

# CounterPunch

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HOLLYWOOD AND THE VIETNAM WAR BY MATTHEW STEVENSON

INSIDE THE TRUMP IMPEACHMENT BY RON JACOBS

THE NEW DIRTY WAR IN LIBYA BY DAN GLAZEBROOK

THE IOWA CAUCUS CIRCUS BY LUCY SCHILLER



# CounterPunch

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In Memory of  
Alexander Cockburn  
1941–2012



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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VOLUME 26 NUMBER 6 • 2020

<b>LETTERS TO THE EDITOR</b> .....	<b>5</b>	<b>COLUMNS</b>	
<b>BORDERZONE NOTES</b>		<b>Roaming Charges</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Confronting Violence: The Zapatista Example</b>		The War That Time Forgot By Jeffrey St. Clair Tragedy and farce in Afghanistan.	
BY LAURA CARLSEN .....	<b>10</b>	<b>Empire Burlesque</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>EUROZONE NOTES</b>		Impeachment's Soggy Sanctimony By Chris Floyd Distractions and sideshows in Washington.	
<b>Gypsies and Genocide</b>		<b>Bottomlines</b> .....	<b>8</b>
BY DANIEL RAVENTÓS AND JULIE WARK .....	<b>12</b>	Exceptional in Inferiority By Pete Dolack American decline is the plan.	
<b>ARTICLES</b>		<b>Hook, Line and Sinker</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Water Wars: A Ticking Bomb</b>		When Power Speaks By Jennifer Matsui The dehumanizing jargon of the managerial class.	
BY T.J. COLES.....	<b>14</b>	<b>CULTURE &amp; REVIEWS</b>	
<b>The Trump Impeachment</b>		Notes on the Caucasus By Lucy Schiller.....	<b>31</b>
BY RON JACOBS .....	<b>18</b>	Foster Youth: The Invisible Class By Lee Ballinger.....	<b>33</b>
<b>Why the Real War in Vietnam Will Never Get into Movies</b>			
BY MATTHEW STEVENSON .....	<b>20</b>		
<b>Is Haftar Doing the West's Dirty Work in Libya?</b>			
BY DANIEL GLAZEBROOK .....	<b>25</b>		
<b>The Fallout from the British Elections</b>			
BY MARLON ETTINGER .....	<b>28</b>		

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Thank You Jennifer

I just want to tell Jennifer Matsui that her articles are the best I ever read in a long time. We live in a hypocrite society, that she describes very well. Thank her for her writing it made me have faith back again, that someone see what I see. Her choice of words and expressions are right on. A pleasure to read her.

*Pilar Menendez*

## Weekly Charges

Jeffrey,

Thank you for your thoughtful, yet humorous, weekly article. I look forward to reading it every weekend. (Fyi, I was the fourth paid subscriber to CounterPunch back in, I believe, the mid-1990s and have been a subscriber since then.) When I want to learn the truth about a complex political, foreign policy, or economics issue, I go to Counterpunch. Please continue to fight the good fight.

*Be well,*

*Dennis Donohue*

## The Bullet That Hit Wallace and McGovern

Had that event not happened, Wallace would have likely done what he did in 1968, and run as a third party candidate. And though McGovern might have lost to Nixon anyway, the split of the conservative vote would have made the race much closer. (How else to explain why the 1968 election was one of the closest, but the 1972 one was one of the biggest landslides—and yet, McGovern only had five fewer percentage points than Humphrey.) Instead, Wallace's shooting married the reaction-

ary northern, midwestern and southwestern Republicans with the southern racist Democrats. For the first time, the reactionary forces in American politics were joined as one. And they have remained joined—and triumphant—ever since. One of the most important days in American political history was May 15th, 1972. That was the day that Arthur Bremer shot and permanently paralyzed George Wallace.

*Harvey Pleshaw*

## The Jazz Killer

I write to thank you very much for your How Ken Burns Murdered Jazz review. I am a lover of jazz, including very much jazz as it exists right now, am in the middle of watching the documentary and just finished reading your review twice in a row. I am enjoying the documentary so far a bit more than you did, despite the unfortunate bias and blindness in it that you reveal so well, some of which I sensed already, but find your criticism refreshing, biting and, as far as I can tell so far, dead on. So thank you.

*Russell Colwell*

## The Late Lehrer

I watched when for 20-years or more PBS's Jim Lehrer used his very powerful position to deny the existence of global warming, at the behest of his employers—Exxon-Mobil.

*Chris Welzenbach*

## Bageant the Great

I miss Joe Bageant. Could you do re-runs of his CounterPunch pieces? Please?

*Tim Stallman*

## Mighty Shasta

As Jeffrey St. Clair wrote, mountains like Shasta and Rainier which stand alone are so much more dramatic than say, Whitney or many of the 14ers in Colorado. It's similar to viewing a tree growing apart from others. Not only do they expand to fullest expression, you can actually SEE it—from top to bottom. I'm a Muir junky. For my money, there's no more impressive adventure he undertook than his second climb of Shasta. Like Muir's Stickeen story, the narrative reads so comically improbable, one is inclined to think John spiked the embellishment meter. But on this trip he had a human companion.

*All the Best,  
Jim Williams*

## Roadtripping the Environment

I've never written a "letter to the editor", but I must thank you for your work over the years documenting the dire threats to our environment. It is one of the many reasons I am an annual subscriber to CounterPunch. (I thoroughly enjoy your "road trip" stories as well, and your knack for choosing the contributing writers each day). Your latest exhaustive summary of the environmental perils of 2019 will serve as a wonderfully comprehensive reference, which we can hopefully winnow down for 2018. Thanks to all who make CounterPunch happen every day.

*Best,  
Joe Rath*

## What Kind of Country?

As the poet William Carlos Williams said when he was 71 years on, and still badgered by the FBI as an alleged communist sympathizer, "For heaven's sake, what kind of a country is this?"

*Nancy Meadows*

## What Capitalists Fear

Apparently, even the mildest form of socialism is a far greater existential threat than climate change to uber capitalists.

*Rich Domingue*

## Bloomberg News

So former Republican, stop-and-frisk Bloomberg has got two of his supporters on the DNC and bought his way onto the debates in pursuit of trying to buy the presidency. If he'd really wanted to help, he'd have challenged Trump in the GOP primary instead of Sanders... but nah, that's not Bloomberg.

*Eve Ottenberg*

## Let the Right Ones In

It's time to acknowledge that the attacks on migrants are an attack on the working class. They are not keeping billionaires and capitalists out, just their exploited labor force.

*Judith Osterman*

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## ROAMING CHARGES

# The War That Time Forgot

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

I hear it all the time. The most crucial decision of this century was the vote to go to war against Iraq. It's meant to serve as a political line of demarcation, a sure-fire way to determine which politicians, celebrities and news personalities you can trust.

But there's no question, to my mind at least, that the impulsive decision to invade Afghanistan was the more consequential and enduring tragedy, a political bloodletting that nearly every political leader, left and right, fell for, even putative peaceniks like Bernie Sanders and Ron Paul. This was the true moral test of our time and nearly everyone failed, except Barbara Lee. She was the lone voice of conscience in the fall of 2001, a vote of dissent in a time of mass hysteria that has been vindicated time and again over the past 18 years.

Remember, the vote to go to war against Afghanistan, enacted only seven days after the 9/11 attacks, was actually a vote for an open-ended war waged against nebulous "terrorists" anywhere on the planet: Pakistan, Niger, Yemen, Somalia, Algeria. You name it. No questions asked. It is that only Barbara Lee saw this coming and that a highflying critic of the rush to invade Iraq like Barack Obama 14-years later used the hastily-written AUMF as a legal basis for launching airstrikes on ISIS forces inside Syria. Now, Donald Trump has claimed the same authority and used it to justify strikes against the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad and to justify the assassination of Qasem Suleimani. It's the gift that keeps on killing.

What has it wrought? More than 18 years after the first US airstrikes hit Kabul, Kandahar and Jalalabad, the Taliban now controls more of

Afghanistan than they did on October 6, 2001, the day before a cruise missile strike destroyed Mullah Omar's house. Last year was the deadliest year for US troops in Afghanistan since 2014 during Obama's ill-fated surge. The US has long since stopped tracking the Afghan dead, but Neta Crawford, of Brown University's Cost of War Project, estimated that by 2016 more than 111,000 Afghans had been killed in the war, at least 31,000 of them civilians. Trump has repeatedly boasted about having secret plans in his desk draw to win the Afghanistan war in a week, but it would "kill 10 million people." On April 13, 2017, US planes dropped a MOAB bomb on a suspected tunnel complex in Khorasan Province, the most destructive non-nuclear bomb in the Pentagon's arsenal. Trump has since implied a willingness to consider using tactical nuclear weapons against Taliban, Al Qaeda and ISIS positions in Afghanistan.

Because of the Pentagon's \$1.7 trillion secret slush fund for "anti-terror" operations, it's almost impossible to calculate the total cost of the Afghanistan war to date. At a minimum, the US is spending about \$52 billion a year waging war in Afghanistan. But this number is likely to rise, as US combat missions and airstrikes in Afghanistan have increased steadily since 2017 with little public debate or justification.

As recently as December 2019, top US military brass have described the war as a "strategic stalemate." But it's almost impossible to determine what this means since under Trump the Pentagon is "no longer producing its district-level stability assessments of Afghan government and insurgent control and influence"—the only real

metric for judging the progress of the war. These reports, known as the SIGAR assessments, had provided quarterly estimates of the amount of land area and population under Taliban control or influence. The final SIGAR report, issued in January 2019 before Trump pulled the plug, showed that only 53.4 percent of Afghanistan was under government control or influence, the lowest amount since SIGAR began tracking the data in 2015. The clear message is that 18 years into a war that has killed and maimed hundreds of thousands of people, the US is losing, even as one administration after another lies about the reasons we are there and the consequences, political and moral, for staying.

The so-called Afghanistan Papers, an internal review of the conduct of the war by the Inspector General's Office, reveals that the Pentagon knew the war was hopeless from the earliest days and went to extraordinary lengths to hide this reality from the public and from the politicians who hold the purse-strings. The fraudulent depictions of the war spread virulently across three administrations. As Bob Crowley, a counterterrorism advisor to CENTCOM during the Obama surge said derisively: "Every data point was altered to present the best picture possible."

When disclosed in the Washington Post, the story made a splash for a couple of days and then, like every other revelation about the Afghan catastrophe, dissipated from the headlines and from the political debate. The tempo of US airstrikes once again increased. A suicide bomber blew himself up in Charikar at a rally for Afghan president Ashraf Ghani, killing 26 and wounding 42. Trump put a hold on reconstruction funds, pronounced talks with the Taliban "dead", then secretly revived them. US troops were ambushed by the Taliban. A CIA special ops plane was shot down. And the UN reported that US airstrikes had killed 579 civilians and wounded 306 in the last year, an increase of 35 percent over 2018. Just another few weeks in the war that time forgot. **CP**



EMPIRE BURLESQUE

# Impeachment's Soggy Sanctimony

BY CHRIS FLOYD

**S**ome say property, some say money, some say the insatiable attempt to assuage psychosexual anxieties by a projected identification with monstrous edifices of domination and death is the true American religion. But I say it is what Americans love most: sanctimony.

You could soar like a far-seeing hawk across the entire political landscape of the United States and never spy a single spot not covered with the fine, strong moss of sanctimony. From the highest mountaintop of power to the deepest crevice of servility, from east to west, from north to south—and certainly from right to left—sanctimony will fill your eyes and cloud your head with its powerful savor.

Every issue, every public action, is informed by it—and deformed by it. In a land where both religious and secular people are indelibly imbued with the sense that they belong to a sanctified nation—whether the divine sanction comes from God or else emanates from the fetish object of an 18th century parchment—there can be no political contention that is not also a spiritual agon for righteousness. Whether knowingly or not, most Americans view politics in the words of Dmitri Karamazov: “God and the devil are fighting it out, and the battlefield is the human heart.”

The recent impeachment farce is a good example. As the spectacle slouched inexorably toward its preordained end of acquittal, the writer Jacob Bacharach made a very pertinent observation: “Pretending the whole impeachment and trial were some grave, solemn, and serious legal proceeding rather than just a perfectly normal parliamentary No Confidence vote that was never going

anywhere is a total affectation.” And of course, this is true: having the legislature vote on whether or not a government should continue in office is ordinary if the infrequent matter in most countries that call themselves democracies. It’s a question of workaday politics, a calibration of coalitions and numbers that have nothing to do with the “soul” or “character” of the nation involved.

But owing to the doctrines of the national religion, the Trump impeachment was treated—or at least depicted—by the Democrats as a Karamazovian battle for the soul of America. You could barely see Adam Schiff for the soggy, mossy sanctimony that enveloped him as he stood on the Senate floor and evoked the spectre of Kremlin hordes pouring into the holy Heartland to kill, ravage and rape. Trump, proclaimed Schiff, had opened our sanctified soil to demonic impurity by, uh, briefly withholding the kind of lethal military aid to Ukraine that Barack Obama himself had adamantly and (in a rare moment of perspicacity) wisely refused to provide.

As so often happens, the hysterical level of sanctimony was in inverse proportion to the gruel-thin substance of the charge. Given the chance to absolutely nail Trump to the proverbial wall by impeaching him for the gargantuan, brazenly open corruption he perpetuates every day of his presidency through violations of the emoluments clause and the loot his “senior aides” (who also happen to be his daughter and son-in-law) rake in from foreign states and nabobs while serving in office—charges which could have been easily proved with a simple reading of receipts—the Democrats instead focused on a murky case of dip-

lomatic pressure involving the political fortunes of one of their own nabobs, the hapless, hopeless, hair-sniffing joke known as Joe Biden.

Obviously, there could have been no practical, reasonable consideration behind such a ludicrous and counter-productive course of action; we can only attribute it to the mind-blind religious fervor of acolytes drunk on their own sanctimony.

Then again, as in all societies from time out of mind, religion, whatever else it does, functions as a veneer in which people are mesmerized by the glittering shadows and flickering shapes while the actual operations of power—the ugly, brutal, lizard-brained process of seeking (or serving) domination—carry on unabated and unnoticed. A cynic or unbeliever might be forgiven for suspecting that the Democratic leadership never intended for Trump to be removed from office before the election and thus chose their charge precisely for that reason—and then deliberately used the sanctimony embedded in the American subconscious to produce a great deal of distracting light and noise while they continued their own avid, lizard-brained pursuit (and service) of power and domination.

For awhile Schiff and his mossy fellows were sanctimoniously decrying Trump’s moral depravity and unfitness for office, they also gifted him the largest, most lunatic military budget in the history of humankind (including the militarization of the cosmos).

To read the comments and columns of earnest liberals praising Schiff’s sanctimonious oratory is to know despair. Especially when you realize how paper-thin liberal sanctimony is against the genuinely hideous depredations of the Trump gang and its tens of millions of followers, all of them equally drunk on the delusions of divine sanction.

Perhaps, in the end, sanctimony is our high, hollow, established religion—while despair is the gritty, realistic faith of those hiding in the catacombs. **CP**



## BOTTOMLINES

# Exceptional in Inferiority

BY PETE DOLACK

In 1998, there was a general strike in Denmark that lasted for 11 days. Although the Internet was in its infancy then, I was working at Dow Jones at the time and had access to its subscription-based international wire service, where I could read daily reports on the strike.

That availability was not the contradiction it might seem, because these news services were intended for subscribers who worked in finance or other businesses—the corporate owners of the mass media lie as a matter of routine in content for the general public but will provide truthful reports to corporate leaders, who prefer to know what is actually happening so as to stay one step ahead. So when not rigging the office computers to scrawl “workers of the world unite” when the screen savers kicked in, my other tactic to stay sane in that inhumane office was to peruse the news wire. (I would soon quit Dow Jones without having a new job lined up, which tells you how wonderful it was to work there, although it was a good education in how finance capital functions.)

What vividly stood out for me was that the key demand of the Danish general strike was for a sixth week of mandatory paid vacation. A general strike, never mind one advancing such a goal, would be quite improbable in the United States. And needless to say, the corporate media would do its part to keep it that way as I recall not a single story managing to find its way into any newspaper. Ultimately, Danish workers did not get that sixth week, but did extract a couple of concessions when union leaders made a hurried deal with industrialists who were threatening to close their businesses and move elsewhere.

Workers in Denmark, along with many other European countries, are still legally entitled to five weeks of paid vacation. Danish workers additionally have nine paid holidays, making a total of 34 guaranteed paid days off per year.

For those of you scoring at home, that is 34 more days of guaranteed paid days off per year than working people in the United States.

Denmark’s 34 paid days off are not exceptional; it is in the middle of the pack among European Union countries. Among the countries comprising the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the club of the world’s advanced capitalist countries and biggest developing countries, Denmark is one of seven countries where workers are guaranteed 25 or more vacation days per year. Another 25 mandate at least 20 days. Each of those countries also mandate anywhere from eight to 15 paid holidays.

Among the 42 countries that are members of the OECD and/or the European Union, there is only one country with zero paid days of vacation or holiday under the law—the United States. Among those countries, only two—Turkey and the United States—have no holidays with mandatory pay. So when we add up the two columns, the country that stands out is the U.S., with precisely zero annual days of mandatory paid time off. Next worse are Turkey (12), Mexico (13) and Canada (19). Among the 42 countries surveyed, 34 legally require 28 or more days, led by Austria and Malta (38 each) and another half-dozen with 36.

There are official federal holidays in the United States, but there is no law that says you have to be paid for them. There’s

“American exceptionalism” for you.

Of course, the above far from exhausts the list of issues where the U.S. is deficient compared to the rest of the world. For example, here is the list of every country in the world that doesn’t mandate paid maternal leave: Papua New Guinea, the United States. That’s it. By contrast, at least two-thirds of the world’s countries have mandatory maternity pay for at least 14 weeks, according to the International Labour Organization. Many also mandate paternity leave.

How about health care? An amusing graphic making the rounds last year was a world map with one color denoting countries with universal health care and a second color for the one country that had someone who sent an automobile into space. Nonetheless, it is sobering to see just how bad United Statesians have it when it comes to health care. Not only are expenses far greater than in any other country with tens of millions not covered (\$1.4 trillion per year in excess costs according to my own calculations), but the U.S. has among the worst outcomes.

A Commonwealth Fund report, for example, found that the U.S. “placed last among 16 high-income, industrialized nations when it comes to deaths that could potentially have been prevented by timely access to effective health care.” The average U.S. lifespan is actually declining and, at the other end, U.S. infants die at a rate 66 percent higher than comparable countries. The U.S. is a country in which 22,000 people die and 700,000 go bankrupt per year as a result of inadequate, or no, health insurance.

And now with the rise of the “gig economy,” more workers can do without minimum-wage or other legal protections. One more capitalist innovation that is the product of U.S. “exceptionalism.” **CP**





## HOOK, LINE AND SINKER

# When Power Speaks

BY JENNIFER MATSUI

**T**he language of power reassures and obfuscates. Rather than communicate ideas, it's a tool that enables the overclass to impart self-serving platitudes that intentionally trigger associations with things generally considered 'nice'.

Take for example, "wellness", an industry that seeks to replace universal healthcare with New Age quackery. The word itself conveys yoga pants, sunrises and smoothies. It's one of those expressions imbued with filtered and carefully posed beneficence, repelling any critical inquiry into its implied definition.

Instead of considering a multibillion-dollar industry dependent on the average person unable to afford medicine, we are left to contemplate a host of products unfairly and often violently extracted from an impoverished country. We call this process of being unmindful of planet-devouring, neoliberal economic practices "mindfulness".

Against our better judgment, we believe a re-purposed office broom closet were can "meditate" represents corporate America's commitment to our "wellness" rather than a means of discouraging the realization that we are merely biding our times as obsolete automatons until AI makes us altogether redundant. There's a reason that tech and banking bros often cite 'Zen' as their guiding principle since the word (in English, at least) redefines a moral vacuum as a sea of white stones in a private temple garden somewhere in wine country.

The same goes for "connectivity"—as if being stalked, monitored, wire-tapped and harvested for residual data by powerful microwaves puts us in the same league as Bill Gates.

Misidentification with the ruling class becomes "aspiration", yet another misnomer re-labeled as a scented candle. The language of power, collated from our involuntarily surrendered medical records, and carefully implanted inner thoughts, is then focus-group-tested on lobotomized lab marmosets and Joe Biden supporters. Eventually, all this manipulated data is willfully disseminated in the media and echoed on social media platforms until we are all mindlessly disconnected from reality and plugged into a labyrinthine, neuron-imitating grid on a Pentagon computer screen connected to Amazon's cloud server. This digitized dragnet that installs in humans what Marx termed "false consciousness" has become the final frontier of capitalism.

By now, you are imagining something called a "paradigm shift", and are now able to readjust your worldview so that digitized tyranny is just more "empowerment". You remember that girls like that word, so you wonder how you can insert it into the conversation to impress your date, who is at this moment, undergoing a juice "cleanse" and shitting her yoga pants under the hashtag #lifegoals.

The language of power is the subterfuge means of diverting consciousness away from actual awareness, and directing it towards products (like political candidates) and services that install more spyware into our phones and devices to better monitor our behaviors and manipulate our 'choices'. The terminology it applies to these processes is technocratic and most often upbeat. It labels us "team players" to reward our willingness to cede our autonomy to an organization's group-think imperatives. It calls the laws employers are forced to

uphold that prevent them from tethering us 24/7 in a retail behemoth's warehouse "Work-Life Balance".

Increasingly, the de-humanizing jargon of the manager class has become inclusive, "diverse" and above all, sensitive to the roiling tensions beneath the surface of the selectively deputized class of social justice warriors it "empowers" to ensure that actual social justice remains an opportunity for a few to bloviate to the many about the kind of identity that serves a corporation's PR-led hiring quotas. Absent in identitarian discourse is the underlying economics responsible for balkanizing marginalized groups into brands all competing for coveted "space" at the proverbial table.

Enter Donald Trump, disrupter-in-chief, deliberately unleashed as malware designed to wreak havoc on the political machine, identifying its vulnerabilities and fortifying them against the sort of populist revolts that can unseat an establishment candidate in rigged primaries. In reality, this "black swan", is a tunnel canary for the totalitarian, bipartisan regime that spawned him in a swamp. Unlike his predecessors, Trump speaks only the brute words of force; the impotent bluster underlying the language of power. A formally worded eviction notice won't necessarily give unwanted tenants the message to "Vacate planet earth immediately!"; but a hired goon might deliver it more effectively.

Power speaks in two dialects, one detached, void of clarity, and delivered in a voice that imitates Mr. Rogers, and the other brutish, aggrieved and deeply personal. One orders drone strikes and beverages labeled 'venti', while the other tweets about nuclear holocaust between cheeseburger bites. In every election cycle, we choose our poison, depending on our identification with the single class that unites the hydra-headed beast. When power speaks, we need to respond with a raised middle finger, and carry on dismantling the structures that uphold it. **CP**

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## BORDERZONE NOTES

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# Confronting Violence: The Zapatista Example

BY LAURA CARLSEN

**W**hen four thousand women from around the world met in a Zapatista community to find ways to end violence against women, we knew what we were up against. Many, if not most, brought with them the scars of gender violence. We also knew we were meeting at a critical and contradictory point in the history of women's movements—a point when an all-time high in public attention and mobilization coincides with a rise in the violence the movements aim to stop.

The second gathering of “Women Who Struggle” faced two big questions: how do we take personal pain and forge it into collective action, and what do we need to be doing differently to reduce a form of violence that has proved to be not only intransigent, but resurgent?

There was no real program or set of issues defined beforehand, which made for a loose-knit and sometimes chaotic situation. The first day, scores of women stood up to a mike on a wooden platform to describe the abuses they'd suffered, and the paths they built, collectively, to free and heal themselves. Their stories demonstrated the degree to which violence against girls and women permeates society and how it has been normalized through socially accepted practices that isolate the victim and her pain. Each woman who spoke through her tears was met with a cry of “you are not alone!” That's an important first step.

The second day participants broke into

groups to discuss strategies to deal with the frustrating truth that after decades of identifying, legislating, institutionalizing and organizing around violence against women, we are no closer to eradicating it. In most of our countries, femicides—the murder of a woman for being a woman—have gone up. In El Salvador, murders of women more than doubled between 2013 and 2017, with Honduras and Guatemala close behind. Mexico faces an epidemic in violence against women. The UN reports that nine women are killed every day, and the Mexican Institute of Statistics and Geography found that 44% of women have suffered violence from a partner and 66% have experienced some form of violence.

The statistics don't even reflect the full extent of the problem since many cases aren't reported. Most of the testimonies presented at the Zapatista meeting described a process of years, if not decades, to dare to speak about the attacks. In many legal systems, women who were attacked in childhood can't report the crime later due to statutes of limitations. The stories of the abuse of women as little girls are the hardest to listen to.

The testimonies also bore out how discrimination, racism, homophobia and poverty compound the risk. Native American women in the United States face a murder rate more than 10 times the national average. Undocumented migrant women are increasingly afraid

to report violence for fear of deportation, putting them at far greater risk and allowing situations of domestic violence to escalate. Attacks against members of the LGBTQ community have become particularly common and vicious, and women workers face systematic violence that often includes economic blackmail.

At the same time, feminist movements have made great strides in raising the issue. From the MeToo movements that publicly denounce sexual abuse and harassment, to the Chilean women's viral performance of “A rapist in your path”, to demonstrations throughout the world, and the current wave of student strikes and school occupations against gender violence in Mexico, a new generation of feminists leads organizing to reclaim the right to live without fear, injecting a new anger and urgency in women's movements, as well as new tensions and challenges.

The inauguration speech of the Zapatista Comandanta Amada, reflected the frustrations of this paradox. “They say there's been a lot of progress in feminist struggles, but they continue to kill us. They say that women are now taken into account, but they continue to kill us. They say there are now more laws that protect women, but they continue to kill us...” she told the crowd. She criticized apparent progress on many women's issues—toward equal pay, presence in the media, men in the movement, and representation in government—ending every achievement listed with “but they continue to kill us.”

The Zapatistas announced that in 2019 not a single woman was murdered or disappeared in their communities. In conversations, they emphasized that theirs is not a model to be applied elsewhere, but a call to organize in different ways, in different places. Their success reminds us that the basic demand to live without the reality-based fear of attack by men is not impossible.

Comandanta Amada emphasized three issues that constitute major challenges for modern feminisms: the devel-

opment of an anti-capitalist analysis and practice, the generation gap, and the relationship of women's movements with governments.

"It seems like our violent deaths, our disappearances, our pain, profit the capitalist system. Because the system only allows that which brings it profit. That's why we say that the capitalist system is patriarchal." She concluded, "... To fight for our rights, for example, the right to life, it is not enough that we fight against machismo, patriarchy or whatever you want to call it. We must also fight against the capitalist system."

Among the thousands of women at the gathering from all kinds of organizations and collectives, some clearly include anti-capitalism as a central tenet of their work, some don't reject it as part of their analysis, and many, probably the majority, seem to consider it an abstraction that isn't particularly relevant to their antipatriarchal cultural, social and political work.

This gap that often exists between a critique of capitalism and feminisms couldn't be broadly debated at the gathering, but the linkage must be understood and deepened, not only in updated feminist theory, but especially in practice. It's no accident that the anthem of the contemporary feminist movement "A rapist in your path" emerged in the context of the massive movement against neoliberal policies in Chile. A vision of women's liberation that does not confront the economic model ends up including only women with privilege, and even for them it's ultimately doomed to fail.

The Zapatistas' specific call to respect "women of judgment, that is, of age" spoke to a widening gap between younger feminists and older generations that has opened up in the context of recent mobilizations. Unfortunately, it's not just a gap, it's a wedge, with misunderstandings on both sides and for some reason few spaces for open discussion about the differences. Comandanta Amada ended with an admonishment that must be taken to heart: "If we don't

let geographies divide us, then let's not let calendars divide us either."

Finally, during the discussions and in the speeches almost nobody talked about the government's role in ending violence against women, except to say that it has failed. This is interesting considering that women's movements have invested a great deal of time, effort and resources into drafting and passing legislation, improving justice systems, putting abusers behind bars and creating governmental protection mechanisms and programs. The results have been alarmingly bad.

Even programs that seem to have worked prove to be vulnerable and too-often ephemeral. Take the 1994 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in the United States. The Act has been credited with reducing domestic violence by 60% and yet the Republican Senate has refused to renew it because the House passed a strengthened version last spring that broadens a prohibition on the sale of firearms to those convicted of domestic violence. U.S. studies show women are five times more likely to be murdered by men if there is a gun in the house. Similar studies in Mexico and Central American countries where the U.S. exports massive amounts of firearms also show the lethal link between guns and femicide. But apparently, the political clout of the NRA trumps women's lives.

Where rightwing governments come to power—Trump in the U.S. and Bolsonaro in Brazil come to mind—hard-won protections for women are being rolled back at mind-boggling speed. Even progressive governments, like Mexico's under president López Obrador who has declared "the end of neoliberalism", end up putting women's rights and safety on the historical back burner.

So it's no wonder that proposals from the gathering focused on women's grassroots organizing and collective self-protection. While groups of women practiced self-defense training

in the community soccer field, others discussed their work in accompanying women who have to take routes known to be dangerous, creating "safe spaces", publicly denouncing abusers where impunity reigns, forming brigades to search for women who have been forcibly disappeared, adopting security protocols in their organizations, creating victims' support groups and popular education groups, providing translators for indigenous women, defending migrant women en route, setting up counseling services and all kinds of creative therapies, visiting women in prison and providing re-entry services, campaigns for women tourists to prevent abuse and assault in resort areas, performances and street art to raise consciousness, networks of women human rights defenders, fighting for access to land for economic security for rural women, building shelters, sharing basic necessities and creating an infinitely wide range of ground-up initiatives.

In general, the idea is to build feminist caring communities that don't necessarily give up on law enforcement, but take matters into their own hands. For many, the state has lost all credibility as a guarantor of basic safety for women. Many groups continue to document and denounce abuses, while at the same time protecting and providing among themselves.

Today's movement aims not only to "take back the streets", but to take back every nook and cranny where women live their lives. To spend three days in an encampment of thousands of women committed to ending violence—without men, without fear—provided an exhilarating glimpse of the freedom we want.

Because, as feminists, we know that those battles for nooks and crannies are precisely where real transformation is born. **CP**

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## EUROZONE NOTES

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# Gypsies and Genocide

BY DANIEL RAVENTÓS AND JULIE WARK

What happened in the United Kingdom a couple of months ago is an example of the rule that attacks on wider rights and freedoms frequently start with a minority. It also warns that when any human group is labeled as redundant, inferior, and removable, the crime that follows will be monstrous. On 4 November 2019, as the elections neared, Priti Patel, Secretary of State for the Home Department, presented a written statement on an “important issue”: “Strengthening Police Powers to Tackle Unauthorised Encampments”. The text is peppered with words like “criminalizing”, “distress and misery”, and “criminal offence”. They refer to Gypsies, a word Patel scrupulously avoids though it’s spread all over her project. It’s an old Tory election trick to blame others for “distress and misery” and Gypsies (the term embraced by the UK community), Roma, and Travellers (who are native to Ireland), or the GRT community, are a handy culprit. The wider issue is human rights. In the 2005 election campaign, the Tories scapegoated the GRT community—who allegedly use the Human Rights Act to bend planning laws—when they tried to scrap the Act. After the latest Tory win and with Brexit looming, this project and withdrawing from the European Convention on Human Rights is high on the agenda of Dominic Cummings, Chief Special Adviser to Boris Johnson, who is “coming for that next”.

Priti Patel’s project raises the question of genocide because it aims to abolish Gypsy and Traveller existence altogether, basically by criminalizing the presently civil law matter of using stopping places without permission. Taking their cue from her, thirty-four councils have taken out injunctions threatening Gypsies and Travellers with fines and imprisonment if they camp on public land within their boundaries. The culture, the identity of many of Britain’s still itinerant 63,000 Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers will be eradicated by the only alternative offered to them: council housing. In the late 1980s and

early 1990s, two-thirds of their ancient stopping sites were closed, and after the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994 local authorities were no longer obliged to provide sites. The aim now is to give councils greater powers to expel Gypsies, Roma and Travellers and confiscate their homes which represent, “Every single thing of value, financial or emotional”, as one woman told Foreign Policy. Two men captured the essence of the Tory project when they called it a “legal pogrom” and “ethnic cleansing”.

Demonization of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers comes hand-in-hand with racist violence. Last year, caravans were set alight in several Traveller sites and there were threats to fire-bomb any new sites. Many Tory officials whip up violence with their hate speech. Midlands councilor Mike Bird speaks of “parasites” that cause “mayhem” and, in 2014, Berkshire councilor Alan Mellins said that Travellers who refused to leave should be “executed”. They have been called a “disease” and likened to Genghis Khan. The press does its bit, figuratively abolishing them by refusing to capitalize the names Gypsy and Traveller, arguing that they don’t represent a distinct ethnic group.

The good news, this time, is that at the end of January, the GRT community won a major victory at the Court of Appeal against eviction by councils. Citing the European Convention on Human Rights, the court ruled that Gypsies and Travellers have an “enshrined freedom”

to move from one place to another, and also that “Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers are separate ethnic minorities protected by the Equality Act 2010”. The bad news is that the Tories will “coming for” these protections. Worse, their attacks on human rights legislation and attempts to abolish the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller way of life almost seem commonplace because of a much more general pattern in Europe.

There are some twelve million Romani worldwide, mainly in Europe but with about a million in the United States and 800,000 in Brazil. Everywhere, to a greater or lesser degree, they have been persecuted and discriminated against. Raising the fear of genocide is no exaggeration. The report *Countdown to Annihilation: Genocide in Myanmar* details six stages of genocide: stigmatization (and dehumanization); harassment, violence and terror; isolation and segregation; systematic weakening; mass annihilation; and, finally, symbolic removal of the victim group from the collective history. The first four are common anti-Roma practices and the fifth happened not many decades ago with the *Pharrajimos* (“Cutting up”, “Destruction”) when, according to the recently updated figure of Romani scholar Ian Hancock, 1.5 million out of two million Roma were murdered by Nazis. It could be argued that the sixth stage of removing the victim group from memory is also happening with the attempt to hide them away in council housing.

Genocide is not necessarily a fast process like the *Pharrajimos*. It can be slow, stealthy, and long-unnoticed as happened with the Rohingya and West Papuans. A series of deliberate steps are placing Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers at high risk of annihilation. The Roma are already greatly handicapped. Only a few thousand survived the *Pharrajimos* and concentration camps, after which they had to try to rebuild their lives after losing many family members, health, and property. The *Pharrajimos* was not considered at the Nuremberg trials.

In a slow ethnocide by legal decree the Roma (the term commonly used, together with Sinti, in Europe) have been forced into settlement by official enclosure of their traditional stopping places. Today's awful irony is that when the Roma travel across Europe it is often because they are seeking asylum after being driven from their *settled* homes. Legal ethnocide goes back a long way, for example to sixteenth-century vagrancy laws which, by the eighteenth century, included punishment by whipping, imprisonment, and removal to a place of "settlement". The Roma were also confined by peddlers' and hawkers' licenses which, not easy to obtain, were a kind of *laissez-passer* for crossing unwelcoming territory. More recently, legal obstacles to itinerancy have forced them into wasteland areas. Denied potable water, sewage treatment facilities, and exposed to hazardous waste sites, incinerators, and factory refuse, they are vulnerable to dysentery, hepatitis, tuberculosis, skin diseases, and respiratory illnesses.

Hate speech by politicians and in the media draws on ancient stereotypes based on the cultural and ethnic differences which have always made the Roma easy targets for persecution in many parts of Europe where, genetic evidence suggests, they first appeared after leaving northern India around 1,500 years ago. In many regions of the Balkans they were enslaved until the nineteenth century, in Romania until 1856. In medieval England, Switzerland

and Denmark, they were put to death, and other countries like Germany, Italy, Spain, and Portugal ordered their expulsion. They were branded with hot irons, some women had their ears cut off, and children were taken from parents. Their language was banned in some countries and, in others, they were not permitted to marry among themselves.

Today's anti-Roma speech and action recall the Nazi methods that preceded the mass killings. In 2009, the Bulgarian prime minister Boyko Borissov referred to Roma as "bad human material". His countryman Angel Dzhambazki, Member of the European Parliament, posted on Facebook a photo of a group of Roma men with the caption "Euthanasia". Egged on by politicians, demonstrators in Sofia were soon shouting "Gypsies into soap". A 2011 Amnesty International report documents "systematic discrimination" against some ten million Roma across Europe. Romani children are often segregated from regular schools and sent to "delinquent" or learning disability centers. Adults and children are routinely assaulted. A 2019 Pew Research Centre survey shows that 83% of Italians, 76% of Slovaks, and 72% of Greeks, for example, have negative views of Roma. In 2005, Germany deported 50,000 Kosovar Romani asylum seekers and, in 2010, French authorities demolished at least 51 Roma camps and started to repatriate their residents. In Norway, many Romani people were forcibly sterilized until 1977, and, in Great Britain, children were taken from their families and given up for adoption. Italy, and Romania have shameful records of recent violence against the Roma, and anti-Roma aggression is especially virulent in Hungary where the extreme-right party Jobbik has used "Gypsy crime" to rise in the polls.

It's as if all these persecutors forget that humans began as a migratory species in the savannah of East Africa, following food and the seasons, and genetically geared to keep moving. Nomadism is generally viewed as a primitive state

that was superseded by the "civilization" which developed after the Neolithic hunter and gatherer became a sedentary farmer. International law is based on this agricultural premise, on property in land. It's argued that nomadic peoples don't *occupy* land, as happened with the Terra Nullius argument in Australia, which paved the way for some 270 frontier massacres over 140 years, taking the Aboriginal population from 250,000 to 60,000, a horror story never forgotten in Aboriginal oral traditions—"Many kartiya [whitefellas] were too greedy for our land and didn't see us as fully human"—but erased from white history. Colonial history offers many examples. It's all about landed property.

Nomadic peoples can only survive if they have right of access to territory. This is a basic question of international law. Denying it is a legal form of cultural genocide. It affects not only Gypsies, Roma, and Irish Travellers but also other roaming peoples like the Nenets in Russia, the Sami in Scandinavia, and nomad shepherds. All over Europe, they are being forced into settlement. They don't demand political autonomy, or independence but just the right to move. Like other mobile people, immigrants and refugees, they are seen as a problem, harbingers of the dystopian world which, with its praise of "resilience", the World Economic Forum describes as having a "civilized" walled-in part threatened by health-hazard, mayhem-causing hordes outside.

Nomads traditionally lived as part of the land, leaving a light ecological footprint for conservation was essential to their way of life. The civilization founded by the land grabbers has led to the Sixth Extinction. This calls for a rereading of the story in the *Book of Genesis*. The settler Cain, the original embodiment of greed and violence, killed his wanderer brother Abel and, for his crime, was condemned to a life of vagrancy. But his crime was somehow projected onto the Abels, the free, untainted wanderers, and now it is claimed that Gypsies bear the mark of Cain. Who brought the Sixth

Extinction upon humanity? It wasn't the Abels. The original curse was on Cain: "When thou tillest the [exploited] ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength". According to Josephus, Cain, once established in the lawless land of Nod, imposed property lines and shaped human culture in cunning and deceit. He even built a fortified city like that envisaged by the WEF. Grabbing, enclosing, and plundering the land, the Cains have destroyed it for all of us. **CP**

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## Water Wars

# A Ticking Bomb in Our Greedy, Overcrowded World

BY T.J. COLES

Jasmine McBride, a young black woman, was looking forward to her 30th birthday. Not letting her dependence on a recently-acquired oxygen mask get her down, she prepared her family for the celebration: "Just let [the kids] have fun, get some food and have a water balloon fight." Jasmine lived to enjoy her 30th, but not her 31st birthday. She was one of the dozens of victims of the spread of Legionnaire's disease caused by the Flint water crisis in Michigan. Smelling of a cover-up, Legionnaire's is not confirmed as her cause of death. Nearly 8,000 miles away in Udaipur, India, Raju of the Bhil peoples showed journalists the death certificate of his daughter, Sohani. Sohani had died just nine days before her eighth birthday. Raju has no photographs of her. In fact, Raju has few material possessions, including sanitation. Like Jasmine's death, contaminated water was the cause of Sohani's demise; a cruel irony in what is known as India's City of Lakes. Udaipur ranked the 417th cleanest city on India's list of 476. Just like the spike in Flint deaths caused by money-saving mismanagement, the Bhil community has recently experienced a rise in disease-related water deaths underpinned by industrialization.

The ownership, monopolization, and exploitation of fresh-water is a global problem. It has long resulted in ill-health and conflict. This article is about water, one of the most basic resources, as a source of conflict and profit.

### Ancient Fights

Water can be used as a weapon by challenging coastal and river boundaries, fighting over trade routes, cutting off supplies to rivals and enemies, and more recently through privatization.

The oldest recorded water battle occurred in 2,500 BCE. A 28-mile tract of land called Gu'edena separated Umma and Lagash (in modern-day Iraq). At the time, Ullama King of Lagash diverted water from Gu'edena to canals, and in doing

so dried the boundary ditches of Umma. The ensuing conflict prompted to King Mesilim of Kish (d. circa 2,492 BCE) to erect a stone stela. This created a new boundary and a temporary peace. But peace did not last. King Eannatum of Lagash (2,454–25 BCE) conquered Umma and established a new border, making part of it no-man's-land. To give another example: Iluma-Ilum (circa 1,732 BCE), the Sumerian King of Isin, declared independence from Babylon. In doing so, he deprived southern Babylon of its access to the sea. As part of the secessionist war, Abi-Eshuh King of Babylon (circa 1,720–1,684 BCE) prevented the retreat of rivals from the marshes of Mesopotamia by damming the Tigris River and attempting to flood and drown Iluma-Ilum's troops. To give a final case of water wars from Mesopotamia: Between 720 and 705 BCE, King Sargon II of Assyria defeated the Halidians (who lived in part of modern-day Armenia) and destroyed their sophisticated irrigation networks in order to flood their land. (Though the extent of Sargon II's success may have been exaggerated.)

Other cases of ancient water wars include the opening in 104 BCE of the Jiuquan prefecture by Han Wudi of China in an effort to facilitate trade with the West. Wudi sent an armed envoy to Ferghana (in modern Uzbekistan) led by General Li Guangli. After the envoy was slaughtered by locals, Gen. Li cut Ferghana's water supply. The digging of wells allowed the city to survive for 40 days. Fifty years later in Europe, the Roman Emperor Julius Caesar at Uxellodunum (in modern-day France) cut the water supply to the Aquitanian Gauls, in one of the last battles of the Gallic Wars (58–51 BCE). The Gauls reportedly surrendered without further bloodshed.

The closer we move to the present, the richer the record. Notable 19th-century battles over water include Napoleon's efforts to reroute the Rhine to divert trade from Holland (1804); the canal, dam and reservoir resisters of Ontario (Canada) and Ohio, New Hampshire, Virginia and Indiana (USA) (1844–1887); and the destruction of dams by Confederate forces to isolate Union troops during the Civil War (1862). Notable 20th-century conflicts include Germany's genocide of 70 percent of the Herero and Namaqua peoples (of modern-day Namibia) in part by driving them into the desert to dehydrate them (1904); the destruction of the Burguillo and Ordunte dams by the Nationalist Army in the Spanish Civil War (1938); the flooding of the Huayuankou part of the Yellow River by Chiang Kai-shek to defend against Fascist Japan (1938); the US bombing of North Korea's Yalu-Amnok River dams (1950s); Said Barre's destruction of Mudug and Nugal's water-points in Somalia, as part of his scorched-earth policy (1980–82); and the US-British sanctions on Iraq (1990–2003), which deprived the nation of vital water purification chemicals.

### Standing Rock

One of the great battles of modern times is the Standing Rock Water Protectors vs. the machinery of the state and local authorities. In the 1940s, the Columbia Basin Project led to the US Army

Corps of Engineers constructing Lakes Oahe and Sakakawe, the creation of which submerged hundreds of miles of tribal lands, displacing thousands of Arikara, Brule Sioux, Cheyenne Sioux, Crow Creek Sioux, Hidatsa, Lower Mandan, the Nebraska Tribe, Standing Rock Sioux, and Yankton Sioux. But by the mid-2010s, the US Army Corps was back. This time it prepared to clear the way for the North Dakota Access Pipeline. Thousands of indigenous and non-indigenous demonstrators alike, calling themselves the Water Protectors, camped at the construction sites demanding the project's termination for fear that the pipeline will leak into sources of drinking water.

The North Dakota territory of the Great Sioux Nation or Oceti Šakowin (Seven Council Fires) was recognized by the US in the Fort Laramie Treaty 1851. Today, the Standing Rock Reservation (Ínyan Woslál Hán) is over 3,500 square miles (9.2 km) and straddles North and South Dakota. The indigenous residents include the Dakota Oyate (Ihanktuwona and Pabaksa), Lakota Oyate (Hunkpapa and Sicasu), the Hunkpatina Dakota, and the Wicoyena (Ihanktonwona Dakota).

In 2014, the Obama administration announced the creation of the \$3.7bn North Dakota Access Pipeline (NDAP) to complete the Bakken System, which takes oil from Canadian shale fields through North and South Dakota down to Nederland, Texas. Owned by the companies Energy Transfer, MarEn Bakken, and Phillips 66, the loans for the project were provided by international financial institutions, mainly ABN AMRO, Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi, BNP Paribas, Citibank, DNB ASA, ICBC, ING, Mizuho, RBS, SMBC Nikko, Société Générale, SunTrust, TD Securities, and Wells Fargo. The NDAP violates the 1868 version of the Fort Laramie Treaty (Sioux Treaty) by running through sacred Standing Rock land.

What started as a small protest consisting mainly of Oceti Šakowin people ballooned into an international cause. From the outset, protestors faced arrest, intimidation, and infiltration at the hands of federal and local authorities. At Morton County, a warrant for the arrest of the Pueblo Water Protector, Brennon Nastacio, was issued following Nastacio's disarming of a private security contractor, Kyle Thompson, who tried to infiltrate the group, possibly as a provocateur. Joint-owner Energy Transfer hired the company TigerSwan (founded by ex-Delta Force James Reese) to guard the pipeline. One TigerSwan contractor, Joel Edward McCollough, infiltrated the movement and paid Water Protector fellow travelers to inform on the group. The very prospect of informants helped to spread debilitating paranoia, McCollough said. McCollough worked with women in an effort to spread rumors about sexual abuse at the protests. In addition to raiding the camps with armored cars and making sweeping arrests, local authorities—notably ND governor Doug Burman—signed laws criminalizing trespass, increasing penalties for rioters, and banning the use of face masks and hoods, even in freezing ND temperatures. Despite the dedicated protests, Barack Obama signed a

Presidential memo on 24 January 2017, authorizing the construction of the section of the NDAP that runs under Lake Oahe. Obama also signed the Notice of Termination of the Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.

By June 2019, the pipeline was described as being “essentially full” by industry experts. Water Protectors continue the fight in court, asking federal judges to revoke the NDAP permit. There are political prisoners, too. After apparently being set up as an FBI informant, convicted felon Red Fawn Fallis, a Oglala Sioux, pleaded guilty in January 2018 to civil disorder and possession of a Ruger .38 (reportedly the informant's). Judge Daniel Hovland sentenced Fallis to 4 years.

## Water Today

The Standing Rock Water Protectors could be a microcosm of the future. The UN defines water stress as “the proportion of water withdrawal by all sectors in relation to the available water resources.” More than 2 billion people across 32 countries experience water stress. In some countries, it is up to 70 percent of the population. Just 2.5 percent of all the Earth's water is freshwater. Sixty-eight percent (of that 2.5 percent) comes from glaciers, 30.1 percent from groundwater, and 0.8 percent from permafrost. Yet by 2050, it is estimated that 9.7 billion people will live on the planet. By the same year, current water usage for manufacturing alone is expected to increase by 400 percent and by 130 percent for household use. Total water demand is set to increase by 50 percent by the year 2030. Today, 30 percent of extraction is lost due to leakage. Eighty percent of wastewater returns to the environment—to land, rivers, streams, the sea—without first being treated.

The biggest cause of water stress is agriculture, with 70 percent of all withdrawals used in that sector. The UN notes that the major problem with water is that it is subject to ideological differences between those who consider it a human right and those who use it as a commodity. By 2035, the UN estimates that 40 percent of the world's population will live in “seriously water-stressed areas.” There are at least six overlapping contexts: “water scarcity and insecurity, water-related disasters, water sanitation and health (WASH) crisis, water infrastructure deterioration and destruction, unsustainable development, and ecosystem degradation (sic).” According to the UN, 60 percent of freshwater derives from river basins that cross national borders. This amounts to some 592 transboundary aquifers. Ninety percent of all global disasters—floods, drought, typhoons, burst banks, landslides, etc.—are water-related and account for 70 percent of all disaster-related deaths. By 2050, up to 200 million people could be displaced as a result of water-related phenomena, including desertification and sea-level rises.

Two billion people drink dirty water, resulting in the death of one child every minute. Now that more than half of the global population lives in urban areas, people will come under more water stress, including the drinking of dirty water. Inner-city

water consumption is expected to grow by 15 to 20 percent by 2050. At the international level, major treaties designed to safeguard resources and diffuse international tensions include the Helsinki Convention on the Protection and Use of Trans-boundary Watercourses and International Lakes (1992) and the Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of Transboundary Watercourses (1997). As populations increase and new nation-states are founded, more treaties will be needed. Other specific treaties, like the ones between Israel and Palestine outlined below, make explicit references to water security and shared responsibilities.

## “Security” Threats

Given that the US military wants to rule the world by force and the threat of force in order to shape the global economy in ways conducive to US corporate interests (“full spectrum dominance” as they call it), it is imperative that the global hegemon incorporates water “security” (meaning others’ insecurity) into military planning. Freshwater is a finite resource. Be it glaciers that feed major rivers or subterranean aquifers, populations including states and insurrectionary or separatist movements could seek to maximize their interests around water, the way they currently do around oil and gas fields.

In 2012, the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) wrote: “water problems—when combined with poverty, social tensions, environmental degradation, ineffectual leadership, and weak political institutions—contribute to social disruptions that can result in state failure.” The DNI report presents a table of river basins affected by water stress, including the Indus Valley. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, the transboundary Indus basin stretches from the Himalayan mountains to the Arabian Sea. It includes Afghanistan, China, India, and Pakistan. It covers the entire Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The river flows consist of glacier and snow melts, as well as rainfall and runoff. In 1960, India and Pakistan signed the Indus Water Treaty in recognition of their respective water rights. But similar territorial treaties, e.g., over Jammu-Kashmir, have failed to prevent war between the two nuclear-armed states. The DNI document predicts that by the year 2040, Indus water resources will deplete due to mismanagement, inefficient agricultural practices, soil salinization, and pollution.

The DNI document also cites the Jordan Valley as a potential flashpoint for water conflict. With Jordan as an internationally-recognized state and Palestine currently de facto annexed by Israel, the DNI document predicts that by 2040, pollution, depleted shared groundwater resources, vulnerabilities over available water, and poor inter-state coordination will reduce resilience to drought and flooding, degrade regional food security, and exacerbate geopolitical and ethnic tensions. According to experts, only rainwater replenishes the Jordan Valley, with 65 percent of freshwater coming from surface waters and 35 percent from groundwater. On average,

per capita, global water resources equate to 1,000 cubic meters. But in Jordan, per capita share is just 140 cubic meters. By 2025, this is estimated to fall to 90 cubic meters. The average US citizen, by contrast, enjoys 9,000.

Jordan’s surface waters are spread across 15 major basins, 40 percent of which derive from just one; the Yarmouk River, which borders Syria. Owing to Syria’s agricultural practices, the amount of water flowing into Jordan from the Yarmouk has reduced over the last four decades from 400 million cubic meters (mcm) to around 150 mcm. The Israel-Jordan Treaty of 1994 sets out in detail the water rights of both countries with specific reference to the Yarmouk and other rivers. Only one reference is made to Palestinians—and that’s in the context of refugees. In the Oslo II treaty 1995 between Israel and Palestine, “water” is mentioned 120 times, including an emphasis in Article 40 of Israel’s recognition of Palestinian water rights in the Israeli-occupied (annexed) West Bank of the Jordan.

Referring to East Asia, the US military’s DNI report mentions Mekong River water stress as a threat to elite US interests. Spanning 2,700 miles, the Mekong runs through Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, China, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. Seventy million people live in the region. The majority are farmers and fishers who live on less than the equivalent of \$2 a day. In the wet seasons, half of all villages are inaccessible by road. The main Upper Basin flows from China, near Chinese-occupied Tibet, and decreases in altitude to Burma (Myanmar) and Laos, before forming the border with Thailand. The DNI reports notes that by 2040, the region will be affected by increased development and changes in sediment flows. This might reduce food security, particularly of fisheries, as well as resilience to floods. At present, the region is a dumping ground for Chinese waste and subcontracted industrial production, as well as a hub for Islamist and other armed secessionist movements. How long before these groups demand their water rights and the affected states crack down hard?

## Privatization

In addition to war, there’s corporate capture. The two often go hand-in-glove. What could be better for profiteers and speculators than a scarce resource over which armed forces and mercenaries are increasingly likely to fight? Today, iShares Global Water UCITS ETF invests in the top 50 global water companies, as does the Guggenheim S&P Global Water Index, while the PowerShares Global Water UCITS mirrors performance on the NASDAQ OMX Global Water Index. Top US water stocks include American Water Works, Aqua American, the California Water Service Group, Pentair, Primo, the SJW Group, and the York Water Co. But water privatization is nothing new.

In 1903, the government of the British colonial territory of Trinidad and Tobago raised the price of water to finance



new infrastructure projects. After protestors rioted at the Red House (the parliament building), police opened fire on the crowd, killing 16 and injuring over 40. Nearly a century later in Cochabamba, Bolivia, between December 1999 and April 2000, six people died and over 100 were injured, mainly by state forces, in protests against the company Aguas del Tunari (part-owned by the US giant Bechtel) over its privatization of the city's water. New privatization laws made it illegal for residents to catch rainwater.

Meanwhile, in the US, the NGO Food & Water reported that between 1990 and 2011, the 10 largest municipal water and sewage companies had nearly tripled their rates. Local authorities typically finance water projects with municipal bonds with a four percent interest rate. Yet private companies use equity and corporate debt to fund their operations at average interest rates of 7.5 to 14 percent. For workers, privatization leads to job losses.

The average water workforce typically declines by 34 percent following privatization. As for consumers, the average household in the US pays around \$185 more per year for 60,000 gallons of water provided by private companies than it does for

the same amount of water provided by public companies. In addition to provision, private companies charge consumers 63 percent more than public providers for sewage services. Municipalities that revert to public ownership enjoy an average price decline of 21 percent. Private price-rises appear to be connected to operation and maintenance costs, which usually increase with privatization.

According to the Financial Times, the UK is the only country to have fully privatized its water and sewage systems. As in the US, British water companies finance their operations via debt. In the UK, consumers lose £2.3 billion a year due to water privatization, according to Greenwich University. Six of the nine English regional water and sewerage companies are privately owned and three are listed on the stock market. None have major shareholder equity, yet they have profited by adding £100 per annum to the average household bill. In addition to ripping off consumers, the environment is at risk from privatization, such as the cumulative dumping of 4.2bn liters of raw sewage into the River Thames by the Thames Water company. Private water companies could also pose a systemic economic risk by running on debt, with three companies—Anglian, Severn Trent Water, and Yorkshire Water Services—paying out more to shareholders than they make in profit.

But debt-based privatization means that volatile money mutuals, notably hedge funds, can profit. The asset company IG, for instance, writes: "Water is arguably the most important

natural resource on the planet and, considering the growing fears about its availability as the world's population grows and climate change makes it scarcer, it is unsurprising that investors are starting to pay attention." At the moment, the relative stability of water companies means that hedge funds use them as long-term investments.

Hedge funds' profiting from water scarcity, both artificial (via water purchasing) and induced by climate change, derives from the military sector in the form of intelligence-gathering and analysis. In 1999, CIA analyst John Dickerson founded the world's first water hedge fund: Summit Global Management (SGM). "The maldistribution of freshwater is getting much more severe," he says. SGM's \$600 million fund bought both water rights and hydro-commerce technology. SGM anticipated climate change-induced droughts in the US and elsewhere and laid foundations to profit by purchasing utilities, from

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## More than 2 billion people across 32 countries experience water stress. In some countries, it is up to 70 percent of the population.

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Colorado to Australia. But SGM wanted the physical water itself, not just the utilities. Common law in the Eastern US prevented this kind of expropriation, but Western law did not; hence the trip to Colorado. Ironically, Al Gore's climate change awareness-raising activities alerted hedge funds to emerging water securities markets, hence the flood of investments in SGM and other companies (pun intended). By 2014, SGM was managing \$400 billion.

It is widely reported that the melting Arctic is a wonderful business opportunity for oil and gas companies hoping to exploit the region's resources in the absence of the permafrost that otherwise prevents drilling and exploration. But what is being underreported is the buying of Arctic territory by hedge funds, including the Cooperative Arctic Hedge Fund, whose aim is to own the territories that make up the Circle in order to lease zoning and drilling permits and equipment, as well as betting on stock-price fluctuations.

### Conclusion

Privatization and war are not the only factors jeopardizing our water. Jasmine McBride, mentioned at the beginning, was a victim of the broader effects of poverty and disinvestment. Once-upon-a-time, the Detroit Water and Sewage Department (DWSD) drew its resources from Lake Huron. But the County's drain commissioner, Jeff Wright, saw a business opportunity in effectively replacing the DWSD with a new venture, the Karegnondi Water Authority (KWA), ironi-

cally titled after the indigenous name of Lake Huron. Unlike its predecessor, the KWA decided it would use raw, pumped water and rely on local retreat plants to make the water safe for consumers. But deindustrialization had collapsed the town of Flint's treatment plants.

Raju's daughter, Sohani, also mentioned at the beginning, perished in large part because of pollution. The World Bank reports that "[p]ollution in Udaipur is mainly because of the 200 small and large-scale zinc smelters and fertilizer, chemical and pesticide units." Many of the products made there are for export to wealthier countries, such as ours. "In the case of drinking water and sanitation, the [price] gap ranges between 55 percent in Kota and 89 percent in Udaipur." The Standing Rock Water Protectors, Cochabamba demonstrators, and indeed thousands of others across the world should give us the courage to take action to democratize and reform exploitative systems before it becomes too late. **CP**

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## The Trump Impeachment

### The Failure of Bourgeois Law or, When the President Does It... It is Not Illegal

BY RON JACOBS

Trump is the Emperor who has no clothes. Since he was elected, his courtiers, the media and many residents of the United States have acted like the crowds in the classic fairy tale "The Emperor's New Clothes," going along with the charade that Trump is equal to his vanity or, at the least, not as bad as he originally seemed. His courtiers are more than willing to play his game as long as he cuts their taxes, locks up immigrants, and encourages white supremacists to run loose across the land. His detractors in power go on pretending, as well. After all, many of them are reaping the benefits of his tax cuts and, because he is so bad, they end up looking good. There are detractors, for sure, but they are from groups the powerful consider the usual discontents—intellectuals, students, leftists, Blacks, Latinos and a number of women.

Anybody expecting an investigation into the nature of the US presidency, the Congress or the foreign service was bound to be disappointed if they thought these impeachment proceedings would provide that. History tells us that presidential impeachments barely ever touch the secrets of the State. Even in the 1970s during the Nixon proceedings, it was the violations of campaign law by his re-election committee and the subsequent attempted cover-up of those violations that forced Nixon out of office. The revelations regarding FBI, CIA and

NSA violations of the law and other criminal acts by forces of the state were only uncovered afterward in hearings conducted by Senator Frank Church. Of course, it is unlikely the Church hearings would have occurred if the impeachment proceedings had never taken place. That being said, it is interesting to note that this particular impeachment is specifically focused on the way foreign policy is manipulated in the halls of power.

One of the observations from the Left—especially by those who saw no point in following the impeachment process—is that Trump was guilty of much greater abuses of power than attempted extortion in the Ukraine/Biden situation. Among those abuses are his ongoing abuse of immigrant families—specifically, children's separation from their parents and the use of the US military to police them. In addition, there were (and are) potential charges regarding his violation of the emoluments clause in the Constitution and the obstruction charges hailing from his stonewalling of both the Mueller and impeachment investigations. I've sat in a few courtrooms over the course of my life. Usually, this was because of my required presence after getting arrested at a protest or for possession of marijuana (back when it was illegal in every state in the union). One thing I noticed during the course of my courtroom watching was that prosecutors tend to take one of two approaches when charging defendants. They either throw the book at the person in the docket hoping one of the multitudes of charges would stick, or they choose one charge to convict the defendant on. Often that charge was a misdemeanor instead of a potential felony. For example, a few years ago I was hit by a car. I was in a crosswalk and had the right of way; the light was red but the driver drove right through the light, not slowing down even after striking myself and another pedestrian. The driver was charged with felony negligent driving with major injury resulting. The intent of the prosecutor was not to convict on the felony but to get the driver to plead to a misdemeanor charge. It worked. She pled to the lesser charge. It seems to this writer that the impeachment planners decided to focus on the singular charge of attempted extortion, knowing that other charges could end up in the final list of charges—among them obstruction of justice and lying to Congress.

While it was occurring, many people wonder what difference the process made. A big reason for this is that people accepted the framework provided by the mainstream media and politicians. If one takes a step back and perceives it through a broader lens, it is apparent that the impeachment proceedings were part of a power struggle between factions of the capitalist class. The more they tear at each other; one hopes the more it delegitimizes their rule. Even though Trump was acquitted in the Senate, the impeachment matters, but not in the way the public is being told. It is their battlefield, but the public will pay the cost. If Trumpist fascism can be thrown from the White House in 2020, it seems that the nature of US politics would take a slight movement to the Left even if the Left does nothing. If Trump is still in the White House next February, chances are

that much of the US population will feel the brunt of his lust for power. It is not likely to be pretty.

The story of the charges against Trump unfolded in front of the public like an intricately composed, albeit boringly presented, detective story. Given the stonewalling of the Trump administration, there were few smoking guns that the House committees could latch onto. However, there were enough that, when combined with the overwhelming circumstantial evidence, most intelligent viewers could see that there were impeachable offenses committed. In their ultimately pyrrhic battle to retain what little remains of the US republic and its approach to rule in a reasonably fair and democratic manner, the members of the House and Senate who voted for impeachment and removal of Trump from the White House have exposed its weakness when confronted with an executive branch that sees itself as something between a monarchy and a dictatorship.

There was serious bullying from the Trumpist forces during this process. Some House Democrats voted against impeachment because they were afraid of losing their seats in the fall 2020 elections. As far as I'm concerned, they deserve to lose them. The fact that this occurred, however, certainly adds fodder to the charge that the US electoral system and the political system it fills with small-minded and hollow humans is a pathetic joke. If the elections go the way they went in 2016—with Trump stealing the White House and Left-leaning Democrats shut out of their own party—even the façade of democracy will be gone. The Republic will have thrust the knife into its own heart the final time. Yes, there will be a government in Washington, but it will be a government that much of the rest of the world will likely see as the dictatorship (at least privately) it has been sliding towards for decades.

When Richard Nixon resigned in 1974, an argument could be made that the system worked. In other words, it removed a crooked executive. After all the histrionics, alarmist rhetoric and absurd comparisons of the Trump impeachment to the trial of Jesus Christ and other nonsensical analogies, what remains is the fact that because Trump remains in office the system did not work. One of the most corrupt and slimy humans to occupy the White House will remain in office, thinking he is vindicated and further destroying the already diminished presidency and the myth that is the United States. Donald Trump is the essence of US business and politics. He is the darkness that has always comprised a substantial part of the nation's soul. His continued presence in the White House makes it clear to all what really motivates the powerful in this nation. Far be it from me to mourn this turn of events except for the fact that it is the right-wing and fascist elements that will reap the benefits (if that's what you call them) from the exposure of this truth.

Besides the reality that too many people think impeachment means more than it does, too many citizens think they have no effect on politics. In essence, they have handed their power

to the powerful. Like many other mechanisms of the state, an impeachment is just a tool—it provides us with an opportunity to expose the nature of the system. It should not be an excuse to give up and act like we have no power. Instead, it should wake us up to the fact that our elected officials will only go so far in taking down one of their own, even one as openly crooked as Donald Trump.

I once wrote in regards to the resignation of Richard Nixon and his subsequent pardon by Gerald Ford that it was the pardon that proved how the system really worked. It works to protect its own. Nixon (and even Clinton) were at least somewhat ashamed of their actions once it became clear they would not get away with them. Donald Trump has no shame. The manipulation of the impeachment proceedings by his office and his supporters in Congress is not only what one calls peak arrogance, but it has also mocked the process and the legislature. In defense of the Trumpists, it is fair to say that Congress acceded to this mockery. By refusing to bring up charges regarding corruption and greater abuses of power, refusing to enforce its subpoenas, and by waiting as long as it did to even consider impeachment, the House of Representatives proved its greater interest lies with the pursuit of business as usual. Indeed, it's almost as if the fact of Donald Trump's abuses of their fractured system got in the way of their own pursuit of the power and monies Mr. Trump made his own. In the wake of Nixon's resignation and pardon, Jimmy Carter was elected. Carter's rhetoric promised a different United States; one of justice, honor and truth. As it turned out, within ten years the nation was ruled by a right-wing cabal with Ronald Reagan as its figurehead. The causes for his rule included cynicism on the part of the Left-leaning voters, rabid nationalism and racism on the part of the right, and a combination of numbness, self-deceit fostered by television, and self-centered greed on the part of those voters in between both political poles.

The story referred to earlier titled "The Emperor's New Clothes" ends with a parade where amid pomp and pageantry the Emperor shares his new and expensive outfit with his subjects. In what can best be described as the ultimate display of sycophantry, his courtiers, ladies, servants and subjects fill the air with remarks concerning the exquisite and beautiful nature of his new robes. Out of fear and the hope of some kind of reward, all who are gathered feed the Emperor's vanity by telling him and themselves bald-faced lies. Then, the child speaks up.

"But he doesn't have anything on!" said a small child.

"Good Lord, let us hear the voice of an innocent child!" said the father, and whispered to another what the child had said.

"A small child said that he doesn't have anything on!"

Finally everyone was saying, "He doesn't have anything on!"

The emperor shuddered, for he knew that they were right, but he thought, "The procession must go on!" He carried himself even more proudly, and the chamberlains walked along behind carrying the train that wasn't there."—Hans Christian Andersen

This is where the United States stands in the year 2020. Not only is its leader a vain and narcissistic man, but an extraordinary number of his courtiers, advisers, generals and subjects feed his vanity, forsaking truth and honor in the name of their own greed and prejudices. Unlike the fairy tale, though, in this instance, it will take more than the words of a child to expose the truth, if only because too many are too invested in maintaining the lie.

I held off on submitting this article until after Trump's State of the Union address and the Senate vote on the impeachment charges. The former is a misnomer and the latter was a fait accompli with Mitt Romney's vote to acquit being the only surprise. One thing that was not present at Trump's speech was national unity and, as this piece states, the verdict in the Senate trial was never in doubt given the obstruction by the Trumpists running that body. The speech itself was typical Trump bragadocio based on lies celebrating the reactionary politics of the Trumpists and can be best summed up not in anything he said, but in the presentation of the Medal of Freedom to right-wing propagandist Rush Limbaugh.

Beyond Trump's vanity and arrogance is the very real possibility of fascism. The blind allegiance of his supporters in Congress and in the streets provides the essential element to any dictatorial regime. Trump and his financial backers have provided most of the rest. Over the course of the impeachment proceedings, two positions in the ruling class were made crystal clear. One position is beholden to bourgeois law. The other is beholden to Trump. Both are beholden to monopoly capitalism and the imperial policies it requires to continue its destructive ways. This was exemplified by the bipartisan applause the failed Venezuelan coup plotter Juan Guaidó received when he was introduced.

It cannot be stated enough, the victory of the Trumpist forces seems to predict a giant leap towards dictatorship. If nothing else, the Trumpists proved that if a powerful man openly flouts the law, he truly can get away with almost anything. The question remains: how far will this go? Will Trump order the invasion of Venezuela and perhaps Iran? Will his Department of Homeland Security intensify their racist and immoral attacks on immigrants? Will the Trumpists void future elections and just take over? Will the fact of a pliant Senate encourage Trump and his advisors to push through something akin to the Nazi law known familiarly as the Enabling Law, which made it possible for Hitler to enact legislation without the approval of the legislature? Will there be real resistance in the streets should such a scenario occur? The truth of Trump's acquittal by the Senate renders all of these possibilities more real than at any time since the US Civil War.

Don't laugh, don't cry, don't give up. Organize. **CP**

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## Apocalypse Now: Final Cut?

### Why the Real War in Vietnam Will Never Get Into the Movies

BY MATTHEW STEVENSON

For the past few years, I have been working on a book about the American and French wars in Indochina. In particular, I wanted to visit and write about the battlefields of those wars, to see what remains of the imperial adventures. I began my travels in Laos's Plain of Jars and from there went north to Dien Bien Phu, perhaps the most celebrated battle site in Indochina. There, in spring 1954, North Vietnamese troops, under the command of General Vo Nguyen Giap, surrounded and then overran a French division made up of paratroops and foreign legionnaires. From Dien Bien Phu, I took a bus to Hanoi, and then, in a series of trips taken over the next few years, mostly by train and bicycle, I worked my way across Vietnam and Cambodia. Along the way I explored the Demilitarized Zone, the Central Highlands, and the Mekong Delta; and during lulls in my travels, I read memoirs, histories, and novels, in the hope that at least some of the real war had gotten into the books.

The one thing I didn't do during my travels was to watch Vietnam War movies. During my time on the road, Ken Burns released his ten-part serial about the American intervention, and other films from that era were showing up on sites such as Netflix and Amazon Prime. It would have been easy, when spending the night in some Vietnamese roadside hotel, to have watched *Full Metal Jacket* or *Platoon*, but I resisted the temptation to mix my impressions of Vietnam with those of Hollywood directors. I stuck to my own memories, which were formed, for example, on long bike rides along Highway 19 in the Central Highlands, or along Highway 13 (Thunder Road to the GIs) north of Saigon. And I came to my own conclusions about the war's legacy, at least in the United States, which I expressed when I gave the book its title, *Upcountry: The Finishing Schools of American Exceptionalism in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam*. In it I describe the many wars fought around Indochina as variations on colonial folly and what Rudyard Kipling called "the White Man's Burden." In that poem, he writes:

Take up the White Man's burden —  
The savage wars of peace —  
Fill full the mouth of famine  
And bid the sickness cease;  
And when your goal is nearest  
The end for others sought,  
Watch Sloth and heathen Folly  
Bring all your hopes to nought.

Only on my last visit to Vietnam did I decide that I should watch at least some of the films that came out of those wars. For many, the movies are their only frame of reference that

they have for Vietnam. On my return, I spent an uninspiring three weeks in front of my computer watching much of the canon, including all of Ken Burns and a number of Hollywood blockbusters.

The problem with nearly every Vietnam movie that I watched is that they imagine, in some altered reality, that America won the war, or at least was fighting on the side of angels. For example, *We Were Soldiers* (about the battle of Ia Drang) is another “boys’ crusade” of World War II, in which the 7th (Air) Cav takes on and wipes out evil. At the end of Stanley Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket*, as H Company, 5th Marines, is marching away from a smoldering Hue, the men are singing the theme song from the Mickey Mouse club (“M-O-U-S-E...”), just as would good American boys coming back from a Scout jamboree. And for all that Oliver Stone’s *Platoon* tries to air grievances against the war (“We’ve been kicking ass so long that it’s time we get our asses kicked a little...”) and shows a village massacre, it ends with Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen) blowing away the evil Sergeant Barnes (to redeem the soul of Americans at war?) and killing enough V.C. to give the mission aspects of an early video game.

Even the Ken Burns 10-part series, *The Vietnam War*, that examines every conceivable angle of the war (the fighting, draft dodgers, the Paris Peace talks, Agent Orange, the home front, casualties, POWs, and the dead) presents the war as yet another way to interpret American Exceptionalism. It makes the point that while, yes, the war had some ugly aspects—My Lai, the pesticides, strategic hamlets, the bombings, etc.—they were not so bad as to tarnish what it is that makes the heartland of the country great. And in all the films, when things get a little too uncomfortable, the producer can switch on the classic rock medley (“We Gotta Get out of This Place...” is a standby) and viewers can feel better about the war, the way an audience at a South Pacific musical production can forget about the seawall at Tarawa by humming a few bars of Rodgers and Hammerstein.

At least *The Year of the Pig*, a black-and-white documentary released in 1968 during the height of the war (probably just to art houses in Berkeley and Cambridge, and then to oblivion), has Senator William J. Fulbright saying about Tonkin Gulf: “That wasn’t self-defense... That was an act of constructive aggression on our part.” By that point Fulbright had no more influence on the course of Lyndon Johnson’s war than did First Lieutenant John Rambo.

Until I tracked down a screening in London, the movie that eluded me was the new release of Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*, which on this occasion came with the subtitle, *Final Cut*. The updated film had come out earlier in the year, but only at a few theaters and film festivals around the world, and while it could be watched online, I didn’t think it would do justice to the celebrated movie to see it on my laptop. Instead, I waited for a trip to London (not far from where I live), and there arranged to attend a screening.

In the theater lobby there was a reproduction of an original poster for *Apocalypse Now* (I guess the exclamation mark came later, after the reviews concluded that Coppola was a genius), which shows headshots of Marlin Brando and Martin Sheen floating above a darkened Nung River. In the distance, beneath a setting sun, are a boat and a bridge, indicating to the movie-going public that while the film was based on Joseph Conrad’s novel *Heart of Darkness* (fairly obscure in 1979, except on the reading lists of high school sophomores), it was also a war picture in the tradition of *The Bridge On the River Kwai* or *A Bridge Too Far*.

In the poster, Brando looks more like an evil Japanese samurai than an American colonel, and the more distant Martin Sheen (he plays Captain Benjamin Willard in the film) has the boyish good looks of Dustin Hoffman in *The Graduate*, never a bad thing when teenage girls make up a majority of the film-going public.

Over the years I had seen clips but had never managed to sit still to watch all 153 minutes of the first rendition. Now, for my sins of omission, I would have to watch *Final Cut*, which is 183 minutes long and includes footage and audio that Coppola and his team dragged out of an archive that was buried in a mountain.

The reviews that I had read about the latest release said it was essentially the same movie (if a half-hour longer), but that the audio was improved and the playmate sex scenes at the USO show along the river were omitted. I am sure it wasn’t lost on Coppola that many potential viewers of the latest take could be supporters of the MeToo! movement, for whom the M\*A\*S\*H humor of pliant playmates after the USO show might seem a touch dated. In this version, the after-party sex, like the war, would remain unrequited.

*Apocalypse Now: Final Cut* begins with helicopters crisscrossing a jungle horizon, although the perfect row of palm trees used in the sequence look more like ones found on a California golf course than anything I saw in Vietnam. Jim Morrison and the Doors are on hand to provide the soundtrack, and then the narrative shifts to the special ops mission of Captain Benjamin L. Willard (Sheen), who is being ordered up the river to find and kill the rogue American colonel, Walter E. Kurtz (Brando), who has become a warlord in remote jungle between Vietnam and Cambodia that is only accessible on a small patrol boat.

In Coppola’s words, *Apocalypse Now* is “a modern telling of *Heart of Darkness* in a Vietnam setting.” But it didn’t take me 183 minutes to figure out that the film is no more faithful to Conrad’s novel of the Congo than, say, *McHale’s Navy* (a 1960s sitcom set on PT boats in the Pacific during World War II) was based on James Jones’s *The Thin Red Line*.

The hired gun, Captain Willard, is being sent up the river to rub out Colonel Kurtz (much of *Apocalypse Now* feels like another *Godfather* movie, this one set in the Cambodian jungle which, despite all the smoke and vines, still evokes certain sections of Staten Island).

In Nha Trang (shown as a jungle HQ, not a beachside resort city full of Russians), Willard gets his assignment from Colonel Harrison Ford (I forget his nom de guerre) during a four-course luncheon, as though kill orders in Vietnam were cut in the dining room at the Beverly Hills Hotel.

Over roast beef Willard is told: "Walter Kurtz was one of the most outstanding officers this country's ever produced. He was brilliant. He was outstanding in every way. And he was a good man, too. A humanitarian man. A man of wit and humor. He joined the Special Forces, and after that, his ideas, methods, became . . . unsound. Unsound." None of the shady senior officers or CIA operatives tucking into the Sunday buffet ever explains why having "unsound ideas" in Vietnam merits a death sentence, and Willard ships out for the heart of darkness "to terminate the colonel's command", although his wandering route to the front makes Don Quixote look like a morning commuter on I-95.

So as not to attract attention to his assassination plot, Captain Willard boards a small coastal patrol boat (a PBR), which heads south to the mouth of the Mekong River (in the film it's the Nung), although why Willard and his oddball crew (like the cast of a World War II movie patrol heading behind enemy lines with a stoic farm boy and a few wisecracking Italians from Brooklyn) have to sail 300 miles in open waters just to approach the mouth of Kurtz's river is never explained. It could well have been John Kerry's Swift boat that was used for the mission, as before heading upriver the crew takes aboard a surfboard, although maybe it was the windsurfer that doomed Kerry's 2004 run for the presidency.

Before the PBR can turn west into the Nung delta, Lt. Colonel Bill Kilgore (a Catch-22 name for those keeping score at home) and the Ninth Air-Cav decide that the stealth mission can only proceed after they have wiped out a coastal communist stronghold that, seen from the vantage of the approaching gunship helicopters, looks like the Viet Cong Polynesian Seaside Resort and NVA Diving Center.

It's the famous scene in the film in which American Hueys charge into battle to the sound of Richard Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries." Kilgore has a stereo in his chopper, as if he's Randy Newman cruising in a ragtop on the LA freeway, although his persona is that of Buck Turgidson aka Dr. Strangelove on the wings of death. Kilgore is the character in the movie who wears a Confederate hat and loves the smell of napalm in the morning.

You would have thought that for such an aerial attack Coppola would have saddled up Colonel Harrison Ford from Nha Trang (after all, *Star Wars* has the same music and attack scenes), except that Ford was probably still at lunch with his general and the shady CIA ops man, who when last heard from were whispering about Kurtz over the port: "Power, ideals, the old morality, and practical military necessity. But out there with these natives, it must be a temptation to be God." In the Vietnam War those risks were higher in the White House than

in the jungle.

It's while wiping out the Viet Cong Club Med from the air that Lt. Col. Kilgore orders some of his men to lock and load their surfboards and take to the breaking waves. ("That's good son, because you either surf or fight. That clear?") I assume Coppola is making a point about American innocence (in the presence of slaughter) in Vietnam, but the sequence lacks the gravity mixed with light-heartedness of Robert Altman's *M\*A\*S\*H*, and the best Coppola can come up with is a few surfing scenes and a beach party after the battle/massacre, where the likes of Lt. Rusty Calley are pounding Budweiser while the commanding officer makes jokes. Finally, with the village reduced to looking like My Lai and the beachside bungalows in ruins, in part because of a napalm strike from Air Force or Star Wars jets, Willard's mission up the river can proceed.

\* \* \*

On the journey to the heart of darkness, Coppola treats his viewers to a barrage of canned 1960s philosophical discourses, which are delivered as voiceovers from Captain Willard, who after the beach battle reflects: "If that's how Kilgore fought the war... I began to wonder what they really had against Kurtz. It wasn't just insanity and murder. There was enough of that to go around for everybody." Journalist Michael Herr (*Dispatches*) wrote and spoke many of Willard's reflections, which explains why on camera Sheen's character grunts like one of the errand boys in the *Godfather*, while in the voiceovers he might well be an essayist for *Esquire*.

It takes about an hour of film time for Willard and his crew to steam up the river, which becomes more fetid with each advancing mile, even though the Mekong River in Cambodia is wider and more open than the Mississippi at St. Louis. Every time Swift Boat Willard comes across a riverside town, the river or the town is on fire, as if Coppola filmed these sequences on the Cuyahoga outside Cleveland ("Burn on, big river, burn on...").

At one point, searching for mangoes in a rain forest, Willard has a close encounter with a tiger (probably Richard Parker from the *Life of Pi*, as Vietnam has few tigers), but it's enough for Willard and his men to run away in panic, as if they had confronted a squadron of Russian tanks coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Then, out in the middle of nowhere on a dark stretch of the river, they come across a base piled high with American beer and the sound-and-light of that USO show featuring Playboy playmates of the month. Here again, in case we missed it on the smoldering beach, is the juxtaposition of American innocence and sexual prurience on an entrance ramp to the heart of darkness.

After the dancing cowgirls floor show and a few brewskis, the crew resumes its quest, although not before a breathless courier from Nha Trang hands Willard a mail pouch, which suggests that perhaps there were easier ways to get Willard to the kill zone than by roundabout sea and surf. And if he was

supposed to stay undercover, how come he was ogling Miss November?

For reading material on his jungle cruise, Willard sticks to Kurtz's army personnel file, as though most hitmen really care how well their targets scored on their SATs. In his review of Kurtz's fitness reports, the captain discovers an officer very much in the mold of U.S. Army Colonel John Paul Vann (described in Neil Sheehan's book, *A Bright Shining Lie*), someone who believes that with the right training American and Vietnam forces can turn the Communist tide in Southeast Asia. The Kurtz in the files is Everyman in the pantheon of American politicians and soldiers convinced that the war in Vietnam can be won by well-trained special forces on the ground. He's anyone who remained a believer until the end, except HR File Kurtz (a bit like Vann) decided to fight the war according to his own rules, not those of the Pentagon.

In a voiceover, Willard reads aloud: "October, 1967. On special assignment, Kontoom Province, Two-Corps... Kurtz staged Operation Archangel with combined local forces. Rated a major success. He received no official clearance. He just thought it up and did it. What balls. They were going to nail his ass to the floorboards for that one. But after the press got a hold of it, they promoted him to full colonel instead. Oh, man, the bullshit piled up so fast in Vietnam, you needed wings to stay above it."

On this stretch of the river, Willard might well be journalist Neil Sheehan researching what went wrong with the American dream in the wilderness and reading aloud from an article that Kurtz wrote. The article is entitled "Commitment and Counterinsurgency" and it reads, in part:

As long as our officers and troops perform tours of duty limited to one year, they will remain dilettantes in war, and tourists in Vietnam. As long as cold beer, hot food, rock 'n' roll, and all the other amenities remain the expected norm, our conduct of the war will only gain impotence. We need fewer men, and better. If they were committed, this war could be won with a fourth of our present force.

Later Willard played the part of author-scholar Bernard Fall (*Street Without Joy* and other histories) when the patrol boat comes ashore at a French plantation. Willard stumbles into a Parisian dinner party complete with Burgundy and a cheese course, in dense jungle by the river. The scene was deleted from the original but restored in the 2001 Redux edition.

At the dinner party with an extended French family (who somehow have figured out how to grow rubber trees in a swamp and who have hung on to their wine cellar since 1954), Sheen listens while various uncles and cousins (dressed in Banana Republic faded white flannel suits) despair over the betrayal of French troops at Dien Bien Phu, and declaim on how colonial France was stabbed in the back. The uncle at the head of the party says, while pounding both the table and his cognac, "In Algeria, we lose! In Indochina, we lose. But here, we don't lose! This piece of earth, we keep it! We will never lose it! Never!"

Pretty soon the planter class drifts off to bed (the house is furnished in colonial wicker), leaving Willard alone with a grieving French widow, Roxanne Sarrault, played by Aurore Clément. With a sultry French accent, she says: "I apologize for my family, Captain. We have all lost much here. Hubert—his wife and two sons. And I have lost a husband..."

In every World War II resistance movie set behind the lines in France, a woman as beautiful as Roxanne "comforts" someone as brave as Captain Willard, and here the lonely widow shows her compassion on the other side of a mosquito net (it gives the love scene that Penthouse look) and in the company of an opium pipe. The only element of verisimilitude in the Coppola movie was watching Martin Sheen take a few hits on a bong; the rest was fantasy.

By the time Willard and his crew break away from the croisants and arrive in the People's Republic of Kurtz, I would have killed off the rogue colonel, just to be done with the movie. But before docking at the terrorist enclave, the patrol boat is showered with arrows and a few spears, one of which goes through the boat's navy commander, allowing viewers to imagine that the North Vietnamese defeated the Americans with homemade weapons, when, in fact, they had MIG fighters and SAM missiles from Russia and munitions from China, not to mention all the guns and bullets left behind in battle by the Army of the Republic of Vietnam.

Then there is the film's sweeping, operatic, blockbuster ending, set before an Angkor Wat Cham temple (even though Angkor Wat is about 250 miles to the west). The tribesmen are Filipino extras with spears and bark canoes, giving the impression that Kurtz's breakaway army of mountain tribes were actually Pacific islanders. By this point in the film-making, Coppola was running out of money, and he must have figured that American audiences would not spot the differences.

Dennis Hopper, playing a crazy Rolling Stone-ish photographer who has "gone over" to Kurtz, greets the patrol boat as it lands in this jungle Oz, and his pattern of speech would seem to indicate that the circulation of the opium pipe wasn't limited to Willard and his French lover under the mosquito net.

Pointing to the House of Horrors temple, Hopper says to the Americans who have come up the river, "Him! Colonel Kurtz! These are all his children, man, as far as you can see. Hell, man, out here, we are all his children." In these sequences, Colonel Kurtz appears in the role of the Jonestown cultist Jim Jones, and the Dennis Hopper character is there to stir the Kool-Aid.

Enter Marlin Brando as Colonel Kurtz. According to various documentaries made about *Apocalypse Now* (including a love song made by Coppola's wife Eleanor called *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*), Brando was being paid \$1 million a week to appear at the end of the movie, although he refused to learn his lines, follow the script, or even read the Conrad novel. Because of his insecurities about his weight, Brando demanded to be filmed in shadow, which is why we only see Kurtz's face or body in chiaroscuro. And all Brando could think to do for

his million bucks a week was to give a reprise of the role of the Godfather—hence all his mumbling in the jungle. I was a little surprised that he wasn't wearing a tux.

Kurtz confronts Captain Willard for embracing the hypocrisy of the American army, if not the society as a whole (“I expected someone like you... You have a right to kill me. You have a right to do that... but you have no right to judge me...”). He also banters with the assassin as though they had met at the PX (“Where you from, Willard?”), and they chat about the rivers and flowers near Willard's boyhood home in Ohio (implying that a Boy Scout has been sent upriver to kill off America's only hope of victory in Vietnam). Kurtz even reminisces about the goodness of his intentions:

I remember when I was with Special Forces. Seems a thousand centuries ago. We went into a camp to inoculate some children. We'd left the camp after we had inoculated the children for polio. And this old man came

running after us, and he was crying. He couldn't say. We went back there, and they had come and hacked off every inoculated arm. There they were, in a pile. A pile of little arms. And, I remember, I cried, I wept like some grandmother. I wanted to tear my teeth out. I didn't know what I wanted to do. And I want to remember it. I never want to forget it.

The Kurtz that Willard has been ordered to kill is an American special forces officer who has “gone native” and is besting the V.C. and the NVA in guerrilla warfare, although for that Willard might well have been sent upriver with a few bronze stars in his pocket.

Kurtz is described as a military Superman, someone who has raised a private army of Montagnards and has beaten President Richard Nixon to the “incursion” of Cambodia. (Maybe Coppola's point is that Kurtz is Henry Kissinger, waging his own private war in Cambodia?) But the Kurtz discovered in his upriver command post, instead of dispatching crisp military orders to his phalanxes, looks more like a reclusive billionaire on his back in a Vegas hotel suite, with the lights dimmed and a floor show outside his windows.

Rather than take out the terrorist asset, Willard engages in exit-interview chit-chat with the madman, so that Don Corleone Kurtz can say dismissively to his killer: “You're an errand boy, sent by grocery clerks, to collect a bill.” He might

well have been eating an orange, and he throws the feckless hitman Willard behind wooden bars.

It takes a while for Willard to escape from his tiger cage and kill Kurtz, which he does with a machete. At the same time, to suggest that the Americans in Vietnam were no better than jungle savages, Coppola has the chorus line of Filipino extras sacrifice a water buffalo (about the same weight as Brando but its agent wasn't able to negotiate a shadow clause). The colonel's last words, “the horror, the horror,” presumably express Coppola's feelings about American imperialism, as those were Conrad's words for King Leopold's ghosts in the Congo.

As the credits rolled, I thought of all the people that I



Still from *Apocalypse Now: the Final Cut*.

had met in my travels who said to me that *Apocalypse Now* was the best film ever made about the Vietnam War. A few even made convincing cases that it was an opera or satire explaining the dark soul of the American experience in Vietnam, and that few direc-

tors have ever had Coppola's inventiveness behind the camera. They spoke of him as a cinematic genius and pointed to the *Godfather* series as proof of his artistic inspiration, claiming that *Apocalypse Now* was the silver-screen equivalent of modern art, on a level, say, with Picasso.

All that may be true, but I part company with *Apocalypse Now* when it is nominated in conversations as “the best film ever made about the Vietnam War.” In reality, it rarely rises above the level of *Hot Shots! Part Deux* or some rockumentary from the 1970s in which absurdist clichés are passed off as truths about war and the nature of evil.

Kilgore may be a caricature of an American officer, and perhaps in action, he embodies the policies ordered by the likes of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. But to understand how hard it was to command troops in Vietnam, read Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War* or Lewis Puller Jr.'s autobiography, *Fortunate Son*, about his upbringing as the son of Marine Corps legend Chesty Puller and about how he lost his arms and legs to a landmine while leading a Marine platoon in Vietnam.

Willard, tasked with killing Kurtz, comes across as a department store mannequin kitted out with a rifle. Having already served a tour in Vietnam, he's adrift both at home and back in Indochina, and is low-hanging fruit to serve as a Parallax View hitman to settle a score he doesn't understand. Even though



he's adrift on a river, he's more John Rambo than Huckleberry Finn. But Willard is no more capable of the insights of his philosophical voiceovers than would be most draftees handed a few grenades at Bien Hoa airport. He's not Caputo in the hills above Danang, but another Coppola hitman trying to pass off his appetite for gangland violence as "art".

Even Marlin Brando's Kurtz is a stick figure of the American experience, a Branch Davidian hiding out with his cult. Had he actually gone behind enemy lines in Laos and Cambodia, broken enemy infiltrations, and organized the Montagnards to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail, he would have been rewarded, not with a death sentence but, like Colonel John Paul Vann, been appointed to command II Corps in the waning days of the American war. Instead, Coppola kills him off as symbol of everything that went wrong for the United States in Vietnam, so that, as a nation, we can feel that our country will always confront evil, even when it appears on our side of the front lines.

I suspect the killing of Kurtz is one reason so many viewers admire the film. It shows the better angels of our nature, just the way, in *Full Metal Jacket*, the killing of the brutal Marine Corps drill instructor, Gunnery Sergeant Hartman, is a way of saying that Americans will always retain a sense of their goodness and humanity, even in the face of an unpleasant war.

The disturbing aspect of *Apocalypse Now* is that it ends with Coppola in the camp of those who believe that if the war had been fought differently, it might well have been won, or at least held up the side in Ronald Reagan's "noble cause." Of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, Coppola/Kurtz says:

And then I realized like I was shot, like I was shot with a diamond bullet through my forehead. And I thought, My God, the genius of that! The genius. The will to do that. Perfect, genuine, complete, crystalline, pure. And then I realized, they were stronger than we. Because they could stand it. These were not monsters. These were men, trained cadres. These men who fought with their hearts, who have families, who have children, who are filled with love... that they had the strength, the strength to do that. If I had ten divisions of those men, then our troubles here would be over very quickly. You have to have men who are moral, and at the same time, who are able to utilize their primordial instincts to kill without feeling, without passion. Without judgment. Without Judgment. Because it's judgment that defeats us.

To me the film is part of the process that has whitewashed the Vietnam War into something that props up American exceptionalism. The Ken Burns series does the same thing, although using conventional, documentary images. Both are cinematic confessions. Coppola addresses some uncomfortable truths about power, imperialism, war, and justice, but in a cartoonish manner that suggests that the Vietnam War can be digested in 183 minutes, provided the river is burning and the voiceover soundtrack can be made to sound like Khalil Gibran reading aloud from *The Prophet*. **CP**

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## Is Haftar Doing the West's Dirty Work in Libya?

BY DANIEL GLAZEBROOK

On April 4th of this year, the Libyan National Army (LNA), under the command of Field-Marshal Khalifa Haftar, launched a new offensive on Tripoli. The move came just ten days before a major peace conference was due to take place, under the auspices of the UN, to flesh out an agreement between Haftar and his rival Serraj al-Fayez made a month earlier—and it appears to have been at the behest of—or at least given the green light by—Saudi Arabia.

On March 28th, one week before Haftar launched his offensive, Haftar was in Riyadh meeting with the two most powerful men in the kingdom—King Salman and Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman. Senior advisors to the Saudi government told the *Wall Street Journal* that, at this meeting, Haftar was promised tens of millions of dollars to help pay for the operation. And once it was underway, Saudi-linked twitter accounts launched an "avalanche of tweets" in support of Haftar, according to journalist Mary Fitzgerald.

But why would the Western world's number one Arab ally be sponsoring an offensive against a government—the so-called Government of National Accord (GNA)—which was not only backed by but in fact largely a creation of, the West itself? Are we seeing an unprecedented divergence between Saudi Arabia and its Anglo-American allies? Is this the beginning of the end of the Saudis' long-established role of doing the West's bidding in the region? Has Saudi Arabia gone rogue? Or is something else going on?

Saudi Arabia has a long track record of doing the West's dirty work, financing violence which the US and UK governments want to be carried out, but would prefer not to be directly associated with. The current pummeling of Yemen and the building up of Syrian anti-government death squads since 2011 are but the most recent examples; in the 1980s the Nicaraguan contras, UNITA rebels in Angola, the Lebanese Phalangists and the Afghan Mujahideen were all recipients of Saudi largesse; and in the 1970s, the House of Saud bankrolled King Hussein's attack on the PLO in Jordan. In every case, Saudi Arabia was financing and equipping the enemies of governments and movements deemed undesirable by the CIA. Are we to believe that this mutually-serving relationship has now come to an end?

There is, of course, another explanation: that the Libyan National Army's attack on GNA-held Tripoli does, in fact, serve

western goals just as surely as it serves those of the Saudis. For, whilst the GNA is indeed a creation of the West, it—like so many others before it—has increasingly come to see more of a future—economically at least—with China.

In May last year, the GNA signed a major oil contract with PetroChina, paving the way for GNA's decision to sign up to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—also known as 'One Belt One Road'—in July. Involving over \$1trillion of Chinese infrastructure investment across 152 countries, the BRI is the most ambitious attempt to promote South-South relations and reduce trade dependence on the Western world since the end of the colonial era. Trump's policy towards the BRI was neatly summed up by his former National Security Advisor Steve Bannon in just eight words "Let's go screw up One Belt One Road". Following the GNA's momentous decision to be part of it, notes Samuel Ramani in *The Diplomat*, "the GNA's diplomatic outreach toward China has intensified and broadened. In September 2018, al-Sarraj openly called for an expansion of Chinese investment in Libya, and at the February 2019 Munich Security Conference, GNA representatives lauded Libya as a potential gateway for Chinese economic influence in central Africa."

To those such as Trump, such statements are a red rag to a bull. Trump has made economic war on China a cornerstone of his foreign policy; for the GNA to openly tout Libya as a "gateway" for Chinese economic influence in Africa, then, is a major snub to their US overlords. And China has been receptive, too: continues Ramani, "In response to these statements, Chinese Ambassador to Libya Li Zhiguo praised the GNA for improving Tripoli's security situation and stated that China had plans for a swift expansion of its economic presence in Libya".

Is it so far-fetched to suspect that the US might have approved Haftar's operation against the GNA in order to punish their insubordination over China—and to entrench their dependence on Western military support?

There is much evidence that the West has indeed been 'cooling' in its attitude towards the Libyan government it created. Shortly after Haftar launched his latest offensive, GNA Prime Minister Al Serraj toured Europe's capitals seeking public condemnations of the LNA advance. He did not receive them; instead, he was rebuffed by both French President Macron and German Chancellor Merkel. *Al Monitor* comments, "By failing to explicitly support Sarraj's demands, the UN Security Council and European nations appear more willing to forgive Hifter's military advance than the GNA's ongoing inadequacies as a functional government. Therefore, the GNA, a direct product of the international community, is now being abandoned by it."

Likewise, the International Crisis Group notes that to the extent that "escalation"—carefully worded to avoid singling out the aggressor - has been condemned by the US, UK, France, Italy and other, "none of these statements included the threat of sanctions and none made explicit mention of the need to support the UN-backed Government of National Accord in

Tripoli." They add that "To many Libyans this suggests that foreign governments are tacitly backing Haftar in his ambition to seize the capital and power"

The GNA even apparently feels let down by the UK, the power which arguably did the most to push for both the NATO destruction of the Jamihiriya in 2011, and for the installing of the GNA in Tripoli in 2016. Notes the BBC: "Militia leader and GNA Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha accused the UK Prime Minister, Theresa May, of abandoning Tripoli in its hour of need by withdrawing British military and embassy staff from the city when it came under attack. Relations between the countries had been "damaged" by this, he said, and it would be difficult to rebuild them in a short space of time." The Foreign Office response to this was decidedly not to reassure the GNA that they had the full support of the UK, but merely to note that Britain is "in contact" with the GNA. The Guardian added that, according to then Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, "The UK is not ruling out the warlord Khalifa Haftar from a role in a future Libyan government despite his attack on the capital." Ahmed Maiteeq, Libya's deputy prime minister, concluded that "Britain just left Libya behind."

France, meanwhile, has long had a relationship with the LNA and Haftar—who received emergency medical treatment in Paris in 2018—with the depth of their involvement made public when three French soldiers were killed fighting alongside LNA units in Libya in 2016. Shortly after the advance on Tripoli began in April this year, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, explained that France backed Haftar because he had "fought terrorism in Benghazi and the south of Libya, and that's in our interest." The LNA victories in Southern Libya which preceded the attack on Tripoli had been "facilitated by French military operations" according to the intelligence analysts at Jamestown Foundation, whilst a high-ranking government official from the GNA's Presidency Council has claimed that the French operate a drone control room at the Sidra oil terminal in northern Libya which they are using to attack GNA positions. In May the GNA decided to take revenge on French interests in Libya in May by suspending the operations of 40 French companies, including oil giant Total, who had been operating in the country.

Then there is the US. Haftar was, of course, a Virginia-based CIA asset for decades before returning to Libya with NATO in 2011, and has, according to the *New York Times*, now allowed the CIA to establish a base in LNA-controlled Benghazi. Following the attack on Tripoli, the US threatened to veto a UN Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire, with the UN's Libya envoy Ghassan Salame commenting "The American line was to say: no, give war a chance." According to the Guardian, one US "diplomat said the US was more adamant in its opposition than Russia, which had asked for amendments to make the resolution more "balanced" and less explicitly anti-Haftar, but did not go so far as brandishing a security council veto." US President Trump had apparently had

a phone call with Haftar on 15th April and had been impressed.

Yet none of this necessarily means that the US and its European hangers-on actually seek an LNA/ Haftar victory. As I have argued elsewhere, the aim of Western policy towards the global South today appears to be the creation not of Cold War-style puppet regimes, but rather of ‘failed states.’ Unable to compete with China financially, the old imperial powers understand that any stable regional power today—however capitalist, pro-western, or right wing—is far more likely to be drawn towards economic ties with China than the West, and that this threatens the entire edifice of South-to-North wealth-extraction that has been carefully crafted over hundreds of years. By this analysis, a stable Libya under either the GNA or the LNA is equally unwelcome to the West; far preferable is a Libya at war with itself: precisely the scenario, that is, that has been imposed on Libya by NATO ever since 2011.

This makes the Saudi intervention just days before the April UN peace talks were due to begin much more comprehensible. Although it is easy to say in hindsight, of course, these talks did appear to have a much greater chance of success than previous attempts. The summer 2018 attack on GNA-controlled Tripoli by an alliance involving some of the powerful Misratan militias which had been sidelined by the GNA shocked Prime Minister Al-Serraj into incorporating some of them into his government. These militias, in turn, had a more open attitude towards dealing with Haftar’s LNA, and, on the eve of the planned UN peace conference in April, had succeeded in pushing the GNA towards a more conciliatory attitude. One former US official told *Al-Monitor* that Haftar was offered a “very generous” deal to join forces with the GNA, in which he would be head of the country’s united armed forces, subject to civilian oversight, but with the prime minister being “hands-off in terms of military operations”. Indeed, such an agreement had already been reached in principle between Serraj and Haftar during talks in the UAE in February. Had the West and its regional proxies at that point made their continued military and financial support for Haftar contingent on his cooperation with this process, he would have had little choice but to comply; instead, as we know, they did precisely the opposite, offering him millions of dollars to reject the talks and advance on Tripoli.

Haftar, then, appears to have been pushed to launch a self-defeating war just when the western militias were ready to contemplate power-sharing. The result is both the weakening of the China-friendly GNA and the deepening of Libya’s civil war—exactly in accordance with western strategic aims. Bringing these two elements together is the fact that China had in fact been a key player pushing for peace. Notes Ramani, “In order to subtly advance the GNA’s position without jeopardizing its neutrality, China has actively supported a ceasefire in Libya, as the GNA has historically possessed an upper hand in peace negotiations, due to its status as Libya’s UN-recognized government.” He adds that “China’s adherence to strict multilateralism in Libya reflects its skeptical view of the ability of

external stakeholders to constructively influence the situation in Libya” and that “China’s May 21 expression of support for an expansion of the African Union’s (AU) role in ending hostilities in Libya also aligns with these principles, as the AU has consistently called for a ceasefire in Libya without external interference.” All this has now been thrown into the fire.

It is not simply guesswork to speculate that the Saudis and the West are aiming to keep Libya weak and warring, however: there are ample historical precedents. In the 1980s, for example, the US and the Saudis ‘supported’ Iraq’s war with Iran with weapons and financial backing. Was this because they genuinely sought a strong, stable Iraq? Just to ask the question immediately exposes the idea as ridiculous. Before the war was even over, it was revealed that the CIA was secretly shipping weapons to Iran as well, whilst the war-racked Iraqi economy came under concerted attack from US proxy Kuwait through the outright theft of its oil. The US then ultimately used the resulting Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, which they had earlier greenlighted, as an excuse to rain hell on Iraq’s (retreating) army, as well as its civilian infrastructure. They then spent 12 years systematically rendering the Iraqi state defenseless before finally destroying it altogether.

Likewise, the Vance-Owen Bosnian peace plan was, in 1992, on the verge of acceptance by all sides, before the US pressed their proxies (namely the leader of the Bosnian Muslim faction, Izetbegovic) to reject the deal and keep fighting. Finally, after three more years of war, a virtually identical deal was signed up to by the mutually exhausted parties.

In Libya today, just as in 1980s Iraq, the West’s proxies are again backing both sides, whilst, as in 1990s Bosnia, they are pushing their dependents into rejecting peace and stepping up their attacks. Meanwhile, the stream of weapons to both the LNA from NATO-allied Saudi Arabia and UAE, and to the GNA from NATO-allied Turkey and Qatar continues apace; there are UN sanctions against shipments, but, notes Bloomberg, they “are among the world’s least enforced”. In fact, peace would be relatively easy to bring about, should the Western powers actually seek it; as Jason Pack points out in *Al-Monitor*, “If the main international players would look past their sunk costs and find a common interest in a stable Libya, they might see a fairly simple way out of the seemingly endless wars of post-Gadhafi succession: denying all sides access to external sources of funding and arms, while also forcing the Libyan central bank and the internationally recognized government to eliminate subsidies and cut salaries to militiamen on all sides.”

Instead, through its proxies, the West continues to sponsor a mutually destructive war between the two rival governments its (repeated) intervention has spawned. **CP**

**DAN GLAZEBROOK** is currently crowdfunding to finance his second book; you can order an advance copy here: <http://fundrazr.com/c1CSnd>.

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# The Fallout from the British Election

## The End of the Corbyn Project

BY MARLON ETTINGER

The general election in Britain this past December can be described as nothing but a generational defeat. The damage for the Labour party is dramatic—as soon as the exit poll came out, when myself and the other members of the Durham University Labour Club who had been out in the cold since five in the morning started drinking, the right-wing of the Labour Party saw its chance to take back power dawn. The damage is not just the defeat at the polls and the fact that a reactionary Tory government will indisputably be in government for the next five years with a massive 80 seat majority and Labour losing 60 seats, almost eight percentage points down from the result in 2017.

The damage means the end of the Corbyn project.

How different the feeling from the last Labour loss! From the moment the exit poll came out in 2017 there was jubilation in the air for the Labour left, gains on the last election, a feeling that they were on the cusp of power, that if that election (a summer election, and so different from the dreary winter drudgery of this one) had been held a week later Labour would have come to power. Labour had a socialist leader, they had a manifesto filled with social democratic policies that, while they wouldn't have been anything too radical in the 70s, would have represented a generational shift in priorities, and there was unity in the party the likes of which hadn't seen since before the contentious and surprising rise of Jeremy Corbyn to the leadership of the party in 2015.

All that was needed for the party to come to government, went shadow Chancellor John McDonnell's thinking, was to push a few percentage points Labour's way and the "government-in-waiting," repeated like a mantra by MPs and activists on the Labour left, would become a government. McDonnell began taking tea with the CEOs of finance firms to explain the type of government that Labour would be, part of a charm offensive that won him cautious approval from even that tribune of London business the Financial Times.

What lost Labour this election then? They had been leading polls at the beginning of the year. But that all changed dramatically as soon as Labour adopted a second referendum policy on Brexit. Brexit was why Labour lost: it has to be stated unequivocally.

I campaigned myself in three different constituencies, two up North—the last one, Bishop Auckland, had been held by the Labour Party for generations. Its ousted MP who had sat for fourteen years. There was a simple calculus at work that was confirmed to me by all the activists I talked with after we

had recovered from the defeat: the defeat lay principally at the feet of the party's decision to make its Brexit policy a second referendum. There was this: Brexit had already been voted on, and should be settled rather than dragging on interminably for years. There was this: reversing on Brexit made people dislike Jeremy Corbyn, who even if the background and the beard (I was told on one doorstep in Loughborough that him not shaving showed a lack of seriousness for the job he was going out for) and the baggage which might have turned people off, was widely seen as a man of principle. That insurgent energy which many felt about Jeremy Corbyn, a lifelong eurosceptic (euroscepticism is traditionally a position of the left in Britain, and one which the right stole the momentum right out from under their noses), dissipated. Not only couldn't he be trusted, but he was viewed as a man who'd changed under the pressure of Westminster, the liberals, the media.

Was there a more pathetic manifestation of this than watching John McDonnell's interview with Alistair Campbell, Tony Blair's Streicherian spin doctor during the Iraq War and all the ignominies of that reign? In the interview McDonnell, who widely enjoyed a reputation as a bruiser and a radical, not afraid to call himself a Marxist and support violent protests, tells Campbell he doesn't think that Tony Blair is a war criminal when Campbell asks him. He says he'd support Campbell re-joining the party. He laughs with him warmly.

When I campaigned up in Bishop Auckland it was at the end of a week-long trip jaunting about with friends and comrades making the case on the doorstep and on the streets. I credit myself with having got pretty good at making the pitch. But even as I was learning the ropes, I saw what was going on. Spencer Payne, a friend of mine who is active in the Durham University Labour Club, told me after the defeat that he had "started a little bit in denial," but had "been saying for awhile [that] a second referendum would be a disaster." Two weeks before the election he realized "yeah, it's bad." But he didn't realize just how bad it would be.

"The moment we headed into the campaign it was probably already lost," he said. He credited that with a very simple reason: the party didn't uphold the referendum decision.

"As soon as we started betraying that, that's when we lost it."

I saw the same thing. Those last couple of days up in Bishop Auckland I probably convinced fifteen people to vote Labour. It felt like a lot. But Labour lost the seat by over 8,000 votes. Last election the party had just held onto the seat by a margin of hundreds. The seat had been swinging away from Labour for decades. It was finally lost. It feels like it's lost for good.

When you talked with people about Brexit you could not convince them. And they were right not to be convinced. Already under Blair the damage had been enormous. Walking down the High Street, full of boarded-up shops, you saw the state the town was in. Labour had done nothing for Bishop Auckland for a generation. And people in Bishop Auckland, who voted Leave in the Brexit referendum then saw the party

take on a policy to ignore what they had clearly said in 2016, sure as hell weren't convinced that they were going to do anything for them in the future.

Charlotte Austin, who grew up in Bishop Auckland and is in the Durham University Labour Club too told me about how people in the town were taking the election result: "The mood is quite jubilant in Bishop Auckland. People like upsetting the order. People are actually excited about things."

That comes from what the French call "degagisme"—throw 'em out-ism roughly. The former MP Helen Goodman was not personally popular. She was never really seen as of the area anyway.

"The best thing that could happen to Bishop Auckland would be being hit by a bomb," a guy told me while standing outside smoking with his friend while I did the rounds door knocking. That bomb hit, and some people are celebrating. It means Brexit will happen. Whatever Brexit will actually mean for many, Brexit is something. Brexit is a change.

Jack Pearce, who's the co-chair of the Durham University Labour Club, campaigned for Brexit. It held the same sort of appeal for him—and he remembered people coming up to him with food and words of encouragement as he stood outside passing out fliers during the referendum campaign.

He credits a lot of the loss with not getting the referendum sorted before the election. "We suffered a lot more than we would have," he told me. "I don't know if I saw it being as bad as it was." He remembers watching the 2017 conference vote that adopted the referendum as the policy of the party and thinking "this will be the end of the party." It made people dislike Corbyn, made people think he was just another lying member of the establishment and made the Corbyn project just seem like another expression of limp establishment politics, no broadening horizon, just betrayal as usual.

"A lot of people who work for the party shouldn't work for the party," Pearce said. Many of those working for the party are "holdovers from the Blair era." A few of the people I talked to after the election echoed this train of thought. Not all party officers organizing at the regional level were hoping for a Corbyn win. Many regional organizers have little connection with the communities they're ostensibly organizing—they parachute into the jobs after university, and see it as a stepping stone to becoming an MP.

Stuart Brady, who was Labour's losing candidate for the Loughborough seat, summed up one of the main contradictions in the party. Loughborough is student heavy, and young people largely voted against Brexit. Brady campaigned hard on

the 2nd referendum and seemed unabashedly remain. While out in the streets and rebuffed by a voter who wanted Brexit, Brady started going at it with him on the street, saying Brexit had been such a disaster so far, asking what Brexit even meant to them, and generally carrying on with the pitch against Brexit until they'd receded into the distance. Over lunch, he told me about frustration with the way the messaging was being run, particularly directed at Seamus Milne who ran the party's messaging and strategy, and said "you've probably seen a little bit how my politics are," "more centrist?" I volunteered. He winced slightly and said "pragmatic, more pragmatic."

Following the election, this has been the watchword of the Labour right. That Corbyn had too much baggage (read: commitments to anti-imperialism and internationalism over the years), that Labour should have campaigned heavier on Remain, that the public just wouldn't elect a radical like Corbyn.

Here's the reality about the leadership election: it looks

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like it's going to come down to a contest between Rebecca Long-Bailey and Keir Starmer and Starmer is most likely to win. Starmer was the party's Brexit Secretary, and played a widely acknowledged role in changing the party's policy to support the second referendum. He is not a man who initially supported Corbyn. If, and I suspect he will, he wins, it will represent a grievous defeat for the left project within the party.

Already I think it's worth acknowledging that the Corbyn project has failed. Long-Bailey is the acknowledged continuity candidate and the one which the Left of the party has coalesced around, a bit desperately though really. There's no alternative really, they say—Starmer winning would be a disaster.

That said, Long-Bailey is hardly an inspiring figure. She hits all the right notes, sure, she's McDonnell's personal pick, sure, but she just doesn't have much of a presence. This is hardly a high-minded analysis but there is a certain absence of the ineffable. RLB is very legible as somebody who makes very little impression on people. She certainly isn't a bruiser, though her politics are good and socialist enough for a professional member of the party.

That's really her problem though. She feels professional, she feels like she ticks all the boxes, she feels like the "right person for the job" of Labour leader. But politics thrives on transgression, politics thrives on conflict, politics thrives on bombast,

and she lacks all three of these things. Activists I talked with on the left of the party are largely behind her out of a sense of necessity. Those who claim to be fired-up by her seem to be saying it with a degree of forced enthusiasm.

“Young Labour will vote for RLB. It’s the boomers we’ve got to watch out for,” one told me. Down in the constituency of Southport, which was won by the Tories, I was told a hundred new people had joined the party, most with the intention of voting for Keir Starmer. I campaigned in Southport for an evening and there was huge enthusiasm among the activists, fired up by the idea that the seat could be poached from the Tories if the Liberal Democrats stepped aside far enough to let the anti-Tory vote carry the day their way. That failed to materialize, and Southport seems like just the sort of middle class area where Keir Starmer will carry the party. Starmer would be the revenge of this respectable middle class in the party. Rebecca Long-Bailey feels constitutionally similar, but she has kept figures in the party that are known for being good solid socialists on her campaign, which is the barest of reassurances. At least she has come out in favor of mandatory reselections. That would correct the case where MPs running in constituencies were in some cases rooting against the idea of Jeremy Corbyn becoming the prime minister, just hoping to hold on long enough for the socialist moment to pass.

I doubt RLB will win, because all the enthusiasm that should be coming for her from the left isn’t really there. RLB is a rear-guard action to try to salvage the Corbyn project. Frankly, I think it isn’t worth salvaging. There are five years until the next election. The left of the party should split, do like what Jean-Luc Mélenchon did to the Socialist Party in France, get a popular pugnacious figure to run in elections for them, build it every year. That’s wishful thinking on my part, not least because no such prominent figure exists on the left.

The Labour Party will continue to be the graveyard of the left. Despite all the problems with the party, despite the coming resurgence of the Labour right and the betrayal and sabotage (which Keir Starmer, the likely next leader, participated in), the socialist left in Britain has on its hands an unpickable addiction to the Labour Party. Many members, with good politics when you talk to them personally, can’t imagine a horizon beyond the Labour party. One told me that, were the election to be held today, he thought Keir Starmer would win. Still, he’ll be out talking to members trying to make the case for continuity in Rebecca Long-Bailey.

Here’s the terrible tension at the heart of that—RLB is McDonnell’s candidate. McDonnell still enjoys reserves of goodwill on the left far beyond what he deserves. The general perception is of a man who made a mistake, a tragic figure who flew too close to the sun. I started this article mentioning his grotesque and genial interview with Alistair Campbell, a man who actively sold the Iraq War to the public. Many of the left who had traditionally admired McDonnell, a man roundly condemned for occasionally threatening violence

against his political opponents, thought this transformation of McDonnell—the phrase bandied about often about his image was something like a warm bank manager—was an act.

But we were wrong to think that. McDonnell, closer to power than he ever had been in his long political career, let his hands shake and reached for soft hands to shake. Or maybe he was never really so radical as the papers ever made him out to be. Stuart Brady over lunch had warm words for John, and when I told him about my surprise about the change in attitude, he, in tones of reassurance, told me that John has always been more moderate than people think he is. Brady liked McDonnell. I didn’t hate Brady—I campaigned for Brady to win a seat, he’s a personable guy—but after the election he, and many other in the party who come from the same sort of political context as he does probably breathed a sigh of relief. The regional organizer who ran his campaign and drove me and a friend to the station had no faith in the possibility of Labour winning. She thought it was time to move back towards the center, citing a desire to win for a change.

I’m not convinced that a more centrist (alright, pragmatic) leader like Keir Starmer would win. The animosity in the crumbled Red Wall seats in the North towards anyone against Brexit was a real phenomenon. There is probably nobody in the Labour Party more responsible for the change in Labour’s Brexit policy, save for John McDonnell. Yet win he might. He has the most nominations of Constituency Labour Parties, and is the clear media favorite. But what would Starmer winning mean?

“I think a lot of people are going to be enamored...and very soon disappointed,” Spencer said of Keir.

Starmer might be the leader for the next five years if he wins—that is when the next election, barring any surprise, will be. A Starmer win will represent everything wrong I saw over the campaign and, not so much a radical restructuring as a return to what the party was before the Corbyn moment. That’s the best way to describe what Corbyn was at the end of the day: it was just a moment. There was a moment when the Labour party could be stormed for socialist ends. Corbyn is a long-standing man of principle, a real anti-imperialist, a real socialist. I want to like Corbyn but it’s difficult to feel warmly about someone who failed. The moment to transform the party was missed out on. This wasn’t a defeat for the moment, but a failure.

From everything I’ve seen that moment has passed. That doesn’t mean an abdication of the struggle for socialism of course. Capitalism was born in Britain. It would be meet if it could die there. But it won’t be the Labour Party reading the death certificate. **CP**

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# CULTURE & REVIEWS

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## Notes on the Caucus

BY LUCY SCHILLER

### I. ENVIRONMENTAL NOTES

In Glasgow, the new little crocuses shaking in the rain in Kelvingrove Park instilled in me a sense of optimism. My American accent sounded shallow within a landscape of rollicking Scottish brogues. The customs officials at the airport the morning after Brexit were at a loss for exactly what to do and how to do it. Taking shelter from the rain, I walked into a room in the botanic garden as a group of teenage boys walked out and wondered for a few seconds which exotic plant it was that smelled faintly of marijuana. I forgot my pajamas and spent half the day in search of anything that could work. All of these observations, not chronologically ordered, contain some feeling of being one person inside a larger context. This feeling is ongoing to human experience but is particularly pronounced when you travel—you're constantly gauging what this outside context is composed of, what its texture is, and how you fit, or not, against it.

### II. BACKGROUND NOTES

The hot water in my apartment wasn't working, so I didn't shower for a few days and just bought dry shampoo. I ate at a place named Kimchi Cult. These things aren't related.

### III. DIVERSION NOTES

I need to state now what I was in Glasgow to do: participate in the Iowa democratic caucus from abroad. The day arrived. As my anxiety about the approaching event heightened, I felt

the need to kill time, and it was, as seemingly ever, raining. So I ducked into the Glasgow Film Theater and found myself watching *The Lighthouse*, wherein Robert Pattinson, who adopts for his character the jaw stance of one of those deep sea fishes rarely glimpsed by human eyes, and Willem Dafoe, as nineteenth-century lighthouse keepers, spit Melvillean monologues at one another somewhere in New England as the waves lash against their windows. The men go insane there, or maybe they already are insane, or one of them is. One of them might not really exist. And the lighthouse is a phallus, and the seagulls are the reanimations of the souls of dead sailors. And, rangy and addled, increasingly drunk, the men rage and obsess over light, guilt, longing. Watching there, I was doing that context gauging thing. I was loving the movie. The Glaswegians were loving the movie. There was no distance between us. We all roared when Willem asked Robert plaintively if he wasn't "fond of me lobster." No one laughed at any of the lame commercials at the beginning. It was all very fine. It made me feel at home.

### IV. DIVERSION NOTES, CONTINUED

An hour before the caucus, in an attempt to quell my anxiety, but in a strategy that actually increased it, I wandered around a nearly empty Marks & Spencer, touching fabric absentmindedly under the gazes of the attendants.

### V. QUICK NOTE

As of this morning, February 5, if you search the word "shambles" on the internet, you immediately receive news results about the Iowa caucus.

### VI. APPROACH NOTES

The caucus location itself, in a flat

on the West End of Glasgow, was one of three spots abroad where you could participate as an Iowa voter—the other two were Paris and someone's apartment in Tbilisi. At the latter, two or three people (reports differed) were scheduled to attend. At the Glasgow event, hosted by six friends from Iowa now living in Scotland, nineteen were expected. Standing outside the flat in the rain, still thinking of Robert and Willem dealing with their own much worse weather, I saw media already beginning to assemble. They were taking photos from numerous angles of the construction paper CAUCUS HERE! sign on the Glaswegian door.

### VII. INITIAL NOTES

Inside, my context gauge went haywire. The room was ringing with those flat Iowan accents. Strangers were touching my shoulder and asking about my trip. Everywhere were plastered the floating heads of presidential candidates. In the living room/voting room: a large sign reading "Is this Heaven? No, it's Glasgow." In the corner: a bowl full of that cereal-based snack called puppy chow. On the walls: little factoids everywhere about famous Iowans, only some of whom I recognized (Elijah Wood??). Walking around: about thirty people, two-thirds caucusgoers and one-third press, all looking different amounts of befuddled and anxious.

### VIII. JUST A NOTE

A major motif of *The Lighthouse* is the Prometheus myth. Robert stares into the fiery lighthouse light at the end of the movie, knowledge is revealed to him, he falls in fulfilled shock down the stairs. The next time we see him he's getting his innards eaten by seagulls, a la Prometheus. There could be a metaphor for the caucus here, but I can't really be

bothered to reach for it, because all I can do, in this extended post-caucus moment of deep frustration while we're still waiting for every vote to be counted and to be counted accurately, is write notes, one for each participant in Glasgow.

But in the days following the caucus, The Lighthouse began, oddly, to be referenced in conjunction with the event. Will Menaker of Chapo Trap House read aloud, to the app-makers and the Buttigieg campaign, which swooped in prematurely to claim victory, Willem's speech damning Robert for his selfish ways: "Hark, triton, hark! Bid our father the sea king rise from the depths full foul in his fury! Black waves teeming with salt foam to smother this young mouth with pungent slime—" and many more lines, after which Robert admits fine, he does like Willem's cooking.

More simply: "The Lighthouse was a parable for the Iowa caucus," wrote one Twitter user.

#### IX. CAUCUS NOTES

Packed in like that in the room, we caucusgoers were subsumed by inquiries by the European press, many of whom expressed complete bewilderment to the voters. "So you see each other vote?"

One reporter would spend a lot of time mulling over puppy chow, which she proclaimed an "Iowan delicacy."

An escaped cat ran around.

A few non-press and non-Iowans were also there to observe. The result—one result, that is—was that we were kind of watching what we were doing as we did

it, and the whole thing felt deeply, even as we did it, and took meaning from it, like watching ourselves on screen, alone together in this little room so far from the continent on which our votes were meant to matter.

#### X. RECOLLECTED NOTES

At the last caucus in which I participated, in Iowa City, the mass of people in the auditorium—there were hundreds of us—sang to pass the time. Someone

caucus often assume it's an ancient Iowan custom, in other words, a tradition, whose quaintness we've outgrown, kind of like the ritual in Shirley Jackson's famous short story "The Lottery." In "The Lottery," of course, a crowd of villagers assemble to stone to death an unlucky citizen, for the community's continued well-being and agricultural success. I repeatedly taught this story in Iowa to undergraduates. It was a crowd favorite.



*Coin toss decides Iowa caucus winner. (CSPAN).*

brought drums. Impromptu speeches were given. I recognized neighbors and professors and acquaintances throughout the room, seated and standing for their candidate. It felt like a pep rally at a DMV. And then it was over, and we walked back out into that terrible Iowa winter, semi-satisfied at having done some essential, we were told, duty.

#### XI. HISTORICAL NOTES

Those unfamiliar with the Iowa

The caucus isn't ancient; it started in 1972. In the wake of this disaster, some have said this must be the last time the caucus occurs—Iowa is not demographically representative of the larger country, the caucus's format is inaccessible to many potential voters (which is why satellite caucuses, whose results we're now waiting on, were put together for those who couldn't make the standard 7 pm time—like about a dozen workers in Ottumwa, most of whom



caucused for Sanders: <https://theintercept.com/2020/02/03/iowa-first-caucus-satellite-pork-plant-workers/>).

This year's bungle, or whatever we want to call it, might cement the deal.

## XII. IT MUST BE NOTED

Glasgow's caucus was beautifully organized. Participants were walking around recording everything on their phones, the feeling being that documentation provided safety. The main host, a grad student, had clearly studied and practiced protocol, and did not make an exception for the woman who arrived late to participate, even though he was, as we say, deeply Iowa nice, and she was upset. He steered the press out of the room, for lack of space ("Including me, Colyn?" asked the photographer whose camera bag the cat was playing around in.) The process went quickly, the first alignments and re-alignments, and then the delegate calculations, witnessed by representatives from each camp. The press looked in through the door, marveling aloud.

## XIII. IMPORTANT NOTE

We did not use the app.

## XIV. PROCESS NOTES

An essential part of the caucusing process is doing that context-gauging thing, looking around the room, which in our case was very small and cleared of furniture, to see who is voting in which way, and if their group has enough voters to be "viable," and, if not, to persuade them lovingly and gently to come over to your side. At this caucus, as at so many, voters knowingly casting their initial alignment towards an unviable candidate often have a backup vote prepared. In other words, there is sometimes little convincing to be done, either way. The Sanders camp in Glasgow received nine voters and that number did not change. The Warren camp received four, which moved up to six in the second alignment. Buttigieg got a stalwart three; Yang a determined one.

## XV. OF NOTE

We were, I think, the very first caucus to report results—Sanders with three delegates, Warren and Buttigieg each with two. Living abroad, we were all used to the reality of being hours ahead of most of our loved ones, and so while we knew our caucus fit into a larger context, we understood it would be early morning until we learned what that context looked like.

## XVI. IRONIC NOTE

Did we want to draft any resolutions to put forth to the Iowa Democratic Party, Colyn asked us. Yes, it was decided. The resolutions were the following:

- Do this again
- Do this with greater clarity of process
- Overturn Citizens United

## XVII. BAR NOTES

In the meantime, then, between the transmission of our results to the Iowa Democratic Party and the beginnings of leg-stretching in Iowa, a huge amount of press came our way: ABC News and AP, a Scottish radio station and the Guardian. Photos of us were taken at the pub where we arrived after the caucus, and within minutes we saw ourselves on the internet, multiplied on Twitter a few thousand times. I saw myself leaning back in the booth, next to a fellow caucusgoer in a Bernie hat, enjoying my beer, underscored by Twitter comments: "Scotland cannae stand Biden," "Hey hat guy if ur reading this my DMs are open," "All caucuses should be in Glasgow they seem having fun," "Feel the Robert Burns," "Is this real?"

## XVIII. POST-CAUCUS NOTES

Was it real? We were all there to try to vote, because the alternative wasn't, as they say, "viable." In the moment, it felt completely bizarre, like a bit of a hallucination, and yes, like working inside of a very flawed system. But it also felt deeply meaningful to have come here, and to have worked to make sure that, even divorced by time and distance from the election, self-stranded there together on

this Scottish rock, we could participate, we could make some kind of record. We were from Germany, London, Italy, elsewhere in Scotland. Some of us had babies. Some of us barely got there in time to participate. It was not, for any of us, easy.

## XIX. FINAL NOTES

I woke the next day early, to get to the airport for a series of flights back to Germany. I checked the internet. I checked it again. The context into which we had cast our votes was obscured by, at best, an ongoing series of errors and a private app most people had never before heard of. I felt like I was looking into some great confounding light whose glare I recognized. As with so many things, there was a plan that was already in action for me, I had to get on a train to get to a bus to get to a plane to get to another plane to get to a train to get home. I spoke to everyone I could on the way—a bus driver, a clerk at an airport café, a musician in line in front of me at boarding, a customs official—explaining what I had done in Glasgow, and why, attempting to leave a record. **CP**

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# Foster Youth The Invisible Class

BY LEE BALLINGER

*We are sending more foster kids to prison than to college*

— Brent Kent,  
*Indiana foster youth advocate*

In late 2019, the Kansas City Star published "Throwaway Kids," a six-part series on foster youth, written by Laura Bauer and Judy L. Thomas. "Taken from an unstable home," Bauer and Thomas write. "Terrified by their first contact

with the state. Emotionally and cognitively damaged in care as they are moved from home to home. Robbed of an education equal to their peers.”

As part of its investigation, *The Star* surveyed nearly six thousand inmates in twelve states. One in four said they were the product of foster care.

The investigation also found that:

\* Many kids are moved dozens of times from one foster home to another—a few as many as 100 times—over several years. Foster children are diagnosed with PTSD at a rate greater than Iraq war veterans.

\* Since the 1980s, nearly three dozen states have faced lawsuits asserting that they were further harming children they were supposed to protect.

\* In Oregon, just 35 percent of foster kids earned a high school diploma in 2017 compared to 77 percent of their peers. Nationwide, less than 3 percent of foster youth will get a bachelor’s degree.

One who did is Stephanie Serrano, who grew up in foster care without a real family. When she was pushed out of foster care at age eighteen, she became homeless. Ultimately, she managed to go to college and is now a case worker for foster youth in Los Angeles and runs Seeds of Peace, which conducts special programs for foster youth in several high schools. She calls foster youth “the invisible class.”

That’s hard to argue with. Most people not directly involved with foster youth know nothing about these young victims and may not even know that they exist (even though there were 442,995 kids in foster care nationwide as of 2017). And it’s not as if foster youth are trying to make themselves seen or heard. “I think people like myself who have experienced these things,” Stephanie Serrano told me, “we’ve learned to just survive and move forward so we don’t talk about it.”

Roughly 23,000 kids across the country are churned out of the foster

care system every year. “When you’re ageing out you’re thinking about ‘Oh, I have to find a job, I have to get housing,’” says Stephanie Serrano. “Nobody’s really thinking about mental health and how am I recovering from this trauma that I just lived in foster care. The needs foster youth have in transitioning are not met so a lot of them become homeless.”

One center for homeless youth in Indiana reported that nearly 70 percent of the young people it served in 2019 had spent time in foster care, a 36 percent increase over 2018.

“Depression is a big thing that I see with youth who are transitioning out,” Stephanie Serrano says, “because they had somebody who legally had to keep a roof over their head, legally had to pay for their food, legally had to be around them, meeting their social and emotional needs. But when they’re going to leave foster care all that’s being ripped away. I’ve seen youth that were getting straight As in school start getting straight Fs.”

The state that neglected me as a kid and allowed me to age out of its support is the same state that wants to kill me.

— Convicted murderer on death row in Texas

Those who do step up to help face many challenges. Carvell Holloway is a professional jazz trumpeter who has also worked for a foster care agency. He teaches music at a middle school in Compton, California. He told me that it’s difficult to connect with foster youth in the classroom “They think ‘Nobody gives a fuck about me so why should I do anything that anyone says?’ They’ve been thrown out—from a home, from everything, from life. They don’t see any reason for doing anything.”

Stephanie Serrano describes her own experience with foster care as “Constant change. Could never really get my roots down, never could have stability. There were times I couldn’t breathe, I didn’t know what was happening, I thought I was dying. I could never feel safe and secure.” She was under the control of

California’s Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS), which does little to keep families together. Instead, they look for reasons, most of which boil down to poverty, that families should be torn apart.

How about instead of paying a stranger \$800 a month to take care of my kid, how about you help me so that way I can be present for my kid?

— Stephanie Serrano

DCFS doesn’t go into rich neighborhoods and break up families there. Stephanie Serrano says, “DCFS is a war on poor people, on working class families that are amazing, that are super resilient, women who are recovering from domestic violence, that are heroes and warriors and they’re not giving up. They can’t drive so they’re walking to work. Passing by drug dealers, recovering from their domestic violence. But that’s not valued by DCFS. They’re seeing them as less than, and that’s based on privilege.”

Families don’t just fall apart. They are pushed. Most of the \$30 billion spent on child welfare annually is funneled into foster care or adoption services, despite a forty-year-old federal mandate that prioritizes family preservation. More dollars are spent on investigating families than trying to keep them together.

Is this because DCFS is run by heartless bureaucrats? Only in part. In *The Poverty Industry: The Exploitation of America’s Most Vulnerable Citizens*, Daniel Hatcher writes: “Vast contractual interconnections between government and private contractors are undermining the legal and economic structure of America’s government assistance programs and siphoning billions in aid from those in need.”

State human services agencies face shrinking budgets and a rising demand for services. Instead of pushing to tax bloated corporate treasuries or local billionaires to make up the shortfall, these agencies increasingly partner with corporations. At the national level, the

Federal Activities Inventory Reform Act requires government agencies to determine every possible government activity that can be contracted out to private firms.

For example, state human resources agencies hire corporations to help them find the children already in foster care who are entitled to Social Security disability benefits but are not receiving them. The state then applies for the benefits in the child's name without

routinely sends its agents into homeless encampments and forces children living with their parents into foster care, a policy reminiscent of press gangs and slave patrols.

As American attitudes toward the homeless continue to shift toward sympathy and solidarity, foster youth remain ignored and isolated. Yet they are natural allies of all others without a home or in danger of losing the one they have—the homeless or anyone

understand the needs? We need to have the community at the table and to ask the uncomfortable questions and demand answers. We need to hear from the children impacted by it, we need to hear from foster parents, because they're doing this work, we need to hear from group home staff."

Foster care advocate Brent Kent warns that "As a society we view foster children the same way that we might view offenders coming out of prison or addicts in recovery. We forget that they are just children, that they were put in foster care and removed from their families through no fault of their own."

We need to follow our instincts, which are to love all children, not just our own. Children are a blessing, filled with great potential and wondrous capacities. They should be loved and honored. Any government or corporate policy which falls short of that standard is nothing less than a hate crime. **CP**

If it's really about family, then you need to solve the problems of the family. A lot of that is having homes for people, having jobs for people, developing a society that takes care of everyone. If we have a society that takes care of everyone, then we can have stable families

— Carvell Holloway

**LEE BALLINGER** is co-editor of *Rock and Rap Confidential*.

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## State human services agencies face shrinking budgets and a rising demand for services. Instead of pushing to tax bloated corporate treasuries or local billionaires to make up the shortfall, these agencies increasingly partner with corporations.

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telling them about it and then pockets the money every month. Ditto for child support payments. If the child has parents who were killed while in the military, the state takes their VA benefits.

"They target the kids ahead of time," Carvell Holloway notes. "They know what monies are associated with the kids before they take them from the home."

Corporations and state agencies collude to have as many foster children as possible declared disabled by the Social Security Administration and thus eligible to receive SSI benefits. The state agency will then apply to become the payee, without telling the child, and keep the resulting payments for itself.

The money's just sitting there so corporations and government agencies go and snatch it. Except that in order to get the money, they have to first snatch the children. Any poor family is in danger of suffering such a kidnapping—California

facing foreclosure, eviction, or skyrocketing rents. Foster youth could be a key component if they were embraced, nurtured, and encouraged to use their gifts and hard-won experience to push the overall struggle for decent housing forward. We need only look at the way that teens and young adults have escalated the fight against climate change to see the possibilities.

There are many obstacles to realizing such possibilities. Stephanie Serrano describes some of the roadblocks faced by her organization Seeds of Peace: "I'm coming up against a lot of heavy hitters, corporations and large non-profits that already have a grasp on the funding for these programs. That's detrimental to the work we do because a lot of these programs are outdated or the leadership is not reflective of the community they serve. They haven't been through these experiences so how can you help someone in that situation if you don't

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