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Chomsky on Moral Depravity

Z MAGAZINE FEBRUARY 2019

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FEBRUARY 2019 TABLE OF CONTENTS

COMMENTARY/4

The horror of the Yemen War is changing minds at last/4

Kathy Kelly on the anguish suffered by Yemeni children and their families

Gentrification: The New “Negro Removal” Program/5

Ron Daniels on the historical pattern of marginalizing, subverting or outright destroying Black communities

Lessons to Learn on the 25th Anniversary of the Zapatista Uprising/8

Hilary Klein on the Zapatistas’ ability to remind us of what we have in common

Medical Conflicts of Interest/9

Martha Rosenberg looks at Pharma’s brazen financial infiltration into U.S. medicine

Destroying Civilization/11

Yves Engler on how our planet is being cooked so wealthy people can make more profit

Is There A Plot To Depopulate Palestinian Refugee Camps In Lebanon?/13

Ramzy Baroud on ignoring the misery of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon

The Hidden Structure of U.S. Empire/14

Nicolas J S Davies on the end of empire

It Has Begun: One in Five Million Protest in Serbia/18

Danica Jorden on a common alienation uniting the people

FEATURE/20

Moral Depravity Defines U.S. Politics/20

Noam Chomsky on monsters in the past and present

Global Oil Price Deflation 2018 & Beyond/25

Jack Rasmus on what oil prices mean for the global and U.S. economies

We Are Not Tired/29

Richard Greeman joins the Yellow Vest protests

Climate Jobs For All/36

Jeremy Brecher on the Green New Deal

South Africa Searches for a Financial Parachute/41

Patrick Bond looks at the IMF’s regrettable history and current agenda

Living it Large—Life on Benefits/45

Bridget Meehan on living on less than 100 pounds a month



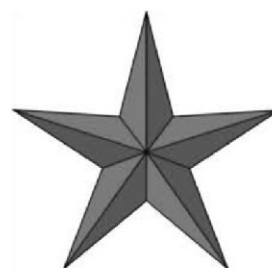
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COMMENTARY

The horror of the Yemen War is changing minds at last

By Kathy Kelly

Twenty years ago, a small delegation organized by Voices in the Wilderness lived in Baghdad while U.S. cruise missiles attacked more than 100 targets in Iraq. Following four days of bombing, known as “Operation Desert Fox,” our group visited various Iraqis who had survived direct hits. One young girl handed me a large missile fragment, saying, “Merry Christmas.”

An engineer, Gasim Risun, cradled his two-week-old baby as he

sat in his hospital bed. Gasim had suffered multiple wounds, but he was the only one in his family well enough to care for the infant, after an unexploded missile destroyed his house. In Baghdad, a bomb demolished a former military defense headquarters, and the shock waves shattered the windows in the hospital next door. Doctors said the explosions terrified women in the maternity ward, causing some to spontaneously abort their babies while others went into premature labor.

In December 1998, U.S. news media steadily focused on only one person living in Iraq: Saddam Hussein. With the notable exception of Stephen Kinzer of the *New York Times*, no mainstream media focused on UN reports about the consequences of U.S. economic sanctions imposed on Iraq. One of

The war in Yemen is horrific and ought to be ended immediately

Kinzer’s articles was headlined: “Iraq a Pediatrician’s Hell: No Way to Stop the Dying.”

The hellish conditions continued, even as UN officials sounded the alarm and explained how economic sanctions directly contributed to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of children under age five.

Now a horror story of similar proportions is playing out in Yemen.

In November 2018, the *Guardian* reported that up to 85,000 Yemeni children under age 5 have died from starvation and disease



Looking through rubble in Yemen, photo by anasalhaji/Shutterstock.com

COMMENTARY

during the last 3 years. Mainstream media and even governments of large and wealthy countries are finally beginning to acknowledge the anguish suffered by Yemeni children and their families.

Stark and compelling photos show listless, skeletal children who are minutes or days away from death. Reports also show how war plans have deliberately targeted Yemen's infrastructure, leading to horrifying disease and starvation. Journalists who have met with people targeted as Houthi fighters, many of them farmers and fishers, describe how people can't escape the sophisticated U.S.-manufactured weapons fired at them from massive warplanes.

One recent Associated Press photo, on page one of the *New York Times* for December 14, shows a line of tribespeople loyal to the Houthis. The youngest child is the only one not balancing a rifle upright on the ground in front of him. The tribespeople bear arms, but they are poorly equipped, especially compared to the U.S.-armed Saudis.

Since 2010, according to the *New York Times*, the United States has sold the Saudis 30, F-15 multirole jet fighters, 84 combat helicopters, 110 air-to-surface cruise missiles, and 20,000 precision guided bombs. Last year, the United States also sold the Saudis 10 maritime helicopters in a \$1.9 billion deal. An American defense contractor, Booz Allen Hamilton, "earned tens of millions of dollars training the Saudi Navy during the past decade."

Earlier this year, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman—along with his counter-

part in the United Arab Emirates, Mohammed bin Zayed—seemed untouchable. He was feted and regaled by former Presidents, Oprah, Hollywood showbiz magnates, and constant media hype.

Now, the U.S. Senate has passed a resolution holding him accountable for the gruesome murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Several U.S. Senators have said they no longer want to be responsible for bloodshed he has caused in Yemen. UN negotiators have managed to broker a fragile ceasefire, now in effect, which will hopefully stop the fighting that has raged in the vital port city of Hodeidah. One message which may have prompted the Saudis to negotiate came in the form of a Senate vote threatening to curtail the support of U.S. armed forces for the Saudi-led Coalition's war on Yemen.

I doubt these actions will bring solace or comfort to parents who cradle their listless and dying children. People on the brink of famine cannot wait days, weeks, or months while powerful groups slowly move through negotiations.

And yet, a shift in public perception regarding war on Yemen could liberate others from the terrible spectre of early death.

Writing during another war, while he was exiled from Vietnam, Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh imagined the birth of a "Peace Child." He ends his poem by calling on people to give both their hands for the chance to "protect the seeds of life bursting on the cradle's rim."

I think of Iraqi mothers who lost their babies as bombs exploded just outside their maternity ward. The shift in public percep-

Gentrification has emerged as a major threat to Black communities that have been centers for Black business/economic development, cultural and civic life for generations

tion is painfully too late for innumerable people traumatized and bereaved by war. Nevertheless, the chance to press with all our might for a continuing and growing shift, repudiating war, could point us in a new direction.

The war in Yemen is horrific and ought to be ended immediately. It makes eminent good sense to give both our hands and all the energies we can possibly summon, to end the war in Yemen and vow the abolition of all war.

Z

Kathy Kelly (kathy@vcnv.org) co-coordinates Voices for Creative Nonviolence (www.vcnv.org).

This article first appeared on the website of The Progressive magazine.

Gentrification: The New "Negro Removal" Program

By Ron Daniels

Gentrification has emerged as a major threat to Black communities that have been centers for Black business/economic development, cultural and civic life for generations. Gentrification has become the watch-word for the displacement of Black people and culture. Gentrification is the "Negro Removal Program" of the 21st century. There is an urgent need for people

COMMENTARY

of African descent to mount a serious offensive to defend Black communities from this insidious onslaught.

During the Civil Rights, Black Power era, the term “Negro Removal” was virtually synonymous with “Urban Renewal,” local, state and federal highway and development projects that often disconnected and destroyed stable Black communities. It was not unusual for a local highway project designed to benefit residents from the suburbs or a component of an Interstate Highway system to be routed through the center of a Black community, uprooting and displacing Black people or permanently weakening businesses, institutions, networks and relation-

ships that bound folks together. As advocates for Black entrepreneurship correctly urge Black people to create and support Black business districts in our communities, it is useful to remember that Urban Renewal destroyed thriving business districts in Black communities across the country in the latter part of the 20th century. In fact, there is an historical pattern of marginalizing, subverting or outright destroying Black communities to thwart our ability to achieve full political and economic empowerment and equity in this nation. Gentrification is the latest manifestation of this pattern.

There are a multiplicity of testimonies about this destructive phenomena. The caption of a feature

“Development” to accommodate the newcomers is driving up the cost of housing, especially rental properties in a manner that is unaffordable for large numbers of Black residents

article in the May 2, 2018 edition of the *New York Times* captured the essence of the crisis confronting Black communities across the country: “When Home No Longer Looks the Same: Rapid Change in Durham Has Left Many Black Residents Feeling Unwelcome.”

The article details how the revitalization of Durham, North Carolina has increasingly meant development/progress for middle and upper-income Whites, but dis-



Artists Studio Availability Project, ASAP, protested in front of the Brooklyn Museum with an installation of furniture to decry gentrification, photo by a katz/Shutterstock.com

placement for large numbers of Black working-class and middle-class people who can no longer afford to live in certain sections of the city. An article in the October 21, 2018 edition of the *Houston Chronicle* is also illustrative of the growing concern about gentrification in Black America: "Historic black neighborhoods disappear all the time. But they don't have to."

In Atlanta, the "Black Mecca" of the South, Vine City, the neighborhood where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and civil rights and political leader Julian Bond lived, no longer exists. It was wiped-out by sports stadium projects. Public housing development after public housing development has been felled by an advancing wave of "progress." The "Sweet Auburn" District, which was once the home of major Black businesses, is now stagnant. In the face of this onslaught, a youthful group of community advocates called the Community Movement Builders have recently launched an Anti-Gentrification Campaign to mobilize community residents and their allies to address the massive displacement of Black working class and poor people from their neighborhoods. One of their slogans is: "Stop Gentrification: Keep Residents in Place."

"Development" in Washington, DC, the original "Chocolate City," has displaced thousands of Black people, forcing them to move to surrounding suburban areas; the prosperous central city neighborhood and Black business district in Seattle, Washington has vanished as Blacks have been forced to flee to Tacoma and other outlying cities where housing is more afford-

able; in Los Angeles, the Crenshaw Subway Coalition is vigorously resisting a subway extension that would spur gentrification in one of the most storied communities in Black America; in neighborhood after neighborhood in New York City, from Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx to Harlem, gentrification is rapidly displacing hundreds of thousands of Black people. In a few years, Harlem, the cultural-political Capital of Black America, will hardly be recognizable. A Whole Foods Store now stands where Malcolm X once held his legendary rallies.

Chocolate Cities, once the domain of Black political and economic power, are vanishing as increasing numbers of Whites, who, in previous generations abandoned urban centers for the suburbs, are now returning to establish more comfortable and convenient spaces in closer proximity to their workplaces. "Development" to accommodate the newcomers is driving up the cost of housing, especially rental properties in a manner that is unaffordable for large numbers of Black residents. Property taxes are also skyrocketing, putting enormous pressure on Black homeowners as well. As Blacks are displaced and replaced by newcomers, this is inevitably leading to dramatic shifts in political power from neighborhood advisory boards, to city councils and the office of Mayors. Black power is diminishing.

What is equally egregious are the attitudes of some of the newcomers whom residents of Black communities sometimes characterize as "invaders" or "neo-colonialists." This is because some newcomers are not content to become

a part of the community; they arrogantly attempt to change the rhythms, culture and character of the community. For decades it has been a well-established and accepted custom that scores of drummers gather on a designated date at a regular time in Marcus Garvey Park in Harlem to play African music. But, once a large number of "invaders" became occupants of a nearby apartment building, they began to complain to the police and petitioned local elected officials, seeking to ban this longstanding weekly ritual. In Detroit, three White women, newcomers to a predominately Black neighborhood, falsely accused a Black man of being a pedophile and demanded that the police file charges against him. The brother in question was starting a community garden on a vacant lot in the neighborhood and the women protested this activity taking place in "their neighborhood." Fortunately, the Judge dismissed the charges in a case of "gardening while Black." Reports of these kinds of attitudes and behavior across the country is breeding resentment and hostility towards the "invaders."

Let me be clear, as a civil right, any person in the United States has the freedom to live wherever they choose. People of African descent have waged a relentless struggle to achieve this precious right. People also have the right to live amongst their own nationality, ethnicity or ethnic group if they choose, hence there are Irish, Italian, Polish, German and Jewish communities in this country. And, occasionally these communities change in composition. "Little Italy" in lower Manhattan in New York is now mostly shops and

COMMENTARY

stores as people of Italian descent have largely chosen to migrate to other neighborhoods. Voluntary migration is one thing, forced displacement is another matter. Time and time again, Black people have faced schemes, targeted policies and outright violence—e.g., Tulsa, Rosewood—to force their removal from neighborhoods and communities they worked and invested in to “develop” as their home.

Black people believe in “development” and no reasonable person would be opposed to improvements or progress that would better their community. The crucial issue for people of African descent is not development, it is “development” that is displacing Black people and culture. Therefore, the order and challenge of the day is to achieve “development without displacement.” The question is, can development strategies be devised that prioritize improving the lives of the current residents and preserving the culture and character of their communities? The answer to that question is, yes. The collective brainpower, skill, experience and will exists within Black America to mount an offensive to defend Black communities against gentrification, the “Negro Removal” program of the 21st century. Therefore, we must gather our brightest and best, the conscious and committed in our brain trust to devise plans and a policy agenda to rescue, preserve Black communities. We possess the collective genius to develop just, safe, viable, vibrant and sustainable Black communities.

To that end, the Institute of the Black World 21st century (IBW) is issuing an urgent call for a National Emergency Summit on

Gentrification to be convened in Newark, New Jersey, April 4-6, 2019 in conjunction with the annual commemoration of the martyrdom of our beloved Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Newark has been selected because the City’s ambitious development plans incorporate community-based strategies designed to mitigate gentrification. IBW has requested that Ras J. Baraka, the Mayor of Newark, host the Emergency Summit. This gathering is viewed as an extension of the milestone Urban Marshal Plan and Black Economic Development Symposium convened by IBW in Newark in April of this year. We envision anti-gentrification advocates, community economic development practitioners, Mayors, urban planners, faith, civil rights, labor, business and professional leaders attending the Emergency Summit on Gentrification. The Urban Strategies Program of Faith In Action, National Urban League, Democracy Collaborative and Freedom Caucus of the Center for Community Change have already signaled a willingness to partner with IBW on this crucial undertaking.

Now is the time to act boldly and courageously to defend Black communities from the destructive forces of gentrification. “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.” We must muster the collective resolve to stop gentrification from devastating Black communities, from displacing Black people and culture...and we will.

Z

Ron Daniels is President of the Institute of the Black World 21st Century and Distinguished Lecturer Emeritus, York College City University of New York. His

I believe the Zapatista movement has much to teach us about the enduring nature of this work and the patience that comes along with that understanding.

articles and essays appear on the IBW website.

Lessons to Learn on the 25th Anniversary of the Zapatista Uprising

By Hilary Klein

Twenty-five years ago, the Zapatistas rose up in arms. Twenty-five years—it’s hard to believe. It’s been many years since the Zapatistas were the darling of the international solidarity scene, and many years since I’ve been back to



*Photo by
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COMMENTARY

Chiapas. But in the era of Trump—of white nationalist populism on the rise around the world, of migrant children dying in ICE detention centers, of countless other horrors—I believe that the Zapatista movement still has much to teach us—about having the chutzpah to take on state-sponsored terrorism and global capitalism, while having the wisdom and humility to know that no one has all the answers, that we make the road by walking. I believe the Zapatista movement has much to teach us about the enduring nature of this work and the patience that comes along with that understanding.

In the era of the Me Too movement (with all its successes, we still have so far to go), I remain convinced that we have much to learn from Zapatista women. I feel lucky to have worked side by side with them for several years, witnessing and absorbing the quiet dignity of their resistance, their unflinching commitment, their combination of discipline and humor, militancy and tenderness. In the face of patriarchy's ugliest manifestations, they took some truly remarkable strides towards collective liberation, showing us what is possible. A handful of Zapatista women in key roles of leadership, combined with a broad push from women in the Zapatista base, succeeded in changing laws, institutions, behavior and expectations around gender roles and domestic violence, and achieved a series of tremendous transformations for women in Zapatista territory.

In a moment of heightened polarization in this country, I appreciate the Zapatistas' ability to remind us what we have in common.

A group of indigenous peasants in southern Mexico succeeded in communicating to the world that, yes, they wanted land reform and indigenous autonomy, but their vision of a just society was so universal that people all over the world, living in completely different contexts, felt included in their struggle.

As we face a daily barrage of hateful words and actions, I am reminded of the intertwined relationship between family, community, and political struggle in Zapatista territory, and what that can tell us about building social justice movements that are also a political and creative home—spaces where we foster community, where we treat each other with respect and dignity, where we collectively create some shelter from the storm.

In 1994, the Zapatistas were often celebrated for their creative use of the Internet to reach people all over the world. (The Internet was relatively new back then.) But anyone who has spent time in Zapatista villages can tell you that was a very externally focused strategy, that one of the strongest foundations of the Zapatista movement is the deep sense of community, the unquestioned assumption that the collective well being takes priority over the individual. So, yes, let's use new technologies to get our message out, but let's not forget to build community, and to have rigor and discipline while we do some old-fashioned face-to-face organizing.

Z
Hilary Klein spent several years working with women's cooperatives in Zapatista territory and is the author of

The responses of doctors exposed for the payola/bribes are downright embarrassing

Compañeras: Zapatista Women's Stories.

How Medical Conflicts of Interest Get Dangerous, Expensive Drugs in Your Medicine Cabinet

By Martha Rosenberg

The year was 2011. FDA Commissioner Margaret Hamburg proposed loosening conflict of interest rules for doctors sitting on advisory committees because non-compromised doctors were disappearing. The FDA could not find "knowledgeable experts who are free of financial conflicts of interest," said news reports.

How bad is Pharma's brazen financial infiltration into U.S. medicine? The *New York Times* and ProPublica recently reported that Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center's own CEO, Dr. Craig B. Thompson, its chief medical officer, Dr. José Baselga, and one of its immunotherapy specialists, Dr. Jedd Wolchok, were swimming in Pharma money.

Thomas sat on the boards of Merck and Charles River Laboratories and actually founded a cancer start-up. Wolchok, says the *Times* and ProPublica, has links to 31 Pharma companies. Baselga, who has since resigned, received undisclosed millions from Pharma. I have personally attended medical

COMMENTARY

conferences where doctors unflinchingly show slide after slide of Pharma companies who pay them as if the payments did not affect their presentations to follow.

The responses of doctors exposed for the payola/bribes are downright embarrassing. Lee Cohen, lead author of a 2006 JAMA article promoting antidepressants during pregnancy listed 76 financial relationships with Pharma that he and the other authors had not mentioned explaining that, “We did not view those associations as relevant to this study.”

Entire hospital programs have been Pharma funded. Harvard child psychiatrist Joseph “Risperdal” Biederman approached Johnson & Johnson with a money-making scheme called the Johnson & Johnson Center for the Study of Pediatric Psychopathology at Massachusetts General Hospital to “move forward the commercial goals of J. & J.” and “support the safety and effectiveness of risperidone [Risperdal] in this age group.”

Dr. Mani Pavuluri, who received GlaxoSmithKline dollars, founded the Pediatric Mood Disorders Program and the Pediatric Brain Research and Intervention (BRAIN) Center at the University of Illinois, conflicts of interest notwithstanding. She has since left in disgrace.

The corruption also affects our tax dollars.

Despite leaving Emory University under a shameful cloud for not disclosing Pharma income and having a National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant terminated, Dr. Charles Nemeroff resurfaced at the University of Miami along with our tax dollars in what was widely regarded as undisguised cronyism.

Rather than stopping such conflicts of interest, mainstream medicine is moving toward legitimizing them. Dr. Timothy Wilens, chief of the division of child and adolescent psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital readily admits his “ties” to Pharma saying he has “an academic obligation to work with the industry.”

Duke’s Dr. Robert Califf, who became FDA Commissioner after Hamburg, said, “many of us consult with the pharmaceutical in-

Rather than stopping such conflicts of interest, mainstream medicine is moving toward legitimizing them

dustry, which I think is a very good thing. They need ideas and then the decision about what they do is really up to the person who is funding the study.”

A disclosure statement on the website of Duke Clinical Research Institute says “Robert M. Califf, MD, reports receiving research grant support from Novartis Pharmaceuticals, Johnson & Johnson/Scios, Lilly, Merck, and Schering Plough, and consulting fees from Annenberg, Aterovax, Bayer/Ortho McNeil, BMS, Boehringer Ingelheim, GSK,



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COMMENTARY

WebMd/theheart.org Johnson and Johnson/Scios, Kowa Research Institute, McKinsey & Company, Medtronic, Merck, Novartis Pharmaceuticals, Sanofi Aventis, and Schering Plough, and has an equity position with NITROX, LLC.”

Since Califf, Pharma operative Scott Gottlieb now heads the FDA and former Eli Lilly lobbyist Alex Azar now heads Health and Human Services in a clear message that government officials with Pharma ties are fine.

Z

Destroying Civilization

By Yves Engler

Is it simply business as usual or a corporate conspiracy to destroy the planet? However one characterizes it, our planet is being cooked so already wealthy people can make even more profit.

Recently, the *New York Times* published a front-page story titled “The Oil Industry’s Covert Campaign to Rewrite American Car Emissions Rules.” The article pointed out that Exxon Mobil, Chevron, Marathon Oil, Koch Industries and other oil/refining interests won “rollbacks” to vehicle fuel mileage rules that, “have gone further than the more modest changes automakers originally lobbied for.” The legislative changes are expected to “increase greenhouse gas emissions in the United States by more than the

The private automobile has risen to dominance in large part because of its ability to draw together a wide array of powerful corporate interests from steelmakers to real estate developers, rubber companies to big box retailers

amount many midsize countries put out in a year.”

With internal combustion engines consuming nearly two-thirds of U.S. petroleum, industry profits are threatened by measures that cut gasoline consumption (be it better fuel mileage, diverting funds from roadway, eliminating auto infrastructure, etc.). About 150,000 gas stations do hundreds of billions of dollars in sales every year. In *The End of Oil: On the*



Environmental activists protest against Donald Trump, photo by Avivi Aharon/Shutterstock.com

COMMENTARY



Cars submerged in Houston, Texas, during hurricane Harvey, photo by michelmond/Shutterstock.com

Edge of a Perilous New World, Paul Roberts explains that the oil industry's business model is planned around the gasoline pump, "from the kind of crude oil it sought to the kind of refineries it built, to its intense focus on retail marketing."

The oil industry's recent opposition to regulating automakers is consistent with its history of promoting automobility, as I and Bianca Mugenyi detail in *Stop Signs: Cars and Capitalism on the Road to Economic, Social and Ecological Decay*. As far back as 1925, oil representatives packed a committee organized by the U.S. surgeon general concerning the health effects of leaded gas. They successfully argued that lead was harmless despite the fact that companies such as Standard Oil of New Jersey knew leaded gasoline was a health threat. Over the next 60 years lead levels increased

100-fold until it was finally banned in 1986.

In the 1930s and 1940s Standard Oil of California and Phillips Petroleum were part of the corporate conspiracy against trolleys that changed the face of urban landscapes across North America. With General Motors and other companies they set up a network of front organizations that ripped up, converted and resold a hundred electric transit systems in 45 cities.

Amidst increasing smog in California in the 1950s, oil interests engaged in a fight against anti-pollution legislation. They financed the Stanford Research Institute to contest the findings of Professor Arie J. Haagen-Smit who demonstrated that automobiles and oil refineries were the major sources of smog.

In 1970, oil companies helped defeat California's Proposition 18, an initiative to divert a small por-

Another component of Trump's "deal" is to resolve the issue of refugees without their repatriation and without respecting international law

tion of the state gas tax to public transit.

Oil companies were part of the National Highway Users Conference (NHUC) that was set up during the Depression to lobby for roadway funding. When the Chicago Transit Authority proposed using \$30 million in state fuel tax to finance improvements to mass transit in the mid-1950s, the NHUC sent in two full-time workers to successfully coordinate opposition (with the Illinois Highway Users Conference) against the proposal.

In 1951, the NHUC launched Project Adequate Roads, which called for a national highway system. Project Adequate Roads helped win the massive Interstate Highway System.

Oil interests were part of another group that lobbied for the Interstate. Beginning in 1942 the "Road Gang," a secret society of men representing automobile, truck and tire makers as well as highway engineers, top highway bureaucrats, etc., met regularly in a private Washington, DC, restaurant to push for more roadway.

The private automobile has risen to dominance in large part because of its ability to draw together a wide array of powerful corporate interests from steelmakers to real estate developers, rubber companies to big box retailers. During the automobile's embryonic phase, the oil industry

was already big business. At that time, oil was mainly used to fuel the kerosene lamp, a business destroyed by the emergence of gas and electrical illumination. The powerful oil interests of the day, led by the Rockefeller family, were bailed out of this crisis and set up for life with the advent of the automobile. And as barrel upon barrel was drained from the earth and pumped into gas tanks, big oil swam in its profits.

So, in many respects, oil interests lobbying against restrictions on automakers is simply business as usual, given their history of promoting automobility. But, given the dangers of climate disturbances “business as usual” takes on the appearance of a criminal corporate conspiracy to destroy civilization.

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Is There A Plot To Depopulate Palestinian Refugee Camps In Lebanon?

By Ramzy Baroud

An eerie video composed of a recorded audio prayer and a photo of one “Hajj Jamal Ghalaini” occasionally pops up on Facebook. The voice is that of an alleged religious sheikh, praying for the well-being of the man in the photo for saving the Palestinian refugee youth of Lebanon, by facilitating their departure to Europe.

The video would have been just another odd social media post, were it not for the fact that Ghalaini is a real person, with his

name recurring in the ongoing tragedy of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Many have credited their successful “escape” from Lebanon by citing this person, who, kindly, they say, has made the journey to Europe far cheaper than all other human smugglers.

We know little about Ghalaini, except that he seems to operate brazenly, without much legal repercussions from Lebanese authorities or the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which is, supposedly, the caretaker of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

Something strange is going on.

Immediately after the U.S. Administration of Donald Trump began to promote its “Deal of the Century,” Palestinian refugees—a fundamental issue in the Palestinian national struggle which has been relegated years ago—have, once more, taken center stage.

Although Trump’s plan is yet to be fully revealed, early indications suggest it is attempting to sideline Jerusalem entirely from any future agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and Trump’s own assertion that “Jerusalem is off the table” is enough to confirm this assumption.

Another component of Trump’s “deal” is to resolve the issue of refugees without their repatriation and without respecting international law, especially United Nations Resolution 194, which calls for the Right of Return for Palestinian refugees and their descendants, who were driven from their homes in historic Palestine in 1948.

Many news reports have been pointing to an elaborate American

Ignoring the misery of Palestinian refugees of Lebanon is now coming at a heavy price

plot to downgrade the status of refugees, to argue against UN figures indicating their actual numbers and to choke off UNRWA—the UN organization responsible for refugees’ welfare—from badly needed funds.

Lebanon has been a major platform for the ongoing campaign targeting Palestinian refugees, particularly because the refugee population in that country is significant in terms of numbers and their plight most urgent in terms of its need for remedy.

There appears to be an active plan, involving several parties, to deprive Lebanon’s Palestinian population from their refugee status and to circumvent the Right of Return.

To some, this may seem like wishful thinking, since the Right of Return is “inalienable,” thus non-negotiable.

Yet, obviously, without refugees collectively demanding such a right, the issue could move from being an urgent, tangible demand into a sentimental one that is impossible to achieve.

This is why the depopulation of Lebanon’s refugee camps, which is happening at an alarming speed,

COMMENTARY

should worry Palestinians more than any other issue at the moment.

I spoke to Samaa Abu Sharar, a Palestinian activist in Lebanon and the director of the Majed Abu Sharar Media Foundation. She narrated that the nature of the conversation among refugees has changed in recent years. In the past, “almost everybody from young to old spoke about their wish of returning to Palestine one day; at present the majority, particularly the youth, only express one wish: to leave for any other country that would receive them.”

It is common knowledge that Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are marginalized and mistreated most, when compared to other refugee populations in the Middle East. They are denied most basic human rights enjoyed by Lebanese or foreign groups in Lebanon, or even rights granted to refugees under international conventions. This includes the right to work, as they are denied access to 72 different professions.

Left hopeless, with a life of neglect and utter misery in 12 refugee camps and other “gatherings” across Lebanon, Palestinian refugees have persisted for many years, driven by the hope of going back to their Palestinian homeland one day.

But the refugees and their Right of Return are no longer a priority for the Palestinian leadership. In fact, this has been the case for nearly two decades.

The situation has worsened. With the Syrian war, tens of thousands more refugees flooded the camps, which lacked most basic services. This misery was further accentuated when UNRWA, under

intense U.S. pressure, was forced to cancel or downgrade many of its essential services.

A suspiciously timed census, the first of its kind, by the Lebanese Central Administration of Statistics, conducted jointly with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics last December, resolved that the number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon stands at only 175,000.

The timing is interesting because the survey was conducted at a time that the U.S. Administration has been keen to lower the number of Palestinian refugees, in anticipation of any future agreement between the PA and Israel.

According to UNRWA statistics, there are more than 450,000 Palestinian refugees who are registered with the UN.

There is no denial about an influx of Palestinian refugees wanting to leave Lebanon. Some have done so successfully, only to find themselves contending with the misery of yet a new refugee status in Europe. Expectedly, some have returned.

Clearly there are those who are keen to rid Lebanon of its Palestinian population, thus the disregard for Ghalaini and other such human trafficking networks.

“There is more than one organized network that facilitate the immigration of Palestinians at prices that have recently gone down to make it more accessible to a larger number of people,” Abu Sharar told me. The conclusion that many of these young men and women now draw is that “there is no future for them in Lebanon.”

This is not the happy, triumphant ending that generations of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon

have hoped and fought for over the years.

Ignoring the misery of Palestinian refugees of Lebanon is now coming at a heavy price. Relegating their plight till “the final status negotiations,” a pipe dream that never actualized, is now leading to a two-fold crisis: the worsening suffering of hundreds of thousands of people and the systematic destruction of one of the main pillars of the Palestinian refugees Right of Return.

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The Hidden Structure of U.S. Empire

By Nicolas J S Davies

My father was a doctor in the British Royal Navy, and I grew up traveling by troop-ship between the last outposts of the British Empire—Trincomalee, Gibraltar, Hong Kong, Malta, Aden, Singapore—and living in and around naval dockyards in England and Scotland.

The British naval bases where I grew up and the fading empire they supported are now part of history. Chatham Dockyard, a working dockyard for over 400 years, is now a museum and tourist attraction. Trincomalee Dockyard, where I was born, has been in the news as a site where the Sri Lan-

kan Navy is accused of torturing and disappearing Tamil prisoners during the Sri Lankan civil war.

Since the late 1970s, I have lived in California and Florida, grappling with the contradictions of U.S. empire like other Americans. The U.S. does not have an internationally recognized territorial empire like the British or Ottoman Empires. American politicians routinely deny that the United States maintains or seeks an empire at all, even as they insist that its interests extend across the entire world, and as its policies impact the lives—and threaten the future—of people everywhere.

So how are we to understand this phenomenon of U.S. empire, which is so central to all our lives and our future, and yet whose structure remains hidden and covert?

In *Ethnographies of U.S. Empire*, co-edited by Carol McGranahan of the University of Colorado and John F. Collins of CUNY, 24 anthropologists studied groups of people whose lives are shaped by the U.S. empire and their interactions with it. Their subjects ranged from indigenous peoples in the U.S. and Hawaii to call center workers in the Philippines to the forcibly exiled people of Diego Garcia.

Many of the ethnographies highlighted the seeming contradiction of an actually existing global empire in a post-colonial world where nearly all countries are internationally recognized as independent and sovereign.

Stratified Sovereignty

The final entry in *Ethnographies of U.S. Empire* arrived at the most comprehensive analysis of

COMMENTARY

In *Ethnographies of U.S. Empire*, co-edited by Carol McGranahan of the University of Colorado and John F. Collins of CUNY, 24 anthropologists studied groups of people whose lives are shaped by the U.S. empire and their interactions with it

the stratified and complex patterns of sovereignty through which formally independent states and their citizens nonetheless fall under the overarching sovereignty of the U.S. empire.

This chapter, “From Exception to Empire: Sovereignty, Carceral Circulation and the Global War on Terror,” by Darryl Li, an anthropology professor at the University of Chicago, follows a group of men who came to Bosnia Hercegovina from mostly Arab countries to fight on the Bosnian Muslim side in the U.S.-backed proxy war to break up Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

By 2001, most of these 660 men had made new homes in Bosnia. Many had married Bosnian women and had Bosnian families. All had been granted Bosnian citizenship in recognition of their role in their adopted country’s independence. But after the crimes of September 11, 2001, the U.S. government saw these former mujahideen as inherently dangerous, and insisted that they must be “denaturalized” and “repatriated.”

At first, this was done through an extrajudicial process of “rendition,” but after 2005 it was institutionalized in a nine-member State Commission (which included a U.S. Army offi-

cer and a British immigration official) to strip people of Bosnian citizenship; a “Reception Center for Irregular Migrants,” a prison built at European Union expense on the edge of a refugee camp for Bosnian Serbs in Lukavica on the outskirts of Sarajevo; and a “Service for Foreigners’ Affairs” under Bosnia’s Ministry of Security, organized, trained and equipped by U.S. advisers at U.S. taxpayer expense, to run the prison and conduct deportations.

Darryl Li visited, studied and stayed in contact with some of these men and their Bosnian families for several years. He observed how, while the U.S. exercised supreme sovereignty over these men and their fate, the U.S. role was carefully hidden behind and operated through the formal sovereignty of Bosnia Hercegovina; and also how the fates of groups of men of different nationalities were governed by U.S. imperial relations with the various countries they came from and to where they could be “repatriated.”

Most Egyptian men were sent back to Egypt, a reliable U.S. ally, where they were imprisoned, tortured and, in many cases, disappeared, according to their Bosnian families. By contrast, six men from Algeria were rendered to the U.S. concentration camp at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. They were imprisoned there until they won a landmark case in the U.S. Supreme Court that allowed them to sue for habeas corpus in U.S. courts. They were finally released in 2009, 2010 and 2013.

A Syrian-Bosnian man named Abu Hamza became the de facto leader of resistance to these denaturalizations and deporta-

tions. He was imprisoned for 7-1/2 years at the Lukavica prison, during most of which time the U.S. and its allies fought a bloody but failed proxy war to install a more subservient regime in his country of origin. He was finally released in 2016 to rejoin his Bosnian family.

When Darryl Li first visited Abu Hamza at the prison in Lukavica in 2009, he was dressed in an orange jalabiyya and baseball cap, on which he had stenciled the word “BOSNATANAMO.” He had made this uniform for himself to highlight the parallels between the plight of prisoners at Lukavica and Guantanamo.

The flags flying over the guard gate of the prison in Lukavica were those of Bosnia and the European Union, and the U.S. was officially involved in the imprisonment of the men there only through diplomatic channels, generous funding and the assistance of American trainers and advisers. And yet the U.S. empire was the thinly veiled power behind the very existence of the prison and all that happened there.

Darryl Li compared the fates of the men in Bosnia with other cases of post-9/11 U.S. detention, and found a similar pattern throughout the U.S. gulag, in which the fates of people from specific countries were largely determined by the nature of U.S. imperial relations with the countries involved.

For example, four British men detained in Pakistan and sent to Guantanamo were among the first prisoners to be released and repatriated, and returned home to relatively normal lives in the UK. By contrast, Li met a Palestinian man in Gaza in 2007 who

was “repatriated” there despite never having lived there before. He was born in Jordan and grew up in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, where he was arrested and handed over to U.S. forces. After several years in U.S. military and CIA prisons, mostly in Afghanistan, he was sent back to Jordan, handed over to Israel and banished to Gaza.

In all these cases, Li observed how the U.S. empire maintained a systematic and overarching sovereignty over the people and countries involved, not by completely ignoring the sovereignty of Bosnia, Egypt, the UK and other countries, but by selectively and opportunistically exercising its own power through their nominally independent political and legal systems and the particulars of its relations with each of them.

Darryl Li's research revealed an international system of stratified sovereignty, in which people's lives were subject to the overarching imperial sovereignty of the U.S. empire as well as to the nominally independent sovereignty of their own countries.

Empire, not Exception

The U.S. concentration camp at Guantanamo in Cuba is widely viewed as a glaring exception to U.S. and international rules of law. Darryl Li noted that the prisoners are not the only non-Americans and non-Cubans living at Guantanamo, which also has a civilian staff of janitors, cooks and other workers, mostly from Jamaica and the Philippines. Like the prisoners and their American guards, these workers

A framework of stratified sovereignty, in which people live under the sovereignty of both their own country and that of the U.S. empire, is not an exception, but a norm of life in the U.S. empire

also live under the overarching sovereignty of the U.S. Empire.

“Both third-country national prisoners and workers at GTMO share the predicament of dwelling in a space between the juridical protections of their governments, the local state and the U.S. hegemon,” Li observed.

Darryl Li concluded that this framework of stratified sovereignty, in which people live under the sovereignty of both their own country and that of the U.S. empire, is not an exception, but a norm of life in the U.S. empire. The shared predicament of workers and prisoners at Guantanamo is a striking example of how the U.S. empire works, not an exception to it.

Other seemingly exceptional cases can also be better understood as examples of this actually existing imperial system of stratified sovereignty.

Julian Assange's precarious asylum in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London is a case in point. In Julian's case, U.S. imperial power has worked through a network of four nominally independent but subordinate states—Australia, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Ecuador—to corner him in London for over six years and prevent him from re-

gaining his freedom. And it may soon succeed in rendering him to the U.S. in shackles.

If this is what happens to Assange, his fate will not differ substantially from that of people who dared to defy the formal, territorial empires of the past. The Saudis conquered most of Arabia in the late 18th century, but their leader Abdullah bin Saud was defeated, captured, rendered in chains to Istanbul and beheaded at the order of the Ottoman Sultan in 1818.

Until 1830, the British Royal Navy brought mutineers, smugglers and pirates captured on the high seas around the world back to London to be hung (slowly, in the case of pirates) at Execution Dock on the Thames. The most notorious pirates' bodies were covered in tar and hung in chains from a gibbet on the riverbank as a warning against piracy to sailors on passing ships.

If anything can save Julian Assange from a 21st century version of their fate at the hands of today's imperial power, it is empire-wide public outrage and the fear of U.S. officials that such a naked display of imperial power will give their game away.

But fear of exposing its brutality and criminality rarely constrains the U.S. empire. Since 2001, the U.S. has been more ready than ever to attack or invade other countries at will, with no regard for U.S. or international law, and to kidnap or extradite people from around the world to face imperial retribution in U.S. prisons and courts.

Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou, now detained in Canada, is the latest victim of U.S. im-

perial power. At least 26 U.S. and foreign banks have paid fines of billions of dollars for violating U.S. sanctions on Iran, but none of their executives have been arrested and threatened with 30-year prison terms. In launching a trade war with China, challenging Chinese sovereignty to trade with Iran and holding Meng Wanzhou as a hostage or bargaining chip in these disputes, the U.S. is displaying a dogged determination to keep expanding its imperial ambitions.

The case of NSA whistle-blower Edward Snowden illustrates that there are geographic limits to U.S. imperial power. By escaping first to Hong Kong and then to Russia, Snowden evaded capture or extradition. But his narrow escape and the very narrow choices available to him are themselves an illustration of how few places on Earth remain safely beyond the reach of U.S. imperial power.

The End of Empire

The corrosive and debilitating impact of U.S. empire on the sovereignty of other countries has been obvious to its detractors for a long time.

In the introduction to his 1965 book, *Neo-Colonialism: the Last Stage of Imperialism*, President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana wrote, "The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its po-

litical policy is directed from outside."

Darryl Li quoted Nkrumah's verdict that this is, "...the worst form of imperialism. For those who practice it, it means power without responsibility, and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress."

Nkrumah was deposed in a military coup orchestrated by the CIA the year after his words were published, but his critique remains, begging serious questions, "How long will the world tolerate this irresponsible form of empire?" Or even, "Will we allow this 'last stage of imperialism' to be the last stage of our civilization?"

The way the U.S. empire exercises power through stratified layers of sovereignty is both a strength and a weakness. For a brief period in history, it has enabled the U.S. to wield imperial power in an otherwise post-colonial world, as Nkrumah described.

But Nkrumah had good reason to call this the last stage of imperialism. Once the U.S. empire's subject nations decide to claim in full the legal sovereignty they gained in the 20th century, and reject the U.S.'s anachronistic imperial ambitions to dominate and exploit their institutions, their people and their future, this empire cannot permanently hold them back any more than the British or Ottoman Empires could.

This irresponsible empire has squandered the resources of our own and other nations and spawned existential dangers that threaten the whole world, from nuclear war to environmental crisis. The *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* has gradually advanced the hands of its Doomsday

Clock from 17 minutes to midnight in 1994 up to 2 minutes to midnight in 2018.

The U.S.'s system of "managed democracy" or "inverted totalitarianism" concentrates ever-growing wealth and power in the hands of a corrupt ruling class, increasingly subjecting the American public to the same "exploitation without redress" as the U.S. empire's foreign subjects and preventing us from tackling serious or even existential problems.

This self-reinforcing vicious circle endangers us all, not least those of us who live at the heart of this corrupt and ultimately self-destructive empire. So we Americans share the vital interest of the rest of the world in dismantling the U.S. empire and starting to work with all our neighbors to build a peaceful, just and sustainable post-imperial future that we all can share.

million people in the street," the spark was lit. Carrying signs saying "Poelo Je" (It Has Began) and "Jedan od pet miliona" (One in Five Million), tens of thousands of protesters are packing the icy January streets of Belgrade, Kragujevac, Niš and other Serbian cities in demonstrations that began in early December demanding an end to what they call a dictatorship.

Meanwhile, a mass demonstration is planned for January 16 on the anniversary of the assassination of Kosovar Serb opposition leader Oliver Ivanovi in divided Mitrovica/Mitrovicë. Ivanovi, leader of the Freedom Democracy Justice Party ("Sloboda demokratija pravda"), advocated for peaceful coexistence between people of both Serbian and Albanian ethnicity in Kosovo/Kosova. In other events protesters say were acts committed by the Vucic government to silence opposing viewpoints, Borko Stefanovi of the Serbian Left Party ("Levica Srbije") was brutally beaten on a street in Kruševac on November 23, while an attempt was made on the life of leftist journalist Milan Jovanovi in Belgrade on December 12. Stefanovi's bloody shirt has become a talisman during the protests.

Protesters have also borrowed the yellow vests that are being donned in France for that country's demonstrations against higher fuel taxes that would especially hit the working class. As in France, the protest has brought together diverse causes such as gay rights and actions against gender-based violence, in addition to public distrust of state-controlled TV. A recording of a reporter calling the protesters "violent rapists"

As in France, the protest has brought together diverse causes

was sampled to a disco beat and blasted from loudspeakers at the Belgrade protest on January 5.

Propaganda is a bit of a specialty for President Vucic, who has a long history with Serbia's far right and nationalists. In his 20s, he was Slobodan Milošević's Minister of Information. Later he was Defense Minister and then Prime Minister. Elected president in 2017 with 55 percent of the vote, predominantly from citizens over the age of 55, he has been accused of quashing the opposition through autocratic control of the media, voter intimidation and other electoral irregularities. Protests erupted when he was announced the winner, with 10,000 students gathering in front of the National Assembly and similar events happening across the country. These protests have been growing steadily ever since.

In a statement he made on July 20, 1995 during the Bosnian War which he has never renounced, Vucic declared, "For every dead Serb, we will kill one hundred Muslims." This was days after the notorious mass killing in Srebrenica, Bosnia, when over 8,000 Muslim men and boys were separated from the regional population and executed. As recently as November 15, 2018, Serbia's prime minister, Ana Brnabic, declared that what happened in Srebrenica was a war

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It Has Begun: One in Five Million Protest in Serbia

By Danica Jorden

When ultra-nationalist Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said he wouldn't concede to protesters' demands "even if there were 5

crime and not genocide, and in December she intimated that the Serbian Army might once again intervene in Kosovo.

Brnabic, female as well as openly gay, was appointed by Vucic last summer in what many LGBT groups in Serbia have come to see as a sly neoliberal tactic to convince the European Union of the new Serbian government's merits. She was disinvented from Belgrade's 2018 Gay Pride Parade after her remarks in 2017 that gay rights should only be addressed after more pressing issues were resolved.

Student Jelena Anasonovic's hennaed hair peeps out from her knitted cap and scarf as she stands on a stage in front of protestors in

Belgrade. "We realised that the time had come to do something in the streets," she told Agence France Presse. "Violence, both verbal and physical, has become the norm" in Serbia, she said. Actor Branislav Trifunovi has also emerged as a prominent spokesperson in the movement, and one of his specific demands is for a set amount of time on national television for opposing viewpoints. He's asking for just five minutes, and in this climate it could be enough to break the government's stranglehold on the media.

Right now, young people are organizing themselves on the internet with hashtags like #Protivdiktature (Against Dictatorship) on Twitter and

"1od5milion" on Facebook. But the crowds show faces of all age groups, so the message is getting out.

Vucic learned early on about accruing power through scapegoating and malignant nationalism. But in a country with an average wage of merely 300 euros a month and over 20 percent unemployment, the old tropes have worn thin. A common alienation is uniting the people and hopefully an inclusive unity across economic, gender, generational and ethnic lines can be sustained.

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Protest against the Serbian president in Belgrade, photo by Fotosr52/Shutterstock.com

FEATURE



Photo by Joseph Solm/Shutterstock.com

Moral Depravity Defines U.S. Politics

By Noam Chomsky and C.J. Polychroniou

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, with people still arguing about winners and losers from the 2018 midterm elections (and there is clearly a lot to say about what those elections mean), what do you consider to be the most striking features of the latest manifestation of American democracy in action?

Noam Chomsky: The most striking features are brutally clear.

Humanity faces two imminent existential threats: environmental catastrophe and nuclear war. These were virtually ignored in the campaign rhetoric and general coverage. There was plenty of criticism of the Trump

administration, but scarcely a word about by far the most ominous positions the administration has taken: increasing the already dire threat of nuclear war, and racing to destroy the physical environment that organized human society needs in order to survive.

These are the most critical and urgent questions that have arisen in all of human history. The fact that they scarcely arose in the campaign is truly stunning—and carries some important, if unpleasant, lessons about our moral and intellectual culture.

To be sure, not everyone was ignoring these matters. They were front and center for those who are constantly vigilant in their bitter class war to preserve their

immense power and privilege. Several states had important ballot initiatives addressing the impending environmental catastrophe. The fossil fuel industry spent huge, sometimes record-breaking, sums to defeat the initiatives—including a carbon tax in the mostly Democratic state of Washington—and mostly succeeded.

We should recognize that these are extraordinary crimes against humanity. They proceed with little notice.

The Democrats helped defeat these critically important initiatives by ignoring them. They scarcely mentioned them “in digital or TV ads, in their campaign literature or on social media,” a *New York Times* survey found. Nor, of course, were they mentioned by the Republicans, whose leadership is dedicated to driving humanity off the cliff as soon as possible—in full knowledge of what they are doing, as easily demonstrated.

The *Times* article goes on to explain that “Environmental activists and political scientists say it is a reflection of the issue’s perpetual low ranking among voters, even Democratic voters, and of the intense polarization along party lines that has developed around global warming.” The article failed to add that this assessment is an incredible indictment of the country and its political, social, economic and media institutions, all of which, so the assessment claims, have sunk to such a level of depravity that the question of whether organized human society can survive in any minimally tolerable form, in the near future, is of little consequence.

Whether that unspoken indictment is correct, we cannot be sure. It is perhaps of some significance that one Democratic candidate, Sean Casten, flipped a Republican district while making impending climate disaster the centerpiece of his campaign.

There is plenty of competition for moral depravity in the current remarkable moment of human history. Perhaps the prize goes to a bureaucracy, maybe in honor of Kafka: Trump’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Right in the midst of the campaign, it produced a detailed study calling for an end to regulations on emissions, with a rational argument: extrapolating current trends, it turns out that by the end of the century the game will be over. Automotive emissions don’t contribute very much to the catastrophe, so there isn’t any point trying to limit them.

In brief, let’s rob while the planet burns, putting poor Nero in the shadows.

There have been many monsters in the past ... but it would be hard to find one who was dedicated to undermining the prospects for survival of organized human society, not in the distant future—in order to put a few more dollars in overstuffed pockets

This surely qualifies as a contender for the most evil document in history. Again, not an issue in the campaign.

There have been many monsters in the past ... but it would be hard to find one who was dedicated to undermining the prospects for survival of organized human society, not in the distant future—in order to put a few more dollars in overstuffed pockets.

It’s hard to find words to describe what is happening before our eyes.

The same is true of the second truly existential threat: nuclear war. A few weeks before the election, Trump announced that the U.S. is withdrawing from the INF treaty, which eliminated short-range missiles deployed in Western Europe and Russia—extremely hazardous weapons, which have only a few minutes flight-time to Moscow, posing a decapitation threat, a sudden attack that would destroy any possibility of response. That, of course, sharply increases the danger of a nuclear response to warnings given by automated systems that have often failed in the past, thus ending all of us.

Anyone familiar with the record knows that it’s a virtual miracle that we have so far avoided terminal nuclear war. The threat, which was already grave, was heightened by the Trump nuclear posture review that authorized new destabilizing weapons and lowered the threshold for nuclear attack. This latest move increases the threat further. Scarcely a mention on the campaign trail or in coverage.

The U.S. is withdrawing from the treaty on the grounds that China is not a partner and that the Russians have violated it—they in turn claim that the U.S. has violated it. It’s plain how to address these problems: through inspections and diplomacy, neither of which has been attempted. Rather, let’s just blithely increase the threat of total destruction. And let’s ignore

all of this in the vast outpourings during the political campaign.

Again, we have to ask some serious questions about the prevailing moral and intellectual culture—and about the urgency of providing remedies, very soon.

Let's put aside what are merely the most significant questions in human history, and turn to what is within the realm of discussion.

A striking fact about the election is that it once again demonstrated the failure of the Democratic Party as a whole to deal with issues that matter to working people. While working-class people of color largely supported the Democratic Party, even more than before, the party lost the non-college educated white population. What's more, it seems to be of little concern, at least to Democratic Party leaders, the "Wall Street Democrats" as they are sometimes called. They were exultant about their successes in the affluent suburbs, where normally Republican voters were disgusted by Trump's vulgarity. Whether they come naturally or are feigned, Trump's antics help keep his white working-class constituency in line while his party stabs them in the back at every turn, meanwhile serving its real constituency, great wealth and corporate power, with impressive dedication.

The betrayal of working-class America could hardly be clearer, though fortunately, some are breaking free of the treachery. One positive feature of the midterms was the success of a diverse group of young progressive candidates, mostly women—a tribute to the popular activism of recent years, and a hopeful sign for the future, if it can expand and flourish.

On the surface, it seems that Trump's success with much of the voting constituency can be attributed to racist and xenophobic appeals, particularly concerning the imminent threat of "invasion" by hordes of terrorists and criminals approaching our borders that he focused his tantrums on up to the election—then dropping the topic when it was no longer needed to rally the faithful.

Few seem to have recalled that Trump was pulling a leaf from Reagan's playbook. In 1985, our intrepid leader strapped on his cowboy boots and declared a national emergency because Nicaraguan troops were a two days' drive from Harlingen, Texas—and people didn't collapse in laughter. Trump made a similar move in warning that if people fleeing from misery and oppression (misery and oppression for which we are largely responsible) reach our borders they'll try to kill

The betrayal of working-class America could hardly be clearer, though fortunately, some are breaking free of the treachery. One positive feature of the midterms was the success of a diverse group of young progressive candidates, mostly women—a tribute to the popular activism of recent years, and a hopeful sign for the future, if it can expand and flourish.

us all. Heavily armed militias travelled to the border to back up the thousands of troops deployed to defend us, and it seems to have worked. Surveys report that people did vote for Trump because only he could save us from destruction by these criminal hordes. That also carries some lessons.

But when we ask why Trump's strategy works, we find something deeper, which extends pretty much worldwide, with particularities from place to place. In conditions of economic distress, a sense of hopelessness, justified contempt for institutions, and understandable anger and resentment about what is being done to them, people can become easy prey to demagogues who direct their anger toward scapegoats, typically those even more vulnerable, and who foster the symptoms that tend to rise to the surface under such circumstances. That's been happening, worldwide. We see it in election after election in many countries, and in other ways.

In the U.S., working-class people have suffered 40 years of stagnation while wealth concentrates in very few hands, leading to staggering inequality. The Democrats have ignored all this, and worse, have carried forward the neoliberal policies that took off with Reagan and Thatcher and have imposed these consequences, by design. And for the designers, the neoliberal programs have been brilliantly successful, in ways that we need not review here.

Despite low unemployment, wage growth, after a rise in 2014-15, is now barely keeping up with inflation while corporate profits are skyrocketing, particularly for the predatory financial institutions, which emerged from the crisis for which they were responsible even richer and more powerful than before. A side effect is that the country's wealth is being shifted from R&D, innovation and product development, to financial trans-

actions in the interests of the very rich. Fine for them, but disastrous for the health and future of the society.

The concentration of wealth and enhancement of corporate power translate automatically to decline of democracy. Research in academic political science has revealed that a large majority of voters are literally disenfranchised, in that their own representatives pay no attention to their wishes but listen to the voices of the donor class. It is furthermore well established that elections are pretty much bought: electability, hence policy, is predictable with remarkable precision from the single variable of campaign spending, both for the executive and Congress. Thomas Ferguson's work is particularly revealing, going far back and including the 2016 election. And that is a bare beginning. Legislation is commonly shaped, even written, by corporate lobbyists, while representatives who sign it have their eyes on funding for the next election.

The midterms highlighted other ominous developments. The Republicans increased their Senate majority—with barely 40 percent of the votes cast. Right now, 60 senators are elected by states with 25 percent of the population, which means some 15 percent of the vote (mostly rural, white, religious, skeptical of science, heavily armed). And the tendency is increasing. It's hard to see how some form of civil conflict can be avoided unless the Democrats reverse course sharply and become a political party that doesn't simply abandon the working class to its bitter class enemy, as they have done for 40 years.

How do we explain the fact that while U.S. politics seems nastier, more polarized and more divided than any other time in recent history, both parties stay away from addressing the most critical issues facing the country and the world at large?

Chomsky: In 1895, the highly successful campaign manager Mark Hanna famously said: "There are two things that are important in politics. The first is money, and I can't remember what the second one is."

Those who control the wealth of the country have their own priorities, primarily self-enrichment and enhancement of decision-making power. And these are the priorities that prevail in a neoliberal democracy with the annoying public dismissed to the back rooms where they belong.

The CEOs of major banks surely understand the extraordinary threat of environmental catastrophe but are

Those who control the wealth of the country have their own priorities, primarily self-enrichment and enhancement of power

increasing investment in fossil fuels because that's where the money is. Like the energy corporations, they are hardly eager to support candidates warning of the serious crimes they are committing. Lockheed-Martin and its cohorts are quite happy to see vast increases in the military budget and are surely delighted with such declarations as the Trump administration's new National Defense Strategy, just released by the U.S. Institute of Peace (lacking a sense of irony, the bureaucracy is quite happy to caricature Orwell).

This somber document warns that our dangerously depleted military, which almost overwhelms the rest of the world combined, might not be able to prevail in a two-front war against Russia and China. Of course, neither military industry nor the distinguished authors of the report believe that such a war could even be fought without terminal destruction, but it's a great way to siphon taxpayer dollars away from absurdities like health and education and into the deserving pockets of the captains of industry and finance.

Not many political figures will dare to dismiss such awesome threats to our security.

As for the nastiness, it's largely a result of the drift to the right of both parties during the neoliberal years, the Democrats becoming what used to be called "moderate Republicans" (or often worse) and the Republicans drifting off the spectrum, with devotion to wealth and corporate power so extreme that they cannot possibly win elections on their actual policies. They have therefore been compelled to mobilize voting constituencies on "cultural issues," diverting attention away from actual policies. To keep them in line, it's natural for the leadership to demonize the political opposition as not merely wrong but intent on demolishing their most deeply held values—and for the latter to resort to contempt for the "deplorables." Soon antagonisms degenerate to warfare.

There are many illustrations of how the Republican leadership has sought to organize a voting constituency, some of which we've discussed before. One revealing case is abortion rights. In the 1960s, the Republican

Party was strongly pro-choice, including the leadership (Reagan, Ford, George H.W. Bush and others). Same with voters. In 1972, two-thirds of Republicans believed abortion to be a private matter, with no government involvement.

Nixon and his cohorts realized that they could attract the Catholic vote, traditionally Democratic, by adopting an anti-abortion plank. Later in the 1970s, evangelicals began to organize for political action. Among their demands was maintaining segregated schools. Republican operative Paul Weyrich recognized an opportunity. An open call for segregated schools wouldn't work, but if the Republican Party pretended to oppose abortion, it could pick up the huge evangelical vote, now a core part of Trump's voting base. The leadership accordingly shifted to passionate "pro-life" advocates, including those who it is sometimes believed had some character and honesty, like Bush I, who shifted along with the rest.

Meanwhile the actual constituency of the Republican Party remains great wealth and corporate power, even more dramatically so under Trump. It is quite an achievement to serve this actual constituency with dedication while maintaining a hold on the voting base. As their voting base shrinks, Republican leaders understand that the GOP is becoming a minority party, which is why they are so dedicated to finding modes of voter suppression and packing the courts with reactionaries who will support their efforts.

It should also be noted that popular opinion differs from the party leadership on many central issues. But as already mentioned, since the majority of the population is disenfranchised, it doesn't matter much. To take just one example, for 40 years of polling the population has strongly favored higher taxes on the rich—as taxes on the rich decline.

Bernie Sanders was re-elected to the Senate while his protégé Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez won a smashing victory over her Republican opponent for New York's 14th District and became, in fact, the youngest woman elected to Congress. In fact, there are now probably as many Democratic Socialists in the House as there are conservative Democrats, so the question is whether progressives should go on to form a third party or try to change the Democratic Party from within. What's your take on this matter?

But we should never forget that electoral politics, while not to be dismissed, should not be the prime focus of serious radical political action, which aims to change the basic institutions that undergird the political system, to dismantle hegemonic ideologies, and to help develop the kind of mass consciousness that must be the basis for badly—even desperately—needed social and political change

Chomsky: In the 18th century, with all of its extreme flaws, the U.S. constitutional system was a major step forward in democratic participation as compared with Europe. Even the concept "we the people," though grossly misleading, was a conceptual breakthrough. Over the years, however, by comparative standards the system increasingly ranks as quite regressive. It is doubtful, for example, that Europe would admit a country with the U.S. system as a new member. In particular, the system is radically rigged against any challenge to the governing duopoly. To develop a basis for a third party would require a serious and sustained effort in popular mobilization—not impossible, but not now on the horizon. There do seem to be possibilities to shift the character of the Democratic Party, at least back to its modern New Deal origins, and beyond (it already is considerably beyond in some respects as a result of the civilizing effect of the activism of the 1960s and its aftermath).

There are possibilities for development of independent parties, beginning at the local level, adopting fusion policies for more general elections, perhaps gaining enough traction to take part more actively in the political system. But we should never forget that electoral politics, while not to be dismissed, should not be the prime focus of serious radical political action, which aims to change the basic institutions that undergird the political system, to dismantle hegemonic ideologies, and to help develop the kind of mass consciousness that must be the basis for badly—even desperately—needed social and political change. **Z**

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FEATURE



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Global Oil Price Deflation 2018 & Beyond

By Jack Rasmus

One of the key characteristics of the 2008-2009 crash and its aftermath (i.e. chronic slow recovery in U.S. and double and triple dip recessions in Europe and Japan) was a significant deflation in prices of global oil. After attaining a price of well over \$100 a barrel in 2007-2008, crude oil prices plummeted, hitting a low of only \$27 a barrel in January 2016. They slowly but steadily rose again in 2016-2017 and peaked at about \$80 a barrel this past summer 2018. Now the retreat has started once again, falling to a low of \$55 in October and remaining around \$56 today, likely to fall further in 2019 now that Japan and Europe appear to be entering yet another recession and U.S. growth almost certainly

slowing significantly in 2019. With the potential for a U.S. recession rising in late 2019, oil price deflation may continue into the near future. What will this mean for the global and U.S. economies?

The critical question is what is the relationship between global oil price deflation, financial instability and crises, and recession?—something mainstream economists don't understand very well. Is the current rapid retreat of oil prices since August 2018 an indicator of more fundamental forces underway in the global and U.S. economy? Will oil price deflation exacerbate, or even accelerate, the drift toward recession globally now underway? What about financial asset markets stability

in general? What can be learned from the 2008 through 2015 experience?

In my 2016 book, *Systemic Fragility in the Global Economy* and its chapter on deflation's role in crises, I explained that oil is not just a commodity but, since the 1990s, has functioned as an important financial asset whose price affects other forms of financial assets (stocks, bonds, derivatives, currencies, etc.). Financial asset price volatility in general (bubbles and deflation) have a greater impact on the real economy than mainstream economists, who generally don't understand financial markets and cycles, think. Hence they don't understand how financial cycles interact with real business cycles. This applies as well to their understanding of oil prices as financial asset prices, not just commodity prices.

OIL PRICE DEFLATION REVISITED 2018

Oil is a commodity whose price is determined by the interaction of supply and demand, but it is also a financial asset the price of which is determined by global finance capitalists' speculation in oil futures markets and the competition between various forms of financial assets globally, for the new global finance capital elite (also addressed in the book) look at the returns on investment (e.g. profits) from financial asset investing globally—choosing between oil futures, stocks, bonds, derivatives, currencies, real estate on a worldwide basis.

The price of crude oil futures drives the price of crude oil in the short- and medium-term, as a commodity as speculators bet on oil supply and demand, and the relative price of other types of financial assets in part also determine the demand of oil speculators for oil futures.

What this means is that simply applying supply and demand analysis to determine the direction of crude oil prices globally is not sufficient. Neither supply nor demand has changed since August 2018 by 30 percent to explain the 30 percent drop in crude oil to its current mid-\$50s range; nor will it explain where oil prices will go in 2019. Nevertheless, that's what we hear from economists today trying to explain the recent drop or predict the trajectory of global oil price deflation in 2019.

WHAT MAINSTREAM ECONOMISTS DON'T UNDERSTAND

Mainstream economists are indoctrinated in the idea that only supply and demand determine prices. It harkens back to the influence of classical economics of the 18th century and Adam Smith. Supply and demand are the appearance of price determination. What matters are the forces behind, beneath and below that cause the changes in supply and demand. Those forces are the real determinants. But mainstream economists typically deal at the surface of appearances, which is why their forecasts of economic directions in the medium- and longer-term are so poor.

Looking at recent explanations and analyses by mainstream economists, and their echo in the business media, we get the following view:

First, it is clear that there are three major sources of oil supply globally today: U.S. production driven by technology and the shale fracking revolution. Second, Russian production. Third, OPEC, within which is Saudi Arabia and its allies, UAE, Kuwait, etc. Each produce about 10-11 million barrels per day (bpd).

Since this summer, U.S. fracking has resulted in roughly an additional 670,000 barrels a day by October compared to last July 2018. Both Saudi and Russian production has added roughly 700,000 more each, respectively. Offsetting the supply increase, in part, has been a reduction in output by Venezuela and Iran—both driven by U.S. sanctions and, in the case of Venezuela, U.S. longer-term efforts to prevent the upgrading and maintenance of Venezuelan production.

The more than 2 million bpd increase in global crude oil supply by the global oil troika of U.S.-Russia-Saudi has, on the surface, appeared as a collapse in global oil prices from \$80 to \$55, or about 30 percent in just a few months. Projections are that supply increases will drive global oil prices still lower in 2019: U.S. forecasts for 2019 are for an average of 12.06 million bpd; for Russia an average of 11.4 million bpd; and for Saudi an average of 10.6 million bpd (sources: EIA and OPEC secretariat).

DEMAND & SUPPLY AS MERE APPEARANCE

So the appearance is that supply will drive global oil prices still lower in 2019. But what about demand? Will the forces behind it drive oil price deflation even further? And what about other financial asset markets'

price deflation? Will declines in stock, bond, derivatives, and currencies prices result in financial capitalist investors increasing their demand for oil futures as they shift investing from the collapse of values in those financial markets to oil? Or will it reduce their investing in oil futures as other financial asset markets prices deflate, as a psychological contagion effect spreads across financial asset markets in general, oil futures included?

While mainstreamers focus on and argue that pure supply considerations will predict the price of oil, my analysis insists that a deeper consideration of forces are necessary. What's driving, and will continue to drive, oil prices are politics, other financial markets' price deflation, and demand that will be driven by renewed recessions in the major advanced economies (Europe, Japan, then U.S., and continued GDP slowdown in China).

As global economic growth slows, now clearly underway, more than half of the world's oil producers will increase oil production. Russia, Venezuela, Iraq, smaller African and Asia producers, are dependent on oil sales to finance much of their government budgets. As real growth slows, and recessions appear or worsen, deficits will rise further requiring more government revenues from oil sales. What these countries can't generate in revenues from prices they will attempt to generate from more sales volume. Even Saudi Arabia has entered this group, as it seeks to generate more revenue to finance the development of its non energy-based economy plans.

So Russia and much of OPEC—for political reasons—will increase supply because of slowing economies—i.e. because of Demand originally and supply only secondarily. As the global economy continues to slow demand forces trump those of supply. But the two are clearly mutually determined. It's just that demand has now become more determining and will remain so into 2019.

DEBT AS A DRIVER OF GLOBAL OIL DEFLATION

But what's ultimately behind the demand forces at work? In the U.S., it's technology, the fracking revolution, driving down the cost of oil production and thus its price. It's also corporate debt, often of the junk quality, that has financed the investment behind the oil production output rise. Drillers are loaded with junk bond debt, often short term, that they must pay for, or soon roll over now at a higher interest rate in 2019 and

beyond. They must produce and sell more oil to pay for the new technology-driven investment of recent years. And as the price falls they must produce and sell still more to generate the revenue to pay the interest and principal on that debt.

So is it really supply, or is it more fundamentally the debt and technology that's driving U.S. shale output, that in turn is adding to downward global price pressures? Is it supply or is it the way that supply has been financed by capitalist markets?

Similarly, in the case of Russia and much of OPEC, is it supply or is it the need of those countries to finance their government growing debt loads (and budgets in general) by generating more sales revenue from more oil output, even as the price of oil falls and thereby threatens that oil revenue stream?

Whether at the corporate or government level, the acceleration of debt in recent years is behind the forces driving excess oil production and supply that appears the cause of the emerging oil price deflation.

POLITICS AS A DRIVER

Domestic and global politics is another related force in some cases. Clearly, Russia is engaged in an increase in its military research and other military-related government expenditures. Its governing elite is convinced the U.S. is preparing to challenge its political independence: NATO penetration of the Baltics and Poland, the U.S.-encouraged coup in the Ukraine, past U.S. ventures in Georgia, etc., has led to Russian acceleration of its military expenditures. To continue its investment as the U.S. attempts to impose further sanctions (designed to cut Russia connections with Europe in particular), and as Russia's economy slows as it raises its domestic interest rates in order to protect its currency, Russia must produce and sell more oil globally. It thus generates more demand for its oil competitively by lowering its price and demand for Russian oil increases—but not due to natural economic causes as the world economy slows. It increases because it shifts oil demand from other producers to itself.

Saudi politics are also in part behind its planned production increase. It has stepped up its military expenditures as well, both for its war in Yemen and its plans for a future conflict with Iran. The Saudi government investment in domestic infrastructure also requires it to generate more oil revenue in the short term. The recent Russian-Saudi (OPEC) agreement to reduce or hold oil

The driver of oil prices since July 2018 must be financial speculation in oil futures

production steady has been a phony agreement, as actual and planned oil production numbers clearly reveal.

Not least, there's the question of global financial asset markets in decline with falling asset prices and how that impacts the oil commodity futures financial asset market. Once again, changes in oil supply and demand simply do not fluctuate by 30 percent in just a couple of months. The driver of oil prices since July 2018 must be financial speculation in oil futures.

Here it may be argued that investors are factoring in the slowing global economy, especially in Europe and Japan, in coming months. They may be shifting investment out of oil futures as a speculative price play, and into U.S. currency and even stocks and bonds. Or into financial asset markets in China. Or speculating on returns in select emerging market currencies and stocks that have stabilized in the short term and may rise in value, producing a nice speculative gain in the short run. The new global finance capital elite looks at competitive returns globally, in all financial asset markets. It moves its money around quickly, from one asset play to another, enabled by technology, past removal of controls on global money capital flows, easy borrowing, and ability to move quickly in and out of what is a complex network of highly liquid financial asset markets worldwide. As it sees global demand and politics playing important short-term roles in global oil price declines, it shifts investment out of oil futures and into other forms of financial assets elsewhere in the global economy. Less supply of money capital for investing in oil futures reduces demand for oil futures, which reduces demand for oil and crude oil prices in general.

CONCLUSION

What this foregoing discussion and analysis suggests is the following:

- Looking at oil supply solely or even primarily is to look at appearances only.
- But supply and demand analyses of oil prices are also superficial analyses of appearances. They are intermediate causal factors at best.
- What matters are real forces that more fundamentally determine supply and demand.

- Politics, technology, and debt financing are more fundamental forces driving supply and demand in the intermediate and longer run.
- Oil is not just a commodity, since the 1990s especially; it has become a financial asset whose price is determined in the short run increasingly by speculative investing shifts by global finance capital elites.
- As financial assets, oil prices are determined in the short run globally by the relative price of other competing financial assets and their prices.
- The structure of the global economy in the 21st century is such that a new global finance capital elite has arisen, betting on a wide choice of financial assets available in highly liquid financial asset markets, across which the elite moves investments quickly and easily due to new enabling technologies and past deregulation of cross-country money capital flows.

To summarize, as it appears increasingly that politics (domestic budgets and revenue needs, U.S. sanctions, rising military expenditures, trade wars, etc.) and a slowing global economy are causing downward pressure on oil demand and thus oil prices, this price pressure is exacerbated by a corresponding increase in production and supply as a result of rising corporate and government debt and debt-servicing needs. However, in the very short run of weekly and monthly price change, it is global oil speculators betting on further oil price deflation and shifting asset investment returns elsewhere that is the primary driver of global oil deflation.

Global oil prices are determined by other financial asset market price deflation underway in the short term, and in turn determine in part price deflation in other financial asset markets. Global oil prices cannot be understood apart from understanding what's happening with other financial asset markets and prices. Understanding and predicting oil prices is thus not simply an exercise in superficial supply and demand analysis, and even less so an exercise primarily in forecasting announcements of production output plans by the big three troika of U.S.-Russia-Saudi. **Z**

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FEATURE



*Protesters at Arc de Triomphe during the Yellow Vests protest against Macron, photo by Guillaume Louyot Onickz
Artworks/Shutterstock.com*

“We Are Not Tired”

By Richard Greeman

Is the Yellow Vest rebellion, now in its seventh week, “petering out?” Such was the near-unanimous pronouncement of the mainstream media, when I returned home to Montpellier, France, eager to participate and to observe first-hand this popular insurrection which I had been afraid of missing.

I needn’t have worried. By 9:00 AM on Saturday morning (December 22), hundreds of Yellow Vest demonstrators were gathering for a peaceful march to the Préfecture (local seat of government) chanting “We’re not tired” and carrying placards reading “We are not casseurs (vandals) or pyromaniacs. Peaceful.”

The mood was bon enfant (“jolly”) with demonstrators en famille including children and old folks in wheelchairs. Marching ten abreast, they filled the rue de la Loge, but when they arrived at the Préfecture, the police, apparently taunted by some radicals in the crowd, let loose with teargas, injuring children. Then all hell broke loose and continued all day, with marches, countermarches and gas in the air.

This indiscriminate use of gas was typical of the government’s tactic of preventing mass peaceful demonstrations by provoking violence and spreading fear. For example, “black bloc” casseurs and rock throwers have been identified as undercover police by eyewitnesses and on videos. This was apparently the case on Saturday at the Montpellier Préfecture.

Meanwhile, my wife and I were out with the Yellow Vests at the main roundabout into Montpellier, where two-thirds of the passing drivers were displaying yellow vests, giving the high-sign, or honking their approval. So much for the Yellow Vests decline in popularity. The sign we were handed shows the word “Republic” crossed out and replaced by “Direct Democracy. The Divorce is Consummated.” Then: “Inform yourselves by Internet. 99% media owned by billionaires.” At the same time, we were getting regular cellphone reports from downtown of tear-gassing continuing all day, capped by the triumphal arrival of more than 80 Yellow Vest motorcyclists who took over the main square as evening fell.

Similar actions, on a larger scale, were taking place in Paris, where, in a successful ruse, the Yellow Vest Facebook page convinced the police that they were going to attack the royal chateau out at Versailles, where hundreds of CRS riot police were moved. In fact, the Yellow Vests organized a last-minute, fast-moving wildcat march that began in Montmartre, snaked through the capital ahead of the police, and was only stopped at Macron’s Elysée Palace, heavily invested by the “forces of order.” At the very same time, the National Assembly in Paris was hastily approving a “Yellow Vest Law” designed to recognize their protesters’ grievances and embarrass President Macron, a number of whose party members voted with the majority. A measure of the President’s popularity.

SMALLER NUMBERS

The sure, the Yellow Vest demonstrations in Paris and the provinces yesterday and last Saturday (De-

cember 15) were smaller than the previous four Saturdays. The reasons for this decline are obvious:

- 1. Massive police violence;
- 2. The concessions already won from President Macron (who had vowed never to make any);
- 3. The shocking December 11 terrorist killings in Strasbourg;
- 4. The pro-government bias of the media, and;
- 5. Winter vacation (sacred in France).

So I’m not sure this decline in numbers means the movement is “petering out”—as the talking heads in mainstream media keep proclaiming with undisguised relief.

In any case, one thing is certain: the French establishment, non-plussed by an incomprehensible leaderless movement which refuses to be coopted back into the system, has reacted crudely with an onslaught of violence and lies. Although partly successful, these repressive tactics have also backfired in a serious way, depriving the French political class, already weak and divided, of its legitimacy and threatening its hegemony. Let’s take a closer look at this campaign of state repression and establishment propaganda.

I. Violence

The unprecedented violence unleashed by the “forces of order” over the previous five Saturday gatherings, invisible in the mainstream media, has been taking its toll on activists, as videos of police brutality and hideous injuries circulate on YouTube, on alternative new sites like Médiapart, and through the Yellow Vest Facebook pages.

These new tactics, officially named PROJECT FEAR, were explicitly designed to intimidate. So are the harsh sentences imposed on Yellow Vest demonstrators arrested as casseurs (vandals) for as little as possessing bike helmets, gas masks, and ski goggles considered “evidence” of “conspiracy” and “intention to attack the forces of order.” These items are now so common, that the local Bricorama (Home Depot) strategically displays ski goggles right next to yellow emergency vests, yet such demonstrators are routinely herded straight from the street into Room 24, a 24-hour emergency courtroom where they are sent to jail after summary trials.

From the very beginning of the movement on November 27, Yellow Vests have been systematically repressed by the government through massive use of teargas, flash bombs, pepper spray, water canons and police truncheons. In a report, Human Rights Watch said that France's "crowd-control methods maim people," pointing to cases where protesters were wounded by rubber projectiles and teargas grenades. At the same time, the mainstream media systematically played up vandalism

against property (windows broken, cars burned) during demonstrations—while failing to expose indiscriminate police brutality and the many serious injuries including the murder of an 80-year-old Arab woman hit in the head with a flashball while attempting to shutter her balcony windows. (There are some gruesome videos which you may not want to look at showing what happens when police are licensed to deliberately aim their flashball and gas grenades at people's faces.)

Given the demographics of the more-than-3,000 people arrested thus far, few fit the stereotype of young, black-clad casseurs and fascists, whom the government and media blame for the violence. Many of



The author (middle) at a Yellow Vest protest

de-legitimizing their authors. The contrast between official reports and those of eyewitnesses and videos on Facebook is too glaring. The narrative is always about demonstrators violently "attacking police," however not a single injured police officer has been seen on TV.

Having seen French CRS riot squad Robocops from close up, it seems to me demonstrators fighting with them (like we did with their ill-equipped predecessor in 1968) would be like ragged peasants with clubs going up against knights in full armor.

Macron's militarized state over-reaction to a mass political demonstration breaks with a long tradition of

them, provincials, had in fact come out to protest (and gone to Paris) for the first time in their lives. The Yellow Vests I have seen here in Montpellier appeared mostly middle-aged. They, and their Parisian counterparts, don't look a bit like the typical black bloc "anarchists" who are visible on countless videos and who somehow never seem to get arrested—although some have been filmed climbing aboard police vehicles.

This contradiction might be one explanation for why, despite all attempts to castigate them as "perpetrators of unacceptable violence," the government's and media's ongoing rhetoric about security has been quite ineffective. Indeed, it has mainly succeeded in

tolerance for muscled demonstrations by rowdy angry farmers and militant labor unions. A tolerance Macron, in speeches, has blamed for the failure of previous governments to pass needed pro-business counter-reforms.

2. LIES: THE MONARCH ADDRESSES HIS PEOPLE

On Monday evening December 10, after a month of silence in the face of massive rejection of his neo-liberal policies and arrogant, condescending personality, Macron finally went on TV with a lame pre-recorded speech combining threats and concessions. The “Jupiterian” President began by blaming all the violence on the protesters (“we have all seen them attacking the police”) and threatening them with severe punishment (“no indulgence”) if they persist. For the Yellow Vests, this was throwing gasoline on the fire, as everyone who had participated in the protests or had seen the horrendous videos of the systematic police mayhem deliberately unleashed by Macron knew he was lying.

“The President of the rich” then went on to admit that the protesters may have had a legitimate point. “We” (the royal “we”?) “may have forgotten the single mother struggling to make ends meet” and the other little people. Macron then condescended to propose “a national conversation, which I will coordinate,” including even local mayors, about the social/economic crisis. He also made few economic concessions.

These included rescinding his new taxes on social security retirement for some retirees with very low incomes, elimination of taxes on paid overtime, a call on businesses to voluntarily give a year-end bonus to their employees, and a year-end 100€ (\$115) raise in the minimum wage.

On closer examination by the Yellow Vests, this “raise” turned out to be “smoke and mirrors.” First, it applied to only some low-wage workers. Second, it was not really a raise in the hourly wage, but in fact a government bonus to encourage “active” workers, which did not include benefits and was to be paid for out of the workers’ taxes, essential moving money from one pocket to another. “Don’t give us words, give us figures” one Yellow Vest told me, infuriated at being taken for a fool.

In his address, the monarchical President pointedly refused to pronounce the words “Yellow Vests” and

“ecology” or to re-establish the Tax on Great Fortunes to pay for these concessions. Macron’s offer of crumbs from the table of the rich was immediately rejected as “too little, too late” by the Yellow Vests, who continued calling for Macron’s resignation and a bottom-up reorganization of French democracy.

3. THE STRASBOURG KILLINGS

Concerning Macron’s speech to the nation, Susan Ram suggests that, “two elements merit particular concern. Firstly, his inclusion of the phrase ‘laïcité bousculée’ (‘secularism buffeted or overturned’) in his analysis of the ills of current French society. Secondly, his reference to the ‘profound identity’ of the nation and the need, in this context, to ‘tackle’ the question of immigration. Both comments seem suggestive of an effort to inject racist and xenophobic themes into the Yellow Vest movement, the better to divide it while simultaneously making it appear that the state is listening to right-wing grievances. Indeed, from the beginning the Yellow Vests, given their origins in la France Profonde (middle France) have been smeared by the media (and rejected by much of the Left) as right-wing and racist, despite videos showing them forcefully ejecting members of Le Pen’s National Front from their march.”

Events in Strasbourg just a day after Macron’s speech opened up further opportunities for divisive propaganda. As Ram continues: “The killing of four people, and injuring of a dozen or so others, by a lone radicalized Islamist gunman at the city’s popular Christmas market predictably became grist to state efforts to undermine and divide the Yellow Vest uprising. A sequence of senior government ministers and regional officials called on protestors to call a halt, optimistically invoking the ‘exhaustion’ of the security forces as an argument likely to melt the hearts of Yellow Vests subjected to baton charges, tear gas, rubber bullets and more. The education minister, Jean-Michel Blanquer, expressed his horror at ‘vile’ social media posts suggesting the government had exaggerated (or worse) the Strasbourg attack in order to deflect attention away from the protest movement. On cue, the mainstream media plunged into a smear-the-protestors feeding frenzy.”



Demonstrators with yellow vests ("gilets jaunes" in french) protest against the increase of fuel cost, excessive living costs and high rate of taxes, photo by Gerard Bottino/Shutterstock.com

4. THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

Workaholic U.S. readers may have difficulty taking in the seriousness of holidays in this country, which mandates five full weeks of vacation per year, where family ties remain strong enough so that children are routinely sent to their grandparents for the Winter holiday, where train reservations are all booked up months in advance and where no place is farther than four hours from Paris.

The first paid vacations were won by the French workers at the end of the 1936 national wave of sit-in strikes, and newsreels of the departures that August of Parisian worker families who had never seen the sea are part of the national narrative. Impending summer vacations were also partly responsible for the eventual collapse of the inspiring May-June 1968 student-worker rebellion. The French police have taken advantage of this factor to forcibly remove the makeshift shelters and barbecues that had been a convivial feature of the Yellow Vest presence at roundabouts and toll-booths. Yet there were still a few Yellow Vests at the main roundabout here in Montpellier on Christmas

eve, and a downtown rally announced on Saturday, December 29, came off peacefully, although there was gas elsewhere. Meanwhile, Yellow Vests descended onto the tracks at the Montpellier railroad station and blocked trains.

WHY FRANCE'S "SILENT MAJORITY" IS MAD AS HELL

Like all the spontaneous mass uprisings that dot French history going back to feudal times, the Yellow Vest revolt was initially provoked by unfair taxes. Spurning all established political parties, and unions, the Yellow Vests got organized on social media and acted locally. The broadcast media, although highly critical, spread the news nationally, and the movement spread across France, blocking intersections, filtering motorists, allowing free passage at highway tollbooths, and gathering to demonstrate, more and more numerous and militant, on successive Saturdays.

Why Saturdays? "I can't go on strike," explains one woman. "I'm raising three kids alone. My job, that's all I have left. Coming on Saturdays is the only way for me to show my anger." Women are present in unusu-

ally large numbers in these crowds, and they are angry about a lot more than the tax on diesel. Like Trump, Macron has showered corporations and millionaires with huge tax cuts, creating a hole in the budget which he has compensated by cuts in public services (hospitals, schools, transit, police) and by tax increases for ordinary people (up to 40 percent of their income), large numbers of whom are struggling hard to make ends meet and going into debt.

This anger has been building since last Spring, the 50th anniversary of the 1968 worker-student uprising, but was frustrated when Macron won the stand-off with labor over his neo-liberal, pro-business counter-reforms. This labor defeat was facilitated by the leadership of the CGT and other unions, who played the same negative role in the 1968 sell-out to de Gaulle. Although workers have been active in the Yellow Vest movement, which fights for traditional labor goals like higher minimum wage, public services, etc., the French labor leaders have shunned them as petty-bourgeois potential fascists. These union bureaucrats see the Yellow Vests, accurately, as competitors and a threat to their own hegemonic status as official representatives of the workers, especially after Macron's "concessions."

On December 6, in direct response to an appeal for calm from Macron, the leaders of the CGT and all the other labor federations except for Solidarité signed a Déclaration of solidarity—not with the injured and arrested demonstrators, but with the Macron government as the representative of the peaceful republican order. In return for what many have described as a "betrayal," these professional negotiators accepted Macron's invitation to "resume the social dialogue"—that is to sit at the table with him and negotiate more "give backs" of workers' rights. The next day, contradicting themselves, the CGT's Martinez and the other union leaders called for a national labor demonstration on Friday, December 14 covering the same basic economic demands as the Yellow Vests but not on the same day, Saturday, December 15.

Needless to say, only a few stalwarts came out for Martinez' much touted demonstration. Yet clearly, only with the active participation of France's organized workers can this broad popular movement succeed—for example through a general strike—in bringing the capitalist class to its knees and founding a new social order.

WHAT NEXT?

So apparently the Yellow Vest movement is not exactly "petering out." After six weeks of daily road-blocks and disruptions in every corner of France, and after six (now seven) successive mass demonstrations of hundreds of thousands in Paris and the provinces, violently repressed, this spontaneous, self-organized rebellion, coordinated via social media, is still seriously challenging the political and economic order in France.

Not only has this rebellion persisted despite unprecedented police brutality, media misrepresentation, and rejection by labor union officials, it has retained its grass-roots popularity and deepened its goals—from an initial rejection of a tax increase on diesel fuel to explicit rejection of the established political/economic system and to near-unanimous call for the resignation of Macron and the creation of a new kind of democracy via referendum or constitutional convention.

Moreover, the French students have joined the uprising, protesting Macron's introduction of anti-democratic selection in college admissions, with 170 high schools disrupted in answer to the "Black Tuesday" appeal by their union. There has also been a revival of strikes and protests among civil servants, nurses and educators, all inspired by the Yellow Vests' success in wringing concessions from Macron, whose onslaught of pro-business, neo-liberal counter-reforms organized labor, hamstrung by its collaborationist leaders, failed to stop last Spring. The apparent rift with the ecological movement has been breached as demonstrations from the two movements combined in action under the slogan "End of the Month/End of the World: Same Cause/Same Enemy." Likewise, marchers from the feminist "End Violence Against Women" have been honored and welcomed by the Yellow Vests.

Meanwhile, the epidemic of Yellow Vest-inspired revolts has spread to Belgium, Great Britain, Portugal, Holland, Hungary, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt and beyond, recalling the Internet-propagated contagion of the 2011 Arab Spring and "Occupy" movements and even provoking the Egyptian military government to ban the sale of yellow emergency vests. But the numbers are smaller.

Clearly, to achieve ultimate success this spontaneous, self-organized, uprising of the 99% against the 1% will have to unite internationally as well as to continue to deepen itself, to grow and to mutate—like similar



Riot Police used a water canon and tear gas against demonstrators, photo by Alexandros Michailidis/Shutterstock.com

popular movements in the history of France from the Jacqueries of the Middle Age through the Sans-culottes of 1789, the social-republicans of 1848, the Communards of 1871. Armed with social media on which to coordinate mass actions and to debate goals and methods from the local to the national and international levels, there is no technical reason why this self-organized insurrection cannot surpass the uncoordinated movements of 2011 and take root everywhere. So far, as far as France is concerned, the missing political elements are the full participation of the industrial working class and of the North African and African immigrant population, which have not yet showed up en masse. Only the future will tell how far this movement will go, but already its achievements are impressive and permanent:

- > 1. The Yellow Vests have succeeded in unmasking and discrediting Macron, the neo-liberal wunderkind who was supposed to Thatcherize France and is now so hated that the remaining years of his mandate are in question.
- > 2. The Yellow Vests have also unmasked and discredited the mass media, particularly television net-

works, which had supposedly hypnotized the ignorant masses who now see them as corrupt, overpaid propagandists for the billionaire class.

- > 3. The Yellow Vests have also succeeded—wonder of wonders—in unmasking and discrediting the hegemonic myth of representative “democracy” with its unrepresentative “political class” of professional politicians of right left and center. These genies can never again be put back in the bottle.

Amazing achievements for a movement that is only seven weeks old and still growing. The hegemony of the French ruling classes is hanging by slender threads of increasingly counter-productive violence and lies. The French popular masses, already famous for their anger and cynicism, are furious at being taken for fools by their betters and joyful at feeling their own strength and solidarity. No one knows where all this will end. **Z**

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FEATURE



Hundreds of young people occupy Representative offices to pressure the new Congress to support a committee for a Green New Deal, photo by Rachael Warriner/Shutterstock.com

Climate Jobs for All

Building Block for the Green New Deal

By Jeremy Brecher

It was an iconic moment: young people occupy Representative Nancy Pelosi's office demanding a Green New Deal to put millions of people to work making a climate-safe economy, when suddenly newly elected Congressional representative and over-

night media star Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez joins them with a resolution in hand to establish a Select Committee for a Green New Deal. But those who actually read her resolution closely may have been puzzled—or stunned—by its call for “a jobs guarantee

program to assure a living wage job to every person who wants one.” What is a “jobs guarantee program” and what does it have to do with protecting the climate?

The federal jobs guarantee (JG) is a concept also known as “jobs for all” and the federal government as “employer of last resort.” It envisions a federal program somewhat like the New Deal’s Works Progress Administration (WPA) that would provide funds for non-profit organizations, local governments, and other agencies serving the public to employ anyone who wants a job at a wage roughly comparable to the demands of the Fight for \$15 campaign. According to columnist Jonathan Chait, the jobs guarantee plan “has materialized almost out of nowhere and ascended nearly to the status of Democratic Party doctrine.”

The advocates of JG generally include climate protection as one of many types of work beneficial to the public that might be included in a jobs guarantee program. However, they generally have not said how such a program might specifically address the climate emergency.

This May, Varshini Prakash and Sarah Meyerhoff, two leaders of the youth climate movement Sunrise, wrote an article titled, “It’s Time for the Climate Movement to Embrace a Federal Jobs Guarantee.” They called for a policy through which “the government directly employs anyone who wants a job but doesn’t have one.” They argued that a jobs guarantee program with a strong focus on stopping and preparing for climate change might “quickly marshal public support and resources behind climate action.”

Sunrise is a youth climate movement that aims to “stop climate change and create millions of good jobs in the process.” It has been taking the lead on efforts to combine climate protection with a federal jobs guarantee. Other groups like the Sierra Club, Demos, 350.org, the Center for Popular Democracy, the Labor Network for Sustainability, and the US Climate Action Network have also been discussing the climate jobs guarantee (CJG).

The CJG appears to have popular support. Polling firm Civis Analytics says a jobs guarantee is one of the most popular issues they’ve ever polled: 52 percent in support and 29 percent opposed. Polling by Sunrise indicates that support for a jobs guarantee focused on climate protection is even more popular. Prakash and Meyerhoff say a climate jobs guarantee could be the

climate movement’s “Medicare-for-All” policy—“a universal program big enough to address the massive and complicated crisis of climate change, but still tangible and popular among the vast majority of Americans.”

The climate jobs guarantee has also been finding political support. Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) is developing a jobs guarantee proposal; many Democratic candidates and presidential hopefuls have supported the idea. It was projected into the 2018 campaign and is likely to play an even greater role in 2020. Evan Weber of Sunrise says the group’s top goal for the next two years is to “Push JG to the top of the political agenda.”

Sunrise’s “Climate Jobs Guarantee Policy Primer” concludes that by “making a Jobs Guarantee a headline demand for the climate movement” we can “end the ‘jobs vs. environment’ fallacy forever”; rally “unprecedented public support behind climate action”; and “ensure that JG proposals include jobs for a just and rapid transition to a zero-carbon, climate-resilient economy.”

THE JOBS GUARANTEE

The discussion of a jobs guarantee has been largely based on an April 2018 working paper by Pavlina R. Tcherneva of the Levy Economics Institute of Bard College called “The Job Guarantee: Design, Jobs, and Implementation” and the report, “The Federal Job Guarantee – A Policy to Achieve Permanent Full Employment” by Mark Paul, William Darity, Jr., and Darrick Hamilton commissioned by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

A federal jobs guarantee will provide jobs for all who want them in their own communities performing socially useful work. It will be established by federal legislation, funded by the federal government, and run under the jurisdiction of the Department of Labor. It will be primarily administered by local and municipal governments, nonprofits, social enterprises, and cooperatives. In some ways it resembles the New Deal’s Works Progress Administration (WPA), but in contrast it is a permanent program, though its size can be expected to vary depending on economic conditions and social needs.

The JG will not exclude any individual or group of people who want to work. It will make whatever special provisions are necessary to employ veterans, at-risk youth, ex-convicts, people with disabilities, and other people with special needs and/or barriers to employ-

ment. Like the WPA, it will fit jobs to people, providing employment that is appropriate to their education, skill, and experience. It will provide part-time and flexible work arrangements for those who need them.

The jobs provided by this program will pay an estimated \$15 per hour plus benefits, including health insurance. “Because it guarantees that every person who wishes to work can find a public-option job with a living wage-benefit package,” the JG “establishes the labor standard that must be met by all employers in the private, public, or nonprofit sectors,” ensuring that “no working person would live in poverty.” It will provide education, training, and apprenticeship opportunities.

The JG will establish “community jobs banks” which find and list available and potential jobs in the communities where they are needed. It will create the greatest number of jobs in communities with the greatest number of people needing work, and will target those groups that have been deprived of fair access to good jobs. The JG will assess community needs and resources to “match unfilled community needs with unemployed or underemployed people who could work to meet them.” It will include programs to protect and improve the environment.

The JG is a new program that does not replace existing programs. People will have a choice between receiving unemployment insurance, welfare benefits, or working under the JG program. JG is an employment program, not a workfare program that requires people to work in order to receive other benefits to which they are entitled like Medicaid, SNAP, or Head Start. It does not displace existing public or private sector work.

The estimated direct cost of providing jobs for all is 1.3 percent to 2.4 percent of GDP. This is about half of what we now spend on Social Security and half of what we spend on Medicare and Medicaid. The JG will greatly reduce unemployment, welfare, and other benefit programs, so its net cost will be somewhere between 0.8 percent and 2 percent of GDP. That’s not counting additional savings from reduced unemployment, substance abuse, health-related costs for uninsured individuals, and suicide.

Tcherneva points out that this program is an investment in the public good. It “separates the offer of employment” from “the profitability of employment.” Projects are “created to serve community needs,” rather than “prioritizing whether the projects are deemed ‘profitable’ in the narrow sense.”

WHY A CLIMATE JOBS GUARANTEE?

A climate jobs guarantee proposes a jobs guarantee program that is geared to the transition to a climate-safe, fossil-free economy. It will accomplish four principal objectives:

1. Justice. The JG provides a powerful weapon against poverty, inequality, and injustice. It will eliminate poverty among nearly all who want to work by providing a living wage and benefits to everyone who will take a job. Because the program is open to all, it ensures that those who have been most excluded from remunerative employment for whatever reason are guaranteed a job with benefits at an above-poverty level. It therefore has the greatest beneficial impact on the most marginalized and discriminated-against people. By lifting up those who have been at the bottom economically it directly reduces inequality. The program is designed to further realize these objectives through recruitment, training, and job design focused on those who have been excluded from good jobs.

The JG, unlike many social policies that aim to “raise the bottom,” will directly benefit the millions of people who are currently outside the workforce. These people do not show up in unemployment statistics; they only show up in the shrinking proportion of Americans who are in the labor force. These people have little reason to hope they can make a living through a job. The jobs guarantee will provide them both the opportunity and the incentive to join the workforce.

The JG will also provide jobs with benefits for the millions who are unemployed or involuntarily working only part time. This will benefit not only those who have been laid off from steady jobs, but the larger number of workers for whom intermittent involuntary unemployment is the norm.

The JG will drive up the wage floor in the rest of the economy since workers who are paid less than \$15 an hour plus benefits can shift to the JG program. That enormously increases their bargaining power and means that employers must pay a comparable wage-benefit package to retain their workforce. The JG is therefore an effective means to achieve the objectives of the Fight for \$15.

The JG will help increase all workers’ power by strengthening their ability to organize and bargain collectively. It should be designed to create a sector of the

economy that guarantees worker protections and standards, including workers' right to organize, bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, engage in concerted action, and retain their Constitutional rights on the job. It will eliminate the proverbial "long line of job seekers outside the employer's door" that undermines the power of workers to effectively bargain with employers.

2. Climate protection and other public purposes.

The climate jobs guarantee, by drawing millions of people into the workforce, will provide the labor power needed for an emergency mobilization to transition to a fossil free, climate safe economy, as well as to meet a wide range of other public purposes. In this it resembles the home front mobilization in World War II through which the war effort was able to meet its need for millions of workers. Without such an increase in the available workforce, the creation of millions of climate jobs will be stymied through labor shortage leading to uncontrolled inflation. The CJG will provide work experience and training that will allow its participants to move into higher skilled, higher wage jobs in the private and public sectors.

In addition to climate protection, workers in the JG program will also be able to provide for a wide range of needs that can help reduce injustice and create a better way of life for all. These range from education to housing to environmental protection and improvement. The WPA produced schools, parks, post offices, and other amenities that we still celebrate today. The JG can do the same.

3. Countering economic cycles. For many advocates of a jobs guarantee, a primary purpose is to counter the economic cycles of boom and bust. In times of recession, the millions of people thrown out of work not only constitute a monstrous accumulation of injustice and human misery; their loss of income leads to a decrease in effective demand (aka purchasing power) that aggravates the downward spiral of the economy. The JG automatically counteracts this tendency by employing a high proportion of those who have lost their jobs, thus maintaining their incomes and the economy's effective demand. When the economy expands, many workers will choose to leave the JG for better jobs, providing an expanded workforce for the private and public sectors. JG workers who are needed for climate protection and other essential activities can then transfer to other sectors.

4. Economic democratization. The JG provides a way to challenge our society's growing democracy deficits. According to Tcherneva, it can encourage "citizen engagement, public decision-making, and local institution building," for example through local participatory budgeting and community input about local projects.

Because the program aspires for citizen input, because it drastically reduces the threat of unemployment, because it puts pressure on punitive labor practices in the private sector, because it establishes a labor standard for pay and working conditions, and because it focuses exclusively on investing in the public good, it can be an institution with profound democratizing tendencies, and a conduit for transformative change in the workplace, people's everyday lives, and the economy as a whole.

The JG also provides opportunities for workers and communities to experiment with alternative, more democratic forms of enterprise, such as coops and public utilities. The JG should encourage such experiments and ensure a level playing field for them.

MESHING THE JOBS GUARANTEE WITH CLIMATE JOBS

The jobs guarantee, like the WPA, is based on hiring people without regard to their existing skills and then matching people with available jobs. The jobs created by climate policy will not automatically fit the workers in the CJG program. Conversely, the jobs proposed by most current JG proposals, while worthy, will only incidentally include jobs that help protect the climate. How can a climate jobs guarantee contribute to a Green New Deal—a massive, rapid transition to climate safety that at the same time provides a massive, rapid reduction of poverty and economic marginalization?

This problem arises in part because the workforce has effectively been divided into a low-wage, low-job quality sector in which people of color, women, youth, and other disfavored groups have been concentrated, and a higher-wage, more secure sector which disproportionately includes white men. Those in the higher sector have a far greater opportunity to acquire skills, apprenticeship, union membership, connections, education, and opportunities to move upward. Those in the lower sector are disproportionately excluded from all these.

Many of the millions of jobs required to protect the climate will be infrastructure jobs that generally require skills acquired through apprenticeship, education, advanced training, and opportunity to work in favored jobs and industries. But as Tcherneva notes, infrastructure alone is not a particularly effective means of ensuring full employment, given that many infrastructure jobs require higher skill levels and are often male dominated. A JG program must create opportunities for those who are less skilled or for whom intense manual labor is not suitable.

Fortunately, the transition to a climate safe, fossil free economy will entail millions of jobs that do not require a high skill level and are not limited by gender. The report, “Green New Deal” by Data for Progress, details a wide array of climate-protecting jobs that would be appropriate to the JG workforce. Jobs requiring minimal experience or on-the-job training include weatherization and energy efficiency improvements, waste removal and recycling, tree-planting, and wetland restoration. Jobs requiring some experience, education, or certification include energy auditing, building electrification, solar, wind, and geothermal installation, and mass transit electrification.

Five policies are required to make climate jobs programs mesh with the CJG:

- 1. Priority in climate programs to jobs covered under the CJG.
- 2. Training within the CJG to help workers move from “minimum experience” to “some experience” jobs. An example would be training weatherization workers to perform more sophisticated “deep efficiency” retrofits. Programs like Oakland’s Green Jobs for All and Emerald Cities can provide considerable experience with such workforce development.
- 3. Apprenticeship and job training to equip CJG workers to move into permanent climate jobs in the public and private sectors. This may require tailoring and greatly expanding apprenticeship programs with preference for CJG candidates.
- 4. Preference for hiring CJG workers in publicly funded climate programs.



Photo by arindambanerjee/Shutterstock.com

- 5. Means to transfer CJG work units to the public and private sectors. This could include, for example, turning CJG projects into municipal agencies and/or allowing them to become subcontractors to the private or government sectors.

These policies would build the CJG into the core of climate protection programs. At the same time they would shape the CJG to maximize its contribution to climate protection.

It is hard to envision a CJG being implemented by legislation alone without a context of popular demand for change. And without mass popular mobilization it is difficult to imagine a CJG surviving the probable onslaught of those who have rolled back other full employment programs in the past. But it is hard to envision a better program around which to promote such a popular mobilization. The climate crisis confronts us with a critical need that may help lift the idea of jobs for all from an idle speculation to a realistic possibility, indeed, a necessity.

Z

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For a longer, footnoted version of this piece go to Labor Network for Sustainability, the publication of origin for this article.

FEATURE



Managing Director of the IMF, Christine Lagarde gives a press conference at the end of Eurogroup finance ministers meeting at the EU headquarters in Luxembourg, photo by Alexandros Michailidis/Shutterstock.com

South Africa Searches for a Financial Parachute

By Patrick Bond

A recent hush-hush visit by International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Christine Lagarde to Pretoria (between stops in Ghana and Angola) is mysterious. In contrast with the IMF press briefing claim—"Madame Lagarde will hold meetings with the authorities, as well as fairly extensive meetings with the private sector, civil society, ac-

ademia, women leaders, and of course the media"—there's a complete information void here, with no public events scheduled.

An open, frank public discussion about the IMF's regrettable history and current agenda is sorely needed, in a context where a few honest politicians and officials are belatedly struggling to reverse what

is termed “state capture” and return stolen funds to the taxpayer. Undoing a decade of looting by former President Jacob Zuma and the Gupta empire (three immigrant brothers plus hundreds of hangers-on) is no small task.

Hence it is perhaps with discomfort that Lagarde will meet one of the main post-Zuma/Gupta leaders, Finance Minister Tito Mboweni, who twice (in 2013 and 2016) tweeted about Lagarde’s own corruption trial in France. She was found guilty of “negligence” for gifting \$430 million to a tycoon—Adidas founder Bernard Tapie—who donated to her Conservative Party when she was finance minister (in 2017 he was forced to pay back the French state).

Retribution for corruption is indeed in the Pretoria air. Two months ago, Mboweni replaced Nhlanhla Nene, who resigned in disgrace over lying about his secret Gupta meetings. But is Mboweni himself arranging a secret bailout deal, as happened in December 1993 when the IMF granted an infamous \$850 million loan—a “Faustian Pact” (according to former Minister of Intelligence Ronnie Kasrils) replete with Washington Consensus promises—to outgoing president FW de Klerk, so as to “instill global financial confidence” in the incoming Mandela government?

After 5 “junk” denunciations of South Africa by the 3 most powerful (albeit suspect) credit ratings agencies over the past 18 months, President Cyril Ramaphosa has tried hard to restore their trust. However, with the giant energy parastatal agency Eskom now trying to dump another \$7 billion in debt onto a severely-stressed national Treasury, does Ramaphosa need a financial back-stop from the Bretton Woods Institutions?

Indeed, more to the point, is Eskom’s foreign debt again creating havoc, as happened in January with a “pending letter of default from the World Bank” that “could trigger a recall on Eskom’s \$25 billion debt mountain,” as Carol Paton reported in *Business Day*? (Ramaphosa’s urgent meeting with Bank officials in Davos the next day was apparently temporarily soothing.)

Lagarde’s opaque visit contrasts with World Bank President Jim Yong Kim’s high-profile trip earlier, amidst a blaze of Global Citizen anti-poverty populism to 90,000 youth at a Soweto stadium: “I’m tell-

ing you, you can’t trust anyone over 30 to determine your future!”

Kim also met Ramaphosa to discuss, he tweeted, urban planning and sanitation (neither of which would need U.S.-denominated Bank loans). He also lectured at the Wits University School of Governance about human capital investment, at one point jovially criticizing another ex-lefty, his host, Vice Chancellor Adam Habib, for being a “student of Trotsky.”

Are loans to South Africa from the IMF and World Bank really needed? On the one hand, their leaders are here in the wake of July’s Brazil-Russia-India-China-SA Johannesburg summit, which again raised hopes for the BRICS bloc’s international financial governance reform agenda.

For example, notwithstanding angry protests by environmental justice activists at its Africa Regional Centre office, the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) quickly announced loans to three local parastatal agencies. One of these, Eskom’s \$180 million, had been “in abeyance” since 2016 due to then-CEO Brian Molefe’s second thoughts: he opposed the loan’s linkage of privatized renewable energy to Eskom’s grid (instead, Molefe wanted to take on more nuclear debt, which Mboweni—then an NDB director—had publicly endorsed in 2015, while in Russia at that year’s BRICS summit).

The other credits went to Transnet’s Siyabonga Gama (fired for Gupta-related corruption a few weeks later) for \$200 million to expand the Durban port-petrochemical complex—a project now frozen due to brazen procurement fraud involving a notorious Italian firm (unrelated to the Guptas)—and the Development Bank of Southern Africa for on-lending \$300 million to municipalities (assuming there are any creditworthy ones left, able to pay sufficiently high interest rates to justify a hard-currency loan for local infrastructure).

Explained Earthlife Africa protester Makoma Lekalakala, co-winner of the 2018 Goldman Environmental Prize as Africa’s leading activist this year, “Both Eskom and Transnet are under scrutiny for corruption and mismanagement. No due diligence was done on the Transnet loan. If this is how the [BRICS] bank operates, we have to brace ourselves

for accelerated environmental degradation for the pursuit of profit.”

But the Bretton Woods Institutions are no better, and just over a year ago, Ramaphosa offered a scathing critique of Washington’s bias: “We should not go to the IMF because once we do we are on a downward path, we will be sacrificing our independence in terms of governing our country and sacrificing our sovereignty.” He cited the risk of imposed “cuts in social spending” what with anticipated IMF orders to Eskom “to do away with free electricity quotas for the poor and indigent.”

Ramaphosa repeatedly denies that the Bretton Woods Institutions will bail out South Africa: “IMF, no, we’re not looking at the IMF. The New Development Bank has a facility that could be made available to us. And we are exploring that as well. And we want to do it in a way that does not require a sovereign guarantee.” Actually, Ramaphosa probably didn’t mean the BRICS NDB, which makes project-specific loans, but instead its \$100 billion Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), which offers a \$3 billion credit line for South Africa to immediately draw upon, in the event of a balance-of-payments emergency deficit.

On the other hand, the BRICS look much less coherent today than in July, because Brazil’s new leader, Jair Bolsonaro, could drop out of the bloc and, at minimum, will more firmly hitch his regime to Donald Trump’s. Yet in spite of oft-expressed Sinophobia, Bolsonaro has just grudgingly agreed to continue the rotation of BRICS heads-of-state summit hosting (although this is likely only to occur in Brasilia next November). There will be much Trump-style geopolitical, economic and especially environmental chaos starting on January 1 when he becomes president, such as paving over the Amazon.

But compared to November, fewer insiders I talked to on a visit earlier this month (including former Foreign Minister Celso Amorim) fear that Bolsonaro will reduce the bloc to RICS through a “Braxit,” the way he just did to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change summit. (His predecessor Michel Temer had agreed to host it in Brazil late next year, but Chile will now take over.)

The oft-stated contrast between the agendas of BRICS and Washington, as articulated by Zuma’s

scribe Gayton McKenzie, for instance, was in any case mainly myth. From 2014, Lagarde has enjoyed the power to co-finance the more desperate of BRICS borrowers (not just SA, but also Brazil and Russia suffer junk status), because the CRA’s Articles of Agreement stipulate that if Pretoria (or any other borrower) wants the next \$7 billion in BRICS funding within its \$10 billion CRA quota range, it must first get an IMF structural adjustment program.

If Pretoria needs financing to repay increasingly onerous foreign debt tranches in 2019, could this fractured society withstand IMF austerity, given what Business Day already termed 2018’s “savage fiscal consolidation”? Radically-reduced funding for basic infrastructure left even a confirmed neoliberal, Johannesburg Mayor Herman Mashaba, crying foul on Treasury’s 65 percent budget cut to the city’s housing program.

At the global scale, the BRICS financial institutions are not up to the massive bailout requirements necessary if financial meltdowns similar to 1998 and 2008 reappear in coming weeks, for instance due to Britain’s anticipated “hard crash” from the European Union on March 29. In even the recent weeks’ relatively mild economic turmoil, South Africa’s currency was the world’s most volatile (out of the 31 most traded). The Rand continues to zigzag in part because of then Finance Minister Malusi Gigaba’s February 2018 relaxation of exchange controls on \$43 billion worth of local institutional investor funding that can now depart South Africa. (That puts into context the oft-remarked \$7 billion exit threat from Citibank’s World Government Bond Index once Moody’s finally drops the junk axe on the domestic-denominated securities rating.)

However, while we continue to pay close to a 9 percent hard-currency interest rate on 10-year state bonds (even higher than does Venezuela), there will be willing buyers—until the next world financial melt ratchets rates even higher. And in spite of BRICS babble about IMF reform so as to lessen the load of borrower conditionalities, there have been no changes in economic philosophy under Lagarde. Worse, Africa lost substantial voting power in the last quota restructuring, in 2015, including Nigeria by 41 percent and South Africa by 21 percent. The main countries that raised their respective IMF

shares were China (35 percent), Brazil (23 percent), India (11 percent) and Russia (8 percent).

AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY: REPUDIATION OF CORRUPT BANKERS

IMF reform that leaves most Africans with less voice is better considered deform, Ramaphosa himself seemed to concede in a speech to the United Nations in September, complaining that the IMF and other multilateral institutions still “need to be reshaped and enhanced so that they may more effectively meet the challenges of the contemporary world and better serve the interests of the poor and marginalized.”

Because their interests are not served by either Washington’s or the NDB’s lending to corrupt parastatal elites, the “poor and marginalized” need another strategy. Just as in the days of the Jubilee 2000 debt-repudiation movement, which was led in South Africa two decades ago by the late poet Dennis Brutus and Anglican Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane, it’s overdue we talk about, and indeed audit, South Africa’s foreign debt. Including parastatal and private borrowers (for whom the state ensures hard currency is available for repayment), foreign debt stood at \$171 billion as of mid-year (up from \$25 billion in 1994). That figure, the SA Reserve Bank announced last week, is down nearly 8 percent from March 2018’s \$183 billion, but only as a result of “non-residents’ net sales of domestic rand-denominated government bonds as well as valuation effects.”

The main foreign debtors remain Eskom and Transnet. They have contracted, over the past eight years, South Africa’s three largest-ever loans:

- in 2010, \$3.75 billion from the World Bank, mainly for the Medupi coal-fired power plant (a deal for which Eskom chairperson Valli Moosa was criticized by the public protector for “improper” conflict of interests since he sat on the ANC Finance Committee, during the notorious Hitachi corruption of the ruling party);
- in 2013, \$5 billion from the China Development Bank, mainly for Transnet’s purchase of imported infrastructure inputs, especially for corrupt port-petrochemical expansion in Durban and a coal export rail line to Richards Bay (hundreds of millions of dollars were illicitly directed via China South Rail to the Gupta empire, as well as loan “success fees” from the Chinese loan); and
- in 2016, \$5 billion again from the China Development Bank, mainly for Eskom’s other coal-fired mega-genera-

tor, Kusile, initially arranged by Molefe and renewed at the BRICS Sandton summit last July.

None of these loans can be justified, especially on ecological grounds—since they all rapidly increase the climate debt we South Africans owe both future generations and, more urgently, contemporary African victims of worsening droughts and floods. Moreover, with state procurement corruption costing in the range of 35-40 percent per contract, according to the lead Treasury official in 2016, there is a strong case for a full debt audit, followed by the demand that the World Bank, China Development Bank, BRICS Bank and other lenders also assume liability.

After all, the Hitachi deal with the ANC’s investment wing Chancellor House led the U.S. government to fine the Japanese firm nearly \$20 million in 2015—for Foreign Corrupt Practices Act violations at Eskom—and hence when Public Enterprises Minister Pravin Gordhan (responsible for borrowing the \$3.75 billion in 2010) last week blamed Hitachi incompetence for recent load-shedding, that alone should invoke World Bank debt repudiation.

Jim Kim should not only have addressed this largest—and perhaps worst—loan in his institution’s history. The Bank’s portfolio also includes the largest share in the notorious CPS-Net1 “financial inclusion” strategy to rip off millions of poor South Africans, and a \$150 million debt+equity stake in Lonmin which until just before the 2012 Marikana massacre (not long after Kim became president) the Bank was celebrating as a best-case for corporate social responsibility.

Add to all this the new threat of Faustian Pact 2.0 from the ethically-challenged Lagarde. The need for a new Jubilee movement is obvious. All existing anti-corruption initiatives should be pursued forthwith, but our ever lower expectations mean that a genuine “Ramaphoria”—which if serious would include repudiation of the Gupta and ANC fraudsters’ financial facilitators, such as the World Bank, China Development Bank and BRICS Bank—is simply a fantasy. Instead, the meme best describing our current state of governance is, indeed, Ramazupta. **Z**

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Living it Large—Life on Benefits

By Bridget Meehan

It's a fact. People living on benefits are having the time of their lives—and at the expense of the public purse, too. These lazy skivers are scrounging so much state money that they don't need to work. They lumber around all day every day, eating takeaways, drinking beer and watching their flat screen TVs while their countless kids do nothing but play on their top-of-the range gaming consoles and smart phones.

The only time they're put out is when they have to sign on at the Jobs and Benefits office, which they always drive to in their BMWs—in case you didn't know it, the BMW is the car of choice for people signing on.

Who needs to work when you can get more on benefits than the honest-to-goodness strivers who are out there working hard and paying their own way? But let's break it down. Just how good is life on benefits?

Well, let's take a typical skiver, a single person, over 25, claiming Jobseekers Allowance and Housing Benefit. That Jobseeker gets a handsome sum of £7,602.40 per year, or £146.20 per week no less. Of course, about £73.10 goes straight to the jobseeker's landlord. In reality, our Jobseeker lives off £73.10 a week minus another £10 or £20 which goes to the landlord because housing benefit doesn't foot the full rent. So, what we're looking at here is a hefty an-

nual income of between £2,761.20 and £3,281.20. But there are bigger rewards to be had from the benefits system.

What about the skivers who are making a killing by having kids? What about a lone parent; over 25; with a child under 5; and private renting? Well, every week they get Income Support of £73.10, Child Tax Credits of £63.94, Child Benefit of £20.70 and Housing Benefit of around £89.53. Leaving out the Housing Benefit, since that goes to the landlord, they get a weekly sum of £157.74—although that's

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before paying out the £10 or £20 top-up for the rent—that gives a grand total of £8,202.48 per year.

A person could have a great time on that amount of money. But it doesn't end there. Some people get even more.

Say there's a family made up of an unemployed couple; renting; with five children, two of whom have severe disabilities and are receiving high rates of Disability Living Allowance; and one parent receiving carer's allowance. Or it might be a couple; renting; with five children; both parents and one child all with a disability; one

child and one parent both receiving high rates of Disability Living Allowance; the other parent receiving mid-rate of Disability Living Allowance. Those lucky families could be in receipt of benefits around £50,000.

Granted, these higher benefits are paid to cover extra expenses resulting from their disabilities, making them necessary to keep the family out of severe poverty and allow them to live life with some dignity. But still, they must be having a ball on £50,000, right?

Now, let's return to our average jobseeker. How does their income compare against the highest incomes, the incomes of say, a top footballer or the CEO of a bank or a big corporation? Well, a top footballer can earn up to £160,000 per week; the CEO of a big corporation can earn about £150,000 per week (that's about 130 times more than the lowest paid employee); the CEO of a bank earns a mere £60,000 per week on average.

Okay, salaries like that are somewhat more than £73.10 a week but those big earners are so talented, so uniquely skilled, so hard working, so valuable to society in the services they offer, that they surely deserve the income they get. A society that allows many, many people to live on less than £100 per week while a privileged few get by on over £100,000 is surely a great place to live.

It has to be the reason why people on benefits are living it large. I just wish I didn't have a job and could claim benefits too. Don't you? **Z**

