

National Democrats Resist Reforms

Still refusing to face why Donald Trump and the Republicans won in 2016, the national Democratic Party rebuffs proposals from progressives to make the party more democratic and less corporate-dominated, writes Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

With the Democratic Party's "Unity Reform Commission" now history, major political forces are entering a new stage of contention over the future of the party. Seven months after the commission's first meeting – and nine months after Hillary Clinton backer Tom Perez won a close election over Bernie Sanders supporter Keith Ellison to become chair of the Democratic National Committee – the battle lines are coming into focus for next year.

The commission's final meeting adjourned on Saturday after a few steps toward democratizing the party had won approval – due to the grassroots strength of progressives. But the recommendations from the commission will go to the Rules and Bylaws Committee, which was one of the DNC decision-making bodies that Perez subjected to a purge two months ago. Now, in the words of Jim Zogby (who was removed from the Executive Committee by Perez), "There are virtually no Bernie supporters on the Rules and Bylaws Committee."

When the latest Unity Reform Commission meeting got underway, Perez talked a lot about unity. But kicking Sanders supporters off of key DNC committees is the ugly underside of an ongoing dual discourse. (Are we supposed to believe Perez's soothing words or our own eyes?) And party unity behind a failed approach – internally undemocratic and politically hitched to corporate wagons – would hardly be auspicious.

"Emerging sectors of the electorate are compelling the Democratic Party to come to terms with adamant grassroots rejection of economic injustice, institutionalized racism, gender inequality, environmental destruction and corporate domination," says the recent report "[Autopsy: The Democratic Party in Crisis](#)" (which I co-authored). The report adds: "Siding with the people who constitute the base isn't truly possible when party leaders seem to be afraid of them."

DNC Chairman Perez and allied power brokers keep showing that they're afraid of the party's progressive base. No amount of appealing rhetoric changes that reality.

"We pride ourselves on being inclusive and welcoming to all," the Democratic National Committee proclaimed anew at the start of this month, touting the

commission meeting as “open to the public.” Yet the DNC delayed and obscured information about the meeting, never replying to those who filled out an online RSVP form – thus leaving them in the dark about the times of the meeting. In short, the DNC went out of its way to suppress public turnout rather than facilitate it.

Rebuking the DNC

One member of the task force that wrote the Autopsy, Karen Bernal, is the chair of the Progressive Caucus of the California Democratic Party. After traveling across the country and sitting in the sparse audience during the first day of the Unity Reform Commission meeting, she took the liberty of speaking up as the second day got underway. Bernal provided a firm rebuke of the DNC’s efforts to suppress public attendance.

“For all of the talk about wanting to improve and reform and make this party more transparent, the exact opposite has happened,” Bernal told the commission. (Her intervention, which lasted a little more than two minutes, aired in full on C-SPAN.)

On Sunday, a mass email from Zogby via Our Revolution summed up: “We are fighting for racial, social, economic, and environmental justice. The Democratic Party needs everyone, regardless of their race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, country of origin, language, or socioeconomic status, to be deeply involved in order to change the course of this country.”

For those reasons, he added, “we are calling for an end to superdelegates, [for] open primaries and caucuses, [for] same-day registration, and [for] more transparent, fair, and accountable leadership at the helm of the DNC.”

Overall, the commission approved some recommendations that were partial victories for progressives. Among the most notable: It called for reducing the number of notoriously undemocratic superdelegates to the national convention from 712 to about 300, while the only democratic number would be zero. [Superdelegates are party insiders who are not chosen through a primary or caucus but nevertheless get to vote for the party’s nominees. In 2016, they broke overwhelmingly for Hillary Clinton.]

The commission somewhat improved transparency for often-dubious DNC contracts with high-paid consultants and vendors, while defeating sensible amendments by commission member Nomiki Konst – who spoke with notable clarity about the need to clamp down on financial conflicts of interest among DNC decision-makers.

The eight Sanders appointees – Konst, Zogby, Larry Cohen, Lucy Flores, Jane Kleeb, Gus Newport, Nina Turner and Jeff Weaver – put up a good fight as members

of the Unity Reform Commission. They were outnumbered, and on key issues were often outvoted, by the 13 who'd been selected by Clinton or Perez. Next year, the odds to overcome will be much worse.

With the purged Rules and Bylaws Committee now overwhelmingly stacked against progressives, only massive pressure from the grassroots will be able to sustain momentum toward a democratic Democratic Party. Meanwhile, corporate forces will do all they can to prevent the Democratic Party from living up to its first name.

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The Corruption of College Athletics

The U.S. likes to view itself as the epitome of sports integrity, but beyond its own professional and amateur doping scandals, there is the institutionalized corruption around U.S. college athletics, reports Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

There is an old saying when it comes to college sports: "they are played not quite for fun, and not quite for money." Of course, that sentiment is supposed to apply to the players. It certainly does not apply to the college administrations and athletic departments which nurture these sports.

For the schools with "big name" teams, college sports is *all* about the money. In the U.S., "the 231 NCAA [National Collegiate Athletic Association] Division 1 schools that make income data available generated a total of \$9.15 billion in revenue during the 2015 fiscal year." At least 25 U.S. schools make almost or more than \$100 million a year. We are talking about money generated directly or indirectly by the teams themselves, and we all know about the corruptive power of that sort of cash.

So how would that corruption work? We are not talking about gambling schemes and fixing games here. But, as it turns out, we are talking about fixing the "eligibility" to play of "student" athletes. According to the academic eligibility rules used by the National Collegiate Athletic Association, student athletes must maintain between 90 and 100 percent of the *minimum* GPA (Grade

Point Average) required for graduation at the school they attend.

Freshman athletes need 90 percent to be eligible to play their sport, sophomores need 95 percent, and then it is 100 percent for juniors and seniors. OK, that is a bit of a break already, at least for the freshmen and sophomores. And maintaining a minimum GPA should not be that hard. However, with all the money at stake for the institution, most of these schools do not want to take any chances about high-performing athletes staying eligible.

The result of this pressure was laid bare by a *New York Times* article of Oct. 14. It appeared in the Sports Saturday section and was entitled "N.C.A.A. Declines to Punish North Carolina for Academic Fraud." It seems that for nearly the last 20 years the administrators of the highly regarded University of North Carolina were "running one of the worst academic fraud schemes in college sports history, involving [200] fake classes that enabled dozens of athletes to gain and maintain their eligibility."

However, the university was not penalized by the N.C.A.A. because the organization has no rules against fraudulent classes as long as they are not open only to athletes. In this case, although really designed with student athletes in mind, the "paper" classes were technically open to everyone. "Similar misconduct has been alleged at Auburn [in Georgia] and Michigan."

No one at North Carolina has lost their job, and no student academic records have been reviewed. The embarrassment of it all did move the administration to "correct" these "academic irregularities." Yet the school representatives will still argue with you about the term "fraudulent."

Mark Merritt, the university's general counsel, says that "the fact that the courses did not meet our expectations doesn't make them fraudulent."

But, of course, he is dissembling. These pseudo-courses did meet expectations: keeping the money coming in by keeping athletes unable or unwilling to also be students on the field.

The Fans

How is it that college athletic teams are so popular that they can generate this level of wealth? The answer involves our instinctive need to identify with, and cheerlead for, a group we have made our own. The intensity of this proclivity varies with individuals, but generally we all feel the need to some extent. And, when we really get into the role of cheerleader, that which we identify with becomes an extension of ourselves. Its fate becomes our fate.

The number of candidates for your enthusiasm is very large. They can be

religious, political or cultural organizations. They can range from a Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) post to the community glee club. Or it can be that fondly remembered college you graduated from, now symbolized by its sports teams.

It must be pointed out that such wholehearted identification isn't entirely misguided. For instance, devoted followers of sports teams do get something, besides overpriced tickets and team paraphernalia, for their money.

Daniel Wann, a psychology professor who has made a career researching the mind-set of sports spectators, tells us that there is a correlation between identifying with a sports team and a sense of psychological well-being: "Higher identification with a team is associated with significantly lower levels of alienation [and] loneliness, and higher levels of collective self-esteem."

Colleges with popular sports teams have simply learned how to turn the satisfaction of this psychological need into a \$9 billion-a-year niche industry.

Sports Teams and the Nature of Education

Unfortunately, there is a downside. When it comes to the enthusiasm around college sports, the notion of education gets lost. Thus, it seems not to have occurred to most college sports fans that whatever satisfaction they might derive from supporting their teams, they are simultaneously helping to undermine the education of the players.

This situation is, in good part, a consequence of the fact that the very definition of a college education and, indeed its ultimate value, has been long under question. It used to be that relatively few went to college and those who did went for a "liberal education."

For the first two years of what then was a four-year degree program, one took a mandatory sampling of courses in the arts, sciences, social sciences and humanities. Having a taste of the breadth of knowledge out there, the student then spent the last two years specializing, or "majoring," in their chosen field: history, English, anthropology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, economics, aspects of art, music, etc.

This traditional, non-vocational, approach to education ran into trouble in the 1960s, an unsettled time when a lot of revered traditions were being questioned. At that time the complaint arose from students, parents, and that anomalous category known as employers, that colleges were not teaching anything "useful."

In other words they were not adequately preparing students for the job market. As a result, increasing numbers of colleges, urged on by state governments, did away with the liberal arts approach to education. As they did so, education

itself, at least as traditionally understood as a broad introduction to a world of knowledge, ceased to be the goal.

In the resulting new vocationally oriented environment in which career preparation took center stage, traditional standards of educational judgment deteriorated. For instance, grade inflation became rampant, reflecting an administrative notion that the student is really a consumer who needs to be satisfied with the “product” the college is peddling. As time went on, a process of confirmation bias occurred as both administrators and faculty who had bought into this new “business model” of education, replicated themselves in new hires.

That is the background against which the University of North Carolina could devise and then run, for nearly 20 years, “one of the worst academic fraud schemes in college sports history.” You see, most of the athletes in those fraudulent courses were in school for the vocational purpose of moving into professional sports careers. For them, the playing field was (and still is) the only classroom that mattered. And the pseudo-courses? They were, shall we say, a form of grade inflation. The fans, when they noticed at all, seemed to take the irregularities in stride.

Thus, within the context of the modern commercial culture of the United States, the vocational nature of college sports is really “normal.” These sports also make barrels of money for the sponsoring institution and give a lot of people something to cheer about. Isn’t all of that worth 20 years of fraud?

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Capitalism's Failure of the Flesh

A bitter irony of modernity is that the age-old dream of freeing people from work's tedium has been answered by robots, but capitalism has turned that “freedom” into a barren life with little left to lose, writes poet Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

Humankind, being an inherently tool-making species, has always been in a relationship with technology. Our tools, weapons, machines, and appliances are crucial to forging the cultural criteria of human life. At present, amid the technology created phantomscape of mass media's lurid – yet somehow sterile – imagery, one can feel as if one's mind is in danger of being churned to spittle.

On a personal note, an informal consensus has formed among my friends who share a passion for reading: We read far fewer books since the time we became enmeshed with the internet. Worse, we find the feelings of isolation that we have attempted to mitigate by an immersion in online activity, at best, provides only a palliative effect. Yet, in the manner of addiction – or a hopeless love affair – we are prone to trudge deeper into the psychical morass by further immersion into the very source that is exacerbating our feelings of unease and ennui.

Yet we insist on remaining mentally epoxied to electronic appliances, as the oceans of our technology besieged planet die, as the atmosphere is choked with heat-holding greenhouse gas emissions, and, as a result, exquisite, living things disappear forever.

Therefore, it is crucial to explore why we are so isolated from each other but so connected to our devices, and are married to the belief system that misinforms us, technology can and will lift us from our increasingly perilous predicament. When reality dictates, if the past remains prologue, a fetishising of technology will further enslave us in a de facto techno-dystopia. A reassessment, for numerous reasons, of the relationship between humankind and technology must come to pass.

Moreover, the reevaluation must include machines, at present and in the future, we have created in our own image. For example, those such as artificial-intelligence technologies, that on an increasing basis, will cause a significant number of the workforce to be rendered idle.

Flesh Machines

Of course, it is a given, bottom-line obsessives that they are, capitalists crave to replace workers with an automated labor force. The parasitic breed has always viewed workers as flesh machines, of whom they were inconvenienced by having to pay wages.

Capitalism is, by its very nature, dehumanizing. From the advent of the industrial/capitalist epoch, the system has inflicted mass alienation, societal atomization, and anomie. Moreover, the vast wealth inequity inherent to the system allows the capitalist elite to own the political class – a mindless clutch of flunkies who might as well be robots programmed by the capitalist

order to serve their agendas.

The question is, what effect will the nature of being rendered superfluous to the prevailing order have on the powerless masses – who have, up until now, been kept in line by economic coercion, by meretricious, debt-incurring consumer bribes, and by mass media indoctrination and pop-culture anesthesia? Will consumers continue to insist that their mental chains are the very wings of freedom?

Yet the Age Of Mass Mechanization carries the potential to bestow an era of liberty, artistic exploration, scientific inquiry, intellectual fervor, the pursuit of soul-making, and inspired leisure. Or the polar shift in cultural *raison d'être* might inflict a crisis of identity so harrowing that demagogues rise and despots promise to seed a new order but harvest the corpses of dissidents and outsiders.

A couple of weeks back, during a visit to a neighborhood playground with my four-year-old, I had a conversation with an executive on voluntary leave from her management position at BMW (Bayerische Motoren Werke). She was grouching about a infestation of seaweed choking the beaches of the Florida Keys she had encountered on a recent excursion to the U.S.

When I averred the phenomenon of the warming oceans of the planet, the progenitor of the exponential growth of the sea flora she had been troubled by, was caused, in large measure, by the very socio-economic-cultural dynamic that financed her trip to Florida in the first place ... well, it put a crimp in the conversation.

It can be unsettling to be confronted with one's complicity in the ills of a system that, by its very nature, provides camouflage to its perpetrators – the big bosses, down to its functionaries, and foot soldiers. Soon, she, by a series of subtle moves, extricated herself from the conversation – and I cannot say I blame her. I myself experienced discomfort by the thought of the discomfort I inflicted on her. Therefore, as a general rule, under the tyranny of amiability, which is the rule of the day of the present order, one is tempted to avoid trespassing into the comfort zones that aid in enabling the status quo.

Yet we are faced with the following imperative: The system and its machines must begin to serve humanity, as opposed to what has been the case since the advent of the industrial/technological age: the mass of humanity serving the machine. Therefore, there must arrive a paradigmatic shift in metaphors and the ethos of the era, e.g., a renunciation of the soul-decimating concept of human beings as flesh machines – who must, for the sake of monomaniacal profiteering, divorce themselves from human feeling, as well as, must forgo exploration, enthusiasm,

and craft in the pursuit of expediency.

Machines of the Flesh

We do have a choice in the matter, all indications to the contrary. Yet, in the prevailing confusion regarding what ethos should guide our relationship to technology, we are confronted with phenomenon such as the situation chronicled in a recent article in The Guardian. Headlined: “The Sex Robots Are Coming: seedy, sordid – but mainly just sad.”

Regarding the supercilious nature of the headline, wouldn't it be more propitious for all concerned to ask and explore why, under the present order, men are so alienated, socially awkward and lonely, as opposed to lapsing into all the predictable moral panic, wit-deficient snark, and supercilious value judgments these sorts of stories evoke?

Isn't being attracted to consumer goods what it is all about, identity-wise, under the present order? Don't customers demand that the de facto slaves of the service industry evince the demeanor of compliant androids? Isn't it a given that the underclass workforce, holders of service industry jobs, will soon be replaced by robots? Do we not worship and are ruled by the gospel of the cult of efficiency?

Withal, for the present order to be maintained, it is crucial for the general public to remain both alienated thus using consumerism as a palliative, and that includes the production and retailing of sexualized, simulacrum appliances that mimic sex partners and the psychical release valve of finger-wagging, easy virtue and shallow vitriol aimed at the poor sods who seek comfort from them.

Addendum: I'm much more mortified by robotics designed for surveillance and war than for one's designed for simulacrumatic sex. I'm simply beastly that way.

Robots can be programmed to simulate copulation but it is doubtful that machines can be tuned and tweaked to experience the manifold, complex states of being that define human consciousness and its innate ability for self expression, for example, the ability to express themselves by means of spontaneous generated metaphors.

While it is true, AI technologies can mimic forms of poetic and artistic expression but, in any honest account of the processes they utilize, machines engage in the activity sans a depth of feeling, the facility to evince empathy and the ability to access imagination i.e., the phenomenon we human beings term soulfulness. Sans the ineffable quality of soul, AI entities, as is the case with our present information technology, will contribute the palliative, yet inherently alienating, effects inherent to our hyper-commodified era.

In contrast, writers/artists/activists must proceed to dangerous places. It is imperative that they descend into the danger zone known as the soul. The soul is not a realm inhabited by weightless beings radiating beatific light. Rather, it is a landscape of broken, wounded wanderers; inchoate longing; searing lamentation; the confabulations of imperfect memory; of rutting and rage; transgression; depression; fragmented language; and devouring darkness.

The reductionist metaphors inherent to the age of mechanization – which limn human beings in mechanized, commodified terms – as opposed to the organic, unfolding pantheon composed of needs, longings and desires we are – inflicts not only alienation from our fellow human beings but from our essential natures. In our misery and confusion, we have bloated our bodies, maimed and poisoned the earth, and scoured the hours of our lives of meaning by the compulsive commodification of all things. Therefore it should not come as a surprise when alienated, lonely men become enamored of glambots.

We have delivered insult after insult to the soul of the world, and yet it loves us with an abiding and bitter grace. The question remains, do we love it in turn, and deeply enough, to mount a resistance to the present order thus turn the tide against the love-bereft forces responsible for the wholesale destruction of both landscape and soulscape.

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America's Military-Industrial Addiction

Polls show that Americans are tired of endless wars in faraway lands, but many cheer President Trump's showering money on the Pentagon and its contractors, a paradox that President Eisenhower foresaw, writes JP Sottile.

By JP Sottile

The Military-Industrial Complex has loomed over America ever since President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned of its growing influence during his prescient [farewell address](#) on Jan. 17, 1961. The Vietnam War followed shortly thereafter, and its bloody consequences cemented the image of the Military-Industrial Complex (MIC) as a faceless cadre of profit-seeking warmongers who've wrested control of the foreign policy. That was certainly borne out by the war's utter senselessness ... and by [tales of profiteering](#) by well-connected contractors like

Brown & Root.

Over five decades, four major wars and a dozen-odd interventions later, we often talk about the Military-Industrial Complex as if we're referring to a nefarious, flag-draped Death Star floating just beyond the reach of helpless Americans who'd generally prefer that war was not, as the great Gen. Smedley Darlington Butler aptly put it, little more than a money-making "racket."

The feeling of powerlessness that the MIC engenders in "average Americans" makes a lot of sense if you just follow the money coming out of Capitol Hill. The Project on Government Oversight (POGO) tabulated all "defense-related spending" for both 2017 and 2018, and it hit nearly \$1.1 trillion for each of the two years. The "defense-related" part is important because the annual National Defense Authorization Act, a.k.a. the defense budget, doesn't fully account for all the various forms of national security spending that gets peppered around a half-dozen agencies.

It's a phenomenon that noted Pentagon watchdog William Hartung has tracked for years. He recently dissected it into "no less than 10 categories of national security spending." Amazingly only one of those is the actual Pentagon budget. The others include spending on wars, on homeland security, on military aid, on intelligence, on nukes, on recruitment, on veterans, on interest payments and on "other defense" – which includes "a number of flows of defense-related funding that go to agencies other than the Pentagon."

Perhaps most amazingly, Hartung noted in TomDisptach that the inflation-adjusted "base" defense budgets of the last couple years is "higher than at the height of President Ronald Reagan's massive buildup of the 1980s and is now nearing the post-World War II funding peak." And that's just the "base" budget, meaning the roughly \$600 billion "defense-only" portion of the overall package. Like POGO, Hartung puts an annual price tag of nearly \$1.1 trillion on the whole enchilada of military-related spending.

The MIC's 'Swamp Creatures'

To secure their share of this grandiloquent banquet, the defense industry's lobbyists stampede Capitol Hill like well-heeled wildebeest, each jockeying for a plum position at the trough. This year, a robust collection of 208 defense companies spent \$93,937,493 to deploy 728 "reported" lobbyists (apparently some go unreported) to feed this year's trumped-up, \$700 billion defense-only budget, according to OpenSecrets.org. Last year they spent \$128,845,198 to secure their profitable pieces of the government pie.

And this reliable yearly harvest, along with the revolving doors connecting

defense contractors with Capitol Hill, K Street and the Pentagon, is why so many critics blame the masters of war behind the MIC for turning war into a cash machine.

But the cash machine is not confined to the Beltway. There are ATM branches around the country. Much in the way it lavishes Congress with lobbying largesse, the defense industry works hand-in-glove with the Pentagon to spread the appropriations around the nation. This "spread the wealth" strategy may be equally as important as the "inside the Beltway" lobbying that garners so much of our attention and disdain.

Just go to U.S. Department of Defense's contract announcement [webpage](#) on any weekday to get a good sense of the "contracts valued at \$7 million or more" that are "announced each business day at 5 p.m." A recent survey of these "awards" found the usual suspects like Raytheon, Lockheed Martin and General Dynamics. The MIC was well-represented. But many millions of dollars were also "won" by companies most Americans have never heard of ... like this sampling from [one day](#) at the end of October:

- Longbow LLC, Orlando Florida, got \$183,474,414 for radar electronic units with the stipulation that work will be performed in Orlando, Florida.
- Gradkell Systems Inc., Huntsville, Alabama, got \$75,000,000 for systems operations and maintenance at Fort Belvoir, Virginia
- Dawson Federal Inc., San Antonio, Texas; and A&H-Ambica JV LLC, Livonia, Michigan; and Frontier Services Inc., Kansas City, Missouri, will share a \$45,000,000 for repair and alternations for land ports of entry in North Dakota and Minnesota.
- TRAX International Corp., Las Vegas, Nevada, got a \$9,203,652 contract modification for non-personal test support services that will be performed in Yuma, Arizona, and Fort Greely, Alaska,
- Railroad Construction Co. Inc., Paterson, New Jersey, got a \$9,344,963 contract modification for base operations support services to be performed in Colts Neck, New Jersey.
- Belleville Shoe Co., Belleville, Illinois, got \$63,973,889 for hot-weather combat boots that will be made in Illinois.
- American Apparel Inc., Selma, Alabama, got \$48,411,186 for combat utility uniforms that will be made in Alabama.
- National Industries for the Blind, Alexandria, Virginia, got a \$12,884,595 contract modification to make and advanced combat helmet pad suspension system. The "locations of performance" are Virginia, Pennsylvania and North Carolina.

Sharing the Largesse

Clearly, the DoD is large enough, and smart enough, to award contracts to companies throughout the 50 states. Yes, it is a function of the sheer size or, more forebodingly, the utter “pervasiveness” of the military in American life. But it is also a strategy. And it’s a tactic readily apparent in a contract recently awarded to Raytheon.

On Oct. 31, 2017, they got a \$29,455,672 contract modification for missions systems equipment; computing environment hardware; and software research, test and development. The modification stipulates that the work will spread around the country to “Portsmouth, Rhode Island (46 percent); Tewksbury, Massachusetts (36 percent); Marlboro, Massachusetts (6 percent); Port Hueneme, California (5 percent); San Diego, California (4 percent); and Bath, Maine (3 percent).”

Frankly, it’s a brilliant move that began in the Cold War. The more Congressional districts that got defense dollars, the more votes the defense budget was likely to receive on Capitol Hill. Over time, it evolved into its own underlying rationale for the budget.

As veteran journalist William Greider wrote in the Aug. 16, 1984 issue of Rolling Stone, “The entire political system, including liberals as well as conservatives, is held hostage by the politics of defense spending. Even the most well intentioned are captive to it. And this is a fundamental reason why the Pentagon budget is irrationally bloated and why America is mobilizing for war in a time of peace.”

The peace-time mobilization Greider referred to was the Reagan build-up that, as William Hartung noted, is currently being surpassed by America’s “War on Terror” binge. Then, as now ... the US was at peace at home, meddling around the world and running up a huge bill in the process. And then, as now ... the spending seems unstoppable.

And as an unnamed “arms-control lobbyist” told Grieder, “It’s a fact of life. I don’t see how you can ask members of Congress to vote against their own districts. If I were a member of Congress, I might vote that way, too.”

Essentially, members of Congress act as secondary lobbyists for the defense industry by making sure their constituents have a vested interest in seeing the defense budget is both robust and untouchable. But they are not alone. Because the states also reap what the Pentagon sows ... and, in the wake of the massive post-9/11 splurge, they’ve begun quantifying the impact of defense spending on their economies. It helps them make their specific case for keeping the spigot open.

Enter the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), which notes, or

touts, that the Department of Defense (DoD) “operates more than 420 military installations in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam and Puerto Rico.” Additionally, the NCSL is understandably impressed by a DoD analysis that found the department’s “\$408 billion on payroll and contracts in Fiscal Year 2015” translated into “approximately 2.3 percent of U.S. gross domestic product (GDP).”

And they’ve become a clearinghouse for state governments’ economic impact studies of defense spending. Here’s a sampling of recent data compiled on the NCSL website:

- *In 2015, for example, military installations in North Carolina supported 578,000 jobs, \$34 billion in personal income and \$66 billion in gross state product. This amounts to roughly 10 percent of the state’s overall economy.*
- *In 2014, Colorado lawmakers appropriated \$300,000 in state funds to examine the comprehensive value of military activities across the state’s seven major installations. The state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs released its study in May 2015, reporting a total economic impact of \$27 billion.*
- *Kentucky has also taken steps to measure military activity, releasing its fifth study in June 2016. The military spent approximately \$12 billion in Kentucky during 2014-15. With 38,700 active duty and civilian employees, military employment exceeds the next largest state employer by more than 21,000 jobs.*
- *In Michigan, for example, defense spending in Fiscal Year 2014 supported 105,000 jobs, added more than \$9 billion in gross state product and created nearly \$10 billion in personal income. A 2016 study sponsored by the Michigan Defense Center presents a statewide strategy to preserve Army and Air National Guard facilities following a future Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) round as well as to attract new missions.*

Electoral Impact

But that’s not all. According to the DoD study cited above, the biggest recipients of DoD dollars are (in order): Virginia, California, Texas, Maryland and Florida. And among the top 18 host states for military bases, electorally important states like California, Florida and Texas lead the nation.

And that’s the real rub ... this has an electoral impact. Because the constituency for defense spending isn’t just the 1 percent percent of Americans who actively serve in the military or 7 percent of Americans who’ve served sometime in their lives, but it is also the millions of Americans who directly or indirectly make a living off of the “defense-related” largesse that passes through the Pentagon like grass through a goose.

It's a dirty little secret that Donald Trump exploited throughout the 2016 presidential campaign. Somehow, he was able to criticize wasting money on foreign wars and the neoconservative interventionism of the Bushes, the neoliberal interventionism of Hillary Clinton, and, at the same time, moan endlessly about the "depleted" military despite "years of record-high spending." He went on to promise a massive increase in the defense budget, a massive increase in naval construction and a huge nuclear arsenal.

And, much to the approval of many Americans, he's delivered. A Morning Consult/Politico poll showed increased defense spending was the most popular among a variety of spending priorities presented to voters ... even as voters express trepidation about the coming of another war. A pair of NBC News/Survey Monkey polls found that 76 percent of Americans are "worried" the United States "will become engaged in a major war in the next four years" and only 25 percent want America to become "more active" in world affairs.

More to the point, only 20 percent of Americans wanted to increase the troop level in Afghanistan after Trump's stay-the-course speech in August, but Gallup's three decade-long tracking poll found that the belief the U.S. spends "too little" on defense is at its highest point (37 percent) since it spiked after 9/11 (41 percent). The previous highpoint was 51 percent in 1981 when Ronald Reagan was elected in no small part on the promise of a major build-up.

So, if Americans generally don't support wars or engagement in the world, why do they seem to reflexively support massive military budgets?

Frankly, look no further than Trump's mantra of "jobs, jobs, jobs." He says it when he lords over the sale of weapon systems to foreign powers or he visits a naval shipyard or goes to one of his post-election rallies to proclaim to "We're building up our military like never before." Frankly, he's giving the people what they want. Although they may be war-weary, they've not tired of the dispersal system that Greider wrote about during Reagan's big spree.

Ultimately, it means that the dreaded Military-Industrial Complex isn't just a shadowy cabal manipulating policies against the will of the American people. Nor is the "racket" exclusive to an elite group of Deep State swamp things. Instead, the military and the vast economic network it feeds presents a far more "complex" issue that involves millions of self-interested Americans in much the way Eisenhower predicted, but few are willing to truly forsake.

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Behind the Push for Catalanian Independence

Exclusive: Like many separatist movements, the push for Catalanian independence from Spain results from a mix of historic grievances, cultural pride and economic challenges, as war correspondent Don North describes.

By Don North

Before embarking for a visit to Barcelona, the hotbed of Catalanian independence, I was disappointed to find little historical analysis about the enigma of Catalan independence in the major U.S. news media. The U.S. news agencies that I follow presented little more than a daily chronicle of street demonstrations and the conflict between the supporters of Catalanian independence and the political leadership in the Spanish capital of Madrid. If there was much else, I missed it.

So, as a journalist interested in the history of both political and armed conflicts, I had to dig deeper into the complex dynamics of this secessionist movement as well as the broader dynamics of why regions within otherwise successful nation states seek to shatter those unions.

For Americans, there were the events that led up to the Southern secession of the Civil War. Having grown up in Canada, I had experienced two votes for the separation of French-speaking Quebec from the Dominion of Canada. Still, the reasons why separatist movements had such strong appeal – even when they ultimately failed – always mystified and intrigued me.

Looking for answers, I reread George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, which presented a first-hand view of the Spanish civil war of the late 1930s. It still left me as confused as Orwell seemed to be about the factions involved in the struggle.

Walking in the streets of Barcelona today it's easy to forget the great political passions that once played out here in Orwell's time. It was here in Barcelona on July 19, 1936, that the opening shots of the Spanish Civil war were heard. It was Barcelona's revolutionary fervor that helped inspire volunteers from 50 countries across Europe and the Americas to join International Brigades to fight against Gen. Francisco Franco. There were an estimated 8,500 volunteers from neighboring France, 4,000 British, 2,800 Americans and 1,700 Canadians.

The surviving wounds of the war in Barcelona are mostly psychological with scant

physical evidence. In the Placa Sant Filip Neri, shrapnel scars in the church walls from two bombs dropped by the Italian Fascist Air Force that killed 42 civilians can still be seen. Placa de George Orwell is a peaceful square in the city's Gothic Quarter, where the only tangible reference to the writer can be found today.

The popular Bar Libertaria, whose walls are a celebration of Catalan anarchism, with original posters, photos and newspaper clippings from the civil war is a mecca for today's independence supporters. The owner Sergio claims Catalonia's brand of libertarian anarchism is alive and well, especially in response to unemployment, corruption and growing social inequality in Spain.

But the majority of flags flying over Barcelona or draped over balconies today are Catalanian, supporting independence.

Weak Nationalism

Historian Stanley Payne, a scholar of modern Spain and fascism at the University of Wisconsin, has offered logical historical reasons why Spain is today prone to the attraction of regional independence. In 1936, Franco's army launched a crusade to save Spain from "foreign threats," such as anarchism and communism, and drove the country into a bloody civil war in which up to one million people died and 500,000 were forced into exile.

Following the war in 1939, Franco consolidated an authoritarian regime that remained in place until his death in 1975. Franco's regime exalted a conception of Spanish nationalism built on the long-past achievements of imperial Spain and the "purification" of Spanish civilization with the expulsion of the Moors and Jews and the spread of Christianity.

As a consequence, the association of Spanish nationalism with the historically unpopular Franco makes national symbols like the flag highly suspect. As history Stanley Payne wrote in 1991, "Spanish nationalism is weaker than ever and has for all practical purposes disappeared."

Today's Spain lacks the intense nationalism that has surfaced in other European nations as part of a resurgent right-wing populism and rejection of supranational entities, such as the European Union.

Among Western nations Spain is a rare exception without a national agenda based on anti-immigrant themes. There is no equivalent in Spain of Marine Le Pen's "make France more French" or Donald Trump's "make America great again."

But there is a dark side to this disappearance of Spanish nationalism: a surge of "subnationalism" in regions like Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia.

The success of democracy in the post-Franco period has allowed Spanish regions to assert long-repressed identities. In the case of Catalonia, that sentiment seems to have reached a breaking point.

On Oct. 1, Catalonia, a region of 7.5 million, held a referendum on whether to declare itself an independent country, drawing 42 percent of eligible voters to the polls and registering a 92 percent majority for independence. But only the separatists are taking the landslide vote as an accurate reflection of the will of the Catalan people, in part, because there was no independent verification of the tallies.

Madrid also declared the referendum illegal and took a heavy hand toward the vote.

Days before the referendum, the Guardia Civil arrested Catalan officials and seized 10 million ballots. National police blocked voters from entering polling stations. According to Catalan officials, altercations between police and the public caused injuries to 844 people.

The Catalan government claims Madrid's aggressive tactics explain the relatively low turnout (although Madrid's harsh reaction was also cited by some observers as a factor in the lopsided outcome in favor of independence).

A Historic Reflection

Fortunately for those of us struggling to understand the daily news reports from Spain, a timely new book has surfaced, *The Struggle for Catalonia: Rebel Politics in Spain*, by Raphael Minder, a Swiss journalist based in Madrid for the last ten years for The New York Times. The book attempts to explain what has brought Spain and Catalonia to the brink of divorce.

Minder asserts that despite Catalonia's claim to a history and culture distinct from the rest of Spain, it is deeply connected. Indeed, Minder writes that it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand Catalan history as separate from Spanish history. After all, Catalonia was one of the main theatres of the civil war, home to some of the key losers in that conflict, such as the anarchist movement, trade unions and the communist party.

And in spite of Catalonia's resistance to Franco – resulting largely from his elimination of all autonomy and harsh repression of Catalan culture, language and the flag – parts of Catalan society supported his fascist assault on democracy in 1936. Franco's lengthy rule was backed by the Catalan business community, rural oligarchs, and the Catholic Church. Further, Catalan nationalists have historically relied on compromise with Madrid to advance their agenda, casting it as an aspiration for local rule and not independence.

Raphael Minders book is based on interviews with 200 politicians, journalists and scholars, giving it a wide scope of the Catalonia crisis. Minder places the origins of the current conflict, not to ancient claims of Catalan nationhood, but rather to the provocations of a new generation of Catalan leaders who support independence and have little regard for the democratic institutions put in place after Franco. Also feeding the movement was Madrid's overheated response to the Catalans' desire for more control over their own affairs.

Madrid's behavior amounts to a failure of leadership. It has allowed a dispute over Catalonia's control of its fiscal affairs to grow into the most serious constitutional crisis that Spanish democracy has faced in the post-Franco era.

Madrid's position toward Catalonia hardened considerably after 2011 when conservative Mariano Rajoy became Prime Minister. He immediately said his administration had no interest in accommodating Catalans' request for greater autonomy.

In 2015, following Catalan regional elections, Catalonia's new premier Carles Puigdemont, from Girona, Catalonia's most independent province, escalated the crisis by announcing plans to create the Republic of Catalonia. During his swearing in, Puigdemont broke with precedent by refusing to pledge loyalty to the Spanish Constitution.

When the Catalan parliament authorized an independence referendum, Rajoy in Madrid, threatened to arrest the parliamentarians who voted for it. In spite of expressing regret over the Madrid-induced violence marring the attempted referendum, the political establishment in Madrid, including the opposition party, backed Prime Minister Rajoy. In a speech to the nation, King Felipe accused the separatists of "inadmissible disloyalty."

A Painful Recession

It also was no accident that the Catalonia crisis deepened as Spain endured its most serious economic crisis in decades, following the international financial crash in 2008. The unemployment rate reached 27 percent, the highest in the European Union, and sharpened the sense among Catalonians of being economically exploited by the rest of Spain.

(The Occupy Movement was born in Spain with protesters camping out in public squares to protest the financial abuses that shattered the global economy, with the occupy tactic later spreading to other countries, including the United States.)

Other factors also fed the Catalonia's interest in independence. The 2014 Scottish independence referendum, although rejected, inspired Catalans to demand

a referendum from Madrid. They were also inspired by the Brexit vote in which a majority of British voters decided to exit the European Union.

(The Brexit vote resonated somewhat differently in Catalonia, where some secession supporters argued that continued incorporation in Spain was irrelevant because of the supranational E.U., which an independent Catalonia could join as a new state.)

Catalans also take extraordinary pride in their cultural, architectural and business achievements. Minders's book hails Catalonia as one of Europe's most culturally complex, economically prosperous, and politically liberal regions. In particular, his book praises Barcelona, Catalonia's capital as one of Europe's most cosmopolitan cities. In 2016, Barcelona attracted over eight million visitors, making it one of Europe's top tourist attractions.

Minder also gives great attention to how Barcelona's identity is being transformed by "big money and international brands." Until recently it seems Barcelona had managed to retain its local flavor while opening itself to the world. Its current transformation is felt most dramatically in its old city center, the Gothic Quarter, where hundreds-of-centuries-old businesses, such as book stores, bakeries and toy stores, have disappeared in the last few years due to rising rents.

Ironically, the Catalan independence movement faces its toughest resistance in Barcelona although secessionists have relied heavily on Barcelona's size and importance to argue Catalonia would be a sustainable state. But the argument hasn't captured the hearts and minds of a broad cross-section of Barcelona citizens.

The cosmopolitan city is a magnet for people from other parts of Spain as well as for immigrants. It's home to the largest Muslim community in Spain and has sizable communities of Latin Americans. Many of these citizens are suspicious of what an independent Catalonia might hold for them and for Barcelona.

Business Uncertainty

Another obstacle to independence is Barcelona's business community, which is unsure that Catalonia, with 16 percent of Spain's population and accounting for 20 percent of Spain's GDP, can survive on its own, especially given the E.U.'s negative reactions to the referendum. Such uncertainty is causing an exodus of businesses from Catalonia.

According to the newspaper *El Pais*, almost 700 businesses have left since the independence movement began. And since the referendum, Catalonia's two largest banks have moved to other regions. It could well be that pressure from the

business community rather than Madrid will break the Catalan separatist movement.

New elections in Spain have been scheduled for Dec. 21 amid calls for compromise echoing from Madrid to Barcelona. But Madrid's display of violent force on the day of the Catalonia's referendum, and the images that linger on social media of police shipped in from other regions beating up voters, dragging the elderly through the streets and firing rubber bullets into peaceful crowds have given the separatists the moral high ground and likely expanded support for independence. Further use of force by Madrid would be like throwing gasoline on a fire.

Jose Andres is a Spanish-American writer living in Barcelona whose dual identity as a Spaniard and a Catalan reflects the sad dilemma that many who care for both Spain and Catalonia face.

"In 1974 my family moved from the north of Spain to Catalonia, the land of opportunity." Andres wrote, " I fell in love with Catalonia's food, language, songs, stories and unique traditions. In my heart, I was both a proud Spaniard and a proud Catalan—a seamless identity I've carried with me my entire life."

Andres described the last few months as being caught between opposing forces: a hard-headed national government in Madrid keeping Catalans from their democratic right to vote, and a rogue group of misguided politicians leading Catalonia off a political and economic cliff.

"In between these two extremes is the true story of Spain and Catalonia, where I and millions of Spaniards find ourselves," he wrote.

Andres explained that as a boy he learned an important word in Catalan; "seny."

"It's a word that means sanity, and espouses a world view governed by level-headedness and integrity," he reflected "I'm afraid 'seny' has abandoned Catalonia in recent months. If we want to live in a civil society, we need to respect the laws of the land. I support the idea of a vote for Catalan independence, but not in the haphazard, unconstitutional way it's been conducted in recent months."

Andres believes that for Catalonia to ensure a stable future, the silent majority will need to find its voice and bring "seny" back to the heart of Catalan and Spanish society.

"That means voting for new leadership on December 21st, that will represent all Catalonians, not just those who will stop at nothing short of independence. It means supporting politicians who know how to build bridges, not just dig holes.

‘Seny’ is the foundation upon which Spain and Catalonia build their future.”

Since the abortive referendum, thousands of Spaniards have taken to the streets to demand national unity. From the movements slogan, “Parlem Hablemos” (let’s talk), to the Spanish flag waving on the streets of Barcelona, the desire for peace and reconciliation is evident.

On Oct. 10, the separatists suspended a unilateral declaration of independence to allow for negotiations with Madrid and the new elections on Dec. 21.

Don North is a veteran war correspondent who covered the Vietnam War and many other conflicts around the world. He is the author of Inappropriate Conduct, the story of a World War II correspondent whose career was crushed by the intrigue he uncovered.

Democrats Rely on Blame-Shifting

By riding hatred of President Trump and spurring on the Russia-gate hysteria, Democrats hope to win in 2018 without a serious examination of why they lost support of key working- and middle-class voting blocs, says Andrew Spannaus.

By Andrew Spannaus

Victories in state-level elections in New Jersey and Virginia on Nov. 7 have buoyed Democratic hopes for an anti-Trump wave among the population that will lead to a big victory in next year’s mid-term elections, and permanently damage President Trump heading towards 2020. Yet there is significant risk in hoping that anti-Trump sentiment will be enough for the Democrats to return to power.

The danger is that the considerable differences between the centrist faction, which for the most part controls the party structure, and the progressive wing of the party, will be swept under the rug in the name of unity, perpetuating the substantive problems that have alienated important sections of the population from the party.

The power of opposition to Trump has been on display from the very beginning: It was more than a bit ironic to see feminist protestors – properly exercising their right to protest against a President who has made many derogatory comments towards women – hold up signs defending the CIA during the Women’s March on Inauguration Day.

Yes, in their zeal to oppose Trump, both the center and the far left have been

willing to embrace the battle led by a limited but powerful grouping in the intelligence community to stop the President from his stated intention of improving relations with Vladimir Putin's Russia.

This has become such a *cause célèbre* that people who would normally look suspiciously at the motives of the CIA or other similar agencies seem unable to recognize that the basic "crime" Trump is accused of is favoring diplomacy with a country most of the institutions consider an enemy. With the media's help, it has apparently been decided that this President does not have the right to influence policy, if the majority of the establishment disagrees with his positions.

The major issue in the Democratic Party is obviously the economy. Sen. Bernie Sanders, officially an Independent from Vermont, won 43 percent of the vote in the 2016 Democratic primaries because he pushed a "populist," anti-system message that was heavily critical of globalization, Wall Street and trade deals that have weakened the American middle class.

There were numerous similarities with the positions of Trump himself, although without the offensive language and scapegoating of various ethnic groups. Yet the Democratic élite did its best to ensure a Hillary Clinton victory, both legitimately based on the notion that Hillary would be the strongest candidate, and through actions that have led to accusations of a rigged nomination process.

A Deeper Problem

The recent spat raised by the publication of Donna Brazile's new book *Hacks: The Inside Story of the Break-ins and Breakdowns That Put Donald Trump in the White House* (Hachette, November 2017) shows that the issue is still being fought out.

Indeed in October, Democratic National Committee Chairman Tom Perez unveiled his picks for the party's Executive Committee, and many Sanders supporters immediately complained that their faction was being sidelined. One of the key removals was that of James Zogby, whose pro-Palestinian positions are clearly unappreciated by many higher-ups, who prefer to avoid criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In terms of economic policy, the question is whether the party will embrace the progressive message espoused by Sanders and Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts or maintain a centrist tone by avoiding positions considered "unrealistic" according to Washington veterans; many of these political operators fear losing their influence if the terms of the debate change.

Two of the major issues Sanders and Warren have been fighting for are incisive reforms regarding healthcare and the banking sector. In September, Sanders

presented a bill for a single-payer health care system under the name of Medicare-for-All, and has been holding numerous public events on the issue, joined by Warren and various other Senators.

Policymakers and industry representatives tend to shudder at such “radical” proposals, but the political calculus is clearly that you need to set your sights high if you want to achieve anything at all. This proposition was proven – although negatively – by the numerous compromises made by Barack Obama in the first year of his presidency.

On financial reform, the key issue is the restoration of Glass-Steagall, the Depression-era law that separates commercial banks and investment banks, in order to protect the real economy from financial speculation. The law was officially repealed in 1999, at the end of Bill Clinton’s administration, in the context of a gradual loosening of financial regulations that began in the 1980s.

The results are before our eyes: the crash of 2007-2008 – despite the weak attempts by Wall Street defenders to divert attention from deregulation as a cause for the crisis – and its political aftermath; this includes the election of Donald Trump, which certainly would not have happened if there had been a more effective response to the crisis, rather than bailing out the banks while imposing austerity and lower wages on the population.

Excuses, Excuses

The Democratic Party platform adopted the call for Glass-Steagall in 2016 (as did the Republicans), although Clinton had repeatedly stated her opposition to the measure, claiming she would be really tough on Wall Street in other ways. Many people clearly didn’t believe her; and taking hundreds of thousands of dollars from large banks for speeches exemplified the candidate’s lack of credibility.

Why should workers in states such as Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania trust someone who was soft on Wall Street, and had trumpeted international trade deals for years?

This is the issue that the Democratic Party must tackle. To say that Hillary won the popular vote, and thus essentially the election, but was robbed by Russian interference or fake news on the Internet, means to ignore the fundamental problem. A realignment is underway of electoral politics throughout the Western world.

Profiling voters based on their ethnicity, gender or social group showed its limits in 2016, as people followed an anti-establishment instinct fomented by the economic difficulties associated with globalization.

There were other factors, but this protest vote was enough to swing the election despite Trump's obvious weaknesses as a candidate, so any notion of going back to old models should be recognized for what it would produce: a Pyrrhic victory in which the underlying problems before the country are not faced.

If the Democrats hope to ride an anti-Trump wave, they would do best to look below the surface and recognize the tectonic shifts taking place, that much of the political establishment seems to prefer to ignore.

Andrew Spannaus is a freelance journalist and strategic analyst based in Milan, Italy. He is the founder of Transatlantico.info, that provides news, analysis and consulting to Italian institutions and businesses. His book on the U.S. elections *Perchè vince Trump (Why Trump is Winning)* was published in June 2016. [This article originally appeared as Aspenia online at <http://www.aspeninstitute.it/aspenia-online/article/risks-democratic-party-unity>]

The Hidden Hazards of GOP's Tax-Cut Plan

Though sold as a pain-free tax cut for most Americans, the Republican plans favor the rich and carry hidden dangers for Social Security, Medicare and other key social programs, as Dennis J Bernstein describes.

By Dennis J Bernstein

The Democrats and the entire progressive community are up in arms about the Republican tax-cut plans, which budget experts say will shower the wealthy with tax breaks while raising taxes on some middle- and working-class families. The plans also could flood the federal debt with another \$1.5 trillion in red ink over the next decade.

The legislation is now in the hands of the U.S. Senate where some modifications are expected in order to bring onboard a few Republican holdouts, but the Senate version does not play well either with critics alarmed about the potential debt-induced raid on Social Security and other key social programs.

Rep. Ro Khanna, D-California, put it this way: "Not only would the GOP tax plan blow a hole in the deficit, but as a result, it would trigger major cuts to programs that many Americans depend on, including a \$25 billion cut to Medicare.

This plan is a disaster for the middle class...[It] clearly demonstrates that they think it's better to serve the interests of the very wealthy than everyday people. Shareholders and corporate executives do not need any more favors handed to them."

What follows is an in-depth primer, from a progressive perspective, on the tax cut legislation. I spoke about it with Josh Hoxie on Nov. 21 in Boston. Hoxie has studied the proposal extensively and written about it as well. He is the Co-Editor of Inequality.org, based at the Institute for Policy Studies in Boston.

Dennis Bernstein: Let's start with some background on the Estate Tax. What is the estate tax and how was it established?

Josh Hoxie: About 100 years ago, Teddy Roosevelt and a few others saw that wealth was concentrating in fewer and fewer hands. We had a funneling of wealth up to the upper class and the rest of the country was struggling. They decided that we ought to have a levy on the inter-generational transfer of immense wealth. When so much money concentrates in so few hands, it is bad for everyone.

Today this tax is levied on wealth dynasties of \$7 million for married couples or \$5.5 million for individuals. It is probably the most progressive aspect of our tax code. It is incredibly important, not just for raising revenue, but for controlling the runaway inequality we are witnessing in America today.

Dennis Bernstein: Does the estate tax actually deal with the issue of inequality?

Josh Hoxie: If you have a fortune and can do whatever you want with that fortune when you die, you should think about how your money was made. I can guarantee that every great fortune in the United States was in some way enabled by the public sector: the roads you drove on, the schools that educated your workforce, the intellectual property rights that protected your intellectual property, and so on down the line.

One way we think of the estate tax is as "economic opportunity recycling."

Paying forward the benefits that you had to create your fortune to the next generation so that they can get ahead too. Without an estate tax, the only people who benefit from your fortune are the genetic lottery winners who happen to be born to multi-millionaire and billionaire parents. With an estate tax, that opportunity gets spread around a little bit.

Dennis Bernstein: Trump says that eliminating the estate tax is going to bring money to the middle class. You say it is ultimately going to cost all of us \$260 billion in inequality. How do you come to that figure?

Josh Hoxie: The Senate Joint Committee on Taxation came to that figure. If we get rid of that tax, that is how much won't be raised. So it comes out of the public coffers and into the hands of the wealthiest people in this country. The most regressive thing you can do is take money away from the Program for Women and Infant Children (WIC)—which half of the children in this country rely on for basic nutrition—and give that money to the wealthiest people who need it the least.

Dennis Bernstein: You wrote a piece that appeared recently in *The Las Vegas Sun*. Can you say more about how this would significantly widen the racial wealth divide?

Josh Hoxie: When we look at who has the wealth in this country, we find that it is incredibly concentrated by race. Essentially, White families have hundreds of thousands of dollars in assets, while the median Black family has a few thousand. So we are talking about a hundred-to-one ratio. And it is similar for Whites-to-Latinos.

When you look at who pays the estate tax, it is proportionately White folks who have tons of money but the money is held in disproportionately White hands.

That is the result of a legacy of racist public policy that goes back to red-lining in our cities, the legacy of slavery, and income disparities that extend to today.

Dennis Bernstein: How would you critique the focus of this new tax plan?

Josh Hoxie: It is hard to criticize strongly enough the Trump tax cuts. They could mean irreparable damage for generations to come. This is a money grab.

This is done on party lines, jammed through Congress, backed by multi-millionaires and billionaires for their exclusive benefit.

It is bad economics but more than that it is morally reprehensible. In an age where one in five children is food insecure, we are going to cut basic public programs in order to give this tax break to people who need it the least in this country!

We have the first billionaire president and the wealthiest cabinet in history.

And we have never had so much money in our campaign finance system. So this is not being done for congressional constituents, it is being done for wealthy billionaire donors.

Dennis Bernstein: What programs are going to be cut, who is going to suffer?

Josh Hoxie: The Trump tax cuts will create such a major hole in the federal budget that they will preempt mandatory spending cuts in Social Security,

Medicare and Medicaid. They are bringing back something called “chained CPI” which translates to less money for seniors. Social Security is the most successful anti-poverty program in American history. Before Social Security came around, half of people over 65 lived in poverty. Now it is less than 10 percent, largely thanks to Social Security.

I think it is just now coming out, all the insidious ways that this wealth grab is going to affect all the non-wealthy people in this country. A lot of people will see their taxes go up. Graduate students are going to see their costs go up fivefold. This is just mean on its face.

Dennis Bernstein: Are corporations and the wealthy spending a lot of money to make sure this goes through? And how will the Trump family make out?

Josh Hoxie: Donald Trump likes to claim that he is worth \$10 billion. If we take him at his word, eliminating the estate tax would mean \$4 billion for his kids. The Walton family stands to benefit enormously, as do the beneficiaries of the Koch brothers. There is a carve-out in the Trump tax cuts for private jet owners and alongside it is a fee increase for ordinary commercial flight passengers! That is indicative of who is in the room when these things are decided.

Dennis Bernstein: What did we learn about these people from the *Panama Papers*?

Josh Hoxie: Two major leaks have come out regarding offshore tax shelters: *The Panama Papers* came out last year and *The Paradise Papers* came out this year. Essentially, we know that there is an untold amount of money hiding in offshore tax shelters. We still don’t know how much money is concentrated at the very top. We do know that it is not small businesses who are putting away money in these tax havens. It is corporate CEO’s, corporations themselves, shady entities.

The whole premise of trickle-down economics is that if you give money to the top they will spend it and it will benefit everyone else. That has never happened, but even if you took them at their word, if the money is hiding in an offshore tax shelter, how is that ever going to benefit anyone else?

It is hard to overstate what happens when so much money concentrates in so few hands. Basically, we are seeing our politics, our civil society, our philanthropy dominated by the very rich, who care about no one but themselves and their country club friends.

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of “Flashpoints” on the Pacifica radio network and the author of [Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom](#). You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.

Trump Resists Progress on Global Warming

Exclusive: Market trends now favor renewable energy as a cost-effective alternative to fossil fuels, but President Trump's resistance to this good news is doing real damage in the fight against global warming, reports Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

With petrochemical billionaires Charles and David Koch paying many of the GOP's bills these days, it's no wonder conservative policymakers are pushing hard to protect dirty fossil fuels against competition from clean, renewable energy. But entrepreneurial capitalists whom conservatives claim to worship are fighting back, slashing costs for wind and solar power to the point where few customers can refuse them.

A remarkable new study by Lazard, the venerable New York investment house, concludes that the *unsubsidized* cost of energy from new wind and solar plants now falls decisively below that of nuclear and coal plants, and even below that of efficient natural-gas-fired generation. The gap is widening each year as scale economies and improvements in turbine and photovoltaic technology drive cost reductions. Significantly, even cautious modelers at the U.S. Department of Energy concede these trends.

Even more disruptive is Lazard's finding that "in some scenarios the full-lifecycle costs of building and operating renewables-based projects have dropped below the operating costs alone of conventional generation technologies such as coal or nuclear." In other words, it's often cheaper to shut down those older plants and replace them with new wind and solar projects.

Where local conditions especially favor renewable energy, the cost advantages of wind and solar have become enormous. Last spring, for example, Tucson Electric Power inked a 20-year deal to purchase enough solar energy to power more than 20,000 homes at a price of less than 3 cents per kilowatt-hour. (One kilowatt-hour is the amount of energy needed to light ten 100-watt bulbs for an hour.)

That's just half the cost of new gas and coal generation and about a quarter of the cost of new nuclear power. Only the cheapest wind power can compare.

Trump Fights the Market

Members of the Trump administration, and many Republicans in Congress, are trying to derail the renewable express train.

Secretary of Energy Rick Perry has called for "rebalancing the market" by issuing federal rules to tilt the playing field in favor of coal and nuclear power. Perry was reportedly influenced by the CEO of Murray Energy, a major coal company that sells much of its product to U.S. utilities whose traditional generating plants are becoming uneconomic.

In an effort to boost profits for coal companies, the Trump administration is also working with Peabody Energy to subsidize continued operation of the Navajo Generating Station in Arizona, whose owners voted in February to close the 43-year-old plant. The coal-fired facility has been a major source of air pollution and haze in the Grand Canyon and is the third largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the nation.

Speaking at a Kentucky Farm Bureau event in October, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt said "I would do away with the incentives that we give to wind and solar," even though current law already schedules most credits to expire by 2020 for wind and 2022 for solar.

Echoing his sentiment, the latest House tax bill guts clean energy tax credits, though the draft version under consideration by the Senate keeps them intact. The Senate's reluctance reflects the fact that many of the nation's more than 300,000 jobs in renewable energy production are in heavily Republican states.

As renewable energy costs continue to fall, however, the Trump administration is finding it hard to repeal the laws of supply and demand.

In August, Duke Energy Florida said it was scrapping plans to build a new nuclear plant and would instead double the Sunshine State's solar capacity as part of a \$6 billion program to modernize the state's power grid and build 500 new electric vehicle charging stations.

Meanwhile, American Electric Power, one of the country's leading owners of coal-fired plants, announced in July that it is investing \$4.5 billion to build the nation's largest single-site wind project, in western Oklahoma. Beyond that 2,000 megawatt project, AEP has plans to acquire 5,300 megawatts of additional renewable power by 2030 to diversify its power production portfolio and slash carbon emissions.

In a survey this spring of 32 power utilities operating in 26 conservative states, Reuters found only one that said it might prolong the life of its coal-fired units to please the Trump White House.

“The number of utilities betting their futures on renewable energy seems to be growing by the day,” observes the investment website *The Motley Fool*. “Utilities aren’t investing billions of dollars into renewable energy to save the climate or appease environmentalists, they’re doing so because it’s in their best interest financially. Renewable energy is now the lowest cost option when building new power plants and that’s what’s driving adoption. If these utilities are any indication, there will be tens of billions more poured into the industry over the next decade.”

The same trend is happening globally, as major greenhouse polluters like China and India invest tens of billions of dollars in new solar and wind plants. Even the world’s fossil-fuel capital, Saudi Arabia, is joining the revolution: In October, its power authorities received an astonishingly low bid of only 1.8 cents per kilowatt-hour for a 300-megawatt project in the north of the kingdom. Unlimited sun and cheap land make solar power the cheapest resource even in the land of oil.

Policy Imperatives

With renewable energy costs in sharp decline, and utilities shifting their investments accordingly, why should we care if President Trump’s team denies the existence of climate change and lauds the future of coal? Because with global carbon emissions still rising, the world must dramatically step up its response if we hope to keep the impact and cost of global warming in check.

“Humanity has failed to make sufficient progress in generally solving these foreseen environmental challenges, and alarmingly, most of them are getting far worse,” declared a communique by more than 15,000 scientists from 184 countries published this month in the journal *BioScience*. “Soon it will be too late to shift course away from our failing trajectory.”

To keep overall warming of the planet under 2 degrees Celsius relative to pre-industrial levels – about twice the increase to date – global annual investment in clean energy must *triple*, according to a major new analysis issued this October by Stanford University’s Precourt Institute for Energy.

As climate activist Bill McKibben told a recent international climate conference in Germany, “If we have any hope of preventing absolute civilization challenge and catastrophe, then we need to be bringing down carbon emissions with incredible rapidity, far faster than it can happen just via normal economic transition.”

In other words, we can’t afford to depend on slow market adjustments. We need continued renewable energy subsidies and new carbon taxes to accelerate the

transition to cleaner energy. We need increased investment in customer energy efficiency programs. We need to tackle carbon emissions not just from power plants, but from transportation, industry and agriculture – all potentially greater challenges.

Daunting as that agenda is, we can at least find some comfort in signs – like the new report from Lazard – that market forces are finally lining up to help humanity save itself.

Jonathan Marshall, former editor of the Next100 blog on clean energy and the environment, is author of the recent stories “Trump’s War for Coal Raises Risks,” “Trump Takes Aim at Energy R&D Funds,” and “The World’s Shift to Electric Cars.”

Denying the Imperium of Death

The tens of thousands of American deaths from drug overdoses are a measure of the hopeless desperation left behind by the soul-starving socio-economic system of late-stage capitalism, writes poet Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

According to a nationwide study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a greater number of U.S. Americans died (approximately 65,000) from drug overdoses last year than were killed during the course of the Vietnam War.

All part and parcel of capitalism’s war against life itself. The emotional and physical pain, anxiety, and depression inflicted by the trauma inherent to a system sustained by perpetual exploitation has proven to be too much for a sizeable number of human beings to endure thus their need to self-medicate.

The root of addiction is trauma. The soul of the nation is a casualty of war. There is not an Arlington Cemetery for these fallen, no hagiographic ceremonies will be performed over their graves nor statues erected in memoriam. Their ghosts will howl through the long, dark night of national denial. Listen to their wailing. It is an imprecatory prayer. A curse and augury ... that admonishes, our fate and the fate of the nation will converge ... as the nation will stagger, keening in lament, to the abyss.

The solution: Within each of us swells a deathless song. Powerful. Resonate.

Piercing. A song, miraculous of influence, plangent with the force to seize back your soul from the death-besotted spirit of the age. Let it rise from within you. Notice: how flocks of empire's death birds scatter like ashes in the wind.

Yet it will not be possible to navigate around the cultural deathscape; we must walk through it and chronicle its serial affronts to our humanity: "You have to see that the buildings are anorexic, you have to see that the language is schizogenic, that 'normalcy' is manic, and medicine and business are paranoid."
– James Hillman

Try this: Simply stand in the isle of a corporate, Big Box chain store or in the parking lot of a strip mall that squats, hideous, on some soul-defying, U.S. Interstate highway and allow yourself to feel the emptiness and desperation extant. The tormented landscape, besieged by an ad hoc assemblage of late capitalist structures, emporiums of usurped longing, reflects the desperate, rapacious nature of late capitalist imperium.

Compounding the pathos, the forces in play impose a colonizing effect upon the mind; therefore, a large percent of the afflicted have lost the ability to detect the hyper-entropic system's ravaging effects. Stranded among the commercial come-ons and hyper-authoritarianism inherent to late stage capitalism's imperium of death, the human psyche, like the biosphere of our planet, subjected, at present, to humankind-wrought ecocide, has begun to display the terrible beauty of a nightmare.

Internal weather has grown increasingly chaotic: the earth's oceans and seas are rising; wildfires rage; drought scorches the earth. And conditions will grow increasingly inhospitable in regard to the flourishing of inner life, personal and collective thus will continue, and at accelerating rates, to be reflected in the web of phenomena we know as human culture.

The Decimated Working Class

Growing up in a working-class social milieu, as I did, I am confronted, more and more, by the news of the large number of men I grew up with who are dying in their 50s. As of late, when I contemplate the fact, I am forced to pause and seek solitude because my eyes become scalded with tears. I've known, over the years, hundreds of human beings, born into and ensnared by the crime against humanity known as poverty, broken by the culture of greed and social degradation, and blamed by the clueless and the callous for the tragic trajectory in which impersonal fate and the wounding culture, by no fault of their own, has placed them.

Thus arrive: Tears of rage; tears of outrage. Tears unloosed by passion and

tempered by compassion ... fall. If poverty was not so profitable for the greed-head elite, both punitive-minded conservatives and affluence-ensconced liberals alike, the situation would be addressed and rectified. The cause of the reprehensible situation, it should go without saying, is not the fault of the poor but the poverty of spirit at the core of capitalism.

Truth is the system, a hierarchy of ghouls, is maintained by harvesting the corpses of the powerless, by means of imperial slaughter and domestic, economic exploitation. Deep down, we know it. The system's psychopathic beneficiaries, in particular, are aware of the reality. In fact, their desiccated hearts require being irrigated by blood. From the evidence of their actions, it appears they revel in the knowledge of the damage they incur. They appear to believe they will enter the golden dominion of heaven by climbing a mountain of corpses. It is time we dragged them back down to earth and subjected them to our earth-borne fury.

Or so goes my own (powerless) revelry. Of course, we the powerless, at this point, have been left with scant little but a dreaming heart. When we allow heartless power to subdue and usurp our longings, we languish. Thus many die of a broken spirit. The world itself can appear to be depleted of mercy. In turn, all too many begin to mirror the malevolence of the upper castes thereby losing their own measure of mercy.

Hostility directed at the poor is the shopworn, demagogic sleight-of-hand trick used to distract from realities such as: Every McMansion and high-end luxury high-rise constructed creates multitudes of the homeless. Every low pay, no benefits, no future Mcjob serves to decimate an individual, heart and spirit. Moreover the beneficiaries of the system promote the lie that shame should be the exclusive dominion of those broken by their system, a system, which is, in essence, a form of government-sanctioned gangsterism, by which they, the ruthless few, and they alone, benefit.

As a result, in an age of denial and duplicity, change tends to arrive violently. Reactionary, racist soreheads, brandishing Tiki torches, construct an ambulatory klavern in the hateful night. Maledictory tweets rise and roil the imperial air like a nimbus of locust. Unmoored from their sense of humanity by lashing angst and alienation, gunmen, in acts of warped libido, raise assault rifles and kill with no more connection to the strangers they slaughter than do stateside-deployed pilots of the empire's predator drones.

A Needed Paradigm Shift

We human beings, as a species, have arrived at a profound point of demarcation: paradigm shift or perish. Yet, and the fact is mortifying in its implications,

there is not a sign of the emergence, even an incipient one, of a viable resistance to the present order. Weekend marches and boutique protests might promote (ephemeral) feelings of affinity and jack the adrenal systems of participants. But the events have proven woefully inefficacious in regard to the rising and raging tides of adversity we face.

(In addition, monopolist, internet corporations, such as Google, Facebook and Twitter, at the behest of U.S. governmental forces, are further marginalizing the already almost vaporous left by means of presence-abridging algorithms of leftist websites and outright censorship of social media content. Dissenting voices are being ghosted into oblivion.)

An aura of bleakness prevails. Hope seems a fool's palliative. The victims of drug overdoses and, in general, the large and rising, without precedent, untimely deaths of middle-aged, laboring-class people should be regarded as canaries in the coal mines of the late-stage capitalist order, an augury of calamities that loom due to the exponentially increasing harm being inflicted upon both humanity and environmental forces crucial to sustaining the continued viability of the human race.

"Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate." C.G. Jung

Although it does not have to be the case. If reality is met head-on, if empire, external and its inner analog, is renounced and challenged, then a liberation staged by the heart's partisans can begin, thereby freeing up a great amount of acreage – a fructifying landscape – wherein both the earth's ecosystem and the architecture of human desire can begin to co-exist and cross-pollinate thus a crucial re-visioning of oneself and the culture can begin.

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Trump Adds to Washington's 'Swamp'

Exclusive: President Trump's vow to "drain the swamp" was just one more empty promise as he adds to the muck with military contractors in key Pentagon jobs and other industry lobbyists at regulatory posts, says Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

In the Famous-Last-Words department, this Dec. 12, 2016 headline from Reuters surely ranks among the worst: “Trump attack on Lockheed Martin foreshadows war on defense industry.” When it comes to military contractors, President Trump surely prefers to make love, not war.

Not only does he seek a \$51 billion increase in the base military budget, Trump is putting top defense industry insiders in charge of spending more than \$300 billion a year in contract awards to private corporations.

Those insiders include former General Dynamics board member James Mattis, now Secretary of Defense; former Boeing Senior Vice President Patrick Shanahan, now Deputy Secretary of Defense; Raytheon’s former top lobbyist, Mark Esper, now Secretary of the Army; and former Textron CEO Ellen Lord, now Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, a post that supervises all Pentagon weapons procurement.

Oh, yes, let’s not forget Lockheed Martin Corporation, subject of the Reuters headlines and the nation’s biggest military contractor, with annual sales of nearly \$50 billion. Trump chose its former consultant, Heather Wilson, to become Secretary of the Air Force.

Lockheed Martin paid Wilson, a former Republican congresswoman from New Mexico, nearly a quarter million dollars for advice on winning an extension of its contract to run Sandia National Laboratories. Following that campaign, the company had to pay the feds \$4.7 million to settle charges that it improperly used government money to lobby senior U.S. officials.

Now Wilson is overseeing the biggest weapons program in U.S. history – the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, a notoriously trouble-plagued jet with a total estimated program cost of *more than \$1 trillion*. Who makes it? Lockheed Martin. Lockheed Martin also makes the equally notorious Littoral Combat Ship for the U.S. Navy.

More Military-Industrial Complex

Last month, the Trump administration sent to the Senate its nomination for the Pentagon’s third-highest position, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. He’s John Rood, senior vice president of Lockheed Martin International. Rood oversees the company’s weapons sales in some 70 other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, which signed a gigantic arms deal with President Trump in May.

That \$110 billion deal sent defense stocks soaring to all-time highs. Lockheed Martin’s CEO, citing prospective new weapons sales worth \$28 billion, said she hoped the deal would “strengthen the cause of peace in the region.”

In his previous job as Vice President for Government Affairs for Lockheed

Martin, Rood directed its lobbying activities in Washington. Last year the company spent more than \$13.9 million on lobbying and mobilized \$5 million in campaign contributions, making it one of the very top corporate political spenders.

Lockheed lobbies through the media as well as in Congress. In May, a *Washington Post* column authored by Stephen Rademaker, a lobbyist with the Lockheed-funded Podesta Group, insisted that the best way to confront North Korea was by deploying the THAAD and Aegis Ashore missile defense systems, as well as “long-range strike aircraft” – all, not coincidentally, built by Lockheed Martin. Adam Johnson, a writer for Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), pointed out that the newspaper noted Rademaker’s connection to Podesta Group, but not its role as a major lobbyist for the military contractor.

Rood would also have had a hand in the company’s contributions to many “independent” think-tanks, such as the Atlantic Council, Center for a New American Security, Center for Security Policy, Heritage Foundation, Lexington Institute (founded by a Lockheed lobbyist), and others that promote greater military spending and often recommend specific weapons systems built by Lockheed Martin.

One example is the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a major hawkish think tank based in Washington, D. C. It has “push[ed] the THAAD missile system or its underlying value proposition in US media” at least 30 times, according to Johnson and his colleagues at FAIR. CSIS, which has long been notably secretive about its funding, admits that Lockheed Martin ranks with Boeing, General Dynamics, and Northrop Grumman among its top-10 corporate funders.

A *New York Times* exposé last year also cited the Center’s role in pushing for government permission to export drones, another weapons system that Lockheed Martin helps build.

Trump Goes to the Extreme

Trump is certainly not the first president to appoint defense industry executives to senior Pentagon posts, but he’s taken the practice to extreme lengths. He’s also extended the same practice to almost every other cabinet department.

Thus he appointed a top lobbyist for the American Petroleum Institute, the American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers, the American Chemistry Council, and the National Association of Manufacturers to head the Environmental Protection Agency’s clean air enforcement office; a coal industry consultant to

head the Interior Department's Office of Surface Mining and Reclamation and Enforcement; and a top pharmaceutical executive to head Health and Human Services.

And after his frequent campaign blasts against Goldman Sachs, Trump has appointed its alumni to top White House, Treasury, economic policy, national security, and Wall Street regulatory jobs. Goldman CEO Lloyd Blankfein said he was proud of this record but admitted he was "a little apprehensive . . . for fear of how it might look."

With their stock prices up more than 30 percent in the year since last November's election, neither Goldman Sachs nor Lockheed Martin seems to worry too much about appearances. Nor do Raytheon, General Dynamics, and all the other contractors profiting from the military spending boom that Trump is promoting. But if you smell something funny coming out of Washington, it's because someone forgot to drain the swamp.

Jonathan Marshall is author of many articles on military procurement and contractors, including "US Arms Makers Invest in a New Cold War," "Feeding the Military-Industrial Complex," and "New Navy Ship Leaking Tax Dollars."
