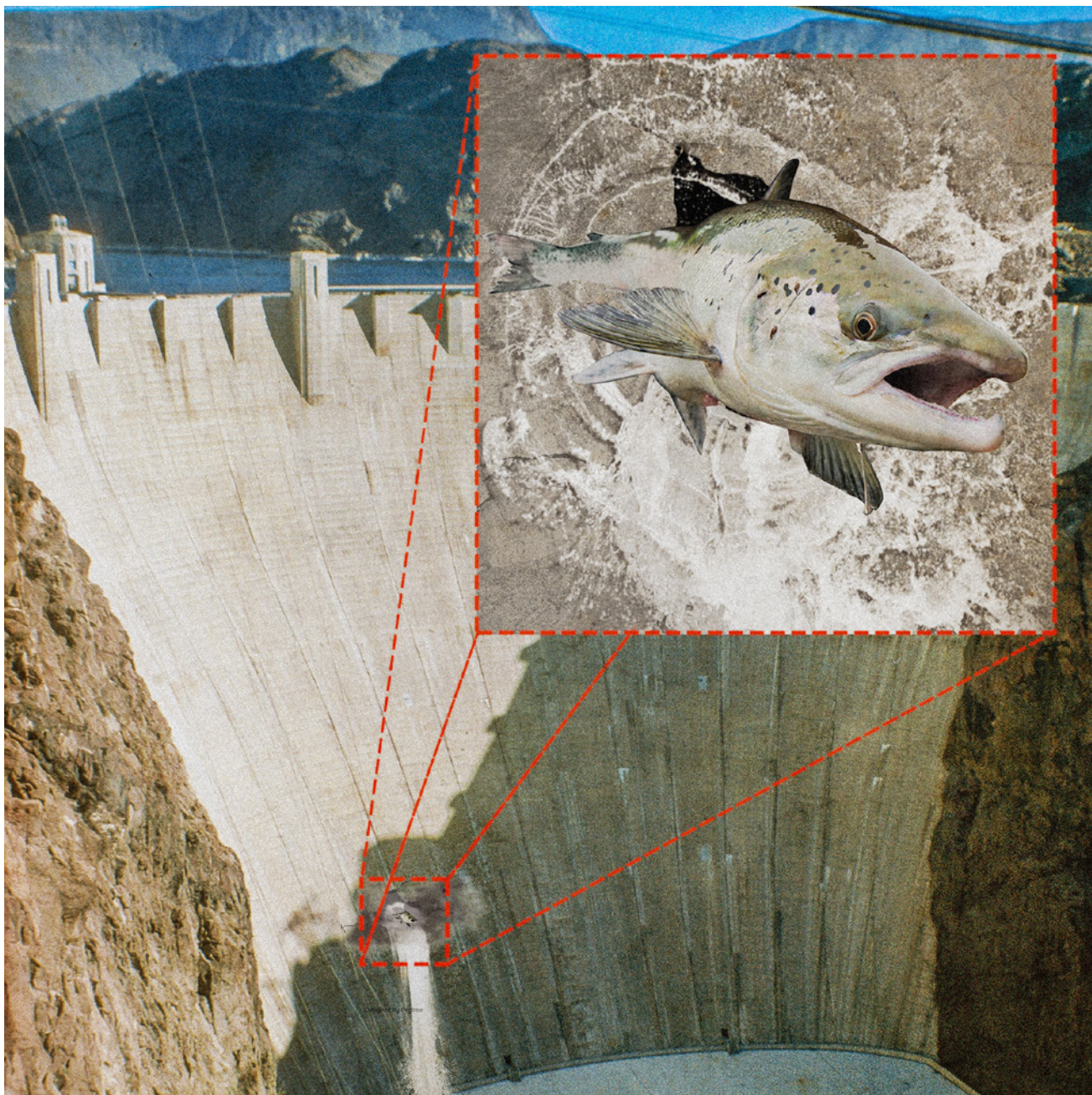


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"Dam Buster" by Nick Roney

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In Memory of
Alexander Cockburn
1941-2012



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Democratic Ideals

Why is Chris Floyd so disturbed by by Lisa Page's statement that Putin's goal is to "make us less of a moral authority to spread democratic values" (Counterpunch, vol 25, #6), when, as Floyd demonstrates with multiple examples of America's bellicosity, the U.S. has lost such moral authority as it may once have had? Maybe Putin is doing us all a favor if his aim is to disrupt the Western alliance and thereby impede the spread America's murderous "democratic ideals".

Bill Scoble

Muellering

Joshua Frank, your web article on the Mueller Report and Russiagate is the best I've seen. I think you put all the players in this story in the right context. Thank you.

Howie Hawkins

Is Chaco Next?

While Notre Dame was burning, a congressional hearing was being held in Santa Fe to protect another World Heritage Site, Chaco Canyon, from the threat of fracking.

Zoltan Grossman

Female Reagan

I agree that it appears that Taibbi's take on the Mueller affair invites one to speculate that he has reverted to his consumption habits during his Exile days. A more trenchant comparison is with the Reichstag Fire and subsequent Enabling Act. It's clear that the emboldened Replubifascists will now wreak havoc in the wake of HRC's failed, bitter and hubristic revenge fantasy.

Is she perhaps the most toxic political actor in US history? Nixon in a pantsuit? Reagan with a vagina? I can't dispel her Nurse Ratched cackle over the demise of Ghadaffi.

Bob

The Limits of Punk

I loved the Clash and Bad Brains. Saw the latter 6 times in their prime. But when a son of Bohemian royalty at my high school chanted "Free Sid Vicious" at school assembly soon after he stabbed her to death, I simply said "Shut the F*ck Up!"

Gregory Thomson

We're in Deep Shit

I am a career physicist retired since 1995 but have done extensive research on climate change/global warming for several years now. We ARE in deep trouble. Even if, as I advocate, we reach 100% fossil fuel free in a few years, we still have a much tougher problem of ridding the atmosphere of much of the CO₂ and CH₄ already up there. I have taken the very most optimistic view on CCS(carbon capture and storage) and calculated the cost to remove enough to get the CO₂ back to at least 325ppm. The \$ cost is absolutely staggering and can not possibly be done unless the entire world collaborates and sacrifices!

Your "Coldest Spot" article was top notch. Thank you. Now figure a way to have everybody read it. I do believe your numbers about the various total mass losses from Antarctica and want to familiarize myself with their sources. If you have time

I would very much appreciate your giving me a reference to allow me to research more.

Thanks so much! If you would like to receive my depressing carbon removal calculation or my "4-point" plan to get us 100% fossil fuel free sooner or later, i would be honored to share with you (and to hear your critique!).

Peter

Police Union Power

As a labor supporter and ex-union member, it pains me to say this but police unions have often prevented cities from firing officers with a penchant for violence. I have no issue with paying LEOs a fair wage, it is a tough job, but city contracting officers need to insist on contracts that facilitate rapid culling of ill-suited officers—sans arbitration. Or, if a labor contract arbitrator forces a city to reinstate a violent officer, then that arbitrator should carry the liability for his/her future misdeeds. Our big cities are becoming unmanageable.

Rich Domingue

Mother, It's Time

Clearly congress needs to rescind the war powers authorization law. There is nothing in the Constitution that gives congress authority to delegate their exclusive responsibility to decide whether to take this country into war.

Alane Butterfield

The Knowing Poor

Adjunct professors in American universities are the new working poor but with credentials.

Bill Valliere

Notre Dame This Time

You can rebuild Notre Dame, but you can't re-create it. Surely there are some super strong, super lightweight modern ceramic something they could put in. A cathedral is the product of many times; what can go in to Notre Dame that's from this time and not ugly?

Orna Isakson

The Plan, Until It Backfires

As noted in the DNC emails, the Democrats' plan is to move Republicans to the right so easier to get elected. Works? Until the Republicans win, which is at least half the time with smaller membership numbers.

Mike Iacuessia

God's President

Mike Pence was the key to "God" allowing Trump to be the president. Without Pence, it was a no go for the born agains. Freakin' lunatics, no question about it. Pence and Pompeo both are in that group, too. I wonder if they're trying to convert Bolton?

Tim Withee

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ROAMING CHARGES

The Dams That Kill Orca

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

A few years ago, Chuck Williams and I drove up to the Olympic Peninsula for a salmon bake near the mouth of the Skokomish River. It was a gathering of old friends, veterans of the salmon wars. I was bringing the salmon, six large chinook iced-down in the back of my Subaru, and Chuck was primed to do the baking. He'd also brought a bucket of huckleberries and a bag of wapato, the so-called "Indian Potato" he'd harvested from a fragment of his family's historic property near Beacon Rock in the Columbia River Gorge.

Chuck was royalty in a tribe, the Watlata (or Cascades), that no longer exists in the eyes of the government. His people lived in what is now Oregon City, near Willamette Falls, and along the Columbia River near that river's cascades, two of the most productive salmon fishing sites in the world. Chuck's relative Chief Tumulth signed the Willamette Treaty of 1855, which was almost immediately violated by white settlers. When Chief Tumulth moved to defend the tribe's treaty rights, he was arrested and hung on the orders of Philip Sheridan. Most of the Cascade tribal members were then rounded up and removed to the Grande Ronde Reservation, 80 miles to the West and far from the great salmon runs that had sustained them for 6,000 years. Today, the Grand Ronde Reservation has dwindled to a population of only 55 enrolled members.

But Chuck's family held out, gleaning a living on a patch of grassy land and marshes on the north side of the Columbia River in what is now Franz Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Then, in 2001, the George W. Bush administration, fearful that the river tribes might cause problems by asserting their treaty

rights to the salmon and sturgeon of the Willamette and Columbia Rivers, simply revoked their status as a tribe. "First they took our land, next they took our leaders," Chuck told me. "Then, finally, they took our tribal identity itself, making it seem as if we never existed."

Our intersection was David Brower, the archdruid, who we had both worked with at Friends of the Earth. Brower made Williams his chief advisor on the national park system and charged him with turning the Columbia River Gorge into a national park, a 20-year battle that was fatally subverted by the hydro-power companies and the Portland elites, who wanted to build mansions on the Gorge's rims.

By the time Bill Clinton arrived in the early 1990s, Chuck had turned his attention to the plight of the Pacific salmon, whose stocks were plummeting across the region from rapacious logging, livestock grazing and, most devastatingly, the chain of dams choking the life out of his ancestral river.

Over the course of two decades, Chuck and I met up probably once every two months, either in his house/gallery in The Dalles or here in Oregon City. We'd plot strategy, tell tall tales, and engage in some pungent editorializing on the dilapidated state of the planet. So when he invited me to join him on the trip up to Skokomish, I happily agree to pick him and drive him north.

After our feast, a friend of Chuck's lent us two sea kayaks and promised that the weather was perfect for an evening cruise on the Sound. It took a few minutes to squeeze Chuck into the kayak. He was a large man, afflicted with diabetes and other chronic illnesses that often went untreated because of the vicious vagaries of the US health

care system. But he was a whiz with a paddle once he got situated and soon we were cutting our way across the dark, still waters of Annas Bay toward the Great Bend of the Hood Canal. As a huge orange moon, Chuck called it the Sturgeon Moon, crested over Mt. Rainier to the east, the once placid waters around us began to roil and our kayaks rocked violently. Then suddenly four, dorsal fins, large and luminous in the moonlight, breached the surface no more than 30 feet from our boats, and subsided as quickly as they had appeared. Orcas. Chuck turned to me and chuckling nervously said, "Evidently we're trespassing. The orcas aren't my clan. Do you know the way back?"

That was my last trip with Chuck and every moment is burned into my memory. As his health declined we traded barbs by email and phone. The last time we spoke, he said, "Hey, St. Clair, remember the night of the orcas? They let us live. Will we do the same?"

What Chuck and I didn't realize then was that those orcas were sick, starving, in fact. Unlike other populations, which feast on seals and other marine mammals, 80% of the diet of the orca of Puget Sound consists of a single species: chinook salmon, mostly from the Columbia and Snake Rivers. Four years ago, there were 85 orcas in Puget Sound. Now the population has shrunk to 76. The only hope of saving the rest is to restore the salmon runs and the only way to do that is take down the four fish-killing dams on the Snake River: Lower Granite, Little Goose, Lower Monumental and Ice Harbor.

"Our culture suffered two deaths," Chuck told me. "First, the white plagues, which killed 90 percent of the people. Then, the dams, which killed 90 percent of the salmon, which had made us who we were."

In a parable for our time, one endangered species is dependent on another. The question is do we have the will to do what it takes to save both species and by doing so help reanimate a human culture that is also vanishing from the Earth. **CP**



EMPIRE BURLESQUE

Magnetized by Despair

BY CHRIS FLOYD

Looking at America today, you swing back and forth between two poles, both of them magnetized by despair.

At one pole, you find yourself saying that things have never been as bad as this: we are in uncharted waters, in a foundering ship being swept toward the reefs. And when the crack-up comes, its horrors will outstrip our imaginations, making our cinematic dystopias look bucolic in comparison, as we devour each other in a dying world ruled by psychopaths, gangsters and warlords.

Yet at the other pole, you find yourself thinking that what we're seeing today is just a continuation—and in some cases, even a diminution—of the horrors and hellishness you've seen all your life. Wars, liars, atrocities, hatred, coups, riots—whole cities burning!—injustice, terrorism, plunder and corruption: when have these NOT been the background of the six decades you're spent on this earth? And if you have even a passing interest in history, much less a passion for it, then you can extend this malevolent roar all the way back to the beginning of recorded time.

Perhaps, you think, what we're seeing today is not some violation of the norm in our national life (or human affairs in general); perhaps it's just a particularly vivid expression of our essential nature, heightened and hyped and made more all-pervasive by technology, yes, but in no way a fundamental break from the past. Perhaps it's true, as the Preacher saith: "there is nothing new under the sun."

But then, you turn on your phone, tap into one of the hallucinatory networks of data-harvesting and ad-disgorging that you, like so many, have become addicted

to (while telling yourself—disingenuously?—that a conscientious citizen must keep abreast of these for-profit platforms because that's where our public life now occurs), and suddenly you see ... a picture from a snuff film. It's a man being raped with a bayonet until he dies. You can see his face—a bloodied mask of agony—and the exulting, murdering mob around him.

But you haven't stumbled down some algorithmic path into the festering, belching pits of depravity that lurk mere inches below the glossy surface of the internet. No, you're looking at a tweet sent out to the world by a member of one of the most respectable institutions in the land: the United States Senate. The senior senator from Florida, Marco Rubio, a man of intense public piety, who regularly adorns his Twitter feed with Bible verses, had posted—on a Sunday morning, the Lord's day—a graphic of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. On one side was a smiling Gaddafi in his pomp; the other was the aforesaid shot from the snuff-film video of Gaddafi's slaughter.

The tweet emerged in the midst of Rubio's feverish push for regime change in Venezuela and was an unmistakable message to that country's president, Nicolas Maduro: This is what happens to leaders who don't do what we say. A naked, brutal, open, terroristic threat, from the very top ranks of the American establishment.

The shock you feel is like a slap in the face. Even in the Age of Trump, this seems to overstep some boundary. Senators reveling in rape-murder, brandishing gangland-style threats? Surely this is a qualitative difference, taking us

into those uncharted waters far from the shores of the past.

But suddenly you are pulled back to the other pole. For you remember another figure on the commanding heights of our society laughing, with deep, hearty glee, at this very same rape-murder. Sitting with a TV interviewer, eager to publicize her reaction, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton laughs and exclaims, "We came, we saw, he died!" Ha ha ha! It made your blood run cold.

Then you further recall the brutal threat she'd made years before, running for president, promising to "totally obliterate" 70 million human beings in Iran if that nation, which had and has no nuclear weapons, launched a nuclear attack on Israel, which had and has more than 200 nuclear weapons. The scenario was pure fantasy, but the imagination of this much-admired paragon of our society ran immediately to mass murder.

Your mind keeps reeling backward, remembering that the rape-murder that gave such sick, psychosexual titillation to Rubio and Clinton had been committed by extremists armed and backed by the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Barack Obama (along with many other worthies of Western civilization.) And that one of Clinton's predecessors, the liberal Madeline Albright, had defended the death of half a million innocent children from the sanctions imposed by her boss, Bill Clinton.

From there you keep going back, through all the evils you've seen committed in your name, in just your lifetime, back to the one that first fully entered your childish awareness: My Lai. And you know that what we're seeing today is not a break, but a continuation.

Accelerated, yes; the rotten timbers of the foundering ship are now in an advanced state of decay. But the reefs coming up so swiftly are the same ones we've been hurtling toward for a long, long time.

But then you turn on your phone and suddenly... **CP**



BOTTOMLINES

For Whom Does Capitalism Work?

BY PETE DOLACK

If capitalism “works,” how is it that only one-third of the world’s working people have formal employment that provides even the barest security or livable wage?

Well, OK, it works for industrialists, financiers and other members of local bourgeoisies—the only votes that count when assessments of global capitalism are made by representatives of those elites. The rest of us? Not so good. Not even close.

A sobering report issued by the International Labour Organization (ILO) found that “A majority of the 3.3 billion people employed globally in 2018 experienced a lack of material well-being, economic security, equal opportunities or scope for human development.”

Beyond those 3.3 billion mostly marginally employed people, the ILO estimates that 172 million people were out of work in 2018. Although not specifying its methodology, it does appear that the ILO is using “official” governmental statistics to arrive at that figure as it translates that number of unemployed to equal a world unemployment rate of 5.0 percent. The ILO report said its global unemployment rate peaked at 5.6 percent in 2009, and that it took nine years for the global unemployment rate to recover a decline that occurred in just one year from the onset of the global economic meltdown.

“Official” unemployment statistics always drastically understate the true level of unemployment because they exclude those who are employed part-time but are not able to secure full-time work, those who wish to work but have given up, and those whose unemployment insurance has run out. Nonetheless, the ILO report provides a sobering look

at the reality of just how bad working people have it under capitalism.

The report states: “Being in employment does not always guarantee a decent living. Many workers find themselves having to take up unattractive jobs that tend to be informal and are characterized by low pay and little or no access to social protection and rights at work.”

Well, more than a billion people worldwide work in “subsistence activities” due to a lack of formal work. That is not an easy life, the ILO reports: “Overall, 2 billion workers were in informal employment in 2016, accounting for 61 percent of the world’s workforce. The poor quality of many jobs also manifests itself in the fact that, in 2018, more than one-quarter of workers in low- and middle-income countries were living in extreme or moderate poverty.”

The majority of the world’s people don’t have access to reliable work because of a lack of jobs and thus are unable to reliably obtain the means to keep themselves and their families alive.

It can hardly be said that having a formal job means that you have escaped deprivation, or that you have security. So the world’s total of insecure people would certainly be much higher than the two billion working informally and those dependent on those informal workers. And the rate of job creation is predicted to fall short of the number of young people entering the workforce in the coming years.

In Africa, for example, the ILO reports: “Only 4.5 percent of the region’s working age population is unemployed, with 60 percent employed. However, rather than indicating a well-functioning labor market, this [relatively low unem-

ployment rate] is because many workers have no choice but to take poor quality work, lacking security, decent pay and social protection.” In Africa and almost everywhere else, job growth is forecast to be lower than what is required to maintain current employment levels.

The United Nations has adopted a set of “sustainable development goals” that include a plea for governments to “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.” In support of that goal, the ILO recommends that “Sustainable development should be achieved through the fostering of productive activities, innovation and formalization while optimizing resource efficiency in production and consumption.”

But who is going to enforce these prescriptions? The governments of the world’s advanced capitalist countries are dominated by the capitalists whose interests are enforced through not only the ability to close down production and/or move jobs to other locations but their ability to propagate ideas through control of a vast array of institutions, including mass media. Thus, relentless ideology proclaims the necessity of allowing “markets” to decide an ever-larger array of social questions. But “markets” are nothing more than the aggregate interests of the largest industrialists and financiers.

Still less are the countries of the Global South able to implement policies in the interest of their populations (as US aggression against Venezuela grimly demonstrates), being on the subaltern end of power relations not only in relation to Global North governments using their command of financial and military power to enforce the supremacy of their multi-national corporations but in relation to the concentrated power of those corporations themselves.

A system that causes such imbalances and deprivation (a requirement for billionaires to exist) is inhumane by any standard. Can we really be so naive as to expect the beneficiaries of capitalism can be persuaded to be nicer? **CP**



HOOK, LINE AND SINKER

Bibi's Re-election: Bad News for AIPAC

BY JENNIFER MATSUI

Until the very end, Israeli election returns showed a dead heat between the incumbent Likud Party leader Benjamin Netanyahu, now heading the governing coalition, and the Blue and White Party leader Benjamin Gantz, his former military chief-of-staff, with both parties claiming 35 seats of the 120 seats up for grabs in the Knesset. Netanyahu's narrow victory over his slightly more centrist right wing rival will speed up the processes of forced expulsion of Palestinians from land earmarked for further Israeli settlements, and further the entrenched policies favored by his extreme right wing coalition partners.

The gamble of forming an alliance with ultra-nationalist religious extremists including representatives aligned with the outlawed Kahanist movement, branded a terrorist organization by the American government, has paid off in dividends, despite the move inviting condemnation abroad, and even criticized by his country's most ardent supporters in the US. His new accomplices have already signaled their willingness to pass laws that would grant him immunity from prosecution on a host of corruption charges, boosting his winnings even further. The now flush incumbent like his casino boss in the White House has proven that a strategy of unmitigated asshole without any pretense at concern for life creates a virtual but impenetrable wall of political infallibility.

Gantz, riding on the coattails of his national security background and proven record of bombing Gaza "back to the Stone Age" during the military onslaughts he presided over as a General,

underestimated the blood lust of voters outside the more cosmopolitan enclaves of Tel Aviv where he garnered the most support. Echoes of Hillary Clinton's doomed run for the White House are apparent in Gantz's defeat, predicated on the assumption that the lesser hawk is better suited to oversee the destruction of Arab land. As proven time and time again, the job requires a more ham-fisted approach to better rally the grunts on the ground and in the voting booths.

The good news (if you consider the victory of an extreme right wing coalition with openly genocidal tendencies is anything to celebrate) is the impact that the Likud leader's re-election will have on lobbying efforts on behalf of the "Jewish State" within the US. AIPAC is already reeling from a series of setbacks brought on by its over-reliance on the tired techniques of smearing its critics, and playing its faded, dog-eared victim card at the scene of every Israeli war crime. There was a time when accusing your detractors of anti-Semitism was an effective deterrent against any and all criticisms of Israel. Today, that particular weapon is no more than a spent canister of Silly String lobbed carelessly at all moving targets.

With Netanyahu out the picture, AIPAC could have drawn a sigh of relief. It's hard to rally US support for an apartheid regime when its leader openly declares that the "Middle East's Only Democracy" is only democratic to its deplorable voting majority. As it is now, with the official declaration of Bad Benny's victory, AIPAC and their ilk have an uphill battle ahead to justify their existence. Bad ideas like Israel require the endless dissemination of

lies, talking points comprised wholly of dog whistle, and a complex network of conscienceless foot soldiers, prepared to face down the democratic forces that impede its stranglehold on campuses and Congress alike. It requires an ever precarious balancing act to convince the liberal half of its base that an organization modeled on a crime syndicate and battle ready to crush the First Amendment is somehow in line with their 'tolerant' values.

Netanyahu's winning gambit at home amounts to a loss of credibility to his apologists overseas. By conflating the limits of American tolerance to Israeli war crimes with the Democratic Party's willingness to overlook them, and the Republicans' eagerness to commit them, he has overlooked the significant chunk of the American voting bloc growing increasingly squeamish about supporting a balls out Nazi agenda on the US taxpayer dime.

The powerful Israel lobby is probably noticing by now that its weakening grip on the American liberal establishment will have consequences for its bipartisan fundraising efforts, and embolden its sidelined and silent critics to finally speak openly. Those timid voices could eventually amplify into a cacophony of condemnation, putting 70 years of unquestioning fealty to a hostile foreign government into jeopardy.

Netanyahu's political undoing would have also compelled the US corporate media to rhetorically contort a Gantz victory into the pretzel logic of Hasbara: "A Blue and White Victory Spells Peace", signaling a bountiful replenishing of AIPAC's depleted coffers. Netanyahu's now confirmed victory lays out a more detailed blueprint for genocide that his beleaguered apologists state side will have to spin like Dervish dancers in overdrive to justify. It's doubtful they will survive the effort. **CP**

BORDERZONE NOTES

Beyond White Nationalism

(militarist, racist, patriarchal, capitalist)

BY LAURA CARLSEN

You don't have to be Sherlock Holmes to find a pattern in recent mass shootings throughout the world, and especially in the United States. In the most recent, the massacre of fifty worshippers at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, the assassin, a self-professed white "ethno-nationalist", laid out his beliefs explicitly. The ideological connections, the tactical similarities and the Internet subculture these crimes feed off of and into, leave no trace of doubt regarding their white nationalist parentage—or the inevitability of repetition.

The 28-year-old Australian killer, Brenton Tarrant, wrote a 74-page manifesto titled "The Great Replacement" (borrowing from the French far-right classic) before opening fire on the Friday Prayer congregations on March 15. Steeped in the history and culture of the alt-right, he refers to convicted criminal and U.S. white nationalist leader David Lane's 14-word slogan "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for White children", and cites his role models, including Anders Breivik, the Norwegian white supremacist who massacred 77 people at a youth camp in 2011, and Dylann Roof, the 24-year-old convert to white nationalism who shot up a black church in Charleston, SC in 2015 leaving nine dead.

Tarrant, like other white national-

ist assassins, praises President Donald Trump as an example, calling him "a symbol of renewed white identity and common purpose".

When a reporter later asked Trump if he thought white nationalists were a growing threat around the world, Trump replied, "I don't really. I think it's a small group of people that have very, very serious problems."

Trump's attempt to minimize the threat of rightwing terrorism comes as no surprise. He's a part of the same global movement, despite the fact that he doesn't explicitly endorse the attacks. Trump has laid the foundation for a racist revival the likes of which we have not seen in contemporary U.S. history. The Muslim ban, the wall, the restriction of refugees and the dehumanizing language create heated debates, but behind each outrageous tweet is a global hate movement being carefully constructed, bloody stone by bloody stone.

Bjorn Ihler, one of the few survivors of the Norway massacre and a leader against global extremism, recently wrote, "When Trump warns that immigrants will "infest" the US, he is feeding the narrative that some people are sub-human. That narrative—also taken up by other leaders, such as Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro—has real-world consequences, including the emboldening of extreme actors." Ihler criticizes the lack

of policy on rightwing terrorism and concludes, "These attacks are clearly part of a broader pattern, which demands a response on par with all other counter-terrorism efforts."

The response has been nothing of the sort. The rightwing in power has blocked attempts to detect and prevent this kind of violence. Meanwhile, the left is still unclear how to define it. "White nationalism" has gradually become the default term.

The Southern Poverty Law Center that tracks these movements offers a broad working definition: "White nationalist groups espouse white supremacist or white separatist ideologies, often focusing on the alleged inferiority of nonwhites. Groups listed in a variety of other categories—Ku Klux Klan, neo-Confederate, neo-Nazi, racist skinhead, and Christian Identity—could also be fairly described as white nationalist."

The press, when it has to label it, refers to "white nationalism" as a way to loosely package the white supremacist, racist, anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant, Muslim-hating ideologies that lurk in the minds of the white men wielding the weapons. But "white nationalism" is at once not broad enough and not specific enough to describe the growing threat we face today. "White" describes the racism directed at all non-white peoples and nations, and "nationalism" refers to the territorial aspirations of the movement and the goal of a nation or homeland.

Yet the "white nationalist" movement is every bit as global as the "globalist" culture it despises. Wherever the European race exists—through colonialism, conquest or as original peoples—they believe it should rule. And to restore rule requires uniting and building forces across borders. Former Trump Chief Strategist Steve Bannon currently focuses on building what he calls "The Movement" of alt-right forces in Europe. Although primarily aimed at European elections, the idea is to extend forces with the goal of harvesting the popular appeal of the far-right on a global level. Bannon

appointed Bolsonaro's son, Eduardo, as the South American representative.

Also, although race is at the center of the concepts espoused by white nationalists, the hatred of "the other" casts a wider net. The "replacement theory" that immigrants and "others" will replace white people—the many angry signs of "You will not replace me!"—reflect deep insecurity that found a hook to hang its hat on with racism. When I first saw those signs, I thought of a petulant two-year-old coping with the arrival of a new brother or sister. But the big difference is that, in our hemisphere anyway, white people aren't even the older sibling. They're the second born on indigenous soil, so the pretense of dominance at any cost is particularly fratricidal (and historically genocidal). It's a different and complex discussion on how economic, spiritual and social insecurity translates into the rise of white nationalism, but everything is in play.

The biggest reason "white nationalism" doesn't capture this vicious global rightwing movement is that it ignores the profoundly and aggressively patriarchal doctrine inherent in the alt-right. Analysts occasionally tag on "anti-feminist" in the list of "anti" adjectives that describe the movement, but few have recognized the centrality that restoration of brute patriarchal power to the movement's vision. As always, the language hides the patriarchal violence that is also at the root of these killings and is a pillar of the white nationalist movement.

A Norwegian researcher analyzed anti-feminism in Breivik's 1,500-word manifesto. Far from the raving of a lunatic, this masterwork of a mass murderer argues throughout that women's place is in the home at the bidding of men, that feminism has made men weak and unable to defend the homeland from the "Islamic invasion" and that feminists who make up the majority of "cultural Marxists" should be executed. In the profile of nearly every alt-right mass killer, there is both a personal strain of misogyny and explicit

analysis of feminism as the enemy.

The problem for the white nationalists, as usual, is women's sexuality and their role in reproduction. Breivik states that women should be strictly controlled to assure the reproduction of white babies. Screeds against interracial "mixing" abound in alt-right material. Racist attacks we thought had become a thing of the past, in increasingly diverse societies where people meet and fall in love in a global context, have returned with a vengeance. Across the top of Tarrant's manifesto repeatedly runs the phrase "It's the birth rates". Our wombs are once again the battlefield.

White women must reproduce as prolifically as possible and never with men of color. White men must be provided with white women as their birthright. Breivik even proposed that if women wouldn't carry out this role of their own volition, baby farms could be set up.

Writers in the *New York Times* and *Ms. Magazine* have pointed out that the white/male supremacists have a "woman problem". They insist that women shouldn't be in the public sphere, but they need their wombs and their votes. To involve women directly in the white nationalist movement, the "tradwives" movement arose to convince women of the virtues of a non-existent (for the vast majority) past in which they are restricted to baking cookies and popping out blue-eyed babies. Nothing wrong with blue-eyed babies or cookies—the problem is, of course, the restrictions. The white nationalist, patriarchal agenda to eliminate abortion rights and access to birth control aims to force women out of the workforce and into a cloistered private sphere, even though it would affect poor women of color disproportionately.

In many profiles of mass shooters, rage against women lies at the core of the crime. Many had a history of domestic violence, or an electronic trail of tirades against women. The links between the white nationalist movement (or whatever new, more comprehensive name we finally come up with) and

MRA and incel violence have been well documented.

Men's Rights Activism (MRA) at least makes sense in a twisted-reality kind of way, but the incel—short for "involuntary celibacy"—movement seemed unbelievable to me, from here in Mexico where I had been blissfully oblivious to its rise. I could not, and still cannot, place within any rational interpretation of human relations the notion that women not putting out for men is an affront to manhood and proof of the evil of females.

Aja Romano points out in an interesting article on Vox, that the fundamental driver of the convergence of white supremacy and misogyny is this meticulously cultivated sense of entitlement among white males. No matter the social class, wealth, physical appearance, you, young male, are entitled to women and social dominance. And a real man goes out and claims that. Since women are by nature emasculating, no negotiation can take place. The groups focus their most vitriolic rants for activist women, dubbed Social Justice Warriors or SJW, who they claim embody how feminism destroys masculinity. White privilege fits right into the same logic of entitlement and rage.

How to confront this many-headed monster? We can start by admitting that we have allowed violence and hate to permeate our society and, in some circles, not only given it permission but actively encouraged it. The Gun Violence Archive lists 340 mass shootings (4 or more people shot or killed not counting the shooter) in the United States in 2018 alone. The Global Terrorism Index 2018 points to an alarming increase in "far-right political terrorism".

Social acceptance on some level contributes to the mass shootings. Long, the former Marine who took a semi-automatic pistol into Latino night in a bar in Thousand Oaks, California on November 7, 2018 and killed 12, mocked society's normalization of mass assassinations. He posted on social media

during the attack: “I hope people call me insane... wouldn’t that just be a big ball of irony? Yeah... I’m insane, but the only thing you people do after these shootings is ‘hopes and prayers’... or ‘keep you in my thoughts’... every time... and wonder why these keep happening.” He had a point. Our responses have not been serious.

We know from the profiles of the white nationalist attackers what the factors are that feed into violence—normalization, hate ideologies, Trump, social media, misogyny, military training. Political Research Associates’ report on Alt Right and Far Right mobilization notes that 2019 saw a slight setback as mainstream took a dimmer view of the movements, lawsuits attacked groups’ public actions and digital platforms took down some white nationalist accounts. The Christchurch massacre and positive responses to it show that it’s far from gone. Knowing the causes can’t put us closer to eliminating the violence associated with the movement if we’re not willing to do more than wring our hands.

We need to develop a characterization of this toxic blend of totalitarianism, white male violence driven by collective entitlement and frustration, and manifestations of extreme racism, sexism, xenophobia and homicidal gun-adoration. In political science, “fascism” is a slippery word—Norberto Bobbio’s classic *Dictionary of Politics* devotes a full 11 pages to it and begins with “Problems in Definition”. I find Irish analyst Fintan O’Toole’s term “pre-fascism” convincing because it describes an active transition while serving as a warning.

“White nationalism” leaves too much out. Any new characterization has to connect as many dots as the movement itself does. Only then can we begin to understand how all this interacts and where the threats will come from next. **CP**

EUROZONE NOTES

Interlacing: Climate Gender, and the Means of Existence

BY DANIEL RAVENTÓS AND JULIE WARK

The planet is asphyxiating. Children are walking out of schools and into the streets to tell adults what should have been obvious decades ago when springs were already going silent. Oceans are suffocating with rubbish, toxins, radioactivity, and dead creatures; forests languish or are chopped down; species large and tiny are vanishing; once-fertile soil turns to sand or sludge; plastic, air, and food toxins invade our lungs and blood; and floods and fires ravage vast swaths of land, mostly where poor people dwell. These facts are cited again and again but the profligate rich and powerful have no ears to hear the limpid words of teenager Greta Thunberg: “We cannot solve a crisis without treating it as a crisis [...] if solutions within the system are so impossible to find, then [...] we should change the system itself.”

But how? Since this Sixth Extinction affects everyone one way or another, maybe we should be thinking in all-inclusive terms. And the only universal political narrative we have (OK, often rightly seen as an ideological tool wielded by the powerful for the powerful, and generally reduced to a travesty of the original ideas) is universal human rights, this notion that every single human being has a right to freedom, dignity, and justice. And the

sine qua non in implementing them is guaranteeing the right to material existence for absolutely everyone. With the Sixth Extinction already upon us perhaps, more than ever before, we need to take a good look at this subject of human rights: the “human”.

Human rights affect not only humans but the whole planet and all its species. And, right now, one urgent priority is to end this hubris of seeing the human species as superior to all others and recognizing the destruction its mindless arrogance and greed has wrought. The earthly origins of “human” are enshrined in many languages, for example the Latin *humanus*, related to *humus* meaning “earth” and earthly beings, as opposed to gods, all more or less equal by virtue of that fact, Sanskrit (*ksam*, earth as opposed to sky), Greek (*khthon*, earth’s solid surface), et cetera. Humans, so close to Earth, in their languages and their very physical composition, are so alienated from it (themselves) that they are now bent on its (their own) destruction. If we are to achieve harmony in our own species, with others, and our terrestrial habitat, it will take what Mike Davis prescribed in *Prisoners of the American Dream* as a “process of revolt that overlaps boundaries and interlaces movements”. This revolutionary process, including an interlac-

ing of human beings with all the other interdependent species inhabiting the planet, would entail nothing less than “a complete revision of our relationship with the living planet,” as George Monbiot of *The Guardian* writes.

Humans have brought about the climate catastrophe and the planet, thrown completely out of kilter, is no longer resilient and self-regulating, so humans must deal with it. One idea that has gained traction is the Carbon Fee and Dividend, especially applying to high-income, high-emissions nations. Ideally, this is a tax on carbon, the revenue from which is paid out equally to all as a kind of basic income. This could become a real unconditional universal basic income bumped up to an amount above the poverty line with other progressive tax measures like restructuring personal income tax, taxes on financial transactions, property and luxury goods, elimination of reduced tax rates (for example for corporations and billionaire foundations), a review of inheritance, estate and gift taxes, and a tough government stance against tax fraud and evasion.

In fact, the economic policy that really could change the system, overlap boundaries, and interlace human beings is unconditional universal basic income. It has five main features. It is periodic, a cash payment above the poverty line, individual, universal, and unconditional (without means-testing or work requirement). It is a right, independent of personal circumstances except for citizenship or resident status and, since it is mainly financed by progressive tax reforms, it is also a way of mitigating the unspeakable inequality where the world's 26 richest people own as much as the poorest 50%. Basic income shouldn't come alone but should also entail, for example, a reinforced welfare system, free public transport, accessible health insurance, free education, and better pensions for seniors. On the environmental front, tax credits could be given for initiatives like solar-electric systems, sustainable farming, perma-

culture projects, measures benefitting other species, for example, forest, grasslands, jungle, and ocean regeneration, and rewilding.

Environmentalism is, of course, interlaced with environmental justice. Long ago, land stolen by colonial powers for intensive farming was inhabited by indigenous communities that nurtured its biological diversity, sustainability, and beauty. When they were removed, enslaved, and massacred their land husbandry techniques were all but lost and with them, perceptions of the earth as part of humanity and vice versa. Yet there are still communities with deep knowledge of the natural world, which is now perhaps the most valuable form of knowledge there is. Part of the system overhaul would require restoring to these communities old rights, new means to revive them, and relearning from them how to practice wise ways of living that were snatched away long ago. If actively connecting with nature is good for physical and mental health, access to nature is unequal, another issue of environmental justice. In England, for example, where roughly 35% of all minors will be poor by 2021, more than one in nine children didn't set foot in any natural environment over a whole year.

The universal sense of basic income is that it could go beyond piecemeal thinking and transform the way people treat and think about the whole social and physical environment. Environmentalists who see economic “growth” as destructive and unequal understand that basic income automatically uncouples entrenched notions of income and work, and view it as a way of countering uncontrolled growth. Florent Marcellesi, Green member of the European Parliament, writes “Basic income can be understood as one of the engines of improved social and environmental justice, an ecological restructuring of the economy, and promotion of the autonomous sphere.” Since wellbeing is not conceived as synonymous with consumerism, a good

part of ecological thinking sees basic income as a way of fostering so-called non-productive activities like care and voluntary work, or community gardens and permaculture—political projects inasmuch as they bring people together and create spaces outside the capitalist system—and realizes that they could be ecologically powerful if interlaced with indigenous practices and techniques in the global South. A basic income, then, could cultivate political ecology and help to construct a coherent plural economy that is respectful of the biosphere.

As an individual (not household) payment, basic income would free women from economic dependence on men, especially women who are victims of domestic violence, dependent on their abusers, and unable to separate. The social security systems constructed in the wealthier countries after World War II were designed to keep women economically dependent on their husbands. Any benefits they received were due to their status as wives and not as citizens and, as ancient republican philosophers pointed out long ago, true citizenship requires economic independence. As an individual payment, basic income fits well with new kinds of cohabitation, especially single-parent families headed by women.

The feminist aspect of basic income also interlaces with the environment. In many societies, women are largely responsible for food acquisition in the prevailing division of labor. But climate change works in sexist ways: its effects worsen physical, psychological, and social harm to women and girls, and sexual violence increases. Land degradation and drought affect more than 169 countries, with the severest impacts being felt in the poorest rural communities, and 70% of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty worldwide are women. Their odds of dying in a “natural” disaster are greater and they are more likely to be forced into an early marriage or prostitution if famine, drought, or floods destroy the family livelihood. Gender and climate are inextricably in-

terlaced and gender equality can directly affect climate change.

In poor countries women tend to grow most of the food on smallholdings but they have fewer resources than men, so their land is less productive, which means more deforestation since they must clear more land to grow the same amount of food while also coping with biodiversity loss, deforestation, soil degradation, land and water grabs, stifling of indigenous knowledge, and lack of essential services. Scientists calculate that if women had the same tools as male farmers, they could grow 20-30% more food on the same amount of land. This would mean avoiding two billion tons of emissions by 2050.

Women activists, scientists, writers, scholars have been contributing to the environmental movement since its beginnings and, in traditional systems, well before there ever was a movement. For example, women on Leyte Island in the Philippines are restoring water-depleted peatland (and peatlands store as much as 30% of global carbon). In African countries where the Green Revolution is pushing smallholder farmers into the homogenized global food supply chain by restricting and even criminalizing independent control over reproductive materials (seeds), women have always played an essential role in selection, saving, and sharing of seeds, thus protecting agricultural diversity and creating a pool of genetic resources that is a mainstay of social life.

Global Witness calculates that 207 environmental defenders were killed in 2017 (mainly in Brazil, Colombia and the Philippines) for defending community land and natural resources. About 10% of those victims were women and nearly all were indigenous. In 2016 the murder of Berta Cáceres in Honduras was widely condemned but the deaths of other women (like Emilsen Manyoma in Colombia, Leonela Tapdasan Pesadilla in the Philippines, Laura Leonor Vásquez Pineda, in Guatemala, Macarena “La Negra” Valdés in Chile) were largely ignored, and many others face intimidation, rape, torture, and imprisonment. Studies in gender violence show that women with productive resources (or a guaranteed income) are less vulnerable.

Climate change also works in racist ways. Professor James K. Boyce points out (The Real News Network, November 28, 2018) that, in the United States, communities with higher proportions of African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans are more exposed to pollution. This applies at the international level as well: environmental degradation correlates with inequalities of wealth and power. “And if we have more inequality, we’re going to get more environmental harm. That’s going to produce more inequality as it damages people’s health, and income opportunities, and so on. On the other hand, we could have a virtuous circle where we get less inequality and less environmental harm that in turn produces less inequality, and so on.” Could a universal basic income be a kick-starter in putting humanity on the virtuous circle track? **CP**

Chemical Shock

Whatever Happened to the EPA

BY EVAGGELOS VALLIANATOS

Those who eat “organic” food are largely protected from synthetic pesticides. The Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 forbids organic farmers from spraying synthetic chemicals and fertilizers and growing genetically engineered crops. But those eating conventional food sprayed with synthetic chemicals and fertilizers eat, necessarily, food contaminated by those chemicals and fertilizers.

No restaurant menu or label in a food store says anything about chemical pesticides in food.

DDT, parathion, chlorpyrifos, neonicotinoids, and glyphosate are a few of a myriad names identifying pesticides.

America hooked on Pesticides

The US and other “industrialized” countries have been drenching themselves in pesticides—for decades.

For example, in 1982, there were 30 companies in charge of the production and sale of pesticides in America. These major producers supplied 3,300 formulators who distributed their products to some 2 million farmers. There were also 100 other producers connected to 29,000 distributors who sold their pesticides to 75,000,000 households and 40,000 pest control companies.

All this production and trade relied and relies on the “registration” or approval of the sprays by the US Environmental Protection Agency. From 1970 to 1982 EPA registered 1,400 chemicals known as active ingredients. The chemical industry then made these active ingredients into 35,000 products.

According to EPA data, agrichemical companies produced, in 1982, about 1.5 billion pounds of pesticides. This production employed 15,000 people while earning \$ 5.8 billion for the 30 major pesticide corporations. Agriculture used 62 percent of all pesticides; industry and government 24 percent, and 14 percent went to supply homes and gardens.

In the decades of the 1970s and 1980s EPA approved between 450 and 500 new pesticides, nearly one half of the total sprays licensed in the United States in the last century.

Millions of pounds of approved synthetic substances, including pesticides, are being dumped into the environment every day, not just in the US but also around the world.

These chemicals seep into drinking water, are carried thousands of miles by wind and rain from the site of application, remain potent long after they are deposited, and constitute, in the words of William Carl Heinrich Hueper, “biologic death bombs with a delayed time fuse... which may prove to be, in the long run, as dangerous to the existence of mankind as the

arsenal of atom bombs.” Hueper was a scientist who worked for the National Institutes of Health.

EPA: Protector or Gatekeeper?

President Richard Nixon founded the EPA in December 1970. Its mission has been to protect human health and the natural world from the deadly effects of chemicals and other toxic substances.

Over the course of its 49-year history the public has usually seen it as exercising its “protective” function. It must be doing something right—after all, proponents of the free market have constantly attacked it for being “alarmist” and over-zealous, and for having a negative effect on the economy.

But the EPA is also the “gatekeeper.” It approves products. These include thousands of chemicals used for everything from dry cleaning to farming.

Under the pretense of working with science for the protection of public health, the EPA issues standards of “tolerance” (how much of any chemical can the human body “safely” absorb) and “risk-benefit analysis” (highlighting the benefits of sprays to farmers and minimizing the risks for those eating the sprayed food).

These EPA standards are like gears for an engine. They keep agribusiness on the move. They give legal protection to the food products of industrialized agriculture and to the stores selling them.

Agriculture, however, has been trapped in a downward spiral of dependency, in which the fabled, and illusory, yield of crops has been secured at the price of fueling a \$ 50 billion global pesticide industry, one which is, on the face of its own record, not concerned with protecting public health or the environment, but with profit—and pushing chemical addiction through the government itself. The EPA, the protector, has become largely complicit with the pusher. How did this come about?

First, the EPA, almost from its inception, became a captive of the main industry it was chartered to regulate.

I watched this horrific process unfold from the inside. As an EPA analyst working at the agency from 1979 to 2004, I participated in meetings in which I could see the corruption gather momentum. I kept talking to the scientists who were outraged when they did their jobs, and were ignored. I began to collect what became a huge mass of documents showing how and why this seduction and hollowing out of the EPA took place in the 1970s and 1980s and 1990s when the precedent was set and the irreparable damage done.

I watched as EPA based almost all of its findings about the “safety” of chemicals on reports of “scientific” studies by the manufacturers of those chemicals, almost all of it based on scientific fraud by those companies and the frequently criminal “experts” they employed. EPA also outsourced a staggering amount of its watchdog function—and its moral conscience.

This all took place under both Democratic and Republican

administrations. EPA became a servant of the politicians and the producers. That is its great tragedy—and ours.

I have waited for many years, hoping against hope that either a democratic administration or the environmental movement would stand up for public health and the environment, insisting that the country should ban pesticides. It never happened.

The least I could do, and I did, was to tell my story at EPA: *Poison Spring*, a 2014 book in which I detailed the role of EPA, the White House, Congress and the industry in the creation, government approval, and use and deleterious effects of pesticides in the United States.

The Politics of EPA Corruption

With the assistance of the White House and Congress, industry influences and often controls the actions of EPA. As a result, EPA slowly withdrew from enforcing the law; doing nothing to bring bad practices to an end; overlooking evidence of wrongdoing; ignoring the rapid increase of cancer and other diseases corresponding to the rapid spread and increase of the use of toxic chemicals and pollution; and failing to keep companies accountable.

Chemical companies produce defective and fraudulent “studies” to put their applications for approved use in a favorable light, emphasizing the “benefits” and downplaying the dangers of the chemical or device they want to sell here and in many other countries.

The EPA political appointees know that scientists want to do credible science, but they also want to be rewarded for what they do. So, the EPA bosses emphasize the economic benefits of the “scientific” work of EPA.

This means registering pesticides as new “tools” for the farmers. In other words, the managers of EPA stimulate the climate that encourages the scientists to think of their well-being first, downgrading or ignoring public health and the natural world.

Any president and his appointees at EPA could have stopped this process of corruption, but they have so far chosen to follow their political instincts of favoring the mighty chemical and agribusiness industries.

The difference between Republican and Democratic administrations is one of style, not substance. The Republicans always hammer in the economic benefits argument: What is good for large farmers and agribusiness is good for America. The Republicans also use the budget weapon more forcefully to silence and or eliminate programs that are making a difference in public health and environmental protection.

The Democrats are more circumspect. They treat the scientists gently, giving them the illusion that simply doing their jobs is the equivalent to protecting public health and the environment. Democratic Party politicians running EPA talk a lot about public health and the environment while doing the bidding of the industry.

Given these political realities, it is almost impossible for EPA

to defend nature and human health. Bad news is ignored—unless, in rare instances, the alarm bells are ringing at a deafening level. (This was the case in the banning of DDT in 1972.)

EPA pays for data from outside consultants, only to hide, shred, or dump negative findings about risks posed by the use of highly toxic chemicals. Thus it has become, in effect, a polluters' protection agency.

Politicians have made certain that EPA looks the other way while businesses turn the spigot of pollution on. But since cancer takes decades to show up, the government, the industry and the scientific community and the media don't bother filling the dots connecting the parallel paths of pollution and cancer.

Yet the country has been living through public health and ecological meltdowns, which, unlike the current Donald Trump administration meltdown, remain almost invisible.

The toxic politics and corruption surrounding Trump, however, all but push the environmental disaster, including the extinction of species and global warming, out of the forefront of politics and policy.

The Secrets of Pesticides

Pesticides originated from warfare and petroleum. They are petrochemicals. The most deadly toxins used, organophosphates and carbamates, are the descendants of substances—nerve gasses—developed for chemical warfare.

In order to bind, stabilize, and disperse these “active ingredients,” innocuously named “inerts” make up the rest of a pesticide. Far from being “inert” these are almost invariably as dangerous and poisonous as the toxins they enfold.

Sometimes the inerts act as synergists, increasing the toxic impact of the active ingredient by knocking out the liver's life-saving powers.

An EPA scientist described the chaos of inerts as the “inerts-bucket-of-worms.” The deficient and biased methods of approval by EPA, including contaminants like dioxins, fail the tests of science and public health.

For example, the weed killer 2,4,5-T, which was half of Agent Orange, the weapon America used to destroy forests and rice fields in Vietnam, was contaminated by dioxin, the most toxic of man-made chemicals. The US Forest Service sprayed that Dow Chemical herbicide 2,4,5-T in the woods of Oregon, resulting in miscarriages among women living close to the sprayed area. EPA used the evidence from a study of the effects of dioxin in Oregon to ban 2,4,5-T.

Dow Chemical used its political connection with the White House and EPA to take its revenge. EPA dismantled its Health Effects Branch responsible for funding the study of the Oregon women. Dow Chemical has yet to clean up the dioxin pollution in its factory grounds in Midland, Michigan, a 1,900-acre manufacturing plant. In addition, wastewater from the Dow Chemical works contaminates the Tittabawassee River and Saginaw Bay. This is a huge area with fish and wildlife. Fishermen catch and sell fish contaminated by dioxins.

The Plight of Honeybees

Another horror story from the EPA is the poisoning of honeybees laying the sweet egg of honey and performing the vital services of pollinating one-third of our crops: Honeybees became one of the first and chief victims of the cozy relationship of EPA to the owners of pesticides.

In 1974, EPA approved parathion and other powerful sprays, in nylon microcapsules the size of dust and pollen particles. These bubbles of poison on spring flowers, weeds, and blooming crops have been decimating honeybees.

Second, the agribusiness-academic complex is spinning other than pesticide theories in explaining the demise of honeybees.

Testing Fraud

The chemical industry has behaved in criminal fashion in order to protect highly profitable pesticides; most of them bring in \$ 50 to \$ 100 million per year for 10 to 20 years. To protect their 17-year patent term products, the companies employed blatantly fraudulent scientific practices in the testing of its products.

This outrageous practice was spotlighted by the revelation that the Illinois-based Industrial Bio-Test Laboratory had faked data for thousands of animal studies from the 1950s to the 1970s. The fact that IBT had “tested” about 40 percent of all pesticides and drugs in the American market underlined the magnitude of corruption in the chemical industry and, of course, IBT's criminal deception.

EPA discovered other, lesser IBTs; Stanford Research Institute faked data on insecticides for Shell, the giant British chemical and petroleum company. Even a government laboratory in Texas belonging to the US Department of Agriculture indulged in shameful and illegal practices in order to support an insecticide with the power of DDT and nerve toxins.

Small is safer

EPA politicians suppressed the work of Sharon Hart, a scientist from Michigan State University, who was funded by EPA. Her report showed that large farmers use significantly more pesticides than small farmers. EPA buried the results of this study because it contradicted the ill-founded contention of the entire agribusiness-academic-government complex that agribusiness was an “efficient” way of raising America's food.

The Michigan study showed the dangers of eating onions from large farms, the amount of poisons they use becoming progressively larger as the size of the farm increases. Given the reality that methods used for growing onions are similar to those employed in using chemicals for growing all other crops, the implications are damning for large farms and the food they produce.

Ronald Reagan

The administration of Ronald Reagan remade EPA to be the

servant of polluters. I noticed EPA scientists gave lip service to the integrity of science in public, but betrayed that integrity when they knew they would not be accountable for doing so. In fact, the Reagan administration muzzled and ordered the scientists of EPA to do nothing without official orders.

In the early 1980s, my supervisor told me he cared less for environmental protection. I asked him why he was at EPA. “I am working at EPA to make policy,” he said.

In that climate of carelessness, hubris and fear EPA political appointees undermined the very foundations of science at EPA.

For example, the Reagan EPA funded a multi-year multi-million dollar study of the traces of toxins in Hispanics in the US. The study was done at EPA’s laboratory in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, specializing in dioxin analysis.

The Hispanics research had the effect of disrupting the laboratory’s dioxin work—the main reason for the Hispanics study. Nevertheless, the results of the Hispanics study were so politically explosive—widespread pesticide residues in the Hispanics—that the Reagan administration suppressed them.

Poisoning the Water

Pesticides, of course, did not merely target Hispanics but the entire population of the country. In farm states like Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, Nebraska and California, each growing season results in the contamination of the drinking water of millions of people. Weed killers and other sprays move from the fields to rivers and streams and groundwater, all sources of drinking water for humans.

An EPA colleague, a chemist named Padma Datta, kept talking to me about water pollution. He monitored public water supplies for the agricultural poisons that seeped into drinking water, especially in the rivers of Ohio.

Studies done at universities show that the insults of pesticides in drinking water are severe: birth defects; premature births peaking during the farmers’ spray season, April to July; a harvest of cancer, especially among farmers and those living close to farmers. The more bushels of corn and soybeans the farmers bring home, the more cancer hits them.

A secret 1983 EPA study revealed massive contamination of the country by chemicals, wastes, and pesticides. Of all those threats, pesticides had the most serious effects.

Legal Crimes

The largest chemical companies would convince the governors of several states that none of the chemicals at their disposal were effective in protecting crops from insect and fungal enemies. They did this in order to jointly appeal to EPA to allow them to use untested and, therefore, unregistered pesticides.

EPA rarely disapproved such blatant violation of the spirit if not the letter of the law. Tons of extremely toxic chemicals, including DDT, have been poisoning millions of acres of land used for agriculture in America for decades without any

concern for those eating food and drinking water. This corrupt practice continues to this day.

George W. Bush

The administration of George W. Bush was as bad as that of Reagan in both deception and the wrecking of an effective EPA. With his preoccupation with wars for petroleum and “terrorism,” Bush abandoned the environment to the industry, forcing EPA to become subservient to the polluters for its very survival.

Eric Schaeffer, director of EPA’s office of regulatory enforcement, resigned in 2002 because of White House interference on behalf of the energy power companies dumping millions of tons of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide per year into the atmosphere. Those poisons are killing thousands of Americans every year. Bush also did nothing about global warming. Industry lobbyists working at the White House censored all government research on global warming. Finally, EPA shut its own libraries and labs, a sure sign it was fading out of environmental protection.

Metamorphosis

From the administration of Richard Nixon to that of Donald Trump, EPA evolved to accommodate the corporations’ ceaseless quest for profits.

Both Republican and Democratic administrations pushed this business ideology down EPA’s throat. The Trump administration is so bad it easily wins the competition for being in the pockets of polluters.

As a result, America is swimming in chemicals and Americans are suffering from the massive impact of chemical shock.

It is high time for action: removing EPA from working for the political protection of private interest and restoring it to a truly independent agency empowered to function, like the Federal Reserve or the Supreme Court, as a protector of the public interest. Neither the president nor Congress nor the industry should have a say in EPA’s protecting public health and the environment.

EPA should also have a national laboratory for testing chemicals. The industry should be forbidden from testing its own products.

With presidents like Trump, my EPA proposal becomes a dream.

My hope, however, is that citizens stand up to polluters. A modest beginning is dawning in Toledo, Ohio, where residents approved the Lake Erie Bill of rights.

Our future, including the future of the environment, is in our hands; only we can stave off the soon irreversible poisoning of the spring of life. We are responsible for preserving our republic. **CP**

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The Evolution and Promotion of the Minimum Wage

BY DAVID MACARAY

I don't want you to follow me or anyone else. If you are looking for a Moses to lead you out of the capitalist wilderness, you will stay right where you are. I would not lead you into this Promised Land, even if I could, because if I could lead you in, then someone else could lead you out.

—Eugene Debs

Ever since it was first introduced, the federal minimum wage has been argued hard from both sides. Those who favor it, mainly traditional Democrats, regard it not only as beneficial and vital, but as necessary. Those who oppose it regard it as needless and potentially destructive.

One aspect of the argument has changed a bit over the years. Because U.S. worker productivity has gone through the roof, most opponents no longer insist that a minuscule federal minimum leads to small businesses being forced to shut down.

Opponents have finally acknowledged that if an employer can't even afford to pay his workers the pitiful federal minimum, God is trying to tell him something. He is telling him to go work for somebody else because he ain't cut out to be a "small business owner."

Typically, ideological conservatives and nominal "libertarians" oppose the federal minimum on general principle. They see it as paternalistic and intrusive, as a case of government overreach, as one more glaring example of what they like to call the "nanny state."

Opponents of the minimum wage argue that, if the issue revolves around whether a wage is "too low," then so be it. Let us address that issue. But let us address it within the proper context. Whether a so-called "low wage" is too low to accept is a decision that should be left to the individual, and not the government. Having the federal government make that call is not only a violation of the principles underlying the free market, it is, frankly, "un-American."

Dripping with hypocrisy, the anti-minimum wage crowd contends that we should trust the people, that we should trust working men and women to be able to recognize when a wage is, in fact, "too low." After all, the genius of the free market lies in the fact that it has a built-in mechanism to deal with this. When a wage is "too low," the employer will instantly know it, because he won't be able to hire anyone.

The minimum wage advocates come at it from a different angle. Their approach is based on what might be called the "common good." As Karl Marx, John Maynard Keynes, and a few hundred thousand others have accurately noted, there's

almost always going to be a surplus of labor, particularly in low-skill, readily filled jobs.

And without a minimum wage to serve as a benchmark or "safety net" of sorts—and recognizing that virtually everyone needs to work—employers would be free to exploit our basest instincts. It would be only a matter of time before a "Law of the Jungle" mentality dominated the economy (assuming it already hasn't).

A boss could ask, "Who's willing to work for three dollars an hour? Raise your hand." Many hands are raised. "Who's willing to work for two dollars an hour?" Fewer hands go up. "Who's willing to work for a buck fifty?" Two men, whose families are desperate for money, raise their hands. "You're hired," the boss says. In the absence of a minimum wage, that's exactly what would happen. So the argument goes.

Of course, for the pro-minimum wage argument not to appear misleading or insultingly naïve, something needs to be made clear at the outset. Even with a federal minimum in place, a person unlucky enough to rely on it as their sole source of income will never come within spitting distance of a sustainable standard of living.

Consider the current federal minimum (established in 2009) of \$7.25 per hour. If a man works forty hours a week, fifty-two weeks a year, his annual income will be \$15,080. That's gross pay, not his take-home. This figure falls so far below the poverty line, it usually entitles an individual to any number of federal and state poverty programs.

So basically, despite the drum beat of free market fundamentalists and the grunting squeals of piggish employers, the federal minimum is, for an able-bodied, full-time employee, basically an institutionalized poverty wage. And with that being the case, why has this always been such an incendiary issue? We'll get back to that.

As we all learned in school, the first federal minimum wage in the U.S. was established in 1938, as part of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal program. The initial rate was set at \$.25 per hour. Something else we learned in history class was that Frances Perkins, FDR's legendary Secretary of Labor, was the driving force behind it.

There has never been a Labor Secretary remotely like Frances Perkins. And even though we are cautioned never to say "never," we'll say it anyway: There will never be another one like her. For one thing, Perkins was the first woman Labor Secretary in history as well as the first woman to serve on a US Cabinet in any capacity. For another, she served from 1933 to 1945, a mind-numbing longevity record that will never be broken.

And finally, Frances Perkins was not simply one of those ambitious government workers, one of those sharp-eyed climbers, looking to put together an impressive resume. Unlike, say, ex-Secretary of Labor Elizabeth Dole, wife of Robert Dole, the Republican senator and former presidential candidate, Perkins didn't view the job merely as a high-profile means of "serving

her country.”

And unlike, say, ex-Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao, wife of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who moved from job to job (in her accumulation of an impressive resume, Chao even briefly served as Director of the Peace Corps), Perkins was no dilettante. She did not regard her role as Secretary of Labor as a stepping stone. On the contrary, Perkins was the real deal—a hardcore labor zealot and true believer.

But there’s some interesting background to this. Activists during the Progressive Era (roughly from 1890 to 1920) were already pushing hard for a minimum wage well before FDR and his posse got around to it. Also, the very first instance of a minimum wage didn’t occur in the U.S. or Europe. It began in Australia, in the state of Victoria, in 1896.

Not to detract from Perkins’s role in this, but as early as 1910, through the efforts of reformers like Florence Kelley (affiliated with the National Consumer League) and Elizabeth Evans (of the Women’s Trade Union League of Massachusetts), the minimum wage was already part of a three-pronged push for reforms.

One prong was an improvement in sweatshop conditions, the second was the minimum wage (and a maximum number of hours), and the third was the elimination of child labor.

Although the U.S. labor movement had already coalesced in exposing the Gilded Age for the maggotty era it was, Massachusetts was where much of the really good stuff was happening. In 1912, public awareness of working conditions in factories was magnified by the textile strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, led by the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World). This industrial action eventually became known as the “Bread and Roses” strike.

Half the workers at Lawrence’s four leading textile mills (owned by the American Woolen Company), were women between the age of 14 and 18, and another significant portion was under-age (younger than 14) children. Accordingly, one of the goals of the strike was to reduce the weekly hours of work for women and children from 56 to 54 hours.

Even though the “Bread and Roses” strike is still spoken of as being a victory for labor, it was largely co-opted and mitigated by what followed. In short, there was no way in hell that the textile industry was going to sit back and calmly accept “defeat” at the hands of a bunch of factory women and fiery proletarian radicals.

Management knew how to spread fear among its workers. Employees were already aware that the company could exert enormous political pressure, including dispensing police goon squads. Also, it didn’t help when union politics and power struggles got in the way—when competing elements within the IWW couldn’t agree on strategies.

However, one undeniable product of this increased awareness of the plight of low-wage factory workers was the quasi-enactment of a minimum wage. On June 4, 1912, Massachusetts became the first state to pass legislation that established a state

commission to “recommend” a non-compulsory minimum wage for women and children.

Granted, “recommending” a minimum wage wasn’t the same as having or enforcing one, and referring to it as “non-compulsory” more or less removed its fangs and served as an engraved invitation to management to blow it off. Also, by applying only to women and children, it left America’s male workers to fend for themselves. Still, it was a start.

The good news was that by 1923, fifteen additional state legislatures, along with the District of Columbia, had passed minimum wage laws. It was a giant step forward. Clearly, the notion of demonstrably improving the conditions of American factory life was no longer alien to the public.

Now the bad news. Because this occurred during the “Lochner era” (1897–1937), the Supreme Court shut it all down. Fifteen states tried establishing a minimum wage, and fifteen failed. The Court basically pissed on the campfire and sent everybody home. It ruled that any attempt to impose a minimum wage was unconstitutional as it “interfered with the ability of employers to freely negotiate wage contracts with employees.”

The Lochner era took its name from a 1905 Supreme Court case, *Lochner vs. New York*. This era distinguished itself by rigidly labeling as “unconstitutional” any attempt by state legislatures to impede management’s inalienable right to pay employees as little as possible. This went well beyond interpreting the constitution. The Supreme Court was not only playing politics, but it was also coming down unequivocally on the side of Republicans.

How toxic was the infamous Lochner era? It was toxic enough for two later conservative Republican jurists to speak openly and critically of it. Addressing its transparent favoritism, the loathsome Robert Bork referred to Lochner as “the symbol, indeed the quintessence, of judicial usurpation of power.”

And current Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts went even further. During his confirmation hearings, Roberts said, “You go to a case like the Lochner case, you can read that opinion today and it’s quite clear that they’re not interpreting the law. They’re making the law.”

[Fun fact: During the Watergate scandal, when Attorney General Elliot Richardson resigned rather than fire special prosecutor Archibald Cox, as President Nixon had ordered, and Richardson’s Deputy Attorney General, William French Smith, resigned for the same reason, it fell to Nixon’s Solicitor General to do the dirty deed. And who was that Solicitor General? Robert Bork.]

For those who cling to the belief that the Supreme Court is immune or indifferent to public opinion and day-to-day politics, they need to reconsider. As history has shown, this is not only not true now, it has never been true.

As “apolitical” or “constructionist” as Supreme Court justices prefer to think of themselves, they are not. Like everyone else in the Washington D.C. political orbit, they are highly attuned

creatures who not only know what's going on in the world but pay as much attention to the daily newspaper as Jesuit monks poring over scripture.

Take the end of the *Lochner* era, for instance. The same “principled” Supreme Court that, in its wisdom in 1935, ruled that the establishment of a minimum wage was “unconstitutional,” did a complete reversal in 1937. Why? Well, it certainly wasn't because the U.S. Constitution had been significantly altered in the interim.

Rather their reversal was the result of this FDR fellow being re-elected president by an overwhelming landslide in 1936. And the Supreme Court was watching. So, goodbye, constitution, and hello, public opinion. When the electorate clearly indicated that they liked President Roosevelt, and heartily approved of his newfangled program, the Supreme Court followed suit.

Thus, the federal minimum wage became part of the economic landscape. But right out of the gate, and even at a measly \$.25, it still didn't apply to all workers in all cases. Even at two-bits an hour, there were exceptions.

Initially, the federal minimum applied only to employees engaged in interstate commerce, or in the production of goods intended for interstate commerce. And even though the federal minimum has been increased fairly regularly over the years, to where it stands today (\$7.25 per hour), it still comes with exemptions.

Among those exemptions are farm workers, seasonal workers, disabled workers, and those who receive tips. Employers may pay tipped employees \$2.13 per hour, so long as the hourly wage plus the tip equals the federal minimum. Also, it is legal for employees under the age of 20 to be paid \$4.25 per hour (a full \$3.00 per hour less than the federal minimum) for the first 90 calendar days of employment.

Considering the obstacles and opposition it had to overcome to get to where it is today, the trajectory of the minimum wage is impressive. That trajectory reflects nothing but struggle—of forcing itself into existence, only to be followed by a long list of minuscule increases, each achieved by interminable haggling with Republican opposition.

That's one way of looking at it. Another way of looking at it is that, impressive history or not, the minimum wage itself, the crown jewel of the New Deal, is close to meaningless. But more on that later.

As for state minimums, there are now twenty-nine states with standards exceeding the federal minimum. One reason why states have voluntarily exceeded the federal minimum was to avoid being swept away by “Living Wage” fever, which was gaining momentum. Better a higher minimum wage than, God forbid, a “living wage.”

In order to circumvent having to constantly do battle with the state legislatures to keep the minimum wage from being eroded by inflation, some states have adopted “indexing.” This consists of automatically raising the minimum in accordance with the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Understandably, it was tough to get this perfectly reasonable but ambitious measure passed anywhere. Republicans were much more comfortable flatly denying or dragging their feet rather than having the minimum wage bumped up automatically—even when inflation had clearly eaten away at it.

But in 1998, Washington became the first state to approve consumer price indexing. It was a watershed moment for the minimum wage. It meant that the rate would increase relative to inflation, but without the usual haggling. Then, in 2003, San Francisco, California, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, two fairly high-scale locales, became the first cities to adopt automatic CPI increases.

The idea caught on. Oregon and Florida became the next states to do it, and by 2006, six states (Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, Montana, Nevada and Ohio) were added. Oddly, as Missouri and Florida will attest, those convenient “red state” vs. “blue state” distinctions don't seem to apply here. In any event, as of 2018, seventeen states now have their minimum wages indexed to inflation.

Along with indexing for inflation, in 2012, another common sense approach to addressing workers at the bottom of the economic scale appeared on the scene. It began as “Living Wage” advocacy and grew into the “Fight for \$15” movement. The name is self-explanatory.

The “Fight for \$15” movement recommended \$15 as the new federal minimum wage. And if people were willing to acknowledge the hard economic truths staring them in the face, this recommendation made eminent sense.

After all, why endure all the debate, bickering and political posturing over whether or not to raise a state's minimum wage when, raised or not, the amount doesn't come close to being enough to live on? What good is a minimum wage when everyone—those paying it, and those receiving it—agrees that it doesn't come close to satisfying the most basic needs?

One is reminded of Mort Sahl's joke about Republican hypocrisy during the Nixon administration. Seeing a man drowning in a lake fifteen feet from shore, Richard Nixon throws him a ten-foot rope. And then Henry Kissinger goes on TV and solemnly announces that “the president has met him more than halfway.” We'll get back to that.

As for hypocrisy, there's no shortage of it in either political party. When President Reagan bragged about having “created” more than 100,000 new jobs, the Democrats stood on their hind legs and howled at the moon. They insisted that these jobs were mainly low-paying entry-level dead-end jobs—jobs that you could work full-time, and yet still not support yourself.

But then, when Bill Clinton became president, the Dems did the exact same thing. Party leaders proudly boasted that in Clinton's second term, more than 130,000 new jobs were “added to the economy.” Exposing these jobs for what they were, an LA comedian quipped, “They say Clinton created more than 130,000 jobs, and I believe that, because I'm working three of them myself.”

But the minimum wage movement continues to plug along. In 2014-15, several cities, including San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, and Washington D.C. adopted ordinances that locked them into gradually increasing the minimum wage to \$15 per hour. Not that you could hope to live anywhere near a pricey city like San Francisco on an annual salary of \$31,200, but it was a huge, if largely symbolic, step forward.

In 2016, California and New York, the first and fourth most populous states in the country, respectively, became the first ones to lock themselves into ordinances that required them to gradually raise the minimum wage to \$15. In 2018, Massachusetts did the same thing. The “Fight for \$15” had become a reality.

All of this leaves us with the question: Despite the difficulty in having made even tiny, incremental increases—and despite the noble, self-congratulatory rhetoric—does a minimum wage actually help working people? Has it helped? Will it help? Can it help?

Like so many questions in life, the answer can be framed as either exceedingly complicated or absurdly simple. Organized labor prefers the latter. And, arguably, based on what we know of the history of the American Labor Movement—going back to well before the passage of the Wagner Act (1935)—it’s hard to contradict them.

While having a minimum wage is probably better than that not having one, organized labor will tell you that mandatory minimums are largely public relations gestures, that they’re gimmicks, that they serve only as a palliative, like putting ointment on a broken arm. After all, if you can’t live on it, what function does it serve? If you can’t sustain yourself, what damn good is it?

History has shown that, with few exceptions, the only way the working class has ever improved itself was by joining a union. Evidence for this is seen in the fact that, even today, what employers fear most—what they fear more than government interference, terrorist threats, or bad publicity—is having a labor union represent their workers. Which is why they spend so much time and money trying to keep unions out.

So three cheers for the minimum wage. Getting its foot in the door was a milestone. Still, we ask: Is it sufficient to live on? And if the answer is a resounding NO, then everything else becomes irrelevant. Meaningless. If a working man can’t live on it, then why are we pretending it’s even worth discussing?

Which is best expressed by an apocryphal story.

In medieval Europe, a King made a practice of visiting the towns and villages in his province. He did this once a year. And on these visits it was customary for the church bell to be rung in his honor.

As he approached a town on one of his visits, he and his party were surprised that the church bell hadn’t been rung. They reached the outskirts of town, and still no bell was heard. When they reached the town square itself, and all was silent, the King angrily summoned the mayor.

“Why wasn’t the church bell rung in my honor?” he demanded.

The nervous mayor answered, “There are three reasons, Your Highness. First, our church has no bell. Second...”

The King interrupted him. “Stop there,” he said. “I don’t need to hear the other two.” **CP**

DAVID MACARAY is a former labor organizer and author. His newest book is *How To Win Friends and Avoid Sacred Cows*.

David W. Conde Lost CIA Critic and Cold War Seer

BY DAVID PRICE

Last year I stumbled across references to an obscure 20th century, journalist, author, and CIA critic named David W. Conde and began tracking down some of his writing. The more of Conde’s work I read, and the more I learned of his backstory, the more I kept thinking about Kilgore Trout, the underappreciated science fiction writer in Kurt Vonnegut’s fictional universe. Trout spent his life publishing stories in obscure outlets, most frequently crude pornographic magazines uninterested in his prose, printed by publishers seeking verbiage to fill magazine pages simply to reduce production costs. Because Kilgore Trout only published in the most out of the way places, except for rare obsessive fans often at the core of Vonnegut’s novels, his work was destined to be ignored—regardless of the profundity of his observations. Trout was a prophet without honor in his time, publishing pearls of wisdom in places where few could be influenced, making him an absurd hero in a world that cared little for him regardless of the truths he uncovered. And while there are limits to the similarities between Kilgore Trout and David Conde, their shared marginal status, lack of concern with mainstream conventions, ability to make startling observations out of step with their time and place, and comfort publishing in the most obscure outlets links them in very concrete ways.

I first learned of David Conde while researching a book I’m writing on the CIA’s past links to The Asia Foundation in the years between 1951 and 1967. While working through a massive archival collection of Asia Foundation papers at Stanford University’s Hoover Institution, I found a memo mentioning Conde’s previous directorship of the US Motion Picture and Theatrical Branch (MPTB) in occupied postwar Japan. This 1953 internal Asia Foundation staff memo summarized the MPTB’s postwar work censoring and promoting movies in occupied Japan, producing focused propaganda messages, and then described someone—I later determined to be Conde—while being unable to recall his name, declaring him a communist, writing:

...as is to be expected the Japanese communists early recognized the value of the movies as a means of mass-communication and moved into the field immediately after the cessation of hostilities and the beginning of film production. The communists were aided in early occupation days by several Americans' who were either card-carrying commies themselves, of fellow travelers of a heavy red tinge. Two of these individuals (Roberts, and a man with an Italian name I have forgotten [this being David Conde]) were directly assigned to the motion picture unit in the [Civil Information and Education Section] organization. These lads spread the commie line with sufficient diligence to be given credit by many for really establishing the strong leftist foundation upon which the new industry grew.

The possibility of radical Americans greenlighting left-leaning Japanese films under MacArthur sparked my interest. With a bit of triangulating I soon determined Conde was the referenced "man with an Italian name." I tracked down a rare copy of one of the dozen books he authored, and eventually visited the University of British Columbia archives which houses his collected papers. The paper scraps remaining of the man I found were intriguing, and like Vonnegut wrote of Trout, he comes off like a bit like "a cracked messiah."

David Conde's Backstory

David W. Conde was born in 1906 in Ontario, Canada where he spent his early childhood, later moving to California with his family and becoming a U.S. citizen in the early 1930s. During the Second World War, he worked on Allied propaganda operations within the Office of War Information's Psychological Warfare Branch, specializing in writing and producing anti-Japanese radio broadcasts. Conde later described himself as, "one of that small group of men who had served with General MacArthur all the way from Brisbane to Japan. The only difference perhaps was that I was not a soldier. I was a civilian 'Japan Specialist' picked and hired by the State Department." Conde wrote that his propaganda broadcasts stressed "the errors, cruelties, and crimes being committed by the Japanese militarists, paying particular attention to the role of the Tokko Keisatsu [elite Japanese police unit monitoring political groups] within Japan." Conde insisted that it was this war propaganda work that prepared him to analyze postwar CIA propaganda targeting Japan. He wrote that because of his war work "against the thought control police of Japan, it was natural that I should be aware of and know the dangerous-to-liberty role of the CIA when it was born just after World War II."

After the armistice, Conde applied his propaganda skills overseeing the production of Japanese films at the American occupation's Film, Theatrical and Music Section, assuring these films fit the guidelines established by MacArthur during the occupation. In the book *Allied Occupation of Japan*, Eiji Takemae observed that "Conde was known for his radical ideas, a zealous determination to reform Japanese cinema and a short temper. Under his leadership, the Motion Picture and

Drama Branch worked to revitalize film-making and theatre by encouraging anti-militaristic and democratic themes."

One of the many film productions Conde supported was, "Those Who Make Tomorrow," a 1946 feature film co-directed by Akira Kurosawa (along with Hideo Sekigawa, and Kajiro Yamamoto), a pro-Union story portraying the heroic labor struggle of members of a Japanese film studio. Rumors of a surviving print of the film persist, though known copies have not been found. Details of the plot are known, and Conde's radical sympathies are clearly represented in this story of a labor union struggle. Film writer Patrick Galvan observed, "In the early years of the occupation, labor unions were viewed as a metaphorical spit in the face to the allegiance-demanded beliefs prevalent in the war....In other words, labor unions represented individual rights: something the occupation forces very much wanted to push." Conde supported the film for its pro-union message, while the Film Section's policies endorsed the union's threat to the pre-war social order. However, the rushed production, and reportedly crude message and delivery resulted in an awkward film that Kurosawa later omitted from his own credits.

Conde also backed one of the occupation period's most popular pro-democracy films, Akira Kurosawa's 1946 *Film No Regrets For Our Youth*, inspired by the true life story of Hotsumi Ozaki, the only Japanese citizen executed during the war. He was executed for aiding a Soviet spy ring and for trying to undermine Japanese imperialism. Conde helped shepherd *No Regrets* through the censorship process, helping bring to life one of the most mature of Kurosawa's early films.

In July 1946, Conde left his position as Chief of the Films Section over disagreements about the political messages of some of the Section's films, and because of growing rumors that he was a communist sympathizer. Conde's "resignation" appears to have been un-voluntary. He was likely fired for backing Fumio Kamei's eventually banned film, *The Japanese Tragedy*, a work described by film historian Kyoko Hirano as a "Japanese documentary critical of capitalism and of the imperial system, which the American military censors found objectionable."

After his firing, Conde was soon hired by Reuters as a news reporter covering the International Military Tribunal for the Far East. While reporting on the Tribunal, Conde collected a significant body of trial transcripts, prosecution documents, POW documents, wire stories, and notes. Without these war crime tribunal documents to anchor his collection of papers, it seems likely that his many typed published and unpublished book manuscripts, hundreds of articles and correspondence would have been discarded after his death instead of being deposited at the University of British Columbia.

Conde's war crime tribunal reports for Reuters were often as focused on those who escaped justice as they were on those sentenced. He wrote about Prince Fuminaro Konoye committing suicide before he could be tried, and about how Japanese crime boss Yoshio Kodama was initially "arrested as a war

criminal for his great crimes in China but strangely—mysteriously—Kodama escaped all ordinary punishment heaped on those guilty of crimes against some part of humanity.” News reports would speculate that Kodama later used the yakuza to smuggle for the CIA in Asia. For Conde, the selective prosecutions of the tribunal revealed a US deal helping establish American regional dominance in the postwar world. Conde later reflected that, “it is at this point that my interest in the CIA story begins, with Tokko Keisatsu [political police], plus my knowledge of Yoshio Kodama as a war criminal. And it was at this time, before the War Crimes Trials were completed that I was given ten days to leave Japan, in the name of General MacArthur, and under the instructions of his semi-Nazi G2 head General Charles A. Willoughby.”

After publishing a story in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch criticizing the strict limitations MacArthur imposed on reporters covering the tribunals, Generals MacArthur and Willoughby quickly expelled Conde from Japan. Conde resented his deportation and member of the international press covering the tribunal protested. He wrote that MacArthur’s General Headquarters’ “secret police” assumed that once he was expelled from Japan, that he would return to the United States. He instead moved to China, spending time in Shanghai and Taiwan, where he became friends with Anna Louise Strong, and other progressive writers.

Conde returned to the United States the following year, where he became convinced that he was “watched every day by the secret police as though I was truly dangerous”—and FBI records at the National Archives, which I am now working to declassify, indicate the Bureau began investigating Conde as a suspected Communist in San Francisco in 1947, with investigations continuing until 1980. Back in the US, he was a manager at Sears until persistent harassment by the FBI, with accusations he was a Communist, at his workplace and his home led to him losing his job and two divorces. He then worked a variety of jobs until returning to Japan in 1964 as a journalist working for several news outlets including the Far Eastern Economic Review and several Japanese publications.

Criticism of US Hegemony in Japan

Back in Japan, Conde’s years writing and analyzing propaganda for the Office of War Information informed his analysis, and he began writing articles for the Japanese press examining how the United States was reshaping Japanese news media in ways aligned with American interests. He wrote about the ways that organizations like The Asia Foundation, USAID, or Rockefeller and Ford Foundation programs selected certain journalists and scholars over others for funding or seminars; and how those chosen learned to produce works aligned with American narratives of power. Conde was keenly aware how these forms of US-aligned support selectively stifled critiques of western intervention in Japan during the 50s, 60s and 70s. Conde described himself as “a CIA watcher,” and wrote

numerous articles trying to identify CIA assets in Japan, in one article he even claimed to have identified the CIA’s Japan headquarters to be located “in the Mantetsu Building across the street from the U.S. Embassy,” estimating that they employed about 50 employees.

Conde’s archived papers include thick political news clipping files from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s on political topics including: Nixon, Kissinger, CIA revelations and governmental hearings into CIA activities, and a Japanese-CIA bribery scandal. Many of these clippings have detailed hand-scrawled notes and highlighted passages preserving Conde’s methods of working directly from these newspapers, Reuters and TASS press wire teletype printouts, and wire service transcripts of political speeches. In the pre-internet age access to these news-wire documents in real-time, were a rare resource for the sort of critical analysis he undertook. Conde used these sources and published reports to write investigative articles tracking the funding of US army programs at Japanese universities and institutes, and to analyze how US aid shaped the production of knowledge these universities and Japanese news outlets.

Conde wrote hundreds of articles for Japanese magazines and newspapers, most frequently writing political analysis, originally in English then having it translated into Japanese. He published articles in Japanese magazines, frequently Japanese men’s magazines, on topics like: “The Revenge Motive in Post-War Japanese Films,” “How Nixon Sold Pepsi to Moscow,” “Will Nixon use the A-Bomb in Vietnam?” Many were prescient, unreserved critical analysis of American hegemony in Asia, though some betray an overzealous CIA obsession steering him into untethered territory where paranoia overtook his interpretation of the shards of what he believed to be larger stories revealing covert CIA connections. An example of this is seen in his 1972 Pynchonesque piece, “Was Mao Tse-tung a CIA Agent, Opening China for Nixon?,” which attacked Mao for détente with the west—entertaining the possibility that Mao had been duped by a CIA plot. Yet even with these occasionally wild analyses, the larger body of Conde’s prose and analysis remained engaging.

The UBC archival materials include complete and partial Conde manuscripts, and references to a dozen books (8 surviving book manuscripts, 5 missing) that were self-published overseas at inexpensive presses. CIA—Core of the Cancer was published at small New Delhi press. His CIA—Core of the Cancer was the only book I was able to locate in libraries or online booksellers, while the UBC archives has partial and complete manuscripts, and references to another seven Conde books. Conde’s dozen books include the titles: American Dream is Ended, The American Nightmare Begins, America in Despair, The Atomic Samurai, How America Ate Japan, CIA: Core of the Cancer, Indonesian Invisible Coup d’état, or Mud on the Kimono. Most of his book manuscripts were reworked version of articles he had published in Japanese newspapers and magazines, though some were new works. I read his long

unpublished manuscript, *A Structured History of the United States*, an unpublished textbook, apparently written in the 1960s, highlighting class conflict and struggles in US history. Like Conde's other writings, it showed a radical critique of power relations, and argued for liberation, and followed themes similar to those explored by Howard Zinn in *A People's History of the United States*.

Conde's Vision

Conde's most significant critique came from his clear vision that after the press exposed various programs in the late 1960s as having secretly received CIA funding, these programs were not necessarily suddenly transformed by receiving new non-CIA funding sources. What Conde did, and so many others at the time failed to do, was to focus on the desired outcomes of these programs from a perspective assuming there were continuities of neocolonial desires that were independent of funding sources. He did not care that many of these programs were simply scholarships, research fellowships, academic exchanges, or library programs, he remained focused on the larger issues of political control he saw at work. Conde had no way of knowing that behind the scenes, following the rapid exposure of various academic CIA fronts in the late 1960s, there were panicked discussions within the Executive Branch, and within the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations seeking to deal with the crisis of what were internally referred to as "CIA widow and orphan foundations" created by these exposures. Yet Conde's analysis did an exceptional job of independently intuiting the empire's desire for continuity, regardless of the end of CIA funds.

After investigative journalists exposed dozens of CIA funding fronts during the late 1960s, Conde predicted these revelations would cause the US government to increasingly use other "safe sounding" governmental and private agencies to fund similar projects to those the CIA had covertly funded. For example, in *CIA-Core of the Cancer*, Conde wrote, "now, as the CIA is preparing to change its name—to shed its skin—to confine itself to actual spying and transfer its 'educational' tasks to other private business' organizations, it becomes obvious that such activities of the Rockefeller, Ford, the Asian and other US Foundations are intertwined with the CIA, and that it is this 'American way of life' that is the 'enemy.'" As USAID and other State Department

agencies became new sponsors of projects following CIA funding revelations, many programs designed by the CIA were now funded by these "clean" funding sources, as if the source of funds were the only problem, not their links to political intervention abroad.

After a March 1967 *New York Times* article revealed the Asia Foundation had been received CIA funds, the Foundation responded quickly, admitting it had received some funds, and stated it would no longer do so. The Foundation made misleading statements minimizing how much CIA funding it had received, though it did stop receiving CIA funding as a result of this exposure. Most journalists covering the story



David W. Conde. Photo: National Archive

acknowledged this change in funding and moved on, but Conde's analysis of the Foundation during its pre- and post-CIA-linked years focused on both the leadership and activities of the Foundation, as well as the continuity of programs after these revelations. He analyzed the significances of a CIA-linked foundation stacking its board of directors with capitalism's captains as a way of representing the economic interests the CIA sought to preserve. Corporations placing their CEOs on

the Foundation's board highlighted symbiotic relationships between capital and "security" such involvements nurtured, and in discussing other symbiotic relationships allowing the CIA access to Asian students. He observed that,

The Asia Foundation took particular interest in Asian students, seeking to influence the younger generation and make friends of the US. Scholarships were offered for American universities and carefully screened students were brought to American to study approved subjects. A most careful system was set up to guide these students from the time they left their homes in Asia until they reached their selected school in the US. Counselors accompanied them on shipboard to prepare them until they left the shores of the United States bound back to their homeland. Forever after they were in the "files" as a future contact.

Conde argued that before 1968 the CIA had used the Asia Foundation to finance the Japanese Federation of Bar Associations and other international judicial organizations (such as the International Commission on Jurists) because,

most law is concerned with property and the purpose of this organization to inculcate respect for law, is in a sense, seeking to retain the sanctity of existing contracts. As half the world is deeply in debt to the United States, and facing both the repudiation of contracts, bonds and currency, the mobilization of world opinion to support some possible US forceful action, appears most desirable from the US view.

In CIA-Core of the Cancer, Conde critiqued CIA efforts to covertly influence foreign governments and cultural movements. He analyzed how the CIA funded Congress of Cultural Freedom (CCF) sponsored the Japanese magazine Jiyu ("Freedom"), which presented Japanese views aligned with American political messages. He observed that after the CIA links to CCF were exposed, the Ford Foundation made up for the lost CIA funding and the program continued as before. Conde argued that because of the continuity of desired outcomes, the entire project must be rejected. Conde observed that McGeorge Bundy's "formerly top CIA man in the White House, now head of the Ford Foundation" oversaw the continuity of these arrangements. Conde also argued that the Japanese readers of Jiyu magazine were not the CIA's only target audience, instead,

A most interesting part played by such magazine is their role in deceiving the American public. Articles published in Jiyu are most frequently translated by the American Embassy service and supplied to Japanese English-Language newspapers, particularly Yomiuri, Mainichi and the Japan Times, and thus serve to give the English-reading public in Japan the belief that such material is typical—which it is not—of the views of Japanese magazines. Additionally, copies of this translation are sent to Washington and they serve to give the impression there that the Japanese press supports the US position—a far cry from the truth. The Embassy's use of

Jiyu's "viewpoint" is most deceptive and in a sense is but reflecting the Washington line back to Washington as in a distorted mirror.

Conde viewed American academics as largely complicit with CIA efforts to steer academic inquiry. He observed that when the CIA began using funding fronts to shape and limit discourse, and,

thousands of US professors and scientists, imbued with the "free idea of success" and a "high standard of living" accepted CIA and Pentagon "subsidies" and "research grants," bettering their family income but thus contributing to the corruption of educational ethics. Rather than being seekers after objective truth with a concern for mankind, a larger percentage of "scholars" became employees of the CIA-Pentagon, committed to the anti-Communist cold war.

After Praeger Press's was exposed for having secretly published CIA sponsored books for years, Conde wrote that,

the books of Praeger have served to "educate" a whole generation of all those who sought to learn the truth of what the world of liberation meant. Many US professors have been guided in their writing and publications of books on foreign affairs, totally unaware that the CIA stood behind their publisher, assuring that the end product would meet cold-war standards.

As the FBI investigated Conde for decades, suspecting he was a communist, his writing did nothing to quell such suspicions. He frequently moved far beyond the usual progressive critiques of American hegemony, that were usually enough during this period to garner FBI suspicions, to overt praise of Joseph Stalin for refusing "to bow to the dictates of US monopoly" after the atomic bombing of Japan. He described McCarthyism's Red Scare as simply recycling Hitler's anti-Communist hysteria. One of the rumors of his communist links stretched back to the postwar occupation of Japan was a story that Conde had been visibly upset that newsreel footage he reviewed as a film censor did not more prominently feature Japanese Communist Party leaders that General MacArthur released from prison.

Conde corresponded with other radicals around the globe, his archived correspondence includes exchanges with Julius Mader, the East Berlin writer who in 1968 authored Who's Who in the CIA—a scattershot effort to publish names of CIA employees, which while filled with inaccuracies but pioneering many of the techniques later used in 1970s at CounterSpy or Covert Action Information Bulletin to identify CIA agents. His correspondence with Mader shows Conde's general paranoia not inhibiting his critique or engagement with others struggling against the CIA.

What remains so unique about Conde was not that his analysis of the reach, methods, and goals of the CIA was flawless or heavily documented (it wasn't)—there are clear instances where he was wrong, or his paranoia led him astray; it is instead how he drew on his World War II OWI intelligence

experience, studying American and Japanese intelligence practices, to interpret postwar developments and extrapolate what the CIA was likely covertly doing. In some sense, his wartime experience studying cultural manipulation by an empire struggling to expand its reach across Asia, shaped his analysis of the next global power who tried to expand across the region. His war years committed to fighting fascism left him politically prepared to challenge the forms of corporate fascism the CIA soon aligned to protect as it opposed anti-colonialist liberation movements all over Asia.

With the hindsight offered by a half a century of historical research and FOIA revelations we can see that at times his analysis went too far or wandered off in strange directions, but all told, even with his errors and occasional paranoid miscalculations he did a better job of interpreting CIA motivations and activities in Japan than did most of the mainstream press or academics, whose work largely ignored or downplayed these persistent CIA interventions. That he was a marginal figure tells us more about the inevitable status of those rare lone voices unconcerned with making their analysis fit with commonly accepted views than it does about the truth of what he found. **CP**

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Lopez Obrador's Stormy First 100 Days

BY KENT PATERSON

Assuming office as Mexico's new president December 1, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) faced the Herculean task of addressing decades of neoliberal economics, emigration, violence, corruption, insecurity, political scandal and environmental destruction.

Prominent Mexican poet and human rights activist Javier Sicilia, who is critical of Lopez Obrador's development plans, surveyed the national landscape while speaking at the annual Puerto Vallarta book fair this year. "It's a broken country in ruins, in despair, an orphaned country," Sicilia told the crowd.

But optimism over AMLO's left-leaning Fourth Transformation of Mexico (4T) program sets millions of Mexicans apart from Sicilia and other critics.

"He's doing good for the country, making an improvement," said Aguascalientes high school student Ashley Perez. "We hope he does something good for the people of the country" added fellow student Juan Pablo Vasquez. Perez and Vasquez belong to a generation whose political formation will likely be highly influenced by the Lopez Obrador presidency.

During its first 100 days, AMLO's administration doubled the minimum wage to about nine dollars a day in the northern border zone; hiked modest pensions for 8 million-plus senior citizens; earmarked grants for 9 million low-income students for the first time; trimmed the juicy salaries of senior government officials; delivered mortgage relief to some low income homeowners; established guaranteed prices for basic grain crops; began popular credit programs for small business people; and canceled a controversial new airport for Mexico City, among other measures.

Mexico's federal government, AMLO declared, had stopped being a "committee for the few" and was now dedicated to serving popular interests.

In conjunction with the Mexican Congress, the new administration sought to reassert the power of a State that was gutted, outsourced and auctioned off during nearly 40 years.

On the migrant question, the new administration outlined expanded relationships between Mexico City and Mexican immigrants in the United States, including making greater use of mobile consulates and ensuring that more of the annual \$30 billion remittance flow winds up in the pockets of migrants' families back home instead of as profits for money transfer companies.

Gathering migrants' input at upcoming forums envisioned for different U.S. cities will contribute to the new transnational relationship, Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrad and Lopez Obrador both pledged.

Cirpriana Jurado, Mexican political exile and a leader of Lopez Obrador's Morena party in the U.S., praised the initiatives, saying they will finally "take into account the Mexicans in the exterior."

Additionally, AMLO's government freed sixteen people deemed political prisoners and began reviewing the cases of hundreds of others; rolled out a plan to investigate the forced disappearances of 40,000 plus people, an estimated 10-15 percent of whom are Central American migrants, according to senior Interior Ministry official Alejandro Encinas; and formed a truth commission to investigate the fate of the 43 Ayotzinapa rural teacher college students who were forcibly disappeared in 2014 in a crime that implicates state security forces.

AMLO announced the government will open pre-1985 secret government files to the public, disclosing that among the dossiers is his own, which falsely identified Mexico's future president as a member of the old Mexican Communist Party.

"Great injustices were committed by labeling social activists....never let there be another authoritarian regime that pursues people for their ideals, for their party membership..." AMLO implored, assuring that the presidential guard, the CISEN state intelligence agency, the Islas Marias penal colony, and political spying were now history.

In his greatest first test as president, Lopez Obrador moved against so-called huachicoleros, gasoline thieves, who've looted the state oil company Pemex for decades in what amounts to

illicit privatization on top of the gradual, legal one AMLO and other critics of have long denounced.

Administration officials estimate the thefts deprive Pemex of three billion dollars in revenue annually. The human cost of the violent huachicolero trade was gruesomely conveyed to the nation January 19 when hundreds of people in the state of Hidalgo brazenly robbed gasoline from an illegally tapped pipeline. Suddenly, the site exploded in flames and the blood-curdling screams of victims were transmitted on national television. At least 135 people perished from the horrendous explosion, many suffering agonizing deaths in hospitals.

As the government crackdown unfolded, reports poured in of the involvement of high-ranking Pemex officials and franchisees, state and local politicians and police officials in the huachicoleo.

Temporarily disrupting gasoline supplies, the federal offensive was followed by long lines outside gas stations, particularly in central Mexico; by February, the supply crisis had eased, though price increases began hitting the pump.

AMLO's action was lambasted by critics as ill-conceived, but it was hugely popular with a public enthused to see a firm hand against corruption.

The president's approval rating reached an astonishing 86 percent in one February poll reported by *El Financiero* newspaper. Huachicol became Lopez Obrador's watchword for the rip-off of Mexico. "There is huachicol in everything," the president offered. "In the pharmaceutical business, social programs, public works; the luxuries of senior functionaries."

Barbs From the Balcony

Every weekday, AMLO conducts a 7 am press conference. He explains policies, attacks the nation's ills, rails against corruption, vindicates Mexican historical leaders, expounds on morality, and sometimes quotes the Bible.

The leader upholds "republican" austerity in government, hard work and personal honesty. AMLO's political philosophy, if you will, hints at Che Guevara's conception of the new socialist man and woman

The "early bird" briefings have the pundits, numerous journalists and opposition politicians howling. Sarcastically tagging AMLO as "Saint Andres," pundit Denisse Dresser writes he is cultivating "disciples instead of citizens."

From all sides, the critics lay it on hot and heavy on the president, variously declaring that the Man from Tabasco is trampling on international financial standards and risking disinvestment; imposing a one-way political discourse; reviving a singular ruling party dominated by an intolerant authoritarian; mimicking Joseph Goebbels; and taking Mexico down the road of North Korea and Venezuela.

Many of these criticisms of AMLO are nothing new, and frequently mask the authors' embrace of the unbridled free market, the Washington Consensus and the overthrow of the Venezuelan government, soon to be followed by Nicaragua,

Bolivia and Cuba.

What the right-and a part of the left- seems to forget was that there was a landslide election last July 1 in which AMLO won with 53 percent of the vote. Moreover, his Morena party captured the Mexican Congress and many state and local offices as well. Mexicans voted for change, and they are expecting action. AMLO and Morena possess a legitimate mandate, and to the chagrin of naysayers, they are plowing ahead with their 4T agenda.

"There is a revolution in the country, man. It's time they realize that," Paco Ignacio Taibo 11, celebrated writer and new director of the federal government's Cultural Economic Fund, told *Proceso* magazine in response to the barrage of anti-AMLO sniping.

That's not to say Lopez Obrador and Morena have all the answers for moving Mexico in a more progressive direction. Questionable individuals have managed to worm their way into both the federal administration and party. Morena is a "big tent" party, similar to the U.S. Democratic Party, with left, center and right factions and politicians and all the contradictions that entails.

AMLO's popular consultations, in which people vote yes or no for a particular policy initiative like a hotly disputed thermoelectric plant in Morelos state are under fire for their legality and/or authenticity in truly measuring the public will.

Arguably, environmental policy is a weakness of the new administration.

Though the president opposes GM crops and fracking, favors more protected areas and has canceled an open pit mine for Baja California Sur, environmental advocates like Greenpeace criticize environmental agency budget cuts and a continued fixation on fossil fuels.

"It's true that achieving energy sovereignty is a priority but we can't speak of sovereignty if we remain anchored and dependent on fossil fuels with a policy that worsens the global climate crisis," said Greenpeace Mexico's Pablo Ramirez.

The Chiapas-based Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) vehemently opposes AMLO's Maya Train Project envisioned to whisk millions of tourists across the Yucatan Peninsula and northern Chiapas as an attack on Indigenous communities. The EZLN strongly rejects AMLO's government for its adherence to NAFTA, capitalist "macroeconomic" structures and the U.S. "imperial orbit"

Great controversy swirls around the new National Guard launched by Lopez Obrador. Although the details of the envisioned 150,000 member force are still being crafted, the first units will be drawn from military and federal police personnel.

Mexican and international human rights organizations initially denounced the plan as a violation of the Mexican Constitution, a breach of international human rights agreements and a continuation of the creeping, drug war militarization which has been accompanied by ample rights abuses committed by the security forces.

AMLO insists, however, that the National Guard will respect human rights, refrain from repression and serve as a guarantor of peace and order.

Politically favoring AMLO's National Guard is the rampant insecurity plaguing states like Guerrero, where dozens of paramilitary organizations—many of them connected to organized crime—effectively control nearly two-thirds of the state's territory, according to a thorough report published by *Trinchera* magazine. Murder and extortion are widespread, with some areas in a virtual state of war and entire communities forcibly displaced.

Horror shows like the severed human head that was dumped this year near a Zihuatanejo middle school in broad daylight are the stuff of daily life that has the populace terrified and traumatized.

Reporting the atrocities is a risky endeavor, too. After stories on the severed head were published, bullets struck Zihuatanejo's *Despertar de la Costa* newspaper, whose founder was murdered in 2006, and *ABC de Zihuatanejo*. Several local journalists were then reportedly forced to flee the town.

Guerrero's public safety conditions aren't necessarily mirrored in all regions of a vast country, but enough entities share similar circumstances that lawmakers ultimately approved AMLO's National Guard.

National Guard critics were hard-pressed to offer credible alternatives, often resorting to longstanding but so far unsuccessful formulas of purging and professionalizing corrupt civilian police forces, reforming the justice system and demilitarizing law enforcement.

At the same time, violent repression continues in a nation riddled with myriad conflicts and pillaged by powerful interests in a thousand shady quarters. During the first three months of AMLO's administration, *La Jornada* newspaper counted 14 murders of journalists and activists, including Morelos anti-thermoelectric movement leader Samir Flores.

Filling the public safety vacuum, more and more citizens are coming up with their own answers, and they are not of the pacifist variety. Two popular solutions include mob lynchings of suspected criminals and the formation of still more armed, self-defense groups. In AMLO's view, the new National Guard will act as a sort of UN peacekeeping force.

The new government recognizes that the National Guard alone cannot be the answer, hence reforms addressing educational access and job opportunities, an anti-drug campaign targeting youth, new subsidies for rural economies and even the consideration of legalizing opium poppy production for medicinal purposes.

Author Silvestre Pacheco, veteran Guerrero left activist, notes that AMLO is an anti-market menace for the right but too pro-capitalist for a segment of the left. Pacheco contends that much of the left has missed grasping the essence of AMLO's inequality-leveling reforms and the popular support it will garner.

"We carried on for many years with the idea that it was necessary to create a revolutionary rupture for social justice to succeed," wrote Pacheco in *El Sur*. "To destroy, in order to construct, but never through a peaceful revolution."

An important difference between AMLO's 4T and the EZLN and other anti-capitalists rests with the former's national program that has captured the imagination of broad sectors of the population, something that an often fractious and localized left has not achieved until now. Although Mexicans have stepped to the left, that doesn't mean they are ready to storm the Winter Palace and overthrow the capitalist system.

Change from Below

Still, judging Mexico's direction from a political telescope focused on the top misses the forces stirring below that are giving previews of a possible future. Two of the most significant new actors on the political stage are labor and women.

The first months of AMLO's administration witnessed the eruption of rank-and-file labor movements among factory workers, department store employees, teachers and others.

An epicenter of the new labor movement emerged in the northern border city of Matamoros, where thousands of low-wage workers in foreign-owned border factories staged wildcat strikes when the *maquiladoras* began withholding annual bonuses after the federal government doubled the minimum wage for the border zone.

Workers prodded their union into supporting a legal strike at more than 40 factories under contract with the SJOIIP union and were successful in winning their demands for a 20 percent pay hike and the payment of a bonus worth about \$1,500. The Matamoros factory workers inspired other workers in their city and beyond to demand higher pay, bonuses and union democracy.

Susana Prieto, legal adviser to the Matamoros wildcaters, described a four-way struggle against companies, the Tamaulipas state government, a "bought-off" press that "defames" the workers and the longtime SJOIIP union leadership, which was criticized by workers for not representing their interests while benefiting from paycheck deductions.

In a vivid example of the risk activists run in Mexico, Prieto began receiving death threats and was photographed wearing a bulletproof vest.

Media outlets played up a constant drumbeat of strike-related economic losses and possible plant closures brought on by Prieto and her band of low-class economic vandals. Lopez Obrador claimed the center, maintaining that workers' grievances must be attended to while the viability of the enterprise is ensured, "because it is a source of employment and a business can't be disrupted."

The president agreed that workers had a right to know where their paycheck deductions go and union autonomy should be respected. While AMLO's position might not have been sufficiently pro-striker for some, it was a far cry from

the days of outright repression. Police violence occurred in Matamoros, but it came from the conservative state government not Mexico City.

Another showdown occurred in the state of Michoacan, where the leftist National Coordinator of Education Workers (CNTE) blockaded train tracks for weeks in demand of long overdue back pay and bonuses owed to them by the Michoacan state government. Cargo shipments piled up for weeks, and echoes of Matamoros, business interests were soon screaming about supply and production disruptions.

Since a portion of the teachers' salaries are paid by the federal government, AMLO's administration was sucked into the fray. Pressured from both sides, Lopez Obrador asked the train track blockaders to reconsider their tactic.

"All of this will be addressed during my term in office. That is my pledge. But it can't be done overnight," the President said, vowing not to be baited into repression. The strike ended peacefully but not before divisions surrounding the CNTE surfaced, as a small group of protesters clung to a section of the train track until the very end.

AMLO raised eyebrows on the left when he scolded the CNTE for "intransigence" and accused the group of acting more like rightists than leftists. "That radicalism has to do with conservatism when the two extremes come together..." he asserted.

Happening at the same time as the gasoline supply crisis, the Michoacan train blockade posed fundamental questions during a potentially progressive if not revolutionary political transition. What political circumstances justify civil disobedience? For how long? Do the interests of one group, teachers or others, justify large scale disruptions to the lives of others who are not part of the movement? Can or should radical actions be undertaken in the absence of a broad consensus?

In AMLO's Mexico, women have visible and significant leadership roles. Nearly half the members of the new Mexican Congress are women, as is the chief executive of Mexico City, former student activist Claudia Sheinbaum. Yeidckol Polevnsky serves as president of Morena. Despite these notable political changes, the fight against sexual oppression will be a long one.

In January and February, thousands of women in Mexico City and Cuernavaca staged demonstrations after a surge of femicides and attempted abductions were reported.

On International Women's Day, a revived women's movement flexed its muscles with marches drawing thousands in at least 13 Mexican cities, La Jornada reported. The women demanded a halt to femicides, better labor rights, health services for indigenous communities and safe and legal abortion, a reality in the capital of Mexico City but still restricted in other parts of the country.

For AMLO, who won the presidency with the support of anti-abortion evangelicals, women's right to choose is a hot potato he would rather not handle at the moment. Mexican

feminists, however, won't permit the issue to be relegated to secondary status.

The persistence of rampant sexism (and racism and classism) was crudely illustrated earlier this year when actor Sergio Goya called actress Yalitza Aparicio a "damn Indian." A young school teacher who barely entered acting, Aparicio achieved the unthinkable by when she was nominated for an Oscar as best actress for her portrayal as a housekeeper in director Alfonso Cuarón's highly acclaimed new film "Roma." In response to Goya, Aparicio calmly but firmly proclaimed that she was proud to be an "Indigenous woman from Oaxaca."

Although Aparicio lost the Oscar, her smash debut in "Roma" was a cultural watershed, denoting the changes simmering below in Mexico that might bring closer to reality the EZLN's slogan of "Never again a Mexico without us."

The Foreign Factor

Auguring serious roadblocks ahead, AMLO's new government was almost immediately pressured by Fitch Ratings, Moody's Investors Service and Standard and Poor's- the same credit rating agencies that facilitated the subprime mortgage crisis and the 2008 global economic meltdown.

The wise trio began warning about or downgrading the standings of Mexican government agencies like Pemex and the Federal Electricity Commission, as well private banks, citing possible threats to the continued privatization of energy resources, hypothetical fuel shortages (long after the January crisis had eased) and even violence in tourist centers, including in places like Puerto Vallarta where the problem was worse several years ago.

Lashing out at Fitch Ratings, AMLO appeared ready at first to confront the credit rating kings. But he soon tampered down the rhetoric, retreating to a diplomatic critique after a Standard and Poor's downgrading.

"The only thing I can criticize in a fraternal and respectful way about the credit rating agencies is that they stayed quiet during all the time corruption reigned in Pemex and the CFE...they gave grades of 10, with excellence," the Mexican leader said.

Mexico confronts another big problem hulking in El Norte. Although fundamental differences exist with the current occupant of the White House on immigration and the border wall, Lopez Obrador has clearly decided not to directly challenge the Trump administration, as if taking on the Behemoth of the North would be a wise political choice at a time when huachicoleros, mafia paramilitaries, shady officials, hostile businessmen and corporations, corrupt cops, opposition governors and mayors, not to mention international financial institutions, are more than willing to undermine the new administration.

Although migrant advocates criticize AMLO's administration for accepting the Trump administration's illegal policy of sending Central American asylum seekers back to Mexico

while awaiting legal disposition of their cases, Mexico City's new migrant and refugee policy differ from previous Mexican administrations that deported Central Americans and others en masse.

Instead of one-way tickets back home, migrants are now routinely offered humanitarian visas and allowed to legally seek work in Mexico. Probing Mexican immigration agents are visibly absent from some highway checkpoints. Rightly or wrongly, it's a safe bet that AMLO is buying time and wagering a Democrat with more reasonable immigration/border policies will win the U.S. presidency in 2020.

But Mexico is not playing Washington's game of overthrowing Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and, together with Uruguay, unsuccessfully attempted mediation of the Venezuelan conflict. For how long Mexico's differences with Washington over Venezuela can be papered over is uncertain, evidenced by Mike Pence's recent demonstration that it was time for Mexico to recognize Juan Guaido as the true Venezuelan president.

For now, AMLO and Mexico stand as the most important regional barrier to a revived Monroe Doctrine. If AMLO's government falters or falls, the rightist trend sweeping the region will be virtually complete.

A political survivor with decades of battles under his belt, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador understands the necessity of choosing battles on favorable ground.

Whatever their contradictions, AMLO and the 4T mark a critical historical juncture and perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for progressive change not only in Mexico but across the hemisphere- the U.S. included. And it's a moment that likely won't be repeated anytime in the near future.

"We will continue building the Fourth Transformation... among all of us, the beautiful utopia," Lopez Obrador proclaimed in an upbeat speech delivered on the 100 day anniversary of his new presidential administration. "We will continue walking toward this great ideal of living in a new country that's free, fair, democratic and fraternal."

This article is dedicated to the memory of Miguel Angel Torres (1957-2019), Mexican economist, journalist, activist, environmentalist, revolutionary and dear friend who believed that another world is possible. **CP**

KENT PATERSON is a freelance journalist in New Mexico.

Future Shock

The Peril and Promise of Artificial Intelligence

BY LEE BALLINGER

The keywords in Bastani's title are "Fully" and "Automated." How will this happen? It begins with raw computing power.

The supercomputer ASCI Red, built in 1996, was the first that could process a teraflop—a trillion calculations per second. It cost over fifty million dollars and was the size of a large house. A decade later, the same processing power was packed into a PlayStation 3, a \$600 game console. PlayStation 4, released in 2013, was almost twice as powerful as ASCI Red. It cost 1/100,000th of the world's leading supercomputer of just two decades earlier.

This exponential increase in computer power, coupled with the exponential decrease in price, is the fertile soil in which Artificial Intelligence grows. AI is defined by ZDNet as "intelligent systems that have been taught or learned how to carry out specific tasks without being explicitly programmed how to do so." AI is not a fixed category, but a constantly evolving phenomenon in which human capabilities are being digitized and, ultimately, greatly exceeded.

Artificial Intelligence has spawned Machine Learning, which uses algorithms to analyze data, learn from that data, and make decisions. Deep Learning takes Machine Learning a step further, using algorithms and artificial "neural networks" that are based on the information patterns found in the human brain.

In *AI Superpowers: China, Silicon Valley, and the New World Order* Kai-Fu Lee, founder of Google China, writes: "As deep learning washes over the global economy, it will indeed wipe out billions of jobs: accountants, assembly line workers, warehouse operators, stock analysts, quality control inspectors, truckers, paralegals and even radiologists, just to name a few... Within fifteen years, artificial intelligence will be able to replace around 40 to 50 percent of jobs in the United States.... Rising in tandem with unemployment will be astronomical wealth in the hands of the new AI tycoons. Uber is already one of the most valuable startups in the world, even while giving 75 percent of the money earned from each ride to the driver. How valuable would Uber be if in the span of a couple of years, the company was able to replace every human driver with an AI-powered self-driving car? Or if banks could replace all their mortgage lenders with algorithms that issued smarter loans with much lower default rates? Similar transformations will soon play out across industries like trucking, insurance, manufacturing, and retail."

This isn't some possible outcome on a vague horizon. The future is now. "A college degree—even a highly specialized professional degree. is no guarantee of job security," Lee writes. "When competing against machines that can spot patterns and make decisions on levels the human brain simply can't fathom."

Is Anyone Exempt?

In Henry VI, Shakespeare has a character named Dick the Butcher say "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers." That hasn't happened yet but technology is working on it, as large law firms use algorithms to replace armies of attorneys who once did labor-intensive tasks such as discovery research.

In a 2018 Beijing competition, doctors competed against AI computers to recognize illnesses on magnetic resonance images of a human brain. The human doctors lost, not because they aren't competent but because they relied only on their own experience, while the computers drew instantly on 600,000 patient records.

The elimination of work is well underway and certain to increase rapidly. Researchers at the McKinsey Global Institute estimate that around 50 per cent of work tasks around the world are already automatable. A 2017 study by Deloitte found that 53 percent of companies had already started to use machines to perform tasks previously done by humans, a figure projected to climb to 72 percent by next year. In the U.S. alone, 3.6 million fast food jobs, 12 million retail sales jobs and 3 million truck driving jobs are all on the chopping block for the 2020s.

Who or what will replace them? Worldwide sales of industrial robots grew from 81,000 units in 2003 to 245,000 units in 2015. Annual sales will reach 900,000 by 2025. And these robots are nothing like C-3PO or R2-D2.

Corporate berry giants Driscoll's and Naturipe Farms are funding the perfection of an industrial berry picker. So far, it picks 50% of the fruit perfectly, vs. 80% by seasoned farmworkers. But that's up from 20% last year. The manufacturer plans to rent the machine at the cost of farmworker labor.

Meanwhile, Washington State University has perfected an automatic apple picker that delivers nearly all the fruit perfectly and will be on the market soon. It currently costs \$300,000, too much for small farmers, but it works overtime, Sundays, and holidays in a state where farmworkers have been unionizing.

Amazon, now the owner of Whole Foods, plans to open two thousand fully automated supermarkets within ten years.

FedEx will introduce autonomous delivery robots this summer, small vehicles that can travel independently along sidewalks and roadsides. AutoZone, Pizza Hut, Target and Walmart have already signed up as clients. Domino's will launch a self-driving, no-humans delivery service by 2021.

All of this is just the beginning. "People are looking to achieve very big numbers," Mohit Joshi, the president of Infosys, a technology and consulting firm, told the New York Times. "Earlier, they had incremental, 5 to 10 percent goals in reducing their work force. Now they're saying 'Why can't we do it with 1 percent of the people we have?'"

As AI-driven companies gobble up market share by offering lower costs and superior services, their employee-heavy rivals will have to fire most of their workers or risk going under. Meanwhile, AI is upending the global economic order itself.

Adidas has announced the start of new automated mass-production plants in Germany and the US that will use 3-D printers to turn out one million pairs of sneakers previously made in Asia. By putting 3-D printers where the customers are, Adidas will be able to bring products to the market more

quickly and greatly reduce costs.

While these developments are hardly secrets hidden away by shadowy conspirators, there is an ongoing attempt by government and the media to pacify us with reports of new jobs, a booming economy and "full employment." Shadow Stats, which adds in categories of the unemployed long ago defined out of existence by the Department of Labor, puts the current actual unemployment rate at 22 percent.

The official Labor Force Participation Rate measures how many adults are working now and how many will never go back to work. In January it was at 63.2 percent, continuing the numerical decline that has been ongoing throughout the 21st century. This means there are already 95 million American adults who are permanently unemployed.

The government claims 20,000 jobs were created in February. That might be true but it should be noted that the Labor Department counts anyone who works as little as one hour a week as employed. It must be noted that there was not a net gain of 20,000 jobs in February or any other month. Over the past eleven years as many as 2.6 million jobs have been eliminated annually.

The economy isn't booming, it's disintegrating. Even jobs that are not directly eliminated by technology are in danger because they are based on the existence of a market economy that cannot function if a hundred million plus able-bodied people are not working.

Working, But Not for a Living

All of us, certainly including myself and every employed person I know, desperately want to hang on to our jobs. This makes us susceptible to the siren call of "Make America Great Again," if not from Trump than from his honey-voiced liberal counterparts. But we can't escape the fact that we are coming to a historic fork in the road where having a job is no longer the basis of society. It isn't just the havoc being wreaked by technology. It's the inability of even those people who currently have jobs to pay their bills. This isn't the same old story of intractable poverty, it's a question of an ongoing transformation of everything. This is the most fundamental change in human history.

In the post-war era, most of us were able to rely on jobs to at least cover the basics. Yet a recent study by the Third Way found that 62 percent of jobs today do not provide a basic living for an individual, let alone a family.

According to research by the Urban Institute, four in ten Americans, many of them "middle class," are struggling to pay for basic needs such as groceries or housing. An Associated Press study of the most recent census data concluded that *eighty percent* of Americans live below or near the poverty line.

There are seven million Americans today who are ninety days or more behind on their auto loan payments, the highest figure ever. Over ten million American families have lost their homes to foreclosure since 2008—the largest forced popula-

tion movement in the U.S. since the Dust Bowl of the 1930s.

According to a new report by Prosperity Now, one-third of US households don't have a savings account because they don't have any money to put in one. Report co-author Kasey Wiedrich says "This isn't a problem of just low-income people—this is a problem of middle-class people and even people with higher income without enough savings. If they hit a shock, they are in the same boat."

East Vs. West

China was once a mere stepchild of the West. That's no longer true, especially when it comes to AI. China buys nearly as many industrial robots as Europe and the Americas combined. China's AI industry grew 67 percent in 2018. China now publishes more scientific papers on AI than any other country.

On March 18 the announcement of a new \$500 million U.S. supercomputer was trumpeted with much fanfare, the band led by Rick Perry, Trump's Secretary of Energy. Scientists predict that when this new supercomputer comes online in 2021, it will reach a milestone called "exascale" performance, or more than a quintillion calculations per second. This is seven times faster than the most powerful existing system and a thousand times faster than was possible just eleven years ago.

China will be bringing three exascale systems online next year and China has 227 of the most 500 powerful computer systems in the world. The United States has only 109. In China, the payback period for replacing workers with robots has dropped from 5.3 years in 2010 to 1.5 years in 2016 due to rapidly falling prices.

Trump's tariffs are only a symptom of what underlies the competition between the U.S. and China for shrinking world markets. The super-productivity of AI means that there already isn't enough room for both American and Chinese exports in a world marketplace rapidly eroding in lockstep with the disappearance of jobs. As jobs become obsolete, so do profit-driven market-based systems.

Our society, our world, will either be rooted in catering to the needs of all or it will continue to be based on protecting the bloated wealth and savage power of a few. For a long time, these two ends of the spectrum could co-exist, however imperfectly. But those days are over and the growing dominance of AI should awaken us to that reality. It should also inspire us to dream of using AI to free us from toil, abuse, and poverty, setting us free to live prosperous lives of peace and creativity. If the abundance created by AI is shared by all, what will there be to fight about?

This new era will either be the beginning of human history or the end of it. There is no in between any longer and there is no going back. We will disappear into the void or move forward together over the rainbow. **CP**

LEE BALLINGER is *CounterPunch's* music columnist.

Eastern Predators Need Respect And, in a Disrupted Climate, We Need Them

BY LEE HALL

The Pennsylvania Game Commission, through its press secretary, has long declared it will never countenance a re-introduction of wolves in Pennsylvania. The wolves, though, haven't waited around for reintroductions. They've returned, in the wildest of ways, on their own.

Smaller canids, coyotes, have spread eastward across North America—some breeding with wolves as they've moved over the Great Lakes area. In and through these coyotes, some measure of wolf DNA has come back to Pennsylvania.

And the supercharged coyote progeny are highly effective deer predators.

The White-Tailed Deer Problem Meets Its Match

Five years back, South Carolina's Department of Natural Resources completed a major study at its Savannah River Site, investigating the effects of coyotes on deer populations. The DNR wrote:

Cumulative data through the first 3 years of the study indicated approximately 70 percent total fawn mortality with coyotes being responsible for approximately 80 percent of these mortalities. If these findings even moderately represent a statewide situation, this "new mortality factor" is clearly involved in the reduction in deer numbers.

The implication? If game commissions would halt their year-round open seasons on coyotes, the "deer problem" of the eastern states could meet its match—naturally. Bobcats are targeted in winter hunting and trapping seasons in several eastern states; and they, too, would curb the deer population to some degree if we'd give them a chance.

Then, perhaps, there would be no excuse to call deer shooters into towns and cities, as Philadelphia and many surrounding townships do now. Then, perhaps, there'd be no need for the National Park Service to hold annual sharpshooting sprints in Valley Forge National Historical Park, the Maryland and Virginia Civil War battlefields, and Rock Creek National Park.

Managers of these eastern parks associate deer with—to quote the Rock Creek managers—"decreased plant diversity, increased invasive exotic plants, and reduced forest regeneration, which would adversely affect a large percentage of habitats for other wildlife (e.g., ground-nesting birds, frogs, snakes, and turtles)." But these managers also instituted mass deer kills to appease local landowners.

While Our “Cultural Carrying Capacity” Problem Remains

Rock Creek’s plan says it outright: “An overabundance of deer could lead to increased browsing of landscape vegetation on neighboring properties, having a negative economic impact on those landowners.” Likewise, the Valley Forge plan declares: “The presence of deer on neighboring properties has been linked to loss and damage of ornamental vegetation.”

The National Environmental Policy Act does allow latitude for local values (sometimes referred to as our “cultural carrying capacity”). Nevertheless, a national park that follows the Park Service’s mission is one that “preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values” of its sites.

Instead, national parks are slashing deer populations and

freshwater systems (consisting of predators, primary consumers and primary producers) appeared in *Nature Geoscience*. This study found markedly reduced carbon dioxide emissions in the presence of predators. The researchers wrote:

The marked influence of predators on CO₂ emissions from our freshwater ecosystems also indicates that human-induced removal of predators, or introduction of non-native predators, may have complex consequences for regional and global C [carbon] cycles. Although predators are well known to shape ecological communities, our multisystem approach provides evidence that changes to predator abundance can extend beyond the biotic realm of an ecosystem and may fundamentally alter biogeochemical cycling and greenhouse-gas dynamics.

The loss of predators’ populations and diversity will have wide-ranging effects on whole biological communities and biogeochemical cycles. Only in recent years have we begun to fathom how extensive these effects will become.

depriving deer of their natural life spans by killing the animals (175 deer died in the November 2018 shootings at Valley Forge). The Park Service says it plans to use pharmaceutical birth control on the deer, too, when that artifice receives official approval.

Meanwhile, one of the worst consequences of the battles waged against deer is the concurrent devaluation of nature’s timeless deer control agents: predators.

That predators have a role to play in carbon sequestration makes this devaluation all the more serious.

The Climate Needs Predators

We might believe Mid-Atlantic suburbanites aren’t ready for coyote-wolf hybrids. But these beings are already here—and they aren’t trying to create additional risks for us. Indeed, a far greater danger lies ahead for us if we do not let predators live and thrive.

Without predators, plant-eating animals stick around specific areas, eating their fill, putting plants under physiological stress. This stress impedes surviving plants’ ability to take in carbon dioxide.

A study carried out in Connecticut, published in 2013, showed plants under pressure from grazing grasshoppers, without the presence of hunting spiders, emit carbon dioxide rather than absorb it—indicating, as the authors wrote, that “carnivores increase the potential for grasses to act as a carbon sink.”¹ In the same year, a study of three-tiered food chains in

For multiple reasons, some we have yet to fully grasp, predators need us to stop repressing them. They need the space to regroup and return to their tasks.

We live in the sixth global extinction period. The loss of predators’ populations and diversity will have wide-ranging effects on whole biological communities and biogeochemical cycles. Only in recent years have we begun to fathom how extensive these effects will become.

How Should Agencies Attend to the New Data on Eastern Coyotes?

The National Park Service’s Battlefields deer control plan says coyotes and bobcats “appear to be opportunists that take advantage of specific periods of deer vulnerability and none of these predators has demonstrated a consistent ability to control deer populations.” An approach using best available science, which the National Environmental Policy Act requires, would examine the now demonstrated potential of Eastern coyotes to succeed in curbing white-tailed deer populations.

Predators have proved themselves in South Carolina. Isn’t it time for federal and state agencies to work together on behalf of predator protection in the eastern region of the United States? **CP**

LEE HALL is a professor of law and legal studies.

CULTURE & REVIEWS

Breslin, Hamill and the Limits of the Mainstream

BY ANDY PIASCIK

One evening two years ago when I was walking toward Flatbush Avenue to catch the subway, I saw up ahead a man I was quite certain was Pete Hamill. What threw me was that he was very frail and old-looking as he struggled even with the use of a walker and the assistance of a woman who appeared to be a health aide. Perhaps I should not have been surprised; doing the math later, I realized Hamill was 81 at the time. I learned from my sister the next day that it was indeed Hamill, that he had moved back to Brooklyn from the Village a short time earlier, the return of the native son ballyhooed in Park Slope's neighborhood newspapers.

Hamill had been much in the news immediately prior. Jimmy Breslin had just died and the New York dailies and electronic media were full of quotes and reminiscences from Hamill about his old friend and colleague. That was entirely appropriate, as the two have been closely associated since bursting on the scene almost simultaneously in the 1960s when New York City's seven daily newspapers were still the primary means by which millions in the tri-state area got their news.

Early Years and Long Dead Newspapers

That evening when I caught a brief glimpse of Hamill came back to me recently when I heard about an HBO special, *Breslin and Hamill: Deadline Artists*. Like many such shows, it's extremely well-done as far as it goes. It traces their many similarities as jour-

nalists and as human beings: both were born into Depression-era Irish working-class families in the outer boroughs before that became fashionable, Breslin in 1929 in Jamaica, Queens and Hamill in Brooklyn in a neighborhood that is today called Windsor Terrace.

Both got hired despite not having much formal education and, after stints as reporters, both became columnists. Breslin is often cited as the seminal figure in what soon became known as the New Journalism. Hamill, of a more literary bent (though Breslin, like Hamill, also wrote novels), similarly captured life among working-class New York as the city went through monumental upheaval: a rapid shift in its ethnic make-up, with a dramatic influx of Puerto Ricans and Southern Blacks and the exodus of hundreds of thousands of second-generation Europeans; the devastating rise of heroin; and perhaps foremost, capital flight and the resultant economic ruin of millions of lives as the work once done in manufacturing plants, breweries and factories was relocated to places far away where profit rates were significantly higher.

Reviewing their newspaper resumes is like an archaeological dig of the long-gone and mostly forgotten: the New York Journal-American, the New York Herald Tribune, the New York City edition of Newsday, the pre-Murdoch New York Post that was the only liberal paper of the bunch, the Daily News when it sold 2.5 million copies each weekday and as many as 5 million on Sundays.

Hard-Hitting Local Commentary

Given the sorry state of the press at the time, two talented columnists writing about the difficulties of working-class life was a bit of a revelation. While there were as many things to hate about the New York Times then as there are today, not to mention rags like the

Journal-American, what all the dailies lacked most by far up to that point was hard-hitting local coverage of the lives of New York's millions of workers. A quote from Breslin in the HBO show describes his and Hamill's approach best: "Just go to any neighborhood where the poor live and tell the truth about what you see."

It's what Breslin says immediately after that spells out the limits of his and Hamill's work, one that underscores the constraints of working in the very narrow spectrum of corporate media: "Please do not put out a sermon. That's for Sunday." That's not really what he means, of course, as he and Hamill did plenty of what could be called sermonizing. What he really meant was not to do certain kinds of sermonizing, of trying to get at the heart of a socio-economic system from which flows all of the problems they wrote so eloquently about.

Perhaps Hamill's close relationship with Robert Kennedy, which went so far that Hamill states in the documentary that he was the one who convinced Kennedy to run for President in 1968, best illustrates this notion of the right kind of sermonizing masquerading as not sermonizing. While Hamill laments having done so, saying it was a mistake, what is striking is not the crossing of some journalistic line. Rather, it's his support for Kennedy at all. Kennedy was a war criminal and a fraud. It's telling that, with the exception of a commendable exploration of a nasty episode of sexism and racism from the latter part of Breslin's career, there is not a single critical voice heard in the documentary. All of the big guns interviewed, from the late Tom Wolfe to Spike Lee to the late Les Payne, take turns in heaping praise onto Breslin and Hamill. More importantly, they sing the glories of the media system that spawned both while foggily lamenting a heyday that never existed.

Nowhere is there a hint of the constraints within which mainstream journalists work, then and now. The impression left is of media corporations that are benevolent and neutral in which someone with enough talent and fight can rise to a point where they can write whatever they want. That is not even remotely true, of course. There is a very real, very narrow spectrum within which certain issues and certain opinions on issues are acceptable and others are most definitely not.

An issue such as, say, a vast national corporate media encompassing print, electronic, digital, radio and television where there is not a single socialist voice, in a country where the population favors socialism over capitalism, is never brought up, let alone discussed, during the two-hour show.

Vietnam

The same is evident in examining the work the two men did on Vietnam. While writing with great insight about the deaths of and long-term damage to American soldiers, Breslin appeared unable to see the Vietnamese in any real way. They are subjects, never objects. One never would know that they suffered and died at a scale, to use the wholly inadequate measure of arithmetic, at a rate hundreds of times worse. All a result of the worst international war crime since the Nazis, no less. His work fits comfortably alongside that of David Halberstam, Walter Lippmann and others who earned reputations as “anti-war” solely because of their concern about the costs to the United States.

Hamill, to his credit, did write about Vietnam as a war crime and the men who waged it as war criminals who deserved to be brought to trial. But the best he could come up with as a way to end the war was to throw his support behind Robert Kennedy, one of the war criminals, and by urging anti-war protestors to cut their hair and run for Congress. The every day millions who contributed to the actual end of the war seemed sec-

ondary to him even as he covered some of the largest demonstrations.

Missing were the people in hundreds of places who risked local scorn and even violence to build a movement that eventually proved stronger than the warmakers. Missing, too, was the work of Vietnam Veterans Against the War and other organizations of soldiers and ex-soldiers. Instead, Hamill focused on and mocked the ever-convenient straw man of the Weather Underground type, those he could safely dismiss as “credit card revolutionaries.”

Roads Not Taken

It’s also striking that there is little attempt in the show to contextualize how Breslin and Hamill were able to forge long careers that made them both famous well beyond New York City, as well as fabulously wealthy. We wouldn’t expect kindred spirits like Tom Wolfe and Gay Talese to point out they did so precisely because they obediently accepted and abided by the system’s constraints, but someone should have. Each progressed very profitably from reporter to columnist to novelist whose books were marketable precisely because of who they had become, to well-paying freelance work at prestigious magazines.

Always, important choices were made; nowhere in the documentary is there any discussion of those choices and it’s apparent neither of the subjects ever considered alternatives. So while both were, loosely defined, of the Left, with an important emphasis on the working class, Hamill, for example, chose to write for upscale fluff magazines like *New York* and *Vanity Fair* and the overrated *Village Voice* rather than, say the *Guardian*, *Liberation* or *Radical America*.

The point is not to second guess or even criticize those choices. Nor is to try and retroactively say what either of them should of have done. The point is that there were and are many fine writers, dating to Breslin and Hamill’s time and before, including many able to write circles around both, who toil in

obscurity working for outlets like this one precisely because they have a commitment to “telling the truth” beyond what either Breslin and Hamill ever imagined. But such writers aren’t allocated nice expense accounts to travel the globe or get to date movie stars and Jacqueline Onassis.

The Ravages of Gentrification

It’s telling that in a *New York Post* story previewing the HBO show, Hamill replied to a query about the massive, deadly phenomenon of gentrification that’s been plaguing working-class New York for decades and is worsening still, by saying, “It’s better than heroin.” As if heroin and gentrification are the only alternatives. How nice it must be to experience the city from Greenwich Village or Prospect Park West, while out of sight and out of mind are all the hundreds of thousands of workers who have been evicted from their long-time apartments in neighborhoods that, though not necessarily ideal, were home.

The bus drivers and nurses and struggling artists are no longer welcome in New York. Whole colonies of transit workers live in Pennsylvania and commute from there to work in New York for precisely that reason. That Breslin and Hamill, bloated by wealth and apparently unable to conceive of a world where there are other choices besides gentrification and heroin, came to accept that that is what New York has become is a sort of fitting end to their story. Meanwhile, journalists around the world who work on the margins because they cannot be bought, who are rooted in the working class and write clearly about what it’s like “where the poor live,” struggle on far from the limelight, to tell the truth. **CP**

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