

# CounterPunch

GEORGE ORWELL, SNITCH BY ALEXANDER COCKBURN

VENEZUELA AND THE WEAPONIZATION OF US AID BY TJ COLES

HOW THE UAW ABANDONED WORKERS BY THOMAS ADAMS

THE COLLAPSE OF HONDURAS BY LAURA CARLSEN

THE LONG WAR AGAINST EL PASO AND JUAREZ BY KENT PATERSON

THE WAR ON FOIA AND TRANSPARENCY BY ANDREW SMOLSKI



# 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

Obama had two monumental opportunities to make the world better: 1) prosecute the Bush / Cheney War Gang, and 2) hold legally accountable the ruling bankster class that nearly destroyed the world's economy leading up to 2007-2008.

He not only refused to uphold the oath of his office by allowing both criminal factions to escape the law, but he also set an incredibly dangerous precedent that would further the ambitions of those who for so long have proclaimed the sanctity of the supreme executive

*Jerry Steele*

## Child Preachers

Child preachers, like Greta Thuneberg, are nothing new. You see them among hillbilly churches fervently rebuking people and promising fire and brimstone. People who aren't familiar with poor people churches won't see this for what it is. It goes down a lot in S. America and Africa too.

*Andrew Miles*

## 911 Again

911 was the response of fanatical Saudi Muslims to the presence of 10,000 infidel American soldiers on sacred Muslim soil. America then attacked Afghanistan. Here we go again. American troops to Saudi Arabia. After 911 happens again, maybe they should attack Yemen or Somalia for the terrorists from Saudi Arabia.

*John Gouchenouer*

## Train Dining

My last meal in a dining car featured two elderly Fox viewers and a priest. When I

encountered the latter the next morning he shared that after I left the table one of the former had whispered "I think that fellow is a communist."

I'll miss the real food but I had already decided that on my next trip I'd just have the food brought to my roomette. Life's too short and the midwest is too wide.

*Jim Flanagan*

## Train Neglect

Amtrak has been neglected for decades. Running on the worst rail system in the developed world because we have been brainwashed into worshiping car/drive-thru/big-box-retailing culture/exurb living resulting into the genetically modified humans we are now.

*Tony Wilson*

## Shifting Powers

Patrick Cockburn really nailed it about the relationship between Trump and the Saudis. Hard to understate the gravity of what these events signal from a military standpoint. Someday there will be an exhibit about this at the Imperial War Museum...

All of the odd reluctance, by POTUS and MBS, it all makes sense. The power balance is literally shifting under their feet. In the distance you can hear Iranian generals shouting "checkmate!"

*Bill Blunden*

## Warhol Defense

In defense of Andy Warhol, it must be said that he was a supporter and nurturer of avant-garde art and talent in the 1960's. He was himself a pioneer of the "underground" film, and he recognized the talents of such people as the

Velvet Underground, Sally Kirkland and Dennis Hopper, among many others. Perhaps because he could identify with them, Andy embraced the artistic rebels and outcasts of the time as few others did.

*Harvey Pleshaw*

## Why Vote

As a child growing up in the midwest we had zero blacks and mucho seasonal migrant Mexicans with their own movie theatre in a town of 5 thousand people so it seems to me this shit is never-ending so why does anyone still bother to vote in Hoopeston. With a population of 5,000 back in the fifties and after all these years I'm an old man and the population has not changed in that little hell hole 80 miles south of Chicago. My kids and I live in Richmond Va. with no real future in sight but still the thought of being stuck in Hoopeston going to John Deere High School is to my mind scary enough to vote for a billionaire to save us from the billionaires. Trump duped a whole nation of duped citizens.

*Joe Bernardo*

## Biden vs Reagan

So, Barack Obama described himself as an '80s Republican, and current front-runner Joe Biden is to the right of Ronald Reagan.

*Stay virtuous Democrats,  
Scott Bassman*

## Trump and Iran

It would be dangerously naive to think Trump is against bombing Iran. He just didn't want Bolton made it his war. At times Bolton acted as being the president himself. Not in Trump's backyard. Those who

do not realize that Don is a don (and act accordingly) will be ousted.

*Vladimir Stupar*

## Blood Sport

I remember asking a Spanish Civil War historian if the Nationalist elite really did hunt peasants for sport—surely that had to be Republican propaganda? But no the evil bastards really did do that, just as Trump absolutely would feed a child to a large reptile.

*Corey Pein*

## Common Nonsense

Nancy Pelosi quoting Thomas Paine, as she did in her press conference about Trump's crimes, should itself be grounds for impeachment... hers!

*Russ Smith*

## Anti-Trump Celebrities

Trump and his enablers have caused devastating harm. But a worrisome and often overlooked byproduct is the media's dangerous embrace and rehabilitation of "anti-Trump celebrities" once recognized as warmongers, human rights abusers, and self-serving one-percenters.

*Roy Eidelson*

## Legalize It!

I heard something like 10% of the police force / justice system could be culled if marijuana was legalized everywhere. 25% if this extended to all drugs!

*Nick Kant*

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ROAMING CHARGES

# Eat an Impeachment

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

Alexander Cockburn and I had our most ferocious arguments not over climate change or the relative merits of Muddy Waters versus Howlin' Wolf, but about the impeachment of Bill Clinton. Alex didn't think Clinton should be pilloried for lying about sex. I thought the more trivial the offense the better, for the man whose murderous sanctions on Iraq killed a half million innocent kids.

Cockburn didn't care much for Clinton and didn't really become animated in Bubba's defense until Alex's own nemesis Christopher Hitchens offered his services to Lindsey Graham and the other Republican persecutors. Hitchens' loathing of the Clintons was so pathological that it drove him to inform on his former pal Sydney Blumenthal, Bill and Hillary's political hitman, for his scurrilous table talk at a luncheon in Georgetown trashing Monica Lewinski and Kathleen Willey, who had accused Clinton of sexual assault. Hitchens dropped a dime on Sydney during the impeachment trial and Alex later dropped the hammer on Hitch the Snitch in columns for CounterPunch and The Nation. All of this is to suggest that impeachment is not only a political trial, but a personal one, too.

When I was in school in DC in the 1970s studying history and literature at American University, I became a little obsessed with the life and political thought of George Mason, one of the shrewdest and most psychologically conflicted of the American Revolutionaries. Mason, whose sprawling plantation at Gunston Hall was just across the Potomac in Virginia. Mason was a slave owner, who refused to sign the Constitution because it didn't abolish slavery. He was a proto-abolition

who, unlike his compatriots Washington and Jefferson, refused to free any of his slaves in his will, fearing they would be abused in a landscape of racists. Like I said, a conflicted man and, in many ways, a difficult one to like. But it was Mason who took the most strident position in favor of the impeachment clause at the Constitution Convention in 1797, arguing that any president who "procured his appointment" by corrupting the electors must be impeachable, which is a concise description of the current charge against Trump.

Mason would, I think, have been appalled to learn the country, even then riven by savage political divisions, waited 70 years to launch its first impeachment inquiry into the actions of a sitting president. Mason, and many of the other early radicals, viewed impeachment as a lethal check on the unfettered expansion of power in the hands of the executive branch and believed that it would, and should, be threatened and used with some regularity. Instead, impeachment has become a dusty constitutional relic, akin to the emoluments clause.

Constitutional scholar Alan Hirsch's succinct but very well-argued book *Impeaching the President: Past, Present and Future* can serve as a field guide to our forthcoming trauma. Hirsch's book reminds us that US politics has always been nasty & vicious and that Joe Biden's bipartisan fairy tale exists only for the rich (and defense contractors).

The chapter on Andrew Johnson's impeachment is especially informative. The main charge was that President Johnson had illegally fired the Secretary of War, but the floor speeches included allegations that he was a drunk, a liar, illiterate and had been complicit in the

assassination of Lincoln. A racist from Tennessee, who Lincoln recruited as his VP because he was the lone southern Democrat in the Senate who had opposed secession, Johnson's real crime was sabotaging Reconstruction. His impeachment failed by a single vote, a vote which helped spark the Jim Crow era.

In theory, a president can be impeached for almost anything, except the crimes nearly every president commits. In 1973, Rep Robert Drinan introduced an impeachment resolution against Nixon for the illegal bombing of Cambodia. It was quickly squashed by Tip O'Neil, who said that while Drinan may have been morally right but it would have only gotten 20 votes. Priorities, priorities.

The Democrats haven't changed that much in 45 years. In June 2008, Dennis Kucinich and Robert Wexler introduced an resolution containing 35 articles of impeachment against George W. Bush, ranging from the Iraq War, torture, profiteering and climate change. The House voted 251 to 166 to send the Resolution to the Judiciary Committee, where Pelosi had it quietly killed without a hearing.

Trump will only go down if he becomes toxic to the political future of Republicans in the Senate. A constant refrain from the press is who will be the Howard Baker of 2019? A reference to the Tennessee Republican senator during the Watergate hearings, who asked, What did the President know and when didn't know it?

But if you read Jimmy Breslin's great book on Watergate, *How the Good Guys Finally One*, Howard Baker was actually an obstructionist until almost the very end and his famous question, which he repeated like a talking doll, served as a defense of Nixon...until suddenly, with the release of the tapes, it wasn't.

If Trump consults the Clinton playbook for how to distract from impeachment, we'll soon be seeing cruise missile strikes on Caracas, Tehran and, who knows, maybe Copenhagen (unless Denmark turns over Greenland). **CP**



EMPIRE BURLESQUE

# Blond Beasts Ride the Whirlwind

BY CHRIS FLOYD

**A**s I write these lines, in the last week of September, the political worlds of the US and UK—both led by blustering blond beasts installed in power without a popular mandate—are in an almighty flux. By the time you read this, there's no telling where things might stand. Donald Trump might be hosting a raucous talk show on Netflix after a sudden resignation to avoid impeachment. Or he could be curled up on his office floor in a panic-ridden fetal position (like Clarence Thomas of yore), twittering madly while little Stevie Miller wipes the dribble from his phone screen.

Or he might have started that long-imminent war with Iran to divert attention from his troubles and get the establishment media back on his side. You can already see the lead editorial from the *New York Times*: “Even as he faces a multitude of difficulties at home, Donald Trump has shown true presidential timber today with his hard-hitting missile attack on the terror-supporting tyrants of Teheran. While impeachment is by no means off the table—the House’s preliminary inquiries should quietly continue—we must now turn our focus to the mighty business at hand, as America selflessly puts its blood and treasure on the line to ensure a safer, better world for all.”

Meanwhile, Trump’s twittish British mini-me, Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson (yes, de Pfeffel is really part of his name) is also riding the whirlwind. Confronted with a Supreme Court ruling that he lied to the Queen to force an illegal closure of Parliament—and the fact that, with no legislative majority, he is basically the head of a zombie government animated by a

single, mindless imperative: jumping off the Brexit cliff without any deal to please the far-right nationalists who have cannibalized the party—de Pfeffel faces a number of possible outcomes by the time of our publication. He might have resigned, or been taken down by a no-confidence vote, or be out on the road belching endless lies in the midst of a snap election—or even buggered off to New York (where he was born) to join the line-up of “Fox and Friends”.

Or he might have jumped into that diversionary Trump war with Iran. (He’s already slavishly lined up behind the claim by Mike “Mondo Apocalypto” Pompeo that Iran was responsible for the recent drone attack on Saudi oil fields.) But unlike the love Trump would garner from the ever-eager wardrum-beaters of the Democrats for getting his Iran war on, de Pfeffel would actually find fierce anti-war resistance from his political opposition, the Corbyn-led Labour Party (which this week released the most radical platform in British political history.)

Then again, by the time this issue appears, maybe nothing much will have changed. Perhaps Ukraine-gate will have gone the way of Russiagate, with the caravan moving on to the next scandal. (Or the next dozen scandals.) Perhaps Nancy Pelosi’s patented stall tactics will have kicked an actual, formal impeachment process even farther down the road. (It’s absolutely certain that the Democrats will not be impeaching Trump for his open-and-shut, indisputable, straightforward, imminently criminal violations of the Emoluments Clause. What would be the fun in that, when you can get lost in the impen-

etrable murk of diplomatic intrigue instead?) And perhaps Putzie de Pfeffel and Parliament will still be sitting there, frozen in the Brexit zugzwang that has paralyzed the country for three years. Who knows? (Well, you know, dear reader, because whatever will happen in the coming days has already happened for you. But writing right now, I can but see through a glass darkly.)

But behind the garish goon shows now playing in the political theaters of the “world’s greatest democracies,” the deadly business of empire goes on. Both nations continue their direct support for mass slaughter in Yemen, where AP reports “that 85,000 children under age five have died from starvation or disease since the war began.” Of course, US-UK complicity in this war crime began years before the Blond Beasts blundered into the arena, during the days of the progressive Peace Prize winner Barack Obama and the “moderate conservative” David Cameron. This, one of the more horrendous war crimes of an already atrocious century, has drawn very little criticism of note—and none of substance—from across the US-UK political/media spectrum (except at times from Corbyn’s Labour).

But this kind of thing—cynical, brutal, child-killing, war-profiteering power gaming—has long since become the real business, the meat and drink, of these bastions of Western civilization. When people look at the thuggery and crudity of the Blond Beasts today and yearn for things to return to “normal,” the wanton murder of 85,000 children is precisely the “normal” they’re longing for. The kind of “normal” where it’s OK for a president to use unaccountable death squads and drone strikes to kill innocent people—as long as he’s cool and well-spoken with a nice family.

The current leaders are rotten, yes; but their removal, if and when it comes, will not rectify the rottenness of the systems over which—by hook, crook and bizarre circumstance—they have somehow come to preside. **CP**



BOTTOMLINES

# Political Independence ≠ Economic Independence

BY PETE DOLACK

This is admittedly counterintuitive, but as Britain's Brexit crisis lurched from the incompetency of Theresa May to the mendacity of Boris Johnson I couldn't help but see strong parallels between the movement for Scottish independence and the agitators for leaving the European Union.

I don't mean to say there is some sort of equivalence at work. The vast differences between Scottish independence advocates, generally a sober group with a strong sense of reality when it comes to delineating the evils of Conservative government, and "Brexiters" with their fantastic notions about Britain's current place in the world, are obvious.

Nor are there equivalences in the nationalisms of the two sides—Scottish independence advocates are seeking to overcome subordination to an English nation much more conservative than theirs, while Brexiters pine for a past that can not be recreated and on behalf of a traditionally imperialist nation. (I write "nation" rather than "country" because, at bottom this is an English, and not a British, nationalism.) The very name of the vehicle created to promote Britain leaving the EU is ludicrous on its face—the United Kingdom Independence Party.

There are many formerly colonized peoples who must laugh ironically at such a name. But as the Brexit crisis has been all too real the past three years, it is necessary to ask: UK independence from what?

Britain's economy is too integrated with Europe to thumb its collective nose. Even if the risk of undermining the Good Friday Agreement and the complications of the Irish border didn't exist,

it would be quite impossible for Britain to decouple. A customs union and regulatory alignment seem inevitable, even if Johnson successfully engineers a "no deal" withdrawal.

The likelihood, if Britain does indeed leave the EU, is a deal along the lines of Norway or Switzerland. But what those countries have are the responsibilities of EU membership without having any say. Norway is tightly bound to the EU in an arrangement described as a "transmission belt" whereby the EU ensures that Norway adopts EU laws as the price for being a part of the EU's "free trade" area. That is a one-way transmission. Norway has no say in the creation of any EU laws or regulations. In practice, the Norwegian parliament dutifully changes its laws to conform with whatever the EU decrees.

Switzerland, with a different arrangement, has a little bit of room to not adopt EU laws, but some of its goods are blocked from export to EU countries as a result. Switzerland, however, is under pressure to do as the EU dictates, and not only does Berne not have representation, it lacks even the toothless consultation that Oslo has.

Although Brexiters have convinced themselves that Britain is stronger than the combined strength of 27 other countries, it simply is not so. Britain will remain tied to EU institutions. Jeremy Corbyn's progressive intentions notwithstanding, Britain will remain tied to neoliberalism and austerity as long as the EU is so tied. Indeed, Conservative leaders clearly intend to go further by making Britain a low-wage, low-regulation haven for multinational capital.

What does this have to do with

Scotland? Remember that in the run-up to the Scottish independence vote, a common theme was "We'll be rid of the Tories forever!" But although Scotland can be formally free of London, it can't be free on its own from capitalist markets.

The Scottish National Party promised a host of progressive policies to reverse London-dictated austerity while stating that an independent Scotland would continue to use the British pound as its currency and recognize Queen Elizabeth II as its head of state. In part these promises are borne from the SNP's desire to retain the advantages of being a part of Britain while formally separating. Intended or not, retaining the pound ensures fiscal policy will be decided in London and not Edinburgh.

How little control an independent Scotland might have was signaled in the months before the independence vote when the chairman of the company that refines most of Scotland's oil "settled" a labor dispute by threatening to close the refinery. The union swiftly backed down, accepting the demanded cuts, and the Scottish National Party government did nothing.

Simply put, Scotland couldn't stand up to one midsized corporation, never mind the coercive force that can be applied by multinational corporations and banks, and the governments they dominate. And just as the economy of Britain as a whole is tied to Europe, Scotland's is tied to the rest of the UK.

A socialist Scotland could nationalize the refinery and other enterprises, or support worker and community takeovers. But could a socialist Scotland survive the sanctions and blockades that would inevitably be imposed?

One country leaving the EU will have no effect on the EU's anti-democratic structures, a bloc in which the dominant institution, the European Central Bank, is nakedly an unchecked instrument of finance capital. It will take a continent-wide movement to bring an end to the EU and institute a better world. **CP**





HOOK, LINE AND SINKER

# The Cult of Neoliberalism: Manson Goes to Davos

BY JENNIFER MATSUI

**F**ifty years ago, Charles Manson was able to convince his followers to carry out a string of grisly murders to avenge the architects of his failed music career. Today we have even dumber reasons to adhere to a deranged ideology as compliant and programmed consumers of information technology, along with the financial instruments that enslave us to our quality of life killing devices.

We bow to the demands of capital and its “visionary” overlords, somehow convinced that the confounding “solutions” they present to whatever quagmire they have dug us all into will somehow hit pay dirt. Carbon offsets, anyone? Or the constant evaluating and monitoring of output and outcomes to reward “efficiency” and further punish those lower on the economic ladder with constant demands to justify the oxygen they use up in any given workplace. De-regulation to deliver these desirable outcomes to its intended targets up on high, privatization to ensure severe consequences for everyone else who fail to live up to its constant, changing demands. We follow these charlatans deeper into the desert, rallying our capacity for cognitive dissonance to uphold and maintain a belief in an unhinged ‘leadership’ to deliver us all from the havoc they wreak from up high.

Neoliberalism is as indefensible and nihilistic as any doctrine put out by a Messianic maniac when it comes to articulating an ego-driven dogma based on further enriching the powerful by making collateral damage of the rest of humanity. Both rely on the perceived profundity of intentional vagueness,

and the promise of something better than life in some foreseeable future, whether a post-armageddon nirvana in an abandoned mineshaft or robotic bees to pollinate GM crops, to be later robotically harvested and drone-dropped to Whole Foods customers worldwide. Any sane person would take the option of crawling into a hole and blowing their brains out.

Just as any low rent cult leader talks about ‘community’ to mean violently enforced estrangement from family and society, our tech gurus extol mass alienation from the physical world as “connectivity”. Soon, 5G (fifth generation cellular technology) will take that connectivity to its logical conclusion and connect us all to cancer wards globally.

Both systems exhort us to kill, whether it’s the command to murder individuals with completely insane justifications, or destroy humans en masse and the ecosystems that sustain us all for utterly rational, market-based reasons. Neoliberalism like any cult comes with the same implied violence for those who resist it. Just ask its latest targets Iran or Venezuela. The foreign policy that upholds it could be summed up as succinctly as “DIE PIGGY!” scrawled in blood on an intended murder victim’s front door.

The means and the rationale to commit spectacular crimes might have changed in the years since ‘Helter Skelter’ and, Jonestown, but the shared objectives of grimy cult leaders in the past and their more clean-shaven counterparts in the present remain intact. Controlling credulous populations by forcing them to relinquish privacy and undergo mindless regimes

of self-evaluations and self-blame in order to carry out largely useless and self-defeating tasks is still the most efficient method of foisting literal poison down the throats of gullible adherents. Death is the best motivator, it turns out, to convince your workplace flock of the greater benefits that lie ahead by becoming redundant in every sense of the word. The greater your contempt for humanity, the greater your chances of being heralded as its savior.

From tribe members in the still burning Amazon rain forests to the now un-insured employees of Amazon’s Whole Foods subsidiaries, neoliberalism’s tentacled grip on the planet is a prolonged chokehold that will sooner than eventually yield a Darwinian victory for the parasites already consuming it.

Just as a deranged cult leader requires external threats to galvanize his leadership, neoliberalism also requires a political framework to maintain the volatility necessary to sustain it. Whether it’s the Global War on Terror, or “Russian Interference”, the urgency of the mission is outlined as a comic book plot pitting the virtuous many against the rogue individuals intent on destroying a democratic way of life. In the years since a gibbering ex-con mesmerized his followers with a rambling, incoherent tale of impending race wars, the rhetoric of white supremacy has since been refined to reflect its technocratic makeover.

The impending weather-related catastrophes foretold by doomsday prophets of yore are now “opportunities” afforded to present-day profiteers for land grabs and investments in technology that will insulate them from the rest of us when the proverbial shit hits an app-controlled air-circulating device, launching a very real shit storm of biblical proportions. We are left with a stark choice: Abandon the belief in top-down hierarchies that prioritize the desires of the few in opposition to the needs of the many, or simply relinquish any hope of surviving capitalism. **CP**

# The Collapse of Honduras

BY LAURA CARLSEN

**H**onduras is collapsing. The thousands of migrants who flee every day are simple testimony to a political, economic and social crisis that the world ignores and the U. S. government seems bent on perpetuating. Instead of examining the crisis behind the exodus, the Trump administration has set an intercontinental trap that captures thousands of the world's poorest and most persecuted men, women and children, and then converts their suffering into campaign fodder.

Until the Ukraine gamechanger came along, it seemed to be working as the central message of a candidate at least implicitly declaring white supremacy a valid political platform. Since the whistleblower exposé, the Trump re-election campaign has had to pivot to spewing lies about Joe Biden. But sooner or later it will return to slandering immigrants and issuing racist warnings of the "invasion" from the south.

Meanwhile, almost no-one is asking why so many people leave. Donald Trump portrays Honduran and other Central American migrants as global gold-diggers, looking for a way to scam an overly tolerant United States. Anyone with the slightest familiarity with what migrants go through, abandoning their homes and facing the physical and psychological dangers of the migrant trail,

immediately and correctly dismisses this version. The Mexican government has insisted on going to "the root causes" of migration and a democratic congressional delegation led by Nancy Pelosi in August recently used the same language. But how well do we know or understand what they are? What causes so many people leave, right when their chances of making it to relatives and new lives in the United States are so low? Right when the costs of the journey—in all senses—are so high?

I went down to Honduras to ask grassroots leaders these questions. Also, to find out what's behind the rise in the popular movement over the past year and, most of all, if it can provide a way out of the downward spiral the country has been in since the coup of 2009. I found a country facing an acute crisis on all levels—a political crisis of legitimacy that has destroyed faith in the leaders and led to violent repression of protest as the government weakens, an economic crisis with over 60% of the population living in poverty often extreme, and a crisis in security as organized crime groups control urban territory and corrupt security forces and paramilitaries routinely attack the citizenry with practically no legal consequences. There is also a deeper, more ineffable crisis: many Hondurans see no

future in their own country.

Bartolo Fuentes is a migrant organizer who went with the first large caravan that left San Pedro Sula in October of 2018, picking up thousands of Hondurans and later Guatemalans before arriving at the Mexican southern border. He dismissed the explanation of Bush and AMLO that traffickers are responsible for convincing people to leave.

"That's absurd, if they just ask the migrants in Tapachula (Mexico's southern border) how they got there, what motivated them to leave, they'll realize that here there's terrible hunger, people don't have a way to make a living, and worse, they don't have any hope that things will get better." Fuentes and others also cited death threats for the slightest of offenses—a young woman who rejects the advances of a local gang leader, a taxi driver who can no longer pay the weekly extortion fee, the mother who shields her young son from forced recruitment into gangs, and the child himself, growing up with too many images of loved ones murdered or filled with fear. The list of what makes you a target in a land where the law has no inhibiting influence whatsoever goes on and on.

According to former president Manuel Zelaya, the current crisis has been a long time in the making—since 2009 when he was kidnapped in a military coup. Despite widespread international condemnation of the coup, he was never restored in office. Democratic institutions became tools for private national and transnational interests.

"This has created more migrants, more poverty, greater corruption, more looting and an increase in drug trafficking because, put simply, there's a popular phrase that says 'when the river is muddied, it's the fisherman's gain', Zelaya explained in his office in the opposition LIBRE Party headquarters.

"And we're facing a reality—the global economic system of the transnationals generates privatizations, impositions of the International Monetary Fund and more poverty. With the lack of opportunities, the people flee, it's not that they

migrate— they flee —from the lack of opportunities and the misery in our country.”

His reflections on what happened after the coup lead straight into the protests happening today. After the coup, Honduras became the field for extreme neoliberalism. Transnational investment megaprojects displace rural communities and cause entrenched conflicts. The foreign debt burgeoned from \$3 billion to more than \$9 billion in ten years. To bolster JOH, the IMF signed a stand-by agreement for \$311 million in May, signaling further privatization. The nation depends on remittances from the thousands who fled.

The Platform is the people’s gut reaction to the wholesale delivery of the country to international capital. It started with a law and then a series of presidential decrees to allow private sector participation in health and education services. The medical profession, unions and farmers, teachers and students hit the streets and forced the government to roll back some, but not all, of the measures. Under the leadership of the head of the Medical College, Dr. Suyapa Figueroa, they refused to back down.

Today, the Platform for the Defense of Health and Education is the backbone of the resistance. While strengthening its specific demands for strong public services and against price increases, its main demand is the immediate resignation of President Juan Orlando Hernandez.

That day might be closer than anyone expected. Hernandez was cited as a co-conspirator in the drug-trafficking trial of his brother, Tony. Tony Hernandez was extradited to the United States under terms his brother passed into law, in part to guarantee US support for his bid for power. The District court filing states that Juan Orlando used illegal drug money to finance his campaign and maintain his power.

For the Honduran opposition, the trial means that the accusation that Honduras is a “narco-state” could now

be proven in a US court of law, with the president at the head. It was huge news—not so much the revelation of the president’s involvement, but the fact that it had been formally presented in a US court. Pressure to oust JOH has increased and the movement gain momentum.

The mounting evidence of corruption and illegal activity against JOH should be ample reason for the US Congress to reconsider its strategy in Honduras. Trump announced plans to cut off aid to the country, and other Central American nations, for not doing enough to force their citizens to remain in violent situations they caused. His announcement caused a stir in Washington and the

in Honduras—the nation that already expels more people than any other country in the Hemisphere. As crazy as it sounds—and it is—the Honduran president quickly agreed, amid speculation that the negotiation included some sort of immunity or conditions of exile (denied ordinary Hondurans). JOH is teetering on the edge of a precipice, with the accusations of drug trafficking, abuse of power and corruption hanging over his head and a huge part of his own citizenry calling for his resignation on a daily basis.

Instead of turning a blind eye to the Honduran crisis, Congress should support the Bertha Cáceres Act, the feminist environmental activist

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## Donald Trump portrays Honduran and other Central American migrants as global gold-diggers, looking for a way to scam an overly tolerant United States.

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press, but the aid suspension never happened. Instead aid has continued, largely to repressive military and police and border programs that exacerbate rather than address the real problems.

Many progressive politicians and Washington NGOs protested the suspension of aid to Honduras, as if US aid— in the hands of Trump no less— were suddenly disinterested and beneficial to the receiving Central American countries. All the Honduran grassroots leaders I talked to were very clear—U.S. aid props up the JOH government and works against us.

And now the U.S. government has a new way to spend taxpayer money and ruin lives in Honduras. On Sept. 25, Trump convinced a very vulnerable Juan Orlando Hernandez to sign a “Safe Third Country” agreement. This agreement would force asylum seekers from other countries to seek asylum

murdered for her defense of a river slated to be dammed, which calls for an immediate suspension of security aid. For those of us who have worked for decades on Central American solidarity, for the hundreds of thousands of Hondurans living in the United States and for new generations of activists involved in migrants’ rights, social justice and foreign policy, the plea is to stand by the popular movement Honduras has been the worst-case scenario of broken rights and ruinous economic policy. By joining grassroots and international pressure, people could finally win their nation back from the corrupt oligarchy that has hijacked it. **CP**

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## EUROZONE NOTES

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# What Brexit Shows

BY DANIEL RAVENTÓS AND JULIE WARK

**A**lexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson, fifth cousin twice removed from the queen and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, has recently managed to get Her Royal Highness to prorogue parliament from September 9 until October 14. He's trying to foil any parliamentary attempts to block a no-deal Brexit, though claims he's simply getting on with a "very exciting agenda". Right now, it's impossible to keep track of all the antics, responses, and consequences. But we can talk about what Johnson represents and describe what Brexit shows about the state of British (and indeed global) democracy. So far, it's clear that he's put his distant cousin in the hot seat and, having acceded, she might actually help to bring her whole realm crashing down if Scotland, Ireland and even Wales decide they've had enough Westminster. But, with his unshakable faith in the superiority of the ruling class, what matters to Boris is that, whatever the realm, they'll still rule.

So, apart from his silver-spoon name and connections, who is Boris Johnson? Maybe a "blinkering, blethering, burbling bandersnatch", who tells "piffing, pernicious porkers", an obtuse, lazy, racist, self-important jackass who thinks most people are "beasts" and supposedly has redeeming features like being witty and charming (which revives memories of a long-ago Politics prof who always said "Beware of the witty and charming"). Actually, we've mixed up Boris's portrait with that of the long-ago fictional schoolboy Billy ("Yaroooh!") Bunter but, never mind, they're birds of a feather. And, however outlandish Boris looks when dangling from a zip wire holding two little Union Jacks, and however exclusive his toff's education, he's no isolated phenomenon. His puerile racist expressions and "bursting-with-spunk" sexism aren't idiosyncratic gaffes but core to the values he stands for and that are shared by other far right leaders.

How come one of the oldest modern western "democracies" has such an unprincipled, mendacious, mediocre

leader? One answer is that when the world's wealth is controlled by a handful of billionaires there can be no real statesmen (as in wise, skillful, and respected political leaders). Neoliberalism requires Billy Bunters. It's now clearer than ever that democracy, by definition, must be some kind of socialist system which precludes inequalities that depend on enormous lies. Systematic lying by purported political representatives means there can be no social contract. And great inequalities mean there can be no democracy when a handful of mega-rich individuals and corporations can determine the material conditions of life and hence freedom of most of the rest of the world. The people now demonstrating on Britain's streets aren't defending a "democracy" or, if it must be called a democracy, it's a democracy in ruins. The notion of what a democracy should be needs a big rethink.

Trump and Johnson have more in common than strange hair, especially when it comes to the extra-constitutional sphere. When Trump declared a national emergency last February, thus overriding many legal limits on his authority and vesting himself with broad, undefined executive powers, he understood all too well that such a move "gave the presidents the power". Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer called it an affront to the rule of law but it was more like a latter-day version of Nazi ideologist Carl Schmitt's state of exception in which the ultimate expression of power is the decision to suspend the law to make it stronger. Nowadays, this is expressed in a profusion of orders, ill-defined repression,

judicialization of politics, administrative shortfalls, but no solutions because crisis, real or manufactured, concentrates power still more. A headline in *The Guardian* (31/8)—"We have become a land of permanent crisis. This suits the blustering liars of Brexit"—would seem to support this idea.

An admirer of Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte's anti-drug campaign and its extrajudicial killings, Trump with his detention of migrants on the southern border is also Schmittian in removing the protections of law from his victims while retaining the use of law as an instrument of brute force. Another example of this fast-normalizing exceptional power is Viktor Orbán and his "immigrant" crisis, with which he has demolished Hungary's free press, expelled the Central European University, criminalized helping migrants and refugees, and whipped up homophobic campaigns, all with the compliance of the EU. And bugger Article 7 of the Lisbon Treaty on EU values.

So what about the democracy Boris heads? The 93-year-old queen is an appropriate symbol of the doddering datedness of the institutions of the British state. The unelected House of Lords has the world's only hereditary legislators and (like Iran) automatic seats for clerics. Power is extremely concentrated. There is no written constitution. It's "uncodified", which means that setting limits to the Prime Minister's power is a gentlemen's agreement and that the gentlemen of Britain's governing class have been making up the rules all along the way. When parliament resumes,

Boris Johnson will have been PM for some 80 days but with the scrutiny of parliament for just five. Who does he represent anyway? He was elected by a very particular 0.13% of the population (i.e. 92,000 members of the Conservative Party) and, as the Institute of Government recently noted, it will be very difficult for parliament to stop a Prime Minister, even a meagerly elected one, who is determined to deliver Brexit. Even his party is a lie. Officially it's the Conservative and Unionist Party but a recent survey revealed that 63% of its members would sacrifice Scotland to ensure that Britain leaves the EU and 59% said the same about Northern Ireland. These Tories nonchalantly contemplating the breakup of the United Kingdom are showing their true colors as dyed-in-the-wool English nationalists.

Is Boris Johnson really a heartfelt Brexiteer? Well, now he needs it to stay in office. But just days before his 2016 Telegraph article in favor of leaving the EU appeared he wrote another (then unpublished) one that backed remaining. Oh but that was "semi-parodic"! Like Boris himself. After all, he's the former journalist who invented the Euromyth, a subgenre of fake news, under the rubric of which he claimed, inter alia, that the EU planned to issue directives on the correct curve of bananas and that coffins would be standardized. In doing so, he brought about a shift in the British media and ushered in the kind of journalism that paved the way for Brexit.

Despite election law violations by all three organizations supporting Brexit in the 2016 EU referendum, which took huge donations of dubious origins, there was little outrage in the press. According to Dominic Cummings, strategist of Johnson's Vote Leave campaign, 1.5 billion targeted social media messages were sent out. The bogeyman-conjuring xenophobia was barefaced: "Reason No. 8 to leave the EU, To stop convicted criminals from countries like Latvia and Romania coming to the UK". Hate crime rose by 49% just after the referendum, and the

UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination concluded that "British politicians helped fuel a steep rise in racist hate crimes during and after the EU referendum campaign". Were they sanctioned? No.

The members of Johnson's clique are rich enough to ride out Brexit and, indeed, expect to get richer. Boris has powerful pals abroad, among them Steve Bannon who is now busy with The Movement, the foundation through which he aims to spread far-right causes across Europe and install a "super-group" in the European parliament. Bannon hails Johnson as a "key player on the world stage". The state they see rising from the Brexit wreckage is part of a new form of absolutism. The global power structure is changing. After the crash of 2008, billionaires have been abandoning their former free market doctrine and are constructing an oligarchy of the mega-rich (maybe like the World Economic Forum on steroids) in the form of enduring monopolies with official and unofficial state support. Politicians aiming to be swished through revolving doors into billionairehood and the oligarchic club will happily oblige.

Boris Johnson, candidate of the ultra-rich, now heads a government of corporate lobbyists representing interests like Tate and Lyle, Meat and Livestock Australia, hedge funds, Glencore, British American Tobacco, and so on. They're well aware that Brexit will free companies domiciled in the UK from the EU Tax Avoidance Directive (2019). Many will make a killing with a deregulated business environment, strong property laws and a legal system in which only the wealthy can afford lawyers. And if bankers leave London in droves, one way of compensating is attracting business by drastically cutting corporation tax. Roberto Saviano, who knows a thing or two about the mafia, wasn't joking when he called the UK "the most corrupt country on earth". And, since 86% of the land for which the British state is responsible lies outside the North Atlantic archipelago, the Pentagon's also

eyeing the situation. Recently, openDemocracy has revealed how millions of pounds funding the Leave campaigns came through British Overseas Territory and Crown Dependencies, vendors of secrecy, money launderers, tax havens, and cash-cooling grounds. For the Pentagon, this is a matter of strategic interest and so too are places like the "international legal black hole" Diego Garcia.

A No Deal, hence break with European rules and tariffs, will subject the United Kingdom (or maybe England shorn of former realms) to US rules and tariffs as yet another vassal state, as Labour MP Diane Abbott puts it, like Canada, Mexico, and India, no longer a party in negotiations but brought to heel. It could also be dragged into conflicts with countries like Iran and China, and suffer grave assaults on the environment, especially with fracking by US companies and GM crops. Boris is a fan of the latter and, in his first speech to parliament as Prime Minister, declared that he wants to "liberate the UK's extraordinary bioscience sector from anti-genetic modification rules". The aim, he asserts, is to "feed the world" but it's really about a deal with Washington that will recklessly loosen health, safety, and environmental standards and introduce non-scrutinized GM crops and pesticides. Boris is toxic in more ways than one.

The upside is that many of his opponents are realizing that the struggle isn't about defending something uncritically called "democracy" but nothing less than a democratic revolution. The signposts are well marked. Abolish the House of Lords. Introduce a written constitution. Decentralize power. Allow referendums on self-determination should this be the wish of any nation(s). Abolish the monarchy. As activist journalist Owen Jones said to anti-prorogation demonstrators, "... our democracy wasn't given to us as an act of generosity or charity by the people on top. It was won through the struggle and sacrifice of our ancestors." And reviving what these early

democrats won will take a mighty struggle that could also yield some hope for the whole plundered planet. For, if it is to be saved, the Borises must be ousted from power.

Watch this space. **CP**

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## How the UAW Abandoned the Working Class

BY THOMAS ADAMS

The United Auto Workers (UAW), born of the class struggle for social and economic justice during the Great Depression was recognized for integrity and pattern-setting contract gains under the leadership of Walter Reuther. He negotiated the 1950 “Treaty of Detroit,” a five billion-dollar wage and benefit package with GM that lifted workers into a middle-class lifestyle and set bargaining standards for other industries. However, Reuther created a single-party UAW government during the Cold War era by purging key left-wing militants.

The trajectory of the union changed after Reuther’s death in a 1970 plane crash. The last of the Reuther leadership cohort retired from the UAW in the early 1980s as the Reagan revolution and the worst economic recession since the 1930s gripped the nation. U.S. manufacturing, staggered by back-to-back oil embargoes and stiff foreign competition, closed dozens of factories, throwing tens of thousands of workers into the street. Management launched an all-out assault on organized labor. Instead of fighting back, the next generation of union leaders, who came of age within UAW’s authoritarian bureaucracy joined with management to promote corporate competitiveness at the expense of trade union principles.

The UAW embraced joint labor-management cooperation schemes (jointness) with the Big Three American automakers, General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler in 1982, abandoning completely the class-conscious worker advocacy that built the union. The jointness strategy transformed the UAW from a membership-driven to a capital driven-organization.

The UAW and the Big Three have established a series of joint programs purported to benefit union members and management. “Joint funds,” the financial resources that support these programs amount to hundreds of millions of dollars that are neither overseen publicly nor reported to corporate stakeholders or the UAW membership. The union leadership welcomed these joint-funds along with diversions of interest earned on the union’s strike fund, given that they supplemented declining union dues. However, the enormous sums involved were enticing to those who saw opportunities to pocket the money. Here is an example.

The lack of public oversight of joint training funds produced a “culture of corruption” among the directors of the UAW-Chrysler National Training Center (NTC), set up to promote jointness, led to bribery, theft, and a cover-up of

criminal activity. The case filed in U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Michigan, Southern Division charged that Fiat Chrysler Vice President Alphons Iacobelli and UAW Vice President of the Chrysler department General Holiefield violated the Labor-Management Relations Act (LMRA). One provision of the LMRA sought to prevent the corruption of the collective bargaining process that occurs when an employer gives something of value to union representatives, presumably to influence them to ignore their duty to promote the interests of union members. Iacobelli, Holiefield, and their cronies embezzled \$4.5 million of joint training funds from the NTC to pay for items that varied in value from shoes, purses, and luggage to a Ferrari sports car. Iacobelli encouraged training center staff to use NTC-issued credit cards for personal purchases, to keep senior members of the UAW Chrysler Department “fat, dumb, and happy,” “take company-friendly positions,” and to pay off co-conspirators to cover it all up. UAW President Dennis Williams declared that he was “appalled” by the “betrayal of trust by a former member of our union.” Williams said the NTC was a separate entity and no union dues were involved. Holiefield retired in 2014 and died the following year.

Norwood Jewell continued the General’s criminal enterprise when he took over the UAW Chrysler Department in 2014. Fiat Chrysler of America (FCA) management welcomed Jewell to the Chrysler department with a decadent party paid for with \$30,000 of NTC training funds. The party featured “ultra-premium liquor, more than \$7,000 worth of cigars, and more than \$3,000 worth of wine with custom labels” emblazoned with Jewell’s name. Scantly clad “strolling models” lit UAW leaders’ cigars.

FCA executives authorized Holiefield, Jewell, and other UAW officials to offer sham “special assignment” jobs at the NTC to their friends, family, and allies. The NTC transferred hundreds of thousands of dollars of fraudulent payments to the UAW to cover salaries and benefits to specially assigned individuals who did little or no work for the NTC. Jewell lived a luxurious lifestyle spending thousands of dollars of NTC funds at fancy steakhouses and luxury golf resorts. He resigned in January 2018 after the FBI searched his home, and he pled guilty to violating LMRA on April 2, 2019. Jewell’s attorney begged for leniency at the sentencing hearing, arguing his client was a victim of a corrupt culture in the union. The judge rejected the “everybody was doing it” defense and sentenced Jewell to 15 months in prison. Even though Jewell retired in January 2018, he received \$219,495 from the UAW for the year—about four times the annual wages of a shopfloor autoworker. In retirement, Jewell receives dual pensions,—one from GM and a more generous pension from the international UAW with COLA adjustments. Nancy Johnson, Jewell’s top assistant implicated him, Williams, and other UAW officials in misconduct as the federal investigation expanded to the General Motors and Ford joint training centers.

The federal probe into the UAW-GM Center for Human Resources (CHR) produced a criminal conviction of a retired aide to two former UAW Vice Presidents and a search of the homes of the current and a retired UAW president. Michael Grimes, the former administrative assistant to UAW GM Department Vice Presidents Joe Ashton, and Cindy Estrada pled guilty on September 4, 2019 to wire fraud conspiracy and money laundering for receiving \$1.99 million in kickbacks from vendors. Grimes served on the board of the CHR with Ashton and Estrada. Training funds paid for jackets, backpacks, and a \$3.97 million contract to a vendor for 58,000 watches that are stored at the CHR. Federal agents searched the Detroit home of UAW President Gary Jones and the California home of Dennis Williams on August 28, 2019. The FBI also searched the UAW Black Lake Conference Center, a 1,000-acre retreat where the UAW built Williams a \$1.3 million retirement lakefront cottage paid for with interest earned on the UAW strike fund.

The UAW International Executive Board (IEB) tapped the strike fund as a discretionary funding source as the Big Three laid-off thousands of workers. The UAW constitution was amended in 1980, 1989, 1995, 2002, 2006, and 2010 in order to make additional funds available to UAW leaders. In 1980, 50 percent of the interest earned on the strike fund was placed in the newly created Organization, Education, and Communication (OEC) fund. The diversion was increased to 75 percent in 1989 and 100 percent in 2002. The IEB transferred \$50 million from the strike fund into the UAW's general fund in 1995. Another reservoir fund was created in 2002, the Emergency Operations Fund (EOF), with the diversion of \$75 million directly from the strike fund. The IEB was given the authority to withdraw \$60 million in 2006, and an additional \$100 million from the strike fund in 2010.

UAW leaders collaborated with management in 1982 to form nonprofit training centers with GM, Ford, and Chrysler to administer joint programs established in the UAW national agreements. An extensive list of joint programs at the training centers were staffed by appointed representatives chosen by the UAW president with the consent of management. The training centers reimbursed the UAW with joint funds for the cost of salaries and benefits of the appointees. The joint funds reimbursements (JFRs) from the three training centers to the UAW have averaged \$27.5 million annually since 2005. Williams correctly stated no union dues flowed into the training centers, but more than \$387 million in JFRs flowed from the Big Three through the training centers into UAW coffers during the same period. Several hundred million dollars of JFRs were not reported separately in the annual Department of Labor LM-2 financial disclosures prior to 2005. Meanwhile, jointness was presented to UAW members as a win-win strategy whereby improving corporate competitiveness would boost job security. Unfortunately, labor-management cooperation schemes have produced the opposite; corporate market share

and employment levels have plummeted. I call this peculiar enterprise "UAW Incorporated."

The corruption on display at the NTC is rooted in the political machine that has dominated the UAW since Reuther was elected president in 1946. His Reuther Caucus, renamed the Administration Caucus, transformed the UAW government into a single-party state. The Public Review Board (PRB), the UAW ethical oversight body, described the International UAW as a "one-party institution like many national governments in which a single political party controls the government and the officials who formally make and administer those laws are selected entirely by that party." For several decades, "the lines of demarcation between party, the Administration Caucus, and the formal governing body, the International Executive Board (IEB), have become blurred, for 100 percent of its personnel are, and traditionally have been, members of the Administration Caucus."

Reuther's political machine rewarded partisan loyalty and punished opposition activists—sometimes violently. Black Nationalist inspired the Revolutionary Union Movement (RUM) erupted in several Detroit auto plants in 1968. When members of UAW Local 212 walked out of the Mack stamping plant in 1973 then refused orders to return to work, several hundred union officials armed with baseball bats attacked them—ending the strike. The New Directions Movement (NDM) that arose within the UAW rank-and-file in protest to concessions and jointness provoked a fierce reaction from Administration Caucus at the 1986 28th UAW Constitutional Convention. Opposition delegates were beaten, and the administration rigged the election for Region 5 director to defeat Jerry Tucker.

The outcome of jointness belies the promise of mutual gains. Quality of Work Life (QWL) was inserted into the national contract in 1973 and Quality Network (QN) in 1987, but GM still lost 10 percent of its market share and shed 127,000 workers in the 1980s. Even though the Big Three continued to shed thousands of workers, joint programs were expanded in every bargaining cycle to the point where appointees outnumbered elected UAW representatives. When GM entered bankruptcy in 2009, GM's market share was 22 percent, roughly half the level when UAW Inc. began in 1982, and only 69,000 hourly workers remained of the 441,000 who were on the job in 1981. GM currently employs 46,000 hourly workers. Jointness did nothing to prevent a 75 percent reduction of UAW-represented workers and the reversal of most of the bargaining gains from the Walter Reuther era. The rebranding of joint programs from QWL to QN or from QN to Global Manufacturing System (GMS) didn't preserve jobs or make GM more competitive.

The deception of UAW Inc. was well-illustrated when GM reported \$10.8 billion in U.S. profits in 2018 but announced on the day after Thanksgiving the shutting down of five North American factories—four in the United States. The Big Three effectively bought labor peace with JFRs to the UAW while eliminating hundreds of thousands of workers. Utilizing

the UAW strike fund to finance discretionary expenses of the IEB created a deterrent to deploying a labor strike. The Administration Caucus became a reliable partner in the downsizing of GM operations in exchange for preserving, expanding, and financing the UAW bureaucracy. **CP**

**THOMAS ADAMS** is a retired autoworker and activist who received a PhD in History from Michigan State University in 2010. His dissertation, “UAW Incorporated: The Triumph of Capital,” is the basis for the forthcoming book about the impact of institutional corruption within the UAW on the rank and file.

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## The Danger of Contagion Venezuela and the Weaponization of U.S. Aid

BY T.J. COLES

In 1998, Venezuela broke from over a century of U.S.-backed political and economic domination when a young Lt. Col., Hugo Chávez, came to power. “Chávismo” lifted tens of thousands of Venezuelans out of the abject poverty imposed on them by the “structural adjustment” programs of the U.S.-led International Monetary Fund (IMF). Former U.S. Foreign Service Officer, Lowell R. Fleischer, wrote at the time that, because Chávez enjoyed warm relations with the U.S. despite being clear that he rejected imperialism and the IMF’s neoliberalism, America’s initial response to Chávismo was to wait and see. Fleischer said that Venezuelan independence “could mean trouble for the entire region as well as the United States.”

By the year 2000, U.S. planners were still hoping that Chávez might be pro-American. But evidence of potential U.S. interference in the politics of Venezuela appeared from the outset of the Chávez presidency. Fleischer wrote of anti-imperialist ideology spreading across Central and South America and of “the danger of contagion.” Fleischer noted at the time that “U.S. policy toward Chávez has been appropriately low key,” but he added: “The United States must be prepared, however, to speak out forcefully and to take any necessary action if Venezuela begins to take actions inimical to vital U.S. interests”; oil being the main one. Within a year, it was apparent that Chávez meant what he said about using the nation’s substantial oil revenues to benefit the poorest by providing them with free education and healthcare.

This article explores how the U.S. crippled Venezuela’s vulnerable, oil-based economy with targeted sanctions and argues that aid and NGOs are “soft power” weapons. It also looks at the use of private charter flights as cover for illicit operations and provides evidence from the National Intelligence Council that U.S. officials game-planned Chávez’s physical demise from a heart attack several years before his actual death from cancer and a possible heart attack.

## Coup 2002

Published in the year 2000, a U.S. National Intelligence Council (NIC) projection out to 2015 stated: “Latin America—especially Venezuela, Mexico, and Brazil—will become an increasingly important oil producer by 2015 and an important component of the emerging Atlantic Basin energy system,” on which the U.S. relies for a significant amount of its oil. Latin America’s “proven oil reserves are second only to those located in the Middle East.” Already, the NIC was anticipating how to manipulate social unrest in Chávez’s Venezuela: “Fatigue with economic hardship and deep popular cynicism about political institutions, particularly traditional parties, could lead to instability in Venezuela, Peru and Ecuador.”

The military coup against Chávez in April 2002—which ultimately failed—was anticipated by the CIA and indirectly sponsored by U.S. civil society organizations (a.k.a. nongovernmentals, or NGOs). In April 2002, just days before the failed coup, a Senior Executive Intelligence Brief published by the CIA anticipated the removal of Chávez by the Venezuelan military.

A redacted report published by the Office of the Inspector General denies that U.S. “assistance” programs to Venezuela helped the coup, but does acknowledge that “it is clear that [the National Endowment for Democracy (NED)], Department of Defense (DOD), and other U.S. assistance programs provided training, institution building, and other support to individuals and organizations understood to be actively involved in the brief ouster of the Chávez government.” The U.S. diplomatic mission in Venezuela’s strategy aimed “to engage not only high-level civilian Venezuelan officials, but also the military, police, judicial system, media, non-governmental organizations, academia, and the business community” in opposition to the Chávez government.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) established the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) “to bridge the gap between emergency disaster relief programs and long-term development assistance.” USAID OTI began operations in Venezuela in August 2002. Within six years, funding for anti-Chávez parties and NGOs amounted to \$44.27 million. The funds went to “[p]rovide assistance to maintain democratic stability and strengthen the country’s fragile democratic institution,” a.k.a., remove Chávez. A footnote in a Congressional Research Service report notes that in Venezuela, “the lack of a USAID mission resulting from the denial of visas to USAID personnel may account for the ongoing OTI role. OTI staff are banned from the country as well, but programs continue to operate through local partners.”

## NGOs & Sanctions

Increasingly, Chávez cracked down on these so-called civil society organizations. NED published a report lamenting what it described as a “backlash” around the world, including from Venezuela, against U.S.-led NGOs. In 2004, NED funded the



NGO Súmate, which specializes in voter registration “education.” A NED report notes the “challenges to democracy assistance, both operationally and politically,” resulting from the newfound scepticism towards such organizations.

The U.S. State Department implied that the U.S. had to tread a thin line between alienating Chávez, risking anti-U.S. “contagion” in other countries (as Fleischer described it), and continuing to benefit from Venezuelan oil revenues. “U.S.-Venezuelan commercial ties are close,” said the State Department. “The United States is Venezuela’s most important trading partner, representing about half of both imports and exports. In turn, Venezuela is the United States’ third-largest export market in Latin America, purchasing U.S. machinery, transportation equipment, agricultural commodities, and auto parts.” The opening of the oil sector in 1996 “created extensive trade and investment opportunities for U.S. companies. As a result, Venezuela is one of the top four suppliers of foreign oil to the United States.”

In 2005, the U.S. Army’s Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) published a report on the threat of democracy (“populism”) in Europe and South America. The U.S. military was concerned about Europe because its counterparts in the intelligence agencies had worked hard to bump Eastern Europe into Western Europe’s sphere of influence and away from Russia’s. Any backlash from the populations of European nations against U.S.-led neoliberalism might undermine U.S. elite progress in that area. Latin America is considered to be an even more acute problem because U.S. policy wonks consider Latin America to be the U.S.’s “backyard.” Like Fleischer before them, the SSI feared that “Chavez’s brand of populism could potentially have the broadest appeal across various racial and cultural groups of any populist movement currently existing in the Americas.”

The George W. Bush administration decided to impose targeted, as opposed to blanket, sanctions that did not harm U.S. investments. This appeared to be more of a political signal than a real attempt to coerce Chávez. Venezuela borders Colombia, where FLN guerrillas (considered to be terrorists by the U.S.) operate, as do drug-runners. Venezuela has long been accused by the U.S. of acting as a haven for smugglers and “terrorists.” The U.S. sanctions banned arms sales to Venezuela and froze the assets and revoked the U.S. visas of those believed by the Bush administration to have trafficked drugs and supported terrorism.

Published a couple of years later, a National Intelligence Council report predicting global trends stated: “Venezuela, Bolivia, and other petro-populist regimes could unravel completely, if that has not occurred beforehand because of already growing discontent and decreasing production. Absent support from Venezuela, Cuba might be forced to begin China-like market reforms.” This indicates that if political nature wasn’t taking its course in the interests of U.S. elites, it might have to be modified.

## **Chavez Assassinated? U.S. Prepares For War**

An undated National Intelligence Council projection (circa 2010) modelled by representatives of energy and other companies, including PFC Energy, the Evian Group, and Shell, predicted the death of Hugo Chávez from a heart attack, long before he actually died. “The sudden death of Chavez, resulting from a heart attack, is mourned not only throughout much of Latin America, but in other parts of the world, as the populist phenomenon of ‘Chavez-ismo’ expands,” says one scenario. “Populist regimes are now also increasingly present in Southeast Asia as well.” There are two extraordinary parts of the projection. The first is that when he died in reality, some media reported that Chávez had died of a heart attack. The second is that the projection anticipates Chávez’s between 2013 and 2021. In reality, Chávez died in 2013.

Chávez was diagnosed with cancer; a fact kept secret from the public until July 2011. In 2012, he asked: “Would it be strange if they had developed the technology to induce cancer and nobody knew about it?” (Interestingly, the BBC published an article attempting to debunk the possibility. Why?) Historically, the CIA used a “Health Alternation Committee” to assassinate foreign politicians. Chávez was, however, treated in Cuba, where the CIA had long-failed to assassinate Castro, despite repeated efforts. There is conflicting information about Chávez’s death. He apparently died on 5 March 2013, yet international media were not informed until 7 March. The head of the presidential guard, Gen. José Ornella, told the Associated Press that Chávez died of a massive heart attack. But a couple of days later, Reuters reported that unnamed medical sources claimed that Chávez died of lung failure due to the spread of the cancer.

Whatever the true cause of death, Chávez passed the torch to Nicolás Maduro, who was elected President in April 2013.

A year later, the U.S. General, Martin E. Dempsey, Head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was asked about the worsening political situation in Venezuela. Dempsey replied that the U.S. was “planning activities ... in response to what Venezuela is doing and ... the political turmoil in which they find themselves.” Like the Office of the Inspector General before him, Dempsey noted “the valance of the instruments of power, diplomatic, economic and military. Militarily, obviously, we don’t have a relationship with Venezuela, but we have a relationship with its neighbors,” specifically Colombia. “And so we spend our time ensuring that we enhance our relationship with Venezuela’s neighbors.” Dempsey concluded that, “in terms of responses to Venezuela near term, they will largely be economic and diplomatic, with our effort or our emphasis on the periphery.”

## **Economic Crisis**

In response to Maduro’s reported human rights abuses during the demonstrations that took place in 2014, the U.S. Congress introduced new targeted sanctions against members of the Venezuelan government and their assets.

According to the right-wing, U.S.-based Brookings Institute,

the financial crisis in Venezuela is due to corruption and economic mismanagement, but crucially, also because Maduro has been unable to borrow from international institutions due to sanctions. As a result, Venezuela has defaulted on its debt obligations. Brookings notes that “attempts to raise sufficient financing abroad will prove unsuccessful unless there is a serious attempt to restructure the current debt, something this government has been unwilling to do, and which U.S. sanctions now make difficult.” In an attempt to manage the balance of payments issue, Venezuela cut imports by 70%, triggering food and medicine shortages.

In 2017, then-CIA director Mike Pompeo said: “we are very hopeful that there can be a [political] transition in Venezuela and we the CIA is doing its best to understand the dynamic there [sic], so that we can communicate to our State Department and to others.” The Brookings Institute also says that since 2017, “at least two credible coup conspiracies have failed, confirming reports that the Venezuelan military is closely surveilled by Venezuela’s Cuban-trained intelligence services. This has pushed regime opponents into increasingly bizarre tactics executed by small groups of conspirators, such as the use of drones to attack President Maduro in August 2018.” Also in 2017, new sanctions were imposed. The U.S. State Department confirms that they “prohibit dealings in certain existing bonds owned by the Venezuelan public sector, as well as dividend payments to the Government of Venezuela.” It also notes that sanctions “deny the Maduro regime a critical source of financing with which it maintains its rule, [and] restrict the Venezuelan government from using the U.S. system to restructure existing debts.”

Recall that Fleischer and the Strategic Studies Institute on separate occasions referred to the threat of ideological contagion arising from left-wing governments taking power. A National Intelligence Council study from 2017 states: “Additional collapse in Venezuela probably would further discredit the leftist experiments of the past decade in Latin America and increase pressure to focus on improving economies,” which would be a bonus for U.S. planners.

## **The Weaponization of Aid**

With Venezuelan refugees fleeing to neighboring Colombia, the U.S. military and civil society increased efforts to undermine the Maduro government, weaponizing aid in the process. The weaponization of aid by the U.S. has a long history. Joint Forces Quarterly points out that “U.S. Government international food aid can be traced back to an 1812 earthquake in South America when Washington donated shipments of flour to Venezuela,” using its Navy to do so, “just weeks before declaring war with England.” In November 2018, the U.S. Navy’s hospital ship, USNS Comfort, began an 11-week mission to support Venezuelan refugees. It was anchored off the coast of Colombia. Acting Secretary of Defense, Patrick M. Shanahan said: “Our hemisphere’s security is at stake, and rest assured

the United States will continue to keep all options on the table to ensure regional security,” supposedly because Maduro is hosting Colombian rebels (the ELN) and drug lords.

The U.S. Department of Defense’s Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) includes Venezuela in its “area of responsibility.” Echoing Dempsey’s comment in 2014 and continuing the trend noted by the Office of the Inspector General, SOUTHCOM’s Strategic Posture (2019) reveals that Comfort was, in part, a cover for legitimizing the presence of NGOs and the training of groups opposed to Maduro: “The integration of more than 100 military and non-governmental organization (NGO) personnel from 10 other nations helped us build trust, tell our story effectively, and enhance regional perceptions of the United States.” It notes that “[t]he U.S. military medical and command staff also returned from the deployment more ready, able to operate with foreign partners, and prepared to provide critical care to U.S. warfighters. These impacts will far outlast COMFORT’s 70-day deployment.” It concludes that “[t]hrough collaboration with the Department of State, USAID, and non-governmental partners, our civil affairs teams execute low cost, high impact civic action projects that help partner nations and extend governance to vulnerable communities.”

In February 2019, the U.S. flew three C-17 Globemaster III cargo aircraft from bases in New Jersey and South Carolina to Cúcuta, Colombia, less than two miles from the Venezuelan border. Col. Armando Hernandez, deputy public affairs chief at SOUTHCOM said: “The U.S. military has a long history of supporting USAID-led aid missions and working with international relief organizations to provide aid to people impacted by life-threatening crises and disasters.” The State Department provided \$140 million in aid and Mike Pompeo, now Secretary of State, authorized \$20m additional funding. The C-17s were met by Colombian President Iván Duque and Vice President Marta Lucía Ramírez. In early-May 2019, Acting Secretary of Defense, Patrick M. Shanahan, briefed the heads of various departments “on a wide range of military options, as the command continues to monitor activities on the ground in Venezuela.”

## **The Aid Trucks & Cargo Planes**

Weaponized U.S. aid was delivered, in part, via trucks along the Simón Bolívar International Bridge, over the Táchira River that separates Venezuela from Colombia. Maduro ordered the Venezuelan entry point blocked, preventing access to four aid trucks that were stopped at the road blocks on 23 February. Anti-Maduro demonstrators accidentally set one of the trucks ablaze with a Molotov cocktail. It is unclear who, but someone edited Colombian CCTV footage to make it look as though the Maduro government had fired teargas at the trucks to set them on fire. Falling for the fake news, Florida’s Senator Marco Rubio tweeted: “This is a crime and if international law means anything [Maduro] must pay a high price.” When unedited footage of the real cause of the fire emerged, even the New York

Times had to report the facts.

Consider also the strange case of 21 Air Llc.

The CIA has a history of using front companies to fly weapons to guerrillas. Air America operated from 1950-1976, transporting aid, diplomats, commandos, drugs, guerrillas, and weapons for use in the U.S.-led wars in Indochina. In the 1980s, Elliott Abrams, Assistant Secretary of State under Reagan, helped organize covert arms supplies to the Nicaraguan Contras via the CIA's front company, Southern Air Transport. More recently, President Trump appointed Abrams Special Envoy to Venezuela. In 1996, one Michael Steinke began a year's work for Gemini Air Cargo. Adolfo Moreno is the owner of two businesses (Airline Management Group and Florida Franchise Development) at an address used by a Gemini subsidiary. In the early years of President George W. Bush's "war on terror," people were kidnapped and flown to military bases in foreign states by the CIA for torture, using cargo plane companies including Gemini, as part of the so-called "rendition" program. In 1999, a company called 21 Cargo was founded by Adolfo Moreno.

In 2014, Moreno founded 21 Air with Steinke (the former Gemini employee). The company operates from Miami International Airport. In February 2019, following social media revelations about its activities in Colombia and Venezuela, 21 Air issued a statement confirming that one of its planes (a Boeing 767) with the registration N-881-YV had indeed made dozens of flights from Miami International Airport to destinations in Colombia and Venezuela. It denies any wrongdoing and confirms that all operations were cleared by the federal Transportation Security Administration. Each trip lasted only a few hours. This coincided with claims made by the Venezuelan government that their customs officers had seized assault weapons, ammunition cartridges, and military-grade radio antennas.

## Conclusion

At the time of writing, Venezuela has spent over two decades successfully resisting U.S. domination. Either the successful resistance will endure and, in doing so, send a message to the U.S. that its days of easy dominance are over, or it will fail and signal renewed success of U.S. hegemony. **CP**

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# The Long Wars Against El Paso and Ciudad Juarez

BY KENT PATERSON

Perched above the Rio Grande with a splendid view of neighboring Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, the Cielo Vista Mall is

one of the commercial nerve centers of El Paso, Texas. On a normal weekend, the mall and an adjacent Walmart store bounce with shoppers, many of them middle-class customers from Juarez and northern Mexico who pump money into the local economy, support jobs and bolster Texas state tax coffers.

This routine went on for years without major incident until, suddenly, an invader came to town on August 3, 2019.

The intruder wasn't one of the migrants from the south trying to cross the border here that Fox News, the President and his cronies rail about, but a young white racist who drove hours and hours from a Dallas suburb armed with an assault rifle and a mission to kill Mexicans.

Unloading his weapon at the Cielo Vista Walmart on a Saturday morning, the killer slaughtered 22 people and wounded 25 others before surrendering to police.

"It reminds me of the 19th century and early 20th, when the Texas Rangers would go hunting Mexicans, especially in the 1910s," said Oscar Martinez, an El Paso historian, educator and author who grew up in Juarez but was educated in the Texas city.

Though racist killings of African Americans are part of the historic epistle, "there is little knowledge outside of the Chicano community that people were lynched," Martinez added.

Published only days before the El Paso massacre, media stories commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Red Summer terror against African Americans, renewed attention on violence against Mexican Americans in Texas and other parts of the U.S. Southwest during the same historical period.

An Associated Press story, for instance, recounted the long-forgotten 1918 massacre in Porvenir, Texas, when Texas Rangers kidnapped 15 men and boys and slaughtered them. A network of researchers and activists, Refusing to Forget (refusingtoforget.org), is recovering the historical memory of Porvenir and similar human rights atrocities, making sure the crimes are not consigned to oblivion.

In 2019 El Paso resident Rita Davis and her six-year-old son, Jacob, declared in unison that the Walmart victims were slaughtered "because we are brown."

The mother and son came to a community shrine erected for the victims above the massacre site, where on a Saturday afternoon dozens of people at a time turned out to pay their respects to the murdered. Featuring crosses, candles, flags, posters, mementos, photos, and messages in both Spanish and English convey grief, love, outrage and resistance.

According to the official list released by the City of El Paso and media outlets, the victims included: Andre Anchondo, 23; Jordan Anchondo, 24; Arturo Benavidez, 60; Leo Campos, 41; Maria Flores, 77; Raul Flores, 77; Jorge Calvillo, 61; Adolfo Cerros Hernandez, 68; Alexander Hoffman, 66; David Johnson, 63; Luis Juarez, 90; Maria Eugenia Legaretta; 58; Elsa Mendoza, 57; Maribel Loya, 56; Ivan Manzano, 46; Gloria Marquez, 61; Margie Reckard, 63; Sarah Regalado Moriel, 66; Javier Rodriguez, 15; Teresa Sanchez, 82; Angelina Silva-Elisbee, 86;

Juan Velazquez, 77.

Of the victims, 13 were U.S. citizens, 8 Mexican, and one German.

“This was a killing against Mexicans and Mexican Americans. It didn’t matter if you have papers,” commented David Dorado Romo, El Paso author, historian and activist.

An outpouring of solidarity characterized El Paso-and Juarez-after August 3. Vigils, memorials and benefit concerts were held, with more than six million dollars donated for the victims and their families. A local dentist pledged free services for life to survivors. Hundreds of “strangers” showed up for the funeral of Margie Reckard, whose husband was left alone by the murder of his wife and his predicament publicized by local media.

“I think the people have responded in a very positive way to help the victims and make it known that El Paso is a city that is caring and giving. All you have to see is the donations and the different events,” Martinez remarked.

A new slogan, “El Paso Strong,” was emblazoned on t-shirts and splashed across bulletin boards, city buses and other public spaces across the city.

Thousands of El Pasoans protested when Trump visited the Sun City after the butchery, and recovering victims declined to see him in the hospital.

El Paso Firme (El Paso Strong in Spanish) soon emerged, uniting 21 activist groups against white supremacy and racist violence. The movement kicked off with a musical serenade for detained migrants, a procession in the historic Segundo Barrio of the city, and a concert-rally that attracted more than one thousand people to a city park.

Romo found irony in the involvement of politicians in El Paso Strong events.

“Like (El Paso Firme activist and head of the Border Network for Human Rights) Fernando Garcia said, it’s been coopted by the same people who’ve been behind Durangito and the Chamizal school project...and all the institutional racism,” he added, referring to local development and educational policies that are displacing residents and students.

Romo lambasted the city’s economic and political elite, Republican and Democratic, for manipulating public sentiments and casting themselves saviors.

A case in point was the August homage to the Walmart victims held at the Chihuahuas minor league baseball stadium, which was built in 2013 on the ruins of a razed city hall and amid public opposition. Speaking at the memorial was Texas Governor Greg Abbott, who only days prior to the massacre sent a fundraising letter to supporters warning of an “invasion,” a common dog whistle word in the anti-immigrant camp.

“How can you get more surreal than that?” Romo asked.

Martinez criticized Abbott for obstructing action on gun violence and saying he wouldn’t be rushed into signing new legislation. Meantime, another shooter went on an August 31 rampage in Midland-Odessa, Texas, killing 7 and wounding 22.

Among the victims were truck driver Raul Garcia and U.S. postal worker Mary Granados. Both were immigrants from Juarez with years in the U.S.

Prior to August 3, fresh rounds of activism electrified El Paso, illustrated by intensified migrant solidarity, the formation of the Community First Coalition that’s taking on developers, and last spring’s protests by University of Texas El Paso (UTEP) students and faculty against the imposition by the university regents of Heather Wilson as the new president of UTEP. A former Republican Congresswoman from New Mexico, Wilson served as U.S. Air Force Secretary in the Trump administration.

Although nearly 10,000 people signed a petition against Wilson’s appointment, regents didn’t budge and Wilson assumed office in August.

## Violence Foretold

Although the Walmart bloodbath was the worst incidence of racial violence El Paso has experienced in memory, local events leading up to the slaughter foretold something bad, perhaps real bad, was imminent.

A rightwing paramilitary group, United Constitutional Patriots, appeared this past spring in neighboring Sunland Park, New Mexico, an El Paso suburb that also borders Ciudad Juarez. Controversy ensued when a video was circulated that showed the private group detaining Central American migrants attempting to enter the U.S.

Amid growing outcry against the group, the FBI and Sunland Park Police Department arrested the UCP’s apparent leader, Larry Mitchell Hopkins (aka Johnny Horton, Jr.) on charges of being a felon in possession of firearms and ammunition.

Curiously, the charges against Hopkins dated back to October 2017 in San Juan County, New Mexico bordering the Navajo Nation, another entity that’s suffered historic racist violence.

According to the 2019 criminal complaint, Hopkins’ group of about 20 individuals in San Juan County was allegedly stockpiling arms, undergoing training and discussing assassinating George Soros, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, because of their purported support of Antifa.

Why Mitchell, who already had a felon record, and his cohorts were not arrested in 2017 is a big unanswered question.

A second man associated with militia activities, Jim Benvie, was subsequently arrested and charged with impersonating a federal officer. According to media reports, he had previously been charged in Oklahoma for vehicle theft and fraudulently using a cancer-stricken child’s name to raise money.

Benvie was spotted this spring around the construction site of a privately-funded border fence in Sunland Park that was touted as putting Donald Trump’s border wall on the ground.

Associated with Trump supporters Steve Bannon and Kris Kobach, We Build the Wall, Inc., rolled material-laden trucks into the small city without bothering to notify the locals and proceeded to construct a half-mile, 18 foot steel bollard fence

outfitted with surveillance technology and a concrete roadway designed for Border Patrol vehicles on privately-owned land within feet of the Mexican border.

As workers hastened to erect the structure, the administration of Sunland Park Mayor Javier Perea temporarily suspended construction because of permit issues.

Enraged border wall supporters then inundated Sunland Park City Hall with hostile phone calls and e-mails, reportedly including a threat to “shoot up” the local government headquarters; Mayor Perea declared that he and his family were personally threatened. Amid the hullabaloo, the suspension was lifted and the builders were granted a local permit.

Similar to the city government’s experience, intimidating emails and phone calls next deluged the U.S. section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC),

policies beginning September 1.

Picking up on the thread, El Paso media outlet KVIA ran a story but noted that the name Antifa was not even employed on a website promoting the action which, in any event, ultimately never materialized.

El Paso’s Republican mayor, Dee Margo, was nevertheless quoted by the ABC affiliate as saying, “We are aware of Antifa’s announced visit to El Paso and we will continue to monitor plans for the event...;’ The El Paso Police Department pledged likewise.

Two days later, El Paso suffered a public safety crisis, but it came from the right and not the left.

No direct connection between the El Paso Walmart shooter and/or United Constitutional Patriots and We Build the Wall has come to light so far, but the escalating chronology of guns, bullying, inflammatory rhetoric, and extreme violence is striking.

Romo is critical of post-massacre media coverage. He considers the local media’s obviation of the accused Walmart killer’s manifesto a whitewashing of a terrorist act couched in historic racist thinking that exposes white supremacy and not guns as the central issue of August 3.

“The guy’s telling the truth. He had all that history before Trump,” Romo remarked.

After the massacre, statements poured forth affirming El Paso as a peaceful, safe and accepting city. Bolstering this reputation are the border city’s low violent crime rates of recent years.

Romo agreed that El Paso is a safe place for its residents, but represents an entirely different reality for migrants passing through who are subject to mistreatment, detention and worse. “El Paso is one of the deadliest cities for people who are seen as non-human,” the border scholar affirmed.

One underreported story concerns migrants who’ve perished in this borderland. A largely silent violence plays out each spring and summer when desperate migrants attempting to skirt the Border Patrol drown in El Paso area irrigation canals. This year’s been a particularly deadly one, with at least ten migrants drowning between June and early September, including a little girl not yet of school age.

Additionally, two Honduran women died in the desert outside Juarez. Typically, the migrant deaths make spot news and then are pretty much forgotten.

### **The Scene in Juarez**

Another common statement heard after August 3 was that El Paso is one with its big Mexican sister across the Rio Grande. Indeed, the two cities are historically, culturally, economi-

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## **Border wall boosters and immigration restrictionists decry the lawlessness of Mexican cities like Juarez but they omit the U.S. role in fomenting drug consumption north of the border and violence south of it.**

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the agency charged with overseeing U.S.-Mexico water and boundary issues, after We Build the Wall’s work crew built a gate section on federal land without the proper permit. “90 percent” of the messages originated from outside the El Paso, according to the IBWC’s spokeswoman.

For We Build the Wall and its funders, the Sunland Park fence is a huge success. Steve Bannon and Donald Trump Jr. have visited the site and the builders are reportedly eyeing other parcels of private land along the U.S.-Mexico border for new structures.

Following the Walmart massacre, We Build the Wall’s Brian Kolfage posted the obligatory messages of sympathy for a couple of days and the American flag at the fence was lowered to half-mast. But the group’s social media accounts were soon back to business as usual, replete with postings about immigrant rapists, drunk drivers, alleged human traffickers, and “locus” plagues.

An anti-Antifa hysteria was ginned up by the likes of Andy Ngo and others who screeched warnings about a purported national protest in El Paso against government immigration

cally, and even politically interlocked. Besides the shared Rio Grande, the two cities draw water from two common, trans-boundary aquifers.

But the two sisters' relationship has been a trying one in recent years, strained by forces from outside the region. Border clampdowns and time-consuming crossings at the international bridges have all but become semi-permanent features of the sister cities since the Border Patrol's Operation Hold the Line of 1993.

A U.S. government built-steel fence fronting the Rio Grande now obscures the view from El Paso of Juarez neighborhoods. Out of sight, out of mind, as the saying goes.

Nowadays, mobile clumps of barbed wire sit at the U.S. line on the Santa Fe Bridge, ready for deployment by U.S. border guards as a tactic to repel refugees.

From 2008 to 2012, two cartels battled for control of the Juarez drug-smuggling corridor, unleashing murder, extortion and other crimes. According to an estimate by border researcher Molly Molloy, at least 13,801 people were murdered in Juarez and the adjacent Juarez Valley between 2007 and 2017.

Many El Paso residents who formerly visited Juarez on a regular basis now stay away, like the El Paso couple that was amazed over this writer's visits to the Mexican city during a conversation held, ironically, days before the Walmart slaughter.

After 2012 Juarez recovered to a degree, as homicides decreased and crimes like extortion and kidnapping diminished. Residents jammed bars and restaurants again.

Since 2017, however, the Juarez press reports that another 2,300 people or so people have been murdered in this city of an estimated 1.4 million. Violent competition flares for controlling not only drug smuggling to the U.S. but a thriving, domestic retail market for methamphetamine, cocaine and heroin as well.

Border wall boosters and immigration restrictionists decry the lawlessness of Mexican cities like Juarez but they omit the U.S. role in fomenting drug consumption north of the border and violence south of it.

While drugs flow out from Juarez, lots of guns stream in from the US, ensuring that the killings continue. Chihuahua State Prosecutor Jorge Nava claims that 90 percent of the guns used in recent Juarez homicides are of U.S. origin.

"The majority don't even have 90 days of having been purchased in sporting goods stores and in businesses close to the border in Texas and New Mexico," Nava was recently quoted in *El Diario de Juarez*.

Oscar Martinez, who grew up in Juarez and is the author of two classic books about the city, said U.S. arms trafficking is nothing new, dating back to the 1800s when U.S. arms dealers profited from Mexican political turmoil. The gringo arms conduit has been a lucrative "constant for more than a century," escalating during the 1910 Mexican Revolution and later profiting from powerful organized crime groups, he added.

Mexican Chancellor Marcelo Ebrard has declared curbing the illegal arms exports a priority for the Lopez Obrador administration, promising that Mexico will begin monthly reviews of U.S. purchased arms linked to violence in his country.

In a recent press conference, Ebrard stressed that the issue of illegal arms trafficking is as important to Mexico as migration is to the United States. But immigrant advocates increasingly blast the Lopez Obrador administration for cow-towing to Trump by detaining more than 100,000 migrants—mainly Central Americans—so far this year, forcing asylum seekers to wait their dubious turn in line in Juarez and other border cities, and deploying Mexico's new National Guard on the international line as a kind of "human wall" against migrant/refugee crossings.

Beginning last fall, Juarez was transformed into the flash-point of the immigration showdown, when hundreds of Cubans and Central Americans began camping out at the Santa Fe Bridge connecting the Mexican city with its U.S. city, hoping for an asylum interview. Thousands and thousands more followed.

One year later, large numbers of migrants and refugees are stranded in Juarez, though nobody really knows for sure how many. Downtown Juarez has the air of a little Havana, with Cuban food on restaurant menus and Cuban clients making up the new renters in hotels and apartments. Many Cubanos work in the border city— with or without government permission.

"We're waiting to get called when our turn come up, but I wouldn't live here," said a female Cuban asylum-seeker named Surama. "We're working to get by. If you don't, you can't support yourself."

The latest group of migrants/refugees to reach the international bridges are Mexican, more than one thousand of them since the summer, according to *El Diario de Juarez* and other press outlets. There are men, women and many children camped out waiting for a chance to argue an asylum case.

Invoking the fear of violence, the asylum seekers are reportedly fleeing the states of Zacatecas, Michoacan and Guerrero, all entities where guns from the north threaten and murder so drug production for the alienated burghs of El Norte and the street corners of Mexico can continue profitably uninterrupted. Quoted in *El Diario*, a young couple explained how they fled their homes because of narco threats against the entire family, including their newborn child.

In the borderland of Juarez-El Paso, the migrants can peer down from the Santa Fe Bridge and see the sickly Rio Grande paralleled by a big canal where predecessors have drowned. Near the middle of the bridge, barbed wire and U.S. border guards stand solid to make sure the migrants don't rush over. U.S. Customs helicopters fly overhead while Mexican soldiers guard the banks of the Rio Grande. Not far away a community shrine exists outside an El Paso Walmart, where a white racist terrorist determined to halt an "invasion" of folks who believed

there was still an American Dream gunned down scores of people out shopping one summer day in 2019. **CP**

**KENT PATERSON** is an investigative reporter in New Mexico.

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## Spiritual Babe

# Marianne Williamson's All-American Grace

BY RON JACOBS

We are told, much too frequently for many people's taste, that the United States is a Christian nation. Of course, this "truth" is told primarily by those who use their religion as a police officer uses their nightstick on a mouthy protester. Alternatively, we are reminded of the nation's Christianity by prosperity preachers whose bank accounts depend on the pretense that one's spiritual worth is dependent on one's material worth. Then there are those who, taking Max Weber's warning that the ultimate capitalist religion no longer needs a god because the accumulation of wealth has replaced such a being with the "spirit" of capitalism.

Most readers are probably having visions of right-wing radio and television preachers at a prayer breakfast with Donald Trump providing the benediction before they dig into their breakfast sandwiches ordered by the gross from McDonald's. To Trump's right are Joel Osteen and the ghost of Billy Graham breaking bread and talking about their dental work; Richard Nixon smiles up from hell. The thing is, though, not all today's nonsense about the special place god holds in their heart for the United States comes from the right-wing. Indeed, one can hear many a liberal politician mix a little god and spirituality into their speeches no matter what sins they committed the night before. It's part of the tenets so many US citizens believe in the name of American exceptionalism.

The 2020 election cycle, which began way too early, includes the Christian Zionism of the Trumpists and most of the Republican party. The ultimate expression of faith for this group is the Apocalypse and Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Donald Trump's recent tweet that seemed to accept his coronation as the King of Israel by the ultraright wing radio host Wayne Allan Root certainly have these people added hope. To the Christian Zionists, this must certainly mean the Four Horsemen are even closer than they were after Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

On the Democratic side, the 2020 campaign features another uniquely US take on religion. It is the New Age manifestation of what Harold Bloom defined as the American religion—a marriage of the Pentecostal belief that God lives inside each of us and the unique and false American idea that one can become whatever they want. In the case of most US residents, it seems that the latter usually means they want to be as rich

as the rich people they see on television. The candidate who represents this for the Democrats is Marianne Williamson, the new age hustler with a social conscience.

Williamson's spirituality is not racist like so many of her right-wing fellows, nor is it sexist. It is open to all who are willing to accept its essential message: one can change their world and place in that world by perceiving their world differently. Then, one must work to manifest that new perception. Although she began her spiritual career by reading and interpreting another person's interpretation of Jesus' gospels in the New Testament, it seems safe to say that what Williamson is selling is secular and non-denominational. It also preaches social justice in a manner reminiscent of various Catholic theologians and priests. However, it remains insufficient and, to put it nicely, utopian.

Karl Marx wrote in his introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* that religion represented "...at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions." In other words, the reason people turn to religious faith is because of the nature of their existence on earth. Under capitalist systems, that existence is one that at its worst leads to an early, yet lingering death, with nothing to show for it. It is a life where one's only value is determined by the capitalist class and is reduced solely to an individual's labor. Furthermore, labor itself is alienating and with little or no spiritual or emotional satisfaction. Marx understood this increasing alienation resulted from the ever-greater automation of the tools designed to create goods and the increasing separation of the fabricators from the finished product. He considered this a byproduct of capitalism's innovation and need to squeeze every last bit of surplus value from a worker's labor.

Williamson acknowledges the alienation of contemporary labor. Her solution, however, tells us to change our perception of that alienation. In other words, change the way you understand your exploitation, but don't try to change the material reasons for it. Many modern workers have heard similar suggestions at so-called mindfulness workshops. These workshops dispense the idea that we should undertake each and every activity of the day with an awareness not usually assigned to mundane tasks. In other words, we should change our perception of such tasks, thereby making them something they are not. Not only does this let the bosses off the hook, it pretends that the worker's position in the corporation is the same as the owners and management. Even though the worker is an autonomous, self-realized human being, their existence as an economic entity means they are directed to goals and activities that are dictated by those who own the means of production. One does not change this essential fact by changing one's perception of their work.

#### NOT QUITE PIE IN THE SKY

You will eat by and bye  
In that glorious land above the sky  
Work and pray, live on hay  
You'll get pie in the sky, bye and bye

— Joe Hill IWW Songbook

There are many decent things Marianne Williamson says. Her impulse to help others is certainly the best of them. On the other hand, her faith in capitalism denotes either that she really doesn't understand the essential foundation of capitalism—the pursuit of profit—or she just prefers to pretend it's not really as bad as it looks. Given her financial success, either possibility seems possible. After all, how could such a decent person as herself be engaged in a system that depends on the exploitation of most of humanity?

Her solution is a solution that addresses the symptoms of the problem but glosses over the problem itself. Her call for a makeover of the current politics in the US acknowledges its moral vacuity, but not its material base. Williamson believes, like most every other US politician, that her nation is exceptional. "America," she writes. "Has been a vessel for the great Work from its inception." Essentially ignoring the slave trade and native genocide the country is actually based on, she tells her readers that they should join her on a road of high and enlightened purpose. If we take this road, the nation's material wealth will "take care of itself". Not only does this represent a gross misunderstanding of how capitalism actually works for most people, it is a straight out lie.

While her policy proposals are in some ways comparable to many of Bernie Sanders proposals, it is important to look at her core beliefs, her motivation. Most importantly, and it cannot be said enough, it is important to emphasize that she has is no apparent skepticism about capitalism and its ultimate inability to be used for good. Although she attacks the current neoliberal stage of capitalism and its need to privatize everything, she considers this capitalist phase as something that can be reformed within the superstructure of capitalism itself. There is no hint of socialist thought in Ms. Williamson's worldview. Instead, as noted before, it seems to be framed by these two classically north American Protestant settler concepts: God is outside the world and in the world. This god cares about the world, especially the United States. Also, this god is inside each and every one of us and it is this that gives us the power to be whatever we want to be. These beliefs ignore a basic fact. If one is working for someone else to pay their bills and take care of family, they are not able to be whatever they want to be.

Like almost every other liberal to left candidate, Williamson refuses to acknowledge that we need something more than a prayer, more than a belief that we can be better, more than a change in direction. We need to fight the powers destroying the planet and its inhabitants. Liberal reform leaves the political and economic infrastructure intact. The rich and

powerful are not afraid of those who merely want to make the system work better for those beside themselves. Indeed, they welcome the distraction while ice caps melt, families flee hunger and violence for concentration camps and desert treks, and working people in the homeland incur debt that can never be paid just to go back to work.

Ultimately, Marianne Williamson's answers at the debates and speeches on the campaign trail are founded in a system of spiritual claptrap for the liberal voter for whom there is no other economic system but some form of capitalism. Her (and their) faith is in a system that has proven it cannot be reformed. "We are part of the American river of destiny, running through time and carrying with it the extraordinary gift of one great idea: that there can be a land where all are free to be and to become their essential selves." Like Marx, she discusses the alienation people feel from their labor. Also, like Marx, she seems to understand that the worker ultimately loses their ability to determine their destinies or even to be the director of their own actions in such a system. She isn't promising pie in the sky, but she is suggesting one can manifest a similar pie here on earth via her spiritual path. Williamson's prayer is that we will supersede this alienation by making our servitude meaningful as a means towards self-fulfillment. Marx rejects this essentially Christian notion knowing that the only way to end the alienation is by changing the material reality. In other words, by ending the capitalist system of wage slavery.

While it is reasonably certain that a revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system is not in the offing—and that no US presidential candidate would be leading it if it was—Williamson's spiritual over material reality approach is, while uniquely American, unrealistic and doomed to fail in the long run.

Briefly stated, Marianne Williamson is a left-liberal answer to the right-wing preachers like Billy Graham and Pat Robertson. She is the Jesus who threw the moneychangers out of the temple to their John Calvin. Her spiritual message is 2019 USA's sigh of the oppressed creature, its heart of a heartless world, and soul of soulless conditions. She is this Democratic campaign's opium of the people. **CP**

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## Cities, Green Orthodoxy, and the Future of Sustainable Development

BY CHRISTOPHER KETCHAM

As the world has urbanized rapidly since 1950, per capita carbon footprint has declined, and so has carbon intensity



in economic output, defined as the amount of energy used to produce a unit of economic growth. But gross material throughputs and greenhouse gas production during this same period skyrocketed. Global natural capital—fisheries, topsoil, freshwater supply, etc—has plummeted. This is because, as we pack into cities, we are consuming more materials as measured by absolute volume. The totality of the chopping up of mother earth into little bloody pieces has become more intense, not less.

These facts would appear to undermine one of the central tenets of green orthodoxy: that urbanization always leads to sustainability.

Three characteristics common to large-scale 21st century cities augur an unpleasant future.

The first is that, though they are already metastatically overgrown, cities seek always to grow more. There is not a city on earth that has for official policy a ceiling on population, no city that has said, We shall have only so many people. Lewis Mumford in *The City in History* described this as pathopolis, the city as cancer.

The second is that, from an ecological vantage, cities produce nothing of value. “In ecological terms,” writes William Rees, a population ecologist at the University of British Columbia and the originator of the ecological footprint concept, “the city is a node of pure consumption existing parasitically on an extensive resource base.” (By contrast with the modern city—to take one example of difference—the medieval city produced night-soils that fed nutrients back into the surrounding agricultural land-base; the modern city removes its feces from ecological cycling, and reduces it to “treated sewage.”)

Rees calls the globally-integrated consumption-oriented city a “dissipative structure,” citing the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics to make his case. Says Rees:

Under the 2nd law of thermodynamics cities are dissipative structures, open systems that can maintain themselves and grow only by consuming and degrading available energy/matter extracted from their host environments (ecosystems) and by ‘dissipating’ the resultant waste back into their environments. In short, cities maintain their internal ‘order’ (negentropy) at the expense of increasing the external ‘disorder’ (entropy) of the ecosphere. Seen this way, the city is a node of intense energy and material consumption and waste generation dependent on a complementary, vastly larger area of productive ecosystem that lies mostly outside the city. The city’s de facto ecological footprint is typically several hundred times larger than its geographic area.

The third commonality is that cities promote and make possible affluence. Cities are the places we go to make more money, buy more goods, live with a heavier material-wealth footprint.

Linger a moment on point #3. Literally every urban planner I’ve interviewed has issued the same remonstrance about the affluent society: no city can be sustainable, they say, if its inhab-

itants enjoy unfettered consumerism. Gary Gardner, a senior researcher at Worldwatch, says that outsize consumption of goods, the driver of the global economy, will always push the urban ecological footprint beyond what’s sustainable.

The city of the future, counsels Gardner, must take shape not only with technological innovations in efficient infrastructure but with a radical change of mindset. In the futurological city, “gone is the excess, the wasteful use of so much,” he writes in the introduction to his book *Can a City be Sustainable?* “In its place is resource stewardship and a deep appreciation for civic resources of all kinds. Gone is frivolous and thoughtless purchasing. In its place is a restraining ethic characterized by the question, ‘Will this make my life better?’”

Gardner’s idea is that in the developed North we will embrace austerity—become relatively poorer—and the rising consumer class in the global South will enjoy only a small taste of the promise of material riches.

A quixotic vision—bordering, I think, on the delusional. What Gardner and other sustainability urbanists promulgate, of course, is the end of global capitalism as we know it. Fat chance without a global revolt against elites.

Meanwhile the available data shows the historic pattern of cities as centers of affluence to be unchanged: you move to the city, your material-wealth footprint rises.

In a 2011 study entitled “A Carbon Consumption Comparison of Rural and Urban Lifestyles,” Jukka Heinonen, then a professor of engineering at Aalto University in Finland, theorized that if cities “accommodate more consumption-intensive lifestyles, the possible advantage of high density... might be easily lost in comprehensive carbon emission calculations.”

Heinonen set out to do the comprehensive calculations for Finns. He looked at heat and electricity consumption, building design and maintenance, private driving and public transit, consumer and leisure goods purchases, leisure services, travel abroad, and health services, among other factors.

The results, he wrote, were “unconventional” and appeared to fly against “prevailing belief.” Total carbon consumption of a rural dweller in Finland was 9.0 tons of carbon dioxide equivalents. In the most urbanized part of the country, Helsinki, it was 12.5 tons. Heinonen suggested that his data could be extrapolated generally to the developed world to show that when people move to cities, the energy savings of density, shared infrastructure, public transit, auto-free streets etc. may be negated by the rise in affluence.

William Rees, in his studies of cities as dissipative structures, has calculated the ecological footprint of the metropolises of the developed world. He finds, for example, that Tokyo, parasitically feeding on resources from multiple continents, has an eco-footprint roughly 344 times larger than its metro region. “What would Tokyo do,” he asks, “if cut off from its global supportive hinterland?” (What would it do, that hideous city of frantic light?)

In China, it is now the official policy of the government

to effectively increase the eco-footprint of its cities, with the chief purpose of the country's breakneck urban development to stimulate domestic consumption.

The Communist Party's "National New-Type Urbanization Plan (2014-2020)," released in 2014, says as much. From *Bloomberg News*:

By 2020 the country will have 60 percent of its people living in cities, up from 53.7 percent now. What's the ultimate aim of creating a much more urban country? Simply put, all those new, more free-spending urbanites are expected to help drive a more vibrant economy, helping wean China off its present reliance on unsustainable investment-heavy growth. "Domestic demand is the fundamental impetus for China's development, and the greatest potential for expanding domestic demand lies in urbanization," the plan says.

Demand for the greenhouse-gas intensive products of animal agriculture will also increase with the new tastes of the urban consumer. "The rising demand for meat in developing countries," says the UN-FAO, "is mainly a consequence of the fast progression of urbanization and the tendency among city dwellers to spend more on food than the lower income earning rural population." While animal agriculture has been identified as the most wasteful, carbon-intensive, environmentally destructive mode of food production—in other words the least sustainable—it is now poised to skyrocket with developing-world urban migration.

Look to investment banking institutions for a cold-eyed assessment of the profits to be made from the affluenza spreading in the new cities. The Mirae Asset Financial Group, which manages \$83 billion in assets, identifies urbanization for the investor class to make a killing from massive increases in consumer spending expected in China and India. "Mirae Asset sees urbanization within emerging markets as one of the most important drivers of consumption growth," says the report. "With greater job prospects and higher wages, the rural farmer becomes the new middle class consumer."

All the trends suggest the 21st century city, far from being sustainable, will remain locked in the global capitalist system with its imperative of expansion and its belief that consumer excess is at the center of economies. The city is an expression of this dominant ideology, an ideology that at its heart refuses to recognize any biophysical constraints to economic output.

In other words, we are not driving headlong toward a sustainable world order with growing urbanization. We are merely continuing business-as-usual, toward civilizational suicide. Short-term profits, however, are waiting to be made, and they will be called green **CP**

**CHRISTOPHER KETCHAM** is the author of *This Land: How Cowboys, Capitalism and Corruption are Ruining the American West*.

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## FOIA and Waiting on Transparency

BY ANDREW R. SMOLSKI

Waiting on the State is political. The State provides the feeling of participation, as if a citizen is a player in the machinations of power. Instead, citizens confront a passive bureaucracy with obscure processes and unreachable names. Life is made of sardonic humor directed at waiting on the diabolic, nine-headed Director of the Proving Your Humanity Division. It's a collective whisper between one another, "O, yes, I've stood those hours too."

I bring this up, because I have a waiting story. It is a story of frustration, where I've faced no danger to my life or limbs. That danger is faced by families globally who are victims of state violence and cover-ups. It is because of the US government's likely role in such violence that I submitted a Freedom of Information Act request and this dull saga began. I was waiting on evidence for whether the US government follows its own laws when arming and training Mexican security forces. The search for that evidence began in 2016, after analyzing the New York Times' coverage of the 43 students forcefully disappeared in Guerrero, Mexico. Then, I showed how coverage often omitted the dominant protest narrative, "¡Fue El Estado!" [It was the State], and the role of the US in the Mexican government's drug war. And that role is large, with billions of dollars of arms moving south, confirmations of the US government training battalions that participated in emblematic cases of state violence, like Iguala and Tlatlaya, and extensive coordination between the two governments in the so-called "War Against Narcotrafficking." It is a history of shared responsibility terrorizing the Mexican people.

The United States government invests incredible sums of money in Mexican security forces. According to Security Assistance Monitor, the sale of arms and training is between 100 and 500 million USD from year to year, and the Congressional Research Service stated that Merida Initiative "aid" amounted to more than 2.745 billion USD from 2007 to 2017. In 2019, Ricardo Moya at El Universal reported that Mexico's budget for just its Army and Navy totaled approximately 6.4 billion dollars. This means approximately 274,000,000 USD on average per year in just US Merida "aid" is equivalent to 4.28 percent of Mexico's military budget in any given year. Although, technically the "aid" goes to all types of Mexican security forces, from military to police, weaving an elaborate network of contacts between the governments of the United States and Mexico. As such, the United States government is a responsible party in actions carried out by Mexican security forces. The United States government even recognizes this with the Office of the Spokesman at the State Department stating in October 2007 that Mexico-US "strate-

gies for expanded cooperation...are guided by principles of mutual trust, shared responsibility and reciprocity.”

The question is, what does the United States government have shared responsibility for? What are the results of all this training, assistance and arms? Carolyn Gallagher in the School of International Service at American University writes that shared responsibility unites the United States and Mexico’s governments against the Mexican people, rather than cooperating in defense of human rights. Mexico’s National Commission for Human Rights and its state-level commissions on human rights constantly receive complaints against military personnel and federal, state and municipal police. In all likelihood, the United States government is contravening its own laws by continuing to arm and train Mexican security forces. Then, what the United States may share responsibility for is crimes against the Mexican people in the name of “security” and “stopping the flow of drugs”, neither of which has been successful (and in the latter case, should not even be a concern from a decriminalization and public health perspective).

I began to look around for laws that govern provisioning arms and training to Mexico. The most important are known as the Leahy Laws passed in the 1990s and built upon over subsequent decades. These are a set of human rights laws that constrain the selling and providing of arms and training to security forces that abuse human rights. Under the Leahy Laws, security forces do not need to be convicted of human rights abuses, only that credible information exists that an individual or unit committed such abuses. However, no public list exists that states the who, when, where, why, and how about Mexican security forces receiving arms and training. So, there is no way for a citizen to verify in the public record if a unit is authorized to receive arms and training that should be rejected based on credible information. Even in emblematic cases, the US Government almost never states if they trained or provided arms to security forces. For instance, Gallagher notes that the US government declined to confirm whether they had provided authorization, training or arms to security forces alleged to have participated in the attack on the students from the Rural Normal Isidro Burgos de Ayotzinapa.

Journalist Bill Conroy of NarcoNews pointed me toward a State Department and Department of Defense document, Joint Report to Congress: Foreign Military Training Report, which provides program offered, training location, the student’s department (like Army, Marine, etc.), number of students, number of courses, a dollar value, and total cost. You can learn that some group from the Mexican Navy took a Department of Defense training called “Combating Transnational Organized Crime” in Washington, D.C at the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense for two hundred and eighty-four dollars from April 24th, 2017 to May 5th, 2017. Even learning that requires finding new links to where files are located, as old links go dead and reports are moved around.

From the joint reports, Bill Conroy was able to calculate

that US funding for training went from 4.7 million in 2007 to 16.3 million USD in 2013. Conroy goes on to point out that over those years, the US trained a total 10,591 security forces in Mexico and homicides rose by 300%. Yet, despite such logical problems with the outcomes of this training, Bill Conroy reports Air Force Master Sgt. Chuck Marsh, spokesman for Northcom, saying, “We do not believe that U.S. military training enables corruption and human rights violations.” Marsh should read the study, “Bases, Bullets and Ballots: the Effect of U.S. Military Aid on Political Conflict in Colombia,” in which the researchers, Oeindrila Dube and Suresh Naidu, show that US military aid often correlates with increasing human rights violations.

Even with the joint reports, without the names of specific units, there is no way to verify if credible information exists concerning human rights abuses. Documents retrieved through a request by the National Security Archives show the United States government receiving multiple credible reports concerning human rights violations committed by Mexican security forces across the country. Cora Currier and Jesse Franzblau reported that five individuals from the unit involved in the Tlatlaya massacre were provided training by the United States, although not themselves implicated in the massacre. Further, the unit’s authorization was suspended. This is what Currier and Franzblau call “a rare confirmed example of the U.S. government actually cutting off funding for security forces.”

Even in this rare case of confirmation and reprimand, there is strong reason to doubt that it addressed the extent of the problem. The Director of the Americas Program, Laura Carlsen, described how the military commander in charge, General José Luis Sánchez León, was just moved to another post without being investigated or questioned. Additionally, Carlsen wrote that in 2013, Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vermont) considered the Merida Initiative to have largely no accountability. With rampant impunity and little accountability, it isn’t shocking that the Centro de Derechos Humanos in Mexico reports almost 2,959 civilian deaths at the hands of Mexican security forces from 2007 to 2012. They go on to provide evidence for the widespread use of illegal and arbitrary detentions, torture, and obstruction by security forces. Once more, this calls into question Northcom’s assertion that military training and arms are authorized in accordance with the Leahy Laws.

So, in the overwhelming majority of cases there is no way to corroborate whether reports of human rights abuses lead to the suspension or rejection of units or individual authorizations to receive arms and training from the US. For example, journalist Anabel Hernández reports in her book, *A Massacre in Mexico: The True Story Behind the Missing Forty-Three Students*, a likely participation by the 27th Infantry Battalion, stationed in Iguala, Guerrero, in the 43 students’ disappearance. Did that battalion receive arms and training from the

United States government? And if so, were their authorizations suspended after Hernández's reporting? Simply put, if an American citizen wants to answer these questions, they have to enter into direct contact with a bureaucracy that claims transparency while practicing secrecy.

To assure the government follows its own laws requires participation in an elaborate process. If you want to obtain pertinent information that is not public record, you have to file a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. This involves stipulating all the information you want provided. It is from my FOIA saga that I more and more came to realize how in the United States we have a right to petition the State, not to receive a coherent response. I came to truly understand what sociologist Javier Auyero in *Patients of the state: the politics of waiting in Argentina* describes as a principle tactic of the State against its citizens, waiting. Waiting on the State for Auyero "is the everyday manufacturing of subjects who know, and act

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## Knowing that the State Department is cognizant of what is occurring in Mexico, were any of the security forces approved by the INVEST system participants in these crimes?

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accordingly, that when dealing with state bureaucracies they have to patiently comply with the seemingly arbitrary, ambiguous, and always changing state requirements." I became, I am, that subject. Everyone excluded from state secrets is that subject, the waiting subject.

As a waiting subject, first, I made sure that I was filing the request with the right Department. Both State and Defense handle these authorizations. File your FOIA with the wrong department and you could be waiting on nothing. Adding to the absurdity, the Departments do not coordinate between each other. Send your request to the wrong department, get rejected, and start again. If you are lucky, they might tell you to which department you submit the request. Following a Congressional Research Service report, I found out that authorizations for much of Mexico are handled through the State Department, and like most authorizations goes through the International Vetting and Security Tracking (INVEST) system.

The INVEST SYSTEM makes embassies the starting point for authorization of arms and training. Information about units and individuals is inputted into a database, and then reports from governments, NGOs, and civil society are checked. The State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights,

and Labor is the lead in this process in Washington, D.C., coordinating with embassies on each batch to be vetted. An Office of the Inspector General inspection shows that the vetting caseload continues to grow from 150,990 cases in 2011 to 214,566 cases in 2017. According to the United States government, approximately one percent of those vetted are denied. Considering the State Department's Office of Inspector General reported issues with procedural compliance, lack of oversight, lack of data quality assurance, and staffing limitations in implementing the Leahy Laws, along with the state of human rights globally, there is good reason to interrogate the low level of rejections.

Even more, as I was learning about the INVEST system, I realized that writing the request was akin to learning another language. For the State writes with its own semantics, order words that constrain speech and require a dictionary. At least, if you want the government to respond. I am thankful to the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, who have developed a very handy guide and templates for filing FOIA requests. Plus, the government can even choose to charge you for carrying out the FOIA request. Although, I was lucky to be able to use my status as a freelance writer to receive a fee waiver. At each step, I realized that the existence of a process doesn't mean all people have the resources to participate, as each step becomes a mechanism to exclude people from exercising their political will.

On March 14, 2016, I submitted my FOIA request and began to wait. At first, I was optimistic. I received a confirmation that the State Department's FOIA Office received my request. I was provided with an estimated timeline and even provided the opportunity to apply for expediting my request. On June 15th, 2016 I requested that the case be expedited based on credible reports that Mexican security forces were committing human rights abuses. That request was denied, because I could not provide specific units who were vetted that had committed human rights abuses; which, is the logical outcome of not being able to find public records of which units were authorized, the records I was attempting to access. I then filed an appeal in July 2016 to expedite the request, which was also denied. My only option was to wait.

They did continue to provide me with a firm deadline, August 2016. That deadline was subsequently passed. At this time, I contacted the State Department to inquire about the delay. In response to a September 16, 2016 call to the State Department's FOIA Request Service Center, I was informed on Oct. 4, 2016 that the estimated completion of my request was July 2017. While several months away, it provided me with a new time frame and so I set the issue aside until the new estimated completion date. Once more, there are no other options,

because the government decides, the citizen acquiesces.

When July 2017 passed, I called the FOIA Request Service Center on August 14, 2017. I was provided with the contact information for the Public Liaison officer. On two separate occasions, I e-mailed this officer. On three occasions I called and left voice mails. No communication was returned by the Public Liaison officer. Like Schrödinger's cat, the Public Liaison could be said to exist and not exist at the same time. For the purposes of the bureaucracy, only the title and an e-mail to nowhere are necessary to perpetuate waiting; only the process must exist, making the end only incidental.

During this period, the State Department never claimed an "unusual circumstance" for passing each deadline. "Unusual circumstance" is State-speak for a legitimate reason that the request cannot be processed in a timely manner. All I was told was they had many cases to process, even though a predictable agency workload is not grounds to delay response. Therefore, I encountered an excessive delay in the release of these documents, which can be considered a "constructive denial". As I said, learning to speak the toxic slang of a bureaucrat, which involves reading documents like "Responding to Requests" by the Department of Justice. Basically, it is likely they were contravening their own procedures, and I was powerless as a single citizen to force them to move quicker. And that's because the existence of a process is just that, an instrumental means that doesn't need to have any relation to their stated goal. Especially true when the State is dissimulating its actual goal, that of guarding information against the prying eyes of an engaged citizenry.

It is at this time that I consulted with an anthropologist, David Price, who I knew used FOIA requests in his research. He provided a couple options for redress, the most important being to mail a letter to my Congressperson. Based on his advice, I mailed a letter to Congressman David Price in January 2018 requesting his assistance. I had to follow that letter up with a phone call after waiting a couple of months. That finally got some action going. On April 18, 2018, Congressman Price's office assigned a case worker, who began to find out an estimated date and to motivate release of requested materials. After a period of silence from the State Department, which the case worker reported as unusual, the Congressman's office received a response.

On June 7, 2018, the case worker received a letter from Mary K. Waters, Assistant Secretary at Legislative Affairs in the State Department, stating that "the Department has completed its search of the INVEST system and anticipates making an initial release of any non-exempt, responsive records on or before August 31, 2018." This was rather joyous news to me. After two years of waiting, of being made into a pliant subject at the mercy of an often silent, apathetic void, I believed that I was going to get a response. I still wasn't certain of what exactly the government would deliver to me.

I had an idea of what I would do with what they sent if it

was detailed enough. I figured on checking the data they would send me against the grave violations of human rights reported to the National Commission for Human Rights and news and civil society reports. That way, I could get a tally of units that committed human rights violations and received authorizations and/or arms and training from the US government. So, once more and a bit more jubilant, I waited.

August 31st came, and nothing had arrived. On September 5th, 2018, I called the FOIA Request Service Center to check on the status of my request and see if the documents were in the mail. I was told they had no record of the letter. They then stated that there wasn't an estimated date for completion and they only know the request is still "processing". I immediately e-mailed a copy of the letter to the FOIA Request Center e-mail and copied my Congressman's case worker. It was an odd position, to have to prove the existence of a PDF copy of a document the State Department itself had sent me. And because so much of the process is handled through e-mail, post, and telephone, I began to wonder if it was all an elaborate ruse. The void was responding only to keep me waiting. Or maybe this was all part of a new gameshow, "Gaslighting".

On Sept. 17th, 2018, I called again to find out if the letter had been received. I was transferred to the Public Liaison and left a voicemail. I knew that game and wouldn't be caught waiting any longer. I wasn't a scorned lover. I was a citizen and I deserved a real response. I called again the same day, at which time I was told that they had not received the letter and that I should send it again. If this is beginning to sound like that The Onion video, "Prague's Franz Kafka International Named World's Most Alienating Airport", you are exactly right. "Gate B2 is next to gate B11, and gate B14 is in the F terminal." Not only was I waiting, but they were continuously making me participate in validating their own interactions with me. Luckily, I did have the letter and a Congressman's case worker. That was enough to make them react to me. Imagine if it was just a citizen without a representative. The nothing that is bureaucracy would mostly stare blankly and smirk from time to time.

After sending the letter again, I finally received an e-mail response on Sept. 21, 2018:

"This is in response to your email below. Your FOIA case control number F-2016-01957 has been completed. You should receive the Department's response in the mail within the next 7-10 days."

Again, I waited, this time with the word "complete" ringing in my ear. Yet, I had no evidence to believe that anything would arrive in the mail. Nor had anyone even attempted to explain why the process had become a house of mirrors. I never received a call back from the Public Liaison Officer, supposedly a position invented to handle exactly these sorts of problems. With a process this opaque in which you most certainly need a lawyer, only the rich get an equal playing field. That's why Margaret B. Kwoka's study of the FOIA system demonstrated the majority of FOIA requests are filed by corpora-

tions seeking private gain and not the public good.

I was still the pliant subject, and whatever they ceded me through this process does not alter that state. This exercise does force authority to entertain the demands of its subjects, an important act if only to ward off the darker temptations and totalitarian nightmares. Besides, would the State really force me through waiting more than two and a half years to just screw me? Yes, that's exactly what they would do.

At the end of September, I came home and checked the mail. There I found a brown envelope. Its plainness struck me, as did its lightness. I felt it and thought, "This couldn't be more than a few pages." I walked inside and opened the envelope to discover what the State thought its obligation was regarding my request. I counted ten pages total. Two pages were the letter explaining why they were only providing me with eight pages. The letter also explained that I could appeal their decision. Basically, I could wait some more, because they "determined the information contained in the cells is exempt from disclosure pursuant to...a clearly unwarranted invasion of an individual's privacy...which could reasonably be expected to endanger the life or personal safety of an individual."

And so, eight pages of black with a sentence of white text providing me with three numbers; authorized, suspended, and rejected for each year from 2010 to 2018. Across the top are the cells from an Excel spreadsheet that contains the information I was requesting. They didn't black out the top row, with headings "Name1, Name2, Name3, Name4, Name5, Rank/Title, Disposition, UnitName, UnitAlias". It seemed like taunting when they wrote that this information "is being provided as a courtesy." In two and a half years, they printed off 8 pages of information as a courtesy. It took two and a half years to tell me their copy-paste response to all requests on who they are authorizing for arms and training. If I sound like I was kneeling, head raised, yelling toward the sky, I literally was.

Worse still, they said they couldn't provide me with records prior to 2010 because they used "a cable-based process [before]...not a database so no records are available." Basically, they weren't going to go back and compile the data pre-2010 that was responsive, because it would be too time-consuming for a request that all the information was exempt.

This was all I was getting. I could appeal, but that would involve more waiting. Possibly, if I had a lawyer, I could better navigate the process. But that was outside the realm of my economic resources or current contacts. Even getting to this point was thanks to resources I could tap, many of which aren't available to the general populous. I conducted an experiment to see how transparent the US government is, and it came up cloudy. Here is what I did learn about the US governments relationship to Mexican security forces.

In the case of Mexico, from 2010 to 2017, 113,893 personnel were approved, 788 were rejected (with no reason given), and 5,008 were suspended (with no reason given for the suspension nor what information they used to authorize in the first

place) by the INVEST System to receive training and arms from the United States. That is a .69 percent rejection rate and a 4.4 percent suspension rate, evidence that initial rejections are lower than they should be. The actual number trained and assisted in the Joint Report to Congress: Foreign Military Training Report is a smaller number, because authorization doesn't mean that the unit or individual received arms or training, only that they can.

The numbers illuminate an important point about the US-Mexico relationship. In December 2018, Mexico's Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit reports there were 215,243 personnel across the Mexican Armed Forces. According to a Secretaría de Gobernación report, there are a further 119,133 police in the country, with a grand total of 334,376 security personnel. That means that at maximum, the United States has authorized training and arms for 34.1 percent of Mexican security forces. That, plus the "aid", makes the US the most major arms dealer and trainer of Mexican security forces after the Mexican government. Their capacity, whether good or bad, is in no small part a US government product. This is definitively shared responsibility.

Since the Enrique Peña Nieto administration, the Mexican Armed Forces no longer provide numbers on civilians killed by security forces. We have specific emblematic cases to go by where military and/or police involvement is alleged or confirmed: the 43 students disappeared, 6 dead, and 25 injuries from the 2014 massacre in Iguala, the 22 dead in 2014 at the hands of the 102nd Battalion in Tlatlaya, and the 2017 execution of an unarmed man by the military in Palmarito Tochanan. There was also the Apatzingán case in 2016, in which Federal Police killed many after firing on protesters who had camped out in support of their rural police, and the Tanhuato case in 2015, when police executed at least 22 men. The National Commission for Human Rights also has numerous recommendations on grave violations of human rights, such as No. 18VG/2019, when in 2011, 15 people were illegally detained and tortured by naval security forces in Tabasco and Veracruz. Even the State Department notes in its 2017 Human Rights Report on Mexico that "impunity for human rights abuses remained a problem, with extremely low rates of prosecution for all forms of crimes."

Knowing that the State Department is cognizant of what is occurring in Mexico, were any of the security forces approved by the INVEST system participants in these crimes? Were security forces that were approved suspended after evidence surfaced of their participation in human rights violations? Why were forces rejected? We have the one confirmed case with Tlatlaya. I sent an e-mail to the State Department inquiring about the 27th Infantry Battalion and whether INVEST had approved, rejected or suspended participating Mexican security forces. The State Department spokesperson's response was a copy-paste about not providing arms and training unless violators are being brought to justice.

Additionally, they claimed that:

“Due to the sensitive nature of our security force assistance and bilateral relationships, the Department does not release specific vetting records. Exposing which members and units of foreign security forces were submitted for Leahy vetting exposes those individuals and units to possible risk for their affiliation with the United States Government, and discourages the governments of foreign security forces from submitting such information in the future, which detracts from our ability to comply with the Leahy law.”

While releasing specific records is not Department policy, a Government Accountability Office report states that starting in December 2011, the Leahy Law was amended to include “a requirement that the Secretary of State develop and periodically update procedures to make public, to the maximum extent practicable, the identity of those units prohibited from receiving assistance.”

I asked the State Department directly about why they confirmed the Tlatlaya case, to which I was told they have nothing further to add. Nor would a spokesperson explain the process for deciding to confirm that case. I was provided a list released in January by the State Department that showed the following units in Mexico applying for and being denied authorization through the INVEST System in 2017:

Hidalgo State Attorney General's Office, General Directorate of the Investigations Police

Mexico State General Secretariat of Government, Mexico State Commission of Public Security, General Directorate of Intelligence and Investigation for Crime Prevention

Michoacán Secretariat of Public Security, Undersecretariat of Public Security, Municipal Unified Command, Directorate of Public Security in Caracuaro

Municipal Government of Zempoala, Hidalgo, General Directorate of Public Security and Municipal Transit

Secretariat of Public Security Transit and Roadways, Municipality of Pachuca, Hidalgo, Directorate of Crime Prevention, Preventative Police

The list does not provide reasons why these units were denied, and I assume asking the State Department would not yield any further insight. Basically, the State Department's general response to inquiries concerning the INVEST System makes public oversight impossible.

I followed up with the Government Accountability Office and the State Department's Office of the Inspector General, the bureaucracies officially tasked with oversight. They linked me to a few reports that had been done in which the Leahy Laws and their process are discussed. But they didn't have any further information. I also followed up with Congressman Price's office, because he sits on the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs for the House Appropriations Committee. However, Appropriations only

handles the money, with the House Foreign Affairs Committee providing oversight on the Leahy Law process. They do not comment on specific cases. And, oversight on specific units is carried out by the House Armed Forces Committee. They also do not comment on specific cases. No one comments, and each committee only covers a sliver of the overall system. It often appears that the most anyone is legally obligated to do is make recommendations to improve vetting. Hence, more waiting on human rights, more processes that obfuscate as opposed to assure respect for life and dignity.

In actuality, there appears to have never been, at least as a matter of public record, a thorough review of whether the Leahy Laws are effective at curtailing the arming and training of human rights violators. Yet, there is evidence of non-compliance with the Leahy amendments, and evidence that the systems in place don't achieve the spirit of the law, which is to not arm and train human rights violators. The existence of those laws is important, yet no consideration is given to whether they accomplish their stated goal. We are just to assume the existence of a process is equal to curtailing the abuse of human rights with our material support. Are we really to just continue trusting when we know the system is flawed?

The fact that I must wait and trust the government is especially unsettling, because government officials have at times stated, “the violence we see is actually a signpost of success”. These callous words were spoken by Anthony Placido, then-Assistant Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration, in March 19, 2009 during a committee hearing on the Mexican drug war. How can more violence be a sign of being on the road to more security? How can I trust this unelected bureaucrat to make life or death decisions in the interest of human rights?

There is empirical evidence that increasing militarization is actually a cause of violence, rather than an obstacle. Studies often find a connection between U.S. military aid and human rights abuses in Latin America, with authors like Horace A. Bartilow, a political science professor, calling for increasing oversight as a way to strengthen human rights protections. Even more, this extends beyond Latin America, with a study by Lerna K. Yanik revealing a global problem of arms dealer countries like the United States arming serial human rights violators, like Saudi Arabia. Together American private businesses and the US government are the largest arms dealers in the world, making approval of arms and training part of the national economy. Plus, having a global network of relationships with security forces aids the United States in maintaining its military superiority. It's clear, there are real incentives to keep the rejection rate at what the Congressional Research Service states is “around 1% or less” and to see benefits in violence. Therefore, there is every reason to doubt that the Leahy Laws are being implemented in a way that produces their state goal.

This saga goes beyond the US government's failure to

execute the Leahy Laws properly, in Mexico or globally. It's a general lack of transparency in government. I, as a citizen, have no oversight role. This is the case, despite probable violations of national law and human rights occurring in the name of my supposed national security. And the FOIA process is important to check government power. For example, Angelina Snodgrass Godoy describes in *Human Rights Quarterly* how the University of Washington Center for Human Rights used FOIA requests to obtain documents on forced disappearances in El Salvador by US-backed security forces. To get the information required lawsuits against the CIA, once more demonstrating government recalcitrance at allowing oversight. Not to be overly dramatic, but "justice delayed is justice denied".

And with the State Department you are even more likely to have justice denied than other parts of the federal bureaucracy. According to Khaldoun AbouAssi and Tina Nabatchi, the State Department has a lower full grant for FOIA at 5.7 percent than does the federal government overall at 21 percent. The State Department processed 15,386 in 2016 and only gave 874 requests full grants. My request would be with the partial grants/denials, 2,155 in 2016. Basically, if it is not already public record, a US citizen is not likely to access the information. Unless, they have a lawyer and time, and even then there is no guarantee. We are left to shrug our shoulders and proclaim, "We don't actually know what is going on, even though our tax dollars and name are being used." Considering the global reach of US arms and training, what we don't know is a lot, and the government isn't going to let us know what we need to know. Especially not if it involves complicity in human rights violations.

And so, we wait. That is the purpose of these processes, more so than their stated goal. The existence of a process becomes a way to dissimulate. The US government doesn't have a shared responsibility in human rights violations committed by vetted security forces, because that is an administrative error. If only we had more compliance with better procedures. Hell, it would be nice to just have sufficient staffing to follow the procedures already in place. Then again, that may lead to unwanted consequences, like higher rejection rates.

Knowing how this process seeks to stop the flow of information, it makes the last piece of information I received from a United States government representative feel like even more of a fluke. The State Department confirmed for the Congressional Research Service that "they have not provided assistance/training to members of the 27th Infantry Battalion since August 2014." August 2014 was a month before the massacre and disappearance in Iguala (a convenient date for the US government). When I followed up to see if authorizations were suspended, and whether the Municipal Police of Iguala, the Municipal Police of Cocula, the Auxiliary Police of Guerrero, or the Federal Police in Guerrero were also provided with assistance/training, I was told nothing further would be forthcoming. Those are all implicated parties, at least according

to the Interdisciplinary Independent Expert Group charged by the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States to investigate the crime. In sum, all security forces in the area are thought to possibly play a role in the massacre and disappearance, making it even more likely that the United States is in violation of the Leahy Laws with respect to arming and training Mexico's security forces.

Furthermore, Rogelio Agustín Esteban reports that in 2018 the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights started to suspect that the Command, Control, Communication and Computer Center (C4) had United States technical assistance, along with holding a meeting the night before the attack concerning the Ayotzinapa students. The C4 is a center for centralizing surveillance and information to coordinate operations between different agencies. It appears that coordination was used to block a proper investigation, with evidence existing that the C4 erased footage from cameras around Iguala. That is part of a larger Mexican government strategy to obfuscate and block a thorough, independent investigation of what occurred on September 26th, 2014, up to presenting a "historical truth" that was shown to be almost total fabrication based on faulty investigations. All of this is grotesquely compounded further by the recent divulgence of a video showing investigators extracting false information through torture, repeatedly suffocating a man detained during the investigation. By conducting themselves in such a reactionary form, government officials provided even more evidence of State complicity in the disappearance. It appears, the US may share responsibility as well.

With the Merida Initiative ongoing, if diminished under Trump, more Mexican security forces will be vetted, armed, and trained by the United States in some capacity. Journalists and human rights lawyers would do well to look at FOIA as an avenue to check that the Leahy Amendments are being followed when implementing this global, imperial project. Projects like Property of the People that file FOIA requests and expose documents are crucial, especially under a Trump Administration curtailing responses to FOIA requests. As reported in *The Hill* and *ProPublica*, federal departments, like the Interior and Housing and Urban Development, are letting processing systems lapse and changing administrative rules on timelines to slow down and disrupt the release of relevant, non-exempt material. That is compounded by the Supreme Court's recent ruling in *Food Marketing Institute v. Argus Leader Media*, that broadens the definition of "confidential". With the broader definition of confidential, more documents become exempt from release. The State slowly strangles its already weak process for citizen oversight.

Because of the FOIA processes' obstacles and privileging state secrets, be under no illusions that authority believes it must legitimate itself through transparency. This is why many of the most important pieces of information we have about state crimes come from theft and whistleblowers, not following the FOIA process. The "Collateral Murder" video of US



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# CULTURE & REVIEWS

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## The Fable of the Weasel George Orwell, Snitch

BY ALEXANDER COCKBURN

**This essay is adapted from Cockburn's foreword to John Reed's *A Snowball's Chance*, published by Melville House a few months after his death.**

John Reed's *Snowball's Chance* takes its intriguing departure from Animal Farm, and set me thinking again about Orwell. These days I can't get through almost any page of Orwell without a shudder, though in my teens I often had the Penguin selection of his essays in my pocket. I'd learned to loathe Animal Farm earlier at my prep school, Heatherdown, where any arguments for socialism would be met with brays of "and some are more equal than others" by my school mates.

Some writers admired in adolescence stay around for the rest of the journey, perennial sources of refreshment and uplift: P.G. Wodehouse, Stanley Weyman, H.L. Mencken, Flann O'Brien, to name but four I'd be glad to find in any bathroom. Now, why can Mencken delight me still, while the mere sight of a page of Orwell carries me back to memories of England and of British-ness at full disagreeable stretch: philistine, vulgar, thuggish, flag-wagging?

Maybe the answer comes with the flag-wagging. Mencken made terrible errors of political judgement. Like Orwell he could be a lout. Both men's prose has excited awful imitators. But Mencken was a true outsider. Orwell wasn't. To step into Mencken-land is to be lured down a thousand unexpected pathways, with firecrackers of wit ex-

ploding under one's feet.

Contradicting Thomas Love Peacock's famous jibe at landscapers, even on the twentieth tour of the Mencken estate there are surprises. I don't feel that, trundling through Orwell Country. It gets less alluring with each visit. What once seemed bracing, now sounds boorish. How quickly one learns to loathe the affectations of plain bluntness. The man of conscience turns out to be a whiner, and of course a snitch, an informer to the secret police, Animal Farm's resident weasel.

When Orwell's secret denunciations surfaced a few years ago, there was a medium-level commotion. Then, with the publication of Peter Davison's maniacally complete twenty-volume collected Orwell, the topic of Orwell as government snitch flared again, with more lissome apologies for St. George from the liberal/left and bellows of applause from Cold Warriors, taking the line that if Orwell, great hero of the non-Communist left, named names, then that provides moral cover for all the Namers of Names who came after him.

Those on the non-Com left rushed to shore up St. George's reputation. Some emphasized Orwell's personal feeling toward Kirwan. The guy was in love. Others argued that Orwell was near death's door, traditionally a time for confessionals. Others insisted that Orwell didn't really name names, and anyway (this was the late Ian Hamilton in the *London Review of Books*), "he was forever making lists,"—a fishing log—a log of how many eggs his hens laid; so why not a snitch list?

"Orwell named no names and disclosed no identities," proclaimed Christopher Hitchens, one of Orwell's most ecstatic admirers. Clearly, Orwell did both, as in "Parker, Ralph.

helicopter pilots murdering journalists and Iraqi civilians would not have occurred without Chelsea Manning releasing those materials. The Pentagon Papers were photocopied and shared by Daniel Ellsberg, who was subsequently charged for stealing and holding secret documents. Revelations about the Federal Bureau of Investigation's COINTELPRO program of politically repression were the result of theft by the Citizen's Committee to Investigate the FBI. The State will give up tidbits, clues to follow as to its darker nature, but to drag power into the light so that it shrivels appears to require civil disobedience such as these heroic acts.

In the end, FOIA still plays an important role for bringing state secrets to the surface. It provides us an avenue to get evidence on the US government's role in human rights violations carried out by Mexican security forces, and globally. While we will be forced to wait, that waiting is political. It becomes an active waiting, a form of resistance. File a FOIA, make the government answer, make the bureaucrats show they aren't breaking their own laws. We must do everything we can to stop US participation in circuits of violence.

The Padres y Madres de Ayotzinapa continue to struggle under the banner, "¡Vivos los llevaron, Vivos los queremos!" [alive you took them, alive we want them]. They fight to find their loved ones and get the truth about what happened that infamous night to their children. As we pass the fifth anniversary of the atrocity in Iguala, I hope the Ayotzinapa families receive closure and justice, that the security forces who participated be held accountable for their crimes and that the US role in maintaining a global security apparatus be curtailed rather than our right to oversight over the government.

I appreciate and am grateful for help given by Laura Carlsen, Bill Conroy, Dawn Paley and David Price to complete this work. **CP**

**ANDREW SMOLSKI** is a sociologist.

Underground member and close FT [fellow traveler?] Stayed on in Moscow. Probably careerist.”

Apologists for Orwell sometimes suggest this was a sort of parlor game between Rees and Orwell, playful scribbles that somehow ended up with Kirwan. The facts are otherwise. Orwell carefully and secretly remitted to Celia Kirwan, an agent of the IRD or Information Research Department, a list of the names of persons on the

modestly adding that “I don’t suppose it will tell your friends anything they don’t know,” and reflecting that, although the IRD probably had tabs on the subjects already, “it isn’t a bad idea to have people who are probably unreliable listed.”

Reviewing this sequence in the London Review of Books early in 2000, Perry Anderson emphasized some important points. Orwell knew the destination of the list, and “was very anxious to keep the list hidden.” It remains thus.

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## Loyalty was the issue, and it’s plain enough from his annotations that Orwell thought that Jews, blacks, and homosexuals had an inherent tropism towards treachery to the values protected by the coalition of patriots including himself and the IRD.

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left who he deemed security risks, as Communists or fellow travelers. The IRD was lodged in the British Foreign Office but in fact overseen by the Secret Intelligence Service, otherwise known as MI6.

Kirwan, with whom Orwell had previously had some sort of liaison, visited Orwell in Cranham on March 29, 1949. She reported to the Department the next day that she “had discussed some aspects of our work with him in great confidence, and he was delighted to learn of them.” Case Officer Lt. Colonel Sheridan annotated this report.

On April 6, a week later, Orwell wrote to his friend Richard Rees, asking him to find and send “a quarto notebook with a pale bluish cardboard cover” containing “a list of crypto-Communists and fellow-travellers which I want to bring up to date.” Rees duly dispatched the notebook and Orwell wrote on May 2 to Kirwan, “I enclose a list with about 35 names,”

Though 99 names from the notebook are displayed in Vol. XX of Orwell’s Collected Works, with another 36 withheld by the editor for fear of libel, the list of 35 remains a state secret, lodged in the Foreign Office archives.

Those secret advisories to an IRD staffer had consequences. Blacklists usually do. No doubt the list was passed on in some form to American intelligence that made due note of those listed as fellow travelers and duly proscribed them under the McCarran Act.

Hitchens has written softly of Orwell’s “tendresse” for Kirwan, as though love rather than loyalty led him forward. Against the evidence under our noses, he insists Orwell “wasn’t interested in unearthing heresy or in getting people fired or in putting them under the discipline of loyalty oath.” Although as opposed to the mellow tendresse for secret agent Kirwan, he had “an acid contempt for the Communists who had betrayed their

cause and their country once before and might do so again.”

Here Orwell would surely have given a vigorous nod. Orwell’s defenders claim that he was only making sure the wrong sort of person wasn’t hired by the Foreign Office to write essays on the British ways of life. But Orwell made it clear to the IRD he was identifying people who were “unreliable” and who, worming their way into organizations like the British Labor Party, “might be able to do enormous mischief.” Loyalty was the issue, and it’s plain enough from his annotations that Orwell thought that Jews, blacks, and homosexuals had an inherent tropism towards treachery to the values protected by the coalition of patriots including himself and the IRD. G.D.H. Cole, Orwell noted, was “shallow,” a “sympathizer” and also a “diabetic.”

There seems to be general agreement by Orwell’s fans left and right, to skate gently over these Orwellian suspicions of Jews, homosexuals, and blacks, also the extreme ignorance of his assessments, reminiscent of police intelligence files the world over. Of Paul Robeson Orwell wrote, “very antiwhite. [Henry] Wallace supporter.” Only a person who instinctively thought all blacks were anti-white could have written this piece of stupidity. One of Robeson’s indisputable features, consequent upon his intellectual disposition and his connections with the Communists, was that he was most emphatically not “very anti-white”—ask the Welsh coal miners for whom Robeson campaigned.

If any other postwar intellectual was suddenly found to have written mini-diatribes about blacks, homosexuals, and Jews, we can safely assume that subsequent commentary would not have been forgiving. There was certainly no forgiveness for Mencken. But Orwell gets a pass. “Deutscher [Polish Jew],” “Driberg, Tom. English Jew,” “Chaplin, Charles (Jewish?).” No denunciations from the normally sensitive Norman Podhoretz.

When someone becomes a saint, everything is mustered as testimony to his holiness. So it is with St. George and his

list. Thus, in 1998, when the list became an issue, we have fresh endorsement of all the cold war constructs as they were shaped in the immediate postwar years, when the cold war coalition from right to left signed on to fanatical anti-Communism. The IRD, disabled in the seventies by a Labor Foreign Minister on the grounds it was a sinkhole of right-wing nuts, would have been pleased.

Orwell's *Animal Farm* is a powerful fable, though as I've noted, in my experience, the effect of the fable has mostly been to deride the utopian impulse. Orwell as Weasel is a powerful fable too, as powerful as the awful saga of betrayal conducted by that other Cold War saint, Ignacio Silone. "The Fable of the Weasel" is cautionary, not least about defenders of Orwell's conduct. If they thought what he did was okay, or even better than okay, somehow an act of sublime bravery, should one not assume that they regard snitching against Traitors to the West as a moral duty too. We have been warned. John Reed's parody in *Snowball's Chance* warns us too, how the non-Com side plays on Orwell's very field. **CP**

**ALEXANDER COCKBURN** was co-editor of *CounterPunch*.

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## A Body in Fukushima

BY LUCY SCHILLER

Next year, and less than a decade after its full-blown nuclear disaster, Fukushima will be the site of the start to the Summer Olympics. A torch will be relayed; baseballs and softballs will be hurled Olympically at Fukushima Azuma Baseball Stadium. Presumably, tens of thousands of people will visit the area—up to six hundred thousand are predicted to visit Tokyo, the main site of the Games, and the baseball stadium holds thirty thousand. How safe it is to visit, let alone live in, Fukushima, is not a matter particularly well-probed by the

Japanese government. The games are being marketed as "Recovery Games," with the accordant implication of safety. After the disaster in 2011, much of Fukushima sat dusty, abandoned, and irradiated. More recently, large swaths have been bulldozed by workers, vegetation and soil swept up into black plastic bags each meant to hold one ton of material, and irradiated water will have to be, the government says, released into the Pacific.

"I should not be here," the performer, artist, and nuclear power scholar Eiko Otake thought while standing off the coast of Fukushima, not far from the Daiichi Reactors, and calf-deep in seawater surely thrumming with radioactivity. But of course, many people were here, and were killed in the earthquake and tsunami, exposed to radioactivity, and/or displaced, having yet to return. Sixty-seven now, Otake is a veteran artist with a long body of work behind her. She wanted to put her body, at this point in its life, in a disaster zone off-limits even to the imaginations of most people. "A Body in Fukushima" is the result. The dance performance was captured in photographs by William Johnston, a professor who teaches courses with Otake at Wesleyan, and who joined Otake over several visits to Fukushima. There are a few permutations of the project; I saw a fifty-minute video of Johnston's photographs interlaced with ruminative title cards at Portland Institute for Contemporary Art's Time Based Art festival. Otake, in attendance, introduced the project and took questions.

Inescapable in Johnston's photographs, stitched together like this, is the tug between stillness and movement—both of Otake, at times clearly moving with pressing anger or grief, but captured by a camera, and also of the invisibly blasted landscape itself, irreparably damaged but not in overtly obvious ways. An original score patterned by construction, birds, frogs, boats, trains, grasses, and the ocean murmurs behind the images. Otake bends, some-

times framed centrally, sometimes not, among deserted houses, flowering plants spooky for their lushness, ancient shrines, empty train stations. She holds often a swath of crimson cloth, originally sewed as lining into her grandmother's kimono. All is irradiated. The project is meant to witness not just Otake and the surrounding landscape, but the lives of people killed or evacuated. "Who sat here?" Otake wonders textually of two chairs, dusty, facing an abandoned garden. These things are, as she writes in an accompanying essay, "broken, but holding time. Forgotten, but holding memories of loss and traces of the days when these things were used by people. So many people are gone and dead. Were the souls of those people transmitted to these things? I danced not to forget the dignity of these things."

To be a body in these parts of Fukushima often means being close to alone. Otake and Johnston's work involves few other humans—at one point, a family shows up to walk on a seawall in the distance, perhaps, Otake muses, mourning a loss. Workers very occasionally bulldoze in the distance. This is an examination of remains more than evidence, of trauma more than fault, although blame is levied at humanity on a grand scale: "things humans create resemble humans," Otake says, implying that they are faulty, corrupt, doomed to fail. At the time of this writing, a Japanese court has just today acquitted three executives of Tokyo Electric Power Company, ensuring, it seems, that blame and justice for the nuclear disaster is never fully dealt. Perhaps the point of this artwork is not to indict a capitalist system that made such a disaster, well, so disastrous, but to indict a culture, as Otake says, uninterested in hesitation. But when it comes to justice, as always, there is plenty of hesitation. **CP**

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