Lake and Clear Lake.

Following Trump's lead, Interior Secretary, Ryan Zinke, strode forth to calm a troubled nation by assuring us that the historic fire-season had nothing to do with climate change. Instead, Zinke pointed the finger at radical environmentalists as the culprits, who he alleged had shut down logging across the West. "America is better than letting these radical groups control the dialogue about climate change," Zinke fumed. "Extreme environmentalists have shut down public access. They talk about habitat and yet they are willing to burn it up."

In the last 20 years, 84 percent of wildfires haven't been "wild." They've been started by humans, many of them by people affiliated with the timber industry seeking to profit from post-fire salvage logging. In order not to excite skeptical minds, Zinke has cut all funding for federal research into the links between climate change and wildfires. As if to drive home the point.

Not even the timber industry is taking Zinke seriously. Their own internal documents reveal what should be obvious to all: extreme heat is fueling the megafires. Across the West, temperatures have increased by more than 2 degrees since the mid-1970s. Higher temperatures lead to drier vegetation. As a consequence, wildfires burn hotter, longer and spread faster. The proof is on the ground. Since 1984, the average number of acres burned in the West each year has more than doubled. The fire season starts earlier and ends later. In California, the fire season has expanded by 76 days since the mid-1980s.

Last September, San Francisco, noto-

rious for its frigid, fog-bound summers, hit 106 degrees, shattering a record for any date. On the day the Carr Fire ignited, the temperature in Redding topped out at 113 degrees. The Carr Fire raged with such fury that it created fire vortexes that propelled plumes of searing air 40,000 feet into the sky at speeds of 130 miles per hour.

The Mendo fires are burning on the outskirts of wine country in (take note, Mr. President) Lake County about 120 miles north of San Francisco. Since 2012, more than half of the land in the county has been burned over. Lake County is now the most fire-prone county in California, perhaps the entire United States. In 2015, the Valley Fire consumed 1,300 homes and killed four people. The next year, the Clayton Fire roared through the town of Lower Lake, incinerating more than 300 houses. Land that was just burned is now burning again.

July 2018 was not just the hottest month in California history, it may have been one of the hottest months on Earth in the last 40,000 years with the daily temperatures (night and day) in Death Valley averaging 108 degrees, six degrees higher than normal. July 24th saw the hottest rain ever recorded, when a cloudburst opened over Imperial County with the temperature at 119.

Meanwhile, back in Oregon, the Columbia Gorge is burning again. Four major fires have blackened more than 100,000 acres and will likely burn until the November rains. Or longer. There are still embers smoldering from last year's fires. In Portland, the temperature topped 90 degrees 15 times in the month of July alone, the hottest on record. For perspective, from 1941 to 1975, Portland averaged only nine 90 degree days for an entire year. Since 2000, the annual number climbed to 15 days. In the past two years, the average has been 22 days. Through mid-August of this year, the temperature in Portland has already hit 90 degrees 25 times, and that's with the skies turned opaque by layers of smoke.

Call it a heat wave if you want, but up here it feels like the summer of no return. **CP**



EMPIRE BURLESQUE

Dystopia? You're Soaking in It

BY CHRIS FLOYD

All across the liberal landscape, we hear the plaintive, piteous cry: “When can we return to normalcy?” Our progressives pine for a ricorso to the glory days before Big Casino came to town. To the prelapsarian state of grace that existed until that moment when the Beast slapped his hand on the Bible and seized the mandate of heaven from the Lightbringer.

Now all is darkness. Even worse, all is uncoolness. No more dapper leader of the free world with an advance copy of Jonathan Franzen under his arm.

No more draining cheap beers with Anthony Bourdain in Hanoi. All is unseriousness.

No more tearstained speeches in the pulpit, sharing grief with the victims of gun violence.

No more long dark nights of the soul in the White House, locked in spiritual agony over Augustinian principles of just war and the grim practice of extrajudicial assassination. Where once there was suavity, dignity and style, now all is blunt, crude, loud and garish.

If only the Pimple could be removed from the beautiful face of America, and we could go back to the status quo ante. Not that everything was perfect then, mind you. Heck no. Any good liberal will tell you that there was, like, a bunch of stuff wrong with America, even in the good old days. (Although, with hindsight, we can see now that some of that bad stuff wasn't as bad as we thought it was.

Like George Bush, for example. Remember how we used to rant and rave about big dumb Dubya and his whole sick crew? Now we get a little lump in our throats when he tweets that we

should be nicer to each other or basks in a hug from Michelle. In fact, many folks we heatedly eschewed way back when turn out to be pretty OK these days—indeed, our honored partners in the Resistance: David Frum, Bill Kristol, William “WMD Liar” Mueller, all manner of CIA thugs, FBI goons, warmongers, drone-pushers, rapacious billionaires. A veritable melting pot of American patriots!)

But yes, despite the roseate glow through which many liberals now see the past these days, they will readily affirm that there were—how to put it?—challenges to the full realization of the American Dream even before the Orange Cheeto fell out of the bag. (Although thanks to Russiagate, we now realize that so many of the “problems” and “divisions” liberals sought to ameliorate—sensibly, incrementally—were actually exacerbated (if not created) by the Kremlin! Black Lives Matter, Standing Rock, the rise of those far-left Bernie Bros and more—all of it machined and manipulated by the Russkies.)

But again, regardless of any earlier imperfections in the American system, any honorable liberal—and so are they all, honorable liberals—will tell you that the ascension of the Trump Thing has carried us far beyond the pale, into the deadly wastes of dystopia itself.

And of course, they're not that wrong. There is something qualitatively different about Trump's mad rampage across the heights of power. It is a radical break from the past, from a continuity that might have been more notional than real but was felt powerfully by many nonetheless. But—perhaps surprisingly for a political faction that now

traffics almost entirely in hysterical, eye-bulging paranoia about the Russian root of all evil—our good liberals actually fall short in ascertaining the depth of our darkness. For we are not just waist-deep—not even neck-deep—in dystopia; we are entirely submerged in it. The dark waters are far above our heads, and the shore of the imagined normalcy our liberals long for is flooded too, gone for good, never to return.

Why? Because that “normalcy”—the state of American society and politics before Trump—was itself the seedbed and progenitor of the dystopia that now engulfs us.

To take but a few examples, it was that normalcy that saw local police transformed into highly militarized occupying armies treating two-thirds of the population as enemies. It was that pre-Trump, Obama-era normalcy that expanded Bush's ICE gestapo, that incarcerated, tormented and abused children then deported them, by the many thousands, back to hell-hole created by “normalcy's” bipartisan foreign policy. (And now these militarized forces stand ready to back up any tyrannical notion of Trump's with deadly force.)

It was that normalcy that shielded torturers, fraudsters and war criminals drenched with the blood of innocent victims. It was that normalcy that ran death squads, despoiled whole countries, stripped its own citizens of agency and opportunity and put them under the power of rapacious corporations and a pitiless state devoted almost entirely to feeding a world-girdling war machine and rescuing the rich from their own criminal stupidities.

To escape the hell we are in now, they would take us back to the hell—the lies, the murder, the hypocrisy, the injustice, the corruption—that gave rise to it. But the only way out—if there is a way out—is not to return but to endure the now, and fight through to something new, something we can't yet see and can't yet know if it even exists. **CP**



BOTTOMLINES

Careful What You Wish For

BY PETE DOLACK

A universal basic income is one of those ideas that sound good but might best be classified under the heading of beware of getting what you ask. The reason for this pessimistic assessment is not doubts about the good intentions of proponents but rather the nature of the capitalist system.

A leading proponent of a universal basic income, the Basic Income Earth Network, defines it like this: “A basic income is a periodic cash payment unconditionally delivered to all on an individual basis, without means-test or work requirement.” It is to be paid on a regular schedule. Everybody gets this money, on top of their regular earnings.

That does sound good, doesn’t it? Maybe too good to be true, because there is a vast difference between what proponents advocate and what we’d actually get should a universal basic income (UBI) actually be implemented, unlikely as that is.

Because we live under capitalism, we don’t get anything for free. We have to ask ourselves: What would the bosses do? They would seek to cut wages because with the UBI you receive you would be told you don’t need as much money.

For those fortunate enough to be represented by a union, those cuts might be ameliorated somewhat, but the union would still be bargaining over the size of the cut.

Cutting the wages of current workers might be difficult, at least in cases where employees are subject to collective-bargaining agreements, but wages for new hires would be less and a pay cut might well in the offing for anybody attempting to change jobs. For those without representation, it would be difficult to stave off a wage cut.

And even if wages didn’t decline,

would the aggregate sum of the UBI be reasonably equal to the value of social services offered by government? By no means is that certain, and it may very well be less, plus the targeting of social services to those in need would be lost. And here it must be pointed out that there are some economists on the far right who are proponents of UBI. Most notably was Milton Friedman, godfather of the Chicago School of extreme neoliberalism.

Friedman liked to call UBI a “negative income tax” but it is the same thing: Give money to recipients unconditionally, without means tests. That the likes of Friedman would advocate such a thing ought to make us pause for thought. And indeed there is a reason for this advocacy: The UBI would be a replacement for the entirety of the welfare state. Instead, you would pay for whatever services you needed out of your income. Whereas pre-UBI an expensive surgery would be covered by a government insurance system, you’d have to pay the difference between your UBI and the cost of the procedure out of your pocket. Under a functioning social-welfare system, services and resources can be directed toward those who need them. Under a dismantled system, your UBI may or may not be sufficient to cover the cost of those services (offered at market rates) previously supplied free or at subsidized prices.

Right-wing economists and Silicon Valley CEOs also like the idea of a UBI because it would provide a subsidy to capitalists—by paying their employees less they would thereby reap bigger profits. You don’t think they’d cut prices due to having reduced labor costs, do you? This has already happened in the past. From 1795 to 1834, England had a

system of wage supplements called the “Speenhamland system,” and under it farm owners and industrialists paid low wages because the local parish would provide the supplement.

In our times, the governments of Ontario and Finland have introduced experiments with UBI to be confined to particular locales. In both cases, the government’s goal was to reduce expenditures. The then Liberal Party government in Ontario said it hoped to increase efficiency and “achieve savings in other areas, such as health care and housing supports.” (The new right-wing provincial government has canceled the three-year pilot program, in which 4,000 received money.)

The Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, in announcing its plan to provide a UBI to 2,000 people as an experiment, hinted strongly that the goal was to cut benefits, saying it sought “to overhaul social security to encourage participation and employment.”

At bottom, a universal basic income is a scheme to dangle a nice-sounding reform in front of working people to preserve the present capitalist system. A UBI would leave the system of exploitation untouched and might well leave us worse off.

Proponents firmly say they support only a UBI with no cuts to wages or social services. There is no reason whatever to doubt their sincerity.

The problem is that such a major reform won’t be implemented on the basis of what proponents want but what the capitalist system, and its massive inequality, will allow. When someone like Elon Musk advocates a UBI at the same time he threatens retaliation against Tesla workers considering unionizing while paying substandard wages and allowing dangerous working conditions, we might ask why.

The effort to bring about a UBI would be so enormous, wouldn’t it better to work toward a sustainable economy that provides for human needs? **CP**

Family Separation: Can Outrage Lead to Change?

BY LAURA CARLSEN

In April of this year images of tearful children taken from their parents at the border provoked outrage across the country. Donald Trump the Politician-in-Chief, Stephen Miller the Ideologue, Kristjen Nielsen the Operator and Jeff Sessions the Justifier launched the policy of “zero tolerance”—apparently for the parent-child bond among brown people—and began separating migrant children from their parents at the border.

Most of us can recall an instance of separation in our childhood, usually short-lived and in safe environments, that still triggers a rise of panic. It traumatizes you for life. Now imagine a child who has already lived through loss and violence in her home country, who has tried to sleep on speeding freight trains patrolled by violent gangs, who has felt hunger and thirst as she crossed rivers and deserts clutching the hand of her mother as her only lifeline.

Then her mother is taken away from her. And she’s alone in a world where she has no allies, no clues, nothing is familiar. In the United States of America thousands of children have been put in this situation, not as a result of policy failures, but of policy goals, and not for hours or days, but for months, often with no end in sight.

Trump and his crew have admitted that they did this to teach the immigrants a lesson. The measure has nothing

to do with making America safe or great. It’s purposely used as a deterrent—strip children from their parents to discourage families from leaving Central America for the United States. Although Trump rescinded the family separation order on June 20, many children are still separated from their parents either because they have been unable to match them up again or because their parents were deported without them.

Family separation doesn’t work, even for deterrence. A new study shows that zero tolerance failed to reduce the number of immigrants. The Center for American progress analyzing data since 2014 found that neither family detention or family separation work to keep migrants from seeking to enter the United States. At the Americas Program, we’ve spoken with scores of Central American migrants coming up through Mexico to the U.S. and the reason is simple—what they’re fleeing from is worse. Many have strong cases for asylum due to death threats, violence and extreme conditions and all of them have the right to a safe and decent life.

If separation and detention don’t work to reduce immigration, what’s the Republicans’ real goal here? Basically, hate-mongering and elections. Using terrified toddlers to climb in the polls is what even Ivanka Trump called “a low point” of her father’s administration. Celebrities began a Twitter campaign

calling on the president’s daughter—portrayed as being the member of the clan capable of compassion although there is no real proof of that claim—to intervene in favor of the children. A tweet sent by Amy Schumer noted that the crisis continues, with 572 children not reunited, one dead after separation and detention and 400 parents deported without their children. It also states what many news reports have shown—that children are being sexually and physically abused and drugged in custody.

The tweet calls for the resignation of Homeland Security secretary Kristjen Nielsen. No doubt Nielsen should be ousted for applying zero tolerance, but is this really the solution we need to inhumane policies that prey on the world’s weakest and most vulnerable?

Nielsen came in as the right arm of General John Kelly and when she leaves—and I hope she does—there are many more like her willing to tear families apart and worse, whether out of a craving for power or a dedication to the white supremacist vision or both. Nielsen’s resignation would be satisfying, but it wouldn’t guarantee any change in the administration’s anti-immigrant strategy.

So what would? It’s important to understand what we’re really up against. White supremacists are desperate to reverse the historical trend that will inevitably return the United States to a non-European population. They don’t care about the studies that show that immigrants hold up the U.S. economy. They consider our national history and even their own family histories irrelevant experience. And they certainly don’t give a damn about the cries of the children.

There’s even reason to believe that the outrage caused by the policy, followed by rescinding the order as a supposed act of sympathy, is a classic example of Trump’s “two steps forward, one step back” deal-making—make an outrageous ask to fall back to what you wanted in the first place.

The executive order to stop the family separation policy after massive protest, lays out what Trump really wants on the

refugee and immigrant issue. He wants expanded detention. To do this he calls for eliminating the Flores settlement that states that migrant children may only be detained for a maximum of 20 days, the use of army bases and other public facilities for immigrant detention, and express removal procedures.

More detention serves the double purpose of putting public money into the pockets of Trump donors who run private prisons and sending out a message that all migrants are criminals and will be treated as such.

Another part of the plan would make Mexico stop the migrants before they reach the U.S. border. The Mexican government came out firmly against family separation but now appears to be caving on the U.S. demand to crack down on Central American migrants in its own country. The lame-duck administration of Enrique Peña Nieto is reportedly considering accepting a “safe third country” agreement that would require refugees to apply for asylum in Mexico. It says that if someone is fleeing persecution or violence in their home country they must request asylum in the first safe country they enter, in this case Mexico coming from Central America. Now there are rumors that Peña will accept the agreement in return for more money under the Merida Initiative security co-operation framework and progress on NAFTA.

This would set the stage for the massive violation of migrant and refugee rights and chaos in Mexico where the US SouthCom already oversees much of the military and police operations on the southern border where migrants

are notoriously preyed upon. It’s also a huge step forward for the white supremacist agenda in the U.S. too. By closing off legal and internationally mandated channels for requesting asylum in the United States, more legal channels closed off, more immigration becomes unauthorized, criminalization increases and the cycle of violence and human rights abuses intensifies.

Trump tweeted out his real immigration agenda on June 15, days before the executive order to stop family separa-

tion over the next decade and is a critical part of the Make America White Again agenda.

Despite the protests and the outrage, Trump has actually gained ground on his real immigration agenda. The only effective brake on the fullscale rollback of immigrant rights have been the courts. In the past few weeks they have ruled against the administration’s decision to eliminate DACA (twice now), accepting a challenge to the proposal to demand proof of citizenship in the

census, and they are currently hearing the ACLU’s petition for reunification and information-sharing on family separation in district court. In that filing, the Trump administration had the gall to insist that civil society organizations search to match missing children and parents, saying “Plaintiffs’ counsel should use their considerable resources and their network” to find the

parents they failed to keep track of.

The outrage against family separation could hurt us if the totally unacceptable (family separation) ends up making the unacceptable (immigrant detention and refugee refusal) palatable. Trump is an expert at resetting our national moral compass. He throws it way off with an extremely offensive act and then waits for it to settle back—a few degrees closer to evil.

To stop that from happening again, we have to keep our bearings. Children shouldn’t be separated from their parents, and families should not be held in prisons for seeking a safe place to raise their children. **CP**



Immigrants detained by ICE in the Rio Grande Valley. Photo: US DHS.

tion. “The Democrats are forcing the breakup of families at the Border with their horrible and cruel legislative agenda. Any Immigration Bill MUST HAVE full funding for the Wall, end Catch & Release, Visa Lottery and Chain, and go to Merit Based Immigration. Go for it! WIN!

There’s his real fallback position—the wall, ending catch and release by expanding detention instead of simply removing undocumented immigrants at huge expense to the public and massive violation of human rights, terminating the visa lottery and ending what he calls chain migration that permits families to be together by allowing close family members to apply for residency. His merit based immigration system, as defined in the Republicans’ proposed legislation, would halve legal immigra-

EUROZONE NOTES

I'm Rich So Fuck Off (My Planet)

BY DANIEL RAVENTÓS AND JULIE WARK

Our friend Jordi's a lovely guy who works hard. By the time his birthday came round he needed a break so he and his wife decided to have a weekend at their favorite beach at Sant Martí d'Empúries in the Costa Brava, a village known for 6th-century BCE remains of a Greek city Empòrion lying side-by-side with those of the Roman city Emporiae. But no go. The problem with beautiful places is that billionaires can decide to throw a bash there, close them down for "security reasons", ban press, and keep everything top secret. Elon Musk's little brother Kimbal decided to marry fellow rich person, "environmental activist" Christiana Wyly (sporting "boho-chic") in the ruins precisely when Jordi wanted to have his small holiday. Guests supposedly included the Obamas, Will Smith, Salma Hayek but they were too important for us to be informed.

How come a South African cowboy-hatted "philanthropist" can shut down a village and its surrounds in Catalonia? The "socialist" mayor of the municipality responsible, L'Escala, declined to comment. The Catalan Culture Ministry cited "security reasons". Instead of asking hard questions or expressing outrage, the excluded media gushed about "healthy" wedding food and reported that this is actually the third nuptial knotting after a "spiritual" wedding in the desert and a "legal" wedding in Texas. Kimbal wanted ruins as well as sand and paperwork in his conjugal career, so everyone else just had to suck it up. Local businesses were

not compensated. Tourists came, not to protest about the ruins but to gawk at the celebs from afar.

Bloomberg informs (March, 2018) that there are no European billionaires among the world's top five and that the biggest fortunes are in the USA and Asia. But Europe still deserves scrutiny, not least because billionaires everywhere—some 2,208, says Forbes, with an average worth of about \$4.1bn—are a kind of club exercising powers in the domain of political economy that will never be disclosed to those of us struggling to make a crust in our so-called democracies. Their wealth soared in 2016 by nearly \$1 trillion, so their combined fortunes are now greater than the GDP of any country in Europe. They directly employ 27.7 million people, which is equal to the working population of the UK.

Evidently, the other side of the billionaire coin—minted not by smart genes but markets and political economy—is poverty. Even official EU reports recognize it: the larger the income share of the richest, the smaller that of the poorest, and the greater the inequality in income distribution. According to Eurostat, 118.7 million people, or 23.7% of the population of the EU-28 in 2015 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The average income of the richest 10% is around 9½ times higher than that of the poorest 10%. So how do billionaires maintain this blatantly unfair situation, especially when many are guilty of crimes ranging from tax dodging, to use of child labor, to gun running. The short answer: po-

litical alliances for billionaire-friendly policies.

So who has Europe's (declared) 10-figure fortunes and where do they come from? The Business Insider (August 21, 2017) gives some idea. They are based on beer (Tatiana Casiraghi, Monaco, wife of Prince Andrea Casiraghi of Hanover); escalators (Iceland's Antti Herlin), investment (Poland's Dominika and Sebastian Kulczyk); cork (Portugal's Americo Amorim); steel (Belgium's Albert Frere); supermarkets (Norway's Odd Reitan and Beate Heister and Karl Albrecht of Germany); big pharmacy (Switzerland's Ernesto Bertarelli); oil deals during the Iran-Iraq War (Norwegian John Fredriksen, now resident in Cyprus); Lego (Denmark's Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen); Red Bull (Dietrich Mateschitz of Austria); and fashion (Stefan Persson of Sweden). In the really big league, Spain's Amancio Ortega (\$71.3b) founded the Inditex fashion group, best known for its Zara line (also environmental damage, poor factory conditions, and slave, child, and refugee labor). So unbeknown to most people, these billionaires control many aspects of everyday life: food we eat, beer we drink, clothes we wear, corks in our wine bottles, and our kids' toys.

Then there's the overt political meddling. In the 2015 UK general elections, 27 of the 59 richest hedge-fund managers sponsored appreciative Conservatives whose Chancellor then granted special exemption from stamp duty on stock market transactions. This meant a loss of some £145 million a year for the public sector. If 41% of private donations to political parties came from just 76 people, the political system is a plutocracy, as George Monbiot points out (The Guardian, July 13, 2016). Now Brexit's biggest donor, to the tune of £12m, Arron Banks, is being investigated by the National Crime Agency over links to Russia after emails suggest that in the run-up to Brexit he was offered three big Russian business deals.

The Isle of Man is home to five billionaires. The Paradise Papers reveal that the

British government paid the island more than £300m in 2017 to subsidize its zero corporation tax rate, an arrangement not disclosed to parliament. Hence, the UK is bankrolling the Isle of Man as a tax haven and undermining its own tax system by offering special rates to tax avoiders: as of 2006, 0% to companies except banks, which would pay 10%. The “zero-ten regime” was swiftly adopted by Jersey and Guernsey with the result that the UK has a nearby network of zero-tax zones with access to the single market, so protected billionaire funds can flow freely into the City and continental Europe.

In Spain, the brand new (old) PSOE “socialist” government is showing its don’t-give-a-damn-about-inequality stripes. The Minister for the Economy, Nadia Calviño, says that Spain will respect EU neoliberal guidelines and the budgets approved by the former corrupt, right-wing PP government. Some 224,000 citizens (0.48% of the population) have accumulated \$650bn (in known fortunes), which have grown by nearly 100% since the onset of the crisis. Yet, according to calculations based on tax returns anyone who earns more than \$64,000 a year is in the richest 5% of the population! Which gives some idea of the country’s scale of tax evasion. For purposes of comparison, the pensions fund amounts to less than \$162bn and unemployment benefits just over \$20.2bn, or 25% and 3.1% respectively of what the super-rich (less than half of the legendary 1%) have stashed away. The PSOE government argues that any corrective measures, like increased taxes or introducing a universal basic income above the poverty line, to slow (let alone turn around) the accelerating growth of inequality will cause capital flights! That the bird has already flown isn’t a matter of concern. Or maybe it is. Well, the present wife of the PSOE patriarch, Felipe González, did pop up in the *Paradise Papers*. One study estimates that a sum approximately equal to 12% of Spain’s GDP, \$162.5bn, is in tax havens. Yep, the same amount as the pension fund.

Poverty keeps growing. It gets at-

tention in demonstrations, political circles and academic congresses, with a million ideas of how to deal with it, but the other part of the equation, the rise of the mega-rich, is largely ignored. Few people seem to understand or care that their activities hugely impinge on the freedom of the vast majority. It’s summed up in Empúries. Kimbal Musk wants to get married there so Jordi can’t swim. And it gets much worse than that, for example with GMOs in our food, Bill Gates dominating the WHO, the Koch brothers’ plans in education, who sells arms, how, and to whom, and, yes, who lives and who dies. Members of the ten-figure league do what they damn well want because we vote for governments which let them.

Since the 1970s gigantic winner-take-all markets have spread across the globe. States embrace the foulest, most pillaging aspects of globalization and enable billionaires to accumulate dirty money more easily with lower taxes, laxity, loopholes, corruption, and other avoidance opportunities in protected tax havens. Billionaire meddling in politics, or international “social entrepreneurship”, is exemplified by Davos. Social structures destroyed by politically shaped market economies get dribbles of “philanthropy” from people made obscenely rich by their wheeling and dealing in the selfsame economies. While undermining the state with their tax dodges they’re also replacing some of its functions. Politicians can be voted in or out but what about billionaires? We hardly know who they are, or how they can shut down a small town in the Costa Brava, let alone ruin economies around the world, only to apply their structure-transforming philanthropy-balm later on. When it suits them.

Oh, but they’re giving away more to education, health and social causes, as well as art and cultural organizations, people say. There are no alarm bells ringing about this—to put it kindly—image polishing and what it represents. It’s bad enough that a gang of rich people can swirl in and close down public places

like Empúries (or Venice in the case of George Clooney’s wedding) but the fact that it can even be contemplated is what’s really alarming. Celebrity, rich-folk “culture” isn’t froth and bubble but a powerful, ironfisted institution. Clothes, planes, cars, houses and weddings are the new form of ritual regalia. In Ancient China, ritual was understood as being needed to underpin a harsh hierarchy. Ritual requires distance. As the Wuxing pian text (from a tomb dated to 300 BCE) puts it, “Without distance, there is no respect”. Ritual is not mere ceremony. It is the public face of a social and political order which crystallizes in relations of subordination cemented in prescribed distances.

Rampant inequality underpins twenty-first-century ritual culture where we ordinary folk are kept in the dark by high priests in the temples of Mammon. It’s leading, when not to Kardashian worship, to a populist backlash in which the most vulnerable are blamed and punished for the dark doings of the most powerful. Blocking evident sources of illicit money won’t solve much and, while billionaires and politicians are hand in glove there’s little will. Meanwhile, they’re robbing everyone else of their freedom. The only way to stop today’s, planet-killing, antihuman trends is to introduce concerted structural measures like controls on banking, high taxes for the rich, stringent environmental measures, real democracy, a strong public sector, a universal basic income above the poverty line, tough anti-corruption laws, and a generous focus on all needy people.

The planet is in danger yet billionaires are still chemtrailing to their charity galas and imposing products that are fast killing off vegetation and species, not to mention humans. The weekend Jordi tried to have a holiday, some 170 refugees drowned in the Mediterranean and NGO rescue boats were sequestered in, or turned away from ports. In Empúries, the graveyard sea was closed off so billionaires could have a nice swim, unmo-
lested by other people. **CP**

How Neo-Fascists Colonised Anti-Imperialism The Browning of the Left

BY DAN GLAZEBROOK

Historically, fascism has always been associated with imperialism: Hitler's grand ambition, after all, was German *lebensraum* in a Russia cleansed of Slavs and Jews, whilst Mussolini sought to create a new Roman Empire in North Africa. This is hardly surprising, given that the ultra-imperialist Pan-German League was, according to Nuremberg prosecutor Franz Neumann, the "direct ideological forerunner" of the Nazis, whilst Mussolini's movement was born of dashed territorial hopes following the first world war. Likewise, today's British National Party has its roots in the League of Empire Loyalists, a pressure group to resist decolonisation within the Conservative party, whilst most of the fascist formations in France, including the Front National, emerged from the OAS, a group of French military officers committed to maintaining Algeria in the French Empire. In the words of Alexander Reid-Ross*, "Historically speaking, fascism is not a derogation from imperialism, but a deepening of it—perhaps even a force majeure, a consequence of the momentum of centuries of crusades, colonialism, and imperialism through which Europe began to colonize itself".

Yet, the fascism of today increasingly proclaims itself as proudly anti-imperialist, opposed to the wars and austerity packages of the 'globalists', and apparently ready to staunchly defend those nations at the receiving end of empire's military and economic aggression from Syria and Libya to Russia and Greece. The BNP opposed the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan, whilst the Front National maintains close ties to the West's enemy of choice in Moscow, and neofascist networks are at the forefront of online 'solidarity' networks against US intrigue in Syria, Ukraine and Iran. What is going on?

In reality, anti-imperialism, just like nationalism, has always had its reactionary as well as its progressive variants. In 1873, Europe and America was plunged into a 'Great Depression' which lasted almost a quarter of a century. This triggered a new wave of colonial conquest, including the so-called 'Scramble for Africa'—but it also triggered a wave of almost millennial pessimism amongst European thinkers who saw an economic decline as a harbinger of the collapse of western society at large. It was this intellectual environment that spawned theorists such as Charles Henry Pearson and Herbert Spencer, who saw imperialism as a force which, far from regenerating Europe, would ultimately destroy it. Not only was the 'civilising mission' rendered futile, they argued, by the genetic and cultural backwardness of non-Europeans; but by bringing Europeans into contact with supposedly inferior peoples, imperialism promoted a miscegenation that would fatally undermine the

virility of the master race. In other words, these men opposed imperialism precisely because they were racist: the debate over imperialism, on both sides, was being fought strictly within the parameters of white supremacy.

John M Hobson, in his monumental survey *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics 1760-2010*, notes that "in many racist texts it was assumed that the whites are destined to expand while the lower races will remain within their stationary limits. But in Pearson's racist imagination it is the white West that is fated to remain within its stationary limits while the yellow races are destined to expand and triumph over the higher whites." For Pearson, imperialism facilitated this predatory triumph of the inferior races by producing a "prosperity [which] triggered a non-white demographic explosion".

A similar debate amongst racists is taking place today. Today, as then, there is a divide between liberal ('cultural') racists of the Fukuyama type—who believe that the innate superiority of western political and economic institutions means western culture is ordained to prevail—and the fearful fascistic racists who believe that demography dooms the west to degeneration and decline. The key difference between then and now is that today's ('anti-imperialist') fascists believe that imperialism creates a demographic threat to the white race not through the supposed prosperity it brings, but by so ravaging the non-European nations that its populations are forced to flee—to Europe.

Reading some of these writers today brings immediate parallels with the 'anti-imperialist' fascists of our own age, who cover their racism with entirely legitimate fulminations against liberal arrogance and hypocrisy. Spencer, for example, highlights the hypocrisy of those who preach kindness and Christian compassion at home, but support extermination of the lower races abroad; whilst Sumner criticises the arrogance of "saying to somebody else, we know what is good for you better than you know yourself and we are going to make you do it"—a clear violation of the liberty the imperialists supposedly uphold. Yet, more than all this, the ultimate crime of imperialism was its transgression of Spencer's injunction to "keep other races at arm's length as much as possible". It was the cultural and biological deterioration of white society brought about by racial mixing that was truly horrifying. In the words of Hobson, "the defensive racists in general sought specifically to 'defend the West' by seeking to maximize the distance between the white and nonwhite races so as to maintain white racial vitality and the supremacy of Western civilization in what amounted to various 'racial apartheid' conceptions of world politics".

Such thinking was also at the heart of the politics of the American Anti-Imperialist League, founded in the in opposition to the extremely brutal US war on the Philippines at the dawn of the twentieth century. J Sakai writes that whilst the atrocities in the Philippines were denounced on humanitarian grounds, "the League was very careful to point out that their support for Philippine independence did not mean that they

believed in any equality of colonial peoples with Europeans". Furthermore, their opposition was explicitly grounded, not in internationalist solidarity, but in petty-bourgeois self-interest—specifically a fear that, by boosting the power and wealth of the monopoly capitalist class, imperialism would weaken their own position in the class struggle. Says Sakai, "they feared that the economic power gained from exploiting these new colonies, plus the permanent armed force needed to hold them, would be used at home to smother the 'democracy' of the settler masses". And, like their racist anti-imperialist counterparts in Europe, the League were terrified of the degenerative effects of integrating the Philippines into the US Empire. As the League's President Congressman George Boutwell put it, "Does anyone believe, that with safety, we can receive into this union the millions of Asia, who have no bonds of relationship with us...The question before this country shall be this: Should the labouring and producing classes of America be subjected to a direct and never-ending competition with the underpaid and half-clad labourers of Asia?" More troubling still was the thought that colonial subjects might actually become vote-wielding citizens of the mother country. In the words of Camp Clark, Filipinos "no matter whether they are fit to govern themselves...are not fit to govern us". Furthermore, argued David Starr Jordan, the Filipino immigration that would inevitably follow annexation would lead to social chaos and breakdown—"wherever degenerate, dependent or alien races are within our borders today they are no part of the United States. They constitute a social problem: a menace to peace and welfare". Why, he asked, are we taking "into our body politic millions of people—ignorant of and hostile to our laws, our language, our religion and the basic principles of our government?" The parallels with the racism of today are obvious: this particular, anti-immigrant, strand of 'anti-imperialism' has a long history.

But it is worth noting here how utterly impotent, hypocritical and delusional it is. The Anti-Imperialist League were silent on both the Boer War (in which their supporters' natural sympathies towards the Boer settlers were set against their extensive US investments and employment in the British mining industry) and the vicious European suppression of the Boxer rebellion in China. And, of course, they had to perform some major ideological contortions in order to rationalise their support for the colonization of the US itself. Leading light Carl Shurz claimed the 'old' colonialism (annexing Native American lands in the first place, as well as, later, California, Texas, Florida, Alaska and so on) was justified because these lands were supposedly virtually unpopulated, and therefore the demographic 'problem' posed by the annexation of 'millions of...half-clad labourers of Asia' did not arise. This not only demonstrates the centrality of racist demographic concerns to the League's 'anti-imperialism', but can even be read as a rationalization of genocide.

This particular type of 'anti-imperialism', then, is not opposed to imperialism on principle, but only to certain types of im-

perialism, depending on whether they are judged to serve or undermine European settler interests. The annexation of Native and Mexican lands is 'good' imperialism, providing the settler masses with land without diluting their white culture and stock; whilst the annexation of Filipino territory is 'bad' imperialism, because it threatens the settler population with miscegenation, competition, and political-cultural degeneration. In a similar manner, notes Reid-Ross, Mussolini's fascists "insisted that the conquest of Libya would empower the working class, strengthening the nation in ways socialism could only dream of" (24)

Today's 'anti-imperialist' fascists are the same, judging imperialism not by the impact on its beleaguered victims, but according to who is carrying it out, and who is benefiting from it. Today, the 'bad' ('pro-Muslim'/ pro-banking/ 'Jewish-instigated') imperialism of Obama is contrasted with the 'good' (anti-Muslim, pro-US, coordinated with Russia) imperialism of Trump.

This demonstrates that the basis on which imperialism is opposed is crucial. If imperialism is being opposed not on principle, but because, for example, it is somehow 'in cahoots with Islam', or because it is detrimental to the needs of the (white) 'volk', this opens the door for supporting an imperialism which is aimed against Muslims, or which benefits the volk. And on further inspection, in fact, such a hypothetical imperialism turns out to be precisely the imperialism which actually exists. Muslims, after all, constitute the vast majority of those killed in imperialist wars, (including those killed by US-British-backed Salafist proxies); whilst the European volk do, in fact, benefit from the wars which underpin the West's global power.

This is why a far-right 'anti-imperialist' like Trump can in power escalate imperialist aggression on every single front—including against his supposed chum Putin—without prompting any major reevaluation by his fascist supporters. After all, he's always hated Muslims and sought to increase US power: he has just realized that imperialism, far from being a hindrance to this, is, after all, quite a good means of pursuing both. In sum, allowing fascist infiltration of anti-imperialism not only allows fascist notions to develop and gain credibility on the left, but also neutralizes anti-imperialism itself.

Whilst racist 'anti-imperialism' has a long history, however, its modern variant has emerged from a specific configuration of fascism developed by men like Julius Evola, Francis Parker Yockey and Jean-Francois Thiriart in the decades following World War Two.

Julius Evola was a leading fascist ideologue in interwar Italy who, says Reid-Ross, "criticised Mussolini's dictatorship for not being fascist enough" and has been credited as a major influence on Italy's anti-Semitic Racial Laws of 1938.

Evola's mentor was Rene Guenon, a French convert to Sufism, whose 'spiritual' fascism drew on his idiosyncratic readings of Arab, Buddhist and Hindu texts. Guenon blamed Judeo-Christian civilization for the fall of Europe's heroic warrior culture, and for Evola, therefore, only the rediscover-

ery of a pagan 'traditionalism' could liberate and regenerate a dying Europe. Following World War Two, Evola identified the US as the modern flagbearer of cultural degeneration and called for direct action against NATO to liberate Europe from its overbearing and crippling influence: a variant of fascism which "would come to paramount influence over the resurgent global fascist movement", according to Reid-Ross. Here can be seen the seeds of the 'anti-imperialist' fascism advocated by those such as Alexander Dugin today.

One of Evola's most important followers was Francis Parker Yockey, a US fascist who was very likely a Nazi agent during the war. Like Guenon and Evola, Yockey saw a (racially-defined) people's strength as a product of the extent of its adherence to its own ancient traditional culture. And, for Yockey, the west itself no longer adhered to genuine western culture—which, he argued, was actually more honored in the Soviet Union, whose authoritarianism reflected (pre-Enlightenment) European traditions far more than the liberalism of Europe and North America. Like Evola, he saw the most pernicious threat to genuine western culture as emanating, not from the USSR, but from the US itself. Putting meat on the bones of Evola's call for resistance to NATO in Europe, he founded the European Liberation Front (ELF) in 1948 with the explicit aim of overthrowing US influence in Europe. Demonstrating fascism's endless ideological malleability, the 'anti-US' formulation developed by Evola and Yockey was both a recognition of and adaptation to the ideological hegemony of the left and the popularity of the Soviet Union in the postwar years, and was a clear attempt to occupy the terrain of the anti-imperialist left. And it was very successful; in the opinion of Reid-Ross, "Yockey's ideological melding of left and right would set the standard for the remainder of the century". This is no exaggeration: it was the ELF, after all, who played a key role in building the networks between Russian and European far-right groups in the 1990s that are at the heart of the 'red-brown' fascist resurgence today.

If the 1940s saw the development of a fascism which had switched from an anti-Soviet to an anti-US position, the 1960s would see the emergence of a strand which would apparently reverse fascism's attitude towards colonialism. Tellingly, this would first emerge precisely out of the most virulently pro-colonial strains of the movement.

The OAS was an underground organization of French military officers violently opposed to the decolonization of Algeria. Formed during the Algerian of 1954-1962, its roots lay in the Cagoule organization of the 1930s, who practiced false-flag terrorism in France, which it blamed on the communists with the aim of herding a fearful people towards accepting fascism. The OAS was formed of its remnants and is thought to have been responsible for around 2000 deaths during their two years of operation from 1961 to 1962. One young supporter of the OAS was the Belgian Jean-Francois Thiriart, a former communist who had switched sides and helped the Nazis

locate Jews and resistance fighters during the war. Thiriart provided safe houses for OAS soldiers on their return from Algeria, and had in 1960 set up his own Belgian equivalent, the Mouvement d'Action Civique, to resist the liberation of the Congo. "However", writes Reid-Ross, "as decolonization spread, Thiriart's aspiration grew to accentuate the left wing aspects of fascism and to transform the character of mainstream politics"—leading him to begin to call for workers rights and decolonization. Once again, fascism was demonstrating its ability to adapt even its apparently most central beliefs in order to widen its appeal.

In reality, Thiriart's support for third world decolonization was superficial, and served primarily as a rhetorical justification for Yockeyan ideas about 'liberating' Europe both from 'Zionist' and US influence, and from non-European 'infiltration'. As Reid-Ross writes, "The fascist notion of decolonization remained distinct from the Third World decolonization movement...their notion of 'European liberation' demanded the expulsion or otherwise liquidation of populations deemed non-European. The strong odor of anti-Semitism and racism continued to emanate from their literature, which emphasized violence against the state, 'Zionists', and NATO as a means of achieving the spiritual empire of Europe...Thiriart's appeal to the left by violently rejecting NATO and embracing Soviet and even Maoist influence retained only a short-term promise of liberation from capital with a long term plan of genocide. This support for decolonization was, more or less, a disingenuous ruse to cater to possible left-wing recruits".

In fact, whilst fascist 'decolonialism' clearly was an attempt to wear the clothes of the left, it was also much more than this. Using the language of colonization to describe US (and 'Zionist') influence in Europe was and is about flattering the Europeans by endowing them with a (nonexistent) victimhood. At the same time, it is a transparent attempt to legitimize racism, by drawing an equivalence between third world liberation movements and white nationalism. As such, it is a perfect example of fascism's appeal to the deep, but repressed, psychological needs of the western petty bourgeoisie. Specifically, fascism appeals to the aspiration of western peoples to maintain or restore their threatened privileges in a way that is in tune with their conscience. This idea of 'decolonisation' does this perfectly. Previously, biological theories of racism had served this purpose, provided conscience-salving justification for white privilege; but with the marginalization of such theories in the postwar era, a new rationalization became necessary. Fascist rhetoric about US colonisation of Europe not only absolved Europeans of responsibility for their own imperial foreign policies (now all projected onto the US), but simultaneously provided a veneer of 'leftist', 'anti-imperialist' credibility to attacks on immigrants, who were presented as the advance guard of a 'colonial invasion' driven by US-Zionist interests bent on destroying Europe. This was, then, the birth of a 'politically-correct' fascism which could present both the

whitewashing of European crimes and anti-immigrant hatred as a part of a pseudo-left project to 'decolonise' Europe.

This precise formulation has huge currency today. The 1930s-era fascist trope of 'communism as a Wall St plot' has mutated into a new trope of 'immigration as a Wall St plot'. Today, whilst the figure of the 'poor Jew' (communist) has been replaced by the 'poor Muslim' (immigrant), behind both of them lies the rich Jew pulling the strings; in both cases, supposed movements of the poor are seen as nothing more than Jewish plots to destroy Europe from within. Hatred of the poor is thus transformed into an acceptable and even necessary part of the struggle against the rich, much easier to square with petty-bourgeois sensibilities. This can be seen clearly in the obsession of many current neofascists with the supposed

beneficiaries of capitalist-imperialism, they are forced to adopt all manner of idealist suppositions to explain their supposed failure to act in their own class interests. But O Colmain is too sophisticated for the 'false consciousness' argument. Instead he has another answer for the failure to make revolution in the west—the backward identity of the immigrant has divided the working class. As such, he, following in the footsteps of Yockey and Thiriart, provides a pseudo-left/ progressive veneer to anti-immigrant hostility. By opposing immigration, we are not, as it turns out, defending indefensible privileges or giving vent to base xenophobia—we are valiantly fighting against imperialist intrigue.

But perhaps the most important figure in the fascist appropriation of leftist concepts in the service of a more 'politically-

Whilst Yockey exploited the anti-US and pro-Soviet sympathies of the immediate postwar period, and Thiriart appropriated the decolonial rhetoric of the 1960s, Benoist drew on the concepts of the New Left to fashion an explicitly fascist form of identity politics.

role of the Rothschilds and George Soros in 'flooding Europe with immigrants'. One particularly lurid example is Gearoid O Colmain, a frequent RT commentator who proclaims himself a Marxist-Leninist (but clearly of the 'National Bolshevik' variety), who in 2016 penned an 11-part series entitled "Coercive Engineered Migration: Zionism's war on Europe" published by several supposedly leftist websites such as Dissident Voice. O Colmain's basic claim is that Zionists are using Muslim immigrants to facilitate white genocide and weaken Europe. In O Colmain's view, the immigrant—the tool of the Jew—is responsible not only for the weakening, and potentially fatal, dilution of European culture, but for pretty much every crime and failure in the western world. For O Colmain, immigrants are responsible for the west's wars of aggression, through pressuring western governments to invade their homelands—with Iraqi expats specifically held responsible for the US invasion of Iraq—and they are even to blame for the continuation of capitalism itself, by dividing the working class; reading O Colmain, one would imagine white people were chomping at the bit to enact communist revolution until those pesky Muslims came along. Ultimately the fulminations of O Colmain, and many others like him, represent yet another response to the Euro-Marxist despair at the western working class's attachment to capitalism. Unable or unwilling to recognize that the western working class—their 'chosen people'—are, in fact,

correct' fascism, is Alain de Benoist. Like Thiriart, Benoist's political career began as straightforward cheerleading for jingoistic imperialism in books like "Courage is their homeland" and "Rhodesia—land of the faithful lions". But also like Thiriart, the decolonial upsurge of the 1960s, and the political earthquakes it unleashed in the west, led Benoist to reverse his former support for groups like the OAS and adopt a more leftist, 'anti-colonial' rhetoric. Writes Reid-Ross, "Though originally characterized by pro-colonial celebrations of early European warrior societies united by honour and loyalty, Benoist's ideology transformed through the paradigm-shifting events of 1968 into a syncretic new formulation organized under the banner of the 'Nouvelle Droite'". In 1969, he created GRECE—the Research and Study Group for European Civilisation—and "produced a 'neo-Gramscian' analysis of social conditions based on anti-liberalism and anti-Marxism without necessarily condemning socialism", attempting to "recapture what they saw as the unity between left and right that had prefigured 20th-century fascism". Like Thiriart and Yockey, GRECE sought to "demonstrate how even left-wing revolutionaries...could be utilized in order to delegitimize liberal democracy". The aim was to fight a long-term battle of ideas (termed 'metapolitics') waged through his think tank.

Benoist was in many ways a natural progression of the path forged by Yockey and Thiriart. Whilst Yockey exploited the

anti-US and pro-Soviet sympathies of the immediate postwar period, and Thiriart appropriated the decolonial rhetoric of the 1960s, Benoist drew on the concepts of the New Left to fashion an explicitly fascist form of identity politics. His 'Nouvelle Droite' movement directly lifted New Left catchphrases about 'respect for diversity' and the 'right to difference' to advocate a politics of racially-purified ethnic separation. This was essentially a rehashing of the global apartheid theories of the nineteenth-century racists, who Benoist explicitly sought to rehabilitate. Theoretically in favor of the equality of races, Benoist advocated what has become known as 'ethnopluralism'—the idea that each ethnicity needs to defend its unique ethnic identity by resisting globalization, inter-racial marriage, and immigration. By presenting such goals as an imperative for all races, Benoist sought to counter claims of white supremacism and indeed claimed to support "Black Power", "Yellow Power" and "Red Power" along with White Power. Even his hostility to immigration was presented as good for the immigrant: "The truth is that people must preserve and cultivate their differences...immigration merits condemnation because it strikes a blow at the identity of the host culture as well as the immigrant's identity". In line with classical fascism, the virility of a 'people' is seen as being dependent on their degree of internal homogeneity, with impurities and dilutions to be resisted or purged.

Benoist's neo-Gramscian strategy of 'counter-hegemonic' 'cultural struggle' aimed to use the concepts of the left to delegitimize the left whilst simultaneously providing classic fascist tropes with a new acceptability through the use of politically correct terminology. In this way, notes Reid-Ross, Benoist sought to implement Hitler's injunction to create a people who are "ready" for fascism. His ideological framework has been gold dust for fascists desperate to whitewash their image and legitimize fascist notions of racial purity, and has been seized on by neo-Nazis such as Richard Spencer. For his supporters, anti-fascists are 'the real racists', whose support for immigration amounts to a form of 'white genocide' facilitated by a 'colonial invasion' of Europe. In other words, Benoist effectively lay the groundwork for the white 'identity politics' at the heart of modern fascism.

In his book, "Mistaken Identity", Asad Haider defines identity politics as "the neutralization of movements against racial oppression. It is the ideology that emerged to appropriate the emancipatory legacy in service of the advancement of political and economic elites". Whilst true of identity politics in general, the white identity politics employed by modern-day fascism pushes this basic truth to the extremes. Trump's successful harnessing of white identity, for example, has neutralised white workers so successfully that he has been able to enact some of the most extreme anti-working class policies since the Reagan era, resulting in a massive transfer of wealth from the poor (through unprecedented cuts to public housing and welfare programmes) to the rich (in the form of \$1.5 trillion worth of tax cuts). These tax cuts, CNN reported recently, have been

used to finance a surge in share buybacks (to the tune of \$178 billion), which will both artificially boost share prices—disguising the underlying sickness in the economy—and result in shareholder payouts that "could top \$1 trillion for the first time ever". In other words, Trump is facilitating the looting of the economy by billionaires before it goes bust, at the expense of the working class; but his attacks on immigrants, China, North Korea and so on allow him to parade as a valiant defender of those being plundered whilst simultaneously ensuring a solid list of scapegoats to be blamed when the impact of these policies really starts to bite. At the same time, Trump is pushing through executive orders to limit the powers of already weak trade unions to resist any of his measures. This is the reality of white 'identity politics'—racist tubthumping as a smokescreen for attacks on workers of all hues.

This article has, in its analysis of the ideological development of fascist notions of anti-imperialism, drawn attention to two major dangers in allowing fascists to infiltrate our movements: that they provide a smokescreen for the continuation of neo-liberal attacks on the working class, whilst neutralizing anti-imperialism itself. But there is also a far greater danger: that leftists allying with fascists on 'anti-imperialism' end up providing a platform for—and giving a veneer of credibility to—the other ideas of fascism, and specifically for the scapegoating of Jews and immigrants for problems rooted in the current crisis of the modern world system.

The various crises in which this system now finds itself—environmental, economic, and military-imperial—have been building for a long time, and the western ruling class has been preparing for them. The goal of western governments is to confine the impact of these crises, as far as possible, exclusively to the peoples of the third world. Liberal imperialism, in its various aspects (neoliberalism, 'humanitarian intervention' etc) has been laying the groundwork for this for some time; all that's left is the legitimization of the torture and killing of anyone who tries to flee. This is where the fascists come in. Capitalism in crisis has always utilized fascism—whether grudgingly or otherwise is open to debate—and continues to do so today. The question for those of us on the left is the degree to which we are willing to be utilized by the fascists.

* Alexander Reid-Ross's book "Against the Fascist Creep" is one of the best accounts of the development of fascist infiltration of the left. Nevertheless, Reid-Ross himself is utterly hostile to the anti-imperialist struggle. It is indicative of the malaise in which we are in that the left is increasingly divided between an anti-imperialist wing deeply infiltrated by fascists and an anti-fascist wing dominated by those hostile to anti-imperialism. After all, as James Stuart has said, a consistent left movement must oppose both, as "fascism is imperialism at home and imperialism is fascism abroad". **CP**

DANIEL GLAZEBROOK is a political commentator and analyst.

Politicizing the Secret World

The Intelligence Agencies Under Trump

BY MELVIN A. GOODMAN

“When the full extent of your venality, moral turpitude, and political corruption becomes known, you will take your rightful place as a disgraced demagogue in the dustbin of history.”

— Former CIA director John Brennan on Donald Trump in the wake of the firing of FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe just a day before McCabe’s retirement

Donald Trump’s war on intelligence has been a comprehensive attack on the intelligence community, particularly the Central Intelligence Agency, denigrating every aspect of intelligence leadership and policy. Trump’s war is against fact finders, the press, the judiciary and the Federal Bureau of Investigation—as well as the Intelligence Community for which fact-finding is central. Trump’s incantations of “fake news” have been remarkably successful; the credibility of the media has been compromised as a result. The charges of perfidy against the FBI have undermined the ability of an essential institution to do its job. Trump’s efforts to discredit the intelligence community have harmed the reputation of important institutions.

Secret intelligence institutions are not fully compatible with the democratic process so there has always been tension between an open democratic society and a closed secret community. President Harry S. Truman encountered opposition when he created the CIA in 1947, and the crimes of the CIA, the FBI, and the National Security Agency during the Vietnam War, which included illegal surveillance of Americans, mail openings, and wiretaps, led to bipartisan opposition from both liberals and conservatives. More recently, the NSA’s massive surveillance campaign, the CIA’s program of torture and abuse, and the FBI’s use of “national security letters” to collect confidential information on American citizens without a warrant have outraged civil libertarians.

Truman wanted a CIA to collect and analyze intelligence, not to become another “cloak and dagger agency.” Truman opposed the covert actions of Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy. Trump, however, is not targeting the cloak and dagger operations of the CIA; he is targeting the pursuit of intelligence analysis that does not conform to his personal views. He does not accept the validity of the Iran nuclear accord and Iran’s observance of it. And he does not accept the fact that Russia interfered in the 2016 presidential election, which the Intelligence Community has endorsed.

President Richard Nixon shared his negative views on the CIA with very few advisors, but Trump put his views on

public display before his inauguration. As a candidate, he made it clear that he wouldn’t sit still for daily top-secret briefings. As a president, he has not. And no sooner had Trump been elected president that he labeled Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and CIA Director John Brennan “political hacks.” Trump’s closest ally during the presidential campaign of 2016 was Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, who was a bitter enemy of James Clapper and soon to become the president’s first national security adviser. Flynn strongly believed that Clapper had engineered his removal from the position of Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency and was responsible for his early retirement from the Army.

Many bizarre events marked the first years of the Trump Administration. One of the most incredible events took place on the first full day of the Trump presidency when he traveled to CIA headquarters on January 21, 2017. Several weeks before his inauguration, Trump had compared the CIA to the Gestapo of the Third Reich, and had lambasted CIA Director Brennan. Trump views the CIA as prime members of the so-called “deep state.” Trump’s repeated references to the CIA’s intelligence failure regarding Iraqi weapons of mass destruction was designed to justify his criticism of the Agency and to compromise its credibility. The appointment of Representative Mike Pompeo to be CIA Director was not meant to appeal to senior CIA leadership. Trump employed this tactic elsewhere, naming stewards at the Department of State, the Department of Justice, the Department of Energy, and the Environmental Protection Agency, all of whom were extremely unpopular with senior leaders.

The fact that key intelligence components—the CIA, the Director of National Intelligence, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the National Security Agency—concluded authoritatively on January 6, 2017 that Russian President Vladimir Putin had sanctioned intervention in the presidential election put the intelligence community in Trump’s gunights. A little more than a year later, Robert Mueller’s special investigation confirmed the conclusions of the intelligence community when it indicted 13 Russian citizens as well as several Russian companies for their interference with the U.S. presidential election. The fact that this issue was President Trump’s first encounter with the CIA made it certain that there would be tension between the commander-in-chief and his intelligence chiefs.

The CIA and the NSA, after all, have supplied sensitive documents to the investigations of the Special Counsel and the congressional intelligence committees, which stuck in the craw of the president. The mounting evidence of Russian intervention and the secret contacts between key members of the Trump campaign staff and Russian operatives has caused the thin-skinned president to continue his volleys of criticism at the intelligence community as well as Attorney General Sessions, who recused himself from the investigations at the Department of Justice and thus removed himself from providing legal and

political cover for the president.

In July 2018, the Senate intelligence committee, chaired by Senator Richard Burr (R-NC), corroborated the 2017 assessment of the intelligence community, calling it a “sound intelligence product.” The Senate report was a significant contrast to the report of the House intelligence committee, which criticized the intelligence assessment in March 2018 and tried to exonerate the Trump presidential campaign. Meanwhile, Russian President Putin repeatedly denied Russian intervention, and President Trump—unlike his national security adviser and his secretary of state—sided with his good friend Putin.

Trump’s anger with the intelligence chiefs who prepared the January 2017 assessment and their continued criticism of his presidency led him to consider revoking their security clearances, which would represent an unprecedented retaliatory step. Never before have intelligence officials lost security clearances because of their political views. Brennan, Clapper, and Comey have been frequent targets for Trump in the first 18 months of his presidency, including unfounded charges that they leaked classified information to the press and conspired to undermine the legitimacy of his presidency. Brennan’s views were particularly noxious to the president who is accused of a “treasonous” performance in the Helsinki summit with Putin, which warranted impeachment.

Ironically, the actions and statements of both Trump and Brennan went too far, the type of indiscriminate allegations that marked McCarthyism in the 1950s. Senator Joseph McCarthy was fond of the word “treason,” and it was used against J. Robert Oppenheimer, the physicist who helped develop the atomic bomb, to revoke his security clearance. Nothing can stop a president from awarding or revoking a security clearance. Meanwhile, three former chiefs in the intelligence community (Clapper, Comey, and former CIA director Michael Hayden) have produced memoirs highly critical of the president, also unprecedented.

Trump’s self-aggrandizing performance at CIA Headquarters marked a new low in presidential efforts to politicize the most controversial agency in the intelligence community. He brought many supporters from the White House with him, and they occupied seats in the front rows where they cheered the president’s remarks. Trump faced two groups of agency personnel. The main section consisted of agency staffers who provided cheers and applause for the President’s embarrassing political statements, particularly his efforts to intimidate the press. The heaviest applause followed Trump’s accusation that journalists were “among the most dishonest people on earth.” A separate section in front consisted of senior agency officials, including clandestine operatives, who stood throughout but remained stoic and offered no obvious support.

Trump’s visit to the CIA was brief—less than fifteen minutes—and controversial. Standing in front of the Memorial Wall in the lobby of the headquarters building, Trump made no mention of the meaning of the 112 stars on the wall, which

represent the CIA officers who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. Trump also stood near the biblical inscription at the entrance to the Langley headquarters: “The Truth Will Set You Free.” Trump, who is obviously self-conscious about his girth, never took off his overcoat as he reminded his audience of his own “intelligence,” and repeated the lies about the size of his inaugural crowd.

Trump’s random remarks, which resembled a campaign appearance, were designed to ingratiate himself in the wake of his attacks on former director Brennan and the agency during the transition period. On his Twitter account, he had called the agency’s assessments “ridiculous” and politically motivated, and said CIA actions were comparable to what had taken place in Nazi Germany. Never before has there been a feud between a president-elect and the CIA, and never before has a president blatantly attempted to manipulate agency personnel.

Early on, President Trump vividly demonstrated that he had no understanding of the sensitivity of intelligence materials, particularly those items obtained from foreign liaison when he shared a sensitive report from Israeli intelligence with Russian officials. In a strange meeting in the Oval Office on May 10, 2017, Trump displayed the report to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Russian Ambassador Sergei Kislyak. This shocked key intelligence officials who immediately leaked the story. Trump presumably saw no contradiction in vilifying intelligence officers, and then boasting to the Russians about the excellent intelligence he receives from them.

This embarrassing episode suggested that there are no guardrails or impulse controls on this president, and it reportedly led to serious discussions within the intelligence community about sharing sensitive materials with the White House, particularly a White House where so many key officials were operating without full security clearances. CIA intelligence briefers were particularly hesitant to brief the president orally on issues dealing with Russian President Putin because of Trump’s sensitivity about Russian interference in the 2016 election that may have contributed to his victory. In April 2018, President Trump fired his second national security adviser, Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, only several days after the general acknowledged the fact of Russian interference.

Trump’s authoritarian style during the presidential campaign attracted an authoritarian following, so it was no surprise that he selected an authoritarian national security team dominated by general officers, and Pompeo—a West Point graduate. Trump ignored the Founding Fathers’ commitment to civilian control of the military. The Senate’s confirmation of Trump’s appointments to the CIA was particularly troubling. Pompeo was the leading Trump loyalist in the House of Representatives when he was appointed CIA director, which is not the best attribute for an intelligence director. Previous directors from the Congress were too willing to provide their masters with the intelligence they were seeking, which led to periods of moral bankruptcy at the CIA. George Tenet helped prepare

the phony speech that Secretary of State Powell delivered to the United Nations in February 2003, and falsely testified to a “sinister nexus” between Iraq and al Qaeda prior to the 9/11 attacks. It was Tenet who told President Bush in December 2002 that it would be a “slam dunk” to provide the intelligence to justify war against Iraq.

Pompeo immediately became the greatest Trump loyalist in the Cabinet. He spent much time telling skeptical audiences that the president is an “enthusiastic consumer of intelligence” and particularly loves the “killer graphics” that he is given on a daily basis. When Pompeo described the president’s relationship with the intelligence community as “fantastic” at a talk to the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, there was laughter in the audience. “Don’t laugh,” Pompeo responded, “I mean that.”

When Pompeo made his first major decision at CIA in February 2017, the appointment of a deputy, he pandered to President Trump’s support for torture and abuse by naming Gina Haspel. Ignoring the Senate Intelligence Committee’s authoritative study of the illegality and immorality of CIA’s torture and abuse, Pompeo appointed Haspel who was deeply involved in the torture program from the beginning and drafted the order to destroy the 92 torture tapes that documented sadistic CIA activities at secret prisons, the so-called “black sites,” where Abu Zubaida and Abd al-Rahim al-Nishiri were waterboarded.

Pompeo became so popular with the president that in March 2018 he was named Secretary of State, and Haspel was nominated to be Director of the CIA. With these two moves as well as naming John Bolton as Trump’s third national security adviser, the president created a “war cabinet” that favors the use of military force and the reinstitution of torture and abuse. Two so-called “adults in the room,” Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster and Rex Tillerson, were removed from the National Security Council and the Department of State, respectively.

After a difficult confirmation process due to her involvement in torture and abuse and the destruction of the torture tapes, Haspel was confirmed by the Senate on May 17, 2018, receiving a record-breaking 45 negative votes. The mainstream media described her as a “seasoned intelligence veteran;” her support for torture and abuse earned her the nickname “bloody Gina.”

In 2011, when Leon Panetta wanted to name Haspel to become the deputy director of operations, the number three position at the Agency, Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) blocked the move. Feinstein, the former chairwoman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, led the investigation of the CIA’s sadistic torture and abuse program, which determined that CIA leadership lied to the White House about the extent and results of the so-called enhanced interrogation techniques. Haspel played a leading role in the program, and Senator John McCain (R-AZ) was among the first to demand that Haspel publicly explain her role.

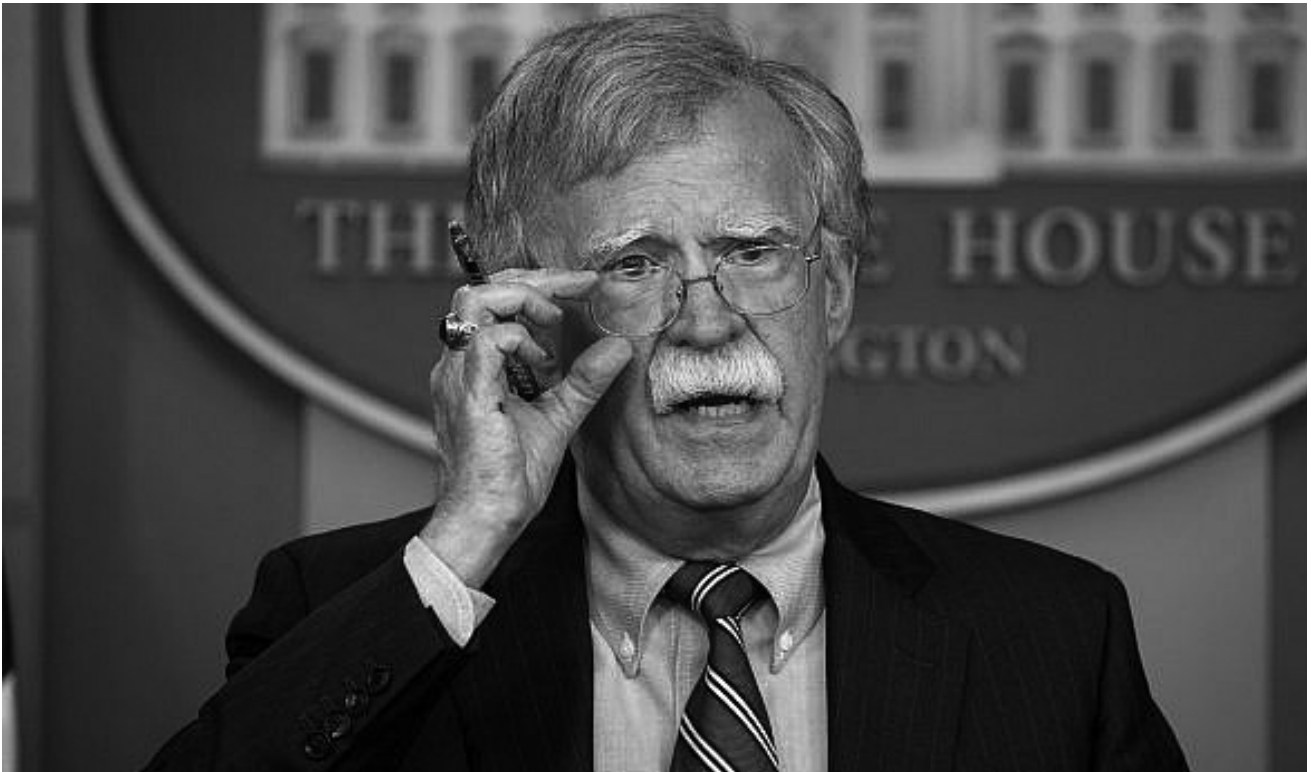
Haspel was a deputy and protege of Jose Rodriguez, the CIA’s

notorious former Deputy Director for Operations and former Director of the Counterterrorism Center. If the torture and abuse program at the CIA had a godfather, it was Rodriguez. Haspel was a devoted acolyte. In 2005, when Rodriguez decided to destroy the torture tapes, Haspel prepared the cable to do so. The Department of Justice investigated the entire episode, but no one was charged with obstruction of justice even though the White House and a federal judge had ordered that the tapes be protected.

Prior to the confirmation hearings in May 2018, former CIA directors and deputy directors, including former Deputy Director Mike Morell, declassified information and memoranda for the Senate intelligence committee to vouch for Haspel’s qualifications. The CIA did the same for Robert M. Gates during his controversial nomination hearings in September 1991, violating the CIA charter against politicizing intelligence information for a congressional committee. For Haspel, the CIA declassified and released a memorandum that cleared her of wrongdoing in drafting an order to destroy videotaped evidence of sadistic interrogation techniques. Morell cited a disciplinary review in 2011 in which he “found no fault with the performance of Ms. Haspel” because she drafted the cable “on the direct orders” of her superior and did not release it herself. Morell obviously knows nothing of the Nuremberg principles that recommend punishment for officials who carry out illegal orders. In late April 2018, more than 100 retired general and admirals took the unusual step of circulating a statement opposing Haspel’s confirmation because of her role in CIA’s sadistic torture program.

Haspel and Rodriguez told numerous senators that the tapes had to be destroyed to protect the identity of the CIA agents depicted in them. This was a lie. The agents and contractors who took part in the sadistic techniques were hooded, which is typical of torturers throughout history, and could never be identified. Rodriguez received a letter of reprimand, but no further punishment because Morell determined Rodriguez did what he had determined to be in the interest of CIA agents and believed his actions were legal. Rodriguez’s actions were in fact unconscionable as were Haspel’s and Morell’s in view of sadistic practices that went beyond what was authorized by the so-called torture memoranda of the Department of Justice. The torture began before the Department of Justice memoranda were written.

Two memoirs by former CIA officials took issue with Haspel’s testimony regarding her role in torture and abuse and in the destruction of the torture tapes. In John Rizzo’s memoir “Company Man,” the former Acting General Counsel of the CIA wrote that he was stunned to learn about the destruction of the tapes because he believed that the decision was under senior-level review. He wrote that he “never thought that destruction was a realistic possibility” because there were “too many people adamantly opposed to the idea.” Jose Rodriguez, Haspel’s boss, told an interviewer on May 9, 2018, that he told



John Bolton. Photo: White House.

Haspel, then his chief of staff, that he planned to take the matter of the destruction of the tapes in his own hands and that she offered no objection. At the hearings in May 2018, Haspel denied that such a conversation ever took place.

In confirming Haspel, the Senate failed to appreciate the cynicism that takes over a government agency when an individual such as Haspel becomes the head of that agency. A similar event took place in the early 1990s, when Bob Gates, who orchestrated the efforts to politicize intelligence in the CIA, was returned as its director in late 1991 following the nomination by President George H.W. Bush, a former CIA director himself. A decade later, two individuals who were linked to Gates—CIA Director Tenet and Deputy Director John McLaughlin—politicized intelligence to take the country to war against Iraq. Tenet was staff director of the Senate intelligence committee that confirmed Gates, and McLaughlin was a Gates’ acolyte throughout his CIA career.

It is shocking that a woman who supervised torture and abuse at a CIA prison and played a key role in destroying the torture tapes that documented such sadism received the blessings of the White House and the U.S. Senate to direct the Agency. Haspel has demonstrated the absence of a moral compass and, with the appointment of a loyal “war cabinet, there is no assurance that key decision makers will stand up against the politicization of intelligence. Pompeo and Haspel were confirmed in part because a handful of Democratic Senators from Red States, who faced tough reelection chances

in November 2018, were afraid to join the overwhelming number of Democrats who opposed both nominations.

True to his word, Trump refused regular intelligence briefings that have been part of the presidential working day for the past six decades in the form of the President’s Daily Brief (PDB). During the transition, he declined the daily intelligence briefings that every president-elect has received since the creation of the CIA in 1947. And only several days before his inauguration, he conceded in an interview that, if he were to receive briefings, “I like bullets or I like as little as possible. I don’t need, you know, 200-page reports on something that can be handled on a page.” Trump told Fox News that “I’m, like, a smart person. I don’t have to be told the same thing and the same words every single day for the next eight years. I don’t need that.”

The combination of a rule-breaking president and a subservient CIA director is a formula for substituting partisan myth for realistic policy. As director, Pompeo downplayed CIA’s analysis of Russian meddling in the election. His Islamophobia, particularly the exaggeration of the threat from Iran, patronized President Trump, and it was at odds with intelligence evidence. Pompeo joined Trump in dismissing climate science as a fraud; CIA and the Pentagon believe that climate change is a threat to American national security.

The only president whose disparagement of the CIA matched that of Trump was, of course, Richard Nixon, whose attitude, according to then CIA Director Richard Helms, was that “the

only bright, really intelligent fellow in town was himself. He was constantly disparaging everybody else about their abilities.” In fact, if Nixon had his druthers he would have conducted a “house-cleaning” at the CIA, which he described as a “muscle-bound bureaucracy” with a “paralyzed brain” and having “personnel, just like the personnel at State,” that were “primarily Ivy League and Georgetown.” Nixon ordered chief of staff Haldeman to study “how many people in CIA could be removed.” Trump was no less paranoid.

Weak leadership at the CIA will not stop recent intelligence failures that have surprised U.S. leaders. In the past ten years alone, Washington’s national security decision makers have been surprised by the Arab spring and the Syrian rebellion; the Russian interventions in Crimea, Eastern Ukraine, and Syria; the pace of the nuclear program in North Korea; and the sudden diplomatic thrust from Kim Jong Un for summitry with the United States and South Korea.

Washington’s policy and intelligence communities have spent so much time and effort demonizing Iran that it has underestimated the instability caused by the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003; the aggressive nature of the Israeli government; and the militant leadership in Saudi Arabia that has overplayed its hand in Yemen, Qatar, and Syria. Secretary of Defense James Mattis has described Iran as the “single most enduring threat to stability and peace in the Middle East.” Secretary of State Pompeo has echoed the view of Saudi Arabia’s Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir that “Iran is on a rampage.” The United States has never accepted that its military interventions in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, which removed Iran’s enemies to the east and west—the Taliban and Saddam Hussein, respectively—opened up opportunities for Iran in the region.

As a result, U.S. policy and intelligence are falling behind the rapidly changing scene and the turmoil in the Middle East that has provided openings for Russia, Turkey, and Iran. President Trump, Secretary of State Pompeo, and UN Ambassador Nikki Haley have used worst-case views to challenge the Iranian nuclear accord and have exaggerated the success of Tehran’s efforts to spread the Islamic Revolution throughout the region. National security adviser Bolton has a long record of politicizing intelligence to support his policy views and recommendations.

It is difficult to imagine the “war cabinet” having influence over the thinking of the president or to even ascertain the substance of Trump’s policies. He is no thinker, let alone a strategic thinker. There is no Trump doctrine or strategy to guide American policy abroad, and his war on intelligence will limit substantive discussions of his foreign policies. His thoughts emanate from the White House in 140-character sound bites that demonstrate no awareness of the consequences of his statements, let alone an appreciation for unintended consequences. Trump regularly ignored his communications directors (there were three of them in his first seven months); his chiefs of staff (there were two of them in the first six months);

and his lawyers (far too many to track), who tried to silence his tweets or at least soften his edges.

In view of the conflict that the Trump administration is facing in the Middle East, North Africa, and Southwest Asia, as well as the potential for conflict in North Korea and Iran, the importance of objective and balanced intelligence, has never been greater. By maligning the intelligence community, particularly the CIA and the FBI, President Trump has not made Americans safer and, moreover, has compromised the possibility for a thoughtful debate on U.S. actions abroad. President Harry S. Truman created a CIA to provide information for decision making at the highest levels of government; President Trump has weakened and demoralized the central intelligence institutions. The rebuilding process will be difficult and prolonged. **CP**

MELVIN GOODMAN, a former CIA analyst, is the author of *A Whistleblower at the CIA*. His forthcoming book is *American Carnage: Donald Trump’s War on Intelligence* (City Lights Publishers, 2019).

Lopez Obrador’s Tsunami Democracy and Mexico’s Fourth Republic

BY KENT PATERSON

Glee, glum and guesses are three words that describe the mood in Mexico in the aftermath of the stunning triumph of center-left presidential candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) in the July 1 elections.

“Anti-AMLO negative campaigns were very effective in the past, but not now. I interpret the election result as a protest vote mainly against the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), violence, crime and feminicides, and the excesses of the governing class,” mused Dr. Aurora Teran, historian at the National Pedagogical University in the central Mexican city of Aguascalientes.

“It’s also a vote of hope, perhaps naively so...AMLO’S promise to end corruption is a campaign promise. Obviously, it can’t be ended overnight. A lot of work has to be done...”

Attracted by Lopez Obrador’s 50-point Nation Project, Mexicans likewise voted for a new dawn at a time when the neo-liberal economic model implanted 35 years ago prompts the oft-heard comment that people nowadays earn “barely enough to eat.”

Consequently, on July 1, Mexico made an unmistakable left turn, former attorney general and constitutional law expert Diego Valades told *Proceso* magazine. “We have a right to expect a government that responds to social expectations, and that it is a government with a social democratic orientation,” Valades said.

Chalking up about 30.1 million votes (nearly twice what he received in 2012), the three-time presidential contender's 53.1 percent margin of victory left his three opponents and their respective parties writhing in the dust, even hinting that the ruling PRI, whose presidential candidate Jose Antonio Meade received a pathetic 9.3 million votes (16.4 percent), might change its name to politically survive. Bowing to history, Rene Juarez, the PRI's national president, resigned.

The party's Internal Democracy faction squarely laid the blame for an unprecedented debacle on President Pena Nieto's government and decades of neoliberalism.

Almost sounding like Lopez Obrador and his National Movement for the Regeneration of Mexico (Morena) party, Internal Democracy published a statement urging a new PRI with a clear center-left posture.

According to the National Electoral Institute (INE), the agency tasked with overseeing the elections, 56.6 million Mexicans cast ballots July 1, a turnout of 63.4 percent of registered voters.

Lopez Obrador's landslide expanded well beyond his longtime strongholds in south-central Mexico, sweeping traditionally conservative states like Aguascalientes.

Winning Aguascalientes with 39 percent of the vote in a four way-race, the 64-year-old president elect pried open a closed political door in a place where the PRI and conservative PAN parties long maintained an alternating stranglehold on power, setting the stage for a future, vibrant "moderate left" presence, beamed Carlos Tristan, campaign coordinator for an unsuccessful Morena Senate candidate.

AMLO's pledges to curb corruption, bring peace to violence-torn Mexico and give relief to the financially strapped working and middle classes resonate in the City of Good People. His slogan of "abrazos, no balazos" (hugs, not bullets), now overdubs the musical beat of local street break dancers.

Called a "tsunami" by observers, Lopez Obrador's victory did not stop at the Mexican White House, which the president-elect plans to remake into a cultural center.

AMLO's four-year old Morena party and its two partners (the small PT and PES parties) in the Together We Will Make History coalition captured the Mexican Congress, plucked four strategic state governorships, won a majority of state legislatures, and claimed mayors' offices of important cities including Acapulco, Ciudad Juarez, Culiacan, Toluca, Oaxaca, and Mexico City. As the political flood waters receded, five of the smaller political parties were on the verge of losing their registrations because of insufficient votes.

Writing in *El Universal*, Harvard's Maria del Carmen Alanis noted that the incoming government is positioned to effect constitutional changes if it gains a few more allies-and the pieces of Lopez Obrador's own potentially fractious coalition hold.

The former Mexico City mayor's longtime political adversaries on his right were so humbled by their nemesis' rousing

victory that old sores were publicly rubbed over and a veritable AMLO love fest played out in the media, casting well-wishers that starred former presidents Carlos Salinas de Gortari and Vicente Fox, opposition party governors, corporate kingpins, and the once-powerful, pro-PRI SNTE and CTM unions.

Among the new political chameleons was German Larrea of Grupo Mexico, head of the multinational mining and metals giant responsible for such catastrophes as a 2006 coal mine explosion that entombed scores of workers and a 2014 toxic spill in Sonora state.

Although Lopez Obrador and Morena Plus are poised to implement a reform program tilted in favor of popular interests after the new government takes office later in the year, questions abound over the nature, scope, viability and ultimate beneficiaries of the changes envisioned by the victors.

Probable AMLO cabinet members stress plans for better senior pensions, higher education scholarships, youth apprenticeships, a decentralized federal bureaucracy, cheaper gasoline, and a new direction in the so-called drug war. The legalization of marijuana and opium (for medicinal purposes) are under consideration.

AMLO and company contemplate amnesty for low-level narcos, small dope growers and political prisoners, crafted with the participation of victims' families, human rights organizations and the United Nations.

Carlos Urzua, designated budget and taxation secretary, confirmed a campaign promise in a television interview that the new government plans to cut the value-added tax for consumers in northern Mexican border cities from 16 percent to 8 percent, so local businesses can compete with U.S. stores across the border where many Mexicans shop and pay a lower sales tax, as well as save money on pharmaceuticals by purchasing medicine wholesale for the three federal government health-care institutions.

Ratifying the centrist side of his politics, Lopez Obrador pledges to respect private property, Mexico's existing financial obligations, and the renegotiation of NAFTA. Leading representatives of the capitalist class such as Juan Pablo Castanon waxed enthusiastic over prospects for Keynesian-like stimulus spending flowing from AMLO land.

Free of the libertarian cliches so often heard in the U.S., the Business Coordinating Council chief proposed tripling Mexico's public investment in infrastructure to five percent of the GNP which, combined with private investment, would create 1.2 million new jobs, Castanon told the press.

AMLO's triumph thundered in Latin America, where left-of-center forces have suffered stinging political defeats since 2015.

But progressive politicians praised the Mexican vote as a signal that the tide was turning. Given Mexico's size and economic weight, socialist Bolivian President Evo Morales proclaimed to the Cuban news agency Prensa Latina that AMLO's victory heralded a "great beginning to the liberation of our

peoples...”

Perhaps with an eye on November, an excited President Donald Trump, who’s anxious to put a final clamp on the border and possibly reach a bilateral trade accord with Mexico in substitution of NAFTA, quickly dialed up Lopez Obrador. A preliminary meeting of Team Trump and Team AMLO was held July 13 in Mexico City.

Although initial contacts between Washington and the newly elected Mexican leaders were described as cordial, serious differences separate the Trump administration and Lopez Obrador, who’s sharply critical of Trump’s border wall scheme and U.S. immigration policies.

Aimed at fomenting economic development and reducing emigration, Lopez Obrador proposes a Kennedysque Alliance for Progress involving the United States, Mexico and Central America.

Friction could emerge over Latin American policy. In contrast to Washington’s maneuvers against the Nicaraguan and Venezuelan governments, Lopez Obrador and expected Foreign Secretary Marcelo Ebrard have both pledged a return to foreign policy principles of non-intervention and self-determination.

In the days surrounding July 1, Lopez Obrador reiterated the left nationalist side of his political thinking. At the candidate’s closing, massive campaign rally in Mexico City, he defined his presidential bid as the latest manifestation of pro-democracy and social justice movements stretching back decades, rendering tribute to legendary fighters like railroad union leader Demetrio Vallejo and the assassinated small farm leader Ruben Jaramillo.

The presidential frontrunner then announced he would write in Dona Rosario Ibarra for president. Dona Rosario’s son, a leftist guerrilla militant, was forcibly disappeared by state security forces in 1975 and remains missing to this day.

Considered the mother of the modern human rights and relatives of the disappeared movements in Mexico, 90-year-old Dona Rosario was a pioneer in combining social movement activism with women’s involvement in left-wing political initiatives.

After mounting two presidential campaigns for the old Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers Party during the 1980s, she later served as a senator for the Labor Party.

Immediately prior to a meeting with President Pena Nieto, a newly victorious Lopez Obrador parlayed with Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, son of former Mexican President Lazaro Cardenas (1934-1940), and a prominent politician in his own right.

Monikered the “moral leader” of the Mexican left, Cardenas failed in his own three presidential campaigns between 1988 and 2000, but was elected as Mexico City’s first opposition mayor in 1997. Back then, Cardenas and Lopez Obrador belonged to the center-left PRD party, a grouping both men helped to found in 1989 but later quit at separate times.

Prior to the election, Cardenas critiqued all four presidential

candidates-Lopez Obrador included- for not adequately addressing issues of Mexico’s besieged natural resources, women’s rights, indigenous autonomy, public participation in decision making, and Mexico’s fading identity as a Latin American in favor of a NAFTA nation.

“I salute (Cardenas) because he and other social and political leaders were the predecessors of this movement —and thanks to them, and many other Mexicans, this triumph for the fourth transformation of public life in Mexico was achieved...,” Lopez Obrador was quoted in *La Jornada*.

The president elect envisions himself leading Mexico into a new democratic and more equitable era, a fourth republic, similar to the transformative presidencies of Benito Juarez, Lazaro Cardenas and Francisco Madero.

The three historic presidents governed during eras when Mexico demanded a curbing of elites, and national sovereignty was threatened by foreign intervention. Some analysts liken Lopez Obrador to Brazil’s Lula or Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose New Deal policies are admired by the man from Tabasco state, observed columnist Mario Melgar.

Sectors of the left view AMLO’s triumph with a critical eye. The Zapatista National Liberation Army derided the election results as more business as usual, while the Anti-Fascist and Anti-Imperialist Youth, which is organizing an international gathering in Mexico this summer, publicly slammed named appointments to the Lopez Obrador administration, adding the group wouldn’t give the new government a “blank check.”

Hailing July 1 as marking a new and democratic stage, the Mexican Communist Movement editorialized that the new political circumstances demanded fresh and robust analyses. AMLO’s victory will reverberate throughout the Americas, the communists contended, including in the United States where “the struggle for and with migrants is acquiring new dimensions.”

In his drive to establish the Fourth Republic, Lopez Obrador might be the towering political figure of 2018. Yet he is far from the only story flowing from the July 1 elections.

The political exercise was Mexico’s largest in history, with more than 3,400 federal, state and municipal offices up for grabs. The post-election political map revealed promising roads and deadly detours in the long and tortured journey to make Mexico a more democratic and equitable country.

Save for a disputed election in Puebla, voting generally unfolded without major election day problems. Nonetheless, serious troubles plagued the lead up to the polls, boding ill for a democracy in which public participation transpires without fear, intimidation or manipulation.

Much to the chagrin of the average, hard-pressed Mexican, the election price tag easily topped a billion dollars in public money- the costliest in Mexican history. The amount does not include illegal funds spent by campaigns, an issue which even the Organization of American States zeroed in on in a report calling for greater control over political spending and mean-



Lopez Obrador at the Zocalo. Photo: Eneas de Troya.

ingful sanctions for violators.

Election-related violence, too, reached record proportions. From the commencement of the election process last September to the first week of July, at least 152 people were murdered in crimes with political overtones, according to reports compiled by the Etelleket security consulting firm and the Mexican media. The murdered included candidates and their supporters, former and current office holders, election workers, and family members of purported targets.

If Etelleket's inclusion of government functionaries is tossed in, another 371 victims add to the toll. Although politically-tainted murders occurred across Mexico, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Puebla and Mexico states accounted for a disproportionate share. Hundreds of office seekers reportedly resigned amid the violence, as shootings, fire bombings, verbal threats and the dumping of pigs' heads outside party headquarters disturbed the political scene.

Violence was concentrated in regions where organized crime groups possess a material interest in imposing candidates, particularly state and local ones. Pacifying large regions of the country ruled by shadow governments will be a formidable and defining task of the new government.

Despite press warnings as early as last January, buttressed by statements of alarm from the United Nations, the Organization of American States and Amnesty International, violence intensified as election day drew near. The Pena Nieto administration, however, escaped the international censure or sanctions levied against the governments of Venezuela and Nicaragua because of political violence in the two countries.

Old-style election crimes- including vote-buying and the

stealing of ballots-stained the 2018 contest, but the sheer number of voters determined to see change overwhelmed any real chance of a successful election fraud.

Civil society organizations like the University and Citizen Network for Democracy and Citizen Action on Poverty marshaled election observers, monitored voting and documented irregularities. A consortium of media outlets, Verificado 2018, scrutinized the truthfulness of candidates' statements. Still, journalism continued being risky business in Mexico, exemplified by the young photojournalist who was murdered in the company of a political candidate in Oaxaca.

2018 loomed as the year of the independent candidate, a status made possible by political reforms that partially addressed the citizenry's growing rejection of the same old political parties. A record number of independents launched campaigns but few achieved office. Independent presidential candidate Jaime "El Bronco" Rodriguez, for instance, wound up with 5.2 percent of the vote.

Casting a pall over the process, the INE accused some candidates, including Rodriguez, of submitting falsified or irregular nominating petition signatures of voters. Conversely, many independents criticized the campaign rules as excessive, overly expensive and biased in favor of well-funded political parties.

Immersed in a dispute over his nominating signatures, Puerto Vallarta activist Fernando Sanchez sued in state election court to get on the mayoral ballot. Per election requirements, Sanchez formed a registered organization of environmental and other activists to advance his campaign, the Social Council Collective.

"This is the work of conscious people who want to change

Puerto Vallarta,” Sanchez said in an interview before July 1. The independent lost the 12 way-race, but later vowed to remain active as a city hall watchdog.

Migrant activists on both sides of the border struggled to increase the vote of Mexicans living abroad, a right which was first realized in the 2006 presidential election with the disappointing reception of about 34,000 votes.

The INE lauded this year’s eligible voter roll of 181, 256 Mexicans residing abroad as a leap forward, but activists like Cipriana Jurado, Morena coordinator for the U.S. Southwest, criticized the exercise as costly, time consuming and confusing. Jurado and others complained of completed absentee ballots arriving at wrong addresses.

“This doesn’t take away the sensation of fraud,” Jurado said. It’s another red flag.”

A 40-year resident of New Mexico, Juan Cabrera successfully voted by absentee ballot- the first time he cast a vote in a Mexican presidential election. But the 60-year-old barely made the deadline, because of technical difficulties in activating online a required special voter ID card which, fortunately, were resolved at the last minute. Cabrera’s son applied for the voter ID card but never received one and was unable to vote.

Ultimately, the INE reported that 98,470 Mexicans abroad mailed in ballots, slightly more than half who were registered to vote. Election totals showed roughly two thirds of the migrant vote going for Lopez Obrador.

Though the diaspora’s electoral participation increased in 2018, INE critics contended the voter numbers were still way too low in light of the 12 million Mexicans who reside abroad.

In this year’s elections, women loomed large. Lopez Obrador’s campaign coordinator, Tatiana Clouthier, as well as Morena’s president, Yeidckol Polevnsky, are women. Additionally, the president-elect has named 8 women to his proposed 16-member candidate, including former Supreme Court Justice Olga Sanchez to the powerful Interior Ministry post.

Mexico City’s chief executive elect, Morena’s Claudia Sheinbaum, moves along a political path that took the engineer and academic from a 1980s student activist at the national university, to secretary of the environment for Mexico City during Lopez Obrador’s mayoral administration in the early 2000s, to this year’s victory in a seven way race in which five of the candidates were women.

Reflecting INE-promoted gender parity reforms, 244 of 500 members (48.8%) of the incoming lower house of congress will be women, while 63 of 128 (49.2%) of new senators will be female.

According to INE councilor Adriana Favela, the new legislature will elevate Mexico from number 8 to number 3 in the international category of women’s legislative representation. Meanwhile, nine of the new state legislatures will be majority women, with four others having a 50-50 gender breakdown, noted Alanis.

Surveying presidential, legislative and mayoral bids by

women since 1982, historian Aurora Teran ventured that “if this tendency and scenario remain, perhaps in the not-so-distant future there will be a woman president.”

Teran cautioned that gender quotas don’t necessarily translate into greater equality. Male politicians sometimes fulfill gender quotas by assigning women candidates unfavorable districts which they will not win or by simply doling out candidacies to relatives, secretaries and lovers, she said.

“Just because they are women doesn’t mean they have a gender perspective, and some even come in with a patriarchal vision of the world,” Teran affirmed.

In 2018 abortion and reproductive rights remained “taboo” topics in Aguascalientes and other conservative states, a political reality illustrated by Lopez Obrador’s general avoidance of thorny, sexuality questions.

A noteworthy exception was during the winning candidate’s victory speech in Mexico City when he openly supported sexual freedom, Teran added.

2018 was also the year of Nestora Salgado, an ex-commander of the grassroots-organized community police in Guerrero whose personal saga seemingly embodies all the burning issues of contemporary Mexico-criminal violence, poverty, women’s oppression, migration, resistance, and repression.

A dual Mexican-U.S. citizen, Salgado returned to Mexico after working and living in the state of Washington only to find her hometown of Olinala overrun by organized crime. Salgado and others rose up, forming a community police force which was initially supported by the state government. Government tolerance ended in 2013 when Salgado and her comrades were arrested and accused of kidnapping.

Mounting an international campaign for her release, supporters charged the government with retaliating over the community police force’s effectiveness in cracking down on criminals and corrupt officials.

Released from prison in 2016, Salgado is now headed to the Mexican Senate. Enduring threats and an intense negative campaign against her, Salgado’s successful run with AMLO’s coalition linked issues that affect Mexicans at home and abroad.

Arguably, she became the most visible woman in Mexican politics after PRI presidential candidate Meade began rehashing the dismissed kidnapping charges. As part of a propaganda operation attempting to smear Lopez Obrador with guilt by association, robocalls and television spots incessantly repeated the accusations.

“(Meade) wanted to strike a blow against AMLO but he couldn’t, so he went after Nestora,” Jurado offered. Yet like Meade’s campaign, the anti-Nestora blitz failed.

Briefly reached by phone during calls that were constantly disconnected, Salgado acknowledged that the election wasn’t easy but attributed the community’s “hard work” to her success.

She is on record as listing political prisoners, human rights, indigenous causes, migration and rural economies as her

Senate priorities. Earlier, on national television, the senator-elect invited citizens to participate in a perhaps once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for change.

"We all have the responsibility. The change is in all of us," she said.

Mexicans appreciate that genuine changes will take time, but many are anxious to see quick results from AMLO.

"There are going to be a lot of people watching, those who voted for (Lopez Obrador) as well as those against him, to see if he follows through," Teran said.

Not resting after July 1, AMLO rolled out dozens of initial reforms he intends to enact either by executive fiat or congressional action.

A short list includes stripping the president and other functionaries of criminal immunity; ending widespread spying on citizens; ensuring government purchases and contracts undergo public and United Nations monitoring; giving preference in government business dealings to companies from nations characterized by "honesty" and a track record of combating corruption; and reassigning the Mexican president's huge Praetorian Guard-labelled an "army within the army" by Proceso- to the Defense Secretariat. Discarding another royal trapping, the personage of the First Lady will be eliminated.

Lopez Obrador is no revolutionary but if his Fourth Republic materializes, the future Mexican president- despite the contradictions, conflicts and confrontations sure to shape his government- could very well open new political spaces, alter the tone and texture of governance, and shift the frame of politics in Mexico and beyond to the left for years to come. **CP**

KENT PATERSON writes for Frontera NorteSur.

The Current Condition Who's Afraid of Hannah Arendt?

BY MICHAEL DOLINER

Richard J. Bernstein has written a book entitled *Why Read Hannah Arendt Now*. It comes at a time of renewed interest in her work. The title has no question mark so the book is an answer to this question. What is this answer? Bernstein refers to "dark times", an expression Arendt often used to refer to the twentieth century, and sometimes the Enlightenment as a whole. In a passage Bernstein quotes she mentions "credibility gap" as an example of an expression the government used during the Vietnam War to refer to its having been caught lying. By inventing a "credibility gap" the government transformed its own lie into a problem we all must work to correct, a mere misunderstanding on both sides. It is the most pathetic liar's trick, obvious on the face of it, but it was forced down the public's throat. And this in the wake of the already suspi-

cious public who had had to stomach the blatant nonsense of the Warren Commission. To be forced to use that expression should have made everybody puke, but it didn't. Acceptance of such expressions used in that manner darken instead of illuminate. To use concealing vocabulary is to utter the lie yourself. Through its acceptance, darkness fills the public space. It was this sort of language spoken in "the public realm" that produced dark times when it extinguished the light language properly used would bring. It is a problem both of the citizens and the regime.

The banality of evil, an expression that got Arendt into a lot of trouble with Jews, refers not to the Nazis but to the entire German population. It is in the subtitle of Eichmann in Jerusalem. Bernstein accepts this idea of evil banality but doubts it fits Eichmann, presumably a reference to the mysterious Aktion Reinhardt. The Nazis were old fashioned diabolical evil; banal evil is new. The average citizens saw and did nothing because, Arendt decided, they did not think. They followed rules. That was why they were so banal. They had sacrificed their uniqueness, their own way of looking at things, to an ideology. Such a set of rules is home to a bureaucrat like Eichmann. He does what the rules say he must do in every instance. He adopts the official vocabulary. If he thinks for himself he will be at fault. But if he does what the rules say he must in a situation the rules define, he is blameless regardless of the outcome, even if it is mass murder. Clearly, such banality extends far beyond the German population. Personally, I always thought that the banality of evil was nothing more than a colorful way to say that bureaucrats will follow the rules blindly, including shutting up about certain things and adopting official vocabulary, even with monstrous consequences. Bureaucratic thought is about what the rules say. Those who got all upset at Arendt for this book seem not to be noticed that the Eichmann trial was a legal farce, a foregone conclusion, and a bit of Shoah Business. I don't see much purpose in dredging this up now unless it would be useful to make another mountain out of a molehill. But banal characters like Eichmann who adopt official language inhabit "dark times". If you use the word "insurgent" to refer to Iraqis fighting Americans in Iraq, welcome to the club.

Bernstein then explains what benefit we will get from reading Hannah Arendt:

"I want to show that Arendt provides such illumination ["illumination that comes not from theories and concepts but from the lives and works of individuals"] that she helps us to gain a critical perspective on our current political problems and perplexities."

I suppose it would help to get a critical perspective on our current political problems and perplexities. But then what? Will having such perspective help us to resolve these problems and perplexities? We have known of the disaster of climate change for 28 years at least and have done nothing, zero, about it. Is it now useful to get a new perspective on this problem?

Dark times do not result from not knowing, but of learning how to not know what you can't help knowing.

Is finding the source of this passivity the first step towards freeing ourselves from it or merely a diversion, the start of more “mere talk”? Might it not be simpler, seeing that the problem is inaction, to act? But how? If we did take the time to clear away the rubble of propaganda that now fills the public space would we then better be able to act? Nonsense far worse than the lies during the Vietnam War now pass without comment. Do we need to know why we tolerate this crap before we stop doing it? Anyone who wants to bother looking knows the truth. For the public space also contains the work of reporters and historians who have ferreted out the facts and shown that the obfuscating lies are absurd. A good reader develops a powerful bullshit detector. The ridiculous lies the authorities ladle out fool no one. People fool themselves.

Arendt wrote an essay entitled “Truth and Politics” as a response to the critics of Eichmann in Jerusalem. In it she talks of the fragility of facts, for they are always contingent. But facts are much more robust than Arendt gave them credit for. They are contingent—until they happen. Then they are woven into the tight fabric of reality and real historians recognize any patches put over holes torn out of it. Fake evidence is hard to fit into the pattern. All governments leave reams of documents behind. Important people keep track of what they do for posterity. The fake history is obviously absurd. Victors do write the history, but then historians take what they wrote and find it reveals them rather than what they were writing about. We know the true story about the United States in the last half of the twentieth century, the story of a coup d'état and hijacking of the state by a bunch of criminal morons. I always thought it was just the movies that showed organized crime as having terrible personnel departments. Why is it always thuggish murder and then total incompetence? Has there ever been anything more badly managed than the United States after the World War? Not that the government of the United States was anything to write home about before the war. Read John T. Flynn's *The Roosevelt Myth* if you need an eye-opener. Americans are only beginning to learn the true history now,

and they are ashamed.

But so what? Being ashamed is just another way to feel and not act. Debate about the past is even worse. What must be done now, if anything, is what should concern us. Our present political structures offer no way of even posing this question. The amoebic constructs called states don't act, but ooze into policies. Those who fill the public space are like gas filling a vacuum. Everything is ironic with unstable irony, as Wayne Booth might put it. A wink goes a long way. Hurtling into the abyss, we love being in on the joke, for we all feel that we rarely are. Insiders know that everything is really its opposite. We admire phonies who reveal their phoniness and dare us to question them while they laugh all the way to the bank. And

they are all actors entertaining us with a big fat diversion, a big fat zero. They whisper, “it's all an act.” We imagine that the sixties, seventies, eighties and the rest were actually each something. We think we have a “culture”. Anything, as long as it's not serious. It is all one big fat fun fog.

Why is the human race locked into giant amoeboid structures called states run by bureaucrats which make all action im-

possible while species extinction stares us in the face? Species extinction! Doesn't even the lowest form of life respond to danger when it senses it, unless it is already nearly dead? At this historical moment, the idea that knowledge leads to action is dubious. Journalism in all its forms is probably irrelevant. Climate scientists who know the situation is dire can only think to give talks to a couple of hundred people who will all go home and shake their heads sadly. If galvanized into action someone puts something up on YouTube. Well, guess what? Just knowing is not enough.

One of the characteristics of so-called totalitarian regimes is a collection of things, such as gulags, that are in plain sight but that no one dares to mention. That everyone so easily takes leave of his senses because he is afraid of being frowned upon reveals a pathetic slavish population, banal if you will, not some diabolically evil regime. No one makes us do this. We do it because we are afraid of losing our jobs. Apparently, we care nothing for losing our marbles. But we are going to die soon anyway, so what are we thinking? Nothing, in Arendt's



Hannah Arendt. Photo: The Ethics Center.

opinion. Not thinking is the problem. The American mind is suffering a terminal brain freeze.

Now Arendt's intention is to encourage political action. The public realm is where people act and by acting exist, that is, become famous in all fame's forms. Famous people have public selves with lives of their own. People in public have power. Others want to see and listen to them. They can persuade whole nations to do things. Arendt declares such public selves essential to a "human" existence. Without appearance in public we are "embarrassed". Existence is both a good thing for oneself and a responsibility to the polis, the public space. We owe the polis our unique view of things in return for its protecting our existence. It is a political obligation to become famous.

People are famous because we want to see what happens to them. What appears is what we want to see of ourselves. For us now not Roy Rogers but Louis C.K is what we want to see. Ashamed, we love to shame. We need to hide from ourselves. We are fascinated with meta-levels because their facing-mirrors depth dazzles us. People become famous for being famous and its cool. They leave us speechless, which is right where we want to be. We listen to airheads to admire their airheadedness. The public realm is full of sports, goofiness and all sorts of ironic entertainment. Above all it announces that it is not to be taken seriously. We revel in the frivolous and castrate the public space.

So we need a new public space. The examples Arendt give for new public spaces opening up—the founding of the United States, the French Resistance, the Paris commune, and some others—all required people to choose mortal danger over ignominious if comfortable slavery. The public space opens up when people come together to protect with their lives a threatened way of life that they identify with freedom.

Do we have that? In such an emergency people create a public space to offer opinions about what to do. The imminent danger burns away all motives for appearing in public and offering one plan over another except that it will have a better outcome. Such purity of motive, virtually forced by the situation, makes such association with others pleasurable. Deception spoils ordinary human intercourse. This association requires some agreement about "better". Since we humans are not nice guys, simply us against them won't do. For what holds the "us" together after we have disposed of the "them"? There can be no honor among thieves. The polis must protect a way of life that is palpably different from some other. "Anything goes" won't do.

When no danger threatens, the public space fills with whatever attracts attention at the moment. Bits of glittery foil or the equivalent. The dangers come from the inside—dissipation. The decline is in human character. To face external danger requires focus and discipline, skill and practice. When the danger passes, we relax. Then dissipation, a wasting of strength, seduces us. Why not? Dissipation is fun. Then the

polis no longer has anything to protect. Only if the way of life required to protect the polis is the desired way of life rather than one taken up in emergency, can we resist dissipation.

With safety, the benefits of being in the public space, being famous, inspire the desire to be there rather than any concern for the good of the polis. Pretending to ward off danger, stage acting, is almost as good as facing real death. The public space fills with people good at blowing their own horns. We look at them because they are in the public space. It's there because it's there because it's there and then it isn't. Everyone suddenly walks away, as in the Soviet Union.

Hannah Arendt saw entry into the public space as the purpose of human life. The public space is the theater of reality on which can appear as a potentially memorable character, ourselves. This character steps into a story that is real, that is, a matter of life, death, and freedom, in our case the story of the United States. Anything in the public space not about its central theme distorts the story. Isak Dinesen, the only woman in *Men in Dark Times*, admonishes the poet who tries to make his story. In her *The Immortal Story*, which Arendt discusses in her essay, a rich man tries to pay a sailor to enact a story and so make it true. He is thwarted in a beautiful way. The true story is real, a matter of real life, real death, real freedom. It is written in blood and so has no author. When we die we leave the story of our life, that is our real life, behind. It continues to live and change with the changes in the public sphere. Changes in stories of the ancients mark the political sphere's decline.

Since the only criterion Arendt puts on such appearance is "something new", which she saw as the essence of "natality", the fact of being born, the appearance of banality is a sure sign of public decay. Being requires appearance and someone to whom it appears, and we only notice what is new. But eventually even the new gets old.

For to protect something is to want it to get old. Arendt is uninterested in the protective aspect of the polis. That would require cherishing something old. Newness is unlikely to always characterize the best way to protect the polis, especially if the old thing you are trying to protect is a way of life that produced men able to defend it. In such a situation we would want to hear from citizens, those who put the good of the polis, which by definition is old, above all else. No one else could inspire trust, even less so if they were "new".

The polis disappears when its citizens don't defend it. Nothing can hold it together but those in public if they are citizens in the true sense. A true citizen has power in that he expresses in his way of life what the polis has been fighting for, namely, a way of life that protects the polis. Others will see what they want to be in him—he will be a *paideia*. For this reason the true citizen has power, the ability to persuade others. It's up to them to find him sensible and trustworthy. Since for Arendt newness, not citizenship, is what determines what appears, the polis exists for those who appear, not they for it.

Hannah Arendt, knew that the heart of the Greek idea, shown in Pericles funeral oration, is that the citizen, in his sacrifice for the polis, becomes part of its story. Citizenship, devotion to the polis, is what offers entry into the public space, not as a story, but simply as one who died, nameless, in a battle to protect the polis. Pericles, in the funeral oration, offers no names of those he honors,. He talks of them as Athenians. But having had the experience of statelessness, deciding, rightly, that this was permanent, and living in the intellectual climate in which she lived, Arendt saw the public space as where a person appeared as himself, as in a story, the story of his public life. When you are set adrift, as Arendt was, the old is gone and you are looking in through the porthole. In Heidegger's expression, the human being is "thrown" and his essence, who he is, is a question for himself. The public realm supplies the answer.

Freedom, freedom to appear, was what politics offered. In the public space you reveal your uniqueness. Arendt disliked truth because of its coercive power. It limited freedom. She preferred opinion and praises Lessing for his similar preference. For the same reasons, she preferred appearance to reality. Reality is coercive. There is nothing in Arendt's observations, except taste, to keep clowns, con-men, and murderers from the public realm as long as they are "something new". What appears is what the polis reveres. If it's clowns, it's clowns, mass murderers, so be it. Neither laws nor tisk-tisking will change that. Indeed the only categories Arendt does forbid are good, because its no longer good when shown off, and evil because it is what we don't want to see, is properly banished from the public realm.

These general observations informed Arendt's topical writing. Bernstein discusses Arendt's "Reflections on Little Rock" in which Arendt criticized the civil rights movement for demanding school integration rather than voting rights and the repeal of miscegenation laws. She insisted that school integration was not a proper political demand for it was an attempt to forcibly open a social situation to a class of person. Politics is not for solving problems through legislation, which, for Arendt, was pre-political like building walls to a city. Miscegenation laws, regulating something that should be private, are also improper political items. Who someone wants to marry, just as who someone wants to go to school with, is their own business. Everyone should have the right to enter the political realm, and politics should not step on human rights, but political regulation of social and private situations was oppressive. Particular problems that do not involve the survival of the polis, do not concern it. This obviously comes directly from her idea about the polis and politics. The only possible business of the polis was its own protection, which may or may not concern it.

Black students who forced their way into schools were in the same situation as Jews who forced their way into Western societies, they were parvenus. Arendt saw Jews as having to

choose between parvenu and pariah and found the latter the only choice with integrity.

It should be clear that, although Arendt objected to legal restrictions on such appearance in the public realm, she had nothing to say about other restrictions, for example, mediocrity, ugliness, poverty, prejudice, or anything but law. To complain was to demand parvenu status. The public realm is an Agon, a contest. What appeared forced its appearance with power, the influence one human being has over others, to be distinguished from violence, the rule of master over slave, a being over a non-being since not self-ruled. As long as there were no legal restrictions, what appeared revealed, indeed was, the polis. Those who embody the polis, the citizens, dictate with their attention what will or will not appear.

Bernstein goes on to task Arendt for criticizing black parents for making their children take risks that they themselves were not ready to take in sending their children to integrated schools.

Bernstein says:

I have been critical of Arendt's reasoning in "Reflections on Little Rock", but looking back from the present, one should also see how prescient she was.

What are we to make of this? Was she prescient by accident? Then what is the point of reading her? Was she prescient because her reasoning was good? Then what is the point of the criticism? For Arendt's remarks on Little Rock come directly from her observations in *The Human Condition*. It is like saying that if only the doctor knew how much the patient was suffering he would relent and give him the harmful poison. Arendt thought it would do more damage to black children to force themselves in where they weren't wanted than to attend segregated schools. Forced integration made them parvenus rather than pariahs. Pariah is the right choice because that is who they were. Parvenus were people who tried to remake themselves.

Bernstein says that Arendt failed to understand the depth of the suffering of black Americans. Presumably, if she had, she would have changed her mind about school segregation not being an appropriate political goal. He points out that Arendt changed her mind when Ralph Ellison informed her that black parents sent their children into this hostile confrontation to teach them the true nature of race relations, not to enforce legal integration. It is analogous to letting a child reach into a fire to teach it how to not get burnt. Arendt reconsidered. She informed Ellison that she hadn't understood this custom of sacrifice. But Bernstein mistakenly thinks she also changed her mind about the good of legally enforcing school integration. She hadn't.

What appears in the public space depends upon the Kantian idea of judgment, a faculty for forming opinions without the appeal to concepts. Judgment is taste, but taste itself is nothing more than an alignment with the general opinion of the polis.

For the Greeks, this did not betoken an acceptance of the wayward whims of fashion. The Greeks, although Arendt would deny this, educated children to be a certain kind of human being. Spartans were quite different from Athenians. Athenians had characteristics other Greeks did not. Athena, as Athens's patron, embodied with her practical intelligence, the Athenian's idea of who he was. Plato's *Laws* treat of this kind of education. Also, see Werner Jaeger, *Paideia*, a book that Arendt had.

What of all this will help us act, if anything? Do we even need help? How, given that Arendt's only criterion is newness, distinguish between real action and play? Isn't an inability to do so part of our affliction now? To create a public space requires us to value something more than life itself. Before we can do this we must believe in a future. That is what makes it real and not play.

Bernstein argues in another book against the coherence of Arendt's "realms", the social and the political. I have not read these arguments, but he certainly has reasons for arguing that they are incoherent. Arendt thinks of the social realm as a sort of hybrid between the private and public. Many social realms look very much like the political. The arenas of the NBA, the National Basketball Association look remarkably like a collection of Greek city-states built on a Platonic model. The social realm differs from the political in that entry into the social realm requires something in addition to mere humanness. Social realms are all play. In the case of the NBA this extra thing is, of course, basketball talent. In another group one must be a bird watcher. But to make this distinction we must accept speech as an essential part of humanness rather than basketball skill. Basketball players believe it is playing basketball that reveals who someone really is, not speech. And basketball players now think about their legacy, their story within the story of the NBA. Without the human soul, which speech expresses, there is no reason to call speech rather than basketball talent the more basic human trait.

So why read Hannah Arendt now? It seems that Bernstein thinks Arendt's best idea is councils, small political spaces in which anyone can participate. The idea was to somehow institutionalize the public space and cut it down to size. Of course, if it were to be simply more blather it would be pointless. But in the present emergency it would be a good idea provided such councils had a serious political effect. They ought to ask the question, "what is to be done?" If someone has a good idea he ought to be able to test it against the ideas of others. A way to quickly explore and decide upon what is to be done is what we must do. A plan of action must be either decided upon or abandoned once and for all. Good ideas must have political influence. Clearly, if all we want to see is frivolous, this won't have a very good result. In my opinion what we need is a truth-teller, not a fruitless conflict of opinions. This would certainly not please Hannah Arendt. She thought Socrates was a "pest", and her last book, *The Life of the Mind* is written against Plato

who substituted the life of the mind for the public life. But what we must do if there is to be any politics, that is human life, is to face reality and stop entertaining ourselves.

Bernstein concludes with this: "Arendt should be read today because she was so perceptive in comprehending the dangers that still confront us and warned us about becoming indifferent or cynical." But the dangers Arendt warned us about, including totalitarianism, a word that now has no meaning, if it ever did, no longer confront us. Not domination but chaos threatens. Nor will reading Arendt make us as perceptive as she.

My own opinion is that Arendt is worth reading for her insistence on the uniqueness and newness of each of us. That was important in the private sphere. Her writing about real people is wonderful. An encounter with her obligated you to be who you were and show it. Arendt was a mystic, believing we had a story situated at birth that is the tale of our defense against "necessity" in all its forms. I've never met anyone else with her generous welcome. It seems rather English and certainly Greek. Arendt's hostility to ideas will not help us, but her description of the human condition can remind us that our lives are a response to our common experience, the human condition of having been born, met others like ourselves when we got here, and having to leave this world in death. This is the outline of a story, something the Gods, with their immortality, cannot have. **CP**

MICHAEL DOLINER studied with Hannah Arendt at University of Chicago and has taught at Valparaiso University and Ithaca.

Getting Pushed Off the Capitalist Cliff

BY RON JACOBS

The statement, "If democracy is indispensable, capitalism must be dispensable" appears on page two of Alan Nasser's recently published study of US capitalism, *Overripe Capitalism: American Capitalism and the Crisis of Democracy*. He continues by telling the reader that without popular, leftist and militant working class resistance, the likely future for the United States is not democracy, but fascism. Indeed, as Nasser and many others have stated, the current regime in Washington is a very clear testament to this possibility. Although many of Trump's opponents on the left argue amongst themselves if his regime is fascist, some of his right wing supporters cheer and salute him as if he is. Another point Nasser makes early on in his text is that the only thing that can prevent the US from becoming a fascist nation is the aforementioned working class resistance.

Nasser's text is an economic and political history of the United States since the latter part of the nineteenth century. In narrating this history, Nasser does not separate the economic establishment from the nation's political structure. Instead,

each page provides greater proof in the intricate and intimate relationship between the two. It is the author's contention that capitalism as an economic system is neither moral or immoral. Instead, it is without morals of any kind. Like the algorithms Wall Street whiz kids create, capitalism does not know right from wrong. However, those who apply those algorithms do. Likewise, argues Nasser, the politicians and administrators in Washington, DC know right from wrong. When they vote to increase social spending, these men and women are making a choice to use some of capitalism's profits to help those left behind in the pursuit of those profits. When the politicians and administrators decide to remove so-called safety net spending, they are choosing to let the people affected by that spending suffer. In other words, they are making a moral choice no matter what decision they make.

Of course, there are other machinations and motives at play in these decisions. For example, the pursuit of profit has blinded stronger men than Donald Trump. It is also true that that pursuit has created an economy that does not fill the needs of all the people. Instead, it creates unneeded products and uses marketing to convince folks that such products are needed. As part of this mechanism, the act of buying and owning certain products creates artificial needs and desires. This understanding, perhaps stated best by Herbert Marcuse in his book *One Dimensional Man*, is an operative and fundamental part of contemporary human society.

It wasn't always so. Overripe Capitalism divides the history it provides into two essential sections. The first includes the decades of the late nineteenth century up to and including World War One. This period is defined economically by corporate and financial growth and monopolization. Most profits at this time were reinvested machinery and factories in order to increase production. The years were marked by ever increasing exploitation of labor and a subsequent intensification of labor rebellion. Like always, corporate owners, their investors and upper management was determined to squeeze as much labor for the fewest pennies in order to increase their profit.

The second essential period according to Nasser began in the 1920s. This period is marked by a turn from the economy's growth being dependent on increasing production to it being dependent on the population's ability to consume at greater and greater levels. It was this scenario that gave birth to the myth of the Roaring Twenties. As Nasser makes clear, there were more people buying more things that were not staples, especially automobiles. However, this consumption was not being fueled by increased wages for workers, but by an expansion of credit and unregulated stock manipulation. That credit would be the cause of the 1929 crash and subsequent Great Depression. The years that followed were marked by capitalists' continued attempts to rein in the government for its own purposes despite the despair and abject poverty that had created. In reaction, communists and other leftist formations organized across the country, helping to create a popular

and militant movement defending workers and in opposition to the capitalists and their government. From this set of circumstances came the years of FDR's administration.

In discussing these years, Nasser emphasizes, like most left-leaning analysts, the role FDR played in saving capitalism. Likewise, he discusses the nature of the programs instituted during his time in office and the built in compromises with Wall Street many of them contained. Most interesting, however, is his discussion of Keynesianism and how it is misunderstood by most economists right to left. As has been stated elsewhere, Overripe Capitalism notes that what saved US capitalism in the mid-twentieth century was the US military's entry into World War Two and the war time production that entailed..

As Nasser's narrative continues, the reader is brought up to the current time. The years of economic growth and prosperity following World War Two are discussed, including the fact that those years were mostly prosperous for white-skinned citizens. During this part of the narrative, it becomes clear that what Nasser terms the Golden Years were not meant to last. The collapse began under Nixon and the Democratic party became openly complicit when Jimmy Carter was elected to the White House. The dawning and eventual supremacy of neoliberalism is chronicled in its cancerous ignominy for most of the rest of the text. Also present is a discussion of the role technology plays in making the working class even more irrelevant than it already is. In other words, the reason for replacing humans in McDonalds with humans isn't efficiency, as much as it is part of capital's desire to eliminate the unknown quantity human workers represent.

From Wall Street to the police state repression of the economically irrelevant; from the neofascist rallies of the alt-right to the white supremacists in the White House; from the stock market surges to the shrinking value of the US worker's paycheck, the reasons for our dystopian present are convincingly presented and discussed in this masterwork by Mr. Nasser. As he writes: "the current capitalist command of the American State is the result of repeated efforts, since the early days of the republic, by the capitalist class to gain control of the State. Economic elites have long understood that the hegemony of the capitalist class is possible only if the business class has full command of the State..."

As he also makes clear: "No economic crisis, however severe, could spell "the end of capitalism." Only a politically educated working class, actively organized, could bring about a transition to a post-capitalist future." The alternative is almost certainly an authoritarian future that makes any dystopian fiction seem gentle by comparison. **CP**

RON JACOBS is the author of *Daydream Sunset: Sixties Counterculture in the Seventies* published by CounterPunch Books.

CULTURE & REVIEWS

WHAT COLOR IS MUSIC?

BY LEE BALLINGER

In the early 1980s, MTV justified its nearly all-white playlists with excuses that were just silly (the amount of guitar in the song) and more fundamental, if equally dishonest (blacks and whites just happen to like different kinds of music). Then Michael Jackson came along and tore that segregated playhouse down.

Evidently, Tammy Genovese wasn't paying attention. In a 2006 interview, Genovese, then the head of the Country Music Association, said: "The black community's lifestyle is different than what we communicate in country music. We try to market to all types of people. But every culture has its own type of music, and that is something we can't change. Black people have their own types of music that they like to listen to."

Such misconceptions were widely accepted, to the point that Stevie Wonder found it necessary on his 2007 tour to conduct mini teach-ins about the ways that country and soul music had been artificially separated.

The attempts to separate the culture of blacks and whites in the United States go back to the second half of the seventeenth century. In the wake of multi-racial rebellions by slaves and indentured servants, rebellions that sprang from common conditions and a common social life, plantation masters doled out certain privileges to poor whites, whose exploitation continued nevertheless. But the degree of separation between blacks and whites that resulted was far from complete.

For example, as Davy Crockett observed in 1834: "Such fiddling and dancing nobody ever before saw in this world. Black and white, white and black,

all together".

"When U.S. talking machine companies began to record and market blues and old-time music during the early to mid-1920s," Diane Pecknold writes in *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music*, "they effectively began the process of transforming southern vernacular music, heard for decades at fiddle contests, dances, house parties, tent shows, and other social gatherings, into immensely popular commercial products. This music, the product of more than three centuries of vibrant cross-racial exchange and adaptation, was profoundly multiracial, but talking-machine companies, in an effort to streamline their marketing efforts, separated the music of black and white southerners into special categories of 'race' and 'hillbilly' records."

Despite such marketing schemes and despite the fact that Jim Crow was at a peak and lynchings were common, 1920s recording sessions were often racially mixed, with blacks playing on hillbilly tunes and whites playing on sessions for black records that were explicitly issued as "race music."

I went down to Nashville and got to know [bluegrass virtuoso] Earl Scruggs. His musical stories have roots in centuries of dancing and drinking on the old country island. "There's Irish in there," I said. "A lot more than Irish," Scruggs replied. "There's black in there, too. No musician with ears can leave out the black."

—Nat Hentoff

Cross-fertilization could be found almost anywhere. Jimmie Rodgers, a seminal country music star known as The Singing Brakeman, absorbed much of his music from the black railroad hands he worked with.

"I had to play Chuck Berry in the 50s," Buck Owens said, "because I was

playing in a honky-tonk and the people demanded it. But I got so much resistance on it from Nashville that I was afraid to put 'Memphis' out as a single."

Chuck Berry songs did eventually become hits for such country music stars as Marty Robbins, George Jones, Johnny Paycheck, Waylon Jennings, Ernest Tubbs and Emmylou Harris. Berry is one of five blacks who've been inducted into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame.

Country stars Barbara Mandrell and Porter Wagoner waged a lengthy and ultimately successful campaign which brought James Brown to the stage of Nashville's Grand Ol Opry in 1979. Brown sang a couple of country songs and spoke of the impact of the Grand Ol Opry on his work. That same year Stevie Wonder performed country crooner Charlie Rich's "Behind Closed Doors" at the Opry. In 2006, there was a tribute at the Grand Ol Opry to Ray Charles, whose classic 1962 album *Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music* is still popular. Ray Charles began as a country piano player in Jim Crow Florida before recording some of the greatest R&B songs of all time.

"Country and soul records were made by the same people, recorded in the same places, and released by the same record companies," writes Charles L. Hughes in *Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South*. "Even as the genres became opposites in the national consciousness, they were inextricably linked on the production level."

There have been successful black country artists such as Charley Pride, O.B. McClinton, and Darius Rucker. R&B stars with country albums to their credit include the Supremes, the Pointer Sisters, Joe Simon, Joe Tex, Bobby Womack, and Millie Jackson. Aaron Neville and the Pointer Sisters

won country Grammys.

Legendary post-war saxophonist Charlie Parker was a big country music fan, saying “The stories, man. Listen to the stories!” Louis Armstrong, who recorded with Jimmie Rodgers during the Depression, released a country album in 1970.

Actor Jamie Foxx, who won an Oscar for his portrayal of Ray Charles in the movie *Ray*, and Rascal Flatts frontman Gary LeVox were once roommates and sang together at the 2007 Country Music Association awards. At the 2009 Academy of Country Music awards, Foxx covered a George Strait song and made fun of the idea of musical segregation.

In September 2017, Rhiannon Giddens, an African-American bluegrass musician, summed things up with her keynote address at the International Bluegrass Music Association conference in Raleigh, North Carolina.

“I’m just a hillbilly at heart”: That’s what my Aunt Ruth said one day, smiling broadly at me, all cheekbones and gorgeous brown skin. To say she surprised me is an understatement. We had just listened to a few tracks off my first album with the Carolina Chocolate Drops when she dropped this bombshell. This was in the beginning of my career, when I still hadn’t fully come to comprehend just how much the popular notion of the hillbilly stereotype shaped post-war Southern life and culture—the moonshine and the banjos; the overalls and the hay bales; the coal mines and the fiddles. All of these generalizations had left out people like my great-aunt; people like her sister, my grandma, and her children. And left out people like me—who come from both sides of the track—except, in so many areas of the South, there is no track. There’s just people living and influencing each other in spite of what they are told to feel and do; and yes, Southern and American history is unfortunately thickly dotted with instances of the worst of human nature: violence, discrimination, and the warping of our souls; but underneath, and behind and around all of these acts

is the strong current of intense cultural exchange.

“It is important to what is going on right now to stress the musical brother and sisterhood we have had for hundreds of years. For every act of cultural appropriation, of financial imbalance, of the erasure of names and faces, of the outside attempt to create artificial division and sow hatred, simply to keep us down so that the powers-that-be can continue to enjoy the fruits of our labor, there are generous acts of working class cultural exchange taking place in the background.”

Despite all that mutually dependent history, it might seem as if rap and country are just too different to find common ground. Can a happy medium exist between programmed beats and the sweep of the fiddle, between spoken cadences and sweet harmonies? Yes. The twenty-first century is full of their synergy.

Snoop Dogg cites Johnny Cash as a prime musical influence, adding that “Country music inspires me and it makes me feel so good hearing it.” Snoop put out a song with Willie Nelson called “My Medicine.”

NASCAR driver Dale Earnhardt, Jr. grew up listening to his father’s races on country radio but says he learned what was really going on in the world from rap music. At the Pontiac 400 NASCAR race in 2002, Earnhardt, who has appeared in music videos with Jay Z and with country singer Trace Adkins, wanted to honor auto accident victim Lisa “Left Eye” Lopes of the hip-hop/soul trio TLC. So his crew wore black stripes under their left eyes and taped a black stripe under the left headlight of Earnhardt’s car. Earnhardt, who has also criticized public displays of the Confederate flag, was voted NASCAR’s most popular driver fifteen years in a row, beginning in 2003.

Collaborations continue unabated. Country’s Tim McGraw and rapper Nelly. Jason Aldean and Ludacris. Taylor Swift and Kendrick Lamar. LL Cool J rapped on country star Brad Paisley’s

album after Paisley had sung on an LL Cool J record. Florida Georgia Line and Nelly put out a record that was played on both country and pop radio.

One reason country and rap have been dancing together is that the gap between blacks and whites established in the 1600s is now narrowing. Half of all people killed by the police are white. Eighty percent of America now lives in poverty or near poverty. 41% of the homeless are white and 40% are African American, while water is unsafe to use for all races in thousands of big cities and small towns across the country.

As a byproduct of these changing conditions and with cultural reinforcement from music, people are hooking up across racial lines with increasing frequency. Between 1980 and 2010, the number of new marriages between blacks and whites in the South grew rapidly until it almost doubled the national average. Virginia—a state which once prosecuted an interracial married couple all the way to the Supreme Court—led the pack. Today, according to scholar Sheryll Cashin, “54 percent of millennials have friends of a different race.”

Change has come on more than a personal level. Old stereotypes have been crumbling for years in the political realm as well.

Going back to Super Tuesday in 1988, Presidential candidate Jesse Jackson got a shockingly big chunk of the white vote: 15 percent in Georgia, 16 percent in Mississippi, 20 percent in Louisiana, and 25 percent in South Carolina. Jackson did so well because he was a constant presence on picket lines, at homeless shelters, and at rallies of bankrupt farmers.

In 2003 at a London show, Natalie Maines of the Dixie Chicks spoke out against the Iraq war and George Bush. In response, Lon Helton, country music editor of *Radio & Records*, wrote that country fans are all right-wing, saying “Country music is for people who live in between the Hudson and the Hollywood sign and they have a different view.” Really? When the Chicks came

back to the U.S., they began a tour of the Deep South in which they showed a video that highlighted the civil rights movement, Gandhi, Malcolm X, and women's rights. Arenas full of country music fans responded to the Dixie Chick shows with wild applause.

A few years later, in Brad Paisley's song "Welcome to the Future," the singer praised the civil rights movement and condemned cross burning. In 2016, Bernie Sanders put forward, in essence, Jesse Jackson's program of a comprehensive safety net, something often misperceived as a program only for minorities. Sanders did spectacularly well in the Democratic primaries in Appalachia, home to a big section of the country audience.

Close to half of the large cast in country singer Carrie Underwood's recent video for "The Champion" are people of color, including Muslims. Special guest is hard core rapper Ludacris. The civil rights movement and its struggle for equality is featured prominently. The video has 31 million hits so far.

Away from star-driven musical mergers is what some call the country/rap movement, others call "hick-hop." Although a few of its practitioners have sold a lot of CDs, it remains firmly outside the mainstream music business. A lot of it is centered at festivals staged at some of America's several hundred mud bogs. Rolling Stone described last fall's sixth annual Lactember Fest as a big party where thousands of people listened "to live sets by artists like Bottleneck, Moonshine Bandits, Big Smo and the festival's patrons, the Lacs [Loud Ass Crackers]."

It's good to see a poorer class of white people connecting with an art form created by poor blacks. But undesirable parts of history are also being brought into the mix. The Confederate flag is often prominent in hick-hop videos, on merchandise, and at concerts. Brian King of the Lacs says "It's something to do with family." D Thrash of the Jawga Boyz adds: "It's more to do with being a

poor person from the South."

The Stars and Bars has nothing to do with family or representing the poor. It was and is the battle flag of plantation owners who brutally oppressed millions of slaves and millions of poor whites.

California rapper Murs spoke to that when he posted a fifteen-minute video entitled "Does Hick Hop Have a Right to Exist?" "That flag is a symbol of slavery and racism," Murs says in the video. "It's a flag that people who fought against the civil rights movement chose to uphold. I know the majority of Southerners weren't slave owners and that they got the raw end of the Industrial Revolution and a whole lot of other shit, but so did we. We've got to get rid of that flag. It's literally just a piece of fabric dividing us." Murs concludes by calling for unity. Is that possible?

Last year, the hip-hop group Nappy Roots did seven shows on a tour with the Lacs and other hick-hop groups. Skinny Deville of the Nappy Roots reports that "It was Confederate flag crazy. We were the only black guys there. My prejudice was, someone's gonna call us niggers. We're gonna get into a fight." But, DeVille added, "I couldn't have been more wrong. These people were excited to see us. We have so much in common."

Bubba Sparxx, a white rapper from rural Georgia whose album *Deliverance* has been a major influence on hick-hop, adds that whites and blacks "aren't as different as they think."

How can we turn that commonality into unity?

The late rocker Tom Petty, who grew up near the Florida/Georgia line, displayed the Confederate flag in promotional material early in his career. During a 2015 interview, Petty talked about the results of that decision: "When we toured I noticed people in the audience wearing Confederate flag bandanas and things like that. One night, someone threw one onstage. I stopped everything and gave a speech about it. I said, 'I would prefer it if no

one would ever bring a Confederate flag to our shows again because this isn't who we are."

When the recent struggle to remove the Stars and Bars from the South Carolina statehouse was successful, Tom Petty said: "Lowering the flag from the statehouse grounds was the right decision. That flag shouldn't have any part in our government." Then he added: "We should be more concerned with why the police are getting away with targeting black men and killing them for no reason. That's a bigger issue than the flag. Years from now, people will look back on today and say, 'You mean we privatized the prisons so there's no profit unless the prison is full?' You'd think someone in kindergarten could figure out how stupid that is."

Unity can move from words to deeds only if we can come together to deal with the problems we have in common. Police. Prison. Poverty. A lack of health care and a lack of education. The growing synergy between rap and country music is one of many signs that such unity is possible, that we may be able to find new pathways to fundamental solutions. Music itself is not that path, but it can shine a bright light on its possibilities for all to see. **CP**

LEE BALLINGER has a new book out, *Love and War: My First Thirty Years of Writing*. It's available as a free download ebook at loveandwarbook.com.

To check out the **LOVE AND WAR** podcast, go to: <http://feeds.feedburner.com/LoveWarPodcast>

CounterPunch

ISSN 1086-2323 (print)

ISSN 2328-4331 (digital)

www.counterpunch.org

1 (707) 629-3683

\$7.50 per issue

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