

# CounterPunch

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TRUMP'S WAR ON SCIENCE BY MELVIN GOODMAN

HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT BY LEE BALLINGER

BERNIE SANDERS AND THE F-35 BY DAVE LINDORFF

THE AFTERLIFE OF CHERNOBYL BY LOUIS PROYECT

REMEMBERING MAE BRUSSELL BY PAUL KRASSNER



# CounterPunch

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In Memory of  
Alexander Cockburn  
1941–2012



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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## 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 US 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*

## Victims Not Petrators

People with "severe mental illness" aren't the ones doing these mass shootings. So NONE of these posers trying to pin these massacres on people with mental illness are doing a damn thing to try to stop them. As a matter of fact, people with "severe mental illness" are 10 times more likely to be VICTIMS of violence, both by individuals in the community and by the police and other agents of the State.

*Suanne McDonald*

## From Davis to Morrison

I grew up in a household in Iran that celebrated Angela Davis; when in the US, I read Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon for the first time and was blown away: this was a great US novel, one of the best written in the 20th century. I have learned so much from these two women.

*Laleh Khalili*

## Disingenuity in DC

Predictably the politicians are completely disingenuous. We

don't need new laws to deal with most of our problems. There are currently federal civil rights statutes that permit for prosecution of substantive crimes of violence motivated by racial, gender, faith based hate. Sentences can range from 10 years to life to capital punishment.

*Stanley Cohen*

## Enforcing Tyranny

The Second Amdment was about defending the "liberty" of owning slaves. "The Right to bear arms" was about enforcing tyranny, not resisting it.

*Curtis Noel*

## Bearing Books

A well educated populace, being necessary to the maintenance of a free state, The right of the People to keep and bear books shall not be infringed.

*Tom Winter*

## When the Right Liked Gun Control

Conservatives were overwhelmingly in favor of gun control in the 1870s and 1970s when former slaves started arming themselves.

*John Benson*

## TGIF

Dear Jeffrey:

Just a word of thanks for "Roaming Charges," my favorite contemporary political column and one of my favorites of all time (along with, of course, the work of your late, great collaborator, Alexander Cockburn).

Every Friday morning, I await it with the anticipation of a child on Christmas morning. You tell it like it is and how it should be. You state what I believe with eloquence, wit and

clarity. You take no prisoners or bullshit. In terms of political writers, you're the best we've got in 2019.

Take care, thanks again, and keep Roaming Charges coming! It's one more great reason to TGIF!

*Sincerely yours,  
Hartley Pleshaw*

## Knowing the Victims

I'm one of those Americans who knows victims of gun violence, especially suicides. I knew one suicide where the husband put the gun on the coffee table and walked out on his very sick wife. She took the hint and took the bullet. 'nother was a woman who shot herself and her child at lunch. Last year there were more than 23,000 gun suicides.

*Rita Stanley*

## The Weird Divide

There's no good end to our current crisis. We're too far apart on what we perceive as reality. I'll go as far to say as we're every bit as divided as we were prior to the Civil War. It's going to get a lot weirder too, believe me.

*Tim Withee*

## Still on the Street?

Long ago and far away I was teaching in a prison. We were talking about advertising, the creation of false needs, planned obsolescence, etc., and one of the prisoners starts going off on Corvairs in Ralph Nader fashion. This was 1985 and he clearly thought they were still out there on the street. Had to ask him, "How long you been in here?" Yeah, it was that long.

*Leon Bailey*

## Pin Ball Brains

Trump has said idiotic things so many times, not to be confused with his calculated lies. I'm surprised he has the brain capacity to keep things anywhere near straight at this point. I imagine his brain to be like a pin ball machine, with his train of thought the ball that lights up random stuff. We don't need a Democrat with a similar feature, and Uncle Joe has a long history of putting his foot in his mouth. The man spent the last year of his tenure as Vice being fodder for memes.

*Judy Hayner*

## Fox and the Blue Collar Voter

When Fox News' Ainsley Earnhardt refers to Trump as being "blue collar," she doesn't mean somebody with a laboring job who wears a blue shirt while doing it. She means somebody who may be a rich real estate heir but who is also shallow, vulgar, vicious and stupid...that is what (in her unconscious view) makes somebody "blue collar," which reveals her true opinions about actual laborers, regardless of her true opinions about Trump.

*David Underhill*

## Let's Get Biblical

Rep. Steve King's defense of rape and incest is what happens when you take Genesis as a family planning handbook.

*Jim Tourtelott*

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## ROAMING CHARGES

# The Camp by the Lake

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

**T**he Japanese-Americans, both citizens and immigrants, living in Hood River, Oregon were given seven days' notice that they were going to be "evacuated" from their homes. They were told to pack their belongings into one bag and assemble at the Union Pacific train station on the morning of May 13, 1942. They had no idea where they were going, how long they would be detained or what would happen to their property and businesses while they were imprisoned.

As it turned out, the trains hauled them first to the Portland Stockyards, where they were confined in squalid conditions, and later to a concentration camp (the FDR administration's words) at Tule Lake in northern California, about 20 miles south of the Oregon border. In total, 544 Japanese-Americans were rounded up in the small town of Hood River. Many of the detainees worked in the local orchards. Though they were spared the indignity of having it tattooed on their skin, each detainee was assigned a number, which would become their new identity as far as their captors were concerned.

The 1940 census was used to locate and target Japanese residents and Japanese-American citizens who did not voluntarily show up at "relocation centers". In the case of Oregon lawyer, Minoru Yasui, who intentionally stayed at his home in Hood River in an attempt to challenge the constitutionality of FDR's internment order, six-armed MPs (take note Tulsi Gabbard) were sent to his house to arrest him and haul him back to Portland in shackles. In an example of how the language of a repressive bureaucracy dehumanizes its victims: during the intern-

ment, American citizens of Japanese descent, like Yasui, were referred to as "non-aliens."

As in Nazi Germany, the Japanese-American detainees were transported from Portland more than 300 miles to Newell, California by freight train. Some of the detainees had actually worked to build that very rail line. After the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the railroad companies were desperate for a new source of cheap labor and they turned to Japan. Nearly 1/3 of the Japanese immigrants to the US from 1900-1920 were lured by the railroads, who promised them \$1 for each day of brutal work. So the Japanese completed the rail networks that a few decades later hauled them away to concentration camps.

When told they were being shipped to Tule Lake, many of the Americans of Japanese descent were relieved, thinking they were going to be imprisoned near a big lake. Anything would be an improvement over the Portland stockyard, which one detainee described as being kept in a pigpen. They were shocked to find they were to be imprisoned on a dusty and dry lakebed, a man-made environmental disaster area. By 1942, Tule Lake had been drained of nearly 65 percent of its surface area by the Bureau of Reclamation and irrigators, mainly to raise potatoes and sugar beets. The town where the concentration camp was built was named Newell, after the first commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation.

It is one of the savage ironies of American history that after the round-up and internment of Japanese-Americans In 1942, the West Coast was so short of ag labor that they begin importing field workers from Mexico and many

of the young Japanese-American men at Tule Lake where shipped to Montana to perform forced agricultural labor during the fall wheat harvests.

A few months after it opened, Tule Lake was designated a "maximum security" concentration camp for Japanese-Americans of "questionable loyalty", the number of armed watchtowers went from 6 to 24. The so-called Segregation Center was a prison within a prison, for the confinement of suspected subversives. What did you have to do to have your loyalty questioned? Merely assert your rights as a US citizen, as Minoru Yasui had done.

In early August, I retraced, as closely as I could, their mortifying journey. If the government wanted to hide evidence of its crimes, then the Feds did a pretty good job because there are very few traces of what it did to these Japanese-Americans, many of them US citizens. I finally found the Tule Lake concentration campsite in the late afternoon. The watchtowers and dormitories have all been removed, chopped up and given away as housing to locals. There's a small airstrip, a crumbling water treatment plant and an old jail. In the end, I followed a tall fence of barbed wire that ran along HWY 139 and found the old entrance to the camp, which was locked. Across the road, where the prison hospital used to be, there was another area behind barbed wire enclosing perhaps 100 tiny blue houses. Some women were hanging laundry on the fence and a few young kids were kicking a soccer ball around in the dirt. I asked a man working on his car, what this area was. He said it was housing for migrant workers. Why were they fenced in? He shrugged. The place had the look and feel of a prison as if the ghosts of the past had infected the present.

Down a gravel road I found a sign behind a locked gate that read: "WW 2 Valor in the Pacific National Monument." If the Nazis had prevailed in eastern Europe, you have to wonder what they would have called Treblinka. **CP**



## EMPIRE BURLESQUE

# Present Future Tense

BY CHRIS FLOYD

“There are times when you begin to feel you are breathing lies, universal and all-pervading, soaking through absolutely everything around you ... Here, the voices of the marketplace, ignorance, narrow-mindedness, racial hatred and the like, are freely and dazzlingly blended with their opposites. This is what allows these dark undertones to acquire a binding legitimacy which they have never possessed before, even in the gloomiest periods of our history.”

— Boris Pasternak, private letter, 20 September 1924.

It's hard to know what to say about the state of the United States at this moment, about our galloping darkness, which echoes the same shrouding that now envelops so many other lands. It might be that we are caught in a terrible pincer movement, a pressure point where the unresolved evils of the past are smashing into the agonies of the future—the burning planet, the death-throes of civilization sending shock waves coursing backward through the space-time continuum.

(The possible effect of the future on the present is being increasingly explored in quantum physics, but it is not a new idea. In his most famous poem, “Hamlet,” Pasternak himself—once a philosophy student much influenced by Bergson—wrote:

“The crowd grows still; I step onto the stage

And catch the echoes from the future.”

And of course, we all experience, very intimately, this pressure from the future, an intimation that inflects and colors our present experience, especially as we grow

older: mortality, the proleptic awareness of non-existence bearing down us from the horizon ahead. And it is also a fact that more and more of us are feeling this in a wider sense, as we witness, almost day by day, the collapse and transmutation of the biosphere that we and eons of our ancestors have known into some new, harsher, punishing thing.)

But there can be no doubt, no dispute that we are today “breathing lies, universal and all-pervading, soaking through absolutely everything.” And yes, those who have even a passing knowledge of history know that human beings in every era of recorded time have moved through a noxious miasma of lies—lies about their nations, their rulers, their societies, their histories and about themselves. Yet at the same time, I think many of those of us who have lived long enough to have seen different eras rise and fall, to have experienced different sets of lies, in varying degrees of pervasiveness, can attest that something qualitatively different has entered our world in this regard.

This is due in part—perhaps even the largest part—to the astonishing, all-pervasive power of the internet, which has consumed the world and all its workings with a speed and reach that defies belief. In less than a quarter of a century since its acceleration in the 1990s, it has taken possession of virtually every fundamental aspect and infrastructure of human civilization, augmenting it to hitherto unimaginable heights—while also making it more fragile than it has ever been. A single person—alone or state-backed—now has the capability to, say, take down the power grid of a city or country, disrupting every single aspect of human life. This is something that would

have required vast armies—or a nuclear bomb, a product of immense collective labor—even within the lifetime of a young person today. Our advanced industrial civilization has, of its own volition, decided to base itself—and guard itself—with an eggshell so thin even the smallest sparrow could break it with a single peck.

And we all know what the internet has done to our politics, how it enables the all-pervasiveness of “ignorance, narrow-mindedness, racial hatred and the like”—to a degree we have never seen before, and which we seem to have no defense against. (And this is not a Luddite polemic against technology, even this particular technology; it's just a recognition of what it has—unwittingly and, more and more, wittingly—done to us.) It has created whole new modes of cognition—virtual, digital, distorted, often demented, but felt by more and more people as more real, or at least more meaningful, than the actuality around them. And this indeed, more and more, lends “a binding legitimacy” to the “darkest undertones” of our ever-more digitally disordered humankind.

I don't know the answer to these problems. I don't know what course to take. I'm getting old—Hitler had turned to ash only 13 years before I was born; there were still people in my hometown then whose parents had been slaves. So when I see the resurgence of these not-at-all ancient evils today—fascism and racism that seeks to deny our ineradicable kinship with all human beings—I reach for the old solutions: solidarity with the poor, the oppressed, the victims of injustice and greed.

But can these solutions stand against the modern hyper-powers, which come against us with means and weapons of unfathomable force and reach, even as the very planet that sustains us falls to ruin? I don't know. I don't know. But I don't know what else to do. **CP**



## BOTTOMLINES

# As Unanimous as it Gets

BY PETE DOLACK

If anything can be said to have reached an unquestionable scientific consensus, it is that human activity is causing global warming.

The widely quoted figure of 97 percent of the world's climate scientists agreeing on human causation—as close to unanimity as you are likely to find on any scientific question—was confirmed in a 2016 paper that studied thousands of research papers. That study backed a series of other studies that found the same percentage. And the lead author of that 2016 paper, John Cook of George Mason University, told *The Guardian* in a July 24 article that the consensus is likely now at 99 percent.

The two record-breaking heat waves this summer in Europe underscore what should be incontestable—that the climate is undergoing unprecedented change. The last five years (2014 through 2018) are the five hottest in recorded history and the hottest nine have all occurred since 2005, according to Climate Central.

Two-thirds of the total warming Earth has experienced since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution has occurred since 1975. The rise of temperatures is fastest in the Arctic, leading to loss of sea ice and melting of permafrost, which in turn will accelerate the warming as newly ice-free seas absorb rather than reflect sunlight and newly thawed land release copious amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

That the warming is occurring on a planetary scale—there is no permanently populated place that is not experiencing rising temperatures—provides a critical piece of evidence. Global-warming denials are fond of pointing to the “Little Ice Age,” a Medieval period when Europe suffered through much colder winters.

But there is much reason to see the Little Ice Age as a regional phenomenon. A paper published in July in the scientific journal *Nature* reported there is no evidence that similar cooling occurred on a global basis, nor did any cooling or warming during the past 2,000 years occur on a global basis. The paper found that although northwestern Europe experienced its coldest period in the 17th century, temperatures bottomed out elsewhere anywhere from the 15th to early 19th centuries.

The Bad Astronomy blog concluded that during the depth of the cold spell, in the 1690s, there was an unusually intense period of volcanism (based on natural records of atmospheric sulfur) and a persistent dip in the jet stream that allowed Arctic air to pour into Europe. There isn't necessarily evidence that this cold period occurred in other parts of the world, other than eastern North America, which would also be affected by jet stream meanderings.

A separate scientific paper published in *Nature* revealed that alleged changes in solar output (another red herring regularly offered by denialists) can't account for any climate variability over the past 2,000 years, a conclusion based on analyzing seven different statistical methods based on a variety of temperature-sensitive palaeoclimate records. Volcanic eruptions and greenhouse-gas forcing are the only factors that can account for the variations. Moreover, the warming of the past 50 years is unprecedented, the paper said, which also attributes the Little Ice Age to volcanoes throwing aerosols into the atmosphere.

Need more proof? A paper published in April in *Science Advances* (Matteo Willeit is the lead author), using deep-sea sediment cores, found that the

Earth's temperature has never been more than 2 degrees C. above the pre-industrial level during the past 3 million years, nor has atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration ever been as high as today in that span. Finally, Stanford University climate scientists, in a 2013 paper, calculate that the current climate change is occurring 10 times faster than at any point over the past 65 million years.

More specifically, our planet-spanning economic system is responsible.

Knowledge of that responsibility seems to be growing, a glimmer of hope in a world that today seems hopelessly trapped in a capitalist stranglehold. As an example, the Global Sustainable Development Report 2019 drafted by a “group of independent scientists,” as the 15 interdisciplinary scientists who prepared the report are designated by the United Nations, which commissioned it, unambiguously concluded that the only path to future sustainability is the end of capitalism.

The report envisions “unique, autonomous economies and societies engaging in regulated international trade for specific reasons, such as food security, rather than for the sake of free trade as a principle. Individuals, organizations, and nations would approach the economy as a tool to enable a good life rather than as an end in itself.” Further, “The focus on life-improving and emissions-reducing goals rather than abstract economic goals would also characterize the relations between developing and developed countries; economic activity between them would consist of bidirectional learning in order to build new, locally suitable infrastructure and practices at both ends.”

That sure ain't capitalism. There can't be infinite growth on a finite planet—yet capitalism must expand. Democratic control over productive activity and equality among humans and nations is essential—yet capitalism is based on a numerically minuscule class holding all power. Capitalism as a cancer is not simply a metaphor. **CP**





HOOK, LINE AND SINKER

# The Curious Case of Patient X

BY JENNIFER MATSUI

**A**n international body of medical experts without medical degrees or expertise were gathered around their patient: Female. Approximately 3 billion years old. For several years, the G-Team (as they nicknamed themselves) had discussed the urgency of a drastic intervention to save Patient X, who was clearly in the throes of respiratory failure. In the end, they decided on a less radical course of treatment involving Band-Aids and bed rest, even though their American team leader had resisted all attempts to resuscitate the flat-lining patient, insisting the woman was faking it and would be up in no time.

In the meantime, the Patient X's temperature had spiked to 109 degrees Fahrenheit, compelling the French doctor to turn on the hospital's sprinklers. They looked to the German physician who had somewhat of a scientific background, hoping she would know what to do. With a slightly trembling hand, steadied by a grim Teutonic resolve, she calculated the cost of Patient X's lengthy hospitalization and announced everyone else on earth living below the poverty line would be shouldering the cost.

As the G-Team was agreeing among themselves about the ultimately wasteful expenditure of Patient X's care, the Canadian doctor took the opportunity to inject bitumen directly into the patient's bloodstream, while planting a deep kiss on to her parched lips. The young, dreamboat physician was confident that his twinkly charm and thick black eyelashes would inspire Patient X's own to flutter, signaling a return to consciousness and a fairytale ending to her suffering. "Hey, Girrrl", he whispered.

A few weeks later, Patient X was wheeled out on her gurney, and once again placed at the mercy of the international team of experts tasked with reducing the costs of saving her. It escaped their notice that the rest of the population was melting with greater speed and intensity than previously recorded; a phenomenon that was some said was linked to Patient X's worsening fever. The American doctor meanwhile denied ever having mounted the dying woman, declaring she wasn't his type.

While the G-Team was confronting crises on multiple fronts, the Chinese and Russian specialists had carved out one of Patient X's kidneys, having coaxed her into signing an agreement to be a live donor. It was said that the Saudi specialist had been seen lurking around the patient, making ominous moves with a bone saw. The American doctor shot down these rumors by insisting Patient X had chewed off her own left foot.

The team's Brazilian specialist had deliberately punctured Patient X's only functioning lung. The American doctor had also taken matters into his own hands by performing a lobotomy on himself.

As the doctors huddled to brainstorm their next move, the British specialist, a rather retiring, weak-kneed woman who was occasionally confused with an empty bedpan, announced her retirement. An orderly led her away. "Strong and steady, there, Mum". A moment later, her replacement, a lumbering Yeti with a self-inflicted haircut came bounding into the conference room. He had been preceded by his reputation, which had also soiled itself on its way to

the G-Team summit. He licked everyone's faces and lifted his leg to urinate on a potted plant in the corner. "I'm leaving, he announced to his soon-to-be former colleagues who had heard "I'm drunk and I'm drawing my own happy face on a bus.

"Bon débarras", the French doctor haughtily mused to his Belgian assistant, a three-foot-tall technocrat who constantly dabbed himself with a cologne drenched handkerchief. Doctor Macron then made a toast to his own good health with a Napoleon-era brandy before the group (minus the exiting Brits) returned to the operating room. Soon they were back to the drawing board, figuring out the best way to euthanize Patient X, whose continuing survival was determined to be a drain on everyone's bottom line. A team of analysts from Goldman Sachs responsible for assessing the risks involved with prolonging her life had given their verdict as well: Time to pull the plug.

None of them (with the exception of the senior American specialist) wanted the responsibility of actually pulling the plug, but they were eventually convinced by their tech cohorts during a Ted Talk about the "game changing paradigm" that lay ahead. According to this elite unit of casually attired elves on the brink of puberty, they could all survive in another parallel universe that Elon Musk had discovered while on a vision quest brought about by a near fatal overdose of helium.

While the G-Team imagined their individual places in this marvelous, gated other dimension, where youth-restoring fountains of champagne awaited their arrival, they were rudely startled by the appearance of the American doctor's daughter. Deliberately ignoring the "No Unauthorized Personnel Beyond This Point" sign, she made her entrance into the OR, doffing her surgical cap and shaking loose her flaxen locks in the direction of the Canadian doctor. "Hey, girrrl", he stammered, pretending not to feel the pain of the German doctor's heel grinding into his right foot. **CP**

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## BORDERZONE NOTES

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# Welcome to Tijuana

BY LAURA CARLSEN

**T**he line forms early for breakfast in front of the Padre Chava soup kitchen. As the morning fog still hovers, the city's street people arrive first, emerging from camps in the dry canal along the border and the hidden sanctums of the homeless. Most are deportees who had families and jobs in the U.S., but that's another story.

The doors open and the production line begins: wash hands, serve plates, seat tables, pray, eat, clear, start over with the next group. After the first round, the crowd changes. Central American migrants mix with families from Mexican towns who have been run out by cartel or state violence. And since January, familiar faces are reappearing. A growing number of Central Americans seeking asylum in the US have been returned to Tijuana. After spending months waiting to cross to make their claims, they find themselves back in the breadline thanks to a new Trump program commonly referred to as "Remain in Mexico".

Through the "Migrant Protection Protocols" issued Dec. 20, 2018, Trump declared that asylum seekers who came through Mexico could be returned there to await their hearings. The plan went into effect in January and now more than 20,000 mostly Central American asylum seekers have been sent to Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez, and more recently to other Mexican border cities. In Mexico, they are required to wait three to six months or longer for their asylum hearing. In most cases, they have little more than a piece of paper with a date on

it and the clothes on their backs.

The measure forms part of the Trump administration's anti-immigration policies and in particular of the chiseling away at the right to asylum. Trump first tried and failed to strongarm the Mexican government into accepting a "Safe Third Country" agreement. That kind of agreement, which exists in Europe and between the U.S. and Canada, would require migrants who passed through Mexico to apply for asylum there. When Mexico refused, Trump went ahead and made a rule change to block asylum for all migrants coming up through Mexico. The move, blatantly illegal, has already been suspended by the courts and is unlikely to hold up.

Mexico's center-left president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador promised a new and less punitive approach to immigration, but accepted the Remain in Mexico program, saying he had no choice because it was a unilateral decision by the Trump administration. Behind the scenes, his government acquiesced to the plan after Trump threatened a border shutdown and later tariffs on all Mexican imports. In June, under the gun of trade and investment sanctions, Mexico agreed to an expanded version of the program that increased both the number of cities along the shared border and the number of migrants returned. If the new rule change sticks, Mexico will be forced into a de facto Third Country agreement, without even the usual support those entail. Mexico has its own huge backlog of asylum cases, and

although it has offered work visas and some forms of legalization on a limited basis, its cities are not safe for migrants and finding a job and a home can be difficult and dangerous, to say the least.

The U.S. press has recently broken stories of detention centers in Texas, Arizona and Florida where children sleep on the floor, twelve-year-olds care for two-year-olds, meals are rotten burritos and hundreds of asylum seekers are crammed into conditions of filth and abuse. Members of Congress have called hearings, sent delegations to inspect conditions and reported back horrified at what they found. Seven children have died in detention-deaths doctors say were caused by the lack of care or concern. Experts describe the detention centers as concentration camps. Thousands of children, many separated from their parents by U.S. authorities, will be scarred forever by the days or weeks or months they spent in "the Land of the Free".

Yet, shockingly, migrants in Tijuana say these are the lucky ones. For the thousands of men, women and children who have requested asylum in the U.S. and been illegally shunted back, life on the Mexican side is as bad or worse than detention centers in the United States. In this border city of 1.7 million, migrants live in improvised encampments, overcrowded shelters or ten-to-a-room in the worst parts of town. Only the shelters, run by church and humanitarian groups, provide food and that reaches just a small fraction of the population. Hundreds of children wake up every day in precarious, unhealthy and extremely dangerous situations. Almost everyone I spoke to had a horror story-of the cop who stole his last penny, the seemingly helpful man who turned out to be a sex trafficker and tried to force her into prostitution, the delinquents who beat them up for not having more pesos to be robbed of.

None of these people chose to be sent back to Mexico. Most were not even told what was happening nor were they allowed to make their case for asylum. They don't understand the process that

will determine their future lives and safety because no-one understands it. With every rule change and court challenge, it changes. Orderly border enforcement doesn't exist, the court system is overwhelmed and confused, respect for human rights is wishful thinking. The dedicated and beleaguered corps of lawyers trying to assist the migrants don't understand what's going on, nor do the US officials required to enforce the law, and much less the migrants themselves, who suffer a constant chain of victimization from one country to the next.

Trump's offensive against asylum has been relentless over the past weeks. On July 26, Guatemala's president, Jimmy Morales—a comedian accused of corruption whose term ends in January—accepted Trump's Safe Third Country proposal. Guatemala's government also signed under threat, this time of taxing remittances as well as imposing tariffs. The agreement with Guatemala is utterly absurd—it would require Guatemala to try to force Hondurans and Salvadorans to seek asylum there when the majority of apprehensions at the US border are Guatemalans. People flee Guatemala, they don't seek asylum there. Besides that, the country's Constitutional Court already ruled that such an agreement violated the country's constitutional procedures, making the signature not only stupid but illegal. Both leading candidates for the presidency have stated explicitly that they would not accept a Third Country agreement with the United States.

On the domestic front, the attack on asylum began early in the administration. A year ago, then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced that domestic violence and gang violence would no longer be criteria for asylum. These are the principal reasons for fleeing Honduras and El Salvador. A federal court permanently blocked that move, which would have meant the expedited removal of people facing death threats, noting that it violated the Immigration and Nationality Act, the Refugee Act,

and the Administrative Procedure Act. In another “because-I-say-so” ruling, on July 29, 2019, current Attorney General William Barr ordered that immediate family members are not “a particular social group” eligible for asylum protection. His ruling means that any claim involving credible fear as an immediate family member would be thrown out. Rights groups pointed out that families are, in fact, a universally recognized “social group” and that threats that extend to the family are very common and potentially fatal. Moreover, women and children would face heightened risks since they are often threatened as an extension of male violence. Completely absent from the calculation is the failure of the governments of Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala to protect their citizens, a failure that is deepened by how the U.S. government consistently rewards repressive governments that impose violence, patriarchy, impunity and predatory capitalism—all major reasons people flee.

There's no way the agreement with Guatemala or the rule change on migrants coming through Mexico will hold, and the Barr ruling has been challenged in court and will likely be struck down as well, but we can see a pattern emerging. The pattern goes beyond the longterm white supremacist goal to eliminate Latinos in U.S. society. All these measures, whether implemented or not, give Trump points on his anti-immigrant agenda. The quintessential wedge issue is already at the center of mobilizing his base and sowing chaos and distraction as the preconditions for re-election. The Trump administration isn't getting rid of asylum seekers; it's fanning fear of them. By keeping alive his racist image of repelling the hordes at the border, the president is feeding his narrative as the defender of white America. Trump needs refugees and asylum seekers so he can demand more money and more media coverage to stop them.

This goes to the fundamental conundrum that many of us who work on

immigration and asylum rights have identified—if the point is to keep people from coming to the U.S., why does the Trump administration continue to exacerbate the conditions that cause them to flee? It maintains support for the illegitimate government of Juan Orlando Hernandez in Honduras and for corruption in the region, continues policies of repression and displacement, and finances hardline counternarcotics and anti-gang measures that dramatically increase violence and lawlessness. These policies didn't begin with Trump, but have been hardened under his administration, and they send thousands of people running for the border.

From the standpoint of solutions, nothing about this makes any sense. A government genuinely concerned about immigration would assure first that all its residents can live safely and productively within its borders and that families are together to raise healthy future generations. It would take rational stock of labor demands and future labor demands to guarantee employment with full labor rights that don't pit immigrant workers against citizens to benefit bosses. It would cast out the shadows that cause people to shun cooperation with police and that force them to live in fear. It would review and reform foreign policy where countries subject to high levels of US influence and intervention have become nations that exile their own citizens. It would bolster an asylum system that follows internationally sanctioned procedures, granting due process and giving special attention to the needs and rights of children. It would end the imponderable cruelty of “death as deterrence” and abolish once and for all physical and psychological torture of people seeking protection. **CP**

**O**n 23 and 26 May the European Union held elections for the European parliament with a five-year mandate until 2024. The social, economic and political background deserves special attention though most headlines were about Brexit with its interminable negotiations and declarations ending with the resignation of Theresa May. But it wasn't the end. Boris Johnson has now replaced her, stacked his cabinet with leavers, and the Brexit show will still drag on for months. One lesson from this debacle is that what we call "democracy" isn't about the people's will but the will of the rich and powerful. In other words, socialism is inherent to democracy.

The EU's economic situation is far from good. The much-vaunted recovery hasn't materialized. According to a recent J. P. Morgan report, the Purchasing Managers Indexes (PMIs)—opinion polls on present and future purchases and sales and a good indicator of real production—show a mere 2.5% of annual growth in world GDP when a global recession is defined by growth dropping below this threshold. In the Eurozone, the latest data situate growth in the EU in 2019 at 1.3%, and 1.6% for 2020. Contrary to expectations, the price of money won't be going up at the end of the year: while the price of money or the official interest rate in the United States is 2.5%, the figure for the EU is 0% and this is expected to hold until halfway through 2020.

At a European Central Bank (ECB) policy meeting on June 5-6, its president Mario Draghi announced that the plan was to stimulate the Eurozone economy through interest-rate cuts or relaunching a €2.6 trillion (\$2.9 trillion) bond-buying program, a decision that, by extending the present ultra-expansive phase of monetary policy known as quantitative easing, flew in the face of previous suppositions about EU monetary policy. After November 1, Christine Lagarde will take over from Draghi. Not that it will make any difference. The private banks in Europe,

as elsewhere in the world, control the monetary offer. Lagarde or Draghi, the banks win.

So what lies behind these figures of a slowdown in GDP growth rates? To begin with, European Investment Bank data—from 2007 with respect to 2015—sum up the situation. The Gini Index went from 33 to 33.5, the population at risk of poverty from 16.6% to 17.3%, the working poor from 8.3% to 9.5% (but in Romania, the figure is 15% and in Spain 13%). The participation of salaries in the national income of almost all the EU states has dropped by comparison with capital. The quality of employment is much worse than it was before the onset of the crisis in 2007.

So how did things come to such a pass? The EU is evidently undemocratic because its institutions are structured to give political power to unelected, unaccountable officials who rubber-stamp national decisions made by politicians, technocrats, and bankers, and thereby undermine mass participation. Its regulatory framework, with which only large companies with big budgets can comply, protects and favors multinationals at the expense of small and medium-sized enterprises. Its four key institutions, the European Commission, European Parliament, European Council and the Court of Justice of the EU are suppos-

edly separate but, in effect, they all come together in representing the big multinationals. And real power lies with the EU Commission, not the parliament. As for the Court of Justice, it ignored the rule of law and allowed the bailouts even though the treaties stated that bailouts were illegal. But the Eurozone was failing and needed propping up so the bailouts went through.

Not only does the EU override democratic decision-making processes in its member states but, in these member states, politics is throttled by the iron fist of oligarchies. "Crony capitalism" used to refer to Asian countries like the Philippines, and "oligarchs" was often preceded by the qualifier "Russian" but one thing this crisis has made clear is that the western "democracies" (how long can we keep using this word?) are riddled with both. When a former chief economist at the IMF says that the US is in the hands of a financial oligarchy that helped to create the crisis and then blocked appropriate policy responses to it, we can be sure that things are serious.

A blog by French economist Nicolas Véron, written ten years ago, gives a good idea of the longstanding rot at the heart of European democracy. Here are a few tidbits: it was the City of London that shaped the Blair-Brown regulatory approach; the government

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## EUROZONE NOTES

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# Democracy, Oligarchy and Political Prisoners in a Degenerate Europe

BY DANIEL RAVENTÓS AND JULIE WARK



bailout in Ireland was a bankers' self-preservation feat; German politicians and financial elite are fused in the banking system; Spain's savings banks created the country's catastrophic real estate bubble; in France bosses of financial firms have been giving influential policy advice throughout the crisis (and the country, of course, now has a former Rothschild investment banker as president); in Central Europe, "oligarchization" of the media is well established; and Orbán's thorough dismantling of Hungary's system of checks and balances has only been possible because of his wealthy cronies. Now, ten years on, we have the former Austrian Vice Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache plotting in Ibiza with the alleged niece of a Russian oligarch to provide his Freedom Party (FPÖ) with flattering news coverage in exchange for lucrative government contracts. Since EU member states can manage their own media laws, Brussels can only make delicately phrased protests because, at the bottom, the loyalties are the same. In theory, EU member states with less than satisfactory democratic standards can be sanctioned. And pigs might fly. Even if EU institutions are theoretically a restraint, the national oligarchies can and do impose their will through their own and other governments. In short, Europe, more oligarchy than democracy, is rotten to the core.

This was the unpromising backdrop to the European elections a couple of months ago. Of the 751 seats, 179 went to the European People's Party (PPE, called "center-right", but very right); 153 to the centrist Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D); 105 to the center-right Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE); 69 to the progressive Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA); 63 to the right-wing Eurosceptic, European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR); and 58 to the extreme right of ECR. It's not worth going into detail about changes vis-à-vis previous elections. The winners are more or less the

same people who imposed the austerity policy of recent years in order to benefit the big banks. The European Union was, and is after these May elections, a bureaucratic apparatus serving European oligarchies and structured around German-French hegemony. The left has been deactivated and has barely responded to the neoliberal European project, the main instrument of which has been the Fiscal Stability Treaty which came into force in 2013. There's a certain amount of magical thinking that leaving the EU in the name of national sovereignty could be a new way to building up strength but, with the weakness and disarray of the workers' and social movements, this playing field has become fertile ground for the populist right. So far, the left hasn't come up with any new ideas.

"Local" matters here in Catalonia shed some light on the ill-health of EU democracy. The EU elections were held with Catalan candidates who are elected to political office but also political prisoners. Sure, some people might think this is parish-pump stuff, a mere anecdote. But this is a question of human rights, which are supposed to be universal. And, however much some people might wish, they're not "cultural" or gender- or wealth-based, or anything of the sort. If human rights aren't universal, they're the privilege of some.

These elections were held with a democratically elected Catalan president (Carles Puigdemont) forced into exile under threat of imprisonment, together with several ministers of his government. His vice-president, Oriol Junqueras, was elected to the European parliament last May but can't represent anyone as he's been languishing in prison for nearly two years. Many people around the world know about the brutality of police acting like a true occupying power on October 1, 2017 against peaceful citizens exercising their right to vote on Catalan self-determination. Soon the Spanish Supreme (i.e. Kangaroo) Court will decide the fate of the emphatically non-violent Catalan

political prisoners after several months of hearings where they're accused of rebellion and sedition. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention published a seventeen-page report at the end of May criticizing the arbitrary preventive detention of the political prisoners. Signed by the Working Group president, José Antonio Guevara Bermúdez, the report finds that their imprisonment violates the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, accordingly, asks the Spanish government to take "immediate" measures, among them freeing the prisoners, paying financial compensation to those affected, and an exhaustive independent inquiry.

The Spanish prime minister, the social-democrat Pedro Sánchez, was offended by the report, as was his Foreign Minister Josep Borrell. A vignette about the latter says much about a country that chooses to be represented abroad by such a man. At the end of 2018, at the Complutense University in Madrid, Borrell declared that, "The United States was born from independence almost without history. The only thing they did was to kill a couple of Indians. Apart from that, it was very easy." Meanwhile, the avowedly pro-Franco party VOX with twenty-four seats (out of 350) in the Spanish parliament praised King Felipe VI (son of Juan Carlos, aka the elephant killer, who Franco imposed as his successor) for the speech he made two days after the police charges on the Catalan referendum day, in which hundreds of people were injured and some seriously. Felipe VI deplored the "violence" of the politicians and population who made the referendum on Catalan independence possible! Enough said.

Then there's the matter of Franco's corpse lying in atrocious splendor in the Valley of the Fallen, the regime monument to fascism constructed with the slave labor of republican political prisoners. In June this year a Supreme Court decision quashed an attempt to exhume the body—a symbolic gesture to help the country grapple with its violent past—and recognized Franco as

Head of State as of October 1, 1936, just weeks after his uprising against the Second Republic which, with the support of Hitler and Mussolini, set off the Civil War that lasted until 1939. Franco cast a long shadow that still darkens our days in 2019. And Europe's dark past lurks all around the continent, straining to rise again. Did the EU protest about the Catalan political prisoners or dead Franco's retrospective head-of-statehood? Of course, it didn't. Spain is just a symptom of the democratically threadbare, elitist, oligarchic, rightwards shifting European Union whose parliament was "renewed" at the end of May. **CP**

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## Trump's War on Science Return to the Regulatory Dark Ages

BY MELVIN GOODMAN

Donald Trump and Michael Pence are leading the "science denial" movement in the United States. In addition to dismissing climate change as a "Chinese hoax," Trump argues that vaccines cause autism. Recent outbreaks of mumps and measles in the United States are linked in part to those Americans who choose to withhold vaccines from children. Pence denies evolution as a concept.

Trump's denial of the harm from human-generated emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases is legendary. In June 2019, he told Britain's Prince Charles, a knowledgeable environmentalist, that "there's a change in weather, and I think it changes both ways." Trump doubled down on his ignorance by explaining that "it used to be called global warming. That wasn't working. Then it was called climate change. Now it's actually called extreme weather, because with extreme weather, you can't miss." Previously, Trump professed his love for dirty coal, and argued that raking forests would prevent wildfires and windmills cause cancer.

The renunciation of science is central to Trump's war on fact-finding. It challenges the U.S. reputation for scientific research on every aspect of medicine and health. An attack on research is an attack on science and the scientists responsible for important breakthroughs in every aspect of human existence. With the "deconstruction of the administrative state" including a war on science, the United States turns its back on progress.

The first indicator of Trump's opposition to science was his appointment of climate deniers to key positions: Rex Tillerson to the Department of State; Scott Pruitt to the Environmental Protection Agency; Ryan Zinke to the Department of the Interior, and Rick Perry to the Department of Energy. Pruitt opposed environmental legislation, previously suing the EPA to reverse numerous regulations; Perry was ignorant of most energy issues. He did not know that the central work of his

department was managing nuclear programs and nuclear weapons, not the extraction of oil and gas. In this group of troglodytes, only Perry remained in the Cabinet at the end of Trump's second year in office, but the successors to the others were similarly anti-intellectual and anti-science.

Tillerson had been the CEO of ExxonMobile, known for covering up scientific data on climate change and denying the fact of man-made global warming. Tillerson and ExxonMobil argued for years that humans had no impact on climate change and that, even if they had, nothing could be done about it. Tillerson opposed carbon credits, a system designed to cap the emission of greenhouse gases.

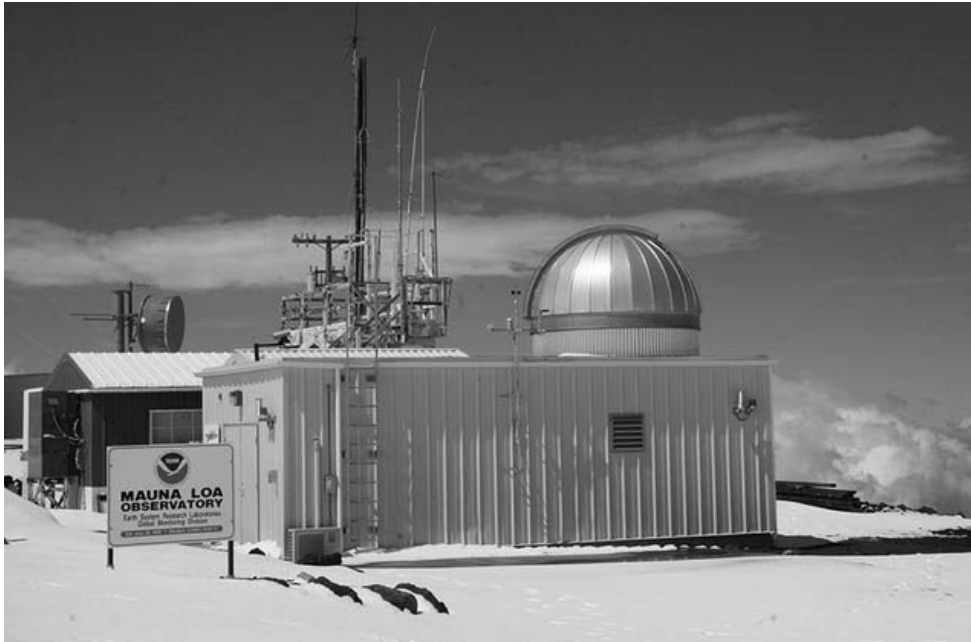
Trump's supporters argue that climate scientists are frauds; that climate science was fabricated for political reasons; and that climate research was a gravy train for academicians to gain government funding. They charge environmentalists with using land, air, and water regulations as political tools to advance a socialist agenda and create a global green mafia to fund like-minded academicians and businessmen. Trump's war against science includes heavy restrictions on the release of official information through the Freedom of Information Act.

No American president in history has demonstrated such disdain for science and technology and the role of the Science Advisor as Donald Trump. The advisor is essential to the president for gathering relevant information and evaluating conflicting advice from senior officers and Cabinet secretaries, and for formulating evidence-based options for decision making. In the recent past, the Science Advisor was essential to decision making on 9/11; the subsequent anthrax attacks; the Fukushima nuclear nightmare in 2011; the Ebola and Zika outbreaks; and various cyber-attacks.

Trump delayed appointing a director to the White House Office of Science and Technology, the science adviser to the president. Prior to eventually naming Kelvin Droegemeier, a meteorologist, the president withdrew the United States from the Paris climate accord and entered into negotiations with North Korea on nuclear matters without science advisers. Droegemeier is a distinguished researcher in his field, but narrowly based for a White House position that deals with biological, environmental, and physical sciences. Until Trump entered the White House, the record for presidents without a science adviser belonged to George W. Bush, who went nine months without one.

The Office of Science and Technology Policy was authorized by Congress to provide "independent, expert judgment and assistance on policy matters that require accurate assessments of complex scientific and technology activities and policies among federal agencies." President Bush's advisor was John Marburger, the Director of Brookhaven National Laboratory. President Obama's advisor was John Holdren, a physicist and energy policy expert from Harvard. Holdren and Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz, a nuclear physicist from M.I.T., played key roles in developing the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran.

There was no input from a science advisor on the 2019 budget, which listed draconian cuts at the EPA, the Department of Energy, the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The government shutdown in December 2018 harmed scientific research. The shutdown closed laboratories throughout the country; compromised scientific conferences that depend on federal participation; and interrupted the planning and flow of resources to the scientific community. The last time the government conducted a concerted and well-funded effort to silence scientific



*Atmospheric carbon observatory at Mauna Loa, Hawaii. Photo: NOAA.*

research was when the Reagan administration tried to block the link between cigarettes and cancer.

Since his first days in office, Trump strived to eliminate federal regulations, particularly environmental rules that he believed burdened the fossil fuel industry. The research of numerous law schools concluded that more than 70 environmental rules created by President Obama are threatened. Oil and gas companies no longer have to report methane emissions; the use of hydrofluorocarbons, a powerful greenhouse gas, is no longer prohibited; coal companies can dump mining debris into local streams; and certain uranium mines no longer have to protect groundwater.

Trump's climate deniers made the United States an environmental "pariah state" in a global community committed to addressing climate change. The United States is the only nation outside the Paris climate accord; even Nicaragua and Syria—the two original outliers—have joined. Nicaragua stayed out of the accord initially because it felt the agreement didn't go far enough.

After Trump's withdrawal from the Paris accord, France announced a program called "Make Our Planet Great Again" in order to recruit the best American scientists to France. The program has attracted 24 scientists from the United States and elsewhere to conduct research in France, including Ben Sanderson of the National Center for Atmospheric Research. Sanderson received a \$1.8 million, five-year grant to work for Meteo-France, the national weather forecaster.

The Trump Administration's assault on the EPA and its scientific foundation is unprecedented, a perfect example of Trump's blaming liberals for allowing environmentalists to pass

regulations attacking free enterprise. Pruitt targeted the EPA's authority to regulate toxic mercury pollution, smog, carbon emissions from power plants and the quality of wetlands and other waters. He immediately initiated a dozen roll-backs of regulations from the Obama era. Pruitt's attacks on the budget and the scientific framework of the EPA ensure the return of illness and disease related to pollution. William Reilly, who headed the EPA for President George H.W. Bush, remarked that Pruitt's tolerance for "more exposure to pollution is altogether different from anything we are used to."

Representative Frank Pallone (D-NJ), the leading Democrat on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, noted that his "biggest concern...which runs across the whole spectrum, is the role of science." Pallone noted that Pruitt "wants to put science under the rug, make decisions that are not scientifically based. Get rid of anyone who is scientifically oriented." Pruitt excluded EPA's scientists from the decision making process. He convened a team of researchers to test the scientific premise of human-caused climate change, including a "red team-blue team" exercise to challenge mainstream climate science. Andrew Dessler, a professor of atmospheric science at Texas A&M University called the exercise "fundamentally a dumb idea. It's like a red team-blue team exercise about whether gravity exists."

Pruitt treated the EPA as an unconstitutional agency that shouldn't exist and, as a result, more than 700 people left the agency. The scientific community within EPA has been hardest hit, with many scientists being offered buyouts. As a result, there are now 14,000 staff members at EPA, the lowest number



since the last year of the Reagan Administration in the 1980s. Political appointees are running the agency, and “experts” from industries EPA is supposed to regulate have replaced academic experts. With the exception of President Reagan’s appointees, previous EPA administrators—both Democrats and Republicans—created a balanced participation from industry, environmental organizations, and the citizenry to improve the environment.

The forced resignation of Pruitt in July 2018, and the naming of Andrew Wheeler as acting administrator of EPA meant that Trump’s war against the environment continued in less abrasive hands. Wheeler, the deputy to Pruitt, lobbied for energy and mining companies for the past decade, serving as the vice president of the Washington Coal Club. Wheeler has continued the unraveling of federal restrictions on greenhouse-gas emissions and toxic-waste discharge from coal-fired power plants. As Senator Edward Markey (D-MA) said, the Trump administration was merely “trading one fossil fuel friend for another.”

A year after Pruitt’s resignation, Wheeler reversed Obama’s efforts to reduce pollution from coal plants by allowing such plants to remain open longer and to ignore efforts to reduce carbon emissions. The new ruling allows states to determine how far to scale back emissions, or not to do so at all.

Pruitt abandoned key regulations on proven carcinogens without explanation. An ugly example of the EPA’s willingness to allow the use of a dangerous chemical involves the pesticide chlorpyrifos, a chemical developed as a nerve gas by Nazi Germany and linked to lung cancer and Parkinson’s disease in adults. It can cause brain damage and reduce I.Q. levels in children. The EPA banned chlorpyrifos for most indoor residential use in 2000, and planned to ban the chemical for agricultural and outdoor use in the spring of 2017, but the Trump administration rejected the ban. The pesticide is produced by Dow Chemical Company, which donated \$1 million for Trump’s inauguration.

In the wake of heavy lobbying from the chemical industry, the Trump administration undercuts the way the government determines health and safety risks associated with dangerous chemicals. A law in the final year of the Obama administration required EPA to evaluate hundreds of potentially toxic chemicals to determine if they should face new restrictions or be removed from the market. The EPA decided to exclude from its calculations any potential exposure caused by the presence of chemical substances in the air, water, or ground in order to focus exclusively on direct contact with substances in the workplace. The improper disposal of chemicals, which can contaminate drinking water, was not a factor in EPA’s decisions.

The EPA is changing the methodology for assessing scientific findings in order to restrict the work of research scientists in writing environmental regulations. In April 2018, EPA announced a regulation to restrict the use of scientific studies for the development of policy. No longer would the EPA be

allowed to use scientific research based on raw data that is not available publicly for industry groups to examine. Regulators will not be able to use seminal environmental research that links air pollution to premature death or that measures human exposure to pesticides and other chemicals because such information is based on personal health information protected by privacy rights or agreements of confidentiality. This policy will permanently weaken the agency’s ability to protect public health.

Pruitt’s major effort to weaken the Obama-era regulations on water pollution took place in June 2018, when he narrowed the interpretation of the Clean Water Act to prevent regulation of seasonal tributaries, streams, and wetlands that flow into larger bodies of water such as the Chesapeake Bay. The Obama rule prevented farmers from dumping chemical fertilizers and pesticides into such waters. The Pruitt rule would benefit golf course owners and real estate developers such as the Trump Organization, which owns more than a dozen golf resorts in the United States.

Pruitt challenged the fuel economy standards for automobiles, compromising one of Obama’s singular achievements. Wheeler is dismantling measures to create standards for tailpipe emissions. These decisions could lead to one set of rules for such states as California that have stringent requirements and another set for the rest of the country. According to the director of Harvard’s environmental economics program, Robert Stavins, the “result will be more gas-guzzling vehicles on the road, greater total gasoline consumption and a significant increase in carbon dioxide emissions.”

California received a waiver from the Clean Air Act in 1970 that allowed it to enforce stronger air pollution standards than those set by the federal government, a holdover from the state’s history of setting its own air pollution regulations before the federal government got into the game. Twelve other states representing 40 percent of the domestic auto market, including New York, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania, have followed California’s lead. The Obama administration toughened tailpipe pollution standards to match California’s.

The Trump administration is rolling back efficiency rules for cars, known as the Corporate Average Fuel Economy Standard or CAFE standard. Part of Obama’s legacy, the CAFE standard would have required automakers to nearly double the average fuel economy of new cars and trucks to 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025. In April 2018, Pruitt weakened Obama’s stringent vehicle fuel economy standards that was to double the average fuel economy of new cars, SUVs and light trucks.

Not even major automakers are lobbying to lower the CAFE standards. The president of Ford Motor Company, Executive Chairman Bill Ford, said that he supports “increasing clean car standards through 2025” and is “not asking for a rollback. Honda Motors issued a separate statement in favor of flexibility to address the problem of California, but “without a reduction in overall stringency.”



The Department of Energy, like EPA, has downgraded the work of its scientists, leaving Rick Perry to make decisions on the development and safeguarding of nuclear weaponry for which he is totally unqualified. In the past, secretaries of energy had the support of presidential science advisors, who were typically physicists who could address the sophisticated problems of nuclear weaponry and technology. President Trump's reckless decision in 2017 to decertify Iran's compliance with the Iran nuclear accord ignored advice from the scientific and intelligence communities.

Perry is doing his best to cut regulations, to end support for renewable subsidies, and to revive the coal industry. There are nuclear and coal plants that are unable to compete with renewables and natural gas, but Perry is doing his best to keep them open. Perry endorsed Pruitt's "red team-blue team" idea in order to weaken regulations, although he has not been as aggressive as Pruitt in politicizing the department.

No government agency is immune from the Trump administration's attack on science. In June 2019, the Department of Agriculture announced it was moving two key research offices responsible for projects involving climate control, nutrition, and food safety out of Washington, DC. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue's plan was part of the Trump administration's effort to suppress scientific data, particularly on climate change. The move to Kansas City would weaken the scientific foundation of policy decisions. Many top economists and scientists threatened to resign rather than leave Washington. The Union of Concerned Scientists warned that moving the research services would lead to the politicization of a key function of the department.

The Department of Agriculture also buried dozens of studies on climate change that document damage to the farming community and stopped funding research into the damaging impact of higher temperatures on crops and health. The studies didn't focus on the causes of global warming, but merely examined the wide-ranging effects of rising carbon dioxide. A key study dealt with the loss of vitamins in rice due to a carbon-rich environment, a serious health concern for the 600 million people whose diet consists mainly of rice. Perdue has retaliated against the department's economists whose findings contradicted administration policies. Moreover, the Trump administration threatened to lay off 150 officers at the Office of Personnel Management if Congress tried to block Perdue's plans.

The appointment of Zinke to run the Department of the Interior was another blow to environmental science. His first act as secretary set the tone as he removed a colorful picture of a western landscape from the Bureau of Land Management's website and replaced it with a black wall of coal. Zinke opened public lands to extract oil, gas, and coal, and sidetracked the examination of health risks to fossil fuel workers. He announced the largest Gulf lease for oil and gas exploration in U.S. history: 77 million acres on the east coast from New Jersey to Florida.

Trump campaigned on the basis of "drill, baby, drill," and Zinke opened large tracts of previously protected land to coal excavation in the West. The 2018 tax bill paved the way for additional leases for exploration; the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge was the first victim. In expanding offshore drilling, Zinke gave a political exemption to Florida, a swing state, helping Republican Governor Rick Scott defeat Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL) in the November 2018 election. Zinke's home state of Montana was also exempted.

In May 2018, Zinke's National Park Service blocked rules from the Obama era that prevented hunting on federal land in Alaska that scientists and conservationists called cruel and inhumane. The new rulings allowed bear cubs to be killed alongside their mothers; the hunting of wolves and their pups in their dens; and the targeting of animals from airplanes and snowmobiles. The National Parks Conservation Association called the proposal a "shocking reversal of common-sense wildlife management."

In 2017, Zinke directed the U.S. Geological Survey to delete language from a news release that discussed the role of climate change in raising the level of the Earth's oceans. It removed two top climate experts at Montana's Glacier National Park from a delegation scheduled to show Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg a park studded with shrinking glaciers. Several scientists resigned from the department as a result of the actions to compromise research, creating an additional brain drain of American scientists from the government to private agencies.

Early in his administration, Trump eliminated policies and institutions designed to assess the impact of climate on infrastructure planning. In March 2017, he revoked the climate guidance of the National Environmental Policy Act, which instructed agencies to review the impact of climate on the construction of bridges, roads, pipelines and other projects. In the summer of 2017, key departments in the National Institutes of Health were instructed to drop references to "climate change" from NIH's website.

The disastrous appointments of Zinke and Pruitt to the Interior Department and EPA, respectively, were reminiscent of Reagan's appointments of James Watt and Anne Gorsuch Buford to those institutions. Watt was an unabashedly pro-industry voice determined to loosen government control over public lands. He started out by promising that "we will mine more, drill more, and cut more timber," and he offered up the entire U.S. coastline to oil and gas leases. Watt, a loose-lipped racist and political liability, was forced to resign. In two years, Buford, the mother of Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch, cut the EPA budget by 21 percent and staff by 26 percent, which meant a massive retreat on all environmental programs.

Trump's attack on science and fact-finding is unprecedented in a country that prides itself on innovation and development. The United States leads the global community in Nobel prizes for science and math, and no country has registered more patents for research and the application of theoretical ideas.

U.S. educational and research institutions are some of the finest in the world; they attract foreign scientists to their classrooms and laboratories.

The Union of Concerned Scientists conducted a survey in 2018 of federal scientists from 16 government agencies. With more than 4,200 responses, the survey concluded that the Trump administration is doing its best to stymie scientific analysis. Major areas of scientific inquiry have been compromised by hiring freezes, staff cuts, and budgetary pressures. Half of all respondents reported that political interests are hindering the ability to base policy decisions on science, and that self-censorship is worsening the problem.

Any weakening of the role of science in government will hurt our most vulnerable citizens. Low-income populations are the hardest hit when regulatory policies are compromised or existing rules and standards are weakened. Obama's Stream Protection Rule, designed to protect people living near mountaintop-removal coal mining operations from toxins in their drinking water, was reversed soon after Trump was inaugurated.

Trump's targets have included the judiciary, the intelligence community, the press, and public service. In targeting science, Trump has created an era of anti-enlightenment; it is up to the scientific community to lead the opposition to his carnage. Science is the central source for truth, and Trump's war on truth is destructive. When the Trump era ends, a massive rebuilding job will be needed that will be costly and time-consuming. **CP**

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## Bernie's Choice Bombers or Butter? Sanders and the F-35

BY DAVE LINDORFF

Sen. Bernie Sanders' enters the race for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination this year with an inspiring new focus on attacking not just Pentagon waste, but the broader issue of American militarism and the sheer size of US military budget.

But the elephant in Sanders' otherwise solidly progressive campaign this year is his bizarrely dogged support for the stationing of a squadron of 18 F-35As (at over \$100 million per plane part of the most expensive weapons system in history), at the civilian airport in Burlington, VT. There they will be flown by the Vermont Air National Guard, replacing the unit's aging F-16 fighters.

Sanders, like his fellow Vermont Senator Patrick Leahy, has long offered this moral support for the cost-overrun, overpromised and problem-plagued F-35 program, often described by its critics as an epic "boondoggle," a plane that is

supposed to meet the requirements of Air Force, Navy, Army and Marines but that does none of them well, and that in total is estimated to cost over \$1.5 trillion (so far) over the plane's useful life. Sanders defends his unstinting support of the F-35 basing in his state by arguing that whatever its cost or dubious performance, it is a "done deal," and that if it's going to be based anywhere in the US, he wants it to be in Vermont.

At a Q&A session in the neighboring (and first primary-holding) state of New Hampshire back in 2014, when he was already testing the waters for a 2016 presidential run, Sanders explained the classic bread&butter vs. bombs dilemma saying: "In very clever ways, the military-industrial complex puts plants all over the country, so that if people try to cut back on our weapons system what they're saying is you're going to be losing jobs in that area... We've got to have the courage to understand that we cannot afford a lot of wasteful, unnecessary weapons systems, and I hope we can do that."

A good soundbite on the campaign trail to be sure, but here's a case where Sanders himself is succumbing to that very Military-Industrial-Complex tactic he criticizes. Instead of "having the courage" to flat out oppose the F-35, he's supporting basing it in his home state and citing of the "hundreds of jobs" that the plane will allegedly keep in Burlington, or that will allegedly be lost if the plane doesn't go there!

The F-35A basing issue is generating a lot of anger in Vermont, especially in the Burlington area where Sanders got his start in politics as mayor. The City Councils of Burlington, which owns the airport, and of South Burlington, where the airport is located and where the F-35 squadron will be based starting this September, as well as of adjacent Winooski, which town the plane will fly over (or perhaps crash into) during takeoffs or landings, have all passed resolutions opposing the Vermont Guard's getting the new plane. So has, most recently, the Vermont State Senate, which resoundingly passed a resolution in May opposing the basing of a nuclear-capable fighter-bomber in the state.

One critic of basing F-35s in Vermont is Roseanne Grieco, who earlier this year lost a three-way race to win appointment by the state legislature to head the Vermont National Guard. A one-time Catholic novitiate, Grieco left the convent for the Air Force, landing a job at the Pentagon, where somewhat incongruously she became a nuclear strategist, rising to the rank of colonel before retiring in 2011. She says that the F-35A plane version destined for Vermont is not just a fighter as Sanders claims, but it part of the Pentagon's strategic first-strike nuclear strategy.

Grieco notes that the "Block 3F" version of the plane which the Vermont Guard is slated to get starting this September, will eventually, along with all of the Air Force's F-35A planes, be upgraded to "Block 4" status. This would mean adding software modifications and other fixes she says would allow pilots of the plane to train for carrying and delivering two new B61-12 precision-guided nuclear bombs specially designed to

be carried by this plane. She warns darkly that the new jet is designed to use its purported radar invisibility to deliver these bombs—whose power can be adjusted to produce a nuclear explosion ranging between 0.3 to as much as 50 kilotons or in other words more than twice the size of the Nagasaki bomb—as part of a “first strike” on an adversary (the US has never renounced a first-strike policy). For that reason, she says basing the plane in South Burlington automatically puts a nuclear bulls-eye on the state’s largest metro area in the event of any serious nuclear war crisis.

“I don’t think most Vermonters know that their state’s Air National Guard pilots could end up training for a first-strike nuclear attack on Russia, or for dropping a small nuke on some non-nuclear nation,” she says.

Dan Grazier, a 10-year Marine combat veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, is now a defense researcher with the Center for Defense Information at the Project on Government Oversight (POGO). Currently POGO’s expert on the F-35 program, Grazier says, “Whatever Sanders and others supporting the basing of F-35s in Burlington may say, the F-35A was designed from the beginning to be a nuclear-capable bomber, and the official Pentagon plan is for every F-35A to eventually be upgraded to Block 4.” That, he says, means new software and the wiring in of a cockpit keyboard for arming the two specially built new B61-12 nukes designed to be carried by the plane will be installed.

The key point, he says, is that all F35As—even those already off the assembly line in earlier versions—will eventually become so-called “Dual Capable Aircraft” (DCA), meaning not just interceptors but bombers ready to carry those nukes and to deliver them as part of any all-out strategic first strike on an enemy with advanced radars. (That would be Russia or China.)

The “Block 4” planes would not attack from Vermont, of course, both Grieco and Grazier agree, but would be available to be deployed on short notice to bases in eastern Europe along with their Guard pilots, where they would pick up their weapons and be ready for any planned attack or for nuclear blackmail purposes.

The problem, Grieco notes, is that a potential enemy seeking to pre-empt such an attack or attack threat wouldn’t care whether or not nuclear bombs were being stored in Burlington. “They’d want to blow up the delivery system—the planes and

pilots—not the bombs,” she explains. “That’s how nuclear war strategy works.”

Grieco is supported in her view of the F-35A as a first strike weapon and as a weapon that makes Burlington a nuclear target by Pierre Sprey, a nuclear strategy expert and long-time Pentagon whistleblower. “It is a first-strike weapon,” he says, “not a plane for defending the country’s borders.” Sprey adds, “The B61-12 is also about making use of nuclear weapons in a conventional war.” He explains that the eventually nuclear-capable version of the F-35A slated to equip Vermont’s Air National Guard unit is “integral to a first strike” in the Pentagon’s strategic planning.

Asked to explain new staunchly anti-war candidate Sanders’ seemingly incongruous support for basing the F-35A in his home state, a press spokesman in Sanders’ Senate Office emailed us a note declaring the senator’s “serious concerns

about cost over-runs, delays and the overall cost of the F-35.” The spokesman also wrote that Sanders “not only would strenuously oppose basing nuclear weapons in Vermont, but he supports ending the F-35’s nuclear mission entirely.”

In fact, though, Sanders has been either less than candid in his support for the Vermont Air National Guard’s being assigned an F-35A squadron, or is ill-informed himself about that squadron’s potential

future nuclear mission. In a memo he sent in early May to the state’s restive legislators (a copy was emailed to the author by his Senate office), Sanders included a series of Q&As intended to placate those concerned about any future tactical or strategic nuclear role for the planes.

That Q&A list, which Sanders’ Senate press office claimed was compiled by the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force and “forwarded to us” by Capt. Mikel R. Arcovitch, public affairs officer for the Vermont National Guard, includes the following five questions and answers:

Q: What variant of the F-35A will the Air National Guards’ 158th Fighter Wing in Burlington, VT receive?

A: The 158th Fighter Wing will receive F-35A Block 3F jets.

Q: Are F-35A Block 3F jets nuclear capable?

A: No

Q: Will the F-35A jets in Burlington, VT be nuclear capable?

A: No. The Burlington jets will not have the hardware necessary for the nuclear mission.

Q: Would the Air Force ever add hardware to the F-35As in



*F-35 in flight. Photo: DoD.*

Burlington, VT to make them nuclear capable?

A: There are no plans to add the hardware necessary to make the Burlington, VT F-35As nuclear capable.

Q: Will the F-35A in Burlington, VT be nuclear capable once fitted with block 4 upgrades?

A: No. Only units with a nuclear mission will be given the hardware necessary to carry nuclear weapons. The Burlington jets, as they will be configured, will not be nuclear capable.

Actually, however, that memo, originally drawn up by the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Finance, and was obtained back in February through a FOIA request submitted to the Pentagon by a Burlington group including Grieco, who notes that some additional questions and answers appear to have been “conveniently omitted” from the version of the memo Sanders sent to state legislators, while others were subtly altered. Missing or altered were the following three Q&As:

Q: Will the F-35 in Burlington, VT receive Block 4 upgrades?

A: Yes, all F-35 Block 3F aircraft will eventually receive block 4 upgrades, however the timing of these upgrades is still being determined.

Q: Would the Air Force ever task Burlington, VT F-35A with the nuclear mission?

A: Currently there are no plans to task the Burlington ANG with the nuclear mission.

Q: What is the process for the Air Force to decide which units are tasked with a nuclear mission?

A: Any decision to assign a unit a nuclear mission would be based on a Combatant Command requirement for such a capability.

As Grieco comments, “Note the wishy-washy wording about whether Burlington would ever get a nuclear mission. The Pentagon says (and they always do) there are no plans currently to give Burlington a nuclear mission. Military plans change all the time though. And since the Air Force stated that Burlington’s F-35 will be upgraded with block 4, it is a very minor step after that to actually give them the ability to deliver the B61-12 (as simple as plugging something in).” She adds, “In military missions, there are never assurances on what could happen in the future.”

POGO’s Grazier adds, “People need to know that the actual planes that will initially get stationed with the Vermont Guard are not always going to be there. Planes and other such military equipment get shuttled around all the time. If these planes go elsewhere for repairs or upgrade, different plans can routinely be sent to replace them.”

And given the Pentagon’s intention to make all Air Force planes into fully “Dual Capable Aircraft,” those replacement planes will be ready to carry nukes.

Sanders’ Senate press office, asked to explain why Vermont legislators were only provided the first five Q&As and not the last two questions and answers, and why other answers were

subtly altered by the Senator’s office, responded only that the clipped memo “as sent is unambiguous that the VT Guard will not have a nuclear mission.”

Technically that is correct, but the subsequent questions excised from what legislators received are ambiguous.

Also misleading is Sanders’ dogged insistence that the F-35A is a fighter and “not a bomber.” As his press office puts it, “We referred accurately to the plane a multi-role fighter (or more accurately a Joint Strike Fighter). That is what the USAF calls it. Multi-role fighters can drop bombs, but they are not bombers.”

Actually, as Kris Osborn explained in a May 2018 article in the National Interest magazine (<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/the-f-35-the-ultimate-nuclear-bomber-25932>) headlined “The F-35, the Ultimate Nuclear Bomber,” the new plane, in accordance with the Pentagon’s 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, is being upgraded to a Block 4 status to make it capable of carrying two B61-12 nuclear bombs—hardly the work of a fighter plane.

The article states:

The text of the administration’s Nuclear Posture Review, released earlier this year, specifically cites the importance of dual-capable aircraft (DCA) in Europe and states that a nuclear-armed F-35 is fundamental to deterring Russia.

“We are committed to upgrading DCA with the nuclear-capable F-35 aircraft. We will work with NATO to best ensure—and improve where needed—the readiness, survivability, and operational effectiveness of DCA based in Europe,” the Nuclear Posture Review states.

Sen. Sanders is using a semantic dodge in an effort to claim the F-35A is “just a fighter.” The Pentagon’s use of the term dual-capable aircraft or DCA is clearly referring to a plane designed to function as a tactical fighter and as a strategic nuclear bomber.

As Sprey says, “Roseanne makes a good point that having these planes based at South Burlington makes the area a strategic target.”

Anti-war activists in Vermont and around the nation puzzled by Sanders’ unwavering support for an F-35A squadron in his home state should note that Sanders has long accepted significant financial support from the arms industry for his campaigns.

According to the Center for Responsive Politics, a campaign funds monitoring organization, during the 2016 presidential primary year Sen. Sanders received and accepted \$96,655 from a Boeing PAC. Boeing has the contract to produce the critical maneuverable tail fin end section of the controversial new B61-12 nuclear weapon designed specifically for delivery by the F-35A. Only four other corporations, Apple, Microsoft, Google and Amazon, contributed more to Sanders’ campaign that year. As for Sen. Leahy, the Center reports that between 2013 and 2018, his largest corporate donor was Lockheed, (<https://www.opensecrets.org/members-of-congress/summary?cid=N00009>



918&cycle=2018) the prime contractor for the F-35, which contributed \$83,300 to his Senate campaign.

The press office for Sen. Patrick Leahy, Vermont's senior senator who reportedly took the lead in pressuring the Air Force to grudgingly chose Burlington over more suitable bases with fewer homes around them in South Carolina or Florida, also declined to comment on this story, not even forwarding requested news releases about his position on the basing as promised. Leahy is a senior member of the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee's subcommittee on defense and is co-chair of the Senate National Guard caucus.

Sen. Sanders is not alone either in Congress or among Democratic presidential hopefuls in talking peace while accepting support from the military industrial complex. Self-proclaimed anti-war candidate Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, for example, decries America's huge military budgets, but has received over \$100,000 through 2016 from the arms industry. Rep. Beto O'Rourke during the 2017-18 election cycle took \$138,000 from arms industry firms (both Gabbard and O'Rourke sat at the time on the House Armed Services Committee). Gabbard is still on it. And even Sen. Warren, who has criticized corporate influence on Pentagon spending, accepted \$36,000 during her last Senate term.

Still, Sanders, as clearly the most progressive candidate running for the Democratic presidential nomination this year, running on a program that advocates all sorts of popular proposals to support the working class, including reining in military spending, has some explaining to do. Consider his Feb. 20 tweet saying, "I'm running for president because a great nation is judged not by how many billionaires and nuclear weapons it has, but by how it treats the most vulnerable—the elderly, the children, our veterans, the sick and the poor." How does he square that with his support for the basing in Vermont of a squadron of planes that are part of a bomber fleet that will suck at least \$1.5 trillion (and counting!) out of the federal budget and help put the nation in an aggressive first-strike nuclear posture towards both Russia and China?

It's hard to imagine the kind of peace transition of the US economy from its current \$1.3-trillion-a-year military obsession that Sanders and other alleged "peace candidates" advocate if even politicians like Sanders can't cut themselves loose from the Pentagon's and arms industries' ubiquitous tentacles.

"We'd hope that the fact that the F-35A is a first-strike nuclear weapon would make Sanders rethink his position on supporting basing it in his state," Medea Benjamin, founder and co-director of Code Pink, tells CounterPunch. "Unfortunately he's as good as it gets [among candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination], but he's not consistent in what he says publicly about military spending and what he supports in his own state." **CP**

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## In Search of a Secure Place to Live Housing is a Human Right

BY LEE BALLINGER

Rents are skyrocketing everywhere as a housing crisis sweeps across America. Its epicenter is California, where I live. Though one in eight Americans is a Californian, one in four homeless Americans live here. Despite what you might hear, it's not because of an inviting climate or easy access to public aid.

California ranks 49th in housing units per capita and, according to Harvard researchers, 30 percent of the state's renters spend more than half their income on housing. The state of California has cut housing funds to one-third of the amount it spent as recently as 2012, even after housing bonds passed last fall.

Thirteen thousand more people become homeless each month in Los Angeles County. Fifteen percent of all college students here are homeless. UCLA has an off-campus homeless shelter and there are faculty at USC who live in homeless shelters. Tens of thousands of people live in their cars. 16,500 homeless encampments in LA have been destroyed in the past five years.

The city of Los Angeles has given over one billion dollars in taxpayer subsidies to luxury hotels since 2006. In that same period of time, the city of LA has given homes to zero homeless people. Since a CD printer can build a house (in 24 hours) for just \$10,000, the money the city donated to hotel developers could have housed 100,000 families instead.

The consequences of neglect can literally be fatal. According to the National Health Care For the Homeless Council, people without shelter have drastically shorter life spans than other Americans, as much as thirty years shorter. The LA Times reports that over the past five years homeless deaths have increased 76 percent in LA County--918 homeless people in 2018 alone. The bodies are also piling up in supposedly safe and suburban Orange County.

Homeless people are very visible in Los Angeles--new encampments pop up daily throughout the city. On the other hand, in Fayette County in eastern Kentucky, the homeless are invisible, according to a report by Mary Meehan in Ohio Valley ReSource. Meehan found that people were living out in the woods in significant numbers, sometimes dying from hepatitis or exposure to the cold. NPR reports that one in three

rural Americans say homelessness is a problem in their communities. Between urban and rural extremes, large numbers of Americans in every state are living in their cars, couch surfing, or sleeping in a corner of the student union.

There is not a single county in the United States where a full-time minimum wage worker can afford the average two-bedroom apartment. Every month in New York City, almost two million people pass most of their income to landlords.

Two years ago, I attended a forum on homelessness at a local church in a poor neighborhood in Los Angeles. A lovely young woman stepped to the mic to give her testimony. She was well-dressed and spoke with confidence. She began by telling the crowd that she had just graduated from college. There was loud applause, a palpable sense that one of our own was on her way up. Then she dropped the other shoe: "I lived in my car the entire time I went to college. I'm still living in my car and have yet to find a job."

"Global real estate is now worth \$217 trillion, thirty-six times the value of all the gold ever mined," writes Sam Stein in *Capital City: Gentrification and the Real Estate State*. "... predatory equity funds scour the globe for 'undervalued' investment opportunities...extremely wealthy and somewhat nervous individuals view property as the safest place to hide their money."

Apartments and houses for rent are increasingly owned by giant corporations which bundle them together, up to 70,000 at a time, into securities which are then sold around the world. As a result, they constantly raise rents to make those financial instruments more attractive to investors. They can make money even if no rent comes in. Your apartment or house may be partly owned by someone in Nairobi, someone in Buenos Aires, and someone in Silicon Valley.

In 2016, a record 37 percent of home sales were made to absentee investors, mostly banks, hedge funds, and private equity firms like Blackstone--now the world's largest landlord. Last year a friend of mine's apartment caught fire and he was put in the difficult position of negotiating repairs with an owner who lived in Thailand.

In this environment, it's not surprising that a real estate developer named Donald Trump became a celebrity, then a TV star, then ultimately the president.

The housing crisis is so severe that it has begun to change the thinking of the American people. Twenty years ago, the most common response to the homeless was "Why don't you get a fucking job?" That's changing because homelessness is now so widespread that John and Jane Q. Public can visualize it happening to them. The maxim that "The only way to guarantee that you don't become homeless is to eliminate homelessness" is beginning to make sense to millions of people.

"Using an online platform, Yale researchers surveyed Americans on their attitudes about homelessness and then compared the results to studies from the 1990s," writes Alice Park in the Yale News. "The new study found that Americans

are now more likely than they were twenty years ago to attribute homelessness to external factors like the economy, rather than internal factors such as laziness or irresponsible behavior. Americans surveyed also showed significantly more support for affordable housing and government funding to end homelessness.

One thing you do still often hear is "People are homeless because they want to be." This idea, relentlessly promoted by the media, is the 21st century equivalent of "Slaves are happy." If people are homeless because they want to be homeless, what explains the exponential yearly increase of the number of homeless in most cities and rural areas? Out of the blue, tens of thousands of people just decide that what they really want to do with their lives is to live outdoors?

Across the United States, there is a growing response to the housing crisis that corresponds to this shift in thinking. From coast to coast, people are organizing to feed the homeless, not to mention the countless acts of sharing a dollar or a doughnut one on one.

Going further, 76 percent of Los Angeles voters approved a \$1.5 billion bond issue to pay for housing for the homeless in 2016. This was followed by similar measures in Santa Barbara and Santa Clara counties with initiatives likely in Alameda and San Diego counties in 2020. In 2018 California voters statewide approved a \$6 billion proposal to subsidize the construction of housing for the poor and homeless.

But what does it mean to be housed? Across the United States almost every proposal for housing the homeless is for homeless shelters, not homes. Shelters are not homes. Just as slave families were cruelly separated, most shelters do not allow families to live together. And that's not the half of it. A friend of mine with three small children left a shelter with no money and no prospects because, she said, conditions in the shelter were so bad her kids would be better off in the streets. Her experience is typical.

There are other ways to address the housing crisis. Around the world, local governments, often under grassroots pressure, are trying new methods to rein in the high cost of housing, which is the number one cause of homelessness. In Berlin, where gentrifiers include BlackRock and Warren Buffett, tenants easily gathered 70,000 signatures (50,000 more than legally necessary) to force a referendum on a proposal to expropriate the properties of corporations which own more than three thousand housing units, in order to place those properties under public ownership. In response, the Berlin Senate quickly passed a measure to freeze rents for five years. In Barcelona, there is a policy of appropriating bank-owned housing that is left empty.

Closer to home, in Oakland, Vancouver and Washington D.C. there are new taxes on vacant property. In Los Angeles, where 111,000 units sit empty, four city council members have proposed that a similar tax be placed before the voters next year. In Smithtown, a city of 117,000 people in New York, city

workers identify homes in pre-foreclosure and provide counseling, and sometimes assistance with mortgage payments, to help keep people housed.

The lack of affordable housing affects not just the homeless but tens of millions of Americans who still have a roof over their heads. This is reflected in growing struggles over rent control, evictions, etc. If everyone without a secure place to live would unite, the problem could be easily solved. But the housing movement is segmented, with separate battles of tenants, of the homeless, and of homeowners, while the government evicts people from public housing based on the immigration status of family members.

The homeless need the numbers and resources of the broader housing movement while tenants facing impossible-to-pay rent increases and homeowners facing foreclosure need the moral power of unity with the homeless.

A united movement might even allow us to win over a section of the Not In My Backyard crowd (NIMBYs) who are being prodded into attacking the homeless. Many NIMBYs are one paycheck away from foreclosure and on a slippery slope toward homelessness themselves.

The alternative to shelters and \$4,000 a month one-bedroom apartments is to take the people without homes and put them in the homes without people. According to Amnesty International, there are eighteen million empty housing units in the U.S. Many of these are owned by the government, the majority of them in move-in condition.

Putting people in empty housing units is not a gift. The American people have paid for all these empty nests through taxes, public services, and subsidies to banks. We should be able to stay in them if we need to because, by any logical or moral standard, they belong to us.

In order to fill those empty housing units, it will take a powerful movement to overcome the real estate industrial complex and the politicians they buy so easily. Such a movement will help to unify our country, allowing us to move toward the society we need and deserve. **CP**

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## Secrets, Lies and the Nuclear Cabal The Afterlife of Chernobyl

BY LOUIS PROYECT

In the first of a series of podcasts tied to HBO's mini-series on Chernobyl, producer/writer Craig Mazin recounts how came to make the widely hailed docudrama. He says that everybody knew that Chernobyl blew up but nobody seemed to know exactly why. With that question nagging away at

him over the years, he decided to tell this story to satisfy his own curiosity as well as that of millions of others who had the same sorts of questions. I should confess that I am one of those people.

Given Mazin's prior work, it is surprising that he would take on such a project since he has mostly written comic fluff like the sequels to "Hangover" and "Scary Movie". One supposes that he has now written the scariest movie he could have ever dreamed of since Chernobyl was a far greater threat to humanity than is commonly understood.

In episode two, titled "Please Remain Calm", there is a scene that left me horrified. In the initial stages of the efforts to bring Chernobyl under control, firefighters poured thousands of gallons of water into the burning building that eventually seeped down into the subbasement creating a virtual lake. Meanwhile, above the subbasement, molten uranium fuel was descending into the lower floors like lava flowing from a volcanic explosion. Once that fuel reached the water, it would create a steam explosion that would detonate the other three reactors.

At the Kremlin, the physicist Ulana Khomyuk, a composite character developed for the docudrama, explains to Mikhail Gorbachev and other top officials what the consequences would be. The interaction of radioactive lava and water would detonate a two to four kiloton "dirty bomb" fatal to everybody in Kyiv, a city of 1.6 million souls in 1986. She adds darkly that the radiation would also impact the rest of Eastern Europe. When Gorbachev asks her what she means by "impact", her fellow scientist Valery Legasov (a real person) replies that Ukraine and Belarus would be uninhabitable for 100 years and that food and water in the other Eastern bloc countries would be toxic for years to come. This was not to speak of a cancer epidemic and other terrible illnesses.

I was so shocked by this scene that I resolved the next day to get up to speed on Chernobyl by reading two highly acclaimed new books. Adam Higginbotham's *Midnight in Chernobyl: the Untold Story of the World's Greatest Nuclear Disaster* covers the events described in the HBO series while Kate Brown's *Manual for Survival: A Chernobyl Guide to the Future* looks at the disaster's aftermath. Soviet heroes did drain the water in time, preempting an apocalyptic nightmare but for the survivors in Ukraine and Belarus, that was little consolation given Brown's reporting on the epidemic of cancer, birth defects and other ailments that have never been revealed prior to the publication of her book. Keeping in mind that to this day the Kremlin's official casualty numbers for Chernobyl is only 31, this is a book that was sorely needed, especially in light of the susceptibility of pro-nuclear leftists like George Monbiot to minimize the risks of nuclear power, including those that led to the Chernobyl disaster.

As for Higginbotham, his reference to the looming catastrophe hews closely to Mazin's script:

And some of the scientists feared that if the white-hot fuel

made contact with the thousands of cubic meters of water held in the sealed compartments there, it would bring about a new steam explosion orders of magnitude larger than the first. This blast could destroy not only what remained of Unit Four but also the other three reactors, which had survived the accident intact. Amounting to a gargantuan dirty bomb formed of more than five thousand tonnes of intensely radioactive graphite and five hundred tonnes of nuclear fuel, such an explosion could exterminate whatever remained alive inside the Special Zone—

a story of conflict between the two scientists and a bureaucracy that was acting in the time-dishonored Soviet tradition of lies and secrets. Between the secondary characters like the plant managers who tried to cover up their misdeeds and the two scientists, Scherbina is a man poised on the knife's edge. Trained as a loyal Soviet official, his first instinct is to accede to the demands of fellow bureaucrats to treat Chernobyl as a containable local problem but as the horrors mount, he moves inexorably toward the realization that Chernobyl was a product



*Still from Chernobyl (HBO).*

and hurl enough fallout into the atmosphere to render a large swath of Europe uninhabitable for a hundred years.

Besides the two scientists, who are played by Jared Harris and Emily Watson respectively, the other main character is Boris Shcherbina, the bureaucrat overseeing the “liquidation” effort, the word used by the Soviets to designate the massive project to quell the radiation and serve the needs of the local population. Scherbina is played by the veteran Swedish actor Stellan Skarsgård, who is always a pleasure to watch. In the final episode of the miniseries, Scherbina is coughing up blood, the result of his exposure to radiation at Chernobyl. Valery Legasov was also a victim of Chernobyl but not from radiation-related illnesses. Presumably, post-traumatic stress led to his suicide by hanging exactly two years after reactor four blew up.

The drama in “Chernobyl” operates on two levels. It is a carefully choreographed reenactment of how the first responders risked their lives to put out the firestorm that was spewing radioactivity across Ukraine and Belarus. It is also

of a dysfunctional system.

In addition to the scene in which plant engineers don hazmat suits and descend into the bowels of the building to open valves that will drain water from the sub-basement, there is another that stands out for both its fidelity to the historical record and its ability to capture the soul of the men and women who risked their lives to stop or at least reduce the radiation threat from reactor four. A volunteer brigade of coal miners digs a tunnel into the building in order to allow a concrete slab to be placed under the out-of-control reactor without regard for their personal safety. While there have been a number of articles that offer correctives to the fictionalized aspects of the docudrama, including the depiction of miners working in the nude because of blistering heat within the tunnel, there is one thing I believe Mazin got right and that was the grittiness of the miners who never hesitated to defy a Soviet official when his orders did not make sense.

The miners were largely drawn from Eastern Ukraine where



socialist beliefs still held sway in the mid-80s. Donetsk was a stronghold of working-class militancy that remained distrustful of Gorbachev's reforms as well as the neoliberal tendencies of the Ukrainian governments that came to power after the country became independent. Today, the secessionist movement in Eastern Ukraine combines both reactionary and progressive aspects with miners and oligarchs uniting around a mixture of nationalist and class-based policies. As such, they are the mirror image of the Euromaidan western part of the country that is motivated by long-standing grievances against Russia, including its responsibility for imposing a death-trap like Chernobyl on their country. Both halves of the country have legitimate grievances against the ruling billionaires but have not yet found a way to unite on a class basis.

To give credit to Mazin, who is primarily interested in the systemic flaws of the Soviet system, he respects that same system for instilling a sense of social responsibility that allowed its leadership to rapidly deploy over 600,000 men and women into an exclusion zone that would leave many sick or dead. There was something of the spirit of 1917 that lingered on, no matter the abuses of Stalin and the continuing failure of the country to satisfy the material and political needs of its citizens under Perestroika and Glasnost.

Valery Legasov was totally devoted to socialism, according to Higginbotham who described him as a product of the Soviet system: "Both an intellectual and a scientist, he believed in the principles of Socialism and an equal society run by an educated elite. Legasov was witty and opinionated, and his privileged background gave him the confidence to speak his mind in a world of cowed apparatchiks. In his spare time, he wrote poetry."

Over two decades of reviewing narrative films based on historical events, I've often run into discrepancies between fact and fiction. If documentaries editorialize, narrative films up the ante by simply falsifying history—all in the interest of "story-telling." By having his miners working in the nude, Mazin calculated that this would pique the interest of HBO viewers who tend to feast on the sensationalism of shows like "The Sopranos" or "Game of Thrones". I am less troubled by such inaccuracies as I am by Mazin's decision to depict Legasov as a whistle-blower rather than as a Soviet scientist simply carrying out his duty.

In the fifth and final episode, there is a recreation of the series of mishaps that led to the explosion in Chernobyl as well as a trial of three of the top managers in which Legasov provides crucial testimony. We are led to believe that the composite character Ulana Khomyuk has to practically beg him to tell the truth about what happened at Chernobyl that both involved grievously unwise decisions by the plant management and inherent flaws in the way that Soviet reactors were constructed. Those flaws were only tolerated because of bureaucratic indifference to the lives of people living near Chernobyl and thus were covered up. Mazin sets up his trial as if Legasov

went through a political awakening that gave him the courage to expose the top bureaucrats as using unsafe technology in the pursuit of cost-cutting.

After his testimony, Legasov is brought to KGB headquarters and dressed down by a thuggish officer who alternates between implied death threats and explicit warnings about never being able to work in his profession again. One cannot help but think that Legasov was a stand-in for Jack Lemmon in "The China Syndrome" who was intimidated by company executives at first to keep his mouth shut and subsequently killed. In "Chernobyl", the villains are Soviet bureaucrats. They certainly were reprehensible but the idea that they were operating on the same basis as in 1938 is pure fiction, especially with Gorbachev in the driver's seat. Whatever his flaws, he was not aspiring to be the new Stalin.

In *The New Yorker*, Masha Gessen describes Mazin's approach as "terribly wrong". She writes: "There are a lot of people throughout the series who appear to act out of fear of being shot. This is inaccurate: summary executions, or even delayed executions on orders of a single apparatchik, were not a feature of Soviet life after the nineteen-thirties. By and large, Soviet people did what they were told without being threatened with guns or any punishment."

Not only did Legasov have nothing to fear, there is every indication that he had total support from higher-ups to let the chips fall where they may. Some of his testimony, especially that which incriminated the bureaucrats who had sanctioned the use of cheap but unreliable technology, was never reported in the Soviet press but his findings were incorporated into retrofitting reactors with better safety devices and making sure that new ones would not cut corners.

On April 6, 2019, an op-ed titled "Nuclear Power Can Save the World" appeared in the *New York Times*. It was co-authored by Joshua S. Goldstein, Staffan A. Qvist, the co-authors of a book that supports nuclear power as a way to stave off climate change, and Stephen Pinker, the Panglossian Harvard psychology professor. Perhaps given Mazin's overarching goal to portray the Soviet system as naturally prone to such a disaster (and rightfully so), he tweeted his agreement with the pro-nuclear three: "There is real merit to this argument. The lesson of Chernobyl isn't that modern nuclear power is dangerous. The lesson is that lying, arrogance and suppression of criticism is dangerous."

Those who search for any comments by Craig Mazin on Three-Mile Island or Fukushima will do so in vain. While the standards of Soviet nuclear power plants were low in comparison to other nations, there is little reason to consider them in general as a safe alternative to other energy sources, even if done right.

Leaving aside the possibility of accidents such as Three-Mile Island or natural disasters like the tsunami that hit Fukushima, how do you deal with nuclear waste? There are plans afoot to make Yucca Mountain near Las Vegas a central repository. On

May 17, 2018, CounterPunch reported that anti-nuclear groups have dubbed the plan “Mobil Chernobyl” and “the Fukushima Freeway”. The planned 10,000 plus shipments of waste to the site would contain roughly the same amount of radioactive Cesium as was released by Chernobyl, and as much plutonium as was in the Hiroshima bomb. This goes hand in hand with a recent ruling that would allow the desert north of Las Vegas to be used for air force bombing tests. That includes a wildlife refuge, six mountain ranges that are home to bighorn sheep, and sites that Paiute and Shoshone peoples consider holy. Radioactive waste and bombing runs are reminders that the genocide against native peoples never ended.

On April 13, 2011, George Monbiot wrote an op-ed in *The Guardian* defending nuclear power against his critic Helen Caldicott who is to the nuclear power industry what Rachel Carson was to DDT. Much of his article is an attempt to minimize the damage done to humanity and nature by Chernobyl.

As a self-proclaimed environmentalist, he shares many of the same talking points made by Goldstein, Qvist, and Pinker but even more emphatically as a climate change activist. He is not alone in this. Leigh Phillips had defended nuclear power in Jacobin as the “cheapest option” when it comes to non-carbon energy sources. Meanwhile, Matt Huber wrote an article for the Winter 2019 *Socialist Call*, the official magazine of the DSA, which stated that “a socialist push toward solar communism must also think seriously about complementary sources of power such as hydro and even the low carbon source that might make us squirm: nuclear power.” Obviously, Monbiot reflects a growing trend on the left that must be confronted especially given the enormous dangers posed by nuclear radiation.

For Monbiot, the trump card against nervous nellys like Helen Caldicott is the United Nations are august Western agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that she has accused of covering up the full extent of Chernobyl casualties. He argues that they line up with him. Unfortunately, he is correct.

Caldicott’s “conspiracy theory” has made it harder for activists like him to gain traction for the case he makes about Chernobyl being a nothing-burger. He writes, for example, that the risk of radiation-induced mutations in sperm and eggs, resulting in heritable disease “is sufficiently small that it has not been detected in humans, even in thoroughly studied irradiated populations such as those of Hiroshima and Nagasaki”.

That quote came from the BEIR VII report published by the National Academy of Sciences, which was part of a packet of material Caldicott sent him that supposedly made the case against nuclear power. What Kate Brown makes clear in “Manual Survival” is that Hiroshima and Nagasaki are not comparable to Chernobyl. Despite the lack of a dramatic mushroom cloud over the power plant, the radiation certainly

did induce mutations and worse.

Belarusian scientists had a much better handle on whether Hiroshima and Nagasaki could be used as benchmarks than did the IAEA experts, who like Monbiot, failed to understand the differences between the two over how radiation affected each population. Brown writes:

Belarusian scientists pointed out the differences between A-bomb and Chernobyl doses. Much of the danger, they told visiting IAEA scientists, came from ingested radioactive isotopes, some in the form of inhaled hot particles, which they found caused more damage than external exposures. On hot particles, and IAEA scientist reported that no calculations had been made since there is “no official method.” The Belarusians also saw a problem with the selection of controls. It was unlikely that people in the “clean” regions [IAEA head investigator] Mettler chose were really control cases. Belarusian researchers supplied information to IAEA teams showing that people outside contaminated zones had ingested nearly as high levels of radioactivity as those in contaminated areas because of the exchange of food across regions, a deliberate strategy Soviet officials used to contain the disaster. The Belarusians told the visitors they suspected that the ingestion of isotopes had a lot to do with the sharp jump in disease rates in Belarus, increases of 100-400 percent.

Furthermore, despite the warm and fuzzy image of WHO, there is ample evidence that it did fail to do due diligence when it came to investigating the health impact of Chernobyl. As for the IAEA, it was certainly suspect at the outset given its genesis as a fulfillment of President Eisenhower’s “Atoms for Peace” program. Indeed, a glance at its website reveals an article in line with Monbiot’s agenda: “Proven Clean Energy: Time to Talk About Nuclear Power?”

Keith Baverstock, a scientist from the European office of WHO, was impressed with the data collected by Valentina Drozd, a Belarusian physician who had discovered that children in Belarus had extremely high amounts of radioactive iodine in their thyroids. Studies had revealed that thyroid cancer, a rarity among children, had increased dramatically in the region. (Since Chernobyl was close to the border with Belarus, the radiation had a major impact on the country as well.)

After Baverstock proposed a fact-finding mission to look into these cases, WHO decided to torpedo the project. Why would a UN agency dedicated to the health of children want to suppress such a key investigation, especially since the Cold War was still on, even in an abated form? The answer is simple. Making a connection between Chernobyl and cancer through data-driven studies might help bolster legal cases against the United States that provided much of the funding for the UN.

The International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War has estimated that roughly 2.4 million people will eventually die as a result of the atmospheric nuclear tests conducted between 1945 and 1980, which were equal in force to 29,000

Hiroshima bombs. Brown points out that the rates of thyroid cancer in the USA tripled between 1974 and 2013 and that better detection does not account for all of the increases. In Europe and North America, childhood leukemia, which used to be a medical rarity, increased in incidence year by year after 1950. When I was a database administrator at Memorial Sloan-Kettering in the late 1980s, I could never get used to seeing a five-year-old child walking along the corridor with a chemotherapy bottle attached to his or her veins. I never considered at the time that it was the Cold War that made them sick.

Both the Kremlin and its enemies in the West practiced secrets and lies when it came to Chernobyl. The only people who seemed to care were the scientists and physicians in Belarus and Ukraine that had a close identification with those who were suffering from birth defects, cancer and countless other ailments.

Dr. Yuri Bandanzhevsky, the rector of the Gomel Medical School, was one of the Belarusians who spoke out. Alongside his wife, he studied the impact of cesium-137 on the heart. They discovered that Belarusian children suffered heart disease at a rate not common in their age group.

In 1998, Bandanzhevsky challenged the government headed by Alexander Lukashenko, which was veering away from a commitment to public health that was one of the Soviet era's gains, even if carried out in a typically inadequate manner. He complained that seventeen billion rubles earmarked for Chernobyl research had disappeared or had been spent on other projects. His gadfly attack on the government occurred just at the time Lukashenko had given his blessing to the first nuclear power plant in Belarus.

He was then arrested for violating a new anti-terrorism law and charged with treason. His sentence, if found guilty, was execution. To intimidate him, the authorities put him in a cell with common criminals charged with murder. Knowing about his advocacy for the Belarusian people, one of the burly inmates came up to him and said, "Do not fear, we will take care of you". He then made the doctor tea and offered a cookie to go with it.

For those on the left who have spent decades denouncing "color revolutions" in Eastern Europe, including Belarus and Ukraine, it is worth considering how angry people can become when their children have suffered and died as a result of Chernobyl. If given a choice between a thug like Alexander Lukashenko and Dr. Bandanzhevsky, I'd argue for standing in solidarity with the doctor. Getting past geopolitical formulas is especially advisable when both West and East have been so negligent when it comes to the devastating damage nuclear power can do to ordinary human beings. **CP**

**LOU PROYECT** reviews movies for CounterPunch.

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## India's Tryst with Destiny Freedom Struggle from Exploitation and Degradation Is Global

BY COLIN TODHUNTER

Today, we are in the grip of a globalized system of capitalism which drives narcissism, domination, ego, anthropocentrism, speciesism and plunder. A system that is using up oil, water and other resources much faster than they can ever be regenerated. We have poisoned the rivers and oceans, destroyed natural habitats, driven wildlife species to (the edge of) extinction and have altered the chemical composition of the atmosphere with seemingly devastating effects.

With its never-ending quest for profit, capitalism thrives on the exploitation of peoples and the environment. It strides the world hand in glove with militarism, with the outcome being endless destabilizations, conflicts and wars over finite resources and the capture of new markets.

This is sold to the masses as part of an ongoing quest to achieve human well-being, measured in terms of endless GDP growth, itself based on an ideology that associates such growth with corporate profit, boosted by stock buy-backs, financial speculation, massive arms deals, colonialism masquerading as philanthropy, manipulated and rigged markets, corrupt and secretive trade deals, outsourced jobs and a resource-grabbing militarism.

That such a parasitical system could ever bring about a 'happy' human condition for the majority is unfathomable.

Over the last 70 years, material living standards in the West have improved, but how that wealth was obtained and how it is then distributed is what really matters. Take the case of the UK.

While much of manufacturing has been outsourced to cheap labor economies, welfare, unions and livelihoods have been attacked. Massive levels of tax evasion/avoidance persist and neoliberal policies have resulted in privatization, deregulation and the spiraling of national and personal debt. Moreover, the cost of living has increased as public assets have been sold off to profiteering cartels and taxpayers' money has been turned into corporate welfare for a corrupt banking cartel.

Meanwhile, the richest 1,000 families in the UK saw their net worth more than double shortly after the 2008 financial crisis, the worst recession since the Great Depression, while the rest of the population is confronted with 'austerity', poverty, cutbacks, reliance on food banks and job insecurity.

But let's not forget where much of the UK's wealth came from in the first place: some \$45 trillion was sucked from India alone according to renowned economist Utsa Patnaik. Britain developed by underdeveloping India. And now the West and



*Nehru speaking at the Red Fort, Delhi. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.*

its (modern-day East India) corporations are in the process of 'developing' India by again helping themselves to the country's public wealth and natural assets (outlined further on).

Under this system, it is clear whose happiness and well-being matter most and whose does not matter at all. According to researcher and analyst Andrew Gavin Marshall, it is the major international banking houses which control the global central banking system:

From there, these dynastic banking families created an international network of think tanks, which socialized the ruling elites of each nation and the international community as a whole, into a cohesive transnational elite class. The foundations they established helped shape civil society both nationally and internationally, playing a major part in the funding - and thus coordinating and co-opting - of major social-political movements.

Additional insight is set out by David Rothkopf in his 2008 book *Superclass: The Global Power Elite and the World They Are Making*:

The superclass constitutes approximately 0.0001 percent of the world's population. They are the Davos-attending, Gulfstream/private jet-flying, money-incrusted, megacorporation-interlocked, policy-building elites of the world, people at the absolute peak of the global power pyramid ... They are from the highest levels of finance capital, transnational corporations, the government, the military... and other shadow elites.

These are the people setting the agendas at the Trilateral Commission, Bilderberg Group, G-7, G-20, NATO, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. They decide which wars are to be fought and why and formulate global economic policy.

### **Tryst with destiny**

In 1947, on the steps of the Red Fort in Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru spoke optimistically about India's tryst with destiny. Free from the shackles of British colonialism, for many the future seemed bright.

But some 72 years on, we now see a headlong rush to urbanize (under World Bank directives—India is the biggest debtor nation in the history of that institution) and India's cities are increasingly defined by their traffic-jammed flyovers cutting through fume choked neighbourhoods that are denied access to drinking water and a decent infrastructure. Privatization and crony capitalism are the order of the day.

Away from the cities, the influence of transnational agri-capital and state-corporate grabs for land are leading to violent upheaval, conflict and ecological destruction. The links between the Monsanto-Syngenta-Walmart-backed Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture and the associated U.S. sanctioning and backing of the opening up of India's nuclear sector to foreign interests show who really benefits from this.

Under the guise of 'globalization', Western powers are on an unrelenting drive to plunder what they regard as 'untapped markets' in other areas of the globe. Foreign agri-capital has



been moving in on Indian food and agriculture for some time. But it first needs to eradicate the peasantry and displace the current model of production before bringing India's food and agriculture sector under its control.

Other sectors have not been immune to this bogus notion of development. Millions of people have been displaced to facilitate the needs of resource extraction industries, Special Economic Zones, nuclear plants, and other large-scale projects. And the full military backing of the state has been on hand to forcibly evict people.

To help open the nation to foreign capital, proponents of economic neoliberalism are fond of stating that 'regulatory blockages' must be removed. If particular 'blockages' stemming from legitimate protest, rights to land and dissent cannot be dealt with by peaceful means, other methods are used. And when increasing mass surveillance or widespread ideological attempts to discredit and smear does not secure compliance or dilute the power of protest, brute force is on hand.

The country's spurt of high GDP growth was partly fuelled on the back of cheap food and the subsequent impoverishment of farmers. The gap between their income and the rest of the population has widened enormously to the point where rural India consumes less calories per head of population than it did 40 years ago. Meanwhile, unlike farmers, corporations receive massive handouts and interest-free loans but have failed to spur job creation.

Millions of small-scale and marginal farmers are suffering economic distress as the sector is deliberately made financially non-viable for them. Veteran rural reporter P Sainath says what this has resulted in is not so much an agrarian crisis but a crisis of civilization proportions, given that the bulk of the population still lives in the countryside and relies on agriculture or related activities for an income.

Independent cultivators are being bankrupted, land is to be amalgamated to facilitate large-scale industrial cultivation and remaining farmers will be absorbed into corporate supply chains and squeezed as they work on contracts, the terms of which will be dictated by large agribusiness and chain retailers.

US agribusiness corporations are spearheading this process, the very companies that fuel and thrive on a five-year U.S. taxpayer-funded farm bill subsidy of around \$500 billion. Their industrial model in the U.S. is based on the overproduction of certain commodities often sold at prices below the cost of production and dumped on the rest of the world, thereby undermining farmers' livelihoods and agriculture in other countries, not least India.

It is a model that can only survive thanks to taxpayer handouts and only function by externalizing its massive health, environmental and social costs. And it's a model that only leads to the destruction of rural communities and jobs, degraded soil, less diverse and nutrient-deficient diets, polluted water, water shortages and spiraling rates of ill health.

We hear certain politicians celebrate the fact India has

jumped so many places in the 'ease of doing business' table. This term along with 'foreign direct investment', making India 'business-friendly' and 'enabling the business of agriculture' embody little more than the tenets of U.S. neoliberal fundamentalism wrapped in benign-sounding words.

Of Course, as Gavin Andrew Marshall notes, U.S. foundations have played a major part in shaping policies and co-opting civil society and major social-political movements across the world, including in India. As Chester Bowles, former U.S. ambassador to India, says:

"Someday someone must give the American people a full report of the Ford Foundation in India. The several million dollars in total Ford expenditures in the country do not tell 1/10 of the story."

Taking inflation into account, that figure would now be much greater. Maybe people residing in India should be given a full report of Ford's activities too as well as the overall extent of U.S. 'intervention' in the country.

A couple of years ago, economist Norbert Haring (in his piece *A well-kept open secret: Washington is behind India's brutal experiment of abolishing most cash*) outlined the influence of USAID and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in furthering the incorporation of India into the U.S.'s financial (and intelligence architecture). But this is the type of thing just the tip of a very large iceberg that's been going on for many decades.

After the recent general election, India seems destined to continue to capitulate to a programme that suits the needs of foreign capital for another five years. However, the focus is often on what India should or should not do. It's not as if alternatives to current policies do not exist, but as Jason Hickel wrote in *The Guardian* back in 2017, it really is time that the richer countries led the way by 'de-developing' and reorienting their societies to become less consumption-based. A laudable aim, given the overexploitation of the planet's resources, the foreign policy implications (conflict and war) and the path to environmental suicide we are on. However, we must first push back against those forces and which resist this.

On 15 August, India commemorates independence from British rule. Many individuals and groups are involved in an ongoing struggle in India to achieve genuine independence from exploitation and human and environmental degradation. It's a struggle for freedom and a tryst with destiny that's being fought throughout the world by many, from farmers and indigenous peoples to city dwellers, against the same system and the same forces of brutality and deceit. **CP**

**COLIN TODHUNTER** is an independent writer and former social policy researcher. He writes on food, agriculture, geopolitics and neoliberal globalization.

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# A Social Media-based Regime Change Strategy

By JOHN MARK SHORACK

“¡Quemaron el camión!” (“They burned the trucks!”) rang across Twitter, Instagram and other social media network’s on February 23rd faster than anyone could corroborate the story. Videos and photos of the burning trucks were recorded, shared and re-played thousands if not millions of times on social media. It was replayed so many times, it became a reality. Especially, for Venezuelans and others living abroad whose main source of information are these social media platforms. Millions of people believed the story on social media: that the Venezuelan National Guard at the border purposefully burned a truck of “humanitarian aid.”

There were a few who didn’t follow suit. Madelein Garcia, a TeleSUR reporter who live-tweeted from the border insisted it was burned by those protesting on the Colombian side of the border and Venezuelanalysis.org, a news site based in Caracas also wrote on February 27th “according to testimonies of the right-wing protestors as well as Colombian policemen on the other side of the bridge, the GNB [Bolivarian National Guard] and PNB [Bolivarian National Police]

used tear gas and rubber bullets, neither of which are flammable nor capable of penetrating the gas tank of a large truck. No live rounds, grenades, or flamethrowers were used by Venezuelan state security personnel. As such, the claim that the GNB or PNB set the trucks on fire is hard to fathom.”

So, which side of the narrative was true? Did it matter?

Social Media has the power to shape the perceptions of reality, impact the news cycle, daily politics and much more within the circles that have access to the medium. Within Venezuela, according to a report by IEDGE.eu in 2011, that meant 3.1 million Venezuelans and the number is only growing. Governments and organizations have quickly learned this and are influencing the social media narrative to their benefit.

Marco Rubio, the US Republican Senator from Florida, was one of those who joined Mike Pence and thousands of others retweeting and writing, “Maduro National Police set fire to an aid truck carrying food & medicine while people in #Venezuela starve. #23FayudaHumanitaria.” It received close to 7,500 retweets.

Members of Voluntad Popular and other political parties in

opposition to President Maduro’s government also spread the story like this tweet from the de-facto leader of the right-wing opposition and self-declared interim president Juan Guaido, “El régimen usurpador se vale de los actos más viles e intenta quemar el camión con ayuda humanitaria que se encuentra en Ureña...” It also received slightly more than 33 thousand retweets.

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) is also one of these government-funded organizations using social media to strengthen their personal narrative. Originally created in the 1980s as an offshoot of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), it was meant to “foster liberal ideology, market economy, and U.S.-style ‘democracy’” as Ronald Reagan put it. Since its creation it has been funding pro-US organizations, interests and more across the whole world, including the 2002 coup d’état in Venezuela against the late President Chavez.

More recently in 2014, Eva Golinger reported, as cited by Kenny Coyle, how the USAid and OTI (who work in close cooperation with the NED) “failing in its prior attempts to oust Chavez from power, in 2006 ... reoriented its funding, increased its budget and began focusing on crafting an op-

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## Political movements have learned to manipulate social media to create a reality and the NED is funding projects to help spread the narrative which supports the United States’ government’s interests.

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position ‘youth movement’ that could utilize new technologies, such as Twitter and Facebook and other internet media to build an international campaign against the Venezuelan president.” Social media has become a major tool of regime change to help achieve their desired outcomes.

Now, heavily redacted documents recently released through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), along with the 2013 NED Annual Report shed light on the specific programs sponsored in Venezuela during 2013. A large portion of funding relates to direct political action groups involved in the 2013 elections (although they are not named) as well as to several programs working with the youth and with new internet platforms. So, let’s dive into the programs the NED funded.

According to the 2013 Annual Report, a total of \$1,752,300 dollars was granted to organizations in Venezuela. The documents received via FOIA requests reveal the financed projects for a little over 1.3 million dollars of the total amount. After an initial review of the documents, it’s clear that \$509,895 dollars are devoted to projects directly connected to the electoral campaigns and election processes of the year. Considering 2013

was a year of important electoral races in Venezuela, the NED 'electoral' funding went to organizations focusing on projects including, "Get Out the Vote" campaigns, electoral observation networks, working with Venezuela's "democratic actors," training of candidates and more. The largest funded project, as shown in the declassified documents, received \$135,000 for an electoral observation network and a more efficient "Get Out the Vote" campaign. In the 2013 Annual Report, one project received \$149,413 to "foster entrepreneurship in Defense of Democracy and Free Markets," and another \$295,050 for "Improved training and communication skills for political



Nicolas Maduro. Drawing by Nathaniel St. Clair.

activists." The NED did not include these two projects in the FOIA documents released.

Nonetheless, if we look beyond the funding of organizations connected to the elections, we can notice a significant number of projects focusing on the youth, social media education (also referred to as cyber-activism) or a combination of both.

Programs devoted to youth received in total \$191,980 dollars. One of these programs, for example, received financing of \$60,000 to "promote greater dialogue and unity among democratic youth on issues of national and regional importance." It will be done through a seminar on politics and local government "followed by a discussion of economic freedom and progress." To conclude, a national seminar will be organized to discuss, "development in Venezuela since 1999 that have led to deterioration in the country's democratic system ... [and] democratic resistance" among other topics. The regional

seminars are meant to reach a minimum of 350 youth, plus, a select few who will be supported by the organization to join a youth movement.

Another set of programs totaling \$92,000 dollars benefited organizations working with youth, but with an educational component devoted to developing social media skills. \$55,000 dollars was devoted to one seminar across five cities in Venezuela providing training to "more than 150 young and emerging leaders about the meaning and challenges of democracy in Venezuela." Specifically, the seminar covers 7 themes, including "developing and delivering strong public statements through social media networks and traditional media outlets," cyber-activism, understanding Venezuela, non-violence, and more.

Finally, \$112,990 go to programs with a large component on social media education. One of these programs, received \$49,990 to work with indigenous communities conducting a diagnostic study to raise awareness to the "political, social, and economic needs of Venezuela's [indigenous] population." Once the study is complete, the organization will partner with another NED grantee to provide eight, two-day long training sessions "on the use of Twitter for civil society organizations." It aimed to reach 200 participants with each having hands-on practice as part of the training.

As described above, many projects funded by the NED, although of a wide variety, have a clear component targeting youth and the use of social media. In total, the amount of money going to projects for youth, social media education or both is about 397 thousand dollars or 22.6% of the NED's 2013 funding.

So, let's return to February. What did we learn about the event at the border? Twitter erupted all day with the declarations that the Venezuelan government were responsible for the trucks set on fire.

Eventually, however, on May 10th, the *New York Times* released a report rejecting the Twitter narrative, writing, "The opposition itself, not Mr. Maduro's men, appears to have set the cargo alight accidentally." But very few retractions came, the Twitter narrative had done its damage. The Twitter narrative remained the truth. Organizations, governments and political movements have learned to manipulate social media to create a reality and the NED is funding projects to help spread the narrative which supports the United States' government's interests.

This is exactly the purpose of the NED's funding for youth and organizations learning how to use social media for "cyber-activism". It's to further the US agenda in Latin America. An agenda we've seen all too often in war, violence, coup d'état and imperialism. **CP**

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# CULTURE & REVIEWS

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## Remembering Mae Brussell

By PAUL KRASSNER

Mae Brussell was a twice-divorced suburban homemaker with five children. In her forties, she had an affair with Henry Miller, and he became a significant influence on her life. When President Kennedy was killed, Mae's seven-year-old daughter saw Lee Harvey Oswald on TV—he had a black eye and was saying, “I didn't do it, I haven't killed anybody, I don't know what this is all about.” She decided to send him her teddy bear. It was all wrapped up and ready to mail when she saw Oswald murdered by Jack Ruby on TV. Mae had to wonder, “What kind of world are we bringing our children into?”

One bit of research led to another, and she started a weekly radio program, “Dialogue Assassination,” originating on her local rock station, KLRB in Carmel, California, and syndicated to a half-dozen other stations. What had begun as a hobby turned into a lifetime pilgrimage. She purchased the Warren Commission report for \$86, studying and cross-referencing the entire twenty-six volumes, without the aid of a computer. It took her eight years and 27,000 typewritten pages. She was overwhelmed by the difference between the evidence and the commission's conclusion that there had been only a single assassin. In fact, she concluded:

“Lee Harvey Oswald was set up to take the fall. But the Warren Commission ignored physical evidence from the scene of the crime—bullets, weapons, clothing, wounds—and based its judgment that Oswald was just a disturbed loner on the testimony of some thirty Russian emigres in the Dallas-Forth Worth area. Most of them, according to the testimony, was affiliat-

ed with anti-Communist organizations that had collaborated with the Nazis during the war.”

Then she began to study the history of 600 Nazis brought to this country after World War II under Project Paperclip. They were infiltrated into hospitals, universities, and the aerospace industry, further developing their techniques in propaganda, mind control, and behavior modification. She observed how the patterns of murder in the United States were identical to those in Nazi Germany. The parallels between the rise of Adolf Hitler and the rise of Richard Nixon were frightening to Mae. Hitler came into power as a result of more than four hundred political assassinations. So, rather than just investigating the death of John Kennedy, she collected articles about the murders of people involved in his assassination.

And, instead of limiting her research to the killing of Robert Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and the attempted assassination of George Wallace, she began paying attention to the untimely, suspicious deaths of judges, attorneys, labor leaders, professors, civil rights activists, reporters, authors, Black Panthers, Chicanos, Native Americans—and Mary Jo Kopechne. Mae believed that Chappaquiddick was yet another CIA-orchestrated dirty deed; the National Safety Council had never found a single case of anybody escaping from a submerged car the way Senator Ted Kennedy supposedly had.

One afternoon in February 1972, Mae read in *The Realist* about the lawsuit in response to my announcement of “The Rise of Sirhan Sirhan in the Scientology Hierarchy.” She immediately phoned to assure me that Scientologists had nothing to do with the assassination of Robert Kennedy. “Oh, I knew that,” I told her, “but the article was just gonna be a satire, and they took it seriously. I'm

working on something else now instead. Let me ask, do you know anything about the Manson case?”

“Of course,” she said. “The so-called Manson murders were actually orchestrated by military intelligence in order to destroy the counterculture movement. It's no different from the Special Forces in Vietnam, disguised as Vietcong, killing and slaughtering to make the Vietcong look bad.”

“Oh, really? Could I come see you?”

A friend drove me to Mae Brussell's home. She was about fifty, plump and energetic, wearing a long peasant dress patch-worked with philosophical tidbits, knitting sweaters for her children while she breathlessly described the architecture of an invisible government. Her walls were lined with forty file cabinets containing 1,600 subject categories.

Every day, Mae would digest ten newspapers from around the country, supplementing that diet with items sent to her by a network of researchers plus magazines, underground papers, unpublished manuscripts, court affidavits, documents from the National Archives, FBI and CIA material obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, and hundreds of books on espionage and assassination. Each Sunday she would sort out the previous week's clippings into various categories as though she were conducting a symphony of horror.

“About 80 percent of all CIA intelligence information comes from printed news,” she said, “so I am doing what they are doing, without being paid, and without selectively writing my own history, but using all the material.”

“So how come you're still alive?” I asked.

“Well, I'm not,” she chuckled. “I'm a robot.”

But it was obviously a question that she had considered. If she knew so much, why hadn't they killed her?



"The CIA works on a basis of need-to-know," she explained. "Because if you know too much, you may not do what you're supposed to do. You must have a given order to do something, but if you know that the end result is that somebody's going to be blown up twelve miles away—and all you're supposed to do is deliver an envelope—you may think about it. One agent called me—he had killed ten people for the CIA. When members of the CIA cut his jugular vein, he had to sew it up, and he vowed vengeance against them because he had killed ten people, and when he was ordered to kill a member of Congress, he wanted to stop. Various agents listen to my program. It's a safety valve for them, on how far things are going."

"Are you saying that the intelligence community has allowed you to function precisely because you know more than any of them?"

"Exactly," she said, laughing at her own truth.

I stayed overnight, devouring material from her massive files. For Mae, although the ultimate mystery would remain forever inconceivable, assassination research had become her spiritual quest for truth. Conspiracy became her Zen grid for perceiving political reality, drawing her deeper and deeper into a separate reality that Carlos Castaneda never dreamed of. (The mysterious author of the New Age bestseller, *A Separate Reality*, was, of course, one of the three tramps arrested at the grassy knoll.)

I had originally intended to write a satirical article on the Manson case, but now I had stumbled upon an American version of the Reichstag fire. The next morning, my head was still swirling in the afterglow of a fresh conversion. On the bus, I pondered a theological question Mae had posed:

"How many coincidences does it take to make a plot?"

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Within a week after the killings, there was a dawn raid on the Spahn Ranch, with a grand-theft-auto search

warrant. The Manson group had been stealing Volkswagens and turning them into dune buggies. Manson and four family members—Linda Kasabian, Susan Atkins, Patricia Krenwinkel and Leslie van Houten—were arrested, then released in three days. But, while they were in confinement, Atkins told her cellmate about the murders, and when the cellmate was released, she informed the Los Angeles police.

By this time, Manson and the others had moved to another ranch in Death Valley, where they were arrested again.

the local fire station had been accosted by armed members of Manson's band and told to get out of the area, all sorts of complaints like this.

We had been advised to put anything relating to Manson on a memo submitted to the station because they were supposedly gathering information for the raid we were going to make. Deputies at the station, of course, started asking, "Why aren't we going to make the raid sooner?" I mean, Manson's a parole violator, machine-guns have been heard, we know there's narcotics and we know



*Mae Brussell in her office. Courtesy: MaeBrussell.com.*

Mae Brussell put me in contact with Preston Guillory, a former deputy sheriff at the Malibu Sheriff's Department, which aided the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department in the original raid of the Spahn Ranch. Guillory had participated in that raid, and I interviewed him at an apartment in San Francisco. He stated:

We had been briefed for a few weeks prior to the actual raiding of Spahn Ranch. We had a sheaf of memos on Manson, that they had automatic weapons at the ranch, that citizens had complained about hearing machine-guns fired at night, that firemen from

there's booze. He's living at the Spahn Ranch with a bunch of minor girls in complete violation of his parole.

Deputies at the station quite frankly became very annoyed that no action was being taken about Manson. My contention is this—the reason Manson was left on the street was that our department thought that he was going to attack the Black Panthers. We were getting intelligence briefings that Manson was anti-black and he had supposedly killed a Black Panther, the body of which could not be found, and the department thought that he was going to launch an

attack on the Black Panthers....

"Charles Manson was a patsy," Mae Brussell told me—"identical with Lee Harvey Oswald, Sirhan Sirhan, and James Earl Ray. The Manson thing was a hidden war against the youth culture. People sharing their housing, their food, their cars, recycling their old clothes. Make your own candles and turn off the electricity. It was an economic revolution, affecting everything from the cosmetic industry to the churches."

She believed that Tex Watson, the Manson Family member who led the others on the night of the murders, had played a bigger part in planning the massacre than generally believed. Charlie had instructed the girls to do whatever Tex told them. When Manson was charged, Watson was also charged, but federal authorities held Watson in a Texas prison with no explanation—not even his own lawyers were allowed to see him—while Vincent Bugliosi prosecuted the Manson trial in California.

In order to find Manson guilty, the jury had to be convinced that Charlie's girls were zombies who followed his orders without question. However, in order to find Watson guilty, another jury had to be convinced that he was not a zombie at all and knew exactly what he was doing.

\* \* \*

No wonder Mae Brussell was so excited. The attempted burglary of Democratic headquarters at the Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C. in June 1972 had suddenly brought her eight-and-a-half years of dedicated conspiracy research to an astounding climax. She recognized names, methodology, patterns of a cover-up. She could trace linear connections leading inevitably from the assassination of JFK to the Watergate break-in, and all the killings in between.

There was, for example, the murder of Ruben Salazar, a Los Angeles Times reporter, at the first Chicano-sponsored antiwar protest. Salazar had been working on an exposé of law enforcement, which would reveal secret alliances

among the CIA, the Army, the FBI, California's attorney general, and local police authorities.

L.A. District Attorney Robert Meyer received a phone call from L. Patrick Gray—who had recently become acting head of the FBI after J. Edgar Hoover's death—telling him to stop the investigation. Meyer did quit, saying it was like the "kiss of death" to work with these people. Mae called Meyer, asking if he would help with her research. She wanted to find out why the Justice Department in Washington was stopping a D.A. in Los Angeles from investigating the killing of a reporter. A month later, Meyer was found dead in a parking lot in Pasadena.

And now L. Patrick Gray was involved in an even bigger cover-up. A year before the Watergate break-in, E. Howard Hunt, who had worked for the CIA for twenty-one years, proposed a "bag job"—a surreptitious entry—into the office of Dr. Lewis Fielding, a Beverly Hills psychiatrist who had refused to cooperate with FBI agents investigating one of his patients, Daniel Ellsberg, leaker of the Pentagon Papers. It was the function of the White House "plumbers" to plug such leaks.

The burglars, led by G. Gordon Liddy, scattered pills around the office to make it look like a junkie had been responsible. The police assured Dr. Fielding that the break-in was made in search of drugs, even though he found Ellsberg's records removed from their folder. An innocent black man, Elmer Davis, was arrested, convicted, and sent to prison, while Liddy remained silent. Mae Brussell corresponded with Davis, and after he finished serving Liddy's time behind bars, he ended up living with Mae. It was a romance made in Conspiracy Heaven.

Hunt also masterminded the Watergate break-in. Three weeks later—while Richard Nixon was pressing for the postponement of an investigation until after the election, and the mainstream press was still referring to the incident as a "caper" and a "third-rate burglary"—Mae Brussell completed a lengthy article for *The Realist*, documenting the con-

spiracy and listing the players, from the burglars all the way up to FBI Director Gray, Attorney General John Mitchell, and President Nixon.

"The significance of the Watergate affair," she wrote, "is that every element essential for a political coup d'état in the United States was assembled at the time of their arrest."

Mae proceeded to delineate the details of a plot so insidious and yet so logical that the typesetter wrote *Bravo!* at the end of her manuscript. However, instead of my usual credit arrangement, the printer insisted on \$5,000 cash in advance before this issue could go to press. I didn't have the money, and I had no idea how I would get it, but as I left the printing plant, I was filled with an inexplicable sense of confidence. When I got home, the phone rang. It was Yoko Ono.

I had known her in the '60s as an avant-garde conceptual artist. She had one project which took place on a wooden platform in *The Paradox*, a macrobiotic restaurant a few blocks from my loft. People would climb inside these huge black burlap bags, singly or with a partner, and then do whatever they wanted, providing a floor show for patrons while they ate their brown rice and sprout salad. I had helped support theatrical groups—the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Free Southern Theater—but Yoko's project was so absurd that I gave her some money too.

As a token of appreciation, she presented me with a personally revised alarm clock. On the face of the clock, there was a blue sky with white clouds, but there were no hands. I wound that clock every day, leaving the alarm knob up, blindly changing the time it would go off so that I would have no way of telling when it would, but trying always to be psychically prepared.

It was just a Zen Bastard's way of learning to pay attention to the moment. I planned to do this for a whole year, but I decided to stop several months into it, on the day that I was in the middle of performing cunnilingus on a temporary

soulmate on my vibrating chair when the alarm clock went off and we both screamed out loud in unison. I took that as an omen.

Yoko had since married John Lennon. Now they had arrived in San Francisco and invited me to lunch. At the time, the Nixon administration was trying to deport Lennon, ostensibly for an old marijuana bust, but actually, because they were afraid he was planning to perform for protesters at the Republican convention that summer.

I brought the galleys of Mae Brussell's article, which provided a context for John and Yoko's current harassment. I mentioned my printer's ultimatum, and they immediately took me to a local branch of the Bank of Tokyo and withdrew \$5,000 cash. I had never intended for the money I once gave to Yoko in New York to serve as bread cast upon the water, but now it had come back all nice and soggy, so precisely when I needed it that my personal boundaries of Coincidence were stretched to infinity.

I could rationalize my ass off—after all, Yoko and Lennon had been driven across the country by their assistant, Peter, and they just happened to arrive in San Francisco at that particular moment—but the timing was so exquisite that Coincidence and Mysticism became the same process for me. John Lilly even told me about the Earth Coincidence Control Office—extraterrestrial guardians who protected him by manipulating human events so that he could carry out their higher purpose. At first I thought he intended this as a clever metaphor. Then I realized he meant it literally. And if they were doing it for him, maybe they were doing it for me.

Actually, that melding of Coincidence and Mysticism had begun in 1971 when I wrote a comic strip, drawn by Richard Guindon. It was about political witchcraft, a takeoff on Rosemary's Baby, directed by Roman Polanski. A key scene in that film showed Rosemary moving around the letters from a Scrabble game so that instead of spelling out the name

of her neighbor the letters spelled out the name of a warlock in a book she had been reading about witchcraft. And now, scrambling the letters of the vice president's name—SPIRO AGNEW—it became GROW A PENIS. Coincidence had been my religion, but this was so appropriate that it challenged my theology.

Yoko Ono and John Lennon spent a weekend at my house in Watsonville. They loved being so close to the ocean. In the afternoon I asked them to smoke their cigarettes outside, but in the evening we smoked a combination of marijuana and opium, sitting on pillows in front of the fireplace, sipping tea and munching cookies. We talked about Mae Brussell's theory that the deaths of musicians like Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Otis Redding and Jim Morrison had actually been political assassinations because they were role models on the crest of the youth rebellion.

"No, no," Lennon argued, "they were already headed in a self-destructive direction."

A few months later, he would remind me of that conversation and add, "Listen, if anything happens to Yoko and me, it was not an accident." For now, though, we were simply stoned in Watsonville, discussing conspiracy, safe at my oasis in a desert of paranoia. At one point, I referred to Mae Brussell as a saint.

"She's not a saint," Lennon said. "You're not a saint. I'm not a saint. Yoko's not a saint. Nobody's a saint."

We discussed the Charles Manson case. Lennon was bemused by the way Manson had associated himself with Beatles music.

"Look," he said, "would you kindly inform him that it was Paul McCartney who wrote 'Helter Skelter,' not me."

Yoko said, "No, please don't tell him. We don't want to have any communication with Manson."

"It's all right," Lennon said, "he doesn't have to know the message came from us."

"It's getting chilly," Yoko said to me. "Would you put another cookie in the fireplace?"

Lennon was absentmindedly holding on to the joint. I asked him, "Do the British use that expression, 'to bogart a joint,' or is that only an American term—you know, derived from the image of a cigarette dangling from Humphrey Bogart's lip?"

"In England," he replied, "if you remind somebody else to pass a joint, you lose your own turn."

\* \* \*

Mae Brussell believed that her article could literally prevent the re-election of President Nixon. We held a press conference—I had never done that for any issue before. I started running around like a graduate fresh out of Zealot School, getting copies of *The Realist* to the media and individual journalists.

Mae was an extraordinary researcher. While her father, Edgar Magnin, senior rabbi at the Wilshire Boulevard Temple, was entertaining Richard Nixon at his Beverly Hills home, Mae was busy revealing Nixon's rise to power as an incredible conspiracy. In the summer of 1972, she told me that the ultimate purpose of all the assassinations was to get Ronald Reagan into the White House. And her prediction became a fact in 1980.

But sometimes her heavy investment in conspiracy affected the objectivity of her perception. She was convinced that behind the death of John Belushi there was a conspiracy involving Robert de Niro and Robin Williams, who had both snorted cocaine with Belushi the night he died. I argued with Mae about this. After her death in 1988, I learned that, actually, the LAPD had been preparing a drug sting operation in which they planned to ensnare de Niro, Williams and Belushi.

Mae is dead, but the young conspiracy students she taught are known as Brussell Sprouts.

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